

2023 Special Awards Candidate Bio Form

Please send this form back no later Friday, October 21, 2022.

If you were nominated for more than one award you must **submit a bio form for each award.**

Email *

cmsob2@gmail.com

Name of Nominee: *

Chris Sobieck

Award Nominated for: *

Executive of the year

Facility Employed at: *

Mines Golf Club

Year Elected to Membership: *

1997

Please describe your achievements/accomplishments that would pertain to this award. *

The nominee was elected to membership November 1997, has been a PGA Member for 25 years. In March of 2021 Chris started High Road Golf Management and purchased Mines Golf Club in Grand Rapids.

Since taking over ownership of the Mines, Chris has made significant changes to the operation including: The addition of a liquor license, increased hours of operation, new cart fleet with GPS, and several course renovations and improvements. The changes, along with the increased popularity of golf, have resulted in a very robust operation with a significant revenue increase from prior years. Rounds have increased over 15,000 since 2020 and revenue has nearly doubled. In addition to the mentioned changes, a new restaurant and banquet facilities is currently in the planning stages and expected to open in early 2024, as well as an expanded practice facility with three par 3 holes and short game area that is expected to open in the summer of 2023.

For five years prior to the Mines, the nominee was the General Manager of Watermark Properties (now RedWater) which had 7 golf facilities (4 private, 2 daily fee, and 1 semi-private). Chris was also one of the owners of Thornapple Pointe where he served as General Manager from 2001 until the sale of the club to Watermark Properties in 2017.

Chris was the 2021 Bill Strausbaugh award winner for the Michigan PGA Section, was a two-time Director of the Michigan Section and served as the employment chairman (2013-2016), and now currently serves as a Board Member with the Michigan Golf Course Association.

Because golf has meant so much and been such a positive influence in his life, Chris has increased his focus on growing the game and developing the next generation of golfers and potential PGA Members. Chris is both a High School golf coach for girl's golf (6 years) and an Assistant Coach for the 2022 GLIAC Champion Davenport Universities Men's golf team (4 years). Chris uses both avenues to try and create a positive influence and be a positive role model to both demographics. Chris also developed both ladies and junior programs at several facilities leading to growth and awareness of golf and its caretakers the PGA Professional. In 2020, Chris also started a non-profit charitable corporation designed around raising funds through golf events which has raised over \$20,000 donated to various local charities.. With the Purchase of the Mines in early 2021, Chris has partnered with the West Michigan Chapter of the First Tee and has started a new Junior Program at the Mines. This year Chris and his wife volunteered for the Drive, Chip, and Putt sub-regional that was hosted at the Mines. Growing the game and exposing as many new players to the game is one of the featured goals for Chris at the Mines.

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Email *

cwhitten@GAM.org

Name of Nominee: *

Chris Whitten

Award Nominated for: *

Executive of the Year

Facility Employed at: *

Golf Association of Michigan

Year Elected to Membership: *

2009

Please describe your achievements/accomplishments that would pertain to this award. *

Thank you very much for considering me for this important recognition. I'm humbled to even be nominated by another PGA member.

I have served as the Executive Director (Chief Executive Officer) of the Golf Association of Michigan (GAM) since May of 2019. In this role, I am responsible for GAM's overall operation, as well as the GAM Foundation. As Executive Director I am the GAM's chief spokesperson, and liaison with the United States Golf Association (USGA) and other state, regional and national golf organizations, such as the Michigan PGA.

The GAM is the governing body for amateur golf in the state. As a not-for-profit organization, our purpose is to represent, promote, preserve, and serve the best interests of the game. The GAM provides membership to more than 80,000 golfers and more than 450 golf courses; conducts 30 amateur championships; and oversees 16 USGA qualifying events.

Our strategic vision is: "GAM is dedicated to connecting and serving all golf in Michigan - for players, administrators and facilities. By providing excellent core services and products, we strive to make golf accessible and inclusive in all its forms, for players of any ability & age."

The GAM Foundation aims to make golf affordable and accessible to the widest possible audience through programs and grants, led by Youth on Course Michigan.

I report to the GAM's volunteer Board of Governors, Officer team and Executive Committee.

Personally, I feel I serve the Association with a "general manager" focus and skill, political awareness, a detail oriented yet strategic approach, and a vision of "what could be" for the Association, and more broadly, for game in our state.

Along with managing our staff of 18 and 300 active volunteers, I have overseen significant growth of the GAM since 2018:

- Membership growth from 57,000 to 80,000
- Overall revenue growth from \$2.35 million to \$3 million
- Continued success of various GAM championships and high-level amateur tournament opportunities, attracting over 4,000 tournament entries per year, including nearly 1,000 for the Michigan Amateur Championship.
- Advancement of Youth on Course Michigan to help over 25,000 junior players in Michigan play 68,000 rounds of golf for \$5 or less. To make this possible, the Foundation has raised over \$1M for participating golf course subsidies, player development grants, junior tournament player grants, and a new PGM Educational Scholarship at Ferris St.

Other key objectives reached in the past three years include:

- Successful GAM Strategic Planning and Strategic Vision for 3-year initiatives
- Retention and funding models of Golf Genius Tournament Management Software for our own championships, but also our member clubs
- Celebrated the GAM Centennial in 2019 at Oakland Hills with a significant fundraiser for the GAM Foundation, led by special guest speaker Jack Nicklaus.
- Spearheaded GAM tournament support of the John Shippen Invitational, a tournament opportunity for black players highlighted by exemptions for PGA and LPGA Tour opportunities.
- Participation in USGA Golf Advocacy Nationwide Working Group
- Participant in collective effort of Michigan Golf Alliance during the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic to advocate for safe golf and reopening of facilities across the state
- Successful Governance of the Association and Foundation with Bylaws updates for both as well as Governor retention and recruitment with a focus on Diversity, Equity & Inclusion
- Upcoming introduction of new GAM.org and revamped CRM model for staff and club administrators.

Overall, I feel that I represent the GAM, the Michigan PGA, and the game of golf with integrity, professionalism, friendliness and an inclusive attitude. I grew up watching and respecting PGA members from a unique point of view; I am a second-generation PGA member originally from Michigan - this makes me truly grateful for the opportunity to advocate for golf in our state. Now, I feel PGA professionals are my peers, but also GAM's valued customers. My goal is for the GAM to provide outstanding education, service, opportunities, experiences, and appreciation to those who play and serve the game.

Thank you again for this kind consideration and good luck to everyone in the Michigan PGA Section for a great season.

-- Chris

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Email *

rolla@foundationgolfcenter.com

Name of Nominee: *

Rolla Frisinger

Award Nominated for: *

Executive of the Year

Facility Employed at: *

Foundation Golf Center

Year Elected to Membership: *

1983

Please describe your achievements/accomplishments that would pertain to this award. *

I am honored to be considered for The Golf Executive of the Year Award as I complete my 47th year in the golf business. I am thankful for where my career is at this point and the unusual and sometimes risky path it took to get there. Most importantly, I am thankful for the many friends that I have met along the way and who have supported me in my endeavors and for the nearly 700 staff members I have had the pleasure to work with along the way. Without the help of all of these people, I would not have accomplished anything. Having grown up on a golf course it was a natural transition to become the golf professional at my local course at a young age. I learned a lot of lessons the hard way by thinking I knew a lot more than I really did about teaching and about merchandising in those early days, but those mistakes with my own money, made me grow up fast and learn even faster. Those early mistakes led me to where I am today-owner of The Foundation Golf Center (a 30 acre golf practice facility) in Coldwater, Michigan and Founder and President of The Game Of your Life Foundation (G.O.L.F.) I had The Foundation Golf Center built in 1997 because of the tremendous growth of my retail operation at Coldwater Country Club and the tremendous demand for the Power-Bilt Junior Tour that was being run by the non-profit corporation The Game Of your Life Foundation (G.O.L.F.) which I founded in 1994 to provide youth golfers quality competitions at quality facilities. This Tour, which is just wrapping up it's 29th season and has conducted 1140 events since its inception. Building both of these businesses from scratch was quite a challenge at the beginning and quite risky by investing hundreds of thousands of dollars in the hopes that we would have a product that people would support and become loyal customers. My goal from the very beginning was to provide a product with professionalism and friendliness and here we are at the end of the 2022 season celebrating 25 years of success at The Foundation Golf Center and about to begin our 30th season with what is now called the Callaway/Meijer Tour. I am extremely proud of how both of these operations have promoted and grown the game of golf, not only in our community, but throughout the country as some of the staff members that got their start at The Foundation Golf Center have gone on to successful careers across the country and some of the players from the Callaway/Meijer Tour have gone on to win events on the PGA and LPGA Tour or gone on to become successful golf professionals in our industry. Probably the thing I am most thankful for is the fact that The Game Of your Life Foundation (G.O.L.F.) has been able to award \$536,000 in scholarships to deserving student athletes.

This has been a great 47 year adventure thus far and I can't wait to see what the next chapter brings and these are the axioms that have led me to where I am today...1) Treat people the way you want to be treated. 2) Hire people smarter than you. 3) Always thirst to learn more. 4) Do something EVERY DAY to make yourself better so you can make those around you better. 5) Have a great work ethic because Champions are made when no one is looking.

I appreciate the opportunity to tell my story and thank God for his continual blessings and grace.

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Email *

hockey2005@tds.net

Name of Nominee: *

Dean Kolstad

Award Nominated for: *

Executive of year

Facility Employed at: *

Gull Lake View Golf Resort

Year Elected to Membership: *

2001

Please describe your achievements/accomplishments that would pertain to this award. *

As the Director of golf oversee 6 golf courses with 64 villas
Have had Interns from different golf programs work at our facilities
Have HOPE graduates work at our facilities the last few years
Have been a member since 2001 serving on the Western chapter board, held director at large position, President of Michigan PGA,
Member of Executive board at Gull Lake View
Worked HOPE program at VA in battle creek since day1
Have won Patriot Award
Have Coached jr league teams in the past
Have hosted Drive/Chip/Putt

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Email *

jabbergolf@aol.com

Name of Nominee: *

Dean Marks

Award Nominated for: *

Golf Executive of the Year

Facility Employed at: *

Milham Park Golf Club

Year Elected to Membership: *

1997

Please describe your achievements/accomplishments that would pertain to this award. *

The Golf Executive of the Year Award is a very prestigious award and I am honored to be considered for it. I have been a PGA Member for 25 years but have been in the golf business since my parents built a golf course 49 years ago when I was 3 years old.

I have always been passionate about sharing the game I love with everyone I can. I have run a junior golf program for over 20 years that averages 350 participants a year. I coached a college women's golf team for 17 years. I have been the Director of Golf the last 10 years for the 3 golf courses owned by the City of Kalamazoo. I have advocated for having a First Tee program in Kalamazoo and after many years, became a satellite location to the First Tee West Michigan chapter in spring of 2021. I have taught veterans at the VA Hospital in Battle Creek through the PGA HOPE program since 2013. I had the 17th largest PGA Jr League program in the country with 117 participants in 2020 and was selected to host a 2022 PGA Jr League Regional in 2022. I have hosted 3 Drive, Chip & Putt local qualifiers. And because I didn't have enough on my plate, I purchased Olde Mill Golf Course in 2020 with the intention of improving the course conditions while keeping the prices affordable.

I strive to provide the best golfing experiences at affordable rates, whether it's the \$5 for 9 holes I charge at our Red Arrow Golf Course, or the \$70 I charge in my junior golf program for either 6 weeks of instruction or to play in 5 tournaments. I even ran a 3-year membership special at Olde Mill for \$49 per year that acquired over 2100 new members. I feel I have a strong network of mentors and have 21 different facilities who donate playing time for my junior programs. I hire PGA professionals at all of my facilities and encourage them to participate in as many community events as possible. I feel that whatever I can give back is minor considering what the game of golf has given to me over the years.

Thank you for taking the time to read about some of my highlights.

- PGA Certified Professional in Instruction 2009
- Michigan PGA Junior Golf Leader award 2007, 2012
- Michigan PGA Player Development award 2017
- TPI Certified Level 2 Junior Coach 2010
- US Kids Golf Top 50 Kids Teacher 2008, 2009, 2010
- US Kids Golf Master Kids Teacher 2011
- US Kids Golf Certified Coach 2012
- US Kids Golf Certified Coach Level 2 2018
- Kalamazoo College Women's Golf Coach 2003-2020
- First Tee Level 1 Coach 2016
- USGA Rules of Golf Advanced Certification 2019

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Email *

jcarlson@redwatergolf.com

Name of Nominee: *

Jeff Carlson, PGA

Award Nominated for: *

Golf Executive of the Year

Facility Employed at: *

RedWater Golf Clubs / RedWater

Year Elected to Membership: *

2008

Please describe your achievements/accomplishments that would pertain to this award. *

I am honored to have been nominated by my peers for the 2023 Golf Executive of the Year award. Since becoming a PGA Member in 2008, I have been fortunate to experience the golf business in different roles at different types of facilities in both Colorado and Michigan. My career spans through a variety of roles such as Assistant Golf Professional, Head Golf Professional, and currently as General Manager of Golf and Sports for RedWater Golf Clubs. The transition from Head Professional into my current role started when I was asked by ownership to start improving our merchandise programs at all the clubs in the RedWater group. I now have the privilege of overseeing 8 golf clubs here in West Michigan (6 private and 2 public), 5 private pools, and 4 LiveGolf locations. Daily, I work with our talented PGA Professionals and their operational teams at our clubs, along with the hardworking Superintendents and their crews that maintain our courses and grounds to enhance the golf community in Michigan. I strive to set our staffs and clubs up for success so they can positively impact our members, guests, and patrons through improved facilities and enjoyable experiences. Below are points I would like to highlight for all to consider when voting for this award:

- Currently our RedWater Team has 14 Class A PGA Professionals and I have just created a PGA Associate reimbursement program for our other golf professionals who have career goals of becoming a PGA Member. We have 7 professionals currently in or about to enroll into the PGA Associate program to gain PGA Membership. Our professional group consists of 24 professionals at our clubs, when fully staffed, that I get to help support and work with throughout the season to continue to grow our offerings and services.
- I continue to enhance our compensation packages for our professionals through increases in salaries and additional revenue streams for operational and merchandise success. With these changes in compensation, our goal is to also create a more positive work/life balance for our staffs ensure their future in the golf business.
- I supported and implemented a new RedWater Director of Player Development position to increase our offerings of clinics, new to the game programs, junior golf options, private instruction, and club fitting. Our goal is to ensure that we meet the demand of current players for instruction and continue to bring new people into the game through a variety of options with consistent quality.
- Our clubs host events or activities for the Michigan PGA, PGA Western Chapter, Golf Association of Michigan, West Michigan Golf Association, USGA, First Tee, and currently host 26 High School and College Programs.
- I implemented a successful and more profitable merchandise plan for our Golf Shops through increasing the quantity of sales with more aggressive pricing for our members and guests. Each year we continue to show growth in merchandise through our offerings and personal service for both golf and lifestyle items.
- I have the privilege to recommend and oversee major capital improvement projects at our clubs. Currently we have 2 major golf course upgrade projects happening at Watermark CC and Sunnysbrook CC, 1 new LiveGolf installation happening at Muskegon CC, and a full clubhouse update at Thornapple Pointe to happen over the winter months. Improving our current offerings to the golf community will ensure the game of golf is attractive and exciting into the future.

Again, I am very humbled and honor to be nominated for this year's award. By no means can I list all the items that I get to contribute to within our RedWater group or in the golf community, but I do feel very lucky that I am in a position currently to continue to strive to make changes for the better for this great game.

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Email *

tomham@renaissancegolfmanagement.com

Name of Nominee: *

Thomas Ham

Award Nominated for: *

Golf Executive of the Year

Facility Employed at: *

Renaissance Golf Management Group, Inc and Huron Breeze Golf Club

Year Elected to Membership: *

1995

Please describe your achievements/accomplishments that would pertain to this award. *

I began my career in the PGA (Quarter Century Member) with the goal of improving the player experience as a PGA Head Professional at Huron Breeze. As I pursued more responsibility, I earned the distinction of General Manager and continued developing my craft by achieving Master Professional status certified in General Management.

Several years ago, that simple goal turned into a mission of assisting owners and board of directors that are dedicated to provide a venue for our incredible game of golf. In 2007, I founded Renaissance Golf Management Group, Inc. for that purpose. As the founder of Renaissance Golf Management Group, Inc., I recognized it requires a great dedication of time and resources of owners to provide playing experiences at golf facilities, I felt a calling to assist those struggling to provide venues for all of us to enjoy the game we love.

My company, Renaissance Golf Management Group, Inc., began by performing feasibility analysis for a few clients. In that process, it became apparent the benefit of creating stable management for owners and board of directors. Within a year, Renaissance had three facilities to focus on and the natural progression was to eliminate the detrimental effects/reliance on third party providers. Renaissance went to work for our facilities by becoming proficient in a variety of services to include:

- Providing overall facility management (elevating PGA members to general management positions, hiring support staffing, accounting, business planning, employee incentive plans, employee performance standard documentation, etc.).
- Online Marketing (importance of controlling your own domain, website hosting, website design, website marketing)
- Email Marketing (creation of our own email marketing module, auto response, and database segmentation)
- Social Media Marketing (creating social sites, criteria for posting, and PPC)
- Removal of convention untraceable advertising
- Financial Management
- Developing comprehensive business plans to include strategic goals, management objectives, personnel standards/manuals, budget planning, budget justification templates, and more.

Renaissance Golf Management Group has given me the opportunity to employ, collaborate, educate, learn from, support, and, at times, bridge the gap in understanding operational challenges between owners and management for some of Michigan's finest PGA/GCSAA Members and facility support staff, such as, most recently:

- Lt Col Dan Rooney, PGA
- Dave Mocini, PGA Past President
- Bob Bales, PGA Past President
- Doug Bell, PGA
- Ed Bialek, PGA
- Michael Rey, PGA
- Kevin Krohne, GCSAA
- Jason Culver, GCSAA
- Raymond Hearn, GCAA
- Ian Ziska, PGA
- Joe Verduin, GCSAA
- Paul Cornwell, PGA
- Erica Reed, PGA
- Rick Dewling, CMAA
- Dan Contraras, GCSAA
- Adam Boyn, GCSAA

Over the last 13 years, I have been very fortunate to call so many of these facilities 'partners' and most are still part of Renaissance Golf Management Group. Currently, I am assisting eight facilities.

It is an honor to be considered for this achievement and I thank you for the nomination.

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Email *

gm@walloonlakecc.com

Name of Nominee: *

Harry Dixon

Award Nominated for: *

Golf Professional of the Year & Executive of the Year

Facility Employed at: *

Walloon Lake Country Club

Year Elected to Membership: *

1998

Please describe your achievements/accomplishments that would pertain to this award. *

Dear Michigan Section Awards Committee,

Thank you for the nomination of PGA Professional of the Year and Executive of the Year! I have been a member of the NMPGA since 1990. I have been a class A member since 1998. I have served on the Northern Chapter and Section Board of Directors.

I am married, my wife's name is Kelly. I was fortunate to marry my high school sweetheart. We just celebrated our 25th wedding anniversary last month. We have two beautiful daughters, Mallory age 22, who graduated from Central Michigan University, and Haley age 19, who is looking forward to going to Michigan State University next fall.

I am finishing my 35th season at Walloon Lake Country Club, a private club in Petoskey, MI. I started working at Walloon when I was 15 years old in the bag room. After graduating from Petoskey High School, I attended NCMC and studied accounting. At the same time, I became an apprentice in the PGA. I changed career paths and went through PGA Business Schools 1, 2 and 3. I became the Assistant Golf Professional at Walloon at the age of eighteen. I was the Assistant until the age of twenty-three, when I was promoted to Club Manager. I still had responsibilities in the golf operation during the time as Club Manager. At the age of twenty-eight, I was approached by the board president inquiring my interest in becoming the general manager of Walloon Lake Country Club. I told him it was something in which I was extremely interested. At the age of thirty, the club named me General Manager. The position I currently hold today.

My responsibilities include overseeing the club finances, overseeing the golf & grounds operation, the food and beverage operation, tennis/pickleball operation, kid's camp operation and all social events. The club employs up to 95 employees during the season.

I have been through many capital projects at the club. I have been involved in the construction of a new clubhouse, golf shop and maintenance facility, renovations to the clubhouse and golf practice facility. We are currently working on adding to our employee housing needs and adding two modular houses. The club has also decided to add two more pickleball courts for the 2023 season.

During my time as general manager, we have increased membership equity from \$4.2 million to over \$9.0 million. We have been able to increase initiation fees from \$10,000 to \$60,000 and currently have 92 people on our waitlist. Most importantly, the club is debt free.

Something I most proud of is being a part of the Harbor Cup and being a member of Team Harbor. A golf event that puts 12 golf professionals from the local golf courses in Northern Michigan against 12 golf professionals from Boyne USA in a Ryder Cup format. We just completed the 26th playing of the event, my 25th year of playing in the event. Over the 26 years of the event, we have raised a substantial amount of money for the local charities in Northern Michigan. I was told next year we may surpass the \$1,000,000 mark. The golf professionals that have participated in this event over the years have helped changed the lives of many. Another example of the satisfaction you get from being a PGA professional.

It is an honor to be nominated for both of these awards, thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

Harry Dixon, PGA
General Manager
Walloon Lake Country Club

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