

2026 Professional Development Award Candidate Bio Form

Please submit this form no later than **Monday, October 6, 2025 at 5pm.**

Email *

wardsutton@pga.com

Name of Nominee: *

Ward Sutton

Facility Employed at: *

Kent Country Club

Year Elected to Membership: *

2004

Are you a Master Professional, Certified Professional, serve as an Association Subject Matter Expert or adjunct PGA faculty member? *

- PGA Master Professional-Golf Operations-2011
- PGA Certified Professional- Retail, Golf Operations, General Management, and Instruction-2006
- Subject Matter Expert for PGA Education in 2007 to develop the Certified Professional Program 2.0
- Certified Club Manager-Club Management Association of America-2018
- Certified Chief Executive-Club Management Association of America-2022
- Master Club Manager-Club Management Association of America-2025
- Adjunct faculty member Michigan State University within the Hospitality Program at the Eli Broad College of Business, teaching Club Operations and Management (HB 321) each fall semester
- In 2026, I will transition from guest lecturing (since 2023) at the Business Management Institute programs held three times annually at Michigan State University to leading the program for the Club Management Association of America
- Also in 2026, I will begin lecturing twice annually for the Certified Club Manager Review Course for CCM designation candidates at Georgia State University and will serve as a resident club consultant for clubs seeking guidance through Michigan State University.

Please describe your contribution to the PGA educational programs in the Michigan Section or nationally in 250 words or less: *

- Chair, Education Committee, Michigan PGA (since 2024)
 - o Developed the Education Committee charter
 - o Invited Michigan PGA members who are General Managers, Directors of Golf, and Directors of Instruction to form “pods” aligned with PGA Career Tracks
 - o Surveyed Michigan PGA Section members to ensure educational offerings reflect their wants and needs
 - o Coordinate educational programming for the Michigan PGA Spring and Fall Meetings
 - o Developed the “Education and Meetings” tab on michiganpga.com
 - o Played an integral role in launching the “Lunchtime Learning” series for the Michigan PGA in 2025
 - o Co-developed the “Coaches Fall Roundtable,” hosted at Kent CC in 2025
 - o Co-developed the Spring Coaching Summit scheduled for 2026
- Chair, Associate Mentorship Subcommittee, Membership Committee, Michigan PGA (since 2024)
 - o Created the “Associates” and “Mentorship” tabs on michiganpga.com
 - o Initiated outreach to all Michigan PGA members to develop a mentorship program aligned with PGA Deferred Compensation
 - o Created the Michigan PGA Associate Guide
 - o Committee contacts all Associates via calls and emails, offering support and encouraging attendance at the Spring and Fall Meetings
 - o Attended the “Outside Services Roundtable” at Red Run Golf Club and successfully recruited five new PGA Associates
- Section Representative, PGA Mentoring Task Force Initiative, Michigan PGA
 - o Incoming Education Chair, Greater Michigan Club Management Association (beginning 2025)
 - o Member, Education Committee, Greater Michigan Club Management Association (since 2022)
 - ☐ Presented at the 2025 Club Management Association of America (CMAA) World Conference
 - ☐ Annual presenter at Greater Michigan CMAA events since 2022, delivering sessions including:
 - Earning CCM, CCE, and MCM
 - State of Golf with John Lindert, PGA
 - Perspectives from PGA General Managers
 - o Collaborate with both the Michigan PGA Section and the Greater Michigan Club Management Association to synergize educational efforts

Please describe your contribution toward development of articles or materials related to and benefiting education in 250 words or less: *

During my tenure at Kent Country Club and as a member of the Michigan PGA Section

- Employer of Choice Principles at Private Clubs – Master Club Manager Monograph, CMAA (2025)
- Ray and Sutton Achieve Master Club Manager Designation – Club Management Magazine (2025)
- Kent Country Club General Manager Ward Sutton Achieves Master Club Manager Designation – Boardroom Magazine (2025)
- Kent Country Club Announces GM Ward Sutton Achieves Master Club Manager Designation (2025)
- Ray, Sutton Achieve Master Club Manager Designation – Club & Resort Business (2025)
- Missions Aren't Meant to Be Secret – Canvas Rebel (2025)
- Marc Ray and Ward Sutton Master Club Manager Designation – Golf Wire (2025)
- Ray and Sutton Achieve Master Club Manager Designation – CMAA (2025)
- Becoming the Employer of Choice: Insights from Ward Sutton, MCM, CCE, PGA Master Professional – Club Management Magazine (2025)
- Boardroom Magazine Recognizes the Private Club Presidents of the Year – Boardroom Magazine (2024)
- What You Need to Know About Footwear – PGA Magazine (2024)
- Taking Pride in the Outside – Club & Resort Business (2023)
- Kent Country Club Renovating Clubhouse, Adding New Dining Area – Grand Rapids Business Journal (2023)
- How Technology Is Changing Operations and Engagement with Members – PGA Magazine (2022)
- Local Spotlight – Voyages Michigan (2022)
- 35+ additional articles published prior to my tenure at Kent Country Club and before joining the Michigan PGA Section
- Links to all articles can be found at <https://www.linkedin.com/in/wardsuttonpga/>

Please describe your contribution to build the image of both PGA Professionals and the Association? *

My professional mission is to be a bridge between where people are and where they aspire to be—through the club experience. I am committed to enriching the lives of my staff and members, driving ambitious club goals, and elevating the club's reputation within the community.

I measure my success by elevating those under my care. Below are examples of building the image of others during my career, particularly during my tenure at Kent Country Club:

- Nine former assistant golf professionals or assistant general managers have advanced to Director of Golf or General Manager roles at other facilities.
- Jimmy Wisinski, Kent CC Director of Instruction:
 - o 2025 Michigan PGA Professional Development Award winner
 - o 2025 Michigan PGA Teacher and Coach of the Year
 - o 2023 Michigan PGA Player Development Award winner
- Ryan Bayer, Kent CC Assistant Golf Professional:
 - o 2025 Michigan PGA Assistant Golf Professional of the Year
- Tiffany Drye, Kent CC Assistant General Manager:
 - o 2024 Greater Michigan Club Management Association Mid-Manager of the Year
- Mike Gianopoulos, Kent CC Golf Course Superintendent:
 - o 2024 and 2025 Michigan GCSA Championship winner
 - o 2025 National GCSAA Championship winner
- Craig Welch III, Kent CC President:
 - o 2024 Boardroom Magazine Top 20 Club Presidents honoree

Please describe how you inspire fellow PGA Professionals and promote the game of golf in 250 *
words or less.

An essential element of my leadership philosophy is ensuring that our club supports amateur golf, professional golf, and the overall growth of the game. Below are examples of that commitment during my tenure at Kent Country Club:

- Host of the 2022 Drive, Chip and Putt Regional Qualifier
- Host of the 2023 Michigan PGA Western Chapter Championship
- Host of the 2024 USGA Senior Amateur Qualifier
- Host of the 2025 USGA Women's Amateur Qualifier
- Host of the 2025 Michigan PGA Fall Pro/Pro
- Host of the 2025 Michigan PGA Western Chapter Pro/Pro/Pro
- Participated in and led the fundraising team for the 2025 Birdies for REACH initiative
- First Tee host facility, raising more than \$20,000 annually
- Four Evans Scholarship recipients from Kent CC since 2021
- Two active PGA Junior League teams at Kent CC since 2021
- Five certified PGA HOPE instructors on staff
- Added a two-bay TrackMan Studio to promote year-round golf and instruction
- Supported the growth of our junior sports program—including golf, racquets, and aquatics—to 186 participants
- Expanded our KE Camp program to 60 annual participants, with exposure to golf twice weekly during the summer
- Championed golfer development programs such as Ladies and Libations, golf schools, clinics, beginner programming, and on-course coaching—tripling participation in women's golf tournaments
- Provided full funding and support for two PGA Associates on staff
- Played an integral role in developing the "Lunchtime Learning" instructional series for the Michigan PGA Section in 2025
- Co-developed the "Coaches Fall Roundtable" hosted at Kent CC in 2025
- Co-developed the Spring Coaching Summit scheduled for 2026
- Collaborated with both the Michigan PGA Section and the Greater Michigan Club Management Association to synergize educational efforts

Please list any other PGA Section or National Awards you've received and the year(s) you received them (50 word limit): *

2004 Acushnet Apprentice Scholarship Recipient
 2012 Ping Regional Club Fitter of the Year
 2014 Professional Development Award, Northern California PGA Section
 2016 Bill Strausbaugh Award, Northern California PGA Section
 2018 Golf Professional of the Year, Northern California PGA Section
 2025 Manager of the Year, Greater Michigan Club Management Association

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