

## Getting the swing of golf

MGAA sponsors free golf clinic at Medford course

Fifteen-year-old Terrance Hawkins of Wading River never swung a golf club before visiting the Mill Pond Golf Course in Medford late last week.

That all changed when Hawkins, along with 15 other youths from the Little Flower Residential Treatment Center in Wading River, attended a free golf clinic for underprivileged and minority youths. The session, the first of six weeks of free golf classes, is being organized by Mill Pond and the Minority Golf Association of America (MGAA).

"I think anything that they haven't had contact with that's different just enlightens them," said Joe Standler, a social worker at Little Flower, which houses children who have no home and have been separated from their families.

The clinic, which is geared toward minorities and underprivileged youths, is part of the MGAA's efforts to open up opportunities for young

people in urban and suburban areas.

"We use golf as an empowerment tool," said MGAA Director of Marketing David Press. "The child who does well in golf will develop other important life values including hard work, social graces and goals," he said.

So far, the program has produced a number of golf enthusiasts who have gone on to play at a semi-professional level. More importantly, the program has helped many underprivileged youths to set short and long term goals for their lives.

"We've seen that a lot of these kids want to continue in the sport of golf," said MGAA President John L. David, who was the first minority to receive a full golf scholarship to Pennsylvania State University and now teaches golf clinics across the country for the MGAA. "They realize that having golf skills can help them to be active citizens," he said.

Before becoming the next Tiger Woods, however, patience was the

first lesson that many of last week's clinic golfers learned.

"I like it," said Hawkins, who was hitting the ball almost 100 yards by the end of his first day of golfing. "It's a little bit challenging, but it's fun."

"Golf is probably the toughest sport because of the self-discipline that's involved in learning the basics," said Press.

According to Press, the MGAA's goal is to help get local communities started with free minority golf clinics which may bring in donations from local businesses and organizations.

"We will be able to assist them in any way, shape or form," he said.

So far, the MGAA has been able to offer golf clinics gratis due to some key nationwide sponsors. The MGAA is currently sponsored by Pepsi, American Airlines and Callaway Golf.

Although the rates for golfing at many country clubs and golf courses is beyond the financial means of many minority and underprivileged

youths, David said that the future of the sport will dictate certain economic changes.

"A lot of the facilities see that the next generation of golfers are going to come from juniors and senior citizens," said David, adding that the benefits of lower costs especially to youths will help stimulate personal values that will last a lifetime.

"They're going to learn patience, they're going to learn confidence," he continued. "First I give them small goals and then they go and learn greater skills and the next time I give them bigger goals."

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MGAA President John David (right) instructs Noel Lewis, 14, of the Little Flower Residential Treatment Center in Shoreham-Wading River during a free clinic at the Mill Pond Golf Course.  
ADV/Cromeyn