

Sports & Outdoors

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Celebration Of Making A Difference

By Gavin Menu

Dozens of boxes stacked to the ceiling in John David's Westhampton Beach office offered a clear indication this week that David's Multicultural Golf Association of America, which will celebrate its 15th anniversary this week, is in a state of flux.

David will move the nonprofit organization he founded in 1990 with his brother, Paul, and chief financial officer Dick Friedson, to a yet-to-be decided location in Westhampton Beach or Quogue in the near future. The move is not because of financial short-comings, David said, although he conceded the overall financial status of the organization is causing him some worry.

That began when the National Broadcasting Company, or NBC, merged last year with the USA Network, which has traditionally been one of the MGAA's biggest sponsors. Executives at the broadcasting giant decided to drop its contract with the MGAA, which for 15 years has made the sport accessible to 175,000 children in 42 states and the Caribbean, according to David.

As a result of the unforeseen fallout with NBC, the MGAA is turning to other media outlets as a way to raise money for the golf clinics and educational programs that David built his foundation with. **The MGAA will celebrate its anniversary with a premiere movie event at the Westhampton Beach Performing Arts Center on Thursday, November 10.**

The upcoming film, 'Angels with Angles,' starring the late comedians Frank Gorshin as George Burns and Rodney Dangerfield as God, has already garnered whispers about possible Academy Award nominations, according to its producer, Scott Edmund Lane. And while the official "world premiere" will be held in Los Angeles next month, this week's showing at the PAC will be the movie's first screening.

"Out of nowhere, John asked if I could get involved with this event," Lane said in a phone interview from Los Angeles this week. "I'll do anything to help kids, and this is certainly a worthy cause."

David's long and winding journey through the golfing world began at the age of 13, when he was painting tennis lines at the Westhampton Country Club in the mid-1950s. David, who is African-American, noticed some of the older kids carrying golf bags, and wondered if he could make a living on the golf course. He quickly became a caddy at the exclusive club, then a caddy master, and later an assistant professional, a job he earned because of his natural ability to shoot rounds in the low 70s.

David was a rarity in the world of golf during the 1960s as an African-American professional teaching a game almost exclusively played by whites. In fact, David said his status as a professional was never officially recognized by the Professional Golfers Association because of a written policy that recognized white golf pros only. "My ambition was to play on the PGA Tour," David said, "but that wasn't going to work because the racial situation was so terrible."

It has been nearly 50 years since David played his first round of golf, and today he has not only made a living off the game, but has influenced thousands of underprivileged children across America just by handing them a club, a set of golf balls and a few hard-earned lessons about life.

Now we have the opportunity to expose our program not only locally, but nationally," David said, speaking about this week's upcoming movie premiere and party. "We've got youth agencies involved by the hundreds - the Boys and Girls Club, Big Brothers and Big Sisters, the Timothy Hill Ranch in Riverhead, the Town of Southampton Parks and Recreation Department—any program that has to do with kids at risk. It's not just about golf. We equip these kids with the necessary tools to help them become productive citizens."

David said when he and his brother started the organization in Paul's basement 15 years ago, they never could have imagined what it would become.

The Quogue natives wanted the MGAA to be an informative organization that would educate people about the lack of golf-course accessibility for minors. Media reports said the Davids were targeting inner-city minorities across the United States.“

The word minority was misunderstood,” David said. “We were targeting all kids who couldn’t afford private clubs. Our kids come in all shades and all colors. We want Hispanics, Caucasians, African Americans, Asians—everybody.”

Along with their national supporters, which over the years have included American Airlines and Pepsi, the Davids obtained local support as well. Today, the two biggest financial supporters are WRCN Radio and the Amica insurance company. The support has allowed the Davids to travel the country and teach each and every child on their own.

“We have project managers across the country but I try to personally teach all the kids at all the locations,” said David, who will often walk the streets near courses and ask children to join his clinics. “Rather than wait for the kids to come to the sport, we bring the sport to the kids.”

The future of the MGAA is a changing one, despite what David hopes is a successful event this weekend.

Based in large part on the popularity of Tiger Woods, the sport of golf has grown in popularity among minority and underprivileged children.

To support that, David and several business partners have been exploring a permanent home for the MGAA, one that would serve as a school and a golf and tennis facility. The group of investors has already found land in Orlando, Florida, and planning for the center is underway.

“We’re looking for a new location, and we need the support of the community with this premiere,” David said. “Literally, we’re starting from scratch.”

Bob Batson, who is originally from Quogue, but now lives in Mississippi, has been working on the plans for the new MGAA center. He said the center would be set on at least 225 acres in Orlando, and would include an 18-hole championship golf course, a 9-hole short course and a 4-hole training course, along with a practice range and putting facilities. Plans to construct a Multicultural Golf Hall of Fame are also underway “By the beginning of next year, we should have the commitment” from investors, Batson said. “Golf is a social elevator. This will be the new permanent home for the MGAA, and it will insure that its services will be available for generations to come.”