

PLAYER BIOS 2017

JIM BAKER

Jim lives in Nashville, Tennessee, he runs a vending route about 75 miles west of Nashville which includes a prison and a vocational school. Jim is originally from Seattle and graduated from the University of Washington with a B.A. in Zoology. He later attended the Ohio State University Dental School and practiced dentistry in Mansfield, Ohio before losing his sight in 1986 from complications to diabetes.

In 1991, he joined the USBGA and plays as a B1 golfer. Jim and coach Kyle Seeley have won the USBGA National Championship twice, in 2001 and 2007. Jim has also finished second in the USBGA National Championship six times.

Jim has been a member of the USBGA Board of Directors for 15 years, serving as president from 2002-06 and from 2013-15. He has also served as director of the USBGA Junior Golf Program, helping the program grow immensely. Through his efforts, the clinics and multiple session programs have introduced over 6,000 blind and vision impaired individuals to golf over the past 15 years.

Coaching Jim will be his Stepbrother, Tom Popp from San Antonio, Texas. Tom is a retired Air Force A10 Warthog Fighter pilot and now plays golf 2-3 times each week to a ten handicap.

BOB BANKS

I am a California native, originally born and raised in southern CA, but for the past 29 years I have lived in northern CA east of San Francisco in Concord, CA. I am 57 yrs young, married to a wonderful woman for the past 32 years and who is an amazing mother to my two adult kids. I am blessed to have a great family and many friends who help keep me laughing and enjoying life. . My oldest sister, Cindy, will again be my coach for this tournament. She has, and continues to be, a great friend and support for golf and other curveballs life tosses my way. She makes sure I don't just strike the ball, but try to understand course management and how to improve my many mis-hits.

I began losing my vision in April of 2015; by May 2015 I was legally blind with very little central vision with a diagnosis of Leber's Hereditary Optic Neuropathy (LHON) a rare genetic disorder which effects central vision. While there is currently no cure or treatment, I am so thankful that I can continue to work, play golf, travel and live life to its fullest.

I have played golf off and on most of my adult life, but only until a couple of years ago did I begin playing more regularly. I began playing golf with my vision loss last fall after watching a video of Jeremy Poincenot. It didn't make much sense to me how that would work, but I pulled the clubs from the trash and gave it a try. I am thankful for that moment not only to be able to continue to play golf, but to enjoy the companionship of

friends and family on the course. This is my 2nd USBGA tournament I look forward to meeting friends from last year as well as new friends this year.

GERHART BERGANT

I was born January 2nd 1969 and grew up in Austria/Europe – in a region which is called Tyrol, in a small town called Telfs. I have 2 older sisters and a younger brother. We live in a big house with a large garden. I got married to Andrea almost 20 years ago and we have a wonderful daughter Chantal, aged 19. For all my life I was working as a shop assistant in a supermarket and the last years as a shop manager.

I always had glasses for reading but my sight was not too bad. Only during a routine examination I was diagnosed retinitis pigmentosa at the age of 40. Since then my sight always got worse. Now I'm retired and to keep fit I play golf (for over 25 years now) and in winter I do cross country skiing.

My wife Andrea is guiding me. Our collaboration works quite well, as she also plays golf for a long time. In 2016 we played our first Blind Golf Tournament and it worked quite well. Here in Austria there are only 3 active Blind Golf players!

ART BEAUREARD

Art currently lives in Leesburg Florida. He is a B3 who lost his vision to Macular Degeneration at the age of 42. Art's first tournament was in 1997 at the first Blind and Vision impaired Florida open Golf Championship. He was the first to receive the Florida Peekers Champion award.

Art has played in many Tournaments all around the country and has represented the USA at tournaments in Scotland and Canada. He did leave the USBGA in late 2006, as his wife and coach, Sue moved him around to follow her changing jobs.

Art re-joined the USBGA last year and placed 3rd in the USBGA National Championship in his division.

Art and Sue are excited to be back playing competition Golf with such great people.

JEFF CARRICO

Jeff along with coach and wife of almost 35 years Marge live in Independence Kentucky. We started playing golf about 8 years ago. I have been employed as a computer specialist for the government for 31 years. Our first USBGA tournament was a couple of years ago in Lexington Kentucky. This US Open will be our 3rd time playing in beautiful Arizona.

My vision loss was discovered when I was 18 years old and went for a routine eye check up. When asked to read the chart with my second eye, I responded "what chart?" About a month later, it impacted my other eye. I have a rare eye disease called Lebers Optic Atrophy, which primarily affects my central vision. I am in the B2 category. We are really looking forward to another great experience in Arizona.

JOHN CASOLO

John lost his right eye in a kitchen accident at 18 months old. He lost his left eye in 1984 to a detached retina. He got his first guide dog in 1987. He and his sixth dog???, Happily live in Waterbury CT.

John came to the USBGA championship in San Antonio without a coach and met his coach and friend David Mouton. Their partnership was cemented with a record setting score of 501. They have played in nearly every available tournament since then, winning along with fellow competitor Dick Pomo, the trophy “trophy impaired trophy” at the Bluegrass regional tournament in Kentucky in 2014. John considers himself the luckiest and happiest man in the world.

STEVEN CASTANEDA

Steven lives in Lake Elsinore California. He lost most of his sight eight years ago. While employed, he worked his way up from shipping and receiving to circuit design. Steven also became involved in an employment agency with his son and was in charge of business development.

Before becoming visually impaired, Steven states that he would often play golf five to six times a week. With the loss of vision Steve gave up the game until about two years ago when he was introduced to blind and visually impaired golf by Bill Davis through the California “blind buddies golf challenge program.” During his second year in the program Steve won the longest drive competition. This program got him back involved in playing golf. This will be Steven’s first competitive tournament. He will be coached by Green Valley resident Hector Aguirre.

JACK COLLINS

I lost my sight to Macular Degeneration. In 2002/03. I started playing golf in September of 2007. I try to play every day in my front yard. I write poems and talk to everyone who will listen. Jack will be coached this year by Jack Cerasuolo of Green Valley AZ.

BILL DAVIS

Bill is from Southern California. He was born with limited vision in one eye and no vision in the other. He has competed in several National and World Championships in Track and Field, Cycling, Triathlons, and Golf. Over the past 13 years, Bill has organized and facilitated introduction golf clinics for people with disabilities, while also providing free lessons to visual impaired golfers and potential coaches/caddies.

Bill has been a member of USBGA for 17 years. During this time Bill has competed in several National and World Championships as a B2 player.

This will be Bill’s fourth time competing in the Arizona Tournament with his coach/caddy Ira “Rocky” Rockowitz, a Green Valley resident. Good luck to all the players.

RON DERRY

Ron was a teacher and coach for 18 years. He spent the first 13 years at Hamilton Local Schools and the next 5 years at Watkins Memorial. His teaching experiences included middle school math and science. His coaching experiences included girls and boys basketball, football, and tennis.

Twenty-two years ago Ron lost all light perception in both eyes due to retinopathy, and is totally blind. Upon losing his eyesight, he dedicated his life to teaching others that life doesn't end when confronted with a major problem. Immediately after going blind, he wanted to continue working with students of all ages. He founded the GOOD(Going On Or Defeated) Program, and started a motivational speaking service which has now presented life lessons on perseverance and maintaining a positive outlook in life to thousands of adults and children. The GOOD motivational shirt he designed has now been given to over 60,000 students.

Ron has been playing blind golf for approximately 20 years. He won the Midwest Regional in the early 2000's, came in third in the USBGA National Championship three times, and won the 2014 Corcoran Cup in Mt. Kisco New York.

His coach is Amy Badolato. Amy has been Ron's assistant with the GOOD Program for the past seven years. They have worked with children in over 100 schools during each of these seven years. Amy is a good golfer, winning her club championship during the summer of 2015. Amy and her husband Rob reside with their children Kyle and Corissa in Hebron, Ohio.

DAN DILLON

Dan was born in Kalamazoo Michigan and gradually lost the rest of his sight in his late teens. Upon graduating from Michigan State University, he journeyed to Nashville Tn. to pursue the music business.

For the past 18 years, Dan has been very involved with the American Council of the Blind (ACB), and served as president of the Tennessee Council of the Blind, and President of the local chapter in Nashville, the Mid-Tennessee Council of the Blind for 6 years in each organization.

Playing golf, playing cards, bowling and trivia games, fishing, woodworking, singing and playing his guitar and traveling to the beach as often as possible

Dan has always been involved in some type of an exercise program and tries to walk every day. He feels extremely fortunate to have been involved in the Tandem Bike riding program for the blind and visually impaired since its inception He is very excited to ride in his seventh Harpeth river ride this June.

Dan will be coached by his coach of many years Dave Ranken who is a master at reading greens.

JAN DINSDALE MBE

Jan lost her sight over 3 weeks in 1996. With rehab & equipment, she was back to work after three months as a Ward Clerk at the Ulster Hospital.

In 1999 she took up Golf – Blind Golf as an “interest” to share with her partner & Guide, David McVeigh.

Since then, they have traveled far and wide to play golf tournaments, visiting “the States” & Canada many times.

This is their second visit to Arizona. They are looking forward to discovering new terrain, meeting up with old friends and making new ones.

..... And most of all enjoying the golf!!!!

Play well! Everyone!But most of all ENJOY!!!!!!

KEVIN EDWARDS

Kevin lives in Paris Tennessee. He started to play golf at age 12 and played high school golf and one year of college golf. Kevin lost sight in the fall of 2000. He joined USBGA in 2001 and participated in his first tournament in 2004

Kevin and his wife Anna were married on their local golf course in 1999. In 2012, while playing in the USBGA Kentucky Regional tournament, Kevin scored a hole in 1. While Kevin’s wife Anna will not be able to coach Kevin this year, Peg Whitlock from Green Valley Arizona has stepped forth to coach him.

JEFF ESTEBO

Jeff is a 31-year-old father of one, from St. Petersburg Florida. He began playing golf at the age of nine. After being diagnosed with Stargardt disease at the age of 12, he continued to spend hours on the golf course playing with his dad and brother. He is currently a B2 player and is very happy to have found the USBGA. He has found participating with other visually impaired players to be an inspiration to his life both on and off the course. Jeff will be coached by Green Valley resident Craig Burgess.

JOE FURBER

My name is Joe Furber, and I, in tandem with my longtime friend/Coach, Gordon Melnyk, are thrilled to be participating in the 2017 United States Blind Golf Open. We both reside in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. Competing at the B1 level, this will be our 4th time in Green Valley.

I have Retinitis Pigmentosa, a hereditary degenerative eye disease that has caused my vision to deteriorate over the years. I began to play golf around age 12, but gave it up in 1999. Then in 2011, with the encouragement of my wife, I began to play Blind golf. Thankfully, now at age 54, Blind Golf has afforded me the opportunity to meet many new people, play golf all over the world and, to once again, enjoy the game I love!

HARRY HESTER

Hailing from Austin, sixty-four year old Harry Hester is married with one grown son. He retired as a Rural Mail Carrier with the US Postal Service when his vision

deteriorated due to macular dystrophy. He began a new career as a Teaching Assistant with autistic and special needs children and retired three years ago.

An avid golfer when he was a youth, Harry picked the game back up when he became visually impaired and became involved in blind golf tournaments about twelve years ago. He has since participated in blind and low vision tournaments both nationally and internationally and enjoys the camaraderie and the opportunities to travel to new destinations offered by his association with blind golf. Harry has been a runner up at a national championship and has been a close contender in numerous other tournaments.

Harry's coach will be Rob Burneson, a close friend for many years who encouraged Harry to resume playing golf after his vision had deteriorated. Rob is an avid golfer who has coached Harry in several tournaments and will again coach Harry this year in Arizona. They are the B-3 champions of three previous Arizona tournaments.

Phillip HUBBARD

Phil was Born and raised in the south, Phil currently resides in central Florida with his wife and the youngest of their seven children. He lost his eyesight by the age of 19 due to a genetic disease, Stargardt's. He is blessed to own a vending business with his wife and operates through the Bureau Business Enterprise. His current vending route is at Kennedy Space Center where he is lucky enough to get up close and personal with the space program. In his spare time, he plays golf, travels, and enjoys time with his family. Phil has been a B2 member of the USBGA since 2004. He has held several board positions.

DEREK KIBBLEWHITE

Derek is 32 years old and resides in Calgary Alberta Canada. Derek started golfing at the age of 3 thanks to his grandparents. At the age of 11 Derek started losing his vision due to a rare genetic eye disease called juvenile retinoschisis. Derek joined Blind Golf Canada in 2014 and currently plays in the B2 division. When Derek isn't golfing he works as an Account Manager for an IT staffing company in Calgary. Derek will be again this year coached by Chris Chambers.

PAUL McCORMACK

Born in Philadelphia in 1996, both parents are from Donegal Ireland. Paul grew up in Ballybofey, Ireland, and completed his Leaving Certificate (finished High School) in 1986.

He immigrated to New York, in 1986 and worked construction for 4 years.

Joined the NYPD in 1990, and rose through the ranks very quickly, becoming the youngest Captain in the history of the NYPD in 1999.

Was the Commanding Officer of the 41st precinct, better known as Fort Apache, the Bronx, during the attacks on NYC on September 11, 2001, and spent 4 months working at Ground Zero.

Paul retired from the NYPD in 2010 due to eye injuries sustained in the line of duty while working at Ground Zero.

Paul was the chairman of the NYPD Gaelic Football Club for 10 years and hosted many teams and organizations traveling from around the world to New York during his tenure. He earned his Bachelors Degree in Police Science from John Jay College of Criminal Justice in 1997, and earned a Masters Degree in Management from New York University in 2000.

Paul and his wife Nicola have five children, Paul Jr. (12), Mikey and James (10), Bobby Dee (8) and their little princess Lola Jean (1).

They live in Dublin, Ireland, and their world revolves around their kids.

Paul and Nicola created a travelling exhibition called Ground Zero 360, which is dedicated to honoring the victims of 9-11 and their surviving families.

The exhibition has been to 19 venues around the world in the past five years, including a tour of Ireland, Britain, Israel and the United States.

Paul has always been an avid golfer and has played many of the courses in the tri-state area of New York, New Jersey and Connecticut, as well as the wonderful courses in Ireland.

His highlight was birdying the first hole at Bethpage Black.

MIKE MERCADO

Mike was born in Plattsburg New York. He lost his vision in 1967. Shortly after vision loss, Mike received training in the Blind Business Vending program in 1967. He ran a vending stand for 40 years at the state education building

Mike met his wife Bonnie in 1980. Unfortunately Bonnie passed away in 2004.

Mike retired several years ago and says that now he will get the chance to do some things he just didn't have time for. Golf is at the top of his list and Tim Bartlett will again coach him in his second Arizona tournament.

TOM MIRUS , Kissimmee, FL

Coach—Robbie Robinson, Kissimmee, FL

Tom Mirus was elected to membership in the Professional Golfers' Association of America in 1980. In 2000, he qualified for Life Membership and for the Quarter Century Club in 2005. Tom holds the distinction of being the only PGA member in America who has been legally blind since birth. Tom owns a Golfweek Amateur Tour franchise, which boasts a membership of more than 200 players--he started the tour in 1997 with seven tournaments and 23 members. Holding tournaments on central Florida's best courses, along with Tom's expertise in tournament administration, have made the Golfweek Amateur Tour the best tour in central Florida for amateurs seeking competition for over 20 years. There are 44 local Golfweek Amateur Tours across the country and Tom was honored as National Director of the Year in 2012.

In 1998, Tom was invited to serve as the Senior Rules Official at the 1998 World Blind and Vision Impaired Championships hosted by the USBGA. Tom has continued to serve as the Senior Rules Official for the association since. The association also asked Tom to serve as its Director of Education. He has conducted seminars for fellow PGA professionals on teaching and coaching blind golfers. In 2016 Tom, and USBGA Hall of

Fame member Joe McCourt hosted the USBGA's 71st National Championship in Sarasota, FL.

Tom was born with cataracts & glaucoma and had 23 major operations on his eyes before the age of 10. Ultimately his left eye was replaced with a prosthetic. But it did not diminish his drive for success. Golf became his greatest passion, lifelong companion, and career focus.

This will be Tom's fourth time playing in the Arizona tournament.

DOUG PENNER

Doug is the Past President of W.C.B.G. A. Doug started losing his vision as a teenager because of the generic disorder Retinitis Pigmentosa. He joined the W.C.B.G.A. in 1995 and has represented his province of Manitoba and Canada with distinction at many tournaments. Doug enjoys the competition but also enjoys the fellowship and friendship of all the players he has met over the years in his travels. Doug's coach is his good friend and buddy Dave Emberley (Papa Smurf). Unfortunately Dave will not be able to join Doug this year due to cataract surgery. However, as usual, another Green Valley volunteer has stepped up to the plate. Joel Mitchell will assume coaching duties and if nothing else Doug will be expected to buy the first four beers.

DICK POMO

Dick was born legally blind, he often wonders what would have happened to him if he had been born illegally blind. Dick attended the Oak Hill School for the Blind in Hartford Connecticut. Dick realized fairly early in life that his greatest strength in the world of sports was spectating. However, after playing golf for some forty plus years, he still plays the game with the enthusiasm of a beginner and with the skill level to match.

I was elected president of the United States Blind Golf association in August of 2015. The only stipulation of my election was that I cover up the USBGA emblem when on the golf course.

This year my coach Dennis Gose from Green Valley will attack the course with me. Dennis has the patients of a saint during practice and during play as well.

Finally, It is only because of my favorite wife Sharon's hard work and support, along with the assistance of the wonderful group of volunteers that we have helping us that this international tournament can take place. The tournament has grown from seven years ago when we started our Arizona tournaments with 11 golfers from the US and 17 volunteers to today when we will have 36 golfers and their coaches representing five countries, and 70 volunteers. Sharon and I are not only proud of our community and those who live here, but we are also grateful for the wonderful friendships that have come our way because of the great game of blind golf.

LINDA PORT

Linda took up the game in 1989, a few years later, played golf club team golf, serving as captain for a couple of years. She then returned to work and played relatively little golf.

Fifteen years later, she was back on the course again and in 2014 began competing in United States Blind Golf Association (USBGA) competitions.

Linda has a genetic vision condition-- a total loss of central vision. Linda's dad was her inspiration; he was totally blind at an early age but lived a long (93), active and athletic life -- an educator, coach, musician and the Principal of the Washington State School for the Blind. She has often commented, "... I feel privileged to have grown up among the teachers and students at the School for the Blind."

Her work career included: real estate development and management; hotel sales and marketing; and project management for a memoir. Husband Fred (her most-of-the-time Coach) was the President of Callaway Golf International and served on the Callaway Golf Company Board of Directors -- '95 to '99.

Linda has competed in some 12 Blind Golf events with several victories including: Opens in Britain, Italy the US and Canada and recently the Women's World Championship in Tokyo. In addition, she competed on the North American Vision Cup Team in the 2015 matches at Villa d'Este, Como, Italy. She will again play for North America in 2017.

Linda was elected to the IBGA Board of Directors at their meeting in Japan in November, 2016. Her goal is to encourage vision-impaired children, "I want to create an approach to training vision-impaired children to play golf; this could truly change the paths of their lives; introducing competition, building self confidence and engaging a whole new 'family' of potentially life-long friends"

“SHORTY ” JOE Quartuccio

I became legally blind in 2014 from Macular Degeneration. Born in 1924, my family immigrated from Monreale, Sicily to Cleveland, Ohio when I was five. We moved to San Jose, California when I was 12 years old. Growing up a poor Sicilian immigrant during the depression, I developed a hard work ethic that had me working multiple jobs. Whether picking produce, working in the canneries, or learning to be a painter, I continued to pursue my passions, first baseball and then music. It wasn't until I was married and had a family that I took up the game of golf. My wife of 71 years and I moved from the Villages in San Jose to Sacramento, CA in 2014 to live with my daughter and son-in-law due to my vision loss. My son-in-law, John Wilcox will be my coach at the tournament. He has started to play golf more and more, but has never played in a tournament until now.

I have led a remarkable life. Besides years as a country music disc jockey, singer, songwriter, and band leader I worked with many test pilots and astronauts as part of my work with N.A.S.A. and its predecessor N.A.C.A. I never graduated from high school, yet with my World War II Navy aircraft mechanic skills, I was able to work with N.A.C.A. and N.A.S.A. I look forward to meeting new fellow golfers at my first tournament in Tucson.

MILLARD REED

Before I lost my eyesight, tennis was my game and I only played self taught golf beginning in 1950.

My first eyesight loss, through wet Macular Degeneration began suddenly in October 1996. As I could no longer play tennis, I then started playing golf on a once a week basis with a neighbor. I finally took golf lessons in 1999. Some say it did not help much!

Then I lost my reading and driving sight in October 2004. As I was eating lunch I watched myself lose vision. For two years, I saw many doctors and through the Nevada Blind Services, an adaptive sports specialist asked if I wanted to play golf again and I jumped right back in to the game eagerly. I learned of the USBGA through computer searching and joined in 2007. I did not play for the next two years as my wife lost her battle with Cancer in 2009.

I was elected to the USBGA board of directors and worked with the board to rewrite the bylaws and then played in my first national championship in Philadelphia that year.

I continued working on my game with my coach Jay Carter, and at the 2011 championship in Georgia, I was awarded the impaired vision most improved player and was the senior net champion. I have participated in the nationals at New York and Portland winning the senior net champion. I have also played in the USBGA regional's at Green Valley six times and in the Kentucky Bluegrass twice, winning the overall impaired vision net championship in 2012. I was fortunate to play at the British Blind Open in Peebles Scotland in 2012 finishing in the middle of the field.

Now at age 83 I am looking forward to many more tournaments under the USBGA and who knows, I intend on meeting new friends and encouraging old friends to not give up on me.

GEORGE REEDER

George lives in Mesa Arizona. He spent 41 years in the Postal Service, the last 32 years as a rural letter carrier. I retired in 1990 and moved full time to Arizona in 2009.

I started caddying at the Country Club at age 12, played golf on and off until I was in my 70's I got wet macular in my right eye when I was 70, and it was five years before I got dry macular in my left eye. I played a little golf, but felt I was imposing too much on my friends so I gave up the game. In 2012, when I was attending SWR Blind Rehab Center at the Tucson VA Hospital, the activities director talked me into joining the USBGA, and arranged for a super coach to assist me in my journey back into the world of golf. I am now doing something that I thought was gone forever, thanks to the great coaching of Bob Newell. He has given me equipment, encouragement, advice, and donated many hours and miles on my behalf. I am very grateful for such dedication. Bob will be coaching me again this year.

LARRY RHINEHART

I worked 39 years in Human Resources for Boise Cascade, Miller Brewing and Raytheon Company and I retired in 2015. I was born legally blind, 20/200 vision, in my right eye with a partially pigmented chorioretinal cicatrix in the central right fovea due to congenital Toxoplasmosis syndrome. There are no known heredity issues; parental exposure to defoliating chemicals in the Korean War is the most likely cause because my younger brother has similar eye problems. During my last few years of work, my sight in my good left eye began deteriorating from morning to evening due to Fuchs Dystrophy and torsional nystagmus, bouncing eyes. In 2011 my left good eye experienced 3 retina tears, 1 retina detachment, a macular pucker and developed cataracts in both eyes which all required eye surgeries. My good left eye vision now fluctuates between 20/200 and 20/300 throughout the day.

I have been playing golf regularly, once a week, for 17 years after I moved to Green Valley, AZ in 1999. After the loss of sight in my good left eye, I have been limited to playing with a ball locator, target and flag color indicator with good vision. I currently play with the Haven's men golf league and am looking forward to playing in my 2nd USBGA golf tournament. Bob Korbas FROM Green Valley will be coaching me this year.

JOHN SANDERSON

John is from Winnipeg Beach, Manitoba Canada. He lost his eyesight over a period of years to Retinitis Pigmentosa. John enjoyed playing golf with his friends and family way back in the 80's but gave it up in the early 90's due to his vision loss. Now close to 25 years after his last game he has been reintroduced to golf through his nephews, Joe and Darcy Furber. John played his first blind golf tournament in Truro Nova Scotia 3 years ago and has now played in tournaments in Creston, B.C., Westlock, Alberta and again in Truro N.S.. John plays in the B1 category.

John and his coach, Mike Brickwood are excited to be attending the Arizona Open!

JEFF SKEMER

Jeff lost his vision in a motor vehicle accident in December 2005. Jeff was involved in a head on collision with a semi-truck and is lucky to be alive. He underwent 7 months in the hospital rehabilitating from the accident, undergoing several surgeries to repair his elbow, wrist, legs, and facial reconstruction. Jeff's optic nerve was also damaged resulting in severe vision loss. Jeff has no sight in his right eye and a small amount of peripheral vision in his left eye.

His involvement with an occupational therapist led him to try several different sports recommended by the CNIB and this is where he rediscovered his love for golf. Jeff had played golf as a sighted person since the age of 11 and was happy to find out that he could enjoy this game again even without his sight. Jeff has been participating in blind golf tournaments since 2009 and continues to be inspired by other blind golfers. His coach is Mark Applejohn – his longtime friend.

GEORGE THIRKILL

George has in over 60 blind golf tournaments since starting in 2008. my coach/caddy/swing guru for the US open blind golf tournament is Jason(Nitro) Rite.

TY THOMPSON

Ty Thompson lives in Lexington Kentucky, I was born with a genetic disorder called PXE E. it began to affect my vision in my late 30s and by my early 40s I had lost all my central vision. Sadly I also lost my job as national sales manager, but found great hope in volunteering for many organizations that assist blind and visually impaired persons. My best enjoyment is helping children with those disabilities and teaching them new abilities that they can develop and encourage them to use them throughout their lives to raise their level as high as they wish. I also teach senior and veterans about Apple products and the use of Voiceover with this products to engage technology for communication and reference capabilities, just as if the user was sighted.

My coach is Doug Kaylor and he is also part of my senior group called "The Short Knockers". He's been a superb coach and mentor for many years and is best known for his "Apple Pie" moonshine. And, yes, you now know the real truth on how I actually lost my vision... (ha-ha)

MARIO TOBIA

Mario started playing competitive blind golf in 2007 as a visually impaired golfer. With his son, Matthew, as his coach, Mario dropped 10 strokes off his handicap. In 2011, Mario competed in the B1 division for the first time, winning the American Blind Golf National Championship and the Ohio McCulloch Match Play Tournament and finishing second in the USBGA National Championship and the Guiding Eye Classic. In January of 2013, Mario received the Most Courageous Athlete award given by the Philadelphia Sports Writers Association. This award is given to an individual who has overcome some hardship to excel in his given sport. Other winners of the MCA were Ben Hogan, Tommy John, Jim Abbott and Tom Dempsey.

In 2014, Mr. Tobia won his first United States Blind Golf National Championship along with a first place in the American Blind Golf National Championship, becoming the first blind golfer to win both events in the same year. Mario repeated as USBGA National Championship in 2015 and won the Guiding Eye Classic and American Blind Golf Championships in 2016. Later that year, Mr. Tobia took fourth place in the IBGA World Championship held in Saitama prefecture, Japan.

DIANE WILSON

I am a B3 golfer. I lost my vision to Macular Degeneration. They couldn't correct my vision to 20/20 when I was in high school, a long time ago. It continued to get worse. I taught elementary school for 43 years and retired in 2011.

I played some golf with my family over the years. I got serious and played more than three rounds a year when I joined the USBGA in 2009. I have participated in many tournaments in the United States and Canada since then. The Arizona tournament is my favorite!!!! I understand that this year I will be playing one round with Dick Pomo, this is great because when my husband Byron and I get home we will be spending several weeks teaching very young children. According to Dick, the time on the course spent with him will prepare us for this teaching experience.

SCOTT WILSON

My wife Vicki and I live in Ontario Oregon. I have been competing in blind golf since 2009. Vicki will again be my coach this year. I am legally blind due to Optic Nerve Atrophy, a genetic deterioration of the optic nerve. I enjoy the competition along with the social part of tournaments. I have made many friends playing blind golf. My wife and I own and operate garbage and recycling business in Ontario Oregon. We have three adult children and four grandchildren. We play in two to three tournaments per year. At each tournament, we are treated to a great time and want to thank all of the volunteers and donors for their support.