



# Terry Russ

## Making tee announcing an art form

After 41 years in the organization, 25 of which he has spent as a tee announcer during the tournament week, Terry Russ is going to pass on his clipboard and index cards. Fans know him as the burly silver-haired man who always wears a coat and tie for hours, no matter how warm it gets, and never, ever leaves the tee.

"Tee announcers must learn to balance hydration, dehydration and urination," Earl Elliott once described how he and Russ remained on the tee for such long stints with no breaks.

Russ is more than a Houston Golf Association role model. He is an icon. In 1993 Russ was called upon to provide a sound bite in a volunteer service video. With deep emotion he declared, "It is simple. You get out of it, what you put in it."

Russ, the man with a great sense of duty, has put much into serving the Houston Golf Association.

So, the man the late network golf analyst Dave Marr once said made Mel Tillis seem like a speech therapist, will be hanging it up after the final group tees off at the 2008 Shell Houston Open. Russ and Marr, boyhood friends, always seemed to find a way to have a good laugh. Their one-liners are legend. More on that later.

The organization has named a very special award after him - the Terry Russ Shell Houston Open Service Award. It is annually awarded to a member for outstanding work during the tournament, something Russ has been doing since 1967.

He has handled assignments - large or small - with equal zest. "Everything is important from parking cars to roping fairways, to counting tickets," recalled Russ. "Believe me, my responsibilities with HGA taught me the importance of teamwork." In 1981 he was elected by his fellow volunteers to lead them. The job was called president back then and now it is called general chairman.

However, the honor of which Russ is most proud is being named a board member for life.

In the 61-year history of the organization only two others - the late C.D. Tinsley and Paul Wahlberg - have been accorded that honor. "I feel humbled by that," said Russ. "That is very special."

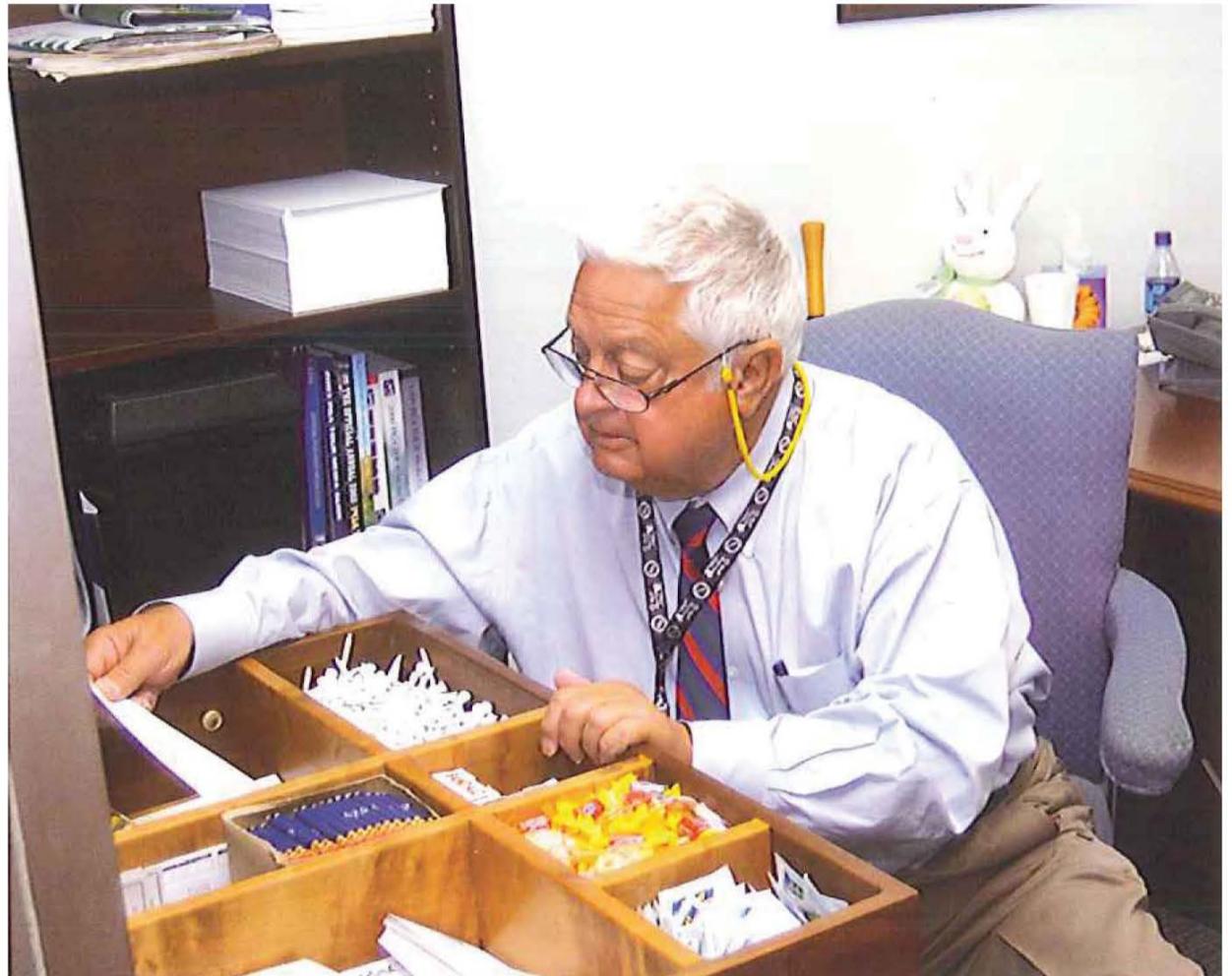
Special things happen to special people. "The golf association," as Russ likes to call it, has been a very big part of his life for over four decades. His son Jim served the organization and now his grandson Travis Walla is a member.

It is easy for the big man with the big laugh to get emotional about the organization. He loves it. "We kid Terry about crying at Supermarket openings," his close friend and fellow tee announcer Ken Stockton once said. "But he is so dedicated to the HGA. His passion for helping make the tournament as good as it can be is just awesome."

Russ firmly believes injecting humor into sometimes stressful situations can make all concerned feel at ease. He doesn't mind poking fun at himself. Regarded as an excellent public speaker, Russ is the first to point out that was not always the case.

Russ and Marr, who literally grew up together at Memorial Park Golf Course, often double-dated when they were teenagers. Marr, the 1965 PGA Championship winner, went on to a broadcasting career as an analyst for ABC and later NBC. Russ went into business. Today he is chairman emeritus of the firm Edminster, Hinshaw, & Russ.

"Dave was amazed when he found out I was serving as a tee announcer," recalled Russ. "I stuttered quite a bit when Dave and I played junior golf. Years later Dave made a talk at an HGA meeting. After I gave this big introduction, Dave



told the group they probably didn't realize how far I had come. He told them I used to stutter so much that I made Mel Tillis seem like a speech therapist."

Russ had been in the spotlight as a tee announcer longer than any volunteer in the 61-year-history of the Houston Golf Association. The memories it has fostered are legion for the man nicknamed "The Big Coon" because of the dark circles under his eyes.

**About those dark circles:**

Some say they are the result of 4 AM wakeup calls Terry left to ensure he was at the golf course an hour-and-a-half prior to the first 7 AM tee time. Others say Terry's fast-paced business life never has left much time for sleep. "The Big Coon walked late," is something Russ has uttered on many mornings to elicit a laugh from his fellow volunteers.

In the late seventies he climbed the HGA officer's ladder and took on the role as the organization's lead volunteer in 1981. Russ promptly challenged his fellow volunteers with the first million-dollar sales target.

That wasn't much compared to today's sales targets but it was a \$200,000 increase over the previous year," says Russ. "I remember how excited everybody got when a member named Jerry Greise brought in \$5,000 in sales to put us over the top."

Veteran rules official Vaughn Moise, who has served stints on the PGA TOUR, Nationwide TOUR and Champions TOUR, once said, "Terry Russ and Earl Elliott ought to write the tee announcers handbook. They make tee announcing an art form."

Elliott and Russ began their roles as tee announcers the same year and worked in tandem on No. 1 and No. 10 tee until Elliott's passing in 2003. "I really miss Earl, just like everyone else who came in contact with him," says Russ. "He and I really worked at ensuring we were prepared for our roles as tee announcers. We looked at it as an opportunity to give a good impression of Houston and the Houston Golf Association."

Today, the PGA TOUR generates bios for the tee announcers. When Russ started he wrote every bio card himself. He often spent as much time in the Media Center after play as the writers covering the event.

"When you introduce somebody, get the name and his accomplishments right," says Russ. "We make an effort to do that but sometimes your eyeballs, brain and tongue don't always get in sync."

Such was the case in 2003 at the TOUR Championship. Russ was introducing German star Bernhard Langer. It came out: "Next on the tee, Long-hard Banger!"

"Everybody broke into laughter, even Bernhard, who is known for being very quiet and serious," says Russ. "That was when ESPN carried the first two rounds of the TOUR Championship, so naturally it got replayed over and over on Sports Center."

In 2007 Langer played in the Shell Houston Open. Langer came up to the tee, saw Russ and both had a good laugh.

Russ has had the privilege of being on the tee with many of the game's greats - from Tiger Woods to Jack Nicklaus, to Greg Norman and Tom Watson.

"The Thing I've always tried to do is make sure the players feel comfortable and let them prepare however they choose," says Russ. "That tee box is their office. Some of the guys are nervous and want to be left alone. Some of them are nervous and want to chat. I just want them to feel comfortable."

Inside the tent on the back of the tee is a large wooden box. Russ and others personally make sure all the scorecards, pencils, tees, pin sheets and extra yardage books are in place. "We've got band-aids, tape, nail clippers, antacid tablets, tissue paper, all kinds of stuff in there," says Russ. "You never know what you might need."

The Houston Golf Association will always need more volunteers like Terry Russ.