

2019



THE VOLUNTEERS

Keeping score may be up-to-date, but the love is still old-fashioned

By SALLY BAHO

GENE AND Sue Snuggs have volunteered at the AT&T Pebble Beach Pro-Am for decades. Him for 26 years, and her for 27.

“She’s got one year on me,” Gene said.

Their remarkable record of volunteerism began in February 1993, when Gene joined the communications committee, the group in charge of keeping track of tournament scoring.

In those ancient days, scores were tracked with each foursome by walking scorers who hiked the length of the course, recording each stroke on a paper chit. After play finished on each hole, the paper was given to a green-side reporter who input the scores for each professional and each team in a 10-key computer. They were automatically transmitted to a trailer, known as scoring central, where Gene and another person would record them on a big sheet of paper, keeping track of all the results. The green-side reporter also called the scores into the trailer with a radio as a backup for the automatic system.

Fancy and new

Just the year before, when there was a vacancy for one of those green-side reporters, Sue asked her dad — then the communications committee chair — if she could fill it, but he wasn’t too sure “because she was a girl.”

But John Sokolich asked one of the higher-ups anyway, and he said yes, as long as she did a good job. So, Sue became the first female green-side reporter for Pebble Beach.

She and Gene were no more than colleagues until 1996, when El Niño played matchmaker. As a green-side reporter, she had been calling in her scores to Gene for several years. But that year, the tournament was canceled after two rounds.

“We had a lot of time to sit around and talk,” Gene said.

“Walk on the beach,” Sue added.

“And get to know each other,” he picked up where she left off. It was love from the start. Shortly after, the couple was married and have been happily together ever since.

In 2001, the communications committee — co-chaired by Gene and his father-in-law John — was told that the old system of scorekeeping and reporting would no longer be used, and lasers would replace it. The new system was called ShotLink and offered a way to track scores along with the distance of each shot without all those pieces of paper and radio calls.

It has two components. Teams of laser operators at the fairways and greens measure each shot as soon as it lands. Meanwhile, the walking scorers no longer fill out pieces of paper with scores; they enter them

into a handheld computer that instantly transmits them to the ShotLink trailer and the internet. A process that previously took several steps and was rather time-consuming could now be done almost instantaneously.

Yes to Pebble Beach

Gene and his father-in-law became de facto co-chairs of the new laser committee and were in charge of the transition from traditional green-side reporting to ShotLink. The new system was in use at the Reno-Tahoe Open in August, so Gene and Sue took a trip across the Sierra Nevada, but John had no inter-

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Gene and Sue Snuggs in their home in front of an image of Pebble Beach, where their life together began. Between the two of them, they’ve volunteered for more than 50 years. They’ve also been married for more than 20.

PHOTO/SALLY BAHO



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est in the lasers and stayed home. They observed the tournament and eventually approached the chairman of the laser committee at the Reno-Tahoe Open, Steve Shultis, asking if he would be interested in volunteering to help the AT&T team transition to ShotLink.

"There's only one answer when you ask a golfer and volunteer if they want to come to Pebble Beach and that is, 'Of course!'" he said.

And for 17 years, Shultis volunteered on Gene's committee.

"He's out of the country this year on business," Gene said. "But he'll be back."

It's personal

Gene and Sue have different reasons for why they love to volunteer, on top of the fact that it's what brought them together. Over the years, they have developed friendships — especially since the same volunteers tend to come back every year.

Gene called the AT&T Pebble Beach Pro-Am, "the best fundraising mechanism in the country" because it raises about \$8,000 per volunteer.

And he loves the

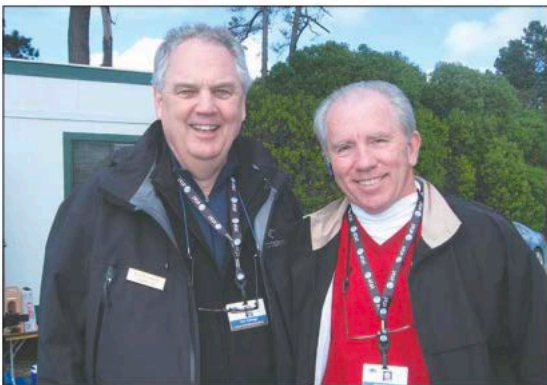
fact that the money raised by the program goes back to the local community.

For Sue, it's very personal. "I probably volunteer because my dad did it for so many years, and I just adored him," she said.

They both also enjoy being out on the course and the fact that they're part of a team.

At this year's U.S. Open — to be hosted in June at Pebble Beach — Gene will serve as the committee chair for the U.S. Golf Association's version of laser scoring.

Who would have known that during the decades they have been volunteering, Gene and Sue would not only have found each other at the pro-am, but also learned a technology that has changed the way golf is scored — giving them the opportunity to volunteer at the mighty U.S. Open?



Gene Snuggs in 2009 with former Carmel city councilman Ken Talmage, when they were co-chairs of the AT&T Pro-Am laser committee.