

## Joe Lazaro

**Golfer**

**Inducted 2007**



Joe, the eldest son of Sicilian immigrants, was born in Waltham on January 8, 1918. Joe graduated from Waltham High School and worked as a truck driver before being drafted by the United States Army in 1942 during the outbreak of World War II.

He met his future wife, Edna (Skip), while stationed in England. The last time he saw Skip was in August, 1942 before being shipped out to Tunisia in North Africa with the 109<sup>th</sup> Combat Engineers to join General Patton's forces. Later, under the direction of General Mark Clark, he landed on the beach in Salerno and fought in the Italian offensive. On September 8, 1944 near Florence, tragedy struck when a land mine exploded while on patrol and took away his vision forever. In addition to several medals awarded to him for his contribution to the war effort, Joe received a Purple Heart.

Joe caddied as a teenager at Weston Golf Club in Weston, MA, where he learned to play golf by watching others swing. He had "fooled around" with golf only slightly during this time. As part of his rehabilitation program at the Old Farms Convalescent Hospital in Avon, Conn, Joe was reintroduced to golf as part of his adaptation to a new sightless life. Joe was discharged from the Army's Valley Forge General Hospital in Pennsylvania on April 12, 1946. Father Thomas J. Carroll ran the program in Avon and later started the Carroll Center for the Blind in Newton, MA where Joe became an integral contributor.

On his return to Waltham, a number of the Waltham civic leaders, led by Tom Murphy and Dick Furbush, a future President of the Massachusetts State

Senate, encouraged him to play golf by acting as his coach. Joe went to work for Raytheon Company as a salvage technician where he met his first “official” coach, Paul Fahey.

Joe played at Wayland Country Club run by Phil Farina for years, Later; he was made an honorary member at Nashawtuc Country Club. He would often practice at Woodland Golf Club in the late afternoon, and even in his 80’s he maintained his beautiful swing. Joe’s strength was his ability to repeat the same fluid swing time after time. As one would suspect, the short game was the toughest for him, and he relied heavily on the assistance of his coach. Joe always said that, “blind golf is a team game” and he contributes his success to the wonderful men who coached him including;

Paul Fahey, Joe Curley, Dave Charnock, Bob Jennette, Rich Rivers, John Callahan, Mike Meehan, Steve Martini, Jim Demoy, Peter Bourque and Dick Roche.

Joe played in his first United States Blind Golf Association championship in 1950 and competed in well over 50 USBGA championship matches during his illustrious career. He was a seven-time National Champion and holds two international championships. Joe also served for years on the USBGA Board of Directors.

Joe became a favorite of some of golf’s all-time greats. Arnold Palmer always sought out Joe whenever he was in the Boston area, and Jack Nicklaus was always impressed with his ability. During the 1970’s and 1980’s Joe was a fixture at The Bob Hope Classic, many times staying at Hope’s Palm Springs home.

He is a lifetime member and past President of the Waltham Lions Club working to help others who also lost their eyesight. He initiated the “Lazaro Celebrity Hope for the Blind” charity golf tournament sponsored by the Lions in 1971. Bob Hope, as well as numerous sports celebrities, attended this event for many years. The tournament is in its 44<sup>th</sup> year, raising hundreds of thousands of dollars for various charities throughout Massachusetts.

Joe received a proclamation of “Joe Lazaro Day” on Saturday June 9, 1962 by the Honourable Mayor of Waltham, Austin D. Rhodes for conquering his handicap and being an inspiration and source of comfort to many thousands of his fellow Americans. He is a long-time member of the Waltham Parks and Recreation Committee.

Joe also accepted numerous invitations to deliver motivational and inspirational speeches to many organizations, schools and clubs nationally stressing the importance and ability that anyone can overcome life's challenges to achieve their goals and dreams. Joe was also a supporter of the Carroll Center for the Blind in Newton and the Perkins School for the Blind in Watertown.

Joe was presented with the Ben Hogan Award in 1970 in New York City by the Golf Writers Association (GWAA), given annually to an individual who remains active in golf despite a physical handicap or serious illness. He captured the New England Professional Golfers Association (PGA's) "Man of the Year" award in 1980 and he remains the current record holder for the lowest score ever recorded by a blind golfer of 77, achieved at Wayland CC.

It was during a previous GWAA banquet that Sam Snead proposed a golfing duel and Lazaro accepted with one condition. "We were sitting together at the Golf Writers dinner in 1962 and Sam was the guest of honor." He told me he'd like to play against me some time. I said, "Okay, we'll play and we'll bet. You can even name the golf course if I can name the time." He said, "Let's play at my course in South Carolina," Lazaro recalled. "I said, 'That's fine with me. We'll play at midnight.'"

Despite his vision impairment, Joe wrote an instructional golf classic book, "**The Right Touch**" "If I can break 80, you can!" in 1978 with an introduction by Bob Hope.

Joe was inducted into the National Italian American Sports Hall of Fame in 1995.

For over half a century Joe has exemplified great leadership, ability and inspiration to his fellow members of the USBGA. In 1995, the USBGA created an award for the most improved player given at each national championship. It is called the "Lazaro Trophy" in his honor.

Joe recently won the seniors division at the 62<sup>nd</sup> National USBGA tournament at Edgmont Country Club in PA.

The United States Blind Golf Association is proud to recognize and induct Joe Lazaro into its inaugural 2007 class of the Hall of Fame.