



# Illinois PGA Foundation News

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## IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **FOUR MEMBERS TO BE INDUCTED INTO ILLINOIS GOLF HALL OF FAME**

GLENVIEW, Ill. – Notable local players Steve Benson of Buffalo Grove, Ill., and the late Robert A. Gardner of Hinsdale, Ill., head the four-member class of inductees that also features Sherm Finger of Lake Bluff, Ill., and long-time golf course superintendent Paul Voykin of Lake Bluff, Ill., all of whom will be enshrined as the 2011 class in the Illinois Golf Hall of Fame.

The inductees will be honored at a ceremony celebrating their achievements October 21st at the Illinois Golf Hall of Fame exhibit located at The Glen Club in Glenview, Ill.

One of the most decorated professional players in Illinois PGA history, **Steve Benson, 64**, distinguished himself early on as an amateur player. He earned All-American honors while captaining the 1968 Michigan State University golf team and was named the Chicago District Golf Association (CDGA) Player of the Year twice (1971, 1972) after winning the 1971 CDGA Amateur Championship and the 1972 Illinois State Amateur Championship.

Mr. Benson began his professional career in 1973 as an assistant golf professional at Lake Shore Country Club in Glencoe, Ill. That same year, he received Illinois PGA Assistant Player of the Year honors. After gaining PGA membership in 1976, Mr. Benson became the head golf professional at Glen Oak Country Club in Glen Ellyn, Ill. Following seven seasons there, Mr. Benson accepted an offer for the same position at Hillcrest Country Club in Long Grove, Ill., where he remained until 2010.

Born and raised in Chicago, Ill., Mr. Benson attended Michigan State University in East Lansing, Mich., where he earned a degree in business administration. He was an All-American and captain on Michigan State University's golf team and was awarded All Big Ten honors twice.

A three-time winner of the Illinois PGA Championship (1982, 1984, 1994) and Illinois PGA Match Play Championship (1981, 1982, 1989), Mr. Benson has continued his outstanding play as a senior, winning the Illinois PGA Senior Championship (2006) and the Illinois Senior Open Championship (1996, 1998, 2009). In 2006, he was named the Illinois PGA Senior Player of the Year.

In addition to his victories in the Illinois PGA, Mr. Benson also qualified to compete in many national events. The impressive list includes: 12 Western Open Championships, 4 PGA Championships, 1 U.S. Open Championship, 4 U.S. Senior Open Championships and 2 PGA Senior Championships.

Mr. Benson went above and beyond the duties of a PGA Professional serving on the Illinois PGA Board of Directors and was chairman of the tournament committee for several years. His dedication to junior golf in Illinois is evident in his strong support for Little City and the Little City Invitational. His efforts extend beyond Illinois as well. Mr. Benson has hosted a pro-am event in Florida for many years with proceeds benefiting Father John Smyth at the Maryville Academy.

In 1957, **Sherm Finger, 67**, started toward a career path in golf that would take him from his hometown of Wilmette, Ill., to Pasadena, Calif., to Fort Knox, Ky. and back to Chicago. Along the way he would become a collegiate All-American, Chicago District Golf Association (CDGA) Amateur Champion, and PGA head golf professional at two of Chicago's most prestigious country clubs.

Mr. Finger started out as a caddy and worked the driving range at Westmoreland Country Club in Wilmette before focusing on golf his final two years in high school. The extra work paid off in 1963 when he earned a spot on the golf team at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles, Calif.

His freshman year Mr. Finger played on the same team with future PGA TOUR player Dave Stockton, who was both a senior at the time and his big brother in his fraternity. In 1964, Mr. Finger was named First Team All-American. After achieving that honor again in 1965 and 1966, he became the first player ever to become a three-time First Team All-American. He captured the Pac-Ten individual title all three years as well. His USC golf team won the conference title all four years he was there.

After graduating in 1967 with a Bachelor of Science degree in Business Administration, Mr. Finger worked as an assistant golf professional at North Shore Country Club in Glenview, Ill. However, his time at North Shore would be cut short as he had to report to the United States Army in Fort Knox and then in Long Behn, Vietnam.

After his service was complete, Mr. Finger headed back to California to work as a teaching professional at Westlake Village Golf Club, earning his PGA membership in 1971. While teaching at Westlake, Mr. Finger joined the PGA TOUR for two seasons before returning to North Shore as an assistant golf professional in 1973.

Mr. Finger's hard work and dedication to the PGA paid off as he was offered the head golf professional at Shoreacres in Lake Bluff, Ill. He spent the next five seasons at Shoreacres until he was offered the same position at Knollwood Club in Lake Forest, Ill., where he spent 27 years as head golf professional.

Mr. Finger was very involved in the Illinois PGA, serving on the Board for over twenty years. He served on numerous committees and was elected by his peers through all of the officer chairs, culminating with his service as president in 1987 and 1988.

In addition to his collegiate success, Mr. Finger was an accomplished player on the local and national levels. In 1965, he won CDGA Amateur Championship, Pasadena (Calif.) City Amateur Championship and the Palm Springs (Calif.) Amateur Championship. He competed in the United States Amateur Championship four times (1961, 1962, 1964, 1965).

The awards and recognition for all he has accomplished and given to the game began to accumulate. In 2002, Mr. Finger was inducted into the Chicago Sports Hall of Fame, in 2007 the Evanston High School Hall of Fame, and in 2009 the USC Athletic Hall of Fame.

In 2005, Mr. Finger retired from Knollwood Club and now spends his time teaching a few days a week at Lake Bluff (Ill.) Golf Course. He also is very involved with music and singing as he belongs to the Chicago Masters Choir, a group that performs concerts throughout the year and serves on the Board of the Ars Viva Symphony Orchestra.

Known by most as an outstanding amateur golfer, **Robert Abbe Gardner, (1890-1956)**, was much more than that. His diverse athletic abilities highlighted a career that helped him win championships in other sports.

Born in Hinsdale, Ill., Mr. Gardner attended Phillips Academy in Andover, Mass., before moving on to Yale University in New Haven, Conn., where he was a member of the Skull and Bones. While a freshman at Yale, Mr. Gardner won the 1909 United States Amateur Championship held at Chicago Golf Club in Wheaton, Ill., and at the time, was the youngest ever to do so at the age of 19 years and 3 months. The record stood for 85 years until Tiger Woods won his first U.S. Amateur at age 18 years, 8 months in 1994. In 1915, Mr. Gardner won his second U.S. Amateur Championship, which took place at Country Club of Detroit in Grosse Pointe Farms, Mich. He would go on to finish as the runner-up two additional times in 1916 and 1921.

An outstanding multi-sport athlete, Mr. Gardner was captain of both the golf team and the track team at Yale. In 1912, he set a world record of 13 feet 1 inch in the pole vault at the National Intercollegiate Championships in Philadelphia, Pa. He was the first person to ever vault over 13 feet.

In 1917, Mr. Gardner enlisted in the Army, where he went on to serve as a lieutenant in a field artillery unit in France during World War I. Following the war, Mr. Gardner returned home to Chicago, where he joined securities and brokerage firm Mitchell, Hutchins & Co., where he spent the rest of his career as a partner.

Mr. Gardner played on the first four Walker Cup teams (1922, 1923, 1924, 1926) and served as playing captain for his last three. He finished as the runner-up in the 1911 Western Amateur Championship and 1920 British Amateur Championship and won the Chicago District Amateur Championship three times (1916, 1924, 1925), one of only three people in the history of the Championship with three victories.

A member of the Racquet Club of Chicago, Mr. Gardner teamed up with collegiate friend Howard Linn and together, won the 1926 National Squash Racquets Doubles Championship.

Mr. Gardner graduated from Yale in 1912, where he was also a leader of the famed Yale Glee Club. He served as Vice President of the United States Golf Association from 1921-1925 and served on a number of USGA committees over the years. He also served as president of the CDGA from 1924-1927.

In his more than 50 plus years of work as a golf course superintendent, **Paul Voykin, 80**, innovated the way many golf courses look and are maintained today. What started out 39 years ago with a controversial presentation titled “Overgrooming is overspending” to over 600 high-ranking United States Golf Association (USGA) officials, has turned out to be the norm in today’s environmentally conscious society.

Born of Russian and Ukrainian parents in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Mr. Voykin began his career as an apprentice superintendent at Jasper National Park in Jasper, Alberta, Canada. After his apprenticeship, he and his brother Peter moved to the Chicago area where Mr. Voykin was hired as an assistant superintendent at Olympia Fields (Ill.) Country Club. While working at Olympia Fields, Mr. Voykin was a student and observer from mentors Gordon Brinkworth (Olympia Fields), Bob Williams (Beverly Country Club) and Wally Peepers (Flossmoor Country Club).

After serving three years at Olympia Fields, Mr. Voykin was named the head superintendent at Calumet Country Club in Homewood, Ill. In 1961, he was hired as head superintendent at Briarwood Country Club in Deerfield, Ill., where he remained for 47 years until his retirement in 2008.

After 10 years at Briarwood, Mr. Voykin, always experimenting, wanted to see what would happen if he let areas that did not affect play grow instead of mowing them and using fertilizers and other chemicals in those areas. The result was a colorful mix of plants, wildflowers, butterflies, dragonflies and unfamiliar types of grasses. Mr. Voykin began to let other areas of the course grow with the same result. Soon afterwards, because of those areas, a variety of wildlife began to exist at Briarwood, which still can be seen today.

His “Overgrooming is overspending” presentation to the USGA at the Biltmore Hotel in New York City during the 1972 USGA Green Section annual seminar focused on his successes at Briarwood with those areas and how fellow superintendents and golf course architects can reduce costs and add to the course’s natural beauty by adopting the philosophy.

One of three brothers, who were all golf course superintendents in the Chicago area, Mr. Voykin had a severe stuttering problem, which limited his reading and speaking. He eventually overcame the stuttering and went on to educate others suffering with the same issues. He also authored two lawn-care books, *A Perfect Lawn the Easy Way* (Rand McNally, 1969) and *Ask the Lawn Expert* (Macmillan, 1976), with the former selling more than 50,000 copies.

Mr. Voykin was a pioneer in another area as he is credited with being one of the first superintendents in the country to hire Hispanic workers in the early 1960s. He created and administered a Mexican Open golf tournament for his employees to teach them about the game of golf. His long-time assistant Moe Sanchez started working with Mr. Voykin in 1964 at the age of 15 and was still there with him when he retired in 2008. He was honored by the golf course superintendents group in Mexico for his dedication and commitment to providing opportunities for Hispanic workers.

Among his many awards and recognitions, Mr. Voykin was named the 2003 Superintendent of the Year during the 75th Annual Golf Course Superintendents Association of America conference and was a former president of the Midwest Association of Golf Course Superintendents.

#### **About the Illinois Golf Hall of Fame:**

The Illinois Golf Hall of Fame is located at The Glen Club, in Glenview, Ill. Plaques, trophies, photographs, and other related memorabilia make up a first-class tribute to those individuals who have made significant contributions to the game both in Illinois and throughout the world.