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Golf's Leading Ladies

The three most powerful women in American golf were in one place Nov. 8 as the Executive Women's Golf Ass'n honored USGA president Judy Bell (front). With her is Nancy Oliver, top left, founder and president of the EWGA, and Alice Dye, president of the American Society of Golf Course Architects.

Fairy-tale EWGA is success story of year--any year

By CHARLEY STINE

I met Nancy Oliver in 1990, when she was working for Raymon Finch in establishing the Florida Golf Council, one of the early attempts at organizing the Florida golf industry.

She was in the the public relations business, doing some brochures for the organization, and a whole lot of phone calling and stamp licking.

Pretty, pert, and enthusiastic, her weakness, which she readily admitted, was that, even though she had been golf promotion director for PGA National and several other places, she didn't know much about the game.

She was the world's most unlikely candidate to, seven years later, be golf's Player Development Person of the Year. That's the award she won—most deservedly — from the International Network of Golf.

At a time when the golf industry is talking about expending effort to spread the game among more people, Nancy Oliver does it better than anybody else.

She's founder and president of the Executive Women's Golf Association, which in six years of existence, has grown to

13,000 members, with 90 chapters in 30 states.

Almost overnight, the EWGA has become a major force in golf. It's the golf success story of the year, probably of the decade. If its record of doubling membership each year continues, its limits still are infinite.

Florida has the most chapters, 10; California has nine, Ohio seven, and New York, North Carolina, and Texas, five each.

Leaders and delegates from the chapters, 250 women strong, held their annual conference last month at PGA National resort, and at their banquet, honored USGA president Judy Bell with the EWGA 1997 National Leadership Award.

The organization is open
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to all women, but the demographics breakdown shows that 68 percent of the members are in management positions, and 13 percent own their own businesses. The median income is \$73,000. Ninety seven percent are college graduates. Sixty five percent are married. This is not your mother's Oldsmobile. The EWGA title sponsor — and there are many other sponsors — is Cadillac.

The growth of EWGA sounds like a fairy tale. Nancy Oliver struck a nerve, found a niche group that was just waiting to be asked, and from that standpoint, serves as an example of what can be done when such groups are presented with opportunity.

She didn't have the common goals that drive such efforts. She was not an equipment manufacturer wanting to sell more clubs, a golf course owner looking for more customers, or a golf pro looking for people

to pay for lessons. She organized from the simple thought that there must be more women like herself who were interested, but a little in doubt how to approach the "man's" game.

Her approach to beginning women golfers is not about how to swing, or what to buy. It's about etiquette, how to approach the clubhouse and get around a golf course without embarrassing yourself.

The outline for a beginners program that Nancy Oliver wrote six years ago is just as applicable to men as to women. It's the best in existence and should be considered by all of golf.

How to play well is for later. The EWGA program is about how to become comfortable as a golf insider without feeling foolish in the process. Or, put another way, how to learn golf without imposing on your golfing friends who don't want their round spoiled by a total beginner.

Nancy Oliver learned those things

herself in a class of 28 women she organized at West Palm Beach's Emerald Dunes Club in 1991. It was the first EWGA chapter.

She spread the word with her own investment of time and money until the project became self-supporting.

Now the EWGA has been turned into a non-profit organization, Cadillac is the title sponsor, and a strong list of other sponsors, including Office Depot, Time Magazine, Tiletist, Foodloy, American Express, Lady Cobra, lady Fairway, Square Two, and EP Pro.

There's even an ordained successor to Nancy. At the November meeting, Alicia Jansen, of Houston, was elected national president-elect, meaning she'll become president next year, after Nancy spends one more year keeping things on the right track.

She has a staff of 13 at EWGA headquarters at Suite 100, 1401 Forum Way, West Palm Beach.

Next year Nancy's says she'll retire and be a wife and grandmother. And maybe even play more golf.

Local chapters are governed by a national organization which lends guidance and expertise in establishing chapters, as well as ongoing support through public relations, promotional supplies, and sponsorship. A board of directors presides over each chapter, along with officers and committee chairs, who work together to schedule local activities. Each chapter conducts a myriad of events and activities throughout the year including beginner clinics, league play, and monthly outings. Local host clubs serve as the base for chapter activities, offer discounts to members, and provide educational programs.



Alicia Jensen

National dues are \$50 per year and each chapter sets its own dues.

During the first two years, the EWGA grew by ten percent per month. Since 1993 it has more than doubled each year, which trend is anticipated to continue for several years.

It's been like putting a jig saw puzzle together without a picture to look at, said Nancy. "You know you have all the pieces but you don't know where they fit."

They fit now. If you want to learn something and there's no place that teaches it, build a school.