

Ambridge native Antkiewicz headed for Hall



Montana Pritchard

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COLLIER TWP. - Jim Antkiewicz has come a long way since he used to sneak onto Ambridge Country Club as a youngster fascinated by the game of golf.

Forty-three years later, he's bound for the PGA Golf Professional Hall of Fame.

"Not bad for a little Polish kid from Ambridge," Antkiewicz said sheepishly.

Antkiewicz's fascination with the sport led to a long career as a golf pro in western Pennsylvania. His story is one of hard work, dedication, persistence and opportunity.

When he was 11, he caddied at Ambridge Country Club, a nine-hole track that's now public and called Harmony Ridge. Caddies had to be at least 12 years old, but Antkiewicz convinced the pro that he could do the job. He remembers making \$20 the first time he carried a bag.

As a caddie, Antkiewicz was allowed to play the course on Mondays. But he loved golf so much that he used to sneak through the woods on other days and play holes 2 through 4 over and over again. When he'd see members coming, he'd duck back into the forest until they played through.

Jim Antkiewicz

Club at Nevillewood golf professional Jim Antkiewicz

"That's how I got into the business," said Antkiewicz, who's now in his 17th season as director of golf at The Club at Nevillewood, a thriving venue in Collier Township whose membership includes Mario Lemieux.

Ten years after his first caddie assignment, Antkiewicz got his first break professionally while taking classes at Geneva College and working on the grounds crew at Ambridge. While serving as a marshal at the PGA Championship at Oakmont Country Club in August 1978, he met Roy Vucinich, the pro at Allegheny Country Club at the time.

During a practice round at the PGA Championship, Antkiewicz struck up a conversation with Vucinich, who had qualified to play in one of golf's four majors.

"Roy said he needed some help at Allegheny the following year. He told me to call him in the spring," Antkiewicz said.

Antkiewicz didn't wait until spring. He called Vucinich a week later and was hired on the spot. After graduating from Geneva in 1980, Antkiewicz began working full-time as Allegheny's assistant pro.

Then in 1983, Antkiewicz was hired as head pro at Highland Country Club near Bellevue. In 1995, he moved to Nevillewood.

"I'm lucky that I can wake up each morning and honestly say I look forward to going to work every morning," said Antkiewicz, who lives in Center Township. "I mean, my office is a golf course. I love the game of golf. I love the golf business. I love what I'm doing."

Over the years, Antkiewicz has served the PGA of America nationally and locally. He was the Tri-State Section PGA president from 2002-2006. He was on the PGA national Board of Directors from 2002-05, and was re-elected in 2010.

In 2008, Antkiewicz became just the third member of the Tri-State PGA to receive the PGA Golf Professional of the Year award. The others were Oakmont pro Bob Ford (1987) and former Pittsburgh Field Club pro Gary Ellis (1979), two men also in the PGA Golf Professional

Hall of Fame.

Antkiewicz will be enshrined with six other inductees Nov. 2 at the PGA Village in Port St. Lucie, Fla.

"This is very humbling," said Antkiewicz, who'll celebrate his 54th birthday on Monday. "The game of golf has been so good to me. It's been my career. It's my life. I have so many people to thank."

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