



Member Profile

Ken Holtz

Sun City West, Arizona, USA

Wisconsin native and former SoHG president Ken Holtz knows where the sun shines best. As soon as he retired, Holtz and his wife, Jean, moved to Sun City West, Az., where he can golf most every day of the year.

He was in marketing for 16 years with Procter & Gamble before going his own way in advertising, and then producing a lifestyle magazine for the cable television industry.

Golf began for Holtz when he was 7 years old. A neighbor gave him a handful of golf clubs including one hickory club. Something about the old club intrigued the youngster and Holtz began to look for and purchase old wood shaft clubs whenever he came across one. By age 20 he had a closet full.

“Jean was dismayed at the number of clubs I had when we got married,” he says. “I started as a collector, but I grew into a player.”

For the past seven years, Holtz has played only original, pre-1935 wooden shafted clubs, and his modern clubs sit in the garage collecting dust.

With a handicap index ranging from 8-10, Holtz says it is nice to win a round or two from those few of his golfing buddies who still prefer modern clubs.

Asked why he loves hickory golf, Holtz says it's for the experience.

“It is much more enjoyable because with each shot you need to chart/find your way to the hole,” he says. “With modern golf you check your distance finder and wale away. Hickory golf is more like the art form of sailing and modern golf could best be compared to power boating.”

The game of golf has often been called a great equalizer, a game that all people can play. Holtz enjoys that aspect of the sport that allows him to make new friendships.

“Hickory golf has allowed me to be friends with people all over the world,” he says. “I have been fortunate to play in Ireland, Scotland, Sweden, and all across the USA. Hickory golf has a way of bringing people together and building lasting friendships and it is all because of the ‘Hickory Experience.’”

Several years ago, Holtz and long-time friend, Joe Guerard, started the Hickory Kummel Cup at Lawsonia Links, Green Lake, Wisc., “one of the best hickory courses in America,” he argues. The tournament is now called the Wisconsin Hickory Open. Lawsonia was also the site of the 2016 U.S. Hickory Open.

Though he is no longer involved in the Wisconsin event, Holtz wasted no time in creating a new hickory golf event in Sun City West. The Arizona Desert Hickory Tournament is now in its 5th year. Each spring, the last weekend in February provides Arizona sunshine and a desert hickory challenge for the 60 to 70 players who come from as far as Canada and the Midwestern states.

“We have a great time,” Holtz says.

The Holtz's have three children and four grandchildren.

How often do you play hickories?

I play hickory golf 100% of the time. To me it would be a wasted experience to pull out modern clubs when the hickory experience awaits. I try to limit my play to courses and tee boxes under 6,300 yards and prefer to play tee boxes set at 5,800 to 6,000 yards.

What's in your play set?

I am a strong supporter of using authentic pre-1935 hickory clubs. But I understand that some want to experience hickory golf ASAP and sometimes obtaining reproductions is the quickest way to start playing. But, to me, playing an authentic club is the best experience because after each shot made, authentic clubs have a way of “talking to you.”

Canoustie Bench Made Driver 11 degrees
R Simpson Spoon 15 degrees
W Braid Bull Dog 22 degrees
Unknown Bull Dog 27 degrees
Gibson Star Maxwell Mid Iron 26 degrees
George Cawhwell Jigger 30 degrees

Favorite hickory tournament?

Every hickory event is my favorite because you will have a great time at every event you play. Standouts include the



Ken Holtz was the SoHG's second president and its 2014 Mike Brown Award recipient.

Wisconsin Hickory Open at Lawsonia Links; the Mid Pines Hickory Open; and, of course, The Arizona Desert Hickory.

Favorite club?

Gibson Star Smith Model 46 degree Mashie Niblick. It sits so square and performs magic from 80-90 yards.

What ball do you play?

Any soft ball is great to play, and since my club head speed is not very fast I enjoy the feeling of the ball coming off the club head. My favorite ball to putt with is the McIntrye square mesh ball.

Any particular player or aspect of golf history you especially enjoy?

Since moving to Arizona, I had the great pleasure to meet Bill “Willie” Noble. Willie was a lifelong PGA Golf Professional who had a passion for teaching and trying new things. When we first met and he found out we were playing with 100-year-old wooden shafted clubs, he said “I need to try this.” Willie was a devoted hickory convert and started to spread the “Hickory Experience” with everyone he met. During his storied career he had the great fortune to meet Ben Hogan, play golf with Byron Nelson, and learn from some of golf's greats. Willie shared many stories of the people he met, the lessons he learned and the impact that golf had on his life. Willie passed away this last fall, and he made a lasting impact on me as I am sure he did with many others. In fact, this Arizona Desert Hickory Tournament coming in 2017, will also feature a “Hickory Humanitarian Award” which will be to memorialize Bill “Willie” Noble and honor other hickory players who grow the hickory experience for others. (See the Wee Nip, Autumn 2014, p. 16)

Ideas to promote hickory golf?

I encourage everyone to put together a minimum of two sets of hickory clubs. This way you always have some clubs available to offer to someone new to the game for them to try. And you always have a back up in case you break a club or your swing needs to try something else.

Note: Ken Holtz was the second president of the SoHG (2008-2011). He was instrumental in developing the Society's first website, and in developing the current structure of the SoHG based on the founding constitution. He helped to secure a key early sponsorship in Mountain Valley Spring Water for the development of the Championship Series, and in creating the role of a communications director/secretary to help with the day-to-day duties of web management, member communication, and publications.

Holtz is also the 2014 recipient of the Society's Mike Brown Award, which honors an SoHG member's dedication to the traditions of hickory golf, growing the sport, and promoting lasting friendships through hickory golf. (See the Wee Nip, Autumn 2014, p. 4.)