



Member Profile Bill Engelson

Pinehurst, N.C.

"Lang Willie"

Originally from Michigan, Bill grew up in Wisconsin where his family has had a presence on Washington Island since 1892. He joined the U.S. Coast Guard in 1961, retiring as a Commander in 1982. He and wife, Donna, have been married for more than 30 years, have four children and 12 grandchildren, "the source of our true wealth".

Since 1984, Bill and Donna have operated The Leadership Edge Inc. She specializes in job matching services (putting the right people in the right jobs) to clients using psychometric assessments available over the Web. Bill serves as a strategy consultant to CEOs and executive teams from mid-size companies. "Neither of us plans to retire from our business as long as we are able and the work is enjoyable," he says. "It is axiomatic that my client CEOs play golf. They love it that I live in Pinehurst."

An uncle, the only one in the family who played, "infected" Bill with a love of the sport. "In junior high and high school in Kenosha, Wisc., I used to sneak onto the municipal course with a neighbor and we both learned to play, after a fashion. We had a vacant lot between his house and mine that we used to whack balls by the hour."

He played little while in the Coast Guard. Following retirement, he developed a yacht sales enterprise in Annapolis, Md., then formed The Leadership Edge. Building a business left little time for golf. Bill says it wasn't until the mid-1990s that he began playing again. Around that time, he spotted Mort Ohlman's book in a golf store. "That was all it took to get me into hickory golf and firmly hooked."

In 2004, Bill met Rob Pilewski at Oakhurst who invited him to attend the inaugural Mid Pines Hickory Open later that year. He and Donna had already visited the Pinehurst area on the way to visit a grandchild and were considering relocating to the area. "We came down to the MPH Open a day early, looked at houses and narrowed our choices," he says.

Bill then learned there was a group of hickory players who met monthly in the Sandhills. In April 2005, after the Engelsons did move to the area, Bill visited local golf store owner Tom Stewart and asked how he could join the monthly hickory players. He was told the group was not yet a reality, only a wish. So, "with a little prodding, probing and prevailing, I helped to co-found the Carolina Hickory Golf Association in December 2005 and have served as its Captain ever since," he says.

The group plays monthly hickory golf on some of the finest golf courses available and typically has 20 to 50 players at each event. "We welcome all hickory players," Bill says.

Go to www.carolinahickory.com for information on the group and its events.

How often do you play hickories?

I play exclusively with hickories now and have hung up my Calloways for the foreseeable future. When I am not engaged with my clients I am out on the course three to four times a week. As one is never sure how many rounds are left in one's life time allotment, I play in temps above 35 degrees and in the rain, as well.

What's in your play set?

Like many other hickory players, my play set is in constant evolution. I was most fortunate to win an eBay auction of a set of Gibson Maxwell hosel flanged rustless irons with B-Bow shafts. Although a couple of the hosels had sustained damage due to a misguided effort by a previous owner to tighten the hosel joint, I was able to restore them to playable condition. I also have a half dozen or so Gibson woods that rotate through the play set. Mike Just of Louisville Golf has installed face inserts on the woods so that they should outlast me. My current putter is a Spalding Model 10 which is more upright than the previous Macgregor model 331, which I still turn to from time to time. I prefer the wooden headed Schenectadys which are very hard to find at a less than exorbitant cost. I have a few in reserve, just in case. Since I walk and carry a bag, I usually have about 10 – 12 clubs with me.

Favorite club?

I'd have to say my favorite club is my Gibson anti-shank flanged niblick that I bought from John Sherwood. I've given up golf carts and started to walk; so to lighten the load just a bit I've reduced the number of clubs in the bag and make do with one niblick, even out of the sand. This has induced me to become more versatile with the niblick and use it for a wider variety of shots. Full out, I hit it 90 yards, so within 90 yards, this is my club of choice.



Bill "Lang Willie" Engelson at Oakhurst Links in West Virginia. He was the NHC Reserve Champion in 2007.

What ball do you play?

Normally I play with a Pro VI, but have also used the NXT and the Precept Laddie.

Favorite course for hickories?

I have several favorite hickory courses with Mid Pines topping the list followed by Southern Pines CC, Pine Needles and Pinehurst #3. I could be content to play all my remaining rounds on those courses. However, I'm off to my first Scotland trip in May, so I'm sure I'll have some others to join these favorite courses of mine.

Favorite hickory tournament?

This is a hard question, so I'll answer it as if I'm a politician running for re-election. Among my favorites are the NHC, Mid Pines Hickory Open, U.S. Hickory Open (I was the inaugural USHO tournament director in 2008), the CHGA Hickory Haggis (I run this match play tournament each year), the Southern Hickory 4 Ball and Foxburg.

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

I love reading golf history, especially books written in the late 19th century and the early 20th century. I've learned that there is little new in the golf world. Most of the so-called "cutting edge" technology has already been tried nearly a century ago. I've been able to assemble a very large digital library of public domain books from that era and have them loaded on my iPad.

Best thing about hickory golf?

That, no doubt, is the people I've met through hickory golf. I've formed many strong and enduring friendships through hickory golf, people I never would have otherwise encountered, for which I'm very grateful.

Ideas to promote SoHG, hickory golf?

I'm a big promoter of growing the game of hickory golf. I'm not a collector although Donna would disagree. However, I will admit that you wind up with a lot of clubs while looking for playables. If each of us would bring in one new hickory player each, then we'd dramatically enlarge the hickory playing community. I pledge to do my part.

Most recent book on golf that you read?

*I'm currently reading Phil Mickelson's *Secrets of the Short Game* which I'm finding very illuminating and illustrative given my use of a single niblick within 90 yards of the hole. Amongst my all time favorites are Horace Hutchinson's *Golf from the Badminton Series*, *The Game of Golf* by Willie Park, Jr., *Tommy's Honor* by Kevin Cook, Mark Frost's *The Greatest Game Ever Played* and *The Match*, everything by Bobby Jones and *Golf My Way* by Jack Nicklaus.*

Note: Bill's business acumen and his solid encouragement and support are no small reasons for the SoHG's growth and success these past several years.