



# On Course.

The News Magazine of First Tee – Connecticut  
FALL 2023

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# First Tee – Connecticut Changing Lives ... One Golfer at a Time

When First Tee – Connecticut was selected to manage operations at Goodwin Park Golf Course in Hartford during early spring 2022, it opened a whole new world for prospective young golfers. For the first time, many local youngsters now had access to the sport, and it changed the game for the surrounding community.

One of the beneficiaries of this new partnership is Hartford's Covenant Preparatory School. The school's mission includes providing young men from underserved communities the opportunity to thrive in academics and life while becoming leaders and serving the neighborhoods they call home. Covenant Prep jumped at the opportunity to give the gift of golf to its students. The result: Access to a game that would change the lives of the kids interested in pursuing golf.

"Most of our students have never had access to golf, so this was a new experience for them and they fell in love with the sport almost immediately," said Katie McKinney, the school's Director of Development and Community Relations. "Golf is an excellent way to teach our students leadership, patience and strategy in a setting that is safe, fun and focused on community. We are so appreciative of this opportunity that First Tee has provided us."



Students from Covenant Prep practicing on the North Course at Goodwin Park Golf Course in Hartford, CT.

The relationship between First Tee and Covenant Prep began during a summer golf academy at Avon Old Farms. More than 10 students from the school, including Lincoln Peter, 12, and Jonathan Hall, 11 – participated in the First Tee camp once a week during the summer and became connected to coaches and other volunteers who helped grow their appreciation for golf. Some of the students even decided to continue their golfing during the fall program.

"Golf isn't really something I thought about until I started the First Tee camp. It's a fun sport to play and I am learning a lot," said Jonathan, who also had the opportunity to attend the Travelers Championship in Cromwell last summer. "I've been around golf a lot because my family also likes to play. I really like playing it and I am focused on trying to be more accurate with my shots."

Lincoln said he enjoyed learning from the First Tee team and is excited that Goodwin Park Golf Course is a place where many of his fellow classmates and neighbors can play and learn the sport. He also knows that golf is an activity he can participate in for his entire life.

"I like to play golf and it's a great way to stay healthy," said Lincoln. "I like being outside and enjoying the fresh air and physical activity. My goal is to play golf for a long time since you can play at any age." ►





## A message from Mark Moriarty, CEO

2023 was a year of change and a year of growth for First Tee – Connecticut! While we said goodbye to some key members of our chapter’s leadership team, we also said hello to several new faces who have joined us to be a part of the exciting future at the chapter. Please help me in welcoming Rochelle Hakim as Vice President of Development & Corporate Partnerships and Marsha Rupp as Vice President of Communication & Events.

Rochelle and Marsha join the rest of our team at First Tee – Connecticut as we continue to expand our programming to young people across the state with a strategic focus on ensuring access to programming for young people in underserved and underrepresented communities.

As is always my great pleasure, I am proud to highlight the inspiring young people within this newsletter who represent only a sampling of the youth that our staff and coaches are privileged to engage with throughout the year as we work to enable kids to build the strength of character that empowers them through a lifetime of challenges. We know kids and teens can accomplish amazing things when they are supported and given the space to grow and learn, and we are thankful to each and every family for their trust in First Tee – Connecticut by sharing their children’s time with us.

To our incredible donors, partners, board members and volunteers, thank you for your continued belief in our work to **#BuildGameChangers** throughout Connecticut. Without your time, treasure and talent, we would not be able to successfully support over 65,000 young people as they work each day to be the best version of themselves for focusing on key commitments such as “Pursuing Goals,” “Growing through Challenge,” “Collaborating with Others,” “Building Positive Self-Identity” and “Using Good Judgment.”

I hope you will consider continuing your support of First Tee – Connecticut as we move toward the end of 2023 and begin our planning for a successful 2024.

Best wishes for good health and well-being!

*Mark Moriarty*

- In addition to a passion for playing and learning golf, both boys also agree that the camaraderie and friendships are their favorite part. Both hope to engage more of their classmates to participate in golf activities and utilize the facilities at Goodwin Park.

“I have already made a lot of friends playing golf,” said Jonathan, who also has tips for beginners. “You need to take your time when playing golf. I like that you can play it for your entire life.”

Adds Lincoln, “I like having access to a course near where I live. Golf is definitely my favorite sport.”

To learn more about how to engage with First Tee, please contact Mark Murnane at [mmurnane@firstteect.org](mailto:mmurnane@firstteect.org).

## First Tee – Connecticut and Camp Courant



Camp Courant is the oldest and largest free summer day camp in the nation, with approximately 800 kids attending each summer.

Our chapter has a long-standing relationship with Camp Courant, supporting the camp each summer offering golf once per week as an activity for the campers, almost all Hartford residents.

This past year, Camp Courant leadership approached and informed us that they would launch a spring break camp week in mid-April for the first time. In addition to providing golf to the campers during that week on their grounds at Batterson Park in Farmington, Coach KJ Smith and the camp team selected 20-25 campers to attend a field trip at the Karl Krapek Family Learning Links at our headquarters in Cromwell.

We hosted these enthusiastic young people for a golf clinic with three different stations staffed by our team and guest coaches such as Bobby Powell, a Hartford native and one of the first chapter coaches more than 20 years ago.

First Tee – Connecticut was honored this past September to be recognized with Camp Courant’s 2023 Community Partner Award at their Annual Buddy Bash! We look forward to continuing our partnership well into the future!

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# Events and Happenings

Our 2023 events were largely a tremendous success, despite the fickle weather we had to work around. In true fashion, we persevered through a BIT of rain this year.

The first event of the year was the **PwC First Tee – Connecticut Charity Classic** at the Country Club of Fairfield on Tuesday, May 30. The weather was spectacular that day for the 116 participants who enjoyed beautiful water views as they wound their way through 18 holes. We'd like to thank First Tee – Connecticut Board Member Craig Watchmaker and PwC for their ongoing support as the title sponsor of this event, which netted over \$100,000! A shout out is also due to Board Member Tim Bunt for all his help each year making this event a resounding success. After a great dinner, the guests got to hear from Fairchild Wheeler participant Jack Papageorge share his thoughts on how First Tee helps him with golf and with life!

On Saturday, June 24, First Tee – Connecticut hosted its annual **Patrons' Breakfast** on site at the Travelers Championship at one of the Tournament's hospitality venues. At this event we announced our scholarship recipients and thanked our donors for their amazing support throughout the year. This year our guests were treated to Greg McLaughlin, CEO of the PGA TOUR First Tee Foundation & World Golf Foundation, interviewed by CBS Sports Broadcaster Amanda Renner. The program also featured several of our alumni introducing some of the speakers, and the inaugural Coach of the Year Award was given to our own Coach Taylor Januario (featured elsewhere in this edition). Although our guests had to dodge a lot of rain getting to the venue, by the time the event was finished, so was the rain, and everyone was able to enjoy the third round of the elevated event.

The third annual **First Tee – Connecticut Charity Classic in Memory of Shepard W. Baker** Presented by Beverly Buckner Baker was held on Tuesday, October 10 at TPC River Highlands in Cromwell. Hartford HealthCare was also a significant sponsor in honor of Beverly and Shep Baker. It was close to perfect weather for a golf outing; not too hot, not



Amanda Renner, CBS Sports Reporter and Greg McLaughlin, PGA TOUR First Tee Foundation CEO at the 2023 Patrons' Breakfast during the Travelers Championship.

too cold and 96 golfers enjoyed this tournament which raised over \$100,000 for our golf programs in Central Connecticut. A huge shout out to Beverly for sponsoring this tournament, as well as all the other ways she supports First Tee – Connecticut. A special thank you to the team from the Bone & Joint Institute for offering on-course fitness evaluations, and to Links Drinks for providing on-course beverages at our events in 2023.

Back to that dreaded subject, rain – our **Mastercard First Tee – Connecticut Charity Classic**, which was to be held at The Country Club of Waterbury on Tuesday, September 26th had to be postponed until Monday, October 30 and ultimately cancelled after a very rainy Sunday on the 29. We are so thankful that Mastercard, our Title Sponsor, as well as the 17 foursomes scheduled to play continued to support our efforts, and each will be given a certificate for a round of golf at The Country Club of Waterbury which they can redeem sometime in 2024!

# Selam Olson: Embodying Sportsmanship, Leadership and Passion

When Selam Olson, 17, received a phone call from her mom Susan while at school, she grew concerned about what she was about to hear. That concern quickly turned to excitement when she was informed she was named recipient of the 2023 Connecticut PGA (CTPGA) Sportsmanship Award. This was the first time Selam had even heard of this recognition.

"I was so excited and surprised to be recognized with such a great honor," said Selam, a senior at Choate Rosemary Hall. "My mom opened my mail and told me I won. It's such an honor."

The New Haven resident epitomizes leadership and sportsmanship, which is why she has been such a valuable part of First Tee – Connecticut and its growth over the years. In addition to this award and countless hours spent on the golf course, Selam has also participated in First Tee's Drive Your Future Academy presented by John Deere, a female empowerment event she attended in San Francisco this past October. Selam was also chosen for First Tee – Connecticut's Participant Advisory Council in 2022, where she had the opportunity to focus on issues impacting all First Tee chapters.

According to Selam, in her time engaged with First Tee – Connecticut, she has learned the importance of relationships, how to be an effective leader and how nonprofits operate and impact their communities. As she embarks on the college application process, Selam also plans to continue her love for the game while upholding the sportsmanship that embodies the CT PGA Award.

"It's important not just to practice and become a better golfer, but also to be a better person and leader," adds Selam. "First Tee has taught me to keep pushing even when life isn't going smoothly."



Connecticut Board Chair, Ken Baldwin (left) and CEO, Mark Moriarty (right) with Selam Olson after she accepted her award from the Connecticut PGA.

## 2023 Scholarship Recipients

### 19 Iron Scholarship (Downey Family Foundation)

Cora Tinker

### Aetna Retirees Scholarship in memory of H. Grant Thomas & Roger Lawson

Jack Wise

### Andrew K. Dwyer Foundation Scholarship

Christian Bonvisuto

Elizabeth Dunn

Cora Tinker

### Daniel Novarr Scholarship

Lysa-Baye McCaw

### Donald E. Vacheron Scholarship

Joseph Pontoriero

### Epstein Family Scholarship

Daniel Asare

Ishaan Bafna

Raphael Blocher

Brendan Connors

Catherine Cruess

Thomas Cruess

Carys Dinunzio

Tyler Heidgerd

Mario LaChance

Mathew Luponio

Christopher Mancini

Meghna Mazumdar

Selam Olson

Arianna Owens

Hunter Palleria

Joshua Raj

Katherine Regan

Mary Reidy

Luca Sousa

Savannah Stanco

### Mazumdar Family Scholarship

Elizabeth Dunn

### Shepard W. Baker Memorial Scholarship

Jake Terlik

### William P. Lyons Scholarship

Christian Bonvisuto

Jack Wise

## Christian Bonvisuto, Wethersfield, Named First Tee National Scholar



In addition to his recognition as part of First Tee – Connecticut Class of 2023, Christian Bonvisuto of Wethersfield was also recognized as one of just 24 members of the First Tee College Scholarship Program.

The First Tee College Scholarship Program aims to support alumni after high school graduation by pairing each Scholar with a trained adult mentor to provide guidance throughout their college careers and beyond. Each Scholar will also participate in professional development workshops and receive up to \$5,000 per year towards tuition and expenses.

The class of 2023 – comprised of 14 young women and 10 young men – was selected from a competitive national pool of First Tee teens. This diverse group of scholars represents 21 First Tee chapters across 18 states. The scholars' future aspirations range from becoming doctors and lawyers to studying economics, biometric engineering, computer science, professional golf management and journalism. Six plan to play collegiate golf.

Participants across First Tee's network submitted applications to be a part of the latest Scholar class. Following an online application process, finalists were selected by a committee for one-on-one interviews. In addition to academic performance, applicants were considered based on financial need, chapter involvement, volunteerism and other criteria.

"Welcome to our new class of Scholars and congratulations on being selected," said First Tee CEO Greg McLaughlin. "The decision to embark on higher education is an important one and I am proud that First Tee can continue to support alumni through the process. Thank you to our partners who support the program and our mentors who provide year-round guidance."

Christian is attending UCONN this fall to further his education. He has been a part of First Tee for almost ten years. He says that through First Tee he was presented with many learning opportunities and appreciates the "invaluable life lessons" he gleaned from those experiences. He was captain of the Wethersfield High School Golf and Tennis Teams and enjoys mentoring younger players. Christian has a passion for helping others through volunteer work; one such activity is coaching the Special Olympics tennis team. He has also participated and won many awards in the PGA Jr. League and in Drive, Chip & Putt competitions.

# Hartford HealthCare Women's Championship

The Epson Tour returned to Connecticut in 2023. The event, hosted by Great River Golf Club in Milford, was held in mid-July. As part of our strong partnership with Hartford HealthCare, the title sponsor, First Tee – Connecticut participated in events surrounding the week.

First Tee hosted and conducted a junior clinic with 25 girls from the southern part of the state on Tuesday, July 11. The girls, both experienced and new to golf, enjoyed a fun putting game on the large, sloped putting green at Great River and hit balls with four LPGA pros. The professionals (mostly young women, just out of college) held a clinic on the range, giving the girls tips, talking about their college experiences and now playing golf for a living on the Epson Tour.

In addition, Board Member Bess Barnes played in the Pro-Am with two of our most experienced and accomplished participants--- Laniah Moffett and Libby Dunn. This stellar team tied for first place and had a phenomenal experience spending the day with an LPGA pro in competition!



Libby Dunn (Berlin) and Laniah Moffett (Waterbury) prepare for their round during the Pro-Am at the Hartford HealthCare Women's Championship.

## Coaching for the Love of Golf and Life

For Susan Wagemaker, golf is more than just a top three finish or completing a round with a birdie. It's about what players learn in life while on the course: Sportsmanship, integrity and respect for the game and fellow golfers.

As a coach with First Tee – Connecticut over the last 15 years, Wagemaker has enjoyed shaping kids' love for the game and teaching skills they take with them to school, their communities and, eventually, jobs and life.

"I love that golf provides a healthy and competitive outlet for kids and helps them model how to be as people," says Wagemaker. "This is more important than their actual golf skills."

Wagemaker, who can walk to the First Tee facility from her home in Cromwell, has spent her career as an educator, mainly with teenagers. She played a key role in bringing the First Tee golf curriculum to schools in Cheshire. While she still enjoys working with teens, her passion in shaping the love of the game for the younger generation energizes her every day.

"I have had so many "A-ha" moments where I see younger kids, especially girls, start out timid then realize they really can play and get better," said Wagemaker, who noted a time she was coaching and played a game where a group of young girls had to putt the ball and see who could get it as close to a line as possible. They started apprehensively, but that didn't last. "By the end they were giggling and doing cartwheels. It was quite an experience."

Wagemaker plans to continue her engagement with First Tee for the foreseeable future. She knows she – along with all the organization's coaches and volunteers – will continue to make a difference and ensure an affordable, rewarding experience for participants.

"We not only want to teach them about golf, but also life skills," adds Wagemaker. "They are learning lessons that without golf in their lives they may never have learned. That's something we can all be proud of at First Tee."



## Dunn Deal: Female Empowerment Drives First Tee Teen



Sammy Dunn of Berlin loves the game of golf and wants to change the world. Thanks to her engagement with First Tee – Connecticut, she's able to pursue both passions.

The 16-year-old road warrior traveled to Philadelphia this past summer to participate in the First Tee Game Changers Academy Honoring Joe Louis Barrow, Jr. and to San Francisco for the First Tee Drive Your Future Academy presented by John Deere. Both trips influenced the way Sammy sees the world and reinforced her role as a young, female leader.

### Changing the Game in Philly

Sammy was one of 72 participants nationwide selected for the First Tee Game Changers Academy, a five-day learning and empowerment academy. Participants selected to attend the academy participated in important conversations around issues of identity, racism, diversity, equity and inclusion. First Tee invites its partner, RISE, a national leader in the sports community championing social justice and working to improve race relations, to facilitate engaging and interactive workshops paired with introspective activities and reflections led by nationally trained First Tee coaches.

"It was one of the most amazing experiences ever and I still keep in touch with a lot of the other participants I met," said Sammy, a junior, who added that the combination of golf and learning about diversity, equity and inclusion was unique and inspiring. "These are lifelong relationships and we all learned so much about people's different perspectives on life."

The experience is designed to enlighten, inspire, encourage and position teens to be advocates for justice and social change in their current and future communities. First Tee Game Changers Academy is the ultimate tribute to Joe Louis Barrow, Jr., a fearless champion of change.

### A Drive for Change in San Francisco

The First Tee Drive Your Future Academy presented by John Deere is a female empowerment event recognizing young women who are motivated to influence positive impact at their chapters, schools and communities. The five-day academy experience focuses on cultivating meaningful relationships, embracing self-awareness and advocating for oneself and others.

The 24 selected teens had the opportunity to participate in activity-based workshops with female industry leaders in technology, STEM and business development. Additionally, teens developed their relationship with mentors on the golf course in a relaxed setting.

"I was able to build so many connections and met incredible young women from across the country," said Sammy, who added that a trip to the Pomeroy Recreation & Rehabilitation Center was the highlight of the trip, along with the amazing golf experience. "We all love First Tee and the energy from everyone that took part in the program was something I will always remember."

## For Paige McKenna, Community Comes First

For Paige McKenna of Fairfield, the future of her community starts with the younger generation, and she intends to lead the charge. That started with a recent trip to Jacksonville, Florida, to participate in the First Tee Innovators Forum, which equips and empowers First Tee teens to develop a meaningful service project in their communities focused on education, health, human rights, or environmental sustainability.

"First Tee has really taught me how to positively impact my community by engaging with people and helping others," said Paige, who added First Tee allows her to combine her passion for golf and her community. "It's important for me to have an impact on my community. I am excited to attend the Innovators Forum to learn new ideas and meet kids from other parts of the country who have the same values."

While Paige enjoys the individual component of golf, she also believes it's a sport that brings people together. First Tee shows her first-hand how the sport unifies people and communities. "Even though golf is an individual sport, First Tee always brings the community together," said Paige, who has also volunteered with Special Olympics. "It has allowed me to build relationships and I am excited to pursue golf as I get older."

Those selected for the program can learn from industry leaders through interactive workshops and small group breakout sessions. By bringing together passionate participants from across the chapter network, First Tee Innovators Forum provides a distinctive enrichment experience, engaging teens who share a similar desire for learning and generating changes in their communities.

"Kids are the next generation," adds Paige. "It's important that they learn from a young age how important their community is and their role in making it stronger."



Paige McKenna (Fairfield – 2nd from right) enjoying her time with her fellow participants during First Tee's Innovators Forum this November.

## With tremendous gratitude to each of the organizations and individuals who have held fundraisers in 2023 to benefit First Tee – Connecticut

- 10th Annual Golf Marathon for Charity at Sharon Golf Club
- 2nd Annual Charlie Sifford Golf Outing
- 5th Annual Sine Die Cup
- Bongiorno Correctional Golf League
- Connecticut Section PGA Spring Meeting Hall of Fame Blue & Gold Celebration
- Final Final Open
- Gary Gätzen Memorial Golf Tournament
- Hop Meadow Country Club Superintendent's Revenge
- John Romano Memorial Golf Tournament
- Keney Links Womens Golf Club
- Longshore Women's Golf Association Member Guest
- LPGA Amateurs Fairfield County Chapter Annual Tee-Off
- Mastercard Employee Outing
- Max Classic
- NFL Alumni, CT Chapter Super Bowl Raffle
- Orange Hills Country Club Men's Golf Association
- Redding Country Club Longest Day Marathon
- Ron Booth Mission Golf Outing
- Silvermine Road Trippers
- Torza's Golf & Putt Putt Fundraiser

# Access to Golf Drives Love for the Game

As a collegiate basketball player, Anthony Bonelli of Rocky Hill never cared much about golf. Then his coach told Bonelli and his teammates they all had to participate in a fall sport to stay focused and in shape for the winter basketball season. While most of the team chose track and field, the golf team at Newberry College in Boston needed bodies to fill out its roster, and Bonelli decided to give it a shot.

Bonelli has now been a coach with First Tee – Connecticut for seven years and spreads his love for the game and skill to those in the Waterbury community. It's a city where golf is often not thought of as an option, and Bonelli is changing the game.

"When I was told I had to play a fall sport in college, I began to really focus on golf and loved it," said Bonelli, who is also the Camp Director at First Tee's summer camp. "It's such a great sport for families to connect."

That connection has played an integral role in the growth of golf's popularity in Waterbury, according to Bonelli. He's made it a point to ensure that kids not only have access to the sport in the city, but that they stick with it and refine their skills.

"The kids in Waterbury really love golf and they are telling their friends to play. Some have even begun to assist me with lessons," said Bonelli. "There's no better feeling than seeing the excitement and progress of these golfers. That's the reason I spend so much time with First Tee. It's inspiring."

The summer and fall sessions of First Tee Group Lessons run seven weeks and provide weekly access to golf for participants. Bonelli not only wants to ensure kids have access to golf clubs and courses – many of which are city-owned – but also to create a lifelong passion.

"The feedback we get from our golfers is always positive," adds Bonelli. "When we have families outside enjoying the sport together, we know we have succeeded in our mission."



Coach Anthony Bonelli working with students at Kingsbury Elementary School in Waterbury.

## Walter Shelton Coach of the Year Award



We established this award after we lost our friend/coach/mentor, Walter Shelton, in early 2022. Walter exemplified what it means to be a game changer, made an impact on young people and personified the Nine Core Values. Walter embodied positivity, kindness, passion and compassion for others.

At our Donor Breakfast on the Saturday of Travelers Championship week in June, First Tee and Pat Shelton, Walter's wife, were so excited to honor Taylor Januario, Assistant Program Director and Lead Coach for many of our Group Lessons at the Learning Links.

Taylor worked closely with Walter every Saturday during the golf season for several years in Cromwell and they developed quite a friendship, so it only seemed appropriate to recognize Taylor first. Coach Taylor shows great versatility at our chapter, in age groups, skill level and geographic diversity. She has impacted hundreds of First Tee participants over the years, from our enthusiastic 5- and 6-year-olds to our teen alums, many of whom have ended up working with Coach Taylor as assistant coaches.

Taylor is passionate about delivering the First Tee curriculum seamlessly for each and every group lesson. Taylor not only spends time in Cromwell, but also works with youngsters at other locations across the state. She has introduced golf to the Waterbury PAL kids every Monday at either East Mountain Golf Course or Prospect Driving Range. She also served as a female role model for the Grace Academy girls from Hartford, at Goodwin Park Golf Course on Thursdays every spring and fall.

Taylor is rarely emotional but when she gave her brief acceptance speech, it was heartwarming to see her teary in recognition of her friend, Walter. Thanks for all you do at our chapter, Coach Taylor!

## A Passion for Life, A Passion for Golf:

**David M. Ladd**  
1943 – 2023



David Michael Ladd died peacefully at home on June 14, 2023, following a brief illness. David is the son of William E. Ladd and Ruth Purdy Ladd. David is survived by his best friend, his wife of 56 years, Billie Hankins Ladd and his brother-in-law, Skip Conn. After a brief career as a bank officer, in 1975 David founded an investment advisory firm in New Haven, Ladd Capital Management, where David was the managing partner for 48 years.

David's passion in life was golf. He loved watching golf, talking about golf, reading about golf and mostly playing golf. That passion led to David's involvement with First Tee – Connecticut where he began serving as a volunteer golf coach and mentor at Alling Memorial Golf Course in New Haven. He then proudly served as an active member of the chapter's Board of Directors for 16 years. Until the time of his passing, David was a member of First Tee – Connecticut's Emeritus Board, recognizing his exemplary service to the organization and its mission and goals.

CEO, Mark Moriarty said, "David will be sorely missed; he was always so passionate about First Tee, and he was incredibly supportive of our efforts in New Haven and beyond over the years."