

SENIOR LIFESTYLES

After 20-plus years, this marshal knows the ropes

By Mike Latona
Staff writer

PITTSFORD — Dick Welles felt the time had come to relinquish his Ladies Professional Golf Association volunteer work, which he had done for more than 20 years.

"Last year I thought, well, this is it," said Welles, 71, a parishioner at St. Louis Parish in Pittsford.

No such luck. Gail Lyle, co-chair of the marshals' committee for the Wegmans Rochester International, didn't relish the idea of Welles' absence once she caught wind of his plans.

"His smile is the first thing you look for every day," she commented. "He's just the best guy."

Lyle did some arm-twisting during the winter, and Welles relented. As the Rochester International returns to Locust Hill Country Club June 8-11, Welles is back in the saddle, having retired and un-retired without missing a beat. He also sports a new title: Grand Marshal.

Welles has served as a marshal, and later a marshals' captain, since the late 1970s — almost from the time that Locust Hill first became an annual LPGA stop. Welles hasn't missed a single year, meaning that the 2000 Rochester International marks the fourth different decade of his LPGA involvement.

Welles moved into a supervisory role, coordinating other marshals, approximately 10 years ago. Prior to that time he logged many years in the trenches, making sure that galleries stayed inside the ropes and remained quiet during tournament play.



Andrea Dixon/Staff photographer

Dick Welles, this year's grand marshal of the LPGA, on June 1 at Locust Hill Golf Course in Henrietta. The tournament at Locust Hill kicked off on June 5.

"I've rarely ever played the course, but I feel like I know every inch of it," Welles said of Locust Hill.

Even so, Welles has observed scant tournament action over the years. He explained that marshals are concerned more with spectators than players.

"If marshals are doing their job, they re-

ally don't get to see that much. When they're standing along the ropes, they're supposed to be facing the gallery," he said.

Welles has encountered some bizarre incidents. Once, he recalled, an LPGA pro hooked her drive into a tree on Locust Hill's 16th hole — and the ball never came down. And on the 18th hole, LPGA Hall of Famer Kathy Whitworth "put her tee shot right in someone's lap," Welles said. "I was nearby and said to the person, 'Don't move, don't touch the ball.'"

Despite his position of authority, Welles said he has refrained from being stern and severe as a marshal.

"You get much more cooperation by being reasonably friendly and courteous," he observed. "It takes diplomacy."

Welles praised the galleries at Locust Hill, saying they're knowledgeable and generally cooperative. The only noise issues, he said, tend to occur near the 18th hole where people "have had a few drinks and are enjoying themselves."

Welles noted that a marshal is often the first contact if a rules official or security officer is needed. And, because the marshals are hooked into a radio system, spectators seek them out for updates on tournament standings or weather forecasts.

Welles said that Whitworth, the 1984 Rochester International champion, is a personal favorite of his. "She's always been very personable and gracious," he

commented. Welles also acknowledged the longtime appeal of Nancy Lopez at Locust Hill, saying, "She is popular and rightfully so."

Welles observed that many pros are friendly with the galleries during the early part of tournament week — but their smiles largely disappear once the pro-ams and camera days are done.

"On Thursday they change dramatically, because they're here to make some money," he said.

Welles is struck by the Rochester International's growth over the years. He said the marshals' staff has nearly doubled since he began volunteering, and the current group of 350 includes marshals who drive in from Buffalo and Syracuse.

"We've got some of the largest galleries on the tour," he said. "What's amazing to me is the number of young couples with infant children. It reminds me of the children's Mass at St. Louis (Church)."

Welles retired three years ago from the manufacturers' representative business he owned. He and his wife of 46 years, Mary, have four children and six grandchildren — but, for at least one more year, Welles must balance his family plans with his duties at the Rochester International. Now that tournament week has arrived, Welles said he's excited to be a part of the action.

"It's kind of like, this is the place to be," he remarked.



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