

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE (6-2-2018)

Golf Hall of Fame: Harding, Williams-Hoak, LaFontaine and Erickson Inducted

BIG RAPIDS - A notable foursome joined the Michigan Golf Hall of Fame Saturday night.

Tom Harding of South Lyon, a winning tour professional and PGA instructor, Debbie Williams-Hoak of Saline, a former LPGA player and award-winning coach, Gordon LaFontaine of Houghton Lake, executive director emeritus of the Michigan Turfgrass Foundation (MTF) and groundbreaking fundraiser, and the late Bud Erickson of West Bloomfield, a former executive director of the LPGA and the Golf Association of Michigan (GAM), were inducted at Ferris State University's Katke Golf Club.

"I still can't believe I was included," said Williams-Hoak. "What an incredible honor. I'm so humbled by this."

LaFontaine called his life in golf service an incredible journey.

"In the grass cutting business, I met some of the greatest people in the world," he said.

Harding cited the support of his wife Peggy, her daughter Esther and his three daughters Caroline, Priscilla and Elizabeth, who in 2019 will all be part of the Michigan State women's golf program.

"We are a family that plays golf," he said. "This is a big deal to us."

Jon Erickson, Bud's son, said their father loved the social aspect of golf.

"I always said he wasn't the life of the party, but he was the guy next to the guy who was life of the party," he said.

Erickson, who died last August at the age of 94, was an Army Air Corps veteran and graduate of Michigan State University who before his career in golf was a public relations director and assistant general manager for the Detroit Lions when they won three NFL Championships in the 1950s. In golf he was executive director of the LPGA from 1970-75 credited with adding tournaments and purses and was executive director of the GAM from 1980-84. He also served as tournament director for Oakland Hills Country Club as host site of the 1979 PGA Championship, the 1981 U.S. Senior Open, the 1985 U.S. Open and the 1991 U.S. Senior Open.

Harding, 53 and a teaching professional at Kendall Academy of Golf in Ypsilanti, played on the Asian, Australian and Web.com tours and won the Canadian PGA Championship in 1991. After his tour career, the Michigan State graduate and Spartan golfer was twice the Michigan PGA Player of the Year and won four Michigan PGA Section major titles including the 1997 Michigan PGA Professional Championship. He has been at Kendall Academy since 2004 where he has been named one of Golf Digest's Top 15 Instructors in Michigan five times since 2011.

Williams-Hoak, 58 and golf academy director at Brookside Golf Club in Saline, was an All-America track and field athlete in javelin at the University of Michigan before taking up golf at age 31. At age 40 she was a celebrated rookie on the LPGA Tour. Before turning professional she was a two-time Michigan Women's Amateur champion and qualified for seven USGA national championships. She won the Michigan Women's Open in 2000 and twice lost in playoffs on the LPGA's Symetra Tour. She coaches the

boys and girls golf teams at Saline High School and has twice been named a state high school golf coach of the year.

LaFontaine, 73 and owner of Pine View Highlands Golf Course in Houghton Lake, retired in January after 37 years as executive director of the MTF where he administered \$500,000 in annual revenue and product funds, helped to raise over \$1.1 million annual donations of equipment, product and funds, oversaw \$1.3 million in endowments and was instrumental in the creation of the world renown Hancock Turfgrass Research Center at Michigan State University. The MSU graduate has won multiple awards, and is a past winner of the Golf Course Superintendent's Association of America Distinguished Service Award.

The MGHOF is a heralded collection of portraits, plaques and memorabilia that now commemorates 123 members, including Walter Hagen, Chuck Kocsis, Horton Smith and more current notables Dave and Mike Hill, Dan Pohl, Meg Mallon and Kelly Robbins. The collection will soon be housed and displayed in the new Ken Janke Sr. Golf Learning Center that is under construction at Ferris State University's Katke golf facility. The late Ken Janke Sr. was co-founder and is a member of the MGHOF.

The MGHOF is administered by the Michigan Golf Hall of Fame Committee, which is funded through the non-profit Michigan Golf Foundation (501(c) (3) since 1996) and includes 18 members representing a cross-section of the state's golf associations as well as golf media. The MGHOF committee conducts an annual election to recognize the achievements of competitive Michigan golfers, but also accomplishments of individuals who have contributed to the growth of the game.

Find out more at michigan-golf-foundation.com.

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PHOTO ATTACHED: The Class of 2018, from left Tom Harding, Gordon LaFontaine and Debbie Williams- Hoak. LaFontaine holds the Hall of Fame plaque of Bud Erickson.