

2017 KPGA DEACON PALMER AWARD NOMINATION

NAME OF NOMINEE: Daniel R. Mullen

FACILITY NAME: Paxton Park Golf Course

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1. Please describe the nominee's service and commitment for others and their success regardless of situation.

Nominee has the responsibility as the PGA Director of Golf & Operations for a 25,000 round municipal golf course, which hosts an average of 4 events per week, each week from April through the end of October (7 months a year). The nominee is also the PGA head professional and GCSAA greens superintendent at this same facility. The nominee is also responsible for soliciting, maintaining and promoting more than half of the approximately 65 community sponsors (which raised \$67,000 in 2016) that advertise on our scorecard and tee markers or sponsors that support our largest four tournaments during the year, making these events a success for the players and the facility. The nominee has no assistant golf professional or no assistant greens superintendent to help supervise the staff. Due to budget (golf course maintenance budget approximates \$200,000) constraints, the nominee regularly volunteers 1,000 hours or more each year working on the golf course helping the maintenance crew keep the course properly maintained for the consistent stream of events hosted by the facility (hosted 124 events from April thru October). The nominee spearheaded efforts to both plan and implement significant capital improvements at this facility over the past 15 years, including providing much of the labor. Most of these capital improvements were made possible by approximately one million dollars in community donations, not user fees and not City subsidies. Although the City of Paducah owns this facility, it is funded by user fees and donations, not by the City (although we are trying to change that).

All that being said, the result is a nominee that spends 80+ hours a week on the job during the season and 60+ hours a week on the job during the offseason. This nominee has virtually no life during the season and his sanity should really be questioned for taking on this responsibility, but it has become his personal mission to restore this facility to a position of leadership in the local golf community and make Paxton Park relevant again.

It is important to the nominee that Paxton Park is successful, that our events hosted here are successful and that all of our participants in our events have a good experience and want to come back. It is important to the nominee that this facility represent our members and sponsors in a positive, consistent manner and one in which all will take pride in the facility and what it stands for in our community. It is much more than just a golf course to our community, and the nominee understands that.

The nominee has made choices to pursue this mission of consistent maintenance care and capital improvement, despite budget and personnel limitations (3 FTE on the golf course maintenance crew and 3 seasonal weeders during the summer, plus the nominee; 2 FTE in the Pro Shop, plus the nominee) because he believes this community facility is an important element of the recreational and social fabric of his community. He has made a sacrifice for a group of people that don't always understand or appreciate the extent of that personal sacrifice that was willingly made on their behalf.

The nominee could make more money elsewhere and work fewer hours, but the "nominee idiot" is hell bent on making this facility work and prosper for the next generation. He believes we are simply stewards of this facility and wants to leave it better than he found it. Ultimately the nominee believes that in the end, the improved product will lead to more volume and increased budgets, and more personnel to do the job.

2. Please describe the nominee's performance and service to the Association, fellow PGA Members, and the community to include contributions to building and growing the image of the PGA Professional, the Association and the game of golf while dealing with their own personal difficulty.

Due to the nominee's far western Kentucky geographic location, and the many responsibilities he has at this facility, his service to the Association has been limited to hosting Section events such as Kentucky Junior Tour events, Kentucky Open qualifiers and a middle school regional. However, the nominee makes every effort to accommodate any request made by the Section for an event site and makes every effort to promote policies consistent with the PGA, USGA and the KGA. He believes strongly that he represents the Section and the Association in everything he does and is cognizant of that.

Contributions to the community, other than promoting and maintaining this facility, involve primarily making sure the local charity fundraisers held at this facility are successful. Local charity fundraisers net over \$100,000 a year from events hosted by this facility. The nominee and his staff prepare cart tags, rules sheets, hole prize signs and anything else requested by the fundraiser in order to make sure everything is successful for each event, including choreographing the other players on the course at that time to minimize course closures and player friction, and maximize availability to members and public patrons. The nominee also promotes participation in other community events via regular donations of rounds of golf for other fundraising events.

The nominee also champions the cause of community junior golf by providing access to the facility for the local high school golf programs and area juniors the facility puts on "scholarship". Two local high school golf programs use Paxton Park as their home course and have year-round access to the golf course and practice range privileges and a third school uses the facility from time to time—all at no charge. The nominee believe the facility has an obligation to do this to promote the game. Many times this gets a little tough during the high school golf season balancing high school matches, tournaments (Paxton Parks hosts a large high school event in August) and practices for three schools with normal public and member play and events, and required course maintenance

As any other “seasoned” professional in our business does, the nominee fields quite a few calls from other local clubs that may or may not have a PGA professional requesting assistance with some event, or operational procedures, or turf issues, or something at their facility they need help with, and he always finds time to assist others in his profession. That is one of the perks to being the “old guy on the block”. Sometimes this requires commuting to and from another local club and the nominee typically does this on one of his two afternoons “off”. Sometimes the nominee spends several hours a week on the phone trying to answer these phone call questions about turf issues or tournament issues. Professionals that came before the nominee did it for him, and he feels it is the right thing to do for someone else. And it is quite interesting that in trying to help someone else, you typically end up learning something yourself.

3. Please briefly describe the nominee’s significant impacts made on others and ability and encourage success and achievement in individuals regardless of the personal challenges they face.

This is a tough one because you don’t always know what kind of impact you have made on others. I would say the nominee has impacted others by the level of cooperation the facility gets from local sponsors and donors. What has been done at this facility by a relatively small maintenance crew has been possible many times only through the efforts of volunteers who help lay sod, cut drainage trenches, ferry golf carts, or put tarps down on the greens in the winter. The fact we have had this kind of help would suggest the way we go about our jobs has garnered the respect of our patrons, which is a huge boost to crew morale and suggests we have impacted others. The nominee believes you earn this kind of loyalty by being hardworking for your patrons and appreciative of their participation at your facility.

Being one of the “older guys around”, the nominee is naturally asked from time to time by fellow golf and turf professionals about a specific situation or opportunity in turfgrass or club management. The nominee has more than once encouraged someone to make a significant change (i.e., change employers, ask for more money, get a contract, etc.) and they made the change, so for whatever reason, they would listen to what was recommended—and that suggests an impact of some sort, hopefully for the better.

The nominee believes that you impact others by the example you set. As I stated above, you don’t always know to what extent you may be impacting others but always be cognizant of the fact someone is always watching, for better or worse. We have unsolicited sponsors who have come in the door after playing here and want to be a part of what we do for the community. They respect what they see and the changes and effort being made to improve something for the betterment of everyone involved. That means we are impacting someone in “how” we do “what” we do.

4. Briefly describe how the nominee has had significant influence on Golf Professionals, facilities, and employers in the effort to assist others and better the community.

The nominee has impacted other facilities by spearheading efforts to establish and maintain quality ultradwarf Bermuda greens in the western Kentucky region. Paxton Park was the first in our area to do this in 2003. Since then, this turf has been installed on five other area courses (several converting from bentgrass) and at least four or five are considering the change now due to the excessively hot summers recently. The nominee gets calls from Oklahoma to the Carolinas (courses in the turf transition zone) requesting experience information relative to this type of turf fairly regularly—Paxton Park seems to be the “poster boy” for this grass in the northern transition zone.

Recently, the nominee was asked to contribute to an article in Superintendent magazine, a national golf course greens superintendent publication, specifically demonstrating how to successfully manage ultradwarf Bermuda greens on a limited budget. Paxton Park was suggested for the article by Mike Brown, one of the founders and owners of Champion ultradwarf Bermuda in Texas. He has put Champion on 500 golf courses since 1996 and the fact that he chose Paxton Park was quite a compliment. The article was written and published in the November issue of this national publication in order to encourage others with limited resources they can succeed with this high quality warm season greens turf.

Paxton Park has won the local Paducah Sun’s Readers Choice award three out of the last four years for “Favorite Golf Course”, and we have a lot of competition in our area. We’re proud of that accomplishment for our facility, our members, and our supporters. It evidences the fact that people notice what you are doing and helps fuel the engine for further improvements.

The nominee has been fortunate to be nominated for Professional of the Year in our section 3 times now and surprisingly even won it once (2015)—that suggests some sort of influence on someone, hopefully a good one.

This nominee is just a “dirt farmer” who can play golf, get along with others and just wants everyone to have a good time. He is determined to provide the best possible experience for everyone wanting to have a good time, while respecting each other and the course. He also understands he can’t please everyone and can’t make everybody happy. He wears many hats and tries to perform each one in a fair and professional manner. Our policies apply equally to everyone and no one is above the rules. They are in place to protect the course and maximize the enjoyment of our patrons. By consistently enforcing those policies and educating the violators, the nominee believes he sets an example which other professionals can use to tame the “beasts” at their clubs.

5. Please provide any additional information regarding the nominee and his/her contributions relevant to the Deacon Palmer Award.

The nominee is simply a guy who is blessed to be healthy, and knows it. He is a guy who enjoys his job because of the satisfaction it brings him and others, but understands it came with a heavy price...sacrificing his personal time and much of his personal life. He made a choice because at this particular facility, he can “make a difference” because of his unusual skill set (also a CPA who worked for a large accounting and consulting firm for seven years). He’s a guy

who has had other opportunities to go elsewhere, but chose to stay at Paxton Park. He's also a guy that sometimes, in the summer, wonders why in the world would anyone want this job.

So I guess the challenge I face is my determination to make this work and my inability to quit, and some would say I'm just simply "stubborn and stupid". I'm also concerned that if I got away from it too much, I might not want to come back...and that scares me.

I have made what some would say are unorthodox career choices in the past when I left a successful career with Ernst & Young, an international accounting firm where I was a Manager level CPA, for an assistant golf professional position working for my father, Kayo Mullen, a long time PGA professional. My uncle, Larry Mullen, was also a long time PGA member (so I guess my challenge was genetic).

The long term goal was to get my PGA credentials and ultimately own my own golf course. I knew if I got in the golf business and served my PGA apprenticeship under anyone but Dad, I would hurt his feelings and I didn't want to do that. So I went to work for my father at Paxton Park. I had grown up working at the golf course so it wasn't anything new to me. It was just a different level of responsibility now. Well...my Dad got cancer and ultimately passed away, so I kind of inherited his job and this facility. Paxton Park was very important to him, and he was good for Paxton Park. My "challenge" is to make this facility successful and an example to others, because in my mind, it still reflects him and what he meant to so many people who grew up, or played, at Paxton Park. It is not just a golf course or a job to me. It is personal.

6. Please list any Section or National awards the nominee has received.

Golf Professional of the Year	2015	Kentucky Section
Merchandiser of the Year—Public	2001	Kentucky Section
Apprentice Scholarship (Titleist or TaylorMade)	1989	Kentucky Section

One final comment: I apologize for the length of this answer narrative. I just want to do justice to the individual that nominated me for this award and Mr. Palmer, who this award is named after. To do that, I felt I had to answer these questions as thoroughly as I can, with thought and honesty. Thank you for your consideration.