7th Tavistock Country Club Veterans Appreciation Day

Kevin McCloskey - Southampton, PA
US Army Veteran - Iraqi Freedom - AK/BK
Entries open today for inaugural championship at Pinehurst Resort & Country Club on July 18-20, 2022

LIBERTY CORNER, N.J. (Feb. 28, 2022) – The United States Golf Association (USGA) today announced additional details regarding the U.S. Adaptive Open – a new national championship that will showcase the world’s best golfers with disabilities – including information on the entry process, field composition and competition format.

The U.S. Adaptive Open will serve as the association’s 15th national championship, joining such iconic longstanding events as the U.S. Open, U.S. Women’s Open, U.S. Amateur and U.S. Women’s Amateur. Champions of this new event will see their names recorded in the annals of golf history alongside many of the game’s storied figures. It will be held July 18-20 at Pinehurst Resort & Country Club’s Course No. 6.

“The USGA has long been committed to providing the world’s greatest golfers a platform to showcase their skills, and we are proud to give the adaptive golf community the same opportunity to compete for a national championship,” said John Bodenhamer, USGA senior managing director, Championships. “Pinehurst will serve as a wonderful backdrop as these incredible athletes compete to leave their mark on this great game.”

Entries into the championship open today, Feb. 28, and close on Wednesday, May 4, with the final field to be posted on May 18. Eligibility is open to both male and female professional and amateur golfers with a World Handicap System (WHS) Handicap Index® of 36.4 or less and an eligible impairment confirmed by a WR4GD Pass. Those interested in applying to play can do so at usao. usga.org.

The field will include 96 players, with at least five male players and two female players per impairment category. Impairment categories are:

- Arm Impairment
- Leg Impairment
- Multiple Limb Amputee
- Vision Impairment
- Intellectual Impairment
- Neurological Impairment
- Seated Players
- Short Stature

A player’s individual Handicap Index will be the primary factor for determining the field. Additionally, up to 20 spots will be filled by a USGA Selection Committee to assure representation from key demographics.

The championship will be contested over 54 holes of stroke play. Multiple sets of tees will be utilized. Carts will be permitted for all players and caddies.

In addition to determining overall male and female champions and runners-up, there will be a male and female winner in each impairment category.

Additional information on the U.S. Adaptive Open can be found at usga.org.
First Swing Clinic -
Good Shepherd Rehab Hospital
Saucon Valley Country Club, Bethlehem, PA
May 10th, 2021

PHOTOS: (From left to right)
Row 1: Bill Lippincott & Participant
Row 2: Joanne Dantonia
   Kenny Bontz & Steve Forsythe
   Jill Fedora & Ken Wridaw
Row 3: Tyler Kapinus
   Ken Wridaw
   Steve Kave
Row 4: Kenny Bontz, Bob Buck & Adam Benza
First Swing Clinic -
Hanger Clinic
East Potomac Golf Course
Washington, DC
Friday, August 20th, 2021

PHOTOS: (Clockwise)
Attendees —
Veteran Joseph Rice & Jacob Calvert, CPO —
Adam Benza —
DJ Hughes & Veteran Malcolm Pointer

PARTICIPANTS: (Alphabetically)
Darren Belle, Youssef Ghabbar, John Mason,
Ricardo Matthews, Ralph Mitchell, Steven Nix, Malcolm
Pointer, Joseph Rice, David Rollins, Anthony Turner,
Jim Wilson & Robert Wojtaszczyk

Many thanks to DJ Hughes, ATC, CPOA and Jacob Calvert, CPO of DC’s Hanger Clinic for hosting their First Swing
Adaptive Golf Clinic at the East Potomac Golf Course. Moving Foreword’s Adam Benza was the Clinic Instructor.
13 amputee & disabled individuals attended including EAGA’s Jim Wilson (AK) of Alexandria, VA. Pleased to have
our wounded veterans participating at the Clinic as well. Hanger’s 2nd First Swing Adaptive Golf Clinic will be held
on April 29, 2022 at East Potomac Golf Course. See you there!
First Swing Clinic - Lawall P & O Services
Bridges Golf Course
Morristown, PA
Sunday, September 18th, 2021

Many Thanks to Ann Lawall, Jack Lawall and their staff for hosting their first Adaptive Golf Clinic. EAGA’s Louis Namm & Bill Lippincott were the instructors for the Clinic. Close to 20 individuals attended the Clinic on a beautiful Friday afternoon. A 2022 Clinic is planned for May 15th at the Camden County Driving Range in Pennsauken, PA.
Tournament Director Kim Bartman, RN welcomed 180 golfers as they descended on the 27 holes at Coopersburg’s Wedgewood Golf Course for the 13th Annual Lehigh Valley Amputee Support Group Outing. Everyone enjoyed a fine Barbeque Chicken & Steak dinner provided by Outback Steakhouse. All the proceeds benefit the Lehigh Valley Amputee Support Group which is part of the Lehigh Valley Health Network, Allentown, PA. Kim Bartman, who is the chair of the Amputee Support Group was especially pleased with the terrific turnout. Close to $13,000 was raised at the event. Pretty good considering 75 less golfers played. Raffle and Door Prizes were handed out during the Outback Steak Dinner by members of the LVASG and Lehigh Valley Health Network staff. The LVASG EAGA Scholarship Award was given to Max Nierenberg, a Below Elbow Amputee from Stanford, CT currently a Freshman at Muhlenberg College in Allentown.

EAGA members participating were: Steven Blatz (AK), Nazareth, PA; Dan Carney (BK), Hatfield, PA; George Horning (BK), Bethlehem, PA; Matt Graham (AK), Langhorne, PA; Chris Miller (AKBK), Emmaus, PA; Joe Rutter (AK), Harrisburg, PA; David Brodar (BK), Lititz, PA; Jeff Keller (AK), Reading, PA; JoAnne Dantonio (BK), Jim Thorpe, PA; Kevin Mensch (BK), Emmaus, PA; Bill Lippincott (BK), Center Valley, PA; Michael Frey (BK), Washington, NJ & Bob Buck (BK), Bethlehem, PA.
New EAGA Board Position Announced –
EAGA Website Coordinator – Dave Borden Jr.

In March of 2022, the EAGA welcomed Dave Borden, Jr (AK) of Cranbury Township, PA as the newest member of our EAGA Board of Officers. Dave takes on the position as our EAGA Website Coordinator responsible maintain and updating our new EAGA Website that he recently created. We are pleased that Dave will help the EAGA keep our Internet communications timely and accurate.

David Borden, Jr. was born in Hanover, Pennsylvania in 1981. He graduated from Kutztown University in 2003 with a B.S. degree in Finance and Marketing. He was commissioned as a United States Marine in March 2006. As an Infantry Officer, he participated in several deployments in support of OPERATION IRAQI and ENDURING FREEDOM. In 2008, due to combat injuries sustained, his right leg was amputated above the knee. He was awarded the Purple Heart. Upon recovering from his injuries, he continued to serve on active duty and deploy. Dave retired for active duty in July of 2019. Dave is the recipient of the 2013 NCAA Inspiration Award. Currently, Dave is the President of AVA Assessment Associates, Inc. Dave grew up playing golf and still has a passion for the game. He became a Life Member of the EAGA in 2010 and the Tournament Director of the Pennsylvania Amputee Open Tournament in 2020. Dave is honored to be a part of the EAGA board. Dave is married to Jennifer Borden of Austin, Texas and they have two children, Avery and Tucker. They live in Cranberry Township, Pennsylvania.
More Photos for the 72nd National Amputee & Disabled Golf Championship and the 31st Senior Amputee & Disabled Golf Championship

Dave DeGaravilla
Paul Sheehan
Michelle, Fred Jr. & Fred Heller

John LeMieux
Chad Pfeifer
Kellie Valentine
John Manley

In 2021, the 3rd Georgia State Adaptive Golf Tournament returned to the Bobby Jones Golf Course in Atlanta, GA. Congratulations to Chris Biggins (G8) - Birmingham, AL for capturing the Title shooting 69-63-132. EAGA’s Kenny Bontz (AK) - Bradenton, FL finished 4th with 77-69. Deborah Smith (BK) - Western Springs, IL won the Woman’s Championship with rounds of 99-89. Special Congratulations to Tournament Director Dave Windsor, PGA for hosting the Georgia State Adaptive Golf Tournament. Dave is the Head of the Adaptive Golf Division of the Georgia State Golf Association, Instructor for the PGA HOPE program, and Founder of the Adaptive Golf Academy. Everyone had a terrific time at the Bobby Jones Golf Course in Atlanta. EAGA Members participating in the Tournament were: Cathy Walch - Buford, GA; Bart Oliva - Pompton Lakes, NJ; Dewey Easley - Hiawassee, GA; Josh Tankersley - Fort Worth, TX; Shawn Reimold - Peach Bottom, PA; Tracy Ramin - Montrose, MI; Bill Hoy III - Lancaster, OH; Stephen Kuketz - Quincy, MA; Jonathan Synder - Westmont, IL; Ryan Brenden - Norfolk, NB. All are looking forward to the 2022 GS Adaptive Golf Tournament.
Kevin McCloskey grips the golf club, a driver made to the length of a standard 3-wood, takes his stance, and swivels his head so his left eye, the good eye, is looking straight down at the ball on the tee. Sometimes, he isn’t quite sure if the grip is too firm or too loose, because there isn’t much feeling in his fingertips, particularly on his right hand. But since his right arm is mostly built around a titanium rod, and there isn’t any bend at the wrist, the club face usually stays square regardless of the grip, so that’s all good. The stance is slightly closed, as it has to be. The thing about being an amputee, particularly a bilateral amputee with prosthetics on both legs, is that the centrifugal force generated by swinging a golf club can make you fall on your freaking face if you’re not braced.

Some guys have to take such an unorthodox stance - the left foot much closer to the tee than the right foot for a right-handed golfer - that they can’t do much more than punch down at the ball because they can’t get their front hip out of the way. McCloskey’s lucky there. He’s always been an athlete and doesn’t need to close up as drastically. He’s learned to control his body to keep from falling down and, anyway, it was something to beat and he doesn’t mind that.

He does have to lift the front part of his right shoe off the ground. That doesn’t help with the balance, naturally, but the right prosthesis, the one that extends above where his knee used to be, is engineered to kick forward when it senses the pressure of walking. If McCloskey pushed his weight forward on the right shoe as he prepared to hit the ball, that leg would kick out and he’d probably whack himself with the club and fall down and that would really be a dumb-ass thing to do. Other than that, it’s no big deal once he actually climbs up to the tee box, using the club like a hiker’s staff, and gets his rebuilt pelvis and hip into proper alignment. There were seven surgeries alone on the pelvis. Seven of the 30 total surgeries, and that’s not counting the smaller stuff to treat the burns or pluck out shrapnel, some of which still remains in place like so many black freckles. Now and then, especially when it’s really sunny, McCloskey will wear a patch over his right eye, although it’s kind of annoying and he doesn’t like to do it. But the belt that runs behind the eye and makes it move -- if you look close, you can see the tip of it when he pulls back his eyelid -- that thing gets hot and the pressure builds up and it feels as if someone is sticking a thumb in his eye.

On this day, at the 17th tee of Jeffersonville Golf Club in West Norriton, the No. 1 handicap hole on the course, McCloskey is looking to cut the corner on a 363-yard dogleg right, and even though his depth perception sucks because of having just one eye, he’s pretty sure he can carry the drive to the fairway. It really isn’t his personality to lay up. He addresses the ball, bends his left knee slightly, closes the stance, lifts the front of the right shoe, feels for the grip, cocks his head to the right so he can see the damn thing, takes the club back slowly and comes down and through with a crack that echoes off the trees like a rifle shot in the high mountains of Afghanistan.

His is a good story, but it’s not a fairy tale. Army Cpl. Kevin McCloskey, now 31, lost his legs -- the right one above the knee, the left one below the knee -- when the Humvee he was driving ran over an explosive device buried in an Afghan road on June 8, 2008. Along with his many obvious injuries, he suffered a traumatic brain injury and is experiencing some memory loss and migraines. But he is living, and doing better than anyone in his platoon’s convoy would have predicted on that day. He is married to a childhood sweetheart, even though they never knew they were sweethearts back then, and he is able to work and get around, and he has golf. Every morning, though, he has to roll a thin, silicone liner onto what remains of each of his legs and insert them into the sockets of the prosthetic legs where they are held in place by suction cups. And then he stands to meet another day.

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“Everybody thinks that everything’s fine. Everybody that I know thinks everything’s fine,” McCloskey says. “It’s not freaking fine. Every day isn’t happy. When I wake up and I’m a little irritable, well, just think about it. I just had a nightmare about me getting captured, and I was in a cave, and then I woke up and I didn’t feel like getting out of bed, but I did, and now I’m trying to make myself happier. But I’m sorry if I’m not that freaking happy today. “I haven’t said this to anybody, and I don’t want to come off as being cocky or anything, but other amputees aren’t necessarily doing the same things I’m doing, tending bar, playing golf, running around. It is a normal version of myself despite the injuries, but I have to work hard to do that, and people think it’s just the regular old me. People get it, but they kind of forget.”

It’s easier to embrace just how far he has come rather than the reality that the journey will never end, but McCloskey understands that other people can’t know what it takes every day. They can’t know what it took to get out of the hospital bed, or to resume life, or to find love, or to discover the game that allows him to compete again. He plays golf to a 10-handicap now and will put that ability on display in a two-day Ryder Cup-style tournament at St. Andrews in Scotland. The match is between 13 U.S. veterans of various abilities and disabilities and an equal number from the United Kingdom. The Simpson Cup is now in its eighth year, and McCloskey has qualified twice in a row. He views the veterans from the U.K. as brothers in arms. He also wants to kick their butts.

Golf gave him a reason to get out of bed again, and not drift through an aimless succession of days when he was either depressed or medicated or unsure if there was still a direction for him to take. The game saved him, even if that might sound to some like a dramatic overstatement. “No,” McCloskey says, turning his head slightly so the good eye is looking straight ahead, “it’s not.”

**Tacony!** The three syllables of the neighborhood are smoothed over by outsiders, but if you are from there, it is pronounced, “Tuh-CONE-ee,” with a biting edge to the word that mirrors the nature of the working-class Northeast Philadelphia neighborhood hard by the Delaware River. Kevin McCloskey is Tacony, and Tacony is Kevin McCloskey. He is the youngest of the three children of Joann and Tom McCloskey (Muh-KLUS-kee, not Muh-KLOS-kee, in Tacony) and he was something of a handful from day one. Not bad, just into everything. Mischievous is a nice word and will have to do, but it doesn’t quite cover it. “He was a fun-loving kid, always joking around, making people laugh,” says Tom Boyle, who grew up with Tom McCloskey and whom Kevin considers an uncle from the neighborhood. “All the kids from there were rambunctious and Kevin fell right in line with them.”

Kevin was always slight, but fast, with legs that could carry him in and out of trouble in an instant, whether on the football field in Rhawnhurst, where he was a tailback as a kid, or on the wrestling mat in junior programs and then with the varsity at North Catholic, or on the streets. His legs were his offense and his defense. “His speed was one of his big attributes,” says Jim Savage, who coached him at North. “And he was really, really tough. He was never intimidated by any opponents.” At North Catholic, the motto was Tenui Nec Dimittam. It is Latin for: “I have taken hold and will not let go.” The falcon was chosen as the school mascot, because it is the fastest of God’s creatures and never releases its prey, much like a wrestler with an opponent in his grip.

The gym at North, before the school closed in 2010, was called The Pit. It was small and the stands raked steeply from the floor, so the spectators hovered over the action like gargoylees. When the wrestling mats were rolled out, those seated in the first row of bleachers had their feet on the edge of it. It was an ominous setting made for a kid who feared nothing and wanted to defend his turf. “Mentally, I think it’s the best sport there is,” McCloskey says. “It’s a team sport because points rack up and you see which team wins, but it’s just you on the mat. It’s all on you. The slightest mistake could get you pinned, and you have to be a man about it, and stand up and shake that person’s hand. It taught me a lot about life.”

After high school, after Catholic League wrestling championships his last three years, McCloskey waited for those life lessons to point him in the right direction. He stocked fruit shelves at Capriotti Brothers on Frankford Ave and hung out with his buddies. One night, a year after graduation, at a party in Fishtown, he saw a guy he hadn’t seen in a while and the dude looked great — had a clean haircut, had lost weight, and was jacked. “Man, what have you been doing?” McCloskey asked. “I joined the Army,” the guy said. And McCloskey thought, “Why not?”

**Kharwar I** - The Hindu Kush mountain range slopes steadily downward from the northeast corner of Afghanistan to the southwest. In translation, the name means “Hindu Killer,” because so many of the Indian slaves transported west by way of the Khyber Pass did not survive the brutal journey through the high mountains. It is arid at that altitude and cold at night, and the small camp where a platoon from the Fourth Brigade, of the 506th Infantry Regiment, of the 101st Airborne Division made its base, not far from the foot of some of those mountains contained perhaps 100 men in that vast expanse. “We were almost in...
the mountains and it was a lot scarier, because you’re thinking: ‘Holy crap, there’s only 100 guys here. If they want to hit us, they can hit us.’ ” McCloskey says.

The camp was 60 miles south of Kabul, where they would convoy to resupply, and very near a circular ring of mountains within which lay the small town of Kharwar. It was a place of interest for the Army because it was known to harbor Taliban leaders. Everyone in the platoon knew there would be missions that would take them up the switchbacks into the mountain bowl and then over the winding, exposed road to Kharwar. “It was terrible,” says Jim Romeo, a specialist 4 who was a bunkmate of McCloskey. “There were only two passes in or out. If there was an ambush set up, there was a 50-50 chance. It was their home field. They knew where to hide.”

The platoon went to Kharwar in late May 2008 to look for “persons of interest” and to meet with village elders and hopefully persuade them to stop hiding Taliban leaders for the ultimate good of the town. It was a mission and they carried it out to the best of their ability. “When we were pulling out to come home, we started feeling the ping-ping-ping on the side of the trucks and we were getting hit,” McCloskey says. “Then, RPGs [rocket-propelled grenades] started coming down and you could watch them coming in like Nerf footballs. You see them coming past you, then feel the dirt shake and see a cloud go up. There’s no explosions like on television.”

The men returned fire, started taking more from the other side, then got the orders to get the hell out of there. The convoy was seven or eight Humvees. The vehicles had been up armored on the sides and the roof, but not underneath, and a mine or bomb in the roadway posed the biggest danger. McCloskey was driving in the middle of the convoy when the Humvee ahead of him hit something and exploded, threatening to close the entire line of escape. “It blew the back of that truck up, and I hit my gas pedal as hard as I could,” McCloskey says. “If I had stopped, all the trucks would have stopped and then there was no way to get out. A lot comes down to where you were born and raised. I’ve been in 200 fights in the neighborhood. You think on the fly. I knew I had to ram it and when I rammed it through, it came over the radio, ‘Everybody’s good.’”

They got back to the base safely and it was quiet for a few days. McCloskey was just a couple of weeks away from coming home on leave and he was going to head straight down to Wildwood to meet up with his buddies and have a good time. One day when he had recreation time, he set up a chair outside wearing just his shorts and relaxed in the Afghanistan sun to get a base tan on his chalky Irish body. What he didn’t realize, at that altitude, under those conditions, was that he was baking himself, and by the late afternoon he had such a case of sun poisoning that the lieutenant sent him straight to the medic. The next day there was a supply convoy planned, pretty easy duty, and McCloskey was going to stay behind, swabbed with aloe, while the burn subsided.

When the day came, however, the orders changed. The platoon was going back into Kharwar. “Back into the Wild, Wild West,” Romeo says. “When Kevin found out, you couldn’t keep him out of the truck.”

The lieutenant tried. He told McCloskey to stay put, rest up, and we’ll see you when we get back. “I said, ‘No, you ain’t going without me,’ ” McCloskey says, and he got behind the wheel of a Humvee and began the climb toward Kharwar.

The Army - Being in the Army agreed with McCloskey from the start, even if it meant getting up on time every day. “The Army is a schedule,” he says. “I needed that self-discipline.” His training took him from Fort Leonard Wood in the Ozarks of Missouri to Fort Campbell along the Tennessee-Kentucky border, and he was schooled as a combat engineer. He learned to make explosives and then was sent to the air-assault training program where he rappelled to the ground from helicopters. From there, he was directed toward Army Combatives, the hand-to-hand fighting that meshed with his wrestling background and mind-set.

McCloskey advanced through Combatives Level 1 and Combatives Level 2 -- did some MMA-style recreational fighting on the side -- and was preparing to enter the Level 3 program when his orders came through. He was sent to Kurdistan for two weeks of climate training, then flew into Afghanistan on a tandem-rotored Chinook CH-47. The night after he moved into his barracks, a spartan 10-by-12-foot room, McCloskey and his bunkmates decided it wasn’t quite homey enough. “We broke into the rec center,” Romeo says. “I want to say that we acquired a lounge chair, a TV stand, a dresser, and a rug.” You can take the kid out of Tacony, but not totally. “His personality was at the heart of our platoon,” Romeo says. “He could just walk into anybody’s room and blend in, just change the room. And his personality is a fighter’s personality. He’s not going to get beat down. He’s going to figure it out. You could call him the life of the party, but he knew when to turn it on and when to turn it off.” “His personality was at the heart of our platoon. He could just walk into anybody’s room and blend in, just change the room.”

Jim Romeo, McCloskey’s bunkmate said. He “had their six,” their “six o’clock,” the Army parlance for having one’s back, and they had him. They had the same spade on their helmets, the famous Band of Brothers regimental symbol of the 101st Airborne Division, and with Kevin McCloskey along, it seemed they could dig out of any trouble.

Kharwar II - The second mission to Kharwar was at night, beginning about 1 a.m. and lasting until just before morning. The night provided some cover and an element of surprise, but it didn’t make it easier for the U.S. troops to see, either.

The platoon members met with the elders, did an unfruitful sweep of the town, made their presence known, and began to convoy back toward the pass that would lead them out of the bowl and back to the safety of the base.
The Taliban had buried mines in the sinuous roads across the high plain, just crude IEDs (improvised explosive devices) that lacked only an ignition system that could be hooked up in a matter of three minutes to the wire leads that stuck out of the ground. The mines were charged with C4 explosives, stuffed with metal and often covered with feces, urine, or blood to increase the chance of infection and potential amputation for their victims. Between the time the convoy entered that night and the time it left, some of those mines had been rigged.

McCloskey was driving the third humvee in the line of eight or nine vehicles, taking the turns tight and fast to keep sight of the truck in front of him, when he rounded a corner and spotted something.

“The dirt’s kicking up and I could see a little board sticking out of the road and it registers right away that it’s a pressure plate,” he says. “I can see visions of it, but I have trouble putting it all together because that’s right when I got blown up. All the guys with me said I turned the wheel as hard as I could and yelled, ‘Yo, yo, yo,’ but I caught it on the edge of my tire.”

Romeo was in the last humvee, riding with the medic, when it happened.

“You could hear the explosion and see the cloud go up,” Romeo says. “It was the worst day of my life, and the worst part was that it was Kevin. It takes away that invincibility mind-set. You realize quickly that you aren’t immortal.”

San Antonio - The sergeant got to McCloskey first, yanking him from the Humvee and applying tourniquets. McCloskey was shattered and in shock. His legs were in the backseat of the truck. That much registered. “Just leave me. I don’t want to go back like this,” he said, but they pulled him out of there and he was airlifted out of camp to a battlefield medical unit, and from there to Landstuhl, Germany, to stabilize his injuries, and from there to the Brooke Army Medical Center in San Antonio.

Tom McCloskey was down the Shore when the first call came about his son. “They said Kevin got burned a little and busted up an arm, and maybe there was a little eye damage,” he says. “The phone calls kept getting worse. By the third phone call, by the time I had gotten back home, they said he had lost his legs.” At Brooke, McCloskey was put into a drug-induced coma that would last six weeks. His mother and father sat at his bedside, but he hardly knew anything. It wasn’t an easy sleep as much as a half-waking nightmare. “That honestly was the worst part of it all,” he says. “I was hallucinating. I was in this dungeon with my mom and dad right there and I wanted to tell them to stop this guy from torturing me, but really it was just a nurse changing my IV. It felt like someone was putting a knife in my arm. There are a lot of stories like that and I’m starting to write them down because they keep coming back to me.”

When he was taken out of the coma, and enduring an endless succession of surgeries, McCloskey was able to have visitors. Romeo came as soon as he could. “I really don’t think anyone else would have survived,” Romeo says. “You try to keep it lighthearted and let him know everyone loved him and cared for him. After a couple of days, I went to leave and I almost patted him on the leg to say goodbye, and I saw his eyes light up, like, ‘I’ll crawl out of this bed and kick your ass if you touch my legs.’ He still had that same attitude. He had not been defeated.”

Some neighborhood and high school buddies made the trip, including Alex Ryzinski and Chucky Dugan. Ryzinski, from Holmesburg, just above Tacony, had met McCloskey on the first day of school as a freshman at North Catholic. Ryzinski was relieving himself at a urinal in the boys’ bathroom when Kevin came up behind him and spun him around from Holmesburg, just above Tacony, had met McCloskey on the first day of school as a freshman at North Catholic. Ryzinski was relieving himself at a urinal in the boys’ bathroom when Kevin came up behind him and spun him around in circles. That was just Kevin, and they became lifelong friends, sharing the 66 bus down Frankford Ave. on school mornings, and then the El to Juniata.

“You can’t grasp the concept of what happened until you see it firsthand,” Ryzinski says. “You definitely have to hold it back. You can’t show emotion and have to be strong for him. We didn’t want to show there was anything different with him, even though there was. As soon as we got out there, you could tell he’s got this. He ain’t got no quit in him.”

McCloskey came home for the first time that October, then again for Christmas, using crutches and not allowing himself to rely yet on his prosthetic limbs. He and a big group of friends went out to a bar one night. When he had to use the bathroom and looked around for his crutches, they were gone. “Where are my freaking crutches? I’m going to freaking pee myself right here at the bar,” McCloskey screamed. “You can walk, dude,” a friend told him. “Just do it. The crutches are gone.” After a good deal of profanity, McCloskey pushed himself up, and stiffly, slowly made his way to the bathroom. When he gingerly walked back out, everyone at the bar was crying.

Tom McCloskey is a union guy, a steelworker, as is Kevin’s brother, Michael, a glazier, and all the tradespeople from the nearby neighborhoods got together and reddi the basement of the McCloskey house to make it accessible and comfortable for Kevin as a living space when he returned home for good. It wasn’t an easy time. Kevin fought hard with depression and struggled to get through the days without relying too much on pain medication.

The first of the two lights that would show him the path came back into his life when he renewed a friendship with Bridget McGeehan, who had reached out to him when he was still in San Antonio. She grew up two blocks from him,
and they had gone through all eight years of elementary school together at St. Bernard’s. You sit in alphabetical order in Catholic school and so they were always near each other. “Our grade was pretty close,” she says. “We only graduated seven kids. We remained friends, but we were just friends. I think he always liked me, but I would have a boyfriend, or it was just bad timing. I think if we ever started dating any earlier, it just wouldn’t have worked out. For the way things happened, it was just perfect timing.” They began to hang out together once he returned home, and both of them quickly realized it wasn’t just hanging out. “To me, he didn’t really change,” she says. “He was still the same person. It’s not like he came home this monster, even though he looks a little different. I found that I actually had feelings for him in that way. It caught me by surprise, but that was pretty much it.”

She became Bridget McGeerhan-McCloskey in 2014, and they first moved to a house in Elkins Park, and then to a specially built place in Upper Southampton constructed by Homes for Our Troops, a nonprofit that provides accessible housing for injured veterans.

By that time, the second light had come into his life, and that was golf. It gave him an outlet for his competitiveness, and a challenge to conquer, as if he needed another. Apparently, he did.


On The Course

Chris Bowers, a Marine, lost his left leg below the knee in Iraq. As part of his rehabilitation, he became involved in some of the programs offered for veterans who had returned home injured. The one that captivated him was the On Course Foundation, begun by John Simpson, a polio victim as a child and a former executive with IMG, the high-power talent agency. The concept is simple enough: Get disabled and alternatively abled veterans into the game of golf as a means of speeding their recovery and return to civilian life. Bowers became a good golfer, and became a recruiter for the foundation, seeking out other veterans who could benefit from the program. Chris Bowers on Kevin McCloskey, He had been hiding at home, taking his meds, not really living. I could tell he was searching for a better way. Bowers met McCloskey in 2013 at a golf outing sponsored by another support group -- Kevin was just getting into the game -- and they hit it off immediately. They are both die-hard Eagles fans. The friendship started with that. “I was like, ‘Why don’t I know you?’ But he had never heard of any of the programs I had been a part of,” Bowers says. “I said, ‘Where have you been the last five years?’ and he said he had been hiding at home, taking his meds, not really living. I could tell he was searching for a better way.”

Early in the first round they played together, McCloskey opened a pill container from his golf bag, and Bowers was on him. “He comes up behind me and says, ‘What are you doing?’ I said, ‘Nothing, man, you need one?’ And he said: ‘Listen, I see your injuries. I know what’s going on, but you’ve got to get away from that,’ ” McCloskey says. “I don’t feel like I was ever addicted, but it was a dependency. Those guys wouldn’t leave me alone.” Bowers says the fight in his friend is ridiculous. “He’s got so much heart. He motivates other people. I think he’s firing on all cylinders and enjoys being himself again. He can thank me as much as he wants. I want him to be that guy for somebody else.”

It hasn’t been all fairways and greens since McCloskey let the game come to him, but he is that guy. He speaks to veterans groups, takes part in swing clinics for amputees learning to golf, and recently took a position with the PGA’s Helping Our Patriots Everywhere (HOPE) program. “Trusting Chris was one of the best moves I’ve made,” McCloskey says. “He stayed on top of me. He’s the guy who convinced me the pain meds aren’t going to be good for you. He’s the guy who brought me to the Simpson Cup team. Now he’s the guy who calls every few days just to make sure life’s good. Do I need to talk about anything? Have I been having any bad dreams? He asks all the questions and it’s never about him, always about you. After being around all that military stuff and camaraderie, I was like: ‘I’m all-in. Whatever you guys want, I will do.’ ”

The Finishing Hole - McCloskey didn’t have to go back into Kharwar, but no one could have kept him out of the truck. He doesn’t regret the way fate dealt with that decision. “If I went back to that day, I would do the same exact thing. I like who I am today,” he says. “I learned a lot about myself. I feel like I’m a better person and life’s good. I have my family. I have the best wife I could ever ask for. I get all full when I talk about her. Some of all this has helped out other guys. That’s what it is meant for.” I feel like I’m a better person and life’s good. I have my family. I have the best wife I could ever ask for. I get all full when I talk about her. Some of all this has helped out other guys. That’s what it is meant for.

Kevin McCloskey on if he regrets going on the mission in Kharwar. The falcon does not let go of what it has taken, and McCloskey does not much believe in retreat. Like the bird, he doesn’t even need his legs to really fly. During a practice
round two weeks ago, he advances slowly but steadfastly up a steep incline to a raised green, using a putter and wedge like ski poles as he climbs.

“I love hills,” he says, with a wry smile. Back in the cart, on a small radio that accompanies him during his rounds, Pat Benatar is telling someone to hit her with his best shot. Fire away. It’s just a song, and it blends into the sounds of birds in the trees, and the crack of drives from adjoining holes, but he still hears it.

“Kev is passionate not just about playing the game, but trying to conquer it,” says Joe Szychulski, another North Catholic buddy, and one who has known McCloskey since they played 75-pound football together in Rhawnhurst as 11-year-olds, with Joe at fullback and Kevin as the speedy tailback. “I started golfing after high school, and I helped him with a few things I could see. But it was all about the hard work he put in. For the longest time, I didn’t even know how bad his eye was. He’s not one for excuses, you know?”

After a few days of team training in Florida this week, the U.S. Simpson Cup contingent was set to fly to Scotland on the 18th, with McCloskey scheduled to return to Philadelphia on May 24. The tournament is all about being in it together as a team. There is match play, but also four-ball with a partner. Every player will need some help occasionally, a shoulder to steady him if he stumbles, but eventually so will his teammate. If you believe nothing else in a life so uncertain that even walking is not guaranteed from one day to the next, you can believe Kevin McCloskey will have that guy’s six.

Posted: May 16, 2019 - 5:00 AM
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Photos by Jessica Griffin – Staff Photographer – The Philadelphia Inquirer
Bob Buck glides his finger down the annual Eastern Amputee Golf Association brochure. He hesitates as his hand meets the first picture of a double below-knee amputee in a wheelchair lining up his tee shot.

“This is one of my oldest friends,” Buck said. “He’s a Vietnam War veteran. You know he’s got three hole-in-ones from his wheelchair.”

Buck pauses as he gazes past the floor-to-ceiling picture windows out at the first hole of the Saucon Valley Country Club golf course, which is covered by an unadulterated blanket of February snow.

The elderly man is donned in a light blue and white checkered shirt, sporting the colors of his University of North Carolina Tar Heels. The outfit is complemented by a pair of tan khakis, a golf vest and FootJoy golf shoes. He’s ready for spring.

Buck peers back down at the brochure.

“This is another great gal,” Buck said. He can’t help but concede a smile as he points to an aged photograph of a young child wielding a miniature driver. “This gal is Alexis Robinson. She’s missing an arm. I met her at one of the first swing clinics in Atlantic City. She is now a junior at Catawba College in North Carolina. And she’s on the varsity soccer team.”

Buck speaks of the organization’s members as if they were family, revealing their life accomplishments with smiles and laughs, and speaking about their injuries in an open and candor manner.

Buck founded the Eastern Amputee Golf Association in 1986, and is the former president and current executive director of the organization. The association conducts five, two-day amputee golf tournaments and seven, one-day golf outings from April to October. In addition, it hosts 24 “First Swing” and 25 “Learn to Golf” clinics, which aim to teach individuals with disabilities more about the sport.

According to the organization’s brochure, its objective is to “assist in the rehabilitation of amputees and provide for their general welfare, both physical and psychological, through the medium of golf and its associated activities.”

The association welcomes members, with or without amputations, from all over the world, but concentrates its efforts in Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Delaware, Virginia, West Virginia and Washington D.C.

The organization was formed by Buck and several additional members of the National Amputee Golf Association who were interested in developing a regional amputee golf union. The association utilizes the same guidelines as the national organization, but operates under its own officers, constitution, by-laws and membership dues.

Buck is a Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, native and has been a below-knee amputee for the past 44 years. In 1969, Buck suffered a broken tibia and fibula in a car accident and was restricted to crutches for over a year. On April 6, 1970, Buck made the decision to amputate his leg as a result of osteomyelitis, which causes infection and inflammation to bone or bone marrow.

“That was the lucky thing for me,” Buck said. “I was on crutches for a while so I had time to figure out what it meant. When I made the decision, it was thought through. And boy it turned out great.”

Three months later, Buck walked down the aisle with his wife Linda. They will celebrate their 45th wedding anniversary this June.

Buck is now trying to build up the association and get the word out about golf’s positive effects for amputees.

“We’ve been a well-kept secret and we don’t want to be,” Buck said. “We want to get the word out to come play golf. The game of golf is truly for everyone.”

Association member Steve Kave said Buck has been a great member for everyone involved in the group.

“The group has been really good for me,” Kave said. “It’s been good to a lot of people.”

The association has helped to transcend golf for many of its members and has served as more of a community and family where both individuals, with or without amputations, can feel at home. At association retreats, members of the

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organization go golfing while family members engage in activities such as shopping or wine tasting together before
everyone gathers for an evening dinner.
“As a group we don’t discuss how we became an amputee or what your story is,” said association member Rick
Armitage. “It’s just an opportunity to have a good time.”
Buck actively recruits members from all over the country at various amputee golf tournaments and veterans from
groups such as the Wounded Warrior Project, which works to foster successful, well-adjusted military personnel after
their time on the battlefield.
Buck recruited his now dear friend Kave at a local Wawa after he recognized that Kave was an amputee.
“(Kave) went to a golf clinic in the Poconos and got hooked,” said his wife Bonnie Kave. “I’m thrilled he introduced
my husband to golf. It has been absolutely wonderful for him because he has opened up to the group.”
Buck says that invariably when he meets an individual who is adapting to an amputation they will state, “I used to
like to dance,” “I used to like to run” and “I used to like to play golf.”
However, Buck stops them.
“If we can catch them at that time and say you’ll be able to golf and dance, that helps so much with the recovery to
know that you can come back,” Buck said. “I think the overall feeling is that we are a support group but we happen to
meet on the golf course.”
More Eastern Regional Photos

Raffle Winner - Bruce Hobbs
Raffle Winner - Pat Skelly
Raffle Winner - Eric Neily
50-50 Raffle Winner - Michael Geary

Closest to Pin & Raffle Winner - Maya Shirakura
Closest to Pin - Dan Simpson
Membership Dinner

Poolside - Karen Rytelewski, Rose Ann Prince, Joyce Rytelewski, Marilyn Gregorek, Bonnie Kave, Kathy Karnes, Marie Jordan, Christine Rytelewski

Marie Jordan, Rose Ann Prince, Karen Rytelewski & Bonnie Kave

Ed Prince and his Girls
Marilyn Gregorek, Joyce Rytelewski & Kathy Karnes
Grace Ann Johansen
More Eastern Regional Scramble Photos

Tournament Director Bob Buck
Steve Rytelewski & Steve Shipuleski
Steve Kuketz, John LeMieux & John Caruso
John Caruso
Scramble Start
Scramble Dinner
Membership Dinner