

## Spotlight on the Member: Michael Walsh

### A Life of Quiet Service and Unyielding Generosity



In the world of golf, where competition and camaraderie intersect, few members embody the spirit of quiet humility and selfless giving quite like Michael Walsh. A soft-spoken gentleman with a warm smile and a steady presence on the course, Michael is the kind of person who listens more than he speaks, always quick to offer encouragement to a fellow player rather than boast about his own achievements. Yet behind his understated demeanor lies a remarkable story of resilience, sacrifice, and a lifelong commitment to helping others.

Born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, in 1949 to parents John and Mary Walsh, Michael grew up in a close-knit family rooted in hard work and strong values. His father, a WWII paratrooper who made a combat jump after D-Day, instilled in him a sense of duty and perseverance. Family traditions, like gathering everyone for Christmas no matter the distance, shaped his early years. Michael met his wife Frannie in a Pittsburgh in 1980. They were married in 1985 and have raised two children: son Adam with his fiancé Geovanna live in the Chicago area; daughter Elizabeth, who lives in Cincinnati with her husband Christian and their young son Sebastian. After high school and a brief time at Slippery Rock State College, Michael's path took a profound turn when he was drafted into the U.S. Army in 1969.

Serving as a squad and platoon leader in Vietnam, Michael's tour ended tragically on Friday, March 13, 1971 at 1300 hours when the soldier next to him tragically stepped on a landmine. Shrapnel tore through the right side of his body, and doctors initially feared he would lose his leg. After treatment in Japan, he spent nearly two years recovering at Walter Reed Army Medical Center, supported tirelessly by his parents, Michael fought through immense pain and uncertainty to regain the ability to walk. He emerged with a **Purple Heart**, **Combat Infantryman Badge**, and **Bronze Star**—honors he holds dearest not for the glory, but for what they represent.

Rather than succumb to bitterness in being drafted into the service and sent to a foreign land, Michael chose a different path: turning his experience into fuel for helping fellow veterans who faced even greater challenges. In 1975, inspired by a disabled friend working for the Disabled American Veterans (DAV), he joined the organization as a National Service Officer in Pittsburgh. What started as a job became a 37-year calling. Rising through the ranks—transferring to Detroit, then to Washington, D.C., and eventually becoming National Director of Voluntary Services—Michael oversaw vital programs that supported thousands of disabled veterans with claims, transportation, and care. Michael states that despite the pain and extensive rehab, he would do it all again in a heartbeat.

One of Michael's proudest contributions was strengthening the DAV Transportation Network, which provides free rides for veterans unable to travel to VA facilities on their own. Volunteer drivers log millions of miles annually, making a profound difference. A key partner in this effort has been Ford Motor Company, whose extraordinary generosity dates back over a century. In 1921, Ford provided transportation for the DAV's very first national convention—a foundational act of support. DAV operates a fleet of vehicles around the country to provide free transportation to and from VA medical facilities for injured and ill veterans. Volunteers drive these vehicles at more than 247 VA locations in the US. Since the programs' inception in 1987, DAV departments and chapters have donated 3,833 vehicles.



In his high-profile role as national event coordinator, Michael shook hands with presidents from Bush Sr. to Obama and Joe Biden. He worked alongside celebrities like Gary Sinise—all in service to veterans. Recognized early as one of Pittsburgh's outstanding Vietnam-era veterans, he never

sought the spotlight. As he puts it, he simply wanted to be remembered as someone who was fair and tried to understand others.



Now enjoying retirement in South Florida, Michael looks forward to improving his golf game—a passion he picked up in the 1990s—and watching his family grow, including grandchildren. Reflecting on life's hardships, Michael believes "life is fair" and that people can make positive change by talking about it and playing their part. His legacy? Honest hard work, a sense of humor, and a heart always turned toward helping others.

In our Plantation Men's Golf Association as we approach the Christmas season, we're fortunate to have Michael among us—a true exemplar of generosity, caring, and quiet strength. Next time you see him on the fairway, take a moment to appreciate the extraordinary man behind the gentle smile.