

GIVING, GOLFING & GOOD FRIENDS



Charity, golf and friendship ... (from left) Cathy Gilbert, Bev Wait, Margaret Appleton, Diana Carter, Jean Sedgman and Jenny Tillbrook are just some of the life members of the WIGCC who have loved this event.

Every year since 1929, barring World War Two, former school chums have formed teams to compete against others and to raise funds for charity. KAREN HARDING takes a look at the Women's Inter-School Golf Challenge Cup.

There is an event on the Victorian women's golfing calendar which has outlived many others over nearly a century – and it's still going strong. Yet outside its dedicated participants, few people have heard of it.

Perhaps best known as the Sun Cup, as it was called for a long period in its history, the now Women's Inter-School Golf Challenge Cup (WIGCC) celebrated 90 years in April. What was celebrated was not just the anniversary of a long-standing event but, rather, what is good and what is possible in women's golf.

Teams of four players representing their old schools vie for the overall school trophy – the Women's Inter-School Golf Challenge Cup – while there are separate trophies for the winners of two individual handicap-based divisions. It all brings out the competitive spirit, the social bent and the philanthropic aspect.

Speaking at the presentation lunch following play in early April, secretary Sue Thomas summed up the event: "It's a unique event, possibly the largest of its kind in Australia."

It all began in 1929 when a group of 12 women – representatives of different girls' schools – formed a committee with the mission to foster teamwork in women's golf and to support charities involving women and children.

That translated into the first running of the *Table Talk* Challenge Cup, sponsored by *Table Talk* magazine, at Victoria Golf Club. *Table Talk* was a social magazine, very popular in Melbourne society of the time with its articles on politics and finance, the arts and literature, and society happenings. The magazine donated the main trophy, a magnificent solid silver cup made in 1827 during the reign of George IV. It is unclear where the cup was during its first 102 years but almost 200 years later it is stunning.

The main driver behind the *Table Talk* Challenge Cup was the exceptional Kitty McEwan, a story in herself. Kitty was from Ormiston Girls' School, the oldest girls' school in Victoria, and one of the early, if not the earliest, women golf writers. She started writing on golf for *The Radiator*

in 1937 and then the *Sun News-Pictorial* in 1938, which she continued – with a break for significant war service in the Land Army – until she retired in 1966.

In doing so, she paved the way for other women golf journalists to follow such as Peg McMahon at *The Age* and Di Gatehouse, a member of the notable Gatehouse golfing family, at the *Sun News-Pictorial*. Di won the Sun Cup in 1974 with her alma mater Toorak College team.

Kitty was a talented sportswoman, particularly in golf, and was a member at several clubs including Barwon Heads, Riversdale, where she was club champion in 1933, and Commonwealth, where she was the inaugural women's club champion in 1926. She acted as secretary/treasurer for the interschools event from 1929 through to 1947, again with a break for her war service, with another stint acting in that capacity in 1953.

Outside of golf, Kitty possessed a philanthropic and generous approach to life. She lobbied strongly for improved conditions for women in the workplace and the army, and for women's sport to receive press coverage. She was also very active on the Women's Amateur Sports Council.

Kitty had a heart attack playing golf at Commonwealth in 1969 and died two months later. Amongst other things she is honoured by the Kitty McEwan Trophy awarded to the highest score in the A Division at the WIGCC, by the Kitty McEwan Trophy at Barwon Heads and by the Vic Sport Kitty McEwan Award for the Victorian Female Athlete of the Year.

When *Table Talk* magazine collapsed in 1939, Kitty organised for the *Sun News-Pictorial* to take over sponsorship of the event which it did until 1995, some 56 years later.

So, to the question: how does an event comprising female golfers representing elite private schools translate into an event significant in women's golf history in this state?

It's all in the structure of the event, its mission to promote golf and to support those less fortunate. To that end, since inception, its main purpose has been to raise benevolent funds. In the early years, different charities benefitted from donations ranging from 15-20 pounds each year. Since 1996, the children's charity Cottage by the Sea has been the sole beneficiary, receiving over \$50,000 in total.

Margaret Appleton, who first played for Korowa as Margaret Cox in 1961 and has been in three winning teams (1961, 1986-7)

is passionate about the event. "This is a unique way for women to make money for charity and enjoy the process of doing it."

It's about the strength of character that reinvents itself to adapt to changing times while at the same time preserving its foundations. Society has changed enormously for women over the last century and the WIGCC has striven to maintain the best of the old while integrating essential new.

Following the decision at the end of the *Sun News-Pictorial* agreement to run the Inter-School Golf Challenge Cup independently of sponsorship, its other concession has been to add "Women's" to its title in 2007 as it recognised the growth of co-education in private schools. As schools drop away, they are replaced with another, whether that be a girls-only school or a women's team from a co-educational school.

Part of the modern era in women's golf is also evident in most talented young players moving along the elite amateur and professional pathway, leaving fewer to represent their schools as their predecessors did. But the WIGCC committee is fully aware of that, actively seeking out younger players. The 2019 winning team from Korowa included Jesika Clark, one of the fine young players from Victoria Golf Club.

"There are younger players around, we have some in their 20s, and we just have to tap into them," said life member Jenny Tilbrook.

It's in its determination to represent only that which is positive about women's golf. Some might think that a committee with a representative from each of 30 schools might be unwieldy. But life member Judy Bull noted that most committee members have been captains of their home golf clubs and are both knowledgeable about the game and well organised, so the event runs smoothly each year.

"It sounds amazing, a committee of 30 people, but it actually works," said former secretary Helen Smith.

It's in the players themselves.

The list of winners – both in the team and individual events – through the years reads like a who's who of women's golf in Victoria.

In the stellar roll-call of those who have participated through the years, it is somewhat unfair to single out individuals but a few must be mentioned nonetheless.

Burtt Cheney and Margaret Trounson were both members of seven victorious teams.



2019 WIGCC winners from Korowa (from left): Ann Mitchell, Meg Bowen and Julie Martin. Absent: Jesika Clark.

Trophy has been donated for many years by Anne, while fellow "lifer" Margaret Appleton donates the Nell Goff Trophy for the winner of B Division.

There are names familiar to all in the women's golf world: Victorian Hall of Fame member Jane Lock, who won the Victorian Junior Girls' Championship a record five times in a row as well as the Victorian Amateur twice before moving onto a professional career; former Women's Golf Victoria (WGV) president Anne Court (St Catherine's, 1980); fellow former WGV president Judy Onto (Korowa, 1986), Victorian Hall of Fame member and former WGV president Rosemary Wakeham (Shelford, 1989) and former state player Simone McClure (Ruyton, 1991-2).

Other modern notables include Judy Bull (Clarendon, 2011), who equalled the Commonwealth course record with her 76 in winning the 1976 Kitty McEwan Trophy and later penned a short history of the event highlighting Commonwealth's strong involvement; Judy's 2011 team-mates, sisters Kristine Vandertop and Simone Byrne (both of the wonderful Titheridge golfing family), and former state player Lorraine Clothier (Lowther Hall, 1993) who achieved everlasting fame when a newspaper photo of her playing in the 1956 Victorian Junior Girls Championship in a flaring skirt appeared with the caption 'Skirt and petticoat swirl'.

And the list goes on.

Finally, the value of the event is also in the friendships made.

Without exception, whenever asked, anyone who has participated in the event, winner or not, ventures mateship as one of the best things about it all.

Anne Wooldridge and fellow WIGCC life member Jean Sedgman, both former presidents of WIGCC, have been close friends for nigh on 74 years, a bond cemented through the sport. Jenny Tilbrook reflected that, "I've made a lot of lifelong friendships with so many women from other schools", while another life member Anna Mason said, "we've had a lot of fun over the years".

Perhaps the last word should go to Helen Smith: "I love the history of it. I think it's extraordinary that it's an annual event that has been played since 1929 and only not played during the war.

"It's a fun event. It's a great example of women working well together to foster women's golf. We feel very strongly about that and about supporting charity and we work hard to continue it."

Burtta's winning years were 1947, 1949, 1950, 1951, 1954 and 1958. What a player – winner of multiple state titles, she held the Australian Amateur, the Victorian Amateur and the Victorian Champion of Champions concurrently over 1957-8 and would later go on to receive an MBE for her services to golf.

Margaret Trounson (later Bladen), at five feet one inch height described by Don Lawrence in *The Age* as 'the smallest topline player, male or female, in golf' when she and Eric Routley won the Victorian Mixed Foursomes championship at Royal Melbourne in 1954, shared five of those team wins with Burtta, claiming another two with other partners in 1948 and 1952. An 11-time club champion at Commonwealth Golf Club, she is perhaps one of amateur golf's least recognised champions.

Both were ex-students from Presbyterian Ladies College, one of the strongest teams throughout the event's long history. With 13 victories, it's the winningest.

Joan Fisher, Victorian Hall of Fame member who won the Victorian Amateur the four successive times it was played over the period 1939-1948 and added another four state titles – the last in 1967 – won as Joan Lewis with team-mates from Melbourne C.E.G.G.S. in 1938.

Betty Kernot from Geelong C.E.G.G.S., two-time winner of the Australian Amateur and a 13-time winner of the Geelong Golf Club women's championship, added the WIGCC team cup to her collection in 1934.

Shirley Tolhurst, sister of Susie and a champion in her own right – winner of the 1934 Victorian Amateur and a state team player – achieved something her sister did not, being part of the winning St Catherine's team in 1933. Shirley's daughter Jenny Tilbrook would later join her mother, winning with Toorak College in 1998.

And Bettine Burgess, 1966 Victorian Amateur champion, won with Melbourne C.E.G.G.S. in 1963.

Other notables to have played in the event include the champion player and Victorian Hall of Fame member Mona Macleod, who won the Victorian Amateur five times and later became a leading administrator, Nellie Gatehouse, who won the inaugural state title plus another four titles and who became a formidable administrator of the game and Victorian Hall of Fame member, (Lady) Joan Lindsay, well-known artist and author of *Picnic at Hanging Rock* amongst other works, and Dame Elisabeth Murdoch.

Modern winners (1980 onwards) have included life member Anne Woolridge (MLC, 1969 and 1978). The Kitty McEwan