

Kellie Stenzel, one of golf's better instructors

BY CRAIG DOLCH
P2J Golf Columnist

Kellie Stenzel always knew she wanted to be involved in golf.

That's what happens when your grandfather was a PGA head professional and your dad (both were named Robert Stenzel) played briefly on the PGA Tour.

Stenzel knew she was going to continue the golf lineage, but in what role?

She played collegiately at Furman and for five years, she played professionally, mostly overseas in Europe, Asia, Australia and South Africa. She enjoyed only limited success – but she did enjoy herself.

"I had a lot of fun," she said, smiling. "I had a couple of top-10s in some big events, but I could never get through the LPGA Tour's qualifying school. I missed by one shot once. I could about break even (financially)."

So in 1990, while working as a starter at Admiral's Cove – that gave her the opportunity to practice for free – she decided to switch roles. She went from being the student to the teacher.

"Even though I kept playing for another year or so, I realized that I seemed to want to teach," Stenzel said.

"I asked to start teaching at Admiral's Cove, but they wouldn't let me because I had no credentials. So I started teaching some of the members for free. I quickly found I was much better at that."

Two decades later, the Palm Beach Gardens resident has become one of the better instructors in the game. She was ranked among the top-50 teachers by Golf For Women magazine (which stopped printing last year) and also is in the top-100 Teachers in the nation by Golf magazine.

Stenzel, 45, splits her time between esteemed Sebonack Golf Club in Southampton, N.Y. during the summer and The Town of Palm Beach Golf Course and Palm Beach Country Club in the winters.

She is more than breaking even these days.

"I can't complain at all. I'm very lucky and thankful," she said. "I love what I'm doing and I love going to work."

In addition to her time on the practice tee, Stenzel also has written three women's golf books:



Palm Beach Country Club instructor Kellie Stenzel.



Palm Beach Country Club instructor Kellie Stenzel looks on as Connie Blue putts. Photos by Clay Willis

"The Women's Guide to Golf: A Handbook for Beginners," "The Women's Guide to Consistent Golf" and "The Women's Guide to Lower Scores."

While she says the books have not been huge money-makers, they have provided her with a nice payback.

"When someone calls me or tells me 'thank you' for helping their game, and I've never met them, that's pretty cool," she says.

Stenzel joked she probably should return the fees she received from her early students because she was still learning her craft.

Fortunately, being based in the golf hotbed of South Florida, she was exposed to quality instructors such as Bob Toski, Todd Anderson and Mike Adams, as well as visiting the PGA of America's annual coaching summits.

"What I liked about her was when she works with someone, the results come quickly," said Anderson, who hired Stenzel when he was at The Breakers in 2001. "She didn't try and rebuild a swing; she took what they had and made it better. She was good at getting golfers excited about playing the game and she had a good rapport with her students, because they almost always kept coming back."

Stenzel says her students are about evenly split between men and women.

But when she goes to a new club, she usually gets more women to start with, for whatever reason.

"It sort of amazes me that when I start teaching at some place, I always get mostly women," she said. "I guess it's because they think a woman is better at giving lessons to another woman. But when the husband sees how much better his wife is getting, then he wants to come see me."

Stenzel said she's never been bothered by the gender issue. Fact is, she thinks it helps her in one regard.

"One of the advantages of being a woman instructor is I don't get a lot of difficult personalities," she said. "If they are difficult, they're probably not coming to a woman."

Stenzel does have a favorite male student – her 2-year son, Matthew. She has given him some scaled down clubs, but is more interested in Matthew enjoying the game, not making a living from it.

But who knows? Golf seems to be in his genes. ■