

DR. WILLIAM J. POWELL

William J Powell epitomizes all that Lifetime Achievement means in the world of golf and deserves to be inducted in the class of 2009.

William (Bill) J Powell is the only African American to design, build, own and operate a golf course anywhere in the world. In 1946 Mr. Powell broke ground for what is today, Clearview Golf Course. The first 9 holes which opened in 1948, was built mostly by hand. When the second 9 holes was added, Clearview became an 18 hole golf course. In 2001 an Ohio Historical Marker was placed on the first tee and Clearview was also placed on the National Register of Historic Places by the Department of the Interior. Of the over 16,000 golf courses in the United States – there are about 15 listed on the National Register. Also in 2001, the Clearview Legacy Foundation for education, preservation and research (a 501c3 tax exempt charitable foundation) was formed.

He grew up in Minerva, Ohio where his family was the only black family in the small town. At the age of nine he discovered the game of golf and began playing and caddying at the golf course which was being built in his hometown – that was 83 years ago. He learned to play golf as a caddy like so many of the greats like Gene Sarazen and Walter Hagen and too became very passionate about the game. Bill captained both the golf and football team at Minerva High School. Although he played golf in high school at various golf courses, both private and public – he found that after graduation he was not welcome at those same area golf courses, simply because of the color of his skin.

In 1937, he along with his older brother, Berry, formed the **first** golf team Wilberforce University ever had. History was made when Wilberforce University and Ohio Northern University played a match against each other. This was the **first time in American history** that a black college and a white college competed against each other. In that match and one later that same year, Wilberforce was victorious.

When WWII broke out, Bill was sent to the European theatre. At that time the US Armed Forces were completely segregated and remained so until President Harry Truman integrated the US military around 1945. While serving in Scotland and England, he was able and welcomed to play golf during the occasional days off. After returning home from the War, Bill went to play some of the local courses as he thought segregation and discrimination towards blacks had changed - but found that even as a veteran of WWII he still was not welcomed at local golf courses. He set out to do what he felt was the **only thing** he could do and that was to build a golf course, so that others regardless of the color of their hair, skin, nationality or religion would not have to suffer the same indignities that he did in his own country.

In order to build the golf course he needed land and money. When he went to the bank he was denied a GI loan, because of the color of his skin. His white counterparts returning home from WWII had no such problems. He became even more determined to make a change – he taught 2 black doctors to play the game and they each put in 1/3 of the money so that he could buy the plot of land he found which was located along the Lincoln Highway – the first and only coast to coast highway in the US at that time. The land was an old run down dairy farm – but he saw the incredible potential for a beautiful golf course, which he literally began to build from the day he moved in with the family. So in 1946 as he began building Clearview, he also held down a full time job in order to support his wife and two children.

Bill Powell at the age of 28 became a **golf course architect, builder, superintendent, and golf professional**. No one taught him how to lay out a golf course, he did not have the equipment to move dirt and build courses as they do today, he did not go to class to learn about agronomy and turfgrass, nor was he able to join the ranks of the PGA – but he excelled in every aspect of what it took to build a course **despite** having every obstacle put in front of him, because of the color of his skin. Out of sheer pride, determination and the desire to make a difference he built Clearview Golf Course over 60 years ago.

Clearview became a family project and business as he taught each member of the family how to play the game and work the course. In this family were produced 2 golf course superintendents and members of the GCSAA; 2 members of the PGA of America; 1 LPGA Tour player. William Powell has made significant contributions to the game of golf by teaching his family the game.

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It has only been in the twilight of his years that people have begun to realize and recognize the incredible contributions and the doors he has opened for others to grow in the game of golf and the business of golf despite the obstacles he faced in a sport that was not a minority oriented sport., but more than that not a welcoming sport to people of color.

It is important to name some of the honors he has received which include:

Induction into the Canton Negro Oldtimers Athletic Association;
The National Golf Foundation, Jack Nicklaus Golf Family of the Year Award; Cornerstone of Freedom Award from the Dr Martin Luther King Commission;
The Metropolitan Golf Writers Association Family of the Year Award
Trend Setter in Sports Award;
Diamond in the Rough Tribute;
Induction into the National Black Golf Hall of Fame;
Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters from Baldwin Wallace College and from Wilberforce University;
Legends of Golf Award by the Woodholme Foundation;
Recognition by the Ohio Legislative Black Caucus
Induction into the Ohio Veterans Hall of Fame;
Resolutions from the Ohio Senate, and the Ohio House of Representatives;
Recognition Award in conjunction with the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center.
Unsung Hero Award from the Congressional Black Caucus Spouses
First Tee – Life Skills Scholarships was named in honor of Dr William Powell
Recipient of awards from: Ohio & Stark County NAACP
Induction into the Ohio Golf Hall of Fame with his daughter, Renee – the only 2 people from the same family ever inducted.
In December of 2007 Dr Powell received the Professional of the Year Award, the highest award presented by the Ohio Turfgrass Foundation.

He has been featured in print media such as: *Golf World, Golf Digest, Sports Illustrated, New York Times, Wall Street Journal, The International Herald Tribune, Chicago Tribune, People Magazine, Reader's Digest, Ebony Magazine, African American Golfer's Digest, Guidepost* and many others.

Featured on such the electronic media such as: CBS Sunday Morning, MSNBC, The Gordon Elliot Show, CBS Special entitled “Golf Around the Globe – Family Ties” including The Kuehne Family, The Franco Carlos Family and the Powell Family

He was 1 of 2 special guests of the PGA of America during their 90 year celebration recognizing where the original PGA charter was signed.

During the dedication of the WWII Memorial he was invited by the Smithsonian Institute to be a special guest & attend the National World War II Reunion and participate in the Wartime Stories Pavilion along with actor Ossie Davis Their topic was “The African American Experience During WWII”.

As an American and veteran of WWII – this was one of the proudest highlights of his life.

To learn more about Bill Powell and why he should be inducted into the World Golf Hall of Fame – you may enjoy reading his autobiography, “Clearview America’s Course”.

I cannot think of anyone more deserving to be inducted into the World Golf Hall of Fame in the category of Lifetime Achievement in 2009 than William J Powell.

He has been dedicated to the game of golf for over 80 years and has made significant contributions in the growing the game on many fronts.

His life has been one of lifetime achievements.