

# For the Longs, golf was a bond to each other and the community

*The renamed Mike Long Youth Benefit Golf Tournament is Sept. 16 at Lebanon's Mallard Creek Golf Course and RV Resort.*



**Bill Poehler**

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Mike Long was in the hospital earlier this year, in and out of consciousness for about two weeks, in the late stages of leukemia.

When he was conscious, Long did what he was best at — talking up the golf tournament he and his wife, Jan, founded two decades ago.

"He was trying to get people to donate to the tournament," Jan Long said.

Mike Long died March 7. He was 86.

The tournament has been renamed the Mike Long Youth Benefit Golf Tournament. But the mission to raise money to provide grants and scholarships to students living in the Santiam Canyon remains the same.

"It's still hard, but he was really, really wonderful," Jan Long said. "He really was. He was my best friend. We were married 40 years, and we never once said a swear word to each other in all that time."

## **From different backgrounds**

Mike Long was born in Oregon City and graduated from West Linn High School and Oregon State University. He was in the Air Force as a medic before working for the U.S. Census Bureau.

Jan Long was born and raised in St. Paul, Minn. She also worked for the U.S. Census Bureau, which is where she first met Mike by phone.

She was a single mother of four when she was transferred to the Los Angeles census office. While watching golf on TV with a relative, she asked if they would take her golfing. At 40, she had never played the game.

They played nine holes not long after, and she liked it so much that they played another nine that day. She lived on a budget and had little disposable income. But she had found her passion.

"But my two younger boys, they went with me and two or three of us went over to a little tiny old par 3 every other week when I got paid," Jan said.

Mike took a job at the L.A. office in 1971, but it would be eight years until they went on their first date.

"I had been married before and so had he," Jan said. "We both had such terrible marriages, I think that's why our second marriage was so good."

Though they had been friends and both loved golf, they didn't play golf together until they started dating. Golf was a bond between them.

"We got married in 1982," Jan said. "We left the chapel ... went to the hotel, changed clothes, went right out on the golf course."

Jan and Mike were nearly inseparable. Mike didn't have children from his first marriage and quickly became part of the lives of Jan's children and grandchildren.

In 1984, grandson Richard Ballard came to live with the Longs. So, of course, he had to learn how to play golf.

Richard competed in the same youth golf circuit as Tiger Woods.

In the finals of the 1987 Southern California father-son-tournament, Mike and Richard placed second to Earl and Tiger Woods.

## **Starting the benefit golf tournament**

The Longs started a business, Western Economic Research, and decided they could live anywhere. In 1993, they moved to Mill City to be closer to Long's brother, George.

They got involved in the community, and Mike became a city councilor for about a decade and president of the North Santiam Chamber of Commerce for years. He and Jan were among the founders of the Canyon Senior Center.

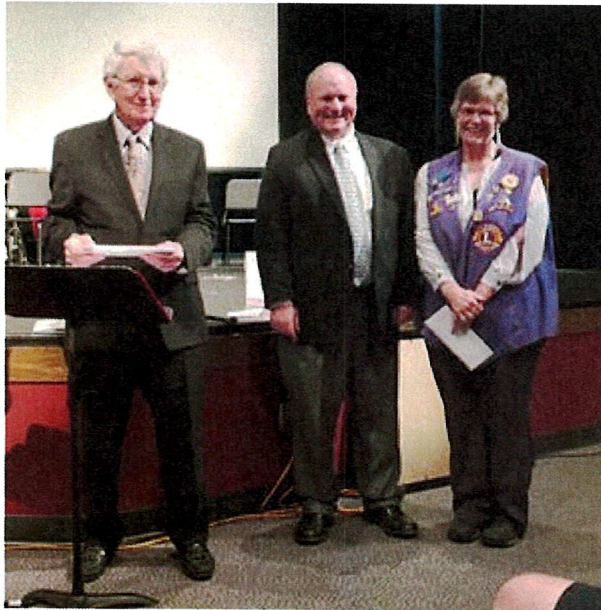
And they played golf together nearly every day. They normally played Elkhorn Valley Golf Course in Lyons.

"It was natural up there, and we had the best time," Jan said. "Truthfully, we went up seven days a week. We played 27 to 36 holes every single day."



But Jan wanted to do something for youth and had seen that area teenagers didn't have much to do. Mike said he wanted to start a golf tournament to benefit youth.

The first year, in 2000, about 100 people played in the Youth Benefit Golf Tournament at Elkhorn Valley.



“It really helped, too, that we were at Elkhorn Valley at the time because a lot of people loved that course and that was kind of their main reason for signing up at the tournament, just to play out there,” said Jan's son, Jeff Ballard.

They cleared about \$500 and gave out two scholarships to high schools students that year.

But Mike wanted to do more. So he sold sponsorships and recruited more people to play. He would hit up any business he thought might sponsor the tournament.

Many did, including Santiam Hospital and Freres Lumber.

Pretty soon, the tournament was thriving. In a few years, the maximum 144 people participated.

"And that's just it, you do not have to be an ace golfer by any means," said Sandy Lyess, the current chamber president. "It is such a day of fun, absolutely."

To date, the tournament has raised nearly \$350,000. The money has gone to fund college scholarships for high school students from Idanha to Stayton. It also funds grants to community organizations that involve youth such as libraries.





## **This year's charity event**

In recent years, the Longs played less golf. They accomplished a lot — like the day in 2010 when they both hit a hole-in-one on hole No. 12 at Elkhorn Valley — and never lost their love for the game. Or their love for the tournament.

The 2023 Mike Long Youth Benefit Golf Tournament will be held Sept. 16 at Mallard Creek Golf Course in Lebanon.

The tournament will include a 4-person scramble with a cart. The format is a shotgun start beginning at 8:30 am. For more information, go to [ybgolf.com/](http://ybgolf.com/)

*Bill Poehler covers Marion and Polk County for the Statesman Journal.*

*Contact him at [bpoehler@StatesmanJournal.com](mailto:bpoehler@StatesmanJournal.com)*