



Laurie Buckland, one of the finest athletes to come out of Stouffville High, is now the Golf Professional and Sports Director at Aurora Highlands Golf and Country Club. The 40-year-old father of two says the position is so much fun, it hardly seems like work. Laurie's parents, Mr. and Mrs. Len Buckland reside at 135 Main Street East, Stouffville. —Bruce Stapley

## Golf Pro Laurie Buckland

# A success story

By BRUCE STAPLEY

Laurie Buckland has the look of relaxed confidence that goes with making a living at something one really enjoys.

There's a vibrancy to his manner that makes you wish you could tap into his energy source.

Laurie, a one-time Stouffville Dist. Secondary School athletic prodigy, is the Golf Professional and Sports Director at Aurora Highlands. It's an ever-expanding operation that offers its members the best of the sporting and fitness world.

"I consider myself fortunate," admits the former S.D.S.S. Athlete of the Year. "It's been a great experience."

When Laurie first arrived at Aurora Highlands back in 1966, he didn't expect to stay more than a year. He's now in his 21st year.

Laurie is solid proof the athletic grads of Stouffville High can make it in the real world.

"Hopefully, I'll be around for awhile yet," he says with a smile.

The 40-year-old father of two was a member of the much-heralded 'Group of Six' that formed the nucleus of so many championship teams at S.D.S.S. in the '60s.

The six are still talked about today by the then Physical Education Director Jim Rehill.

Like several others in the 'Group', Laurie took six years to complete the five-year high school academic program.

"It was almost as if we wanted to hang around an extra year," he laughs. "We were having so much fun we didn't want to leave."

A couple of the six top athletes did manage to graduate in five years; Laurie recalls. "Mr. Rehill didn't get to them in time."

Ironically, Laurie credits his academic ineptitude as being a big part in his winding up at Highlands.

"When I finally finished Grade 13, I missed out on French. This meant I couldn't go on to university, so I figured I'd just work a year, then go back and tackle it. I went to the P.G.A. Office and noticed a job opening in Aurora. I signed on as an assistant golf pro," he recalls.

From there, Laurie advanced to a Class 'A' Professional in 1970 after being named Assistant Golf Pro of the Year. He now holds the rank of an A-1 Golf Pro, a title that goes with the position of a professional at a recognized club.

Laurie's association with Club General Manager Bruce Butterworth led to several other interests including Assistant Manager of the Richmond Hill Curling Club; ownership of the Aurora 'Tigers' Hockey Club; partnership in a sporting goods store and increased prominence on the local sports scene.

However, with Aurora Highlands becoming a year-round operation, Laurie withdrew from these extra-curricular activities so he could concentrate on golf-related business.

"I happened to come along at the right time," he says, "the owner was beginning to upgrade the Club and branch out into things other than golf."

Consequently, Laurie has become well versed in areas such as merchandising, accounting and yes, public speaking. He's even played a part in land development. The site now includes 400 homes and 150 luxury condos with the golf course, winding its way through the subdivision.

"There's a lot more to being a golf pro than just playing golf," Laurie insists. "Sure, you have to be able to play well enough to

command the respect of your members, but I'm basically an ambassador whose job entails serving the members' golfing needs."

Laurie has a staff of eleven in the pro shop to ensure the fitness clubs, squash courts, pool and tennis facilities are properly looked after.

"We're a life-style kind of club," says Laurie, "many of our members live in the homes and condos we built."

The pro shop alone registers up to \$300,000 in sales a year.

Laurie's quick to admit that golf remains the No. 1 attraction. "It's become such a big operation," he says, "there's a corporate identity to the game now. An awful lot of business is done on the golf course."

Because of this, Laurie explains, it's important that a private club like Aurora Highlands maintains a thriving image.

Towards this end, Laurie and his staff organize the annual Pro-Am Tournament and other major events such as the Ontario PGA Championship, the CPGA Seniors Championship and the Ontario Jr. Girls' Championship.

Plans are in the works for another 18-hole course, says Laurie. "You can never stand still. That's why I love this job so

much. There's always so much going on I hardly feel like I'm working at all."

Long hours are all part of the position. He insists this isn't a problem.

Wife Renee, whom he met when she was a Club member, has been very understanding about his off-beat schedule.

"When we started dating, it wasn't uncommon for me to pick her up at 11 o'clock at night," he remembers.

Does Laurie ever see any of the 'old boys' he used to chum around with at S.D.S.S.?

"I run into Jim Rehill every now and again," he replies, "I still consider him a close friend."

And then there was the 'Old Boys' Reunion, honoring Mr. Rehill's retirement as Phys. Ed. Head. This featured the 'Battle of the Decades'.

"They called us 'the old guys', Laurie chuckles, "but we really thought we had a chance of winning it all."

They nearly did, Laurie remembers, taking the first two games. "Then Father time took over," he recalls.

However, when it comes to his personal career as Aurora Highlands' Golf Pro and Sports Director, Laurie's discovering some things improve with age.

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