

Ellison memorial tournament continues to support junior golf

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Raymond Ellison found golf later in life, but it didn't take long for him to fall in love with the game.

Ellison's passion for golf filtered down to his sons Matt and Mark. Father and sons shared many great moments together on the course. Matt and his father teamed up to win a prestigious Father-Son Tournament hosted by the Southern California Golf Association, beating longtime PGA Tour pro John Cook and his father.

In 1967, 12-year-old Matt took his first golf lesson from Lee Martin, who was teaching at Olivas Park Golf Course. As his skills increased, Matt Ellison started playing tournaments run by Mike Andonian Sr. and the Ventura County Junior Golf Association.

Andonian was the pied piper for Ventura County's junior golfers, convincing thousands of young players to play and enjoy the game. He spent nearly his entire adult life teaching kids to love the game, but his greatest impact came through his dedication to junior golf.

Alumni of the VCJGA is an impressive list. It includes some of the top players to ever come through the county — PGA Tour veterans like Corey Pavin and Paul Stankowski and top-flight players like Chad Wright, Paul Holtby, Tom Stankowski, Chris Zambri, Mark Wipf and Matt Ellison.

Raymond Ellison saw the joy competing in VCJGA events gave his son, so he provided financial support to Andonian and the VCJGA to help cover costs of running the tournaments.

Andonian called Matt Ellison the best player he ever coached. While playing for Andonian at Ventura High, Ellison captured the 1974 CIF-Southern Section Individual title and helped the Cougars finish second as a team.

“There are three men who have been a huge inspiration on my life — my father, Jim Blakely (a former head professional at Olivas Park) and Mike Andonian ,” Ellison said. “He (Andonian) helped me grow up and understand people. The things I learned from Mike helped me get through so many things in my life.”

Raymond Ellison died in 2011. A few weeks later, Matt Ellison was at Soule Park in Ojai with some friends as part of a memorial to his dad.

It was Chris Harvey's first day as head pro at Soule Park. They talked about Raymond Ellison and decided to start a memorial tournament in his honor.

Matt Ellison decided to make it a Pro-Am tournament as a way to give local teaching pros a chance to compete together. The pros and their amateur partners can win some prize money while also raising funds for the VCJGA.

“Our local pros work hard, so I wanted to give them an event where they could win some decent prize money,” said Matt Ellison, who spent three years playing professionally in Australia and

Asia. "I knew Dad would like the idea of having a tournament where we could raise money for the VCJGA.

"My dad loved the integrity that junior golf helped instill in kids. He saw the positive effect it had on me and my brother Mark, so making the VCJGA a beneficiary made sense."

The first year in 2012, the tournament had 23 teams. The last two years there have been 27 teams. This year, Ellison is hoping for 30 or more teams.

The tournament is set for June 29. Cost to play is \$120. Amateurs can form teams with a local pro and register together, but amateurs can also register as a single and get put on a team.

The Ellison sons, owners of M&M Management Company, contributed to the prize money.

"We pay 10 spots for pros and 10 spots for the amateurs. Last year the guy who finished first won almost \$800. And we gave \$2,900 to junior golf, and we're hoping to give more this year," Matt Ellison said.

After Harvey left Soule Park, Ellison decided to move the tournament. He considered Saticoy Country Club, but when that didn't work he called Las Posas head pro Roger Rockefeller.

Since Las Posas was Andonian's club and the tournament benefits junior golf, Las Posas seemed like a perfect fit.

"So many juniors grew up playing this course it's just a great place to have it." Matt Ellison said. "I wanted to bring the tournament some place where the atmosphere is good and the people at Las Posas are great."

Rockefeller was thrilled when Ellison reached out to him. He knew the members would be thrilled to host an event to benefit local junior golf.

"It's something that is good for the club and for the community," Rockefeller said. "We're excited about having it move here."

For more information, contact Rockefeller at 805-388-2901.

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