

Abby Spector Award 2016: Cindy Choate

presented by Laurie Hyndman on Wednesday, July 27

I am honored to be standing before all of you on this special day. It's special because I truly believe that this is a watershed year for women golfers in Maine. There is a sense of the passing of the torch. Never before have we had so many young women playing in this tournament and, remarkably, 26 players in this tournament have single-digit handicaps. Things are changing. Just look at today's results - the lowest final score of any women's championship in Maine history.

What does all of this have to do with the Abby Spector Award? Well, before some of you were born this 12-year-old girl arrived on the scene with a smooth swing, a ready smile, and a subtle competitiveness; and she took the golf scene by storm - maybe not like yesterday's storm, but she started winning and winning and winning.

Abby, like many of us, didn't do it alone. She was embraced by the golf community, had many mentors and supporters - especially seasoned women golfers who were there for her throughout her competitive career. And today she is doing the very same thing for young women golfers around the state.

Golf & Ski Warehouse established The Abby Spector Award *"in recognition of the Maine female golfer who best exemplifies the spirit of the game through a unique combination of her ability and sportsmanship, her perseverance and courage, and her passion for and commitment to promoting the growth and enjoyment of the game of golf."*

This year's recipient exemplifies all of those qualities. Let me tell you why:

I moved to Maine in 1989. The following year I joined the Southern Maine Women's Golf Association and played my very first Tuesday round at Webhannet Golf Club. I was paired with three other women, one of whom was Cindy Choate, a multiple-year SMWGA champion. Just knowing that was intimidating. That and knowing no one made for a nervous start for me.

I will never forget that round. Cindy was inclusive, kind, helpful, and encouraging. I can't say I played that well, probably a bit overwhelmed with playing with someone that good - and probably because I expected her to be competitive. She wasn't. She was welcoming and seemed delighted to have a new friend to play with.

Cindy, while a fierce competitor, does not show it. She is gracious and generous. Ever humble, she is the essence of good sportsmanship. Throughout the subsequent years we have played together, played against each other, mourned each other's losses, and celebrated each other's successes! She has always applauded my successes even if they were at her expense.

Cindy didn't start playing golf until her mid-thirties, and it wasn't long before she was winning tournaments. Her unflappable nature, calm demeanor, and her determination -- plus that fluid swing -- are the ingredients of a champion.

Off the course, I have had the opportunity to witness her total commitment to the game of golf and opportunities for women in golf. Cindy was instrumental in establishing the SMWGA at a time when gas prices were high and traveling all over the large state of Maine began to impact participation. She was a leader, serving on the Board in various capacities over many years, finally as President of the organization. She established the SMWGA Scholarship Fund and remains one of the trustees entrusted with encouraging young women golfers to apply, then reviewing applications and awarding annual grants. She is eager to welcome new players to the game. She is incredibly trustworthy and an incredible resource. In addition, Cindy was among a group of investors who stepped in to buy Bridgton Golf Club to make sure it stayed open for golfers out that way.

Cindy is committed to promoting the game of golf and making sure girls and young women have access to the game and support from more seasoned golfers. When Cindy hears about a girl's interest in the game, she's the first to reach out, to tell her about the weekly tournaments as well as the championships. Just recently she was excited to hear about a young woman from North Berwick who is playing in college. She made sure this young woman signed up to play on Tuesdays and would be paired with other golfers who would welcome her like Cindy would.

Cindy's contributions to the game were recognized when she was voted into the Maine Golf Hall of Fame, one of the first women selected. She has gone on to serve on that Board, to promote the recognition of other women golfers, and support the fundraising efforts of the Hall.

Cindy's legacy is the growth in participation of young women in the game of golf. In addition, her generosity, sportsmanship, grace, and friendship on and off the course are exemplary and represent the very high standards set forth by the R&A and USGA.

Cindy's contributions to golf in Maine extend close to forty years. I consider her my friend, my mentor and a model of how the game should be played.

I am honored to present the Abby Spector Award to my dear friend, Cindy Choate.