

Merle Oatman

The first Merle Oatman Memorial Award will be presented to the Club Champion of the PebbleCreek Men's Nine Hole Group (PGM9HG) at an award dinner to be held on April 12 at 7 PM in the Chianti Room of the Tuscany Falls Clubhouse.

The Merle Oatman Memorial Award has been created to honor a great man and a fine golfer. Merle, upon moving to PebbleCreek in 2000, recognized the need for a senior golf group in our "active adult community". He was the driving force in the initiation of men's 9 hole golf at PebbleCreek, creating a foundation for the active organization that exists today. Over the past 5 years the PGM9GA has grown from an informal group of a dozen guys that gathered each Thursday afternoon at the Eagle's Nest driving range to choose foursomes, to nearly 100 members that utilize both the Eagle's Nest and the Tuscany Falls courses. Those of us that are members of the group are forever grateful for Merle's foresight and leadership.

Merle was born in 1925 in the US heartland - Alta, Iowa - one the many small farming towns in the northwestern part of the state. By the time Merle finished high school WWII was raging. He joined the Navy to do his part and spent much of the war in combat as a radar technician aboard the USS Marcus Island in the Pacific Theater. The Marcus Island, a light aircraft carrier, saw action in Peleliu, Leyte, and Samar; supported the recapture of the Philippines in late 1944; and supported the invasion of Okinawa in early 1945. Merle took an active part in the many reunions held over the years by the surviving crew members of the USS Marcus Island.

When the war ended Merle went home to Iowa and married his sweetheart, Helen, his wife for 61 years. They moved to California in the late 40's where they raised their two daughters as Merle pursued his life long career in the field of electronics. In 1950 he joined a company to be known as Applied Solar Energy and ultimately became the Director of Quality Control. His career there lasted 41 years until he retirement in 1991.

In the late 50's the space race began with Russia's launching of "Sputnik" and in 1961 the United States initiated a program to put men into space. Merle, as a part of the Applied Solar Energy (ASE) team, with his knowledge of a then state-of -the-art device known as the transistor, participated in the national effort that successfully put a man on the moon before the end of the decade. America discovered what quality control and reliability were all about.

In the 80's, having gained expertise in photovoltaic devices, Merle and his team members at ASE participated with NASA in development of the Hubble Telescope which is currently providing researchers with data from the far reaches of our universe. No doubt an accomplishment far beyond the wildest dreams of a young man gazing into the Iowa night sky with Helen at his side.

In his spare time Merle found enjoyment in the game of golf. Because of his natural ability his efforts were rewarded with low scores. Living most of his adult life in California, "the land of the rich and famous," Merle was invited to participated in several of the celebrity tournaments. Not being one to shy from a new challenge, Merle even took up skydiving to celebrate his 80th birthday.

Merle passed away on September 24, 2006. As an avid golfer and an inspiration to those around him that were not blessed with his natural talents, and because of his contributions to the world we shared with him, we are honored to be able to dedicate this memorial to him.