

December 2021 - Did you Know?

Meet the Stark Family – Five of our Former Caddies

Unless you were a Blythefield member a couple decades ago, you probably haven't heard about the Stark family. Mr. and Mrs. Stark raised six children, three boys and three girls. They lived a mile or so from our course and attended Rockford schools. The second oldest of the Stark children is John, who in 1986 started a parade of five Stark kids caddying at Blythefield CC. The next Stark child is Matt, who started caddying the year after John. Then came sister Marie, who showed up to caddie at Blythefield in 1989. The two youngest Starks later made their way to Blythefield; Beth Ann started to caddie in 1997 and the next year Tom did also. This is the beginning of a heart-warming story of caddying and how the Evans Scholarship Foundation can impact lives. Read on, please.

All of the Stark kids were good students in high school, on the National Honor Society at Rockford HS and with records worthy of a college education. Each of them also showed good citizenship during their years growing up. They were good kids, engaging in volunteer activities at their church plus youth organizations such as NHS, Boy Scouts, Habitat for Humanity, Toys for Tots, and more. But would they be able to fulfill their potential?

Their problem was finding resources to pay for college. Fortunately, caddying at Blythefield opened possibilities with the Evans Scholarship. Over time, each of them was chosen for the Evans by the Western Golf Association, the Evans' sponsor organization. Recently I reconnected with these five Stark children to find out what had happened to them. Here is a brief look at their stories.

John led the way by developing a good record as a caddie and other part-time summer work at Blythefield. Encouraged by a fellow caddie, John applied for the Evans Scholarship and went to Detroit Golf Club for an interview before a group of Evans officials. He recalls his reaction later after being chosen: "I received the letter from the Western Golf Association in December of 1990. I can still remember how elated I was reading the letter." John attended Michigan State University, living in the MSU Evans House, and graduating in 1995 with a degree in Environmental Engineering. He later added an executive MBA degree, also at from MSU. His first job was in environmental engineering, using a contact from a former BCC member. During his career he found his way into the IT field which has been his focus for many years. A few years ago, he and his wife moved from their former home in Washington state back to Michigan. They have two children, a daughter at MSU and a son in high school.

Matt was next to apply for the Evans, in 1992: "I will never forget the meeting at the Country Club of Detroit", in a large meeting room, in front of dozens of Evans' representatives. He recalls being nervous before his interview but found the interviewers to be welcoming, smiling and putting him at ease. Soon thereafter he also was awarded an Evans Scholarship, to attend the University of Michigan. During his undergraduate college years, he lived in the UM Evans House, graduating with a Bachelor of Science in architecture. Matt stayed at UM to get a masters' degree, also in architecture. He started his career as an architect, but when construction market tanked in the early 2000's he went back to school to earn his law degree. He is now an intellectual property attorney at the prominent IP law firm in Grand Rapids. He and his wife have three children who attend Rockford schools.

Marie was the next in the Stark family to caddie at Blythefield and then be awarded the Evans Scholarship. She went to MSU and also lived in the Evans House, graduating in 1999 with a bachelors' degree in supply chain management. She continued at MSU, earning a

masters' degree in business and supply chain management. She worked for several years in Michigan at a robotics company that services manufacturing industries, before she and her husband moved to Texas. She now owns and manages her own small business and while raising their four young kids.

Beth Ann was awarded the Evans Scholarship shortly before her 2001 high school graduation. Like John and Marie, she attended MSU with a major in history and dual minors in social science and sociology. After college she became an elementary school teacher. She ended this career after her young son became seriously ill, with multiple health issues. He was eventually diagnosed with a rare genetic condition. Her other two children were later diagnosed with this same genetic condition, resulting in their having epilepsy. Her new career then became full-time mother. Beth Ann recalls: "The education and child development courses I took at MSU would become a beacon of hope for my family in later years." She explained that her MSU education was valuable for her with her children, as they each were exhibiting developmental delays and medical issues. When they were still quite young, she studied and researched, finding ways to assist them to deal with their disabilities. Today, she now not only cares for her own children (ages nine, seven and five), she also advocates for kids with health issues. "I serve and belong to several non-profit organizations that are dedicated to children with special needs. I also serve to connect parents with special needs children to each other so that our community knows they are not in this journey alone."

Tom is the youngest of the Stark family. He was awarded the Evans the fall before of his Rockford HS graduation in 2003. He also went on to MSU where he majored in computer science. "I would not have gone to Michigan State if not for the Evans Scholarship." He is now a software developer in the Detroit area. He and his wife are raising their three small children in Rochester, Michigan.

Each of these five former Blythefield caddies needed financial aid to continue their education beyond high school. They likely would not have been able to attend a major university like MSU and UM. The Evans Scholarship was crucial for them. They were able to earn undergraduate degrees with little or no student debt. They continued to work at Blythefield in various summer jobs during their college years, which gave them funds for books and living expenses. Their experiences here contributed greatly to their education, says Marie: "I learned how to listen and be respectful of others in my time at Blythefield. It was also an invaluable introduction to networking and professionalism."

I was pleased to learn that each has made good use of their higher education to make an impact, not only for themselves and their families but also for their communities. They appreciate the blessings have received and pay it forward.

I asked the Starks whether they had any memory of their years as a BCC caddie, good or bad. There are too many stories to list them all. Here are a few:

- Beth Ann told me about caddying for one of her regulars who wanted to race her up the hill on #16. Each Saturday he made her a bet: "If I ever beat him, he promised to double my tip. I think he knew that I would never beat him! One Saturday, a member of his foursome told me to start running and held him back so that I would have at least a chance. Alas, I still did not beat him."
- John recalled his most demanding loop, "with Chris Winther. He was a great guy, but he had a staff bag with a bag strap that couldn't have been more than ½ inch thick. I wasn't the biggest kid in the world." It was a struggle.
- Tom recalls one day getting a loop for a foursome with some guests. One guest didn't normally walk so he had an enormous cart bag that everyone could tell was heavy. The caddie who got that bag was small and struggled the whole round.

- Marie appreciated the kindnesses of BCC members, including this: “One of the things I remember and share most frequently was walking towards the golfer that I had been assigned to and seeing him change to his travel bag from his large tour bag, not expecting this hundred-pound girl to be able to carry his bag at all, let alone for 18 holes!”
- Matt told me this: “The members I caddied for (with very few exceptions) were some of the friendliest people I have met. They enjoyed talking with me about what was going on in their life, their business or their family. Being around that type of atmosphere was an outstanding experience. Looking back on it, caddying was my first professional networking experience. I learned some new words and bad jokes, but I also learned how professionals handled themselves in a wide range of situations. It was the best summer job!”
- John summed up his caddie experience this way: “I learned from being a caddie not to be timid or afraid of talking to people. I was able to interact every day with some of the most influential people in my community. I learned that they too were human, and I saw that on the course and how they reacted to good shots and ones that needed some improvement.” His caddie experience was very impactful on his life; he “can trace back everything to the Evans Scholarship.”

The Stark children are a close-knit group. They told me that their home life was instrumental in creating a good family atmosphere. Sadly, their parents both passed within the last two years. They were rightfully proud of what their children accomplished. Blythefield’s membership should also be proud of the Stark family.

To keep in touch, the six siblings schedule bi-weekly family Zoom calls. Recently they also gathered at the Detroit Zoo with spouses and kids.



Our Blythefield membership has responded well to the Evans Scholarship Foundation. With our recent drive in October, over 75% of our membership contributes to the Evans at or above the "Par Club" level. This DYK is to thank you for your contributions. With generous support from Blythefield and other clubs like ours, more caddies will be able to further their education.

Let me close with thanks from the Starks.

- Matt: "The generosity of the members at Blythefield and the other WGA member clubs is extraordinary and changes lives for the better each day. I cannot thank you enough for your help that you have given me and my family."
- Marie: "The Evans Scholarship and Blythefield Country Club hold a very special place in my families' hearts."

Thank you, Blythefield!

Brent Rector

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