

Elaine Woodward Setapen



She's been called the Jerry Courville of women's golf in Norwalk.

Indeed, Elaine Woodward Setapen is to women's golf in this city what Jerry Courville Sr. is to men's golf, and she has a record 13 Shorehaven Golf Club championships to prove it.

What's even more remarkable about Setapen's 13 club championships is she won them in six different decades and under three different names.

Born in Norwalk, Elaine Harris grew up not far from Shorehaven where her father, Edwin Harris, played every chance he got. He made sure to pass that passion for golf down to all his kids, including his daughters.

"There were seven of us," Setapen points out. "My four brothers were all golfers, and they were good golfers. I had two older sisters and they played, too." The youngest sister turned out to be a pretty good golfer herself. Setapen was just nine years-old the first time she swung a golf club.

"My father would play golf on Saturday afternoons and every Sunday morning, right after he got the vegetables ready for Sunday dinner," she recalled during an interview with *The Hour* in 2002, right about the time the Augusta National Golf Club was making headlines for not opening its membership to women. Setapen, however, never had to worry about such obstacles growing up.

"The men played on weekends, but we were there everyday during the week so we had plenty of opportunities," she said. "We could play anytime we wanted and stay out as long as we wanted."

Setapen took advantage of that and by the time she was 15 and still known as Elaine Harris, she won her first Shorehaven Club championship in 1938. She also captured the 1939 crown the following summer.

That was also the same year she graduated from Norwalk High School, and would go on to attend Endicott Junior College, Northwestern University, and Sacred Heart University in Fairfield.

It was also during this time, in 1943, that a 21-year-old Elaine Harris would join the United States Naval Reserves and spend two years as a radioman and then telegrapher while stationed as a First Class officer at Floyd Bennett Field in Flat Bush, N.Y.

"I am very proud to be a veteran," she said.

Between college and the reserves, it would be nine years between club championships at Shorehaven, but in 1948 Harris won her third title, and her last as Elaine Harris. In 1950, Elaine Woodward would win the first of three straight club championships and five that decade. Besides 1950, '51 and '52, she would win again in 1957 and then added back to back titles in 1959 and 1960, giving her nine overall.

But she wasn't done yet, winning another Shorehaven Club championship in 1966 and again in 1973, bringing her record total up to 11.

She wouldn't win another championship the rest of the '70s and through all of the 1980s. But in 1992, at the age of 69 and 19 years after her last club title, she would win her 12th and her first as Elaine Setapen. That also gave her club championships in the 1930s, '40s, '50s, '60s, '70s and '90s.

And in 1993, a 70-year-old Setapen won her 13th club championship. No other woman golfer at Shorehaven has won more than seven, and Setapen's 13 is the second most in the history of Shorehaven Golf Club. The only person to win more? Why that would be Jerry Courville Sr., whose 26 club championships set a national record.

What's more, in a career that has spanned more than 70 years and includes countless highlights, Setapen calls winning her last two club championships at the age of 69 and 70 her greatest feat.

But even though Setapen's last club championship came 11 years ago, she continued to excel on the links, even into the next decade. In 2002, just a few months shy of her 80th birthday, Setapen teamed up with Eileen Nolan to win Shorehaven's prestigious Ladies Governors Cup.

Just one more reason why many consider Elaine Harris Woodward Setapen to be perhaps the greatest woman golfer ever from Norwalk.

But golf wasn't her only sport. She played basketball and tennis while in high school, and years later coached the church basketball team at the First Congregational Church on The Green. She taught bridge and also had an interest in bowling and badminton, once winning the Class B state title in mixed doubles with partner Duke Demonkos.

She also enjoyed a successful career in real estate, starting with Village Green Realty from 1979-89 before opening her own company, Woodward & McElroy.

A mother of four and proud grandmother of 10, Setapen and her husband, Anthony Setapen, recently moved from Norwalk to Naples, Fla., where they had been making their winter home the last several years.