

# 25th Anniversary Celebration



Presented by Northern Trust

**HONORING** The Lesnik Family • The Merrill Family • The Waddell Family

**Thursday • November 13, 2025 • Venue West • Chicago**



# At a Glance

## First Tee – Greater Chicago



**1,400+**  
Hours of Instruction



**2,700+**  
Registrations



**130**  
Volunteers



**11**  
Program Locations



**85+**  
Coaches / Junior Coaches



**20+**  
Schools reaching 7,000 students  
(averaging 350 students per school)



**20+**  
Community Organizations

# Welcome

## Welcome to Our 25th Anniversary Celebration Presented by Northern Trust!

Tonight, we reflect and celebrate 25 years of life-changing impact through the game of golf.

From our first swings back in 2000 to today, our mission has been simple: give kids in the Chicago area a safe place to learn, grow and belong. Through the game of golf, we've helped thousands of young people develop the confidence to dream big, the resilience to persevere through challenges and the courage to lead.

This evening, we are proud to honor three families whose vision, generosity and belief in young people have helped shape our story: the Lesnik family, the Merrill family and the Waddell family. Together, their leadership has not only fueled our tremendous growth, but also inspired and supported countless moments of opportunity for the kids we serve.

Tonight is about celebrating our community – our participants, coaches, mentors, friends, parents, board members and supporters who have walked alongside us every step of the way. Together we look ahead to the next 25 years of First Tee – Greater Chicago.

Sincerely,



Jill Sylvester

Interim CEO  
First Tee – Greater Chicago



# Featured Speakers and Panelists

## for 25th Anniversary Celebration

### Golf's Impact on My Life

#### Host

#### **Amanda Balionis**



Amanda Balionis is a star broadcaster at CBS Sports, leading national coverage across both the PGA Tour and NFL. She joined the team in 2017 and has quickly become a fan favorite across CBS' primetime coverage, as well as Netflix's chart-topping docuseries *Full Swing*. Amanda is a certified yoga instructor and recently founded *Puppies & Golf*, a 501(c)(3) supporting and promoting shelters across the country with a focus on connecting humans and dogs for a lifetime of purpose.

#### Vice President of Programs and Operations for First Tee – Greater Chicago

#### **Brandon White**



Brandon was first introduced to the First Tee through his high school golf coach as a freshman at Hammond High School. He credits the organization for providing him the access and skills needed to fuel his growth from a second string junior variety player to team captain by his senior year of high school. First Tee paved the way for Brandon to earn a college golf scholarship and inspired his coaching career today. Brandon has helped expand First Tee chapters and program locations throughout Indiana and Chicago and currently serves as a National Trainer for First Tee Headquarters, in addition to his role for First Tee – Greater Chicago. Brandon has coached and mentored more than 20 collegiate level golfers over the course of his career and strives to make good golfers and even better people.



## **Braulio Ascencio**

Braulio Ascencio is 14 years old and a graduate of Richard Henry Lee Elementary School. He is proud to have earned the Daniel Murphy Scholarship and the HFS Chicago Scholars Award in his high school career. He currently attends St. Laurence High School, where he plays soccer for both the school team and his travel club, Inter FC. Through the First Tee, Braulio has grown both as a person and as a golfer. The program has helped him become more coachable, meet new people and maintain a positive attitude in a fun and supportive environment. He especially enjoys playing golf with his brother, which makes the sport even more meaningful.



## **Jasmine McGhee**

Jasmine is a senior at Whitney M. Young Magnet High School, where she runs track, is on the Board of Directors of the National Honor Society, and is co-captain of the varsity girls golf team. Jasmine McGhee was introduced to golf when she was four years old. Her father brought her to the First Tee, where she met Coach Brandon, and from then on, golf and the First Tee have been a constant fixture in her life. She credits First Tee for instilling confidence and teaching her perseverance and leadership. This year, her high school golf team won the City Championship for the 5th time in a row and made history by becoming the first Chicago Public School to win its IHSA regional competition.

# The First Decade: 2000 - 2010

## 2000

Under the vision of Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley and KemperSports Founder Steve Lesnik, Chicago chapter is established, becoming one of the first 25 chapters of The First Tee

First Tee programming is established at three Chicago Park District locations (Douglas Park, Marquette Park, South Shore) led by CPD program directors

## 2006

Partnership with CDGA begins through Special Olympics golf camps at Diversey Driving Range, Robert Black, South Shore

## 2002

Josh Lesnik, KemperSports, joins the Board of Governors, bringing industry experience and leadership to the organization



## 2001

Bruce Patterson, PGA, becomes founding president, helping to bring structure and new board members to the chapter. Bruce led the organization for more than 10 years with Illinois PGA as a supporting partner



## 2008

Rob Dauphinais is hired as the chapter's first Executive Director. Rob served in this role through 2014, growing the chapter from a small start-up to a regional organization

Hosted inaugural Taste of The First Tee event with Luke Donald. The event becomes an annual event and the chapter's primary fundraiser, driving more than \$1M+ in donations, including significant contributions from Rick and Cate Waddell and Northern Trust

## 2010

Topher Merrill joins the Board of Governors

Chapter adds three additional Chicago Park District Golf Courses: Robert Black, Sydney R. Marovitz, Columbus Park

The First Tee of Greater Chicago chapter continues to evolve, merging Chicago, Joliet and Aurora to expand reach across the region

## 2007

Pat Goss, PGA, becomes director of golf and player development at Northwestern University and taps into talent opportunities to progress the mission, most notably PGA TOUR player, Luke Donald

Cole Hyland becomes first full-time coach and program director. He served in this role through 2019

## 2009

An independent First Tee of Greater Chicago Board of Directors is established as the organization matures



# The Second Decade: 2011 - 2020

## 2013

Hosted first Corporate Challenge Golf Outing, setting the stage for an annual summer fundraising event that continues today



## 2011

Launched after-school programming at six CPS schools

## 2016/2017

Erika Shavers joins the team as a coach and assistant program director. Today, Erika is the chapter's longest tenured full time employee, now Director of Community Outreach and most recently, a certified LPGA Teaching Professional

## 2014

Lisa Quinn is appointed as Executive Director. During her tenure (2014-2019), Lisa managed multiple Taste of the First Tee fundraising events and a field of part-time coaches and volunteers

Partnership with the Chicago Police Department is established to engage at risk youth in Chicago



Signed Harborside license agreement with KemperSports, providing a classroom atmosphere and safe place for local area youth to gather

Chicago Park District COO, Patrick Levar, approves the renovation project at Waveland, adjacent to Sydney R. Marovitz Golf Course. This approval led to a shift in fundraising efforts to create stand-alone facilities for The First Tee of Greater Chicago

# 2019

Lea Jesse is named CEO. Her business background from the corporate world and experience from Big Shoulders Fund lays a foundation for significant fundraising and organizational changes during her five-year tenure

# 2018

Charlie Waddell joins the Board of Governors, continuing his family's legacy of leadership and support for The First Tee of Greater Chicago

# 2020

Launched new annual fundraising event, Fore the Kids, featuring Cubs player Ian Happ

The First Tee of Greater Chicago launches rebrand; First Tee – Greater Chicago

Launched partnership with the Western Golf Association/Evans Scholars Foundation to create a path for participants to become future caddies

\$2.2M capital fundraising campaign for the Waveland Youth Facility begins to renovate the clubhouse and build a short game complex designed by Quito Golf Designs and built by Wadsworth

Matt McIntee officially joins Troon and his commitment to youth golf is immediately evident across the Chicago Park District Golf Courses



# Recent Years: 2021 – 2025

These years represent a strategic shift in fundraising to support three standalone facilities for First Tee – Greater Chicago to enhance accessibility to free and low-cost programs for youth of all backgrounds in Chicago.

**2023**

**2022**

**July**

Phase II of the project is complete and a new 60,000 sq-ft short game area is added to the clubhouse. The full Waveland Youth Facility now opens

First Tee – Greater Chicago commits to invest in the renovation of a youth campus at Canal Shores Golf Course in partnership with the Evanston Wilmette Golf Association and the Western Golf Association (with intent to have a caddie program)

Harborside Youth Learning Center is complete. The facility includes a year round simulator in a clubhouse atmosphere

The chapter hosts a first ever kids pavilion (presented by KPMG) at BMW Championship at Olympia Fields Country Club

Brandon White joins the team as VP of Programming & Operations, expanding the full-time coach roster (which now includes 5 alumni!)

**June**

Phase I of the Waveland Youth Facility is complete with the addition of a 1,200 sq-ft. clubhouse and full swing simulator, offering a safe space for kids to gather and participate



# Today

First Tee – Greater Chicago continues to impact over 8,000 kids annually via a model of life skills programs, schools and community organizations

## 2025

### April

The Evans opens

### June/July

Three summer camps operate simultaneously at Waveland, Harborside, and The Evans, offering a week-long experience for kids (The Evans in partnership with Golf Practice)



### October

Presidents Cup contributes \$250,000 to First Tee – Greater Chicago in celebration of the 2026 Presidents Cup at Medinah Country Club



# Honoring The Lesnik Family

The Lesnik family has been a cornerstone of First Tee – Greater Chicago since the beginning. In 2000, Steve Lesnik, founder and chairman of KemperSports, stepped up alongside Mayor Richard M. Daley to bring the chapter to life, recognizing golf's potential to teach life skills and expand opportunity for young people in the neighborhoods of Chicago.

To successfully establish one of the first 25 chapters nationwide, KemperSports partnered with the Illinois PGA and Chicago Park District to become the driving force behind the chapter's programming and growth in the early years.

Steve's vision and passion for the chapter has sustained for more than two decades, most notably through his son, Josh, who joined the board in 2002. With a commitment to creating opportunities through the game of golf, Josh has been a driver in expanding the reach of First Tee – Greater Chicago through innovative partnerships and facility investments.

Thanks to KemperSports and its management of Harborside International Golf Course, First Tee – Greater Chicago received its first classroom-style space in 2018 to give kids a place to gather and connect. As of 2023, that space was reimagined to provide a year round clubhouse environment for kids to learn the game of golf and just be together.

The Waveland Youth Facility, graciously supported by KemperSports, opened in 2022, providing a clubhouse space where kids can play and learn from coaches year round.

Arguably, the best example of Josh's impact is through his direct involvement in the transformation of the youth campus at The Evans at Canal Shores, a collaborative effort between First Tee – Greater Chicago, the Western Golf Association, the Illinois PGA Foundation, the Chicago District Golf Association and the Evanston-Wilmette Golf Association. That project not only revitalized a historic course, but created new access points for caddie training, college scholarships and inclusive golf programming.

Through their time, investments and relationships, the Lesnik family has given First Tee – Greater Chicago more than facilities and programs. They've built a legacy of opportunity and their commitment continues to inspire the work of the organization today and the young people it serves.



**"I've never been more inspired by the work of First Tee – Greater Chicago than I am today."**

Josh Lesnik



*Proudly supporting  
First Tee — Greater Chicago  
and its mission to empower  
Chicago's youth through golf.*

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# Honoring The Merrill Family

Rob Dauphinais still remembers the first time he met Topher Merrill for lunch in Glenview. As the Executive Director of First Tee – Greater Chicago in 2008, Rob was introduced to Topher by PGA Master Professional Don Wegrzyn and he remembers how eager he was to get involved.

Inspired by the organization's ability to use golf as a platform for character development, Topher jumped at the chance to bring his thinking, resources and network to bear for First Tee – Greater Chicago. He connected with the team through a shared belief in the power of sports to teach lessons of integrity, perseverance and respect. More importantly, Topher saw an opportunity to give young people the tools they need to face challenges, set goals and make a positive impact in their communities.

Since joining the board in 2010, Topher has played a key role in supporting the chapter's growth over the last 15 years by leading fundraising efforts and expanding the expertise of the board. He has witnessed firsthand how investment in dedicated facilities and strong board support has provided more consistent opportunities for kids to learn, thrive and grow.

Among his favorite memories is the opening of the Waveland Youth Facility, where he watched participants experience something new and exciting that would open doors for their future. The project holds personal significance for Topher as his son, Brooks, has devoted his own time to volunteer at Waveland, making the experience and contribution especially meaningful for his family.

First Tee – Greater Chicago is well-positioned for future growth because of Topher's contributions and commitment to supporting Chicago's youth. He has been a passionate supporter of providing scholarship opportunities as a pathway for youth, and his personal values of hard work, perseverance and integrity align perfectly with the mission. Topher and his family are a driving force behind building strong community partnerships for First Tee – Greater Chicago and broadening access to programming in a city that means so much to him.

**“When I first started at First Tee – Greater Chicago, the Waveland Youth Facility was our big dream. Topher was one of the first to step up and help make it a reality. He believed in the project before we even broke ground. Topher’s answer is always the same: “How can I help?” And he means it. We’re forever grateful for his belief in our mission.”**

Jane Seder Conen, Director of Development and Operations



CONGRATULATIONS ON  
**25 YEARS**  
OF MAKING AN IMPACT



*The CDGA and CDGA Foundation are proud to partner with First Tee — Greater Chicago in its mission to impact Chicago's youth through golf.*

# Honoring The Waddell Family

Rick Waddell's leadership and vision have left a lasting mark on the game of golf, both at the highest professional level and in the lives of young people discovering the sport for the first time.

As former Chairman and CEO of Northern Trust, Rick was instrumental in deepening the firm's relationship with the PGA TOUR and using the game of golf as a force for good.

Under his direction, Northern Trust became the title sponsor of the Northern Trust Open in 2007 and it was through this work that Rick helped strengthen the partnership between Northern Trust, First Tee – Greater Chicago and PGA TOUR professional Luke Donald. Together, they created a unique platform to raise funds and awareness for the local organization in a market that was important to Luke and his collegiate career at Northwestern University.

Rick later guided Northern Trust's transition to sponsorship of The Northern Trust, the first event of the FedEx Cup Playoffs. Through these events, Northern Trust helped generate \$21 million for charitable organizations, including commitments to First Tee – Greater Chicago, underscoring Rick's belief that golf should serve a broader purpose beyond competition.

Rick's commitment to using golf as a platform for positive impact extends far beyond the professional game. As a member of the Board of Governors

for First Tee National, he has been a tireless advocate for the organization's mission to teach life skills and character development through the game of golf. His support has been felt nationally, and especially in Chicago, where the Waddell family has championed initiatives such as the Waveland Youth Facility, helping to expand access to the game for young people in the community.

Rick's legacy of service continues today through the next generation. His son, Charlie Waddell, joined the First Tee – Greater Chicago board in 2018 and is set to become President in 2026. Charlie's leadership reflects the same values of giving back and ensuring that golf remains a source of opportunity and growth for young people across the region. Charlie has been instrumental in guiding the organization's future-forward strategic plan.

Throughout their careers, Rick and Charlie have combined business leadership with philanthropy, guided by values of integrity, humility and service. Their contributions reflect the best of what golf can represent – excellence on the course, generosity off it – and a commitment to using the game as a vehicle for opportunity, character and community.

# WE HELP OUR CLIENTS PLAY THE LONG GAME



Northern Trust is proud to support  
First Tee – Greater Chicago and  
congratulates the Waddell Family.

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# Notable Trailblazers

## in First Tee – Greater Chicago History



2001-2018

### Bruce Patterson

Reflecting on the origins of First Tee – Greater Chicago, we honor Bruce Patterson's pivotal role. As Board President of the chapter for many years, Bruce saw golf as more than just a sport – he saw it as a way to teach young people life values like perseverance, respect and integrity. As a start-up non-profit, the chapter faced many challenges. As the Director of Golf at Butler National Golf Club, Bruce became involved through his ties to the Illinois PGA. He was able to encourage Illinois golf professionals to partner in bringing golf to under-accessed kids and communities. This led to reaching more kids, increased exposure to the mission and more financial support. Bruce's friendship with Pat Goss (Director of Golf at Northwestern University) also accelerated the chapter's growth as Luke Donald became the Honorary Ambassador of First Tee – Greater Chicago. Bruce's connections, introductions, and passion put the chapter on a growth trajectory that has continued through today. Bruce's guiding principle – always focusing on what is best for the kids – continues to inspire the First Tee – Greater Chicago team. We have deep appreciation for Bruce's dedication to the mission.

2005-present

### Pat Goss

As we celebrate 25 years of impact, we proudly honor Pat Goss, one of First Tee – Greater Chicago's earliest champions. Known for coaching Northwestern Men's Golf and his relationship with PGA TOUR star Luke Donald, Pat has long been a leader in the Chicago golf community. His support helped establish our credibility, connect us to local clubs and shape our early programming. Pat also inspired and helped design the Waveland Youth Facility, creating a lasting home for youth development. Through clinics, mentorship, and advocacy, Pat's commitment to character-building through golf has left a lasting legacy we are proud to celebrate.



2019-2024

## Lea Jesse

Under Lea's leadership, First Tee – Greater Chicago experienced massive growth in capital fundraising, programming and facilities. Thanks to her vision and transformative work, First Tee – Greater Chicago now has three thriving standalone youth facilities: Waveland Youth Facility (Chicago), Harborside Youth Learning Center (Chicago) and the First Tee Youth Campus at The Evans (Evanston). Lea's talent continues to benefit Chicago's youth given her role at Cubs Charities.



2009-present

## Matt McIntee

Matt McIntee, Senior Vice President of Troon Chicago, has been a passionate supporter of First Tee – Greater Chicago since 2009. Long before any formal involvement, he was already coaching, sponsoring and advocating for the mission. Matt believes that golf is a powerful tool for unity and personal growth – one that transcends barriers and builds character. Over the years, he's collaborated with many dedicated team members and is especially proud of his son, Patrick, who now coaches with First Tee – Greater Chicago. As we celebrate 25 years, Matt's continued support helps make golf more accessible and inclusive for the next generation.



2016-present

## Erika 'Birdie' Shavers

For Erika, golf started as a lifeline and turned into a lifelong mission. She spent two decades working as a mortgage and real estate professional. During the 2007 financial crisis, she signed up for a women's golf clinic to help make new connections. What she found was a deep love for the game—one that would change the course of her life. Erika joined First Tee – Greater Chicago in 2015 and is now our longest-tenured full time staff member. As Director of Community Outreach, Erika has expanded our reach across the South Side, connecting kids to golf, mentorship and life skills that extend beyond the course. Now an LPGA teaching professional, Erika is especially passionate about introducing more girls and women to the sport. She was also recently inducted into the African American Golfers Hall of Fame—a recognition of her impact and leadership.

# Live & Silent Auction

## Fund the Need: Paddle Raise

**\$10,000**

### Transform a Summer

Provide a full summer camp experience for kids, giving them a safe, fun and life-changing place to grow.

**\$5,000**

### Champion a School

Bring First Tee programs into an entire school, reaching hundreds of students with the game of golf and its life skills.

**\$2,500**

### Drive Opportunity

Cover transportation so kids can access First Tee programs, courses and tournaments they otherwise couldn't reach.

**\$1,000**

### Empower Through Workshops

Support a series of life-skills workshops that teach confidence, perseverance and leadership on and off the course.

**\$500**

### Open Doors

Provide a travel scholarship that allows a participant to attend regional and national First Tee opportunities.

**\$100**

### Remove Barriers

Cover program fees for a child, ensuring no one is turned away due to cost.

## Live Auction Items



**Ultimate  
Golf Getaway at  
Ochopee Match Club**

**Elite Club Fitting  
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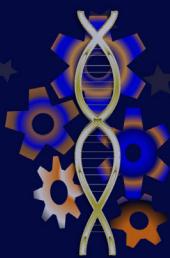
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**Jasmine McGhee**  
Game Changer  
14 years  
participating in the  
First Tee



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Together, we're helping young people develop confidence, perseverance, and life skills both on and off the course.



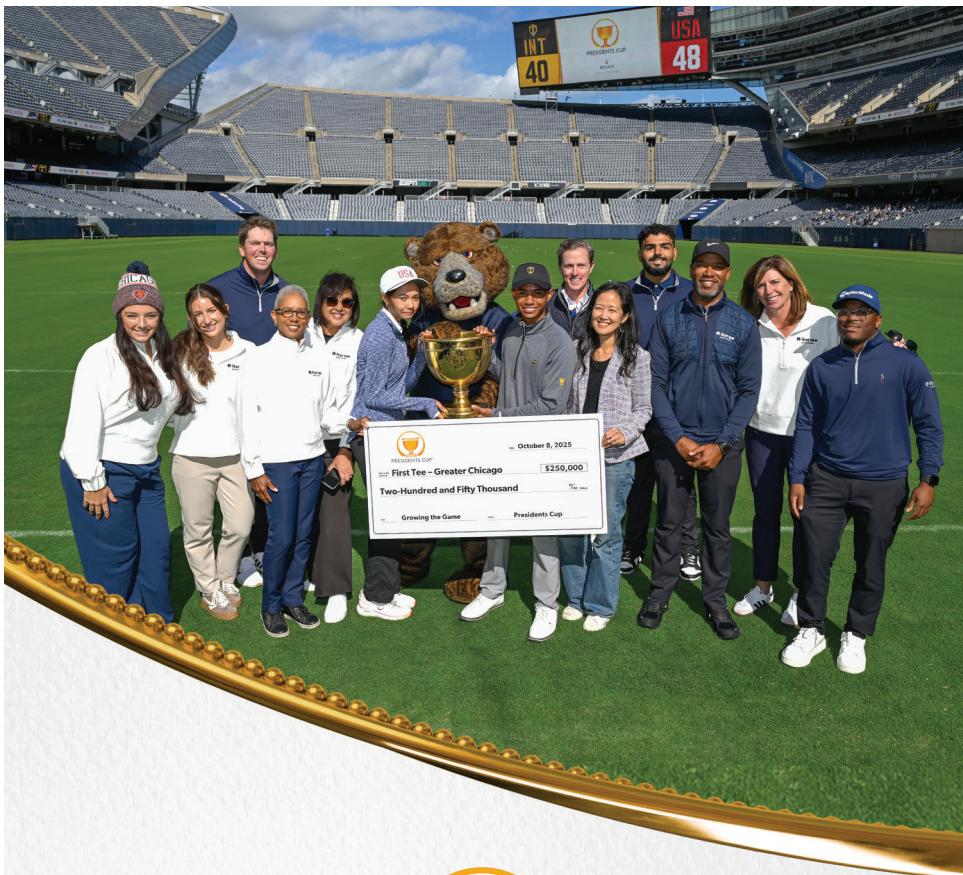
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