

# Golfing for a cause

We are a few days into the new year. Are you looking for a simple inspirational story? A philanthropic cause? A reason to align towards? Well, here is one. Unabating Covid issues in 2022 will continue to carry its own bane and blessings. For example, recent reports show a significant jump in sales and consumption of alcoholic beverages. This is a cause for a pause.

The Texas Research Society on Alcoholism (TRSA) has seen several challenging and excellent financial phases over its 41-year-old history. It persevered with lessons learned along the way. I learned a lot from ground zero fodder (board meetings) regarding emerging research, knowledge gaps, and evolution of policies associated with alcohol and other substance use disorders. From resolute to humorous snippets exchanged between its experienced and founding members. Dr. Martin Javors (Marty) is a friendly down-to-earth board member of the TRSA, and is also a recently retired Professor, Dept. of Psychiatry at UT Health San Antonio. Marty narrates with alacrity about his foray into organizing the San Antonio Open golf tournament. This is an annual fundraiser held each November which supports the McGovern fellowship and the annual TRSA scientific meeting. Amazingly, it all appears copacetic now even against the Covid backdrop for the last two seasons!



Marty (second from right - beige cap) organizing the 2015

**Q: Tell us about when and how you turned one of your hobbies into a successful golfing tournament event in Texas?**

**Marty (in his own words):** I became the president of TRSA in 1990, I think. The original board members were mostly recovered alcoholics who believed in and supported research on alcoholism and alcohol abuse. As I recall, they were all very successful businessmen as well as one Catholic priest. The meetings were very interesting and filled with wonderful stories, but action plans combined with action were never realized. On the other hand, the officers were all substance abuse scientists. Zehava Gottesfeld, of the Psychiatry Dept. at the UT medical school in Houston, proposed an annual research meeting to provide a basis of interaction among Texas scientists. I came up with the idea to have a golf tournament which would fund a yearly \$5000 fellowship under the supervision of a faculty member (and TRSA member) for a graduate, medical, or dental student to propose, design, and perform a research project addressing some aspect of drug abuse. I was also a volunteer committee member of the United States Golf Association, so I designed a tournament for professionals and low handicap amateurs, similar to those I played while I served in the Navy in North Carolina. The rest is history. We have awarded over 30 fellowships, 32 successful golf tournaments, and a yearly scientific meeting at which the student fellowship awardee presents his/her results.

**Q: Is there a particular event or incident of the golf tournament that stands out as memorable to you?**

**Marty:** Other than satisfaction from the success of the tournament and the fellowships awarded, Cameron Beckman was the 1997 winner of the San Antonio Open Golf Championship. In an interview a few years after his win, he credited his success in the SA Open with giving him confidence for a very successful career on the PGA Tour, that included several wins.

**Q: Has Covid had an impact on the golf tournament?**

**Marty:** Not really. In 2020, we designed the tournament to minimize the physical interaction among the players by using an electronic scoring device so paper scorecards were not necessary. Also, there were Styrofoam donuts around the bottom of the flagsticks so golf balls could be picked from the hole without touching the flagstick. Players were advised to be aware of the proximity to other players during their rounds.

*(The November 2021 tournament turned out to be an equally great event for both, the TRSA cause and the golfers alike! Mitchell Meissner, pictured at right, won the 2020 and 2021 SA Open.)*



**Q: How has the fellowship support had a direct impact on substance abuse research?**

**Marty:** One of the purposes of the fellowship was to require the application to mimic the basic structure of a grant application to the NIH as training for the students to learn the process. This was successful. A deeply satisfying memory related to the fellowship involved a young grad student from Houston. After receiving the award and performing her project, she wrote a letter to the TRSA board expressing her gratitude and explaining that she was about ready to look for another career, but the award helped her make the decision to continue her studies and pursue a career in substance abuse research.

**Q: What are two of your favorite inspirational quotes?**

**Marty:** “The most exciting phrase to hear in science, the one that heralds new discoveries, is not ‘Eureka!’ but ‘Hmmm, that’s funny...’” – Isaac Asimov

“If there’s a fork in the road, take it.” Yogi Berra

Circling back to the initial questions. What is your inspirational goal for this year? Have you identified with a philanthropic cause? What will be your higher purpose and contribution this year? If you have these answers, great! Don’t let Covid hold you back.

Since I joined ~ fifteen years ago, it’s been a privilege to work alongside distinguished researchers and TRSA members on several endeavors. TRSA’s four pillar mission is centered around educating the public, research, public policy, and training the next generation of scientists and physicians. It is the only state affiliate of the national organization Research Society on Alcoholism (RSA). For more information visit the website: [www.trsoa.org](http://www.trsoa.org)

*Written by Dr. Shivani Kaushal Maffi*