

Neighbors

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Octogenarian golfer drives into record book

BY KRISTINE CANNON
Progress Staff Writer

Scottsdale resident Bob Kurtz spent March 25 celebrating his 80th birthday year the only way he knows how: Racking up his seventh Guinness World Record at Scottsdale TopGolf, where he hit more than 1,000 drives in less than 12 hours.

Kurtz is “The Ironman,” after all.

“That was really satisfying — very satisfying,” he said.

But the best part of the accomplishment for Kurtz?

The event, dubbed Ironman 1000, raised \$20,000 from sponsors and individual donors to benefit the Mesa-based nonprofit, A New Leaf, which provides homes and essential items for homeless families and veterans in the Valley.



Bob Kurtz completed a total of 1,115 drives at TopGolf Scottsdale on March 25, meeting his goal 90 minutes sooner than he thought he would. (Pablo Robles/Progress Staff Photographer)

“I get double pleasure out of it: the pleasure out of doing something that’s extraordinarily difficult that a much younger man can’t do, and the true pleasure of doing something for a charity,” Kurtz said. “And I just think the world of A New Leaf. What they do is incredible.”

Kurtz’s goal was to hit 1,000 drives in 12 hours.

Each drive had to travel at least 200 yards and stay within a 40-yard grid.

But for a pro who owns several world records for golf marathons and endurance marks, it came as no surprise that he exceeded the goal with 1,115 drives.

“It was a long day as Bob started the record attempt at 10 a.m. He took very few breaks because he wanted to keep momentum going, so his pace was faster than

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Writing books bring mom, son even closer

BY KRISTINE CANNON
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Dr. Hilda Villaverde is a jack of all trades.

She’s an ordained minister, a published author, a speaker, and a professional hair stylist who has worked in the Scottsdale beauty industry for 50 years — more than half of that at her boutique hair salon.

But when the pandemic temporarily shuttered the salon, Pluma Designs at Shea Boulevard and Scottsdale Road, Villaverde found herself quarantined at home without a project.

Then, her son Ron Fusselman suggested they write a book together.

“In the beginning, I thought it’d be fun for my mom and I to write a children’s book because I was reading all these chil-



At the start of the pandemic, longtime Scottsdale resident Dr. Hilda Villaverde teamed up with her son, Ron Fusselman, to write not one but two books about their relationship. (Hilda Villaverde)

dren’s books to my kids,” said Fusselman, a San Diego resident, as he bounced his newborn daughter on his lap.

“Then, it progressed into something that was a bit more, I guess, ‘adult,’” the 49-year-old continued. “The more we wrote, the more it became more of an autobiographical thing.”

Fusselman and Villaverde ended up publishing two books: “Dear Son, Dear Mom: Thoughts I Wanted You to Feel,” which details their moving and dramatic story; and “Dear Son, Dear Mom: Lessons I Learned from Somebody: Uncomfortable Tales from a Son and a Mother Raising Each Other.”

The project brought the already-close mother and son team even closer.

“My mom and I are very close, and we’re

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anticipated,” recalled Joe Dulin, Chief Philanthropy Officer for A New Leaf. “Bob hit his 1,000 drive around 8:30 p.m. and we cheered his success.”

Those donating to the event gave anywhere from 10 to 50 cents per completed drive.

“We are grateful for their support,” Dulin said. “The dollars raised will have an immediate impact on families who have been impacted by COVID-19.”

A New Leaf provides multiple services to the community to help domestic violence victims find protection, provide shelter to the homeless, help children find family and help veterans find peace.

Amid the pandemic, it has seen an increase in demand for its services.

“A New Leaf provides support and services to around 30,000 people annually. That number will certainly increase this

past year due to the impact of the pandemic,” Dulin said.

In response, A New Leaf partnered with the City of Mesa to provide millions of dollars to families through rental and utilities assistance in an effort to help keep people stable in their homes.

“A New Leaf will continue to work with state and local governments over the next year to utilize funds provided by the American Rescue Act to stabilize families and help those seeking employment find good jobs,” Dulin said.

The idea of the Ironman 100 was the brainchild of Kurtz, who approached A New Leaf about the fundraising event.

He was more than familiar with the nonprofit, as his wife is a volunteer and donor.

“Bob has raised hundreds of thousands of dollars for charity through his endurance golf records. Because Bob is turning 80 years of age in May, he wanted to take

on a couple of new challenges this year,” Dulin said.

Raising money for a charity as part of his world record attempts is something Kurtz started in 2006, when he played his first marathon, playing 168 holes in a row and averaging 18 holes in less than one hour.

Kurtz’s other world records include most times for a golfer to score their age or below in 24 hours; 500 consecutive holes without rest or sleep, which he accomplished in 39 hours; most holes played in one week, 1,850; completing 72 holes of golf in three hours and five minutes; and completing a round of golf in 39 minutes, shooting a 71.

“There’s no better feeling than to accomplish something of significance, but then to have it have a significant outcome, which is the money that was raised for A New Leaf, that was very, very rewarding,” Kurtz said.

This year is a milestone year for both A

New Leaf and Kurtz.

Founded in 1971, A New Leaf celebrates their 50th anniversary this year and will host its 50th Anniversary Camaraderie Gala on Oct. 23 at JW Marriott Phoenix Desert Ridge Resort & Spa in Phoenix.

Kurtz, on the other hand, plans to ring in his 80th birthday by doing what he does best: adding another world record to his growing list of accomplishments.

This time, he plans to golf his age 10 times in one day, in July.

To prepare, he’ll train on the course, much like he did for the Ironman 1000 event, where he spent several hours each day for three months on the driving range at Ancala Country Club in Scottsdale.

“People say age is just a state of mind,” Kurtz said. “I’m 80 years old, and I’m doing things that a 30-year-old can’t do. And that’s very satisfying.”

Information: turnanewleaf.org, golfsironman.com 🐾

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very lucky that I came out of hardship, and we were able to get even closer,” Fusselman said.

The books deal with their heart-wrenching. Villaverde discusses things like a cancer diagnosis at 19 and being told by her doctor that she would need an abortion.

“The truth is, I wanted this child. I had this feeling that I need to have this baby,” Villaverde said. “Now, look at Ron here. Now I have these precious grandchildren, and I really thought that somebody, I thought we needed to share that story.”

It was an emotional journey for Villaverde to not only put pen to paper and share her most personal stories but to also share that experience with her son.

“Our lives have transformed from uncomfortable secrets into a loving and cherished mother-son relationship – a blessing we could not have imagined,” Villaverde said.

“I knew she was strong, but I appreciated her even more — and especially being a parent now,” Fusselman added. “And just knowing what my mom was doing and going through and how she protected me and how she basically formed the parent I am today, I’m really appreciative of that.”

Fusselman and Villaverde began writing the book, her 10th, in April.

“People keep saying, ‘Write your life story, write your life story,’” Villaverde said.

She split her story into two tiny books.



Dr. Hilda Villaverde poses with her then-4-year-old son, Ron Fusselman. (Hilda Villaverde)

“We knew it was going to be a tiny book, but a tiny book with a big message,” she said.

Fusselman suggested to his mother that

they write the book together as a way to help keep Villaverde, who was 365 miles away, busy.

“And I thought writing something to-

gether would keep her mind busy, that’s like a therapy, through this whole thing,” Fusselman said.

“It was very cathartic for both of us,” Villaverde added. “I cried a lot.”

The books have received nothing but positive reviews on Amazon.

Reviewers describe the book as a “touching tribute to moms and sons everywhere.”

One reviewer wrote the “pain and anguish jumped off the page.”

“My heart was breaking for both of them,” the review continues. “The gift in this book is that I learned that love is stronger than fear. I have respect for anyone that can look fear in the face and listen to their heart.”

“Women have emailed me and said, ‘I wrote my son a letter and asked him to forgive me,’ or, ‘I want to reconnect with my son,’” Villaverde said.

In addition to Amazon, the books are available to purchase at Villaverde’s Scottsdale hair salon, where her clients have also raved about the books.

One client was so moved she bought an additional 10 copies to share with her friends.

“We really want our story to motivate many other families out there,” Villaverde said. “I would love every mother to feel the way I feel about my son — that sense of pride that I have in him.”

Information: dearsondearmom.com 🐾