

# DEB VANGELLOW

**RIVERBEND COUNTRY CLUB, HOUSTON, TX**

INTERVIEW BY PAUL RAMEE, JR

Fairport, New York-born Deb Vangellow was always an athlete and, as she once told a reporter, “was always going to be an educator.” Despite her achievements in soccer and track, golf turned out to be the sport where Deb built her career—as one of the most honored instructors of her generation.

Vangellow, who spent 17 years at Sweetwater Country Club in Sugar Land, Texas, before moving across town to Riverbend in 2014, was the 2012 LPGA National Teacher of the Year—one of seemingly countless standout achievements that fill her resume. She is one of Golf Digest’s “50 Best Women Teachers” in the U.S., an LPGA “Top 50 Teacher,” a GOLF Magazine “Top Regional Teacher,” a US Kids Golf “Top 50 Master Kids Teacher” and a GRAA “Top 50 Growth Of The Game Teaching Professional.”

Able to balance work and service adeptly, Deb was the first-ever National Vice-President for the LPGA Teaching and Club Professional membership and is now serving as elected National President. She is a longtime lead instructor in the LPGA Global Education Program, an industry-leading teacher training program for golf professionals in the U.S. and Korea.

In 1997, Deb was honored as a recipient of the Young Alumni Award at the University of Northern Iowa and in 2008 her research project entitled “Less Is

More And More Is Better: The Benefit Of Less Length And More Loft In The Driving Club For Recreational Women Golfers” was accepted for presentation and publication in two top Golf Research

conferences; “Better Golf Through Technology” and the “World Scientific Congress Of Golf.” In 2015, Deb was selected as one of Houston’s “50 Most Influential Women.” She was recently inducted into the Northern Iowa Athletics Hall of Fame and The Hall of Excellence for the School Of Education.

As this recent interview with her fellow Proponent Group member Paul Ramee indicates, Vangellow was exposed at a young age to some teaching concepts and business goals that were ahead of their time. Her capacity to see their value and weave them together with a host of other key understandings has been a continual source of her diverse and distinguished achievements in the coaching field.

**Deb, can you describe for us the path you took to become the golf instructor and industry presence you are today?**

**Vangellow got her start in golf when she landed a job with the Golf Digest Golf Schools while attending grad school at Miami (Ohio) University.**





**Born in the Rochester, New York area, Vangellow has been based in metro Houston for most of her professional career.**

I was a Health/Physical Education/Coaching major at the University of Northern Iowa and went right on to graduate school at Miami (Ohio) University. It happened that the Golf Digest Instruction Schools were in town and I was in the right place at the right time for a summer job. I came on board with them, assisting with anything they needed operationally. The staff was very strong: Jim Flick, Hank Johnson, Paul Runyan, Dick Drager, and Dr. DeDe Owens, to name a few. DeDe became an important mentor, helping me think about going into the LPGA Teaching and Club Professional Membership.

**DeDe being the only woman in that group, did you naturally gravitate toward her?**

It was interesting. Some of the other program assistants preferred to be with certain instructors, which was fine. We rotated instructor stations but as it turned out, I ended up being with DeDe most of the time. I did not know a lot about teaching but certainly noticed that DeDe approached each student with a lot of individual attention based on who they were, what their goals were, and what they could physically do. DeDe encouraged me to do whatever was needed in order to help the student succeed.

**All in all, this was a fortunate break, so early in your career.**

No doubt about it. I finished my masters degree, entered the LPGA and stayed with the Golf Digest Schools for the next two summers, doing whatever they needed—shagging balls, setting up schools, whatever they needed. I was a total sponge.

**Did that work with Golf Digest open up any doors for you?**

It really did. Golf Digest Instructor Charlie Epps asked me to be part of his own golf school in Texas. I helped with Charlie's program during the next couple of summers and served as the women's golf coach at the University of Northern Iowa during the academic year. The combination position was a good one as I was able to begin work on a Ph.D at the university. Finishing this academic work is on my to-do list!

**That was the hot format at the time—brand-name golf schools.**

True, because before very long, LPGA Hall of Famer Kathy Whitworth asked me to be a part of her Japanese corporate sponsored "SuperLady" Golf School. Once again, I feel like I was fortunate to be in the right place at the right time. This program was really ahead of its time and was very multi-faceted and wellness based. We provided a very balanced program including fitness, nutrition, and numerous supplementary activities that are considered the norm now. It was a terrific three years.

**What was next, after working with Kathy Whitworth?**

When the "Superlady" project ended, I moved "north" to Sugar Land where I spent very good years at Old Orchard Golf Club and Pine Forest Country Club before landing at Sweetwater CC where I was the Director of Instruction for 17 years. I worked with Matt Reams, one of the best golf professionals in the business, and then with five different management



As President of the LPGA Teaching and Club Professional Division, Vangellow participates in numerous LPGA seminars and education events around the globe each year.

companies after his departure. This was not easy and the last company was challenging, bringing much different values and attitudes toward golf education programming. Basically, I was not fitting in with their plans and had a frustrating departure that ended up being a blessing in disguise. I have such fond memories from my time at SWCC but I sure learned that if you do not match the conscious level of the environment, pay attention to the signs and signals because they are accurate. In other words, time to move on.

**You were able to make a move without leaving town, which isn't always the case.**

Very true. From Sweetwater, I went over to Riverbend Country Club where I have been for the last four years. It is a good fit as the head golf professional honors teaching and the club has allowed me time away to serve in my leadership roles in the LPGA.

**Sounds like you compiled a long list of great mentors over the years. Who has had the biggest impact on your career?**

Betsy Cullen is and has been an extraordinary mentor to me. She played the LPGA Tour, winning three times, before beginning a phenomenal 40-plus-year teaching career. She was a student of Harvey Penick and has helped me become an effective instructor. Lucky me to have such an amazing mentor and friend!

**Any others?**

Dr. Debbie Crews has helped me understand and differentiate the relationship between learning and

performance. Long Drive Champion Mike Austin, whom Betsy and I traveled to see for 12 years in California, really helped me in the areas of Anatomy and Kinesiology. Kathy Whitworth was terrific in helping me understand playing the game, which I learned when I caddied for her at the end of her career. Dr. Deborah Graham, Motivational Speaker and Trainer Patti Holmes, Dr. Betsy Clark, Jackson Bradley...so much help along the way and I am so very grateful.

**Explain your Intuitive Based Golf Education Programs.**

It is a student-centered approach that allows me to work from a model that incorporates a plethora of methods I have studied over the years, coming up with a plan that works best for the golfer in front of me. Effective, efficient and compatible swing motion... teaching the LPGA way!

**If I were to take a lesson from you, what would the structure of our time together include?**

I teach one-hour and half-hour lessons. With the heat in Texas, half-hour lessons are very popular. I spend a good amount of time getting to know you, how your body works, your lesson history, what you do for a living, injury history, how much time you can spend practicing. This allows me to understand expectations and what we will be able to accomplish. All full-swing lessons have a goal and this goal is a part of the long-term goal that the student and I have for their development. They get



Vangellow's duties as LPGA T&CP President include attending major LPGA Tour events including the PGA Women's Championship last month. Here she is pictured with Paul Levy, President of the PGA of America.

an understanding of what piece of the swing is not working for them. We develop strategies for them to improve through drills and they leave with notes that summarize our time together.

**You were a multi-sport athlete in college. Do you believe in athletes specializing in one sport?**

I don't. I think any sport has an "order of movement" and it is very helpful for people to play other sports and learn each "order of movement" and transfer it to their golf swing. I encourage my juniors to play everything. A quick story about learning order of movement. I was teaching a 75-year-old woman, who had not played any sports growing up, a self-proclaimed non-athlete. She came to me to take golf lessons and no one worked harder. She really learned how to move her body. Fast-forward a few years later and she is with her grandkids. They are throwing a football around and it drops at grandma's feet. She picks it up and just zips it back to them. The grandkids were stunned. Well, she had indirectly learned how to throw a football through learning how to swing a golf club.

**Regarding your presidency of the LPGA—anything you care to share?**

It is something that I have dreamed about since I became a member of this wonderful organization and is a tremendous honor. The office comes with great responsibility to honor the past and plan for the future,

while serving the present membership. Vice President Karen Palacios-Jansen has been a terrific teammate with like-mindedness and similar values. Together, we stay true to our platform/philosophy of Vision, Value, and Visibility. It is a great journey to be on together and I can't thank her enough for her support and friendship!

**Do you believe the status of woman has improved in golf?**

I believe it is a lot better and it is due to the fact that we continue to get quality women entering the business. The opportunities are far greater than just being the teaching pro at a facility. Women are landing roles as GMs and head professionals at golf facilities of all types. During my 30 years in the industry I have seen tremendous growth for women who want to follow their passion in the game.

**In all the ups, downs, steps and stages of your long career, what would be a reflection that stands out?**

Carol Mann shared with me an important truth, which is that sometimes you are going to have to move on. When that happens, it may not be easy. You may be miserable doing it, but if you have faith in yourself it will all work out. I believe you have to stay true to your path and passion, as Carol alluded to. There are going to be bumps in the road, and that's OK. **PG**