

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Produced by RESORT ASSOCIATION PARTNERS, LLC

June 2016

for MAUNA LANI RESORT ASSOCIATION

Meet your Mauna Lani neighbors...

The Mauna Lani community is comprised of diverse individuals from all walks of life. Get to know them a bit better through our series of **Member Spotlight** articles.



Dr. Joseph Triggs

“What’s guided me in my life is to help people. I loved medicine. I love helping you. It made me feel good to help you feel good.”

— Dr. Joe Triggs

Dr. Joseph Triggs, Mauna Lani Terrace

In his living room at Mauna Lani Terrace, modestly tucked away among some family pictures is a photo of Dr. Joseph Triggs with a group of football players whom legendary player and broadcaster Dick Butkus called “the most dominant line in football history.” Known as the Fearsome Foursome, Roger Brown, Lamar Lundy, Deacon Jones, and Merlin Olsen were at one time regular patients of Dr. Joe, who had an impressive career as physician to the Los Angeles Rams, the California Angels, and many other prominent sports teams.

Dr. Joe grew up in Springfield, Massachusetts, where during high school he worked numerous jobs, including holiday post office clerk, shade tobacco picker, lumber jack, lobster fisherman, and his favorite—Arthur Murray dance instructor, where he put his natural charm to work to win over prospective attendees, who may have been miffed to arrive in the classroom and find that Joe was nowhere in sight.

The seed of Joe’s interest in medicine was planted by his mother, who had earned a masters in chemistry and wanted to be a physician but was discouraged from doing so by her father, who felt it an inappropriate career for a woman. Instead, she worked as a high school chemistry teacher and school administrator. Joe was the oldest of four children—two brothers and a sister who was born shortly after his graduation from college.

“Triggysy,” as Dr. Triggs is affectionately called by his friends, played baseball, basketball and football for Cathedral High School and was offered scholarships from a number of esteemed universities, including Notre Dame, where renowned coach Frank Leahy asked “fast and shift” Joe to take an extra year to gain weight in prep school before coming on board to play football. Anxious to get into college, Joe instead accepted the offer of a full scholarship from Rutgers University and earned a B.S. in biological sciences.

At both Rutgers and in high school, Joe served as vice president of his class, and 25 years after graduating from college, he was honored with the prestigious Ernest T. Gardner Memorial Award, which recognizes the civic contributions of a Rutgers alumnus who played intercollegiate sports in his time at the university.

After graduating from Rutgers, Joe married and worked in the chemical division for Goodyear. He was transferred to Akron, Ohio for training and later to Philadelphia, where they began raising two of their four children.

Still, with the yearning to be a doctor, Joe applied and was accepted to UC Irvine’s medical school. He made California his home for the next thirty years, initially setting up a private practice in Orange County, where he was one of the first family doctors to be recognized for high standards in the profession as a Fellow in the American Academy of Family Practice. He soon decided to pursue sports medicine and became one of the first sports physicians in a newly burgeoning field.

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Through a twist of fate, Dr. Joe happened to know the general manager of the California Angels stadium. Before long, he was hired by the Angels as one of their team physicians and, soon thereafter, by the Los Angeles Rams, for whom he worked for 25 years. While he doctored athletes both on and off the field, he also cared for many of their families, developing longtime friendships in the process. He was one of two physicians for the first Super Bowl and then the Pro Bowl when it was located in Los Angeles; he and his partner took turns tending to the AFL and NFL teams each year, which offered Triggs the opportunity to meet and care for many of football's greatest players at that time. He also worked for the WFL's California Suns and the California Surf soccer team. He was appointed commissioner for the 1984 US Olympic Wrestling Team and physician to the US Olympic Ski Team training at Sun Valley, Idaho that same year. He also had the honor of being the team physician for the US Open and Masters Golf Tournament.

Sometimes, as a way of cutting costs, opposing teams didn't bring their own physicians, so he cared for them as well. Down on the field, he often found himself in challenging, one-of-a-kind situations that required quick thinking in the face of severe trauma. In one such instance, after a kickoff with the Rams on offense, Dr. Joe heard screaming and rushed toward an opponent playing for the Oakland Raiders. While attempting a tackle, his upper body had been grabbed by a Rams defender and twisted around backward while his feet remained planted, breaking both his ankles as he stood in place. In another memorable case, during an Angels game, Dr. Joe was summoned by Joe DiMaggio, at that time a batting coach for the Oakland team. DiMaggio was experiencing chest pains. After being examined, he wanted to pay Dr. Joe for his services, but Triggs refused and accepted a signed baseball for his son instead.

As a result of his work for professional sports teams, Joe Triggs has been fortunate to know and meet many celebrated athletes like the Fearsome Foursome and Nolan Ryan; entertainers such as Jim Nabors, Perry Como, and Bob Hope; and even four presidents. But what stands out about Joe Triggs is how caring he is. "What's guided me in my life," he told MLRA, "is to help people. I loved medicine. I love helping you. It made me feel good to help you feel good."

Dr. Joe retired from medicine in 1988 after a severe heart attack. By that time, he was married to his current wife, Doane, known to many in the Mauna Lani community for her work as president of the Mauna Lani Terrace Association Board and as a member of the MLRA board. She also served as co-chair of five major fund-raising galas for North Hawaii Community Hospital (NHCH).

The couple met in 1974 on a disastrous blind date set up by the wives of football players Marlin McKeever and Joe Scibelli. Despite getting off to a rocky start and not meeting again for months thereafter, Joe and Doane have now been happily married for 38 years. In 1990, they sold their home in Newport Beach, California and moved to a condominium at Mauna Lani Terrace, at that time one of only two residential communities at Mauna Lani, along with Mauna Lani Point. They chose their home at Mauna Lani Terrace for its proximity to the fishponds and the peace and quiet. "We just feel like the luckiest people in the world to live here," says Doane. "It's a very special resort, a very special property."

Upon moving to Hawaii, and having helped start two hospitals in California, Triggs jumped in to help his former neighbor, Earl Bakken, raise money as a board member for NHCH. Bakken, who honored Joe with a Mission Medallion, says Joe quipped that people ran away when they saw him on the golf course, afraid he was going to approach them for money. "I'm sure he was joking," says Bakken, "because I don't think anyone would or could have walked away from Joe. He's just that magnetic."

He also helped to start and was on the Board of the former Kawaihae Transitional Housing (since moved to Kona), which was close to his heart. He told MLRA, "I used to love it. I would get people from here at the resort to cook a turkey at Thanksgiving and bring it to Transitional Housing, and I would carve it. It was really nice to see these people get a new life."

Doane says, with fondness, that whomever he meets—from the valet parking his car to the waitress in a restaurant, or to the governor of the state—"Joe has the ability to make everybody feel like they are his very best friend."



Dr. Joe and Doane Triggs

— By Gillian Culff