

ANN LIGUORI

Sports radio and television personality, entrepreneur, philanthropist, author and golf enthusiast

STORY BY MAUREEN TRAXLER • PHOTOS BY JEAN SKIDGEL

Like Christiane Amanpour and Maria Bartiromo who have both graced the cover of *Networking*® magazine and paved the way for women in their respective fields, Ann Liguori has led the way in the world of sports broadcasting. Throughout her 20-year career, she has worked in three mediums—radio, television and print—simultaneously.

Liguori built her reputation as a credible sports correspondent and producer, and became the go-to person with her weekly talk show, *Hey Liguori, What's the Story?*, which aired on WFAN 660AM, the first radio station to change to an all-sports format. She was known for the ease with which she engaged her callers, giving them time to chat and voice their opinions. She continues today to be the station's golf and tennis correspondent, airing "on location" at such events as The Masters, the U.S. Open, PGA Championships, the U.S. Tennis Open and special competitions, including the Ryder Cup in Scotland, Solheim Cup for professional women golfers, and the Olympics.

"Life's been a mix of hard work, challenges, and incredible opportunities. I've been blessed that I can pursue my passions — covering sports, interviewing fascinating personalities, golfing throughout the world, and helping others."

Liguori is highly regarded for her groundbreaking interviews with top names in sports. She brought these interviews to viewers and sports fans on her sports talk show, *Sports interview with Ann Liguori*, the longest-running cable sport show owned, hosted and produced by a woman through her company, Ann Liguori Productions. She owns an extensive library of her award-winning interview shows with sports legends like Mickey Mantle, Ted Williams, Wilt Chamberlain, Sam Snead, Hank Aaron and Billie Jean King.

She became the first woman to host and produce her own weekly, prime-time series, *Conversations with Ann Liguori*, on The Golf Channel, newly launched in 1995 by co-founder Arnold Palmer. These "conversations" took place with celebrities in sports, music, Hollywood and business—including Matthew McConaughey, Kevin Costner, Sylvester Stallone, Celine Dion, Vince Gill, Smokey Robinson and Joe Pesci, to name a few—while Liguori golfed with them on courses around the country.

Although Liguori always considered herself an athlete—competing in junior tennis tournaments as a youngster in Ohio and earning 16 Varsity Letters in high school—golf was not one of her original sports. But as her popularity grew among golfers, she began to receive attractive invitations to play in celebrity golf tournaments, often as the only woman at the event. "You definitely want to bring your A-game to these types of tournaments," she emphasizes in an interview with *Networking*® magazine.

With the determination of any athlete, Liguori set out not only to learn the game, but also to become good enough to compete in high-profile tournaments. She recalls playing in the Frank Sinatra Celebrity Tournament, Kathryn Crosby's Celebrity Tourney, Alice Cooper's Celebrity Tournament, and in 2011, she was the fourth female celebrity to play in the 54-year history of the Bob Hope Classic. In a nod to her intriguing, in-depth interviews, Liguori has been referred to as the "Barbara Walters of the Country Club set."

Career blossoms in New York

A graduate of the University of South Florida, Liguori started her career on the "main stage," New York City, when she won a fellowship from the International Radio and TV Society. "It was difficult going out on my own in the city and trying to afford to live there, while putting a broadcasting career together," says Liguori. "It would have been easier to go back to Ohio and come up with Plan B. And a challenge it was for a young lady, born and raised in Ohio, to "make it" in the old boys' network of sports reporting. The back-story is two-fold.

When Liguori was three-years old, her mom watched a daily television show that featured Ruth Lyons, an early pioneer in the talk show genre. Liguori recalls Lyons interviewing "these incredible people." "She made a huge impression on me and I wanted to interview people from the first time I saw this woman." As a youngster, Liguori would even role play interviewing family members and classmates.

Secondly, Liguori says, "When I was growing up, our family's yard was where

the kids would come for a pick-up game. It was always all the boys and me, and often I would be the first to be picked for a team." In high school, she played volleyball in the fall, basketball in the winter and went from girls track to the boys' tennis team in the spring.

"Sports teaches young people how to compete, how to win, how to deal with losing, how to be a good sport," states Liguori. "It also teaches organization; how to be both mentally and physically strong. These are skills you take with you for the rest of your life." She continues, "You also learn confidence; that fearlessness that comes with being an athlete, competing and putting yourself on the line, dealing with nerves, and knowing that no matter what the challenges are, you are going to overcome."

While her training as an athlete helped her pursue her dreams and goals, Liguori adds, "I always wanted to advance based on my knowledge, work ethic and experiences. You have to be knowledgeable or you can't thrive in the sports business."

Sports coverage and more

In addition to WFAN, Liguori continues as golf and tennis correspondent for CBS Sports Radio Network. She has covered six Olympics (summer and winter games) for the radio network rights' holders as talk show host, reporter and play-by-play commentator. She covers about a dozen major sports events, on location, throughout the year. She also produces and hosts her Sports interview show, which airs on Saturdays at 9 a.m. on WPPB 88.3FM and peconicpublicbroadcasting.org. And she's an "ambassador" for Cross Golf Apparel, now distributing in the United States.

Liguori writes for *Hamptons* magazine (look for her cover story on golf legend Raymond Floyd and former Mayor Rudy Giuliani in the Labor Day issue), and does a weekly column for CBS Sports online. In addition, she is the author of *A Passion for Golf, Celebrity Musings about the Game*, and is working on a second book, featuring excerpts of interviews with various sports legends.

Begins a Foundation

Liguori experienced the passing of her father from cancer and brother from leukemia during and just following her college days. In 1998, she organized and began hosting a golf classic, held on Long Island's East End, for the American Cancer Society. Six years ago, she formed the Ann Liguori Foundation and in May 2014, a full complement of 116 avid golfers took part in the Ann Liguori Foundation Charity Golf Classic, held at the prestigious Friar's Head in Baiting Hollow, LI.

The Foundation's mission is to raise money and awareness for organizations that focus on cancer prevention, research and care, and health and wellness. While her golf tournament continues to support the American Cancer Society, Liguori says, "The Foundation gives us the flexibility to help other efforts like St. Jude's Hospital and Kids Need More, an annual camp on Shelter Island for children with cancer and their siblings." Over the past 16 years, Liguori estimates that she and the dedicated volunteers of her organization have raised approximately \$1.5 million in support of cancer research and prevention and the care of cancer patients and their families.

The Foundation brought the Healthy Children Healthy Futures program to Southampton Middle School, as part of its mission to educate people about good nutrition and incorporating fitness into their daily lives. "Young people have to be continuously

educated about the importance of good nutrition and regular exercise because they are bombarded with all kinds of opportunities not to be active through the use of Internet, video games and social media. It's very easy for many to spend too much time texting and being on their phones and computers," stresses Liguori.

Always reaching out to new interests, Liguori is delighted to be helping another not-for-profit, Independent Group Home Living (IGHL), which provides services for individuals who are developmentally disabled. "I help get publicity for many of their amazing programs, and connect the organization with various leaders in the community, entertainment and the sports and business worlds," she adds. She's also a media/marketing consultant for Travers & Associates and Platinum Maintenance.

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Ann Liguori at The Masters 2013

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