

Volunteering at the Bill Sugra Memorial Golf Tournament is rather like spending the day with friends you have yet to meet. So many people gathered for the same purpose – raising money for those in need in memory of the young man who lost his life in the Twin Towers on 9/11 – automatically creates a certain bond.

And a bond that lingers, as many volunteers and golfers give of their time and talent each year at the tournament held at Green Pond Country Club, Bethlehem Township. This year's 12th annual event on Aug. 23 drew 142 golfers to the greens for a great cause – and 100 of those golfers were teeing off for the 12th year.

“We count the tags on the bags. It brings home that it's been so long,” said Ed Mangold of Reading, referring to the 12 tags he and his friends have on their golf bags. Each one ticks off another year past Sept. 11, 2001.

The fund gave **\$54,250** to the needy and disadvantaged in 2013, raising the total to **\$397,000** dispersed to worthwhile organizations and individuals in the past 12 years. Surely, Sugra's spirit of giving lives on.

Sugra, 30, was a network administrator in Cantor Fitzgerald's eSpeed division on the 103rd floor of the World Trade Center when he lost his life on one of America's darkest days.

The golf tournament is the lynchpin of fundraising for the Bill Sugra Memorial Fund launched by his family, parents Bill and El Sugra and sister Tracy Sell. The Sugras have been parishioners of St. Thomas More, Allentown since 1973.

The fund began when students at St. Thomas More School – of which Sugra was alum – raised \$75,000 to assist with Sugra's medical expenses with the hope he'd be found alive.

said Bill and El Sugra

Sugra and Mangold met as students at Allentown Central Catholic High School (ACCHS), and Sugra was best man when Mangold got married; Mangold's wife, Jenn, volunteers at the tournament.

Another way the Mangolds mark the passing years is through their son Nicholas, who was born months before Sept. 11, 2001. Sugra was at the baptism.

Ed and Jenn Mangold were there with Greg Bealer of New Tripoli, a Whitehall police officer who was Sugra's roommate at Indiana University of Pennsylvania (IUP); and Mike Sophy of Doylestown, a friend and classmate of Sugra and Mangold at ACCHS.

“It's nice to see the same people every year. We haven't missed one,” Sophy said of their group, who enjoy participating in the day together, though it is against a bittersweet backdrop.

They miss their friend.

“It's nice to all get together. We do that as much as we can, but this is a definite date every year,” Sophy said.

And everyone agreed it was great to see Bill and El Sugra. Their son's friends frequently hung out at their Salisbury Township home in high school and college, and the couple always made them feel so comfortable they referred to it as their “home away from home.” So much so they'd pop into visit Sugra's parents even if he wasn't there.

“They always made us feel welcome, and we always had good fun,” Sophy said.

“It's like he's there,” Jenn Mangold said of Sugra as she reflected how he's weaved into so many memories.

Sophy added he likes that the money raised by the tournament stays local. “You know where it's going.”

Volunteers Donna Hersch and Maureen Steward also feel a bond to the Sugra's through a different avenue; both taught with El Sugra at Muhlenberg Elementary School, Allentown and have been volunteering at the tournament for four or five years.

"We were together at school on Sept. 11," Hersch recalled.

Hersch and Steward said, "There was a lot of bonding at school after that day," even in something as simple as making meals for the Sugra family." Like El Sugra, both are now retired.

"The tournament is a good thing, it's brought El some peace. They give so much to charity to help others. That's what it's all about," Hersch said.

"It's nice to see the same people return each year," Steward said. That's what Hersch and Steward do, having laughs along the way as they served lunch to hungry golfers before the shotgun start at noon. Other volunteers worked the grill, registered golfers ... anything that needed to be done to help the day flow smoothly.

While volunteering at the putting contest, Jane Sonne, who teaches second grade at Muhlenberg Elementary School, recalled teaching many years with El Sugra. "We became best friends. She's a wonderful lady with a loving heart and a great family." Sonne, who has volunteered each year except the first, was also teaching with Sugra on that fateful day 12 years ago.

"We knew Billy since he was born, we've been friends with the Sugras for 40 years," said Carol Collins of she and her husband Chuck. She was volunteering with Linda Sell at the putting contest as she said, "This is the most rewarding thing I do all year."

"It gives you such a wonderful feeling knowing that more than \$397,000 has been given in Billy's name in the area to people who need it," Collins said.

She also highlighted the "fabulous volunteers and wonderful employees of Green Pond," noting this year the Green Pond staff decided to place American flags at the putting contest because they felt it they were so appropriate for this tournament.

Linda Sell, Tracy Sell's mother-in-law, said she began volunteering when Tracy and her son Steve began dating eight or nine years ago. "It's fabulous that 142 golfers came to give their time and money to support this," Sell said. Both Collins and Linda Sell were especially touched that 100 golfers were there for the 12th consecutive year.

This year's Platinum Sponsors Plumbers Local 690, Jim and Lynne Finnegan, Scott Dealerships, actors Christine Taylor and Ben Stiller and Gillespie Printing, which donates all the printing for the tournament. Taylor went to St. Thomas More School and ACCHS with Sugra.

The tournament began with kids from Embrace Your Dreams and The First Tee of the Lehigh Valley at the Boys and Girls Club of Easton and Willowbrook Golf Course receiving tips from golf instructors before the children teed off at 8 a.m.

Embrace Your Dreams, through "First Tee of Willowbrook" and "First Tee of Lehigh Valley," provides golf instruction and teaches life skills. At lunchtime, the children received a certificate and a gift bag.

"We had 27 kids today with First Tee," El Sugra said with a smile. "We had a great turnout, it's wonderful. It's nice to see a lot of kids repeat each year."

El Sugra noted one family has five girls who participate in First Tee, and the mother has voiced interest in volunteering.

The event concluded with a reception/silent auction and dinner at 5 p.m. Honorary chairs of the tournament have included Father Dan Gambet, president emeritus of DeSales University, Center Valley (nine years); Tony Muir (nine years), Mimi Griffin (third year), Mark Lieberman (fourth year) and Mike Guman (first year).

Some of the past grant recipients include Embrace Your Dreams; Boy's and Girl's Club of Allentown; Lehigh County Conference of Churches; Sacred Heart Hospital, Allentown; Catholic Charities, Diocese of Allentown; Mercy Special Learning Center, Allentown; Camelot for Children, Allentown; the Eastern Pennsylvania Down Syndrome Center; Greater Lehigh Valley Muscular Dystrophy Association; William Allen Chorale of Allen High School; Allentown Ecumenical Food Bank; Meals on Wheels of Lehigh County, Inc.; and Meals on Wheels of Northampton County.