

## LINKS PLAYERS INTERNATIONAL

# Ministry History

Links Players International began as the Links Letter, a brief two-color newsletter, produced as an outreach tool by group of PGA Tour professionals beginning in 1980. The Links Letter was sent free to all who asked for it. In the early 1980s, through the work of Jim Hiskey and Tom Flory, the Links Letter became the production of Links Fellowship, an outgrowth of the Fellowship ministries in Washington, D.C. The primary purpose of the Links Letter remained to broadcast the testimonies of Tour players with the hope of planting seeds of faith in readers, particularly golfers.

A secondary ministry of Links Fellowship became to establish local groups of believers associated with golf throughout the country. To this end, Jim Hiskey traveled extensively, helping men and women start such groups, called Links Fellowships. The familiar LINKS acronym/mission was built to encourage and guide these groups. Successful national conferences were held.

Additionally, Links Fellowship produced new resources, including tracts and video tapes. Over time, the Links Letter mailing list grew to as many as 60,000.

By the mid-1990s, the Links Letter and Links Fellowship began to experience financial shortfalls. In the fall of 1997, the Links Letter ceased publication, and the Links Fellowship office was unable to support consistently the many local Links Fellowships.

In 1999, Tom Flory, on behalf of Links Fellowship, approached College Golf Fellowship about the possibility of taking over publication of the Links Letter. College Golf Fellowship agreed to take over the Links Letter and other Links activities beginning in 2000. A new organization, named Links Players International, was formed. Ken Hopper was hired as CEO, and Jeff Hopper was hired as Media Director. Rik Massengale moved from director of CGF to president of LPI.

CGF restarted the Links Letter on a subscription basis in April 2000 with a cover story about Casey Martin. The Links Letter was published bi-monthly until 2005, when it became an annual publication with as many as 35,000 copies given away for outreach purposes each year. In 2010, the Links Letter was renamed the Links Players Magazine to coincide with the name of the ministry.

In mid-2000, Links Players established [www.linksplayers.com](http://www.linksplayers.com). The Web site is easily the most extensive of its kind, featuring more than 60 player profiles and 500 archived devotions. The Web site offers several resources newly produced since the LPI formation, including tracts, Bible studies and online books.

In fall of 2000, LPI started the Links Daily Devotional, posted to the Web site. In late January 2001, the Daily Devotional began dissemination via e-mail with 70 readers. Today, nearly 3,000 golfers receive the Daily Devotional via e-mail.

In August 2002, the Links Players board decided it would be in the best interest of College Golf Fellowship and LPI to operate separately and focus on their different audiences. The decision, though difficult at the time, proved to be just right for the health of both organizations. Both thrive today, CGF among male collegiate golfers and LPI among adults in and around clubs and courses.

In February 2003, Jeff Hopper was named executive director of Links Players and the ministry operated in a lean fashion, focusing on resource development.

In the ensuing years, Links Players advanced its commitment to encouraging and supporting the establishment of local Links Fellowships. To this end, former PGA Tour player Randy Wolff was hired in 2005 as Director of Links Fellowships. When other regional directors were added—Tom Gray in the Southeast and LPI national board member Dereck Wong in the Southwest—the warm weather regions of the United States were covered, with men and women aided in their Fellowship activities.

In 2007, Links Players national board member Jeffrey Cranford, who was a leader in country club ministries in the Coachella Valley (Palm Springs area) of California, was named president of Links Players. As an accomplished professional golfer, Jeffrey's "inside status" gave him a particularly compelling voice among golfers, and he became the visionary leader of Links Players and of Links Fellowships everywhere.

In 2010, Josh Nelson was hired to replace Tom Gray, who had moved to local pastoral ministry, as the Southeast region director.

After all these years, founder Jim Hiskey remains active with Links Players, writing monthly for the Daily Devotional. He is a willing ambassador for Jesus internationally, often using golf as the vehicle of his meeting with others.

Today, Links Players sees itself strategically placed in the kingdom work of God, with expertise among golfers, as well as among the millions of Baby Boomers who are moving into retirement at this time, because so many of them recreate on golf courses. The resources we create are increasingly focused on this combination of audiences. We look forward to the work God has for us each day and into the years to come.