

# meet the pro

## Abby Messick River Marsh Golf Course

Interviewed by: Delaney Cha



### How long have you been playing golf?

I've been playing golf since I was 8 years old. The first time I played was at Green Hill Country Club. My aunt and uncle were members there, and I would tag along with her sometimes. I would play with them over the summer and one day my aunt bought me a putter and a 9-iron out of the loose club barrel (which I really think was the lost and found) and I started playing then. I loved it. I played in high school at Cambridge South Dorchester and now here we are. I never would have thought that we would have such an amazing golf resort right here in Cambridge. And it's interesting, I'm the third generation in my family to work on this property. When this land used to be the hospital, my grandparents were nurses, my dad was a rehab therapist, and my mom was a mental health nurse. She worked with the health department which is now our hole # 12.

### What made you interested in the sport/who influenced you?

Definitely my family. I love spending time with family, and I love sports. I played tennis growing up and even before that I loved individual sports, and that's exactly what golf is. Golf makes you think so much. But it was mainly family. The ease of having someone to play with.

### Favorite course that you've played?

A lot comes to mind for a lot of different reasons. My favorite courses are all so different. I would say Kapalua Golf Course in Hawaii is beautiful because Hawaii is just so lovely and it was a thrill to play there. I also really love Aviara which is at a Hyatt Resort in Carlsbad, California. I also really enjoyed Pinehurst No. 2. But honestly, even if it's biased to say, I really like River Marsh because it just feels like home. It's a lot of fun and it can be a very different golf course depending on which tees you play from. But mainly by it being my home course. Rum Pointe is also a favorite on the shore. I think it's great and I love everything about it.

### How did you get your LPGA Certification?

I got it through the LPGA. I was working here for 6 years. I came to the property to teach tennis, as I was a certified tennis instructor. I was working in Salisbury and started thinking about moving south and they built the resort. I knew they were building tennis courts and I was interested in working for a global corporation, to have the opportunity to move around. When I came in to meet with someone about the job, there was no one yet for tennis, so I met the golf director at the time. We hit it off and he asked me to come work at the golf division until tennis got figured out. Now, 21 years later, here we are. But I love it, I love everything about the environment, I love the game obviously but I really enjoy the people aspect of it.

**What is something you think the industry could do better to expand women's interest in the sport?**

I like what is happening with the handicaps next year, with the short-hole option or the 9-hole option. I like that we are doing something to make the game more inclusive because a lot of ladies have struggled to develop a valid, verified handicap when they play 9-hole rounds that is true to an 18-hole golf course, so I think that's a great step. I just think inclusivity is important. Golf has carried this stigma of 'it's going to be really long, it's going to be really hard, it's going to be...' and it is all of those things; it is challenging, don't get me wrong. But it should be open to everybody. It's a great sport for ladies, for sure a great sport for young women who can play the game. You'll play it for the rest of your life. It'll carry you a long way in business. A lot of business deals are made on the golf course. I've read in the past two or so years that the most underutilized scholarship is in women's golf, which makes you think, 'Wow! That's a great opportunity for a young lady to take advantage of.' Opening up the door and showing people that it isn't all about a dress code, it isn't about the brand of clubs you play with. It doesn't always have to be an expensive sport. It just has to be fun. One of the things that we do here, and I'm very proud of it because it's been happening for a long time, is that we do a 4-hole loop program where it's the first four holes of the golf course. It dials it back, making it a little easier. It isn't 18-holes and it isn't as daunting. This golf course is a resort course and it is a lady-friendly course. The forward tees are nice, the fairways are large and open. It has the opportunity to make yourself feel good. What we watch on TV isn't what we see out here every day.

**What is the most impactful lesson that you've learned through your time in the industry?**

I think it's important to remember when you were put in that role. I always thought to myself, my assistant today won't work a 60-hour work week. It's very different now, times have changed. When I worked those longer hours, when I worked those shifts, when I came to work and I didn't know when I might leave, granted this was 20 years ago, I knew I never wanted to be that boss who then did the same thing because it happened to me. I try to make a concerted effort to make sure our team rotates holidays, rotates days off, and gets their requests. We try to stick to a 40-45 hour work week, even during the busy season, and we really try to take advantage of our time off during a slower time. We try to take advantage of slower days and be mindful of that. I think the potential for burnout and what the burnout of being in the golf industry can do to you is a threat to really great potential colleagues. I find that work-life balance is really important and I try to treat my team the way that I would want to be treated. Hyatt really does a great job of supporting that balance for us as well.

**What's your vision for River Marsh over the next few years?**

In my mind, I would like to see us adding a few more simulators, which fully dedicates more time to year round golf. This year, we have a couple of big renovations happening. Next summer, we're turning over the fairways which are really big and impactful for both the course and the environment. For me, my hope is we continue to drive rounds of golf, in high volumes while keeping in mind the resort component of relaxation and fun.