Courtland Keyes, Assistant Golf Professional, Marshwood

“I came here to have an impact and be a part of something special at The Landings Club”

Courtland Keyes took his first swings with a golf club at the age of 3. He began competing around his hometown of Lafayette, Ind. at the age of 10. By the time he was a teenager, he was playing alongside his famous father at celebrity golf tournaments around the country.

Yes, what you’ve heard rumored is true. Courtland’s father was the late Leroy Keyes, the College Football Hall of Fame running back and defensive back for the Purdue Boilermakers who finished third in the voting for the Heisman Trophy in 1967 and second in 1968, his senior year. He then had a brief career in the National Football League with the Philadelphia Eagles and Kansas City Chiefs before injuries forced him to retire.

Courtland admires what his dad did on the football field, but he’s equally proud of what he did off it, both in college and after retiring, to create opportunities for other African Americans. Leroy Keyes attended segregated schools in Newport News, Va. and went to Purdue on an athletic scholarship. He put that scholarship at risk by participating in several demonstrations to call attention to the unequal treatment of African Americans on campus. After football, he spent 16 years addressing desegregation issues in the Philadelphia Public Schools before returning to Purdue as a coach and then an assistant with the football program.

In Philadelphia, the elder Keyes also worked with troubled youths and, back at Purdue, mentored many athletes. “He had a big impact not only on my life, but on countless others,” Courtland said.

Courtland was born in 1997 and grew up idolizing Tiger Woods, both for his prowess as a golfer and because of how his success inspired a broader range of people to take up the sport.

“I will never have the great impact on the world that Tiger has had as a player,” Courtland said, “but I try to go out and do my job and make the game as accessible, enjoyable, and competitive as I can in my community.”

Like his dad, Courtland played football early on but switched to golf and basketball in high school. He attended Purdue but didn’t play college golf. He majored in hospitality and tourism, but knew he wanted to be involved in the golf industry. If it wasn’t as a tour player, he said, he wanted to be a club pro or a coach. “I just knew I wanted to be in the business and be at a golf course,” he said.

His first position as a golf professional was at the Robert Trent Jones course in Huntsville, Ala. He had completed the playing test that's a prerequisite to becoming a PGA professional, and passed the written test that's required for entry into the Professional Golf Management program soon after coming to The Landings Golf & Athletic Club last fall. He is now taking classes toward status as a full-fledged pro.

He was impressed that The Landings Golf & Athletic Club had a commitment to diversity, and already had two other African American assistant pros, Kobe Freshwater and Alyssa Clements. (Alyssa left earlier this year to prepare for attending medical school.)

He said he was fortunate to have the means to play golf when he was young. Too many minorities, he said, feel like golf is not for them. He hopes to change that and show that golf, in general, and The Landings Golf & Athletic Club, specifically, is welcoming to all. "It's humbling to be in this position, but I also know I have to push forward to get more people coming behind me, playing the game."

Courtland loves to work with children and, this summer, he was one of the pros who taught in youth camps The Landings Golf & Athletic Club offers, starting with 4-year-olds. He also will work with area schools through a program called Golf Squad, based at Pinehurst, which arranges for golf pros to teach in afterschool programs.

Outside of golf, Courtland enjoys playing with his 2-year-old cockapoo, watching sports, and cooking all kinds of food, especially the Cajun and Southern dishes he enjoyed as a child. He's also spending as much time as possible with his wife, Sierra, who he married in a sunrise ceremony Aug. 6 on the beach at Tybee Island.

"One of Sierra's least favorite sayings of mine is that I didn't come to this island to sit on the couch. Every day I have a chance to make somebody's day better, it makes my day better. I came here to have an impact and be a part of something special at The Landings Club."

By Rick Colvin, a member whose career as a journalist included 12 years with the Los Angeles Times.