

A passion for golf keeps Berea's Walter Dietz on the fairways -- despite being unable to see them

by [Tim Rogers/Plain Dealer Reporter](#)

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Even though Walter Dietz can't see his ball head toward the green, his love for golf keeps him on the course despite his blindness. The Berea resident recently competed in the Corcoran Cup for blind players in Westchester County, N.Y.

CLEVELAND, Ohio -- Walter Dietz remembers the day he returned to golf.

More than 30 years ago, his eyesight had begun to fail, but he was still capable of watching people play the game he had grown up with. He attended the United States Blind Golfers Association national tournament at Acacia Country Club as a spectator and came away convinced he could return.

"I watched those people play that day and I said to myself, 'If they can do it, so can I,'" said Dietz, who began playing golf around age 10, mostly because his father was the greens superintendent at Manakiki Golf Course. "I had gotten away from the game for many of the reasons many people do and my sight was failing. So, I sold my clubs, got married, had kids, began a career. Then I went to the USBGA tournament."

Not only did Dietz return to the game, he has become one of the country's top visually-impaired players.

With the assistance of guide Paul Tomashefski, at right, Walter Dietz lines up a putt at Ironwood Golf Course in Hinckley.

This past weekend he was one of 14 players nationally to play in the Corcoran Cup, regarded as the Masters of blind golf. It marked the 21st time he has qualified for the event, and he finished 12th.

"I've finished second once and third a few times, but I've never been able to win," said Dietz, an Ohio State graduate who worked as a rehabilitation supervisor at the Ohio Bureau of Services for the Visually Impaired. "There are some very good players there."

The event, sponsored by the Guiding Eyes for the Blind, was held at Mount Kisco Country Club, in Westchester County, N.Y. It is 18 holes, stroke play. The Guiding Eyes for the Blind is one of the foremost guide dog schools in the country. Each blind golfer has a coach who aids in club selection, alignment and distances. John Fazio has been Dietz's coach for years and accompanied him to New York.



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purred by what he was able to see at the USBGA tournament, Dietz returned to the game with the help of a sight coach. He returned to Manakiki, the layout in Willoughby Hills where he had caddied and helped his father cut grass and plant trees.

"I remember when I was very young I helped my dad plant some pine trees along one of the fairways," said Dietz, who now lives in Berea with Joan, his wife of 50 years. "When I went back to Manakiki for the first time many years later, don't you know I hit my drive into those darned pine trees?"

Dietz marked his return to golf in a big way. On that first day back he made a hole-in-one on Manakiki's seventh hole. He chipped in for par from behind the green on the 13th hole and chipped in from behind the green on the closing hole. He said he usually shoots around 100.

Dietz, 76, plays regularly at courses such as Ironwood, Brunswick Hills, Bunker Hill and North Olmsted. He is the only blind golfer in the **North Royalton Lions** League, which meets weekly at Ironwood on Thursdays.