

Good People: Hard Work, Dedication Make Tourneys Successful

BY HOWARD WARD: GOLF WRITER 9/12/2007

It may take a village to raise a child, but it takes a lot of good people to put on a successful golf tournament.

Two tournaments held last week offer shining examples of this. The Moore County Men's Amateur and the Moore Buddies Rigsby Cup Charity tournament are wonderful examples of what a difference people working together for a good cause can make.

It was only a couple of years ago that the Moore Amateur almost died. Just weeks before the dates when the tournament was normally held, no one even knew if there was going to be one.

"People would come into my store and ask, 'Do you know where the Men's Amateur is being held this year?,' Robert's Golf Shop owner Bob Burwell recalls. "I didn't know and neither did anyone else, because nothing had been planned."

So Burwell got busy. He and Dick Wilson rounded up some friends willing to put in some time and work, and they saved the men's event.

When it was held at the Country Club of Whispering Pines last weekend, a full field of 120 golfers competed, despite a heat index exceeding 100 degrees.

OK, one guy had a last-minute conflict and didn't play, but the message was clear. Planning, promotion and promises kept equal success in putting on a golf tournament.

The Moore Amateur isn't just about coming out and playing a couple of competitive rounds of golf anymore, either.

Burwell is one of the most vigorous supporters of The First Tee of the Sandhills, and he and the tournament committee have rounded up sponsors and gotten cooperation from the host golf clubs to the point that \$2,000 was raised for the local chapter over the weekend.

"I became the tournament chairman by default," Burwell said. "It just wasn't going to happen two years ago. But we put it together in six weeks that year."

Burwell does not seek credit for his work, although anyone connected with The First Tee Program will tell you that he is a major factor in making the Sandhills chapter one of the most successful in the state, if not the entire country.

"Dick (Wilson) does all the work," Burwell said of the men's amateur. "He and James Dockery handled all the details."

Wilson shuns credit, too.

"It's a lot more than just one or two people," he said. "Michael McDonald does all the data entry for the participant database and interfaces with Lynne Peterson at The Pilot regarding all Web issues. He's also our photographer at the event.

"James Dockery does most of the information dissemination with the posters to golf courses and businesses in the area. James also did the stuffing of golf information into the 120 golfer tee bags that was initially provided by the Moore County Visitors Center.

"James Manninen gets involved during the weekend with scoring assistance, score posting and general help with the course staff. It's a team effort."

One of the things that has boosted participation is allowing nonresidents of Moore County to compete. That started last year, and word is spreading that this is a quality event.

"We had 102 players last year and 120 this time," Burwell said. "If we get up to 150 players, we'll have to use two courses or have morning and afternoon starts. We were right on the edge of having to split this year."

Danny Kirby, the executive director of The First Tee of the Sandhills, was a willing worker at the event, collecting scorecards and double checking the numbers for the players before they were posted.

"We appreciate the work that all these people do," Kirby said. "The First Tee has to have donations to survive, and this gives us money and exposure."

Bob Rigsby was hobbling around The Pit Golf Links on Saturday with a bum leg and a huge smile. He was limping because of a freak accident with the door of his truck, and he was smiling because his pet project, Moore Buddies, was getting another needed boost from the annual tournament.

"We've got 53 teams this year," he said. "This is largest field ever. Moore Buddies is a hugging, hand-shaking outfit and we're all having a good time."

Davis Clark, whose companies -- Mac's Food Stores and McNeill Oil and Propane -- are major sponsors, served as chairman for the early events.

"It got to be such a big deal, we brought Bob in," Clark said. "One reason we're so successful is that everything we do is for the kids. We're not a big trophy event, but we get a lot of people to play every year because they know it's for a good cause. We've raised well over \$200,000 for the Moore Buddies Program over the years.

One of the feel-good stories from the program is about a young girl whose life was changed by it.

"When she came into the program, she was 13 years old and pregnant," Rigsby said. "Now she's graduated from UNC-Pembroke with a 4.0 average, married and getting ready to attend law school. She'll make it, too."

Clark nodded. "That could have been a horror story," he said.

Good people for good causes. As Rigsby said of the cooperation the Moore Buddies tournament gets from vendors, sponsors and participants, "It's a win-win. Nobody loses."

The golfers certainly don't. They play the renowned Pit Links and compete for prizes for \$75. And before they tee off, they're given a chance of winning a raffle prize and gift boxes so large that they have to be trucked to the course. The contents of the boxes alone are worth much more than the entry fee.

"Everything here is donated," Rigsby said. "One guy called a few weeks ago and asked, 'When's your tournament? My wife's running out of soap.'"

"It's amazing how this has all happened. It's kind of got a life of its own now. I'm just hanging on."