

Ferncroft Jr. Golf
Scholarship Program

Taking a New Swing at a Timeless Tradition



BY PAUL SIMPSON

When Affinity Golf Management acquired Ferncroft Country Club in 2006, managing director Damon DeVito wanted to invest in the community by giving back to the area's youth as part of the club's facelift - and what better way than teaching kids how to golf. DeVito had been involved with one-day golf clinics in the past but felt that, while these events whet the appetite, they offer no follow-through for kids interested in learning more about the sport. DeVito envisioned a program that would give a handful of kids full exposure to golf.

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"I wanted the experience to be personal," says DeVito. "The kids would be members, not guests. They could use all the resources available to other members, and they would have all the same behavioral expectations."

DeVito approached the Ferncroft's golf pro, Phil Leiss, with the idea, and Leiss loved it. With a driving range, putting green, practice bunkers, and a little-used 7-hole par-3 course, the facilities were perfect for the concept.

After he got buy-in from Leiss, DeVito had one more hurdle to clear. He needed Ferncroft's members to sign on in order to make the junior scholarship program a reality. DeVito was delighted that the club members fully embraced the program when approached.

In addition to the ideal facilities and membership support, Leiss credits Celebrity Marketing, Inc. (CMI) for helping to make the program. CMI provides



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celebrity support during the Ferncroft Jr. Golf Classic, a fundraising tournament that pairs golfers with a celebrity for a day of golf and a banquet that follows. The 2008 tournament featured Boston Bruins players Phil Kessel, Dennis Wideman, Marc Savard, and Tim Thomas. Mark Mowers of the Anaheim Ducks, and Brandon Bochenski of the Nashville Predators also participated. Former Boston Bruins defenseman, Don Sweeney, served as the tournament's host.

"The commitment from Affinity Golf Management, the Ferncroft members and staff, coupled with the financial support from title sponsor, Eastern Propane, has enabled the Ferncroft Jr. Golf Scholarship Program to get off the ground," explains Don Sweeney. "The foundation of this program is to grant kids with access to a wonderful facility as well as, instill the confidence in which to try new experiences. It is my hope that we can continue to grow the program and reach out to more kids."

Last year, four kids joined the Ferncroft Jr. Golf Scholarship Program's inaugural class. Leiss chose them from a pool of applicants, making his selections based on economic need and written essays that conveyed an enthusiasm for the opportunity to learn the game. "The kids received access, instruction and equipment," said Leiss. "We worked around the kids' schedules for the lessons."

Once the program was up and running, Leiss noted how the members reinforced their initial support whenever they ran into the kids at the golf course. "They really go out of their way to say hello, offer

CONTINUED ON PAGE 28



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Ferncroft Jr. Golf Scholarship Program CONTINUED FROM PAGE 27



encouragement, and make the kids feel welcome,” said Leiss. “Sometimes I think the members and staff get as much out of the program as the kids.”

The best indicator of the program’s success in its first year wasn’t found on the course’s greens or fairways, but rather in the words of one participant’s mom at the banquet following the tournament. She told the audience that after she officially adopted her son a few months earlier, she asked him what he’d like to do to celebrate. His answer: “Go hit balls at the Ferncroft.”

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