

PGA PLAYER DEVELOPMENT: PUTTING YOUR RESOURCES TO WORK IN GROWING THE GAME



When Play Golf America was launched in early 2004, it was built upon a simple idea: Make it easier for PGA Professionals to grow the game and their business. Using this concept and feedback from numerous PGA Professionals around the country as a foundation, the PGA Player Development Department has built an evolving series of programs that has touched hundreds of thousands of golfers from all walks of life. In the process, this wide-ranging initiative is serving as an important catalyst to attracting new golfers to the game – and retain existing golfers while continuing to branch out into new areas.

The Play Golf America campaign has come a long way in less than seven years, and the Player Development Department continues to work side-by-side with PGA Professionals in refining and improving the program – and in celebrating its success stories. PGA members are using this flexible assortment of Play Golf America programs and resources to generate customers, drive more rounds and even new members. Some PGA Professionals do this by using pieces of the Play Golf America program to enhance the programs they already have in place at their facilities, while others use Play Golf America programs as a turnkey opportunity to attract new golfers to the game.

To make sure our entire readership understands the many ways Play Golf America can benefit all PGA Professionals, *PGA Magazine* reached out to PGA members from a variety of facility types and asked if they had any questions about Play Golf America. We enlisted the help of PGA Professional and Player Development Director Ron Stepanek to answer the questions, and here's what Ron had to say:

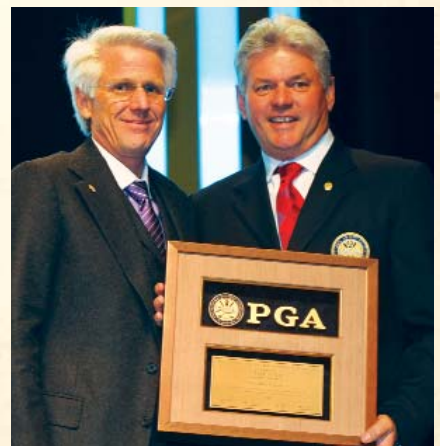
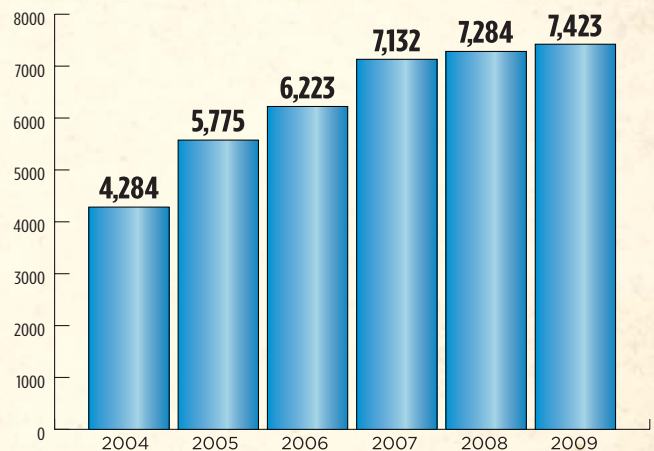
Q: What is Play Golf America?

A: Play Golf America ultimately is a tool for PGA Professionals – regardless of facility type – to pick and choose programs that can help impact their business. There are a wide variety of programs, resources and best practices under the Play Golf America umbrella to help you make money by growing rounds, adding revenue and retaining golfers. That's been the experience of PGA Professionals such as Kyle Heyen, the PGA head professional at Hiwan Golf Club in Evergreen, Colo. The 2009 PGA President's Plaque winner says, **“Play Golf America is one of the greatest initiatives set forth by The PGA. Just think about the impact if PGA Professionals introduced the game to 25 new people each year; the industry would be doing pretty good. If you are not signed up for Play Golf America, you are missing an opportunity.”**

Q: What is the overall strategic plan, and what is the role of PGA Professionals?

A: At its core, Play Golf America focuses on initiatives that are successful in the field. The strategy is to encourage more PGA members to adopt these initiatives through the sharing of best practices. We also use the PlayGolfAmerica.com website as a way to link golf enthusiasts with PGA Professionals and their activities. If you already have similar programs, Play Golf America can augment them. If you don't have player development programs at your facility, Play Golf America is a great way to start. As Bob Baldassari, PGA General Manager of PGA Golf Club in Port St. Lucie, Fla., says, **“For PGA members actively hosting programs, Play Golf America resources are there to help enhance your efforts. For the others, Play Golf America offers a variety of ideas and turnkey options for PGA Professionals to grow the game and prosper.”**

PGA facilities hosting at least one Play Golf America program

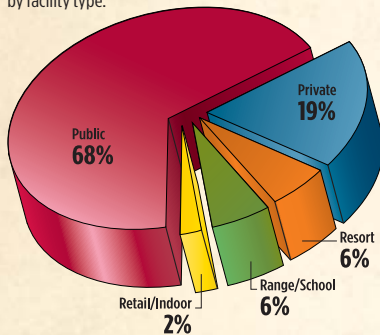


Kyle Heyen (left) accepts 2009 Presidents Plaque from PGA of America President Jim Remy, exemplifying his outstanding efforts in player development.



Get Golf Ready usage by facility type

There are more than 1,400 facilities in the U.S. using Get Golf Ready programs. Here's a look at how they stack up by facility type.



Get Golf Ready gets results

Facilities that are hosting Get Golf Ready programs are seeing strong results. Here are a few of the statistics showing the program's potential:

Participation - PGA Professionals averaged 25 Get Golf Ready students, with nearly all reported as new or former golfers

Meeting Expectations - 96 percent of all Get Golf Ready participants said the program met or exceed their expectations

Retention and Growth - 84 percent of Get Golf Ready participants have been back out to play golf since finishing the program

Diversity - 61 percent of the program participants are women and 25 percent are minorities

Compensation - With an 8:1 student-to-teacher ratio, a PGA Professional can make up to \$160 an hour

Revenue - With 25 participants, a facility has the potential to make nearly \$20,000 in additional revenue from Get Golf Ready

Another vital element to this strategy is the sharing of results. There are 28,000 PGA Professionals working at golf facilities across the country - an extremely valuable asset for the entire industry. The more we as an Association learn what parts of Play Golf America are working for individual facilities, the more we can improve the program for everyone. So we want to gather this information not for the benefit of The PGA itself, but to assist you and your fellow PGA members in growing the game at your own facilities.

Q: Is there a way to make these programs more segmented to appeal to specific facility types?

A: Since day one, we have designed these programs to be flexible and succeed at all types of facilities. There are numerous best practices of PGA Professionals at public, private, resort and off-course facilities using Play Golf America programs as a way to get more people playing golf - and we will be sharing these best practices from different facility types in upcoming issues of *PGA Magazine*.

One example of a PGA Professional at a private club who is having great success with Play Golf America is Barrett White, the PGA head professional at Jupiter (Fla.) Country Club. As he says, **"In the first year of Get Golf Ready we had 70 players in the program, and five of them became full members. Private clubs can use this program to attract your social or sports members. If you get social and sports members involved and upgraded to a golf membership, it's a win-win situation."**



Barrett White, PGA

Q: What makes Get Golf Ready unique, and what are you trying to accomplish with this program?

A: Prior to the launch of Get Golf Ready in 2009, promotions such as Free Lesson Month and Women's Golf Month called for PGA Professionals to deliver quick, one-time instruction experiences. Based on feedback from PGA Professionals and consumers, we felt the time was right to develop a "program-in-a-box" that provided a complete learn-to-play experience that went beyond getting a "taste" of the game. The PGA worked directly with GOLF 20/20 to come up with such a program, and established Get Golf Ready.

The short-term goal is simple: Attract new and former golfers through a program that is fun, affordable and quick. Based on what consumers were telling us, it was vital that any introductory program needed to get them on the course and enjoying "play" activities in a relatively short period of time. The ultimate objective, however, is to create new golfers who will continue to play the game. And that's the reason why Get Golf Ready calls for every group lesson to have an on-course experience to get participants having fun on the course, making them into golfers for the long term. For an example, look no further than Bill Zimmer, a PGA teaching professional at Hilaman Park Municipal Golf Course in Tallahassee, Fla., who ensures that the on course experience is a part of each of his Get Golf Ready classes. Says Zimmer, **"We make sure participants get on course every session. Then, they see real golf conditions. We even have a little competition at the end of each session. This heightens their confidence to come back and play."**

Q: Are facilities having success promoting their local Get Golf Ready offerings on the Play Golf America website?

A: Absolutely, and those that are fully engaged with Get Golf Ready are reporting great success. A perfect example is PGA Professional Mike Kenny from Needwood Golf Course outside of Washington, D.C. Mike uses the Play Golf America website extensively, with around 70 percent of his 300 Get Golf Ready students from the past two years finding out about his programs online and then using the online tools to register. Mike may be an extraordinary case, but he proves the website can help connect consumers with our members. As Mike says, **"Our No. 1 responsibility is to grow the game. We have to find new golfers to play the game. Get Golf Ready is successful, and it works. It brings people to your golf course, and it's just something that you have to do."**



Q: What are the key elements of success for using Get Golf Ready?

A: We've already been able to identify three vital keys to success: Promotion, Commitment and Retention.

Promotion: PGA Professionals benefit from the national media exposure we create through advertising. But each PGA member should be strategic in how you promote Get Golf Ready. At private clubs, you have a captive audience of non-golfing and social members to target. Many resorts are having success by offering day-long sessions to guests who are interested in taking up the game. For public facilities, you can partner with local civic organizations and recreation departments, or target nearby companies. A leader in the area is PGA Professional Tim Krebs from East Potomac Golf Course who reports **"We rely heavily on social media and internet. In fact, promoting our activities on craigslist.org has produced our best results."**

Commitment: Don't just sign up and stop - make sure your entire staff is ready to deliver the best program possible. Everyone needs to understand how important it is to make customers feel welcome and comfortable, especially with Get Golf Ready attracting people new to the game.

Retention: Have a plan to retain your Get Golf Ready golfers, and keep following up with them. More than 50 percent of students completing Get Golf Ready reported wanting to do more, but never heard from their host facilities again. Just think about this missed opportunity! To maximize the impact of the program, work to stay in contact, promote follow-up opportunities and give students fun options to keep coming back.

Q: Why is it important to track and share Play Golf America results with The PGA?

A: The PGA overall is constantly striving to tell the story of PGA Professionals and your essential role in the game. To maximize industry-wide support, we need to know what our members are doing with Play Golf America, plus report on the successful impact these efforts have made.

The most efficient way to track player development activity is for PGA Professionals to register for the branded programs, use PlayGolfAmerica.com to post schedules of events, and report results. The PGA wants to highlight the positive impact our members have on the game and business, and showcase the value PGA members bring to their facilities. ●

How to learn more about Player Development programs

- The best place to start is the Player Development page on PGALinks.com. This provides links to the resources, registration tools and data to support all of the programs.
- Several programs and services will be available at the 2011 PGA Merchandise Show, including the Play Golf America Conference.
- The new Player Development Mentor Program, will include weekly PGA Best Practices: Player Development e-mails and increased editorial presence in *PGA Magazine* each month.
- PGA Professionals are always welcome to contact our department directly by e-mailing PGA Professional Ron Stepanek at rstepanek@pgahq.com or by calling 561-624-8451.