

Proactive Marketing of Player Development

Regardless of facility type, taking initiative with Get Golf Ready can produce positive results

By Tony L. Starks



Hosting a successful Get Golf Ready program can benefit all aspects of the golf operation.

Since Get Golf Ready first launched in 2008, it has grown exponentially to become one of the largest and most accomplished player development initiatives in the golf industry. The success of Get Golf Ready has crossed facility-type borders and has found its place at public courses, learning centers, resorts and private facilities alike. But hosting a successful Get Golf Ready program doesn't just happen on its own; it takes initiative and a proactive approach on the behalf of PGA Professionals.

At the Mike Bender Golf Academy in Lake Mary, Fla., Get Golf Ready has become a crucial component for PGA Teaching Professional Cheryl Anderson. Since hosting the program, there have been approximately 230 Get Golf Ready graduates at the Mike Bender Academy. To market the program, they utilized branded email blasts – sending every email address in their database an invite to sign up for Get Golf Ready, featuring logoed material provided by The PGA's player development department.

Partly due to our promotional efforts, Get Golf Ready has exceeded our expectations," explains Anderson. "Once you initially get them through the door, many students return to take private lessons and purchase equipment, range memberships, course memberships, rounds of golf, in addition to food and beverage. It helps the entire golf operation."

One of the ways they keep them coming back is by hosting a monthly outing for Get Golf Ready students that usually attracts 20–30 participants at \$25 per player. It gives the students an objective to aim for.

Nearly 2,000 miles away at the private Hiwan Golf Club in Evergreen, Colo., Get Golf Ready is also having a tremendous impact for PGA Head Professional Kyle Heyen. The club is located within the Hiwan Estates and Fairway suburb, which has a population of about 10,000. Heyen markets his program throughout the community, and its popularity has grown mainly through word of mouth.

Even though Hiwan is a private club, its Get Golf Ready program is open to non-members, since many of the members and non-members live in the same neighborhood."

"Get Golf Ready is vital. There is no other program that's more important at this time period," says Heyen, the 2009 National President's Plaque recipient. "It affects employment, compensation, growth of the game, and membership.

"The goal for us is to ultimately turn a couple of those new golfers into members of the club, which we've been able to do," explains Heyen. "We used to

separate the members from the non-members during the sessions, but now we just combine them. It helps the non-members to feel more comfortable and welcome at the facility, which we've found makes them much more likely to eventually become a member."

When Jon LeSage, the PGA head professional at the daily-fee Falls Road Golf Course in Potomac, Md., first began offering Get Golf Ready about three years ago, he was skeptical that the program would work. But shortly after hanging signage all around his club, including on the range-ball machine, LeSage saw the students start rolling in.

"Since we've started it, we have several golfers who have become regulars at Falls Road, and can go out on a Saturday morning without holding the course up," describes LeSage.

Get Golf Ready has done so well at Falls Road, that LeSage piggybacked off the idea and created the Keep Golf Going program, where graduates of Get Golf Ready can take an additional four classes for the same \$99 rate and cover more advanced topics.

"We've had hundreds of students go through Get Golf Ready, and once they get a taste of the game we're bringing them back through Keep Golf Going," says LeSage. "It turns our facility into their home course."

At the public Brookline (Mass.) Golf Club, Get Golf Ready has been a "home run" for PGA Head Professional Brian Bain, even though his facility doesn't have a full driving range. Bain says that one of the reasons he's been able to attract so many new students is that Brookline is the only club in his area that offers Get Golf Ready. So when consumers in eastern Massachusetts search for a program on PlayGolfAmerica.com, his facility is the first to pop up.

"We had 55 students the first year, 77 last year, and we're over 100 for this year," says Bain. "Even though we don't have a range, we've been able to accomplish that by using all the marketing tools from The PGA as well as embracing and believing in the program. ■