

A Remarkable Story of Caring

A McGladrey Team Championship Local Qualifying Event will draw attention to Hillandale Golf Course's HEARTS Club for ailing children

By Bob Denney



A year ago, PGA Professional Karl Kimball, the PGA director of golf at Hillandale Golf Course in Durham, N.C., served as one of six regional ambassadors for The McGladrey Team Championship.

In between promoting a Local Qualifying Event, Kimball found that the visitors to his course – youths and their families – reflected the essence of what team-building is all about.

They also were beacons of tremendous courage.

Kimball decided in June of 2008 that he wanted to do something to enhance the Local Qualifying Event for the McGladrey Team Championship that could perhaps serve as a best practice model for the country.

Kimball founded the HEARTS (Hillandale Embracing a Really Tough Situation) Club.

The families that arrive in the golf shop at Hillandale Golf Course first visit Duke University's Pediatric Blood and Marrow Transplant unit. The patients represent thousands around the world who are desperately hoping that their children – stricken with a form of cancer – may find a lifesaving cure.

Kimball's staff that helps coordinate the club includes LPGA Professional Fran James, and PGA apprentices Joe May, Mesha Levister and John Brown.

This July, Hillandale Golf Course will combine a fundraiser with a Local Qualifying Event to draw attention to the HEARTS Club. Kimball, 52, the vice president of the Carolinas PGA Section, reported that he now has seven families on the club roster from Arizona, Florida, New York, Brazil and London.

"The children visiting our course come wearing respirators on their faces," says Kimball. "They are also wearing smiles when they leave us. They are outside, enjoying the fresh air and more and more hospitals are looking for golf courses, which represent the perfect situation to host these patients."

"They can't be around large groups of people due to their weak immune systems and could be in danger with the common cold. Golf played in the outdoors allows the child and family to be in a positive setting."

Kimball is banking on the idea that his PGA Professional colleagues will join him this year and register to host a Local Qualifying Event, which are conducted from February through August. Forty-one PGA Section Championships follow from April

through late September, with a 164-player field assembling at the National Championship, Oct. 26-28, at Pinehurst (N.C.) Resort.

Lindsey Kearns is the director of the Family Support Program at Duke University's Pediatric Blood and Marrow Transplant unit, where patients and their families arrive annually from around the world. The success rate, Kearns reports, is between 60 and 65 percent in a unit that performs 85 transplants per year.

Founded in 1990, the Duke unit is the largest dedicated pediatric transplant facility in the world.

"If Karl wasn't a golf professional, he would be doing what I'm doing," says Kearns. "Karl and his staff are amazing! The patients and their families average about a two-months stay with us. Having the opportunity to get outside can be a tremendous help to their psycho-social care."

"When they arrive at Hillandale Golf Course, these families feel like they are at home."

Kimball says that Dave Lovell of upstate New York came into the golf shop one day last year, and an emotional conversation developed. He said that he had said his "goodbyes to his daughter, Alivia," whom was expected to lose her battle with cancer at any time.

"However, she had other plans," says Kimball. "Today, Alivia is back home and doing very well. Her favorite experience, she later said, was going on a golf car ride at Hillandale."

"What makes this that much more gratifying is that Karl came to me with his idea, and we didn't approach him," says Kearns. "The families can't believe how those from a local golf course are so willing to open up their arms and their hearts."

To register for a Local Qualifying Event, visit PGA.com/teamchampionship.

The McGladrey Team Championship is the result of a partnership between The PGA of America and RSM McGladrey, the Official Accounting, Tax and Business Consulting firm of The PGA of America. RSM McGladrey is the fifth largest accounting, tax and business consulting firm in the country when considered with McGladrey & Pullen LLP (a partner-owned CPA firm). ■

Bob Denney is The PGA of America's senior association writer.

COURTESY OF FRAN JAMES



What: The McGladrey Team Championship
Where: Pinehurst (N.C.) Resort
When: Oct. 26-28
Who: 41 four-member PGA Section Champion teams composed of three amateurs and a PGA Professional
Web site: PGA.com/teamchampionship

Rick Spraggins of Daytona Beach, Fla., holds a flag signed by the staff at Hillandale Golf Course that bears the HEARTS Club logo. The flag is given to families that are able to take their children home after treatment. Spraggins' son, Sammy, advanced through treatment at the Duke University Medical Center to return home.

ANNUAL REPORT 2008



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