

Successful Golf Tournament Course Selection

By Neal McFarland, Tournament Sales Director, Celebration Golf Club

Event Purpose and Goals

The purpose of the event should be well defined from the start, because it should direct the decision-making and planning process. Planning a successful golf tournament is a lot like organizing a successful conference or trade show. The work accomplished up front will generally be reflected in the final result.

Committing to the event purpose will maintain a focus that will effect course selection, marketing and administrative decisions, volunteer manpower needs, sponsorship support, and a host of other issues.

Purpose, goals, course location, budget and service expectations will all enter into the selection of the golf course that is best suited for your event. Remember that you are not planning a PGA Tour event. With that in mind, your two most important considerations should be: (1) Player enjoyment. Make sure they have fun; and (2) Take good care of your sponsors. See that they are properly recognized and that they also have fun. This kind of concern for both players and sponsors will save you tons of time, money, and effort in planning future events by building a loyal base for repeat participation.

The purpose may be as simple as giving conference attendees a recreational break from several days of meetings. It may be to provide your organization's members with a networking opportunity with business partners or clients. Very often, the purpose of the golf event will be to raise money for scholarships and educational funds or to support a charitable organization.

Research and Course Selection

If you know little about golf—or planning a golf tournament—you will find the following resources helpful in finding a course for your event:

- Ask for referrals from other association executives, business partners, and members or friends who have played golf or held

The Celebration Golf Club's management team recently conducted a seminar on planning a successful golf tournament. Last month Gene Garrote, general manager, Dave Creighton, director of golf and Neal Mc Farland, tournament sales director hosted the FSAE educational seminar entitled "Successful Tournament Planning-101." Due to space limitations, this article addresses only the important course selection process for staging a successful golf tournament.

It is based upon Celebration's experience in hosting some 2000 organized golf events with 89.7% of all planners rating the "overall experience" a cumulative score of 4.9 on a scale of five.

a tournament in the area where your event is to be held. One word of caution: While some of your contacts may have played a course, they may not have the ability to evaluate it as a suitable tournament venue. Still, it's a start.

- Surf the internet. Pay special attention to the completeness of tournament information. Also, how service-oriented does a course appear to be? Finally, how does the course, it's facilities (especially food and beverage), location and pricing appear to fit your requirements?
- Use area CVBs to send out leads or RFPs from courses that are members. At a minimum, be prepared to give the bureau your preferred date, start time, number of players, scoring format, food and beverage requirements, special services needed, and budget range. Be sure to furnish the most realistic information possible, since this will enable each course to make the most accurate proposal addressed to your specific requirements.
- Look at golf course guides, then contact a few courses directly that seem to have what you are looking for. Narrow your choices to four or five courses that appear to fit your needs and request proposals from them. This may be done by e-mail, but it's better to call them for two important reasons: First, it will give you a good idea how timely they respond to a voice mail



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message, a pretty strong indicator of how promptly they will respond to your needs, if you book your event with the course; and secondly, when you do talk with a course representative, you will learn very quickly how committed they are to making your tournament a success. Every course may be interested in your event, but which ones really seem to be committed?

A couple of important questions you should ask that may be easily overlooked are, “If we decide to use your facility, who will be responsible for the success of our tournament,” and “what services do your rates include without additional charges?”

Final Course Selection

When you receive a proposal, be sure that you are comparing “apples to apples,” because the range of services, amenities, value-added features, and complimentary tournament enhancements vary significantly from course to course. Insist on a bottom line cost per player and for the overall event, excluding some charges, such as beverage cart tabs, that cannot be predicted.

After receiving written proposals from your short list of courses, we strongly suggest that you, or at least a tournament-savvy member of your organization, make a personal site inspection. This will give you an opportunity to talk with the staff that you will be working with, walk through the flow of the tournament and evaluate first-hand the quality and degree of difficulty (called rating and slope) of the golf course, itself.

Whether a personal site inspection is possible or not, and assuming your final two host candidates are comparable, ask two more questions to guide you in making your final decision:

1. “What comparable golf tournaments has the course hosted recently?”
2. “May I get a list of two or three references I may contact?”

The answer to those questions may very well lead you to an easy decision. ■

Space does not permit continuing through the remainder of the planning process and staging of a successful golf tournament. However, a copy of the entire seminar outline may be obtained by sending an e-mail request to: nmcfarland@celebrationgolf.com. In addition, Celebration Golf Club will be happy to answer any specific questions you have by e-mail to the same address.