



Sunday, 7/31/2011

## **Omaha turning heads two years out**

BY STU POSPISIL

WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

Two years before the golfers come to town, the 2013 U.S. Senior Open at Omaha Country Club already is a jaw-dropper for the sponsoring United States Golf Association.

The reason is the success of the local organizing committee in selling its highest-priced corporate hospitality packages. Only two of them remain unsold.

“When I explain what’s happening in Omaha, it’s an eye-opener,” said Tim Flaherty, the USGA’s senior managing director who’s conducted the U.S. Senior Open since 1996.

“If you look at Omaha two years out, it’s unprecedented at this point what it’s done. Especially in this economy.”

The tournament’s general chairman, Patrick Duffy of Omaha, said the response from the corporate community “has truly been amazing.”

“This support will position us to deliver a world-class experience for the entire community,” Duffy said. “We hope this success furthers our community’s reputation as a great place to host major events.”

The 2013 Senior Open, the first USGA championship held in Omaha since the 1941 U.S. Amateur, will run from July 8 to 14, counting practice time, at the course southeast of 72nd and State Streets.

The Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce estimates the tournament will generate \$30 million for the local economy.

“Hosting the U.S. Senior Open will be another jewel in the crown of Omaha’s reputation for successfully putting on superlative multiday sporting events,” Chamber President and CEO David Brown said. “From hotel rooms, rental cars and food sales,

to restaurant, bar and retail sales, businesses in the region should be ecstatic.”

Mike Meyer, the tournament’s vice chairman, said he anticipates all corporate hospitality packages will be sold in the next 60 days. Already sold are the four clubhouse venues and nine “supersuites” behind the 13th and 17th greens. Only two of the nine villas along the 17th fairway remain.

“That is truly remarkable in this economy,” Meyer said. “Corporations are supporting the Senior Open because of the unique hospitality opportunity, marketing opportunities and their civic-mindedness.”

The hospitality villas will be climate-controlled with room for 125 people indoors and outdoors. Included in the package are 65 VIP parking passes for each of the seven days of practice and competition and a foursome in a special golf outing at the country club the Monday after the tournament with the tees and hole locations as they were for the final round.

Also to be sold are nine “chalets” along the 10th fairway that can accommodate 100 people.

To manage the tournament, Bruno Event Team of Birmingham, Ala., was hired by the local organizing committee. Liz Leckemby is the championship director and Danny Rodgers the operations director.

Both said personal experiences tell them awareness of the event is no issue. At this month’s U.S. Women’s Open at the Broadmoor in Colorado Springs, Leckemby met many volunteers who had ties to Nebraska and wanted to help with the Senior Open.

Rodgers said when he first arrived in Omaha, the cab driver who took him from Eppley Airfield found out why he was here and said he was “so excited” about the tournament.

Rodgers was surprised the driver already knew about the tournament. “That,” he said, “shows how the community already has embraced this.”

The USGA’s Flaherty said Omaha “is doing it the right way.”

“From here on in, it’s planning,” he said. “The financial support is there already to make it a success, and Omaha will get to the detail and make sure it’s a great Senior Open.”

Volunteer, ticket push starts in spring 2012

Two questions that come up often about the 2013 U.S. Senior Open:

When can we sign up to volunteer? When can we buy tickets?

The volunteer push begins next March. There will be more than 3,000 volunteers needed to fill positions on 30 committees. A volunteer fee will be charged, which covers uniforms and a weeklong admission ticket. Typically, USGA championships have volunteers come from all 50 states.

There also will be a junior volunteer program (for ages 13 to 17) to help with program sales and be standard-bearers — those who carry the portable scoreboards in each group of golfers on the course.

Patrick Duffy of Omaha, the tournament's general chairman, said a number of volunteer chairmen are attending this weekend's Senior Open in Toledo, Ohio, "to see firsthand what it requires to run a major championship." Committee chairmen will attend a "future sites school" to meet and learn from their counterparts.

The ticket campaign begins next April when the tournament will release information including prices, how to purchase tickets, where to purchase tickets and what the process will be.

Tickets will be limited to about 25,000 per day.

Duffy said, "We expect the demand for tickets will exceed the supply and are working on an appropriate process for selling tickets."

Duffy said the goal is to keep prices affordable for families. For instance, he said, children with an adult who has a ticket will be admitted free, and the first row of each grandstand will be reserved for those 17 and younger.

Special events during the practice rounds will be Military Day on Tuesday and a junior clinic on Wednesday.

## U.S. SENIOR OPEN

When: July 8-14, 2013 Where: Omaha Country Club March 2012: Volunteer registration process begins April 2012: Ticket information becomes available Website: [www.2013ussenioropen.com](http://www.2013ussenioropen.com)

— Stu Pospisil