

Is a better golf game the path to pay equity?

'Porky' Oliver clinic lets businesswomen into exclusive club

BY DWAYNE STEWARD ● THE NEWS JOURNAL ● 07/16/2006

Just 20 years ago, women were a rarity at some golf clubs. Today, professional female golfers share the spotlight with their male counterparts and Ladies Professional Golfers Association tournaments draw legions of fans.



But the sweeping changes that put women into the professional golfing limelight have not made their way to corporate America.

"Outside the professional arena, the game has tended to be played by white male execs in exclusive clubs. Some private clubs still don't have women," said Rebecca Dengler, PGA/LPGA member and director of instruction at Ed "Porky" Oliver Golf Club in Greenville.

As a result, businesswomen can find themselves on the outside looking in while deals are struck on the links.

"A lot of women executives or business owners are missing out of deals and gaining clients because they don't know how to play," said Alicia Sheerin, National Association for Women Business Owners Delaware president. "It's a real void in my business strategy because I don't know how to play, and I'm sure a lot of people feel the same way."

The organization, along with MegaBiz Fest, an annual two-day event for business networking in October, is hoping to change this by organizing a professional golf clinic July 25 where beginners can learn the game and veterans can sharpen their skills. Registration for the clinic is \$50 with no registration deadline.

"A lot of women know how to play golf, but don't get out there because they don't think of it as a way to do business. But I think the mind-set is rapidly changing ... women are starting to understand," said Loraine Watson, MegaBiz Fest Committee chairwoman.

Carol Arnott, who runs a financial-planning practice affiliated with Greenville Financial Group, hasn't used golf for networking but is participating in the clinic because she feels golf has become an asset in business that she can no longer avoid.

"Very often, there are a lot of business decisions on the golf course and lots of women are excluded because they do not participate," Arnott said. "I want to be able to speak the language and feel comfortable in that environment."

The instructors plan to give a crash course in how to play the game and how to behave on the course.

"We're going to start with showing them a lot of the basics, like putting, chipping," said Darius Smith, PGA apprentice and Ed Oliver's head golf professional. "Then we'll show them a few long iron shots and some drivers before we take them out to the course."

Instructors usually spend considerable time teaching students the basics before taking them out on an 18-hole course, Dengler said.

"What we're doing for this clinic is rarely done but the way I think it should be done because many beginners spend too much time on swinging and never learn how to put, which is 60 percent of the game," she said.

A crash course in golf is just what Jane Bartsch needs. "I would just like to be able to learn the basic stand and basic swings so I don't look like a jerk on the golf course; a kind of golf 101," she said.

Bartsch, vice president of radio station WJBR/99.5 FM in Wilmington, said she's tried to learn how to play golf in the past but was unsuccessful. She's hoping the clinic will help to get her foot in the business door.

"I've noticed, even when I was a secretary, that an extension of the workplace was the golf course, I think it's time that I tapped into that," she said.

Women have started taking their education and training into their own hands. The Executive Women's Golf Association Delaware chapter has provided golf networking functions for women for five years locally and 15 nationally, said chapter president Anastasia Bove.

"Part of our mission is having a safe environment for women to learn and play golf," she said. "There hasn't really been an open forum."

Bove said golf allows for more time to get to know a client or employer, making it easier to do business off the field.

"You play for four or five hours and people like to do business with people they know," she said.

Other avenues

Kay Keenan, owner of Growth Consulting Inc., explains in her book, "Conversation on Networking: Finding, Developing, and Maintaining Relationships for Business and Life" that **golf is an important networking tool** but one doesn't need to know how to play to be involved.

"Golf events always need volunteers, whether it be to check people in, or make food," she said. "I knew a lawyer who met a law firm executive while flipping hamburgers; now he's a partner at that law firm."

Vincent White, owner of ProVest Realty and MegaBiz Fest Committee member, said **30 percent to 40 percent of his networking is done through golfing**. He initiated the idea for the clinic and is heading its production.

"Golfing translates into a business environment," he said. "You must be gracious, yet aggressive, in both."