A three-year struggle, Fore Hope founder and director Melinda "Mindy" Deer believes her non-profit golf program for the physically disabled is off the ground in Columbus, Ohio.

She'd welcome a major sponsor from the golf industry, but is buoyed by a distinct upswing in interest in her project. The latest Fore Hope focus was a four-minute spot on "Life Choices," a show originating in Columbus and syndicated to seven major cities in the United States.

Deer recently spent a week in Miami at the 8th International Symposium on Adaptive Physical Activity. Her work was selected for presentation from more than 400 abstracts. Experts throughout the world shared knowledge that will improve opportunities of those with special needs to lead an active life.

Keeps on track with others through golf was work that would stimulate the minds of persons with limited physical abilities, and at the same time, not require too much physical strength or agility. Golf fits the bill. It required concentration.

"You're not thinking of your problems while you're playing," Deer noted.

Developing a golf program for the handicapped — particularly for "forgotten people, those in nursing homes and those like Dad, at home" — was a challenge.

An even bigger problem was finding a teacher. In 1988, she attended a school in Chicago that taught pupils how to teach golf. Her track clinic in northern Ohio attracted 52 golfers. A two-season total was 43 persons, 107 lessons and $20,000 raised.

She moved her program to Columbus in November 1990. The state capital has many rehabilitation centers. Edwin Shaw Hospital in Akron has built a three-hole course and practice range that are handicapped-accessible. Several pros have donated time to work with the handicapped.

Derr works with local therapists, and stresses safety, fun and golf at each lesson. Handicapped golfers don't need special clubs, but there are Velcro gloves that fit around a hand and a place to attach the club to the hand for those unable to grip a club. She suggests lightweight shafts for some, and longer shafts for those in wheelchairs.

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A group of golf industry professionals in Colorado has formed the Committee for Better Access for Disabled Golfers and expects to spring to publish guidelines this spring for making public courses accessible to the disabled.

The panel was the brainchild of Don Tolson, project coordinator for Fox Hollow at Lakeview Park in Colorado Springs, and Tom Houston, a disabled golfer and inventor.

Joining them on the committee are golf course architect Rick Phelps, professional Marcia Bailey, who teaches the Golf-Fun 4-Fun instructional program for disabled golfers, Raccoon Creek Golf Course pro Dave Detweiler, Golf-Fun director and PGA pro Jim Bailey, Colorado Golf Association Executive Director Warren Simmons and CGA Assistant Executive Director Ed Mate.

Tolson said the committee hopes to "demystify some of these perceptions by allowing able-bodied golfers a chance to play and spend time with disabled players."

"With the United States Golf Association handicap system that we use here in Colorado, not only will disabled persons be able to play, many of them will be able to compete with and even outscore their able-bodied counterparts," said Simmons.

Through all its efforts, the committee hopes to develop a "user's guide that will be a brief introduction to disabled golfers, demographics of disabled Americans, and a comparison to the site increasingly disabled population."

The second part will discuss the effect on public facilities of the Americans With Disabilities Act, which was enacted by Congress and signed by President Bush in July 1990. Part three of the guidelines will regard obstacles to disabled people and make general statements about grades of land, widths of bridges and the like, Tolson said.

"They will only be suggestions, not rules," Tolson said, adding that developers and course officials will make their own decisions about how to deal with access regulations.

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