GCBAA joins First Tee program

2-year agreement calls for builders to construct facilities at cost

CHAPEL HILL, N.C. — The Golf Course Builders Association of America (GCBAA) has become a major partner in The First Tee program, an initiative of the World Golf Foundation to provide affordable and accessible playing opportunities for beginning golfers, especially youths.

The First Tee program, announced in November 1997 by Honorary Chairman George Bush, aims to provide hundreds of new golf facilities over the next decade by working through local chapters that can help design programs and facilities to meet the unique needs of each participating community. “Golf may be unique in the values it teaches,” said Bush. “It is a game of honor, integrity and good sportsmanship and it can build an individual’s self-esteem and self-control.”

“This is a perfect fit for the GCBAA,” said Phil Arnold, executive vice president. “Our members build the best golf courses in the world and The First Tee program meshes with our own Sticks for Kids initiative.” Sticks for Kids is a nationwide program to provide good quality golf clubs for children who otherwise could not afford them.

The two-year partnership agreement calls for GCBAA members to construct facilities at or near cost whenever a participating builder can be matched with a local First Tee chapter. Participation by individual builders is voluntary.

Common types of facilities will be three-hole courses, a pitch-and-putt courses, nine-hole executive courses and full-scale 18-hole courses. All will feature extensive teaching and practice areas and other facilities.

“The saving in construction costs could really be significant — amounting to several million dollars, depending on how many facilities we can participate in,” said Arnold.

The First Tee’s initial goal is to develop 100 facilities by Dec. 31, 2000. “Four of the six Official Suppliers to the First Tee are GCBAA members,” Arnold noted. The four are Toro (maintenance and irrigation equipment), Club Car (golf cars and utility vehicles), Syncroflo (pump stations) and Jacklin Seed (grass seed).

The partnership agreement specifically calls for the GCBAA to encourage members to:

• participate in the construction of First Tee facilities at or near cost;
• participate in programs, projects and activities that encourage youth, especially inner-city youth, to play golf and pursue educational and career tracks in golf; and
• incorporate wildlife habitat preservation, enhancement and interpretation in the construction of learning and playing facilities.

In addition, the association will:

• promote The First Tee program and sites; and
• make The First Tee a beneficiary of the Sticks for Kids program.

In turn, The First Tee program will:

• cooperate in establishing criteria and construction practices to encourage environmentally friendly development of facilities;
• assist in the design and construction of facilities to meet community needs and site constraints;
• provide opportunities for minorities, especially youth, to learn to play golf; and
• participate in programs that encourage youth to play golf and pursue educational and career tracks in the golf, recreation and tourism industries.