

## Management group reunion



Pete Davison

Something about the recently-formed Sage Golf Group might sound familiar to some. The golf course management company might be new, but this isn't the first time its executives have worked together.

Sage president and c.e.o. Pete Davison worked for the PGA Tour's Tournament Player's Club network for 25 years. Originally a golf professional, Davison was hired to oversee operations at the network's first facility, TPC Sawgrass, in 1980. He worked his way up in the organization, ultimately managing the operation of all TPC clubs.

Most of the other Sage staff members' resumes read like Davison's. His wife, Jayne, ran merchandising at TPC and has similar responsibilities now. Mike Diffenderffer, senior consultant for marketing and membership, was with the TPC for more than 20 years. Roberta McDougal handled accounting and financial functions for the TPC for 20 years and now is the vice president of financing and accounting and a partner at Sage. Chris Wilkerson, senior consultant

of construction management and Chuck Green, vice president, were with TPC for about 15 years.

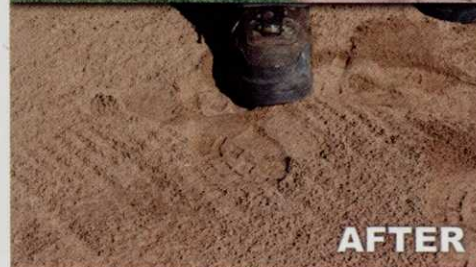
Combined, the team has about 150 years of experience in the industry. They decided to take their experience into an environment they felt suited them better. They recently set up offices in Ponte Verde Beach, Fla., not too far from the PGA Tour's headquarters.

"We enjoy working with each other and agreed we'd get out of the corporate rat race, so to speak," Davison says. "I enjoyed working in it, but I like that we're all owners of this company and the only people we answer to are ourselves."

Davison and the other employees won't conduct themselves any differently than they did while working for the TPC network, but now they don't answer to a board. The other difference is they don't have the well-known PGA Tour or TPC brands behind them, so they have to increase marketing efforts that much more to create a name for themselves.



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Davison believes the group can stand out in the industry because he knows of only a handful of management companies that cater specifically to upscale clubs. (A list from 2003 compiled by the Club Managers Association of America listed almost 140 management companies in existence in the U.S.) Plus, high-tiered golf clubs make up a minority of all golf courses, he says.

"We thought we'd have a boutique-type management company," he says. "We manage one club at a time."

Sage's offerings include membership, marketing, operational analysis and a fairly extensive range of agronomy services. The company aims to work in concert with owners and developers, taking a hands-on approach to hiring a team to manage a course, develop a business plan and hold them accountable for that plan. The company draws from its successful practices at the TPC network to try and bring about the same results now.

"We try to exceed customers' expectations," Davison says. "If you do that, you're going to be pretty special."

Davison is used to managing in a high-profile-club environment.

"The TPC hosted more than 275 PGA Tour events at clubs while I managed them," he says.

Even with seven staff members transitioning from the TPC to Sage, TPC is well staffed, Davison says. He left at the end of 2004, and the other staff members, with the exception of one, took early retirement and left at different points after he did.

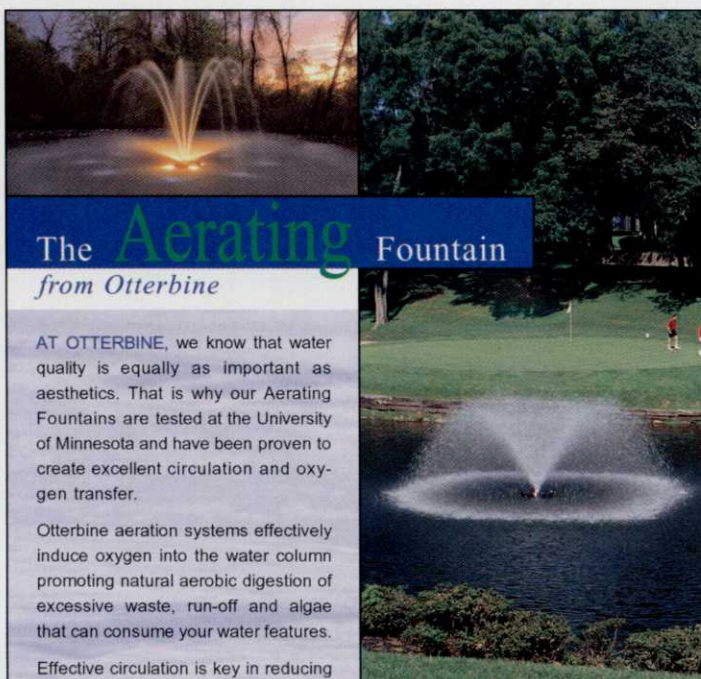
"We hired a lot of good people (at TPC) over the years," he says. "Understudies, so to speak, have taken over where we left off. They're doing fine."

Just a few months out of the box, Sage is focusing on building its client base. Davison is talking to possible clients in multiple parts of the world, including the U.S., Mexico and the central-Caribbean region.

The company is likely to take on 10 properties in its first 10 months, says Davison, who's comfortable with where the company is positioned.

"We're not trying to be the biggest company," he says. "We want to share the knowledge and experience we have with other people and allow them to become successful because of it." – Heather Wood

For more information about Sage Golf Group, visit [www.sagegolfgroup.com](http://www.sagegolfgroup.com).



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