



John Walsh
Editor

DO YOUR PART

At Golf 20/20's annual forum last month, Joe Steranka, CEO of the PGA of America, left attendees with a thought-provoking question about growing the game: "If not us, who?"

The golf industry – the World Golf Foundation, the PGA of America, the PGA Tour, the Golf Channel, and equipment companies on the business and consumer sides of the industry, to name a few – knows it needs to reinvigorate the game. That's why, at the eighth Golf 20/20 forum, industry big-wigs put their minds together and presented a player development program called Get Golf Ready in 5 Days.

You've probably heard this before. The Play Golf America program the PGA of America launched several years ago is one that comes to mind. The Get Golf Ready organizers spent time explaining how this program is different from other programs launched in the past. In short, the program centers on a five-lesson package for the suggested price of \$99, plus an introduction to the rules and etiquette of the game. The World Golf Foundation will provide a \$1,000 stipend to participating facilities. (For more details, read the news story, "A course for action," at golfcourseindustry.com/acourseforaction.)

They've put thought into the program and have addressed the two biggest concerns facility operators have – retention and accountability. They have plans to keep new entrants to the game coming back to golf after their initial involvement with the Get Golf Ready program. Industry executives are serious about raising money to get this program up and running quickly. At press time, they've raised \$2.2 million, on their way to a goal of \$4 million in three years and \$7 million in five.

Joe Barrow, CEO of The First Tee, was the best speaker at Golf 20/20 because he was the most passionate and inspiring. He sparked a fire in the eyes of attendees, explaining how important this player development program is. He's driving the fund-raising efforts. It's clear he wants companies to donate money to the cause, but he's also confident about being held accountable for the money that's raised and how it's spent. The return on investment for this program won't happen for a while. Nonetheless, the investment is needed to help develop a base for the next generation of players, which is the future of your business.

Collectively, these organizations will make an impact on the industry that won't be seen or felt for years to come. But, they're acting now. They need to. They don't have much choice. The game, and the business, need a growth spurt.

However, the faction of industry executives can only do so much. The other faction is you – the people managing individual facilities throughout the country. Do you have a successful player development program at your facility? If you do, how effective are you at retaining new golfers? Is this an area of the business that's receiving the effort and attention it needs? Are all of the facility's employees and friends and family encouraged to golf? Jim Singerling, CEO of the CMAA, estimates 70 percent of employees at private clubs don't golf. That's about 190,000 people, or a quarter of Get Ready Golf's goal to develop 700,000 new golfers by 2013.

Superintendents might say player development isn't part of their job description, but the bottom line is that everybody at a facility needs to have the same mindset about constantly mining new golfers, getting them started and keeping them playing. This mentality will complement what the big boys are doing on a grander, national scale. Actually, if you think about it, your involvement is more important than the big boys' efforts because you're the ones executing their plan.

Top industry organizations are doing their part to grow the game. You have to do yours, too. Growing the game is a business-threatening issue industry leaders are taking seriously. How seriously are you taking it? **GCI**

We would like to hear from you. Please post any comments you have about this column on our message board, which is at www.golfcourseindustry.com/messageboard.



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