



# THE GREENEST SHOW ON TURF

The WM Phoenix Open was already known as the largest-attended golf event in the world. Now it vies to be known as the greenest, too.

STORY AND PHOTOS BY SETH JONES

**A** new record was set at the Saturday round of this year's Waste Management Phoenix Open. On that day, 173,210 people entered TPC Scottsdale, setting an all-time PGA Tour attendance single-day record.

Perhaps an even more impressive number? The number of trash cans on the golf course that day: zero.

### Zero Waste Challenge

The absence of trash cans is a credit to tournament sponsor Waste Management, in conjunction with the hosting organization, Phoenix-area civic group

the Thunderbirds. The groups teamed up to launch what they called the "Zero Waste Challenge" for the tournament. The goal was to divert 90 percent of tournament waste away from the landfill and instead into recycling and composting facilities. According to the WM Phoenix Open, it was the first time ever a PGA Tour event was played without trash cans on the course.

The lack of garbage receptacles was a success. Recycling bins and composting facilities collected all waste, and by the end of the tournament, Waste Management and the Thunderbirds were celebrating a 90.7 percent diversion rate.



Harris English prepares to hit on No. 16 at this year's Waste Management Phoenix Open. The hole, totally surrounded and enclosed by fan seating like a sports stadium, is well known as the loudest hole in golf.

TPC Scottsdale CGCS Jeff Plotts, who has been at the course for seven years, calls the environmental effort put on by the event “inspiring.”

“When you think of the amount of waste for 500,000 people coming through here, and to know that 90 percent of it is diverted away from a landfill? That’s just unreal,” he says.

The environmental effort of the Waste Management Phoenix Open goes right along with TPC Scottsdale’s origins — the course was created in 1986 in part as an environmental benefit to the area. The land the course sits on was used for years as a dumping ground. Through a partnership with the Federal Bureau of Reclamation, the PGA Tour and the

City of Scottsdale, the course was constructed as an environmentally desirable solution for reclaimed water captured from thousands of nearby acres.

“We’ve always been proactive about the environment,” Plotts says. “The entire TPC network is involved in the Audubon program, so it was great for us to have another company with that same mindset come in.”

### **Unique opportunity**

Many know the WM Phoenix Open as a giant party that takes place around a golf tournament. No. 16, a completely enclosed par three, is one of the most unique holes on the PGA Tour, with fans treating the tournament more like an NFL game

than a Tour event. Players have embraced this shift in golf culture — some even bring souvenirs to chuck into the stands.

With this new green culture, organizers hope the tournament might take on two identities — as the biggest party on Tour, as well as the greenest event on grass.

“The Thunderbirds have a great desire to be known as the greenest professional golf tournament in the world,” Plotts says. “It’s already the largest. So if they can take the largest and also turn it into the greenest? They feel that will put them ahead of everyone by leaps and bounds, and I agree.”

Thunderbird’s Tom Altieri, tournament director for the 2013 WM Phoenix

*Continued on page 22*



## 2012 Waste Management

*Continued from page 21*

Open, says the partnership with Waste Management makes for a unique opportunity, with a great stage to show off the environmental process.

“We call it ‘the greenest show on grass,’ and we try to live up to that,” Altieri says. “It’s a huge part of our partnership with Waste Management. They’re one of the most environmental companies in the world.”

Plotts says since the tournament ended, all the disposable infrastructure on the golf course has been carefully sorted in order to keep it out of landfills.

“The scrim and carpeting can be used for erosion control. They can find people who can reutilize these things,” he says. “The scrim, the plywood, the wood chips... everything has to be separated and accounted for.”

Besides the lack of garbage cans and the intense sorting of materials, the

tournament also:

- ▶ Worked closely with vendors to monitor their use of water in order to increase overall conservation.

- ▶ Used greywater from the concessionaire’s kitchens in portable toilets.

- ▶ Had solar-powered compactors along the course, allowing patrons to dispose of their food waste more efficiently.

- ▶ Used compressed natural gas (CNG) trucks to transport the waste and recycled materials collected during the tournament, reducing fleet emissions.

- ▶ Featured a hospitality tent that was entirely powered by electricity generated from a portable solar power unit.

### Security detail

The environmental effort at the WM Phoenix Open is indeed Herculean, but what about hosting 173,000 people on a single day? How has this tournament gotten so popular?



Fans attending the 2012 Waste Management Phoenix Open saw plenty of these receptacles on the course. What they didn't see was a single trash can.

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“The weather helps,” laughs Altieri. “But to get over 500,000 people at a single PGA Tour event? There’s nothing like that on the PGA Tour.”

The layout of the course makes it crowd friendly, Plotts says.

“Commissioner (Deane) Beman’s vision was for a stadium course with large corridors,” Plotts says. “I don’t know if he had the vision to imagine what we have today — skyboxes and holes like 16, totally enclosed — but it was built for this. Our venue has been able to separate itself because of that.”

Plotts says the event has changed “hugely” in just his seven-year tenure at the course.

“I was in tournament golf for eight years before I came out here. I felt like it was just going to be more people, not that big of a deal,” Plotts reflects. “Until you’ve gone through one, it’s difficult to explain

*Continued on page 25*



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## 2012 Waste Management

It's on holes 17 and 18 that the crew gets its own security detail.

"Once people get that liquid courage in them, they think they want to come out and mow grass," Plotts says.

### Numbers game

Plotts laughs when he thinks back to last year's Wednesday round, or lack thereof. Frozen conditions forced the cancellation of the pro-am. No golf was played. Yet 15,000 fans still came out to the course.

"Just to sit around and drink beer all day," Plotts laughs.

He wasn't always so amused by the crowd at the Waste Management, sometimes called the 'Wasted Management.' But he has since come around.

"I'd say seven years ago, my first tournament here, I wasn't interested (in the atmosphere)," Plotts says. "I'm from the South. My idea of a tourna-

*Continued on page 26*



**"IT'S ALREADY THE LARGEST (ATTENDED TOURNAMENT). SO IF THEY CAN TAKE THE LARGEST AND ALSO TURN IT INTO THE GREENEST?"**

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*Continued from page 23*  
just how big it is, how different it is."

It's not often a maintenance crew needs a police escort, but the crew at TPC Scottsdale gets one daily during the tournament. They enjoy a motorcycle police convoy to the course as well as mounted horseback police blocking the crowd at

key crossing points on the course.

Plotts tries to get the crew out by 3:30 p.m., with the hopes that the last golfers finish at 4 p.m. Early on, the crew is on holes where fans have long ago left, so there isn't much fan interaction. That changes once the crew gets near the final few holes.

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## 2012 Waste Management

*Continued from page 25*  
ment is the Masters.”

He now embraces the spectacle that the tournament can sometimes be considered. After all, how many tournaments can boast having a Tilted Kilt bar built alongside the 18<sup>th</sup> fairway?

“Maybe I was uptight,” Plotts says of when he first arrived at TPC Scottsdale. “I had to roll with it and understand that this is a unique event. I need to cherish being blessed enough to be involved with it. Every year I’ve learned to enjoy it more.”

However he felt about the tournament, the conditions of the course always gets rave reviews from Altieri, who plays there often.

“Jeff and his team are second to none,” Altieri says. “Every year Plotts has the course tuned up and ready for the PGA Tour players to play.”

Waste Management and the Thun-



“I don’t know if (former PGA Tour commissioner Deane Beman) had the vision to imagine what we have today — skyboxes and holes like 16, totally enclosed — but it was built for this,” Plotts says of TPC Scottsdale’s ability to handle large crowds.



derbirds hope that the tournament continues to be second to none in terms of their attendance and green effort. The plan for next year? Bigger and better, if that’s even possible.

“The Thunderbirds are a competitive group. Our 2012 tournament chair was proud to achieve the 90.7 percent diversion rate,” Altieri says. “I assure you I’ll be working hard to beat that number.” ■

An advertisement for the Buffalo Turbine Cyclone KB4 blower. The main image shows a red blower attached to a tractor, blowing a large pile of brown leaves on a golf course. The text "CYCLONE KB4" is written in large, bold, red letters at the top left, with the slogan "Engineered to Perform, Built to Last!" in a script font to its right. At the bottom, there is a website address "www.buffaloturbine.com", the brand name "BUFFALO TURBINE" in large red letters, and contact information: "Ph: 716.592.2700 / Fax: 716.592.2460 / All Buffalo Turbine products are manufactured in the U.S.A. and feature a one year warranty." Logos for the PGA TOUR, NHRA (Official Turf Care Sponsor), and the U.S. flag are also present. A small inset photo in the bottom right corner shows the blower in use on a golf course path.

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