

Thursday, October 25, 2018



*Brian Riddle is the PGA Head Professional at TPC Sawgrass in Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida.*

## **Offer Programs that Serve Students With Disabilities**

### **Brian Riddle on the importance of offering programs that serve students with disabilities:**

At TPC Sawgrass, we are proud to be part of the TPC Network of golf courses, as well as a member of our local community. It remains an important aspect of our business to offer programs to non-traditional golfers in an effort to introduce them to the game and potentially grow our business in several vital areas. One program that has proven beneficial to its participants, as well as rewarding to our instructors and interns, is the HUG Program. "Help Us Golf" is coordinated with the local HEAL (Helping Enrich Autistic Lives) organization. This local group raises money that supports a plethora of programs that promote the education and the advancement of autistic youth. Through an annual grant, we are able to coordinate the three-day golf program for 16 autistic kids each summer. The primary goal of the program is to focus on the social aspect of their time with us, ensuring a comfortable, inviting, open environment where new friends can be made and relationships forged. In addition, we focus on physical skills like stretching and exercise, with an education on the proper golf set and swing incorporated into the curriculum. Also, we discuss short game and putting, history of the game, parts of the golf club, safety, etiquette and Rules. We promote a highly supportive environment, ensuring each participant has a pleasant, fun and memorable experience. We use SNAG equipment at first and then participants, who may range in age from five to 15, are divided into smaller groups by skill. The student to teacher ratio is 2:1, enabling the students to truly get the most out of the sessions.

### **Brian Riddle on the business impact of offering programs that serve students with disabilities:**

This program has provided local autistic youth with the opportunities detailed above since 2009. They learn skills that can be utilized off the golf course as well as on, and through the years, we have witnessed many participants continue to play the game after attending our program. As we celebrate a decade of great education in a supportive setting, we also consider the benefits reaped by our facility and the men and women who teach here and represent the best that a TPC facility can offer. In addition to valuable nontraditional teaching experience for our PGA Professional staff, the PGA Golf Management student interns that we employ each year may benefit more than anyone. As I watch them teach and interact with the kids, I can see the joy on their faces. The insight they gain in teaching within this program is experience they simply cannot attain in a classroom. Additionally, from a club's perspective, any program that introduces the game to non-golfers has great potential to grow the game. With parents and siblings in attendance before, during and after the sessions, we have several opportunities to pique the interest of many individuals who haven't played the game before. They often see their children's enjoyment and are so appreciative of the experience afforded their kids that they consider playing as a family. And with that, the possibilities are endless, with instruction, youth camps, retail, food & beverage and even memberships (if applicable) possibly growing. Sure, this program provides memorable experiences for the youth participants, but our young interns and PGA staff consider this one of the highlights of the year as well.