



“Grow the Game?” Who is supposed to do that?

It's anyone but us, we say. You and me, the average golfers, male or female. Hey, it's not our fault; what can we do outside our own club?

Which brings us to today's subject and I hope you'll consider how this model can be applied to your area.

In Northeast Florida, we have the Jacksonville Area Golf Association. It has been around since 1954 and is an association of golf facilities, not people. It is, if you will, a union of clubs which have banded together for the common good as well as their own benefit.

Most of all, today it is a place where the average person can do his or her share.

A few years ago, a past JAGA president faced a problem and, not being interested in reinventing anything, called around the Southeast to see if there was another similar association in a similar area which may have faced the same problem.

The closest our man could find was Palm Beach County, which has a great tournament schedule and a solid scholarship program. It's person-oriented, so the comparison isn't quite right. Richmond has an association but it's only to conduct the big tournaments.

That was it. In every other area that he surveyed, there either was no mechanism or it was run by the municipal government. In the former, players had to make do themselves. In the latter, you can only imagine how the Parks and Recreation Department handled it...probably as a stepchild to the softball leagues.

Therefore, I ask you to consider our model and see if it can be applied to your area, even in a modified manner.

A quick background: JAGA was formed by prominent members of Northeast Florida's then-only six courses for one reason: to avoid conflicts in the member-guest and invitational events of the day. They got everyone together for the common good.

A lot happened, some then and some eventually. The immediate concern of conflicting dates was easily handled. But they found fellowship, and they started thinking of other things they could do. They wisely avoided making JAGA people-oriented. Instead, it is club-oriented, with the theory that clubs remain (well, most are left) and people will move on.

That was then and this is now, and today JAGA is a multi-faceted organization that reaches deeply into the golf community.

Like:

Tournaments: There are a dozen events this year ranging from the traditional championships to a “Family” day. Very well handled; JAGA has contracted with BlueGolf and works the system well.

Website: Always tricky when dealing with volunteer webmasters, the current site does the job. Jaxareagolf.org.

News roundup: There's a monthly collection of news items and association promotions compiled by a committee of ex-newspaper types and former Tour publicists. It goes to the association's master email list which now has over 1,000 names.



Membership: Almost every local club has bought in, paying \$175 annually. There are about 36 members today out of perhaps 40 that should be there. (In the good old days, before bad loans, there were upwards of 50.)

Board meetings: All member clubs may appoint their board members, who meet eight times a year to conduct business (in the morning) and play golf (in the afternoon.) A typical meeting draws 60 or so people representing 25 or so clubs. This is a direct outgrowth of the meetings back in 1954 and it gives everyone an entree into other clubs.

Banquet: There were 257 at this year's to honor a local lady who chaired events in all three major PGA Tour and hear Champions Tour player Len Mattiace. The cost is kept to \$65. Every areawide organization (PGA, superintendents, etc.) is given a few minutes to introduce officers and winners.

Annual awards: There are six, some self-serving (Outstanding Board Member) but most are external (GM of the Year, Pro of the Year, CommunityService Award.)

Scholarships: It started because a board member left \$130,000 in his will for scholarships. The Trust now has over \$650,000 and awards 8-10 scholarships each year. A “JAGA Scholarship” has become as much a matter of pride as the money.

Publicity: Several ex-PGA Tour publicists keep their talents honed by handling releases. In these days of cutbacks at news outlets, any outside copy is much appreciated and the releases get very good coverage.

Support for other events: If a club needs volunteers, JAGA helps by publicizing the need and helping coordinate things. An example: the USGA Four-Ball was at Timuquana last month and JAGA recruited volunteers through its website, then signed them up through BlueGolf.

Outreach: JAGA is visible in other organizations, attending PGA Chapter meetings (JAGA directors have won the Chapter's Amateur of the Year award three of the last four years)

The latest step is to have a paid employe to coordinate the association activities, both internally and externally. This was partially funded by donation and supplemented by dedicated sources such as sale of JAGA-logoed attire.

Okay, we (briefly) showed you ours. Now, show us yours.

If you have a similar organization, do everyone a favor and pass along the details. If you're trying to form a similar organization, let us know and we'll help. If you're sitting on your duff and letting the city Parks and Recreation Department manage golf in your area, do the rest of us a favor and don't call.

Comments? I'm at fs4569@comcast.net.