

Golf tourism



Simon and Louise Hudson

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Design and setting by P.K. McBride

3 The Golf Tourism Product

Spotlight: Celebrating golf Disney-style



Junior Golf Camp at Celebration, Florida, courtesy of Celebration

Disney never misses a trick when it comes to marketing and providing products for families. It has even delved into the world of golf with an 18-hole, championship golf course, designed by father and son team, Robert Trent Jones Sr. and Jr. Established at Disney's flagship Florida community in 1996, Celebration Golf Course also features a renowned Golf Academy and a three-hole junior course for ages five to nine. There are five different tee boxes at each hole on the course, facilitating play for all levels of ability.

Run by Celebration Golf Management, the Club has hosted over 3500 tournaments, including the annual Robert Gamez Celebrity Invitational every March, the US Senior Open Qualifier in 2002 and various national and state championships. Rated 4½ Stars in *Golf Digest's* 'Best Places to Play' since 2004, Celebration provides a comprehensive events package including an uplink GPS system with electronic scoreboard, televised results and sponsor ad programme, souvenirs for every player and even a Scottish bagpiper to welcome and lead out golfers. To counteract the hot weather, two pre-iced coolers are provided for every golf cart and iced wet towels are distributed on hotter days.

With top service one of Disney's tenets, there are bag valets, costumed 'greeters', a full-time professional Golf Event Manager, shuttle services to and from the practice range, and even red carpets leading from the bag drop to registration. Celebration has thought of everything from club cleaning after the event to Caddy Shack-style 'goofy' activities which include putting with broomsticks, teeing off in a chair, playing left-handed or using only three clubs.

The Golf Course and Academy has also achieved national recognition as the site for the finals of the Golf Channel's Junior Drive, Chip and Putt competition aired on American Thanksgiving Day – 26 November, 2008. Patti Covert has been Academy Coordinator for Celebration since 2005. Covert says Celebration is a prototype in many ways, pioneering junior golf as part of its model, environmentally-friendly

lifestyle and avoiding urban sprawl in its picket-fence perfection. The TV exposure was a great promotional tool for the golf course: 'It's cool because we had our stage set up and everything worked out really well for the television production and exposure. It definitely helps encourage kids into the sport and to come to Celebration. We have a lot of local kids, too, because of our community,' said Covert.

The golf course is user-friendly for pros, families and novices. Ranked in the 'Top 25 Public Courses' by *Golf World's* 2009 Readers' Choice Awards, the course has a broad appeal as confirmed by its ratings in the Top 25 Best Family Golf Resorts and in the Top 30 Courses for Women by *Golf For Women* magazine. 'We have tee boxes set half way up the fairways which are used mostly by juniors and women golfers,' explained Covert. 'That way they get to play a regular, beautiful course and enjoy the round as opposed to playing the forward tee box and not scoring well. It's more motivational this way.'

There are golf instruction summer camps for destination visitors (who can stay in the picture-postcard Celebration Hotel nearby) as well as weekend and after-school programmes for local kids. 'These camps attract kids from all over as we are the number one tourist attraction in the world, being Disney,' said Covert. School parties also attend customized courses – one South American group comes regularly from the American Explorer School, in Colombia. Kenny Nairn, a Scottish PGA professional golfer, is head pro at Celebration. 'Golf is a game of integrity, respect, citizenship, friendship and rules. The South American school is using golf – as part of their curriculum – for these aspects plus the enjoyment of the sport,' said Nairn.

For local Florida juniors there are bi-monthly free golf clinics as well as complimentary 30-minute lessons awarded to honours students from Celebration's public schools. The club also uses grants from the USGA to target under-privileged children with three different teaching groups. Lost-and-found golf clubs are also donated to junior golf.

Celebration's General Manager, Gene Garotte has tracked the ratio of out-of-state visitors at 60 per cent during the popular January–April period. Annually, though, destination visitors number 35 to 45 per cent of the course's clientele. The course is promoted in partnership with the nearby Celebration, Mona Lisa and Radisson Hotels. Celebration is also a member of the Orlando Convention and Visitors' Bureau (OCVB), Visit Florida and the Orlando Golf Trail, cooperating on joint marketing programmes with neighbouring courses. 'We work very closely with third party packaging companies. Our guests looking for accommodations, travel and golf are referred to companies such as Golf Pac, Tee Times USA, Captain's Choice and Merit Travel,' said Garotte. Celebration Golf Management also encompasses Legends Golf & Country Club in Clermont, Florida; the International Club, Myrtle Beach, South Carolina; and Crockett Ridge Golf Course in Kingsport, Tennessee.

Sources

www.celebrationgolf.com, www.cgm-golfproperties.com, www.legendsgolfforlando.com

Personal interview with Patti Covert, December 2008.

Interviews with Gene Garotte and Kenny Nairn, February 2009

Chapter extract

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