

PGA Junior League enjoys early success at Oak Hollow

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HIGH POINT — On a recent Sunday, a group of 13-and-under golfers, some wearing matching orange shirts and others in matching blue shirts, fanned out across the front nine at Oak Hollow with parents, grandparents and siblings follow-

ing in carts.

The youngsters were playing matches for the courses' teams in its new PGA Junior League program, which is an addition to its youth activities that include instruction, camps and participation in the First Tee program that focuses on instruction and core values.

According to the PGA Jr. League website, it is the pillar youth program of the PGA of America's 501 © (3) foundation, PGA REACH. In 2020, around 37,000 youth participated nationwide.

"We decided to add it because with COVID, it was a perfect opportunity because golf has come

back to the forefront," Oak Hollow head professional Jimmy Bayne said. "We knew several courses had been highly successful with it. So, it was like what if we just form one team, which is basically eight or 10 players, and play in a league?"

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But, after learning that a course could form its own internal league if it got at least 20 players, Oak Hollow went in that direction. Practice at Oak Hollow is held once a week with matches so far held twice a month.

"We started to have a few responses and word of mouth started to spread, between what we had going on with First Tee and adding junior camps this summer," Bayne said. "We threw this idea out and a lot of people liked this idea with a Little League environment, with head-to-head competition."

At an orientation meeting, 25 parents showed up. Eventually, Bayne had to cut off participation to 32 players, which allowed formation of four teams of eight people.

The in-house model allows the program to have a set schedule of practices on Thursday and matches on Sunday, instead of an outside schedule that would vary depending on when other courses in the region could play.

"They like the idea of staying here and not having to change schedules to meet the other golf courses," Bayne said.

Bayne coaches two of the teams and fellow Oak Hollow pro Eddie Isley coaches two. The teams are named Bucks, Ducks, Hawks and Eagles for some of the wildlife seen around the course.

The teams names are fashioned across the back of the shirts and golfers also are given a hat with PGA Jr. League logo.

"Kids like wearing

their jerseys," Bayne said. "They wear them to practice and of course to matches."

Playing abilities range from a 13-year-old who can blast a drive almost the length of the driving range and a 6-year-old who is proficient in most phases of the game to those who had not picked up a golf club before this spring.

The program is limited to those 13-and-under this year but is allowed to have those as old as 17. Bayne said he will open the program to 14-17 year olds next year because he has a number of 13 year olds now.

Ages are almost evenly split between those 9-and-under and those 10-and-over. There are five girls.

Bayne coaches the Bucks and Hawks while Isley guides the Hawks and Ducks. They picked the teams at random. Players are from throughout the Triad. One is a former High Point resident who now lives in Mayodan.

They are assisted by Seamus Maguire, a club player at High Point University.

"It's mainly something I like to do," Maguire said. "I'm from Philadelphia. There was nothing like this when I was kid and I wasn't interested in it. I think it's great that the young kids are interested. That young, if a couple of kinds pick it up and keep playing that's fantastic. The main thing is getting exposure for these younger kids."

"If there's someone who needs specific help, I can do that, or I can run chipping and putting. The emphasis is just to have fun. There's the conception that it's serious and for older people. But I think younger people



LAURA GREENE | HPE

Sophie Alverson, 9, practices her golf swing on the driving range at Oak Hollow Golf Course.

can have fun, too."

Some players signed up for additional playing time and the competition. Parents and some grandparents who play golf said they saw it as an opportunity to introduce their child to a new activity and see if they have an interest in the game.

Robert Alverson has a son and a daughter participating.

"They enjoy going and watching my stepdad play and getting on the course with him," Alverson said. "And it gives them another sport to play. They play soccer. They both enjoy it. It took a little bit to get my daughter interested, but when she found out she could play with grandpa, that was OK. They made some good friends out here. Some pretty good golfers out here."

"My son had played five or six rounds but my daughter hadn't played. She didn't know how to swing a club. And now she can hit the ball. And, he likes to wear his jersey. And they learned etiquette and how to treat the course."

Players are divided into two sessions for practice, with each session split between time on the range and time on chipping and putting.

Bayne said he puts an emphasis on putting and chipping.

"That's how some of the smaller kids can beat the bigger kids," Bayne said.

Matches involve each of the four two-player teams competing for nine holes in a scramble format in which both players on a team hit a tee shot and then each hit from the best shot after that. Best score wins a hole.

The nine holes are divided into three-hole segments, with the team winning the most holes in a segment getting a "flag" and the team with the most flags winning the match.

For the first match, Bayne said players were sure of how the format worked but have become accustomed to it.

Bayne tries to match a player who can hit the ball down the fairway with one who is able to

chip and putt. He doesn't pair the two best players on a team together and tries to have different pairings each week because of the social aspect.

"It's easy and hard," Dominic Specht, 10, said. "It challenges me so I can advance. That's why I like the Junior League. I learned more about my swing and about the chipping, and I like meeting new kids and friends."

An emphasis was placed on etiquette and sportsmanship from the start.

"I took that one when we had the parents meeting," Isley said. "I told them this wasn't like baseball or basketball, that this is golf we were going to be supportive of all the players. And they have cooperated."

Maintaining pace of play is also a point of emphasis. Older players help younger ones stay focused and ready to hit during matches.

There is a rule that triple bogey is the worst score that can be made on a hole, and there is a time limit as a commitment to parents. Only one match went the entire nine holes the first week, Bayne said,

but play is moving along better.

Play is from special orange tees, which may or may not be closer than the normal red tees on a hole.

"We still want to challenge the longer hitters, but still make it enjoyable for the others," Bayne said.

There is a postseason for players 10-13. An all-star team will be selected for local matches at Bermuda Run. Winners advance to sectionals and regionals and nationals.

The purpose of the Jr. League is to complement but not replace the other programs such as First Tee.

"First Tee teaches core values besides golf skills," Bayne said. "The two programs can work with one another. We don't want to take kids away from something else. We want them to be immersed in golf, and keep the juniors on the golf course in addition to other sports they play. We want them to play other sports as well because they are trying to figure out what they want to do. We realized golf lasts for a lifetime as long as they are introduced to it."



Laura Greene | HPE

Oak Hollow teaching professional Eddie Isley, left, works with a group of junior league golfers as they practice their chip shots at Oak Hollow Golf Course.

comers School for the spring semester of the next academic year and have up to 100 students enrolled by the end of the school year, said Janson Silvers, the school system's public information officer.

The Newcomers School

at Andrews would involve spending \$8.6 million and would be funded during the next four fiscal years through the federal Elementary and Secondary School Emergency

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SCHOOL

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Relief Fund. Known commonly in education circles as ESSER, the program established by Congress aims to provide federal money to local school districts to tackle COVID-19 costs and address learning loss because of the pandemic disruption of education.

Guilford County Schools is slated to receive a total of \$307.5 million in ESSER funding through the 2025 fiscal year. Superintendent Sharon Contreras described detailed plans for the local ESSER spending during the Guilford County Board of Education meeting last week.

Andrews Principal Marcus Gause said the Newcomers School will help families and their children adjust to their community and adopted country.

"They can learn the language here while embracing the cultures of all the different students," Gause told The High Point Enterprise. "But from an academic perspective, it really tries

to focus on building language skills and giving them a great shot at getting a solid education."

The ESSER money includes other proposed spending geared toward High Point schools and students. The school district plans to spend \$2 million in federal funds through the program for community partnerships and mental health care coordination for High Point community schools.

The vast majority of the ESSER funding is planned for initiatives throughout Guilford County, including:

- Help with tutoring of students including formation of a tutoring corps.
- Expanding library and digital learning resources.
- Replacing band uniforms for high school marching bands.
- Forming a campaign to increase student attendance.
- Creating innovative outdoor and indoor learning spaces.
- Securing adequate cleaning supplies to sanitize school buildings.

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