

PGA of America aids junior golf program

By Billy Turner, The Times-Picayune

November 12, 2009, 1:00AM

The PGA of America, which will be conducting its 93rd annual meeting beginning today in New Orleans, awarded \$10,000 to the Bayou District Foundation on Wednesday for its junior golf program.

Jim Dorman, Gulf States PGA president, said the ceremony at the City Park driving range was about supporting the next generation of golfers. The money will be used to support the curriculum, equipment and instructors committed to junior golf.

"This is another step in bringing back those junior golfers who were displaced by Hurricane Katrina," said Mike Rodrigue, a Bayou District Foundation director, with the North Course as a backdrop. "You can still see some of the scars from Katrina. This validates our whole process. It allows us to reach out to those persons who haven't been able to come back and say, 'Come on home.' We couldn't do this without the network we've built at the Bayou District Foundation."

The BDF's junior program originally targeted youths in the 7th Ward, but it has drawn players from across the city. The program's specific purpose is "reaching low-income children who lack easy access to the game of golf."

Joe Steranka, CEO of the PGA of America, said that the 400 PGA of America delegates came to New Orleans to sample the "legendary hospitality" of the area. The PGA last gathered in New Orleans in 1998.

"The PGA (of America) is here this week because of a commitment our Board of Directors made to return and support New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina," Steranka said. In 2007, Golf 20/20 released a study that concluded that the state's golf economy was approximately \$810 million. Additionally, the industry was responsible for more than 11,000 jobs, \$275 million of wage income, and the amount of charitable giving attributed to the game exceeded \$23 million, he said.

"As we enjoy New Orleans," Steranka said, "we also focus on golf's values for our next generation of players. That should never be understated. Golf builds character, provides direction and also is the source of new jobs and fulfilling careers. The PGA of America looks forward to the days ahead in working with the Bayou District Foundation."

Jim Remy, PGA of America president, said that the presentation was held on the site of a parcel of land that "represents the heart of a commitment of the Gulf States PGA Section in a state where more than 1,900 golf clinics are held annually serving 12,600 juniors. Today, we look upon this occasion as one step in the upward journey of the Bayou District Foundation's Junior Golf Program. The Bayou District Foundation represents the resiliency of the citizens of this region, this city."

The BDF is expected to be the organization selected to redevelop at least one golf course at City Park. The park's board in late May approved changes to its master plan that cleared the way for a \$24 million golf facility. City Park has in hand about \$15.5 million to pay for Phase I -- \$5.9 million in FEMA reimbursements and \$9.65 million from state capital outlay. The Bayou District Foundation is said to be raising approximately \$9 million to cover the remaining costs and will make that bid when the request for proposal is issued.

City Park CEO Bob Becker said Wednesday the RFP could come next week.

Once the RFP is issued, it will be open for a minimum of 30 days, perhaps more, Becker said. "We hope that we've structured the RFP so that we will get competition," he said.