CHaD Classic at 25: A Quarter Century of Golf for CHaD Kids

There's a certain symmetry to the concept of grownups playing games and having fun as a way of helping sick children get well. And perhaps nowhere else have the games been so robust and the results over 25 years so generous, tangible and vital as the annual CHaD Classic Golf Tournament.

Modest Beginnings

In 1984, Ginny and Tom Lane, with their friends and neighbors, established the Quechee Lakes Landowners' Association Charities (QLLA Charities) as a way to channel proceeds from the existing New England Open Pro-Am Golf Tournament to support worthy local causes. Their survey of the region identified pediatric services at Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center as one of the charity's initial beneficiaries. (Children's Hospital at Dartmouth (CHaD) wasn't formally established as a "children's hospital within a hospital" until 1991.)

The Pro-Am Tournament, established in 1980, had quickly become an important annual event in the region, attracting many noted pro golfers to the courses in Quechee and an abundance of interest from local amateurs. When you add the element of charitable support for kids in the hospital to an event run by community and business leaders, with dozens of energetic volunteers, the combination also generates interest from the corporate community in the form of sponsorships, advertising and other income for the tournament.

Even with prize purses for the professional golfers during the early years and other expenses of running such a large public event, there was always a considerable sum left over for the kids.

A Huge Cast of Characters

Over the years, so many people have been involved that it would be impossible to list everyone here, but certainly notable names and faces spring to mind. Penny and Drew Cunningham have supported the tournament since the very beginning. Key sustaining corporate support has been provided by Centurion Insurance – a company founded and presided over by Drew Cunningham – as well as Golf & Ski Warehouse and Quechee Lakes Development Group.

Past chairs of the CHaD Classic include Vermont Senator John Campbell (no doubt with much assistance from wife Kathy), Jim Keighley and Lorraine Guile. This year's co-chairs are Sharin Luti and Gail Ferney.

Any list of key players is bound to be inadequate, as each year's tournament requires the orchestrated efforts of dozens and dozens of volunteers. We beg the indulgence and forgiveness of everyone not mentioned by name here!

Jim Keighley, Co-Chair, Billy Casper, Golf Legend, John Campbell, Chair, Laura Baugh, LPGA Pro, John Ziegler, Co-Chair enjoy a few minutes together before teeing off at Quechee.

John Ferney, Jim Keighley, Gail Ferney and Drew Cunningham were honored at a recent Friends of CHaD Board meeting.

Professional Long Driver Mike Gorton is a true friend of CHaD.

Favorite Memories

The "Long Drivers" add a thrilling and sometimes comical note to the Classic. These professional 'ringers' are positioned at select holes and, for an additional contribution to CHaD from golfers, they "guarantee" to get the ball onto the green for them in just one stroke! Notable among regular long drivers at Quechee is Mike Gorton, a four-time World Long Drive Champion from Colorado. Not only does Mike help out during the tournament, he also pledges five percent of his professional long drive earnings to CHaD.

In 1998, despite some concern that the event wouldn't survive without the attraction of professional golfers, the CHaD Classic turned fully amateur and all efforts focused on having a great time while raising as much money as possible for CHaD kids and families. But that didn't mean the end of celebrity sightings on the Quechee links.

Penny and Drew Cunningham have been there since the beginning.

Vermont State Senator John Campbell gets a tip from the late golf pro Jeff Julian in 2001.

The shotgun start as Quechee's two pristine courses fill with CHaD golfers.

Golf legend Billy Casper, LPGA pro Laura Baugh and the late Jeff Julian are among many notables from the world of golf who have helped out over the years.

In 2003, QLLA Charities added a pre-tournament gala event, adding to both the festivities and to each year's total contribution to CHaD. Gala events have included silent and live auctions, "A Night at the Races" and Las Vegas-style casino nights.

And each year the CHaD Classic has 'sold out,' with roster of teams and players that fully occupies the Quechee Club's two magnificent eighteen-hole golf courses! Did we mention that the Club donates the use of the courses? Yet another substantial contribution to the bottom line for the tournament.

Silver Anniversary Milestone

Now, on the eve of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the CHaD Classic, there's a very real possibility that the tournament's cumulative total support for CHaD over the years will exceed $1.5 million, a milestone that was most likely never imagined at the outset. But many believe that it sets the pace for the next 25 years. ■

Where the Money Has Gone Over the Years

1984-1993: Support during the early years went to CHaD's Pediatric Oncology Program and the Intensive Care Nursery (ICN), including funds for the "Koala Suite," named for QLLA (often pronounced koala). The Koala Suite is a private room adjacent to the ICN where families learn to provide total care of their infant – with medical staff immediately available – before they go home on their own, often many miles away.

1994-1996: During the period shortly after CHaD was formally established, funds were allocated through a mini-granting process. CHaD and QLLA leaders would meet to review requests and provide funding for selected programs and projects, including the purchase of chair beds for parents, loaner hearing aids for deaf children, support of CHaD's Child Life Program, the creation of poison prevention displays and more.

1997-1999: QLLA Charities made a $100,000 pledge to the new Pediatric Intensive Care Unit, a state-of-the-art, freestanding unit that remains one of CHaD's most distinctive facilities and a recognized center of excellence.

2000-2001: CHaD Classic funds supported the development of CHaD's Pain-Free Program, created to reduce pain and stress for children who need to go through some tests and procedures. This program has become nationally known for its effectiveness and outstanding compassionate care for children.

2002-2005: Tournament proceeds helped construct CHaD's Outpatient Center that opened in July 2005. This remarkable facility offers a child-friendly, interactive waiting area and a pediatric center that brings together virtually all of CHaD's pediatric medical and surgical sub specialties. For the first time nearly all children see their doctor(s) in one place at DHMC.

2006-present: QLLA Charities has made a five-year commitment to support one of CHaD's most fragile and vulnerable patient populations – abused and neglected children – through a pledge to provide operating as well as endowment funding for the Child Advocacy and Protection Program (CAPP). CAPP collaborates closely with protective services, law enforcement, schools, social service agencies, and referring providers, and offers not only urgently scheduled evaluations, but also ongoing medical education throughout the region.