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Beneficiaries say tourney tees up lot of opportunity

By RICK BROWN • ribrown@dmreg.com • May 29, 2008

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Thomas Simmons has witnessed the doors of opportunity the Principal Charity Classic golf tournament have opened for his students.

The eighth annual Champions Tour event, which starts Friday in West Des Moines, raised \$575,000 for charity in 2007. By comparison, Iowa Golf Charities Inc., the charity vehicle for former sponsor Allianz, raised a total of \$900,000 for charity in six years.

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"Saying thanks is really not enough," said Simmons, principal at King Elementary School in Des Moines.

Two of the tournament's five designated charities, Bravo Greater Des Moines and the Greater Des Moines Community Foundation, pooled their dollars to create the "Connecting Kids and Culture" program. It helps pay for transportation to educational events such as field trips.

Charity donations last year allowed King students to go to the Hall of Pride and helped a group of student leaders attend an event for Olympic hopefuls at Iowa's Capitol.

"Dollars are short in the district to do those kinds of things," Simmons said. "It's so important to give children an opportunity to experience as much as they can during their growing years.

They see things and think, 'Maybe I can do that.' "

Those types of opportunities are at the heart of Principal Financial Group's decision in 2006 to take over title sponsorship of the tournament when Minneapolis-based Allianz Life Insurance Co. decided not to renew.

"We never would have gotten involved in this had it not been for the charity aspect of it," said Barry Griswell, who retired as Principal's chief executive this month and is now co-president of the Greater Des Moines Community Foundation.

Griswell acknowledges that branding opportunities for Principal and the estimated \$3 million to \$4 million in economic impact for greater Des Moines are important.

"But it took another element, and that's doing something good for kids," Griswell said.

Each of the five designated charities in Principal's "Fore Our Kids" program - United Way of Central Iowa, Variety - the Children's Charity, and Blank Children's Hospital are the other three - received \$110,000 in 2007.

"If you take that dollar, or \$10, or \$100,000, and you spend it in the right way around early childhood development, the payback on that return is incredible," said Larry Zimpleman, Principal's new CEO.

The other \$25,000 benefited several charity partners that provided on-site services during the 2007 tournament .

"That \$575,000 is very meaningful to all of us," defending Principal Charity Classic champion Jay Haas said. "Those dollars can make a pretty big impact. That's a pretty cool thing."

And appreciated, according to Alissa McKinney, director of development at Blank Children's Hospital.

"We're thrilled and honored to be a part of this," McKinney said.

The community's support for the event in 2007 led to Principal's decision in November to extend its title sponsorship for two more years, through 2010.

Principal will pay the PGA Tour \$2.5 million to be title sponsor in 2008. Wells Fargo will pay \$350,000 to be presenting sponsor. There will be some escalation, in the neighborhood of 5 percent, over the final two years of the current deal.

All net proceeds from the tournament, once the undisclosed budget is covered and a contribution is made to the tournament's reserve fund, go to charity. Most of that budget is covered by sponsorships, meaning that money spent for tickets, merchandise, food and drink during tournament week will go directly to charity.

A total of \$300,000 was put in the reserve fund, which had a zero balance before the 2007 tournament, last year. The goal is to build that reserve fund so it covers a year of the purse, which will translate to more dollars for charity.

Why the increase in charity dollars now?

Tournament director Jeff Starr said the partnership of Principal and Wells Fargo, two of the largest employers in Iowa, allowed organizers to sell more local sponsorships.



MARY CHIND/THE REGISTER

Blank Children's Hospital patient Amanda Ostrem, 3, of Stratford enjoys a visit Wednesday from Child Life specialist Laura Reicks. The Child Life program was started with money raised during the Champions Tour golf event.

Tracking charity dollars

Each of the Principal Charity Classic's five designated charities received \$110,000 from last year's tournament. Here's how the five charities used their dollars in 2007 and plan to use them in 2008:

UNITED WAY OF CENTRAL IOWA: Money from 2007 funded the Elevate Program, a group of young people who educate legislators, foster parents, human services staff, juvenile court professionals and the public about foster care and adoption. Charity dollars in 2008 will go toward Smile Squad, a mobile dental clinic that provides free or reduced-cost dental care to students.

VARIETY - THE CHILDREN'S CHARITY: Money received last year and in 2008 is funneled into established programs: before- and after-school programs; camps and shelter services; early childhood and special-needs programs; medical facilities; and equipment and mobility programs.

BLANK CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL: Money in 2007 was put toward the Pediatric Therapy Department. Therapy devices, toys and games for both the facility at the hospital and the one in Ankeny

"In Allianz, we had an out-of-town insurance company in an insurance center," Starr said. "We didn't get a whole lot of community support. It means so much more now to walk into someone's office and say, 'Hey, this is being a part of the Principal and Wells Fargo.'"

Lynn Horak, who retired at the end of 2007 as regional chairman for Wells Fargo, Iowa's largest banking company, is on the Principal Charity Classic board. He also served on the Iowa Golf Charities board.

"I think it's fair to say that we (Iowa Golf Charities) didn't focus in on a few specific charities," Horak said. "We ended up handing out a lot of small charitable gifts to a lot of broad-based organizations. When Principal and Wells Fargo got involved, we knew we had to focus in on some key charities for people so they could get excited about it."

Horak said Iowa Golf Charities would take requests from Iowa-based charities each year, then decide which ones would share the money.

"Coming up with \$100,000 or \$200,000 is not a small amount of money," Horak said. "But frankly, when you're doing a community-wide event like a golf tournament, you'd like to think you could be more successful."

Instead of a piecemeal distribution of dollars, Principal narrowed its focus for a concentrated impact.

"Barry and I said to ourselves, 'We ought to be able to raise at least half a million dollars for charity,' " Horak said. "And frankly, if we can't, then you have to question whether the community wants to support this. Fortunately, we did better than that."

Starr said sponsorship sales were more challenging this year because of the stagnant economy, but there was still a 3 percent increase.

"In a time when we can all agree that the economy is not doing as well" as it was a year ago, Horak said, "the support has been as good or better than the previous year. And I think that's a pretty strong statement."

Mary O'Keefe, Principal's senior vice president and chief marketing officer, said the goal in 2008 is to keep charity dollars at the same level as 2007 despite the current economic climate. The same five designated charities will receive money in 2008.

That's good news for people like Dr. Nancy Dowdle, principal at St. Augustin School in Des Moines.

Her students were able to go to such places as the Civic Center and the Science Center of Iowa through the "Connecting Kids and Culture" program.

"We probably wouldn't go without it," said Dowdle, whose school operates without a bus. "This is learning outside the walls. To have an opportunity to go to the Science Center, it's phenomenal for those kids to be able to do all those hands-on experiments. It opens up their world."

were purchased. Dollars in 2008 will go toward two projects: Fire Safety House, a mobile unit that traveled to 36 Iowa counties last year and taught fire safety to 7,887 students and 1,300 adults; and the Child Life program, which helps prepare children and their families for upcoming medical procedures.

BRAVO GREATER DES MOINES AND THE GREATER DES MOINES COMMUNITY FOUNDATION: They pooled donations in 2007 to create the "Connecting Kids and Culture" program, designed to cover the cost of things like field trips that have fallen victim to dwindling public funding. Funds were made available for every student in Polk and Dallas counties, public and parochial, from kindergarten through fifth grade. A curriculum was also established. The program also received a grant from the Kenneth P. and Helen I. MacDonald Fund through the community foundation. Funds in 2008 will go toward the same program

New in 2008

BIRDIES FOR CHARITY: Fans can make a pledge (minimum 2 cents) for each birdie made during the three days of competition starting today. There were 752 birdies made in 2007. Fans can also designate their charity of choice from 58 different charities involved in the program. For more information or to make a pledge, go to www.principalcharityclassic.com/pcc-birdies.php.

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