

At Pottawatomie Golf Course, Playing Poorly Pays Off for Local Charity

In a sport filled with birdies and eagles, played by people called “Tiger” and “Bear” and “Shark,” it was probably only a matter of time before pigs started making their way into the game of golf.

At the St. Charles Park District’s Pottawatomie Golf Course, a profusion of little pink pigs can be seen everywhere — adorning golf bags and hanging off key chains — the visible mascot for a fundraising campaign that hopes to bring a lot of smiles to needy area children each Christmas.



Dubbed “Piglets 4 Tots,” this moneymaker is the brainchild of local golfer Tim May, a championship regular player at Pottawatomie and other area courses. What began as a friendly little challenge between May and five of his closest golfing buddies quickly blossomed into a way to give something back to the community.

The rules for playing “Piglets 4 Tots” are simple: every time a golfer takes 3 strokes to sink a putt that should have gone in in two (called a “3-putt” in golf parlance), he or she pays 50 cents to a piggy bank housed in the course’s pro shop. Golfers who want to participate pre-register at the front desk, at which time they’ll be awarded a pig key chain emblazoned with the Pottawatomie “Piglets 4 Tots” logo.

The pig key chain attracts a lot of attention, according to Billy Ogiego, a part-time Pottawatomie Golf Course employee and one of May’s original golfing group. Ogiego is only too happy to relate how the campaign began.

“When Tim started this with our group,” explains Ogiego, “we charged each other \$1 every time one of us 3-putted.” At the end of six months, the golfers had amassed a little over \$200, which they used to treat themselves to a party. The second year, they raised more than \$500, “which just goes to show what bad putters we are,” quipped Ogiego. In addition to May and Ogiego, the group includes Chuck Grote, Steve Jorstad, Chris May, and Bob Wulff.

They soon realized that if six guys could raise \$500 at \$1 a shot, a significant sum of money could be gathered if more people got in on the game — money that could then be donated to a worthy cause. Knowing that Pottawatomie Golf Course manager and PGA golf pro Jim Wheeler was actively involved with the area “Toys for Tots” campaign, May and the others thought this would be the ideal charity to support.

They lowered the 3-putt fine to fifty cents, and on March 24, 2007, May officially kicked off the “Piglets 4 Tots” campaign with the first contribution. More than \$600 has been raised to date. “That’s 1,200 3-putts. That’s a lot of bad golfing,” jokes Ogiego. The goal is to raise \$1,000 by the time the fundraiser ends on December 1, which is when Wheeler begins his shopping for the “Toys for Tots” campaign.

It’s an idea that has caught on with Pottawatomie course regulars. So far, some fifty-four people have signed up — both men’s and ladies’ leagues, as well as individual golfers of all ages. “Our youngest participant is Kate Meyers, who was the #1 golfer at St. Charles East High School, and our oldest has to be Dick Rabbitt, who is in his eighties,” says Ogiego. In fact, people are so enthusiastic about the fundraiser that they keep track of their 3-putts even when they’re playing other courses. “There are a good dozen or so people who, no matter where they’re playing, come back and donate their fifty-cents,” says Ogiego.

The “Piglets 4 Tots” campaign has also attracted the attention of one of the country’s premier golf venues. While traveling on business to Carlsbad, California, May noted that his “Piglet 4 Tots” key chain caught the eye of the golf pro at the LaCosta Resort and Spa. When May returned to St. Charles, he asked Ogiego to send some key chains to LaCosta’s pro. “He thought it was a great program and he thinks he’d like to do something like it out there,” says Ogiego.

“It has definitely been a great thing for us,” according to Ogiego, who enjoys keeping track of how “Piglets 4 Tots” players are doing. “I like to “rib” them when they 3-putt and don’t come in and tell me. I’ll point out that that’s a toy or a sock that some child’s not going to have at Christmas time.”

And if the motivation to help those less fortunate have a brighter Christmas isn’t incentive enough, the “Piglets 4 Tots” campaign rewards its golfers by entering their name in a raffle drawing each time they log in a 3-putt. “At the end of the

year, if you had 76 3-putts, your name's in the raffle 76 times," explains Ogiego. The prizes are donated golf-related items such as a "rare" all-white Ping Hooper Extreme Golf Bag, a dozen Titleist Pro VI golf balls, and Titleist Cubs and White Sox hats. People who wish to contribute items to the raffle are asked to donate new golf-related items they already have, as opposed to purchasing something specifically for the raffle. "If you're going to spend money, we'd rather you just contribute that amount directly to the "Toys for Tots" campaign," says Ogiego.

With a lot of great golfing weather still ahead, Ogiego hopes more visitors to Pottawatomie Golf Course will get involved with the "Piglets 4 Tots" campaign, helping them to meet — and, hopefully, exceed — their \$1,000 goal.

For more information about the "Piglets 4 Tots" campaign, contact Billy Ogiego at Pottawatomie Golf Course Pro Shop by calling 630.584.8356.