

Save the
Date!

GOLF'S RISING STARS

THE FUTURES TOUR GOLF CLASSIC May 21-24, 2003 Innsbrook Country Club, Merrillville, Indiana

*Author: Deborah Hawkins,
Deborah Hawkins Communications*

Golf, today, is as much about enjoyable, family recreation as it is a venue for mixing business with pleasure. The success of women's professional golf has had a lot to do with the overall rise of the sport. And the "FUTURES Golf Tour," which will be on display in its first Chicago/Northwest Indiana appearance, as the Lake County Golf Classic, May 21-May 24, 2003, is largely responsible for the increasing "professionalism" of women's golf.

The FUTURES Golf Tour, which began in 1981, has always been aimed at giving women, who were not on the LPGA tour, competitive opportunities to improve their play so they could move to that level. Originally named the Tampa Bay Mini Tour, over 20 tournaments were held each year in Florida. Renamed the "FUTURES Golf Tour" in 1984, the organization grew from a statewide venue for showcasing women's golfing talent to an international collection of highly skilled and entertaining professionals. The FUTURES Golf Tour is now the largest international development tour and second largest women's golf tour in the world. Reflecting the popularity of the sport itself, the Tour has grown to include members from all over the world. The 2003 roster includes approximately 260 players from over twenty countries, including members from Asia, Africa, Australia, Europe, and South America. A full field of 144 players will be teeing off in the Lake County Golf Classic.

The FUTURES Golf Tour, in fulfilling its charter to help women golf professionals develop their skills, has become quite literally, a key stepping stone to the LPGA. After each season, the top three money winners from the FUTURES Golf Tour (who have competed in a minimum of six tournaments) automatically receive exempt status on the LPGA Tour for the following year. Players ranking 4th-10th on the money list receive direct entry into the LPGA's qualifying tournament. (*See profiles of "Players To Watch."*)

The Tour's 2003 season of 17 tournaments runs March 13 - August 17 and features play on top flight courses in 14 states. The Lake County FUTURES Golf Classic, to be held at Merrillville's beautiful and historic Innsbrook Country Club, marks a return of the Tour to Indiana after nearly twenty years.

According to Zayra F. Calderon, current President and CEO of the Futures Tour, the addition of a premier Lake County course was perfect for the Tour. The location, which is well-served by airports and highways, as well as its proximity to Chicago and Lake County's many hospitality and entertainment venues, makes it a great spot for players, fans and potential sponsors. "Our tournaments are centered around the communities in which we play, and we are confident that the entire Lake County area will embrace the Tour and will work tirelessly to turn this into a marquee event for years to come."

According to Tom Crowel, Innsbrook's President and lifelong resident of the area, the Club has a lot to offer the Tour as well. The course, which is currently laid out as a 6-5-7, par 73, was built in 1919 and boasts one of the widest practice ranges of any course in the area. Running over 70 yards, fifty players can easily practice at one time. With a new putting green, chipping green and sand traps located off the course, players have ample opportunities to work on their game between rounds.

Crowel also noted that the course is very *walking and viewing friendly*. The distances between holes are not great, and spectators can actually stand along a fairway and watch play on the two adjoining holes simultaneously. The Spring date for the classic should be a great time to enjoy the 100-plus species of native Indiana trees and the design of the course itself, with long par 3s and 4s, Crowell claims, would encourage a player to use "every club in her bag."

By all accounts, Innsbrook is a great course for players and for spectators. Getting the local community involved is key to the long-range plans of all the organizers.

Fourteen out of the 17 tournament locations on the FUTURES circuit are returning from last year. (The Michelob Light FUTURES Charity Golf Classic, in Decatur, Illinois, has been on the schedule for 19 years.) Regular scheduling helps players plan their participation over a season and supports the development of sponsorships, establishing an attractive purse and fund-raising activities that advance the year-round work of the Tour. FUTURES Golf Tour events have raised more than \$2.65 million for charitable organizations in its 23-year history.

Innsbrook Country Club wants to showcase its club to the entire Chicago/Northwest Indiana area. Promoting the game of golf through the talents of upcoming national stars and introducing area residents to its facilities will be aided by plans to offer an affordable and exciting professional tournament experience. (Single-day, tournament and family passes promise to be an exceptional deal).

Of course, the Lake County Convention & Visitors Bureau, who played an integral role in bringing the event to the Lake County area, recognizes that being a good tournament host can impact the area's economic future. The success of this tournament can not only ensure that Lake County will become an annual stop on the FUTURES Golf Tour, success in securing sponsors and supporting a week of tournament-related events could be a great boom for golf *and business* in the area.

You can help make this event a tremendous success by coming out for the **FUTURES Golf Tour, Lake County Classic, May 21-24**. Here, you will be able to see a great crop of young talent and enjoy a wonderful venue for watching the game. Be part of the community that will make the event memorable!

- ?? For information on sponsorship opportunities and a schedule of tournament events, visit www.futurestour.com or contact Futures Golf Tour at 863-709-9100.
- ?? If you would like to volunteer for the tournament (help with registration, crowd control, parking, etc.) or if you would like to host a FUTURES Tour player in your home for the week, contact the Innsbrook Country Club's Main Office at 219-980-9060 or the Lake County Convention and Tourism Bureau at 219-989-7770 or (800) ALL-LAKE or www.alllake.org.
- ?? For additional profiles of leading money winners from the 2002 season, visit our website at www.golfnowchicago.com.
- ?? For more information on the FUTURES Tour, including the full schedule of tournaments and results, visit www.futurestour.com.