



## HSVPOA Golf Director Updates Board at Retreat

### Description

#### **HSVPOA Golf Director, Tom Heffer, Updates the Board Directors at the 2021 Board Retreat on May 12, 2021**

##### **HSVPOA Golf is a Big Division**

Tom Heffer, Director of Golf, said we have 18 divisions, eight golf shops, eight maintenance shops, a golf admin division, and golf cart maintenance. There are 175 employees under Tom. The number of employees can fluctuate on a daily basis as hiring and retaining workers can be difficult.

##### **Golf Department Goal is to Lower Property Owner Subsidy**

“The main goal and responsibility of the Golf Department have been to lower golf subsidy without decreasing quality,” stated Tom. The Golf Department is trying to lower subsidy by increasing revenue in member play, guest play, Stay and Play Packages, and tournament play.”

##### **COVID-19 and HSV Golf**

COVID-19 has affected golf in 2020. It was not possible to have tournaments. Some months there were no Stay and Play packages.

COVID-19 actually helped the golf. Member play increased substantially and subsidies were lowered to just over a half a million dollars. The subsidy was 1.6 million, or two million the previous year.

##### **Obstacles**

Tom said, “the biggest obstacles in golf is funding the rolling stock and course projects as well as difficulty in hiring and maintaining golf course maintenance employees.” John Paul said they are down 16 full-time employees in golf alone.

Granada Golf Course (95 acres) only has four employees, plus the superintendent.

In the past couple of days, there have been some applicants for the golf course jobs. Heffer said, “trying to run a 95 acre golf course with four people is really hard. That is a huge obstacle for us.”

Heffer said, “as far as deferred maintenance, most of our capital has already been bid out. The Board has approved it. We went out to bid for six units. But we have 240 units across the Golf Department, six is a drop in the bucket. We need some help in deferred maintenance. So money is definitely a big issue.”

Continuing, Heffer said, “the last capital project we have in 2021 is crack sealing, asphalt sealing and restriking of the Coronado Golf Course parking lot and also striking of the Cortez parking lot.”

“I don’t want to leave out another hurdle. It is nothing that we can do about, but the weather is always a constant hurdle in golf, too.”

“Funding, people and weather are my biggest hurdles,” explained Tom.

#### **Golf Staff**

A lot of part-time employees are used in the golf shops. 97% of their part-time workers are in the golf shops.

Director Belair asked if using part-time employees is a huge administrative burden? Or could you use more part-time employees?

Tom Heffer said, during COVID-19 there was a struggle and they had to hire a couple of more part-time employees to keep up with the demand of the cart traffic. (This had to do with the single cart riders.) “Right now, as we get back into normalcy in golf, we’re okay,” explained the Golf Director.

GM Paul said, “one of the beauties of the inside staff in the Golf Department and living here, which is a positive for a change, is that a lot of the part-time workers are doing it for mental health. They are not doing it for the money. They cash the checks, but we have a hundred-thousand-dollar, a hundred-fifty-thousand-dollar people that have retired that are working for \$11 an hour in the pro shop, mostly, just to keep active and for mental health. The beauty of that is when we have a rain day or something, we can call them off and they don’t care. Whereas if you were the normal club with young people, they’d want their hours and want to work. So that is one of the positives that we have with part-time people in the golf shops here.”

They enjoy coming to work and working in the golf shops. 100% of our golf shop employees are Property Owners. The work ethic is there. They show up in the mornings.

Heffer said, “our Superintendents have contacted the football coaches in the area, also. To keep the football team in shape, come out and work on our golf courses. We are working that line of hiring.”

There have been some takers on that offer. Tom said the problem is most of the takers live on the west end and they don't want to travel to the east end of the Village.

### **Future Renovation of Bunkers**

John Paul said he would weigh in on this because he was the Director of Golf for 16 years..."one of the things we need to look at in the future as funding is available, are renovating the bunkers at Isabella and Granada. And the reason for that is the new bunker systems that they put in out here two years ago provide incredible labor savings. It costs half a million dollars to do these bunkers, but it used to take four people three days to put the bunkers together after an event. It now takes one guy about two and a half hours. So, if you can imagine the labor savings in that and just being able to get to mowing and that other stuff. I was watching them do the bunkers at Isabella this morning after this rain event and they have to pump them out first of all. That takes 15 minutes. Then they have to push them up and it takes two guys probably two hours on a bunker. Whereas, this other thing, there is very little movement of the bunker. It drains through and this stuff lasts for 25 years now. This is one of the things we will be talking about in the future."

### **Golf Department Goal**

Director Chris Jones asked Tom what his goals are and what he is targeting.

The Golf Director said their main goal is to lower subsidy by a certain percentage. We decreased costs so much last year, but it is not sustainable. There is a fine line there.

### **Golf Packages/Tournaments/Lodging**

The GM asked Tom to touch on the golf packages.

Tom said, "when Troon was here, the most we made in golf packet revenue was about \$275,000. That was back in 2016 and '17. Last year during the pandemic, with three months shut down and not allowing Stay and Play packages, we did \$433,000. This year, we're about \$433,000 booked out, already with the long part of the year left to go. We look to increase, hopefully, over half a million dollars this year from \$433,000 last year. It is going in the right path. People want to come here. It is drivable for a lot of the Dallas area, St Louis, Missouri, Kansas City, those areas and we get them here, they like to stay. Hopefully, we get more people moving from these packages."

Paul said, "They did a study not too long ago that there is 20 million people within six and a half hours, so the drivability of this place, it is really a good destination, as far as golf goes. That is one of the reasons the pandemic has helped us. Without people flying, they are driving here. They've done a really good job of increasing package play. A good job."

Because of COVID we had zero outside tournaments last year. Tom said, "it is almost like restarting again. We are forecasting about 22 tournaments this year. They keep canceling and moving to fall because of COVID. It is a revenue problem, somewhat. We lose money when we have a tournament because our normal play is more during COVID times. Bringing a tournament is not always a revenue generator. But it is a marketing generator, to bring in people to the Village...Our play for the members

is 8:00 a.m. till noon and there are eight tee times. Right now, with our packages, packages are paying full rack rate, which means our highest price. Tournaments are discounted down. Do we want to have more Stay and Play or more tournaments? Definitely more Stay and Play. They are taking up a lot more tee time. The members are seeing a little crunch too, with the tee time openings. We are trying to book out the Stay and Play packages first, and then the tournaments.”

### **Lodging Can Be An Issue**

“It is a struggle for where people stay the night when they come here. A lot of them stay in Vrbo’s. The big problem is the “hotel” word is a big word. That is big. We have our big corporate event coming back in June and they want to double their size, which is great. That is a \$25,000 tournament that we are booking again. Their convention is in Hot Springs. They take buses to come out, play golf, and then head back for their dinners and the convention in the city. We don’t have a big enough place and no housing,” Heffer explained.

Avila asked, “if we had a place for them to stay, then we would get their lodging revenue? We would get their food and beverage revenue?”

Tom replied, “I believe they would stay out here.”

The GM said, “that is our Achilles heel. For ten years before I left, I was trying to promote that. Our main competition is Branson, Tunica and Shreveport... They have absolutely no trouble with rooms. We do. If we had a place to book packages and people, the Golf Department alone could keep them full, 70%. It is unbelievable... We have tried to get people interested over the years, but we just don’t fit the demographics.”

Stephanie Heffer, Director of Programs and Operations, said, “Kevin Sexton, Director of Tourism and Community Affairs, is meeting with a hotel contractor today (May 12, 2021). We’ve been pursuing this for a number of years and we’ve kind of hit a wall, just about every turn. People are interested and excited until they start to really run the numbers. They just can’t pencil it out to make it quite fit. But we’re continuing to try... Hopefully, we will have something to report.”

John Paul said, “It is not for lack of effort. I promise you.”

The POA would not own the lodge and would not receive lodging revenue.

Pam Avila said, “From an economic point of view, it is still a good thing for the Village.”

Jones said, “I just don’t want the POA to run it.”

Stephanie said, “we don’t actually have land to put a hotel on. It has to be done privately through individuals who own the land.”

Property Owner, Jan Parker, mentioned that Hot Springs has a lot more to offer as far as outside activities.

Tom said, “a lot of the golfers want to stay here together. Our biggest Stay and Play has 76 people coming from Texas. They want to stay close, but they are not. They are staying all over the Village and

some are staying in Hot Springs. It has always been a problem where we get packages of 10, 12, 14 people. They want to stay in the same place and they are spread out all over the place. We lose repeat business because of that.”

Stephanie said, “We are going to talk about marketing later, but everybody knows our Discovery Package program is the backbone of getting people here and where we are driving our leads and trying to get them here to choose to relocate...We have grown from 30 Discovery Packages our first year to an anticipated 150 plus packages this year. It is a challenge to find a place to stay.”

John Paul explained that people stay at the [Waters Hotel](#) in downtown Hot Springs, [Mount Carmel](#) and [Los Lagos](#).

Jones said, “we are a city without a hotel – which is unheard of.”

John Paul said, “we’re not talking about a five-story hotel. We are talking about a 60 to 80 room hotel. A lodge. if we just had someplace to put the people. And it is not just golf; it is bridge, pickleball, tennis, lakes. There is a lot of other stuff that goes on here, but golf alone can keep this hotel fairly full and if they will listen to us and listen to the spiel, and we’ve got people listening now, so there is some money out there to do this kind of thing. So, we’ll see where it goes.”

By Cheryl Dowden, May 14, 2021

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