

BUSINESS

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Networking program mixes business with pleasure

*Business people
link up with
each other on
the golf course*

By Andrea Lepore
OAKVILLE BEAVER STAFF

People say you should never mix business with pleasure...that is until the Oakville Chamber of Commerce began its Golf Networking program.

Each Thursday, the Chamber hosts an afternoon of golf, refreshments and appetizers, along with an opportunity to network with other business professionals in Oakville, helping bring people together that might otherwise never have the chance to interact.

According to organizer, and Chamber President Elect, Mike Haines, you don't necessarily have to play golf to reap the rewards of the program.

"We usually try to help people network through seminars and trade shows and thought this would be another venue that would be of benefit to our members. It's an opportunity for people who don't play golf at all to have fun," he said.

"It's a great way for people to do a little business and a little pleasure at the same time."

Participants are divided into foursomes and play nine holes at the Oakville Executive Golf and Country Club. The cost is \$30 per round for members and \$35 for non-members (walking carts extra). Reservations should be received at the Chamber on the Tuesday preceding the Thursday you wish to play so the foursomes can be arranged.



Peter C. McCusker • Oakville Beaver

Each Thursday the Oakville Chamber of Commerce offers its Golf Networking program which has proved to be an invaluable tool for participants. The afternoon games give people an opportunity to mix business with pleasure. You don't have to be a pro at golf to enjoy the benefits of this program. Above, Fielding Howard, right, creative director of MediaEchoes shows his business card to Chamber of Commerce/Welcome Wagon's Patti Kohanik and Kay Williams while networking during a recent golfing afternoon.

The afternoon begins at 3:30 p.m. on the golf course and usually wraps up around 7:30 p.m. in the clubhouse, where participants can enjoy beverages and appetizers, as well as share ideas.

"After the game, we go to the clubhouse and introduce ourselves and discuss all types of topics. Everyone is included and each participant delivers a brief synopsis on their business," said Haines. "Some get so engrossed in the discussion that they don't want to leave."

To keep things fresh, each week participants have the opportunity to play with a different foursome to network their business and enjoy the pleasures, or aggravations, of the great game of golf.

Since the program's inception, Haines says people have had nothing but positive things to say about their golfing experience.

"Every person who has played says it's a great idea and they would like to see it continue," he said. "The program

was scheduled until the end of the summer, but we decided to extend it until the end of September due to the positive response. We hope to get more and more people involved every week."

Haines said the list of participants varies as much as their skill set. Currently, participants include such professionals as financial planners, real estate representatives, graphic designers, management consultants and bankers...to name just a few.

Patti Kohanik from Oakville's

Welcome Wagon and has attended three networking events. She said the program not only allows her to practice her swing, but also gives her the opportunity to meet business contacts in a relaxed atmosphere.

"The program helps breach the formality of things - because it's a small group, things aren't as formal. It's a relaxing way to meet new people and have fun at the same time," she said adding those hesitant about their lack of golfing expertise shouldn't be.

"I'm not the best of golfers but everyone is very encouraging," she added.

Bill Harris is the president of his own financial services company and has participated in the program since the first session. He said the program not only allows him to enjoy the game, but is also an excellent opportunity for business owners to network and educate others.

"For a person-to-person financial services business, making contacts is important. Since we aren't able to spend a lot of money in promotion, word of mouth is very important," he said. "The program helps people stay in business, generate business and it's a good way to get out from behind a desk and meet different people."

Haines, who jokes "my club of choice is the ball retriever," said it doesn't matter if you are a pro or novice, and promises a rewarding experience for all players.

"I hope when people are out there doing business, when they need someone in the graphic design field, for example, a light bulb goes off and they say 'I know this person from the golf networking program,'" he said. "It's a great way for people to cultivate their business and have fun."

For more information on the Golf Networking program, call the Oakville Chamber of Commerce at 905-845-6613.

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