

Area Golf: Buzz is getting louder for Brainerd tour stop



By all accounts, Ron Sanders smoked a perfect drive down the fairway with the initial "Happening Event" last August at Cragun's Legacy Courses.

But Sanders and his group, who are working toward bringing a Web.com Tour event to the Brainerd lakes area, are eyeing up their approach shot and in doing so will look to increase their budget from \$100,000 this past season to \$500,000 for next summer's event.

August's event, the Dondelinger Brainerd Lakes Area Tour Showcase, included two practice rounds, a fishing experience with five area guides and then the big event, which included a breakfast pairing party, an 18-hole scramble with 120 players featuring current and future tour players followed by an awards dinner.

"This year's event was a great community success," Cragun's director of golf Chuck Klecatsky said. "We were able to cover all the costs of the tournament as well as donate over \$10,000 to Mount Ski Gull. That was our No. 1 goal and we were able to accomplish that."

The Dutch Legacy was the site and it held up to the tour players' long drives, dart-like approach shots and precision putting.

"The conditions were very good this year and with our superintendent, Matt McKinnon, knowing that the event will be the third week of August, he'll prep the courses even better for that," Klecatsky said "We think the pros will play well and they shoot some low numbers, but it's going to be a good test."

While everything from the weather to the food was spot on, next year's event needs to be bigger and better, Sanders said.

Sanders is expanding the event into an almost week-long extravaganza starting Monday, Aug. 19, 2019, with practice rounds, tour pros and sponsors

partnered with up to 20 fishing guides for a fishing event followed by a large entertainment gala with the pairing party.

Sanders said he's looking at local and even national bands to provide the entertainment. The event organizer said he's got plans on top of plans and it all depends on the interest of the local community, sponsors and the tour itself.

He said last year's event went so well he's upping his expectations of a tour event coming to the area from five years to within three years.

Tuesday, Aug. 20, 2019, will be two pro-ams with the morning format being an 18-hole scramble followed by an afternoon regulation play opportunity for sponsors and community supporters. Interested players will have the option to play the scramble or put their skills to the test against the pro players.

Wednesday and Thursday will be the big event. Sanders would like to put up a \$100,000 purse and is hoping to draw 80 to 100 professionals from the Web.com Tour or Canada's version the McKenzie Tour for 36 holes of competitive stroke play.

"Although clearly an unofficial competition, it is being planned to set the stage for 2020 as organizers plan to be ready for the Web.com PGA Tour should they reach out to Brainerd for an official tour stop," Sanders said. "For now, it's all about securing sponsorship funds for 2019 and into the future which will require support not only from local companies, but regional and national corporations as well.

"People wishing to assist with this effort or even simply introduce organizers to a potential sponsor are encouraged to contact Ron Sanders or former CTC CEO Kevin Larson."

The two-day competition will be open to the public. Klecatsky said viewing areas will be designated on the course as well as grandstands on holes 9 and 18.

Sanders said he's been in contact with the PGA Tour and felt the conversations were promising. But he couldn't say enough about the support he's received from area businesses and the community. He knows he'll have to expand his reach in order to obtain his goal of a \$500,000 budget, but believes having Dondelinger and Cragun's and the other sponsors onboard is a good start.

"We really think that our partnership with this really does showcase all of what the Brainerd lakes area has to offer as well as helping to pool community funds to give them back to charity," Klecatsky said. "We really do feel like this is a win-win."



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My career at the Brainerd Dispatch began May 11, 1999 after graduating from North Dakota State University. My areas of emphasis includes local high school sports, Central Lakes College, the lakes area golf mecca and once a year I dabble in the NHRA when the Lucas Oil Nationals come to Brainerd International Raceway.

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