

LPGA PLAYERS CHANNEL SPIRIT OF THE FOUNDERS DURING THE COVID-19 CRISIS

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The true values of a culture or corporation and the character of an individual are tested not during good times but in bad. Behavior under trying conditions exposes core beliefs and defines us. The response of the LPGA community to the Covid-19 crisis reveals a decades-old culture built on looking out for each other.

In many ways, the Covid Crisis is like the days when it all began. Seventy years after the LPGA was founded by 13 women who fought for its creation and then its survival, the players are united in a single purpose while its corporate partners are resolute in their commitment and flexibility, aware that bad times demand the best of us.

In those early years of the LPGA, players traveled in car caravans, partly for the comradery, partly to save money and partly for safety at a time when women traveling alone was a rarity. There was a time when players would sneak Renee Powell, the only African-American on Tour, into motels where she was not allowed. Always, they were in this together.

Now, players are in this together again. They post videos about how they are dealing with the isolation with which we all struggle; they engage in on-line chats with fans; they promote charities helping those most in need; and they reach out to sponsors, offering to reward corporate loyalty in any way they can.

As golf's global tour, the LPGA was uniquely positioned in the vanguard of those impacted by the Coronavirus and, from the very beginning, took a leadership role in acknowledging the severity of the problem and the actions needed to ensure the health and safety of not just the LPGA community but the world community.

On Jan. 30, when few had heard the term Covid-19, the LPGA canceled the Blue Bay China tournament and then on Feb. 1 announced that the Honda Thailand and HSBC Women's World Championship in Singapore would not take place this year. On March 12, the first wave of postponements for tournaments in the United States was made. Every step of the way the LPGA Tour was out front.

Leading that aggressive action is Commissioner Mike Whan, the public face of a leadership team working hard – albeit now remotely – to protect the interests of the players and promote the positions of sponsors while ensuring the safety of the public. Whan has articulated the LPGA position through frequent videos and

countless media interviews while also speaking directly – via video – to his players about the current situation.

For the 10 years Whan has been Commissioner, his mantra to the players has been: “Act like a Founder.” What he means is that today’s players must exhibit the same sense of ownership of the Tour as did those 13 women who founded it in 1950 and the pioneers who followed them. To a woman, the current LPGA members have honored that legacy.

At the core of LPGA culture is a history of perseverance and determination. In the 1950s, the Tour had little money and almost no staff. Players were the accountants, public relations managers, rules officials and more. At the same time, equipment companies like Wilson, Spalding and MacGregor subsidized the big-name players on whose celebrity the Tour was promoted. It was crucial support.

In times of tribulation, the LPGA community has always pulled together. In 1971 – a year after the Tour’s 20th birthday – the LPGA schedule dwindled to 21 events. But sponsors, players and supporters of women’s golf united and in 1972 there were 30 tournaments.

That remarkable recovery was led by entertainer Dinah Shores and Colgate-Palmolive Chairman and CEO David Foster, who together created the Colgate Dinah Shore Winner’s Circle at Mission Hills Country Club in Rancho

Mirage, Calif., now one of the five LPGA majors – the ANA Inspiration.

The LPGA – with the help of Shore, Foster and Colgate-Palmolive – found a way. That challenge was faced again in 2010 – the 60th anniversary of the LPGA – when the full effect of the 2008 stock market crash was being felt. In Whan's first year as Commissioner, there were just 24 tournaments – the fewest since 1971 – and in 2011 there were only 23.

But the climb out of that hole was remarkable. The schedule for 2020, before Coronavirus cancellations and postponements, had 34 events and more than \$75 million in prize money – nearly double the total purse in 2010. And earlier this year, a new TV contract that goes into effect in 2022, brought with it greater exposure and financial stability for the Tour.

In the 1950s, the LPGA found a way. In 1971, the LPGA found a way. And in 2011, the LPGA found a way. And with the help of corporate partners like ANA, KPMG, AIG and Evian – all of whom sponsor LPGA majors – as well as dozens of other companies, the LPGA will again find a way.

This is a Tour that has always had one eye on the present and the other on the future while making decisions built upon the experiences of the past. The challenges ahead are significant in large part because of

the uncertainty surrounding the future – not just for the LPGA but for the world. We are not certain what's on the other side of this tunnel, but a faint glimmer of light is coming into view.

And if the 10 years of leadership by Whan and his team has taught anything it is that they not only have a plan for the future, but they likely have several of them. When things get back to normal – and they will – the LPGA will be ready.

And if the 70 years of the LPGA Tour have taught us anything, it is that the players and the sponsors will be ready to put on a quality product that will bring a smile to an entertainment-starved world.

That's what the LPGA has been doing for decades: Competing, entertaining and surviving. Always, it emerges from adversity stronger. This time could be the most dramatic yet. The players, administrators and sponsors know this crisis will define the LPGA. They know this crisis will define all of us.

A lesson learned from those who've gone before us is this: We can't control what happens to us, but we can control how we react to what happens to us.

Once again, the players of the LPGA are traveling in a caravan. But this time it's not just to the next tournament but to a new reality. As it was for the

Founders and Pioneers, this is a journey of values, beliefs and determination. And just as it has always been for the players of the LPGA, it is a trip they will make together.