BUSINESS

Bi-Lo Classic fundraiser set to tee off

By Angelia Davis
BUSINESS WRITER
adavis@greenvillenews.com

Organizers of the 2009 Bi-Lo Charity Classic hope to raise $4 million to aid the needs of nonprofit groups in the Carolinas, Tennessee, Georgia and North Carolina.

The event, considered the largest one-day benefit golf tournament in the nation, will be played on 10 courses Monday. It will officially open Saturday with a President's Party and other special events set for Sunday.

For the first time, the participating golfers aren't solely suppliers and vendors of Bi-Lo Supermarkets. This year's event was opened up to the public and businesses were able to sponsor courses.

As a result, said Carol Browning, executive director of Bi-Lo Charities Inc., "We actually ended up with more golfers than we thought we'd have."

The event will have about 1,100 golfers, she said.

Three courses have been sponsored by businesses.

Money raised through this weekend's 26th annual Bi-Lo Charity Golf Classic tournament will support children, education and hunger relief nonprofit organizations in areas served by Bi-Lo supermarkets.

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Visit www.bi-locharityclassic.com.

Last year, Bi-Lo Charities received $8.5 million in grant requests from nonprofits, Browning said. The grants aren't all in yet for this year's event, she said, because they aren't due until the end of July.

"But there's about a six-inch stack on my desk," she said.

In years past, the event has exceeded its fund-raising goals, collecting a record-breaking $5.6 million in 2008. Sixty Upstate organizations received a portion of those funds last year.

Browning said this year, though, is "a tough year. We're keeping our fingers crossed and still working at it."

Some of the fund-raising work was done before the tournament. Bi-Lo Charities offered donation raffles, including an opportunity to win a year's worth of groceries for a gift of $20.

Bi-Lo stores also sold candy bars and other products for sale with a portion of the proceeds going back to the charity, Browning said. The items included candy bars featuring the Bi-Lo Charities logo and the plush bears known as Champ, the charity bear.

The organization also partnered with Kellogg's, which offered a 5-cent donation with a sale on a variety of their products.

Browning said they were pleased with customers' responses to those efforts.

They also anticipate a good response to the auctioning of a 2010 Chevrolet Camaro and a Mercedes Smart Car.

The auction and pairings party will be held Sunday.