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Cross Creek to host NGA Tour event

BY ERIC SPROTT
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SENECA — Thanks to a connection that dates back 30 years, Cross Creek Plantation is set to play host a national golf event this spring.

The National Golf Association Tour will roll into Seneca from April 19-22 as Cross Creek for the Mountain Lakes Classic, which will be sponsored by the Mountain Lakes Convention & Visitors Bureau, with a portion of the net proceeds going to benefit the Oconee Medical Center Foundation.



Ernst

And according to Mark Ernst, the PGA professiona and Director of Golf Operations at Cross Creek, hosting the event presents an incredible opportunity as it projects to pump $200,000 into the local economy.

"We just see it as a win-win-win for not only the club, but for the community, and I think all fans in the area will get to see some great golf," he said. "We want the community to be involved, and we want them to come out and watch the guys play.

"The economic impact, I think, will benefit our community, especially the city of Seneca and also the surrounding areas in Oconee County."

Ernst helped spearhead the event, as he is close friends with NGA Tour President Robin Waters, who acquired the organization — previously known as the NGA Hooters Pro Golf Tour — in 2011.

And as soon as the previous title sponsor was removed, Ernst told his pal from his days on the junior golf circuit to call him to get the wheels turning to host an event.

"I thought Hooters was a little detrimental, especially in our area, to try to promote the event and try to get people to sponsor it," Ernst said. "It's nothing against Hooters, but it was basically a business decision."

Cross Creek hosted a Hooters Tour event in 2004 and has also hosted the South Carolina Open in both 1997 and 2009, as well as a U.S. Open qualifying event in 2008.

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The NGA Tour was established in 1988 and is the longest running developmental tour in the country, with 50 percent of the players who have qualified on the PGA Tour this year having come from the NGA Tour.

And with alums such as John Daly, Stewart Cink, Keegan Bradley and former Clemson All-American and 2009 U.S. Open champion Lucas Glover, a high caliber of golf is expected in Seneca, as Ernst said 35 former collegiate All-Americans are on the NGA Tour this year.

Prior to the start of the tournament, Cross Creek will host a junior golf clinic April 17 primed for fourth and fifth graders from Oconee County schools, though kids of all ages are welcome.

And if all goes according to plan, Ernst expects for Cross Creek to become a regular stop on the NGA Tour.

"We just thought that as an event that we could host that didn't cost us seven figures, that this event would enable us to do some things to help the community and also showcase our golf course and facilities," he said.

"I believe, provided we get some good results this year, this will become an annual event."

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