LOCALS

First Tee event kicks off

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The competition actually begins long before the first drive of the Bi-Lo Charity Classic.

The 26th Bi-Lo Charity Classic, a one-day golf tournament that has raised more than $44 million over the years, is scheduled for Monday.

But leading up to the event, Bi-Lo stores sell paper golf balls for $1 – the project raised $750,000 last year – and the top store manager in each district gets to come and play in Monday's event.

"That's where the competition is for them," said Carol Browning, executive director of Bi-Lo Charities Inc. "That creates excitement at the store level.

"At the corporate level, it comes from raising funds – the raffle tickets that they sell and the auction items that they get. There really is an involvement and a heightened sense of 'This is what Bi-Lo does' around this whole event. It's a point of pride for Bi-Lo and throughout the chain."

The event kicks off today at Thornblade Club in Greer with the First Tee Invitational, which gives children a chance to warm up with college and professional golfers and then play in a nine-hole tournament.

The President's Party for sponsors and invited guests will be Saturday night at the Hartness Estate.

The President's Practice Round will be Sunday morning at all 12 participating courses, and the pairings party and auction will be Sunday evening at the Hartness Estate.

The Bi-Lo Charity Classic will begin at 10 a.m. Monday at 12 courses throughout the Upstate and western North Carolina.

Bi-Lo Classic

The event, previously for Bi-Lo's vendors and suppliers but open to the public for the first time this year, raises millions of dollars for hundreds of nonprofit organizations in the Carolinas, Tennessee and Georgia.

Browning said event organizers "tried to make the things we did this year fit the economy."

For example, instead of a set of golf clubs, the prize for the raffle was a year's worth of groceries. And those from nonprofit organizations who volunteer for Bi-Lo had the opportunity to sell raffle tickets and keep half the money they raised.

"We hoped to make the tournament more relevant," Browning said.

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