

# 8TH ANNUAL GOLF RANGE ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA INDUSTRY WORKSHOP & RECEPTION

## The Man From SNAG

SNAG is what happens when velcro targets meet golf balls working undercover, cleverly disguised as tennis balls. My hunch is that SNAG is really an acronym for some spy bureau (is SMERSH just a coincidence?), such as the Society of Newly Acquired Golfers. Their mission is to bring more golfers into the game, whether young or old, by dropping the entry skill level without sucking out the fun.

The colorful balls, oversized plastic clubs, "sticky" flags and other targets opens the door for both creative playtime and semi-serious competition.

President Terry Anton enthusiastically explained SNAG's "no limitations" appeal: "Wally Armstrong and I looked at the myriad challenges that faced entry level golf. We realized that we were facility bound, with miniature golf or actual golf. And while pitch 'n putt filled some of the gap, people were still frustrated by not being able to make a full swing. We realized you guys (range owners) had a wonderful environment that could be turned into a course to learn and play." The mobility of SNAG to be arranged in almost any spacious environment is a major asset.

Anton feels the lucrative corporate outings market can be expanded, appealing to non-golfers who have traditionally been excluded from outings: "There are

tremendous corporate opportunities out there. We also found that women hit it about the same distance as men, and that's pretty special. And with kids, because they and their parents are still in the same league as far as distance, it really means a lot to them. People accelerate to traditional equipment rapidly, especially women and children. We're not the end all for golf, but the first touch."

## First Tee: Moving to Stage Two—Synergy

The First Tee, the ambitious initiative whose founding partners include the PGA, USGA, PGA Tour, The Masters, and the LPGA, is ahead of schedule. With an initial Phase One goal looking at one hundred facilities (which includes practice facilities with short courses that vary between 3 holes and 18 holes), they're close to topping a hundred-forty. That's the good news. The magnitude of what they're trying to accomplish is still a far sighted goal. Joe Louis Barrow, Jr., The First Tee's Executive Director, addressed the GRAA to explain the next stage or Phase Two of First Tee.

"The next five years is about impacting the lives of 500,000 kids," trim back the growth of new facilities (maxing out at 250) and focus on building partnerships and affiliations with existing facilities in order to instill instruction and values for the game. We think it's a tremendous opportunity for the golf industry to capitalize on the participation of 500,000 kids in the game over the next five years...and the next twenty."



Terry Anton has done stints playing the Asian Tour; running Hale Irwin's company and now launching his own venture with teaching Wally Armstrong called SNAG Golf. ▲

Barrow is working toward utilizing every avenue available to expose more children to the game, especially golf ranges, since they're cradles of learning. And as he perceives it, the payoff extends far beyond the fairway.

"For those of us who have played golf, we're probably different people because of it," he recalled. "And we'd like to share that with kids who otherwise wouldn't have access to the game. To improve they'll have to focus, deal with the emotional challenges and work hard. We want them to take those same values off the course and into their lives and education."

Barrow grew up in South Chicago, in the shadow of tall smoke stacks from steel mills in Hammond, Indiana. This area became a site of one of the initial First Tee programs, a nine-hole course. "When I went there for the grand opening I witnessed black, white and Hispanic, boys and girls of different ages...for the first time in their lives hitting golf balls," he recollected.

"There were great smiles and pride when the ball flew off the tee, and behind them were their parents. One of the parents could hardly stay still watching his child, and when the kids went off he tried hitting some balls. I asked him if he had ever played the game. He said no, but now he has a reason to, because his daughter is."



Joe Barrow, Jr., the Executive Director of the First Tee spoke about moving into Phase Two and the importance of giving kids life skills training. ▲

