

Chipping in Overseas

Written by Written by Nichole Brophy

Saturday, 01 November 2008 10:10 - Last Updated Sunday, 01 March 2009 14:11

For one LPGA Hall of Famer, the most rewarding victory is in giving back.

When Betsy King, 34-time LPGA Tour winner and 6-time Major Champion, was selected as Solheim Cup captain in 2007, she viewed it as the ideal platform from which to promote a cause dear to her heart; the AIDS crisis in Africa.

In 2006, King and her good friend Debbie Quesada traveled to Africa on a church mission trip. Upon returning to Arizona, they became determined to raise awareness, funds and support for people in Africa infected or affected by the AIDS pandemic.

"Debbie and I both were attracted to Rwanda," King says. "We just felt connected to the people there and wanted to do something."

That attraction parlayed into the establishment of their organization, Golf Fore Africa, in 2007. The Scottsdale-based nonprofit, which has the support of the LPGA through a member-charity initiative, has helped more than 60 children gain sponsorship by members and fans of the LPGA. Superstars like Lorena Ochoa also donate their time to country club events and Golf Fore Africa clinics and raise the funds to advance the organization's goals.

Dedicated to working on specific projects where progress can be monitored, Golf Fore Africa teamed up with World Vision and recently completed a \$250,000 project in the Rwandan community of Mudasomwa (see sidebar). According to Debbie Quesada, Golf Fore Africa's COO, the community of 70,000 people was aided in a multitude of ways: schools were established; uniforms were provided for children; medical care was made available to orphans and vulnerable children; health insurance was provided for families infected with HIV; and food assistance, agricultural training and clean water were all integrated into the community.

In the beginning of 2007, Golf Fore Africa rallied together LPGA pros to observe the growth in the Mudasomwa community. King recalls a museum outing the group held with the community's children.

"We got to bring them gifts, soccer balls, dolls and different things for the children," Kings says. "We also let the children pick one gift in the museum shop, and all the children picked something that was useful—not a toy. But lots of children picked bags because it was something they could use to put whatever they had into. It kind of hit me, that here they were thinking of something useful as opposed to a kid [from the United States] who might choose a toy because he already has a backpack or something to carry his things." Another group of LPGA players is expected to make the trip this coming January.

Currently, Golf Fore Africa is raising funds for two new projects to develop in 2009. The first, a medical clinic in Rwanda, will provide health care and antiretroviral (ARV) drugs to help AIDS-infected individuals. The second project, a collaboration with World Vision and Habitat for Humanity, will entail building homes for AIDS orphans in Lesotho, Africa.

"Our dream is to see that every person in Africa that needs support, because they have been infected or affected by AIDS, would have that support," King says. "And I know we have a long way to go. There are over 10 million children that have been orphaned by AIDS in Africa. We are not going to be able to help everyone, but we are going to help as many as we can."