

Group uses golf to teach life lessons

By: David Showers - El Dorado News-Times

KidsNGolf Arkansas teaches the importance of a still head, a full shoulder turn and a well-timed release, but area youth who participate in the program are learning lessons that transcend golf.

The nonprofit's executive director explained Monday how the program applies virtues inherent to the ancient game — honesty, integrity, confidence, decision making etc. — to everyday life. Kids 8 to 18 learn a game they can play the rest of their lives while absorbing abiding life lessons.

"(Golf) gives kids more than just something to do on the weekend," Art Noyes told the El Dorado Rotary Club during its weekly meeting at St. Mary's Episcopal Church. "The discipline and values it teaches have a profound effect on young people as they learn.

"It begins to affect their personalities. They're learning to play this all-purpose, wonderful game, but more importantly they're learning to take control of their lives."

Noyes' nonprofit is a youth development program to positively influence the lives of young people. He saw its effect when he was involved with The First Tee of Houston and wanted to introduce similar character-building programs to rural areas.

The opportunity presented itself when he recently relocated to South Arkansas with his wife Catherine, who's from Norphlet. Now his charges can be seen Saturday mornings at the Lions Club Golf Course, beating balls on the driving range and learning lessons integral to life.

"I've been doing some research, and El Dorado is one of the few towns this size that has a program like this," said Noyes, who previously worked with aspiring touring pros at the Hank Haney International Junior Golf Academy in Hilton Head, S.C. "The worst enemy for kids is having too much time.

"People here in El Dorado say 'We don't have enough to do for our kids.' They sit inside and play video games or go out and get into mischief. Golf will not only take up their time, it will challenge them and focus them. It develops the same discipline and values needed for everyday successful living."

Noyes related how he was recently approached by a man who gave him a \$500 check for KidsNGolf. Noyes said he was grateful for the windfall, but he aims to tap more sustainable funding sources for his nonprofit. He said by explaining the program's goals he hopes to generate support from the business community. Annual dues of \$35 combined with the \$25 fee for each of the four 10-week golf semesters supplements donations.

"We feel like it's important for kids and their families to contribute something," he said. "For \$135 you can have a year-round membership."

Noyes said he plans to enlist community leaders to help him impart the importance of self control. He wants kids to model how influential people react with equanimity to miss-hit shots, bad lies and other vagaries specific to golf.

"The self control you learn on the golf course can go straight into life," Noyes said.

A round of golf can also build relationships, he said.

“A lot of kids don’t have personal relationships with leaders in the community,” he said. “You start a round of golf as strangers, but by the end of 18 holes you’re old friends.”

More information about KidsNGolf is available at www.kidsngolf.com or by calling (870) 299-0192.

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