

ClubsHelp Offers Golf Communities a Chance to Give Back During Covid-19

By John Scott Lewinski Dec. 19, 2020 11:28 am ET



In the wake of criticism, a nationwide effort in the U.S. emerged to demonstrate how golfers can source and route aid to frontline health workers faster than some federal and state efforts.

Image by Shawn Reza from Pixabay

When the Coronavirus pandemic first wreaked havoc during the spring of 2020, golf became a target of derision among overwhelmed politicians who shamed players for wanting to get out in the fresh air. In the wake of that criticism, a nationwide effort in the U.S. emerged to demonstrate how golfers can source and route aid to frontline health workers faster than some federal and state efforts.

In mid-March, with viral infections soaring in the tri-state area, members and friends of Spring Brook Country Club in New Jersey saw an opportunity to send some much-needed practical resources to the battered emergency room staff at nearby Morristown Medical Center. Within a couple days, \$500 worth of sandwiches arrived at the ER's door, giving birth to ClubsHelp—a growing community of golfers and golf courses working to support the fight against the pandemic.

According to Susan McGahan, president of the Spring Brook CC Foundation, watching a nurse crying during a TV news report on overwhelmed New York hospitals spurred her club into action.

“We knew the kitchen at the club was still open for takeout,” McGahan says. “They were urging members to order from home to keep our kitchen staff employed during

the lockdown.”

And because every member of the club contributes \$100 to fund the Spring Brook Foundation, “we were able to use some of those funds to donate sandwiches to Morristown Medical ER at cost,” she says.

Rather than reach out to a swamped emergency room, McGahan contacted Scott Serbin, recruiting marketer for Envision Physician Services, as a point of contact. The nationwide Envision network staffs ERs like Morristown Medical, and Serbin was able to call on a wide range of contacts both in and out of his network.

“We can act as middle men so the busy professionals on the frontline can focus on their important work,” Serbin says. “In what seemed like no time, the effort went from one call and connecting one emergency room to getting completely immersed in this effort while it became a national entity in just a couple of weeks.”

The New Jersey feel-good story found itself on cable news, drawing immediate national interest. Rob Goulet, CEO of the Entertainment Sport Partners marketing firm and ClubsHelp president, caught the TV report and saw an opportunity to help form a network of golf and country clubs helping communities hit hard by Covid.

“It started small,” Goulet remembers. “I soon discovered there were so many golfers out there looking to connect and find ways to help in the fight against the virus. There they were just stuck in their homes and wanting to do something.”

David Bachman, Spring Brook’s general manager and executive director of ClubsHelp, insists the hospital assistance effort grew naturally and rapidly once Spring Brook and Goulet connected.

“After Susan’s appearance on television, and once Bob called us, it all happened pretty quickly,” Bachman says. “In a matter of a couple days, we were able to help Mount Sinai Hospital in New York and Queens’ Elmhurst Hospital. We had Cliff Bars donating and drop-shipping thousands of its products, and we arranged to deliver pallets of water, soda, and Gatorade—whatever we were told the ER staffs needed.”

“The connections grow so quickly,” McGahan recalls. “An ER in New Jersey needing masks leads to a call to a kitchen here, which turns into contact with a florist in Oregon that has access to a company in China that provides masks for the hospital. It happens organically.”

While the New Jersey and New York efforts are still underway as coronavirus infections spike into the winter months, the fire lit on the East Coast soon began to spread west.

“We thought we could activate a national network and persuade other clubs to get involved,” Goulet says. “We knew it could be beneficial on a much larger scale. So, we went to work on that—activating the entire club community.”

Within weeks, ClubsHelp took shape as a nationwide entity. The organization now empowers a country club or golf course looking to join the effort to establish its own

one-on-one relationship with a local representative of an emergency room. Club members or their collective funds pay for sandwiches, bagels, pizzas, beverages, and whatever else local frontline health service staff members say is needed. The national ClubsHelp officials offer assistance and guidance as needed.

“We don’t decide the relationship on a local level,” Bachman adds. “We let the community and the facility decide what they need and how they want to arrange the deliveries. We want to empower the members of these clubs. If they don’t have a cause already, we have the ability and the contacts to connect them with a network of hospitals. The efforts are always organized through third party administrators so as not to disturb busy ER workers directly.”

ClubsHelp is now a coast-to-coast operation assisted by advisory councils made up of golf industry executives and medical facilities experts. As of mid-December, more than 200 country club/medical facility partnerships were active across the United States. .

Even once vaccines and treatments knock down the Coronavirus pandemic, ClubsHelp’s organizers see the effort continuing and becoming a support resource for everything from disaster relief to struggling school lunch programs to food banks requiring a seasonal boost.

“Our members will continue to find causes that inspire them,” Goulet says. “We’re laying in an infrastructure to assist during emergencies of different types across the country, and our philosophy and focus will always be to ‘unite nationally and to care locally’.”

Copyright ©2020 Dow Jones & Company, Inc. All Rights Reserved

This copy is for your personal, non-commercial use only. Distribution and use of this material are governed by our Subscriber Agreement and by copyright law. For non-personal use or to order multiple copies, please contact Dow Jones Reprints at 1-800-843-0008 or visit www.djreprints.com.