

Women Scale Summit for Success

By Brent Ellenton, Alberta Golf Executive Director

Challenged by declining participation in its competitive events, the Alberta Golf Association introduced the first Alberta Women's Golf Summit, Conference and Tradeshow on May 29th and 30th. Held at the Mayfield Inn and Conference Center in Edmonton, the event featured former LPGA champion, Gail Graham and Canadian and World Long Drive Champion, Lisa 'Long Ball' Vlooswyk as keynote speakers. The champions of the weekend however were the over 100 delegates who took the time to share their enthusiasm to re-energize women's golf programs.

As the conference keynote speaker, Gail Graham, originally from Winnipeg before moving onto a successful career on the LPGA tour and currently employed by that tour as its Tour Owners Association president emphasized the importance of golf in our communities. "Golf is the ideal family recreation. Personally, I have played with my Dad my whole life. Heck he is now 83 years old and we still love to get out and enjoy each others company even though he does like to heckle me."

Gail encouraged all the attending delegates to become golf ambassadors and be willing to guide friends who might just be entering into the game. "We need to break down golf's intimidation barriers and we can do that by being good friends. If we can provide a comfort zone we will retain more female golfers. In my life, I have and still count on the mentorship of several individuals including Dawn Coe Jones and Jocelyn Bourassa (fellow former Canadian LPGA stars) who allowed me to lean on them through my college and playing days."

Lisa Vlooswyk took the stage with a flurry and inspired the audience to keep reaching for the stars and to have fun on the journey. "I was inspired to take up golf seriously after having the opportunity to watch the LPGA tour stars at Priddis in 1999. The girls were so poised, confident and skilled that I was immediately caught up golf's aura. Since that time I have strived to set and meet many goals. Of course, there are always setbacks, but adversity just made me more determined. Golf is such a fantastic game and has provided me so many enjoyable moments. It is my passion and I want to share the fantastic opportunities for personal growth with as many female golfers as possible." Walking the walk, Lisa was not only a 'hired gun,' but she rolled up her sleeves in every session with the delegates and provided terrific insights on possible new directives.

"We can't downplay the importance of female participation in the Alberta golf marketplace," emphasized Ryan Vold, Wolf Creek Golf Resort owner and conference panelist. "We really enjoy having ladies' groups play our course. They are always ultimately organized, enjoy the game and play quickly. I applaud Alberta Golf for taking the initiative to explore creative new ways to introduce, retain and maintain our lady golfers."

This year's conference was bolstered tremendously by a Government of Alberta Community Initiatives Program grant along with important supporting assistance from the Royal Canadian Golf Association, Chinook Golfer and Polycast International. The financial support ensured that delegates were treated to a fantastic, first class experience.

The organizing committee worked tirelessly over the past 18 months to ensure participants would enjoy non-stop entertainment. Along with sizzling keynote addresses, there was also a thirty booth tradeshow, two panel discussions, a cocktail party featuring the Terry Jordan and Orest Warchola Jazz duet, strategic planning sessions and a closing banquet highlighted by a salsa dance lesson. Additionally, a silent auction raised in excess of \$2,500 for Golf Fore the Cure breast cancer research initiatives.

Alberta Golf is proud to have taken a key leadership role in this conference and every delegate was overwhelmed by the attention to detail and success in bringing the concept to fruition. The conference strategic planning specialist, Tammy Oberik, did an outstanding job directing the delegates through an afternoon idea sharing session that will prove to be valuable in creating future direction for women's golf. Other provincial, state and national organizations are anxiously awaiting the results of the conference so that they too may be able to learn and take action on the highlighted initiatives.

The Alberta Women's Conference organizing committee and staff did an amazing job with this year's event and along with the delegates and speakers are to be congratulated on their efforts. In the closing address co-chairs, Enid Botchett and Fran Marsden summed up the result of two fantastic conference days in dramatic fashion by leaving the attendees with one last inspirational thought: "When we set about trying to reach our dreams, there is no doubt we may stumble on the way. We will learn new things about ourselves and may even take an unforeseen detour. But it is the friendships gained, the smiles and laughter shared that make the journey so worthwhile. This year's conference may seem like a small step, but it has established a strong base camp for us as we build our confidence to scale the summit for women's golf."