

BLOG POST

How Congaree Is Shaping the Lives of Youth Through Golf

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While the Masters Tournament at Augusta National Golf Club grabs the collective conscious of the golf world each April, a course about 100 miles southeast in South Carolina's Lowcountry is clutching the hearts of golf enthusiasts from around the world.

Congaree Golf Club, which opened in 2017, is an 18-hole, par-71 course located in Ridgeland, South Carolina. Situated on an historic 18th century estate, Congaree is a world-class course designed by renowned architect Tom Fazio. In 2018, *Golf Digest* named Congaree the best



private course in the United States.

But what makes Congaree truly special is its founding purpose.

Dan Friedkin, chair and CEO of The Friedkin Group, and Robert C. “Bob” McNair, the late owner of the NFL’s Houston Texans, established the Congaree Golf Club and the Congaree Foundation with the goal to create an elite golf course with a philanthropic mission at its core. With support of the Congaree Golf Club, the Congaree Foundation “provides resources

for educational and vocational mentorship opportunities to help shape the lives of underserved and ambitious youth who share a passion for golf.”

The course and its mission were brought to life through the creation of the Foundation, which Bracewell’s public finance team helped facilitate.

Led by Partner Todd Greenwalt, Bracewell assisted the Foundation with its certificate of formation and bylaws. The public finance team also assisted the Foundation with its application for tax exempt status. Bracewell continues today to advise the Foundation on tax exempt matters such as donations and fundraising activities.

For Todd, who picked up the game of golf at the age of 12 and played competitively in high school, representing the Foundation has been a labor of love.

“The legal work itself is not that dissimilar to that of other clients engaged in charitable matters,” explains Todd. “But the fact that this project involves the use of golf to help kids and generate social change certainly makes it more special to me and our public finance team.”

The signature program of the Foundation is the Congaree Global Golf Initiative, an immersive collegiate preparatory curriculum tailored toward

high school students in the United States and abroad. Participants come to Congaree over the summer to work with educators, guidance counselors, life-skill mentors, athletic trainers and golf instructors to advance their preparation for the college admissions process and prepare them for success in life. The intense four-week program includes a mix of college preparatory class work, fitness training, counseling, mentorship, golf lessons and even club fitting. The support for the “Congaree kids” continues after they leave, as advisors and counselors monitor their development while they finish high school and prepare for college.



Founder Dan Friedkin is technically the only course member at the 3,200-acre property. Everyone else is an “ambassador,” asked to join by invitation or referral only. Ambassadors are successful, influential figures who support Congaree and its philanthropic mission. There are also no initiation fees. Instead, ambassadors are strongly encouraged to donate to the Foundation. The only “requirement” for ambassadors is to get involved in the lives of these students, acting as mentors and offering guidance.

Congaree turns to PGA pro ambassadors — such as World Golf Hall of Famer Mark O’Meara, LPGA star Morgan Pressel and 39-time PGA Tour winner Tom Watson — to help identify participants who are passionate about golf and show academic promise, but do not have the means or support to fulfill their potential.

Named after a Native American tribe that once called the area home, Congaree is located in one of the poorest counties in South Carolina. Jasper County, where the course sits, has a population where more than 20 percent live below the poverty line. Congaree is bringing light to the



children in Jasper County by undertaking projects in the surrounding area, which includes updating the facilities at the local Boys & Girls Club and partnering with the Lowcountry Food Bank to provide free fruits and vegetables to more than 300 households. Congaree, with aid from equipment manufacturer Ping, also donated golf clubs to the local Ridgeland-Hardeeville High School. There are additional plans to help the local community as well, including partnering with programs that

provide mentorship to kids and families. Whether it's an afterschool program, motivational speakers, helping to learn a trade or pursue higher education, Congaree and its ambassadors are ready to lend support.

The Congaree Foundation was Todd's second opportunity to work on a project of this nature. He also did similar work in the creation of the World Health & Golf Association, which is now known as The Spirit Golf Association. The former WHGA was founded in 1999 as a 501(c)3 organization for the purpose of promoting amateur golf activities for the benefit of charity.

"Each project was set around building activities to expose underserved youth to the character-building aspects of golf," said Todd. "And while it may not be important in and of itself to learn the rules of the game, it is a great exercise in teaching kids the social etiquette and discipline needed in life that are displayed through the game of golf."

Congaree photos courtesy of The Friedkin Group.