



The Delta Golf Open History

Promoting the fellowship of Delta employees through the competitive spirit of golf

The stepping-stones were laid in 1956 as an invitational tournament composed of primarily Atlanta based employees. Bob Wharton of Personnel, Jack King of Flight Control and Harry Cooper of Maintenance spearheaded the formation of a committee to organize a system wide tournament for the spring of 1957.

The first official Delta Golf Open was in the spring of 1957 at the Griffin Municipal Golf Course. The 1957 tournament attracted about 88 golfers mostly from Atlanta and Dallas-Fort Worth. The first champion was Bobby (Rabbi) Smith an Atlanta based mechanic. From this, the tournament has grown from a local Atlanta municipal golf course to excellent resorts, with as many as 900 golfers.

Griffin Country Club in Griffin, Georgia hosted the first seven tournaments. Mr. C.E. Woolman, founder of Delta Air Lines, did not play golf but attended the Saturday night functions during the early years at Griffin. The tournament did not grow very much until 1962 when the limit was reached for one golf course. In 1963, the Highlands Country Club in Conyers, Georgia co-hosted the event with Griffin to accommodate the 220 entrants.

The popularity of the open created the need for a larger facility so in 1964 the tournament moved to Callaway Gardens in Pine Mountain, Georgia. Callaway hosted seven tournaments, including two in 1964, one in the spring and a second in the fall. The last spring tournament in 1964 was reduced to 18 holes due to rain. Callaway Gardens introduced Curtis Wagner, Atlanta based pilot, as the champion in 1965. Curtis was the champion 13 times, including 10 consecutive from 1965 through 1974.

Due to the growth of Delta and the popularity of the tournament, the event ventured to Miami and the Doral Country Club, home of the "Blue Monster" in 1968. Over 400 golfers participated in 1968. Callaway in the meantime was busy constructing the Gardens View course expressly for the Delta open of 1969. Callaway was enjoyed by all but the allure and excitement of Miami attracted the open back to Doral from 1970 through 1975. Callaway was the site of the 1976 where Curtis Wagner won his eleventh championship. In 1977, we traveled back to the Doral.

South Florida offered some unique challenges for the tournament. In 1970 the final round was rained out, the courses were covered with small frogs. The courses were so wet in 1975 only one cart per foursome was allowed for Saturday's round. After Sunday's round, the Blue Monster looked like it had hosted a tractor pull contest instead of a golf tournament. Door prizes began in the early 70's at Doral. Delta's Sales Promotion Department and companies that sold goods to Delta donated the prizes. One year we had so many items that winners were drawn each day and a list of winners made. An umbrella was considered a big prize and the oddest item were paper swim trunks.

After the 1977 event, a search was made for a resort that offered a combination of Callaway and Doral. The Innisbrook Golf Resort in Tarpon Springs, Florida hosted the tournament in 1978.

Innisbrook offered outstanding lodging and 63 holes of golf. Due to a conflict in dates in 1979, the open moved back to Doral for the last visit to Miami.

Innisbrook introduced new events to the Delta Golf Tournament. Delta Golf Open shirts were first sold at Innisbrook in 1980 and have been a very popular part of the event every year since. 1980 saw the first long drive contest on Friday at the driving range. The long drive contest was part of the weekend through 2002.

Innisbrook was a great facility for the golf and lodging, but did not have the banquet and reception facilities for the expanding Delta Golf Open. The tournament had grown to over 600 golfers each year. To accommodate all the attendees the receptions were held outside under the pine trees.

Another era began in 1985. The open moved to the orange groves of central Florida at the Grenelefe Golf and Tennis Resort in Haines City. Grenelefe was the ideal facility for the event, 3 PGA caliber golf courses, outstanding lodging and a convention center large enough to accommodate the expanding tournament.

The first year at Grenelefe got off to a wet start. Over 9 inches of rain fell on Friday and 'Lake Delta' formed on the 10th fairway of the East Course. The Grenelefe staff was up to the task and the tournament was held on Saturday and Sunday and provided a great experience for everyone. Grenelefe and the Delta Golf Open were partners for seventeen consecutive years.

The growth of Delta through the combining of Western and Pan Am into the Delta system increased the number of golfers and brought employees from Hawaii and Europe. The average number of golfers for the Grenelefe years exceeded 720 per year. The 1987 tournament drew over 900 golfers and required a fourth golf course. Golfers were bussed to the Sun Air Country Club for one of the morning rounds on Saturday and Sunday.

The Delta Golf Open booked the entire Grenelefe facility for the weekend and allowed many additional activities. In addition to the long drive contest, a closest to the pin contest was added in 1986 and a putting contest on 1990. Friday afternoons were spent between the beers at the swimming pool, close up and long drive contests at the driving range and the putting contest on the putting green.

In 1993, a raffle was added to the Delta Golf Open. Raffle tickets are sold to anyone associated with the tournament drawing the winning tickets has added excitement to the Saturday night reception.

The Delta Golf Open logo was so popular on the golf shirts, putters and straw hats with the logo were sold in 1994. The straw hats were great in the Florida sunshine, but did not hold up in the afternoon thundershowers. The putters looked great did not prevent three putts. Sales of both items were discontinued after a couple of years.

In 1996 and 1997, the Dennis Walters Golf Show was performed on the driving range. Dennis is a golfer paralyzed from the waist down who hits golf balls from a specially designed golf cart with clubs made from fishing rods, radiator hoses and many other items. Those who attended the shows were impressed with his golfing skills and inspired by his determination.

In 1998, the first Delta Golf Open Scramble was held Friday. The scramble has been a popular addition to the weekend and sells out each year.

The Delta Golf Open was greatly enhanced in the early 90's with the introduction of a VIP Flight. The VIP flight is for the many corporations and suppliers that support Delta Air Lines. These

suppliers have added tremendous value to the tournament. With the VIP support the value of door prizes have grown from an umbrella to cruises and complete golf sets valued at over \$ 2500.

The 1990's saw many changes to the corporate environment of Delta Air Lines and the golf tournament kept pace. Employees of Delta subsidiaries and connection carries are invited to attend the tournament and are a welcome addition.

Grenelefe was a great facility for the Delta Golf Open, but after 17 years of afternoon thundershowers and love bugs it was time for a change. After the 2001 tournament, the golf committee decided to return to Innisbrook for the 2002 event. The facilities for golfers, room accommodations and banquets had been completely renovated since the last time the open played at Innisbrook. Apparently, the golfers liked the change. Over 846 golfers entered the 2002

The 2004 Delta Golf Open brought a new challenge to the tournament, hurricanes. Frances, a category 4 hurricane, hit the Innisbrook area 5 days before the start of the tournament. Frances hit central Florida with 100+ mph winds and dumped over 10 inches of rain at Innisbrook. The Innisbrook staff did a great job preparing the facilities and by tournament time we were able to drive carts on most of the fairways.

More named hurricanes hit the United States in 2005 than any year in recorded history, but the golf gods shined on Innisbrook. Comfortable temperatures, clear skies and no rain resulted in a great weekend of golf and fellowship. In 2005 the tournament expanded to include family members (fathers, sons, brothers, spouses, etc.). The added eligibility hopefully will bring additional players for the weekend.

The size of our tournament requires planning and selection of sites many years in advance. Due to the over whelming positive responses for Innisbrook, the contract has been extended through 2006. The staff at Innisbrook has been working closely with the committee to provide a first class facility that is affordable for all Delta employees.

Back in 1957, the idea of promoting Delta fellowship through the competitive spirit of golf was the foundation of the Delta Golf Open. In 1964, this was formally adopted into the by-laws that govern the Delta golf committee.

The 50th anniversary of this great Delta tradition, held at Innisbrook for the final year of the five year contract. Attendees had a surprise on Friday night with a key note address from former Delta President Whit Hawkins. Whit and his son Jeff competed in the tournament for the first time in many years.

The members of the current committee would like to recognize and thank all the thousands of golfers from throughout the Delta World for your attendance and support over the years. As evidenced by not changing locations very often, the committee does not change for the sake of change. Innisbrook will always be a special place and we hold many fond memories.

After the completion of the 2006 Delta Open, the committee decided to accept an invitation to visit a new resort, the Ginn Reunion located close to Orlando. The beauty of the entire resort is so outstanding and with competitive package pricing, we accepted the contract for the 2007 tournament. All attendees will be treated to superb accommodations and championship courses that are signature designed by Arnold Palmer, Tom Watson and Jack Nicklaus. Dates are September 7, 8 and 9th.