

American Express – A Utah Open Cornerstone

By Kurt Kragthorpe

Officially, competition in the Siegfried & Jensen Utah Open begins annually on a Friday morning when golfers go off the Nos. 1 and 10 tees just as the sun is coming up in Saratoga Springs.

Unofficially, the jockeying for Utah Open consideration among American Express employees begins long before that.

Upwards of 60 team members, as the company refers to them, among the 2,000 based in Utah are awarded spots in the company-sponsored pro-am that takes place on the Thursday morning of tournament week. It's a unique event, because American Express invites athletes from Special Olympics Utah to play in its foursomes.

That gesture enhances the relationship between the sponsors and the tournament charity, helps the golfers capture the spirit of the event and, you had better believe, makes American Express employees compete for those invitations.

Each of the company's various businesses has its own way of allocating the pro-am spots. One set of criteria is participation in volunteer projects, which become quite popular when used as an incentive for the Utah Open.

And those playing opportunities — especially the Special Olympics aspect — also drive American Express' presenting sponsorship. The fact that so many pro-am spots come with a sponsorship investment makes the Utah Open very attractive to the company.

American Express has a considerable history with Utah golf, but its involvement became particularly critical when the Utah Section PGA took over the Utah Open. The company became one of the three cornerstone, presenting sponsors at the time and has remained in that important role after Siegfried & Jensen became the title sponsor.

"It's a really wonderful event that benefits all of Utah, and we wanted to do our part," said Steve Allmatt, director of public affairs and communication.

Dorothy Anderson, manager of public affairs, is a familiar figure during the tournament, defining her primary role as "cheering people on." Anderson traditionally participates in the check presentations to the winning golfer and to Special Olympics Utah. But most of American Express' contributions to the tournament come long before that, providing the financial stability and credibility the tournament has needed to re-establish itself as one of the premier state opens in the country.

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