

Published Wednesday, October 29, 2008

200 female golfers go for the pink

MAGGIE FITZROY

Their shotgun start was delayed by driving rain.

Then, after 200 women began playing the second Pink Ribbon Golf Classic Thursday at the Ponte Vedra Inn and Club, rain continued, accompanied by gusty winds that whipped some of the players' hats off.

The sun had broken through by the time breast cancer survivor Candy O'Gara arrived at hole No. 18 of the Ocean Course.

The "joy of being outside, of being alive, brings me here," O'Gara said.

The tournament, presented by The Ponte Vedra Women's Golf Association, raises money for breast cancer research at the Mayo Clinic in Jacksonville, so "it's great to see so many people out supporting a good cause," she said.

"The weather's not a challenge, I don't mind. I don't sweat the small stuff," O'Gara said.

Many of the players were breast cancer survivors or have witnessed family members and friends battle the disease.

Susie Buckey of Ponte Vedra Beach founded a Pink Ribbon tournament 20 years ago in Richmond, Va., where she lived at the time.

It became so successful that when she moved to the Beaches she brought the idea with her.

Last year, 90 women played, said Buckey, event chairwoman.

This year, the number of players more than doubled, and next year, with plans to make the tournament even bigger, "surely we'll have another 100," she said.

Last year's tournament raised \$37,000; this year Buckey was hoping to raise \$80,000, despite the slumping economy, which she said has an impact.

The event included a luncheon with two physician guest speakers, Amber Isley of Mayo Clinic and Ponte Vedra Beach plastic surgeon John Harris.

It also included a silent auction with donations from area businesses; a basket raffle; and opportunities to win prizes, including two hole-in-one automobiles courtesy of Arlington Toyota and a Rolex watch hole-in-one prize from Underwood's Jewelers.

A "Margaritaville Express" van making the rounds of the course also raised about \$500.

In addition to stopping for drinks, the ladies had opportunities to relax at other holes.

They could have their fortunes told by "Omar the Great," played by volunteer Richard Pelletier, at hole No. 17 of the Lagoon Course, and could get a massage at hole No. 12 of the Ocean Course, courtesy of masseuses from Massage Envy.

Linda Halter, a breast cancer survivor from Palm Valley who had the disease diagnosed on her daughter's second birthday, said she was having fun at the tournament.

"Golf is fantastic, even on a rainy day," she said.

"It's better than the alternatives - cleaning the house, taking care of kids, and it's way better than chemotherapy."

Maggie FitzRoy can also be reached at (904) 249-4947, ext. 6320.