

U.S. Open Driving More Business Activity for Hometown Vendors

Transportation Services, Equipment Rentals Augment USGA's Premier Event Action

BY LIZ WIEDEMANN

This is a marathon month for San Diego.

Barely catching its breath after hosting the Rock 'n' Roll Marathon on June 1, the tourism industry is now preparing to drive more spending at the U.S. Open Championship.

While the U.S. Golf Association has locked in national contracts for many of its corporate hospitality needs, local vendors stand to benefit substantially from the June 9-15 golf tournament, too.

Reg Jones, managing director for the U.S. Open, said that the organization has contracts with national firms for catering and telecommunications services but uses local companies for transportation and parking.

"Ace Parking is obviously the go-to for any parking services, and it's headquartered right here in San Diego," said Jones.



Photo courtesy of Torrey Pines Golf Course

The city of San Diego's Torrey Pines Golf Course is ready to welcome an event that is expected to pump \$124 million into the local economy.

Ace Parking Management Inc. agreed to manage the parking at Qualcomm Stadium, the central parking and shuttle location for those attending the major championship at Torrey Pines Golf Course.

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Dale Theriot, a partner with Carlsbad-based La Costa Limousine, reaped big rewards when a friend in the transportation business referred La Costa at last year's U.S. Open held in Oakmont, Pa.

"We established the U.S. Open connection through a longtime friend in the business, and about three months ago, we

signed the contract," Theriot said.

Shuttle Buses

The company was hired to provide 50 small buses to shuttle U.S. Open volunteer workers from 5 a.m. to 10 p.m. during the tournament.

Theriot did not disclose the contract's value, though he expects a revenue surge of 50 percent in June compared to the same month last year, with more than half of that increase attributed to the contract.

A normal year-over-year increase for June would be between 6 percent and 10 percent, he said.

"This event is huge for our industry, and some would say it's bigger than the Super Bowl in terms of corporate events and the amount people who are going to be commuting around the city," Theriot said.

Classic Party Rentals and Classic Tents, another regional firm hired by the USGA, has scheduled between 60 and 80 of its employees to work the event.

The Los Angeles-based company runs a large San Diego operation that will provide tables, chairs, tents and furnishings for all catered U.S. Open corporate hospitality events.

Mike Bjornstad, chief operating officer, has said that being local was an important



Photo courtesy of Torrey Pines Golf Course

Following a redesign, Torrey Pines Golf Course was awarded the host bid in 2002 for the 2008 U.S. Open.

factor in winning the contract.



Setting Up For Play

If anyone understands the significance of the U.S. Open's presence from a local standpoint, it's Mark Woodward, golf operations manager for the city of San Diego.

"The local story is a long one that goes way back, back to 1999 when Jay Rains and Rich Gillette started working to bring the Open to Torrey Pines," Woodward said.

Nine years and \$3.5 million later, Torrey Pines is ready to welcome the event that is expected to pump \$124 million into the regional economy.

Because the notoriously difficult championship's standard called for extensive renovations to Torrey Pines' south course, members of the nonprofit Century Club of San Diego raised the \$3.5 million for added maintenance.

Following the redesign, Torrey Pines was awarded the host bid in 2002.

Woodward said that in preparation for the USGA tournament, Torrey Pines shut down the north course for 18-hole play in mid-March, and then closed it entirely starting May 11. The south course closed down May 21 and is set to reopen June 19, following the U.S. Open.

"What we lost in revenue due to related closures, we should get back in a portion of merchandise sales and of the \$250,000 the city will receive in lost revenue," he said.

Woodward said the exposure of the championship will provide long-term benefits that are immeasurable.

"There's no doubt about it — the impact to the local community of this international event is huge," Woodward said.