

# Inside the ropes: Louisiana Golf Association membership...what does it mean?

By Carr McCalla

As we've traveled the state in recent months answering questions regarding the LGA dues re-structure that went into effect Jan. 1, 2006, it's become obvious that there is much misconception, and even some misinformation, that exists about what the LGA's mission is. Our mission statement, though short, packs a pretty powerful punch in just a few words.

The stated mission of the LGA is.....to foster the enhancement and expansion of amateur golf through the development of member and information services, the promotion of opportunities for all who want to play, and the protection of the game's integrity and valued traditions.

Over the course of the last 10 years, the LGA has grown from an organization that simply existed to conduct its statewide amateur championships, to a full-service state golf association that strives to accomplish our stated mission. While we provide numerous peripheral benefits and services to approximately 120 Member Clubs and approximately 16,000 individual members (which we'll talk about later) our core services include the following:

1) The provision of USGA approved course and slope rating services to all Louisiana golf courses. These services, though valued at \$2,500, are free to LGA Member Clubs. The LGA is the only organization in Louisiana licensed by the USGA to provide these services.

2) Administration of 23 LGA Championship events and LGA and USGA qualifiers. This, our original service, is still an extremely important one and we continually strive to upgrade the competitive experience for our tournament players.

3) The LGA provides oversight and administration of the USGA Handicap System in Louisiana. Again, just as with course and slope rating services, the LGA is the only organization licensed by the USGA to provide handicapping services to clubs in Louisiana.

4) Upholding the integrity of the Rules of Golf and the Rules of Amateur Status. If you have a question about whether some activity might violate the rules of amateur status, we're the organization you're going to call.

These services are the nucleus of what we do. Without the LGA and its services there would be no benchmark from which to compute a USGA Handicap Index (your Handicap Index is based upon the USGA course and slope rating system) nor would there be an entity to oversee the amateur game in Louisiana. And, while we have no formal tie to the USGA, they sincerely look to us to govern the amateur game here. We are responsible for maintaining the integrity of the game and its valued traditions (remember our mission statement). Just as the USGA carries out these responsibilities on a national level, we do the same in our area of jurisdiction

(i.e., Louisiana). These core services are extremely important to the maintenance of the game we all love and, the LGA is committed to upholding our responsibilities in all of these areas. Having said that, we also feel a strong responsibility to create additional access to the game for our new players and our long-time members, as well as to create additional value-added services and benefits to our member clubs and individual members.

That's where a couple of our new initiatives come in. We have just recently partnered with the Audubon Golf Trail (AGT) to provide a discount card for our individual members that will allow them to receive a free cart fee at each of the 11 AGT courses each year (a \$165 value).

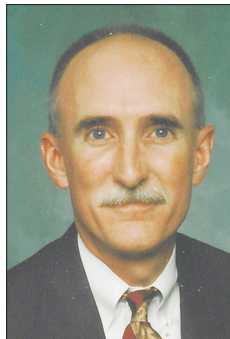
We also hope to announce in the near future an opportunity for our LGA Handicap Network participants to receive a substantial discount off the purchase of a Bushnell laser rangefinder (a pretty timely benefit with the recent sanctioning of these devices by the USGA and R&A). This, in addition to a computer, touch-screen monitor, label printer, report printer, and handicapping and tournament management system software that are provided to our LGA Handicap Network clubs. There's no denying the LGA Handicap Network has had a tremendously positive impact on the integrity and credibility of handicaps statewide.

We have also, just within the past 3-4 years, initiated the LGA's website at [www.LGAgolf.org](http://www.LGAgolf.org). If you've not visited our site recently, please come take a look. The LGA website exists to provide visitors with information about the game, and in particular, golf in Louisiana. On our site, you may register online for our championships, follow LGA Championship events with our real-time on-line scoreboard, search for course information on LGA Member Clubs in our course directory, review your (and your cronies') handicap information and post a score on-line if you're a LGA Handicap Network participant, and much more.

In addition to all of these programs, the LGA conducts seminars on such topics as handicapping, course rating, rules, etiquette, and other subjects that our constituency feels important. We also liaison with our many allied golf associations 'for the good of the game.'

Here's the challenge. For most of the benefits and services that we've listed above, there's really no revenue component. Unfortunately, we don't have the TV rights revenues coming our way that the USGA does. Therefore, in order to continue to provide the benefits and services that are so critical to the health of our game in Louisiana, we ask our clubs, and individual members in those clubs, to fund what we do. Our annual dues total \$150 per club plus \$9 per year per member (plus an additional \$4 per year per member if your club participates in the LGA Handicap Network). That means if you're a member of a LGA Member Club, you have an ownership stake in the LGA. On the surface, it looks like a pretty good deal. Look a little deeper and the value gets even better. For \$9 a year (75 cents/month) you get \$165 worth of value with our Audubon Golf Trail discount card alone. Use it only once and you've recouped your annual individual dues. In addition, your club gains all the benefits of LGA membership,

**CONTINUED ON PAGE 21**



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