

INVESTING IN THE GAME OF GOLF

NEWPORT BEACH COUNTRY CLUB MEMBER AND CHAIRMAN OF THE TOSHIBA CLASSIC GOLF TOURNAMENT IRA GARBUTT WASN'T A LIFELONG GOLFER, BUT THE SPORT CERTAINLY SHAPES HIS REALITY TODAY.

BY ASHLEY RYAN



There's something relaxing, but at the same time thrilling, about setting foot on a perfectly manicured course and hitting a golf ball across the blue Southern California sky. While some start out perfecting their swings early in life, others turn to the sport once their lives have started to slow down—as is the case with member Ira Garbutt.

But Garbutt is not a typical member. This year will mark his 20th year volunteering for the Toshiba Classic, an annual golf tournament hosted by the Newport Beach Country Club in an effort to raise funds for Hoag Memorial Hospital Presbyterian. Between his family, his business and his weekly golf meetup with other members, Garbutt stays busy, but consistently makes time to give back.

THE EARLY YEARS

Garbutt's tale starts not on the sunny shores of California, but on the East Coast, in Brooklyn, New York. Even while growing up, his family was an important part of his life, with Garbutt and his grandfather frequently venturing to baseball games to watch Jackie Robinson play with the Brooklyn Dodgers.

When he got older, he moved to Massachusetts, where he obtained a bachelor's degree in finance from the University of Massachusetts Amherst before landing a marketing job at IBM in New York City. During his time in the Big Apple, Garbutt met Heather, a Pan American World Airways flight attendant from London, whom he married in 1969. Soon after, the couple was blessed with two daughters.

Working for a smaller company in 1973, Garbutt was transferred to Newport Beach, where he got his first taste of California living. And his family, of course, traveled with him.

"Once I found out what Newport Beach was all about, I knew I didn't want to go back to the East Coast," Garbutt says, noting the weather as one of the biggest reasons he stayed. While the company was based in

Newport, he settled first in Mission Viejo and then in Laguna Hills before eventually moving to Newport Coast—only 3 miles from the Newport Beach Country Club.

A third daughter was added to the mix, and Garbutt's family was complete. But he knew that his current job would not necessarily pay the steep bills that a California ZIP code incurs. Instead, he got involved in the insurance and retirement plan business to earn a living. He started his own company, Certified Financial Group, which has been thriving since 1985.

And it isn't just Garbutt who is successful. All three of his daughters have gone on to form impressive careers after graduating from the University of California public university system, now working as a managing district attorney, an ophthalmologist and a special agent for the FBI's counterterrorism squad. On top of that, Garbutt has three grandchildren between the ages of 5 and 7, further fueling his love for spending time with his family.

GETTING INTO GOLF

A combination of things led to Garbutt becoming involved with the country club, and with the game of golf in general, but there were three in particular that resulted in his involvement with the Toshiba Classic: the success of Certified Financial Group, the free time resulting from his children heading off to college and a medical condition that he had since birth.

Garbutt was born with a bicuspid aortic valve—two flaps on the valve instead of the usual three. As a result, he had to undergo open-heart surgery,

for which he turned to Newport Beach's Hoag Memorial Hospital Presbyterian, a hospital known for its world-class cardiovascular unit.

He had also decided that he wanted to volunteer his time to one specific entity. Fittingly, he chose to focus his attention on Hoag. "One of the things I wanted to do was understand what goes on in a hospital," Garbutt explains.

In 1998, as part of the Hoag Hospital Foundation's Planned Giving Advisory Committee, a financial group that offers advice on planned gifts to the hospital, Garbutt got involved in the Toshiba Classic as a walking scorer. Only in its fourth year, the tournament raised over \$1 million for Hoag Hospital Foundation.

That competition marked the first time Garbutt visited the Newport Beach Country Club course, and he says he immediately felt it was special.

"I could see very clearly that all of the players loved the course," he explains. "It is old-fashioned, but still a challenging course to read."

He continued to volunteer in the years following and, after joining the Board of Directors for the Hoag Hospital Foundation in 2001, played a role in Hoag becoming the first charitable sponsor of the tournament.

After working as a volunteer at the Toshiba Classic for 10 years, Garbutt was named the tournament chairman, a task that he will have undertaken for a decade when the 2018 tournament rolls around in March. As part of the roughly 300 hours he devotes to the tournament each year, Garbutt leads the Hoag Charity Sports board of directors, helps develop and implement the competition's long-term agenda, recruits members and communicates with corporate sponsors.

Garbutt became a member of the country club in 2003, something he remains proud of to this day. "The golf course is terrific," he says. "Every time I play somewhere else, I say, 'I'm glad I'm a member [at NBCC].'"

For nearly 15 years, he has walked the course, participating in golf games with friends, special member events and, of course, the Toshiba Classic, traversing the 18 holes in around 12,000 steps each time.

LOOKING AHEAD

Preparing for what might be his last year as the tournament's chairman, Garbutt says the main goal for this year's event is to entice a younger crowd. While many of his duties will remain the same as they have for the past few years, he says the environment of the competition itself will be a little bit different.

The hole that will be most affected by the changes will be number 17—a

modern corporate world, funds are sure to keep pouring in. Since Garbutt first volunteered at the Toshiba Classic 19 years ago, the tournament has raised more than \$19 million for the Hoag Hospital Foundation.

In addition to the quality of the tournament and of the club itself, Garbutt notes that credit should be given to long-time Newport Beach resident, businessman and NBCC owner Richard H. Pickup. "In a way, this was his gift to the city of Newport Beach," he explains. "There will never be another country club on Coast Highway."

While Garbutt has enjoyed his time working on the competition, he says he also enjoys playing golf

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landmark par 3 hole that features a picturesque pond. According to Garbutt, there will be numerous casita canopy tents erected around the course for corporate sponsors to enjoy, creating a stadium effect to add to the excitement. Hole 17 will also be the site of some fun activities, such as a concert with golfer John Daly and Military Appreciation Day events.

"We're gonna have a good time at that green this year," Garbutt says. "The golf champions like the crowds."

He also plans to welcome each of the more than 75 professional golfers to the country club himself, as well as touch base with those at the corporate tents on holes 15 through 18 to thank them personally for their sponsorship.

Though he may soon be taking a step back from the tournament to clear the way for more active members who could potentially have better contacts and more knowledge of the

at the club—something he hopes to do more of in the future. "I'm trying to scale my business back and play more," Garbutt notes.

One of his most memorable golfing experiences was when he got a hole-in-one at a May 2008 member tournament, though he says that all of the NBCC events are something special.

"It's a relaxed atmosphere, the people are all great, the service staff is exceptional," he adds. "It's a very friendly place."

And while the member events always provide a thrill, he says his favorite thing about being a member remains the Saturday morning games he plays with four to eight other members. "We divide up, play and grab lunch after," Garbutt explains. "That's the fun part—playing with good friends. ... There's no better friend-making machine in the world than golf."