

editor's
letter

BY
BENNY TEO

IN TIME WITH


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SENTOSA GM KEEPING IT REAL

When Sentosa Golf Club launched the “Keep It Green” campaign in conjunction with the 2018 SMBC Singapore Open, it left a lot of people wondering just what it was.

Initial impressions were tied to a partnership with then Asian Tour Merit winner Gavin Green, who's every birdie or green-in-regulation achieved, would earn a deserving junior golfer a complimentary round at the exclusive golf club.

Then, some others accrue it to an attempt at being environmentally conscious.

Andy Johnston, general manager and director of agronomy at Sentosa Golf Club, sums it up succinctly.

He said, “It was launched a little over a year ago at the SMBC Singapore Open and meant to be a campaign that we drive the whole year that involved several things but it launched with telling the whole world that we were going to start doing things for the environment and trying to grow golf with juniors.”

The idea for “Keep It Green” had been a long term mission of Johnston's to inculcate green practices in the golf club. They simply put a name to help make sense of an otherwise dry subject.

Johnston stated, “How do you push awareness towards what we can do as a facility, as a beacon of stability for others to try to follow? I think attaching

it with growing golf with juniors and Gavin Green in a big tournament like the SMBC helps give it a little bit more awareness.”

Last year, Green had earned 52 rounds of golf for the younger set but the club ended up giving 177 free rounds as each junior had to be accompanied by an adult chaperone. This year, they are doing the same to get the young engaged in golf and at the same time educate them that golf is not bad for the environment.

“The opposite of that is true,” quipped Johnston.

“We are probably the best stewards of the land on the face of the earth. We're so careful that we map out all the different plants and insects to try to find ways to make it as eco-friendly as possible,” he explained.

One of the simplest and most effective “Keep It Green” initiative that the club has done this year was to remove plastic bottles from golf carts.

“You should see the amount of plastic bottles we collect at the end of each day, mountains of it just going to waste. Contributing that is 150,000 bottles a year that we no longer put into the environment.

“I thought that it would get a lot of push back from people complaining about not having them, but it wasn't the case especially once we've gotten over the learning curve of showing them what this is all about, they were all very supportive of it,” said Johnston.

It had garnered so much attention around the world that even golf club managers from Europe and Australasia caught wind of it.

From bottles in carts to plastic straws in the restaurant and even biodegradable bags in the locker room, Sentosa Golf Club has taken the campaign very seriously indeed, and it seems, will continue as part of a long term mission to reduce their carbon footprint.

But they are not stopping there. They have reinvested in energy efficient air conditioning that has garnered a Platinum Green Mark from the Building and Construction Authority (BCA) – the only club of any kind in Singapore to achieve that.

They are also researching into the potential of harvesting solar energy in the day and then using them to charge their battery powered golf carts at night.

But beyond just looking inwards, the

club wants to spread their influence to the rest of the resort island and beyond as well, like starting a bee colony.

“When people hear that, they go, ‘what’,” chuckled Johnston.

“Bee population is down 70 per cent of the world, and scientists say that when the bee goes, that signals the end of the world because then there is nothing to pollinate, to keep the cycle of life,” he explained sombrely.

“We went to South Florida to look at courses where they are colonising bees and are now talking with some bee specialists in Singapore to get the plant food right.

“We can colonise but they will die if there isn't enough to feed them, so we gotta get the plant food right and then we'll colonise, which will take about six months,” he said.

And for those concerned about safety when playing at the award-winning Serapong or New Tanjong courses, Johnston assuredly said, “We're going to do this at parts of the property where we can't use for golf but has vegetation on it. We're also focused on a stingless bee that can be found at Fort Canning Park at the moment so it takes away that fear of being stung.”

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