

House v. Senate Rivalry Benefits Harlingen Municipal Golf Course

Austin, TX – Senator Eddie Lucio (D-Brownsville) and Representative Eddie Lucio III (D-Harlingen) collaborated to bring a legislative rivalry to benefit the Tony Butler Municipal Golf Course in Harlingen. Revenues raised from the House v. Senate Tournament were donated to assist with the maintenance and operations of the historic and aging course to keep portions scheduled for closure open through the City’s budget shortfall. Regrettably, the community based House of Representatives Team won the day by one stroke, leaving the Senate Team eager for a future rematch.

Lucios' tournament raises money for golf course*

HARLINGEN — State Sen. Eddie Lucio Jr. came back to help the golf course where he learned to play the game he loves.

Earlier this month, the father and son Lucio team launched the first Senate vs. House Golf Challenge by the Arroyo Golf Tournament, raising \$9,110 to boost revenues at the Tony Butler Golf Course.

Now, the tournament’s trophy stands in the golf course’s pro shop waiting to be engraved with the name of the winner of the Jan. 5 tournament — the House.

“ I’m grateful to them for organizing that tournament and bringing supporters to have a great event at Tony Butler,” Mayor Chris Boswell said yesterday. “Sen. Lucio and Rep. (Eddie) Lucio (III) are sincere supporters and advocates of golf and particularly the Tony Butler Golf Course. It’s a great event and I’m grateful to them for starting the annual tournament.”

For about five years, the golf course has been losing money, pushing the city to dip into its \$43 million general fund to offset shortfalls.

While sponsors of most tournaments fund other causes, the Lucios organized their tournament to raise money for the golf course.

The tournament drew 28 teams, each fielding three players, city spokeswoman Irma Garza said.

While the golf course charges \$28 to play 18 holes of golf, each golfer paid \$65 to play the tournament.

“ It’s beneficial when all funds are going to the golf course,” David Arce, the city’s assistant parks director, said.

The golf course plans to use the money to purchase bunker grass or new flags to mark the course's 27 holes.

Yesterday, Lucio Jr., who was attending Gov. Greg Abbott's inauguration, was not available for comment.

For the Lucios, golf is a family tradition, with some family members playing the professional circuit.

For months, the Lucios worked to organize the tournament to boost the golf course's revenues.

"Like a lot of golf courses, it's struggling," Brenda Watson, the senator's chief of staff who helped organize the tournament, said. "He wants to help that golf course. He'd hate to lose a beautiful part of Harlingen history. It's one of the oldest golf courses in the Valley."

As a boy, the senator worked as a caddy at the golf course where a member gave him a treasured set of golf clubs, Watson said.

"They were his first golf clubs," she said. "That's a golf course very close to his heart. He loves it."

The tournament featured golfers who founded the Pan American Golf Association in 1959.

"Some of the golfers who played at our tournament were the founding members," Watson said. "They are die-hard golfers who love the sport. They made it special."

At the pro shop, Arce said the golf course is working to draw more tournaments — even if the events would not earmark proceeds to help the golf course.

Yesterday morning, he was working to draw more high school tournaments to the course.

"It doesn't make us a lot of money but it gets people playing here — anything to increase the traffic here," he said.

At City Hall, officials are searching for ways to boost the golf course's revenues.

Earlier this month, golfers packed City Hall to speak out against a proposal to sell off holes 19 to 27.

At the meeting, city commissioners agreed to hire a consultant to study the golf course's operation and management.

* Del Valle, Fernando. "Lucios' tournament raises money for golf course." *Valley Morning Star*, 16 January 2019, https://www.valleymorningstar.com/news/local_news/lucios-tournament-raises-money-for-golf-course/article_e9dfb296-19a7-11e9-b58b-ef9ab3d48bd7.html