

Golf: Not just for (business)men anymore

More women swinging clubs

By NANCY RICHISON
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Two years ago, Nancy Oliver owned her own public relations business in Florida specializing in golf marketing, but Oliver wasn't a golfer. In fact, she didn't even know how to play.

After 15 years in the business, she decided it was time she learned. She says she thought it might be more fun if she took up the game with other women. Starting with a group of 28, she formed the Executive Women's Golf League (EWG). Once word got out about the new club, Oliver began receiving calls from women in other cities who wanted to know how they could start a chapter.

Today there are 35 chapters across the country, including three in Cleveland, one in Akron and

one currently forming in Columbus.

"Everyone thought it was a novel idea that businesswomen wanted to learn to play golf," Oliver says.

But women are discovering what men have known for years—getting out on the links is a great way to relax, get away from the office and build good relationships with clients.

'Thou shalt not discriminate against women on tee times ...'

"They keep noticing men landing new clients as a result of a relationship made in a golf setting," Oliver says. "Now, if a woman doesn't know how to play golf, she can hurt herself."

According to figures from the National Golf Foundation, headquartered in Jupiter, Fla., women, who represent nearly 22 percent of all golfers, comprise a much higher percentage of new golfers. Last year, nearly 38 percent of all beginning golfers were women.

But there are still barriers for women to break and EWG is trying to help in that arena by teaching women golf etiquette so they know what they're doing once they get out on the course.

And thanks to a few legislators, past discrimination practices like restricting women golfers to playing only during "off hours" are changing.

"Michigan is considered one of the leading states," Oliver says. "They passed a new law, it goes something like this, 'Thou shalt not discriminate against women on tee times or thou shalt lose your liquor license.' That's getting it where it counts."

Elayne J. Gunder, an account vice president with PaineWebber and founder of EWG's Columbus chapter, says the goal is to make women feel comfortable in a golf setting and teach them that "it's OK to leave the office a little early and you can mix business and pleasure."

"I think it's very hard for executive women to take the time to play for themselves and to do things they just like to do period," Gunder says.

She found out about EWG while reading a magazine article on an airplane flying from Cancun last March.



PHOTO: DUNAMIS CONCEPTS

NOT JUST FOR MEN: Jane Ahearn examines her clubs at an outing at the Country Club at Muirfield Village.

The Columbus chapter held a kick-off meeting in late June and is planning its first golf outing July 14 at 3 p.m. at Raymond Memorial Golf Course, 3860 Trabue Road. The event will feature a nine-hole scramble followed by a 1 1/2-hour clinic, or an 18-hole scramble for more advanced players.

"We will accommodate the good golfers, placing them together in a foursome," Gunder says.

The league will play every Wednesday afternoon at 3 p.m., through Oct. 9, with special monthly events planned. The cost is \$40 to join the league and \$25 for each weekly event.

"We ask that you sign up for six weeks," Gunder says. "We felt that if you took lessons anywhere

else, the normal lesson is somewhere between four and eight weeks.

"We're really looking for women where the price is not the hurdle. It's the time commitment, plus that's one of the things women must learn. It is for the woman who can leave the office and it is for the working women."

And how about Oliver? After finally learning how to play, is she tearing up the course? Well, not exactly.

"The thing snowballed on me," she says. "I got so busy."

She says she still loves the game, but "I'm terrible. I wish I had more time to do it."

Anyone interested in joining the Columbus chapter can call Gunder at (614)460-6563 or (614)761-2318.