

BEYOND THE TEE

First Tee Gulf Coast Newsletter





More than a Game

Marty Stanovich, President & CEO

This past year opened the door to exciting new opportunities for First Tee Gulf Coast participants—both on and off the course. Just last month, four outstanding young golfers—Mobile’s Jasmine Nguyen, Shalimar’s Mason Dean Hampton, Niceville’s Tenley Sharron, and Gulf Breeze’s Michelle Burt—were selected to represent our chapter at the First Tee Greater New Orleans Invitational Tournament.

Despite it being the first appearance for all four, they rose to the challenge and successfully defended the overall team title by just one shot. Tenley captured the girls’ title, while Mason Dean finished runner-up in the boys’ division—also by a single shot. Their performance reflected not only talent, but preparation, teamwork, and composure.

Another highlight came from Abby Vernier of West Florida High School, one of our brightest young leaders. A year after representing First Tee Gulf Coast at Pebble Beach, Abby was selected for a new national First Tee Participant Opportunity—Indigo and Gopher—held at South Carolina’s Ohoopee Match Club. There, she connected with participants from across the country and returned home with unforgettable stories of camaraderie, competition—and even zebras on the course. She also earned a financial support for future education and playing expenses. As Abby described it, along with Pebble Beach, it was *another experience of a lifetime*. These are the opportunities First Tee opens up for our participants with strong golf skills and character who remain engaged in the program.

This past year also brought a moment of reflection with the loss of Coach Rod Kelley (pictured middle), a beloved mentor, leader, and friend. A Pensacola native



and Air Force veteran, Rod lived a life of service as an ordained minister, civics teacher, corrections officer, and marriage counselor. In 2013, he helped launch our Okaloosa/Walton programs at Fort Walton Beach Golf Club and went on to build a coaching family that expanded to four additional sites. At our first meeting, while discussing the Nine Core Values, Coach Rod said, “I’ve been looking for a program like this my entire life.” He is survived by his wife of more than 56 years, Coach Jorja, and by the thousands of young people whose lives he impacted.

As we look ahead, we hope this spring is the season more families discover that while being great at golf is a worthy goal, living the core values can make a young person a **Game Changer for life**. To all of those like Coach Rod who passionately care to invest in and improve our youth—thank you for all you do to shape the next generation of leaders.

9th Annual Golf Ball Gala

Jan Castillo, Event Coordinator

Get ready for a night where Caddyshack meets The Masters—with a splash of Happy Gilmore. On April 10, 2026, First Tee Gulf Coast invites you to one of the most entertaining fundraisers on the Emerald Coast: the 9th Annual Golf Ball Gala, hosted at Scenic Hills Country Club from 6:00 PM to 10:00 PM. This isn't a stiff, black-tie gala — it's a high-energy street-party-meets-country-club celebration where golf, glam, and good times collide. If tailgating were allowed at a golf tournament, this is what it would look like.

For just \$95, a General Admission ticket gives you access to an unforgettable evening packed with food, drinks, music, games, and interactive experiences throughout the entire venue.

The evening begins at 6:00PM with flair as a bagpiper officially opens the doors at Scenic Hills Country Club and tees off the festivities. A dramatic “shotgun start” to a night you won't forget.

Forget the tie and suit, BRING YOUR BEST GOLF GLAM!

Think Caddyshack, Loudmouth, or country club chic.

Best-dressed contests will keep the fashion fun and competitive all night long.

A Masters-inspired cocktail buffet, a top-shelf bar, and a dinner buffet by Culinary Productions? We've got it all!

Whether you're grabbing a cocktail or a plate, the flavors will be just as memorable as the entertainment.

Step outside and join the action on the lawn, where the party truly comes alive:

Live Music, Hot Spot BBQ, Caricature Artist, 360 Photo Booth, The Amen Corner, the Hitting Bay, & more

Browse live and silent auctions filled with one-of-a-kind trips, premium golf experiences, and exclusive memorabilia you won't find anywhere else.

Fair warning: Your wallet may want to take a swing!

The Golf Ball Gala is where First Tee Gulf Coast puts the FUN in fundraiser — all while supporting life-changing youth programs through the game of golf.

Join us April 10, 2026

Scenic Hills Country Club

6:00 PM – 10:00 PM

\$ \$95 General Admission ([register today](#))



A Grand Kickoff

Dress to Impress

Eat, Sip, & Swing

Party on the Lawn

Auctions & More



\$5K Putting Contest

And for those feeling confident? Take a shot at the \$5,000 Putting Contest.

Sink a 50+ foot putt and walk away a winner.

Tournament Ready

Ty Aulger, Tournament Director

At First Tee – Gulf Coast, tournaments are more than competition—they're an extension of our golf and life skills classes. Tournament play reinforces the values we teach every day, including confidence, integrity, perseverance, and respect. Competing under pressure helps participants apply these lessons in real-world settings, which is why we encourage players to participate in events whenever they are eligible and able.

Summer Tour

*Registration opens in mid-March

Our popular First Tee Gulf Coast Summer Tour returns this year with five exciting weeks of competitive play at some of the area's top courses!

Interested in becoming the presenting sponsor of a Summer Tour event? Please contact Tournament Director Ty Aulger at ty@firstteegulfcoast.org to learn more about sponsorship opportunities.

North Pensacola Optimist Club – Pre Qualifier

This event serves as the Northwest Florida pre-qualifier for the Optimist International Championships, one of the largest junior golf tournaments in the world. Held each July, the international championship hosts more than 600 players from countries around the globe and has featured past participants such as Tiger Woods, Phil Mickelson, and Lexi Thompson.

We are incredibly grateful to the North Pensacola Optimist Club for sponsoring this tournament and donating their time each year. Their support plays a major role in making this event a continued success and providing our players with a truly special competitive opportunity.

Spring Fling Adult Junior Scramble

The Spring Fling Adult-Junior Scramble is a fun-filled event focused on family, teamwork, and plenty of golf. This tournament kicks off our series of four adult/junior scrambles throughout the year and is always a favorite among our community. Space is limited and the event fills quickly, so be sure to register early—we look forward to seeing you on the course!

Save the Dates

Summer Tour

Look for registration to open in mid March

Week 1, Cook Family Classic:

Tanglewood Golf Course (June 1&2)

Week 2, Pensacola City Championship:

Osceola Golf Course (June 8&9)

Week 3, Sugar Sands Showdown:

Fort Walton Beach Golf Course (June 15&16)

Week 4, Blue Angel Classic:

AC Read Golf Course (June 22&23)

Week 5, Southern Juniors:

Scenic Hills Country (June 29&30)

North Pensacola Optimist Club - Pre Qualifier

Date: April 4th

Location: Cypress Lakes Golf Club

**Limited to the first 30 players to register*

Spring Fling Adult Junior Scramble

Date: March 1

Time: 3pm shotgun start

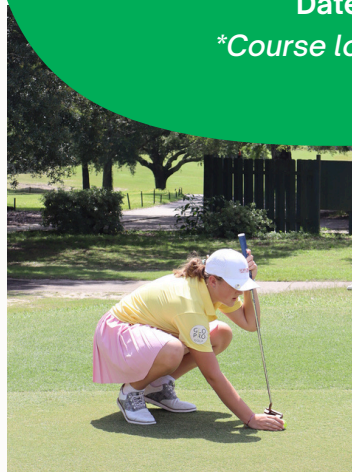
Location: The Club at Hidden Creek

Limited to the first 30 teams to register 9 holes

Divot Derby Week

Dates: July 12th - 16th

Course locations coming soon

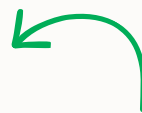


Building Champions for Life

Sharron Ellison, Program Operations Director

We're teeing up an exciting start to 2026 as First Tee Gulf Coast launches our Spring Golf & Life Skills classes at 14 programming sites across the region. First Tee Gulf Coast is committed to providing quality programming throughout the Gulf Coast area, giving kids access to programs that help shape and mold them for success—on and off the course.

Spring registration opens in early February,
with classes *beginning in March*.
Families can register online through our [website](#).



Scan to Register!

In addition to golf and life skills instruction, First Tee Gulf Coast offers engaged participants opportunities beyond the classroom—including special events, leadership development, and continued growth both within and outside the game.

Game Changers

One exciting addition to our program was the Game Changers Prep Series, a 5-week curriculum that featured guest coaches and trainers working hands-on with teens to help improve their tournament scores. Each week wrapped up with a tournament to test their new skills. A heartfelt thank-you to Jim Prim, Kristen Dorsey, Steve Fell, Ryan Mattox, Jon Flores, Greg Jones, JL Cruz, Steve Bobe, and Landell Cade for sharing their expertise. We are excited to announce that this program will return in 2026, with dates to be released in February.



Our LPGA*USGA Girls' Golf Camps, made possible by the Women's Council of Realtors of Bay Area, were a huge success. Camps included Sunshine, Swings, and Smiles at Links at Sandestin, along with Glitter and Greens and Empower Me! at our Golf & Life Skills Facility. We also hosted a High School Girls Golf Camp at Marcus Pointe, with special thanks to guest coaches Lauren Lamm, Kristen Dorsey, and Rob Strano.

Girls' Golf

Play Days

This year we also launched **On-Course Play Days**, giving select participants the opportunity to gain real tournament-style experience while working directly with coaches. These Play Days took place at Gulf Links, Tanglewood, Seascape, and Bluewater Bay, and we are excited to continue expanding this program.



Congratulations to Coach Dustin Smith of Gulf Links in Foley, AL, winner of the 2025 Billy Brent Coach of the Year Award!

Coach of the Year (2025): Dustin Smith

Driving the Mission

Jerry Mortellaro, Goofy Golf Facility Manager

We're excited to keep Goofy Golf playing an important role in supporting the mission of First Tee Gulf Coast, with new experiences and opportunities coming to the facility this year.

Our two-course, 18-hole Goofy Golf facility—built in 1958—offers a fun, nostalgic, and affordable experience for the community. First Tee participants enjoy playing at half price, making it an accessible way for our kids to spend time on the course. Goofy Golf is open Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays, and welcomes players of all ages and skill levels.

The facility is also home to one of the most unique driving ranges in the area. Our 11-bay range allows golfers to hit balls directly into scenic West Jackson Lake, creating a one-of-a-kind practice experience. The floating golf balls add an extra element of fun while helping golfers of all abilities work on their game.

Looking ahead, we're excited to introduce batting cages to the facility. This new addition will bring even more energy to Goofy Golf and provide another fun activity for families and community members to enjoy.

All proceeds from Goofy Golf, the driving range, batting cages, and birthday parties held at the facility directly support the mission of First Tee Gulf Coast. Every visit helps us continue developing young people, building character, and inspiring future golfers—on and off the course.

Thank you for supporting First Tee Gulf Coast. We look forward to seeing you at Goofy Golf soon!

Hours

Mondays-Thursdays: Closed

Friday: 2PM - 7PM

Saturday: 10AM - 7PM

Sunday: 1PM - 5PM

Location: 3924 W Navy Blvd, Pensacola, FL 32507



Coaches Corner

Tish Boozer, Coach & Program Director

One of the most rewarding parts of being a First Tee coach is watching players discover what they are capable of, not just on the golf course, but in how they approach challenges, setbacks, and success in everyday life. While our weekly Golf and Life Skills classes provide a strong foundation, some of the most meaningful growth happens when those lessons continue at home in simple, fun ways.

Two of the Five Key Commitments we emphasize at First Tee Gulf Coast are **Growing Through Challenges** and **Building a Positive Self-Identity**. These commitments show up on the course when kids persevere after a tough shot or gain confidence from small improvements. Golf is a game where no one plays perfectly, not even the professionals, so learning to keep trying and believe in themselves is just as important as learning proper technique. When kids see that effort and a positive mindset lead to progress, they begin to feel proud of who they are, both in golf and in life.

A great way to reinforce both golf skills and Life Skills at home is through short, fun practice challenges. These activities do not need to be complicated or time-consuming. Just 10 to 15 minutes in the backyard, at a park, or even in the living room can make a big difference.

Try this simple activity: place three objects on the ground (cups, water bottles, or small cones, etc.). Have your child use a club or plastic putter to roll a ball toward each target. The goal isn't perfection, but effort and improvement. Encourage your child to say something positive out loud after each attempt, such as, "I can do this," or "I'm getting better!"

Misses are a great opportunity to practice perseverance. Encourage your child to take a breath and try again or turn it into a game by rewarding effort and positive attitude instead. Another fun option is a family challenge—let your child teach you what they learned in class. Laugh together, make mistakes together, and celebrate small wins.

The more kids experience golf as fun and encouraging, the more likely they are to keep playing and improving. Every small practice helps build habits that support success on the course and in life!



Supporting Youth Through Golf and Life Skills

Sarah Dimitroff, Chief of Staff

At First Tee Gulf Coast, our mission is simple yet powerful: **to empower young people with essential life skills and strong character through the game of golf.** Every day, we see how golf becomes more than a sport—it becomes a pathway to confidence, resilience, integrity, and leadership for the youth we serve.

Many of our participants come from families facing financial challenges. That's why ***scholarships are a cornerstone of our program***, ensuring that every child—regardless of circumstance—has access to high-quality golf instruction and life skills education in a safe, supportive environment.

How You Can Help

Your generosity makes this work possible. Every donation directly supports our mission by:

- Providing scholarships for at-need youth
- Expanding access to our golf and life skills programs
- Creating opportunities that positively impact young lives across our community

Whether you make a one-time gift or become a recurring donor, your support helps us reach more kids and create lasting change. You can also support First Tee Gulf Coast by attending or sharing our fundraising events throughout the year. These fun, community-focused events help fund our programs and can be found on the Events tab and calendar on our website.

Ready to Make a Difference?

Click <https://secure.qgiv.com/for/firstteegulfcoast/> or scan the QR code to donate today and help us continue this important work.

Your Impact at a Glance

\$100 sponsors one participant (ages 5–6) for a 9-week Target Program session
\$250 sponsors two participants (ages 7–18) for a 10-week Golf & Life Skills session
\$500 sponsors four participants (ages 7–18) for a 10-week Golf & Life Skills session
\$1,000 sponsors eight participants (ages 7–18) for a 10-week Golf & Life Skills session

Our vision is to strengthen the character of our community!



SCAN TO DONATE

**See you on
the course!**

