

BEYOND THE FIRST



First Tee Gulf Coast Newsletter



Summer 2026

www.firstteegulfcoast.org





Fairways to Service

Marty Stanovich, President & CEO

One of our greatest joys at First Tee Gulf Coast is watching the incredible young people in our programs grow into remarkable adults. So when I recently heard two amazing stories from the mother of Niceville's Mariane Johnson—a senior Accounting major and varsity golfer at Palm Beach Atlantic University—I asked one of our most accomplished alumni, and former Pebble Beach participant, to share her story in her own words.



Jimbo Covert (pictured center), Mariane Johnson (pictured far right)

This past March, I had the opportunity to caddy for Jimbo Covert, a former Chicago Bear and Pro Football Hall of Famer, in the James Hardie Pro Football Hall of Fame Invitational alongside PGA Tour Champions players. I had a great time caddying for him and learned so much valuable information from being around him and the PGA Tour Champions players. It was especially memorable for me, as Jimbo Covert went on to win the tournament.

What I observed most about him was his immense focus and composure. He did not let anything affect him—whether he hit a bad shot or a great shot, he always had a smile on his face and stayed in the moment. Additionally, watching the Champions Tour players was a great reminder that golf is a game that can be shared with individuals from all walks of life. The players—many from different countries, cultures and backgrounds—would laugh, share jokes, and give advice to one another throughout the day, highlighting how golf can be used as a tool to create lifelong connections and friendships between individuals from completely different walks of life.

Over the last four months, I also had the opportunity to volunteer with United Way of Palm Beach County as an IRS-certified income tax assistant, where I prepared and filed federal and state income tax returns for low- to moderate-income individuals and families. It brought me great joy to steward my abilities in ways that could help a great deal of individuals in the local community.

Both experiences have been great reminders of why I value both golf and service. Having the opportunity to observe and learn from highly accomplished individuals, while also serving members of the West Palm community, has been incredibly meaningful to me. Thank you so much for your constant support. I am so grateful to be a part of the First Tee Gulf Coast community.

Thank you—Mariane Johnson

On behalf of our board, volunteers, coaches, and staff: **THANK YOU**, Mariane. Your accomplishments in golf—as both a player and now a caddy—are impressive, but even more meaningful is your commitment to giving back. That spirit of service is what we strive to instill in every participant and throughout our growing network of alumni. To our boosters, donors, and sponsors, thank you as well. Your support makes stories like this possible. These moments can sometimes go unseen, but they are always worth celebrating and remembering. As we celebrate high school, college, and graduate school graduations this season, we are proud of all our First Tee Gulf Coast alumni and the impact they are making—both now and in the future.

Teeing Up Leadership

Bailey Berry, Marketing Coordinator

First Tee Gulf Coast is proud to announce the addition of Brad Cooney as our new Program Director, Operations.

Brad brings more than 12 years of experience within the First Tee network, most recently serving as Program Director at First Tee Greater New Orleans. A native of Mobile, Alabama, he earned his degree in Sport Administration from Louisiana State University. His extensive background, proven leadership, and deep understanding of the First Tee mission make him a valuable addition as we continue to grow and strengthen our chapter.

What truly sets Brad apart is his passion for developing Game Changers and his commitment to creating meaningful, lasting impact in the lives of the young people we serve. Throughout his career, he has demonstrated a strong ability to build impactful programs, support and empower coaches, and continuously elevate the participant experience across all levels.

Brad's energy, experience, and dedication will play an important role in advancing our work, and we are excited about the impact he will help drive across First Tee Gulf Coast in the years ahead.



“I’m really looking forward to working with our amazing participants and coaches, and helping continue the growth and success of the First Tee Gulf Coast program.”
-Brad Cooney

Teeing Up the Summer

Brad Cooney, Program Director, Operations

ONLINE REGISTRATION
FOR SUMMER TOUR IS
NOW OPEN!



Since 1990, the Greater Pensacola Junior Golf Association (GPJGA) has helped shape the junior golf landscape along Florida's Gulf Coast. At the heart of its success is the GPJGA Summer Tour—a multi-event series each June that creates meaningful opportunities for young golfers while supporting the mission of First Tee.

The Summer Tour continues under new leadership, as I will work alongside our new Tournament Director Nicholas Dimitroff. I would also like to extend my sincere thanks to former Tournament Director Ty Aulger for his years of dedication and the strong foundation he helped build for this program.

The Summer Tour's impact lies in its inclusive, developmental structure. Junior golfers ages 5–18 can compete in a 9-hole weekly division designed for beginner and intermediate players, while more advanced golfers ages 12–18 participate in 36-hole, two-day events each week. This tiered format creates a clear pathway for growth, allowing younger players to gain experience while challenging more competitive athletes to elevate their game.

This progression aligns directly with First Tee's mission to empower youth through golf by building character, instilling life skills, and promoting personal growth. Participants take values like integrity, perseverance, and sportsmanship from the course to competition—creating an experience that extends well beyond the scorecard.

As the GPJGA Summer Tour enters its 37th season, its impact continues to resonate across the community, providing accessible pathways to competition and reinforcing the values at the core of First Tee.

2026 Summer Tour Locations

- > Tanglewood Golf Club
- > Osceola Golf Course
- > Ft Walton Beach Golf Club
- > AC Read Golf Club
- > Scenic Hills Country Club

These courses provide not only a competitive setting, but also an environment where players build skill, confidence, and character.

Previous 4 Boys Champions

- 2025: Baylor Touchstone
- 2024: Jacob Drysdale
- 2023: Braden Duvall
- 2022: Bentley Van Pelt

Previous 4 Girls Champions

- 2025: Tenley Sharron
- 2024: Anna Kunkel
- 2023: Gabby Hulstrand
- 2022: Gabby Hulstrand

REGISTER ONLINE TODAY!



SWING, SIP, CELEBRATE: Inside 'The Golf Ball' Gala

Bailey Berry, Marketing Coordinator

The 9th Annual Golf Ball Gala, hosted by First Tee Golf Coast, teed off in unforgettable style on Friday, April 10, 2026, at Scenic Hills Country Club—delivering an evening that was equal parts elegance, entertainment, and spirited fun.

From the moment guests arrived, the tone was set for a one-of-a-kind celebration. They were welcomed by the Gopher and treated to samples of the new “Water Hazard” Vodka Lime Seltzer from Lewis Bear, alongside playful nods to golf’s traditions with Baby Ruth candy bars and roasted peanuts on the Bev cart. At 5:55 p.m., the sounds of bagpiper Ken led guests in a lively procession into the clubhouse to begin the festivities.

Inside, attendees were greeted by a stunning ice sculpture from Just Ice and an impressive silent auction featuring golf adventures, curated wine experiences, spa packages, private reserve liquor and wine baskets.

Dinner was a highlight, with buffet stations inspired by 2025 Masters champion Rory McIlroy’s pre-tournament private dinner from Mike DeSorbo’s Culinary Productions. Guests enjoyed beverages in signature Blinky cups provided by sponsor FPL, while the best golf attire contest brought out creative looks blending Caddyshack, Happy Gilmore, and Masters style.

The celebration continued outdoors with a lively street party on the lawn. Music by The Bay Bridge Band set the tone as guests enjoyed Hot Spot BBQ, Bamboo Willies frozen drinks, Margaritas To Go, and treats from J’s Bakery & Ice Cream. Entertainment included caricatures by Tim Banfell, a 360 camera experience from One Shot Two Shot, Shoreline Swings golf simulator, and our annual \$5,000 putting contest.

Mark your calendars for the 10th annual Golf Ball on April 9, 2027. Start planning your “Caddyshack meets The Masters” look and join another unforgettable FUNdraiser supporting First Tee Golf Coast’s mission to teach life skills through the great game of golf.



Save the
Date

2027 Golf Ball Gala
Friday, April 9

at



SCENIC HILLS
GOLF RESTAURANT™ EVENTS
EST 1958

Coach's Corner

Tish Boozer, Coach & Programs Director

When people talk about First Tee, they often focus on the impact it has on kids—and that's certainly true. But I've come to realize its reach goes much further. It touches families, builds lasting connections, and becomes something truly generational.

My journey with First Tee Gulf Coast began as a parent. I brought my oldest son, Keiji, to his first class at age six, simply hoping he'd learn the game and be part of something positive. I had no idea how much that decision would shape our family's path.

After learning about my background in college golf and coaching, I was invited to volunteer. That one question changed everything. I started as a volunteer, became a trained coach, stepped into a program director role, and eventually served as a national trainer. Along the way, my younger son, Kaelen, began his own First Tee journey at age five. Both boys grew up in the program, developing not just golf skills but life lessons that helped shape who they are today.

As they got older, they began giving back by volunteering in high school. That's when things came full circle. My husband, Greg, saw the program's impact on our family and became a Level 1 coach. Soon after, both of our sons followed. Today, all of us are trained coaches working together at Hidden Creek. Coaching side by side as a family is something I never take for granted.

One of First Tee's Key Commitments is Building Positive Self-Identity. I've seen that come to life not only in participants, but within my own family. Coaching together has given us a shared purpose and strengthened our connection, while showing my sons the importance of giving back and leading by example. This year, that generational impact deepened. After my dad passed, my mom moved to Florida and quickly became part of our First Tee family, coaching camps and events. We lost her earlier this year, and I'll always be grateful for the time we shared on the course.

First Tee has brought our family together in a way that is truly special—and continues to remind me why this program and this game matter so much.



At-Home Tip for Parents

Keep it simple and fun. Have your child practice rolling or chipping a ball to stop close to a target like a towel or cup. Focus on feel and staying positive. This **builds confidence** and helps them grow through challenges, which are two things we work on in every class.

From Tee Forward

Sarah Dimitroff, Chief of Staff

My family's journey with First Tee Gulf Coast began nearly 20 years ago when we enrolled Madelyn and Nicholas in Golf and Life Skills at Osceola Golf Course.

Madelyn wasn't always thrilled about "First Tee Day" and often asked if she had to go. Like many parents, we wanted her to follow her interests—but we also believed in the program. So we made a simple decision: she would attend. We supported her other activities; First Tee was our choice, just 90 minutes each week.

Even when she didn't look forward to it, she always left smiling—proudly showing off the "Billy Bucks" she earned from coach Billy Brent. As her skills and friendships grew, her mindset shifted. She came to love the game and chose golf over volleyball in high school. Her freshman year, she qualified for State, broke 90, and told me, "Mom, I want to get really good at golf"—and she did.

Nicholas was hooked from his first swing. While he played other sports, golf quickly became his passion. By middle school, he practiced daily—not because we asked, but because he wanted to. He was named PNJ Golfer of the Year and won every age division of the Divot Derby.

Through First Tee, both gained far more than golf skills—they built relationships and accessed opportunities across the country. Madelyn played at East Lake Golf Course and earned college scholarship support. Nicholas competed in the Quicken Loans Pro-Am and played at TPC Potomac. Both had the life-changing experience of competing in the PURE Insurance Championship at Pebble Beach.

If you wonder whether your older or more accomplished golfer should remain in First Tee, my answer is simple: why not? Many of the most meaningful opportunities come to those who stay engaged beyond age 14.

First Tee helped instill values that still guide Madelyn and Nicholas today at 26 and 23. As I write this, our family is celebrating two graduations just one week apart. Madelyn focused on academics, earning her degree from Florida State University and now receiving her white coat as a Physician Assistant from The George Washington University. Nicholas competed in collegiate golf at the University of West Florida, where he earned both his BS in Business Administration and MBA while contributing to the university's 2025 National Championship team.

Seeing this impact inspired me to join First Tee seven years ago as Chief of Staff, helping grow our programs and reach. One misconception I hear is that a child is "too good" for First Tee. In reality, leaving can mean missing scholarships, mentorship, and lifelong connections. You might be surprised at the doors the program can open—simply by staying involved.



Gather. Play. Celebrate at Goofy Golf Pensacola.

Jerry Mortellaro, Facility Manager

When you think of Goofy Golf, what comes to mind? Maybe colorful obstacles, family-friendly competition, and a little bit of nostalgia? At Goofy Golf Pensacola we offer all of that and more—it isn't just a place to play, it's a place to connect.

As part of First Tee Gulf Coast, Goofy Golf serves as an extension of our mission to build character, confidence, and community through the game of golf. While our programs focus on youth development, this space allows us to bring people of all ages together in a fun, relaxed environment that reflects those same values.

One of the ways we see that mission come to life is through the many gatherings hosted at Goofy Golf. From **birthday parties** filled with laughter and friendly competition to **private events** that transform the course into a personalized celebration space, the facility offers a unique and welcoming setting for all kinds of occasions.

For families, birthday celebrations at Goofy Golf are easy, flexible, and memorable. Guests can enjoy time on the course while also having access to a dedicated party space, making it simple to celebrate without the stress of planning every detail. It's a place where kids can be active, parents can relax, and everyone can share in the fun.

For larger gatherings, the facility can be reserved for private events, offering a more personalized experience. Whether it's a family reunion, corporate outing, school event, or community celebration, having the entire course creates an atmosphere that's both lively and intimate. Groups can bring their own food, tailor the event to their needs, and even host organized tournaments with support from our team—turning a casual outing into a memorable competition.

These events do more than create great experiences—they directly support the work of First Tee Gulf Coast. Every gathering at Goofy Golf helps sustain and grow our youth programs, allowing us to reach more young people and continue making a positive impact throughout our community.

At its heart, Goofy Golf is about bringing people together. It's where milestones are celebrated, friendships are strengthened, and community happens naturally—one hole at a time.

If you're ready to plan your next celebration, we invite you to call our office today to reserve your event and experience everything Goofy Golf has to offer.



See you on
the course
this summer!



www.firstteegulfcoast.org

