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THE LIST

U.S. OPEN

The ultimate rendezvous tees up



SILVER BIRCHES + KREATE RENDERING

The Champions Pavilion will provide the ultimate in corporate hospitality for the U.S. Open Championship at Chambers Bay.

BY BRAD BROBERG
Contributing Writer

Inside the ropes separating the spectators from the players, the U.S. Open Championship is all about golf. The tradition, passion and prestige are palpable as 156 players compete on a course chosen and prepared with a single goal – to give the world's best golfers their toughest challenge of the year.

Outside the ropes, the U.S. Open is all about corporate hospitality. The food, drinks and screens are fit for royalty as companies reward employees, thank customers and court prospects by hosting them at one of the top business rendezvous in all of sports.

"The U.S. Open is up there with the Super Bowl," said Mimi Griffin, CEO of MSG Promotions in Allentown, Pa., which manages corporate hospitality for the U.S. Open – including this year's tournament at Chambers Bay Golf Course.

Located just outside Tacoma in University Place, Chambers Bay will become more than a golf course the week of June 15-21. Work started in March to transform three sites around the course into catered encampments of tents, suites and pavilions – 500,000 square feet of floor space for 280 or so primarily corporate hosts who are paying big bucks to the United States Golf Association (USGA) to make a big impression on their guests.

Like a Brigadoon full of bars and buffets, though, it won't last long.

► CLOSER LOOK

CHAMPIONS PAVILION TABLE PACKAGE

When: June 15-21

Where: 2015 U.S. Open Championship at Chambers Bay in University Place

Price: \$40,500 per table, plus taxes

Amenities:

- 15 tickets per day
- Reserved table with seating for 10 in the pavilion
- Complete breakfast and lunch buffet, hors d'oeuvres and open bar
- 7 daily VIP parking passes
- 15 pairing sheets delivered to table each day of championship round
- Exclusive opportunity to purchase co-branded merchandise bearing company name and logo with the U.S. Open logo.
- Corporate identification sign
- Computerized scoring terminals available for use by all pavilion guests
- Internet access at shared business center
- Television broadcast coverage of the U.S. Open Championship

"Everything is temporary," she said. "It's like building a city for a week."

Assembled and disassembled by a select group of contractors, the structures are short-lived because the U.S. Open moves to a different golf course every year. The tournament has been contested at 30 courses since the first Open in 1895, but has never come to the Pacific Northwest until now.

When the USGA announced the U.S. Open would finally be played here, Jeff Lyon, CEO of Kidder Mathews commercial real estate, was all in. A private hospitality tent beside the 18th tee that seats 80 and comes with 100 daily tickets costs \$235,000 for the week – not including the catering bill – but the wow factor is priceless.

"I just thought this was something we had to do," Lyon said. "It's a great way to thank clients and show them our appreciation."

To cushion the cost, Lyon convinced three other companies that work closely with Seattle-based Kidder Mathews to share a private tent. Patriot Fire Protection Inc. normally doesn't do much corporate entertaining, but the stars were aligned when Lyon called, said Jim Boulanger, president of the Tacoma mechanical contracting company.

"It's our 25th anniversary as a company," he said. "The U.S. Open is the biggest sporting event that's ever been in Washington. It's in our back yard and this is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity."

If any business gets done during the tournament, that would be gravy. The real focus is on building relationships with clients and rewarding employees by giving them an experience they'll never forget, Lyon and Boulanger said.

"You try not to talk business unless clients bring it up," Lyon said. "You're there to have a good time, not give a sales pitch."

The private tents come in two sizes – the 50-by-50-foot space Kidder Mathews reserved, and a 30-by-30-foot space that seats 40 and costs \$130,000 for the week.

Despite the price tag, the private tents – the USGA won't say how many – sold out by March.

"At most U.S. Opens, we still have tents to sell in April (but) we don't have as much space to put up as many tents here," Griffin said.

With space at a premium, Chambers Bay will feature the U.S. Open's first two-story hospitality facility, the Puget Sound Suites and Pavilion.

This glass-façade structure contains 28 private suites, according to a rendering. Each suite seats 20 guests, comes with 30 daily tickets and costs \$118,000 for the week – although in this case the price includes food and drinks. The facility also includes a shared space with 18 reserved tables. Each table seats 10, comes with 15 tickets and costs \$61,500 for the week including food and drinks.

The final hospitality option is the Champions Pavilion, a shared space where a reserved table for 10 people plus 15 tickets costs \$40,500 for the week – including food and drinks.

The USGA also makes suites available on a daily basis – with practice rounds Monday through Wednesday costing less than the championship rounds Thursday through Sunday.

National companies usually take about 40 percent of the hospitality space at a U.S. Open, with local and regional businesses taking the rest. This year, national companies are taking about half of the space because there's a "newness" about the event that broadens its appeal, Griffin said.

Not only is the U.S. Open's first visit to the Northwest, but Chambers Bay – a true links course with a seaside setting, huge dunes and just one tree – is unlike any previous U.S. Open venue.

"It's a destination U.S. Open," Griffin said.

Anyone still on the fence about purchasing hospitality space at the U.S. Open might not want to wait much longer. With 12 weeks to go, the only options still left were a limited number of weekly and daily (\$6,000-\$11,500) tables in the Champions Pavilion.

MSG's website states the U.S. Open's hospitality program has produced more than \$150 million in total revenues since 2001.