

Golf leagues help businesspeople connect

BY JAN BUCHHOLZ

Phoenix Business Journal

When Maurine Karabatsos left the banking industry to work for a real estate title agency, she wondered how she could brand herself as “the title person” in a memorable way. About that time, she heard a presentation by Debbie Waitkus, founder and CEO of Golf for Cause, an education and marketing company focused on golf.

The two got together and created a golf league called Take Time for Nine.

Initially, Karabatsos just wanted a reason for meeting with clients and potential clients to remind them that she didn’t make loans anymore; she insured them.

The duo crafted a list of people Karabatsos wanted to reach with that message. Some 40 people showed up for the first round in summer 2002.

“That first day, the temperature hit 116 degrees,” she recalled, “and everybody was lined up in their carts ready to go.”

No one was deterred by the weather then, nor have they been since.

Some 426 people have participated in TTFN during the past nine years, which now has a spring, summer, fall and abbreviated winter league. The foursomes — usually 10 or more of them — play Thursdays at 4 p.m. and have teed off at a variety of golf courses, including those at the Arizona Biltmore and the Phoenician. This spring, they are playing at Silverado Golf Club in Scottsdale.

Karabatsos, who now is director of strategic alliances for Empire West Title in Phoenix, believes she has not only achieved



Maurine Karabatsos, left, and Debbie Waitkus created Take Time for Nine as a business networking tool. More than 400 people have played in the golf league since 2002.

JIM POULIN | PHOENIX BUSINESS JOURNAL



JIM POULIN | PHOENIX BUSINESS JOURNAL

Maurine Karabatsos, left, and Debbie Waitkus created Take Time for Nine in 2002 as a business networking tool. Page 8

her initial goal, but also created opportunities for other participants.

“I’ve gotten a lot of business through TTFN,” said Larry Wilk, a partner at Jaburg & Wilk PC. “It’s been very beneficial.”

Though golf is a popular pastime in the Valley, Kirk McClure said it is underused as a business development tool. He started a league three years ago.

“I wanted to get people in front of me and my company,” he said.

The golf league is called the AEC Golf Invitational, which stands for architects, engineers and contractors.

McClure, director of business development and project manager at Penhall Co., said the league continues to grow. Members play twice a month on Friday afternoons at Grayhawk Golf Club in Scottsdale.

“It’s given me some exposure, and it’s given Penhall exposure, but it’s all about putting people together,” McClure said.

The TTFN model goes beyond networking. Raffle tickets are sold, with the proceeds donated to charity. Whoever wins each week chooses the charity. So far, 87 charities have received nearly \$41,400 from the league.

Freelance copywriter Bower Yousse, who has played in TTFN for years, agrees that the benefits go above and beyond.

“It would be worthwhile even if my business didn’t benefit from participating,” Yousse said. “The players are first class all the way, and tons of fun.”

Connect with Jan Buchholz at jbuchholz@bizjournals.com or on Twitter at [@jreneebuchholz](https://twitter.com/jreneebuchholz).