

Pets' caddie program wins fans in first season

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SOMERS — The first year of a program that teaches local teens how to caddy at Petrifying Springs Golf Course will close out a successful season next week, according to officials.

"We'd love for it to continue and to have caddies come back," said Dan Drier, general manager of golf operations for the county. "It's fantastic for the caddies because they learn about golf and the other principles from the game, like honesty and respect."

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The Caddie and Leadership Academy

of Southeast Wisconsin, modeled after an elite PGA program, started training 21 youths ages 14 to 16 in June.

For hauling a 15- to 20-pound bag for about 6,000 yards — or sometimes half of that — caddies were paid \$15 for nine holes or \$30 for 18 holes ... with the occasional tip.

"It's a success with golfers as well because they enjoy how attentive caddies have been, from handling their clubs to raking the bunker. One golfer told me that their caddy had made them feel like a king," said Drier.

The academy partnered with the Boys and Girls Club of Kenosha to draw attention, Drier said, by using the club's website and emails to involve teens.

Working vacation

Some teens, like Anna Steinmetz, heard about the program from an indirect source — a relative.

"My grandmother saw it in the paper and told my mom," said Steinmetz, 15. "The fresh air is great, since I'd normally spend my time indoors. And a lot of people I've caddied for are nice and talk to me about my future."

Torrey Brown, a student at Kenosha Christian Life School, said his mother forced him to go to the train-



KENOSHA NEWS PHOTO BY KEVIN POIRIER

Sandy Milligan hands her club to caddie Drake Dickerson, 15, of Kenosha, while caddie Josh Hood, 16, replaces the pin at Petrifying Springs County Park.

ing session and the first few days, but he found that golf grew on him.

"You get to have great conversations with people about their lives, like their jobs. Once I got to talk to a physical trainer, and that's something I'm interested in," said Brown, 15.

Others, like Carson Swaney, 16, saw their new job as a way to look at golf differently.

"I never thought about it before, but it's definitely a gentleman's game. I played baseball, football and basketball — you shake the opponent's hand when you're done, but it's not like golf. People come to play

to relax. I'd come back and caddy if asked," said Swaney.

Worth the wait

Some teens, like Swaney, originally applied when the program was first announced only to be turned away at training.

The program, initially to be at Washington Park's municipal course, was canceled in 2014 due to legal concerns.

County Executive Jim Kreuser said, "We felt disappointed for the youngsters when city decided not go forward, so we got personnel and the county attorney together to get

it done." But after a rough start, there are still bumps ahead on the program's course. Caddymaster Marcus Gallo said that a change in golf culture has made it difficult to get the teens on the green.

"Golf culture is now cart-oriented instead of walking around a field, so that's affecting caddies. But the program has gotten positive support when people agree to give it a try," he said. In the future, Drier said, he hopes caddies return and branch out to other courses such as Kenosha Country Club.

"It's been a fantastic program for everyone," he said. "It's been worth the wait."