

# OPEN INVITE FROM SOUTH COUNTY



ABOVE: LADY MEMBERS OF THE SOUTH COUNTY GOLF CLUB WITH LADY CAPTAIN CHRIS ADAMS (CENTRE).

BELOW: LADY CAPTAIN RELAXING AS SHE WELCOMES MEMBERS TO HER LADY CAPTAIN'S DAY.



**Golf clubs around Ireland are coming to terms with the realities of the current economic environment. Many clubs have experienced a drop off in their membership numbers and it could be some time before the demand of the last 3 years returns to its peak. The South County Golf Club is one of the few exceptions and 2009 has proven to be a fruitful year with growth of over 10% in membership numbers. "We've had a great year and we are now looking to build on that success for 2010" was the view of Michael Diskin, General Manager at The South County Golf Club. "Central to our strategy for the next 3 years will be ladies golf and growing the number of female members within the club. We believe that ladies golf can remain a growth segment despite the recent downturn".**

The club already boasts a strong and committed ladies section and in fact, ladies make up an above average percentage of the overall membership at the club. According to the Lady Captain, Chris Adams "The South County Ladies Golf Club (SCLGC) is a young club, with a fabulous, progressive group of ladies; we are equally committed to developing our competitive golf skills as we are to building a warm and welcoming SCLGC identity and club atmosphere".

So what exactly is the club doing to attract ladies into the golf club? "Firstly it's important to point out that this is a very social club, run by its members for its members' benefit and this attracts people to join the club, both male and female. We are very proud of our equal status with our male members, but we are always looking for opportunities to attract new ladies to our club and to the game. This year, we ran two such initiatives – a 'Juniors in Golf' programme with the Transition Year girls in Blessington Community School, as well as a 'Ladies in Golf' programme for beginner ladies; both of these were very successful, creating an awareness both of golf for potential new players, and of SCLGC, its facilities and our

members. Our Ladies are just as keen to develop the game for existing lady golfers- we have been pleased with the success of our first year of running Ladies Seniors Opens and we also run an innovative 'South County White Ladies' competition, the brain child of one of our ladies, Eileen O'Driscoll. The competition is played off the white tees and it has been so successful in our club that we plan to extend the idea in 2010 and host a White Ladies Open for other ladies to enjoy.

As well as these initiatives, we have introduced specific membership initiatives which we believe will prove very attractive. Our new Novice Membership has been designed to introduce ladies to the game of golf in a friendly, relaxed and safe learning environment and we believe that this will act as a natural feeder system into full membership. The concept includes an introductory 10 week tuition course, with golf lessons from our club professional Raymie Burns as well as on-course lessons. At the end of this programme the ladies will have the opportunity to play the course in the company of existing female members where they will learn more about the game of golf and develop a new social network. At the end of that particular year they will have the option of becoming a full member of the club or opting out, but we expect most will have enjoyed their golfing experience enough to remain".

There is no question that this is a novel approach to developing the ladies membership and the club's Management and Ladies Committee appear determined to make this work. "We believe ladies golf will be to the forefront over the next 3 years. 2008 was marked by the reintroduction of the Ladies Irish Open and the focus on ladies golf in Ireland will culminate with the Solheim Cup in 2011. It is also a segment that has capacity for growth whereas we forecast that the demand for male membership may decline for the foreseeable future". The Novice

Membership is designed to attract new blood to the sport in a proactive fashion. The membership has been priced at €600 and includes many benefits, to ensure that cost should not be a barrier to entry.

Other membership initiatives that Management of the club has introduced include a new Family Membership and a special 5 Day Membership. According to Diskin, "The Family Membership is designed to encourage members within the club to introduce their spouse and young children and we expect this initiative to motivate many of the existing male members of the club to sign up their wives and children; it is also an attractive offering for other families with budding golfers, not least due to the pro-active Junior Programme run in the SCGC and the focus on attracting Junior boys and girls". The Family Membership at this golf club seems to be quite appropriate as there is a sense of a tight knit yet welcoming feel to the club. "We have made significant strides in the last 12 months to develop the club spirit and atmosphere within the golf club, a

proper sense of identity which will be enhanced further by more families being involved within the broader SCGC family" commented Diskin.

The 5 Day Membership provides a more affordable option of membership and is targeted specifically at ladies who can play golf midweek. There is a vibrant group of ladies who play throughout the week, particularly on Tuesdays when a competition is held by the ladies club and on Wednesdays, when a weekly Mixed Open is held.

One really does get the sense that The South County Golf Club is particularly well positioned to grow over the next few years. The initiatives that have been introduced to support and encourage ladies golf are welcomed and Diskin, his team and the Ladies Club seem very determined and committed to making this work. A dynamic and welcoming golf club, anybody thinking of joining a new club should certainly consider The South County Golf Club. It would appear that there is no time like the present.

**"This is a quality course in a quality location. The Club should take considerable pride in what they have achieved in Brittas"**

Philip Reid, The Irish Times



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