Your daily golf transaction newsletter
THE WIRE

OTHER NEWS:
» APPAREL WIRE: Pink Tee comes to girls' apparel rescue
» APPAREL WIRE: Ready or not

Golf Data OnLine :: The Apparel Wire :: The Tour Van

Sciences get a hand from Mickelsons

By Megan Jones
GPA Correspondent

Hundreds of elementary school teachers from around the country are beginning the school year with new educational tools for the classroom, thanks to a training academy that gets an "A" from PGA Tour veteran Phil Mickelson and his wife, Amy.

The Mickelsons have partnered with ExxonMobil to bring top-notch instructional training for teachers through the Mickelson ExxonMobil Teachers Academy, which wrapped up the last of the 2007 sessions in July.

United States Secretary of Education, Margaret Spellings (right), putts a golf ball as professional golfer, Phil Mickelson (left), explains the math and science behind his game, at the ExxonMobil Building in Fairfax, Virginia. Mickelson and wife Amy (center), cofounders of the Mickelson ExxonMobil Teachers Academy, conducted the demonstration as part of a Town Hall Meeting during the 2007 Academy.

The academy grew to include three sessions this year -- two regional academies in Texas and Louisiana, and the national academy in Fairfax, Va. -- up from one in 2005, its first year. A total of 600 teachers attended the three academies.

Each academy had the same goal: to equip third- through fifth-grade teachers with new strategies and philosophies to keep kids interested in the sciences. And there are no dull formulas or theorems to memorize in this toolkit. Instead, lessons are made fun for teachers and students alike with materials such as rolling marbles, crashing toy cars and catapulting foam rockets.

"The situation in America is that students are not becoming interested enough to pursue the harder subjects," said Joe Scuilli, Ed.D, a program director for the National Science Teachers Association. The NSTA, along with teacher-training organization Math Solutions Professional Development, designed the curriculum, provided instructors and managed the daily activities and logistics of the academies.

"One thing we want to do is revitalize that interest," Scuilli said. "How do you do that? Through the teachers, and elementary teachers build the foundational blocks."

So what does golf have to do with science?

"I see how math and science plays a role in my golf game every day, whether it be the angle of the putter, the temperature of the air, the friction of the green or the force I use to drive the ball," said Phil Mickelson in an e-mail interview. "Math and science are everywhere, including calculating the yards for a hole or the par for a course."

The more important question, then, might be why the Mickelsons decided to help launch this effort. Like Scuilli, they said they have concerns about the future of math and science education in this country.

The cost of decreased student interest, they fear, is too high.

"A few years ago, I was playing golf with some key leaders who told me that the number of science and engineering graduates had been dropping in the United States, while rising rapidly in other countries," Mickelson said. "Our status as a scientific leader in the world is at jeopardy unless we do something to change that trend."

Over the years, he said, ExxonMobil has been a pioneer in their support of math and science education, so he brought the issue to them to explore ways to address the issue.

The hope, Amy Mickelson said, is for teachers to become motivated to want to do more science in the classroom.

"We wanted to equip them with hands-on experiments that they can take back to their classrooms to inspire their own students about math and science and encourage life-long learning in these subjects," she said.

"By participating in these hand-on experiments themselves, we hope to equip these teachers with the tools to demonstrate that math and science are everywhere, including with such simple materials as an egg, a pizza pan, a broom and a glass of water."

One activity, for example, examines the pendulum, Scuilli said. Teachers, and their students, can explore the length and speed at which it operates. That's the science. But there is also a math lesson involved, as well, if they graph the pendulum's motion. The graph then becomes a visual, two-dimensional expression of the physics involved. Math becomes a language and tool for the science lesson.

The bottom line, Scuilli said, is this: Excited teachers create excited students.

"This is not a new way to teach," Scuilli stressed. "It's a more efficient way to teach. It gives them the opportunity to say, 'Yeah, I want to do more of this.'"

The Mickelsons already know of one child interested in doing "more of this."

"A couple of years ago, our daughter, Amanda, was given the opportunity to choose what summer camp she wanted to attend, and living in Southern California her possibilities were endless," Amy Mickelson said. "She chose to go to science camp and she had the greatest week of her life. She ended up being the only girl in the entire camp. She continues to be interested by science subjects, and we hope that through the teachers at the Mickelson ExxonMobil Teachers Academy, girls like her across the country, learn that math and science are a lot of fun."