



Lemon Bay Golf Club, giving kids 'A Better Shot'

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BY T MICHELE WALKER – When looking for a quality camp for children, there are certain tell-tale signs that you've found the right place. For example, when you walk in while the campers are on a break or eating lunch, check to see where the teachers are sitting. Are they sitting off to the side chatting amongst themselves, or are they sitting and engaged with the campers? If it's anything like Lemon Bay Golf Club's "A

Better Shot" summer camp, the teachers, or rather mentors, are sitting and engaged with the children. And that engagement doesn't stop at the end of camp.

After experiencing an abbreviated camp last summer due to COVID-19, the young golfers are excited to be back.

This is especially true for Yui Fujii, a recent graduate of The University of Florida and someone who has been a "Better Shot" camper since 2008.

"Coming back to Lemon Bay every summer is like coming home," he said. "It was definitely sad and I was kind of upset last year, having to miss camp. But coming back and seeing everybody this year is really exciting."

"Kids become confident and outgoing and know they can be whatever they want to be," explained Ben McCoy, Director of Golf and Head Golf pro at Lemon Bay's A Better Shot. "The smile on their faces will convince you of that in a New York second. A Better Shot matters."

The program is staffed with high-quality, caring mentors and coaches and their support is contagious. "You've got this!" said one camper, as another was getting ready to take his swing. The camaraderie between the campers is heartwarming, and one of the many reasons children come back year after year.

"I know of no other sport where you can get to know another person as well as you can in golf," explained Fujii. "After you've exchanged pleasantries and talked about the weather, you have another three and a half hours to fill. You end up getting to know each other really well."

"I really love being out in nature," said young golfer Hunter Pope, and there's a lot of nature to love at Lemon Bay Golf Club, which is a fully certified Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary. With bald eagles, storks, herons and birds of all kinds, it's a peaceful oasis.

A Better Shot began in 1996, when the founders of Lemon Bay Golf Club wanted to reach out to the local community in a meaningful way. Assistant Golf Pro Missy Eldridge and club founder Kim Honey created Lemon Bay's Junior Golf. Reaching out to the community's local youth, the program offered, and continues to offer, professional golf instruction for ages 5-18. The tuition is \$100 but no one has ever been turned away because of lack of funds.

A Better Shot has become a second home to many girls and boys in the community. Golf skills have always been viewed as a happy side effect of the program, with golf's core values of integrity, honor, self-esteem, and respect the primary focus.

The campers happily embrace the philosophy taught at "A Better Shot".

"When you play golf there is a set of rules," explained Fujii. "When you play golf you have integrity, and you always want to leave the green a better place than you found it. Those are the things that Lemon Bay teaches you."

For Fujii, golf teaches you to think of others and to practice consideration.

"Those are the types of things that golf teaches. You always want to have etiquette, you always want to rake the bunker. Something like raking the bunker might seem insignificant, but you have to understand that the next person behind you might have a more difficult time just because you didn't do it properly or you didn't do it at all. Those are the little things that you learn, not just in golf but through this camp. And I think being able to get that from the camp and from A Better Shot is the best thing that anybody could learn anywhere."

The mentorship doesn't end after summer camp. Students are eligible for a college scholarship from Lemon Bay Golf Club. This year Lemon Bay gave 11 deserving

children, graduates of their summer program, up to \$10,000 each for college.

In addition to college scholarships Ben McCoy meets regularly with local children, just to touch base.

"I just sort of make sure everyone is still on track," McCoy explained. "Just because the summer program is over, we still contact you to follow up and see how things are going in your life. We're not letting anyone fall through the cracks."



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Marcy Shortuse is the editor of the Boca Beacon, and has been with the paper since 2007. She is also editor of the Boca Beacon's sister publication, Gasparilla Magazine. She has more than 20 years of experience writing and editing local newspapers and is originally from the Chicago area.

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