

Driving for Dollars

PHILANTHROPY: Century Club Turns Passion For Golf Into Support for Monarch School



Photo by [Melissa Jacobs](#)

From left, Monarch Principal Sarita Fuentes, Tom Wornham of the Century Club, and Charles Dabelgott of Farmers talk while board member Julie Dillon helps a student.

By [Brad Graves](#)

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The quiet of Monarch School, at the foot of Cedar Street in downtown San Diego, is punctuated by train horns on this Wednesday morning while students bear down for their instructional day.

A dozen miles to the north, golfers head out to play the famous courses at Torrey Pines.

The two places seem worlds apart, but a strong thread binds them together.

Every January the Farmer's Insurance Open comes to the Torrey Pines municipal courses. The golf tournament, produced by the Century Club of San Diego, raises money for charities including various local schools. It's Monarch School — a unique school for homeless children — that is the beneficiary of the gala called Diamond in the Rough, produced the Saturday before the tournament.

Over five years the Century Club has provided more than \$1.3 million to Monarch School, which serves students from kindergarten to 12th grade.

The school relies on standard public school funding from the San Diego County Office of Education, but only for core expenses. Donations augment its budget, paying for salaries, services and supplies the state will not, said Sarita Fuentes, principal and CEO of Monarch School.

The school offers a smorgasbord of services, including after-school activities, family meals, a place to shower and wash clothes, financial help with public transportation and art-based therapy. Not surprisingly, students living a transient life have other counseling needs as well.

It seems, however, that Monarch School takes the edge off being homeless. Fuentes said a student who might feel shame at being the homeless kid at a conventional school feels more comfortable at Monarch School, where everyone is in the same situation. And it's not just downtown denizens that attend. Students travel from locations all over the county, as far away as Escondido.

No Student Turned Away

As the recession has lengthened and California has cut its budget, the school has had to rely more on donations. Last year, income was split evenly between state and private funds, Fuentes said. Today 55 percent of the budget has to come from private donations. This year's budget for the school's private-sector services is \$2.2 million.

As the economy has grown rockier, enrollment has increased, Fuentes said, going from 100 students in September, peaking at 165 in December, and then falling off to 140. One hundred sixty-five students was "madness," Fuentes said, but the school doesn't turn students away.

Monarch School occupies 10,000 square feet a few steps from Pacific Highway and the County Administration Center. A visitor is struck by the small size of the school, said Charles Dabelgott, the Carlsbad-based Southern California state executive director for Farmers Insurance Group of Cos. Farmers, based in Los Angeles, is a unit of Switzerland-based Zurich Financial Services Ltd.

Farmers took over sponsorship of the Torrey Pines tournament — a stop on the PGA Tour — in a last-minute move in January. In March, the insurance company agreed to sponsor the tournament for four additional years. Financial terms of the sponsorship were not disclosed.

There seemed to be an immediate rapport between Farmers and the Century Club, said Kevin Kelso, the Los Angeles-based chief marketing officer for Farmers. "We are a company that believes in giving back," Kelso said, adding that the charitable component of the Century Club and the Torrey Pines tournament "really resonated with us."

Many people do not realize it is a volunteer organization that puts on the San Diego tournament, Kelso said.

The week of events associated with the Torrey Pines tournament benefits a variety of other schools and organizations, including the Boys and Girls Clubs of San Dieguito, the March of Dimes Foundation, the San Diego County Junior Golf Association and the Pro Kids Golf Academy.

Public-Private Partnership

“We try to support as many organizations as we can,” said Tom Wornham, the Century Club’s outgoing president, who works in San Diego as executive vice president and regional manager for Wells Fargo Bank.

Wornham recalled being part of the group that made the decision to support Monarch School five years ago. With the support, he said the Century Club hopes to raise the profile of an underserved group of people, and raise the school’s profile among the philanthropic community.

Tournaments on the PGA Tour all have their charitable components. This week’s Crowne Plaza Invitational at Colonial in Fort Worth, Texas, will benefit charities in surrounding communities. The St. Jude Classic, set for early June in Memphis, Tenn., and presented by British medical device company Smith & Nephew, benefits the St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital, also in Memphis.

Longtime San Diegans will remember the Torrey Pines golf tournament as the Andy Williams San Diego Open. Since then it has had a number of title sponsors. The 2011 event will run Jan. 24-30.

The Diamond in the Rough Gala features top-name entertainment. Television personality Jay Leno brought his act to the venue in 2010. Comedian Dana Carvey is booked for the Jan. 22, 2011 gala, says Tom Wilson, longtime executive director for the Century Club. “It takes year-round planning to put together functions and events,” Wilson said, recalling that in earlier days, singer Andy Williams and his buddies provided an evening of entertainment.

Datron World Communications, the Vista-based maker of specialty radios, was title sponsor for 2010’s Diamond in the Rough Gala. Other sponsors included Jack in the Box Inc., San Diego National Bank (now U.S. Bancorp), the San Diego Padres, the John Sachs family, the Hilton La Jolla Torrey Pines hotel, Donovan’s Steakhouse, the Manchester Grand Hyatt San Diego hotel, the San Diego Chargers and the Lodge at Torrey Pines.

The Century Club was founded in 1961. Jim Horton, who recently retired as a vice president for California Bank & Trust, is the club’s new president. Julie Dillon, president and owner of Dillon Development Inc., is a key link in the Century Club-Monarch School relationship, as she sits on the boards of both organizations.

“Monarch School is an excellent example of a public-private partnership with the County Office of Education and the nonprofit Monarch School Project,” said Dillon. “However, Monarch School Project, the private component, could not happen without other relationships. The Century Club is an example of an organization that has contributed so much — more than \$1.3 million — to Monarch School.”



