



PGA Tour shows off plans for new headquarters building as Gov. Scott visits

By Stuart Korfhage
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The PGA Tour allowed the first public peeks at renderings of its new headquarters, but the big focus Friday was on the economic picture.

Although there wasn't much actual news in Friday's media gathering at the clubhouse of TPC Sawgrass, it was a rousing pep rally for an organization that is considered a prize for St. Johns County.

"This would be our Amazon," said County Commissioner Jay Morris, referring to the ongoing recruitment around the country for the internet retailer's second headquarters.

It's a prize St. Johns County actually won more than 30 years ago when then-commissioner Deane Beman first established the headquarters here. It was much more modest then at two small buildings, but it has since grown to include about 800 employees in 17 different buildings in Ponte Vedra Beach and around the county.

"It was the first thing we ever really owned, so that was a special day," Beman said Friday when thinking back about establishing the headquarters here. "It continues to grow."

Beman said he couldn't remember how many employees were with the Tour when the first headquarters opened: "Not too many," he said.

But the Tour wasn't the global operation of today with six tours under its control. In fact, Beman pointed out that television coverage for Tour events in the early 1970s was less than that of bowling.

"I never thought in terms of how many employees," Beman said of his dreams for growth. "I thought of how can we grow the game, develop the game from a minor sport into a major sport. That was the original objective."

There's little doubt Beman's objective was realized a long time ago, and this county has been one of the major beneficiaries.

That's why the County Commission was happy to approve the Tour's plans for the new building near County Road 210 on property it already owned. And the Commission also approved \$2.8 million in tax incentives to reward the Tour for its commitment to building an \$81 million, 187,000-square-foot facility - scheduled to open in 2020 - and to adding about 300 jobs here.

Morris said Friday that revised data show the Tour will contribute about \$28 million to local tax revenue over the next 20 years. The estimate was \$24 million when the Commission approved the incentives at the Oct. 3, 2017, meeting.

"It's about as important as anything I can think of right now," Morris said of the Tour's commitment to staying in the county. "It's the biggest thing going on in the county."

The Tour is currently the sixth-largest employer in the county and could move even higher as the additional 300 employees are gradually added.

The presence of the Tour also helps the county attract other companies and organizations that are considering a move here.

"We will definitely use that as an (example)," Morris said. "Show it to them as a picture coming and then two years from now when it's done to take them in."

Because of the positive economic benefits and job creation, Gov. Rick Scott decided to make an appearance Friday and praise the Tour for its impact in St. Johns County and in the state overall.

Including The Players Championship at TPC Sawgrass, the Tour conducts nine tournaments a year in Florida with a total impact estimated at \$355 million.

"This is a great day," Scott said. "The PGA Tour is adding 300 jobs in a beautiful new headquarters on top of the 800 jobs you already have here. It's going to be exciting to see this building, but for me, I love the jobs."

Commissioner Jay Monahan said the plans for the new building, which is expected to be rated LEED Gold for energy efficiency and environmental impact, started about 15 years ago. Those plans included the idea to build the clubhouse where Friday's new conference took place as well as improvements that have been made to The Players Stadium Course.

"We've known for a while it's been time for a change," Monahan said. "We're going to have an awesome facility in which to work."

He said it's amazing to think about how much the Tour has grown since Beman was able to purchase the land for the current headquarters for \$1 from the Fletcher family more than three decades ago.

"We still think that we, and this county and this city and this state got a pretty good deal - a fortunate one for everybody," Monahan said.