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Tourism ready to tee off



News-Tribune file photo

Tourism officials are excited about the upcoming Ginn Championship golf tournament, a Champions Tour event scheduled for March 26-April 1 at Ocean Hammock. They are expecting a significant economic impact from the tournament.

Officials ready to showcase county via golf event

By **AARON LONDON**
STAFF WRITER

While Flagler County's share of the tourism pie is small compared to its neighbors to the north and south, 2007 is shaping up to be a banner year.

The 2007 Ginn Championship — a Champions Tour event scheduled for March 26-April 1 at the Hammock Beach Resort is expected to

boost the county's exposure on both the tourism and economic development fronts.

"One thing it gives you is national and international recognition as far as the quality of life in the community," said Tom



COOLEY

Cooley, executive director at Enterprise Flagler, the county's public/private economic development agency.

Cooley said a gold tournament of this caliber is a significant source for corporate networking. Enterprise Flagler already is using the event to bring two or three corporate executives to the county to play in the traditional pro-am event held at

the start of the tournament week.

Cooley said once executives are here, it can make the area even more attractive to those who might be looking to expand or relocate their business.

"It provides a great window of opportunity to bring those executives in and tour our community and see the

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The Flagler County Chamber of Commerce estimates the Ginn Championship will generate between \$14 million and \$30 million in revenue for the county.

TOURISM

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opportunities on the industrial development side," he said. "It is also an opportunity to work the event as volunteers to network with the other people who will be visiting at the time."

The Flagler County Chamber

of Commerce also has announced its strong support for the tournament.

"Through television and print media exposure this event will bring unprecedented attention to Flagler County, putting us on the map both nationally and internationally," the organization said in its most recent newsletter.

The chamber also released some facts and figures regarding the potential impact of the Ginn event. They include:

- The tournament will generate an estimated \$14 million to \$30 million in revenue for the county.
- The event will generate more than 1,000 room requests for three nights and in Flagler

County there are slightly more than 1,300 rooms total.

- The majority of local commerce will benefit either directly or indirectly from the economic impact of an event of this magnitude.
- The tournament will generate thousands of dollars for local charities.

The potential boost to Flagler

County tourism efforts comes at a time Florida is bracing for a decrease in tourists for the first time since 2001.

Visitation to the state was down 2.4 percent in the third quarter of 2006, according to Visit Florida, the state's tourism arm. To put the decline in perspective, a 1 percent decrease represents a loss of \$37.2

million in general revenue collections, according to a tourism official.

"The recent decline in visitation is a serious concern for the continued growth of Florida," said Donna Ross, president and chief executive officer of the Florida Attractions Association and chair of the Visit Florida board of directors, in a news release.