

# PGA SUCCESS STORY IN NEW MEXICO

## AT THE SANTA ANA GOLF CORPORATION, EMPLOYEES GO BEYOND HOSTING A NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP

By Bob Denney

**T**O BETTER UNDERSTAND THE MISSION OF SANTA ANA GOLF CORPORATION OF SANTA ANA Pueblo, N.M., you only have to look at the faces of the members of its staff after a group of some 75 Native American youngsters have finished an introductory golf program. Better yet, look at the faces of the youngsters walking off a green on the three-hole course near Santa Ana Golf Club. That is where all juniors play golf at no charge.

The facility was opened in 2004, a year after the PGA Professional National Championship first visited New Mexico. What was first deemed to be a \$289,000 project was completed for under \$70,000.

Santa Ana Golf Corporation's 158 employees include 50 full-time positions, with 10 PGA Professionals – making it the largest PGA of America employer in New Mexico. The employees will again serve as hosts for the PGA Professional National Championship, June 28–July 1.

Aspiring PGA Professionals who train at Santa Ana Pueblo work at two premier facilities that have earned national accolades as among the best courses in the Southwest – Twin Warriors and Santa Ana Golf Club.

“We’re proud of our staff and of those Professionals or superintendents who have graduated through our program,” says Santa Ana PGA Director of Golf and General Manager Roger Martinez. “We created an incentive for those entering our program, and establish a cutoff time to show progress.”

Hosting significant championships is part of the tradition at Santa Ana Pueblo. In 1999, Santa Ana Golf Club hosted the U.S. Women’s Public Links Championship, and has been the site of seven New Mexico Opens, nearly 40 USGA qualifying events, three former Nike Tour events and the 1999 Western PGA Professional Championship. Twin Warriors, which opened in May 2001, has hosted two U.S. World Senior Team Championships, the 2003 PGA Professional National Championship, the 2007 U.S. Women’s Trans National Championship, the 2008 U.S. Men’s Southwest Amateur and more than 1,600 corporate/charitable golf events.

Among Santa Ana Golf’s staff is the father-son duo of PGA Professionals Bob and Rob Lowry, who bring to work more than a love for the game. They also shaped their respective teaching careers by instilling the life values of golf for hundreds of youngsters in the greater Albuquerque area.

Santa Ana golf reaches youngsters from elementary to pre-college; to those who can travel to a course and for those who cannot afford to play.

“I bring the golf course to them,” says Rob, 36, who was the 2007 Sun Country PGA Teacher of the Year and 2007 Section Junior Golf Leader. “We go to a physical education class in school and develop a ‘mock’ golf course on site. When you count all visits made to area schools over eight years, I have worked with some 40,000 kids.”

There are 21 tribes in New Mexico and 19 pueblos (villages), including Santa Ana Pueblo, which once had but three tribal members playing golf. Today, there are more than 500 tribal members in the game, including four of the five Board members who learned to play golf at Santa Ana.

Martinez, a native of El Paso, joined Santa Ana Golf in 1990, during construction of Santa Ana Golf Club. In 1997, after signing his first contract, the tribal attorney asked Martinez, “Do you want to lock yourself into a five-year contract?”

“I told him that I did, but I didn’t know it at the time,” said Martinez. “It has been a blessing to be here.”

In addition to a shared commitment to Native American youth and the resort itself, Martinez and Lowry, 63, also share having survived near-death experiences. Those frightening moments ultimately led them to Santa Ana Pueblo.



Bob Lowry, PGA teaching professional with Santa Ana Golf Corporation





The staff of Santa Ana Golf Corporation of Santa Ana Pueblo, N.M., which oversees operations at the two sites that will host the 42nd PGA Professional National Championship features - **Front Row** (from left): Twin Warriors Golf Club assistant professional Ron Ulibarri; Twin Warriors and Santa Ana Golf Club Director of Instruction Sandy Lemon; Twin Warriors Superintendent Don Petrey and Santa Ana Golf Club Teaching Professional Bob Lowry. **Middle Row** (from left): Santa Ana Golf Club PGA Teaching Professional Rob Lowry; Santa Ana Golf Club assistant professional Mark Swanson; Santa Ana Golf Club Assistant Professional Steve Manning; and Roger Martinez, PGA director of golf and general manager at Twin Warriors and Santa Ana Golf Club. **Back Row** (from left): Santa Ana Golf Club PGA Head Professional Dave Brown; Zach Hoefel, PGA assistant professional at Twin Warriors Golf Club; Derek Gutierrez, PGA head professional at Twin Warriors GC; and Joe Dosstter, superintendent at Santa Ana Golf Club.

Lowry, a former electrical engineer and aspiring Champions Tour player at age 47, went on a fishing trip to the Gila wilderness of New Mexico in July of 1993. During the trip, he slipped off a cliff and fell more than 30 feet. He landed on boulders and suffered a broken neck, back and shoulder.

The fact that he survived the fall was what Lowry called “the first of two miracles.” The other act of providence took place in an Albuquerque hospital emergency room. An x-ray technician, inexplicably unaware of the depth of Lowry’s injury, moved the PGA Professional’s head several times to gain the best x-ray images. Once Lowry’s neurosurgeon finally arrived, he examined his patient and then asked a question.

“Did anything happen where you heard a pop in your neck?” the doctor asked. Lowry then spoke of the x-ray technician’s visit, and the surgeon’s face turned pale.

“After he regained his composure, he told me, ‘You’re a *very* lucky man,’” recalls Lowry. “I learned that the technician risked having me completely paralyzed. By accident, he actually had set my bones back together.”

Lowry spent six months in a halo brace and had to learn to walk once again. His thumb and forefinger on each hand remain numb.

“If you don’t believe in angels and divine intervention, you’re not with me,” says Lowry.

Martinez, 43 took his own fateful journey while attending New Mexico Junior College in Hobbs, N.M. A first-team All-American his freshman year, Martinez fell asleep at the wheel while returning from out of

town in an attempt to make an 8 a.m. class.

His truck ran off the road, spun out of control, rolled three and a half times and came to rest on the open highway in several pieces. Martinez was thrown through the windshield, bounced off the asphalt and back into the truck. He suffered multiple abrasions and lacerations, and he lost a portion of his right leg when it struck a windshield wiper. An aspiring playing career was over.

“Everything happens for a reason,” says Martinez, who later met the developer for Santa Ana Pueblo’s future resort.

Martinez served as PGA head professional at Santa Ana Golf Club from 1993–97; was named PGA director of golf at both Santa Ana and Twin Warriors Golf Club in 1999, and in 2003 added PGA general manager to his responsibilities.

“Many of today’s corporations focus entirely on the bottom line, with many operators not knowing who their owners really are,” says Martinez. “At Santa Ana, there is a real sense of community. I know just about every one of our shareholders on a first-name basis. It makes my job mean that much more knowing who my performance impacts.”

For Bob Lowry, there is an ongoing mission of his own that doesn’t end once the last student has left the range and a trademark chamber of commerce sunset nudges the horizon.

“I want to see the kids succeed,” says Lowry. “If you’re around me, you learn about life skills.” ■

**Bob Denney** is The PGA of America’s senior association writer

Roger Martinez, PGA director of golf and general manager with Santa Ana Golf Corporation

