

**Proposal for USF Campus Development  
Committee  
September 2, 2004**

**Executive Summary:** The Claw at USF golf course has received a proposal from the Florida State Golf Association (FSGA) to make the golf course the state headquarters for the FSGA and build the Florida Golf House, which is a Hall of Fame for state junior and amateur golf.

The FSGA is proposing to spend upwards of \$9 Million to upgrade the course to a premier facility. USF's contribution will be to lease the land the golf course currently sits. The renovation would take place from April-Dec 2006. Upon completion, the FSGA would assume operations and management of The Claw and thus retain all resulting revenues and profits. SUNDOME Inc. would eliminate any loss potential from golf course operations and the USF Men's and Women's golf programs would secure use of a premier facility thus helping recruiting and tournament play. Raising the stature and conditions of The Claw would yield additional benefits to the University, for Alumni and Development initiatives. A condition of the partnership is to secure up to 10 acres of wetlands adjacent to the existing golf course. This land would be used to reconfigure a few golf holes in order to make room for proper practice facilities and clubhouse that meets FSGA standards. This proposal is being brought before the USF Campus Development Committee to secure permission to pursue the partnership.

**Recommendation:** We recommend USF begin negotiation to finalize a partnership with FSGA in order to establish the USF Golf Course as the home to FSGA Golf House Florida. By bringing the home of Florida's amateur golf community to USF, we will take the first step toward raising the USF Golf Facilities to a higher level of prominence and recognition.

From a marketing perspective USF has access to a superior facility at no cost and the FSGA affiliation will act as another national image building component for USF. Through this agreement the USF Golf Facilities will be greatly enhanced as the course will become one of the finest daily fee facilities in the area. The Florida Golf House will become a must-see destination for any golfer visiting the area and there is only one FSGA headquarters golf facility which provides a distinctive market edge for The Claw. Negotiations with the FSGA should include discussions regarding their absorption of golf teams expenses—perhaps in the form of a leasing fee that accrues back to support the teams and coaches.

## **The Claw at USF Florida State Golf Association Partnership**

**Project Background:** The Claw at USF ([www.theclawatusf.org](http://www.theclawatusf.org)) is a 35 year old moderately priced golf course that generates 40,000-50,000 rounds of golf per year. The course is located adjacent to the main USF campus on Fletcher and 46<sup>th</sup> St. and in a very advantageous, centrally located geographic area, easily accessible to a large population/golfer base. "The Claw" (as it is known) has always been recognized as one of the best daily-fee layouts in the Tampa Bay area and is well regarded for its natural surroundings absent of any on-course housing development that is typical of the newer courses in the area. The Claw is one of the few area courses that allow walkers at all times (a time honored tradition in golf) and has always enjoyed the support of the local golf community. As is typical of all area golf courses, The Claw sees the majority of profitable business in the winter tourism months and has lower activity in the warm summer months when rates for all courses are reduced. The Claw is a community asset that serves a diverse user base, where many private courses still can be exclusive due to cost and location.

The University has also benefited from the close proximity of the course. Students, faculty, staff and alumni use the course extensively and a number of campus related tournaments, leagues, fundraising events, University golf classes and even a cross country meet are held at the course.

The course is also home to the USF Men's and Women's Golf Programs with team facilities (lockers and meeting rooms) located at the course. In addition the golf course restaurant, Rocky's Sports Grill, is a frequent campus stop for lunch as well as student socializing and has become part of campus life. The Claw has also played a role in entertaining donors who golf. Many top universities such as Duke, Stanford, Michigan and Ohio State boast some of the finest courses in their markets and there is no doubt that The Claw has the potential to be in that same class.

In the past 5 years, the golf market has become increasingly competitive and this phenomenon, along with the lack of discretionary funds to re-invest in the strengthening of the playing conditions of The Claw, has challenged it to remain profitable. Because golfers have more quality choices, greens fees have been moderated in order to attract a steady flow of golfers in order to keep the course busy. In the summer of 2003, The Claw embarked on a \$1 million renovation from state appropriated funds for a water mitigation project. These funds were used to improve overall drainage systems and run-off from the greens. A new irrigation system was also installed throughout the golf course resulting in better conditions year round.

While the improvements mentioned above have brought the course back to "playable" conditions, and business is improving, significant renovations (estimated at \$2.5 million) are still required to fulfill the potential of the golf course and deliver a product worthy of the increased greens fees that will be needed to bring the course to profitability. Since it appears that University resources are not available to invest in this effort, we have explored other opportunities to move the facility to optimum condition.

**Florida State Golf Association:** The FSGA ([www.fsga.org](http://www.fsga.org)) is a non-profit volunteer based organization that has served amateur golf in Florida since 1913. The mission of the FSGA is to preserve and protect the integrity of the game of golf in Florida. The FSGA includes over 775 member clubs and over 160,000 individual members from across the state. FSGA is currently located in Tampa at Hidden River Corporate Park on Fletcher Avenue.

The FSGA provides a variety of services to member clubs, their members and the general golfing community. FSGA conducts more than 100 tournament days each year, including 21 state championships and 41 days of USGA qualifying events. FSGA also actively cooperates with the United States Golf Association, the PGA of America, the Florida Women's State Golf Association, the International Association of Golf Administrators, the Golf Course Superintendents Association and all other golf-serving organizations. Because Florida has more golf courses than any other state, the FSGA commands quite a lofty presence in the national golf community.

**FSGA/USF Partnership:** The Florida State Golf Association has approached SUNDOME Inc. and the University seeking a partnership which would bring the FSGA headquarters to The Claw. FSGA has already had their Board of Directors visit the course and has also had a noted golf architect assess the course. FSGA is proposing that SUNDOME/USF and FSGA combine resources to completely renovate the course, add a modern practice facility and develop a new club house/FSGA Golf House (which would also include a Hall of Fame for Florida Golf). Accomplishing the project would require the appropriation of up to 10 acres of additional land adjacent to the golf course. FSGA is proposing an estimated \$9 million project and will fund the entire renovation. USF's contribution will be the land. The renovation would take place from April-Dec., 2006.

Pursuing this partnership would culminate in the FSGA assuming operations and management of The Claw and thus retain all resulting revenues and profits. The FSGA would operate Florida Golf House, conduct training and hold major state golf events at The Claw. USF would inherit a premier golf facility with a National Audubon site designation for the campus and SUNDOME Inc. would eliminate any loss potential from golf course operations.

## Positives

- Will bring a very prestigious partner under USF umbrella and create another differentiation point among national universities
- Will insure USF has an A+ rated golf course connected with the University as well as the best facility in The Big East
- FSGA stature as well as tournaments held at the course will attract national attention in golfing circles
- Environmentally, will improve drainage and any hazardous chemical run-off. The new course would qualify for certification from the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program
- Will make the USF golf facility a must play option for golfing tourists
- FSGA Board members and supporters become a potential new donor group to USF
- Creates a prime, campus specific location to entertain and impress large donors.
- Will elevate men's and women's golf team recruiting into the top echelon in the nation.
- Will provide the existing golf programs with premier facilities and rent-free space for locker rooms, coaches' offices and team meeting space.
- FSGA community activities (teaching and promoting the game of golf to lower income groups) will reflect positively on USF
- Opens the real potential to develop a Professional Golf Management program at USF
- USF golf classes would be conducted at a premier learning center
- The new golf course coupled with the new facilities will allow the course to host better quality and larger fundraising golf events (assuming FSGA intends to pursue such events)
- Would provide the best scenario for realizing a significant profit due to the ability to increase average daily fees and at the same time maximize the rounds played.
- SUNDOME removes loss potential from the golf course and any additional investment requirements
- Ability to draw larger and more prestigious events to the course and area
- Could become another positive component in recruiting faculty and staff
- The deal will maintain a golf course at USF as a permanent facility
- As an additional ROI incentive for the University, we would also recommend the partnership include financial support for the intercollegiate golf team programs.

## Concerns

While there may be some negative implications, we feel many of them can be addressed as below.

- As the deal currently stands there is no financial ROI "guaranteed". USF turns over the course to the FSGA with the rewards being the prestige of FSGA affiliation and development of an A+ golf facility. A lease, or support fee, for the golf teams, whose expenses are presently carried on the SunDome, not Athletics, budget, is yet to be set.  
**Response:** In its present state and without further investment our best case scenario is a break-even business.

- Loss of control: Flexibility to serve USF students and organizations may become limited. (For example holding a cross country track meet on the course or USF related tournaments)  
**Response:** In their proposal, FSGA has already indicated they will continue to support USF activities. We intend to negotiate assurances that this will be honored.
- Any intent to utilize the golf course for other USF uses would require a significant buyout.  
**Response:** This will require some long-term thinking from the Trustees and philosophical agreement that a golf facility adds a special value to the University.
- Some of the current business building alliances we have forged may be lost (tournaments, alumni groups, campus leagues, tourism)  
**Response:** Any USF related alliances will be maintained. It will be FSGA's business decision to continue any other activities. No negative impact is expected.
- It will take adjustment to USF master plan.  
**Response:** Of the 570 acres of property we are only asking for up to 10 acres.
- Land may be getting used by Biology Department or other University Research groups.  
**Response:** Every attempt would be made to accommodate any existing research or move it to similar areas.
- Downtime for the golf course and staffing issues would create another profitability issue.  
**Response:** FSGA would assume control of the facility once construction begins. Construction may be done in phases to eliminate disruption of play.
- Financial impact on Athletics due to taking on golf coaches salaries.  
**Response:** Construction is not scheduled until April of 2006 and thus the matter of Golf Coaches' salary allocation will hopefully have been finalized.
- Men's and Women's Golf programs will need temporary practice facilities.  
**Response:** A short-term solution with a local course (or multiple) courses will be accomplished.
- Possible impact on USF golf classes during renovation.  
**Response:** We will attempt to schedule the range renovation during the summer months to minimize any impact. The estimated time for the entire renovation process is April-Dec 2006.

Besides the land use issue, the decision to move forward appears to hinge on the issue of control. If USF Administration and Trustees feel comfortable about relinquishing control of the facility and it is enough of a return (in prestige and amenities) to end up with a premium golf facility, the deal is a win-win for all. Some major assurances will need to be negotiated to insure USF students and golf teams maintain access.

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