

## **What If They Threw A Four-Day Party And Called It A Golf Tournament?**

The World's Greatest Amateur Golf Tournament returns to Biloxi Sept. 20-22 when more than 550 two-man teams swarm six of the Coast's top golf courses for the 45<sup>th</sup> edition of the Slavic Invitational.

Easily the most popular and wildly successful amateur golf tournament in the Southeast ~ if not the nation ~ this year's Slavic arrives already sold out and with a growing waiting list of eager participants. Players will warm up with a practice round on Thursday Sept. 19 and then rush headlong into the 54-hole shootout Friday-Sunday.

"This was our earliest sold out field ever," noted longtime tournament official David Leckich. "And the waiting list has never been this long. The popularity of the tournament is growing exponentially."

Of course, the phrase "golf tournament" hardly captures the essence of the Slavic, which is more family reunion on steroids mixed with both serious and insincere golf competition stretched from one end of the Coast to the other. Tournament courses this year include Fallen Oak, Grand Bear, Sunkist, Windance and the Diamondhead Pine and Cardinal courses.

Foremost on the agenda are the social events held at Tournament HQ ~ the Beau Rivage. Locals, former locals and wannabe Biloxians from across the country will gather to partake of near-bacchanalian special dinners Thursday-Saturday nights. Highlighting the revelry are seatings for about 2,300 at Seafood Night Friday and Steak Night Saturday. On the courses each day, players and spectators indulge themselves with the Slavic's signature roast beef and gravy pistolettes.

"The size of our out-of-town guests continues to expand each year and the size of the record setting tournament makes for a significant tourism event," said Biloxi Mayor FoFo Gilich, who has helped manage the event since its inception in the early 1970s. Since inception, the Slavic only missed one year in 2005 when Hurricane Katrina devastated the Coast.

Serious golfers will chase the championship trophy currently held tightly by Josh Lampley and Colin Spiers, who won in 2017 and again in a rain-shortened final round in 2018. Most of last year's 1,050 payers were able to finish all 54 holes, but the championship final at Fallen Oak was reduced to six holes due to thunderstorms. Pressing the Lampley-Spiers duo again this year are powerhouse pairings like John Boothby-Ethan Smith and Michael Dowst-Todd Nace.

At the other end of the golfing spectrum are the mainstream players who will comfortably compete in respective flights based on their scoring totals after the first two rounds. The top teams in each flight will receive gift certificates of equal value to those in the championship flight.

"The Slavic is designed for golfers of all skill levels, especially the unskilled," joked Gilich. "You don't have to win the championship to enjoy yourself and come out a winner."