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WOMEN OF COLOR GOLF: DRIVING IN THE GREEN

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Driving In the Green

Women of Color Golf is helping sistahs step up their professional game and level the playing field.

By Alexias Brasfield

Clemmie Perry spent more than 20 years working for two Fortune 500 companies. As a corporate trainer, she equipped the right people with the necessary tools to move the organizations to the next level. She garnered relationships with captains of industry and found solid footing high in the ranks. But soon, it became apparent that the life she lived would be behind her. When the job layoff finally came, Perry channeled the same innovation she used to inspire those she trained; and it was something her brother found on the side of the road that changed the trajectory of her life.

Golf clubs. One set. Waiting to be swung.

Once her brother handed her the sticks, she realized golf was a sport that she wanted to learn. Her brother saw her passion for the game and gifted her a new set. She knew that golf was going to be a part of her future.

Perry had never picked up a set of golf clubs until that layoff about four years ago. After seeing a lack of diversity on the course, she wanted to make a change. She used her severance package to start Women of Color Golf (WOCG) and Girls on the Green Tee (GOTGT) and is turning her passion into a national movement to make a difference in the lives of women and girls.

“When I started playing in 2014, I didn’t see many women on the golf course who looked like me,” Perry said noting that golf is a mostly white-male dominated sport. “WOCG is creating pathways and access for women to enter the game. Golf is about access. Golf is giving black women access to business relationships they would never gain in a typical networking setting. We can’t get career advancements or new business clients and opportunities if we don’t build new relationships through golf.”

Golf provides women executives an interactive, personal social networking experience; it provides visibility to senior executives, and promotes relationship building. Golf can increase the quality of life by renewing your spirit, improving your posture, building confidence and providing numerous health and fitness benefits.

“Minority women want to play; they just need to be informed and a pathway to enter. We can’t do it alone—it is important to build relationships in this industry,” said Perry.

In nearly four short years of operation, WOCG has introduced the fundamentals of golf to Tampa and St. Petersburg, and Washington, D.C., training more than 350 minority women and girls. The nonprofit organization is promoting and facilitating the inclusion of minority women and girls into the game. Not only does WOCG encourage women to golf, but it also targets young women through its mentorship program.

“Our objective is to be a driver of opportunities for growing participation in golf, particularly women, the millennial generation, and all people, regardless of the color of their skin. It sets the foundation as we foster greater diversity in the game,” Perry said.

Livi Grant, a sophomore in the School of Business and Industry at Florida A&M
University, serves as the Student Ambassador for Women of Color Golf.

“I was elected to become a WOCG Ambassador, which I found extremely beneficial and fulfilling,” said Grant. “I embrace the role of trying to increase the involvement of minorities and women, like myself, in the game and business of golf.” Grant also interned with the U.S. Open during the summer of 2017.

The mentoring program, Girls on the Green Tee (GOTGT) is designed for girls from 10 to 17, responding to the ongoing need for strong, accomplished, and resilient female role models. WOCG and GOTGT seek to develop an interest and inspiration in golf.

Perry was inspired by Renee Powell and her family’s legacy in golf. Renee Powell is the second African-American woman to play on the Ladies Professional Golf Association (LPGA) tour. Perry admired that she was a courageous African-American woman who endured many challenges to play the game during a segregated era. Powell has made numerous contributions to the world of golf as an African-American woman. Powell is the daughter of the late William Powell, the only African-American to design, build, own, and operate a golf course in the U.S., Clearview Golf Course.

In this industry, community, personal, and golf relationships are all important to create partnerships. As women of color advance in their professional careers, golf will be a necessary skill to help level the playing field and allow them to reap benefits beyond normal employee contributions.

Perry has established relationships with The Centre for Women in Tampa and several local golf organizations.

“To close the gap, you must create connections” said Perry. WOCG has also created strategic alliances with Rogers Park Golf Course, Hillsborough Community College, Top Golf Tampa, Golfers Grail, and Cheval Golf & Country Club to provide an inclusive environment for their members.

WOCG received recognition by former President Barack Obama, as a U.S. White House Champion of Change for Extra Curricular Enrichment for marginalized girls. It also is the recipient of the 2017 Tampa Bay Lightning Community Hero Award.

WOCG aspires to change the world of golf with the help of the World Golf Foundation CEO Steve Mona and Dr. Michael Cooper, Golf 20/20 Chairperson of the Diversity Task Force. Perry has reached out to African-American women pioneers and has become a golf pioneer herself.

“We are changing golf to be more inclusive” said Perry. “The purpose is to ultimately make golf look like the changing face of America, relative to gender and ethnic diversity.”

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—Clemmie C. Perry

Livi Grant, left, who serves as the WOCG College Ambassador at Florida A&M University. Livi received a prestigious internship to work last summer for the United States Golf Association at the U.S. Open, Erin Hills, Wis.