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Working with the competition

TPC Sawgrass is one of Jacksonville's main attractions and a focal point of vacationing golfers. It may also be the greatest untapped resource of a nearby hotel.

In his first week as **general manager** of the **Hilton Garden Inn** in Ponte Vedra Beach, **Chuck Schoonmaker** discovered that the hotel could provide its guests access to TPC Sawgrass. The Hilton, which is in direct competition with the neighboring Sawgrass Marriott Resort & Spa, never knew about this opportunity. As a result, the hotel failed to make use of one of its most valuable assets.

"For the longest time I always thought you had to stay at the Marriott to get on the Stadium Course," Schoonmaker said. "You don't have to; you can stay right here. Why would they never promote that? When we finally did tell our customers, it floored them because they didn't know that, either."

This is just one way that Schoonmaker, who is now at his fourth Hilton property, hopes to help the Hilton Garden Inn not only contend with its biggest competitor, but also work with it.

The inn's goal is to be the No. 1 choice for small weddings and small groups. This is a stark contrast to the Marriott, which "goes after the huge monsters," as Schoonmaker put it. In light of their differences, he feels it would benefit both to work together rather than compete.

"We're working on our relationship with the Marriott so that we're an extension of them," Schoonmaker said. "Sometimes they turn down business because they [visiting groups] are not big enough, so they need to have that second option. For the longest time that wasn't considered an option just because it's supposed to be Hilton versus Marriott. That's crazy."

When he is not running hotels, Schoonmaker devotes a large chunk of his free time to the Boy Scouts.

He serves as the assistant Cub master for his two sons' Boy Scout pack, and is also a den leader.

On the rare occasion that he is done with work, Scouting and his "honey-do list," Schoonmaker enjoys playing golf.

He describes himself as a "chamber golfer" who plays mostly in shotgun starts and scrambles. As a result, he can't remember the last time he played a full round of 18 holes by himself.

What Schoonmaker does remember, however, is the last time he played at TPC Sawgrass, when he was lucky enough to land his ball on the No. 17 hole's famous island green.

STORY AND
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