

SPORTS

David Havens' Spare for Change program offers recycled clubs for new golfers

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PHOTOS COURTESY SPARE FOR CHANGE

Aloha Section pro David Havens provides free recycled clubs to kids and anyone who wants to play golf with his Spare for Change non-profit. Havens gave away a record 460 clubs at the Sony Open in Hawaii in January. Havens hopes to have facilities around the state provide storage space for recycled clubs to be used for the Spare for Change program. He now has a permanent space at Maui Nui Golf Club in Kihei.

Not everybody was following Matt Kuchar at last month's Sony Open in Hawaii.

A diverse mob was lined up at the tournament's Spectator Village, where David Havens was sharing a hitting cage with the Aloha Section PGA and offering free recycled, re-gripped and cut-down clubs to anyone who asked.

It is his way — at least one of them — of growing and preserving the game. He gave away 460 clubs at Sony this year, a new record for his Spare for Change non-profit.

"You look at his turnout at Sony, the line is around the block, it's great," Aloha Section Executive Director Wes Wailehua said. "I told the Tour and the Golf Channel you've got to put a camera on this guy. Nobody at any other tour event is doing this kind of stuff for spectators. It's partly who David is, and his spirit of aloha and passion for the game."

Havens' ideas are unique. So is he, but he is trying to change that. One of his next moves is to get his clubs into the hands of prospective players on all the islands, then in every state.

And beyond.

A "hated" opponent from his college days at Virginia Tech, who grew into a trusted friend during their days together on the South Africa tour, gave away 3,500 used clubs last year at a Spare for Change site in Canada.

Havens, whose Havens Golf Experience is based at Maui Nui, has collected the Aloha Section's PGA Golf Professional of the Year, President's Plaque Award, PGA Teacher of the Year and PGA Junior Golf Leader award in the past six years.

He has also distributed more than 20,000 free golf clubs to players of all ages and experience since creating Spare for Change in 2011. He calls it "Growing the game of golf. One recycled club at a time."

The mission covers much more than that. Spare for Change has provided college scholarships, tournament entries and hours of free instruction.

It is also one of the best ways for folks to recycle unused golf clubs, which mysteriously multiply the longer you play the game.

On the other end of the spectrum, Havens believes it is the best way for someone — anyone — to get introduced to the game. Spare for Change erases the game's initial investment in equipment, which, as Wailehua puts it, is much more than just buying a soccer ball for your kid to kick around the yard.

Havens brought some of the thousands of recycled clubs he has collected to Sony again this year. When people — of every age — got to the front of the line and asked for a club so they could give golf a try, Havens let them pick the club,

measured them, put the club in a vise, cut it to their size, re-gripped it and handed it over.

He can do it in four minutes, but he doesn't.

"I want the kids to have a personalization to it," Havens says. "They get to touch the grip and see me cut the club. That's part of their buy-in. I think it's really valuable so that takes me awhile.

"I know I could do more if I went faster, but I'm thinking that out of those 460 clubs, one of those people is going to play college golf along the way. I had two parents come back the next day and say their kid slept with the club the night before he liked it so much."

His expansion involves very little. He wants facilities on Oahu, Kauai and the island of Hawaii to provide a 4-by-4-foot space where he can stack 10 pallets, enough to hold 1,000 clubs. Havens would provide grips and grip tape and "all you need to do triage." From there, anyone interested in the game could try it for free.

Eventually he envisions that 4x4 space as a PGA initiative, everywhere. It would be somewhere for golfers to recycle unused clubs and prospective golfers to give the game a try, without a prohibitive cost.

Spare for Change finally has a permanent base at Maui Nui (formerly Silversword and Elleair) in Kihei, where it can store thousands of its ready to recycle clubs. It also provides instruction, club repair or "anything else needed to grow our players' chances of making golf a lifelong passion," Havens says.

The site is off the grid, run on solar and a backup battery. So is Havens' creative teaching academy, which is about to include a simulator. He also mows the lawn and does other landscaping, and helps with irrigation.

The Aloha Section PGA Foundation has been a Spare for Change partner the past three years. Wailehua is "super passionate about what David is doing" and wants the section to help Havens with his expansion.

Until then, Havens moves on. Tuesday, 25 kids from Kihei Charter School visited his home base. He made a custom golf club for each and let them give the game a shot.

"Those that like it and get into it, I'll make five more clubs for," Havens says. "The ones who want to continue, I'll get them a full set."