

## PAGA Story

By Alonzo Garza  
POST-REGISTER

It has been more than 10 years since Lockhart hosted the last National Pan American Golf Association (PAGA) Winter Meeting. Many changes have come to Lockhart since 1997 and they will certainly make a big difference during this year's 2008 Lockhart Winter Meeting.

Prior to 1997, the Lockhart PAGA hosted a winter meeting in 1980 and a State Tournament in 1960.

The Lockhart PAGA was organized in 1956. Julio Perez was responsible for organizing the Chapter by introducing young men in Lockhart to the sport of golf. He was also responsible for hosting Lockhart's first State Tournament in 1960.

Back then, the State Tournament was held at the Lockhart State Park and the Luling Golf Course.

That was then.

Today the Lockhart PAGA Chapter has 50 members and continues to influence the enrollment of young people to the Chapter.

The Lockhart PAGA organization has gone to great lengths to make the tournament experience a positive one for all the expected visitors. Many improvements have been implemented and although many things have changed, some challenges remain.

A challenge for Lockhart in the past had been accommodating an increasing number of participants. This year, Lockhart PAGA expects between 350-400 golfers. Half of those golfers are likely to bring their families along for the three-day event. With a new and bigger motel in Lockhart, the lodging challenge may no longer exist.

With a brand new motel, Lockhart will be able to keep more PAGA Winter Meeting participants here as opposed to sending them to surrounding towns for lodging. With more people staying in town, Lockhart will be able to keep the visitors entertained, fed and spending their money here.

"10 years ago we only had two motels,"

Tournament chairman, Richard Moya said. "We had to send people to San Marcos. I hope we will be able to keep everyone here with the new motel."

The 2008 Lockhart Pan American Golf Association Winter Meeting promises to be one of the best golf tournaments in the area according to Lockhart PAGA President Fermin Islas. This year the Lockhart PAGA has joined forces with the Rites of Spring volunteers, and participants involved in both events are expecting a great turnout.

"In this event we are trying to get the whole community involved," Islas said. "We have asked the Rites of Spring folks to join us in making this one of the best collaborations ever. With the Rites of Spring events going on at the Square during the same three days of the PAGA tournament, golfers and their families can spend their money here for a possible economic boom for Lockhart."

By far the biggest challenge Lockhart will have to deal with during the National PAGA visit is holding a golfing tournament in a city with a nine-hole golf course.

"10 years ago, when we hosted the tournament, I was wishing we had an 18 hole course and here we are 10 years later and I'm still wishing we had a 18 hole course in Lockhart," Moya said with a slight snicker.

Luckily, Bastrop, San Marcos and Seguin have been able to help by allowing the Lockhart PAGA organization to utilize their 18-hole courses.

With their challenges taken care of, the Lockhart PAGA is fired up and ready to go. Both Islas and Moya were visibly excited about the upcoming event. They were beaming with enthusiasm and ready to hit the pavement with their 2008 Winter Meeting and Tournament brochure.

"We're telling people to come to Lockhart for our hometown hospitality." Islas said. "We've been working on this project for two years. We started in Oklahoma in 2006 where we got approval from National Officers to host the tournament and we've been planning ever since."

Islas went on to mention all the planning and legwork that went into the preparation for the upcoming event. He seemed confident about their

readiness and proud of all the hard work the Lockhart PAGA members had contributed in preparation for the event.

"In March 2007, we went to Alice, Texas, where we had a hospitality booth to encourage golfers and members to come to Lockhart," Islas said. "In July we went to Fort Worth and did the same." Both Islas and Moya talked enthusiastically about what they had seen at all the events they participated in and visited in preparation for their tournament.

Registration will begin at 5 p.m. on Thursday, March 27 at the American Legion Hall. Friday, March 28, delegate meetings will also be held at the American Legion Hall starting at 8 a.m. The Men's and Ladies' Golf Tournament will begin promptly at 8 a.m. on Saturday, March 29.

One of the best things about this year's PAGA Winter Meeting is that is scheduled to coincide with the City of Lockhart's Rites of Spring festival around the Square and all over town. The Rites of Spring will feature dance, style show, children's' theater arts, crafts, great food and much more.

"We really want to encourage everyone in the county, including businesses to help support our tournament by buying ads in our 2008 Winter Meeting brochure, Islas said. "Our Chapter is ready to welcome everyone to Lockhart. Remember to leave your ties at home and if you have never had Lockhart Bar B Que, you have never had the best Bar B Que in Texas."

The National PAGA organization has been in existence for over 50 years. Its primary function is promoting golf for juniors, women and men. The organization is able to provide its services through community involvement and fundraising activities.

The National PAGA has a membership of 2,600. It is established in 10 states with 44 Chapters.

See you at the tournament.

agarza@post-register