

“ANNIKA & Friends Golf Tournament” for Sandestin Living Magazine
By Sallie W. Boyles

Over her 17-year professional career that began in 1991, Annika Sorenstam earned worldwide fame as one of the best golfers in history. Along with 90 victories and 10 major championship titles, she also won the admiration of fans and peers for her ethical and gracious conduct on and off the fairway. Underscoring those sentiments, the United States Golf Association recently honored Annika with the Bob Jones Award for her distinguished sportsmanship in golf.

Retiring as a professional golfer in 2008, Annika has since pursued entrepreneurial and philanthropic endeavors with the same work ethic, dedication and spirit that drove her career. The ANNIKA Foundation, her non-profit organization, “teaches children the importance of living a healthy, active lifestyle through fitness and nutrition, and offers aspiring junior golfers opportunities to pursue their dreams.”

As part of that initiative, Annika and her celebrity friends have teamed up with the Sandestin Golf and Beach Resort to host an inaugural ANNIKA & Friends fundraiser on May 12 and 13, 2013. Proceeds will support the implementation of SPARK—a nationally acclaimed physical education program that has served children for over 20 years—in Florida’s public schools. “My foundation chose the SPARK program because it is the leading physical education curriculum in the country,” says Annika. Selected Northwest Florida elementary schools in Okaloosa and Walton Counties will be among the first to benefit.

“This is a wonderful opportunity to assist the local community,” says Annika. “SPARK will go into the schools that have the most need with principals and physical education instructors who are excited about implementing it. Our goal is to put SPARK in every school in Florida, like they are doing in North Carolina and Arkansas.” Explaining why such efforts are essential, she adds, “Physical Education is disappearing in schools. Less than half of all schools offer PE today, which is alarming.”

Devoted to enlightening children about healthy living, Annika found another likeminded partner in Sandestin. “I want to inspire kids to be active,” she says. “Sandestin shares our passion for health and wellness, as evidenced by the lifestyle you see here. With it being a first-class development with wonderful amenities, the resort is the ideal host for our event.”

Sandestin, likewise, recognizes the value of teaming up with the ANNIKA Foundation. “We are delighted to be associated with Annika, who has such a positive brand,” says Laurie Hobbs, Sandestin’s Director of Public Relations and Marketing Communications. “This is an opportunity to host an important children’s cause while also showcasing our four championship golf courses, dining and entertainment venues, and Beach to Bay experience.”

The weekend tees off on Saturday evening with a wine tasting and hors d’oeuvres reception on Elation Lawn at the Sandestin Hotel. Wines featured are from the Annika and Wente Vineyards of Northern California, a relationship that reflects a commitment to winemaking. This year, in fact, a fifth generation of Wentes celebrates the family’s 125th year as vintners. Celebrities and sports stars plan to share a toast with Annika, who hosts the event. Dinner at the Grand Sandestin Hotel and a private draw party with a concert and dancing are to follow.

The big day of golf begins on Sunday morning with a Mother's Day breakfast with Annika. From there, Annika and her celebrity friends will conduct a golf clinic at Sandestin's Raven Golf Club, which kicks off the Pro-Am shotgun, starting at 11:00 a. m. Twenty-six teams of four amateurs—each paired with a celebrity, LPGA player, PGA Tour player, or sports personality—will compete for exciting prizes as they play on the course designed by Robert Trent Jones Jr. A roster that includes a namedropping list of actors, musicians, and professional athletes, some of which are listed here, heightens the fun and excitement.

Alice Cooper, one of America's most prominent and, according to *Rolling Stone*, "most beloved" heavy metal rock musicians, has continued his success as a film actor, golfer, restaurateur, and radio DJ.

John O'Hurley, the actor best recognized for playing the role of J. Peterman on the NBC sitcom *Seinfeld*, is also known as the MC for the American Kennel Club's National Dog Show for the past ten years and as the former host of the TV game show, *Family Feud*.

Bode Miller, the most successful male American alpine ski racer and the only one to win five World Cup events in all five disciplines (slalom, giant slalom, Super-G, downhill and combined), is an Olympic and World Championship gold medalist with more medals in the Winter Olympics than any U.S. skier.

Alfonso Ribeiro, an actor remembered for his rich-kid role of Carlton Banks, the cousin of Will Smith's character, in *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air*, also directed some episodes of *Fresh Prince* and later hosted the Game Show Network's *Catch 21*.

Yani Tseng, a Taiwanese professional golfer on the U.S.-based LPGA Tour who is currently Number One in the Women's World Golf Rankings, stands as the youngest player ever to win five major championships, earning her such titles as the LPGA's Rookie of the Year in 2008 and Player of the Year in 2010 and 2011.

Nancy Lopez, the American professional golfer who won 48 LPGA Tour events with three major championships during her career, remains the only woman earning LPGA Rookie of the Year, Player of the Year, and the Vare Trophy in the same season (1978) before entering the World Golf Hall of Fame (in 1987).

Laura Diaz, the professional golfer from New York who won three titles on the Futures Tour and then named Rookie of the Year on the Ladies European Tour in 1998, joined the LPGA Tour in 1999 and earned two victories, both in the 2002 season when she had ten top-10 finishes.

Suzann Pettersen, a Norwegian professional golfer who plays on the U.S.-based LPGA Tour as well as the Ladies European Tour, was named Ladies European Tour Rookie of the Year in 2001, counts the LPGA Championship in 2007 among her 14 professional wins, and is currently ranked Number Two in the Women's World Golf Rankings.

As personal friends of Annika, each of the celebrities mentioned have demonstrated their desire to give back by supporting children's causes.

After returning to the Raven Golf Club for an awards ceremony, players and VIPs will be guests of Fleming's at Grand Boulevard for a reception. The festivities then continue with a public concert by Darius Rucker, another of Annika's friends, along with other musicians at Grand Boulevard.

"You know, we do a few fundraisers throughout the year, and this is our premier event for 2012," says Annika. "I can't think of a better place to tie in golf, food and wine, and the concert on behalf of kids."

Sponsorships for ANNIKA & Friends at Sandestin Golf & Beach Resort are available at multiple levels. Interested parties are invited to contact Monark Events by phone at 850.728.9476 or by e-mail at info@monarkevents.com.

General admission tickets to Sunday evening's concert featuring Darius Rucker at Sandestin's Grand Boulevard are available online at www.annikaandfriends.com.