



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Summer Participation Above-Par for First Tee**

**MIDDLESEX COUNTY** – While the end-of-summer countdown is in full swing, The First Tee of Raritan Valley is winding down yet another banner season at Tamarack Golf Course in East Brunswick.

Much like seasons past, the nonprofit saw a spike in youth participation, as instructors used the game of golf to reinforce some of life's most fundamental lessons to this latest wave of players. With each new class, a student builds upon their golfing game, while instructors infuse one of First Tee's nine core values and a life skill into the curriculum, said Michael Blackwell, the local chapter's executive director.

The result: Students who set goals, develop interpersonal skills and are well-versed in conflict-resolution.

Once a participant exhibits a firm grasp of these concepts, as well as improvement on the course, through both a written, as well as a certification test, they are able to move up the program's ranks.

Tamarack Golf Course, an operation overseen by the Middlesex County Improvement Authority, has been home to the local chapter for 11 years now.

Twice, between July and August, the course hosted a week-long class for some 153 registered First Tee students, who ranged from seven-to-19 years old.

That number amounts to a 5-percent uptick when compared to 2014.

"I'd say that it's because of the coaching," Blackwell said. "Our program is popular, because more people get involved when they learn it's more than just golfing – it's character development."

The nominal fee may also appeal to many of the families involved.

At \$10 per class or through scholarship funds, players are provided a handbook, clubs, a bag and in some cases, even shoes through The First Tee program.

"Whether you have the money or you don't, you'll fit right in," Blackwell said. "We have one of the best diversity levels in the country – that's another life skill. It's more than golf; that's the key."

For many, who are taking notice, these novice golfers of today will grow into the stand-out citizens and players of tomorrow.

"These children and young adults are the future of this game," said Middlesex County Freeholder Deputy Director Carol Bellante. "It's our hope that they will return to these greens, the same place where they made friends and fond memories, for many years to come."

At present, The First Tee of Raritan Valley is holding a 10-week session, classes it offers in both the spring and fall. Further details may be found at

[www.thefirstteev.org/club/scripts/public/public.asp](http://www.thefirstteev.org/club/scripts/public/public.asp).

For more information on any one of the MCIA's four golf courses, including Tamarack in East Brunswick, The Meadows at Middlesex in Plainsboro and Raritan Landing in Piscataway, log onto [www.mciauth.com](http://www.mciauth.com).

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