

# Is this really the saviour of golf?

**There is currently significant focus on making the game more appealing to women in their 20s and 30s to address golf's recent membership decline. Here, women's golf expert Sarah Forrest argues that the mothers of millennials actually offer far more potential for golf clubs looking to boost participation in the game**



**I** have been in the golf business for nearly 11 years, as a golf tour operator – the only GTO to focus on travelling lady golfers and latterly as a consultant for women's golf; you could say I have been around the track a few times!

Earlier this year I received my invitation to attend the Women in Golf Charter, driven by The R&A, on the day I was due to leave the UK to cover the US Women's Open in Alabama. With no regard to sleep and the extended day ahead of me, I didn't hesitate to say yes, I will be there.

A drizzly day unfolded as daylight overtook my ridiculously early start and night drive, but it didn't dampen the spirits of the people attending the event, both from the attendees and the enthusiasm of the speakers whose passion shone through.

Listening to Martin Slumbers, chief executive of The R&A, address the overwhelming message 'doing nothing is not an option', there were pledges of £200 million in the next 10 years with £80 million being invested in women's and family golf. Does this satisfy the overriding big question about getting more women into golf?

I began to think that while new, younger women in golf is essential for the growth and longevity of the sport, this really isn't the only thing that needs addressing. I absolutely endorse the initiative and, with women's golf being a big buzz right now, (and long may it continue), we now have a number of golf programmes fighting to claim the best stats and results to engage with women. All are worthy and all fill a gap that needs to be filled for the future growth of golf for females and families.

## Millennials and golf

I have two millennial daughters (born between 1982 and the early 2000s) and this further helps qualify me, together with my experience in the women in the golf arena, with what I am about to say:

The pioneers of women's golf are fundamentally the reason why women are playing today, OK – not as readily in some clubs but that is slowly being addressed. The pioneers of women's golf; your every day lady golfer who got stuck in and made it OK for us to all play and enjoy golf, they got us to where we are now.

I'm not for one moment saying women's golf is perfect, even now, but without these pioneers in golf, the former LPGA and LET players, the regular lady golfer at the regular golf club, the former golf writers of newspapers back



## comment

in the day when newspapers were a daily purchase and quite often the only source of women's golfing news. Hats off to these ladies, they have done their bit, some are still involved at club and county level, and they still want to play daily or weekly as they wish, and they deserve to enjoy the sport they helped shape.

And now the focus has shifted to the millennials – a big leap without, it seems, consideration for forgotten generations: Generation X and late baby boomers; we are the mums of the millennials.

We have nurtured and brought up the millennials.

We have worked or are still working, we have a bit of wealth behind us, we have time that we sensibly see as 'our time'. We have raised our children and are ready to take the next step in our lives. We bring knowledge and we bring the language. A unique language that enables us to converse with pioneers and millennials. We have fought tooth and nail to get where we are now, we are the next generation of ladies' committees – or we will evolve with the club.

We can make a worthwhile contribution – if we had been recognised. These forgotten generations do not seem to be the focus to grow women's and girls' golf. When speaking to my pro, the ladies who participated in 'Get into Golf' were all Generation X or baby boomers, with my intervention they have been encouraged to join the club and importantly they have kept up with the sport.

My daughters both know how to play golf – neither do now. Why? One is a superb mum, the other is working all hours and saving for a house. One has her golf clubs and can see the benefit in her future career but she doesn't have the bandwidth to afford membership or the time right now – golf is simply not her priority nor that of her peer group.

My children are typical of the millennial generation, despite both parents playing, and both being able to play, neither now do.

I suspect they will pick it up in later years; when they have more time and a bit more spare cash to spend on the equipment, the clothes, the golf holidays and all that is associated with the growth of golf. They are our long-term future investors in golf, Generation X are our short-term investors.



### **Generation X and late baby boomers have a bit of wealth and time – we should be the current focus on the growth of women's golf**

Generation X may not have thousands of followers on social media but we do have real relationships with real people, one forged from years of networking in business and socially, and we do have knowledge of golf, we deserve to be the focus of the golfing fraternity. We are the group that will make the millennials the best they can be – haven't we been doing this all of our lives? We are the glue between the

pioneers and the millennials. We are the natural stepping stone.

So please start listening, engaging and funding the forgotten generation in women's golf; working on retention, giving them a worth place to make the game great and generally growing the game of golf for all women, naturally, one step at a time.

Is a millennial good to aid the growth of women's golf?  
Absolutely yes, but ... not yet.

"The charter is a strong statement of intent from the golf industry that it has to change and a commitment on behalf of all of us to take measures designed to achieve positive change for women, girls and families. This is crucial to growing participation in the sport and the years ahead."

Or in millennial speak:  
#togethertakingadifference

Engage with Generation X and get the whole family. TGB  
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