

# Nationwide Tour coming to KC

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The Nationwide Tour has a strong presence in the Midwest, and next year it will get stronger.

The tour confirmed Tuesday in a news conference that it will hold a tournament at Nicklaus Golf Club at LionsGate in Overland Park. The dates will be Aug. 17-23, 2009. The Nationwide Tour has stops in Wichita, Springfield and Omaha.

"We've evolved in that when we first started, we were almost always in smaller markets," Nationwide Tour president Bill Calfee said. "As we've become more successful and the recognition of the tour has grown, we've been able to grow into bigger markets. If you get with the right people and the right host organization, it all comes together."

The charitable organization that will benefit from the event — but must sell it to sponsors first — is Christmas in October.

That group, which was founded in 1984 by Kansas Citians Dick Miller and John McMeel, provides home repairs at no cost to economically challenged owners in this area. The organization relies on volunteers, which include professional electricians and plumbers who donate their time and expertise.

In the past two years, Christmas in October has worked on more than 800 homes, plus four community centers, two schools and two retirement homes. The group is responsible for bringing on board sponsors for the golf tournament and will work with the tour over the next several months to do that.

"They assume the financial risk, but we're partners with them," Calfee said. "We'll be talking on a weekly basis on how they are doing, who their prospects are. We do have a close working relationship with all our host organizations."

The Nationwide Tour and the Champions Tour are governed by the PGA Tour. The Nationwide Tour is both a developmental circuit for younger players but also a place where former PGA Tour players can go to work on their games. At season's end for the Nationwide Tour, the top 25 players get PGA Tour cards.

Approximately two-thirds of the current PGA Tour players previously played on the Nationwide Tour, which this year will award some \$19 million in prize money for 30 tournaments. One of the competitors in 2007 who played his way onto the PGA Tour for this year was Michael Letzig of Richmond, Mo.

The Nationwide Tour offers the opportunity to see some of the best future PGA Tour players while they are ascending to that circuit, so you never know what potential star you may see. In that way, it's the opposite of the Champions Tour.

The 50-and-over circuit ended its stay in the Kansas City area after its 2006 event, which was at LionsGate. The course there will be significantly longer for the Nationwide Tour (about 7,200 yards) than it was for the Champions Tour (approximately 6,800 yards).

"The course should set up to be extremely challenging," LionsGate general manager Martin Meier said. "And we feel like the timing of the event will be much better, from a weather perspective, than the senior event."

Calfee thinks LionsGate's previous history with the Champions Tour will be an advantage.

"I think it helps a lot in that they've got some experiences with traffic flows and spectator services," he said. "It's important for the club because they know what to expect in terms of bringing another tournament back to the area."