

UConn Set To Host Til Duty Is Done Collegiate Invitational Tournament Will Feature A Team Of Military Veterans

STORRS, Conn. – The UConn men's golf team will host one of the most unique collegiate golf tournaments in the country on April 23-24 when it honors U.S. military veterans at the Til Duty Is Done 2016 Collegiate Invitational at Mohegan Sun Golf Club in Baltic, Conn.

The tournament is named for Til Duty Is Done, a Connecticut-based, non-profit organization dedicated to helping military veterans with reintegration after returning from duty overseas. The aim of TDID is to reduce veteran homelessness and unemployment by linking and integrating existing organizations that provide education, employment training, employment, healthcare, mentorship and other supportive services.

UConn golf partnered with TDID for the first time last spring, staging a hugely successful tournament, where many military veterans, serving as volunteers, mixed and mingled with the student-athletes to the benefit of both groups.

"I was very proud that we were able to get the tournament started as we did last year," UConn Coach Dave Pezzino said. "We had three winners of the Bronze Star, two Silver Star winners, six Purple Heart recipients and six man-years of recovery time at Walter Reed Hospital, all volunteering to help with the tournament. I can tell you that everybody in the field felt the presence of those heroes walking amongst us. It's quite an honor to be able to actually introduce our young people to the veterans who sacrifice so much for us."

This year, the veterans will have even more of a role in the tournament as UConn has received an NCAA waiver to allow a team from the Veteran Golfers Association (VGA) to compete alongside the 12 college teams in the tournament.

"It means a lot to me to play in a college invitational," said Army Staff Sergeant Micah Tilley, 34, the 2015 VGA Men's Champion, who is stationed at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, just outside of Tacoma, Wash. "I'm honored to represent the Veteran Golfers Association and I'm excited to play against talented college golfers since I joined the army right after high school and never played in college."

"I love playing competitive golf against other good players," added former U.S. Navy Officer Jim Day, 39, who hails from New York City and served as captain of the U.S. Naval Academy golf team and was a two-time All-Navy champion. "I have fond memories of playing in college and I'm looking forward to playing again."

Frank Austin, 53, a retired U.S. Marine now residing in Boulder City, Nev., is excited to be part of the event.

"To say this is a once-in-a-lifetime experience is an understatement," Austin said. "Having the opportunity to compete at this level is both extremely nerve-racking and a privilege. In a simple statement, this means the world to me."

Besides UConn and Team VGA, the tournament will include teams from the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, Bryant, Central Connecticut, Fordham, Hartford, Holy Cross, LIU-Brooklyn, Sacred Heart, St. Bonaventure, UMass-Lowell, and Rhode Island.

"I can't think of a better way to thank our veterans than to give them an opportunity to compete in this event," Pezzino said. "In my opinion, college golf is the most exciting form of amateur golf and to be able to combine that with our country's greatest team, the military, it's just a 'win-win' for everyone."

The tournament will consist of two rounds on Saturday, April 23, and the final round on Sunday, April 24. Hartford is the defending team champion.

The Til Duty Is Done 2016 Collegiate Invitational will begin with opening ceremonies on Friday, April 23, at 12:30 p.m. at the golf course, including a color guard and all 13 competing teams. It is open to the public with no admission charge.