

Inside Golf | February 10, 2009

Signature Risk Sets Gold Standard For Golf Industry Insurance

When the average player tees it up, their first thought is not generally about whether the course has the appropriate insurance coverage.

It's different if you are the course's owner.

Aside from the "usual" theft and fire insurance needs that every company has, golf courses have a huge number of unique risks (e.g. insurance for one player being hit by another player's errant ball or damage to tees and greens).

This is where Signature Risk Partners Inc. comes in.

Co-founded in 2005 by CEO James M. Grant, and based in Toronto, this niche program administrator creates specialized insurance programs for professionally managed groups in select niche markets... like golf courses. Their aim is to create "best-in-class" programs where owners and operators can benefit from improved coverage and superior service.

Says Grant, "Insurance is a complex business and many clients have specialist insurance needs, which were not being met by traditional products. We decided that there was an opportunity for us to bring together leading experts who share a marketing led philosophy that differentiates Signature Risk from other insurance groups."

Needless to say, the development of a new insurance program is a complex process as well.

Each must begin with a rigorous due diligence process that includes extensive data collection, research and interviews with leading operators, consultants and insurance industry partners.

Once a new program has been developed, an underwriter is carefully selected to ensure the right fit for the program.

In the case of golf, the Signature Golf insurance program was created from scratch after an exhaustive two-year research study of the golf industry. This involved contacting government agencies to find data, looking at accident rates, and so on. From this, precise calculations could be made about each golf specific related insurance claim's likelihood.

In the case of the golf business, it quickly became apparent that the existing insurance products were basically generic business packages with golf added to the name.

For example courses were being charged the same rates for clubhouse fire insurance as all other types of buildings, yet there had only been two clubhouse fires in Ontario in the past ten years. There were good reasons for this. There were new building codes, smoking was now banned in public spaces and people are drinking less in general. All of this made a fire less likely.

As Grant put it, "The times have changed.. but the insurance companies haven't."

After completing this in-depth analysis, the best underwriting consultants in the business were brought together and created a brand new golf club insurance program combining the highest quality coverage.

They were able to identify unique coverages appropriate to golf like "WeatherBill" that provides coverage against inclement weather.

For example you have a big tournament that gets rained out. You now can be insured against the lost revenue. It can also kick in if there are a certain number of days of rain in a given period. This would be definite peace of mind for any weather dependent business operator.

Aside from access to WeatherBill, Signature Golf includes:

Specialized Tee-to-Green Coverage for all golf related property with no per hole limitations,
- Stated Amount Coverage - No co-insurance penalties in the event of a loss,
- Deluxe Business Interruption Coverage,
- a 24/7/365 Customer Response Line.

All of this comes with a two-year price guarantee and an automatic premium credit for low claims that begins in year one.

When all was said and done their efforts had led to a program that is considered the gold standard of the industry and something that Signature Risk's CEO is very proud of, "Customer focus and distribution are key to everything we do. We are very proud of what Signature Risk has achieved; giving customers the products and service they need is only part of the equation. We want people to enjoy placing their insurance with Signature Risk and to stay with us year after year."



Meadow Gardens Is One Of Many Courses Who Are Taking Advantage Of Signature Risk's Gold Standard Insurance Program

But where Signature Golf is truly in a class by itself is through its unique "Audubon International Credit."

In the early 90s, Audubon International, a longtime environmental organization, set about developing a set of guidelines that courses could follow that would help them enhance the valuable natural areas and wildlife habitats that golf courses provide, improve efficiency, and minimize potentially harmful impacts of golf operations.

The result was an award winning education and certification program called "The Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program" and today there are over 70 ACSP certified golf courses in Canada and more than 2,300 program members in 24 countries around the world.

In 2007, Signature Risk's James Grant saw a 'win-win' and set about seeking a formal relationship with Audubon International.

"We saw an opportunity to work with Audubon International to help golf courses reduce their impact on the environment," says Signature's Grant.

"Now a golf course can address this vital issue while being financially rewarded for doing so as we are pleased to offer a 10% premium credit to golf course facilities that achieve and maintain ACSP certification. This is an incredible opportunity for courses to reduce the amount of chemicals they use, increase their natural habitat and save a considerable amount on their annual insurance bill... Not to mention the fact that their employees and players will be proud about working and golfing at an environmentally responsible facility. I believe that this is a true win-win for golf course owners and operators in Canada."

Dr. Kevin A. Fletcher, Executive Director at Audubon International was just as excited about the concept, "Working with Signature Risk Partners is a new way to reward those courses who are leading the industry in best environmental practices through a meaningful reduction in annual insurance rates, while also creating a new market incentive for others to get involved. We see this as yet another way we can, through partnership and innovative services, continue to lead in a greener golf industry."

The response from Canadian courses has been hugely positive and Signature Golf continues to add leading ACSP certified courses to the program.

Surprisingly up until April of 2008, this gilt edged insurance program had not been available to courses outside of Ontario and Quebec.

That has changed with the addition of a network of independent agents in BC and Newfoundland who will serve BC, Alberta and all of Atlantic Canada.

"In response to significant interest from golf clubs outside of Ontario, Signature Risk Partners is pleased to announce the appointment of two new authorized brokers; JT Insurance Services (jtinsurance.com) in British Columbia and Wedgwood Insurance (wedgwoodinsurance.com) in Atlantic Canada," confirms Grant.

"Both are the premiere brokers in their respective regions and are a welcome addition to the Signature Golf family... We are committed to the independent broker network and these new brokers will help us ensure that every Signature Golf customer receives exceptional levels of advice and service."

Even with its tremendous growth and achievements, Signature Risk is not resting on its laurels.

In September of this year, they began offering a Claim Forgiveness Program that breaks the mold of existing golf course insurance programs.

"We are in the business of establishing long-term relationships with our customers and we understand that despite the highest levels of care and caution, accidents can happen." said Grant.

"Events like lightening strikes and wind-storms are a fact of life in the golf business however they are not necessarily a reflection of the management at the facility. In the past, many insurers have been quick to raise rates after a single claim, but that is not how we operate and our customers take comfort in our commitment to them."

"Some programs make their customers earn this type of feature over time, but with Signature Golf claim forgiveness is available on day one."

Even with this success in golf, Signature Risk is finding new niches where their expertise can pay dividends for business owners.

In working with the some of the golf courses in Ontario they came across Mike Weir's winery in the Niagara region and they found that the insurance services for vintners could be dramatically upgraded.

To find out how Signature Risk Partners Inc. can help your group or business improve its insurance experience, visit their website at www.signaturerisk.com or call toll free (800) 260-9921, anytime.

About Signature Risk Partners Inc.

Signature Risk Partners Inc. creates and manages specialty insurance programs for selected industries and niche markets. Based in Toronto, Signature Risk works with global insurance experts located in the United States, Bermuda and London, U.K. who are leaders in underwriting, consulting and brokerage. For more information, contact: James M. Grant, President & CEO Signature Risk Partners Inc. Tel.: (800) 260-9921 or Email: jgrant@signaturerisk.com

About the Signature Golf Authorized Broker Network

At Signature Golf they have assembled a network of leading independent insurance professionals who understand your needs and will work with you to ensure that you have the best insurance protection for your golf club facility. These specialists bring you a unique perspective that comes from working with a wide array of leading golf clubs.

Alberta & British Columbia - J.T. Insurance Services

Tel.: (604) 684-7291 - Web: www.jtinsurance.com

Atlantic Canada - Wedgwood Insurance

Tel.: (709) 753-3210 - Web: www.wedgwoodinsurance.com

Quebec - Fort Insurance

Tel.: (514) 481-0481 - Web: www.fortinsurance.com

Ontario | Hamilton & Niagara - The Dorsey Group Inc.

Tel.: (519) 759-0033 - Web: www.thedorseygroup.com

Ontario | Central & Northern - Gougeon Insurance Brokers

Tel.: (705) 675-2241 - Web: www.gougeoninsurance.com

Ontario | Toronto & the GTA

Hallmark Insurance

Tel.: (416) 490-6026 - Web: www.hallmarkins.com

Hunters International Insurance

Tel.: (416) 323-9300 - Web: www.hunterscorners.com

Ontario | Southwestern

Precept Insurance and Risk Management

Tel.: (800) 881-5581 - Web: www.preceptgroup.net

Stevenson & Hunt

Tel.: (519) 963-3526 - Web: www.sthunt.com

About Audubon International and the ACSP

Audubon International is a not-for-profit, environmental education organization dedicated to educating, assisting, and inspiring millions of people from all walks of life to protect and sustain the land, water, wildlife, and natural resources around them. The ACSP is an education and certification program that helps organizations and businesses protect our environment while enhancing their bottom line. The program offers information and guidance to help participants implement an environmental management plan that improves efficiency, conserves resources, and promotes conservation efforts. For further information, contact: Joellen Lampman, Program Manager, Audubon International Tel.: (518) 767-9051 or visit www.auduboninternational.org

