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## **Locals remain hopeful that the U.S. Open will boost sales**

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With over 100,000 golf fans expected to descend on The Country Club in Brookline this week for the U.S. Open, local businesses are optimistic that travelers will make their way to downtown local shops and restaurants.

The 122nd National Men's Golf Championship runs from Monday, when the practice rounds begin, to Sunday, June 19, with the championship rounds slated to start Thursday. The total purse for the Open is \$12.5 million this year, with the overall men's winner expected to take home about \$2.7 million, or about 18% of the total prize pot.

The significance of the event and the fact that it extends over multiple days will certainly have an economic impact on the region. But how much so depends on who you ask.



JOHN MUMMERT

The 14th and 8th Holes of The Country Club in Brookline, Mass. as seen on Tuesday, Sept. 7, 2021.  
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Martha Sheridan, president & CEO of the Greater Boston Convention & Visitors Bureau, is convinced the Open will prove to be a windfall for the local economy.

Sheridan said her office understands that area hotels are close to being sold out. Tickets to the U.S. Open are difficult to come by and picturesque shots of nearby Boston during the television coverage are hard to measure but it all points to positive results.

"It is great exposure and continues to solidify [Boston] as a stellar sports destination," Sheridan said.

However, the actual economic impact of the U.S. Open may not be all that it's cracked up to be, according to Victor Matheson a sports economist at the College of the Holy Cross in Worcester. Historically, the United States Golf Association (USGA) reports that the U.S. Open generates over \$120 million in direct and indirect economic spending in the host region. Matheson estimates that even if half the tickets go to people from outside the area — with about 20,000 people attending the tournament daily and spending on average of \$1,000 per day — that translates to about \$10 million to \$20 million being pumped into the local economy each day.

When the estimate exceeds \$100 million, "the math just doesn't make sense," Matheson said.

The idea is that attendees will spend time in the host community, spending money at local shops and restaurants, which will have a "multiplier effect" when those owners and workers spend the money earned locally in the community, said Matheson.

But there are several pitfalls to this theory, Matheson said. The first is that local people who otherwise would be spending their money in town are now going to the U.S. Open and spending at the event — otherwise known as the "substitution effect."

For this reason, economists tend to look at visitors coming to the event who are not from the region, Matheson said. But unfortunately, no good studies show many people who attend golf events are travelers versus people who live in the area, he said.

**'LIKE THE CIRCUS'**

There is an expected 175,000 fans who will descend on the town of Brookline for the duration of the event, according to a USGA presentation given to Brookline town officials.

The USGA expects about 35% of fans will be traveling from different regions to attend. In addition, about 1,000 or more workers will travel to the area, according to Julia Pine, the director of championship communications.

Even looking at just the visitors coming into the area poses another problem, said Matheson. During the summer, hotels and rental car bookings are already pretty full, and a person coming to the U.S. Open might take a reservation away from a typical tourist, he said.

Lastly, there are a lot of "leakages," said Matheson. With a purse of \$12.5 million, only a small percentage of the winnings will remain locally, he said. The majority goes into the player's pockets, who live outside of Boston.

"Spending money at the U.S. Open is like the circus coming to town and taking all of your money away," said Matheson.

## **SPECIALTY CHOCOLATES**

Locals hope for a well-needed boost in the economy

The Country Club has hosted the U.S. Open in 1913, 1963 and 1988. The last major event to bring visitors from across the world to the club was the Ryder's Cup, in 1999.

There wasn't a bump in the economy when the Ryder's Cup came to Brookline, said Debbie Miller, executive director of the Brookline Chamber of Commerce.

"No one really knows what is going to happen," Miller said.

"Regarding big events, fans tend to stay there all day because of the number of festivities going on. We are hopeful that people will venture out and explore Brookline during the time when they are not at The Country Club, just out of curiosity."

The Brookline Chamber of Commerce worked with both The Country Club and USGA to feature local vendors at the event, Miller said. In partnership with the chamber, local businesses had a chance to strut their fare to the vendors at the U.S. Open.

One store, Serenade Chocolatier, struck a chord and now owner Monica Dewar is tasked with creating 192 specialty chocolate boxes for the week. The deal was all unexpected business, Dewar said.

“The village is a very popular location,” said Dewar. “I am expecting a bit more foot traffic.”

The USGA also committed to using local vendors for its services, said David Gladstone, who spearheaded the Community Partnership Committee. The committee worked with the USGA and the Country Club to connect with local businesses to boost economic benefits beyond the club’s walls.

Gladstone, president of the Brookline Chamber of Commerce, said many are looking forward to hosting this event as the town continues to open up after the pandemic.

“A lot of the businesses suffered, and now we are hoping (the pandemic) is going to be in the rear-view mirror,” said Gladstone. “The Open is a welcome event because it does bring people to Brookline.”

— *Beth Treffeisen is an ACBJ reporting intern.*