

**BY GREGG HARDY
CSI EDITOR**

For most of its 10-year existence, the Gene Sarazen Charity Golf Tournament — held by the Naples Italian American Foundation — benefited a most worthy cause: the Special Olympics.

The event, which was founded by the late Joseph D’Annunzio, became so popular that the NIAF was the Special Olympics’ No. 1 donor in Collier County, according to board member Jen Hoy.

Then, a couple years ago, the Naples Winter Wine Festival began to donate to the Special Olympics. Feeling as though the Special Olympics was well taken care of, the NIAF members sought to put their goodwill to good use elsewhere.

And since this year’s golf event was being held on Veterans Day, well, it was a no-brainer.

Red, white and blue was visible everywhere around the clubhouse of Wyndemere Country Club on Saturday — small American flags on and around the practice green; on golf carts; on name tags; and on people’s golf attire.

This year’s event benefited two veteran causes: Folds of Honor, which provides educational scholarships to children and spouses of America’s fallen and disabled





service members; and the Wounded Veterans Relief Fund, which assists wounded veterans from Florida with temporary emergency financial assistance.

“To me that’s the best charity you can do it for because that is a debt we will never repay ever,” said Hoy, whose father was a marine and whose sister had flown in from Chicago just to help her work the event.

Having a golf legend’s name attached to the event certainly adds to its reputation.

Known as “The Squire” and inventor of the sand wedge (oh, and you might have heard about his double eagle at the 1935 Masters, known as “the shot heard ’round the world”), Sarazen – who was born in 1902 as Eugenio Saracini – passed away in Naples in 1999 at the age of 97. He and his late wife Mary are interred at Marco Island Cemetery.

Hoy said some members of the NIAF knew the Sarazen family, which, she said, was “thrilled” to put The Squire’s name on the event. Hoy said Sarazen’s daughter, Mary Ann, was expected to be present for the post-tournament dinner Saturday night.

The Gene Sarazen Charity Golf Tournament has become such a big event for the NIAF, that once the bookkeeping from this year’s event is finished, Hoy said the foundation begins preparations for the following year.