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Regions Charity Classic pours \$24.7 million into state, study finds

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The Regions Charity Classic pumps \$24.7 million a year into Alabama's economy, according to a University of Alabama economic impact study released today.

The findings from UA's Center for Business and Economic Research study "shows how this event has grown over the years," said Gene Hallman, chief executive of the Bruno Event Team, which stages the tournament.

The Regions Charity Classic concludes today at the Renaissance Ross Bridge Golf Resort & Spa in Hoover.

Hallman said between 80,000 and 100,000 people from across the nation and overseas were expected to attend during the five days of the tournament, which Sports Illustrated has named the past two years as top senior event on the Senior PGA's Champions Tour.

Bill Ritter, executive vice president of Regions Financial Corp., which this week renewed a three-year deal as title sponsor, said the Regions Charity Classic has become a tremendous recruitment tool for the Birmingham-based banking company.

Regions has customers and clients from many of the 16 states in which it operates attending the tournament, Ritter said.

"For many of them, it's their first time getting a chance to experience what the Birmingham area has to offer," he said. "It's a great opportunity to expose them to our hometown."

Sam Addy, director of UA's business research center, said the study estimates direct spending of \$4.3 million by the Bruno Event Team to put on the event, salaries for 12 employees and charitable donations. The tournament generates an additional \$8.4 million from 2,200 hotel rooms rented at an average \$195 a night, and 80,000 attendees spending an estimated \$100 per person.

A ripple effect of \$8.3 million in spending at other venues, payroll-related earnings and \$394,000 in state and local sales and income taxes bring the total economic impact to \$24.7 million, Addy said.

"About 70 percent of that income is in Jefferson County, but the tournament has a positive impact across the state," he said.

The study, provided without charge by the university, represents the first time an outside source has attempted to analyze the financial impact of the golf tournament.

Ross Bridge has generated \$1.5 million in revenue at the resort alone in hosting the tournament the last two years, excluding golf, said General Manager Steve Miller. The Regions Charity Classic's exposure also has generated additional corporate meeting business, he said.

"The Regions Charity Classic is one of the most important and exciting weeks each year for Renaissance Ross Bridge Golf Resort and Spa," Miller said.

Hallman said the tournament has broader impact than the economic figures - positive exposure for Birmingham, the state and the Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail.

"The fact we have a national television audience (The Golf Channel) and get a chance to showcase the Hoover-Birmingham region is immeasurable in dollars," he said. "When Mercedes officials came here on a fact-finding mission before they picked Alabama for an auto plant in 1992, one of the places they visited was the Bruno's Memorial Tournament. This event enhances Alabama's image internationally."

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