



CASE STUDY 1

2025



TWENTY YEARS AT THE WASTE MANAGEMENT PHOENIX OPEN

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OVERVIEW

Transforming a Golf Tournament Experience: Two Decades of Culinary Innovation at the Thunderbird Tent at the 18th Hole, Waste Management Phoenix Open

BACKGROUND

The WM Phoenix Open, known as “The Greenest Show on Grass”, is a leading example of sustainability in sports. Held annually in Scottsdale, Arizona, it combines world-class golf with eco-friendly practices, led by its sponsor, Waste Management. The event showcases how large-scale events can minimize their environmental footprint and has earned various sustainability awards.

Attracting up to 500,000 attendees each year, the WM Open is one of the most popular stops on the PGA Tour. The Thunderbirds, a civic and philanthropic group, play a vital role in organizing and managing the event, ensuring smooth operations from logistics to fan engagement.

In 2003, the Thunderbirds sought a culinary and event partner for their private tent on the 18th Hole to serve between 200 and 1,000 guests over seven days. The request included full-service event planning and design, along with catering services covering breakfast, lunch, dinner, full bartending, setup and daily happy hours and snacks.



Previously, the Thunderbirds were serving concession-style food, but sought a more elevated event and culinary experience. It was essential for the new partner to meet the sustainability expectations of the WM Open, operate outdoors, adapt to weather conditions, and deliver an exceptional food experience.

SUSTAINABILITY REQUIREMENTS

The WM Phoenix Open aims for Zero Waste, diverting 100 percent of its waste through recycling, composting, and waste-to-energy technologies. There are no trash cans; attendees are directed to recycling and compost bins. The event emphasizes energy efficiency, renewable energy use, and water conservation efforts, such as greywater reuse and reduced water consumption.

Tournament partners, vendors and sponsors are required to meet sustainability standards and report data related to water, travel, fuel, and other greenhouse gas emissions.



CHALLENGE

As key organizers of the WM Open, the Thunderbirds wanted to maximize attendance at their 18th hole tent. However, attendee dissatisfaction with the poor food quality and subpar service provided by a concessionaire vendor caused attendance to decline, with many guests hesitant to participate due to the negative experience.

SOLUTION

To address the challenge, we developed a comprehensive plan aligned with the WM Open's sustainability goals and the Thunderbirds' vision for an elevated culinary experience. This space was designed to be clean, well-organized, and ideal for dining, drinking, and enjoying the tournament. With thoughtful layouts, premium amenities, diverse menus, and a seamless blend of hospitality and golf viewing, we created an environment that encouraged attendees to bring family, entertain clients, and fully enjoy the event.

IMPLEMENTATION

Due to the scale of the event, our plan begins nine months prior to the event with an initial meeting with the new Chairman to discuss design goals for transforming over 10,000 sq. ft. of outdoor space. After presenting multiple design options, the Thunderbirds select the preferred style for that year's tournament. Coordination with contracted vendors and internal staff follows, involving:



Designing three meals and snacks per day, producing a total of 21 different menus over seven days.



Building an on-site kitchen to prepare meals under the stringent safety and sustainability standards.



Collaboration with building flooring installers, custom signage companies, and event rental vendors

RESULTS + OUTCOMES

Each year, the contract for the Thunderbirds' tent is up for bid. We have been invited back 21 consecutive times due to the success of our services and partnership. We helped the Thunderbirds achieve cost savings and deliver an exceptional experience. What began as a single 25x25 tent has grown significantly in popularity and attendance, evolving into a two-story, 10,000+ sq. ft. structure to accommodate guests, reflecting its elevated status at the tournament.



CONCLUSION

Our commitment to client responsiveness, adaptability for outdoor pop-up events, and adherence to rigorous sustainability standards have made us the Thunderbirds' trusted caterer and event partner for more than 21 years. By consistently aligning with the environmental goals of the Waste Management Phoenix Open, we have demonstrated our expertise in executing large-scale, eco-friendly events. Our long standing partnership with the Thunderbirds is a testament to our dedication to quality culinary experiences, excellent service, and sustainability.



THANK YOU!

INSPIRED BY THIS STUDY?

Get in touch with us to start your journey toward outstanding results.

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