

# Hispanic group more than a club

But PAGA members also have fun on and off the golf course.

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The Pan American Golf Association was founded in 1947 to give Hispanics a chance to play golf, but it was always more than just a social club to its members.

The association and its members have awarded five \$1,000 scholarships annually for the past 20 years and donated more than \$100,000 to diabetes associations.

Those donations, especially the funds given for diabetes research, are important to PAGA because it has a direct effect on its members.

PAGA member Uvaldo Garcia said African-Americans have the highest rates of diabetes of any race in the country and "Hispanics are second."

Upon hearing those statistics between holes Thursday at Brackenridge, PAGA member Gary Hanks of Houston said his wife and daughter also have diabetes.

Golf is what brought a group of Hispanics together, but taking care of a growing family on and off the course is what has sustained PAGA.

"We have fun," said Garcia, a member of the Dallas metroplex chapter. "We take it seriously, but we have fun, too."

PAGA is holding its national convention in San Antonio this

week. The annual convention ends today with the final round of the men's national championship at seven local courses and tonight's closing ceremonies at the Westin Riverwalk.

The association has expanded to 4,000 members and 44 chapters throughout the country since its inception in San Antonio in 1947.

There are 3,000 people attending this week's convention, including 1,100 that are competing in the association's national championships.

"It's like a family," said Antonio Garcia, a member from the Rio Grande Valley. "You would be surprised how many people come just to see old friends. It's like a family reunion."

It's a diverse family gathering.

The initial group was exclusively comprised of Hispanics, but the association's membership is now 80 percent Hispanic, 15 percent Anglo and 5 percent African-American.

"We embrace everybody," Uvaldo Garcia said.

National meeting chairman Jesse Garza of San Antonio said 60 to 70 percent of the association's members are white-collar workers compared to just 10 percent in the association's first decades.

The change in membership has allowed PAGA to be of greater help to others.

"That to me is the most important thing we do," Hanks said of the college scholarships the association awards.

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