

Los Angeles Business Journal

HOME FINANCE HEALTHCARE MANUFACTURING REAL ESTATE SERVICES TECHNOLOGY GOVERNMENT

[Sign in](#)



Getting the Swing of It

El Segundo-based TGA has seen its after-school golf program take off as a franchised business model.



Photo by [Ringo Chiu](#)

From left, TGA's Steve Tanner and Joshua Jacobs at their headquarters in El Segundo.

By [Joel Russell](#)

Monday, November 29, 2010

Lots of entrepreneurs would like to spend their time playing golf, but can they make a profit that way?

Yes, answers Joshua Jacobs. The 34-year-old is chief executive of TGA-Premier Junior Golf, an after-school sports franchise that started in Los Angeles and is growing steadily.

Jacobs launched TGA in 2003, running summer golf camp programs for teens. Parents started asking him about programs during the school year, so he started setting up classes through after-school programs.

In 2005, he signed five elementary schools in upper-middle-class

An advertisement for the Los Angeles Business Journal. At the top, it says "LOS ANGELES BUSINESS JOURNAL". Below that is a laptop displaying the journal's website. To the right of the laptop, the text reads "Subscribe today and save \$56 off the cover price". At the bottom right, there is a blue play button icon with the text "click here".

L.A. neighborhoods. By late 2006, he was teaching golf at about 80 schools in Los Angeles County and an additional 150 in Orange County.

Each class includes six to 10 lessons, taught one day a week on school premises. Parents pay a fee of \$13 to \$20 a lesson, depending on the specific agreement with the school.

The program takes students through five levels of golf. After that, they start playing in TGA tournaments and attend day camps at golf courses during the summer.

“We cultivate their passion for the game and then transition them to the golf course,” Jacobs said. “About 60 percent of our kids have never played golf, nor has anyone in their family. We are bringing it to the masses.”

TGA sells rights to run the program to franchisees for between \$15,000 and \$40,000. Each franchise usually covers one county. Franchisees then convince school officials to host the program, and parents pay for their kids to attend. Franchisees then hire golf teachers to give the classes, and turn over 8 percent of their revenue to TGA.

Steve Tanner, TGA’s chief operating officer, said the average franchisee signs up about 650 to 700 students in their first year, and reaches about 1,000 within a few years.

Barry Kurtz, an Encino attorney specializing in franchise law who works with TGA, recommended to Jacobs that he follow a franchise model. Kurtz usually works with big franchisors such as Baja Fresh, Conroy’s Flowers and Cinnabon, but saw a lot of potential in TGA after it proved itself locally.

“Franchise owners get into a system because they want information on how to run the business,” Kurtz explained. “A franchisor with only one restaurant, for example, hasn’t developed that knowledge. They need to repeat the experiment so they don’t have to learn on their franchisees’ backs.”

Low cost

Also, TGA had good timing. Kurtz said franchises that cost a lot of money by requiring property ownership or extensive equipment have seen their growth dwindle due to decreased bank lending; low-cost franchises are doing better.

“Josh is in the right place because his investment requirements are substantially lower than restaurants, retail or technology franchises,” Kurtz said.

Today, the TGA system has 46 franchises, plus Jacob’s original L.A. operation. He sold the Orange County territory to a former employee.

Before selling a franchise, Jacobs advises would-be franchisees to meet with local school officials and check their receptiveness to the program.

The franchise fee includes curriculum materials, golf equipment, a two-day local training consultation, a six-month checkup as well as an accounting system and a website.

To encourage franchises in cold-weather regions, TGA provides artificial grass mats and special balls that don't damage windows or walls. That allows the program to function in gyms, cafeterias or even hallways.

Tanner, who sells the TGA franchises, said many of the people who apply to buy a franchise know more about golf than business.

"The majority of people require a lot of education," he said. "A lot of them don't understand what a franchise is. Also, many think we're offering them a job or hoping we will eventually hire them."

Ray Titus, chief executive of United Franchise Group, a company in West Palm Beach, Fla., that has 1,400 franchises in niches from signage to event planning, said the first big challenge for TGA is to grow big enough, fast enough to generate significant profits.

Titus said TGA's growth trajectory looks good, especially since the last three years have been difficult for the franchise sector.

"To go through one of the worst times since the Great Depression and have almost 50 franchises is excellent growth," he said.

Tennis, anyone?

Jacobs financed TGA's first summer camps with money from family and friends. He later bankrolled the launch of the franchise system with profits from the L.A. and Orange County after-school programs.

Currently, most of TGA's franchises are on the West and East coasts. The company hopes to expand to the Midwest and Pacific Northwest, and then fill in the rest of the country. Jacobs estimated that about 150 to 200 franchises will cover the entire United States. His goal is to reach that level within five years.

After that, he hopes to take TGA international. He has identified Australia, Canada, Japan, South Korea, China, Argentina and Western Europe as prime markets.

In addition to geographic expansion, Jacobs hope to increase revenue by securing sponsors for tournaments and by selling golf equipment to young players.

Finally, he thinks he can take the format to other sports. A pilot program in Los Angeles is testing TGA tennis classes.

"A lot of schools are asking us about tennis and the franchisees are looking to expand their business," he said.

He may become a global presence in the golf industry, but at heart Jacobs is still the teen who won a Los Angeles city golf championship at Grant High School in the San Fernando Valley. And he's still heavily involved in TGA's original L.A. business.

“Even though we have successfully established TGA across the country, my loyalty and roots lie at TGA’s birthplace in the Los Angeles area,” he said. “I have always felt a close connection locally with our schools and camps here in Los Angeles.”

TGA-Premier Junior Golf

FOUNDED: 2003

HEADQUARTERS: El Segundo

CORE BUSINESSES: After-school golf programs

EMPLOYEES: 5

GOAL: To establish 150 to 200 domestic golf school franchises, then expand internationally and into other sports such as tennis.

NUMBERS: Charges \$15,000 to \$40,000 per franchise; has sold 46.

- [Share This Story](#)

- Share this item

[Send this to a friend](#)

- Grab the link

Copy and paste the link:

- [Close](#)
- [Print View](#)



Subscribe today for only \$1.96 per week!

