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Disc golf tournament welcomes all levels of play

Top pros at Riverside Park

By **DAN BARKER** Times News Editor
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People swarmed around Riverside Park at ease, among recreational vehicles and tents before the start of the High Plains Challenge disc golf tournament Saturday.

Participants knew the area from previous years, and were out early practicing on the course. Some stretched as they waited for the play to begin, while others lounged in camp chairs or made plans for a poker game later in the evening.



Tyler Patrick of Arvada makes a shot during practice before the High Plains Challenge disc golf tournament at Riverside Park Saturday.

About 180 players came from as far away as Georgia, Oregon, California and Michigan to play the Fort Morgan disc golf course. About half of them were professional disc golf players, and the other half amateurs.

Organizer John Bird, president of the Mile-Hi Disc Golf Club and state coordinator of the Professional Disc



Sue Lande of La Porte gives Leroy Jenkins of Ohio a massage before the High Plains Challenge disc golf tournament. She has a reputation for having "muscle magic" for the players.

Golf Association, said Morgan County residents should come out to watch the world-class pros that play. This is not like the free-wheeling days of college Frisbee, he said. Disc are much faster and the players more skilled.

Nonetheless, the morning was filled with laughter as the excited players prepared, and there was a sense of camaraderie shared.

People played at their own levels, whether for fun or for \$1,000 purses.

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Pros played on the west side of the Riverside Park disc golf area, with amateurs on the east side.

On the pro side, players could be part of the men's open, the women's open, the men's master, the men's grand pro master for cash prizes, and paid for the chance to compete. The top fee was \$100.

They and amateurs could play in the advanced master division for prizes such as disc golf branded items like discs, towels and baskets.

Amateurs played for similar prizes in the men's open, women's open, intermediate men's or women's or recreational divisions.

Bird said his organization wants to work with the city of Fort Morgan in getting the east side disc golf area in better condition. The west side is named for the Optimists Club which helped establish it, but the east side is nicknamed

the "Pessimist" area.

However, Bird congratulated Fort Morgan for having a disc golf course that people enjoy. There are few places in Colorado with enough space for two disc golf courses in one area, and players look forward to coming to Fort Morgan.

The 20 to 35 year age group has the largest number of disc golf players, but the demographics are changing, Bird said.

He had kids barely in their teens at the tournament with their parents and professionals such as a dentist in the competition. A number of players have hi-tech backgrounds, he said.

As the Baby Boomers retire, they are joining in the fun, Bird said. Disc golf is relatively inexpensive and does not take all day, but is still a way to have fun and stay in



Mark Nielson of Lakewood uses a hiking-running stroller to haul around his disc golf equipment, much as golfers use a golf bag or cart.



shape. Walking 18 holes is about equal to 1 1/2 or 2 miles.

The High Plains Challenge is rated as an A-tier tournament, which is just below the highest level of play, Bird said, and the course is getting a national reputation.

Every year, the city sponsors the tournament,

and every year it improves, he said.

This tournament is on what is considered a super tour, and some of the player will go on to an Oregon course, Bird said.

Bird is now retired from play himself, and is a consultant for cities which want to build disc golf courses. His consulting firm is called Birdie Disc Golf and can be seen at birdiediscgolf.com.

-- Contact Dan Barker at business@fmtimes.com.

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John McDonald of Brush prepares to make a throw during the disc golf tournament at Riverside Park Saturday.

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