

## Impacting Communities

An Interview with Neera Shetty, Chief Legal Officer and Executive Vice President, Social Responsibility, PGA TOUR

**EDITORS' NOTE** Neera Shetty currently serves as Chief Legal Officer and Executive Vice President, Social Responsibility, for the PGA TOUR and its affiliates and subsidiaries including PGA TOUR Enterprises. She has been with the PGA TOUR since January 2008. As Chief Legal Officer, she is responsible for overseeing and advising on all legal matters for the PGA TOUR and its properties throughout the world. As the leader of the Office of Social Responsibility, she oversees the PGA



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TOUR's efforts with respect to diversity, equity and inclusion as well as its efforts with respect to environmental sustainability. She is also the chair of the PGA TOUR's Inclusion Leadership Council. Prior to joining the PGA TOUR, Shetty was a partner in the labor and employment department of McGuireWoods LLP in its Jacksonville, Florida office. She has also served as in-house lawyer and human resources vice president for employee relations with Sabre Holdings, a world leader in technology solutions for the travel industry. Shetty received her BA degree from Duke University and her JD from the University of Texas School of Law. She is a member of the Florida and Texas bars.

**ORGANIZATION BRIEF** The PGA TOUR (pgatour.com), headquartered in Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida, co-sanctions tournaments on the PGA TOUR, PGA TOUR Champions, Korn Ferry Tour, PGA TOUR Americas and administers PGA TOUR Q-School presented by Korn Ferry and PGA TOUR University. TOUR members represent the world's best players, hailing from 28 countries and territories. Showcasing the biggest moments in the sport with history and legacy on the line, the PGA TOUR has long-term domestic distribution partnerships for broadcast coverage on CBS, NBC, and Golf Channel and video streaming service on ESPN+. Internationally, PGA TOUR coverage is available across 200+ countries and territories in 28 languages via 44 broadcast and digital partners. Virtually all tournaments are organized as nonprofit organizations to maximize charitable giving, and to date, tournaments across all tours have generated more than \$3.93 billion.

**How do you define the PGA TOUR's culture and values?**

From the day my husband and I first arrived in Jacksonville, I knew that the PGA TOUR was

where I wanted to be. Though I had joined a law firm and become partner, I was drawn to the PGA TOUR's efforts to have a positive impact in communities where it played. After being given an opportunity to join the TOUR, I was so impressed by their efforts to establish an inclusive culture where employees felt both heard and empowered to grow, and I feel that energy every day I enter our Global Home headquarters now. Everyone loves a good acronym, and here at the TOUR we use "DRIVEN" to

showcase our core values – Diverse, Respectful, Innovative, Vigilant, Energetic, and Never-Compromising. Those principles are reflected throughout our organization, where employees are uplifted and encouraged to be authentically true to themselves. It's easy for companies to thrive when everyone pulls in the same direction, and that's certainly the case here at the PGA TOUR, where we're all invested in seeing our teammates flourish.

**Will you provide an overview of your role and areas of focus?**

In April, I assumed the role of Chief Legal Officer from Len Brown, who after nearly two decades has been promoted into the role of Chief, Global Business Ventures. While I take great pride in heading up our global legal function, I'm equally as honored to also lead the PGA TOUR's commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion and environmental sustainability as Executive Vice President of Social Responsibility. I tell people I am truly humbled to have a position that feeds both my brain as well as my heart.

**How important is it for the legal function to be engaged in business strategy?**

The PGA TOUR's legal arm is playing a critical role this year following the launch of PGA TOUR Enterprises, a new for-profit entity that houses our commercial assets while establishing a new player equity program – a first in professional sports. Of course, with such significant structural change comes additional challenges from a legal perspective. It's an honor for our first-class legal team to play a small part in shaping the direction of our organization and the game of men's professional golf.



Neera Shetty speaks during the PGA TOUR Partner Connect DE&I Summit at State Farm Arena prior to the TOUR Championship at East Lake Golf Club in Atlanta, Georgia, on August 24, 2022





*Operation Shower themed “Oh Baby” at the Patriots Outpost presented by CSX, prior to THE PLAYERS Championship at Stadium Course at TPC Sawgrass in Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida, on March 10, 2024*

**Will you discuss the PGA TOUR’s commitment to build a diverse and inclusive workforce to mirror the diversity of its players and the communities it serves?**

Change doesn’t happen overnight, but it’s been inspiring to see the evolution of our workforce throughout my tenure, led by our talent and culture team. I believe the cause of this is two-fold: for one, our sport has never been more popular, with the National Golf Foundation estimating some 45 million Americans played golf in 2023. We’ve been able to build upon that growth at the TOUR through our Inclusion Leadership Council, which since 2019 has identified and executed the TOUR’s key inclusion initiatives. The ILC – which I chair – is comprised of some of our brightest and most passionate senior leaders across the PGA TOUR, and our focus is on improving not only our business, but our sport as a whole and the impact it makes worldwide. We’re also proud of our participation in Make Golf Your Thing, an industry-wide initiative led by the PGA TOUR, PGA of America, LPGA, and USGA that ensures individuals from all backgrounds know the opportunities in golf from a career, business, and participation standpoint. There’s much work left to do, but the PGA TOUR has made tremendous progress in weaving diversity, equity, and inclusion into the fabric of our business.

**Will you highlight the PGA TOUR’s efforts with respect to environmental sustainability?**

The PGA TOUR is committed to playing its part when it comes to environmental sustainability, implementing credible initiatives that reduce negative environmental impacts while driving positive change in the communities where we work and play under the leadership of our Director of Sustainability, Brazos Barber. Whether at our tournament venues, TPC Network

golf courses or offices across the globe, we are leading a collaborative effort to reduce emissions, conserve water and divert waste from landfill. With guidance from partners and experts, the TOUR is also identifying areas of improvement, innovating new processes, and implementing creative programs that achieve measurable results. We are committed to leading, partnering, and inspiring to take climate action and promote nature, doing so through four strategic pillars: Leadership and Influence, Climate Action, Purpose-Drive Partnerships, and Promotion of Nature.



*Scottie Scheffler hits a tee shot on the 18th hole during the second round of THE PLAYERS Championship at Stadium Course at TPC Sawgrass in Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida, on March 15, 2024*

**You have spent over 15 years with the PGA TOUR. What has made the experience so special for you?**

It’s really the same thing that separates every great job from all the rest of them – the people that you share it with. I’m truly fortunate to work alongside bright, energetic colleagues that make every day fun and different from the one before it. Rarely are two days ever the same. It’s particularly rewarding to do it all for an organization that’s committed to leaving our world better than we found it, both here at our home in Northeast Florida and across the globe in the communities where we play. Everyone here takes personal pride in the fact that the TOUR will soon approach \$4 billion in all-time charitable giving, and it’s all those stories of generosity and goodwill over the years that help get us out of bed every morning.

**What advice do you offer to young people beginning their careers?**

Had you asked me 20 years ago what my career path would look like, working in the legal department for a major sports league would probably not have been my answer. No one in my family practiced law in the United States before I walked through the law school doors at the University of Texas, but I didn’t let unfamiliarity stop me from what I set out to achieve. There is so much pressure these days to have a master plan all figured out and to hit each step in the process at the exact right moment, but we miss out on so many unique opportunities in life when we’re laser-focused on only one or two things. I believed in myself enough to try my hand at all sorts of new things, and never allowed an avenue to close because it wasn’t part of the pre-described “plan.” My advice would be to always venture behind Door #2 – you never know what adventure awaits on the other end. ●