

## Electrolux wants to make tourney LPGA's top stop

### Sponsor enters second of three-year deal with Raycom Sports, LPGA

By **WENDY SMITH**  
Staff Writer

Electrolux LLC, the official floor care company of the LPGA, is in the second year of a three-year contract as title sponsor of the women's tour event here and expects to extend the relationship.

"We have been extremely pleased with our role as sponsor of the tournament and could easily see us wanting to continue the role for the foreseeable future," said Joseph Urso, chairman and chief executive officer of Electrolux LLC.

Should the partnership move forward, Electrolux LLC says it wants to make Middle Tennessee not just another tournament but the premier stop on tour.

"We haven't thought about [a new contract], but we will probably want to make it the No. 1 stop on tour and the way to do that is to have the biggest purse in ladies golf," Urso said.

While most companies have had plenty of cutbacks do to the economic downturn, Urso insisted that it has not affected his business.

A company by the name of Electrolux Group laid off 2,000 employees earlier this year, but it is not part of the same company as Dallas-based Electrolux LLC, which sponsors the tournament.

"The only issue is whether there is a smarter way to manage our marketing dollars," Urso said. "A lot of senior executives strongly feel that continuing the tournament is a very smart thing for us to do."

This year's event is the second of a three-year contract among Electrolux LLC, Raycom Sports and the LPGA. The tournament is owned, and operated by Raycom Sports, which also owns and operates LPGA stops in California and Alabama.

"From all indications, we have been very pleased with the relationship and we would expect that relationship to continue," said Ken Haines, chief operating officer of Raycom Sports. "Given the uniqueness of the Nashville event, we would probably not have difficulty finding another title sponsor if they chose to do something else. Right now, every indication is

they want to continue."

The contracts are generally rolling three-year contracts, and the Raycom executives plan to meet with Electrolux officials at this year's event to start working on another three-year deal which would include tournaments from 2003 through 2005.

"We would hope that during this year's tournament we could kind of kick-start the discussions for an extension," said Ray Warren, president of Raycom Sports.

Television partner CBS also has a deal that has one year remaining, according to Warren, who expects to meet with network officials as well during tournament week.

The LPGA believes the event has a lot of unique elements that are attractive to sponsors.

"It continues to have all of the elements of one of the more dynamic events on the LPGA Tour," LPGA Commissioner Ty Votaw said. "... As for the future, it is a three-year agreement. We are in the second year of a three-year agreement, which is all we can really talk about in terms of the future."

Electrolux budgets on an

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annual basis and hasn't begun work on its 2002 budget, let alone one for 2003 and beyond, Urso said, but added that the company is committed to the tournament through May 2002.

"I doubt we will really think about 2003 until we get to 2002," Urso said. "We want to see that the third year still went well. We'll probably make a decision immediately after [the 2002 event]."

According to Warren, Raycom looks for reasons to stay involved in events, not leave them, and feels they can be in the golf business as long as they want to be.

"Frankly, we would love to add an event," Warren said.

"I would not be surprised if somewhere in the next 12-18 months we don't announce a fourth golf tournament.

"But we love it here. This for Nashville, for Raycom Sports, Raycom Media, we think, especially having combined The Vinny with the golf tournament, we think this should be one of the premier stops on the tour. If it isn't, it can be." ■