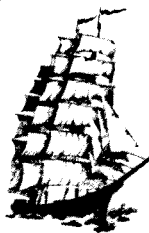


WEATHER

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Showers, chilly, Low of 35.
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Baddour postpones charity golf tournament because of ethics law

By J.J. HUGGINS
STAFF WRITER

METHUEN — State Sen. Steven Baddour says his annual charity golf tournament is “temporarily postponed” until state officials determine whether the tournament is on par with new ethics laws.

The Senator Steven Baddour Charity Fund is a nonprofit that has been running an annual golf tournament since 2003. The tournament raises tens of thousands of dollars per year. Last year’s event was held in June at the Haverhill Country Club.

Baddour, D-Methuen, said he is seeking opinions from the state Ethics Commission, attorney general, and secretary of state as to whether the tournament violates new ethics laws.

“As a result of the changes in the ethics laws, we are dotting the i’s and crossing the t’s to ensure that we comply with the new laws and new regulations that have yet to be interpreted,” he said.

Gov. Deval Patrick signed new ethics reforms into law last July 1. The law strengthened the Ethics Commission’s ability to enforce ethics laws, clarified existing law, and emphasized education and training for public employees, according to the state’s Web site.

Campaign finance rules limit the amount of money people can donate to politicians’ campaign funds. The charity is separate from Baddour’s campaign fund, and Baddour said the old ethics law allowed people to donate to both his political fund and his

charity. But he said he needs to find out if this is still allowed under the new law.

“You have no idea how much time and effort goes into running one of these tournaments. We didn’t want to be 80 percent into it... and the Ethics Commission or the attorney general comes out and says, ‘There’s a conflict,’” he said.

Baddour said his charity has given out more than \$100,000 to various causes — such as hospitals, food pantries and families with disabled children — since its inception seven years ago. He said roughly 180 golfers play in the golf tournament, but refused to release a list of their names.

“It’s too burdensome to put it all together at this time of the season,” he said. “It’s not public information.”

A review of the charity’s recent tax returns show that it gave \$15,153 to charity in 2008, \$2,224 to charity in 2007 and \$14,000 in 2006. It paid John Bonanno, the treasurer and director of the fund, \$12,000 per year for each of those years to work an average of 10 hours per week.

“We needed someone who could devote a significant amount of time to the operations of the charity,” Baddour said. “Running the golf tournament, it’s an enormous amount of time and effort.”

When reached, Bonanno, the city of Methuen’s sanitary inspector, said he didn’t have time to talk.

“He organizes and is responsible for the smooth operation of

the golf tournament,” Baddour said. That includes registering players, organizing prizes — “a whole litany of things that go into it,” he said.

Bonanno won’t be paid this year because the tournament is on hold, Baddour said.

The group’s 2009 tax return isn’t available yet, but it spent \$18,000 on a wheelchair van for a family in Haverhill and gave \$2,000 to the South Lawrence East Little League, according to past articles in The Eagle-Tribune. Baddour said the fund currently contains \$39,000.

“We’re trying to build it up so we can give larger donations out,” he said.

Baddour said the charity gave away a smaller amount in 2007 because that was the year it changed its mission from donating to hospitals to donating to individuals.

James Zenevitch is president of the charity. Baddour is not on the board of directors, but two of his Statehouse staffers — Dennis Marcello and Jeevan Ramapriya — are. Bonanno is the only person listed as collecting pay for his involvement.

Pam Wilmot, executive director of the government watchdog group Common Cause Massachusetts, said politicians raise money for charity all the time, and she thinks it’s good that Baddour is seeking the ethics opinions.

“I think it’s entirely appropriate to have these things reviewed periodically,” she said. “The new law is a good one. It’s a tough one.”