Tannone's Palm Beach balancing act wins accolades among par-3s

By MARK LESLIE

PALM BEACH, Fla. — For Stephanie Tannone, life is measured in pre-golf and post-turfgrass school days, and her career in pre-Alex and post-Alex terms.

"It's a challenge," she said of parenting her 20-month-old Alex while working as superintendent at Palm Beach Par-3 Golf Course, the country's second-ranked par-3 track.

"Before [Alex was born], it was easier because I could stay and work late. Now I have to pick him up at the babysitter's. It's a weird profession — and a nice one. I sometimes bring Alex to work, and no one's ever said a thing.

"But, yes, you can have it all." Even as a woman in a man-dominated field, she has met no bias, encountering one lone anti-female contact in the world of golf, and that back in college in 1980.

Head superintendent at the country's second-ranked par-3 track, Palm Beach Par-3 Golf Course, Tannone has parlayed a love of the outdoors and golf into a career she wouldn't trade for anything.

Indeed, as her dreams come true, her wish list gets shorter:

• In 1987, when she joined the club, a municipal 18-hole course, they promised me a new maintenance building. Two years later, she had one.

• Next, she wanted an irrigation system. Voila! Two years ago, she started up a new Flowtronex pump station and an OSMAC computerized irrigation system operated by a radio "which I absolutely love."

• She originally planned to renovate the entire course. She happily settled for Joe Lee's remodeling of all greens and tees.

"Being year-round is the other difference. You get a break up North. You don't down here." Tannone gets fewer breaks from work because her entire staff consists of an assistant, a laborer, a mechanic and addition of several traps.

"And, in between all this, she married Mark Tannone — on the 12th tee, mind you," said Bill Gabriel, who was behind her husband and her golf game.

"She's considerably shorter dream list is now headed by a tree-planting program. "We lost 700 to 800 palm trees to lethal yellowing," she said, adding that she is trying to plant about 40 palms every year.

A 1982 graduate of the Ohio State University, Tannone said a professor suggested she change from the male-dominated turf program to horticulture. But she held her ground, with one other female classmate, and "it's always amazed me. I've never had a problem — not from classmates, and with no other instructor. Even down here, I never experienced any discrimination. "The super in my area are very helpful — except when I go to play the ladies' tees," she laughed.

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