Off The Fringe

‘They Were Jumping Up And Down And Freakin’ Out’

A MILLION BUCKS WILL DO THAT TO YOU

Russ Kelly will continue as club manager for Bent Pine GC in Vero Beach, Fla. He’s not going to let a meager million bucks change his life.

“I’m not gonna make any changes now,” says Kelly, who along with 25 employees at Bent Pine won the $65 million Florida lottery in July.

The 26 employees, including two pros and a golf course maintenance worker, kicked in money to purchase 56 tickets for the lottery. Because the jackpot was higher than normal, the group bought more tickets than usual. One of the tickets, the only one in Florida, had the correct six numbers to claim the jackpot, which amounts to about $1 million for each worker after taxes. Many of the winners were on the club’s food and beverage staff.

“I wasn’t at work the day they found out they won, but from what I understand it was mayhem,” Kelly says. “They were jumping up and down and freakin’ out.”

The 34-year-old Kelly plans to invest most of the money, although he’s building a swimming pool at his home. Kelly also has to help rebuild the Bent Pine staff because about 12 of the winning workers are leaving their jobs. But the millionaire isn’t whining. “I have no complaints,” he says.

Daddy’s Girl

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“They put us in the small business category because they weren’t sure where to put a golf course.”

Blum says he uses a few vegetable-based hydraulic oils and category 3 synthetic pesticides, which are the least toxic synthetic products available. Even with those concessions to the environmentalists, Blum says he keeps his course in above-average condition.

Award applicants submit to a grueling process that starts with filling out a form detailing what measures were taken to reduce pollution and how much pollution has been reduced. The form is submitted to the Department of Energy Conservation’s Compliance Counsel and the governor’s staff, who narrow the applicants to the top 10. Then two members of the selection committee visit each finalist and make their recommendations to the governor, who picks the winners.

Blum said the awards dinner, where he brought the house down when he told them the inspiration for his program, was intimidating.

“Here I am, the only turf guy there and the only representative from Colonial, amid these huge entourages from these other companies,” Blum says. “All the major environmental groups were there — and then I had to get up and give a speech.”

He must have done something right because one of the governor’s committee members pulled him aside and insisted that Blum enter Colonial again next year.

“I’m certainly going to consider it,” Blum says. “We enjoy being touted as an environmental golf course.”

And Blum still takes inspiration from Samantha whenever she visits the course.

“She’s out here just about every day and I think about how my work affects her,” Blum says. “Doing what we did here is definitely for her and the future.”

— Frank H. Andorka Jr.