

# Jason Funderburg and Jeff VerCautren -N- Rich Harvest Farms



*The Funderburgs, Jason, Bridget, Jackson and Jaycie.*



*The VerCautrens, Amanda, Jenna and Jeff.*



*This month, MAGCS members have the opportunity to visit Rich Harvest Farms located in Sugar Grove. The golf course has two superintendents, Jason Funderburg and Jeff VerCautren.*

*(Ed. note: The intended idea was to have Jeff write Jason's and Jason write Jeff's profile for the article, however I've combined both articles into one.)*

## **Superintendent Funderburg**

Born and raised in Belvidere, Illinois, Jason Funderburg is thirty-four year old. He currently resides in DeKalb, with his wife Bridget, two-year-old son Jackson, and six-month-old daughter Jaycie. Jason's free time is spent enjoying his family and friends.

Oddly enough, Jason was introduced to the golf business through carpentry. While building his mother's retirement home in Hot Springs Village, Arkansas, he decided that it was time for a change. With his passion for the game of golf, what better way to get a discounted rate than to take a job on the maintenance department at one of the village courses. Working for Don Jensen at the Magellan course in Hot Springs Village, Jason found his true calling, and decided to make a career of it.

Knowing the importance of education, he returned to the Midwest and attended Kishwaukee College, where he graduated with an Associates of Applied Science in Horticulture, and a Certificate in Turf and Golf Course Management. While fulfilling his academic requirements, Jason wanted to challenge himself with an internship at one of the area's top golf courses. He was given the opportunity to do so at Rich Harvest Farms. Upon graduation Jason had a chance to get involved with the grow-in of a golf course, so he accepted an assistant position at the Golf Club at Timber Pointe in Poplar Grove, Illinois.

Just prior to Timber Pointe's opening Jason had the opportunity to return to Rich Harvest in the capacity of

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*A green complex at Rich Harvest Farms. Notice the red tailed hawk in the upper left hand sky in the image.*



an assistant superintendent. His desire to manage at a high-end facility proved greater and he went back to work at Rich Harvest Farms. After spending one-and-a-half seasons as assistant, the ownership made the decision to make a change and promoted Jason along with Jeff VerCautren as co-superintendents.

When asked what he felt was the most difficult part of his job, Jason answered with “personnel management,” and wanted to share an inspirational quote of Vince Lombardi:

“Leadership rests not only upon ability, not only upon capacity; having the capacity to lead is not enough. The leader must be willing to use it. His leadership is based on truth and character. There must be truth in the purpose and will power in the character.”

### Superintendent VerCautren

Born and raised in the Quad Cities, Jeff also lives in DeKalb with his wife Amanda and three-year-old daughter Jenna. They’re expecting a new born in June (good timing).

His other interests are classic cars, hunting, and fishing.

Jeff entered the golf course business by loving the outdoors. He had worked on an apple orchard through high school, and his father wanted a place where he could play golf for free. This led Jeff to try his hand in the golf course industry. Shortly thereafter, he started at Short Hills Country Club as a laborer and has loved the profession ever since.

After graduating from Riverdale High, in Port Byron, Illinois, He went to Black Hawk East Junior College in Agri-Business Horticulture. From there he received an Associates Degree in Science while playing college basketball for Black Hawk. Upon graduation he went to Illinois State, continuing his studies in Agri-Business Horticulture for two more years.

Jeff started his career at Short Hills Country Club in East Moline, working summers while going to Illinois State University. While at school he worked at Crestwicke Country Club and Bloomington Country Club. From there he helped with the grow-in of TPC at Deere Run as an Application Foreman. Jeff transferred to TPC of Prestancia, in Sarasota,

Florida, as an Assistant. He eventually worked at three different TPC courses in Florida, helping with PGA and Senior PGA Tournaments. Jeff wanted to get back to the Midwest, and that brought him to Rich Harvest Farms in 2002.

### The Course

Rich Harvest Farms was started with three holes in 1989 and completed 18 holes in 1998. The course sits on 250 Acres with 2000 Acres of property for the farm. The greens are Pennncross/Pennlinks, with Pennncross tees and Penneagle fairways. There are two practice facilities, one with bentgrass tees and one with low-mow bluegrass. The owner, Jerry Rich, was the designer, with the help of Greg Martin Design. It is a private facility with many fundraising events. Every hole has signature-hole characteristics. Twelve holes on the course are heavily treed and six are more of a links style. There are numerous holes with multiple tees, so one can play the hole as a par three, four, or five. Thirteen holes on the course have some sort of water feature. Rich Harvest Farms upgrades the course yearly by adding tees or renovating bunker surrounds. This winter they are in the process of moving into a new maintenance facility that is more centrally located (we are all invited to tour the new shop after our meeting this January).

The most difficult aspect of the job is dealing with the environment and shaded greens. Jeff and Jason have been working towards Audubon certification at the course. They have completed the Water Conservation, Environmental Planning, and Wildlife and Habitat Conservation certification. They hope to complete the whole certification by the end of the 2007 season.

Past achievements at Rich Harvest Farms include the 2006 **Golf Digest** “America’s Best Retreat Course”, where it was ranked 21st, the only course in Illinois. In the 2005-2006 **Golf Digest** “America’s 100 Greatest Golf Courses” it ranked 45, the largest jump (54 places) a course has made in the ranking history. In 2003 and 2006 RHF was CDGA’s Toughest Course in District. In 1999 it was named in **Golf**

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**Digest’s** “Top 10 New Private Courses in the Country.” Rich Harvest Farms is hosting the 2007 NCAA Regional in May and the 2009 Solheim Cup in September.

### The Team

Working with shared superintendent responsibilities has been a great experience for both. Jeff relates, “I am with Jason more than anyone on a day-to-day basis. We’re both here to improve the course. We do what the owner asks of us and what we feel needs to be done. It has worked out for the best. The question I get asked most often about shared responsibility is, “what happens if you disagree?” Well it doesn’t happen that often, but when it does we discuss it and give the reasons for our differing opinions. Sometimes we get backing from literature or other peers to arrive at a decision. It’s a relationship that’s a lot like a good marriage: a lot of communication and a lot of give and take. After it’s said and done, we each back the decision and go on to the next task at hand.”

Both plan on staying with Rich Harvest for a long time. There are a lot of great upcoming events scheduled, and the “Farm” hopes for more in the future. Both enjoy the high-end, great conditions that they are able to produce daily. The owner, Jerry Rich, has never turned them down when they wanted for the course. He has created great working conditions.

The MAGCS members look forward to the January meeting at Rich Harvest Farms.





