

Holliday overcomes odds, aims ever higher

BY VERN PUTNEY

As a girl, Tracy Holliday flew gliders. It was smooth sailing.

Not so when she entered the golf course business.

The current superintendent at Sterling Farms Golf Club in Stamford, Conn., encountered rough winds on her first job as assistant superintendent.

When her boss introduced her to the green chairman, Holliday extended her right hand, but it wasn't accepted. The man looked her up and down, uttered an oath, then remarked: "I hope you start lifting weights. You're awful skinny."

"After six months under his close scrutiny, I somehow won his respect and praise without greatly increasing the size of my biceps," recalls Holliday.

Holliday had two-year assistant superintendent tenures at the Country Club of Fairfield, Conn., and at Sterling Farms before assuming her present role in March 1988.

She said highlights of her job have included upgrading irrigation pumping stations, designing visually attractive golf car traffic controls to reduce compaction areas around greens, implementing an extensive tree replacement program, being fully responsible for golf course maintenance budget and hiring decisions, and the same for pesticide applications, irrigation system and equipment maintenance.

Glider pilot Holliday has her feet on the ground in other areas. She has a supervisor's commercial applicator's license for pesticide spraying, is a member of national, Connecticut and Metropolitan golf course superintendent associations, and is a contributing reporter for the Metropolitan and Connecticut GCSA newsletters.

Though she grew up on the family's five acres in Pennsylvania, her Dad never let her mow the lawn with the wheelhorse. "That was my brother's job, and he hated it."

"In fact, I never touched a lawn mower until I was 19 and on a golf course. Now, tractors, loaders and mowers are like driv-



Tracy Holliday at Sterling Farms Golf Club in Stamford, Conn.

ing a car," Holliday noted.

Since childhood, Holliday has been outnumbered by men. After majoring in painting and drawing at the College of Wooster (Ohio) from 1979 to 1981, she enrolled at the University of Massachusetts' Stockbridge School of Agriculture.

She was the only woman. Focusing on agronomy, irrigation design, small engine mechanics and business law, she graduated in 1984 as the top student in turf management with a 3.9 grade point average.

Summer jobs those three years were at Longshore Club Park in Westport, Conn.; Plantscapes, Inc.; and placement training at Westchester Hills (N.Y.) Golf Club.

Sterling Farms, an 18-hole public course, accommodates 60,000 rounds annually.

Holliday has a staff of nine during the busiest season.

Holliday likes the public course because of exposure to the people who live in the city. "It's a great way to meet all kinds."

Athletics have been an important part of Holliday's life. "I like team work and discipline," she said. "Working on a golf course is a lot like athletics. It is a team effort among your grounds staff and your governing board. It is an endurance game come mid-summer, when managing stress becomes the discipline."

"There always is something more to be learned. The skills one can acquire are endless. That's why I love it. I am glad to see that more women are getting into the golf course business. We need a peer group with which to share 'Bear Stories.'"

Sharing camaraderie in a male-dominated profession can be an adventure.

"At many educational slide presentations, the end of the lecture is punctuated by flashing on the big screen a picture of a very shapely woman wearing not much more than a bikini," she said. "What is funny is that the men seated around me turn to catch my reaction before they respond. The lecturer usually is unaware that a woman might be in the audience."

Better somewhat-embarrassed laughter, Holliday philosophizes, than the stony silence that greeted her first venture into the field of golf and men.

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