

ON THE GREEN

Art and love of nature come together for super

BY MARK LESLIE

Let us know if Andy Stoffel is not one of a kind.

Here's a guy — the oldest of 13 children — who grew up quickly, yet may grab hold of a dream of his youth. A guy who hammered nails for years while running his own roofing and siding company, yet handles a paintbrush with the aplomb of an award-winning artist. Who bought a farm to build a housing development, then constructed a golf course on it instead. Who first opened his course on the honors system, with golfers putting money in a can before teeing off. Who wakes to water



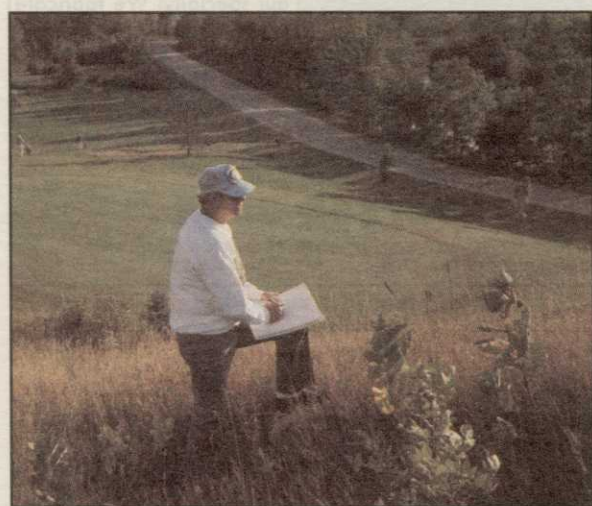
'Three clergy friends who golf my course, keep telling me it is just like heaven, only not as far away.'
— Andy Stoffel

his course at 4 a.m., works all day, then returns after dinner to fertilize and prepare for the next day. Who has pulled two loves together into two distinct careers that are, well, inseparable.

Andy Stoffel, 1) owns and maintains his own golf course, Auburn Bluffs in Campbellsport, Wis., and 2) paints wildlife/golf course pictures that people are encouraging him to mass produce.

"I love my work on the golf course. It's a real challenge keeping beautiful greens... And I love my painting. I'm always getting new

Stoffel touch on 2 canvases



Andy Stoffel, at left, gets many ideas from his own course, including the painting above, which has been chosen as the May photograph for a special 1990 calendar featuring Wisconsin wildlife artists. Stoffel will be honored as the Artist of the Month for May.

ideas and they stay there in my head until I get them on canvas. If I don't paint it, it won't leave," Stoffel said.

From the time he was a boy drawing pictures while the teacher spoke of history or arithmetic, art has been a crucial part of Stoffel's life.

"I've always felt the need to sketch or paint," he said.

Stoffel first used his self-taught skill in the Army. He used it in his roofing and siding business. And he's perfecting it today.

While stationed at Fort Lewis when he was 18, Stoffel painted murals on the 30- by eight-foot mess hall walls.

"I painted ducks, bears, elk. I got out of a lot of KP and guard duty. Once it took me two weeks to paint the rear of a black bear," he laughed. "They knew I was dragging my feet. But I'd finish one, and they'd tell me to do another one. I painted murals in seven mess halls."

In the siding business while giving an estimate, Stoffel would sketch the house and add colors to show the homeowner what it would look like. "I sold the job every time," he said.

Then came a back injury that led to his new life as an owner-operator of nine-hole Auburn Bluffs, which the artist appropriately calls a "scenic" challenge.

He started entering duck stamp competitions, winning prizes and receiving encouragement from other artists.

"I've always been fascinated with nature," he said, and one day it clicked: "Why not combine the wildlife with the golf course?" he asked himself. There certainly was enough wildlife on the course's 107 acres tucked into Kettle Moraine State Forest.

Now, putting his paintbrush to an 18- by 24-inch canvas instead of a wall, Stoffel said: "I'm using my golf course for all my ideas, but I ad lib. They're my own dream shots. I'm just putting them to the canvas."

"Being a superintendent, I have the opportunity to observe nature at my fingertips."

Responding to suggestions from golfers, friends, family, salesmen and other passersby, Stoffel has had postcards printed of several of his paintings. He had one scene printed on 500 T-shirts (which quickly sold out) and another on 500 sweatshirts. He is eyeing other markets.

"I want to finish a 24-painting series. I've got 20 done now," he said, adding that that would be enough for two calendars.

In fact, a radio station has chosen one of

Stoffel's creations to be the May painting on a 1991 calendar, and will name him May Artist of the Month. Fifty thousand calendars will be printed.

And Miller High Life beer is using Stoffel paintings as prizes in a regional contest.

Excitement fills Stoffel's voice when he speaks of the future, and the hopes he holds dear.

Owners at two other courses want him to paint their courses so they can put up the paintings in their clubhouses and use them on scorecards.

Others have suggested he have place mats made of his paintings.

More T-shirts and sweatshirts loom ahead. People are starting to collect prints of his series.

"I'm just looking for that one big break, one big backer," he said. "People say my work is getting better with each painting."

"You strive for the day you can get on your feet. In my case, I will pursue my art as I'd like to." Like he does in the off-season between early October and late March.

Still, his golf course has a pull of its own.

Construction began on Auburn Bluffs in 1979. It opened in 1982. Stoffel built the clubhouse and began work there full-time in 1984 when he left the siding business.

"I did put a few houses on the land," he said. But he pictured a nine-hole golf course on the rest of the land and has never regretted his decision.

Three holes run down between bluffs. One of the tees stands elevated 80 feet above the fairway. Little ponds formed by the glacier

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