

# Superfocus

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

By MARK LESLIE

**P**ALM 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 son 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 facility owned by the wealthy community of Palm Beach, "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 and addition of several traps.

- And, in between all this, she married Mark Tannone — on the 12th tee, mind you, in February 1991 with the sun setting behind them — and gave birth two years later to Alex.

Adding the Alex Effect, she said, life — and her career — are "all I expected it to be. I wouldn't even change where I'm at. I can be outside or inside when I want. I can play golf when I want..."

Tannone'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 has 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 supers in my area are very helpful — except when I go to play the ladies' tees," she laughed.

In fact, she numbers her first golf course boss, Dan Jones of Banyon Golf Club in West Palm Beach, as a "staunch supporter" who "has taught me a lot."

After a one-year stint at Banyon, Tannone "grew in" second 18s at 36-hole Boca Woods Country Club in 1985 and 36-hole Gleneagles in 1986 before returning to Banyon for six months and landing the Palm Beach job.

Her most difficult challenges have been adjusting to and learning warm-climate agronomics, along with the effects of the ocean and Intracoastal Waterway. At Ohio State, she said, "it was a whole different education. We weren't taught about Bermudagrass and mole crickets, etc. So, when I came down here I was shocked. Everything was opposite. I had never seen a mole cricket. I wasn't used to the insect problems. I never saw grass grow as fast.

"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 herself. The four of them maintain the 2,450-yard, par-54 course covering 35 acres. Yet, golf course architect Jan Beljan of Tom Fazio Golf Design Co. in Jupiter said Palm Beach Par-3 is "very well maintained, very polished. Stephanie has the respect of the top superintendent."

Much larger greens, with a new grass, will help improve conditioning even further, Tannone said.

"We do 50,000 rounds a year here and we had only two acres of greens," she said. "We simply didn't have enough pin placements." The renovation pushed the total greens area to five acres.

The old 328, which had "a bad case of



Palm Beach Par-3 Golf Course superintendent Stephanie Tannone doesn't mind her seaside location — not one bit.

Bermudagrass decline" and couldn't be mowed low in the summertime, was replaced by Tifdwarf. And the top 12 inches of soil were replaced.

Having more walkers than riders on the course — and, therefore, a little less compaction — is also an advantage. Tannone hopes the new greens and tees will win accolades from Ladies Professional Golf Association players at their annual late-January benefit tournament.

She believes women pros are more appreciative of a well-maintained course than men, judging from her experience at Gleneagles, which hosted a Senior PGA Tour event. She regularly gets positive feedback from LPGA players like Judy Dickinson and Muffin Spencer-Devlin.

ChiChi Rodriguez, she said, was the only man to comment on Gleneagles' grooming. And perhaps that is the extent of the male-female difference.



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