

Thus Russell began life as a superintendent's wife in tiny Shelby, Mont. Just before their second child was born, she left her job at a local bank to be a full-time mom. Shortly after, the person who'd managed the local Peaks & Prairies association for 20 years retired, and the chapter was advertising for an executive director. Another superintendent – a friend of her husband – called her and told her she'd be perfect.

"I was their second choice because I didn't even have an office, but I got the job eventually."

That was 15 years ago. She took on management of the Idaho GCSA eight years ago after a couple board members attended a Peaks event and were impressed with her abilities. She added the Inland Empire association about two years ago and solidified her reputation as the undisputed queen of the Northwest chapters.

She and Tom now live in Missoula, Mont., where he's the superintendent at Missoula Country Club. Their oldest is in college, but they still have two at home. In fact, their 15-year-old daughter helps Lori with chapter business, making it truly a family affair.

What are the typical problems facing chapters and chapter managers?

Lack of volunteer leaders – which is no surprise – but also competition from other groups in the turf industry that offer continuing education. Chapters aren't the exclusive source for seminars and networking anymore. We're extremely lucky (in our chapters) because neither of those is a big problem. We have a great volunteer base and, because we're kind of isolated, we're still pretty much the primary education source for superintendents.

Is it tougher financially than it used to be?

Money is often an issue because industry support has pulled back. We need to find ways to be more creative with fund-raising. For us, it's important we keep dues and fees as low as possible to allow everyone to participate regardless of budget.

What else are chapters dealing with?

Trying to move ahead with technology. Peaks & Prairies just held its first webcast recently. We worked through the GCSAA for a fee, and it set up the webcast, but it was just for our members. We promoted it and arranged it with Roch Gaussoin of the University of Nebraska. It was a great chance to discuss last year's agronomic

challenges at a time when members had time to breathe. It was so successful we had to cut off the questions. The GCSAA said it was one of the most interactive webcasts it has ever seen.

So the digital age has arrived for chapters?

We're constantly trying to drive members to Web sites. It used to be difficult to get e-mail addresses. We're also using e-blasts for announcements and newsletters. We'll still have a hard copy newsletter, but other chapters (e.g., the California GCSA) have gone strictly electronic. When chapter managers meet, most of our conversation tends toward technology. It's

and to keep offering the education for them to grow. Some chapters are using GCSAA's new field staff or asking about financial assistance to bring someone on as a paid manager.

I can't believe any chapter can't afford somebody. Why not start small and see how it goes? The position usually will pay for itself at the least. When I started with Idaho, it didn't have the money in the bank to pay me for a full year. It was a gamble, but it paid off. Everyone benefits.

What else can chapters do to reach out?

Chapters can vote into their bylaws another classification – a "facility membership" for the

I see what a huge difference having a paid staff person has made to the smallest association. They're far more productive and proactive. - LORI RUSSELL

faster and cheaper, but we can't do it overnight because not all members want it.

The first time the chapter relations group met in Lawrence (in the early 1990s) and said it was developing a Web site just for members, it was shocking. When I told the board, it thought I was nuts. Few of our members even had computers. We were just trying to get fax machines. We've come a long way since then.

What is the national doing to help chapter executives?

The GCSAA hosts two meetings for us – one at the GIS and one in Kansas. It used to bring us in every other year. Now it's a limited group coming in every year with one of its volunteer chapter leaders. It's useful to spend a day and a half with volunteers to get to know them better and learn at the same time. The GCSAA also puts on webcasts and dedicates part of the site just to us. It offers a lot to help us continue our education. It's a shame everyone isn't taking advantage of it.

Why don't other chapters participate?

A lot of the onus isn't on the national. It tries, and it has things in place, but many chapters don't use the resources, don't have paid staff, etc. The GCSAA needs to communicate the value of having any kind of paid staff person in place

small-budget courses chapters haven't been able to reach. A primary person at the facility is designated to receive the mailings. This classification has been defined by the GCSAA and, although it has been available for the past couple years, many chapters haven't implemented it.

Some chapters seem to have an arm's-length relationship with suppliers who sponsor a lot of stuff. Is that true for your groups?

We have an outstanding relationship with commercial members. It's not an "us and them" thing, it's a "we" thing. They need us, and we need them. It's a partnership. We don't just put out our hand and take the money and walk away. They have input, and we value what they say. Some chapters even have commercial representatives as full board members.

We can't depend on them to finance the association without giving them a chance to participate and have a voice in what we do. We also try to create different opportunities – big or small – to give them a chance to help. Not everyone can afford to be a major sponsor.

What else are you doing for funding, given the pressure on sponsors these days?

We've been successful with an auction in Idaho the past few years at the Boise golf show. We have

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a booth, and we auction off golf rounds and host a silent auction. Even the general golfing public contributes. It's a great fund-raiser for us. We're trying to do the same thing for the Inland Empire GCSA at its consumer golf show. We're also lucky to receive significant contributions from our local golf associations and PGA sections to help fund continuing education. It's win-win.

We're constantly looking for more funding and promotion ideas. It's a challenge because we cover such a large geographical area.

What legislative or regulatory issues specific to your region are you dealing with?

We haven't been as proactive as we should be on that front. Water issues are huge, and we're trying to coordinate with other chapters in the area and the national. Fortunately, we haven't had some of the intense political pressures that other areas of the country have faced.

Our biggest challenge is the same with all

three chapters: facing the fact there's no labor pool from which to draw. Montana, for example, has the second lowest unemployment rate in the U.S. Couple that with expanded playing seasons and superintendents are being called on to do more with less labor, higher demand for conditions, etc. One side effect of that is it's forcing us to reevaluate the timing of the meetings. We're changing the big meeting and trade show for Peaks to allow more people to attend. Because everyone's so busy, attendance isn't growing at the same rate as the membership and we need to do something about that.

That must make it difficult to schedule anything.

That's not the half of it. We also have to deal with weather, hunting season, fishing trips – you name it. The guys love the outdoors. They entered the business because they love being outside, and their playtime is spent outdoors. We have to work

around the various hunting seasons.

Do the same people volunteer for everything?

There's been a lot of discussion about not "re-cycling" volunteers. Some chapters have serious problems with generational differences. We're lucky we have a lot of young guys who want to be engaged, but I know other chapters struggle with it. For us, it's mostly a matter of what stage of life they're in and other things (family, etc.) they have going on. As a chapter, we're competing against our member's personal time and their professional time. We have to make sure we make it worth their while to participate. It's not generational, it's all about time. That's where technology helps us be as inclusive as possible.

What's it like to be married to a golf course superintendent?

If Tom was here, he'd be telling you how hard

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it is to be married to a chapter executive. He's passionate about his profession. We all know it requires a substantial amount of time. We lived right on the golf course for years in Shelby, so our family time didn't suffer as much as most.

He loves his job. He takes it seriously. But what I admire about him is he leaves the job at the job. He doesn't bring work home, but he wasn't always that way. He was inspired about the story of the "worry tree" (a tale about a man who "hangs" his worries on a tree outside of his house before he comes home), and it made a big impact on him. We've been lucky because of that. He's just as passionate about his family as he is the job.

Now, my job is demanding. I usually put in 50 hours a week plus travel. What's important is that we both respect when we need to work. We're not obsessive, so when he says, "I have to go back to the course," I know he means it, and I don't give him a hard time. It's also been extremely

helpful because there are times when there are things about the business I don't understand. He's my constant sounding board. He's much better at dropping things on the "worry tree" than I am. When he's home, he's home. That's not so true for me.

So you haven't had some of the typical "superintendent's wife" issues?

I receive that feedback from members' wives. We were so fortunate our house was on the course and the kids were able to see dad at work. He came home for lunch, took the kids to work, etc. Ours wasn't a typical scenario.

I know other superintendents and their families really struggle with this. My advice to those spouses would be to remember the time they spend at the course putting out a good product isn't time they're intentionally trying to be away from their families. The expectations and the pressures are probably higher than you

understand. You have to help them make sure they have a balanced life. It boils down to the fact they have to understand they don't want to not be with their family. It's part of the job.

What message do you want to send to superintendents and others in the industry?

I want them to remember there's tremendous value to having paid staff. I serve on the chapter relations committee. We're focusing on chapter/national relationships and what the ideal model should be. I see what a huge difference having a paid staff person has made to the smallest association. They're far more productive and proactive.

Final thoughts?

What I do, I don't do alone. We have great boards, committees and support. I'm not a superwoman. It's a team effort. That's the only way small chapters can succeed. **GCI**



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Young architects make names for themselves

Names such as Fazio, Doak, Nicklaus and Palmer are instantly recognizable in golf course design. But what about Wiltse, Johnson and Layton – or Logan Fazio, for that matter. Not so much. These might be the next big names in golf course design sooner than you think.

Golf course architecture is an interesting profession that requires an artistic side, practical side and the ability to deal with people, says Erik Larsen, executive v.p. of Arnold Palmer Design Co.

“You’re a problem solver and need to gather people together,” he says. “You need people skills to deal with different groups along the way. Designers do their own thing, and architects solve problems. You have to be able to work with and in different projects and styles.”

Larsen refers to three young projects architects at Arnold Palmer Design who will be influential in golf course architecture: Eric Wiltse, Brandon Johnson and Thad Layton. All three are working to become members of the American Society of Golf Course Architects.

“They have more knowledge about what’s happened in golf course architecture with different styles and looks than anybody I’ve seen,” Larsen

says. “They have more experience than I did at that time in my career. They don’t let the look of a golf course carry them away.”

Wiltse, Johnson and Layton are students of architecture.

“Their passion has driven their education to learn more about each aspect of the golf course,” Larsen says. “It makes them more exciting and reliable. They pay attention to how good a course can look and how fun it can be.”

The three architects have the ability to look at the competition and see what’s exciting, Larsen says.

“For example, the competition has a style Brandon and Thad wanted to learn about, so they went to play those courses,” he says. “They take the time to look at other things and build an encyclopedia of knowledge. The passion is there. The industry hasn’t seen their new work yet, but it’s going to be something different from us. They will be known guys.”

THE ORCHESTRATOR

Wiltse, who has worked at Arnold Palmer Design for more than 15 years, started right out of high school.

“I lived across the street from Harrison

Minchew, who worked for Palmer Design, and when I was 18 or 19 years old, I talked to him about golf course architecture. I learned to draw and draft, and they kept me around. I used mylar, pen and ink to help make topo maps.”

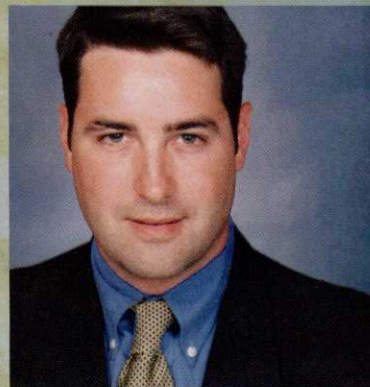
Wiltse, who doesn't have a landscape architecture degree, learned his craft from Minchew, Vicki Martz, the late Ed Seay and Larsen.

“If I left Palmer Design for school, I would have lost my position,” he says. “From Vicki, Harrison and Erik, I learned more technical experience about drawing and graphic standards and how the company did plans. Ed was more conceptual, and taught how the game is played and how courses played. Ed let me problem-solve in the field. He wanted to see how I could tackle and solve problems. Ed would throw you to the wolves but bring you back in. Ed let people go at their own pace. He had so much experience.

“It's not neat and tidy and wall-to-wall green. I would hope we can get people to understand brown is OK. I don't think we'll see the European look for at least another 10 years. Developers want to see lush green. But we're selling less wall-to-wall green. We're promoting smaller green sizes because greens have gotten to be huge and have made golf courses less intimate. Golf courses' environmental impact should be smaller.”

Wiltse likes to design courses where golfers have several options and shots. He's also keeping an eye on the competition.

“I'm watching what other design groups are doing because it helps me keep sharp,” he says. “I watch tournaments on TV and where the Tour is playing. I visit Web sites to see where other



By John Walsh

If you really couldn't solve a problem, he'd help you out in need.”

Wiltse worked as a CAD technician when drafting became electronic and soon became the IT guy (he's the in-house computer whiz), then project coordinator and finally project architect.

“Eric's mentality is more like 'let's get the job done,’” Larsen says. “He's more of an orchestrator and less about the artistic side than Brandon and Thad. They complement each other. Eric just finished a golf course on the Gulf Coast of Texas that's true links-like golf. It wasn't an easy deal. It took Eric a lot of working with different people.”

Wiltse has always wanted to work for Arnold Palmer Design.

“I never entertained the idea of working for anyone else,” he says. “I saw no good reason to pick up and do golf course design for someone else. I figured I was at the best place, so why go anywhere else?”

Wiltse adheres to the design standards Arnold Palmer set, which don't include target golf, but courses that blend in with their natural environments – more of a traditionalist style.

“Pine Valley is one of my favorites,” he says.

designers are working.”

Since Wiltse has been at Arnold Palmer Design, he has worked on 100 courses, 30 as a project coordinator and three which he designed. He needs two more golf course designs or four renovations to be eligible for ASGCA membership.

“I've been a bit laid back about getting into the ASGCA but would like to be in in two years,” he says. “Being an ASGCA member lends credibility to me and the firm. It's a win-win for me and Arnold Palmer Design.”

Some of Wiltse's more memorable projects include Star Pass in Tucson, Ariz., where he was the lead architect for the first time; The Bridges Golf Club at Hollywood Casino in Bay Saint Louis, Miss.; The Oasis Golf Club in Mesquite, Nev., where he learned the details of what Palmer likes; and the TPC Boston where he was



Logan Fazio (top), Eric Wiltse (middle left), Thad Layton (middle right) and Brandon Johnson (bottom) are a few of the bright young architects in the industry who learn from veterans while developing their own style and reputation.



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“As a designer, you’re always trying to push the envelope and reinvent the wheel even though we don’t need to. We’re always looking for something different.” - BRANDON JOHNSON

a project coordinator.

“I’m grateful and honored to work at Palmer Design, and hopefully, I’ve done enough good work to stick around,” he says.

THE STUDENT

Before coming to Palmer Design in 2006, Johnson gained experience with the PGA Tour and The First Tee.

“I met Brandon years ago and was impressed with him, and when we had an opening, I went out and got him,” Larsen says.

After earning a bachelor’s degree in landscape architect from N.C. State University and a master’s degree in landscape architecture from Harvard University, Johnson started with the PGA Tour Design Services, completing two internships in 1995 and 1997.

“The graduate program is an investment that grows over time,” he says. “It was great to be pushed by those who were in the field. I traveled a lot and worked on large projects in Italy and England that weren’t related to golf. There were diverse projects that made you think about a lot of different things at once.”

When doing the second internship at the PGA Tour, Johnson met Layton, and they became buddies and kept in touch. Johnson also knew Wiltse because they went to the same church. Through those relationships, Johnson met Minchew and Larsen.

Johnson was hired to be an architect at The First Tee and worked there from 1999 to 2006.

“I was to service all chapters and review all sites no matter if it was new construction or a renovation,” he says. “I did oodles and oodles and oodles of plans.”

The biggest difference between The First Tee and Palmer Design is the pieces of land Johnson had to work with.

“With the not-so-choice pieces of land for The First Tee, I was trying to fit in components such as gas lines, power lines and dealing with rock outcroppings and existing roads – things you couldn’t move to build the course,” he says. “At Palmer, you get to work with choice pieces of property, and your decision is different. For example, you’re maximizing frontage next to lakes. At The First Tee, we were forced to be creative with no money. I’m freed up here at Palmer. It was dirt and grass at the First Tee – that’s all we could afford. You learned restraint and what’s interesting on site. At Palmer, we’re working with clients who have the means do it right.”

Even with his experience, Johnson says there was a learning curve working at Palmer Design, and there still is.

“As a designer, you’re always are trying to push the envelope and reinvent the wheel even though we don’t need to,” he says. “We’re always looking for something different. As a company, we’re moving forward, but after 300 courses, it’s difficult to think outside the box.”

Johnson likes traveling and learning about golf courses to improve and remain inspired.

“We’ve built up a pretty good photo file,” he says. “We went to Scotland and played 36 holes a day and took tons of photos.”

Learning what projects to accept was another growth opportunity for Johnson.

“When I first started, we were on site with a client, and Erik Larsen asked me if this was something we should do,” he says. “It was comforting to have a say about the type of client, budget and project and how it might perform. You don’t want to take work that doesn’t fit your mode of operation.

“In the ’80s and ’90s, there were a lot of projects with houses right on both sides of the fairways and a lot of road crossings,” he adds.

“This is an example of something we might pass on. We’re trying to work better to think through the land plans. Projects are case-by-case situations. Clients are more sophisticated and savvy. More developers want to do high-quality work and not just jam homes in near the golf course. Better master-planned communities are being more environmentally sensitive and are creating a community with a sense of place.”

Two of Johnson’s memorable projects were the bunker renovations at the PGA National Resort and Seven Falls Golf and River Club in Etowah, N.C.

“We’re able to walk the property and find the routing right there,” he says. “It turned out the way we envisioned.”

Johnson would like to work on a project that’s on a choice site near the ocean with sandy soils and have a client willing to go the extra mile to create something special and give him the opportunities to do what he wants.

“As an architect, I want to be remembered as one who has done great work where people have come from far away to play a golf course I’ve designed,” he says. “I want to create something that people don’t get bored with, that people want to play again and again. I also want to design tournament golf courses to test golfers’ abilities. The trick is to design courses for the best players in the world and for the 20 handicappers.”

LESS IS MORE

While visiting his mother in Las Vegas years ago, Layton drove by a golf course that was part of a gated community and never forgot it.

“The waterfall, the beautiful green grass, the light sand bunkers – that image hooked me,” he says.

Layton did research, talked to architects and figured out he needed a landscape architecture