

Land of Hope & Dreams



BY FRANK H. ANDORKA JR., ASSOCIATE EDITOR

These millennium
kids aspire
to build their turf
management careers
on the golf course

In nature's seduction often works in magical ways. John Nachreiner, now a senior at Michigan State University, experienced an epiphany one day while playing golf in Bozeman, Mont. As he stood in the middle of a lush, green fairway and bald eagles soared above his head, the beauty overwhelmed him. From that moment, he felt the call to work on a golf course.

"Golf never entered my mind until that day," Nachreiner says. "Now I know this is what I was meant to do."

Dreams and aspirations like Nachreiner's form the essential fabric of human life. Almost from the moment human beings emerge from the womb, they strive to achieve what they believe they want. Hope keeps people striving despite setbacks, and it's what inspires them to reach their goals.

As 2000 unfolds, graduates of turf management programs look toward the golf maintenance industry filled with such hopes and dreams. With the help of their professors, *Golfdom* identifies five students whose aspirations are chronicled here. In future years, the magazine will revisit these students to examine their progress.

Kevin Tansey, 22, bussed tables in the kitchen of the Liverpool Golf & CC in Liverpool, N.Y., at 16. As he cleared plates and replaced table linen, he watched people working on the golf course.

"I've always enjoyed working outside, and I would watch the golf course crews from the kitchen and think how nice it would be to do what they were doing," Tansey says. "I talked to the two brothers who owned the course, pulled a few strings and started on the course as an assistant to the mechanic. Once I started, I was hooked."

Still, Tansey says he didn't know he could receive a college degree in turf management until he started looking for colleges in 1995. He discovered the turf management program at the State University of New York at Cobleskill, and he fell in love with the program.

"It was smaller than my high school and I had heard good things about it," Tansey says. "It offered me a great opportunity to do something I wanted to do."

His most recent internship came at the Black Horse CC in Bethpage State Park in Farmingdale, N.Y., where the 2002 U.S. Open will be played. Tansey says he hopes to return to pre-

pare for the Open.

"I look forward to seeing a tournament from the inside," says Tansey, whose dream is to work at a well-known course with a small crew, somewhere in Pennsylvania or Virginia. "I never thought I'd end up in this industry, but I'm glad I'm here now."

The elegance of the game, combined with the lure of working outdoors, drew Steve Richau, 28, to the golf course management program at Lake City Community College in Lake City, Fla. Growing up in Florida, Richau had played golf since he was 7 years old, but had never considered it a career — until he left high school.

After graduation, Richau found work at the Tournament Players Club at Prestancia in Sarasota, Fla. There he met Clayton Estes, who suggested Richau take an assistant superintendent's job at Eagle GC in Broomfield, Colo.

"I wanted to take a break from Florida, so I pursued the opportunity," Richau says. "After working there, it was clear this was what I wanted to do for a living. But I knew I had to get a degree."

Richau turned to Estes, who introduced him to the Lake City program. Richau hasn't regretted his decision. "Being a superintendent gives you an incredible sense of self worth," he says.

In 10 years, Richau says he would like to be a superintendent at a resort or private course somewhere north of Florida.

"I don't necessarily want the most money in the world," Richau says. "I'd just want to be doing something I love."

Ross Pudenz, 22, says his passion for golf courses started on a visit to cousins in Hendersonville, N.C. Pudenz, who grew up on a hog farm in Iowa, decided early that farming wasn't his future. Working outdoors, however, appealed to him. His visit to Hendersonville offered him an outlet. That summer, he worked at Crooked Creek GC.

"I was basically weed-eater boy," Pudenz says. "I figured anyone could grow grass, but I found out after working on that golf course how wrong that per-

ception was. It's a lot like working on a farm and provides a great outlet for rural kids like me."

After his experience in Hendersonville, Pudenz pursued his degree in turf management at Iowa State University. His last internship, at Old Island GC in Kingsport, Tenn, provided him with course construction experience and taught him skills he hopes will put him ahead of others in the class of 2000.

"You should look at getting as much

variety in your internships as possible and gain as much different experience as you can," Pudenz says. "The construction internship gave me a lot of respect for what goes into building a golf course."

Pudenz, who wants to work in the Midwest, says he has a goal of making \$25,000 out of school and progressing to between \$40,000 to \$50,000 within 10 years.

He says he also believes the golf industry should start looking at farming communities to recruit workers in today's tight labor market.

An Iowa farm community also produced Andy Thompson. Thompson, 28, lived down the street from Davenport CC in Pleasant Valley, Iowa, and his love for the game led him to work for the course.

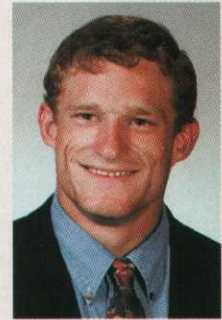
"If I wasn't golfing on the course, I was doing something on it," Thompson says. "It was just a natural for me to get into this business."

Thompson says he worked in the kitchen of the country club at night and mowed lawns during the day before he decided golf course management would be his career. In 1996, he enrolled in a few community college classes before pursuing a degree.

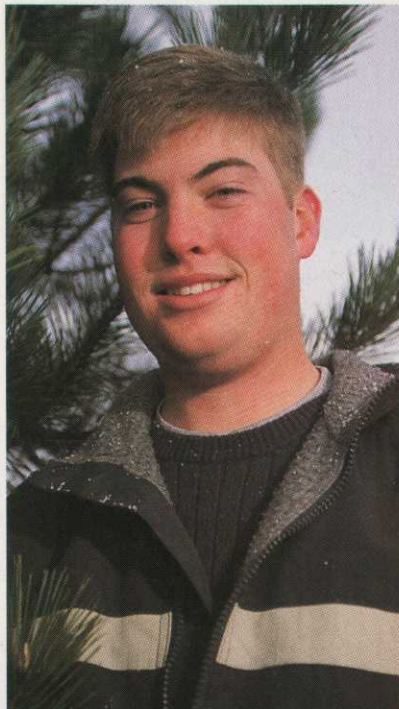
That's when his mentor, Davenport CC superintendent Scott Azinger (who is PGA Tour pro Paul's first cousin), stepped in.

"He said the only school he was going to recommend to me was Penn State University because that's where he graduated from," Thompson says, laughing. "I worked hard and my grades came up. With Scott's help, I got into Penn State's two-year program."

Thompson worked last summer at the Old Elm Club in Highland Park, Ill., a small private club that hosts only 6,000



Ross Pudenz



WILL WALDRON

"I would watch the golf course crews from the kitchen and think how nice it would be to do what they were doing."

KEVIN TANSEY
student

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rounds per year.

Since the club is so small, Thompson says he received personal attention from Edward W. Fischer, the superintendent, and he saw every aspect of golf course maintenance up close.

"I got as much experience in that one internship as I could have gotten in three internships at larger courses," Thompson says. "It was a real eye-opener."

Thompson says he wants a starting salary slightly higher than \$20,000. He ultimately hopes to work on a small course in the country, buy a farm near the course and live a quiet life away from the bustle of the big city.

"You're not going to become Bill Gates in this business," Thompson says. "Your payoff, however, is waking up every day to the sunrise."

Shortly after his life-changing incident, Nachreiner moved to Tucson, Ariz. and found a job with Wally Dow, su-

"You're not going to become Bill Gates in this business. Your payoff, however, is waking up every day to the sunrise."

ANDY THOMPSON
Superintendent of the future

perintendent at Ventana Canyon GC in Tucson, Ariz. Dow, a 1991 graduate of Michigan State, later recommended Nachreiner to the school as a student

and is now on the verge of graduating with a degree in turf management.

Nachreiner says his most valuable internship came this past summer at Oswego Lake CC in Lake Oswego, Ore., where he learned the people management skills he thinks will make him stand out from his peers. "I learned how to smooth over troubles on crews and getting people from different backgrounds to work together," he says.

Nachreiner says his ideal job would find him on Michigan's western coast, at a private club where there's a commitment to excellence — and a budget to match. Nachreiner says he hopes to making \$80,000 in 10 years.

"I'm going to be doing something I love to do," he says. "You can't ask for much more than that." ■

Golfdom will revisit these students every year to examine their progress toward their dreams.

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