

Life Goes On

Golfdom's millennium kids are a year older. Are they a year wiser?

BY FRANK H. ANDORKA JR., ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Last year, they were students on the verge of entering the golf course maintenance industry. They each had their own hopes and dreams about where they would be in 10 years, and they each had their own perception of the industry. But they had two things in common: They wanted to care for golf courses and promote the game they love.

This year, they're veterans with a year of experience. So what lessons have *Golfdom's* Y2K kids learned? We talked with them again to find out:

John Nachreiner

"The weirdest thing for me was becoming a full-time worker this year instead of being a seasonal one," says Nachreiner, assistant superintendent at Egypt Valley CC in Grand Rapids, Mich. "When you're a student, you gear up in the fall to start classes and take tests. This year, there was nothing like that to prepare for, other than getting the course ready for winter."

Nachreiner, who decided to enter the profession after being struck by the natural beauty surrounding him on a golf course in Bozeman, Mont., graduated from Michigan State University. He found a job within a couple of weeks. He joined Egypt Valley because it has regularly hosted a Senior PGA Tour event since 1986.

"The tournament experience was amazing," Nachreiner says. "Every day was a new challenge, and you learned more during tournament time than at almost any other time."

Nachreiner had to balance individual problems — setting up spectator areas, putting together skyboxes and helping the television crews set up, to name a few — with the agronomic issues of preparing for a tournament, such as green speeds and

fairway height. He also learned lessons about water management that he didn't learn at Michigan State.

"I discovered that you can push grass further than I ever thought," Nachreiner says. "At first I panicked, but I quickly learned that grass could go without water for a few days [and not suffer] long-term damage."

He's excited about this new chapter of his life, which he plans to make longer than the chapters he wrote as a student.

"When you're in school, you write short chapters," Nachreiner says. "Work ends, school starts, school ends and work starts again. All of that changes once you get your first job. This is the start of longer chapters in my life, and I'm looking forward to writing them."

Kevin Tansey

When *Golfdom* talked to Tansey last year, he wanted to return to the Black Course at Bethpage State Park in Farmingdale, N.Y., where he had interned the previous summer. The Black Course hosts the 2002 U.S. Open, and Tansey wants Major experience. He briefly considered a few jobs in Virginia, but the lure of the Open was too strong. So when he was offered a full-time position at the Black Course, Tansey jumped at the chance.

"I'm planning to stay here throughout at least 2002," Tansey says. "It's a good place, the money is good, and I like Long Island (N.Y.). I may want to stay in the area even if I move on from this course."

Tansey had a busy summer. After graduating from State University of New York at Cobleskill (N.Y.), he put in a spring and summer at hallowed Augusta National, where he was one of 55 crew members. When asked how much money they spend on keeping Augusta in pristine condition, Tansey quiets down.



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ASSISTANT SUPERINTENDENT
EGYPT VALLEY CC
GRAND RAPIDS, MICH.

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"We're not allowed to talk about those things," Tansey says secretively. "I had to sign an agreement that I wouldn't reveal anything for 10 years. All I will say is that it shows how much you can do with a lot of money."

When his work at Augusta was done, Tansey returned to the Black Course as one of two assistant superintendents. He

says he's grateful to head superintendent Craig Currier (who oversees all of Bethpage State Park's courses) and Garret Boddington, superintendent of the Black Course, for having him back. Equally important, he married wife Christine in October. She is a teacher and tolerates Kevin's long hours well.

"Summer was my busiest time and it was her slowest time,

so that took a little getting used to," Tansey says. "But I'm lucky. I've heard stories from other superintendents who don't have spouses as understanding as mine."

Steve Richau

Life's lessons are often learned the hard way, and Richau has a lesson that he would teach all students before they leave school: Research the area you're planning to move to before you take a job.

Richau graduated from Lake City Community College in Lake City, Fla., and took a job at Bull Run CC in Haymarket, Va. He, his wife, Kim, and his now 9-month-old daughter Sadie started looking for places to live in the area. They quickly realized they couldn't afford to live in the Fairfax County/Washington D.C. area.

"It was beautiful course and the people were great, but it was completely unworkable from a personal standpoint," Richau says. "Kim and Sadie were living two hours away (in Staunton, Va.), and I was living near the course. The commutes to see each other were killing us. We knew it couldn't go on."

So Richau moved more than two hours south to work at Stoneycreek at Wintergreen Resort in Wintergreen, Va., as

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"Kim and Sadie were living two hours away (in Staunton, Va.) and I was living near the course. The commutes to see each other were killing us. We knew it couldn't go on!"

**STEVE RICHAU, SPRAY TECHNICIAN/
SECOND ASSISTANT SUPERINTENDENT
STONEYCREEK AT WINTERGREEN WINTERGREEN, VA.**



his short tenure at Bull Run.

"It was not an easy decision to leave Bull Run after only three months, but you have to do what's in your family's best interests," Richau says. "It caused me a lot of sleepless nights, but I know that I made the right decision."

Richau says he chose Virginia because he wants to

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work in the transition zone. Other superintendents told him that if he could grow grass there, he could grow grass anywhere. He doesn't know if he'll stay in Virginia forever, but he's enjoying himself now.

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"Students shouldn't be afraid to take risks," Richau says. "You may go through hard times at first, but they will be worth it in the end."

He says Stoneycreek's director of golf, Fred Biggers, and superintendent, Craig Taylor, were understanding about

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Ross Pudenz

It's not heaven — it's Eau Claire, Wis. But for Ross Pudenz, that may amount to the same thing.

"Everything I was hoping for happened," Pudenz says. "I couldn't have had things work out more perfectly if I'd scripted it myself. I was completely comfortable from the beginning."

Pudenz graduated from Iowa State University and took a job as an assistant superintendent at Mill Run GC in Eau Claire, a 36-hole facility (18 holes were added this summer after Pudenz joined the staff). He says the owners hope to have the new 18 holes — called Wild Ridge — listed as part of *Golf Digest's* new top 10 new upscale public courses in 2001. Pudenz says he learned a great deal partaking in the construction process.

"It was challenging, but they gave me as much responsibility as I could handle," he says. "They would tell me what they wanted done. Then I went out and did it."

Pudenz says he's planning on leaving Mill Run soon because he believes he's



ready to take on the challenges of being a superintendent. His current superintendent, Barry Hines, knows he's looking and is helping him. "I want to leave Mill Run on good terms, and it appears that I will be able to do that," Pudenz says.

Pudenz says he would advise students entering the profession to pace themselves: It's a different world on a real golf course than it is in the classroom.

"The season is long, and you have to make sure you're putting out the same effort at the end of the season as you are in the beginning," Pudenz says. "You don't want to burn out, so just make sure you take it as it comes. Work hard, but it's not necessary to kill yourself."

Andy Thompson

We tried to track down Andy Thompson, the Penn State University student we profiled last year, but to no avail. Penn State's crack alumni staff listed him as working at Davenport CC in Davenport, Iowa, but a phone call to the course revealed that Thompson had left there for Madison, Wis. Attempts to find him there also failed.

Andy, call your mothers at *Golfdom* — we miss you. ■

Editor's note: Golfdom will revisit these students periodically to examine their progress in the industry.

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