



How the

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Half
Lives*

Wives say it takes an understanding, independent and resilient woman to be married to a superintendent

BY LARRY AYLWARD, EDITOR

***Editor's note:** Attention superintendents and husbands — this article is as much for your wives or wives-to-be as it is for you. Take it home and make sure they read it. They'll be able to empathize with the women quoted in the article. As for you superintendents and husbands, you'll probably learn something, too — although in a roundabout way.*

The more she learned about the profession's demands, the more Megan Dickerson grew worried about wedding a golf course superintendent. Was she engaged to a guy who would be married to his job instead of her?

"Superintendents put their heart and souls into their golf courses," Dickerson says. "It's a very demanding job."

But in the back of her mind, the 23-year-old Dickerson couldn't help but wonder if her future husband, Tom Mooney, would put his heart and soul into their marriage. Dickerson knew that Mooney had golf course maintenance in his blood. She knew that her fiancée, who will graduate with a degree in turfgrass management from Michigan State University next spring, would give him all to be successful in his career for years to come.

But while impressed with Mooney's passion for his profession, Dickerson also realized that his dedication to his job could be detrimental to their marriage. That's because in the three years she has known Mooney, Dickerson discovered that other superintendents' dedication to their jobs harmed *their* marriages.

"One day I was thinking that all of the superintendents I've met are divorced," Dickerson says. "I asked myself, 'What am I getting myself into?'"

But when Dickerson moved to Tucson, Ariz., with Mooney to be with him while he interns this summer at the Loews Ventana



Canyon Resort, she met a woman who has been married — happily — to a superintendent for seven years. Dickerson's boss at the Tucson apartment complex where she works as a leasing agent is Christa Sims, wife of Jim Sims, the superintendent of Del Lago GC in Tucson. Sims told Dickerson what it's like to be married (with children) to a superintendent.

What Sims told Dickerson — and what other superintendents' wives say — is that it takes a woman with certain characteristics to be married happily to a superintendent. The other half in superintendents' marriages says it takes a woman who's independent, understanding, patient and resilient. They say it takes a woman who wants to see her husband succeed in his career — no matter how demanding — and share in his rewards. They also say it takes a woman who knows when to set her husband straight when he's paying more heed to his job than to his marriage and family.

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Megan Dickerson (left) credits Christa Sims for helping her understand what life will be like being married to a superintendent.

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"Now I know what I'm getting myself into," Dickerson says, noting her talk with Sims helped enlighten her to what life will be like when she's married to a superintendent.

It's frustrating, but . . .

Life isn't always easy for women married to superintendents. For some women, life might be especially difficult if they have children and are married to superintendents whose careers are also their hobbies.

Those superintendents are often involved in extracurricular activities, such as their local associations and consulting, in addition to their jobs of tending turf. The bottom line is that they're not at home much to pitch in around the house, prepare meals and help their wives raise their kids.

While those on-the-go superintendents are in the minority, other superintendents can relate to their bustling agendas, especially during the playing season. So *their* wives can count on them not being available to attend family functions, such as picnics, family reunions and

even vacations because they have to baby-sit their golf courses night and day.

Lacy Kastler plans to attend family get-togethers this summer with her son, 12-year-old Cody, but not with her husband, Tom, who's superintendent of the Club at Runaway Bay in Runaway Bay, Texas. "He's missed a lot of family functions because he couldn't leave the course," Lacy says.

Janae Batchelor is already resigned to the fact that her husband Jason, assistant superintendent of Montour Heights CC near Pittsburgh, will miss this summer's family vacation to the Outer Banks in North Carolina. "I just have to leave him behind," she says.

Batchelor and Kastler admit it's frustrating, but they understand why their husbands must stay behind. Of course, both realize they'll see more of their husbands (and maybe even take vacation) after the golf season.

Understanding and communicating

Understanding the responsibilities of their husbands' profession is vital to successful marriages, wives say. When a superintendent must rush to the course to help repair a broken-down irrigation pump on his day off, his wife must grin and bear the consequences of not getting to spend the afternoon with him.

"You just have to be content with being alone sometimes," says Batchelor, who has her own career as a high-school guidance counselor.

Sue Brown has been married to a superintendent for 24 years. She says she and her husband Tom, certified superintendent of White Manor CC in West Chester, Pa., have a solid marriage, partly because she understands the demands that come with being a superintendent.

When their 20-year-old and 17-year-old boys were younger, Brown says they rarely saw their father in the summer. She sometimes



"His is different from a nine-to-five job, but you have to accept that he's not going to be there all the time and you do. It has worked out fine for us." – SUE BROWN, WIFE OF SUPERINTENDENT TOM BROWN

took the boys to the golf course so they could see him.

"His is different from a nine-to-five job, but you have to accept that he's not going to be there all the time — and you do," Brown says. "It has worked out fine for us."

In May, Batchelor gave birth to a daughter, Abigail. Of course she would like to have Jason around the house more this summer, but she understands that he must work 12 straight days before he gets a day off.

"It's what he has to do," Janae says. "So complaining, moaning and being miserable isn't going to help."

Superintendents' wives say strong communication is the most important component in a successful marriage.

"You have to be able to communicate with one another," says Kim Luccini, married nearly five years to Brian Luccini, superintendent of Laurel Lane GC in West Kingston, R.I. "You have to understand what a superintendent's job is all about."

Wives also can't be afraid to communicate their true feelings, Batchelor says. "I told Jason



from the beginning that I wasn't moving to Arizona, California, Florida or any place like that," she adds. "We decided it was more important to stay in the Pittsburgh area near our families."

Kastler is not afraid to remind her husband that he's paying too much attention

Janae Batchelor and with husband Jason and daughter Abigail. "I don't think I'll get tired of putting up with his job," Janae says.

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to his course and not enough attention to his family.

"If he misses a few of Cody's baseball games, all I have to say is, 'Tom, you're forgetting your priorities.' Then he gets right back on track."

Independence – a must

For obvious reasons, wives say a woman must be independent to marry a superintendent.

"It takes a woman who doesn't need a lot of attention," says the 35-year-old Sims. "I don't think I'd be married to Jim if I needed a lot of attention."

Sims says her independence is reflected in her full-time job as the property manager of the Tucson apartment complex where she and Dickerson work. Sims wanted a full-time job because she didn't want to be a housewife. "If I didn't have a job, I don't think I'd have as much respect from Jim to have shared responsibilities [with the kids and the house]," she says.

Brown, who was a stay-at-home mom while

her two boys grew up, has great memories of the time spent with them. She became accustomed to doing things with them in the summer without her husband, such as fishing. There were times she missed Tom, but she was happy because she enjoyed being with the kids.

"I'm very independent," Brown says. "I was happy I didn't have to work and could be with the kids. That meant more to me."

Luccini says women need to be independent, no matter whom they're married to. "You need to do your own thing and have your own interests," she adds.

But Luccini admits there are times when she gets lonely in the summer. She and Brian recently agreed to set aside an afternoon a week so they can spend time together with their 1-year-old daughter, Christina. "It's about making sure we stay connected," she says.

While it's important to be independent, superintendents' wives agree it's comforting to lean on each other for advice.

"One of my good friends is the wife of a superintendent," Luccini says. "It helps [to talk to each other]. We always joke that we're golf widows during the summer. It's like a support group."

Getting involved

The past few years, Brown has worked in the office at the White Manor CC. She sees her husband every day and has a great working relationship with him. She says the job has helped her even better understand what her husband does for a living.

Luccini also formerly worked for two years at her husband's course. Even though she worked in Laurel Lane GC's pro shop, she says the experience made her realize that her husband's job encompasses many sectors.

"I realized his job is not just taking care of the grass," Luccini says. "He also faces the pressure of dealing with golfers' [demands]."



"You have to be able to communicate with each other. You have to understand what a superintendent's job is all about."

– KAREN LUCCINI, WITH HER DAUGHTER CHRISTINA

There's a lot of work that goes into keeping a golf course in nice condition."

Kastler often accompanies her husband on evening rides around the course. Tom takes time to explain potential problems related to the turf.

"Getting involved is a good thing," Lacy says. "I know what Tom is up against every day. I understand his job better and why he has to dash out at 11 p.m. some nights if there are problems."

Dickerson has taken an interest in golf course maintenance since she began dating Mooney. "I understand the love he has for his job," she says.

The other half also says it's good to be married to men who enjoy their jobs. Superintendents, who are known to love their work, may be physically tired and mentally exhausted after working 10 straight days, but they don't come home complaining about work.

Batchelor says Jason never complains about his job and rarely comes home grumpy. Lucini says Brian comes home from work happy, which makes her happy.

Tough people

Although there are no statistics to verify it, wives have heard there's a high divorce rate among superintendents. But it doesn't scare them.

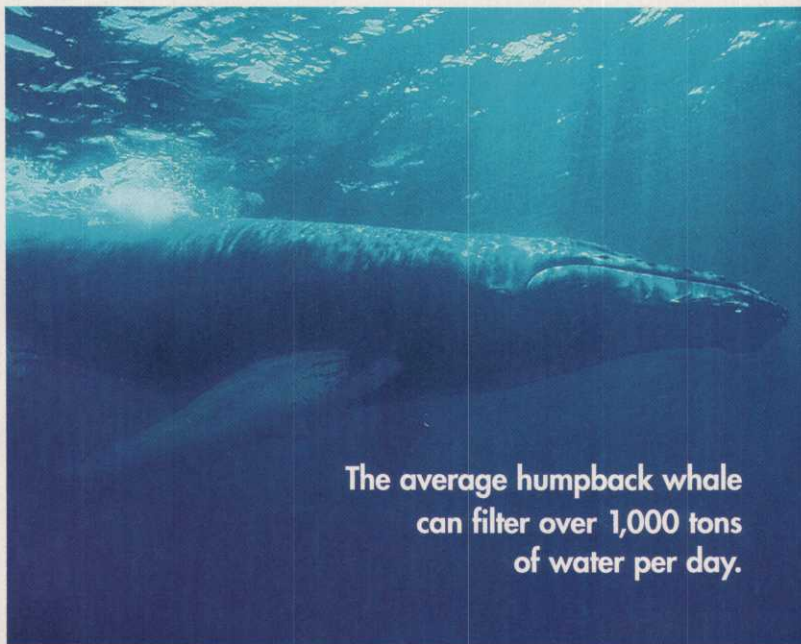
"Jason isn't going anywhere, and neither am I," Batchelor says. "I don't think I'll get tired of putting up with his job."

Dickerson, who will wed Mooney next year, realizes that being married to a superintendent will be a challenge, but she's confident their marriage will be a happy one. Taking advice from Sims, Dickerson says it's simply matter of getting their priorities in order to make it work.

"I live by the motto: Tough times don't last; tough people do," Dickerson says. "Whatever I commit to, I always give 110 percent. It will be the same with our marriage. I love this superintendent and all that comes with him." ■

Aylward, the author of this story, can be reached at lalward@advanstar.com

Jennifer Mongeluzo is a woman in a man's world, but she plans to make her mark as a superintendent. See page 32.



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