

Twosomes in Turf

Married couples make careers out of golf course maintenance

BY PETER BLAIS

When the grass starts dying in central Pennsylvania, Wanda Fry doesn't just hear about it from her husband Jeff, the long-time certified superintendent at Lebanon CC. "I hear about it from 200 superintendents," says the executive secretary of the Central Pennsylvania GCSA.

The Frys are one of at least a half-dozen husband-and-wife teams with one spouse serving as a superintendent and the other as the chief administrator of a regional superintendents association. All agree that their marriages are positive situations, and they share their turf knowledge to help each other in their jobs. Here's a look at four married couples that fit the bill.

WANDA AND JEFFREY FRY

Jeffrey has been a superintendent for 16 years and was recently promoted to general manager at Lebanon CC. The two married 13 years ago, and Wanda became executive secretary of the Central Pennsylvania GCSA two years later. In fact, the last three executive secretaries have been spouses of superintendents. Wanda worked in the mental health field until the couple had children.

"After being in the field I was in, you come to realize the importance of family," she says. "I work out of my home now, which is across the street from the golf course. The number of hours per week varies with the time of year. I edit the newsletter, manage the database, handle the



Jeffrey and Wanda Fry have a greater understanding for the pressures they both face because they're in the same field.

bills, assist the treasurer with the monthly statements and field all the phone calls."

The two better appreciate each other's job responsibilities because they're in the same field. "He understands what I go through waiting for the guys to send in newsletter articles because he knows how superintendents are," Wanda says. "And I appreciate how busy superintendents are because I see his schedule.

"Many wives don't understand or appreciate the field unless they've had an opportunity like this," she adds. "Superintendents work a lot of hours. And it's not always appreciated. Nothing is ever right. The greens aren't fast enough, or the rough is too high."

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TENIA AND BUCK WORKMAN

Buck is certified superintendent at Catechee GC in Hartwell, Ga. He has been a superintendent for the past 25 years, a member of the Georgia GCSA board of directors for 12 years and the association's immediate past president. Tenia took over as executive director of the 850-member GGCSA last spring, replacing Karen White. White moved to Texas, where husband Charles, also a former superintendent while she was GGCSA executive director, accepted a position as an agronomist for the USGA Green Section's Mid-Continent Region.

"With my husband being in the golf business for so long and our 15-year-old son John [a single-digit handicapper] being an avid golfer, this just felt like a perfect fit," Tenia says.

The GGCSA office is in downtown Hartwell, a town of roughly 4,200, located in northeast Georgia. Tenia's responsibilities run the gamut from public relations to financial administration, overseeing monthly meetings, conducting the association's educational seminars and golf tournaments, and working with the Allied Golf Group (AGG). AGG is a joint effort involving the Georgia PGA, Georgia State Golf Association, Club Managers Association and GGCSA that was formed to stay abreast of the uncertain water situation brought on by a drought that's plagued the state in recent years.

"We've been very busy contacting our legis-

lators and letting them know that superintendents are the good guys and are working hard to help out with the water situation," she says.

In fact, Buck has been actively involved in efforts to move courses toward the use of effluent since Catechee, one of just 41 Audubon International Signature courses worldwide, was built as a way for the town to dispose of its treated wastewater.

Buck has been a major help to her in her first year on the job.

"If I have a question about something in a magazine article, I can ask him," Tenia says. "He gives me information about how the association has spent its research dollars in the past, and ideas about how to approach universities and technical schools regarding what we'd like to do in the future."

White, who was GGCSA executive director for 12 1/2 years before moving to Texas and is now her husband's administrative assistant with the USGA, said of their working relationship: "We could relate easily to each other. It was extremely helpful because we knew many of the same people, traveled in the same circles and both understood the turfgrass industry."

LORI AND TOM RUSSELL

Lori has been executive director of both the Peaks and Prairies GCSA (encompassing primarily Montana and Wyoming) and Idaho GCSA for nearly 10 years. Husband Tom has been a superintendent for two decades and is certified superintendent at Marias Valley Golf and CC in Shelby, Mont., located 30 miles from the Canadian border.

"One of the biggest advantages [for Tom] is that I'm aware of the time and commitment his job takes," says Lori, who credits that understanding to her dealings with many superintendents.

She also benefits from his knowledge.

"If I'm reading or writing about a maintenance subject I don't fully understand or diseases that relate to our area, I can turn to him for help," Lori says. "He helps find subjects to feature in the newsletter. I'm on our associations' education committees, so if I run across something I'll ask him if it is pertinent to our area. He has saved me from some embarrassing moments."

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TENIA WORKMAN
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, GGCSA



Tenia and Buck Workman took over from another dynamic duo where both spouses worked in turf – Karen and Charles White.



Lori and Tom Russell leave their work at the office and carve out family time in the evenings.

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For some couples, golf seemingly dominates their lives 24 hours a day. Others make an effort to leave it at the office.

"Tom discusses work very little at home and focuses on the family," Lori says. "He's very supportive of what I do and my time commitment."

Lori estimates she averages 45 hours a week on her job, a figure that can grow to 60 to 70 hours during certain times of the year.

"My slowest times are from mid-June to mid-August and a couple weeks in December," she says. "My busiest times are mid-August through mid-December, and January through May. My busiest times are when he is quietest. So we can work together to pick up the family piece. Having my office in the home helps. We always take time at the end of the day for our [three] children."

KRISTEN AND JOE LIEBSCH

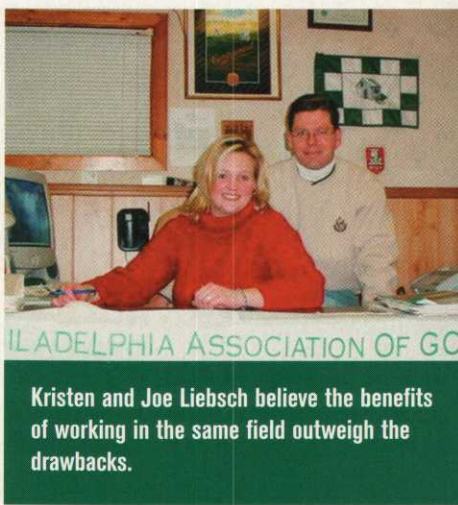
Kristen is executive secretary of the Philadelphia Association of GCSA. Joe has been superintendent at Kennett Square G&CC near Wilmington, Del., for the past six years.

Kristen began editing the newsletter at Joe's club several years ago. Eventually, she took on the association's newsletter. Impressed with her work, then association President Don Brown asked her to become executive secretary.

"Joe and I keep each other informed more than anything else," Kristen says. "I might find out where there is a job opening or who has moved where. Professionally, the only thing I do for him is offer advice. He keeps me in touch with people, their interests and needs."

Much of her practical knowledge and empathy for those in the profession, she says, comes from being married to a superintendent. "You have to see the expression on his face when he comes home and says, '[The greens] have anthracnose.' You actually develop an emotional attachment to something called anthracnose."

Kristen agrees that having two spouses in the golf industry can occasionally be overwhelming. "The other night, Joe got home from a grounds committee meeting at 10 p.m. I was stuffing envelopes for the association. He started to say something about the meeting, took one look at my face and said, 'I'll tell you later.'"



Kristen and Joe Liebsch believe the benefits of working in the same field outweigh the drawbacks.

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EXECUTIVE SECRETARY,
GCSA, PHILADELPHIA

But both believe the benefits far outweigh the drawbacks. "Having the office in our house helps me be a full-time mom," says Kristen, who is devoted to her two children, one a special-needs student.

"It's nice to work together," Joe agrees. "Few husbands and wives get that opportunity. When superintendents and their spouses have two separate professions, I'm sure it makes for some awkward situations. I'm at the golf course for long hours. Then I come home and we stuff envelopes together. There's always something to talk about. It's very positive." ■

Blais is a free-lance writer from North Yarmouth, Maine.