

When I spoke with Jim Jennings late last year, he was looking for work in golf course maintenance. The 47-year-old former steelworker was about to graduate from college with a two-year degree in turf management and was embarking on a new career.

At the time, Jennings was as worried as any new graduate about finding a job. "Sometimes I wake up in the middle of the night and wonder if there are any jobs out there," Jennings said.

It took him a few months, but Jennings found a job on the golf course maintenance crew at Shady Hollow Country Club in Massillon, Ohio. He says things have been going well for him there.

He did receive one big scare, however. In September, the course's superintendent and the man who hired Jennings announced to the crew that he was let go from the course. When Jennings heard the news, he wondered if he and other members of the course's core staff would also be let go. His troubled mind took him back to the steel mill, where he experienced a similar scenario so many times before.

Jennings worked in the unstable steel industry for nearly 25 years, where layoffs are as ordinary as rows of bungalow homes in blue-collar neighborhoods. All told, Jennings was laid off five times during his steel-industry career. He was called back to work four times. But when the mill at which he was employed announced it was closing for good in October 2002 and moving its machinery to China, Jennings knew there was no chance of being recalled a fifth time.

When Jennings joined Shady Hollow in the spring, he figured he wouldn't have to worry about getting laid off from the 18-hole private course. But when the course's superintendent walked in the lunch room and told of his fate that day, the same sick and sinking feeling formed in Jennings' gut as when the foreman at the steel mill announced to crew members that they would be soon out of work.

"It was like, oh man, here we go again," Jennings says.

While Jennings was left worrying for several weeks about his fate, he learned recently that he and the others would not be let go. With the hol-

He's Just Looking for Steady Work

BY LARRY AYLWARD



EX-STEELWORKER

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idays looming, not to mention a mortgage and a family to feed, Jennings was relieved.

Mindful of his unpredictable employment in the steel industry and to take control of his fate, Jennings considered another livelihood back in the early 1990s. In 1992 he enrolled at The Ohio State University's Agricultural Technical Institute to study turfgrass management. When he wasn't working, he went to school. Hence, it took him 11 years to get a two-year degree.

While looking for work in the golf industry last year, Jennings said he wasn't searching for a dream job. He just wanted to learn the business and gain experience. "I just need a chance to prove myself," he said at the time. "I hope I'm in the right place at the right time."

More than anything, Jennings just wanted something stable. He deserves that after what he's been through. There should be a law that says: "People that want to work and like to work should be afforded the chance to work without constantly worrying that work be taken away from them."

Regarding his career employment, Jennings has joked that he won a free trip on a cruise ship — but the ship was the Titanic. Hopefully, however, Jennings' ship has come in in the form of Shady Hollow Country Club, and it will stay put for a while.

"This place is beautiful," Jennings says of the course. "It has huge white oak trees. It's really pretty out here."

The physical work, from mowing greens to cutting cups, is tough on his bones, Jennings admits. But he likes the tough work, and says he sleeps well at night.

Hopefully, Jennings' mind can rest well, too. Here's to him not having to worry about not having a job to go to upon rising in the morning.

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