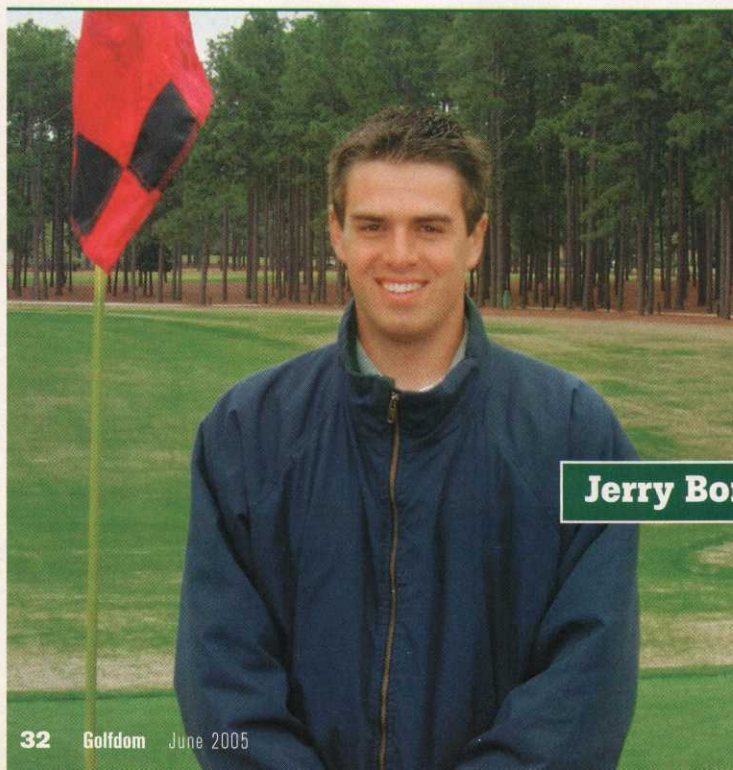


The Apprentices

For three turf students, an internship at the site of this year's U.S. Open . . . well . . . it just doesn't get much better than that

STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHS BY LARRY AYLWARD, EDITOR IN CHIEF



Jerry Bonner

They've been picking up pine cones, plucking *Poa annua* from bentgrass greens and patching pot holes on cart paths. Some of the tasks the golf course maintenance

interns have been performing are as boring as plain pizza. But that's OK — they get to perform the mundane chores on one of the most celebrated golf courses in the country as it prepares for one of the year's most thrilling sporting events.

So the three interns — Jerry Bonner, Ian Daniels and Bennett Croy — don't complain about the work. They realize how fortunate they are to have landed the internships at Pinehurst (N.C.) Resort's No. 2 course the year it's hosting the U.S. Open Championship. Heck, they would pick up pine cones with their teeth if it meant doing it at Pinehurst this year.



Ian Daniels

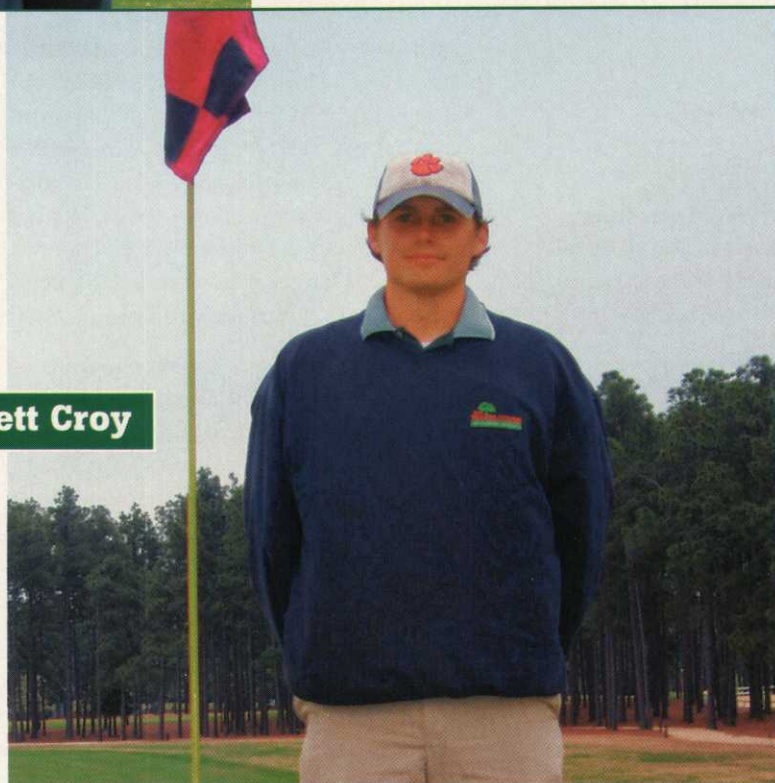
Daniels and Croy, who began their internships in January and will work through August, are seniors at Clemson University in South Carolina. Bonner is a senior at the University of Rhode Island.

It's safe to say that an internship at Pinehurst No. 2 in the year the course hosts the country's national golf championship is . . . well . . . it just doesn't get much better for a turf student. It's akin to a journalism student interning at the *Wall Street Journal* or a science student spending time at the Smithsonian Institute.

But at Pinehurst No. 2, Bonner, Daniels and Croy are spending more time than usual completing their internships. They each took off an entire semester of school to work at Pinehurst. The three, who've worked during the summers in previous internships, say it's unusual for them to take this much time off and delay their graduation times in the process.

But to truly experience the U.S. Open in its entirety, Bonner, Daniels and Croy agree they needed to spend more time at Pinehurst than the few months allotted for a usual summer internship. "You want to be here to see the developments that lead up to the tournament," says the 22-year-old Bonner, who arrived at Pinehurst in March and will stay through mid-July. "You wouldn't want to get here at the end of May when there are only three weeks to go until the tournament."

Daniels, who grew up near Ithaca, N.Y., could have finished school this spring and grad-



Bennett Croy

uated. But he wanted to come to Pinehurst to experience the U.S. Open.

"You need to set your standards high and go after them," says the 22-year-old, noting that he plans to finish his degree in the fall.

The three applied for their posts more than a year ago. Croy and Daniels didn't know each other at Clemson and first met at the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America (GCSAA) Conference and Show last year in San Diego. Croy told Daniels he had ap-

Continued on page 34

Continued from page 33

plied for an internship at Pinehurst, and he advised his fellow student to do the same.

Paul Jett, Pinehurst No. 2's certified superintendent, says he chose the interns on a first-come basis. Jett, a Clemson graduate, completed two internships at South Carolina golf courses while he was a student. While he didn't get to participate in a U.S. Open, Jett says the internships provided solid experience.

"The biggest thing [an internship] gives you is the idea of what it's like to work in the golf maintenance industry," Jett says. "You find out what the hours are, and you find out how hard you have to work at what you're doing. It's a great time to decide if it's what you want to do for the rest of your life."

(Incidentally, there's no "Clemson connection" between Pinehurst and Clemson. Jett says Croy and Daniels are the third and fourth students he's hired as interns in 10 years. Daniels says he didn't know Jett was a Clemson graduate "until I got here and somebody told me.")

Throughout their college careers, Bonner, Daniels and Croy have interned at different-level courses to gain extensive experience. Croy,

▼ Bennett Croy hopes to find a job in his hometown of Boise, Idaho, after graduation.



who grew up in Boise, Idaho, previously interned at a public course with a medium-range green fee. Then it was on to a high-end private club. And then came Pinehurst, which provides him with two different experiences simultaneously — resort and high-end public.

Jett says he wants the interns, who earn more than \$8 an hour, to learn more than how to grow grass. Jett points out that the golf course maintenance business these days is more about managing people than tending turf. That said, Jett would rather interns learn more about people skills.

"They've got plenty of time to figure out how to grow grass," Jett says. "It's important they learn now to interact between themselves, other crew members and their bosses."

Learning management skills are vital to the profession, says Jett, adding that such skills were the most difficult thing for him to learn early in his career as a superintendent.

"They are the things you don't realize you need until you're already out in the work force, and you've been thrown into a situation of managing people and you don't know how," he says.

Croy has watched Jett in his dealings with myriad people, especially in the few months leading up to the U.S. Open. He realizes that Jett's job is as much about diplomacy as it is about agronomics.

"It's interesting to see what a superintendent at a place like this has to do different than someplace else," Croy says. "He has to spend a lot of time answering to other people."

There are reporters for Jett to speak with and tournament details to finalize. "It's a lot of extra work for him," Croy says.

Even though Jett has been extra busy, Croy says he's been very helpful.

"If you ever ask him a question, he's excited to answer it," Croy says. "He always makes sure you have what you need."

Because of Jett's extra work, he has had less time to spend with the interns than he'd like. So Jett has left it to his assistant, Matt Boyce, to take the interns under his wing. With the arrival of spring and the bloom of the courses' bermudagrass fairways and bentgrass greens, Boyce was able to assign the interns some more exciting duties, such as mowing greens.

Even though some of the work has been

Continued on page 36

Continued from page 34

mindless to a point, the interns say they've been kept fresh because they haven't been doing the same details day after day. And even if a job might have seemed boring at first, the interns might have found it rather exciting once they started doing it.

A prime example is when the interns help raise all of the irrigation heads around the greens. Daniels says it seemed like an undesirable job at the time, but it was a good learning experience.

"I didn't have much experience with irrigation work before," he adds. "So I was able to learn some things, like the inner workings of an irrigation head."

Brad Kocher, senior vice president of golf and golf course management at Pinehurst, has also spent some quality time with the interns. In hour-long skull sessions, Kocher taught them various business and management topics associated with the industry, such as how to devise a budget and the ins and outs of the hiring process.

Says Jett, "You want to give them as much exposure to everything possible during the time they're here."

So how impressive will the interns' resumes appear with "Pinehurst No. 2" and "U.S. Open" listed on them?

"It's a big resume booster," Bonner says. "A lot of [superintendents] at courses will look at it and say, 'This kid knows what a golf course should look like for a big event. Maybe he can bring something to the table at my golf course.'"

While Daniels knows his resume will look impressive, he also realizes his experience at Pinehurst will not automatically transform him into an overnight sensation in the business.

"You're only as good as what you know," he says matter-of-factly.

If Jett were looking to hire someone out of college, he says he wouldn't weigh that person's worth on whether he interned at Pinehurst or another great classic golf course.

"There are a lot of great places to go and do summer internships that probably nobody has ever heard of," Jett says. "You don't have to be at Pinehurst No. 2 or a Wingfoot Country Club."

What can an internship at Pinehurst No. 2 do for your career? For Thomas Collins, it helped him land a job at ... Pinehurst No. 2. The 23-year-old Ohio native interned at the course in the summer of 2002 and returned in early 2004 to work full-time on Jett's crew.

"It was a great learning experience for me," Collins says of his internship. "That's one of the reasons I came back."

Scott Nuzum's internship at Pinehurst ended about a year ago. But the 37-year-old, who graduated from Sandhills Community College with a two-year degree in turfgrass

Continued on page 38

Better Days

Jett will enjoy this year's U.S. Open more than the last

By Larry Aylward, Editor in Chief

More than 20 million people wear the yellow rubber bracelets embedded with the word "Livestrong." One of those people is Paul Jett, certified superintendent of Pinehurst No. 2.

Most people purchased the bracelets because they knew the money they spent on them went to the Lance Armstrong Foundation to support cancer research. That includes Jett.

But Jett, whose course hosts the U.S. Open Championship later this month, also wears the bracelet for another reason. Like Armstrong, Jett is a cancer survivor, having endured the trauma of testicular cancer six years ago.

At the time Jett was battling the disease, which usually strikes men between the ages of 18 and 35, he was readying Pinehurst for the 1999 U.S. Open. Jett was diagnosed with the cancer three months before the start of tournament. He finished radiation treatments three weeks before it began. To say it was a challenging time for Jett would be an understatement.

But Jett says that dealing with the pressure that comes with readying a course for the U.S. Open helped distract him from dealing with the duress brought on by the cancer.

"When I was on the golf course, I wasn't thinking about the cancer," he says.

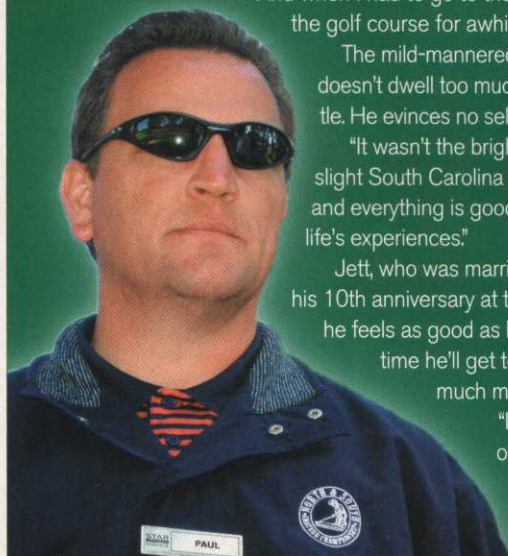
"And when I had to go to the doctor, my mind was off the golf course for awhile."

The mild-mannered Jett, who turns 41 in July, doesn't dwell too much on that time and his battle. He evinces no self-pity.

"It wasn't the brightest time," Jett says in his slight South Carolina drawl, "but it all worked out and everything is good now. I just chalk it up to life's experiences."

Jett, who was married in April and celebrates his 10th anniversary at the course next month, says he feels as good as he's felt in a long time. This time he'll get to enjoy the U.S. Open much more.

"I'm thrilled to death that I'll only have one thing to worry about — the golf tournament," he says.



The Apprentices



▲ Jerry Bonner (right) and Ian Daniels agree that some of their duties have been mundane, but they don't complain.

Continued from page 36

science, asked Jett if he could stay on the crew through the U.S. Open.

Nuzum, who decided to pursue the golf course maintenance field after losing his job in the furniture industry a few years ago, says being part of the U.S. Open is bound to boost his career.

"This is probably one of the biggest things I've ever been a part of in my life," says Nuzum, who spent six years in the Navy and was part of Operation Desert Storm. "It's a great experience for anybody. I couldn't be in a better place."

Waiting for the U.S. Open to arrive hasn't been easy for the interns. They've watched Pinehurst No. 2 transform from a golf course into an amazing spectacle of a sporting event, what with rows of corporate chalets and massive grandstands. They're as charged up about the tournament as the players who will play in it.

"I can't wait," Bonner says excitedly.

"I expect it's going to be crazy," Croy adds.

Sitting in Jett's office on a recent cool and cloudy spring day, the interns discuss their futures after Pinehurst and graduation. The tall, dark-haired Bonner says he'd like to get a

second assistant's position at a high-end course after graduation. Croy, who sported a grungy Clemson cap tucked tightly over his forehead, plans to look for a job back in Boise, where his fiancé lives. The sandy-haired Daniels, dressed in a Clemson pullover, wants to work at a private country club.

Over time, the interns have become more than just co-workers. They're friends. And as 20-something friends tend to be, the interns like to kid each other. They even have nicknames: Croy and Daniels are known as "Laverne and Shirley," and Bonner is "The Big Ragu."

After working so hard to get the course ready for the U.S. Open, one might think the interns will be glad when the tournament ends and the circus leaves town.

"But it's just the opposite," Croy says softly, hinting that he wishes he could start the process over again.

"I imagine that will be the depressing part," Bonner says flatly, when asked how he'll feel when it's over.

Yeah, but the grand memories of what the interns will have experienced at Pinehurst No. 2 will always remain.

Even picking up the pine cones. ■