

Madden Chose Love

AND COLORADO SUPERINTENDENT HAS NO REGRETS

By Anthony Pioppi

John Madden was in the fast lane on his way to becoming a head superintendent at one of Westchester County's finest private golf courses. Then he gave it all up for the woman who would become his wife.

Oh, the things we do for love.

Madden elected to follow his fiancé west, back to her hometown of Boulder, Colo., so she could take a nursing position at Children's Hospital in Denver where she was once a patient.

For him that meant taking a couple of giant steps backward on the career path. But Madden's career is flourishing again. He's now the superintendent at Green Gables Country Club, which reopened last spring after a comprehensive renovation by architect Arthur Hills that included the rerouting of holes.

Madden earned a political science degree from St. Lawrence University, followed by a year and a half working in Albany, N.Y., in the advertising field. When it became apparent to Madden he was not made for that line of work, he moved on to golf course maintenance, a job he first worked during summer vacations. He eventually ended up on the crew at Winged Foot Golf Club in Mamaroneck, N.Y., under the guidance of superintendent Bob Alonzi.

When he realized golf course work was for him, Madden attended UMass-Stockbridge, earning a two-year degree in agronomy while still working at Winged Foot for his first mentor. "He's a straight-forward guy," Madden said of Alonzi. "He taught me lessons about everything, lessons I teach my guys."

The grow-in of Centennial Country Club was Madden's next career stop. "I thought it would be good to get involved in the nuts and bolts of a golf course," he said.

He remained there for two years under the tutelage of superintendent William Heintz. "He showed me how you manage people, lead people and inspire people," Madden said.

Now firmly entrenched in the Westchester scene, Madden had the pedigree to get his own course, but that's not how it worked out. At a friend's wedding in 1998, Madden met Jennifer Raybin, then a graduate student in nursing at Yale. The romance was on. They married in 1999 and when she was offered a job in Denver at Children's Hospital, a position Madden knew she could not turn down,

his job search switched to Colorado.

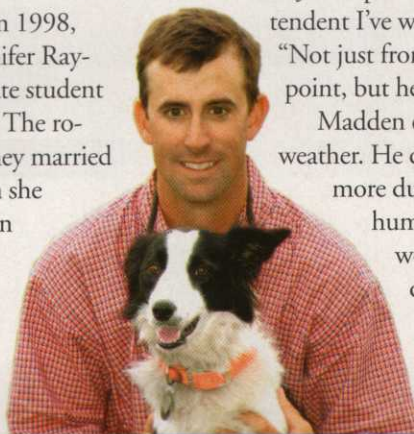
A native of Boulder, his wife had been a patient at the same hospital at the age of 9 when she had a cyst removed from her lung, an event that inspired her to choose nursing as a career. When a position as nurse practitioner in the oncology department was offered to her by the hospital that saved her life, she had no choice but to accept, a decision Madden supported.

Madden's first job in the Denver areas was as a crew member at Green Gables. He worked his way up to assistant for then-superintendent Brett Armstrong. When Armstrong left, Madden was offered the head spot on an interim basis.

When the renovation began in 2002, Madden had proved his mettle to the members and was rewarded with the permanent position. Green Gables golfers weren't the only ones impressed with Donahue's performance. Chris Wilczynski, the lead architect for Arthur Hills, also raves about Madden.

"John's probably the best superintendent I've worked with," he said. "Not just from an agronomic standpoint, but he's also a great guy."

Madden enjoys the Colorado weather. He doesn't lay awake anymore during those warm, humid summer nights worrying about turf disease. "I love the climate," he said of Denver's arid conditions.



Quotable

"Those who attempt the ridiculous can achieve the impossible."

— Col. John Blashford-Snell, the British adventurer and veteran expeditioner who was the keynote speaker at the recent

British & International Golf Greenkeepers Association's annual conference, on getting ahead

"People think in terms of the instant mature look. We're in an era of instant gratification."

— Architect Bill Coore, who has helped design some of the nation's top courses, on what golfers expect from new golf courses.