

THE END OF AN ERA

By Monroe S. Miller, Golf Course Superintendent, Blackhawk Country Club

It has taken me a long time to find the courage to try to put words on paper that will be a fitting tribute to Jennifer Samerdyke and her formidable contributions to *The Grass Roots* since 1993. The reality is that this issue is her last as our cover artist. To describe my feelings as sad would be to understate it considerably.

Where has all the time gone? Wasn't it just a year or two ago that she started dressing our chapter publication with covers matched by no organization like ours ever has?

Well, actually, it was 14 years ago. Honest. When she did our first cover for the January/February 1993 issue, she was still an undergraduate student at the University of Wisconsin - Madison working on her degree in graphic arts. Her brother Chad, who for a time wrote a column for *The Grass Roots*, was the assistant superintendent at Blackhawk. I was visiting with him about my desire to have a cover for the GR, rather than filling the front page with copy and headlines. I thought about photography but wasn't wild about doing what everyone else was doing. "I need to find an artist to draw or paint covers for us," was my conclusion.

Chad casually mentioned that his sister was "a pretty good artist." She had done some wildlife drawings for her father that Chad felt were of real professional quality. Conversations with Jen resulted and we struck a deal to give it a try.

Our first JLE cover was done in black and white with ink. Dr. Frank Rossi was newly hired and seemed a natural for a cover. I made arrangements to meet Frank early one morning in a lecture room in the basement of the Horticulture building on the Madison campus. I shot up a roll of film, gave the prints to Jennifer and in a few days she dropped off cover artwork at our shop.

I was stunned. She had used a style I wasn't familiar with (and don't know how to describe) but that was spectacular. I knew I had lucked into a good thing.

Although she has employed different art for our covers over the years, we go through a similar process each issue. At first Jen would stop at the shop, we'd visit about the subject and I would give her some raw materials - photos mainly, but notes and examples as well. She did the rest.

After she graduated, her first job was at Kramer Printing, the firm that has printed every issue during my time as editor. Our paths would cross in the Kramer offices or plant and covers were planned then.

Jen has advanced through a number of firms and com-

panies. She would move up quickly - to art director, for example - and then move to another company to advance her career. For a few years we'd meet for lunch at Tony Frank's restaurant six times a year and spend an hour or so discussing the next cover.

As time went on and her success grew, it became difficult to find a time when we could meet and spend that hour or so to talk about each succeeding cover. Our communications evolved to phone visits and an exchange of material for her to use to create the cover. Obviously that has worked well.

In the most recent years Jen has assumed very substantial responsibilities for a large company in Waunakee - Uniek. Uniek is the largest picture frame manufacturer in the world with a plant in Waunakee but also in a number of countries around the world. Their largest customer is Wal-Mart. Jen is gone a lot of the time, frequently out of the country. She is a very busy and very responsible



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young business executive. She had difficulty telling me last year about this time that 2006 would be the last year she would be able to help me. I still haven't gotten over that reality.

I really give her credit for being so faithful for this long. She has been too busy for a number of years, but came through nevertheless. We have all enjoyed her generosity. But now it ends.

My guess is that Jen and I will be pals for a long time to come, and that is what matters. She is a great young person with a huge talent that she was willing to share. We are thankful for that.

Here are a few thoughts and facts about Jen's 14-year career as our cover artist. As I mentioned, she started with the Jan/Feb 93 cover of Frank Rossi. In total she did 62 covers; Gene Haas did two covers in that period. She has presented the portrait of all of our chapter presidents during that time, along with all newly hired UW - Madison turfgrass faculty and a couple of veteran faculty (Kussow and Newman). She also did the portraits for a few golf course superintendents who had unusual circumstances - tournaments and awards, for example. Friends and contributors of the association have also been featured.

For years Jen captured the beauty of the favorite golf hole of the superintendents hosting the State Amateur

and the State Open. She noted holidays and special events. She captured noteworthy golf course history and tracked our progress through her art.

I presume most WGCSA members have a favorite cover. I do. Mine is the Mar/Apr 93 portrait of Vincent Noltner, a quintessential golf course staff person whom I revere. Her cover complemented my story about him perfectly.

I resisted using my course as a subject except on a couple of occasions. And even then no one knew unless they had worked with us. Jen's cover "No Golf These Days" on the front of the Jan/Feb 2001 issue was a look over our 12th green and putting green on a cold winter day. There were a couple of others.

My third favorite cover was her "GCSAA's 75th Anniversary." It was better than anything the national prepared for the celebration.

Jen's best holiday cover, in my judgment, was also my fourth favorite. An old Toro tractor, curiously like the one we have, was photographed outside our shop. In her cover art, Jen decorated it with Christmas lights, parked in on a snowy night, and created a cover that generated mail from all over, especially from many Toro people. It was run on the Nov/Dec 2000 issue.

Rounding out my top five covers is the bronze statue



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of Old Tom Morris that was on our Mar/Apr 2002 GR. It was stunning to look at.

Here are my next ten favorite covers:

1. Sep/Oct 1996. This was our only double cover issue - front and back and upside down. It was like two issues in one and noted Jacobsen's 75th anniversary and Milorganite's 70th anniversary.
2. Jen's first color issue - Jan/Feb 1998 - captured the snowflake photos of W.A. Bentley and accompanied my story about him. It was a beautiful cover.
3. Her "Turfgrasses of Wisconsin" graced our Nov/Dec 1998 issue.
4. "Autumn Leaves of Wisconsin," Sep/Oct 1998 completed a series of sorts that year, all beautiful.
5. Jen used a few of my antique golf course post card collection (later traded for a book) as a subject for the Mar/Apr 1996 cover. It was a wonderful pencil-drawn cover.
6. Bucky Badger swinging a golf club and promoting his Badger creeping red fescue, May/June 2000, was very popular among the UW - Madison grads!
7. The bright colors of her Mar/Apr 2003 cover, "Spring Flowers of Wisconsin," generated a lot of comments.
8. The Wisconsin State Capitol Building, filled the cover of our Jan/Feb 2005 issue, caught everyone's attention and led readers to learn of our meetings with state legislative leaders.
9. I love fall so much, like most of my colleagues, and Jen's Sep/Oct 2004 Halloween cover received rave reviews.
10. Using one of Tom Schwab's aerial photos, Jen created a fall scene of the Noer Facility on the Sep/Oct 2005 issue of GR. Tom has the original artwork framed and hanging in the hallway of the Noer.

Each cover has a story and I can recall them all. Three more are worthy of note. The Nov/Dec 1996 issue was our only fold out cover. It featured the construction of Whistling Straits and the role of Mike Lee and Ed Kirchenwitz in that highly successful project.

Jen and I faked out everyone with her cover of the Wisconsin Golf Course Museum and my story of the same. You have no idea how many calls and letters I received, including one from a GCSAA staff person who wanted directions on how to get there. My old pal Tom Harrison asked me, "How did I miss that museum?"

And most recently Mike Hurdzan wrote a warm note of gratitude for the Erin Hills artwork on our cover. I sent him Jen's original artwork and he framed both it and the cover and they hang in a prominent place in his office.

This could go on for a long time, but the point would be the same: a talented young woman made contributions to our profession that she is barely aware of. And for that, again, a great big thanks, Jen. ♣



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