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Dream of a lifetime comes true for R.J. McCord and Tina Tiepel

By Elsa Bonstein, Golf Gab

When golf is your passion, your dreams revolve around golf.

Maybe you dream about winning the club championship someday, or shooting an even par score. Maybe you hope to break 100 or 90 or 80.

A beginner might want to get his handicap down to 30; a seasoned player might dream of getting down to single digits. A junior golfer may watch the U.S. Open and dream of being in the ranks of the PGA Tour someday; a seasoned golfer may dream of living long enough and playing well enough to shoot his age.

There are many golf dreams in this world and right now, R.J. McCord and Tina Tiepel are living theirs.

These two friends leased the Holden Beach Driving Range a few months ago and they couldn't be happier.

The road to Holden Beach was a convoluted, long journey for both of these women.

R.J. McCord was raised in Indiana and attended the University of Evanston, getting a degree in design and secondary education.

"After college, I moved to Front Royal, Virginia, and tried to find work as an artist," R.J. said as we chatted in the open air deck of the driving range on Holden Beach Road. "I started out painting murals but wound up painting bathrooms and kitchens to make ends meet. My education in design kicked in and after awhile, I was an interior designer. From Front Royal, I moved to Washington, D.C., to work for the National Gallery of Art. I stayed there for the rest of my career and retired as Supervisor of Facilities."

While R.J. was working at the National Gallery of Art, the game of golf insinuated itself into her life.

"I had friends who were playing this stupid game called golf and they wanted me to learn it, too," she said. "I had always played softball and had even coached my daughter's softball team. I really couldn't understand what all the fuss was about, but then I tried it. Suddenly, I was hooked. I found myself hanging out at the East Potomac Golf Club at Hains Point in all my spare time.

"The LPGA pro at Hains Point, Paige Veliz-Gilbert, became my mentor. I took lessons from her, learned the game and soon I wanted to do what she did. I wanted to teach the game."

As R.J.'s game got better, she became certified by the United States Golf Teaching Federation (USGTF), and soon she was working evenings at Hains Point, teaching the game of golf.

"In my job with the National Gallery, I had to go to work. Now, as a golf teacher, I got to go to work, and that was infinitely better."

Tina Tiepel's road to becoming a golf teacher was also long and convoluted.

Tina was born in Ohio. When her parents divorced, her mother got a job as a teacher in Hawaii. Tina graduated from high school, then came to Washington as a freshman at Mount Vernon College. She majored in public communications and photography. After graduation, she found work as a travel agent.

"I like working with people, and as a tour escort, I had the opportunity to travel all over the world," Tina said. "I started work in a private agency and did well there, but then when the rate structure changed, I

went to work in corporate travel. I started to play golf in 1990 and loved the game so much that it became almost an obsession with me. My vacations centered around golf, my spare time was spent at golf. I quit my job as a travel agent and went to work at Hains Point, doing everything I could to be in and around golf.”

Tina quips that as a travel agent, she had a high salary, but low passion. When she followed her dream into the golf industry, she had a low salary, but high passion.

“As my own game improved, I wanted to teach others,” she said. “Like R.J., I took lessons with Paige Veliz-Gilbert, learning the Jimmy Ballard swing and techniques. I became certified by the USGTF and began teaching regularly at the East Potomac Golf Club.”

The facility at Hains Point has an 18-hole golf course, two nine-hole golf courses, a miniature golf course, plus a huge practice range that includes a double-decker covered driving range with heated bays, where golfers can practice and learn the game year-round.

“I worked with men, women and juniors and had developed quite a following, but when we visited Brunswick County, we started talking about moving here and having our own golf facility,” she said. “We decided to follow our dream and we plunged right in.”

R.J. continues the story: “I drove to Texas and brought my mother here to live. I wanted her to spend her remaining years close to me on the beautiful Carolina coast.”

When the opportunity came up to lease the Holden Beach Driving Range, the two friends jumped at the chance. Today, the facility has been renovated and a grand opening was earlier this month. The driving range is open from 9 a.m. to dusk seven days a week.

“We have a lot of folks coming out to practice late in the evening, and we are considering turning on the range lights on certain evenings,” Tina said. “We’d also like to enclose some or all of the teeing areas so that we can accommodate golfers year-round. That’s what we had in Washington, and the place was crowded every night.”

Both women credit Lori Desimone (LPGA teaching pro and owner of Lori’s Golf Shop in Calabash) with helping them get started.

“Lori has been wonderful to us,” Tina said. “Right now, we both teach with her at Carolina Shores on Mondays and Thursdays. In addition to that, I work at Oyster Bay as a golf photographer during their busy season. We’ve got a lot of things going for us, and I know we’re going to make it here.”

R.J. echoed her statement: “We are living our golf dream right now, each time we drive in and see this place, each time we give a lesson. We often work with women who have just retired to this area. Their husbands have played golf their whole life and now the wives want to learn too. We keep it simple and straightforward and make it fun for them to learn the game of golf.”

GOLF GAB GROANER

Jack, an avid golfer, was in big trouble when he forgot his wedding anniversary.

His wife was furious and hissed, “Tomorrow there better be something in the driveway for me that goes from zero to 200 in 2 seconds flat!”

The next morning, Jack’s wife found a small package in the driveway. She opened it and found a brand new digital bathroom scale.

Jack’s memorial service will be at his favorite golf club at 1 p.m. Saturday afternoon.

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