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Local

Laughlin Ranch pro gave up career in engineering

By *RYAN BEVITZ*

Monday, May 30, 2005 9:57 PM PDT

BULLHEAD CITY - Two years out of college, Matt Valen was not living a life that he pictured.

Sure, the \$60,000-a-year salary he was making as an electrical engineer was nice, but he was trapped in a cubical all day looking at schematics.

That's when Valen, currently the head pro at Laughlin Ranch Golf Club, decided he'd rather be doing something else.

With the blessing of his then-girlfriend, now wife Karna, the San Francisco native quit his engineering gig and went to work for his local pro shop, earning \$5.35 an hour.

Since then Valen, 38, has come quite a long way. He has worked at six different golf courses and became a Class A member of the Professional Golfers Association in 2001.

"I love golf so much, that I wanted to be around it any way I could," Valen said.

To do so not only meant scrapping a well-paying job, but it also meant lots of work getting himself certified by the PGA.

"It was like going back to school," Valen said.

Valen's love of golf started at a young age. He worked as a cart boy at local courses as a kid and then went on to play for Aptos (Calif.) High School in Santa Cruz County. From there he teed off for Cabrillo Junior College. He then transferred to Chico State where he earned his electrical engineering degree.

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Ironically, Valen's work as a club pro means his actual time of the course has been cut down.

"It's more of a business now," he said. "You're running it to assure other people are having a good time."

Valen has worked at five other courses before making his way to Laughlin Ranch. The highly-touted course's first nine holes opened to the public on Dec. 18. All 18 holes have been open for the last two months. There are further plans to expand Laughlin Ranch to four separate 18-hole courses within 15 years. Ground for the second course will be broken in 15 months.

Valen, who had never worked as a head pro prior to this job, was on the job before the construction began on the first course.

"I wanted a course that was managed by someone who was looking for the best and not trying to cut corners," Valen said.

Although hopping from course to course in the past, Valen said he could see himself retiring from Laughlin Ranch.

As for his other career, Valen said his engineering background doesn't help him in the slightest when he's on the links.

"No, it doesn't," He said. "But, it's just one of those things you can fall back on."

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