



# Miss Congeniality

As the Staffield state of mind sets in with soothing country as the backdrop, we steal a vivacious tête-à-tête with Sara, the club's resident sweetheart.

by SYAMA RAMASAMY

It's a fine Thursday morning when my pleasant little road trip finds its way to Mantin, Negeri Sembilan. Located a mere 45 minutes from Kuala Lumpur, the impeccably kept course of Staffield Country Resort is a vision that would take anyone's breath away. Refreshingly subdued and away from 'real life' that consists of the inevitable rat race of weary city-dwellers, the beautifully maintained 27-hole course bears such a welcoming vista – all 335 acres of it – doing wonderfully apt justice to the word 'Country' in its name.

Sara, the club's golf coordinator, greets me with the brightest smile and sits me down at a table that allows an uninterrupted view of the course. "It's indeed amazing, especially in the early morning when the sun is just rising," admits the Kedah-born girl-next-door who has been with the club for 14 years. "Actually, my name is Saraladevi," she declares. "When I first came to Staffield for an interview back in 1996, the man who interviewed me said that my name was just too hard to pronounce. So 'Saraladevi' became 'Sara'."

Growing up in Sungai Petani with three other siblings, she being the eldest, the bubbly lass shares that she loathed physical education in school. "I didn't care much for sports," reveals Sara. "But I was very passionate about Tamil literature. I still am." Upon completing secondary school Sara knew exactly what she wanted to pursue, but the journey towards her goal wasn't as clear-cut as she had hoped it would be. She arrived at a trying crossroad, a fix she thought she could wriggle her way out of. "I was really in a dilemma – I whole-heartedly wanted to study law, but my parents were totally against the idea." She eventually gave in and went on to complete a diploma in computer science, away from the nest in Seremban.

"I joined Staffield as a secretary," shares

Sara. "I was the first girl in my department. The guys used to tease me so much, but it was all in good fun. They just cracked me up a whole lot." Apart from the usual secretarial duties, she also had to organise events. "Later on, I was promoted to golf coordinator. Frankly, I'm not much of a golfer but I just love organising golf events and tournaments," she says, lighting up as she speaks of the game that is the heart and soul of her job.

With responsibilities that include establishing monthly and yearly statistics, handling bookings, insurance for members and non-members as well as processing claims, she admits to hardly having any time for other things. And when it comes to organising golf events, she sees to every detail – from the first poster that goes up to getting sponsorships, purchasing the goodies for the tourney, and deciding on the prizes for players. "The job requires long hours and we work six days a week. Due to this, women, especially those married with kids, are usually not in favour of a career down this path," says Sara, who professes to missing countless weekends of quality time with her family. "Getting calls from club members on my off days is quite a norm, simply because my number's programmed on

their speed-dial, so they call me for anything and everything – even a broken buggy," she laughs, recalling the specific incident. "That's how my club members are!"

After so many years of being with the club, Sara says there's a bond between her and the club members that is quite priceless. "We're practically family. It's a great environment to be in," she affirms. "Some of them are just plain sweet. There was this one time," she relates, "an elderly club member fell ill and needed to withdraw himself from an impending tournament. He felt so bad for withdrawing from the competition that he even faxed me his medical certificate from his doctor the next day – I mean, he didn't have to but he did anyway. I thought that was really unexpected and sincere." She then tells me about the time she had fractured her wrist and was on medical leave for some time. "Some of the club members called me to see how I was doing; some even wanted to pay me a visit. I was really moved by all that. That showed that they care, and to me, this relationship that I've developed over the years with these people is extremely important and invaluable, and I genuinely appreciate it."

Although work can be exceptionally

## FACT FILE

**Name:** Saraladevi Marimuthu  
**Birthdate:** 29 June  
**Birthplace:** Sg Petani, Kedah  
**Residence:** Mantin, Negeri Sembilan  
**Favourite food:** Vegetarian Chinese & spicy South Indian cuisine  
**Favourite music:** Instrumental piano & Ilayaraja songs  
**Favourite TV show:** America's Next Top Model & Hindi serials  
**Favourite pastimes:** Reading, writing & meditation  
**Favourite author:** Robert Kiyosaki

stressful, Sara says she will not trade her job for anything in the world. "Yes, it can be really taxing, but then again, when there are no events, I miss it!" she quips, declaring her intriguingly addictive love-hate relationship with her profession. "Plus, the Staffield management is really nice and supportive, which I truly appreciate," she says. "My club manager is very understanding. Without his support, I wouldn't have been able to achieve the things I've accomplished so far." She giggles as she speaks of her team – a beloved bunch with a cool sense of humour and the ability to look at the lighter side of things. "We all laugh so much. After a hectic day – after an event for instance – it really helps to de-stress," she lets in, agreeing that laughter is indeed the best medicine.

With her off days conflicting with those of her friends', who work the usual five-day week, Sara says that she also loves losing herself in movies every now and then as a form of relaxation. "I also enjoy a good session of meditation. It's very calming and re-energising," explains Sara, adding that she'd love to take up yoga seriously someday.

So what is Sara's take on the age-old game of golf? After all, she's watched pros and amateurs go for broke for more than a decade – unravelling characteristics, unearthing man's true colours. "It's a fascinating game; it requires your complete focus," she says. "But most of all, what's interesting about it is you can totally tell if someone is being honest. The game boils down to integrity." Adding that it's also a great tool for networking and making new acquaintances, she lets us in on the next big event to take place at Staffield. "The annual Chap Goh Mei celebration tournament in March is expected to draw a spectacular crowd – there'll be lion dance performances, the works," says Sara, with palpable enthusiasm in her voice. "I usually won't be able to sleep the night before. It's absolutely exciting!"

The Club Championship is also one of Staffield's most anticipated events, an exhilarating two-day event that is deemed as 'The Oscars' by the club's golfing fraternity. "The participating members get extra excited about this one; in fact, so do all the staff," states an effervescent Sara.

Clearly one who thoroughly takes pleasure in every nuance of her job, Sara insists that she would not survive a typical 9-to-5 desk-job. "My forte is the service industry or events. I really enjoy meeting people, organising games – it's my thing," asserts the single and affable ball of charm who just can't seem to get enough of putting together golf events. "I love bringing people together. Every single person will end up having the time of their life," concludes Staffield's sweetheart, flashing a big warm grin – one that's evidently won hearts at the club as Miss Congeniality. Move over, Sandra Bullock! ■



Part of the team – with her colleagues at Staffield