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This month’s article includes an update on Ken Richardson’s visit to the GCSAA Headquarters, details of the TORO Student of the Year Regional Finals and some important information on FREE training.

Toro Student of the Year Competition 2004

After travelling almost 15,000 miles and staying in four different hotels, interviewing 34 candidates, my fellow judges and I selected eight National Finalists for this year’s competition.

This was the eleventh year that I have been involved with the Student of the Year and I was pleased to see that standards of presentation, preparation for interview and technical knowledge have all continued to improve. It is always difficult to choose between candidates and this year was no exception.

The judges would like to put forward all of the candidates but that is not possible and some selection must take place. It is obvious that employers are taking more of an interest in education and training and course managers have a great part to play in encouraging candidates to do their best at interview.

There were two problems with this year’s interviews. Firstly, two candidates did not bother to turn up for interview, not only wasting the time of the judges but also preventing training providers putting forward an alternative candidate. Secondly, someone attempted to break into my car when it was parked in a hotel car park. The double locking system held and they did not gain access although they did cause over £300 of damage.

Free training on offer in several areas

I have recently been informed of a scheme called Skills @ Work which gives free training at a number of locations around England.

Areas funded so far are Leicestershire, Berkshire, Birmingham Solihull, Derbyshire, Essex, Greater Manchester, Kent and Medway, London East, Shropshire, South Yorkshire, Tyne and Wear and Wiltshire and Swindon.

Visit to GCSAA Headquarters

John Pemberton and I made a flying visit to the GCSAA Headquarters in late June, where we met up with the Chairman, Andy Campbell. For those who don’t know, the GCSAA Headquarters is based in the town of Lawrence, Kansas, where their 120 employees look after 120,000 members.

John, Andy and I spent two and a half days travelling and one day in meetings during our four day visit so we did not have much time for sightseeing, although Hannes and Gina gave us the quick tour of Lawrence and Kansas City. I have still not worked out why Kansas City is in Missouri and not in Kansas.

Our meeting with various members of the GCSAA staff reinforced the perception that golf course superintendents had very similar problems to greenkeepers on this side of the Atlantic. The GCSAA are working hard to improve the status of superintendents and the way golfers and the general public perceive them. They are trying to encourage golfers to think about the input of superintendents when they have had a good round of golf and not just blame them when they have had a bad one.

They are expanding their trade show to include the golf club owners and calling their new show Golf Solutions. They are working hard to encourage international members, although their rules say that UK greenkeepers must be members of BIGGA before they can join the GCSAA. They are also having a close look at the environment and the superintendent’s job in its management.

Just some of the things happening across in Lawrence, most of which are happening over here. Despite what television seems to indicate, not every golf course in the US has a massive budget, nor three times the personnel. They do have restrictions on the type and amount of pesticides that can be used and the restrictions are getting worse. Not all is gloom however. Salaries are good, the cost of living is quite low and travel is still relatively cheap. Petrol was $1.69 (93p) per gallon when we were there.

The National Finalists this year are:

Christopher Kerr, aged 22, from Glasgow who works at Cowglen Golf Club and was trained by GOSTA
Peter Kennedy, aged 21, from Ballymumna who worked at Pinehurst Golf Club and was trained by Reaseheath College
Stuart Glover, aged 32, from Ballygolawn who works at Lisburn Golf Club and was trained by Greenmount College
Alex Shore, aged 26, from Milton Keynes who works at Woburn Golf and Country Club and was trained by Oaklands College
Robert Finnegan, aged 21, from Navan who works at the Old Course and was trained by Elmwood College
Katie Walls, aged 21, from Taunton who works at Taunton and Pickeridge and was trained by Myerscough College
Alistair Higgs, aged 19, from Reading who works at Calcot Park and was trained by Sparsholt College
James Canham aged 19, from Wisbech who works at Weston Park and was trained by the College of West Anglia.

The National Final will be held at BIGGA House on Monday 27 September.

Subjects covered include: NVQ Level 2 Sportsurf, Health and Safety, First Aid, Food Hygiene, IT Training, Customer Care, Food Preparation, Bar Service, Administration and Management Skills.

I shall be sending out further information as it becomes available so start to think about what training is needed at your golf club and be prepared to take advantage of this great offer.