News from the Chief Executive

Congratulations to Rachael (Membership) and her husband Stuart on the safe arrival of their son Adam. Rachael is now on Maternity Leave and in the meanwhile Gemma is looking after the Membership Office with help from our other Rachael (Reception), Sarah (my PA) and others as time allows.

A 'Well done' must also go to Stephen (Accounts) who, not only recently passed another module in the final stage of his accounting exams, but also managed to win a shiny new Peugeot 206 in a competition run by the local radio station. I have banned him from taking over the office lottery syndicate since as a non-member I cannot afford for them to scoop a jackpot and leave me on my own!

Staff wise we are still under Establishment as they say in the golf club world. We have a vacancy in our Sales Office for someone to sell the classified advertising, a situation that originally arose some while ago with the departure of Cheryl, who emigrated to Australia. Until recently the position has been covered by temporary staff from an agency, however that has now come to an end due to the incumbent's personal situation. The scenic but somewhat isolated location of BIGGA HQ often works against us when recruiting which, together with very low unemployment locally, results in a shortage of suitable candidates. Things have not been made any easier by a bout of illness that has moved through the office.

There appears to be continued confusion and concern over the Recommended Salaries and Conditions of Employment for Greenkeepers as published by the current Committee. I would firstly point out that the BIGGA Pay Rates have not existed since 1997 and members and their employers should refrain from using this terminology as it only adds to the confusion. Historically it was always felt inappropriate that greenkeepers (through BIGGA) should determine their own remuneration recommendations and so a totally independent Committee was formed comprising representatives from golf club owners, golf club secretaries, the R&A and greenkeeping (again through BIGGA).

The Committee, which meets twice a year, established a completely new scale based on a survey and research and for the first time also linked remuneration to qualifications. This scale has been reviewed annually and is adjusted in line with the Average Earnings Index, this is an official government index and is Great Britain's key indicator of how fast earnings are growing. In using this index the Standing Committee ensures that the recommended scale for greenkeepers does not fall out of sync with the rest of industry.

I would comment that the scale is only a recommendation and employers can choose to either be guided by it or ignore it. For ease of administration, queries are normally routed through BIGGA Headquarters but I would stress that this is only to try to provide a quick response and NOT because BIGGA controls the Committee. A booklet containing the scales for 2005 may be obtained free of charge by contacting BIGGA Headquarters.

While on the subject of confusion may I take the opportunity to clarify the scope of and access to the Member's Legal Helpline. This is a 24hour/365 days of the year service to BIGGA subscribers and is for the use of and benefit of members and ANY of their family living in their household. The service is operated by a specialist company and is manned by suitably qualified staff who, in most cases, will be able to give you instant advice but who may on occasions need to ring you back with an answer. The person answering the call cannot be expected to know every point of law!

Advice can be sought on any legal matter and is not restricted just to employment. If any insured person has been wrongfully dismissed from their employment then the company will, at the company's discretion, pursue a claim for any sanctions meted out in due course. The service is operated through a free-phone number that is 0800 068 1893. If you do not receive this confirmation please get in touch with BIGGA Headquarters.

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As any of you know I was lucky enough to travel to Florida with the Bernhard's Delegation. One night while sitting in the local watering hole I happened to get talking to a greenkeeper from Aspen, Colorado, who after- hearing that I worked in Scotland stated that his club were going to make their course more Scottish in nature. Intrigued at this I inquired how would this be achieved? To which he replied: "By raking the bunkers just twice a week!"

I hope that neither you nor your course is put under stress that you cannot cope with. Headquarters' staff are always on hand to help where they can, please do not hesitate to contact someone if you feel the need - full details can be found inside the front cover of this magazine.

John Pemberton