Some people like to ease themselves into new situations while others are great at hitting the ground running. It is perhaps fortunate that Andrew Mellon, BIGGA’s 2011 Chairman, is of the latter persuasion.

Throughout his career Andy has shown himself to be someone who doesn’t shirk a challenge and, with much to do in the first few weeks of his Chairmanship, easing himself in was never going to be an option.

“We are entering a period of change as John Pemberton, our long-standing CEO, is retiring and it is crucial that we recruit the right person to take the Association forward and continue to manage our resources as effectively as possible,” said Andy, as we chatted in his office in the grounds of Elmwood College Golf Course.

“We have appointed a company to carry out the recruitment process and getting the right person is top of the agenda. We could be looking at having someone in place as early as April, depending upon the notice period the successful person has to give, but we will take the time to ensure we get the best person” he revealed.

A relative late-comer to the profession, 43 year-old Andy has made up for any lost time with a commitment to hard work and a will to learn which has seen him recently promoted to Golf Operations Manager at Elmwood Golf Course and rise through the ranks of BIGGA with indecent haste.

“It has been a rapid learning process while Vice Chairman because I hadn’t been involved in the main Board prior to that, so it has been a year of learning how the Association operates – what goes on at BIGGA HOUSE and how it interacts with the members through the Regions and Sections etc”

What he has always known, however, and it is a view which has hardened over the last 12 months, is that what a superb organisation it is that he’ll be chairing.

“I do believe that BIGGA is a very strong, established Association and think that its great strength is its membership. We are only as strong as our membership and the Association could not have been successful in getting to where it is today without that commitment from its members,” he said.

Andy is well aware of the issues facing the Association, and the industry as a whole, as we look to the future.

“We are in a more financially challenging situation than we have ever been and, of course, we are not alone in that. It means that we must ensure that we make the most effective use of our resources and, more than that, increase collaboration with like-minded bodies, which can add benefit to our members.”

Andy was born in Glasgow but spent the first six years of his life in Kenya, the family having moved to Africa through his fathers work.

“I have vivid and fond memories of Kenya. It was a very relaxed lifestyle and a wonderful climate.”

Another clear recollection was of his return to Scotland.

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from the airport and I’d never seen weather like it. It was terrible and I can still remember wiping the steamied up windows, probably wondering why we had left Africa” said Andy, who lived initially with his grandmother and aunts in Twechar, a small mining village near Kirkintilloch.

It was then that he displayed a rare ability to fit into his new surroundings.

“Living in Kenya I’d picked up quite a posh accent but within two weeks I was speaking like a true Glaswegian. My parents said they had never heard anyone change so quickly?” – Kids have a strong ability to adapt’

On leaving school Andy went to Strathclyde University to study Civil Engineering, but his desire to earn a living was never far away and he took a job in the summer holidays selling photocopiers and also joined the University’s Officer Training Corp. This saw him out on exercises most weekends;

“I enjoyed the challenging outdoor, military lifestyle, so much so that I joined Glasgow’s Royal Marines Reserve Corp, and was seriously considering a full time military career.”

After having studied for two years Andy decided to take a year out and worked on a self employed basis for an insurance brokerage. He was still serving in the Reserve Corp, but having met his future wife, Jane, the prospect of a full time military career and being away from home for long periods became less attractive and the demands of self employed insurance Sales required his full time commitment. Having progressed to the position of Trainee Manager he explored setting up his own company.

“I was actually in the process of setting up my own brokerage when Standard Life offered me a job and I worked for them in Glasgow for two years,” said Andy.

“I took full advantage of the superb Standard Life’s Customer service and Sales training programme, which has served me well ever since’

“It was a fairly intense job and the money was good but there was something missing’ The opportunity to make a change came when his wife was offered a job in the Western Isles.

“Jane had worked in the area before and had a lot of friends up there so I said let’s just go. I decided that I would go to college and study Business Admin and just see what happened.”

As it turned out, one of his lecture-tuers also ran a local insurance brokerage and offered Andy a job so he found himself working in the same industry as the one he’d left behind in Glasgow.

“We settled in Stornoway for seven years and two of our children were born there. We had a fantastic house, looking out over a bay, and a great lifestyle, although it was difficult being so far away from family.”

Over the years Andy turned his hand to several jobs, seeking something which he would feel happy in. He played golf regularly and a chance encounter with the Greens Convener made him aware of a vacancy as a six month labourer.

“I filled out an application form and one interview later I had a job. I can still remember my first day walking around the course with Alistair MacLeod, the then Greenkeeper. The sun was coming up and I thought – I’m getting paid to do this. This is the life and what I want to do.”

The job was only meant to be temporary but Andy three behaviours into it making himself as indispensable as possible. He serviced machines, saving the club money, and never missed an opportunity to learn more about his new vocation, using holidays to visit other clubs in the mainland and learn more about the job.

“Working in a small dedicated team, I learnt a lot from Alistair, and my desire to progress grew. I needed an industry so I joined Glasgow’s Royal Marines Reserve Corp, and was seriously considering a full time military career.”

Within a year he’d been appointed as Head Greenkeeper and another year on, when John left to set up his own business, he was appointed Course Manager.

“I like to think that I was working hard and applying myself, but opportunities came along at the right time and I was able to take advantage of them. Elmwood College was a very supportive employer, allowing me to fulfull my desire for further education. Carol Borrow, the Director, encouraged me to develop my knowledge and skills, for which I’m grateful, and I took full advantage.”

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