Greenkeepers Training Committee

Donald Steel, GTC Chairman, looks at improving communication within the golf club.

One point emerged emphatically from a series of recent GTC workshops conducted very ably at Temple and Gatton Manor by Laurence Pitchie MG, the message being that the principles of greenkeeping haven’t changed - simply the way in which they are applied and implemented. Put another way, whole scale mechanisation has widened the scope of what is possible when it comes to course condition and presentation although machinery is expensive and every machine needs at least one person to operate it. It actually makes you realise that, with an average crew of only five or six, it is something of a miracle that our greenkeepers manage to do what they do. Certainly, other countries are open-mouthed in wonder.

I have always maintained the major problem with being a Course Manager or Head Greenkeeper is in dealing with the hundreds knocking on your door with something to sell. That undoubtedly rose to a regrettable period 30 odd years ago when courses were subjected to overdose of water and fertilizer. It led to bad habits spawned from the belief that American-style courses, green wall-to-wall, were superior to our own. What made it even more reprehensible was the discovery of a traditional formula that was known to work.

The formation of the GTC was one of the influences that brought about a much needed change of heart but it had to be proved to a fresh audience and Laurence’s presentations provided everything of evidence to show that greenkeeping has mended its ways. Nevertheless, periodic reminders are always wise which is why good communications are so important.

September’s workshops to which I referred brought together Greenkeepers, Green Committee Chairmen and Club Secretaries, engaging in an enjoyable open forum with Laurence who kept everyone interested for four or five hours which is no easy task. By engaging in a comprehensive review of the fundamentals, the recurring theme was that greenkeeping is more common sense than mystic art. Nobody can question that scarification, scarification, top dressing, ever-seeding and sensible cutting heights are the common bonds of course managers everywhere. The skill lies in making on the spot, day to day judgements in adjusting to weather conditions. Details can vary even if principles are constant.

Resources differ from Club to Club and so do budgets which, in turn, can dictate methods. Practically the only advantage of growing old is you can make comparisons and, seeing the list of modern aerational techniques, brought to mind the days when, as a junior member of Denham in the 1950s, we earned welcome pocket money by lending a hand with the annual ritual of treating the greens.

It consisted of scything by hand with a springbok rake, cutting the shoots by hand that were raised, hand hollow-tining to a depth of no more than 2-3 inches, applying a dressing of soot and later round-tining with a hand fork with an application of dried blood, hoof and horn meal. It was a laborious and dirty process involving working on perhaps two or three greens a day whereas, nowadays, the entire operation can be completed in two days and the greens back near their best in little more than a week. In today’s context, it is merely part of an industry’s proud heritage in the same way as hickory shafts and gutta-percha balls but, while the only shot ever in which a player has influence is the next one, greenkeeping can only look ahead. Here the future couldn’t be brighter.

BIGGA and the GTC have joint interests and responsibilities in raising standards and performance. The Home Unions lend practical and financial support, leaving golfers to understand that it is all being done for their benefit. Whether they do or not depends, as I have stressed, on the vital role of communication.

Owing to the demand for Chairmen of Green – Secretary Manager – Course Manager workshops, more are being planned. Dates and venues will be available from the GTC and on the website.

Delegate feedback has also encouraged the GTC to organise more workshops covering such subjects as Health & Safety including EMPOLOYER responsibilities and how to improve communications within the golf club.

All workshops will be conducted by GTC Quality Assured Training Providers.

October heralds the launch of the Digital Learning Education Programme at Harrogate Week and the decent into complete mayhem in the Learning and Development Department. Racers and I are bracing ourselves for a very busy period ahead!

Continue to Learn at Harrogate Week 2012

You should have received your copy of the Continue to Learn Harrogate Week 2012 with this issue of the Greenkeeper International. For those of you who have already perused it, prior to reading this, you’ll see that we have a number of workshops that are new to the 2012 programme. These include:

One-day Workshops

Progressive Cultural Management – Frank Rossi Ph.D

How to be an Outstanding Manager, Part Three – Shona Garner

Essential IT Business Administration for Greenkeepers – Jacky Lowe

Successful Project Management – Bruce Williams COGS

Half-day Workshops

A Practical Guide to Setting Up a Social Media Presence – Lesley Wood

Rescuing Your Course – Parts 1 and 2 – Howard Swan

Managing Parkland, Heathland and Links Aeroponics – an Ecological Perspective – Bob Taylor

Compost Teas – Provide Healthy Rootzones for Healthy Grass – Martin Wurd.

Writing and Environmental Policy Document – Richard Stuttard

The Turf Managers’ Conference will make its return to the programme on Monday 23 January featuring presentations on:

Turfgrass – Dr Colin Fleming Golf Course Photography – The Job, Purpose and Challenges – Ian Lowe

The Effects of Climate Change and Climate Phenomenons on Greenkeeping Practices – Mark Hunt

Employee Engagement – Helen Bennett

The Power of Social Media for Your Golf Club – Lesley Wood

Practically Sustainable Golf Turf Management – Frank Rossi Ph.D

Book now to secure your place by completing the booking form or by contacting the L&D Department on 01347 833800 option 3.

Toro Student Greenkeeper of the Year

The calibre of candidates, who attended the Toro Student Greenkeeper of the Year 2011 finals at BIGGA HOUSE, was outstanding. Any one of the eight finalists could have won the Award making the selection process for the judges a bit of a nightmare! Finally, though, the decision was made and the winner of the 2011 award was Matthew Perks, from Harrow Golf Club, representing Thames Valley College.

I am delighted to report that attendance figures were better than hoped and that the feedback from the attendants and the organisers was great! We have now been asked to put together some seminars to take place at Scorton in November – details to follow.

Higher Education Scholarships

Supported by Ransomes Jacobsen

The most recent higher education scholarship has been awarded to:

Ash Smith - On Line Foundation Degree - Sports Turf