About $24,000,000, which was actually five times the cost of the course as well as the season-ending PGA Tour Championship, which it will continue to host. East Lake served as host to the Ryder Cup in 1963, as it has zoysia fairways, bermuda rough and extremely firm and true Crenshaw bentgrass greens. East Lake also eliminated thanks to the club and the Tom Cousins foundation. The course renovation work and much of the deprivation of the past has now been eliminated, a history of fame that rose, fell and then rose again from urban squalor that was a part of the opening experience. The first was the famed East Lake, a club with a mixed history of fame that rose, fell and then rose again from urban squalor that was a part of the opening experience. The first was the famed East Lake, a club with a mixed history of fame that rose, fell and then rose again from urban squalor that was a part of the opening experience.

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The US visit is hugely important not just as a fabulous shared experience, an opportunity to build new friendships and make new business contacts, but most importantly as a tool for learning, educating, training and growing. Last year’s delegates are keen to testify. Stuart Yarwood, Course Manager at Lytham Golf Club said: “For me the trip dispelled lots of myths. I realised that in the US education comes from the top down alongside their practical knowledge. I have been trying to apply this back home - to think like the person I want to be perceived as. In the UK we tend to start at the bottom and work up, learning on the way, so that for many people, when they find themselves in a managerial position they don’t have any of the basic skills to do that job. If you put lads in a horrible tin shed with the wind howling through it they will apply those standards on the golf course.”

Neil Ballingall, Course Manager at Fairmont St Andrews, said: “I found some of the seminars at GIS really useful. We had a long session on growth-scribers which was great, very in-depth. I knew it stopped the grass grow- ing, but I didn’t know how or why. We learned that if you don’t reaply at the correct time it can have the opposite effect.”

Sallie Taylor talked to the 2012 Delegates to find out how the trip impacted them at the time, and what lessons they have carried with them a year down the line.

“The trip spurred my education - getting their views on things and growing, but I didn’t know how or why. We learned that if you don’t reaply at the correct time it can have the opposite effect.”

David Gray, First Assistant Greenkeeper at Ladybank Golf Club, agrees. “The trip gave me a greater drive for education. I loved the seminars and bouncing off the other guys. The trip will always benefit me.”

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Ian Kinley, 2006 Delegate
THEN: Deputy, Old Ford Manor Golf Club
NOW: Course Manager, Muswell Hill Golf Club

I went to Atlanta (right) and the key for me was the feeling that you’re getting involved not just in the American perspective on course maintenance, but the world. Lifetime friendships were made on that trip, you spend a lot of time with the other delegates and get to know them really well and exchange opinions and ideas.

Leonie Hawkins, 2004 Delegate
THEN: Head Greenkeeper, Cleethorpes Golf Club
NOW: Course Manager, The Richmond Golf Club

I remember thinking on my trip that the US were much more advanced in certain areas, although I do feel we’ve caught up now. I recall we went to a seminar discussing absolutely everything about Primo, which at that time was unavailable in the UK. This meant that when Primo did become available over here, I had a head start over other greenkeepers and wasn’t afraid to use it because I was very well informed about it. The Golf Industry Show was also an amazing experience, the scale of it was colossal.

Another thing that sticks in my mind is one of the course visits to a course called The Bridges. They had 55 staff and 14 gardeners looking after an 18-hole course, and they couldn’t believe how few staff we had in comparison! You’ve looked after so well while you’re out there and I can’t imagine why a greenkeeper would not want to apply to join the delegation.

“A year after my trip, I secured my first Course Managers position at Muswell Hill and the Bernhard Delegation certainly helped – I was told it made my CV stand out. It’s a fantastic, amazing experience” Matt Plesett, 2006 Delegate

Gordon McKie, 2003 Delegate
THEN: Head Greenkeeper, The Eden Course, St Andrews
NOW: Course Manager, The Old Course, St Andrews

The ten years since I went has flown by but I still remember so many elements of the trip. A real highlight for me was the educational side. I recall attending a GCMA Seminar on Communications which I found particularly useful, and I referred back to it repeatedly as my career progressed. I also learnt a lot from the guys I travelled with. We were all able to offer advice to each other, and we really built up a great camaraderie between us. Several of us still stay in touch now, either meeting at BTME or on Facebook or Twitter. I’ve no doubt that the whole experience really enhanced my career.