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# A Trip to England For BIGGA's BTME Show An Experience of a Career

By Ken Williams, CGCS  
Superintendent, Stanford Golf Course

This past January I was selected as one of ten North America superintendents to represent GCSAA and travel to Harrogate, England to attend the British Turfgrass Management Exposition. The trip was the brainchild of Stephen Bernhard and sponsored by his firm, Bernhard & Company. Bernhard has been bringing international greenkeepers to the Golf Industry Show for the past seven years and decided it was finally time to bring a group of US superintendents to the UK. Bernhard thought it would be a good idea to run the process through GCSAA and then select the superintendents through an essay contest. Through some major miracle of luck, my association involvement and probably some well-timed essay humor, I was selected as one of the ten delegates.

Joining me on the trip were Bob Becker of The Scioto Country Club in Ohio, Gregg Blew, CGCS of Wellshire Golf Club in Denver, Bob Farren, CGCS Manager of Golf and Grounds at the Pinehurst Resort in North Carolina, Michael Morris, CGCS of Crystal Downs CC in Michigan, Robert Murtaugh, CGCS of Overland Golf Course in Colorado, David Phipps of Stone Creek Golf Club in Oregon, C. Todd Pippin of The Club at Longview, North Carolina, Roger Stewart, CGCS of TPC Jasna Polana in New Jersey, and David Ward of Coyote Run Golf Course in Illinois. They were a great group of guys, all having numerous positive things to share.



It was a bit of a challenge logistically to get ten different superintendents from all over the country to arrive in England at the same time. But one of our hosts, Kim Furnell of Bernhard & Company, magically pulled it off. We flew into Manchester, and were picked up by Kim and her

associate, Gina Putnam, a former GCSAA employee who had worked in Lawrence. Gina actually emigrated to England three years ago to

work for Bernhard. These two ladies went out of their way to make us feel welcome the entire week and thankfully did all the driving. With the steering wheels on the right and the direction of travel on the left and the numerous mazes of roundabouts, I never felt completely sure where cars were coming from the entire week. And my numerous mistaken attempts to jump into the front right side (drivers seat) of our van were met by numerous snickers by the group of, "Oh, looks like you want to drive, huh?" In the name of human preservation and auto insurance agents across the land, I relinquished any attempts at getting behind the wheel!

We arrived on a Sunday and were based in the quaint town of Harrogate in the north of England. As with many of the older towns in Europe, everything was within walking distance. The exposition center was a mere two blocks away. We spent the first day getting situated and exploring the town. That exploration just so happened to include a couple of pubs where many of us were introduced to the tumultuous excitement of watching an English Premier League Football Match! A welcome dinner followed that evening where we met three European greenkeepers who ended up becoming our unofficial guides for the week. We found that they had been part of the BIGGA delegation that traveled to San Diego in 2004. Sid Arrowsmith, MG ran a 54-hole complex in England, Richard McGlynn was building a course in Russia, and Steven Tierney had the luck of running a course in Wengen Switzerland. These guys were a joy to be around, and got us into, and out of trouble all week! That first dinner provided a hint of what was yet to come, as everyone we met during the week went out of their way to chat with us and share their stories. It felt as everyone was thrilled to be in Harrogate, and anxious to talk amongst their peers.

The following day we traveled to the Sports Turf Research Institute (STRI) in Bingley where nearly all of the turfgrass research is done in the UK. We observed their research on golf turf as well as on other "amenity" applications such as football (soccer), rugby and cricket pitches. We learned in England, a field is somewhere you graze livestock, and a pitch is somewhere you play sport! We toured their test plots and talked with resident chemists and pathologists. With the damp wet climate, Fusarium patch (*Microdochium nivale*) is the #1 disease problem UK, and crane fly larvae are one of the biggest insect problems. Birds have been known to tear up entire fairways foraging for the numerous grubs.

Following STRI, we left for the Alwoodley Golf Club in Leeds. Alwoodley is the first golf course ever designed by Dr. Alister MacKenzie. Our host was Nick Leaf, Club Historian and former Chairman of the Green. Nick shared his deep knowledge of both the renowned architect and the course. We ended up walking all eighteen holes as our host explained the architectural principles inherent to the design. One of the more

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remarkable features of the course was the medieval farming furrows



*Alwoodley Golf Club in Leeds, first golf course ever designed by Dr. Alister MacKenzie*

left in place across the fairways. These numerous rounded ridges of approximately one foot in height ran across many of the fairways insuring that no two fairway lies would be the same. It was interesting to see what they considered adding interest to the game, was something we would view as being completely unfair!

The BTME show opened the next day. It was a joy to attend, and could be described as a throwback to what the GCSAA Show was in its earlier days. Approximately 250 people attended the Opening Session and most of the educational seminars ran concurrently with the trade show. It was interesting seeing the different types of equipment used abroad and the differing applications. (We would never need a flail strong enough to handle gorse!) The educational seminars provided insight into differing management strategies but the information related universally. One highlight was how very focused the Europeans were on sustainable practices and low input methods. This was initially for economic reasons but has also proven sound for both environmental protection and the fight against annual meadow grass (*Poa annua*.) Most of the courses seek greens made up of the "finer grasses," the fescues and bents. In that pursuit, one British greenkeeper insisted he only applied 6 grams of actual nitrogen per square meter to his greens last year!

Harrogate week is similar to our conference and show, with evenings filled with wonderful opportunities to meet new colleagues, network and just talk turf. As a GCSAA delegate, it gave us the opportunity to meet the next ten BIGGA delegates who will be traveling to the GIS in Anaheim. They are a great group of guys and we all made plans to reconnect there. The last thing that anyone who attends this conference feels is lonely. Everyone is genuinely inclusive and is quick to introduce themselves. At one dinner I was fortunate enough to sit across from Sir Michael Bonallack, former Secretary of the R&A, who when persuaded, talked at length about his duties with the R&A, his British Amateur titles (5) and Walker Cups (9.) I was in awe, to say the least!

The BIGGA Banquet was the climax of the show. Held at the posh and historic Majestic Hotel, the banquet allowed everyone to let loose after a great week. A lavish meal was served followed by Irish comedian

Adrian Walsh. This guy was tremendous, providing big laughs with his never-ending string of one-liners. Afterwards it was disco dancing or adjournment to the famous Majestic Hotel bar. I introduced myself to an older greenkeeper I had sat next to in one of the seminars earlier in the day, and low and behold, I find out it is Walter Woods, who had just retired from St. Andrews after 40 years. Talk about a legend of the profession! That guy has probably forgotten more than I will ever know! And his sense of humor would make even Joe Vargas blush! Meeting and talking with him were one of the highlights of my trip!

On our last day Friday, we visited a great old links course, The Ganton



*The Ganton Golf Club*

Golf Club. Both Harry Vardon (6 British Opens) and Ted Ray were former professionals at Ganton and the club recently hosted the Walker Cup Matches in 2003. Their greenkeeper, Phillip Baldock took us around for a no-nonsense look at the links. He had previously overseen 36 holes at Royal Portrush in N. Ireland. It was great having his insight as our group asked numerous questions about managing the links. The course there was prepared for golf alone – no signs, no yardage markers, no flowers, no fancy monuments, no beverage carts, etc. Practice green markers were made of a simple short hook of steel. Bunkers contained the native sandy soil that included many sea shells, and weeds were not a problem as long as they didn't effect play. It was a refreshing way to see a course prepared. Mr. Baldock said he would probably be disciplined if he ever burned in the stripes on the fairways like we do in the US! They had a crew of six and only one utility vehicle. When asked how steep they construct the walls of the riveted bunker faces, he said, "We use a very technological method, on greenside bunkers we place each piece of sod one finger back of the last piece, on fairway bunkers we use two fingers!" Greens topdressing was done frequently and consisted of a mix of 70% sand and 30% soil. Iron sulfate was used regularly to control moss. When asked about his rate, Mr. Baldock noted, "Black does not bother me, it only lasts a few days and does a world of good." It was empowering seeing such a practical approach to golf course maintenance.

The trip was a series of great experiences, one followed by another. It was a week in my career that I will never forget. We had a dignified group of professional superintendents and our hosts from Bernhard were tremendous. Words simply cannot describe the quality of individuals met and the experiences gained. Attending BIGGA's BTME is something every superintendent must do at least once in his career. And I encourage each of you to somehow find a way to experience it yourself.

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## TREASURER'S REPORT / BOARD ROOM BRIEFS

Account Type	As of 01/31/07	2006
Wells Fargo Checking	\$56,784.69	\$57,644.88
Wells Fargo Savings	\$8,285.36	\$10,741.25
Wells Fargo Savings Research Reserve	\$9,706.77	\$9,361.77
Wells Fargo Scholarship Reserve	\$4,818.54	\$2,818.54
Golf Links Savings	\$5,583.06	\$4,787.30
Golf Links School/Research CD	\$14,250.72	\$14,250.72

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- 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary year – plans are in the works for a grand celebration.
- Discussion on 2007 events and how we can increase attendance and provide more educational opportunities.
- All recently approved new members will be called personally by a Board member to welcome them to the Association and to invite them to upcoming events.
- Don Simonich has submitted all of the paperwork necessary for State approval of the Greenskeeper Apprenticeship Program.
- Andy Tittle was appointed to a one-year term as a Director.
- Jason Green has asked all of the Committee Chairmen to write an SOP for their Committee.
- The Regional Holiday Gatherings proved to be very successful, 96 total members attended the 4 events and the Association made a profit.
- Affiliate Director, Pete Bowman, CGCS reported on the Affiliate Meeting at our Annual Meeting last month.
- \$2,500 was approved for Nematode Research.

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## Special Recognition for GCSANC Award Winners

about the association and its members,” states GCSANC Awards Chairman Vince Keats, CGCS, “and is quite deserving of this highest honor, the Superintendent of the Year Award.”

In support of this honor, Netz was recognized by the California Golf Writers Association at an awards banquet on February 6, 2007 at The Inn at Spanish Bay (Pebble Beach, CA), held in conjunction with the AT&T Pebble Beach National Pro-Am.

The **GCSANC Turfgrass Excellence Award** is presented to two individuals for their high level of achievement in upholding standards in the area of turfgrass maintenance. The criteria for this award consider: overall course condition, environmental factors, rounds of play and maintenance budget.

The recipient for the GCSANC Turfgrass Excellence Award in the Public Category is Kevin Pryseski, CGCS, who received the award for his superior level of professional maintenance and conditioning at StoneTree Golf Club (Novato, CA.), a bay area course where he served as golf course superintendent from 2000 through October 2006.

Now serving in a similar position at Marin Country Club, Pryseski came to the GCSANC from the state of Maryland where he was employed as a golf course superintendent since 1980. It was there, he garnered talent and credentials in the construction, renovation and administration of intensively maintained and highly regarded courses. His previous experience includes assignments at Cattail Creek Country Club (Glenwood, MD), Sparrow Point Country Club (Baltimore, MD), and Pine Ridge Golf Course (Lutherville, MD). A GCSAA Certified Golf Course Superintendent, Pryseski has a B.S. in Biology from Towson University.

In the Private Category, the Turfgrass Excellence Award was presented to Thomas Bastis, CGCS, of the California Golf Club of San Francisco (South San Francisco, CA) where he currently serves as golf course superintendent.

Prior to the California Golf Club, Bastis served as golf course superintendent at Moraga Country Club and assistant superintendent at Sharon Heights Golf & Country Club (Menlo Park, CA). An alumnus of California Polytechnic State University-San Luis Obispo, Bastis continues to attend educational seminars that expand his knowledge on subjects relating to course maintenance. He also holds the distinction as Certified Golf Course Superintendent (CGCS) from the GCSAA. Later this spring, Bastis will oversee a historically minded restoration project at the California GC, working closely with design experts from Kyle Phillips Golf Course Design.

Bastis just completed his second year on the GCSANC Board of Directors and was reelected at the annual meeting to serve a second term. He has served on the Scholarship, Research and Strategic Planning Committees for the association. With his help the GCSANC Research Committee has made over \$6,800 in donations to aid research efforts in turfgrass disease prevention and treatment programs under the auspices of the Northern California Golf Association (NCGA) and U.C. Riverside Research Programs.

He has been involved with the Scholarship and Strategic Planning Committees, and the GCSANC Research Committee (chaired by Bastis), has made significant donations to aid research efforts addressing turfgrass disease prevention and treatment programs under the auspices of the NCGA and the U.C. Riverside Turfgrass Research Programs.

Jim Husting, CGCS, is the recipient of the George Santana Distinguished Service Award presented for his long-standing commitment to the GCSANC and the turfcare industry. A Certified Golf Course Superintendent at Woodbridge Golf & Country Club (Woodbridge, CA) where he's worked since 1987, Husting has been instrumental in tracking legislation that impacts the golf industry. He is past president of the CGCSA and a former recipient of the GCSAA Excellence in Government Relations Award. Husting is a founding member of the California Alliance for Golf (CAG), an organization that serves as a liaison to governmental agencies, promoting the economic and positive environmental contributions demonstrated by the California golf industry. Husting holds a degree in Ornamental Horticulture from California Polytechnic State University-San Luis Obispo and a B.A. in Latin American Studies from Kent State University (Kent, OH).

John Holmquist, Horizon Turf California Golf Project Coordinator, is recipient of the GCSANC Affiliate Merit Award, an honor he also received in 1997, for his contributions to the association. A resident of Vacaville, CA, Holmquist served on the GCSANC board of directors in 1996-97 and 2005-06. He has been a loyal supporter of the GCSANC Ball Mark Repair Tool Program promoted in conjunction with Play Golf America and its player development initiatives. Holmquist has been involved with the GCSANC Scholarship Research Tournament that has raised more than \$9,000 for turfgrass scholastic awards for worthy candidates and industry research programs.

For 12 years collectively, Holmquist has worked with Horizon as a professional supplier to the green industry. He continues to provide exceptional service to his clients in the areas of irrigation, chemical, seed, erosion control and drainage. “Horizon recognizes the importance of supporting golf course superintendents at the local level, which in turn, allows me to be involved with programs that benefit GCSANC members and our affiliates,” said award recipient Holmquist. “To receive this coveted award for a second time during my career, is an honor I will cherish for years to come.”