

REGULAR readers of this magazine will know that I have always advocated the attendance at some time by everyone in the golf course industry at the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America's conference and show. This year, GCSAA held their annual event in Houston, Texas, during February. A sizable party of 'Brits' travelled on a package put together by Richard Frost, public relations officer of the IOG, through Pressplan Travel Ltd. Personally I dislike travelling in groups but the organisation of this trip was excellent. Several of us, including Howard Swan, Peter Wisbey and other of their colleagues from Portugal flew on the Sunday ahead of the main party.

Our flight was a little delayed, due to one of our number believing that the Continental Airlines flight might offer greater comfort and facilities than that of the booked British Caledonian flight! However once he was 'recaptured' we had a most enjoyable passage. The plane being less than a third full, we were able to take advantage of the space and enjoy two particularly violent films after Sunday lunch - and no washing up!

On arrival our group piled into the customary 'van' and made our way to the hotel. Again the arrangements were very good. The "Grand" is situated next to the Galleria, Houston's answer to Knightsbridge or Prince's Street all under one roof - three levels of shops and restaurants surrounding, amongst other things, a full sized ice rink.

We tried to keep going on the Sunday for as long as possible and in this we were helped by the screening of the American Superbowl.

I managed to stay awake longer than most, having backed the underdogs. The Washington Redskins triumphed over the Denver Broncos, amidst incredible razamatazz and some of the most dreadfully obvious sporting commentary I have ever heard.

Our advance party had arrived early in order to attend specific seminars, and amongst the topics chosen were "Basic Turf-grass Botany and Physiology"



The advance party

by James B. Beard PhD. "Golf Course Construction and Project Management" by Stephen Harrell, and "USGA Golf Course Rating Systems" by Dean L. Knuth. By common consent everyone learnt something of value.

Peter Wisbey said that he had never experienced any educational event like it, even when EIGGA was at its height. Peter also felt that a modular conference with other bodies, such as the Course Builders, Architects, Turf Managers and the USGA all participating, had enormous benefits. A change in view-point for him, as after "Golf Course '84" at Cambridge, he had been in favour of greenkeepers going it alone as far as conferences and seminars were concerned.

GRACIOUS

During the first three days much had been learnt, friendships renewed with the staff of GCSAA, all of whom are most gracious with visitors, especially Judy Jones and Colleen Pederson for whom nothing appears to be too much trouble. Thursday was to be a rest day ahead of the weekend's trade show, so through an introduction from Christine Langford, former chairman (or should that be 'person') of the WPGA and now one of a growing band of lady club professionals, we visited the Sweetwater Country Club where, on the magnificent estate, the LPGA have their headquarters and "Hall of Fame". On our arrival we were met by a former compatriot, Elaine Scott, a Wentworth member, former writer with *Golf World* and now Media Services Co-ordinator for the LPGA.

Elaine was kind enough to

arrange a tour of the LPGA Hall of Fame, golf at Sweetwater and a tour of the country club and its marvellous facilities. The \$28 million club was officially opened in 1983 and offers three nine hole layouts, designed by Roger B. Packard who sought the assistance, most diplomatically, of several prominent LPGA members.

There are four indoor and six outdoor tennis courts, raquet ball (similar to squash) basketball and volleyball courts, and the most frightening health club - all power and perspiration. Some of these facilities were put to full use, for as Elaine left us to go back to work, we sallied forth. Only four holes later, soaked to the skin and colder than I have ever been, even on the Kent coast in winter, we called it a day.

Sweetwater appeared to be one of the less extravagant American creations, with one particularly memorable short hole being sampled - no pars were recorded! Having come to the conclusion that it was time to stop, getting a buggy back to



Sweetwater Country Club, located in the heart of the Professional Golf Association

The 1,800 square foot tribute to the games greats is open 9 to 5 Monday through Friday



FIRST COLONIAL

A Development of Sugarland

the clubhouse in something approaching a straight line proved to be a challenge and to the driver who met us head on, coming down the wrong side of the estate's dual carriageway in blinding rain - my apologies. After an hour in the steam room, sauna and shower, in a locker room that would have not been out of place in a five star hotel, we collected our freshly pressed clothes and adjourned to the club's restaurant. Over an excellent

was a promotional film splendidly produced by GCSAA's media director Bob Still detailing the work of the superintendent. This film will be shown to BIGGA members later this year and it is something that the Association would do well to immitate.

Friday is the first day of the Trade Show for distributors and trade personnel only. Luckily the press are allowed a preview. Although trade day is pretty hectic there is not a great

Eric Hunter of the Eric Hunter Grinders in Newcastle, Trevor Martin of Vitax who supports the IOG's Young Groundsman and Master Groundsman of the year awards, both of whom make the trip as part of their prize, Rolf Loewgren of the Swedish Golf Federation, Ron Fream the golf course architect who is doing so much work on the continent, Gerry Brouwer of Brouwer Equipment from Canada which is now part of Cushman/Ryan and many,

MICHAEL COFFEY OUT AND ABOUT IN TEXAS

lunch, again of five star standard, Elaine Scott told us a little of the LPGA's history and how thanks to the Galleria's developer Gerald Hines, who owns Sweetwater, their multi million dollar operation has such a luxurious home.

STIRRING

We returned to the George R. Brown convention centre for the opening session hosted by GCSAA's president Donald Hearn. This featured not only a stirring address from Jim Tunney, whose many accomplishments include being an NFL referee, former head teacher and highly professional speaker and motivator, but also a new TV advertisement for GCSAA. Additionally there

volume of traffic, so I managed to get round most of the show while other members of the by now greatly increased UK party went off in other directions to the NASA Johnson Space Centre, New Orleans or even to the golf course.

There were a number of interesting items, a new ride-on from Jacobsen, the LF100. On the Ransomes stands, of which there were several (a novel approach) were one or two SIS machines which are now being marketed in the USA by Ransomes Inc. Arthur Harrison of SIS was there to obtain first hand reactions. David Jenkins and Phillip Treadgold were helping Verti-Drain's sales along. This machine is really starting to take off in the States.

Many superintendents, having listened to Jack McMillan's talk in Pheonix last year on "deep aeration," have taken the plunge after being reassured that putting surfaces would not be permanently damaged. Chris Smith of Jacobsen was busy on their stand and Gerald Bruce the winner of the Jacobsen Greenkeepers Golf Tournament also got a preview of what was new.

It is a testament to the success of the GCSAA's show how many people you meet from all over the world drawn together for this one event. Len Breakwell of E.T. Breakwell in Birmingham, Mike Eddington of STS in Edinburgh, Stan Ellison of "Turf Management"

many more.

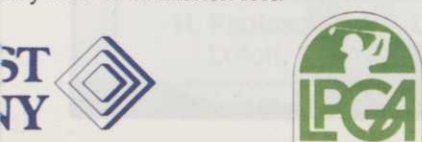
That evening Ransomes Inc. gave a splendid reception at which the whole UK contingent was present. Ransomes chief executive Bob Dodsworth, sales director Keir Wyatt, as well as Brian Mitchell, played hosts and much goodwill was created with customers and friends from around the globe.

STRIKING

Saturday sees the trade show floor opened to the general public. Some 15,000 visit the show over the three days, and most make a dash to claim their Jacobsen's baseball cap - a prized souvenir each year. The most striking stand was Toro's with their entire staff decked out in red, white and blue, to match the convention centre, including white flat caps 'a' la Bobby Locke, red 'knickers' (plus fours to us!), and red, white and blue argyll socks - the equipment took a back seat. Even Peter Roberts of Toro Irrigation, happily recovering from a recent illness, was so attired. Toro also hosted an international reception which included a prize draw. One can only conclude that sales in Japan needed a boost by the number of winners from that country! Graham Dale of Lely, Toro's distributors in the UK, saw to it that the UK party were again well fed and watered especially Messrs Hayes and Baldwin of the STRI. Prawns must be in >



part of First Colony, is the home of the Ladies Golf Club. The club's new Clubhouse and Offices and Hall of Fame. The club's new Clubhouse and Offices and Hall of Fame. The club's new Clubhouse and Offices and Hall of Fame. The club's new Clubhouse and Offices and Hall of Fame. The club's new Clubhouse and Offices and Hall of Fame.



< short supply in Bingley, but then they have Harry Ramsden's fish shop down the road!

Sunday is a repeat of Saturday for most, as the trade show is so vast that it takes over 20 minutes to walk round the perimeter without stopping.

At the same time and therefore to a thin audience, the Sports Turf Managers Association programme was under way. The STMA had invited Dr Peter Hayes to speak, as well as Christine Smith of *the Groundsman* and Huw Morgan and Laurence Pithie the Groundsmen of the Year. I had the pleasure of lunching with an old friend, Jim Prusa, the former assistant director of GCSAA who now heads the National Office Machine Distributors Association. Jim was in attendance as a former superintendent, member of GCSAA and member of the USGA rules committee to speak at the USGA session on the Monday. This he did, his theme being the need for superintendents to support the turfgrass research programme to which GCSAA and the USGA amongst others have contributed substantial sums, which have been used by universities country-wide to study a variety of turfgrass problems, such as new varieties for extreme climatic conditions, the effect of reduced watering, thatch and its related diseases.

Clearly as the turfgrass research programme is something of a 'hot potato' currently within GCSAA, both the USGA and the Association felt that an update on progress halfway through was called for. The USGA Green Section director Bill Bengeyfield gave an illustrated report on the programme thus far. One can only hope that this kind of research, irrespective of its actual subject, continues to grow worldwide, not just in America, and that all involved in golf, especially the players, continue to support such programmes.

Reverting to Sunday, GCSAA's president Donald Hearn gave a reception for a few hundred honoured guests, clearly a time for some to start winding down. I had an opportunity to talk to Bob Ochs, GCSAA's

lawyer, who sits at the right hand of the president at the AGM to ensure that the Association's business is carried out to the letter of the law - I hope it never comes to that with the BIGGA! Jacobsen International's dinner followed with at least fifteen countries represented. Our host, Curt Kimpfbeck, was as gracious as ever and he presented a number of awards to the top salesmen for all the Jacobsen range in the International division. This was followed by a presentation to Jacobsen from the IOG, made by Ray Johnson, of an Institute Crest. Finally all the guests were given a gift of a Jacobsen paper knife when leaving.

INTERNATIONAL

On the Monday after the USGA session we joined a party of Germans, all involved in the golf course industry, at a seminar organised by the Toro company at Woodlands, the Tournament Players course and home of the Houston Open. After lunch Howard Swan and I accompanied by Peter Wisbey, played nine holes, in buggies, in an hour and twenty minutes - being called through by three fourballs and a two ball - surely a record in America! The golf wasn't bad either. The course was, in all honesty, not that great - suffering from an excess of water. Whether natural or man made it was hard to tell.

For me this was the end of another enjoyable trip to the US as I had to return on the Monday night flight.

GCSAA honoured Gene Sarazen with their 'Old Tom Morris' award. Sarazen joins Arnold Palmer, Bob Hope, Gerald Ford, Patty Berg and Robert Trent Jones Snr as

recipients of the prestigious award for services and commitment to the game of golf. Sarazen was the first man to achieve the professional Grand Slam having won the 1932 Open Championship, the 1935 Masters and won the US Open twice and the USPGA three times.

INTERESTING

It was a most interesting trip and one which, as I have said, I would encourage anyone involved in golf to make. One learnt a great deal, not necessarily about American climatic conditions or their huge maintenance budgets, but about the way they organise their Association, the way they project greenkeeping as a profession, the individual's attitude to education, the education of the establishment to reward the better educated superintendent, not to mention sight of new products, machinery and ideas which like automatic irrigation, the ride-on triplex and a host of other new products will, whether we like it or not, arrive in our own country sooner or later.

The cost of the package, plus daily living expenses, shopping and sight-seeing, would probably total between £600 and £750. Certainly not a cheap trip. and for the next two years (Anaheim, California, 1989 and Orlando, Florida, 1990) the cost will be greater than the oil-effected economy of Houston.

But then ask anyone who has been, especially those bright greenkeepers who have attended the educational sessions, and ask them whether they think it is worthwhile. I think their answer would be an emphatic 'yes'.

The Houston skyline

