

BIGGA REPORT

Learning from the GCSAA

A BIGGA party of 30 attended the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America event in Anaheim, California headed by the Association's chairman, Jack McMillan. Following the long flight to Los Angeles, it was indeed a surprise to be greeted by the news that Los Angeles was experiencing its first snowfall in 20 years! indeed for the first two days of the trip, this 'major' event received saturation media coverage and yet the snowfall was measured at the two inch level! Such was the novelty value! Luckily, the snowfall surrounded the Anaheim area but missed the city itself. By the third day, the 'crisis' was over and the party was able to enjoy much more traditional Southern Californian weather.

The GCSAA event is a major affair with an estimated attendance of some 15,000-16,000 persons this year. I was primarily interested in the structure of the educational seminar programme and the trade exhibition, with reference to the future development of our own event at Harrogate. The Exhibition is well-staged and planned with plenty of room to accommodate visitors. It takes a considerable time to get around given the vast number of stands and, even if attending for three days, it would be quite easy to miss a particular company.

A number of companies use 'gimmicks' to attract visitors to their stands, and I am not sure that this is a development we should encourage at Harrogate. It seemed to suit the style of the American event, and yet would seem out of place at our own.

The real problem facing the GCSAA Exhibition is its continued growth. The Association is already limited to a select number of venues which can accommodate the show, and this number is likely to decline with the envisaged continued expansion. There is therefore some concern amongst GCSAA officials and they are constantly planning ahead.

Seminar sessions are run concurrently and attract large numbers. Speakers are rigorously kept to allotted timespans and consequently

there is only a token attempt at question and answer sessions. Indeed, questions seemed to be called for as delegates were leaving their seats to attend another seminar of their choice elsewhere. I found this disconcerting and there seemed to be a constant movement of people and a generally unacceptable noise level whilst speakers were in action on the platform. Having said this, it is not easy to suggest an alternative system given the numbers in attendance at the seminars.

The range of speakers is excellent and golf course superintendents are actively encouraged to participate in the speaker programmes. This is something we have adopted at Harrogate and will be developed for the future. Whilst certainly learning much from the seminar programme, my overall view is that we need to develop our own individual programme rather than follow the American system which is essentially geared to the large numbers for which they cater.

Our party enjoyed excellent hospitality and the traditional warm welcome from our American hosts. Hospitality rooms abound and there are many invitations from trade companies as well as to the official GCSAA functions. The climax was the Monday night banquet with some 1,500 in attendance. So vast were the seating arrangements that the chairman and myself at the guests table could not see our party sitting at the other end of the banqueting room!

Whilst there were some gremlins in the registration procedures, one could only admire the organisation.

The American Superintendent holds a respected position at his golf club and this is due, in no small measure, to the professional image projected and the structured education programme which produces well-qualified greenkeepers. There was much interest in BIGGA and positive comments regarding our uniform. The Americans are looking for a close relationship with ourselves and an exchange of information, together with reciprocal visits where possible.

Socially, our party did extremely well, indeed one or two seemed quite overwhelmed by the hospitality on occasions! Members took the opportunity to visit and play on Southern Californian Golf Courses and there was the obligatory visit to Disneyland - enjoyed by all. Some greenkeepers of mature years were seen taking numerous turns on the most tortuous rides - a tribute to their stamina and many healthy years spent on the golf course! Anaheim is not an attractive city and exists primarily for its Convention Centre facilities and Disneyland. Those able to spend some time away from the city area appreciated a taste of the real America.

The week passed quickly and half of the party then left on extended trips whilst the unlucky ones departed for the airport. There was much talk of plans for next year in Florida and every expectation of a large BIGGA contingent attending. A good time was had by all and much learnt for the future.

Neil Thomas

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