

A Greenkeeper International tribute to supporters of
the Greenkeeper Education and Development Fund.
Number 1: COLIN GREGORY, formerly of ISEKI Ltd.



Golf's Mr Memory

There's a tale often told which features The Pope and Colin Gregory and of Colin being called to the Vatican for an audience with Pope John Paul II. With the audience nearing completion, Colin escorts John Paul II out onto the veranda of the Holy Palace, high above the thronging masses that congregate there, the better to receive the cheering accolades. The crowds are suitably impressed – including a group of British tourists clustered at the very back of St Peter's Square, looking on in awed silence. Finally, unable to contain his curiosity any longer, one tourist turns to another and asks: "Who is that on the veranda?" "Don't know who the big fellow in the white robe is," comes the reply, "but isn't that Colin Gregory beside him?"

If this seems a bit of a tall story, there is nonetheless an element of truth encapsulated – for Colin Gregory is the very epitome of the character who is known by everyone and who equally knows everyone and everything (or knows a man who does!) – he's a veritable walking memory bank.

To further illustrate the point, I'll tell of the time when playing golf with three greenkeepers, some 400 miles from home and on an unfamiliar course. On my back swing I became aware of a car stopping nearby and of a face peering out to witness my less than classic execution. I stopped in mid-swing and a voice laughingly observed "I could never forget a swing like that – how are you, boy?" Yes, it was Colin Gregory, a man I had only met once before and who just happened to be passing by! "Did you know who that was," I later asked my colleagues, "yes, of course", came the unanimous reply, "everyone knows Colin Gregory!"

To greenkeepers, Colin is perhaps best known as the man behind the Iseki Tournament, though he is and indeed always has been associated with our industry; right from starting work. Now beginning a new phase in his career as Managing Director, Hardi Ltd, we met again recently and he

told me something of his interests and ideals.

Colin was born into a Norfolk agricultural family, his father a branch manager with Dalgety, and began his career at Ransomes, Sims and Jefferies Ltd in 1966 as a "poor, underpaid apprentice", going through the works, progressing to the experimental department and at aged 19 entering into 'Service Department – Agricultural'. I said that the man has a phenomenal blotting paper-like memory, and this was borne out by his actually lecturing to dealers within weeks of being trained in the Combine Training School – a 19 year old whizz kid! Still an apprentice, at 20 he moved into the sales office as the link man for A to E clients and with the apprenticeship over at 21, Colin was quickly transferred to southern Ireland to help develop sales, both there and in Northern Ireland as well.

Three years and many, many sales later, this adopted leprechaun conducted his craft with consummate skill – often over a pint or two of Guinness and late into the night, as is the Irish way – before returning to England and a new post with Lely (the interview gleefully conducted with John Hawkins at high speed whilst travelling on the A1), as northern England and southern Ireland Area Manager.

The dealer network, then principally agricultural, continued and grew, for those were pioneering days when the sales force trailed their wares behind a company car and Colin was instrumental in introducing Cultiseeders, Buryvators, and a Turfsprayer – his first introduction into the turf-care market – for Lely. Chance often plays a part in any career progression and in 1979 Lely took on the franchise for the innovative Iseki range, which was introduced at the Highland Show. Jack Wilkinson, the man who started the new company, Lely Iseki Tractors, left suddenly and Colin became sales manager almost overnight, taking him headlong into the fine turf care market full time. In a span of six years the sales of Iseki tractors grew by some 300%, largely

Of Colin and the BIGGA connection there is a record of success from the very start



through Gregory inspired intensive demonstrations and vigorous marketing, this success not surprisingly attracting interest in Japan. In 1985 the parent Iseki, intent on setting up their own UK operation, had meetings with John Hawkins (then MD of Lely) and Colin Gregory, resulting in the formation of Iseki UK Ltd, with John and Colin as sole British shareholders, in 1986, the business opening in St. Neots and moving in 1989 to Bourn in Cambridgeshire. John Hawkins had always declared a wish to retire at 55, and in 1990 he did so, this bringing a Japanese managing director, the first of two such Japanese Nationals, in his wake.

Colin, however, remained the driving force of Iseki, and of the hugely popular Iseki Tournament, until fate once more took a hand, strangely enough, again from a man bent on retiring from business and casting his net for a worthwhile replacement. Literally 'headhunted', Colin was whisked into the top job of Managing Director, Hardi Limited, just a few weeks ago and it is at Hinckley, Leicestershire that the wheel turns full circle.

Of Colin and the BIGGA connection there is a record of success from the very start, when a decision was made to bring sponsorship by way of the tournament in 1988, beginning at St Pierre, followed by equally successful events at Moor Allerton, Moortown and most recently at Hillside. I fancy he is something of a would-be greenkeeper himself, for his enthusiasm for the Association and its cause knows no bounds. He positively bubbles with eagerness over our growth, sings the praises of BTME as much as if it were his own baby, and is totally committed to our ideals.

Of the man himself, like almost everything he touches, he

seems to have a grand and clear cut plan. He married the delightful Rosemary back in his early 20s, following a courtship that began when he was first nursed back to health by her in a Norwich hospital. He's a keen though very occasional golfer, left handed like myself, with an eagerness to see his son Paul (13) into his hometown St Neots Golf Club and moving toward a 'proper' golf swing, "unlike yours and mine," he chuckled. He positively dotes on daughter Rachel (16), loves gardening and caravanning and, not surprisingly, loves his work.

I said the man has an amazing memory, and this was proved when he took me on a whistle stop tour of the Hardi building. In a little over one week he knows everyone by name, reels off specifications and part numbers with consummate ease and knows the vast range of Hardi spraying products (and their every application) by heart. He's an early bird, treasuring the brief period between seven and eight before 'phones start jangling to recharge his thought batteries and prepare for the day ahead. I asked him to account for his success in what has always been a highly competitive market. "Knowing the product thoroughly is vital," he said, "together with understanding fully the needs and demands of those in the marketplace. This, coupled with a relaxed, non-pressured, atmosphere creates confidence." He then added, again with the typical Gregory chuckle, "and, of course I never forget to ask for the order!"

His immediate aims at Hardi are equally clear cut. He will increase Hardi's share of the agricultural market and develop and expand the amenity market. As they say in all the best movie success stories - this will be a saga that will run and run!

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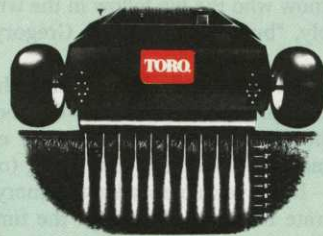
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