

# Adventure in the land of the free



**O**n the day I won the Toro/PGA European Tour Student Greenkeeper of the Year award, together with a Toro sponsored trip to the USA, I was dumbstruck. In truth, I had never expected to win anything; leave alone the Toro Student Greenkeeper title, and certainly never realised the magnitude of the prize. The shock didn't really begin to 'sink in' until I received my November '92 issue of Greenkeeper International. On the front cover, there for all to see, was the proof – my photograph!

Quite apart from the great kudos attached in winning such a prestige award, the trip to America was a great adventure in itself, begun in early January. After a time span of some 17 hours, which included two air flights and a bus ride, I arrived at the motel that was to be my base for the next few weeks. It was a dark night and very cold. Over the next

seven weeks my colleagues and I experienced some very cold conditions indeed, with temperatures down to minus 30° centigrade and lots of snow!

Attendance at the Winter School for Turfgrass Managers, University of Massachusetts, started at 8am the very next morning, which alone should have indicated that I was in for some pretty hard work. Our timetable dictated attendance to 35 hours of lectures each week, studying such diverse subjects as: Turfgrass Management; Irrigation and Drainage; Machinery; Turfgrass Diseases; Soils and Fertilisers; Turfgrass Calculations; Turfgrass Physiology; Trees and Shrubs; Personnel Management and Golf Course Architecture. We crammed in a deal of work over the next seven weeks, for example, on one occasion we were called upon to design a complete computer-controlled irrigation

system.

As past winners have often intimated, the terms and titles used by our American cousins are often quite different to those common to the UK. I came to terms with most of them quickly enough, though the hardest to use and understand were the American units of measurement – yards, fluid ounces, US gallons (not Imperial) etc., which were confusing to such as me, brought up on metric scales.

The university (and the Turfgrass course in particular) has an international reputation, though most of the 65 students attending were from the USA. In addition, students came from Canada, Argentina, Austria and France, along with one other Englishman, Londoner David Cluggie. As an example, one student visitor was the Frenchman Eric Alber, who had won the title of 'Best Young Superintendent' in his country and Toro had sponsored him also – with a trip to the USA as his prize. I was amazed at the sheer size of the university, which seemed to be like a town built specifically around a population of some 25,000 students and staff.

However, do not believe that the trip was all work, for upon completion of our course Eric and I went to Minneapolis, thereafter visiting the Toro factory at Tomah in Wisconsin to witness the actual manufacture of Toro turf equipment. On the day we arrived the new Toro Workman 3200 was being constructed in petrol engined versions, along with Greenmaster 3100s. Needless to say, this was extremely interesting, it being obvious how much attention is paid by Toro personnel to the quality of their machinery, with each person on the production line carrying out numerous quality control checks.

The day following we visited Toro headquarters and enjoyed a guided tour of the facility, including the design, development and testing cells. Following this we were taken to the 'Mall of America', the biggest shopping centre in the world, with some 10,000

retail outlets under one roof and crowned – smack in the middle – by a theme park!

From Minneapolis we flew to California, discovering that 28 inches of rain had fallen in the past four months compared to only 8-12 inches in a normal year. In this State we visited the Toro irrigation plant at Riverside, about an hour or so by car from Los Angeles, and here we saw sprinkler parts being constructed, assembled and tested – again a most informative and interesting diversion. Touring of the plant completed, the following day saw us on the fairways of Moreno Valley Ranch GC, playing golf in the rain!

To finish, we had two 'free' days during which Eric and I elected to visit Hollywood and the Universal Studios – an unbelievable trip to the world of celluloid make-believe – this before returning to Riverside and taking the long flight home.

Looking back, I can declare it an absolutely fantastic trip, a once-in-a-lifetime experience. There are so many people to thank that it is impossible to mention them all individually. That stated, the Toro people in both America and Britain must be singled out for praise, for making me feel so welcome. Follow these good folk with praise for BIGGA, for arranging and running the event, and also to my new-found American friends and everybody at home and at my workplace.

I'm sure that anyone lucky enough to have attended such a trip will echo my sentiments – that it is a wonderful learning experience, a fantasy, an amazing and overwhelming prize. Future winners, for the moment, must content themselves with mere dreaming!

**BARRY NEVILLE**

*Toro/PGA European Tour Student Greenkeeper of the Year 1992-93.*

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