

# TALKING HEADS

**Everyone agrees that good communication between the keepers of the green and the users of the green is essential, but is it worth going to the extra bother of organising a presentation evening for members? Duncan McGilvray, course manager at Letchworth, reckons it is.**

It is my belief that the vast majority of our present problems are due to the lack of communication and presentation of ourselves and our staff. If, as we have proved at Letchworth, this can be largely overcome, everybody – including member, committee member and secretary – is much happier and, dare I say, the greenstaff are better paid.

Giving a presentation such as the one outlined below may seem a daunting task but, if successful, makes all our other tasks much easier.

Following five years of annual course manager presentations in the clubhouse giving updates on progress, describing problems, with the assistance of invited speakers, and answering sometimes difficult questions, I believed that there was something more that could be done to get the message across regarding what the job of the greenkeeper was all about.

Then in 1992 I attended an EGU seminar on policy documents and there was the answer – Ed McCabe and Arthur King from Brockenhurst Manor Golf Club had given their committee and membership a presentation of the greenstaff and their equipment.

With great enthusiasm I returned to work the next day and planned our own presentation at Letchworth.

Firstly I asked the greenstaff what they thought. All agreed it was a good idea and suggested different set-ups to get the most from the day – even though it was scheduled for a Friday evening in the middle of summer. With that sort of backing from our staff I knew it would work. Permission from the club? No problems. Huge encouragement from our liaison officer. The treasurer even advised me to set-up a separate budget so that we could do it properly (decent PA system, cheese and wine, etc). Treasurers always know somehow that a little money spent now bears fruit into the future.

So all the preparations were made (far too many to list) and the day arrived.

5pm: Final staff briefing. All staff including seasonal and part-time were there.

4.30–6.15pm: PA system installed and tested.

5.30–6.15pm: All relevant equipment, machinery and staff to putting green and in place for presentation.

5.30–6.15pm: Still and video cameras set up so that an accurate record of the event could be kept – all set up and monitored by our liaison officer Brian Hodder (without whom my position as course manager would be near impossible).

6.30pm: The presentation begins – and the sun was even shining.

The president of the club, who introduces all our course presentations, introduced me with his usual flair and then it

was down to a very nervous course manager.

Following my brief introduction of what the evening would hold for our members I started with our greenstaff.

## The staff

I spoke about each of them in turn, probably embarrassed some, named them, went through their service history, explained about training and some of the tasks they had to carry out and the difficulties they were up against in getting some of those tasks completed with golfers on the course.

## The machinery

How much it cost. I explained that they are not just lawnmowers in the same way as greenkeepers are not just grasscutters. How much the machinery costs to maintain and more importantly the costs and problems which would occur if it was not maintained.

## Action demonstrations

A pin position was changed all the time a commentary was done on what the staff have to think about before a place is selected – nobody I spoke to following this demonstration had any idea how much was involved. The differences between triple and hand mowing were explained along with height of cut, hand watering, wetting agents and dry patch.

We even set up a situation on the first fairway where one of the greenstaff was cutting a fairway and an irate lady member (assistant pro with a skirt on) was trying to play the first hole.

I could then discuss the difficulties experienced by both parties and explain why – and more importantly *how* – they could be overcome in the future.

I then closed the reasonably formal part of the evening and invited all present to visit our workshops for cheese and wine and discussions with all the staff.

## The workshop visit

The members were generally left on their own to look at whatever they liked with the staff on hand to answer questions – they were kept very busy and a very good atmosphere was created.

Some of the attractions were bench set-ups of vertical cutting units and back-lapping machinery. We especially took time out to show some of the behind-the-scenes administration involved, ie. year planners for competitions, holidays, maintenance schedules etc, diaries, day books, forward planners, machinery records and health and safety requirements.

When I look back, the good that was done on that one evening in June 1993 will last a very long time – the membership know much more about the work that we do, and that is no bad thing.

Much more importantly they now see the staff as highly trained, respectable, professional people.

The staff themselves got a great deal from the evening as well – they now look at our membership in a different light – not just aloof golfers who get in the way of their work.

It is a fact that the membership pay subscriptions which ultimately pay our salaries and if they know that the course is managed by trained professionals they will not argue at any time in the future regarding additional finance to maintain and improve golf course conditions.

We made the effort – I would urge my colleagues everywhere to do likewise. Believe me, it is certainly worth the hassle.

● Duncan McGilvray has been at Letchworth GC for more than six years.



**Above: the club president gets the members in the mood for course manager Duncan McGilvray**



**Left: members take a look round the workshops**