

**Duncan McGillvray concludes his series on the role of the Course Manager by looking at the hoary subject of communication**

**M**any if not all the problems we come up against in our jobs as greenkeepers can be blamed fairly and squarely on the distinct lack of communication of information.

As a teenage Apprentice Greenkeeper I remember top dressing greens which took six men three days to complete!

I knew something was wrong because at a time when we were working our hardest the golfers seemed to complain the most about what we were doing!

Why? The simple answer was that in the golfer's eyes we were making putting surfaces much worse than they were before we started (in the short term anyway) so who can blame them.

They did not know why we were doing this job because it had not been communicated to them.

Now, some 25 years later, I have to say that the situation has changed very little – all the effort has gone into getting the job done as quickly and as efficiently as possible so that the golfer is inconvenienced as little as possible which is commendable but little or no effective advance has been made in explaining the very necessary work of the greenkeeper which I believe is vital in securing the future of our profession.

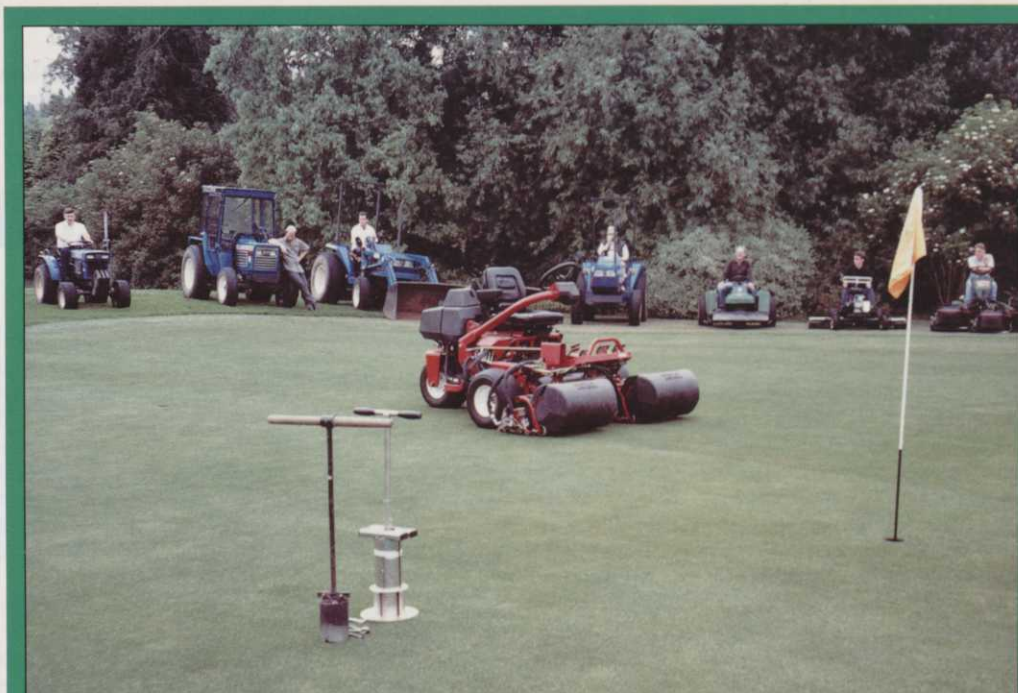
I use the top dressing scenario as an instance – all the tasks on the golf course require explanation from the most general question, e.g. "How often do you cut greens?" to the more detailed analogy "Why do you dig the greens up just when you've got them right?"

The days of hiding away in some distant corner of the golf course when questions are being asked are long gone. Today's Course Managers are required to be excellent communicators and must communicate effectively at all levels.

I fervently believe that it makes our job easier in the long term if we continue to try to "get the message across".

#### **ENDEAVOURING AT ALL TIMES TO IMPROVE COMMUNICATION**

The average private members' golf club probably has around 500 – 1000 members, is controlled by an elected General/ Management Committee of say 10 – 15 people, has various Sub-Committees of which one will be for the course, e.g. Course/Liaison/Green Committee of say three – seven people.



Ready for the off: Greenstaff and equipment prepare for course information evening, for members' information

# KEEPING EVERYONE INFORMED

The club will have a Ladies' Section, a Seniors' Section, a Juniors' Section and in some instances an Artisans' Section.

But only one golf course! So how can you possibly communicate with all those people? With extreme difficulty is the answer but we have to if we are to be in any way effective in maintaining and improving upon present golf course conditions.

One thing I have learned over my years as a greenkeeper is that anything worthwhile is not achieved easily and that is certainly the case with effective communication. The subject must be tackled from many different directions with a common goal in mind – accurate information to the member.

Not only that but the whole system has to be monitored and reviewed periodically to assess if it is actually achieving the objectives set. If it is not we must be

prepared to change and improve the system – it is no good proclaiming that "the members never read the noticeboard". That is accepting that you have failed to communicate.

I have come across five main areas of communication and these are as follows:

#### **Official Communication**

The Course Manager's presence at appropriate Committee meetings to convey all aspects of the maintenance work involved, present schedules and programmes, etc. for approval, and be able to answer questions. The development and publishing of a Golf Course Management Policy Document to ensure continuity on all golf course matters. Appropriate regular management meetings with the overall Head of Staff (usually the Secretary) to assist in his/her role as a channel of information to Committee and members.

#### **Direct Written Communication**

Monthly Course Reports by the Course Manager on detailed observations, progress, expectations on all areas of the golf course as well as general information on staff, etc. which are presented to the relevant Committee and once approved are posted for member information. Winter/Spring Renovation/ Autumn Renovation Programmes once approved should also be posted. Internal magazines and newsletters as well as simple A4 large print notices of impending work on the course can be distributed on tables throughout the bar.

#### **Direct General Communication**

Presentations by the Course Manager to the members on subjects ranging from "What's wrong with the golf course and what we are going to do to put it right" to "How much it costs to maintain Augusta National in comparison



# KEEPING EVERYONE INFORMED

to our own golf course" followed by question and answer sessions.

Smaller presentations by the Course Manager to sections of the Club (25 - 30 people maximum) on various subjects. This is a better way to develop two-way communication because the emphasis is placed on discussion and not lecture and much is learned by all concerned (and that includes the Course Manager).

## General Communication

A large area must be made available in a prominent area of the Clubhouse for Course Information to post reports, programmes and schedules and any other relevant information.

It is important that this area is up-dated regularly and kept "fresh" to keep interest. Illustrated drawings and photographs are an excellent way of attracting attention and should be used as often as possible.

Videos both professionally produced, e.g. the BIGGA career video and home-made on subjects such as course etiquette, can also keep the subjects interesting.

## Public Relations/Semi-Social Communication

Staff golf matches against different sections of the club and even the Committee. Visits to the workshops by Committee and members to look behind the scenes. These two measures bring the rest of the greenstaff into the equation as well as the Course Manager which is important.

Having lunch in the Clubhouse periodically and playing golf with members to a small degree help us to understand and get over individual views in an amicable way.

Using all these different ways of communicating will "get the message across" better than previously and the membership will begin to understand what we are trying to achieve on the golf course. After all, we all want the same thing - a well maintained, well presented golf course of which we we can all be proud.

## TO ENSURE THE SAFETY OF THE STAFF AND THE ENVIRONMENT

The last and vitally important responsibility of every Course Manager is basic safety. With the assistance of the Health & Safety

Executive, the local Authorities and the many competent safety consultants working within the industry, this area is not so frightening as once it was.

The one piece of advice which I can pass on is to contact the relevant authority first and request assistance in setting safe systems in place and not waiting until they come knocking on your door.

In this way you are demonstrating your commitment to ensuring safe standards of work in your workplace and also ensuring a good future working relationship with the relevant authority.

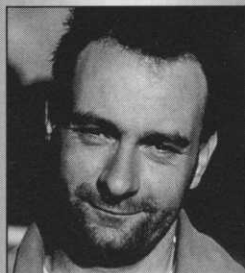
■ *During the course of this series of articles I have had some feedback regarding content. Some destructive but mostly constructive.*

*One point which has been made is "It's okay for these big money 36/54 hole complexes and golf clubs which can afford these highly trained Course Managers but we are just a 9/18 hole private member's club - we can't afford a Course Manager" or even "We don't need a Course Manager".*

*My answer to that is - you cannot afford not to employ a fully trained Course Manager. It is he/she who will analyse/assess what you have and devise efficient systems which will ensure that money is not wasted.*

*I would guarantee in the long term you will enjoy a better maintained and presented golf course and therefore a more contented membership for the money available - that is after all what efficient management is all about.*

*The job I'm always glad to see the back of is...*



**"Putting in drainage ditches"**

- Richard Gamble  
Aldwark Manor

## A big thank you

May I take this opportunity to thank all those BIGGA members who formed the Walker Cup Support Team for their help in the preparation of the course.

Your efforts were much appreciated by both Royal Porthcawl and myself.

**David Ward**  
Course Manager  
Royal Porthcawl GC

## In search of age record

I am writing to you to see if you can find out how old the youngest Head Greenkeeper in Britain is.

I am 18 years-old and a Head Greenkeeper on an 18 hole private course - Sandilands GC in Sutton-on-Sea, Lincolnshire. I have just finished my National Certificate at Elmwood College and have been greenkeeping since I was 12.

If you could do this for me I would be very grateful indeed.

**James North**  
Sandilands GC

■ *Editor's Note: Our investigations suggest that as you were born on December 18, 1976 you are the youngest Head Greenkeeper in BIGGA. However if we are wrong we'd be delighted to hear from anyone younger.*

*The job I'm always glad to see the back of is...*



**"Hollow coring"**

- Glenn Millar  
Ullesthorpe GC

Send letters to The Editor, Greenkeeper International, Aldwark Manor, Aldwark, Aine, York YO6 2NF or fax them on 01347 838864

# Tournament magic

I would like to take this opportunity to thank everybody at BIGGA Headquarters for the marvellous two days I enjoyed at the West Lancashire GC competing in the Hayter Challenge. I thought that the tournament was extremely well organised and it was a great honour to take part.

The kindness and hospitality shown by the golf club was also of a very high standard, as was the setting and the condition of the golf course - which was a credit to the greenstaff.

I would also like to thank our sponsor Hayter for making everything possible and I am most grateful to them for such a fine competition. I'm sure everybody who took part would agree with these comments and will look forward to next year's tournament, hoping they are fortunate to qualify again.

**Antony Bindley**  
Kirby Muxloe GC

## Peter Alliss' explanation appreciated

*The following was first published in Golf Weekly magazine:*

May I publicly thank Peter Alliss on behalf of greenkeepers, Chairmen of green committees and Club Secretaries for his invaluable assistance while commenting on the Walker Cup. For many weeks we have been trying to explain to members why the grass is being lost on the greens only to be met with disbelief and accusations of poor greenkeeping practices.

Alliss' explanation of Take All Disease will hopefully make the many doubters realise that this problem is totally outside the control of greenstaff and is a direct result of weather conditions.

**Mike Penny**  
Secretary  
Worlebury GC, Avon

■ *Editor's Note: Peter Alliss was provided with information regarding the disease of the Royal Porthcawl greens by BIGGA.*