

A very busy 1996: and another full year ahead

This month's article looks back at Education and Training related activities during 1996 and looks forward to 1997.

It does not seem possible that the year has almost come to an end and Harrogate is only seven weeks away. This year started with the Learning Experience, with the week starting with the National Education Conference and the welcome return of two workshops. Workshop 1 on Golf Course Design, Construction and Maintenance was extremely popular, so much so that we had to stop taking applications in early December. We therefore decided to run this workshop again in 1997. Unfortunately, for those slow to apply, this workshop is again full and we are not accepting any more applications. The National Education Conference was a great success with speakers from around the world, entertaining over one hundred and fifty delegates. The last three days saw the seminar programme run for the last time in the Royal Hall. We have had problems with heating such a large theatre and 1997 will see in a new venue.

February and March saw the continuation of the very successful Regional Supervisory Management Courses run for us by Brin Bendon and Frank Newberry. The autumn/winter/spring period sessions allowed more than 180 greenkeepers to gain knowledge and practise the skills of supervisory management and, thanks to the contributors to the Education and Development Fund, at a very, very low price. Sami Collins joined me as Education Assistant in March and was soon involved in administrating training courses.

April and May saw the entries rushing in for the TORO/Lely/PGA European Tour Student of the Year Competition. This competition has got better each year and the overall standard of this years regional finalists made it very difficult for the Regional Judges to select the eight National Finalists. This competition always gives me a boost as I get to see the people



Education Update

BY KEN RICHARDSON

who represent the future of greenkeeping and from what I have seen over three years, there are exciting times ahead. Congratulations to Fintan Brennan, John Bachelor and Noel Green on their success this year. Watch out at BTME for details of the 1997 Competition.

June, July and August, the so called quiet months saw us beginning the filming for BIGGA's next training video, preparing for the next round of Supervisory Management Course, arranging course visits for the Miracle Greenkeeper of the Year Competition and administering the Master Greenkeeper scheme.

Thanks to the contributors to the Education and Development Fund, BIGGA will be launching three more training aids. Its new training video, designed to complement the very successful book, *A Practical Guide to Ecological Management on the Golf Course*, which will look at the process of conducting an ecological survey, production of a management plan and the methods of ecological management, the latest *On Course Field Guide*, which looks at grass identification and the relaunch of the pests and diseases guide which has proven to be very popular.

That brought us to September when I travelled around the Regions, judging the Regional Finalists for the Student of the Year, continued filming for the new video and began the production of a grass identification guide.

October and November started with the first three of this autumn's supervisory management courses, in Scotland, quickly followed by two weeks of residential courses here at Aldwark Manor, then more regional supervisory management courses.

That brings us back to Decem-

ber, where I started this article, and the start of a look to the future. Unfortunately, my crystal ball in broken and Mystic Meg is fully committed to the National Lottery but I will do my best.

The Learning Experience at Harrogate has been expanded yet again with four workshops and the National Education Conference taking place over the first two days ie 20 and 21 January. As I have mentioned before, Workshop 1 (Golf Course Design Construction and Maintenance) is now full but we still have places on Workshop 2 (Levelling and Surveying), Workshop 3 (Effective Communication-Presenting to Green Committees) and Workshop 4, a one day workshop, (The Magic of Greenkeeping). All four workshops and the National Education Conference take place in the Majestic Hotel, which will be BIGGA's Headquarters for the full week. We are again presenting a Chairmen of Green/Secretaries Course, on Tuesday 21 and Wednesday 22 January, in cooperation with the STRI. This course has been modified this year following comments from last year's delegates, and will include an input from Billy McMillan. This year sees the move of the Seminar programme from the Royal Hall to the Kings Suite, which is under Hall D. All four workshops, the National Education Conference and Seminars will, once again, attract Master Greenkeeper credits and BASIS Continuing Professional Development points. Full details of the Education Programme and Social activities is elsewhere in this magazine.

When we get back from Harrogate, the process will start all over again so that we will continue to provide quality education and training opportunities for greenkeepers.

Those attending a two day workshop will receive four credits, two for a one day workshop while each half day seminar session in the Education Conference will be worth two credits and the BTME Seminar programme worth five credits.

Irish

The Celtic connection shone through at the Toro/PGA European Tour Student of the Year Final with an Irishman from a Scottish college claiming the top prize.

Well that's it. The cat's out of the bag and the formula to success in the Toro/PGA European Tour Student Greenkeeper of the Year is now available to everyone. Postcards to a Mr Fintan Brennan, Dublin, Ireland.

So what is this big secret which can turn a man into a winner and give him a reference on his CV which only very few can boast?

Here it is:- Take a pinch of ambition, add a dash of application and a dose of determination, add two tablespoonfuls of talent to taste... oh yes, and be prepared to make sacrifices.

It was a recipe which all eight of the 1996 finalists had used "exceedingly" well to present the judges with the most difficult task of identifying a winner they have had to face.

However, the man whose particular combination of ingredients proved a winner was the aforementioned Fintan Brennan, Deputy Head Greenkeeper at Portmarnock Hotel and Golf Links.

Fintan proved his ambition at his interview for his job at Portmarnock when he looked Head Greenkeeper Peter Casbolt straight in the eye and in answer to the question what do you see yourself doing in future said, "Your job." That convinced Peter that Fintan was the man for the job and nothing has changed his mind from that initial impression.

His application and determination were also proved when his dedication to his studies won him awards at college and his talent shone through in his second year when he won the Barenbrug Student of the Year Award and was promoted to Deputy Head Greenkeeper after less than two years in greenkeeping.

Sacrifices? Fintan is married with two children, Mike, six, and Joe, two and a half, yet his college courses took place on block release over the Irish Sea, far removed from his home comforts at Elmwood, in Cupar, Fife.

"I was away from home for a total of 19 weeks over the last two

eyes are smiling



Toro/PGA European Tour Student Greenkeeper of the Year Fintan Brennan, centre, flanked by, from left, Mark Hunter, Graham Dale, John Bachelor, Pat Murphy, Noel Greene and Neil Thomas

years," explained Fintan. "Peter Casbolt has sent a number of students to Elmwood and it is reckoned to be the top college in Europe so I was delighted to go there."

Peter Casbolt confirmed his admiration for Elmwood and explained that of the 10 students he had sent there six were now Head Greenkeepers.

"I only send my best students there because it is expensive but they seem to do better because I believe the standard of teaching is so good."

There is no doubt that Fintan qualifies as one of his best students and Peter is quite comfortable that his latest protege is "after his job".

"I teach Fintan how to do a job and then he teaches the next person down. That's how we work here," explained Peter, who will meet up with his Deputy at the GCSAA show in Las Vegas in February which Fintan will attend as part of the 10 week State-side trip which constitutes his prize.

Fintan, who plays golf to a mean handicap of 6, only began greenkeeping at the age of 29, having spent the first 14 years of his working life as a metal fabricator. Even then his work ethic and desire to improve himself shone through.

"I went back to night school to

do the equivalent of British "A" Levels and did all the qualifications which were available to me as a metal fabricator," explained Fintan.

This had been ingrained in him by his late father, Michael, who died last November.

"He was a big influence on me and told me that even if I was sweeping the floor I should do it to the best of my ability. I've always remembered that advice."

His involvement with the Bernhard Langer-designed PGA European Tour/IMG course at Portmarnock came when he was working as a site foreman with the company which got the contract to put a fence around the course site. That gave him the urge to get into greenkeeping and he took a job as a dumper driver with the constructors with the single aim of becoming a greenkeeper and, hopefully, going to college from that.

Being based in Scotland for the block release course gave him the opportunity to sample some of Scotland's finest golf courses and among those he played were Carnoustie and Turnberry where he spent a day during the '94 Open with George Brown.

"I've been back to Turnberry three or four times and played the course with George and he has been a big

help to me," he explained.

He is looking forward to his time in the States – if not the added time away from his wife Bernie and the two boys – where he will undertake a turf management course at the renowned Massachusetts University and visit the Toro Company's Headquarters in California and Minneapolis and the GCSAA Show in Las Vegas.

"The Americans are very well up in turf grass science and although the nutrients, the diseases and the climate are different the basic rules are the same and to study in America, where much of the forward movements are coming in greenkeeping and new grass species are being developed is wonderful."

Coming from a course with such a famous name as Portmarnock will also assist Fintan in integrating with the locals in America but although Portmarnock Hotel and Golf Links and its more illustrious namesake are only 100 yards apart they are in all other respects completely different.

"We're a pay and play course, our greens are fescue bent, while they are poa annua at Portmarnock and we are 100 years younger than Portmarnock which is 102 years old."

Fintan has been given great

support on his way to the Toro/PGA European Tour Student of the Year title and not just by Peter Casbolt.

"The Chairman of our company Colin Maclaine was delighted that I'd reached the final and wished me the best of luck.

"Now having won I'm absolutely delighted and I just hope I can do the other seven finalists proud when I go to the States.

"To try and pick three of us out of the eight was a hard decision as each of the finalists had their own special qualities. The whole occasion has been really super and it was great to meet the other students and those on the interview panel as well."

The other two winners two whom Fintan referred were John Bachelor of Mendip Spring Golf Club and Cannington College and Noel Greene of Gay Hill Golf Club and the Warwickshire College who were runners-up winning a trip to the PGA European Tour Conference in Penina in December and the opportunity to work at two PGA European Tour venues on the 1997 Tour Schedule.

Both have strong BIGGA connections as John's boss at Mendip is Ian Harrison a former Premier Greenkeeper of the Year while Noel's Course Manager is Dean Cleaver, the current BIGGA National Chairman.

Each was thrilled by their achievement and at age 20 each is looking forward to an exciting year ahead

The judges Mark Gunter of Toro, Graham Dale of Lely UK, Richard Stillwell of the PGA European Tour, Pat Murphy Chairman of BIGGA's Education Sub Committee and Neil Thomas, BIGGA's Executive Director were impressed by the general standard of finalist in '96 and a case could have been made for each winning the main prize.

"It is a credit to the colleges and the golf clubs where the students work that the standards are now so high and the judges were given such a difficult task," said Pat Murphy.

The other finalists were Alasdair McLean, Karl Weston, John Donnelly, Stephen Privett and Michael Hartney.