

Here's to the next time

SUNDAY JANUARY 21

It's that time of year again, BTME week. For some reason I appear to be taking an over keen interest in the TV weather bulletins but then before the week is out... Off to the Majestic Hotel where Ken and Sami are busying themselves with preparations for registration. Conference set looks impressive. Registration goes smoothly with everyone seeming to be impressed with the new conference folders. Our international guests arrive and join us for an excellent dinner. I end up on a table which produces an interesting debate between Jeff Collinge and Billy McMillan – nobody else had much chance to speak. The week seems set fair but you couldn't say the same about the weather – it's cold outside.

MONDAY

Conference and Workshop One are off to a good start but our lecturer for Workshop Two on Stress Management Techniques, Brin Bendon, is missing. 9am rolls on to 9.20am and I am feeling distinctly stressed. Ken is growing paler by the minute. Finally Brin's car is spotted and we help him out, broken ankle and all. He had been planning for a 9.30am start. Stress levels are running high. Should be a good workshop – wish I could go. The day goes well, while a conference highlight is the presentation of Master Greenkeeper Certificates to John Wells and David Winterton. So to the conference dinner with speeches from the Chairman and Peter Wilson from Ransomes followed by an hilarious after dinner speaker in David Gunson – the ex-air traffic controller had flown all the big names including Buddy Holly, Jim Reeves and Ricky Valence... A good end to the day – but it's getting colder...

TUESDAY

Down to the George Hotel at 8.30am for the start of the Chairman of Greens/Secretaries course. Sense of déjà vu. First lecturer from the STRI has failed to arrive. Course introduction is delayed for 15 minutes until a breathless Tim Lodge arrives. Car problems. My immediate thought is to join



BIGGA in focus

BY NEIL THOMAS

Brin Bendon's workshop. Day Two continues well with an early indication of Joe Vargas' talents... Short Board of Management meeting with Dean Cleaver elected as Chairman and then off to the exhibitors' cheese and wine gathering. The third annual Hayter Dinner in the George Hotel follows, superbly organised by Kim Macfie and Barbara Garton. This event is now a Tuesday fixture during BTME and not to be missed. I walk back to the Majestic Hotel – am I becoming paranoid about the weather?

WEDNESDAY

Here we go. 8.15am and Hall A is already well populated. Board Members arrive and the Chairman, broken leg, fractured

shoulder and all, is ready for the ribbon-cutting ceremony. The Chairman's ever present wheelchair pusher and minder, Per-Olof, is also in attendance. Our Swedish friends are much appreciated. The ribbon is cut and great numbers hurry in.

11am – first flurries of snow. I'm on the phone to Leeds Weather Centre – assured there is little to worry about. Viscount Whitelaw arrives for Chairman's luncheon and tour of the exhibition – his enthusiasm for BIGGA knows no bounds. Off to the AGM. Revised Constitution and Rules are approved – we continue to move forward. This year the karaoke night actually takes place. Sami's been hiding her singing talents – she seems almost semi-professional. I refuse to become involved but I should have known better. There's obviously been an orchestrated attempt to get me on board with the 'BIGGA Boys' and I have no option but to join in a terrible rendering of 'Uptown Girl'. The evening is highlighted by one of Joe Vargas' other talents – the appearance of 'Elvis Presley' in full regalia brings the house down – a great evening noted for repeat next year. It's now very cold indeed.

THURSDAY

7.30am BTME Steering Commit-

tee. Well supported even if all brains are not totally functioning at this early hour. Business completed at 7.55am just as fire alarm goes off and hotel evacuated. We eventually return to a hot breakfast. Exhibition is again very busy but complaints about heating in the Royal Hall – note to consider alternative venue for 1997. The International Symposium takes a great stride forward towards the probable formation of a European Golf Greenkeepers Association to represent the interests of greenkeepers throughout Europe. Off to the banquet. The numbers are swelling at the doors long before kick-off time for this 'sold out' climax to the week. For a year I have lived with the fears that it will not reach the standard of last year with Tom O'Connor and Linda Nolan. My fears are groundless. Lyn Paul sets the standard, a great voice and, as we found talking to her after the show, a really nice lady. Stan Boardman was on top form giving a great performance. This event really has become a social highlight of the year for both our members and the companies. Book early for 1997. A late night for many and it's no longer just cold outside...

FRIDAY

A thin white blanket of snow but nothing to worry about as yet. The bleary eyed faithful arrive at the Exhibition Halls and Joe Vargas attracts a good audience to his seminar. Much talk of the previous evening's banquet and show begins to turn to talk of the weather. The flurries are increasing. I pull the plug on the show an hour early at 12.30pm. The evacuation of equipment and personnel is impressive. Late afternoon and the snow is setting in. 24 hours later it is still snowing but its all over and I can stop taking the tablets. We made it and it's been a great week.

Thanks to everyone who contributed to the success and particularly to our exhibitors without whom there would be no BTME.

I hope they had a successful week and are planning to return. Our planning for 1997 is already underway – here's to the next time.

Geof Hills: a tribute

It is with much regret that I have to advise members of the passing of Geof Hills, Regional Administrator for the South East Region. Geof was taken ill on the Friday morning of the BTME and admitted to hospital in Harrogate where he subsequently passed away early the following day. Geof joined the staff of BIGGA in May 1995 as the first employee Regional Administrator covering the South East Region. Geof had followed a varied and interesting career path which included duties as an inspector in the Northern Rhodesian police as well as ten years in that country as a Game Ranger. His early career had been in the role of greenkeeper/professional at Bexley Hill Golf Club and in the

1980s he became Course Manager at the West Lake Golf Club in Cape Town before in 1987 taking up the post of Secretary/Manager at Sene Valley Golf Club in Folkestone.

Geof had settled well into his role as Regional Administrator and was well-liked by all who came into contact with him. He had a quiet, courteous and efficient manner and quickly became very committed to the cause of BIGGA. He greatly enjoyed BTME week which had given him the opportunity to meet many of the South East Region's members. Geof had much to offer the Association and he will be sadly missed. We send our deepest sympathy to Marianne, his sister Pam and all his family.