

A coming together

History will surely record that 30 March 1996 was an important day for European Greenkeeping. For this was the cold and snowy day in Amsterdam when 16 representatives of greenkeeping associations throughout Europe sat down at the Vlijmen Headquarters of Mommersteeg to discuss the formation of a European Greenkeeping Association. From the meeting emerged the "Federation of European Golf Greenkeeping Associations" or FEGGA as it will inevitably come to be known. While the concept of such a body had long been discussed by greenkeeper leaders throughout Europe, it was during 1995 that the pace quickened and a number of discussions took place. During the BTME in January, the International Forum determined that the time had come to call a formal meeting of interested parties and this resulted in ten countries being represented in Amsterdam with a further six declaring their support by proxy. So it came about that FEGGA was established from a strong base of sixteen countries' support.

Why then has this Federation been deemed necessary? The underlying reason is quite clear and very simple – within the European Community greenkeepers were perceived as being unable to speak with one voice and the reluctance to invite greenkeeper participation in environmental discussions within the European Golf Association's Ecology Unit based in Brussels highlighted the need for European greenkeeping associations to come together. During the Amsterdam meeting the enthusiasm for the new Federation was marked as delegates could envisage the long term benefits for greenkeepers. The environment is a key area for consideration and so too is education and here the establishment of common standards throughout Europe must be the ultimate aim. There can be little doubt, also, that FEGGA will be able to assist those greenkeeping associations still in their infancy to flourish and grow. There is much that can be achieved and I sense that the commitment for FEGGA to succeed is very much in evidence.

Initially there is much work to be done in order for FEGGA to be



BIGGA in focus

BY NEIL THOMAS

established and accepted within the game of golf. It has been agreed that FEGGA will not become a bureaucratic body while administration will be jointly shared by BIGGA and the Swedish Greenkeepers Association. The postal address will be that of the SGA. An Interim Board of Directors has been appointed which will take the Federation forward to its first AGM which will be held during BTME '97 in Harrogate. After that it is planned to take the AGM to other European countries. Meetings of the Board of Directors will similarly rotate within Europe and it is planned to initially hold two meetings of the Board before the AGM. These will essentially be planning meetings enabling a structure including organisational arrangements, statutes and financing proposals to be presented to the AGM during the BTME. Five representatives of Associations have been elected to the Interim Board and these are:

Dean Cleaver – BIGGA – Chairman, Per -Olof Ljung – SGA- Vice Chairman, Claus Detlef Ratjen – Greenkeepers Association of Germany, Roland Favrat – Spanish Greenkeepers Association, Elise Jarvinen – Finnish Greenkeepers Association.

Elections to the Board of Directors will then take place at the AGM and it is envisaged that Board Members will serve for a minimum period of two years. It is appropriate to record the other delegates present at the meeting who were: Etienne Bruier and Rudy Duyck – Greenkeepers Association of Belgium, Rob Spruit and Gerard Koster – Dutch Greenkeepers Association, Patrick Guinan – Golf Course Superintendents Association of Ireland, Stal Bo and Fridtjof Myhre – Norwegian Greenkeepers Association, Gilbert Ayer – Swiss Greenkeepers Association, Frederick ten Hage – Holland – BIGGA member, Tommy Lindelof – Chief Executive – SGA, Neil Thomas – Executive Director – BIGGA.

The other countries to indicate their support for FEGGA were France, Denmark, Estonia, Austria, Northern Ireland and Italy. It should be pointed out that the new body is not one which an individual greenkeeper can join. It will represent associations rather than individuals. As such it will be for individual greenkeepers to make their views and suggestions relating to FEGGA known to their own Associations who will then ensure that appropriate consideration is given by

the Board of Directors to the worthwhile proposals of individuals. One matter receiving immediate consideration is that of a logo for the new body and any suggestions in this regard will be welcomed and can be forwarded to BIGGA Headquarters.

So FEGGA has finally come about. Many will argue that it is long overdue. This may well be so but until recent years communication between greenkeepers and greenkeeping associations within Europe has not been a strong point. Now those difficulties are being overcome and the profession is set to speak with a strong voice within the EEC's corridors of power as well as within the European golf community. Few will doubt the necessity for this strong voice if greenkeepers are to be key players in setting standards within the game and the profession. Within the EEC only a strong voice will gain access to the funding so necessary to advance the profession. No one should pretend that an easy road lies ahead but a significant start has been made and the future can be viewed optimistically.

Finally a big thank you to John Akers, Commercial Manager for Mommersteeg for his assistance in arranging the inaugural meeting and the use of the excellent facilities at the company's Vlijmen Headquarters. Here is yet another example of BIGGA's partnership with a Golden Key supporter working for the benefit of greenkeepers and the profession.

● Pictured: FEGGA delegates.

