

The brotherhood of greenkeepers

It's mid-November, bleak, depressing, not a favourite month. Through your letter box comes another invoice but one with a difference for this one is headed "BIGGA". Yes, it's membership renewal time again. To digress slightly before returning to the main theme, I have recently been reflecting on the great success of the inaugural Hayter International Cup competition where 24 competitors from around the globe played a stirring cup match and over a period of five days communicated and bonded in such a way that enduring friendships have been made. For Kim Macfie and Tony Bourke at Hayter as well as for myself, it was a wholly rewarding experience to see at first hand this coming together of individuals from many lands and diverse professional circumstances through the brotherhood of greenkeepers.

I use the word "brotherhood" advisedly as surely in many ways this is what BIGGA represents for our members. Defined in the dictionary as "members of association for mutual help", perhaps we have in the past been guilty of not emphasising enough this essential part of BIGGA membership. Never was it more needed than in today's greenkeeping world. The intolerance of society in general has pervaded this world and many of our members are increasingly put under pressure and find themselves in stressful situations. Our first recourse is to provide practical benefits to assist them in such circumstances, the legal and stress helplines immediately come to mind. The recent extension of the legal services to members through assistance from the Association's solicitors in appropriate cases represents a "first" for BIGGA. Hambro Legal Protection do not know of any similar professional body offering such a service to its members. It truly represents a substantial benefit of membership. The introduction this year of the transition package for the unemployed greenkeeper is another example of our concern for the member experiencing one of life's most difficult circumstances.

Briefly then I have touched on some of the practical benefits of



BIGGA in focus

BY NEIL THOMAS

membership the details of which can be found within the pages of this month's magazine. Let's look more closely though at this concept of brotherhood. Mutual help can be made available in so many ways, most often perhaps in simple, social networking. Picture the scene and a common one it is for BIGGA members. You have enjoyed a good round of golf in your section competition, the catering has been excellent and now you have retired to the bar. I have never known it otherwise than that conversation turns inevitably to greenkeeping. So many greenkeepers have come away from such conversations with either a tip to help them in their daily tasks or with a solution to what seemed at the time an intractable problem. Mutual help at its most distinctive I would venture to suggest.

BIGGA's main brief has been and remains the education and training of greenkeepers. Members enjoy the benefits of heavily subsidised training courses, subsidies made possible through the operation of the Education and Development Fund which enjoys the support of companies and individuals throughout the industry and the profession. Too often

members take that support for granted. It is not theirs as of right and recognition of and appreciation for it needs to be more readily given. Through such training once again mutual help is available – greenkeeper can speak to fellow greenkeeper either through a formal lecture situation or in subsequent question and answer sessions and informal discussion.

Finally on the subject of mutual help I mention again the intolerance of society. This indeed pervades so many golf clubs in this day and age. The course condition is all important. If that condition falls below the perceived standard required by club committees and members, the greenkeeping staff are immediately, and quite literally, in the firing line. Key issues such as level of maintenance budget, provision of equipment and particularly in 1995 and 1996 prevailing drought conditions are conveniently ignored as the rumble of discontent grows into a roar. While the greenkeeper can utilise BIGGA's practical benefits in such situations, he often has a need for advice from his peer group and within BIGGA there is always a friend he can turn to or an influential figure who will lend support.

The brotherhood of greenkeepers can therefore be seen to be increasingly important. It manifests itself within BIGGA and all that BIGGA has to offer. To remain on the outside is always a choice open to the individual greenkeeper but I would argue that it is leaving that individual increasingly vulnerable and isolated. The old adage applies to BIGGA that there is strength in numbers and today BIGGA is strong with over 6000 members and recognised within the game

as one of golf's leading professional bodies. It is true that those of us working within BIGGA share a sense of frustration that the Association still has to convince greenkeepers on the outside who cannot or will not see the benefits, both visible and invisible, of BIGGA membership. BIGGA is committed through its Constitution to promote the welfare of greenkeepers and this it will most surely continue to do. Its Mission Statement declares that "BIGGA is dedicated to the continuing professional development of its members and in serving their needs will strive through education for standards of excellence in golf course management throughout the greenkeeping profession".

There are therefore compelling reasons for members to renew their membership and for non-members to join our vibrant Association. There has never been a better or more apposite time to renew or apply for membership. If you are joining, welcome to BIGGA, if you are renewing, we appreciate your commitment and confidence as we move forward in a spirit of optimism.

I will conclude this month with some words of Charles Dickens from *A Tale of Two Cities* which give food for thought and which are worth dwelling upon. A case perhaps of 'a tale of two greenkeepers'? It remains my conviction that greenkeepers have everything before them if they continue to move forward united and purposefully, with dedication to their profession and commitment to the ideas and aspirations of BIGGA. The alternative is indeed a gloomy prospect and not to be countenanced. As a greenkeeper which direction are you set upon?

"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the Spring of hope, it was the Winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way".

Reason to enter competitions...

The winner of the holiday voucher prize at BTME 96 sent a postcard to BIGGA Headquarters from Menorca showing that if you just take the time to enter competitions rewards can follow.

Russell Lucas of Hazlemere Golf

and Country Club and his family spent a week at the resort of Cala en Bosch in late September and reported that while weather was mixed the children were having a brilliant time in the pool while he and his wife tried to relax.

It could be you next year!