

# TOP STUDENT – BAR NONE

Sally Doherty's elevation to Toro's top student came after a chat across a bar changed the course of her life...



Above: A delighted Sally poses with her well-earned trophy

Below: The finalists (from L-R) Back row; Gary Gruber, Mark Allen, Nick Webber, Geoff Mills, Richard Aitken Front row; Paul Shelley, Sally Doherty and Steven Myres

A chance remark in the Golf Bar of The Belfry changed the course of Sally Doherty's life and led her to the title Toro Student of the Year for 1998.

"I'd just handed in my notice at the bar when got speaking with Derek Ganning. I said 'Go on. Give me a job.' It was just pure chance as he happened to be in the bar and to be honest I was bored with life at the time. After humming and hating for a while he agreed and I started full time. That was three years ago," explained Sally, whose progress since has been such that she has recently been promoted to First Assistant on the renowned Brabazon Course.

Born and raised in Tamworth, near Birmingham, Sally completed an Environmental Science Degree at Wolverhampton University, and had worked at The Belfry in the bars and restaurants for several years during holidays and after completing her course.

"Despite that I'd never thought of working on the golf course until that time and I certainly never dreamed I'd end up greenkeeping," said Sally.

Having taken the plunge it then dawned on Sally that when she walked into the Mess Room for the first time she would be the lone female amid 40 males.

"I was super nervous on my first day but the guys have been brilliant. They do give me a bit of stick now and again but I'd rather have that than be treated with kid gloves."

Sally has not regretted her decision to take up greenkeeping one little bit.

"Once I started, and after the initial shock of working outside in the winter, I loved every minute of the job," she explained, enthusiasm oozing from her voice.

Although her Environmental Science degree did involve soil science and looked at trees and grasses there was little cross over into the golf side but Sally threw herself into education for her new chosen profession.

"When I found out about the NVQs I wanted to do them straight away and started a block release course at The Warwickshire College. I've just finished my Level 2 and started work on my Level 3. I'm also an assessor to Level 2."

Progress in the Toro Student of the Year Award came when her tutor, Graham Martin, nominated her as the college representative for the Regional Finals.

"I attended an interview in Shropshire and wasn't nervous at all. I just thought I'd give it a go and wasn't particularly worried about it," she explained.

Nerves did start to build, however, when two weeks later she was informed that she'd made it through to the National Finals.

"Just before the final interview I was very very nervous," she admitted.

However, she shone in the longer, more technical, interview conducted in BIGGA HOUSE by Mark Gunter, of Toro; Peter Mansfield, of Lely; Ken Richardson, of BIGGA and BIGGA's National Chairman, Gordon Child and was delighted when her name was announced at the Toro Awards dinner held in Aldwark Manor Hotel that same evening.

Part of Sally's prize for winning the Toro Student of the Year Award is to undertake a six week residential study course at the University of Massachusetts early next year.

"The thought of going to the States is exciting, but a little bit scary as I've never travelled on my own before, but I'm looking forward to being able to feed back to the lads at work on what I've learned."

It is not the first time she has been to the States having been on a University field trip to Boston a few years ago.

"I was working in the hotel at The Belfry at the time but even so the Americans were excited to hear that I worked at the Ryder Cup venue even although at that time I didn't work on the course. No doubt the students on the course this time will be interested to hear about what's The Belfry," said

Sally, who was working in the restaurant serving the players and assembled starts when the last Ryder Cup was played at the course in 1993.

She has and will be more involved for the next match as she has been carrying out the work which has and is being done to make the Brabazon an even greater test for the Ryder Cup in 2001.

"I've been lucky to have been involved in the renovation work on the course - new paths, bunkers and bridges - and pick up such valuable experience.

"The course is looking brilliant and it will continue to get better as it will be closed every winter between now and 2001," explained Sally, talking about an initiative made possible by the opening of the new PGA course.

It all means that Sally is going to be busy between now and the playing of the Ryder Cup but you get the impression that she wouldn't want it any other way.

"I'd like to thank my tutor Graham Martin for setting me on the way for the award and of course Derek Ganning for giving me the chance in the first place. I'd also like to thank David Samuel (Courses Superintendent for all three Belfry courses), Bevan Tattershall (Head Greenkeeper of the Brabazon) and all the rest of the guys for their help."

The joint runners-up in the Toro Student of the Year final were Steven Myres of Glenisla Golf Course and Elmwood College and Paul Shelley of Chesfield Downs GC and Oaklands College who each win all expenses paid trips to Harrogate next year.

