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Spain hosts

NEIL THOMAS reports

The attractive village of Mijas, in the hills above Fuengirola, provided the base for delegates for the first FEGGA Conference held during the weekend of 21-23 November. Eleven member Associations of FEGGA were represented at the Conference with each Association providing speakers to cover papers on the education and training of greenkeepers as well as environmental considerations in their respective countries. From the welcoming barbecue on Friday evening and through the weekend it was noticeable how quickly the different nationalities intermingled, old friendships were renewed and new ones forged. Language did not prove a problem as there was always someone with linguistic ability around when a difficulty arose!

The Conference was held courtesy of the local Toro distributor and the facilities made available were truly excellent. Special thanks are due to Toro for their support of the Conference and in particular to Bob Buckingham, Franco Marcolongo, Christian Grisard Van Roey and Ignacio Miranda. Bob, who had liaised throughout on the organisation of the Conference, found that he had to be in South Africa rather than Spain at the last moment and Franco took over in his absence doing an excellent job in making delegates feel welcome.

It now remains for the FEGGA Board to take stock of the Conference. Sunday morning proved the opportunity for delegates to put forward their views on the way forward for FEGGA and a common concern was the need for establishing uniformity of educational standards in Europe with help being provided to those Associations who lacked both resources and governmental support. On environmental issues, FEGGA's representation on the Brussels based Ecology Unit will be important as representation on behalf of the greenkeeping profession in the respective countries will be vital during the ongoing environmental debate.

Some 18 months on since the formation of FEGGA, this proved to be an instructive conference ably chaired by FEGGA Chairman, Dean Cleaver - no easy task when people spoke with "many

In Germany training and further training have only a recent history - since 1988 when a few German greenkeepers set the wheels in motion. In 1989 the Deula Rhineland was engaged as a training provider. Training is carried out in a series of three, three week intensive courses outside the growing season. One week is run as a practical in summer at several golf courses. These training courses serve to convey both theoretical and practical knowledge. Between these courses, the greenkeeper must work on a golf course for at least one season. During the respective season, a correspondence course consisting of three lessons is also undertaken providing a link between theory and practice. The qualification can be compared with level three of the British training system and since 1990, 386 students have sat the exam.

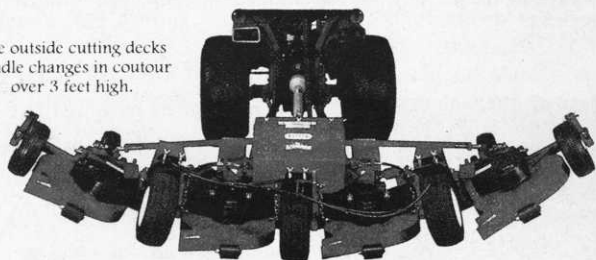
Further training for Head Greenkeepers is now in place. Only those people who have successfully completed the qualified greenkeeper training course, and can then prove at least three years work on a golf course, can apply to do this higher course on successful completion of which the title 'Qualified Head Greenkeeper' may be used. It is expected that the first exams will take place at the earliest in 1999. In the next three years about 40 greenkeepers are expected to take part. The qualification will be comparable to level four in the United Kingdom.

In Sweden the educational programme is organised jointly by the Swedish Golf Federation and Swedish Greenkeepers' Association. There are three courses of increasing levels of difficulty ie Basic Knowledge - four weeks, Further Education - two weeks and Higher Greenkeeper Education - six weeks. The first two courses finish with a written examination, while the higher course has weekly tests as well as a project to be presented in the final week.

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FEGGA's first conference

tongues"! Delegates departed a little wiser and enthused at the prospect of European co-operation in the future and the strength which the profession will gain from speaking with a common voice and in significant numbers.

Many papers were presented and there was much talk during the weekend. Some conference snapshots may be of interest to readers whilst individual papers can be made available on application to the FEGGA Office at P O Box 42, S-139 21 Varmdo, Sweden, Tel. 46 8 570 196 10, Fax. 46 8 570 198 10.



FEGGA representatives at last year's BTME

➤ In Spain, 20 years ago there were 25 golf courses – mainly country clubs. Today there are over 250 golf courses. Spanish greenkeepers suffer from a lack of information and difficulties in translation. The last Association conference attracted 120 members. Support from golf clubs in Spain is vital to assist greenkeepers with their education while there is a need for technical programmes focussed on turf grass management.

➤ In France, golf courses with more than 10 employees are required to devote 1.5% of their wage bill each year to training. Wouldn't that be wonderful in the United Kingdom?

➤ In Switzerland, the position is complicated by language! 64% are German speaking, 19% French speaking, 8% Italian speaking, while 1% are Romansh speaking and 8% speak other languages. In 1980 Switzerland had 29 courses, today there are 59 with 30 new projects in the pipeline. The SGA has 159 members, 64 being French speaking and 95 German speaking. The SGA works closely with the GTC and the Training Manual has been translated into French and German enabling members to pursue training where desired through the framework of the GTC.

➤ In Belgium, there are 61 golf courses with Dutch, French and German being the main languages. It is interesting that 14 Head Greenkeepers from the USA are employed in Belgium. Greenkeeper training is very much in embryo form with one day training courses for Head Greenkeepers arranged during the winter. However, a one year course for greenkeepers was introduced in September 1997 and a similar course for Head Greenkeepers will be introduced in September 1998. The Association in Belgium is for Head Greenkeepers only.

➤ In Norway, the Association was formed 10 years ago with eight members. There are now 150 members and 60 golf courses with a projection of 150 courses within the next 10 years. An educational plan is lacking but a week's seminar is held every year in the second week of January. For 1998 this will be held in Spain and has attracted 80 members (there must be a moral here!). Additionally one day seminars are organised as well as meetings on golf courses.

➤ In Finland, golf courses are a relatively new industry with the main boom occurring in the 1980s. From less than 20 courses in 1989 there are now more than 90. The FGA with 250 members has an average of three members on each course. Generally courses are frozen every winter, opening in March with the main season from May to October.

➤ In Iceland, there are 30 members of the Association and no educational programmes. The Association was founded in 1994. Some 50 greenkeepers have been educated through a close association with Elmwood College. Occasional seminars are held and at present there are 50 golf courses in Iceland.