

John Coleman, Toro Excellence in Greenkeeping Award winner, reports back from the American trip which formed part of his prize

One heck of a ● prize



The prospect of visiting Orlando during the dreary month of February was always appealing, but to be invited as guests of Toro and as the Excellence in Greenkeeping Award winner was the icing on the cake.

My Itinerary was split between attending educational seminars, attending the GCSAA show and some free time which I had pre-booked to include the Disney Parks and Universal Studios. This would conclude the first week of my trip, whereupon I would then fly up to Minneapolis and spend three days or so with Toro at their Headquarters.

The GCSAA Show lasts one full week with the seminars taking place from Monday to Thursday and the show itself from Friday until Sunday. The convention centre which hosted the show was over one million square feet in area and over a mile long in length. Yes it's depressingly true, everything does seem bigger over there!

The seminars I attended were either one day or two day's in length so they were fairly intense. I found the American Superintendents to be far more receptive to audience participation which helped break up the long hours spent in class. This benefited all attendees in that they learned as much from one another as from the lecturer. The longer sessions seemed to suit this format better and I for one feel this is something we should possibly consider for our annual conference.

Come Friday, I was looking forward to the show and arrived somewhat early, in my enthusiasm I failed to notice it didn't begin until 11am and felt rather stupid when I turned up at 9am on the dot!

However, when it finally opened I wasn't disappointed, the show was as good as I was led to believe and was quick to take advantage of the vast product range and new ideas on offer.

The thought of leaving Orlando with temperatures regularly exceeding 25°C was not appealing, especially when Minneapolis was



Above: John with Jack Copeland, his Chairman of Green

Above right: The other element of the prize was presented by Pete Mansfield, of Lely UK

minus 20°, but I was still looking forward to visiting Toro and off I went on the Sunday. I received my three day Itinerary which included a visit to the Toro Headquarters, the manufacturing plant and the production plant which was located about a three hour drive away, this was interspersed, as far as I could tell, with the eating of copious amounts of food – they really do know how to look after you!

My first visit was to The Toro Headquarters. This is where the research and development takes place, all administrative work is carried out and equipment testing is performed. This building is home to 1200 employees and has had some heavy investment (about seven million dollars) over the last couple of years.

While touring the design section of the building, it was explained to me how the new machines we use are developed. Ideas for new pieces of equipment are firstly designed on computer with the aid of technology developed initially for the aviation industry. Prototypes are then built using the latest laser profile cutting techniques. The machine will then be tested and sent out into the field, evaluated and a decision made as to its commercial value and practicality of build. If all these factors fit into place then a new machine may be put into production. It took me a full day to tour all these elements of

design, so you can imagine how much work is involved from the conception of a new machine to actual production.

On the second day I visited the manufacturing plant where all the component parts are made. This employs about 700 people and is not dissimilar to some of the factories I've visited here in Sheffield, the home of steel. Although very impressive with robotic welders, the latest CNC equipment, massive presses and all sorts of weird and wonderful machines this reinforced my opinion that I'm glad I work on a golf course.

My last day was spent at the production plant about 200 miles away in Wisconsin. This I felt was probably how a car plant would look with the bare bones of a machine at the start of a production line and the end product being driven off the end. All painting of the machines is also performed here with a state of the art electroplating dipping process being used. I must say I felt very envious seeing all these brand new machines stacked up and did try to convince them that they wouldn't miss a couple, but to no avail unfortunately.

Overall it was a great learning curve for me and I don't think I'll be quite as quick to complain when any of my machines break down in the future, well on second thoughts, maybe I will!