

The 70th GCSAA International Golf Course Conference and Show was held at the impressive Orange County Convention Centre in Orlando, Florida between Monday 8 and Sunday, 14 February. BIGGA's Sales & Marketing Manager, James McEvoy reports from...

Over there

Considered the largest fine turf exhibition of its type and hosted by the largest representative green-keeping supervisor Association in the world, over 25,000 visitors were expected at the exhibition.

The BIGGA party, totalling twenty one, travelled together from Gatwick on Sunday 7 February. Included in our group was the winner of the Toro Excellence Award John Coleman and the winner of the Toro Student Greenkeeper of the Year Award Sally Doherty. The Association would like to take this opportunity to thank Toro for their continued support of both of these awards.

Above right: Gearing up for a busy show at the BIGGA stand

Below: Time to relax!

The Association travels to the show and takes a complementary stand which is reciprocated by BIGGA at Harrogate. During the course of the show we met a great many of our international members, we recruited a number of new members and generally used the opportunity to promote BIGGA. A special thanks must go to Bill Montague MG from Ohio who helped man the BIGGA stand. We were amazed at the number of Brits who took time out to come and say hello.

The show and the GCSAA generally are the closest comparison that we have to gauge ourselves.



Admittedly their show is 4 times the size of BTME and the GCSAA is similarly 4 times the size of BIGGA. It was therefore interesting to observe, at first hand, how the GCSAA organise their show as well as investigating some of their other current projects.

The GCSAA Foundation Silent Auction was the third produced by their Association. The beneficiary of this year's event was the GCSAA's Historical Preservation Effort. The goal was to raise \$100,000 for this cause. The concept is simple - companies are asked to contribute their products as a donation, the members are then offered the chance to bid for the said products. All proceeds from the auction go directly into the fund. The most expensive piece of kit on offer was provided by a company from the UK, Bernhard & Company Ltd, who donated an Express Dual 2000 spin grinder - estimated value \$19,000. Altogether, over 110 companies provided donations varying in value from \$19,000 to \$1,000. Although still unconfirmed, it is believed that the final figure for bids made will be in excess of \$150,000.

The GCSAA made its web site available at the show for any visitors to browse. A number of terminals were positioned for peo-



PHOTOCAST TEE SIGNS

By
EAGLE PROMOTIONS

Scorecards • Course Measurement • Yardage Books • Tee Signs • Event Boards • Leaderboards • Notice Boards • Bag Tags • Green Fee Tickets • Call Philip McInley on : 01883 344244

Call Philip McInley on 01883 344244

& INTERNATIONAL GOLF KEEPERS ASSOCIATION



ple to operate in a relaxed and friendly environment. The site is huge and offers a wide range of services and points of interest. I was advised that over 1,000,000 hits had been made on their web site in January alone! BIGGA is still at an early phase in the development of its web site and I found it of great interest to see how our American counterparts have seized upon this medium as a form of communication and education.

Having spent much of January in a state of blind panic preparing for our own exhibition, BTME, it was a pleasure to be able to walk around the show meeting many of the company members who had been exhibiting at Harrogate. It seemed a greater number of British companies were exhibiting in their own right or sharing stands with their US producers and distributors. There were also a great many companies who were attending the show in a visitor capacity.

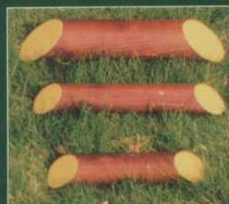
One of those companies attending were Barrenbrug, a BIGGA Golden Key Company who also have offices in the USA. Michel Mulder, who for many years worked for Barrenbrug in the UK and now works for the company in the US has great experience of both BTME and the GCSAA show and explained to me his views on both.

"Overall the GCSAA show is, an impressive and well organised national event. One has to bear in mind that comparisons between the BTME and GCSAA event are difficult because BIGGA caters for 2,500 golf courses compared to 15,000 golf courses in the US. One also has to be aware that this show is always organised in one of a number of popular locations therefore one is encouraged to take your family for a short holiday as well".

The show attracts a wide variety of British interest including many of the suppliers and distributors who trade in the UK. Richard Fry, who distributes Blazon in the UK for Millican, was at Orlando and he explained why it was so important to have travelled thousands of miles to meet with his US counterparts?

"They used to say that what took place in America would happen in the UK some 10 years later. Well, the result is still the same but the time frame has changed, it's now almost instantaneous.

A visit to the GCSAA is a must for any supplier who is serious about selling products to the UK golf course industry. With over 16,000 golf courses in the USA, the pressure on suppliers to come up with new ideas, concepts and themes is enormous. Even if, as this



Over there



Above: Just one of the many GCSAA exhibition halls

Below: BIGGA Chairman, Gordon Child gets an extra guest at his table in the Hard Rock Café

year, the number of truly new products was lacking, there are tremendous opportunities to see a different approach to the way products are promoted, displayed and even advertised.

Over the last ten years a number of products, first seen at a GCSAA show, have been introduced into the UK and many such as Blazon have become market leaders".

As with BTME, the education conference starts on the Monday and continues through the show. For the greenkeepers in our party the conference was the prime reason for being in Orlando and it was

interesting to hear their views on the seminars available. The seminars were well received by the majority of British Greenkeepers and Golf Course Managers that I spoke to. The major criticism being the difficulty that they encountered when attempting to book to attend.

One disappointment with the education conference was the lack of UK speakers; Ian Macleod was our only representative. Ian gave an excellent and interesting presentation and was a credit to himself, his golf club and BIGGA. I hope that the GCSAA will consider inviting more of our members to speak at future conferences.

The GCSAA is blessed with having a wide choice of venues that, even during the winter months, provide a temperate climate. The average temperature during the week at Orlando was a warm 80 degrees. An excellent programme of trips and social events

were available, utilising Disney Land and other well known holiday attractions to entice families to attend. There were also the usual evening functions, the highlight being the banquet on the Saturday evening. I may be biased but I still believe that our own banquet evening, sponsored by Stylo, has the edge.

So with the two major shows in the world of fine turf over for another year we can all go back to prepare for our respective millennium spectacles. Harrogate will once again host BTME and Education Conference between xx and xx January, with a new hall (Q) and a few surprises in stall. The GCSAA show in 2000 will be held in New Orleans between the 14 and 20 February. BIGGA will again be attending and we hope you will be able to join us for what promises to be memorable event. Watch this space for details.

