



Neil Thomas reflects on Golden and Silver Key membership of the Education and Development Fund and looks to the future ...

The Key to Success

BIGGA's Education and Development Fund in 2000 is entering its ninth year. Launched in January 1992, Golden and Silver Key members, both companies and individuals, have contributed significantly to a Fund that, throughout the nineties, has greatly enhanced the education and training of greenkeepers and which is reflected in their ever growing professionalism. Greenkeeping has moved on in the intervening years and today's Course Manager/Head Greenkeeper enjoys a status and profile as the custodian of a golf club's most valuable asset, its golf course, which was rarely apparent a decade ago. Perceptions have changed within golf clubs. In 1992 it was quite normal for a golf club to view the clubhouse rather than the course as its primary asset. Now it is the course which is perceived as the number one priority. High maintenance standards are demanded, innovative practices and attention to detail. Professionalism is the order of the day and up front are many Course Managers and Head Greenkeepers whose education, training and experience renders them well suited to meet the expectations of the current generation of golf club members. Whilst much credit for this can be given to our national training system, it is in no small way due also to the utilisation of resources within the Education and Development Fund which, over the years, has

enabled BIGGA to provide wide-ranging training courses across the United Kingdom, as well as a myriad of publications, field guides, videos and training aids together with the refunding of fees for educational courses.

Since the opening of BIGGA HOUSE in October 1998, a purpose built, state-of-the-art training room has been available for training courses and it also houses the BIGGA library. Funding of £44,000 was provided by Golden and Silver Key company members through the auspices of the Education and Development Fund towards the costs of this training facility which was appropriately named 'The Key Room'. The room is available for hire both within and without the industry and is free of charge to Golden and Silver Key company members.

Much has been achieved then through the Fund and it is only right to pay tribute to companies who have supported the Fund through the years, appreciating the benefits which would accrue in enabling them to deal with trained, professional greenkeepers in the course of their business operations. Equally, BIGGA is mindful of its individual members who have contributed to the Fund in the belief that they are investing in their own futures. The achievements since 1992 would suggest that theirs was a wise investment.

Over the years some companies

have come and gone from the list of contributors to the Fund, maybe through mergers or changed priorities. We thank them for their past support. In 1999 there were 26 contributing companies with a total membership tally of 107 years as set out in the accompanying league table. In some instances this table reflects the prior merger of companies. A maximum of eight years is possible in support of the Fund.

These companies alone have contributed since 1992 some £277,000 to the Education and Development Fund. This is an outstanding figure which BIGGA members need to recognise and appreciate as fundamental to the education and training now available to them. The successful utilisation of the Fund can be measured by the increasing numbers of trained, qualified and technically competent greenkeepers now emerging as true professionals, who, year on year, are producing better quality and well maintained golf courses. Not everything in the world of greenkeeping is perfect, far from it. However, standards have improved considerably since 1992. BIGGA's efforts through the Education and Development Fund and in partnership with the industry are justly recognised as significant in this regard.

So to 2000, and we are pleased already to welcome Gem Professional as a new Golden Key member. We believe that the time has come for BIGGA to review the Golden and Silver Key scheme in conjunction with its industry partners.

Consultations have already started and during the year we will look to update and strengthen the scheme with a view to consolidating the Education and Development Fund during the first decade of the new century. The Fund has a major role to play in BIGGA's overall strategy for the education and training of its members and our partnership with the industry in this regard is vital. Whilst we are looking at a success story, we now need to have a vision for the future as the game of golf continues on its path of global expansion and greenkeepers are challenged to reach new peaks in their professional lives.

Years in Key membership Companies

8	Kubota UK Ltd, Scotts Turf & Amenity, Textron Turf Care and Specialty Products, The Toro Company
7	Hayter Ltd, Rigby Taylor Ltd
6	Avoncrop Amenity Products, Lambert/Fenchurch UK Group Ltd, Rhône-Poulenc Amenity, Sisis Equipment Ltd
4	Advanta Seeds UK, Ocmis Irrigation UK Ltd, Rolawn, Supaturf Products Ltd
3	Amazone Ground Care, Barenbrug, John Deere Ltd, PGA European Tour
2	Amenity Technology Products Ltd, Charterhouse Turf Machinery Ltd, Ernest Doe & Sons, Rainbird, Weed Free
1	Bernhard & Co Ltd, The Grass Roots Trading Company, Stylo Matchmakers