

Simon Hutton is a remarkable young man. As Scott MacCallum found out, he has two full time jobs and puts more than his fair share of overtime into both of them...

# Simon says



Simon Hutton, FineTurf Services

Simon Hutton is a workaholic. There can be no other way of describing a man who not only maintains Sudbrook Manor Golf Club, near Newark, in Lincolnshire, but has masterminded the growth of Simon Hutton Fine Turf Services which, since the launch of the company two years ago, has grown to such an extent that many golf clubs in the Lincolnshire, and increasingly beyond, rely upon it to carry out verti-draining, coring as well as other construction work.

To fit such a workload into a normal week would be impossible but normal doesn't apply to Simon as he regularly clocks up 100 hours a week, while a holiday, which he takes once in a

blue moon, would be described by others as a "weekend".

He is no "Johnny come lately" to greenkeeping having already chalked up almost 14 years of experience, and has a network of con-

tacts to draw on from all aspects of the industry to enable him to carry out the tasks he is unable to undertake himself.

Oh yes. Simon has just turned 22.

His is a remarkable story of a single minded determination to succeed in a profession for which he has had a passion since an early age, and of a family who have pulled together to create a superb little golf club which certainly lives up to the term "family concern".

"My father, Tim, was the professional at Sleaford Golf Club and it was always his dream to have his own golf course," explained Simon, as he grabbed a bite of breakfast, in the attractive little Sudbrook Moor clubhouse.

"The land here came up for sale about

13 years ago and although it was a big decision for the family we decided to buy 17 acres. We put on six holes - three par-3s and three par-4s - laying them out and constructing them all ourselves," he explained.

"Then in 1990 we acquired another 20 acres and made it a really good nine hole course."

In the early days Simon worked on the course in his spare time after school.

"School was not a priority for me," he confessed.

"From the age of eight I used to hand cut the greens and cut the rough while my mother, Judith, who was a teacher at the time, used to cut the fairways in an old Massey Ferguson with trailed gangs when she got home from work," said Simon, who mused about how such a situation would go down with the Health and Safety Executive these days.

Judith retired from greenkeeping duties when they employed Ernie Tatchell, as a greenkeeper/mechanic. Other labour is brought in on a self employed basis.

# Simon says

Simon's love of all things greenkeeping began as he grew up in the family home on Sleaford Golf Club itself.

"I used to love knocking about with the greenkeepers and did so every spare minute I had," recalled Simon, who remembers Jim Durrant, Head Greenkeeper at Sleaford as well as John Scotney, who took over a year before the Hutton family began their great adventure.

"I was in my element when we bought this place because I could be hands on."

Simon worked full-time on the course when he left school at 16 and the next big leap for the course came in '97.

"We bought another four acres and put two new holes to replace two not so good holes. It made it a proper course and we had 18 greens, and nine tees which means that golfers play to a different green on the back nine."

His greenkeeping skills have been accumulated through experience, reading books and magazines while he forged friendships with people who were able to pass on knowledge to him.

"I'm a quick learner and although I've made mistakes they have tended to be



adding that with 600 members plus green fees the course gets lots of wear.

Over the last ten years Simon acquired more machinery than would be absolutely necessary for a course of Sudbrook's size.

"I'd always had an interest in machinery and known a lot of people in the trade and they would phone me to say they had a particular machine and ask if I'd be interested in it. Ernie is a superb mechanic which allowed us to get the best out of the machinery. It got to the stage that we had quite a bit and in '98 I started to do a bit of contracting - spraying, hollow tining and top dressing," he explained.

It was through this that he was pointed in the direction of the machine that was to be the making of Simon Hutton Fine Turf Services.

"I was talking to Sheamus Cogan, of Belton Woods, and he asked me if I'd ever thought about getting a vertidrain. I said that it had

crossed my mind as I knew only two people in the county at the time had one but it got me thinking more seriously about it.

"I chewed the matter over. I had an old tractor that we could put it on already and I knew that I had the money to buy it as I lived at home and all I did was work and never had time to spend it so I bought a Wiedenmann for £16,000 in February last year."

Initially he did his own course and a few football pitches before sending out some brochures to five or six local clubs some of which took him on.

In addition they spent a full three to four week spell at Belton Woods on pathway construction, tee building, bunker work and big roll turving, with the help of another contact who had experience in that field.

He has also worked at The Belfry and was involved in some work on the Millennium Dome and Cardiff's Millennium Stadium.

"Then last July I decided to buy a brand new Kubota L3600 tractor and got some work with Nuneaton Borough Council to verti-drain all 14 of their football pitches and sand spread them. So I went out and bought an Amazone sand spreader. Then last autumn it was absolute mayhem.

I hadn't done any advertising at all but I was going all over the country. I ended up buying a trailer to put behind my Trooper, which I'd already bought, and it just got busier and busier.

"I had New Year's Day off and the vertidrain was absolutely solid until something like May 20," said Simon, who has recently bought another Kubota tractor, a Proseed core collector while a second vertidrain is on the cards for this month.

While Simon Hutton Fine Turf Services enjoyed such a successful period the man himself was still running Sudbrook Moor, with the help of Ernie and two students, both of whom have worked for Simon since they were 15 - hence the need to extend his working week to 100 hours.

"For example I haven't started after six for the past month and normally don't finish until eight or nine at night, seven days a week.

The success of the contracting business is a boost to the whole Hutton family which is completed by his younger brother, Ben, who is an aspiring tournament professional.

"My father runs the pro shop and gives lessons, my mother acts as secretary and I manage the course but the club won't really support us all so my brother supplements our income with his winnings and I bring in more from

the contracting business," he explained.

He has a pool of around 10 able people on whom he can call on for work, including a tree specialist and a landscaper while he also has his own turf nursery from which he sells to the domestic market.

"I bought the land five or six years ago and it was meadow turf and I mowed it and sold it as such but then I redrilled it and sowed it with bent fescue and rye for domestic use and stripped that field. I've only got about 1000 metres left in a corner. We recently redrilled it again and hopefully it will be ready by Christmas," he explained, adding that he also acts as an agent for seed as well as top dressing.

"In an ideal world I would get another man on the course and another on the contracting full time to enable me to manage both," said Simon, who runs the business from a mobile phone. He has an accountant but does all his own invoicing in his "spare" time.

"I don't mind putting the hours in but it's tough when you can't see an end to it. I don't want to get too big because I've seen it with other contractors who are not making any money. Payments all go to the men and to cover overheads. At the moment I don't have many overheads."

Concerned that he might be burnt out by the age of 25 he does point to the fact that he has more grey hairs than his two older colleagues who popped into the clubhouse for their breakfast.

"My ultimate ambition is to do well early on in life, make money and then retire. I may build the business up and then sell it. I don't know really."

With his easy manner and extraordinary work ethic you can be sure that whatever the future holds for him he will make a success of it.

Ever the entrepreneur Simon called the office a few days after the interview to ask if we could include his telephone numbers in the article. Happy to oblige Simon. Tel/Fax: 01400 250796 Mobile: 0976 726909



Above: Remarkably, a bird has nested in the hydraulic arm of the company trailer, and now, the chicks travel everywhere it goes

minor and made on our own course, which tends to be fairly disease free.

"I've sprayed for Fusarium three times in 13 years. We use a lot of mechanical rather than chemical maintenance. We go from sandy loam to heavy clay on the course but it's amazing how it looks after itself.

"We mow it, aerate it, top dress it. We put on granule fertiliser in the spring or early summer and then later liquid fertiliser and we vertidrain the greens with large tines once a year and through the summer with pencil tines. In the autumn we hollow tine," he said,