



Five hotels, 15,000 miles, thirty two interviews and the hottest week of the year so far, all contributed to this year's TORO Student of the Year Regional Interviews. However, as Ken Richardson found out, the quality and variety of finalists made the task of selecting the National Finalists an enjoyable rather than an onerous task.

A superb selection of students

Monday 25 June saw the first set of interviews, held in Edinburgh, when Jim Paton, BIGGA Education sub Committee Chairman, Pete Mansfield from TORO and myself interviewed the six Scottish entrants. At the end of the day, Mark Cummine, representing Langside College was picked to go forward to the Final. Mark, who is an assistant greenkeeper at Buchanan Castle Golf Club, nr Glasgow, has been in greenkeeping for 11 years and is currently studying for his HNC. Mark's other claim to fame is as an accordion player in a Scottish Dance Band, which has given him the chance to travel widely both in Scotland and around the World.

Tuesday 26 June saw the Roadshow arrive at the Hilton Hotel, Manchester Airport, where Pete and myself were joined by Andy Campbell MG, Golf and Estates Manager at Carden Park, to judge the Northern Region Entries and the Irish Entries. The excellent entries in the Northern Region saw both John Stuttard, representing Askham Bryan College and Mike Robertson represent-

ing Myerscough College selected for the Final. Mike is the Deputy Head Greenkeeper at Penrith Golf Club, where he has been for almost five years. John is an assistant greenkeeper at Wyke Ridge Golf Centre nr Leeds, where he has been for almost three years.

Ireland produced four very high quality entries and the judges selected two to progress to the final. John Williams represented Teagasc in Dublin and he works at Athy Golf Club in Co Kildare. He has been studying for his NVQ Level 3 and has ambitions to study for a Masters Degree with Penn State University. James Murphy works at the Old Head Golf Links in Kinsale, Co Cork and it is a case of an old head on young shoulders as James is the youngest of the finalists.

Back on the road again saw us travel to St Albans, where Pete and I were joined by Ian Semple to interview the six candidates from the South East where Andrew Pledger was selected for the Final. Andrew took up greenkeeping as a second career after several years in retailing. Andrew said that he wished that he had

Following the dream



The prize was a seven week trip Stateside, the first six weeks of which, I would be based at the University of Massachusetts, followed by a week of travelling. Although very excited by this opportunity, I was at first understandably apprehensive. However, once meeting some of my fellow classmates who were also staying in the same accommodation as myself, it didn't take long for me to settle in. There was no time however to sleep off the jetlag. No sooner had my feet touched the ground, and I was straight into a full day of lectures.

The six and a half week Winter Turf School covered eleven subjects including: studies in Turf Grass Physiology and Ecology, Soil Science and Fertilisers, Irrigation, Diseases, Entomology and Weed Management. Each subject was lectured by a specialist in their own field, and often required long hours of background studying outside the classroom to keep up with the amount of scientific detail examined. Nevertheless, it was quite normal for everyone to come back from class, grab a bite to eat, and hit the books once again. There were no final examinations as such, but a continuous progression of quizzes and assignments, so the group study and

discussion sessions were of real benefit to everyone, and were a vital factor in guaranteeing success in the course.

My time in Massachusetts was not entirely confined to a classroom. Since this was my first trip to America, I was keen to visit as many places as I could. Fortunately, two of my classmates invited me to Boston, Rhode Island and Ottawa, Canada at the weekends.

This resulted in me having to spend only two weekends at the motel I was staying; but I managed to take in some of the local culture: seeing a basketball game and an ice hockey game.

I was kept very well occupied during this six and a half week period, and the Graduation Dinner and the presentation of certificates was quick in coming around. Although it was difficult to say goodbye to everyone, I was looking forward to the next stretch of my travels, and to having a rest from the books. After considerable celebrations at the graduation I flew out of Hartford to head for Dallas, Texas.

The Golf Course Superintendents of America Association (GCSAA) Trade Show and Conference was my next port of call. The show was enormous, and was certainly bigger than anything I've seen at home. Also attending were Toro representatives, BIGGA repre-

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Mike Robertson



Andrew Pledger

made the decision to swap careers much sooner as he enjoys his job so much.

Thursday saw Pete and I in Cheltenham where we were joined by Richard Barker, Vice Chairman of BIGGA to judge the South West and South Wales Region entries. Mark Wilshire, a South African, working at Llanishen Golf Club was selected from a very high quality group. Mark who represents Pencoed College has only been working in Britain since 1999 feels that his NVQ course has given him the foundations to progress to the highest level in Greenkeeping.

The final journey saw Pete and I travel to Kettering where we were joined by BIGGA Board of Management Member, David Walden. The eighth finalist, selected from the five Midlands entries is Ewan McCabe. Ewan represents the College of West Anglia and works at Gog Magog Golf Club. Ewan started his working life as a greenkeeper, left to join the Army and finally returned to his true vocation five years ago.

The National Final will be held on Tuesday 28 October at the Crown Hotel in Boroughbridge, alongside the Final of the TORO Excellence in Greenkeeping Competition.

The National winner will be awarded the TORO Scholarship and travel to the United States for six weeks of study at the University of Massachusetts followed by trips to the TORO HQ in Minneapolis, and the TORO Factory in California and to the GCSAA Conference and Show in Orlando.

Although judging is strenuous, this Competition gives me, and my fellow judges a great boost when we hear how greenkeepers are using their education and training qualification to further their careers, improve their pay and conditions of service and to improve the status of greenkeepers. The industry has continued to progress thanks to GTC ensuring the range and quality of greenkeeper qualifications, to BIGGA for encouraging greenkeepers to study and learn and to TORO for supporting this competition.



John David Williams



James Murphy



John Stuttard



Mark Wilshire



Mark Cummine



Ewan McCabe

I would say that winning the Toro Student Greenkeeper of the Year 2000 Award is a great honour, and one that was very unexpected. To those who believe that it could only be a dream, I would say follow that dream. Apart from the accomplishment of winning such a prestigious award, it was a great opportunity to attend The Winter School for Turfgrass Managers at the University of Massachusetts. This experience has fed my professional development, and given me a renewed enthusiasm for the problem solving nature of our business. It has changed the way I now look at my career. Jonathan Cleland

representatives and my college lecturer Chris Bothwell from GOSTA in Glasgow. On exhibit were a large range of turf care products and machinery. Not only was the show very informative but it allowed me to question representatives about their products and advances in technology. I was glad that my schedule had allowed me a full day, as it would not have been possible to see everything in any less time.

While in Dallas, I was also invited to attend the President's Dinner Show at the Adams Mark Hotel to celebrate 75 years of GCSAA. I felt very privileged to have been invited to such a prestigious event, and the entertainment wasn't disappointing. Before dinner we were given a presentation of how the Association has evolved over the last 75 years, and during dinner we were entertained by a fantastic ice display, which involved a huge block of ice being carved out using chainsaws into the GCSAA logo. After dinner entertainment was just as extravagant, with the World Classic Rockers entertaining us until the early hours.

My next destination was Minneapolis. For the remainder of my trip I was accompanied by Ian Ritchie, Links Superintendent at Portmarnock, Ireland who was award-

ed the Toro Award for Excellence in Greenkeeping, as well as Pete Mansfield and other Toro representatives. Over the next few days our itinerary included visits to the Toro Headquarters, the Shakopee Production Plant and the Tomah Manufacturing plant. However, our first day was free so we took the opportunity to visit the Mall of America that was once the largest undercover shopping mall in the USA.

The following morning we visited Toro Headquarters, where we were given a tour of the facility in which over 1000 people are employed. This is where all the research, development and equipment testing and trials are performed. It certainly made me appreciate how much work goes into the research and design of the machines we use on our golf courses. The Shakopee was where they manufactured various steel components such as the cutting reels and sole plates. My final excursion was to the Tomah Plant in Wisconsin, which is where all the machines are finally assembled, painted and placed in crates ready for consignment. I'll never take one of these machines for granted again!

The final destination of my eight

week trip was California. It was bizarre to leave Minneapolis where the temperature reached 40 degrees below and then to arrive in California where the temperature was mid 70's.

We were greeted at our hotel by Kenne James, from Toro who had arranged for us to visit Oak Valley Golf Club. There we were given a tour of their maintenance facilities and golf course. The Superintendent was available to answer any of our questions in relation to maintenance regimes.

During our time in California Ian Ritchie and I were also able to play a round of golf at the Hidden Valley Golf Club. This course was literally constructed in the middle of a desert. As you can imagine this made quite a dramatic backdrop to the golf course. However, our main purpose of being in California was to visit the Toro Irrigation Division where all irrigation components and sprinklers are designed, manufactured and tested. The highlight of our last night in California was the salsa dancing, which I have to say; Ian Ritchie was exceptionally good at!

Being home for a couple of months now, I can reflect on how much I believe I have gained from being named the Toro Student Greenkeeper

of the Year. The trip fulfilled all of my expectations, but it's been intangible areas that I feel I've benefited most from; such as increased confidence, contacts and a revitalised enthusiasm for my work. This coupled with the knowledge gleaned from working practises in the States will certainly help me with my career in the future.

Among the benefits the prize has offered me, the longest lasting and most valuable will be some of the relationships I struck with my colleagues and classmates. I plan to get over to the USA again as soon as I can, to check the next generation of developments taking place that we can learn from.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Ken Richardson, Education and Training Manager and everyone else involved at BIGGA headquarters, as well as all the Toro representatives, especially Pete Mansfield. In addition I would like to thank my friends and family, Helensburgh Golf Club, and particularly Chris Bothwell from GOSTA for all their encouragement and support.

Jonathan Cleland, Toro Student of the Year 2000