



BIGGA GOLDEN KEY and SILVER KEY MEMBERSHIP



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'Strengthening the Partnership' - Neil Thomas reflects on the invaluable contributions of Golden and Silver Key supporters since 1992...

One of the cornerstones of BIGGA's Education and Training programmes is the Education and Development Fund. It is the Fund which provides the means to produce Field Guides, Books, Posters, Videos, Careers Advice Packages, assist with Region and Section Conferences, Seminars and Courses and enable the purchase of Training Aids e.g. computers, video cameras, digital camera, OHP, LCD Projector, 34mm Slide Library and Lending Library. For BIGGA's members it is therefore vital in their education and training advancement. Yet how much is known about the Fund, its origins and those who contribute to it? Time to dig a little deeper.

First, and perhaps a surprise to some, it is a long standing Fund. It was established in January 1992 and has certainly stood the test of time. Traditionally greenkeepers had always enjoyed the support of companies within the industry and for many years this was at a local level and was reflected particularly in backing for Section seminar programmes and prizes for golf tournaments. With the advent of BIGGA, it was inevitable that the nature of this support would change. In just a few years, companies found that they were now working with a large, professionally run Association which operated nationally and regionally as well as on a Section basis. Companies continued to wish to support greenkeepers and the development of their profession but found there were now conflicting pressures at the respective levels of BIGGA. The Association for its part had no wish to see companies pressurised in this way and saw a need for consistency and fairness in relations with companies working in the industry. To meet this need, the Education and Development Fund was established.



The Fund enables those companies so wishing to join as either Golden or Silver Key members, thereby enabling the development of BIGGA's education and training programmes at a national level as indicated earlier in this article. While 17 companies are currently taking this route, the Association is mindful of those companies who wish to continue many years of support at regional and section level. This support continues to be much valued. The benefit of the Fund to companies is that it provides equal recognition to all and they can clearly identify the projects on which their contributions are being spent.

Meetings are held with the Golden and Silver Key company supporters in the spring and autumn each year. Recommendations for spending priorities from the Education Sub-Committee are considered at these meetings and company representatives can themselves put forward projects for consideration. Companies are acknowledged for each and every spending programme. While wishing their contributions to be acknowledged and their companies profiled, those attending the meetings are anxious to avoid overt commercialism. The participating companies also enjoy a number of practical benefits related to BIGGA membership and formal recognition each year at the BTME.

The Fund has achieved much over the years. As far back as 1993 'Setting the Standard - In Spray Application' established a trend for first class videos which continued through to 2001 with the excellent 'Irrigation' video. Field Guides, starting with 'Weeds, Pests and Diseases' and through to 'Grasses in the Rough', have proved of great benefit to greenkeepers. Particularly high profile was the 'Wildside of Golf' booklet last year which has been excellently received both within the game of golf and wider afield. This year the Fund will be continuing with the Training Voucher Scheme which enables companies to provide BIGGA members with vouchers to be used to offset the costs of BIGGA training programmes.

A highlight for 2002 has been the decision to bring careers advice for greenkeepers up to date in a jointly funded project with the GTC as the 1994 video 'Keeper of the Green - A Career in Golf Course Management' had become dated. The package will be available on DVD and CD with the voice over once again being provided by Peter Alliss. It will be available very shortly and will be sent to careers offices, schools and colleges as well as being available to golf clubs and greenkeepers upon request.

It would be remiss of me not to mention the individual Golden and Silver Key BIGGA members who support the Fund as part of their annual membership subscriptions. They are acknowledged each month within 'Greenkeeper International' and their contributions are greatly appreciated. It is important to note, therefore, that the Fund is not purely for companies. Individuals who wish to support greenkeeper education and training have a means to do so through the Fund and many have contributed over a considerable period.

Finally, in acknowledging the first class support that the Fund has received from companies over the years, there remains a need for greater recognition of these companies by greenkeepers in general. Considerable numbers of them have received substantial enhancement of their education and training programmes through the resources of the Fund. Indeed a number of companies have now supported the Fund for eleven successive years. It does not take much for a 'thank you' now and again or perhaps an invitation to a Region or Section event where the support can be acknowledged. Partnerships with companies in the industry have always been important. I am sure that they will remain so and BIGGA members can do much to strengthen existing partnerships and forge new ones for mutual benefit in the years ahead.



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