

COUNTDOWN TO 2004...

Neil Thomas reports on a year round operation...

So the 15th BTME has come and gone as well as the first ClubHouse exhibition. New records have been set for both show visits and visitor attendance. This must be encouraging for both trade and the profession after a most difficult year with the economic downturn hitting hard at both the industry and golf clubs generally. While the 'Harrogate week' remains a major event in the golfing calendar with its very special atmosphere and invigorating effect, we in BIGGA remain conscious of the need to keep moving forward and to meet the challenges posed in these turbulent times if the success of the exhibitions is to be both maintained and strengthened.



Within BIGGA, we now work on a 12 month rolling plan such is the size and scope of the Harrogate operation, taking in a comprehensive education and training programme as well as the two exhibitions. Yet there are still those who believe we employ an agency to come in and do it for us. The truth is that the whole week in all its aspects is organised and run through our headquarters operation at BIGGA HOUSE. Herein lies one major reason for our success - we stand or fall on our own efforts.

As I write immediately after the event, we are busy analysing the statistics and feedback from the show. The Steering Committee, represented by 16 companies, is being consulted. Members of our Board of Management will have visited the exhibition stands and will be reporting back on the outcome of their visits. By the end of February we will be able to take stock of the 2003 exhibitions and, having validated the feedback, this will be of great assistance in our planning for 2004.

On the education and training front, accessing the BIGGA website will provide excellent information on the views of our members as to what worked and what did not with the education programmes, while surveys undertaken during the week will also provide vital planning information for 2004.

By mid-March our BTME/ClubHouse Staff Working Party will be setting the parameters for next year's event. At the end of that month we will have already reached the final date for this year's exhibitors to confirm their bookings for 2004 before stand bookings are opened up on a first come first served basis.

Early summer and the education and training programmes are taking

shape. Much consideration is given to the choice of Keynote Speaker, a session that has proved most successful in recent years. Debra Veal was outstanding this time around, so much achieved at so young an age. Not to be underestimated is the choice of Banquet entertainment. The social highlight of BIGGA's year demands a high standard. This year the Counterfeit Stones seem to have met with universal acclaim.

As we move into autumn the pressure is mounting. The halls are filling fast and speakers from around the world are being chased for CVs and photographs. Liaison with Harrogate International Centre on a daily basis is crucial while the bookings from delegates are pouring into BIGGA HOUSE. The details of various BIGGA functions during the week are set out and circulated and VIP invitations issued. The first two weeks of January see it all coming together and finally the logistics of moving the BIGGA HOUSE operation, staff and materials, to Harrogate for a week are debated and decided.

Before you know it, another year has passed and the Sunday sees the start of 'Harrogate week' with the BIGGA staff bright eyed and raring to go!

I hope that I have been able to paint just a small picture of the background and planning of a much anticipated event. Each year we look to learn and innovate for the future. We believe our partnership with the industry is vital for ongoing success. We also firmly believe at BIGGA HOUSE that each year we must improve on what has gone before and with that in mind we will set our sights on 2004 being bigger and better than ever.



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Outgoing Chairman, Richard Barker, helps George Brown into his blazer following the AGM