

The Career Path to Success



Toro Student Greenkeeper of the Year 2004 – Alex Shore

Careers are very individual things. While some people stick with one particular job, at one certain level, and are happy to do so, others find a vocation that suits them, then climb the career ladder step by step and don't stop until they hit the top.

That is certainly what Alex Shore is doing, and winning the 2004 Toro Student Greenkeeper of the Year Award has helped him jump up a few rungs.

September 27 was the date of the Final held at BIGGA HOUSE and Alex, along with the seven other finalist – Kate Walls, Christopher Kerr, Robert Finnegan, Peter Kennedy, Stuart Glover, James Canham and Alastair Higgs - faced a exhausting, but exhilarating day of tackling both an interview and conducting a course report of Aldwark Manor.

So how do you start an interview with the 2004 Toro Student Greenkeeper of the Year? Simple in my case, ask him an obvious question. "So Alex," I started, "how does it feel to win?"

"It really hasn't sunk in yet. I think it will take a while to believe that I won, but I'm sure by the time I get back to work it will have hit me, and the lads at the club will help bring me back down to earth," replied Alex.

That is the answer from someone who didn't dream of winning the entire competition. A modest individual, Alex, 26, knew that, with the high standard of the finalists, anyone could have won it.

"Everybody knew their stuff and were really passionate about their jobs and greenkeeping as a whole. A bunch of us were talking before the ceremony and we all agreed that it was very close, I don't think any one of us could have predicted the winner. I certainly did not expect my name to be read out."

The spirit of the eight finalists was summed up when Alex chose to take his time to shake the hands of the seven other entrants and thank them before going up to receive his award.

"Everyone was very friendly, and that made for a great few days. The standard was so high, and everyone wanted to win, but the atmosphere always remained friendly and everyone helped each other out when needed," added Alex, after his celebration night out of bowling and beer.

Alex's career has been built around education, and the important role it can play in life. After leaving school he started his professional days at a company called Ravens Sports Fields, which is a sports turf/ground maintenance company. He was soon to be back in the classroom however.

"I left school about eight years ago, went to Ravens and they put me straight back into college. I was studying Amenity Horticulture at Oaklands College, while developing my landscaping skills at Ravens.

"I am very grateful to the manager there for taking me on and putting me through college and for showing me the ropes.

"It was a fantastic experience for me and I don't think I would be in greenkeeping, let alone the winner of the Toro award, if he hadn't been so encouraging."



Alex now had his career and was quickly looking onwards and upwards. The next step for him was clear.

"I wanted more variety and I wanted to work with people who were really passionate about their job, they were certainly that at Woburn Golf and Country Club. I enjoyed sports field maintenance, but I think moving into greenkeeping was the natural progression for me. I see greenkeeping as a higher level of groundsmanship, so to get into that was the next path for me.

"I enjoyed playing golf, though I was never a world beater, and it just seemed the right move for me at the time. I have never looked back."

His last statement is backed up by the passion you detect in his voice when he talks about the club he has been an Assistant at for five and half years.

"It is a close team at Woburn, so originally that helped me fit in quickly. It's a very friendly team and everybody helps each other out. We have three courses, the new Marquess course, the Duke's and the Duchess courses.

"Each has their own green staff, so it's individual in that way, but then we all come together and help each other out when needed, so it is still a big team effort, and that creates a good spirit and an excellent working environment."

Another reason for Alex's attraction to the Woburn vacancy back in 1999 was that the club had similar ideas

to his own about the importance of education. The club is known for placing a high emphasis on training programmes, while allowing its staff to make up their own mind whether or not to take up the opportunities out there. In fact it was the club's green staff, who were studying at Oaklands College at the same time as Alex, who recommend the position to him.

"With all employees the club make education schemes available for anyone who wants them and when they want them. So the club is always very pleased to help you in any course you want to take up, from first aid to spray training to gaining a training licence. Eddie (Bullock), the Managing Director, is always keen to help his staff into the education side of greenkeeping," stated the award winner.

As normal, Alex was both keen and quick to make the most of the

Gareth Jones meets Alex Shore, the 2004 Toro Student Greenkeeper of the Year.

opportunities provided, and he believes it has made a big difference to him as a greenkeeper.

"I was pleased to make the most of the chances in front of me. I wanted to push myself forward and learn more. The more qualifications, certificates and, most importantly, more knowledge about your job you have the better off you are going to be. So doing my NVQ Level 3 has helped inspire me to do as much as I possibly can."

In any successful career you need to be in the right place at the right time and the 2004 Student of the Year is currently in the right place. Woburn has just hosted the European Tour's Heritage Tournament, which was won by Sweden's Henrik Stenson.

Alex played a major part in the set up of the Duke's course, but was forced to miss the final rounds due to the Toro competition at BIGGA HOUSE.

The club also held the Bovis Lend Lease European Senior Masters this year and in the past has entertained the cream of women's golf with the Weetabix British Open and has had the men's British Masters over the Duke's course for 20 years until 2003.

"I am lucky to be at a course that holds major events. To have that kind of experience is great, and not every greenkeeper is fortunate to have that kind of tournament experience. As I said, I am lucky.

"Holding major tournaments like the Heritage and British Masters, means that the club demands a high standard of work, so you have to set yourself up to that level. That, along with the fact that your colleagues are working to the same high standards, is going to have a positive effect on your work and development as a greenkeeper."

The future is looking healthy for Alex, particularly with the Toro Shield and Crystal Bowl taking pride of place on his mantle piece. Former Student Greenkeeper of the Year winners have gone on to scale the heights of the Greenkeeping and Groundcare industry, and Alex has similar ambitions.

"I really enjoy it at Woburn, there is enough variety to keep me interested and motivated. If a deputy position came up that is certainly the next step for me and it's something I'll be looking at closely. I eventually want to be a Head Greenkeeper, but I wouldn't say I am ready to be one yet, I still have a lot to learn before doing that."

More to learn, does that mean more time in the classroom for Alex?

"I've been looking in to doing a HNC or a foundation degree possibly. For now I will be concentrating on going to America and the training course I will receive from the University of Massachusetts and then I will see what happens after that.

"I would like to learn more on the scientific side of things, and it will be nice to apply my theory to practice on the Duke's course. Andy Brown (of Toro) said to us all that it is important in today's environment to also learn the business and budgeting side of golf, so that's another thing I would like to get more involved with, but that is all for the future," said the man who is clearly keeping his feet on the ground.

Past winners, such as Keith Scruton in 2003, speak highly of the eight week trip to the US. The visit entails a six week period of study and then two weeks visiting the Toro factories in Minneapolis and California and also a trip to the GCSAA Golf Industry Show in Orlando.

"I'm really looking forward to the trip. I am nervous about it too, as eight weeks away from home is a long time. Hannah, my wife, was shocked and delighted when I told her I had won, but like me she is a bit anxious to be losing me for that amount of time.



▲ Toro's Andy Brown presents winner Alex Shore with the shield with runners up James Canham, left, and Robert Finnegan.

"However we both know how important this experience will be and the great benefit it will be to my career. The course is very scientific based and that is something that will help me and I really want to learn more on that side.

"Like greenkeeping in general, it will be very hard work, but it's all worth it. You really do get out what you put in. It is about dedicating time to education and your learning, it is hard to juggle both, but if you can do it, it really will be of benefit," concluded Alex, as he took in the magnitude of winning the entire competition.

So, how do you finish an interview with the 2004 Toro Student Greenkeeper of the Year? Ask him another obvious question. "So who would you like to thank then?" – See told you it was obvious.

"Well there are a few people. On the golf side, Eddie Bullock, Managing Director at Woburn, Chris Hunt, Course Manager, Steve Tompkins, Head Greenkeeper and his Deputy, Simon Trotter, have all been very supportive and I owe them a big thank you. They taught me how to compile course reports and things like that. Chris White, my lecturer at Oaklands, had the confidence in me to enter me in the competition and he has stood by me all the way. Hannah, my wife, has been very strong and a great help, her support has made a big difference to me."

"BIGGA and Toro have been wonderful. Everyone at BIGGA has been very helpful, especially Ken Richardson and Sami Collins. From Toro, Andy Brown and Peter Mansfield have been excellent. The two organisations put so much work in to this competition and that effort makes the competition really magnificent.

"Finally I would like to thank all the other contestants, they helped confirm my belief in the importance of education in greenkeeping and also made the whole few days very memorable for me."



▲ The entire cast of the 2004 Toro Student of the Year Award final.