



Atlanta Here We Come

Gareth Jones unveils the 10 members of the BIGGA Delegation, who are travelling to the GCSAA Golf Industry Show in the USA courtesy of Bernhard & Co.

Organising any Exhibition is a complex and arduous task, but when it is on the massive scale of the GCSAA Industry Show, it is just that bit tougher. So spare a thought for the Association as they were forced to move the location of the Show not once, but twice, within the final months leading to the event. Originally scheduled for New Orleans, the devastation caused by Hurricane Katrina saw the City's Conference Centre used as a base for those left homeless by the storms.

The GCSAA had no option but to search for a new base for their annual Show and Houston was chosen. Fear rose again as Hurricane Rita locked its radar on the City. Surely lightning wouldn't strike twice? Houston survived the natural disaster, but the GCSAA's luck was still not in - Houston's Convention Centre could not deliver the facilities originally promised.

Starting to think that the entire GCSAA staff had walked under a ladder or driven over a litter of black cats, the Association commenced their third search. Atlanta came to the rescue, offering the required facilities on the same dates for the Show as originally planned for New Orleans - the GCSAA Conference on February 6-11, with the Show 9-11.

Once again 10 BIGGA members will be flown to the United States to experience this incredible event, thanks to sponsors Bernhard & Co. The BIGGA Delegation will not just visit the GCSAA Show and Conference, it will also be taken to some of the most prestigious golf clubs in the State and gain a first hand view of how turf professionals do it the other side of the pond.

THE DELEGATION

Greg Skinner only started his greenkeeping career in 2003, when he joined Lingdale GC. Previously Greg had taken the guise of a National Account Manager for construction company Ingersoll Rand. After wishing to find a new career that he found both enjoyable and rewarding the new man has not looked back since becoming part of the greens team at Lingdale.

"The fact that I made a huge life changing decision to enter the exciting world of greenkeeping demonstrates my enthusiasm and desire to learn. I feel the Delegation will increase my knowledge of the profession," commented the First Assistant.

Matthew Plested has been a BIGGA member for eight years and is currently Deputy Course Manager at Old Fold Manor GC. An ex employee of both Lee on the Solent GC and Hendon GC, Matthew has achieved his NVQ Level 3 in Greenkeeping and Sports Turf Management and aims to become a Course Manager in years to come.

"It is a wonderful opportunity to see how golf courses are managed in the US. I plan to look for ideas to improve my own skills. It will be a great chance to meet and share experiences with other greenkeepers," said Matthew.

Born in 1984, Alastair Higgs will be the youngest member of the Delegation. He is Deputy Course Manager at Blue Mountain GC, where he

has worked since 2004. An NVQ Level 3 at Sparsholt College led to him all the way to the 2004 Toro Student of the Year final. A young and ambitious individual, Alastair is always looking for ways to improve his knowledge and skills.

Fred Deamen is Course Manager at Alton GC, where he has been for over 20 years. A member of BIGGA for 16 years plus, Fred dreams of achieving Master Greenkeeper status in the future. As a senior greenkeeper on the 2006 Delegation, he will have a lot to offer younger members.

Course Manager at Felixstowe Ferry, John Houston has headed seven clubs in total. When John took on his first headship in 1981 at Dorking GC he was the youngest Head Greenkeeper in the Country at the time. Felixstowe were rewarded the Best Newcomer Award in the 2004 BIGGA Golf Environmental Competition.

Speaking about his BIGGA membership John commented: "It gives me great confidence in knowing that there is a great team of people which support greenkeepers. Their help and guidance can support learning and education to help our careers."

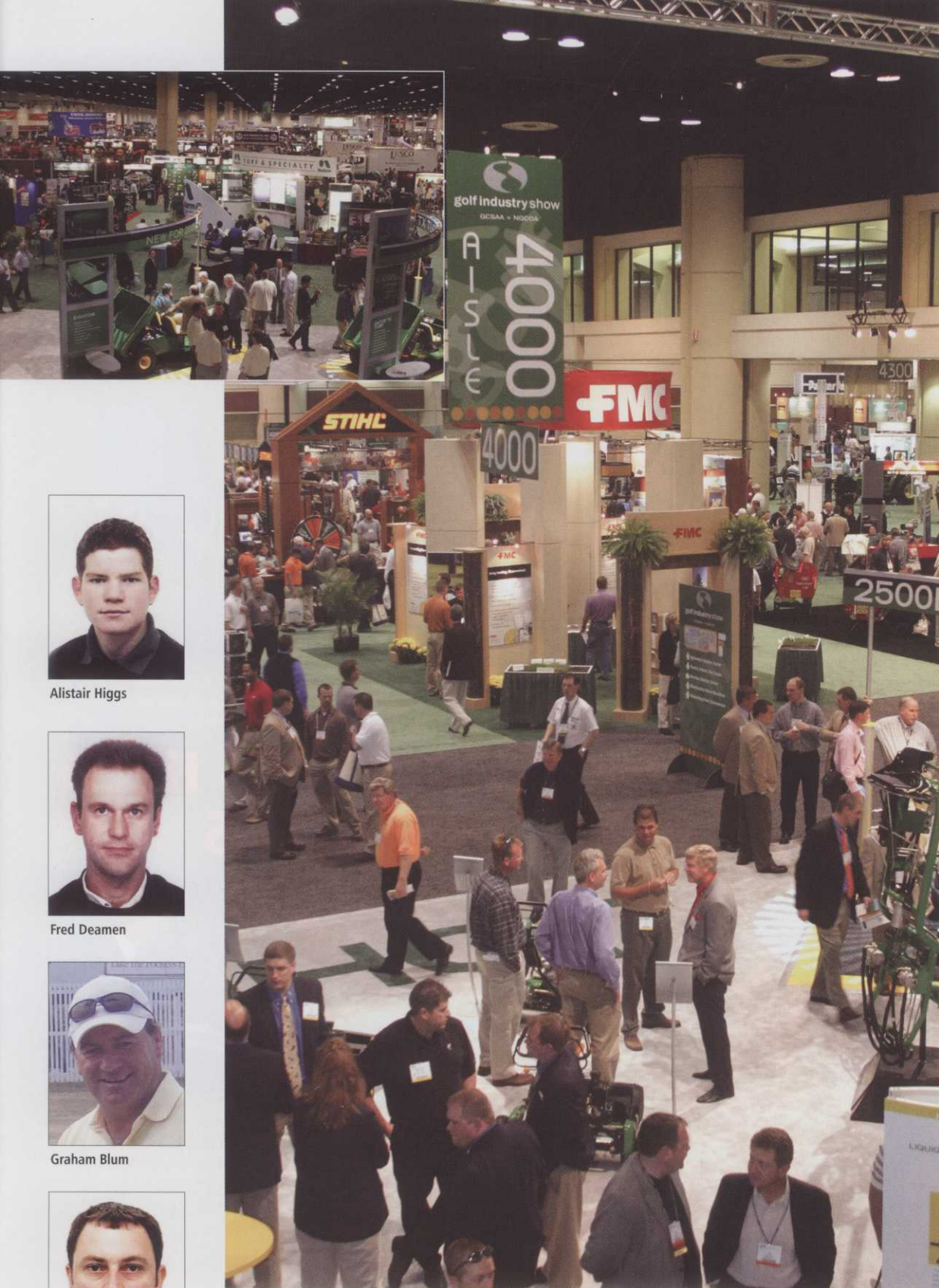
Ian Kinley boasts St Andrews and Royal Birkdale on his CV and is presently the top man at Glen Golf Club. Ian believes that a higher profile within the golfing sector would provide the opportunity to present the greenkeeping profession in such a way that the golfing community would be more educated as to why and when certain operations are necessary on the course.

"The trip to Atlanta will provide the opportunity to represent British greenkeeping in such a high profile delegation and ultimately I hope to employ the knowledge gained to raise the standard of British golf courses," said Ian.

Marc Haring is Course Manager at Cumberwell Park GC, a position he has held since 1993. A regular at Harrogate Week, Marc is an enthusiastic and knowledgeable character who plans continued professional development by taking on more responsibility with his company.

Justin Austin has been the headman at Windwhistle GC for the past five years. He thinks more knowledge should be passed to school leavers about greenkeeping. More detailed job descriptions should be placed at school job fairs to highlight that it is a forward thinking career. Justin is looking forward to comparing the American courses with the likes of Troon and St Andrews.

A former caddie on the Ladies European Tour, where he caddied for current Solheim Cup Captain Catrin Nilsmark, Graham Blum is now Course Manager at Trefloyne GC. After 25 years in the fine turf industry the Aussie is now tackling his NVQ Level 3.



John Houston



Justin Ausin



Keith Ratcliffe



Marc Haring



Matthew Plested



Alistair Higgs



Fred Deamen



Graham Blum



Greg Skinner



Ian Kinley

"I think I will benefit by attending the Conference and speaking to other greenkeepers in America about how we can make our Association a more harmonious and stronger one," explained Graham.

The 10th member of the BIGGA Delegation is Keith Ratcliffe, Course Manager at Wychwood Park. He has recently passed his Master Greenkeeper Certificate and is an NVQ Assessor. Before taking on a role in golf, Keith spent 21 years in the British Army.

"With my background in the Army and 12 years in greenkeeping I'm equipped to get the most out of the Delegation. I will fly the flag for greenkeeping in the UK," said Keith.

Undoubtedly, despite three moves, the GCSAA Show will be another great success and all 10 members of the BIGGA Delegation, sponsored by Bernhard & Co, will greatly benefit from their experiences in Atlanta.

