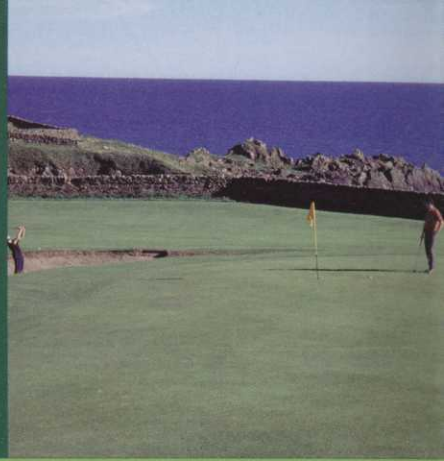


Course Feature



Golfing First for Scotland

Scott MacCallum visits the latest club to be crowned BIGGA Golf Environment Champions

In much the same way as Egypt immediately brings to mind pyramids, thinking about Scotland does the same with golf. Of course the pyramids were in serious need of repointing by the time Allan Robertson and Old Tom Morris started to make golf the popular sport it has now become, but it would hard to claim that golf lacks history.

So when something occurs for the first time in the Scottish golfing world it is certainly news.

But that is exactly what Brighthouse Bay Golf Club has achieved – a Scottish golfing first – in becoming the first Scottish golf club to win the prestigious BIGGA Golf Environment Competition, in association with Ransomes Jacobsen, Scotts, Syngenta and Course Care.

What makes the feat even more commendable is that Brighthouse Bay is not one of Scotland's traditional, established golf clubs, set, as it is, in an award winning holiday park near Kirkcudbright, an area which is not regarded as one of Scotland's foremost golfing regions.

"As a relatively new golf club we are more than delighted to have become the first golf club in Scotland to win the Award,"

said owner, Tom Gillespie.

"We are always looking to raise our profile and gain recognition, particularly coming from an area which isn't renowned for top golf courses, and this shows that we have a very interesting course here with a lot going for it," added Tom.

The win has already brought publicity to the club with VisitScotland.com featuring the Trophy presentation picture on its website and it has created quite a bit of excitement in the local area.

"The South of Scotland Golf Association is absolutely delighted about this because we sponsor their juniors while they are very keen for us to pass on some of the environmental expertise we have at Brighthouse to other clubs in the area," said Evelyn Gillespie.

Tom and Evelyn have always been extremely pro-active when it comes to environmental issues and Brighthouse Bay is one of the most environmentally sustainable holiday centres in the UK, having collected a host of awards and certificates - including Gold Status in the Green Tourism Business Scheme; the Scottish Award for Environmental Excellence on Golf Courses; the Pan European Golf Environment Europe certification and Committed to Green, while they recently picked up the David Bellamy Gold Award for the 10th year running.

"A golfing landscape is of huge benefit to wildlife and the fact that it is viewed with suspicion in some quarters is ridiculous. However the BIGGA competition actually turns that on its head and displays to people that a golf course is a fabulous resource, not only to maintain, but to encourage, wildlife. We have had a huge turn around in the amount of wildlife which has come to the area since the development of the golf course," said Tom.

The drive and enthusiasm for environmental issues showed by Tom and Evelyn has been passed on to Head Greenkeeper, Richard Davis. "To be blatantly honest when Evelyn asked me to assist with the entry in the first year I was probably like 70% of greenkeepers out there and didn't give it too much thought. Since then, though, we've taken it on board, run with it and everything has snowballed to such an extent that it culminated with this win," said Richard.

And it would be fair to say that Richard and his team are now fully committed to ensuring good environmental practice is undertaken at all times. And Evelyn is particularly proud to be assisting in the development of the Course Managers and Head Greenkeepers of the future.

"Every decision we make is taken with

Every decision we make is taken with environmental issues in mind and if something we do affects a particular area of the course we ensure we compensate for that."

environmental issues in mind and if something we do affects a particular area of the course we ensure we compensate for that. For example the driving range re-development involved an area which had previously been set aside for skylark nesting but we reinstated an area for the skylarks around 100 yards away so nothing

was lost," explained Richard.

Tom and Evelyn were encouraged to take part in the competition by a friend, Ross Lindsay, who had read about it in

“ We were also pleased that the BIGGA competition is so much more about a passion for the environment ”



Greenkeeper International in 2002 and who felt that, with all the work Brighthouse Bay was doing, it was right down their street.

In the first year of entry they were Highly Commended and then, in 2004, they became Scottish winners which proved a great boost to all involved.

During the entry process Richard, Tom and Evelyn have built up a close relationship with judge, Lee Penrose, of the STRI, to the extent that they were actively looking forward to his visits and the opportunity to show off their work and pick his brains on future projects.

“In Lee’s role he must be as much an advisor as he is an inspector. It isn’t an easy balance to strike, and I know of many who

have failed to do so in other programmes, but Lee has always done this extremely well,” said Tom.

“We were also pleased that the BIGGA competition is so much more about a passion for the environment and not paper-based involving a lot of box ticking,” added Evelyn.

With a good run of results in the two previous years, Richard and his team went into last year’s competition with hopes high for a good result.

“I’d be lying if I said that we didn’t expect to be in the shake-up, although I perhaps didn’t expect to win,” said Richard diplomatically, too diplomatically for his boss’ liking.

“You’d have been most upset if we hadn’t

won it,” interrupted Evelyn, most indignant. “Ok, We’d have been most upset if we hadn’t won this year,” responded Richard, dutifully. Much of the Gillespie’s environmental thinking can be credited to Tom’s father, who farmed the land before it became the Holiday Park.

“He was a man before his time, who thought outside the box and could have perhaps been described as a bit of a crank,” said Tom, of his father, Douglas.

“He supported the first whole food shop in the UK, which was in Baker Street, in London. Sorry to say that about five years later it went bust but you can see how many whole food shops there are nowadays.”

It pains Tom that when he left agricultural college in the ‘50s and returned to the farm

“The Scottish Golf Environment Group identified that we had nine different landscapes on the course – most courses have about two or three and that’s what creates the interest.”



he had to persuade his father to forgo organic practices for a more profitable approach.

“We couldn’t afford to run the farm organically without some extra support. It was impossible and even nowadays organic farming is heavily subsidised to take the operation through to a finished product. I’m sorry to say that I had sympathy for the organic approach but could see how difficult it was from a practical point of view so had to call a halt to it.”

But as Evelyn points out Tom’s passion for the environment and the responsibility he has as custodian of Brighthouse Bay is undiminished.

“Tom knows every inch of this landscape and loves this land – he would spot if a single tree had been removed.”

“We keep coming back to the word sustainable, but if you are making something sustainable it is actually good business – maximising what you can maximise and minimising the costs of running.

“The other thing you want to do is maximise the resource which is out there. We have the privilege of managing an area and we are duty bound to maximise what it can do for wildlife and for the golfer. It’s all about making life worth living,” said Tom.

Golf became part of the Brighthouse Bay portfolio in the early ‘70s, not long after the Holiday Park opened, as Tom reasoned that the game was a great way to attract visitors in the summer months.

“We produced a fairly rudimentary nine holer but I always felt that the land we had lent itself potentially to a very interesting golf course,” said Tom.

That vision began to edge towards reality in the late ‘90s when Tom, working with local greenkeeper and golf course designer, Duncan Gray, planned the new 18 holer.

“I’d become aware of Duncan as he was from the neighbouring parish and he’d built up a reputation as an advisor and designer both locally and in Ireland. I’d got the impression that he took easily to the natural environment and made the most of the natural topography of the area,” said Tom.

Duncan, a well known BIGGA member, built and runs his own golf club The Pines, near Dumfries, about 50 miles from Brighthouse Bay.

England football legend and former Republic of Ireland manager, Jack Charlton opened the new 18 holes in 1999 and the course has gone on from strength to strength since then.

“The Scottish Golf Environment Group identified that we had nine different landscapes on the course – most courses have about two or three and that’s what creates the interest,” said Tom.

Included among the nine are a wetland landscape; rock shore landscape; cliff landscape; hillside landscape and upper plateau landscape.

With the publicity machine about to spring into action to ensure the rest of Scottish golf and beyond is aware of Brighthouse Bay’s status as the leading environmental golf course in the country, Richard’s thoughts

turn to ensuring the golfing challenge it presents is enhanced.

"We are trying to up-grade the quality of tees and greens and hope to attract more UK championships to the course – we've already had the British Universities Championship in 2004," said Richard.

The balance has to be struck however with Championship golf and providing a course that visiting holiday makers can get round.

"It is a difficult but we manage it by having a lot of tees to provide easier routes," explained Tom.

Having to refrain from entering the competition for three years is a frustration to the Brighthouse Bay team but they are already gearing up for a triumphant return in 2009 – Richard was particularly disappointed to learn that the feat of winning twice had already been achieved by Ipswich Golf Club.

"I'd particularly like to thank Espeth Coutts, from SGEG, and Lee Penrose and Simon Watson, from STRI, who have done so much to help me. It really gives me confidence, as a relatively young

greenkeeper, to make decisions which might be deemed to be controversial, knowing I've got the support of SGEG and the STRI behind me."

The point is reinforced by Evelyn who feels that more clubs should enter the competition because of the advice and support they would receive from the judges.

"I wouldn't want people frightened about taking part because they would probably find out that they were doing much more right than they are doing wrong."

While Tom is delighted that golf, through the competition is setting a fine example. "I think the competition is well timed, In fact it is ahead of a lot of things as every news bulletin at the moment is about climate change and environmental awareness.

"It's the biggest challenge to society today.

"I'd also like to thank all my green staff for their continued help and support and recognise the role they played in our winning the Award," said Tom.

For more information on Brighthouse Bay visit www.gillespie-leisure.co.uk

Look out for application forms for the 2008 competition around May.



FOR THE PERFECT COURSE FROM TEE TO GREEN

Do you know what's in your golf mixtures?
Our range of golf course mixtures contains an impressive range of STRI listed cultivars, including BSH Aber varieties. These are bred in the UK for UK conditions by our turfgrass breeding team at IGER, Aberystwyth.

Because every course is different, our technical advisors are on hand to help you select the best mixtures for your course.

Visit www.bshamenity.com to download our 2007 seed catalogue, or call 01522 868714 to contact your regional advisor.



The ABER® prefix is a registered trade mark of Germinal Holdings Limited, the parent company of British Seed Houses Limited.