

A SAD GOODBYE

We are blessed today with some of the finest equipment in the world to help us maintain our golf courses, the manufactures have, year on year, invested time, money and effort into development to aid the greenkeeper at grass roots.

I fondly remember my experiences on the farm as a wee boy doing a summer job and seeing the farmer get the tractor out of the shed. Now this was no ordinary tractor, it mostly spent its life in the shed and would only be brought out for special occasions. It was a fruit farm and most of the lugging was done by wheelbarrow and of course by the seasonal helpers from the village and surrounding towns. I remember the tractor driver getting it out was quite an event. It was an old Massey Ferguson with a spotlight on the front, not only did it have its own shed but it had clothes too. Before this tractor went to work there was a hive of activity. Firstly it was undressed with all its finery removed; then the battery, which was stored elsewhere was fitted; next it was fuelled from a watering can and then dusted down.

It was then the big moment when Willie would start the engine with a cloud of smoke. He would then start a process of twiddling and turning a knob and when finished he drove the tractor in all its splendour out of the shed to get to work.

As usual I have gone off the subject and delved into my past, but the reason for the story was not wasted I hope. Yes the tractor was wonderful and will always be a special memory, but it was not the tractor that inspired the story, it was Willie who made it a truly wonderful experience and that's what I really wanted to touch on in this my final column.

Yes we do it with grass, with the wonderful machinery available today, but my most memorable experiences during this past year have without doubt been the people I have met along.

Now to mention by name all those who have made my journey such a pleasant one would be impossible. The passion I had been told was weaning and lost forever, but it's still evident to me in abundance and that's got to be a good thing.



The world is a changing and we have to adapt, taking with us all that is the special and developing into the future.

This year we've had a major push on sustainable golf, it's hard to pick up a magazine without the subject matter being discussed. Well is it the new magical recipe for success or not? Well of course it is, because it's nothing new. It's been with us since time and memorial it's called good greenkeeping. A new name for a tried and tested system for producing a fine golfing venue with judicial imputes of all the ingredients to produce fine turf that can take the game of golf into the future with the blessing of the general public.

The point is this, it should not or ever be viewed as an evangelical visionary new idea because that turns people off to the fact that it's got to be right way to go forward.

I am firmly of the opinion that the basics of good greenkeeping are as relevant today as they have ever been, so what has changed that makes this such a hard thing to achieve in some cases? Trust me, no two courses are the same and the management at your golf club should be different from the one down the road. Of course the basics never change but they do have to be fine tuned to suit your own land mass. I am concerned there are those who wish to criticise the efforts of well meaning members of our Association and

have an answer to all the ills and, of course, a remedy for a better way forward. They do so with no real interest other than their own and I have seen a groundswell of opinions that have harmed the well being of the incumbent greenkeeper and the course, but also employ the tactic of financial savings as the buzzword for their very existence.

Well, take note, I for one have an interest in the well being of you all at heart and to those that think otherwise. I'm not that old and will be around for a wee while yet and if I have achieved nothing more this year then I have had my eyes opened to bad practice and the dumbing down of the art of greenkeeping. Make no mistake I am buoyed to challenge the sometimes unethical, practices that needs weeding out of this industry.

We have within our ranks some very special people from whom I am sure we could all take great lessons. I know this to be true because I have met many of them. This year my life has been enriched beyond my wildest dreams and, frankly, I don't think I have met a bad greenkeeper on my travels. You are an amazing lot with an ability to share your experiences and help others around achieve bigger and greater things. This, mixed with a dusting of greenkeeping passion and sprinkled with a determination to succeed, means we all have an assured way forward so I urge you to consider this - rub shoulders with as many other greenkeepers as you can. I have been greedy this year and have received all the benefits of doing just that. I have had a ball and for that I thank you all for the opportunity. It has been a life changing experience that I will never forget. If we can master the art of people then we will truly become masters of the art of greenkeeping.

So it's a worn out Chairman that passes on the mantel to Kenny Mackay and if he enjoys the experience as much as I have he will have a wonderful year. I am looking forward to a quieter life and seeing more of the kids, I have missed them like crazy at times this year and I plan to make up for lost time. I will also remember all those special people that have made my term as Chairman a truly amazing experience.



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