

Welcome



A Greenkeeping Anachronism

Occasionally we receive calls at BIGGA HOUSE from golf club officials keen to learn a little more about specific greenkeeping issues. “Can golf be played in frost without damaging the surface?” “What is BIGGA’s view on trolley bans?” “What green speed should be achievable on our course?”

The first answer to all these questions is always “Have you spoken to your Course Manager?” The reason being, other than the fact that BIGGA Headquarters staff are specialists in their own areas of responsibility and are not greenkeepers, is that you can’t help thinking that any information gleaned could be to use against the club’s own Course Manager.

They may be trying to increase their own knowledge, but more likely is the fact that they don’t agree with the approach which is being taken at their club and are looking for evidence to back up their own point of view.

Wouldn’t it be far better to engage with the Course Manager on the subject and at least learn why he or she adopts the particular approach? It’s more than likely that there is a perfectly good reason for going down one route and not another.

It is all part of the old chestnut of the average golf club having 650 greenkeepers and the generally held belief that anyone who sits down in front of the box on a Friday to watch Alan Titchmarsh or Monty Don, and who possesses a modicum of knowledge about gardening, is perfectly capable of double guessing a Course Manager on matters agronomic.

The make up of many traditional members’ clubs doesn’t help, with Green Committees often charged with planning the working week of the Greenkeeping Team rather than acting as a communication link to the rest of the membership.

I’ve met some wonderful Chairmen of Green over the years, many of whom have developed good greenkeeping knowledge and who have been big supporters of the greenkeeping staff, but the fact remains that their sole role should be to act as a middleman between the Maintenance facility and the Board Room. Even then, in an ideal world there should be no room for them. They are a greenkeeping anachronism. Any modern Course Manager worth his salt should have the skills to communicate with club members whether it be on the course, in the bar or in the Board Room.

While out visiting members at their clubs I’ve noticed that the Course Managers who play golf with the membership, and who take time to learn names and chat with members, are the ones who have fewest problems when it comes to the whispering campaigns about the state of the course.

It might seem that you have enough to do without adding to your workload and adding to your day by popping into the clubhouse but it is time well spent. It can nip potential problems in the bud and, if you press the right buttons, you might find that 650 strong greenkeeping team losing some of its recruits.

HOW CAN GOLF CLUBS RETAIN ‘NOMADIC’ GOLF MEMBERS?

The GTC has recognised a growing expectation amongst golfer’s seeking to play on golf courses in pristine condition for as near to 12 months a year as possible with those in golf club membership seeking to derive full value for their annual subscriptions.

The commonly acknowledged trends of reducing waiting lists, removal of entry fees and marketeers actively promoting new member packages, now offer the ‘nomadic’ golf club member an ideal opportunity to satisfy his/her needs to move freely between golf clubs, at will.

Kevin Weir, The Scottish Golf Union’s, Golf Service Manager, says: “The reasons for joining a golf club are obvious - location, cost, length of waiting list, ease of access to the course, practice facilities, condition of the course and many more. But fundamentally golfers simply join clubs to play golf.”

Kevin explains: “Golfers will therefore seek a course that is presented in the best possible playing conditions at all times for as near to 12 months of the year as possible, having had their expectations significantly fuelled by current TV and golfing media coverage. Augusta and the Masters inevitably kick starts this in early Spring every year.

“Expectations such as these will apply whether playing in a club championship, an open competition, a monthly medal, a bounce game with friends or a few holes on a summer’s evening - the player will always want to enjoy the best possible course conditions at all times.” Kevin continues.

It is important for golf clubs to identify and implement course management practices appropriate for their courses that will best deliver the best possible quality playing surfaces for their members and visitors alike. To do this golf clubs must plan ahead utilising a long term Course Management Policy framework. This process should not only include the course management and development programme for the golf course but also the commitment of the golf club to support and fund this agreed programme.

The policy document should be openly shared and communicated to the golf club membership, allowing them to understand the agreed long term plans for the golf course, some elements of which they will have voted for. The policy should be reviewed regularly and updated as required.

Kevin adds: “The success of the golf club will depend on high quality playing surfaces that can reap huge rewards for a club and also significantly enhance the reputation of its green staff. This will retain existing members, attract new members, establish the club as an attractive venue for visiting parties, visiting golfers and corporate events, and external sponsorship. Most importantly golfers will achieve value for money, have access to the quality of a golf course they desire and become extremely satisfied customers!”

NEW PRODUCT OF THE YEAR AWARD

DJ Turfcare has won a Turf Professional New Product of the Year Award with MO Bacter, an organic fertiliser which also destroys moss without leaving debris.

The announcement was made at BTME by editor Chris Biddle who said: "We were impressed by the qualities of this product and by the fact that it is genuinely new to the industry and developed with the environment in mind."

MO Bacter, from Viano of Belgium, is a slow-release granular fertiliser (launched at IOG Saltex) which eradicates moss by secondary action, feeds grass and improves the soil. Scarifying after treatment is not necessary.



INDUSTRY EXPERTS INSPIRE STUDENTS

Writtle College hosted an Industry Day event recently. Organiser, Donna Sheringham, Recruitment Officer in the School of Horticulture, said "the aim of the day was to introduce students to the wide diversity of occupations available in the industry including the steps needed to enter particular fields".

High profile guest speakers included Mark Gregory of Landform Consultants, Paul Downer of Oakview Landscapes, Alistair Bayford representing Liz Lake Landscape Architects, Ian Legros, Curator of RHS garden Hyde Hall, Fiona Dennis, Scheme Co-ordinator of the Historic & Botanic Garden Bursary Scheme; Wyevale Garden Centres were also represented along with freelance arborist Darren Blunt; Ian Baalham from Colchester Parks and Paul Stacey from Mole Valley Local Authority.

Students Annika Brown and Heidi Baker having previously undertaken an industrial sandwich placement also shared their experiences with the student audience.

Senior Lecturer Greg Allen, also Regional Vetting Officer for BALL, believes the day was an important step in bringing education closer together with industry and anticipates the college hosting similar events in the coming year to ensure students are aware of what is happening in the real world of work and prepare Writtle graduates for the workplace.

NORTHERN REGION

The Northern Region would like to thank Aitkens and Vitax for their continued patronage, which makes a valuable contribution towards greenkeeper training. The photos show the Northern Region Chairman, Ian Holoran, presenting commemorative plaques to Richard Aitken from Aitken's Ltd and Karl Geary from Vitax on their respective stands during Harrogate Week.



NEW DEALERS

Two new dealers have been appointed by Turfmec to provide sales, service and parts support in the north-west of England for the full range of Allett professional pedestrian mowers and fineturf maintenance equipment.

Appointed to look after north and east Lancashire and parts of Greater Manchester is Burnley-based Balmers. Established in 1979, the business is owned and run by David Balmer and has built over the years a strong reputation for the high levels of service it provides to retail and hire customers throughout the area.

Responsibility for Cheshire, Merseyside, south Lancashire and parts of north Wales and Greater Manchester has been given to the Chester branch of Turner Groundscare, a four-times winner of Turfmec's dealer of the year award. The branch becomes the third Turner Groundscare depot to take on the Allett agency, joining the company's outlets at Bledlow, Buckinghamshire and Erdington, a suburb of Birmingham.

GOOD COMMUNICATION

The GTC sees Golf Course Manager/ Secretary Manager partnership as a significant step forward in golf clubs allowing professionally trained and qualified personnel to manage the day to day business of a golf club.

One example of this is at Ashburnham Golf Club, Burry Port, Carmarthenshire where a new partnership has reaped success and shows the need to communicate within a team.

Secretary Manager, Ian Church, and Course Manager, Huw Morgan, joined forces to take Ashburnham's fine reputation to even greater heights. By bringing their expertise together they see their success can be greater than the sum of what they bring separately to Ashburnham.

Ian Church states: "I don't see how I can achieve my goals without Huw doing his job. I know he is one of the best there is and that means I can give him free reign to achieve the goals that we want."

Huw Morgan realises the importance of Ian's job: "Ian brings in the money to help finance the tools, materials and resources needed to execute the work on the course. We have many areas where large sums of money need to be spent and this will have to come through visitor greenfee income.

"A good relationship is vital to the success here at Ashburnham. I have worked for some great secretaries who have trusted me and wanted to work with me. I have also worked with people who wanted to control my job as well as trying to do their job. One job is hard enough, no-one will benefit if we interfere in each other's work." Huw continues.

Planning has already started at Ashburnham for future tournaments, including the Home Internationals in 2010. Ian and Huw are vital cogs in that process. They meet or speak daily to communicate what is going on in both departments.

Standards required at golf clubs have risen to unprecedented levels in the last 10 years. All staff must be trained to be able to cope with these demands. Golfers demand high standards on the course, in the clubhouse, proshop and administration office. Golf clubs have to employ professional people with the correct skills, experience and customer service to manage their departments and produce the standards required.

The relationship must be down to trust, respect and shared positive experience. At Ashburnham, Ian and Huw trust each other to do their jobs professionally, respect each other for the areas that they bring to the team and which invariably allows them to focus on their own areas of expertise.

The shared positive experiences are that Ian delivers what Huw needs (money to pay for the materials and tools Huw and his team use to get the course to the required standard) and Huw delivers what Ian needs (a golf course that exceeds expectations and acts as a springboard for Ian to use to generate further business).

After only nine months working together, great progress has been made with increased visitors giving positive views of the course improvements. The GUV has bestowed its approval by naming the club to host the 2009 Welsh Amateur Strokeplay Championship and the 2010 Home Internationals.

Huw continues: "[The GUV] is not only saying it approves of the path we are laying down, but this is its vote of confidence in the ability of Ian and I to achieve the required standards. We are both reaping the rewards of each others hard work and the future looks very bright for the members of Ashburnham."

LAST CHANCE!

BIGGA are to provide a Greenkeeping Support Team for the BMW PGA Championship at The Wentworth Club, May 22-25.

As a team member you will be involved in walking with a match and raking any bunkers found by the players, as well as aiding Chris Kennedy and his staff, should adverse weather occur.

You will be responsible for your own transport arrangements to the course, while there is no overnight accommodation provided.

Being a member of this team will not be detrimental to your chances of making The Open Championship team that BIGGA also puts together.

Applications should be sent to: Clive Osgood, South East Regional Administrator, 34 Howard Close, Walton-on-the-Hill, Tadworth, Surrey, KT20 7QF.

IRRIGATION CONTRACTOR OF THE YEAR 2007

Ocmis UK Limited has been awarded the title of Toro Irrigation Contractor of the Year 2007. The Martlock-based company is one of the UK's leading installers of irrigation systems and was awarded this accolade, which is based on total sales, after working closely with Toro Irrigation for the past year.

Toro Irrigation's UK sales manager, Robert Jackson, and the company's area manager for northern Europe, Simon Squires, presented the award to Ocmis' managing director, Chris Aplin, at Harrogate Week. Commenting on Ocmis' achievement, Robert Jackson says: "Ocmis has undertaken numerous projects on our behalf in the last year, including prestigious installations at Ballyliffin Golf Club in Co. Donegal, Ireland, and Castle Stuart in the Scottish Highlands. It's a pleasure to work in partnership with someone at the top of the irrigation industry – Ocmis is an excellent contractor to work with."



NEW APPOINTMENTS

John Deere has appointed Richard Charleton as Product Manager for the Commercial and Golf & Turf equipment range.

The continued growth of the Commercial and Consumer Equipment (C&CE) Division within the UK and Ireland has presented the opportunity for John Deere Limited to invest in this new position.

Richard joined John Deere Limited in January 1991 as C&CE Demonstrator and Instructor. Successfully progressing through the company to become Area Service Manager for the UK and Ireland, Richard then became Territory Manager for Scotland and the north of England in July 1996. Richard's wealth of experience will stand him in good stead to take on this challenging role.

The appointment of Richard sees Henry Bredin fill the position of Territory Manager for North England and Scotland.

Henry renews his relationship with John Deere Limited as he had previously been with the company when he joined in the summer of 2001 as a management trainee with the C&CE division.



Henry Bredin



Richard Charleton



Call to discuss your requirements: 01883 344244

Email: info@eagle.uk.com Website: www.eagle.uk.com



STEM INJECTION TRAINING COURSE



Specialised new training aimed at the eradication of Japanese knotweed has been launched.

Cheshire-based Reaseheath College and Stem Injection Systems (Europe) have been promoting training in the use of an innovative new direct stem injection system which is set to augment traditional chemical spraying and 'dig and dump' treatment methods for non-native invasive plants.

The hand-held stem injection applicator works by delivering a measured dose of herbicide into the stem of the plant rather than just to the leaf surface. This means it targets only the plants injected and there is no environmental risk of spray drift, run-off or contamination of watercourses and other sensitive vegetation. Injection directly into the plant stem means the method is unaffected by rain or wind and can be applied in all weathers throughout the growing season which assists in dramatically reducing treatment times for the removal of Japanese knotweed to a single season.

Reaseheath College, based in Nantwich, which has one of the biggest horticultural departments in the country, has devised a specific training course in the use of the new equipment and is looking for accreditation with a national awarding body.

Head of Horticulture Ian Benison said: "We are delighted to be able to work with such a forward thinking and rapidly expanding company towards developing and delivering training for the control of Japanese knotweed. We are expecting a great demand from industry because there are no other courses like this in the country."

SPEEDCUT

Contractors of Oxford used Harrogate Week 2008, to launch a newsletter and celebrate their 30th anniversary.

Director and founder Dick Franklin, together with Contracts Manager, Kevin Smith, manned a busy stand that attracted a wide range of inquiries – from golf clubs to local authorities.

"We have a lot of people to talk to during the next few months about drainage work this year," says Dick. "And we are looking at a number of possible sports facility construction jobs."

The launch of Speedcut News gave past, present and future clients an opportunity to read about recent work carried out by the company.

"Harrogate was an excellent show for us," said Dick. "We were kept busy during the whole three days and met a wide cross section of people from every type of sport."

TOP PRIZE FOR CHRIS



The winner of the BTME 'Racing ahead with Rigby Taylor' promotion was Chris Milnes, Deputy Head Greenkeeper at Lowes Park Golf Club, Bury. The competition during the first two days of the show was for stand visitors to guess the number of golf balls that would fill a Callaway golf bag and prize was a pair of tickets for a 'hospitality weekend' at the 2008 Formula 1, Silverstone Grand Prix. Over 500 entered the competition and the winner guessed the exact number of 777 balls.

John Pemberton is seen above with the winning ticket and two RT Promotions girls.

NEW APPOINTMENT

Rockliffe Hall has made its first senior appointment, placing former Slaley Hall Course Manager, Davy Cuthbertson in charge of their own golf course.

Davy, aged 40, is highly regarded as a Course Manager and said he's thrilled at the challenge which lay ahead at Rockliffe Hall. The course at the development is set to become the jewel in the crown at the multi-million pound development in Hurworth, near Darlington.

Warwick Brindle, director at Rockliffe Hall Ltd, says he's thrilled to have someone of Davy's standing in position. He said: "We've waited a long time to make the right appointment for Course Manager. Its one of the most important positions for the development and we're overjoyed someone of Davy's stature has agreed to join us.

"With the course construction now near completion, Davy's arrival is perfect and I know he's going to do a first class job of developing the course to one of the very best in the UK."