

ON HIS TODD

BIGGA's new National Chairman, Peter Todd, found his way into the industry through a circuitous route but has made up for lost time since. He chats with Scott MacCallum...

FEATURE

There is an array of different routes into greenkeeping. Some people arrive through a love of playing the game of golf; others have followed their fathers into the profession, while some have had a complete change of career direction.

Peter Todd, BIGGA's new National Chairman and Courses Manager at The London Club, found his way into greenkeeping when he was forced to give up a weekend gardening job. He missed it so much it proved to him just how much he loved the outdoor life and encouraged him to change his life path.

On leaving school and joining multi-national company, Reed International, Peter started off in their logistics division, later moving into sales and negotiating contracts with clients. Alongside his career with Reed, Peter also worked at weekends on a four acre private garden in Loose, Kent, a job he had done for eight years until his move north with the company prevented this continuing.

The valuable commercial experience gained with Reed is something that, coupled with his passion for greenkeeping, Peter believes will be a useful benefit during his year as Chairman.

"Working at a proprietary club where commercial considerations as well as greenkeeping matters are constantly in focus fits entirely with my thinking."

A very solid grounding on several areas of business life at Reeds, coupled with an excellent education at Maidstone Grammar School has since helped Peter in his greenkeeping career.

"I'd spent seven years, working for three different divisions of Reed – within the Logistics and Industrial Packaging fields – and thoroughly enjoyed it. The training was excellent and I progressed to the stage where I was the youngest person on the sales team and left negotiating directly with large companies.

"However, when I was given an area covering from Liverpool to Hull and everything north of there, I came to the realisation that I didn't want spend my life in a car. Giving up my outdoor job had been a real wrench when I moved north and made me realise it was time to change direction before it was too late to re-train."

Having taken the decision to leave Reed, Peter signed up to study for an HND in Landscape Management Course, at Merrist Wood College, in Guildford.

"Initially I didn't want to narrow my focus as I didn't know in which area I wanted to specialise



but George Shiels was the Vice Principal of the College at the time and I talked with him about golf course construction and in my studies saw the early stages of plans for the Merrist Wood golf course.

"I soon recognised that a lot of people involved in horticulture were extremely passionate about working outdoors with nature but were actually struggling to make a decent living. The leisure

industry was growing fast and seemed to offer more opportunities. Having decided that a move into golf, which was booming at the time, would be good sandwich year work option, I set about finding a job.

"George (Shiels) put me in touch with three of the largest golf construction companies in the UK and I met with them all, before being offered the chance to work on the construction of what is now

called the PGA Centenary course at Gleneagles with Transcontinental.

"I spent 11 months working at Gleneagles working an average 65 hours a week and the experience was superb. I got involved in all aspects of the construction apart from shaping, which is very much a specialist job. I admired the way Transcontinental worked hard in the day and just as hard at enjoying themselves after work, there was a great team atmosphere"

Before he left to return to College for his final year Peter met Joe Paulin, who had been appointed the Grow-In Superintendent at Gleneagles, and they struck up a friendship during the hand over from construction to grow-in.

"I returned to Merrist Wood and later discovered that the Transcontinental had moved on to the construction of the London Club."

Peter asked if he could help out when he had any spare time from studying and spent a week there during the earth moving stage. It was during a night out with the lads that set him down his current path.

"Joe (Paulin) was with them and said that he'd left Gleneagles and was the new Superintendent of The London Club. He asked me what I was going to do after I'd finished college and I said I'd be looking for a job and was interested in doing a grow-in. There he was, in my home county, doing a high end construction job. It was right up my street. So we discussed me joining his new crew when I finished college."

For Peter to have the opportunity to work on the grow-in, having had construction experience at Gleneagles was another piece of his greenkeeping jigsaw.

Finishing college in June '92 he worked with Transcontinental again for three months before taking up a full time position in September with the club. There were plenty of opportunities to learn, particularly from Joe and antipodean colleagues, Steve Marsden and Andy Wood, who were also well versed in warm season grasses.

By this time Peter saw himself very much as a greenkeeper, but one who had yet to come across any golfers.

The club opened with a match between Jack Nicklaus, Seve Ballesteros and Tony Jacklin and members started to sign up. Peter didn't know it at the time but by the end of the century a mere seven years later, he would be the man in charge.

"There was a lot of ambitious people at The London Club, and a lot of movement within the team, so there were opportunities to move up the ladder but I could never have dreamt of being in charge of such a large operation when I started out."

Ironically among his fellow assistants and friends during his early days was one Kenny Mackay.

"Kenny subsequently moved on to Hanbury Manor and in recent years The Belfry, but we have always kept in touch and remained good friends. Our common ground of both working at proprietary clubs and staging tour events has resulted in reciprocal swaps of staff for tournaments and



Outgoing chairman Kenny MacKay hands over to Peter Todd

also exchanges of ideas. Kenny and I run very similar operations and both of us understand the commercial demands of running these types of business, so there is often much we can find to discuss. Greenkeeper involvement in more general management decisions is one of those subjects we both see a future in.

Peter believes that there is a great deal of knowledge, expertise and experience within the BIGGA membership that clubs would be well advised to take advantage of the skills that are there right under their nose.

"There is lots of experience and ideas within the greenkeeping profession but often greenkeepers are not involved in the running of clubs and business decisions."

"It is highly motivating to contribute ideas that are outside of your immediate area of responsibility and then see them instigated.

"I have suggested making clubhouse alterations to give a better view of the course from the bar and on another occasion I suggested charging higher green fees on a Friday, which was our busiest day, to encourage more play Monday to Thursday.

"Both ideas were taken up. The more you can help to develop the business the more valuable you become to the organisation."

Peter believes BIGGA should support those who wish to move towards general club management as he feels that some greenkeepers are well placed to take on greater responsibility at golf clubs.

"I firmly believe that the industry is moving closer to the point where Course Managers, so integral to the running of the golf club, make the natural progression to become General Managers. Part of my aims are for BIGGA to offer education and training opportunities to those who wish the option of taking that route.

"I am delighted that BIGGA has teamed up with The Club Managers Association of Europe allow BIGGA members to take the internationally recognised Certified Club Manager (CCM) qualification.

"There are a lot of talented individuals with a commercial bias who may also wish to move into other areas and we should help them. More generally, we must get the message across to young people that our industry can offer exciting and satisfying careers in a healthy work environment"

With his drive, enthusiasm and commercial background BIGGA could not have a better man as Chairman in what are undoubtedly difficult times.