

THE CHALLENGE SO FAR



Jordan Fairweather describes the challenges he has faced since he left work in one of the wettest golfing environments for one of the driest.



Jordan Fairweather

I have been fortunate to work and volunteer at some of the most prestigious golf clubs in the world, including Loch Lomond Golf Club, where I spent seven years as Irrigation Technician and Special Projects Supervisor.

During my time there, I was given every opportunity to learn (Rutgers University Graduate) and take on new challenges from upgrading the irrigation system, installing two sub-surface aeration systems, re-building fairways and leading a crew of 30, literally anything one could ask for and more. During that time I had often wondered what it would be like to move from a big name club like Loch Lomond and take up a new challenge elsewhere and would it be worth it?

So when the offer of a move to the sun came along, could I really say no? A lot of investigation

was carried out to determine whether this new opportunity had what I was looking for. Would the job fulfil me intellectually? Would I learn new skills to become a better manager? Could I meet the needs of the company who were offering me the job? Well I did take on the challenge and accepted the role of Construction Superintendent for Tanto International Golf.

My role is to manage the day-to-day construction programme for the first 18 hole course at Dubai Golf City. Dubai Golf City will be a five course complex surrounded by a very high end residential complex scheduled for completion by 2012. The first 18 hole course we are constructing is a Tim Lobb design as will be the next three. We have also started construction of the new Kyle Phillips-designed course at Yas Island in Abu Dhabi, which is next to the Formula 1 circuit and scheduled for completion in 2009.



The first challenge I faced when reaching Dubai was the heat, in July and August temperatures reach 55 degrees Celsius with fluctuating humidity. I was amazed how quickly I acclimatised. Having gone from the wettest area of Britain to a place where they accumulated 7mm of rain last year, and all in one day, you would think nothing would ever stop construction, but the weather does! Working regulations state for July and August no staff are allowed outside of an air conditioned cab to work between 12 and 3pm. This just means our day became three hours longer to compensate. Work can also be stopped due to sand storms which can come through daily. During this you can only see as far as 50 yards.

One thing I face daily is the language barrier. English is the first language in Dubai, followed by Arabic. All road signs are in English and in the city there is not a problem. If in a bar or restaurant it

will be mainly Europeans and Americans. There are over 200 nationalities living in the United Arab Emirates. The language barrier that can be a problem is on the job site. Currently we have an American, a Canadian, three Scots and, for my sins, two Englishmen along with our labour force of 128! This is made up of Pakistani, Indian and Bangladeshi nationalities. They all speak Urdu, which is our main language on site. They have been teaching me a few words daily but they seem to be picking up English quicker than we can pick up Urdu.

Along with my Deputy, Richard Crocombe, it can take us up to 45 minutes to ensure all staff are at their locations and fully understand what is entailed. It can be frustrating at times when all you need is someone to go and do a quick five minute job but end up having to drive them there yourself. One point I should point out is that out of

the 128 staff only my two irrigation foremen had ever worked on or been on a golf course before! The task could not have been greater. It helps greatly that Eric and Robert Samells, of Edinburgh Landscaping, lead our finish teams. Every person has to be trained on every job by myself, Richard, Eric or Robert. We had to get them to visualise and understand what we are all there to achieve. We have taken some to visit nearby golf courses, have shown them many pictures on computer and also given layout plans to certain groups.

At times I was unsure what to expect and of what level of understanding I was getting across to them. When we had explained exactly that the holes in the ground were bunkers and we had prepared approx 20 I thought, yes, we have cracked it - green, tee, bunker - only to be preparing a lake for lining to hear from your Group Leader, "Big bunker boss". You do not know whether to



View of the 15th

laugh or cry. At times I had a JCB drive across a newly cut out green cavity and a skid steer loader drive and turn on a tee, but, all in all, 128 people have grasped the fact better than could be expected.

One task I find myself putting a lot of time into is planning. Day to day tasks, material deliveries and trying to achieve the end result in the time frame set to me. This has been tricky in many ways. One is man hours and religious holidays. After losing three hours in the middle of every day in July and August, September is the holy month of Ramadan for Muslims. During Ramadan all staff do not work more than six hours a day. There are also a lot of other religious holidays which are controlled by the moon, so short notice on holidays is not unusual. The weekend in Dubai is a Thursday afternoon and Friday for some companies while Friday/Saturday for others. Along with planning orders which need to come from Europe or USA this cannot be done on Saturday/Sunday means I can have a three day week to get ordering through.

Materials and availability can be a problem

in the UAE. It is always tough to source products when you move to new job but out here there is a difference. Due to the rapid growth of construction the UAE cannot produce and import materials fast enough to keep up, so a payment of 50% on the day you order is required to get your material which may take months. Golf machinery is also non-existent. All the main franchises are here but due to the market not being big enough as at present there are only 11 golf courses, none of them hold stock, not even demonstration machinery so an order of many months can be expected. Many companies tell me this is about to change due to the rapid increase in golf construction in the area.

Day-to-day on the golf course we encounter many new projects and learning experiences, from warm season grasses to managing an eight metre dig with five metres of rock. This was to install three, 32inch pipes to feed the irrigation and circulation system. This was the first major task we undertook and the first thing I learnt was to never assume the desert is all sand! This is as much an irrigation project as construction, as

even well before grass is on site we require water to hold the shaped sand in place. Due to sand storms and the lack of water in the beginning we had constructed some bunkers three times before completion. You could come in the next day to find the bunker gone and the grades completely changed. Along with reading plans, I have learnt a lot about shaping, moving material and being able to visualise what we have to create.

Being the contractor and not the client can also be tough to deal with. You have to build to specification and not preference which means we have to do things that maybe you would do differently on your own course. Sometimes you have what you think is a great golf hole and the architect and client can come along and change the plan, it can be tough to see weeks of hard work put under a Dozer again. I hope to write a second article next year on completion of the first 18 holes explaining more about the construction process in Dubai and how we overcame a lot of difficulties.

At the moment there are 11 golf courses in Dubai with the same under construction. I was



Most of the crew at Dubai Golf City



Green, lake and wall construction on the 12th

told there is planning for approx 90 golf courses between Egypt and Abu Dhabi lodged at the moment. Dubai has started construction of four major theme parks including Universal Studios. They are constructing the world's tallest building and already have plans to beat that by creating one a kilometre high!

I was looking for a new challenge and I have definitely found it, or it found me, as is the case maybe. I am enjoying what every day throws at me and yes it can be frustrating at times but also very rewarding. I am learning more than I could have imagined and already feel no task is too big. I can only imagine that wherever I end up the challenges can be no greater than what I, and the team here, achieve on a daily basis.

There are some drawbacks to Dubai and working abroad, mainly missing family and friends. The time difference trying to keep in contact back home is difficult. There is no VAT on anything including petrol, the traffics is chaos. The town is full of Europeans and Americans, the sun shines every day and if you do not drink your beer quickly it goes very warm.

