

Chairman's Word

National Chairman, Paul Worster, gives his thoughts for the month

In this month's column Paul Worster reports on a busy first month as National Chairman: travelling and comparing and contrasting what we do in the UK with what is being done by greenkeeper trade associations in the USA and Europe. He also reviews what greenkeepers achieved during difficult times in the past and concludes this month's column with a message to all BIGGA volunteers and members.

Visit to America. I represented BIGGA at the GCSAA Trade Show in San Diego in February 2010. Some interesting facts from the Show: the San Diego Convention Centre is over half-a-mile in length; the show contained some 660 exhibiting companies, and was absolutely crammed to the rafters with greenkeeping equipment and materials!

There were a surprising number of similarities between BIGGA and GCSAA members. American Superintendents are increasingly concerned about issues such as bunker maintenance and cost-saving on labour and materials throughout their operations. They are also paying increasing attention to the impact that golf may be having on their environment.

The 3 'P's - 'People', 'Planet', 'Profit'. Environmental concerns in the USA are summed up very nicely by this phrase the 'Three P's'. This means that profit is not a dirty word, but a necessary part of being sustainable, going hand-in-glove with "People" and "Planet". If a business is not profitable, it will not function for long. To quote a line from the conference - "strong environmental consideration in golf is something we can celebrate".

The GCSAA as an organisation is also concerned about ensuring that all its members are fully engaged in participating at their events, particularly education and CPD. They also feel that the modern Course Manager should be communicating widely about what exactly his Trade Association does for his career and his standing. Something I believe we should do more of in order to raise the profile of what BIGGA, its HQ team and volunteers are all

doing to advance the greenkeeping profession in the UK.

FEGGA held its two day annual conference in Vienna. FEGGA represents almost all the greenkeeping Associations in Europe, including Russia. South Africa have been associate members for two years and sent two representatives to Vienna. FEGGA co-ordinates education and support for all its member countries, many of whom are very small - the Bulgarian Greenkeepers Association represents about 25 clubs. However, I found all the delegates to be friendly, well educated, and totally committed to their profession. By far the majority of the 20 or so associations are run entirely by volunteers.

A good example of the spread of education was the host country. The Austrians have about 300 members and almost three-quarters of these have achieved accreditation via a system provided by the GTC. For me this shows the kind of results achievable through the efforts of dedicated volunteers. and I look forward to the day when the UK boasts similar achievements. We, in BIGGA - Members, HQ and Volunteers - have such key roles in taking the profession forward in the UK.

BIGGA. Interestingly 2012 is the 100th anniversary of the formation of the first Greenkeeper Association in Britain (BGA - British Greenkeepers Association). There is some evidence of a Scottish Greenkeepers Association possibly pre-dating this, but I'm told all records were destroyed in a fire.

British Greenkeeping was interrupted as our forefathers fought their way through two World Wars. However, such was the dedication and tenacity that, each time, the industry came back to life and

continued where it left off; building towards what it is today.

I think we can all learn from this in today's difficult economic times. What we perhaps need to show as greenkeepers and volunteers for the Association is exactly what our predecessors showed when they were challenged. We need to engage and support the activities and educational programmes that will take the profession forward. I believe that both you and I can help take our profession forward, further and faster.

So, how can you help? You can help us to grow our membership and advance our profession. The profession needs you to communicate the value and importance of being a BIGGA member - to employers, to golfers, to non-members, and to Trade Partners.

BIGGA can help you to do this as it continues to help provide the education and the opportunities for development that volunteering for the Association brings to individuals*. This provision will help ensure that the esteem with which the profession is held by all participants of the sport continues to grow.

It may be the case that you feel awkward or uneasy about volunteering or offering your help or even asking for assistance or advice. Perhaps no-one has ever asked you to volunteer for anything before.

Well, the Association can help you and the profession can use your help.

There is perhaps no better time than right now.

So - right now - I am asking you.

You can learn more about taking yourself and the profession forward through volunteering for BIGGA by contacting your local BIGGA Section whose details are on the BIGGA website www.bigga.org.uk or, if you prefer, by contacting Paul Worster direct on talktopaul@hotmail.co.uk.

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