



On the Soapbox

A vehicle for letting people within the industry express their point of view

People talk about grass roots greenkeeping but what about the grass tips of Greenkeeping, equipment technicians are the very people who have the responsibility of keeping grass tips cleanly cut?

It was good to read the Chairman's column in last May's edition of Greenkeeper International; what Peter Todd said was very true:

"The work involved in maintaining golf course equipment properly, demands the skills and experience of trained staff together with an adequately equipped workshop. Many clubs rely on dealers and outside help whilst some see in house facilities as essential to the smooth running of their operation. Whatever is appropriate."

But it also raises the question where do trained workshop staff come from?

I come from inside the industry starting as a greenkeeper in 1987 at horticultural college and then moving on to the workshop and attending agricultural engineering college, finally becoming the Workshop Manager here at John O'Gaunt Golf Club, which I believe to be a near perfect apprenticeship for the trade.

So why do many technicians come from the car trade or agricultural workshops with only a few from within the industry itself? Is this from lack of career awareness?

Personally I think it is, after doing some research into the subject I could not find anywhere where Golf Course Machinery Technician was offered as a career path or very little mention of Equipment Technician at all.

The technician, who plays a key role in golf course preparation and presentation, some would say, is as important as the Course Manager, ensuring accurate machine set up and quality of cut. Equipment Managers, Technicians and Greenkeepers who carry out machinery maintenance are estimated to number only 300 or 400 in the UK, (a small number compared to the US) and are required to carry out machinery maintenance to a very high standard.

With many clubs experiencing reduced members and visitors, they cannot justify employing full time technicians, so many golf clubs operate with Greenkeepers, Deputies and Course Manager's carrying out machinery maintenance on a part time basis with dealership support, with that in mind the number of people doing so is far greater than full time staff, this works well

for many clubs and they achieve excellent results especially as some of them have no formal mechanical training.

With so many untrained "mechanics" in the industry how can they increase their knowledge? By talking to each other, of course, but how? You may think it's not that easy considering that I don't even know the Equipment Technician's name at Woburn Golf Club 45 minutes down the road, but recently I have had many communications with Patrick Callaby, at Celtic Manor Resort; Chris Minton, at The Belfry, and Stephen Tucker, at the Ritz-Carlton in Bradenton, Florida. All are members of the International Golf Course Equipment Managers Association (www.igcema.org).

Oh no you may think, yet another Association, but just wait and consider this, we all encounter technical problems on a regular basis and sometimes have little opportunity to talk to anybody that may be able to add constructive input to solve the problem.

usually an OEM representative or engineer who can answer the question immediately, it's not very often that end users get the opportunity to speak to a manufacturer virtually face to face.

IGCEMA is dedicated to expanding the education, enhancing the professionalism and improving the image of the Golf Course Equipment Managers and Turf Equipment Technician worldwide.

Supported by various manufacturers in the turf care industry, IGCEMA membership is free to join and strives to be an association where members and industry alike can learn from each other,

There is no reason why every golf club, dealer and manufacturer in the country should not have a member of IGCEMA within its staff.

So next time you're at a BIGGA meeting, training day or golf day tell your colleagues there about IGCEMA and encourage them to join.

Where do we come from? (Workshop technicians that is)

But what about if someone in Spain, Australia or just down the road has experienced the same fault, well this is where IGCEMA comes into its own, you make a post regarding the fault, describing what happens and when, it may just be the case that Jo Bloggs from outer God knows where has just fixed the very same fault on his machine for the zero cost of joining the Association.

That's right, joining (IGCEMA) costs nothing and is simple to do online, just click on www.igcema.org and you can start supporting its aims, learn from other members and contribute to its pool of knowledge.

But that's not all the association can offer. Since its inception in 2006 many of the turf industries machinery manufacturers have joined the association to help support it financially and to offer educational web casts.

A web cast is a live presentation from anywhere in the world, presented by a variety of different people offering Slides, videos and literature which can be viewed on any pc while you are in your workshop or at home, one of the biggest advantages of this is that questions can be directed to the presenter,



In this article, Stuart takes the opportunity to make the case for the unsung heroes of the industry.

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