

Chairman's Word

This month BIGGA Chairman Paul Worster turns his attention to young people, in the profession, and game

“If we truly wish to change things – we must start with the young in our society”. Mohandas Karamchand (Mahatma) Gandhi. Indian Statesman (1869-1948)...

I recently attended the student graduation ceremony at Bridgwater College to see my son, Rob, graduate.

Over 200 students from the University of Bournemouth (to which Bridgwater College is affiliated) were congratulated by College Patron Sir Harry Studholme – Chairman of the South West Regional Development Agency and himself a student back in the 1970s. There was a terrific sense of pride among the students, lecturers and parents. Sir Harry spoke of the importance of education and development and how the two should never really cease. “Quality learning stays forever” and “Knowledge overcomes challenge” were two quotes that really struck chords with me.

My interest also sparked back in November last year when I heard an emotive speech from Mike Darby, President of the Gloucestershire Golf Union, at the 2009 County Dinner. Mike talked about the importance of youngsters in golf clubs and how golf really needs them. He made the point that we must not write young people off, “just because they look and act differently to the established norm, and we feel challenged as a result”. He looked back to his own youth musing - “How on earth did an ex-punk rocker like me from Frampton Cotterill (close to Bristol) ever rise to become President of the County Golf Union?”

“The answer is that people believed in me – people didn’t treat me with mistrust just because I looked and sounded different – people made allowances, and gave me a chance”. “In all honesty - I’ve never looked back – and this is what we need in golf. We need to encourage the junior golfer, and not be put off or taken aback just because he perhaps doesn’t fit our perception of the ideal young person.”

I am in full agreement with Mike. Golf may not fully thrive again until it fully embraces the family and the

youngster and is no longer seen as an elite sport.

Greenkeeping is no different. We have to give our young people a chance. This profession and this Association need young people. They are our future Course Managers and Association Leaders. They have so much to give and so much energy. We must help this energy to be channelled into something really special.

We should celebrate that they think differently to the way some of us did at a similar age. They may have different values but that is all the more reason for us to engage with them fully for the benefit of our profession.

How? Well the BIGGA Board is actively considering proposals for a Regional Assistant Greenkeepers’ Day at a golf club in each Region. This special day for our youngsters would help them to be better at:

- Preparing a CV
- Climbing the career ladder
- Bullet-proofing their career with continuous professional development (CPD)

This day would give all Assistants attending:

1. The opportunity to participate in a series of activities and interviews to gain vital experience.
2. A tour of the club’s facilities and a ‘Question and Answer’ session with the Course Manager.
3. The opportunity to compete in an afternoon golf tournament.

I often hear the question: ‘Where is the next generation of Course Managers coming from?’ An Assistant Greenkeepers’ Day is perhaps part of the answer. Those of us in management positions provide the rest of the answer – we can and we must give them the opportunity to prove themselves. We have to help them on the way.

BIGGA will always provide networking and skill development opportunities but BIGGA will also help Assistants to develop the key

attributes needed to advance from Assistant to Deputy Course Manager and beyond.

I know that this focus on Assistants will also contribute to the advancement of the profession because employers will see how value has been added at Assistant Greenkeeper level. There are many articulate and thoughtful young men in our profession who could probably teach us elders a thing or two – particularly about modern communications, IT and Internet use!

Interestingly – Assistant Greenkeepers have been identified as the group least likely to renew BIGGA membership after their first year. The BIGGA Board will respond to this by ensuring that what we do is as relevant as possible to their careers.

If you are an Assistant reading this – I would ask you to be patient. A career in greenkeeping is very rewarding and enjoyable - but it can take a while to progress. It can take a while to climb the ladder. There are things you can do – and there are things BIGGA can do to speed the process.

Take part in as many Section events as possible: offer to help out; offer to greet people at the door, thank people for attending at the end of the event. Volunteer for the Support at the Open Championship or BMW Championship. Enroll for the Assistants Day!

Get yourself noticed. There will be training specifically aimed at helping you to do this. You will quickly increase your knowledge and confidence. We cannot do it for you of course, and it will take some effort on your part, but it will be immensely rewarding.

Let me close with another quotation: “The more we increase the active participation and partnership with young people, the better we serve them”. Carmen Martinez. American Politician.

Finally my thanks to all who have been in touch via talktopaul@hotmail.co.uk. Good ideas are being shared and acted upon right now as a result. More please!