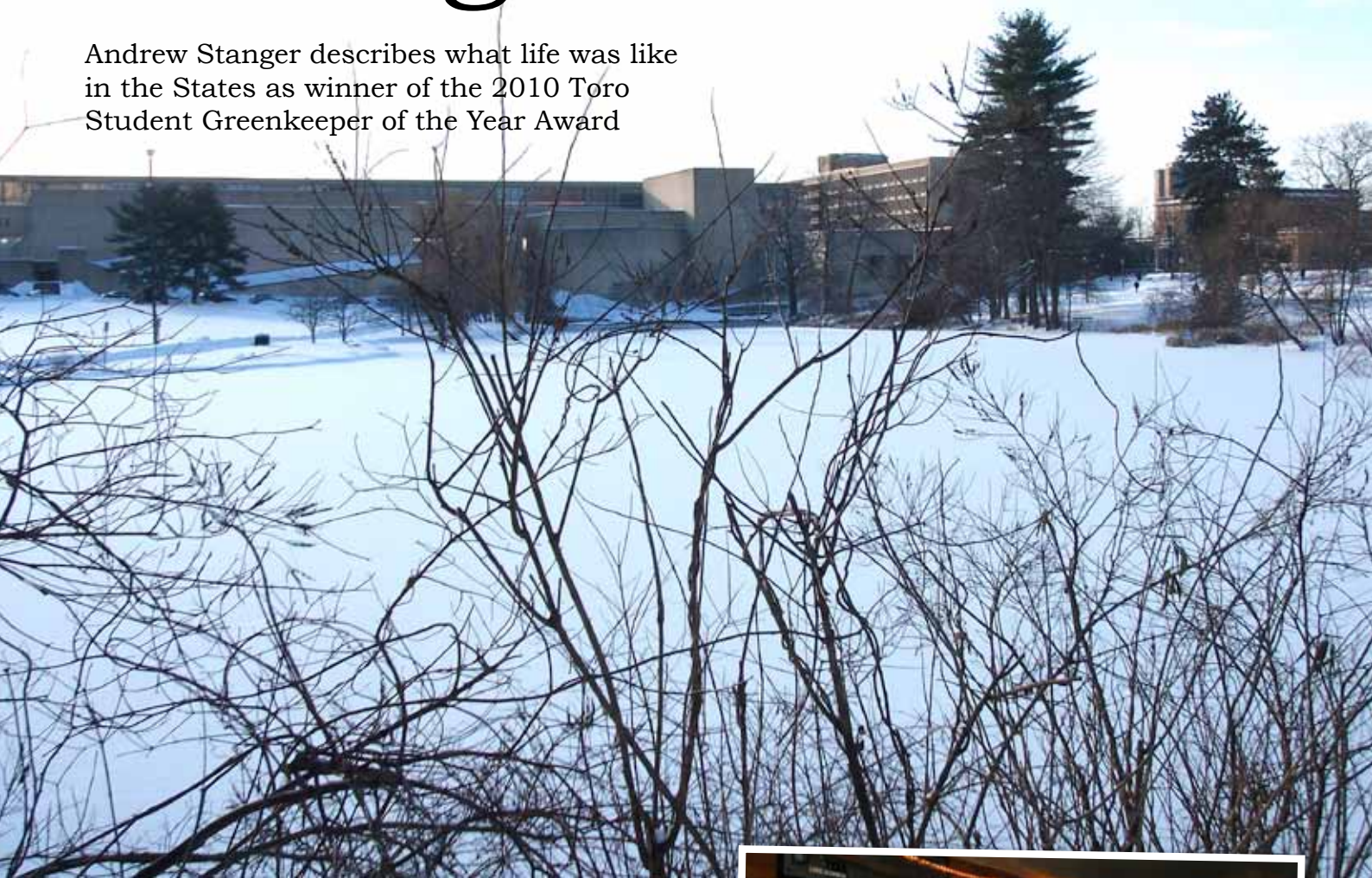


Having a blast!

Andrew Stanger describes what life was like in the States as winner of the 2010 Toro Student Greenkeeper of the Year Award



When I entered the Toro Student Greenkeeper of the Year competition, I didn't give a single thought to the prize that came with it, so when it was announced that I had won, the realisation hit that I was going to spend two months in a place that I couldn't even point to on a map!

The previous year's winner, Rhys Norville, mentioned that it can get quite cold in Massachusetts and it might be a good idea to take some warm clothes. Little did I know that the coldest winter in 80 years was heading towards Massachusetts and no amount of warm clothes would protect me from the -28°C temperatures and the 52" of snowfall I was about to experience.

This wasn't my first trip into the unknown as I spent a year in the United States while participating in the Ohio State Programme. That trip taught me to expect the unexpected and this trip turned

out to be no different. I had no idea how I was going to get from the airport to my hotel, which was in a different State; how long it might take or if the roads would even be suitable for driving on but I just decided to leave that to fate. Luckily for me, there were some other students heading up to Amherst to join the 22,000 waiting for us at UMASS.

When I checked into the Comfort Inn I was informed that the Australian winner had already arrived and had gone out for the evening, so I left instructions with the receptionist for him to call by and introduce himself so we could make arrangements to get to our first class the next morning. A few hours went by without a knock and after my long journey I couldn't help but fall asleep. In the early hours the knock finally came, not knowing what day it was or where I was, I answered the door to find two very merry gentlemen that



over the next eight weeks would become friends for life.

There was no time for adjustment, classes started the next morning at 8am and it was clear from the outset that we wouldn't be stopping for breath until the graduation dinner at the end of February. Looking through my induction pack on Day One it would seem that we were going to attempt to complete the equivalent

of our NVQ2 in just eight weeks, a tall order for anyone never mind the students who had no previous education in turf.

The first week hit everybody hard, a lot of information came flying at us in a very short space of time but it wasn't long before things settled down and the nine hour days, with an average of three tests a day, became our routine.

With topics like Turf Grass Physiology, Turf Grass Management, Turf Grass Diseases, Weed Management, Entomology, Turf Grass ID, Calculations, Water Management, Golf Course Design & Irrigation and Arboriculture, there was plenty to keep us busy, both in the classroom and the hotel room at night. The lecturers had their work cut out, keeping a classroom of 40 men, who usually spend all day outdoors, focused, would be no easy task, but they were all fantastic. They were all specialists in their field and were only too happy to show us what they were working on and were keen to get feedback from us as to how we did things out on our own courses.

After a couple of weeks we all knew each others' names and felt that we deserved some social time and the campus had plenty to offer. Tickets were always available for the college basketball and hockey games and by the end of term, me and 'the Aussie' were keen fans. They ran a competition in the interval at the hockey called 'chuck a puck'. You could buy three foam pucks for \$5 and you had to try and land your puck closest to the centre of the ice rink. As a keen cricketer, the Aussie more than fancied his chances and kindly explained to the woman selling the pucks that he would only require one! From half way up the bleachers, true to his word, Adam Shields put it within inches of the announcer's feet and collected the \$250 prize pot! A good night was had by all!

Our projects were progressing nicely and our test averages were high, before long it was time for us to make our way down to Florida for the Golf Industry Show. A little reluctant to leave our new found friends, Shields and I flew out in search of some much needed warmth. As I expected, the show was massive and it was great to see that so many professionals from all over the world had made the journey. I managed to meet up with Greg James and Brad Owen, the Superintendents I had worked for two years before, along with a

few other faces that I've met along the way. Toro kindly took us out for dinner and we got the chance to meet and thank the people that made it all possible. The show was a huge success and I had a great time, it was the rest we needed to prepare us for our final leg at UMASS.

With time running out, we managed to get up to Portsmouth and spend the weekend with the family of our classmate and fellow Comfort Inn resident, Jerry Lachance. It was nice to thank his mother in person for all the meals she'd sent down to us at UMASS. We were welcomed with open arms and fed like her own sons for the weekend.

They took us to their social club that we'd heard so much about as Jerry wanted to pit our international pool skills against his locals. After a 16 game winning streak, Shields and I were rubbed off the chalkboard and politely asked to play darts instead. It was great to meet the whole family, his friends and to see where Jerry grew up, without his trusty truck and his sense of humour the trip wouldn't have been the same.

We made the two hour journey back for our final week and our long awaited, well earned, graduation. Shirts were ironed, shoes were polished and the lecturers couldn't recognise us at the presentation dinner. Some parents had made the long journey to see their son's graduate, It was a very proud moment for all and I felt extremely privileged to be part of it. Celebrations went on long into the night but that sadly meant that our time together had come to an end. I never imagined I would make such genuine friends on this trip and to be quite honest I don't think our time there could ever be replicated. I'd like to take the opportunity to thank everybody at UMASS and wish the class of 2011 the very best in their careers.

Things weren't quite over for us Internationals, we had a trip to the Toro Headquarters, in Minnesota, to look forward to as we set out on yet another flight. We landed, not really knowing what was in store for us but all became clear when we were greeted by our personal Toro tour guide, Edric Funk. At this point, I was under the illusion that when you ordered a new piece of Toro equipment, an email was sent to Toro, they built it and sent it to you, so you can imagine the shock when I learnt that the Toro plant works in a three shift pattern that never stops! We saw the raw



Aussie, Adam Shields put the puck within inches of the announcer's feet

steel enter the pre plant that had come from back home in Sheffield, go right through the complex system to become a shiny red TriFlex at the end.

Edric asked us if we had any suggestions on how to improve the mowers based on any problems we've found in the past, I pointed out that cutting unit clips tend to get sand in and stick. Toro had already noted the problem and eliminated them on the new TriFlex. Knowing what they put into it, I'll never look at their machinery in the same way again; it was a huge eye opener.

I would like to thank Toro for giving me this once in a life time opportunity and the friends and memories that came with it. Special thanks must go to Peter Mansfield and his secretary, Christine, at Lely UK, who went more than out of their way to make sure the trip went without a hitch. I'd also like to thank BIGGA, my college lecturer Steve Prinn and Horsforth Golf Club for their continued support in the furthering of my education. Last but not least, the team, Adam Shields, Jerry Lachance, Brian Prescott and Chad Brown. Good luck to all those candidates competing this year and to whoever wins; you're going to have a blast!

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