





# Hitting the ground running

Scott MacCallum find out what makes BIGGA's new Chairman, Andrew Mellon, tick

**Some people like to ease themselves into new situations while others are great at hitting the ground running. It is perhaps fortunate that Andrew Mellon, BIGGA's 2011 Chairman, is of the latter persuasion.**

Throughout his career Andy has shown himself to be someone who doesn't shirk a challenge and, with much to do in the first few weeks of his Chairmanship, easing himself in was never going to be an option.

"We are entering a period of change as John Pemberton, our long-standing CEO, is retiring and it is crucial that we recruit the right person to take the Association forward and continue to manage our resources as effectively as possible," said Andy, as we chatted in his office in the grounds of Elmwood College Golf Course.

"We have appointed a company to carry out the recruitment process and getting the right person is top of the agenda. We could be looking at having someone in place as early as April, depending upon the notice period the successful person has to give, but we will take the time to ensure we get the best person" he revealed.

A relative late-comer to the profession, 43 year-old Andy has made up for any lost time with a commitment to hard work and a

will to learn which has seen him recently promoted to Golf Operations Manager at Elmwood Golf Course and rise through the ranks of BIGGA with indecent haste.

"It has been a rapid learning process while Vice Chairman because I hadn't been involved in the main Board prior to that, so it has been a year of learning how the Association operates – what goes on at BIGGA HOUSE and how it interacts with the members through the Regions and Sections etc"

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What he has always known, however, and it is a view which has hardened over the last 12 months, is just what a superb organisation it is that he'll be chairing.

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Andy is well aware of the issues facing the Association, and the industry as a whole, as we look to the future.

"We are in a more financially challenging situation than we have ever been and, of course, we are not alone in that. It means that we must ensure that we make the most effective use of our resources and, more than that, increase collaboration with like minded bodies, which can add benefit to our members."

Andy was born in Glasgow but spent the first six years of his life in Kenya, the family having moved

to Africa through his fathers work.

"I have vivid and fond memories of Kenya. It was a very relaxed lifestyle and a wonderful climate"

Another clear recollection was of his return to Scotland.

"I was in the car on the way back

from the airport and I'd never seen weather like it. It was terrible and I can still remember wiping the steamed up windows, probably wondering why we had left Africa" said Andy, who lived initially with his grandmother and aunts in Twechar, a small mining village near Kirkintilloch.

It was then that he displayed a rare ability to fit into his new surroundings.

"Living in Kenya I'd picked up quite a posh accent but within two weeks I was speaking like a true Glaswegian. My parents said they had never heard anyone change so quickly! – Kids have a strong ability to adapt"

On leaving school Andy went to Strathclyde University to study Civil Engineering, but his desire to earn a living was never far away and he took a job in the summer holidays selling photocopiers and also joined the University's Officer Training Corp. This saw him out on exercises most weekends.

"I enjoyed the challenging outdoor, military lifestyle, so much so that I joined Glasgow's Royal Marines Reserve Corp, and was seriously considering a full time military career."

After having studied for two years Andy decided to take a year out and worked on a self employed basis for an insurance brokerage. He was still serving in the Reserve Corp, but having met his future wife, Jane, the prospect of a full time military career and being away from home for long periods became less attractive and the demands of self employed Insurance Sales required his full time commitment. Having progressed to the position of Training Manager he explored setting up his own company.

"I was actually in the process of setting up my own brokerage when Standard Life offered me a job and I worked for them in Glasgow for two years," said Andy.

"I took full advantage of the superb Standard Life's Customer service and Sales training programme, which has served me well ever since"

"It was a fairly intense job and the money was good but there was something missing"

The opportunity to make a change came when his wife was offered a job in the Western Isles.

"Jane had worked in the area before and had a lot of friends up there so I said let's just go. I decided that I would go to college and study Business Admin and just see what happened."

As it turned out, one of his lec-

tures also ran a local insurance brokerage and offered Andy a job so he found himself working in the same industry as the one he'd left behind in Glasgow.

"We settled in Stornoway for seven years and two of our children were born there. We had a fantastic house, looking out over a bay, and a great lifestyle, although it was difficult being so far away from family,"

Over the years Andy turned his hand to several jobs, seeking something which he would feel happy in. He played golf regularly and a chance encounter with the Greens Convenor made him aware of a vacancy as a six month labourer.

"I filled out an application form and one interview later I had the job. I can still remember my first day walking around the course with Alistair MacLeod, the Head Greenkeeper. The sun was coming

with Elmwood College.

"I decided to study distance learning but soon realised I would have to move to move to fulfil my career ambitions."

"I decided to take on a full time HNC course at Elmwood which was a real sacrifice as initially I'd be leaving my wife and children in Stornoway. I did so with a view to eventually getting a job in Fife. I reasoned that there were over 50 courses in Fife and that if I couldn't get a job after doing my HNC there would be something wrong!"

He was right, but that job came quicker than he could ever have imagined.

"Within a month of starting there was an advert for a Greenkeeper/ Instructor on Elmwood's course. I applied for it, got it, continued my HNC and began working under John Quinn MG. Being apart was difficult and six months later my wife managed to find a good position in Cupar, and the family was back together"

Within a year he'd been appointed as Head Greenkeeper and another year on, when John left to set up his own business, he was appointed Course Manager.

"I like to think that I was working hard and applying myself but opportunities came along at the right time and I was able to take advantage of them. Elmwood College was a very supportive employer, allowing me to fulfil my desire for further education. Carol Borthwick, my Director, encouraged me to develop my knowledge and skills, for which I'm grateful, and I took full advantage."

Before long the Course was to undergo a massive project reconstructing eight of its holes, building a superb new driving range and training academy and a state-of-the-art maintenance facility.

"I remember applying for planning permission and being desperate to get it but when it came through, all of a sudden, thinking 'Oh dear. How are we going to do all of this?'"

It was a fair question because, although Andy had Howard Swan to provide the design and planning, all of the work was done in-house and, over the five years the work was being carried out, hundreds of students, at various stages of their education, worked on it with Andy operating as Project Manager.

"I learned a great deal from Howard and his team, and was

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The job was only meant to be temporary but Andy threw himself into it making himself as indispensable as possible. He serviced machines, saving the club money, and never missed an opportunity to learn more about his new vocation, using holidays to visit other clubs on the mainland and learn more about the job.

"Working in a small dedicated team, I learnt a lot from Alistair, and my desire to progress grew. The network available through BIGGA membership, and Greenkeeper International enabled me to make contact with many more experienced Course Managers, who were always willing to give advice, and I owe them a great debt." After the six month contract was over the committee asked him to stay on.

His voracious appetite for knowledge was soon to put him in touch

fortunate that there was a lot of construction taking place at Kingsbarns, Fairmont and St Andrews. I was not shy in asking for advice.”

Despite this he found time to join the Central Section committee and before long had become Secretary/Treasurer, succeeding another former BIGGA Chairman, John Crawford.

“We had a great committee of dedicated experienced guys who built on the great work done by John to make the Section one of the most proactive and successful in the Association, focussed on providing education and network opportunities for the members.”

Having completed the majority of the Elmwood project the call from Paul Worster asking him to consider Vice Chairman came at a time when his work commitments had reduced a little and he could see that he could devote the time required to taking on a greater role within BIGGA.

“Having ensured he had the support of his employers and more importantly his family he accepted the position.

“We are often asked ‘Why should people join BIGGA?’ I think we need to make the Association something for which the question should be, ‘Why would you not join?’”

“The answer to that is one which already exists in my head but we need to get that across to all greenkeepers out there as well as Club Managers, Secretaries and the owners of golf facilities.

“They need to be made more aware of how their club would benefit from their staff being members of an Association which supports their staff and makes them the best they can be at their job,” he said.

“I honestly believe that being a member of BIGGA is worth its weight in gold because of the resources that are available to them. But I think we can improve in a lot of areas.

“I’d like to see Sections and Regions having more support and sharing good practice while we need to continue to develop our alliances with other bodies within the industry so we can work together for the mutual benefit of the clubs and businesses we work for.

“One thing I have learned in the time I have been involved is the growing respect there is among the other industry professionals for the position of the greenkeeper.

“They recognise that we have a very important part to play, as part of the team which supports this great Industry.”

