

Thomas's travels

TORO

Toro Student Greenkeeper of the Year Thomas Flavelle tells us about a life-changing eight weeks in the States, his reward for scooping the coveted prize last September

I felt very nervous as I sat on the plane about to fly out to the States. On arrival I found myself waiting at a very cold bus stop, when a large pick-up truck pulled out of the hotel car park and the driver leaned out and offered me a lift - a big thank you to Mike Prescott from turf contractor Sportscape for that.

At first it felt strange to be back in a classroom, taking notes and revising for tests at the University of Massachusetts Amherst (UMASS). The college day consisted of two-hour lessons from 8am-5pm with subjects including Entomology, Pathology, Turf Management and Soil Science. I enjoyed listening to some very interesting guest speakers such as Bill Spence, Superintendent at the Boston Country Club which held the 1999 Ryder Cup.

I expected the American way of doing things would be totally different to ours, and in ways they are, maybe less environmentally friendly, but the biggest hurdle was learning the different grass names for the cool seasons grasses. The lessons were very informative covering topics new to me. Networking with the other students on the course was priceless - I discussed the different techniques they use as well as how their courses are run.

As a part of my prize I was lucky enough to attend the GCSAA golf show in San Diego. I would be travelling there with Dave Canterbury - the Australian Toro winner. Unfortunately our flight to Chicago was delayed, and with only 40 minutes between flights I could see it was going to be tight. Firstly

we headed in the wrong direction through the huge airport, but after a rushed chat with an official we turned around and ran back the way we came, just making the flight and collapsing back into our seats.

San Diego was like landing in a different country - it was warm and sunny with palm trees. That evening I attended the opening ceremony, with some very interesting speakers. After this I joined my tutor Jonathan Knowles for some dinner and explored a few bars around the Gaslamp Quarter. The show itself was very interesting, with lots of products that are rarely used in the UK, including big fans to improve air circulation. It was great to catch up with people I already knew but I also met many new people. I also managed to make time for a tour of the USS Midway Aircraft Carrier which was very interesting.

I knew the trip home was also going to be eventful when I discovered storm Nemo was forecast to dump three feet of snow on the east coast. Even though my flight from Philadelphia to Hartford was cancelled, I decided to take the flight to Philadelphia. On arrival I was informed that there would be no flights for two days which created a weekend in Philadelphia for me, and what a beautiful city it is. I then headed to Washington.

We began by visiting some of the local bars and restaurants and had some great nights out at basketball and hockey games. I was lucky enough to watch UMASS beat the number one seeds Boston College 5-1. It was a great atmosphere.

Unfortunately my trip to Boston got cancelled due to the snow, but the final leg of my trip went ahead

- a visit to the Toro factories in Minneapolis.

This was an amazing tour full of information about Toro as an employer as well as the products they produce. Standing at the start of the production line was very cool, as you looked down the line a shell turned into a mower. I was now sad that the end of the trip was near.

I would like to thank Toro, Lely and BIGGA for organising this award, as it gives an amazing opportunity for aspiring greenkeepers to progress their knowledge and careers. I had a fantastic time in America, making some lifelong friendships along the way, and these people made the trip so much fun.

It truly was a once in a lifetime experience, and I wish I could start it over again. I would strongly recommend to any enthusiastic greenkeeper who wants to stand out from the crowd and study at a highly recommended University while having the time of their life to consider the Toro award.

I will never forget the experience that I had at UMASS and the people I met there.



ABOVE: Thomas at the UMASS campus

FAR RIGHT: At Toro HQ from left Rory Bairnsfather-Scott (winner of the Australian award) Thomas Flavelle, Cameron Shaw (Canadian winner) Dave Canterbury (another Australian winner)

RIGHT and BELOW: San Diego





UMASS
AMHERST

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