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TORO STUDENT OF THE YEAR

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, which a large pickup 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 turfcontractorsportspage for that.

At first it did seem to be back in a classroom, taking notes and crossing bar charts at the University of Massachusetts Amherst (UMASS). The college day consisted of two-hour lessons from 9am-12pm with subjects including Entomology, Pathology, Turf Management and Soil Science. I enjoyed learning to some very interesting guest speakers such as Bill Speers, 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 species for the cool season 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 GCRAA golf show in San Diego. I would be travelling there with Dave Casteney, the American Turf writer. Unfortunately our flight to Chicago was delayed, and with only 40 minutes between flights I could see it was going to be tight. Fluffy

headed in the wrong direction through the huge airport, but after a rabbit that 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 that I joined our 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 easily 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 know the trip home was also going to be eventful when I discovered snow. Snow was forecast to dump three feet of snow on the road 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 with 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 baseball and hockey games. I was lucky enough to watch UMASS beat the number one ranked 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

as 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 so awed that the end of the trip was now, I would like to thank Toro, Terry and BRIGA, for organising this award, as it gives an amazing opportunity for visiting 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.



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20 Four seasons in one day at The Carrick on Loch Lomond



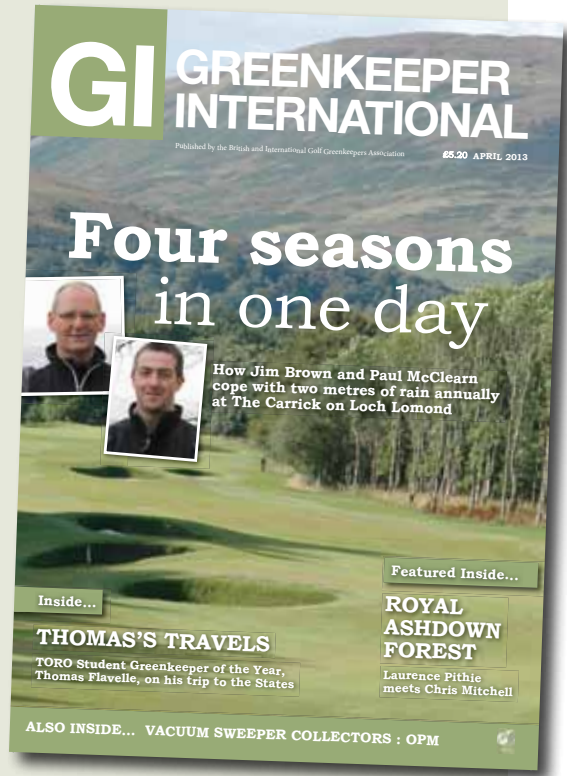
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