

Going Stateside!

GCSAA Conference and Show,
Orlando, February 8-14, 1999

GCSAA's 70th International Golf Course Conference and Show will be held in the Orange County Convention Centre, Orlando from 8th - 14th February 1999.

As in previous years BIGGA is offering you the opportunity to travel on the trip to Orlando.

The BIGGA party will meet at Gatwick Airport on Sunday 7th February for departure to Orlando at 12.30 pm.

BIGGA will be able to arrange accommodation for any member wishing to stay overnight before the flight at competitive rates.

The Omni Rosen Hotel, chosen by BIGGA to accommodate our party, offers excellent facilities and is located on International Drive next to the Convention Centre.

The GCSAA Conference and Show takes place from February 8 - 14 with the trade show on February 12 - 14. You will be able to attend the conference seminars and education programmes as well as take in the latest golf course equipment, products and services at the trade show.

Itinerary

Sunday, February 7

All members will assemble at Gatwick Airport and will take the 12.30 pm Virgin Atlantic flight to Orlando with onward transfer to the Omni Rosen Hotel for an eight-night stay on a room only basis inclusive of private facilities.

Monday, February 15

You will be transferred to the airport for your return overnight flight to London, departing Orlando at 19.10 pm arriving at London Gatwick at 8.15 am, on February 16.

Prices

£775 per person based on a twin share. £1188 per person based on single occupancy.

Plus comprehensive travel insurance for the duration at £30.

Included are:

Return Economy class flights London Gatwick/Orlando; UK and US taxes; Transfer to and from the airport to the Omni Rosen Hotel; Eight nights accommodation on a room only basis and US accommodation taxes.

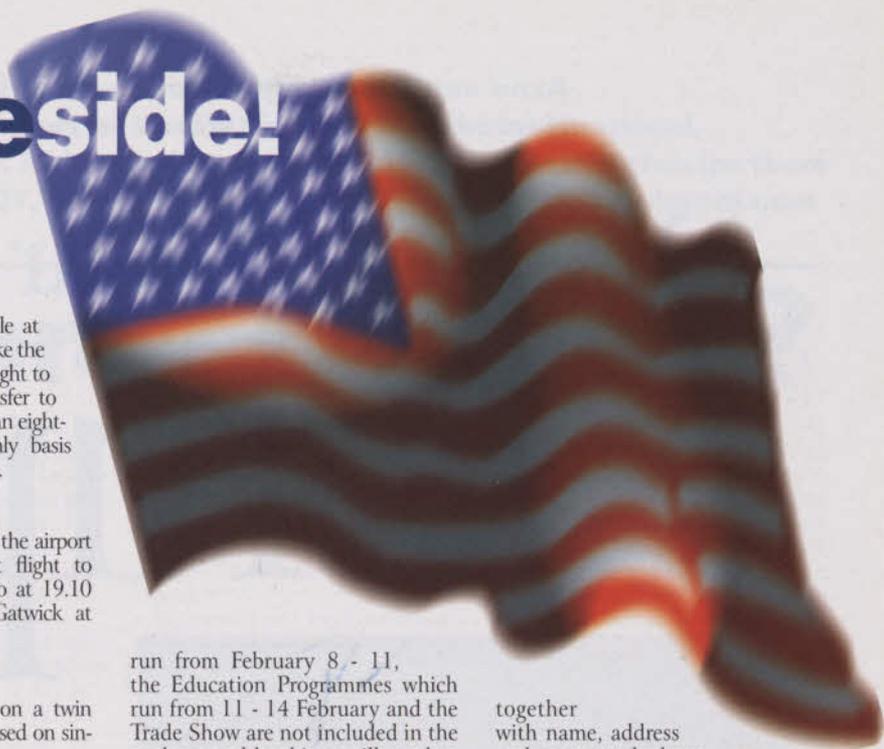
Please note: Registration costs for the Pre-Conference seminars which

run from February 8 - 11, the Education Programmes which run from 11 - 14 February and the Trade Show are not included in the package and bookings will need to be made directly with the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America. Details are available from BIGGA upon request.

Please forward full payment of £805 or £1218 (unless travel insurance is not required) to BIGGA, Aldwark Manor, Aldwark, Alne, York, YO61 1UF to arrive no later than Friday 13th November;

together with name, address and contact telephone number. If accommodation is required for the night of 6th February please advise in order for the hotel rooms to be booked. Payment will be made on checking out of the hotel.

N.B. Places are limited on this trip and demand will be high - book early!



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Arne van Amerongen, supervisor for the Golf Course Architect Peter Harradine, gives his views on the use of wood chips on golf courses...

You've had your Chips



One of the worst innovations in recent years has been the use of wood chippings to combat mud on paths, walk-offs from tees and between green and tees.

Wood chips are a menace to both greenkeeping and play. They damage mowers, become trapped in between spikes and delay play while golfers dislodge them.

They also get carried round the course and even onto greens, especially where they are used around seats, bins, etc.

It is not as if there are no alternatives ranging from crushed shell, where available, to gravel and crushed stone (if retained between edging timber) and even to sphagnum peat (not without its own problems).

A far better method than trying to improve muddy paths once the damage is done, is to create alternative paths from greens to the next tee, so that when wear starts to create mud, one path is closed and the other opened.

This also spreads wear on the green, especially if two trolley parks are provided, one at each side of the green, each clearly marked when closed, with an appropriate notice to the side of the approach.

Players will then hopefully leave their trolleys in the appropriate park (not covered in wood chippings) and walk

to their ball, thus avoiding traffic to and from across the front of the green.

Turfing to repair damage will not solve the problem on its own, but good wiry fibrous turf, if periodically rested by alternate closure should survive the winter.

One tip in looking after them is not to mow too closely eg. keep at semi-rough height 32-35 mm and of course aerate them regularly with the fairways and approaches.

Quite apart from being an unacceptable nuisance and irritation, wood chippings are aesthetically unattractive.

One big problem with paths is to decide between making them wide enough to take two trolleys line abreast against creating conspicuous scars.

If surfacing materials are disapproved of by golfers they merely walk on the grass alongside, so some barrier to pulling trolleys along verges if not walking on them must be devised. This can be done by contouring, by planting scrub or even constructing cross barriers (traffic calmers!) at intervals.

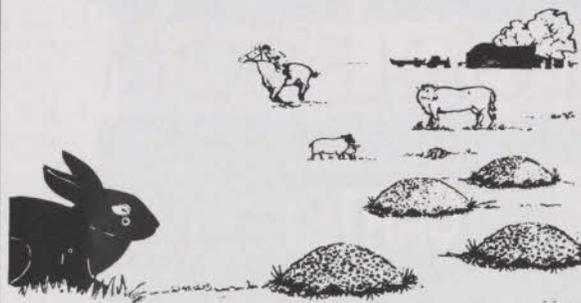
Above: Wood chips can create an untidy appearance

Below: Those chips again, this time making a mess around signage systems



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Fensoil 1

With reference to the article "Hey Big Spender" in the September issue.

It is somewhat surprising to read that the personal opinions of someone should be expressed in dogmatic terms, especially in criticising something which is so widely used with great success on so many courses and in new constructions.

Perhaps one should not blame Mr Clement but statements that Forest of Arden "bunkers became swimming pools when the irrigation was on" indicates to any greenkeeper that gross overwatering was practised.

Perhaps it was this that caused the greens "not to take heavy play". Certainly it is common knowledge, firstly, that management banned routine aeration between spring and autumn to avoid upsetting the guests and secondly that the current top dressing is "pure" sand - and any greenkeeper worth his salt knows what this does eventually in terms of root breaks.

In no way can sand-only top dressing meet Mr Clement's statement about "being duty bound to top dress with the same material that the greens were built with in the first place". The root zone was in fact fen soil and an approved sand.

It should be made clear that top dressings based on fen soil and approved sand (or with fen dress premixed from the same top quality basic materials) is the choice of most of our best greenkeepers - and also is the material used on most of our championship courses as well as literally hundreds of others.

Alternatives with sphagnum peat (often with too fine a sand) are not only ecologically unacceptable, but the peat separates out after rain or irrigation - leaving black 'ripples' over putting surfaces, with the sand left behind.

May I stress that I have absolutely no interest, save technical and academic ones, in any top dressing - but Banks (father and son) and I "discovered" fen soil and fen peat and promoted its use well over 30 years ago and I have advised its use ever since - with invariably excellent results, provided all other management was equally correct.

J H Arthur,
 Agronomist
 Budleigh Salterton,
 Devon

Short changed?

The Association has recently contacted me, asking my club to donate to the Building Fund for the new headquarters. This, I am sure, is a noble and worthy cause, after all, the growth and prosperity of the Association is something which all in the industry should welcome.

On the subject of noble and worthy we at Laleham are having a fund raising day for SCOPE (a real charity, Mr Thomas). As luck would have it I attended a meeting with the charity at about the same time as I was deciding whether to ask the club to support the Building Fund.

Surely BIGGA could spare us a few quid for such a worthy cause. After all, the rumours that Lee Hurst was paid a princely sum by

the Association does suggest that we (yes, that was ~~we~~ Mr Thomas), are rather flush with cash at the moment. Confident in the Association's generosity I suggested that we ask BIGGA to donate to the charity.

Apparently not! You have refused to donate even a token amount to a charity that is truly in need of funding. That's fine Mr Thomas, you save BIGGA funds for new offices and third rate comedians (as well as the fourth rate singer WOW).

Laleham golf course shall concentrate its limited funds on projects of true worth.

Finally looking down the list of contributing clubs proudly published in the magazine, I see two

that I know of where the club does not encourage BIGGA membership by paying their staff's subscriptions, (unlike Laleham where all the greenstaff have their membership paid). One of these clubs, whom you have taken money from does not even pay for greenstaff to attend college. Strange way of supporting the profession that. Unlike Laleham where we encourage all staff to attend college, and pay them to do so. Funny how people's principles will shift at the prospect of some publicity, don't you think?

On that subject how about publishing this letter?

John Ross, Course Manager
 Laleham GC, Chertsey, Surrey

Fensoil 2

For over 30 years now my company has been involved with the supply and marketing of Fensoil. It is therefore with some dismay and extreme annoyance that I read the article about Steve Clement in the September issue of your magazine - "Hey Big Spender" - which referred to Fensoil as being a "smeary wet material that doesn't take heavy play when wet, so we have moved away from fen soil".

Banks Amenity Products Ltd pioneered the use of Fensoil during the 1960s and is now a major supplier, so much so that it has its own high quality resources specifically supplying Fensoil for incorporating into Rootzones and Topdressings (particularly Fendress (TM) for golf greens and tees).

Our track record in supplying Fensoil for Rootzone materials is without question the most impres-

sive of any company in this business today. We have supplied Fensoil for the construction of over 170 new courses and countless individual greens - too numerous to mention. In addition, Fensoil is used in the manufacture of our Fendress (TM) topdressing which is recognised nationally as one of the top two leading brands.

I am extremely surprised that the Editor of Greenkeeper International should publish an opinion which publicly pillories a product and which is something I have not seen previously. The opinion in this article is not based on fact and is totally without foundation and as a major supplier of this product we take great exception to this article.

T.J. Banks, Managing Director
 Banks Amenity Products Ltd
 Market Harborough, Leics

Fensoil 3

My offer to show Steve Clement many examples of first class greens built and top dressed with fen soil, backed up by sound management, fell on deaf ears. Had he accepted, his contention that greens topdressed using fen soil "will not take heavy play when wet" would have been blown to smithereens.

It would be interesting to know the name of the author in question. Anonymous pieces never carry the same weight.

Donald Steel, Donald Steel and Company Ltd, Chichester, West Sussex

Editor's note: The article in question was written by Greenkeeper International Editor, Scott MacCallum, following a comprehensive and wide-ranging interview with Steve Clement.

The grass isn't always greener

Making a new green for an experienced greenkeeper should be a very simple matter. Select the site for the new green, improve the drainage if necessary, take the top off and rotovate, you can then add extra soil, sand etc and then get the levels right. The beauty of all soil greens is the fact that all the nutrients required to grow grass are naturally there. Add to these occasionally and you have a green for life.

I cannot understand why so many clubs change their established greens for these new American type greens where the soil content is almost nil.

To make grass grow on these kinds of

surfaces requires lots of fertilisers added at regular intervals. To stop them drying out a regular supply of water is also required.

With the drainage being so good, leaching must take place ensuring that a high percentage of the expensive fertilisers will find its way very quickly into the drains from where it goes into the stream or pond or even nearby lake. Times this by 18 or even more greens and I think you must agree the amount of fertiliser finding its way into the waterways is frightening.

Our organisation, BIGGA, is rightfully proud of our commitment to pro-

tect the environment and the question must be asked, has enough thought gone into what we are doing? Or has keeping up with the Jones's (Americans) once again over-ridden all else, including common sense.

FL. Fletcher, Chapel-en-le-Firth GC, Derbyshire

PS. Last month's letter from Jim Arthur was another reminder of old ideas being the best. The simple method of reducing the pH levels of the soil with sulphur is more than adequate to remove the problem of worms without the use of expensive chemical.

**The latest FEGGA Board Meeting was held in Iceland.
Neil Thomas reports from the distant North...**

A warm welcome

Iceland conjures up many images, most I suspect being those of snow, ice and cold. Well, the news is that, in fact, it is a green and pleasant land set among the lava plains formed from volcanic eruptions and featuring geysirs, waterfalls and the soothing hot springs of the Blue Lagoon. One does not automatically associate Iceland with golf. However golf is second only to soccer in Iceland and when the FEGGA Board descended on Reykjavik, the capital, for its autumn Board meeting the members were soon made aware that they were indeed in golfing territory.

Iceland has enjoyed a warm and dry summer but the arrival of FEGGA had produced a gale force wind with a chill factor not previously experienced by the newly arrived, inadequately clothed FEGGA Board members. Nevertheless, the welcome from the Chairman of the Icelandic Greenkeepers Association, Margeir Vilhjalmsón and the Vice Chairman/Treasurer Olafur Thor Agustsson, was warm and hospitable. The intrepid travellers set off on a tour of Keilir Golf Club, built in a lava field, and then thawed out in the clubhouse to which the planned barbecue had quickly been transferred. A visit to a Viking pub later in the evening was

highlighted by an induction ceremony whereby FEGGA Vice Chairman Per-Olof Ljung was made an Honorary Viking.

Next day FEGGA held a lengthy Board meeting which reflected the progress of FEGGA since its formation in 1996. Among many other matters, the Board finalised its plans for the second FEGGA Conference to be held this coming November. Later in the day the FEGGA Board had the opportunity to see some of scenic Iceland in the company of enthusiastic greenkeeper guides Björn Ólason, Guðmundur Gunnarsson and Ellert Þorarinsson. On the final day in Iceland, Dean Cleaver and myself were able to spend some time with Margeir visiting the Sudurnesja Golf Club and his own club, Reykjavik Golf Club, formerly the Golf Club of Iceland. It was at this club that golf had started in Iceland in 1934, having been introduced, in all probability, from Sweden.

Iceland has 57 golf courses including nine 18 hole courses with the rest 9 holes. The Icelandic Greenkeepers Association was formed in 1994 and is run by a committee of five. It has some 50 members. On average, a golf course will have one to two full time staff with the remainder seasonal. It was indicative of misconceptions of Iceland, to learn that to a large extent golf is played all year round using winter greens and tees, and that the most is made of the limited daylight hours in winter. Where there is snow it is concentrated in the north.

It is clear that greenkeepers in Iceland value their links with both BIGGA and FEGGA. These links arose originally through educational contacts, and it was Olafur who initiated contacts when he attended Elmwood College in 1992. He was followed by Margeir in 1993. Margeir went on to attend the School of Excellence at Gleneagles for 10 months in 1994 before taking up his position at Reykjavik Golf Club. He is currently studying for an HNC through distance learning. Margeir was joint runner-up in the Toro Student Greenkeeper of the Year competition in 1994. Educational links were strengthened when Carol Borthwick from Elmwood College visited Iceland in 1994 and some 17

Icelandic greenkeepers have attended at Elmwood. Another visitor has been George Brown from Turnberry. While the FEGGA Board was in Iceland Howard Swan was undertaking a design school for 16 greenkeepers. The contacts with the United Kingdom are therefore ongoing and can only benefit the young, enthusiastic greenkeepers making their way in the profession in Iceland.

In commenting on the FEGGA visit Margeir said, "It is a great thing for Iceland. It is recognition of what we are doing and that we are going in the right direction. Our members are keen to be involved and they will get to feel more a part of FEGGA. The Association tries each year to come to Harrogate with a group to be part of the European scene. We have greatly enjoyed having FEGGA with us. We are a small Association trying to introduce the techniques of greenkeeping to greenkeepers on smaller golf courses. The full-time greenkeepers are the core for spreading knowledge and giving experience. Conditions may be different but the basics are the same as the rest of the world".

Margeir and Olafur are now looking forward to attending the second FEGGA Conference in Spain from 12th to the 15th November as their Association's representatives.

They see this as an opportunity to meet European colleagues and discuss greenkeeping. This year's theme, "Water Management", is of particular interest to them.

FEGGA Chairman Dean Cleaver commented that, "The visit was another step forward in FEGGA becoming closer to a member Association in a country with a lot of commitment to greenkeeping. We are seeing the benefits of that in the maintenance of their golf courses. We have been well received and strengthened relationships for the future. I am impressed with the enthusiasm shown towards us and look forward to ongoing close contacts".

If you get the chance to visit Iceland take it - you will receive a warm and friendly welcome. If you aim to play golf you will find some well-maintained and challenging courses. Look up the greenkeepers they will be pleased to see you.



Above: Margeir Vilhjalmsón, Chairman of the Icelandic Greenkeepers Association, and FEGGA Chairman, Dean Cleaver

Below: A spectacular par 3 at Sudurnesja Golf Club



Countdown well underway to BTME '98

It seems like only yesterday that everyone was leaving Harrogate having enjoyed a successful BTME '98 so it will come as a shock to many that BTME '99 is only three months way.

Preparations for the final BTME and Learning Experience, in association with Textron of the millennium, are well advanced - to be truthful they began as soon as the previous show had finished - and visitors to Harrogate on the week of January 18-22 will find all their old friends among the exhibitors as well as many

new ones.

Companies exhibiting for the first time include Petroleum Products and Services, Gannon Oils, True Surface Rollers, Angus Horticulture, Bowley Hinton Associates, Garden Master, Eamonn Wall & Co, Fargo, Trelleborg, Alginure Products, Cooper Clarke, Vitagrow, Heron Electric, Club Car, Countax and Soft Spikes UK. All are welcome and join the many other established exhibitors bringing the total to 166.

With the same four halls - three

permanent and the enormous marquee which made its debut at BTME '98 - space is at a premium but several companies have increased the size of their stands, among them Kawasaki and Wiedenman, which has doubled the size of its stand.

Since last year Textron has purchased Ransomes, the sponsor of the Learning Experience which encompasses the National Education Conference and workshops held in the Majestic Hotel during the Monday and Tuesday and the seminar programme held in conjunction the show itself.

Textron, now know as Textron Turf and Specialty Products, possesses an enviable stable of fine turf machinery including Jacobsen, Ransomes, Iseki and Cushman has an exciting new stand to visit.

As ever the education programme put together by BIGGA's Education and Training Manager, Ken Richardson, is without compare on this side of the Atlantic and includes some of the finest brains in their respective fields.

They include David Oatis, of the USGA; Pelino Senna, of the CGSA; Dr Stephen Baker of the STRI and Dr Richard Hurley, of Lofts Seeds Inc.

For more information on BTME '99 and the Learning Experience in association with Textron Tel; BIGGA Headquarters on 01347 833800.

Second FEGGA conference venue named

The second FEGGA conference will be held at the Hotel Mijas, Fuengirola, Spain from 12 - 15 November. This follows the successful inaugural conference at the same location last year.

Toro will again be sponsoring the conference and will be joined this year by Supaturf/Aquatrols with the conference adopting the theme of 'Water Management'. One session will be devoted to 'Theory and Reality' and the other to 'Strategies for Effective Management'. The conference will also incorporate a FEGGA summit with the coming together of member Associations.

Each member Association has been asked to nominate two delegates to attend the conference and the conference papers will be published in English, French and German.

Further details from Neil Thomas at BIGGA or Tommy Lindelof at PO Box 42, S-139 21 VARMDO, Sweden tel. 468 570 196 10 fax. 468 570 198 10 - E-mail - sga.sweden@swipnet.se



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Ad Ref 544

Neil Thomas, Executive Director of the British and International Golf Greenkeepers Association gives his personal view on the Association, where it has come from, and perhaps more importantly, where it is going...

Past, present and future

The early days

If I can presume upon the reader's time for a few minutes, come back with me to 3rd of August 1987, a day which marked my entrance to what for me was the twilight world of greenkeeping. In May of that year I had been appointed to head up a new organisation with an imposing title, quickly to be known by the acronym of BIGGA.

I had no pretensions to know anything about greenkeeping, indeed my tenuous connection was as an average club golfer who that summer managed to get down to a handicap of 12 whereupon employment by BIGGA sounded the death knell to any future golfing ambitions. I guess I was one of those whose view of greenkeepers depended on the merits or otherwise of my current round of golf.

So on that day in 1987 I descended from Wales upon a building known as the STRI and located in Bingley - not exactly the centre of the world. Here I was informed learned men spent their days looking at grass. I was suitably impressed. Within the confines of this somewhat intimidating establishment the headquarters of BIGGA would be based for the immediate future. It would be untrue to say that I was totally unaware of what awaited me. For the previous three months I had received regular communications both written and verbal from a Mr Woods, of St Andrews, a Mr McMillan, of Sunningdale (which sounded a nice place), and a Mr Lawson, of Heswall, who all seemed very knowledgeable on the subject of greenkeeping.

At this point I was not aware that the aforesaid gentlemen were in fact icons within the profession. Mr McMillan kindly arranged to meet me during a major golf tournament at St Pierre Golf and Country Club - I remember nothing of the golf but by the end of the day I seriously questioned my sanity in entering the world of greenkeeping! I was informed that his five sons also plied this trade so I decided that it must have something going for it!

On that first day I entered a small, empty office inheriting some 1200 members from the three previous greenkeeping associations with a brief to collect the membership subscriptions which had been set at £15 a year. My main guideline was the 'Constitution and Rules' established on the 1st of January 1987.

The icons had suggested that they would like a computer system installed, a major turf management exhibition set up and a new magazine introduced, while I was enrolling up to 12,000 greenkeepers into membership. With some temerity I suggested that all this might not be possible within the first month or two.

So BIGGA was on its way and off on a roller coaster ride. Those first eighteen months at Bingley were a tremendous learning exercise as I struggled along with just a Personal Assistant to help (remember Caroline!). By May of 1989 having long since outgrown our accommodation (though not I hasten to add our welcome) at the STRI we were on our way to Aldwark Manor, first to a portakabin and then in December of that year to our cur-

rent rented offices (long since expanded). By this time I also had an Education Officer and a Membership Services Officer so I concluded that the icons must be pleased and that I was doing something right.

Progress meanwhile was rapid. The first Turf Management Exhibition had been held in Harrogate in 1989, a year which had also seen the Toro Student Greenkeeper of the Year Award introduced. 1990 marked the inception of the Miracle Premier Greenkeeper of the Year Award. This was also the year which saw the introduction of the Master Greenkeeper Certificate scheme with eighteen members now holding the cherished certificate and many others are at various stages within the scheme. I hope that in the future many more will aspire to reach the high standards of this scheme and achieve the Certificate. In January 1991, after some false dawns, 'Greenkeeper International' first saw the light of day since when it has continued on a successful path. 1992 saw the establishment of the Education and Development Fund from which so many greenkeepers have subsequently benefited. BIGGA was therefore moving in many directions but some difficult days lay ahead.

Troubles in store

As the fledgling organisation moved forward dangers lurked ahead and there were traumas on the way. Without doubt 1990 in many ways marked the nadir of BIGGA's existence from which much was learnt. As the reader will be aware, the game of golf is viewed



Above: The early days: BIGGA started life in the STRI building at Bingley, West Yorkshire

by many as a means of making a quick buck and in our naivety we did not see at first sight appearing on the scene those who would exploit us. This happened particularly with our magazine prior to 1991 and with the exhibition in its first two years. By 1991 on both fronts we were in control of our own destiny with salutary lessons being learnt. Running your own organisation and services is a far better option than contracting out to third parties who are motivated by commercial gain rather than the altruistic interests of the membership.

Education and Training as a priority

In the space available some random thoughts on our progress to the present day. From the beginning education and training were foremost in our considerations and this continues to be the case. When I started, City and Guilds were on the way out, NVQs on the way in. This has represented a fundamental shift in the training philosophy and resources available to greenkeepers. Alongside this major change has come increasing evidence of clubs providing training budgets for their greenkeeping staffs. Through the auspices of the Education and Development Fund BIGGA ensures the provision of a comprehensive range of supervisory and management courses (heavily subsidised) as well as training aids in the form of booklets and videos. Many Course Managers now utilise their training budgets to send their staff on BIGGA courses and purchase training aids. However, far too many greenkeepers are still ambiva-

lent regarding education and training. I urge them to take advantage of the opportunities available. Times have changed and those greenkeepers not prepared to move with the times put their very futures at risk. A word here of appreciation for those companies within the industry who, as Golden and Silver Key members, provide outstanding support for the Education and Development Fund and a very real sense of partnership with Greenkeepers. Internally I would suggest training to be in good shape, externally it is a more worrying scenario.

BIGGA continues to work closely with the Greenkeepers Training Committee in seeking effective implementation of NVQs. There is clear evidence that we are ahead of many other industries in this regard but funding is a key issue. Many clubs now appreciate the need for qualified, competent greenkeeping staff if their members are to have the quality of golf course increasingly demanded. Many are pointing their staff in the direction of NVQs but the system to train and assess these staff has to be funded. Back in 1987 the contribution of each golf club member to greenkeeper training was 2p. It is now 8p. I well remember early meetings of the GTC discussing the need for 50p. Enough said. It is the Home Unions who collect the monies for greenkeeper training as part of their general levy on golf club members, for onward transmission to the GTC. It is my hope that within the near future the GTC, golf clubs, county and national unions will open a meaningful dialogue which

will lead to enhanced funding for greenkeeper training, subject of course to accountability by those charged with spending the monies and administering the training system. This funding is long overdue and without it the training aspirations of many greenkeepers seeking recognised national qualifications will most surely be stifled.

Membership issues

Membership remains the key to a successful Association. BIGGA is engaged on a rapid growth curve which has taken us to 6,400 members today. No complacency here though for this probably represents around 50% of potential membership. Undoubtedly the appointment of part-time Regional Administrators over the last two years will bring long term benefits in membership recruitment. Their visit reports indicate how pleased greenkeepers are to receive a visit from a BIGGA representative and while first contact will not always have a positive result, follow-up visits are quite likely to produce success through new recruits. The Board of Management recently adopted a five year plan and this targets a membership of 8,000 by 2003. This will take some doing but with our recently restructured membership services section and the input of the Regional Administrators much can be achieved. Best of all, however, will be a commitment within the current membership to seek out new members. Just look at the impact if each current member brought in one new recruit. This is not the occasion to extol the benefits of membership although I would sug-

gest that our services for members are exceptional amongst professional associations with subscription rates comparing more than favourably with those of other such associations. It goes without saying, of course, that the prime beneficiaries of membership are those members who take an active part whether that be at section, regional or national level - better still at all three!

Double aces

Two of BIGGA's aces are unquestionably 'Greenkeeper International' magazine and the BTME. The magazine has long been a successful product after the early difficult days. However, it cannot stand still and the reader will have noticed that it has moved on apace in recent months both in improved design and production techniques. It must reflect the wishes of members while remaining commercially sound.

Constructive criticism is welcomed and particularly ideas and copy. BTME - the 'Greenkeepers Week' - is the focal point of BIGGA's year. It is quite simply a great occasion and BIGGA can be proud of organising and running Europe's premier indoor turf exhibition. Our partnership with the industry is its strength and around it runs a comprehensive "learning experience".

Greenkeepers return home from Harrogate enthused and invigorated for the challenges of the year ahead (at least after a week's recovery!). I would urge each and every member to target attendance at the BTME as a priority. It will be an experience to remember.

Past, present and future



Above: Inspecting the building work on 'BIGGA HOUSE'

Below: A fond farewell to the old BIGGA headquarters building



The new headquarters

So much to cover and so much regrettably to be left unsaid. BIGGA's history is short and it is not perhaps out of place to describe those involved, and to whom much gratitude is due, in bringing the three previous associations together in 1987 as the "founding fathers" of BIGGA. As they looked ahead at that time did they envisage the progress that would have been made by 1998? Most certainly their own headquarters building was not on the agenda at that time. As I write,

we are approaching what will surely be a defining day in BIGGA's history with the official opening of purpose built headquarters. It is good to see golf clubs supporting our Building Fund, surely just recognition of BIGGA's contribution to the education and training of greenkeepers. For 11 years BIGGA, through no-one's fault but as part of the growing process, has been unable to adequately house its staff in the manner it would wish as a professional body. Now with the backing of the R & A, the industry and golf clubs, together with the efforts of staff and members and support from both individuals and organisations this has become possible and will be for the benefit of all concerned. However, let me say quite categorically that the new headquarters is not some edifice purely for the benefit of staff. It is also very much a members building which I hope and trust members will use. There is a modern training facility from which we will run a broad spectrum of courses and which will be available for use by companies within and without the industry. I hope many members will take advantage of these courses and the increasingly comprehensive BIGGA library. Members should take great pride in their new building which will prove to the golf world that we have come of age as an Association. It says much about the permanence of BIGGA and that is important. Long after the staff and myself have gone our separate ways and are in

our dotage, the building will be there to serve future generations of greenkeepers. The opening is a time for celebration of BIGGA's progress, its professionalism and the many benefits it has brought to greenkeepers.

In conclusion

I look back today not purely through rose tinted glasses and aware of the difficult times along the way. Tomorrow will bring its own problems no doubt and, I hope, many more benefits for members. I have enjoyed the journey so far if on occasions it seems to have been "a hard day's night". The journey continues and will take us in many directions, occasionally down the low road from which we will turn back but more often I trust along the happy highway to a successful future. Our professionalism will stand us in good stead and I am committed in a members' association to continually work for the betterment of members. The fellowship and sense of belonging within BIGGA is something special and should be treasured by all members. It is at the very heart and soul of our Association and will assuredly serve us well in the future. I hope that we have achieved some at least of the aspirations of the founding fathers since that day in August 1987.

As H.R.H. The Duke of York officially opens our new headquarters on 21st October, we can perhaps reflect that BIGGA may be short in timespan but is increasingly long in achievement.



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Providing properly for maintenance should be a club's number-one priority, though too often budgets allow more cash for other departments of the club. This month, The Learning Experience advises on how you can cut costs without cutting corners.

Cutting remarks

Today's Course Manager on occasions has good reason to wear a salesman's hat, since he must compete for the machinery, staffing levels and materials to do his job effectively. If your course is in great shape, revenue generated will greatly benefit the overall health of the facility and its income, simply because members bring more guests, while visiting societies – a vital source of income for most clubs – will continue to impact favourably on the overall spend, especially in bar consumption and food revenue.

Providing properly for maintenance should be a club's number-one priority, though too often budgets allow more cash for other departments of the club. It's a fact that where capital machinery purchases are a priority, at least in your view, you will often have a battle on

your hands unless you are well prepared with facts and figures and can present a wholly convincing case.

So, like boy scouts, being prepared must be your first priority if you are to get the machinery you need. The case of fairway mowing is one example, since the purchase price of a multiple reel mower is only one part of its lifetime cost. Every season your budget must include operational costs for fuel, manpower and maintenance.

When the time comes to add a new mower to your inventory, by looking further than the factory price and calculating all related operational costs you can arrive at an annual cost for different types of mowers. This will assist in making wiser selections between, say, triplexes, 5-gang or 7-gang units. Indeed, by calculating in advance

you may have a strong case for purchasing larger yet more productive units if your presentation shows operating reductions for each year.

Since each course has its own profile, for the purpose of this exercise we will concentrate on the costs of purchasing, operating and maintaining triplexes and multiplexes. Once a true cost is determined, a decision can then be made to determine whether your course profile warrants the added expense of a different type of unit.

Some important assumptions must be made in order to establish the life-time cost of any cutting unit, for example its anticipated productive life under normal golf course conditions. Reliable calculations backed by experience suggest that a 7-reel mower will last about nine years; a 5-reel unit about seven years, while a triplex will be productive for five years. By using these realistic averages a depreciation figure can be arrived at, given that a mower is worth on average about 10% of its purchase price at the end of its productive life. By taking 10% from the purchase price and dividing the remainder by the number of productive years you will arrive at a realistic depreciation figure.

As an exercise, take the cost of a triplex at £17,000; its life span five years. Ten percent of £17,000 is £1,700, which is its worth after five years. Dividing the balance of £15,300 by five will give an approximate annual depreciation of £3,060.

Such simple calculations will provide useful information; for example the depreciation annually of a 5-unit mower is about the same as a 7-gang unit, for though the 7-gang is more expensive it has a longer productive life. Of course, purchase price is just one of the calculations

A Bat wing rotary mower at work.

