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# Turfgrass



VOLUME 16.4 JUL-AUG 2014

MANAGEMENT JOURNAL

## The Class of 2014

AGCSA/STA award winners John Neylan, Shaun Cross, Ethan Bell and Luke Cooney

## Rottnest revitalised

From sand scrapes to seashore paspalum

## Conference review

What political animal are you?

## On 'Fiji time'

A super life on Laucala



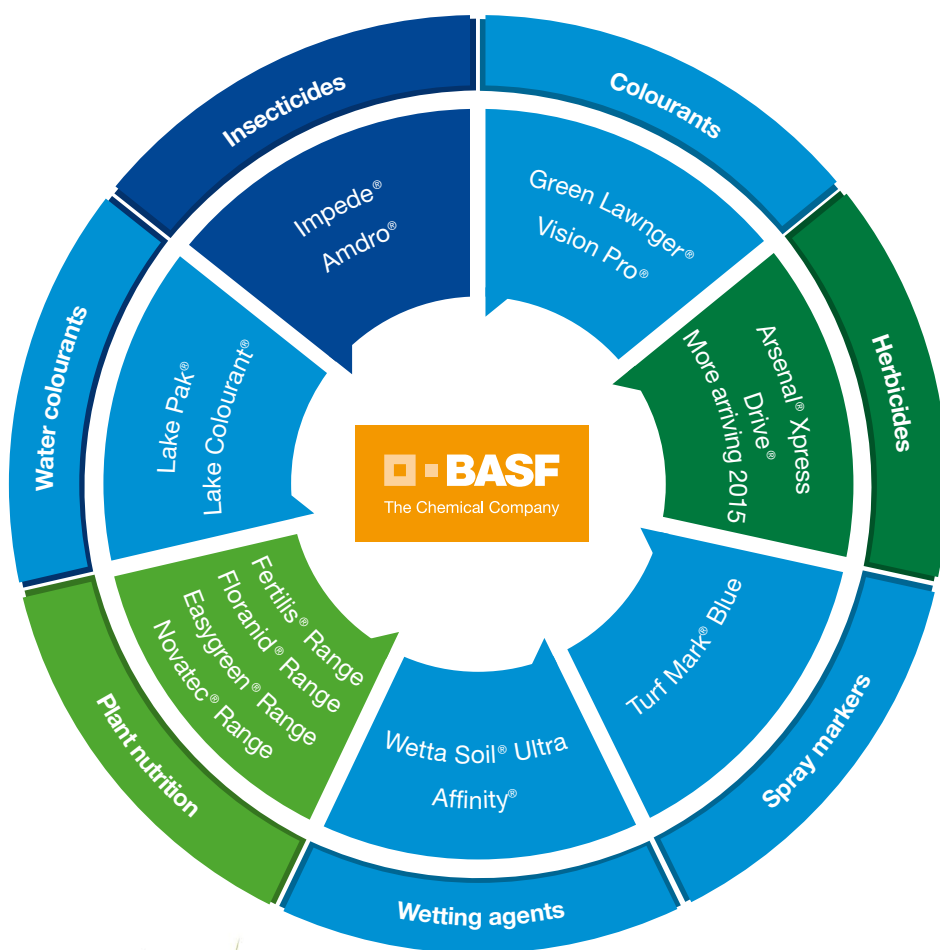
# 2014 Fiji International

Natadola Bay set for tournament spotlight



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## COVER

**Natadola Bay Golf Course: The 18th at Natadola Bay, Fiji.** The course will host the inaugural 2014 Fiji International from 14-17 August.

**Photo:** Gary Lisbon/  
www.golfphotos.com.au



## LEAD STORY: Natadola's international debut

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Last September, the PGA of Australia announced that the inaugural Fiji International would be held at Natadola Bay Golf Course in August 2014. The third new tournament added to the PGA Tour of Australasia in as many years, the Fiji International will be the country's first internationally televised golf tournament with a potential broadcast reach of more than 400 million viewers. For Natadola's Australian course superintendent Steve Lalor it is set to be the biggest test his Fijian greenkeeping team has faced, but as he writes it is one they are looking forward to.

## FEATURES

## A super life on Laucala

14

Owned by Red Bull co-founder Dietrich Mateschitz, the exclusive island of Laucala, Fiji is as close as you can get to paradise. Since November 2013 it has been home to Australian superintendent Mark Stanley who manages the island's spectacular 18-hole David McLay Kidd-designed golf course. It's the latest stop in a greenkeeping career that has taken Stanley from his early days as an apprentice in Brisbane to the US, India and Vietnam.



## Byron Bay's coming of age

20

At the 30th Australian Turfgrass Conference on the Gold Coast, Byron Bay Golf Club course superintendent Shaun Cross was named the recipient of the AGCSA's Excellence in Golf Course Management Award. Presented in partnership with John Deere, the award is just reward for Cross who over the past decade has overseen a mountain of improvement works to transform Byron Bay Golf Club into one of the best regional courses around.

## Future proof

26

The AGCSA and STA Graduate of the Year awards, presented in partnership with Toro, represent an investment in the future of the Australian turf industry and provide a huge stepping stone for those coming through the industry. ATM profiles impressive 2014 winners Ethan Bell and Luke Cooney.

## A verdant career

30

One of the Australian turf industry's most respected agronomists joined the elite of his profession when he was bestowed the AGCSA's highest honour at the recent Australian Turfgrass Conference. Over the past four decades John Neylan has devoted his career to furthering the turf management profession and the body of work he has produced during that time has benefited a generation of turf managers. ATM profiles the founder of AGCSATech and one-time AGCSA general manager who joins an illustrious list of past recipients.



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Following a major redevelopment in 2013, for the first time in its 50-plus year history Rottneest Island Country Club off the coast of WA now boasts turf greens. Formerly a sand scrape course with artificial tees, the redevelopment was undertaken with a view of improving the club's facilities and ensuring the course provided year-round enjoyment for visitors. Current and former WA superintendents Darren Wilson, Jeff Lane and Peter Fleming look back over the project.

## GOLD COAST 2014

### Positive politics

38

The Gold Coast was the setting for a highly successful 30th Australian Turfgrass Conference and Trade Exhibition from 22-27 June. ATM editor Brett Robinson looks back at some of the highlights of the week including David Bancroft-Turner's popular political intelligence workshop and Michael Dennis' back-to-back win at the 2014 Toro AGCSA Golf Championships played at Sanctuary Cove.



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## Contributors to Australian Turfgrass Management Journal Volume 16.4 (July-August 2014)

Brendan Allen (NZGCSA); Ethan Bell (Wangaratta GC); Peter Boyd (Pakuranga Country Club, NZ); Barry Bryant (SAGCSA); Chris Chapman (STA NSW); Luke Cooney (Hale School); Shaun Cross (Byron Bay GC); Jeremy Cutajar (VGCSA); Peter Fleming (Peter Fleming Consulting); Peter Frewin (AGCSA); Tony Guy (STA WA); Martyn Hedley (STA Qld); Steve Lalor (Natalola Bay GC, Fiji); Jeff Lane (Globe Growing Solutions); Dave Morrison (Windaroo Lakes GC); Simon Newey (Red Cliffs GC); John Neylan (Turfgrass Consulting and Research); Mark Stanley (Laucala Island, Fiji); Richard Stephens (Turf Australia); Nathan Tovey (STA Vic); Darren Wilson (Wembley Golf Complex); Jenny Zadro (STA Australia).

# A model for success

In April I was fortunate to travel to Byron Bay Golf Club and catch up with superintendent Shaun Cross. At the time Cross had just won the GCSAQ Superintendent Achievement Award, thus qualifying him for the 2014 AGCSA Excellence in Golf Course Management Award which he would go on to collect at the recent Australian Turfgrass Conference. Sitting on the clubhouse balcony overlooking the superbly presented course, for over an hour Cross reflected on his 11 years there and the work that his crew and the club had achieved to turn what was a solid country track into one of the country's finest regional courses.

Too often in this industry we hear stories of superintendents and club management at loggerheads, hamstrung by personality clashes and short-sighted demands. As I have said before, it takes both sides – superintendent and management – to formulate a productive relationship based on mutual respect in order to achieve something positive and it was therefore very refreshing to hear from Cross that such a story had played out at Byron Bay.

As you will read in this edition, the Byron Bay course has gone from strength to strength and the model for this success has been firmly rooted in a couple of integral components. First, is a proactive board which has the course and its continuing improvement at the forefront of its agenda and has faith in the skills of their superintendent to drive that. This is in no small part down to a few key personalities and in his acceptance speech on the Gold Coast Cross paid tribute to former and current club captains Mark Wilson and Peter Sinclair for sharing his vision for the course. Incidentally, Sinclair was present to see Cross collect the award which was duly noted by the 280 people in attendance with a round of applause.

And second, it comes down to the superintendent and their team – their skills, work ethic and the ability to educate and communicate. Cross, by his own admission, is meticulous to a fault – the 104-page dossier which accompanied his award nomination is a testament to that – but it's that passion for his job combined with an ability to effectively communicate his ideas and, more importantly, the reasoning behind them that has helped engender a positive working relationship with those in the clubhouse.

Indeed, watching Cross go about his daily preparations, I got a small glimpse of the extent that he goes to. After cutting one green, Cross jumped off the triplex, grabbed a broom and started sweeping off the small amount of clippings that the cutting units had left behind. An old-timer, out for his morning nine-hole constitutional, looked on and commented to me – "I've never seen a greenkeeper do that before, yet he does it every morning!" It's that sort of attention to detail which crosses over into many other areas of Byron Bay's course management and is resulting in the course getting the due recognition it deserves.

Speaking of recognition and to conclude on a somewhat down note, it was disappointing that the AGCSA Claude Crockford Environmental Award wasn't bestowed this year due to a lack of entries. The industry has taken huge strides recently to improve this aspect of course management, yet every year it's like pulling teeth for the AGCSA to convince members to nominate. It is also a shame especially in light of the recent findings of the AGCSA and Australian Research Council funded study on golf course biodiversity. Those who sat in on the University of Melbourne presentation at the conference would have learnt that this project portrays golf courses and their role in enhancing biodiversity in urban centres in a hugely positive light. That has in large part been driven by superintendents and their management practices, but as 2014 AGCSA Distinguished Service Award winner John Neylan comments in this edition, the industry needs to be more proactive in selling this 'good news' story back

to the wider industry. One way of doing that is through programmes such as the AGCSA Awards, so let's hope we have a few more nominations by the time Hunter Valley rolls around in 2015. Enjoy the read.



Brett Robinson, Editor

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# Thank you Gold Coast, now bring on the Hunter Valley



I write this report from Far North Queensland while having a break from the office and taking some time to refresh and reflect on the recently completed (and very successful) 30th Australian Turfgrass Conference and Trade Exhibition.

The Gold Coast certainly turned on the weather for us again and I did not hear of many weather-related complaints from the delegates during the week. A couple of the locals were complaining about the cold in the morning, but I must say it was great to wake to perfect sunny days and temperatures that were about double what we have experienced in Victoria recently.

The conference week got off to a great start on Sunday with Royal Perth Golf Club's **Michael Dennis** defending his Toro AGCSA Golf Championship title on the beautifully presented Palms course at Sanctuary Cove. **David Hobday** (South West Rocks Golf Club) won the nett title, while **Barry Bryant** (Mt Osmond Golf Club and current SAGCSA president) won the stableford event that was played at the nearby and equally conditioned Hope Island Golf Club.

The presentation dinner at Hope Island was a highlight with guest speaker **Mick Colliss** entertaining all about his very Australian desire to represent the country at an international level, albeit at sudoku. A big thanks to Toro for again partnering

the event and also **Danny Foote** (Hope Island) and **Robin Doodson** (Sanctuary Cove) as host superintendents.

The week of education kicked off on the Monday with the workshops conducted by **Dr Karl Danneberger** and **David Bancroft-Turner**. The workshops, which are in their second year and again partnered by Jacobsen, are quickly becoming one of the highlights of the week.

Karl presented to a packed room of eager listeners, while David conducted his session to a closed room of 40 delegates, all of whom left very impressed and wanting more.

David will certainly become a regular to our conference if he can find time in his busy schedule. It is not often an Australian will heap praise on anyone from the 'old enemy', but David was a great presenter and also great company as he mingled with the delegates during breaks in education sessions and at the social functions.

The other big change to the week was hosting the President's Dinner, presented in partnership with Syngenta,

on the Monday night and from the comments we have received this was a huge success. Not only did it kick the week off in a big way, but it also gave all the opportunity to congratulate the winners of the awards over the entire week. On the awards, I would like to congratulate **Shaun**



**David Bancroft-Turner was one of the standout presenters during the 30th Australian Turfgrass Conference on the Gold Coast**



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Robin Doodson

**Cross** (Excellence), **Ethan Bell** (Graduate) and **John Neylan** (Distinguished Service). All are worthy recipients and congratulations must go to all the other finalists.

With the move to Monday night for the dinner, Everris came on board and partnered the Farewell Bash on the Thursday night. The farewell also proved a huge success with almost 400 delegates attending to wrap up what was a great week of education and social activities.

While the week was a big one for all concerned, it also proved a momentous one for AGCSA Board Director Robin Doodson. On the Friday he tendered his resignation at Sanctuary Cove after successfully being appointed the new superintendent at Doha Golf Club in Qatar.

While Robin only served on the AGCSA Board for just over a year, he brought to the table great passion and clear direction. Robin's departure to the Middle East will leave a big hole to fill, but this is a once in a lifetime opportunity for him and his family. I would like to take this opportunity to sincerely thank Robin for his insight during his time as a director and wish him all the best on this exciting new chapter.

Last and but no means least I would like to say a very big thank-you on behalf of the Australian turf industry to the staff at the AGCSA. The running of the Australian Turfgrass Conference and Trade Exhibition takes a great deal of time, effort and, importantly, patience. To come out the end of a busy week with so many compliments and, equally as importantly, very few complaints is a testament to the professionalism and passion of the AGCSA staff.

It is a pleasure to work with these people on a daily basis and to see the fruits of their labour come together so well during this week gives me great pleasure. The team was this year complemented with some of the wives of staff and Board and I would like to thank **Cheryl Balloch**, **Lynn Horsburgh** and **Katrina Frewin** as they all did a sensational job to ensure all delegates had a great time on the Gold Coast.

Preparations are now in full swing for the 31st Australian Turfgrass Conference which will be held in the Hunter Valley. Negotiations are still underway to determine exact venues and times and these will be announced through the AGCSA website and The Cut email newsletter as soon as these are confirmed. 🌱



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# Natadola's international debut



From 14-17

August, Natadola

Bay Golf Course

will hit the tournament  
spotlight when it hosts

the inaugural \$US1 million  
Fiji International. Charged  
with the task of preparing  
the Vijay Singh-designed  
course is Toowoomba  
native Steve Lalor who  
takes a look at what  
promises to be one of the  
country's biggest sporting  
events.



**O**n 19 September 2013, the PGA of Australia announced in conjunction with the Fijian Government that the inaugural Fiji International would be held at Natadola Bay Golf Course in 2014. Confirmed for a five year period, the PGA Tour of Australasia and OneAsia co-sanctioned tournament is set to be held from 14-17 August and will be one of the country's largest and most acclaimed sporting events in its history.

Located a 45-minute drive from the tourist hub of Nadi on Fiji's main island Viti Levu, Natadola Bay was opened in June 2009 with that year's Fiji Open being among the first rounds to be played on the new layout. The course has subsequently hosted regular events including the 2010 Fiji Open, the 2011 Men's Asia-Pacific Teams Championship (Nomura Cup) and the Natadola Bay Fiji Classic in 2012.

Designed by Fiji's three-time Major winner Vijay Singh, who will headline the tournament along with fellow multiple Major winner Nick Price, the golf course is owned by the national superannuation fund Fiji National Provident Fund. The master plan for the development included a resort, golf course, residential zones, marina and shopping hub and to

promote residential sales it was envisaged to hold a major golf tournament to expose the area to a wider audience.

The Fiji International, the third new tournament added to the PGA Tour of Australasia in as many years, will be the country's first internationally televised tournament with a potential broadcast reach of more than 400 million viewers across 40 countries. With such a global focus, for the Natadola greenkeeping team, which comprises almost entirely of local Fijians, it is set to be one of the biggest events of their careers.

## ISLAND HOME

Although I have been course superintendent at Natadola since June 2010, looking back at where I started my turf career it's fair to say that Fiji was never on the radar. Toowoomba Golf Club on Queensland's Darling Downs was my first experience in greenkeeping but it was there that superintendent Phillip Knight inspired me to travel using our great profession as a platform to do so.

After doing a week's work experience while a student at Toowoomba's Downlands College, Phil offered me an apprenticeship which I eagerly





PHOTO BY GARY LISBON

The inaugural Fiji International will be contested at Natadola Bay Golf Course in August. Its dramatic elevation changes, as shown in the par four 8th hole pictured here, and coastal location guarantee a spectacular setting for what will be Fiji's first internationally televised golf tournament

took up. I enjoyed five years at Toowoomba before joining the crew at Royal Queensland Golf Club just in time for the 1997 Australian PGA Players Championship.

Six months later, I embarked on my first venture overseas after a great opportunity arose to work on a course in Japan that was being redeveloped. This was a stark introduction to working abroad as no one on the crew could speak English and the use of hand signals and broken Japanese/English to communicate was common.

The 45-hole complex included two golf courses – Tojo Country Club (18 holes) and Okura Country Club (27 holes) – with the management of each differing greatly. Okura had two separate greens on each hole, one Pennecross bentgrass and the other *Zoysia matrella*. These greens would be played on during different seasons to alleviate wear from play as the course regularly had full fields every day of the week, regardless of the weather. Tojo was the premier course in the area and held both the World Junior Golf Teams Championships and the Mizuno Ladies Tournament (JLPGA) in the same year.

After seven months in Japan I returned home and landed at Brisbane's Indooroopilly Golf Club under

superintendent Peter Sawyer. This was a rewarding time for me and I was involved in a number of major projects undertaken by the club. This is also where I first met a young, naive apprentice by the name of Mark Stanley... oh how things have changed! (See 'On Fiji time' page 14 for more on Mark Stanley's career and his current role as course superintendent on the exclusive Fijian resort island of Laucala).

It was while at Indooroopilly that I finally decided after many years of looking at The Ohio Program (TOP) to bite the bullet and head to the US. After a meeting with Mike O'Keeffe at Indooroopilly, he lined me up with a position at Pinehurst Resort working on the No.8 course which was designed by Tom Fazio to celebrate Pinehurst's first 100 years.

Bidding farewell to Indooroopilly after nearly two years, I spent six months at Pinehurst before deciding to join Maccurach Golf Construction. I moved from North Carolina to Florida where I started work on the construction of greens at The Palencia Club and one month later I relocated to Gainesville, Florida to renovate the University of Florida golf course as the assistant construction superintendent.

This was a great role as most of the guys on crew were from the university and had no golf

The 2014 Fiji International will be based at Natadola Bay for the next five years







Natadola was built to USGA specifications with the fairways sandcapped at a depth of 300mm due to the underlying limestone rock



Loading seashore paspalum sprigs onto the truck 'Fiji style' during construction

One of the main challenges during Natadola's construction was the weather, with Cyclone Gene causing significant damage during grow-in in January 2008 (pictured is the 13th)



we stuck with his original design plans and made only minimal changes due to on-site issues that arose.

Construction of the course had its own set of challenges, the weather being one. On one occasion in late January 2008 we had 150mm of rain fall in two hours which washed away sections of four holes that were ready to be handed over to the grow-in team. Two days later Cyclone Gene rolled through and compounded damage to the fledgling course (see photo below).

This was a common event during the construction, but the local and international crew that had been brought together battled on to create the course that we now have today. The local Fijians on the crew at the time even went so far as to ask to sacrifice a goat on one hole to stop the rain, as they thought a bad spirit was residing there, such is the great culture of the Fijian people.

The course was built to USGA specifications with the fairways sandcapped at a depth of 300mm as the underlying ground is completely limestone rock. Construction wrapped up in June 2009 and just weeks after opening rookie Australian professional Matt Griffin etched his name into the course's history books by claiming the 2009 Fiji Open.

With the course open, I returned to Queensland to complete the grow-in of Ipswich Golf Club west of Brisbane. After a year had passed there, the superintendent position at Natadola was advertised and in June 2010 I returned to Fiji. Four years on I am thoroughly enjoying the role despite the many unique management challenges the course and country present and especially now with the announcement of the Fiji International and the focus that the tournament will bring with it.

## ON 'FIJI TIME'

The location of the Natadola Bay course is certainly spectacular with 15 of the 18 holes affording wonderful views over Fiji's stunning Coral Coast. The course is wall-to-wall Sealsle Supreme seashore paspalum and off the tips it measures 6569m. The elevation changes (the highest point is 86 metres above the lowest point, a good test for the irrigation system), wind and extreme rough make it quite a tough proposition for the average golfer and being far less than average I have been known to use up to 25 balls in a round!

Aside from the challenges with sticks in hand, there are numerous challenges managing a course such as Natadola, whether cultural, climatic or agronomic. As an example, just three months into my tenure the irrigation pumps failed. It took 18 months for the owners to approve new pumps and they were installed in March 2012 with the third and final pump only coming online in late 2013. When the pumps went down the only one we had available was a 3" suction end pump which meant it took all

CONTINUED ON PAGE 10



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**Fifteen of Natadola's holes afford stunning views of Fiji's breathtaking Coral Coast, including the magnificent 201m 13th, the longest par three on the golf course**

## CONTINUED FROM PAGE 8

day to irrigate greens as we could only have six sprinklers on at a time. To put that into context, we have some 1000 Rainbird Eagle 700 sprinklers on the course.

We manage around 40 hectares of turf and a further 40-50ha of natural vegetation. Annually, we have around 15,000-20,000 rounds which is mostly made up of tourists and visitors. We currently have around 120 members ranging from locals to international visitors who stay for more than three weeks at a time and play every day. Most locals have never seen golf played or even been to Natadola to see the golf course or what I rate as one of the best beaches in the world.

One problem we commonly experience is stray animals and I'm not just talking about your usual domesticated cats and dogs. We have to contend with horses, cows and goats as well and the damage that these larger animals do to the greens is testing (see photo below).

The land the golf course is on has been leased from native landowners who believe they are allowed to graze their animals here. They tie the animals to a clump of grass who in turn eat the grass and then run amuck around the golf course, damaging greens, taking sand baths in bunkers and leaving 'deposits' everywhere.

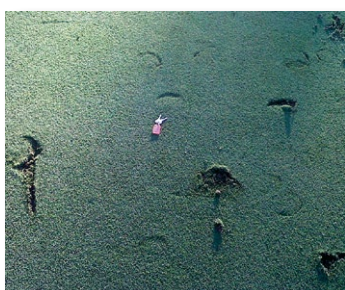
In terms of agronomics, we renovate the greens once a year in November, however, we have a monthly solid tine programme in place. The sand used to build and maintain the course is natural and is mined about 20km down the main highway at the Sigatoka sand dunes. No screening is required and physical testing shows similar parameters to a USGA spec sand.

Average annual rainfall at Natadola is 2.5 metres and this mostly falls in the wet season from September to April. This allows us to fill our irrigation lakes (our main lake as a capacity of 78 megalitres) ready for the dry season where the winds tend to dry out the profiles quickly. We also have the luxury of two bores as well as another lake (38ML) that we can draw from which is filled with treated water from the neighbouring Intercontinental Resort. There is also the ocean if we are really struggling.

Temperatures throughout the year range from 20-35°C, however, the humidity does influence our management practices during the wet season. The main diseases the paspalum is susceptible to are brown patch, anthracnose and dollar spot which we combat mostly with rolling and a healthy fertility programme.

I don't like to use too many fungicides given our location, although sometimes they are simply needed. Plant protection products are pretty scarce in Fiji and as a result I order all of my fungicides, herbicides and pesticides from Australia. Pricing of standard chemicals here is outrageous and a 20L container of blue dye alone costs around \$FJD1000 (AU\$600). Registration of chemicals is also done every two years by the end user.

With a course maintenance budget of around \$FJD1 million (\$AUD585,000), I have to watch the bottom line closely. Parts for equipment take up a fair chunk of this budget. The current machinery fleet was used for the grow-in and needless to say many items are on their last legs. Fortunately we have received new equipment prior to the Fiji International (see more on this later) which will assist presentation of the course greatly in the lead-up to and during the tournament.





Cost of freight is also something to watch. I tend to order two container shipments a year comprising fertiliser, herbicides, fungicides, pesticides, tyres, hand tools, machinery parts, filters and anything else I can think of at the time. It usually takes around two months from ordering to final delivery so planning needs to be spot on.

My current team consists of a foreman, two irrigation technicians, two mechanics and 20 groundsmen. There is no specific turf training or related programmes in Fiji which does make it difficult for staff to understand the maintenance practices we carry out. I have found that one-on-one chats about tasks we do goes a long way with the crew. Craig Easton from Simplot Partners also visits regularly and conducts seminars for the team which is enjoyable for all.

When I first started as the maintenance superintendent here at Natadola there was only one other ex-pat superintendent out on Laucala Island which lies to the east of Fiji's second major island Vanua Levu. It was difficult to get in touch given the exclusivity of the island (it is privately owned by Red Bull co-founder Dietrich Mateschitz) and in the past couple of years I have seen several international superintendents come and go from both Laucala and Denarau golf courses (Denarau is west of Nadi).

It has been great to meet different superintendents and actually talk to someone else about turf other than my wife, who I'm sure is equally happy. When current Laucala superintendent Mark Stanley comes



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE PGA OF AUSTRALIA

over to the mainland we always meet up at the local with Denarau superintendent David Brennan for an impromptu 'Fiji Golf Course Superintendents Association' meeting. This, predictably, carries on into the early hours as there is so much 'turf' to talk about...

Living and working in Fiji certainly has its challenges. All I thought of when I first started was the white sandy beaches and azure waters. All is not as it seems. 'Fiji time' does make for some frustration, however, once you start to understand the lifestyle you tend to adapt to island living.

Being so isolated even from the nearest town makes it difficult to source tools and parts and simply hopping in the ute and driving to Bunnings isn't an option. Having to improvise has become

**In the lead-up to the Fiji International more than \$FJD500,000 (\$AUD290,000) has been spent on course improvements and infrastructure works to facilitate the tournament**

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5754/0713





Steve Lalor (left) has been superintendent at Natadola since June 2010 and is preparing his Fijian crew of 26 for what will be the biggest tournament of their careers

the norm on several occasions and our mechanics have become experts in adapting and fabricating tools and parts until the correct items arrive from suppliers. Having other supers around, like Mark and David, is also a great help when we need to borrow equipment or just have a vent.

### EXCITEMENT MOUNTING

Upon the PGA's announcement of the Fiji International coming our way last September, we kicked into gear and carried out some minor projects that required attention. During March/April this year, major works were completed including building access roads for tournament officials and television production crews.

The extension of the par three 15th tee was also completed to improve the view and playability of the hole. Construction of a pedestrian bridge on the 9th hole and safety barriers along cart paths for holes 6-9 were also undertaken. All up to date some \$FJD500,000 (\$AUD290,000) has been spent to facilitate the tournament's arrival.

Other course works are planned over the next two years to test the players and improve the overall maintenance of the course. Depending on the scores during this year's inaugural tournament, additional tees on several holes (such as the par three 4th, the 300m par four 12th, and 363m par four 14th) may be constructed. We will also be looking at increasing the diameter of the mainline drainage pipe on the 6th fairway and possibly reshape/extend the green on the 508m par five 5th.

A major boost ahead of the tournament has been the delivery of some new Jacobsen course maintenance equipment including:

- Two LF550 4WD turbo fairway mowers;
- Two GP400 triplexes;
- Ten GK522 walk-behind greens mowers;
- Five Hauler 1200 transport vehicles;
- Two Cushman Turf Trucksters;
- Cushman Spraytek DS300;
- Tri-King tees/surrounds mower;
- Turfcut 600 rotary rough mower; and
- 30 Club Car golf carts

In the months leading up to the tournament we have been keeping our regular maintenance programmes running with some extra applications to the playing surfaces to prevent disease and alleviate traffic pressures. As the course is new on the Tour and due to its obvious difficulty, the PGA of Australia has asked for green speeds to be around 10-10.5 for the tournament. We normally have them running at 10 on a daily basis.

Andrew Langford-Jones from the PGA of Australia is happy with how the course looks currently and hasn't asked for too many changes. Tournament cutting heights will be as follows:

- Greens 3mm;
- Tees, collars and aprons 5mm;
- Fairways 10mm;
- Primary rough 25mm, secondary rough 50-60mm and deep rough 1-2m.

These are no different to our year round cutting heights with the exception of the secondary rough which we mow at 40mm during normal play. The deep rough will be one challenge that will really confront the professionals. Comprising of 1-2m high mission grass just 5-10m off most fairways, if your shot is wayward you can forget looking for it. This will become an even bigger test when the wind makes itself present over the four days.

Although this won't be my first large televised golf tournament, it is for the whole country as well as my team. The magnitude of this event is incomprehensible to most in Fiji, so in order to try and educate the crew about what is coming their way we have been watching snippets of other tournaments on YouTube and through other social media sites. This is done during lunchtimes and the amazement and expressions on their faces is something to witness. They are excited now but when the infrastructure starts to go up I am sure the levels of anticipation will reach new heights.

Refining the practices we all know to present a course to the best of our capabilities will undoubtedly be the most challenging part of the tournament. Thanks to some volunteers coming from Australia, the guys will have some expert knowledge in tournament preparation to learn from.

We also successfully hosted some local tournaments in early June which proved very beneficial to help prepare the guys for what is in store. One thing for sure though is that we will be ready to meet the challenge come mid-August and are looking forward to showcasing this wonderful course to a global audience. 🙌

As the Natadola Bay course is new on the Tour and due to its obvious difficulty, the PGA of Australia has asked for green speeds to be around 10-10.5 for the tournament



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# A super life on Laucala



Owned by the co-founder of Red Bull, the exclusive tourist island resort of Laucala, Fiji is, quite simply, paradise. Since November 2013 it has been home to Australian superintendent Mark Stanley who manages the island's spectacular 18-hole David McLay Kidd-designed golf course. It's the latest stop in a greenkeeping career which has taken him from Brisbane to the US, India and Vietnam.

**W**here I work there's no need for an alarm. The countless wild roosters and exotic bird life which abound make sure you're awake every morning come sunrise. Welcome to Laucala, a sleepy island which lies out in the northern division of the Fiji islands. Measuring just 12 square kilometres and surrounded by the azure waters of the Pacific Ocean, it's as close to paradise as you can get.

As I leave my bungalow, I jump in my Toro Workman and cruise through an area known as 'Jurassic Park' on the way to the maintenance facility. The trees, like most on the island, are as old as time and the jungle vegetation is so thick and dense it's as if you are back at the dawn of time. Such a raw, dramatic landscape, combined with no traffic jams or lights, makes the morning 'commute' an enjoyable one. Laucala gradually wakes and the hundreds of staff who make this ultra-exclusive resort island tick go about their daily routine, albeit at a leisurely pace. 'Fiji time' is the only time we go by here on Laucala.

Once owned by publishing magnate Malcolm Forbes, in 2003 Laucala was bought by Austrian businessman and co-founder of Red Bull Dietrich Mateschitz who has subsequently turned the island into an exclusive tourism resort. It is the ultimate escape and the principal reason guests stay here is the island's isolation. Private jets and billion dollar yachts grace the island with guests paying anything from \$USD7000 to \$USD40,000 per night (yes, you read right). If the budget allows and you're a nice bloke to boot, then you can book the island out for you and your mates for a cool \$USD150,000 per night. And it happens!

The island boasts an 18-hole David McLay Kidd designed par-72 championship golf course but golf is only a small part of what the resort has to offer. Surrounded by some of the best waters in the world, diving, snorkelling and fishing is a huge draw card, along with the world class food which is grown on the island. Soon a submarine will be part of the water activities, just in case you can't dive.

Every morning before the 33-strong Laucala golf maintenance crew start their daily tasks, they sing a hymn followed by my local assistant Joji saying a prayer for the day, all in Fijian. Eight months into my time on the island I'm still only learning the language, but words like 'mowers', 'boss' and 'irrigation' stand out when spoken in English, so I'm guessing he is asking the man above for new gear and no irrigation breaks! It's quite a unique way to start the day and as with other countries I have worked in during my career, religion and culture play a huge part and something you accept and adapt to.

## ON THE ROAD

Laucala has been my home since November 2013 and is the latest stop in a career that has already taken me to the US, India and Vietnam. As my good friend and fellow Fiji-based superintendent Steve Lalor alluded to in his earlier article this edition ('**Natadola's international debut**' – page 6-13), being a superintendent in Fiji was the furthest thing from my mind when I was completing my apprenticeship at Brisbane's Indooroopilly Golf Club in the early 2000s.

Growing up in a golfing family, I spent a lot of time on golf courses and I knew during my school days that I wanted to be a greenkeeper. After





completing high school I got straight into it and landed a job at Indooroopilly under superintendent Peter Sawyer. The large crew, which included Steve at that time, was full of experienced guys, many of whom are still in the trade today. That job got me going in the right direction in between being on the end of the typical apprentice pranks.

Upon completion and gaining qualification, a handful of the team had been through The Ohio Program (TOP) and hearing their stories it sounded like a once in a lifetime experience. Being 21, still living at home and having never travelled abroad, I naturally jumped at the idea of heading to the US and it was from here that the travel bug well and truly kicked in.

I flew over to the US six months after the September 11 terrorist attacks and after a mix up with US Immigration (visas at that time were, understandably, touchy) Mike O'Keeffe and the superintendent of Pinehurst No.8, Jeff Hill, worked hard to get my papers in order so I could start cutting grass. A stint at Pinehurst No.8 as spray tech opened my eyes to golf course presentation at its finest.

This was followed by a short time at Westchester Country Club in New York for the summer and assisting with preparations for the US PGA Tour's Buick Classic. Westchester had a reputation for crazy hours and no sleep and both proved to be true. The contacts you make while on TOP are life-long and I can recommend it to any apprentice.

Returning to Australia was hard and after a stint at The Glades and some construction jobs at Royal Queensland, Royal Pines and Dent Island (Hamilton Island Golf Club), the bug bit again and

after some time off travelling Europe I gained my first superintendent job in India at Prestige Golfshire. A PGA UK design by architect Bob Hunt, the links style course was situated about an hour from Bangalore in India's south and was wall-to-wall seashore paspalum.

Living and working in such an environment was a huge lifestyle change for me and one that I'll never forget. The poverty is in your face, the country doesn't stop and driving is chaotic to say the least. On arrival, the course construction had started and with no other expats on site you could say I had been thrown in at the deep end. The language barrier was certainly pronounced but luckily I had a great assistant who would translate and start the day in the right direction.

No turf machinery had arrived so everything was built by hand. Everything was carried on top of heads and greens were built by local ladies wearing saris. Construction and grow in numbers were up around 300 and whether they were laying cart paths, transplanting trees or hand sprigging bunker faces, I had workers everywhere. Worker numbers for the adjoining clubhouse, 225 villas and Marriott hotel complex were close to 1000 all of whom lived across the road from the development in a slum.

Once the turf equipment did arrive, I had to personally train, one by one, my 55 strong maintenance team to mow, roll, change holes and rake bunkers etc. It felt like my apprenticeship days all over again! The crew had never seen golf course machinery before, never driven a car for that matter, so for the first few months I was a little on edge, but fortunately there were no accidents. It was a real hands-on role, one that I thoroughly enjoyed and there was a great sense of satisfaction having grown-in a course with the bare minimum.

After three eye-opening years (and India winning the Cricket World Cup) it was time to move on. I had been lucky enough to get a job through Brad Burgess at Sports Turf Solutions (STS) in Malaysia as an agronomist, a different role but one I wanted to gain experience in and also move into South East Asia. Things were looking up until I received a phone call from home.

Being an ex-pat superintendent has many bonuses, but living away from friends and family and missing out on major events like birthdays and weddings can be a real downside. Out of the blue one day my dad called and I automatically knew something was up – dad only calls when it's serious. My mother had been sick for quite some time and after a trip to the doctors our worst fears were confirmed when she was diagnosed with cancer.

Living abroad and hearing this was tough to say the least. I called Brad to say I had to go home and having been through such a situation himself before, he was very supportive. Within weeks I was back home in Brisbane with mum as she started her treatment and to get by I took a job at North Lakes Golf Club.

**The spectacular David McLay Kidd-designed Laucala Island course in Fiji was opened in 2008. Pictured is the course's signature hole – the par five 12th**



**Laucala Island – words don't do it justice**



**The Fijian themed Laucala clubhouse**





Laucala has been home to Mark Stanley since November 2013. He oversees a 33-strong greenkeeping team with assistant Joji (pictured fourth from left)

The par-72 Laucala layout has been integrated seamlessly into the island's incredible landscape. At 6100m from the back tees, it is a visually intimidating prospect with dramatic changes in elevation and narrow fairways

Mum went through her treatment well and with every trip to the doctor the good news kept coming. Mum being mum pushed me to get back overseas which I did, moving to Vietnam where I resided as superintendent at Danang Golf Club. I regret the move now as just six months later mum lost her battle with cancer and I made it home only days before she passed. Cancer is a terrible disease and no sooner had we thought we had it beaten and things were looking up, it took mum away even quicker.

In these difficult times I was very lucky to have some great people in the industry supporting me, among them Brad Burgess and Mark Ecott from STS, Luke Partridge and David Brinkel and also Shane Summerhayes and Paul Dugmore (Floratine). Working overseas and having a strong support base is vital and no more was that apparent than during this time.

## THE ISLAND WAY

Having always kept in touch with Steve in Fiji (I always thought he had the 'dream job'), he contacted me about the role at Laucala. After what I had gone through with mum it sounded like just what I needed and after sending my CV through to the general manager, two weeks later I was on a plane bound for Fiji.

Starting construction in 2006 and opening in 2008, the McLay Kidd-designed Laucala course is a beast (you would expect nothing less when your owner is the co-founder of Red Bull). The par-72 layout has been integrated seamlessly into the island's incredible landscape and at 6100 metres from the back tees it is a visually intimidating prospect with dramatic changes in elevation and narrow fairways. Some tees (like the 4th) have a 50m drop to the fairway below, while the 20m wide fairways place a premium on accuracy (slightly wayward and the jungle will swallow your ball).

The course wends its way through though deep valleys, dense vegetation and around rocky volcanic lava outcrops with only a handful of holes actually meeting the water. One of these is the par five 12th, Laucala's signature hole (see main photo page 14-15). The green sits right on the island's edge and if you miss it to the right you'll be playing your recovery from the beach which wraps itself around one side of the green.

Minimal vegetation was moved during construction as the owner loves his trees and the natural look. Construction would have been a nightmare due to the island's isolation and volatile weather, but somehow they made it happen and the end result is truly spectacular. With the course only





six years old, it is still maturing and there is plenty of ongoing work to be done, including the addition of new native areas and gardens.

As golf superintendent my role is to look after the maintenance of the golf course and some of the resort grounds along with the huge fleet of Toro and Club Car vehicles that drive the rest of the island staff, which total 150. It's a huge operation, one that I share with my ex-pat mechanic Andrew Hollingsworth who has a lot on his hands. He oversees two local Toro mechanics and three local Club Car mechanics.

The greenkeeping team consists entirely of local Fijians, most of whom built the course which is valuable when needing to find faults, drainage pipes and irrigation lines (I have been known to hack through the jungle looking for main lines!). As mentioned earlier I have one assistant, Joji, along with a spray technician, two irrigation techs, a lead supervisor and a groundsman supervisor who make up my senior team. Under them, 22 staff take care of the daily jobs.

My job as superintendent is made so much easier thanks to my assistant Joji. Growing up on Laucala, I promoted Joji to the role of assistant not long after starting. His local knowledge not just of the golf course but the island itself is priceless. He was part of the original course construction crew, grew the course in and can operate just about anything.



Being an assistant in a tight crew can be tough, especially keeping the boys happy and in line along with the responsibility of needing to get the job done. He has stepped up admirably and the next step for him will be some computer courses along with some online turf management training.

Having no tee times and booking sheets, our day starts at 7am ('Fiji time' remember) not knowing who or how many golfers we will see for the day. In my first month here I saw just three, yes three! My day consists of getting everything cut and prepped hoping to see a golfer rip it up.

All this quiet time gives me a chance to do those jobs you couldn't usually do on a busy track, so in

Course renovations on Laucala are made somewhat easier with views like this

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Above right: Only a handful of Laucala's holes meet the sea, but when they do the vistas are spectacular

Above: Assistant Joji mows Laucala's *Cathay zoysia japonica* fairways. Growing up on the island, Joji was recently promoted to the assistant's role

The Laucala greens are Novotek hybrid couchgrass



the coming months fairway drainage and a total bunker re-construction is on the cards. We have also just constructed a practice putter and its growing in and the driving range needs some attention. Also high on the priority list is a new wash bay facility.

Laucala is grassed with *Cathay zoysia japonica* on the fairways, which is perfect for the clay beneath and the high annual rainfall we receive (up to 4m a year on average). It has a moderate fine leaf texture, exhibits good density and has a high pest tolerance threshold which means I can keep the use of fungicides and pesticides to a minimum.

By contrast, the greens are grassed with the Australian-developed Novotek hybrid couchgrass which requires some work. One of the major changes I have introduced since starting is the way we manage the greens. We have stopped using iron and urea and introduced a Floratine programme to the surfaces which have responded well. We had a poor root system with high salts and sodium, so regular flushes and soil applications have been made to combat this. My fungicide usage has also decreased which is a bonus as I'm not a fan and I'm sure the owner isn't also as the course was designed to have as minimal impact on the environment as possible.

We have just finished renovating greens which according to the crew is the first time this has been carried out in two years. We used the Graden scarifier at -25mm twice over the greens and pulled out a lot of thatch which had built up. We then hollow

tined, applied dolomite and Profile before giving them a healthy topdress. Regular needle-tining and the odd core has also helped them breath.

In terms of their preparation, due to the low number of rounds we can go easy on the greens. I try to cut five days a week, sometimes six. We are working our cutting heights down from 4mm to 3mm at the moment, while the fairways and approaches are kept at 10mm and tees at 8mm. When we have higher stress periods due to the weather I sometimes leave the greens for a few days then go out with a double cut and roll. The weather plays a huge part out in our course management practices and I try to needle tine as much as I can due to our poor drainage.

Being so isolated you rely on your team and also planning ahead as getting supplies to the island can be time-consuming. Six months' worth of fertiliser and chemical orders are made at a time and then it's the hustle of getting barge space for the overnight trip from Viti Levu to Laucala, considering all the other departments' orders. Fuel, engineering goods, farm items, gas, alcohol, cigarettes, tyres... you name it, it'll be on the barge. As with all jobs there are challenges, but with an office like Laucala it eases the pain somewhat.

Living on an island is not for everyone and this is my second stint having been on the construction crew of the Thomson Perrett-designed Hamilton Island Golf Club on Dent Island in The Whitsundays. Loving anything that is associated with the ocean, Laucala offers fishing, spearfishing and snorkelling for myself afterhours and with my jetski on its way over as we speak, that'll keep me preoccupied.

I try and get off the island once a month and head over to the main island (Viti Levu) and catch up with Steve (Natadola) and fellow ex-pat Australian Dave Brennan (Denarau) to share a few cold ones, trade stories and play some golf.

Working on Laucala has been a massive change of pace and is an experience in itself. With a stunning course to look after, combined with a very particular owner, no committee members and crazy 5am golfers that surprise you while changing holes, it is a very unique set-up. 'Fiji time' is something you must experience once in your life, even better when it's with work! 🌴





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At the 30th Australian Turfgrass Conference on the Gold Coast, Byron Bay Golf Club course superintendent Shaun Cross was named the recipient of the AGCSA's Excellence in Golf Course Management Award. Presented in partnership with John Deere, the award is just reward for Cross who over the past decade has overseen a mountain of improvement works to transform Byron Bay Golf Club into one of the best regional courses around.



**JOHN DEERE**  
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## Byron Bay's coming of age

If you have made the trek to Byron Bay and driven in from the north, you would have passed the town's much talked about welcome sign. Written across a plank of wood, tacked underneath the official 'Welcome to Byron Bay' sign, are the words 'Cheer up, slow down, chill out'. Given Byron Bay's reputation for being home to an eclectic and hedonistic mix of alternative lifestylers, artists and backpackers, it is a very apt mantra and leaves you in no doubt about the vibe of this unique northern New South Wales township.

It doesn't hold true, however, for one of the town's residents – Byron Bay Golf Club course superintendent Shaun Cross. Aside from the first bit – a cheerier bloke you would be hard pressed to meet – it's the 'slow down' and 'chill out' parts that Cross hasn't quite managed to get his head around in the 11 years he has been employed at the club.

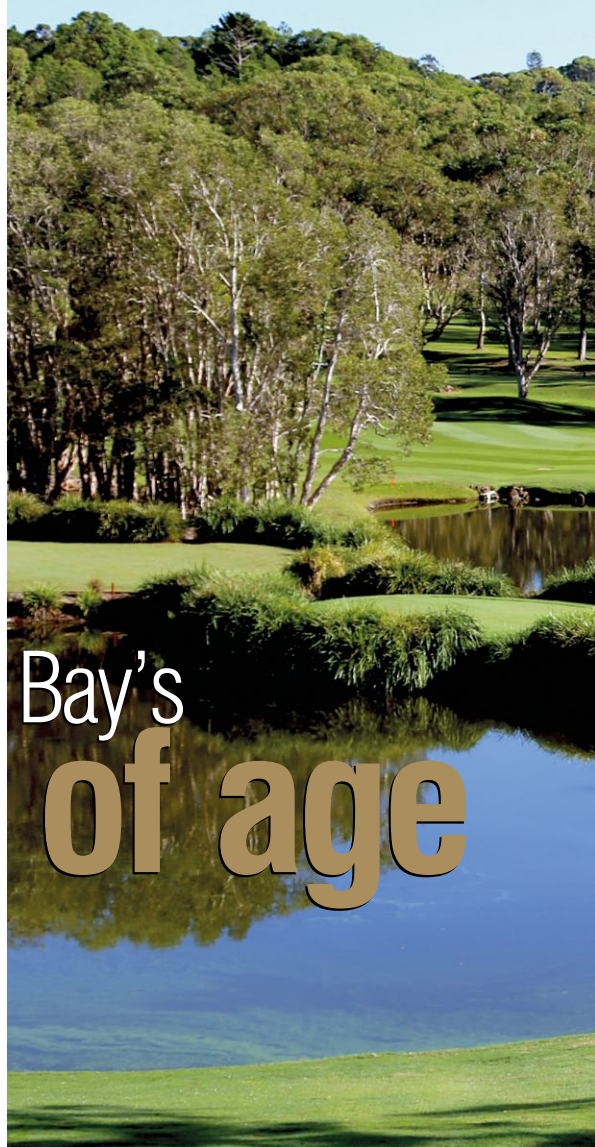
If you have seen the amount of work undertaken on the course over the past decade, you soon understand why it has been near impossible for Cross, his long-time assistant Garry Kunz and their small yet dedicated crew to 'slow down' or 'chill out'. It's simply not an option when you manage and maintain a regional golf course, especially one that has been as progressive as Byron Bay.

Whether it has been fairway conversions, green surrounds and tee reconstructions, through to the construction of water bodies, cart paths and upgrading irrigation infrastructure, Cross has overseen a raft of improvement works that have helped put the course on the golfing map. And all this on top of upholding very high presentation standards which the course has become known for.

On the back of this work and combined with it successfully hosting one of the biggest events on the PGA of Australia's E-Z-Go Legends Tour, the course made its debut in Golf Australia magazine's Top 100 Public Access Courses rankings list in 2011, coming in at 79. When that list was released again in 2013, the course jumped a further six places to 73.

Through such achievements and seeing the effort put in by the course maintenance team, late last year Byron Bay club captain Peter Sinclair nominated Cross for the GCSAQ's Chesterfield/John Deere Superintendent Achievement Award. In his nomination Sinclair wrote: "Shaun has, in the space of 10 years, transformed a 'good track' into a first-class regional golf course with arguably the best greens in the district. Day in, day out with a crew of himself and four others, he produces a golf course in fantastic condition which draws many favourable comments from members and our large number of visitors. Shaun is a very disciplined, meticulous and professional superintendent with a detailed and passionate approach to his chosen career."

Sinclair's comments were backed up by glowing recommendations from club president Rob MacMillan and club professional Greg Stewart, the latter stating: "Shaun's professionalism, knowledge, commitment to not only the golf course but to his







WORDS AND PHOTOS: BRETT ROBINSON

team is something I have not witnessed before. Shaun always presents the course in immaculate condition (and) I constantly receive compliments from both members and guests."

With support like that it was no surprise when Cross duly collected the GCSAQ award at the annual Queensland Golf Industry Awards in March. He then saluted again in front of more than 280 industry peers at the recent Australian Turfgrass Conference on the Gold Coast when he won the AGCSA's longest-running award, the Excellence in Golf Course Management Award, becoming just the fourth GCSAQ member to win it since 1990.

## GOOD KARMA, GOOD FORTUNE

It's almost karma that Cross should end up ensconced at Byron Bay Golf Club. It was while on a surfing road trip from the Gold Coast to Sydney in 2002, having just returned from 12 months working and snowboarding his way around Canada, when Cross saw the job advertised at Byron Bay. Turning the car around and driving back up for the interview, the former Beaudesert boy impressed enough to be given a shot.

It was to be Cross's first superintendent posting and came after a somewhat itinerant career which to that point had included stints as an assistant at Banff

Springs Hotel and Golf Resort (Alberta, Canada) and Bear Lakes Country Club (Florida, USA), as well as earlier placements at North Ryde Golf Club, Royal Pines and Hills Educational Foundation, the latter two where he served his apprenticeship.

Just 25 at the time, Cross arrived in December 2002 to find what was your typical regional town golf course. Budgets were tight, the course had a number of inherent issues which impacted its maintenance, while the general course environment, aside from the topography and its outlook, was rather bland and certainly not synonymous with Byron Bay's vibrant reputation.

It was just over a year into his tenure when the club, through some good fortune, embarked on a course of action that a decade later has resulted in what Cross and his crew present today. As Cross wrote in ATM Volume 11.1, the club was approached in 2004 by the developer of The Byron at Byron Resort across the road who wanted to offload treated effluent water for reuse on the course.

Although initially blocked by the Byron Bay Shire Council, the golf club managed to agree and have pass through council the reuse of this water in its native garden areas. It also included a provision that the developer upgrade the club's main pump station and irrigation infrastructure.

**Top left: 2014 AGCSA Excellence in Golf Course Management Award winner Shaun Cross (centre) with Byron Bay Golf Club captain Peter Sinclair (left) and assistant superintendent Garry Kunz**

**Above: Thanks to a range of course improvements and the fastidious standards set by superintendent Shaun Cross, over the past decade Byron Bay Golf Club has developed into one of Australia's finest regional courses. Pictured is the par four 9th**





**With only a small yet dedicated team to call upon, the superintendent role at Byron Bay Golf Club is very hands-on**

**By the end of 2014 nine of Byron Bay's fairways will have been converted from Queensland blue couch to Wintergreen couchgrass**



This sparked a flurry of major works including five new holding ponds which not only increased capacity by 36 megalitres but also provided a larger collection area for storm water runoff which assisted drainage of the front nine holes. Other components included 14 kilometres of drip line to distribute the effluent water to new landscape areas, an expanded and fully automated Rain Bird irrigation system as well as a new variable speed pump system, all of which combined now mean that 85 per cent of the club's playing surfaces are under automated irrigation.

With these fundamentals in place, Cross has in the years since been able to rectify a number of problematic areas, with a key focus on weather-proofing the course to enable play 52 weeks a year, an all important aspect for a club located in a tourist hotspot. As the ledger stands this winter, Cross has reconstructed 14 green surrounds, added 36 new bunkers, reconstructed three fairways and converted nine and modified tee complexes on 12 holes (this included totally rebuilding three of the four par three tee complexes). Budget constraints have meant the work has been spread over a number of years and Cross estimates that it will be at least another three years before all works are completed.

To add interest and strategy around what were originally uninspiring greens complexes, and to also remedy significant drainage issues, the greens surrounds were the first areas targeted. New

bunkers were constructed and mounding added using fill from the lakes excavation (fairway mounds were also incorporated across the course with this material to assist with stormwater diversion). New irrigation was installed and Wintergreen couchgrass solid turfed to replace the existing warm-season mix.

With the exception of the 3rd, 15th and 17th, the 328 greens were left relatively untouched, while two new TifEagle greens – the near 1000m<sup>2</sup> 4th and the new chipper – were constructed to accommodate the new lake infrastructure. The idea was to trial the newer ultradwarf hybrid couch variety with a view of doing all greens at a later date. While the chipper was a success, the 4th has large areas of contamination and may be converted back to 328.

The conversion of the greens surrounds also carried over to the fairways. When Cross first arrived at Byron Bay, the fairways were a mix of native Queensland blue couch, kikuyu and carpet grass. For a number of years he battled to get them back to the native blue couch, but its inability to handle wet conditions, traffic and wear led to Cross pushing for the switch to Wintergreen.

After doing all the par threes in one hit, the par four and five holes have been dissected in the middle and progressively converted across in halves each season. The existing blue couch is sprayed out with two applications of glyphosate before being scarified back to the soil and then opened up with numerous passes of the Ryan Tracaire to make voids throughout the surface. Wintergreen sprigs, harvested by scarifying an already converted fairway, are then broadcast using an old modified topdresser before being tyre rolled in and irrigated.

Due to the realignment of some holes because of the holding ponds and effluent dam, 37 new tee decks were constructed and landscaped with native plantings. These tees have also been converted to Wintergreen with TifSport used on the par threes.

Cart paths have also been a big focus and the club has been fortunate to source mostly free concrete from major works being undertaken on a number of nearby Pacific Highway interchanges. At the drop of a hat, Cross will receive a phone call saying that anything from a couple of metres up to three fully-laden cement trucks are on their way over. With the help of volunteers who do the bulk of the form work, Cross has a couple of areas prepped and ready to go at a time and to date close to 600 lineal metres have been laid.

"If you had seen the course 11 years ago, and I mean no disrespect whatsoever to those here previously, it has really changed," comments Cross. "I have been lucky to come on board at a time when the club had the opportunity to make these changes and take the course in a new direction.

"I'm very proud of what we have achieved. Sure at times I would like to have seen things happen a bit quicker, but for a smaller club we have achieved a lot. Life is very different when you have a Board that is proactive and shows confidence and a belief



in the way that you conduct your maintenance operations. I have been very lucky that both the past club captain Mark Wilson and current captain Peter Sinclair have been very course driven and shared my vision for moving the course forward."

## FINE-TUNING

Along with watching the course gradually evolve, Cross has also made a number of changes to his management techniques. Many of these have been forced upon him due to budget constraints or staff cutbacks, but despite that Cross has been able to maintain the high presentation standards which he fastidiously sets. From a peak of seven full-timers and two casuals when he started, Cross now runs with a crew of just four full-timers and a casual mechanic. That means Cross plays a very hands-on role as superintendent and has had to streamline operations and become smarter in how he approaches various tasks.

After seven years of doing two major greens renovations a year, that has been scaled back to one major in early September and a minor at the end of January. For the major, Cross alternates each year between 5/8 inch hollow tines on the Toro ProCore and 1/2 inch hollows on the Vertidrain as well as heavily scarifying them with a tractor-mounted CD36. The minor renovation at the end of the summer holiday period generally comprises a 6mm mini-tine and light verti-cut.

Dusting and grooming form a critical part of Cross's greens management programme and he will go out fortnightly during the peak seasons before easing it back to monthly through the autumn and winter months. The 328, which performs exceptionally well at Byron Bay, is worked pretty hard and Cross operates on a 'little and often' philosophy when it comes to nutrition and dusting. Aside from putting down a base application at renovation time, Cross now uses a lot of liquid



Byron Bay's beautiful par three 3rd

fertilisers on the greens, while Primo has become a much utilised tool around all areas of the course, especially as staffing levels have declined.

An equipment roll over programme that Cross instituted shortly after arriving has also been fine-tuned over time and has played a major role in ensuring that the plant with which his crew maintain the course is reliable and efficient.

"Now that we have the course up to a level, we're working hard to keep it there," says Cross. "If you can keep nipping away and maintain those levels, it's a lot easier to keep on top of things. Once you let go of things, it can take a lot of work to get it back. When I was working in Canada, the director of golf there had a motto that you treated each day like it was a tournament. I try to run that philosophy at Byron even though it has become a little harder recently with the drop in staff numbers.

"I'm big on the detail and some would say I'm too anal, but that's just who I am. I'm meticulous and we try to deliver that high standard of presentation for our members day in, day out as well as for our social golfers who are very important."

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Since 2007, Byron Bay has hosted consecutive major tournaments on the E-Z-Go Legends Tour, with past winners Ian Baker-Finch and Peter Senior heaping praise on the course



More than 600 lineal metres of cart paths using concrete sourced from nearby major road works has helped to keep golfers on the course during the wetter months

## HIGH PRAISE

Thanks to all these changes and high level of conditioning, the recognition continues to grow for Byron Bay. As well as its debut in the rankings list, the club has received major publicity through its hosting of the Australian Seniors PGA Championship and Australian Legends Tour Championship.

Byron Bay hosted the Seniors PGA Championship from 2007-2009 and after it moved south to Sydney the Schweppes Nor East Australian Legends Tour Championship took its place from 2010. Held the week before Christmas, it is the final event on the E-Z-Go Legends Tour and always attracts a strong field as it provides players with their final opportunity to secure Order of Merit points.

Peter Senior is one such player who has taken to the Byron Bay course and after winning the Seniors PGA in 2009 has gone on to win the past two (2012 and 2013) Legends Tour Championships. Mike Harwood (2010) and Ian Baker-Finch (2011) have also etched their names onto the trophy and after his win Baker-Finch donated money to the club so that it could upgrade its chainsaw. While very complimentary of the course, he noted that there were too many trees which made the layout extremely tight. Needless to say the chainsaw has been put to very good use to not only open up the playing corridors but also eliminate shade issues and improve turf health.

The positive feedback from the players continues to grow with each tournament and as part of Cross's nomination for both the GCSAQ and AGCSA awards Sinclair included the following correspondence from Senior and Baker-Finch:

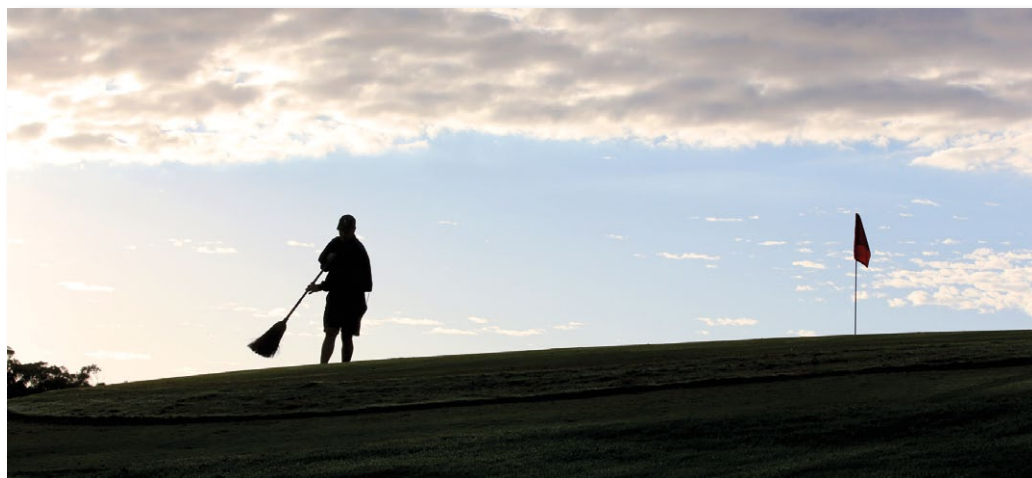
Senior wrote: "I had heard the course was pretty good from other players, but I was greatly surprised when I played it. I found out Shaun was the super and went to congratulate him on what a terrific job he was doing. I have played the tournament a number of times now and can't believe how good the course is presented. The greens are firm and have as good a putting surface as you can get. The fairways are really good and the short rough makes it very difficult to hit the greens. This is how a golf course should be set up. It's guys like Shaun who make the game so enjoyable for us."

Baker-Finch added: "Every credit must go to Shaun for the way he presents the golf course for the Legends Tour Championship. It's just amazing how good the course plays and how excellent the greens are manicured. I believe Byron Bay Golf Club should be a model course for all superintendents to visit and copy Shaun's standards, which amaze me on such a tight budget. The course is simply the best country golf course I've played in NSW."

It's those sort of comments, together with the recent awards, that have been a real feather in the cap not only for Cross but also his team.

"It has been tremendous to get that recognition from the players and your peers, especially for the staff," says Cross. "We have been together as a crew now for seven years which is pretty rare and their support and effort has made a huge difference. I'm very lucky to have a loyal, hard-working and dedicated bunch of guys who consistently produce high quality surfaces and continue to push the improvements we are making to the course."

"Byron has always been well renowned for its backpacker lifestyle, beaches, pubs and musical festivals, but never really golf. We have tried to put the course on the map and with the improvements we have made over the years I think we have been very successful in doing that and hopefully we can keep that up. It's still a regional golf course, but it has stepped up to a whole new level." 🌱



Attention to detail is a key focus of Cross's course management philosophy at Byron Bay





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The AGCSA and STA Graduate of the Year awards, presented in partnership with Toro Australia, represent an investment in the future of the turf management profession. ATM profiles impressive 2014 winners Ethan Bell from Wangaratta Golf Club in Victoria and Luke Cooney from Hale School in Perth, WA.

At the 30th Australian Turfgrass Conference on the Gold Coast, 19-year-old Wangaratta Golf Club assistant Ethan Bell became just the third VGCSA representative since 1996 to win the AGCSA Graduate of the Year Award, presented in partnership with Toro Australia. The youngest of this year's crop of finalists, Bell beat home a strong field that included Simon Winzar (GCSAQ), Chris Varty (GCSAWA), Kurt Eldridge (NSWGCSEA), Luke Merchant (SAGCSA), Simon Snedden (STA ACT) and Andrew Burgess (TGCSA).

In collecting the award, Bell paid special tribute to his parents, Wangaratta Golf Club and Wodonga TAFE teachers Michael Dove, Graham Hart and Graeme Goninon for helping him achieve so much in just a short amount of time. For his efforts, Bell receives a fantastic prize courtesy of award sponsors Toro which will see him attend the Winter School for Turf Managers at the University of Massachusetts along with a trip to the GCSAA Golf Industry Show and Toro's manufacturing headquarters.

With a solid country upbringing under his belt, it was at the end of Year 9 at Wangaratta's Galen Catholic College that Bell got his first taste of turf management. Family friend Andrew Heslin, who owned local business Calibre Turf Management, was looking for a summer casual and duly hired Bell. That summer Bell was involved in a major turf, landscaping and irrigation job in Stanley, Victoria that whetted his appetite considerably.

Unsure whether to continue on with Year 10 or to search for full-time employment, Bell approached then Wangaratta Golf Club superintendent David Warnaar about working on the ground staff. The club was keen but due to budget constraints could only offer Bell a part-time role. That led Bell to exploring the path of a school-based apprenticeship which both the club and school agreed to. That would see Bell spend four days of the week continuing on with Year 10 schooling and one day at the golf course.



Proving his worth during that initial year, Bell approached the club's management towards the end of Year 10 seeking a full-time apprenticeship. Impressed by the work ethic and maturity of their young recruit, the club duly obliged and in February 2011 Bell began the first of eight trade school blocks at Wodonga TAFE. On many occasions Bell had the teachers stunned with his depth of knowledge, particularly in relation to irrigation systems, pest identification and machinery maintenance.

Later that year Bell found himself heavily involved in preparing the Wangaratta course for its first Pro-Am tournament since 1994. Being held in November, the timing of the \$15,000 tournament could not have been better for Bell who was coming to the end of his first year of his studies.

Some two months out from the tournament, preparations began in earnest for the event with the Wangaratta crew of three working long hours to fine-tune the course's surfaces. As well as fertilising the fairways with a 12-0-0 and 6 per cent water soluble iron mix, the greens were rolled and mown at 2.5mm 5-6 times per week to generate consistent pace. To minimise any possible thatch build up, nitrogen was kept to minimum with the greens only receiving 0.05kg N/100m<sup>2</sup> at the best of times, while phosphorus, potassium and various other trace elements were given a generous dose.

In the days leading up to the event a premium was placed on surface presentation and ensuring all the finer details were in order. All surfaces were cut, bunkers raked, markers and holes moved and general course inspections made for any debris or jobs that may have been missed.





Wangaratta Golf Club in regional Victoria is the home of 2014 AGCSA Graduate of the Year winner Ethan Bell

## STEPPING UP

2012 would prove to be a definitive year for Bell. At the start of the year the club decided to cut back the hours of full-time groundsman Charlie Parkinson to two days a week because of financial issues. While disappointed for his crewmate, the change meant Bell was promoted to second in charge. With that came extra responsibility and a change from the basic apprentice tasks to more involved course management activities including fertiliser and pesticide applications and calibration of spray equipment through to machinery maintenance, repair, parts ordering and organising volunteers.

That winter Warnaar was successful in gaining the superintendent's role at Warnambool Golf Club and while the club looked for his replacement they gave Bell the opportunity to act as interim superintendent. Taking over the day-to-day running of the golf course at just 17 years of age was a huge responsibility, but one that Bell relished. Initially only required to fill the role for 3-4 weeks, Bell would eventually take charge for almost three months.

During his time as interim superintendent, Bell experienced his fair share of challenges. In his first week Wangaratta received record rainfall which caused nearby rivers to rise rapidly, destroying the course's irrigation suction line. No sooner had that been replaced and upgraded, the greens and surrounds were hit hard by winter fusarium due to the large amount of rain and the humidity post-storm. Once the ground had dried out Bell went out with a fungicide application which the surfaces responded well too and within days the disease had started to grow out.

In late August 2012, the club employed Rick Lee as its new course superintendent who arrived from The National Golf Club on Victoria's Mornington Peninsula. Dropping back to the assistant's role Bell has continued to play an integral role in the management of the course and impress the club with his level of maturity and expertise.

In 2013 Bell started his third and final year of study at Wodonga TAFE and among that year's programme was a week-long trip to visit a number of turf facilities in Melbourne. Among those included were Huntingdale Golf Club, Royal Melbourne Golf Club, Kingston Heath Golf Club, Flemington Racecourse, Toro Australia, the MCG and AAMI Park.

Completing his studies later that year and having the club sign off on his trade credentials, the good news continued early in 2014 when Bell received a phone call from Wodonga TAFE informing him he had been nominated for the VGCSA Apprentice of the Year Award. Bell beat home a strong field and as well as collecting a cheque for \$1000 qualified for the final of the national award.

"I am very honoured to have been chosen as the AGCSA Graduate of the Year," said Bell during his acceptance speech on the Gold Coast. "It has been over four years since I began working at Wangaratta and I am still enjoying it more than ever. The course has come on in leaps and bounds, first through David and now with Rick and it's now one of the best courses in the district. There is no bigger joy than to work in a happy and productive environment alongside colleagues that you can call your mates. I couldn't have chosen a better career path."

Far left: Ethan Bell with Toro's Australia and Asia managing director Richard Walne





**STA National Sports Turf Graduate of the year winner Luke Cooney. Earlier this year Cooney received the C.H. Bailey & Sons Perpetual Shield for best WA sports turf graduate**

**After five years at James Oval, Cooney has moved to Hale School (pictured below) in September 2013, one of WA's largest and oldest independent schools**

## COONEY CLAIMS STA SPORTS TURF GRADUATE AWARD

While a Victorian claimed the AGCSA Graduate of the Year Award, it was a former Victorian who now calls Western Australia home who took out the Sports Turf Association's National Sports Turf Graduate of the Year Award. Luke Cooney from Hale School in Perth became the second STA WA representative in four years to win the national award and will now attend the 2015 Sportsfield and Grounds Forum conducted by award sponsors Toro in Minnesota, USA.

Cooney was unable to accept his award in person at the Gold Coast conference on account of being in Brazil where he was helping conduct inspections of pitches used for the FIFA World Cup. Hale School grounds coordinator Chris Kercheval was on hand to accept the award on Cooney's behalf and commented on his crewmate's passion and drive since joining the team in September 2013.

"Luke has only been with us a short while, but I can vouch for the extreme passion and knowledge he has for his profession," said Kercheval. "Luke wanted to pass on that it is very humbling to win the award and that he will endeavour to use this opportunity as a stepping stone in what he hopes will be a long and fruitful career within the sports turf industry."

Cooney's journey in turf has certainly been unconventional and it all started after he moved from his home town of Melbourne to Perth following the first year of university. Studying economics at the time, Cooney decided to transfer his degree across to Curtin University in Perth and after packing his 1986 Toyota Corona to the brim with his worldly possessions duly set up home in the West.

A mad cricketer, Cooney joined the local Tuart Hill Cricket Club in North Perth and it was during his third year of his studies that it dawned on him that a career as a financial planner didn't exactly appeal. Around the same time, the curator at the cricket club, an Englishman, left to head back home which left the club without anyone to prepare the

decks. Together with a mate, Cooney put his hand up to volunteer to prepare the pitches and with the help of Ben Rodgers from the WACA they saw that season out.

The following year the club offered Cooney the curator's role and a career in turf management was officially born. After a few seasons there and a winter working at the 27-hole Collier Park Golf Course, Cooney received a phone call from the University of Western Australia (UWA) offering him a job as cricket curator.

For the next five years he called James Oval home and during that time he completed his turf management apprenticeship at Challenger Institute of TAFE, culminating in him receiving the C.H. Bailey & Sons Perpetual Shield for best WA sports turf graduate.

In September 2013 Cooney left James Oval to join the grounds crew at Hale School, one of the largest and oldest independent schools in WA. Working under Kercheval, a former Victorian himself, Cooney assists in the preparation and presentation of 11 hectares of sports turf, including five cricket ovals which each have a turf wicket plus two turf practice wicket blocks.

In a self-penned article that appeared in the January 2014 edition of the STA WA publication Turf Grass Times, Cooney commented that switching to a career in turf had been extremely rewarding and that he had truly found his calling.

"It was during my time at UWA that I have my fondest memory in the turf industry," wrote Cooney. "It was not of a touring cricket side or Perth Glory banging a few in the back of the net at training, but of an engineering student. While mowing the outfield on James Oval, this student rode over on his fixie and waved me down. I thought to myself 'Here we go'.

"He stopped me and said 'Mate, you don't know how much we love coming out here to this manicured oval, taking our shoes off and throwing the Frisbee around for an hour. We cram all day for exams and this is our only release. Mate, you're bloody awesome and we love your work'. It made my day knowing that I made his."

"In recent months I have moved to Hale School and I am enjoying every minute of it. Chris, head cricket curator Nick Ling and all the boys in the grounds department at Hale do a fantastic job in what is a very impressive set up. I am very thankful to Chris for offering me the job at Hale School and I just hope I can add something of value to the team.

"My mum's only advice when it came to me choosing a career was to make sure I did something that I loved. I not only love it, I have found a home within the turf industry."

**Editor's Note:** The section on Luke Cooney has been adapted with permission from the January 2014 (Issue No.36) edition of STA WA's Turf Grass Times. 🌱



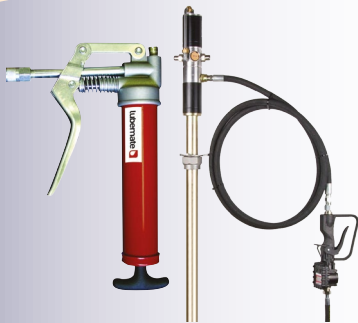
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# A verdant career

It was in 1983 when he joined the Turf Research and Advisory Institute that John Neylan took his initial steps in a career that would see him become one of Australia's most influential agronomists. That career was officially recognised recently when he was bestowed the industry's highest honour – the AGCSA Distinguished Service Award.



It took nearly 30 years, but it was a rev up from former Royal Sydney Golf Club course superintendent John Odell that would finally put John Neylan at ease. Sitting across the boardroom table from Odell at the AGCSA head office in Melbourne in early 2009, the then joint AGCSA general manager and AGCSATech manager had just bared his soul to the AGCSA's Board members who were grilling him about taking on the role as the association's sole GM.

Odell, ever the master motivator, had just listened to Neylan relay his fears and insecurities about taking on the role and questioning whether he had the skills to do the job justice. Odell doesn't mince his words and once Neylan had finished he proceeded to lay down the law in his own indomitable style. "You're highly respected and well known throughout the industry, you're the man we want for the job!" Enough said.

It seems strange to think that a man as widely regarded as Neylan, who since the early 1980s had carved out one of the most influential careers in the turf industry, should have had such levels of self-doubt in taking on the role, but it was those incredibly reassuring words from someone whom he had the utmost respect for that banished any lingering reservations Neylan had about his place in the industry.

Five years on that status was firmly cemented when Neylan was bestowed the AGCSA's highest accolade – the Distinguished Service Award – at the recent 30th Australian Turfgrass Conference on the Gold Coast. The 24th recipient of the award, Neylan was recognised for a career which has now spanned

more than 35 years and benefited a generation of turf managers and no doubt many more to come.

Originally hailing from Mildura in regional Victoria, it was an interest in soils and soil conservation which would inexorably lead Neylan into turf. After stints with Universal Soils Laboratory and then the Latrobe Valley Water and Sewerage Board, it was 1982 when he joined the Victorian Government's Department of Agriculture as a reclaimed water extension officer. It was through this role that Neylan would make his first forays into the turf industry and ultimately led to him gaining a job with the department's Turf Research and Advisory Institute (TRAI) which is where his passion for turf and turf research blossomed.

Following a highly productive 17-year period with the TRAI and then its commercial spin off Turfgrass Technology, it was in 2000 when Neylan made a career-defining step. Having established a reputation as one of this country's most knowledgeable agronomists, Neylan was sought out by the AGCSA to establish the association's new technical division – AGCSATech. Starting with a blank canvas, the brief was to set up AGCSATech's suite of agronomic services and testing and reporting protocols, as well as undertake golf-specific research funded by money generated through AGCSATech. Over the ensuing years AGCSATech would grow into what is now regarded as one of Australia's leading independent agronomy services.

In 2006 Neylan's endeavour was rewarded when he was appointed joint general manager of the AGCSA and some three years later he was running the show, stepping down eventually at the



2011 conference in Adelaide. In the years since he has continued to remain at the forefront of the industry by operating a highly successful agronomic consultancy where his expert advice and wise counsel has been sought by superintendents and turf managers across Australia and around the world.

It has indeed been a verdant and fulfilling career and the body of work Neylan has amassed over the years is nothing short of astounding. His research has encompassed everything from bentgrass and couchgrass evaluation trials, sand type and soil amendment studies, *Poa annua* control trials, reclaimed water use management and water quality monitoring, wetting agent trials and more recently golf course benchmarking.

From this work Neylan has become a mainstay of seminars, workshops and conferences both within Australia and internationally and it was on the eve of the recent Gold Coast conference that Australian Turfgrass Management Journal caught up with the 58-year-old to reflect on his award and his time in turf.

**ATM: Congratulations John on your highly deserved AGCSA Distinguished Service Award. What does the honour mean to you?**

**John Neylan:** It's an incredible privilege and quite humbling to be awarded it. I was thinking of the people that have won the award previous – Peter McMaugh, Peter Martin, Peter Sawyer, Doug Robinson and John Odell – people that I looked at when I came into the turf industry with huge admiration and respect, so to be classified in that same group is pretty incredible.

It's very nice to be acknowledged by your peers and that people think enough of what you have done. I still look at myself as being someone who is sort of new in the industry and at times feels a little bit insecure and unsure of my place, but I guess the award is reinforcement that I do have a place and have earned that to some extent.

**ATM: How did a humble soil scientist start on the road to becoming one of the industry's pre-eminent agronomists?**

**JN:** It was during my time as a reclaimed water extension officer with the Department of Agriculture that I was introduced to the world of turf. My role was to liaise with end users of recycled water and the interesting aspect was that most of it was being used on turf. The work that I had done previously on salinity and salt-affected soils drew me into turf and that's when I started to interact with the department's Turf Research and Advisory Institute. We did a project together at Waverley Park footy ground which ultimately led to a job working with them as a research/extension officer.

Once I got involved in turf I found it such an interesting area because of its relationship to sport. The TRAI facility in Frankston was large and had a bowling green, lawn tennis court, various



turf plots and a par three golf hole which really peaked my interest in research. I conducted my first ever herbicide trial there – killing *Poa* surprisingly enough!

It was an area where I saw that a lot of things could be done and to the credit of the people there at the time, like Max Fielder, Dr Mary Lush and Terry Woodcock, there was a real atmosphere around research which made me want to become involved.

**ATM: During your time at the TRAI and then subsequently when it became Turfgrass Technology you were involved in some pretty significant research work. What stands out?**

**JN:** Looking back it was a very productive period and a lot of the work we did still holds up today. One that really sticks out was a massive couch selection project for the MCC where we collected between 400-500 individual plants. The spin-off from that was the development of grasses used for both the wickets and original reconstruction of the MCG outfield to a sand profile, which is where Legend couchgrass had its origin.

When the TRAI closed and Turfgrass Technology came into being, a number of the projects we had funded through the Horticultural Research and Development Council came across as well. Those included the putting green trials at Royal Melbourne Golf Club where we looked at different cutting heights and rolling regimes and the three-year sand types and sand amendments trial at Holmesglen TAFE.

Another really interesting piece of work was the detailed water quality monitoring trials conducted at Werribee Golf Club, Kingston Links and Peninsula Country Club. At the time there was nervousness about golf courses and the potential for pollution

John Neylan's status within the Australian turf industry was firmly cemented at the recent Australian Turfgrass Conference when he was named the 2014 recipient of the AGCSA Distinguished Service Award. The 24th recipient of the award, Neylan joins the likes of fellow winners John Odell, Peter McMaugh and Doug Robinson

**Doing what he does best – informing turf managers and making them think about and question their management practices**





A love for research and an ability to determine what needs researching has seen Neylan produce some of the Australian turf industry's most groundbreaking studies during his 35-plus year career



so we took regular water samples coming into and out of the properties as well as water bodies within the property.

**ATM:** It was late 1999 when you were approached by the AGCSA Board to head up the association's new technical arm AGCSATech. What sort of impact did this move have on your career?

**JN:** Going to the AGCSA was the best thing I did from a career point of view. Golf course management is the high-end of turfgrass management, there's no question about that, and my time at the AGCSA really immersed me in that area of the industry and took my expertise and understanding of it to a whole new level.

It was a really exciting time because the AGCSA had done some strategic planning and had a vision to progress itself as an entity. I have tremendous admiration for the work that CEO Euan Laird did in developing the AGCSA and along with the support of the Boards at that time they dragged the AGCSA into a new era.

It was an interesting time as there was a lot of negative reaction from the trade about AGCSATech starting up, but to the credit of then president Peter Frewin and the AGCSA Board, they stood firm which was really pleasing. I still recall the very first disease sample from Michael Bradbery at Manly Golf Club and soil sample from David Warwick at Avondale. Not long after that John Odell engaged AGCSATech at Royal Sydney and that was quite a boost also.

**ATM:** What do you think you achieved in setting up AGCSATech?

**JN:** If I was to look at it from a fairly selfish point of view, I think AGCSATech provided a focus for the organisation. Together with Andrew Peart, who came on board in 2002, we did some very innovative research and I am very proud of the body of work we achieved. We ended up doing two major bentgrass cultivar trials, which if we hadn't have done there wouldn't be any independent research in this area in Australia. We also co-funded the significant warm-season grass trials with Don Loch in Queensland and in the later years carried out the country's first major golf course benchmarking project.

The one I was really passionate about in my latter days with the AGCSA was the University of Melbourne golf course biodiversity project. The work that has come out of that has been quite stunning, but we have failed a bit to grasp the full value of it and sell it back to the industry. As an industry we are still very much focused on playing surfaces and due to this obsession for speed and firmness we have lost a little bit of momentum in terms of looking at the value of the whole property.

One of the big involvements AGCSATech had and something I am very proud of is the work we did with the AFL. We took ground monitoring procedures from nothing and through some hard knocks and criticism along the way we developed the standards that are used today. The AFL

A long-time lecturer and sessional teacher in the TAFE system, Neylan has played a big role in teaching the next generation of turf managers such as the group from Wodonga TAFE's Diploma of Sports Turf Management course



CONTINUED ON PAGE 34



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Golf Course Superintendent  
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Interacting and learning off superintendents and turf managers has been one of the most rewarding aspects of Neylan's involvement in the industry



## CONTINUED FROM PAGE 32

virtually took them on in their entirety and Andrew continues to do a tremendous job with what is a very demanding code.

**ATM:** Your shift into the AGCSA general manager role was sort of thrust upon you. Did the role ever sit comfortably with you?

**JN:** The joint role initially with Scott Petersen was really good and while there were a number of initiatives that didn't quite get there (water management and environment), at least we had a crack and provided some resources for the industry.

When the board approached me to take on the sole GM role I was incredibly apprehensive. The bit that really challenged me was the relationship with the trade. Working with the trade is extremely demanding and unless you are up with that whole commercial side of the industry it can be difficult and I'll admit that aspect of the role never really sat comfortably with me.

One of the highlights of Neylan's career was his involvement with the 2003 and 2005 Australian Opens at Moonah Links



**ATM:** 2010 was your 'annus horribilis', one which saw your own health issues and that of family members ultimately lead to a defining point in your life.

**JN:** It was just ahead of the Gold Coast conference in 2010 and I was on the way to do an inspection of a course on the Mornington Peninsula. I had a high level of commitment at the upcoming conference both in terms of AGCSA matters and conference presentations and on the home front both of my parents were unwell. It got to the point where I was totally overwhelmed with everything and it was as I was driving down to the Mornington Peninsula that I had my heart attack.

In some respects it was the best and worst thing that could have happened to me. When you give your wife and children a scare like that you really start to put things in perspective and it certainly gave me a huge wake-up call. So by the time the next conference came around in Adelaide I had made the decision I was going to call it quits.

It was the responsibility of the job too. When I sat down and listed all the issues that the association needed to address, I didn't have the drive or expertise to tackle these in the appropriate manner. Sometimes you just have to admit that you are not up to it and clearly I wasn't.

Leaving the AGCSA was both the hardest and easiest decision to make. I had 11 wonderful and challenging years at the AGCSA during which time we have achieved many great things. It was a difficult decision because of the great relationship I had with the fantastic AGCSA staff, the board and the members, but it was easy when I came to grips with the fact that I needed to start thinking outside the job more and looking after myself better.

**ATM:** After some time off you then started your own consultancy business. Are you enjoying being 'back on the tools'?

**JN:** Absolutely. When I left the AGCSA I had no plans because of the circumstances at the time. I set up Turfgrass Consultancy and Research and it has been incredibly reassuring the number of people that have thought enough of me as an individual to seek my services. I haven't had to make one phone call to get work and I have been very grateful for that support. I guess it comes back to what is the fantastic part of the industry and that is the people and the relationships you develop.

My wings have spread a little in my new role and while I'm still involved in golf I'm doing a lot more back in local government and undertaking some project work with long-time friend and colleague David Nickson. I have also decided to set up a couple of research projects which I am self-funding because they'll never happen unless I do them.

One of the things I have been reasonably confident in myself over the years has been recognising areas where research is needed. To do research in this industry you have got to put



yourself out there and if I can afford myself one little pat on the back I think it has been in this area. I've always had that interest in research and it is such an important area that we can't afford to neglect. Thirty years ago we had two thriving institutes – TRAI and ATRI – doing research; now we have none and the amount of local research done in the maintenance area is almost non-existent which is a real shame.

**ATM: What have been some of the biggest changes in the turf industry and what do you see as some of the challenges going forward?**

**JN:** It has been very interesting to see the industry evolve over the years. If I think back to when I first started with the TRAI, we had maybe two specialist turf fertilisers and half a dozen specialist pesticides and you could literally name them all off the top of your head. Nowadays there are so many combinations I often find myself having to ask what the active is.

If I was being absolutely pragmatic, the basics of nutrition are still exactly the same as they were when I started, but the plethora of products now available is unbelievable. Sure there are plenty to choose from, but do they do a better job? I don't think so. Likewise with wetting agents and organic products, there are so many different types that have come onto the market and at times I am still astounded by the claims and spin based around some of these.



Since departing the AGCSA in 2011 Neylan has started his own agronomic consultancy



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During his 11 years with the AGCSA, including five as general manager, Neylan witnessed some significant changes as well as major events impact the turf industry, among them the 2009 Black Saturday bushfires in Victoria



“There wouldn’t be a day go by that I don’t learn off superintendents and turf managers. When you talk with them and see how they manage their facilities, whether high-end or low-end, I always come away with a lot of insight and feel grateful that they have shared that knowledge with me.”

- John Neylan

A big change has been the level of testing now available. We started with just pH and salts, but when Scotts came into the Australian market they revolutionised the testing parameters that we considered for turf. Now, however, soil testing is at the point where it is almost ridiculous and some of the testing methodologies out there are quite poor. It has become such a central part of the marketing by a number of product supply companies and it is now very difficult to be critical of or to get people to have a critical eye towards the information they are being presented. It’s imperative that turf managers question what’s being recommended to them.

The changes in education have been quite massive too. When I first started, NMIT was only just starting to fire up and with Phil Ford the principal driver it became the outstanding TAFE college and industry benchmark. Over time we have had a number of other institutions rise to similar heights and it has been strongly based around the efforts of committed individuals – the likes of Barry Fraser (Chisholm), Graham Hart (Wodonga), Brett Chivers and now Jim Porter (Holmesglen). That’s been the downside too, as once such individuals move on these institutions suffer.

The level of education and training has improved dramatically but it is at a bit of a nexus now with cutbacks in the TAFE system and I do fear its ability to deliver to the levels that the industry wants. The National Turf Education Working Group in conjunction with the TAFEs has done an enormous amount of work to standardise the curriculum and lift the teaching standards, but going forward it will be up to organisations like the AGCSA to ensure that this high level continues.

**ATM: Having witnessed such change, what advice would you offer to those coming through the industry today?**

**JN:** They need to be critical in their assessment of what they do. It’s incredibly important that when they move from a 2IC role to being superintendent

at another golf course that they can put into context what their prior knowledge is with the new facility and not just import the programmes and techniques from their old course.

Even though things have improved considerably, the big deficiency I still see is in the area of communication. Being able to communicate ideas, programmes and philosophies in a semi-technical, non-complex manner is a critical skill for a superintendent nowadays.

One of the great challenges I have had over the years is dealing with club structures and committees and in recent times I do wonder sometimes whether it’s getting better or worse. Turf is complex and you can’t narrow it down to one thing, as much as some try to do. What I’ve learnt is that you have to trust yourself in terms of what you know is the right thing to do. Some turf managers, who I have the utmost respect for and who are incredibly well qualified, have tripped up when they have been pressured into doing things because of management demands and start to second guess their own ability.

**ATM: Finally John, what have you taken most out of the industry over the years?**

**JN:** As an industry, you could not meet a better group of people. There are so many interesting, dedicated, hardworking and knowledgeable people in this industry and because of its nature and pitfalls it’s a very tight knit group. Seeing what many have to do with at times limited resources and the pressures from clubs and committees, I think they do a remarkable job and go way beyond the call of duty.

There wouldn’t be a day go by that I don’t learn off superintendents and turf managers generally. When you talk with them, see how they are dealing with issues in a practical sense and how they manage their facilities, whether high-end or low-end, I always come away with a lot of insight and feel grateful that they have shared that knowledge with me. 🙌



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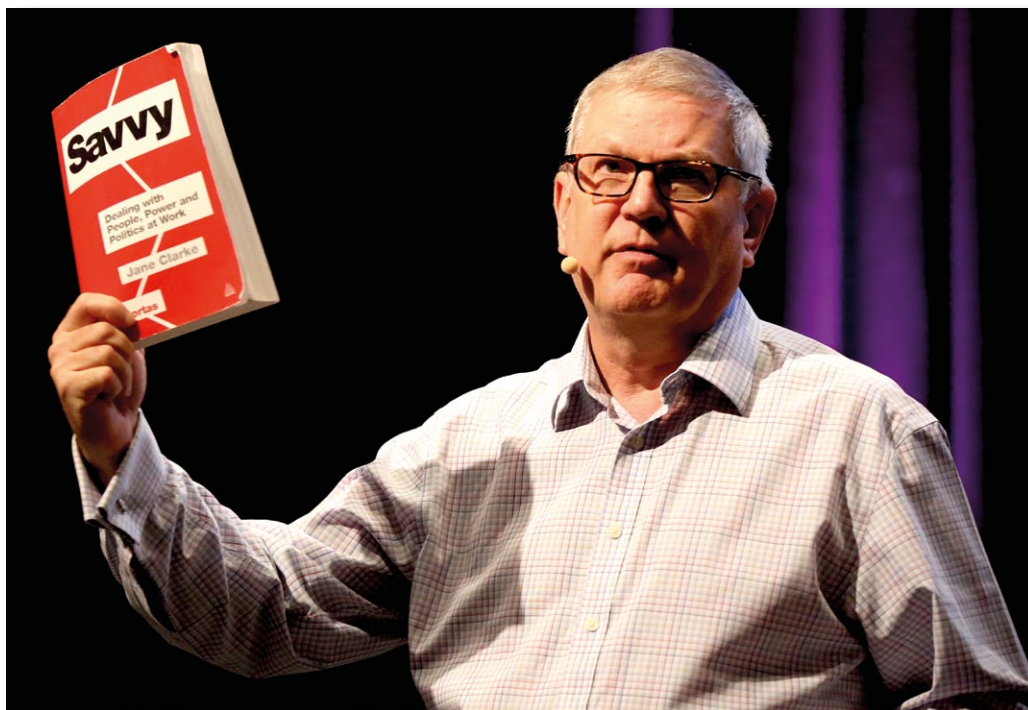




Keynote presenter David Bancroft-Turner encouraged delegates to develop an understanding of and engage in the political landscape of their club in order to bring about positive outcomes



ATM editor Brett Robinson looks back at a highly successful (and warm) 30th Australian Turfgrass Conference on the Gold Coast which challenged delegates to delve into the minefield that is organisational politics.



## Positive politics

The role of the modern day turf manager is a complex one and has long transcended just looking after the green stuff. As turf managers are acutely aware, they are now called upon to deal with aspects well outside of the agronomic basics instilled during their apprentice years and as the old adage about change being the only constant in life goes, you either adapt or get left behind.

An integral part in the planning of recent AGCSA conferences has been to include topics that delve into non-traditional management areas to assist delegates with their professional development. These have included men's health and mental wellbeing, workplace health and safety and managing problematic staff, through to personal financial management, communication and presentation skills and utilising social media. Invariably these have drawn some of the biggest attendances and have deliberately put delegates outside of their comfort zone and forced them to confront their own prejudices or shortcomings.

And so that theme continued at the recent 30th Australian Turfgrass Conference on the Gold Coast with the somewhat daunting topic of organisational politics front and centre. Probing the murky depths of this highly important yet often neglected area was UK keynote presenter David Bancroft-Turner from The Academy for Political Intelligence whose wit and self-deprecating style endeared him to many.

"From past conference surveys it was quite evident that clubhouse politics permeates many levels and can have a significant impact on our members," explains AGCSA events and education manager Simone Staples. "It was for this reason that we sought out Dave who has conducted similar sessions with organisations such as the PGA, BIGGA and SODEX in the UK. Such was the success of David's sessions on the Gold Coast that we are already in negotiations to secure his services for future conferences."

### OF FOXES, MULES, OWLS AND SHEEP

During his day-long Jacobsen-sponsored Monday workshop, which was capped at 40 delegates, and follow-up presentations throughout the week, Bancroft-Turner espoused the importance of developing an understanding of and engaging in the political landscape of an organisation and how to successfully navigate it by developing a higher level of political intelligence.

Golf clubs are strange places at the best of times and failing to identify and understand the political machinations that are in operation and who the key players and personalities are can, as some turf managers have discovered too late, ultimately make life extremely difficult. While many view organisational politics in a negative context, Bancroft-Turner's view was that it should be a positive experience and about getting things done.

During the Monday workshop, attendees were initially asked to fill in a questionnaire which challenged them to make a blunt assessment of their current level of political intelligence. That served as a base for the remainder of the workshop where delegates were taken through a step by step process to encourage them to develop a greater level of political savviness.



The first stage was developing an awareness of the four archetypal 'political animals' that exist within organisations and their particular attributes:

- The fox – who exhibits guile, cunning, is ruthless, has a high level of political intelligence but whose agenda is self-oriented;
- The owl – wise, patient, principled, a killer who also has a high level of political intelligence but in order to achieve both personal and organisational goals;
- The mule – has a low level of political intelligence, is stubborn, noisy, hard-working and determined; or
- The sheep – supportive, innocent, submissive and naïve, has low political intelligence.

From the questionnaire completed earlier, delegates were then able to discover what their political intelligence profile was – whether they were a 'strategist', 'operator', an 'influencer', 'collaborative', 'responsive', 'driven', 'flexible' or 'adaptable' – and the implications such a profile type had in their dealings with others in the organisation. Thereafter delegates were asked to prioritise some key skill areas for development and create an action plan to bring about more positive political behaviour.

Canvassing a number of delegates post-conference, it was clear that Bancroft-Turner's sessions, especially the Monday workshop, struck a chord with many:

**Ben Tilley (Headland Golf Club, Qld):** "I really enjoyed these sessions and understanding what 'animals' really do exist among the golf club membership. Two things stood out for me:

- Pick your mark in a conflict situation. People have long memories and it could come back to bite you should that member be elected to the board and have revenge as his/her agenda.
- Be prepared to take a hit. You will not always win in every decision-making process, remembering that it is not your golf course and that you are employed to provide professional guidance and options for the best outcomes.

"So, don't sweat the small stuff, let them have a win sometimes and you will find it can lead to profitable negotiations in the future."

**Shaun Cross (Byron Bay Golf Club, NSW):** "It was one of the main highlights of the conference. That style of interactive workshop is great as it captures everyone and no matter what your personality you are forced to be involved and participate. It may take some people out of their comfort zone but they are designed to do that which in itself is a positive to enhance your ability to deal with future management issues that may arise.

"The key points I took away from the session were understanding your personal profile and that of others in your organisation (even the wife!), treating each profile type accordingly to maximise results/outcome and understanding that what works for one person doesn't necessarily work for everyone – adapt and be flexible to achieve outcomes."

**Joshua Straub (Lismore Works Golf Club, NSW):**

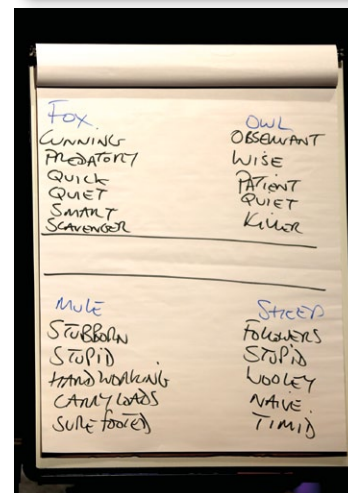
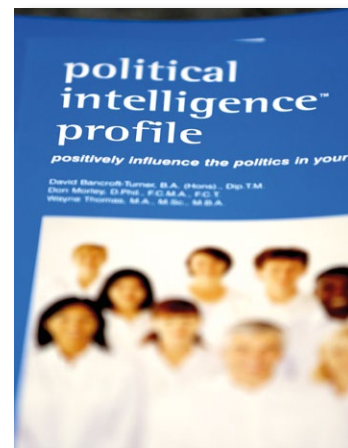
"It was very informative about the different types of personalities we supers deal with on a daily basis. It helped me to recognise the differences (including myself) and how to react or say certain things to different types of people to get a more positive outcome. It also taught me how to recognise when conflict situations were going to arise and how to deal with them in a better way so that both parties can feel like they have had a positive outcome."

And it wasn't just superintendents who took plenty out of the sessions. Among the participants were assistant superintendents Jarrod Arps (Ryde Parramatta Golf Club, NSW) and Tom Bickerdike (Commonwealth Golf Club, Vic) who saw the workshops as being hugely beneficial.

"I went into this workshop thinking I was going to learn how to manage negative/political situations with fellow staff members, but it was so much more," says Arps. "I also learnt what my 'political animal' is and how my attributes can be perceived by others I work and interact with at my club. Dave helped us pick up skills to best navigate the key stakeholders in our organisation in a way that our message can be absorbed according to their 'influencer framework'.

"Dave also asked us to pick two skill tips out of the dozens provided and take back to our organisation and work on. This will start us engaging with our staff and committees with political intelligence in mind. There was so much information provided in this workshop that it will take me time to digest and see how these skills can be adopted for ultimately the greater good of myself and the organisation."

Adds Bickerdike: "Within the role of assistant superintendent we deal with a great variety of people such as staff, committees and contractors. The workshop highlighted skills to manoeuvre around issues with these people by way of strategies and greater understanding of ourselves and people's political intelligence behaviour to ultimately get a positive outcome for all."



Delegates learnt to understand their level of political intelligence and the different types of political animals that exist within organisations

While many take a dim view of organisational politics, Bancroft-Turner's view was that it should be a positive experience







◀ **Gavin Kirkman (pictured), together with Paul McLean, gave a frank and at times shocking account of the implications of a serious workplace accident**



**Ohio State University's Dr Karl Danneberger**

**The Olympic Club's Pat Finlen made three presentations to delegates on the Gold Coast**

## FROM US OPENS TO WORLD CUPS

One presenter or topic doesn't make a conference however and Gold Coast delegates were also treated to the likes of US guest speakers Dr Karl Danneberger and Pat Finlen. Ohio State University's Danneberger conducted the second of the Monday workshops on managing turfgrass under environmental and pest stress and also spoke on his pet topic of Growing Degree Days.

The impressive Finlen, immediate past president of the GCSAA and current general manager of The Olympic Club in San Francisco, gave three talks during the week. Among the most fascinating was his behind-the-scenes look at preparations for the 2012 US Open when he was Olympic's superintendent, especially the incredible infrastructure set up.

While the Open has a reputation for providing some of the most challenging course conditions, it would also rate as one of the most challenging for a superintendent outside of just preparing the



surfaces. The USGA literally takes over the entire facility months out and anything that isn't 'in play' is fair game. Some of Finlen's out of play greens and fairways were turned into roadways or enveloped by decking for the massive hospitality suites and merchandise marquees which are a key part of such events.

Finlen also joined an insightful panel session which featured fellow superintendents turned general managers Peter Schumacher (Monash Country Club), Andrew Casey (Royal Canberra Golf Club) and Craig Molloy (Cypress Lakes). Together the panellists looked at how they made the significant step from being a superintendent to club general manager, the qualities required to do so and some of the lessons they have learned on the way. Such a career progression is becoming increasingly common and, as if to prove that, in the days after the conference Sydney-based Mona Vale Golf Club made the announcement that it had appointed course superintendent Andy Hugill as its new general manager.

The team from University of Melbourne were also on hand on the Gold Coast to present the final findings from their three-year golf course biodiversity study. The findings from this Australian Research Council and AGCSA-funded project are extremely positive for the golf industry and in coming editions ATM will highlight these in more depth and look at some practical measures superintendents can implement to improve the biodiversity value of their golf courses.

The Sportsfield Stream was highlighted by the 2015 Cricket World Cup forum convened by New Zealand Cricket's Ian McKendry. The panel included Australian curators Brad van Dam (Manuka Oval) and Damian Hough (Adelaide Oval) and their Kiwi counterparts Blair Christensen (Eden Park) and ex-pat Australian Brett Siphthorpe (Wellington Regional Stadium). Van Dam also backed up for the Manuka Oval redevelopment session which featured John Neylan, Jarrod Hill (Arup) and Dimitri Dimakopoulos (Evergreen Turf).

The Golf Stream concluded on Thursday with former Royal Pines superintendent Paul McLean teaming up with his former general manager Gavin Kirkman to look at the lessons learnt from a serious workplace accident. As reported back in ATM Volume 12.6, McLean went through every superintendent's worst nightmare when one of his staff became trapped under a mower that had flipped into a water body. Their candid and at times shocking account of the accident, its aftermath and the implications for all parties left a lasting impression and would no doubt have sent many delegates back reassessing their ability to handle such an incident.

In total, 450 fully registered and day delegates attended this year's conference while a further 565 people visited the two-day trade show on top of the more than 380 trade representatives from 70 companies. This year's event featured a number



of format changes, including the switching of the Syngenta President's Dinner to the Monday which attracted 280 people. Likewise, the addition of the Everris Farewell Bash on the Thursday attracted more than 350.

"The vibe during the week was that the format changes were very well received," says Staples. "Those who normally wouldn't have been able to attend the dinner were able to and thoroughly enjoyed it, while the relaxed atmosphere of the Farewell Bash was a popular way to conclude the week. The proof, however, will be when we get the conference survey responses back."

## DENNIS GOES BACK-TO-BACK

The golfing accolades racked up by Royal Perth Golf Club superintendent Michael Dennis over the years could fill numerous pages of this journal and at Sanctuary Cove Golf & Country Club on 22 June the +3 marker added yet another to kick off his week on the Gold Coast in style. Entering the 2014 Toro AGCSA Golf Championships as defending champion, the WA state amateur representative barely worked up a sweat en route to posting a one-over 71 around the Ross Watson-designed Palms course to collect his second Toro Red Jacket.

On a day where just seven players broke 80 thanks to the Palms' challenging TifEagle greens, Dennis looked on target for a sub-par round and went to the 14th tee two under after birdies on 4 and 12. A double bogey on 14 followed by a bogey on 16 saw him falter a little toward the end, but a superb up and down on 17 and a tap in par on 18 saw him prevail by two shots.

Next best was South West Rocks Golf Club superintendent David Hobday who was left rueing a costly six on the par three 13th after his tee shot found the water. Hobday, playing off a 2 handicap, lit up the course early and was three-under after four holes. Hobday would end up carding five birdies in



his round of 73 and despite failing to catch Dennis comfortably won the Nett title (71).

The boilover of the day came in the state teams championships, a competition dominated by NSW which has taken the honours six times over the past 10 years. On home soil, the Queensland team led by Sanctuary Cove host superintendent Robin Doodson won on a countback from the NSW team, captained by Martyn Black (Castle Hill CC) who agonisingly four-putted on his final hole.

Somewhat ironically, just five days after leading the Queenslanders to the state title, Doodson shocked many by resigning from the club after five years at the helm. The AGCSA and GCSAQ board member has been appointed superintendent at Doha Golf Club in Qatar and begins his new role on 10 August. He will have just over five months to get

**Royal Perth's Michael Dennis secured his second Toro Red Jacket in as many years at Sanctuary Cove**

**The 'Taking the Next Step' forum featured (from right) Craig Molloy, Andrew Casey, Pat Finlen and Peter Schumacher**





## The National superintendent Leigh Yanner in action during the 2014 Toro AGCSA Golf Championships



23/6/14  
DAN DOCHERTY

| ERA | ER B | ER C | ER D | BLACK | BLUE | WHITE | PAR | INDEX / MEN | A | B | RESULTS | C |
|-----|------|------|------|-------|------|-------|-----|-------------|---|---|---------|---|
| 392 | 373  | 354  | 4    | 2     | 4    | 3     |     |             |   |   |         |   |
| 494 | 478  | 462  | 5    | 18    | 4    | 3     |     |             |   |   |         |   |
| 161 | 145  | 128  | 3    | 16    | 1    | 4     |     |             |   |   |         |   |
| 384 | 355  | 327  | 4    | 4     | 5    | 2     |     |             |   |   |         |   |
| 503 | 481  | 462  | 5    | 14    | 3    | 2     |     |             |   |   |         |   |
| 172 | 152  | 136  | 3    | 10    | 4    | 2     |     |             |   |   |         |   |
| 347 | 332  | 311  | 4    | 6     | 5    | 2     |     |             |   |   |         |   |
| 342 | 324  | 309  | 4    | 8     | 5    | 2     |     |             |   |   |         |   |
| 366 | 350  | 332  | 4    | 8     | 5    | 2     |     |             |   |   |         |   |
| OUT | 3181 | 2990 | 2821 | 36    |      | 21    |     |             |   |   |         |   |

Player's Signature: Daniel Docherty

One to frame – Daniel Docherty's Lakelands' scorecard

The Globe team of Peter Abel, Jeff Bowtell and Kevin Booth claimed the AGCSA Trade Challenge at Lakelands



a handle on his new role before the European Tour's 2015 Qatar Masters arrives in January. As a result of his move, Doodson will relinquish his executive duties with both the AGCSA and GCSAQ.

Across at Links Hope Island, SAGCSA president Barry Bryant collected the stableford title with 42 points. The 18 handicapper had an afternoon out, scoring 18 points on the front nine and 22 on the back to edge Manly Golf Club's Michael Bradbury who posted 40 points.

Complete results from the 2014 Toro AGCSA Golf Championships were:

- **Stroke:** Michael Dennis (Royal Perth GC) – 71 (+1); David Hobday (South West Rocks GC) – 73; Matt McLeod (Tocumwal GC) – 75; Brett Woodward (Armidale GC) – 76; Jason Seis (Mudgee GC) – 78; Leigh Yanner (The National GC) and Brett Balloch (Anglesea GC) – 79.
- **Nett:** Hobday – 73-2=71.
- **Stableford:** Barry Bryant (Mt Osmond GC) – 42 points; Michael Bradbury (Manly GC) – 40; Peter Boyd (Pakuranga CC, NZ) – 37.
- **State Teams:** 1. Queensland (Robin Doodson 77 nett, Duncan Lamont 81, Lincoln Coombes 83 and Mark Hauff 86) – 239 (on countback); 2.

New South Wales (Martyn Black 85, Woodward 76, Justin Sheehan 78 and Craig Molloy 90) – 239 points; 3. Victoria (Yanner, Balloch, Kyle Wilson) – 242; 4. Western Australia (Dennis, Brad Anderson, Nick Price, Idris Evans) – 249; 5. ACT (Scott Harris, Brett Hull, Bryan Kelly, David Thomson) – 255.

- **Nearest the Pins:** Sanctuary Cove: Hobday; Hope Island: Boyd.
- **Long Drives:** Sanctuary Cove: Ben Hedges (Kooindah Waters); Hope Island: Mitch Hayes (Brisbane GC).
- **Eagles:** Sanctuary Cove (4th) – David Aplitt (Stonecutters Ridge).
- **Twos:** Sanctuary Cove: 6th – Hobday and David Gove (Horsham GC); 11th – Balloch; 16th – Hauff and Roland Curley (Glenorchy City Council). Hope Island: 5th – Shane Herring (Camden GC); 17th – Garry Kunz (Byron Bay GC).

## GLOBE MAKES IT TWO IN A ROW

Just as Dennis went back-to-back, so too did the team from Globe Growing Solutions at the AGCSA Trade Challenge held on 23 June at a superb Lakelands Golf. The Challenge, now in the third year of its team stableford format, attracted a field of more than 60 with representatives from the likes of HG Sports Turf, Living Turf, Toro, River Sands, Lawn Solutions, Geotynes Online, All Stake Supply, Dint Golf Solutions, Komma Media, Syngenta, Brown Brothers, Country Club International, Active Safety, Jacobsen, Total Eden, Nuturf Australia and the AGCSA.

The Globe team of Kevin Booth, Jeff Bowtell and Mark Doherty were all ready to defend the title they won in 2013, however, due to plane delays out of Melbourne that day Doherty was unable to make the start in time. Peter Abel was duly promoted and helped guide the Globe A team as they beat Brown Brothers Engineers on a countback. Able and Booth posted 37 points each for a best two score total of 74.

While Globe Growing Solutions collected the team honours and with it the main prize of \$2000





worth of advertising in ATM, individual honours went to Brown Brothers' Mark Griffiths. The 22 handicapper scored an impressive 42 points around Lakelands, which included two four pointers.

Those exploits, however, couldn't rival the shot of the day (and the week) which belonged to Daniel Docherty. The Syngenta senior territory sales manager aced Lakelands' 128m par three 3rd with a wedge, but it wasn't until he reached the green that he discovered the ball in the hole. It was Docherty's second hole in one, his first coming more than 20 years ago, and the second at an AGCSA golf event in five years.

The AGCSA wishes to thank AGCSA Accredited Golf Course Superintendents Robin Doodson and Phil Soegaard along with Danny Foott (Links Hope Island) on the superb conditioning of all three courses and for availing their facilities for the AGCSA's premier golf events.

## ROLL ON HUNTER VALLEY 2015

At the end of the Gold Coast conference in was announced that the 31st Australian Turfgrass

Conference will be heading to the spectacular Hunter Valley from 21-26 June 2015. At the time of this edition going to print the venue was still to be finalised. Darwin had been earmarked as a possible destination, however, a number of factors, in particular pricey accommodation options, meant it was overlooked.

Planning for 2015 is well underway and a number of potential speakers have already been canvassed to ascertain their availability. In mid-July all Gold Coast delegates were sent a survey and this will be used as a key planning tool for next year's event. Delegates are encouraged to fill in the survey as comprehensively as possible and provide as much feedback, especially in regards to content, speakers and possible format changes.

The AGCSA wishes to thank all delegates, speakers, principal partners, trade exhibitors and trade show visitors who made it up to the Gold Coast and looks forward to seeing you next year in the Hunter Valley. Check out the AGCSA's Flickr photostream link on the AGCSA website to view more images from the conference. 🌱



**Comedian Des Dowling entertained delegates during the Syngenta President's Dinner which, in a change of format, was held at the start of the conference week**



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Following a major redevelopment in 2013 under the auspices of Davey Shearer Golf Design, for the first time in its 50-plus year history Rottnest Island Country Club now boasts turf greens

# Rottnest revitalised

Situated off the coast of Western Australia, Rottnest Island has for many years been a popular holiday destination for Perth residents. In 2013 the island's nine-hole sand scrape golf course was redeveloped with new turf greens constructed and new irrigation system installed. Current and former WA superintendents Darren Wilson, Jeff Lane and Peter Fleming look back over the project which has revitalised one of the island's main recreational facilities.



**R**ottnest Island is located 19 kilometres off the coast of Fremantle, Western Australia. Called Wadjemup by the Noongar people, meaning 'place across the water', the island is approximately 19 square kilometres with an elevation of only 46m. It is 11 kilometres tip to tip, 4.5km at its widest point and by bike a round trip of the island measures some 24km.

The island is purely tourist with only island staff and their families living on the island. Just a 30-minute boat trip from Fremantle, more than 500,000 people visit Rottnest Island each year, drawn to its crystal clear lagoons and beaches and superb natural environment. Rottnest Island was once a prison for Aboriginal men from mainland Western Australia between 1838 and 1904 and during that time their labour was employed to build many structures on the island, some of which still stand today.

Managed by the Rottnest Island Authority (RIA), the island is classified as an A-Class Nature Reserve and is home to some spectacular flora, fauna and marine life. The most famous animal on the island is the quokka, a marsupial which closely resembles a small wallaby. Each visitor to the island pays an admission fee, which assists the RIA to preserve and protect this unique natural resource.

Among the many recreational activities the island offers, golf has featured prominently for more than 50 years. Originally built in 1961, the nine-hole

Rottnest Island Country Club was the brainchild of Des Sullivan, a highly decorated wartime pilot who was appointed Rottnest Island manager in 1959.

A passionate golfer, Sullivan instigated the push for a course to be built on his favourite island getaway and on 3 February 1960 approval was duly given. A public access golf course, with a private club attached for both men and women, was subsequently formed and on 20 August 1961 the course was officially opened, with two West Australian newspaper identities, cartoonist Paul Rigby and journalist Bernie Kirwan Ward, invited to perform the honours.

The course resides on the northeast corner of the island and stretches over 22 hectares. Since its opening and up until the recent redevelopment, the course comprised nine sand scrape greens, 18 artificial turf tees (3m x 3m boxes with brick retaining walls around them) and very limited grass on the fairways, the coverage of which only improved during the winter months due to increased rainfall and growth of annual wintergrass.

To the north of the golf course resides the island's waste water treatment plant (WWTP) and a 200m strip of native vegetation which provides a natural barrier between the course and Longreach Bay. Directly to the south, the course is bordered by Garden and Herschel lakes, two of a number of 'hypersaline' lakes which make up around 10 per cent of the island's area. Adjacent to the course, on





the north eastern boundary, there is a 1.38 hectare sports oval, while an artificial turf bowling green, located adjacent to the clubhouse, completes the recreational amenities within the vicinity.

## COURSE REDEVELOPMENT

In 2012, the RIA announced confirmation that the golf course had been allocated funds for a major redevelopment, with a view of improving the club's facilities and ensuring that the course provided year-round enjoyment for visitors to the island. Davey Shearer Golf Design, headed by Ben Davey, Tim Lovell and former touring professional Bob Shearer, was awarded the contract to design and construct the new course, with the key change being the construction of new turf greens.

The other significant aspect of the redevelopment was the installation of a new irrigation system, designed by Paul F. Jones and Associates, and its connection to the island's WWTP. Prior to this there was no irrigation infrastructure on the course or

the nearby sports oval. The new irrigation system irrigates a total area of 9.6ha, comprising 8.5ha of the golf course and 1.1ha of the oval.

The WWTP was upgraded prior to the course redevelopment and is powered by an eco-friendly 80m high wind turbine on top of Mt Hershel which rises up behind the 4th green. Water from the treatment plant is stored in large tanks and can also be topped up by the island's desalination plant which is located approximately 4km from the golf course.

The Davey Shearer re-design utilised the existing course routing with minimal changes made to the layout. They created nine interesting and fun putting greens and also a practice putter dubbed the 'adventure green' on account of its distinct undulations.

The new design introduces a very natural character to the golf course that blends seamlessly into its sandy setting. Distance was gained by pushing back tees into elevated positions where possible, while one hole was shortened by about 20m to allow for a public walking trail behind the green complex. Overall the course measures 5400m (for 18 holes) and has a par of 70.

As with any course reconstruction, some changes to the masterplan were required prior to construction, in particular to the second tee, a creek which runs through the course and the proposed incorporation of sandy waste areas.

The 2nd tee, which is beautifully located on a piece of land that juts out into Garden Lake, was to be turfed, however, this was shelved due to environmental concerns. Garden Lake houses a large number of thrombolites, one of the planet's oldest living creatures, and there were fears the introduction of extra freshwater, fertiliser and chemicals to that tee area would impact upon this rare population. As a result, an artificial tee was constructed on the site of the old tee (see photo on page 43).

The master plan had also proposed to turn the course's ephemeral creek, which dissects the



Rottne's famous native marsupial inhabitant – the quirky quokka

Formerly a sand scrape course with artificial tees, the redevelopment was undertaken with the view of improving the club's facilities and ensuring that the course provided year-round enjoyment for visitors



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Despite Pennncross bentgrass originally being specified, as a safeguard against water quantity issues Velvetene seashore paspalum was eventually chosen for the greens and surrounds



3rd, 4th, 5th and 6th holes, into a more prominent feature. The creek has its origins at Lockeyes Lake, a small ornamental lake which resides on the right hand side of the 8th hole and flows south into Garden Lake. This was also removed from the scope of works due to the presence of acid sulphate soils in these areas, with the original creek left in place but tidied up as part of the improvement works.

Sandy waste areas were also to be incorporated around greens and along the edges of fairways, however, soil testing and investigations beforehand revealed there was only a 50cm layer of soil above the limestone cap which runs through the whole course. The sand was also dark in colour, rather than a white beach sand as was previously predicted, so it did not have the right contrast.

Construction of the new-look course began in March 2013 with the old sand greens broken up and the course then surveyed. During construction all soil was moved via the cut and fill method where possible and once basic shaping was completed the new irrigation system was installed. Final shaping of the tees, greens and surrounds followed before being laid with solid turf shipped across from the mainland.

## CHALLENGES

Due to the course being located on an island, there were numerous construction challenges that needed to be overcome, from the logistics of getting equipment and materials shipped across

through to unusual things like sourcing enough accommodation for construction staff during the island's peak tourist periods.

All sand for construction had to be sourced from the island due to the high costs associated with barging it across from the mainland (up to \$6000 for a one way trip). Fortunately sand was able to be sourced from a dune blowout at nearby Parker Point and trucked by six-wheelers and stockpiled on the course until required.

There was also only a very small amount of water available during construction, with all of it monitored for usage, as well as pumping from various holding tanks to get it to the site from the treatment plant. Getting power to the site was also an issue and with the mains power source being too far away, a diesel generator needed to be brought in. Getting the generator and the pump stations to be compatible caused a number of problems, especially at start-up.

As the island is a protected nature reserve, before construction even started a significant amount of work was required to ensure a number of strict parameters were met. Along with having to submit an Aboriginal heritage report, a 191-page Nutrient and Irrigation Management Plan for the Rottnest Island Recycled Water Scheme also had to be prepared. The course master plan also called for the removal of a number of trees to accommodate the new layout, which necessitated the appropriate reports and permits as the island contains many heritage-listed specimens.

## FROM SAND TO TURF

The bulk of the construction works centred on the new greens and tees with former Burswood Golf Course superintendent Peter Fleming overseeing this aspect of the redevelopment. Fleming's role actually started two years prior to the redevelopment and after initially assisting the RIA with a risk assessment of the project was later asked to sit on the selection panels for both the course designers and construction contractors. During the tender processes Fleming was technical advisor and then became project manager during the reconstruction, being the point of contact between the RIA and contractors and working with Ben Davey and Tim Lovell.

The Davey Shearer re-design utilised the existing course routing with minimal changes made to the layout. Distance was gained by pushing back tees into elevated positions where possible





Once the old sand scrapes were removed, the new greens sites were excavated and 300mm of dune sand, which had been amended with Dynamic Lifter at a rate of 10 per cent per volume of sand, was imported (no gravel or drainage layer was required). Prior to final shaping, Sanoplant soil amendment (400g/m<sup>2</sup>) and a 24-12-14 fertiliser were rotary hoed into the dune sand. That was followed up by applications of Super-phosphate (8kg/100m<sup>2</sup>), potassium sulphate (5kg/100m<sup>2</sup>) and a granular trace element mix (2kg/100m<sup>2</sup>).

Despite Pennncross bentgrass originally being specified, as a safeguard against water quantity issues (see more on this below) Velvetene seashore paspalum was eventually chosen for the greens and surrounds with 9000m<sup>2</sup> of turf shipped over in rolls from a Perth-based turf farm. The new turf tees, which replaced the existing artificial ones, were laser levelled and solid turfed with Santa Ana couchgrass rolls also sourced from Perth.

Unfortunately, funding prevented the fairways from being grassed and it is intended to progressively re-grass them using the common couch already growing on the island. With a full irrigation system now in place, there is no reason that over the coming years the fairways will gradually increase in quality.

Perth-based course superintendent Darren Wilson (Wembley Golf Complex) assisted by identifying a rare turf variety called *Agropyen*



*repens* or salt couch. It resembles an ultradwarf type couchgrass and hopefully this will dominate the newly grassed fairways over time. It is very hardy and has survived amazingly well over many summers on the island despite never receiving any irrigation.

Although originally going to be turfed along with the rest of the new tees, the 2nd tee, which juts out into one of the island's lakes, was re-laid with artificial turf due to environmental concerns

## MAINTENANCE AND MONITORING

The new-look course officially re-opened on Friday 15 November, 2013 with three days of events to mark the occasion. The first two days saw fields of 108 and 120 players respectively take to course followed by an Ambrose competition to complete festivities on the Sunday. All members were in high praise of the new greens as well as the new design of the course which has enhanced what was already a challenging golf course.

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Unfortunately, funding prevented the fairways from being grassed and it is intended to progressively re-grass them using the common couch already growing on the island

Following the redevelopment, the management of the entire golf facility was put to tender with Golf Oracle, headed by professional golfer Nigel Williams, awarded a 15-year lease. The contract includes management of the golf course, clubhouse and Pro Shop. It has required a huge investment with regards to infrastructure, including the building of a large maintenance facility and the acquisition of stock and equipment to maintain the course.

The maintenance facility, situated behind the clubhouse, sits among an Aboriginal artefact area so its placement was a delicate process. It houses a new fleet of Toro equipment which also had to be brought in for all the new turf areas that previously didn't exist.

The emerging course is presently maintained by two staff members who both reside on the island. Well respected former WA course superintendent Jeff Lane, who is now a turf client manager with Globe Growing Solutions, has been assisting with advice on the grow-in of the new turf.

Being such an environmentally sensitive area, careful consideration of all maintenance inputs has been a high priority to date and assisting with this has been Darren Wilson who has extensive experience in environmental management. The e-par system has also been employed by the RIA.

Conditions on Rottnest Island are quite favourable for growing turf. Being a small island off the coast, it doesn't suffer the hot easterly winds that can scorch Perth and mean temperatures over the summer months are generally 5°C cooler than the mainland (Source: BOM). During the colder months its minimum temperatures are greater while relative humidity is also quite low. Annual average rainfall

for the island is around 570mm with more than two thirds of that falling from the start of May to the end of August.

While water quality from the WWTP is not a major issue, water quantity is with only a maximum of 400 kilolitres per day able to be supplied. Water is stored in a 4 megalitre reservoir and only filled at a steady rate, so there is no scope to save water during the winter. As such, re-grassing of the fairways will be managed and grassed areas will be strategically minimised and located.

This will be beneficial in two ways. First, it will help to minimise water use and, second, it will provide a point of difference for the relatively short course, placing an emphasis on strategy and accuracy off the tee. It is hoped, in time, that the course will have a somewhat unique feel similar to many 'desert' type golf courses.

Soil types on the island are typically shelly in their composition, high in calcium and have a pH of around 8.5 which shouldn't significantly compromise the potential for the course's future turf quality. The sand does, however, tend to pack together tighter than is normally the case in Western Australia. The more angular nature of the sand does restrict drainage more and as the course sits in a basin area, not far above the water table, drainage is often slow in low lying areas. With little or no changes made to the layout or contouring of the fairways, the native topsoil is quite fertile and looks promising for the future grow-in of the fairways.

To assist with the accurate delivery of irrigation water, a Toro Lynx central control decoder system was installed along with a Grundfos multi-stage VFD pump system. Toro 835S and 855S series sprinklers have been used throughout the course, with part circles installed around the greens.

The monthly irrigation design water balance, presented as part of the RIA's Nutrient and Irrigation Management Plan, predicts that no irrigation will be required during the months from May to August as there will be sufficient rainfall to meet turf needs. Winter rains will also allow fresh water to percolate through the soils and flush out any salts that have accumulated over the summer irrigation period.

Irrigation with reuse water is highest from December to February when there is little rainfall and high temperatures. It is anticipated there will not be enough recycled water from the WWTP to water all irrigation areas to 100 per cent of demand. As a result, a scheduling factor of 60 per cent has been applied to fairways and the sports oval.

Due to the island being an A Class Nature Reserve, the RIA maintains a strict monitoring schedule for all of its environmental compliance requirements associated with the island's WWTP, salt lakes, landfill, seeps and borefields. Required monitoring to assess environmental impacts associated with recycled water irrigation of the golf course has been added to this programme. 🌿

The island's waste water treatment plant, which supplies irrigation water to the course, is powered by an 80m high wind turbine on top of Mt Hershel which rises up behind the 4th green







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**JACOBSEN**





Droughts, floods and devastating locust plagues are just some of the many challenges Simon Newey has had to battle during his four years as superintendent at Red Cliffs Golf Club. Here he provides an insight into managing the regional Victorian golf course which boasts just 190 playing members.

Red Cliffs Golf Club is located in the town of Red Cliffs, about 10km due south of Mildura in regional Victoria. Pictured above is the 13th green

**Superintendent:** Simon Newey.

**Nickname:** Newey.

**Age:** 34.

**Family:** Wife Nicole, kids Rylan (8) and Mya (6).

**Period as a superintendent:** 12 years.

**Association involvement:** AGCSA (4 years).

**Turf management career:**

- Trainee – Mildura Tennis Club (1996-1997)
- Apprentice – Robinvale Golf Club (1997-2001)
- 2IC – Coomealla Golf Club (2001-2002)
- Superintendent – Wentworth Golf Club (2002-2010)
- Superintendent – Red Cliffs Golf Club (2010-present)

**Qualifications:** Certificate III Horticulture and Turf, Torrens Valley Institute of TAFE.

**Where in Australia is Red Cliffs and what is the town known for?** Red Cliffs is a solidier settlement town, located in the Sunraysia region in northwest Victoria, 10 kilometres south of Mildura. Sunraysia is one of the largest irrigated horticultural districts in Australia and has more sunny days than the Gold Coast! It is famous for its warm weather, the Murray River and its food bowl – oranges, grapes, dried fruit, vegetables and wineries. Red Cliffs takes its name from the 70m cliffs on the Murray River, east of the town which are a red/orange colour.

**Tell us a bit about your background in turf management and how you ended up being superintendent at Red Cliffs Golf Club.** I grew up in Ouyen, Victoria (approx. 100km south of Mildura)

playing golf and helping out at working bees at Ouyen Golf Club, which had sand scrapes. I did a traineeship at the Mildura tennis courts which was a good start in turf management. My dream was to be a greenkeeper on a golf course and at the time I was a really keen golfer and played off a single-figure handicap.

I worked my way through an apprenticeship at Robinvale Golf Club before becoming assistant at Coomealla Golf Club. The superintendent job at Wentworth Golf Club then came up, so I applied and was successful. I enjoyed eight long, hard years there. One day the manager and I had a chat about the way the club was going and he told me to keep my options open as the club was really struggling financially. It proved to be good advice as Red Cliffs Golf Club was hiring and I applied and was duly appointed superintendent in 2010.

**Give us an overview of Red Cliffs GC and some of its unique characteristics?** The club was established in 1925 as a nine-hole sand scrape course and owes its existence to the hard work of the soldier settlers that opened up the Red Cliffs district after the First World War. In 1928 the new 18-hole course was opened. The first green keeper was employed in 1935 to work a 48 hour week for three pounds 10 shillings, less 15 shillings and sixpence rental of a house.

In 1957 the members purchased the land for 850 pounds from the Victorian Government Lands Department. The course changed from sand scrapes to grass greens in 1976. In 2004 the golf



club established a five hectare turf production farm – called Grass Growers of Red Cliffs – in the middle of the course. The course currently has five par threes and five par fives.

**What are some of the unique features about Red Cliffs GC from a turf management perspective?**

Combining the daily maintenance operations of the golf course and the management of the turf farm would rate as the most challenging aspect of the job, especially with the small staff we have. You pretty much have to drop what you are doing on the golf course to go do the grass orders and sometimes it can be days before you get back to what you were doing. My phone does not stop and I am constantly getting calls at all times of the day and night, every day of the week.

**Take us through your turf management operations there and what, if any, changes have you brought about in terms of managing the course during your time as superintendent?**

We mow greens 3-4 times a week. We rely on the Dad's Army volunteers to mow the roughs and the picky jobs that we can't get to. We mow fairways fortnightly, tees weekly and change pins once a week. We mow the turf farm weekly also. We are constantly repairing irrigation and machinery and we have a saying with the Dad's Army chaps – if you (f...)/break it, you gotta fix it! Over summer, watering greens takes up a staff member's time with hand watering dry patches.

Since arriving here four years ago I have tried to set the course up to be easily looked after. As we have a lot of thatch in the greens I decided to scarify the greens heavily three times before I Verti-drained with solid tines. This caused a lot of talk, especially from the members who play here and at other high profile clubs, but it was good to see the bentgrass come back and prove them wrong. This will be an ongoing process I hope.

**Any special environmental considerations that you have to incorporate into the management of the course?**

We have a lot of natural Mallee scrub and Murray Pine ridges on the course which we keep natural and try to add to every year. Usually a lot of balls go missing every round!



**What are some of the major challenges facing Red Cliffs GC both from a turf and club management perspective?**

Financial pressure caused by ageing golfers and low member numbers is our biggest challenge at present. We are by no means unique in this situation, but it does put pressure on budgets and what we can do on course. We are lucky to have Dad's Army help out with jobs that need doing on the course on a weekly basis. The club installed the turf farm to help ease this financial burden, but with the additional maintenance requirements along with orders and deliveries, it takes up a significant amount of time to operate.

The clubhouse is very old and needs renovating/rebuilding and the committee is chasing up avenues to do this. We have a parent running a juniors programme trying to encourage budding members which is going well. Thankfully, with a small club like ours, there are always members willing to help out.

**Outline any major course improvements recently completed or any future works planned.**

We have installed a Tiger tee on the 11th to lengthen the course and add a longer hit for the men across water. As the course has no bunkers we have installed mounds near greens and fairways to add another element to our members' games. On the driveable par four 9th we have also constructed a

The Red Cliffs greenkeeping team comprises (from left) apprentice Daniel Cooper, superintendent Simon Newey and part-time groundsman Neville Birch



Red Cliffs boasts a small yet dedicated playing membership of just 190





Originally built as a nine-hole sand scrape course in 1925, it increased to 18 holes three years later. The course changed from sand scrapes to grass greens in 1976 with 16 of the original greens still in play

new dam next to the green to bring into the players' minds whether or not to go for the green, as well as putting a premium on the approach shot. We are hoping to start replacing one or two greens in the next 12 months. Sixteen of the greens are originals from 1976 and some still have the old sand scrapes under them.

**Water is obviously a critical issue for any golf course. How is Red Cliffs faring in the water management stakes?** We have 161 megalitres of river water and we use all of that in 12 months because of the turf farm and having kikuyu fairways. Four years ago we had our 40ML allocation of treated effluent cut off because the local water authority redirected it. This has hurt us because we used this water on the turf farm and fairways and helped us save on fertilising the turf farm. We are connected sometimes to drainage water from the 'blocks' but only receive small doses due to a number of 'blockies' (fruit/grape growers) in the surrounding area going to drip irrigation.

**The weather and climate is always a great leveller for a course superintendent. How has**

### Mother Nature treated Red Cliffs in recent times?

During my first week at Red Cliffs in April 2010 we had a locust plague descend on the course. They ate everything in their path, stripping the greens and fairways bare. It made headlines around the country and the then Victorian Premier John Brumby visited the course to see the new hatchlings. This lasted for four weeks.

We spent a lot of time, money and effort on spraying the new hatchlings as they needed to be sprayed at a certain stage before they produced wings and could fly. This was bad for the course and it looked terrible, but on the upside it cleared the course of thatch. The course recovered in time for the club championships in August.

From December 2010 to February 2011 we had 450mm of rain which equates to nearly twice our annual average (290mm) and caused widespread flooding. Flash flooding in February 2011 throughout the Sunraysia district heavily affected Mildura, Irymple, Cardross and Red Cliffs. We received 200mm of rain in 24 hours, with 150mm of that falling in a three hour period. The turf farm went completely under water, we lost the 3rd green along with hundreds of trees.

We had to close the course for two weeks and when we re-opened we played only 15 holes for a month until we could remove all the water. Myself, the apprentice plus some members worked shift hours to keep pumps working all day and night. The main problem was we had to pump into a dam in the middle of course then had to irrigate other areas on the course to remove the water. We rebuilt the 3rd green to a point that if it ever happens again (ha ha!) it will not go under.

**The one product I couldn't do without is...** wetting agent because of the long, hot dry summers we have each year.

Newey is fortunate to have a loyal 'Dad's Army' group of volunteers to assist with maintenance of the course on a weekly basis





**What are some pros and cons of being a regional-based superintendent?** The laidback lifestyle of living in the bush and not having to deal with traffic getting to and from work. It's a great place to have a family as there are so many outdoor activities to do and things to see. The drawbacks include the time spent waiting for spare parts to come from the city to repair machines and not having the budgets and staff of our city counterparts.

**Are expectations of course presentation and conditioning any less than that placed on your metropolitan counterparts?** No, the members expect the course to look as good as the ones in cities and they do need reminding often that we don't have the same finances, members or staff to produce these results. I have a really good greens committee that understand what our restrictions are and how important communication is.

**Do you have to be more resourceful as a regional based superintendent?** Definitely, as you are not just taking care of turf, you are also a mechanic, the course marshal and a sales person. It's great in a country town to know a lot of people and be able to use their skills and knowledge to help you out when needed. Having members that are willing to help out is a fantastic resource to have.

**If you could change one thing about your job as a regional superintendent what would it be and why?** To be able to play golf at my club and enjoy myself without having to answer questions about the course and to not have people whinge when I play well and say it's because I know where the pin placements are!

**How important are the relationships you have with other course supers/trade reps?** Very



**A new dam has recently been constructed adjacent to the 9th green to make the driveable par four hole more strategic off the tee**

important. If you have good reps and are friendly with other course supers you can call them for back up and advice at any time.

**What are some of the more unusual requests you have had?** We picked up a 800kg money safe with the loader after it was knocked off from the clubhouse but dropped (from being too heavy) on a fairway because the police had nothing to remove it from the scene. (Police records showed that the safe had been carried by two people, but only made it 50m – go figure!)

**What have you got in your shed?**

- New Holland G6035 rough mower;
- New Holland Boomer super steer tractor loader;
- 6700D Toro fairway mower;
- 3250D Toro greens mower;
- Jacobsen GK IV greens/groomer mower;
- John Deere Gator diesel; and
- John Deere tractor.



**From December 2010 to February 2011 Red Cliffs received twice its annual rainfall which caused widespread flooding of the course and club's turf farm. 200mm of rain fell in 24 hours, with 150mm of that coming in a three hour period**





◀ **Red Cliffs' 126m par three 8th hole. The course boasts five par threes and five par fives**

**What's your favourite piece of machinery and why?** Our New Holland Boomer super steer tractor loader. We purchased it just before the floods in 2011 and it was great during the floods to divert water. It makes work easier around the course that was once done by hand.

The next major purchase will be a new work ute – the current one has clocked up 530,000kms and has certainly had its time and done the work. As for a wish list – lots... topdresser, corer, new greens and fairway mowers, where do I stop!

**Do you have any interesting pieces of machinery which have been manufactured out of necessity or any old pieces of equipment that you keep alive through necessity?** The Jacobsen greens mower has been kept alive because it has got the grooming heads on it and it gets repaired by us regularly. We have a member who is a great engineer and if we need any parts made then he can make it so we can keep this old machine going longer.

**Favourite spot on the course:** The BBQ area next to the clubhouse. You can see the 18th hole, 10th tee to green, 1st tee to green and the 9th green. It's a great place to relax, especially on a Monday when we have our BBQ lunch with Dad's Army.

**What's the best piece of advice received about being a course superintendent/greenkeeper and who gave it to you:** 'If you cannot get it done today, don't stress, there's always tomorrow' – my wife, Nicole. When I worked as the sole greenkeeper at Wentworth I used to do 14 hour days and was never home; it almost killed me! I have very high expectations of myself.

**Most pleasing/rewarding moment during your time as Red Cliffs superintendent?** The feedback we are receiving about how good the course looks now, seeing as we have been through and survived drought, locust plagues and floods over the past four years. It's very rewarding to know the effort you put in brings those comments and reward. 🙌

**In his first weeks as superintendent at Red Cliffs, Newey watched helplessly as a plague of locusts stripped his greens and fairways bare**



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE SUNRAYSIA DAILY

## AT A GLANCE – RED CLIFFS GOLF CLUB

**Course specs:** 18 holes, 6120 metres, par 72. Twenty-five hectares of maintained turf (1ha of bent grass greens, couch and kikuyu tees, kikuyu fairways and roughs). 5ha turf farm (kikuyu and Santa Ana couch).

**Members:** 190.

**Annual rounds:** 8000.

**Major events:** Annual men's and ladies Open championships. Annual concert on the course with dancing on the 18th green.

**Annual course management budget:** \$113,000 (not including wages).

**Staff structure:** Simon Newey (superintendent), Daniel Cooper (3rd year apprentice) and Neville Birch (groundsman, 20 hours a week). Dad's Army volunteers.

**Climate:** We experience hot summers and cool winters every year. Our top temp for 2014 so far was 45.8 degrees in January. Frost is common

during winter. Average temperatures for summer are 32°C and down to 15°C during winter. Annual mean rainfall of 290mm.

**Soil types:** Red loam greens, limestone clay fairways.

**Water sources:** River (161 megalitres), drainage (5ML).

**Irrigation system:** Toro Site Pro 7 (just upgraded), 3-wire decoder system.

**Cutting heights:** Greens 3mm, fairways and tees 14mm, rough 50ms.

**Renovations:** Two major renovations a year – spring and autumn. Solid tines 5", topdress with washed river sand, organic fertiliser, scarify 2-3 times and groom during the warmer months.

**Major disease pressures and how you combat them:** We get a lot of dollar spot and rhizoctonia in the greens. We have a monthly spray programme to keep on top of this.





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## BASF USES GOLD COAST CONFERENCE TO LAUNCH INTO AUST MARKET



BASF has relaunched its wide range of products into the Australian turf market which include herbicides, insecticides, colourants, wetting agents, dyes, water treatments and spray markers



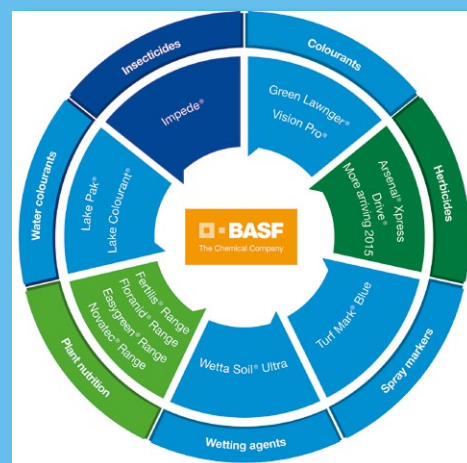
**B**ASF, one of the world's leading chemical manufacturers, cemented its entry to the Australian turfgrass industry launching an expansive range of products at the recent Australian Turfgrass Conference and Trade Exhibition on the Gold Coast.

The BASF Australia team, which included commercial manager – turf Stewart Paterson and sales manager Craig Burleigh, showcased its turf products over the two day event which included herbicides, insecticides, colourants, wetting agents, dyes, water treatments and spray markers. The range is available through BASF's distribution partners Living Turf, Simplot, K&B Adams, Nuturf and Globe. BASF has also indicated that there will be a number of innovative solutions in the pipeline, including the development of new fungicides for the turf market.

"This is just the beginning of our commitment to Australian turf solutions," says Paterson. "We're investing globally in R&D resources to help the turf industry to be more successful. As a diehard sporting nation everyone wants pristine green grass all year round and we are looking forward to delivering solutions to support that."

"BASF's acquisition of Becker Underwood and our global experience in weed, insect and disease control turf solutions, particularly in the US, enables us to offer a portfolio of products with considerable strength here in Australia."

"BASF has had a long and successful history in the Australian agriculture fertiliser market. This experience coupled with BASF's return in March this year to direct distribution in the Australian crop protection market, has seen the building of a larger Australian based team. This has meant that we can increase our efforts focusing on solutions for markets like turf and bring other solutions from businesses like pest control."



BASF's development manager, fertiliser and soil solutions, Rohan Davies added: "There are a number of plant nutrition ranges available including Fertilis, Floranid, Easygreen and Novatec that have a complimentary fit in our portfolio."

Products such as Green Lawngr with features that restore a natural green to damaged turf, are long lasting and don't rub off, have been developed on the back of innovations such as BASF's ColorLock technology. Drawing from cross-business technology strengths in crop protection, the product offering also includes herbicides Drive and Arsenal Xpress.

"We are excited to step into the Australian market, knowing the capacity and capability a company like BASF has with its near 150 year history in R&D," says Paterson. "We look forward to understanding the industry's needs further and bringing them solutions as we grow our activities in Australia."

**More information on BASF's product portfolio can be found at [agro.basf.com.au](http://agro.basf.com.au) or through distributors Living Turf, Simplot, K&B Adams, Nuturf and Globe or call toll free 1800 558 399.**



Chuck Greif

### GREIF APPOINTED JACOBSEN'S NEW ASIA PACIFIC MD

AGCSA Gold Partner company Jacobsen announced in late May that Chuck Greif had been appointed Managing Director, Asia Pacific, replacing Alan Prickett who recently returned to the UK to head up the Ransomes Jacobsen operation at its Ipswich headquarters.

A respected industry veteran with almost 30 years in global sales management roles, Greif has relocated to Singapore to take on the position. As part of his new role Greif attended the recent Australian Turfgrass Conference on the Gold Coast where Jacobsen was one of the event's principal partners and sponsored the two Monday workshops conducted by David Bancroft-Turner and Dr Karl Danneberger. He also attended the NZGCSA's Fine Turf Seminar held from 15-17 June.

Greif began his career in the turfgrass industry in 1998 when he was appointed national sales manager at John Deere's golf and turf products division. He began his career with Textron in 2005 as director of product development at E-Z-GO in Augusta, Georgia. In 2008 he was promoted to the role of director of global specialty and pre-owned vehicle sales and in 2009 he joined Jacobsen as a regional sales manager before being promoted to director of sales for the eastern region in 2012.

Shortly after Greif's appointment, Jacobsen also announced that it has appointed ADE Turf Equipment as a non-exclusive distributor for the state of Victoria. Mike Foskett, Jacobsen's territory sales manager for Australia and New Zealand commented: "The appointment of ADE Turf again emphasises our strategy of increasing distribution touch points and creating more opportunities for

**JACOBSEN**



customers to purchase our products. Tim Coram and his team at ADE have an excellent reputation in the turf care sector in Victoria and that was a significant factor in their appointment."

## GOLD COAST SHOW WINNERS

As well as providing delegates the opportunity to view the latest in turf maintenance machinery, products and services, the recent Australian Turfgrass Conference Trade Exhibition on the Gold Coast also had plenty of prizes on offer. The successful winners were:

**AGCSA:** Taking home a GoPro Hero3 Silver Edition camera for downloading the AGCSA conference smartphone app was **Kate George** (Woodlands Golf Club, Vic). Also winning a GoPro for updating his details with the AGCSA and having his photo taken was **Joshua Punch** (Burleigh Golf Club, QLD).

**Syngenta:** By entering Syngenta's business card prize draw, RACV Cape Schanck superintendent **Mathew Hose** won himself a Toro mower valued at \$850. Gold Creek Country Club superintendent **Scott Harris** won a SpraySure kit valued at \$1000 after he ordered nozzles from the Syngenta XC Nozzles range.

**Simplot Partners:** **Martyn Black** (Castle Hill Country Club, NSW) won an all-expenses paid trip to attend

the 2015 Asian Turfgrass Conference in Pattaya, Thailand after placing an order of Simplot Partners products at the company's stand.

**Bayer:** Manly Golf Club's **Ian Thompson** walked away with a 16GB iPad Mini after registering with Bayer's Amplify Turf website.

**Everris:** Running one of the more unique competitions at the trade show, Everris asked delegates to literally reach new heights with their vertical leap competition. Winners from each state/region took home an STRI-tested Everris disease resistance treatment package comprising 12 Sierraform GT 20kg bags, one Greenmaster Liquid Effect Fe 10L drum and a one Hydraflo L 20L drum.

The state winners were **Simon Sczesny** (D&D Curators, SA), **Joshua Straub** (Lismore Workers Golf Club, NSW), **Brad Anderson** (Sun City Country Club, WA), **Jamey Rosewarne** (Pelican Waters, Qld), **Marcus Saddington** (Etihad Stadium, Vic), **Blair Dalton** (Cricket Tasmania, Tas) and **Brad Sim** (Cape Kidnappers, NZ).

The top three state winners – Sczesny, Straub and Anderson – then competed in a 'jump-off' which saw Sczesny take out top honours, jumping an impressive 69cm off the ground. For his efforts Sczesny won a ParryMeter, a new tool available through Everris which measures the smoothness and trueness of fine turf surfaces.



**Everris's John Walsh (left) presents Simon Sczesny (D&D Curators, SA) his ParryMeter after winning the vertical leap competition**



# COLOSSEUM

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## TORO IN PARTY MODE DURING GOLD COAST CONFERENCE



**Celebrating its centenary, Toro's stand at the Gold Coast show took up one whole side of the trade floor**



**The new zero-turn Sand Pro 2040Z bunker rake was one of a number of new machines on display**

**A 1932 Toro Parkmaster formed part of the Toro display**



**O**n 10 July 2014 the Toro Company celebrated its 100th birthday and to mark the occasion Toro Australia had a significant presence at the 30th Australian Turfgrass Conference Trade Exhibition held on the Gold Coast during the last week of June.

As well as again being a principal conference partner and sponsoring the AGCSA Golf Championships, Toro dominated the trade exhibition floor with its 678m<sup>2</sup> stand taking up one whole side. It wasn't hard to miss and along with the usual machinery and irrigation products on display it also contained an eye-catching timeline that outlined the company's extensive history in developing golf course maintenance products.

As well as showcasing many of the company's new products which have recently hit the market, the stand also featured two machines that harked back to the company's formative years. A 1923 Toro Standard hand putting green mower stood alongside a 1932 Toro Parkmaster 50-inch mower, with plaques outlining the story behind each machine. The Parkmaster was the predecessor of what superintendents now know as Toro's Greensmaster ride-on mowers.

Among the new products to catch the attention of delegates were the SandPro 2040Z, Workman HDX Automatic, GreensPro 1240 roller, MultiPro 1750 and new Infinity Series golf sprinklers. The Sand Pro 2040Z, which provides zero-turn

radius manoeuvrability, an industry first for golf course bunker rakes, was of particular interest for many, especially those who attended the bunker management workshop conducted during the conference education sessions.

Ideal for all bunkers, even small, tight bunkers and those with sloped walls, the Sand Pro 2040Z's patent-pending Lift in Turn system, paired with a flex tooth rake, allows it to groom contoured bunkers, steep slopes and tight fingers, all without leaving tyre marks or teardrop mounds of sand. The 84-inch wide flex tooth rake has three reversible rubber trowels designed to keep bunker liners from tearing and turf on bunker edges safe.

Operators are able to move quickly between bunkers with a top transport speed of 19km/h. The 2040Z is powered by a 12.2-horsepower Kawasaki gas engine which has a unitised transmission design, minimising hydraulic lines and connections for reliable, low-maintenance performance. Optional accessories for the Sand Pro 2040Z include an LED light kit, a mesh storage bag for tools, trash or debris, and a Bimini sunshade. A seat suspension kit and Turf-Trac tires are also available.

### FLAG BEARERS

Following the 2014 Toro AGCSA Golf Championships held at Sanctuary Cove and Links Hope Island at the start of the conference, Toro conducted a silent auction for their limited-edition Centenary golf flags which were used for the event.

The flags, supplied free of charge by AGCSA Bronze Partner company David Golf, were embossed with Toro's exclusive Centenary logo and all 36 were put up for auction with the money raised going to the families of Russell Cook and Stuart Charman, two Queensland assistant superintendents who passed away suddenly earlier this year.

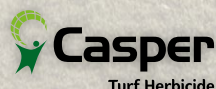
A grand total of \$4750 was raised and the success bidders were: AGCSA (top bid of \$300), Michael Dennis (Royal Perth GC), Ian Elphick (Gunnedah GC), Leigh Hunt (Cervadon), De Lage Landen (Toro Finance), Twin View Turf, Matt McLeod (Tocumwal GC), Simon Adermann (Lawn Solutions Aust), Air Road, SAGCA, Brett Balloch (Anglesea GC), Ellerston Golf, Craig Castelino (Bunnings), Craig Molloy (Cypress Lakes), Andrew Perrett (Pacific Dunes GC), Joshua Straub (Lismore Workers GC), GCSAWA, Nathan Bradbury (Eastlake GC), Luke Ognabine (Toro), Steven van Esveld (NC&M), Graeme Church (GYC), Jean-Paul Groosman (T-Quip), Trevor Ridge, Richard Walne (Toro), Ian O'Donnell (Bayldon Ag), Gordon Watkins (AgPower), Brenton Jaensch (Aldinga Mowers), Mark Draganoff (Nowa), Robert Rein (Toro), Jeff Horan (Mower Supastore), Ben Tilley (Headland GC), Riverland/BSF, Tim Emery (Toro), Laurence Bingham (Toro), Neville Coulson (Pellows) and Scott Trembath (Darwin Golf Club). 🍷



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# In The Green

Turf Australia Conference & Field Day

Penrith Panthers Conference Centre, Penrith NSW

& Greener Lawn Supplies, Freemans Reach NSW

27-29 August 2014



## Improving skills and knowledge

Turf Australia business  
and industry development  
manager Richard Stephens  
looks at the upcoming  
turf growers conference  
at Penrith Panthers and  
delves deeper into the  
recent Horticulture Australia  
Limited review.



Improving business skills and knowledge is the key focus of this year's annual Turf Australia conference to be held in Sydney from 27-29 August. This year's programme of presentations, workshops and the field day will give turf growers a better understanding of what their businesses are doing and practical ways in which to improve them.

The presentations at Penrith Panthers Conference Centre will give a wide range of perspectives on business, specifically related to turf as well as general business practices, and growers will come away with some really practical ways to improve their business. This will include:

- How to be more strategic in business;
- Knowing the real costs of turf production;
- Energy efficient irrigation;
- Effective use of water allocations on turfgrass in open spaces;
- Tapping into the new national turf industry marketing campaign;
- Learnings from the USA and Turf Producers International.

The field day will highlight the intensive turf production region around the Hawkesbury River and an impressive array of exhibitors have already been confirmed. Greener Lawn Supplies will host the field day which will include two on-site workshops, being the turf farm herbicide trial and irrigation energy efficiency. The field day will also provide the opportunity for growers to see a wide range of machinery displays and demonstrations.

Turf Australia urges all turf growers to register for the event and if you haven't received a copy of

Identifying, determining and implementing business strategies along with managing business costs and structures will be among the key focuses at the upcoming Turf Australia conference

the conference brochure visit [www.turfaustralia.com.au](http://www.turfaustralia.com.au), contact Jasmine on (02) 4588 5735 or email [admin@turfaustralia.com.au](mailto:admin@turfaustralia.com.au).

### BENEFITS OF THE TURF LEVY

The Turf Levy has funded over 100 research and development projects as well as several national marketing programmes, all of which have contributed to the professional development of the turf industry.

To ensure the entire industry is aware of the many benefits that come from the turf levy, Turf Australia has significantly improved industry communications through fortnightly e-newsletters, a quarterly industry magazine, an updated website as well as seminars and annual conferences.

Also, Turf Australia recently identified 465 potential turf growing businesses in Australia and has sent each of them an eight-page Fact Sheet on the levy programme. The Fact Sheet describes some of the benefits already realised from the turf levy, how the levy system works and how individual levy payers can have a say on levy expenditure. If you didn't receive a paper copy of this fact sheet, please contact Turf Australia.

### HAL CHANGE

As discussed in the last edition of Australian Turfgrass Management Journal, Horticulture Australia Limited (HAL) has undergone an independent review which made nine recommendations, the first of which has now been agreed to by the HAL board and members. As a result, HAL will be significantly different and in the hands of individual growers.

The role of HAL is to ensure high-quality R&D and marketing outcomes across Australia's fruit, vegetable, nut, nursery, turf, extractive crop and other horticulture industries. ACIL Allen's final report – 'Better Value for Growers - A Future for HAL: Independent review of HAL and Horticulture Levy System' – was released in early May and its recommendations are:

- Establish grower-owned Research and Development Corporation (new HAL);
- Remove Industry Advisory Committees;
- Rationalise and strengthen planning;
- Streamline industry liaison/research; development and extension principles;
- Improve project management and reporting;
- New HAL services marketing on request;
- Improve direct grower communication;
- Greater levy efficiency and transparency; and
- Improved internal accountability/processes.

According to the report's authors, the case for change was strong and was not limited to singular areas of HAL, but to the entire operations of the organisation – the governance and operations of HAL



to the way levies were collected from the growers of horticulture products and how expenditure of the levies was managed.

Not completely dismissing peak industry bodies (PIBs), the report suggested PIBs can retain a role and “be able to apply, on a competitive and transparent basis, for funds to undertake projects. Under the new arrangements if they are the best provider they will obtain those funds, without the current problem of having a perceived conflict of interest.”

The recommendations also suggested that the new HAL model would “make decisions on which projects to fund based on a single strategic plan, and with regard to what will deliver the best returns for growers. It will be able to take advice as needed from outside sources; it will not have the structural impediment of a set of advisory committees embedded in its constitution.”

The report also recommended that projects should be larger or organised into programmes so as to reduce overhead costs and move away from a ‘one size fits all’ approach to reporting and to minimise paperwork for small projects.

The report stated: “There was a concern among growers and industry representative bodies about whether HAL’s current approach to marketing horticulture products was effective.” Therefore, it recommended “marketing levies could be

spent directly by industry PIBs where they can demonstrate this is more effective, and HAL should engage in marketing on a fee-for-service basis where requested”.

The report also suggested levy collection should be more transparent and the new HAL be empowered to negotiate with the Department of Agriculture on ways to reduce collection costs.

## TURF AUSTRALIA COMMENTS

While there are some valid points made in the HAL Review recommendations, it is still unclear how individual industries can have a say in the expenditure of their levy and/or voluntary contribution funds.

The Turf Australia Board believes it is vital that all industries, regardless of size, have a direct say in the expenditure of levy and/or voluntary contribution funds relevant to their industry. This direct engagement with individual industries is vital to ensure long-term industry support for the levy funding system.

There is now a considerable amount of detail to be worked to enable these recommendations to be implemented. Industry practitioners can access the executive summary and full copies of the HAL review report by visiting [www.horticulture.com.au](http://www.horticulture.com.au) and clicking on the ‘HAL review’ tab. For more information, contact Richard Stephens on (02) 4588 5735 or email [bidm@turfaustralia.com.au](mailto:bidm@turfaustralia.com.au)



**Turf Australia recently identified 465 potential turf growing businesses in Australia and sent each of them an eight-page Fact Sheet on the Turf Levy programme**

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Eden Park's Blair Christensen (above) and Wellington Regional Stadium's Brett Siphthorpe (below) were part of the Cricket World Cup Forum conducted during the recent Australian Turfgrass Conference



It is with a heavy heart that I begin this NZGCSA column with news of the recent passing of former NZGCSA president and industry stalwart **Brett Burgess**. Brett, one of this country's most highly regarded and professional superintendents, lost his long battle with cancer on 1 July 2014.

Brett played an instrumental role in the NZGCSA over many years and in recognition of his achievements he was bestowed the 2013 NZGCSA Distinguished Service Award. Brett's commitment to and outstanding service for the golf turf industry included many years on the NZGCSA Board, including six as president. He was actively involved in every regional association where he worked and made a significant contribution to the NZGCSA's training programmes.

The way Brett, his wife Karyn and their children Jordan and Haylee faced the recent challenges surrounding his illness was a testament to their character and reinforced what a wonderful and respected man Brett was. He will be sorely missed by all in the industry and by way of honouring Brett's memory former NZGCSA president and close friend **Peter Boyd** (Pakuranga Country Club) has penned a fitting tribute episode.

## FINE TURF SEMINAR

The New Zealand Fine Turf Seminar (FTS) was run by the Northland association at Waitangi from 15-17 June and proved to be a huge success with more than 170 attending. The social spirit of the event was fantastic with the accommodation, meals and seminars all contained within the one venue. The organising committee set a professional and relaxed tone from the start with a welcoming address that included translations of northern slang ('bro', 'cuz', 'hangi' and 'hongii') and 'cabin crew' explaining the rules.

A dinner with random allocated seating and a quiz contest was followed the next night by the conference dinner and awards. The NZGCSA presented a number of host recognition awards for those superintendents who had held major events. In truly humorous Northland style, the awards also included 'Best snapper caught while pulling a sickie' and 'The award for receiving the most second places in awards ceremonies'. Former All Black lock and Northland's favourite son **Ian Jones** was guest speaker at the dinner which ended a memorable few days.

The success of the FTS wouldn't have happened without a very strong programme. This included **Dr Karl Danneberger** (The Ohio State University, USA) discussing predictive models and *Poa annua*, **Dan Cook** (Elanora Country Club, Sydney) on *Poa* control, 'Acid theory' revisited with updates, disease updates, the latest on spraying additives and techniques to maximise results, tissue testing,

sand topdressing and the alarming **Jason Shon Bennett** on nutrition.

After a previous evening spent 'maximising their enjoyment,' many delegates received a huge wake-up call with a very lively Jason pulling no punches in highlighting the detrimental effects of coffee, alcohol, red meat and sugar on our health and longevity. Never before have so few savouries, pastries and cakes been eaten at a turf conference morning tea as in the one that followed!

The NZGCSA Annual General Meeting was also held during the FTS with **Gordon Trembath** (Hastings Golf Club) stepping down and two new members elected to the NZGCSA Board. The full Board now comprises:

- **President: Brendan Allen** (The Hills Golf Club)
- **Committee: Steve Hodson** (Westtown Golf Club), **Dane Hawker** (North Shore Golf Club), **Greg Swafford** (Titirangi Golf Club), **Martin Burger** (Whitford Park Golf Club) and **Jason Perkins** (Omanu Golf Club).

Both membership wise and financially the NZGCSA is in as good a shape as it has been for many years and it was heartening to see so many new faces and so much enthusiasm at the FTS.

## FUTURE TURF MANAGERS

Following the FTS, the very first NZ Future Turf Managers Initiative (FTMI) was held. This is an initiative that is supported by Jacobsen and is conducted with other superintendent associations around the world. It is an education and mentoring programme designed to provide extra management level education to future industry leaders at the beginning of their careers. NZGCSA members who meet the criteria can apply to be selected. This year the successful applicants were:

- **Shane Cole** (Springfield Golf Club)
- **Ryan O'Donnell** (Titirangi Golf Club)
- **James O'Malley** (Millbrook Country Club)
- **Owen Williams** (Fairview Golf Club)

The initial mentors are **Brendan Allen** and **John Spraggs** (Royal Wellington Golf Club). All were put through a management training programme designed to enhance their people management and conflict resolution skills and will remain in regular contact helping each other out when needed.

**Chuck Greif** (Jacobsen managing director Asia Pacific) and **Gina Putnam** (Jacobsen director of marketing and communications – international) were on hand to witness the first seeds of what we all expect to be a programme that strengthens the NZ industry.

## ACROSS THE DITCH

A good sized contingent of Kiwi superintendents and turf managers made their way to the Gold Coast to enjoy not just the Australian Turfgrass Conference



but the warmth and sunshine that go missing in so many parts of NZ during winter. The chance to catch up with like-minded Australian counterparts, make some new friends and share ideas is something we all enjoy. The camaraderie that exists in the golf turf industry is pretty unique and the ongoing cross-Tasman support is something we value.

STA NZ chairman **Ian McKendry** chaired the Cricket World Cup forum which featured Eden Park turf manager **Blair Christensen** and ex-pat Australian and now Wellington Regional Stadium curator **Brett Siphthorpe**. They joined with Manuka Oval's **Brad van Dam** and Adelaide Oval's **Damian Hough** to discuss their preparations ahead of next year's tournament.



Among the NZ delegates was **Peter Boyd** who passed on the following message of thanks to the AGCSA team: *"I would just like to pass on my congratulations and thanks to you, the staff and board members of the AGCSA for such a great week of education, social events and fabulous trade show. The standards you set, meet and exceed at these events is a credit to your organisation and us in the industry are the true benefactors of all your hard work and organisation. I know all the Kiwis who attended enjoyed it immensely and look forward for the opportunity to attend again soon."*

**BRENDAN ALLEN**  
PRESIDENT, NZGCSA

**STANZ chairman Ian McKendry**  
chaired the Cricket World Cup Forum

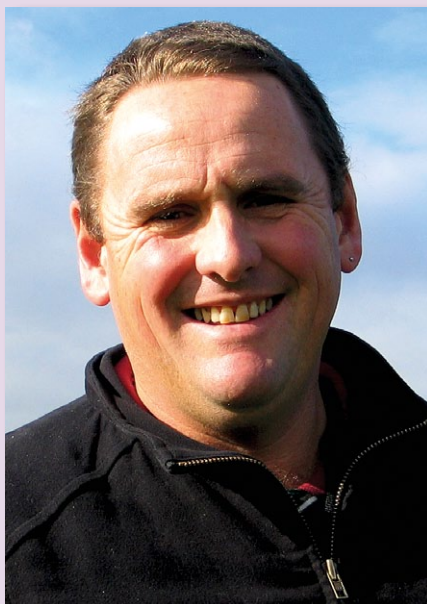
## VALE BRETT BURGESS (13 JUNE 1967 - 1 JULY 2014)

**W**ell known New Zealand golf course superintendent and past president of the New Zealand Golf Course Superintendents Association (NZGCSA) **Brett Burgess** lost his long and courageous battle with cancer recently. Surrounded by family in his beloved hometown of Whangarei in New Zealand's north, Burgess passed away peacefully on Tuesday 1 July aged just 47.

Brett's career in turf management started in the early 1980s at the Northland Golf Club before landing the role as superintendent at Kaitia Golf Club in the far north of New Zealand. Progression through the industry saw him move to Tauranga to take the superintendent role at Western Bays Golf Club, then Taupo Golf Club before moving to what Brett saw as his ultimate role as superintendent of Hutt Golf Club just north of Wellington.

With the merger of Hutt Golf Club and its neighbour Boulcotts Golf Club in 2010 to form Boulcotts Farm Heritage Golf Club, Brett continued as superintendent and played a significant role in the new course development. In April 2014 the club completed Stage One of this redevelopment, opening seven new holes under Brett's watchful eye.

Brett was actively involved in greenkeeping circles and local superintendent associations in whatever region his employment has taken him. He was always keen to help out and would gladly put his hand up to take on whatever role needed doing. This led to him serving as a regional delegate at national level before becoming a board member and eventual president of the NZGCSA, a post he held for six years.



**Former NZGCSA president Brett Burgess lost his battle with cancer in early July**

Without doubt the most influential leader and advocate for change the New Zealand industry has had, Brett took the NZGCSA from a bunch of volunteers to having paid staff. He was a stickler for 'dress for success' and raising the image of our association and its members. He was at times a wonderful politician and his dealings with politics and people at meetings was his forte. Articulate, concise and a real decision maker, Brett probably did more than he needed to do and lived by the mantra of 'I'll sort this out and get it done'.

His time, knowledge and the respect shown to him by those on other boards he sat on during this time, like the Sports Turf Industry Training Organisation, gave our association the credibility he strived so hard for us to achieve.

The NZGCSA is nearing 80 years of age and there have only been seven winners of the most prestigious award our industry has – the NZGCSA Distinguished Service Award. Brett quite rightly is one of those gentlemen, receiving the honour in 2013. He did all this not for the limelight or kudos, but because he was passionate and always wanted to be and do better not only for himself but anyone who wanted to come along for the ride.

As a true testament to Brett's character and achievements, his funeral service held on 5 July 2014 in his old home town of Whangarei, was attended by over 450 people from around the country and from Australia. A further memorial service was held in Wellington later in the month at his second home – the golf course that he was so proud of.

Special mention needs to be made of Boulcotts Farm Heritage Golf Club, its board, members and particularly general manager **John Freer** for the support shown to Brett and his family throughout the entire seven years that they fought this terrible illness. Never once did they waiver on their commitment to support Brett and his family.

After seven years of a courageous and inspirational battle, Brett passed away surrounded by his parents and family, still smiling and telling them that things would be okay and quoting his now famous saying that he fought his illness with – 'It is what it is'. Brett is survived by wife **Karyn** and children **Haylee** and **Jordan**.

**PETER BOYD**  
PAKURANGA COUNTRY CLUB  
PAST PRESIDENT, NZGCSA







Byron Bay Golf Club superintendent **Shaun Cross** celebrates with parents **Lorelle** (left) and **Lester** (right) and wife **Tammy** after receiving the 2014 AGCSA Excellence in Golf Course Management Award on the Gold Coast

Another Australian Turfgrass Conference has come and gone and congratulations must go to the AGCSA Board, management and staff for organising a fantastic event again. The quality of speakers and the trade show were very impressive and Queensland did its bit by turning on a spectacular week weather-wise.

The week could not have got off to a better start for one GCSAQ member – Byron Bay Golf Club course superintendent and GCSAQ board member **Shaun Cross**. The winner of the GCSAQ's Superintendent Recognition Award at the Queensland Golf Industry Awards earlier this year, Shaun was bestowed the 2014 AGCSA Excellence in Golf Course Management Award, presented in partnership with John Deere.

For those who have visited Byron Bay Golf Club and seen first-hand the work that Shaun, his assistant **Garry Kunz** and the team do, all would agree that this award is thoroughly deserved.

It was great to see Byron Bay club captain **Peter Sinclair** and his wife **Sandy** present on the night to share in Shaun's success along with Shaun's

wife **Tammy** and his parents **Lester** and **Lorelle**. Shaun has won a trip of a lifetime to be part of the tournament crew at next year's John Deere Classic US PGA Tour event at TPC Deere Run in Illinois and follows previous winners **Michael Bradbury**, **Ben Tilley** and **Colin Morrison** to do so.

Well done also to local course superintendents **Robin Doodson** (Sanctuary Cove Golf & Country Club) and **Danny Foote** (Links Hope Island) for presenting their courses in great condition for the 2014 Toro AGCSA Golf Championships stroke and stableford events.

The big talking point was Queensland winning the state teams title on a countback from the arch enemy New South Wales. This is the second time Queensland has won the state trophy (the last win coming in 2008 at Royal Melbourne) and was rather timely given the recent State of Origin mishap. Congratulations go to our fair dinkum Queenslanders **Robin Doodson** (Sanctuary Cove), **Duncan Lamont** (Surfers Paradise), **Lincoln Coombes** (Royal Pines) and **Mark Hauff** (Palmer Golf).

## ONWARDS AND UPWARDS

There continues to be some significant movement among the Queensland industry of late with the big news coming during the conference that AGCSA and GCSAQ Board member **Robin Doodson** had resigned from Sanctuary Cove. Robin is heading to Doha Golf Club in Qatar which plays host to the European Tour's Qatar Masters every January.

Also set to enjoy a change of scenery is **Mick McMahon** who has left Beerwah Golf Club to take on the sales game with Simplot Partners. I have also decided to take the plunge and will be joining Living Turf in the near future. After 11 years at Grovely TAFE, **Gary Lee** is moving up to Townsville to take a role at TAFE Queensland North. Good luck to all in their new roles.

The annual GCSAQ Northern Rivers Day was recently held at Casino Golf Club which was well supported. Thank you to host superintendent **Mick Greber** for hosting the day and making everyone welcome, along with all sponsors and **Shaun Cross** for organising the day. Murwillumbah Golf Club held a charity day for **Brian Cox's** former assistant **Stuart Charman** who passed away suddenly in early May. From all reports the day was a huge success and other events have also been held in the district to help raise money for Stuart's family.

The GCSAQ Annual General Meeting is the next major event on our calendar and will be held on Monday 25 August. Horton Park Golf Club will be the venue with superintendent **Pat Pauli** set to host us one more time before he moves to the new course.

**DAVE MORRISON**  
COMMITTEE, GCSAQ





At the annual Queensland Cricket Grade Presentations in May, STA Queensland had the pleasure of presenting three awards. **John McFarlane** from East Redlands Cricket Club won both the STA Qld Cricket Groundsman of the Year Award and STA Qld Best First Grade Ground Award, while **Joshua Kemp** (Wynnum Manly Cricket Club) won the STA Qld Most Improved Grounds Award. Congratulations to both recipients.

Some big news from the recent turf conference on the Gold Coast was the announcement of the formation of a national STA, with the unanimous support from the state associations. **Tony Guy** from STA WA was elected president with every state having a representative on the national committee. It's very early days so stay tuned for more details.

Our new STA Qld partners programme has been well received by many of the companies we all use, and need, for us to be able to carry out our jobs and produce the best surfaces we can. Without each other it's a simple case of we don't exist, so please bear this in mind when choosing a product or service and let's support each other. In fact a perfect opportunity to do this will be at our upcoming partner's day on 19 August.

Don't forget to register and use our social media sites. Not only do we have our STA Qld website and forum, but also our own free STA Qld smartphone and tablet app, Facebook page, LinkedIn site and Twitter feed (this was particularly running hot with

plenty of banter between us and STA NSW during the recent State of Origin series).

To finish on a bit of a down note, our president **Mal Caddies** announced recently that he is battling melanoma. In an announcement through the STA Qld LinkedIn site in late June, Caddies, who is part of the inaugural executive of the STA Australia mentioned earlier, posted the following statement:

*"Sorry to everyone that I haven't already told, but after a fairly tough week I feel I can now let you all know. This week I heard the news no-one ever wants to hear from their doctor – I have been diagnosed with melanoma in my lymph nodes under my left arm. Without a second thought it was the worst day of my life, but today after talking to my new oncologist at the Princess Alexandra Hospital I now feel upbeat about the fight ahead. I have no melanoma on my skin which is a bit of a shock but happens in about five per cent of cases. I only found the lump under my arm by accident and don't feel sick at all. The next little while will be a fight for me but I'm positive about the road ahead. Lastly, to all my mates that work outdoors, get checked because being here sucks."*

On behalf of all STA Qld members we wish Mal all the best for his upcoming treatment and a speedy recovery thereafter.

**MARTYN HEDLEY**  
VICE-PRESIDENT, STA QLD

I would like to start this report by stating that it is with much excitement and enthusiasm that I take on the position of vice president of the newly formed Sports Turf Association, Australia. This national association allows us to have one strong united voice working to promote, develop and support the sports turf industry. I congratulate **Tony Guy** on being voted to the position of president and I look forward to working with him, **Nathan Tovey** (treasurer) and the other committee members.

On the home front, we are very pleased to announce that our Cricket Wicket Seminar will be held at the historic Sydney Cricket Ground on Wednesday 20 August. This event offers both presentations and practical demonstrations and covers many aspects of maintaining wickets and outfields. It is a great opportunity to network with other wicket curators, get information on the latest trends in wicket management and talk to reps about products and machinery. We have been working closely with Cricket NSW and look forward to providing a great event. All the details can be found on our website [www.sportsturf.asn.au](http://www.sportsturf.asn.au).

Other events currently being finalised include

the annual Regional Seminar on 28 October. This event will return to Kurri Kurri TAFE in the Hunter Valley area. The TAFE facility offers a great opportunity to demonstrate machinery on a variety of turf surfaces. The programme will be available on the website. Our final event for the year will be a golf day at St Michael's Golf Club. This will be held on Wednesday 10 December and will be a great way to wrap up another busy year.

I would also like to take this opportunity to congratulate the NSW STA Graduate of the Year Award winner **Thomas Kelly**. Tom represented us well at the STA National Sports Turf Graduate of the Year interviews and while he didn't take out the national title we are very proud of his efforts. It is great to see Tom's enthusiasm and passion for his work. Thanks to Toro Australia's support of the award programme. Tom spent a week at the Australian Turfgrass Conference on the Gold Coast and we will continue to work with Tom and support him throughout his career.

**CHRIS CHAPMAN**  
PRESIDENT, STA NSW

## ON THE MOVE

**Brock Agnew:** From Living Turf to assistant superintendent Sanctuary Cove Golf & Country Club, Qld.

**Will Cheatley:** From superintendent Traralgon Golf Club, Vic to HG Sports Turf.

**Robin Doodson:** From superintendent Sanctuary Cove Golf & Country Club, Qld to superintendent Doha Golf Club, Qatar.

**Brad Harris:** Resigned as superintendent Portsea Golf Club, Vic.

**Kirsty Herring:** From superintendent Cooroy Golf Club, Qld to assistant superintendent Kalgoorlie Golf Club, WA.

**Todd McCully:** From Sanctuary Cove Golf & Country Club, Qld to superintendent Arundel Hills Golf Club, Qld replacing Luke Mortimer.

**Mick McMahon:** From superintendent Beerwah Golf Club, Qld to Simplot Partners.

**Dave Morrison:** From superintendent Windaroo Lakes Golf Club, Qld to Living Turf.

**Simon Snedden:** From groundstaff to assistant superintendent, Gold Creek Country Club, ACT.

**Colin Thorsborne:** From state manager Simplot Partners to superintendent Parkwood International Golf Course, Qld.



# SAGCSA



**SAGCSA president Barry Bryant collected the stableford title at the 2014 Toro AGCSA Golf Championships with an impressive 42 points around Links Hope Island**

**W**inter has well and truly hit South Australia with cold, wet and windy weather impacting most parts of the state. As luck would have it, the bad weather set in the same week as the Australian Turfgrass Conference so for those of us who attended the Gold Coast event the warm weather that greeted us was very welcome.

The conference, trade show and all events were again superb and to everyone who helped organise all aspects of the week, especially the AGCSA staff, thank you for a great time. Congratulations also must be extended to SAGCSA Graduate of the Year winner **Luke Merchant** (The Vines of Reynella). Although he didn't win the AGCSA Graduate of the Year Award, I know Luke enjoyed the opportunity to attend the conference and network with his peers.

On a personal note it was great catching up with so many people and the conference proved again to be a great week both from an educational point of view and socially as well. I also had the fortune of collecting the stableford title at the 2014 Toro AGCSA Golf Championships held at the impressive Links Hope Island.

At a state level, in early May the SAGCSA conducted its bus trip to the Fleurieu Peninsula. Leaving Adelaide early Tuesday morning with 14 people on board, we headed to Willunga Golf Club first where superintendent **Chad Dawe** took us on a brief course walk, describing the extensive damage they get from cockatoos. Boarding the

bus we headed for South Lakes Golf Club where superintendent **Don McAvaney** walked us around and discussed aspects of his course including the lakes system. The club then served up a beautiful lunch before we headed to Victor Harbour.

Course superintendent **Mike Bohnsack** and his crew joined us in nine holes of golf on the front nine of the picturesque Victor layout. After golf we had a few drinks in the clubhouse which has spectacular views over Victor Harbour and the Bluff before heading back into town.

Wednesday morning saw the tour head to Normanville and Links Lady Bay Golf Club. Host super **Ian Putland** organised nine holes of golf and lunch on a glorious day. We played the front nine on this great links layout before having lunch on the balcony overlooking the course and the bay. Heading back to Adelaide, all whom attended the two-day trip said that they thoroughly enjoyed the clubs and their hospitality.

At the time of writing this report the SAGCSA was set to host its Annual General Meeting at Royal Adelaide Golf Club (host superintendent **Nathan Bennett**) on Tuesday 22 July. Following the AGM, on Tuesday 19 August, we will be holding an education day at the Westward Ho Golf Club (Adelaide Shores complex).

**BARRY BRYANT  
PRESIDENT, SAGCSA**

# VGCSA



**Ringwood and Dorset superintendent Jeremy Cutajar was elected president of the VGCSA at the recent AGM at Commonwealth Golf Club**

**A**s this is my first report as the newly elected president of the VGCSA, the realisation has set in that it is a huge honour and responsibility to be in this position.

I am very privileged to be able to take over the reins with the association in an excellent position. Immediate past president **Steve Hewitt** has set a high standard in leading the association over the past three-plus years and he can walk away from the role with his head held high knowing that he has left no stone unturned to better the association. This has manifested itself in many areas, with membership numbers on the increase, meeting attendances up and finances also in a strong position.

A huge thank you must also go out to my fellow VGCSA committee members **Michael Freeman, Mat Poultney, Mark Jennings, Barry Proctor, Steve Burchett** and **Shane Greenhill** for all their hard work and dedication in running the VGCSA. These members volunteer their time because they are passionate about the industry and value the importance of a strong, professional association that provides the opportunity for continual education and networking opportunities for all of its members.

The recent VGCSA Annual General Meeting hosted by **Mark Prosser** at Commonwealth Golf

Club in mid-May was an excellent day. Mark is doing some excellent work on the course which he was more than happy to share with everyone during the course walk. The greens presented hard and fast and certainly kept everyone honest on the course with **Adam Lamb** (Barwon Heads Golf Club) prevailing by one shot over **Leigh Yanner** (The National Golf Club) for the coveted Powell Trophy.

The most recent VGCSA meeting was a day for all assistants, foremen and grounds staff at Chisholm TAFE in Rosebud. The day was a great opportunity for staff that would not normally get the opportunity to experience what the VGCSA is all about to come along and meet and talk to their peers in the industry. Thanks to everyone who supported the day and to our guest speakers.

The next VGCSA meeting is the combined supers and 21C country meeting at Corowa Golf Club (host superintendent **Darren Harvey**) on Monday 4 and Tuesday 5 August. I encourage anyone that hasn't attended one of these country meetings previously to come along as it is always a highlight of the VGCSA calendar.

**JEREMY CUTAJAR  
PRESIDENT, VGCSA**



**W**ow! What an unforgettable time it was during that last week of June attending the 30th Australian Turfgrass Conference on the Gold Coast.

Among the array of topics and speakers during the week I was inspired by comments made by the conference's keynote speaker **Dr Karl Danneberger** visiting from Ohio State University, USA. During his lecture on 'Growing Degree Days', where he paid particular attention to the effective management of turfgrass using predictive modelling of environmental and climatic data, Dr Karl repeated on a number of occasions for delegates to consider the importance that nitrogen plays within the physiology of the entire turfgrass plant, not only on how it affects its growth seasonally but also in how it defends itself against pest and disease stress.

The conference also marked an especially important time for the STA as it provided the location for a meeting of representatives from each of the state STAs across Australia. The result of that meeting was the official formation of the STA's national identity – Sports Turf Association Australia (see more on this on page 68).

Personally I was very humbled and inspired to be awarded the position as the body's inaugural president. I have no doubt it will be a challenging year,

however, also equally rewarding. Such optimism is easily achieved by the sure fact that we have such an excellent team of competent people within the STA sharing the commitment and dedication in promoting and supporting education, research and networking opportunities for all persons involved in the turfgrass industry. I would like to thank all my fellow committee members of STA Australia, with particular note to **Jenny Zadro** and **Hugh Gardner**. Their support and passion has been truly inspiring and reassuring.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the superbly organised and very professional team at the AGCSA. Well done to general manager **Peter Frewin** and AGCSA events and education manager **Simone Staples** and their cadre of staff and volunteers for making the week such a brilliant success, including the glorious weather.

Coming events in the west for the STA WA will be the Annual General Meeting in the early half of August followed by a STA WA refresher course in chemical use and storage in September. Dates, times and venues will be advertised as soon as possible.

**TONY GUY**  
PRESIDENT, STA WA



**Dr Karl Danneberger's Growing Degree Days workshop was well received by many delegates at the recent Australian Turfgrass Conference**

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**W**inter has certainly set in here in Melbourne over the past few weeks. After a slightly warmer than normal autumn, the end of June brought strong winds, rain and plummeting temperatures.

On the STA Vic front we have been busy organising the BioActive Soil Solutions Wicket Seminar to be held at AAMI Park on 16 July. This year we will have talks from **David Sandurski** and **Tony Gordon** from the MCG, **John Neylan**, along with others making it a great day. Our guest speaker for the day is **Billy Brownless**, so come and network with industry colleagues and sponsors on the day.

We will also be holding our AGM in the morning, so if you want to join the committee and help out please contact the office as we still have a couple of spots that require filling. It's a great way to get involved and help out.

Since the last edition, we attended the Australian Turfgrass Conference on the Gold Coast and what a great week it was. Well done to AGCSA general manager **Peter Frewin**, AGCSA events and education manager **Simone Staples** and the AGCSA team on yet another fantastic event. The Sportsfield Stream was well attended with some very interesting talks.

During the conference all of the STA state associations met as per previous years. It was great to catch up and hear what we are all doing around the country. Best of all, however, at this meeting all states agreed to the forming of a national body. The Sports Turf Association of Australia is now a truly national body so stay tuned for more information regarding this exciting development for our industry.

**NATHAN TOVEY,**  
PRESIDENT, STA VIC

## STATES VOTE TO FORM NATIONAL SPORTS TURF ASSOCIATION

**T**he recent 30th Australian Turfgrass Conference on the Gold Coast created a slice of industry history with the formation of the very first Sports Turf Association of Australia.

At a meeting of executives from each of the state STA organisations on Monday 23 June, 2014, it was agreed to proceed with previously discussed plans to establish a senior executive and incorporated association to act and function as the national representative of all the state associations.

Following a round of nominations and subsequent vote conducted by all STA regions on Wednesday 25 June, 2014, the inaugural executive committee for the Sports Turf Association, Australia was elected with STA WA president Tony Guy (All Saints College) elected as president. The full 2014-2015 executive is:

- **President:** Tony Guy (All Saints College/ STA WA)
- **Vice-president:** Chris Chapman (Evergreen Turf, STA NSW)
- **Treasurer:** Nathan Tovey (Trinity College/ STA Vic)
- **Committee:** Malcolm Caddies (Suncorp Stadium/STA QLD), Peter LeRiche (Urrbrae TAFE/STA SA), Scott Harris (Gold Creek Country Club/STA ACT) and Chris Hay (Coretaz, Tas)
- **Administration:** Jenny Zadro

"I am very honoured and privileged to be accorded the responsibility as inaugural president of STA Australia," says Guy. "While a lot of work awaits us over the next 12



months building this national association, I am equally enthralled and enthused at the prospect of helping develop such an amazing potential that exists for the future of the sports turf industry in Australia.

"This is an exciting time for the turf industry as STA Australia will be able to act as a supporting focal point for all aspects of communication, education and industry development to the state associations and in turn for all persons involved in commercial sports turf and amenity turf management throughout Australia."

The Sports Turf Association Australia is now seeking sponsorship to assist development throughout its inaugural year. For more information and to discuss

**The inaugural STA Australia executive committee (from left) John Hagan (standing in for Mal Caddies), Peter LeRiche, Chris Chapman, Tony Guy (president), Nathan Tovey and Scott Harris. Absent: Chris Hay**

opportunities, contact Jenny Zadro on 0408 441 119 or email [admin@sportsturf.asn.au](mailto:admin@sportsturf.asn.au).





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Mark Jennings & Jim Waring with the Box Hill Golf Clubs Lowara Hydrovar pump set

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- Mark Jennings Superintendent Box Hill Golf Club

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