

Phil Ford (left) and Frank Dempsey (right) were recognised by the AGCSA and award sponsors Everris (David Westall, centre) with the AGCSA Distinguished Service Award for their many years of service as turf management educators



Frank Dempsey and Phil Ford joined a unique group when they were bestowed the AGCSA's highest honour – the Distinguished Service Award, presented in partnership with Everris – at the recent 27th Australian Turfgrass Conference in Adelaide. ATM editor Brett Robinson looks back on their respective careers as educators and their unstinting efforts to mould and shape the development of up and coming superintendents and turf managers over the past 30 years.



# In a class of their own

There wouldn't have been many people who attended the Syngenta President's Dinner on the final night of the recent 27th Australian Turfgrass Conference in Adelaide who haven't been influenced by Frank Dempsey and Phil Ford over the past three decades.

Joint winners of the 2011 AGCSA Distinguished Service Award, presented in partnership with Everiss (formerly Scotts Professional), both Dempsey and Ford have taught the art of greenkeeping to fledgling superintendents and turf managers in NSW and Victoria for a combined period of almost 60 years.

Their steadfast dedication to perhaps one of the most demanding and unforgiving jobs within the industry meant the AGCSA Board, which bestows the award annually, had little hesitation in recognising the duo for their efforts and in doing so elevating them alongside the likes of fellow educator Dr Peter Martin who won the award back in 2001.

"When you have been in the industry for as long as I have and you see the recipients of the AGCSA Distinguished Service Award who have gone before, you sort of put them on a pedestal," comments Dempsey, who started full-time teaching at Ryde College in Sydney back in 1980 after more than a decade as a bowling greenkeeper. "To have the privilege of joining them makes me feel very proud and humble."

For Ford, who in many ways pioneered post apprenticeship training courses by starting up the Advanced Certificate and Diploma courses through Northern Melbourne Institute of TAFE, it was the ultimate recognition from an industry which he instantly took to after starting with the Australian Turf Research Institute back in 1981. "To me the most important recognition you can get is from peers and colleagues in your own industry and quite frankly I am thrilled and also humbled that the AGCSA has recognised education in this manner," says Ford.

Adelaide proved to be a fitting location for Dempsey and Ford to receive the ultimate recognition for the many years of service at the education coalface. Back in 2003, at the 19th Australian Turfgrass Conference held in the South Australian capital, both men were part of the very first meeting of the National Turf Education Working Group (NTEWG) which had been formed to address concerns about the Federal Government's horticulture training packages which had been introduced in 1998.

Led by the AGCSA and formed in conjunction with the wider turf industry, the NTEWG's primary focus was to review the education pathway for turf management students and establish an industry supported standard. Including the likes of Dempsey, Ford and then AGCSA chief executive Steven Potts, the group contained representatives encompassing all sectors of the turf industry including golf, bowls and sportsfields as well as association bodies such as the AGCSA and TGAA.

While some of the initial members have moved on, today the NTEWG is as active as ever and over the past eight years has fought doggedly to address industry concerns about the provision of turf education and to ultimately improve the quality of the delivery to students coming through.

Along the way the NTEWG has reached a number of milestones, including the creation of the Certificate II and III Horticulture (Turf) delivery and assessment guides between 2003 and 2006. From these, the first national Resource Workbook for Certificate II Sports Turf Management was unveiled earlier this year (see page 28 for more on this) which provides a uniform set of resource notes for students undertaking the course.

Perhaps the most significant achievement, however, came with the revision of the latest training package which was endorsed at the start of 2011. With the backing of industry, the NTEWG not only had input into the creation of the units which make up the training package for the very first time, but also successfully had the qualification titles changed from Horticulture (Turf) to Sports Turf Management, thus achieving recognition that turf is not just part of horticulture but a discipline within its own right.

At the front and centre of the NTEWG have been Dempsey and Ford and while not always seeing eye to eye on everything over the years, their shared passion to ensure that the future delivery of education is the best it can be has always been foremost in their hearts.

Shortly before receiving the Distinguished Service Award, ATM caught up with both gentlemen to reflect on some of the major changes they have seen over the years, their thoughts on the current state of the turf management education system and what they will ultimately take away from their many years of distinguished service.

### What have been the key changes during your time in the turf management education sector?

**Frank Dempsey:** "There have been so many changes over the years and that has been one of the great aspects about being in education. The principles of greenkeeping remain pretty much

### NATIONAL TURF EDUCATION WORKING GROUP COMMITTEE

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>Simone Staples</b> (Secretariat/AGCSA) | <b>Brian Dale</b> (Brisbane TAFE)          |
| <b>John Odell</b> (Royal Sydney GC/AGCSA) | <b>Bruce Davies</b> (CIT, ACT)             |
| <b>Frank Dempsey</b> (NSI Ryde College)   | <b>Mal Harris</b> (Northbridge GC/NSWGCSA) |
| <b>Wade Turner</b> (Queanbeyan BC)        | <b>Gary Lee</b> (Brisbane TAFE)            |
| <b>John Forrest</b> (Challenger TAFE, WA) | <b>Garry Dawson</b> (CIT, ACT)             |
| <b>Peter Le Riche</b> (TAFE SA)           | <b>Bruce McPhee</b> (Chisholm TAFE, VIC)   |
| <b>Tony Apthorpe</b> (Edgeworth BC)       | <b>Mike Walker</b> (TGAA VIC)              |

the same, but technology has changed incredibly, whether it has been the advent of safer chemicals through to how we as teachers actually deliver education. I remember having to create stencils by hand and put them through a Roneo duplicator if we wanted to give students handouts! Nowadays we're sending students SMS reminding them about excursions and assignments.

The biggest change, however, is the number of courses now on offer. When I went through Ryde in the 1970s there was just one – the trade course. Now you have the likes of Cert IV and the Diploma which is fantastic."

### Phil, you were one of the pioneers of post-apprenticeship turf management training in Australia. Tell us how this came about and why?

**Phil Ford:** "Ian Lee, who was a great influence on my teaching career and who always had the best interests of education at heart, was one of the key drivers behind the development of post-apprenticeship training.

We both recognised for a long time that there needed to be something more to offer people than just an apprenticeship, so in 1985 we developed the first post-apprenticeship course in turf – the Advanced Certificate.



CONTINUED ON PAGE 27

## DIFFERENT ROADS BUT A SHARED PASSION FOR TEACHING AND NURTURING TOMORROW'S TURFIES

Despite sharing an immense enthusiasm for the art of teaching and developing Australia's superintendents and turf managers of the future for the past three decades, the manner in which both Frank Dempsey and Phil Ford entered the TAFE system was markedly different.

Dempsey's career began as a bowling greenkeeper apprentice at Gordon Bowling Club in Sydney during which time he attended Ryde School of Horticulture, the very same institute he would end up spending over three decades teaching at. Leaving Gordon, he then had a brief stint as head greenkeeper at Ashfield Bowling Club before returning to Gordon in 1973 to take over from his old boss and remained there until 1979.

During this time Dempsey was on the committee of the NSW Bowling Greenkeepers Association and in 1975 formed the North Shore Bowling Greenkeepers Group which involved 21 local clubs who met on a regular basis. From his many contacts within the industry and through the work he was doing with the North Shore group, he was invited

to apply for a teaching position at Ryde and in 1980 became a full-time teacher of greenkeeping.

Thirty years later and Dempsey has taught all facets of turf management at what is now NSI Ryde College TAFE, from the trade course right up to the Diploma course which he has organised and taught since 2000. During that time Dempsey also managed to better himself by achieving a Diploma of Teaching as well as a Bachelor in Adult Education.

As well as his passion for teaching, Dempsey's influence has also extended into a number of industry associations and bodies, none more so than what is now STA NSW. In 2000 Dempsey was a foundation member and secretary of what was then the TGAA NSW and has remained on the committee ever since. In fact, looking back over his career Dempsey has spent 33 out of his 44 years involved with some form of industry body, something which doesn't look like stopping any time soon.

By contrast, Ford entered the turf industry after completing a degree in agriculture through Melbourne University. After briefly working for the Department of Agriculture in Shepparton, Ford packed his ute and headed to Sydney in 1981 where he joined the Australian Turf Research Institute (ATRI). He was there until 1984 at which time he was encouraged to apply for a job back in Melbourne at then Collingwood TAFE (later NMIT) which would end up being home for the next 25 years.

"I had no ambitions to work in the turf industry, but after starting with ATRI immediately became hooked on turf and embarked on a pretty steep learning curve," recalls Ford. "The one thing that I appreciated very early on was that you were either a turfie or not. Turf was and still is not some subsection of agriculture or horticulture, it is a field all its own and one that is extremely complex.

"I took to teaching like a duck to water I guess and found it to be a terrific mix of theory and practical and dealing with young people who were all pretty motivated to learn. I found I was able to communicate well with the students and as a result I did everything I could for the next 25 years to stay in the classroom. I have had no desire to get out of the classroom and go into admin or become a head of department. I have only ever wanted to teach and looking back I have absolutely no regrets."

While winding down his involvement in teaching – he currently takes a small group of 10 turf students part-time at the University of Ballarat – Ford is certainly living by his own philosophy of lifelong learning and since leaving NMIT has undertaken a PhD through Ballarat University. Ford's thesis is looking at the agronomic conditions of AFL grounds and the links to player injury, with particular emphasis on hardness and traction, which is due for completion at the end of 2012.

Phil Ford doing what he does best at the recent 27th Australian Turfgrass Conference in Adelaide – "I'm a big believer in lifelong learning."



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 25

From there we started down the long path to get the Diploma course accredited which we eventually did in 1990. In those days to get something accredited and then to get the authority to conduct it was a huge process.

Getting those courses up and running was certainly a career highlight. Speaking from a Victorian point of view, you could see that they were just what the industry needed. There was obviously an unmet demand out there and for the first eight years we were knocking people back because we could only fit so many in a room. A lot of the guys doing the course back then were superintendents who wanted to further their education because in the past they simply had nothing formal to go on with once they had completed an apprenticeship.

John Neylan was right on the money in his last column in Australian Turfgrass Management (*Foreword Thinking, ATM Volume 13.3, pg 6*) about the breadth of skills that a superintendent needs today. Back when we started these post-apprenticeship courses, it was those non-turf management skills, like financial management, OH&S, environmental management and HR management which were starting to come to the fore, so something was desperately needed."

**Does the current system of turf management education provide the best start for our up and coming turf managers?**

**PF:** "Apprenticeships form the basis of our system



and it is an excellent system when you compare it say to the US. An apprenticeship is really a partnership between the apprentice, the superintendent/turf manager and the TAFE college. When it is done well (i.e.: taught well and taught by turf people) the apprentice has the potential to develop a solid combination of practical skills and classroom education which turns out people who are not only work-ready but can think for themselves and are able to tackle the challenges of what is a complex profession.

That is the underlying strength of the Australian system and I would hate to see that change to one where you go straight from school, get a degree and then get a job on a golf course and learn greenkeeping that way, which is how they do it in the

**"An apprenticeship is really a partnership between the apprentice, the superintendent/turf manager and the TAFE college. When it is done well, the system turns out people who are not only work-ready but can tackle the challenges of what is a complex profession." – Phil Ford**



### ONE OF THE TRULY GOOD GUYS OF OUR INDUSTRY

"It is a great acknowledgement of Frank's contribution to the turf industry to receive the AGCSA Distinguished Service Award. In his own right Frank was a very good greenkeeper and well respected by his peers, but got out of the game early to go teaching. Maybe he was smarter than the rest of us!

He has a very calm, cheerful persona and an organised and analytical mind. He tackles issues thoroughly and due to his pleasant and quietly engaging nature draws people to him. I didn't have Frank as a teacher but all the boys that I have put through Ryde over the years have the highest regard for Frank and I think that he has got results with his style of teaching. He ensures that his students get out and see what turf management is all about, visiting all manner of turf care establishments and encouraging his pupils to ask questions and observe which is the essence of greenkeeping.

His work with the National Turf Education Working Group since 2003 has been outstanding and if it wasn't for Frank's and the group's steadfast doggedness one could now get a greenkeeping qualification from the back of a cornflakes packet.

Frank is one of the truly 'good guys' of our industry. He is hard working, intelligent, depressingly cheerful and optimistic and this chakra rubs off on you. He is the sort of bloke who if he rings, you feel special. You can't say no even though he never asks much. He is a leader, an achiever and someone to aspire to be like and I am lucky to have him as a friend." – **John Odell, Royal Sydney Golf Club**

**"You put the past recipients of the Distinguished Service Award up on a pedestal, so to have the privilege of joining those makes me feel very proud and humble." – Frank Dempsey**

**“One of the truly rewarding aspects of being an educator is to see your students go on and do good things and your hope is that you have played a small part in helping them achieve that success.” – Frank Dempsey**



US. To me that type of system trains robots and you don't get that sound, underlying experience which can only be gained during an apprenticeship.

And for proof that the apprenticeship system works, you only have to look at the superb results our superintendents and turf managers are now producing and the fact that Australian trained greenkeepers are in demand no matter where you go overseas.”

**Has the calibre of the students and teachers changed during your time in the system?**

**FD:** “When I first started teaching I guess I thought everyone was there to learn, but I soon found out

that wasn't always the case. You are always going to get those students who are really motivated and those who are there just there because they have to. But that's one of the challenging aspects of being a teacher and it has been very satisfying to see those guys, who may not have been the most enthusiastic in the beginning, start to achieve and by the end have a real interest in the industry and have gone on to do good things.

As for the teachers, quality is very important. You may have all the experience in the world preparing golf courses for major tournaments or cricket wickets for international Tests, but you may not necessarily be a good teacher. Teaching is a skill that you are born with and you must have a number of character traits in order to succeed. First and foremost you need to be a caring person and care about the people you are trying to educate, and second you must have a very strong work ethic.”

**PF:** “When I started teaching, the kids who took the course were often only educated to Year 10, whereas nowadays 90 per cent have completed Year 12. Even though most have gone through to their final year, one thing that hasn't changed and is still a limiting factor for a lot of them is their lack of math skills. Math at school is all x, y, and z. When you're doing an apprenticeship in turf there is a lot of math involved, it's just not the sort that they were taught at school! There is also a big difference between the country students and the city students. The country guys are usually more mature – and they certainly don't have as many tattoos and earrings!”

**Aside from the everyday rigours of being a teacher, looking at the wider picture what have been some of the major challenges faced in the provision of turf management education during your time?**

**PF:** “Education is always under threat and one of the toughest fights we have had was the introduction of the horticulture training packages in 1998 and the move towards private education providers. The training package was a good concept, but the underlying thread was money and once you mix education and money there are always going to be shortcuts and sure enough that's what happened.

The problem was that the training package was not only badly written, it was written by non-turf people. From my perspective it dumbed-down education, especially at a time when turf management was becoming a more complex profession. The other thing I really disliked about the training package was that it was a Diploma of Horticulture (Turf) – that really got my back up. So it has been really pleasing to see the AGCSA, through the hard work of Simone Staples and the rest of the NTEWG, fix those problems in the most recent revision of the training package.”

**FD:** “Where you have a government funded system there are always going to be economic pressures – funding cuts, class sizes, the ability to buy new

**“To me the most important recognition you can get is from peers and colleagues in your own industry and quite frankly I am thrilled and also humbled.”**  
- Phil Ford

equipment etc. The introduction of the training packages was certainly one of the big developments and they caused plenty of controversy.

The initial packages were handed down from government with little input from the industry and we had to run with it. Unfortunately that meant a lot of TAFE teachers got a pasting from the industry because of what they were delivering, but they were only delivering what had been handed down by government. I guess we were the meat in the sandwich in some respects, but now with the strong industry involvement through the NTEWG we have managed to have a much greater input.

**As you have both just mentioned, the formation of the National Turf Education Working Group in 2003 was a key development for the industry. What has this group managed to achieve?**

**PF:** “The NTEWG was formed in response to the twin issues of the training packages and private education providers. The AGCSA, through then chief executive Steven Potts, was the driver behind that. The only way for the industry to move forward was to have fair dinkum training and the NTEWG, initially through Steve and now through the ongoing



**A PIONEER WHO HAS ALWAYS RAISED THE BAR**

“When it comes to the AGCSA Distinguished Service Award you only have to look at the list of past winners to realise what an enduring mark these gentlemen have left on the turf industry, and this year's joint winner Phil Ford is no exception.

I first met Phil in the late '80s when I enrolled in the Advanced Certificate/Diploma classes in sportsturf management. Through NMIT, Phil pioneered the introduction of post-apprenticeship training and he was and probably still is a hard taskmaster. He is passionate about the turf industry and demands the same from his students.

Phil has a sharp intellect but as with all good educators he has the unique ability to communicate across all levels, breaking down the complex into a series of practical steps. As part of his teaching diploma classes, Phil has also established a series of detailed written notes on each subject taught which has become an invaluable source of reference material for teachers and students alike.

Apart from being an educator, Phil's greatest legacy is possibly the role he has played in shaping the way turf management is taught throughout Australia. He has been passionate about raising the standards of teaching together with broadening the subjects taught and has been outspoken in his criticism of sections of the industry he has seen as wanting to dumb down the education sector.

I'm sure I speak on behalf of countless Victorian turf practitioners who have had their careers and lives shaped by Phil over the past 25 years that the AGCSA could not have chosen a more worthy winner.”

- John Geary, AGCSATech

**CERT II SPORTS TURF MANAGEMENT RESOURCE WORKBOOK RELEASED**



Earlier this year the National Turf Education Working Group published the Certificate II Sports Turf Management Resource Workbook (pictured). Sponsored by the AGCSA and Toro, the workbook contains full notes, worksheets and resources for the 10 core units of the Cert II in Sports Turf Management. The units are:

- Participate in OH&S process;
- Participate in environmentally sustainable work practices;
- Operate basic machinery and equipment;
- Prepare turf surfaces for play;
- Plant trees and shrubs;
- Maintain pressurised irrigation systems;
- Treat weeds;

- Support turf establishment;
- Apply chemicals under supervision; and
- Treat plant pests, disease and disorders.

The Certificate II Sports Turf Management Resource Workbook has been delivered to all TAFE institutions around Australia and money derived from their sale will be used to produce further learning material and assisting TAFE teachers. The working group is in the process of developing a similar resource across two volumes for the Cert III course which it aims to complete by the end of 2012. For more information about the workbook or the NTEWG in general, contact Simone Staples on (03) 9548 8600 or email [simone@agcsa.com.au](mailto:simone@agcsa.com.au)

work of Simone Staples, has been very successful. It shows that government does listen to the industry when it speaks as one. The new training package will be pretty good and the industry has got what it wants with the Diploma of Sports Turf Management rather than Diploma of Horticulture (Turf)."

**FD:** "Being a part of the NTEWG for the past eight years has been one of the most rewarding aspects in my career as an educator and I am really proud of what we have achieved. The latest revision of the training package was endorsed at the start of 2011 and it is the first occasion that the industry has had actual input into the units being taught and is a testimony to the work put in by the AGCSA which pushed hard for it.

Since 2003, the NTEWG has formulated learning and assessment guides across all units which culminated recently in the creation of the first ever Resource Workbook for Certificate II and by the end of 2012 we will have done the same for Certificate III. These national notes, which have been produced with the sponsorship of Toro Australia, will be used by all students across the country and means we now have standardised delivery of the units and uniform assessment. We also now, through the NTEWG, have a national validation meeting every year where all TAFE turf teachers in Australia come together to validate the units that are being taught."

**Given those recent challenges, how would you rate the current health of the system.**

**PF:** It's very healthy and the current training package is good, but the system itself is still bogged down in administrative paper work. It is unbelievable how it has multiplied over the years and I'm sure it is the same for superintendents and turf managers as well. I guess it's just part of modern society, but in a lot of respects it is killing the enjoyment of being a TAFE teacher. But on the other hand, there is a terrific quality of people going into teaching at the moment which is very encouraging.

**What changes, if any, would you like to see in the future provision of turf management education in Australia?**

**PF:** "I would like to see the industry itself promote lifelong learning. There is a problem in that for the guys who do have the Diploma there is not a lot to go on with, unless they do something like a business course. It just seems a shame that you hit the wall once you have finished the Diploma. The next step is a tertiary course which involves a lot of expense and is often impractical to do part-time.

There is the concept around of an applied degree which if it took full account of Diploma studies, which meant you weren't starting from year one, and could be set up so that it could be done on a part-time basis so that a superintendent could stay in their job, would be terrific.

As far as the NTEWG is concerned, there will always be challenges and you can guarantee it will have something to do with money. We have avoided the worst of the dumbing down that the training packages initially brought in, but the industry now has to be vigilant in maintaining quality."

**To finish, when you look back on your time, what will be the one thing you will take away with you from your involvement as a turf educator?**

**PF:** The most rewarding aspect is being part of an industry as it has grown. When I think back to 1981 things were pretty basic. Right through that period it has been terrific to be in education because things have changed so quickly with new products, turf varieties, management techniques and research.

There must be some pretty good reasons why you would do the same job for 25 years and for me it's simple. I love to learn new things and believe in lifelong learning. I also believe we have a very good system which is turning out superintendents and turf managers who are recognised the world over.

One of the main reasons I have lasted so long as a teacher is the people. All the teachers – particularly Gary Thomas and Peter Fitzgerald who have kept me somewhat sane over the years – the students, superintendents, greenkeepers, groundsman, curators, turf farmers; as individuals and as part of organisations they have all contributed and influenced me throughout my career. I couldn't have wished to be involved with a better group of people."

**FD:** "I'm the sort of person who likes to help people and I got into teaching because I saw it as a way of helping young guys coming through. One of the great things about being in the industry for the length of time that I have is that you get to work with such a large number of people. To see them come through the system, grow and develop and then remain your friend is really satisfying.

One of the truly rewarding aspects of being an educator is to see your students go on and do good things and your hope is that somehow you have managed to play a small part in helping them achieve that success." 🙌

## CHIVERS JOINS HOLMESGLEN TAFE TEAM



Former Keysborough Golf Club superintendent and VGCSA president Brett Chivers (pictured left) has been appointed by Holmesglen Institute of TAFE in Melbourne to head up its turf section. Chivers brings more than 24 years' experience to the role and he has been given the brief to ensure that the Holmesglen horticulture department meets current industry standards and expectations in the delivery of its turf management courses.

Chivers is currently looking at different delivery methods to better fit both employers' needs and apprentices, including some options such as workplace assessment and competency based training which may include a blended delivery approach (i.e.: classes both off and onsite).

Holmesglen is embracing Chivers' enthusiastic approach to his new role to make the horticulture department and especially the turf section a vibrant, workable and innovative area which meets the demands of the ever-changing expectations in industry. For more information about the turf related programmes offered at Holmesglen, call (03) 9564 6391 or email hortfloristry@holmesglen.edu.au.