



A distinguished career honoured

BY BRETT ROBINSON

The past six months have been pretty overwhelming for former AGCSA president Peter Frewin. Departing Barwon Heads Golf Club after 21 years as superintendent and taking on a new role within the trade, it has been a time of great change. To top it all off, at the recent 25th Australian Turfgrass Conference in Hobart he was bestowed the industry's highest honour – the 2009 AGCSA Distinguished Service Award.



The tears said it all. As a humbled Peter Frewin tried to fight them back during his acceptance speech at the 2009 AGCSA Awards presentation ceremony, few in the room would have doubted what receiving this year's AGCSA Distinguished Service Award meant to one of the industry's most respected golf course superintendents.

The AGCSA's highest honour, the Distinguished Service Award capped off what has been an emotion-charged past half year for the 47-year-old. After nearly 21 years establishing Barwon Heads Golf Club as one of the country's premier golfing facilities, Frewin shocked many by leaving the club in June before embarking on a new career as a turf business consultant with Globe Australia. That decision brought to an end a career at the turf management coalface of nearly three decades, during which time he also played an

influential role in progressing the industry at both state and national levels.

Bestowed by the AGCSA Board, the Scotts-sponsored Distinguished Service Award recognises an individual who has left an indelible mark on the profession. Whether it's their turf management expertise, contribution to research and education, or tireless work with the state or national superintendent association executives, the award pays tribute to someone who has dedicated their time furthering a profession they are passionate about. Frewin unquestionably ticks all those boxes and in collecting the 2009 award he joins a who's who of the Australian turf management industry, becoming the fourth Victorian recipient since the award was inaugurated in 1997.

"When you start out in any line of work you don't think about these things and you certainly don't go about seeking them," says Frewin, who only in May was also bestowed life member status with the VGCSA. "I'm a pretty passionate person in whatever I do and

Frewin fights back the tears after receiving the Distinguished Service Award in Hobart

2009 AGCSA Distinguished Service Award winner Peter Frewin (centre) with AGCSA president Allan Devlin (left) and Scotts Australia's David Westall

I guess I have been through quite an emotional period of my life recently. A lot of people's midlife crisis is to grow their hair long and buy a Harley. Mine was to throw my job in after 21 years and start afresh!

"So to be recognised by your peers and the AGCSA, an organisation which holds a special place in my heart, was very special. It's also an honour to see your name up there with some of the household names of the Australian turf industry, and to be honest you don't think you deserve to be alongside them."

COUNTRY LAD AT HEART

Frewin's transition to his new role with Globe is yet another chapter in a highly diverse and influential career which started at Cheltenham Golf Club in February 1981. Born in Bendigo and growing up with a love for golf, Frewin came to Melbourne in his late teens and took on an apprenticeship at the small nine-hole public course, first under Rob Little then Colin Foster.

"As I tell everyone, I'm a pretty big bloke and as much as I would have loved to have

been a professional golfer, there was no guarantee of actually earning money to buy food, so that wasn't an option," laughs Frewin. "I had to find the next best thing so I applied for a job as an apprentice."

Cheltenham provided a solid grounding in turf management, particularly how to deal with wear and tear given the hammering the course received, and after finishing his apprenticeship Frewin headed back to the country. A six month stint at Maryborough Golf Club followed before a senior greenkeeping position came up at Rich River Golf Club.

There he worked under superintendent Phil Knight who at the time was overseeing the construction of the new East Course. Knight would eventually move on to The Lakes Golf Club and not long after Frewin followed suit when his former boss offered him the vacant assistant position.

Shacking up with three other greenkeepers – one from The Lakes and two from Bonnie Doon Golf Club – Frewin had a memorable two years in Sydney honing his turf management skills on one of the country's most exclusive courses. Highlight of his time there – apart from living with three other single, male turfies - was being involved in getting the course up in just three days for the 1987 PGA Championships.

The Lakes was called upon at the eleventh hour to host the tournament after Liverpool Golf Club suffered severe flooding.

Having cut his teeth at The Lakes, in 1988 Barwon Heads advertised for a superintendent and Frewin eagerly applied. Having spent his holidays at nearby Point Lonsdale as a kid and having played the course a few times, Barwon Heads had always appealed. Little did Frewin know then that it would end up becoming his second home for more than two decades.

"Barwon Heads has always been a golfer's golf course and being a golfing traditionalist it had always appealed to me," says Frewin. "It wasn't in great condition when I first arrived but it had so much potential. Around the same time I arrived there Martin Stolz (club professional) and Andrew Davis (manager) joined as well. We were all around the same age – late 20s – and we all had a very good vision of where we wanted to take the course in order to show its true potential.

"The course had been neglected and was overgrown in parts. We began to maintain it as a golf course to start with and embarked on a major tree removal programme. From there we fine-tuned the playing surfaces and did some reconstruction. Once the playing surfaces were to a standard we wanted them at we then

Barwon Heads Golf Club was Frewin's home for nearly 21 years during which time he played a major role in transforming it into one of Australia's most respected courses

started on things like irrigation systems and maintenance sheds. Looking back, we took it from a little country course to one that is now well established and admired not only in Australia but the world over."

While the playing surfaces now rate among the best in Australia – the course ranked 29th in Australian Golf Digest's Top 100 Courses rankings in March 2008 and was 8th in the 2009 Top 100 Public Access Courses ratings) – Frewin's principal legacy comes in the pioneering work he and the club made in relation to water treatment and management.

The club invested significant amounts of money in developing the use of recycled water for irrigation and was part of a major five-year Horticulture Australia-funded AGCSA trial which examined the effects of recycled water use on *Poa* and bentgrass turf. Following on from that Frewin also oversaw the installation of a Reverse Osmosis plant and harnessed the club's ability to harvest stormwater.

"Our goal was to have the course set up so that we had three avenues of water at all times, effectively drought-proofing the place," says Frewin.

"It was very interesting to go through all the processes and very rewarding to see the positive outcomes for the course. We embarked on a couple of cutting edge projects at the time and they were a great learning curve not only for us but the industry as well."

LEADING THE WAY

As well as overseeing many improvements and innovations at Barwon Heads, Frewin also found time during his tenure to be a highly influential figure outside of his superintendent role. Over a 10-year period Frewin stamped his mark with both the VGCSA and AGCSA and for his efforts was awarded an Australian Sports Medal for services to administration of a sporting body in 2000.

Frewin's involvement at a state level began in 1992 when he joined the VGCSA committee. Following Darren Cribbes departure in 1993, Frewin took the reins as president, a role he held until stepping down in 1997. (During his time as president, Frewin was also a member of the TGAA committee, and between 1994 and 1998 was on the Victorian Golf Association's Turf Advisory Committee.)

Through his involvement with the VGCSA, Frewin attended regular state association meetings with the AGCSA and in 1997 put his hand up to join the national executive. Taking



over from Wayne Hinton as president, Frewin joined the AGCSA at what was an uncertain time for the association, but with a new-look committee comprising Mark Couchman, David Scaife, Craig New and later on Peter Schumacher, they set about turning the association around for the members.

Their first major decision was to start up the AGCSA's own publication Australian Turfgrass Management journal, severing ties with Golf and Sports Turf which up until then had been a joint effort between the association and Glenvale Publications. From there the board embarked upon setting up its own technical division, and after securing the services of John Neylan to head up the service, AGCSATech was born in 2000.

"It was a great learning experience and I got a good appreciation of the industry as a whole," says Frewin of his time on the AGCSA Board. "I certainly got more of an appreciation for the trade and in all honesty probably helped me to end up where I am now.

"Starting Australian Turfgrass Management was quite daunting and was a huge learning curve. We wanted to have something of our own and you only have to see where it is at now – it is the industry's premier turf magazine. Setting up AGCSATech was a major step and to be honest it would never have got off the ground if we hadn't got John Neylan. Regardless of whether it made a profit, we felt it was a good member service to provide.

"In hindsight some of the decisions we made during that time alienated a few people and fractured a few friendships, but we made those calls because we thought it would benefit the members, not just certain pockets of the industry."

While Frewin can look back at the times at Barwon Heads and AGCSA with plenty of pride and satisfaction, he is now looking firmly ahead to the new challenges which his new role with Globe will now present him. Although having no intention of heading into such a position when he resigned from Barwon Heads, Frewin says it has given him a new lease on life and a further appreciation of the turf industry.

"It was a terrible decision to make to leave Barwon Heads Golf Club, but in my own mind I knew it was the right one to make," says Frewin. "Being the age I was, if I left it any later it was going to be hard to break into something else. Even though I have a real passion for the industry, doing what I'm doing now, I can't see myself going back as a superintendent.

"The thing I have really enjoyed is being able to switch off at the end of the day. You're not the mentor for 12 staff any more and you don't have to worry about the many issues which are part of the job these days, particular those which we were never trained in. The job is far removed from turf management now and it's no longer just about maintaining surfaces.

"I'm very happy with the new role and the challenge that it presents. It's been like a renewal. I'm still speaking to the people that I enjoy speaking to and working in an industry that I love, but it's just seeing things from a whole different perspective. I'm enjoying going to different facilities – bowls clubs, councils, schools – and seeing what they do. And I'm learning so much. Having just gone through training with the likes of Syngenta and Bayer, I have picked up so many new ideas. Now when I think back to when I was at Barwon Heads there would certainly be things I would have done differently if I'd known what I do now." 🌱