



20th Australian Turfgrass Conference Review



While the AGCSA Awards ceremony took on special significance this year with the posthumous awards to five industry legends, four others added their names to the AGCSA's honour boards. ATM Editor Brett Robinson profiles 2004 AGCSA Awards winners Ray Keane, Peter Schumacher, David Warwick and Craig Webley.

DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARD

Presented in partnership with Scotts Australia Ray Keane (Gisborne Golf Club, Vic)

Being in the right place at the right time could possibly sum up 2004 Distinguished Service Award recipient Ray Keane's experiences in the superintendent trade.

It began some 35 years ago when the club he was a member of decided to make some big changes. Gisborne Golf Club was then a small country club with a Vern Morcom-designed layout with sand scrapes and 400 sheep. Keane was employed as superintendent in charge of construction, of upgrading to grass greens and removing the sheep every Friday and bringing them back on Mondays.

The only training in those days was a part-time course at Burnley College in Melbourne, and it was while Keane was there that a fellow student suggested that if he really wanted to broaden his knowledge he should join the Victorian superintendents (then curators) association.

The first meeting Keane attended was at the prestigious Victoria Golf Club in Melbourne. Upon arriving, Keane parked his car only to be met with verbal abuse and a loud blast of a car



Distinguished Service Award winner Ray Keane

horn. Unbeknownst to Keane, he had parked in the Secretary Managers car park who soon let it be known what he thought of those who "cut grass".

Keane entered the Victorian association at a time of change and with his desire to learn and be involved quickly became part of the association executive.

"To be part of new initiatives was exciting and rewarding and together with learning from people of the ilk of Claude Crockford from Royal Melbourne it proved to be a great time," recalls Keane.

Keane also played a role in the early development of the national association which despite being a challenging and frustrating time saw him form many friendships with the likes of George Rüb and Rube Walkerden who were honoured posthumously at the 2004 conference.

Throughout Keane's career there have been many highlights, almost all coming about because he happened to be in the right place at the right time and had a desire to be involved.

Keane, a life member of the VGCSA, was president of the Victorian association between 1975 and 1985, and was national association president for a time.

In 2000, he was among a number of superintendents to be awarded the Australian Sports Medal for services to the industry, while his most treasured honour was a life membership at his home away from home, the Gisborne Golf Club.

"A very important thanks goes to the Gisborne Golf Club for their support and encouragement over the years," says Keane. "To have been a part of the club's development over the years and to be involved in the improvement of the course, which is ongoing, is the most rewarding thing of all."

EXCELLENCE IN GOLF COURSE MANAGEMENT

Presented in partnership with John Deere Peter Schumacher (Elanora Golf Club, NSW)

Elanora Golf Club superintendent Peter Schumacher is a pretty tolerant sort of chap but even he would have to admit that during the past four years there were times when that mild mannered demeanour was stretched to the limits.

During that time, Schumacher - who joined the 1056-member club in May 1997 - and his team rebuilt the course, encountering numerous obstacles along the way.

Schumacher's first priority was to secure the club's water source for the long term and after the examination of many options, which included the use of effluent, it was decided to increase the capacity of the existing 24-megalitre dam to 90 megalitres at a cost of \$800,000.

With that phase completed in 2001, Sydney-based Golf By Design was contracted to come



Excellence in Golf Course Management Award winner Peter Schumacher



up with a master plan and after an extensive education program members unanimously voted it through.

After a further 11 months of countless meetings, the DA was approved. Little did Schumacher know that this was where the problems would begin.

While neighbouring residents were happy to go along with the plans on paper, when it came to trucks delivering 64,000m³ of fill, howls of protest quickly emanated. Under pressure, the council threatened to get an injunction in the Land and Environment Court (LEC) and the club decided, voluntarily, to stop work.

After commencing a Class 4 application against the council in the LEC seeking clarification of the DA, the club eventually shook hands with the local mayor on a deal that allowed 60 trucks a day between 9am and 3pm.

Construction of the back nine finally commenced in August 2002 and was finished in January 2003. Front nine construction started a month later and by February 2004 all 18 holes had been completed, which included the reversal of the front nine layout.

The entire course was finally opened on 27 March, 2004. Over a four year period Schumacher and his team returned (predominantly sod) the entire course to Wintergreen couch (the course was a mix of Queensland blue couch and kikuyu), installed a new irrigation system, and constructed 19 USGA spec A1 bentgrass greens to replace the existing tired *Poa* greens.

Forty-five tees were built, a driving range added, 64 bunkers constructed, two wetlands formed, over 15,000 natives planted and the maintenance facility upgraded.

So after four years of hard graft, which also saw the birth of his three daughters, Schumacher is now looking forward to one thing - spring.

Finalists: Shane Bisseker (*Darwin Golf Club, NT*), Leigh Yanner (*Moonah Links, Vic*)

CLAUDE CROCKFORD ENVIRONMENTAL AWARD

Presented in partnership with Bayer Environmental Science

David Warwick (Avondale Golf Club, NSW)

If there are two things that Avondale Golf Club superintendent David Warwick can't impress enough when it comes to improving the environmental management of golf courses, it's communication and persistence.

Together, they have proved to be Warwick's most important tools when it has come to instituting some pretty major changes in the environmental management of his Sydney course.

And the dividends are starting to come. Not only has the course achieved Audubon



Claude Crockford Environmental Award winner David Warwick

certification, one of only a handful in Australia to do so, it has now led to Warwick being bestowed the Claude Crockford Environmental Award, one of the AGCSA's most prestigious honours.

"I have a great passion for the environment," says Warwick. "I'm not a tree hugging greenie. It's something that I've always been interested in and something I've always done, even when I was at Arundel Hills.

"I certainly didn't think it would lead to Audubon certification and to win the Claude Crockford award means a lot. It's industry recognition for all your efforts and I'm tickled pink."

Off all the changes instituted at Avondale since Warwick started there in 1996, the most important has been the elimination of high-maintenance, out-of-play areas which has freed up staff to concentrate on the preparation of playing surfaces.

These areas have been replaced with native grasses and plants, and over the past five to six years over 50,000 natives have been planted and up to four hectares of unnecessarily turfed areas regenerated into bush.

Since joining Avondale, Warwick has finished the conversion to Santa ana and is currently in the process of converting all greens to Penn G2 (nine have been completed).

With water conservation a huge issue, Avondale goes down the line of conserving every possible bit of water. A new irrigation system has been installed while Warwick has instituted a wetting agent injection program which he swears by.

A new washdown bay and chemical filling station have been constructed, while \$1 million was spent on an environmentally friendly maintenance shed, the design of which took into consideration pollutants and energy saving measures.

One of Warwick's great passions in achieving his environmental goals has been education and outreach.

"I think the communication of any environmental projects that golf course superintendents are going to implement is going to be easier to sell now than it was five years ago, simply because of all the legislation and environmental issues facing the industry," says Warwick.

To keep members up to speed with the course's environmental management strategy, Warwick gives regular talks to members and conducts course and maintenance facility tours.

Outside of the club, Warwick teaches environmental issues at his son's local school and has conducted guest lectures at local TAFEs. He has also been invited to other courses to show how things are done at Avondale.

"It's not just about preaching the Audubon way," Warwick says. "I have a wider view that I am trying as much as possible to educate various people and government agencies that golf courses are actually beneficial to the environment because there are plenty of people out there that think otherwise."

Finalist: Scott McKay (*North Lakes Golf Club, Qld*)

AGCSA GRADUATE OF THE YEAR

Presented in partnership with Toro Australia
Craig Webley (Lakelands Country Club, WA)

If there was one thing delegates gleaned from Craig Webley's DVD award presentation, it was that the 2004 AGCSA Graduate of the Year winner won't be troubling the ranks of the PGA.

At the end of his presentation, Webley - the first national graduate award recipient to come from Western Australia - had compiled an extensive bloopers reel taking the mickey out of his golfing prowess.



Graduate of the Year Craig Webley



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But aside from the sliced tee shots and missed three foot putts which had delegates rolling in the aisles, the presentation also demonstrated one very important thing - Webley's desire to fashion a successful career as a superintendent.

Back in 2000, Webley was 18, unemployed and looking for direction. He spotted an advert in a local newspaper for an apprentice greenkeeper at Lakelands Country Club and from that moment hasn't looked back.

Taken on board by Lakelands superintendent Craig New, Webley set about proving his worth and such has his development been that New recently promoted him to leading hand (3IC). Webley says he has relished the increased responsibility that has come with the promotion.

"I'm enjoying leading staff and becoming more involved in the management of the course and decision making," Webley says. "It has allowed me to pass on some of my knowledge and I feel like I'm able to give a little bit back to the industry which has given so much to me."

In March 2004, Webley's achievements were honoured at state level when he was awarded the 2003 Best Indentured Apprentice by the GCSAWA.

In handing out the award, WA president Brad Sofield commented, "You proved unquestionably your passion for your chosen path and for your home course, but more importantly a passion to develop academically and practically as a turf manager and fulfil your ambitions of becoming a superintendent. It is

truly refreshing to see a young person who has goals and is driven, but realises it takes more than words to achieve those successes."

Webley currently holds a Certificate III in Horticulture (turf management) and is planning on attending night school in order to attain Certificate IV. He has his sights firmly set on becoming a superintendent and has also expressed a desire to travel and become actively involved with the GCSAWA.

Finalists: Mathew Windisch (Kiama Golf Club, NSW), Haydn Reid (Flagstaff Hill Golf Club, SA), Matthew Beddison (Horsham Golf Club, Vic) 🏆