

WOMEN IN TURFCARE



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Women in Golf Charter

The R&A unveiled a new Women in Golf Charter on 29 May 2018 in London as part of the organisation's global drive to increase the number of women and girls participating in golf and to encourage more opportunities for women to work within the golf industry.



The Women in Golf Charter intends to inspire an industry-wide commitment to developing a more inclusive culture within golf around the world and enable more women and girls to flourish and maximise their potential at all levels of the sport.

For more information visit:
www.randa.org/TheRandA/Initiatives/WomenAndGirls/Widgets/WomenInGolfCharter

Blazing the trail

Wendy O'Brien

for women
in greenkeeping

Renata Mundim,
Bernhard Company



In a career spanning more than two decades, Wendy O'Brien has worked all over the world, from Augusta National to Spain and now Latvia. Renata Mundim from Bernhard Company caught up with Wendy as she shares her thoughts and experiences on being a woman in the greenkeeping industry.



I started in greenkeeping while studying Level 2 National Diploma in Horticulture for countryside park management.

During the course I had to find a work placement for the summer months. My parents were members at a new golf course so they spoke to the owners who agreed to let me work on the course three days a week. Funnily enough, I was the only member of the college course who got paid during the placement at £10 a day, everyone else ended up doing voluntary work.

In 1998 I attended an open day at De Vere Carden Park. With the Cheshire course already an established 18-hole and a par 3 course, they were also building the Nicklaus course. Originally I applied for a gardening position, but as I had greenkeeping experience, Course Manager Andy Campbell offered me a place on the golf course team. I started there early in 1998, just in time to finish the grow-in for the Nicklaus course to open that summer.

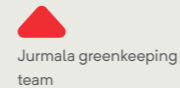
Carden Park put me through my Level 2 apprenticeship for sportsturf management.

In 2001 I went on sabbatical on the Ohio State Program, where Mike O'Keefe arranged my work-based internship, firstly at Kingsmill Resort, Virginia, a 63-hole resort that hosted the PGA Michelob Championship.

Then I moved to intern at Augusta National for 12 months. This was an amazing experience with a great team, an experience I will never forget and I have returned every year since as a volunteer on the greenkeeping support team.

The 2018 tournament was my 17th Masters! Each year I learn something new and meet people in the industry from around the world. It is an amazing opportunity to build relationships, see new machinery and gain further knowledge from some of the best brains in the industry. We all pull together to present the course in its best possible condition.

I returned to De Vere Carden Park when I got back from the



USA and completed my Level 3 apprenticeship and was promoted to deputy head greenkeeper.

In 2007 I moved to Murcia, Spain, as golf course superintendent at La Torre Golf Resort, reporting to Courses Manager Sylvain Duval. Another Jack Nicklaus resort course, it had been open for six months with bentgrass greens and Bermuda on all other surfaces, which would be overseeded for the winter during dormancy.

We had 14 hectares of maintained landscape and over six hectares of bunkers, all of which required very intensive maintenance and high labour. Temperatures in the summer routinely hit 40°C. With severe storms and high salt content water it was a very challenging environment.

In late 2010 I moved back to the UK. With the country in a recession, opportunities in the industry were few. I worked as a work-based assessor and tutor and really enjoyed working with a variety of greenkeepers and visiting the wide variety of courses, but after six years I missed working

and running a golf course so I started to look at moving back in to the practical side of the industry.

Working for the college, it was hard to break back into the practical side and when a first assistant position came available at Carden Park, I spoke with Peter Pattenden, the courses and estates manager, about taking the position while I looked for my own course or next opportunity. He agreed and it was a great solution for both of us.

Later in 2016, Sylvain Duval, who now works as an independent agronomist, contacted me regarding a new Nicklaus Design course being built in Latvia. They were looking for a golf course superintendent to finish the grow in and take the course in to maintenance. It was an interesting proposal and they invited me out for an interview, I accepted the offer and moved to Latvia at the start of 2017.

Moving to Latvia was not an easy decision as I did not know very much about the country and how it was going to be living in

Eastern Europe. There are many misconceptions about Eastern Europe in the west and you never know what to believe, but I visited twice to have a detailed look around and the project was so exciting that I felt it was worth any risks.

I do not regret moving at all, the people here are very nice and the move has been relatively easy. Most people speak some English, so I have not yet had to learn the language, which has been great as I have not had much free time to get to classes, although I do plan to learn Latvian soon.

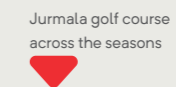
I live close to the golf course in a quiet village. I don't really have much travel time, but it's very quiet and hard to meet people. It is also only 20 minutes' drive from the city, so it's not so bad. I moved with my two dogs who I've had for 10 years, from when I was in Spain, and it's great to have them to go home to. I take them to the course on weekends for a run.

Jurmala is a 27-hole course, with an 18-hole course and a par 3 academy course. We have 31

'...but after six years I missed working and running a golf course so I started to look at moving back in to the practical side of the industry.'

greens, which includes three practice greens and a nursery. We also have a double-ended 3 hectare driving range and practice area. The course covers 75 hectares

There was an existing course which was bought by a new investor and Nicklaus Design was brought in to completely redesign the site. This has included completely sand capping on the natural peat subsoil for all playing surfaces, new irrigation and drainage system, upgrades to the maintenance facilities, installation of fertigation and acid injection system.



Continued over





Staff levels vary throughout the year. I keep eight staff and two mechanics full time and this year we grew the permanent team and introduced an annualised hour system.

We are building a clubhouse and hotel, which will remain open 12 months a year, so we will need to maintain all areas and clear snow during winter months. Seasonal staff join the team from March until October, with some students joining the team for June to August, so my numbers vary throughout the year.

This season we are finishing the grow-in and getting ready to open the golf course. I will have 27 staff for July and August, with less in September and October.

As the golf course superintendent, I am responsible for all the management of the maintenance of the golf course, including agronomy, integrated pest management, machinery, staff, resource and budget management. I get out on the course everyday

and tend to do my own tasks, a lot of monitoring and planning of works, supervising and checking in on the staff.

It's difficult to commit myself to one job all day as I am often needed to run around and be in many different places during the day. I do quite a lot of spraying onsite and will jump on and off tasks, especially the more specialised ones. I like to keep my hand in on all the machines so I can show new members of staff how to use them.

Paul Wilcox installed Bernhard grinders at Jurmala before I started at the course, but I know him from when he delivered training at Polaris World in Spain. I keep in regular contact with him as the grinding system was completely new to the mechanic here and we have a couple of staff trained in using the grinders. It's great to be able to contact him with any concerns regarding the machines and also any problems we may have with quality of cut, mower set up.

Wendy O'Brien

Wendy working at Augusta



We have a much shorter season here than the UK. The golfing season runs from April to October, but the winter is a lot more severe with the ground freezing solid for at least three months of the year. Last year the spring didn't really come until late in May, with snow storms in mid-May. Then the autumn was very nice well into November but it was a cooler and wetter year than most would expect.

This year has been completely different and in February we regularly had temperatures of -25°C and colder. We finally started to come out of winter in mid-April and we had two weeks of temperatures in the teens. Then by May we had temperatures in the 20's and very little rain, so two very different years back to back. This means you have to adapt as you go and I have learned to plan the budget for a bad weather year, hoping for a good one.

Throughout my career, the biggest challenge I have faced as a woman is being taken seriously. I have been challenged and questioned many times from people who I have worked with and when I was working with the college, even students and course managers would ask questions as if checking I knew what I was talking about. I don't claim to know everything and I am always ready to ask questions and try new ideas, mine or others.

For any women just starting out in the industry, I would say hang in there!

We have a Women in Turf group on Facebook, where we

support each other and speak about things work-related that we may not want to put out there publicly. I think this has helped with some of the younger women coming through, so you can tell them stories of what we've been through and know they are not alone. I never had that when I was coming through my career.

I have had some knockbacks during my career, questions like 'how as a woman do you think you will cope working with guys?' I have questioned if I should do something else, but I have also worked with some great people and been supported by some good managers who had faith in me to do the job they asked of me.

Mostly, I've been treated like one of the lads (not sure if that's good or bad!) but I have always worked to not be treated any differently or asked for special treatment.

You have to work hard and get on with it, with a thick skin.

I have actually found people are more open to women in the industry in the US and Europe than in the UK.

Wendy O'Brien

"Throughout my career, the biggest challenge I have faced as a woman is being taken seriously. I have been challenged and questioned many times from people who I have worked with"

By that I don't mean others in the industry, but rather those who do the hiring at a club, such as club managers or committee members.

Breaking through the 'glass ceiling' has been difficult and no matter what it says on your CV, some people will just look at your gender. If that's all they look at then it's probably not going to be somewhere you want to be anyway.

I have had some great support and built a reputation that others are confident to recommend me for opportunities. At the end of the day we all know how small this industry is, so build a network of good people and enjoy what you do.



Ambitious and educated: Here come the girls

They may be outnumbered, but these female greenkeeping students won't let that hold them back

Berkshire College of Agriculture is one of the latest education establishments to have launched a programme for trainee greenkeepers, with former course manager Rob Phillips taking the helm as lead tutor. Of the 24 students who signed up to the college this year, four are female. We thought we'd catch up with them to see how they are finding life in the traditionally male-dominated industry of golf greenkeeping.

Gemma what was the greenkeeping industry like when you first got into it?

Gemma | When I first got into greenkeeping, back in 2000, there weren't many ladies about. Actually, I didn't know of any. When I first started out I got really bad stick. But I just ignored that and through the years, getting my qualifications, they see you can do the job and having both genders in an industry is the way the world works now, as it should be.

Katy you're the youngest here at 17, and you're in your first year as a trainee greenkeeper. What made you want to get into the greenkeeping industry?

Katy | It's quite a random story actually. In the summer holidays when I finished school I wanted to earn a bit more money. My uncle works at Caversham Heath and I went in to work with him for a few days. A year later and I'm still there because I've enjoyed it so much.

Sophie, how did you get into the greenkeeping?

Sophie | I'd always wanted to work outside and when I dropped out of university I started looking around for what to do next. This came up, so I went for it, really enjoyed it, and I never looked back!

I've been really inspired by most of the people I've met and have worked with. I've never met anyone in this industry who hasn't enjoyed their job. They always push you to go further with it, and that is amazing.

I don't think being a female in the industry has held me back and I hope I've got a fair shot at success in the industry.

I did feel for a while that this would only be temporary because, as a female greenkeeper, progressing further would be quite hard, but from what I've learnt at college I'm not sure that's the case, and there's no reason why I can't make a great career from greenkeeping!

Gemma have you ever felt in the industry that you've had to work harder to prove yourself?

Gemma | No not really. I love my job so I do as much as I possibly and physically can. Maybe sometimes I try to lift more than I should, but I've never felt that I stand out because I'm a woman. I'm just one of the team.

At first it was uncomfortable going to things like BTME when you know nobody and they're all men. I found that at first people didn't realise that I was a greenkeeper, they thought perhaps I was there to make tea or something, which was a bit awkward!

I think it would be great that something could be organised at BTME just for the female greenkeepers, just to help them break the ice and build a little confidence.

Katy, were you nervous going into a male-dominated industry?

Katy | Yeah, when I first walked in, the first week I was there I thought 'God, what am I doing?' It was quite intimidating. I'm not going to lie, because obviously I'm still quite young and they are all older than me. At the start I was like, I don't know if I want to do this. But having my uncle working with me has helped me and I am able to get on with the other greenkeepers a lot more.

Melissa, was the existing team at your club welcoming when you became a greenkeeper?

Melissa | They tried really hard to make me feel like part of the team! I knew them for years before, so it was easy for me to walk in and be part of the team.

Continued over

'I've been really inspired by most of the people I've met and have worked with...'

Sophie Bulpit

Katy Castle, 17 (left)

Caversham Heath, Level 2 Certificate in Greenkeeping

Sophie Bulpit, 21 (middle left)

East Berkshire, Level 3 Work Based Diploma in Sportsturf

Melissa Winkworth, 25 (middle right)

Goring & Streatley, Level 2 Certificate in Greenkeeping

Gemma St John, 37 (right)

Brokenhurst Manor, Level 3 Work Based Diploma in Sportsturf



Left to right: Melissa Winkworth, Sophie Bulpitt and Gemma St John

The only thing I've noticed that I struggle with is heavy lifting, but on average men are physically stronger than women so it's unavoidable. But there are so many other things to the job, where there's no difference between what a man or a woman can do.

What is it about greenkeeping that you really enjoy?

Katy | I love it. I don't really know how to describe it, but you know when you find a hobby that you love, and you just want to stick at it? That's how I feel about it now.

Sophie | Me, personally, I really enjoy hand cutting the greens and presenting the golf course as best as you can. With hand cutting you're striping everything up and making it look good and people appreciate that more because they can see it immediately.

Gemma | I think if it was put out to schools more, greenkeeping as an industry, there would be more girls seeing that there's a career out there for them. Because unless you play golf, it's not something you think about.

Would you recommend greenkeeping to your mates?

Sophie | Yeah, they are all jealous of my job. In the summer anyway!

How have you found the job in winter?

Melissa | It's all right, you've just got to wrap up and get on with it.

Left to right: Katy Castle and Melissa Winkworth



when I'm around they might tone it down a little bit. But they don't need to because it's funny, it's enjoyable and it makes the day go faster.

When you encounter golfers, what's that like. Are they shocked when they see you out on the course?

Katy | In my second week I was raking bunkers and one of the members walked past and he asked me if I was a greenkeeper. I said yes, and he started asking me about it. He was quite friendly towards me and I was quite shocked by it because I didn't think golfers would talk to us greenkeepers. But they are all really friendly and don't treat me any differently to the men.

Have you ever worried that being a female will hold you back in your career progression as a greenkeeper?

Gemma | It hasn't so far and I'm a first assistant. I'm not sure what's next in my career, but I hope to get to course manager at some point in my life, one day.

What advice would you give these younger guys based upon your years in the industry?

Gemma | Just give as good as you get, always speak up and don't be afraid to speak your mind!

Katy | I think one thing that would put boys and girls off in general is the winter. This was my first winter and it was hard. That was the test for me to see that if I still enjoyed it, I would stay on no matter what the weather was like. And it was fine, you just had to wrap up.

It was a new experience for me. When it's warmer you're out cutting more, but in the winter you're doing different jobs so it was fun.

What about the banter within the team? Greenkeeping teams are close knit, so are you able to join in with the team bonding aspect?

Gemma | Yeah you have to just give as good as you get!

Sophie | I enjoy it to be honest. I know it's probably very different if I'm not there and they're probably having a lot more banter than they normally would because they can be a bit more extreme, whereas



Women role models

Caroline Carroll, Syngenta

Watch the videos of Lara Arias, along with Alejandro Reyes and many other greenkeepers with their experiences and tips for preparations at Le Golf National on www.turfteamchallenge.com

Greenkeeping has long been viewed as a male-dominated profession. However, progressive clubs and course managers are increasingly recognising that women are not only equally capable of the work, but also bring valuable skill sets to the turf team environment.

At Le Golf National (LGN) in France — home of The Ryder Cup 2018 — will be at least 10 women working in the Turf Team Challenge in September.

With Syngenta sponsoring LGN's turf team, the company's EAME turf marketing manager, Caroline Carroll, believes it's an incredible opportunity for women greenkeepers to showcase their skills, as well as become role models, showing how the industry is open for a successful career path.

At LGN, Caroline caught up with Spanish greenkeeper, Lara Arias, who has been working on a golf course for the past four years.

"I knew, right away, that this will be my future. I love every aspect of the work," Lara said.

An intern of the Ohio State University Turf Programme, Lara started working in the LGN team in preparation for the French Open in June.

"This has been a great opportunity for me to be part of the team at



Caroline Carroll, Syngenta's EAME Turf Marketing Manager

"It's an opportunity to network and to share experiences with everyone," explained Lara. "Everyone working on this course, right now, has the passion for the business. And that's what makes it so exciting."

Lara highlighted that, regrettably, you don't find too many women working in this business. She added: "But I have met great women working as assistants and as superintendents, which gives me the inspiration to continue. It doesn't matter if you are female or male, the most important thing is to have the desire to be in the business. We are all working here together, as a team, because we share that passion."

Although women cannot always be as physically strong as men, Lara said brains will always beat brawn in thinking a way around resolving a problem.

"People have to change their mindset that this business is only for men, because we can do it," urged Lara, who works along with another female greenkeeper, Eva Largeau, at LGN. "Here, people see women working on the golf course and they see that we are doing a good job.

Le Golf National, at one of Europe's great golf courses," she said. "For now it is the French Open, but in a few months it will be The Ryder Cup, and the possibility to work with a huge team for a great tournament."

Having met Courses & Estates Manager Alejandro Reyes through the Ohio network, Lara said working at LGN has given her the chance to meet new people from across Europe.

"Give us opportunities to work on the golf course, and you will see that it will be fine. We have shown that there isn't any problem to have women working on a golf course; we can do everything."

Lara is clear in her long-term objectives for her career path: "For now I am super happy to be working as a greenkeeper. For sure I would like to be a superintendent when I am ready. But there is no rush now. I would love to develop as an assistant, and then again as an assistant (on another course), to

'...brains will always beat brawn in thinking a way around resolving a problem.'

gain experience, and then, maybe, after that as a superintendent."

As for her experiences of working at Le Golf National so soon into her career, she added: "I love working

in the tournament environment. One day I would love to prepare my own golf course for a great tournament — maybe a European Tour or a PGA Tour event."

What is abundantly clear from the women working at Le Golf National is their passion and commitment for greenkeeping, and their desire to encourage more women to pursue the career.

"When you really love your job it makes every day easier," said Lara. "I hope to be working on a golf course for all of my life."

The 13th hole at Le Golf National



Syngenta are sponsors of the greenkeeping team at Le Golf National, host venue of the HNA Open de France and the 2018 Ryder Cup

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