



Farewell to a Little Giant

On 8th November 2014, Brian Coburn sadly passed away after a long illness with cancer. That day the greenkeeping and turfgrass fraternity lost one of their most passionate and well-liked members. Brian was surrounded by his loving family at the time of his passing at the Southern Area Hospice in Newry.



Born on 5th October 1935 in Banbridge, Co. Down, he joined his father's seed merchant business James Coburn & Sons when he left school. He spent a year in Canada learning different aspects of the agricultural industry but returned home to his beloved Ireland where he took over the reins of the family business and started family life.

Brian worked as Managing Director in Coburns until 1997, but he saw many changes in the seed industry and astutely realised that agriculture was not going to be sustainable at the level it was. He decided to diversify into developing 'flora and fauna' seed mixes in the early 1980s and in the mid 80s he developed a range of seed mixes for the golf course industry. Bravely, he headed south of the border with these ranges and was warmly received. His personality and his dedication shone through and he quickly became a valued trade member of the greenkeeping circle. Distance was never an issue or tailoring seed to individual needs as he gave every customer that personal touch. He often travelled to Kerry one day and back to Cork the next – but he always liked to get home each night.

On 30th June 1997 Brian retired from Coburns and joined the GCSAI and launched Greenside magazine. With his business

expertise he took the association to a structured, organised, and highly regarded organisation. It is Brian's foresight and vision that brought Greenside to what it is today. He stepped down as Editor of Greenside magazine in December 2002.

Brian was a keen and passionate golfer and a long time member of Banbridge and Royal County Down Golf Clubs.

He served as Club Captain in these clubs in 1967 and 1994 respectively. However, it was Royal Co. Down that seemed a second home to him. One of his proudest moments at the club was in 2007 when it hosted the Walker Cup. Brian was the club's Green Convenor that year. The condition of the greens at Royal County Down were praised by the players and commentators, particularly BBC commentator Peter Alliss. The 2007 Walker Cup was also the last tournament in which Rory McIlroy played as an amateur.

The Irish Links Initiative (ILI) was founded

by Brian Coburn in 2008. With over 40 years experience in the turfgrass supply industry and as Green Convenor at Royal County Down from 1996-2010, Brian's passion for the heritage of the links course and the love of the links game resulted in the first conference of the Irish Links Initiative in February 2008 at Portmarnock Links. This



One of Brian's early editions of Greenside

attracted Superintendents, Course Managers, Secretary Managers and Green Convenors from every corner of Ireland and indeed Scotland. He continued working with the ILI until his failing health prevented him attending committee meetings but he mustered the strength to attend the 2014 spring conference at Laytown & Bettystown Golf Club.

Links golf was Brian's real love but his illness prevented him from playing for the last few

years of his life. However, being the active and determined man that he was, he was not going to sit in a chair and give up. He resurrected his love of fishing, particularly



Brian landed a whopper of a fish, which he caught in Scotland in May 2014 while visiting his son.

sea fishing and fly fishing, and bought a little boat in 2013. Nothing gave him more pleasure than having the wind in his hair, sea spray on his face, the Mourne Mountains and Royal Co. Down Golf Club in the background and a mackerel or two on his jig!



Royal County Down

Brian will be fondly remembered by the many friends he had in the greenkeeping industry. His warmth and passion always shone through and his love of people. You could sense this as there was always a great smile on his face when he was in conversation with others. Brian loved nothing more than to help up and coming greenkeepers in developing their career. He may have been small in stature but he will always be remembered for his big heart. He was indeed a little giant.

Brian is survived by his loving wife Liz, his sons Norman and Richard and his daughter Tracy. May he rest in peace.



Brian with Course Manager, Eamonn Crawford, during an Irish Links Initiative demonstration at Royal Co. Down Golf Links