

BY BRETT ROBINSON

From swinging spanners to **tending** turf

When Wade Williams applied for the job of mechanic at Federal Golf Club back in 2001, little did he know it would trigger the start of a new career path.

Having spent the previous 12 years as a mechanic at a local Canberra garage, it was time for a change. Federal was looking for a turf technician at the time and Williams thought it would be an ideal opportunity to apply his skill set in a different area. What he didn't count on was the opportunity it would provide to work out on the course and such was the appeal that Williams made the big call to pursue a new career in turf management.

It proved to be the right move and at the 25th Australian Turfgrass Conference in Hobart Williams beat home five other state representatives to win the 2009 AGCSA Graduate of the Year Award. In doing so Williams became the third recipient from the ACT in the award's 14-year history, claiming the honour ahead of James Stewart (Gisborne Golf Club, VIC), David Sutherland (Port Kembla Golf Club, NSW), Joshua Kelly (Pacific Harbour Golf and Country Club, QLD), Jeff Hull (The Vines of Reynella Golf Club, SA) and Daniel Zoccoli (Mt Lawley Golf Club, WA).

Federal Golf Club seemingly has a knack of producing top class graduate candidates and Williams is the third member of the club's course maintenance team to collect the national title. In 1999 Stephen Heskett became the first Federal representative to win, while Glenn Dawson followed suit in 2002.

"It was a real honour to win the award and to be honest I have been quite humbled by it all," says Williams. "It's certainly not something I expected or looked for when I took on a career in turf."

"It's hard to put my finger on exactly what it is about turf management that has made it the right thing for me. I sort of fell into being a mechanic when I left school but never really had a passion for it; it was just a job."

"I got to 12 years and was looking for a bit of a change but didn't just want to swing spanners at another workshop. When I came here and got the opportunity to work on the golf course I found I developed a real passion for it. I love the outdoors and liked preparing surfaces."

After four years as the club's turf tech, in 2005 Williams approached course superintendent Stephen Lording about getting some turf management qualifications, and with his and the club's blessings Williams started his studies in earnest through the Canberra Institute of Technology (CIT).



2009 AGCSA Graduate of the Year winner Wade Williams from Federal Golf Club in Canberra

involved in some big changes, from green reconstruction and bunker reshaping to converting the cool-season fairways to couch."

Williams completed his Cert III studies in 2008 and his impressive results meant he was duly named the TGAA ACT Living Turf Apprentice of the Year which qualified him for the national award. At the end of studies Williams was approached by CIT to teach the machinery maintenance class for Cert III and now finds himself balancing his part-time teaching role with his Cert IV studies.

"I've got a full plate at the moment, doing my studies at night as well as preparing classes, but it (teaching) is something that I do really enjoy," says Williams. "I was a bit apprehensive about taking it on at first because I have never really been comfortable in front of a big group, but it has helped me develop a lot so I'm getting just as much out of it."

Winning the state and ultimately the national award afforded Williams the opportunity to attend his first Australian Turfgrass Conference in Hobart. As well as meeting his fellow graduate finalists, he was also able to pick the brains of the profession's elite.

"The biggest thing I got out of it as a graduate was the chance to speak to a lot different superintendents about the industry, managing staff and how they approach dealing with boards, committees and members," reflects Williams.

"Whether it was speaking to John Odell about his operations at Royal Sydney or a superintendent from a small country course, a lot of their thoughts and ideas were very interesting and I took a lot away from those discussions. It made me realise that even though I'm 37, I'm still very young to the industry and have a lot more to learn."

That learning process will continue early next year when Williams heads to the US. As winner of the national award Williams walks away with a handsome education prize package courtesy of sponsor Toro and will attend the seven-week Annual Winter School for Turf Managers at the University of Massachusetts. As well as mixing with fellow turf managers from across the globe, Williams will also get the opportunity to visit Toro's golf course equipment manufacturing and parts distribution facilities, including the company's headquarters in Minneapolis. 🌱

After 12 years as a light vehicle mechanic, Wade Williams took on a job as a turf technician at Canberra's Federal Golf Club. Gaining a real passion for the turf management game, some eight years later the 37-year-old finds himself as the 2009 AGCSA Graduate of the Year.



"Stephen was very supportive right from when I first brought it up with him," says Williams. "I'm not sure if that was an indication of what he thought of my mechanical skills, but he was really helpful and I have been very lucky in that respect."

"I love the lifestyle and since being at Federal I've had the opportunity of being