

# Minnesota Green Expo

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There are a number of ways to rate the success of an event. Size, scope, quality and feedback are just a few. While final numbers are still being compiled for some categories, several can be reported with a fair degree of certainty. The number of registered attendees set an all-time record of 7,833. This represents an increase of 633, or 8.8% over registered attendees for the 2005 Expo. Advance registration continues to increase both in numbers and percentages, increasing by 447 to 5,695, or 8.5% over 2005. Three-day registrations increased as did one-day, trade show only and exhibitor registrants. The only decrease in registrations compared to 2005 was the Friday on-site registration, which was down from 598 to 520. This most likely is a function of the cycle of pesticide recertification needs which is now every two years vs. the annual recertification requirement.

**There was no major shift in the industry segment registrations** when compared to previous years. Those indicating MGCSA membership totaled 546 while those indicating an association with golf courses totaled 940 registrations. The largest single industry segment represented was the landscape contractor group, with 2,193 registrants indicating an affiliation with this industry segment. Those indicating an association with golf courses tied with three other categories for the fourth largest group represented at this year's Expo. Due to space considerations in this newsletter, complete demographic data is not listed here but is available by contacting myself or one of MGCSA's representatives serving on the MTGF Board of Directors.

**The 2006 Expo featured over 100 educational sessions**, several demonstrations and a Turfgrass Challenge on the trade show floor, 22 non-profit booths and 935 booth spaces featuring the products, goods and services of 403 exhibitors. This year the event was moved to the newer end of the Minneapolis Convention Center. This move was made for several reasons. First, it afforded the use of newer rooms stacked more vertically, reducing

the amount of walking required to get to the various educational sessions. It also provided access to the two largest domes of the Convention Center, thereby increasing the number of exhibit spaces available for vendors wanting to have larger &/or new display areas.

As with any change of this magnitude,

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there were some unexpected problems. However, based on the feedback, both verbal and written that has been received to date, the change resulted in many more positive than negative reports. Meetings have already taken place addressing issues that need to be changed for next year as well as continuing those that generated positive feedback. One definite change that will be made next year is the location of the MGCSA booth. Next year's location will be in the main lobby near the registration desk. This will give much better visibility and easier access for MGCSA members. Another will be increased room capacities for the Pesticide Recertification sessions on Friday. Due to many not checking this need on the registration forms, the room size for these sessions was not adequate and will be corrected for next year's event.

**This was the fourth year of the Minnesota Green Expo.** As most of you are aware, the Expo is the combination of the separate events previously sponsored by the Minnesota Turf & Grounds Foundation and the Minnesota Nursery & Landscape Association. The respective Boards of Directors of these two groups felt for some time that there were syner-

gies that could be realized by combining these two events into one, thereby affording the luxury of offering a broader educational conference and a more all-encompassing trade show. Since there was some overlap between exhibitors and attendees of the separate events, all with an involvement in the Green Industry, these boards negotiated for several years to form the Minnesota Green Expo. The anticipated synergies have, in fact, materialized as the Expo has proven to be one of the largest and best regional Green Industry shows in the country. Both attendance and exhibit space occupied every year has exceeded the sum of the totals of even the best year when these events were held separately.

The contract that is currently in place governing the conduct of the Expo is a three-year contract with a "rolling" feature that automatically adds a third year at the conclusion of each year's Expo barring written notice by either party stating otherwise. This eliminates the need to renegotiate the entire contract every third year. This feature was added for protection against one of the partners abruptly terminating the contract leaving the other high and dry with little time to arrange their own separate event. When the original contract was being negotiated, one of the issues that was discussed in great detail was the allocation of revenue and expenses resulting from this event. Historical data was used to determine the size of each of the respective events that had been previously held separately. After examining all of the data from previous MTGF and MNLA events it was determined that both attendance and exhibitor space was tracking with the MNLA show being twice the size of the MTGF show. These numbers were taken directly from the attendance records of each organization as well as exhibit space utilized for each of the two events. The MTGF had previously rented one hall at the Convention Center and could not fill more than roughly one half of that hall.

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The charge was the same whether the hall was filled or not. The MNLA rented one hall of the Convention Center and filled it plus having a significant exhibitor waiting list in place. By combining the two, the Expo now sells out two complete domes so that all space that is paid for generates revenue and nearly all vendors that wish to exhibit are able to do so. The eventual contract that was written was done so in a way to reflect all of the above, resulting in a distribution of a 66.7% allocation made to the MNLA and a 33.3% allocation made to the MTGF. This applies to both revenues and expenses and therefore to the net income generated each year.

**When studying the breakdown of the registrations and the exhibitor participation** for the 2006 Expo, as well as the previous three that have taken place under this arrangement, the agreed-upon distribution has averaged within one percent of being exactly as estimated. Consequently, the distribution as set forth in the contract does in fact accurately reflect the level of the contribution of each of the sponsors to the overall success of the Expo. While the financial results of the 2006 Expo cannot be determined at this point because all expenses are not yet in, there is no reason to expect that this year's event will vary significantly from the previous three. Those results have provided far more net income for the MTGF than its stand-alone event had ever generated. This allows the MTGF to make larger contributions to various research projects and programs than it could have were this co-sponsorship arrangement not in place.

**A point that surfaces on occasion is that some exhibitors** have a concern that their total expenditure made to exhibit in the Expo is being divided between two groups and thus not going directly to MGCSA, using MGCSA as an example. While this is true when taking this as a stand-alone observation, it does not factor in several things that influence the total outcome of the Expo and therefore the benefits derived from it. First, the current Expo attendance and exhibits exceed the sum of the two totals for each category under the old arrangement. This is a great example of a situation where  $1 + 1 = \text{more than } 2$ . Thus both sponsors of the Expo are deriving benefits for their members, such as more income, more exhibits, more networking opportunities and more educational opportunities than either could derive sponsoring their own individual

event. Greater attendance equals a larger audience for every exhibitor. This makes it more attractive for an exhibitor to participate. This attracts more exhibitors who attract a larger audience - greater attendance. And the circle continues. In addition, increased attendance and exhibits generate revenue that allows for more educational sessions, many of which benefit attendees from each of the sponsoring groups. Thus there are educational opportunities offered at the Expo that no single sponsor could offer just for their members. Third, the number of rooms available for educational sessions for a set fee is directly tied to the number of halls rented for exhibits. Yes, it is true that MNLA benefits from the expenditures made by exhibitors whose primary audience is MTGF members. But it is also true that the MTGF benefits from the expenditures of MNLA exhibitors, and there are more of those, both in the number of exhibiting companies and the number of total exhibit spaces sold. All of these factors, in addition to others, must be factored in to realize the true impact and benefit for each company or individual who participates, whether they be attendees or exhibitors.

**For the most part, the only negative** that is expressed about the educational portion of the Expo is "there were so many things offered that I couldn't get to everything that I wanted to attend." What a great problem to have when compared to "there really wasn't much that I was interested in so I either went home early or had to wait for the next session." The same holds true in many cases with the trade show. "I couldn't get through the whole show because there was so much to see." Again, far better than "there really wasn't much there to see."

**Some ask who decides what speakers and topics** will be offered at the Expo. I will be meeting with the MGCSA Education Committee very shortly, just as I have each of the past four years to determine what this committee would like to have on the program for the coming year. Following each of these meetings, the only time this list wasn't completely included in the next year's program was when a speaker could not attend because of a conflict or there were just too many speakers and topics for the hours available throughout the three days. Consequently, MGCSA's Education Committee determines what speakers and topics will be included in next year's education program at the Expo that will be interesting to MGCSA members. Also in place to help direct this effort is a Joint Programming Board which is specified as part of the

Expo contract. This Board, which has the final say on what speakers and topics will be included in next year's program, consists of three representatives each from the MTGF and the MNLA, the two Executive Directors and Dr. Brian Horgan. The purpose of this Board is to make sure that there are good educational sessions for each group of attendees and that there are no overlaps with speakers addressing similar topics. At no time over the last four years has any speaker requested by the MGCSA Education Committee been eliminated in this process.

**The Minnesota Green Expo is the major source of revenue for the MTGF.** In 2005 the MTGF budgeted \$133,500 for research, program support and an economic impact study, all of which will benefit the turf and grounds industry in Minnesota. This is over 50% more than was realized in total net revenue even in the best year of a stand-alone MTGF Conference and Trade Show. All of these funds will have either a direct or indirect benefit to MGCSA members as well as others in the Green Industry, including the turf and grounds programs at the University of Minnesota. Two members selected by the current MGCSA Board sit on the MTGF Board of Directors. That Board determines what contributions are made by the MTGF each year and your MGCSA representatives have played a major role in making that determination.

In closing, the Minnesota Green Expo is one of the best regional offerings anywhere in the country, both in quality and value. The reason for this success is the participation of professionals who make up the Green Industry in this area. Individual members attend because of the great educational program, the networking opportunity and the tremendous trade show that vendors put together each year. Vendors exhibit because so many of their customers gather at one place for one event. There is no other local gathering that comes close to the magnitude of this event. Each supports the other so that all benefit from participation. The overall end result is that all who are involved in the Green Industry in this area find value in being a part of the Minnesota Green Expo. To each exhibitor who participated in the Expo and to each member who attended, thank you and please remember to support participating exhibitors when it comes time to make your buying decisions. Working together you will all contribute to making the 2007 Minnesota Green Expo the best one yet.