

Doc's Dugout - An Inning From Our Past & Present (Part I)

by Dr. Kent Kurtz - STMA Historian

A Sincere Tribute to a Friend, Colleague, Industry Pioneer and Legend TOM MASCARO

The entire turfgrass industry lost a great friend, entrepreneur and dynamic individual, when Tom Mascaro passed away May 6, 1997, in Pompano Beach, Florida, at the age of 81. Many will remember the folding cane Tom used in earlier years and the electric cart in which he cruised trade shows and turf conferences in his later years. Tom was struck by polio when he was 9 months old. This affected his left side the remainder of his life, but he overcame his adversity to revolutionize the turfgrass industry. Tom perfected the knack of turning lemons into lemonade.

He made a tremendous impact on both the sports turf and golf course industries. Tom was named one of STMA's first Honorary Life Members and campaigned wherever he traveled for new STMA members. In addition, Tom was influential in forming STMA's first Chapter, the Florida Chapter #1.

Tom Mascaro entered the industry in 1936 with the establishment of his own business, West Point Products, Inc., which mixed spent mushroom soil with nutrients to create fertilizers and materials for topdressing. Groundskeepers had been making their own fertilizer and topdressing materials and each had his own formula. Tom called on groundskeepers, listened to their needs and then customized his products for them. During its first 10 years of operation, West Point Products, Inc. produced special soil mixtures for golf courses and packaged potting soil and organic fertilizer. Tom was the first to market potting soil in 2-pound bags for homeowners through nurseries and stores like F.W. Woolworth, S.S. Kresge, and Sears.

In the early 1940s, the company also began manufacturing and marketing turfgrass tools and equipment to improve turfgrass health and vigor. During Tom's lifetime, his company designed, built or formulated over 100 pieces

of turfgrass equipment or products -- 20 of which were awarded U.S. and/or foreign patents. In 1969, West Point Products merged with Kearney National Corp., which later acquired Hahn, Inc.



Tom retired and moved to Florida in 1973, but it didn't "take." He started another company, Turfgrass Products Corp., which became Turf-Tec International in 1986 when his son John joined the company as president. Even with waning health the past 2 years, Tom remained active in the business.

I last saw Tom at the Golf Course Show in Las Vegas this past February. He cruised the show floor in his electric cart, worked the company's booth and fit in time to catch up with old acquaintances. He was his usual self -- positive, caring, supportive, interested and concerned about others. As always, he was focused on how to make the grass greener for his friends and all the turfgrass managers of the world.

Tom Mascaro was a creative and innovative thinker with the unrelenting drive and ability to follow an idea through to fruition. He introduced and manufactured the first true aerifier and vertical mower to turfgrass managers along with many other items needed by an industry struggling for recognition in the earlier years (1930s, '40s and '50s).

Please Note: The next issue of Sports Turf Manager will feature Part II, which will discuss the innovations, products and equipment that Tom Mascaro created for the turfgrass industry.

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Chapter Events

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at The Turf Office at (515) 232-8222 (phone) or (515) 232-8228 (fax).

Southern California Chapter: STMA

For information on the Southern California Chapter or pending activities, contact: Chris Bunnell at (619) 432-2421.

Florida Chapter #1: STMA

For information on upcoming events or the Florida Chapter, contact: John Mascaro at (954) 938-7477.

STMA Chapters on the Grow:

The Mid-Atlantic Athletic Field Managers

Organization (MAFMO) is an active group currently working toward STMA affiliation. A Dinner Meeting is planned for June 19th from 6:30 P.M. to 9:00 P.M. at Joe Theisman's Restaurant in Elkridge, Maryland. The topic will be Turfgrass Seed Certification.

For more information on this event, MAFMO, or other upcoming activities, contact the Hotline: (410) 290-5652.

Great Plains Sports Turf Managers Association

For Information on the Great Plains Sports Turf Managers Association or upcoming events, contact: Mark Schimming, City of Wichita, at (316) 337-9123.