The 17th annual STMA Conference and Exhibition was held this year at Disney's Coronado Springs Resort and Conference Center. A record crowd of 1016 attendees celebrated STMA's 25th Anniversary with 38 educational sessions, hands-on workshops, tours of sports venues, the SAFE scholarship golf tournament, and a vast trade show. This was the second national conference that I have attended and it exceeded my expectations. The facility was first rate and the knowledge gained from the educational sessions and my peers was priceless. Where else can you have access to that many experts in one field?

As the grounds supervisor for the Pine Hill Public Schools I deal with a large number of school specific issues, so I kicked off my conference with a sports turf networking session for K-12 schools. SFMANJ vice-president Don Savard, CSFM gave a good talk about his experience with outsourcing and we had a chance to discuss topics we all have to deal with as sports turf managers. It was great to talk to people from all over the country that are going through the same things that you are. One of the topics discussed was providing professionally maintained fields on a school’s budget. The common denominator seemed to be that expectations were higher than manpower and budget restraints would allow. I know we can change this. Through hard work, networking, and education of our administrators we can put forward a professional product and not break the bank.

One of the great things about the conference is the amount of choices you have in the educational sessions. I had a very difficult time deciding which ones to pick. Looking back I tried to cover a lot of bases. IPM is a hot button topic in our state right now, so I checked out Implementing IPM Strategies for Athletic Fields. Roch Gaussoin from the University of Nebraska was the speaker. He touched on most of the things that we are doing here in the Garden State such as proper seed selection, appropriate nitrogen usage, compaction relief, and proper use of pesticides. He was surprised by how strict our notification laws are (a topic for another time.) IPM is here to stay. We as sports turf managers are going to have to learn how to make it part of our program.

Infield maintenance is one of my favorite topics. I enjoy picking the brains of people who do it on the professional level. The panel discussion about infield mixes with Luke Yoder of the San Diego Padres, and Craig Potts from Texas A&M University was good stuff. They talked about the importance of water management in your infield and how mixes are different from one part of the country to the other. The other topic they both touched on was infield conditioner. The use of conditioner on our infields has made them much safer and gives the fielder a true bounce every time. If you are spending money on infield mix every year, you could get a lot more for your money if you topped off your infield with conditioner.

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Even the best grounds managers don’t know all the answers to their questions, but here is how to find them! We live in the information age, where we can quickly find out almost everything about anything. We look to our resources to find the answers. Anyplace that you can find information is a potential resource.

I believe that my most important informational resources are the people. It began with the instructors that I had in school and the bosses and coworkers who taught me the fundamentals of my job. Trusted colleagues helped me figure out what to do—and sometimes what not to do, and continue to do so. My vendors partner with me and help me find solutions to problems. I network with my industry peers constantly. I try to surround myself with people who know more than me and I learn, ask questions and learn from them.

My next choice is information that I can find in print. I have textbooks and reference books on my bookshelf. Some of these books are like a “groundskeeper’s bible”, they contain the fundamental facts about what I need to know and what I need to do. I read and reference them often. There are also many trade magazines that I read monthly. Publications such as Sports Turf, Grounds Maintenance, Landscape Management and others offer timely information for the reader and most issues have a monthly theme. The articles are usually well written and concise and have useful content. Most subscriptions are free, thanks to an abundance of advertisers.

Another great place for information is the Internet. There are a number of good e-magazines out there for groundskeepers and sports field managers. There are weekly newsletters with links to other websites, others are monthly. If you are looking for something specific, search engines such as Google, Yahoo and others can find tens if not hundreds of search results about whatever topic you choose.

Continuing Professional Education courses that Rutgers or your local community college offers are a good way to become trained and many offer credits and a certification of completion. Among the formats in which courses are offered are seminar, traditional classroom and online or distance learning classes. I took a soils course online last year and it was just as rigorous as any that I had in college. The advantage was that I could fit it around my busy schedule.

Some of the best clearingshouses of information are professional organizations such as the Sports Field Managers Association of New Jersey, the New Jersey Turfgrass Association, and others. These organizations publish newsletters by and for their membership, sponsor field days and demonstrations.

Lastly, if you need to know about a control product, ALWAYS read the label. A label is a tremendous resource. The label will tell you many things including what pests it will and won’t control, what things you can safely apply it to, when, how and the amounts much to use.

Don Savard is a Certified Sports Field Manager; Director, Athletic Facilities and Grounds, Salesianum School; and SFMANJ Vice-President.

**Did You Know?**

Large soil pores called macropores and water will drain from these pores under the influence of gravity, thus called gravitational water.