

STMA 2008: AN SFMANJ MEMBER REPORTS ON HIS EXPERIENCE

By Kevin Shipman

I have just returned to the cold northeast from sunny and mild Phoenix, Arizona (I personally like the cold as a nice break from the hot humid weather in the summer). I was attending the Sports Turf Managers Association (STMA) Annual Conference and Trade Show. This annual conference is the highlight of the Association's year and recognizes its accomplishments as well as the accomplishments of its membership in the previous year. The annual business meeting is held over a lunch and introduces us (the membership) to the Association's new Officers and the new business that STMA is looking to handle in the upcoming year. They provide a financial report on the organization so we can stay abreast of how our membership dues are being spent and how we are aided by being members.

During the STMA conference, there are a multitude of speakers and educational sessions you may attend. The topics range from how to prepare a budget, to managing turf with multiple events, to weed control, to synthetic turf. There are also two days of a trade show that allows the equipment side of the industry to show-off their latest tractors, mowers, seeders, aerators, irrigation, and other supplies. On Friday night, the annual awards banquet lets us see the work of some of the best sports turf managers in the previous year. STMA hands-out awards for the best fields in the high school, college, and professional

levels. They also honor some of the best sports turf managers in the industry with awards named in honor of legendary sports turf managers.

I work at Kingsway High School in Southern New Jersey. It is a Grade 7 through 12 school with about 55 acres of sports fields and 15 acres of common areas around the schools. I have worked in a school setting for the past 7 years and find it very rewarding to do a good job and see that your efforts are noticed. In the school setting everything you perform outside is noticed. If the grass dies, the school administrators and coaches come to see why. If the grass is green, growing well, and the fields are kept-up, the coaches always seem to enjoy the games a little more. The administrators take notice of how the school grounds look and take pride in knowing their school looks good to the tax-paying public. I am even told by non-coaching teachers that the school grounds look nice; that makes me proud of the work that my staff and myself do.

The conference is always educationally rewarding as there are many sessions that are available. This year I focused on attending a few sessions that could provide me with knowledge in areas where I

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felt it was needed. The first one I attended related to irrigation scheduling. This is one area where I think a lot of people need education. You can not just set a program on your controller and let it run. I learned to always check my soil moisture levels and air temperature and humidity for a specific region. I also spoke with Don Savard of Salesianum High School in Wilmington, DE. He wrote a very good article a few months back about doing an irrigation audit; I am planning on doing one myself this spring with his help and expertise.

The second session I was looking forward to attending was how to manage a synthetic field. This is such a hot topic now in schools; I wanted to get all the research that I could just in case this ever comes up at my school. All of our fields at Kingsway are natural turfgrass and they are continually getting better. Synthetics are what everyone is talking about these days and I have learned that the more educated you are about these fields, the better you can prepare when the school board wants to install one. You can talk with the board about what you have learned and hopefully with your knowledge you can all work toward achieving a great field.

The last session that I was really looking forward to attending was one focused on managing turf without pesticides. This is probably the biggest topic currently being discussed within schools and many other most segments of the green industry. Many ideas were brought-up on ways to control all kinds of pests with new and innovative ways without

resorting to pesticides. In my state of New Jersey, the use of pesticides in turf - whether it is an application intended for crabgrass control or vegetation control along fence lines - is becoming harder and harder, so new ways need to be examined. This should be the one session everyone at the conference attends. There are more and more pesticide regulations and we all need to do our part in limiting the use of pesticides when we can.

The Kindergarten through 12th Grade (K-12) membership segment of STMA should ideally have the most members and should be the biggest group attending at the annual conference. Most of these individuals have the least amount of training and knowledge. I was included in this group until I started attending the annual conference. We have the most to gain by attending. The education sessions can teach a new sports turf manager many things that professional and collegiate managers already know; however individuals just starting in the industry may not have a high degree of knowledge. Conference attendance could be a great jumping point to much better fields and improved professional abilities. I am hoping that this message can be passed-on to many K-12 districts that are not currently members of STMA; hopefully they will become members. We can all learn from one another and by attending this conference, or any conference, we can help improve the safety and playability of sports fields.

*Kevin Shipman is Sports Turf Manager,
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