

By Matt Olivi

After a few successful Spring Events, Sports Field Managers Association of New Jersey (SFMANJ) is looking forward to the rest of 2011. This year, in addition to traditionally sponsored field day events and trade shows, the Activities and Education Committee is taking on some new challenges and working to establish new professional relationships. SFMANJ recognizes the legislative and budgetary issues that increasingly limit the resources we have available to us and threaten the professional cultural practices we use to efficiently manage our sports fields and grounds.

Once the snow melted in March, this year's educational program began by targeting a relatively new audience in youth sports. Specifically, Branchburg hosted a Saturday little league field maintenance clinic. This first clinic was attended by an enthusiastic group of volunteers and coaches who share the Association's goals of increasing playability and safety on the field. Several members of the SFMANJ Board of Directors were in attendance to share their knowledge and experience in field layout, infield surface drainage and moisture control. Clinic attendees were introduced to some effective tools of the trade and then took part in a step-by-step pitchers mound construction. At the end of the clinic, participants had constructed a high quality mound that they could be proud of and were given some tips on how to maintain its playability and aesthetics.

The basic format of the Branchburg clinic was duplicated the following weekend in Pine Hill, NJ. The highly dedicated Pine Hill Public School Maintenance Crew took the lead in demonstrating field maintenance techniques that clearly resulted in success. Additions to the Pine Hill Clinic included a turfgrass education segment featuring Brad Park, turfgrass research and education coordinator at Rutgers University. Attendees had an opportunity to learn about proper turfgrass selection and were given some timely tips for making effective agronomic decisions. The Pine Hill clinic also added an afternoon segment that focused on High School field maintenance procedures. Despite the cold March

temperatures, several coaches and decision makers in Pine Hill attended the Clinics and came away with some very useful information.

As the weather warmed-up over the next few weeks, the activities committee made final preparations for the annual Spring Field Day held on April 20. The multi-site field day began at the Torpey Athletic Complex in Bridgewater, home of the 2010 SFMANJ Field of the Year. Attendees witnessed a hands-on field recovery demonstration by Torpey's head groundskeeper Dave Kaczynski and had the opportunity to learn about the award-winning field maintenance procedures used by the Somerset County Parks Staff. The field day continued at the Torpey Athletic Complex for the remainder of the morning. Multiple trade show equipment demonstrations and a Soil Testing Procedure Seminar featuring Dr. James Murphy from Rutgers University were incorporated into the program. Dr. Murphy clarified many misinterpretations of nutrient management legislation and provided attendees with a multitude of necessary informational resources.

After lunch, the field day concluded at T.D. Bank Ballpark; home of the Somerset Patriots. Dan Purner, head groundskeeper at T.D. Bank Ballpark, provided an opportunity to tour a professional baseball facility and shared his insight. Fortunately, attendees were able to see field preparations being made for a game scheduled for later that day. Moving from a public facility with limited resources to a professional facility helped attendees to clearly see the similarities and differences in field maintenance procedures and management techniques.

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Efficient sports field and grounds management techniques will be the focus of the transition from spring to summer. SFMANJ will be kicking-off the summer with a presentation to the NJ Association of School Business Officials. Several members of the Board of Directors will be speaking in a workshop at the NJASBO Conference in June. Early this year, NJASBO invited the SFMANJ to share its professional, on-the-ground perspective with the decision-makers that directly affect how field managers maintain their facilities. This is a great opportunity for school sports field managers to begin to establish mutually beneficial relationships with their administration if they haven't already done so. It is the intention of the Board of Directors to provide NJASBO with necessary decision-making information and staff training resources for effective sports field management.

While SFMANJ is taking on the added challenges of establishing new professional relationships and actively battling impending pesticide legislation, it will continue to sponsor traditional events. Looking ahead to July, SFMANJ is making preparations for its annual Equipment Trade Show at the Rutgers Adelphia Research Field Day. Further down the road, the association is exploring opportunities for a fall field day as well as additional instructional clinics similar

to those that successfully started the year off. Also, it's never too early to start planning the Sports Field Education Program at the December 2011 NJ Green Expo at the Taj Mahal in Atlantic City. In cooperation with the New Jersey Turfgrass Association (NJTA), SFMANJ is already in the process of finalizing this year's program. As a result of last years' record attendance, the Association recognizes the need for NJ pesticide applicators to maintain Category 13 (IPM for Schools) recertification credits. Therefore, this year's educational program will duplicate last years' program by dedicating a full afternoon to School IPM related education.

With the new challenges that SFMANJ is taking on this year and the goal of continuing to provide its membership with timely educational and managerial resources, the Activities and Education Committee and Board of Directors needs your input more than ever. Don't hesitate to voice your opinion on any sports field related issues or help to determine educational content for upcoming programs. The Board of Directors always encourages member participation in the planning and facilitation of activities. Your feedback and insight are always valued greatly.

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