

The winter season is a favorite time of the year for me. Not only do I get to attend and participate in the Ohio Turfgrass Foundation (OTF) Conference and Show,

I am also fortunate enough to be asked to speak at other state and regional conferences. Turfgrass conferences are a time to catch up with people I have not seen for awhile and visit with exhibitors while scavenging through their displays for product materials.

I try attending the educational sessions where my colleagues present their research reports. I especially pay attention, if time on the program has allowed, to attend graduate student presentations on their research efforts. And what would a turf conference be without the obligatory banquet where student scholarships and research grants are announced?

Lately, attendance at many turf conferences have shown little growth and in some cases a decline. For attendees, I know the cost of attending is increasing while budgets are decreasing. Additionally, there are more outlets for attendees to receive information and pesticide points or credits at one-day meetings and seminars. Information in general is also easily accessed from a multitude of sources, including the Internet.

Manufacturers and distributors are more hesitant or analytical in how they use their resources when deciding to exhibit at state or regional turf shows either at tabletop events or full-blown exhibition halls. New marketing tools, means of contacting buyers, and more focused targeted marketing efforts have changed how companies spend marketing money.

Which brings me to the point of my column — to reaffirm the importance and role of state turf conferences and shows to the well-being of our industry. Turfgrass conferences are held where competitors, friends, industry and university personnel interact for the betterment of the turfgrass industry.

Whether you give one scholarship or 20, or \$500 or \$500,000 in grant money, these local conferences and shows were created to support

Making the Case for Turf Shows

BY KARL DANNEBERGER



LET'S NOT FORGET
HOW IMPORTANT
REGIONAL EVENTS
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INVOLVED

university educational, research and outreach efforts for our industry.

What has made the state and regional conferences a success are the loyalty and grassroots efforts of the attendees and exhibitors. When the first OTF Conference and Show was scheduled back in the 1960s, the Ohio Turfgrass Industry didn't know if anyone would attend, let alone exhibit.

Two giants in the Ohio turf industry, Robert O'Brien and James FitzGibbon (now deceased), met and divided the trade-floor space between them. Then they proceeded to sell the floor space by convincing, cajoling and arm-twisting their suppliers and competitors.

In addition, they reminded their customers of the importance of continued education and the need to support this new educational effort. Their efforts contributed to the success of the first OTF Conference and Show, which was the foundation for subsequent successful shows.

What makes this story especially interesting is that it is not unique. In every state and region, a similar story can be told.

The next time you attend a state turfgrass conference, be reminded that your presence not only helps you to grow as a professional but also contributes to the well-being of the industry.

And be reminded that an exhibitor is not only trying to inform you of new products. By its presence, an exhibitor is helping support research and teaching efforts at the local and regional levels.

To all, thank you.

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