

BIG Is Not Always Best

SLOWER-PACED NEW ENGLAND TURF SHOW

IS GIGANTIC PROOF OF THAT

By Anthony Pioppi, Contributing Editor

There is something about seeing a rock band in a big venue like an arena or a stadium — the pre-show vibe, the throng of humanity united by a common sound and the massive stage production. It's truly a spectacle.

From a musical standpoint, however, for both the musicians and the audience, it's not an optimal situation. The acoustics can be abysmal and there is no real connection between performer and audience.

A smaller, more intimate venue may not have the same energy of the big show, but it is by far the best way to hear the music and connect with a performer. This is not to say an unforgettable experience can't be found at a big concert. I, and about 80,000 others, attended Live Aid at Philadelphia's Veterans Memorial Stadium in 1985. My friends and I sat so far back from the stage that the people in the row behind us were in Delaware. It was a blistering day and the performers, hundreds of yards away, looked to be the size of nematodes. The sound was atrocious. But as an event, it was spectacular and at times jaw dropping.

If I had to attend it all over again, I would attend it all over again.

There is correlation, for me, to golf industry trade shows. There is much to be said about the national event with its flash and glitter, and manufacturers showing off *all* their wares, with enough free items handed out to stock a good-sized yard sale. The important researchers are there as are the biggest names in the turf maintenance profession. From North America and the British Isles, they're walking the show floor, teaching or attending classes.

Yet, there is impersonality to the national show where in fact the size can be nothing short of overwhelming, daunting and maddening.

In early March, the New England Turfgrass Foundation held its annual conference and show at the Rhode Island Convention Center in Providence. The event has been steadily growing in attendance as have the number of manufacturers and distributors who ply their goods and services on the floor. It has become a must-attend event for those in any segment of the New England turf industry.

Over four days, classes are offered not just for superintendents, but also for equipment technicians and those in sports turf and lawn care. Because Golf Course Superintendents Association of America credits can be gained, there are always attendees from Long Island and Westchester County, N.Y.

Quotable

"We've always cut greens in March. I'm looking out the window right now and there's snow on the ground. ... That's global warming for you. Where's Al Gore when you need him?"

— *Michael Bavier, certified superintendent of Inverness (Ill.) Golf Club, on the long 2007-2008 winter that stretched well into March*

"If you keep your people well informed and you get them to use their brains, you'll be amazed at how much they can help manage costs."

— *Certified superintendent John Miller, tournament agronomist for the LPGA Tour, on how a properly managed staff is good for the business.*

The New England show has an intimate vibe. The pace is not as harried as the national.

Pennsylvania-based golf course architect Kelly Blake Moran was in Providence for the first time after hearing about the quality of classes offered. He found much more.

"It seemed easier to understand certain products in this environment rather than over the phone or brochures," he said.

He was also surprised by the variation of businesses that were there from regionally focused companies like the Chas. C. Hart Seed Co., a Wethersfield, Conn.-based company that supplies products to the golf and lawn care segments throughout the Northeast, to BLEC USA, a South Carolina company that manufactures equipment for landscapers.

Of course, the major national and international players in the iron, irrigation and chemical segments were there as well.

"There were a few contacts whose business is not solely confined to the New England area which is a testament to the drawing power of the show," Moran said. "I think that one of the biggest benefits is the possibility of meeting not only new contacts in New England, but also people who do business outside this area, some who are worldwide."

I couldn't agree more.

Encore! ■