

VTC Annual Conference and Tradeshow Continues to Buck the Typical Trend

For many of the country's turfgrass associations, both state and national, the past few years have brought times of anxiety — even angst, some might say — particularly concerning the groups' annual conferences. For most, the dour economy has driven down both attendee registrations and tradeshow booth sales, both of which are associations' key revenue producers. The Virginia Turfgrass Council (VTC), however, has defied that trend, posting increased attendance and booth sales at its annual conference for the past three years in a row.

The reasons for the VTC's success are many, says Tom Tracy, Ph.D., the association's executive director. "Perhaps the most important factor in our conference's continued growth was the decision by our board of directors to move the event from Richmond to Fredericksburg in 2006," he says. "Although Richmond was more centrally located for many of our members, the move to the Fredericksburg Conference & Expo Center not only provided a fresh venue for those who had tired of various hassles we faced in Richmond, but it also allowed us to expand into a more regional show. Since Fredericksburg is within a four-hour drive of much of the Mid-Atlantic, we now attract a substantial contingent of turf professionals not only from across Virginia but also from Maryland, New Jersey and Washington, D.C."

The event's growing attendance — this past year alone saw a 20% increase over 2009 — is also enticing more vendors to the tradeshow portion of the VTC's conference. "We now attract vendors from as far away as California," Tracy notes. "And for our upcoming conference, scheduled for January 17-20, 2011, we're already on track for another sold-out tradeshow, despite the continued economic difficulties many turfgrass suppliers are facing. That's likely because we devote so many hours of our conference to tradeshow-only time, so that attendees are not forced to choose between attending high-quality educational sessions and visiting vendors on the tradeshow floor. Clearly, our vendors feel that their presence at our show yields a valuable return on their investment since they have direct face-to-face access to so many of the region's key buyers of their products."

The move to a more regional attendance has also given impetus to the VTC's slotting of more nationally known speakers for the conference's educational program. While the program continues to rely heavily on turfgrass researchers from Virginia Tech, this year's program, will also feature presentations from Drs. Bruce Martin and Lambert McCarty (both from Clemson University), Dr. David Shetlar (Ohio State University) and Dr. Roch Gaussoin (University of Nebraska), as well as Darin Bevard and Keith Happ, from the United States Golf Association. As a special treat, Mark Prieur (of the Ontario Golf Superintendents Association) is slated to relate his experiences with Canada's increasing regulations concerning fertilizer and pesticide use, an issue of growing concern to many American turf managers.

As always, the VTC conference's educational program this year includes dedicated tracks for golf-course maintenance, sports-field management, sod production and lawn care/landscaping (many with GCSAA and STMA recertification credits). The event also offers classes for applicators needing pesticide recertification, another major draw for conference attendees.

Finally, Tracy believes that the Fredericksburg location itself has played an important role in the conference's success. "Fredericksburg is a family destination, even in January," he comments. "The city has a wealth of historic attractions, reflecting its role in both the Revolutionary War and the Civil War. And the Conference and Expo Center is in the middle of a major retail area, with lots of shops and fine restaurants only a few minutes away. Plus, of course, our attendees love the Center's ample free parking, while our vendors appreciate the easy, drive-in access to the tradeshow floor."

The VTC's 51st Annual Turf & Landscape Conference and Tradeshow will be held at the Fredericksburg Conference & Expo Center, January 17-20, 2011. For attendee and vendor convenience, the VTC has a dedicated website where registration forms, the entire educational program and the tradeshow-floor layout can be found. For this information and more, visit www.turfconference.org. Or contact Tom Tracy at (757-464-1004) or (vaturf@verizon.net).

MAAGCS SCHEDULE

December 8, 2010, Annual Meeting, Norbeck Country Club

TBA, MTC Conference, University of Maryland

February 9, 2010, GIS Orlando Reception, Doubletree Resort

March 2, 2011, MAAGCS Education Seminar, Ten Oaks Ballroom