

1987-2007
CELEBRATING
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STA Member Profile

Jane Arnett-Rivers, City of Oakville, STA Past President

1. You were president of the Sports Turf Association from 2000-2001. What was your role in the turfgrass industry at that time? Are you still involved in the industry? How?

At that time I was Supervisor of Parks – West Area, Town of Oakville. This included sports fields, grass cutting, horticulture, trails, and sanitation for the west side of Oakville. I believe we had 7 irrigated fields. I am currently Manager of Parks Maintenance, Town of Oakville. My portfolio has a broad scope: geese, rats, turf, sports fields, boulevards, budgets – projected and current, equipment, environmental issues, design, special events and festivals, washrooms, garbage, water retention ponds, grass cutting and irrigation.

2. What was the biggest challenge in your job at that time?

I believe we were just entering into the unknown world of *Pesticide Free*. It was all very doom and gloom. It is amazing that we have survived and adapted to the moratorium in Oakville. The moratorium forced us, as an operation, to look at what we do and how we do it. It also pushed us into researching best practices and planning ahead to get the funding we required to carry out those best practices. Equipment changed: reel mowers were not cutting it any more (no pun intended) and mowing heights had to be raised. Topdressing and overseeding which used to be a tool to level a field suddenly became a cultural practice for healthy turf. A happy medium would have been nice – the cold turkey approach from preventative pesticide applications to nothing was very tough for a few years – but, here we

are, still cutting and improving what we can, when we can.

3. What is the most satisfying part, what makes the job worthwhile for you?

Watching staff catch the passion for what they are doing. Of course the aesthetics of our job are what most people appreciate but anyone who works in this industry knows that aesthetics are short lived if you don't work smart and hard. Staff who truly care about what they do will find new and innovative ways to carry out their jobs so they get satisfaction. It is great to be a part of such a team and facilitate what THEY need to make us all look good.

4. What is the biggest misconception about your job?

The term *off season*. Can someone explain that one to me and maybe tell me when it is?

5. What is your educational/employment background?

Education was a long time ago: Sheridan College, Environmental Horticulture, some ODH courses, some OMD courses. Employment covers quite a scope. Many years on a weedwhipper, in the standard garden centre, with RBG as a gardener, assisting in writing a horticultural therapy manual, cemetery operations, turf leadhand, operations supervisor and currently manager of parks maintenance. 25 years and counting! Yikes!

6. Tell us about your family.

My husband runs the Town of Oakville Greenhouse Operation. Can you imagine our household in May? Two sons: one

graduated Business from Wilfred Laurier and is living the dream in Toronto; the other is about to enter Wilfred Laurier for Honours Economics (I am sure he will be soon living the dream as well). Between lacrosse, hockey and motocross, they have kept Tim and I hopping for many years. We are looking forward to the empty nest syndrome for a while.

7. What do you enjoy doing outside of the workplace? Hobbies, favourite past times?

To date, hobbies and pastimes have been raising two boys. Now I would like to say kayaking and travel. Tim prefers wilderness so there will be some trade-offs, I am sure.

8. How has the industry changed and in what direction(s) would you like to see the industry, as a whole, move towards?

The greatest change that I have experienced is how to deal with a seasonal work force: the liability of retraining every year is high. Retaining seasonal staff is difficult. These positions are key ones that carry great responsibility with them. Of course the pesticide issue also governs so much of what we plant, how we plant, what we do and how we do it in all aspects of parks operations. Finally, and most recently, is our successful entry into the weather-based central irrigation world. This has had a similar impact to our operation as changing from reel to rotary mowers did. Forget about the rain falling, it's the moisture you are losing that counts. It rounds out the holistic approach we are taking towards our parks. Internships? I would love to see more in our industry.

9. What do you consider to be the biggest benefit of being a STA member?

Networking. I get to sit at a table with seasoned professionals and have answers to most of my questions in an instant. The *Sports Turf Manager*, Field Day and Ontario Turfgrass Symposium are all amazing sources for what you need to know about this ever changing industry. It's a tight group that looks out for each other and loves to share information. I can sincerely say I would not be as successful without the support of the STA.

10. What would your advice be for current and future STA presidents?

Every term seems to have had its issue. For me, the financial sustainability of the association was in jeopardy. My advice is to identify THE issue and go for it. You can't do everything, so pick one, get lots of help and FIX IT! ♦

Adjacent: Past Presidents Jane Arnett-Rivers and Chris Mark, City of Oakville. Chris was profiled in the Summer 2005 issue.



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