

# SPORTS TURF EXTRAVAGANZA IN ORLANDO

Rich Watson\*

The 17th annual STMA Conference and Exhibition was held this year at Disney's Coronado Springs Resort and Conference Center. A record crowd of 1016 attendees celebrated STMA's 25th Anniversary with 38 educational sessions, hands-on workshops, tours of sports venues, the SAFE scholarship golf tournament, and a vast trade show. This was the second national conference that I have attended and it exceeded my expectations. The facility was first rate and the knowledge gained from the educational sessions and my peers was priceless. Where else can you have access to that many experts in one field?

As the grounds supervisor for the Pine Hill Public Schools I deal with a large number of school specific issues, so I kicked off my conference with a sports turf networking session for K-12 schools. SFMANJ vice-president Don Savard, CSFM gave a good talk about his experience with outsourcing and we had a chance to discuss topics we all have to deal with as sports turf managers. It was great to talk to people from all over the country that are going through the same things that you are. One of the topics discussed was providing professionally maintained fields on a school's budget. The common denominator seemed to be that expectations were higher than manpower and budget restraints would allow. I know we can change this. Through hard work, networking, and education of our administrators we can put forward a professional product and not break the bank.

One of the great things about the conference is the amount of choices you have in the educational sessions. I had a very difficult time deciding which ones to pick. Looking back I tried to cover a lot of bases. IPM is a hot button topic in our state right now, so I checked out Implementing IPM Strategies for Athletic Fields. Roch Gaussoin from the University of Nebraska was the speaker. He touched on most of the things that we are doing here in the Garden State such as proper seed selection, appropriate nitrogen usage, compaction relief, and proper use of pesticides. He was surprised by how strict our notification laws are (a topic for another time.) IPM is here to stay. We as sports turf managers are going to have to learn how to make it part of our program.

Infield maintenance is one of my favorite topics. I enjoy picking the brains of people who do it on the professional level. The panel discussion about infield mixes with Luke Yoder of the San Diego Padres, and Craig Potts from Texas A&M University was good stuff. They talked about the importance of water management in your infield and how mixes are different from one part of the country to the other. The other topic they both touched on was infield conditioner. The use of conditioner on our infields has made them much safer and gives the fielder a true bounce every time. If you are spending money on infield mix every year, you could get a lot more for your money if you topped off your infield with conditioner.

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Becoming a Certified Sports Field Manager is my ultimate goal. I have just qualified to take the exam with enough experience points and hope to take it at next year's conference. The Preparing for the CSFM Exam Workshop with Mary Owen of UMass and George Trivett CSFM was a good study guide. They went over the different sections of the exam and ended the workshop with a sample test. I have a better idea of what the exam is about and look forward to taking it next year.

This year's Awards Banquet was very special for me because the STMA honored one of their founding fathers. Henry Indyk was a friend and mentor to many of us. Since his passing I think of him often, especially at turf conferences (go figure). Henry was always there with advice and support. His knowledge was only surpassed by his caring for other people. Greg Petry spoke about his relationship with Henry and brought a lot of fond memories back for all of us there.

If you didn't make it to Orlando this year, you missed out. However, next year's conference is in San Antonio, TX (Jan. 17-21, 2007). Start making plans now to find a way to get there. It will take some salesmanship on your part, but it is well worth the extra effort. My school district supports me in my quest for continuing education. Our budget is small, but that is why going to these conferences is so important. The things I learn and bring back with me are invaluable. I can't always afford to do things the way they are explained but I can get ideas that will fit into our program. Education gives you the tools to do a better job. In addition to education you will meet people that will share information and their experiences with you. The networking system within the STMA is amazing. If you have questions or need help, always remember there is someone out there just like you.

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New Jersey was well represented at the STMA National Conference in Orlando, FL from January 18-22, 2006. Top row (l-r): Don Savard, CSFM and SFMANJ Vice President; Jim Hermann, CSFM; Fred Castenschield; Jim Gates, SFMANJ Treasurer; Rich Watson; Karl "Chuckie" Singer. Bottom row (l-r) Ken Mathis, SFMANJ President; El Hermann, SFMANJ Past President; Brad Park, Editor, SFMANJ Update.

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