

# GOLF & ATHLETIC TURF

## BUILDING A POSITIVE IMAGE THROUGH PUBLIC EDUCATION

by Greg Petry  
Waukegan (Ill). Park District

■ Image is formed not so much by what we do, but by the *public perception* of what we do. For sports turf managers, as for many other turf- and landscape-related professions, what the public sees is but a small portion of what they get. It's up to us, as professionals with an important role to fill, to provide the education that brings public perception closer to reality.

Sports turf managers develop and maintain playing surfaces for athletes that range from the youngest amateurs to the most highly-skilled, highly-competitive professionals. In the pursuit of this goal, we wear many hats. We plan, budget, schedule and implement procedures. We deal with financial entities, facility owners, team managers and coaches, players, other facility users, the media and the general public—as well as our own personnel, equipment supplies, physical facilities and facility requirements.

Sports turf management is not just a job. It's a career and a lifestyle.

The first criteria for building a positive image is self-examination. The better your skills and talents match the demands of your position, the more successful your performance will be, and the higher your credibility and "image" within that position among those you work with, your community and the profession as a whole.

Those willing to make that 100 percent commitment will gain the required educational background. Many of today's positions require a degree in a turf-related field—but that's just the starting point in what amounts to a life-long educational

process.

Professional associations, such as the Sports Turf Managers Association and GCSAA, help individuals grow by providing a forum to increase their knowledge and skills. These associations offer a network of information and human resources for the members. The more each member puts into an association, the more they gain in terms of overall understanding of the profession and in greater efficiency and effectiveness in everyday problem solving.

We must always strive to do our best. Awards programs, such as the STMA Fields of the Year, energize those within the profession by demonstrating that sensible management and hard work accomplish success at all levels, from the small community to the pro-level fields.

Safety is the prime concern of the sports turf manager at every level of play. The second priority is providing a highly-playable surface that gives all athletes the opportunity to concentrate on their game.

Sports turf managers consider the preservation and improvement of environmental conditions an integral part of all construction and maintenance practices. We know that each field and facility is a piece of nature. We're sensitive to the ecosystem and how it is impacted by our actions. A healthy ecosystem produces the healthy grass that results in a safe playing surface which protects the health of the athletes.

Sports turf managers realize that field quality and the environmental health of that property affect not only those who actually play on their fields, but the entire



community. More often than not, the sports turf managers' responsibilities extend to the entire facility: the parking lot, surrounding landscape, stadium or bleachers, concession and restrooms, fencing and lighting, dugouts or changing rooms, and press boxes, as well as the fields themselves. At the very least, sports turf managers are consulted on how playing conditions affect these other components of the facility. Therefore, the concern for environmental integrity and overall safety extends to athletes, officials, coaches and staffs, workers and volunteers, the spectators and the community at large.

Finally, aesthetics brings the total pic-

*continued on page 4G*

### ELSEWHERE

**Golf courses as  
good neighbors,  
page 4G**

**Secrets to  
green speed,  
page 7G**

**Green renovations  
require planning,  
page 10G**

**Zebra mussels  
reach golf courses,  
page 12G**

**PETRY** from page 1G

ture into focus. As the spectators and the athletes enter the facility and view the field, the stage is set for their experience. The spectators'—and the athletes'—perception of a good or bad game are linked with their perception of the quality of the field, and thus connected to their "image" of those who care for the facility.

In today's world, the sports turf manager also must be conscious of how environmental "correctness," safety and playability affect the liability situation. Sports turf managers must set standards for the highest level of quality and establish procedures to ensure that those standards are being met. When deficiencies are found, they must be defined and action documented to show corrections are taking place. It's an ongoing cycle.

It takes foresight to look at your facilities critically and perceive the things that could go wrong. Sports turf managers must watch for trends that might lead to potential problems and take the initiative

to correct conditions before those problems become a real danger.

And finally, the sports turf manager must communicate the essence of all this to the community, through reports and press releases, through contact with the media, booster clubs and community groups, and always through common-sense working relationships with the people.

Sports turf managers must take the time to explain why we do what we do, and why we don't do certain other things. We must be open, honest and straightforward. If we've made a mistake, we must admit it and take actions to correct it. We must analyze why mistakes occurred and prevent them from happening again.

If we establish a good working relationship with the community, and keep engaging in conversation, even when a difference of opinion exists, we're working on developing that positive image. We're building our image when we say we'll do "x, y and z" and then do x, y and Z; when we promptly comply with a community request that is sensible and reasonable.

We're building a positive image when we make sure that every member of our staff understands what they are doing, why they are doing it, and how it affects the overall good of the facility.

We're building a positive image when we explain our current financial and labor limitations, then develop specific plans of action and ask for volunteer contributions of funds, equipment or labor to accomplish those goals.

We're building our image when we work with facility users to develop workable alternatives to fill their needs and keep the fields safe and playable.

Sports turf managers must be willing to exert extra effort to achieve the best possible facilities and clearly communicate their role to the community, in order to create and maintain the highest professional image.

—Greg Petry is executive director of the Waukegan, Ill. Park District and president of the Sports Turf Managers Association.

## Golf courses as 'good neighbors'

by Ron Hall,  
Senior Editor

■ Here's another hat for golf course superintendents to wear—the hat of the goodwill ambassador to your communities.

More of you need to share the good news about golf to friends and neighbors. No, you don't need to tout the game itself. The growing ranks of beginning golfers suggest that's not the problem. You've got to shine a more pleasing light on the properties on which the game is played. Nobody knows more about them than you.

You realize that the courses you maintain are not green islands within your communities. They can't afford to be perceived as being isolated. Not any more.

There are too many lingering misconceptions by the public that golf courses are not good neighbors. A surprising number of people, including some golfers, see golf courses as water wasters and polluters. (see April '95 LM, page 6G)

Superintendents realize that there's little basis for these concerns. You understand that the impact of a golf course in a community is overwhelmingly positive.



The Tampa Palms course earned an Audubon certification in 1993.

You can tick off a half dozen benefits—more if you think about it—of having a properly maintained golf course in your communities. Some of you, in fact, do an excellent job of alerting your communities

to the positive environmental benefits of your courses.

But a lot of the public apparently never hears this message. When it does, it  
*continued on page 6G*