

# THE EXTRA POINT

## STMA NEWS

### FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



In the past several weeks I have had the opportunity to attend three outdoor industry trade shows. The first was the Midwest Sports Turf Institute (STMA) at the College of DuPage. The second was held at the College of Holy Cross (STMA and PGMS) and the third at Harper College (Midwest Park Executives).

At two of the three the educational sessions held in conjunction with the event were well-attended but the traffic through the commercial exhibits was extremely disappointing. Many exhibitors complained about the lack of interest and the small number of people visiting their areas. Several commercial firms talked about not returning next year.

What a shame! If many of these companies don't return there won't be an event. There definitely is a crisis looming on the horizon.

In analyzing this dilemma it appears that there is a lack of concrete effort, support, and commitment on the part of the conferees who don't take their job or profession seriously. Once lunch is served at these events, many people jump in their cars and leave. Some consider the day free time and actually go home early at their employer's expense. They're not only cheating their employer, but also themselves by not sticking around to learn something.

How sad and unprofessional they are. The sports turf industry has the potential to be the largest and most prominent in the green industry. The sports turf segment of the industry is struggling to be recognized on the same status as allied groups, such as golf and lawn care. True, these groups have existed longer and are settled on stronger foundations, but they were once where sports turf is today.

Could it be that these people are more interested in upgrading themselves and their profession, or are they more conscious of education and its benefits? Possibly, but I would doubt this is true in the majority of cases.

Perhaps the wrong people are attending these meetings and trade shows. Perhaps the ones who make the purchasing decisions are not the ones who are being sent by their employers. Perhaps the supervisory personnel are sending all the workers and laborers without attending themselves.

Whatever the reason, this lack of commitment, attendance and enthusiasm is causing the support from our commercial colleagues to dwindle rapidly.

I know from personal experience when I was working for a commercial supplier, that calling on schools was both difficult and confusing because each district had someone different in charge of athletic facilities. Many times the person responsible for the care and maintenance of the athletic fields was not in charge of purchasing. In some instances, the person in charge was the coach, athletic director, business manager, principal, assistant superintendent, or custodian. Rarely was he the grounds manager (sports turf manager).

Many districts purchase their equipment, materials and supplies from a local hardware store or garden center

because the school is expected to support local proprietors. The price in most cases is higher than the commercial supplier and there is no follow-up service by a professionally-trained turf specialist. Technical representatives are an integral part of the sports turf industry, essential in solving problems and assisting each of us in growing better and safer sports turf.

Commercial companies and their representatives are the life blood and foundation of every industry association and organization. It is fact that no group can survive and operate solely on membership dues. In order for an association to meet expenses for salaries, utilities, postage, rent and day-to-day operations, it must raise funds from the commercial segment of the industry. It is the monetary support from the sale of trade show booths, advertising, and donations for drawings, lunches and hospitality rooms that bring in the funds to continue the operation of your association.

**What can you do?** Begin to show a serious interest in the products, equipment or materials that these vendors took the time, effort and trouble to bring to the trade show. Talk with them about your operation as they may have a product or suggestion which will make your job easier or better. Show them your appreciation and thank them for supporting your industry and organization. A few kind words or a positive attitude will go a long way towards a solidified industry. Remember, these individuals must also make a living. Don't take them for granted.

If you are not the person who makes the purchasing decision or who schedules the maintenance at your school, park or sports facility, encourage your supervisor or purchasing agent to accompany you to the next conference and trade show. Get these people involved in your industry and in your job because it's the only way you will get recognition and possibly that new mower or product you want.

Do it now! Don't wait! We currently have a crisis looming on the horizon and an identity problem that won't go away. We can't afford not to get involved. Let's show your support and professionalism to our commercial companies and vendors and make them feel just as vital and important as you are to our industry. For without them, there is no industry.

### CATCH THE ACTION

Mark your calendar

**January 13-15, 1989 - STMA Annual Meeting.**

Dodgertown, Vero Beach, FL

STMA's Annual Meeting, Conference, Awards Banquet, Trade Show and On-Site Demonstrations. An exciting experience at one of the premier spring training sites - 27 holes of golf, conference center, guest rooms. A once in a lifetime experience. Plan now! Contact: Melissa Merritt, STMA, (714) 981-9199.

