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THE FRONT OFFICE

OPINION PAGE

STMA HAS LOST ITS ORIGINAL SPIRIT



As someone close to the Sports Turf Managers Association from the beginning, I feel compelled to speak my piece about recent actions taken by the association's officers and board. A growing number of industry leaders are concerned...for good reason. I think it's time that groundskeepers and managers of sports complexes who believe in the need for a strong industry association are provided with more information about what has been going on these past few years inside STMA.

In 1981, a small group of unselfish individuals realized that the vast majority of managers of sports fields were operating in a vacuum. Because of this, turf at stadiums, parks, schools, and universities was below its potential in terms of quality, durability, and safety.

This was the humble beginning of STMA. The founders were willing to reveal secrets held by professional league field managers and to point out the need for university research. STMA was founded as a much-needed source of technical and professional information for tens of thousands of sports turf managers nationwide.

STMA had to build a foundation on membership dues and commercial support. For the first five years, it grew exclusively with the energy of generous volunteers. However, it also depended largely on the resources of the National Institute of Parks and Grounds Management (NIPGM) in Appleton, WI, and then California Polytechnic University in Pomona. Money generated by seminars and later by Sports Turf Institutes helped finance membership services. During this period, STMA grew to more than 500 members.

In 1987, the board hired its first paid staff person and moved into independent offices. More institutes were added in Chicago, Boston, and Florida; an annual national conference was launched; and membership increased to 700. The dedication of both founders and new members was reflected in a spirit of unity.

In the beginning, STMA was a team. We kept in touch with phone calls and letters. If there was a problem or disagreement, everyone worked together to settle it. We were all glad to help and felt included. People didn't have to be on the board to have input and board members were receptive to new ideas.

People who devoted thousands of hours of their time in the beginning have lately been treated with tremendous disrespect. Personality fights break out every other month. You can't even write your comments to one board member without getting a nasty letter from another. Decisions are constantly being made by the board without first consulting those who are affected. STMA has lost the spirit upon which it was founded.

As a result, STMA is losing the support of some old friends, including Cal Poly and this magazine. It has also lost some influential members who have a great deal to contribute to the association besides dues.

For the past two years, STMA has been headquartered in a new office building in Upland, a few miles from the Cal Poly campus. A large portion of the association's budget was needed just to pay the rent. There wasn't enough money left over to pay a qualified executive director or expand membership services.

The board decided to close the Upland office and hire an association management firm. A search committee was formed in January. Without asking the members or "old friends" for their suggestions, the committee selected a company without association management experience at more than \$50,000 per year. It was clearly an inside job. Not even the members of the search committee saw the final contract.

STMA has burned bridges from coast to coast. It has lost touch with many who gave a great deal to help get it this far. Ironically, this organization, founded to eliminate secrecy and share information, is now apparently operating in a vacuum. What a terrible shame!

Bruce F. Shank