

# THE FRONT OFFICE

OPINION PAGE



## Who's Got the Key?

With this issue we say "Fare well!" to Floyd Perry, *sportsTURF's* outstanding Manager of the Year for 1997, and welcome Mike Schiller, his very worthy successor.

In passing the mantle, Floyd proposes a New Year's resolution: take advantage of STMA's educational opportunities! They include more than this magazine and the annual national conference. The local chapters have equally helpful newsletters and meetings, and the STMA

has recently introduced its own certification program. Follow Floyd's advice and you will find keys to your success.

## New Year's Resolution

By Floyd Perry

At every turfgrass conference, trade show or field day, sports field managers look for "the one key" to creating better, safer, more efficiently maintained facilities.

Progressive groundskeepers talk in small groups, listen to college professors and discuss innovative ideas on how to unlock the sports-field-maintenance vault. Managers look at the latest equipment, try the newest snake-oil formulas and read fancy color advertising pieces, hoping to find the one key that will make their fields look and play better than their neighbors' at half the cost. That's everyone's goal: find the key!

At a recent Grounds Maintenance Services workshop, I asked the audience, "What is the underlying key to athletic field maintenance?" They supplied many answers: bigger budgets, more manpower, quality irrigation, better feeding and seeding schedules, sufficiently amended sub-soil, sub-surface drainage, more efficient aeration and other equipment, new parts for old equipment ... the list goes on and on.

One young female groundskeeper raised her hand late in the discussion and suggested that the number one key to success at her fields was education. All of the concerns above are useless without a basic understanding of certain fundamental cultural practices built on a strong educational foundation.

For example, suppose your department just purchased and installed the latest and greatest irrigation system with all the bells and whistles. If your staff doesn't have a solid understanding of the sub-soil composition, the local evapotranspiration and other climatic variables in your area, and the seasonal playing schedule, your sports turf can suffer from over/under watering or incorrect clock schedules.

Each of us constantly reads about innovative methods from researchers and more efficient equipment from manufacturers that may help our fields. As sports field personnel, we need a certain amount of background knowledge to link the written word with the real world, our situations.

Taking the leading role in creating a solid educational platform — especially with its new Certified Sports Manager program — is your own STMA. If you wish to find the "key" to your own small part of the athletic field puzzle, the STMA can help with its leadership and membership advantages.

Keys — we all have them — car keys, house keys, office keys, safety deposit box keys, but if you're looking for *one specific key* to unlock the mysteries surrounding your athletic fields, look no further than the STMA.

Remember, turf grows by the inch and is killed by the foot. That's a good key to start with.

# TIP O' THE MONTH



## Keep Your Top On!

By Al Hollinger

If you maintain trees, do yourself a favor: don't top them, ever.

In some areas, topping is a common practice perpetuated by "professionals" who don't know their jobs. The evidence for *never* topping trees is overwhelming:

**1. Rotting.** Rot-causing pathogens enter the tree through large open wounds left by topping.

**2. Sunburn.** Topping damages lower branches that are normally shaded and protected from the harmful effects of intense sunlight.

**3. Wind Resistance.** Topping increases the chance of wind damaging a tree. Topping removes a tree's food source. The tree responds by quickly replacing the lost foliage with limbs weakly attached to the main trunk and massive suckers that don't allow the wind to pass through the tree.

**4. Cost.** Because of the effects of topping (poor structure, suckering, rapid growth), topped trees require more maintenance: more money.

**5. Increased Liability.** Ironically trees are topped to "decrease" liability. The opposite is true. It is well established that topping is an improper practice causing unhealthy, unsafe trees by increasing the chance of branch or tree failure.

**6. Aesthetically Offensive.** Topping destroys the natural symmetry of a tree. Topped trees are appraised at lower values than properly maintained trees.

If a tree overgrows its place, don't top; it is safer and more economical to remove the tree and plant a smaller variety that will not outgrow the space.

*Al Hollinger is an ISA certified arborist for Tree Rite, Palm Desert, Calif. The above is reprinted by permission from the October 1997 issue of Southwest Trees & Turf, Las Vegas, Nev.*

*If you have a tip to share, send it to sportsTURF, 68860 Perez Rd., Cathedral City, CA 92234.*