

STMA "pot of gold" for Andresen

Mike Andresen, CSFM, is Iowa State University's athletic turf manager and president-elect of the Sports Turf Managers Association (STMA). Here, as STMA celebrates its 25th Anniversary in 2006, Andresen comments on how his involvement with the association has affected his career and life:

ST: When and how did you get involved with the STMA?

Andresen: I was initially introduced to STMA locally by Gary Peterson, now-retired extension specialist from Iowa State, who befriended me shortly after I took the head groundskeeper position with the Iowa Cubs baseball team.

I had worked in landscape and turf management but knew nothing about managing a high level baseball field other than being one of those disinterested college pitchers that the coach put in charge of our home field clay areas. Gary impressed on me that STMA locally and nationally was where I would find people who'd take time to talk "shop" with me.

Jesse Cuevas from Rosenblatt Stadium really embraced me and I harvested so much expertise from his experiences that I'm almost ashamed today for doing it! I think Jesse started getting worn out with my calls and he turned me on to Steve Wightman and others. To think I had managers like these willing to help a young person succeed was a powerful statement about this association.

At this point I started regularly attending national conferences and so Gary insisted that I had a responsibility to use my position at the I-Cubs to help spread the STMA message in Iowa. Without the encouragement of those mentors early on I would have sunk.

ST: What have been the most valuable things you've come by from your membership?

Andresen: STMA was, and still is, a pot of gold for me. The closer I looked and the more



I dug into it, the richer I got. I can never properly thank those who have and still do take time to enrich me, but I have made a promise to take every opportunity to follow their model, and the STMA model really, to cultivate the passion throughout our industry.

Successful people in our profession are successful because we're passionate about the impact we have on the kids who use our fields. I've learned we provide users with not only game experiences but life experiences. Many kids' dreams involve them doing great things on fields we maintain and it's exciting and truly an honor to play a small role in watching kids live out honest-to-goodness "dreams."

I was one of those kids who dreamed of throwing the final strike in Game 7 of a World Series, a dream always played out on an emerald green field with brilliantly white chalked lines and a perfectly shaped mound. I realize now there's a big difference between a field and a ballpark.

Quality performance from turf managers relates to how successfully we apply textures to our work. STMA exposes to us the textures that we use to enrich the lives of those who compete on our fields. None of us use the textures in the same way but we all draw

upon them to develop our own unique and special product. Every day we get to roll out our product so kids can fulfill more dreams. That's how special our jobs are! That's how special STMA's role is in people's lives. We know it because we're inside it but most people that benefit from what STMA really offers to sports don't know it.

ST: Tell us how else your STMA experience is relevant to your life.

Andresen: Now when I get together with STMA friends, at conference, through chapter functions, or over the phone, the discussion is rarely centered around an agronomic problem. There's a real care and concern for health and happiness exchanged first then a thread of "what did you do for this" or "what do you think about this" takes shape.

Few of those friends are surprised by any questions I've ever had and have generally "been there, done that," which provides great comfort. It's almost as if I can borrow their experience, helping me look smarter to my employer than I really am. There are so many circles of friends and such a complex networking system that goes on within STMA that it's rare to have a truly unique problem come up.

We have no problems showing others our battle earned scars and encouraging others alternative ways of dealing with a similar challenge. I treasure the wisdom in our membership and I love hearing the great stories behind each of the battle scars!

On one hand it validates that misery loves company but it's also a constant reminder that this profession has no room for egos because it can be very humbling at times, and is made up of very special people. Not because of what we do but because of who we are and the impact we have on those around us. Being a sports turf manager without being a member of the Sports Turf Managers Association wouldn't be nearly as gratifying. ■