Making history

The Sports Turf Managers Association will celebrate its 25th anniversary this month in Orlando at their annual Conference and Exhibition. SportsTurf will be featuring stories on the founding of the association and the men behind it throughout the first half of 2006.

One of those men is Dr. Kent Kurtz, who retired 1 1/2 years ago as Professor Emeritus from Cal Poly in Pomona after 35 years of teaching. After a heart attack in 2004, Kurtz took advantage of a “faculty early retirement program” that enables him to continue teaching one-third to one-half of the time. “I didn’t want to sever ties with my students and research projects,” he says.

Now, in addition to helping with community field renovations, he teaches from January to March only (eat your hearts out, Minner and Miller).

“In 1996 STMA President Mike Schiller appointed me as the Historian,” says Kurtz. “I had worked with him for many years when he was a board member and he wanted to keep me active in the association.

“Mike recently reminded me of something (the late) Harry Gill once said, ‘How do you know where you’re going if you don’t know where you’ve been?’”

Gill, groundkeeper for the Milwaukee Brewers, was at the meeting that essentially began STMA in 1981 at the Muehlebach Hotel in Kansas City. Dick Ericson, groundkeeper for the Minnesota Twins and Vikings, the legendary George Toma from Kansas City, and Dr. Bill Daniels, from Purdue University, joined Gill. Toma credits Kent Kurtz with assisting greatly in the initial organization of STMA.

“In the 1967 I met Dr. Daniels as a student in one of his classes,” Kurtz says. “I admired the man as my mentor.

“The first STMA meeting was at Purdue’s Midwest Turf Conference in March 1981. Dr. Daniels was the first executive director and Erik Madison, Jr., of the National Institute on Park & Grounds Management was chosen Secretary,” says Kurtz. “Seed money from the association enabled me to eventually begin a trade show and educational sessions here on the West Coast.”

We asked Kurtz what he shares with students about his long history with STMA and the turf industry. “I tell them to treat people the way you want to be treated,” he says. “And that when buying anything, whether it’s seed, fertilizer, equipment, you only get what you pay for. Work hard and offer to assist your colleagues and peers when they need help to learn.”