

Ericson remembers STMA's roots



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That was a long time ago," responded Dick Ericson, the Sports Turf Managers Association's first president, when asked about the group's formation 25 years ago. Ericson, now retired and 77 years young, had been a groundskeeper in Minnesota since 1946, and was one of a handful of men, led by the late Dr. William Daniel of Purdue University, credited with founding STMA.

"George Toma, Harry Gill, Dr. Kent Kurtz, and Dr. Jim Watson were other drivers behind STMA," Ericson said. "The goal was to share information. A lot of the old timers back then wouldn't share, but George and I had always shared ideas, and we thought sharing information and becoming better educated was what STMA should be all about. And having who we called 'the turf doctors' involved from the university level really improved our ability to do that.

"I became the first STMA president when we were all in a room together, talking about who it should be and everyone looked at me and said, 'You're it!' Ericson said.

"I miss talking with Harry Gill; he was old school but he wanted to learn as much as possible," Ericson said. "Kent Kurtz also was invaluable; he made his rounds every year and always had something new to impart."

Ericson believes his career was enhanced greatly by the fact that he was superintendent of the facilities in which he managed the turf. "I had to get educated about plumbing, heating, and electrical matters as stadium superintendent," he said. "And you have to know your equipment and how to maintain it.

"I know a lot of today's groundskeepers, especially in the minor leagues, are still in charge of these stadium operations. And those duties should be reflected in their salaries," he added. "I would tell today's young groundskeepers to enjoy your work, join STMA, and keep searching for good information, and lots of it."

Ericson keeps busy in retirement by boating, fishing, reading, tooling around with his 1965 Mustang, and spending time with his five children. "I think being outdoors really helped me be healthy at my age," he said.

What's your excuse this year?

I'm looking forward to heading to San Antonio for the STMA Conference and Exhibition in January. By then I'll be ready to escape the Northeast winter for a few days and talk turf. If you've always found an excuse to miss this event, stop it and go. Almost as a rule the people you will meet are fun, and you won't find more relevant educational information anywhere.

And if you like golf, the SAFE Foundation scramble at The Quarry Golf Course is worth the dough. It's for a good cause, the course is unique, and the Jacobsen folks manage the day well. I hope to see you there.

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