

TOP 1



ways to
get the
most out
of the

STMA Conference

By Mike Andresen, CSFM

As our national STMA Conference and Exhibition rolls our way, it is important to begin planning strategies on how to make the most effective use of our time in Phoenix. While we know we attend for the education, networking, and the trade show, there are a number of ways we can make certain we come back with information we need now in our jobs and for the future.

1. Create your "must attend" list.

Review the schedule of speakers and topics and determine the "must see" sessions of all that are offered. I keep in mind the short-term issues of field and facility management that I'm directly responsible for, and highlight those talks that will address immediate concerns.

Each of us also has an idea of our adminis-

tration's long range goals and plans. Sessions that may help me become a more valuable asset when planning for the future are also circled as "must see." I have a responsibility to upgrade my value to my employer when presented with the opportunity, and the STMA conference offers this chance. The Conference brochure will be on your desk soon (if it already has not arrived), and you will notice it has much greater detail about each session to help you create that perfect conference schedule. Check out the new online version, too, which is electronic, so you do not have to worry about downloading a huge file. You can also easily register online.

2. Ask key questions. The educators and your peers teaching the sessions and workshops offer a tremendous wealth of knowledge and experience. They are the experts who can advise you about the issues

you're facing. Go to these sessions with an idea of how they can benefit you. Attend with an open mind. Be prepared to soak in the presentation, actively pull ideas from it, and then adapt them to your world. This helps us to be engaged in the presentation and really allows the presenter to connect with us.

3. Work the trade show floor. The STMA Exposition is the perfect place to evaluate products, find out what's new in the industry, and meet face-to-face with company representatives. Approach your time on the trade show as thoughtfully as you do your conference education schedule. Usually attendees work the floor in one of two ways: 1) divide the floor in half and slowly work the first half one day and the other half on the next day; or 2) visit all the booths the first day, and hone in on the ones you need more information from on the second day. No matter which strategy



you use, wear comfortable shoes! Rather than carrying home a mountain of literature, leave your business card or have the company scan your badge and mail the material to you.

4. Use the Exposition for better decision-making. In this era of electronic shopping and information gathering, it is easy for attendees to forgo this important opportunity to meet face to face with exhibitors. An initial discovery from an online search can help you develop questions about a product, but talking face-to-face with a company representative will give you the chance to touch, sit on, and/or feel a piece of equipment that interests you.

Many times I've gone to a trade show booth with an entirely incorrect perception of the "how's and why's" of a product or service. Oftentimes we don't have an immediate need for the represented product or service, but can predict a future need at our facility. When the time comes to act on the future purchase or contract, you will already have a basis of understanding and hopefully you will have developed a relationship with a trusted industry professional that can help guide you through the selection process.

5. Tap into exhibitors' expertise. We have an obligation to our employers to take full advantage of new technology, new services, and new ways of thinking about our jobs. Exhibitors are one of our greatest resources. They travel the region and the country, sometimes the world, observing successful and unsuccessful operations. Their success depends on our success as sports turf and facility managers.

I know that too many of us see commercial representatives and sales professionals as

adversaries. The fact is because of their travels, expertise, and experience we can learn a great deal from them about being better turf-grass professionals! Exhibitors have a great opportunity at the STMA trade show to help add to the conference education experience.

6. Think partner, not vendor. My interest in the trade show is to experience the existing and leading technology available to me as a sports turf manager, and to maximize the chance to develop solid professional relationships with those with the same interests. The relationship between commercial representatives and sports turf management professionals is symbiotic. Each exhibitor feels their product can be beneficial in our quest to produce safe and aesthetically pleasing playing fields and facilities. Without properly examining each of the products and services we cannot be sure we are doing all we can to ensure the same.

Just as we incur a financial expense to attend conferences and upgrade our expertise, commercial representatives also incur costs in support of that same upgrade in our expertise. Supporting those that support us by purchasing their goods and services ensures that our entire profession remains healthy and full of committed professionals. I truly feel, and have been told so many times, that our trade show is "different" in that we truly value our commercial partners and stand arm-in-arm with them in the mission of producing safer athletic fields. Their role is very important to each of us personally and also to the health of our association. The trade show is part of our education; our education sessions are part of their enrichment. Please always remember that some of our best friends work inside trade

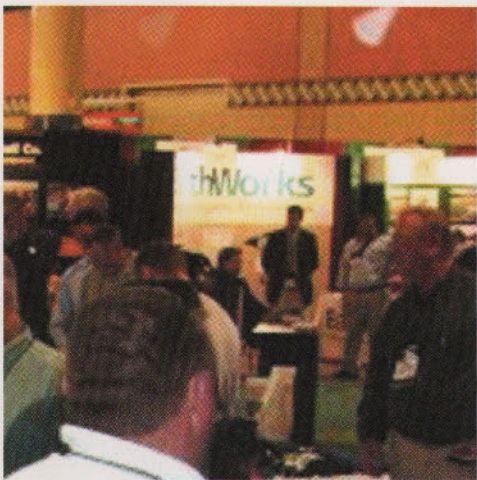
show booths during that one week in January.

7. Report back. We too often fail to report back to our administration on what we learned. Write up a small summary of what you learned and how it will benefit your operation. This is vital in securing the next opportunity and positively reflects on you as a professional, ultimately making you a more valuable employee. My administrators feel the time and expense to attend the STMA conference is worthwhile in my professional development. The tangible solutions I've learned at STMA and then implemented at our facility also reinforce how important my attendance is at the conference and trade show. It adds to my credibility when I acknowledge that importance by way of a short summary upon my return.

8. Have your house in order. Make certain that your facility will be running smoothly while you are away. Develop a plan for how operations will continue in your absence. Designate who is in charge and let your administration and peers know. You should consider leaving contact information so that you can be kept current of any concerns that arise in your absence.

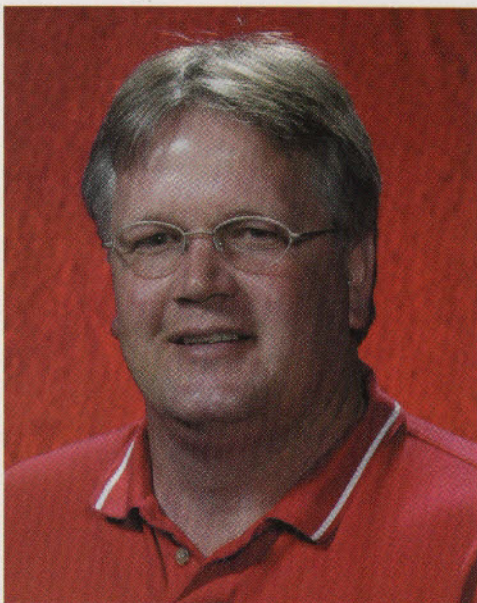
9. Spend time renewing old friendships. The conference is a great time to catch up with friends in our business. It's our one time during the year that we are totally surrounded by those who are involved in this profession — whom we can share our war stories with and empathize with when they tell us about their challenges. Some of the very best people in this world are in our profession. Take the time to reconnect, learn from them, and rejuvenate!

FACILITY & OPERATIONS



10. Spend time meeting new friends. Networking is very important and very rewarding. Of all the "green" industries, ours may maximize the networking as well as, or better than, any of the others. Your new contacts will bring new ideas and solutions to you. We are an industry willing to share our knowledge, experiences, and practices with each other. We need all the teammates we can gather throughout our journey of sports turf management.

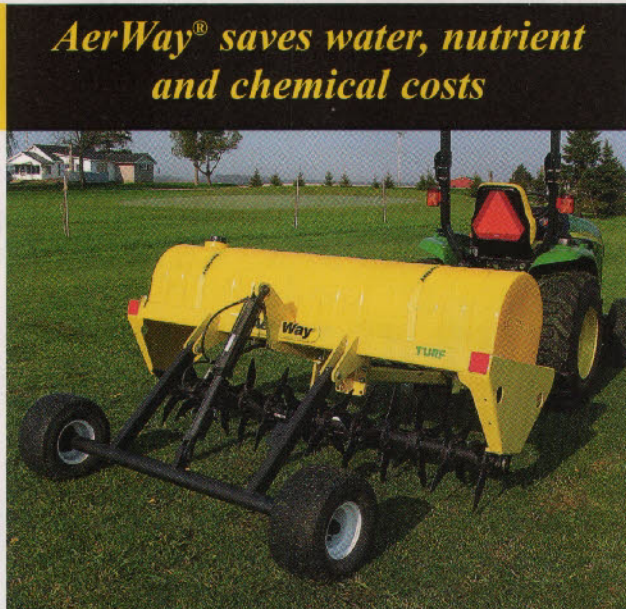
I encourage each of us to prepare for the STMA Conference and Exposition to maximize our opportunities to grow and become even better professionals. ■



Mike Andresen, CSFM, is athletic turf manager, Iowa State University, and president of the Sports Turf Managers Association.

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