

Gill winner Campbell epitomizes wise leadership



Campbell might be the only turf manager in the country named a lifetime member of his school's marching band.

"If we want to be treated as professionals then we must act like professionals."

BOB CAMPBELL, CSFM and former president of the Sports Turf Managers Association, received the Harry C. Gill Memorial Award last winter during the STMA Conference. This Founders Award recognizes long-time service and commitment to STMA and is considered the association's highest honor.

Campbell, the University of Tennessee Director of Sports Fields, started his turf career as a baseball coach back in the day when that job always meant you were also in charge of field maintenance.

Born in Pulaski, TN, south of Nashville, Bob and his wife, Toni, now a math instructor at UT, moved to Knoxville to finish school in 1969 and have lived there ever since. In February they welcomed their first grandchild, a boy, into the family.

At a new high school, the then-math teacher Campbell built a field, doing most of the work himself, with help from parents and boosters. After he stopped coaching but was still teaching he was offered a job at an old city park, Bill Meyer Stadium, in Knoxville where the Toronto Blue Jays

Double A affiliate played. He did both jobs for 5 years.

Campbell says now that being a baseball coach helped a lot with the Blue Jays job because he could relate well to the coaches and players. When he began working for the Jays, he realized how little he knew about turf. He says he's lucky it has worked out so well because he took chances and tried things he would never do now.

Dr. Tom Samples, UT's turfgrass extension agent, took him under his wing, my "personal professor" says Campbell, and taught him what he needed to know, a one-on-one education in turf. "My degrees were in accounting and history so I was very fortunate to have someone with both the knowledge and patience of Tom Samples around to take the time to teach me the things I needed to know. I could not have paid for a better education and I will always be indebted to him," Campbell says.

During the mid to late 1980's there was not as much information available about sports turf management. In the first *SportsTurf* magazine he saw there was a story about Tom Burns, then in Port Charlotte, FL. "I remember reading that story and

thinking Tom had the greatest job in the world. I even tried to paint my foul lines with a paint brush like Tom recommended, but I soon realized that I was not that good," he says.

"In 1990 I got my dream job. I left teaching and working for the Jays to become the sports turf manager at UT. I feel very fortunate that things have worked out well for me and because of my position at UT I was able to become involved with STMA."

STMA growth

"I think the 1990's was a perfect time for STMA's growth spurt. So many schools and professional stadiums were going back to natural turf with sand-based fields. The challenges of managing a sand rootzone created a desire for information and STMA was there at the right time. Many facilities were also hiring full-time sports turf managers because of the change from artificial turf," Campbell says.

"I believe the conference in Colorado Springs is when STMA really took off. Everyone there was eager to learn more about sand fields. If natural fields had not come back the STMA's growth would have been slower."

Mike Andresen on Campbell

Bob Campbell is a remarkable leader. Bob was such a great and patient listener during the time our terms overlapped on the Board. He would hear all sides of an issue, go through a progression within his head that had one criteria, "What is in STMA's best interest?" and then he would cast his vote. Bob's votes within the Board room were always well thought out.

Bob left a lot of sweat and tears inside STMA Board rooms and he challenged those who served with him to take on his same level of ownership of STMA's governance. He taught us that STMA is not some entity we can think about every now and then. STMA is you and me and every colleague doing similar work that needs someone or something fighting for us every day to promote our skills, our professionalism and our relevance in sports and in life. His faith is that if the work doesn't necessarily bare fruit for you or me it most certainly will for those who follow us.

Bob understands perfectly that serving the membership of this association is a great privilege. While that privilege is in your hands you need to be dedicated, motivated and willing to make tough decisions.

Mike Andresen, CSFM is facilities & grounds manager at Iowa State. ■

HARRY C. GILL FOUNDERS AWARD

Campbell says the association is still on the right track though he sees tougher times ahead given the current recession. "We can't forget that the STMA is a people organization; we can't get away from that core value. And it's important that we grow as a profession, have a seat at the table, and be looked upon as professionals."

"The most important job for STMA now is to promote the stature of sports turf managers in the eyes of our employers and the public," he says. "Providing this value to our members can only be done on a national level and it will lead to better salaries and benefits for our members. We are on our way but it is a slow process."

During this recession, Campbell has not had to cut employees. "We have had to cut back on spending but so far it has not cost us any jobs.

of money spent making fields look attractive, and that is important for fans' experience," Campbell says.

"We've come a long way in the past 20 years; many more places hire someone specifically to be sports turf managers than they once did, and we are more respected than ever. Professionally we have a long way to go but we've come a long way, too," says Campbell.

"No matter how much you spend on a field if it's used a lot it's going to show wear. Perception is key—what are you willing to pay for? Decision-makers need to balance use and expectations.

"I was fortunate to work with Coach Philip Fulmer at UT; I never said 'You can't use the field', but I would tell him 'If you do this, this is going to happen'." He was the decision maker and my job was to let him know the consequences of his decision. And that's really all a turf manager can ask for, a seat at the table to let the decision makers know the consequences of their decisions.

"I think a lot of young sports turf managers, and I was this way, are overprotective of their fields. They need to realize that being at the table to share with others the consequences of their decisions is all they can ask for," he says.

"STMs are our own worst critics. We can see something wrong with a field that 99.9% of others don't even notice. We lose

sleep because everything isn't perfect and that's what sets us apart from some other professions, why we work such long hours, sometimes for relatively low pay."

"Maybe it's not being overprotective of our fields but the respect we have for them that upsets us when others don't have that same respect," Campbell says.

He cautions young STMs though on devoting too much time to the job. "Your wife may be understanding but your kids are not. The missed birthdays or vacations, you can never get those times back," he says. "They are gone forever. I would give anything to go back and do it again."

"Many sports turf managers are doing an outstanding job in difficult circumstances with limited budgets and overuse of fields."

Asked about the influx of new synthetic fields, Campbell responds, "It's back to expectations. If more money is directed to natural field maintenance, the fields will be better, but overuse is the enemy. No matter how much money you spend, if someone is on it all the time it will wear out. You can't re-sod every month.

"When decisions are being made, I don't think a lot of people consider that synthetic fields will have to be replaced 8 years down the road. And people don't realize you are still going need equipment for uses elsewhere at a facility. But if you need a field you can use anytime for multiple events, that's a valid argument for going to synthetic. Just don't say the cost of maintaining a natural field is the reason to go synthetic."

Campbell says the issue is a challenge. "We have to adapt and accept changes to survive and grow as a profession," he says. "We have to be part of it or be left behind.

"Be proud of what you are doing. Everyone needs to be involved with STMA. The education is great but it's about people meeting, face to face, and making lifetime friendships. As a group we've always been willing to help our peers," he says.

"It's a strong group of people with the same aspirations. My time as president and board member was great, I got to meet people and go places I'd never have seen otherwise.

"I think STMs as a group are a romantic lot. We're in this business because we love sports, love being a part of it," he says. "We see our fields as special places that we have taken stewardship for this moment in time. Not only are we working in the present time but we are dealing with people's memories. Tennessee has been playing football in Neyland Stadium for more than 80 years and there's a lot of history and memories here as in other stadiums and parks around the world. It means a lot to former players, students and fans and I don't think I'm alone in feeling a sense of responsibility to safeguard those memories. This is not just for big stadiums but is true for all types of ballfields on which we grow up," he says. ■

Eric Schroder is editor of *SportsTurf*.

Jeff Kershaw on Campbell

Bob Campbell epitomizes what the winner of the Harry C. Gill Memorial Award should be. Bob joined the STMA at a time when there was doubt that it would even continue to exist. Bob's leadership over the next 15 years helped the organization to flourish into what it has now become, a vibrant, professional organization.

Throughout Bob's years of service in the profession, he has always stressed professionalism. He also stresses the need for balance in the sports turf manager's life, that one's family and relationships with friends must be maintained despite the numerous and rigorous hours we must put in as turf managers.

Bob's facilities are second to none. The University of Tennessee has some of the best and greenest sports turf in the world. It is through Bob's hard work and leadership that these facilities are recognized for their greatness.

Bob has worked with and on numerous research projects with distinguished professors from throughout the country to develop better ways of maintaining and building quality sports fields.

Jeff Kershaw is Director of Maintenance for the West Baton Rouge Parrish Schools in Louisiana. ■

Instead we have had to limit overtime, which is tough because we can't get as much done, and many of our employees depend on that overtime as part of their salaries.

"We are holding the line on buying equipment, watching supply purchases; we'll use duct tape and wire to get another year or two out of equipment," Campbell says. "Of course, expectations are as high as ever but we brought that on ourselves.

Tough environment

"Even with budget cuts, we still have to make the fields safe and playable even if they are not necessarily the most attractive. There is a lot