

STMA in action

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Penn State, Mt. San Antonio win Student Challenge

Students were able to take advantage of many activities specifically geared to them including a student forum, student lunch, and the Fifth Annual STMA Student Challenge presented in partnership with the SAFE Foundation and Platinum Sponsor Hunter Industries. Through the generosity of SAFE, the Student Challenge provides the winning 2-year team and the winning 4-year team each with a \$4,000 grant to fund a practical learning lab at their college or university. An event record 108 students, representing 22 colleges, universities, and technical schools, entered a total of 31 teams. Teams of up to four students participated in a multiple choice exam on athletic turf and sports field management topics and identified plants, insects, diseases and weeds, as well as performing a written case study. Ninety-nine students and 30 teams com-

peted in the event in 2008. Hunter Industries' continued sponsorship picks up the tab for all Student Challenge competitors' STMA Conference registration.

The winning team from the Four Year Competition was Pennsylvania State University Blue Team 009, whose members were Tanner Del Valle, Matt Elmore, Nicholas Gialloretto, and Nicholas Leviere. Del Valle and Elmore are the first two students to successfully defend their Student Challenge title. Penn State's White Team 008 finished third. The University of Tennessee made a very strong showing with Team 014 finishing second out of 21 total teams in the 4-Year competition.

Ten teams competed in the 2-Year competition, with Mt. San Antonio College Team 102 taking top honors, making them the first school to win the 2-Year competition twice. Teammates Patrick Escalera, Geoff Miller, Chaz Perea, and Hector Ramirez studied intensely leading up to the exam. Second place went to Penn State's 103 and third place was taken home by Mt. San Antonio College Team 101.

In addition to their \$4,000 grant, the two first place teams' will also have their team name etched in the traveling Student Challenge Cup; receive replicas of the Cup and individual medals; and provide an article to be presented in an official STMA publication. Second and Third place winners received plaques and medals. ■

“Marquis de Sod” turns 80



STMA President Abby McNeal, CSFM and George Toma, one of the association's founding members.

George Toma, one of the Sports Turf Managers Association's founders and arguably the most famous groundskeeper in history, turned 80 last month, just 2 days after working his 43rd (that's all of them) Super Bowl in Tampa.

According to a story in the *Kansas City Star*, the National Football League threw a party for Toma about midnight on the 50-yard line of Raymond James Stadium, a few hours after the most entertaining Super Bowl of all time. “We didn't get home until 3 in the morning,” Toma said in the story.

Anyone who has met Toma knows of his boundless energy that shows no sign of dissipating at an age that finds many men happy to play a round of golf, with a cart no less. His famous “And then some” spirit has spurred countless turf managers to go beyond what is expected of them professionally.

Toma told the *Star* that when Pittsburgh's James Harrison was rumbling

100 yards with the game-turning interception at the end of the first half, his proximity almost got him flattened. “I saw him intercept the pass and I was watching up on the JumboTron. All of a sudden, one of the Steelers' executives grabbed me and pulled me back and the pylon comes flying towards me. (Harrison) was lying on the ground, so I picked up the pylon and put it back.”

His hometown paper's tribute continued: “Hard work is really all Toma has ever known. His early biography reads like David Copperfield. It almost sounds made up to say that Toma was born poor in a Depression-era, coal-mining town in Pennsylvania. He got his first job, on a vegetable farm, at the age of 10. He became a groundskeeper at 13, giving him almost seven decades in the field in which he still occupies the summit.”

Happy Birthday, George, many happy returns! ■