



>> BRIAN WINKA, CSFM, president of the Gateway Chapter.

Hosting a successful STMA local chapter event

We all know that the local chapters are the lifeblood of the Sports Turf Managers Association and that each individual chapter is unique. One thing that most chapters have in common is that we host events to help educate members on a local level that may not get the opportunity to attend the STMA National Conference. With that said, one of the common questions that I kept hearing in Austin from members from all over the country is, "How do we get more members involved in our local chapter events?"

With this question in mind I wanted to share some ideas that have worked for our chapter on the local level. The Gateway Chapter had worked hard to provide educational events that were beneficial to our members, but we were still getting mixed results regarding attendance. As a board we collectively sat down and brainstormed on ways to improve our events. We wanted to make sure we were giving the membership what they wanted. We came up with a number of things that we were doing right and wrong.

SOMETIMES LESS IS MORE

A couple of ideas that came from our brainstorming were implemented and we had one of our best years to date. We found out that sometimes less is more. The chapter focused on fewer events but with more quality. The membership had mentioned that it was hard to make it to monthly meeting or outings. We scaled back to quarterly meetings and attendance went up.

"With the busy schedule that I have, it is hard to make it to all of the monthly events. Going to a quarterly system enabled me to attend more events this year than in years past," said Keith Labitska, grounds supervisor for Saint Louis University.

One of the other ideas was to get our Commercial Members involved with the educational events. The commercial people in the

chapter have a wealth of knowledge and are willing to share; they are one of our best resources. Many of them once worked on the other side and can relate to many of the issues that face sports turf managers.

The commercial vendors can also promote the chapter and its events to a large audience. Many of our vendors will carry flyers about upcoming events in their trucks to hand out or leave them on the counter in their shop. Many of our commercial members also will sponsor an event in some way or another, or they will provide the meals or help defray the cost of bringing in a speaker from outside the area.

As a result of the commitment we get from our commercial members, one of the things we do as a chapter for them is to host a Vendor Day at one of our sites which is free to all dues-paying commercial members. This is a great way for our vendors to get out and show off their products, and it also provides the members a "one stop shop" experience to try out any equipment or to get a look at a number of products all in one place.

Glenn Kraemer from GR Robinson Seeds & Service said, "The best thing that happened for me and my small company was meeting prospective customers. I actually sold some product at the event, but better yet, gained a very valuable customer because of the show. The show only cost me some time, but the value was beyond what I thought possible. It's

Forming a chapter

IF YOU ARE INTERESTED in exploring the possibilities of forming a local STMA Chapter, there are many resources available, including the key "Chapter Compliance and Procedures Manual." The STMA Chapter Relations committee developed it with input from many of the leaders of STMA's current affiliated Chapters. This manual will help guide you step by step through the process of starting and maintaining a local STMA Chapter.

Begin the process by calling your fellow sports turf managers, those that share the same enthusiasm and who want to be involved in the foundation of a new STMA local Chapter. STMA Headquarters can provide you with a list of STMA members in your area to add to the list of your own networking contacts. Building a strong foundation of these enthusiastic, committed individuals will give you the nucleus to support a vibrant, active local STMA Chapter.

There are several other key individuals ready, willing and able to help you as you get started: the Chapter Relations Chairperson and Board Contact. Don't hesitate to contact them at any time with your questions or concerns. They'll share their expertise, giving you input on their successes and some of those "not so successful" steps they've made as well. Currently the Chapter Relations Committee Co-chairs are **Amy Fouty, CSFM, 517-355-0323, fouty@ath.msu.edu**, and **David Pinsonneault, CSFM, CPRP, 781-274-8355, dpinson@ci.lexington.ma.us**

Starting a new chapter takes time. New chapters generally take between 6 months to one year to become affiliated. Be patient, be persistent and have fun! It will come together. If you think you are ready to begin forming an STMA Chapter, or if you would like to discuss the possibilities of doing so, please call **Kim Heck, the Chapter contact at STMA HQ (1-800-323-3875)** for the basic background information to start you in the right direction. ■



Kim Heck,
Chapter contact at STMA
1-800-323-3875

the old saying, 'You never know' that will keep me coming back."

When asked about our chapter's Vendor Day, Drew Williams with Redexim Turf Products said, "It is unique because it is like a local trade show that is free to commercial members and we get the opportunity to demo our equipment and show off products to a large audience of sports field managers."

Another way we are attempting to reach a larger contingent of our membership is by improved communication about upcoming events. For 2010, we lined up our events early in the year and were able to get that information out so people could mark it on their calendars. We use a three-prong approach as far as communicating with our members: One, we send a mailer out early in the year with our membership applications to let them know when the events are and to also let them know what they are getting for their membership dues. Second, we email a reminder a couple of weeks before each event just to confirm how many attendees to expect, and third, we put all of our events and sponsors on our chapter website. Keeping our website up to

date on chapter events is very important. If a member goes to the site and the information is outdated and there isn't any new content, they won't be back to the site.

Getting together with other green industry organizations has also been a benefit for our chapter. One of our most successful events over the past 2 years has been a collaboration project with the Missouri Turf and Ornamental Council and the Gateway Irrigation Association to put on the Missouri Green Industry Conference. This year's conference included 1 full day of educational classes with a vendor trade show/expo. On the following day we have our ornamental and turf (Category 3) pesticide applicator recertification program.

But probably the most effective way to have a successful local event is to ask the members what they want. Email them, send out surveys, make phone calls but however you need to do it, make sure you are getting feedback and in turn giving the membership information on topics that they want to learn about. Our members told us that while they like the classroom setting and the information they were getting, many wanted to have some

"hands on" events too. This past year we were fortunate enough to have a Field Day that combined the two. We teamed up with experts from Beacon Athletics, Toro, and Diamond Pro to create a comprehensive learning session that combined hands-on and classroom on field maintenance knowledge.

Each chapter is going to be different as to what is pertinent to their membership, but the key is to get chapter members involved. Share the information you gained by attending the National STMA. Use local universities, extension agents, and vendors to help educate. Use emails, phone calls, mailers, Facebook, Twitter or whatever means you can to communicate the information to your members. Network and use your membership to its potential. We all deal with the same issues, so why not use a great resource like your local STMA chapter to help solve those issues. ■

Brian Winka, CSFM is parks maintenance supervisor for Chesterfield, MO and president of the Gateway Chapter of STMA, www.gatewaystma.org.

70% INFLOW RATE **WATER MUST ENTER TO EVER EXIT!**

◆ 7 to 25 times higher inflow rate than most other systems ◆ Capable of withstanding over 11,000lbs/ft²

HydrawayTM
Drainage Systems **800.223.7015** hydraway.net