

Building an international network one contact at a time

With established members abroad, the prospect of new members, and its culture of sharing information, the STMA Board of Directors began exploring opportunities internationally. A new task group was formed in 2010 by then-President Chris Calcaterra, M.Ed., CSFM, CPRP, to define STMA's role on the international front. He placed Abby McNeal, CSFM as Chair of the Task Group. President Troy Smith, CSFM subsequently created the International Committee from this Task Group a year later, with McNeal also at its helm. Other committee members include: Murray Cook, Ken Curry, Paul Gillen, Roberto Gurgel, Johnathan Knight, CSFM, Gil Landry, Ph.D. Marcela Munoz, Don Scholl, CSFM, John Sorochan, Ph.D., Rene Asprien, and Matt Williams.

One of my goals as STMA intern was to develop a comprehensive list of potential international contacts for the STMA. With the loyalty and camaraderie of the membership domestically, the international market seems like a natural fit for STMA to extend that network. A majority of those contacts targeted were professors and department heads in various colleges, universities, and other higher learning institutions abroad. It is crucial that they know how important academics are to the profession. I informed them about potential opportunities to speak at the STMA annual conference, as well as having their research published in *SportsTurf* magazine. Both of these activities add to their credibility and to the reputation of the STMA.

My email communication was in English and language proved to be a small speed-bump on the road to communication. McNeal also sees language as an issue. "The biggest obstacle would be connecting with the appropriate people in other countries and not letting thousands of miles and language barriers slow the process of sharing information," she says. The vast majority of the educators' contact information was easily attainable, but some required a translation.

As these relationships progress through STMA and as global networking advances in general, cross-border communication should not be an issue in the future. STMA also has plans to create its resources in multiple languages.

US-based academics also advise quite a bit on sports fields abroad and give formal presentations to scientific audiences and to sports turf groups. STMA academic board member Pam Sherratt has asked her peers to promote STMA to the appropriate people during their travels. To help them communicate the STMA message, I developed a PowerPoint presentation that

they could add to the end of their slide shows.

Also introduced to STMA were international sports organizations. These groups span the globe from Argentina, France, to New Zealand. Since safety of athletes is a top concern for the STMA, it was necessary to make these groups aware of the resources offered through the STMA website, including best management practices for field maintenance that help to protect athletes.

Many commercial companies are working internationally and have contacts. STMA commercial representatives Chad Price, CSFM and Rene Asprien asked their peers to introduce the association internationally and to provide their contacts to STMA for follow up.

Building relationships through these key contacts is a very important way to promote STMA to new groups. Another goal of the International Committee is to help sports turf managers form into organized groups internationally. Although this is a long-term effort, there is some recent progress in Brazil, thanks in large part, to a committee member.

Roberto Gurgel, Executive Director of Research for Sod Solutions, Inc., has been working with his contacts to help the Brazilian Sports Turf Organization to get up and running (official name is ABGE, Associacao Brasileira das Empresas e Profissionais de Gramados Esportivos). Some members of this new organization came to the National Conference in Austin, TX this past January. Currently, STMA is providing the resources and information for this professional organization to reach International Affiliate Organization status (IAO). The affiliation was developed to formalize collaboration between STMA and international organizations. To reach IAO status, the group of sports turf managers must be recognized as a business entity in their country and provide proof to STMA annually. They must develop by-laws or other governing documents, and they must elect a Board of Directors. Headquartered in Guelph, ON, Canada, the Sports Turf Association (STA) was the first to gain IAO status in December of 2009.

Another goal of STMA's international efforts is to establish strong relationships with other allied international associations. The efforts of President Smith and Chair McNeal have been key. In the fall of 2010, Smith spoke at a conference for the Institute of Groundsmanship (IOG) in the UK. Likewise, Ian Lacey, Director of Education for IOG will speak at STMA's annual conference this January. Since STMA and the IOG are similar organizations, the collaboration and sharing of information and resources will help

them to serve their members better. STMA and the IOG relationship is an area for continued growth.

McNeal has also been an ambassador on the International front for STMA. In 2009, McNeal traveled to Singapore to give a presentation at the Singapore National Parks Board Regional Turf Conference. She spoke on environmental efforts on sports fields in the U.S. Being the Chair of the International Committee, McNeal sees South America as the starting point based on the information the committee members have gathered this year. "Chile and Brazil are our two strongest areas of having connections, and the sports turf managers there are eager to learn from our organization," says McNeal. Helping create a platform for the International Affiliate Organizations to get started is also an important objective. "Once we have them 'hooked' on STMA then they can start providing educational opportunities to sports turf managers in their areas of the world and raising the quality of sports turf managers and fields worldwide," she notes.

All members on the International Committee are making great efforts to promote the value of STMA to other areas of the world. At such an early point in its development, it is hard to evaluate progress. The success the group has made so far is worthy of note and is in step with McNeal's overall goal for STMA's international efforts. "I would like to see STMA as an international leader in providing education to sports turf managers on best management practices," says McNeal.

My work experience here has made me realize that those involved at every level of the association truly care about the services they are providing. I anticipate those in the industry overseas to become familiar with and take advantage of the resources STMA has to offer. I am looking forward to watching these advances for the next 5 or so years down the road become a positive step forward and a huge success for STMA. ■

Author's note: As an intern, I was fortunate to work with this committee as well as be a temporary staff member for STMA. It has been a pleasure to learn about this service-oriented, non-profit organization and how it conducts business. Before I began my summer internship, I really did not know what kind of work experience I would gain. Doing research and composing communication materials was an excellent experience, and I was surprised how much my education at Benedictine College really came into use. Thank you STMA for the experience.