

President's Message

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Stewards of the land whether we like it or not

I WRITE THIS MONTH'S MESSAGE as I return from speaking at the New England STMA (NESTMA) annual meeting in Providence, RI. This is a wonderful conference and exhibition and it sets a great example for the value of cooperation and collaboration among groups across state lines. I learned a great deal more about the regulatory challenges being faced by all turf managers across New England and how the industry has responded to these regulations by altering and adapting their management programs.

I particularly enjoyed one member's account that for the longest time he let his colleagues take the lead in trying to educate and communicate with state and local officials regarding proposed legislation that he thought was a nuisance, but it really did not affect him directly. Then one day some troubling legislation regarding fertilizers landed at his doorstep and he was forced to address a group of highly unsympathetic administrators and concerned citizens about his use of fertilizers on his sports fields. When I asked him how he felt after that meeting, he asked me if I was old enough to remember the movie "Network" (unfortunately, yes) and if so, then I knew from where the phrase "I am mad as *\$?! and I am not going to take it anymore" came.

How did he get involved? He told me that he first contacted his NESTMA colleagues and his state turfgrass extension specialist for their advice and then he started researching the matter on his own, taking advantage of one of our STMA membership benefits by accessing the Turfgrass Information File. I then jokingly accused him of being a NESTMA spy tasked with telling me everything that an academic and STMA board member would want to hear.

Did everything work out as he hoped? No. There are changes in how he must now manage his fields that are more time and labor consuming, and he probably won't have fields that are as aesthetically pleasing as they once were. However he has put these challenges to work in his management program, as he expanded his IPM approach to field management in ways that he had never considered before. He told me he felt that he now was a steward of the land more so than a manager, and I found it interesting that this philosophy matched up perfectly with the theme of a presentation delivered by long-time STMA member Kevin Trotta at this same meeting (see page 6 for more from Kevin).

Perhaps most importantly he now has a voice and a face in the community as more than "the guy that mows the fields"—his time in front of the public has exposed a whole new audience to his expertise and professionalism as a sports turf manager.

STMA's Environmental Committee has just released its Advocacy Manual that addresses all the steps you can take to get involved like my NESTMA friend. Be sure to take a look at this manual as I think you will find it to be another valuable membership benefit that will help you better address challenges as they arise. Take care, everyone. ■

