

From the Sidelines



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Scenes from Daytona Beach

EIGHTY DEGREES AND SUNNY may never have felt so good as it did for many in the sports turf industry who attended last month's STMA 24th Annual Conference & Exhibition in Daytona Beach, FL, especially for those of us who returned to single-digit temperatures and wind chills. Kudos to the STMA Board for selecting a great site for the show; all Conference activities and most nightspots were at the host hotel or within a few minutes' walk.

The Board tweaked this year's schedule to add education sessions and encourage attendance at general sessions and on the trade show floor. Most notable was introduction of the STMA Academy, which was a direct response to members' request for deeper educational opportunities both before and after the Conference. Education Subcommittee Chairman Jeff Fowler, an extension director and turfgrass specialist for Penn State, said, "Members asked that we offer chances to go beyond the traditional 1 hour sessions so they could learn more about a subject. So we developed the Academy, which allows students and instructors to get more in-depth on a particular topic. The feedback I've received so far has been very positive."

Also for the first time there was both a full-day and half-day Seminar on Wheel tour offered. Jeff Salmond, CSFM, director of athletic field management at the University of Oklahoma and Tours Subcommittee chair, said the half-day tour enabled attendees to arrive Tuesday and still make a tour. "Both full and half day attendees were thrilled with sites we selected, especially the Daytona Speedway," he said. "Even if you're not a NASCAR fan it was a memorable experience. The tour bus went onto the track and we got an up close look at just how steep the bank is, and how narrow the racetrack is itself." More than 200 attendees were part of the tours.

Another change was the SAFE Charity golf tournament's being moved to Tuesday with a tee time set to allow late Monday arrivers like me a chance to sleep in; my partners, Boomin' Boyd Montgomery, Deadeye Ed Hall, and Noel Hammerin' Harryman must have thought with my lackluster performance that I was still sleeping. But at least the cold beer tasted good in the sunshine.

Attendees who opted for a cold one with friends or just wanted a rest before Wednesday's Welcome Reception missed a dynamite keynote address by Ian Hill, who is best known for funding community projects in the name of our fallen soldiers. He noted that STMA members have an "irrational passion"—aka "crazy"—for turf. Hill, who emigrated to the US after an Army soldier-turned-father in Iran exchanged two cases of scotch for him, said that passion works well for turf managers because "you are in the memory business." He still knows the name of the man who maintained the football field he competed on in high school, and he pledged \$1,000 to STMA's SAFE Foundation in the name of Angel Diaz. Hill then challenged the audience to donate \$5, \$10, or \$20 immediately following his talk to STMA President Dr. Mike Goatley or Ed Chair Fowler and name a mentor or person who inspired them as they handed over their "legacy cash."

Hill asked the crowd, "When you reflect back about your life, will you think more about what you have gained or what you have given?" His own commitment to purpose was stimulating and I'm certain his call for us to put our time, fortune and sacred honor toward the betterment of others still rings in our ears. ■

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