

2012 Most Influential People in the Green Industry

GREEN MEDIA, a division of M2MEDIA360 — publisher of *Landscape and Irrigation*, *Arbor Age*, *Outdoor Power Equipment* and *SportsTurf* — is proud to present the 2012 selections for “Most Influential People in the Green Industry.”

Green Media’s “Most Influential People in the Green Industry” were nominated by their peers for their ongoing contributions to the Green Industry. The professionals selected for this honor were chosen from throughout the Green Industry, and exemplify a commitment to the industry and a widespread influence on their peers.

Green Media congratulates all of those selected to this year’s list of “Most Influential People in the Green Industry.”



Tom Nielsen
Head Groundskeeper, Louisville Bats

Tom Nielsen, Head Groundskeeper at Louisville Slugger Field for the Louisville Bats AAA franchise, was nominated by another groundskeeper. Nielsen, recipient of the prestigious Sports Turf Managers Association George Toma Golden Rake Award for 2011, is known for his mentorship of many in the industry, but in particular students that pass through his outstanding internship program. Several of his assistants, crew members, and interns have gone on to notable careers of their own, including Jake Tyler, head groundskeeper for the Toledo Mud Hens; Chad Laurie, head groundskeeper for the Buffalo Bisons; Thomas Trotter, head groundskeeper for the Nashville Sounds; Steve Ruckman, head groundskeeper for the Richmond Flying Squirrels; Dan Blank, head groundskeeper for TD Ameritrade Park, home of the College World Series; and Ray Sayre, head groundskeeper for the Pensacola Wahoos, just to name a few.

The nomination continued, “However, his

‘teaching heart’ doesn’t stop with his staff and interns. He works tirelessly to convey the importance of sound maintenance practices to the administration, players, and fans in Louisville. The Toma award recognizes a member for a dedicated and enthusiastic attitude to achieve their highest goals. The award acknowledges a strong spirit of commitment to the industry. Nielsen has also won STMA’s Field of the Year in 2002 & 2004 and was named the International League Sports Turf Manager of the Year 2009.

Green Media: You were nominated by your peers as one of the most influential people in the green industry. How do you feel you that you influence other industry professionals?

Nielsen: I influence other industry professionals’ everyday when I go to work because I love what I do. Both my words (enthusiasm) and actions (mentoring) influence others as I teach upcoming groundskeepers best practices. When you love what you do, it shows.

Green Media: What do you feel has been your biggest contribution to the green industry so far? And what do you see as your role in the future of the industry?

Nielsen: My biggest contribution has been helping upcoming groundskeepers reach their professional goals. In the past 12 years, I have mentored 30+ employees who went on to continue working in the Green Industry as either head groundskeepers or assistants in professional baseball, universities, high school athletics and landscape companies. I am willing to help anyone interested in helping anyone interested in the green industry. I speak with several school and private groups every year.

I plan to continue doing the same work mentoring and promoting the green industry in the future.

Green Media: Who has influenced you both personally and professionally?

Nielsen: My biggest personal influence is my parents, Ted and Gloria Nielsen, who instilled in me a great work ethic and desire to succeed. Professionally, it is George Toma. He taught me professionalism and the “and then some” attitude, which is doing your job as best you can plus some. Don’t settle for average. Another big influence was the late Gary Vanden

Berg, former head groundskeeper with the Milwaukee Brewers, for giving me my start in sports turf management and being a positive role model.

Green Media: Tell us something about yourself outside of work (hobby, sport or other personal interest) that influences your approach in your professional career.

Nielsen: My hobbies are Civil War re-enacting, camping, mountain biking, running and swimming. These hobbies influence my approach in my professional career in many ways. The Civil War re-enacting makes me appreciate modern conveniences and the things I have. Camping helps me clear my head from work and gives me time with my family without having to run to the stadium to check on the field. My athletic pursuits help me stay in shape so that my job is easier to perform and [because I] appreciate my health. I urge my employees to find a balance between fitness, family and work in order to be at their best in all aspects of their lives.

Green Media: What dreams do you have for the industry? What change(s) are necessary to make those dreams a reality?

Nielsen: My dream for the industry is to help bring up the standards of groundskeepers, which will in turn bring us more respect and higher wages. This is accomplished by increasing expectations both in physical appearance and communications skills. We are all not a bunch of Bill Murrays from “CaddyShack”! This is the stereotype that the general population thinks of when they think of the green industry and we need to work hard to overcome it. There are a lot of very intelligent, experienced professionals in our industry and we all deserve respect.

Green Media: What advice do you have for green industry professionals who want to become influential leaders themselves?

Nielsen: My advice is to work hard, stay enthusiastic, be open-minded to new ideas, techniques and [listening to] new young minds.

Green Media: If you could nominate another person as the green industry’s most influential, who would that be, and why?

Nielsen: Eric Fasbender at LSU and

Aaron Boggs at the University of Louisville. Both are very enthusiastic about their jobs. They have a love for the green industry that shows through their willingness to teach others. They both truly care about the profession.



Dan Sawyer
CEO of Brock International

Introducing innovation to an industry takes a lot of perseverance. But that's never stopped Dan Sawyer. As the Founder & Chief Executive Officer of Brock International, manufacturer of base systems for synthetic turf, he has helped engineer safe playing surfaces

while actively promoting sustainability.

Sawyer first started redefining possibilities while working for Jay Medical in the early 1990s, a medical products pioneer that significantly improved wheelchair seating. Sawyer then applied his valuable insight on how forces impact the human body in launching Brock in 1999. The company's premier product, Brock PowerBase, is a shock pad and drainage layer used beneath synthetic turf fields that has been proven to reduce G-max, which may reduce the risk and severity of concussion. Nothing like it existed before Dan and his team envisioned the technology. Today over 25 million square feet of Brock products is in play underneath athletic fields worldwide.

Sawyer has become a vocal advocate for concussion prevention education. With the perspective of handling hundreds of installations for clients ranging from NFL teams and major universities to community parks, he feels many brain injuries can be prevented through increased awareness as well as better technique, equipment and treatment. That's why his company became an Official Education Partner of The Sports Legacy Institute, a Boston-based non-profit organization founded to advance the study, treatment, and prevention of brain trauma in athletes and other at-risk groups. In this capacity, Brock has provided funding that helped SLI deliver their two-hour Advanced Concussion Training (ACT) program to over 1,000 football coaches in the Los Angeles Unified School District, 2,500 coaches in The Chicagoland Youth Football League, and over 3,000 Chicago Public Schools coaches and athletic directors, as well as programs for parents and athletes.

The Boulder, CO resident has also worked for the betterment of the Green Industry overall by promoting environmental stewardship. In October 2011, Brock became the first company in the synthetic turf sector to have a Cradle to Cradle Certification CM for its combined drainage and shock pad product. Recognized as the most comprehensive, rigorous environmental certification process, the designation is administered by the Cradle to Cradle Products Innovation Institute, which evaluates products and materials for their impact on human health and environmental health and design for future life cycles.

Late last year the Cradle to Cradle certification was awarded to Brock's PlayBase playground and PaverBase patio underlayment technologies, which is used by landscape professionals and homeowners with do-it-yourself savvy. Offering the only product in the market that can be closed loop recycled, the company's technologies reduce the overall energy cost of constructing a field by 50%. Made in an ISO and TS certified manufacturing facility of 100% recyclable and non-toxic material, Brock PowerBase, PlayBase and PaverBase is certified to the world's most stringent environmental standards.

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When we got into this business, most people thought we were crazy.

Green Media: You were nominated by your peers as one of the most influential people in the green industry. How do you feel that you influence other industry professionals?

Sawyer: First of all, our green initiatives and culture are a team effort. So this nomination really goes to everyone at Brock. But I do think an environmentally sustainable approach to doing business is appropriate, and frankly necessary, for any business to be competitive. I'm really honored to see that people in our industry are receptive.

Green Media: What do you feel has been your biggest contribution to the green industry so far? And what do you see as your role in the future of the industry?

Sawyer: I think when we went through a

complete redesign of our core product line with the achievement of Cradle-to-Cradle certification; we showed people that it can be done even in a product that was originally developed for safety. Not only that, but the product got better as a result of the process. Today, environmental impact has become a key subject that must be addressed in any project.

I think Brock must continue to educate people that the process of preventing brain injury starts at the playing surface level, and we have to take an active role in educating others about brain injury prevention programs. At the same time, working with clients who set an example by choosing an environmental path to both product selection and construction technique will raise the bar for the industry.

Green Media: Who has influenced you both personally and professionally?

Sawyer: Steve Jobs, without a doubt. His creativity and vision to challenge the status quo, and his belief that, "people don't necessarily know what they want, or what is possible. You have to show them."

It's up to innovators to guide the way, and his trials and perseverance throughout his life

and his companies has been a guiding light. Others such as Simon Sinek with his philosophy of "people don't buy what you do, they buy why you do it." I think people respond to our company because they know we have a larger view than just selling a product. We exist as a company to evolve the industry on multiple levels and being an environmental leader is one reason for people to do business with us.


Green Media: Tell us something about yourself outside of work (hobby, sport or other personal interest) that influences your approach in your professional career.

Sawyer: I have always been a person who is a natural "rule challenger." I think we as a society can always operate better and more efficiently, and achieve more, if we challenge the current paradigm. I try to teach my children to think beyond what's in front of them, and ask, "Is there a better way?" I do this a lot in airport security!

In sports, I always push myself to levels beyond what I think I am capable of and there is risk in that. But I find my personal and professional work is the most gratifying

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when I achieve something that at the outset seemed overwhelming. When we got into this business, most people thought we were crazy. Here we were, a little company from Boulder getting into an established, conservative market and proposing a new way of doing things. A challenge like that is where I am most comfortable, and I think it brings out the best in us.

Green Media: What dreams do you have for the industry? What change(s) are necessary to make those dreams a reality?

Sawyer: I truly believe that we can use technology to go beyond what even natural turf can do. Just as there have been developments in footwear and helmets, I think the surface can ultimately become one of the key technological components in the sports program to help prevent brain injuries while maximizing sports performance. There are a couple of hurdles to overcome. One is the idea that the cheapest alternative is the best use of public funds. Too often price is placed before quality, but we know that a life-cycle costing approach to the field system today pays off in spades in the long run.

I think the only way to become a leader is to practice what you preach...

The other hurdle is we have to make people understand that laying carpet over stone is not the best we can do, and when it comes to safety, we *have* to do our best. But things are changing due to the attention now being given to head and body injuries through groups like the Sports Legacy Institute, and how the surface can significantly reduce those risks.

Green Media: What advice do you have for green industry professionals who want to become influential leaders themselves?

Sawyer: I think the only way to become a leader is to practice what you preach. You have to create a culture within your organization that embraces environmental choices, whether it's in R&D, how you use transportation, or the demands you put on production. It is typically more expensive to run a business this way, so you have to create value in what you are sell-

ing. But in the end, it is the right thing to do, and if Brock is any example, people will respond positively to those efforts.

Green Media: If you could nominate another person as the green industry's most influential person, who would that be, and why?

Sawyer: I think Professor Michael Braungart, the co-author of Cradle to Cradle, was a true visionary when he realized back in the

1990s that we were going to have to fundamentally change the way we use resources and how we develop products. Today, many companies and even governments have embraced his ideals, even though some are not yet technologically achievable. But he set the bar so high he has given us all something to strive for. And I love his optimistic outlook on the use of materials technology to attain greater levels of sustainability. ■



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