



## MADE IN MASSACHUSETTS

A modest and dedicated public servant, incoming STMA president David Pinsonneault, CSFM, CPRP, is the kind of leader the industry needs

▲ STMA president David Pinsonneault, CSFM, CPRP

### If you were to ask those who know David

Pinsonneault, 2014 president of the Sports Turf Managers Association, about his character and leadership style, you'd hear a lot of the same descriptions and strikingly similar stories.

You'd hear examples of his modesty, generosity, diplomacy, honesty and unselfishness.

Stories would pour in that reveal Pinsonneault as a leader who was able to bridge a gap no one before him had.

A professional who prefers to share the secrets of his own success rather than protect them in the name of self-preservation.

Someone who went far beyond the standard expectations of a job to produce results that benefitted his colleagues and the profession as a whole.

But to hear Pinsonneault deliver those same accounts, his modesty would stun you. He was just in the right place at the right time, he says. His life, a series of events where preparation met opportunity.

### CARVING HIS OWN PATH

Pinsonneault always knew he wanted to work outdoors, so forestry seemed like a natural choice. A New England native (and near-lifelong resident of Massachusetts), Pinsonneault selected a college with a good forestry program that wasn't too far away from home but also wasn't too close—the University of New Hampshire in Durham.

When he graduated in 1984 with a degree in forest management, job prospects unfortunately weren't so bright. He cobbled together the humble beginnings of his career with a couple of part-time, temporary jobs at a paper company in Maine and doing research for the US Forest Service.

Then a more permanent opportunity appeared when Pinsonneault and his brother started up their own lawn care business.

In the meantime, Pinsonneault had gotten married and had his first child, and after about 4 years in the lawn care business, he started looking for a job with a tad more benefits and a tad fewer hours.

In what Pinsonneault would surely call a "lucky" break, he landed a gig in 1990 working for the parks and recreation department of the community of Mansfield, MA about a half hour away from where he grew up in North Attleboro.

In this position, he quickly moved from laborer to skilled laborer to the head of the maintenance division. Someone was clearly taking note of Pinsonneault's potential. That someone was Lorilee Fish, Mansfield's parks and recreation director, who sent him to the NRPA/NC State Park Maintenance and Management School to expand on his education.

Luckily for the STMA, that program (in addition to providing education on park and turf maintenance) gave Pinsonneault his first exposure to the association through other attendees who were involved.

Education also led Pinsonneault to his next job opportunity. At a turf seminar in Providence, RI, he met Bob Ames, the parks and recreation director in South Kingston, RI. They made a good connection that paid off a couple of months later.

Ames had created a new position of parks superintendent in South Kingston and encouraged Pinsonneault to apply. After a 5-month-long process of various interviews and applications, he got the job.

Leaving a job is never easy, but Fish made it less difficult than most, said Pinsonneault.

"My boss was a big believer in education, and she was very supportive in me advancing my career, even if that meant leaving," he says.

Before he left the job in Mansfield, Pinsonneault received one of those tokens of appreciation that are small and facile yet entirely unforgettable.

Part of his job was setting up the field and lighting for night practice for the high school varsity football team. "After their practice, they called me out onto the field and presented

me with one of their practice jerseys,” he says. “That I think told me that this is the profession I want to be in.”

In South Kingston, Pinsonneault had plenty of room to grow, literally and figuratively.

“Because it was a newly created position, I had an opportunity to build the department pretty much from scratch,” he says. “We went from one full-time person, a couple of guys from the highway department and some seasonals to six full-time people who were able to take the department in a very positive direction.”

In 2000, Pinsonneault became public grounds superintendent for the town of Lexington, MA. In this role, he manages operations of the park, forestry, streetlight and cemetery divisions in the public works department, including approximately 600 acres of land, 75 acres of athletic fields, four cemeteries, more than 3,000 streetlights and around 10,000 street trees. He also oversees 22 full-time employees.

It’s a bit of a different set-up in that recreation develops the programs, staffs the programs and handles permitting, but maintenance is under the public works umbrella.

The system requires more attention to coordinate with the parks and recreation department, but Pinsonneault quickly saw the benefits.

“If I need a backhoe or to borrow two guys from another division, it’s a lot easier to do,” he says. “I have a lot of resources at my disposal.”

### FOR THE BENEFIT OF ALL

Though Pinsonneault is arguably at the top of his game professionally, he still holds a special place in his heart for his first municipal job in Mansfield, MA. It’s where he first learned the ins and outs of the sports turf industry, in many cases with the aid of some helpful colleagues who would go on to become lifelong friends.

One of those helping hands came from Bob Romano, a sales rep at the Scotts Co. at the time. “I didn’t know the first thing about taking soil tests, and he was very helpful in setting up a fertilizer program,” Pinsonneault says.

Another colleague he credits with helping him learn the ropes at the start of his career is Eric O’Brien, a playground representative in Medway, MA. “He helped me with the overall picture, getting me to step back and see that there was more than just the turfgrass that came into play for an athletic event,” he says.

Then there’s Mary Owen, turfgrass extension specialist at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, who worked with Pinsonneault to take an integrated pest management guide for golf courses and adapt it for athletic fields.

“(The golf course industry) had protocols they followed, and we needed the same thing for sports turf,” Pinsonneault says.

“David identified the need (for the guide), and the New England Regional Turf Foundation board agreed,” Owen says. “We put together a very insightful and dedicated team of eight sports turf managers, and David was a key player in that. This is way above and beyond what these gentlemen normally did in their work day.”

Amazingly enough, that wasn’t the most notable project Owen and Pinsonneault worked on together. They also played key roles in founding the New England Sports Turf Managers Association.

Pinsonneault first got involved while in Mansfield and was elected to the group’s board while in Rhode Island. That’s where, as Owen attests, Pinsonneault bridged a disconnect between the New England chapter and the national organization.

“The New England STMA started separately from national and was very separate for a long time,” she says. “It had conversations with national a few times about becoming a chapter, and we just couldn’t quite come to an agreement for a number of reasons. We had tried hard for several years to work one out. It was a real conundrum.

“David picked up the ball and had very respectful, productive conversations that resulted in STMA really looking at how it crafts relationships with its chapters. It was David that finally made that connection happen between chapter and national.”

That instance reflects Pinsonneault’s abilities as a diplomatic leader, she says. “David doesn’t get flustered. He’s willing to work through problems to get to a good solution. And in that, he benefitted everybody—New England sports turf, national sports turf. He wasn’t hesitant at all about taking on the challenge.”

Shortly thereafter, STMA adopted that agreement for the way all chapters were affiliated.

His work to affiliate the New England chapter benefitted the industry in another way by spurring his motivation to become involved at the national level. But it was an anomaly that led Pinsonneault to his first position on the national board.

In 2006, after a rare vacant position on the board opened up, it was up to the STMA president at the time, Mike Andresen, CSFM, to appoint someone to fill the position. Andresen’s decision was easy.

Having attended a few New England chapter events, Andresen had seen first-hand Pinsonneault’s listening skills and problem-solving abilities, as well as the respect members had for him.

“David was so tuned in with his analysis, it was very easy to see that the STMA board and membership would benefit from his personality and skill set,” Andresen says. “As I asked colleagues for their feelings on appointing David, it was obvious the decision to appoint him was a no-brainer.”

### A NON-TRADITIONAL PATH

Pinsonneault’s unorthodox journey came to a peak last month in San Antonio, where he was officially elected President of the STMA.

What are his plans for 2014? One of them involves elevating awareness and recognition of the profession.

“There’s misconceptions and lack of knowledge about what we do,” he says. “We want to get the word out to the public that there’s a profession that takes care of their fields and keeps them safe, playable, green and ready to go.”

In today’s economy, Pinsonneault says the sports turf management industry is in remarkably good shape and he’s positive about the future.

“Similar professional associations have had challenges where they’ve had to cut their staff and cut programs to members,” he says. “We don’t want to do that. We’re trying to add programs.”

The annual conference is one area demonstrating particular strength in the industry and organization.

“The quality of education and the trade show has grown significantly,” Pinsonneault says. “Daytona was a good example of that. The people who put the program together have done an outstanding job with educational selections and networking opportunities.”

Pinsonneault also plans to follow a strategic plan he helped develop for the association, which calls for focus on education, environmental programs, membership growth and conference expansion.

No one possesses more confidence in Pinsonneault’s upcoming year as leader than the man who originally appointed him to the board.

“David has no ego, no hidden agenda and he will work his tail off to ensure the board is highly productive and responsible to the membership,” Andresen says. “With David, we’re going to get a very unselfish leader, and one that I want representing us as president, knowing he brings an understanding and work ethic to the office as strong as any that have served.”

STMA CEO Kim Heck agrees. “When David speaks, his comments always have the best interests of STMA at heart. As a leader, David’s honesty and integrity are front and center in everything he does,” she says. “He has respect for everyone, and as a result is given respect in return. David has a unique ability to bring clarity to issues. He can look at an issue and give a 360-degree assessment of it that really helps discussions in our board meetings.”

## PASSION IN WORK AND PLAY

As for Pinsonneault, he’ll tell you he couldn’t have accomplished any of this if it weren’t for his family.

He and his wife, Robin, a kindergarten teacher, raised their two children to follow in their footsteps of careers in public service. Their daughter, Noelle, 24, is a special education teacher; and son, David, 21, is studying public service and political science at Providence (RI) College.

Working for the public takes a particular passion, Pinsonneault says, and if you’ve got it, you’re in for a rewarding career. “You’ve got to like what you do, but you’ve also got to like making a difference. It’s certainly true in teaching, and it’s certainly true in the sports turf world.”

The rewards? Like Pinsonneault’s practice jersey from a high school football team on a late night, they come unexpectedly and they’re 100% worth all the work.

“The thing I like about parks and rec, you can see your results,” Pinsonneault says. “You maintain the field well, you happen to see the 10-year-olds out there playing a ball game, or swimming at the pool, and you know that you helped to make that happen. That’s part of the job, too. That’s part of the appeal.” ■

*Darcy DeVictor Boyle is a free lance writer based in Lawrence, KS.*

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