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Left: Scott Falahee and Jeff Kotas at work. Photo by Mark Frever, CSFM, Director of Grounds, Albion College. **Right:** Steve DiNatale working on campus of University of Oregon. Photo courtesy of Eric Fasbender, CSFM.

Advice on reaching “the next level” in your turf career

Editor's note: We asked some prominent members of the sports turf community how turf managers can get to “the next level” professionally, whether that might be management or moving up the crew ladder:

Mike McDonald, CSFM, U of Minnesota turf manager

Sometimes when you're talking to or working alongside a turf manager or another crew member, you can tell if the person enjoys the profession or is just doing a job. Those that come up to you or a group of people and start asking questions, listening to what other people have done, are the ones you can tell are looking to improve themselves and their workplace.

They can't get enough information to put into practice and see what they can do better to improve their grounds. That is the way to get to the next level, networking with your peers and showing pride in your job and work. People take notice of that kind of commitment and desire to move forward.

Marcus Dean, CSFM, assistant sports turf manager, U of Kentucky

In order to “reach the next level,” I think people have to be driven to be the best at everything they do (some people might

think this is a bad trait!). The “dirt and grass” crew member cannot ever get complacent in what they are doing daily. I think as soon as you get completely satisfied with the job you are doing, you start to decline.

I am never completely satisfied with myself. I constantly look back and try to figure out how and if something can be done better. You know that you are going to make mistakes but you have to learn from those mistakes. To reach “the next level” I think a person has to stay up to date with the latest research and technology, and be able to network and not be afraid to ask questions.

I say all of this and yet I don't feel as if I have reached the next level. I have a great job, work with great people at a great university, but I still have some climbing to do on the professional ladder. But I am not job title hunting at all; I have interviewed and been offered “next level” jobs, but decided the overall situation was not better than my current job.

In January I passed the CSFM test and hope that it will lead to career advancement. There are a lot of reasons that I wanted to be certified; I think there will be jobs within the sports turf industry that require certification and I don't want to limit my possibilities. Being a CSFM shows the administration at UK that I

have added some credibility (by the way, they have never questioned our department's credibility!). It also allows UK to have a recruiting edge over other schools that don't have a CSFM employed. This is one way that I can help recruit world class athletes to UK and allow our athletic department to climb in the Athletic Directors Cup standings. Being a CSFM in Kentucky has inspired other sports turf managers to get interested in the CSFM program (Editor's note: Dean is president of the state's STMA chapter). I can help the entire state of Kentucky advance the quality of sports turf while carrying out my daily job. Isn't that what the STMA is all about?

Jody Gill, grounds coordinator, Blue Valley School District, KS

Achieve as much education and continuing education as possible. Also, consider achieving CSFM, CLT, CLIA or any other certifications that may be applicable to your career. Be willing to work extra hours when necessary especially when you have an opportunity to learn something new.

Volunteer for projects that may be out of your comfort zone or something in which you may need more experience. Be sure your supervisors know that you would like to move into a management position in the future. Most good managers enjoy and take pride in helping good employees move up and take on more responsibility. As with any endeavor, take pride in everything you do. Have a real passion for this industry and make sure it shows in your work. When you achieve your goal, be a positive role model and give back to the industry.

Kim Heck, CEO, Sports Turf Managers Association

Sports turf managers are responsible for so much more than maintaining athletic fields. They manage budgets, inventory, purchasing, capital equipment, recordkeeping, environmental programs, personnel....the list goes on and on. Many are definitely in a management role at their facilities.

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The real issue is how do sports turf managers proactively elevate their stature at their facilities to gain more recognition for their good work? It really starts with how you conduct yourself as a sports turf manager because how others perceive you is reality.

Here's a checklist for sports turf managers who want to be sure they are doing everything possible to be perceived as a professional at their facilities:

- Are you available and responsive to questions?
- Do you react calmly and positively, even when there is criticism?
- Do you embrace new technology, or are you thought of as being 'set in your ways'?
- Are you proactive when there are problems by communicating any potential issues to your boss, and then do you also bring solutions?
- How flexible are you when you have to make changes to your daily, weekly or monthly management programs?
- Are you on time and prepared for meetings?
- Dress appropriately for those meetings?
- Present accurate and unbiased information during those meetings?
- Do you "think big" and bring ideas that excite people?
- Are you considered a "team player"?
- Have a firm hand-shake?
- Look people in the eye with self-confidence?
- Do you have an "ethical" business reputation?
- Do you deliver on your promises?
- Are you committed to continuous learning and gaining skills beyond those needed for your job?
- Do you mentor your staff and position yourself as a role model for them?
- Do you champion the good work of your staff?
- Do you empower your staff to make their own decisions?
- Do you set and maintain high expectations for all who work with you?
- Do you take responsibility for your mistakes and those of your subordinates?
- Do you make a point of thanking employees and praising them when they do a good job?

It goes without saying that sports turf managers have to do an excellent job with the resources allocated to them for field prepa-

ration and presentation. It is the softer skills that will differentiate you.

Mike Andresen, CSFM, facilities & grounds manager, Iowa State

To me "the next level" means to be a better professional, a more respected professional and a more valuable employee. If we truly focus on the job we currently have and strive to grow in that job we most certainly become a better professional and more valuable employee. Certainly you'd be more marketable should you choose to entertain other opportunities in this profession.

We're fortunate to work in the competitive athletics arena and

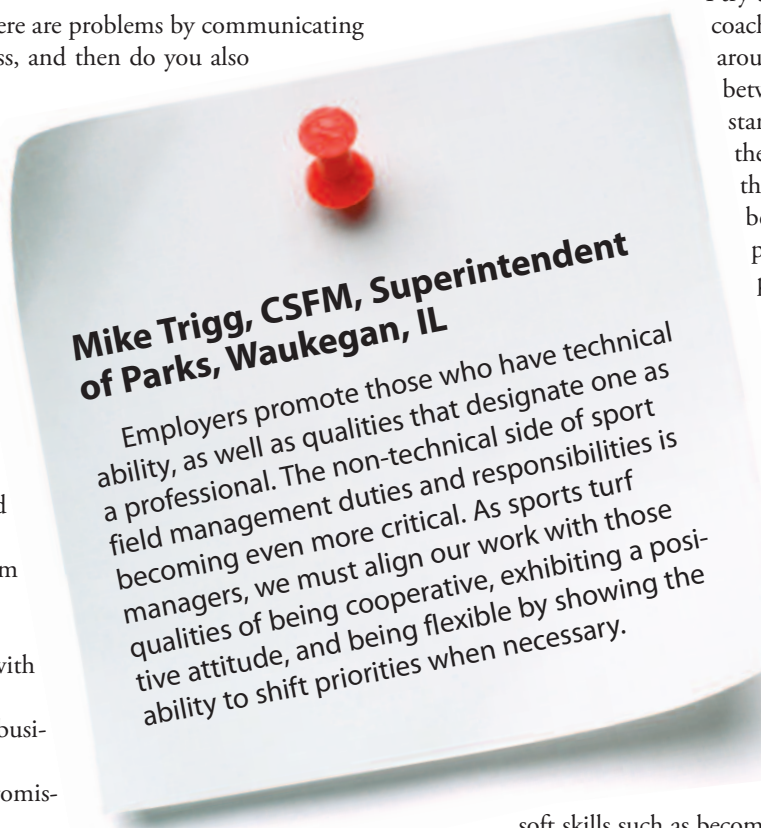
I try to learn from the administrators, coaches and athletes that we work around. The number one difference between an average athlete and a star athlete is the ability to focus on the task; his/her own skills and their ability to help the team be better than its individual parts. Focus every day on really producing for your team (crew) and for the teams you work with. I don't necessarily mean produce volumes of work, I mean produce perfect work. We don't worry about other entities at our business. Simply, they don't know our jobs so what makes us think we know theirs? Focus.

Agronomically we are the expert for our employer so that end of our game has to be rock solid. We should focus effort on keeping those agronomic skills solid. Focusing on

soft skills such as becoming an exceptional listener, communicator, budget manager, crew manager and trusted co-worker are traits that will set you apart from average. I like the adage of "don't take yourself seriously but do take your profession seriously."

Achieving the designation of Certified Sports Field Manager quantifies your level of professional focus and willingness to work intently on hard and soft skills. No employer owes you or me anything except a paycheck for satisfactory work. Very basically, we are a commodity hired to do a job for our employer. From day one it's our job to earn respect and privilege and I believe we pretty much end up being given the level of respect we earn.

This profession can be pretty humbling and can beat us down at times. We're individually not as good as we sometimes lead ourselves to believe and we're certainly not as incompetent as we sometimes feel. Look around at the giants of STMA and what traits do



you see? I see humbleness and focus above all else. Do a self evaluation of your strengths and weaknesses. Ask people you trust to give you honest feedback.

Work hard on skills that are not strengths but don't beat yourself up and think you can change them overnight. Determine steps you'll take, such as reading and attending educational seminars and conferences to help you improve. My boss recognizes her number one resource isn't the mower we own, it's the person doing the mowing and she invests in nurturing that asset. A tip: kind and constructive words go further than any amount of money ever will. People depend on us and take cues from us. Supervisors are named by the boss but leaders are named by the crew. You have to earn the hat of "leader," it's not bestowed. Strive to be the leader!

It's critical that you know what makes those around you "tick," including coaches and administrators. You need to know their personalities and be able to meet their style. At times you'll need to motivate, discipline, teach, learn, negotiate with and so forth. Most of all keep your eyes open and maximize every opportunity you get to improve your "game." Those opportunities flash through our lives every day and only when you focus on that part of your life will you even see them.

Those giants I see in STMA and this profession are successful in my eyes because their focus is on maximizing everyday opportunities to make themselves and their teams better. It sounds goofy but

professionally I really do believe the "destination" (whatever your definition is) is not the fun part; the climb to get there is the real gratification and with proper focus you'll get to feel some of that gratification every day!

Troy Smith, CSFM turf manager, Denver Broncos

Moving to a management position requires a combination of experience and education. If you acquire a two or four year degree then you should have the "book smarts" for the job. Once you take an internship or job in the sports turf industry, you then learn how to do the daily, weekly and monthly jobs that the job requires.

As you gain "field smarts," you will learn that that is more than one way to do the job. All of this will build a foundation for you to draw from in the future. Your supervisors will then begin to ask you what is best for a situation and this is where you use your combination of education and experience. You will also begin to watch your managers and take a little bit of management style from all of them (either good or bad) to develop your own management style.

You should begin to gain the confidence of your employer with time and the transition from a crew member to a management position should be on its way. Continuing your education, continued employment and obtaining your certified sports field manager designation are all examples that will show your employer that you are serious about your earned management position. ■

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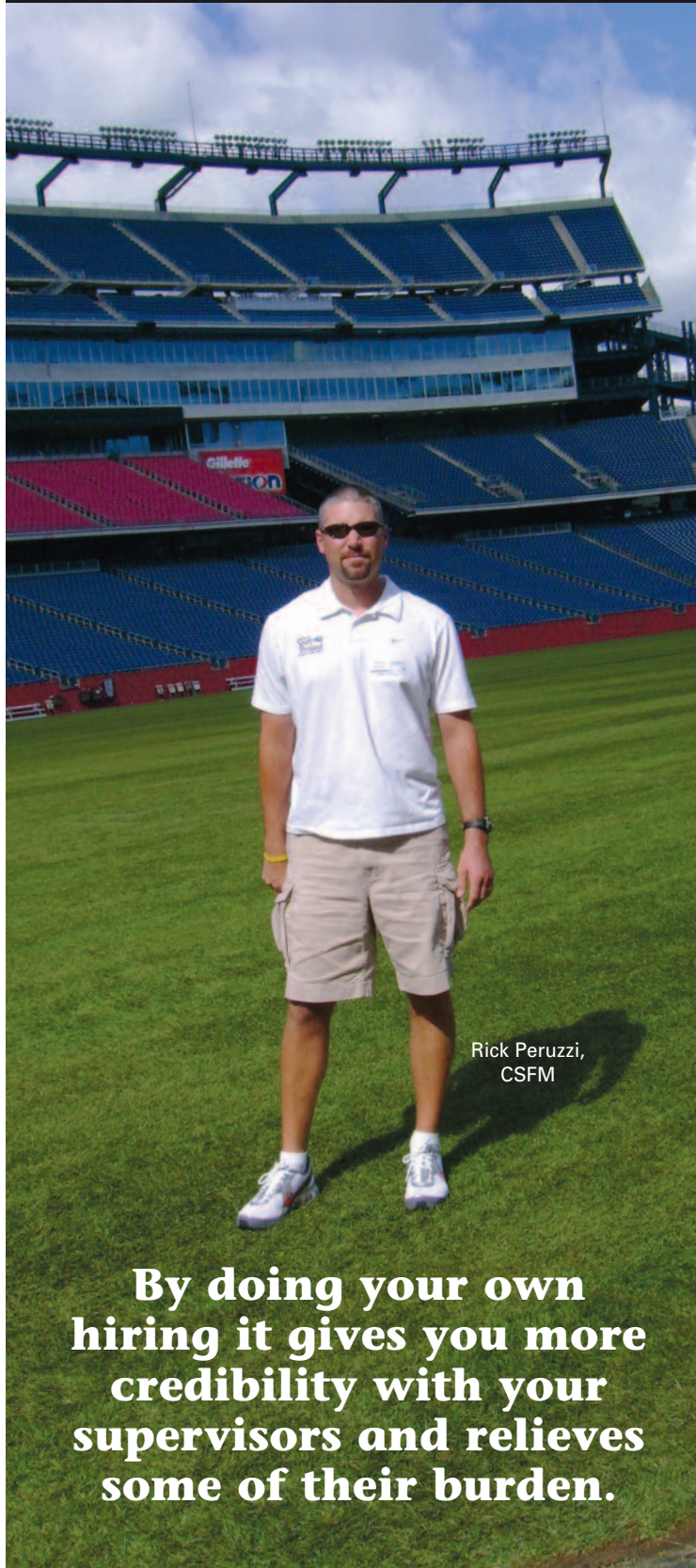
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By doing your own hiring it gives you more credibility with your supervisors and relieves some of their burden.

Good sports turf help is hard to find

THIS IS THE TIME OF YEAR, for many of us in the northern climates, when we start to get excited about the upcoming season especially when many of us have just traveled to a warmer climate to attend the STMA Conference. This year was no different for me when I traveled to San Jose, especially where it was the warmest part of the country during the week.

As I caught up with friends and colleagues, especially persons in warm climates, I found myself looking forward to getting back into the swing of things back home in Maine. What made this difficult was the obvious reason that here in the Northeast we have snow on the ground with more on the way until mid-March, if we're lucky.

I have always treated conference as a way to recharge my batteries, given the 2 months without any outdoor activities, and start to gear up for the upcoming season in 8-10 weeks. Tasks that are routinely done are servicing equipment, taking inventory and ordering of materials, start laying out use schedules and other small projects that always seem to be talked about when the season is upon us but haven't the time to start or complete them. With that being said; the hardest task that I face every year is the hiring of seasonal employees through the months of April and November.

Hiring employees, whether full or part time can be a difficult and tiresome process. It is especially hard to try to find qualified individuals to work a fulltime schedule and only be a part time employee for \$10-\$11 per hour. More times than not you end up hiring persons that are not knowledgeable of what it takes to maintain sports fields at the level we expect.

This can result into some much unneeded stress for you as the turf manager. You find yourself constantly training the individual and explaining the why's and how's of the job and end up feeling that you are taking steps backwards instead of moving forward. We all want to hit the ground running in the spring but that is not always the case and is dependent on the quality of the employees in your crew.

Continued on page 18



John Mascaro's Photo Quiz

John Mascaro is President of Turf-Tec International

Can you identify this sports turf problem?

Problem: Sand being applied to turf

Turfgrass Area: Stadium Field

Location: Boulder, Colorado

Grass Variety: Kentucky bluegrass blend

**Answer to John Mascaro's
Photo Quiz on Page 43**

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Another situation that I have encountered, which you see in a lot of park and recreation departments, is one in which the park supervisor or superintendent is responsible for the hiring of seasonal employees. In this instance they may become consumed with the idea of getting bodies in to do general park maintenance tasks instead of identifying the needs of each crew. As the sports turf manager this notion does not always help and makes things more difficult for you as user groups are knocking on the door to get out and use the fields. Let's face it though we are not going to the moon, but we still need able individuals to get the work done and understand the goals of the crew throughout the season.

The most important thing you can do as the sports turf manager, if you are not doing so now, is to lobby for yourself and let your supervisors allow you to hire your own seasonal crew. This is important because you actually get to meet the individual instead of getting a description from your supervisor. You know what you are looking for in an employee and this allows you to directly relay to them what your expectations are as the sports turf manager. You are going to be able to share your passion and ask them specific questions that may or may not be asked by your supervisor, who is hiring for the whole department instead of for your crew.

By doing your own hiring it gives you more credibility with your supervisor(s) and takes some of the burden off of them, especially in the spring when everything seems to happen at once. I guarantee they will appreciate your helping them in this process, especially when you are going to have work with this individual closely for the next 7-8 months. This process is also a great training aide for if and when you step into a supervisory position.

Being that good help is hard to find, the next question you have to ask yourself is who do I hire? I personally struggled with this early in my beginnings as a sports turf manager and eventually learned from my mistakes. I have found that former athletes often have a greater appreciation for what you are trying to put out for a product day after day. Even though they may not have played a sport on the field or fields you maintain but they understand the tendencies of athletes in respect to each sport.

For example, someone who may have played football but not baseball will have the understanding of why clay surfaces need to be maintained a certain way because of the footing action in pitching or running on a skinned area, just as a football player likes a tight turf-grass field for good firm footing to make quick cuts



The hiring of seasonal or temporary labor can be a tremendous benefit if managed properly. The employment of seasonal labor can save considerable funds while filling many labor shortage problems. It also provides the opportunity for employees to gain experience and be evaluated for future promotion to full time status.

The City of Bowie Parks Department had hired seasonal labor for many years but has only recently used this important employment tool to maximize its benefits. When this program was begun many years ago, it was mainly to provide summer employment for the City's youth. And since it employed unskilled labor the pay scale was minimum wage. This approach was changed 10 years ago because of a decline in interested applicants and the need to have employees later in the season. We created a two tiered pay system, one for summer help and one for temporary labor. We currently employ eight to ten seasonal workers.

The summer help employees work from June through August and are typically high school kids. The best of these are then recruited to return, and many work through college. They get an increase in pay every year they return. The temporary workers start in April and work through mid-December and are paid at the same rate as an entry level Parks employee but without benefits. Since we have changed our hiring procedures, we have had many more qualified applicants than positions. The program has worked so well that the current full time staff of 32 has seen half of the employees make the transition from seasonal or temporary labor to full time. And when a vacancy does occur, it is almost always filled by a temporary staff member negating the need to go through the outside hiring process.

Summer help crews work with various crews doing line trimming, refuse pick up, painting, planting flowers, and miscellaneous labor. Most of this work is performed by those that have never worked before and are learning what manual labor is all about. The work performed by temporary laborers would also consist of working with an assigned crew operating mowers, line trimming, working in and around storm water management ponds and channels, ball field maintenance, and the bulk leaf program. These individuals typically are more mature and have worked for our department for more than one season or have an employment history in grounds maintenance.

We have had excellent success hiring retired individuals who are looking for employment in the milder weather months. They tend to have excellent work habits and can bring a wealth of knowledge and skills from their respective former careers that can have a very positive influence on younger staff members. It has never been more important than the current time to maximize the efficient use of labor of any type and the use of seasonal employee's can give a grounds maintenance operation the required labor force to complete the many numerous and labor intense projects. ■

Ed Hall is superintendent of parks & grounds for the City of Bowie, MD.

during a game. The concept is the same even though they are two different surfaces and maintained entirely differently.

Having this understanding eliminates any communication barriers between you and the employee and allows you to have a conversation about playing conditions without physically being on same site as the employee. This also gives the employee an opportunity to trust their instincts in regards to what is a safe playable field, which brings me into my last point.

Last summer an individual asked what I do for a living and then asked what I do exactly. My answer seemed a bit bizarre even to me. I proceeded to tell them what I don't do, which was mow, paint lines, drag skinned areas, or clay work; in other words what I like to call the "glory" stuff that the user groups and fans see. I labeled myself of more of a behind the scenes person, i.e. fixing irrigation problems, cultivation practices, trimming fence lines, and hand mowing. This individual thought I was crazy because I was the one doing the "grunt work" while my crew was out doing the fun stuff.

Maybe he was right but there is a method to my madness. As each employee in a crew becomes familiar and comfortable with any task they begin to take ownership in that task especially when they start getting compliments, and not just from the sports turf manager. That is when you see the pride and passion

begin as the season moves on and soon after that they start calling it their mower or infield groomer and you're left doing the behind the scenes tasks. This allows you, however, to focus on the big picture of your facility and to plan projects and upgrades that you may want to do knowing that the daily tasks are getting done to your standards. This helps you become a better manager and provides the skills necessary to become an effective manager.

Hopefully most of you are doing a lot of these but for those who are not you need to get out and pound the pavement some and be an advocate for your facility and start early. [Ed's note: Rick was expecting this to run in the March issue, not April!] We have enough to worry about as it is, we don't need to add to the chaos by procrastinating the process of finding good help.

Lastly, to reiterate one point made earlier, let your crew members take part in the glory tasks as to allow yourself to plan and manage your facility. Remember, you can always tell who the sports turf manager is because he or she is the one watering the skinned area; that is one job my crew will never take away from me. ■

Rick Peruzzi, CSFM is the sports turf manager for the City of South Portland, ME.

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WHAT AN INCREDIBLE OPPORTUNITY we have! As the world struggles through a rocky economic landscape we simultaneously wrestle with the environmental issues that challenge the status quo of the industrial age. Here in the 21st century we’ve come face to face with the realities of our misguided trajectory:

- the reckless disregard for the ecosystems that define Earth
- a mistaken belief in the biosphere’s ability to absorb and dilute unlimited wastes
- an entire civilization unsustainably powered by dirty fossil fuels.

A new era brings the promise of a new paradigm. The quest for cleaner, “greener” ways has become a mainstream topic. People around the world agree that our children deserve nothing less than the clean air and water of a healthy planet, teeming with the robust diversity of life. Human ingenuity can pave the way to that future and stimulate a new innovation-driven economy based on sustainability and balanced with the planet’s natural processes. Rip Van Winkle may not realize it, but the science and political wills are emerging and the work is underway. It’s an auspicious time for sports turf managers to secure our position in this bright green future.

Natural grass is the ideal recreational surface and, when appropriately managed, affords many environmental benefits like cooling and oxygenating the air and filtering water. We turf managers need to recognize our own roles within the environmental movement. Those of us who maintain the green space necessary for humankind’s well-being belong on the front lines of this movement, alongside wind turbine installers, conser-

vation officers, recycling staff, solar panel technicians and others working today to shape tomorrow.

As spectators we’d be pushed aside. As participants we’re in the game as green leaders for a greener future. We need to collectively embrace this identity and project this image to a society that benefits from our diligence but is too often unaware of our indispensable contributions.

The Ecoflag

I am very pleased to be associated with an organization that is leading the effort to link sports and environmental stewardship. The Global Sports Alliance (GSA) is an official partner of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). Our mission is to promote environmental awareness and action in the world of sports. The GSA was established in Japan in 1999 by Dr. Tatsuo Okada and has since spread around the world. Our symbol, the ecoflag, is currently flying in 54 countries, which includes the participation of GSA-USA. Under the leadership of President Jane Poynter, GSA-USA is growing, with teams now in several US locations.

Since its inception the GSA has been primarily an effort driven by athletes, teams, coaches and sporting goods manufacturers. The significance of their involvement is obvious. I’m honored to serve as the team captain of GSA-New York and to bring the perspective of a facilities manager to the organization. As sports venue managers and decision-makers we wield tremendous influence to effect environmental change. The GSA would warmly welcome other athletic field professionals to join in our international initiative.



Top: Trotta speaks with UNEP Executive Director Achim Steiner at UN headquarters.

Bottom: GSA-NY sponsors a Great American Cleanup event.