

Minner's understandable and well-delivered words, offered a wealth of information regarding such diverse turf topics as seeding and nitrogen application rates in high-traffic areas; growth outcomes of various seed pre-germination methods; fading differences among paints; field evaluation using the STMA Playing Conditions Index (PCI); sod installment preparation and turf maintenance; and fertility establishment trials.

The tour definitely registered with Dennis Martin, an attendee who came to Ames from Blue Valley, KS, where he works for the school district.

"This is the first turf conference I've been to, and my boss had me come up to try to learn some things that I could take back and we could apply to improve our fields," said Martin. "I just went on Dr. Minner's turf tour, and really learned a lot. Sure, I might not understand exactly what's going on when something is making the grass look bad, but now I can at least say, 'OK, if the grass looks this way, it really is a problem and really does need to be taken care of.'"

For many other attendees, another tour was the main draw of day one. Led by Mike Andresen, CSFM, STMA's past president and Iowa State's Athletic Turf Manager, dozens worked up a sweat and logged a few miles while visiting the university's soccer complex, softball complex, cross country course, and Jack Trice Stadium. Putting up with the heat was well worth it for Warren Stropes of River City Turf, who called the stadium's football field "absolutely amazing."

While not checking out the turf work of Minner or Andresen, attendees had nearly 8 hours to check out Wednesday's trade show, which included 50 distributors of all types and sizes.

As one of the largest exhibitors, Toro had its newest equipment on display. Numerous attendees were interested in the Infield Pro 5040, an infield maintenance machine whose 25 attachments representative Dale Getz was more than happy to display. From its lip broom to its scarifier bar, Getz showed how every attachment could be detached or installed easily by one man, serving TORO's "overall goal to increase productivity."



» ATTENDEES and exhibitors braved the heat to talk shop.

A similar goal was offered by Rain Bird's Brent Neubauer, who remarked that efficiency is just as much about positively impacting the environment through "the intelligent use of water" as about saving money. Neubauer stressed that Rain Bird aims to help its clients do both, currently offering free water usage audits and advice on how to make existing systems more efficient without the high cost of a completely new system.

KeyPlex's Gerald O'Connor made clear that water conservation is not the only way those in the turf trade are trying to show the environment some love. In a nutshell, he explained that KeyPlex's products boost turf growth, health, and vigor by delivering a blend of secondary and micronutrients which elicit the production of a plant's natural defensive proteins. And, since the blend is biodegradable, O'Connor emphasized that KeyPlex offers "a socially conscious product to the community," allowing for great-looking turf without potentially harmful fungicides and pesticides.

While the message of efficient and environmentally friendly turf technology was echoed by virtually all trade show attendees (and definitely registered with STMA members, many of whom reported now operating under tighter financial budgets and water restrictions) the conference's first day ended with everyone in agreement: the time had come to kick back, cool off, and have some fun.

Although a tasty barbecue, cold beer, and (very gradually) falling temperatures made for a relaxing atmosphere, a softball game heated a number of members right back up. The Iowa and Minnesota chapters continued their long-standing Chapter Clash with Minnesota prevailing 19-16 after the game was tied entering the ninth inning. The highly competitive yet sportsmanlike matchup displayed the quality of both Dr. Minner's turf and STMA members' competitive spirit.

Any bruised arms, elbows, or egos produced by the game were forgotten by Thursday morning, as attendees convened for coffee in Iowa State's conference center, a location offering the highly valued creature comforts of flushable toilets and air-conditioning. The highest value, however, was produced by the diverse educational sessions from which attendees could pick and choose.

One of the most notable among these was "Turfgrass 101," a presentation covering turf selection, mowing, fertilization, irrigation, and disease and pest control. The lecture was delivered by Dr. Andrew McNitt, associate professor of soil science and turfgrass at Penn State University and nationally renowned synthetic expert. He offered STMA members a broader look not only at management practices of standard grass but also at the advantages and disadvantages of synthetic athletic surfaces.

McNitt said, "In hard economic times, STMA is bringing the conference to the membership, saving them money while still exposing them to the information and expertise that is found at the national conference." While proving his own expertise, McNitt offered information to help every type of field manager improve his everyday operations.

Both the turf and synthetic break-out sessions did the same, as panelists took practical questions from attendees. A major focus was on doing more with less, as turf managers from throughout the Midwest attested to the budget cuts that tough economic times have created.

One of the most notable suggestions was adhering to Minner's "field within a field" concept, which states that different areas within a field are unique and call for unique and disparate treatments (including seeding, fertilizer, and aeration), and thus allows managers operating under tough budget constraints to commit their resources to the most important or damaged parts of their most important fields.

Another sound piece of advice came from Mike Tarantino, a panelist who, as field manager for San Diego's K-12 school district, recently lost 41 out of 165 personnel and \$800,000 of his budget. As he reminded the audience, "You guys are taking care of the public's first view of that school, and that's something you need to always remember."

In full agreement, Minner stressed that field managers need to demonstrate the cost-effectiveness of how they use their resources and just how great a field can look when it receives the maximum amount of them. To stress the value of these resources, Minner added that managers should also "have a dog—a really bad field." With both ends of the turf quality spectrum on display, Minner's last recommendation was for attendees to show on paper, in dollars and cents, just what it would take to bring every field to the level of quality they desire. Doing this, of course, takes professional-level communication, an ability the importance of which Andresen hoped would be conveyed to every attendee.

In fact for Andresen, the conference's chief purpose was to bring national conference-level speakers and the level of high-

quality information and knowledge they offer to the regional school and park district members who might not be able to fit a trip to Florida into their budget. "We want to bring a more professional mindset to our non-professional membership," Andresen said. "The most important part of this is helping them know how to really excel at the soft skills, the communication skills."

This was no more evident than at Thursday's "Communicating with coaches, user groups, administrators, and other nefarious characters" session. Headed by Dale Getz, former head turf manager at the University of Notre Dame, this SRO-only session offered advice on how better communication can improve the professionalism, and perhaps even the budgets and fields, of any and all turf managers.

Getz said, "The greatest problem of communication is the illusion that it has been accomplished," a quote borrowed from George Bernard Shaw. "Things can be interpreted very differently," he said, "because we all process information in our own way." He stressed that clarity is really the key to communication, and that turf managers "need to make sure they discover and understand what customers [including one's supervisor, every coach, and taxpayers] expect and they understand what economic resources are required to meet those expectations; it's vital for both sides to communicate that."

Delving deeper, Getz said, "You didn't go into the turf grass management business to be a salesman, but you really have to be, because managing your user groups and selling your expertise, what you can do, and your vision is actually the most important part of what you do in this business. So let them know you're passionate about managing those fields and that you really want to work with your user groups in order to provide them with the best possible surfaces to play on."

Drawing on his own experience at South Bend, Getz said the best way to demonstrate one's passion is to offer a vision, both on paper and in reality. He recalled that Notre Dame's coaches loved his monthly newsletter, which included a brief update on his turf management practices, and that administrators were more willing to work with him thanks to the 3-year plan—with

every intended expenditure detailed—that he offered them from day one. Getz added that showcasing the Fighting Irish's football field, his top priority, was key to illustrating his "line of sight" and proving just what he and his staff could do with no expense spared.

Larry DiVito's led the afternoon session on managing the construction of the Washington Nationals' new stadium field a few years ago, and his present experience as the head groundskeeper for the Minnesota Twins as their new park is being built.

Jeff McQueen, a sports turf manager in the Branson (MO) school district, said it well. "The regional conference is a great concept, especially from an economic standpoint. "For me, networking is really the most critical aspect. The trade show is very important because it offers information on where to get [equipment, fertilizer, seed, etc.], and being around so many peers offers the opportunity to find out what they are doing and what the best practices are. Add the various educational sessions from the experts, and coming here is basically all about how to become a better sports turf manager."

Yes, many of the region's members would surely like to attend STMA's national conference, scheduled for next January at Disney's Coronado Springs Resort in Orlando, when the Midwest's temperatures hit the teens in January. But as attendees' comments made clear, Ames offered an equally educational opportunity for less money.

The STMA Chapter Relations Committee is developing an "Interest Form" for chapters to submit if they are interested in STMA hosting a regional event in their area next year. See www.stma.org for more information.

The STMA Midwest Regional Conference was generously supported by sponsorships from Rain Bird Corp.; World Class Athletic Surfaces; Bush Sports Turf; Hunter Industries; JRK Seed & Turf Supply; Kromer, Co. LLC; Newstripe, Inc.; The Toro Company; and Commercial Turf & Tractor. ■

Steve Adams is a freelance writer and graduate student at Iowa State's Greenlee School of Journalism.

SAFE scholarship applications now being accepted

In 1999, the STMA Board created The Foundation for Safer Athletic Field Environments (SAFE) to provide research, educational programs, and scholarships geared to sports field specific endeavors. Each year, top students from sports turf and other turfgrass programs across the country vie for these prestigious awards. The Scholarship Application is available at www.STMA.org.

The level of scholarship funding has steadily increased since the scholarship programs inception, and for 2008 we awarded \$12,500 to eight recipients in two-year, four-year, and graduate level categories. This brings the total scholarships awarded to more than \$125,000. No recipient receives less than \$1,000 and the committee likes to help as many students as possible with the money they are authorized to distribute.

Scholarships may be used for tuition, books, computers, software, or other academic expenses approved by the SAFE Foundation.

A panel of judges independently scores each entry based on students' academic preparation, experience in the sports turf management industry, professional goals, extracurricular activities, and input from academic advisors and employers. Each applicant also must write an essay describing his or her background and career aspirations within the industry.

The deadline to submit all SAFE Scholarship materials is October 15, 2009. Winners will be announced in November and will subsequently be recognized during the Annual Awards Banquet January 15, 2010 at the 21st Annual STMA Conference and Exhibition in Lake Buena Vista, FL. ■

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Editor's Note: Congratulations to STMA's 32nd chapter, the Oregon STMA!

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Chesapeake Chapter STMA (formerly Mid-Atlantic Athletic Field Managers Organization – MAFMO Chapter STMA): www.ccstma.org.

Colorado Sports Turf Managers Association: www.cstma.org.

Florida #1 Chapter: 954/782-2748

Gateway Chapter Sports Turf Managers Association: www.gatewaystma.org.

Georgia Sports Turf Managers Association: www.gstma.org.

The Greater L.A. Basin Chapter of the Sports Turf Managers Association: www.stmalabasin.com.

Illinois Chapter STMA: 847/263-7603.

Intermountain Chapter of the Sports Turf Managers Association: www.imstma.org.

Iowa Sports Turf Managers Association: www.iowaturfgrass.org.

Keystone Athletic Field Managers Org. (KAFMO/STMA): www.kafmo.org.

Kentucky Sports Turf Managers Association: www.kystma.org.

Michigan Sports Turf Managers Association (MISTMA): www.mistma.org.

Minnesota Chapter STMA: www.mstma.com.

MO-KAN Sports Turf Managers Association: www.mokanstma.com.

New England STMA (NESTMA): www.nestma.org.

Nebraska Sports Turf Managers Association: 402/441-4425.

North Carolina Chapter of STMA: www.ncsportsturf.org.

North Florida STMA Chapter: 850/580-4026.

Northern California STMA: www.norcalstma.org.

Ozarks STMA: www.ozarksstma.org.

Sports Turf Managers of New York: www.stmony.org.

Sports Field Managers Association of New Jersey: www.sfmnj.org.

Ohio Sports Turf Managers Association (OSTMA): www.ostma.org.

Oregon STMA Chapter: 503/953-9406

Pacific Northwest Sports Turf Managers Association: www.pnwstma.org.

Southern California Chapter: www.socalstma.com.

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Texas Sports Turf Managers Association: 866/897-8621.

Tennessee Valley Sports Turf Managers Association (TVSTMA): www.tvstma.com.

Virginia Sports Turf Managers Association: www.vstma.org.

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Remembering Coach Ed Thomas

THIS IS A SAD STORY FOR ME TO TELL but it helps to ease my mind here in Iowa and to remind us of the many good friends we have in the sports turf industry.

I had run to my car seeking cover from a cloudburst one morning in late June when I took a call from Joe Wagner. The news that Coach Ed Thomas had died from an act of violence that morning left me dripping in many ways.

Several of the patrons at the STMA Regional event that was to begin that day in Ames had come to know Coach Thomas over the past year and it was comforting to be with so many friends during that troubling time. There has been plenty of national coverage and you can just search the web for Coach Ed Thomas to find several well written articles about Ed's relationship with many different people on and off the football field. Sports Illustrated's cover story in the July 6, 2009 issue is the best one I've read.

I want to tell you more about Coach Thomas as a sports turf manager. Actually if you rolled the athletic director, head football coach, and sports turf manager all into one that was Ed Thomas. Two years ago Pat Brown from Tender Lawn Care asked me to meet on the football field at Parkersburg before the tornado because "the coach" wanted to have someone look over the field. I have met with many coaches and grounds managers in this capacity before but this one would change every-

thing. The big man lumbered across the field and as we spoke it was clear that he loved football and the community of people it connected him with. He beamed with pride as I told him the field was already in pretty good shape compared to what I normally am called out to visit; it was clear that he was a self taught groundskeeper that took a great deal of pride in the appearance and safety of the field. Then he asked "How do we get to the next level?"

That's all I needed to hear; we set out a plan for fall renovation that would make this the best high school surface in the state. But after May 25, 2008 the same question was before us—"How to get from where we are to where we want to be?"

That day an F5 tornado leveled most of the Parkersburg community and the high school. A day after the tornado Coach Thomas crawled into the rubble to retrieve the desk blotter that had all his contacts scribbled on it; the authorities threatened to arrest him if he tried it again. I was blessed

to hear his encouraging words about rebuilding his community, starting with the football field and facility. The field suddenly took on a whole new meaning as it was a rallying point during a time of such despair. The Iowa STMA Chapter, along with the generous donations of time, labor, and supplies from several commercial distributors, was proud to help repair the field and more importantly, be coached by one of the greatest.

It has been just over a year since the tornado and only a month since Coach departed and we are still trying to find a way to keep marching, because that is what he would have wanted.

Coach loved divot mix because it was something that he and his players could do with limited resources and it really made a difference; three buckets he mixed are still in the

shed and no one has the heart to move them. He faithfully mowed and watered the field and could not walk by a weed without hand pulling it. He must have gotten tired of pulling weeds because he spot sprayed the field and ended up making about 15 burned areas on the field. Coach was beside himself for such a blunder and we couldn't wait to rib him a little about it. That never happened and when Joe and I were on the field at the funeral all the spots had already been filled. It was the first time that I experienced damaged turf on a foot-

ball field that I didn't want to repair... somehow we didn't want his marks to go away.

Tony Senio, Iowa Chapter Board of Directors, is organizing a divot mix and turf plugging day to repair all but one of Coach's spots. Usually hand plugging is designated for someone on the crew that is in the doghouse but this time it will be an honor to redistribute a few parcels on the sacred acre.

Now that coach has left the "sacred acre" for the Promised Land we find ourselves asking "how do we get to the next level not only on the field but in life?" He would tell us to hold onto our vision and let others become part of our determination. Coach's son Aaron and I had stood together on Parkersburg's field when his father addressed the crowd a year after the tornado and Aaron told me that football and this field was part of making the community feel normal again. I can't wait to stand on the field again with a man named Thomas. ■



» COACH ED THOMAS, center, working with Iowa STMA members to renovate his football field following the May 2008 tornado.

Q&A



BY DR. DAVID MINNER

Professor, Iowa State University

Questions?

Send them to
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