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David Pinsonneault, CSFM, CPRP, the new President of the Sports Turf Managers Association, has been described 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; and someone who went far beyond the standard expectations of a job to produce results that benefitted his colleagues and the profession as a whole.





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From the Sidelines

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Texas A&M sells Kyle Field turf during renovation

When the Texas A&M Aggies moved from the Big 12 to the Southeastern Conference in 2012 the powers that be decided it was time to enlarge venerable Kyle Field to accommodate more than 102,000 12th men on football Saturdays. The renovation plans included dropping the playing surface 8 feet and pushing it south 16 feet to add more seats.

The two-phase, 3-year project wasn't about to force the Aggies to move their home games though, not with Heisman Trophy winner Johnny "Football" Manziel running the show at quarterback.

So within hours of the end of last season's final home game, the 57,000 square feet of bermudagrass turf was pulled out in a hurry; the contractors were waiting to get their cranes and other heavy machinery inside the walls of Kyle Field to get to work.

Back in the spring of 2013, Leo Goertz, A&M's athletic fields maintenance manager, and his colleagues had thought that Aggie fans might be interested in owning a piece of history, namely some sod from Kyle Field that they could re-plant in their yard or otherwise keep growing. After receiving the go-ahead from those same powers that be, Leo and his guys figured out how much sod they would have to sell to pay for its removal and associated costs. They knew there wasn't a guarantee that the field would be in terrific condition so they ended up deciding they could get 125 pallets of viable sod from the field.

Goertz & Company decided on 110 pallets at \$400 each plus 1,000 blocks at \$20 apiece, all the while wondering how much demand there really might be. Three weeks before the last home game the announcement of Kyle Field turf for sale was made on a Sunday night; Goertz said the word went viral via Facebook and Twitter. The next morning the sale began online at 8 am, and half the pallets were sold by noon, the rest by the end of the week.

Being a fan of "Pawn Stars," Goertz figured fans might need to prove the authenticity of their piece of Aggie history, so he signed 1,500 certificates to provide such proof. "Everyone around here was accusing me of 'selling grass' and competing with drug lords," he laughed.

The sod removal began at 8:30 pm after the final home contest and was completely stripped out by 9:30 am the next morning. Goertz said it was taken to a parking lot for a day and buyers were instructed to pick up their pallet(s) by noon the next day. "There was a long line that morning; we had to have the police here to keep it organized," Goertz said. "People showed up in 18-wheelers, pickup trucks and even one Escalade. We had two lines with forklifts to load everyone up with the 2,000-pound pallets.

"One guy in an 18-wheeler from Houston bought five pallets, and asked if we had any more. After everyone had picked up, we had some left over so he had the truck turn around and bought 10 more. He said he would have bought the whole field if given the chance," Goertz said. "He sent me a photo later showing how he had layed out his sod around his house.

"We also produced a grow sheet to help the buyers keep the bermudagrass growing," he says. "It includes the web address of the turf department here. We had been hammered by emails asking where to plant the grass, etc., and we wanted to provide the right information, like letting buyers know that the bermuda will go brown in winter but green back up in spring."

See photos on page 47. ■

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President's Message

David J. Pinsonneault, CSFM, CPRP

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Make a difference in the New Year

As the calendar turned into 2014 many of us have already dealt with heavy snow and single digit temperatures. In fact, 49 out of the 50 states have recorded some amount of snowfall. These weather patterns will definitely have an effect on our athletic fields as we prepare for the spring season. In Lexington, MA our challenge is not only to have the athletic fields ready in early spring, but also the Battle Green where Patriot's Day is celebrated.

Some of us have already begun the spring season and are making a difference by providing safe, playable fields for college softball and baseball. These sports turf managers are using new techniques or tried and true practices to ensure the games go on and the athletes can enjoy and compete without worry. Some of these sports turf managers learned their new ideas or confirmed their current maintenance practices by attending the 2014 STMA Conference in San Antonio. They took advantage of the opportunity to learn from and share ideas with the great selection of speakers, great topics, great networking opportunities and a chance to visit with many commercial members. There were a large number of attendees with a full trade show floor and the site was outstanding. Attending the STMA Conference is a great way to begin the New Year and a great way to recharge and prepare for the upcoming season.

Many of us will face challenges in 2014 by dealing with reduced budgets, reduced staff, new regulations and additional use. That said, this is a resilient group of professionals. We will find a way to do things differently to still provide safe, playable fields. We will find a way to continue to be the recognized leader in the sports turf industry.

Take advantage of the opportunity to form partnerships and promote what you do, implement new maintenance practices and share equipment and knowledge. Challenge yourself this year to do one thing that will help you to make a difference for your athletic fields and for your user groups. Whether school, park and rec or pro, we can all improve upon what we do so that we enhance the experiences of those who use our facilities. Add a maintenance practice that promotes better grass growth, use a new chalk machine to put down a cleaner crisper line, rake a field that you have not been able to before or begin an overseeding program to keep up your turf density. One of the best things about this profession is that a school district sports turf manager and a pro stadium sports turf manager can talk the same language and learn from each other.

Another way to make a difference is to become involved in STMA. This is your association. You can share your ideas or take in someone else's idea. We are in the process of putting together committees for 2014. These dedicated volunteers will be working on ways to help you do your job. Your 2014 Board of Directors is also committed to making a difference for members. I would like to thank outgoing Board members Rene Asprion, Troy Smith, CSFM and Debbie Kneeshaw for their dedication in strengthening the profession. I would also like to welcome the new Board members Brad Jakubowski, Sarah Martin, CSFM and Doug Schattinger who together with the remaining Board and incredible staff will keep focused on the Strategic Plan and work diligently to enhance your member experience. This association sets itself apart from others by keeping a positive outlook and moving in a forward direction.

Continued on page 45



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

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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.