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On the cover:

An “action” shot from the re-surfacing of FedEx Stadium, Washington, DC, completed early last November. Carolina Green Corp., Indian Trail, NC completed the project by installing new, custom-grown sod grown on plastic. Photo courtesy of Carolina Green Corp.

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From the Sidelines

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@twits #whocares*

I am a late adapter to new technology. I didn't buy a cell phone until my wife was well into her first pregnancy. I realized how bad I'd look if there was a problem and I, most likely three-putting a green at the time, was unreachable. And I recall brushing off texting early on: what a waste of time, I thought; why not just make the call? Most recently I have been shaking my head at friends who constantly have their devices in hand, checking an updated score or searching for the nearest men's room.

But just as the cell phone itself quickly became invaluable, of course I now text, especially with my kids. No more waiting for the bus; a quick message from my daughter tells me she is close and I arrive at the bottom of the hill just as the bus pulls up. High school football game a blowout at the start of 4th quarter? Text the teenagers to meet me at the car (they hate that because the game is really a reason to socialize). Not to mention how exchanging texts with the wife can ease the communication process—information only, no emotion!

So far I have survived without a smart phone and data plan; call me the omega man. Working from a home office with limited road time, I can get away with it. Besides, the oldest kid has an iPhone so I can always ask him to find something out if necessary (and yes, he paid half the cost of the phone and shells out monthly for the data plan so thanks for not going there on my parenting).

Enter Twitter. When it was introduced I ignored it as a fad. What important can you say in 140 characters? A lot, allegedly, as now everyone from presidents to rappers compete to see who can attract more followers. I had two questions when a previous boss requested that I sign up for an account so I could tweet on sports turf issues. If you don't have followers, who sees your tweets? And aren't sports turf managers busy folks who shouldn't be bothered with more digital noise deemed important by just me?

But again I've come around albeit late to the game. Here are some tweets you might have seen from me if I'd bothered to post them:

- "Txting while driving sure is risk—ah, I just rear-ended a guy! #whatadumba**!"
- "Viagra commercials funny. Guy can start a fire with sand and corkscrew but can't . . . #nowonder mydaughterwon'twatchfootball"
- "Cell phone use on planes! Say it ain't so! #ratherbepokedinfacewithsharpstick"
- "2 million pickup trucks sold in US this year mostly to haul groceries. #urnotjohnwayne"
- "Read novel titled 'Schroder' w/ protagonist named Eric Schroder. Character was an idiot"
- "@college basketball coaches. Sit down and let 'em play! #yourfancysuitisempty"
- "Dads talking cooking. 'roasted carrots & beets w/ sheep's milk feta blah blah.' #makesme-wannabarf"

So yeah, I'm tweeting now; please follow me, as well as Green Media editors John Kmitta and Steve Noe, on Twitter's @GreenMediaMags for news of interest to those in the Green Industry.

*The views expressed in this column are entirely those of the author and have no connection to the STMA, Green Media or the author's spouse. ■

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The Official Publication Of The Sports Turf
Managers Association

SportsTurf

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SportsTurf (ISSN 1061-687X) (USPS 000-292) (Reg. U.S. Pat. & T.M. Off.) is published monthly by Specialty Information Media at 1030 W. Higgins Road, Suite 230, Park Ridge, IL 60068. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Sportsturf, PO Box 4290, Port Jervis, NY 12771. For subscription information and requests, call Subscription Services at (845) 856-2229. Subscription rates: 1 year, \$40 US & Poss.; 2 years, \$65 US & Poss.; 1 year, \$65 Canada/Foreign Surface, 1 year, \$130 Airmail. All subscriptions are payable in advance in US funds. Send payments to Sportsturf, PO Box 4290, Port Jervis, NY 12771. Phone: (845) 856-2229. Fax: (845) 856-5822. Single copies or back issues, \$8 each US/Canada; \$12 Foreign. Periodicals postage paid at Park Ridge, IL and additional mailing offices. COPYRIGHT 2014, SportsTurf. Material may not be reproduced or photocopied in any form without the written permission of the publisher.

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President's Message

Dr. Mike Goatley

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Plan ahead to take advantage of Conference opportunities

The annual conference and exhibition is upon us and I hope many of you can join us in San Antonio very soon. As an attendee, I advise you to come to conference with a plan to get the most out of your experience. Do a little pre-conference homework and make a note of the questions that you absolutely hope to get answered. The presenters, the exhibitors, and your peers are all valuable sources of information. What are your “must see” educational sessions?

Scout the exhibition schedule and locations of specific vendors with products or services that could better you and your facility. Be sure to take advantage of all the fellowship offerings available at our annual meeting, networking sessions, welcome reception, and awards banquet. All of these events provide opportunities to make new friends and professional colleagues for a lifetime. And also be sure to find time somewhere to do a little exploring of San Antonio, one of the prettiest cities in America, full of history and great culture. The 2014 Conference and Exhibition promises to be another home run for our association.

I want every member to know that it has been an honor and a privilege to serve as your President for the past 2 years. This association is poised for continued growth as the need for quality, safe playing surfaces for athletes of all ages rises. Thanks to all of the Board members with whom I have worked since 2008; there is no better volunteer leadership anywhere. My thanks to previous Boards that paved the way for the future by developing outstanding strategic plans and making sound financial planning decisions that have provided this and future Boards the opportunities for new initiatives. I had the opportunity to learn and grow from some outstanding Presidents (all CSFM's) during my tenure on the Board: Mike Andresen, Abby McNeal, Chris Calcaterra, and Troy Smith. Each possessed unique and effective leadership qualities and they continue to lead by their examples today. Our CEO, Kim Heck, is one of the best things to ever happen to STMA. Kim has surrounded herself with a wonderful staff that allows her to efficiently and effectively advise the Board. She provides guidance and recommendations, but always reminds the Board of their responsibilities on behalf of their membership. Finally, you will be glad to know that the best is yet to come for STMA. David Pinsonneault, CSFM, is a natural leader and one of the nicest people I have met in the business; those qualities bode well for STMA for 2014.

Kim and I have been doing a countdown on the “President's Messages” for at least 6 months now. Trying to write something of value that might also hold your attention has been both a challenge AND a joy. Thanks to my wife, Lisa, for her regular editing of my writing efforts and thanks to you for putting up with 2 years of my ramblings! Most of all, thanks for your support, suggestions, and friendship as a whole. All the best to you for 2014. ■

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mike Goatley". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.



Contracting services: how to successfully develop productive partnerships

In recent years, most parks and recreation agencies have had to deal with the economic realities of reduced revenue and higher personnel costs. On the recreation side of the house, program fees and charges can be revised and/or programs can be eliminated/given to other service providers to close budget shortfalls. However on the parks side, which is charged with maintaining the amenities, facilities, and landscape, raising additional revenue can be problematic. As a result, many agencies are either considering or have started to contract for maintenance services.

Contracting for maintenance services, a concept that many times replaces department employees with con-

The quality of service provided by a contractor is paramount to any success. The contract needs to clearly state your quality standards so that you get what you want.

tract employees, is usually looked at as being “bad” or something that will not provide the same level of service. However in our new economic reality, contracting may be something that we have no choice other than to accept. If that is the case, there are some lessons learned that can help to make contracting successful.

Contracts that are professional services contracts, where negotiation is possible, are more successful than “low bid” contracts. Experience shows that a low bid contract can end up costing more through change orders and other extra work than a contract that allows for ongoing negotiation. Price is important; however if it is the only criteria you are able to look at, you will probably end up spending more in the long run.

The quality of service provided by a contractor is paramount to any success. The contract needs to clearly state your quality standards so that you get what you want. Do not beat around the bush: if you want your turf to be “weed free”, then write your standards that way. Time is not something we are blessed with these days and spending additional time trying to haggle over agreement on a standard is time you do not have. Standards need to be written in as simply and directly as possible, so that a 12-year old child could say, “Yes it does or does not meet standards.”

QUALITY OUTCOMES IS THE GOAL

Standards for quality should be written as “outcomes” and not based on a performance that you have to count. You want to let the contractor know what you want: weed free turf. You don’t want to direct the contractor on how to make the turf weed free or you will be treating the contractor more like an employee and you will have to spend time making sure they do what you told them to do.

The relationship between the contractor and the agency needs to be written into the contract as that of a partnership where the contractor and agency have a shared interest in maintaining the landscape. One of the arguments against contracting is the belief that a contractor will not care as much as an agency employee. If the contract is an “us versus them” contract, that will be true. If the contract allows for incentives and collaborations, and extensions or options based on a partnership, the contractor will look at the contract as a longer term investment and will hopefully bring skills other than burying the agency in change orders. The City of Rosville uses both collaborations and extensions as methods of showing their long term commitment to their partners. In return this commitment provides their partner with a level of comfort that enables them to invest in both people and equipment that will make them more

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productive and efficient. This commitment has led to the lowering of contract costs over time for the City of Roseville and has also resulted in a sense of ownership within the employees of their partners due to the numerous years that they have spent maintaining portions of Roseville parks and streetscapes. The City of Brentwood regularly meets with contractors to see if there are improvements that can be made in the contract. The intent is to get a great partnership that will last over time to the benefit of both partners.

Quality assurance is critical to the success of any contract and true partnership. The City of Roseville and the City of Brentwood both use the quality assurance process to assist in building relationships and partnerships between their staff members and the staff members of their private partners. Quality assurance inspections are necessary and can be very time consuming but are critical. If you do not do regular inspections, how do you know if your partner is meeting the standards you require? The quality assurance inspection should be a tool used to ensure that your partner is achieving their contractual obligations but can also be a valuable tool that builds the concept that “we” are maintaining this area for “our” residents and the inspection is just another tool that your partner can use in their scheduling, planning, and prioritizing. To simplify the process and reduce paperwork, inspections can be exception based, meaning that unless indicated otherwise, the site meets standard. This requires that the only information you need to identify relates to what does not meet standard. Additionally, the standards should have only two measurements: meets standard and does not meet standard. Measurements such as “needs to improve” only add additional time and misinterpretation between the contractor and the agency. Remember, friends are friends and business is business. When done properly your quality assurance inspections can meet your contractual compliance needs while enhancing the sense of partnership for both entities.

A comprehensive background check of any prospective contractor is important so that you know what they can do in like environments. Is the company fiscally solid? Do they have references that you can check where they do work similar to what you are asking for? Do they use technology and can



they be flexible when necessary? Are they responsive to requests, especially in emergency situations? What is their quality control plan that will provide you a level of comfort that they are paying attention to the details you need? How do they resolve differences with they disagree on the terms of a contract? How did they do in the interview (yes, a formal interview should be a part of your process and you should request that they bring the staff to the interview that will be overseeing your contract). Having the comfort level that a company understands your expectations and can deliver the maintenance you expect is more than just a price consideration.

REMEMBER THE TRUE CUSTOMER

Customer service is many times a misunderstood component of maintenance contracts. Though it is important for the contractor and agency to provide excellent customer service to each other throughout the contract, the real customers of both the contractor and the agency are the citizens of the community. Many times we lose track that the citizens who pay the taxes and/or assessments, the very ones who actually use the facilities and landscape areas, are the customer. A contract should in take into consideration the wishes of the community related to standards and expectations as the agency is just the administrator of the contract when the citizens are providing the funding for the maintenance. Having users understand what they should expect from a maintenance standpoint helps the agency keep the contractor on track and builds on the partnership that should be one of the guiding principles of the contract. The quality of a contract is what the citizens and users want and expect. Truth be told, they care very little how you get there.

Finally, a contract needs to have corrective measures to insure that the work is done to the level the agency expects. Once a situation has been identified as not meeting

