

You can't Tivo this stuff

You asked for advice and presented many challenging questions over the years... so now it's my turn to ask a question in the form of sound advice.

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Did you attend the 15-19 January 2008 STMA Conference in Phoenix?

Good for you if you did and for the rest, here's a small part of what you missed. We hope to see you next year in San Jose, CA.

I'm on the plane trying to process new ideas gathered at the show into action items for my short and long term goals. Just a little Board of Directors' inside humor since CEO Kim Heck constantly shapes our thinking and vision into action and results. This absent-minded professor has personally grown in many ways from working with this board and its leaders. I would also like to thank all of you who have served on the conference education committee and to those who have given of yourself through your ideas, speaking talents, and commitment to spreading the good word about the sporting fields and their managers that we so dearly care about.

Please join me in welcoming Dr. Michael Goatley, Virginia Polytechnic Institute, as the academic representative on the STMA Board of Directors. Mike has the passion, energy, and talent to communicate at any level with a wide variety of sports field managers. With new leadership comes new opportunity; and it is time to share your ideas with your new Conference Education subcommittee chairman by making a submittal for the 2009 STMA Conference in San Jose. The call for presentations will be posted on the STMA website in February with a closing date of 1 April 2008 for the 2009 conference. Nearly 85% of the conference speakers are selected from the presentation submittals.

With 350 booths and more than 1850 combined participants and exhibitors, the STMA Conference is the largest trade show in North America dedicated specifically to managing athletic fields. Every conceivable product and type of equipment used to manage natural and synthetic fields is displayed at the show.

Chris Ralston, head groundskeeper for the Lake Elsinore Storm, teamed up with college and Major League Baseball turf managers to demonstrate mound building techniques on the trade show floor. They built the mound from top to bottom in about 45 minutes using Hilltopper donated by Stabilizer Solutions, Inc. Craig Karges gave an amazing blend of entertainment, message, and motivation. The audience used their minds to move individual pendulums and they were really freaked out when he levitated objects right before their eyes.

On the education side there were more than 50 educational sessions on topics such as budgeting, employee/

employer/administration relations, traffic injury solutions, weed and disease control, fertility, grass selection, preparing for certification, and much more. Randal Dick from the NCAA provided information relating athlete injury on grass and synthetic fields, while Dr. Keith McAuliffe from the New Zealand Sports Turf Institute rounded out the conference with an international perspective on playing field standards and testing performance.

Jeff Fowler had the audience spilling out into the hallway with his riveting oratory on the "Seven habits of defective sports turf managers." Three sessions on synthetic turf management and field construction were discussed by panel experts; they even tackled the hot topic of how to properly construct the base under the synthetic surface.

The innovative sports field manager session showed Mike Hebrard's proven methods for freehand logo painting, Joe Wagner's first hand experience with using only effluent water to manage a large city soccer field complex in Iowa, and David Schlotthauer's tips for making minor repairs on synthetic fields. Kevin Trotta, winner of the Turf and Ornamental Communicators Association's Environmental Communicator Award, led a panel of experts and a roundtable discussion to find a balance between managing fields with fewer pesticide inputs and to bring some sense to the narrow minded approach of a pesticide-free policy that bans the use of all pesticides on all school grounds.

Field contractors Chad Price and Matt Heiss discussed sand cap and narrow sand trench systems and shared their proven techniques to avoid the most common mistakes when building baseball, football, and soccer fields. Outdoor field management techniques were demonstrated by Certified Sports Field Managers from Major League Baseball/National Football League/Major League Soccer. Two days of tours were highlighted by a visit to the University of Phoenix Stadium where everyone touched the field as it moved on rails from the outside position to the game ready position for the 2009 Super Bowl. No predictions were made but the STMA participants became part of Super Bowl fever as the field was prepared for a new champion.

There is so much to see and do that you will be jazzed for a week after the meeting. Only at the STMA Convention can you see the largest moving field football field being prepared for the Super Bowl, the largest moving roof (Chase Field, Arizona Diamondbacks), and hear the stories from George Toma, a living legend in grounds keeping. All the gang will be looking for you next year in San Jose. ■