



## AS SPORTS TURF MANAGERS

we all have the challenge of communicating what we actually do. Much of our work is done while no one else is around. Players, coaches, spectators and administrators attend a game or practice and don't get to see the work that went into preparing the field. Most people do not have much information about the art and science of being a sports turf manager and may understandably assume your job is mowing the grass once a week.

In my role as grounds superintendent at the Longwood Cricket Club, I run into communication issues all the time. The tennis club has more than 1,000 members and I report to a general manager and a grounds chairman. Giving them all clear and current information on all aspects of the grounds and 44 tennis courts can be a challenge. The best way I have found to improve the situation is to be a better communicator, and it is not easy.

In talking to other sports turf managers, this seems to be a common hurdle. At Longwood, improving communications has included talking to members, writing for the club newsletter and putting notes in club email blasts. I even gave a 2-hour introductory turfgrass seminar for members so they could learn about the hard work and dedication of their grounds staff.

These approaches have worked well, but we needed to convey more information to membership. So we created a blog maintained solely by the Longwood grounds department. It has proven to be quite successful.

Wikipedia says "A blog (a contraction of the term "web log") is a type of website, usually maintained by an individual with regular entries of commentary, descriptions of events, or

other material such as graphics or video. Entries are commonly displayed in reverse-chronological order. 'Blog' can also be used as a verb, meaning to maintain or add content to a blog.

"Many blogs provide commentary or news on a particular subject; others function as more personal online diaries. A typical blog combines text, images, and links to other blogs, Web pages, and other media related to its topic. The ability for readers to leave comments in an interactive format is an important part of many blogs."

Creating a blog may sound difficult, cumbersome and time consuming, but it is not. It is professionally satisfying and fun. There are many free websites that let you create a blog quickly. You definitely do not need a lot of computer knowledge to get started (I am proof of that!). Google's Blogger is the website that I use. Just go to Google, type in "blog." The first item to come up is "Blogger: Create your free blog." Just a few more clicks, open a free Google account, and the blog is created and ready to go! No experience necessary. Adding pictures and commentary can begin immediately. On the same Google account, a Google Analytics report can be set up to track how many people have looked at the blog, for how long and where they are from.

Once the blog is established, there are two major challenges: getting people to look at the blog and keeping the blog content fresh and updated so users want to keep coming back. Having the blog address mentioned in emails by you and fellow employees will go a long way in promoting the blog. Mention it to league officials and coaches, and you will be surprised at the amount of people that check it out. If your department has a website, make sure it includes a link to your blog. All of your correspondence should include the blog web



address (mine is [LCCgrounds.blogspot.com](http://LCCgrounds.blogspot.com)). Remember that anyone can look at the blog, so it is important to keep this in mind when posting entries. While ideas may come from employees, blog followers, anyone really, you should be the only administrator for the blog because it represents you.

Supplying content to a blog may seem onerous, but the effort is well worth it. Each entry can be brief, so it really is not a burden. Lots of pictures with commentary is a good way to start. It is helpful to have a small camera to record events for the blog. For example, an irrigation pipe breaks and is a major job to repair. Pictures of the broken pipe, repair work, and job complete, along with a short explanation would be an excellent entry showing crew skills and documenting problems corrected. Things that seem ordinary to a sports turf manager are not ordinary to others and make good blog

entries. Some ideas to get started are:

- Agronomic work
- Field painting
- Turf equipment
- Irrigation
- Weather
- IPM
- Department goals
- Movies, links to YouTube
- Pertinent links – other sites you want your followers to look at
- Field conditions
- Highlight staff and their accomplishments

There is so much turf management and related information to write about that in the 2 years of managing my blog I have always had something to write about.

In addition to connecting with field users and supervisors, the blog can benefit in other ways:

- When fellow members of your

» **MICHAEL BURAS, CSFM**, says blogging can help turf managers “communicate what we actually do.”

grounds crew see themselves and their work online, it is an acknowledgement of their work and boosts morale.

- The blog can be helpful in hiring new personnel, as prospective employees get a feel of what it’s like at your place of work.

- A blog can also help you get better connected with peers. For example, you have a blog entry on painting a logo and someone searches the web for logo painting and is led to your site. They may leave a comment on the blog or contact you to ask for more detailed information. Having a blog will definitely assist sports turf managers with similar problems, and successes unite and make professional networking easier.

- With so many questions about the environment, pesticides, organics and synthetic turf out there, the blog is a great way to articulate the facts about these and many other questions. The sports turf manager is often the best source for answers to these questions, but often the answers don’t get to enough people, or are misconstrued. With a blog, the points you want to get across are in black and white for all to see.

With the straightforwardness of a blog at your disposal, a sophisticated web site is not necessary to promote the importance of your department. To obtain a budget increase, to get funds for a capital expenditure, or even to boost your salary, the value of what you do as a sports turf manager needs to be communicated. A blog is one of the tools you can use to educate sports turf novices of the skills, expertise and knowledge required to be a successful sports turf manager. ■

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