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On the cover: Mike Hebrard, president of Athletic Field Design, and his crew met the challenge of a short window to convert Alpenrose Stadium from a traditional and regulation little league baseball playing surface to a traditional and regulation softball playing surface, and back again. Photo by Darin Stout, Northwest Sports Photography, Beaverton, OR www.4nsp.com

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From the Sidelines



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Earth Day should mean something to us all

ACCORDING TO WIKIPEDIA, the genesis of Earth Day is credited to Gaylord Nelson, a US Senator from Wisconsin. After witnessing the ravages of the 1969 Santa Barbara oil spill, and inspired by the student anti-war movement, he called for an environmental teach-in, or Earth Day, to be held on Wednesday, April 22, 1970. More than 20 million people participated that year, and now Earth Day is observed on April 22 each year by more than 500 million people and several national governments in 175 countries.

Kevin Trotta is the New York team captain of the Global Sports Alliance and president of Environmental Turf Craft, LLC. The GSA is a global network of sport enthusiasts that want to leave a healthy environment for our future generations. Kevin, an STMA member, asked me to share his Earth Day thoughts with you:

“In life as in sports, there are spectators and there are participants. We choose which role we play. Without question, the world would be a different and better place if more of us were players rather than onlookers. Earth Day calls us off the bench and into the game.

“As sports enthusiasts we bring a special vitality to our endeavors. Athletes, coaches, athletic field managers and others involved in the world of sports function at an enhanced energy level. It’s an enthusiasm that sharpens our focus and performance. If we were to collectively direct this energy towards defending our environment the outcome would be world-changing. We have good reason to do so.

“Environmental quality exerts a direct influence on the quality of the sports experience. “Preparations for the Beijing Olympics of 2008 offered a world-stage example of the potentially devastating effects of compromised air quality on athletic competition. Recent history provides too many disturbing examples of cancelled aquatic events or sickened participants due to water pollution. Winter sports and recreation have been altered along with a changing climate. Environmental concerns have been raised regarding the methods and materials used in the management of sports facilities.

“Those of us who work and play outdoors are in direct and intimate contact with the environment. While competing, preparing fields, training or just exerting ourselves having fun outside, we are the environmental ‘canaries in the mineshaft.’ Clearly, we have a vested interest in these issues; for as the environment is compromised so is our well-being.

“Unfortunately, the average citizen remains uninvolved or unconvinced of the urgency to change our present course. We will not succeed in realizing our vision of sustainability on a planetary scale without engaging the general public. People from all walks of life must be made aware that the inefficient use of materials and energy, the fouling of air and water, the destruction of habitat and the loss of biodiversity threatens all life on earth; including our own.

“To implement change we need public will and political pressure. Earth Day affords an opportunity for the sports community to mobilize for stewardship. We can leverage the popularity and enthusiasm of sports to generate a passion for environmental action. We need to step up to the plate, exploit our influential platform and lead by example. We can demonstrate stewardship through our lifestyles and our work. We can recruit colleagues, teammates and friends to engage in clean up efforts, tree plantings and other proactive events in our communities. We can celebrate this extraordinary planet and work towards ensuring that the water our children drink is pure and the air they breathe is fresh and clean. A vested interest? You bet. We have many reasons to get involved. Clearly, every day is Earth Day.” ■

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The Official Publication Of The Sports Turf
Managers Association

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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 2013, SportsTurf. Material may not be reproduced or photocopied in any form without the written permission of the publisher.

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Stewards of the land whether we like it or not

I WRITE THIS MONTH'S MESSAGE as I return from speaking at the New England STMA (NESTMA) annual meeting in Providence, RI. This is a wonderful conference and exhibition and it sets a great example for the value of cooperation and collaboration among groups across state lines. I learned a great deal more about the regulatory challenges being faced by all turf managers across New England and how the industry has responded to these regulations by altering and adapting their management programs.

I particularly enjoyed one member's account that for the longest time he let his colleagues take the lead in trying to educate and communicate with state and local officials regarding proposed legislation that he thought was a nuisance, but it really did not affect him directly. Then one day some troubling legislation regarding fertilizers landed at his doorstep and he was forced to address a group of highly unsympathetic administrators and concerned citizens about his use of fertilizers on his sports fields. When I asked him how he felt after that meeting, he asked me if I was old enough to remember the movie "Network" (unfortunately, yes) and if so, then I knew from where the phrase "I am mad as *\$?! and I am not going to take it anymore" came.

How did he get involved? He told me that he first contacted his NESTMA colleagues and his state turfgrass extension specialist for their advice and then he started researching the matter on his own, taking advantage of one of our STMA membership benefits by accessing the Turfgrass Information File. I then jokingly accused him of being a NESTMA spy tasked with telling me everything that an academic and STMA board member would want to hear.

Did everything work out as he hoped? No. There are changes in how he must now manage his fields that are more time and labor consuming, and he probably won't have fields that are as aesthetically pleasing as they once were. However he has put these challenges to work in his management program, as he expanded his IPM approach to field management in ways that he had never considered before. He told me he felt that he now was a steward of the land more so than a manager, and I found it interesting that this philosophy matched up perfectly with the theme of a presentation delivered by long-time STMA member Kevin Trotta at this same meeting (see page 6 for more from Kevin).

Perhaps most importantly he now has a voice and a face in the community as more than "the guy that mows the fields"—his time in front of the public has exposed a whole new audience to his expertise and professionalism as a sports turf manager.

STMA's Environmental Committee has just released its Advocacy Manual that addresses all the steps you can take to get involved like my NESTMA friend. Be sure to take a look at this manual as I think you will find it to be another valuable membership benefit that will help you better address challenges as they arise. Take care, everyone. ■

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



Creating & managing expectations—the key to field use and maintenance planning

Editor's note: This article is based on a presentation at January's STMA Conference by Rebecca Auchter, manager of grounds maintenance, Cranberry Township, PA entitled "Athletic Field Use and Maintenance Planning." Thanks to Ms. Auchter for allowing us to use this material; more information can be found at the links listed below from www.cranberrytownship.org.

As many parks and recreation and K-12 school district turf managers know, the agendas of field users and administrators are often contrary to what is best for their fields. Rebecca Auchter, manager of grounds maintenance for Cranberry Township, PA told her audience at the Sports Turf Managers Association Conference in January that to combat this, they needed to create and manage others' expectations. Auchter said the path to

creating and managing expectations was to establish good relationships with key "influencers" such as administrators and spend time communicating with and training them, with a goal that eventually you will spend less time doing that and more time on agronomic practices. She reminded the audience that establishing rela-

tionships means "being nice" and "making friends."

"You have to get the 'owners' of the fields to buy in to what you want to do to protect your fields," she said. "The better your documentation and the more thorough your policies are, the faster you can get back to work."

Auchter said turf managers

need to teach, train, communicate, document and explain, not only to supervisors and other administrators but also to field users. She has put together three tools she uses to accomplish this: a Parks Maintenance Plan; an Athletic Field Use Policy; and an Athletic Field Maintenance Manual. "You can use these tools to answer a lot of questions so again, you can get back to work."

PARKS MAINTENANCE PLAN

"The Parks Maintenance Plan is general and comprehensive—what we have, where it is, what we do with it, and how to assess it," said Auchter. The plan is broken out into categories of maintenance (turfgrass, skins, trees/landscape, trails, etc.) and

"It's all about expectations!"

-Rebecca Auchter, Cranberry Twp. manager of grounds

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then detailed levels of maintenance for each category (though not to the level of products/rates). For example, a 75-acre park is divided into priority zones; zone 1 areas are “mow and go”; zone 2 areas are surrounds and common areas; zone 3 areas are non-irrigated fields that do get chemical treatments; and zone 4 areas are irrigated fields that have full programs of fertility and preventive fungicide.

This maintenance plan includes Maintenance Inspection Checklists labeled Athletic Fields: Game and Practice Field Playing Surfaces; Athletic Field Envelope; Playgrounds; Hard Surface Courts and Sand Volleyball; Shelters; Restroom and Concession Buildings; and Park Common Areas. Auchter said these checklists are used as assessment tools but also are valuable documentation in mitigating risk, as well as help her provide answers in meetings.

Auchter said she also uses Daily Task Sheets that include 17 categories to document how many hours are spent doing work in those categories every day. “This shows supervisors what we do and how much we do it,” she said.

“I have used these daily task sheets to show that consistently 35-40 percent of my time is spent NOT working on green-related tasks,” she said. “It is good to be able to show this since I am being judged on those green tasks.”

ATHLETIC FIELD MAINTENANCE MANUAL

Auchter describes the Athletic Field Maintenance Manual as a “training manual for our partner associations”—aka VOLUNTEERS. “Again, this manual creates and manages expectations,” she said. “This manual spells out how the Township expects users to treat and maintain our fields.” [See “Athletic Field Maintenance Manual” sidebar for details.]

ATHLETIC FIELD USE POLICY

This document was adopted by the Cranberry Township Board of Supervisors; Auchter described its content as “middle of the road-specific but not overly penal.” The township holds bi-annual meetings where users and township personnel get together to assess capital needs and introduce new policies, and perhaps most importantly, discuss field reservations and scheduling. “Get involved in scheduling up front,” she said, “because it will be to your great benefit. Spell out to users the most easily avoidable wear that any field gets; for example, no team needs to practice in soccer goal mouths.”

Another important aspect of the meetings is sharing information on how and when fields will be closed. Auchter manages this website for the township and said she posts field closings by 11 am weekdays, and by 9 pm the night before on weekends.

She said there are provisions in the policy manual for associations to overrule the closing if the weather improves, but that the onus on closing fields which deteriorate after an “open” posting falls on the associations as well. Moisture meters are available for the users to use when necessary to remain objective, Auchter said. As part of a Progressive Action Plan, the township will stop maintaining fields used by association groups that won’t work with township officials on these policies.

Auchter said to keep in mind that policies established should include rest and renovation periods, how it is determined whether fields are open or closed, and all scheduled closures, as well as time built in for general agronomic practices. [See “Athletic Field Use Policy” sidebar for details.] ■

