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BRIEF HISTORY OF STMA AND ITS CONFERENCES

By

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In 1977 Harry Gill, Field Manager at Milwaukee County Stadium home to the Brewers and Packers, started sending out Christmas cards to fellow groundskeepers throughout the country soliciting a movement to band together to share information, ideas and experiences. His cards went to not only NFL and MLB groundskeepers but, to college, university, parks and recreation and Little League groundskeepers, as well. Harry was indeed a visionary and sincerely felt that by sharing ideas and experiences each of us would become better and more professional at what we do and the Sports Turf industry would become stronger.

Dr. Bill Daniel, Professor Emeritus at Purdue University, hosted an annual Turfgrass conference on the Purdue campus and in 1981 added a Sports Turf session and invited Dick Ericson, Field Manager at Metropolitan Stadium in Minneapolis home to the Twins and the Vikings, George Toma, Field Manager for the NFL and Kansas City Royals and Chiefs and Harry Gill to speak.

The room where the Sports Turf session was held was packed and even spilled out into the hallway by attendees grasping for a nugget of new information from these industry icons.

Following the day's sessions, Harry, Dick, George, Dr. Daniel and numerous other interested sports field enthusiasts gave birth to the Sports Turf Managers Association. A Board of Directors was established with Dick Ericson as its first president.

That year STMA attached itself to the National Institute of Parks and Grounds Management with its Executive Secretary, Erik Madison, serving in the same capacity for STMA. The purpose of this marriage was to provide STMA members

with an affordable annual conference that included speakers from its own ranks within the sports turf industry. STMA attendees also had access to the National Institute's large Trade Show.

Also, that year STMA established an award for dedication to the association and the Sports Turf industry. It was called, "The Lawn Ranger Award" and who better to receive the first one than Harry Gill.

As with any new organization made up entirely of volunteers with time-consuming jobs STMA struggled with the day-to-day management of its new association.

In 1984, after 3 years of slow growth with the National Institute of Parks and Grounds Management, STMA ventured out on its own and appointed Dr. Kent Kurtz, Professor of Turfgrass and Ornamental Horticulture at California State Polytechnic University in Pomona, CA as its new Executive Director. His garage became STMA's first office.

Also, in 1984 STMA expanded its regional conferences throughout the country into areas that had large membership presence, including Southern California, Chicago, Denver, Arizona, Florida and the East Coast, among others.

Many other STMA happenings occurred in 1984 during its first year of independence. STMA became incorporated in Colorado as a 501- C-6 non-profit Educational organization, started its own Newsletter and membership increased from 60 to over 240.

In 1986 STMA hitched itself to the GCSAA for its National Conference in San Francisco. Not only did this union with the GCSAA allow STMA members an affordable Sports Turf educational conference but also the opportunity to attend the largest indoor Trade Show of its kind in the world.

The 1986 conference in San Francisco was STMA's first National conference in which it developed and presented its own educational sessions.

The marriage between STMA and GCSAA lasted 3 years (until 1989).

In 1987 STMA moved its office out of Dr. Kurtz's garage and into an office in Upland, CA not far from Pomona. STMA also hired its very first employee (Virginia Scharfman) as office secretary. I'm pretty sure she was paid minimum wage.

In 1989 Dr. Kurtz resigned as STMA's Executive Director but remained very active in developing and improving the educational offerings until his passing in 2006.

During Dr. Kurtz's Executive Directorship membership rose from 60 to over 800, he created a quarterly newsletter, coordinated 3-5 regional conferences each year, in addition to National Conferences. And, Dr. Kurtz provided the association with his relentless tenacity in getting things done. There were many other accomplishments during his leadership tenure that are too numerous to mention here.

However, it must be said that Dr. Kurtz was truly the glue that held STMA together during its early years. Without Dr. Kurtz and the undying support of the Commercial membership the odds were very good that STMA would not have survived.

Following Dr. Kurtz's resignation in early 1989, Mark Hodnick moved from the presidency into a temporary role as STMA's Executive Director until a permanent one could be found. And, Steve Cockerham moved into the presidency.

Later that year STMA contracted with Dale Keller with RK Communications in Las Vegas as its new Executive Director.

It was also in 1989 that STMA held its first independent National Conference and Trade Show at Dodgertown in Vero Beach, FL.

In 1990 STMA recognized the first Chapters which continue to grow each year.

In December 1991, still struggling financially, STMA held its 3rd National Conference and Trade Show in San Diego. With a small attendance at the conference and trade show it was even more discouraging at the Awards Dinner. A total of 27 people witnessed Dr. James Watson receive the Harry Gill Award and Steve Cockerham receive the newly established Dr. William H. Daniel Award.

A majority of the people in attendance at the Awards Banquet were STMA's loyal and supportive Commercial members.

1991 was also the year that STMA cut ties with Dale Keller and contracted with a new Executive Director named Bret Kelsey with Smith Buckland, an association management company in Chicago. To help STMA get back on track financially, Smith Buckland agreed to "carry" STMA's management costs until such time that it was in a position to pay.

1992 Adams Publishing brought on "sportsTURF" Magazine as the official STMA magazine.

Between 1993 and 1995 STMA continued to struggle financially but continued to hold its National Conference and Trade Show as well as numerous regional conferences supported by local chapters and, of course, the many loyal Commercial members.

In 1996 STMA hired Steve Trusty with Trusty and Associates as its 6th Executive Director since STMA's inception in 1981.

Trusty and Associates already had 4 years of exposure with STMA as authors for numerous articles highlighting STMA Field Managers that appeared in sportsTURF magazine, newsletters and other industry journals. During this time Trusty and Associates were sponsored by a long-standing stalwart commercial member of STMA. This was one of many various sponsorships provided by STMA's loyal and supportive Commercial members.

As the newest Executive Director of STMA, Steve Trusty, along with a strong and dedicated Board of Directors continued to reform and rebuild STMA during the next 9 years.

From 1996 to 2004 STMA grew from just under 600 members to 2,400 members. In addition, more Chapters came on board, the Chapter Officer Training Session (COTS) was established, S.A.F.E. was created, STMA's Certification Program was initiated and two new Founder's Awards created (Dick Ericson Award and George Toma "Golden Rake" Award). And, STMA became financially sound.

It was a long-standing goal for STMA to be managed from within its own organization. So, in 2004, being financially whole, the STMA Board agreed to bring the management of the Association in-house.

For the first time in its storied history, STMA hired its own Executive Director/CEO to manage its Association. Her name is Kim Heck and she became the 2nd paid employee of STMA. And, as they say, the rest is history.

Kim, I hope the Association is paying you more than minimum wage ... I'm sure they are.

Kim came to STMA from the GCSAA which is based in Lawrence, KS. So, it's no coincidence that STMA's Headquarters are also based in Lawrence, KS. Kim brought with her impeccable credentials and professional experience that fit perfectly with the vision and goals of STMA.

Over the past 9+ years Kim and her Staff have helped to elevate STMA to the pinnacle of the Sports Turf Industry. Her accomplishments are much too numerous to mention here but if you attend Thursday's Business Meeting and Luncheon I'm sure you'll find out how busy Kim and her Staff have been this past year.

Needless to say, STMA's Board of Directors, Kim Heck and her Staff and the support of you, the members, have put STMA on very solid ground. And, it gets better each year. STMA is in very good hands!

Looking out over this room today, it is monumentally evident that Harry Gill's vision way back in 1977 has manifested itself light-years beyond his imagination.

On behalf of all of the old-timers that were there at Purdue where it all started and are still here today (that includes you, Mike Schiller) I can't tell you how gratifying it is to see how far STMA has come since those early years.

You all have made history this week by being here. Take advantage of what our Founding Fathers envisioned this association to be. Get involved. Attend the sessions. Learn. Network. I promise that you will go back home with a new idea,

new information and perhaps a new friend or two that will help make you better at what you do.

Enjoy this historical Conference!

THANK YOU!