



20 Years of Service

Michael J. Bladon • Sports Turf Association • 1987-2007



In 1987 there were three organizations serving the turf industry in Ontario – the Ontario Parks Association (OPA), the Ontario Golf Superintendents' Association (OGSA) and the Nursery Sod Growers Association of Ontario (NSGA). Michael Bladon, Assistant Grounds Manager at the University of Guelph, among others, recognized that the problems of a large, but mainly unorganized group of turf workers, those involved in the maintenance of turf areas used for athletic endeavours such as soccer, baseball and football, were not being adequately covered by the three existing associations.

Michael attended the conference of an American group, the Institute of Parks and Grounds Management, which had a sports turf section. This provided the impetus for a similar program he saw as fulfilling the need of Canadian sports turf managers. He posed the question: Should another association be formed which would address the concerns of this Canadian group; concerns such as the safety of the playing surface?

On February 11, 1987, the Sports Turf Association (STA) was born at an inaugural meeting held at the Arboretum Centre at the University of Guelph. Among those in attendance at that first meeting were Dr. Eliot Roberts/Lawn Institute; James Boyce/Agro Consulting, Ottawa; Peter Prakte/PAC Consultants, Smiths Falls; Roger Jenkins/Assistant Director, Auxiliary Operations, University of Guelph; Bruce Calhoun/Bannerman Turf; Larry Truman/President, NSGA; Annette Anderson/Turf Specialist, Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food (OMAF); Bob Brewster/President, Canadian Golf Superintendents Association (CGSA), OGSA and Canadian Turfgrass Foundation; Norm McCollum/Turf Technician, Cambridge Research Station; Pat Tucker/Head of Grounds, University of Guelph; Jay Kivell/representing Ontario Parks Association; Uwe Sehmrau/Ministry of Tourism and Recreation; George Hammer/Foreman, Waterloo County Board of Education; Brian Skipper/Waterloo County Board of Education, representing Ontario Association of School Business Officials; Dr. Lee Burpee/Director, Guelph Turf Institute (GTI), University of Guelph; and Michael Bladon/Assistant Head of Grounds,

University of Guelph. The consensus from that meeting was the time had come for the formation of the Sports Turf Association of Ontario and that an organizational meeting should be held.

The group elected Michael Bladon as Chairman, Bruce Calhoun as Vice-chairman, Ron Dubyk as Secretary and Robert Allen as Treasurer. Annette Anderson agreed to chair the first Educational Conference and Pat Tucker was to develop the first Field Day at Alumni Stadium at the University of Guelph. Funding was received from the Ministry of Tourism and Recreation which

From the beginning, it was understood that the mandate of the Association was to provide educational programs aimed at producing better, safer natural turf playing areas. To fulfill that mandate, one of the STA's first projects was to appoint a committee in 1988 to produce a publication titled *An Athletic Field Managers' Guide* which was oriented to Canadian conditions. Pat Tucker acted as Chairman, with Jack Eggens, Paul Voroney, Geoff Corlett and Annette Anderson assisting.

On March 9, 1988, the first annual conference organized by Annette Anderson



enabled the organization to produce a membership brochure, letterhead and other necessary office materials.

Michael Bladon, Ron Dubyk, Bruce Calhoun, Annette Anderson and Uwe Sehmrau were appointed to a Steering Committee to produce a logo for the letterhead and initiate a membership drive. Ron Dubyk became the first newsletter editor with Vol. 1, No. 1 appearing in September 1987. The logo was eventually redesigned in a competition among graphic arts students at Conestoga College – the same logo which appears on the cover of this publication and is still in use today.

On a sunny day in August of 1988, members of the association executive including Geoff Corlett, Michael Bladon, Annette Anderson, Robert Allen, and Ron Dubyk gathered at Allen's cottage at Bow Lake to strategize the continuing growth and momentum the fledgling organization was experiencing.

Strategic Meeting at Bow Lake, August 16, 1988. From left to right: Geoff Corlett, Michael Bladon, Annette Anderson, Robert Allen and Ron Dubyk.

featured Dr. Clay Switzer, Deputy Minister of Agriculture for Ontario, as keynote speaker. Also on the program was Dr. Don White of the University of Minnesota and Dr. Jim Watson, Irrigation Specialist with the Toro Corporation. This conference was held in conjunction with CGSA whose conference chair Bob Brewster offered valuable assistance to our organization including shared space at the Harbour Castle Hotel, Toronto.

In late May, 1990, Michael Bladon met Bob Sheard in the parking lot as they headed for their respective offices on the University of Guelph Campus. Michael remarked he had learned that Bob was retiring on the first of July and perhaps would need a new hobby. He asked Bob to drop over to his

office and talk about working with the STA. Two months later, Bob moved the STA office from 185 Edinburgh Road South (Michael and Elaine's home) to a room in his house and became the first Executive Secretary. This venture required obtaining and learning the use of a computer. So it was off to Conestoga College for Bob to learn a new trade of replacing the pencil with the keyboard. With these new skills, Bob also became editor and chief writer for the newsletter.

In this new role, one of the first projects for Bob was to edit and publish *An Athletic Field Managers' Guide* which was produced in 1991 after three years in committee. The Association approved a membership plaque and a telephone drive to increase the membership was initiated.

The first two-day winter conference of the Sports Turf Association was organized with the assistance of the Office of Open Learning at the University of Guelph. It was held on the same dates as the OGSA winter meetings on campus.

Under the general direction of Annette Anderson, the STA joined with three other turf associations to hold the first Ontario Turfgrass Symposium (OTS) in 1992. Her objective was three fold – to bring together of all those interested in turf management at a premier educational forum; to generate money for research at the GTI; and to assist the sponsoring associations in fund raising for their in-house projects. The associations cooperating in this venture were the NSGA, OGSA, the Professional Lawn Care Association of Ontario (PLCAO), and the STA. The GTI and the Ontario Turfgrass Research Foundation (OTRF) were ex-officio members of OTS. This arrangement continued until 2004 when the OGSA decided it was in their best interests to hold their own independent conference and trade show. They were replaced by the Ontario Recreation Facilities Association (ORFA) as a sponsoring partner of OTS.

As part of their educational mandate, at the October 1993 meeting of the Board of Directors, the STA approved the awarding of a \$200 scholarship to a student in the Turf Managers' Short Course at the University of Guelph. In 1997, a second scholarship was approved for a student in the Ontario Diploma in Horticulture Program. In this, our 20th anniversary year, the scholarship program was revised and increased to \$1,000 for any student in a post-secondary program in turf management at a recognized college or university in Canada. To date, 25 students from across the country have benefited from these scholarships.

In January 1994, a major step forward was taken in the move of the STA office from Bob Sheard's home to an office in the newly completed G.M. Frost Research and Information Centre at 328 Victoria Road South, Guelph. In this imposing building on a hill overlooking much of the City of Guelph were also located the offices of the GTI, OGSA, OTRF, PLCAO, Pam Charbonneau, OMAFRA turfgrass extension specialist, and turf research personnel from the University of Guelph. The Association now had "down-

the-hall" access to the best technical information in the province.

This move gave the STA access to meeting facilities, library and all the amenities of a modern office such as fax and photocopying. Storage space was now available for the growing files and a table top display to advertise the association at field days and conferences. Previously Director and Committee meetings of the STA were held in various cities, generally at the President's office and often in the evening.

1995 saw the development of the first Membership Directory. It also heralded in the magazine, the *Sports Turf Manager*, successor to the *Sports Turf Newsletter*. A feature of the *Sports Turf Manager* was a list of the varieties of the various turf species sold by the seed companies in Ontario. This ready reference has been upgraded every second year since that date.

In March of 1995, Bob Sheard resigned as Executive Secretary and was replaced by Ms. Sonja Schneider who held the office until October 1977, when Ms. Lee Huether accepted the position and has operated the office and provided yeoman service to the association to this day.

The following year, Bob Sheard stepped down as Editor of the *Sports Turf Manager* and Michael Bladon assumed the position until 2001 when this role was taken on by a committee of the Board. At the same time, graphic design work was moved from Willustration in Guelph to New Paradigm Communications in Owen Sound who also assumed the responsibilities for printing the magazine; a move which has been a success from the first issue.

During his tenure as Editor of the *Sports Turf Manager*, Bob Sheard wrote many of the articles for the magazine. Among these was a series of articles called "*Understanding Turf Management*." After retirement as Editor he rewrote many of the articles and added others so that by January of 2001 he had prepared a textbook under that name. The Sports Turf Association financed the printing of the book and all revenues received from the sale of the book were donated to the STA by Bob, a major contribution to the bottom line of the Association's financial statement. The book received wide acceptance in diploma teaching at the University of Guelph and other community colleges as well as by members of the association and others. As a result, the first 1,000 copies were soon sold and a second edition with minor revisions was printed in 2005.

To keep pace with modern communication technology and to better serve both our members and others interested in the sports turf industry, a website was launched in the fall of 2002. This website introduces the reader to the association, provides membership information, a calendar of industry events, an employment bulletin board, and features a cumulative index of articles pub-

lished in the newsletter together with the current president's message and feature article. Resources such as the brochure *Constructing the Sports Field* by R.W. Sheard and a series of check lists for the maintenance of various types of sports fields are available for download.

Since its inception the STA has been served by eight presidents. They are: 1987-1989, Michael Bladon; 1990-1991, Bruce Calhoun; 1992-1993, Peter Kleschnitzki; 1994-1999, Chris Mark; 2000-2001, Jane Arnett-Rivers; 2002-2003, Paul Turner; 2004-2005, Andrew Gaydon; and 2006-2007, Gord Dol.

During the past 20 years, six individuals have been awarded Honorary Life Memberships in the association in recognition of outstanding contributions to the sports turf industry. In the first 20 years, this award has been extended to James Boyce (Agriculture Canada), Norman Rothwell (Rothwell Seeds), Clayton Switzer (Dean, OAC), Robert W. Sheard, (University of Guelph), Michael J. Bladon (Grounds Department, University of Guelph) and Christopher Mark (Town of Oakville Parks). Several of these individuals continue to provide significant contributions to the association.

From the beginning, the STA has had a program of summer Field Days which have featured speakers on turf related subjects and demonstrations of new turf equipment. The first Field Day was held June 18, 1987, at the University of Guelph under the direction of Pat Tucker. To a degree the Field Day has replaced the trade show which was a significant part of the original OTS conferences with a more hands-on demonstration of field equipment.

In 2006, another educational feature was added for the membership in the form of a spring workshop. The first workshop program was on water management and it met with such success that the Board has decided to repeat it in 2007.

By January of 1989, the Association had enrolled 76 members. After 10 years, the membership stood at 194. Since then membership has grown to 262 at the beginning of our 20th year. These members are from seven provinces and represent turf management suppliers, municipal parks departments, university grounds units, community colleges, private schools, boards of education and individuals interested in turf management.

In the March 1997 issue of the *Sports Turf Manager* Annette Anderson wrote, "Where will the Sports

Turf Association be in the next ten years? ...Certainly one challenge will be to continue to build the leadership skills within its membership and maintain the involvement of members. Spend a few minutes today thinking about what you have learned in the last [20] years about turf management. It is likely that in some [manner] the STA has helped you somewhere along the way."

