

April/May 2003



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# BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

## Turfgrass Producers International

### Increasing Cooperation & Benefits

## TPI Seeks Affiliate Involvement

Recognizing the increasing importance and value of local, regional and national turf and turf producer organizations throughout the world, TPI will host the first-ever "Affiliate Representatives" meeting in Dayton, OH, Wednesday, July 23 from 7:00 to 8:30 am.

Rather than directing the course of the meeting and group, TPI hopes to be a catalyst that can help to address common or special issues being faced by producer groups at a more grass-roots level. Ideally, this new forum will provide a means for smaller groups to share resources, coordinate their efforts or develop programs that provide greater benefits to its members.

During a preliminary meeting in Birmingham, England it was agreed that the Affiliate Representatives will not simply replace the old TPI Representatives Committee, but will serve as a means of addressing needs and issues arising at the local level. TPI's Board has agreed to consider proposals developed by the Affiliate Representatives or even a single turf

organization that seeks assistance from TPI. While the merits, costs and feasibility of every proposal will necessarily be reviewed in detail by the TPI Board, it is assumed that some matters (such as providing governance documents) would be accomplished immediately, while other issues (such as conducting a localized survey or a specific service such as collecting dues or organizing a conference) would be more involved and could require some level of compensation to TPI.

"Some international associations have chapters," noted TPI Executive Director Doug Fender, "but in this case, where many turf producer organizations already exist, the Board felt that creating affiliate relationships would be best. TPI wants to help improve the affiliate groups, not dictate what they do. It may take a while to work through the past TPI Representatives era and approach, but the hope is that Affiliates will see TPI as a valuable resource to the local organization, as well as its members. Both groups can be better, stronger and more effective as a result."

For more information about the Affiliate Representatives meeting in Dayton, TPI's suggested guidelines for selecting a group representative or to add an item to the business agenda, please contact TPI Board Member George Brandt (American Sod Corp., Palatine, IL) or TPI Membership Manager Terri Berkowitz in the TPI office at 800/405-8873 or 847/705-9898 or by e-mail at [tberkowitz@TurfGrassSod.org](mailto:tberkowitz@TurfGrassSod.org)

## Membership Renewal Notices Coming Soon

In addition to networking with peers, the continuing developments in turfgrass production (ie. improved species, equipment and methods), chemical and water availability, labor, marketing and related information available through TPI, it is more important than ever for members to maintain TPI Membership!

For the convenience of current members, renewal notices are being mailed the first week of May, so check the mail. In order to take full advantage of member benefits, be sure to update and/or

correct all (including address, phone, fax, e-mail, turf or other product information) and return your renewal form with dues promptly so as to not miss out on any timely information.

Because of today's global electronic communications capability, members are encouraged to assure their updates on e-mail and website listings are accurate. This information is included in the *TPI Membership Directory* and on the TPI website where current and potential customers search "Find a Professional" when looking for companies—turfgrass sod or production products.

New for 2003-2004 will be a revised Class B membership category wherein suppliers will have three service options from which to choose. Details will be included in an upcoming mailing.

### Food for Thought

"When you do the common things in life in an uncommon way, you will command the attention of the world."

*George Washington Carver  
Scientist*

### TPI Annual Business Meeting Crowne Plaza Hotel

Dayton, Ohio

9:00 to 10:30 am

Friday, July 25, 2003

All TPI members are invited; however only Class "A" members may vote on any formal business item.





# Taking Care of Business

By Fred Pittillo  
Turf Mountain Sod  
Hendersonville, NC

## Do You Have an Attitude Tester?

### A Familiar Scene?

*It's time to plow and prepare to seed, and the weather forecast for the week is beautiful. After several weeks of bad weather and being unable to harvest any grass, you're able to cut; thus you have several orders to fill today. You come to work this morning with much that needs to be done. But when you arrive, the employees have not gone to the field. You ask, "Why aren't we harvesting yet?" It seems they're waiting on two men who are late. You tell them to go on to the field.*

*In the meantime, a customer walks in wanting four pallets of sod but he forgot to call in his order. While you're talking with that customer, you get a cell phone call inquiring about installing a load of grass. The caller wants to know how many different sizes your sod is available in and which variety would be best for him.*

### Defining the Situation

After reading that scenario, if you cannot relate to those things (customers, employees, field preparations and the economy), you might not be in the turfgrass sod business. If you are able to relate to all of it, you may think its nothing more than just typical problems we have to deal with in the turfgrass sod business. Actually, all of these situations are really *attitude testers*. How you react may reveal your attitude about yourself and your job or business.

Let me begin by sharing with you that I honestly believe if you love what you are doing, you will have a better attitude and do a better job. I'm certain there are statistics to prove this but, based on genuine experience, I can assure you it's true. Let me explain why I feel this way and what I have observed. Not that I'm an expert, but I have lived for over 60 years in the farming community.

You may be the second or third generation in the sod business. You may not have ever done anything else in your entire life. Because it's taken several years to establish the business, perhaps you've spent a lot of time with older equipment, assorted problems and a lack of funds. Thus, the sod business may have you pulled down to where it's a burden to you. If so, you may just be

reacting to what you've seen your entire life. How is your attitude reflected here?

### Keys to Successful Farming

There's another aspect to sod farming that is exciting but it takes planning and preparation. Do you enjoy the business end or the farming aspect? To be successful in the turfgrass sod business, you must have both. How is your attitude reflected in the business aspect of sod farming?

The people, the land and seeing others benefit from what I do, is so thrilling and enjoyable to me as a sod producer. My family has owned some of the land we farm, for years. The remainder of the land we farm either has been purchased or rented. Talking with various individuals about the possibility of growing turfgrass sod on their land has allowed me to see how others view sod farming. But no matter what others may think, I enjoy explaining to them that we have good farming practices—as good or better than other crops that could be grown on their land. They can see I enjoy what I do and that I care about them, too!

When we rent land we agree to take care of it, not only by applying lime, fertilizer and any basic necessities, we also agree to have good ditching and creek procedures. What about your land? What is it saying to others about how you view it and take care of it?

The economy has been very interesting, to say the least. I've learned that (of course you are going to laugh at this next statement, but think about it before you do!) you can't control everything; thus learn your limitations. Unless you're the farm owner reading this, there are lots of people saying, "Yes, the person I work for thinks he controls the world!" Of course we turfgrass sod producer/owners don't control the world, but we do control a portion. There're always others watching us, just as you watch those around you who are farming.

I refer to the book of knowledge, the Bible, for wisdom and I believe that God doesn't allow you to prosper in order for you to keep it to yourself. I believe we all have seen farmers lose because they didn't take care of the land, their equipment or those who work for them. There must be a proper balance of all three. If


there is not, there will not be success—thus there is not reflected a love for what you're doing.

### The Whole Picture

Lastly, I would like to say that by the time most of us have been farming for a while, we realize the importance of our community around us. We know things just don't happen without planning and following through. I feel we should be involved in other areas our community. We don't appreciate others commenting about sod farming—in any shape form or fashion—unless they know what they're talking about. In order for us to be well-rounded farmers, we must care not only about our farm but about our community as a whole, thus doing our part.

I believe it's just that simple. If you don't love what you're doing, you probably are not doing a good job. I'm not saying you need to sell the farm, I'm asking you to look at yourself, your family, your land and your community. I remember being taught by my dad that without good business practices, I could never be a successful farmer.


Although I don't enjoy the paperwork end of my business, I don't dread it because as soon as I finish the paperwork, I can go outside and enjoy what God has blessed me with, farming with friends and family.

Life is not easy. All of us have to deal with negatives. If we have the wherewithal to own our own turfgrass sod farm, there will be times when our tempers will overflow. Attitude makes all the difference, whether in our personal lives or business lives. 

### How's Morale At Your Company?

Listening to the pronouns employees use when they describe your organization can speak volumes about their commitment and morale.

Examples

- "They" and "them"—If you hear mostly these two, you probably have some morale boosting to do.
- "We" and "us"—These are the words you want to hear. They mean employees are proud to be part of the organization. 



## Marketing Tip

By David S Slater  
Slater Turf Farm  
Tryon, NC

### Educating the Public And Customers

Here's a *marketing tip* I want to share with you. I enjoy writing these tips because it means I have to practice what I preach. This one is about how to educate the public (and customers) through free media coverage.

News releases are not hard to do and, when published, carry the perceived credibility of a third party. Understandably, news releases are a very effective way to educate your customers. As an agricultural extension agent earlier in my career, I wrote news releases readily. I was the only person who was going to get the word out about my educational program at the extension office. How else would my farmer clientele know about the upcoming tobacco meeting, the state corn yield contest or the award presented to "their favorite county agent" at the annual meeting of agents? The only way was to toot my own horn and write a news release.

I interviewed the local newspaper editor about how to write a news release and he said, in so many words, "Give me who, what, when, where and why. Then write it, send it in and I'll rewrite it for my readers." That sounded easy.

The format used for writing news releases is one commonly referred to as "the inverted pyramid." The inverted pyramid technique asks for the most important information in the first paragraph, followed by supporting (and lesser important) information in the following paragraphs.

In the sample news release entitled, "Local Farmer Attends Turf Conference," the first paragraph needs to provide critical information such as *who is the local farmer, what was the conference about, where was it held and when did the farmer attend?* The paragraph needs to be written concisely. The second paragraph can be used to answer the question of "why."

The first paragraph answers the *who, what, where and when* of the news release.

The second paragraph answers *why*. The third paragraph could go on to talk about why it is important to continue education, or what is currently happening at the farm as a consequence of attending

the conference. Observe that the most important information is in the first paragraph, and the least important will be in the last paragraph, thus, the inverted pyramid. Three paragraphs are a good length for news release, but be sure to make it interesting.

Send the news release to any newspaper or magazine you believe might have readers who would be interested in knowing more about your business. Be pleased when you see it in print, but do not be alarmed when you see it has been rewritten. Prepare your next news release as soon as you have something to say. Don't be shy because there's no one else who can tell your story better than you.

Try using the sample as a mode, substituting your own *who, what, when, where and why* into the paragraphs. Then send it to your local newspapers. When you send the news release include a date after which the article can be printed and include contact information (name and phone number) where more information can be gathered if there are any further questions by the editor.

#### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

##### LOCAL FARMER ATTENDS CONFERENCE

Dave Slater, owner and operator of Slater Turf Farm, Tryon, NC, attended the annual statewide turfgrass conference held last month in Charlotte, NC, sponsored by the Turfgrass Council of North Carolina.

The conference invites turfgrass professionals from across the southeast to continue their education by attending classes in their areas of expertise. The professionals also take time to visit the many vendors on the trade show floor who set up booths promoting products useful to the turfgrass industry.

#### CONTACT:

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slaterturf@msn.com

Now I have to go write some news releases and send them to the local papers. You should do the same. Good Luck.



## Shrewder Computing

### Web Design Tips For the Graphically-Challenged

Blinking spheres, spinning globes—they're oh-so early 1990s. Instead of attracting people to your Website, chances are those "cool" graphics are driving your customers away...in droves. That's because most people don't want to view a Website that reminds them of A Clockwork Orange.

Above all, your Website should be a place where you can attract customers. Information should be easy to find and easy to read. If you don't grab your viewers within the first minute or two, it's a lost sale.

Here are a few simple steps on which most Web designers agree:

- ✓ Leaving white space (a place with no text or graphics) on the page helps the eye focus more easily on your content.
- ✓ Make it easy for Web surfers to find information on your site. You can do this by thinking through your site navigation. Determine what links make sense to the average person, not just your business or organization.
- ✓ Graphics are an important element, but don't over-do it or make the file size too large. Graphics take longer to download. And because most people have relatively slow modems, they don't want to waste their free Internet minutes waiting for your site to appear. If your site doesn't arrive quickly, viewers will leave your site even more quickly.
- ✓ Unless you are a news-driven site or scholarly journal, lighten up on the text. Most people scan Web sites for information instead of reading word-for-word.
- ✓ Of course, small businesses may not be able to afford Web designers and rely instead on friends or family for help. Just ask them politely to take some of these tips into consideration when designing your site.





## TPI Action

### AD&D Insurance Carrier Drops TPI Program

After 16 years of providing its U.S. Class "A" (producer) members increasing amounts of accidental death and dismemberment insurance, TPI is forced to discontinue this benefit because the Chubb Insurance Company is unable to renew the insurance-based program. Three death claims in two years...all young TPI members killed in auto accidents...required the insurance company to pay-out substantially more in death benefits than was ever collected in premiums.

While recognizing the importance of this insurance to many of its members, TPI's insurance agents were still not able to identify any insurance companies prepared to offer any level of insurance and the risk was too great for TPI to self-insure.

### Record Number (Nearly 9 Million People) View TPI as Result of Successful PR Placements

TPI's public relations program efforts continue to increase through exposure in consumer and professional trade publications, radio stations and websites. In-depth coverage can be found in the May/June issue of *Turf News*—"Association News" section.

### Spain/Portugal Study Tour Airfare Reduced

Further negotiations with Iberia Airlines for TPI's October 25–November 10, 2003 study tour has resulted in a significant reduction in air fares from either Chicago or New York. Now, the round-trip airfare from Chicago will be \$650, a 22% drop from the earlier quoted fare of \$835; while the New York fare dropped 18%, from \$725 to \$596.

TPI will endeavor to make cost-saving fare arrangements for other departure cities if Iberia Airlines (or other carriers) can be convinced that the size of the group is sufficient

Tour brochures and reservation forms can be obtained from TPI.

To receive additional information on any of these items, Contact the TPI Office

Tel: 800/405-8873 or 847/705-9898

Fax: 847/705-8347

e-mail: [info@TurfGrassSod.org](mailto:info@TurfGrassSod.org)

Website: <http://www.TurfGrassSod.org>

## Water Awareness

### U.S.E.P.A. Offers Water-Saving Tips

According to the United States Environmental Protection Agency, many people do not realize how much money they can save by taking simple steps to save water, and they do not understand the cumulative effects such small changes can have on water resources and environmental quality.

- ♦ Nationally, an average of 14 percent of the water we buy is lost through leaks—that's like paying a 14 percent sales tax
- ♦ Fixing a leaky faucet, toilet or lawn watering system can reduce water consumption. Changing to water efficient plumbing fixtures and appliances can be major water and energy savers as well.
- ♦ Reducing water usage translates into energy savings—about eight percent of the nation's total energy production is used to treat, pump and heat water. Less energy demand results in fewer pollutants from power plants.
- ♦ When individual communities have focused on efficient use of water, they have enjoyed great success, the EPA says. Some communities such as Seattle, Washington; New York, New York; and Boston, Massachusetts; have been able to reduce overall water use by more than 20 percent.



## Business Management

### Turfgrass Producers International

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