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Turfgrass Producers International

Santa, Barbara, CA - February 17-21, 2003

“Turf & Surf” Midwinter Conference

Turf Professionals, welcome to *YOUR* 2004 TPI Midwinter Conference debut in Santa Barbara, CA, February 17-21! When you're not learning about *turf*, you can enjoy the *surf* and the area's other great attractions... from the ocean breezes and cool California wines, to golden sunsets, many exciting and interesting places to visit and lots of lush green turf! Bring your managers, employees and entire family to experience Santa Barbara.

At the TPI Midwinter Conference, the focus is on education. In addition to leaning valuable information from seminars and education sessions, you will gain insight from established area farms and leading scientists. You'll find top-notch education programs focusing on some of today's hottest topics and issues. Individual speakers and interactive panels will present the latest information that can help you be a more efficient producer. You gain valuable insight by asking questions and by listening to other producers from around the world who have similar problems and solutions.

The Pre-Conference Seminar is entitled "Dealing Effectively with Labor." Professional Consultant and Advisor Angelo H. Mino will discuss ways to more effectively manage seasonal labor.

TPI's General Education Sessions will address a wide range of topics: "Future

Technologies for Athletic Fields" will be explored and discussed by Chuck Dickson. Den Gardner will present a summary of the newest goals of the Evergreen Foundation. A panel of seed experts will debate the methods of seed testing and trials, with a focus on the importance of obtaining quality seed for use on turfgrass sod farms.

Join TPI's Show & Tell presentation to learn "what goes on" at some of the leading turfgrass farms. A three-member panel will each describe their farm operations, including techniques, local market, challenges and solutions. Their comments will be followed by a question-and-answer session. Next, in a "Back to the Basics" session, Dr. Frank Wong from the University of California will discuss "Best Management Practices" for turf diseases and what fungicides are being used to control them. To close the session, The University of Nevada, Las Vegas Athletic Director John Robinson will share some inspirational experiences.

This year's 3rd Annual ITPF Banquet, Awards & Fundraiser will be held at the Firestone Vineyards where you'll enjoy an evening of wine tasting, beer sampling, personalized wine glass etching and musical entertainment with a Beach Boys/California sound; not to mention great food! Check the TPI website www.TurfGrassSod.org for updates.



Your Year-end Contributions to ITPF Help You, Your Company, & Your Association

One of ITPF's generous contributors says, "I can either contribute to ITPF, or I can pay taxes...I'd rather spend the money where I know it will do some good...with the International Turf Producers Foundation."

As many farms and firms will be closing their financial books for the year, this is an ideal time to consider how large a tax-deductible contribution can be made to ITPF. The Foundation's "\$2-An-Acre" Annual Campaign, donating an item for the Midwinter Banquet Auction, participating in the ITPF Winter Golf Tournament or simply writing a large check are all ways to help fund turfgrass sod-specific research.

The other option of course is to not contribute to ITPF and pay more of your hard-earned money to state and federal income taxes.

It's your choice!

Nightmarish Sod Installation and Farm Stories Sought

By now, you should have received an e-mail asking you to describe your most challenging sod installation job and/or farm "nightmare," including what was done to "fix" the problem. Your stories could form the basis for an informative article in future issues of *Turf News* magazine. If you don't have access to e-mail, contact Cathi Griffith at the TPI office.

Taking Care of Business

By Thomas Stenklyft
I.C. System
St. Paul, MN

Debt Collection Letters that Really Work

Editor's note: The following information is from an article within "Nice People Can Collect Bad Debts," a booklet prepared by St. Paul-based I.C. System <<http://www.icsystem.com/>>. Nothing in this material is deemed to give legal advice.

It's safe to say that debt collection is one of the least favorite jobs. However, it is a necessary evil. You can improve cash flow and collect debts without damaging customer relationships. When debts are seriously past due, it may be necessary to send out a debt collection letter. At times, collection letters are exactly the right medium to use. Keep in mind the following guidelines:

- ✓ Mail all collection letters 10 days apart
- ✓ Include the following: "Use enclosed, pre-addressed envelope to send payment in full because..."
- ✓ Three letters are enough to signal state of communications

Here is an example of a series of debt collection letters:

First Letter

Dear Mr./Mrs./Ms.,

Your account has become seriously past due in the amount of \$250. Please mail your check for \$250 to us today. Use the enclosed pre-addressed envelope to insure prompt delivery.

We are anxious to clear your record in the interest of maintaining your payment reputation with us, and to save you money. Our policy requires that we begin charging interest on this \$250, if payment in full is not in our hands within 10 days of the date on this letter.

Sincerely,

(Your name and title)

Copy: Accounts Receivable
Department

Second Letter

(NOTE: Use legal rate of interest in your state or legal contract amount).

Dear Mr./Mrs./Ms.,

Over 10 days ago, we wrote to remind you that your \$250 account is seriously past due. It is impor-

tant that you pay now, in full.

We will begin charging interest in the amount of 5% simple annually from the date of original charge. If the \$250 remains unpaid in 10 days, the amount due will be \$253.12.

Please use the enclosed return-addressed envelope to mail your payment to us today. We will be looking for it.

Sincerely,

(Your name and title)

Copy: (name and title of owner or general manager)

Third Letter

Dear Mr./Mrs./Ms.,

This is our final notice to immediately pay the \$253.12 you owe us.

In keeping with our standard policy, 10 days from the date on this letter, the account will be referred to our collection agency for handling. That takes matters out of our hands. We don't want to do that but you have not responded to our previous notices and letters. We see no alternatives.

To avoid this action, it is imperative that you mail or bring your \$253.12 payment to our office right away.

Respectfully,

(Your name and title)

Copy: Collection processing file

Answer the following questions about collection letters and compare your answers at the end of this section:

- 1- Is the letter brief? Y/N
- 2- Does a request for payment-in-full appear in the first paragraph of the letter? Y/N
- 3- Does the letter contain cute messages? Y/N
- 4- Is the general tone of the letter apologetic? Y/N
- 5- Does the letter use concrete, simple language? Y/N
- 6- Does the closing paragraph include a reason why the debtor is better off by sending payment in full today? Y/N

- 7- Does the letter include the exact amount (in dollars and cents) of the payment-in-full? Y/N
- 8- Does the overall tone of the letter seem threatening? Y/N
- 9- Is there a sentence in the letter which refers to the return envelope? Y/N
- 10- Imagine yourself as the debtor. Would this letter sell you on making the payment-in-full today? Y/N

Answer Key:

1-Yes; 2-Yes; 3-No; 4-No; 5-Yes; 6-Yes; 7-Yes; 8-No; 9-Yes; 10-Yes

Four Ways To Qualify Prospects

Once you've identified a credible prospect, it's a good idea to review his or her needs and expectations of what is expected, along with how you will deliver the product, as well as the client's responsibility after the sale. For mutual awareness, ask him or her some "what," "when," "how," and "who" questions:

□ "What decision-making process do you go through when considering a purchase like this?" Reason: The answer is your road map to the sale, telling who to talk to, when, and about what.

□ "When do you see yourself moving forward with this project?" Reason: The prospect's time frame may not match yours. He might be a month away from the decision, and you want it today. Or, he might want to purchase tomorrow, but you can't deliver for a week or more. Whatever the case, it's important to get these issues out in the open now, to avoid any nasty surprises later in the process.

□ "How should we proceed, assuming you want to move forward?" Reason: How exactly will the purchase happen? Does the prospect rely on purchase orders? You need to know.

□ "Who besides you will be involved in making the decision?" This question assumes the prospect is personally involved in the decision-making process. That's an assumption that can only work in your favor: It gives the prospect the illusion of power, regardless of the reality of the situation.

Marketing Tip

By Sis Reda
Sod Solutions
Mt. Pleasant, SC

Market Round-Up of the Best Ideas from the Field

As a leading warm-season turfgrass developer, Sod Solutions <www.sod-solutions.com> provides a comprehensive marketing support program to our licensed producers located throughout the U.S., Brazil, South Africa and Australia. The program includes national and regional advertising to help them sell our proprietary turfgrasses. However, we've discovered they are often the most savvy about their local markets, able to refine our programs and even weave their own into the most effective strategies for motivating customers to buy. Following are some of the producers' marketing ideas we've seen during the last few years.

Truck Signage and Driver Preparation—Green Acres Turf Farm, Furman, SC. These two ideas fall into the category of "Why didn't we think of this?" Green Acres displays its farm name and contact information on signs mounted on the backs of their trucks, as well as on the doors. Their reasoning is, "There are as many cars following their



trucks as there are passing them on the road." Green Acres also educates their drivers about the farm's turfgrasses, and they keep brochures in the trucks. These simple activities equip the drivers, who are key customer contacts, to promote the farm's turfgrasse.

Turf Demonstration Area, Field Day Activities—Rhyne's Select Turf, Benton, AL. Rhyne's Select Turf produces EMPIRE™ Zoysia and another variety. Their farm's first field day event was last year. It was well organized and incorporated a series of demonstration activities that were fun, engaging and effective in reinforcing the best qualities of the zoysia. The demos included: an operating harvester, to show how neatly and cleanly the zoysia will block; a golf pro hitting balls across a wide expanse of it; and guests shoveling up corners of

planted variety, to show the deep, tight root structure. Rhyne's Select Turf also has recently installed an impressive turf demonstration area, which includes EMPIRE Zoysia and a number of varieties that the farm does not produce. The individual plots and the entire demo area are large to help customers, especially homeowners, evaluate their prospective purchases.

Promotional Video—Modern Turf, Rembert, SC. Modern Turf developed a cable TV commercial which they also have used as a promotional video. The original commercial, which was taped at the farm, effectively captures Modern Turf's capabilities, competitive advantages and products. The video has been used as a sales tool at special events and for other promotional efforts. Modern Turf is an active marketer, and as this dual use of resources demonstrates, they are practical.

Creative Print Advertising—Evergreen Turf, Tempe, AZ. Last year, Evergreen Turf developed a series of print ads that cleverly and effectively communicated some of their best (most competitive) business advantages. One ad featured the legs of a "prisoner," dragging ball-and-chain, with the headline, "You don't need to 'do time' waiting for sod to be delivered." This ad promoted Evergreen's ability to deliver great sod, at the right price, right away. Other ads

featured similarly unusual graphics tied to creative copy appropriately promoting the farm in a memorable way. Evergreen continues demonstrating creativity and



Shrewder Computing

Web Design Tips for the Graphically Challenged

Blinking spheres, spinning globes—they're a bit dated... somewhere about the early '90s. Instead of attracting people to your website, chances are those "cool" graphics are at least annoying but very likely 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 the viewers within the first few minutes, it's a lost sale.

There are a few simple steps on which most web designers agree:

- 1— Leaving white space (a place with no text or graphics) on the page helps the eye focus more readily on the content.
- 2— 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.
- 3— Graphics are an important element, but don't overdo them, possibly making the file size too large. Graphics take longer to download. And because many people have slow modems, they don't want to waste their internet minutes waiting for your site to appear. If your site doesn't arrive quickly, viewers will leave it even more quickly.
- 4— Unless you are a news-driven site or scholarly journal, lighten up on the text. Most people scan websites for information instead of reading word-for-word.

Whether relying on a paid web designer, friends or family to develop your website, ask them to use these tips and to pay attention to the details that could irritate viewers.

TPI Action

Ag Labor Legislation Needs TPI Member Push

Even with strong bi-partisan support in both Houses of Congress, newly introduced legislation that will streamline the H-2A seasonal farm labor process and provide a means for current illegal aliens to "adjust" their status, passage will require encouragement from TPI members. Call, fax or e-mail your Senators and Representatives to seek their vote for the AgJOBS legislation introduced by Senators Craig and Kennedy and Representatives Cannon and Berman. For more details and "talking points" contact the TPI office or the National Council of Ag. Employers (202/728-0300).

Having worked on this important farm labor issue for over seven years, TPI leaders are convinced this legislation (while not perfect) is the best possible solution to multiple farm-labor problems. Failure to act immediately and gain passage will translate into no activity on this issue for at least two more years.

Leaders Sought for TPI Board of Trustees

If you, or another turf producer you know, have leadership qualities and an interest in helping to guide TPI, contact TPI Nominating Committee Chairman Stan Gardner immediately: Tel: 303/252-1900; e-mail: StanTurf@aol.com. Potential candidates must be Class A (producer) members in good standing who are willing to participate in at least three Board meetings and other activities as needed for a period of at least three years. The Nominating Committee will meet candidates during the Midwinter Conference in Santa Barbara, CA.

Evergreen Foundation Begins Its Formation

In the coming months, you'll be hearing a lot about a new "super-coalition" of green industry associations. Its mission: "To raise the awareness of the environmental, economic and lifestyle benefits of landscapes and promote the significance of those who preserve and enhance green spaces at home, work and play." Plans call for a national, industry-supported \$2 million annual national PR and ad program. TPI Exec. Dir. Doug Fender serves on the Foundation's board.

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

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

Water Awareness

Share Locally: Ways to Save Water When Establishing New Lawns

- ♦ **Reduce steep slopes**—level surfaces allow water to penetrate; steep slopes allow run-off.
- ♦ **Test soil and amend**—create the best possible growing medium with organic materials, pH balance and nutrients.
- ♦ **Install an irrigation system**—water efficiency is greatly improved over hoses and especially hand-held sprinklers.
- ♦ **Select drought-tolerant varieties**—scientific grass breeding has developed many varieties of improved turfgrasses.
- ♦ **Sod rather than seed**—turfgrass sod requires 15 to 60 percent less water to establish a lawn than does seeding, depending on the area and conditions.
- ♦ **Use a soil probe**—water only when a probe or screwdriver is difficult to push into the ground or shows dry soil.
- ♦ **Water in the early morning or evening**—less wind drift and lower evaporation rates increase water efficiency use rates.
- ♦ **Prevent run-off situations**—apply water for brief periods or at reduced rates to allow greater penetration of the soil before run-off occurs.
- ♦ **Match fertilizer to plant requirements**—extension agents or professional agronomists can recommend timing and amounts of fertilizer needed.
- ♦ **Mow higher than normal with a sharp blade**—larger leaf surfaces hold plant liquids and shade the root zone.

Business Management

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