



New York State Turfgrass Association, Inc.

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A Message From President Tom Kaplun ...



As the green industry transitions from winter to spring with the busy season fast approaching in New York, I want to reach out and express what an honor it is to take on the presidency of the New York State Turfgrass Association. Thank you to our immediate past president, Steve Whipple for his many years of great service and leadership to this board. Always well-spoken and well thought out, Steve's leadership reflected the many great things NYSTA has accomplished in the last few years. I hope to carry on the leadership and mission of NYSTA just as Steve did.

I would like to thank Bob Nielsen, Jr. for taking on the role of Vice President, Kevin Collins for taking on the Secretary-Treasurer position, and our current board members - past presidents John Carlone, Jim Hornung Jr. and Greg Chorvas. Directors Chris Strehl, Chris Pogge, Dominic Morales and Darren Shuman, and newly elected Directors Andy Eick and Matt Lindner. NYSTA represents and serves all facets of the green industry, and our board reflects the diverse membership we encompass. I am very fortunate to continue working with a group of professionals that have great passion for the green industry in New York State. Additionally, I would like to thank our Executive Director, Sue VanAmburgh, for her leadership and organization. Sue's can-do attitude is infectious. Lastly, thank you to Elizabeth Seme who, even in retirement, continues to advise on matters of importance to our industry in true watchdog like fashion.

Over the course of this past year, NYSTA advocated right up until the bitter end against the Birds and the Bees Bill. With industrywide support we engaged with many legislators and the governor's office about the impacts this bill would have on our industry. Although we did not achieve the desired outcome we had hoped for, we did make our presence known and will continue to look for ways to strengthen our advocacy efforts and footprint in Albany as further legislation arises. Todd Vandervort, of the Vandervort Group and Michael Lee, Government Affairs Director for the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America, did a tremendous amount of work to help us try and get a veto or chapter amendment for this bill, and we are grateful for their steadfast efforts and support.

The good news is that we have some great legislative support for our industry in Albany and for the first time in 4 years, on March 4th, we returned to Albany for Turfgrass Advocacy Day. I want to thank Todd Vandervort, the Government Affairs Committee, and our sponsors - *BASF, Syngenta, Ocean Organics, Michael Bellantoni, LLC, Target Specialty Products, RISE, New York Green Industry Council, Landscape Contractors Association of Long Island, National Association of Landscape Professionals, Capital Region Golf Course Owners Association, Metropolitan Golf Association, Hudson Valley Golf Course Superintendents Association, Met Golf Course Superintendents Association, Northeast Chapter Golf Course Superintendents Association, the Golf Course Superintendents Association of NY, and Long Island Golf Course Superintendents Association* for helping to make this day possible. Just over 25 of us gathered to meet with 36 legislators, as well as Kevin King, NYS Deputy Secretary for Food and Agriculture, and Lindsey McMahon, Sr. Policy Advisor for Food & Agriculture, to advocate for TEF funding in the amount of \$200,000 for the 2024-2025 NYS Budget year.

Additionally, we spent time talking to legislators about the challenges we will face if our industry is mandated to "go green" without having the proper time, infrastructure, technology, and funding in place to adjust. We are all united in our efforts to protect the environment in NYS and we all take great pride in the environmental stewardship bestowed upon us. If further change is warranted, our industry will respond and do what we do best in our everyday jobs, we will

adapt and adjust. But legislation must be scientifically backed, realistic in its timelines and cannot be economically crippling to our business. To that end, our advocacy efforts do not stop, and we need greater support from our membership when harmful bills reach the senate and assembly floor. A few minutes of engagement with your local legislators, whether it be by email, phone, or in-person, can have a great impact on the future of our professions.

Just as Lobby Day returned in-person, our first in-person educational seminar since the pandemic was held this past December in Hauppauge, NY. Thank you to John Carlone for spearheading this event. It was great to see over 100 people and presenters gather again for a day of education and social interaction. Self-admittedly, over the last few years I took for granted how nice it can be to gather with my industry peers. Going forward, NYSTA remains committed to continuing online education and providing an in-person education day that will float around the state.

In 2023, we began a member only benefit partnering with Steve McDonald, owner of Turf Disease Solutions. Steve's monthly video updates were very well received and provided real time field updates that help with decision making and agronomic planning. This partnership will continue in 2024, as well as our long-time partnership with Cornell University to bring you the Branching Out newsletter during the 2024 growing season.

Labor shortages, employee recruitment, and inadequate wages have all been pressing issues in our industry for some time now. Just over three years ago, NYSTA embarked on a workforce development plan that would address the labor challenges we face in New York State. Under the leadership of Dominic Morales, NYSTA employed the services of Tyler Bloom, founder of Tyler Bloom Consulting, to develop a NYS Department of Labor Certified Apprenticeship Program for Turf Technicians and Equipment Technicians. Since the apprenticeship program was formally approved by New York State in December of 2023, NYSTA has been working with SUNY Delhi and a steering committee of NYSTA members to develop a two-year curriculum for apprentices that will combine on the job training with an online curriculum. In the fall of 2024, our first class of apprentices will begin online instruction via SUNY Delhi working towards their apprentice certificate. We are extremely excited about the opportunity this program presents for employers and employees. For information about the NYS Turf Apprentice and Equipment Technician Apprenticeship program, please [click here](#).

Lastly, regarding the NYSTA Turfgrass Environmental Stewardship Fund (TESF). Since its inception in 2006, NYSTA has advocated for over 2 million dollars in the NYS Budget to fund turf research, education, best management practices, and professional outreach. To Allied Green Industry Associations, if you need funding, please do not hesitate to submit a proposal. The grant cycle runs from April 1st through March 31st. At any time during the year, you can submit a proposal for TEF funding in the next grant cycle. The proposal will be reviewed once the NYS budget is approved, typically in early to mid-April. NYSTA will receive a letter indicating the amount we are allocated, typically one to two weeks after the budget is approved. At this time, we then have 45 days to gather any last-minute proposals, review all proposals and decide how best they can be allocated. If you submit a request after this 45-day period, it is not that we will not review the proposal, but it will have to wait until the following year. I urge any NYS association who needs financial support for whatever your initiative may be to submit a proposal. The purpose of this fund is to support the advancement of the turf industry in NYS, and I pledge to do this to the best of our association's ability. If you have any questions as it relates to the TEF, please do not hesitate to reach out to Sue or me.

On behalf of the NYSTA Board, I wish you all a great 2024 season! Do not hesitate to reach out if there is something NYSTA can address, or if you would like to become involved in the association. We are always seeking active participants who want to volunteer in any way you can.

Thank you for your continued support of our association!

Tom Kaplun
NYSTA President
