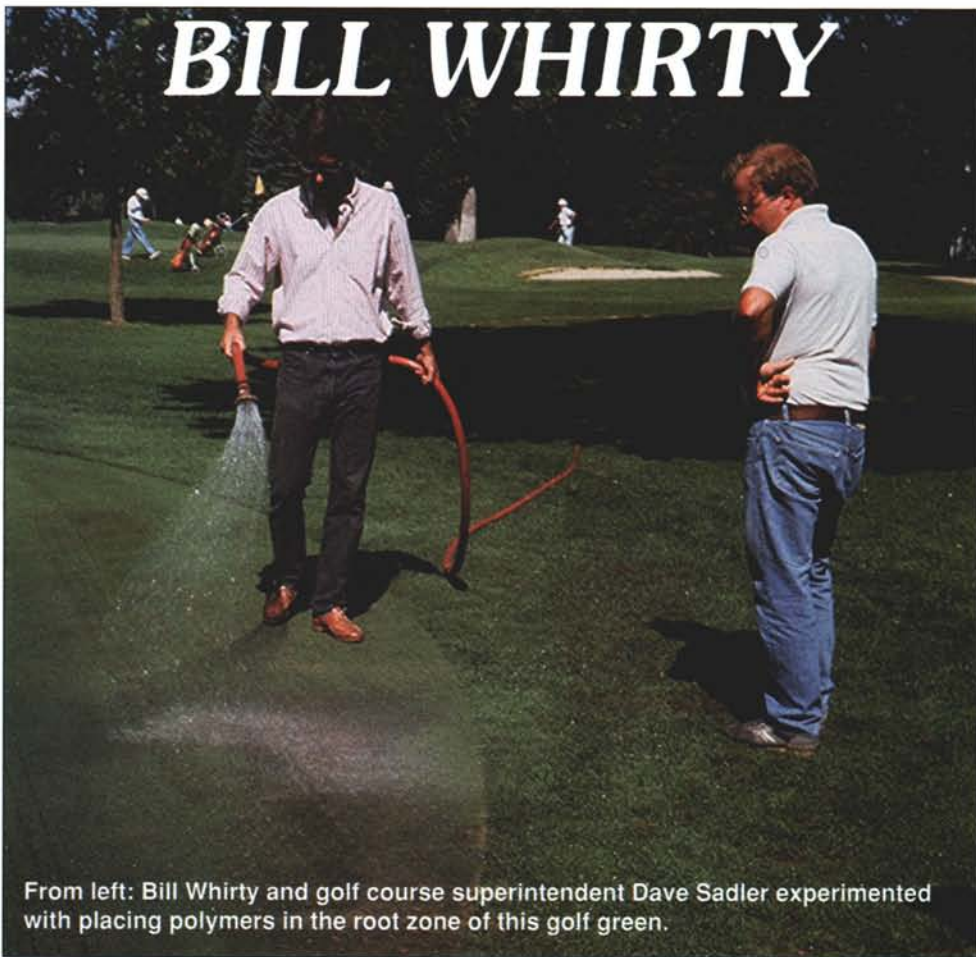


# STMA PROFILE: THE MANY HATS OF

## BILL WHIRTY



From left: Bill Whirty and golf course superintendent Dave Sadler experimented with placing polymers in the root zone of this golf green.

By Steve And  
Suz Trusty

Competitive soccer is big in Fort Collins, CO. Leagues formed for inter-city and intra-city play challenge their opponents on the 26 soccer fields within the Fort Collins park system.

Keeping those fields in shape for safe, competitive play is just one segment of the overall responsibilities of city parks supervisor and STMA member, Bill Whirty.

The Fort Collins parks system offers its residents a wide range of recreational opportunities. Besides the 26 soccer fields, there are five Junior Athletic Association (JAA) football fields, 10 lighted softball fields, two lighted hardball fields and 11 unlighted softball/baseball fields. Within the city's 41 parks are 375 acres of irrigated parkland and 41 playgrounds. Winding along the foothills of the Rockies are trails-14 miles paved and six miles unpaved.

This is Whirty's domain.

"I do have to keep changing hats," says Whirty. "With the trails, the parks, the

playgrounds, the irrigation systems and the sports turf fields, there are plenty of challenges. Fortunately, our entire parks department staff functions with an incredible amount of cooperation and interaction. Jeff Lehman, who also has the title of parks supervisor, oversees the electrical areas and the infields. The whole department works as a team."

Whirty has worked for the city for 14 years, the last 10 in his current position. "Participation in youth sports has exploded," he says. "We've experienced a 7-to-8-percent growth rate each year for the past 11 years. In the spring of 1991, 3,300 youngsters were involved in the various programs.

"Maintenance and development form a double challenge. As sports field use has increased, we've been faced with not only maintaining what we have, but with the development of new play areas to accommodate such rapid growth."

Because the parks system is an integral part of the lifestyle of such a broad range of people,

each component of the whole system is viewed by some as "the primary function" of the park. This attitude leaves no room for slack, no area where services can be shaved.

Tight budgets and limited funding are a major factor in every city's operation. Doing more with less has made Whirty's task even more challenging.

"The staff for 1992 includes 10 full-time employees with the addition of 20 seasonal employees during the summer," he explains. "In 1991, we had 25 seasonal employees."

These trends led to Whirty's involvement with STMA. Three years ago, he was the program speaker on overseeding for the Colorado State University Turfgrass Conference. During the conference, Whirty and Tom Lujan of Mile-High Stadium discussed common problems. The more they talked, the more apparent it became that there was a

real need to share information.

Up to that point, the Turfgrass Conference had offered two tracks, one for the golf courses and one for lawn care. As well as participating in the Turfgrass Conferences, as part of his quest for up-to-date, usable information, Whirty became a member of the Colorado Golf Course Superintendents Association (CGCSA). These conduits of information and opportunities for contact with industry professionals were, and continue to be, beneficial, yet certain areas of concern were not being addressed.

"Sports turf care has become a very important issue," Whirty emphasizes. "With such growth in youth interest, the management of turf has to be attuned for both safety and playability, without cutting expectations in other areas of the system. The need to communicate and share ideas with others in similar situations is vital."

Augmenting the resources of the national association with an active local branch of sports turf professionals facing common problems had great appeal. Spurred by the possibilities, Lujan and Whirty began a serious effort to form a local chapter of STMA. They contacted likely prospects with an enthusiasm so contagious that the first meeting, held shortly after the birth of the idea, had 11 attendees.

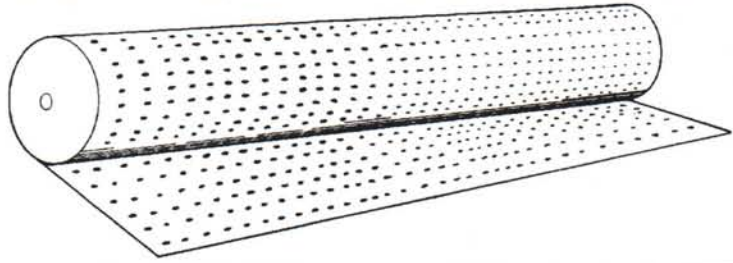
"We got great support," Whirty reports with a smile. "The Midwest and Florida Chapters shared their by-laws and counseled us through the early stages. The national organization gave us a solid backing."

The local group was incorporated as a stage chapter in December of 1990, with Tom Lujan as president and Whirty as president-elect. Membership has now expanded to 97. The 1992 board includes president-elect Ron Martin of the Falcon, CO school district; Vice-President Bill Thornton with Toro Irrigation; Secretary-Treasurer Joe Adams with the City of Greeley Parks Department; Executive Secretary Mark Leisure, who is field manager for Sky Sox Stadium in Colorado Springs; and national representative and past Vice-President Larry Perotti of Sharp Brothers Seed Company. Lujan continues to serve on the board as past president.

The Colorado chapter has indeed been active. With their encouragement, the Turfgrass Conference has added a third track to its program, offering ses-

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One of five Junior Athletic Association football fields under Whirty's care.

## Bill Whirty

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sions on sports turf and parks.

"The national association of STMA came through with the additional coverage needed to support this track at the 1991 conference," says Whirty. "Members from national provided key parts of the program."

Along with continuing its involvement with the Turfgrass Conference, the chapter holds a hands-on workshop during the summer meeting. Proceeds from the workshops are split between the national organization and the state chapter, with 20-percent channeled to STMA and 80-percent to CSTMA.

CSTMA is also working towards holding an STMA regional institute. The institutes bring in even more national people, and cover how both the chapter and national organization interact and influence each other. They also provide funds to STMA by reversing the percentage of proceeds distribution—with 80-percent going to STMA and 20-percent to the holding chapter.

At Institutes, "customers" of the sports turf professionals are invited as speakers and participants. These customers, coaches, athletic directors and players, provide further insight to the common goals of safe, playable sports turf.

Whirty says, "Where the workshops cover nuts and bolts, the Institutes broaden the scope of information and add the important dimension of customer

communication. The Colorado chapter is looking forward to continuing to work together with the national STMA board to achieve goals such as hosting a regional Institute."

According to Whirty, the Colorado chapter plans to reach out more to academia and others who can help get the word out to students that sports turf offers viable, exciting career options with great future potential.

Another factor in the goal of strengthening sports turf professionalism is interaction among turf specialists in related fields. Because of his involvement with the CGCSA, Whirty is on the Scholarship Committee of the Rocky Mountain Turf Foundation, a coalition of area turf professionals. The organization is branching out, having added the Sod Producers and the CSTMA. In the past, only the CGCSA has been able to fund scholarships. Whirty hopes to encourage more involvement on the part of CSTMA, including raising funds for sports turf scholarships.

Take a person who understands the value of his profession, knows inter-industry communications are vital, is willing to share the information learned through successes and failures, has the ability to confront multiple challenges, and you'll find a leader. Add the ingredients of knowledge, flexibility, enthusiasm and leadership, and you'll find "hat changer" Bill Whirty. □