

Certification Sparks an Upward Spiral



by Dale Getz

The Sports Turf Managers Association (STMA) Certification Program is up and running. Materials have been finalized, reviewed by legal counsel and the National Certification Commission and approved by the STMA Board of Directors. Applicant packets have been sent to all STMA members and to others who have requested them.

Application forms are arriving at STMA Headquarters. A 30-day interval prior to testing was initiated for the initial group testing period. From mid-January of 2000 forward, a 60-day interval from the receipt of the application forms by Headquarters to

the testing date will be in effect. The interval allows the Certification Coordinator time to check the data supplied and verify the points to be awarded.

Certification will benefit the individual, the sports turf industry, and the STMA.

Certification Benefits for the Individual

First, the certified individual will gain pride of accomplishment in achieving a goal above and beyond the daily requirements of job performance and in demonstrating a superior level of competence.

In order to qualify for the opportunity to take the certification test, the individual must achieve, and docu-



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Figure 1. Basic Requirements to Qualify for CSFM Certification Testing

Please note: If any of the BASIC REQUIREMENTS are not fulfilled at the time of application, the application will be returned to the applicant (NO EXCEPTIONS).

1. The applicant must have a minimum of a high school diploma or equivalent.
2. The applicant must achieve a minimum of 40 points earned through a combination of education and experience with the following criteria:

EDUCATION & EXPERIENCE POINTS

Education		Points	Experience	
Program			Activity	Points/year*
STMA Approved Educational Program (See current list of approved programs)		varies	Sports Turf Crew	1
			Supervisory Sports Turf (Assistant, Foreman or Lead Position)	3
			Sports Turf Manager (Top Position)	6
			Assistant Golf Course Superintendent	1 1/2
			Golf Course Superintendent	3
Degree			Note: No more than 50 percent of total experience points can be earned on a golf course.	
Associate Degree			*A minimum of 1,500 hours must be spent on the job to qualify for each claimed year.	
Non-turf		2	**The application and resume will be evaluated to determine eligibility for certification.	
Turf or related plant science		8	Written Test: Qualified applicants will be scheduled for a written multiple choice test developed for four major sections pertinent for a sports turf manager.	
Bachelors Degree				
Non-turf		8		
Turf or related plant science		16		
Advanced Degree: Masters or Doctorate				
Turf or related plant science		24		

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ment the achievement of, a minimum of 40 points earned through a combination of education and experience (see Appendix 1).

We've often referred to the "art and science" of sports turf management. This is addressed by the requirement for a combination of education and experience. While management of athletic playing surfaces requires a solid foundation in the principles of agronomics and turf physiology, there are certain elements of the process an individual must acquire through experience.

In sports turf management you sometimes "tamper" with the laws of science to achieve immediate, short-term results. Then you strictly adhere to scientific principles to correct those inconsistencies and bring field conditions back in compliance with the same laws you previously manipulated.

Unless you've "been there" and "done that" you won't have the "feel" for the "best" degree of moisture in the basepath skinned material or recognize the "right" point to raise or lower mowing height of cut, or determine the "precise" amount of topdressing to apply to achieve specific results.

In order to qualify for certification, an individual will need to have accumulated a large span of knowledge and a wide level of experience. The learning process and the self-examination that always precede formal testing will raise the individual's level of competence. Their personal level of professionalism rises and they demonstrate that factor in their own sports turf program. Their demonstrated level of ability makes them more valuable to their current employer and, in turn, gives them an edge in the job market.

To "certify" is defined by Webster's dictionary as, "to guarantee that something or someone meets a standard." Note that according to legal guidelines, any association or profession is able to certify only that an individual has met the outlined requirements for testing and has correctly answered the required exam questions and, for STMA, that these questions were developed from competencies established by professionals, educators and researchers within the industry. STMA is not certifying such things as an individual's work ethic, job performance, judgment, decision making, etc.

The human element will always be a factor in how effectively, efficiently

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and consistently an individual puts their knowledge and experience to work. Most individuals who invest the time and effort to reach certification status will have both the ability and the management skills to successfully fulfill the most demanding positions.

Certification Benefits for the Industry

Certification will benefit the industry as well. Study of the competencies and the resultant discussion of the competencies among industry professionals are sure to result in a solid knowledge base and perhaps in some degree of standardization of practices. Because of the broad scope addressed in the competencies, it becomes necessary for each certified sports field manager to demonstrate understanding and mastery not only of agronomics and turfgrass physiology, but also of such factors as the maintenance of baseball field skinned areas and the principles of irrigation management.

As knowledge is accumulated and skills are honed, the level of professionalism rises not only in individual programs, but across the industry. Just as great sports accomplishments raise the bar for all competitors, excellence in field care raises the level of expectations for all sports turf managers. The results are better fields and safer fields at all levels of sports competition.

Challenges arise as well. Where budgets and staffing levels aren't adequate to meet the level of expectations within the parameters at the existing level of field use, the site's sports turf manager is faced with informing and educating the facility owners, user groups, athletes and coaches. While sports turf managers are highly effective at doing the most with the least, there are limits to what can be accomplished. STMA will need to continue an aggressive program of education within the green industry, the sports community and the general public to help get this message across. Information about the certification program and the combination of knowledge and skill required to achieve certification will be a part of this message. The Certified Sports Field Manager status as designated by the logo and the initials CSFM after the name of a certified individual on business cards, stationery and other correspondence will constantly reinforce that message.

Certification Benefits STMA and Its Membership

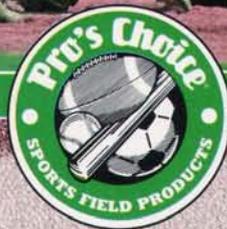
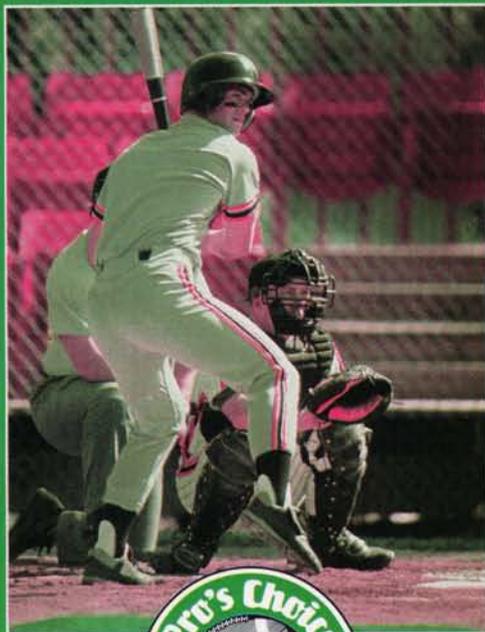
Greater awareness of STMA and of the certification program will help to increase STMA membership numbers. With increased membership, we build a greater base of brain power and human resources. This impacts areas of education and research as well as networking opportunities. It also attracts more financial power to the association, expanding the funding available for educational opportunities, scholarships, internships and research.

The certification program also will increase STMA's level of recognition within the green industry and the sports community. STMA becomes the agency certifying a specified level of competency and at the same time helps gain acknowledgment of both the complexity of the profession and the need for adequate funding for field development and maintenance.

The rising professionalism of the STMA membership will translate across the association in the commitment and dedication within board positions, committee positions and overall member involvement. This will extend to the chapter level and from there to the community level.

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The Upward Process

In effect, the certification program has kicked off a huge upward spiral, with a growing level of professionalism extending from individual to individual across the industry.

Now that the certification program is in place, updating it will be an ongoing process. Sports turf management is a complex and multi-faceted profession, and new technology is continually being introduced and demands for field use are increasing. The STMA anticipates the need for the certification program to reflect, and be responsive to, industry progress. The three-year certification renewal cycle is designed to keep certified individuals responsive to industry progress as well.

There's no better position to be in as we enter the new millennium.

Dale Getz is Athletic Facilities Manager for the University of Notre Dame and co-chair of the Certification Committee.

Editor's Note: If you haven't received an applicant packet and would like one, please contact STMA Headquarters: phone (800) 323-3875; fax (712) 366-9119; or e-mail SportsTMgr@aol.com.

Appendix 1. The Certification Process

In order to apply for certification, an applicant must achieve a minimum of 40 points earned through a combination of education and experience. (This is outlined in the criteria in Figure 1.)

The certification applicant packet contains a credentialing information booklet which outlines the basics of the program and the procedures to follow in making the application. The application forms and education worksheets are in the packet.

Also included is a "Competency Outline" and a "List of Competencies" in the areas of agronomics, pest management, administration and sports specific field management. The List of Competencies was developed by the Certification Committee in "need to know" areas that relate to the four defined segments of study and of testing. Each segment is introduced by the statement, "In order to qualify for the designation Certified Sports Field Manager (CSFM), you should be able to," and followed by the specific competencies in that area.

A Resource List for the Sports Turf Manager, a general educational tool which is available from STMA Headquarters, also is in the certification applicant packet.

Once all the qualifications for application are met, the qualified applicant will be scheduled for a written multiple choice test developed for the four major sections pertinent for a sports turf manager. These will be proctored tests con-

ducted at accepted assessment centers so that each qualified applicant can sit for the test as it fits their schedule.

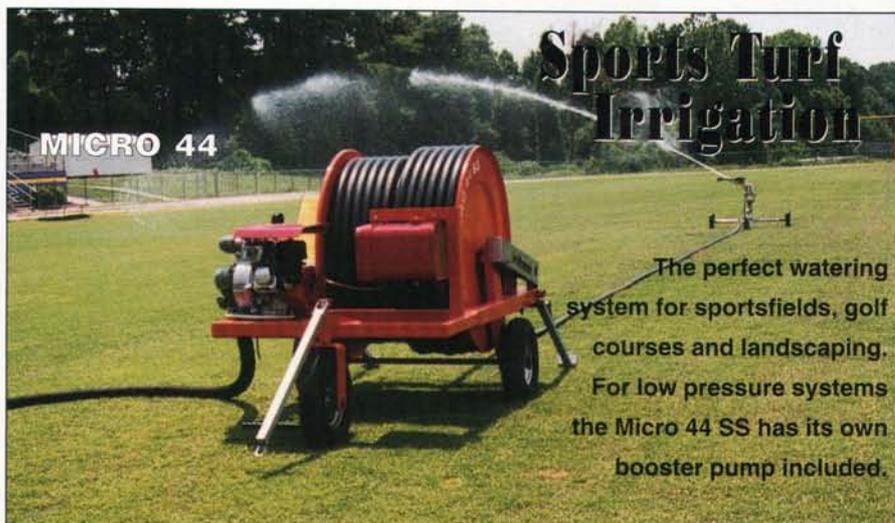
In addition, the test will be offered under similar supervised conditions in conjunction with each STMA Annual Conference, beginning with the 11th Annual Conference and Exhibition held Jan. 12-16, 2000, in St. Louis. Testing for those who have submitted their applications and have been pre-approved to sit for the test will take place on the morning of Jan. 16 at the Regal Riverfront Hotel, beginning at 8 a.m.

Each section of the test must be passed to achieve certification. A passing grade is 80 percent. If an individual does not receive a passing grade in any section of the test, that part of the test will need to be retaken within the parameters outlined in the credentialing booklet. If an individual fails to pass that portion of the test, or fails to complete the testing process within the established time limitation, they will need to start over. A review process has been established within the certification program to handle individual's questions on specific issues related to qualifications and testing.

Once an individual becomes certified, they keep their certification status active through a certification renewal process by meeting specific standards within a three year cycle. These standards will include Continuing Education Units (CEUs), as defined and accepted by national educational accreditation standards and, as with the awarding of most CEUs, requiring pre-approval and proof of participation.

Unique to the STMA certification renewal process is meeting the specified level of Industry Service Points (ISPs) within the same three year cycle. These will be earned by participation in such activities as sports field related service projects and by contributions to the sports turf industry by such activities as providing articles for newsletters, magazines or other publications; coordinating, hosting or speaking at chapter or green industry events; or by serving as an officer, board member or committee chair within the sports turf industry.

A list of ISP opportunities and their point values is included in the certification packet. The specific CEU and ISP requirements also will be provided to newly certified individuals, along with the appropriate forms for reporting them. STMA Headquarters will serve as the hub for information on certification and the certification process. 



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