Regular readers of this space will notice another unfamiliar face atop the column this month; I’m Eric Schroder, the third editor of sportsTURF in the past four issues. What does that mean to you?

Well, a lot and a little. A little because sportsTURF remains the official publication of the Sports Turf Managers Association (STMA), which means Steve and Suz Trusty, their staff, and all the STMA officers and members who contribute their energy and expertise to these pages haven’t gone anywhere. Complete chapter news, peer-written technical articles, business advice, and other insight from STMA remain the foundation of the magazine no matter whose mug shot might appear in “The Front Office.”

A lot because an editor should see and engender the “big picture” and provide something useful and/or entertaining when you pick up his or her magazine. A lot because if and when we meet I’m going to ask for your opinion about how sportsTURF can be better. A lot because my name is linked with the quality of this magazine as much as yours is to your showcase field.

Here’s where I hum that familiar tune asking you to let me know how I’m managing your magazine. It’s customary for editors to do so and with good reason; no matter how hard I try I’ll make mistakes and I want to know about it. My job is to make your job easier, so help me by zipping me an email or picking up the phone when there’s something, good or bad, you have to say.

One warm June morning this summer I bugged out of the office and headed for my local muny 9-hole golf course in the name of “research” for my new job. Playing around, I had new appreciation for the work that went into renovating several holes last year; then I came upon a crew dealing with a soggy ditch that I remembered as being dry ground. The timing was wrong but I wanted to ask them, “Hey, what’s the problem?”

So don’t be surprised, especially you Chicagoland region readers, if I call you someday and ask to come see your problems—and your accomplishments, of course.

My arrival foreshadows another change next month that you’ll notice immediately—a physically larger, redesigned magazine that will focus more on the tools and services you rely on to do your best possible work. We hope that change, combined with my steadfast effort to present relevant information every issue, will ease your using sportsTURF like a reliable tool.
Watering just at the time of wilting will maximize the time between each watering to give the infrequent part of this general rule of thumb. When wilt occurs nearly all of the available water in the soil is gone and you need to supply enough water to completely fill the root zone again. Think of your root zone as a tank of water. Run the tank near empty and then fill it back up. Filling the tank or thoroughly watering the field is another way of expressing “deep” irrigation. Depending on the soil’s water holding capacity, it may take 0.5 to 1.5 inches of water to replenish the moisture between these infrequent waterings.

Sand-based systems store less water so they need to be checked more often (daily), but not necessarily watered more often. Mild wilting on sand-based fields is a mandatory part of proper management to maximize rooting and traffic tolerance. Since water storage is minimal in sand systems, be prepared to water shortly after onset of wilt. A sand field showing mild wilt will usually need watering within 24 hours. If wilt is carried too far then tire tracking from equipment may injure turf. Tire traffic on severely wilted turf will cause brown grass in the tire tracks a few days after driving on the wilted grass.

Black and gray discoloration of soils often referred to as “black layer,” is a clear indication of excessive and improper irrigation. A nasal inspection of the soil will easily detect a stinky odor of methane gas from the anaerobic condition. This is a common problem on sand-based and native soil fields that are sodded and then overwatered in an attempt to make the sod grow-in faster.

This summer I met some great people at the Tennessee Valley Sports Turf Chapter’s workshop in Knoxville. In addition to teaching me the greeting “hi-y’all,” our host Bobby Campbell showed us his irrigation system on the Volunteers Stadium Field. As Bobby bent over and grunted to manually turn on one of the six big gun irrigation heads he imparted this bit of wisdom “over watering is not a problem for us since we have to walk across the field each time before we turn on the water.” It’s not the tool, but how you use it. Bye y’all.