

# Bob Campbell, CSFM, moves to STMA helm

BY SUZ TRUSTY

**B**ob Campbell, CSFM, Director of Grounds and Maintenance for the University of Tennessee, is President of the Sports Turf Managers Association for 2003. He was installed during the association's annual meeting last month, in conjunction with the 14th Annual Conference & Exhibition in San Antonio. Campbell had previously served one year as president-elect, two one-year terms as treasurer and a two-year term representing sports turf managers of College and University facilities.

"Serving as President of STMA is a responsibility I take very seriously," Campbell said. "I strongly feel it's important not only to give back to new members and young people starting off in this industry, but also to support the positive image of the sports turf manager as a professional in an important and worthwhile profession. I understand the unique challenges and the rewards involved in this profession, having been privileged to manage high school athletic fields and minor league baseball fields, prior to accepting the university position.

"The STMA is a member-driven association," Campbell continued. "The members do have control. Each sports turf manager has an equal say—no matter what his or her facility or position. I believe communication is an important part of the President's role. I want anyone to feel free to contact me at any time. Even if I don't agree I will listen and take their opinions into consideration. I pledge to all members that I will have the good of the profession and STMA at heart in any decision I make."

Campbell credits his family, and especially his wife, Toni, as his own personal support system. The UT connection also is a family matter. Toni is a math instructor at UT; son Peter graduated in 1999 in Electrical Engineering, and daughter Tracy is a senior majoring in geology.

## Campbell's background

Though turf management was not Campbell's original goal, it's been part of his background since early childhood. He says, "For as long as I can remember I have been involved in sports. I enjoyed playing any game, but baseball was probably my best sport and the one as a kid I was the most interested in. As both a player and fan, I was always interested in what the fields looked like and how they were prepared for games. My first experience in sports turf management was working a Little League field for \$5 a day while attending Martin Junior College in Pulaski, Tennessee."

Campbell graduated from Tennessee in 1973 during which time he also served as graduate assistant baseball coach. He holds a BS degree in accounting and an MS in history. He taught high school and coached base-





# Cover Story

ball and football from 1973 until 1985. Like most high school coaches he was responsible for maintaining the fields. He not only accepted the challenge of improving the baseball field but the football field as well at Doyle High School in Knoxville. In 1985 he gave up his coaching position to accept the position of sports turf manager for the Knoxville Blue Jays, at that time the AA franchise of the Toronto Blue Jays. For the next 5 years he juggled two careers, high school math teacher and baseball groundskeeper.

In 1990 he accepted a full-time position at the University of Tennessee working for Bob Davis, Associate Athletic Director for Facilities. Campbell's primary responsibility was the care of all athletic fields. Campbell says, "I feel very fortunate. This was the job I always wanted. I grew up as a Tennessee fan and this is my school. I believe this is one of the premier sports turf positions. The expectations are high, but you have the support and resources to get the job done. Working at a high profile facility doesn't necessarily make me a better sports turf manager. I've been fortunate to be in the right place at the right time to reach this position."



Campbell's responsibilities include the football and baseball fields, a track, golf practice range, and women's softball and soccer fields. "To be successful you must have good people working with you," he says.

In 1990, UT had an artificial turf football game field and natural turf football practice fields, a baseball field, track, and a golf practice range. In 1993, Campbell coordinated the design and construction of the sand-based football field when the university converted the artificial turf field to grass. Since then UT has added women's soccer and softball. Campbell's responsibilities now include all the fields, related landscape, and other facility responsibilities.

As facilities and expectations have increased the staff also has grown. The original staff of three full-time employees has grown to a full-time staff of six, including a mechanic, and approximately six part-time student employees, many of whom are turf student interns.

"In order to be successful you must have good people working with you. My assistant, Kevin Zurcher, started working for me as a high school student while I was coaching baseball and moved with me to the Blue Jays during his college years," Campbell said. "He stayed with the Jays a couple of years after I left, and then came here. Jimmy Andes also worked for me at the Blue Jays while he was a high school student. Thomas Garner is the most recent addition to our staff. Supervisor Myron Roach and mechanic Lowell Richey were working for the athletic department when I arrived. Both have been around here for about 30 years. Myron has strong ties to Tennessee; both his father and grandfather were head groundskeepers for Tennessee. I wouldn't trade anyone on this team. They take pride in what they do and understand the high expectations placed on them by all that support the University of Tennessee. My role is to provide them with the tools they need to succeed. They are the ones who make me look good."

"I feel fortunate that most of my staff were athletes for I believe that playing the game at some level is more important than a formal turf education. If you have played the game, you have a better understanding of what the finished product should be. If you know what you are striving for, it is much easier to learn how to get there. You also have a better understanding of the players and coaches who will use the fields, thus making communication much easier."

That's the system that worked so well for Campbell. It was during his stint with the Blue Jays that he first sought technical turf advice from Dr. Tom Samples, extension turf specialist for UT. "Tom has served as my own personal professor and mentor," Campbell said. "He's never run out of patience with all my questions and, as a true teacher, walked me through the learning process from the basics through managing a sand-based field. Dr. Coleman Ward was another mentor as well as Dr. Gil Landry and Dr. A. J. Powell, who were always willing to lend a hand. I was taught by the best without being in a classroom with them. And the advice and support from the network of sports turf managers has been so extensive I can't even begin that list."

## Challenges facing STMA

STMA was founded in 1981. It is a relatively young association, but one that is experiencing rapid growth. Campbell notes the primary challenges at this stage of development are to raise the level of professionalism throughout the sports turf management profession and to establish an accurate and positive image of the profession.

"One goal is to make others aware of what we do, and that extends to our employers, those using our facilities, other facets of the green industry, and the general public. Development and maintenance of athletic fields is complex, but we, as a profession, haven't done a very good job of spreading that message," Campbell said.

"The vast majority of sports turf managers came to the profession because they love sports, love the game, and love to grow grass. How the game is played is the most important thing. We want our fields to be in such great condition that they enhance, rather than detract from, the game. We're content to stay in the background if the game is a

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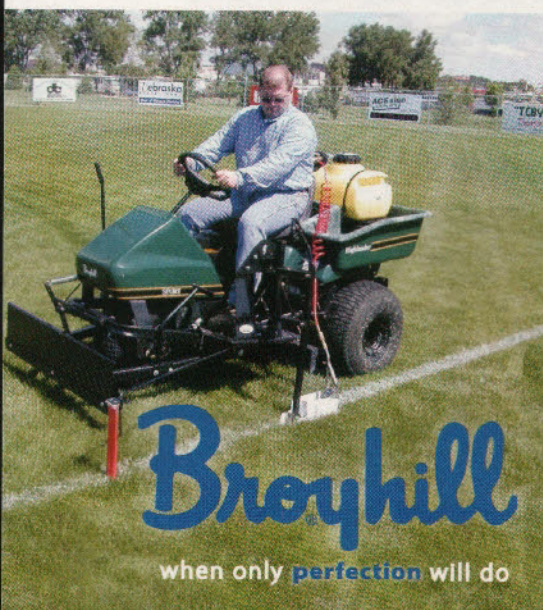
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success. We're far more likely to shrug off a compliment on good field conditions than to explain or even mention all the procedures and manipulations it took to get the field in shape. We mistakenly give the impression that anyone could do our job. We're the experts on the fields; yet, all too often, we're not included in the decision process during design, construction or field use planning."

Sports turf managers are constantly in the spotlight. Campbell notes, "Every time the camera is rolling, we're being judged and many times we're being judged on things beyond our control. And it's not just during a big game. Someone is going to see what we do nearly every day and form a first impression of our workmanship or of us as a professional. We don't have the luxury of being out of view. You can rehearse a play and no one sees the mistakes that are made. With sports fields, you may make a mistake on Tuesday that shows up on Saturday or Sunday. As professionals, we have an obligation to perform at top levels to improve our image and develop an accurate perception of who we are and what we do."

"Overuse is the major problem with most fields. However, most communities are no longer satisfied with fields that don't look like the fields they see on TV every weekend. Yet we haven't made them aware of what it takes to reach the desired levels of safety and playability."

"Whether 108,000 people fill the stadium, as they do for University of Tennessee football games, or a dozen parents turn out to watch their children practice at a parks system field, the sports turf manager's responsibility is the same, to provide safe, playable fields. That Little League game is just as important to those playing in it as the last game of the World Series."

"The past decade has seen more dedicated sports turf managers at college and professional sports facilities as the need for those trained in taking care of the turf has become more recognized. I anticipate with higher expectations for field quality and the recognition of safety and liability issues, we'll see continuing growth there and also in the numbers of dedicated sports turf managers at parks and recreation and public school facilities. The increasing demands for field use will continue to create a tremendous need for sports turf managers skilled in field care, personnel and resource management, and communications."

Campbell notes with interest that, "Since the 1960s various new introductions have been promoted as the answer to all field problems. First, it was artificial turf, then sand-based fields, then modular systems, retractable domes, movable fields, and in-fill arti-

cial turf. The basic aspect that has been consistent with all of them is the need for the sports turf manager to understand and learn to manage them."

"STMA has a double responsibility in that area. First, to provide the education and networking opportunities through our national conference, our chapters, regional turf-grass conferences, our publications and website, and any other available venues to help sports turf managers do the best job possible. We need to facilitate the information flow

and one-on-one contact to assist our members in sharing information with each other."

"Secondly, to help sports turf managers communicate the issues involved with field care, including overuse and the short- and long-term results. We should provide research that gives support to sports turf managers in explaining all field issues. Sports field specific research is one of the goals of the SAFE Foundation that I, as SAFE Board member, strongly support."

### Looking to the future

Campbell sees a bright future ahead, but not a problem-free one. He says, "I believe our potential for growth as an association is unlimited. There are many in our profession now that are not members, and more positions are being created each year. I want to see STMA continue to gain members because individuals see the value in what we're doing. Growing as fast as we are, there are bound to be some turbulent times. We need to work through these, learn from them, and make wise choices to move forward for the good of the membership."

Campbell suggests STMA use the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America (GCSAA) as a role model for growth

and for positive professional image enhancement. He says, "GCSAA made many good decisions during the growth cycle similar to where we are now. I think we can learn from their success and adapt some of their strategies to meet our needs. I see sports turf managers uniting on a national or even international level, with a more proactive approach to marketing our professional image. The Certified Sports Field Manager (CSFM) program is a key part of establishing the credentials of that professionalism. It's going to take all of us, not just the president, not just the board or the headquarters staff, but all of the membership committed to working together to make it happen. I see STMA as the vehicle to unite the power of networking to achieve our goals."

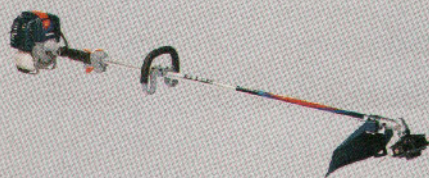
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*Suz Trusty is communications director at STMA Headquarters and can be reached at 800-323-3875.*



**"Whether it's 108,000 people watching or a dozen parents, the sports turf manager's responsibility is to provide safe, playable fields," says Campbell.**

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