

# Champion teams, Champion turf crew

**C**arroll College, Helena, MT, and sports turf manager Gerald Landby won the 2007 STMA College/University Soccer Field of the Year. Here's an interview with Landby:

**SportsTurf:** What's the most important piece of equipment or product in your program?

**Landby:** The most important is the many people who helped Carroll

College achieve this recognition. My crew, Justin Pearson and Dave Sorensen, is the core of the grounds department, and my supervisor, Tom McCarvel, are key but there are many others, too many to mention here. The Carroll College community: students, parents, alumni, faculty, staff, administration and Board of Trustees, we all know our community is our family. And last but not least, the athletes and coaches of the sports pro-



(L to R): Dave Sorensen, Gerald Landby, and Justin Pearson, crew for Carroll College turf. They pose with the college's 2007 NAIA Region 1 Soccer Championship and 2007 NAIA Football National Championship trophies, as well as their Field of the Year award.

# FIELD OF THE YEAR



Carroll College's Nelson Stadium, STMA 2007 Field of the Year

grams. Thank you for your accomplishments! Thank you for believing! I share this honor with each of you.

I don't see any product or piece of equipment as a stand alone for Nelson Stadium. Everything works as part of the overall plan, which can be a challenge as I have limited funds, staff, and equipment. If I was to promote one thing besides the people; it would be aeration! But obviously our Toro 3500D Sidewinder is very valuable.

**ST:** What are your biggest challenges and how do you approach them?

Landby: Our women's soccer team and foot-

ball team use Nelson Stadium and both have been playing and practicing deep into the playoffs, often into mid-December; in the past four seasons, we've hosted nine post-season games here.

The biggest challenge is also the biggest reward! I believe every sports turf manager wants to see the athletes succeed every season. I have been very fortunate to witness continued success of our soccer and football athletes on the 8 acres of athletic fields we maintain. This success brings more demands and expectations; often without budget dollars and funding.

I am seeing use begin in March and lasting

until mid-December but the grass only grows from end of April to early November.

The summer of 2007 was one when all my worst concerns came together. I was not able to hire summer labor due to limited budget. I was very limited in what I could do on campus. Since I am responsible for the grounds of a 65-acre campus, my responsibilities go beyond sports turf. Using funds in the Grounds budget, I was able to outsource campus mowing except for the athletic fields. Working with Athletics, I was able to order materials for the athletic fields. I outsourced deep tine aeration.

My plan was to keep Dave and Justin on irrigation maintenance and other campus needs and I would mow the athletic fields. I met with my crew daily to determine our priorities and we maintained the course. Their input and determination to pull this off could not have been done without their understanding and commitment; however, they did not work extra hours. I did not have the budget for it.

## “Sports turf managers need to become more involved with legislation at the federal, state, and local levels.”

—Gerald Landby

Soon my supervisor, Tom McCarvel, VP of community relations, asked if he could help. I trained him to operate the Sidewinder and him and I regularly did the work, mowing four of the eight acres daily and the rest every other day. We had our regular jobs too.

Soon June turned to July, which brought record heat for Helena. It was

the hottest July since records were taken. By mid July, a forest fire started 25 miles north of Helena and it lasted until snow fall. Other fires on the edges of Helena and the Northwest region made for a very smoky valley, and made for difficult working conditions. While I was working, I would see the athletes training in the same environment. These athletes train and play soccer and football because they love the sport. It is the way the game is supposed to be played. This was my motivation!

By the way, there's been interest here in putting in synthetic turf. Honestly, being the one who has put blood, sweat, and tears into this place as one cares for his or her family, I was offended to hear of it. For example, I listened as one salesman told us how we would win more games, playoffs, and possibly championships if we tore out the grass and installed his product. Obviously, this person did not do his homework on Carroll College!

But I have taken the challenge to learn about something that scared and saddened me. This is what all of us should do. I have sought to learn all there is to learn about synthetic turf and I simply ask, "What is best for Carroll College?" That is the discussion I want to hear. Don't take the words of corporations seeking money or because it is the thing everyone else is doing but research the information and come up with your own data and consensus.

It is my friends at the STMA who has helped me with this struggle. While I am close to reaching my consensus, I know whatever decision or challenge comes before me I am prepared to continue to offer the best facility Carroll College athletes deserve.



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# FIELD OF THE YEAR



Tom McCarvel, Carroll's VP of Community Relations, mowing for Shodair All State Soccer Cup. It was very smoky for nearby fires.

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**ST:** How do you communicate with others?

**Landby:** My short answer is: By taking the first step. Initiate the communication and be a listener! Acknowledge those who do well for you. Give praise! Always ask questions. No question is ever too dumb.

I meet with Athletics weekly to discuss their needs and to share my input. We work together to schedule and prepare for events. We work together to find funds to make our goals happen. We follow up on phone and email. I meet with my crew daily to review work projects and to prioritize each day. My crew is very important to me and I strive to help them succeed in their jobs.

**ST:** How do you see the sports turf manager's job changing in the future?

**Landby:** I think the job description has been changing already. Looking to the future, I am concerned. It is hard to find help and people who want to do this kind of work. Attitudes with the newer generations are somewhat different from 20 years ago. Young people today expect a \$50,000/year job out of high school and by the end of the first week they are ready to be CEO.

I think mentoring and being involved with encouraging young people to consider careers in sports turf will be more of a responsibility for those who are in the career now. Sports turf managers need to become more involved with legislation at the federal, state, and local levels. Our industry is under scrutiny for what we do. We need to be informed and communicate our concerns. Now is the time to be more involved with the STMA and our industry than ever.

**ST:** What attracted you to a career in sports turf management?

**Landby:** I was interested in being a farmer but times were changing in the late 70's. I found out obtaining the family farm was not going to become reality. Horticulture is very much agriculture related so I pursued my interest in Horticulture at the University of Minnesota-Crookston. After I graduated, I wanted to move west so I visited Montana State University-

Bozeman and inquired about another interest, meteorology. But that program was being phased out so I looked into the Landscape Management program. Soon I was hired by MSU Grounds to fulfill my internship obligation to UMC.

I moved to Montana, worked at MSU and got my bachelors in Landscape Management. When I studied horticulture, I studied almost anything to do with horticulture. I believed I needed to be as diversified and well rounded in my education so I would be prepared for anything in my career. While I was prepared through education and experience, I sort of walked onto sports turf management by accident.

I inherited Nelson Stadium as it was under construction when I started at Carroll College. As the only sports turf manager the field has ever had, I have grown into my job and I believe it is my job to take the standards of sports turf to the level affordable but obtainable. Now I see myself as an urban farmer and my crop is sports turf.

**ST:** How do you balance work and personal life?

**Landby:** Last year, this was difficult but then perhaps not. I like what I do and am privileged to live in Helena. Everyday is a day in paradise! However, I need to leave work behind once in a while. I use any moment I have to relax and enjoy life. I look for the small things and appreciate these in a big way. I am an avid hunter and fisherman. When the weather is miserable, I am out there enjoying it.

I occupy myself with the Association of Montana Turf, Ornamental, and Pest Professionals, Montana Urban and Community Forestry Association, and STMA. In the company of these colleagues and friends, we strive to bring our industry to the forefront. These organizations get me away once in a while.

I like to do fire mitigation work so I have been busy helping others making their homes safer. I encourage the professionalism of the STMA and help out at the Helena Brewers baseball club when I can. (Yes, Eddie Alvarez and Jonathon Garrett that was for you!) I enjoy a beer with my friends at the Brewhouse. And I cherish quiet time with my wife, Sandy. ■

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