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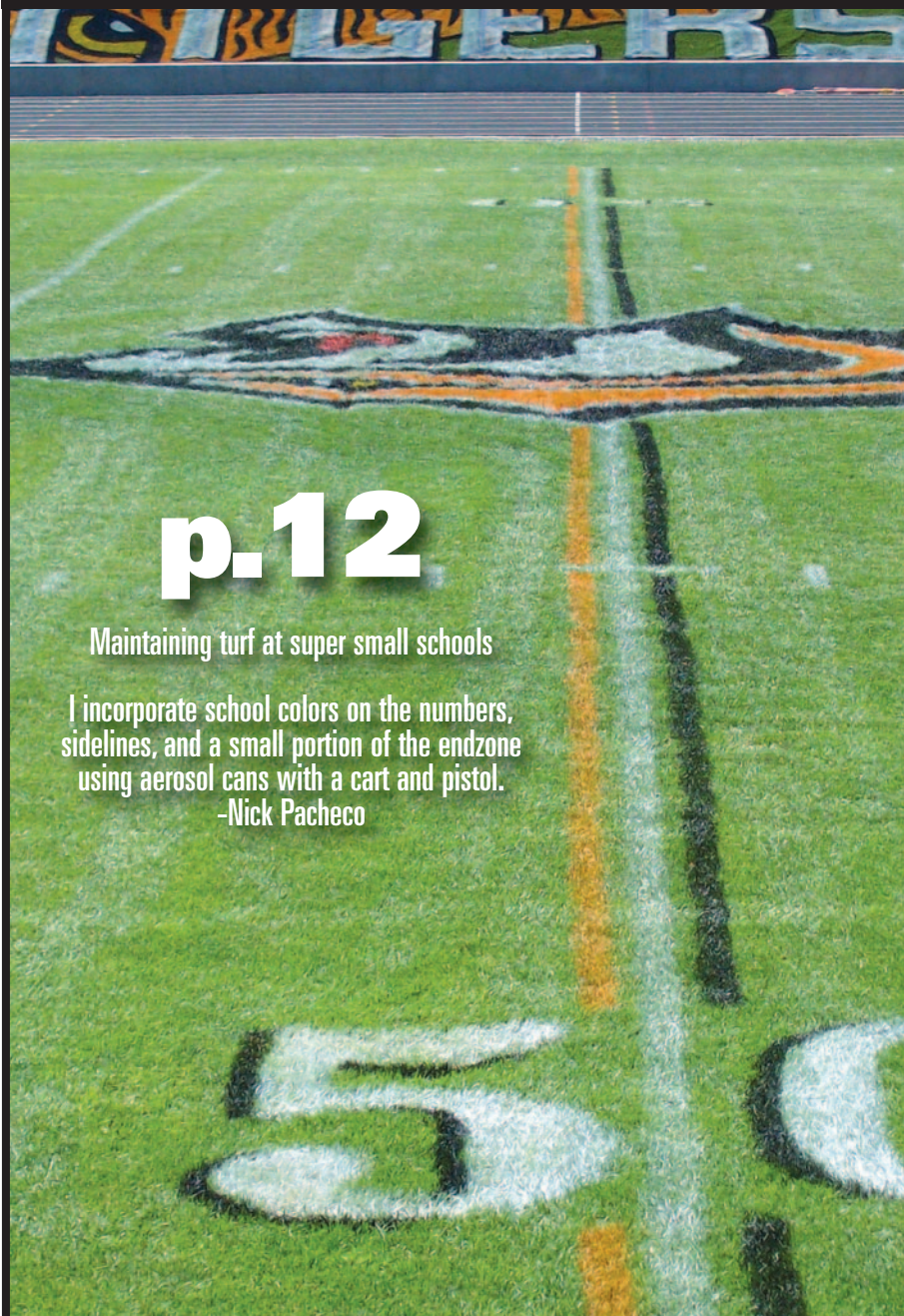
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Maintaining turf at super small schools

Incorporate school colors on the numbers, sidelines, and a small portion of the endzone using aerosol cans with a cart and pistol.

-Nick Pacheco

>> on the cover

See you in San Jose at the Sports Turf Managers Association's 20th Annual Conference and Exhibition. Washed sod from their Scottsdale, AZ farm courtesy of Danielle Marman and West Coast Turf.



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ERIC SCHRODER
Editor

eschroder@m2media360.com

717-805-4197
P.O. Box 280,
Dauphin, PA 17018

One on one with Jesse Driver, CSFM

JESSE DRIVER, CSFM is president of Mid-Atlantic Turf, Inc. and a long-time STMA member. He builds, renovates and provides maintenance services only for athletic fields and is based in Hebron, MD. We exchanged emails recently:

How is the rocky economy affecting your business?

While some have said they think everyone is shell-shocked at the entire economic situation with furloughs, decreases in budgets, etc., we have thus far been fortunate to have contracts, on-going projects and long standing work. The price of fuel and fertilizer is greatly impacting us; when contracts are signed and there is no provision for price increases, it eats into everyone's budget.

Is your company involved in building synthetic turf fields?

No.

Is liability, in terms of player injuries, a concern for field builders? How do field builders limit their liability?

Safe and playable fields have been our major focus throughout over a decade in business. We have turned down work because of our concern that the work wanted by the customer would not result in what we felt would be a "safe and playable" field. If potential issues arise during the course of building the field, they should be immediately brought to the attention of the turf manager and owner's representative in writing.

What is the ideal role of a professional turf manager in the field construction process?

The professional turf manager should be involved in every stage of the field construction process. His or her job is greatly impacted by how well the field plays and functions after the field is completed. We always work to function as a team.

We tell our customers, "If you don't look good, we don't look good." Many of our customers are professional turf managers and need little help, if any, with routine maintenance. We demonstrate field maintenance techniques we have found useful if needed or requested. When field questions arise, we ask pros for how they have handled the issue at their site and their advice as well as university professors across the country. That's what is good about [STMA]. Everyone working together as a team can result in a much better product for the players.

What do you think the athletic field construction market will look like in 10 years?

There will be an increased need for more fields particularly at the park and recreation and middle and high school levels. I believe we will see a turn back to more natural turf fields as turf cultivar research continues to improve. Look how far we have come in the past 10 years including improved drainage systems, heated underground fields, etc.

We may see reel mowers mowing patterns that can be controlled by computers and GPS systems. Riding will be optional.

SportsTurf

1233 Howard Street, Suite 2I
San Francisco, CA 94103
Phone 415-839-5060
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SportsTurf
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STMA Office
805 New Hampshire Suite E
Lawrence, Ks 66044
Phone 800-323-3875 Fax 800-366-0391
Email STMAinfo@STMA.org
www.STMA.org

Editorial
GROUP PUBLISHER Douglas Hebbard
EDITOR Eric Schroder
TECHNICAL EDITOR Dr. Scott McElroy
ART DIRECTOR Brian Snook
PRODUCTION MANAGER Karen Kalinyak
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STMA Editorial
Communications Committee
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MIKE ANDRESEN
CSFM

mandrese@iastate.edu



M2MEDIA360

PRESIDENT/CEO

Marion Minor

VP OF FINANCE AND OPERATIONS

Gerald Winkel

VP OF CIRCULATION AND

COLLATERAL SALES

Joanne Juda-Prainito

PRODUCTION & OPERATIONS DIRECTOR

Mary Jo Tomei

DIRECT MAIL LIST SALES

Cheryl Naughton 678-292-6054

cnaughton@m2media360.com

Reader Services

DIRECTOR OF READER SERVICE

Joanne Juda-Prainito

Readerservice@m2media360.com

SUBSCRIPTION SERVICES

Phone 847-763-9565 Fax 847-763-9569

REPRINTS

Cheryl Naughton 678-292-6054

cnaughton@m2media360.com

Regional Account Representatives:

Eastern U.S. & Canada

Joy Gariepy

16267 W. 14 Mile Rd., Ste 202

Beverly Hills, MI 48025 • Ph: 248-530-0300, ext. 1401

jpgariepy@m2media360.com

Western U.S. & Canada

Ann Cannon

134 N. LaSalle St, Ste. 1700

Chicago, IL 60602 • Ph: 312-236-4900, ext. 1105

acannon@m2media360.com

Major Account Representatives:

Eastern U.S. & Canada

J.F. Purcell

135 E. 55th St., 5th FL

New York, NY 10022 • Ph: 917-421-9059

jpurcell@m2media360.com

Western U.S. & Canada

Bruce Loria

626 Wilshire Blvd., Ste 500

Los Angeles, CA 90017 • Ph: 213-596-7226

bloria@m2media360.com

Classified Sales / Marketplace:

Eastern U.S. & Canada

Nadine Fischetti

Phone: 213-624-0900, ext. 1255

Fax: 213-624-0997

nfischetti@m2media360.com

Western U.S. & Canada

Glenn Belton

Phone: 213-596-7212

Fax: 213-624-0997

gbelton@m2media360.com

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Memory graced

IT'S IMPOSSIBLE to compress all I have to say into this final column. First and foremost, thank you for allowing me the honor of serving as STMA President. In 1999, Mike Schiller, CSFM asked me to consider running for an open Board seat. The thought was overwhelming, but on the other hand too great an honor to dismiss. I'm humbled by the privilege STMA provided, but I also look forward to serving actively in other ways now.

Serving as President allowed me to represent the membership in discussions and to seize opportunities from a perspective I've never considered myself worthy of. I appreciate the good fortune to learn and grow that these last few years provided. I learned how important this association is to **our** success as sports turf managers. Your field is a place where dreams come true. Parents have faith in us that their child will play out "the dream" and not have a nightmare injury. The "child" can be the 4-year-old playing T-Ball in the park or the \$30 million athlete playing in front of 70,000 people.

Our fields are also used for branding the corporate logo into the fans who watch games. As supporters file into your stadium, your administration depends on you to project that "the house is in order" and your facility is hallowed ground where dreams do play out. To represent the great members of STMA that produce those kinds of feelings is truly an honor that I have not taken for granted.

I can't thank Kim Heck, CEO and our awesome staff enough for all they do on our behalf. During the past 2 years I've been privileged to see and hear first-hand how they've positively represented us. Besides being a small, but incredibly efficient professional staff, I sincerely appreciate that their passion for each of us and this industry is without peer in association management. They are family and their success is our success.

I wish President Abby McNeal, CSFM, and the new Board great success as we continue moving down a focused strategic path that began being charted years ago. Of course, the pace with which we tackle the Strategic initiatives and move to others lies in the strong minds and hands of volunteer committee members. The new structure of the Board, especially the one-year executive terms, will help STMA keep high energy in important roles on the Board. Having the Secretary/Treasurer election be a true funnel for choosing future STMA Presidents is healthy and transparent. The approved Bylaw changes will help ensure each future Board will stay unified as their work will be dictated by strategic planning. Expanding the Board roster by two At-Large seats will allow broader representation and more opportunities for leaders to come into the Boardroom. All of these elements lead to energetic leadership that will be able to focus on visionary and long range issues.

Grace is defined as an underserved gift. Thank you for gracing me with the honor of serving as President.

Developing a sound working relationship with a new coaching staff

I was approached a year or so ago by Sportsturf and asked to present a year in review of my experience with our new coaching staff here at Michigan State University. Last fall I hesitated to submit an article because I did not feel I had achieved the results I had strived for over that 10-month period. I felt that after a second season with the new football staff, I could speak with confidence on how we achieve success on and off the field together. After 18 months, we have achieved a working environment that I am proud to be a part of. The following describes some of the ways in which we achieved this environment.

A change in coaching staff brings new challenges and opportunities to create new and stronger relations. Through this experience, I reaffirmed my belief that we can't have great fields without the support of the coaching staff and support of the athletic administration. I am blessed to have three great people to work for in those regards: head football coach Mark Dantonio, director of football operations Tim Allen, and senior associate athletic director Greg Ianni. The expectation is always to have safe, playable, and aesthetically pleasing facilities whether it is the practice facilities or Spartan Stadium.

(L to R): Director of Football Operations Tim Allen, Senior Associate Athletic Director Greg Ianni, Amy Fouty, CSFM, and Coach Mark Dantonio.



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So how have we overcome these challenges and come to the positive and successful working environment we have today?

goals and reassessing strategies to meet the needs of the program. Tim Allen and I have organized and created schedules to outline how we can incorporate maintenance needs, practice times, camp use, and conditioning, to best maximize use of the

bility to be proactive in communicating and organizing how things need to occur for the success of the operation as needed for the success of the team, i.e., so there are no surprises. I am often teased by Tim Allen that I am a “little grass coach,” who develops a yearly training program and then game plans for the success of the fields for the season. I appreciate that, as I like to think in agronomic terms; we train hard in the off season by planning best management and cultural practices, study our opponents, know diseases and pests, and then fight through adversity (basically Mother Nature) to be the best we can be each week for the team.

I would be remiss if I did not mention the importance of having a big picture-oriented administrator such as Greg Ianni in this whole process. Right from the beginning the focus was on developing a structure where we work together to create success on and off the field. At Michigan State, our Spartan Stadium field is not just a football field; it represents our history as the first land grant institution in the United States and our College of Agriculture and Natural Resources’ proud tradition. I depend on Greg for the support to manage that responsibility while meeting the needs of the football program. It is critical to our success with the facilities that our relationships are based upon trust, cooperation, and organization.

If I want to be considered an expert in my field, and a part of the team, I have to conduct myself as such to gain respect for our work and our profession. That means proactive communication to develop, trust and understanding, and to deliver the best fields possible for the team in that schedule. I accept the challenge with a positive attitude and look forward to the challenge of each season. That is what has helped to create a successful, sound, and a positive work environment here at Michigan State. ■

Amy Fouty, CSFM, is athletic turf manager for Michigan State, and represents Higher Education on the Sports Turf Managers Association Board of Directors.



Spartan Stadium, pride of Michigan State University.

I think back to my first meeting with Coach Dantonio and how I immediately felt that I was dealing with a person who cared about how important the details are to true success. I watched his interviews and studied him before our first meeting so I could better understand his perspective. He complimented my work from the film he had seen and conversations he had with others and I guaranteed him that my operation would do whatever we could to support the success of the program. I imparted to him I could not promise that things would be perfect all the time, but we would strive for that kind of consistency and he was very accepting of our best efforts. Throughout that first year, it was sometimes hard to understand exactly what they needed and it was hard to stay a step ahead of their requests. There were times that we all were frustrated, but we chalked it up to a learning curve year and moved forward. There is no “us versus them”—we are all a part of the program.

From the start of the second season we focused on a better structure, developing

facilities and efficiently maintain the facilities with our small staff size. I typically get the upcoming year’s schedule in January and I insert times for maintenance activities to occur on the master schedule and have them approved by the football staff so that we are all on the same page. Planning together out of season reduces the likelihood of problems throughout the year.

Another new thing we discussed in the off season for this year to manage wear areas more effectively was to map areas of use for summer camps and team periods to more evenly distribute wear patterns on our two outdoor practice fields. This is something the coaching staff schedules each week and has managed very successfully by moving their drills off the playing surface and rotating team periods around the fields on a specific schedule.

Proactive planning and conversation will lead to a more positive and understanding working relationship. I try to keep in mind my operation is a small cog in a large machine, and it is my responsi-