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# SportsTurf

## 8 Chris Calcaterra, CSFM, CPRP is a self-made man

Calcaterra manages a \$5.4 million operating budget, a vehicle maintenance asset budget of \$1 million and capital improvement projects such as facility improvements and renovations.



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## >> on the cover



On the cover: Chris Calcaterra, CSFM, CPRP, of Peoria, AZ is in charge of operations, marketing and grounds for the city's sports facilities, which includes the Peoria Sports Complex, a 15-field, 145-acre Major League Baseball spring training facility. He now is also in charge of the STMA as its newly elected president.



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## Plain, muddy, beautiful uniforms

**M**uch has been written and said about Orlando's Citrus Bowl field during this past bowl season. My 10-year-old and I sat down to watch our Penn State side play LSU on New Year's Day and he was stunned by the field's state. "Dad, what happened?" he asked, as he'd never seen a game played in such "old, really old, school" conditions.

While folks are using the unfortunate situation for their own purposes, e.g., calling for the immediate installation of synthetic turf, etc., there are two points of which everyone needs to be reminded: 1) Rain destroyed a field that probably had experienced way too much traffic on it to begin with, including Florida's high school state finals less than 2 weeks earlier and another bowl game just 3 days before the game January 1. And 2) conditions were the same for both teams and no players were injured.

Another note regarding playing surfaces and injuries: It was irritating to read that Patriots coach Bill Belichick blamed the turf in Houston's Reliant Stadium for receiver Wes Welker's season-ending leg injury. Hey Bill, you are nothing but a grumpy multi-millionaire who acts like he's in charge of a Marine battalion or something really important—just shut up.

### Observations from STMA Conference

- Love the price of Disney's free "Magical Express" airport bus service but the marketing video they subject riders to is extremely annoying.
- Funny how often the Conference locale has weird weather. This year in Orlando the SAFE golf tournament was held up 90 minutes by frost; 3 years ago a freak ice storm in San Antonio cancelled the whole shebang. Perhaps Mother Nature enjoys tweaking a gathering of professionals who regularly have to deal with her capriciousness?
- Memo to LSU Athletics: Eric Fasbender needs a raise so he can replace his Walter Hagen-era golf clubs. I kept expecting my SAFE tournament partner to pull a gutta percha ball out of his bag.
- Warning: if Mike Schiller asks if you want to see his back surgery scar, say no. I said yes and yuck, it looks like the largest zipper you've ever seen and it runs all the way down to his . . . like I said, yuck.
- Finally, a shout out to Tanner Delvalle, Penn State turf grad student, who is worried his future job prospects are slim after former prof Dr. Andy McNitt asked him what the porosity of gravel was in front of 150 or so attendees and Tanner couldn't answer. Don't worry, TD, with the Nittany Lions' recent successes in the Student Collegiate Challenge the value of your education won't be undervalued.

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# President's Message

Chris Calcaterra,  
CSFM, CPRP

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## Looking ahead to a great year...rain or shine!

STMA started its 29th year with a very successful Conference and Exhibition in Orlando last month. Our surveys from the conference are still being compiled, but our first reports are confirming what we heard during the event: the educational sessions were excellent and the trade show was outstanding. Thank you to our speakers and to our commercial exhibitors. Our surveys will provide us with great feedback and guidance for next year's program.

Beginning in early March, STMA will be sending out the 2011 Call for Presentations. I encourage you to submit a conference presentation idea for consideration by the Conference Education Subcommittee. The 2011 Conference and Exhibition will be in Austin, TX, a new location for our conference that promises to be a vibrant and welcoming city for our attendees. Austin also offers several exciting sports venues to visit during our off-site tours. Our conference education program strives to blend academic and peer-taught educational programs on topical and relevant management practices, and we rely on your presentations to achieve this balance.

If you missed attending the 2010 conference, or wanted to attend sessions that were offered at the same time, the conference outlines and handouts are online for your use. On the STMA website, go to the Conference tab and click on 2010.

By early next month, our committees should be fully engaged. Thank you to all who submitted Committee Volunteer Interest forms. I am pleased to report that every member who signed up to serve as a volunteer was placed on an STMA Committee. If you signed up to serve and have not heard from a committee chair by mid-March, please contact STMA Headquarters. Committees are very important to the work of STMA. Our network of more than 20 committees, subcommittees and task groups provide valuable perspective and insight on the programs and initiatives set forth by you in the STMA Strategic Plan.

Spring is often equated with renewal. However, as we ready our facilities and fields for spring sports, many of us continue to face debilitating economic challenges. Those who are just beginning their budget year may be starting with a very streamlined 2010 budget. Those of us who are already into our budget cycle may be continuing to feel financial pressures. It is my sincere wish that the challenges you face are not insurmountable. I hope that you will rely on your association for the tools and resources to help you meet those challenges and overcome them. I want to assure you that STMA is committed to your success, and I encourage you to contact me, any board member or our association headquarters' staff for help. I look forward to a positive and productive 2010 for you and for STMA.



## A self-made man

There's no telling what opportunities Chris Calcaterra, CSFM, will make out of the year ahead

**T**he act of initiative began at a young age for Chris Calcaterra, CSFM, CPRP, sports facilities manager for the city of Peoria, AZ who took the reins as president of the Sports Turf Managers Association last month at the 21st Annual Conference & Exhibition in Orlando.

At age 13, Calcaterra worked as a self-professed cart cabana boy at Whitewater Creek Country Club in Fayetteville, GA just 2 miles away from the house he grew up in, when he carved out his own opportunity, a habit that he would repeat over and over again during his two-decade-long career.

When the course underwent a sodding project around the

golf shop, Calcaterra opted to stay late and helped lay some sod. The superintendent at Whitewater Creek back then, Rob Roy, took notice, and “the rest was history,” Calcaterra says. “At the

age of 13 once I laid my first piece of sod, I knew what I wanted to do. (Roy) put me under his wing and was my mentor in the turf industry.”

Since then, one could say that Calcaterra has fashioned his own path, making opportunities appear in front of him, deciding on a particular job that he desires and then simply doing it.

That's the way, at least, that Calcaterra got a stint working for the University of Georgia's athletic department during his first year as a student there.

“I pounded on the door, and created an internship program,” he says, as though it were that simple.

### THE FRUIT OF HIS LABOR

Looking at Calcaterra's beginnings, you could understand how he got into the business. He grew up on a 12-acre farm in south Georgia, where he helped out with gardening and other odd chores, gaining a love for the outdoors and working with the earth. Though his upbringing didn't inspire him to be a row crop farmer, he says that lifestyle is responsible for his work ethic and other qualities imperative to getting him to where he is today. “My parents instilled good traits in me,” he says. “They don't make them like that anymore.”

He may have been destined in more ways than one to go into turf management—his last name



“Calcaterra” literally means “**lime of the earth**,” which earned Chris the affectionate nickname of “**Limedirt**” in 7th grade.

» Chris Calcaterra gives his daughter, Sarah, some tips on watering infield skin.



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literally means “lime of the earth,” which earned him the affectionate nickname of “Limedirt” in 7th grade.

Quick to break out into his own territory after graduating from high school, Calcaterra went away to a 2-year agricultural college for a semester before coming back home and starting school at a community college. From there he had a revelation that led him to the University of Georgia.

“I realized if I wanted to go anywhere, I wanted to get a 4-year degree,” Calcaterra says.

Working for the Athens, GA-based university athletic program sparked an interest that would last a lifetime.

“That’s where I got exposed to athletics,” Calcaterra says. “The beauty of athletics at a college is you have multiple sports, intramurals, indoor and outdoor arenas. It definitely got me hooked on the athletics of stadiums and the turf practices. I was learning a lot just by being there.”

He also attributes his success to the fact that his mentor Roy insisted that he gain a variety of experiences in the profession.

“He was instrumental in my not working for the same person,” he says of the period between attending the 2-year college and coming back home to go to community college. “He helped me get jobs with other superintendents around town. I experienced

the management of turf, how they manage employees, mechanics and the shop. I worked for four different folks in a span of 3 or 4 years, and I networked. I didn’t even know I was doing it.”

## LAND OF THE BRAVES

As a senior about to graduate with a degree in agriculture with specializations in turf and horticulture, Calcaterra hadn’t exactly figured out what he wanted to do next, go into golf or stay in sports. And he once again took the initiative and manufactured his own opportunity.

“I made a decision to go to the Atlanta Braves and introduce myself to their groundskeeper, Ed Mangan, who’s been there for some time and is very well respected,” he says. “I told him I was about to graduate and wanted to get into the sports industry and maintaining a stadium, so he put me on as a gamer.”

And so his senior year of college, Calcaterra repeatedly made the 2½-hour drive between Athens and Atlanta to work at the stadium. It paid off.

An assistant at the stadium left, and Calcaterra was selected to take his place. He spent five years at the Atlanta Braves as the assistant field director, gaining experiences such as hosting the 1996 Olympic Games and the construction of a new, modernized stadium. “And the Braves were playing well, so that didn’t hurt,” he adds.

But on top of the long hours, Calcaterra felt limited by the upward mobility available with the job.

“There are very few positions at that level because there are so few pro teams,” he says. “I wasn’t going to move up unless someone died or left. That’s when I left to go into management.”

## WESTWARD MOBILITY

In 1998, Calcaterra applied for a handful of positions, and the city of Peoria in Arizona came calling. Starting off as a grounds supervisor for the city (whose population is 130,000 according to the latest census data but Calcaterra estimates is closer today to about 170,000 people) he was promoted to a facility manager about 6 years ago, moving from the turf side to the facility side.

Since then, Calcaterra has been in charge

Calcaterra manages a **\$5.4 million operating budget**, a **vehicle maintenance asset budget of \$1 million** and **capital improvement projects** such as facility improvements and renovations.