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Chad's certifications make him an industry leader

Sports fields are a hot commodity and the construction industry that creates and maintains them is as competitive as the sports that play out on them. So when your livelihood depends on building and maintaining those fields, doesn't it make sense to learn everything you can?

Chad Price thinks so. As the owner of Carolina Green Corp., a full-service athletic field construction company in Indian Trail, NC, Price is a strong advocate of remaining informed about the ever-evolving sports facility industry.

"A lot of things have continued to improve," Price noted. "The equipment, the science behind it, the education for, the training for it, even the associations for it. It just keeps changing."

Price has made staying current on technology and techniques his priority, to the point where he holds not one but two certifications related to the sports field industry: Certified Sports Field Manager (CSFM) obtained through the Sports Turf Managers Association, and Certified Field Builder (CFB), from the American Sports Builders Association.

While the two certifications differ in focus, both have prerequisites, including in-the-field experience as well as educational and activity requirements. Once all those are satisfied, each certification includes a written exam.

Price, who maintains both certifications, said he is glad to have gotten them—and that they continue to reap rewards for him.

"Both certifications have been very helpful professionally and personally as well," he notes. "I will say this about both tests; the material is different, there is a different emphasis on things for each, but both are very fair and thorough examinations."

The ASBA's Certified Field Builder program includes several options; builders can elect to gain certification as CFB-N (Certified Field Builder-Natural) indicating knowledge of natural grass fields, or CFB-S (Certified Field Builder-Synthetic), for those who concentrate on artificial turf. The CFB designation indicates a knowledge of both types of field.

In Price's opinion, while the ability to market his work is enhanced by the dual certifications, the increased benefit is to his customers, as well as other buyers, who can finally feel confident about finding an expert.

"It gives us the ability to give assurance to the owner that they will have people out there who know what they're doing. I'm just really happy and excited and thankful that STMA and ASBA offers these."

Price gained his CSFM certification approximately 10 years ago. He was delighted to see it offered in a still-developing industry.

"I've been in business maybe 27 years, and building fields exclusively for about 23 years. When I started, there was no construction manual; in fact, there was very little written information at all about how to do this or how to do that. There were very few contractors that specialized in it around the country."

Colleagues would share information, he noted, but "everyone was trying to learn from one another. I got the CSFM first; it was maybe the second or third year it was offered."

It wasn't until a number of years later that he heard rumblings about ASBA's plans to offer its own certification test, this one for field builders.

"Once I heard the CFB test had become available, I absolutely wanted to be the first one in that room."

The industry had grown, he noted, and a test was sorely needed to help owners find knowledgeable help.

"At the time, there were architects who knew how important it would be to have a qualified contractor, and how much we needed a pre-qualification requirement if someone wanted to bid on a job."

Owners, he noted, were not getting fair bids, since many contractors simply did not know all the facts about sports fields, whether synthetic or natural.

"You'd be competing for a job against someone who



▲ Chad Price, CSFM, CFB

thought you could go to the site and put stone down and grade it and put turf down and there you go. It's certainly not that simple. We were all hitting our heads against the same issues."

Badly built sports fields fail, and owners often did not have the funds to correct the myriad problems they were faced with. Price was glad to see a certification that would finally provide a benchmark.

"I think the certifications certainly hold a lot of weight," said Price. "More and more people are incorporating that into their specifications. Obviously it helps me when we see it on requirements."

The science of sports turf is growing overall. More universities are offering sports turf programs, and those programs are being expanded to cover not just golf (for which some were originally designed) but the plethora of other sports played.

"It's an exciting time," said Price. "I really feel like we're on the cusp of all that."

Certifications such as CFB and CSFM are not granted in perpetuity; those who hold them must maintain them on a regular basis by accruing educational and activity points.

"There's no question in my mind; if you can pass that test, without question you are qualified," said Price. "You have the knowledge."

It's not just personal opinion, either. In a 2008 decision by the Attorney General of Massachusetts, the AG upheld the right of a local school district to restrict bidding for a running track project to companies employing an ASBA Certified Track Builder. In defending its bid-

ding restriction, the school district successfully argued it had encountered serious problems regarding the workmanship in prior track installations justifying the use of the certification requirement as a means of identifying qualified contractors. (It is also worth noting that the Massachusetts Attorney General Office supported a town's right to include minimum contractor experience clauses in bidding documents as long as they were reasonable).

Price is not surprised about the growing demand for certification and he is glad to see it. "I'd say certifications definitely sets us apart from other companies. It's good that there is a standard."

Note: Information on the Certified Sports Field Manager exam is available from STMA (<http://www.stma.org/>). Information on the Certified Field Builder exam is available from ASBA (<http://www.sportsbuilders.org/>) ■

Mary Helen Sprecher is a free lance writer who wrote this article on behalf of the American Sports Builders Association. ASBA is a non-profit association helping designers, builders, owners, operators and users understand quality athletic facility construction. ASBA publishes Sports Fields: A Construction and Maintenance Manual, a comprehensive guide to the design, construction and maintenance of sports fields. The book is available for purchase either in hard copy or in electronic form. Information is available at www.sportsbuilders.org.

▼ **Mid-season** turf replacement at Washington's FedEx Field using Carolina Green Corp.'s sod grown on plastic.



SUPER BOWL GROUNDSKEEPING CREW BEATS OUTDOOR CONDITIONS



▲ **Snow at MetLife Stadium** in East Rutherford, NJ before the Super Bowl.

In an otherwise empty MetLife Stadium near midnight on February 2, several t-shirt wearing, helmetless Seattle Seahawks players and their loved ones raced joyfully along the sidelines, reveling in the team's 43–8 demolition of the Denver Broncos in Super Bowl XLVIII.

The celebratory confetti dotting the green field would have looked just an hour earlier like unseemly dandruff needing to be promptly scraped off for marring the playing surface's otherwise handsome mien.

For the approximately 30 groundskeepers who'd lovingly tended the pasture over the previous weeks, its pris-

tine condition for the game was a source of pride—all the more so, given concerns over this being the first Super Bowl scheduled for an outdoor, cold-weather venue.

But the unseasonably warm day that produced an evening temperature of 49 degrees at kickoff did little to diminish the crew's satisfaction at having readied the turf for winter's worst.

Among most groundskeepers' first tasks upon arriving in New Jersey in mid-January was unloading snow plows and snow-blowing and -clearing machines from several tractor-trailers packed with equipment to prepare the stadium's field, as well as those at the Jets' and Giants' prac-

tice facilities, where the two Super Bowl teams trained for what routinely is television's most-watched American sporting event.

Regardless of the climate, the crew was composed, as it normally is, of groundskeepers who've been on Super Bowl duty for many years and even decades and who, much like the athletes, are team players.

They included men and women recruited from the National Football League, Major League Baseball, college football, an Alabama turf farm, The Toro Company, and even two professionals from Japan and an Iowa State University senior majoring in horticulture.

"The Seahawks won the game, but the crew members, in my book, were also Super Bowl champions," said George Toma, who knows of what he speaks, having now worked every Super Bowl since the inaugural one in 1967.

Toma is retired from a long, full-time groundskeeping career, primarily with the Kansas City Royals. But he's drawn back to the turf for baseball's spring training and such highlight events as the Super Bowl, whose crew he once supervised. That job now belongs to Ed Mangan of the Atlanta Braves.

"This year was probably the most challenging [Super Bowl] on so many fronts, and they did an unbelievable job maintaining that field and getting it to perform the way it did," said NFL director of event operations Eric Finkelstein.

The league, he explained, selects crew members who are "the best of the best."

While it's the biggest of the big games, the Super Bowl has company at the NFL's summit. Other important dates drawing the cream of the league's landscaping crop include the annual Pro Bowl exhibition and the regular-season contests played overseas. For 2013, that meant two games in London's Wembley Stadium; three are scheduled there for 2014.

Absent conflicts with their full-time jobs, most Super Bowl crew members work those special NFL dates, too.

Everyone must be a jack-of-all-trades, doing "a little bit of everything" to help whip the sites into shape, said Lee Keller, the University of Vermont's athletic turf manager for whom New Jersey was his 15th Super Bowl.

For the Super Bowl, that means, primarily, tending to the turf throughout the weeks of preparation, along with a heavy dose of

painting: of the yard-lines and their numerical designations; team names; and NFL, AFC, NFC and Super Bowl trophy logos.

Getting it all done involves emptying much of the warehouse where the equipment is stored for shipment to the Super Bowl site. The items include standard gardening and carpentry tools, like rakes, shovels, brooms and drills; machines, such as motorized carts and sod cutters, and even end zone and sideline pylons.

The artistic-design side requires an abundance of supplies, too, such as multiple 5-gallon pails of specialized field paint, rails, boards to mark the lines, stencils of the numerals and hash marks, and turbine blowers to dry paint. Painting the teams' names and the conferences' logos in the end zones means having four stencils on-site, not two, since the shipment typically reaches the Super Bowl venue before the AFC and NFC championship games.

The frigid temperatures and snow in the days leading up to the Broncos-Seahawks matchup necessitated unusual measures. Heated tents were put up to prevent the paint from freezing as it was being applied. The Saturday night before Sunday's game, the artificial turf field was covered and heat blown under the tarpaulin to assure excellent on-field conditions.

The planning began as far back as last year's Super Bowl in New Orleans's weather-neutral Superdome, several



▲ **Left:** Lee Keller, University of Vermont, painting an end zone. **Right:** Terry Lee, George Toma, Gerald Anderson, & Randy Baker in frigid New Jersey.

groundskeepers said.

The preparations also included such micro issues as preparing the supply list, since departing and re-entering the game and practice sites involves security-related, hours-wasting delays.

"To leave the stadium to get a gallon of paint striper, paint rollers or sandpaper takes so much time, so we bring a lot of that stuff with us. If we need 'em, we got 'em," Keller said.

Getting the field ready is complicated by other Super Bowl-specific schedules. While sports' great appeal lies in its unscripted nature, so much about the Big Game's sidelights is choreographed. The pre-game, half-time and post-game shows are the products of rehearsals—not just of the musical performances, but also to swiftly erect and deconstruct the television, trophy-presentation and concert stages.

Sometimes, faux fields for that purpose are painted with precision in the host park's parking lots. At MetLife Stadium, that wasn't the case, so the field guardians had to work cooperatively with the entertainment and television producers.

When rehearsals ended, the groundskeeping staff put their powerful vacuums and magnets to work, scooping up such debris as errant nuts, bolts, paper clips and safety pins to prevent injuries and unsightly litter. That routine also is followed in-game.

In New Jersey, “there were probably more rehearsals” than at other Super Bowls, said Arizona State University’s facility manager, Pete Wozniak, who would know, having now worked 19 Super Bowls. But the other crews, he added, “work well with us,” including by taking care to stay off the freshly painted logos during rehearsals and on game day.

Another member of this year’s grounds crew, Josh Lenz, is now just 18 Super Bowls behind Wozniak. From a national pool of 62 applicants from 40 colleges, the Iowa State student was selected by Toro and the NFL to work the game on the basis of an essay-writing contest on why the profession appeals to him.

The week-long Super Bowl internship program is an effective way to cultivate the next generation of talent, said Toro’s sports fields and grounds sales manager, Dale Getz, CSFM.

From the moment he reached New Jersey the Sunday preceding the Super Bowl, his turf-management professors were plenty understanding of his absences from class, he said, Lenz kept busy handling whatever tasks he was assigned at the practice and game-day fields. He

spent one day doing only snow removal, another primarily painting.

And he took smart advantage of the continuous networking opportunities.

“I tried to interact with as many [professional groundskeepers] as I could during the week. It was really cool to meet George Toma.”

George, it turned out, wasn’t the only Toma on duty. His son, Ryan, took time off from his job as an airline pilot to lend a hand, too.

As they departed the stadium hours after the game and after all the post-Super Bowl packing and clean-up was done before the snowstorm due Monday morning, the Tomas smiled.

For while Ryan’s dad now has a 48-year Super Bowl streak going, XLVIII marked a first for George, since none of the previous 47 had been played on a Feb. 2.

On the enormous, end zone scoreboards appeared the elder Toma’s likeness, along with the message, “Happy 85th Birthday, George.”

Despite the first outdoor, cold-weather Super Bowl’s failure to produce a single snowflake or hint of wintry pigskin magic, it was, for Toma and his colleagues, a singular experience. ■

Hillel Kuttler is a Baltimore-based journalist who writes regularly for the N.Y. Times. He may be reached at hk@hillelthescribecommunications.com.

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John Mascaro's Photo Quiz

John Mascaro is President of Turf-Tec International

Can you identify this sports turf problem?

Problem: Dark green and light green lines on field

Turfgrass area: College baseball infield

Location: Arlington, Texas

Grass Variety: Tifway 419 bermudagrass

Answer to John Mascaro's Photo Quiz on Page 31



Background illustration courtesy of istockphoto.com

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SEWING SYNTHETIC FIELDS V. GLUING

Editor's note: The author is CEO of Turf Sewing Machines.

I know what you're all thinking: here comes the most biased article I've ever read. As much as I'd like to put on my sewing pompoms, I'll go against my better judgment and remain mostly unbiased. For years I have heard the questions about sewing vs. gluing—which is better? Which lasts longer? Which is easier? Which is more cost effective? The fact is both are effective and both have their advantages.

WHY ARE GLUED SEAMS BETTER?

- Gluing is widely considered easier and I surely agree. See that, glue guys? I'm not so bad.
- The need for skilled, technically proficient labor is not required. This is an enormous advantage for crews that travel state-to-state or nationwide. Why? You can easily pickup unskilled labor anywhere you land. Finding and affording skilled labor is often an arduous task. Not to mention, you have to pay for their hotel, airfare, food, and expenses. Hey, that adds up.
- Glue doesn't need a technician or service station. By employing glue you don't have to contend with a sewing machine malfunction half way down a seam.

WHY ARE SEWN SEAMS BETTER?

Sewn fields cost exponentially less. Let's compare apples to apples in a cost analysis. Say Crew A, which sews, and Crew B, which glues, both install 10 full fields a year for 10 years. Crew A will make an initial \$20,000 investment for two cart-style sewing machines; including repair maintenance and supplies, two cart sewing machines will cost you roughly \$40-50,000 over the course of 10 years. Crew B will purchase glue for every field they sew. To glue a full field (with quality glue) it will cost approximately \$15-20,000 per field. Let's go on the low side



and call it \$15,000 per field. A gluing operation over 10 years will therefore cost \$1,500,000. Crew A will have spent \$50,000. Double-check me, because I almost don't believe it. Tack another \$300,000 in skilled labor for the sewing crew and sewing still saves you well over a million dollars.

Sewing fields can be performed year round; you don't have to worry about glue expanding/contracting in extreme temperatures. In addition, you don't have to waste a full day waiting for a field to cure. Crews can immediately work/walk/drive over a sewn seam.

If you are waiting for that biased "sewn seams last longer" comment, I won't go there. I'm just going with facts here.

Just to further prove I'm an equal opportunity, non-biased guy, my advice is, if you're going to glue go with the best product. ■

One installer's perspective

"Like everyone we glue and we sew. We've glued entire fields in the past, and we have also sewn entire fields and all combinations in between (inlays). From a skill set, we believe it is easier to glue full panels vs. sew. There are pros and cons to both but if you truly look at the bottom line over time, the sewn seam has proven to us to be a better product. Classic example is an all-green field with sewn seams from sideline curb to sideline curb; we have had almost no call backs to repair a seam. We've kept track of almost

every repair from the fields we've installed since 2000 (about 45 million sq/ft) and about 95% of redo's and repairs are of glued seams.

Gluing full panels is surely trending up which may be a reaction to the tighter stitch gauges, underlayments and lighter infill weights being used. From our experience, the sewn seam has lasted longer than the average glued seam and has less call backs for post install care."-John Huard Jr., vice president, Northeast Turf

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HOW SPORTS TURF SAVED A LIFE

For 28-year-old Craig Sampsell working in the sports turf industry has been his passion as long as he can remember. From youth sports to the professional ranks, he has manicured athletic fields of all shapes and sizes. But the path has been anything but straight and narrow.

Growing up near Indianapolis, Craig was quickly drawn to turf management through his father, who owned a sports field construction and renovation company called Diamond Designs. Before Craig could drive a car, he would accompany his dad and uncle to projects around the state to lend a helping hand. While most kids were competing on these fields, Craig was learning about proper safety and field preparation techniques.

His love affair with natural grass turned serious at 16, when he dropped out of high school to work full-time for Diamond



▲ Louisville Slugger Field. Photo by Mike Stewart.

Throughout his journey, Craig has numerous people to thank for their support and confidence that he would, one day, succeed. He's been so impressed with the STMA and how the organization has always emphasized the importance of acting like a professional and doing the job right.



◀ Craig Sampsell

Designs. Three years later, the company folded and, in early 2003, Craig and his dad were without jobs.

Fortunately, their sports turf expertise was quickly acknowledged by Carmel Dads' Club, a 100-plus acre sports complex near Indiana's Clay County. Dad and son were hired full-time in August 2003 and spent countless hours together mowing, aerating, edging, overseeding and topdressing. As things just started to feel normal again, the family would suffer an even larger tragedy.

In January 2004, Craig's mom took her own life. Racked with grief, he began to head down a very dark road. For the next few years, he was uncertain of his purpose on earth. He didn't have a high school degree or any direction to follow. Craig gained significant weight and began smoking to deal with the stress. Regardless of the tough times, his appetite for sports turf never faded and he tried to stay focused on his work at Carmel Dad's Club.

Finally, Craig's luck began to turn. In January 2006, just 2 years after his mother's passing, he met his future wife, Caroline. She immediately started guiding him back to a better track and questioned why he hadn't pursued his GED. Craig didn't have an answer and, to be honest, he didn't have an answer for most questions in life.

With Caroline's persistence, Craig was a high school graduate by August 2006 with an Honors GED and, soon after, enrolled at Indiana University-Purdue University of Indianapolis (IUPUI) to study sports management.

To learn more about his specific trade, Craig became a member of the Sports Turf Managers Association (STMA) and conducted extensive research online. He reached out to other sports