



## Man on a mission:

# Mike Andresen, CSFM

By Eric Schroder

**H**ere's the first thing you need to know about Mike Andresen: He never even looked at the photos that were taken for this issue's cover. His ego is in check, which means he devotes his time to more important matters.

Like his day job, for example. Andresen, a certified sports field manager (CSFM), tends to the athletic turf for the Iowa State University program in Ames. Or his spare time passions, fishing and hunting. And, oh yeah, he recently was elected President of the Sports Turf Managers Association (STMA).

Andresen has always taken great pride in his work and he wants to help educate his peers so they can produce fields to be proud of, and be recognized for doing so.

"We need to get to the bottom of the wear tolerance and traffic issues. It's my number one priority," he says. "We are responsible for educating our members on how to get a field in condition to handle 'X' amount of games. We need to be able to provide our members with the tools for them to answer the question, 'At a certain level of maintenance, what is the wear and traffic tolerance for this field?'"

"I want all our committees to address this issue in some fashion. We need to figure out what research is out there and perhaps use some SAFE Foundation money to conduct research at some point, to answer this question. And we need to ask members what documents they need to answer this question," Andresen says. "If we can provide our members with such info, they become that much more valuable to their respective operations. This is basic info we need now. We need to do this and we can do it."

"As we further develop relationships with other organizations like the NRPA and NIAAA, we want them to look to us as the resource for this information," he says. "In doing so we can enhance our members' value to their employers, as well as enhance the association's value to potential members."



Born and bred in Guthrie Center, IA, an hour west of Des Moines, Mike says his hometown might as well have been 400 miles from the city when Andresen, now 47, was growing up.

"Playing baseball in college, that was the big leagues for me," he says. "Anyone who would have voiced a desire to play professional baseball would have been told they were crazy. To us, the pro level was unattainable.

"I think lots of people from small towns find playing college sports very big time," Andresen says. "I get a lot joy from knowing that our crew plays such an important role in the student/athlete's enjoyment of the experience.

"When a student plays here at Iowa State, they and their parents should know

the fields will be of high standard, and safe. They are playing in a top-notch, competitive league at top-notch facilities. We provide the best experience they could have."

Andresen says working in athletics today is a dream job for him. A sports fan from a very young age, he says his mother understood the importance of athletics and encouraged Mike to participate. Like many boys of his generation, Andresen's childhood dream was playing in the major leagues. He says today he didn't have a clue about how to go about living his dream, and besides, he was an average pitcher. But it was in that role that he first learned how to care for a pitcher's mound.

He also worked at the local 9-hole golf course, where he was deeply influenced by

two retired businessmen who oversaw course operations back in the day. "The late Boyd Parrish and 90-year-old Howard Ely (who shot his age last year Mike reports) helped form my youthful vigor into achievement," he says.

"They put some 'old soul' in me. I didn't listen to teachers back then but spending time shoulder to shoulder with those two convinced me of the best path," Andresen remembers.

Mike likes reading and fishing because he can be alone and dream doing both. "I'm a goal-oriented person. You don't get anywhere if you don't set goals. I don't write them down, I just focus on two or three major goals, things I would like to achieve. I think about them all the time."

## Benefits of certification

Recognizing the importance of fostering and improving professionalism within the sports turf industry, the Sports Turf Managers Association developed the Certified Sports Field Manager (CSFM) certification program.

The purpose of the program is to:

- Increase professionalism in the sports turf industry
- Promote better and safer sports turf areas
- Establish credentials that signify a specific level of expertise
- Increase career opportunities and promote the sports turf manager and the profession
- Provide recognition for attaining a level of expertise and performance as professionals in the industry
- Stimulate and motivate improved performance and increased professionalism
- Increase opportunities for education and training

Certification validates to your employer, to your peers, and to the industry at-large that you have gone above and beyond the requirements of job performance and have demonstrated a superior level of competence. With this recognition can come increased compensation. During employment searches, those with the CSFM designation have a competitive edge over those who are not certified.

Seventy STMA members have achieved certified status. They have demonstrated their personal level of professionalism and their ability to apply those professional standards in their own sports field management program.

In order to qualify to test for certification status, the individual must have a minimum of 40 points earned through a combination of education and experience. The CSFM exam covers agronomics, administration, pest management, and sports specific issues. Once certification is achieved, continuing education and industry service is required.

Just as great sports accomplishments raise the bar for all competitors, excellence in field care raises the level of expectations for all sports turf managers. The results are better fields and safer fields at all levels of sports competition. If you are not already a Certified Sports Field Manager, consider taking the steps to become certified. Contact STMA Headquarters at 800-323-3875 to receive the information you need to start the process.

As a high school senior intrigued by the turf lessons he was learning at the local muni, Mike had interest in the horticulture program at Des Moines Area Community College (DMACC). But when Grand View College offered him a chance to play baseball, he followed that boyhood dream. After his 2 years at Grand View, where he also walked on for the basketball team, straight from being the guy who swept the gym to a contributing member of the squad, Mike enrolled in the 2-year hort/turf program at DMACC. "I really sank myself into that program," he says.

After finishing Mike became the supervisor of a newly landscaped area at DMACC that included multi-use areas as well as a softball field. While there he went to a Professional Grounds Management Society conference, an event for which Mike says he registered so early, the organizers asked him to moderate a morning session. "I was just out of college and didn't know anything and I'm moderating the 'Sports Turf' session: Harry Gill, Dick Ericson, and George Toma!

"I spoke with those men a little, just brushed shoulders with them, but it was a big deal to me," Mike says. "That gave me my first glimpse that sports turf management could be a career.

"I went home with a renewed interest even though at the time there were not really any sports turf manager jobs in Des Moines," says Mike. Mike worked at DMACC from 1982 to 1986; he remembers earning \$9,000 a year when he was managing 13 people in "a low pressure job, an awesome job."

Mike then took a manager's job with a local landscape maintenance contractor, not only to get a larger paycheck but because he wanted to use his hort degree to develop more knowledge, and he wanted more responsibility.

"I enjoyed the variety in that job. I like dealing with shrubs, edging, diagnosing what insects are in trees and so on. I miss a lot of that now," he says. "My degree was in hort so I like trees, shrubs, and annuals as much as grass.

"Motivating crews is still a tough job, the toughest job we have," Mike says. "You won't get their best effort until you show them that it goes beyond being just a job. I try to convey, 'Here are our goals and here's how we are going to get there.' I want them to take pride in their business too."

### Dream job

Mike took a salary cut in 1991 when he went to work for the Iowa Cubs. "That job was fulfillment of a dream. As a kid I imagined what the ballpark was like but when I worked there it filled in my senses, the smells, the sounds," he says.

"Fields can be special places, where people live out their own dreams. That's why I think our work is important. We impact people. You can make a high school venue that special, where dreams are fulfilled.

"I get the same feeling today with the smells and sounds and sights at the ballpark."

**"MIKE IS A VISIONARY AND CAPABLE OF SEEING THE BIG PICTURE FOR THE FUTURE OF STMA AND THIS PROFESSION. HE SEES THINGS FROM EVERY POSSIBLE ANGLE. I VALUE AND TRUST HIS JUDGMENT. MIKE HAS A PASSION FOR STMA AND OUR PROFESSION. I BELIEVE THE BEST DAYS ARE AHEAD FOR THIS ORGANIZATION UNDER MIKE'S LEADERSHIP."**

**- BOB CAMPBELL, CSFM, FORMER STMA PRESIDENT.**

It's no coincidence that Mike landed the job. He knew the GM from baseball at Grand View and one weekend he asked Mike to come work on the field when his city crew was not available. Mike striped the field among other nuances, and his work left an impression.

"In the back of my mind I wondered what might happen because I knew the city was getting ready to build a new stadium. It shows who you know is important, but when you're given that opportunity you must be prepared to succeed," Mike says.

"I started reading about sports fields from then on. My long-term thinking was I want to be ready if my opportunity comes."

It came when the team took over stadium operations for the final year of the old park, a deal that included Cubs managing operations for the new venue. Mike managed the field that last year. "We pumped water out of the dugouts every day because the water used in washing the seating areas all collected there," Mike says. "Big shot sports turf manager, pumping water and cleaning toilets! But I loved it," he says.

Mike says his "#1 guy" while he was with the Cubs was former major league groundskeeper Lubie Veal, who had worked for the Big Red Machine clubs in Cincinnati, followed by time at Wrigley Field in Chicago. "Lubie would come spend a week with me the first of every April. He said, 'Mike, if you know the grass, I can teach you

the dirt.' And dirt's where it's at in baseball. I knew I could grow grass in Iowa and Lubie could help me become a 'sports turf manager'.

"That very first year he showed me what the profession is all about in a week's time. Lubie was good friends with Harry Gill but he was not an outgoing person and so he wasn't involved with STMA. But he would help anyone personally," Mike says. "I had no sprayer, no aerifier, no topdresser, nothing but a mower but Lubie said we could make it work."

#### **More goals**

Andresen knows where he wants to guide STMA. "We need to produce educational opportunities for members. I'd like to have more hands-on education at Conference," Mike says. "I would like to see STMA put out our own version of Extension Service bulletins."

Mike cites as an example a video on how to build a mound done by Bob Christofferson and Jody Gill, and the online education courses now available through this magazine and STMA.

"I know the money's not available from SAFE yet to do proper research, but we should be able, as an association, to condense and publish what's out there.

"I'd also like to re-focus a bit on the certification program (see sidebar). If you compare apples to apples, our CSFM program is as successful as the superintendents' (GCSAA).

We need to do a better job of showing the value of certification," Andresen says. "I received a salary increase after being certified, for example. We work in an arena where certification is valued. Athletic trainers are certified, for example. We need to be recognized but we also need more people certified and grow it to a level where our employers see its value.

"At one point I was reluctant to take the CSFM test," he admits. "I was afraid to fail it. I finally realized that even if I failed a portion of the test, I could use the rest of a calendar year to study and pass the portions I failed the first time. We need to help members embrace the challenge of becoming a CSFM. We have a practice test that can help them get ready. The seminar on preparing for the test at Conference is always full, so we know there's a lot of interest. We need to spotlight what a huge benefit it can be to someone's career."

Andresen is an unabashed natural turf guy. "Artificial turf has its place but we are losing a lot of fields to artificial for the wrong reasons," he says. "Underbudgeting maintenance [for natural fields] yet expecting them to handle excessive traffic makes it easier for administrations to turn to artificial," Andresen says. "Grass is the supreme surface to play on. Trainers and athletes keep telling me so. Our challenge is quantifying how much traffic a specific field, with a specific budget, can be expected to tolerate." ■