SportsField MANAGEMENT

April 2025 | Vol. 41 No. 4 | The Official Publication of the Sports Field Management Association

College Softball Field of the Year

Hard work and dedication result in top honors for University of Georgia's Jack Turner Softball Stadium

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SportsField MANAGEMENT

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Questions? Email jkmitta@epgacceleration.com with "Rising Star" in the subject.

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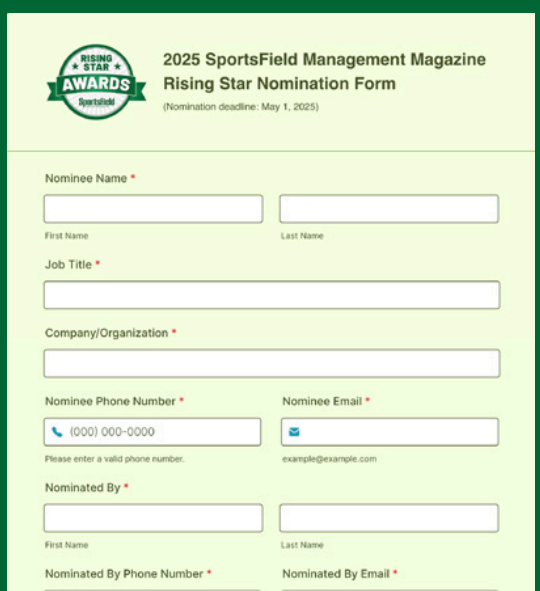

2025 SportsField Management Magazine
Rising Star Nomination Form
(Nomination deadline: May 1, 2025)

Nominee Name *
First Name
Last Name
Job Title *
Company/Organization *
Nominee Phone Number *
(000) 000-0000
Please enter a valid phone number.
Nominee Email *
example@example.com
Nominated By *
First Name
Last Name
Nominated By Phone Number *
Nominated By Email *

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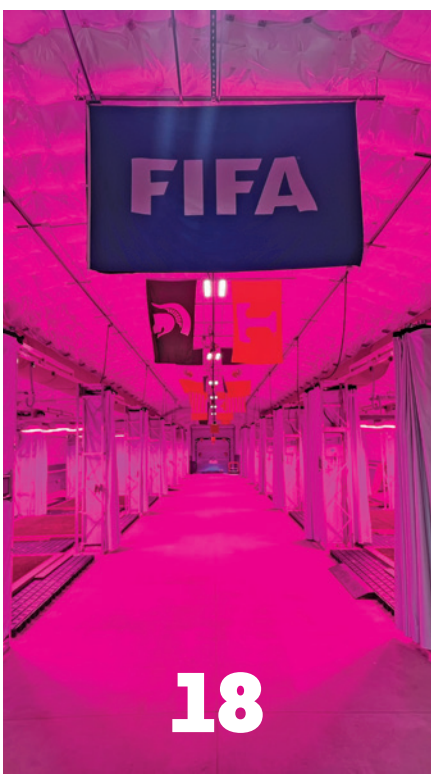

SFMA Online Learning

SFMA has created a multi-step approach to online education:

STEP 1: TURFGRASS MANAGEMENT 101

The Turfgrass Management 101 course hosted through Canvas (*https://www.sportsfieldmanagement.org/knowledge_center/turfgrass-science-curriculum/*) is set up to provide basic knowledge in the core areas of turfgrass science. The curriculum offers comprehensive training in 5 Units:

- **Unit 1 — Introduction to Turfgrass Science:** Students learn about the economic, environmental and community benefits turfgrass surfaces provide. Students will also learn about the various careers available in the green industry.
- **Unit 2 — Turfgrass Growth and Development, Anatomy and Identification:** Students learn about turfgrass germination and growth. They will also learn about different anatomical features and how to use those features to identify turfgrass plants. Adaptations and use of turfgrass species is also covered.
- **Unit 3 — Turfgrass Soils:** Students learn about the importance of soil properties in a turfgrass system. Soil texture, compaction, and drainage and how they influence turfgrass health is the focus.
- **Unit 4 — Turfgrass Cultural Practices:** Students learn about the cultural practices essential for maintaining healthy turfgrass. Mowing, fertility, irrigation, aeration and topdressing, and integrated pest management are discussed in detail.
- **Unit 5 — Turfgrass Establishment:** The final unit utilizes all of the information presented in the course to give students a broader picture of the requirements to manage turfgrass from start to finish.

STEP 2: TURFGRASS SCIENCE CERTIFICATION - INTRODUCTION TO THE INDUSTRY ICEV COURSE

This entry-level certification (*https://www.sportsfieldmanagement.org/turfgrass-science-certification/*) is designed to build a pipeline of skilled turfgrass industry professionals. The certification can be earned by learners in all stages of their education and career and verifies individuals are prepared to pursue a career in the field of turfgrass science.

The certification exam, tested on the iCEV platform, consists of 100 questions and assesses knowledge and skills for the following weighted industry standards:

- Benefits of Turfgrass: 5%
- Turfgrass Anatomy, Identification and Adaptations: 20%
- Turfgrass Environment: 25%
- Turfgrass Cultural Practices: 30%
- Playing Surface Preparation: 20%

STEP 3: CSFM CERTIFICATION

Attaining Certified Sports Field Manager (CSFM) status means you will be looked upon as a leader in the industry. It will give you a sense of pride and accomplishment and it can even improve your current or future employment prospects.

Becoming a CSFM is meant to challenge your knowledge of managing sports fields and to draw upon all aspects of your background in education and experience to prove that you are one of the best in the industry. Meeting the challenge can contribute to your professional advancement in sports field management.

Certified Sports Field Manager (CSFM) Information and Application Packet:

- CSFM Credentialing Information
- CSFM Competency Outline
- CSFM Detailed Competency List

NEXT STEPS: ONGOING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OFFERINGS/RESOURCES

Ongoing professional development includes education on Interpersonal Skills; Diversity, Equity and Inclusion; Dynamic Meetings; and the SFMA Mentorship Program

Online Courses Coming soon include Turfgrass Math Resource Center; Field Painting Resource Center; Synthetic Turf Management 101; and Budgeting 101.

Course costs:

101 level courses are free to SFMA members and $60 for nonmembers; resource centers are free for SFMA members and $75 for nonmembers; all other professional development resources are $50 for SFMA members and $75 for nonmembers.

The CSFM application fee is $250 for SFMA members and $350 for nonmembers. The CSFM testing fee is $100 for both members and nonmembers. The annual CSFM renewal fee is $100 for SFMA members and $200 for nonmembers. And the retest fee is $45 for both members and nonmembers. (Assessment center fees to be borne by the applicant.)

For more information concerning the CSFM program, contact Leah Craig at *lcraig@sportsfieldmanagement.org*. For more information concerning all other educational offerings, contact Jennifer McLendon at *jmclendon@sportsfieldmanagement.org*. SFM

Editor's Note

John Kmitta
Associate Publisher /
Editorial Brand Director
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763-383-4405

My interest in the history of the sports field management profession is the reason we created the Accessing the Archives section a couple of years ago. I'm also interested in the people who shaped the industry. What better way to learn about the history of the profession than from those who lived it? Those two things recently came together for me.

While working on the archives section a few months ago, I read the January 1998 article about the "SportsTurf Manager of the Year," Mike Schiller. Mike is a Certified Sports Field Manager and a past president of SFMA (1996-97), now retired. Although I had never met Mike in person, I had corresponded with him via email several times over the past five years. However, although I knew Mike's credentials, I did not know about his career path or where he was located.

That changed when I read the 1998 article and learned that in the 1970s Mike worked for the park district of the town in which I grew up. His next career stop was in the same village in which I took my first journalism job working for the local newspaper. Armed with this new knowledge, I reached out to Mike and found out that he retired to a place less than 10 miles from where I live.

So, Mike and I recently met up for lunch, shared a great conversation, and found more things in common. Two of Mike's children went to the school at which I spent first through eighth grades (although they were several years behind me); and Mike's wife was music and choir director for our church (Mike later confirmed that she knew my parents).

In addition to marveling at our close geographic proximity and crossover paths, Mike talked about the influence the association's founders had on his career, shared stories of the early conferences when a room for 50 was packed with more than 150 sports field managers eager for information, and reminisced about what it was like to serve on the board of directors in the 1990s.

Mike's joy and passion for SFMA, this industry and the people in it is clear — as is how invested he is in the success and wellbeing of the association that was so good to him.

I plan to meet with Mike again, and I hope to share some of his stories and insights in future issues. For now, I hope this serves as a reminder for all of us to know our history and to ask questions of those who have come before us. You never know what you will learn. **SFM**

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EPG BRAND ACCELERATION

President's Message

Adam Thoms, Ph.D.
SFMA President
athoms@iastate.edu

Spring is finally here, and that means everyone is busy with coaches as every sport wants to be outside and use the fields. This time of year is always exciting with the goal of a fresh start on the fields and new crew members to train.

Successful training is so important to any crew. There are new and exciting courses being offered as part of the SFMA online education. If you have new employees who need some turfgrass education, have them check out the SFMA Turfgrass 101 course. We hope to add several more courses later this year, including turfgrass mathematics.

A quick look at the calendar also shows that there are a ton of local chapter workshops this summer that are great to have new crew members attend. I have personally met several individuals whose only turfgrass education is at these events. They are always very thankful that their bosses take them to these workshops for education.

Additionally, if you feel you have seen everything before at these workshops, speak up and volunteer to be on the education committee to help the planning. It is always a struggle to figure out what people want to learn about.

Summer is also full of field day events at your local universities; I would encourage you to consider attending those events to see the latest in innovation and testing. These events are a great opportunity to see how new products are doing with an unbiased testing protocol in your local climate, giving you a better idea of how they will work for you. Take the time at these field days to visit with the researchers and ask follow-up questions; they often will have additional information that can help you with future decisions.

If formal education is not what you're looking for, then maybe you want to check out the SFMA mentorship program. We have seen growth in the mentorship program with a 25% increase in participation this year. This is a great opportunity to build your network with someone else in SFMA who has more experience. The mentor/mentee relationship can be very beneficial with not only agronomic advice but also career advice.

There are so many opportunities to learn more about our industry and products, and I encourage you all to attend a workshop, seminar or online program to keep up with the latest information in your industry. These events help keep you recent on the new technologies and keep growing your network. **SFM**

– Adam Thoms, Ph.D.

Mt. San Antonio College

Photos courtesy of Chaz Perea, Ph.D., Mt. San Antonio College

MT. SAN ANTONIO COLLEGE (Mt. SAC) is one of the largest community colleges in California. The campus sits on 420 rolling acres in Walnut, California, located on the eastern edge of the greater Los Angeles area. Mt. SAC offers both an associate degree in Park and Sports Turf Management, as well as a Sports Turf Management certificate option

The Park and Sports Turf Management degree is part of Mt. SAC's comprehensive Agricultural Sciences Program. Students learn how to design, install and manage irrigation systems; set up and implement fertilizer and pest management programs; design and properly install a complete landscape; and properly identify and maintain trees, shrubs and turfgrasses. In addition, students learn about personnel management, budgeting and other management topics.

This Sports Turf Management certificate program is designed to provide skills required for students interested in employment at golf courses, racetracks, athletic fields and stadiums, and other high-use turf areas. All courses are applicable for degree requirements in Ornamental Horticulture, Park and Sports Turf Management, Equipment Technology, and Integrated Pest Management.

"What's unique to our community college is that we have a real ag department. We have a nursery that's for production, wholesale, commercial with students and a couple full-time staff," said Chaz Perea, Ph.D., professor of Horticultural Science, and co-chair of Agriculture Science. "That acts as the living laboratory for our horticulture program. We have a nursery, demonstration garden, equine, livestock, sheep, cattle."

According to Perea, within the Ag Science department, Mt. SAC has registered vet technology, animal science and horticulture — all of which are career technical education (CTE) programs focused on job skills, industry connections, and building community.

"People assume we have a large turf program within our within our horticulture department, but we don't," said Perea. "Brian [Scott] teaches AGOR 39 Turfgrass Production and Management, and I teach AGOR 40 Sports Turf Management. That's it. We have eight or nine turf plots and we have a small Wiffle ball field that we use as our lab space. Then we go out onto campus to get our hands on with the grounds crew at Mount SAC."

Dr. Kent W. Kurtz Memorial Stadium is the Wiffle ball field and living laboratory at Mt. SAC. The field's namesake was an industry pioneer, professor at Cal Poly Pomona, and mentor to Mt. SAC's Brian Scott.

"It's very small field, but we use the heck out of it," said Perea.

"Most of our classes in our horticulture department have a lab and a lecture component," he added. "So you'll be in class for two hours, and the lab is approximately three hours. If we go short on lecture, we'll go long our lab and vice versa, but we try for 50/50. We want students to touch the tools, use them, break them; misapply things, apply things correctly — all of the above. We want them to do that in class, so when they go out to a job interview, they have no problem."

According to Perea, most students at Mt. SAC commute from somewhere in Los Angeles County, and most already work in the landscape or turf industry. Adding Mt. SAC to their resume shows they are getting hands-on job skills. Typically, students have been working in industry and find out that Mt. SAC offers classes for irrigation, IPM and other skills needed for their job.

"They come to us and then they'll generally go up one position after another," he said. "Their pay and quality of life will increase while they're getting a certificate or associate degree with us."

Mt. SAC's certificate program consists of five to six courses (three units apiece), then tree care, nursery, integrated pest management, and park and sports turf science, as well as classes such as plant propagation and soil science. For the associate degree, there are 16 core courses plus general ed classes.

Perea, Scott and Jennifer Hinostroza are the three full-time teachers, and they teach five to six different classes year round. In addition, the Horticulture department has several adjunct professors who are industry professionals — including directors of horticulture, golf course superintendents, tree specialists and more.

In terms of career paths for Mt. SAC students, as mentioned, many are already in the landscape or sports field industry when they enroll at Mt. SAC. Students are active in arboriculture, landscape maintenance, nursery, indoor plants, golf courses, sports turf, grounds maintenance and more.

"People in the industry know that if students come from Mount SAC, you can bet they're going to have some skills," said Perea. "Then there is SFMA, which is huge for us."

Perea is a Mt. SAC alumnus who competed on the Mt. SAC turf team and went on to earn his bachelor's degree, master's degree, MBA and Ph.D. As a student, Perea helped the Mt. SAC turf team to multiple Student Challenge wins; and as a professor and coach has gone on to lead the team to continued success.

At the 2025 SFMA Conference Student Challenge, Mt. SAC became the first team to sweep first, second and third place. In addition to winning the 2025 two-year competition in the Student Challenge, Mt. SAC won in 2007, 2009, 2011, 2014, 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2020. And since the two-year competition began in 2007, Mt. SAC has had at least one team finish in the top three in all but three of those years.

"The turf team is interesting," said Perea. "I hand select the students. I need to see their academic work and their ability to work in a dynamic group. A lot of our students in the Student Challenge have never taken a turf class. I personally tutor these teams in person every two weeks, and that's how we prep for it. Through turf team we'll have someone working at a nursery, someone working indoor house plants, someone working on a golf course, someone doing landscape installation, someone doing IPM recommendations."

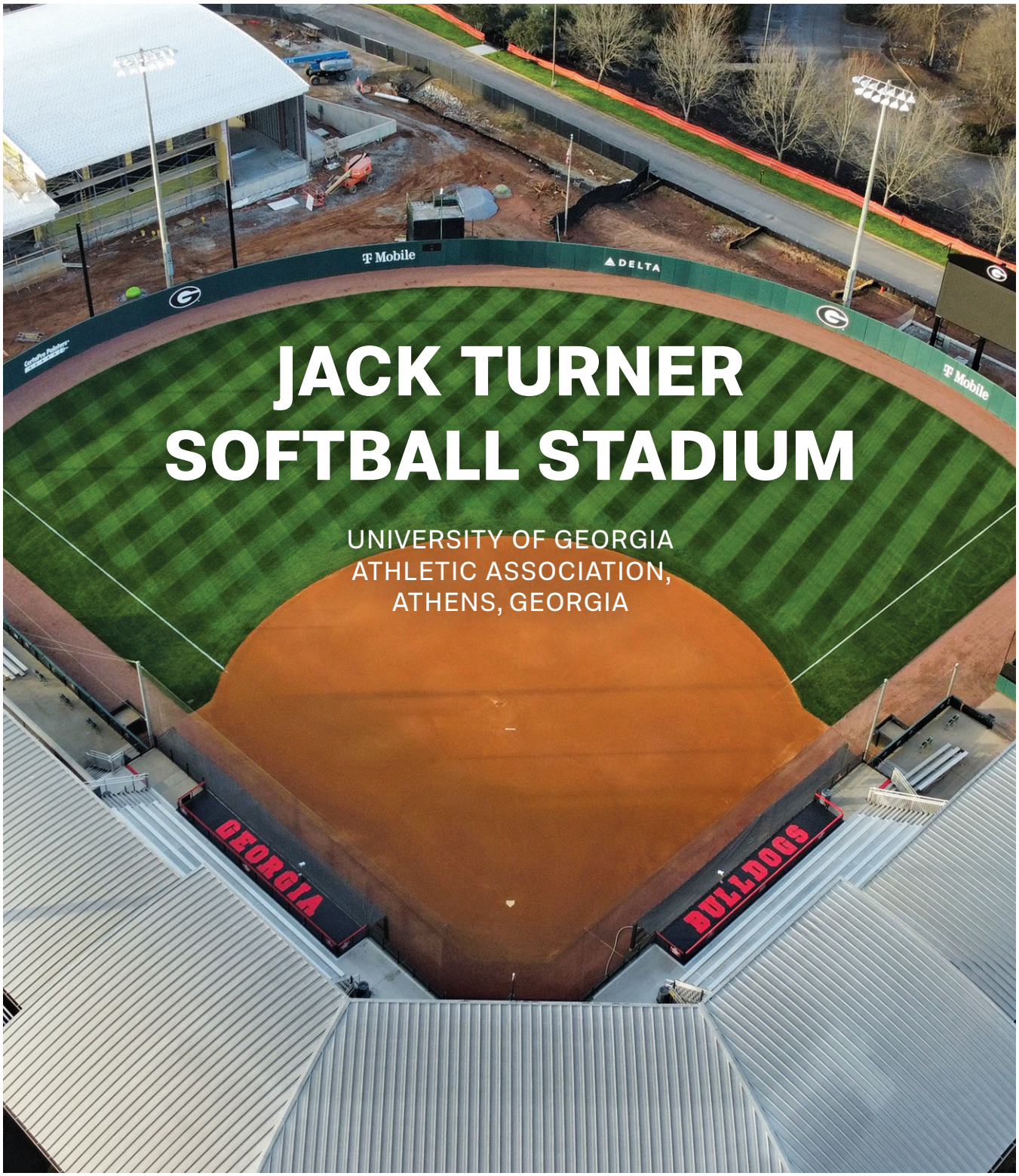
Students who join the Mt. SAC turf team have performed at a high level academically and socially within their peer group and also exhibit niche skills, such as being strong at plant identification.

"I'm generally looking for someone who has really high reading comprehension, and can read through multiple-choice questions," said Perea. "Then I'm always looking for a combination of guys and girls on the same team. Our students don't get credit for this and don't get paid for it. You get something if you win, and you get to add that to your resume. When they're done, students who were on turf team have long-lasting social connections. It's a growth-oriented experience, and unlike any other experience they will have."

Perea added that the opportunity SFMA provides through Student Challenge is incredible.

"I'm so happy every year that the students get to come for this and the experience of the conference," he said. "SFMA has been providing an incredible event for us to learn and grow for a long time. I'm just super grateful." **SFM**

For more information about Mt. San Antonio College, visit https://www.mtsac.edu/horticulture/



JACK TURNER SOFTBALL STADIUM

UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA ATHLETIC ASSOCIATION, ATHENS, GEORGIA

The Field of the Year Awards program is made possible by the support of sponsors Carolina Green Corp., Precision Laboratories, John Deere and World Class Athletics.

THE FIELD OF THE YEAR AWARD is due to the dedication and hard work at the Jack Turner Softball Stadium. I make sure to go outside of my comfort zone when it comes to gaining knowledge. I try to get several different opinions on how someone does a certain task or cultural practice because every field and each result will be different. I do not have a turfgrass degree or any schooling related to turfgrass. I have learned everything that I know by hands-on experience and being willing to ask questions. During my time at Georgia, I have been promoted twice due to my drive, growth in knowledge and dedication to my fields. Each day is a new challenge, and it pushes me to be better.

I have faced more challenges in the last 12 months than I have in the rest of my five years at Georgia. Two winters ago, we faced an issue with our irrigation well, which caused it to freeze and have us without water for three months. This past winter, our irrigation well went through a $50,000 reconstruction to improve it long term. By doing that, it caused us to be without water for two months. During that time period, we were in prime growing season for the ryegrass. We had to use a 500-gallon water trailer to water the infield skin and outfield to keep the rye growing strong.

Another issue that was faced during that time period was tarp burn. We had our tarp on the infield with edges folded back for about a week during winter vacation. We had heavy winds blow the tarp over onto the grass, which caused it to burn. We worked hard to get those areas to grow back without having to resod any of those areas during the season.

One of the bigger issues we faced during this last season was not having our typical sod farm that we have on standby. Due to construction going on for a new building for our softball team, we had to get rid of our sod farm. We had to make some decisions regarding height of cut to figure out what would get us through three tournaments of four games per day and keep us growing strong into conference play. The decision we made ended up benefiting us throughout the season and I believe we will stick with it again next season. With our field being more than 20 years old, we have to try various things to help keep the grass as healthy as possible for as long as possible through the daily wear and tear.

Practice schedules are an issue that all sports field managers face. Dealing with field usage and coaches isn't an easy task. Being able to perform routine cultural practices isn't always an option. There are times we have to get creative on how and when we can aerify, fertilize or seed due to the constant usage of a field.

— Brandi "BJ" Thomas, grounds foreman

Level and category of submission: College Softball

Field manager: Brandi "BJ" Thomas

Title: Grounds foreman

Education: Masters of sports management

Experience: I have been managing the softball field for five years now. 2024 was my second season as the foreman/head of the complex. I have learned everything that I know about managing and maintaining a sports field by asking questions and through hands-on experience. I have bachelor's and master's degrees in sports management. Every day I am constantly learning how to be a better sports field manager.

Full-time staff: Zac Townsend

Original construction: 2001

Turfgrass: 419 bermudagrass

Overseed: Pure Seed perennial ryegrass

Rootzone: Sand

SportsField Management (SFM): Congratulations on the Field of the Year win. What are you most proud of with this win?

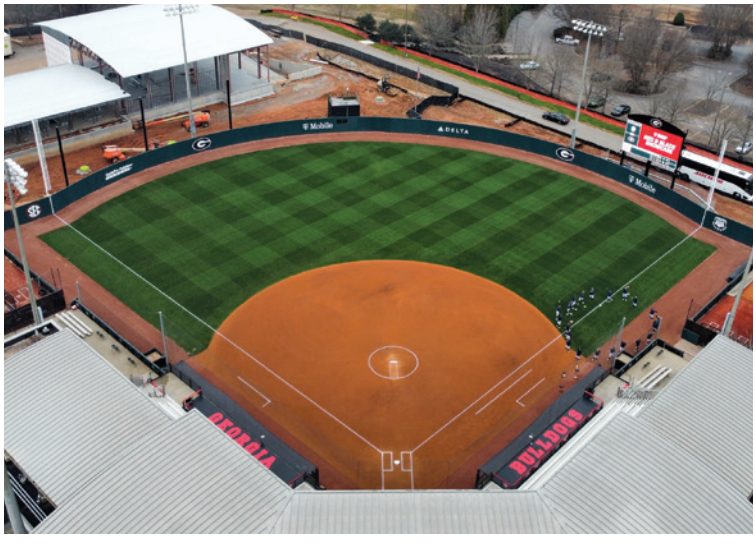
BJ Thomas: I am most proud of my crew. They have really bought in to the standard and work ethic that is required to create a safe and aesthetically pleasing playing surface. These guys put in the work day and night to earn this recognition. In this field of work, there are always challenges that arise; because of our crew, we are able to tackle and conquer each one.

SFM: What were the biggest challenges you have faced with the winning field, and how have you approached those challenges?

Thomas: Some of the bigger challenges we face aren't unique to us — they are challenges other sports field managers also face. We face the ever-changing weather, tournament season, and constant field usage. It's typical for us to host 10 games in three days followed by a mid-week game, in addition to practices. One of the main challenges we face is that the field takes such a beating with the amount of usage, which in turn means we have to work longer and harder to get the surface back to the highest level of playability. The team really only has one off day, which is our best opportunity to repair and reset everything for the following week of practices and games. The best way I have found to approach this is to maximize the time spent on the important tasks.

SFM: Can you share a little about your overall management approach to the winning field and what you feel have been the most important aspects to getting this field to an award-winning level?

Thomas: From early on, applying for Field of the Year has been a goal of mine, and the crew was fully on board with it. I asked them to help make sure we document every single thing we did, big or small. I think documenting everything we were doing not only helped the application process, but is going to also help in years to come as a reference guide. We can look back and see what worked and what didn't work throughout the season. Doing the little things often and correctly is one of the most important aspects of getting the field to where it is. Sometimes we get so caught up in the time restraints of the small windows we are able to work on the field that we lose sight of the little things. Emphasizing the little things really helped set the standard; if you do the little

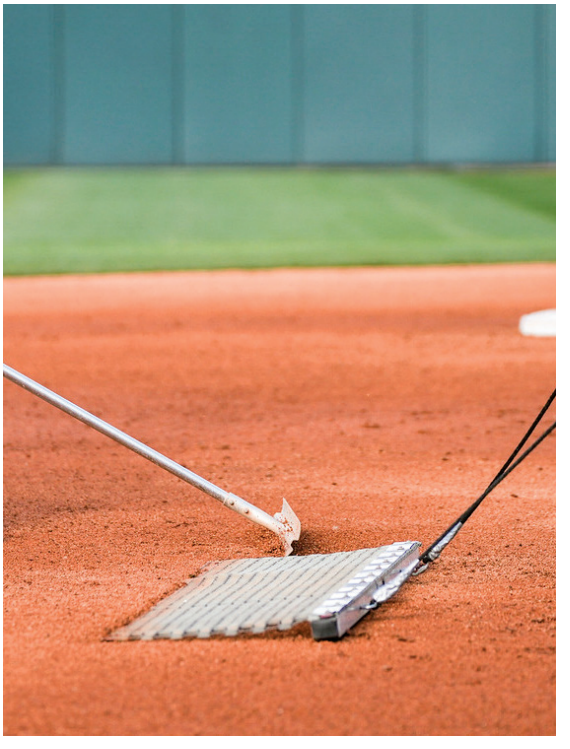


things right, it's hard to do the big things wrong. For example, repairing and leveling out the bullpen. It's a little thing we do every day, and those tasks become habit. Focusing and not skipping steps to speed up the process translated into the field mound being the best it has ever been.

SFM: Please tell us about your crew, and anything else you would like us to know about your organization and the fields/facilities that you manage?
Thomas: The crew at Jack Turner this past season was comprised of two full-time employees and five to six part-time student workers. Among the eight of us, we manage the softball field and two soccer fields. With both sports practicing and competing at the same time in the same season, it can be difficult to balance it all. Having someone like Zac Townsend to help me get through the day is crucial. Over the past two seasons, we have developed a relationship where we can read each other's minds and know what the other is thinking for that next step. Working alongside Zac makes the long hours and late nights worth it. Our bosses, Matt Hollan and Ethan Kain, have set that example for us. Matt and Ethan lead by example in all that they do. They are among the most knowledgeable in the industry, and to be able to learn from them is icing on the cake. Having that example set from top down helps the overall outlook on the job that we do.

SFM: Can you share a bit of insight into what the Field of the Year application process was like for you, as well as any tips you might have for other sports field managers?
Thomas: The Field of the Year application process was lengthy to say the least. It challenged me to learn the history of the field and how things were built more than 20 years ago. One of the best tips I can give other sports field managers about the process is a tip that a former Field of the Year winner gave me: document everything and be very detailed. Take pictures of the good, the bad and the ugly. People want to see the "glow up" that your field has, as well as the challenges you've overcome. If you try something new and fail at it, document that; it's a good lesson. **SFM**


TURF
ELTA



The Dominoes of Siloed Communication

Communication silos are a common but overlooked issue in many work environments. The sports field management industry is no exception. In simple terms, a communication silo forms when information is not shared between departments, teams or individuals who rely on it. This leads to scheduling conflicts, wasted time, and avoidable frustration, one knocks over the next...you get the picture.

A lack of communication affects more than just schedules — it breaks down trust. When people do not share critical information, it fosters a culture of frustration and disengagement. Field management professionals work hard to ensure playing surfaces are in top condition, but efforts feel pointless when there is a lack in communication.

A perfect example happened to me just last week. I was mowing the lacrosse field, carefully crafting an "X" pattern with shiny light and dark stripes of ryegrass, and ensuring every pass was perfectly straight. As I completed a three-point turn in the off-field grass, I suddenly noticed a large group of players and coaches walking directly across the freshly mowed area. Caught off guard, I stopped and asked if they had a scheduled time on the field. Their response? Someone had just told them they were "free to walk around for 10 minutes."

This kind of miscommunication happens so often that I've lost count, leading to unnecessary disruptions and frustration. Situations like this are a direct result of communication silos. In this case, the person who gave the team permission assumed availability without checking. I had no prior notice of their arrival. A simple exchange of information could have prevented this frustration, ensuring both the field's maintenance and team's needs are met without conflict.

Similar scenarios could be practice starting earlier than scheduled on the day of field painting, leading to players unknowingly stepping on wet paint; or a crew completing field repairs when impromptu drills break out, increasing the risk of injury. Small misunderstandings escalate into costly errors when communication barriers exist.

Sports field management requires coordination among multiple groups. If a maintenance crew is unaware of a last-minute schedule change, they might waste time on the field that will not be used, while another field remains neglected. Siloed communication leads to inefficiencies that reduce overall productivity and create avoidable delays.

Field management teams take pride in their work. When efforts are thwarted due to poor communication, frustration builds and lowers morale. Over time, this leads to burnout, decreased engagement, and higher turnover rates. Employees who feel their work is not valued or respected are less likely to go above and beyond in their roles.

What steps can sports field management professionals take to break down communication silos? A simple solution is to create structured ways for teams to share information. This could be as basic as a shared schedule or digital calendar.

Remember though, calendars and schedules are guidelines. A weekly or bi-weekly check-in that includes the field management team, athletics staff, and coaching personnel can go a long way in ensuring alignment. Even a short 10-minute meeting can prevent many of the issues caused by miscommunication.

Technology can improve communication, the speed of it, and offers a documented history for reference when questions arise. For example, a real-time messaging platform can ensure last-minute changes reach everyone instantly.

Breaking down silos requires a cultural shift, and it can start with you. When you talk about your work, talk in numbers, such as the number of hours needed to do the work, number of people needed to complete the task properly, how much material is required, and a goal of what time the work will be completed.

Everyone involved in facility management operations should understand the importance of keeping each other informed. Encourage open communication and reinforce that field maintenance and athletic success go hand in hand.

At the end of the day, keeping the lines of communication open benefits everyone. When teams, coaches and field managers stay in sync, work gets done more efficiently, mistakes are minimized, and the overall experience improves for everyone involved. **SFM**

Alpha Jones, CSFM, is athletic field specialist at Duke University. He also serves on the SFMA Board of Directors as President-Elect. He can be reached at morthangrass@gmail.com

CAN YOU IDENTIFY THIS TURFGRASS PROBLEM?

PROBLEM:
Green turf with squares on right, yellow turf on left

TURFGRASS AREA:
Municipal sports field

LOCATION:
Callaway, Florida

TURFGRASS VARIETY:
419 Bermudagrass

Answer on page 33

John Mascaro is president of Turf-Tec International

THE ROAD TO FIFA WORLD CUP 26

Behind the groundbreaking turfgrass research for a tournament of historic proportions

By John Kmitta

FIFA World Cup 26 is an unprecedented undertaking that will see the world's largest and most prestigious soccer tournament played out in 16 host stadiums across Canda, Mexico and the United States. A groundbreaking event such as this called for groundbreaking research and years of preparation.

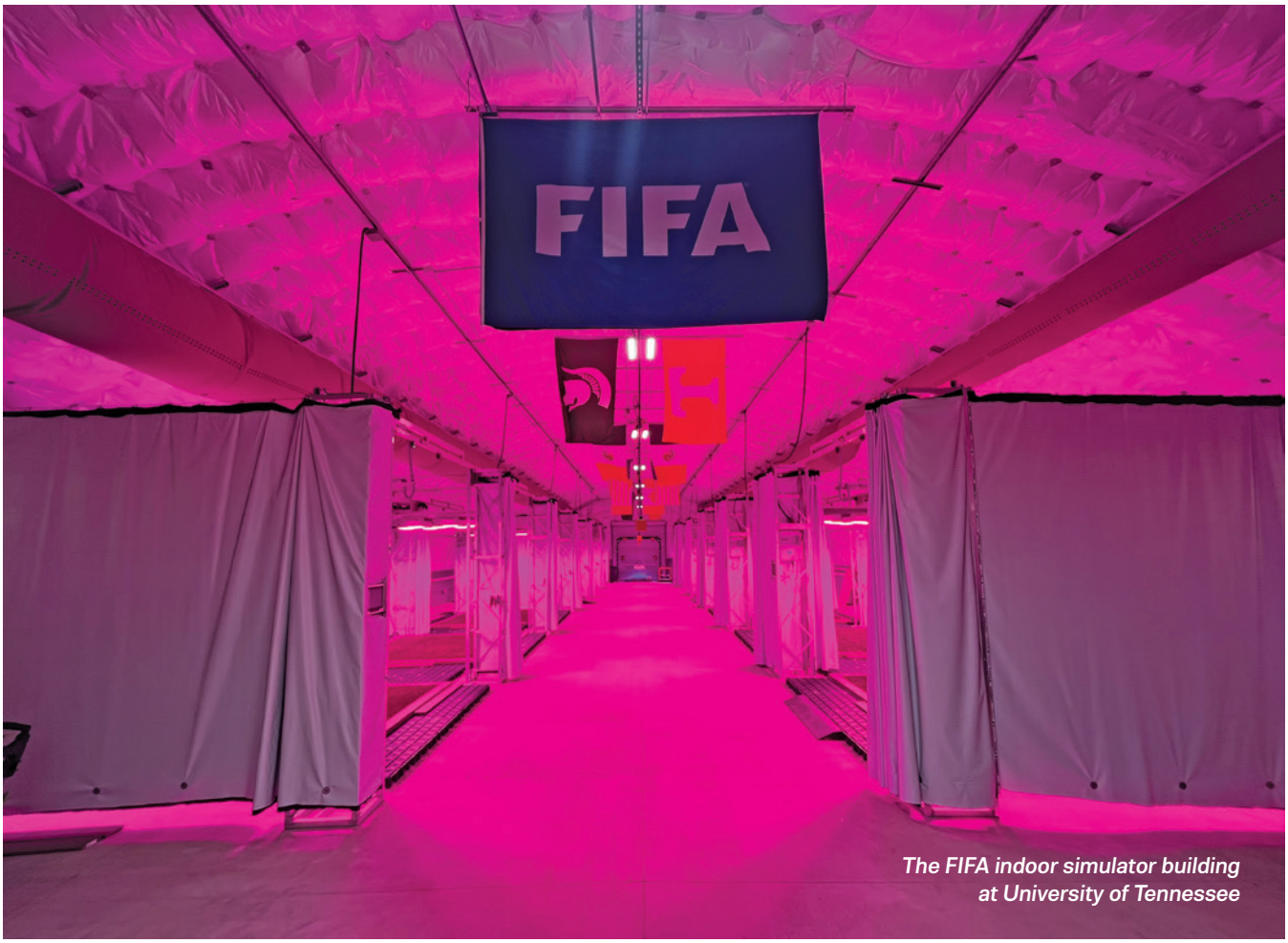
To ensure the best-performing and safest soccer pitches — as well as surface uniformity across such vast geography, climates, and both indoor and outdoor venues — FIFA entrusted the multi-year turfgrass research effort to the University of Tennessee, Knoxville (UT) and Michigan State University (MSU).

According to John Sorochan, Ph.D., distinguished professor of Turfgrass Science and Management in UT's Herbert College of Agriculture, the road to World Cup 26 has been long and winding. Paving that road began more than a decade ago at the STMA Conference.

"Everything's about relationships," said Sorochan. "As education chair for the STMA Conference, I did a general session about turfgrass from the other side of the pond, and brought over some people from the UK to speak about what they do in Europe in terms of sports field management for their soccer pitches."

One of those speakers was Alan Ferguson who, at the time, was head groundsman for England's Football Association (FA), overseeing St. George's Park and Wembley Stadium. Sorochan — who has represented the NFL Players Association for Field Safety and Performance, and was tasked with inspecting and testing the fields for international NFL games – reconnected with Ferguson at Wembley Stadium in 2016.

Ahead of the 2018 FIFA World Cup, FIFA tasked Ferguson with overseeing 6 of the 12 pitches in Russia. Then, in 2019, FIFA appointed Ferguson to the role of senior pitch management manager, overseeing everything related to the pitches for all tournaments. At that time, Ferguson and FIFA were already looking ahead to World Cup 26 in North America. They planned for the tournament to increase from 32 nations to 48, and set



The FIFA indoor simulator building at University of Tennessee

out with the bold vision for 16 stadiums — nearly a third of which would be indoor stadiums.

"Alan had the vision that he wanted evidence-based research data, and he asked me to lead that," said Sorochan. "I agreed; but it's a really big project that would need more than one university. So UT became the lead and we subcontract Michigan State — but we're 50/50 on the research. As we approach this project, we work together."

By 2019, Sorochan was having regular meetings with Ferguson; Kaj Heyral, group leader infrastructure management for FIFA; and John "Trey" Rogers, Ph.D., professor of turfgrass management, MSU. The group had outlined timelines and initiatives, but had really just begun brainstorming concepts when the COVID-19 pandemic hit. While FIFA's focus had to shift to whether there would even be a 2022 World Cup in Qatar, researchers at UT and MSU had to move forward with their efforts to identify the best possible playing surfaces for 2026.

With that in mind, the researchers at UT and MSU looked at temporary surfaces that allow for expedited installation and removal. As such, the focus was always on a shallow pitch profile.

SIMULATING VENUE CONDITIONS

The research team wanted to simulate the indoor conditions of the domed stadiums, so FIFA built a 5,000-square-foot simulator dome at UT. The facility is outfitted with grow lights and climate control, which allows researchers to look at growing grass with zero sunlight (100% artificial light).

"What we're doing inside is taking a lot of the general knowledge that we have for managing grass, and applying it to an environment we consider a microclimate," said Rhys Fielder, project research lead at UT, whose focus has been on indoor testing for the domed stadiums. "We are removing the sun and natural environmental elements from the equation."

According to Fielder, initial research focused on determining the amount of artificial light needed to maintain high-end growth and high-performing fields over the course of a six- to seven-week period from the time the grass is installed to the end of the tournament.

Indoor turfgrass research

FIFA President Gianni Infantino (right) presented Dr. John Sorochan with a personalized pennant during a tour of the University of Tennessee research facilities.

Of the 16 FIFA World Cup 26 sites, five are domed stadiums. Of those, four are indoor climate controlled (Atlanta, Houston, Dallas and Vancouver). The fifth, SoFi Stadium in Los Angeles, is a domed stadium, but does not have air conditioning and is open on the sides to allow airflow.

"We're managing more of the overall environment given that we have complete control of the irrigation, the lighting and everything that goes into it," said Fielder. "We can then use testing devices to see how that may affect something indoors versus what we previously know about being outdoors."

In addition to indoor research being conducted inside the FIFA building at UT, the two universities collaborated over the past several years on outdoor research to homogenize the playing surfaces. According to Sorochan, having MSU students and technicians come to UT to work in the FIFA building has made the relationship a truly integrated partnership.

According to Kyley Dickson, Ph.D., researcher and associate director Center for Athletic Field Safety at UT, one of the first tests performed throughout the research was a ball rebound test, because it is quick and easy to test for the FIFA-defined standards for ideal ball rebound.

When researching the various systems and options for the shallow pitch profile, the ball rebound test allowed researchers to quickly rule out surface combinations that would not be acceptable.

"You can drop a ball and usually it will bounce up somewhere between your thigh and your waist," said Dickson. "In several of these surface combinations we dropped it and it came up to my ankle, and we knew that's not a viable option."

MEASURING PERFORMANCE, PLAYABILITY AND UNIFORMITY

A key component throughout the research has been the use of the fLEX testing device, which measures the performance and playability of surfaces, as well as the uniformity of the field. The device utilizes a 3D-printed foot that strikes the surface, and sensors record what the athlete would feel as they travel across the surface.

"We're able to go across the field without a human and use a device that's repeatable over time so we can see how an athlete would do and what they're feeling," said Dickson. "We're taking some very complex interactions with the surface and distilling it down to something that is very easy to digest for the field manager."

fLEX, which won UT's inaugural Chancellor's Innovation Fund Award, helps researchers determine surface hardness and traction, as well as athlete-surface interactions such as lateral force, the energy return the athlete is feeling, and stability of the foot. As the research team worked to find a solution for the playing surfaces for World Cup 26, fLEX allowed them to evaluate their options quickly and consistently.

During the fLEX testing for World Cup 26, researchers used a 68-kilogram athlete, which is the average weight of the athlete in the last men's World Cup. Adidas provided the most common soccer cleats used by World Cup athletes, and researchers used that boot on every surface that was tested with fLEX to maintain consistency across surfaces.

"The bare minimum of all the research has to be in this high-performing range," said Dickson. "If it's not, then we throw it out. If it met those corridors, then we could continue on to further research."

The fLEX testing device measures the performance and playability of surfaces, as well as the uniformity of the field.

DISCOVERING A WINNING RECIPE

The focus of the shallow pitch profile research was sod on plastic placed directly on top of various system combinations including synthetic turf, shock pads, drainage layers, rubber and more, said Dickson.

Becky Bowling, Ph.D., conducting indoor turfgrass research.

"We tried a lot of stuff that didn't work, and that's part of research," he said. "We finally got to one product that gave us a very similar result when it's on top of concrete to the actual sand rootzone."

Added Sorochan, "We looked at probably 60 different combinations, and we came down to an 85mm (2.5-inch) Permavoid with geotextile and roughly 2-inch-thick sod that provides the same ball bounce as a 12-inch sand rootzone," said Sorochan. "When we put our fLEX machine on it and struck it, it gave the same ground reaction forces as if it were on 12 inches of sand. That was a 'wow' moment."

The process saw the shallow pitch profile go from 1-meter-by-1-meter trials to outdoor plots at MSU to indoor plots in the FIFA building at UT then to a larger-scale plot at UT. Eventually, the shallow pitch profile of choice was used at AT&T Stadium in Dallas for a friendly match between Canada and Mexico, which resulted in players raving about the condition of the pitch and how well it played.

"We went from these little one-square-meter plots, testing all these little things, to it actually working," said Sorochan. "Not only that, the time to install and the time to remove were lowered, which means fewer materials, less labor hours, and lower costs."

Dickson agreed that the surface combination they settled on was the most surprising aspect of the research.

"The product that ended up working, Permavoid, is a water collection system," he said. "We tried it, and that one was one of the most surprising things. We were like, how is this working? We're getting the performance of a 12-inch sand rootzone as far as the ball goes and as far as fLEX goes, and yet it's sod directly on top of this product that is three inches tall."

According to Dickson, using Permavoid also led to better air movement and healthier turfgrass.

"I thought we were going to have several different shock pads and then try all this different stuff," he added. "It ended up being one of the simpler solutions — just one product; you put it in, put grass on top, and you're ready to go so. Sometimes simpler is better."

CAPTURING DATA AND FINE TUNING NEXT STEPS

According to Sorochan, the next year plus will involve capturing as much data as possible from the upcoming FIFA Club World Cup 2025, then fine tuning things as World Cup 26 approaches.

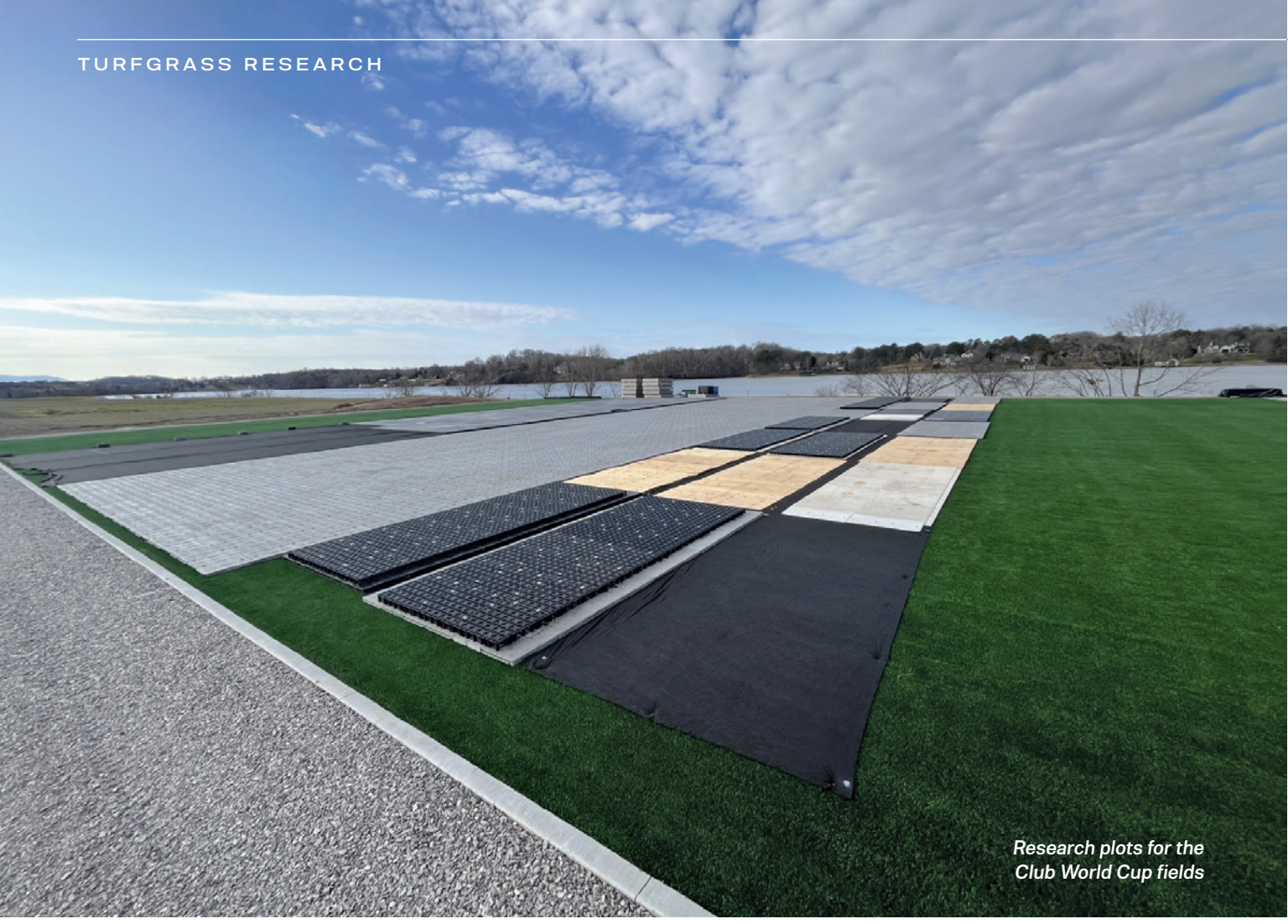
"Perfection is what's expected, so we're doing different overseeding trials and we're starting to mock each stadium," said Sorochan. "We have the schedule. Dallas has the most games, but some domed stadiums have more consecutive games. So, how do we adjust the lights on and off to make sure that the grass is going to continue to grow and be healthy?"

For World Cup 26, the eight stadiums with synthetic turf will take out their artificial surface and build a pitch. However, for the Club World Cup — starting June 14, 2025 — there will be five synthetic turf stadiums that are going to build a pitch over the artificial turf.

Shallow profile rooting

According to Sorochan, baseline data shows that geotextile and sod can't just be laid on top of the synthetic.

"There are variances in concert flooring — some of them are too thin and you still get a trampolining effect and you feel the artificial turf underneath," he said. "When you drop the ball, it doesn't bounce back up like it should for the FIFA standards."



Research plots for the Club World Cup fields

To find a solution for the inaugural Club World Cup this year, the research team built a 30,000-square-foot synthetic turf plot at UT to test a variety of systems on top of the synthetic turf.

Said Sorochan, "We've got all sorts of systems — from plywood to aluminum flooring and the Permavoid shallow pitch profiles — including building up layers of sand above the artificial turf and reinforced flooring to see what we need in order to be like a natural pitch with 12 inches of sand."

The research team will continue to research alternative grow lights and new grow light technologies, including different wavelengths of light that could be used to grow the grass faster or short and stunted.

"Now that we understand how everything's going to react based on all the different elements that we can control, we're looking at directly applying it to the schedule that we have available," said Fielder.

According to Fielder, the plan is for the grass for World Cup 26 to go in three weeks prior to the first game, which will allow a three-week establishment period during which the grow lights will run uninterrupted for 12-hour cycles.

"That gives us 22 moles of light, which is what we found optimal," said Fielder. "The lights will run for 12 hours, be off for 12 hours, and will be on that three-week increment on and off, almost uninterrupted."

Once the match schedule is in effect, the various venues will have sporadic amounts of off days between matches, and the goal is to get as much recovery as possible during those short windows.

CHALLENGES

One of the biggest challenges for researchers is the sheer distance between host sites, as well as the diverse climates across the three countries.

"We've got 16 stadiums, and the farthest two stadiums — Vancouver and Mexico City — are 3,000 miles apart, and the stadiums range from domes to a field at 7,200 feet," said Sorochan.

According to Sorochan, some of the on-site challenges will be wear patterns and traffic — especially due to pregame rehearsals and opening ceremonies.

"Each stadium wants an opening ceremony, and they want to rehearse on the field," he said. "In some instances, that causes more damage to the grass than the actual game itself. In the indoor stadiums, it also takes away from when the grow lights can be

on. There are going to be periods — match day minus one and match day — that the lights won't be on at all. So they're going to go 24 to 48 hours without light. If they want to have a rehearsal match day minus two and we have to take the lights off, that's going to be a challenge."

Proper irrigation for the shallow profile turf in the domed stadiums is another aspect the researchers are examining.

"We started implementing wetting agent trials, because if we do a shallow profile the irrigation is going to be different," said Sorochan. "On match day, when they want to water five times before the game to get the grass blades wet, can we adjust that because it doesn't dry out as fast in the indoor stadiums? They'll stay wet and be consistent throughout the game a lot better than a hot, dry day in Kansas City."

According to Fielder, the training sites and base camps in each host city add even another layer of consideration.

"It's a challenge alone having 16 premier stadiums that are going to play as close as possible to one another throughout the tournament, to now we're talking about 100 pitches at the 49 different training sites that need to be consistent," said Fielder. "So we're just providing a blueprint to work from overall, and then taking other people's opinions into account and working with individual field managers."

FIFA President Gianni Infantino (left) praised the research efforts at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville's turf research and development facility during a recent visit.

SHARING THE BLUEPRINT FOR SUCCESS

The research team pointed out that the blueprint for the World Cup 26 pitches is a guideline for the field managers at the host sites.

"We're going to come up with recipes or guidelines because every stadium is being managed à la carte," said Sorochan. "We're trying to bring 16 à la carte recipes or guidelines of management that will be homogenized across all 16 stadiums for consistency and uniformity."

Sorochan added that interaction with the field managers at the host sites will vary from stadium to stadium, but his team is in constant communication with the pitch management team at FIFA.

"As researchers, we're just here to provide evidence-based data, be a sounding board, and give guidance for what we think is going to be successful in each venue," he said.

Eight of the 16 venues being used don't currently have natural turfgrass. As a result, lessons learned throughout the research at UT and MSU will

be essential to creating the guidelines for the event.

"We're working on a very small scale, but we can recreate everything that we do in an 8-week period with multiple runs throughout a year," said Fielder. "I want to make sure that whatever failures I incur happen at that small volume. That way it's completely avoidable in 2026.

"Not everything we do is going to be A+B=C," Fielder added. "You have all these different options that come with each stadium, and they all have their different construction and infrastructure. We want to provide a base for them to work from; and if there are any questions, we have research to be able to pull from and recommend how we would react to a particular scenario."

According to Dickson, the research team would also like to have as many fLEX devices as possible for World Cup 26 so that they can monitor the pitches from day to day and game to game throughout the tournament.

The goal is for the field manager at the host sites to run the fLEX device, the basic operation of which only takes a few minutes to learn.

Said Dickson, "Hopefully they will be able to do it as we're going, and hopefully we get daily information to help increase the research so that we can make future World Cups better."

Added Fielder, "We're just trying to be an asset and provide guidance and help not only the 16 field managers involved, but the 200- to 300-hundred-plus individuals involved this project. All we're trying to do is play our part in bringing this tournament to North America."

(Left to right): Manolo Zubiria, chief tournament officer for FIFA World Cup 26; John Sorochan, Ph.D., distinguished professor of Turfgrass Science and Management, University of Tennessee; FIFA President Gianni Infantino; and Alan Ferguson, senior pitch management manager for FIFA.

SPURRING INNOVATION AND LEAVING A LEGACY

According to Dickson, having turfgrass in domes that will not have direct sunlight has spurred innovation — not just at UT and MSU, but from sports field managers and technology providers throughout the country.

"That's how we found a lot of these different options," he said. "But the innovation wouldn't have been driven forward without FIFA. It definitely challenged the innovative side of us, and it's been very exciting to be part of the cutting-edge research."

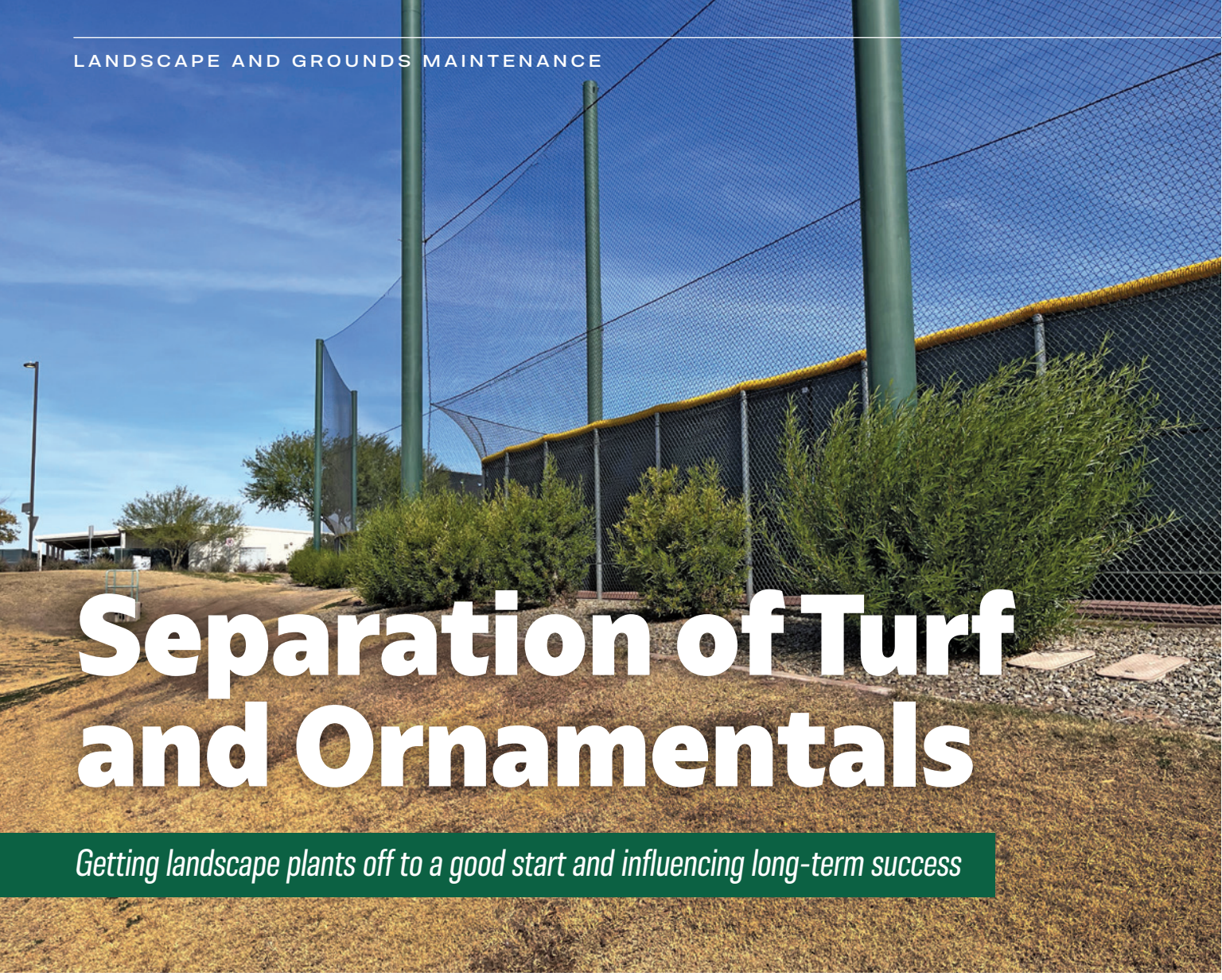
That research will have lasting impact well beyond World Cup 26, and the effect will trickle down to making youth fields better and safer.

"We're looking at health, safety and wellness of players, and I think FIFA is going to create a legacy that is going to raise the bar for future expectations," said Sorochan. "So many secondary and tertiary benefits are going to come from this for not just the sports turf world, but the turfgrass world as a whole."

Said Dickson, "Once we were able to come up with a solution, to be able to try it out and see the performance aspect has been really exciting. You are going to see a safer surface that performs better for everyone."

Added Sorochan, "It all started with the vision of Alan Ferguson, and then FIFA supporting these efforts and bringing Alan's vision to reality. That has been a groundbreaking game changer - pun intended." **SFM**

John Kmitta is associate publisher and editorial brand director of SportsField Management *magazine.*



Separation of Turf and Ornamentals

Getting landscape plants off to a good start and influencing long-term success

By John C. Fech

Two of the most critical influences in terms of landscape plant success in the sports turf or campus landscape are the separation of turf and ornamentals and getting new plants off to a good start. Unfortunately, sports field managers often find themselves caring for plants that are co-mingled or co-located with mowed turf. Since these two groups of plants have very different needs in terms of maintenance requirements, whatever you do to one ends up causing damage and compromising the health of the other. The best solution is to physically separate them from the start or redesign the space to allow for customized management practices. Proper year-one management techniques further enhance the success of overall grounds management.

METHODS OF SEPARATING TURF AND ORNAMENTALS

An examination of the sports turf landscape is the first step. For spaces that surround the field(s), identify non-turf plants that have been placed in the middle of turfgrass installations. Since turf is cared for very differently than ornamentals — mowing, aerification, topdressing, pest control techniques and higher inputs of water and fertilizer (usually) — a prudent action step is to redesign these spaces to exclude ornamentals from the turf or to replace the turf with groundcovers or mulch. In addition to different maintenance techniques, removal of trees often results in reduced shade stress and water competition for the remaining turf plants.

For areas that have not yet been established, work with a landscape designer to create areas that separate turf and ornamentals right from the start. Initial separation minimizes conflicts such as bark injury from string trimmers and mowers, over/under watering and herbicide injury. In addition to keeping each group of plants healthier than when co-located, a significant budgetary savings will result as well.

Good separation of turf and ornamentals in the sports turf landscape. All photos provided by John C. Fech

RIGHT PLANT, RIGHT PLACE

Once separated, either through renovation or initial design, choosing plants that are well adapted to the specific site is a foundational step. Right plant, right place (RPRP) has many components:

- **Plant type** — The best implementation of RPRP starts with a wide funnel approach, with phrases such as "evergreen shrub," "large shade tree," "low deciduous groundcover" and "sunny perennial." This method provides structure, but leaves the selection process open to many options. Specific choices can be made as selection develops.
- **Sun and shade preference** — Plants may grow best in full sun, half sun, filtered sun, part shade or full shade. Plants that are chosen and installed in locations that are contrary to their preference usually struggle to establish and thrive. Fortunately, sun requirement is commonly noted on the plant care tag or easily found on local university or nearby botanic garden websites.
- **Site limitations** — Soil characteristics, adequate space for rooting, prevailing winds, slope and the scale of nearby buildings or other plantings create certain limitations on the planting area. These all need to be considered when choosing specific plants.
- **Purpose** — The functional aspects of ornamentals are often overlooked, characterizing them as "therefore" plants. To have success in the sports turf and/or campus landscape, the question of purpose (a.k.a., what's it there for?) must be answered. If the answer is not easily answered or obvious at first or second glance, it's important to consult with the original designer of the space to determine function or purpose.
- **Eventual size and shape** — Directly related to purpose, desired size and shape are often omitted from the selection process. For example, if the purpose of the plant is to provide shade for a small picnic area or for

Trees in the sports turf and campus landscape.

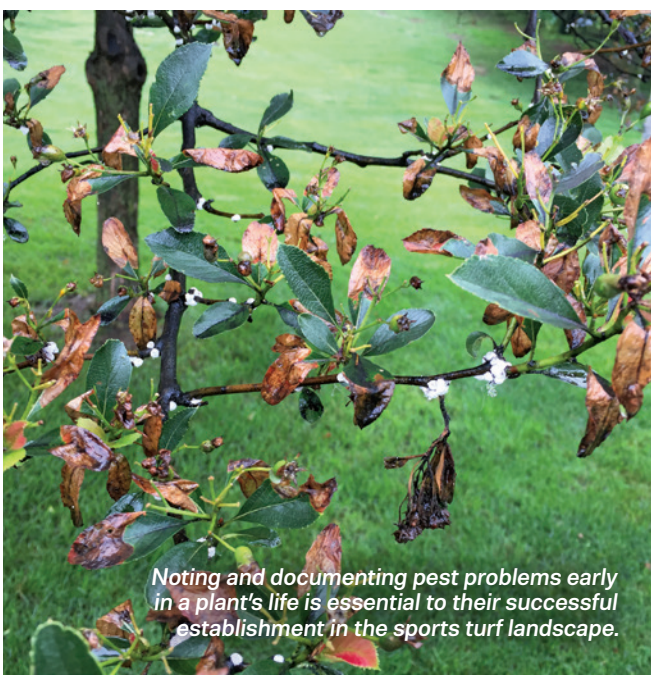
bleachers, then a hedge planting of medium-sized shrubs isn't going to work; a medium-sized deciduous tree is a good fit. Likewise, if the purpose is to prevent erosion on a hillside, a spreading evergreen shrub often works well.

■ **Maintenance level** — In these days of restricted water availability and pressure to reduce maintenance budgets, plants should always be chosen with the amount of care required in mind. Plants that can be allowed to grow to their natural height without lots of pruning or shearing are less expensive to maintain. In addition, ornamentals that are at least somewhat drought tolerant and well adapted require that the soil be kept slightly moist — not soggy or dry. Again, plant care tag instructions provide this important information.

OFF TO A GOOD START

Soil modification (or lack thereof) and following good planting procedure are two of the most important considerations in successful establishment. The size and shape of the planting hole is critical. In fact, it's best to think of it as a "planting area" rather than a "hole." Digging and removing native soil three times as wide as the root mass and no deeper is the goal. This will allow the roots to expand laterally with ease and not sink downward into the soil profile. Comparing the width/depth of the area to the root mass using a shovel is a good technique.

In general, the woodier the plant, the less desirable it is to modify the planting hole/area. When a tree or shrub is planted, it's important to avoid the temptation to mix "kindness materials" such as compost, peat moss and sand into the backfill soil that is placed around the roots. Sure, the roots will be able to grow well into this highly modified space during the first few weeks after planting; but over the first two to three years, they will preferentially grow there, and not outward into the landscape where they need to be to adequately support the tree with structural strength and the capacity to absorb water and nutrients. Instead, they will circle around the original root ball and force the tree to develop into a weak specimen. Soil taken out of the ground to make the planting area should be simply loosened, then used to backfill around the roots.



Noting and documenting pest problems early in a plant's life is essential to their successful establishment in the sports turf landscape.

Defects such as co-dominant leaders should be corrected in the first year after planting.

YEAR 1 CARE

Once trees and shrubs — and even groundcovers and perennials — are in the ground, ensure good establishment by thoroughly soaking them with enough water to fill the air spaces. After the initial watering, it's wise to keep "too much of a good thing" in mind and use the "moist, not soggy or dry" management technique. Checking for soil moisture with a screwdriver will help monitor the water content.

After soaking, covering the roots with a 2-inch layer of an organic mulch such as wood chips or pine needles will suppress weed growth, eliminate the need to string trim around the trunk, and keep the roots moist. In windswept areas, loosely staking trees will prevent them from being uprooted. Canvas, rubber and linen stakes are especially good in that they will support the tree without damaging the bark as wire can, even if tempered with a garden hose.

Canvas, rubber and linen stakes are especially good in that they will support the tree without damaging the bark.


Comparing the width/depth of the area to the root mass using a shovel is a good technique.


This sports turf landscape has been well designed in terms of consideration of eventual size and shape.


These trees provide an effective living screen between the field and the adjacent area.


Separating turf and ornamentals allows for irrigation that is tailored to the needs of each plant group.

Defects such as co-dominant leaders should be corrected in the first year after planting. If left to develop without removing one of the stems, severe injury to the tree will develop as each will increase in width/girth. As they do, the conductive vessels of each will begin to become compressed, dramatically decreasing the movement of water and nutrients throughout the tree. In addition, the area where the "double leader" initially formed becomes a structural weak point in the tree canopy, likely to split and cause the tree to fail.

Regular scouting is an important part of caring for a new ornamental in the first year after planting. Assigning a crew member to routinely inspect the new tree, shrub, groundcover or flower will help to ensure its success. As pests begin to infest or nutrient deficiencies become evident, early detection will greatly increase the effectiveness of any necessary intervention strategy. **SFM**

John C. Fech is a horticulturist with the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and Certified Arborist with the International Society of Arboriculture. The author of two books and more than 400 popular and trade journal articles, he focuses his time on teaching effective landscape maintenance techniques, water conservation, diagnosing turf and ornamental problems, and encouraging effective bilingual communication in the green industry.

ANSWER

From page 17

The green turf with yellow squares on the right and the yellow turf on the left is not really an unexpected problem, but rather the result of a planned event. The director of leisure services for this municipality had been planning for this event for more than a year. Working with the local Bay County Veterans Council, the City of Callaway was the only Florida location in 2024 chosen to host "The Wall That Heals," a traveling Vietnam Veterans Memorial wall and mobile education center. Twenty-four hours a day for one week in November there were more than 5,000 visitors that came to the Callaway Recreational Complex from throughout the country. The wall is a three-quarter scale replica of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C., and is approximately 375 feet in length. Since Veterans Day 1996, the wall has traveled throughout the United States and has been displayed in nearly 800 communities, spreading the memorial's healing legacy to millions. While the wall is on display, an honor guard marches in front of the structure to pay tribute to the service and sacrifices of Vietnam veterans. This action, as well as the thousands of visitors to the wall, created the yellow turf (the green area is the area behind the wall that received little foot traffic). After the event, the area was aerified and fertilized; it recovered on its own in about two weeks.

Photo submitted by Tim Legare, CSFM, CPRP, CPSI, director of leisure services for the City of Callaway, Florida.

John Mascaro is president of Turf-Tec International

If you would like to submit a photograph for John Mascaro's Photo Quiz, please send a high-resolution digital photo to John Mascaro via email at *john@turf-tec.com*. If your photograph is selected, you will receive full credit. All photos submitted will become property of *SportsField Management* magazine and the Sports Field Management Association.

MOWERS

Zero-turn and Ride-on

BOBCAT ZT7000

Bobcat's ZT7000 zero-turn mower offers commercial-grade power backed by transport speeds up to 19 mph and mowing speeds up to 13 mph. The science behind the mower's "perfect cut" technology is the AirFX deck, which comes in two sizes — 61 inches or 72 inches — designed with dual-layer, 10-guage steel, over a quarter-inch steel construction. Durable and built to tackle all turf types, these decks feature a deep, bullnose design that increases vacuum and lifts grass up to the cutting blade for superior quality of cut. The Air-Gap baffle design under the deck provides efficient grass dispersion, allowing for high-speed mowing in all conditions. With a 15-gallon fuel tank system, two engine options with up to 38.5 hp., and a hydrostatic transaxle drive system featuring a two-speed foot pedal, these zero-turn mowers deliver power and professional-grade performance. Operators benefit from a comfortable command center featuring suspension seating, anti-vibration technology and responsive, ergonomically designed controls.

EXMARK LAZER Z X-SERIES ZERO-TURN RIDING MOWER

Thirty years after the launch of the Lazer Z, Exmark unleashed the next generation of its premier Lazer Z X-Series model. Choose from 52-, 60- or 72-inch Ultra-Cut Series 6 side-discharge cutting decks, or a 96-inch UltraCut rear-discharge flex-wing cutting deck. Side-discharge cutting decks feature Exmark's exclusive Adapt technology, enabling quick deck rake adjustments without tools. Increased ground speeds increase productivity, with up to 12 mph forward on models up to 72-inch, and up to 10.5 mph on the 96-inch model. Heavy-duty cast caster wheel forks deliver maximum durability and precise alignment, and large-diameter airless caster tires provide a smooth ride with zero flat tires. The Lazer Z X-Series has just four annual grease points, plus automatic belt tensioners, and sealed maintenance-free spindles. Standard LED lighting to the front and sides of the mower makes it possible to extend the length of the workday when needed.

GRASSHOPPER FRONTMOUNT MODEL 900D

The Grasshopper FrontMount Model 900D is equipped with a Tier-4-Final-compliant, fuel-efficient and powerful 1.3L MaxTorque diesel engine that requires no power-robbing after-treatment systems. The 900D 1.3L uses a second-generation G3 hydrostatic pump-and-wheel-motor system with a single serpentine belt for smooth zero-turn maneuverability. This FrontMount mower delivers a better ride and better cut quality at faster mowing speeds due to balanced weight distribution among six wheels for a lighter footprint on the turf. The 900D is available with PTO-driven, 5.5-inch-deep DuraMax cutting decks in 61- and 72-inch widths. A number of PowerVac collection systems, turf renovation and snow removal implements are available to make the 900D 1.3L a year-round grounds maintenance system.

GREENWORKS OPTIMUSZ 24KWH 60-INCH COMMERCIAL RIDE-ON MOWER

The Greenworks OptimusZ 24kWh 60-inch commercial ride-on mower delivers efficiency, power and sustainability. With an industry-leading 65-hp.-equivalent battery, it mows up to 21 acres on a single charge, ensuring all-day cutting performance without emissions, noise or vibration — perfect for maintaining pristine athletic fields without disrupting surrounding areas. Designed for speed and precision, it reaches 16 mph with a constant 19K fpm blade tip speed, preventing bogging in heavy or wet grass. The PowrTraq Smart Drive System allows smooth handling on slopes up to 20 degrees, while 4G connectivity provides remote diagnostics and theft protection. Plus, by eliminating fuel costs and reducing maintenance expenses by 90%, this mower offers a cost-effective, eco-friendly solution for professional sports turf management — keeping fields game-ready with maximum efficiency.

HUSQVARNA Z560XS COMMERCIAL ZERO-TURN

The Husqvarna Z560XS commercial zero-turn lawn mower is a powerhouse of durability and precision. Heavy-duty components such as a 7-gauge cutting deck, 10-inch-diameter cast-iron spindles, commercial-duty hydrostatic drive, and gel-lined tires keep reliability front and center. Experience increased productivity with powerful fuel injected engines and an efficient 6-inch-deep cutting deck design. Comfort features include full suspension seats, hands-free deck lift, and an automatic park brake for a productive and convenient mowing experience.

JACOBSEN HR3 ELITE ROTARY MOWER

Ransomes Jacobsen Ltd. introduced its new Jacobsen HR3 ELiTE rotary mower. The HR3 ELiTE leverages Jacobsen's electric drivetrain, powered by Samsung SDI lithium battery technology, to deliver quality of cut with zero emissions, less noise, and significantly reduced operating costs. The HR3 ELiTE pairs its electrically driven transaxle with electric motors for its cutting system, eliminating emissions and reducing noise. The HR3 ELiTE's low-noise floor enables operation near golfers and residential areas without causing disturbances. The HR3 ELiTE's low noise level also makes for a safer operating environment for the mower's user, and high-spec suspension seating and intuitive controls further enhance the operator experience. The mower's tilt-sensor technology enhances safety when operating on slopes. For cutting along thoroughfares, the HR3 ELiTE is road-safe, with LED lighting and mirrors. The HR3 ELiTE's Samsung SDI lithium battery system provides more than 40 kilowatt-hours of energy for all-day runtime, and is backed by a five-year battery warranty.

JOHN DEERE Z985R EFI

The John Deere Z985R EFI is a top-tier zero-turn mower built for commercial users who demand power, efficiency and durability. Equipped with an EFI engine, it delivers exceptional fuel efficiency while maintaining the performance needed for heavy-duty mowing. The electronic fuel injection (EFI) system optimizes fuel consumption and ensures reliable cold starts, reducing downtime. A 60-inch or 72-inch high-capacity PRO deck provides superior cut quality, while the hydrostatic transmission ensures

smooth operation and precise control. The ComfortGlide suspension seat enhances operator comfort for long mowing days, and integrated LED lights improve visibility in low-light conditions. Built with heavy-duty steel construction, the Z985R is designed for longevity in demanding environments. With fast ground speeds and an efficient design, this mower maximizes productivity for professionals who need to cover large areas efficiently.

KIOTI ZXD SERIES

The Kioti ZXD Series zero-turn diesel mowers are designed for efficiency and durability, making them ideal for professionals, regardless of acreage. Each mower features a 24.5-hp. Kioti three-cylinder diesel engine, direct-drive transaxles, a shaft-driven deck, and a heavy-duty frame to withstand demanding conditions from tough terrains. Operator comfort is also a priority, with a rubber-isolated three-inch suspension seat and a pedal-operated deck

lift to reduce fatigue during long hours of use. Maintenance is made simple with easy-access dipsticks, fluid-fill ports, a flip-forward seat, and a removable engine shroud. With speeds exceeding 11 mph and options for a 61- or 72-inch cutting deck, these mowers offer both the speed and precision needed to maintain golf courses, public parks, and everything in between. Additional advantages include hill stability, a 17-gallon fuel tank, and smooth, responsive drivability — ensuring that every job is completed with ease.

KUBOTA F3710 FRONT-MOUNT MOWER

In 2023, the F3710 replaced the F3990 in Kubota's F Series of commercial front-mount mowers, and is equipped with a 36.9-hp. Kubota Common Rail System diesel engine for fast, powerful and efficient job performance. Available with both side- and rear-discharge pro-commercial mower decks in 60 inches and 72 inches, the F3710's high lifting capacity provides the versatility to handle an array of implements such as a grass catcher, snow blower, rotary sweeper and debris blower, and is compatible with all implements currently available for Kubota mowers. An LCD digital panel comes standard on the F3710 and provides operators with vital information like Diesel Particulate Filter (DPF) level, engine speed, remaining fuel, water temperature and hour meter. A deluxe high-back seat with four separate adjustments for weight control, lumbar support, back angle and arm rests helps keep operators comfortable and productive all day long.

TORO GROUNDSMASTER E3300

The Toro e3300 is a battery-powered option of Toro's popular out-front rotary mower, and will be available in 2025. The Groundsmaster e3300 is powered by HyperCell batteries — Toro's proprietary, patent-pending lithium-ion technology. Toro has implemented rigorous standards that require every battery to pass extensive environmental and third-party certification testing. The distributed Battery Management System (BMS) optimizes battery performance to enhance productivity and longevity. Because the BMS is integrated, HyperCell batteries communicate with each other to optimize efficiency and extend the lifecycle, well beyond the 5,000-hour design life of the traction unit. HyperCell batteries provide diagnostic information to simplify and streamline any service needs. The Groundsmaster e3300 comes standard with Toro's InfoCenter display with battery charge status, hours, alerts, customizable settings and more. It also features the same impact bumpers and rugged 60-inch high-strength steel side or rear discharge mowing deck options as the diesel-powered Groundsmaster models. **SFM**

FROM THE FEEDS

The following are photos and posts pulled from industry social media feeds during the past month.

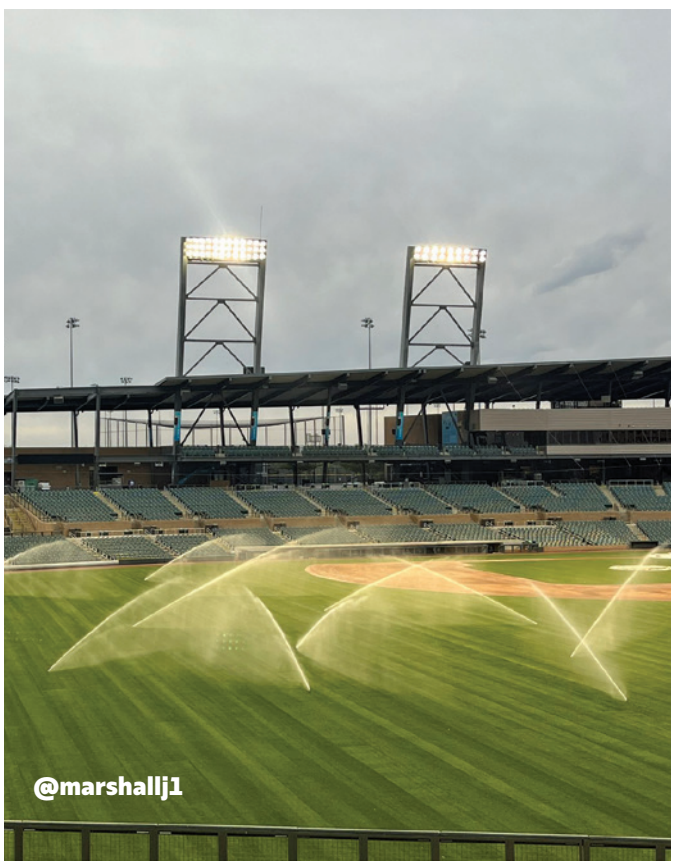
Scan the QR code for links to all of our feeds and connect with us.

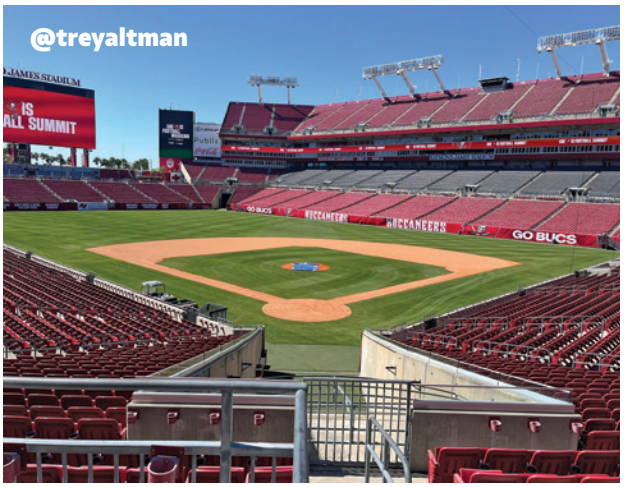
@VAturf

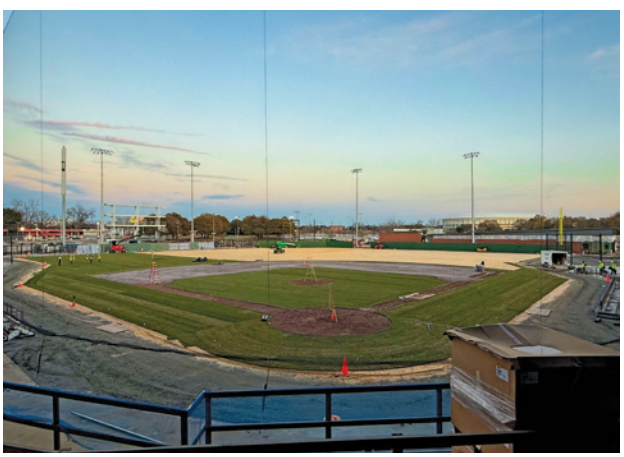
The 2025 Virginia Turfgrass Road Show in Fredericksburg is underway at The F-Nationals Ballpark. Our thanks to the 100+ registrants that are taking the time to gain their pesticide applicator recertification credits by attending today's program. @VaTurfCouncil @VACoopExt

@TurfgrassTiger

It's everyone's favorite time of the year! It's an awesome time for our Turf students to learn from the upper classmen about proper mower operation. They learn the basics before taking it to the field.







@precision_turf
The #pturf team has been working hard completing the field renovation at @SynovusPark, formerly #GoldenPark, in #ColumbusGa. Fans are starting to get pumped for the April 15th Opening Day!

@smallschoolball

Facilities Friday is upon us! Featuring @DeltaStateBSB with one of the most spectacular D2 facilities in the country! State of the art facility for a phenomenal program, this stadium blows a lot of D1 programs out of the water!

Y2K

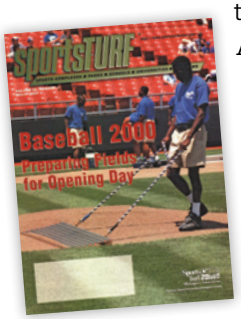
In this retrospective, we examine historic issues of *SportsTurf* magazine, predecessor to *SportsField Management* magazine. For this edition of Accessing the Archives we take a look back at Y2K.

The January 2000 issue showcased *SportsTurf* Manager of the Year winner Eugene Mayer. In addition to serving as technical trainer and support manager for The Scotts Company during his career, Mayer oversaw the development and maintenance of playing fields such as the Rose Bowl for the 1994 World Cup, Ohio Stadium at OSU and several Major League Baseball fields. He served on the STMA Board of Directors, and won the Harry C. Gill Founders Award in 1997.

The Certified Sports Field Manager program launch also coincided with the January 2000 issue, and the benefits of certification were outlined within. "Because of the broad scope addressed in the competencies, it becomes necessary for each certified sports field manager to demonstrate understanding and mastery not only of agronomics and turfgrass physiology, but also of such factors as the maintenance of baseball field skinned areas and the principles of irrigation management," the article stated. "As knowledge is accumulated and skills are honed, the level of professionalism rises not only in individual programs, but across the industry."

In February 2000, *SportsTurf* examined ASTM standards and the work being done at the time on guidelines for everything from tennis courts and track surfaces to pole vault landing pits, playground surfaces, football fields, synthetic turf and more. The primary focus of the editorial was on ASTM standards for skinned areas.

"We're working on guidelines, not practices," said Dr. Don Waddington, chair of the Natural Playing Surface subcommittee. "Guidelines give a series of options or instructions that do not recommend a specific course of action. With either guidelines or practices, people have the choice to follow them or not to follow them. ASTM doesn't legislate."



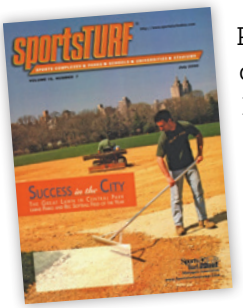
Baseball was the focus of the March 2000 issue, and included articles on infield maintenance and grooming, baseball field drainage, and warning track construction and maintenance. The issue also showcased the Professional Baseball Field of the Year, Jetform Park, home of the Ottawa Lynx, Triple A affiliate of the Montreal Expos.

Dr. Dave Minner wrote about modifying rootzones with sand for the April 2000 issue. "Successfully built sand-based fields can be very expensive," he wrote. "Just what are the agronomic and financial breakpoints of using sand in the rootzone? Can we use less sand, reduce the cost, and still have a

successful field? Can we take the existing soil, mix it with the proper amount of sand, and produce an improved field?"

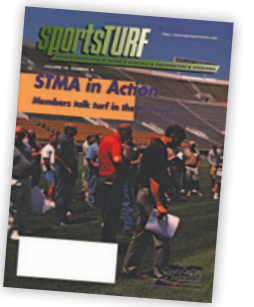
M. S. Deal Stadium winning S&P Baseball Field of the Year was the main highlight of the May issue. Said G. C. (George) Trivett, physical education teacher, head football coach and athletic director for Granite Falls Middle School, Granite Falls, N.C., "We want the best conditions for everyone using our field. It all goes back to the total program, getting the best equipment we possibly can, working in all the maintenance we possibly can. If you have the dream and the commitment, you'll find the necessary knowledge and support out there waiting for you."

"A Chapter is Born," was a headline in the June 2000 issue as Kauffman Stadium, home of the Kansas City Royals, opened its doors for the first official seminar of the newly forming MO-KAN Chapter, serving the surrounding Missouri and Kansas areas.



The spotlight was focused on Central Park's Great Lawn for the July 2000 issue of *SportsTurf*. "Central Park and its Great Lawn are the outdoors for the people of New York City. As part of the City of New York Parks System, they belong to the people. Located in the heart of the city, this green space is the most pristine and best manicured the city has to offer. It attracts users like a magnet, drawing approximately three million of them each year. As a must-see tourist attraction, it ranks near the Statue of Liberty. The Great Lawn ranked at the top in field quality as well, earning STMA's Softball Field of the Year honors in the Municipal/Parks and Recreation Category."

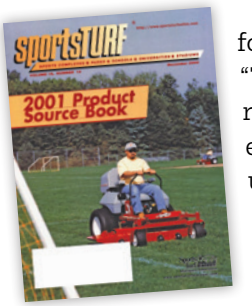
The August issue got to the root of the matter, with a theme issue dedicated to roots. Articles covered tillers, rhizomes and stolons; rootzone materials for athletic fields in the United Kingdom; deep roots; and rootzone properties for athletic fields.



The cover story for September detailed a multi-chapter workshop at the University of Notre Dame for sports field managers from the Indiana, Midwest, Michigan, Ohio, Iowa and Wisconsin chapters. The seeds of the event were planted during the annual STMA Conference, and the regional event quickly took shape with heavy interest from the participating chapters.

The October 2000 issue of *SportsTurf* was a mix of content, including STMA's international outreach, College Football Field of the Year, the best cool-season turfgrasses for your field, and how to survive special events.

A preview of STMA's 12th Annual Conference & Exhibition in Tampa was the focus of the November issue. Although the bulk of the preview was the show exhibitor list, coverage highlight featured speakers, including former Tampa Bay Buccaneer Lee Roy Selmon, former Major League Baseball All-Star Bucky Dent, and an impressive list of sport turf industry experts.



November also heralded the formation of the SAFE Foundation, "To support sports field specific research, educational programs and environmental concerns to promote user safety."

The December 2000 issue wrapped the year with *SportsTurf*'s annual Product Source Book, a buyer's guide of products and services. **SFM**

All content for this section is pulled from the SportsTurf/SportsField Management *archives, an ongoing cooperative project of EPG Media, SFMA and the Michigan State University Libraries. Public access to the archive from 1985 to the present (less two months) is available at* https://sturf.lib.msu.edu/index.html.

Begitschke selected as 2025 Musser Award of Excellence recipient

The Musser International Turfgrass Foundation selected Erick Begitschke as its 2025 Award of Excellence recipient. The Award is given to outstanding Ph.D. candidates who, in the final phase of their graduate studies, demonstrated overall excellence throughout their doctoral program in turfgrass research.

Begitschke received his B.S.A. in turfgrass management from the University of Georgia, and M.S. degree in turfgrass weed science at Mississippi State University under the guidance of Dr. Jay McCurdy. His research at Mississippi State focused on utilizing preemergence herbicides in hybrid bermudagrass sod production. Between his M.S and Ph.D., he worked for SePRO Corporation as a research associate at their research facility in North Carolina where he assisted in managing the internal turfgrass and ornamental research trials and product development. He is currently finishing his Ph.D. in crop and soil science with a concentration in turfgrass science from the University of Georgia (UGA) under the guidance of Dr. Gerald Henry.

The Award [of Excellence] is given to outstanding Ph.D. candidates who, in the final phase of their graduate studies, demonstrated overall excellence throughout their doctoral program in turfgrass research.

While at UGA, he worked as a graduate research assistant in Dr. Henry's lab, where he helped conduct numerous industry and other research projects at the Athens Turfgrass Research and Education Center. His dissertation is titled "Evaluation of novel techniques to measure athletic field performance and player safety." His Ph.D. research centered around utilizing athlete biomechanical data to measure field performance and player safety on sports fields.

Begitschke has already published nine peer-reviewed research papers from his M.S. and Ph.D. projects and has six more currently in draft or under review on the topic of turfgrass science. He is an author of more than 30 scientific abstracts, and has given approximately 40 research presentations nationally and internationally. He plans to dedicate his career to offering sustainable solutions to turfgrass managers through applied research.

"I am deeply humbled and honored to receive the Musser Award of Excellence," said Begitschke. "I greatly respect the previous winners and their remarkable contributions to the turfgrass industry. I will strive to uphold the legacy of this award by continuing to serve the industry with pride throughout my career. This accomplishment would not have been possible without the unwavering love and support of my wife, Madison, and the invaluable guidance and patience of Drs. Gerald Henry and Jay McCurdy. Thank you all for your encouragement and belief in me."

The criteria for selecting award recipients include graduate work, academic record, dissertation, publications, leadership, and extracurricular activities.

GREEN CAREER WEEK

STEM | Business | Design | Logistics | Marketing

Green Career Week sparks inspiration for the next generation

Seed Your Future's Green Career Week — a nationwide initiative to connect students with diverse and rewarding career opportunities in horticulture and related green industries — was held March 3-7. The week was designed to inspire young minds to explore pathways that combine science, art, technology and sustainability.

With the global population growing and environmental challenges increasing, the demand for skilled

professionals in green industries has never been greater. Green Career Week bridges the gap between students and industry leaders, cultivating a future workforce prepared to address these challenges with innovative solutions.

"Horticulture lies at the intersection of science, art and sustainability," said Jazmin Albarran, executive director of Seed Your Future. "Through Green Career Week, we aim to spark curiosity and passion in young people, showing them how green careers empower them to make a lasting impact on the world."

Throughout the week, participating businesses, organizations and educational institutions collaborated to showcase horticulture's vital role in daily life. Activities highlighted career paths ranging from landscaping and plant science to sustainable agriculture and urban forestry. Students, educators and industry professionals came together for hands-on demonstrations, facility tours, mentoring sessions and more.

Since its launch in 2022, Green Career Week has reached more than 15,000 students, connected them with more than 500 companies, and fostered countless relationships that have led to meaningful career opportunities in the green industry.

How to get involved with Green Career Week in the future:

- **For educators:** Host classroom discussions, plan field trips, or invite industry professionals to speak about green careers.
- **For industry professionals:** Partner with schools to offer hands-on demonstrations, facility tours or mentoring opportunities.
- **For students:** Explore your interests by participating in activities, asking questions, and learning about the various roles in the green industry.

Seed Your Future offers free resources to help participants plan and execute Green Career Week activities, including lesson plans, career guides and promotional materials. These tools are designed to make it easy for everyone to join the movement and showcase the value of green careers.

2025 PGMS Green Star Awards application is open

The annual Green Star Awards Program, presented by the Professional Grounds Management Society (PGMS), brings national recognition to grounds maintained with a high degree of excellence. The program complements other national landscape award programs that recognize outstanding landscape design and construction.

This program salutes the grounds superintendent responsible for maintaining a well-manicured landscape year round. Grand, Honor and Merit Awards are offered in 16 categories, covering all types of private, public, commercial and industrial landscapes. To qualify for entry, a landscape must be at least two years old and under your continuous maintenance for at least two years.

The goals of the Green Star Award program are:

- To bring national recognition to grounds manicured with a high degree of excellence.
- To recognize individual professional efforts leading to high maintenance standards and high quality appearance of the landscape.
- To challenge those responsible for maintenance of grounds throughout the country to achieve a higher level of excellence.

Awards are presented during the PGMS School of Grounds Management Annual Conference held in conjunction with the Equip Expo in Louisville, Kentucky each year. Award winners are featured in the PGMS newsletter, "the Forum," and are featured on social media. The application for the 2025 Green Star Awards is now open. The application will close on June 15, 2025. The entry fee is $275 for members or $400 for others. For more information, visit *https://pgms.org/page/GreenStarAwards.* **SFM**

Pro Repair turf repair solutions from Barenbrug

Barenbrug USA launched Pro Repair Sand and Pro Repair Compost, two products tailored for sports field managers, golf course superintendents and landscapers. Designed for seamless repair of divots, bare spots and stressed turf areas, both products leverage TurfMend and Barenbrug's trusted grass seed innovations.

These professional-grade solutions combine premium grass seed with a specialized substrate to ensure rapid germination, exceptional recovery rates, and lasting resilience.

Barenbrug's Pro Repair Sand and Compost offer a variety of seed blends to meet unique turf needs:

- HGT (Healthy Grass Technology): Superior Kentucky bluegrass with unmatched traffic tolerance and recovery.
- HGT & RPR (Regenerating Perennial Ryegrass) 80/20 Mix: A powerful Blue/Rye blend for fast establishment and resilience.
- RPR: The patented perennial ryegrass ideal for long-term durability.
- RTF (Rhizomatous Tall Fescue): Drought-tolerant grass with deep root systems for challenging conditions.
- PanAm: A premium bermudagrass tailored for warmer climates.

These blends are expertly curated to provide reliable solutions for any turf environment. Backed by TurfMend technology, Pro Repair Sand and Compost optimize growth conditions to bring damaged turf back to life quickly and effectively.

"The health and beauty of turfgrass are non-negotiable for professionals managing high-profile spaces like golf courses and sports fields," said Micah Gould, turf product manager of Barenbrug USA. "With Pro Repair Sand and Compost, we're empowering them to achieve consistently superior results."

Pro Repair Sand and Compost are now available through Barenbrug's authorized distributors.

Toro TurfMaster HDX 30" with casters

The all-new Toro TurfMaster HDX 30" with casters combines power and durability with the maneuverability needed for an effortless cut. Built on the same rugged 30"deck as its predecessor, the new TurfMaster HDX features a caster front end to give pros the mobility to work in tight spaces and navigate a variety of properties with the same ease as open terrain.

"The TurfMaster HDX 30" with casters is what you get when you combine Toro innovation with tangible insights from the pros who use our products every day." said Jackson Gray, product marketing associate at Toro. "We set out to create a hardwearing, highly mobile mower with industry-leading power and durability, and we've done just that."

The new TurfMaster HDX combines lightweight maneuverability with efficiency and hearty performance. The two-point height-of-cut system gives operators the power to adjust the deck height, which means no more walking to every wheel on the mower. Operators can lock the casters to easily maintain position for improved lines without sacrificing quality of cut. On flatter terrain, the locking casters deliver exacting precision for a straight, flawless finish.

Built for all-day productivity, the TurfMaster HDX is powered by the robust Kohler CV224 Command Pro engine, delivering increased performance and durability for demanding tasks. Its generous one-gallon gas tank helps operators stay on task with fewer refills. To save even more time, the TurfMaster HDX also includes a blade brake clutch, allowing operators to disengage the blades without shutting down the engine — making it easy to restart after stepping away to remove an obstacle or empty the bag. Plus, the new split deck belt cover streamlines maintenance, providing quick access for cleaning and servicing to keep the mower running at peak efficiency. **SFM**

Invest in Your Future: Join SFMA Today

The Sports Field Management Association (SFMA) is the recognized leader in championing the sports field industry and its professionals.

MEMBERSHIP CATEGORIES

SFMA has specific membership categories for every professional in the sports field management industry.

- **Sports field manager:** If you are primarily responsible for managing or maintaining sports fields.
- **Sports field manager associate:** If you are primarily responsible for managing or maintaining a sports field(s) and your organization already has an SFMA sports field manager member employed.
- **Affiliate:** If you are indirectly or on a part-time basis involved in the maintenance/management of sports fields (coaches, athletic directors, volunteers, etc.).
- **Academic:** If you are in teaching, extension or research.
- **Student:** If you are a full-time student.
- **Commercial:** If you work for a company engaged in a commercial enterprise providing services and/or products to the sports field management profession (consultants, architects, designers, contractors, management companies, distributors and manufacturers, etc.).
- **Commercial associate:** If you are the second person (or more) from a commercial company (must first have an SFMA commercial member at their company before this lower-dues category can be selected).
- **Retired:** If you are retired and no longer seeking full-time employment within the scope of activities of any SFMA membership category, and have been a member for a minimum of five years, you may become a non-voting member of SFMA and are not eligible to hold elective office.

THE THREE MOST IMPORTANT REASONS TO JOIN SFMA

1. Job security: SFMA's programs and services proactively enhance your value to your employer.

2. Career success: SFMA's education and information help prepare you to take that next step in your career.

3. Recognition of your professionalism: In addition to the individual recognition you receive because of your good work, SFMA's advocacy with groups such as athletic directors, parks and recreation directors, coaches and parents enhances the image of the entire profession.

BENEFITS YOU RECEIVE AS AN SFMA MEMBER

- A network of peers who share their best practices.
- Opportunities for education.
- Quick access to information and resources.
- A monthly electronic newsletter that communicates association and industry information.
- Access to the Member's Only section of *sportsfieldmanagment.org,* which has a real-time membership directory and hundreds of technical educational resources.
- Access to Michigan State's Turfgrass Information File, a resource for up-to-date technical information.
- Ability to enter your field in the nationally recognized Field of the Year awards program.
- Opportunity to become a Certified Sports Field Manager (CSFM) and to have your facility certified as environmentally responsible.
- Significant savings on registration to SFMA's annual and regional conferences, and discounts to other organizations' education.
- Opportunity to participate in volunteer leadership positions.
- Opportunity to join one of SFMA's affiliated chapters for a strong local network. (Each chapter sets its own local dues.)
- Purchase SFMA branded apparel.
- *SportsField Management* Magazine each month.
- The ability to apply for scholarships (students only).
- Discounted exhibitor booth at the annual conference (commercial members only). SFM

For more information, visit:
https://www.sportsfieldmanagement.org/why-join-stma/

SFMA Affiliated Chapters Contact Information

Arizona SFMA: www.azsfma.org

Colorado SFMA: www.csfma.org

Florida #1 (South Florida STMA): www.sfstma.com or Phil Busey (phil@philbusey.com)

Florida #2 (North Florida): 850-580-4026, John Mascaro (john@turf-tec.com)

Florida #3 (Central Florida STMA): www.CFSFMA.org or CentralFloridaSFMA@gmail.com

Gateway STMA: gatewaystma.squarespace.com or info@gatewaystma.com

Georgia SFMA: www.georgiastma.org or georgiasfma@gmail.com

Greater L.A. Basin SFMA: www.sfmalabasin.com

Illinois STMA: www.ilstma.org or illinoisstma@gmail.com

Intermountain Chapter STMA: Gavin Gough (gavin.gough@utah.edu)

Iowa SFMA: www.iowastma.org

Keystone Athletic Field Managers Org. (KAFMO): www.kafmo.org

Mid-Atlantic SFMA: www.masfma.org

Michigan SFMA: www.misfma.org

Minnesota Park and Sports Field Management Association: www.mpsfma.org

Mo-Kan STMA: www.mokanstma.com

Nebraska SFMA www.nebraskaturfgrass.com/nesfma

New England STMA: www.nestma.org

North Carolina SFMA: www.ncsportsturf.org

Northern California SFMA: www.norcalstma.org

Ohio Turfgrass Foundation: www.ohioturfgrass.org

Oklahoma STMA: oksfmasecretary@gmail.com

Oregon STMA: www.oregonsportsturfmanagers.org or oregonstma@gmail.com

Ozarks STMA: Derek Edwards (dedwards@cardinals.com)

Sports Field Managers Association of New Jersey: www.sfmanj.org

Southern California SFMA: www.socalsfma.com

South Carolina SFMA: https://scsfma.org/

Tennessee Valley SFMA: www.tvstma.org

Texas SFMA: www.txstma.org

Virginia SFMA: www.vsfma.org

Wisconsin STMA: www.wstma.org

To find the chapter near you, visit https://www.sportsfieldmanagement.org/interactive-chapter-map/

Chapter Sponsors

Hunter®

JOHN DEERE

Using Compost on Native Soil Fields

I have received many questions recently about the use of compost on native soil sports fields, either as an amendment or topdressing.

Compost has been used on native soil fields for many years. Its benefits include improving soil structure and adding nutrients. A high-quality compost with a bulking agent such as wood chip enhances soil porosity and, in turn, improves drainage capabilities. Enhancing soil quality leads to better turf quality, as deeper roots help turf withstand drought and heat stress. Composted materials also contain essential minerals such as nitrogen and phosphorus, which support seed germination, establishment and overall turf health. When applied as a topdressing, compost helps retain moisture and keep seed in place during establishment.

Compost is derived from various materials such as biosolids (sewage), manure, yard waste, spent mushroom compost, coffee grounds, plant and food waste. The quality and safety of compost are regulated by the EPA (Part 503), which sets standards for the presence of heavy metals such as zinc, copper, cadmium and lead; pathogens such as E. coli and Salmonella; salts, and odors. Biosolids and sewage-based materials are closely monitored for their application on food crops, and cannot be used in organic food production. For use on sports fields, compost should include a bulking agent, be free of weed seeds, and not have an excessive odor. Biosolids and manure-based composts may have an odor for a couple of weeks after application.

Forever chemicals (per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances, or PFAS) are synthetic compounds that persist in the environment and the human body, where they are known to cause adverse health effects. These chemicals are used to make products resistant to grease, water and heat, and they are found in a range of items from carpet and bakeware to pizza boxes and popcorn bags. Given their widespread use and persistence, it stands to reason that PFAS are also present in many organic and synthetic products used in the turf industry, including biosolids and other composts. Research into plant uptake is ongoing, but current findings indicate that PFAS concentrations in compost are low. One study on lettuce found that compost amendments can actually reduce PFAS uptake by plants. It is important to remember that PFAS are ubiquitous, legally manufactured, and still present in thousands of materials. The US Compost Council, EPA and other stakeholders acknowledge the need for further research. Additionally, state, tribal and local regulations may apply, so be sure to check for specific guidelines before starting a biosolid compost program.

There are two primary approaches to soil improvement with compost:

1) **Topdressing** is ideal for fields with a solid grade that require additional organic matter. It is usually done manually, while larger areas may require specialized equipment. Spread high-quality compost across the turf surface to a depth of ¼ to ½ inch. Rake, drag or brush the material into the sward. Water the material in. Topdressing is most effective when combined with core aerification to help the material integrate into the underlying soil. Applying seed before topdressing is also beneficial.

2) **Mixing compost into the top 4 to 6 inches of topsoil** is best for complete field renovations where the soil quality is poor and the grade needs correction. The process involves removing existing turf to establish a new surface. Remove dead or old vegetation so that only bare soil remains. This can be done with a hard rake or by lightly rototilling. Spread 1 to 2 inches of high-quality compost over the soil surface and rototill to a depth of 4 to 6 inches. Perform this task when the soil is relatively dry. During tilling, remove rocks, wood pieces and thick roots. Typically, two to three passes with the rototiller are sufficient to mix the materials thoroughly. After tilling, grade the soil surface to the desired slope (crown, side-to-side, etc.). The finished seedbed should have small aggregates; an even surface (without bumps or depressions); and a loose, friable texture. **SFM**

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