

SportsField

MANAGEMENT

July 2025

Vol. 41 No. 7

The Official Publication of the Sports Field Management Association

Professional Baseball Field of the Year **10** | Coping With Change **15**
Road to the World Cup: Training Pitch Management **26** | Field Paint Advice **30**

Introducing
SFMA CEO
Paula Sliefert



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Editor's Note



John Kmitta

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It's an exciting month for SFMA, as the association introduced Paula Sliefert as CEO. I have known Paula for several years through her SFMA service and also her role with the Minnesota Park and Sports Field Management Association, but I was excited to have a more in-depth conversation with Paula to learn more about her background and her vision for SFMA moving forward (see page 18). Paula has always been a strong supporter of the magazine and an advocate for industry professionals, and I look forward to working with her.

Also in this issue, SFMA Education Manager, Jennifer McLendon, M.Ed., outlines current and future SFMA education initiatives; so I thought this would also be a good time to remind everyone of SFMA's Environmental Facility Certification (EFC).

EFC was developed to help document the environmental stewardship of SFMA members, and is awarded to those facilities that meet the requirements. Certification also shows the public that you are utilizing the most up-to-date environmental practices.

For insight into the SFMA EFC and its impact, I recently spoke with Bruce Suddeth, CSFM, director of building and landscape services at University of South Carolina (USC) Upstate, who said the SFMA EFC is a good fit with USC Upstate's Higher Ed Tree Campus USA accreditation from the National Arbor Day Foundation.

"The University has committed to being environmentally conscious in our day-to-day processes of facility management," said Suddeth. "When the EFC was created, we knew that it was one of the certifications that fit our model."

USC Upstate closely monitors and records inputs — whether fertilization or pesticides — to ensure zero negative impacts to campus surroundings. The university also has a sustainability initiative, and the EFC allows them to promote their efforts with this program.

"Anything worthwhile is worth working for," Suddeth said of earning the certification. "The EFC is something you work to achieve, as well as every day after that."

According to Suddeth, the certification has made USC Upstate more aware of its environmental impact, has reduced inputs and related expenses, and has benefited enrollment as a recruiting tool.

"Every sports field manager is an environmentalist whether we know it or not," said Suddeth. "Due to the thoroughness of the program, there is a huge satisfaction in completing the application, receiving the accreditation and maintaining it."

For more information about SFMA Environmental Facility Certification, visit <https://www.sportsfieldmanagement.org/environmental-facility-certification-program/> **SFM**

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President's Message



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Adam Thoms, Ph.D.

SFMA President

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We have had quite the past 12 months as an organization, but I'm very excited about the future with our new CEO for the Sports Field Management Association (SFMA). After a comprehensive search process, we found the person to lead us into the future.

When the search was first started, it was clear among the SFMA Board of Directors — as well as feedback received from many members — that we wanted someone who understood our industry and would help us move our organization ahead as part of our strategic plan. As an organization we learned that onboarding a new CEO is best done anytime but during the rush for conference planning for our largest annual event.

After pausing the search process in the fall of 2024, we reopened the search until mid-February of 2025, and had more than 80 applicants for the CEO position. All of those applicants were screened with a matrix based on what the organization wanted to see in our next CEO in 10 different categories. Each member of the search committee filled out the matrix, and the scores were compared after completion. There were 10 common names that rose to the top across those matrixes for each of the search committee members.

After screening, Zoom interviews were conducted with the 10 highest-scoring individuals in the

search committee matrix. The list was then narrowed down to three individuals to be interviewed by the board of directors via Zoom. A final step in the process was in-person interviews during which SFMA staff got a chance to meet with the three candidates, as well as the search committee for a more extended amount of time.

Although the search process took time, it allowed the search committee to learn more about each candidate and find who we feel will be the best for our future. During this process, Paula Sliefert continually rose to the top of the interviews. Paula brings very strong knowledge of the turfgrass industry and SFMA. She also has an incredible network of people to connect with, and we are excited to have her lead us forward.

I would also like to take the opportunity to thank the amazing SFMA headquarters staff of Leah, Nora, Whitney and Jennifer for taking on extra responsibilities for the past year on top of their job responsibilities. We also would not have gotten to this point without Alpha Jones and Sun Roesslein stepping up to help with day-to-day operations during the past year. Next time you are on a committee call, please thank them for all they do for SFMA. **SFM**

– Adam Thoms, Ph.D.

SFMA Education

According to SFMA Education Manager, Jennifer McLendon, M.Ed., the ultimate goal is for SFMA educational content to become the go-to for anyone in the sports field management industry. In addition to the educational content at the annual SFMA Conference and Exhibition, SFMA offers a wide range of educational content and resources. These include the Turfgrass Science Certification, Turfgrass Management 101, Professional Development offerings, technical resources and more.

TURFGRASS SCIENCE CERTIFICATION

SFMA's Turfgrass Science Certification, tested on the iCEV platform, is an entry-level certification (<https://www.sportsfieldmanagement.org/turfgrass-science-certification/>) 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.

"We have a lot of really great things happening," McLendon said of the iCEV curriculum. "We have been approved in Iowa and Maryland, and we just applied to the Texas Education Agency for approval in the state of Texas. We are working to get approved in Florida. Each state is its own entity and has its own plan."

McLendon added that the curriculum is pending approval in Arizona, Florida, Kansas, Missouri, Ohio and South Carolina.

"Our goal, of course, is to be recognized in all 50 states," she said. "We're getting there."

The Turfgrass Science certification assesses knowledge and skills related to the Benefits of Turfgrass; Turfgrass



Anatomy, Identification and Adaptations; Turfgrass Environment; Turfgrass Cultural Practices; and Playing Surface Preparation.

The SFMA Turfgrass Science Certification is an ideal entry-level test for learners who wish to pursue careers in turfgrass and sports field management. But the best way to know for sure is to explore the certification page (<https://www.icevonline.com/turfgrass>).

TURFGRASS MANAGEMENT 101

"At our last conference, we announced that we offer Turfgrass Management 101, and Canvas is our learning management system," said McLendon. "We are live in Canvas, and Turfgrass Management 101 has been updated and vetted by the committee. We have several people per day that sign up for this

program through our website. Once the application is completed, they receive information to guide them through the process of signing into Canvas to gain access to the content.”

The Turfgrass Management 101 course (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 five units:

- Introduction to Turfgrass Science
- Turfgrass Growth and Development, Anatomy and Identification
- Turfgrass Soils
- Turfgrass Cultural Practices
- Turfgrass Establishment

ONGOING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Ongoing professional development, which is also hosted in Canvas, includes education on Interpersonal Skills; Diversity, Equity and Inclusion; Dynamic Meetings; and the SFMA Mentorship Program.

The SFMA Mentorship Program, launched in early 2024, was designed to provide guidance, support and knowledge-sharing opportunities for individuals passionate about maintaining and enhancing sports fields. The program connects experienced industry professionals with aspiring sports field managers, groundskeepers and maintenance personnel. The SFMA Mentorship Program currently has 38 active members.



FUTURE OFFERINGS

In addition to existing offerings, SFMA is also developing a Turfgrass Math Resource Center created by Dr. Quincy Law and Dr. Nick Christians at Iowa State. The resource center will provide information related to irrigation math, fertilizer math, calculating area and more.

SFMA is also creating a Field Painting Resource Center that will cover field layout, powered and non-powered equipment, autonomous painting equipment maintenance, synthetic field painting, game day prep, logo painting tips, and even a section on painting and its effect on health. In addition, SFMA is discussing options for a Synthetic Turf Management resource center.

Resource center development is spearheaded by the SFMA Subject Matter Experts Committee, which includes Tyler Carr, Ph.D.; Weston Floyd, CSFM; Dan Sandor, Ph.D.; Matthew Arms, CSFM; Mike Blunck; Conlan Burbrink; Richard Douglas; Colin Fulks; Marc Moran, CSFM; Steve Ruckman, CSFM; Craig Sampsell, CSFM; Chrissie Segars, Ph.D.; Don Scholl, CSFM; Ryan Storey, CSFM; Aaron Tipton

TECHNICAL RESOURCES

The SFMA website Technical Resources section (<https://www.sportsfieldmanagement.org/knowledge-categories/technical-resources/>) includes post-conference virtual sessions. Several of the 2025 virtual sessions have already been added, and additional sessions are coming soon.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Turfgrass Management 101 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. For more information, contact Jennifer McLendon at jmclendon@sportsfieldmanagement.org. **SFM**

All photos by Mark Skalny



HAMMONS FIELD

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AT HAMMONS FIELD we take pride in consistently finishing as one of the top two playing surfaces in the Texas League while having the second oldest field in the league. The subgrade of our field is now on its twentieth year, and it is still performing at peak levels. We have put countless hours of work in to make sure it is the best field for our players and fans.

With the work that we have put in, we have had very minimal drainage issues with high rainfall totals in the spring. There were only two games that were rained out in 2024, and that was purely based on weather forecast. We see it as a massive win for us to have a field that still performs at the level of a new surface.



Another area we were able to eliminate this year was sod work. Other than a plug here and there, we didn't have to sod a single area throughout two full seasons of baseball between Missouri State and the Springfield Cardinals. This also includes the two concerts for which our infield and parts of the outfield were covered in flooring. To have no major repairs after close to 100 games and an ever-growing event schedule is at the top of our win column for 2024. All in all, we believe that our playing surface remains among the top of all professional fields in both performance and from a visual standpoint.

— Nathan Strait, manager of field operations



Level and category of submission: Professional Baseball

Field manager: Nathan Strait

Title: Manager of field operations

Education: Bachelor's degree in Sports Administration

Experience: I have been with the Springfield Cardinals for 9 years, which is the entirety of my sports field management experience. Derek Edwards, director of field and stadium operations, has been with the Cardinals for 20 years. Before that, he assisted on the grounds crew for Highland Springs Country Club in Springfield, Missouri.

Full-time staff: Derek Edwards

Original facility construction: 2004

Turfgrass: HGT bluegrass with some 365 SS mixed on the infield surface

Overseed: HGT on the outfield and collars, with 365 SS on the infield

Rootzone: Sand

Drainage System: Perforated PVC pipe

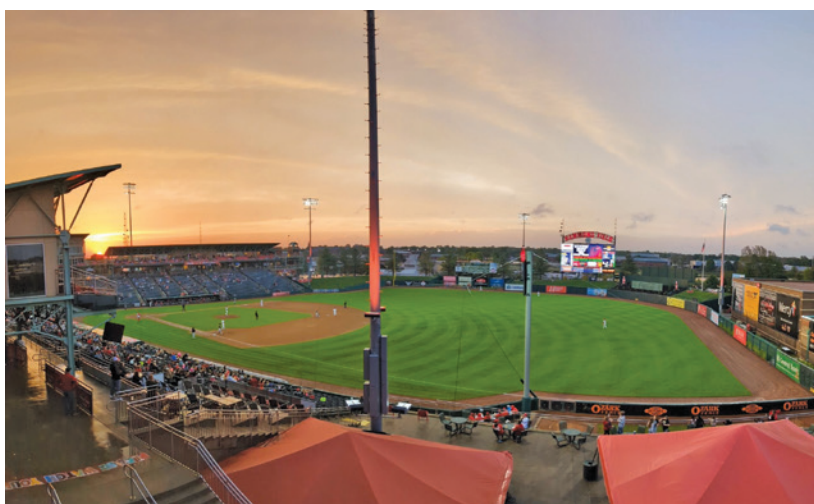
SportsField Management (SFM): What are you most proud of with this win?

Nathan Strait: We couldn't be prouder of winning this award. It is always great to see when the amount of work we put in pays off. We have an incredible field crew staff that we can rely on to go out and help us put together a great product day in and day out. Winning this award gave us a renewed appreciation for that work that we have put in. This is an award that we have been chasing for some time now, and we are happy to finally bring it home.

SFM: What were the biggest challenges and how did you approach them?

Strait: One of the biggest challenges for us is always the amount of field usage. Not only do we have 69 Springfield Cardinals games every year, but we are also home to Missouri State University. With two teams, as well as high school games, we are always around 100 games on the field each year. Along with games, we have also stepped foot into the event business. This past year we hosted two concerts, a dinner on

FIELD OF THE YEAR
PROFESSIONAL BASEBALL



the diamond, a cornhole tournament on the infield skin, and several more events. Our other large challenge is that the field itself is now 20 years old. We are still able to make it perform at a top level, but it does take some extra TLC. With the workload and the age of the field, we must plan our cultural practices more than most to make sure we are putting out a great product for our players and fans. The bipolar weather in Missouri also poses a challenge, but the only thing we can do with that is try to plan ahead and do our best to make sure the field can take on whatever weather comes our way.

SFM: Please share your overall management approach and important aspects of getting the field to an award-winning level.

Strait: With our field being the age that it is, our field management approach can get extensive at times. The one thing we do as much as we can is getting on the aerator. We try to punch holes to break up compaction at least once a month when the teams are out of town. On top of aerating, we are also topdressing sand often to make sure we are keeping our grades



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where they need to be. A lot of our off-week work goes into the grass surface — whether it's our cultural practices or keeping edges where they need to be for the upcoming series. We will also spend time on off weeks focusing on all of our mounds. We scope out every mound before each series to make sure they are where they need to be at all times. During game weeks, we will switch and give a lot of attention to the infield skin. We have an amended infield mix, so it is key for us to try to make sure the moisture is where we want it in all areas. The last area we focus on is attention to detail. The main goal is for the field to play at peak performance for the athletes, but we also take pride in how it looks for the fans coming through the gates.

SFM: Tell us about your crew and anything else you'd like us to know about the organization and facilities.

Strait: We are fortunate to have a great crew working for us here in Springfield. Not only are they a great help on the field, but they are a tightknit group that have fun as well. By having a fun atmosphere, we are able to retain most of our crew from year to year. Our field staff consists of two full-time staff — me and Derek Edwards, director of field and stadium operations — as well as 15 part-time staff. We also get help from our front office and other game day staff. Without their help with tarp, we would have a hard time playing games in weather situations. We are grateful to

have an organization that understands what it takes for us to do our job.

SFM: Please share insight into the Field of the Year application process, as well as tips to other managers who may fill it out.

Strait: The application process is fairly simple. To do it right does take some time, but the reward in the end is worth it. There are a couple pieces of advice I would give to other managers that will be filling out this application. The first would be to fill out your quarterly PCI's. I believe the PCI's to be one of the biggest pieces that they look at when deciding the award winners. Also, don't be afraid to focus on your challenges that season and then explain what you did to overcome them. When you are choosing pictures, make sure you include those that show what might have gone wrong, along with pictures of you performing your agricultural practices and general maintenance. It is good to add pictures showing how great your field looks on a daily basis, but don't overload the committee with full field pictures. The last piece would be to put as much detail into the application as you can provide. **SFM**

Coping With the Change You Asked For

It seems that almost every sports field management crew — regardless of the sport or level of play — has one person who thinks they have all the answers.

“If administration would create one more full-time position and get one more 5-gang mower, we could really meet the needs and expectations for our facilities.”

We all know the feeling. We see the need; and for those of us responsible, those comments motivate us to do the homework to build a case to support the ask. We spend weeks, maybe months, advocating for what will make our operation better. We pitch it, justify it, and even rehearse the perfect conversation in our heads. And then, surprise, leadership says “yes.”

The hardest part isn't getting the yes — it's what you do next that defines whether the change truly succeeds. In reality, it's often easier to fight for change than it is to live through it. Advocating for improvement puts you in control of the narrative. You're energized and clear. But once the change arrives, the control shifts. Now, you're in it. Now, you must adapt, implement, and lead through the unknown.

Change is the process of moving from what is familiar toward something new, different or improved.

What part of change makes you uncomfortable? Is it the loss of control, the pressure to deliver, or the uncertainty that comes with new people and processes?

I've been there. I was once brought into an organization as part of a significant change — hired because leadership saw the need to improve operations. On paper, the move made sense. But in practice it quickly became clear that although the leaders had asked for change, they weren't fully prepared to lead it.

Communication came in small waves. Expectations were sporadically voiced but not clearly defined. The team was told the standard wasn't being met, yet the structure and accountability to support that standard never fully emerged. And then came the moment that caught me off guard: the leader who initiated the entire shift said, “I don't handle change well.” That level of honesty was unexpected — and to be candid, it said a lot.

Even experienced leaders can struggle with the emotional weight of change. We want progress, but we don't always prepare ourselves to live inside it. Change means disruption. It means letting go of habits that feel safe, and adjusting

to new systems that feel unfamiliar. The challenge isn't just identifying what needs to improve, it's leading people through the tension that comes with making it happen.

Passion for change doesn't equal a plan for execution. It's one thing to make the case for a new hire or a new mower. It's another to design the first 30 days of onboarding, clarify expectations, adjust workflows, and communicate what success looks like. There is a great need for these to be communicated at the beginning or before the change takes place.

If changes were approved today, would you be ready? Could you outline a 30-day plan covering people, process, and accountability? If not, this is the time to shift from hoping to planning.

Sometimes we get so focused on getting the green light that we overlook what happens after it. Without a blueprint and leadership behind it, even a well-earned change can stall or, worse, be seen as a mistake.

Then there's the other side — what happens when the change works better than you imagined? The new hire fits perfectly. The equipment boosts efficiency. Momentum builds. And now you're facing a different kind of challenge — sustaining success. Because growth, especially the kind you want, still needs to be managed.

What's your leadership plan when things go better than expected? Who helps you pace the success? Growth without direction can burn just as fast as it builds.

Asking for change doesn't make you a leader. Leading through it does. It's showing up after the approval. It's guiding others while you learn. It's acknowledging discomfort without letting it stop you.

Change will grow you; or it will show you. Often, both happen in similar situations.

Leadership in change isn't about having all the answers. It's about being honest, adaptable, and ready to adjust in real time. Don't just fight for change. Get good at managing it. **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

2025

JULY 1-3

NATIONAL SPORTS SAFETY AND SECURITY CONFERENCE & EXHIBITION

San Antonio, Texas

www.ncs4.usm.edu/events/annual-conference



JULY 23

TENNESSEE VALLEY SPORTS FIELD MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION (TVSFMA) SUMMER MEETING

University of Tennessee's Center for Athletic
Field Safety, Knoxville, Tennessee

www.tvstma.org/meetinginfo.php

JULY 30

SPORTS FIELD MANAGERS ASSOCIATION OF NEW JERSEY (SFMANJ) RUTGERS TURFGRASS RESEARCH FIELD DAY

Rutgers Adelphia Research Farm,
Freehold, New Jersey

www.sfmanj.org/meetinginfo.php

OCTOBER 13-15

SYNTHETIC TURF COUNCIL ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Palm Beach Gardens, Florida

www.syntheticturfcouncil.org

OCTOBER 22-24

EQUIP EXPO

Louisville, Kentucky

www.equipexposition.com

OCTOBER 22-24

PGMS SCHOOL OF GROUNDS MANAGEMENT

Louisville, Kentucky

www.pgms.org/page/AnnualConference

NOVEMBER 2-5

ELEVATE (NALP)

Phoenix, Arizona

www.landscapeprofessionals.org/ELEVATE

DECEMBER 1-5

AMERICAN SPORTS BUILDERS ASSOCIATION TECHNICAL MEETING

San Antonio, Texas

www.sportsbuilders.org/page/UpcomingEvents

DECEMBER 8-11

IRRIGATION SHOW AND EDUCATION WEEK

New Orleans, Louisiana

www.irrigation.org/IA

2026

JANUARY 18-22

SFMA CONFERENCE AND EXHIBITION

Fort Worth, Texas

www.sportsfieldmanagement.org/conference **SFM**

JOHN MASCARO'S PHOTO QUIZ

CAN YOU IDENTIFY THIS TURFGRASS PROBLEM?

PROBLEM:

Line of turf on skinned area

TURFGRASS AREA:

High school sports field

LOCATION:

Windham, Maine

TURFGRASS VARIETY:

Bluegrass / perennial ryegrass

Answer on page 33

John Mascaro is president of Turf-Tec International



“

“I would recommend Latitude to other sports turf managers because of the recovery, the wear tolerance and the extended growth into colder climates when other bermudagrasses are kinda struggling and going dormant during those times.”

— MATT BRUDEREK, DIRECTOR OF TURF & GROUNDS AT INTER MIAMI

A top priority for the soccer field of Inter Miami CF is the ability to hold events 12 months out of the year. The club chose Latitude 36® Bermudagrass to avoid overseeding in the wintertime. The grass growth is much shorter, the grass leaf blade is much finer and everything on it stays more compact. The soccer players love this due to a nice, quick surface so the ball can move fast and with a pure roll. In a tough climate Latitude 36® maintains its color and grows all winter.

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SFMA CEO Paula Sliefert brings industry knowledge and connections to leadership role

By John Kmitta



Photo by Mark Skalny. All other photos courtesy of Paula Sliefert.

"My vision is for SFMA to be the go-to resource and voice for all things related to sports field management — recognized nationally for our leadership, our commitment to safety and sustainability, and our support of professionals at every career stage," said new SFMA CEO Paula Sliefert. "I want us to be an inclusive, future-focused association that not only meets the needs of today's members but also sets the standard for tomorrow's field managers."

In selecting Sliefert as its CEO, SFMA chose a leader with whom it is familiar, and one who is familiar with SFMA, the sports field management industry, and the broader green industry overall.

"Paula comes to us with a strong background in the sports field industry, a passion for member service, and a deep respect for the work that field managers do every day," stated SFMA President Adam Thoms, Ph.D.

Sliefert's impact on SFMA and the sports field management profession was recognized earlier this year when she was honored as the recipient of the Harry Gill Award, SFMA's highest honor.

As an industry veteran who spent 17 years at The Toro Company, Sliefert brings to the role of CEO vast knowledge of SFMA and the industry.

"My involvement with the turfgrass industry has spanned nearly two decades," said Sliefert. "I've worked closely with sports field managers, suppliers and allied organizations — building relationships and supporting initiatives that elevate the profession."

Sliefert's roles in the industry have ranged from developing educational programming to launching industrywide campaigns and partnering on workforce development strategies. She has also collaborated with many SFMA members through committees, board engagement and national events.

"I want us to be an inclusive, future-focused association that not only meets the needs of today's members but also sets the standards for tomorrow's field managers."

THE JOURNEY THUS FAR

Sliefert grew up in rural Iowa, and went on to earn bachelor's degrees in both German and International Business from Simpson College in Indianola, Iowa. From there, she went to graduate school at Bowling Green State University in Ohio, where she earned a master's degree in German.

"It was a two-year program; I spent the first year at the University of Salzburg in Austria, and the second year on campus in Ohio," she said.

Sliefert did not originally intend to major in German, but Glenn Buhr, a professor at Simpson College ran a study abroad program that Sliefert says changed her life.

"I spent a time in Schorndorf, Germany, lived with a guest family, and ended up with a degree in German from Simpson," she said. "That whole experience broadened my perspective on the world."

Following college, Sliefert worked in the automotive aftermarket industry, first in customer service, then sales, then as a regional business manager, and eventually in marketing.

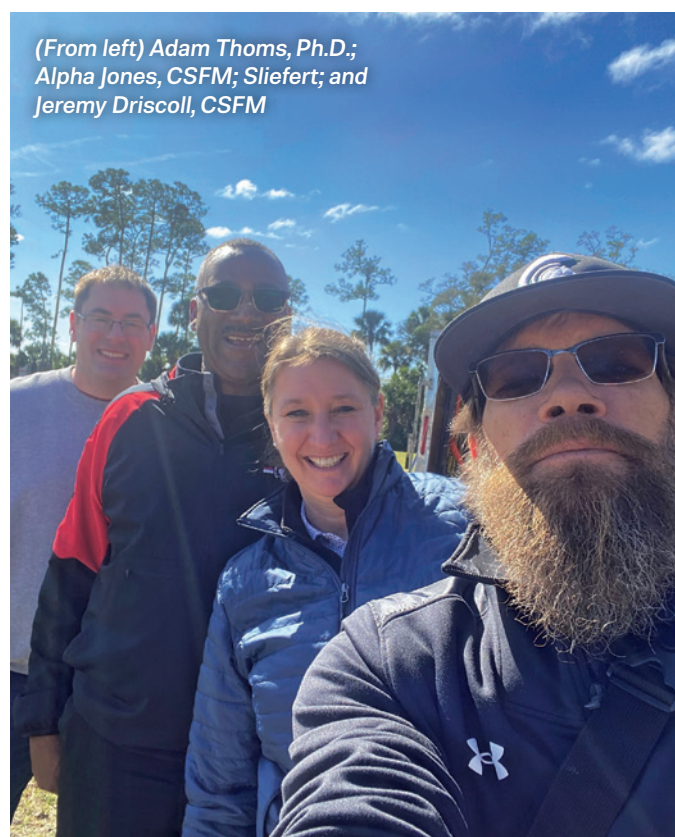
"What I loved about the early part of my career is that I was exposed to the customer journey," she said. "I really appreciated that everybody is technically in sales; it's just how you market or package yourself."

From there, Sliefert entered the manufacturing industry — and the green industry — at The Toro Company.

"My career path has been a blend of strategic leadership, marketing and relationship-building roles — many of which intersected with the turfgrass and broader green industry," said Sliefert. "Over the years, I've had the privilege of working with national brands, leading cross-functional teams, and contributing to initiatives that positively impact both the environment and the people who steward it."



Paula Sliefert at FIFA field days



(From left) Adam Thoms, Ph.D.; Alpha Jones, CSFM; Sliefert; and Jeremy Driscoll, CSFM



"The chance to help advance the profession, grow membership and expand our influence was an opportunity I couldn't pass up."

"They know I don't know how to grow grass, but I know that there is a craft and a science behind it," she said. "I am trying to do everything I can to make sure their voice is heard, no matter the audience. I bring that strategic thinking to the table, and a passion to elevate and gain more respect for the sports field management profession."

Sliefert was drawn to the role of SFMA CEO by the opportunity to serve a profession she cares deeply about, and to lead an organization that has the potential to shape the future of sports field management.

"I see the incredible impact our members make in communities every day — from youth leagues to professional stadiums — and I'm inspired by the dedication and expertise they bring," she said. "The chance to help advance the profession, grow membership and expand our influence was an opportunity I couldn't pass up."

According to Sliefert, the interview process for the role of SFMA CEO was thorough, engaging and affirming; and it involved multiple conversations with SFMA's leadership, including board members and key stakeholders.

"What stood out to me was how thoughtful and committed everyone was to the future of the association," she said. "It wasn't just about finding the right person — it was about finding the right partner to help move the mission forward. That mutual alignment made the process both challenging and energizing."

BECOMING SFMA CEO

Now Sliefert brings a strategic mindset and a people-first approach to the role of SFMA CEO.

"I'm passionate about building strong cultures, aligning teams around shared goals, and creating systems that drive sustainable growth," she said. "My background in communications and brand strategy also enables me to amplify the voice of the association and advocate for our members in ways that resonate beyond our industry. I'm highly collaborative and believe in the power of partnerships to unlock new opportunities for our profession."

Sliefert added that she mirrors the passion of SFMA members; and although she is not a practitioner, she has afforded them respect and earned their respect in return.



*Advocating for parks
on Capitol Hill*

From the beginning of the interview process, Sliefert was open with SFMA leadership about her role as executive director of the Professional Football Field Managers Alliance (PFFMA), a part-time consultant position she took on beginning in March of 2025, and a role she plans to continue moving forward.

At PFFMA, Sliefert is responsible for leading the organization's overall operations, and aligning its strategies and initiatives with its mission, vision and goals set forth by its board.

"I'm there to serve," said Sliefert. "That is a part-time role, and they recognized that they needed somebody to help them get to where they wanted to go."

Sliefert plans to keep the business portions of both roles separate, and both organizations are aware of how she plans to serve their respective interests.

"I couldn't have been more transparent with either organization of how I was going to do this," she said. "They both value the skill set that I can bring. I know how to get things done and I'm a connector."

According to Sliefert, her ability to facilitate connections is a key trait that she brings to her new role as SFMA CEO.

"We can be bigger, and I can help us get there through collaboration and memorandums of understanding," she said. "You have to leverage the value you have, but you can't do it alone. You have to do it through partnerships and discussions."

"Our goal is to become the leading knowledge resource for sports field managers," she said. "We're not there yet, but with the right strategy in place, I believe we can get there."

SERVICE TO OTHERS

Sliefert has a long history of giving back through volunteerism, including serving on the alumni board for Simpson College, the executive board for City Parks Alliance, the board of directors for the Minnesota



Sliefert with SFMA
Founder Dick Ericson

"SFMA has done an exceptional job building a strong sense of community. The peer-to-peer support, the quality of the annual conference, and the dedication of our volunteers are all things I truly admire."

Sliefert also values the openness of the SFMA board and the desire of board members to do the right thing. That said, she sees opportunities to grow SFMA's voice, and raise awareness among decisionmakers, potential new members, and the next generation of field managers.

"We can also continue to evolve how we deliver member value year-round and how we support local chapters and elevate the profession through advocacy and visibility," she said.

Sliefert would like to review the SFMA committee structure, which she sees as being a bit cumbersome in both the number and size of committees.

"We have so many people that want to serve the industry through service to SFMA, and I think there are better ways of doing that," she said. "We need to find some efficiencies, create some room and invest in developing people."

Sliefert would also like to examine the certification structure and ways to make it more marketable without watering down what it means to be a CSFM.

Another challenge facing SFMA is attracting the younger generation, outlining why they should join SFMA, and ultimately fostering and developing the workforce.

According to Sliefert, budget constraints, limited public understanding of what SFMA members do, and climate-related pressures are other significant challenges. To address those, SFMA will need to be more proactive in its outreach and advocacy, deepen its partnerships with allied industries, and invest in tools and messaging that communicate the value of SFMA.

Parks and Sports Field Management Association, and Project Evergreen. Sliefert helped the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) launch a business council, and also serves on one of NRPA's committees. She has made the trip to Capitol Hill twice to help lobby on behalf of the City Parks Alliance and NRPA.

Perhaps most vital to her new role, Sliefert served a total of three years on the SFMA Board of Directors (one year as an elected director and two years on the executive board).

Having been in the boardroom and seen the inner workings of SFMA has given Sliefert a perspective on what the association does well, the challenges it faces, and insight into where opportunities may exist.

"SFMA has done an exceptional job building a strong sense of community," said Sliefert. "The peer-to-peer support, the quality of the annual conference, and the dedication of our volunteers are all things I truly admire. We have also been leaders in certification, field safety and education."

THE PATH FORWARD

Despite identifying challenges and opportunities, Sliefert is adamant that she is not coming in as SFMA CEO to make changes for the sake of change. Rather, she points out that change for SFMA will be a journey.

"It starts with listening — understanding what our members are facing — and responding with resources and strategies that are practical, innovative, and inclusive," she said.

Sliefert admits that having served on the SFMA board and being familiar with SFMA's challenges brings with it the pressure to hit the ground running, but that she will not skip the process of discovery and research — or what she calls her "listening tour."

"I'm asking what we are doing well and what aren't we doing that we should be doing, and I will summarize the feedback," she said. "I started with staff, board, past presidents, committee members and SAFE, and then I want to make sure I talk to all of the different segments of members."

As such, Sliefert is doing her best to manage expectations, and plans to take several months gathering input as part of her listening tour.

"You won't see a lot of changes right away, but I'm going to prioritize which changes I might recommend," she said. "The board will determine what to prioritize or which recommendations will bring the most benefit to the members the quickest."

Although Sliefert is just getting up to speed and working through the feedback from her listening tour, she does have a sense of the priorities that need to be addressed — with the budget being foremost on that list.

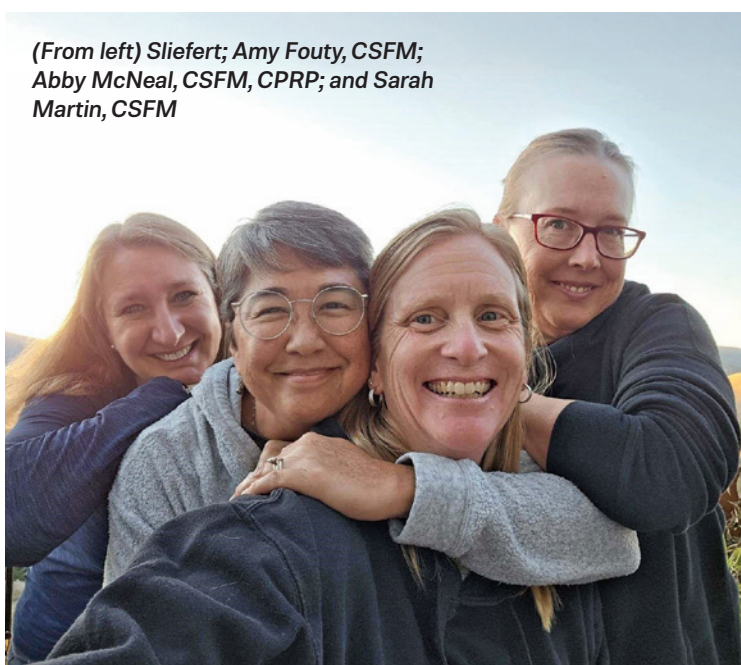
"We need to have a vision for the future on the financial situation," she said. "We've been borrowing from our brand equity, and we need to figure out how to invest again. We are solvent, but we have to stay healthy in order to grow."

Sliefert wants to better understand SFMA's revenue streams; she wants to conduct a brand audit on how SFMA markets itself; and she wants to strengthen board and staff alignment.

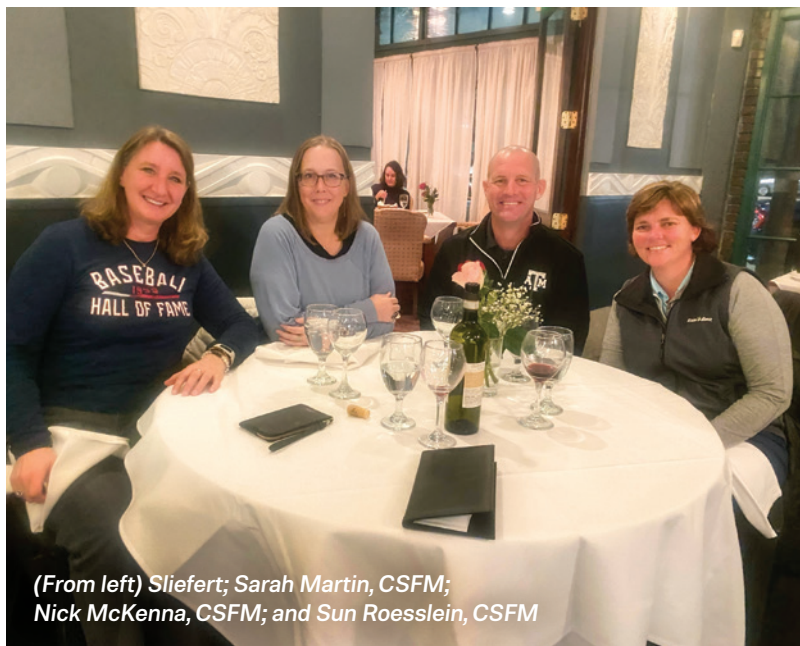
"When you're clear on the strategic priorities, it becomes easier to filter decisions and allocate



Sliefert with SFMA
Founder George Toma



(From left) Sliefert; Amy Fouty, CSFM;
Abby McNeal, CSFM, CPRP; and Sarah
Martin, CSFM



(From left) Sliefert; Sarah Martin, CSFM; Nick McKenna, CSFM; and Sun Roeslein, CSFM

"I also believe in building strong teams and empowering staff and volunteers... Regular communication, agility in execution, and keeping the member experience front and center are key to managing the diverse responsibilities of this role."

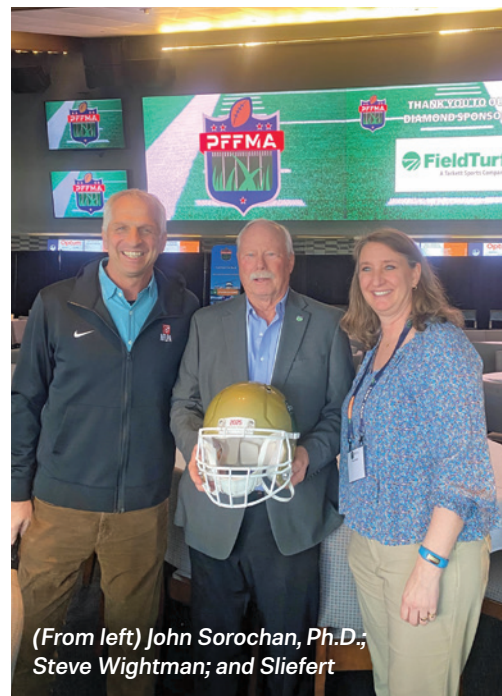
time," she said. "I also believe in building strong teams and empowering staff and volunteers. You can't do it all alone, nor should you. Regular communication, agility in execution, and keeping the member experience front and center are key to managing the diverse responsibilities of this role."

And although Sliefert does not have prior association management experience, she has committed to becoming a Certified Association Executive within the next three years.

"I want to demonstrate that we can all grow professionally," she said.

Sliefert will also tap into her network of connections at other industry organizations — many of whom have already reached out to offer their assistance.

"It's going to be a learning curve," she said. "I am committed to investing to make sure I'm the best I can be and serve with the excellence that comes with certification and this peer network. But I'm going to make mistakes. And I hope I make mistakes quickly, recover fast, and do it with grace."



(From left) John Sorochan, Ph.D.; Steve Wightman; and Sliefert

Through it all, Sliefert is eager to take on the role of SFMA CEO, and is most excited about the people.

"Our members are passionate, knowledgeable, and incredibly hard-working," said Sliefert. "I'm eager to build deeper relationships, to listen and learn, and to help create a future where our profession is more widely recognized and valued."

Sliefert is also excited to work with SFMA staff, and she credits the passion and investment of the staff members at SFMA headquarters with helping guide the association through the transition between CEOs.

"I'm excited about the potential to innovate — whether it's through new programs, expanded partnerships, or modernized operations that support long-term growth," she said. "The mission is to empower sports field managers through educational resources, networking and advocacy; then become the premier global organization and set standards of excellence for sports field management." **SFM**

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

GETTING TO KNOW

SFMA CEO Paula Sliefert

Many people within SFMA are already familiar with Paula Sliefert's industry experience, volunteerism and her commitment to the sports field management profession.

Outside of work, Sliefert enjoys the outdoors — hiking, walking and golfing. She is an avid sports fan, an avid reader, and a member of Toastmasters — an international organization that helps develop presentation and leadership skills.

"I think that I will always be on a journey of trying to become a better version of me," said Sliefert. "You have to invest in yourself and I am trying to lead by example."

"I think I will always be on a journey of trying to become a better version of me."

Most importantly, family is central to Sliefert's life.

"My mom inspires me," said Sliefert. "She's 83, and has raised five kids and seven grandkids. A lot of what I am today is because of her. My mom and dad

divorced when I was 11; and I grew up living with my Dad, which created a close relationship between us. He passed in 2005, but there isn't a day that goes by that I don't think about him. I have three sisters and a brother, and we are a very close knit family group."

Sliefert also cherishes her seven nieces and nephews, and does her best to help them experience the world — most notably on international trips.

"It's super fun for me, because I get to see things again for the first time through their eyes," she said. "When I go with them, it is to reconnect with them and be the best aunt I can be since I have no children of my own. Family is paramount to me."

Added Sliefert, "I believe in balance, humor, and the joy of learning something new — whether that is through travel, reading or simply connecting with people from all walks of life. **SFM**



Sliefert with niece Payton Campbell at Machu Pichu



Sliefert with nephew Chase Green



Sliefert with two of her sisters

TRAINING PITCH MANAGEMENT

Preparing the base camps and training sites for the 2025 FIFA Club World Cup and FIFA World Cup 26

AS THE TOP SOCCER PLAYERS in the world head to North America for the 2025 FIFA Club World Cup and FIFA World Cup 26, the pitch management team at FIFA has rigorously prepared training pitch locations for the team base camps and venue-specific training sites. The combined number of pitches for the upcoming tournaments will total more than 70 for the 2025 FIFA Club World Cup and more than 100 for FIFA World Cup 26. For insight into the preparation required for all of the sites, SportsField Management magazine recently spoke with Weston Appelfeller, CSFM, FIFA 26 senior manager, training pitch management.

SportsField Management (SFM): Please provide an overview of the base camps and training sites, as well as how you are preparing for something of this size and scope.

Weston Appelfeller, CSFM: A team base camp is where a club [for the 2025 FIFA Club World Cup] or a country [for FIFA World Cup 26] will train during the time that they're here. It will be their home base, and where they live for two weeks. The venue-specific training sites are where they will go on match day minus one. They will train for two or three weeks at their home base camp, and then they will rotate over to the venue-specific training site the day before the match, play the match, and then go back to their team base camp.

For a tournament that has 48 different countries playing in it, we need at least 48 of those. Add in the referee base camp, and you have 49. Then you have all the stadiums across three different countries, and each one of those needs to have one to two venue-specific training sites.



All images courtesy of FIFA



We also need to have 30% more of the team base camps for the clubs and countries to choose from. That's where we get somewhere in the range of 100 different sites that we are putting forth. To get those, however, we have evaluated more than 200 sites and what they offer in terms of grass, drainage, soil, equipment, staff, etc. All of those factors come into play as we put our best foot forward.

SFM: When looking at those sites, are you evaluating professional venues, colleges, high school or a mix of sites? Also, what type of existing infrastructure are you looking for?

Appelfeller: Yes, we've looked at everything from private high schools to Division I college to NWSL, USL and MLS facilities. We have looked at different sizes — some are two pitches, some are four pitches — and we determined which ones are the best of each site that we would want to use. There are a lot of factors that go into picking a good training site. Having a good pitch is one thing, but having good locker rooms, a good weight room, a really nice hotel nearby, and having something for the players to do in the city all factor into one big-picture package that we send out to the clubs and countries. The training pitches are extremely important, but they are just a small piece of the whole puzzle.

SFM: Do the base camps have to be in a certain proximity to where those teams will ultimately play? And what are the logistics for the venue-specific training sites?

Appelfeller: The venue-specific training sites are within probably 20 minutes of the stadiums. For the team base camps, clubs or federations will choose those regionally knowing where their matches will be played. There is no distance that could be too close or too far away from those stadiums for a base camp, but it's not likely for a federation to choose a location that is a 5-hour flight from where they'll be playing their matches. Once they know which group they're in and where those matches will be played, they will identify where they want to train and they will tell us which options are best for them.

SFM: With the base camps not required to be in close proximity to the actual event venue, do you anticipate some crossover of base camp site selections from Club World Cup to World Cup 26?

Appelfeller: It's two different tournaments, but in back-to-back years. If you look at the tournament we have this summer, it is based heavily on the coasts. There are matches on the West Coast and there are matches on the East Coast, but there's nothing really in the middle of the country outside of Nashville and Cincinnati. The team base camp options we have on the East Coast and West Coast are options for 26 as well, and are in our brochure going out to the federations for next year. But, starting next year, there are a lot of options in the middle of the country —including in Mexico and Canada —that were not options for the clubs this year that will be options for next year.



SFM: How closely dialed in do the training pitches have to be to mimic the actual game sites?

Appelfeller: That's probably the toughest part of the job we're trying to do — especially when locating different sites around the stadiums. The stadiums will have different types of grass depending on where they're at — whether it is bermudagrass or Kentucky bluegrass. The indoor stadiums will all be Kentucky bluegrass; but when we get outside of those stadiums, bermudagrass might be the preferred option for those areas. So, we're now trying to mimic the inside conditions to the outside world. We are doing a lot of detailed testing and looking at the numbers of how that surface will play. We are trying to mimic it as much as we can for what can we expect on ball roll, hardness, and what the sheer feel like. If we can get those numbers similar, then we think the playability is not going to change from outside to inside. One of the hardest challenges we have is figuring out how to make a bermudagrass surface outside of a stadium play the same way as a stitched bluegrass inside the stadium.

SFM: What type of equipment are you using to test each site?

Appelfeller: We have a Clegg, we have a sheer tester, and we are checking moisture daily. We have a rotation of our staff going around to these sites every two to three days this summer taking readings, taking pictures, writing reports, and sharing them with the overall team so that we can make sure every training pitch is as similar to the stadiums as possible. It is a lot of reporting — numbers on top of numbers. Some of it makes sense to the naked eye, and for some of it you have to dig a little deeper to determine what is causing it to perform a certain way.



SFM: What does the interaction look like with the host venues for the base camps and the training sites? What type of interaction do you have with the existing sports field manager at each site, especially with regard to how each site will be managed?

Appelfeller: Part of us coming on early in this process was to make those relationships and have a working group that is not just Alan [FIFA Senior Pitch Management Manager Alan Ferguson] or Ewen [FIFA Head of Pitch Management Ewen Hodge] or the people at University of Tennessee and myself. There is a personal relationship that needs to be made with every groundskeeper. They are part of our team and we want them to feel that way. We've spent a long time getting to know every groundskeeper and grounds crew at each one of these locations. Any of the guys on my staff can walk in and have a deep conversation with the groundskeeper. We are now to the point where a lot of those groundskeepers treat us no differently than they treat their favorite sales rep. Each site has a special meaning for us; we know the good and bad at each site, and what we could expect to happen at each site. We have helped them develop their staffing and their plan. We know that what we are bringing here is a huge ask for a lot of these sites, and we want to be good partners with them.

SFM: How far in advance did you have to start that process?

Appelfeller: I came on in November, and one of the first things I did was go on the road to some of the sites and start building relationships. We hired two more people in January, and they have been at each site. Once every two or three weeks we have been going around in a rotation. Now, as the tournament is coming up, that will be there every two to three days.

But Alan has been visiting different sites since 2018. And Ewen and David Graham, who's on our stadium side, have both gone around to a lot of the training sites. We've been working on those relationships since long before I got here — probably six or seven years at this point.

SFM: Can you give us a feel for what your team looks like just on the on the training camp and base camp side of things?

Appelfeller: Everything starts with Alan and Ewen, and they provide so much leadership and help to provide us with what we need. I fall directly under Ewen, overseeing all of the training sites for the United States and Mexico. We have Carlos Sartoretto, who is pitch cluster manager for the Mexico sites. In the U.S., we have Jason Griffith, who is in the northeastern portion of the country. Jason is a former groundskeeper for the Boston Red Sox and was head groundskeeper at Daytona International Speedway for seven or eight years. I know people probably don't think NASCAR fits with the soccer world; but when you're doing a track inspection for somebody driving over it at 220 miles per hour and something is not perfect, that is just as scary as having a pitch that can't perform right for the World Cup.

In the south — Texas to Florida — we have Alex Redd, who was formerly with LSU and the University of Tennessee. Then we just added three pitch venue managers, who are responsible for different regions of the country. In Charlotte, we have a consultant, Tanner Coffman, who is at TGL Live in Palm Beach Gardens. Jeff Fowler will be in Atlanta, and Evan Fowler will work the D.C. area and the Midwest sites we are using this year. We have three pitch venue managers, and next year that will expand to include a lot of different areas of the country. But right now, the team is three of us who are full time focusing solely on training pitches, and four different consultants working with us.

SFM: Once you get into the actual tournament schedule — whether that's Club World Cup or World Cup 26 — what changes for you and your team while the tournament is going on?

Appelfeller: For tournament time I will move to Miami, and I will live there for 45 days. Jason and Alex have already moved — they both have about



70 days away from home, living in the markets where the stadiums are located. It's a more detailed dive-in. Instead of being there every two to three weeks, we are now going to be at each site every two to three days. I'll work at headquarters with Ewen, calling all over the country as we will have training going on at 9 p.m. in Portland, for example, which is midnight on the East Coast. Along the East Coast, where Alex and Jason are already in market, they're taking readings and talking to the groundskeepers. We need to know exactly what's happening with the grass at every single site, every minute of every day — and that's hard to do when you are spread out as much as we are.

SFM: What do you most hope to learn from the 2025 FIFA Club World Cup leading into FIFA World Cup 26?

Appelfeller: We've already learned so much. Like we talked about, it's how we interact with the groundskeepers, making sure we have all the information we need, and making sure they have all the information they need. There is so much to be learned from this. Every day is something new, and that's my favorite part about the team I'm working with. This group wants to learn and gather knowledge, and this tournament is certainly helping us for next year. **SFM**

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FIELD PAINT ADVICE

By John
Kmitta



The varied components of painting an athletic field could span multiple articles or even an entire book. However, for some quick tips from the pros, I recently spoke with Mike Hebrard, owner/operator of Athletic Field Design, and Andy Hebrard, founder and president of Athletic Applications.

PAINT SELECTION

According to Mike, when selecting the right field paint for the job, availability, length of delivery time, quality and correct order are all factors, as is how long the paint needs to last on the grass. He also points out that growth regulators can be added for painting lines; and for application on synthetic turf, a key factor is permanent versus removable.

Said Andy, “You want to make sure you use paint built for natural grass on natural grass and paint built for synthetic turf on synthetic turf. Beyond that, durability and brightness are two major factors.

“Removable applications are always a challenge,” he added. “The majority of my removal events are national broadcasts, so I need the paint to stay on, not re-wet, and get through essentially a week’s worth of games for either a tournament or bowl game.”

According to Andy, even if his paint of choice is more challenging to remove, he wants to know it is going to look amazing on camera, handle rain events, and not come off on jerseys.

Andy also recommends using low pressure (300 to 400 psi) on removable applications so material stays on the top of the surface (a tip he credits to Scott from Total Sports Field Solutions).

TOOLS AND EQUIPMENT

Andy uses the Disc rolling spray shield from Athletic Field Design (a rolling straight edge) when painting logos.

“I am also a fan of attaching a 24- to 30-inch-long extension on my gun for logo work,” he added. “I’m a huge fan of the shields or guards anytime I’m walking lines. This provides perfectly crisp lines, but it will make any errors perfectly crisp as well.

“For the guards, you want the bottom sitting flush with your surface, the gun positioned in the front or middle of the guards so paint doesn’t escape, paint spray hitting bottom inch of the guards, and guards slightly angled in toward the string,” he added. “Don’t hit the string with the guards — stay 1/8 to 1/4 inch away.”

Mike added that his essential tools include stencils and stencil boards, as well as string measuring devices.

“I use a PowerPoint slide and group grid lines, copy image to back, convert to size, then usually freehand the image on a tarp cut out — or project, trace and cut out,” he said.

Robotic painters can create the outlines of logos and numbers as well, said Mike.

LOGOS AND DESIGN

According to Mike, when working with logos, keep them simple and cut out detailed graphics. However, it can be hard for fans to see highly detailed logos or text in larger venues — such as NFL and college football stadiums, he said. He recommends contrasting colors and outlines to highlight images.

“About 60 percent of our work is built off of a branding package that the team or event has already developed and we are replicating that on-field,” said Andy. “What’s exciting is that remaining 40 percent. Our crew has a great time brainstorming how we are going to bring the

craziest and most professional visuals to the client within timeline and budget.”

He added that special projects often take more time, so shortcuts on layout and getting where you need to go are key.

“There are a lot of times when we are editing in real time,” said Andy. “For a recent event in Dallas for OT7, the stencil came in slightly smaller than the massive inlaid logo. I saw that the event branding had the ‘rubble football’ logo everywhere instead of the one with clean edges we were supposed to paint. We had the freedom with the rubble style to expand the edges and cover the last foot of inlay. That is an example of a situation where we had exactly what we were supposed to paint but needed a real-time edit in the field.”

According to Andy, there is always an answer to potential problems, and the more experience you have, the easier the answer is to find.

Said Andy, “An umpire once told my father, ‘Mike, no one comes to the game to see what you painted.’ Harsh, but true — the show will go on.”

BEST PRACTICES

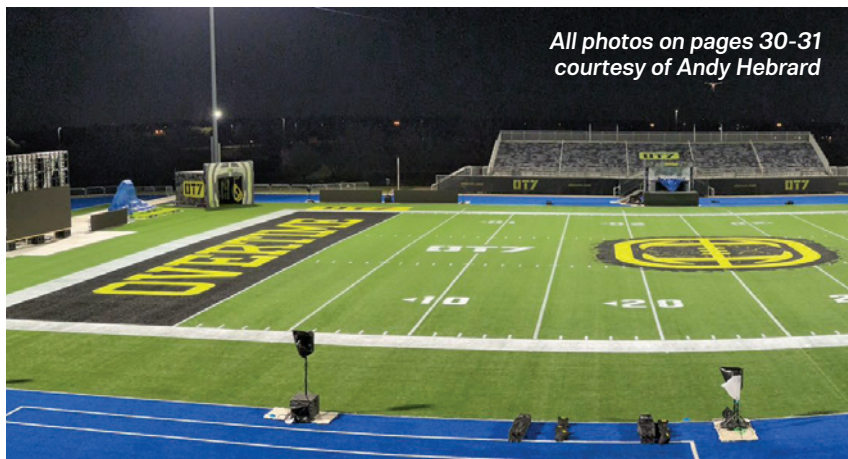
“I have painted on dirt, mud, asphalt, cement, synthetic and grass,” said Mike, who added that a good canvas is key to a good paint job. As such, he recommends a clean mow with no debris and no dust.

“Try to apply paint when the surface is dry, or blow off moisture; check the weather for rain, wind and heat; and be aware of the mowing schedule, band practice, etc.,” he said. “Also, paint applied when sun goes down will not dry until sun is back out.”

Andy added that the height of cut of grass will determine tip size and height of spray above surface.

“Give yourself at least 10 to 15 feet on any obstruction that can cause injury,” he said. “Use yellow striping tips for lines and

All photos on pages 30-31
courtesy of Andy Hebrard





All photos on page 32
courtesy of Mike Hebrard

black tips for fill; and factor in outside conditions — wind, weather and sunlight — and how they will affect spray.”

SAGE ADVICE

According to Andy, when leading a crew, it is always important to receive feedback. Other tips he shares include “Tight strings but not guitar tight.” “There are two ends to the string; be at the other one.” And “Don’t step in wet paint; and if you have to, then take off your shoes on exit.”

Mike added that logos should not be too close to the stands or too far away.

“Plan, plan, plan,” he said. “There is always something coming up, so have a good water source or bring water; and check colors, product and content before going to the job site.”

CLEANUP, STORAGE AND EQUIPMENT MAINTENANCE

“Storing and maintaining equipment is a challenge for our team,” said Andy. “We are constantly mobile so as hard as

we try to properly store and mobilize equipment, we always end up with pieces that need servicing.”

Mike recommends removing nozzles and storing them in cleaner; and replacing worn-out nozzles.

“Don’t let buckets get too low, as a lot of the clumpy material will plug up the valves,” he added. “If using a solvent-based paint, make sure you flush out really well so you don’t kill the grass on the next job. Mark buckets after you use them to ensure you know what’s in them — paint a sample on the lid.”

Added Andy, “Turn the gas switch off during transport, and use premium gas with 2-cycle engines. If the pump won’t prime, tap the bottom of the pump to loosen the marble; mix the paint really well; and if you have chunks in paint, strain them. Clean your filters after use, and try to keep units protected out of direct sun because that’s tough on the seals and gaskets.”

THE JOY OF PAINTING

According to Andy, the best part of painting is doing so with his team and accomplishing big projects at unfamiliar sites in a short amount of time. He also enjoys seeing what other sports field managers throughout the country are doing, thus growing those relationships and challenging each other with new ideas.

Mike enjoys creating or free-handing artwork, knowing that there are not many people who would even attempt it. **SFM**

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

ANSWER

From page 17



This line of turf on this softball skinned area is not really a problem; it is a solution to a problem. As you can see by the painted edge, this field had been measured and marked for lip restoration. As with many municipal fields throughout the country, lack of labor only allows approximately two main edge renovations a year — one at the end of the high school season and again in September. For the back arc, it is 95 feet measured from the middle front of the pitching rubber; they then paint a line at the desired measurement. The base paths are two feet inside the foul line and five feet outside the foul line measured from the apex of home plate. They do this for ease of dragging purposes, as their drag is six feet wide and they create a seven-foot base path, which helps with the reduction of creating lips on their field. First, they use an old-fashioned 1985 vertical edger. This cuts the grass on the painted line, and then they use flat-face shovels to stick in the cut line and kick the material out. After they kick the material (grass, calcined clay, ball mix) out of the edge, they rake the entire area into a straight line away from the edge and come through with a tractor bucket to pick it all up. From there, they back fill the edge with new ball mix, rake, tamp and roll. The field manager commented that if they had more time in their day and more labor, they would be able to keep up with this better and might be able to get away with a full edge once per year, instead of twice.

Photo submitted by Mike P. DiDonato, CSFM, grounds coordinator at RSU 14 Windham / Raymond Schools in Windham, Maine.

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 Sports-Field Management magazine and the Sports Field Management Association.

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MANAGEMENT

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Park and Recreation Month 2025: Build Together, Play Together

THERE'S SOMETHING SPECIAL ABOUT summer in a local park. The sounds of a ballfield coming to life in the morning. The smell of freshly cut grass. The sights of community members coming together in a space you helped shape. It's the kind of thing most people don't think twice about — but we know how much goes into this sometimes thankless work.

By Cort Jones

Every July, Park and Recreation Month (<https://www.nrpa.org/events/july/>) gives us a chance to slow down and recognize the people who make these everyday moments possible. An initiative of the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA), this year's theme is, "Build Together, Play Together," and we are thrilled to celebrate.

Because parks and sports fields don't just appear — they're built by people who care deeply about community; people who show up every day to mow, rake, paint, patch, repair, reline, replant — and repeat. People like you.

If you manage sports fields, maintain parkland, facilitate programs or keep facilities running, this month is about you just as much as it is about the spaces themselves. Your work is the foundation; without it, there's no game, no practice, no gathering — just empty space.

But what's remarkable is how often that work goes unseen. And that's part of why Park and Recreation Month exists — to shine a light on the people behind the scenes, the folks doing the work that makes everything else possible.

That freshly groomed infield? You. That field striped just in time for a championship match? You. That complex built last fall that is now a centerpiece of the community? You helped make that happen, too.

WHAT "BUILD TOGETHER, PLAY TOGETHER" REALLY MEANS

"Build Together, Play Together" isn't just about playgrounds, sports fields and recreation centers; it's about connection, collaboration and community.

Brighton Recreation Center,
Brighton, Colorado. Photo
provided by NRPA.



We build things with and for each other. When that's done right, people come back to play. That's when the real magic happens — neighbors become teammates, strangers become friends, and kids grow up remembering the places they felt free to be themselves.

The word "together" is the key component. The best parks, programs and public spaces don't succeed in isolation. They thrive when maintenance staff, recreation leaders, planners,

volunteers and community members work side by side. We don't always get it right, but it's always meaningful, and we learn new ways to collaborate each time.

GETTING INVOLVED THIS JULY

So how do you make the most of Park and Recreation Month? Start small. This isn't about adding more to your workload; it's about showing the value of what you already do, and helping others see it, too.

Here are a few simple, impactful ways to get involved:

- **Share your story.** Take a few minutes to post a photo on social media of your team or a recent project. Write a short caption explaining the work behind it. People love seeing the process, not just the final product.

- **Use the hashtag.** Tag your social media posts with *#BuildTogetherPlayTogether* and *#ParkAndRecMonth*. It connects your work to a national movement, and NRPA might even share your story with a wider audience (be sure to tag us).

- **Highlight your team.** Whether it's a staff shoutout on your website or a printed thank you at the rec center or ballfield, give credit where it's due. Recognition doesn't have to be elaborate. Sincerity wins the game here.

- **Host something simple.** If time allows, invite the community in. A casual open house; a drop-in sports night; a walk-and-talk with staff — anything that shows how much thought and effort goes into these spaces.

- **Download the Park and Recreation Month promotional toolkit** at <https://www.nrpa.org/events/july/toolkit/>.

The word “together” is the key component. The best parks, programs and public spaces don't succeed in isolation. They thrive when maintenance staff, recreation leaders, planners, volunteers and community members work side by side.

NRPA'S PARK AND
RECREATION MONTH



THESE SPACES MATTER — AND SO DO YOU

One of the best parts of my job at NRPA is hearing from the people who do this work. Groundskeepers who stayed up all night ahead of a weather-threatened tournament. Teams who turned a forgotten field into a youth sports hub. Crews who kept parks clean, open and welcoming during challenging times. The common threads in every story? Service. Community. Pride.

And those common threads are contagious. When people see the care you put in, they start to care, too. When you invest in a space, the community invests in it right back. It's not instant, it's a relationship that builds over time. But July is a good time to remind people just how much of yourself you put into these places.

A MONTH TO REFLECT AND RECHARGE

Park and Recreation Month isn't just about celebration. It's a moment to step back, look around, and relish what you've helped build. Not just the physical infrastructure, but the emotional landscape, too. The memories. The gatherings. The sense of belonging.

It's easy to forget all of that in the middle of the season. You're busy. The days are long. But your work leaves a mark and deserves to be celebrated.

Thank you for building, maintaining, improving, restoring and, above all, caring. For showing up, over and over again, to make sure our communities have a place to play.

Let's keep building and playing together. **SFM**

Cort Jones is the director of content marketing at the National Recreation and Park Association. For more information about Park and Recreation Month, visit <https://www.nrpa.org/events/july/>.

Project Evergreen helps revitalize Detroit area park

Milan Park, a vital green space in northwest Detroit's Evergreen Outer Drive neighborhood, received a transformative makeover, and Project EverGreen was part of the community-led effort to bring it back to life.

Located near Ralph W. Emerson Elementary-Middle School, Milan Park has long served as a gathering place for neighborhood families. In 2023, Detroit's Parks and Recreation Division invited local residents, Emerson families and teachers to help reimagine the park's future. Their voices shaped a revitalized vision that resulted in a vibrant, inclusive space reflecting the heart and needs of the community.

"Transformations like these aren't achieved by one person or group alone, it takes a community effort," said Cindy Code, executive director of Project EverGreen. "Well-maintained parks are more than just green spaces, they're hubs of connection, activity and health. We're proud to help bring that energy back to Milan Park."

This marks Project EverGreen's fifth GreenCare for Communities project in Detroit since 2017.

Construction began in early 2024, and the enhancements include a second playground, a renovated natural grass soccer field, new combination soccer/football goals, improved walkways, a new softball field, benches, picnic tables, BBQ grills, fitness equipment, and a new park entrance off Ever-



green Road. These upgrades make Milan Park a safe, accessible and engaging destination for residents of all ages.

To support this transformation, the City of Detroit invested \$450,000 and partnered with Project EverGreen, the Gilbert Family Foundation and the Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan, which contributed an additional \$300,000. Project EverGreen's construction partner, Premier Group Associates, brought its experience and commitment to revitalizing urban parks, and worked tirelessly to deliver a project that promotes safety, health and environmental sustainability.

In addition, Project EverGreen teamed up with The Davy Tree Expert Company to prune existing mature trees, improving both their health and aesthetic value. In partnership with Re-Tree, 25 trees were harvested and re-homed from various locations across greater Detroit, and an additional 35 trees were planted by The Greening of Detroit.

These upgrades don't just improve the park's appearance they elevate Milan Park into a true community asset. Urban green spaces like Milan serve as the lungs of a city filtering pollutants, enhancing air quality, and promoting public well-being. The park's trees and turf alone sequester more than 351,000 pounds of carbon annually and generate over 530,000 cubic yards of clean air, the environmental equivalent of removing 45 cars from the road each year.



Adding a creative touch, Detroit City Walls and SpaceLab Detroit commissioned three sidewalk murals designed by local artist Miranda Kyle, selected through the City Walls Blight Abatement Artist Residency Program. Featuring lemon trees, a symbol chosen by the community, the murals are expected to be completed by the end of June.

"The City of Detroit's investment in this beautiful park highlights our commitment to providing residents with safe, modern outdoor spaces," said Crystal Perkins, director of the General Services Department. "We hope families in the neighborhood, as well as the Emerson School community, enjoy everything Milan Park now has to offer."

NRPA recognizes excellence in parks and recreation

The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) announced the recipients of this year's NRPA Innovation Awards, Spotlight Awards, and Scholarships and Fellowships. The awards will be presented during the 2025 NRPA Annual Conference in September when NRPA will announce the winner of its Best in Innovation Award, which recognizes the best of the best in park and recreation innovation.



NRPA Innovation Awards recognize park and recreation agencies nationwide that have improved and strengthened their communities through innovative practices in park design, health and well-being, environmental resilience and equity. The recipients of this year's awards are as follows:

- Innovation in Health and Well-being Award: Care Camp, Los Angeles County Parks and Recreation, Alhambra, California
- Innovation in Equity Award: Athene North Shore Recreation Area, Polk County Conservation, Granger, Iowa
- Innovation in Environmental Resilience Award: Blackland Prairie Restoration & Education, Play Frisco, Frisco, Texas
- Innovation in Park Design Award: Taylor Farm Park, Henrico County Recreation & Parks, Henrico, Virginia

NRPA Spotlight Awards are presented to individuals to honor their efforts in the field of parks and recreation. The following individuals are recognized with NRPA Spotlight Awards:

■ National Distinguished Professional Award: Timothy Herd, CPRE, chief executive officer, Pennsylvania Recreation and Park Society, State College, Pennsylvania

■ Dirk Richwine Professional Mentoring Award: Karen O'Donnell, CPRE, director of parks & recreation, City of Wheat Ridge, Colorado

■ Robert W. Crawford Young Professional Award: Gabrielle Vera, CPRP, director of parks & recreation, Lake Havasu City, Arizona

■ Robert M. Artz Advocate Award: Adrian Dell Roberts, community advocate, Adrian Dell and Carmen Roberts Foundation, Riverside, California

NRPA Scholarships and Fellowships provide recipients with the opportunity to attend and explore the operation of the field at the NRPA Annual Conference. Congratulations to the awardees in the following categories:

Young Professional Fellowships:

- Samantha Grainger, CPRP, Indian Trail (North Carolina) Parks and Recreation
- Megan Keul, CPRP, Kannapolis (North Carolina) Parks & Recreation
- Katie MacCammon, CPRP, Fairfax City (Virginia) Parks and Recreation
- Sydney Paredes, CPRP, Schertz (Texas) Parks & Recreation

Diversity Scholarships:

- Jose Rodriguez, AFO, CPSI, Mount Vernon (Washington) Parks & Recreation
- Tina Royer, CPRP, Mesa (Arizona) Parks, Recreation and Community Facilities

Student Scholarships:

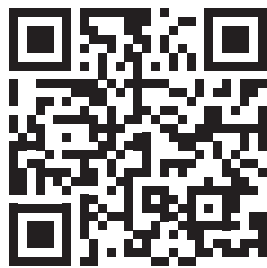
- Olalekan Tunde-Ajayi, Clemson University (South Carolina)
- Jacob Vasquez, Texas A&M University (Texas)

"We're so excited to celebrate our incredible awardees who are shaping the future of parks and recreation with passion and purpose," said Kristine Stratton, NRPA president and CEO. "Their innovative, community-driven efforts embody the values we champion at NRPA. We're proud to celebrate these impactful leaders and look forward to recognizing them in Orlando." **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.



@bj_thomas20



@Tahoma31Bermuda

@TampChamp



@GeorgiaSFMA



@FieldExperts

We're excited to welcome Paula Sliefert as the new CEO of SFMA!



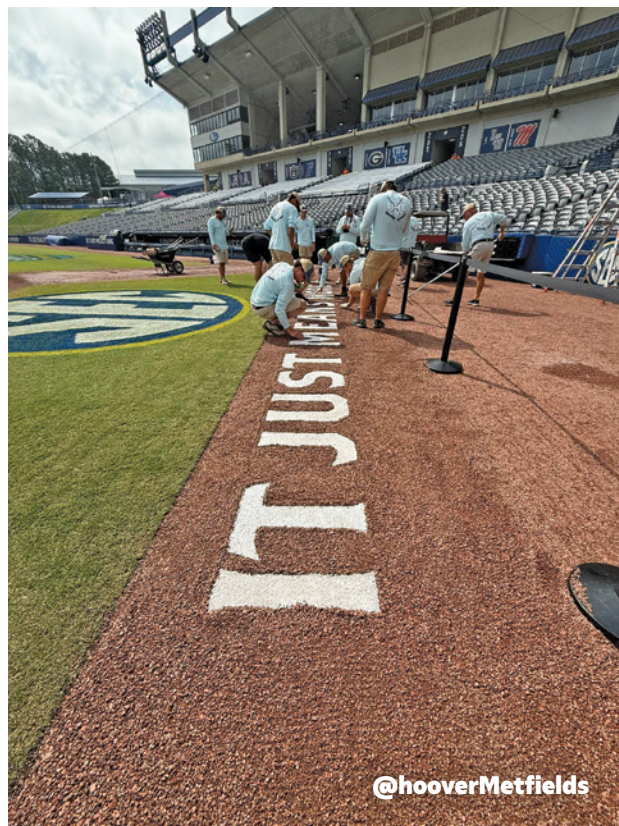
@reedag04

Welp.... after 20 years the pitch is set and ready for my last @FCDallas match. Not enough space to describe all the emotions and memories of this place. Never thought this day would come but God had other plans. Trading futbol for football. #DTID #HowBoutThemCowboys





@ChrisMay117



@hooverMetfields



@NESFMA

Great @NESFMA Social night @WernerPark Thank you to Joe and his staff for showing us around. Shoutout to @jared_hertzel and @SiteoneNE for providing the hospitality for the event. @FieldExperts



@DIRTGottaLoveIt

Doctor. Of. DIRT. #mrmarbet #dirtgottaloveit #safproducts @Bill_DIRT

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@CREEDY95



@SteelCity_BB

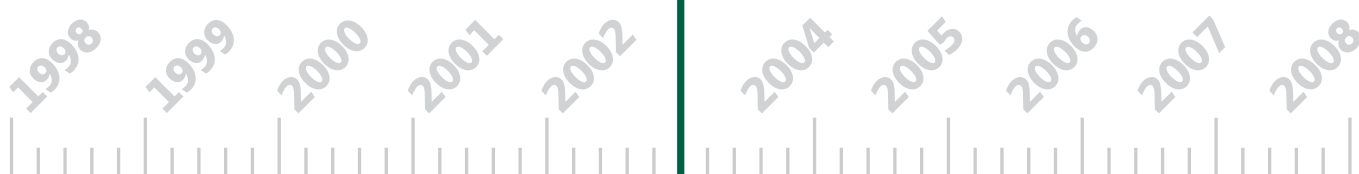
AMERICA'S OLDEST PARK

RICKWOOD FIELD

BHAM, AL

Thank you to @RickwoodField for allowing us the opportunity to showcase this beautiful venue!

2003



THIS RETROSPECTIVE DELVES INTO the historic issues of *SportsTurf* magazine, predecessor to *SportsField Management* magazine. We journey back to 2003 for this edition of Accessing the Archives.



2003 kicked off with a cover story about Edison Field, home of the World Series Champion Anaheim Angels, in the January issue.

“One thing we did do that was a little different to me was walk behind mowers and brooms to cut the ‘A’ in center field,” said Barney Lopas, head groundskeeper. “That was really nice.”

“We aerate every six weeks,” added Lopas. “The soil in this area is easily compacted, which creates real problems with root growth and thatch buildup. Aerating opens up the turf so it can breathe and lets nutrients and water reach the root zone. We do a light topdressing with USGA sand after each aeration.”

The February 2003 issue introduced Bob Campbell, CSFM, director of grounds and maintenance for the University of Tennessee, as president of the association for 2003. Campbell had previously served one year as president-elect, two one-year terms as treasurer and a two-year term representing sports turf managers of college and university facilities.



“I strongly feel it’s important not only to give back to new members and young people starting off in this industry, but also to support the positive image of the sports turf manager as a professional in an important and worthwhile profession,” said Campbell.

“I believe our potential for growth as an association is unlimited,” he added. “There are many in our profession now that are not members, and more positions are being created each year. I want to see SFMA continue to gain members because individuals see the value in what we’re doing.”

Sluggar Field, home of the Louisville Bats, was the focus of the March 2003 issue as STMA Professional Baseball Field of the Year Award. The article outlined how Tom Nielsen, head sports turf manager, and his crew kept a bluegrass field thriving in the middle of the transition zone despite climate extremes and an average of more than 100 on-field events each year.



The March 2003 issue also highlighted Super Bowl XXXVII. “Getting ready for a Super Bowl is a complex process,” said Ed Mangan, NFL grounds manager for the Super Bowl. “The turf has to respond to the players. Keep them safe. Help their game. It also has to survive pre-game festivities and half-time performances as challenging as running a herd of elephants through the field.”

In April 2003, *SportsTurf* magazine highlighted the STMA College Baseball FOY, Raymond H. “Hap” Spuhler Field, as

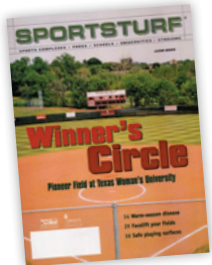


well as tips for quick green-up, how to build a major league mound, the inaugural Roger Bossard professional sports field institute, and much more. During the 3-day institute, attendees got to walk through the steps needed to renovate a professional field, work through irrigation problems, soil conditioning and mowing — with training headed by legendary groundskeeper Roger Bossard.

The conversion of the Seattle Seahawks stadium from artificial turf to natural grass was the highlight of the May 2003 issue of *SportsTurf*. Less than two weeks before a friendly between the U.S. Men's soccer team and Venezuela, Seahawks Director of Fields, Jay Warnick, and crew installed 87,000 square feet of bermudagrass sod over the stadium's FieldTurf.



The spotlight for June 2003 was on the new baseball training hub in Surprise, Arizona. "When the City of Surprise, Arizona, announced plans to build one of the most ambitious pro training sites to date, it came as, well, a surprise," the article stated. "After all, this farming community located 25 miles on the outskirts of Phoenix has a modest population of about 50,000. Astonishment soon turned to shock, however, when the city managed to woo not one but two major league teams, the Texas Rangers and the Kansas City Royals, to hold spring training there."



The July issue focused on the High School/Parks Softball Field of the Year: C. Moore Field of Putnam City West HS, and also featured an article on soccer field maintenance, as well as a focus on field aeration.



August 2003 *SportsTurf* detailed the turf warming system at Lane Stadium's Worsham Field, home to Virginia Tech football. "The system heats and aerates the bermudagrass field, which is a warm-season grass in Blacksburg's cool-season climate," the article stated. "Blowers force air (either heated or ambient) through the drainage system beneath the field, and then up through the turf. The system was designed to keep the bermudagrass active



through mid-November, to prevent winterkill during cold winter months, and to provide an early green-up in the spring."

Football field repair took center stage in the September issue with tips from Dr. Tony Koski, extension turfgrass specialist, at Colorado State University.

"My first suggestion is to overseed with rye," said Koski. "It's simple and it's cheap." According to Koski, field managers should put down rye any time the field is being aerated before games and after games. "The players' cleats are great at seeding for you" All that running up and down the field simply assures good seed-to-soil contact and puts the rye seed right where you need it to be.



In October 2003, Dr. Mike Goatley and Dr. Barry Stewart shared research findings regarding the application of turf blankets on a temporary basis to maintain bermudagrass color through the end of the football season.



"Keeping the covers on the plots during the winter months resulted in spring green-up 4-6 weeks earlier than uncovered turf the following spring," the article stated. "The only negative cover-

ing responses that we observed were an increase in winter annual weed pressure and fire ant activity, both primarily because of the soil warming. There was no evidence of increased disease pressure, though we anticipate this could be a problem."

The November 2003 issue of *SportsTurf* previewed the 15th annual STMA Conference & Exhibition at the Town and Country Resort in San Diego; while the December issue wrapped up the year with a focus on field drainage, as well as multiple articles on the topic of field construction. **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>.



Wiedenmann introduces Terra Core aerifiers

Wiedenmann North America introduced Terra Core, a line of highly efficient shallow aerifiers. Available in two sizes, the machines are made in the USA.

The Terra Core 6 is intended for smaller landscape spaces including lawns, greens, tees and sports fields. Its compact design (58-inches wide) easily follows greens undulations. It features six aerification arms and heads, and may be deployed using a small tractor.

The Terra Core 8 is intended for large grass event lawns, fairways, tees and sports fields. Its wider working width (78 inches) covers larger areas in a relatively shorter period of time. It features eight aerification arms and heads.

Benefits and features:

- Shallow aerifier, with depths down to 4-inches
- Adjustable in 1/64-inch increments to fit ground conditions
- Clean, round holes fill easier than oblong holes created by some machines

- Fast and competitively priced

- Works with multiple sizes of coring tines and solid tines

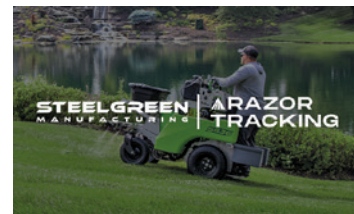
Will Wolverton, president of Wiedenmann North America, LLC, said the straight hole pattern makes it easier to fill holes with sand. "This is an improvement over oblong holes that can collapse," he said. "Terra Core's straight hole pattern prevents the sand from falling into the holes. Terra Core holes are deployed in a straight pattern and are round in shape, which allows the sand to drop into the hole for a more effective, cleaner aerification."

Terra Core 6 and 8 can be used with a turf retainer. "Some turfgrasses may not be rooted very well or deeply, which may cause the turf to be uprooted if the machines are not used with a turf retainer," said Wolverton.

Steel Green adds Razor Tracking on its turf and lawn equipment

Steel Green Manufacturing added Razor Tracking GPS Fleet Coordination to all its new 2025 equipment direct from the factory.

With the Razor Tracking software platform, Steel Green's customers can now see where their equipment is performing on the job site, have access to when spray applications were completed, keep organized maintenance records, and more.



Every new machine comes with a free year of Razor Tracking service, so customers can experience the benefits firsthand and can continue to renew each year they own the machine, if they wish. Customers with older equipment will also have the option to purchase Razor Tracking for their machine.

Steel Green Manufacturing designs and produces a lineup of high-capacity zero-turn spreader/sprayers.

Razor Tracking streamlines fleet management through dispatching, driver location insights, details on equipment performance, and video telematics for all industries. The company's real-time vehicle tracking ensures crew members are on the correct job site and operating the equipment, to increase transparency. Managers can also gain peace of mind with an increased focus on safety through alerts for theft protection and weather map overlays.

"By integrating Razor Tracking into our 2025 spreader/sprayer lineup, we're giving turf professionals real-time visibility of their fleet, allowing them to optimize routes, monitor equipment performance, and improve overall productivity," said Matt Smith, vice president of sales at Steel Green Manufacturing.

New blowers from Ryobi

Ryobi added the new 40V HP brushless 800 cfm blower to its line of 40V HP brushless products, saying this blower delivers more power than a 31cc gas blower. With two modes, users can select between maximizing power or maximizing runtime and achieve more than 85 minutes of runtime with the 40V 8Ah battery included in the kit.



Milwaukee Tool introduces new MX Fuel backpack blower

Milwaukee Tool introduced the new MX Fuel backpack blower, which delivers higher blowing force than up to 63cc gas blowers and enhanced control while eliminating the noise levels, emissions and maintenance associated with gas-powered solutions. This backpack blower offers powerful performance and the convenience of battery power.

The MX Fuel backpack blower utilizes MX Fuel technology to deliver 800 cfm, 190 mph and 30 Newtons of blowing force, providing the ability to take on demanding cleanup applications. Operating at a low noise level of 64 dB(A), this blower meets emerging local noise ordinance requirements.

Equipped with an on-tool mode select, the MX Fuel backpack blower allows users to select from three distinct mode settings, optimizing performance and runtime based on their application needs. These performance modes can be selected by the operator on the tool or managed and locked remotely through the One-Key app from a paired device. In addition to performance management, One-Key compatibility enables usage and location tracking, inventory visibility, and enhanced security features.

Engineered for maximum output, the MX Fuel backpack blower delivers consistent performance across all performance modes. Low mode extends runtime to 45 minutes at 600 cfm, 145 mph and 17 Newtons — ensuring optimal performance.

The MX Fuel backpack blower features a fully adjustable harness, telescoping nozzle, and adjustable handle position allowing the user to optimize the fit to their unique needs and enhance control. As part of the growing MX Fuel equipment system, the MX Fuel backpack blower joins a lineup of more than 25 solutions, all compatible with the same MX Fuel batteries. **SFM**

Part of its Whisper Series, this blower is engineered with noise dampening foam and a uniquely positioned fan to be 82% quieter than gas at just 58.8 dB, allowing users to complete their work without disturbing their neighbors. A variable-speed trigger gives users ultimate control in delicate applications, while cruise control allows users to lock in their desired speed. This blower is compatible with the Ryobi Link wall storage system for convenient storage and access.

This tool is backed by a 5-year manufacturer's warranty and the battery is backed by a 3-year manufacturer's warranty.

Ryobi also introduced a new 40V HP brushless 850 cfm backpack blower. With two modes, choose between maximizing power or maximizing runtime and achieve more than 2 hours of runtime when using the two 40V 8Ah batteries included in the kit.

Also part of the Whisper Series, this blower is engineered to be 83% quieter than gas at just 59.7 dB, so users can work without disturbing others. For comfort, this blower is 40% lighter weight than the previous model and is designed with a contoured back/shoulder harness and adjustable straps. It's equipped with an LCD screen that displays mode & battery life. A variable speed trigger gives you ultimate control in delicate applications, while the cruise control allows the desired speed to be locked in.

This tool is backed by a 5-year manufacturer's warranty and the battery is backed by a 3-year manufacturer's warranty. Recharge each of the included 40V 8Ah batteries in less than 80 minutes with included 40V rapid charger





Seed to STEM 2025 Takes Chicago

Seed Your Future recently hosted the Seed to STEM 2025 Cohort in Chicago for a week of professional development workshops, industry immersion experiences, and networking opportunities.

DAY 1: IMPACT FIELD

The 2025 Seed to STEM program launched at Impact Field, home of the Chicago Dogs, where educators got a behind-the-scenes look at professional turf management — from soil science and irrigation systems to turf repair techniques. Highlights included personal stories from Ball Horticultural Company interns whose careers began through Seed Your Future, and insights from Broch Martindale of Corteva Agriscience, who helped connect classroom learning to careers in horticulture. The day set the stage for a week of hands-on experiences linking plant science to real-world opportunities.

DAY 2: BALL HORTICULTURAL COMPANY

On Day 2 of Seed to STEM, educators spent the day at Ball Horticultural Company, touring departments such as plant breeding, logistics and seed production while learning firsthand how innovation and collaboration bring plants to market. They explored topics from genetics and pest management to AI and automation, and were inspired by the campus design and its role in community engagement. A highlight was hearing directly from Anna and Sannanah Ball, whose leadership and passion for the industry left a lasting impression.

DAY 3: TOURS AND GALA

On Day 3 of Seed to STEM, educators toured Midwest Groundcovers and Midwest Trading, many experiencing a commercial nursery and greenhouse for the first time. They explored large-scale plant production from propagation to distribution, gaining insights into irrigation design, soil composition, and how STEM disciplines drive horticultural success.

On the afternoon of Day 3, Seed to STEM participants explored the floral supply chain at Kennicott Brothers, a 144-year-old cut flower wholesaler. Teachers toured climate-controlled coolers, learned about international flower logistics, and gained a deeper appreciation for the science and strategy behind floriculture. Highlights included a surprise visit from NBA star Derrick Rose and a hands-on floral design session.

The third day of Seed to STEM wrapped with a vibrant evening gala at the Penthouse at Hyde Park, celebrating the program's second year and the growing reach of Seed Your Future.

DAY 4: ZEN GARDENS AND GREEN INDUSTRY EXPERTS LUNCH

The final day of the 2025 Seed to STEM program centered on the healing power of plants, beginning with a hands-on horticultural therapy session led by Kelly Warnick, where teachers created their own Zen Gardens to support student wellness. The day continued with “Lunch & Learn” sessions, offering informal conversations and presentations from industry professionals that highlighted diverse horticulture careers and classroom connections.

The program concluded with teachers revisiting and refining their career-focused lesson plans, equipped with fresh inspiration and resources from the week.

Registration open for SALTEX 2025

Registration is now open for SALTEX 2025, the flagship event for the European grounds management industry, returning to the NEC Birmingham on November 12-13, 2025.

This year's theme, ‘Power Up Your Performance,’ captures SALTEX's ambition to energize the sector from smart technology and new skills to expert advice and opportunities to grow.

Organized by the Grounds Management Association (GMA), SALTEX continues to serve the sector with great purpose, as it has done since 1938. It's the most influential event of its kind in Europe, bringing together thousands of professionals and volunteers from across the sector.

This year's show promises hundreds of leading brands, industry-first product launches and cutting-edge technology on display. Eighty percent of visitors who attend SALTEX are senior decision-makers.



Whether you work in sport, education, local authorities or commercial spaces, SALTEX offers fresh ideas, the latest solutions and real-world expert advice.

"We're introducing fresh features and new thinking to create even more value for visitors and exhibitors," said Sarah Hunter, head of events at GMA. "It's shaped by what the industry's told us it needs, and we can't wait to welcome everyone back to the NEC."

"SALTEX is built around the needs of the industry, and this year's show reflects exactly that," said Geoff Webb, CEO of GMA. "From grassroots to elite level, every detail of the 2025 show has been shaped by the real-world needs of groundspeople today."

Registration is free and now open at www.saltex.org.uk.

Highlights from the 36th Annual TOCA Meeting

The 36th Annual Turf and Ornamental Communicators Association (TOCA) Meeting was held April 29-May 1, 2025, in Charleston, South Carolina. The event brought together green industry professionals from throughout the country for three days of education, networking and professional development.

The conference featured a dynamic lineup of sessions focused on communication strategy, industry insight and skill development. Brandon Bell, M.Ed., North America Diversity and Inclusion Lead at Syngenta, opened with a session on the value of inclusive communication in today's workplace. Jon Greenberg, faculty member at the Poynter Institute and founder of Beat Academy, followed with two practical writing workshops — one on simplifying complex topics and another on tools for stronger storytelling.

Communication coach and professor John Patrick led a session on navigating high-stakes conversations, highlighting how habits can either strengthen or undermine a communicator's message.

Attendees explored Middleton Place on Wednesday afternoon. Located along the Ashley River, Middleton is a National Historic Landmark and home to America's oldest landscaped gardens. Sidney Frazier, vice president of horticulture, shared his experience maintaining the 18th-century property for more than 50 years, beginning as a teenager. The group learned about plant care practices, preservation efforts and the historical significance of the site, once home to a signer of the Declaration of Independence.

On Thursday, the Behind the Sod panel featured Hank Kerfoot, president and founder of Modern Turf; Aaron Tipton, grounds supervisor at the College of Charleston; and K.C. Bell, senior director of athletic grounds at Clemson University. The panel offered insight into field-level turfgrass decisions, covering management practices, college and customer expectations and what it takes to work with grass every day.

To close the education program, Valerie Smith and Scott Covelli led an interactive session on how communicators use artificial intelligence (AI) to support writing, editing and creative development. Attendees rotated between tables in small groups, each tackling a different AI-focused prompt before sharing their takeaways with the larger group.

The conference wrapped with the TOCA Awards Banquet on Thursday evening, which included dinner, the Hall of Fame induction and the annual Communications Contest Awards program.

The 37th Annual TOCA Meeting will be held April 28–30, 2026, at the Hyatt Regency Cleveland at the Arcade in Cleveland, Ohio.

— This article was written by Sod Solutions Media and Content Manager, Cecilia Johnson. **SFM**



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Where Do We Go From Here?

Q: We are facing an urgent issue with our football field. Over the last few years, our field has gradually declined in quality, but this year it has reached a critical state. After we sprayed out the winter ryegrass, there has been very little bermudagrass regrowth. The field looks extremely poor, and we are unsure how to proceed. We have received conflicting advice and we are concerned about making the wrong decision. We have 75 days before our first scheduled game (mid-August).

A: Upon visiting the high school field, I found the conditions consistent with the description provided via email. Bermudagrass coverage was minimal, with only a few semi-healthy patches visible. The extra water and fertilizer they were adding were mostly encouraging algae rather than turfgrass recovery. Typically, bermudagrass fields that were previously overseeded should exhibit at least 80% coverage by this time of year. The few existing patches were attributed to sod inlays used to repair damaged areas a couple of years ago.

It is well documented that perennial ryegrass overseeding can delay bermudagrass green-up. A common strategy to mitigate this is to chemically remove the ryegrass as the bermudagrass begins to emerge from dormancy. This reduces competition, and typically accelerates bermudagrass recovery. In this case, the ryegrass had been appropriately removed; however, bermudagrass growth remained negligible, indicating a deeper underlying issue.

I noted the field's unusually soft surface and extracted soil samples for closer examination. The field's soil profile had an excessively thick organic thatch layer. While an acceptable thatch layer is generally no more than half an inch, most sampled areas exhibited layers between one and three inches. Living rhizomes and healthy white roots were difficult to locate.

Excessive thatch significantly increases the risk of winterkill and spring dead spot disease in bermudagrass. It

also leads to shallow rooting, making the turfgrass more vulnerable to environmental stress. Additionally, a thick thatch layer creates a spongy surface that retains excess moisture — encouraging algae and disease. When this layer dries, it can become hydrophobic, impeding water infiltration and further stressing the turfgrass.

According to the coaches and the school administrator, the field has deteriorated gradually over several years. The rapid accumulation of thatch is typically the result of management practices that both encourage its formation and fail to control its buildup. Effective thatch management usually involves a combination of vertical mowing, aerification and sand topdressing. Following the retirement of the previous field manager, the school began contracting with a local landscape company for basic maintenance. It appears that the contracted scope of work did not include any thatch management practices.

Given the extent of turf loss and thatch accumulation, a full field renovation is likely necessary to restore optimal playing conditions. While fraise mowing can be used to remove moderate thatch levels, the depth of removal required in this case will likely eliminate viable rhizomes. As a result, replanting the field with sod or sprigs will be necessary. Sprigging is the most cost-effective option, but it will need to be initiated quickly to ensure the field is ready for the first game. **SFM**



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Questions?

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