

SportsField

MANAGEMENT

February 2026

Vol. 42 No. 2

The Official Publication of the Sports Field Management Association

An Emphasis on *Excellence*

New SFMA President Alpha Jones, CSFM, looks to lead by example to help SFMA reach new levels of success



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Editor's Note



John Kmitta

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Although January marks the new calendar year, for me the February issue of *SportsField Management* always feels like the true start of the year to come.

The annual SFMA Conference and Exhibition in January is both a culmination of the past year and a turning of the page to the future with the introduction of the new board and executive leadership of the association. That includes the passing of the gavel to the new SFMA President.

With that leadership transition comes my annual opportunity to interview the incoming president for this issue. This month, I'm privileged to introduce SFMA President Alpha Jones, CSFM.

Even if you are not a member of SFMA, you should be familiar with Alpha from his "More than Grass" column in this magazine. From the beginning of that effort, Alpha set out to share his experience and his own brand of leadership advice with sports field managers of all levels. He has helped our audience with tips on everything from communication to professionalism to budgeting to his latest series on the Eight Stalons of Leadership.

Those editorial contributions to the magazine have allowed me to meet with Alpha on a regular basis

throughout the past couple of years. He is always generous with his time, passionate about the industry, and driven in his approach to everything he does.

I believe that the sign of a great interaction with anyone is leaving that interaction better than I was when it began. I feel that is true of my conversations with Alpha; and I am sure that is how Alpha will approach the coming year as president of SFMA and his interactions with members and nonmembers alike.

Alpha shared the story of his career journey with SFMA Conference attendees a few years ago, and followed that up with an article of the same nature in the magazine. But even if you are familiar with his unconventional path to the sports field management profession, you will no doubt learn something new by reading the cover story in this issue.

In addition to highlighting Alpha's career journey, the cover profile also shares his vision for SFMA and his approach to leading the association. I am confident that Alpha will be a strong advocate for industry outreach, growing visibility of the profession, enhancing professionalism and building partnerships.

I am excited to share his story with you, and I am proud to introduce you to new SFMA President Alpha Jones, CSFM. **SFM**

SportsField MANAGEMENT

EPG Brand Acceleration

7760 France Ave. South, Suite 810, Bloomington, MN 55435

Official Publication of the Sports Field Management Association

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Publisher's Notice: We Assume No Responsibility For The Validity Of Claims In Connection With Items Appearing In SportsField Management.

SportsField Management (ISSN PENDING) (USPS 000-292) (Reg. U.S. Pat. & T.M. Off.) is published monthly by EPG Brand Acceleration at PO Box 96, Port Jervis, NY 12771.

Postmaster: Send address changes to SportsField Management, PO Box 96, Port Jervis, NY 12771-0096. For subscription information and requests, call Subscription Services at (763) 383-4492. Subscription rates: 1 year, \$52 US & Poss.; All subscriptions are payable in advance in US funds.

Send payments to SportsField Management, PO Box 96, Port Jervis, NY 12771-0096. Phone: (763) 383-4492. Fax: (763) 383-4499. Single copies or back issues, \$12 each US. Periodicals postage paid at Port Jervis, NY and additional mailing offices. ©2026 SportsField Management. Material may not be reproduced or photocopied in any form without the written permission of the publisher.



President's Message



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Alpha Jones, CSFM

SFMA President

ajonessfma@gmail.com

Stepping into the role of President of the Sports Field Management Association (SFMA) is both an honor and a responsibility. Thank you for the trust you've placed in me. I'm excited about the conversations ahead, the progress we will make, and the opportunities we will create for the next generation of sports field managers.

At this year's conference, I introduced a theme that reflects where we are as an association, and where we are headed: **EVOLVE**. It's more than a message; it's a framework for how we strengthen our organization, support our members, and prepare for the future of our profession.

E — Evaluate committees and programs: Growth begins with clarity. This year, we are restructuring our committees and the timing of the sign-up process. We will continue the evaluation process of other programs to understand what's working well, where we can improve, and how we can better align our efforts as we begin the strategic planning process this spring.

V — Validate member needs: Our members are the foundation of the association. Your challenges, goals and realities will guide our decisions. We will continue asking

for — and listening intentionally to — your feedback, ensuring that our education and programming reflect what are realistic changes to help you succeed.

O — Optimize member feedback: Feedback is one of our greatest tools for improvement. We will continue to ask for and act upon member input to help shape the programs, services and initiatives we deliver.

L — Leverage association strengths: SFMA is built on a powerful network of expertise, passion and collaboration. This year we will lean into these to drive methodical and meaningful progress to help elevate our profession.

V — Value creation for members and suppliers: Our goal is to create tangible value for everyone connected to SFMA.

E — Execute with accountability: A strong plan matters; but follow-through defines us. We will make and execute plans and communicate the outcomes.

I'm energized by the momentum we're carrying into this year. Our chapters are strong, our membership is engaged, and together we are laying the foundation for greater recognition and appreciation of the essential work sports field managers do every day. This is a moment to push forward with clarity, purpose and unity, elevating our profession step by step and shaping the future we know it deserves. **SFM** — Alpha Jones, CSFM

SFMA Post-conference Virtual Education

SFMA will offer post-conference virtual education on Tuesdays in February and early March 2026. The lineup is as follows:

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 10

2 – 3 p.m. | Importance of the Right Foundation: Principles of Athletic Field Rootzone Design and Maintenance — Speaker: Joshua Marden, CSFM.

3:15 – 4:15 p.m. | Water Quality and Lack Thereof — Speaker: Marco Schiavon, Ph.D.

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 17

2 – 3 p.m. | What is Nanotechnology and How Can it Help My Sports Fields? — Speaker: Geoff Rinehart, MS.

3:15 – 4:15 p.m. | Soil Health of Sports Fields: Are Pesticides and Fertilizers Killing our Soils? — Speaker: Bryan Hopkins, Ph.D.

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 24

2 – 3 p.m. | Cool-Season Turfgrasses for Reduced-Input Grounds and Sports Fields — Speaker: Brad Park.

3:15 – 4:15 p.m. | Relationship Goals: How to Improve the Success of Your Sports Field by Communication — Speaker: Keith Fisher.

TUESDAY, MARCH 3

2 – 3 p.m. | Budgeting Fundamentals: Knowing What Goes Where and How — Speaker: Brad Jakubowski, MS, CIT.

3:15 – 4:15 p.m. | How to Plan Athletic Field Management for an Effective Integrated Pest Management Plan — Speaker: Amanda Folck, MS,

For more information, visit <https://www.sportsfieldmanagement.org/2026-sfma-conference-education/>

SportsField Management Podcast features a conversation with SFMA leaders

On the latest episode of the *SportsField Management* Podcast, *SportsField Management* magazine Editor John Knitta visited with Sports Field Management Association (SFMA) leadership.

SFMA CEO Paula Sliefert, SFMA Immediate Past President Adam Thoms, Ph.D., and SFMA President Alpha Jones, CSFM, shared insight based on the SFMA listening tour, the state of the association and an overview of upcoming initiatives.

Listen wherever your favorite podcasts are found.

Iowa Turfgrass Institute conference and trade show

The 2026 Iowa Turfgrass Institute (ITI) conference and trade show will be held February 10-12, 2026, at the Holiday Inn Des Moines Airport Conference Center.

Iowa's premier education and networking opportunity for the turfgrass industry will welcome more than 750 turfgrass professionals, more than 70 exhibiting companies and will feature more than 20 education sessions.

Featured speakers include Kyley Dickson, Ph.D.; Matt Fleetwood, Ph.D.; Tom Gould; Paul Hurst and Gregg Munshaw, Ph.D.

Additional speakers include Matt Anderson; Shawn Buckner; Christian Baldwin; Kris Baldwin; Brian Dornsbach; Jeff Iles, Ph.D.; Holly Espenhover; Quincy Law, Ph.D.; Tami Madsen; Jake Newman; Rob Sikma; Paula Sliefert; Alex Stuedemann; Adam Thoms, Ph.D.; Kristine Tidgren and Dane Wilson.

For more information, visit <https://www.iowaturfgrass.org/conference>

2026 New England Regional Turfgrass Conference

The 2026 New England Regional Turfgrass Conference will be held March 3-5, 2026, at the Rhode Island Convention Center, Providence, Rhode Island.

The event will feature education sessions, a conference reception, a sports turf seminar, trade show and more. To learn more about the show, visit <https://www.nertf.org/>

GCSAA names Erin Wolfram director of First Green and workforce development

Erin Wolfram, who brings 15 years of experience in the careers services profession, was named director of First Green and workforce development for the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America (GCSAA).

In her role, Wolfram will lead the execution of the initiatives focused on enabling current members to continue to grow their careers, providing programs to find and retain skilled employees and increasing interest in turfgrass management careers. At the center of these efforts is GCSAA's First Green STEAM-education program.

Wolfram is a familiar face to many GCSAA members, whom she has supported through individualized career coaching and job search services as the owner of Career Advantage Golf since July 2020. She takes over

the director of First Green and workforce development position from Leann Cooper, who was recently promoted to senior director, member programs.

Wolfram most recently served as program director for the University of Kansas Center for Undergraduate Research & Fellowships. She holds two master's degrees from the University of Kansas in educational technology and counseling psychology. Wolfram earned a bachelor's degree in education from Kansas State University.

"After working with hundreds of GCSAA members through Career Advantage Golf, I am excited to transition into a full-time role at GCSAA," Wolfram said. "I am looking forward to strengthening the relationships I already have with members and continuing to help them and the industry grow while applying skills and knowledge from teaching, career services and program management." **SFM**



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Tahoma 31 at Mexico's Stadium Monterrey

Ahead of the 2026 World Cup this summer, Manager of Pitch and Natural Areas Carlos Castillo explains why he chose Tahoma 31 Bermudagrass as the surface for his new pitch. "It's the best," he says.

FOLLOW HIS JOURNEY



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VOLUNTEER FIELD REBUILD

Project EverGreen
and partners team
up to restore Corinth
Community Park
athletic field

Project EverGreen, members of the Sports Field Management Association (SFMA), the Texas Sports Field Management Association (TXSFMA), the Texas Turfgrass Association and the City of Corinth (Texas) Parks & Recreation Department teamed up on December 8, 2025, at Corinth Community Park Field #4 to give the well-used field a \$55,000 makeover.

More than 60 sports field and landscape professionals joined forces to deliver a renovated baseball field for aspiring youth athletes and neighborhood residents. The project transformed Field # 4 into a safer, more functional, and environmentally healthier green asset for local families, athletes and neighbors to enjoy for years to come.

The comprehensive makeover — made possible by material donations and volunteer field work — modernized field infrastructure while enhancing long-term sustainability. The shared expertise and commitment illustrate how cross-industry partnerships can create greener, healthier and more accessible public spaces.

Enhanced turf management practices will help the fields remain durable, attractive and environmentally resilient. These improvements support Project EverGreen's core mission of bringing people and communities together to create healthier, cooler and more connected green spaces.

“Restoring community athletic fields does more than upgrade the turf, it strengthens the fabric of a neighbor-



hood,” said Cindy Code, executive director of Project EverGreen. “When volunteers, experts, and partners come together to revitalize a space like Corinth Community Park, we’re creating places where families gather, children play, and community spirit grows. This project reflects the powerful impact healthy green spaces have on both people and the planet.”

“We value our ongoing partnership with Project EverGreen and the chance to support projects like Corinth Community Park,” said SFMA President Alpha Jones, CSFM. “Members of the Texas SFMA chapter stepped up to volunteer, applying best practices in turf and field management so local athletes have a safe, reliable place to play.”

Beyond the technical enhancements, the renovation highlights the essential role of green spaces in improving public health. Lush, well-maintained turf naturally cools the environment, filters stormwater, improves air quality, and provides safe places for recreation and connection, benefits that extend far beyond the baseball diamond.

Green spaces, such as ball fields, act as the lungs of a city. Baseball Field #4 at Corinth Community Park is responsible for seques-





tering nearly 53 thousand pounds of carbon from the air annually, and produces nearly 80,000 cubic yards of clean air annually for the community using the park and neighboring the park.

PROJECT SCOPE HIGHLIGHTS

- **Field survey and layout** — Laser-level survey to establish precise grades and field layout.
- **Rebuilt Infield** — Precision laser grading, professional-quality clay, infield mix, and conditioners will improve playability, surface consistency and drainage, reducing the risk of injuries and creating a better experience for athletes of all ages.
- **Home plate and pitcher's mound reconstruction** — New regulation-grade home plate and pitching rubbers; rebuilt areas using premium clay blends.
- **Infield and base installation** — New base anchors and bases installed at 80 and 90 feet; full infield regrade and resurfacing with new infield mix and conditioner.
- **Turf removal and sod installation** — Removal of old turf and installation of fresh TifTuf bermuda sod across 17,000 square feet of turf.
- **Outfield restoration** — Turf repairs, irrigation adjustments, aeration and topdressing.
- **Safety and sustainability enhancements** — Improved drainage, surface consistency, and reduced long-term maintenance.

In-kind donors to the project include Barenbrug, Bulldog Field Equipment, Covermaster Inc., Ewing Outdoor Supply, GLK, Lifesoils, Pioneer Athletics, Prime Sod, Professional Turf Products, and Turface Athletics. **SFM**

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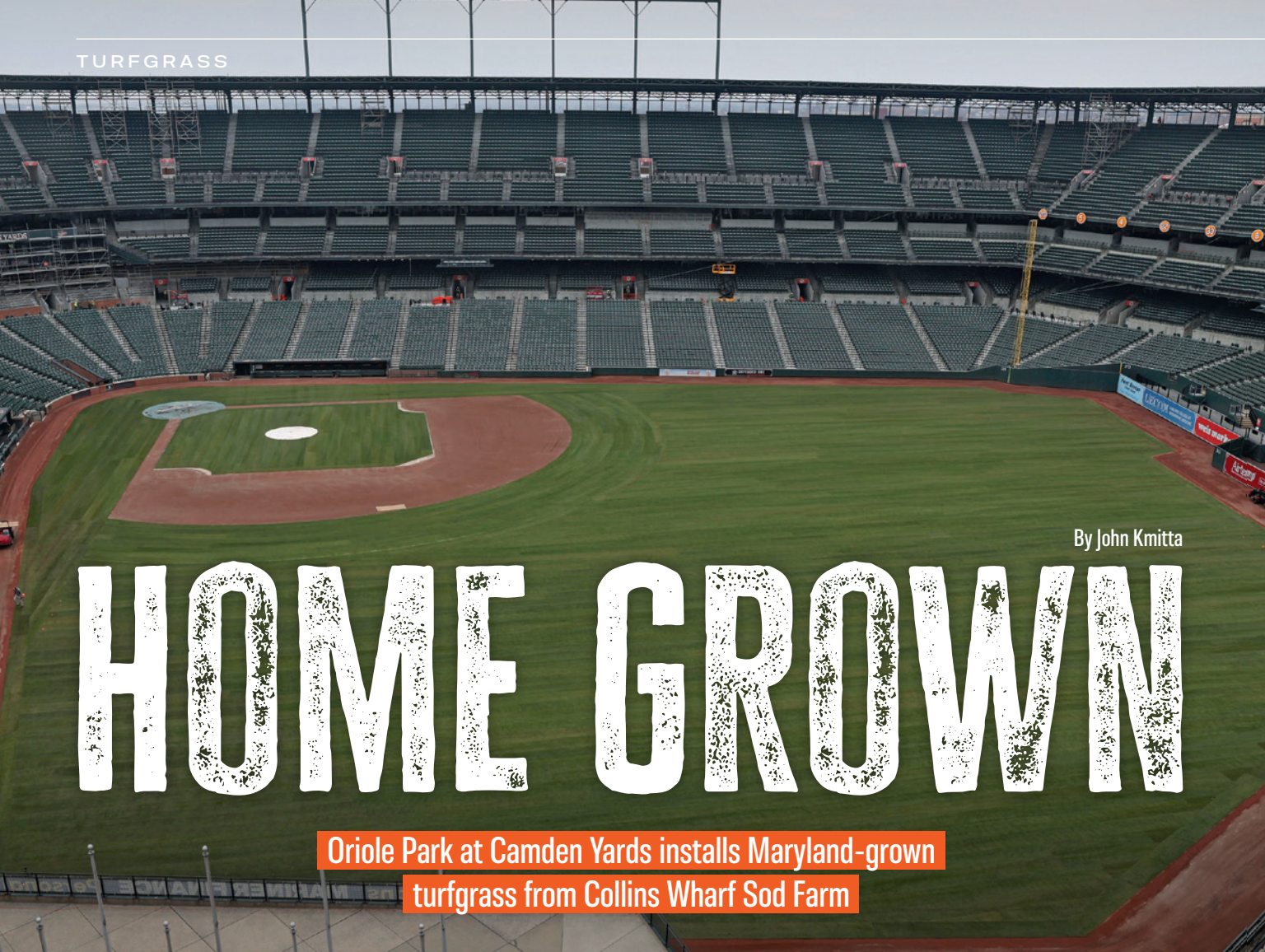


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HOME GROWN

By John Kmitta

**Oriole Park at Camden Yards installs Maryland-grown
turfgrass from Collins Wharf Sod Farm**

The field at Oriole Park at Camden Yards is now home grown, because, for the first time in 20 years, Oriole Park features turfgrass grown in Maryland. HGT Kentucky bluegrass sod from Collins Wharf Sod Farm in Eden, Maryland, was installed just before Thanksgiving 2025.

In addition to the Maryland-grown turfgrass, this project also showcases the importance of the relationship between the sports field manager and sod producer. In the case of Oriole Park and Collins Wharf, that relationship began more than 25 years ago, because Baltimore Orioles Senior Director of Field Operations Nicole Sherry and Collins Wharf Owner Eddie Moore were students together at Delaware Technical Community College (Del Tech).

"I knew about HGT, and saw that Eddie has been growing it at Collins Wharf," said Sherry. "I spoke with my counterparts about how well it played, the recovery time, and how well it performed against certain disease pressures that we have in the Mid-Atlantic. After consulting with everybody that has utilized Eddie's turf, I decided that was

probably the best field to install for next season and hopefully beyond."

According to Moore, whose other MLB clients include Citi Field (New York Mets) and Citizens Bank Park (Philadelphia Phillies), Collins Wharf has had a great deal of success with HGT bluegrass, which is resistant to stress and disease pressure. The success with HGT Bluegrass is not limited to baseball. In the same region, HGT has been utilized at Baltimore Country Club, Caves Valley Golf Club, and Country Club of Maryland to name a few. HGT has been sent to the Columbus Crew in Ohio and FC New York, which also plays some of its games at Citi Field.

Added Sherry, "It has been a long time since we utilized sod from Maryland — mainly because there are not many sod farms here that produce cool-season grasses. When we saw that Eddie's farm was available, we jumped on it. Being from Maryland and having a grass representing Maryland is huge for our fan base. We want to support local businesses as much as we can from an organizational standpoint."



For Moore, supplying the turfgrass for Oriole Park is a dream come true. Moore is the fourth-generation owner of Collins Wharf, a family farm that began in 1921. When he was 12 years old, Moore's father encouraged him to choose a crop to grow on the farm. But rather than melons or string beans, Moore wanted to grow sod.

"I used to cut grass in our yard, and I loved baseball," said Moore. "My father said, 'You know how we get our tomato plants partially grown, then we put them in our fields and continue to grow them? People do the same thing with grass.' I said, 'You mean I could grow this grass and take it to Camden Yards?'"

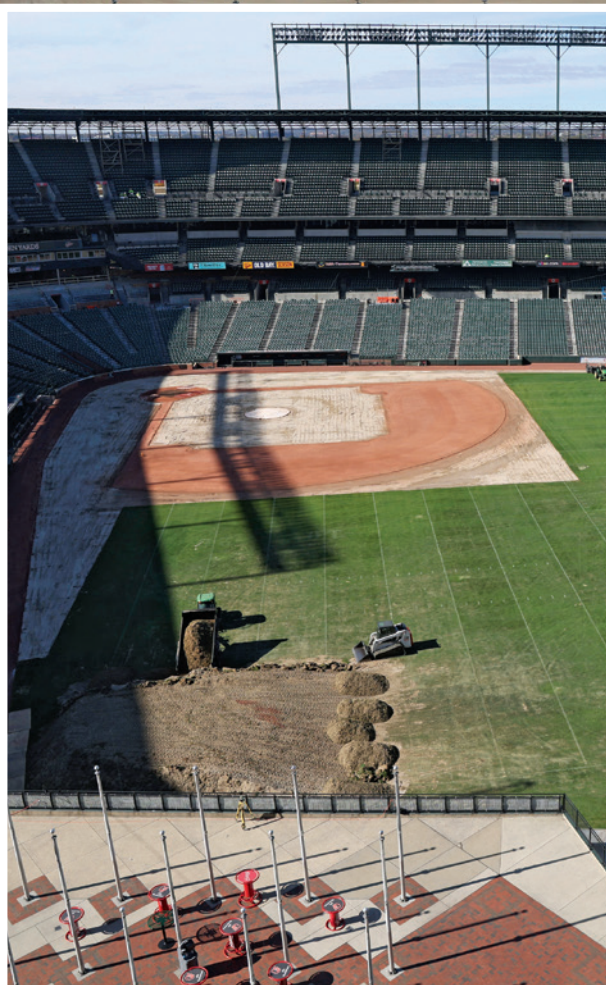
When Moore told his grandfather what he wanted to grow, his grandfather's reply was, "Boy, I've been trying to kill grass on my farm my whole life, and you want to grow it?" Said Moore, "That really stuck with me. I think he's pretty proud of what we've done here and the people that we have encountered."

Throughout high school, Moore held onto the dream of someday providing sod for the Baltimore Orioles. His first planting was in 1999, around the same time he was at Del Tech with Sherry.





*Photos on page 16 provided by
the Baltimore Orioles*



“We’ve done nothing but grow and have success since, and it’s just been wonderful,” Moore added. “I was the last sod farm from Maryland to provide the turf for Camden Yards, and that was in 2005. Now I’m getting another opportunity. So it really means a lot to me.”

A PARTNERSHIP BUILT ON RESPECT

According to Sherry, communication is vital to the relationship between the sports field manager and sod producer.

“This all happened within a month to get this executed and the sod laid at Camden Yards,” said Sherry. “It was a quick turnaround, but there were initial conversations and visits to the sod farm. The communication about what we needed and what Eddie could provide was top of our minds.”

Added Moore, “I think communication going into the future is a big part of what is needed to meet the needs that Nicole and the Orioles will have. That could be different varieties, different soil types, or different types of cut, and we want to be able to provide that for them. To get the product the Baltimore Orioles need and deserve could take more than a year for us to produce. So communication starts way in advance.”

The trust built 25 years ago in the classroom at Del Tech should help with that effort.



All photos on page 17
provided by Collins
Wharf Sod

“Who knew that the two of us would be here together 25 years later?” said Moore. “When we sat in class together, I knew I was going to be a sod farmer, but I didn’t know that she was going to work for the Baltimore Orioles. It’s very surreal to be able to work with Nicole.”

Said Sherry, “It’s pretty special for me, because where Eddie and I are from, you treat people like they’re family. So even though we had a brief encounter in the grand scheme of things, Eddie’s always been somebody that I knew and that I respected. Going into this partnership with him and the people in his company, I know that we’re going to have that same mutual respect. We’re always going to have each other’s backs, and we’re going to communicate effectively. I think that comes from our upbringing, and where we’re from. It is going to be a special relationship moving forward.” **SFM**

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SPORTS FIELD
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MEMBERSHIP CATEGORIES

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

■ **Sports field manager:** If you are primarily responsible for managing or maintaining sports fields.

■ **Sports field manager associate:** If you are primarily responsible for managing or maintaining a sports field(s) and your organization already has an SFMA sports field manager member employed.

■ **Affiliate:** If you are indirectly or on a part-time basis involved in the maintenance/management of sports fields (coaches, athletic directors, volunteers, etc.).

■ **Academic:** If you are in teaching, extension or research.

■ **Student:** If you are a full-time student.

■ **Commercial:** If you work for a company engaged in a commercial enterprise providing services and/or products to the sports field management profession (consultants, architects, designers, contractors, management companies, distributors and manufacturers, etc.).

■ **Commercial associate:** If you are the second person (or more) from a commercial company (must first have an SFMA commercial member at their company before this lower-dues category can be selected).

■ **Retired:** If you are retired and no longer seeking full-time employment within the scope of activities of any SFMA membership category, and have been a member for a minimum of five years, you may become a non-voting member of SFMA and are not eligible to hold elective office.

THE THREE MOST IMPORTANT REASONS TO JOIN SFMA

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

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

3. **Recognition of your professionalism:** In addition to the individual recognition you receive because of your good



work, SFMA's advocacy with groups such as athletic directors, parks and recreation directors, coaches and parents enhances the image of the entire profession.

BENEFITS YOU RECEIVE AS AN SFMA MEMBER

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

For more information, visit:

<https://www.sportsfieldmanagement.org/why-join-stma/>

JOHN MASCARO'S PHOTO QUIZ



CAN YOU IDENTIFY THIS TURFGRASS PROBLEM?

PROBLEM:

Damaged turf from sideline to sideline

TURFGRASS AREA:

High school stadium football field

LOCATION:

South Portland, Maine

TURFGRASS VARIETY:

Kentucky bluegrass/ Perennial ryegrass

Answer on page 35

John Mascaro is president of Turf-Tec International



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An Emphasis on

Excellence

New SFMA President Alpha Jones, CSFM, looks to lead by example to help SFMA reach new levels of success

By John Kmitta



Photos by Devyn Edwards,
CenturyFX Photography.

"Our association is evolving to where we truly stand out as the recognized leader in the sports field management industry," said Sports Field Management Association (SFMA) President Alpha Jones, CSFM. "The direction that we're headed as an organization is about getting it to a point of excellence so things are on the best level for the membership."

According to Jones, those "things" include communication, transparency, response time, availability, connection between the national association and chapters, and partnering with other associations.

To help SFMA achieve those goals, Jones plans to lead by example.

"If I want to improve professionalism, I have to conduct myself professionally. If I want to see better communication and transparency, I have to be the first to do that," he said. "As president, I cannot sit around and wait for somebody else to start that process."

Jones added that he is honored to become president of the association and the opportunities it presents to impact the sports field management profession.

"To be thought of enough to be invited to be part of the board and then to be put in the position to be on the track to president is hugely humbling to me," he said. "It's hard for me to put it into words other than that I see it as an honor, and I don't take that lightly because it's a huge responsibility."

This is also a historic moment for SFMA, as Jones becomes the first African American to serve as president of the association.



*"I bring an inclusive mindset
for as many different
groups as possible."*

"By being the face of the organization, people who are of other ethnicities and other backgrounds can see that we're not what we used to be," said Jones. "That allows us to go into areas that we have not — such as urban schools or other predominantly minority situations — and represent the association. We can say, 'Here's somebody who looks and thinks like you, somebody you can look to and connect with, and perhaps even help you navigate some of the unknowns that come with going into uncharted territory.'"

Jones added that there are many minorities within the sports field management industry, but that they are just not members of SFMA. He feels that the name change the association underwent six years ago — from Sports Turf Managers Association to Sports Field Management Association — was the first step to showing that anyone who works on a sports field is welcome as a member and can benefit from being a member.

"I'm very passionate about the work, about the people, and about creating the opportunity for the next person," he said. "What possibly separates me from others who have held this responsibility is that I have followed a non-traditional path. There are other people out there who have followed an unconventional path and maybe haven't been included. Just because you don't have a degree in sports turf or you went about it a different way doesn't mean you're separate. You should be included in this. I bring an inclusive mindset for as many different groups as possible."

THE UNCONVENTIONAL PATH

Having grown up in Pittsburgh, Jones was influenced from an early age by the blue-collar work ethic of the city.

"I was around a lot of people whose parents worked in the steel mills," he said. "There was just the understanding that when we get up and put our boots on in the morning, we go to work. That was a big influence on me, and it's something I've always carried with me."

According to Jones, putting that work ethic into place eventually came with the realization that it could be done by using your brain more than using your back.

That cerebral approach to hard work was heavily influenced by his parents. Jones's father is a retired pastor, and his mother is a retired teacher and principal — both serving as examples of leadership, ministry and education. Jones also credits his three sisters — Harriet, Karen and Lela — and the strong family bonds they share for shaping who he is.

Having played baseball through high school — to the point of eventually landing some Minor League Baseball tryouts — Jones set aside dreams of a baseball career and focused on a career in computer science with a desire to build computers and understand how they worked.

That led him to the University of Pittsburgh to study computer systems. He later transferred to Point Park College where he met his now wife of 38 years, Beth. The couple eventually moved to North Carolina and Jones began work in computer operations for North Carolina Mutual. The seeds of a career change began two years into his 5-plus years with the company, when a co-worker asked him if he knew anyone who cut grass. Jones didn't know anyone he could recommend, but he knew how to mow a lawn. So he took the job, bought a used walk-behind lawn mower that he would load in and out of the trunk of his sedan, and went to work.

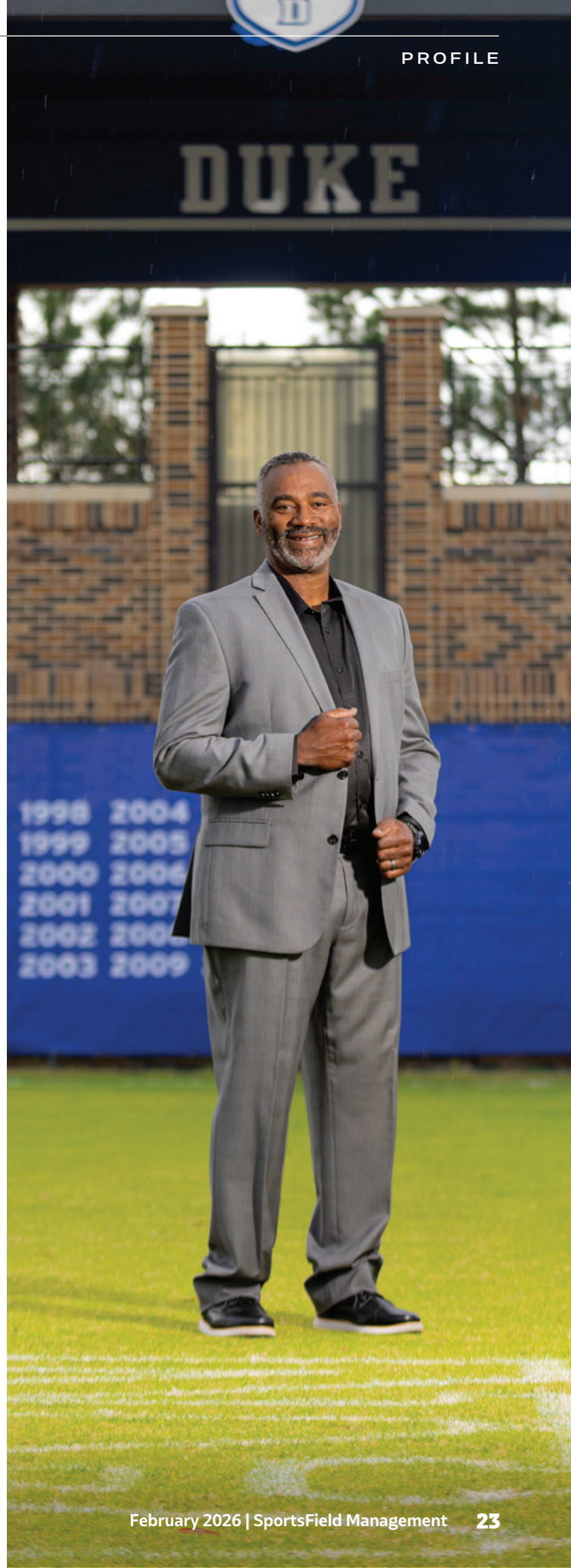
"We lived in an apartment on the second floor, so I would carry that mower up the stairs through the apartment and put it on the balcony outside," said Jones.

Although he continued to work in computer operations, his landscape business continued to grow. He eventually made the leap to go full time into landscaping.

"It got to the point where I was picking up legitimate contracts with corporations," he said. "We were handling 28 different stores between McDonald's and Wendy's corporations. That really helped establish the business. We were up to 11 employees at one point."

Owning and operating his landscape company taught Jones how to wear many hats at the same time, how to write contracts, how to keep track of money, and how to adapt to various situations.

"If you go through enough failures and you want to be a winner, you're going to figure out how to not fail the next time," he said.





"The bug had bit me at that point. I wanted to learn and I wanted to do more."

Running his business also showed him the importance of integrity and honesty when dealing with others, how to communicate with people at all levels, and the value of diversity in staffing.

However, by the late 1990s, the landscaping company that Jones and his wife had built was feeling the pressure from large landscape companies that were undercutting his business by offering deep discounts. Unable to compete, they eventually sold their business — but not before Beth found him a job as head groundsman for Durham Academy, a private school in Durham, North Carolina.

"I was very hesitant about the idea, because I really had grown to enjoy entrepreneurship," he said. "But when I walked in for the interview, I saw two football helmets on the windowsill — one from the University of Pittsburgh, and the other from the Pittsburgh Steelers. The person conducting the interview was from Pittsburgh, and we hit it off right away."

When Jones was hired by Durham Academy in 2002, he was initially under the impression that he would just be handling campus grounds, but it turned out that the position also included management of the athletic fields. Lacking knowledge in sports field management, Jones was reassured by his new boss that the school had a connection with the Durham Bulls.

"I met with the head groundskeeper of the Durham Bulls, and he impressed me right away with his passion for sports field management and the science behind it," said Jones. "What should have been a 45-minute meeting turned into a three-hour conversation. At the end of the conversation, I filled out an application to work part time for the Durham Bulls in addition to my job at Durham Academy."

The head groundskeeper of the Durham Bulls at the time was Jimmy Simpson, CSFM, who himself would go on to be president of SFMA.

"Jimmy is younger than me by close to 15 years," said Jones. "He was going to school full time and taking care of a

minor league ballpark. The things he showed me worked great, and I got kudos from the athletic director and the baseball coach. The bug had bit me at that point. I wanted to learn and I wanted to do more.”

Jones continued to work part time for the Bulls while still working full time at Durham Academy and also going to school full time at North Carolina Central University.

Fast forward a couple of years, and Simpson was hired by the Town of Cary, North Carolina, which charged him with revamping what is now WakeMed Soccer Park — home of the College Cup (the Final Four of college soccer).

“He reached out to me and asked me to come work for him,” said Jones. “So, after 5-1/2 years at Durham Academy, I turned in my resignation letter, and worked as crew lead for the team at WakeMed Soccer Park.”

While in that role, Jones learned how to build team culture.

“I thought that if I work hard, everybody else would just follow suit,” he said. “It doesn’t work that way. You have to inspire them to work as hard as they can. And you have to communicate so they understand not just what you’re doing, but why you are doing it.”

Jones worked for the Town of Cary for two years (in addition to having worked part time for nine years with the Bulls), then went to law school for a year before taking a full-time position with the Bulls. Eventually, Longwood University made Jones an offer he couldn’t refuse, and he became the assistant director of athletic facilities at Longwood University overseeing all outdoor athletic facilities. He spent 5-1/2 years in that role, commuting from North Carolina to Virginia.

From there, Jones and his wife started their own home renovation business, and he also worked as a baseball coach, PE teacher and health teacher.

“I was coaching the baseball team and teaching. When I finished work, if we didn’t have practice, I would drive to wherever the nearest repair job was,” he said. “We were doing a fair amount of renovations when my wife saw a job posting

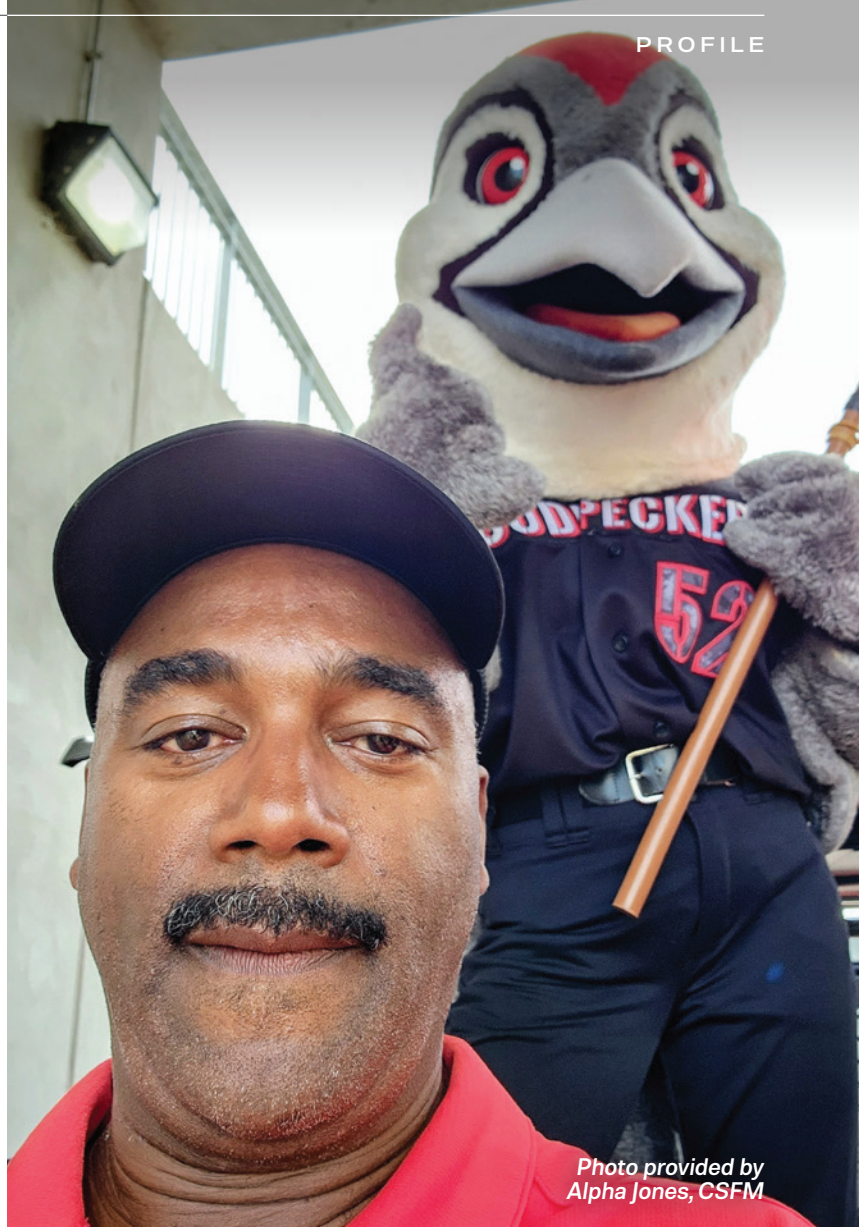


Photo provided by
Alpha Jones, CSFM

in Fayetteville, North Carolina. I walked in for the interview with the Fayetteville Woodpeckers and instantly had great rapport with the GM. I started in March of 2018, and my first day on the job was about six weeks before opening day in a brand new stadium. The whole field was just drainage rock, and the stadium was still under construction. I got to see the whole thing from start to finish.”

For the next 5-1/2 years Jones served as director of field operations for the Fayetteville Woodpeckers, Low-A (now Single-A) affiliate of the Houston Astros.

“It was an awesome experience,” said Jones. “It was challenging in the beginning. The first year they struggled to fill the staff before I got hired. The next year was the COVID year. But after COVID, our reputation grew and we were turning people away for part-time applications. People wanted to come work on the grounds crew. We built a nice core of people who put into practice the things I mentioned earlier, especially in terms of diversity.”

In late 2024, after 5-1/2 years in Fayetteville, Jones transitioned to Duke University where he currently serves as athletic field specialist with a focus on soccer and lacrosse. According to Jones, he was drawn to Duke by the opportunity to work in collegiate sports for a Power 5 school that has a reputation for excellence.

"The thing that it was always interesting when I look back on it now, is that I didn't purposely leave jobs after five years," said Jones. "But five to six years was my number for whatever reason. I'm very proud of the teams that I built — particularly in Fayetteville. I'm extremely proud that we won Head Groundskeeper of the Year in the Carolina League and then Head Groundskeeper of the Year at the national level for Low-A Minor League Baseball in the same year.

"It wasn't that I had to move on," he added. "It was always about what's next. How do I get to the next level? Part of the challenge in sports field management is breaking that ceiling, and not just being the grass cutter, but being the administrator."

THE NEXT LEVEL

What's next for Jones is leading the way for SFMA and continuing to help others.

His connection to the association and his journey of service began with his connection with Simpson, who introduced Jones to STMA and the annual conference. That led to a pivotal decision in Jones's journey.

"At the first conference I attended I found myself in a position to decide if I would be a wallflower and just try to fit in quietly, or if I would try to make something out of the opportunity," he said. "I walked into the annual meeting room and there were several hundred people there. Just about everyone in the room was white. I didn't think there was anyone I could identify with or connect with on a comfort level. But I decided to walk around and introduce myself.

In the years that followed, Jones continued to be exposed to the STMA and, more importantly, its members.

"Several years later I started to look back and see how many people played a role in my still being involved, the success that I was having, and the knowledge that I had gained by attending," he said. "That was a full-circle moment for me thinking about the people who helped me. It made me want to start helping others."

Jones's first service to the association came as part of committees, which was a learning experience that taught him leadership skills in addition to showing him how to deal with people from throughout the country and how to relate to

members. That ultimately led to Jones serving on the board of directors beginning in 2021.

His board service came at a time during which Kim Heck retired as CEO of the association, the transition to Laura Simmons, and then to a year without a CEO during which the board had to navigate all of the challenges the association faced during that time. From that experience, Jones took away that change is what you make of it.

"If you approach change as being difficult or you are not willing to think outside the box, then it's going to be challenging," he said. "If you're more receptive to the idea that you don't know what the end result will be, you can look at it as, 'Here comes change, and the possibility of it being great is there if I step into the moment.'"

MORE THAN GRASS

Jones has devoted his career to creating safe playing surfaces and giving back to the sports field management industry. Outside of work and his role with SFMA, he has shared his own brand of leadership advice by authoring his "More than Grass" column in *SportsField Management* magazine.

According to Jones, he has done so to provide a different perspective in the hope that he can help others build upon their management skills. He now spends a lot of time with his son developing a business plan to extend the reach of the More than Grass brand through additional articles, public speaking engagements, podcasts and other related content opportunities.

That familial effort is fitting, because getting to know Jones outside of work, and outside his role as association leader, begins with family.

"I was always on the grind, but my wife showed me how to make time," said Jones. "She would plan a vacation trip right at the end of the Minor League Baseball season. My kids are now adults and I have three granddaughters. I've learned a higher level of appreciation for family."

The loss of an uncle and a cousin during the past year have also led Jones to emphasize family and the value of time spent together.

"My daughters have me wrapped around their fingers," he said. "They each have daughters. So if any of them needs or wants something, I jump."



"Part of the challenge in sports field management is *breaking that ceiling*, and not just being the grass cutter but being the administrator."



Jones's youngest daughter lives just minutes away, his older daughter 40 minutes away, and his son lives in Durham, North Carolina.

"I try to make sure that I'm spending time with them doing things that they want to do or that they want to do with me," he said.

Having worked as a professional drummer for 12 years, Jones also now busies himself following his son's professional music career as a trombone player in the horn section for multiple bands.

Jones's oldest daughter is the marketing coordinator for the International Civil Rights Center & Museum in Greensboro, N.C. (famous home to the lunch counter sit in), and his youngest daughter is a venue director.

Supporting all of them is Beth, who works as a pediatric oncology nurse for University of North Carolina Health.

"Behind every good man is a great woman," he said. "She doesn't like being the front person, so she's okay with me being out front and doing all the talking. But she's usually right there behind me. I'm only able to do what I do because of her."

According to Jones, no discussion of his life and career would be complete without that emphasis on faith and family.

EXAMPLES IN LEADERSHIP

Now, as Jones steps into his moment as SFMA president, he also draws on the support of his SFMA family and lessons learned from Simpson and other SFMA past presidents.

"Jimmy is a bull in a china shop when it comes to the energy that he will put into something if he believes in it," said Jones. "I was always a little mesmerized to be learning things from somebody who is 15 years younger than me — he has been that impressive upon me. His ambition influenced me. Jimmy was always trying to be better than he was at his previous job, better than yesterday. My conversations with him helped me hone my skills. And the number one thing is that he is loyal. He's always going to be one of the first ones to call and check on you."

In addition to Simpson, Jones also shared a bit about the influence of Dr. Mike Goatley, Tim VanLoo, CSFM; Abby McNeal, CSFM; Nick McKenna, CSFM; and Sarah Martin, CSFM.

"Dr. Goatley didn't know me when I first got to Virginia, but he put himself out there and said, 'Wherever you are, if you need my help, I'll make an effort to see you,'" said Jones. "I was in a small town, Farmville, Virginia, and I reached out to him. It turned out he had a speaking engagement in a nearby town and he made an extra 30 minute drive to help me with a disease issue. That showed me that no matter the role of the member, give them your best effort, and make the time if you can. And when you do, be present for them. He made me really feel like I was the only person he was interested in at the time."

Jones added that VanLoo encouraged him to take the CSFM exam.

"I could always hear him hear in the back of my head telling me, 'You can do this. Just take your time and you'll be fine.' His encouragement got me through the CSFM and then helped me when it came to board service."

McNeal's advice and consultation, McKenna's support and inspiration, and Martin's attention to others have all shown Jones that the goal as president is to leave the association and the industry better than you found it.

"My vision for the SFMA is to see the standards of professionalism, public awareness, and industry leadership continue to grow successfully, and become the recognized true standard and authority in the sports field management industry," Jones shared in his SFMA vision statement. "We can and must establish new recruiting tools that attract the 'technology dependent' generations, the person who is not sure of their future career choice, as well as former athletes who want better, safer, and aesthetically pleasing athletic facilities for their communities and schools. Focusing our outreach on the younger generations now will play a significant role in the vitality and longevity of our industry."

To that end, Jones urges members to connect with local schools, speak with children and young adults, deliver presentations to classes and engage in other similar efforts.

Jones knows that the year as SFMA president goes by fast, but he looks forward to working as a team to continue striving for higher levels of excellence.

"We know the direction we want to go, and we are building momentum in that direction." **SFM**

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



"We know the direction we want to go, and we are building momentum in that direction."



Different Courts *for* Different Sports

By Mary Helen Sprecher

A new study on pickleball published by the Sports & Fitness Industry Association identified the top complaint among players: Overcrowding on courts.

While it's easy to write off the cause as the surging popularity of the sport, the root of the problem goes deeper. In fact, a big contributor is the fact that many clubs, resorts, parks and schools are trying to satisfy the demand for pickleball

quickly by adding pickleball lines to tennis courts. And that's just creating problems, namely a glut of people trying to find court time in the same spaces.

It's really a perfect storm. For one, tennis is gaining players as well. The U.S. Tennis Association's (USTA's) Todd Carlson, senior director, Tennis Venue Services, Parks & CTAs, noted that in the last five years, tennis has grown, adding seven



Photos courtesy of Fast-Dry Courts, Inc. & 10-S Tennis Supply

“Trying to take existing courts and add lines for multiple sports only means more people competing for the same space. The key to growth is to support tennis-specific courts.”

He added that there is a precedent. As it happens, it's one that should be familiar to every facility manager.

“It's similar to what happened when softball first became popular; people originally thought that baseball diamonds could host everything,” said Carlson. “They very quickly realized that too many people wanted to use the same diamonds, and that the answer was to build more diamonds so that everyone could play and both sports could grow.”

An extension to the problem of court crowding is the fact that with both sports continuously drawing players who want to use the courts, parking facilities likewise become congested, leading to additional traffic and more competition for parking spaces in nearby neighborhoods and on adjacent streets.

To try to maintain harmony among players of both sports (as well as those in local neighborhoods), the USTA has created guidance for the discussions around shared spaces; this can provide a jumping-off point for decision making.

OPTION 1: SPORT-SPECIFIC SITES

The ideal solution, according to USTA, is the development and/or expansion of sport-specific public sites. (In other words, there should be separate tennis facilities and pickleball facilities.) Facilities can be offered either as one central complex (but with different courts for each sport) or as two separate facilities.

to eight million players. USTA wants to bump up the total number of players to 35 million by 2035, and it is actively working to do so.

And all those people are going to need places to play.

“If we want to keep adding players, we have to add tennis courts,” said Carlson.





Photo courtesy of Fast-Dry Courts, Inc. & 10-S Tennis Supply

OPTION 2: NON-TRADITIONAL SPACES

In the event that sport-specific sites are not possible, both tennis and pickleball can be played by creating courts for each in non-traditional spaces. USTA advised looking for hard surface areas that could possibly be converted, such as a concrete slab, multi-sport court sites and/or vacant parking lot locations.

A court contractor can be brought in to measure the space, and to mark it with lines, as well as, if possible, color-coat it for sports use. Pop-up nets for tennis, as well as pop-up nets for pickleball, can be obtained affordably online or from brick-and-mortar stores; a search will yield multiple possibilities. [Note: When con-



Photo courtesy of Nidy Sports Construction Co., Inc.

templating any type of sports facility conversion, safety must be at the forefront of all considerations. Further, local ordinances should be reviewed to ensure that accessing the space for play is allowed.]

OPTION 3: SHARED USE OF COURTS

In the event that sport-specific sites and non-traditional spaces are not possible — and in the interest of equitable offerings for both tennis and pickleball — destinations can still allow both sports to be played by having blended lines applied. (Blended lines is the USTA's term for multiple playing lines on any one surface.) This recommendation is useful for sites

with one or two tennis courts. For sites with three or more tennis courts, every effort should be made to utilize Options 1 or 2 because of the sustained growth and increasing public demand for both sports. Diagrams (which can be accessed through USTA's Tennis Venue Services Department) illustrate how lines can be added to courts to facilitate play.

If considering adding or converting courts or adding any playing lines, use a skilled court contractor. The American Sports Builders Association (ASBA) has a free online directory (www.sportsbuilders.org) that allows visitors to look up industry members by geographic area, specialty or other criteria.

DIFFERING REQUIREMENTS

Even if the player numbers weren't a problem, the requirements of both sports are different enough that adding pickleball lines to courts does not create a satisfactory playing experience.

Just as with softball and baseball diamonds, tennis and pickleball courts are very different sizes. Additionally, pickleball nets are lower than those for tennis and, unlike a tennis net, the bottom edge of a pickleball net does not touch the court.

Friction between players of the two sports has also been caused by the sound the pickleball paddle makes when it hits the ball; USA Pickleball, the governing body, has been working on the development of a category of products that reduce the sound.

GETTING INPUT FROM USER GROUPS

Much pressure is being put on those tasked with management of sports facilities. In many cases, the requests are to add courts for sports like pickleball; while in others, it may be a plea to conserve playing areas for tennis, as well as for other existing sports, such as basketball, or even recreational areas like tot lots and playgrounds.

The bottom line is that if only one group is heard from, it's easy to discount the needs of the others. For that reason, it is essential to gather input from all user groups prior to embarking on any conversions, construction or other changes.

Tennis and pickleball may not be hugging it out any time soon, but by not rushing to add lines to courts, it is possible to help the two sports exist peacefully. **SFM**

Mary Helen Sprecher wrote this article on behalf of the American Sports Builders Association (ASBA). For more information, visit www.sportsbuilders.org



Photo courtesy of RWD Landscape Architects



Photo courtesy of Suburban Consulting Engineers, Inc.



Photo courtesy of Nidy Sports Construction Co., Inc.

2026

FEBRUARY 10-12

IOWA TURFGRASS INSTITUTE CONFERENCE AND TRADE SHOW

<https://www.iowaturfgrass.org/conference>

FEBRUARY 10 – MARCH 3

SFMA POST-CONFERENCE VIRTUAL EDUCATION

<https://www.sportsfieldmanagement.org/2026-sfma-conference-education/>

FEBRUARY 16-19

TPI 2026 INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION CONFERENCE AND FIELD DAY

Tucson, Arizona

<https://turfgrasssod.org/event/tpi-2026-international-education-conference/>

MARCH 3-5

29TH ANNUAL NEW ENGLAND REGIONAL TURFGRASS CONFERENCE AND SHOW

Providence, Rhode Island

www.nertf.org

MARCH 11-12

REINDERS 27TH TURF CONFERENCE

Waukesha, Wisconsin

<https://www.reinders.com/turf-conference/>

JUNE 23-25

NATIONAL SPORTS SAFETY AND SECURITY CONFERENCE & EXHIBITION

Palm Desert, California

<https://ncs4.usm.edu/events/annual-conference/>

SEPTEMBER 29-OCTOBER 1

2026 NRPA ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

<https://conference.nrpa.org/>



OCTOBER 20-23

EQUIP EXPO

Louisville, Kentucky

<https://www.equipexposition.com/>

OCTOBER 20-23

TRANSFORM, THE PGMS ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Louisville, Kentucky

<https://pgms.org/page/2025AnnualConf>

NOVEMBER 8-11

ELEVATE (NALP)

Tampa, Florida

<https://www.landscapeprofessionals.org/ELEVATE>

NOVEMBER 11-12

SALTEX 2026

Birmingham, UK

www.saltex.org.uk

DECEMBER 1-4

AMERICAN SPORTS BUILDERS ASSOCIATION TECHNICAL MEETING

Tampa, Florida

<https://sportsbuilders.org/page/UpcomingEvents>

DECEMBER 7-10

IRRIGATION SHOW AND EDUCATION WEEK

Las Vegas, Nevada

<https://irrigation.org/IA> **SFM**

ANSWER

From page 19

This high school stadium football field hosts an annual marching band competition with 10 schools represented. This is an extremely popular event that draws more than 1,500 spectators. Depending on the field's moisture content, damage on the field can vary from year to year. (You would not like to have a rainfall event prior to this competition.) Extreme compaction issues in the middle of the field, as well as intense matting of the turf canopy usually occur as a result of this event. This past year, when the sports field manager inspected the field after the event, he saw this damaged and gouged turf across the middle of the field from sideline to sideline. After further inspection, it was determined that it was a drag mark created after one of the band performances had been completed. Equipment had been loaded onto a flatbed trailer that had a solid pipe welded to its front in place of a trailer jockey wheel. That trailer was hooked up to a utility vehicle, and the added weight of the equipment on the trailer plus the weight of the utility vehicle pushed the welded pipe into the athletic field's surface. As it drove off the field, it created this damage. Luckily, the drag mark was able to be rolled back together so it did not affect safety and playability for games that same week.

Photo Submitted by Rick Perruzzi, CSFM, CPRP, recreation manager of outdoor athletic facilities at South Portland Department of Parks, Recreation & Waterfront in South Portland, 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 at john@turf-tec.com. If your photograph is selected, you will receive full credit. All photos become property of SportsField Management magazine and the Sports Field Management Association.





All photos provided
by Asylon Robotics

ROBOTS ON PATROL

Mercedes-Benz Stadium utilizes robotic dogs to boost security capabilities

To tackle issues related to staffing shortages, security/safety concerns, and inflationary cost increases, Mercedes-Benz Stadium in Atlanta uses robotic patrol dogs to monitor the areas around the stadium.

Stadium management implemented the full-service DroneDog program by Asylon Robotics in 2023 to enhance employee safety in dangerous areas, boost security team monitoring capabilities, minimize theft and vandalism on the premises, improve cost-effectiveness, and ensure consistent staffing.

Built on Boston Dynamics' Spot platform, DroneDog combines robotic mobility, AI-driven automation, and proprietary DroneIQ software to

offer 24/7 perimeter patrols, real-time monitoring, and autonomous incident response.

Since its implementation at Mercedes-Benz Stadium, DroneDog has conducted more than 2,000 patrols and has identified more than 80 security events — resulting in zero incidents of theft or vandalism.

Asylon points out that the DroneDog program was deployed to augment the human security team — not replace it — and acts as a mobile deterrent, incident detector, and force multiplier. The deployment at Mercedes-Benz Stadium includes a full-service DroneDog system with 24/7 remote support, live monitor-

ing, and patrol programming tailored to the stadium's operational schedule.

According to Asylon, security teams are turning to robotics to enhance situational awareness, reduce costs, and maintain consistent coverage — especially during staffing shortages or large-scale events.

DroneDog acts as a deterrent because its presence shows that the facility is under constant surveillance. The robot is equipped with lights, sensors and cameras. Patrol routes are customized for the site layout and security needs.

According to Asylon, most incidents flagged at Mercedes-Benz Stadium have been “behavioral anomalies,” such as unauthorized access attempts, loitering or procedural violations.

Asylon's Robotic Security Operations Center (RSOC) is staffed 24/7 by trained professionals who monitor DroneDog (and who also fly Asylon's Guardian Drone system) in real time. They receive alerts, analyze data feeds, and can take direct control of the robot if needed. When an event occurs — like a person entering a restricted area — the RSOC validates the video feeds, escalates the event if required, and collaborates with on-site teams or first responders.

When not on patrol, DroneDog docks in a secure, weatherized charging station called the DogHouse. It is positioned away from pedestrian traffic and is equipped with environ-



mental controls, locking mechanisms, and sensor integration. Because DroneDog is constantly moving and streaming video, its presence often deters threats to the robot itself. Any attempt to tamper with the system is recorded, reported, and responded to by the RSOC in real time. Additionally, the hardware and software include tamper-detection systems and GPS tracking.

According to Asylon, ground robotics such as DroneDog are ideal for areas with complex terrain, narrow corridors, or places where a physical presence acts as a deterrent. Aerial drones are better suited for rapid-response, large-area surveillance, and fence-line inspection. Many major venues incorporate a mix of technologies.

“The future is hybrid — human security teams empowered by robotic precision and AI insight,” Asylon stated. “Rising crime, labor shortages, and increasing event complexity demand a scalable, cost-effective approach. Robots never call in sick, don't get distracted, and can patrol dangerous or hard-to-staff areas. At the same time, AI enables predictive threat detection, smarter resource allocation, and faster incident response.” **SFM**



@CgcChad



@NE_STMA

Shout out to 150+ sports turf pros who came out to Foxboro to learn what it takes to volunteer on the Gillette Field Crew for World Cup 2026. Kudos to @ryanbjorn for laying out the demanding logistics and @TomIrwinc for their ongoing support. #WorldCup2026 #GilletteStadium



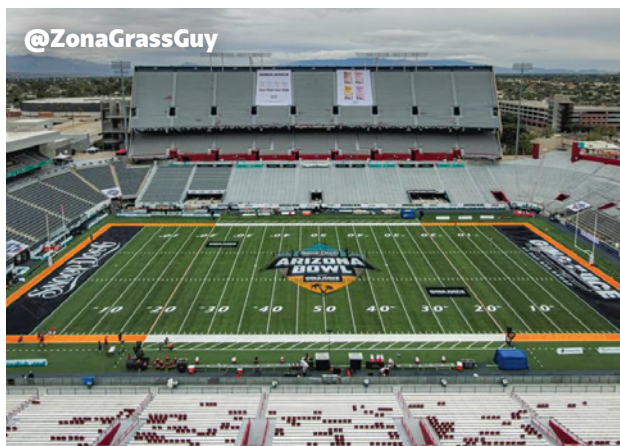
@UHCougarTurf



@VirginiaSFMA

We are so proud of VSFMA board member Bryan Sheetz, Chesterfield County Teacher of the Year! Read the story about this teacher who created one of the most academically and professionally fertile programs in a public school system - <https://vsfma.org/announcements.php>





@ZonaGrassGuy



@gottolive923



@mattbrud



@Mike_Kerns_

See you all in February.
Time for Monster Jam, Supercross, and some rest before
the soccer schedule hits.



@WLUWSoccer

Alston Parker Watt Field takes the crown! Proud to announce
our home field has been named the 2025 VSFMA Field of
the Year. Shoutout to @TurfGenerals and the entire outdoor
facilities crew for the magic behind the scenes! #ForTheBoo



Trimmers and Edgers



*Ego Commercial 56V
17.5" string trimmer*

EGO COMMERCIAL 56V 17.5" STRING TRIMMER

The Ego Commercial 56V 17.5" string trimmer is built to deliver all the power of a gas 35cc trimmer, but is loaded with features that will make it a crew's go-to trimmer. Designed for heavy-duty professional use, the string trimmer's commercial-grade construction and IPX-5-rated weather resistance allows crews to work through the worst weather conditions. The carbon fiber shaft stands up to the job while being lighter weight than metal shafts for day-long ease of use. A three-speed digital control optimizes runtime and gives the user ultimate control no matter what you're cutting. The Rapid Reload head accepts up to 26 feet of .120 line and gets you back to work in under a minute. Runtime will depend on what ah rated Ego 56V battery you use but a 5ah battery will give you 1 hour of continuous trigger time. The trimmer comes with a 2-year warranty.

GRASSHOPPER EDGE-EZE EDGER

Improve productivity, reduce time-consuming hand edging and eliminate the need for two-cycle edgers with the Grasshopper Edge-EZE. Electric and manual models deliver a clean edge up to 2.5 inches deep up to 500 feet/minute



*Grasshopper
Edge-EZE edger*

along sidewalks, driveways and roadways, and vertical adjustment up to 12 inches and allow edging from the sidewalk, turf or curb. An optional electric actuator increases downward pressure in tough conditions and raises the disc to cross sidewalks. By increasing productivity and decreasing labor, Edge-EZE can have significant impact on the bottom line.

HONDA VERSATTACH SYSTEM

Featuring two powerhead options and six different attachments, the Honda VersAttach System combines the power and reliability of Honda 4-stroke engines with a robust lineup of tools to fit a wide range of lawn and garden needs. The Honda VersAttach System offers two powerhead models, the UMC425, powered by a Honda GX25 mini 4-stroke engine, and the UMC435, powered by a GX35 mini 4-stroke engine. The design of the Honda mini 4-stroke engine provides for full, 360-degree operation, allowing the VersAttach to be used — and stored — upright, sideways or even upside down and eliminates the need to mix fuel and oil, saving the operator valuable time, money and frustration of trying to get the right fuel/oil mixture. Each pow-

erhead is a quiet, reliable, efficient machine ready for any of seven attachments, including a trimmer, edger, blower, pruner, two hedge trimmers, and cultivator that fit quickly and securely into the attachment shaft by way of Honda's SureLoc joint locking system, saving time and effort for the user.



**Honda
VersAttach
System**

HUSQVARNA 520iLX

The Husqvarna 520iLX is a premium, battery-powered string trimmer engineered for professional sports field and grounds maintenance. Lightweight yet powerful, it delivers exceptional ergonomics and balance for all-day comfort when trimming field edges, fence lines, and hardscape areas. Its two-way rotation trimmer head reduces grass buildup, while the long-lasting brushless motor ensures high efficiency and durability. Designed for professional grounds crews, the 520iLX combines precision cutting with quiet operation, perfect for noise-sensitive areas. With zero emissions and low maintenance, this trimmer is the smart choice for sports turf professionals seeking reliability and sustainability without compromising on power.



**Husqvarna
520iLX**

KRESS COMMERCIAL KC120.9 MULTI-ATTACHMENT STRING TRIMMER

The Kress Commercial KC120.9 commercial-grade multi-attachment string trimmer provides extreme power and optimal versatility for crews on the go. This comprehensive landscaping tool supports six attachments — a rapid-reload string trimmer head, straight and curved shaft edgers, brush cutter, hedge trimmer and pole saw — and provides power output equivalent to that of a 25cc gas engine.

Equipped with Kress's brushless motor and a built-in LED control panel, the trimmer's variable-speed trigger supports two pre-set speed settings. Part of the broader Kress Commercial line, the KC120.9 integrates seamlessly into Kress's full roster of commercial-grade equipment, as well as the Kress app. And with an aluminum gearhead and IPX5 rating, the KC120.9 is ready for any task.



**Kress Commercial
KC120.9 multi-
attachment string
trimmer**

MILWAUKEE M18 FUEL EDGER

The Milwaukee M18 Fuel edger is designed to meet the performance, durability, and ergonomic needs of landscape maintenance professionals. The edger's Powerstate brushless motor delivers more power than 31cc gas to take on demanding applications like edge creation, and maintains a higher blade speed to create clean edges faster. This fixed-shaft edger is lighter weight and has less vibration, reducing fatigue. The M18 Fuel edger reaches full throttle in less than 1 second, and includes a site line on the guard, steel skid plate, and blade wear indicator to provide more control and increase productivity. Redlink Plus intelligence enables full-circle communication between the tool and battery, providing users with performance, protection and productivity. This edger is optimized for use with the M18 Fuel Redlithium Forge HD12.0 battery to provide more power and runtime. The M18 Fuel edger is fully compatible with more than 275 solutions on the M18 system.



**Milwaukee
M18 Fuel edger**



Stihl FSA 135 R

STIHL FSA 135 R

For sports field managers and professional turf crews seeking a game-changing battery-powered trimmer in a loop-handle design, the Stihl FSA 135 R delivers. Built with the same proven drive and cutting components found in Stihl professional gas trimmers and powered by a brushless motor, the Stihl FSA 135 R provides consistent, professional cutting performance with the added benefits of low noise and zero exhaust emissions, making it well suited for schools, stadiums and municipal fields. With three performance settings, this trimmer delivers the versatility needed for precision edging and trimming across a wide range of applications, from athletic field perimeters and fence lines to hardscape edges and general grounds maintenance. Its weather-resistant, IPX4-rated construction is designed and tested for splash-water protection, helping ensure reliable performance when field conditions change.

TORO REVOLUTION STRING TRIMMER

The Toro Revolution string trimmer is designed for professional landscapers tackling tough tasks. Its rugged solid shaft withstands heavy use, while a 16-inch cutting width and .095-inch line provide increased capacity to handle larger jobs. The bump-feed, easy-load head simplifies operation by eliminating the hassle of threading, helping users stay productive. Powered by Toro's 60V Flex-Force Power System, the trimmer delivers up to 240 minutes of runtime. A rear-mounted, high-efficiency brushless motor optimizes performance and torque, while variable 2-speed operation — offering 5,300 or 6,400 rpm — allows adjustment based on job demands. Compatibility with the Revolution backpack and Powerlink Tether extends runtime and enhances versatility. Comfort features like the included shoulder harness reduce strain during extended use, while a 2-year warranty provides added peace of mind. **SFM**



Toro Revolution string trimmer

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Michigan SFMA: www.misfma.org

Minnesota Park and Sports Field Management
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Mo-Kan STMA: <https://mokansfma.org/>

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Empowerment

Empowerment is one of those leadership terms we often hear — in workshops, hiring conversations, and motivational talks. It's a word people nod along to, a word that sounds inspiring, but a word that's often misunderstood. Because real empowerment isn't about cheerleading; and it isn't about handing over tasks just to clear your plate.

At its core, empowerment is trust in motion. It's the transfer of belief, responsibility and decision making that turns a crew into a team — and a team into a culture. Empowerment is the point where leadership stops being something you hold and becomes something you share. It's how experience becomes mentorship, and how consistency becomes culture.

One of the biggest misconceptions in leadership is that empowering people means stepping back and hoping for the best. That's not empowerment, that's abdication. Real empowerment doesn't ask you to give up control, it asks you to give up fear. Empowerment says, "I trust the system we built. I trust the training I've given you. And I trust you enough to lead inside your lane."

A leader who empowers doesn't just offload tasks — they create ownership. They hand over a piece of the process, framed with expectations, purpose and enough room for the other person to take pride in the result.

Years ago, I worked in a minor league ballpark. The crew was full of sharp, capable people who were familiar with the workflow. But every decision, irrigation timing, equipment swap, material selection, and even basic scheduling hit the same bottleneck: one supervisor. He didn't intend to micromanage. He simply wanted things done correctly. Sound familiar?

The unintended result: The work got done, but slower than it needed to. The crew was hesitant, and the supervisor was burned out. Then he made a shift that ended up transforming their culture. He started weekly "decision rounds." Every crew member had to identify one decision they would normally bring to him — and they had to make it themselves. At the end of each week, they debriefed the outcomes.

The first few times were rough. A couple of decisions needed correction. But the learning curve was worth it. By midseason, everything began to click. Communication improved. Problems were addressed.

Empowerment without accountability is chaos. Accountability without empowerment is control. Effective leadership requires both.

In our world, mistakes are part of the landscape. Mix rates might get off. A mowing pattern might miss the mark. The easy reaction is to take the responsibility back and say, "I'll just do it myself." But empowerment asks a harder question: Did we learn from this, or did we just avoid it? When something goes wrong, your job isn't to rescue the task — it's to coach the person. Ask:

- What did you notice after the mistake?
- What would you change next time?
- What do you need from me to feel confident handling this again?

People thrive when they understand both the freedom they have and the expectations that support it. Empowerment strengthens each level by:

- Reducing the bottleneck on supervisors.
- Improving decision-making on the ground.
- Increasing job satisfaction and career pride.
- Building a stable pipeline of future leaders.
- Creating a culture where people solve problems instead of waiting for directions.

People who feel trusted take better care of their work. If they helped shape the plan, they protect it. If they were trusted to lead, they show up differently. If they're allowed to make decisions, they think like leaders. Empowerment isn't just a leadership technique — it's an investment in your team's future capacity.

Every leader eventually reaches the point where holding everything becomes the limiting factor. Empowerment shifts your leadership from being production-based to being people-based. The mark of a high-level leader is not how much they do — but how many others do it well because of them.

That's the stolon effect — leadership spreading underground, connecting the system, strengthening the entire organization long before results show at the surface. Empowerment is leadership that multiplies. When you empower someone, you're not losing control — you're gaining leaders. **SFM**



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