

THE *SPORTSTURF* INTERVIEW: CHAD PRICE, CSFM, CFB

This month in “The *SportsTurf* Interview,” we meet agronomist Chad Price, CSFM, CFB, president of Carolina Green Corp., Indian Trail, NC. Chad has nearly 30 years in the sports turf construction industry and has been involved in the design and construction of more than 400 fields at the professional, semi-pro, university, municipal, private and public school levels. Chad is a former board member of the STMA. Chad holds a BS in Agronomy from Virginia Tech and is a Certified Sports Field Manager (CSFM), a Certified Field Builder (CFB), and a NC Certified Turfgrass Professional.

SportsTurf: *What different segments of the sports turf industry are you involved in? What does a regular working week look like, if such a thing even exists?*

PRICE: Carolina Green basically has three divisions: field construction, field maintenance, and sod production, and we have managers and superintendents that run these divisions and get the work done. Most of our work is collegiate and professional, but we also work with high schools and recreation league clients. In sod production, we have sand base sod, native soil sod, and GameOnGrass, an engineered rootzone sod grown on plastic. The majority of our sod production goes to athletic field uses.

My job varies weekly, but for the most part involves meeting with clients, working with our design and estimating people to price the work, and helping schedule the crews and equipment. I typically travel several days a week, and spend a good bit of “free time” at the sod farm.

ST: *What field projects are you working on currently?*

PRICE: Fall brings a lot of GameOnGrass field replacements for the NFL and college clients. We are at the Ravens, Redskins, and sending sod to the Eagles and Chiefs during this time. We have done a lot of drainage work and field renovations this year. We are currently working at the Pirates spring training facility, James Madison University softball, Salem Red Sox, University of North Carolina soccer, and University of Virginia baseball to name a few. Larger projects last summer included UVA football stadium field, UNC’s Kenan Stadium, University of Tennessee football practice, East Tennessee State football stadium and Texas A&M soccer.

ST: *What kinds of cutting-edge technologies do you currently employ?*

PRICE: GameOnGrass is probably the most unique new technology we employ. It is a smaller part of our total business, but occurs at high profile places. It has been almost 10 years in the making, and complements our construction and sod production services. GameOnGrass is a sand base bermuda sod grown on plastic, designed to drain vertically and provide stability for play immediately after install. It requires intense supervision and management at the farm, but there is really



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nothing else that we grow that can provide the immediate play capability. It has found uses in small areas like soccer goals, baseball wear spots, lacrosse creases, wedding reception areas, and TV commercials. It is also used to lie over synthetic turf in some international professional soccer games, as well as in-season “gut” and full-field replacement at football fields.

One special case use of GameOnGrass occurred this fall at UNC football, where the stadium field served as both practice and game field for the entire season. UNC is undergoing a total rebuild of most of their game and practice fields, and the construction plan called for going a year without football practice fields. UNC Athletics initially thought synthetic turf for a season was the best option, but after looking at GameOnGrass, they realized not only would it be less costly, but also keep to the coaches and trainers preference to remain natural grass. The key was our ability to flip the field overnight. We produced seven fields of GameOnGrass for their season, one field for each home game if necessary in a worse case scenario. The GameOnGrass performed very well and UNC only had to replace about one third of that amount over the season, resulting in additional and significant cost savings to the program.

The continued advancement in sod removal and install equipment, like the GKB Combinator and SideKick pusher, has increased efficiency in doing field replacements. We can now basically replace a field in a 12 to 24-hour window.

And of course, automated laser controlled equipment continues to be the most important component of building a job. All grading and drainage work centers around laser-controlled equipment.

ST: How did you get your start in this business?

PRICE: Way back in the '80's, when I graduated from Virginia Tech, I thought I would continue working on the family farm, or possibly take a job with an ag chem company, but the farm industry was having difficulties at the time. With the help of my Dad and my uncle, I started a chemical lawn care business, and that evolved into sports field applications, and in 1992 I shifted totally to sports field construction. It was not necessarily a planned path on my part, but clearly divine guidance and lots of support from my family has brought me to this point. My wife, Kerry, is an accountant who worked as an auditor at Deloitte, and later as CFO of Crowder Construction in Charlotte. In 1999, she left the corporate world to become my boss, and that took Carolina Green to another level. My brother, Rodd Price, and his wife, Rita, were instrumental in getting the sod farm established. Our sod operations are key to our responsiveness to our clients' needs. Guess I ended up farming in the end, just on someone else's dirt.

ST: What piece of advice do you wish someone had given you when you were starting out?

PRICE: Take some business/accounting classes, either online or at a community college, whatever you can manage. Or, do like I did, marry an accountant. Looking back, I feel I was strong in agronomics, equipment operation, and the physical part of the job, but lost with payroll taxes and a balance sheet. We all have different skill sets, so surround yourself with good people that complement your shortcomings. And do the right thing, even when it is painful, because it always benefits in the end.

ST: What are the most important changes you've seen in sports turf management since you started in the industry?

PRICE: When I started it was not really an industry, but more of a subset of golf and grounds management. There were not very many "sports field contractors," and really very few standards for sports field construction. We evolved along with field designers and material and equipment suppliers to where we are today, to a recognizable, specific industry. Certification programs, specifically STMA's CSFM and the American Sports Builders Association's Certified Field Builder, have elevated our professional status, and slowly we see increasing compensation for sports field managers (SFMs). We have more women in the industry, some amazing female groundskeepers, industry suppliers, and educators, and we need more.

ST: You know a lot of sports turf managers. What are they saying are the biggest obstacles to overcome for them to be successful today?

PRICE: I think "success" would have to be defined as love for the job and pride in your work more so than financial compensation. Pay and operating budgets for most SFMs is still lower than what I believe is warranted, although there is definitely an upward trend. This industry requires most SFMs to start at the bottom and put in lots of sweat equity to get to a decent wage. I personally do not have a problem with that, and think most jobs are the same, but it is hard to lure good new talent when starting pay pales in comparison to tech or industry jobs.

Once you achieve a level of success as an SFM, you then often hit the glass ceiling where its either stay put, or put on a tie and move on to administration. On the flip side, where else can you get to work outside on fields, be that close to the game, and drive a tractor? I think Marc Anthony said, "Do what you love, and you'll never work a day in your life."

ST: How has your career benefitted from being a member of STMA?

PRICE: I have benefitted immensely from STMA. I cannot overstate that point. I came to my first conference looking for people who built and maintained fields, and I not only found that, but also found lifelong friends and resources and counsel. I have had the opportunity to serve on the STMA and SAFE Boards, and committees, but the gain has been all mine. The CSFM program has helped me professionally and financially.

ST: What are your passions and interests outside of work?

PRICE: I have been accused of fishing and bird hunting on occasion, but that is mostly rumor. I am blessed to get to play in our church praise band and lead a high school Sunday school class. We spend lots of time in the bleachers at wrestling, football, and volleyball. Getting to work with my family is also a blessing, most of the time. **/ST/**