



DESIGN/BUILD BETTER THAN REALTY

Artificial turf moves from sports fields onto properties traditionally maintained by landscape pros

BY RON HALL, Editor in Chief

## Synthetic turf sprouts on home lawns

**E**ach spring the Walt Disney World's EPCOT International Flower & Garden Festival erupts in a spectacle of color, texture and design. Meticulously designed beds of naturally colored flowers, mostly annuals, frame the attractions and cover almost every patch of EPCOT's World Showcase that isn't paved. Themed topiary and, in one landscape, a realistic model railroad chugging through a miniature mountain village add a whimsical air to the floral wonderland.

But this past spring one special festival attraction, a grass-like synthetic turf children's playground, didn't require any particular knowledge of horticulture. This display drew youngsters by the dozens, but it was the grass-like surface, installed

by a company called ForeverLawn, that grabbed the attention of adults. Curious, many of them bent over to feel the texture of the surface and others walked on it as they followed children or grandchildren to colorful playground equipment. Most visitors seemed pleased with the appearance of the feel of the fake grass.

Move over ornamentals, turfgrass, pavers, patios, outdoor kitchens and everything else landscape contractors install and maintain for customers—make room for synthetic turf.

### Business is booming

Synthetic turf for residential and commercial properties is here and it's hot. How hot?

"I've heard numbers of 20 to 30 percent for the industry," says Dale Karmine,

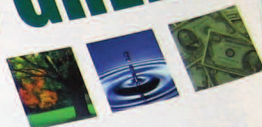
who, with his brother Brian, owns Albuquerque-based ForeverLawn Inc., which has been expanding at an 80% clip these past three years, he says. "I think it will continue to grow for the foreseeable future," Karmine adds.

More than a dozen international, national or multi-regional companies sell, and in many cases install, synthetic, and not just for sports fields either, although that's where it receives the most publicity.

Indeed, the rate that synthetic turf is replacing natural grass in big-name stadiums and small-town sports parks worldwide has been astounding, impacting every level of competition from pee-pee to professional. FieldTurf, the industry leader, has installed about 2,000 synthetic athletic turf fields itself. "Credit several factors for synthetic's

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