

RECRUITING AND COORDINATING VOLUNTEER EFFORTS TO MAINTAIN PUBLIC SPORTS FIELDS*

by Dr. Richard G. Caton

The United States is in the grip of a growing dilemma surrounding the demand by the public for space to carry on athletic activities. In almost every community across the country we see desperate struggles between those who desire to use athletic fields and those who control and maintain the available facilities. We simply have more requests for athletic field use than can be accommodated in any kind of sensible fashion.

When we say "sensible fashion" we refer to the prudent use of a particular facility that allows for the field to be taken out of play periodically so that cultural practices can be employed to keep the fields in good condition so that play can be carried on in a relatively safe environment. Mowing, fertilizing, controlling weeds and other pests, grooming, raking, core aeration, reseeding, sodding, and other techniques all take time. The time is dictated by Mother Nature and kept on a clock that has not changed since the dawn of life on this planet.

Turfgrass - you see, that wonderful natural cushion that athletes of all ages and all skill levels crave, provides the finest and safest playing surface. However, it requires constant care to maintain it in a healthy condition and this care requires sufficient manpower, equipment, and materials to properly do the job.

Now, however, we add the vicious paradox or as Shakespeare said "the unkindest cut of all." At a time when we have the greatest need for improving our programs by providing more fields, and better maintenance to accommodate demand (all of which take increased funding and increased maintenance), we see budget reductions. A dilemma indeed!

The question is - "What can I do, given this woeful scenario, to improve conditions and to somehow stem the tide toward total destruction of our athletic fields, hence our programs?"

Providing for proper maintenance requires a commitment to generate adequate funds for the aforementioned manpower, equipment, and materials; - volunteerism, properly organized and managed, can contribute significantly to offset the demand for increased funding.

A major problem for most Boards of Control and administrators is providing adequate maintenance with ever dwindling funds. The areas of field grooming, mowing, and a variety of other tasks lend themselves well to volunteerism, which is a viable means of meeting basic maintenance requirements without "breaking the bank."

The establishment of such a program is fundamentally based on communication. People don't know about things until

they are told and they can't give you something until you tell them what you want. Such programs, by the way, are not new. They just aren't widely known or utilized.

The following is a brief outline on how to get started with a volunteer program to provide manpower and financial assistance to ailing programs:

I. Clearly define the problem and communicate verbally and in writing to the citizenry.

Develop slide shows or videotapes to illustrate the problem and take groups to visit fields that need "a friend."

II. Clearly define your manpower and monetary deficiencies and do so in an easy to understand format field by field. Be sure that in each instance you list the materials, equipment, and services that the Board of Control can provide and the kinds of assistance you seek.

III. Give your program a name (acronyms work best), for example: ROBIN - Retired Old Buddy Is Needed, or RSVP - Retired Senior Volunteer Program. The program should not be completely aimed at the local cadre of retirees. For example, the local Boy and Girl Scouts, YM or YWCAs, civic groups

continued on page 10

Because 50,000 fans know the difference between Cardinal Red and Crimson Tide.

SPORTS FIELD
LINEMANTM
MARKING PAINT

We know your sponsors are very particular about their colors, and so are the fans.

Becker-Underwood can create any color you want to paint your turf—including white for line striping that won't wear out before your team does!

**BECKER
UNDERWOOD** INC.
THE COLOR OF INNOVATION

Makers of the
World's Favorite
Colors

For more information call us at 1-800-232-5907.

Recruiting & Coordinating Volunteer Efforts*

continued from page 5

Kiwanis, Jaycees, Lions, Elks, American Legion, etc., can be of great assistance through contribution/solicitation of funds and/or manpower. An acronym for the scouts might be SCATTR Scouts Come Again To The Rescue.

IV. Development of group leaders - Provide hands-on training programs particularly for group leaders.

V. Be sure to get "Moms" involved. There is no stronger force on earth than a mother's desire to provide for her children. PTAs and other parents groups and women's auxiliaries of various organizations provide a powerful source of assistance and leadership in all such endeavors.

VI. Start with just one field. Some refer to it as the "Adopt a Field" Program or other catch phrases. Be sure that you know exactly what kind of assistance you need. Work out the timing involved and assign clear responsibilities and the aforementioned training to group leaders.

VII. Develop a short contract showing some minimal formalization of the agreement to help and have a "save/harmless" clause in it to protect the Board of Control in the event of accident or injury. Be sure signees have their own insurance coverage and are willing to assume certain risks.

VIII. Widely publicize early successes and praise the volunteer efforts with pictures of improvements and estimates of savings to the community. Refer to individuals and organizations by name.

IX. Give all volunteers, both individuals and groups, distinguished status within the community by providing identification cards that give them "free" access to all games, concerts, or special events for which one otherwise would have to pay admission.

X. After the program is in "high gear" so to speak, get donations and volunteer assistance to provide an annual dinner for all volunteers. As a special feature of the event give awards for various categories, i.e. most hours logged by an individual, largest single financial contribution, most innovative idea introduced, field most dramatically improved (use before and after pictures, etc.) and other kinds of incentives to encourage increased participation and a sense of satisfaction and belonging to those actively engaged in the program. Be sure all community dignitaries are present and offer words of gratitude.

XI. Publicize and communicate everything to the end that the program is recognized as an indispensable part of the fabric of the community.

XII. After a time, seek to have the group become more self-sustaining by election of officers from within the group to provide leadership and inspiration to the group,

with community officials acting as resource people as opposed to occupying leadership roles.

To reiterate a point, remember that individuals and groups can only give what they know you need. To accomplish this, you must "reach out" to them. We live in the most dynamic country in the world and one which repeatedly gives and gives to help each other and to provide relief around the world in times of crisis.

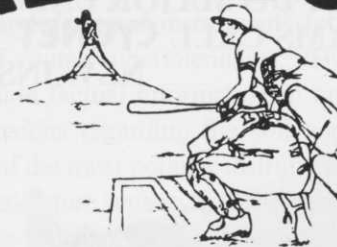
We have a crisis in America. Our athletic fields are not sufficient in numbers or in quality to support the programs and expectations of our citizens. We must do something about it. Volunteerism can provide significant relief to the "public purse." Perhaps it's time you tried it.

We sincerely hope that the thoughts and ideas offered herein will be of some assistance.

**(Reprint of the handout supplied by Dr. Richard Caton in conjunction with his presentation at the 8th Annual STMA Conference & Exhibition in Colorado Springs, January, 1997.)*

STM

KLAWOG®



A New Foundation for Sports

MOUND and BATTER'S BOX MIX

50

Ground Stabilizer

Klawog® Mound and Batter's Box Mix - A patented processed clay compound designed to stabilize heavy-use areas. Formulated for controlled consistency. Klawog welds with itself for fast easy installation and repairs. Available in 50 lb. bags, no mixing, ready to use. Also manufactured for golf bunkers, horse stables and horse-shoe pits.

Wessco, Inc. • P.O. Box 4025 • Copley, Ohio • 44321

Phone: 800-650-9322 / Fax 330-745-9322