

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, is dictated by Mother Nature and kept on

a clock that had 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 which 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 YWCA's, civic groups (Kiwanis, Jaycees, Lions, Elks, American Legion, etc.) can be of great assistance through contribution/solicitation of funds and/or manpower.

Continued on page 10

NATIONAL SEED PROFESSIONAL TURF PRODUCTS

**Specializing in Quality
Grass Seed to Meet All Your
Turf Performance Standards**

Call For a Catalog

800-828-5856

Carry a full line of quality mixtures
especially formulated for:

SPORTS & ATHLETIC FIELDS

LOW MAINTENANCE AREAS

GENERAL GROUNDS

GOLF, LAWN & RECLAMATION

**Technical Agronomic Support and
Custom Blending Available**

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. PTA’s 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 “save/harmless” clause in it to protect the Board of Control in the event of accident or injury. Be sure assignees 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 and 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 time 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.

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

*Dr. Richard G. Caton “Doc”, recently retired, served as the Executive Director of New Jersey Turfgrass Association since 1993. ♦

Renovation of Athletic Fields

by Dr. Henry W. Inkyk*

Natural turfgrass athletic fields provide not only an aesthetically pleasing and attractive appearance but also more importantly a high quality dense resilient playing surface as a cushion for accommodating athletic activities. Intense use of natural turf athletic fields

can severely impact on the suitability of the playing surface. Symptoms of intense use are reflected in severe wear, loss of density, resiliency and cushion. Additionally, the soil may become severely compacted and the surface pocketed with footprints. Under such conditions, the increased potential for athlete injury and impact on playability

are of major concern.

The degree of sensitivity of the playing surface to athletic activities is closely associated with a variety of factors closely associated with turfgrass growth. Included among the major factors are the following:

- Intense use above and beyond the wear tolerance of the specific turfgrasses.
- Uncontrolled or lack of supervised use particularly under adverse soil and weather conditions.
- Deficiencies in construction procedures particularly with respect to proper soil drainage.
- Absence of a well-planned maintenance program directed toward the most favorable conditions for turf grass growth and persistence performed effectively and timely.
- Acidic and/or low fertility soils.
- Appropriate and proper diagnosis and timely treatment (if required) of weeds, insects and/or diseases.
- Delay in repair until relatively complete obliteration of the playing surface rather than at an early stage of turfgrass damage.

E & M GOLF SUPPLY

Nurturing Safer, Healthier Fields for over 10 years.

Deep Tine Aeration relieves compaction and promotes root growth naturally. Improves drainage and eliminates ponding.

Slit Seeding is the fastest method of improving the density of your turf.

Renovation with a RotaDairon produces a deep, fine soil seed bed which reduces the time a field is out of play.

Call for Information, Sales & Contract Services

800-554-4863

eandmgolf@aol.com

Continued on page 16