

Maximizing A Minimal Budget

By Nicole Sherry

Ah yes, it is that time of year again when all turf professionals sit in front of their computer and fret over how they can spend their budget. With fuel costs rising and freight charges climbing, it is hard to imagine how we can still maintain our sports fields the way they ought to be maintained. Let's not stress too much yet! There are many ways we, as professionals, can live up to our own standards. I know that many people in this industry think that just because I work on a professional field I have a budget that is ample enough to complete the task at hand. Well, that is far from the truth. Fact is, many of you probably have more money to spend on field maintenance than I do. When I worked in Major League Baseball I was taught to stretch our budget as far as it could go. That included taking the time to brainstorm ideas that could help us stay away from purchasing things that were too expensive. Instead, we made a lot of our equipment by looking at pictures of expensive tools in trade magazines and copied them. For instance, it is really important to nail drag our infield. We went to the store, purchased wood and nails and constructed our own drag. We saved almost one hundred dollars by doing so. The labor was not an issue either because we saved the project for down time during games or rainy days. We also created level boards the same way. It is easy to find scrap wood or even things you have left over in your shop to use. When I first started at the Thunder I hardly had any hand tools. I was surprised how much they cost at retail prices. They cost more than what I budgeted for. So, I called my dad and asked if he had any he wanted to give away. Whatever he gave up, I gladly took. Then I went around on weekends looking for yard sales or moving sales and seized some more tools that way.

In managing a professional field I dump most of my budget into my machinery, fertilizer, chemicals, clay, and infield skin topdressing. Shopping around and comparing prices can almost cut these costs by 15%. Some companies' policies allow you to purchase quantities before a certain date in order to pay last year's prices before they raise them for the new year. Also, just because you buy them now, does not mean you have to accept delivery now. You can wait and have them delivered at your convenience without paying extra. Some of us suffer from "name brand syndrome"! If you can get away from brand names and shop around for prices, you will be surprised how much you can save and how alike these products are. For example, ABC drying agent for infields costs almost \$11.50 per bag. I found that I can purchase XYZ for \$8.00 a bag and it is exactly the same thing.

In Closing, I am not saying that these ideas are going to save you thousands of dollars. However, if you shop around for lower prices and try to make your own equipment, you will be able to use the savings to put back into your big-ticket items like machinery or chemicals. In this business you never know what the weather is going to bring, so putting an extra \$500 dollars into another item can save you in the long run. Network with other professionals in your area. Ask what they do in certain situations and where they purchase products. Maybe you could borrow a piece of equipment you do not have in exchange for one they do not have. We are all in this together for good and bad. We are such a small industry that helping one another maintain safe, playable, and aesthetically pleasing facilities should be everyone's number one goal.

Nicole Sherry is the Head Groundskeeper for Trenton Thunder, Double-A Affiliate of the New York Yankees. ♦

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