



CONSTRUCTION TOUR MINNESOTA STYLE

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One of the best WGCSA monthly meetings that I've ever attended was the construction tour to Whistling Straits hosted by Mike Lee two seasons ago. It was so educational to see a golf course in all different phases of construction and establishment. Since most of the monthly meetings visit golf courses that are all complete and in peak condition, it was a welcome change to see how one is built.

I had the chance to repeat that experience this past fall when John Stier invited me to join him on a road trip to the Twin Cities area. We were going to visit some of Glenn Rehbein Companies' construction projects for athletic fields, residential lawns, and a premier golf course, in addition to their sod farm and home office. I couldn't pass up the opportunity to see so many turf sites all in a two-day trip. Our tour guide was a long time WTA member and past Turf EXPO speaker Mike Kelly. He is an agronomist at Glenn Rehbein Companies based out of Blaine, Minnesota. Glenn Rehbein is a company that reminds me of The Bruce Company in Middleton. They are both huge and involved in all kinds of landscaping endeavors throughout the nation. One area that sets Rehbein apart is they are getting very involved in growing and installing *Poa supina* in certain situations. John Stier has done much research on this species and wanted to see how the grass was performing in some real life situations.

That was one of the experiences we had. We saw *supina* at the Rehbein sod farm, at soccer and football fields, and in a home lawn. The stop that you would have enjoyed the most was our first stop, though. It was very similar to Mike Lee's construction tour. We visited Troy Burne Golf Course (designed by Michael Hurdzan and Tom Lehman



Troy Burne Golf Course in Hudson, Wisconsin

and owned by Glenn Rehbein) which is being constructed in Hudson, Wisconsin. We saw soils excavated and blended from on-site quarries, California Greens being built, Netlon soil stabilizer being blended and used, big roll sod being laid as fast as the semi's brought it in, a "Living Water" recirculating river being built, use of native plants and numerous mulches for erosion control, and lots of shaping, constructing and planting in all stages of progress. This is going to be a high-end golf course that I hope you can sometime visit. But don't wait until it's all complete and in peak condition.

Our second and last stop on the first day was a new football field built



Part of Honeywell Corporation's parking lot was sacrificed to make room for the regulation size soccer field



Urban Ventures soccer field, a turf parking lot in the foreground

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by a high school in Woodbury, Minnesota. This was a 100% sodded *Poa supina* field. It was interesting to hear John start right in about some of the ways the field should be managed. He thought it should be fertilized right away because, even though *supina* is yellow-green compared to our more familiar species, this field was too yellow. He talked about the shorter mowing requirements and the additional irrigation needs that *supina* requires. Mike, our tour guide, informed us about the construction techniques and some of the politics involved in building the field correctly. Some of the construction techniques were inadequate because the school district decided to skimp on the materials for the root zone mix.

The next morning Mike picked us up for the grand tour. We started out by visiting his home headquarters then traveled north to their large and diverse sod farm. By diverse I mean they grow quite a few different species of turf including not only *supina* but also different cultivars of bentgrass. At the home headquarters we saw offices, labs, shops, and heard about tons of equipment (we didn't see much equipment because most had left for jobs that day). Then we headed out to see numerous athletic field situations.

The first was a combined soccer complex called the National Sport Center (NSC) in Blaine, Minnesota. NSC has 40 soccer fields and the city of Blaine has 15 more adjacent to it for a total of 55 fields. This complex is noted in the Guinness Book of World Records as being the largest soccer complex in the world. We met with the director and heard some common athletic field stories: everyone wants to play on the main stadium



A completed Urban Ventures soccer field with a turf parking lot



John was interested in some of the space plantings at the University of Minnesota

um field in addition to the city's professional soccer team and of course the rock concerts get held in that one field also. We all noted that the professional management of complexes like this could be the up-and-coming profession in turf management in the near future. Turf positions like these could make a professional explosion much like management of golf courses did 20-25 years ago.

Next we visited two new sand-based football fields built for Bethel College in the cities. The college had the foresight to build an adjoining



One of the goalmouths of National Sports Center that was sodded to *Poa supina* in an attempt to increase wear recovery ability



Poa supina football field in Woodbury, Minnesota

practice field to ease the wear on the main field. The main field is usually where everyone from the freshman teams to the band wants to play and practice. A practice field is essential if you want to keep the main field in decent shape, even if the field is sand-based and more compaction resistant. They're not cheap though. A sand-based football field complete with drainage and irrigation can cost \$200,000 plus.

The next stop was very interesting. We visited two *Poa supina* soccer
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fields built in the Minneapolis inner city. One was built and the other was under construction on what used to be very distressed railroad land. The amount of land was limited so the fields had to be built to be played on continually and take a lot of abuse. They decided to build the fields with a Netlon sand based rootzone, install irrigation, and use *supina*. They also wanted to create as much green-space as possible so even the parking lot was sodded to *supina* and on Netlon mix to resist compaction. The funding for these fields came from a group called Urban Ventures. Urban Ventures is a non profit organization supported by corporate and individual sponsors. One of the large sponsors is Honeywell Corporation. Their headquarters is located adjacent to these fields and part of their parking lot was sacrificed to make enough room to build a regulation size soccer field. Another sponsor is the Minnesota Sport Turf Managers Association. Their members are donating time and equipment to guarantee the continued success of the fields. Urban Ventures is involved in many other projects to help inner city children. Their investment was based on their belief that

inner cities can be improved if young children are given more good activities to that will give them pride in their community. Not just anyone can use the facilities either. The children have to earn the right by getting good grades in school.

The last stop was one that I insisted we make. I wanted to visit the turf research facilities at the University of Minnesota in Saint Paul. Unfortunately we stopped in unannounced during a school day; consequently, there was nobody to show us around the facility. Their facility included agronomy, perennial flower and shrub and tree research on the same land. An agronomy student was able to inform us a little about some of the putting green and species research and we also saw some of the space-planted breeding work. I will need another visit to get the complete tour though.

One of the things John and I discussed during the drive was how many athletic field construction and maintenance phone calls we received this summer. John has had a lot of athletic field exposure but mine is more limited. This trip was very informative to see the many athletic fields in different phases of completion and

styles of construction. All the other stops were also valuable learning experiences. My hope is that the WGCSA will have more construction tours for monthly meetings in the coming years. Something is always learned at the usual monthly meetings and even more so when a half-day is dedicated to a special tour like Gary Tanko hosted on shop safety at Sentry World last year. But nothing beats the Construction Tour. ♣

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