

Member Profile

ROGER MACKLIN, GENERAL SUPERVISOR PARKS,
NORTH YORK DISTRICT, CITY OF TORONTO, ON



An Interview with Roger Macklin

What is your role with the City of Toronto? General Supervisor Parks, North York District. The Parks branch is divided into five operating districts: North York, Toronto and East York, Scarborough, Etobicoke and York, and the Waterfront District (WF). It's a North – South - East – West and WF split.

What kind of team do you work with? I report to a District Manager of Parks, who reports to the Director of Toronto Parks. My manager has another General Supervisor (GS) for Parks Operations, and we split the district east/west of Yonge Street. We also have one other GS for Parks Technical Services and Construction, and his team covers the entire district for trades work in all of our parks and recreation facilities. I have three Park Supervisors and we oversee the day to day parks operations, plus the landscape maintenance at several city arenas, community centres, libraries, heritage sites, and transportation division properties. Some horticulture displays are in the middle of busy streets. We also maintain the green space and flower beds at the Ontario Science Centre.

In my area there are 101 front line staff in peak season, 30 in non peak. With three parks supervisors and one support assistant in the office, and two parks foremen we form the Parks Operations management team east of Yonge Street.

Front line staff are members of the Toronto Civic Employees Union, CUPE Local 416. There are 40 permanent staff and 60 seasonal staff; 14 of the permanent staff leave my operation to work at outdoor artificial ice rinks each winter; 12 staff are on shifts to cover evening and weekend maintenance in peak season; the greenhouse gardeners are on a rotating shift all year.

What is your team responsible for? We are responsible for the turf and sports field maintenance, horticulture, general services, and winter maintenance at 250+ parks and city properties (over 950 ha of land area) maintaining approximately half of that area as recreational or passive open space and mowing 450 ha. Our crews work out of two main service yards year round with small engine mechanics on site, and staff work out of Edwards Gardens year round. Peak season we have staff located at three more seasonal/satellite yards to save on travel time. Parks have generally and highly maintained turf areas, sports fields, horticulture displays, playgrounds, natural areas, open bodies of water, splash pads, tennis courts, basketball courts, green houses, running tracks, a BMX bike park, skateboard bowls, environmentally significant areas, dog off leash areas, a disc golf course, an archery range, ravines, picnic sites, fire pits, a bake oven, parking lots, many kilometers of paved and natural surface trails, field houses, washroom buildings, lighting, irrigation, storm water and retention ponds – it's a long list of items we maintain year round.

- 7/365 operations at Sunnybrook Park and Edwards Gardens
- 74 outdoor sports fields for baseball, cricket, soccer, field hockey, football and Ultimate
- 30 ball diamonds Class A (4), B (19), C (7)
- 44 sports fields Class Premier (12), A (7), B (7), C (18)
- 12 field houses, washroom buildings
- 10 splash pads
- 10 picnic sites
- 2 greenhouses
- 2 formal gardens at Edwards, and Alexander Muir Gardens
- Over 100,000 annuals go in/out each year overall in our horticulture display beds

We have nine “flying” grass crews each led by a Lead Hand with one 16’ mower cutting the open areas, and two 6’ rotary mowers on a trailer that go park to park trimming and cutting an average 50 ha/week. One additional turf crew is dedicated to cutting, lining and maintaining the 12 premier sports fields and immediate grounds at Sunnybrook Park. They also cut the playing surfaces at the five diamonds at the Bond Park baseball complex up the street. The District has a dedicated Sports Field IPHC crew of a foreman and five staff that do the fertilizing, aerating, overseeding and topdressing at all the North District sports fields.

We have five flying horticulture crews, led by Lead Hands of Horticulture, and dedicated crews at Edwards Gardens and Alexander Muir Gardens as well as at the grounds of the Ontario Science Centre. An “orphan spaces” crew of gardeners does the horticulture and turf maintenance on the transportation sites. General services and shift crews keep up with the minor repairs to park amenities and maintain all the public use facilities in a clean and tidy manner.

What is the biggest challenge in your job? Making enough time to visit my parks on a regular basis and keep up with the correspondence requirements. You cannot run a quality parks operation from a desk or computer screen. You have to be “out-standing in your field(s).” Toronto Parks staff are very accessible to the public, and we respond to a lot of unique and direct customer service requests.

What is the most satisfying part, what makes the job worthwhile for you? That's a tough one as there are many satisfying parts of my job. The teamwork from my front line staff up to Manager and Director is great. Nobody hears us say, “No, we can't do it.” We figure out a way to get it done. I like being involved in city-wide projects about trail systems, storm water management, urban planning and transportation issues. Attending community meetings, and sports group meetings reinforce how important the parks system and features are to others as well. I still love the smell of fresh cut grass, especially the first cut of the season. I've had more than one person tell me I have the best job in the city – I don't argue that point. The fact that I can be paid to walk in a park some days, to confirm that it is clean and beautiful, is the icing on the cake.

What is the biggest misconception about your job? Many people think we just pick up litter and cut the grass in parks, so we must not do much in the winter. Yes, we are the keepers of the green, but that takes year round planning, stewardship and preventative maintenance to keep everything in a state of good repair. This winter I don't think we had many days we were not plowing or deicing paved trails, parking lots and park roadways.

Many people don't realize the extent of what we do in the summer. A parks system has so many components some folks take for granted. We ensure that for the public, our parks are a relaxing place to visit and enjoy nature, not a brain drain. Maybe that's one reason they don't notice all the work happening around them.

What is your educational/employment background? I started in the turf business in 1976 at the only job I know where they let you start at the top – digging holes to repair a water line leak at a local private golf course. Setting my sights on a Golf Superintendent position, I quickly realized you need good education to succeed in the field, so it was back to school time. I graduated from the Turf Managers' Short course in 1977, which whet my appetite for more turf knowledge. I received my Diploma in Agriculture from the University of Guelph in 1980, and had my Superintendent position at a small Par 3 course. I stayed in the golf business until 1984. I started with the City of North York Park Department in the spring of 1985 at a new sand-based soccer field and stadium they had just built, with six more soccer fields in the hydro corridor beside the stadium. That sand field is now synthetic infill turf.

Tell us about your family. I am a sixth generation Canadian from a long line of farmers, and the pioneer family recognized as the first settlers of Scarborough. The family names on my Mom's side (Thomson) and my Dad's side (Macklin) adorn heritage homes, elementary, secondary schools, and parks in the Scarborough area. We have three generations of University of Guelph Aggie grads in the clan.

What do you enjoy doing outside of the workplace? Hobbies, favourite past times? Like many in this business I like gardening – I play golf often (single digit index), and I've always played hockey.

How has the industry changed and in what direction(s) would you like to see the industry, as a whole, move towards? The demand for multipurpose sports fields has grown significantly. Multipurpose requests are growing where open green space is limited in a community. People want the ability to have layers of potential activities take place like special events, community markets and fitness camps on that ball diamond or soccer field that appears underutilized if dedicated only to sports.

There is more technology involved now, more finite maintenance regimes, and more demand for elite field conditions for longer periods of time.

The turf and sports field industry is becoming more important to the users. To facility providers they are a revenue source, as spaces to have open fields decreases and demand increases. I'd like to see synthetic fields used to meet the demand for longer seasons and reduce the wear tolerance issues on living turf fields. I think the synthetics can be great for practices, and learn to play, mini soccer and 7 on 7 recreational plays that puts so many feet on your field at once. Synthetics are good for wet weather/increment weather games. We still need to maintain quality living fields nearby for playoffs, elite youth, professional, international matches.

What do you consider to be the biggest benefit of being a member of Sports Turf Canada? Sports Turf Canada connections to sports turf industry experts is a great benefit, whether through educational seminars, publications or hands on at field days with our industry suppliers. I reference the publications on a regular basis to keep up with maintenance standards and innovations, as well as current research, and trends in the business. Sports turf is an ever improving and evolving field and Sports Turf Canada keeps me up to date, and provides the best opportunities for professional networking. •

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