

LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT

The Commons is a Number One priority area, receiving twice-a-week trimming and daily policing to keep up the Naval Academy's spic 'n span image.



Sherman Wallace and Bill Cusimano inspect the ornamental plantings at the Superintendent's Quarters on the academy campus, where visiting heads of state are entertained.

Cusimano Navigates Protocol At U.S. Naval Academy Campus

Former landscaper scrambles to make 4,500 midshipmen, thousands of tourists, and visiting dignitaries feel at home.

By Kevin Cooney,
assistant editor

The U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis, MD., is not only a government reservation, but a university, tourist attraction and an athletic entity, according to Bill Cusimano, grounds maintenance manager. It is foremost a military base and operated like one.

Strolling through the tree-shaded central campus, one would believe this was another well-manicured Ivy League university until you notice the military statues and memorials that dot the landscape. Then come the plebes (freshmen) and midshipmen, strolling smartly along the red brick pathways in their crisp white uniforms.

Down by the harbor, rows of athletic fields line the sea wall while a few yards away the class of '87 clamber over the school fleet of training vessels, learning the basics of navigation and boat handling they will one day use to pilot destroyers, frigates and air-

craft carriers through the world's waterways.

Cusimano ran his own general landscaping business for 19 years before he took over turf maintenance chores at the academy in 1978. He said he learned quickly government work means "you have the responsibility, but not the authority" to get the job done on time.

"When I ran my own business, my work crews had the authority to go out and buy the necessary tools to keep the job going. Here, I have to plan sometimes two months ahead to make sure we have what we need.

All equipment and tools at the academy are purchased by the General Services Administration, which determines what to buy based strictly on the lowest bid. "That way you get the cheapest, but not necessarily the best," he said.

Sherman Wallace, Annapolis' pest control foreman, noted that he can, and does, receive specific brands of fertilizers, fungicides

and pesticides he requests. But he has to specify why a specific brand is more appropriate than others for individual jobs and meet state, naval and coastal regulators' requirements before he gets what he needs.

Trim areas are mowed with Jacobsen 20-inch rotaries, and the division's Woods rotary mowers handle the big areas towed behind John Deere or Massey-Ferguson tractors.

Jacobsen reel mowers are also in the academy's inventory. Hustler Excel riding rotary mowers round out the campus equipment.

Decentralization is so inherent in the management structure at Annapolis that Cusimano can't estimate his annual budget. Those figures are spread among the payroll, transportation, purchasing, personnel, housing, athletic and several other departments at the academy.

Occasionally, Cusimano will discover an outside contractor doing work on the grounds as he

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Outside Contractors install new sod after raising the crown of one of the academy's intramural fields.



Plebes pass in front of Hospital Point, a 22-acre intramural field that was suffering from drought stress earlier this year. Cusimano overseeded that field with K-31 tall fescue.

does his inspection rounds. Virtually all new plantings are handled through outside contracts. The Contracts Division will have arranged for the work, and because of the complex management structure and independence bred into the system, he said communication problems are a constant consideration.

Cusimano's equipment is bought through the GSA. The Ford, Chevrolet and Chrysler vehicles are allocated by the transportation division, and other tools are repaired by the mechanic's division. But irrigation equipment is repaired by the plumbing division.

"The biggest part of my job is salesman and diplomat, trying to convince the other departments that my job needs to be done first," he said.

In addition to the hodgepodge of offices he deals with on equipment matters, Cusimano's crews maintain everything from the garden at the superintendent's ceremonial quarters to apartment complexes, single-family homes, greenhouses, football and soccer fields, areas surrounding radio transmission towers and the academy burial grounds.

Visiting heads of state are entertained at the superintendent's quarters, sometimes on a moment's notice. The landscape there always has to be in top condition. The basement of the stately building houses a flower room where staffers can cut and arrange table decorations within hours of receiving word that a for-

mal event will take place.

Officers, instructors and their families are housed in garden apartment complexes and single-family homes. There's the academy medical center and the cemetery where Annapolis graduates are entitled to be interred.

Then, of course, come the classrooms and laboratory buildings, including one area where Japanese pear trees were planted on

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the roof of an underground laboratory.

"That presents a unique management problem," Cusimano said of the Japanese Pears. No irrigation system was installed to service the dozens of trees located on a concrete mall, and a wind shear coming from the bay through a tunnel created by two buildings means that planting has to be continually monitored to prevent any long-term damage.

Every one of the 4,500 midshipmen at Annapolis is required to engage in one sport during their four years. Every day at about 3:30, "the thundering herd," as Cusimano calls them, invade the 60 acres of intramural and practice fields near the waterfront. Because of rigid time schedules built into a military establish-

ment, he has to adjust his maintenance schedules around the needs of the academic, athletic and military arms of the academy.

One Monday morning his staff overseeded the academy's parade grounds, the foreman said, and by Friday two practice sessions were held on the fledgling turf.

The "military lives by the clock—that's the tradition around here." When it comes to maintaining the athletic areas along the waterfront, soil characteristics present a special problem—those fields were built on top of land reclaimed from the Annapolis Harbor, "and it changes every ten feet - you might have some seabed, then construction fill that came from inland—it makes soil testing almost ludicrous," he commented.

This year Cusimano overseeded those athletic fields with a mix of 10 percent Cheri bluegrass and 90 percent Olympic tall fescue with good results. The non-athletic areas received a 30:30:30 mix of Pennant, Premier and Citation perennial ryegrasses with 10 percent Cheri.

Although he called the Annapolis area "the worst place in the world to grow grass—" it's located in the heart of the transition zone—Cusimano said he's pleased with the results of the overseeding and said the turf is in generally good shape throughout the academy.

Cusimano also instituted a full Par-Ex IBDU fertilizer program this year, but due to a month-long drought in July, he said it's going

to be hard to judge the success of the program when he lays down fertilizer in late spring and mid-November.

To maintain the sprawling academy grounds efficiently with the staff of 70 full-time employees, Cusimano has five separate rating systems. Top priority are high-visibility areas, which are cut twice a week and policed daily. Number five areas,

such as around the transmission tower complex and fuel storage tanks, receive occasional attention to minimize weeds and fire hazards.

The athletic areas are in a category by themselves and are maintained according to the needs of the various coaches and athletic department heads who use them. When it comes to chemical control of weeds, insects and fungi,

Cusimano said he and Wallace, "go by bloom" when they schedule their pest applications.

"You can never schedule by the calendar here," Cusimano said. "You get 100 degree days in April and snow flurries in May."

Wallace said he uses Roundup around the athletic areas, such as on the tartan racing tracks and under bleachers, as well as in all perennial areas throughout the 330-acre complex. He also applies it on the red brick walkways that wind through sections of the campus, as it doesn't stain the old brick as other non-selectives might.

To control white clover on the athletic fields, Wallace applies MCPP, and ornamental lawns are treated with non-volatile 2,4-D.

Dalapon is used for top burning on the waterfront areas, beneath bleachers and in combination with Simazine along fenceline. Orthene is the main insecticide used on the academy grounds, and Wallace said he applies Sevin for leaf chewers.

By combining post- and pre-emergents for fenceline control, Cusimano said his crews can treat those areas twice a year instead of four or five times as they did in the past.

Like many areas on the Eastern Seaboard, Annapolis is afflicted with Dutch Elm Disease. When an infestation is noted, Wallace's crews inject cups of Bidrin around the trunk. "That shoots up to the leaves in a matter of hours," and quickly kills off that particular infestation, Cusimano said.

"It's a big problem, but we're holding the line" by using Arbotect 20S in a preventative program, Wallace commented.

Forty-five hundred cadets, their families, VIPs and almost-three million tourists visit Annapolis each year. There isn't any land bank for rotating use of the athletic fields, and new construction projects are always on the drawing board at the Naval Academy. By keeping on top of the myriad regulations, customers and departments at Annapolis, Cusimano keeps Annapolis both an institution and attraction.

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