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An ounce of PR goes far

Providing quality athletic turf is a juggling act. Public relations is where many turf managers—particularly park people—fumble. They can't (or won't) talk with the users of the facilities they maintain.



Mike Golden, parks superintendent of sports-rich Chesterfield County on the outskirts of Richmond, VA, says public relations go hand-in-hand with sound agronomic practices. To Golden, persuasive communication is the grease that prevents screeches of unrealistic expectations.

"Groups such as school officials, little league commissioners, and coaches need education as to what can and cannot be done with turfgrasses," says Golden.

"If they are involved in the early planning of new facilities or of a maintenance program, they are likely to be more cooperative than if policies are dictated to them."

The payoff can be more volunteer manpower and funds for the purchase of materials and equipment, he points out.

Chesterfield, one of the fastest growing areas of Virginia with 170,000 residents, numbers 109 baseball diamonds, 20 football fields, and 43 soccer pitches. One season ends, another begins. Complicating matters, central Virginia is in the so-called transition area where some turf managers oversee baseball fields with cool-season grasses in the fall, and sprig or sod football and soccer fields with Bermudagrass in late May or June (Golden says Vamont looks good in his area).

By meeting with the users of the various facilities, Golden's department establishes firm dates for the start and end of each season, giving his crews the opportunity to restore the turf on the then-unused fields. The key word here is "firm".

"I guess it all started out when some of the baseball people were getting on the infields of the ball diamonds when they were still muddy. And then they were asking why they weren't as good as they should be," Golden recalls. "Now they're keeping people off the fields until they're ready. We're starting to work with the football and soccer people also."

Golden concedes the art of providing grass sports fields "is never perfect." Good PR can help smooth out some of the rough spots.

by Ron Hall, assistant editor