

A new home

"When we prepare an area for a tree, we dig the hole 1 1/2 times larger than the original (root) ball, and we incorporate Milorganite so there is no danger of burning the tender roots when they come out," Shaw explains.

"When we backfill the holes we use a process called jetting in," Shaw says.

The process involves taking a six-foot-long rod with a water hose on the end and probing around the tree, injecting water to help remove damaging air pockets. "It works well down here because the sand collapses so well into the air pockets with water added to them."

He has three staffers who do nothing but water and jet-in trees behind the planters.

"Approximately two weeks after they're planted, we come back and

build a bowl around the root ball out of soil and drench the root ball with Vaughan's Master Blend liquid fertilizer and Chipco 26019. And that usually makes the trees just snap, really go fast."

40 days and 40 nights

Due to the park's planned spring opening, many of the trees had to be planted during the middle of summer, not an ideal time.

To avoid desiccation and give the trees a chance to take root, they required almost constant watering from an irrigation system that was designed in-house.

"Anything to do with horticulture, we do in house," Shaw says. "It never fails that if we contract something out we have to go back later and correct it. We learned a long time ago it's better to do it yourself."

Water risers (hoses) are hooked to the top of the trees, providing a constant spray to the leaves. The risers remain in place for two months. More than three miles of flexible tubing has been used so far.

"If it wasn't for that system, this would just revert back to a scrub area," Shaw comments. "That's how much we depend on irrigation."

"The only thing we've had problems with as far as survival rates are our pine trees. Pines you just don't move in the summer. We spray them with a preservative (Vapor Guard), a coating solution to stop transpiration, but when you plant pines in July, they just don't have a good mortality rate. Out of 1,500 pines we've lost close to 100."

In all, they have lost only 103 trees of the 2,000 planted. The park eventually will have nearly 3,000 trees.

—Jeff Sobul

GOING THE DISTANCE FOR THE ROYALS

Maintaining one baseball field at a high level of quality was never considered easy. But six?

This is the task Boardwalk & Baseball horticulture manager Paul Shaw and field supervisor Mike Hurd find in front of them.

"Two of the fields—the major league practice field with 1,500 bleacher seats and one of the cloverleaf fields—will be ready when the park opens April 4th, about the same time the major league baseball season opens. The 5,500-7,000 seat stadium will be ready for use in February, 1988.

The remainder will be ready for the spring of 1988, when the park begins at least a 10-year stint hosting the Kansas City Royals spring training, and the Royals' Class A minor league affiliate.

Turfgrass maintenance

Outfields and infields for all six fields will be Tifway 419 bermudagrass, except for the stadium infield, which will be artificial turf, the Royals' normal playing surface. Infields on the four practice fields in the cloverleaf will be cut at 5/8 inches, outfields at 3/4 inches. The stadium outfield will be cut at 5/8 inches.

"We will not have a set schedule for mowing because frequency of mowing must be related to the rate of growth rather than to a time schedule," Shaw says. "Each time a field is mowed, it will be mowed in a different direction than the time before to prevent the 'washboard' effect." Grass clippings will be removed each time the field is mowed, Shaw adds.

For spectator appeal, the stadium's outfield will be mowed so that it will create a diamond pattern, a common practice on many major league fields that have games televised.

Shaw hopes to maintain a 14-inch percolation rate by

eliminating thatch build-up. Hurd will topdress with masonry sand, verticuting three to five times a year and aerifying three times a year.

He and Hurd will try to limit herbicide use through proper cultural practices. "Even selective herbicide reduces the hardness of plant material," Shaw comments. "We avoid its use as much as possible. We find that proper fertilization, irrigation and maintenance will prevent most weeds.

"We will use herbicides routinely on bermuda for the first year. Thereafter we will reduce herbicide use as much as possible and rely on cultural practices." Ronstar will be used for pre-emergence control after the sod is established, with back up as needed from pronamide acetates and asulam.

A regular weed control program won't be used on the bahiagrass in areas outside the field of play. "We treat spot problems," Shaw says. Roundup will be used for edging, Trimec for areas with dollar weed during spring and fall.

The fields will have a two-month schedule rotating Daconil, Chipco 26019 and terrachlor.

Pesky mole crickets

"We have three swarms of mole crickets per year in our area. Oftanol-laden fertilizer will be applied in early May, July and September," Shaw says.

He adds that treatment for other pests will be done as needed. Visual inspections will be performed daily on baseball fields for pests and diseases.

All the chemicals will be stored on sight in the park's EPA-approved storage facility. In addition, the park has its own soil analysis lab, and will do all horticulture-related work on-site.

—Jeff Sobul