

# Safety vs. time vs. money: the rec facility 'Catch 22'

**Half of the word 'budget' is 'get.' Here are some suggestions on how to 'get' enough money for your facility.**

■ "Kids have as much right to expect safely maintained fields as professionals do," says Roger Moellendorf of the Green River (Mont.) Parks & Recreation Department. "The ability to play shouldn't affect the safety of the fields.

"That's put us in a real dilemma: to work on limited budgets and still maintain a level of public expectations. And television has increased those expectations. That becomes a very challenging demand. Everyone wants their kid's field to look like Wrigley Field or Mile High Stadium."

Moellendorf has four people (including three seasonals) to maintain 11 scattered ballfields.

"Liability and litigation have changed the concept of our profession," he says. "Fields they used to play on no longer



**Roger Moellendorf:**  
"We have to work smarter and harder."

meet the expectations of today."

So what is the answer?

"We have to work smarter and harder," Moellendorf observes. "We have to become salesmen and campaigners to include maintenance dollars in the budget. The best way to do that is to hang our hats on

the safety issue.

"We also have to campaign with the public; they put too much emphasis on appearance and not enough on playability and safety."

Moellendorf believes that there should be a maintenance and safety audit conducted on every new project. "It sounds basic, but I'll guarantee it's not always done. It's not always easy, either."

Mark Doble of Western Sod has some suggestions for dealing with budget considerations.

"Half of the word 'budget' is 'get,'" he says. "It's a show-and-tell: 'If you give me this, I'll give you this.'"

Doble says that you have to sell yourself before you can sell your department and projects. "Please keep off the grass" is, literally, a sign of the times," he notes.

Doble says you must have a plan of attack:  
*continued on page 48*

## 18 tips for saving money on athletic fields

■ Roger Moellendorf of the Green River (Mont.) Department of Parks and Recreation and Greg Petry of the Waukegan (Ill.) Park District make these suggestions for saving time and money:

**1)** Develop standards for employees. Bring people in for training rather than sending out employees.

**2)** Work with other entities, like school districts, to share facilities.

**3)** Put more emphasis on general-purpose fields. Pitcher's mounds, for instance, are temporary on Green River's fields, so the fields can be used for more than baseball diamonds.

**4)** Try to use native materials whenever possible.

**5)** Try pre-germinated seed, a proven time-saver.

**6)** Use multi-purpose equipment. Moellendorf's district has a sweeper used for winter sidewalks that is also used as a dethatcher during the summer. It "does a fairly good job," he observes.

**7)** Work with local sports organizations. In Green River, the Little League association purchased home run wall fencing. Petry also asked the Waukegan baseball association to include extra fees and kick back money for field maintenance.

**8)** Work with staff, management and

commissioners, to develop a priority list, a "total evaluation of costs and benefits."

**9)** "Look at the big picture," Petry suggests. Look at how each dollar is spent, including employee raises (merit raises only?) and liability insurance increases.

**10)** Make a public relations effort in the community. "There are certain things we're going to have to give and to take away from the public," Petry notes. "We have to balance everything, and that's the hard part because it affects people."

**11)** Take advantage of early-pay discounts, and ask vendors for bigger discounts.

**12)** Take bids on any major service or purchase. "If you really make these guys sharpen their pencils, they will," Petry says.

**13)** Put clamps on absenteeism, and control overtime.

**14)** Focus on work simplification, keeping to the same routines.

**15)** Focus on preventive maintenance.

**16)** Minimize defects. "If you don't have time to do it right the first time, you don't have time to re-do it," Petry says.

**17)** Make sure employees are oriented to equipment, safety, etc.

**18)** Ask vendors if your fields can be used as experimental areas.

—J.R.

### Wildflowers from page 42

will stick to the seeds, making it easier to achieve a more even seed distribution.

**8)** Distribute the seeds by "feeding the chickens". We do not recommend using a rotary-type seed machine that fits across the chest as the tiniest seeds shift to the bottom, and results in poor distribution.

**9)** Drag the site with a fence weighted by a heavy pole or roll with a water-filled drum if the site is large.

**10)** Mulch with a fine layer of pine straw or hay to hold the seeds in place and discourage raiding by birds.

**11)** Water the site if possible.

**12)** The cotyledons and "true leaves" should begin to show in five to six weeks.

**13)** If grass or weeds become a problem, apply the herbicide Poast as recommended, disturbing the site as little as possible.

**14)** Do not mow the site until the annuals have set seed. Set the mower blade high enough to leave the leaf rosette of the perennials which will serve as a green ground cover during the winter.

# Investing in your image

## Improving your company's image is an intangible investment that can reap very tangible rewards.

by E.T. Wandtke

■ If you spent some time—and money—in 1991 investing in your company's image, 1992 could be a better year.

Making image investments is often one of the most often overlooked aspects of marketing. To be recognized in the market, you must spend money on image advertising or promotions. And most companies either do not develop a complete marketing plan, they only develop an advertising plan for the year.

Investing in your image is a commitment to become better recognized and to be looked upon as a responsible business in your geographical market. This type of investment is not intended to directly attract customers, nor is its purpose to retain customers. But it *will* help your

company to be better viewed as a reputable business.

Image investing can be either low key or aggressive, depending on the impression you want to make.

**Two approaches**—Some companies seek a “soft” community awareness, rather than high visibility. To achieve this, you can undertake projects like participating in a United Way fund drive, educating community youth through Junior Achievement, or collecting food and money for a homeless shelter.

On the other hand, aggressive image investing would include spending money to promote your market presence by sponsoring public service announcements (PSAs) on the radio or TV. Using either of these mediums will instantly create an awareness of your presence in the market.

While PSAs do cost less than advertising, they still require significant funds. If you are going to start an image investing program for your company, this is *not* the place to begin. It would be more beneficial to incorporate it into the total plan three or four years later.

**Environmental benefits**—Lawn care

and landscaping benefit the environment. Adding plants to a property, grass cutting, horticultural services for trees and shrubs—all help to renew the ecological process. Oxygen is purified by the grass and other foliar plants maintained or added to the properties you service.

To that end, have you ever sent a notice to the commercial or residential customer explaining these benefits? Your local extension service provides booklets on these types of benefits that you can summarize or reprint to pass along to customers.

Some companies have practiced image investing by targeting school children. Safety pamphlets, first-aid literature or nutrition booklets is an effective method of direct-image investing.

Image investing requires time and planning. Don't rush into an indirect image investing opportunity until you have examined all the potential ramifications. If the opinions suggested in this article do not immediately appeal to you as an area for indirect or direct image investing, get involved in activities to benefit all the people in your market.

—*The author is a principle in Wandtke & Associates, a management and marketing consulting firm based in Columbus, Ohio.*

## Catch 22 from page 46

\* **Gather all the facts** relating to the turf area: who, what, booster groups, personnel, equipment, amount of time to perform certain duties. Define what you want.

\* **Formulate a plan** of operation: list irrigation problems, analyze soil recommendations, outline annual projects to match budget allocations, and outline a monthly plan.

\* **Implement and design a maintenance program**: buy the cheapest fertilizer possible to meet your needs and monitor mowing (frequency, height, equipment, methods, etc.).

\* **Have a month-to-month plan** that is flexible. “Evaluate as you go,” Doble says. “Assess it at year-end and address its shortfalls. Implement changes and re-address the budget for next year.”

Doble suggests using photographs to illustrate what you're going to improve and what improvements will be made.

Yes, these are rough times—both with the economy and with the public expecting more than what might be available. But that doesn't mean the job is impossible. It's just more of a challenge.

—*Jerry Roche*

Everday Play: 7 1/2 - 8 1/2 Feet

Serious Tournament Play: 8 1/2 - 9 1/2 Feet

9 Feet: Turf & Superintendent Stressed Out!

■ “Managing green speed for the sake of speed alone should not be attempted, certainly not at the expense of acceptable turf quality,” says George Manuel, agronomist with the United States Golf Association (USGA).

Manuel suggests that superintendents—and demanding golf course members—be more concerned with uniformity and consistency, which can be achieved by altering management practices.

“(Maintaining) green speeds above 9 feet