

Cooperation builds new athletic fields

Voters in Rockford, Mich. approved a \$40 million bond issue for a new school and athletic facilities—built correctly this time.

■ It helps to have friends in the right places—namely, on the school board—if you're in charge of school athletic fields.

In Rockford, Mich. (pop. 3,400), school board president James Bogart is an agronomist with the nearby firm of Turfgrass Inc. It's no coincidence that, within two years, this growing school system about 10 miles northeast of Grand Rapids will have a new high school and also:

- ✓ a 5,000-seat football stadium,
- ✓ varsity and practice baseball/softball fields,
- ✓ track and field facilities,
- ✓ a soccer practice field,
- ✓ two football practice fields, and
- ✓ eight tennis courts.

The district will have the new school and sports complex because voters smiled favorably on a \$40 million bond issue in November, 1989.

Playing key roles in the development of this ambitious project are Bogart and site planner/landscape architect Mark Wrona of the architectural firm Greiner, Inc., Grand Rapids. They've helped nurture and maintain cooperation among board members, designers and contractors concerning construction of the athletic fields, say co-workers.

Bogart insists passage of the bond issue was critical. He says the district had been growing by 250 to 300 new students a year. There was no more room in the schools.

Building a new school was one issue, but Rockford District residents also indicated by survey that they wanted more students to have the opportunity to compete. They wanted a more comprehensive school intramural program.

School leaders began addressing these wishes.

"The Rockford School Board determined early in the construction process that our new athletic complex would be done properly using modified soils, proper irrigation and adequate drainage," recalls Bogart.

Previously-built ball fields in the district, he says, suffer from three problems:

- poor construction and design,
- built on heavy clay soil without drainage,



James Bogart says school board was committed to the best fields the school could afford.

- and poor maintenance. (Is *that* all?)

So, starting from the ground up, school officials learned that topsoil at the 80-acre new school site contains 44.6% sand, 26.7% silt and 28.7% clay, adequate for the lawn in front of the school, but not good for sports fields.

The soil would have to be modified to make a good foundation for sports turf.

Coincidentally, test borings at the building site discovered existing sands in both fine and coarse texture. Samples were sent to Michigan State University for analysis. Yes, the report back from MSU said, the coarse sand is an excellent sand to use in an 80/20 sand/peat mixture for sports fields.

Securing the cooperation of site planners, architects and contractors, the sand



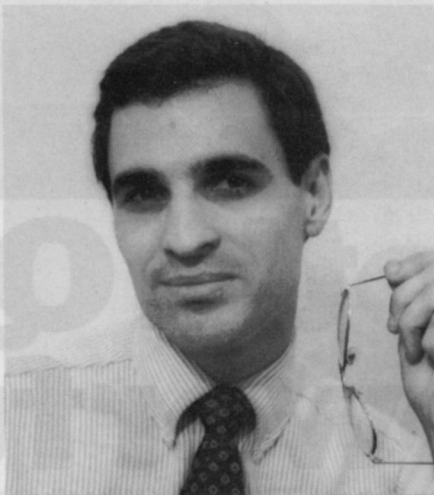
New Rockford High Stadium being built into slope for beauty, cost savings.

and topsoil were mixed and used on site, savings thousands of dollars in hauling costs.

In fact, since most of the coarse sand was found near the stadium, the board saved an additional \$15,000 by eliminating the drainage system beneath the football field.

(Ultimately the stadium field's growing media will consist of 75% sand, 15% peat, 10% topsoil and the equivalent of 80 lbs. of "Sand Aid" per 1,000 sq.ft. The soil mix for the remaining fields will be 50% coarse sand/50% topsoil mix over a sand/tile drainage system.)

Says Wrona: "A project like this is a constant series of tradeoffs and planning moves. But it can only be done if you have a very good relationship with the owner, and everybody understands where every-



Wrona says a planner's job is to get the most for dollars allocated for site work.

body is in terms of the budget."

Wrona continues to work with school leaders on the 80-acre site.

"All playing fields at Rockford High School will have an additional advantage not often afforded to many new sports fields," explains Wrona. "All fields will be allowed to grow a minimum of two growing seasons (one spring and one fall) prior to their use."

Preparing for the day when the fields are playable, Rockford has already hired a new grounds manager, and is developing fertility and field use policies.

The key to Rockford's success?—"A knowledgeable owner representing a positive, supporting community and taking best advantage of available sight design opportunities," says Wrona.

—Ron Hall

Seasonal help: where to find them, how to choose them

Seasonal workers might some day become full-timers, if you hire wisely.

by Ed Wandtke

■ Seasonal help has been one of the standards of personnel recruitment for the green industry. The use of seasonal employees allows the green industry company to avoid the extra costs of full time personnel and at the same time capture the enthusiasm received from fresh employees.

Some job applicants will be looking for more than just a job, although some will only be looking to make money. Others will want an opportunity to learn some additional skills and apply current knowledge. In the past, the seasonal employee has typically not been motivated, but the current economic conditions make this a buyer's market for the employer. Will you be ready to meet the challenge of these job applicants or are you just looking for people to fill the various jobs you have open at this time?

The financial needs of the unemployed will lead many over-qualified individuals to your company if the unemployment rate is very high. Be careful in hiring these job shifters. If an individual has been highly compensated in the past and your job

opening will not pay what he has been used to earning, expect him to leave as soon as a better paying job is offered.

Much of the turnover in the green industry occurs in the first two to four weeks on the job. It is extremely important to advise them that they will be expected to work in almost all weather conditions. Remember: you are used to working 10- to 12-hour days, but the prospective employee might be thinking he will only work eight-hour days.

When to hire — Deciding on how many seasonal employees you need should be done at least two months before you go to the market place to compete for the potential employees in the market. Letting your current employees know in advance of your seasonal employee needs will allow them to recruit for you. One of the most effective systems of finding quality seasonal employees is to have a job notice posted at the various churches within one mile of your shop. The quality of the applicants, their integrity, and highly-dedicated work ethic results in better-than-expected performance.

If your seasonal recruitment takes place at the start of the season, you will be forced into making decisions on the hiring of individuals based on the immediate need for the individual to be working. As a result, you will not be choosing the individuals who can satisfy both the short- and long-term needs of your company. These

type of last-minute hiring decisions will often result in increased turnover or in the hiring of an individual who just doesn't seem to work out. Avoid this process in your company by making the seasonal employee interviewing process a year-round activity.

How to choose — How would you describe your company's personality? You must now determine this before you hire seasonal employees. If not, you may hire some quality individuals who just don't seem to fit in.

When you hire your seasonal employees, you should consider the individual's adaptability to your company.

Flexibility, cooperation and a sense of teamwork are the key characteristics a person needs to bring to the job in order to contribute to the overall profitability and effectiveness of your company.

Their job description — It is very important to allow these people the opportunity to make decisions and have a chance for authority and responsibility. This opportunity for the individual to make decisions on the job and accept criticism will help the employee become an integral part of the company.

Evaluating their performance as well as that of your full-timers will encourage all employees to be concerned more with the job than the job title.

Helping all employees realize that there is a consistency requirement in the performance standards they will be expected to meet will help everyone become part of company.

—The author is a senior consultant with Wandtke & Assoc., Columbus, Ohio.