

# Santa Barbara school crew likes its fescue

by DON DALE

**M**ike Bishop's brush with greatness occurred when Bill Clinton and 20,000 Clinton supporters trampled over the turf at Santa Barbara City College during a rally in 1996.

Afterwards, it took this grounds supervisor and his crew a lot of work to repair the turf, but he didn't mind.

"That was the icing on the cake, when the Clintons came out here," recalls Bishop. "One of the first things the President said was how beautiful the campus is."

Santa Barbara City College sits on the bluffs overlooking the Pacific Ocean. Students gather and contemplate life and mid-terms on its rolling hills.

The turf at the college is wall-to-wall fescue, including the athletic fields. "Triple Crown" tall fescue is used; it's a three-variety mix from Stover Seed located in Los Angeles. The mix is equal parts of Veranda, Olympic II and Empress tall fescue.

"It's a great grass; it does really well out here," says Bishop. In the mild, wind-swept climate, the turf is very easy to maintain,

even though it is irrigated with treated wastewater.

"Fescue is really a durable grass," says Bishop. "It does well in coastal areas." Bishop doesn't have to worry much about fertilizing most of the 40 acres of turf around the grounds, thanks to the nutrients in the tertiary, reclaimed water. The athletic fields, however, are kept well fed, with three applications of a 16-6-8 Scott's Supreme fertilizer to give it recuperative growth.

There are also two acres of high-use turf areas on the coastal bluffs that receive two or three applications each year.

To repair the area trampled during the Clinton rally—because even tall fescue can take only so much punishment—Bishop and his crew topdressed with 20 or 30 tons of washed plaster sand. The sand is washed to remove salt.

"Extra water was also added, though with heavy winter rains, we didn't have to irrigate much more than usual."

## Fescue 'zips' through

The washed plaster sand is expensive (\$17/ton) but Bishop says it's a must because other types of sand contain salt that retard turf growth. The fescue just 'zips' through the good sand, Bishop says.

The football field receives a similar top-dressing if money is tight.

"Before the season," explains Bishop, "we'll resod the playing area if we have enough money." If funds are lower, he gives the field an application of 200 tons of the washed plaster sand, at a cost of \$3400, including delivery.

Either way, the field is prepped after the previous football season by having a tractor grader level the damaged field—which sees lots of action from college and high school football. If funds to resod are not there, the treatment is begun during



Mike Bishop says a three-variety mix of tall fescue thrives at Santa Barbara City College.



Crew chief Nacho Garcia, left, and Ricardo Valenzuela do such good work that most irrigation installations at SBCC are done in-house. A 12-person crew keeps the college green.



the winter, since it takes months for the grass to recover.

Resodding is done, when the money is available, six weeks prior to the season.

The sandy loam of the Santa Barbara bluffs is perfect for the fescue, says Bishop. He has the turf dethatched twice a year in high-visibility areas, and he mows once a week in summer, at a height of 2½ inches.

#### Water watchdogs

The city's "water enforcement police" are always out, says Bishop, and that means sensible scheduling and periodic sprinkler adjustments. The treated water is a potential health hazard, and the water police will shut the system down if they see puddles of standing water.

The scrutiny over water use intensifies in times of drought.

Along with tree modifications, a current trend at the college is toward more "intensive" landscaping, such as small planters in tight areas around buildings. Bishop says this is where you know you have a good crew, because that type of landscaping requires a lot of meticulous hand labor.

#### 12-man crew a 'can do' bunch

Bishop says he has a "terrific" grounds crew, and for that reason he agrees to let them handle jobs that might ordinarily be contracted out, such as irrigation installation.

"It's actually better for the crew to do that," Bishop says, because they are determined to do a quality job, and they know exactly where all water lines and valves are located for later work.

"An in-house crew buys into the job and takes it on as its own," says Bishop, who adopts that philosophy on all campus projects.

His crew has a great attitude about its work, and crew members put their hearts into every irrigation-related project. His ir-

## Tree care tricky with wind, wastewater

The tree maintenance program at Santa Barbara City College is "in a state of flux," says Mike Bishop. Many non-natives are being replaced with native trees.

This particularly applies to eucalyptus trees which are intrusive and have brittle limbs that tend to fall in high wind. Bishop works with Jerry Sortemme, head of the college horticulture department, and a landscape architect to select appropriate species.

Trees must do well on treated wastewater. *Agapantha* and *raphyolyptis* are not native, but are used because they grow well in the reclaimed water.

Oaks are a preferred tree, but they don't mix well with turf.

"It's easy to overwater oaks," says Bishop. Sortemme is using an oak restoration area on a hillside as a teaching project. □

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► Towering eucalyptus trees will eventually be removed from the SBCC campus.



rigation specialist and crew leader, Nacho Garcia, encourages the crew to strive for excellence and to take pride in a good job.

Crews are divided into zones. "Some guys stay with the landscaping and planting, and others prefer to stay in routine maintenance, such as mowing, edging and weed-whacking."

Current projects include planting 650 natal plums (*carrisa grandiflora*) around parking lots.

#### Cross-training works

"We cross-train our crews," says Bishop, who has been with the college for six years. Cross-training enables crew members to fill in on other duties when needed. Every crew member, for example, is checked out on new equipment.

Bishop holds in-house training sessions monthly, and crew safety is held to a high standard.

The 12-man crew is half Caucasian, half Hispanic.

"Because of the safety of the students on campus, it's important that the Spanish-speaking employees have a proficiency in English."

Bishop is especially glad to have an understanding business manager, Dr. Charles Hanson, who has been helpful in getting the best and safest equipment possible.

That equipment includes Shindaiwa trimmers ("a great trimmer"); Honda commercial mowers ("quiet and reliable") and Echo PB4600 leaf blowers ("blower noise is a big issue around here").

"It's gone full-circle," says Bishop. "Dr. Hanson's bought us better equipment, and that's helped to improve morale and productivity." □

Writer Don Dale is based in Willcox, Ariz.