

Grounds management: George Van Haasteren / Director-Grounds, Dwight-Englewood School, Englewood, NJ

BY RON HALL

George Van Haasteren, CGM, is no comedian, although sometimes he tries. In describing his college football days, he says he played end, tackle and guard. "I sat on the end of the bench, guarded the water bucket and tackled anyone who came near," he says.

This big man with a hearty demeanor has the rare ability to pack 25 hours of activity into every 24-hour day. Much of that energy is directed at being the best grounds professional he can be — and helping others achieve a similar goal.

"Many people believe that anybody can run a grounds maintenance operation," says Van Haasteren. "They don't realize that it takes years of training and education to be successful in this profession."

Van Haasteren should know. He's been advancing the profession of grounds management for 20-plus years, starting with the Paramus (NJ) Shade Tree and

Parks Department in 1981. His career includes three years as grounds manager at Columbia University, New York City, and almost 15 years as director of grounds at the 30-acre campus of Dwight-Englewood School.

"He really turned our grounds around," says Kevin Herron, director of the physical plant at the prestigious private K-12 school of about 1,000 students.

"In addition to the landscape, he's responsible for five athletic fields on campus and a couple of fields in a county park."

Van Haasteren says childhood experiences on nearby sandlots led him, ultimately, to become the first grounds manager in the State of New Jersey to gain certification from the Professional Grounds Management Society (PGMS) and, this year, president of that organization.

"When we were kids we played baseball morning, noon and night," he says. "There was a little area between a library and some tennis courts, and we built our own baseball field and made our own ground rules. For instance, if you hit the ball over the tennis nets you had a double, and

if you hit it to the school, you had a home run."

This love of sport led Van Haasteren to excel in football, eventually making the University of Miami (FL) squad. In a sense, those experiences still drive him. In addition to his duties at Dwight-Englewood School, he and partner Ken Krausz, CGCS, own Sports Fields Management, Inc., a firm specializing in athletic field construction and maintenance. One of its clients is Paramus Catholic High School, Paramus, NJ.

"George has done great things with our fields," says Steve DeGregorio, PCHS athletic director and head football coach. "Before he started here there was a 50-by-70-yard area that was bumpy with rocks, twigs and glass. It was awful. Now it's a gorgeous field."

Tom Shaner, executive director of the PGMS, says that Van Haasteren's ability to work as a team player is, perhaps, his greatest gift. "Like a good captain, George seeks out and recruits the best player, or member in this case, to meet every challenge," says Shaner. **LM**

CAREER TIMELINE



1972-1976

Attended University of Miami, Coral Gables, FL

1981-1987

Boro of Paramus (NJ) Shade Tree and Parks Department

1987-1995

Director of Grounds: Dwight-Englewood School, Englewood, NJ

1995-1998

Grounds Manager for Columbia University, New York City

1997-Present

Grounds Manager for Paramus Catholic High School

1998-Present

Director of Grounds: Dwight-Englewood School, Englewood, NJ

1997-2000

Chair for PGMS Certification Committee

2001

President of the Professional Grounds Management Society