

EVENTS

CALENDAR

NOVEMBER

2-6 16th Annual Educational Conference, National Institute on Park and Grounds Management, Louisville, KY. Contact NIPGM, P.O. Box 1936, Appleton, WI 54913. (414) 733-2301.

3-4 Carolinas Irrigation Trade Show, Adams Mark Hotel, Charlotte, NC. Contact Smith Turf & Irrigation Co., (704) 393-8873.

10-12 Golf Turf Conference, Keller Conference Center, Pennsylvania State University, University Park. Contact Dr. Joseph Duich, Department of Agronomy, 21 Tyson Building, University Park, PA 16802. (814) 865-9853.

11-13 1986 Oklahoma Turfgrass Conference and Trade Show, Lincoln Plaza, Oklahoma City, OK. Contact Michael Kenna, Oklahoma State University, 335 Agricultural Hall, Stillwater, OK 74078. (405) 624-5404.

11-13 Green Team Exhibition, PGMS-ALCA joint trade show, Milwaukee Exposition and Convention Center, Milwaukee, WI. Contact the Professional Grounds Management Society, 3701 Old Court Rd., Suite 15, Pikesville, MD 21208. (301) 653-2742.

17-20 1986 Professional Lawn Care Association of America Conference and Show, Baltimore Convention Center. Contact Jim Brooks, PLCAA, 1225 Johnson Ferry Rd. N.E., Suite B-220, Marietta, GA 30067. (404) 977-5222.

DECEMBER

1-4 New Jersey Turfgrass Expo, Resorts International Hotel, Atlantic City, NJ. Contact Dr. Henry Indyk, Rutgers University, Soils and Crops Dept., New Brunswick, NJ 08903.

8-11 Ohio Turfgrass Conference and Show, Ohio Center, Columbus, OH. Contact the Ohio Turfgrass Foundation, (614) 422-2601.

12-13 Southern Nevada Desert Turfgrass Conference, Palace Station Hotel/Casino, Las Vegas. Contact Bob Morris, Nevada Cooperative Extension, 953 E. Sahara, Suite #207, Las Vegas, NV 89104. (702) 731-3130.

THE FRONT OFFICE

OPINION PAGE

SCHOOLS DISCOVER VALUE OF CONTRACT MAINTENANCE



Public schools have tried a number of ways to balance tax revenues with expenditures in the past few years. They have squeezed one or two more years out of textbooks, replaced retiring teachers with teachers fresh out of college and reduced extracurricular programs.

However, some things can't be cut. These are physical plant concerns such as heating and air conditioning, roof repairs, painting and cleaning. Like the overhead of any business, these are costs the schools must pay to fulfill their intended purpose.

In their austerity programs, school administrators have not treated athletic fields with the same concern as other parts of the school's physical plant. They have tried to delay or reduce important field maintenance, often on the advice of their physical plant directors. It's not a case of insufficient concern, it's a case of insufficient knowledge. How can a school administrator or physical plant director know every important fact about every item under their care? They simply can't.

There is a trend in other physical plant areas to contract out service and repairs. Although some school districts still have heating and air conditioning technicians on staff, more and more school systems are depending upon contractors to perform both maintenance and repairs. Cleaning, food service and painting are being contracted out to take the labor burden off the school district and to take advantage of special skills of contractors.

Since contractors deal in one type of work every day, they are more knowledgeable of the small things that can make a big difference. Their experience provides them with skills not usually found in a general maintenance person employed by a school. Although contractors are profit-motivated and often find it difficult to make a decent profit on bid contracts, their reputation depends upon the quality of their work. They must pay attention to all details to achieve the quality they want associated with their name.

One problem with contract sports turf care is the small number of contractors that depend largely on this type of work. Many general landscape maintenance contractors may solicit sports field work without really knowing the special details. Their reputation is less at risk if the quality of their work is poor to average. They lump sports turf work with general maintenance and see little difference between the two. They often win the bid by not making important distinctions between commercial or residential maintenance and sports turf.

Contractors who specialize in sports turf maintenance, or have a sports turf division, can play a vital role in the future quality and safety of public school athletic fields. They have the skills and the desire to keep this important part of the school's physical plant as well-maintained as the other parts. By contracting out sports field construction and maintenance to them, schools can achieve the quality of turf necessary to keep injuries at a minimum and keep school pride at a maximum.

It's time for school administrators to recognize that athletic fields are as important as furnaces and that sports turf contractors are as vital to the maintenance of fields as contractors are for other parts of the physical plant.

Bruce Shank