

Planning Makes Diamond Sparkle at Park District



Grosche Field is maintained continuously into November.

Thousands of acres of high-use park turf were at risk last summer when record high temperatures broiled the Chicago area for weeks. By the end of June, many park superintendents watched helplessly as their baseball diamonds and soccer fields turned from green to brown.

The problem grew worse as communities implemented water restrictions. Park superintendents became more concerned about golf and athletic field turf than they had in years.

In response to this heightened concern and a general increase in athletic field management, the Midwest Institute of Park Executives (MIPE) scheduled a special one-day athletic field seminar. Never before had MIPE presented such a program.

Greg Petry, superintendent of parks for Waukegan, IL, and Mike Schiller, park superintendent for Glenview, IL, volunteered to put together the important meeting. They wanted to make the event practical and informative. While they had the attention of the park executives, they hoped to demonstrate how they could provide high-quality fields with planning, organization and control.

Petry and Schiller invited Harry Gill, superintendent of grounds for the Milwaukee Brewers, and Ken Mrock, superintendent of grounds for the Chicago Bears, to explain how they were handling field renovation, game preparation, and especially the heat and drought. Area distributors were invited to speak on equipment, fertilization and seed selection.

Petry felt he had something to share as well. For years he had devoted a large

amount of time to refining a field renovation and maintenance program. He read magazines, attended training seminars, and sought the advice of his suppliers. By taking this information and applying his park management skills learned at Pennsylvania State University in University Park, he built a solid program for three different park districts. The result of the efforts by Petry and his staff was now available for all to see at Al Grosche Field in Waukegan. So that was where the meeting was held last August.

A large tent was pitched in the outfield. When Gill arrived and started walking the field with Petry and Parks Supervisor Mike Twigg, he had nothing but praise. "If Grosche Field had 7,000 seats around it, any double A club would be happy to play here," he exclaimed. "That's saying something when you consider Greg is working with a park budget!"

Petry knew Grosche Field was special. But after hearing Gill's remarks, he thought it might be the best park field in the country. So he decided to enter it in the Beam Clay Baseball Diamond of the Year Award contest. The judges for the contest confirmed Petry's suspicion this winter, naming it the winning diamond in the park and school category. And the judges didn't even take into account the drought last summer.

During the MIPE meeting, Petry told his fellow park executives, "You should devote the energy necessary to learn the latest maintenance practices for athletic fields. But unless you build them into a definite plan and apply business techniques and politics to get the needed materials and supplies, all your hard work can be wasted.

You can't renovate a field and then let it deteriorate. You have to maintain a standard of care that gives the community something to be proud of for years.

"Once you create a quality facility and recognize its importance, it's not that difficult to create a maintenance schedule for your staff to follow. But it may take you years to learn what works best," he warned. "It's your job to create the schedule, obtain all the supplies, and make sure the schedule is followed without fail."

Petry not only oversees maintenance scheduling for Waukegan's 27 ballfields, five soccer fields, and one football stadium, he also works closely with the district's athletic supervisor, Dave Kilbane, who schedules their use. All baseball leagues that want to play on Grosche Field must submit their requests in March. After all requests are in, he puts together a master schedule for the year. Petry and Kilbane meet weekly to review the schedule and to make necessary changes.

Before the first game is played on Grosche Field, Petry and his staff put together the maintenance schedule for the year by fitting maintenance into the master schedule. Trigg, the park supervisor, takes the maintenance schedule and assigns daily work orders to one full-time maintenance worker and the leaders of three seasonal crews who perform the work. Each year, the week before July 4 is blocked out to rest the field and to give the park crew time to do detail work.

Grosche Field is the park district's premiere field. It is named after Al Grosche, the retired baseball coach at Waukegan Township High School who for 35 years groomed teenagers into serious contenders for the major leagues. He didn't stop when school let out in June. He urged them to continue to play during the summer with the American Legion or Colt leagues. He also formed a traveling team made up of his best players.

Since Grosche's retirement, Waukegan baseball leaders have preserved his traveling team. Lately, 90 percent of the youths on the team have received baseball scholarships to colleges, and five were drafted by the major leagues. Those who choose a career other than baseball after graduating from high school can continue to play in the Shoreline League during the summer at Grosche Field.

Between May and September, 101 games are played on the field. A third of these are tournament games where the stakes are high for young athletes. High school, American Legion, and Colt district tournaments are regularly held at Grosche

Vaukegan

years he developed a "hands-on" style which he employs today to make sure his planning is put into action. Still he gained the greatest amount of pleasure from the "park side" of operations, as opposed to the "rec side."

His chance to concentrate on the park side came when Park Ridge was looking for a coordinator of park services. The park district in the wealthy Chicago suburb needed someone who could both plan and implement a multi-year maintenance and renovation program.

"At Park Ridge I really got to sink my teeth into field management," remarks Petry. "Since I had no technical turf back-

ground to speak of, I knew I had to start from scratch, first identifying the major problems, then developing a long-range program with the help of experts and publications."

Petry had seen many park districts invest heavily in capital improvements, only to have their fields deteriorate after a few short years of use. This was the chance he had been waiting for, to combine renovation expenses with all essential maintenance in one long-range plan. Under the guiding hand of Superintendent of Park Operations William Neuman, Petry started to formulate his plan and consult turfgrass specialists

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Field. The field has also hosted the Colt League World Series, the Pony League National Tournament and the State American Legion championship.

"They play serious baseball on Grosche Field and the community loves it," says Petry. The field has a lighting system that is rated for double A play, so night games are frequently aired on local cable television. "Every year, we have a few college or professional baseball players return home just to help out on the field," he adds. "This field means a great deal to them."

The connection between sports and the quality of recreational facilities has been one of Petry's interests since he started working for the Department of Parks and Recreation of East Brunswick, NJ. After graduating from Manhattan College in New York with a degree in physical education, he quickly realized that schools and parks varied greatly in their support for recreational facilities.

As a sports coordinator for East Brunswick Parks, he decided he wanted more influence over playing conditions. "I fell in love with park work," Petry recalls, "but I wanted the opportunity to improve the quality of recreational facilities." Before long, he realized that to gain this authority he would have to become a park superintendent. This meant returning to school.

As a graduate student at Penn State in Parks and Recreation, Petry concentrated more on the park side of management than the recreation side. To be able to have a greater voice in community affairs, he also took political science.

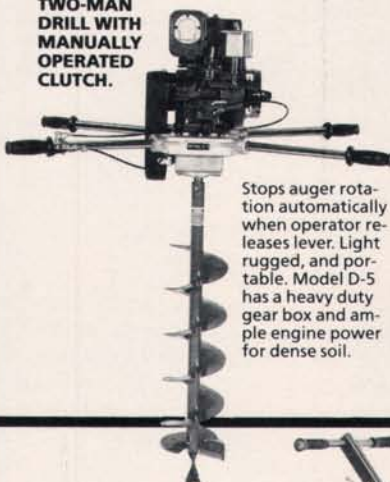
The business-minded Petry studied the different ways park systems are funded in this country. He discovered that for more than a century, Illinois park districts were separate governmental bodies with the power to levy taxes. "They don't have to compete with other municipal agencies like fire and education for funds," he points out. "Since residents and businesses are paying special taxes for parks, they expect them to maintain higher standards."

Petry got the chance to see how Illinois park systems work by securing a postgraduate internship in Highland Park. He was exposed to park planning, policy-making, procedure writing, budget preparation, and grant applications. "It's more than just paperwork," he remarks. "It's the core from which everything operates. You can do it grudgingly, or you can make it work for you and everything you're trying to accomplish."

When the year-long internship ended, Petry was hired as assistant director of parks and recreation for Mundelein, a community west of Chicago. For the next two

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while busily coordinating all facility maintenance in the parks.

During his five years at Park Ridge, Petry polished his planning and management methods. He was ready for the next step: to become a superintendent of parks in his own right. When the job came open at Waukegan, a lakeside suburb north of Chicago, he applied and got the job.

During the previous few years, the park district had concentrated its efforts on its two municipal golf courses and on building a cultural arts center named in honor of former resident Jack Benny. Now the park board wanted to direct more of its attention toward the community's 35 parks. But first the board needed an accurate and compre-

such as Northrup King and Arthur Clesen Company, for their ideas about maintenance of 33 field sites. He evaluated each member of the maintenance staff to gauge their strengths before trying different forms of organization. He also developed a cooperative working relationship with Golf Course Superintendent Dave Beno.

Petry took a hard look at equipment, resources and facilities under his care. Mowers, lights, irrigation systems, bleachers, dugouts, pitching tunnels, fences, trees, plant beds and turf areas were all cataloged and rated for condition, efficiency and performance. Possible improvements for these resources were then noted.

He tracked the use of each facility and asked league officials and players for com-

The description of athletic field maintenance includes a staff organization chart, a three-page monthly work schedule including the names of chemicals and materials required, a complete list of equipment devoted to field care, key renovation projects scheduled according to year, and a report on expected field use.

The athletic field maintenance plan is updated each winter to reflect changes in equipment, labor, maintenance practices and timing. The budget request is then adjusted to meet these changes. Before baseball season begins, Petry knows exactly how much money he has to spend on maintenance. He can also break it out according to fields. For example, last year he had \$17,761 to spend on Grosche Field.

The park budget is purposely kept separate from the golf course budget. But that doesn't mean the two divisions don't work together to save money. Several years ago, a used Toro Sand Pro was obtained from the golf courses and rebuilt to condition the skinned infield areas of the baseball diamonds.

Petry and Beno work together throughout the year on special projects. "Dave has been a big help on selecting fungicides and making suggestions for weed control," Petry says. "He suggested we try wetting agents to cure localized dry spots. That was a big help during the droughts the past three years."

Beno is frequently consulted about equipment and turf problems. "The golf course and athletic field maintenance operations have a lot in common," Petry observes. "If we need a topdresser, we call Dave. If he needs trucks, he calls us."

In January, Petry orders nearly all the chemicals and supplies he needs for the season. By the end of March, the park has received the supplies, has repaired and calibrated all the equipment, and is ready to roll as soon as weather permits.

In April the maintenance plan for Grosche Field is launched. Soil samples are sent to a lab for testing. The soil test report will be used to determine the proper fertilizer to be applied the following month. Balan preemergence herbicide is then applied to control annual weeds.

The field is mowed twice a week at 1¾ inch, using a Jacobsen F-10 or Toro Parkmaster for the outfield and a National reel mower for the infield. The turf is a combination of Kentucky bluegrass and perennial ryegrass. Upon the advice of Mark Grundman from Northrup King, Petry uses a combination of Rugby, Parade and Trenton Kentucky bluegrasses and Delray, Caddie, and Pennfine ryegrasses.

Petry's staff inspects the bleachers, concessions, dugouts, bullpens and batting cage for needed repairs. The lighting system is tested to make sure light levels are up to double A specifications.

There are eight lighting poles surrounding Grosche Field, four in the infield and four in the outfield. Each infield pole has



Petry (right) and assistant check turf this spring for snow mold damage.

hensive plan from which to predict expenses and capital projects.

The new park superintendent knew that the key to a successful plan in the public sector was the same as in the business world: thorough research. "Every community is unique," Petry remarks. "We needed to get a clear picture of what Waukegan residents wanted from their parks, and to be receptive to ideas and trends in the community." Trends were especially important, since the goal was to develop a five-year plan. Petry spent nights and weekends talking with residents, board members, and organizers of community sports leagues.

It didn't take him long to discover that baseball and Grosche Field were very important to the community. The park district board was a strong proponent of baseball activities. District President Ralph Bufano and Executive Director Thomas Shuster appreciated Petry's methods and did not rush him to complete the plan. It was 18 months before the completed plan was submitted to Shuster.

During that time, Petry consulted suppliers who had helped him at Park Ridge,

ments on its facility. Finally Dan Drew, superintendent of finance, obtained an accurate projection of park revenue for the coming five years. In the end, the staff had amassed a huge amount of information before Petry wrote the first word of his plan.

The completed Park and Open Space Master Plan covered a period of five years and expenditures of nearly \$7 million. You might think that small line items such as field maintenance get lost in such a large budget. It was Petry's objective to provide equal importance to all areas by including detailed descriptions of each, regardless of the portion of the budget allotted to it. By doing this, he protected ongoing maintenance programs and important renovation projects from being overlooked or cut.

"A plan becomes a commitment once it is accepted by the park district," says Petry. "That's why it is so important to protect field improvements by including a detailed outline of follow-up maintenance in the plan. You don't want to rob Peter to pay Paul for maintenance, because you lose track of what you really need to budget for in the future."

between 12 and 16 1,000-watt mercury vapor lamps. The outfield poles have 14 lamps each. It's important to note that \$7,400 of the field's \$17,700 budget is spent on electricity, with an additional \$450 devoted to supplies for the lighting system.

In May, the crew's attention is directed at the irrigation system and detail work on the

infield dirt and warning track. Grosche Field's irrigation system was converted from hydraulic control to a Rain Bird RC-1260 electric controller and E-Series valves in 1983. The heads are a combination of Rain Bird pop-up impact rotaries and Toro 640s. Since the system is drained in the fall, all components are carefully inspected as the

system is recharged. There are five quick coupler locations around the infield for hoses.

After all field dimensions are checked, brown clay and sand are mixed as needed into the base paths and clean edges are restored to the turf with a sod cutter. Any dirt that has migrated into the turf over the winter is raked and hosed out. Blue clay is added to the pitcher's mound and batter's box to reestablish a firm base.

The warning track and coaches' boxes are treated with Roundup to eliminate any weeds that encroached over the winter into the limestone screenings. Daily field preparation also starts this month with the first practices and games. It takes two people a total of five man hours to prep Grosche Field for a game. Foul lines are painted at least once a week. Before leaving the field, both individuals police the area for litter and debris and then fill out a daily inspection sheet.

Crew member Bill Barhyte applies Trimec to the turf in May to knock out any broadleaf weeds. To avoid spring and summer diseases, the park crew makes only one application of fertilizer (19-5-9 slow-release) in the spring and begins a fungicide program in May, using Tersan LSR for control of brown patch.

To prevent thatch from contributing to disease development, the turf is aerified twice in May. Granular sulfur (Disper-Sul) is

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One of the first improvements made to upgrade Grosche Field was the irrigation system.

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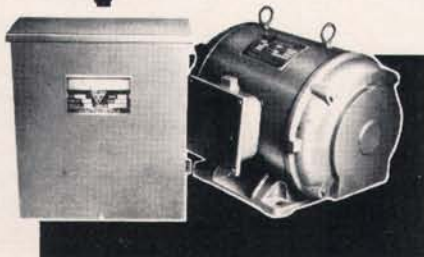
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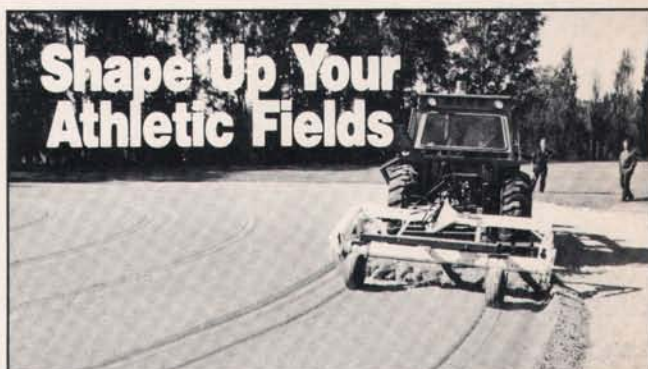
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applied following aerification to acidify the soil, based upon the test results. This assures that the pH is right for natural decomposition of thatch and nutrient exchange in the soil.

The disease control program continues in June with a treatment of Acti-Dione DGF for dollar spot. This is followed by an application of wetting agent (Lescowet) and careful irrigation as needed. The turf is also treated with Diazinon insecticide to control grubs as they begin to feed near the surface.

A strict mowing schedule is maintained in

addition to daily conditioning of the infield dirt. The field is closed for two days at the end of the month for mid-season renovation. This gives the crew a chance to spot seed and/or topdress any wear areas, such as in front of the mound, where the outfielders stand or between the dugouts and the plate.

In July, Petry and his staff pay close attention to the turf for diseases. Although daily irrigation may be required in some instances, it is avoided if possible. The irrigation schedule is set to run in the early morning rather than at night. This avoids long periods during which the turf remains wet, and it helps rinse off any morning dew.

Early in the month, Barhyte applies Bayleton for brown patch, dollar spot and summer patch. Toward the end of July he applies Banner for continued broad-spectrum disease control. He also makes a second application of wetting agent at half rate.

August is a busy month for Grosche Field with tournament games. The turf is aerified early in the month. Half-inch hollow tines are used for the infield and 3/4-inch tines are used in the outfield. Potassium and phosphorus levels are boosted with a low-nitrogen complete fertilizer (6-25-25) before the Kentucky bluegrass/perennial ryegrass seed mixture is broadcast over the field.

The park staff borrows a machine from the golf course to topdress the field with sandy loam. Any low spots are touched up by hand. By tournament time, the turf has healed. The field is closed the day before the tournament for striping, edging, dirt work, and hand raking any lips.

Following the tournament, Barhyte applies Chipco 26019 fungicide for summer patch, brown patch and dollar spot. "We rotate fungicides to avoid any possible resistance that may occur from repeated use of the same fungicide," explains Petry. "We've had no problems with resistance so far."

He also concentrates the majority of fertilization in the fall. In September, the field is aerified for a third time before a pound of nitrogen (18-18-18 sulfur-coated urea) is applied. This procedure is repeated in October, using 27-3-12 with Nitroform and sulfur-coated urea. "We don't have time to spoon-feed the field like a golf course superintendent might fertilize a green," Petry remarks. "So we do what we feel is the next best thing, by using slow-release products."

Winter preparation starts in October with an application of Acti-Dione RZ for snow mold control. In November, the irrigation system and all water lines are drained and winterized. All accessories, such as the foul ball netting and bases, are removed for repair and storage. The field is mowed twice weekly until the facility is closed in November.

By the end of November, Petry is once again compiling information from his staff, baseball league representatives, and suppliers to help him update his plan for the following year. "By devoting time to research and planning in the winter, a park superintendent can save himself lots of headaches during the busy season," reveals Petry. "Just as in business, a good plan keeps the corporation going in the right direction when you are too busy with other things. A park is really a municipal corporation."

"I think planning helped us get through last year's drought," Petry concludes. "A park superintendent doesn't necessarily have to be an expert in turf management. But he should make sure that turf maintenance, like anything else, is done properly. That goes double when a community cares as much as Waukegan does about baseball — or any other other sport."

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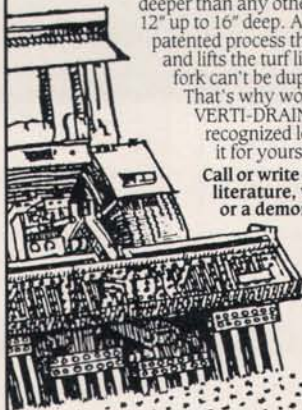
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