Planning Makes Diamond Sparkle at Park District

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.
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 background 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 continued on page 22

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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 comprehensive 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, such as Northrup King and Arthur Ciesen 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 comments 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 maintenance programs and important renovation projects would be 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 maintenance overhead and capital projects. 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 pre-emergence herbicide is then applied to control annual weeds.

The field is mowed twice a week at 1¼ 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...
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 added to the warning track and coaches' boxes to prevent the development of thatch.

One of the first improvements made to upgrade Grosche Field was the irrigation system. Continued on page 24

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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 applica-
tion of wetting agent (Lescowet) and care-
ful irrigation as needed. The turf is also
treated with Diazinon insecticide to control
grubs as they begin to feed near the
surface.

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 irri-
gation schedule is set to run in the early
morning rather than at night. This avoids
long periods during which the turf remains
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A strict mowing schedule is maintained in
depth. The field is closed for two days at the
end of the month for mid-season renova-
tion. This gives the crew a chance to spot
seed and/or topdress any wear areas, such
as in front of the mound, where the out-
fielders stand or between the dugouts and
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