

# STMA Profile

## ON TIME AND ON BUDGET

By Steve and Suz Trusty



**St. Louis University renovated existing park land to create the Billiken Sports Complex.**

**R**enting off-campus space for team play was not an ideal situation for St. Louis University, St. Louis, MO. When arrangements were made with the city to combine existing park land with university property in an on-campus sports complex, the university welcomed the opportunity. As it turned out, “complex” was the right word to describe the conversion.

The Billiken Sports Complex project was coordinated by the Construction and Engineering Departments of St. Louis University. Richard (Rich) T. Moffitt, superintendent of Grounds and Facilities Services for the university, was called upon to help develop the turf fields. He describes the experience as fast-paced learning. A member of both the national Sports Turf Managers Association and the Midwest Chapter, Moffitt credits the advice and assistance offered by fellow STMA members as instrumental in achieving the desired results.

“STMA members, those I knew and many I had never met, were willing to

spend time on the phone to help,” Moffitt says. “They shared their experience from working under similar circumstances and even revealed some of their ‘private secrets’ to help bring the project in on time and within budget.”

The Billiken Sports Complex serves both the Athletic Department, (the university’s Division I field hockey, baseball and softball teams), and the Recreation Department (men’s, women’s, and coed intramural teams, and faculty and staff use). In addition, according to the terms of the agreement between the university and the city, the complex will be made available to certain city special interest groups.

The Billiken Sports Complex is a \$5.5-million facility. In addition to the fields, it is a complete complex with seating (2,400 at the soccer fields alone),

concessions, first aid station, athlete locker areas, training rooms, and storage space.

“We’ve developed a rather unique situation,” says Moffitt. “We have approximately four acres of synthetic surface soccer fields, the largest

continuous synthetic surface in the United States, next door to 3.56 acres of baseball and softball fields on natural turf. We’ll be able to compare the synthetic and the natural fields, side-by-side.”

Moffitt is understandably proud of the soccer fields. With a polygrass surface and 12-inch gravel base, the drainage is excellent. Three inches of water should clear from the fields within 10 minutes, leaving the surface ready for play.

### Overseeing The Project

Work on the Billiken Sports Complex turf fields took place over the last two years, with the major construction occurring in the summer of 1991, Moffitt says. “We wanted to have the fields ready for Division I play by spring of 1992, but the Athletic Department really wanted to have access to them for fall



# IN ST. LOUIS

practice in August. My biggest challenge as a horticulturist was the development of the grass fields in the heat of summer."

Moffitt has a knack for seeing the big picture and pulling the pieces together to make things work. Three different entities were involved in the development of the complex. Integrating Facilities Services, the Athletic Department and the Recreation Department in a manner that will be sustainable by the Grounds Department was no simple task. Each entity has similar yet different needs and concerns. Making sure these groups understood the various needs and keeping the groups working together was a major part of Moffitt's job.

Moffitt credits the project's success to "good internal relationship" between the departments and the desire of all involved to end up with an excellent facility. He calls working together the key.

It's not at all surprising that Moffitt also comments on the positive effects of a good working relationship with his suppliers and contractors.

Outdoor Equipment Company was the primary supplier for the Billiken Sports Complex. "We worked very well together," Moffitt says.

Even with excellent cooperation, he says, "this project wouldn't have happened if my grounds staff hadn't been top of the line. Everyone pulled together. Many staff members went beyond the call of duty to get things done. Barry Roberts especially stood out with his extra effort in installing the warning track, doing the dirt work preparation, and working on the overseeding."

Moffitt came into the project nine months after its start; a situation he calls a major disadvantage. The first contractor was not skilled in athletic field preparation, and it showed. The results at the end of 1990 were definitely not up to Division I standards. Starting in April 1991, the original turf was stripped and two inches of topsoil removed from the six inches the first contractor had brought in. Even then, considerable hand work was needed to remove the rocks from the remaining soil before the project could proceed.

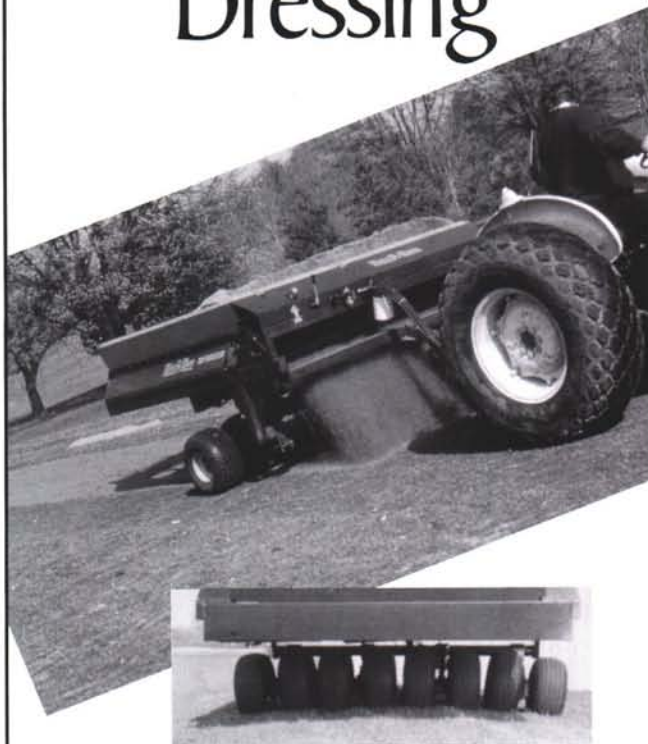
Once Moffitt came in, he took control. "You need complete control of a project like this from day one," he says. "And you need someone with sports field experience. We spent a lot of time and money redoing things that shouldn't have been done."

As always, there were budget limitations. "Working for the results we wanted on the complex was a challenge because we didn't have an extraordinary amount of money to develop it," says Moffitt. Equipment for the project was funded from

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Topsoil installed by one contractor was removed and a new seed bed was prepared.

### Moffitt Profile

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the start. More money is still needed for personnel and supplies to maintain the sports complex.

Moffitt has one full-time mechanic and seven full-time personnel involved with the campus grounds. Four to six groundskeepers are hired during the peak season, depending on the funds available. Three of these groundskeepers work full-time from March through October. Students make up the rest of the work force.

Along with the Grounds department, Moffitt manages the Traffic Department. This involves the movement and delivery of parcels and mail on and between the university's two campuses. Six full-time employees handle these tasks.

Moffitt contracted out much of the work on the turf fields. Professional Landscape Company handled the infield development. Schaeffer/Meyer Sod Company did the finish grade and the original seed and sod work. The grounds crew of the St. Louis Cardinals did the clay work, constructing the batting area, pitcher's mound and bullpens.

By the end of May, the new finish grade was completed and the first seeding made. Then, the contractor began infield development. Turface (calcined clay) and a topsoil/sand mix were used. Because the irrigation system (using Hunter I-40 heads and a Rain Bird ISC

controller) had already been installed, a second finish grade of the area was necessary. Seasonal student employees were brought in to help with the infield finish in June.

Moffitt found establishing turf in the summer to be a challenge he doesn't recommend. "Don't try to develop a turf field during mid-summer in the Midwest. We had to oversee numerous times to augment the original sodding and seeding and to cut burning. The weather was not cooperative."

Initially, adequate water sources were also a problem. Provisions had not been made for the necessary two-inch, high-pressure line close enough to reach the skinned areas. Extra time and funds were needed to correct the situation.

### Toward The Future

Despite the obstacles, Moffitt was able to offer the Athletic Department what he calls a "somewhat finished project" by August 15. An alumni game played on October 12 brought top reviews from the coaches and participants.

Still, Moffitt is not satisfied. "There's much room for improvement, things we want to work on and things that just take more time to develop. The parameters for a good field are usually two full growing seasons, but we were able to provide a playable surface in five months. Overall, the project was a challenging pain, but the end result was beautiful. Hard work does pay off."



## Education Leads To Experience

Moffitt brings a solid background to his position. He earned his bachelor's degree in Agriculture with a Horticulture major from the University of Missouri at Columbia in 1980.

Immediately after graduation, he worked for a nursery as a landscape designer/supervisor. In 1981, he formed his own landscaping company to develop special projects. He still maintains the company, but he does not have the time to do much with it. For four years, Moffitt served as landscape director of the Jamestown Mall in St. Louis, in charge of both the exterior and interior plants.



Seeding during the summer presented an extra challenge.

In 1985, intrigued by the challenge, he joined the University of St. Louis in his current position.

There's not a great deal of published information on sports turf development, according to Moffitt. He started with golf course information and adapted it to his needs.

That's one reason he's so enthusiastic about STMA. "The main missions of STMA are tremendous," says Moffitt. "It's all important—the educational programs, the scholarship programs, the emphasis on safety and liability issues,

and, most of all, the exchange of ideas and information. On both the national and regional levels, STMA works closely with university people on research and testing, and passes this information along to members. Regional learning through the Midwest Chapter has been vital. Through the chapters, members can interact with people in their own areas, those who have some common concerns, where the same timing of problems and controls apply."

"I don't want to be just another member," he says. "I want to become involved.

I pick organizations that can help me and where I can be a help."

As well as STMA, Moffitt is a member of the National Parks and Grounds Institute, the St. Louis Chapter of the Professional Grounds Management Society, the Missouri Valley Turfgrass Association, and the Missouri Botanical Gardens. He is president of the newly formed Green Industry Council of Missouri, an organization "to further improve the quality of the natural and built landscape by uniting the components of the Green Industry." □

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6. Total number of maintenance staff for field.
7. Does baseball field have lighting for night games?
8. Number of events on baseball diamond per year.
9. Types and number of events on diamond other than baseball?
10. How many months during the year is the field used?
11. Why you think this field is one of the best?
12. **IMPORTANT:** Send two sets of color slides or prints.

**Deadline for entries:** Entries must be postmarked no later than November 30, 1992. Selection of winners will be made by the Awards Committee of Four Major League Head Groundskeepers.

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