

STMA PROFILE: VERSATILITY SPELLS SUCCESS FOR RAY FLOOD

By Bob Tracinski

Rugby at the University of Maryland, College Park. "We have the only regulation-size rugby field in the mid-Atlantic," says Flood. "Rugby teams love to play here."

The University of Maryland marching band steps onto the field to perform before the half-time crowd, confident that their routine will be executed with precision because of hours of practice under field-like conditions. Football fans reward the performance with exuberant applause. Ray Flood smiles and adds another satisfied customer to his list.

Raymond J. Flood is landscape technician III for the grounds maintenance department of the University of Maryland, College Park, MD. That designation means versatility.

Flood says, "Rather than the set job description of other positions, ours is broad-range and flexible within the management and training areas. In effect, the university grounds maintenance department can use a landscape tech anywhere, to do anything."

Just a bit of that "anything" includes management of nine automatic irrigation systems, training of more than 50 grounds employees on proper turf management procedures, annual training for more than 25 pesticide applicators, and coordination

of turf and ornamental care on approximately 100 acres of the 340 acres of campus that are devoted to turf and landscaping.

Flood's first assignment upon joining the university grounds maintenance department in 1988 was to work with a three-person crew to whip the 35 acres of recreation and athletic fields into shape.

The intercollegiate fields are under the care of Bill Reinohl and William (Bunk) Carter, except for the women's intercollegiate softball field, which is under Flood's domain. Carter has been with the university 31 years; Reinohl 14.

"With a combination of technical background and hands-on experience, these fellows have put together an outstanding

program," Flood says. "They're also very willing to share their expertise. It's like having a team of supporters right here on campus."

Flexibility Under Harsh Conditions

The University of Maryland is near Washington D.C., in the transitional zone for turf, with hot, humid summers and cold, windy, sometimes snowy, winters.

"Byrd Stadium is planted in Tufcote bermudagrass, which thrives under the maintenance program they've developed for that location. Bermudagrass requires a level of maintenance that is difficult to provide at this time for the recreational fields," Flood laments. "I've gone to a mixture of bluegrass and perennial ryegrass

for them, overseeding worn areas each fall with the best possible varieties according to performance in testing under local conditions. We use turf-type tall fescues for the rest of the campus area."

Flood describes the recreational fields as multi-use. Physical education classes and

intramural teams share the space, with the sports changing to fit the seasons and the needs of the students. As the seasons and time demands change, field use often overlaps.

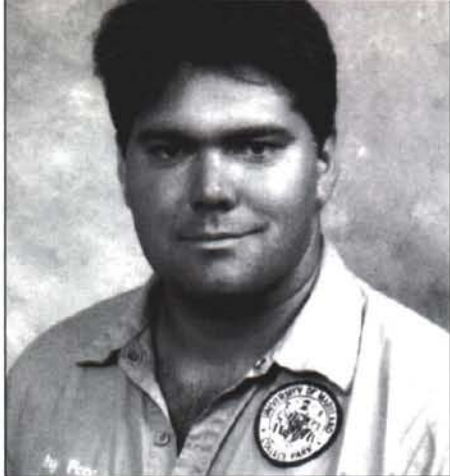
"We have all the standard sports, including a lot of flag football, and a few of the less widely known sports as well," Flood explains. "We have intramural club lacrosse and crease soccer, which is similar to soccer, but uses a smaller field and a triangular, mini-lacrosse net. We also have the only regulation-size Rugby field in the mid-Atlantic. Rugby teams love to play here. A groomed turf field with painted lines is a treat for a sport that is often relegated to the last available space, whatever that surface may be."

Equipment use must be coordinated between sites also, because fields are scattered throughout the campus setting, rather than clustered in a central area. Flood says, "In essence, the university put a field wherever they could find a suitable open spot. As pressures grow for additional academic space, we lose fields to buildings."

The budget crunch facing all universities is affecting the program as well. Limited resources are greatly curtailing the program for the recreational fields, cutting maintenance to the "essentials only" level.

The Human Touch

Flood brings an added dimension to his position. He earned his bachelor's degree in behavioral and social science from the University of Maryland in 1985 with the intention of concentrating on his strong people skills. Following graduation, he took a position with Chemlawn Services Corporation, planning to use his industrial psychology background, combined with summer job experience in the turf and ornamentals area, as a stepping stone for advancement within the company. By 1988, several promotions had brought him to the position of beneficial services manager. Sensing that a change in ownership would slow inter-company advancement, he opted to go back to the university to add



Ray Flood.

more human relations credits.

He entered his current position with the intent of using his landscape-related skills to the maximum to fund the furthering of his education, a condition the university clearly understood and welcomed as a good trade-off for his com-

mitment and expertise. But the constant challenge of the job, especially in the sports turf and irrigation areas, "hooked" him.

Flood finds those "people skills" are a definite asset when interacting with department personnel, instructors, coaches, athletes, students, and other university employees. "Working with the university is really like working for a business in the private sector," says Flood. "I've encouraged my staff to see the foreman, supervisors, repair personnel, students, players, and those working in the buildings as our customers. I make it a point to talk to the people we serve. We need to find out what we can do to make it easier for them."

"The little things that can be changed make a big difference to the individuals involved," he continues. "We talk with the intramural players to assess their needs and work to make conditions as suitable as possible within budgetary constraints. We spend a few minutes with those using each building to learn their preferences in which bulbs and flowers to place in the landscape. It is the work environment of both students and university employees and, as such, it should satisfy their needs. We've added picnic tables in the spots they've chosen to make on-campus lunch and coffee breaks more enjoyable."

Sports turf takes enough of a beating from the athletes in games and practices. The added wear of marching band practice is not welcome on the field. But it's tough for the band to display precision routines without on-field practice. Flood and his supervisor have made solving the band's problem their personal crusade. A large area near the front of the campus is maintained as a football field, and painted once a week, to ease the transition from practice to performance.

Flood directly manages a crew of eight, coordinating tasks for the least interference with campus activities and the most effective personnel usage. For example, he may schedule spraying for midnight,

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or 3 or 4 a.m.

"With crews dressed up like men from the moon, we want as little contact with people as possible," Flood says. "We don't want anyone walking across the treated areas to find out what we're doing dressed like that. It's extremely important in such heavily populated settings to be mindful of all safety concerns. But with a campus, no matter what time of day or night, there are always at least a few people out."

Striving For Excellence

Flood continually works to raise the level of professionalism within the grounds department. Maryland requires that one person for each facility that applies pesticides be certified by the state. Other individuals handling pesticides must be registered under that person. Flood coordinates the in-house training for the registration program. During the past year, the state has produced a video training course that covers six of the eight required topics, which the grounds department has now acquired. A prepared test accompanies each of the videos. The remaining two topics and exams covering the material are prepared in-house, as the entire program had been prior to the issuance of the videos. The testing for registration is also administered through the grounds department.

Flood encourages employees to go through the state certification program. The University of Maryland at College Park is the flagship campus of the 12 state schools, setting the high standards the public

expects of its institutions. It's necessary to apply pesticides to maintain the beauty of the landscape. With 60 employees in the grounds maintenance department, 25 are registered, and seven of them are certified by the state.

Always working to improve his own skills as well, Flood has taken an irrigation troubleshooting, installation and design course from the Professional School of Irrigation in Chantilly, VA, and an IPM: Integrated Pest Management Short Course at the University of Maryland. He is a Maryland Certified Pesticide Applicator, a member of the Maryland Turfgrass Council, and joined the national Sports Turf Managers Association in the summer of 1989.

"WITH CREWS DRESSED UP LIKE MEN FROM THE MOON, WE WANT AS LITTLE CONTACT WITH PEOPLE AS POSSIBLE,"

George Frazee, a grounds department employee assigned to the recreation fields, Flood and Reinohl attended the national STMA meeting held in Houston in January, 1990. On the way back, all agreed it was a very good program, but didn't cover as much material directly related to the transition zone as they would have liked. After discussing the issue with then executive director, Dale Keller, and national board member, Greg Petry, Flood was encouraged to get the ball rolling for a local chapter.

He contacted sports turf managers at parks and recreation departments, colleges, universities, and high school throughout the Mid-Atlantic region. Working with a core of a dozen other dedicated sports turf professionals, he established the Chesapeake Chapter of the Sports Turf Managers Association and was appointed Chapter President.

As with any young organization, the work involved with establishment is just the tip of the iceberg. Flood credits his wife, Susan, for her support and understanding—and his year-old son, Raymond, for the comic relief—that make it possible for him to continue his high level of commitment to the blossoming chapter.

He has now immersed himself in "facilitating" board meetings and quarterly chapter meetings; coordinating chapter seminars, workshops and athletic tournaments; working with the chapter's secretary, Mike Gerwig, in producing the bimonthly newsletter, seeking support from commercial affiliates; assisting vice president, Art Downing, in monitoring committee activities and collaborating with chapter treasurer, George Frazee, on budgeting matters. In addition, he serves as the chapter's official liaison with the national STMA and other industry organizations.

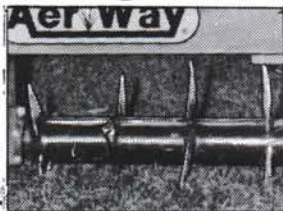
As usual, he's using those management and people skills to create another group of satisfied customers. □

Editor's Note: Bob Tracinski is manager of public relations for the John Deere Company in Raleigh, NC, and public relations chairman for the national Sports Turf Managers Association.

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