

The Carroll Stadium Field, ready for play.



Mike McCaffrey, building and grounds supervisor for the Carroll, IA, Community Schools, was presented the 1990 award for Outstanding Sports Turf Facility from the Iowa Sports Turf Managers Association

## STMA PROFILE:

# MIKE McCAFFREY:

## BUILDING ON COMMUNITY COOPERATION

By Bob Tracinski

There's a big game at the Carroll High School football stadium—and the home team is Carroll Kuemper, the city's parochial high school. A junior varsity game is played at one of the three practice fields at the Carroll High School campus—and the bleachers are loaded with cheering fans. There's nothing unusual about either of those scenes in Carroll, IA, where cooperation and community go hand-in-hand.

The Carroll Public High School and Junior High School, Carroll Kuemper, and neighboring community parochial junior highs all share the football fields. As many as 38 ball games can take place during the football season, sometimes two or three in a single day.

The baseball and softball field complex, also shared by all the schools, is owned and maintained by the Carroll Parks and Recreation Department. The city's school system and the parks department share equipment and coordinate its use. Even the municipal golf course and the local country club have taken up the cooperative spirit.

Working together makes, good common sense, says Mike McCaffrey, supervisor of building and grounds for the Carroll community schools. After all, you've got to know your neighbors.

McCaffrey keeps tabs on five football fields, a small part of the 95 acres

under his care, which is spread between the high school, middle school, and one elementary school. He is responsible for all the grounds, turf, and landscaping, as well as maintenance on the new high school building. He has one "understudy" at the stadium and he knows the value of a dollar.

"Every dollar that's spent on these facilities is a taxpayer's dollar," says McCaffrey. "We're all working with public funds. The better job we can do of maintaining the total public area with more cooperation and fewer dollars, the better the community is going to feel about these facilities."

McCaffrey coordinates the football field use, making adjustments as needed to adapt to weather conditions. Because cooperation is so strong and all users understand the importance of keeping the five fields in the best possible condition for safe play, a rainy day is likely to bring a phone call asking him which field he'd like to have used for a scheduled game even before he has had a chance to make the call requesting a site change.

Prior to 1984, all football games were played at the stadium. Then McCaffrey came on the scene.

### Staying Close To His Roots

No stranger to the area, McCaffrey grew up in Carroll and graduated from Kuemper. After his 1976 graduation from Iowa Central Community College

in Fort Dodge, IA, with an associate arts degree in business and management, he worked with a construction firm for a few years, then with Farmland Foods for six years.

McCaffrey had worked in lawn care during his high school and college years. That, combined with the steady decline of the packing industry, made an opening in grounds care with the school system appealing to him. When he learned of the school's desire for the person hired to take turfgrass management courses at Iowa State University, his interest peaked. McCaffrey was hired by the Carroll Community Schools in November of 1984.

Taking basic turfgrass management courses taught by Dr. Nick Christians, ISU's turf management specialist, spurred McCaffrey's enthusiasm. He kept in touch and "things just snowballed from there."

Carroll's stadium was constructed in the late 1940s and early 1950s. In the 1954-55 school year, Kuemper went co-ed, adding another tier of inter-school sports to their program. In 1964, the stadium was remodeled, adding new bleachers and a press box. (Kuemper has only practice facilities on site. Both the public and parochial schools share the stadium for competitive football and track events.)

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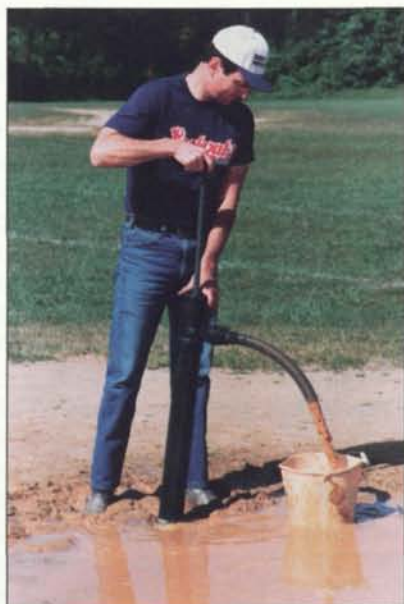


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### MCAFFREY

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One of the first things McCaffrey did in his new position was contact the city of Carroll to ask for use of some of the softball and baseball fields during the off-season. By seasonally converting an area into a full-size football field, six to eight games were shifted from the stadium turf.

#### Construction For The Community

When the new high school was built in 1989, McCaffrey was there to oversee field construction. Because his program was showing results benefitting the whole community, good sports turf was an accepted and welcome part of the program. Five acres of the 50-acre site have complete underground irrigation and it was there that the three new practice fields were built, roughly designated as one full-size soccer field and two full-size football fields—one for the junior high athletes, and one for high school freshmen and sophomore games. The main practice field has bleachers to accommodate the fans for competitive play.

After a check of the buildings around 7 a.m., McCaffrey spends 95 percent of his day outside in the spring, summer, and fall. With just him and his understudy handling grounds care, it takes a major time block just to do the mowing. Then there's the overseeding, sodding, tree, and shrub care and helping monitor the safety conditions of playground areas.

McCaffrey personally makes all fertilizer and pesticide applications. Parking lot upkeep is part of the package, including snow removal. But McCaffrey does contract some of that out when winter snows are extensive.

During January and February, McCaffrey blocks out the grounds care agenda for the coming year and orders supplies. Soil samples taken in the fall and analyzed at Iowa State, along with input from Dr. Mike Agnew, ISU extension turfgrass specialist, give him the basis for program adjustment.

"I like to experiment with different things," says McCaffrey.

The stadium is mowed every other day during the football season, removing approximately one-quarter inch of the three-inch turf. McCaffrey covers the fields with a slicer every 10 days to two weeks. This reduces compaction, increases water penetration, and provides a softer, safer cushion for the players.

McCaffrey walks every inch of the playing facilities at least once a week, looking for problems. He talks with the coaches, players, and officials, assessing the turf from their point of view.

"You have to look at the number of kids on the fields, the number of competitive games held, the total traffic for each field," he says. "Safe playing conditions are essential for sports turf. Liability is a prime factor."

Major renovation takes place in the spring. In late February or early March, the fields are topdressed. Then, around the first of April, McCaffrey makes six or seven passes with the core aerifier. As the tough, broadleaf weeds, such as knotweed, emerge, he applies Trimec. In approximately one month, he does the seeding. His basic mix consists of 60 percent perennial ryegrasses, and 40 percent bluegrasses, because of the quick green-up and fast recovery rate under heavy use. He drill seeds the bluegrasses and broadcasts the perennial ryegrass. Because the soils have a decent phosphorus

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level, the fertilization program includes phosphorus only when seeding, with balanced nitrogen and potash then and throughout the year. Other nutrients are included as soil tests point out deficiencies. Chelated iron applications have been added during the playing season this year with good results.

### Birth Of An Association

In the fall of 1985, Christians came to Carroll to teach a course and stopped in the see what McCaffrey had accomplished. He liked what he saw and he and Dr. Agnew contacted McCaffrey about being a guest speaker at the January 1986 Iowa Turfgrass Conference.

It was during the Turfgrass Conference that Dr. Agnew, Gary Peterson, the Newton, IA, extension agent, and McCaffrey put together the plan for the Iowa Sports Turf Managers Association. McCaffrey appreciated the benefits offered by his membership in the national STMA, and wanted to increase that interaction closer to home. Safe, playable sports turf for all Iowa athletes was—and is—the goal.

McCaffrey reached out to a few neighbors. He contacted the smaller colleges and other school districts. Once the core team was in place, there was no stopping the progress. Today, ISTMA has close to 200 members, holds two regional clinics each year, and participates in the Turfgrass Conference. The organization contributes to ISU turf research and the Iowa Turfgrass Institute.

In 1988 Gary Peterson, ISTMA secretary, approached the Iowa Turfgrass Institute about ISTMA affiliation. ITI is composed of the state's major turfgrass organizations—parks and recreation, lawn care operators, golf course superintendents, sod growers, and since January of 1988, the sports turf managers. Since that formal acceptance, McCaffrey has served as the ISTMA liaison with ITI, and has joined representatives of the other associations, Dr. Christians, Dr. Agnew, and Dr. Mike Chaplin, head of the ISU horticulture department, on the ITI board. In 1992 he was ISTMA's vice president. Recently, he took up the presidential reins.

"With Dr. Agnew as secretary/treasurer, and the main cog of ITI gears, we've been able to establish a strong scholarship program, awarding 16 scholarships

with total funds of more than \$7,000 last year," McCaffrey reports. "The added encouragement has helped the ISU horticulture department increase its student count by 55 percent over 1990/91."

This coalition has also promoted outstanding growth in the Turfgrass Conference. Attendance reached nearly 1,800 in 1992.

McCaffrey continues to reach out to his neighbors. The ISTMA Turf Clinic held at his facilities last August drew 40 attendees, 25 of which had no previous contact with ISU or ISTMA. The Iowa Parks and Recreation Association spent part of its September meeting touring his facilities and learning about his program and ISTMA. Then there's the assistance he provides to other school districts, like helping Lake City Community Schools develop the complete plan for reconstruction of their football field.

"The great thing about cooperation is it works both ways," says McCaffrey. "If I have a problem or a doubt about my facilities, I can just pick up the phone and dial a neighbor, like Dr. Agnew." □

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

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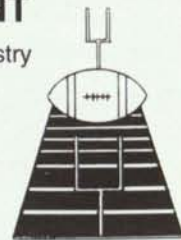
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