

## STMA PROFILE:



Scott Gaunky (left) at Chicago's Wrigley Field with groundskeeper Roger O'Conner in April 1993.

A 90-by-90-foot turf cover is used to get the field ready for its late-March opening.

By Bob Tracinski

**W**hat do you do when your high school's baseball diamond has had no major field work for eight years? When the infield looks like a saucer surrounded by raised skinned areas? When balls pop up at the grass lip, blowing the athlete's chance for a play? When other schools mutter about your playing field? And when the already-stressed budget means no reconstruction funds for yet another year?

If you're Scott Gaunky, you tackle the problem head-on.

Gaunky, grounds foreman of Mundelein High School in Mundelein, IL, instigated a campaign to generate communitywide contributions for field reconstruction. And, with enthusiasm, thorough planning and plenty of hard work, he pulled it off. The Mundelein Mustangs' baseball field is now a source of community pride.

The route to opportunity is seldom well-paved. Gaunky entered the sports turf field through the back door. He initially worked as a carpenter. When the building trade slowed in the late 1970s, he took a position with the Park District, working three years on grounds and

# Creative Financing Pays Off at

## Mundelein High



sports fields. Gaunky "got hooked" on sports turf and took a turf management course to expand his knowledge.

When his alma mater, Mundelein High School, opened the position of grounds foreman, Gaunky was ready to step into the job. He started as a one-man crew with a pickup truck and a tractor. Gaunky alone was responsible for 22 acres of grounds, including three soccer fields, two baseball fields, and the stadium complex for football, soccer and track, as well as all trees and plant materials on the site. At the time he took over, there were no turf programs developed beyond basic mowing and fertilization.

Gaunky knew immediately that there was a lot of room for improvement at Mundelein High. One by one, he attacked the problems. He passed the state licensing test for spraying. (Illinois has 17 categories of sprayer licensing.) He worked toward establishing a basic turf and plant care program. And he paid extra attention to sports turf, which had become something of a passion for him.

"This may sound a little corny," says Gaunky, "but I feel that the adminis-

tration, coaches, parents and grounds care department all owe it to the student athletes to provide a safe place to play. My school and its athletic program supply players that have the potential to become college, and even pro level, athletes. What happens to the student athletes here will have an effect on the rest of their lives. We can't take a chance that some lack of attention to field safety could contribute to an injury that might eliminate future possibilities."

To further his turf management goals, Gaunky solicited advice and technical assistance from experts in the Chicago area. He's met and talked with some of the best, including Greg Petry of the Waukegan Park District, Ken Mrock of the Chicago Bears and Roger Bossard of Comiskey Park. With their input, he laid the groundwork for a superior turf program.

"I attended a seminar at Old Comiskey Park," he recalls. "When Roger [Bossard] explained the construction and maintenance details of the new field, I knew what I wanted as the pattern for our varsity baseball field. Roger introduced me

*continued on page 16*

## STMA Profile

*continued from page 14*

to Dave Cygon [now with Pro's Choice] from Aimcor Corporation, the company holding the seminar and the manufacturer of Turface. I explained what we were trying to accomplish, and he agreed to donate one-half of the 22 tons of Turface we'd need." Turface was used under the sodded outfield area and mixed with sand for the skinned infield surface.

Gaunky laid out the plans for field reconstruction, worked out cost estimates, and considered preliminary approaches to solicit materials, funds and labor. He initially asked for "a written commitment, a confirmation that if the plan took shape, assistance would come through." Realizing his plan was feasible, he approached school administrators and set up a meeting with them.

"I went in prepared to answer questions — I sure didn't plan to fail," he recalls. "After the meeting, the administration decided to take the matter to the school board. I'm sure it didn't hurt that one member of the board was an umpire. Anyway, the board approved the plan and things really started rolling."

Gaunky worked out a letter with then acting superintendent of Mundelein High School, John Schockmel (now the school's assistant superintendent for business). The letter was sent to big businesses in the area to solicit funds and donations.

"This was a total community effort," says Gaunky. "Everybody got behind it. The American Legion Post that uses the field for summer leagues donated money. Pepsi came through with a new scoreboard. The baseball parents Booster Association donated \$4,000. And, when the time came, they, the players, and even superintendent Schockmel showed up to help lay the sod.

"Deak Sod Farms of Union Grove, WI, donated over one-half of 3,000 yards of sod for the field," he adds. "We bought the rest from them."

The old sod was removed and the field was leveled. To establish an effective drainage system, they installed 1,000 feet of drain tiles.

"We laid 6-inch tiles along the arc and back edge of the field, connecting to the main drain," Gaunky explains. "We put 4-inch tiles under each player's position and each base. We ended up raising home plate by 6 inches. The area between home plate and the pitch-

er's mound were 17 inches below grade — third base, 24 inches below grade.

"There were two construction companies in the area handling large projects," he continues. "I asked the managers to donate fill. Town and Country Development donated all the black dirt. They hauled sand to the site where the dirt was being screened and trucked the mix over to the field at no charge. Cambridge Country Construction, Richard Brown Development, donated 14 loads of fill for the rough. We leveled that and then added the sand, soil and Turface mix."

Dave Frost of James Landscaping in Mundelein made the grade — literally. A Mundelein High alumnus, he donated his equipment and crews for all the rough grade work. He even brought them in to help with finish grading.

Additional donations came from First American Bank-Mundelein, Don Michaels of Lake-Cook Farm Supply, Legat Architects, MacClean-Fogg Company, Midwest Horizon, Mofat Construction Company, Mundelein Disposal, Mundelein Fire Fighters Association, Medline Industries Inc., and New Century Bank, Mundelein.

"With all the donations of materials, time and labor. We had everything ready for laying sod by the third week in November," Gaunky recalls. "So many people pitched in to get that sod down that we managed to wrap things up before the weather turned nasty."

The work was completed in the spring of 1991. The field has been maintained at near-pro level, says Gaunky, and last year they reworked one of the lower level fields. The Boosters are working toward putting up lights on the main field. They've also chipped in to upgrade the training room for the trainer, and even built him a customized golf cart painted in Mundelein High School colors. Community spirit keeps moving things along.

"John Schockmel pays special attention to the look of the grounds," says Gaunky. "He'll work with us to find the funds to do what it takes to keep the fields in shape."

Gaunky now has additional help with grounds care. He's also added equipment to his inventory.

The turf care program has a complete fertilization program, based on annual soil tests. Gaunky will add tissue analysis this year, through a special research program put together by Dr. Hank Wilkinson of the University of

Illinois. Samples go to Wilkinson, marked by the numbers of the fields. Results are faxed back within 36 hours.

Gaunky uses a slicing aerator on the fields during the playing season. He follows up with core aeration. For example, the football/soccer field is core aerated eight times in the spring, three times in midsummer and eight times in the fall. The cores are broken up and dragged into the soil profile.

Overseeding for the stadium field incorporates a special blend of five Kentucky bluegrass and two perennial ryegrass varieties (Midnight, Columbia, Challenger, Merit and Touchdown bluegrasses — Manhattan and Citation II perennial ryegrasses). The practice fields are overseeded with a commercial sports turf seed mixture of Victa and Abbey Kentucky bluegrasses and Loretta and Accolade perennial ryegrasses.

Gaunky has also added a 90-by-90-foot turf cover. The cover helps get the baseball field ready for its late-March opening and can be used on the football/soccer field to speed seeding establishment in the fall.

In his "spare time," Gaunky is active in the Midwest Sports Turf Managers Association. He helped with the initial development of the organization, including the shaping of bylaws, and serves on its board. His reconstructed field was the site of the Midwest Chapter's third official meeting, a hands-on demonstration that drew 140 attendees. In addition to his Midwest STMA affiliation, Gaunky is an active member of the national STMA. He also recently served as an adviser for a 188-acre soccer complex in Libertyville, IL.

During the Midwest Chapter's third official meeting, Gaunky spoke on how the Mundelein community pulled together to make the field a source of local pride. The route to such opportunity remains, he observes. It just has to be taken.

"My experience speaks for itself," he says. "Anyone is welcome to come to my school and see what our community has been able to do. It isn't anything unusual. You just have to be dedicated and have determination. The technical resources, donations and help are all there, if you just go after them." □

*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 national Sports Turf Managers Association.*