

Front Lines

Stories from the front lines...

by Dave Ashman

"If you are going to talk the talk..."

As turf professionals, we have an understanding of the importance of managing a playing surface. To have a consistent playing surface, you have to work the field consistently, regardless of the level of competition.

League organizers and field managers communicate about field maintenance and safety on a regular basis. Across the country, a dialog has begun which will create safer and better playing conditions for athletes in most of the turf sports played today. As with any change in behavior or routine, you have to fully commit to a new program if you are to be successful...

"You have to walk the walk..."

The task of managing a sports field often requires superior diplomatic skills in addition to problem solving abilities. There are so many groups looking for programmable space that conflict seems inevitable at times. Nonprofit organizations but heads with for-profit groups, adult leagues are pitted against youth leagues, residents take on non-residents...

Balancing the needs of all these groups can become a major headache. Solutions such as adding lights can extend programming hours, but in the long run, this kind of action only intensifies the maintenance nightmare. All parties expect safe and playable fields, but they resist sacrificing field time to necessary regular maintenance.

In California, the City of Long Beach Park Recreation and Marine

Department implemented a program to improve customer service for all of the groups that use its facilities. Developed by Angie Avery and Terry Lortz, the program uses simple management principles to ensure all stakeholders receive the maximum benefits from participating in the program. This example illustrates the benefits properly maintained facilities give to

program, Baseball America selected the field as one of the top 15 baseball venues in the country this year.

Terry and his staff prepared a balanced presentation to guarantee attendees would learn something that would make them a better field manager. Volunteers began field maintenance instruction in the classroom before moving into the field to imple-

ment what they had learned. Video presentations, guest speakers and hands-on field demonstrations walked the volunteers through techniques and procedures for proper field care, and support-staff fielded questions from the group.

The class stressed the importance of safe and consistent playing conditions for teaching baseball to kids. It gave community members insight into the value of proper maintenance practices.

The event introduced safety training to the field's users and increased

their appreciation for the turf industry. Angie and Terry will continue to develop this program, and hopefully, the fields will improve along the way. □

The concept of this column is to share stories, anecdotes, legends, myths and outright lies from members of the sportsturf community. If you have something you would like to share, call Dave at (562) 425-2449, or write it down with your name and phone number and mail it to: Ashman & Associates, 3164 North Greenbrier Road, Long Beach, CA 90808.



Volunteers receive hands-on training at Blair Field, Long Beach, California. Courtesy: Dave Ashman.

all users.

Terry and Angie manage Blair Field, Long Beach's baseball stadium and home of the Cal State Long Beach 49ers. To emphasize community involvement in maintaining the quality of the field, their program brings professionals and league volunteers together in hands-on instruction for playing surface management.

The program includes: clear communication of expectations; responsibility and accountability; well defined operational protocol and procedural guidelines; and shared resources, expertise, knowledge and training. As a testament to the effectiveness of the