

Program Harmony at Championship Field of Crockett Park Key to STMA's 1998 Football Field of the Year Award

Championship Field
Crockett Parks,
Brentwood, TN, Parks &
Recreation 1998 Football
Field of the Year.

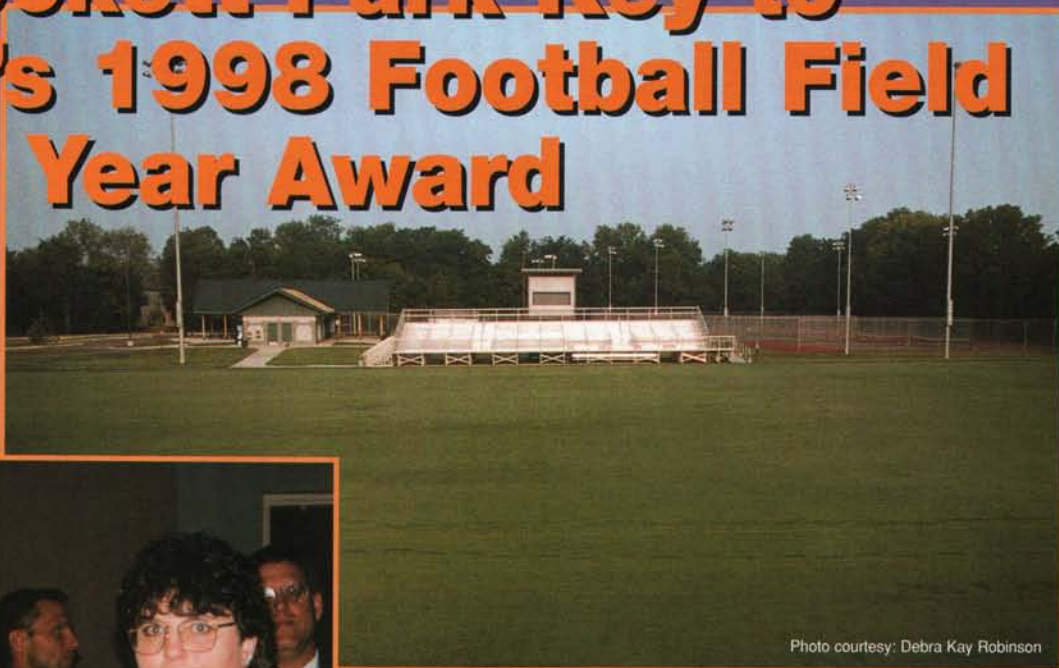


Photo courtesy: Debra Kay Robinson



Photo courtesy: Debra Kay Robinson

Steve Guise, STMA President (L), presents Debra Kay Robinson, Director of Parks and Recreation, Brentwood, TN, Parks & Recreation 1998 Football Field of the Year Award.

By Bob Tracinski

Harmony is a big issue with Debra Robinson, Brentwood, TN's Director of Parks and Recreation. It's that harmony within the field maintenance program, the staff interaction, and the community at large that earned Championship Field of Crockett Park STMA's 1998 Football Field of the Year honors in the Parks and Recreation Category.

The History, the Present, & the Future

Championship Field is only one of 25 athletic fields in this 150 acre, \$8 mil-

lion park, but it is widely considered the best football field in the area. The multi-purpose field was constructed in 1992 during Phase I of Crockett Park. The estimated cost of the project was \$2.5 million, with the Championship Field costing \$175,000.

"The construction included state-of-the-art Musco lighting and a Toro irrigation system that is part of the MIR 500 system," Robinson said. "This enables us to customize irrigation applications, including a schedule for water flow by either time or quantity, to irrigate to the rate of evaporation. It also gives us the ability to operate auxiliary controls such as lighting."

Championship Field has very shallow native soil fields, most with only three to four inches of workable soil.

"We usually hit hard pan at three-and-half inches. The soil is a very hard, red clay. In 1997, Championship Field was renovated to alleviate drainage and compaction problems,

which had developed due to the extensive, year-round use. Ten to 15 truckloads of 70 percent sand - 30 percent topsoil - were added creating just enough slope to promote drainage. Pea gravel was used in selected spots to help excess moisture channel upwards." Robinson explained. "The south end zone was raised as needed: up to 12 inches in some areas. A French drain was installed along the east side line and along the south end zone to channel water to our drainage basin. This renovation, coupled with an aggressive topdressing program using fine grade sand, has maximized field drainage. Much of this \$20,000 project was completed in house by our Grounds Specialists."

Robinson oversees a parks maintenance staff of nine covering approximately 400 acres of land and the park facilities. Seventy-five acres of Crockett Park are developed; the remainder is open meadow and forested area. The complex includes six multi-purpose fields, seven tennis courts, eight ball diamonds located within two fourplexes, a covered shelter, approximately two miles of bike trail, an amphitheater that provides

lawn seating for 3,000, one-and-a-half acres of community playground, and a historical house and log cabin that are rented for weddings, meetings, and other special events.

Another large city facility, Granny White Park, includes three ball diamonds and one multi-purpose field. An additional five or six fields are slotted for development within the community in the next two years.

"Brentwood is an affluent, upscale community and a forward thinking one. Our new fields will be the result of developer donation. The concept is just part of a community evaluation process (master plan) that involved thousands of local residents. The Brentwood 2000 plan evolved from the first community evaluation that rewards developers who donate a percentage of green space within the development. This gives us the credence and credibility to meet with the developers during the planning stages of each project to determine the best use of that green space. The Brentwood 2020 plan continues to promote the donation process. It's a win-win-win situation," Robinson commented.

The Parks and Recreation Department has cooperative agreements with the local middle school, the Brentwood Blaze Football, the Brentwood Soccer Club, and the local YMCA as major field users.

In 1996, Robinson presented a Wimbledon-like concept to the state and received an \$85,000 grant that enabled the purchase of tubular bleachers with a seating capacity of 710 for Championship Field.

"Our concept for Crockett Park was a Wimbledon-like setting with a cluster of tennis courts and athletic fields featuring Championship courts and lighted fields," she explained.

"Through the cooperative agreements, we've gained a flagpole and a press box/crows nest. The Coca Cola Company also donated a scoreboard for that field. That small corner of Crockett Park features the finished Championship Field, paved access that is fully ADA compliant, paved walkways/bikeways fronting the fields and an abutting concessions /restroom facility with an open air shelter and meeting room," Robinson continued.

Playing Time

This outstanding facility is fully scheduled during seven months of the year. The Brentwood Blaze program consists of 12 teams and more than

300 players. They use the field approximately 30 hours per week from August 1 through November 1. The field serves as home field to the middle school during the same period. The middle school also uses the field for two weeks of spring drills adding about 10 hours of use per week. The field also hosts a full spring season of youth soccer matches and tournaments. The Nashville Metro's, the local

Professional Soccer Organization, uses the facility on many occasions. It all adds up to more than 500 hours of on-field activity per year.

"We have two closed periods for Championship Field: November 15 to March 1, and the month of July. That month serves as a recovery period between Spring and Fall use. The turf is 419 Bermudagrass. It is maintained at a one-inch height from Spring until



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November, then raised to one-and-a-quarter inch to protect the crowns from football's wear and tear," Robinson explained.

The Drought of 1999

The drought of 1999 challenged the program harmony.

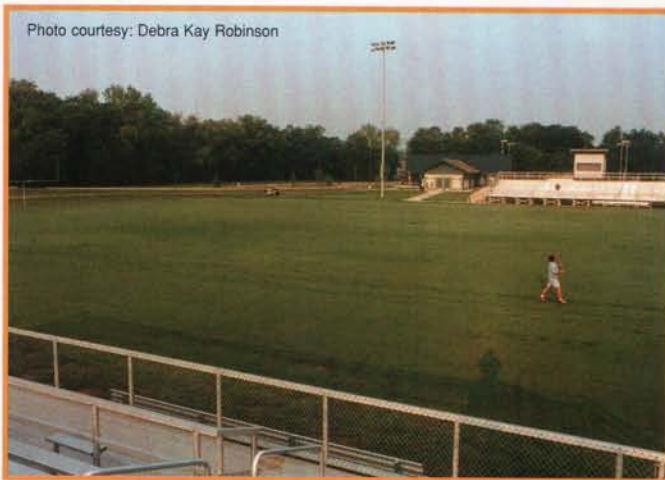
"We had just sprigged our fields to promote density when the city imposed water restrictions. We had a complete

ban for weeks. Then, in early August we could irrigate only for short cycles within a 12-hour period. Baseball, soccer, and football were all running full schedules, so we irrigated each field for a 20-minute cycle, giving each one a taste of water for turf survival.

"When the restrictions were lifted, we overseeded with perennial ryegrass to promote density and help preserve the Bermudagrass. The results

were good. We'll oversee the lighted fields again next year. The natural open field areas we use for additional practice sites are cool-season turf. It went dormant during the worst of the drought, but snapped back well. It's also likely we'll use cool-season turf on the new fields.

"The Championship Field came through the drought better than the other fields, including the field adja-



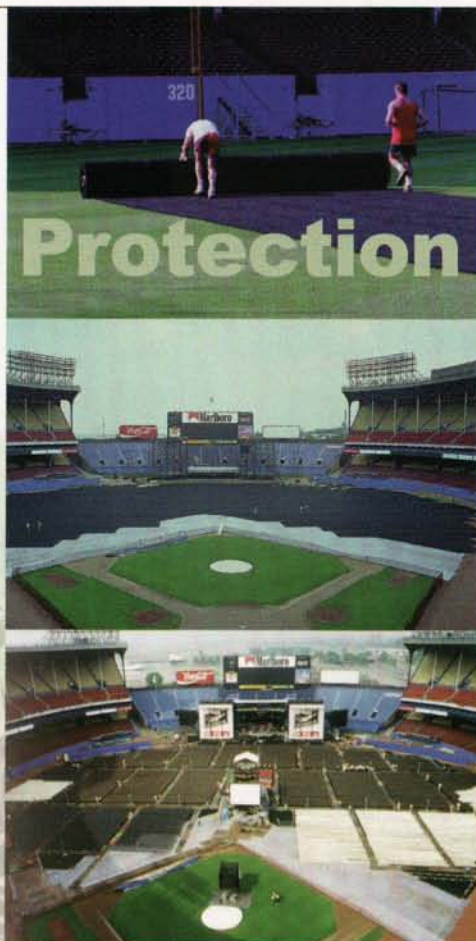
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cent to it that also is lighted and gets the same level of play. We'll adjust some of our cultural practices for the existing Bermudagrass fields to improve our results for the next drought. We'll step up the aeration program to maximize the infiltration rate. We'll also adjust our irrigation cycles, going to less frequent, but deeper irrigation to encourage deeper rooting," Robinson said.

Robinson notes too much water is the more typical problem; there isn't enough depth or layering of soil for excess moisture to percolate through. Once fields reach the saturation point play must be shut down for long-term preservation.

"It's an ongoing educational process to alert our field user groups and the general public to this need, but we're making progress each year," she said. "We've developed a hot line system to provide daily field status reports and we post open, closed, or umpire/referee decision status signs on all the fields."



Photo courtesy: Debra Kay Robinson

Robinson's Final Thoughts

Robinson is quick to note the program results depend on the effectiveness of those staff members out on the fields every day.

"It's the adjustments they make on a daily basis, adapting maintenance practices to existing conditions and staying ahead of needs that keep our program in harmony. It's like a symphony," she said. "I'm the director up front with the baton, but if they don't perform well we lose the harmony. Then we all look and sound bad and field conditions suffer. Our staff understands that and constantly strives to improve their knowledge and skill levels to improve the condition of our fields. They are the key to our success."



Bob Tracinski is the Business Communications Manager for the John Deere Worldwide Commercial & Consumer Equipment Division headquartered in Raleigh, NC. He serves as public relations co-chair for the STMA.

Maintenance Program Outline

Turf Management

- Mow playing surface turf with reel mower - one-inch height of cut from spring through August - one-and-a-quarter inch height of cut from
- September through end of season
- Mowing rate - every other day during prime growing season, decrease rate early and late season
- Core aerify - four times per year, break up cores
- Topdress with sand
- Apply post-emergent herbicide for crabgrass control - as needed in July
- Apply broadleaf control as needed following IPM practices

Fertilization Management

- Soil tested as needed
- Determine what want to accomplish at each fertilization
- Adjust fertilization program to accomplish goals with soil test result parameters
- Typical first fertilization of season - 20-5-5 with 2% FE, 50% slow release
- Typical supplemental fertilization,

generally at three- to four-week intervals, 46-0-0

Irrigation Management

- Recharge system as weather warms
- Inspect irrigation system
- Repair any problems (ie, valves, line breaks)
- Raise irrigation heads as needed
- Customize MIR 500 software to accommodate current irrigation needs
- Winterize irrigation system in November

Facility Management

- Inspect bleachers - two times a year
- Clean and blow bleachers - six times a year
- Inspect lights and scoreboard - daily
- Remove trash - daily
- Mow non-play turf surfaces with rotary mower - three-inch height of cut, rate as needed
- String-trim areas - on a weekly rotation
- Clean and stock restrooms - daily

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