

FIELD OF THE YEAR



Volunteer Power Captures Field of the Year Honors

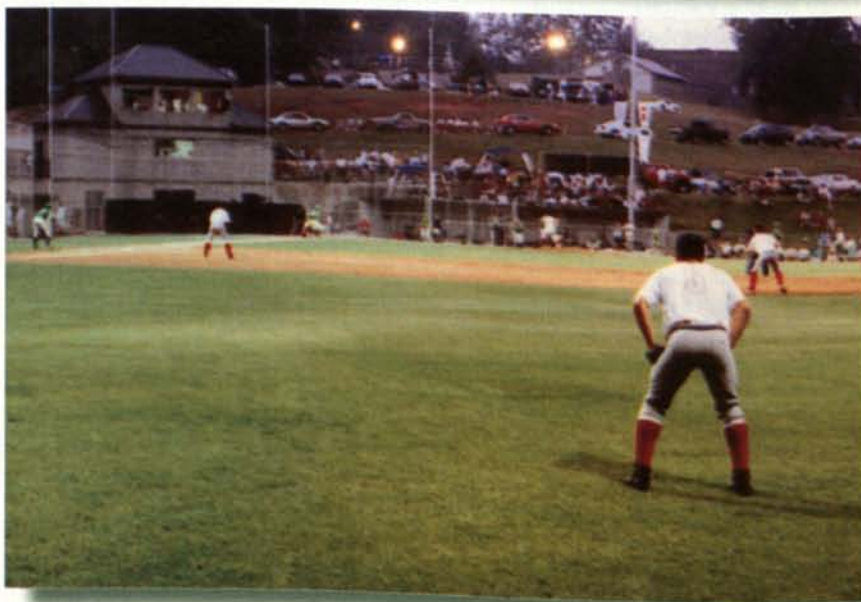
Steve and Suz Trusty

Toccoa Senior League Field earned the STMA 2000 Baseball Field of the Year honors in the Municipal division. It was constructed in 1954 as one of three fields in Doyle Street Park in Toccoa, Ga. It is owned by the City of Toccoa and maintained by the Toccoa Little League which uses the fields in exchange for the field maintenance done by its volunteers.

The program had always worked. The city's population is about 10,000; the county's approximately 25,000. Volunteer levels are high in this Northeast Georgia community that actively supports its youth.

In 1993, a new breed of volunteers came along, headed by Frank Worley. He wanted more than a good field; he wanted a great field—one that was safe for the teams to play on and looked beautiful, too. Worley, an insurance agent, had played Little League ball until he was 12. His son started playing at 5 and Worley coached him. In 1993, his son was 11. Worley attended a Little League meeting and volunteered to be groundskeeper based on this baseball background and his interest in maintaining his home lawn.

Worley knew what he wanted to achieve, but not how to get there. So he went to a pro, Matt Taylor, Head Groundskeeper for the Greenville Braves in Greenville, S.C. Worley says, "When I called with questions, Matt invited me there and spent about three hours with me. He showed me his tools, explained his maintenance methods and even had his grounds crew demonstrate some things for me. He also gave me some issues of sportsTURF, which I later



Lighting was installed in 1998, allowing the field to be used after the sun goes down.

read completely. I came back from that trip and had a carpenter build a nail drag like Matt's. That was the first step in moving our program to

the next level. The principles and goals are the same at the pro and Little League levels, but when you're dealing with a native soil field and a

limited budget, you need to be patient."

Initial Field Renovation

The clay/loam soil native to the red hills of Georgia was the base of the field formed with the large earth moving machines of R. G. LeTourneau during the original construction. They did a good job of sloping so the field surface drainage was still very good in 1993. The infield had been built up over the years, however, so Worley arranged for the county road department to come in with a grader and scrape off the excess infield soil. Volunteers tackled the surface preparation and seeded the infield with Cheyenne bermudagrass. At the same time, the common bermudagrass outfield was overseeded with Cheyenne.

The original infield dirt contained too much silt resulting in a surface that was too soft and took a long time to dry out. Red Georgia clay was trucked in and tilled into the silt to a depth of 5 to 6 inches. Then about 9 tons of calcined clay was tilled in to 3 or 4 inches. The area was leveled, top dressed with another 2 tons of calcined clay, which was scarified, leveled and rolled. The diamond was measured out and the mound, batters box area and bases were all reset.

Adding the Equipment

In 1993, the Little League didn't have a lawn mower so each team was responsible for mowing the grass once or twice a week on designated weeks. A local store then contributed a small residential mower and the League was able to purchase a used rotary diesel mower from a local housing authority to mow the outfield. Two years ago they purchased a used reel triplex mower from the high school for \$300. They're currently negotiating the purchase of a newer reel triplex mower.

In 1994, a quick coupler system was installed behind the mound for hose hook up for watering the infield or to attach an impact sprinkler. That step enabled them to wet down the infield dirt before each game.

Worley says, "In 1994 the Little League Board approved the purchase of a John Deere 1200 field rake and that has allowed us to maintain the infields to the extent we do. The decision took a lot of courage. A purchase of that size was another major step forward for our program."

Another purchase, an edger, has led to the ongoing and perpetual process of edging the fields.

Establishing the Volunteer Team

Little League grounds crew volunteers now cut all grass, edge the diamonds, fertilize, aerate, topdress,



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Maintenance Practices

Mowing: Outfield twice per week to 7/8-inch height with triplex reel mower. Infield every other day to 3/4-inch (three-quarter inch) height with walk behind reel mower.

Fertilization: Program based on annual soil test results. Generally 15-0-15 in April at 7 pounds of material per thousand square feet; 34-0-0 monthly May through August at 3 pounds of material per thousand square feet; and 15-0-15 in September at 7 pounds of material per thousand square feet. Liquid iron is applied to the infield prior to tournaments. Lime was applied annually for 4 or 5 years, has not been needed the last few years.

Control Products: Pre-emergent weed controls has been applied spring and fall from 1999 on. Other weeds spot treated

as necessary. No insect or disease control applications have been needed.

Aerification: Infield is deep-drilled once a year. Field is core aerated up to three times per year, when timing and labor availability allow.

Topdressing: Infield is topdressed once per year with sand. Outfield has been topdressed once with 80 tons of river sand.

Irrigation: On Oct. 15, 1999, complete field irrigation was installed. Irrigation cycles are based on turf needs.

Edging: Field is edged as needed,

approximately once a week during the growing season.

Skinned area: Pitchers plate set with transit for correct height above home plate. Mound/homeplate repair daily. Skinned area conditioned daily. Infield skinned area leveled annually then rolled with 1-1/2-ton roller. Push brooms used to brush infield material from turf edges.

Game Prep: Foul lines on turf are painted with spray can applicator. Chalk lines applied with chalk.

Field Design: Emblems, logos, etc. painted by local artists assisting grounds crew.

maintenance

prepare mounds and batters box areas, drag skinned areas, handle pregame, in-game and post-game maintenance and join with other Little League and community volunteers to tackle most capital improvements.

Worley says, "Our league is totally self-supporting. We receive no designated annual funds from the city or county. We raise money from concession stand sales and players selling candy. Area businesses sponsor teams with the funding administered equally among the teams by the League. The business community supports us financially and will donate materials or give us good prices. The city and county governments and the county



Red Georgia clay was trucked in and tilled into the original silt, along with about nine tons of calcined clay.



Local artist Sue Caudell paints and designs logos for the field.

recreation department are very helpful. The state also has provided funding. Because we're a small community and we know people, we are able to ask for assistance. Also, people can more

readily see the results of our efforts.

"We have 25 grounds crew volunteers during tournaments," says Worley. "Many of them have been

on the crew for several years and are the parents of players. We also have several teenagers and some 8 to 10 year olds who have taken an interest in it. Though my 28 years as a State Farm Insurance agent has little impact on groundskeeping, other adult volunteers bring job skills we've put to use. We have a diesel mechanic, a hardware store owner, a surveyor, a maintenance supervisor for another recreation complex, two phone company employees, a trenching company owner, a metal worker and some industrial employees.

"We do train all of our new crew members before they work on the field on their own. Matt Taylor and I have maintained contact. I take my grounds crew over to the Greenville Braves field every year. Unless you know how it's supposed to feel where the grass meets the infield dirt, you'll never get it right.

"But our program's success is not just due to our grounds crew, our

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The volunteer team prepares the field for an upcoming game. The crew is responsible for all aspects of field maintenance and preparation.

entire volunteer network is excellent—those handling the administration of the league, the concession stand workers, the coaches. It's a huge community effort."

Worley extends special thanks to Bob Troup of Troup's Studio, the League's photographer and mayor of Toccoa, and to local artist, Sue

Caudell, who volunteers her talents to design the logos and paint them for the tournaments.

A big part of the volunteer program is educating the players, coaches and parents. Worley, or another experienced grounds crewmember, will meet with them and explain how to rake, handle rain situations, line the field, and inspect for holes. They also teach the players not to dig holes. They instruct the coaches to have the players warm up in the outfield, all throwing in one direction, and encourage the coaches to hit infield practice from the infield dirt instead of the turf.

Field Use

Worley says, "Every summer there are 142 games played on the Senior League Field during the regular season. With 135 practices held as well to prepare for the spring and fall seasons, this field is used nine months of the year. In 1998, Toccoa hosted the 10 teams of the Junior League State Championship. In 1999 and 2000, we

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Field volunteers take a time out to pose for the camera.

hosted the Southern Region Senior League Championship."

"There are three other 200-foot fields in Doyle Street Park. One is the softball field where we host the Southern Region Tournament for girl's softball. It's held in early August, at the same time as we host

the Senior League Southern Region Tournament for 15 to 16 year old boys. Our grounds crew splits up to get both fields ready at the same time. We'll also host the Senior League State Tournament on the field beginning July 14. Ten teams compete in double elimination, beginning with four games a day for

three days. We have two weeks between the close of that tournament and the start of the two regional tournaments."

Tournament participants continually follow their stay with rave reviews for the field, the personnel and the city. These tournaments bring tourism to the community generating business for hotels, restaurants and other local stores. The Toccoa Little League considers tournaments a way to help repay the sponsors and contributors who have been supporting the program for 40 to 50 years.

Major Projects

Worley says, "Six years ago [1994] the League built the three story press box which also includes restrooms, concessions and storage for field maintenance equipment and supplies. The governments of the City of Toccoa and Stephens County provided money from their

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Volunteers Know How to Have Fun

by Connie Worley

Before game time the crowd hears "The William Tell Overture" being played over the loud speaker system and 15 to 25 crew members dressed in khaki shorts and matching green groundskeeping t-shirts run onto the field armed with brooms and rakes. Each person knows their task as this bit of showmanship is choreographed as carefully as any Broadway Show. Just as the last notes of the "William Tell" fade away, these showmen run off the field to the sound of cheers and applause, their task completed within three minutes. They have performed this bit of fanfare before every tournament game for two years now. Creativity and love of the sport shines in the pre-game show as well as in the beauty of the field.

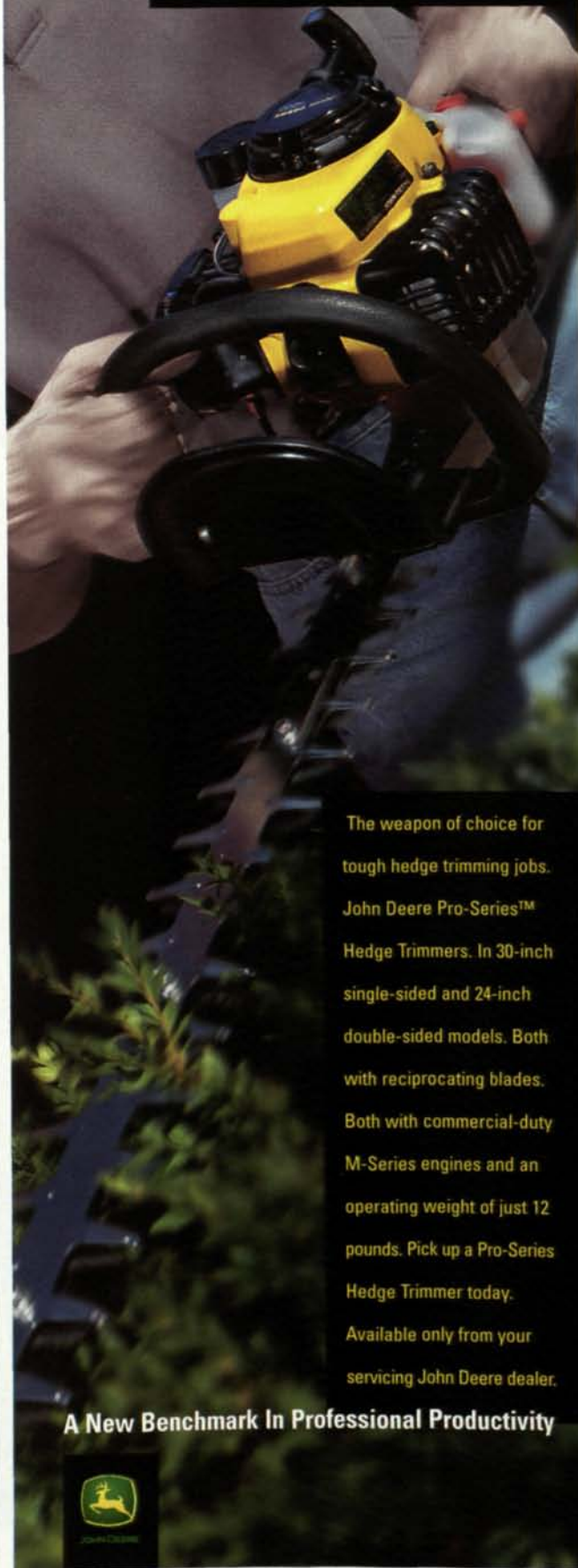
budgets as well as the use of heavy equipment and manpower to do the grading. Community service workers and local contractors were involved as well. The majority of the labor came from Little League volunteers.

"In 1998, the Little League volunteers installed nearly \$75,000 of new Musco lighting per Little League International specifications thanks to funding acquired with the help of State Representative, Jeanette Jamieson. Volunteers installed a new irrigation system on the field in 1999. We've also refurbished the dugouts, erected a donated flagpole and placed a donated granite marker."

Other projects focus on the maintenance area. For example, in late March of 2001, the infield was deep-drill aerated and topdressed with sand using a borrowed topdresser and tractor. There are other good cultural practices Worley would like to implement, but can't due to lack of funding. Timing also is a critical factor since volunteer power isn't always available.


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Worley says, "I joined STMA in 1994 and have made the Bradenton, St. Louis and Tampa Conferences. It's great for learning new techniques, seeing new tools, networking and for confirming what you do is correct."

And the learning process continues. When the new softball field was constructed last year, Worley got a lit-

tle more scientific using the jar and water test to measure the soil content. With the test showing sufficient clay, they brought in 2 inches of sand to create a 60 percent clay, 40 percent sand mixture.

The Latest Project

The latest project began when fall ball wrapped up last October 15. The right field of Senior League field was

extended to 300 feet. Worley says, "This involved cutting down several pine trees. The city used their backhoe to remove the stumps. We brought in several hundred tons of fill dirt. We built a 200 foot long, 5 foot high retaining wall out of Allen block. Twenty volunteers had 90 percent of the wall installed in one day. Still to be finished as of early March, was trucking in additional dirt to finish backfilling before the new fence is installed. A light pole and the score board also will need to be moved. We've prepared the new part of the field for sodding with TifSport Bermudagrass."

Worley's target date was April 1 for the April 7 opening game. If weather delays occurred, he planned to leave the old fence in place until the new fence was installed and all the sod in place so play would not be disrupted. The goal is to do nothing that would keep the teams from practice or play. Worley notes the crew does much of its work on Sunday afternoons and at night. It's not unusual to see the lights on from 11 p.m. to 2 a.m. as they complete projects with no disruption for the players.

Worley says, "The change will be better for our local league. It brings a new dimension to the field literally and figuratively. It makes the outfielder more important. The change also meets Little League field length recommendations and should allow us to be in the running for certain additional tournaments."

And the dreams continue. Worley has plans to renovate the infields of two other fields in the Toccoa Little League program.

He says, "I'm proud that we've earned Field of the Year honors through volunteerism and cooperation among the city, county and state governments, the business community and other groundskeepers. Everyone working together can make great things happen."

Steve and Suz Trusty are partners in Trusty & Associates of Council Bluffs, Iowa. Steve is Executive Director of the Sports Turf Managers Association.

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