

Midwest Chapter drives "Tour on Wheels"

BY ERIC SCHRODER

The Midwest Chapter held its annual "Tour on Wheels" in August, less than 2 days after much of the Chicago region was hit with 6 inches of (much needed) rain in 24 hours. Chapter president Ted Baker insisted he's not jinxed despite a third straight "Tour" day threatened by showers.

A stop at Brookfield/Riverside High School in western Cook County provided much discussion throughout the day. A crumb-rubber amendment was added to the football field before last season and Athletic Director Otto Zeman is convinced it makes fields safer and promotes deeper roots.

Eric Fassbinder, head groundskeeper for Alexian Field, home of the Northern League's Schaumburg Flyers, led our group on a tour of his facility, which had suffered 6 in. of rain that flooded the dugouts 24 hours previous (but did not cause that night's contest to be cancelled!).

Fassbinder, who served three internships including one at Alexian Field under Steve Erickson (now an assistant at PNC Park in Pittsburgh) said he can roll out his tarp in 1 and 1/2 minutes and take it up in 8 minutes, and of course prefers that it not be down. Sponsor Greg Komperda of TruGreen ChemLawn said having the tarp on promotes the "three enemies of turf—dark, wet, and cold—or, the triangle of love." He and Scott Roberts are a big help to Fassbinder and handle the applications of fertilizer, fungicides (Compass), and other chemicals, as needed, e.g., PCMB for snow mold, etc.

Roberts added that they don't use any wetting agents on the field, and that use of that material is normally based on a groundskeeper's experience with a field.

The tour also visited the west fields of the College of DuPage, where Roger Behling is the only full-time turf manager for six facilities as well as some community fields on the college grounds (more than 40 acres of irrigated turf). Behling prefers reel mowers because less maintenance is required, the cut is better and

they cause him "fewer headaches," he said. He also has rotaries for areas that are not as visible or difficult situations.

Roger is challenged by the college community's hypersensitivity to spraying herbicides so he does only one or two applications a year, and in an ideal year, applies no herbicides. Pervasive clover in the spring responds to a Confront and Trimec mixture that he calls environmentally friendly and effective.

Taking extensive notes all year long on each field has

allowed Roger to create a consistent routine, and then he discovers what his seasonal help does best individually and lets them fill that niche.

Another stop was Elfstrom Stadium, home of the Class A Midwest League Kane County Cougars, a Florida Marlins farm club. Head groundskeeper Ryan Nieusma took over the reins in March and so worked another manager's plan for this season. The field was nicely stripped and Ryan was honest when asked about his choice of patterns: "I do simple patterns only; otherwise I think it's a distraction to the fans.

Besides, simple is a lot quicker!

"It's easy to make the players happy here because they are so young," Ryan said. Tour sponsor Gerry Hough of United Horticulture Supply says the four-way bluegrass blend perennial rye grass was used when the field was built in 1991 to "get something in a hurry." Fertilizer is put down every Monday, Perk is used to keep the turf green, and they seed once a month. No broadleaf control is necessary.

Our final stop of the day was at Palatine High School, one of five high schools for which Bob Glascott is the head turf man. He said Palatine's field hosted more than 100 events last year, and that 3 years ago they had flattened the field somewhat for the soccer team. Bob's crew uses Jacobsen equipment, including a reel mower for in-season cutting. He aerates every month but cannot core because it's too disruptive for soccer play, while the underground irrigation system prevents tining too deeply.

The Palatine field is native soil with 80 tons of Turface on top. "We had to add soil to this field and I'm not sure where it came from, but the nutrients just are not there," he said. "We consulted with the Chicago Bears staff before choosing a rye/bluegrass mix."

The tour group's day wasn't over yet though. Instead dinner, refreshments, and a ball game back at Alexian Field were on the agenda, followed by a fireworks show. Thanks to Ted and Libby Baker for an informative and fun day.

ST



"It's easy to make the players here happy because they are so young," said Ryan Nieusma, groundskeeper at Elfstrom Stadium, home of Class A Kane County Cougars.



Midwest Chapter president Ted Baker (left) listens as Bob Glascott of Palatine High School answers a question.