

from the sidelines

Call in the pros

Included in our Founding Fathers' ideal of a free America was the concept that everyone can benefit from education. Both George Washington and Benjamin Franklin developed "agricultural societies" that provided educational opportunities for farmers and industrial workers. These societies influenced the 1862 legislation that permitted the establishment of what today are known as "land grant" universities. The university-related Cooperative Extension Service was established in 1914 and agents are still on the job today.

Extension agents help people help themselves. Don Fowler, now a retired Penn State agent, decided years ago that helping out turf managers was as much a part of his job as assisting vegetable farmers. He made connections with Dan Douglas of the Reading Phillies and they began to put together a sports turf manager group through educational programs. Dan and his peers would provide the technical expertise, and Don the education knowledge to produce programs for turf managers.

Long-time PSU extension agent Jim Welshans recalls how the alliance got its first members. "Don and Dan organized a meeting at the Farm Show Arena and they had a great idea. Whoever showed up at that meeting was an automatic member! So they started with 170 members right off the bat. Today the Keystone Athletic Field Managers Organization (KAFMO) is one of the most respected of all STMA state chapters. But that's not the Don Fowler story we want to tell. Here it is:

In 1996, after KAFMO had established itself as a premier sports turf resource, Little League Inc., paid them a visit to ask for advice on rebuilding the field at Lamade Stadium in Williamsport. Little League's 50th anniversary was approaching and as part of the celebration, they wanted the "best Little League field anywhere," says Welshans.

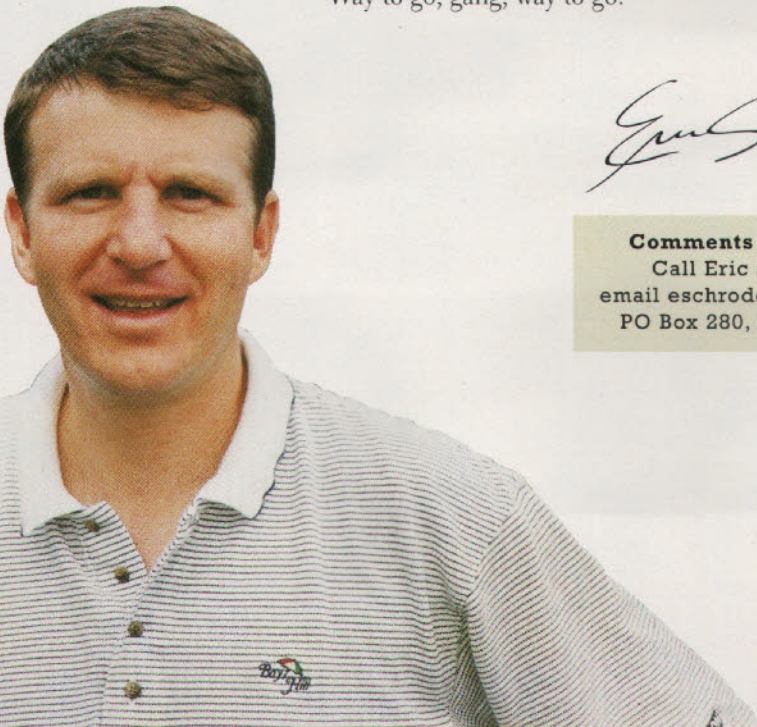
KAFMO designated Fowler "clerk of the works" for the rebuilding project and now, 9 years later, he leads a team of KAFMO volunteers each August to get and keep Little League's two home fields in world-class shape during their World Series.

"We're here for 12 days," says Fowler, who splits his all-star crew between the two fields. "Everyone has their assigned tasks." He talks with a smile as he gently rakes the mound at Lamade. What Fowler doesn't say is that he's there for all 12 days, while shifts of KAFMO volunteers come and go during the same period. But the decision-maker Fowler is a fixture.

Little League provides lodging, a meal ticket, and nightly dinners cooked especially for the volunteers. So, though their contributions are not taken lightly, there's no mention of any grounds personnel, volunteer or not, in the LLWS media guide, which is unfortunate.

Millions of fans worldwide watched the LLWS play out on two immaculate fields to determine a winner, and not too darn many of them knew why those fields looked so good. But you do, now—Don Fowler and his KAFMO crew.

Way to go, gang, way to go.



Comments always welcome.
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