



Aspen Rec Center wins STMA Schools/Parks Complex of the Year

In 1997, the City of Aspen, the Aspen School District, and the Aspen Valley Ski Club were seeking land for recreational facilities in the school campus and the Iselin/Moore Pool area. At this same time, Tom Moore revealed that he was interested in donating land to the community. Moore's donation included flat land, which is very difficult find in the Aspen area, and ultimately made this project possible.

The project proceeded with the input of the community, which overwhelmingly passed a \$13.8 million bond in 1999. The first of the fields opened in 2001 and the project culminated with completion of the Aspen Recreation Center in the spring of 2003. Three brand new multi-use fields were added and one ball field and football field completely rebuilt. The result was five multi-use sports fields centered on the Aspen Recreation Center, which has an NHL regulation ice rink, two pools, and a sauna and steam room. The Aspen Youth Center is located here also, providing activities for the local children. Adjacent to Iselin field is a state of the art batting cage for slow and fast pitch. The City of Aspen has 30 parks and a total of seven sport multi-use fields, per capita one of the highest in the nation and number one in mountain resorts.

The sports field complex is used 365 days a year. Baseball, softball, football, soccer, rugby, and lacrosse are played spring through fall, and in the winter, the fields are used in Aspen's Nordic Trails system. The Mother Lode Volleyball Tournament is held here every fall with more than 750 teams participating. Seating for spectators is a combination of natural seating built into the landscape and some traditional bleachers that are blended into the landscape. The larger multi-use fields can hold up to several hundred spectators. There is no lighting.

The Aspen Recreation Department, which works in conjunction with the Parks Department around the maintenance program schedule, handles all scheduling of

events and athletic activities.

At an elevation of 8200 feet, the Aspen Community Campus presents special problems for sports field maintenance. The high altitude and short growing season (typically soil temperatures are at 65 degrees from mid-June to the end of August) are the biggest challenges for the maintenance program. Colorado has been in a drought for several years, so water management is especially important. Colorado is in an arid climate zone with very low humidity and temperatures can reach in the high 90's in July and August. At high altitude, the sun's intensity can also affect turf growth. All the fields at the complex are irrigated with raw water from Castle Creek, and in early spring runoff the water can be "too pure." Water tests have shown very few, if any salts, minerals or sediments during this time, and this "light



water" has a tendency to sit on the surface and not penetrate into the soil (another reason for early aeration). The Aspen Parks Department uses the Rain Bird Maxicom system to monitor and control the irrigation program. Watering schedules can be monitored and changed from a central computer for all of Aspen's parks and sports fields.

Other challenges are the number of events and field over-use, which leads to compaction and thinning of the turf. Field access during school and high-use times can affect the maintenance program, so scheduling is an important part in overall planning. The solution to all these problems is a complete and timely turf maintenance program. Being native soil, the fields are core aerated and topdressed every spring. Also, the fields are aerated anytime compaction becomes a problem throughout the playing season, using either knife or solid core tines to minimize disruption of play. All the fields are slit- and overseeded each spring. To help promote seed germination and give established turf a head start, turf blankets are used to compensate for the short growing season.

With the fields being new, soil tests are done in the spring and fall to help with our fertilizer program. Potash and magnesium are typically deficient in the Aspen area and these are monitored closely. Humates are used during the season, providing an excellent carbon source and helping to lower pH without additional sulfur, which is already very high. Before stressful events, the fields are typically prepped with a liquid application of nitrogen, potassium, and microbial cultures.

Through an aggressive turf maintenance program and the hard work by a dedi-



cated staff, the Aspen Community Campus sports complex offers some of the finest maintained playing conditions in the state.

Blair Elliot, sports field supervisor for the city's Parks Department, moved to Aspen in 1977 to be a "ski bum," he says. "Work at night and ski during the day was the standard procedure for those days, and having worked through college as a bartender it was only natural to do it in a ski resort," he says. Elliot burned out on the restaurant scene, then worked at other jobs until being hired by the City of Aspen.

Three years ago he was named Field Supervisor. "There was a huge learning process for me to get where we are now, but I had some great help," Elliot says. "I've had two great mentors, Steve Slack and Tom Rubel. Steve is a fellow supervisor and really

helped me with the 'secrets' of high altitude grass management. Tom is the Operations Manager, and he provided all the tools that I required to get the job done, whether it was schooling or equipment.

"The biggest problem that I have as a sports turf manager is scheduling around the user groups and all the activities that public sports fields receive. Factor in weather delays, and you need to really be on your feet. If opportunities open, take them. If planning runs afoul, change it," says Elliot.

"To be a good turf manager, you must be aware and be able to anticipate what the needs of your turf are and are going to be. You must be a good planner and then be able to switch tracks quickly if those plans get interrupted. You must be a good leader for your crew, and lead by example. Last but not least, you must do

"Field Crew Dads" and volunteers of Reicher Catholic High School faced many challenges this fall. Texas had heavy rain, making the tradition of painting the

Field

in stages as the season progressed a difficult task. A desperate call to a Pioneer rep resulted in the answer the school needed to save the season. The Pioneer rep recommended QUIK STRIPE Aerosol because it has the ability to paint and stick to wet turf. The product was delivered and applied the morning

of

the next game. Now, the players and fans look forward to the new designs added to the field each week, knowing they play on one of the best fields in the country. This week, fifty years of tradition are celebrated on the field with a gold fifty on the yardline commemorating this accomplishment. Congratulations on winning the State Title for TAPPS 3A and a Pioneer Scholarship. This field is painted 100% by volunteers who make this a FIELD OF

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your job professionally no matter what happens, and have fun doing your job," Elliot says.

Maintenance program

The five fields at the Aspen Recreation Center are located at an elevation of 8200 feet, and depending on the amount of snow pack and weather conditions during the spring, starting time for the seasons beginning maintenance program for the fields is not a set date. We begin our program after the fields dry out in early April to as late as mid-May:

Turf Maintenance: We begin by grooming the fields with a Steiner tractor and broom attachment to remove dead grass and thatch and "wake up" the turf. We find this also lessens the chance for snow mold to develop. Then we begin the fertilization program based on the soil tests taken from late last fall, usually starting with a 21-5-21 (60 percent controlled release nitrogen w/iron and manganese) as our initial feeding.

Our soil conditions in this particular region of the Rocky Mountains are high in phosphorus but lower potash and magnesium. After the first fertilization, all fields are then aerated with hollow core tines and topdressed. We use a GreensGroomer to break up the core plugs and fill in the core holes with top dress material. The topdress material is USGA spec sand with 10% organics. After aeration and top dressing, all fields are over seeded with 20% rye and 80% bluegrass.

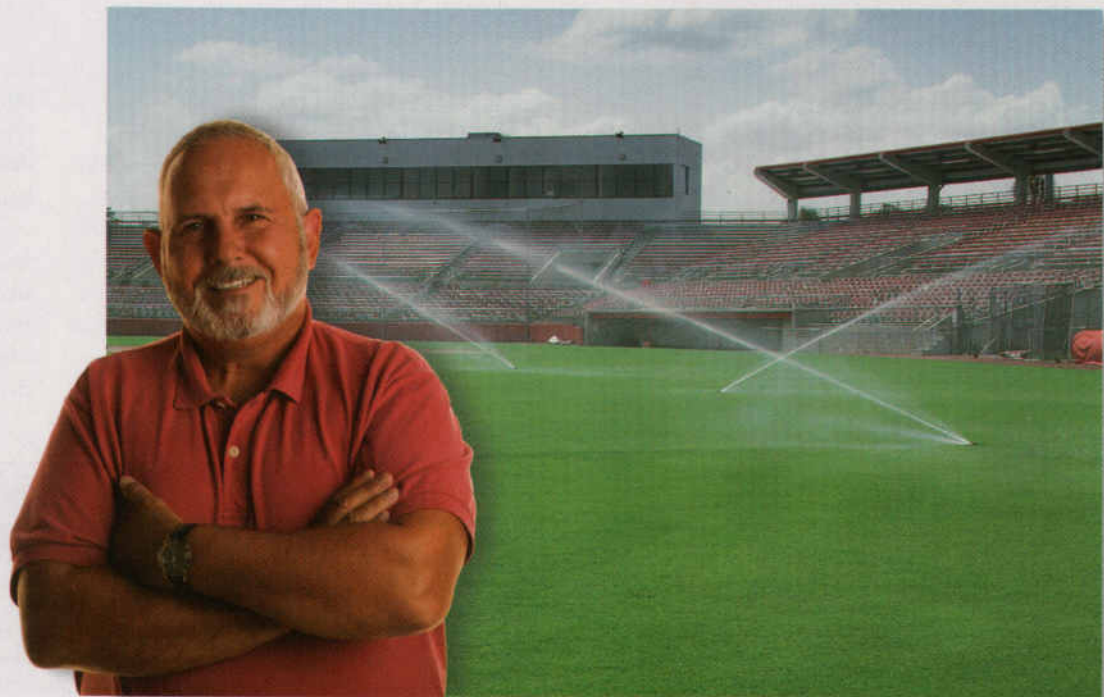
Spring nights are still very cold, so we use Evergreen turf blankets on the fields to promote seed germination and to let established grass get a head start. Throughout the rest of our short growing season, we alternate the fertilizer program with a 6-0-19 K-mag blend and a Nature Safe 21-3-7. Our objective is 4-5 lbs. N for the season. We lay down humates in May, June, and July at 10 lbs. per 1000 sq. ft. During high stress times the fields will receive a liquid application of Threshold Mag, Turf Vigor, and Nutri-Rational K or N. We monitor the compaction of the fields throughout the season, and will use solid core tines and knife aeration to minimize effects on play. At the end of October, usually when the snow begins to fly, we put down a winter application of Perk 4-0-10, and aerate the fields for a final time.

Infield Maintenance: We begin as soon as the fields dry out. We level and add infield material or conditioners as needed. This year (2004) we laser-leveled two fields. At the baseball field, the pitching mound is inspected and brought to playing

condition. The mound is covered all winter and throughout the playing season when not in use for protection. The infields are groomed everyday and each infield has a sprinkler system for moisture management. **ST**

Eric Schroder edited this material. Thanks to Blair Elliot and STMA Headquarters for providing the information.

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