

USC Upstate's Cyril Softball Stadium is best



Bruce Suddeth, director of landscape services for the University of South Carolina-Upstate, was awarded the Sports Turf Managers Association's 2006 College/University Softball Field of the Year for his work at Cyril Stadium in Spartanburg. *SportsTurf* caught up with him in early March:

SportsTurf: What are your specific job responsibilities?

Suddeth: I oversee the landscape planning and operations of 314 acres on University properties, including six soccer, a baseball, softball, and intramural fields as well as two nature trails, including the Palmetto Trail. There are also 17 acres of highway right of ways that we manage as well.

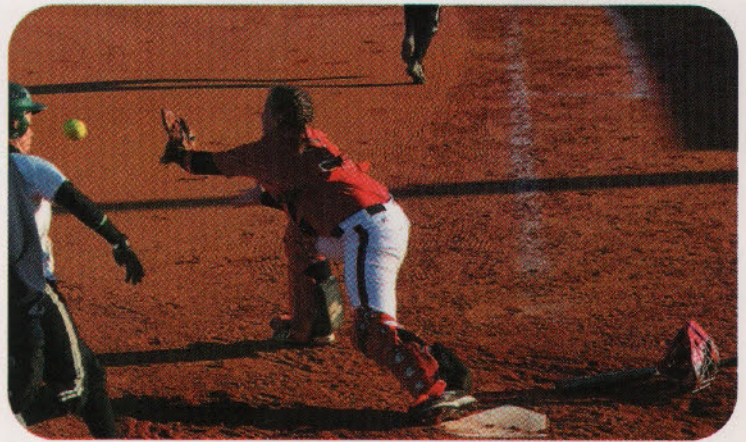
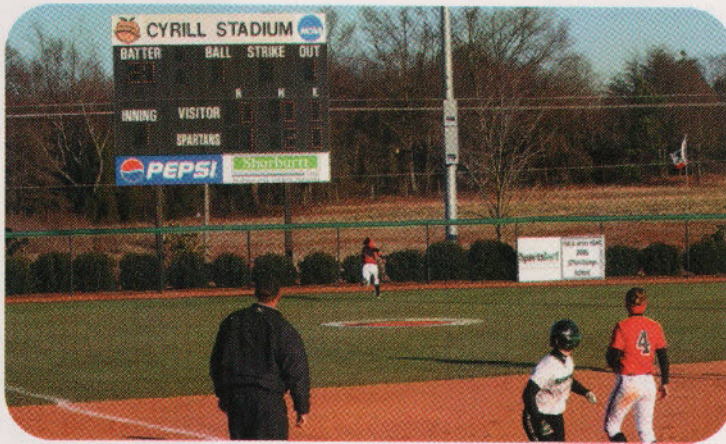
Our department operates with me and the superintendent of landscape services, Robert Easler, along with six full-time, two student, and

four contract services associates. My job is to communicate with our in-house staff and contractors on all aspects of performing work on campus grounds.

All landscape planning and construction, whether it is for Athletics or Campus Grounds, comes through our office. I work very closely with our Athletics and engineering department in athletic field construction, renovation, and expansion.

SportsTurf: Do you plan any adjustments to the 2007 management plan?

Suddeth: Many of our fields have been constructed in the past 5-6 years. In this time data has been accumulated and for 2007 a more scientific approach than we have executed in the past will be used in our turf management programs. Tissue analysis, alternative nutrient sources, and application techniques to better manage our turf performance is our goal. Our plan is to also use more foliar nutrient



applications as well as traditional to obtain a more consistent turf growth and hopefully optimum plant health.

We will also be more aggressive with our cultural practices like verticutting and aeration. New equipment has been purchased to obtain these goals using less labor forces.

SportsTurf: What is the most important piece of equipment or product in our program?

Suddeth: People, from the top down or the bottom up, that is how things get done. Our University Team works as a whole to accomplish goals, whether it's done in-house or by one of our contractors. Landscape Service has tremendous support from our top administrators. As the university grows I find my hands-on time becoming less and less. Believe me, that is not by choice, it's from necessity. There is no one in our organization that works for me, we work together as a team. I put my pants on everyday just like the rest of the crew, and there isn't anything I would ask them to do that I wouldn't.

SportsTurf: What attracted you to a career in sports turf management?

Suddeth: First you would need to know a little background. I grew up on a farm in Inman, South Carolina. My parents worked hard for everything we had, both in the mills and then in the fields after they came home. Our family grew everything from peaches to sweet potatoes. What we didn't grow or raise, my aunts and uncles did. The Suddeth's were all truck and tractor people. Row crops and animals were our way of life. This is how we ate and survived. And we ate well!

I learned early on how to plant, grow, and harvest a crop. I was on a tractor by the time I was 9 years old – today's parents in our polit-

ically correct world would go crazy over that.

My first "job" was at 16 when I went to work for a local golf course during the summer and after school. Best job a 16-year-old could have. Being outdoors, gaining experience, and free golf, plus a nice tan for the ladies. Can't beat that. Tommy Bird was the superintendent, taught me a lot of things I did-

n't have a clue about. I never thought that later in life it would resurface.

My first "real" job was at a chemical plant that made products for turfgrass applications, though I didn't know that then. After a few years I worked my way into that product line while continuing to take horticulture classes at Spartanburg Community College, ultimately

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FIELD OF THE YEAR

obtaining my degree. I learned how to understand and make sense of what I had been taught on the farm and golf course. It all clicked and I finally knew what I wanted to do with my life.

SportsTurf: What channels of communication do you use to reach coaches and users of your facilities?

Suddeth: There are several communication tools that we use so everyone is on the same page. The best tool I have found so far is the old fashioned "Sit down and talk about things" session. All of our coaches and administrators have an open door policy. I know where their offices are located and they know mine.

Our department works very close with our Special Events and Student Services departments. It is imperative to know what is happening and when on campus. Each week an event schedule is published so we can have advance notice. More critical issues and long term notices are handled by meetings, e-mail, phone, and any other means necessary so that

all persons involved will have advanced notice and input.

SportsTurf: What are your biggest challenges and how do you approach them?

Suddeth: My biggest challenge is making sure all communication paths are operating throughout the campus community. This is extremely important in scheduling field management and coordination of our staff. We have soccer fields that we share with the Spartanburg Parks and Recreation Department and communication is imperative so that the fields are managed for safety. We try to get the schedules as soon as we can from Parks & Recreation as well as Special Events. In turn those two entities rely on the various organizations to provide that information and that can be somewhat of a task.

We have a great campus recreation director that communicates constantly with our department. Oftentimes student help is given the tasks of coordinating activities for various stu-

dent groups. With class schedules and students graduating this can be a task to gather this information in a timely manner.

Overall we have a smooth running operation because the communication lines are always open here at USC Upstate. ■



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