



Public plus private partnership *reclaims turf*

By Richard Scott

On an overcast day in spring 2005, Angelo Tilas, supervisor of parklands along the Charles River in Boston, slogged over the poorly drained acreage known as Lederman Field. Only if dry weather prevailed for a week would the soggy fields become playable again.

Fast forward to an exquisite Saturday morning in September 2006; more than 500 energetic kids dash wide-eyed across the expanse of

seven pristine acres of newly manicured and marked pitches, known as "Teddy Ebersol's Red Sox Fields." Located on Boston's famed Esplanade, this recently rededicated area emerged as a result of a groundbreaking public/private partnership between the Massachusetts Executive Office of Environmental Affairs (EOEA), the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), and three local nonprofit organizations: the Red Sox Foundation, Hill House and The Esplanade Association.

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LOCATED ON BOSTON'S ESPLANADE, THIS RECENTLY REDEDICATED AREA EMERGED AS A RESULT OF A PUBLIC/PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP.

The goal of this venture was to restore the well-worn and much-loved youth athletic fields on the Esplanade. The three nonprofit groups raised more than \$1.8 million in private funds and taxpayers contributed \$175,000 through the EOEPA Office of Public Private Partnerships for the rebuilding of the fields. Also, the Ebersol family recently pledged an additional \$500,000 through a matching challenge grant program to create an endowment for field maintenance that will protect the capital investment in this public resource.

With the aid of Geller Sport, these damaged and often flooded ball fields now feature two baseball/softball diamonds, a youth baseball diamond, a t-ball field, five youth soccer fields, and a regulation-sized soccer field.

Not only have the fields been totally rebuilt, but also new drainage and irrigation systems have been added, as well as dugouts for softball and baseball. Due to the addition of enhanced field lighting, adult and youth groups are no longer forced to compete for limited daylight hours of play.

One of generous non-profit partners, Hill House, known as "your backyard in the city," has offered quality athletic and creative programs to kids, adults and seniors living in Boston's downtown neighborhoods since 1966. Hill House soccer programs have flourished at Ebersol Fields and will continue to prosper in the future. Staff members work tirelessly to ensure that the participants have a great experience and that the Fields are

maintained at the highest possible quality.

The Esplanade Association (TEA) is dedicated to the restoration of the historic, well-visited linear park along the banks of the Charles River. In addition to Ebersol Fields, TEA constructed a state-of-the-art play area and over the past few years has completed a comprehensive tree inventory. This group also initiated a bench sponsorship program to raise funds for the park's ongoing restoration and maintenance. TEA will continue to be actively involved in the stewardship of Ebersol Fields, sharing responsibility for its overall maintenance.

The Red Sox Foundation is the official team charity of the Boston Red Sox, founded in 2002 after the group led by John Henry and Tom Werner bought the team. Through Henry,

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Werner and many generous partners, The Red Sox Foundation has raised more than \$18 million over 10 years, making it the largest professional sports charity in New England and one of the largest in Major League Baseball.

The eagerly anticipated opening of the new fields in September was attended by special guests, including Henry and Werner, who jumpstarted the entire project with a lead donation to honor Teddy's memory. Beaming youngsters were able to view and even try on the weighty 2004 World Series Championship ring while posing for photos.

Teddy Ebersol, namesake of the rejuvenated Fields, was the son of Dick Ebersol, President of NBC Sports, and actress Susan St. James who was killed in a plane crash.

Teddy Ebersol's Red Sox Fields exists within a parcel of land dedicated in 1974 to the memory of Dr. Melvin Lederman, a surgeon at Massachusetts General Hospital who joined the armed forces during the Vietnam War. Tragically, Dr. Lederman was killed in a combat helicopter crash in 1969, two days before the end of his tour of duty. When the Red Sox Foundation proposed refurbishing the flooded and worn fields in Teddy's memory, Dr. Lederman's surviving brother and sister-in-law graciously agreed to allow this youth athletic area to be renamed "Teddy Ebersol's Red Sox Fields." The entire expanse, encompassing the Fields, as well as the quieter corners, would subsequently be rechristened as "Lederman Park."

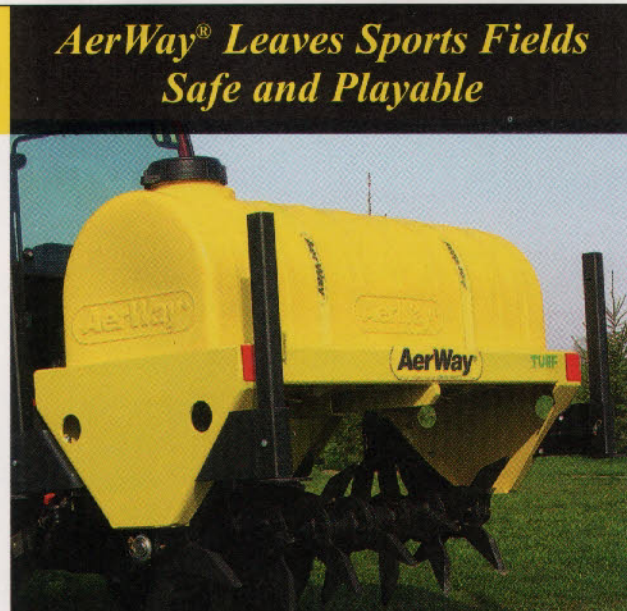
Youth soccer began at the fields in September 2006, and baseball and softball games are now being scheduled for the spring of 2007, allowing time for the new sod to take hold. While some fencing will remain around the baseball fields until the new grass is firmly rooted, the pathway along the Charles River has already reopened, allowing pedestrians and cyclists to access the full length of the Esplanade.

All agencies and individuals engaged in this project are very grateful to the many donors, large and small, who made this "field of dreams" a reality.

Richard Scott is the Charles District Manager for the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation's Division of Urban Parks and Recreation, Richard.scott@state.ma.us. ■

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