

# Making a difference: STMA Chapters step up

*Editor's note: Members of the Sports Turf Managers Association often volunteer their time and expertise to projects outside their regular jobs, both on their own as well as representing local chapters. Here we highlight just a very small sample of that community service.*

## Rebuilding history in New Jersey

Hickey Field in Bergenfield, NJ was built in 1951. Over the past 57 years it has hosted many exciting games as well as having many future professional baseball stars play on it. In 1961 the New Jersey State Little League Tournament was played on Hickey Field for the first time in front of thousands of spectators.

Over the years the field had deteriorated to the point where it became a safety issue. A group of Little League fathers, including turf pros from various facilities, organized a renovation effort that included STMA members, PGMS members, superintendents, and others.

Field renovations began in the spring of 2007 to make the field safe and playable. The infield turf was stripped and the area was graded and 4-foot rolls of sod were laid down. The sod came from Tuckahoe Sod Farms, which supplies numerous major league teams with sod. A warning track was installed using red stone dust. The pitching mound and home plate



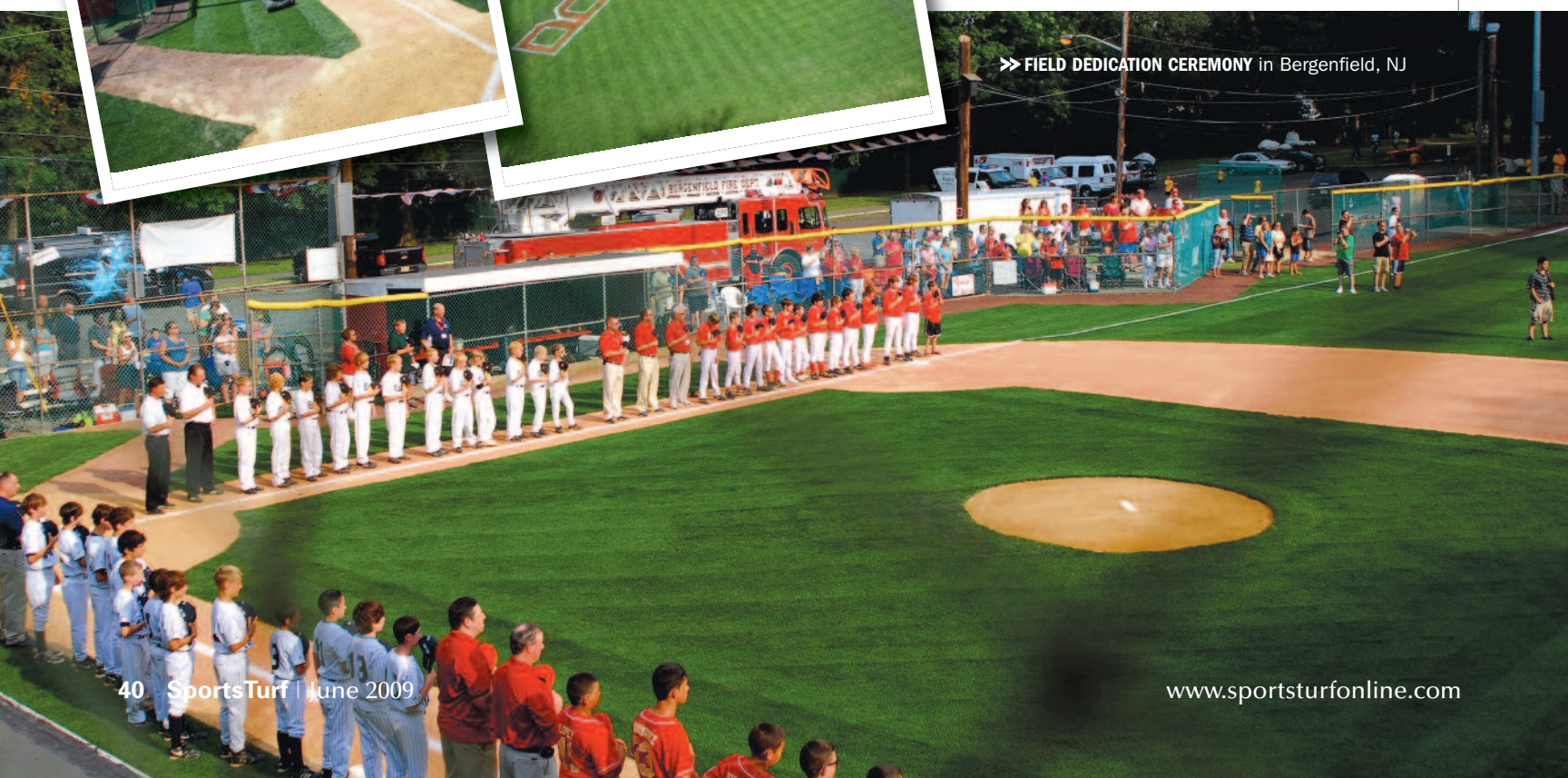
Left: 15-YEAR-OLD KYLE VAN HAASTEREN does his part. Right: HICKEY FIELD—after



>> HICKEY FIELD—before



>> FIELD DEDICATION CEREMONY in Bergenfield, NJ





areas were rebuilt. Cultural practices such as aeration, slit seeding, fertilization, divot repair were part of the program introduced to maintaining the field as well as frequent mowing, edging and infield care. In the summer of 2007, Bergenfield was the host site for the District 4 and Sectional championships.

The warning track was extended to include foul areas in the winter of 2008. New infield clay was added as well. Last year Hickey Field again hosted the NJ State Little League Tournament. Special projects that were completed in the past 2 years include:

- 2007—newly sodded infield (Tuckahoe Sod Farm) and outfield warning track (George M. Schoefield)
- 2008—Completion of warning track around the entire field, new infield clay, rebuilt mound and home plate area (Partac Peat/Beam Clay), and rebuilt bullpens.

Pioneer Athletics' rep Steve Every donated paint for field lining and logo painting and Wilfred MacDonald, a Jacobson distributor, supplied equipment for renovation work, field grooming and mowing.

The field is maintained by volunteers who I have had the privilege to train, including my 14-year old son, Kyle. The volunteers spend countless hours to make sure that not only is the field looking at its best but also safe and playable. The field is maintained daily for more than 300 games as well as practices that begin in early March and end in late November. This is no easy task. Visitors and visiting teams are always impressed with how well the field is maintained.—George Van Haasteren, CGM

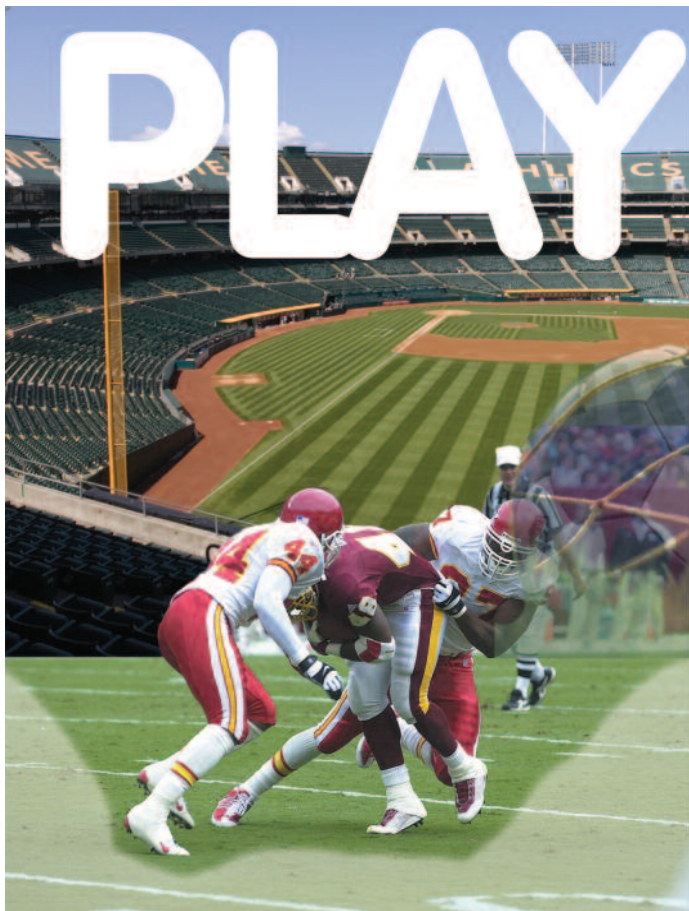
### KAFMO at Little League

Soon after the Keystone Athletic Field Managers Organization (KAFMO) was formed in 1994 Little League approached us asking if we could help renovate Howard J. Lamade Stadium so they would have the best Little League field in the world for their 50th anniversary in 1996. After a meeting with LL officials we decided that we could help and began to organize the resources needed.

We selected Alpine Services to do the grading and Sporting Valley Turf to lay the sod, I was asked to represent KAFMO as clerk of the works and the go-between for contractors and Little League. Alpine Services finished grading the field in late October following many weather delays and group of KAFMO volunteers along with the Sporting Valley Turf crew finished laying the sod on November 9, 2005. On November 11 Williamsport got 11 inches of snow and we did not see the sod until spring.

In the spring of 1996 they asked me if we could get some KAFMO volunteers to serve as grounds crew for the 50th anniversary event. Over the past 13 years, our grounds crew has grown from that first year when 6 volunteers served as the crew on one stadium field, to a 30-person crew who shuffle in and out during the series to assist with games on two stadium fields.

Since the addition of Volunteer Stadium in 2001, when volunteers stayed in the player dorms, we are now provided housing at other locations on campus. Initially we ate in the dorms, then we ate refreshment stand food and now KAFMO solicits sponsors to donate funds for the



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## Facility&Operations



crew to hire their own cooks and set up food preparation and eating area where three meals a day are provided.

In the beginning the crew was made mostly of local volunteers but now we

have volunteers coming from

California, Texas, Wisconsin, Ohio, Virginia, West Virginia and Pennsylvania. Crew members have experience at all levels of our profession, ranging from professional stadiums, to college and universities, to local community parks and Little Leagues.—Don Fowler, retired Penn State extension agent.

### NESTMA's Extreme Field Makeover program

The New England STMA Chapter has run its Extreme Field Makeover since 2006. The project was an idea to promote professionalism, increase our exposure and help give back to communities in need. The project is completed annually in the fall where a field in need of renovation is given a complete makeover in 1 week's time. The entire project is completed using donations of materials, supplies, equipment, and labor. Since 2006 we have completed three projects including a lacrosse field in 2006, softball field in 2007, and a Little League baseball field last year.

Communities fill out an application telling our committee why they deserve the project on their field. Each application is reviewed, and the finalists are given a site visit and the committee awards the winner based on certain criteria that fits our vendors and members. We have had between 25 and 45 different vendors and members

participating in the projects. We rely greatly on our vendors that are able to donate their expertise, time and products for the projects. Our vendors include sports turf construction companies, irrigation suppliers/installers, material suppliers, and sod farms.

Our members come from municipalities, professional sports teams, college/universities, and private schools.

We recruit our vendors and members a few ways. We have an email system that sends out mass emails to our 300+ members. We promote the project in our newsletters. We encourage participation by talking to our vendors face to face and over the phone. And we talk about the project and what the projects needs are at other NESTMA events throughout the year.

A typical project consists of field layout, rough and fine grading, soil testing and modification, irrigation and then finally, sod. All projects were valued between \$75,000 and \$125,000 each. Thanks to every vendor and member that has participated the past 3 years, the projects would not have been successful without your continued support.—Ben Polimer, Longwood Cricket Club

### Safety concerns lead to renovation

As a member of STMA for many years, the first six of which I was one of the only STMA members in the Upstate New York region, I have tried to do at least two volunteer projects per year. One of these projects was initiated last September when I was contacted by Robert Nadler, president of the Mechanicville-Stillwater Little League, which has 300 players and three fields.

The area has an historical significance in being located just south of the Saratoga Battlefield, widely cited as the turning point of the American Revolutionary War. Additionally,

Mechanicville was a hub of industrial activity, hence its name, up until the 1960's. The three youth fields neighbor a nearly abandoned railway yard and train repair center located in the center of Mechanicville. Bob Nadler and I surveyed the fields for safety concerns, as well as field layouts, and found problems on all three fields that needed to be addressed.

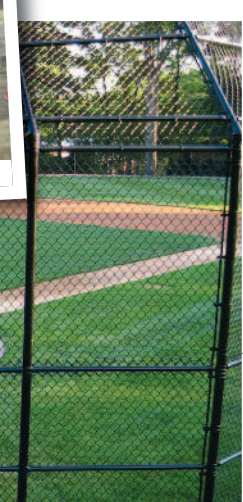
In the past I have always tried to get youth leagues to try to tackle as many issues as possible in the fall of the year. Here in Upstate New York, the real upstate, above Westchester, we have the 4th of July proceeded and followed by winter. All baseball fields in the region are under intense pressure for practice and play as soon as the frost comes out of the ground, so anything accomplished with regards to maintenance or construction in the a fall is a huge help.

On the primary field we built and added clay to the pitcher's mound and home plate area. We also reset all of the bases and relocated some irrigation heads from the skinned area to a location in the turf. We edged the entire skinned area with a sod cutter borrowed from a local golf course. We improved the infield soil profile for drainage and playability. The whole skinned area was groomed and graded (with a Toro Infield Pro, the use of which was donated by my employer).

Our efforts on the pony field (8-10 year olds) and tee ball field (5-7 year olds) were remarkably similar. However, during reconstruction of the pony league field while trying to layout bases, we encountered a small problem. Both foul poles were off 4-5 feet. Once we located the proper position for each foul pole and re-configured the infield it all came together nicely. The last thing that we accomplished was a total aerification of all three fields with a tractor mounted aeravator, again supplied by the local golf course,



NESTMA'S Field Makeover 2007—before



◀◀NESTMA'S Field Makeover 2007—after

and applied seed at the rate of 2 lbs. per 1,000 square feet and an application of slow release nitrogen. The grass seed was applied just at the end of our growing season and germinated quite nicely.

All three of these fields were in tip-top shape for opening day 2009. All supplies needed were purchased through the generosity of league sponsors (local businesses) and some field tools were donated by Par Aide Products.—John Halloran, Grassland Equipment and Irrigation

#### **STMA National gets in the act**

Following STMA's Annual Conference, association members give back to the host community through the Annual MLB Groundskeepers Conference, held this year in San Jose. Corporate sponsors and approximately 45 Major League Baseball (MLB) groundskeepers donated time, money and resources to transform the Sequoia High School baseball field into a first class field.

"We received an e-mail from Larry DiVito, head groundskeeper for the Washington Nationals, that we were selected for the field rebuild," said Tink Reynoso, Sequoia High School baseball coach. "In addition to the MLB groundskeepers, about 100 people from the community came out to help, including our alumni association. The improvements to our baseball field are unbelievable. We now have a baseball field above the level of most colleges. It's a dream come true."

Commercial member sponsors of the renovation included PRO-FILE Products, Toro, Covermaster, West Coast Turf, Colony Landscaping and Barkshire Laser Leveling. The Baseball Tomorrow Fund, a joint initiative between Major League Baseball and the Major League Baseball Players Association, gave a \$40,000 grant to support the project.

A dedication ceremony took place at the school January 19. DiVito, an alumnus of Sequoia, threw out the ceremonial first pitch followed by a one-inning exhibition by the varsity team.

Reynoso mentioned that DiVito presented information to his entire baseball team on how to maintain the field. Representatives from the Seattle Mariners also held on-field classes on how to take care of the pitcher's mound. Luke Yoder, the San Diego Padres' head groundskeeper, spearheaded the entire endeavor that began back in August of 2008.

"This has become somewhat of a tradition at the MLB Groundskeepers Conference," explained Joe Betulius, vice president of sales for Profile Products. "We had an incredible amount of support this year from groundskeepers, corporate sponsors and a large financial contribution from the Baseball Tomorrow Fund. Without a doubt, the Major League groundskeepers are remarkable in their skills and they left an enduring legacy for the San Jose community and Sequoia High School baseball." ■

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