



» **THE MAIN BUILDING** and gymnasium at Rio Vista Community Park, Peoria, AZ.

## “Budget” is not a four-letter word

**B**UDGET. A six-letter word that has the stigma of a four-letter word. It leaves a bad taste in your mouth and probably gives you a migraine, especially in the current fiscal meltdown many are experiencing. Being able to handle the fiscal responsibilities of your position is of utmost importance, and is interwoven into each job priority you oversee. While you might not love budgeting, and it might even be a bit intimidating, it is a necessary part of your job.

Most of us would readily admit that the reason we embraced this profession is not because of our love of budgets. However, budgeting has become the hinge in which you hinder or foster professionalism. Outlined in this article are three overarching tools or principles you can use to make budgeting easier and less of a headache: rationalize, resources and relationships.

➤ **Rationalization** is a key component in staying afloat when the waters are rising. Simply put, it's giving a reason to validate any potential purchase. It might sound inane, but it can be the difference between obtaining what you have determined best, and something else. A good example is Irrigation Efficiency/Conservation, a huge green initiative that has become center stage for both the STMA and Golf Course Superintendents Association. In our current season it would be unwise if we tied into this initiative without emphasizing the financial benefits that can be its partner.

I am honored to have been given the opportunity to work as a Project Manager on the build-out of the second community park for our city. This community park will be 85 acres, and at build out we are estimating that the park will consume about 260 acres of reclaimed water or 84,700,000 gallons. The park I currently supervise requires about 125 acres of Salt River Project (SRP)

Most of us would readily admit that the reason we embraced this profession is not because of our love of budgets. However, budgeting has become the hinge in which you hinder or foster professionalism.



Illustration ©istockphoto.com/borisyanikov

water, or 40,800,000 gallons, which is relatively inexpensive, at about \$2,000 per year. The next community park is situated within eyeshot of the city's newly constructed Water Treatment Facility, so using any other water source would be taking steps backward. Yet, the cost of using reclaimed water is substantially higher. After doing some preliminary projections we are looking in the ballpark of about \$150,000 to \$170,000 per year. This cost is the very rationalization needed to upgrade the park irrigation system, thus allowing us to be green, and at the same time emphasize the "hot" button that is on everyone's mind, the budget.

How could this example save money? Let us say that an irrigation contractor comes in and recommends sprinkler A. However, through speaking with some industry professionals and doing some trials, it is concluded that sprinkler B has better distribution uniformity and thus requires less water to get the same result. Estimates show that the efficiency from Sprinkler B will save 5% a year in water use.

Unfortunately, sprinkler A costs \$25 less, which appears to leave sprinkler B only a small fighting chance. Using rationalization, we can justify our decision by underscoring the facts: there are 50 heads a field over four fields, for a total of 200 sprinkler heads. The cost for sprinkler B (200 heads x \$25) will cost the project an additional \$5,000. Sprinkler A might have an initial lower cost, but would in truth cost the operating budget 5% more each year to achieve the same results. With the anticipated cost of water at \$150,000, sprinkler A would cost an extra \$7,500 a year to operate (\$150,000 x 5%), a financial "gift" that would never stop giving.

Rationalization landed a deafening blow to the cheaper sprinkler head and upgraded the irrigation system that allows for lowering operating costs and puts environmental stewardship at an all-new high. This philosophy applies not only to new construction, but to any area where you may be justifying the purchase of a new piece of equipment, desiring to add additional labor, and/or requesting to use outside contracts to complete proj-

ects. In any situation the more history of reasoning and justification you have, the greater plausibility you have of acquiring what you requested.

**Resources.** How is it that a department can have a \$1,000,000 budget, and yet have no money to spend, when someone else with a \$500,000 budget seems to have purchasing freedom? This is where the rubber hits the road.

Where I work we have three different categories of accounts: Personnel, Contractual and Commodities. Personnel are obviously staffing requirements that include part-time and full-time employees, and all the benefits associated with those positions. Contractual are those expenses for contracts/outside services or charges from other city departments for services rendered (i.e. IT, Facilities and Fleet maintenance), and Commodities are for the purchase of operational supplies.

The goal of budgeting is to make sure that the bulk of available money is not

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wrapped up in Personnel and Contractual line items, but to ensure sure that the line items you actually control are adequate to give you the purchasing power to maintain the assets under your supervision. If 95% of the budget is tied up in Personnel and Contractual, then you have not been a good manager of the finances. Of the hypothetical \$1,000,000 budget, only \$50,000 is left for Commodities or actual spending dollars for the facility. When budget cutbacks do occur, these account lines end up being cut, and thus the spending ice-cube is melted down even further.

You may be asking, “What do you mean by ‘actual’ line items that you control?” When I was first brought on as a supervisor of a community park I soon realized that the electrical account was escalating. I had two choices. Sit back and say, “Boy, that electrical is getting higher every year and I guess I need to justify the raising cost,” or “Boy, that electrical is getting higher and I need to find out why. What can I do to stabilize that

account or even reduce it?” Either you are a victim, or someone who initiates a resolution to the fiscal quandary. Which are you?

Once I started researching the electrical account it became clear that our facility was on the wrong type of metering account. It was a usage account that gave us cheaper electricity with the more kilowatts we used. The funny thing is we never used enough to get into the “cheaper” electricity. I immediately changed the plan to a bank-type electrical, where we are charged more or less for the time of day we use the power. With a combination of this and turning off some unnecessary lighting around the facility, we saved about \$20,000 in the first year of starting the program.

It is important to look at all areas of your budget. When I first started working for the city I had no idea what IT charges were, how they were assessed or exactly what equipment made up the charges. I took the initiative and began asking questions. Just a word of caution, please tread graciously. There are

some people who don't like their “system” questioned and your initiative can be taken as interrogation. After researching the IT system it became clear that the community park was paying for a printer and a computer that were being used by other areas in our department. We made the change and were able to use those savings in other line items where I was given more spending freedom.

Both Electricity and IT are both Contractual accounts, the monies from those accounts are not actual dollars that I can elect to spend. However, they are costs that must be a part of the budget and each manager can influence how much money is spent from those accounts.

**Relationships.** An often overlooked aspect, but of vital importance to budgeting, is developing relationships. The older I get the more humbled I am in realizing that I can't do it alone. I am only as good as the people I surround myself with. I love where I work because of the relationships that are dedicated to the facilities that we maintain. I trust my boss, and am confident that he has my back. When he has to go forward to his boss to rationalize my expenses or justify my resources, I know he has my best interest in mind. Someone who communicates a lone ranger mentality, which may be appealing in an effort to take credit for “your” work, can instead create a recipe for failure.

What are the ingredients you have in your relationship cupboard? How vested are you in the relationships at the STMA and your local chapter? How are you investing in those you are responsible for developing in the area of budgeting? Remember, the Lone Ranger did have Tonto, and was always willing to pass along the lessons he had learned.

The art of budgeting isn't an activity that many of us enjoy developing, but it is a skill that is worth the effort. Don't let the word “budget” leave a sour taste in your mouth, but instead check your resources, rationalize your decisions, and invest in your relationships. You'll become a part of the solution instead of a liability that cannot be afforded. ■

*Todd Wuellner is Sports Complex Supervisor, Rio Vista Community Park, Peoria, AZ.*

» **PART OF THE MAINTENANCE FACILITY** at the adjoining minor league baseball complex.



# Managing a clean and efficient shop

**A**s the shop manager at a private high school that sits on 127 acres in west Nashville, TN I make sure that the grounds staff has sufficient supplies in stock to perform their day-to-day tasks and to also have all the equipment ready and serviced to be used as needed. So I need a shop that is well organized, clean, and a safe working atmosphere.

## TAKES A TEAM

To achieve these goals it takes a team of staff members. It is very important that the team is on board or running the shop is a lot more difficult than it needs to be. Having a proper place for equipment and tools or whatever be cuts down on the time spent looking for any item. And that's whether it's your little tool shed out back or the 8,000-square foot shop that you work in every day.

I found that taking inventory of your tools semi-annually or quarterly allows you to keep track of everything much easier, especially if you are trying to incorporate a budget or already have one in place. Just another simple step to managing department dollars!

## CLEANLINESS IS KEY

Having a clean shop not only makes a strong impression on outsiders and fellow employees, but I think it goes a little deeper than that. It shows that the individual in charge of that particular shop really takes pride in his job.

Keeping up and staying organized work hand and hand, meaning that when you have

An organized, clean shop is the ideal safe work environment. You're doing a great job if your co-workers sometimes give the impression they think the shop runs itself!

a particular place for everything within those four walls no matter the size of your working area, there should be absolutely know reason why things get misplaced or be hard to find. And that goes back to having a strong team where everyone can depend on each other and pick up one another's slack.

Granted it is nearly impossible to keep these high standards implemented at all times unless you just don't have that much going on in your shop, and I think I can speak for the



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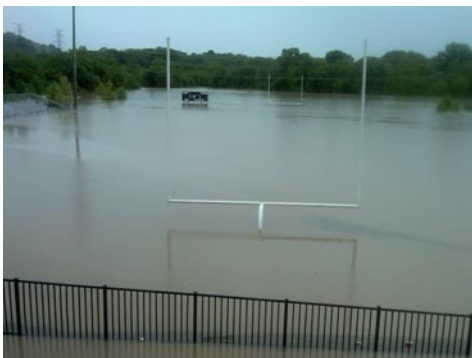
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» Our school, Ensworth, was affected by the flood this past May, when the Harpeth River rose higher than ever in any local's current lifetime.



majority of us in that 90% of the time we are wondering where the day went. That's one of things that I have learned in the turf industry—it is very fast paced, demanding, and can be very expensive.

Our school, Ensworth, was affected by the flood this past May, when the Harpeth River rose higher than ever in any local's current lifetime. Some even have gone as far as to stating that this was a 200 or even possibly a 500-year flood. All ten of our fields including six of our bermudagrass "performance" fields were under on average 15 feet

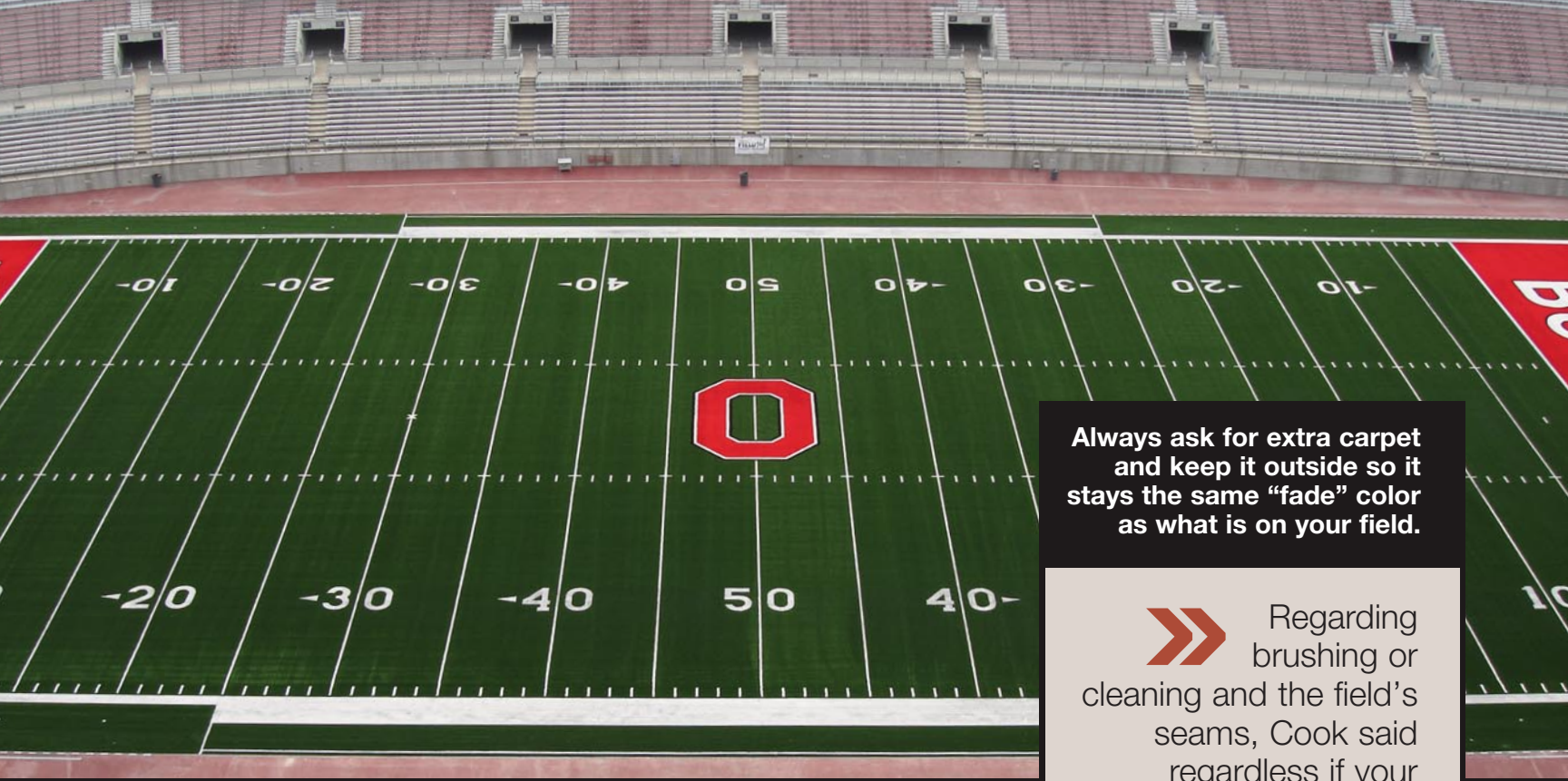
of water. We also had 6-8 inches of standing water in three of our auxiliary gyms and performance gym. All the flooring had to be replaced due to expansion, contraction, bowing, and buckling. By pulling together faculty, staff, and parent volunteers we are nearly back to 100% inside and out after a little more than 2 months of hard work and determination!

An organized, clean shop is the ideal safe work environment. You're doing a great job if your co-workers sometimes give the impression they think the shop runs itself!

I really enjoy every day running into the potential of a new challenge or learning experience, especially when something different goes wrong that I have never dealt with before. I get my fair share of that being responsible for 27 pieces of equipment between two campuses; being a one-man show there is very seldom a dull moment. ■

*Chris Olson is turf maintenance shop manager at Ensworth Schools, Nashville, TN. The head groundsman there is STMA Board member Martin Kaufman, CSFM.*

**All ten of our fields including six of our bermudagrass "performance" fields were under on average 15 feet of water.**



Always ask for extra carpet and keep it outside so it stays the same “fade” color as what is on your field.

» Regarding brushing or cleaning and the field’s seams, Cook said regardless if your seams are glued or sewn, you shouldn’t see damage unless you go directly along the seams. Pine needles are particularly difficult to remove and will contaminate the surface if they are not removed, Cook said. Use a rotary brush machine to help keep them out.

## Synthetic turf maintenance advice from STMA Conference

**W**EBB COOK, Executive Vice President of Liberty Sports, LLC, has helped develop a number of infill synthetic turf systems and helped form A-Turf, Inc., in 2002. He has been the chairman of the Synthetic Turf Council’s Membership Committee and co-chairman of the Business Practices Task Force. Cook has been responsible for the sale and installation of more than 150 synthetic turf fields in the US.

Cook spoke on synthetic turf maintenance at this year’s Sports Turf Managers Association Conference in Orlando. Here are some notes from the discussion.

- Cook said you need to let the infill settle in on a new synthetic field—don’t start

brushing it right away. It takes 4-5 weeks to settle. You can’t water the field to accelerate this settlement!

- He also said big topdresser machines move the carpet around; better to use a utility vehicle with a spreader attachment, which is smaller and better for synthetic turf.

- For field hockey, the first year playing on the carpet is the worst, Cook said. To re-level infill in spots, drag another piece of the synthetic carpet, fiber-side down. This helped settle infill for one audience member, who added that this method did not create any static, which of course just brings the rubber back to the top.





- Cook said standard practice includes drag brushing once every 3 weeks; the idea is to get the infill material settled and staying settled rather than moving it around all the time.

- Cook is not 100% sold that brushing helps keep carpet fibers upright. “Perhaps, but it’s possible these installations could use more infill material,” he said. “Manufacturers don’t like too much brushing; they view it as additional wear.”

- Tines are too aggressive, he said in response to a question about a specific piece of equipment. “[They] have made some changes but I say one tine is better than three tines; you want to keep from getting the drag too deep into the carpet,” Cook said. You now can adjust that machine to groom before games, he said.

- Cook stressed the importance of removing debris from synthetic surfaces. “Don’t let it build up,” he said. “It’s imperative to get leaves off the field as soon as possible.”

- Keep all contaminants off the field. He

recommends using a pull-behind rotary brush that picks up some infill but then screens it back into the field.

Ted Stavropoulos from the University of Hartford said he runs a GroomAll four times a year, twice in the fall and twice in the spring. He said it has hydraulics and some guys don’t like that, plus it takes a larger unit to pull it than a utility vehicle. [The GroomAll is designed specifically for maintaining infilled synthetic turf surfaces.]

Cook said forced air field blowers are great tools to clean fields as long as you’re blowing parallel to the ground so you don’t blow off the infill. But these blowers can help keep debris off your field.

Regarding brushing or cleaning and the field’s seams, Cook said regardless if your seams are glued or sewn, you shouldn’t see damage unless you go directly along the seams. Pine needles are particularly difficult to remove and will contaminate the surface if they are not removed, Cook said. Use a rotary brush machine to help keep them out.

In-laid field markings: Cook said the more markings you have, the better chance of a problem occurring. “If you use a product that will remove paint and you paint and remove, paint and remove, too often you are wearing the fiber,” he said. “In-lay for sports you know you are going to play and don’t put in more than three sports.”

Cook suggested in-laying center of the field logos, saying the paint will build up otherwise.

For high-wear areas, such as the “short corner” in field hockey, you must keep infill levels up; these areas can become completely devoid of infill if they aren’t tended well.

It is still important to convince coaches to rotate practice areas just as you would on natural turf, Cook said. For example, in lacrosse goal areas, infill must be added regularly or brushed back into place, he said. Otherwise the goalies could wear the fibers down to the base.

Sliding into bases will move infill and make a hole if not re-filled as well.

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Clay from infields mixing into the synthetic surface is a dilemma, too, said Cook. "Dirt gets into the carpet and you just have to stay on top of getting it out," he said. "If you let it get wet then it's really tough to get out."

Cook recommended having your synthetic field deep cleaned every 3-4 years, at a cost of \$3,000-\$5,000. This process, which one audience member said he could do in 6 hours on a football field, includes de-compacting the infill, freshening the carpet fibers, and cleaning out dirt and other contaminants. The audience member said the current trend is deep cleaning once a year after a field is 3 years old. He added that to keep dust and small particulates out of a field, management should "plug in upfront money" for these deep cleanings that eventually will be needed.

"Dead fiber" is a fact of life on synthetic fields, even on monofilament systems. You may collect 5-10 pounds of fiber in a trash

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“If you use a disinfectant once a year for a few thousand dollars, any thing living will be killed and it can help clean the carpet,” said Cook.

can—this is normal, Cook said. Right now it is legal to put them in regular trash for landfills now, though he says the industry is working on other answers.

Please don’t drag soccer or other goals on the synthetic turf—pick them up. They can catch seams so they need to be lifted. Work with coaches to rotate, rotate, rotate.



Cook said he is not a fan of anti-microbial disinfectants that coat the carpet fibers and pointed to Dr. Andy McNitt’s study at Penn State showing staph doesn’t originate or live on synthetic fields. “If you use a disinfectant once a year for a few thousand dollars, any thing living will be killed and it can help clean the carpet,” said Cook.

Or, an audience member suggested managers could buy enzymes, which he recommended.

If you want a two-toned field, have alternate panels put in rather than relying on striping the field, which can wear the fibers and move too much infill around, said Cook.

Cook said gluing gives a flatter seam and a wider bond. He doesn’t see any benefit to gluing and sewing seams. In-lays are always glued and this is where you see problems with pieces coming loose. To repair, make sure and clean the area with a vacuum, use contact cement, and get weight on it as it dries.

When using a Terraplas or similar system to cover the field, watch how much weight you put on the field, you can still damage the fibers or the base.

Always ask for extra carpet and keep it outside so it stays the same “fade” color as what is on your field.-Eric Schroder ■

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But you already knew that. You have a more limited bag of tricks to keep good workers and to keep them happy.

In a profession like turf management, in which it can take nearly a full year to train a worker for all seasons, replacing workers can be costly and time consuming. It just makes sense to hold on to the good ones and keep their spirits up. Fortunately, even with limited resources, there are ways to bolster employee satisfaction.

Around the country, some top turf management programs have found that one of the least costly but most appreciated employee benefits is flexible scheduling.

"I try to be as honest as I can about our needs but also respect that they have families and that their time away is valuable," said David Rulli, manager of stadium operations for Jefferson County Schools in Lakewood, CO whose fulltime staff of five manages four stadiums and five fields, putting on more than 400 events a year.

"I've found that the biggest thing is setting the parameters — no surprises — about when our busy times are," Rulli said. "But I also try to be understanding when somebody needs a day off. If somebody needs a flexible schedule, I don't say no if I can possibly do it. I have a younger staff, and I know that weddings come up and things like that, and if I can accommodate them, I'm going to do it because that time off is a reward for the pride they take in what we do."

There are more formal flexible scheduling options used around the country, designed to give workers more days off in a row. One option allows for a work week of three 12-hour days plus a half day on the fourth day.

Another option, used at the University of South Carolina-Upstate, schedules four 10-hour days, giving three-day breaks from the job.

"That helps retention," said Bruce Suddeth, director of building and landscape services. Also valued, he said, are split shifts which let staff members escape the broiling midday heat. Those ad hoc schedules allow employees to work early morning hours and then return later in the afternoon.

The city of Tracy, CA is having good luck with a scheduling plan that gives workers a three-day break every other week. Employees are scheduled for four nine-hour shifts followed by a shorter shift on the fifth work day. To cover weekends, employees' schedules are staggered so that some have different start and stop days for their work weeks.

"It's a selling point. People appreciate it," said Don Scholl, superintendent of parks, sports fields and trees, who acknowledges that "the intent is to minimize overtime. We do incur some, but it's clear that when the budget isn't there, we have to look elsewhere for rewards."

Scholl's department also eases the workload on regular staff by employing youth through a labor department grant and assigning them to litter removal, restroom cleaning and other tasks that require less experience.

Looking elsewhere to share some of the grounds keeping workload is a common tactic. At Suddeth's school in Spartanburg, S.C., students, coaches and maintenance staff help do the grounds keeping for the NCAA Division 1 athletic program that has soccer, baseball, softball, track and field teams. Students on work/study programs, independently hired student employees, and interns from the horticultural program at a nearby technical college help ease the workload on his budget-crunched staff.

"And we get a lot of help from our coaches. They don't just sit on the sidelines and point fingers. They actually help on field

"I've found that the biggest thing is setting the parameters — no surprises — about when our busy times are," Rulli said

Another option, used at the University of South Carolina-Upstate, schedules four 10-hour days, giving three-day breaks from the job.

So Scott MacLean, manager of park maintenance, said he tries to compensate with a popular employee benefit, a pass card for the staff to use the golf course, swimming pool and fitness center at no charge.

Clipboard image © istockphoto.com/yasinguneyusu



maintenance, and that helps a lot to manage costs and workload,” Suddeth said, noting that the buy-in from students and staff helps instill pride in the facilities.

Similarly, there’s been no money for raises for Waukegan Park District employees in Illinois. So Scott MacLean, manager of park maintenance, said he tries to compensate with a popular employee benefit, a pass card for the staff to use the golf course, swimming pool and fitness center at no charge.

More important, MacLean said, is making sure that seasonal workers know they’re appreciated. At the end of each season, he sends thank-you notes and invites the good seasonal workers to return the following year.

“It’s a nice for us because they’ve already been trained, and it’s nice for them because they can concentrate on school and don’t have to worry about finding a job next summer,” MacLean said.

Whether talking about seasonal or year-round employees, managers agree that retention depends on hiring conscientious, self-motivated people, training them well, setting clear expectations and then not overwhelming them with micromanagement. Good workers will stay, Scholl said, if you can “give them the tools they need to be successful, let them take on new responsibilities, give them leeway to make decisions, and give regular pats on the back.”

Rulli said budget cuts in the Jefferson County School district

“seem like the worst of times in my 31 years, but we’re probably no different from anyone else. We’ve all had to learn to be more efficient with our workforce.”

To avoid burning out employees, he said, it’s important to “prioritize what needs to be done” and “don’t beat yourself up, or your staff, if you can’t it all done.”

MacLean agreed; “Communicate your expectations well but be realistic about them. If it rains, we may not get all the parks cut.” And he said he’s found one other key to employee retention that doesn’t cost anything — a sense of humor.

“We talk about attitude a lot,” MacLean said. “You’re outside. Enjoy it. It’s all about attitude. We know that. So I take a lot of time saying please and thank you.” ■

*Diane Stafford is a business writer and workplace columnist at The Kansas City Star. This is the fourth in a series of seven articles in the 2010 Ewing Professional Development Series. STMA and Ewing have again partnered in this series to bring sports turf industry professional development and career issues to the forefront. For more information, go to [www.STMA.org](http://www.STMA.org) or [www.Ewing1.com](http://www.Ewing1.com).*

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# Georgia high school rebounds from flood to win state honor

**N**EARLY A YEAR AGO Dominion Christian High School, in Marietta, GA suffered terrible damage to their baseball field due to heavy flooding. In some parts, the water rose 7 feet high almost covered the outfield fence in its entirety. There was standing water for 3 weeks and the flood left a heavy saturation of silt on the field.

Working on a tight budget and led by supervisor Nathan Tidwell of Championship Turf

(www.championshipinc.com), the team began a rigorous restoration program that started with removing the silt. By the first week of November, they had verti-cut, vacuumed, and overseeded the field with rye. By constantly analyzing the state of the field and adjusting the program to its needs, the field was playable by March of this year and was awarded Field of the Year by the Georgia Independent School Association.

“The Dominion Christian High School Baseball Field is without question one of the nicest and best maintained baseball diamonds in the Southeast,” said Earl Ehrhart, president of the Knights Dugout Club, the baseball team’s booster organization. “The perfect playability of the grass and the infield make for a superior game performance for any team. Without exception, when visiting teams first walk on the field, they stop and look around in awe at our playing surface. Again, without fail someone from the other team will kneel down and run their hands over the grass to experience the texture and perfection.” ■

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## Advice on topdressing

By Jeff Salmond, CSFM

**T**opdressing is important if you want to reduce thatch. I feel topdressing aggressively growing grasses helps in breaking down that slimy layer that can exist between the plant and soil surface.

Topdressing is needed to protect turf injury after an aerification, depending on the time of year and timing of sports seasons. During football season, for example, after an aerification, topdressing is important to re-fill aerification holes to help provide vertical and lateral stability. Topdressing at lighter rates is important to "level" divots during the season and protect from further turf injury. Topdressing at heavier rates is important to protect turf heading into winter to help prevent desiccation.

I don't feel that topdressing is always necessary after an aerification process. With little spring activity, I feel leaving the aerification holes open and not topdressing will provide increased rooting and cavities in the soil for which roots and water to travel. However, a light application of sand topdressing during slow spring growth may help increase the soil temperature.

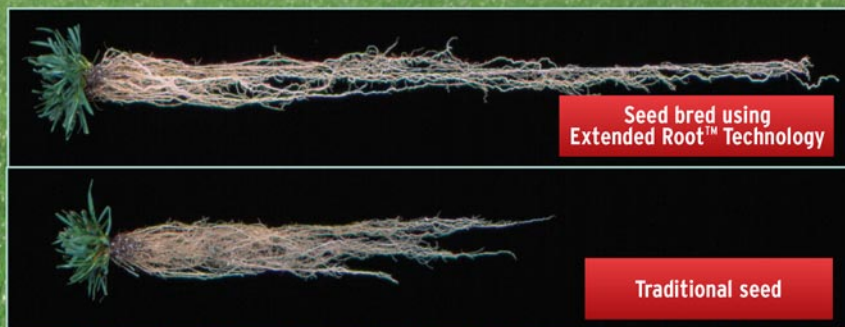
Composition choices could include mixes of different ratios of soils, sands, peats, and calcined clays. For example, a sand-based field rootzone that was originally a 94% sand 6% peat, you might use a 100% sand topdressing that is the same particle size as the sand in the rootzone. On a native soil based field, you might use a well-balanced soil with a little higher sand content mixed with 50% by volume of calcined clay. When you use sand topdressing on some fields, try and stay away from sands with 40% fine/very fine sands.

After the football season is over and your field has been aerified and cores removed, apply a little more than 3/4 of an inch of topdressing over 80,000 square feet, or about 25 tons of sand material. After the sand is spread, allow it to dry and then brush it into the aerification holes and divots. This is the best time to apply a heavy application of sand topdressing while the grass growth has slowed down, allowing the sand to effectively be moved in the aerification holes. The heavy amount also gives you that added protection going into the winter months.

During the season, periodically apply light (1/8 to 1/4 inch) amounts to topdressing between the hashes to help fill divots and protect exposed crowns and rhizomes.

—From Jeff Salmond, CSFM ■

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