Money-saving tips from parks & rec pros

IN CELEBRATION OF NATIONAL PARK AND RECREATION MONTH, STMA has asked several sports turf managers who work in parks and recreation to share their top tips for cost savings and effectiveness.

SHARE EQUIPMENT

"Working in the public sector definitely has it challenges. The greatest and most obvious is the ever-shrinking budgets and the chore of doing more with less as members of the community still demand services at the highest possible level. One way to help us achieve the continued high level of service is by reaching out to other municipalities in our area by primarily the borrowing of equipment. Whether it is a tractor or an aerator, this practice has been done with 4-5 communities in the greater Portland, ME area for the past 10 years. Individually each community cannot have all the necessary equipment but together it is surprising what is available just by picking up the phone and asking. This version of networking with other communities has helped each community in which they need help to achieve their goals in providing quality services. I would strongly urge other communities to start reaching out to others, whether other parks and rec or even golf courses. Again, communities don't want to lose services, so it is our job to think outside of the box and keep services at the level community members expect."-Rick Perruzzi, CSFM, CPRP, Wainwright Recreation Complex, South Portland, ME

BE TRAINED IN TREE REMOVAL

"One way we save thousands of dollars throughout the season is through tree removal. I was lucky enough to be trained by a highly skilled tree feller at my old job at a golf course. Since then, I have also taken a 40-hour training session through Stihl Corporation. I have now trained my staff in the proper techniques to fell live, dead and storm damaged trees. Other than situations near power lines, we pretty much handle everything in house."-Shane Young, CSFM, Prince William County Park Authority, Woodbridge, VA

INSTALL FENCING FOR SAFETY

"When fencing [for] athletic fields is installed, make sure the mesh fabric is fastened on the inside or field side of the posts. This is to soften the blow when contact is made by the player. Also on Little League and baseball fields, the outfield and foul territory fencing should be a minimum of 6 feet high, and the higher the better. This is all to help prevent serious injury from occurring when participants come in contact with fencing."-Stephen G. Matuza, CGCS, Master Greenkeeper, CSFM and much more, for The Farm at Oyster Bay, Syosset, NY

USE VOLUNTEERS

"I do make extensive use of volunteers in the sports organizations for some maintenance like raking the baseball infield areas. And some volunteers have businesses that are willing to donate grass seed and fertilizer throughout the year."-Dudley Rice, CPRP, CPSI, Solebury Township Parks & Recreation, Solebury, PA

COMMUNICATE TO REDUCE WASTED TIME

"Good communication and proper planning with your staff results in the desired result of the work that is to be done. Communicating with your staff about what needs to be done and the time frame that is expected will reduce the amount of wasted time by not having the right tools and equipment for the task. And it will reduce wasted trips back to the shop for anything that was forgotten. Lack of communication results in work not being done to the standard that was expected, along with having to take more time to redo the task."-Jason Moore CSFM, Tualatin Hills Park & Recreation District, Beaverton, OR

GOING GREEN SAVES YOU GREEN

"Convert outside area/security lighting to solar lighting. We are in the process of even placing solar up-lighting at flagpoles. Reduce maintained turf areas to minimize costs (mowing, fertilizer, irrigation, etc). Even categorize the remaining areas as athletic use, multi-use, and passive use to justify changes in maintenance practices.

Reduce the amount of overhead irrigation where possible, use micro irrigation. Change out interior lighting, HVAC, etc to more efficient modern models. There are several grant opportunities still out there for energy conservation.

Stop using huge trucks (3/4 ton and larger) for every job. Replace what you can with smaller trucks and alternative fuel and hybrids."-Joel McKnight, CGCS, CPRP

El Paso General Services Dept., El Paso, TX ■

Synthetic turf update from STMA Conference

AT THE SYNTHETIC TURF UPDATE SESSION STMA hosted last January, a panel answered questions from the audience. The panel included Webb Cook, president of Sprinturf, Darian Daily of the Cincinnati Bengals, Shawn Mahonski of Towson University, and Tom Serensits of Penn State's Center for Sports Surface Research.

The panel began by assuring the audience that some day every synthetic turf field will need to be replaced.

In response to a question on alternatives to SBR rubber infill, the panel cited research saying the crumb rubber is safe and noted that some areas don't allow crumb rubber as infill, in New York City and Los Angeles, for example. Alternative infills cost significantly more than crumb rubber, it was noted.

Daily of the Bengals said the NFL currently has no policy regarding whether its playing surfaces should be natural turf or synthetic. He advised that if rain is forecast the day of an event on your synthetic field you should cover the field if possible, though Daily noted that he has the luxury of the time and money to do this.

He said he is more aggressive now with grooming the field in Cincinnati, hitting it three times a week during the NFL season. He added that the Bengals also practice on the game field, unlike many NFL teams, and that makes a difference. "I can see the difference if we can't drag it," he said.

In response to another question, Daily said wavy lines can sometimes be an issue and recommends using a broom to straighten the lines. He said firm but not hard is the goal and that too much grooming makes the field too soft and not enough grooming makes it too hard. After 7 years, Daily's field is showing signs of age and its Gmax rating has risen.

Daily also said his field was manufactured before the new monofilament products now in vogue, and that he has heard complaints about "moving infill" in some of these fields at the NFL level. "All fibers are going to lay over regardless of what kind it is," Daily said.

Another point the panel made sure was heard is that maintenance is necessary for synthetic fields. "No maintenance" claims are wrong and everyone knows it.

On the topic of cooling down the synthetic infill fields, Daily said the water cannons at his field are great but they don't work to cool the field. He uses them as part of his maintenance practices, hitting 15-20 minutes per station, saying it cleans the fibers and the infill and keeps debris off the field. He tries to get everything as clean as he can, he said.

Putting moisture into the sand and rubber gives players a feel they like, Daily said, they can feel their cleats going in and out and it's not sticky. "Later in the season I might cut down because there's already moisture, like if it snows."

Daily said his field has experienced less static as it has aged.

The panel agreed that 8-year warranties are now the industry standard.

When a field is between 8 and 11 years old, if it has been subject to sunlight 365 days a year, the UV rays will start to break down the fibers, Daily said. He said to get maximum years out of your synthetic turf you should groom it less, and that a field's location also makes a difference. A Texas field absorbs a more intense UV ray than one in New Hampshire, for example, so theoretically the NH field would last longer.

Serensits cited research at PSU, where they have tested shoes on their synthetic turf plots, that showed flat-soled shoes will wear a field faster than cleats.

One attendee wondered if someday there would be an environmentally related tax to pay to process the old infill material. A panel member responded that equipment exists that can remove 65-70% of the old infill; it is cut up and put in a landfill and that he knew of no current issues with that practice.

Another attendee, from Cincinnati, said a nearby cement plant was causing abrasions to his field's fibers and was told he had to just keep flushing that unwanted material through the

The panel agreed that 8-year warranties are now the industry standard.

system. The panel expressed more concern about the number of sticks and sunflower seeds and god-knows what else that regularly must be removed from these fields.

Mahonski said at Towson that outside groups, particularly soccer and lacrosse leagues, renting his facility sign for responsibility if the field needs to be cleaned after they use it. The bill to clean the field? Mahonski said about $1,700. He recommended everyone put language doing the same in all their contracts.

Mahonski said he knows a guy who grooms his field every day and that he's wearing out the 4-year-old field.

Cook said manufacturers' manuals most often recommend grooming every 4 to 6 weeks. The GreensGroomer product was mentioned for the second time by an audience member as being an effective groomer. This one said he saves his field from wear by setting the brush height differently and lightens the setting on his machine and also by adjusting the tension.

The panel recommended removing leaves ASAP, using air such as a pull-behind blower, to get them off. Handhelds work too, no matter what leaves need to "leave" in a hurry.

A machine from Redexim Charterhouse also was mentioned by an attendee who said its rotary brush helped bring the rubber and debris up off the surface and the rubber is then shaken back out, which works for him. A panelist recommended a magnet attachment to pull out metal, and showed a slide with more than a handful of hairpins and worse pulled from the surface.

STUDIES ON PROLONGING LIFE?

The panel said that infill material gets harder over time and the carpet fibers wear, though it was noted that the newer fields' fibers are wearing better while some questions remain as to their longevity.

Cook said, "After 4 or 5 years, I recommend that once a year you spend the $5,000 it costs for a professional, deep-cleaning service to help prolong your field's life. You should work this cost into the budget for the project upfront."

This deep cleaning also includes tining of the field and added infill to bring down Gmax numbers. A growing number of contractors nationwide are getting into the business of cleaning the ever-increasing number of synthetic fields being built annually.

The panel cited it is important to have strength and other coaches rotate the spots they use repetitively on the field. Another point was made on the wisdom of a $15,000 fence to protect a $750,000 investment in a synthetic field. Companies are happy to replace damaged, or as in the case in Canada recently stolen, turf but it will cost you.

An audience member said he knew of a 6-year-old field in New Hampshire that had been dragged in the same direction the entire time and was left with a "not good" situation. He recommended changing it up, going corner to corner, side to side, north and south, and don't set the machine to go too deep so as not to disturb the seams, whether glued or sewn. ■

Field painting tips & disaster stories

MARK FREVER, CSFM,
Albion College (MI)

Pre-mow surface with rotary mower that has side discharge or capable of bagging.

Clean nozzle tips or replace worn tips for consistent width of painted line.

From start to finish, pull lines with string, preferably offset.

A local soccer club parent had the idea to reduce the frequency of painting lines—he would just add a touch of glyphosate to the paint. After 2 weeks of painting he reduced the turf but had to continue painting bare soil. Consequently, the bare soil lines became trip hazards until they filled in with weeds.

ALLEN JOHNSON, CSFM,
Green Bay Packers

No disruptions from extra activity like team walk-throughs, extra event practices, etc. during application.

Make sure there is drying time and good weather if possible.

Have the correct number of people to do the job right.

I hate to admit this, but I inadvertently painted the "G" on Lambeau's 50-yard line upside down once. The error was caught by one of our stadium chefs who was looking at the field from one of the luxury suites. I was very, very glad that someone noticed and brought it to our attention with plenty of time to correct the error. Ironically the upside down G looks like an "e" and we happened to be hosting the Philadelphia Eagles. Someone was looking out for me on that day.

DAVID M. PRESNELL, CSFM,
Gainesville (GA) Parks & Recreation

A good surface. You need healthy turfgrass that is mowed at a good height.

Be prepared. Always check weather, have all supplies on hand, mix paint properly and paint as close to the event as possible.

Be precise. ALWAYS pull strings/sled & use stencil. Always measure everything and check it twice. Straight lines and crisp logos make all the difference.

I have seen and been a part of all kinds of small mishaps. Everything from spilling paint, string getting pulled on wrong side and putting arrows on the wrong side of numbers. The biggest one was when we were painting an end zone logo and someone was blowing clippings off with a tractor and blower. The guys painting went to refill the paint and before you knew it the tractor went thru the logo (not once but twice) and tracked red and white paint everywhere. Thank goodness it was water-based.

SHAUN ILTEN,
Home Depot Center (CA)

Make sure all equipment is running properly and have all the required tools needed for the job (tips, measuring tapes, nails/stakes, string, fuel, proper paint etc.)

Double check all your measurements—make sure all your points are accurate and making sure your field is squared.

Proper communication with your staff during the field painting work, which means being aware of each individual task is being accomplished properly.

The worst painting disaster I was involved would have to be when I was painting a standard football field for a high school game. I was painting yard lines when I reached my last three yard lines to go, when I noticed that one of my yard lines was severely angled. One of my co- workers had skipped a marker and went to the next one so one side was 5 yards and the other side was 10 yards! This could have been avoided with proper communication and double checking all my measurements making sure that every yard line that I paint is accurate.

KEVIN MALONE, CSFM,
Columbia University

Have enough prior notice from athletics to complete the task when weather and conditions are most favorable.

Ensure the sprayer is in tip top shape and working properly.

Using high quality paint.

I would say the worst disaster would be just before my taking this position, the lacrosse lines that are supposed to be painted with removable paint were painted with a permanent product! It took many gallons of Goof Off, paint remover, you name it and many, many hours of scrubbing to finally remove the paint. Columbia only wants football lines on the main fields during the game season. Hopefully that will never happen again! ■

Defending your "turf"

AN OLD JOKE made its way through e-mail a few years back. It was something like, "You know it's a bad day when you wake up in the morning, and Mike Wallace and a "60 Minutes" crew are perched on your front porch."

Well ol' Mike has retired and, for the most part, you'll never have to worry about someone else from "60 Minutes" heading to your 3rd base coach's box and asking what caused that giant mushroom cloud. But the recent explosion of new media outlets combined with the more traditional media outlets has led to a whole new army of reporters who just might be interested in how you handle (or don't handle) your business. That growth of media outlets has re-emphasized for every potential newsmaker, the importance of knowing how to deal with the media, or as you should think of it, defending your "turf."

Back when you were much younger (probably only five or 10 years ago), you could assess potential media coverage by considering the local newspaper, the local talk radio station and the local TV news outlet. You knew the reporters by name and by sight, and they knew you. You shopped at the same stores, ate at the same restaurants and told similar stories about how high your golf handicap should be. Ahhhh, life was so simple then.

Then along came the internet and your world turned upside down. You quickly moved into the age of instant news and the self-appointed, citizen journalist. Thoughtful, edited journalism gave way to "seat-of-the-pants" journalism. Fact-based reporting gave way to opinion and commentary. You have now entered a world of bloggers, twitterers and whole bunch of 'ers that haven't even been invented yet. Better get ready.

The first step in dealing with this hyper-speed news media cycle is to do what you should have been doing all along—play offense. Most newsmakers love to contact the media when they bring "good news." Your department received an award from an environmental organization, check. Number of turf-related injuries reduced in the past 12 months, check. You come up with an innovative way of watering the playing fields, check. Those are all valid stories, and you should contact the local media to get the word out.

But what happens when the news is not so good or just downright bad? Many organizations follow a, "if we just don't feed it, maybe it will go away" philosophy. Toyota and BP pretty much took that approach in recent months. Now that worked well, didn't it?

Had those organizations taken more early ownership of the story, each would have greatly reduced the self-inflicted public relations damage. Yes, the news would have been truly negative in the early days, but maybe, just maybe, if they had a chance to advance their version of what happened, perhaps the media might have seen another side and soft-pedaled some of the criticism. You could argue that would be a losing proposition. And the "just ignore it" plan was not?

In all likelihood you will never face that kind of major crisis. But one way to keep a minor crisis from becoming a major one is to initiate the coverage. Let's look at some examples that you could encounter: injuries grow as poor lighting hampers your key fields; staph infections develop in players using the synthetic turf fields; or bleachers fail during kids' soccer game

If the media get a tip on what happened in any of those cases, you will be playing defense, answering the "How could you ever let that happen?" question. You know what it's like when a parent or coach decides to escalate something that you think is rather insignificant. Things can get out of hand in a hurry.

Now let's take a look at how to initiate coverage and frame each of those stories in a more positive way.

• The lighting on River Bend Field is more than 30 years old. We haven't been able to find parts to repair some of the broken units. As a result the illumination is about half of what it should be. That has led to a number of recent injuries. We need new lights, but that is going to cost more than $200,000. This is a bad time to be asking the city for more money. We may have to stop using that field.

• A local pediatrician recently contacted us and said he had been treating a number of kids with staph infection. He had discovered that all of them were soccer players who play their games on the synthetic surface at Partridge Park. Once he called that to our attention we were able to use a non-toxic chemical sweeper to rid those fields of potential problems. The surface is clean and ready for its heavy fall use.

• Fortunately no one was hurt seriously, but three parents had to seek medical attention when the front row of wooden bleachers snapped during a girls' softball game. That incident has prompted us to begin inspecting every row of every set of bleachers we have at our 73 facilities. We will have the full inspection completed by the end of the week.

The process follows a very simple formula. Admit the wrongdoing then explain how you will keep it from happening again. If you admit to the problem, it's very hard for the reporter to keep beating you up over it. Deny the problem, and the reporter will go after you like crabgrass on zoysiagrass.

This all starts from a premise that if you are a part of a story that has legitimate public interest, you have a responsibility to be accessible to the media. This is especially true if you work for a taxpayer-supported, government body like many of you do.

While the process begins with initiating the coverage, your job is far from finished. Now you must handle the interview. Fol-

low the ADSR approach in executing the rest of the process. The first step is Anticipate. You've been to enough movies and seen enough TV cop shows to have a good idea of what that reporter will be asking you. Run through the journalist's checklist of the Five W's and the H. You can easily answer the "who, what, when and where" questions. They are very fact-oriented and not subject to much interpretation. Develop a handout of facts about the story to give to the reporter. That will save time as well as improve the reporter's accuracy. Consider the visual possibilities for this particular story. Take the reporter to the "where." You will get more coverage and decrease the possibility of a misinterpretation.

The "why and how" questions will be much more subjective and the likely focus of an interview. To handle the why and how questions, you must move to the Develop an Agenda stage. Decide what you are going to say before the start of the interview. This is the message you want to get across. It should address the reporter's question but be totally based on what is best for you and your organization. Use it in a pre-interview as well as the one where the camera is rolling or the reporter is taking notes. Never say "No comment." That never looks or sounds good. If you can't answer give a substantive reason such as "This is currently going through the courts, and I wouldn't want to jeopardize that process," or "We don't have the answer to that right now, but we should know more in the next 48 hours." Never ask to go "off the record." Every reporter and source seems to have a different idea of what that means. If you must say something but don't want your name associated with it, be very clear when talking to the reporter. This is no time for subtlety.

The execution of the agenda comes next so remember to Speak in Bites. The world of TV is built on 10 to 15 second sound bites. Learn to speak that language and use it for radio, newspapers and online interviews as well as TV. Here's why. A 15 second bite will undoubtedly be narrowly focused (as in, focused on your agenda). You won't have time to move off the subject. The 15 second bite also greatly reduces your chance of being misquoted. Give a 60 second answer and expect the reporter to get down every word—not a chance. Use a personal experience or anecdote to get your point across. Don't be afraid to express your feelings and show some emotion. Just don't allow yourself to move into the melodramatic. Think 15 seconds as your time limit for every question the reporter asks. Keep the focus on your agenda.

The final stage is Repetition. Know how to get your agenda across. Keep repeating it. Address the reporter's question briefly, and then bring it back to your agenda.

If you follow those steps, you will increase your confidence in handling any kind of a media situation. ■

Dr. Max Utsler teaches journalism at the University of Kansas. He is a former TV journalist and has trained business executives in how to deal with the media for the past 25 years.

Will outsourcing become the new normal?

Editor's note: *Hal Phillips is a writer for Mandarin Media, a worldwide public relations firm, here representing Lohmann Sports Fields.*

WHEN LEO PECHETTE arrived at Lakes Community High School in the exurbs northwest of Chicago, he thought he'd stepped into a grounds manager's dream. It was the fall of 2003, and this brand new high school had just seeded its brand-spanking-new football field.

Nearly every grounds manager looks upon an inherited athletic field with some measure of trepidation: How old is the irrigation system really, and how sophisticated were the original construction techniques? How often has the facility been aerated, if at all? Where exactly are the drainage trouble spots, and how does the field generally bounce back from heavy rains, especially between the hash marks?

Pechette had plenty of worries at the start in ramping up all the athletic facilities serving a brand new high school. But the new football field shouldn't have been among them.

Indeed, because Lakes Community High was a completely new school, and didn't even achieve full occupancy until the middle of 2004, the football field accommodated no play whatsoever until the 2005 season. That's an initial fall grow-in period, plus some 16 months of unfettered grow-in/root growth before a game was ever played.

You can see where this is going.

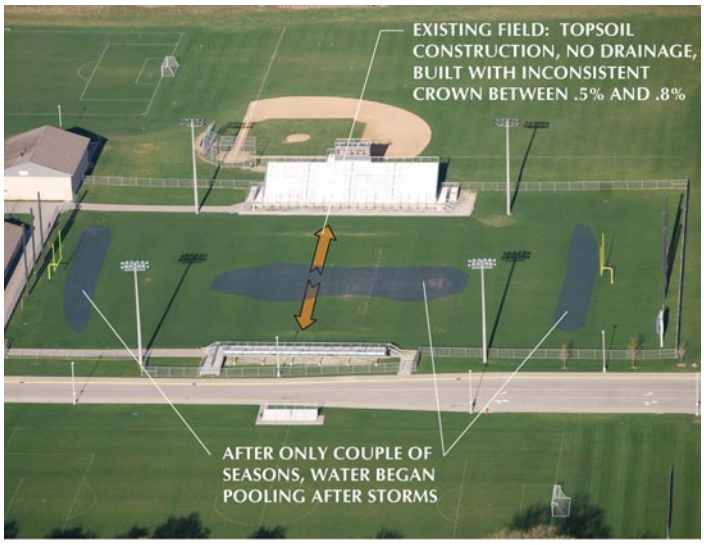
"We didn't play on the field until the fall of 2005," says Pechette, looking back, "and that was a dry fall. It looked great. But the next year we had wet summer and that continued into the early fall of 2006. It didn't take long before we were clued in to just how bad the drainage was.

"It just wasn't built as it was designed, we learned. The contractor had short-cutted the sand depth, for example. The way they graded the field, it settled poorly after a series of rainfalls. A lot of shortcuts were taken which, as far as I'm concerned, means the job wasn't supervised properly. The contractor did a lot of road construction. Enough said on that."

You can see where this is going.

Pechette and Lakes Community High School were obliged to rebuild after just four seasons of play. The $150,000 reconstruction was handled by Lohmann Sports Fields (LSF) out of Marengo, IL. Based on plans by the Vernon Hills, IL-based engineering firm Gewalt-Hamilton, Lohmann re-crowned the field by installing a tapered sand cap, while adding soil amendments to achieve the proper, drainage-enabling soil profile and a better growing medium. The perimeter of the field was aggressively aerated and top-dressed with the same sand mix, and a 6-inch Multi-Flow drainage system was installed beneath the entire field before

A lot of shortcuts were taken which, as far as I'm concerned, means the job wasn't supervised properly.



final grading and re-sodding.

"We went with Lohmann's group because they do this for a living," says Pechette, noting that LSF boasts a client list that ranges from local high schools like his, to the Notre Dame Football Stadium (re-surfaced in 2008), to the creation of minor league baseball diamonds from Grand Rapids, MI to Peoria, IL.

"These guys are experts at the big work, but they pay attention to small details. There were no shortcuts; everything was done according to the engineering plans from Gewalt-Hamilton. Everything was so transparent, and I especially appreciated their paying attention to work-limit areas and not damaging any more than need be. Everything was cleaned up so well when they were done."

You can see where this is going—actually, maybe you don't. If that were the end of the story, it would be a simple (if not terribly uncommon) matter of an experienced sports field contractor cleaning up the mess left behind by a less experienced contractor.

But Lohmann Sports Fields is forging a relationship with Lakes Community HS that may be unique to sports field management at the scholastic level because it will continue beyond the initial project.

LSF, along with Gewalt-Hamilton and other consultants are now formulating an ongoing maintenance schedule at Lakes Community that allows Pechette and his crews to tackle items like aeration within the confines of a normal budget cycle.

"This isn't the sort of thing that the big contractors normally get involved with," said Jim Lohmann, senior project manager at LSF. "But we've spent a big chunk of the last 2 years talking to park district executives, high school athletic directors and recreation directors from across the Midwest. The market is changing. A lot of these guys are dealing with long-term budget reductions, meaning they are looking for new ways to more efficiently (and effectively) care for their sports fields.

"That sounds very general but it's really quite specific. These school and park districts all have the same maintenance needs. We've identified 10 of the most common needs and formulated individual programs to address those needs, each for less than $10,000. This dollar figure is critical. Not all school and park districts operate identically, but the $10,000 price tag generally falls below the traditional threshold cost for projects that require a bid process.

"In other words, anything more expensive may require a bid, an RFP or months of planning, and a series of approvals from higher up in the bureaucracy."

Tom Rychlik, a civil engineer with Gewalt-Hamilton, says that none of these advances in servicing park and school districts would be possible without an understanding of the public sector hierarchies and budgeting mechanisms.

"At most public agencies, budgets are not set up for capital improvements," Rychlik says. "You need to add maintenance costs annually to properly care for a newly built or renovated field, to protect your investment. Park districts that have an agronomist on staff already know this, but if you do not—or you are a school district, which rarely have an agronomist on staff—then this sort of strategic outsourcing makes a lot of sense. It's easier to budget and provides access to this expertise."

At Lakes Community H.S., LSF would handle aeration on this out-sourced basis, if you will. As Lohmann noted, it's a new high school and doesn't have all the equipment on hand to efficiently prepare its fields, especially at the start and end of the season. The same holds true for established schools that are too small to invest in such expensive equipment.

"That's where we see an opportunity to help," says Lohmann. "We have the equipment, expertise and manpower to knock these jobs out quickly, on short notice. And the large volume of work that we do allows us to price the work just as efficiently, especially when schools in the same district contract together.

"Here's another example of how this sort of out-sourced, ongoing maintenance can work: laser-grading," Lohmann continues. "This is a big expense for park districts and schools. Every year when they're getting baseball and softball fields ready for the spring season, they fill depressions and grade things off. Over time, the infield gets built up and is actually higher than the rest of the field, or the mix gets pushed to the perimeter leading to lip and drainage problems and a potential rebuild of that field, at some point. That's expensive.

"We can laser grade quickly and easily each spring and save municipal clients the expense of adding materials year after year. Trust me: laser grading is a lot cheaper than buying a load of ball mix and laying it on there every spring, especially when annually adding mix ultimately leads to other problems that can easily be avoided."

Rychlik noted that Gewalt-Hamilton are engineers, not agronomists nor soil scientists. Accordingly, they recommended to Pechette the services of Dave Marquardt at Dirt-n-Turf Consulting, Hinckley, IL which has developed its own ongoing relationship with Lakes Community HS.

"Dave takes soil samples and provides answers," Rychlik says. "At Lakes Community, he found the water they use to irrigate had unsuitably high salt content. That means Leo's annual plan should call for the laying down of gypsum to counteract the salinity.

"During the construction process, we use consultants like Dirt & Turf to determine what sort of fertilization program to use going forward, but there is no reason you cannot make those soil findings and judgments regarding an existing facility… I like to include $2500 for Dave to come out to a facility twice a year to report on soil strata, both chemistry and physical analysis. Again, no need for a bid and those reports tie in directly to the turf enhancement recommendations. I would say that if you have a good comprehensive maintenance plan that includes fertilization and overseeding, then the cost additions beyond Dave's time to test and report are marginal, i.e. $1,000 a year. You're just dialing in the specific rates that you can have confidence are right."

Pechette has a newly renovated football field, but he's also committed to the aeration regimen he's undertaken with LSF. "We've already seen a reduction in the amount of turf we've had to put down [in repairs]. But the biggest thing is, the field today is a safe field, for the athletes. It used to be a quagmire with 3-4 inch ruts from the cleats. Now it gets wet, but never muddy."

LSF calls its specific ongoing maintenance program "10 under 10", because it details 10 vital projects that cities, park districts and school systems can undertake to add value and performance to their sports field inventory. Most important, each project can be executed for "under" $10,000.

"Don't get me wrong: We have no problem doing rebuilds like the one we did at Lakes Community High School, but we're honestly more interested in helping schools and park districts avoid that sort of major expense," Lohmann said. "There are several things going on here. There are some park and school districts that simply don't have the equipment or expertise to aerate or laser grade or install quick coupler valves on an irrigation system.

"But there's another group of districts that might have the expertise but don't have the budgets, or the political climate, that allow this sort of work to get approved. The 10 Under 10 program was designed to get this important work done economically." ■