

High school instructor leads another winning team

MARC MORAN, THE HORTICULTURE/TURFGRASS INSTRUCTOR for Atlee High School in Mechanicsville, VA led his student staff to an STMA Field of the Year Award for the second consecutive year, this time for

Schools/Parks Soccer Field of the Year. His student crew also was honored with the 2009 Softball award for Schools/Parks.

Moran began working on the school's practice field in 2000 as part of a landscape class project, which led to the athletic administration and booster club asking him to take over managing



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all the sports fields the following year. In 2002 Moran worked with other hort instructors in Hanover County to develop a county-based turf science curriculum, which was adopted by the Virginia Department of Education as a state-based curriculum.

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SPORTSTURF: Has anything changed for your program in light of your winning a Field of the Year Award last year?

MORAN: As a program we have always prided ourselves on trying to maintain expectations that far exceed that of administration, coaches, and athletes. I think the degree of credibility the students and the program have gained has been most noticeable. My students often are the ones who answer the questions that we get from members of the community, coaches, and student body. Most of the students in the program have a strong understanding of the little details that have allowed our fields to perform at a Field of the Year level.

When you hear them answer questions from an administrator, instruct a coach on proper traffic rotation, or pick up a bit of trash that the typical adult would pass by, you get a real sense that you have done things the right way. Many positive e-mails and phone calls from coaches, parents, and even athletic directors from other schools confirm that. Our Superintendent, School Board, Principal, and Athletic Director have all expressed their appreciation to the students and they respect the work that they do and encourage them to keep building from each success.

Our goal is to communicate that the business of Sports Turf Management is a very complex and complicated industry that requires untold hours to get the job done properly. My students are quick to point out to those who think it is as easy as jumping on a mower and cutting grass that it is so much more than that. I have even heard a young man tell another student "If your dad thinks it is that easy, tell him to come by class tomorrow and push the paint machine and paint a straight line." His dad has never shown up.

ST: Have any of your former students gone into turf management careers (yet)?

MORAN: I have had the good fortune to work with an incredible group of young men and women since we started our program in 2001. Since then I have had several students who have worked or studied in the turf and landscape industry. I currently have four graduates pursuing either a 2 or 4-year degree in the turf/landscape industry. I have a graduate who is now a college baseball coach and early in his collegiate coaching career he was tasked with managing the baseball complex as well as other sports turf areas on his campus. He told me that each day he had to call on things he did in high school and that those things he learned allowed him to be successful even though it was not part of his overall career goal.



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I currently have four students who are seeking to study turf science in college and one is in his second season with our Double-A baseball team as the assistant grounds keeper. My goal is to teach each student how to work as a team to accomplish a common goal.



I also try to encourage those students who participate in the sports that use our fields to take a stronger role in that fields success. They seem to pay extra attention to the little things that affect their sports.

That lesson would apply to just about any career they may choose to explore in their future. I also hope they gain an appreciation and understanding of what it takes to manage safe and playable athletic fields.

ST: What's your most valued piece of equipment and why?

MORAN: I would have to say that we have three pieces of equipment that would qualify as our most valued piece of equipment.

Digital camera. It allows us to keep a visual record of our challenges and successes. It typically stays in the utility vehicle so we can take pictures of the fields and their conditions. Every field we manage provides us with teachable moments, and the camera is a great tool for recording those moments and discussing them in class. When we have success, the camera allows us to share that success

with coaches, administrators, and members of the community.

Airless line painter: In 2003 we purchased an airless paint machine based on suggestions from STMA members who work in the NFL and NCAA. Their testimonials as to the quality of the results were exactly what we discovered after purchasing the machine. We were able to nearly eliminate our dependence on aerosol cans for marking practice fields and other areas. We also were able to reduce our paint budget significantly because the new machine allowed us to cover twice the distance with a bucket of paint compared to the machine we were previously using. The machine allows us to spray using two hand guns, and that has allowed us to expand our ability to spray graphics and logos on our field. Our previous system was severely limited and the airless sprayer provided us the opportunity to do things that most high schools in our area cannot.

Tractors with front end loaders. We are fortunate to have two tractors equipped with front end loaders. We use those machines to tow equipment, spread seed and fertilizer, mow, aerate and many other tasks. The tractors alone are incredibly useful, but once we purchased loaders for each of the machines our tractors allowed us to carry out tasks that were nearly impossible before. Moving material, loading topdressing, rough grading, and other tasks are made possible.

ST: Are you yet involved in "sustainable" management practices? If so, what are you doing?

MORAN: Over the past several years we have explored more and more ways that we can reduce the amount of fertilizers we apply. Through more thorough soil testing, we have been able to reduce the amount phosphorus we have needed to apply. We have



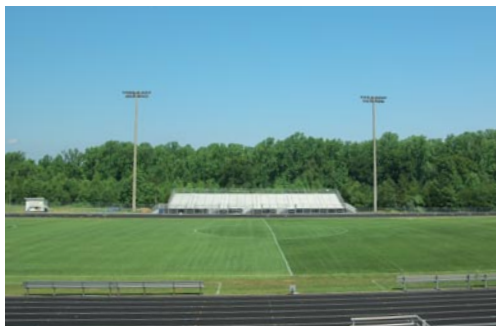
begun a more intensive approach to liming to help our soils better manage nutrients, thus making them more available to the plant. The practices have allowed us to streamline the amount of phosphates we apply.

We are seeing a bigger bang for our buck when it comes to the overall plant response since our soils have been improved. Being in the Chesapeake Bay watershed, there is a larger focus on municipalities to reduce their potential runoff and leaching that could impact the Bay. We have tried to be proactive by not exceeding the state environmental guidelines for nitrogen applications and on some fields operating well below the suggested limits. By working to balance our soils, we have not seen a drop off in the performance of the fields. We have also tried to build in some slow release fertilizers to minimize potential leaching of nutrients.

Water conservation is another concern on the forefront, and we are planning to make irrigation upgrades in the future that will allow us to fine tune our irrigation strategy.

ST: How do you motivate students to work on fields for no pay?

MORAN: Well I must say if I could pay my students I would.



They truly work hard and know how to get the job done. We have never been in a situation where the job did not get done before the end of the school day. I think the students in class have a tremendous sense of pride when it comes to producing a great product. It never fails that they run to the top of the bleachers at the end of the period to check out how the fields look.

I think a lot of students take the class because they know they get to work on the fields, but it does not truly click for them until they realize how hard the tasks truly are and then to they see the end result and realize their efforts truly make an impact.

I also try to encourage those students who participate in the sports that use our fields, to take a stronger role in that fields success. They seem to pay extra attention to the little things that affect their sports.

In an effort to reward them for their work, our athletic director provides passes for each member of the class to all home games. He also provides funding so I can purchase "Field Staff" shirts each of the students.

I try to express my appreciation for their hard work regularly. They need to know that they are doing good work and that those efforts are appreciated. ■



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