

# F.O.Y.

Field of the Year



From left: Brian Gaa, James Pilgrim, John Watt, Russell Gentry.

## *Award winner* among 30 fields spread over 90 square miles

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**JOHN WATT, CSFM**, athletic field manager for North Kansas City Schools, and his crew, Brian Gaa, James Pilgrim, and Russell Gentry, won the 2010 Sports Turf Managers Association Schools/Parks Softball Field of the Year.

These four men are responsible for maintaining 30 fields spread over 90 square miles; the winning field is home to four separate high school softball teams.

Here are some of John Watt's comments from his award entry:  
 "I started out the year like every other, deep into planning trying to be proactive. Then the news came about budget cuts. Next came talk about lay-offs, contracting out services, and decrease in wages. How do you get the crew motivated for the upcoming seasons of play that we were about to endure, ran through my mind. [But] with our dedication that question quickly faded as the snow melted and warmer temperatures arrived.

"The District Activities Complex (DAC) Softball field is played on in the fall by four high school girls' softball teams. It lies on the property of one high school, so they have taken ownership of it where the team conducts camps, practices and games. When fall practice begins in August till the end of the season in October, the field is used continuously by the teams.

"This fall was the third season that the field has been in play. After reviews with coaches and players the number one complaint of the field is how hard the red shell infield becomes. Having a crew of three and taking care of 30 athletic fields over a 90 square mile area, hand watering the infield on a daily basis is not an option. To try and eliminate the problem of "bad hops" and hard pan, we started incorporating calcined clay into the top 2 inches of red shell. In theory it would help reduce the compaction and retain moisture, as it does when amended into turf.

The addition worked on firmness, but it brought up a new problem. There was foreign debris and large limestone that was

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mixed into the red shell from installation. This was solved by doing a "rock party cleanup," with some assistance by players during practice.

"Spending the extra money on the infield caused a short fall in the budget, meaning less to spend on the turf. The field still received 3-4 lbs. of nitrogen and overseeding, but when the turf was invaded by dollar spot, there were no dollars for treatment. Instead some cultural maintenance was performed. Half rate of nitrogen was used in a month cycle and we reduced mowing and leaf wetness. Once the temperatures cooled down, solid tine aeration at four inch depth was completed. Before no time, there was a 98% turf recovery.

"Through a limited budget and some unpredictable weather, my main goal of keeping a safe, playable field was met. This was accomplished due to creative practices and the hard work that was put forth by the crew and coaches."



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## Softball field maintenance, North Kansas City Schools

### MARCH

- Start mowing once a week
- Charge irrigation/make repairs if needed

### APRIL

- 32-0-8 at 1 lb. of N
- Mow weekly
- Spot spray any weeds
- Irrigate as needed
- Mow weekly

### MAY

- Dress up warning track
- Mow weekly
- Irrigate as needed
- Core aerate

### JUNE

- 0-0-7 with .067% Acelepryn
- Mow weekly
- Irrigate regularly

### JULY

- 22-0-3 50% at 1/2 rate of N
- Mow weekly
- Irrigate regularly

### AUGUST

- Mow weekly
- Irrigate regularly

### SEPTEMBER

- 22-0-3 50% at 1/2 rate of N
- Drill 9 lbs./1000 blue/fescue seed mixture
- Solid tine aerate
- Launch application

### OCTOBER

- Winterize irrigation
- Mow weekly
- 32-3-8 at 1 lb. of N

### NOVEMBER

- Put field to bed



>> **FIELD** is ready for play.

**SportsTurf:** What changes have you made to your maintenance plan for 2011, if any?

**Watt:** During the “off-season” from field usage, we have implemented a consistent dragging program of the field to try and keep the material in the current location. The field has great surface drainage to the outfield corners, but it causes the infield material to migrate off. A consistent dragging of the infield also helps control weed infestation. As for the turf areas, aeration has been increased two extras times a year to help improve water penetration into the soil.

**ST:** What’s the best piece of turf management advice you have ever received?

**Watt:** This is a great question and through my years of being an athlete, going to school, and work experiences I still think about it. Don’t try to figure out what the head coach is thinking, go out and do your job, even you can impress yourself. On days when you come into work and see what happened to the field from the night before, don’t get discouraged, it is your time to shine. Always keep challenging yourself.

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**ST:** How do you balance your work and personal time?

**Watt:** The crew is what makes things happen. I know that the work that is scheduled will be completed and that the athletes will be provided with a safe field to show their skills on. We are a small crew but we get things done. Oh, and a cell phone!

**ST:** How have you been dealing with reduced budget if indeed that is the case?

**Watt:** The public education system has seen its fair share of budget cuts. As a manager, I stress the importance of taking care of the equipment through regular maintenance and proper operating practices. We need to get many more seasons out of the equipment. There also have been some adjustments on many of the fields with only treating areas that really need it. I think of Dr. Minner's statement about "a field within a field."

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

**Watt:** Having 25 native soil fields, which are majority clay, the aerator is a great asset. The district has a pull-behind core roller aerator that works great. It allows us to travel around the district in a timely fashion and does the job. During the seasons of play, an Aer-Way with shatter tines is used to help break compaction.

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

**Watt:** Working around children of various age groups, we have to be cautious of the work and products we use. For most of us, it has become second nature through common practices of proper irrigation, selection of products according to soil analysis, and timing of applications. Majority of the products I use are 30-50% slow-release and have had great success. ■

### Equipment used at District Activities Complex Softball Field

B&B 200-gallon sprayer  
RBG-1012-C blade grinder  
Graco 3900 Line Lazer IV  
Graco Field Lazer  
John Deere 1200A Infield Pro  
John Deere 4320 Tractor  
Aercore 1500  
John Deere 797  
John Deere backpack blower  
John Deere Pro Gator  
John Deere Turf TX  
Kubota M4900 tractor  
Lesco HPS spreader  
Redexim overseeder  
Quickpass topdresser  
Schaben sprayer  
Turfco Edge-R-Rite II  
Turfco Sod cutter  
Vicon  
Woods box blade

# STMA Field of the Year Awards

The 2011 STMA Field of the Year Awards Application is available online at <http://www.stma.org/professionalism/fieldyr/>

Read the instructions for submitting carefully, as the process is entirely electronic this year. While not a true "online process," applicants are required to fill out the forms and submit their materials (forms and photos) via email, the internet or a flash drive or CD. It is the intent of the Awards Committee that this process allow for remote judging of applications, provide a level playing field (pun not intended) for all applicants regardless of budget spent on "the presentation" of the facts regarding the field, and really help the "story" of the field and crew shine through.

**The deadline to submit your application for 2011 STMA Field of the Year is Friday, October 15, 2011.**

STMA Field of the Year Awards may be presented in baseball, softball, football, soccer, or sporting grounds and all entry materials must be submitted in accordance with the procedures outlined for each award. All award recipients will be selected by the STMA Awards Committee made up of highly-regarded STMA professionals. Award winners will be notified in November via phone and email. Those not selected will be notified via email in November as well.

If you have any questions about the program, please call STMA Headquarters at 800-323-3875.

