

# F.O.Y.

Field of the Year



**Level of Submission:** Schools/Parks  
**Category of Submission:** Baseball  
**Head Sports Turf Manager:** Michael Brouillard  
**Title:** Grounds Manager  
**Education:** Masters Degree  
**Field of Study:** Horticulture Science/Business  
**Full Time Staff:** Jorge Morales/Crew Leader, George Baumgardt/Leisure Services Supervisor  
**Students/Interns, Part-Time and Seasonal Staff:** Salvador Gutierrez, Jose Torres, Isidro Gonzalez and Rigoberto Mendez

## Village Green Park, Northbrook, IL Park District

### SIMMONS FIELD

**Original construction date:** 1949

**Size:** 58,935 sq. ft.

**Other uses:** Winter Carnival, traveling Vietnam Memorial Wall, 2010 staff softball game, July 4th Police vs. Fire Dept. softball game and fall soccer

**Variety(s) of turfgrass(es):** Kentucky bluegrass and perennial ryegrass

**Overseed:** Overseed infield and outfield in the late summer to early fall (August 15) at a rate of 2-3 lbs./1,000 sq. ft. of Athletic seed mix 60/40. 20% Rugby II Kentucky Bluegrass(KBG), 20% Geronimo KBG, 20% Appalachian KBG, 20% Patriot 4 Perennial Ryegrass and 20% Keystone 2 Perennial Ryegrass. Application method for the infields includes core aerating followed by broadcasting seed with a rotary EarthWay spreader, setting #14. The outfield is aerated and seeded with 153 lbs. of grass seed mix.

**Mix composition:** 37% Sand 63% other

**Other mix:** 32% Silt, 31% Clay

**Drainage:** No system

**Recent renovations:** Renovated in past 2 years. Inspected and replaced base pegs, pitching rubber, home plate, pitching mound repair, added clay/soil conditioner, added crushed limestone screenings to coaches boxes, players benches and bleachers, aerated, overseeded, sodded worn areas, fertilized, rolled up foul ball nets, removed bad soil, filled tire ruts, replaced batting circles, repaired fences, and edged the clay infield, coaches boxes and warning track.

Why was the field renovated?

The field is renovated each fall after athletic activities but needed costly repairs in 2010 after two diesel spills from trucks bringing heavy rides onto the field for Northbrook Days, an annual 5-day community festival. In 2011, heavy rains and flooding occurred at the end of the festival, and tow trucks and an end loader were needed to remove the rides that were stuck on the field. The signature field is out of commission until the grass is established, next spring.

**Challenges:** A tremendous amount of

work is needed to maintain the Village Green ball field, the home of Northbrook Baseball (Little League) since the 1950s. The season never really ends for the crew, who monitor the field monthly, maintaining and replacing equipment as needed. Plans are set and training occurs, preparing for another year of baseball, softball and special events.

The challenges of getting the field ready are compounded by its other uses, including Northbrook Days. The Northbrook Civic Foundation holds that fundraising event in the park every summer, with carnival rides on the ball field. The 87th annual event attracted about 55-thousand people, and heavy rains soaked the field in 2011. The combination of foot traffic, weight of the rides and saturated soil caused major damage to the field. Tow trucks and a tractor had to drag the rides from the field, leaving tire ruts and mud everywhere and little turfgrass remaining.

The challenge to the crew was to continue its regular schedule, adding the required field restoration. The crew had to sod 47% of the

field that was torn up, using 2,650 rolls of sod and 107 cubic yards of soil to fill the tire ruts. For aesthetic reasons, the field had to be finished before the next park event, five weeks later.

Another challenge came from Northbrook Days in 2010, when there were two diesel spills on the field. The cleanup cost \$45,080 plus another \$2,210 in restoration costs for the field. About 30% of the annual materials budget was spent renovating the field, in addition to the cost of the cleanup. As a precaution, the grounds crew prepared a spill kit to have on-site this year.

To protect the turfgrass, the Park District bought 80 turf mats for \$16,000 and borrowed another 75 this year. Because of the rains, the mats became covered in mud and did little, if anything, to protect the turfgrass. Removing the mats was difficult, since the mud added to their weight of 84 pounds. They had to be pried from the ground and pressure washed.

Another challenge this year was removing as much of the water as possible to dry the field before the repair work could begin. The signature field is out of commission until the turfgrass is reestablished, forcing fall soccer games to be played on other fields, for the second year in a row.

**SportsTurf:** What channels of communication do you use to reach coaches, administrators and users of your facility? Any tips on communicating well?

**Brouillard:** The Northbrook Park District has a well thought-out communication plan that consists of printed material, email, text messages, phone calls and website updates. One athletic supervisor schedules and coordinates use of the ball fields and serves as the contact for customers, coaches, maintenance crews and staff.

Each season, the Park District's Recreation Guide and website provide initial information about scheduled field use. On a daily basis, I communicate field conditions to the athletic supervisor by phone or email, by 7am on weekends and 2pm on weekdays. We record field conditions and cancellations on a weather hotline that customers can call, we update game schedules on our website, we send text messages to reach coaches, and we notify parents or players by email.

Throughout the year, the Parks and Leisure Services Departments meet bi-weekly to share information and determine how to best serve our customers' needs. I also meet with the athletic supervisor before a tournament to discuss preparation schedules and special requests.

After leagues and recreation programs end, the Park District sends surveys to participants to capture feedback as part of our commitment to providing outstanding programs and services. To promote environmental stewardship and reduce the use of paper, we conduct our surveys online. The District also conducts in-house surveys to measure internal customer satisfaction; the results show how well each department is doing and which areas need improvement.

Feedback and follow-up are essential in helping to improve our service delivery. Timely communication is critical for disseminating information, ensuring accuracy, providing customer service and building relationships.

**SportsTurf:** What are your specific job responsibilities? What do you find most enjoyable? What task is your least favorite and why?

**Brouillard:** My job consists of directing the day-to-day grounds operations with about 16-20 part-time and seasonal employees. My responsibilities include the management of all District grounds; maintenance of athletic fields, trees, prairie and outdoor ice rinks; seasonal flower and holiday light displays; special event setup (tents, picnic tables and trash



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# Monthly maintenance and fertility programs

## JANUARY

The Crew Leader completes the routine Monthly Athletic Field inspection and checks the nets for any loads of snow or ice.

## FEBRUARY

The Crew Leader completes the routine Monthly Athletic Field inspection and checks the nets for any loads of snow or ice. **EQUIPMENT:** Before the season starts, the mechanics begin going through the equipment to get it ready.

## MARCH

Routine Monthly Athletic Field inspection and inspection of bleachers. **SPRING FIELD SETUP:** On March 30, the athletic crew completes the spring setup on the baseball field. The setup consists of setting out the pitching nets, raising the foul ball nets, rolling the field, painting the foul ball lines, cleaning the dugouts, and putting out the trash and recycling cans.

## APRIL

Routine Monthly Athletic Field inspection. **CORE AERATION:** Due to the amount of traffic on the soil and the texture of our soil, the field will be aerated 3 times per year - in April, August (after Northbrook Days) and October. **MOWING:** Start mowing for 28 weeks, twice per week as needed. **SOIL TEST:** Test soil before fertilizing.

The following is a list of items to complete during each field prep for a game: Water the in-

field using a 1" garden hose to moisten the clay, fill the holes, drag the clay infield and the warning track, expose the correct hollywoods, rake edges, chalk lines, paint lines once per week in the turfgrass, and pick up trash. **MATERIALS USED:** 15 bags of calcined clay; 7 bags of chalk are used to mark the foul ball lines on the infield.

## MAY

Monthly athletic field inspection continues. **FERTILIZATION:** The fertilization of the athletic field is divided into four applications of 25-0-5 PCSCU turf fertilizer. The first application of 1 lb. Nitrogen will be in May 2011, followed by 1 lb. N in Aug 2011 (after Northbrook Days), 1 lb. N in September 2011 and 1 lb. N in November 2011. **HERBICIDES:** A postemergent broadleaf systemic herbicide will be spot treated on the turfgrass to control identified weeds listed on the label at the indicated application rate. A minimum of two applications will be applied, the first in early May, followed by another application in September. Apply non-selective herbicide in other areas. **IRRIGATION START UP:** Monthly adjustments throughout the year. Prep for scheduled games.

**MATERIALS:** 204 lbs of fertilizer used, Chalk 15 bags, Paint 4 buckets, Calcined clay 15 bags

## JUNE

Monthly athletic field inspection continues. **IRRIGATION:** Monthly adjustment and inspec-

tion. Prep for scheduled games. **MATERIALS:** Chalk 14 bags, Paint 4 buckets, Calcined clay 10 bags

## JULY

Monthly athletic field inspection continues. **IRRIGATION:** Monthly adjustment and inspection.

Prep for scheduled games. **MATERIALS:** Chalk 12 bags, Paint 4 buckets, Calcined clay 5 bags

## AUGUST

Monthly athletic field inspection continues. **IRRIGATION:** Monthly adjustment and inspection. **FERTILIZATION:** The fertilization of the athletic field is divided into four applications of 25-0-5 PCSCU turf fertilizer. The first application of 1 lb. Nitrogen will be in May 2011, followed by 1 lb. N in Aug 2011 (after Northbrook Days), 1 lb. N in September 2011 and 1 lb. N in November 2011. The fertilizer will be applied with a rotary EarthWay broadcast spreader, setting #16 or as calibrated. **OVERSEEDING:** Overseed the lawn at 2-3 lbs KBG/1,000 sq. ft. **MATERIALS:** 204 lbs of fertilizer used, Calcined clay 5 bags, 153 lbs. grass seed / 60% KBG & 40% perennial ryegrass, & 107 cu yds soil

## SEPTEMBER

Monthly athletic field inspection continued. Also, inspect fencing for budgeting for repairs next year. **IRRIGATION:** Monthly adjustment and inspection. **FERTILIZATION:** The fertilization of the athletic field is broken out into four applications of 25-0-5 PCSCU turf fertilizer. The first application of 1 lb. Nitrogen will be in May 2011, followed by 1 lb. N in Aug 2011 (after Northbrook Days), 1 lb. N in September 2011 and 1 lb. N in November 2011. The fertilizer will be applied using a rotary EarthWay broadcast spreader, setting #16 or as calibrated. **HERBICIDES:** A postemergent broadleaf systemic herbicide will be spot treated on the turfgrass to control identified weeds listed on the label at the indicated application rate of 3 pints per acre. A minimum of two applications will be applied, the first in early May followed by another application in September. Apply non-selective herbicide. **MATERIALS:** 204 lbs of fertilizer used.

## OCTOBER

Monthly athletic field inspection continues. **FALL FIELD RENOVATION:** Repair worn areas, pick up lock boxes, pitching screens, trash cans and roll up the nets. **IRRIGATION SHUT DOWN:** Winterize the irrigation system to avoid freezing. **MATERIALS:** 44 Rolls of sod, 13 cu yds. of crushed limestone screenings, 40 bags of calcined clay

## NOVEMBER

Monthly athletic field inspection continues. **FERTILIZATION:** The fertilization of the athletic field is divided into four applications of 25-0-5 PCSCU turf fertilizer. The first application of 1 lb. Nitrogen is in May 2011, followed by 1 lb. N in August 2011 (after Northbrook Days), 1 lb. N in September 2011 and 1 lb. N in November 2011. The fertilizer will be applied with a rotary EarthWay broadcast spreader, setting #16, or as calibrated. 204 lbs fertilizer used

## DECEMBER

Monthly athletic field inspection continues

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cans); and litter and snow removal from facilities and parks. I also prepare budgets and oversee the Donor Tree and Bench Program.

Maintaining and improving our athletic fields has always been one of my favorite responsibilities. After completing the maintenance work, seeing the players walk onto the field brings a tremendous feeling of pride and accomplishment. I recognize the positive impact our organization has on people's lives and constantly strive to improve experiences for the people we serve.

My least favorite task is rolling up our foul ball nets at the end of the season and getting the nets back in place in the spring. Finding the best weather conditions to complete this task can be difficult if the ground is wet.

**SportsTurf:** How did you get started in turf management? What was your first sports turf-related job?

**Brouillard:** I worked in a greenhouse during high school and became inspired after seeing how excited customers were about plants. Until then, I had planned to become an electronic engineer, but I switched gears and de-

cidated to study horticulture and business. My first sports turf-related job was with the Waukegan Park District as the Athletic Field Crew Leader/Maintenance Worker III. I enjoyed working on the athletic fields and was fortunate to have Mike Trigg as a boss. He was a terrific leader and teacher; he created a great work environment, and his passion was contagious. I try to carry forward his leadership style as I relate to my field crew.

I continued my education, earning a Master of Science degree with an emphasis in Horticulture, and increased my knowledge in other jobs, most notably maintaining all the turfgrass at the highly regarded Chicago Botanic Garden as the IPM Turfgrass Specialist. Although there was no athletic field, there was a good turf program. I am thankful to be back doing something I really enjoy and have a passion for; nothing is better than seeing others enjoy the benefits of the hard work the staff has accomplished.

**SportsTurf:** What changes, if any, are you considering or implementing for the winning field in 2012?

**Brouillard:** One of our agency's goals is to

identify and streamline critical processes to improve services. To reduce the down time of the ball field after a special event, we are considering using 48-inch rolls of sod for restoration needed on the field. We also will examine ways to reduce the likelihood of damage from special events held on the field. We are holding meetings to recognize the impact of special events and discussing options to relocate the heavy carnival rides that have been placed on the field in previous years.

**SportsTurf:** How do you see your job changing in the future?

**Brouillard:** Through ongoing education, we will continue to improve and create value, create loyalty through customer satisfaction, develop partnerships to share resources, and implement sustainable practices. Our organization's Vision is "to be recognized as a national leader in delivering innovative park and recreation services based on responsiveness, trust and accountability to our community." We will continue to uphold our high standards and improve as needed to meet our customer's needs and exercise environmental, social and financial stewardship. ■



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