



From the Sidelines

Eric Schroder
Editorial Director
eschroder@specialtyim.com
717-805-4197

Texas A&M sells Kyle Field turf during renovation

When the Texas A&M Aggies moved from the Big 12 to the Southeastern Conference in 2012 the powers that be decided it was time to enlarge venerable Kyle Field to accommodate more than 102,000 12th men on football Saturdays. The renovation plans included dropping the playing surface 8 feet and pushing it south 16 feet to add more seats.

The two-phase, 3-year project wasn't about to force the Aggies to move their home games though, not with Heisman Trophy winner Johnny "Football" Manziel running the show at quarterback.

So within hours of the end of last season's final home game, the 57,000 square feet of bermudagrass turf was pulled out in a hurry; the contractors were waiting to get their cranes and other heavy machinery inside the walls of Kyle Field to get to work.

Back in the spring of 2013, Leo Goertz, A&M's athletic fields maintenance manager, and his colleagues had thought that Aggie fans might be interested in owning a piece of history, namely some sod from Kyle Field that they could re-plant in their yard or otherwise keep growing. After receiving the go-ahead from those same powers that be, Leo and his guys figured out how much sod they would have to sell to pay for its removal and associated costs. They knew there wasn't a guarantee that the field would be in terrific condition so they ended up deciding they could get 125 pallets of viable sod from the field.

Goertz & Company decided on 110 pallets at \$400 each plus 1,000 blocks at \$20 apiece, all the while wondering how much demand there really might be. Three weeks before the last home game the announcement of Kyle Field turf for sale was made on a Sunday night; Goertz said the word went viral via Facebook and Twitter. The next morning the sale began online at 8 am, and half the pallets were sold by noon, the rest by the end of the week.

Being a fan of "Pawn Stars," Goertz figured fans might need to prove the authenticity of their piece of Aggie history, so he signed 1,500 certificates to provide such proof. "Everyone around here was accusing me of 'selling grass' and competing with drug lords," he laughed.

The sod removal began at 8:30 pm after the final home contest and was completely stripped out by 9:30 am the next morning. Goertz said it was taken to a parking lot for a day and buyers were instructed to pick up their pallet(s) by noon the next day. "There was a long line that morning; we had to have the police here to keep it organized," Goertz said. "People showed up in 18-wheelers, pickup trucks and even one Escalade. We had two lines with forklifts to load everyone up with the 2,000-pound pallets.

"One guy in an 18-wheeler from Houston bought five pallets, and asked if we had any more. After everyone had picked up, we had some left over so he had the truck turn around and bought 10 more. He said he would have bought the whole field if given the chance," Goertz said. "He sent me a photo later showing how he had layed out his sod around his house.

"We also produced a grow sheet to help the buyers keep the bermudagrass growing," he says. "It includes the web address of the turf department here. We had been hammered by emails asking where to plant the grass, etc., and we wanted to provide the right information, like letting buyers know that the bermuda will go brown in winter but green back up in spring."

See photos on page 47. ■

SportsTurf

1030 W. Higgins Road
Suite 230
Park Ridge, IL 60068
Phone 847-720-5600
Fax 847-720-5601

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STMA OFFICE
805 New Hampshire Suite E
Lawrence, Ks 66044
Phone 800-323-3875 Fax 800-366-0391
Email STMAinfo@STMA.org
www.STMA.org

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