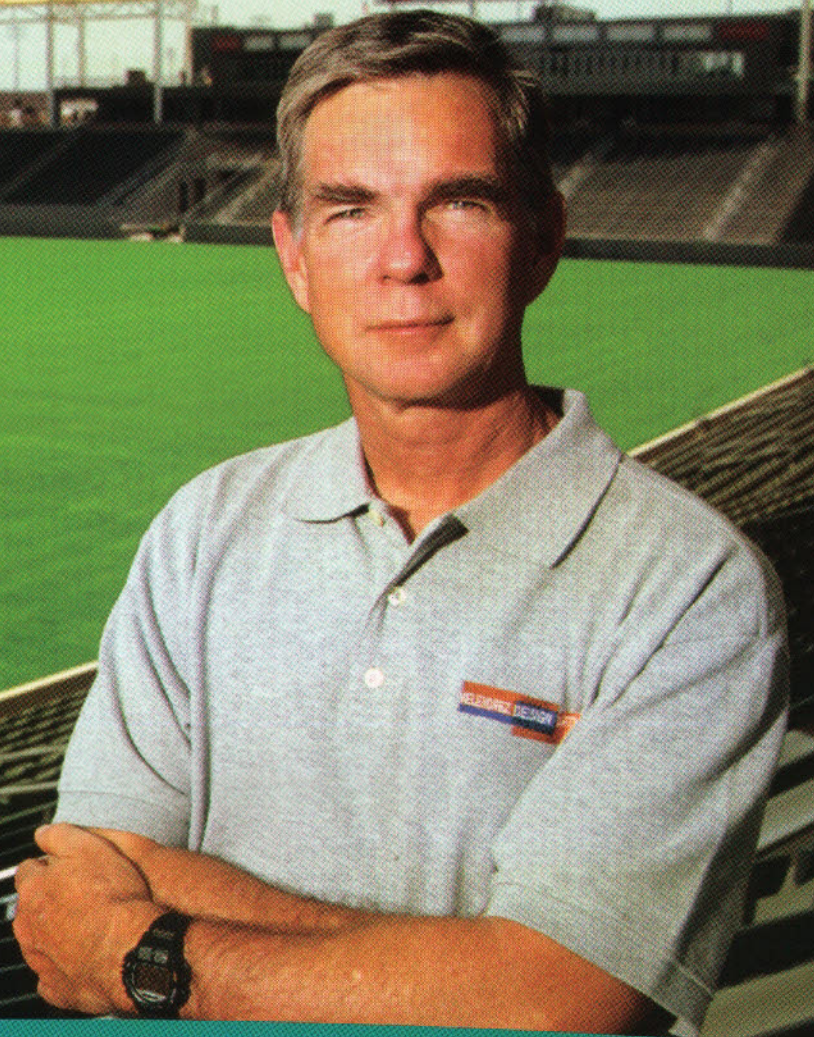


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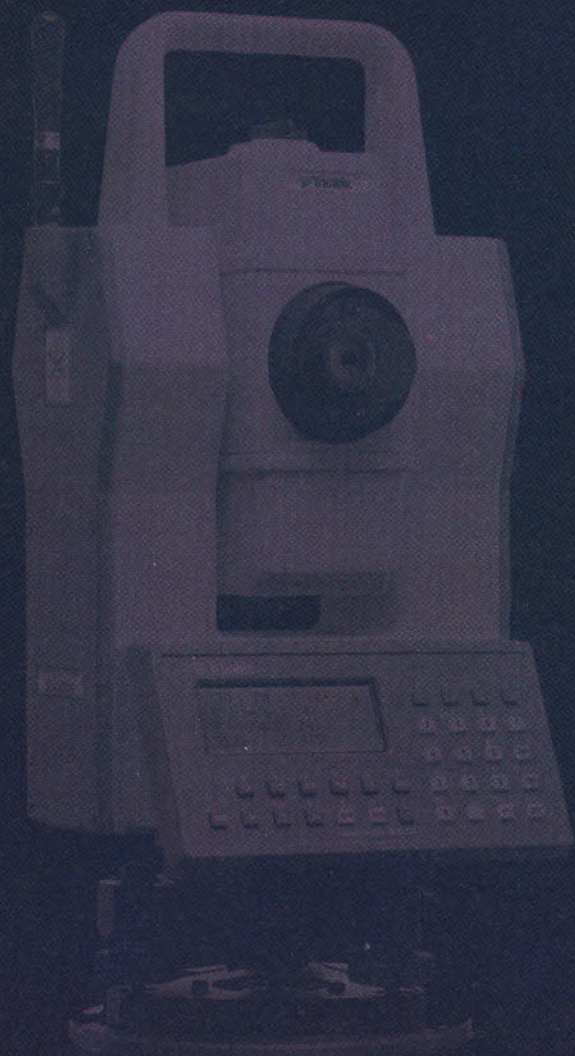
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COVER STORY

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from the sidelines

In the beginning

As a student at Penn State in the late 1970s, I occasionally would ride my bike through an area north of campus that I knew only as "the Ag fields." I never thought much about what was going on there, other than being a bit perplexed at a patch of grass that was truly blue (I recently was told it was painted that color).

Those ag fields are still there today, next to an area that is being developed into Penn State's new Arboretum. Forty-five acres within the Arboretum have been set aside for the university's new Center for Turfgrass Science, which will encompass classrooms, laboratories, offices, conference rooms, dedicated field plots, and the Mascaro-Steiniger Turfgrass Museum.

A prominent part of the museum will be the inventions of the late Thomas Mascaro and Eberhard Steiniger, who collaborated on inventing and testing more than 20 pieces of turfgrass equipment, including the first turf cultivator. I was privileged to get a look at some of these pieces on my last visit to campus, courtesy of Dr. George Hamilton, Jr., assistant professor of turfgrass science. When completed, the 40,000-square-foot museum will provide space to display the equipment as well as a climate-controlled room for viewing historical documents.

Mascaro's company specialized in special soil mixtures for golf course greens and organic fertilizer, as well as machinery and hardware for turfgrass. He began taking correspondence courses at Penn State in 1930 and met H. B. Musser, Penn State's first faculty member in turfgrass research. In the 1950s, Mascaro often accompanied Musser and other Penn State turfgrass faculty on travels throughout the country to turfgrass field days and conferences as they shared their knowledge with golf course superintendents.

Mascaro was a born inventor and would share this tinkering with Steiniger to test at the famous Pine Valley Golf Club in New Jersey, where he served as superintendent for 57 years. In a 1993 interview, Steiniger talked about the collaboration: "Tom was always hanging around our place, bringing some new equipment to try out at Pine Valley. Some of it was really good. We got the whole place aerified, and it didn't cost me a thing because I didn't buy his machine! Tom was very generous with us."

Speaking of generous, Dr. Hamilton reports that half of the funds needed for the new museum will come from private donations. Sounds to me like a great way for today's turfgrass professionals to give something back while perpetuating a wonderful legacy.

For more info or to visit the exhibit, contact Dr. Hamilton at 814-865-3007 or g.hamilton@psu.edu.

Overlooked May issue cover photo credit: Thanks to Tim Anderson, Finch Services Inc, Westminster MD.



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president's message

Safety is the first concern

On May 23, Bill Butler, head groundskeeper for the Lakewood (NJ) BlueClaws, was ejected from his field during the team's Class A South Atlantic League game with the Kannapolis (NC) Intimidators. A tarp dispute led to the ejection. The Friday night game was the fourth of a homestand that took place during nine consecutive days of rain.

There's been considerable media attention to this event and Butler confirms that a search by the National Baseball Hall of Fame revealed no record of a groundskeeper ever previously being ejected in the major or minor leagues.

Butler said, "We had played the three previous games in the rain and had needed to have the field covered during the day, too. Before the fourth game started, the umpires were praising me and the crew for getting in the three previous games. And they asked me to let them know when conditions reached that point that we'd need to shut it down.

"We had pretty steady rain the first three innings. During the fourth inning, the rain really started coming down hard. The coaches were concerned about player safety and agreed the game should be shut down. I relayed that information to the umpires, but they opted to keep it going."

Butler is an STMA member, is working his 13th season in the minor leagues, and has earned Groundskeeper of the Year (now Sports Turf Manager of the Year) honors three times, in three different leagues.

He says, "I've never had a problem with the umpire and crew. I have a lot of respect for them and work with them. But I have to be concerned about the safety of the players and the safety of my crew. No matter how well a field is designed, it reaches a point where it can't take any more. We'd put down all the drying agents that we could, but conditions were getting nasty."

Play was still underway in the sixth inning. Butler says, "By then, I felt it was no longer safe for the players out there. Two batters in a row had been hit because the pitchers couldn't grip the ball. I felt conditions were reaching the point where it would be dangerous for our crew to pull the tarp."

Butler stayed in his customary position for rain events, at the top of the dugout so he could be in eye contact with the umpires. He had a radar printout that confirmed what he told the umpires: there was no window for play without rain.

He says, "I did start barking at them from the dugout, and I shouldn't have done that. Finally, I went out to them with the radar printout. That's when the discussion occurred that led to the ejection. I didn't want to be tossed out and I wasn't trying to show up the umpires. I wasn't worried about the field. We could easily fix it the next day. I was concerned about safety."

Following Butler's ejection, play was stopped and the crew pulled the tarp. Butler says he would much rather be recognized for his work on the field than for his ejection. But, whatever it takes, safety is his number one concern. Which leads me to the closing point of my message: It's more than a job.



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Softball Field of the Year

C. Moore Field of Putnam City West HS



BY SUZ TRUSTY

C. Moore Field of Putnam City West High School, Oklahoma City, OK, earned the STMA 2002 Softball Field of the Year Award in the High School/Parks and Recreation Division. The field, constructed in 1994, was named for former coach and initial developer of the facility, Charlie Moore.

Field management is the responsibility, and the passion, of Rick Newville, who became coach of the Lady Patriots fastpitch softball program in July 2001. He had transferred to the school from Putnam City North in August 2000 to teach biology to sophomore and junior students and to join West's four-coach baseball staff as an assistant. Soon after, he instigated a renovation program for Patriot Field that rallied the forces of the school, coaches, players, Booster Club, and community. These efforts earned Patriot Field STMA baseball field of the year honors in 2001. So it was easy to anticipate he'd focus the same forces on C. Moore Field when he took over the softball program. His passion for the perfect field began long before that.

The interest was sparked when Newville and his friend Monte McCoy (now sports turf manager for the Oklahoma RedHawks Baseball Club) played college baseball at El Reno Junior College (now Redlands Community College). Newville moved on to complete his Bachelors degree in science education at the University of Oklahoma. He began teaching and coaching within his current school district in August 1994. He and McCoy coached American League baseball together in Norman. Then McCoy headed the program that earned the Beam Clay Diamond of the Year award for Oklahoma University.

The passion for perfection, experience as a player, and science education produce a winning combination and Newville makes full use of it. He says, "My science background enables me to work with the concepts of field management and the hands-on labor turns those concepts into action. Seeing the impact of field maintenance on safety and playability got me hooked. And, working with students gives me the ability to use the field care aspect as another educational tool."

C. Moore Field was in need of special attention. All cultural practices on the field had been neglected throughout the spring and early summer months of 2001. Then Mother Nature turned up the heat with several 100-plus degree days thrown into the always hot, dry conditions. By July, this had resulted in a weed-covered, burned up surface.

"My first task was heavy irrigation to soften the soil," says Newville. "Then

I lightly core aerified to aid in moisture penetration. The outfield in-ground irrigation system had been installed in 1997. It consists of four zones with a total of 16 heads. There is no in-ground irrigation for the wings or the skinned surface, but we do have quick connect valves behind the plate and next to the first base dugout.

"Before the initial development of the field, the area had been used as a landfill site during construction of the west wing of the high school, so deep, underlying debris does affect some field maintenance issues.

C. Moore Field is a native soil, with a combination of loam to sandy loam soil that provides adequate infiltration and percolation rates. There is no crown on the field, but the natural slope of the site was retained in the construction and provides surface drainage running from home plate toward first base."

The turf is basically common bermudagrass, with some sections where sod of improved varieties has been installed in front of dugouts, behind the plate, and on the back side of the infield. This came about through the efforts of a former coach who had worked out the donation of leftover pallets of sod during construction of a local housing development.

Newville says, "I gradually lowered the turf height of cut from mid-July to mid-August, going from approximately 2 inches to 7/8 of an inch. Post-emergence herbicide also was applied during this time to eliminate weeds. We brought in 30 tons of infield clay and two tons of calcined clay and worked it into the skinned area to bring it back to playable condition. We cut sod from a nearby area to fill in the weakest spots of the field and redefined the skinned area. Softball is a fall sport for Oklahoma City high schools. By opening day in mid-August, the field was 'playable.' Many considered it one of the better surfaces around. But I felt more improvements were essential to give our players the best surface possible."

As soon as the softball season ended in October, Newville began aggressive field reconstruction and renovation. He says, "We brought in 130 tons of infield clay to bring the skinned area up to grade. We installed warning tracks of crushed volcano rock. We began a topdressing program using washed sand.

"Winter weather shut us down, but we started again in the spring of 2002, coordinating the projects around the teams' spring workouts. We'd reached the infield clay consistency I was after: 60 percent sand, 15 percent silt, and 25 percent clay. We tilled four tons of calcined clay into the infield skin and topdressed with two tons of vitrified clay. We also tackled facility facelift improvements. We added a new 300-seat bleacher set. Players' parents and booster club members helped erect a permanent outfield fence and paint all building structures a neutral 'ballpark' green."

School district funding for the softball program is very limited, so other resources were needed. The Assistant Coach is the Athletic Director, Mike Nunley, who is totally supportive of the field improvement program and the rallying of volunteer support to accomplish it. The booster club is the prime resource for funding.

Newville says, "Our softball and baseball booster clubs combine with the baseball program to cover the leasing costs on the two reel mowers the programs share, a 68-inch triplex and a 25-inch walk behind. They split the monthly payments. The softball and baseball booster clubs also worked with



the school to purchase a bunker rake for the two programs. I've worked out a cooperative agreement with a local agriculture and turf product company.

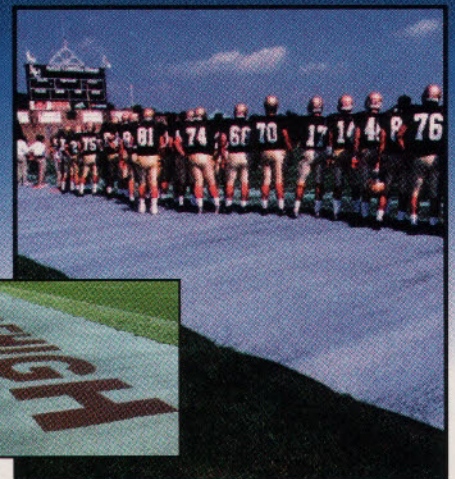
They supply us with additional seed, fertilizer, conditioners, herbicides, fungicides, and insecticides in exchange for signage at the field. Use of equipment such as aerators, rollers and sod cutters is acquired through a similar trade out agreement. The booster club provides additional funding for both renovation materials and daily maintenance materials that are needed beyond those supplied through the cooperative arrangements and the school district budget."

Additional improvements continued before and after the 2002 playing season. Newville says, "The warning track had a tendency to become powdery and dusty. To combat this and make the surface firmer, we topdressed with clay and raked it in. We redefined the back side of

Newville makes good use of his passion for perfection, experience as a player, and science education.

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the infield, creating more of diamond, than a rounded, shape, attacking the lip at the same time. We removed the sod, relevelled where the existing arc had been, and established the new outfield edge. During November, we installed a French drain on the back side of first base, the field's low spot, running a lateral line from that point to outside the playing surface."

C. Moore Field plays host to the varsity, junior varsity, and freshman fast-pitch teams. That puts a total of 90 games on the field each fall, in addition to the daily practices in which the three teams participate. A middle school tournament also is held in the fall. This past season, Oklahoma City University and the USAO in Chickasha, OK, played a doubleheader there. Our three teams have workouts, though not mandatory practices, throughout the summer. A couple of the summer league teams also use it for their practices. Team physicals are held the first of August, followed by the official workout and practice sessions and the fall playing season.

On a typical day during the season, Newville will arrive at the school around 7:00 am to water the infield before classes begin at 7:45. He'll hit the field again late in the morning when his teaching stint is completed for the



A May tornado destroyed two storage buildings and blew them onto the field, where they were pulled off with a tractor.



Newville once again will have to rally his team to get the field back in Field of the Year condition.

day. Field preparation follows. He says, "Much of work will be done at night, post game, with the help of the players and a couple student groundskeepers. I'll groom the warning track and tooth drag the infield with the bunker rake. They'll leaf rake the edges and then help me with pitching circle and home plate repair. We'll tarp these overnight. Students also help with cleanup, including the dugouts.

"After class, I'll do any rebuilding needed on the pitching circle and plate area. Then I'll float drag and then mat drag the skinned area and manicure the edges. I'll water the infield again around noon. Next, I'll double cut the outfield with the triplex and walk mow the wings in one direction. I generally keep the turf height at 3/4 to 5/8-inch, depending on weather conditions and field use schedules. I burn the stripes from foul pole to foul pole and from home to second. I'll water for the third time about an hour before the girls come out for their 2:30 PM practice or on game days, just prior to the 4:00 PM game."

Newville oversees the bermudagrass to keep active turf growth throughout as much of the year as possible and to improve aesthetics. He experimented with an intermediate blend of perennial ryegrass this past season. He says, "I picked the blend for faster transition out in the spring, but we've had a cooler season than usual, so bermudagrass resurgence has been delayed. The growth habit of the blend is excellent, but maybe too fast to be practical. I've been mowing every day throughout the off-season to keep it looking good. It's also a lighter green and seems to require a little more fertilizer. I'll probably go back to a perennial ryegrass blend this year."

With the field to the point of meeting his standards, you'd think Newville would have an easy 2003. Mother Nature had other ideas. Multiple tornadoes moved through Oklahoma City on May 8-9. Mike Nunley called him from the school early Saturday morning with news that the school and the field had been hit. The auditorium roof had significant damage; the rest of the building was spared.

The baseball and softball field fences were destroyed and at the baseball field, one of the lights was bent over in half and touching the ground. The cinder block softball dugouts were damaged and the front façade of one was pulled up and off the ground. But plastic owls on top of the metal roofing were still perched in place to fend off any birds. Two storage buildings were blown onto the field and virtually destroyed. They had to be pulled off with a tractor and chain. The screws and bolts that had held them together were blown throughout the field, as were small sections of debris. The infield amendments and warning track materials also were blown and scattered, but traveled toward the south of the outfield turf, rather than into it. Further emphasizing the unpredictability of tornadoes, the bleachers didn't appear to be touched.

Athletic field repairs are basically on hold until insurance inspections and adjustments are completed. But, with the already tight budgets and the extensive damage to the auditorium, it's very likely that Newville will need to once again rally his team, team parents and booster club to bring C. Moore Field back to Field of the Year condition.

Suz Trusty is director of communications for STMA. She can be reached at 800-323-3875.

