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Life is Short. Sod it!

"They've politicked their way into that, and that's what the sports turf community's going to have to do or we're going to be left out in the cold."

—Chad Price, President, Carolina Green in Indian Trail, N.C.

One explanation for the sudden popularity of synthetic turf at the high school level is that it has become a status symbol, a way of keeping up with the Centrals. Explains Penn State's McNitt: "What it is, it's like, hey, Central is a big high school football power, and we emulate to be as good as them. They put in synthetic turf, wow, they're a serious program. If we're going to be a serious program, we need synthetic turf as well."

McNitt finds it ironic how a high school that isn't able to find

\$7,000 to improve their grass field will suddenly find \$700,000 to build a synthetic field. "It's unbelievable," he said. "I work with a lot of high schools and it's crazy to me."

The synthetic turf craze is troubling for people like Dave Ames, a sports turf consultant based in Vancouver, Wash., who sees pitfalls with the majority of the crumb rubber infill-based systems that are being aggressively marketed to municipalities and school boards. In addition to longstanding issues related to heat buildup, sterilization, and long-term durability, the cost of removing rubber come replacement time is "a bomb waiting to go off," he said.

"The industry has moved so fast with rubber infills, they haven't had a cycle of replacement," Ames said. "I honestly believe it's going to cost more to replace these football and softball fields than it did to originally install them."

He added, "These manufacturers are promising the world, but I see a lot of problems coming."

Synthetic turf manufacturers contacted for this article acknowledged that rubber infill fields first installed in the late 1990s are just now coming up on their 8-year warranties but say that so far they have encountered no "life span" or replacement issues. They insist that a host of new and emerging technologies for disposal, such as

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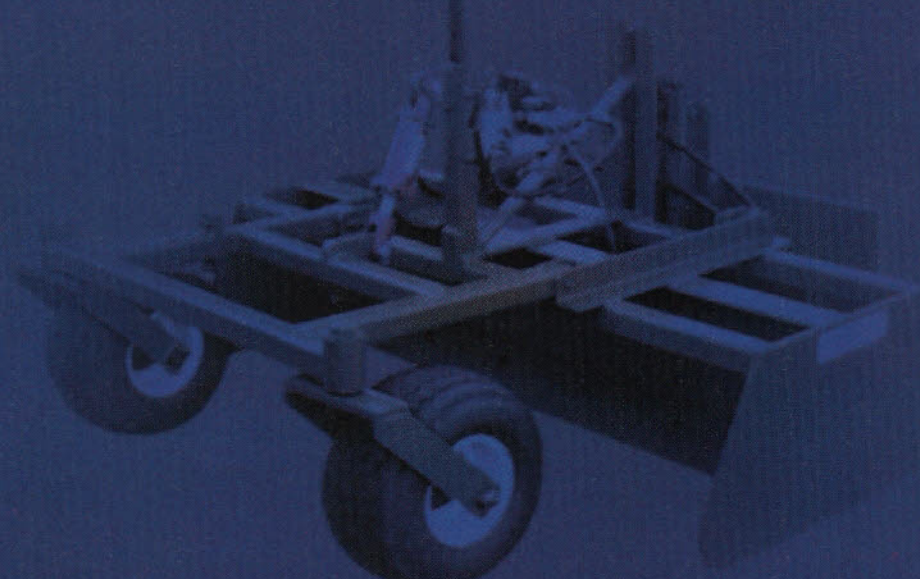


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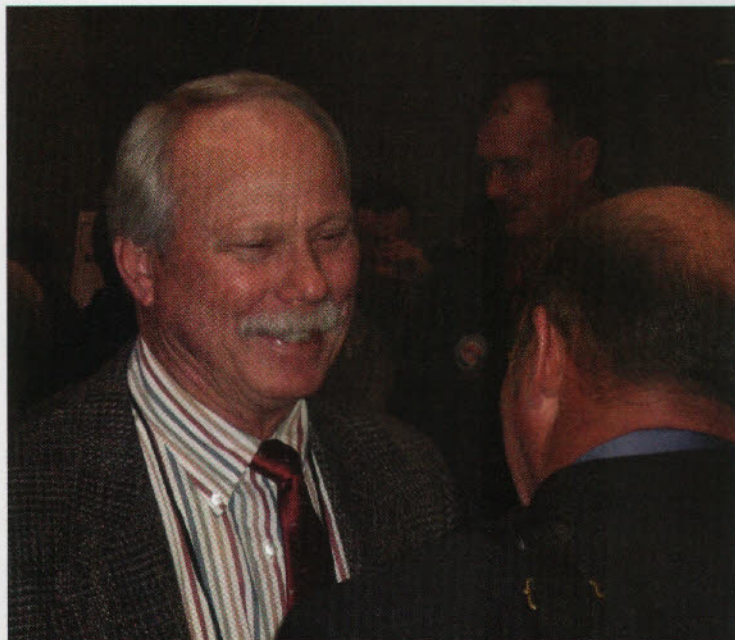
those that convert rubber into fuel, will allow for cost-effective, environmentally friendly disposal of old artificial sports fields.

How the conversion back to rubber fill will affect the industry is unknown, but for the moment, the consensus among many in the profession is that synthetics are quite useful in certain applications and areas of the country.

"It's one more tool in the toolbox," says Dave Minner, professor of horticulture at Iowa State and a former STMA Board member. Minner points out that in nearly every case he's seen synthetics are being used in a complex, not just one field, and "once you get a synthetic field into that complex, most all your other [natural turf] fields improve."

Steve Wightman, CSFM, sports turf manager for the San Diego Chargers, agrees. Although he acknowledges some reservations about synthetic turf, he does not view their widespread use as the death knell for natural turf or the demise of the sports turf manager.

"From my perspective, it's not us and them; it's not natural grass and synthetic," Wightman said. "We're all part of the same industry, and we all have our unique challenges, even synthetic. I see our industry growing maybe more so in another direction than it had been, but we're all part of the same industry and it brings unique challenges. There's still going to be natural grass out there and people



Steve Wightman, Qualcomm Stadium, San Diego

are going want to play on it. I don't see that going away. Maybe your game field or practice field is not natural grass; doesn't mean that it's bad for the industry."

"We use them as a tool to make our grass fields look better," said Waldo Terrell, sports turf manager for the University of Georgia. Terrell oversees two multi-use artificial fields in a facilities complex that encompasses 17 acres of hybrid bermudagrass. Last year, they helped him survive what every manager dreads: "No Water."

"They're promising the world, but I see a lot of problems coming."

**—Dave Ames, Sports Turf Consultant,
Denver, Colo.**

Water woes

According to the STMA, among the 10 most important issues affecting the sports turf management profession, such as labor, advancing technology, and environmental restrictions, water quality and availability is ranked number one. And as the nation's growing population continues to tax water systems, particularly in the Sunbelt, it is an issue likely to dog the industry for years to come.

In Georgia, as well as many other southeastern states, ongoing drought conditions have already prodded sports turf managers to take drastic measures. For Waldo Terrell, that happened when Athens-Clarke County banned outdoor watering in September, at the height of Georgia's football season. Terrell's short-term solution was to rent a tanker truck and pull water out of a retention pond off campus in order to keep his stadium grass alive. In the meantime, he let his other fields go dormant. The football teams used the synthetic fields for practice.

"That helped a ton," Terrell said.

Eventually, Terrell secured a well that will allow the university to water most of its fields next season without impacting municipal systems. His take-home message to sports turf managers: "Find a water source you control," he said.

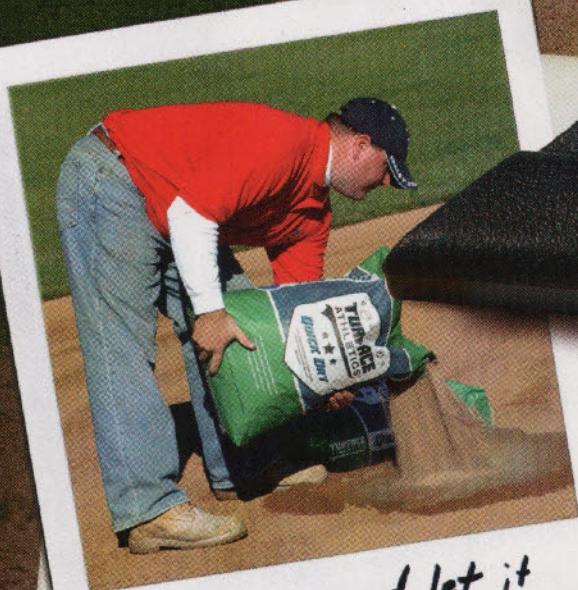
Terrell also advises that managers formulate best management practices and maintain good records to prove to local and state water authorities they are conserving water. The golf industry is a model to follow in this regard, he said.

During a similar drought situation in 2002, the Georgia Golf Course Superintendents Association proactively lobbied for water use leniency as the State legislature was drafting new water rules. Consequently, golf courses in Georgia today enjoy exemptions that the sports turf industry does not.

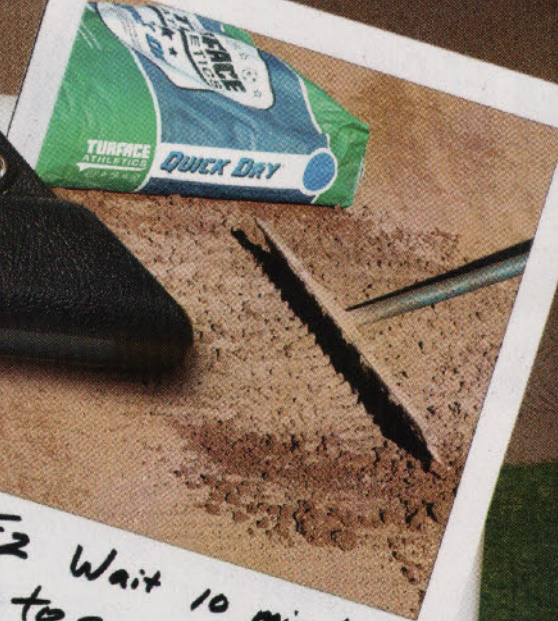
"The golf course guys were really on the ball with this, whereas our industry, the sports turf guys, really missed the boat," Terrell said.

Carolina Green's Chad Price agrees, and says that the sports turf industry should also proactively address the public and show them that healthy turf is good business, as the golf course industry has successfully done. "They've politicked their way into that, and that's what the sports turf community's going to have to do or we're going to be left out in the cold," he said. ■

William Steele is a freelance writer living in Lawrence, KS. The second part of this series will appear in the March issue.



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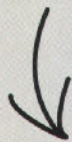
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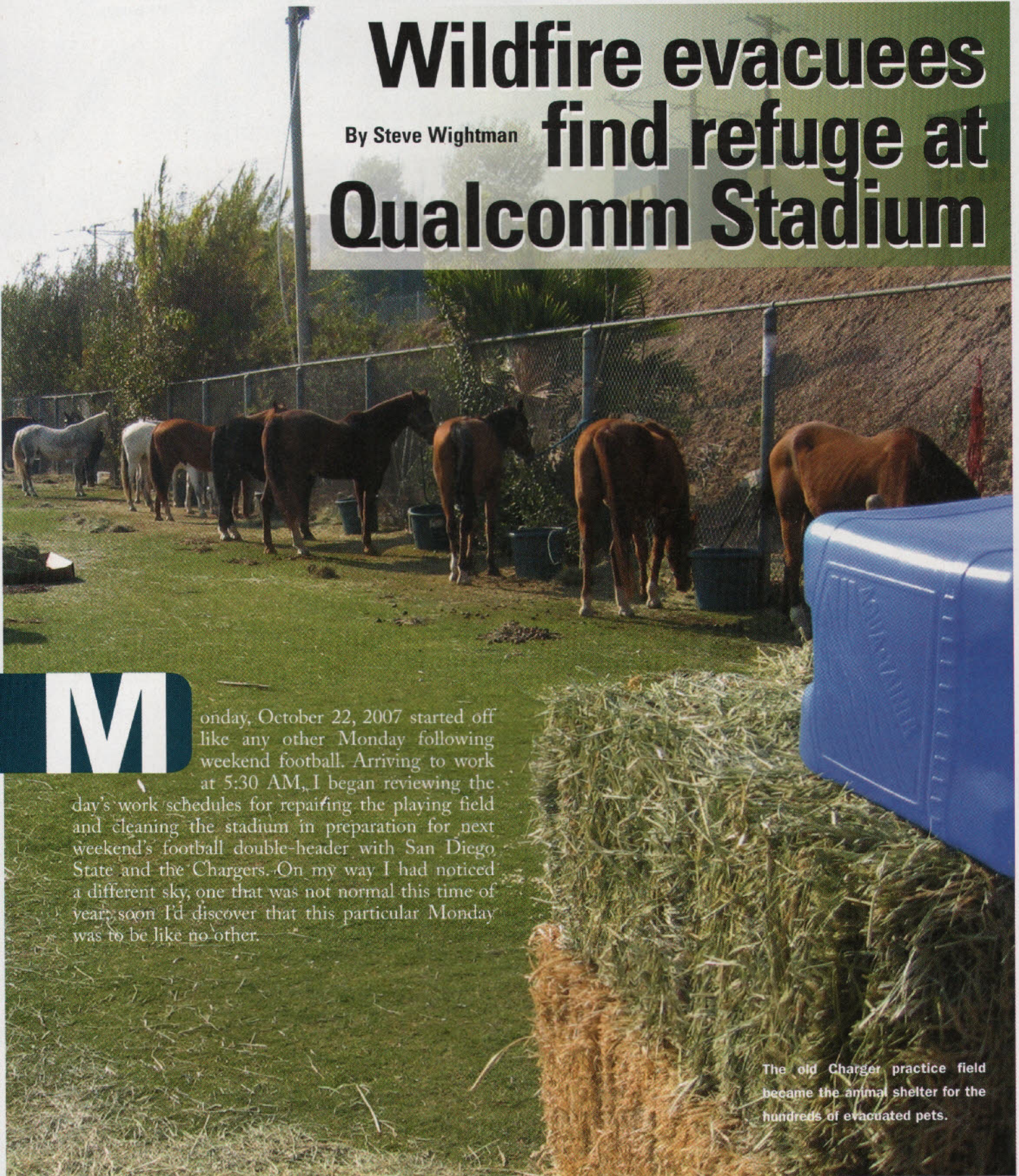
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Wildfire evacuees find refuge at Qualcomm Stadium

By Steve Wightman



Monday, October 22, 2007 started off like any other Monday following weekend football. Arriving to work at 5:30 AM, I began reviewing the day's work schedules for repairing the playing field and cleaning the stadium in preparation for next weekend's football double-header with San Diego State and the Chargers. On my way I had noticed a different sky, one that was not normal this time of year; soon I'd discover that this particular Monday was to be like no other.

The old Charger practice field became the animal shelter for the hundreds of evacuated pets.

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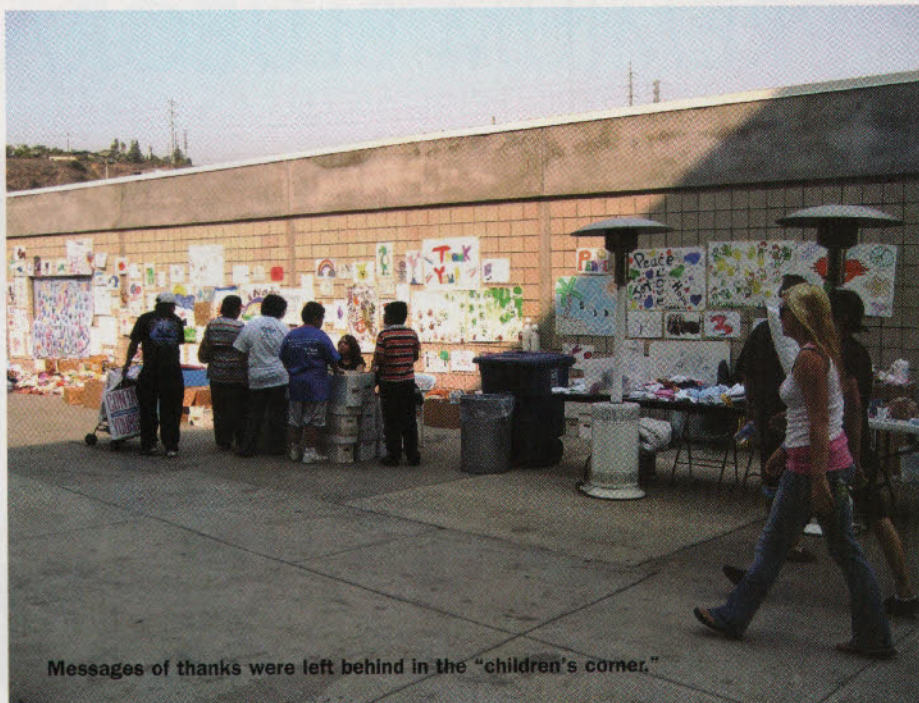
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While most of us slept Sunday night the entire eastern edge of San Diego County was being engulfed by wildfires that were being fanned by the seasonably common Santa Ana winds. Typically, southern California's weather is tempered by prevailing winds that blow easterly from the Pacific Ocean to the inland valleys, distant mountains, and warm deserts. During Santa Ana's however, the wind direction is reversed and brings very gusty westerly winds dominated by the warm temperatures and very dry conditions of the desert regions. The temperatures are welcome yet feared because of the potential for destruction.

While going through my email suddenly a message from the mayor's office came stating that people were being evacuated because of the fires and that the evacuation site was Qualcomm Stadium.

What was a sports stadium just a few minutes earlier was to become a refuge for the young, the old, families, neighbors, pets, and every conceivable possession that people might hastily grab on the way out the door. The first evacuees began arriving at the sta-



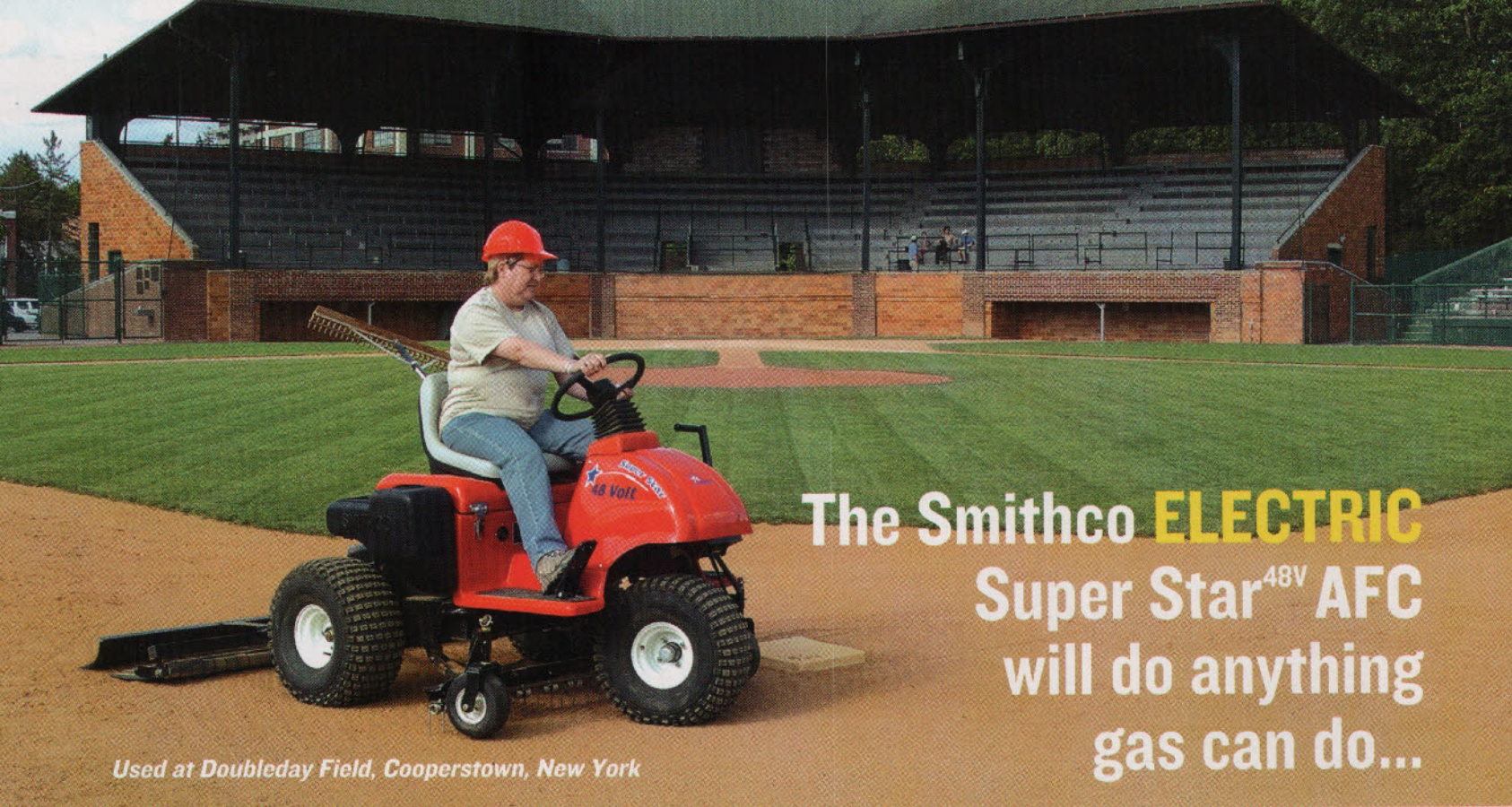
Messages of thanks were left behind in the "children's corner."

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FACILITY & OPERATIONS

dium around 8 AM. At first the traffic was not much more than a trickle into the 150 acres of asphalt parking lots that surround the stadium, but by nightfall the 20,000 parking spaces were about a third occupied by cars, trucks, vans, motor-homes, horse trailers, tents, and sleeping bags.

We began implementing the Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) that, in part, included contacting companies currently servicing the stadium for additional items, supplies, and services. It soon became apparent that much more was going to be needed as the parking area became even more congested and the fires continued raging toward the Pacific.

Numerous other city departments, agencies and military forces sprung into action and added resources to a well developed and seamless execution of the city's Emergency Plan. For example, Parks and Recreation provided trucks, forklifts and personnel to assist with the flood of donated food, clothing and supplies channeled through a "distribution center" setup in the far portion of one of the parking lots.

The old Charger practice field, located in the far corner of the stadium complex, and now used for rugby, soccer, tailgate parties and overflow parking, became the animal shelter for the hundreds of pets of those evacuated. Animals ranged from the dogs and cats to birds, horses, cows, goats, snakes, gerbils, and mice.

Complete with veterinarians, nurses, and throngs of volunteers, all animals were meticulously screened and cared for. To help with the effort the grounds crew setup a watering area for the horses and larger animals and cleaned out some of the nearby open storage bins which became crude animal pens.

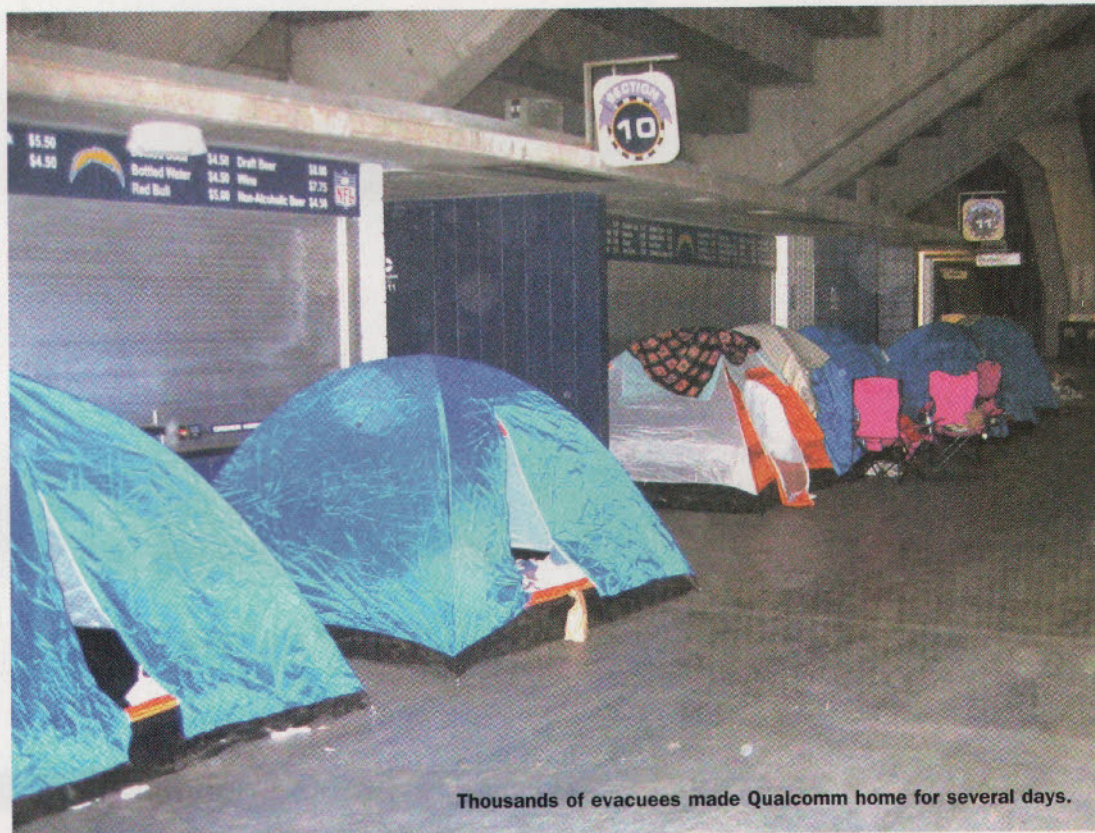
When the evacuations began it was envisioned that all would be confined to the parking areas. However, it became evident early on when more and more people arrived at what was now the main evacuation center for the entire county of San Diego that we were going to have to open up the stadium to properly accommodate all of those who were now entrusted to our care.

Since we were still in the middle of our football season it was decided that all evacuees who came into the stadium would be confined to the seating areas and concourses only leaving the playing field, locker rooms, private suites, and restaurants off limits.

When the gates were opened each person was to be documented for emergency purposes; however, this exercise disappeared when a major logjam quickly formed. So the gates were simply opened up allowing a free-flow of people into the stadium under a somewhat watchful eye of security personnel. It was hoped that the people would conduct them-

selves differently than our normal football crowd. I'm certain that the fact that no alcohol was allowed greatly contributed to that success.

As Monday turned into Tuesday and Tuesday into Wednesday donations of all kinds continued to pour in to the point of exceeding the needs of those housed at the stadium. The distribution center then began to transport the excess donations to other evacuation centers within the city. The number of evacuees now residing within the stadium totaled nearly 10,000. During those first three days many of the evacuees found more comfortable quarters with family, friends and hotel rooms after their initial arrival. Those that left were being replaced by



Thousands of evacuees made Qualcomm home for several days.

new evacuees as the fires continued to rage westward.

The Field concourse became "tent city" with tents covering nearly every square foot and filled mostly with families. Some tents contained giggly children with the tent next door occupied by the concerned and somber parents. Other tents were spread throughout the upper levels and congregated in every conceivable nook and cranny. Most however, were located in areas where restrooms were but a few steps away. Some adventurous souls took up residence on the penthouse level with the moon and stars obscured by the smoke and ash of the fires.

Shower trailers were brought in and setup in one of the parking lots and became a much welcomed spot for those many evacuees who had been camped out since the first day. Portable heaters were spread throughout the main concourse to provide some warmth to the exhausted and worried stadium crowd.

With each passing day we all became more experienced in our new roles. City department directors worked along side custodians in assist-