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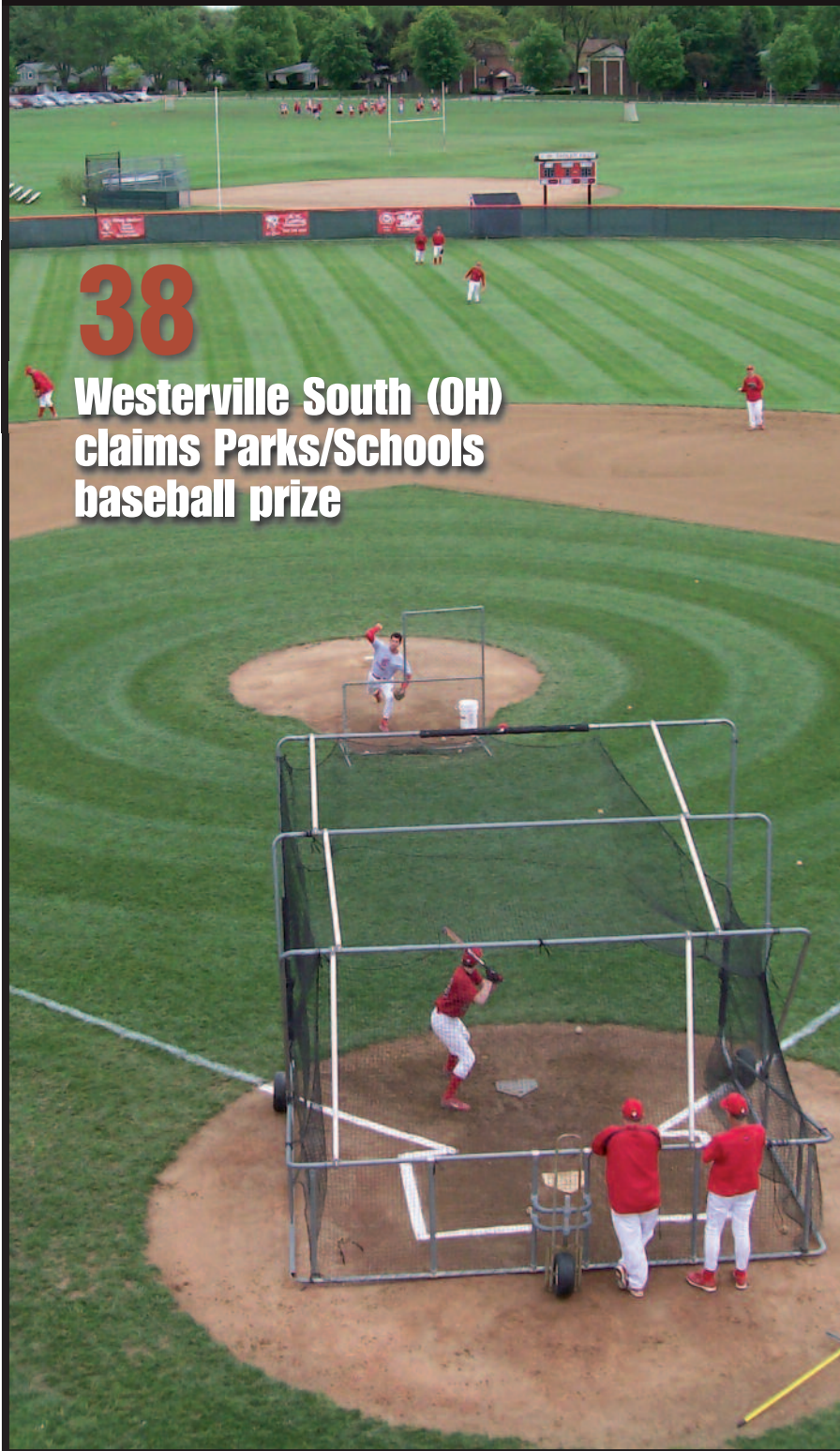
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J.W. Sadler Field at Westerville South High School won the 2008 STMA Parks/School Baseball Field of the Year. Kenny Nichols, grounds technician, is credited with leading his crew to victory.



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Field builders' certification now available

THE AMERICAN SPORTS BUILDERS ASSOCIATION (ASBA), the national organization for builders and suppliers of materials for athletic facilities, has developed a new Field Builder Certification Program. The program, which was developed to help raise professional standards and improve the practice of athletic field construction, will offer its first exam at the ASBA's Technical Meeting in Savannah, GA December 5-7.

ASBA already offers certification for tennis court and running track builders. In both cases, individuals must meet eligibility requirements and successfully complete a comprehensive examination. In order to maintain their designation, they must recertify every 3 years.

The exams offered are for Certified Field Builder, demonstrating expertise in both natural and synthetic turf construction; Certified Field Builder-Natural; and Certified Field Builder-Synthetic. The certification program marks the first time the ASBA has collaborated with two other industry organizations on a certification program, the STMA and the Synthetic Turf Council. Members of those organizations are eligible to take any of the three new exams at the substantially lower ASBA member rate. Of the three exams, the CFB requires a more comprehensive knowledge. All certifications would be renewable every 3 years.

"The Field Builder Certification Program represents a huge step forward for the industry," says ASBA's Field Builder Certification Committee Chairman Dan Wright of Sports Turf Company, Whitesburg, GA. "It will help promote quality construction and just as importantly, will allow the public to identify builders who have taken their knowledge to the next level."

The exam is based on role delineation studies—surveys of builders that define the scope of practice and the knowledge and skills required to function competently as a sports field builder. If you're interested in learning more about the certification exam contact ASBA at 866-501-ASBA, 410-730-9595, or info@sportsbuilders.org.

Art Lewis didn't invent the Thatch Master machine but over the past 18 years he's been building and improving the fine turf verticutting machine. He announced last month that he had sold his interests to TurfTime Equipment.

Lewis says his original market was golf, as the machine started out as a 3-foot-wide unit for use on greens. "But early on I decided to call on the athletic field market. I started displaying it at the Sports Turf Managers Association shows and got requests for wider machines, which led first to a 4-foot machine and later to the 5- and 6-foot machines.

"I have been at every STMA show since the first one and have enjoyed working with athletic field managers. Over the years I have made many friends in the STMA and will miss this part of my life," Lewis says. "The STMA has done a good job of educating athletic field personnel and of bringing advances in maintenance to all levels of facilities. Recently, I have been doing more business with high schools and colleges as well as with the larger facilities. When I sold the business was about 60 percent athletic fields.

"I sold my business because the time had come to retire and spend more time at my hideaway on Pine Island, FL."

Glenn Musser, vice president of TurfTime Equipment, says, "We are grateful for the 18 years that Art Lewis has dedicated to Thatch Master. We will continue to support Art's customers through the existing distribution network."

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Networking starts locally

EVER SIT BACK AND WONDER HOW TO DO SOMETHING THAT YOU HAVE NEVER HAD TO DO BEFORE, and where to start? Have you ever stopped and realized all that you have learned from another sports turf manager? Where would we all be if it wasn't for someone across town or across the country who took the time to answer our phone calls, and help provide a solution to us on that stumping issue that we just couldn't get our hands around?

Our local chapters provide us with a valuable networking opportunity to connect with other turf managers, so that we can build relationships for now and the future. This network provides us with ready resources for information and allows us to be a resource to someone else. I know that at least once a week I think about something that I have learned from someone that I have met through the local chapter or through the national association. These experiences make us the "go-to" people even on those non-turf related questions that we face at our jobs.

Volunteering to participate at either the local or the national level will broaden your resources and experiences. Becoming a leader within your local area is a way of giving back to those who have helped you along the way. Participating on the board of a local chapter allows you to plan educational seminars on topics that are pressing in your area. It is a rewarding opportunity to make connections with other sports turf managers, commercial vendors and educators in the area and learn more than you can imagine. If there is not a chapter in your area, then gather the other sports turf managers in the area and form one; do not miss the networking opportunity that comes from a chapter.

I know that we are all busy with work and our personal lives, so if you do not have the time to participate on a board you might be able to speak at a seminar or write an article to support the local chapter and share your knowledge. Remember all of us are "experts in the field" so don't be afraid to raise your voice and share your knowledge both on a local level and a national level.

By now you should have received the STMA 2010 Conference and Exhibition registration brochure, and are making plans to attend. The brochure and the STMA website, www.STMA.org have all of the information regarding the educational sessions that will be presented. In addition to the brochure, you'll also find other useful tools on the website to provide to your employer to justify attending the conference. It is a very comprehensive educational program that you will not want to miss. Just a reminder—the conference registration and the hotel rates increase in December, so don't wait to sign up. Register now and reap the benefits of discounted prices.

Update on chemical products for sports turf

Park district improves year round playability

Editor's note: This article was provided by The Tierney Agency of Philadelphia.

>> JIM KEPPLER, senior maintenance supervisor-grounds at the Rancho Simi Recreation and Park District.



>> The combination of various grasses and weeds created a clumpy, uneven playing surface.



>> Left: BEFORE APPLICATIONS of herbicides, the playability of the fields was very poor.

>> Below: TO AVOID PIGMENT on uniforms, no dye was added to the tank mix. Chris Olsen, field development representative for Bayer Environmental Science, points out the zebra-stripe effect where applications were missed during spraying.



ANYONE WHO'S PLAYED SOCCER appreciates turf that allows the ball a true roll. A good pitch provides consistent, predictable speed with no unexpected changes in direction of a rolling ball.

When Jim Keppler in Simi Valley, CA inherited two soccer fields from the local American Youth Soccer Organization in 2007, the playability of the turf was poor. "There was a lot of *Poa annua*, fescues, ryegrass and clover," says Keppler, the senior maintenance supervisor-grounds at the Rancho Simi Recreation and Park District. The combination of various grasses and weeds created a clumpy, uneven playing surface. Soccer balls rolled every which way but true.

The soccer fields overseen by Keppler see quite a bit of action. Located 40 miles northwest of Los Angeles, the Simi Valley

area enjoys a warm, pleasant climate almost all year. The soccer association books games and practices year round. On average, each field sees anywhere from 48 soccer games per month.

In Keppler's mind, these newly inherited, heavily-used fields weren't fit for play. And after more than 30 years with the organization, he had earned the trust of district officials to make maintenance decisions as he saw fit.

"My experiment was to take out everything but the bermudagrass. All I wanted was nice, short-cut turf."

Soccer is the only game at Rancho Simi Recreation and Park District. And it isn't the only responsibility for Keppler. With help from his 11-person staff, he manages 17 parks, five soccer fields, 14 ballfields and 54 miles of hiking trails.

The district is also home to two golf courses, an Olympic size swimming pool complex, tennis courts, basketball courts, and a community center.

Overall, the park district has a total of 50 parks and more than 5,600 acres of open space used for hiking, biking, horseback riding and wildlife preservation. "Our goal is to keep the public happy and our parks clean, green and safe," he says. "When you have a lot of use in the parks, it's a challenge." The park system makes Simi Valley a desirable place to live and more than 130,000 residents call it home. It's been home to Keppler his whole life.

Keppler's experiment started with a consultation from Joe Alexander, his distributor sales representative from Crop Production Services (formerly Western Farm Service). "Joe knew what products

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» KEPLER, seen here with application technician Paul Shugrue, relies on a staff of 11 to manage 17 parks, five soccer fields, 14 ball fields and 54 miles of hiking trails.



» Above: **THREE MONTHS** after the initial treatments, the fields are rolling smooth and fast.

Our gray leaf spot program begins in mid-July through September. **We rotate a number of products** through the season to prevent against fungicide resistance.

would help me get a pure stand of bermudagrass,” recalled Keppler. The two agreed on a weed control program built around Ronstar and Revolver herbicides (Bayer Environmental Science).

An application of Ronstar plus fertilizer was applied the first week in March 2008. By putting down the preemergent herbicide with fertilizer, Keppler could get in front of the germination of unwanted annual grasses and broadleaf weeds while also helping the turf to green up. He used a Ronstar formulation from The Andersons with a 15-5-10 nutrient mix.

A week later he followed with a tank mix application of post-emergent Revolver

and methylated seed oil surfactant. The sulfonyleurea product selectively removes cool-season grasses from warm-season grasses. Keppler applied a broadcast, foliar spray of Revolver at the rate of 16 oz. per acre.

Zebra stripes

The crew used a 16-foot wide spray rig to make the application of Revolver. Typically, Keppler would use a dye indicator in the tank mix to track the spray pattern. But due to the year round use of the fields, he didn't use one because teams were still playing. “We didn't want white uniforms turning green from the dye,” he says.

Without the dye, the crew

couldn't be exactly sure where they had sprayed. The result was an unexpected side-by-side comparison about 2 months later showing how well the product worked. “It looked like zebra stripes. There was a stand of perennial in 2-foot wide lines across sections of the fields where we missed with the rig.” Keppler came back in with Revolver to spot spray on the areas missed and, within a week, the stripes were gone.

All that was left was bermudagrass. According to Keppler, “not only does the turf look great, the density is much tighter than it had been.”

It can take about 2 years to turn a sports field from clumpy and uneven to nearly 100 percent bermudagrass.

“Last year, when we started the applications of Revolver and Ronstar, we had about 80 percent *Poa*, clover and other perennial grasses. The base of bermuda was there, but choked out,” says Keppler. “When we went to make the first application this year, we had about 10 percent *Poa* and perennials. That is a 70 percent reduction.” ■