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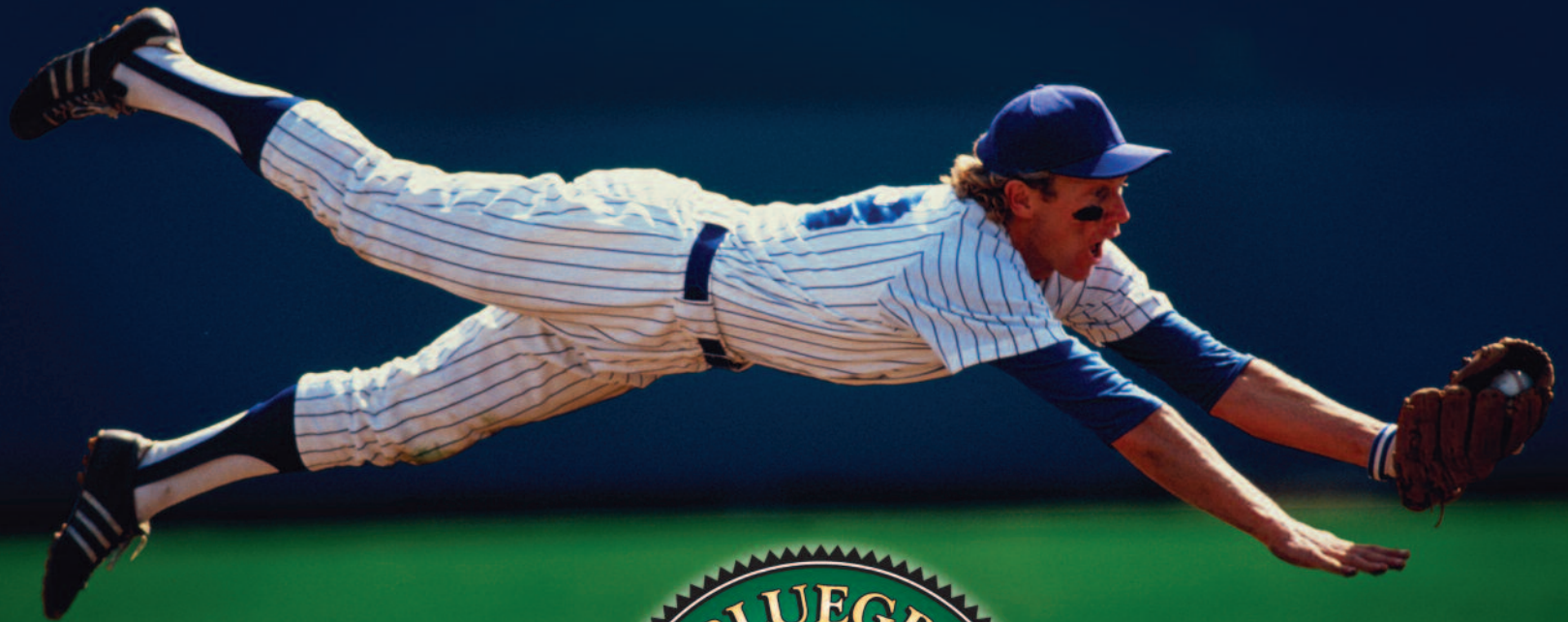
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SportsTurf

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Don't abandon me!
BY DR. GRADY MILLER

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David Presnell, landscape & turf technician for the Gainesville, GA Parks and Recreation Agency, paints midfield logo on Bobby Gruhn Field at City Park Stadium. The field was named STMA Schools/Parks Football Field of the Year for 2008.



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Reaching 50

SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY POET GEORGE HERBERT SAID, “He that is not handsome at twenty, nor strong at thirty, nor rich at forty, nor wise at fifty, will never be handsome, strong, rich or wise.” As I celebrate a half century of living this month, I am 0 for 3, but have a slim hope of still achieving number four.

Current U.S. life expectancy is 77 to 80 years so any way you slice it I’m on the Back Nine of Life having scored, like all of us, mostly pars with a birdie (my family) and several double bogeys (no details necessary) in the mix.

But hopefully there’s plenty of time left to become the person I would like to be rather than the person I am—more thankful, more kind, less cynical, less judgmental. I certainly am not the same person I was as a much younger man, which would make Muhammad Ali happy since he said, “The man who views the world at fifty the same as he did at twenty has wasted thirty years of his life.”

As I’ve gotten older I’ve tried to live by a few simple standards that I think work well for me, and though I’m not into moralizing, please allow me to share a few of them. I’m a big believer in “What goes around, comes around,” which of course is the layman’s version of the Golden Rule, “Do to others what you would like to be done to you.” (Don’t you wish this was etched on the inside of every human’s eyelids?)

Another principle, not always as easily accomplished as I would like, is “Character is doing the right thing when no one is looking.” I hate the feeling of glancing in the mirror and facing the truth that I have done wrong. Thankfully the older I get the less this happens.

And then there’s being a “gentleman.” Forget Webster’s definition; my father told me when I was in college and probably deserved a smack in the face rather than his sage advice, what it really means: Putting another person’s comfort or peace of mind ahead of your own. This goes way beyond giving up your seat on the bus; think more along the lines of not taking unfair advantage of another or being kind toward someone you find completely foolish.

Here are a few other thoughts that I try to remember on life’s journey:

Sometimes it’s better to be silent and let people think you’re stupid than to speak and remove all doubt.

Take your work, but not yourself, seriously.

Enjoy nature.

Tell those you love that you do.

No one is in charge of your happiness except you.

One more quote, from some poet we’ve never heard of, certainly reflects my mood as 50 nears: “Inside every older person is a younger person—wondering what the hell happened.”

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The Official Publication Of The Sports Turf
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SportsTurf (ISSN 1061-687X) (USPS 000-292) (Reg. U.S. Pat. & T.M. Off.) is published monthly by m2media360, a Bev-AI Communications company at 1030 W. Higgins Road, Suite 230, Park Ridge, IL 60068. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Sportsturf, P.O. Box 2120, Skokie IL 60076-7820. For subscription information and requests, call Subscription Services at (847) 763-9565. Subscription rates: 1 year, \$40 US & Poss.; 2 years, \$65 US & Poss.; 1 year, \$65 Canada/Foreign Surface, 1 year, \$130 Airmail. All subscriptions are payable in advance in US funds. Send payments to Sportsturf, P.O. Box 2120, Skokie, IL 60076-7820. Phone: (847) 763-9565. Fax: (847) 763-9569. Single copies or back issues, \$6 each US/Canada; \$9 Foreign. Periodicals postage paid at Park Ridge, IL and additional mailing offices. COPYRIGHT 2009, SportsTurf. Material may not be reproduced or photocopied in any form without the written permission of the publisher.

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Dues forgiveness program for unemployed

THE IMPACT OF THE ECONOMY has had an effect on all of us, and the STMA Board of Directors and its committees are working hard to provide opportunities to assist all members during these times. One program that has been created to assist unemployed members is the Dues Forgiveness Program. This program allows an unemployed STMA member to continue to have all the membership benefits for up to 6 months after they have become unemployed. Members who are unemployed at the time they typically renew their membership can continue to take advantage of all of the privileges of membership. This includes access to the STMA members-only side of the website to search the job listing section on the career page, as well as to post their résumé for potential employers to see. The Board of Directors feels that this program is an opportunity to emphasize to our members how important they are to STMA and to recognize their dedication of membership service in the association. More information on this program can be found on the STMA website, www.stma.org.

Another way the Board of Directors is helping to assist members is by providing more conference education during the annual STMA Conference and Exhibition. The number of pre-conference workshops available on Wednesday has been increased, are offered throughout the entire day, and are now included (at no additional costs) in the full conference registration package. This is just another way that we are expanding the educational value of attending the conference. So keep making plans to attend the 2010 STMA Conference and Exhibition in Disney World in January.

We have all heard stories of other sports turf managers going above and beyond, and now is the time to recognize them by nominating a member for one of STMA's Founders Awards. The STMA Founders Awards program honors members who have done more than just their daily duties at their facility—they are true ambassadors who represent the industry and the association. Each year these awards are given to members who have been nominated by their peers and have met the criteria set forth by the awards committee. If you know of a member who fits the criteria for one of the awards, please take the time to nominate them. More information on the Founders Awards can be found on the website.

Lastly I would like to congratulate the staff at headquarters; it is the 5th year of having a full time staff and an actual headquarters in Lawrence, KS. The STMA has grown, and it is largely due to the exceptional leadership of CEO Kim Heck and her staff: Patrick Allen, Kristen Althouse, Leah Craig, and Nora McIntire. I would like to personally thank them for all their hard work and dedication to making the STMA the recognized leader in the sports turf industry.

Strategies for weathering the economic downturn

AS SPORTS TURF MANAGERS, it is our job to produce safe, playable surfaces to our athletes and users.

With the struggling economy, most sports turf managers are currently dealing with budget cuts, or have dealt with them sometime in the past few years. This has forced prioritization of fields, maintenance and supply cutbacks and also reduced time allocated to maintaining athletic and recreational surfaces. So how

do we provide optimum conditions when dealing with limited resources? Sports turf managers across the United States from various facilities share their strategies on how to handle the effects of the economic recession.

Our role as sports turf managers

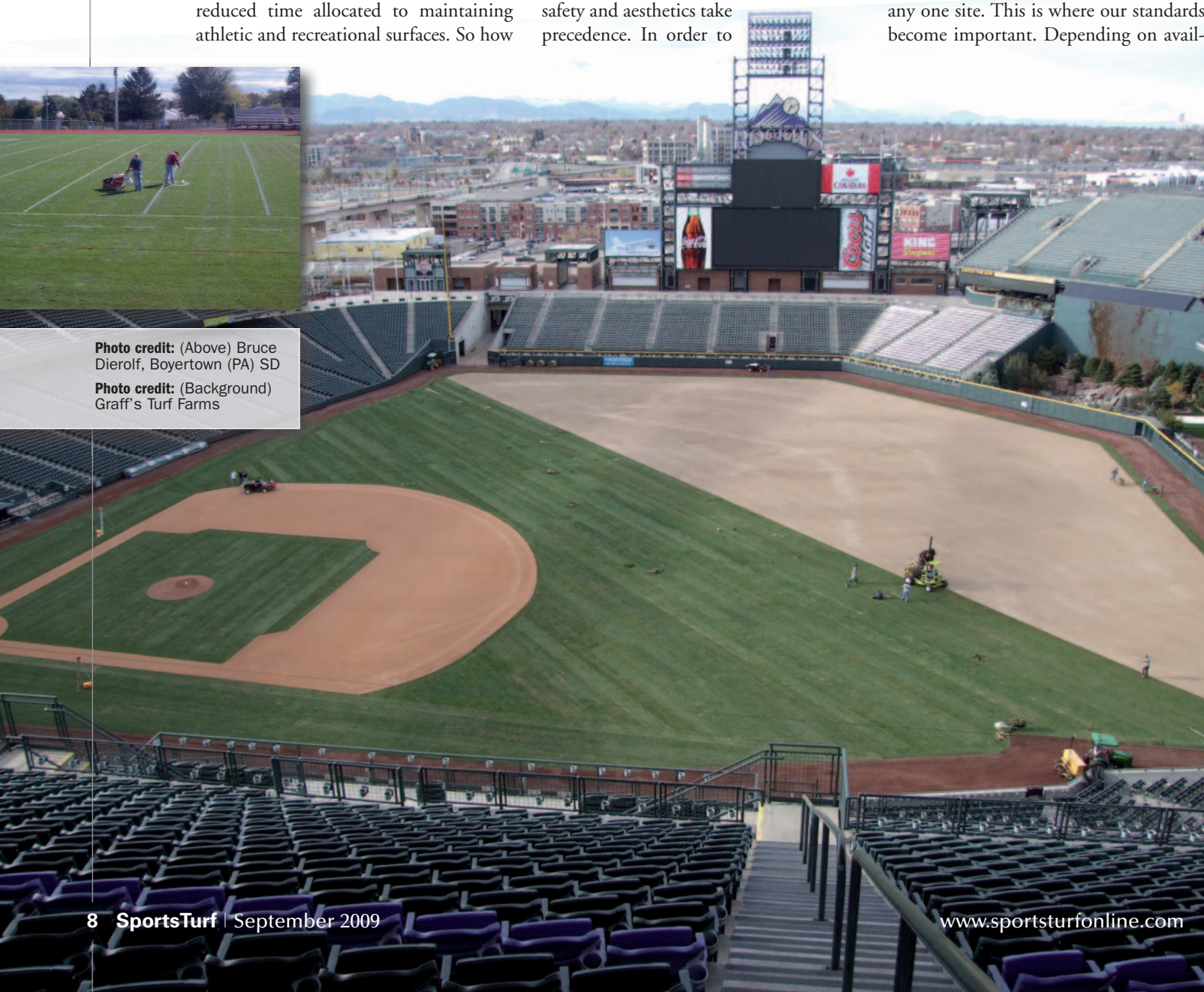
“For turf managers, player and user safety and aesthetics take precedence. In order to

maintain playing surfaces at their highest level, sports turf managers must develop a set of standards and expectations. These standards set the bar for goals on what we wish to achieve each season. Unfortunately, in the current economy we are dealing with a cutback in supplies and personnel, which mean decreased frequency and reduced maintenance at any one site. This is where our standards become important. Depending on avail-



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able supplies, personnel, and expected consequences, we need to readjust our standards. Knowing our available resources and how that will influence a playing surface allows us to make attainable goals.”-Mike Tarantino, director of maintenance and operations, Poway (CA) USD

Prioritizing your fields

“When budgets are being cut, one of the first areas to review is setting priorities on fields and field maintenance. Fields that support greater use or are considered to be high priority fields should receive the greatest resources. Prioritizing maintenance activities may mean reduced cultural practices such as fertilization and mowing frequency or, reduced renovations such as aeration, topdressing and/or overseeding. Of course, all of these come with reduced short and long term playability and aesthetics. There may be areas other than playing fields where reduced maintenance activities can be implemented such as, landscaping or general common areas that carry a lesser degree of expectations.”-Steve Wightman, stadium turf manager, Qualcomm Stadium, San Diego

Whether you are maintaining one field or 20, prioritizing fields helps determine where time, supplies and maintenance should be allocated.

1. Review your entire maintenance program and schedule. Distinguish your high priority areas from low priority areas and try to determine where adjustments can be made in your budget.

Create a rating scale and evaluate areas to determine where they rate on your priority list so you can allocate the proper amount of time and money to maintain each at its highest level.

2. Game and main practice fields need the most attention.

- Game fields have high visibility and should always be kept in top condition for safety and aesthetics.

- Main practice fields are where athletes spend the majority of their time and need to be kept in safe, playable condition.

- These sites should be visited daily for maintenance practices.

3. Cut back maintenance frequency on low priority fields and

Prioritizing maintenance activities may mean reduced fertilization and mowing frequency or reduced renovations such as aeration, topdressing and/or overseeding.

other areas.

- Make sure the lower priority fields still meet safety standards.
 - Have a rotating maintenance schedule that services these areas at least once or twice a week.
 - Reevaluate how much money you want to allocate to maintaining parking and landscaped areas.
4. Reevaluate your budget regularly.

Labor costs

The biggest expense for a facility is the staff. To help avoid layoffs, here are some ways to redistribute your employees to try and maintain quality and frequency of service to playing surfaces.

1. Split shifts.

2. Implement an innovative work week as an alternative to overtime for hourly employees, or as a means to reduce overtime.

- The work week can start on a different day than the traditional Monday through Friday, and can be different for each employee. For example, if some of your staff's work is typically heavy on Thursday and Friday; their work week can be a Thursday through Wednesday model. They would work longer hours on Thursday and Friday, but still maintain the 40 hour maximum in a week.

- By staggering your employees throughout the week, you can make certain that all of the maintenance tasks are covered.

- You can also work with your employees to adjust their schedule to be variable, allowing them to work as much as necessary on certain days, as long as their seven-day period does not exceed more than 40 hours.

- These innovative schedules do require the employee and employer to have a written agreement.

3. Change full time positions to seasonal positions.

4. Evaluate each individual and focus their work based on strengths or what they enjoy doing the most.

5. Reduce employee benefits.

6. Make sure staff is well trained.

7. Contract out services.

- Although this still costs money, it may not be as expensive as using in house labor. Contracted services save us from paying hourly wages and benefits. It also allows our staff to focus on other areas while the contracted service is going on.



Photo credit: The Toro Company