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*source: USDA

Paying for field use

BY BOYD "ROB" MONTGOMERY, CSFM

Many communities struggle with the idea of charging a user fee for field rental cost. Why is this concept a struggle?

The first argument that many community leaders face when tackling this issue is that the taxpayers have built the fields and should not have to pay for use. Of course, you can buy into the notion that your small percentage of tax dollars allows you to use the fields, can't you? Well, not really! If you look at the overall statement and impact of the funds generated based on the community numbers, realistically the average taxpayer might support the facility with a very small amount in relation to the overall operation and capital budgets. Yet, the argument is that they still support the facility, right? Understanding the definition of "support" is critical. While many of the new multi-purpose recreational facilities could be built without this "support," many taxpayers don't understand that the on-going success of a facility is directly relative to the cost structure of maintaining that facility.

Let's look at it this way. If your community builds a recreation center or ice arena the majority of reasonable people will understand that there are costs associated with the operation of the building. It is one of those beliefs that if they see walls, HVAC, lights, and a roof, those costs are associated with the operation of the building. Why are outdoor athletic fields any different? Just like buildings, there are significant capital costs and on-going maintenance costs associated with athletic fields.

So why is there a struggle? Ice vs. grass, cement walls vs. spectator stands, HVAC vs. irrigation, etc. How do you get people to understand the costs associated with expectation? COMMUNICATION!

Is there a potential dilemma? Yes, like any cookie jar, there are only so many cookies to go around before you run out. If communities continue to support education, safety support systems, other tax referendums, and recreation, sooner or later the community will be so taxed out that they will have to start picking and choosing. We all know who comes out on the losing end of that battle—recreation. So we are back in that evolutionary cycle of success and support for many years then comes cut backs and decline. The costs associated with these facilities never go down. Not only do communities risk decline in the overall success of their facilities, but also the talented people that develop programs and run them.

What to do

What can we do? While there is still much contention in charging user fees or

facility rental costs, it really is a compliment to a successful operation. Why tax the whole community all the time, when you should have the ones who use the facilities more often contribute more frequently? Is that the answer?

NO. While many hang their hat on this being the only solution to "right the sinking ship," it should be viewed as a complement to a much bigger picture. Developing a master finance plan that stretches across a number of different mediums should be the goal. Ideally, tax dollars should be a small percentage of the financing/support. Also, consider that these potential sources of revenue (user fees, facilities rentals, partnership opportunities with the community or nationally, fund-raising events, and sponsorship opportunities) are just a few of the ways to generate revenue. I am sure that many of you are thinking, "In this economy,



sponsorships and support is shrinking." While this may be the case on the surface, if you look at what you have to offer and develop partnerships/sponsorships that offer exposure and "dollar for dollar returns," then you should be able to locate the funding. There are many innovative ideas in funding; you just need to engage the people around you for the sparks that light the fire.

Let's pose this question now that many communities around the U.S. have built and/or partially funded some sort of stadium or arena. Do you as a taxpayer have the right to walk onto those fields and demand use since your tax dollars supported those projects? Most likely not and it might equal a night's stay in jail if you are caught. Tax dollars in communities are used for many things, but that doesn't give us the right to demand free use. **ST**

Boyd Montgomery is director of facilities and maintenance for the Sylvania Recreation Corp., Sylvania, OH, and treasurer of the Sports Turf Managers Association.

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PGMS CALLS FOR GREEN STAR AWARDS SUBMISSIONS

The Professional Grounds Management Society (PGMS) is looking to honor the nation's top parks, recreation areas, athletic fields and playgrounds with its revamped Green Star Awards. In order to streamline the application process for busy Green Industry professionals, the awards program now only requires photographs in a digital format.

The deadline for entries is August 5, 2005. Further information is available at <http://www.pgms.org/greenstarawards.htm>

(continued on page 28)

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Aspen Rec Center wins STMA Schools/Parks Complex of the Year

In 1997, the City of Aspen, the Aspen School District, and the Aspen Valley Ski Club were seeking land for recreational facilities in the school campus and the Iselin/Moore Pool area. At this same time, Tom Moore revealed that he was interested in donating land to the community. Moore's donation included flat land, which is very difficult find in the Aspen area, and ultimately made this project possible.

The project proceeded with the input of the community, which overwhelmingly passed a \$13.8 million bond in 1999. The first of the fields opened in 2001 and the project culminated with completion of the Aspen Recreation Center in the spring of 2003. Three brand new multi-use fields were added and one ball field and football field completely rebuilt. The result was five multi-use sports fields centered on the Aspen Recreation Center, which has an NHL regulation ice rink, two pools, and a sauna and steam room. The Aspen Youth Center is located here also, providing activities for the local children. Adjacent to Iselin field is a state of the art batting cage for slow and fast pitch. The City of Aspen has 30 parks and a total of seven sport multi-use fields, per capita one of the highest in the nation and number one in mountain resorts.

The sports field complex is used 365 days a year. Baseball, softball, football, soccer, rugby, and lacrosse are played spring through fall, and in the winter, the fields are used in Aspen's Nordic Trails system. The Mother Lode Volleyball Tournament is held here every fall with more than 750 teams participating. Seating for spectators is a combination of natural seating built into the landscape and some traditional bleachers that are blended into the landscape. The larger multi-use fields can hold up to several hundred spectators. There is no lighting.

The Aspen Recreation Department, which works in conjunction with the Parks Department around the maintenance program schedule, handles all scheduling of

events and athletic activities.

At an elevation of 8200 feet, the Aspen Community Campus presents special problems for sports field maintenance. The high altitude and short growing season (typically soil temperatures are at 65 degrees from mid-June to the end of August) are the biggest challenges for the maintenance program. Colorado has been in a drought for several years, so water management is especially important. Colorado is in an arid climate zone with very low humidity and temperatures can reach in the high 90's in July and August. At high altitude, the sun's intensity can also affect turf growth. All the fields at the complex are irrigated with raw water from Castle Creek, and in early spring runoff the water can be "too pure." Water tests have shown very few, if any salts, minerals or sediments during this time, and this "light



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water" has a tendency to sit on the surface and not penetrate into the soil (another reason for early aeration). The Aspen Parks Department uses the Rain Bird Maxicom system to monitor and control the irrigation program. Watering schedules can be monitored and changed from a central computer for all of Aspen's parks and sports fields.

Other challenges are the number of events and field over-use, which leads to compaction and thinning of the turf. Field access during school and high-use times can affect the maintenance program, so scheduling is an important part in overall planning. The solution to all these problems is a complete and timely turf maintenance program. Being native soil, the fields are core aerated and topdressed every spring. Also, the fields are aerated anytime compaction becomes a problem throughout the playing season, using either knife or solid core tines to minimize disruption of play. All the fields are slit- and overseeded each spring. To help promote seed germination and give established turf a head start, turf blankets are used to compensate for the short growing season.

With the fields being new, soil tests are done in the spring and fall to help with our fertilizer program. Potash and magnesium are typically deficient in the Aspen area and these are monitored closely. Humates are used during the season, providing an excellent carbon source and helping to lower pH without additional sulfur, which is already very high. Before stressful events, the fields are typically prepped with a liquid application of nitrogen, potassium, and microbial cultures.

Through an aggressive turf maintenance program and the hard work by a dedi-



cated staff, the Aspen Community Campus sports complex offers some of the finest maintained playing conditions in the state.

Blair Elliot, sports field supervisor for the city's Parks Department, moved to Aspen in 1977 to be a "ski bum," he says. "Work at night and ski during the day was the standard procedure for those days, and having worked through college as a bartender it was only natural to do it in a ski resort," he says. Elliot burned out on the restaurant scene, then worked at other jobs until being hired by the City of Aspen.

Three years ago he was named Field Supervisor. "There was a huge learning process for me to get where we are now, but I had some great help," Elliot says. "I've had two great mentors, Steve Slack and Tom Rubel. Steve is a fellow supervisor and really

helped me with the 'secrets' of high altitude grass management. Tom is the Operations Manager, and he provided all the tools that I required to get the job done, whether it was schooling or equipment.

"The biggest problem that I have as a sports turf manager is scheduling around the user groups and all the activities that public sports fields receive. Factor in weather delays, and you need to really be on your feet. If opportunities open, take them. If planning runs afoul, change it," says Elliot.

"To be a good turf manager, you must be aware and be able to anticipate what the needs of your turf are and are going to be. You must be a good planner and then be able to switch tracks quickly if those plans get interrupted. You must be a good leader for your crew, and lead by example. Last but not least, you must do

"Field Crew Dads" and volunteers of Reicher Catholic High School faced many challenges this fall. Texas had heavy rain, making the tradition of painting the

Field

in stages as the season progressed a difficult task. A desperate call to a Pioneer rep resulted in the answer the school needed to save the season. The Pioneer rep recommended QUIK STRIPE Aerosol because it has the ability to paint and stick to wet turf. The product was delivered and applied the morning

of

the next game. Now, the players and fans look forward to the new designs added to the field each week, knowing they play on one of the best fields in the country. This week, fifty years of tradition are celebrated on the field with a gold fifty on the yardline commemorating this accomplishment. Congratulations on winning the State Title for TAPPS 3A and a Pioneer Scholarship. This field is painted 100% by volunteers who make this a FIELD OF

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-Douglas Arnot, Pres/CEO, USA Rugby Football Union
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-Dave Rulli, Manager of Stadium Operations, Jefferson County Schools



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your job professionally no matter what happens, and have fun doing your job," Elliot says.

Maintenance program

The five fields at the Aspen Recreation Center are located at an elevation of 8200 feet, and depending on the amount of snow pack and weather conditions during the spring, starting time for the seasons beginning maintenance program for the fields is not a set date. We begin our program after the fields dry out in early April to as late as mid-May:

Turf Maintenance: We begin by grooming the fields with a Steiner tractor and broom attachment to remove dead grass and thatch and "wake up" the turf. We find this also lessens the chance for snow mold to develop. Then we begin the fertilization program based on the soil tests taken from late last fall, usually starting with a 21-5-21 (60 percent controlled release nitrogen w/iron and manganese) as our initial feeding.

Our soil conditions in this particular region of the Rocky Mountains are high in phosphorus but lower potash and magnesium. After the first fertilization, all fields are then aerated with hollow core tines and topdressed. We use a GreensGroomer to break up the core plugs and fill in the core holes with top dress material. The topdress material is USGA spec sand with 10% organics. After aeration and top dressing, all fields are over seeded with 20% rye and 80% bluegrass.

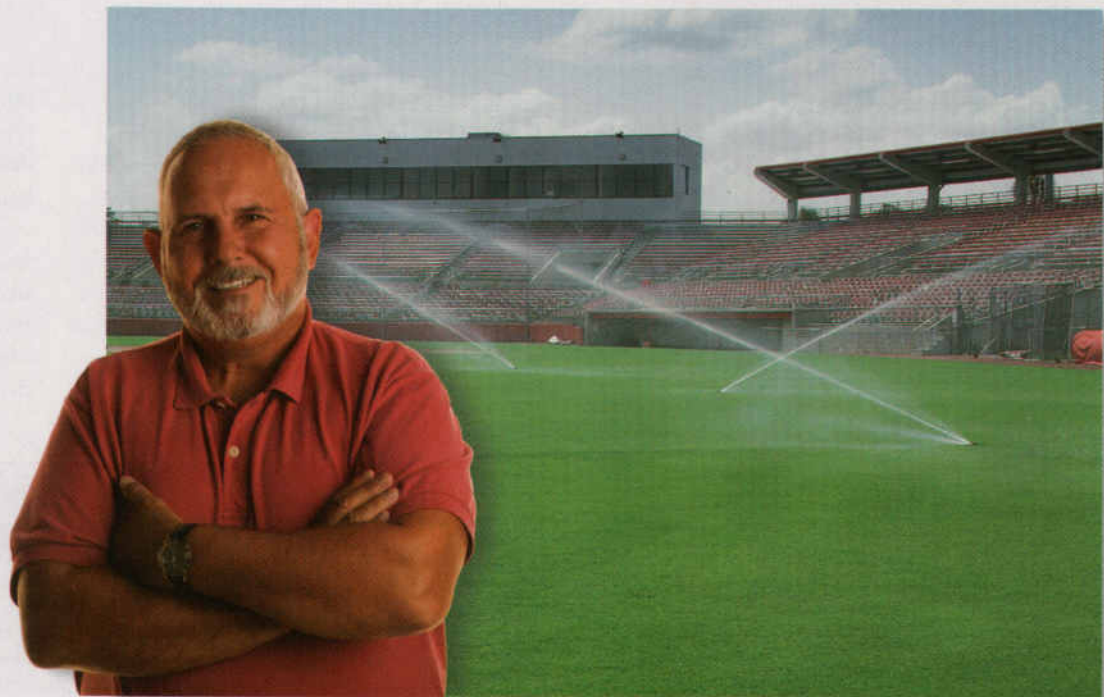
Spring nights are still very cold, so we use Evergreen turf blankets on the fields to promote seed germination and to let established grass get a head start. Throughout the rest of our short growing season, we alternate the fertilizer program with a 6-0-19 K-mag blend and a Nature Safe 21-3-7. Our objective is 4-5 lbs. N for the season. We lay down humates in May, June, and July at 10 lbs. per 1000 sq. ft. During high stress times the fields will receive a liquid application of Threshold Mag, Turf Vigor, and Nutri-Rational K or N. We monitor the compaction of the fields throughout the season, and will use solid core tines and knife aeration to minimize effects on play. At the end of October, usually when the snow begins to fly, we put down a winter application of Perk 4-0-10, and aerate the fields for a final time.

Infield Maintenance: We begin as soon as the fields dry out. We level and add infield material or conditioners as needed. This year (2004) we laser-leveled two fields. At the baseball field, the pitching mound is inspected and brought to playing

condition. The mound is covered all winter and throughout the playing season when not in use for protection. The infields are groomed everyday and each infield has a sprinkler system for moisture management. **ST**

Eric Schroder edited this material. Thanks to Blair Elliot and STMA Headquarters for providing the information.

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around the grounds

A labor of love

BY **BOB HUELSMAN**

As the hot, humid days of summer arrive in the Midwest, thoughts in Covington, a small, rural west-central town in Ohio, turn to the upcoming football season. Football in Covington has a rich history and a tradition that can be summed up by a former player who said: "Football is king and it will always be king."

Thirty years ago, as athletic director and assistant football coach, I searched for a simpler way to line the field rather than the standard crushed limestone routine. A neighboring school district had a handyman who had developed a homemade paint liner mechanism. We had him come over and line the field with paint one evening, and "a labor of love" was born.

We started with stenciled numbers, crawling around on our hands and knees, painting by hand while also slapping the mosquitoes that came out in droves under the lights.

We bought a paint liner and upgraded our paint quality and for many years we worked with this solitary unit. How we got by with only one is still a mystery. It never really broke down where it caused us to miss lining for a game, a fact of dependability that in this day you don't come to expect. And, when you have but one liner, you never really need a lot of people. One or two others besides myself were sufficient.

Over the years, we progressed to four liners, maintenance men to keep them running, human paint mixers, people to push the liners, people to spray the paint, a community and booster organization (the Bucc Boosters) that came out to help (similar to the mosquitoes that greeted us that very first time). We have a field that takes a back-seat to none.

Covington High School's Smith Field won the first Field of Excellence Award, a national award sponsored by Pioneer Manufacturing in Cleveland, the field marking paint specialist.

Beyond the obvious yard lines, hash marks, two-color yard line numerals and end zone letters that spell out BUCCS (26 feet high), the wishbone "C" and Buccaneer head logo that grace the 50 yard line is the centerpiece of the field. An impressive 50 feet high, spanning 20 yards between the 40s, the Buccaneer head is laid out by hand every year and has become the identity of Covington's Smith Field and a point of community pride.

To have a good "painting," you need a good canvas. We feel a good grass surface is important to the overall impact. Mercer Group, Inc. from Troy, OH has worked with us for more than a decade to maintain a healthy, thick, natural grass surface. More than one opponent has been known to kneel and feel the luxurious surface of Smith Field as they step foot on it for the first time...as have Covington seniors, in bidding a proud farewell after playing on it for their last time.

As the buzzards return like clockwork to Hinkley, Ohio, and locusts start their annual drone in August, the men of Covington find their way to Smith Field to begin the ritual of painting for another football campaign.

And as the lights come on Friday nights and the Covington faithful arrive and leave with pride and satisfaction, appreciating the ambiance and atmosphere of a facility that, win or lose, bespeaks the tradition of something more than just high school football. **ST**

Bob Huelsman is a retired administrator for Covington High School, Covington, OH. For more information about Pioneer Manufacturing's Fields of Excellence Award program, see www.pioneer-mfg.com



WEATHER MONITORING FOR SPORTS TURF MANAGERS

An increasing number of sports turf managers are using weather stations to correlate weather conditions and events with turf disease, says Paul Gannett, Onset product marketing manager. For example, many turf managers are concerned about pythium, which can occur during periods of sustained high temperature and humidity. Weather stations are used to identify high-risk periods for this and other diseases, so that chemicals are applied when they will be most effective and without risking the health of the athletes. Turf managers are also using weather stations to record the various weather parameters necessary for calculating growing degree-days or evapotranspiration, as well as for monitoring soil temperature and moisture.

"I'd say that the most significant advance from Onset contributing to greater ease-of-use is smart sensor technology, which our HOBO Weather

Stations and Micro Stations are based on," Gannett says. "Smart sensor technology allows turf managers to plug in any combination of research-grade sensors, which are automatically recognized by the station without complex wiring, programming, or calibration requirements. The user has total flexibility in terms of mixing and matching smart sensors in order to monitor critical site-specific conditions. For example, it might be important to monitor soil moisture at various depths, and soil temperature just below the surface. The weather station would allow the user to plug in these sensors and the logger will recognize them and record and report the data in the correct units.

"We have also simplified power requirements. Our stations are battery-powered which enables turf managers to deploy them anywhere without having to use large battery packs, solar panels, or run wires for AC power."

Regarding data retrieval, Gannett says, "Today, turf managers have a range of options. Many are attracted to our new wireless radio modem, which enables users to automatically retrieve climate data on their desktop from multiple HOBO weather stations deployed up to 5 miles away. The modem uses 900MHz spread-spectrum technology so no license is required, and has the added advantage of being battery powered so no solar panels are required.

"Of course, turf managers who don't opt for wireless communications are free to take a laptop or handheld out to the monitoring sites in the field and offload data there, or bring the logger back to an office PC for offload.

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Morrell Park School	2:38	2.78 miles	65	ENE 3mph
Lakeland ES/MS	3:42	3.41 miles	65	E 4mph

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FOR: Baltimore, MD

Today
Increasing clouds. Highs in the lower 90s. Light winds.

Tonight
Occasional showers. Not as cold with lows in the lower 60s. Southwest winds 10 to 15 mph. Chance of rain 50 percent.

Friday
Cloudy with showers likely. Highs in the upper 60s. Southeast winds around 10 mph. Chance of rain 70 percent.

Friday Night
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Field maintenance, crew scheduling, knowing when to chalk the field or close a stadium roof, are all important aspects of a sports turf manager's job. And most importantly, all of these responsibilities and decisions are affected by weather. Using a modern weather system can help sports turf managers make these decisions more wisely by keeping them informed of accurate, location-specific weather information. Increasing the ease and accuracy in making these critical decisions can help reduce costs, maximize resources and minimize risks.

Real-time, location-specific weather services can make your job easier by providing critical weather information like local forecasts in hourly intervals. Weather systems also have the capability to predict precipitation for an exact location. Since

many stadiums are outdoors, weather systems identify your exact location and automatically monitor real-time radar data for information on when precipitation will start and how long it will last at your exact location. Alarms can also be set to notify you of the type and intensity precipitation, whether heavy to light; giving advance warning so work can be postponed if necessary. The system's future radar capability projects weather movement 90 minutes into the future allowing you to view a storm's path and understand when and where it will hit. Users can view forecasts 10 days into the future to know when to expect major weather changes, such as frost or heat waves. In an effort to "go where you go" sports turf managers can receive weather alerts via e-mail, cell phone, PDA or pager, allowing them to access weather updates relevant to their exact locations of interest no matter where they are located. Another helpful tool is the system's alert manager, which can be customized to the specific needs of turf customers for watches, warnings, advisories, and individualized weather parameters like temperature, wind, rain and other critical weather factors. The warnings can be accompanied by an audible alarm, so when the National Weather Service issues a watch, warning, or advisory that affects your area, sports turf managers are forewarned and know when to halt work, and pull crew members off the field. Based in Minneapolis, Meteorlogix delivers industry-specific weather management capabilities for its customers to manage business risks, maximize personal safety and minimal financial loss. Additional information can be found at www.meteorlogix.com.
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 For information, circle 097 or see <http://www.oners.ims.ca/5061-097>

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TifSport is more aggressive than genetically pure Tifway, especially during the cool weather months. This may account for TifSport's rapid grow-in and repair time.

Superior Sod Strength

TifSport's superior sod strength means quicker installation with less waste, and that's got to be good for your bottom line.

Excellent Traffic Tolerance

TifSport's turf density, sod strength and good lateral growth rate give it a high ranking for traffic tolerance.

Upright Leaf Blade Orientation

TifSport's leaf blade stiffness is being touted by many turfgrass professionals. With TifSport players seem to get better bounces.

Impressive Leaf Texture

TifSport has a similar leaf texture to Tifway, and a finer leaf texture than most other grasses. TifSport will deliver excellent footing for sports fields of all stripes.

Dark Green Color

Pastel green is passé. TifSport's dark emerald green color will make your fields the envy of the neighborhood.

Drought Tough

All grass has to have water, but TifSport can help you make it through those summer water restrictions. It stays healthier and recovers faster from drought than most other bermudas.

Cold Tolerant

TifSport has expanded the northern limit for warm season bermudagrasses. It has survived multiple winters as far north as Stillwater OK & Lexington KY.

Pest Resistant

Research has shown that mole crickets just plain don't like TifSport. That's just one more reason why you should.

Vigorous Root System

This inside view of a typical TifSport plug shows TifSport's impressive root system, stolons and rhizomes.

**For a List of Licensed TifSport Growers Visit:
www.tifSPORT.com**