

# School System Field Care

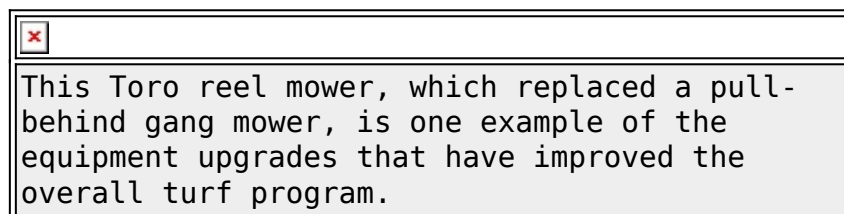


Source: [www.TurfMagazine.com](http://www.TurfMagazine.com)

Peach of a program in Glynn County, Ga.

In the 1990s, the Glynn County Board of Education, based in Brunswick, Ga., took a major step toward improving their facilities' grounds and athletic fields by creating the position of director of grounds and hiring Don Skeens.

The grounds cover over 250 acres, including 17 schools. Glynn Academy, the second oldest high school in the state of Georgia, is set up like a college campus, on both sides of a main street. It has six separate buildings, ranging from one to two stories.



There are 10 additional facilities with grounds, including the central maintenance building. The 12,000-seat Glynn County Stadium is at a neutral site, adjacent to the junior college that donated the land in 1986. It serves as the game field for the football and soccer programs of both high schools. A separate baseball field serves as both practice and game field for both high schools. There currently are three additional game fields and six combination practice and game fields spread between the high school and middle school sites.

Most of the general landscape turf at all the sites is St. Augustine. Each of the school sites has extensive landscaping. Skeens says, "All the landscape materials, from trees and shrubs to annuals and perennials, are adapted to our environment. We design for low maintenance as well as beauty, but there's still a lot of pruning and general plant care involved."

The turf on all the athletic fields is 419 bermudagrass. Skeens says, "All the fields and landscape turf have a native, sandy soil profile. We have a well at every school site to supply the water for the athletic fields, general turf areas and landscape plants. All of the fields have complete inground irrigation systems with the exception of the Glynn Stadium field. There, we have a row of inground irrigation heads running down the center of the field, supplemented by irrigation guns at the sides of the field which can put out water at the rate of 290 gallons per minute."

#### Field demands

Skeens says, "The majority of the multiuse fields serve football in the fall and girls' and boys' soccer in the spring. The middle schools have a competitive team for each sport. With the games, playoffs and occasional championships, we put nearly 20 football games on the turf. Soccer fields, approximately 60 games each spring.

"Our baseball field gets a similar heavy workout starting in late February and running into the summer, with both practices and games alternating between it and a recreation department field. Each of the sports also holds camps during the summer, though we schedule them at our school fields other than these two game fields."

The 12,000-seat Glynn County Stadium hosts the football and soccer games of the two high schools.

The state of Georgia restricts the use of school tax money for athletics. Football is the sport that funds all other major and minor sports. A major fundraiser on the stadium field, the Golden Isles Bowl for Junior College football teams, raised over \$1 million over 12 years, but that program has ended so Glynn County must seek other fundraising sources. Outside users for the stadium field are a potential source of funds and the demand is great.

#### Maintaining the turf

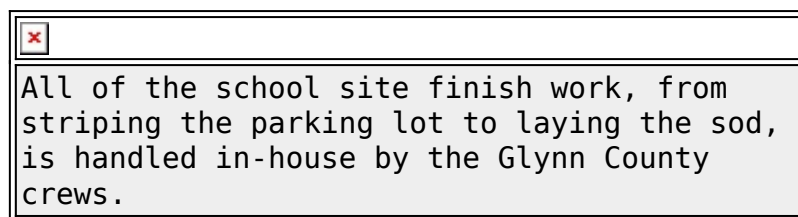
Skeens says, "Like most facilities, we have a small staff with a big workload. Equipment here was antiquated when I first arrived. Our administration has understood and supported our need to keep upgrading our equipment to take advantage of newer, better technology to increase our efficiency and productivity.

Painting sponsor logos is part of the baseball game field preparations for hosting the annual preseason, invitational, fundraising tournament.

"Our mowers for general turf and some multiuse fields are either Scag or Exmark [zero-turn] rotaries. All but one are 60-inch or greater

productivity. The exception is a 48-inch mower for one of the school sites with multiple tight-fit areas. We keep the St. Augustine between 3 and 4.5 inches and the bermuda between 1.5 and 2.5 inches when it's cut with a rotary mower. Our goal is to mow every school site once a week, even in the peak season, and the crews edge and blow, as well as mow."

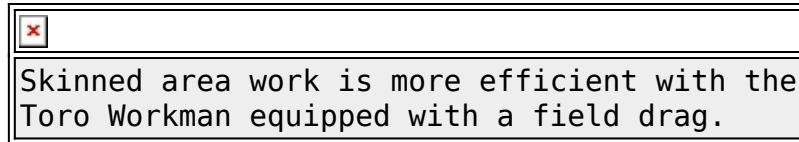
Skeens' athletic field crew has upgraded from a pull-behind gang mower to the more mobile Toro 3100D fairway mower. They're equipped with a Toro Workman with a dump bed and drag attachments, a small Ryan aerifier, topdresser and a large-area sprayer, along with various hand tools. That crew not only uses their walk-behind airless paint sprayers to line and mark the athletic fields, but also to stripe the parking lots.



Before Skeens took over the program, none of the sports fields were crowned for surface drainage and there were multiple field areas with compaction and drainage issues. He says, "The single biggest factor that has improved the condition of our fields and their ability to rebound from all the use during the season is our extensive renovation program. We've been doing it for the last 12 years, always on the stadium field, and to four other fields on a rotating basis. We contract for deep core aeration, reaching to an 8 or 9-inch depth. Some years they harvest the cores, some years they don't. They then topdress each field with between 100 and 200 tons of 'cement' sand and laser-grade them to work the sand down into the holes and maintain a crown and consistent surface. We've used Laserturf out of Athens and they've done a great job for us.

"Timing is always an issue. We begin the process when school is out and all practices and spring games are over. So, it begins at the end of May or first of June. The sand may completely cover the grass, so we have to push them hard to get them ready for fall. We have a good phosphorus level already in the soil here, so we alternate a slow-release 23-5-15 fertilizer with a straight ammonium nitrate. We make applications every two to three weeks depending on the weather."

The game fields are overseeded with the top-performing varieties of perennial ryegrasses, normally a blended mix. The timing varies between late October and early November, depending on the weather. If temperatures are too hot, the ryegrasses will germinate quickly and die off in the heat. They generally overseed the stadium field a second time in January in preparation for the soccer season. Soil samples are taken periodically prior to overseeding to check for changing conditions. Once the new seedlings are established, a complete fertilizer with slow-release nitrogen is applied every three to four weeks with a boost of ammonium nitrate if needed. Heat, aeration and the sand topdressing knocks out the ryegrasses on the game fields.



## Future fields

Two middle schools are being built, one to replace an existing site and one addition. Each will have new fields, including combination PE and multisport practice/game fields and a baseball and softball field. Skeens does provide input during the design stage and either works with the contractors who do the grading and leveling or completes the final leveling and laser-grading in-house. The irrigation systems are installed in-house. The post construction field development and grow in also are staff managed. Skeens says, "I really like being involved so we can control the final product. We have a great staff with the expertise and dedication to do the job right."

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