

FIELD OF DREAMS ...

NAS Jax Upgrades Sports and Training Area

For Morale, Welfare and Recreation (MWR) professionals at NAS Jacksonville, Fla., priority No. 1 is making sure sailors and their families have adequate facilities available to help them stay fit and live a healthy lifestyle. That is why base leadership undertook a massive project to overhaul the main training and playing area on base — a grass field that was prone to flooding and did not provide a consistent and safe area for sailors and their families to use.

The surfacing project, which began in May 2012 and was completed in August 2012, with a ribbon-cutting ceremony on Aug. 13, 2012, came in at a cost of \$1.2 million, which was made possible by a grant from the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD), through Commander, Navy Installations Command (CNIC). The Navy Facilities Engineering Command (NAVFAC) oversaw the project and brought in FieldTurf to install artificial turf.

“This really was a big project because we had to redo all of the irrigation prior to putting in the new turf,” said Fitness Director Tanya Henigman, Fitness, Sports and Aquatics. “So, not only was it putting down the turf, but we had to make sure we had a proper water irrigation system underneath to stop there from being water accumulation on the field when it rained.”

The new multipurpose field now provides a premier playing and training surface for the base community. “NAS Jax is limited in the facilities and areas for commands to use for physical training, and we have limited areas within our facilities, so this new project has really helped our sailors to be able to do command PT [physical training] more effectively,” Henigman explained. “Before, the turf would be very muddy after rains and was not conducive to have command PT on it. This new surface is much more reliable and available for



them to use now for these large-group trainings that are so vital to a sailor’s readiness here on base.”

Now, one of the main uses of the field is for command PT. “We will conduct command PT classes where we will have 200-plus sailors out there at one time doing a boot camp class, or a kickboxing class or circuit training,” said Henigman.

In addition to command PT sessions, Navy Fitness runs Navy Operational Fitness and Fueling Series (NOFFS) training. “Military training — PT, NOFFS and Physical Readiness Test (PRT) preparation — takes precedence over everything,” noted Henigman. “And with our Sports Program, we are now able to enhance that as well with the new surfacing. For a command PT session, we will play flag football, or ultimate Frisbee or soccer, which is a great way to mix things up. In addition, we have a great intramural sports program where we do soccer, flag football and ultimate Frisbee.”

The new field also gets good use for recreational activities, and Henigman pointed out that the fields are busy all week long. “On the weekends, we have our single sailor population, which we really try to focus a lot on, providing them opportunities to stay physically fit, as well as recreational opportunities to keep them occupied. We also have people who go out there with their families, and we do have pavilions nearby as well, where they can set up a little picnic and have a game on the field as a family event.”

Anyone can reserve the pavilion area for a family function or party or for command events, and then use the field for recreational use and games. “It really meets the needs of everyone here on base,” said Henigman. “Command will reserve the pavilion for events, have a BBQ or cookout and sporting events.”

For organized PT classes and sessions, Navy Fitness uses a portable Titan sound system from AV Now that was purchased specifically to run large-group classes outside, such as kickboxing and boot camp.



(From left to right): Naval Facilities Engineering Command Southeast (NAVFAC SE) Construction Manager Nick Bloomer; Cape Design Engineering Company Construction Manager Mark Lueders; NAS Jax Athletic Director Tanya Henigman; NAS Jax Commanding Officer Capt. Bob Sanders, USN; NAS Jax Facilities Manager Lyn Dickenson; NAS Jax Public Works Officer Gil Manalo; NAS Jax Public Works Facility Management Director Troy Thompson; NAVFAC SE Contract Specialist Samantha Shelton; Cape Design Engineering Company President Lutfi Mized; and Robert Slater of NAVFAC SE.

“We will have 200-plus per class, and it still leaves more than half the field for use by other commands to do their own PT. It is a very well-utilized area that can meet multiple needs at one time.”

New bleachers were purchased through BSN Sports, and are set to be installed on one side of the field. The base is considering adding a shade structure for the bleachers, and possibly upgrading the outdoor storage area as well, at some point in the near future.

Additional sports equipment, including flags for football, sports jerseys and goals for soccer, were purchased through BSN Sports. Outdoor fitness equipment includes fitness kits from SPRI, BOSU balance trainers from Perform Better, and other assorted fitness pieces, such as medicine balls, jump rumps and steps, which were purchased from BSN, Power Systems and Gopher. “We make sure that they have what they need and that we have reserves, especially during funding cuts, so we plan out two years in advance,” noted Henigman. “And we try to do buy-ahead purchases for certain items, when possible.”

CHOOSING TURF, GOING GREEN

Prior to the renovation, the field was in disrepair due to a poor draining and irrigation system and an unforgiving grass field. “We would get armadillos digging holes in the field, which was not level in many areas. Also, maintenance costs were a big impetus for this project: It is expensive to water the fields, and for the fertilizer and pesticides — you don’t realize all of the expense that goes into it. Not only that, but you’ve got the cost of maintenance for the grass, which is very high when compared to artificial turf.”

Henigman pointed out that NAS Jax MWR Director John Bushick not only wanted to create a better area for sailors to PT and play sports, but also be more environment-friendly. “He wanted to make sure we had an effective area that could be utilized wisely,” she explained. “Not only that, he was interested in decreasing the amount of money that was being spent on maintenance, while contributing to our Project Green efforts here on base to be environmentally friendly, avoiding the fertilizers and pesticides that go into the water system with grass maintenance. Not to mention that we’ve got our St. Marys river right here.”

The response to the new playing and training surface has been extremely positive, noted Henigman. “Granted, you get the little pellets (used for filler in the turf) on you and you’ve got to brush them off, but it is much better than grass stains and mud. The surface is more effective and safer for the program. First of all, in the past you couldn’t see the armadillo holes on the field, so you would have sailors running to catch a pass, stepping right into a hole and injuring an ankle or a knee, and we then had a sailor who is out because of a recreational event. Now, the ground is level and smooth, and it is not as hard as grass if you fall on it.”

She added that now the field consistency stays the same year-round, so it is not harder during one season and softer during another. “In the summer we would have a dry, hard surface and in the spring it would be wet, muddy and soft.”

And for sailors who are prone to allergies, with the artificial turf they can now participate in training and not worry about their allergies acting up. The new field has also allowed MWR to expand leagues and programs because of the increased time the surface is available for use.

“In addition to the expanded areas for sailors to do their PT and prepare for their PRT, we are seeing a big increase in use by families,” said Henigman. “We have families and kids using it, and a big retiree population that meets at the new field each week. They do activities out there, and that is very important for them to have this space to live a healthy lifestyle. For youth through retirees we need to stay focused on meeting all their needs. It is such a great benefit and we get great reviews from everyone.”

NAVY SUPPORT

Key MWR projects such as this come to fruition because of the efforts of many, and NAS Jax is no different. “We have excellent support from leadership and our directors here,” said Henigman. “One thing that they do every year, and what I find a tremendous benefit to being able to run the operation of our program consistently throughout the Navy, is adhering to certain standards and metrics. Everything is standardized, and by going through an annual accreditation process, we are able to demonstrate that we are coming up to standard, and that we are providing what our military needs to be able to ‘Stay Healthy, Stay Fit, Stay Navy.’ And we would not be able to do that without the support of our executive staff.”

NAS Jax has maintained a 4-star (out of 5) accreditation rating for the past two years, a rating that only a small number of bases have been able to achieve.

“It is hard to maintain a 4-star rating,” Henigman pointed out. “You’ve got to realize that most military bases are either a 2-star or a 3-star. Our Southeast region is very well represented with many bases achieving that 4-star rating, and this reflects well on our regional MWR director. You’ve got to look at the fact that we are able to maintain a 4-star standard with all of the cutbacks and the sequestration that was going on. We had to cut staff hours, work longer hours as managers and supervisors, and still meet the demand of our sailors, which is our main focus. We wouldn’t be able to do that if we did not have the support of our MWR director, as well as our regional MWR director, as well as our skipper and executive officer of the base.”

As part of the overall accreditation process, Navy MWR and Fitness not only checks to see what other Navy bases are doing, but does market basket surveys checking out what the surrounding areas are doing in the civilian population. “We want to keep our sailors here, and we don’t want our sailors leaving the base to go to an area outside the gate to pay for a service that we can provide here on base.”

Ultimately, with very small facilities — a fitness center and base gym that are very busy and crowded with patrons — the new field frees up some space in the facilities and gets the whole base community outside and active.

“It is such a blessing to have the field,” said Henigman.

—GRF

