Sharon Fields

Alleghany County, Virginia

Innovation is a key learning objective for the design/buildLAB at Virginia Tech's School of Architecture. The program's students chose to pursue their innovation endeavor by volunteering to design and build two baseball fields for the Clifton Forge Little League in Allegheny County, VA. The community project was aimed at providing children of all ages a fun and exciting environment to engage with their peers. The charitable project was in response to the need in the community for an adequate facility to mentor children and host tournaments. It was a collaboration between the Clifton Forge Little League, the Allegheny Foundation, and the Virginia Tech School of Architecture's design/buildLAB.

The Virginia Tech design/buildLAB is a project-based experiential learning program focused on the research, development and implementation of innovative construction methods and architectural designs. Students collaborate with indsutry experts and local communities to conceive and construct architectural projects that are both educational and charitable in nature. The aspirations of the program are to simultaneously reinforce the knowledge and skills of students, while supporting development efforts by enriching the quality of the regional environment.

As the 2016 AIA Blue Ridge Design & Construction award winning project, Sharon Fields consists of two customized and visually appealing baseball backstops and an accompanying press box. The two 45' wide x 25' deep backstops were fabricated out of a light gauge steel tubing in multiple sections to allow for easy handling and assembly. The galvanizer was an integral part of the project during the design and fabrication, helping to ensure the large but light oversized tubular sections were able to be progressively dipped and then reassembled in the field. The press box included structural steel and two flights of stairs constructed from expanded metal which were also progressively dipped.

The Virginia Tech architectural students felt hot-dip galvanizing was the best option for the project due to the durability, longevity, and maintenance free nature of the coating. The Clifton Forge Little League is a non-profit organization with a limited budget so long-term durability and low maintenance cost of the project were key concerns. With an average of 400 children enrolled in the baseball programs the design team anticipated the new fields and their partnering structures would encounter heavy usage. Because it is an outdoor structure, the team knew the steel would be constantly exposed to a variety of climate conditions including heavy rain, direct sunlight, and cold temperature in the winter. HDG ensures the tubular structures will be thoroughly protected, inside and out, increasing the overall longevity.

The backstops serve as a protective barrier for spectators and are the most prominent structure audiences view as they attend baseball games in the scenic Blue Ridge mountain landscape. Due to the profile and function of the structures, the Virginia Tech design/buildLAB team viewed hot-dip galvanized steel as a match for the job as it is natural, practical and protective. ■

Galvanizer
AZZ Galvanizing - Bristol

Architect
Virginia Tech School of Architecture

Fabricator
Virginia Tech design/buildLAB

Owner
Clifton Forge Little League

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Civic Contribution