

SIERRASCAPE® WALLS – A WINNER AT HALF THE COST

School Plays Ball with the SierraScape System

Academics are the focus at Villa Walsh Academy, but the college preparatory Catholic school for young women in Morristown, New Jersey, also has a long-standing tradition of supporting athletics, including soccer, basketball and field hockey. In 2003, the Filippini sisters who administer the academy began exploring options for rehabilitating the school's athletic fields and adding a dedicated space for playing softball.

"Putting in the softball field required filling a small valley next to a wetland and forest buffer," says GM of regional Licensee Northeast Mesa Giulio Burra. "Space was tight. So the site had to be retained to make it fit."

Environmental impact, budget and aesthetics were critical issues for the nuns, but Burra knew there was a solution that could address both issues. "We thought the SierraScape System from Tensar Earth Technologies looked like a good fit for the project," he says.

Conventional Strategies Strike Out

Design Engineer Barry Sutherland agreed. His firm, TRC Raymond Keyes Associates, had been hired to engineer the earth structure that would support the new field. Before settling on the SierraScape System, he thought about building the softball field without a wall, but there was insufficient room for the 3 horizontal to 1 vertical (3H:1V) slope that would have been needed to ensure a stable mass. He also considered using gabion rock walls, which would have reduced the structure's footprint, but estimates revealed that this approach would have been labor intensive and expensive.

"A gabion wall was two times more expensive than the SierraScape System," says Sutherland. "It was basically a financial decision by the sisters. They were pleased to get a naturally vegetated

wall that would blend in and be more compatible with the adjacent wooded area. I was satisfied it would give them equivalent performance for less cost."

Field Goes In Ahead of Schedule Despite Foul Weather

Construction on the 25-foot-tall by 200-foot-long wall started in late Fall 2003 and was performed by Preferred Contractor Retaining Wall Systems of New Jersey (RWS/NJ). "The SierraScape Wall went in really smooth even though the weather was wet and cold," says company President Rich Vuolo.

Despite the weather conditions, the RWS/NJ crew was able to complete the project on budget and on schedule. They quickly stacked the geogrid-reinforced, welded-wire forms to create the 1H:1V slope. Using Tensar Biaxial (BX) Geogrids on every third course provided secondary reinforcement and maintained facing alignment during backfilling. Sutherland says the wall is a favorite spot for the school's softball fans.

More Projects Featuring The SierraScape System

"We are building a lot more SierraScape Walls," says Vuolo. "Customers in our markets, like the sisters at Villa Walsh Academy, are intrigued by the cost savings and speed of construction. It's a unique system, and I'm personally very excited about it."

Sutherland says he was impressed with the system and wouldn't be surprised to see it featured on more projects. "The finished wall is very solid," he says. "It even had a tree fall on it, and there was no damage. Bottom line is we are very pleased with the way the system worked out."



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