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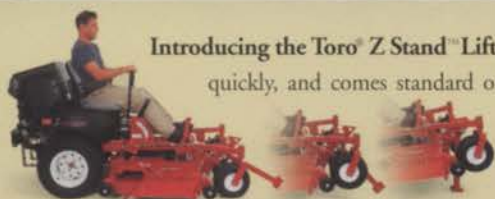
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You can be alerted to breaking industry stories each week by subscribing to *Lawn & Landscape Online's* free e-newsletter. By adding your e-mail address to this list, you will receive an e-mail each Monday evening alerting you to the most recent industry news and latest tools available online. In the busy world of lawn care and landscaping, you can't afford to miss industry news, whether it's consolidation of a major product supplier or the release of a new product.

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Lawn & Landscape Online offers daily features on a variety of topics. Our current schedule is as follows:

Mon. - *Contractor Talk*: Profiles of industry professionals and discussions of common practices.

Tues. - *Irrigation Issues*: An update on new products and hot-button issues.

Wed. - *Lawn Care Roundup*: A look at problems and solutions for the lawn care world.

Thurs. - *Landscape Issues*: The information you need to bolster your landscape design, installation and maintenance skills.

Fri. - *Business Management*: Industry consultants and management firms offer advice on running a business.

First Sat. of each month - *Plant Of The Month*: Learn about carrot family members *Ammi majus* and *Ammi visnaga* from author Barbara Ellis.

Find these features at www.lawnandlandscape.com.

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Finding specific industry information has never been easier. Use the search feature and category listings to find specific information available exclusively online and to view articles previously printed in *Lawn & Landscape* magazine

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Fremont, Calif.



Cover Story

Method Man

Tom Del Conte envisioned a company saturated in organized systems and philosophy, and then used this image to transform a one-man rototilling operation into a thriving landscape business expected to reach the \$10-million mark in 2002. **48**

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TECHNOLOGY *Buyers' Guide*

Lawn & Landscape offers contractors a comprehensive listing of green industry software manufacturers and their latest technology. **T1**



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ONLINE

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"All experience is an arch to build upon."
— Henry Adams

One Free Brain Transplant?

One free brain transplant – that's exactly what the promotional mailer I got from the computer software company offered, and, I have to admit, the idea intrigued me (not to mention amused me).

Just think about the value of such a concept. Who can't think of some other brain that they'd like to have in their head, even if for just a short period of time? Maybe it's someone whose intellect and accomplishments you admire, such as a Thomas Edison or Albert Einstein. Of course, maybe you're looking for a hardly used brain, in which case perhaps some of your ex-employees could serve as donors.

The reality of the situation is that brain transplants are available, figuratively speaking, the only cost is a little bit of your time, and the payoffs can be tremendous. Sound good to you? Then why not gather up a number of your employees and take advantage of their brains? Ask them how the crews can be more efficient in the morning. Solicit suggestions for ways to improve routing. Or, take a real chance and ask them what they think is the dumbest thing your company does.

Their answers may surprise you. Goodyear Tire & Rubber Co., for example, saved hundreds of thousands of dollars a few years back because of an idea from an hourly employee. Apparently, the company was still wrapping each individual tire in protective plastic before shipping, even though the wrapping was designed to keep the white walls clean. The white walls (thankfully) went away years before, but no one thought to get rid of the plastic. The truth is that such an idea could only come from someone on the front lines, close enough to the situation to see the foolishness of continuing to wrap the tires.

This point has been made evident to me since we've been interviewing candidates for an editorial position, and young, talented people are looking to leave their current employer because they "want to be heard" or "want a chance to share ideas." These are valuable brains that companies ignore for any number of reasons, none of which are acceptable.

Are you wasting the brains in your business? Yes, some meetings won't bear new ideas, and everyone is strapped for time. But imagine the benefits of expanding upon your brain by listening, considering and implementing ideas from those other brains. Unless, that is, yours already contains the elements to make you an ideal donor. How likely is that? **LL**

Bob West

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Market Trends

CONTRACTORS TALK BACK

Rising Fertilizer Prices

The Professional Lawn Care Association of America (PLCAA) recently polled its members to gather their thoughts on the predicted rise in fertilizer prices, the effects of which could influence contractors' businesses more than rising gas prices, according to PLCAA.

"Price increases in fertilizer may have a good deal more impact on our profitability than perhaps those recently experienced in both gasoline and insurance," pointed out Bob Andrews, past president of PLCAA and president of The Greenskeeper, Carmel, Ind. "It is also an issue that seems to have caught contractors off-guard."

Ninety-one percent of the survey's respondents said they have already experienced increased fertilizer prices. Price increases ranged from 2

to 35 percent, with 20 to 25 percent being the most reported number, according to PLCAA survey figures.

(continued on page 12)

Many contractors planned for increased overhead expenses in 2001, partly due to the growth they experienced in 2000 and the growth they plan to experience in 2001 (18 percent of contractors said they expected to grow 20 to 29 percent

in 2000, according to a Research USA survey, and 86 percent of the respondents to a *Lawn & Landscape* Online survey predict growth in 2001).

The majority of contractors who answered a *Lawn & Landscape* Online poll are planning a less than 5 percent increase in overhead expenses – 39 percent budgeted for an extra 3 to 5 percent in overhead expenses, while 19 percent planned for a less than 2 percent increase.

To participate in *Lawn & Landscape* online polls and to review past polls, visit www.lawnandlandscape.com/poll.

A "head" of THE GAME

PERCENT OF 2001 BUDGETED OVERHEAD EXPENSES	PERCENT OF CONTRACTORS
0 to 2 percent	19 percent
3 to 5 percent	39 percent
6 to 8 percent	15 percent
9 to 10 percent	13 percent
More than 10 percent	14 percent

Source: www.lawnandlandscape.com/poll

REGIONAL OUTLOOK

Talkin' Texas

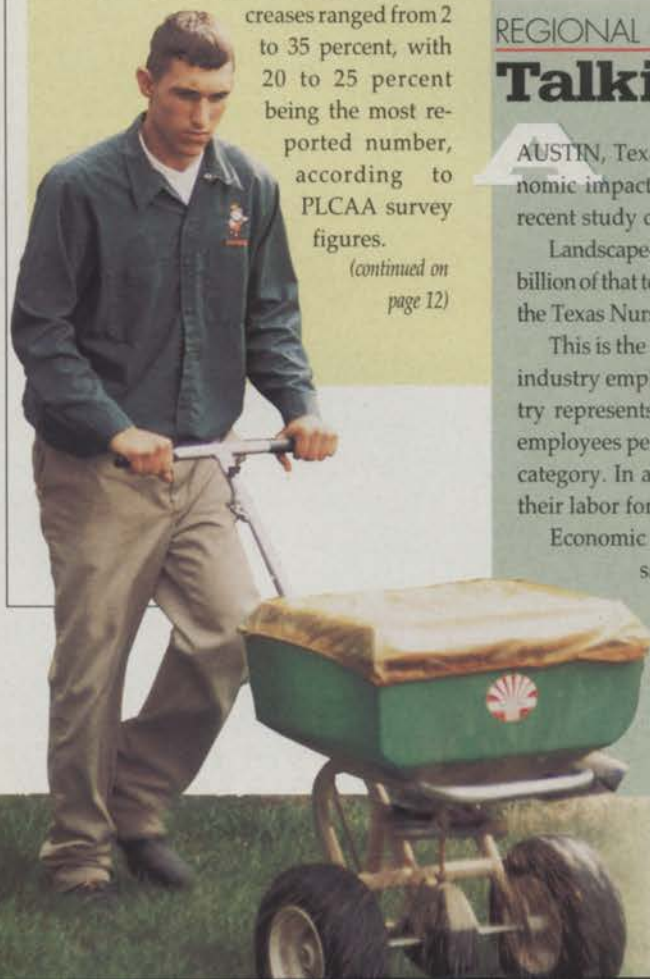
AUSTIN, Texas – Texas' green industry has a total state economic impact value of \$9.76 billion, according to a recent study conducted by Texas A&M University.

Landscape-related firms make up approximately \$2.4 billion of that total, revealed the study, which was funded by the Texas Nursery & Landscape Association.

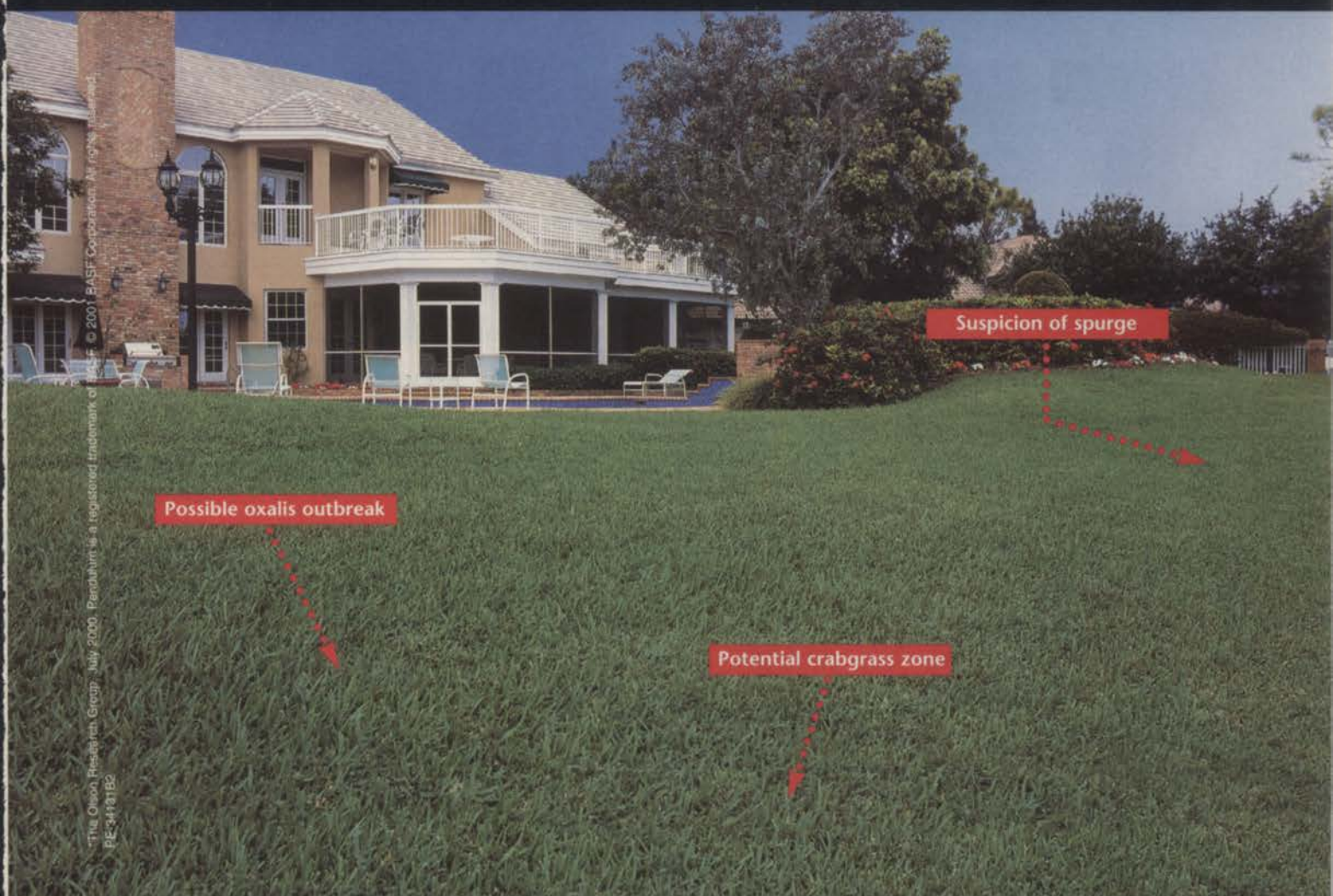
This is the first study conducted in Texas that also examines green industry employment. According to the figures, the Texas green industry represents more than 222,000 jobs, and landscape firms average 42 employees per firm. The majority of these employees are in the general labor category. In addition, the survey said landscape firms expect an increase in their labor force by as much as 30 percent throughout the next five years.

Economic value also was measured, evaluating the difference between sales revenue and purchased input costs, including employee wages and benefits values, owner's compensation, dividends, capital outlays and paid business taxes. Texas' green industry's economic value totaled \$6.46 billion.

Though consolidation continues, the number of landscape firms in Texas has increased, the survey said. Approximately 70 percent of total survey respondents are landscape contractors.



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Market Trends

(continued from page 8)

A majority of the responding contractors – 77 percent – have raised or plan to raise 2001 prices to offset the increasing fertilizer costs. Most of the contractors in this group are shooting for 3 to 4 percent price increases throughout the next year.

"While most members are raising prices across the board, some are increasing prices for new customers only or raising prices slightly higher for new accounts than for existing ones," Andrews said, pointing out that those contractors who aren't raising prices either are pre-ordering a larger product quantity, feel comfortable with their prices and are absorbing the increase or feel that the fertilizer price increase is temporary and the extra money they spend on supplies will correct itself after prices drop.

Rising fertilizer prices also have influenced product supply and availability, according to 86 percent of the survey respondents. "Some contractors said suppliers had backed out of already quoted prices, mean-

(continued on page 14)

People

Bob Woods was named president of Syngenta Corporation for the United States. The company also named **Heiri Gugger** head of Syngenta Crop Protection for North America and **Ed Shonsey** was named president and chief executive officer of Syngenta Seeds.

Dan Klindera was promoted to vice president of Autumn Tree Care Experts.

Scotts Lawn Service welcomed **Don Rossi** to its management team as eastern regional manager.

Green2go named **Robert Shoelson** merchandise manager for general products.

Eric LaFleur is a new partner at Irrigation Consulting. LaFleur will oversee operations at the North Carolina office and handle the firm's new business development.

Havener Enterprises appointed **David Bynum** to national sales and marketing representative for the Mower Sully and Trimmer Guard product lines.

James Kelley was appointed to district sales manager for Landscapers Supply.

RBI Co. promoted **Heather McGonigle** to Human Resources Manager.

Simplot Partners named **Nick Spardy, David Schermerhorn** and **John Maggiore** to its management team.



Woods (top),
Kelley (bottom)

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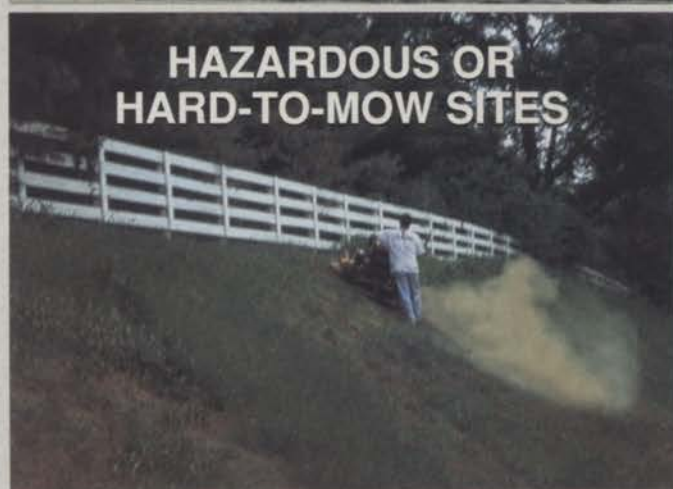
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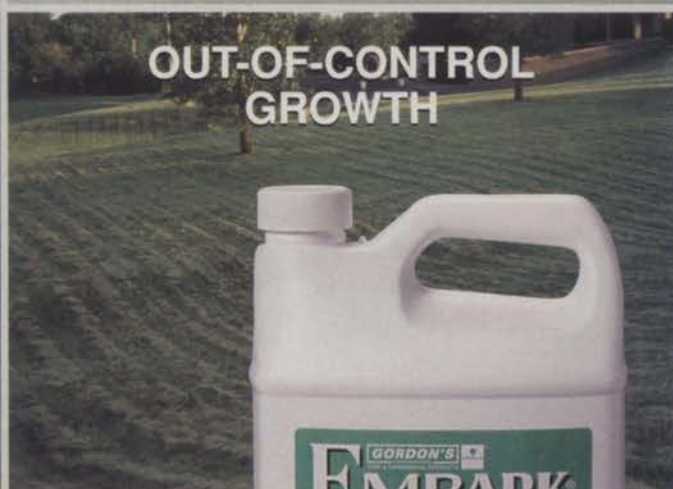
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Market Trends

(continued from page 12)

ing if they did not agree to the increase, 'No sale.'" Andrews said. "Others cited that suppliers were only willing to quote on products already on hand, but not products ordered for future delivery. Some contractors pointed out that only fertilizer with a high urea content was in short supply, but that anything else was readily available. Others said that any shortage had been offset by early ordering for 2001, which they believe their suppliers will honor."

INDUSTRY UPDATES

Catching up with ECI

CALABASAS, Calif. - When Environmental Care first appeared on the cover of our pages in 1992, it was a \$58-million company with 20 locations in seven states. This year, the company expects to generate about \$185 million in revenue from 57 locations in 17 states. After Bruce Wilson steered the ECI ship for 20 years, Richard Sperber assumed the presidential helm last year while Richard's father, Burt Sperber, continued as president of ECI's parent company, 52-year-old Environmental Industries. EII, with its subsidiaries (Environmental Golf, U. S. Lawns, Valley Crest, Valley Crest Tree Co.), now surpasses a half-billion dollars in sales.

Lawn & Landscape recently caught up with Richard to find out how the industry's largest independent company views its future, as well as the future of the industry. Not surprisingly, he is confident that ECI will continue to grow, thanks to an organization-wide focus on three goals. "We focus on three areas: delivering superior customer care; recruiting, training and retaining the finest people in the industry; and producing steady and strong profits," Sperber related.

Describing his role as "someone whose job is to keep reminding everyone else about our goal," Sperber is focused on developing the company's 3,000 employees. "The most important thing we're doing is investing in our people at the branch level with our new EII University," he said. "This represents a \$1.5-million investment to train everyone from the account manager level up in a six- to eight-month-long program that provides a mix of classroom, Intranet and hands-on learning," he explained.

While ECI's acquisitions have made re-

(continued on page 16)

On the WEB

Thornton Landscape - www.thorntonlandscape.com

The Lawnmower Shop - www.TheLawnmowerShop.com

A Neater Nature, Inc. - www.aneaternature.com

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Market Trends

(continued from page 14)

cent news, these are people-driven deals, Sperber noted. "Expansion into new markets takes place for two reasons: our customers want it and our people require it," he asserted. "As we train people better, they want more opportunities. Our people dictate how we grow and where we grow to. Now we're helping them grow faster."

Despite signs of a softening economy, Sperber remains confident that landscape contractors will enjoy continued prosperity. The challenge will be dealing with clients who have higher expectations. "Because customers are more demanding, fewer companies will remain attractive options as a service providers," Sperber noted.

Companies that focus on their people will remain competitive industry players, however. "We all use and have access to the same equipment and materials, and we're all impacted by the same weather. So we're playing on a level playing field," Sperber observed. "The only difference between us and any other company is our team."

Correction

The Scotts LawnService franchise listed in a sidebar to the cover story in the February 2001 issue is in Orange County, N.Y., not Orange City, N.Y.

IN THE NEWS

Dow to Acquire Rohm & Haas

INDIANAPOLIS—The steady stream of consolidating pesticide manufacturers continued with the announcement that Dow AgroSciences will acquire Rohm & Haas, as the turf and ornamental market assumes an increasingly important role for these companies as agricultural markets soften.

"We are delighted with the proposed acquisition of the Rohm & Haas agricultural business, which includes its prominent fungicides, insecticides and herbicides," said Charlie Fischer, Dow's president and chief executive officer. "These product lines complement and enhance our portfolio ... products for specialty crops as well as turf and ornamental businesses."

Although federal regulations prohibit Dow employees from disclosing details until the deal closes in the middle of the second quarter, the company is excited about the additions of Rohm & Haas' Eagle fungicide and Dimension herbicide. In addition, Dow acquires Rohm & Haas' position in the joint venture RohMid, which owns the insecticide Mach-2 with BASF.

"Seeing our CEO specifically mention the T&O business tells you that this deal wasn't just made for specialty crop reasons," added Scott Eicher, senior product manager at Dow AgroSciences, adding that many basic pesticide suppliers are focusing more attention on non-agricultural markets now. "If you look at the global agricultural business, you'll see it's either flat or contracting 1 to 2 percent annually. Where are the companies that sell

(continued on page 18)

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Market Trends

(continued from page 16)

into that market going to get new sales? They're looking more at specialty businesses like T&O and pest control."

And the consolidating probably isn't over. "The six largest suppliers have annual sales from \$3 billion to more than \$6 billion, the next largest company is at \$500 million, and there are about 10 manufacturers at that level," Eicher observed. "Manufacturers need to have enough critical mass to afford basic research and development for products as well as provide products with regulatory support."

Jeff Jetton, Rohm & Haas' business communications manager, agreed, explaining that pesticide manufacturers are finding success harder to come by today. "You have to have a critical mass to compete in this marketplace," he observed. "If you can't compete at that level, the best thing for you to do is get out of the business."

"I'm not sure when the consolidation will end," Eicher added, "but I wouldn't be surprised to see more deals in the next 24 months between companies in the top and second tiers."

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MAY 19-23 American Society of Irrigation Consultants Annual National Conference, Savannah, Ga. Contact: 925/516-1124.

JULY 12-15 American Nursery and Landscape Association Annual Conference, Cleveland, Ohio. Contact: 202/789-2900

JULY 19-22 Associated Landscape Contractors of America Summer Leadership Meeting, Amelia Island, Fla. Contact: 800/395-2522.

JULY 15 Ohio Florist's Association Short Course, Columbus, Ohio. Contact: 800/395-2822.

JULY 20-22 Outdoor Power Equipment/Lawn & Garden Show, Louisville, Ky. Contact: 502/562-1962.

JULY 24 Midwest Regional Turf Field Day, West Lafayette, Ind. Contact: 765/494-8039.

JULY 24-25 Nebraska Nursery & Landscape Association Summer Field Day, Bellwood, Neb. Contact: 816/233-1481.

AUG. 1 Massachusetts Certified Horticulturist Exam, Waltham, Mass. Contact: 413/369-4731.

AUG. 10-12 Northeast Organic Farming Association Annual Summer Conference, Amherst, Mass. Contact: 978/355-4046.

AUG. 17 ALCA Design/Build Conference, Atlanta, Ga. Contact: 800/395-2522.



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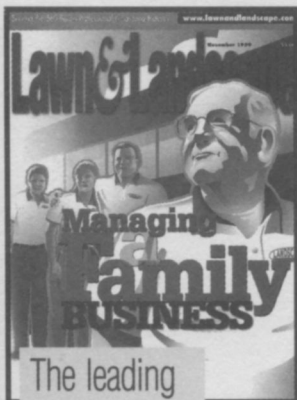
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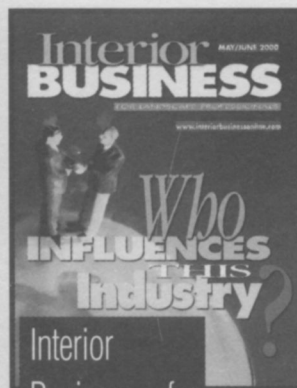
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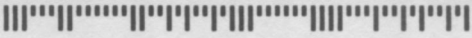
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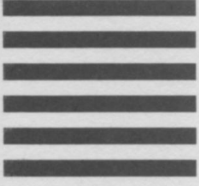


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- AUG 21** Cornell University Field Day, Ithaca, N.Y. Contact: 607/255-1792.
- AUG. 29-SEPT. 1** CalScape Expo, San Diego, Calif. Contact: 707/462-2276.
- SEPT. 9-11** ANLA Legislative Conference, Washington D.C. Contact: 202/789-2900.
- SEPT. 14-15** WALP Certified Landscape Technician Testing, Spokane, Wash. Contact: 800/833-2186.
- SEPT. 15** CLP Interior and Exterior Exam, Cleveland, Ohio. Contact: 800/395-2522.
- SEPT. 18-19** Virginia Tech and Virginia Turfgrass Council Turfgrass and Landscape Field Days, Blacksburg, Va. Contact: 540/231-5897.
- SEPT. 22-25** American Society of Landscape Architects Annual Meeting, Montreal, Canada. Contact: 202/898-2444.
- OCT. 3** Washington Landscape Trade Show/Field Day, Puyallup, Wash. Contact: 800/833-2186.
- OCT. 3** CLP Interior and Exterior Exam, Austin, Texas. Contact: 800/395-2522.
- OCT. 10-11** Southern California Turfgrass Council Turfgrass Landscape and Equipment Expo, Pomona, Calif. Contact: 800/500-7282.
- OCT. 10-11** California Association of Nurserymen Western Nursery & Garden Expo, Las Vegas, Nev. Contact: 800/748-6214.
- OCT. 12-13** Plant Health Care, Inc. Plant Biology Workshop, Frogmore, S.C. Contact: 888/290-2640.
- OCT. 14-17** Atlantic Seedsmen's Association's conference, Annapolis, Md. Contact: 814/237-0330.

HISPANIC LABOR

Proposed H-2B Bill May Increase Visas

WASHINGTON - The Essential Worker Immigration Coalition is devising a bill that could raise the annual cap on H-2B visas and create short- and long-term visas, replacing seasonal and peak-load limitations.

The bill, which largely mirrors the H-2A agricultural guest worker compromise of 2000 that narrowly failed passing in Congress, could raise the visa cap from the current 66,000 to 120,000, and generate six-month and eight- to 10-month visa programs.

The proposed bill also includes an earned status adjustment provision for landscape and other service workers, according to the American Nursery & Landscape Association (ANLA), a member of the coalition.

The coalition is searching for support of this program while pinpointing chief House and Senate sponsors. For more information, contact ANLA's Anthony Bedell at 202/789-1893.

(continued on page 24)

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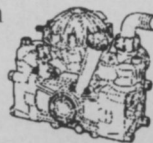
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Market Trends

(continued from page 21)

IN THE NEWS

Senate Votes to Kill OSHA Standard

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The U.S. Senate voted against OSHA's controversial ergonomics standard designed to prevent workplace injuries.

Voting 56 to 44, the Senate approved the proposal to scuttle the ergonomics rule, which could force employers to redesign workspaces and compensate workers for repetitive-motion injuries. The proposal is now at the House, where approval is predicted.

The Senate vote was a major victory for business groups that argued the rule, partly due to compliance costs, which were predicted to reach nearly \$100 billion. For organized labor, which supported the rule as the broadest workplace reform ever ordered by the federal government, it was a big setback.

The Senate resolution not only invalidates the standard, but prohibits OSHA from ever repropounding a regulation that is substantially the same again. **LL**

Association NEWS

The **Ohio Turfgrass Foundation** will celebrate its 40th birthday on April 24. The organization held its inaugural meeting in Wooster, Ohio, on March 23, 1960, and after several gatherings, the group formalized on April 24, 1961, and George Hammond was elected its first president. Since its founding, OTF has contributed more than \$3.3 million in research grants and more than \$300,000 in scholarships.

Associated Landscape Contractors of America named Landon Reeve, president, Chapel Valley Landscape, as the 2001 recipient of the ALCA Landscape Service Award. The award recognizes individuals who have demonstrated commitment and service to the green industry. A formal presentation was made at the recent annual Executive Forum in Tucson, Ariz.

Texas Nursery & Landscape Association announced its new board of directors and granted honorary lifetime membership status to George Tereskovich, professor emeritus at Texas Tech University, Lubbock, Texas. New state regional directors are Floyd Trammel, Sam Weger, Charles Britton and Jon Klement. Business directors are Jack Davis, Bob Cartwright, Mark Baxmann and James Wilhite. Chairman elect is Rick Archi and Tom Mikulastik will serve as chairman of the board. Continuing on the board are state regional directors Tom Dickerson, Bill Brown, Paul Tomaso and Don Legacy, and continuing as business directors are Mike Branch, Dan Davidson, Mark Harris and Michael Bracken. Kent Langlinais will serve as out-of-state director.



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NEW YORK STATE NEWS

Industry Fights Notification Law

Even though the 48-hour notification law took effect in New York on March 1, a coalition of 20 industry groups is still fighting by filing suit against three counties in the Empire State that adopted the law, claiming it violates the State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQRA).

Under SEQRA, proposed legislation that influences public health or the environment cannot be passed without completing an environmental impact study. The coalition claims that neither the state nor the counties that adopted the notification law followed this procedure before passing it. Therefore, the coalition requested an injunction from the state court.

While the coalition's request for an injunction was denied in early March, both parties' argued the validity of the law and

the assertion that SEQRA was violated because no environmental study was done on March 18. At press time, however, the court had yet to make its ruling.

The legislation, which requires 48-hour notification to neighbors within 150 feet of properties scheduled to be sprayed, was enacted as a statewide law, but legislators granted individual counties adoption rights. However, the counties weren't allowed to modify the law. So far, Suffolk, Nassau and Westchester counties have adopted the law and are named in the pending suit.

Richard Brodsky (D-Westchester), the state assemblyman who proposed the legislation, said he believes the coalition's claims are unfounded. "I'm not so sure I understand what environmental research they feel wasn't done," Brodsky said. "This thing was carefully considered for a couple of years and widely debated. This is well thought out and will be successful."

Fred Langley, manager of state and government relations with Responsible Industry for a Sound Environment, explained that counties will likely review the costs associated with enforcing and managing before deciding to adopt it.

"They want to see what happens in other counties and if the state changes its position about placing the burden on the counties," Langley commented.



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Breaking News

MANAGING THE LAW. Each violation of the law carries a \$1,000 fine. But with county resources already stretched to the limit, who will police the law?

Michael Bellantoni, executive director of the New York State Turf and Lawn Association, claims that this law is not only difficult to enforce, but also will cause administrative headaches for involved parties.

The State Board of Health asked the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) to help enforce the new law, he said. Bellantoni predicts problems will arise when someone sees their neighbor's yard being sprayed and calls to report that they haven't been notified. He said, most likely, the situation will not require notification and the DEC will lose money and time.

Brodsky disagreed. "I think giving people notice isn't particularly difficult," he said.

Lawn care operators have already alerted their customers to price hikes resulting from the new law. A Cornell University study found that it can be anywhere from \$39.95 to \$188 per account, Bellantoni said.

ALTERNATIVES. Many in the industry agree that notification is an important issue, but feel there are more effective alternatives.

The most popular idea among those in the industry is a voluntary registration system where people who want notification when their neighbor's lawns are sprayed will sign up to receive it.

"The industry is in favor of it because any person who wishes to be notified can do it on a voluntary basis," Bellantoni said.

This registry was first established in Connecticut, and it generated a high level of positive public response. "At first, the registry was 1½ inches thick, but after a \$5 sign up fee, it dwindled to 10 pages," Bellantoni said.

"The impact of this law is that it blow integrated pest management (IPM) out the window," he continued. "It becomes impossible to use IPM with this law."

While the industry and legislators swap arguments, the court ultimately will decide how this issue plays out in New York.

Larry Wilson, government affairs chairperson for the New York State Turf and Landscape Association and chairperson of the industry coalition, said although they have received a lot of support, there's no way to predict the end result.

"We're all holding our breath. Our attorney has done extensive research and thinks we'll win the first round," Bellantoni related.

Because there are so many consequences, other states are likely to pay close attention to the outcome of this case as well. "Just like the blower ban that started in California - it's an epidemic," Bellantoni said. - Cheryl Green

The author is Internet Project Manager for Lawn & Landscape Online.

The cost of fighting a legal battle such as this is enormous. Therefore any contributions, whether they be financial or otherwise, are being accepted. Please contact Michael Bellantoni at 914/948-6468 or Larry Wilson at 914/588-5500 if you or your organization is interested in helping.

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COMPENSATION PACKAGES

Is Your Price Right?

Supply and demand economics dictate that the price of landscape employees will continue to climb as long as they are in such short supply. The lack of qualified supervisors and managers, in particular, has forced contractors to reevaluate how they compensate their employees in order to attract them.

One trend gaining momentum is providing employees who go above and beyond the call of duty with paid time off work, observed Larry Fish, president, GreenSearch, Atlanta, Ga. "For example, a lot of contractors hustle to get work done in May before the heat really gets bad," he explained. "Maybe a company that asks for

a lot of hours in May will reward the employees by giving them a day off in June when the workload is a little lighter."

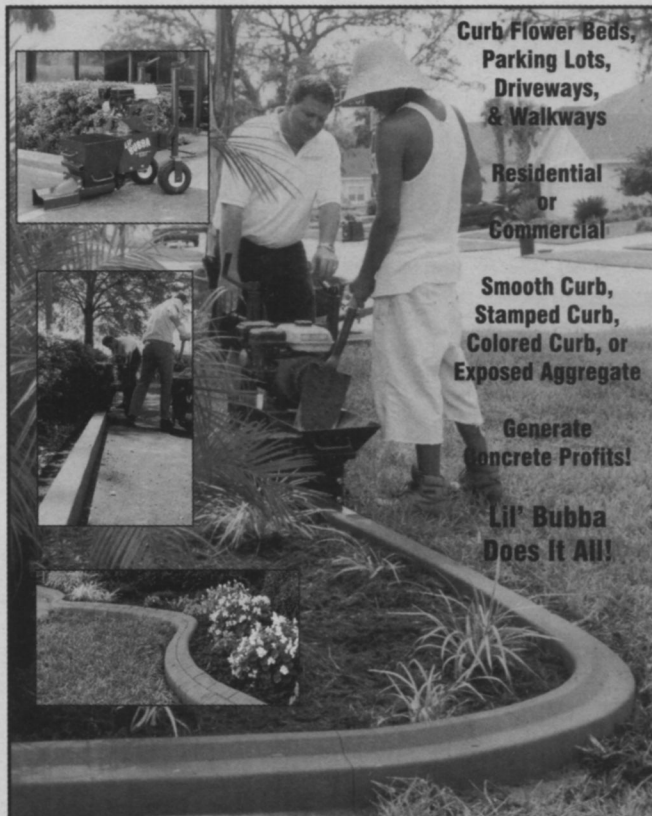
Contractors' compensation creativity is most evident, however, when they start offering variable compensation, Fish noted, adding that more companies are going this route in a dual attempt to attract key employees and drive growth. "The most controllable cost on a profit-and-loss statement is labor," he noted. "If there's a way to reduce the fixed element of that line item and tie that expense to the company's performance, then everyone should win."

Essentially, companies using this approach tie a portion of their managers' salaries and bonuses to the performance of their area of responsibility in the company. Paying employees this way could actually result in paying more dollars, but only if the company hits the desired goals.

"This way, the irrigation manager is motivated to grow his division or maximize profitability, depending on the goal set at the beginning of the year," Fish explained.

For the most part, this variable compensation model has been limited to the upper management of landscape companies, but Fish noted that some companies have offered foremen or crew leaders similar earnings opportunities.

Meanwhile, Fish cautioned employers to steer clear of



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discretionary bonus programs. "More people pay their foremen, technicians and so forth with discretionary bonuses based on how much the company has left over at the end of the year, but this creates inherent employee relations risks," he pointed out. "If you pay these bonuses on Dec. 31 one year, what

happens the next year when there isn't any bonus to give out because of factors out of your control, such as escalating fuel prices? Plus, discretionary bonuses may imply that one individual will get more than another, and employers will eventually have to face the music if that is the case."

An equally important part of total compensation is the benefits package that companies offer.

As employees climb the organizational ladder, company cars and even retirement programs become more common, according to Bob Zahra, general manager, Florapersonnel, Sanford, Fla., adding that this industry offers relatively small benefits packages compared to other industries.

Fish noted that most employers offer a benefits package that includes employer-sponsored health insurance or access to a similar program. "Most employers with 25 or more employees procure a program they can offer employees and eligible dependents," he added, "although most employers require a portion of the premium to be born by the employee."

While vacation days are commonly offered, Fish said generally only large companies offer paid sick days. "Smaller companies forgive the absence or charge the day against another accrual." — **Bob West** 

As important as a paycheck is to people, Bob Zahra, general manager, Florapersonnel, Sanford, Fla., cautioned employers not to assume money is the most important reason people take or leave jobs.

"Salary is about fourth on the list in terms of important reasons people take a job," Zahra noted. "First, people want to work in a company where they feel as if they are making a contribution and they are appreciated for that contribution. Second, people want to be recognized by their peers for their contributions and held in esteem for them. Third, people want to be in a geographical area they like."

If all three of these criteria are met, Zahra said compensation becomes less important to individuals. "On the other hand, if any one of those three begin to falter, then you might see someone think about making a job change," he warned. — **Bob West**

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Nursery Market Report

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Creating Allergy-Free Landscapes

Spring has arrived and so has allergy season – a time that many landscape clients dread. This can change by creating allergy-free gardens to ease their suffering while still beautifying the landscape.

The sex of your plants is the most important consideration when creating an allergy-free landscape. Male trees and shrubs shed huge amounts of airborne pollen intended to reach the females. When females are not nearby, the pollen reaches sinuses instead.

Modern landscapes are loaded with male-only trees and shrubs, including ash, poplar, willow, cedar, juniper, cottonwood, mulberry and xylosma, among others.

Landscape contractors favor the male species because they are “litter-free,” meaning they produce no seeds,

seedpods or fruit. But these male plants do produce “litter,” or pollen, which often triggers allergies. Female trees and shrubs, on the other hand, produce flowers, seeds and fruit, but they do not produce or shed pollen.

In nature, there is a balance between males and females, with roughly 50 per-

cent of each sex present. In urban landscapes, however, the ratio is typically 90 to 95 percent male and 10 percent or less female. With some urban landscape species, male clones now represent 100 percent of the landscape plants used. The result has been a constant rise in total urban pollen loads and a corresponding rise in the number of people affected by pollen allergies.

Airborne pollen floats around, lands on dry surfaces and then becomes airborne again with the slightest breeze. Instead of landing on female trees and shrubs, the dry pollen grains often land and stick on other moist, receptive surfaces – our eyes, skin, mouths, throats and noses. Humans are often the most natural effective pollen traps.

FEMALES TO THE RESCUE. Planting female trees and shrubs is the best way to avoid free-floating pollen. Female plants are nature’s “air-scrubbers,” trapping ambient pollen grains and leaving the surrounding air free of allergens.

Since airborne pollen is negatively charged, and female plants are positively charged, the two are attracted to each other. Female flowers also stand up in the wind, attracting and absorbing male pollen.

Still, whole communities do not need to plant allergy-free landscapes to notice a decline in allergy problems.

Pollen dispersal tests on typical landscape trees such as oak, maple, birch and poplar have consistently shown that more than 99 percent of the source plant’s pollen falls out and sticks within 30 feet of the plant’s drip line. Pollen scientists estimate that an allergenic, pollen-producing tree within one yard will expose you to 10 times the amount of pollen as the same tree planted down the block. The closer the source, the greater the total exposure.

Avoidance is the real key with allergies. In yards with highly allergenic, heavily pollinating trees and shrubs, allergy-sensitive clients may be inhaling a high number of pollen grains with each breath of air at certain times of bloom. This means the areas immediately around homes or office buildings are important zones to protect by planting female trees and shrubs.

Other points to consider are diversifying your client’s gardens to avoid overexposure to any single species, and pay attention to which tree, shrub or plant species are highly-allergenic. — Thomas Ogren

The author wrote *Allergy-Free Gardening*. Reach him at tloallergyfree@earthlink.net. For a listing of allergenic and non-allergenic trees, check out this article with the April issue of *Lawn & Landscape* at www.lawnandlandscape.com.



The *Morus alba* mulberry (top) and *Cedrus deodara* Deodar Cedar (right) are examples of a female and male tree, respectively. Photos: Thomas Ogren



TURFGRASS REPORT

Avoiding Herbicide Resistance

Combining herbicides with timely cultural management practices has significantly contributed to the overall aesthetic quality of turfgrasses. Yet over the years, these turfgrasses have developed a resistance to some herbicides.

HERBICIDE RESISTANCE HISTORY. Herbicide resistance has been slower to develop, or to manifest itself, than insecticide and fungicide resistance. Possible reasons include: a) weeds normally complete only one life cycle per year, b) weeds are not as mobile as insects and disease pathogens, c) crop rotations utilize different herbicide families and mechanical cultivation is routinely practiced in most crops or d)

certain resistant weeds are less ecologically fit than their susceptible biotypes.

A common misconception is that continued use of the same herbicide causes a mutation to occur, which causes the weed to develop a herbicide resistance. However, herbicides do not cause mutations.

Research has shown that resistant individuals are naturally present at extremely low frequencies in a given population of weed species. Continued use of the same herbicide over a period of years controls the susceptible biotypes, but increases the population of resistant biotypes. The herbicide's selection pressure is analogous to a plant breeder selecting biotypes that are resistant or tolerant to various types of imposed selection stresses (i.e. drought, mowing height, dis-

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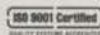
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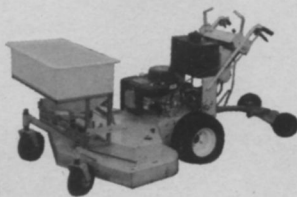
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Horticulture Forum

eases, insects, etc.). Continued herbicide use for several consecutive years causes a herbicide-resistant population of weeds. However, this statement is true only if resistant individuals are naturally present on the site.

CASE HISTORY. In the mid-1980s, goosegrass resistance to dinitroaniline herbicides was reported in South Carolina.

A single application of oryzalin, proflam and pendimethalin at the maximum-labeled rate did not control the goosegrass. Sequential applications of these herbicides at the same rates also did not provide control. Additionally, dithiopyr did not control goosegrass as a single or sequential application, because pendimethalin, proflam and oryzalin are members of the dinitroaniline herbicide family and have the same basic modes-of-action. Though dithiopyr belongs to the pyridine herbicide family, it has a mode-of-action similar to dinitroaniline herbicides.

Single and sequential applications of oxadiazon provided approximately 90 percent goosegrass control in 1993 and 1994. Oxadiazon belongs to the oxadiazole herbicide family and has a mode-of-action totally different than the dinitroaniline herbicides and dithiopyr. Therefore, on sites where dinitroaniline or dithiopyr-resistant goosegrass is present, rotation to oxadiazon or other herbicides with different mode-of-action than dinitroanilines and dithiopyr is necessary to effectively control this biotype of goosegrass.

HERBICIDE ROTATION. Annual use of dinitroaniline herbicides for a period of several years contributed to the development of resistant goosegrass. Therefore, herbicide-resistant weeds can occur in turfgrasses, and turfgrass managers should implement an herbicide-resistant weed control strategy in their weed management plan.

Once resistance occurs, the only practical option is rotating an herbicide that has a different mode-of-action than the herbicide previously used.

Rotating to a different herbicide in the same chemical family is not effective, as members of the same family have the same mode-of-action. Also, increasing the rate of the herbicide is not an effective option, as true herbicide resistance is absolute and is not related to tolerance.

Horticulture Forum

CONTROL STEPS. For several years, dinitroaniline herbicides have been widely used by turfgrass managers to effectively control goosegrass, crabgrass and other annual weeds. No one can accurately predict that resistant goosegrass will occur on every turfgrass site. If there are no resistant individuals in a given population of goosegrass, then the problem will not occur.

However, rather than take chances, turf managers should practice a basic principle of pest control, i.e. pesticide rotation. By following this basic principle, turfgrass managers can continue to depend on the effective, low-cost control that dinitroaniline herbicides have provided in the past.

Herbicide-resistant weeds are a true phenomenon. Factors that contribute to their development include: a) continued annual use of herbicides with similar modes-of-action, b) avoidance of herbicides with different modes-of-action, and c) allowing herbicide-resistant weeds to reseed.

Herbicide-resistant weeds are not a major problem in turfgrasses. However, they can become more widespread if turfgrass managers do not employ herbicide-resistant weed management strategies.

Management practices that discourage or prevent, herbicide-resistant weeds are: a) using herbicides with different modes-of-action, b) using tank-mix combinations of herbicides with different modes-of-action, c) controlling weeds that escape preemergence herbicide treatments with postemergence herbicides that have different modes-of-action, or d) preventing seed production by hand roguing.

Goosegrass resistance to the dinitroaniline herbicides and dithiopyr does not mean that it is time to push the "panic button." Nor does it mean that these herbicides are no longer effective. The dinitroaniline herbicide family can provide economical annual grass control in established turfgrasses.

However, herbicide-resistant weeds can become a problem in turfgrasses. Additionally, there is a natural tendency to continue to use pesticides that have been successful in the past. If turfgrass managers want to prevent widespread herbicide-resistance, then they should practice herbicide rotation.

- Tim Murphy



The author is Extension Weed Scientist at The University of Georgia.



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Design Notebook

Design Notes

PROJECT: Del Mar Thoroughbred Club

LANDSCAPE COMPANY: Stay Green,
Santa Clarita, Calif.

DESIGNER: Sue Ericson

PROJECT MANAGERS: Tony Angelo and
Dave Ericson

PLANTS INSTALLED: Vinca Marigold, black-eyed
Susan, sago palm, canna lilies, frucraya striata,
celosia and Ageratum

MAN HOURS: 4,700

PROJECT COST: Not available

The goal of the Del Mar Racetrack landscape project was to set the stage for a 43-day party, which followed the Del Mar Fair, a 15-day event that attracts more than one million visitors to the San Diego area each year. The 10-day window of time between the two events was the greatest challenge. The available manpower, delivery of products and the other vendors vying for the same elevators and delivery docks created a hectic situation.

TIMING CHALLENGES. Most of the plants and flowers that were used in the landscape were ordered six months in advance. The requirement to have them in full bloom for opening day was extremely difficult. The designers chose to install a selection of Vinca Marigold, black-eyed Susan (*rudbeckia*), sago palm, canna lilies, frucraya striata, celosia and Ageratum.

The phrase, "You only get one shot at a first impression" is true for opening day. Once the race meet starts, the time to work on the landscape is further condensed. The horses were scheduled to train in the Paddock area from 4:30 a.m. until 11 a.m. In addition, the crews needed to enter the area and complete all work by 1 p.m., before the gates opened.



The lawn in the Paddock was the greatest challenge. More than one million visitors had damaged the grass only a few weeks before. Resodding the area or even installing artificial turf had been ruled out, said Dave Ericson, Stay Green. "Actually, there was one year we had a cold, damp July and had to apply green lawn paint on opening day to temporarily solve the problem."

GRAND ADDITIONS. Stay Green crews also installed the interior landscaping of the Grandstand area. They installed the plants and flowers from the main lobbies up to the 6th floor railing boxes. The quality standards that are expected in these areas are the highest as private director's suites belong to some of the wealthiest people in San Diego. The dress code is suits, ties and dresses and the furniture, food and beverage service is all "top of the line."

Invariably, a number of last-minute project additions changed the scope of the project. The crews had to deal with these amendments to meet their deadline. The group sales director ordered three new theme areas for the crews to create, including a cigar bar in a "Tropical Cuban mini-forest." Twenty-four hours before opening day, the director also requested a garden for the horse owners and trainers.

The last-minute additions and detail-oriented nature of this job presented several challenges. The effort it takes to plan, procure, organize and then to maintain all the areas is considerable. Timing was critical to the success of this project, and the crews followed a stringent schedule to meet the deadline. — Sue Ericson

The author is area manager of Stay Green, Santa Clarita, Calif.

Last-minute additions to the Del Mar Thoroughbred Club project caused timing to be the main construction challenge for Stay Green crews. With 21 employees working on the grounds, the project had a stringent 10-day deadline, which had to be met for the racetrack's opening day.
Photos: Stay Green

A THREAT TO TURF

Mole Crickets

Seven species of mole crickets may be found in North American turfgrass, but only four of these are considered important pests. The tawny mole cricket and the southern mole cricket are the most damaging species. The short-winged mole cricket occurs occasionally at pest levels. These three species were introduced from South America. The native mole cricket is considered a nuisance pest in the northern part of its range.

Seven species of mole crickets may be found in North American turfgrass, but only four of these are considered important pests.

Mole crickets that damage turf are found south of the line running from mid-North Carolina through mid-Louisiana and into southeastern Texas. Damage consistently occurs south of a line running from southeastern Texas along the Gulf States into southeastern North Carolina where southern grasses, such as centipedegrass, bahia-

grass, Bermudagrass and St. Augustinegrass, are affected. The native mole cricket occurs throughout the eastern half of the United States. While the tawny and southern mole crickets are the most common and damaging pests, shortwinged and native species have also been known to cause damage in certain areas.

DIAGNOSIS. Mole crickets tunnel through soil like their mammal counterpart. This tunneling breaks up the soil around turf roots and the turfgrass often dies due to desiccation. Severe damage occurs in summer months when nymphs are actively feeding on turfgrass roots. Heavy infestations during this period may result in large dead patches and exposed soil. St.

Augustinegrass does not show severe symptoms of damage from mole crickets, possibly because of its dense growth habit and fibrous root system.

GENERAL LIFE CYCLE & HABITS. Mole crickets undergo incomplete (gradual) metamorphosis with egg, nymph and adult stages. Nymphs resemble adults but are smaller and do not have developed wings. Most species have a single generation per year with adults maturing by fall, but do not lay eggs until the following spring.

IDENTIFICATION. Four common species of mole crickets can be identified by examining the claws (dactyls) on the front leg. The northern mole cricket has four major claws while the imported species have two. The space between the tibial dactyls, either V-shaped or U-shaped, separates the tawny mole cricket from the southern shortwinged.

Color patterns on the pronotum are also useful in separating species.



Shortwinged mole crickets have front legs with a U-shaped space between the claws (left). A tawny mole cricket has a narrow, V-shape between its two large claws (below, right).



Native mole crickets have front legs showing four claws or dactyls (left). Insect I.D. features excerpts from *Destructive Turf Insects* by The Ohio State University entomologists Harry Niemczyk and David Shetlar. For more information on the book, call 800/456-0707.



In Minor's League

Can you give me some ideas on managing my business as the economy slows down?

This is a situation that seems to be developing for many business owners at this time. The stock market is in "bear country," which triggers a slowdown in the economy, and hence spending for many of the services landscape professionals provide.

In general, a key at this point is not to overextend your payroll capacity or create burdens that cannot be met during a recession. Too many contractors think that the next job is right around the corner and don't concern themselves with overextending capacities. However, overextending often causes contractors to bid jobs below a profitable level just to meet the fixed expenses they created for their businesses.

Before you get into this situation, examine your personnel issues. Often, during an economic downturn you

(continued on page 41)

Editor's

NOTE



In addition to serving the industry as a consultant and speaker, David Minor is the William M. Dickey Entrepreneur in Residence and director of the James A. Ryffel Center for Entrepreneurial Studies at Texas Christian University in Fort Worth, Texas. Prior to joining TCU,

David was the president of Minor's Landscape Services, a \$12-million, former INC. 500 award-winning company he founded in 1978 and sold to TruGreen-ChemLawn in 1998. Readers with questions for Minor can fax them to Lawn & Landscape at 216/961-0364 or e-mail them to bwest@lawnandlandscape.com.

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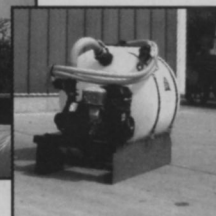
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USE READER SERVICE #35

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Chart a Course for Success in the 21st Century

As we embark on the 21st century, turf and ornamental professionals enter a rapidly changing landscape laden with unknown opportunities and pitfalls. Without a guide through these uncharted territories, businesses often feel like ships lost at sea.



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In a time when more and more products are disappearing from your arsenal, Bayer is investing time and resources to keep the products you trust on the market. The Bayer product line is equipped with several tools that our customers trust to provide excellent control of their pest problems – Merit® Insecticide, Tempo® Insecticide, Dylox® Insecticide and Bayleton® Fungicide. During this time of turmoil, turf and ornamental professionals can count on Bayer's solid product line as a lifeboat.

Our guiding factor in product development and support is you, the customer, and we are constantly looking for new uses for our existing products. When we heard about the need for a better way to

control *Pyricularia grisea*, the fungus that causes gray leaf spot disease, we worked with researchers at the University of Kentucky and Penn State University to refine our recommendations for controlling the disease with Bayleton 50 Fungicide. And now, we are proud to also offer Compass – with its proven performance against gray leaf spot – in our arsenal against the devastating disease.

Similarly, when turf and ornamental professionals told us about the need for a solution for insects on fruit and nut trees in residential areas, we undertook research to evaluate the efficacy of Merit. As a result, the Merit label now includes apple, pear, pecan, grape and other urban fruit trees. Because of our customers' success and comfort in using Merit, we will continue to research new uses for this incredible product.

Even in the face of potential pitfalls, we stand behind our products. Last year, when organophosphates came under regulatory scrutiny of the United States Environmental Protection Agency, we worked diligently to re-register Dylox Insecticide (trichlorfon) to keep it available because of its importance to our customers as a curative treatment for white grubs.

New Business Models

Although great products are vital to successfully navigating the course, they are only half of the equation. Just as following an old map will lead to missed destinations, so too will following the same business models year after year. In fact, the "competition based on price" model that carried many of us through the

20th century is no longer viable.

Bayer offers two new programs to help increase your customer base and your income from current customers, as well as fostering customer loyalty and boosting employee satisfaction.

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Turf and ornamental professionals can extend a guarantee to their residential and commercial customers, instilling a greater sense of confidence in their grub control efforts. In this way, you can reduce retreats with a program customers highly value and will be willing to pay extra for. Knowing they will receive reimbursement if Merit doesn't work assures turf managers that their budgets have been wisely spent.

Building Partnerships

In addition to the Merit Guarantee, Bayer offers another business model to help improve employee satisfaction and to reward loyal customers. Bayer Accolades™ is an innovative rewards program that can be used to benefit both employees and the bottom line.

There is much talk these days about forming strong partnerships. Yet the weakness in many of these partnerships is that they are often one-sided. When we created Bayer Accolades, we made sure each partner benefited from the partnership. When you buy Bayer products, we, of course, benefit, and we wanted to make sure your benefit extends beyond the purchase. That's why we talked to turf and ornamental professionals like you to find out

what kinds of rewards would help them succeed. And, that's why the Bayer Accolades rewards include technology to help you in your office, logo apparel and recreational equipment to help you enjoy your time off.

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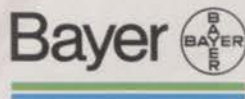
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In Minor's League

(continued from page 36)

will be better served using temporary labor instead of hiring full-time staff in certain situations. The obvious benefit here is reducing fixed costs and retaining flexibility in tough times.

Instead of increasing salaries, consider more incentive compensation. Try your best not to cut people, especially key employees. You will be better served by reducing benefits, overtime or unnecessary perks than by eliminating people you will eventually need again. Freeze those salaries before you are forced to fire good, dependable staff. If you do have to eliminate staff, make sure they are the non-essential, expendable employees.

During challenging periods like this, you, as the leader of the organization, need to manage your associates' expectations and make sure you are realistic with your own goals. Communication is the key. Meet regularly with your staff to talk about the current situation and brainstorm to develop strategies that will help you through the difficult times. Working together to solve problems

creates buy in and enhanced loyalty.

At the same time, the basic business management that you took for granted during the good times becomes increasingly important. Control your inventory and make sure your managers only order absolute necessi-

The stock market is in "bear country," which triggers a slowdown in the economy, and hence spending for many of the services landscape professionals provide.

ties. Capital expenditures that once were commonplace should be closely scrutinized as well. Forego unnecessary purchases.

From a financial perspective, I highly encourage zero-based budgeting. Ask yourself this question: "If I started this business

today, would I spend this money?" If you answer, "No," don't budget for that purchase now. Question everything in your budget from A to Z this way. Expense accounts, country club dues, car expenses and travel are just a few examples of expenses that seem to get out of control during the good times.

Finally, receiving timely financial information so you can adjust and make the needed changes is of the utmost importance. If you are not receiving your monthly financials by the 10th of the following month, then you simply are not getting them soon enough. Weekly reports detailing your payables, receivables and sales prospects – just to name a few line items – are also

important to monitor.

The bottom line is, you have to become a better manager when the economy slows down. Those who pay attention to the smallest details will survive. Those who don't will have tough tasks ahead of them. **LL**



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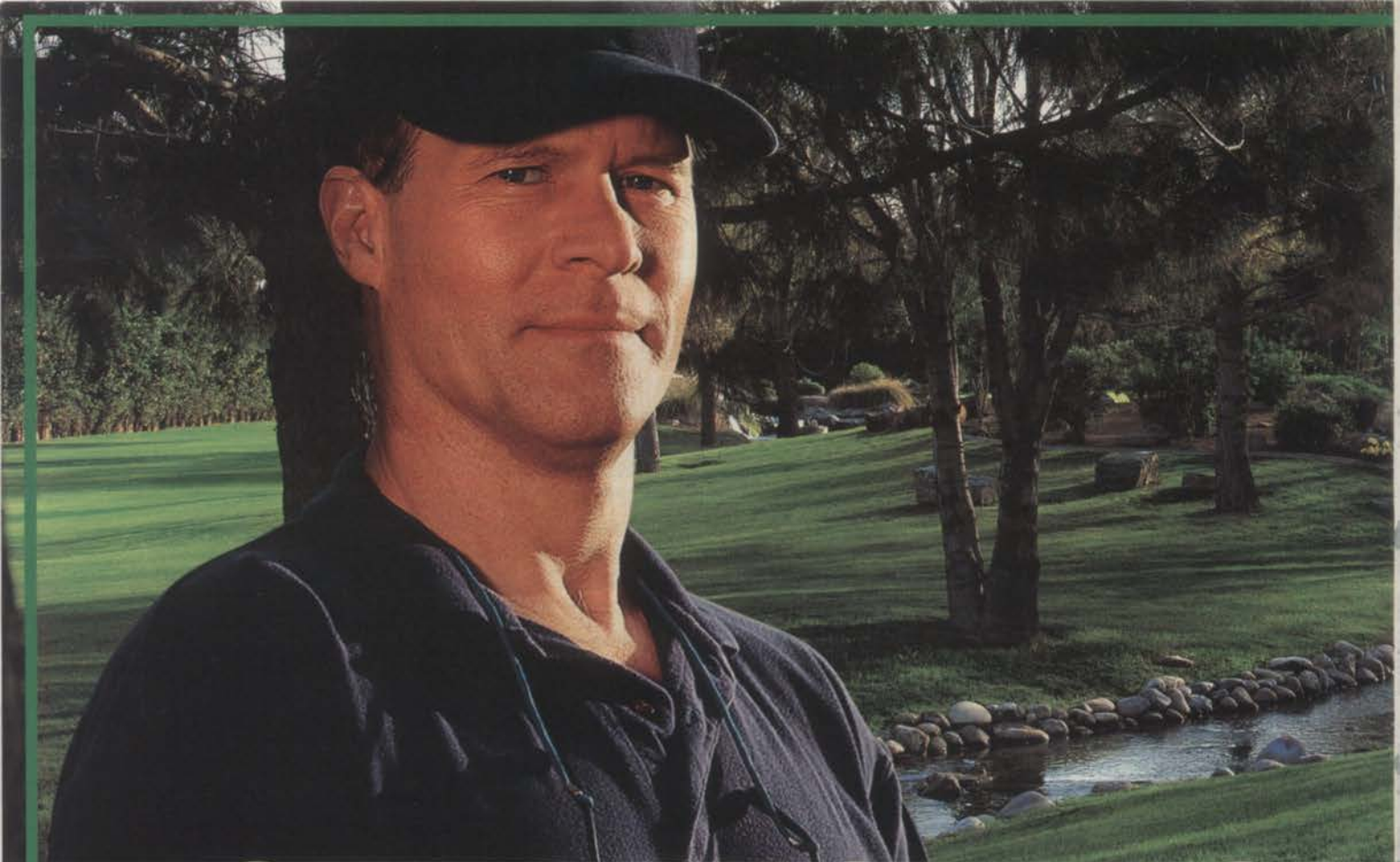
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APRIL 2001

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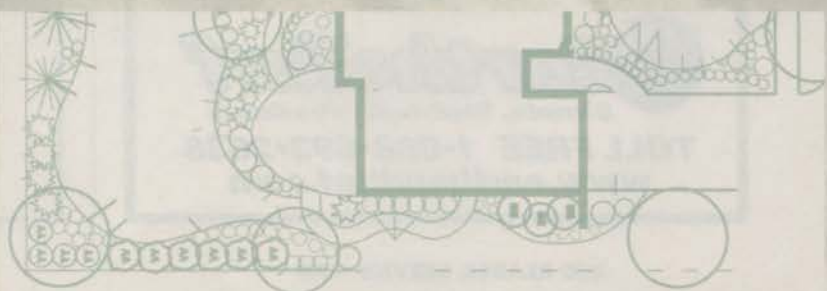


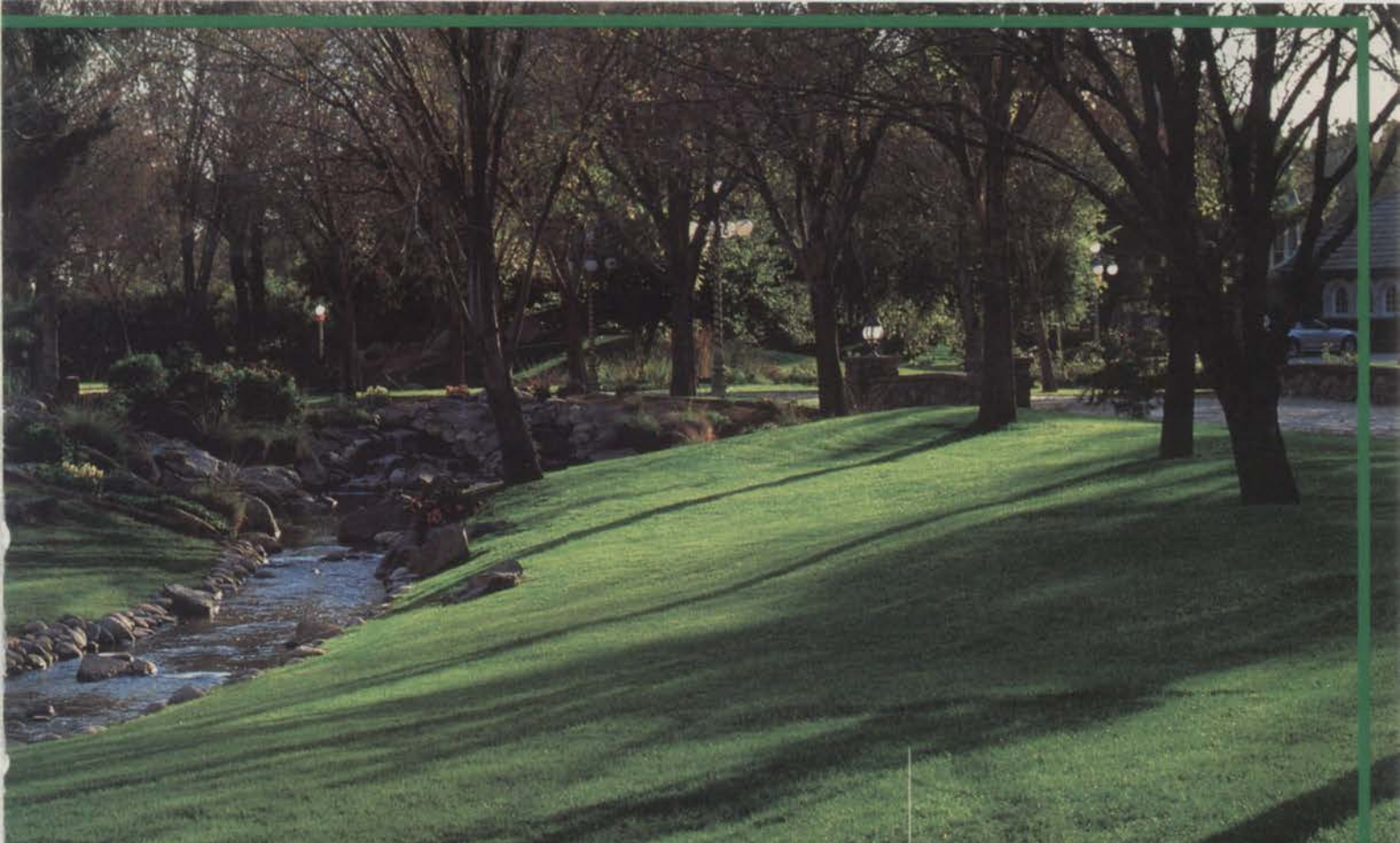
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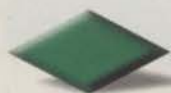
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Minding Your

Business



Winter is Over – Now What?

For landscape contractors, the transition from winter to spring is like going from zero to 60 mph in a high performance sports car. The only thing to do is hold on and try to keep the car on track.

Many landscape contractors feel ready to face the challenges the spring rush offers because they spent time working on improving their companies during the winter.

Creating plans is easy, but sticking to them is a different story. Here are some critical areas contractors must focus on throughout the year to improve their businesses.

A BUDGETED BASE. Budgeting is a key ingredient when it comes to running a landscape company. For most contractors, the winter months are the only time of the year they can find the time to budget.

When creating a budget, the company sets its financial goals for the year. Contractors must manage the goals they hope to meet, and doing this during the heat of the season can be difficult. Most managers find it easier to manage their budgets by reviewing profit and loss statements at the end of each month and comparing them to their

(continued on page 46)

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Minding Your Business

(continued from page 44)

budgets, but this is not budget management. During the busy season, most managers don't have time to take a proactive approach to managing their budgets. Instead they wait until the end of each month to see how they did. The difficulty being maintaining the budget throughout the busy year.

Managers who forecast and project direct costs, revenue, sales and overhead expenses on an ongoing basis will be able to make better financial decisions and improve the consistency of their company's financial performance.

SYSTEMS ARE GO. Typically, strategic planning identifies systems within an organization that need to be modified and improved. A business is made up of many systems that are implemented daily.

Winter provides contractors the chance to evaluate and modify their companies' systems based on last season's experiences. Too often, contractors spend winter hours creating new systems, but then these systems do

not materialize once spring rolls around.

Whenever a company adds or modifies a system, it must always remember that implementation takes time. In addition, when adding or changing a system a business owner needs to create some form of a process to evaluate the new or improved system and its effectiveness.

Too often, contractors spend hours each winter working on improving their systems and creating new systems that their employees will be required to follow, but then those systems never materialize in their businesses. Spring rolls around, business picks up, and the next thing they know is they are back to doing things the way they used to. As managers, contractors are too busy to spend time retraining or enforcing new systems, so they decide to just let them go and allow employees to return to the way they performed tasks in the past. After all, the old way is the

way that got them to where they are today. This is certainly the easy way out. But next winter, these landscape company owners will be spending more time working on the same systems all over again.

Therefore, landscape contractors should not give up on new systems. Instead, they should evaluate systems on an ongoing basis and make adjustments when and where they are necessary. — Tim Lynott

The author is an industry consultant with Landscape Consulting Services. He can be reached at 410/795-6248.

EDITOR'S NOTE: This is part one of a two-part Minding Your Business. In May, Lynott will discuss how landscape contractors can focus on marketing and recruiting efforts in the winter and keep those efforts up once the busy spring and summer months arrive.

Want to know how other contractors handle a particular business challenge? Ask us, and we'll find out. Send ideas for "Minding Your Business" topics to bwest@lawnandlandscape.com or via fax at 216/961-0364.



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USE READER SERVICE #73

by Nicole Wisniewski

Method MAN

At the start of his business nearly 30 years ago, Tom Del Conte had only three employees, but he decided to model Del Conte's Landscaping as a big company anyway.

"Anytime I had to make decisions about how to do something, I wouldn't think of a person or a task, but a position and a process as though we were a large firm," explained Del Conte, president of the Fremont, Calif.-based business. "For instance, even when the company was very small and construction projects could easily be managed by an individual's memory and awareness, we committed ourselves to developing detailed checklists to process the various components of each project."

Regardless of his admittedly disorganized nature, Del Conte pictured himself as part of a larger entity and this, in turn, helped him run his company in a more structured manner. "I saw order and method as a key to part of our future success, so I disciplined the company to be organized, regardless of my habits," he said. "Instead of saying, 'I'll become more organized when I get bigger,' we worked very hard on our systems as though we were going to build into a bigger company."

Envisioning success and aggressively pursuing organization increased the stability and durability of Del Conte's business. Developing an organizational structure first and then gradually growing the company into this mold each year became his basis for development, resulting in a 23 percent average annual growth rate

throughout the past five years and 2000 gross sales of \$6.47 million, not to mention a 93 percent retention rate for year-round employees and a revenue goal of \$10 million by 2002.

GROWING UP. Del Conte's Landscaping was born in 1972 when Del Conte was just a high school junior with entrepreneurial spirit. A one-man rototilling show, he gradually started installing lawns and sprinkler systems for individual clients while attending California State University, Hayward, Calif. He graduated in 1977 with a business administration/finance degree and planned to become a banker or stockbroker, but the monotony of figuring

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Del Conte Landscaping

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Tom Del Conte envisioned a company saturated in organized systems and philosophy, and then used this image to transform a one-man rototilling operation into a thriving landscape business expected to reach the \$10-million mark in 2002.

The Del Conte's Landscaping management team includes (from left to right): Takeshi Yamamoto, Tom Del Conte, Natali Del Conte, Kurt Bland, Jose Luis Magana and Carol Chloupek. Photo: Mark Skorheim

DEL CONTE'S LANDSCAPING

HEADQUARTERS: Fremont, Calif.

FOUNDED: 1972

BUSINESS SERVICES: 43 percent installation, 31 percent maintenance, 17 percent recycling and 9 percent irrigation

2000 REVENUE: \$6.47 million

2001 PROJECTED REVENUE: \$8.79 million

EMPLOYEES: 90 year-round employees, 135 seasonal employees

THE PHILOSOPHY

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FUTURE CHALLENGES: To have the right image internally and externally and to complete future financial goals without sacrificing employees' quality of life.

THE OWNER

Tom Del Conte

BACKGROUND: Started his own company in 1972. Received a business administration/finance degree from California State University, Hayward, Calif., in 1977.

At a
Glance



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Cover Story

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financials all day made building what he'd already started a much grander mission. From there, the business evolved quickly. "I'm the kind of person who sees something that looks doable and I tend to bite off more than I can chew, then I just chew it," Del Conte said, explaining how Del Conte's Landscaping became a full-service company. "A client would ask me if I could install a lawn. So I did plenty of research, asked a lot of questions and then taught myself how to do it. The same thing happened with installing sprinkler systems. I studied each task as a craft as opposed to winging it."

Del Conte managed crews of three to four people and targeted small to mid-range commercial projects. Winning commercial bids was tough at first. "I was young and commercial business wasn't as easy to get," he explained. Del Conte eventually targeted homeowners' associations (HOAs), where he recognized tremendous market potential. The trick was learning how to deal with the unique requirements of these jobs and handling communication despite the frequent turnover of board members and property managers.

"We found a niche that we fit into well," explained Kurt Bland, Del Conte Landscaping's maintenance division manager. "When you're dealing with HOAs, you're not dealing with one customer. You're dealing with a property manager, a board of directors and a landscape committee within that board, so keeping the lines of communication open is crucial to maintaining these accounts."

One way the company tries to perfect communication with HOA accounts is through quality control reports, which are mailed to clients monthly and detail past and upcoming months' work.

Today, 75 percent of the properties Del Conte's Landscaping maintains are homeowners' associations, Bland said. The company primarily uses three-man crews comprised of a route leader, a highly experienced gardener and a less experienced gardener to service anywhere from four to five small accounts in one day or one large account every week. The company also employs four off-site crews that report directly to their respective larger sites daily, Bland said.

GROWING SMART. In the early 1980s, Del Conte began to truly settle into the business, and he developed a few key programs that eventually formed the guts of the company philosophy.


Developing an organizational chart was his first key business objective. He drafted the first chart at 1 a.m. one night in 1986 and found that there were 25 boxes detailing company positions on the chart and only seven employees. "This was a realization that meant we were at a volume such that people were wearing multiple hats," Del Conte said.

This chart became what Del Conte calls "an architectural blueprint on which to build my company." Instead of outgrowing the amount of work his employees could do, he began preparing in advance to fill upcoming positions based on projected company growth. "I had time to

(continued on page 54)

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Cover Story

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prepare each hat before I handed it off," he said.

This chart, which is posted around the office and has 63 boxes on it today, represented the beginning of Del Conte's management-by-objectives program, which was his next structural challenge. By definition, management by objectives is an academic business term that means working objectively vs. subjectively and managing by principals that can be counted and measured. "It's making objective commitments to ourselves when we have an assignment and then each assignment is objectively tracked on our meeting notes," Del Conte explained. "For instance, rather than saying, 'That's a good idea, let's get around to it,' we say, 'Good idea, when is it expected to be accomplished and who's following it up?' Management by objectives is defining what you are going to do and then measuring and establishing accountability for each task."

With this approach, accountability and deadlines aren't forced, but the assignment

isn't forgotten until it's accomplished, so managers, including Del Conte, tend to get embarrassed if their tasks keep showing up on weekly meeting minutes, he pointed out.

A key to the management-by-objectives approach is Del Conte Landscaping's budgeting process. In the past, managers would create budgets and turn them into Del Conte in December. He decided to change this approach in 1995 when he held his first off-site annual budget and goal presentation meeting.

The meeting, which is held on the last work day of the year, has evolved into a full presentation seminar, and serves as a way for managers to present their objective goals and budgets for the coming year to Del Conte. To learn the direction of the company, key employees and strategic allies, such as the company banker, accountant, bonding agent, attorney and select vendors, are also invited to the meeting. "This gives attendees a chance to offer sincere critiques of our plans and helps us point out pitfalls we may avoid that

coming year," Del Conte remarked.

Then, on the first day of every month, managers are expected to create a revised budget based on new knowledge gained since the budget meeting. "It's foolish to hold a manager accountable for a July budget he did in December of the previous year when the company could gain more value from each manager creating a revised budget for that month," Del Conte said. "Managers are still responsible for the annual budget, but we don't want to be naïve and ignore information that's happened over the course of the year. This also gives us a way for managers to focus on every month as its own profit period, which leads to more accurate budgeting."

After budgets are established, monthly forecasts are produced that show needed resources for growth, Del Conte said. This includes equipment and new hires. Each of these areas is forecasted on a spreadsheet and revised monthly along with the budgets

(continued on page 56)

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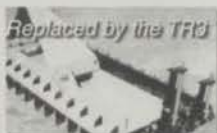
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Cover Story

(continued from page 54)

at the first division manager meeting of each month. Del Conte said the greatest aspect of this program is that they are trying to fill positions one to two months in advance instead of scrambling around to fill positions at the last minute. "We don't say, 'We need help, let's hire someone' – that's subjective," Del Conte said. "We focus on the predefined position we need to hire for based upon our demand and we hire into that position."

GROWING TECHNOLOGICALLY. Defining the most effective methods of performing daily functions is an important company philosophy, along with developing orderly systems that foster efficiency in all operations. Del Conte calls this his focus on improving technology within the company, and noted that this doesn't always refer to electronics or computers.

For instance, new technology allowed Del Conte's Landscaping to branch into two services: computerized irrigation in 1989 and green waste processing in 1993.

Del Conte was struck with the idea for centralized computer irrigation after attending an agricultural irrigation seminar. While computer programs were available for irrigation management, they were designed mainly for large applications, like sports fields and golf courses, and were quite expensive, carrying a price tag of \$30,000 or more.

Despite these limitations, Del Conte turned this idea into a business plan, which entailed offering smaller commercial accounts – homeowners' associations, industrial parks and shopping centers – the benefits of computerized irrigation at an affordable cost. The result is a satellite irrigation system that is monitored and programmed from a central control system in Del Conte's office. This way, the client benefits from the latest technology with a reasonable price tag of \$5,000 to \$10,000 for smaller accounts.

In addition to installation costs, Del Conte charges a monthly service fee for outside monitoring. "With this concept, sites with only 4 acres of landscaping can benefit by cutting water consumption by as much as 40 to 60 percent," Del Conte said.

Del Conte calls this division Aquatech Computer Irrigation, which enables it to serve as an irrigation subcontractor for accounts managed by competitive maintenance com-

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USE READER SERVICE #46

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panies and so that one day Aquatech can branch off into a separate company, explained Takeshi Yamamoto, Del Conte's irrigation division manager. Yamamoto manages both Aquatech and the irrigation division of Del Conte's Landscaping, which operates as a separate entity from the maintenance division, but handles the routine systematic irrigation functions of Del Conte's maintenance accounts.

"The company's concept of specialization allows this portion of the firm to focus on irrigation management so that every irrigation zone on every client's property is inspected by the irrigation team rather than as a task that is overlooked by maintenance personnel during a busy season," Yamamoto said, pointing out that this amounts to 125 or 130 maintenance contracts ranging from \$1,000 to \$15,000 per contract. Because the irrigation division supports the maintenance division, it is paid a percentage of every dollar that the maintenance division brings in through contracts, Yamamoto said.

"The irrigation division is not a huge revenue or profit center for the company," Yamamoto admitted, pointing out that the division makes up approximately 9 percent of total revenue and 15 percent of profits. "In essence, for our base services the irrigation division receives sort of a franchise fee. The fee barely covers the cost of the resources used for the level of water management provided, but the credibility allows our department to sell the necessary improvements to irrigation systems."

Next, Del Conte tackled green waste processing. Until 1993, Del Conte Landscaping sent its waste to a landfill, but increased disposal costs and new state regulations (California mandated that landfill waste be reduced 50 percent by 1995 and an additional 50 percent by 2000) combined with waste disposal and compost demand sparked new ideas.

At first, Del Conte shipped all his green waste to a local wood recycling center, cutting his monthly disposal costs from \$1,600 to \$600. But after learning that the recycling operation was in need of better management, Del Conte decided to buy a controlling interest in that business and purchased a tub grinder with a daily processing capacity of 1,400 cubic yards. The new entity, titled Vision Recycling Co., is now Del Conte's sister organization that generates organic prod-

ucts from green waste for the industry.

While the idea has turned into a successful, profitable business venture, Del Conte calls the expansion a blessing and a curse.

"We needed to put a thumbtack in the wall and we bought a sledgehammer to do it," Del Conte related. "We learned quickly that green waste processing was not a cost effective diversification for a landscape business. It is its own separate entity and services a different market entirely. The heavy equipment aspect presents considerable challenges that just eat money, and safety concerns doubled due to the equipment's complexity.

"Also, our landscape company only uses 5 percent of the resources from the recycling company, so we produce more than 90 percent excess capacity," Del Conte continued.

Eventually, Del Conte hired Roberto Aguirre, who became production manager and is now Vision Recycling co-owner. Today, the company occupies 17 percent of Del Conte Landscaping's total business.

GROWING WITH HELP. To build company loyalty, Del Conte makes every effort to add to each employee's quality of life.

"I'm a firm believer that if I invest in people then they'll reciprocate," Del Conte said. "I don't mind investing upfront to show employees how committed this company is to its people."

An example of this philosophy can be found in the establishment and growth of the irrigation division once Yamamoto was hired to run it more than four years ago. His first challenge was to hire and retain a well-trained irrigation staff.

"Good irrigation technicians are hard to find," Yamamoto said. "But we have been successful at attracting good people with minimal irrigation knowledge by investing in an aggressive compensation package. We then train them intensively to become efficient and, at the same time, show them the rewards that can be achieved by their personal development and assimilation into our system."

Despite the loss of one technician last year, Yamamoto has been able to accumulate seven to nine irrigation technicians through these methods, and many of them have proven their abilities, so their pay has increased instead of leveling off, proving that overcompensating in the beginning paid off.

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by Cynthia Greenleaf

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SETTING a Standard

Tom Walczyk's entry into the landscape industry was somewhat of a geographic fluke. In 1993, he lived a few yards from a Barefoot Grass branch and after being laid off from commercial construction during a recession, he was hired by the company.

In less than a year, Walczyk, now owner, Emerald Earth, Middletown, Conn., was promoted to branch manager of Barefoot Grass. But when the company was eventually bought out by TruGreen-ChemLawn, he was turned off by the big-business environment and left shortly thereafter to work for a smaller irrigation and landscape company, he recalled.

By this time, Walczyk knew he wanted to run his

own company, so he and his wife Monica, started Emerald Earth out of a U-Haul storage facility in 1997.

Since then, his company has grown into a \$500,000 operation, providing residential lawn, tree and shrub care services to central and southern Connecticut.

Having worked for a green industry giant was a tremendous education for Walczyk. "It was like getting an associate's degree in lawn care," he said, recalling the fast and furious environment where he learned every aspect of the business—from product and equipment costs to sales campaigns and collections.

But, for the most part, working for a large corporate entity where customer quantity is emphasized over quality taught Walczyk how he *didn't* want to run his own lawn care operation. "There's a price to be paid for being super-aggressive," he said, noting that his former employer's high customer and employee turnover was one aspect he wanted to avoid in his own entrepreneurial endeavor.

CUSTOMER-CENTRIC. Positioning itself as a highly professional operation, Emerald Earth aims to make lawn care an effortless experience for its customers, Walczyk said of his company's guiding philosophy.

This vision of a kinder, gentler lawn care company is largely in response to Walczyk's previous work experiences. Being highly aggressive in acquiring customers doesn't bode well for long-term business, he pointed out. "At the bigger companies, there is a whole dif-

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Tom Walczyk has consciously controlled Emerald Earth's growth in order to develop technicians who are able to manage all of a customer's needs.
Photos: Emerald Earth





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USE READER SERVICE #122

First Look

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ferent perspective," he described. "There is so much pressure to bring in money," which inevitably results in a high customer turnover rate, he added.

Emerald Earth would rather focus on meeting its revenue goals and constantly stresses this with its four full-time employees, Walczyk noted. "We don't necessarily

want you to make the most sales," he said, reciting what he tells his employees. If the company meets its financial goals, Walczyk is content. "But it doesn't matter if we get there with 500 or 1,000 customers," he added.

The heart of Emerald Earth's mission is establishing a good relationship with its cus-

Walczyk on commission-

based sales: "The guy with the

most customers doesn't win."

tomers. To assist with this, employees work with the same accounts from the beginning, "to start cementing that relationship," Walczyk described. Employees are also cross-trained to do everything from estimating to making fertilizer and pesticide applications. Customers appreciate this service consistency and versatility, Walczyk noted.

Constant communication is also part of the company's service philosophy. For example, when employees get back in the office at the end of the day, their first priority is returning any service calls, Walczyk said. "Even if they can't get a hold of the customer, they call and leave a message to acknowledge that we got the service call."

All of his employees have mobile phones, so they're accessible out in the field.

Other customer-oriented details include never upselling over the phone (although Emerald Earth gets 90 percent of its customers through telemarketing) and providing payment flexibility, allowing customers to pay up to 60 days. Walczyk admitted that he hasn't always been this liberal with past due accounts, but as the company became more established, his philosophy evolved.

To minimize collections problems, the company awards customers who prepay with a 7 to 10 percent discount, Walczyk added.

A CALL FOR PROFESSIONALISM. Like many contractors across the country, Emerald Earth's greatest challenge is battling unprofessionalism.

"We have a competitor who routinely undercuts everybody by 30 to 40 percent," he described, noting that many of these low-ballers are strictly driven by commission-based sales and are out to rack up the most customers. "The guy with the most customers doesn't win," Walczyk pointed out, noting that the secret to long-term success is customer service and maintaining a healthy bottom line.

Pressure from contractors undercutting prices has forced others in Emerald Earth's market to cut prices, which is detrimental when health benefits, fuel and fertilizer costs are skyrocketing, Walczyk added.

Careless contractors pose an especially serious threat in terms of pesticide regulations. Walczyk said he routinely notices off-

(continued on page 66)

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First Look

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target applications of pesticides and fertilizers on his competitors' clients' properties. Since these irresponsible lawn care operators don't police their applicators, their carelessness could lead to more regulations, Walczyk predicted. "People are shortsighted, want to turn a buck and won't clean up," he described. "And when it rains, (fertilizer)

washes down the driveway into the sewer."

Unprofessional contractors can only blame themselves for increased regulations, which are looming on the legislative horizon, according to Walczyk. "You brought it on yourself," he commented.

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Walczyk on retaining good

employees: "If you lose people, it's

your own fault. You weren't mind-

ing the store, so to speak."

THE GAME PLAN. As with any green industry company in an expansion state, Emerald Earth's future growth revolves around the labor issue.

"We'd like to grow as long as we have the right people," he said. "We won't just grow for the sake of growing."

Walczyk is always on the lookout for potential employees, whether he's at a trade show or driving down the street. He has no qualms about handing out his business cards to another company's employees.

"Sure it's ethical," he pointed out, noting that an "every man for himself" approach applies. "Everybody's advertising for workers."

In terms of future plans, Walczyk would like Emerald Earth to hit the \$600,000 to \$700,000 mark in 2001 and maintain a minimum of 25 to 30 percent growth annually, indefinitely, he said, adding that his long-term goals include establishing additional branches throughout Connecticut, Rhode Island and Massachusetts.

Walczyk wants to devote more energy to tree and shrub care, since that's an untapped market with huge potential, he described.

Emerald Earth is in a prime position for growth with several employees anxious for advancement, Walczyk explained. "We can't stay small," he noted. "I have four guys who have the Connecticut supervisory pesticide license and are cross-trained and ready to take on more responsibility—they're ready to get to the next level."

As a manager, Walczyk is sensitive to the fact that his four employees want to be continually challenged. "Otherwise, people start getting burned out and will leave," he pointed out, adding that this scenario is one way to keep employees happy.

To retain valuable workers, managers of any size company should offer their employees fair compensation, benefits and understanding, Walczyk advised.

Retaining employees is a manager's responsibility, he added. "If you lose people, it's your own fault," he noted. "You weren't minding the store, so to speak." ■

The author is Associate Editor of *Lawn & Landscape* magazine.

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by Kristen Hampshire

"With holiday lighting, my employees work full-time."

Extended FAMILY

"Hardscapes expanded our construction business."

Add-on services can produce profits and attract clients once a company overcomes common growing pains.

"Parking lot clean-up catered to our clients."

Newborn add-on services require quite a bit of preparation – not to mention extra care and attention. Often, fulfilling the demands of a new offering can throw the whole house off balance. They can produce a blessing of profits and new clients, or, at the same time, skew financials and compromise the quality of existing services.

The implications associated with adding a new department to the existing family of services are not always a bundle of joy.

"Before you add on you have to know how the service is going to fit within the current operating structure," advised Mark Fowlkes, president, Fowlkes, Norman and Associates, Fort Worth, Texas. In other words, will the new offering mesh into the household's habits, or will it create chaos?

"The company has to know what its goals are – what it's trying to achieve by adding on the service," Fowlkes explained. "And it needs to be totally committed to it. If not, it becomes more of a problem – more of a liability than an asset."

However, add-on advantages can outweigh planning, budgeting or training stumbling blocks that businesses often confront in early stages of integration. Many contractors find their youngest service extensions boosting the company's overall financial health.

COUNTLESS CONSIDERATIONS. Swingle Tree wanted its employees to keep their jobs – even in the winter. The Denver, Colo.-based company knew the key to employee retention was offering workers full-time employment and job security. This motivated the company to add a holiday lighting department to its lawn-care loaded mix, explained Jeff Oxley, operations manager.

"We're in a market that used to be very seasonal,"
(continued on page 70)

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Add-On Services

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and during that time from November to the end of February, you get those winter blahs," he described. "We were trying to provide a full-time position, and we achieved that through our holiday lighting add-on service."

Adding a holiday lighting franchise to its landscape enhancement division allowed the company to maintain an employee roster of 120 year-round technicians compared to the 95 employees that worked at Swingle four years ago. "We haven't laid anyone off in years," Oxley added.

Swingle Tree's lighting department grew 45 percent each year, exceeding the company's 24 percent goal. Four years later, the company now pulls in close to \$700,000 per year through this division, which offers full-time employment for technicians and a year-round service option for clients, Oxley said. Adding sales representatives in the company's infrastructure created additional support for the service, which contributed to

its rapid success.

Now, growth is the company's primary dilemma, as demand for holiday lighting has increased sales and saturated its labor force, Oxley said. The interest in this service yields a hefty profit, but this bonus is not an advantage if quality suffers, he reminded. High standards outweigh high numbers.

"We want to make sure that we can service our customers, and we have such a limited service area that if holiday work continues to grow at a 45 percent rate, we're going to be hanging holiday lights come July," he figured.

This is why creating a business plan before launching a new service is a crucial step, Oxley stressed, noting that contractors should

"With irrigation, we have more control over scheduling."

consider start-up costs, labor, equipment and the goal for the new service. "Make sure that you've taken the steps," he added. "You have to set goals for yourself early on."

EXTRA CUSTOMER SERVICE. Fowlkes' add-on objective centered on regaining control of scheduling construction jobs. Before adding an irrigation department, he relied on subcontractors to fill his clients' irrigation needs. However, the inefficiency of arranging schedules around subcontractors' availabilities strained his business, he said.

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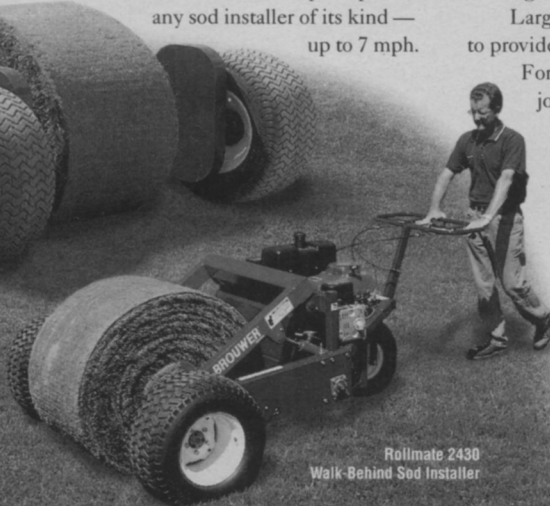
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which was driving down our construction capabilities," Fowlkes explained. "Adding an irrigation department allowed us to be more efficient and it allowed us to be in control of our own destiny, so to speak."

The technical nature of irrigation requires knowledge and background, so hiring an additional employee to concentrate solely on this area ensured that the quality would match that of a specialized subcontractor. By networking with irrigation contractors, Fowlkes found a technician who was managing an irrigation department at another company and interested in heading a new division. "He wanted to build himself up, and we gave him that opportunity."

This specialist trained existing employees on irrigation installation and maintenance and addressed water-related issues on the company's construction properties. This employee education fit into the business plan Fowlkes constructed before adding the ser-

vice. "We looked closely at all of the start-up costs and the implication of expansion, and the cost requirements of hiring skilled, quality personnel upfront," he related.

All of this takes time, Fowlkes emphasized. "Irrigation has benefited our clients, though, because now we are handling all areas of their landscape development and service management, and that has given them an opportunity to interface with us more," he added.

Client interaction can serve as a brainstorming session for add-on possibilities. Feedback from a customer survey prompted Mike Rorie, president, Groundmasters, Cincinnati, Ohio, to set up a parking lot clean-up service in his company in 1992. "We had a captive audience that had parking lots that collected debris, and we felt that it was an easy sell - for the most part it was," he said.

Groundmasters added the service as a separate option on the standard service agreement. A dedicated employee sold 80 percent

of the initial parking lot clean-up work, contributing \$100,000 to the company's \$3 million annual revenue, Rorie said.

The sparse competition and demand from existing commercial clients kept this portion of the business rolling, however, sales plateaued after the first year.

"It was a strange phenomenon where people viewed the service as a little bit foreboding," Rorie noted. To pull sales out of the rut, Groundmasters added parking lot clean-up to its line-item list of maintenance duties, allocating the service as an addition instead of a separate entity. This also guaranteed consistency throughout the accounts.

"Parking lot clean up is no different now than checking the beds for weeds," he said.

The low-maintenance service required little training and a relatively inexpensive equipment investment - both ideal qualities for an add-on service, Rorie noted. "It was a

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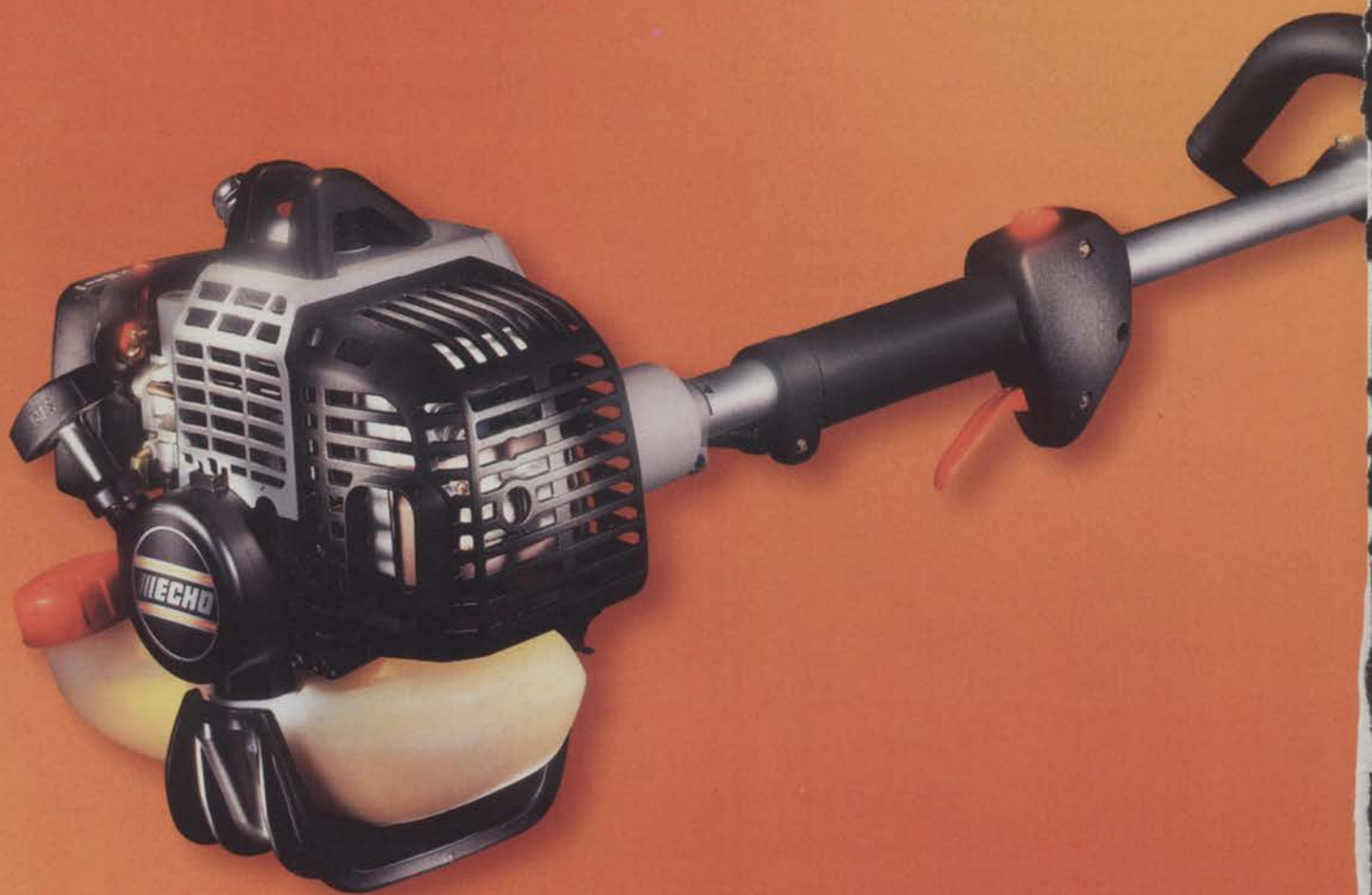
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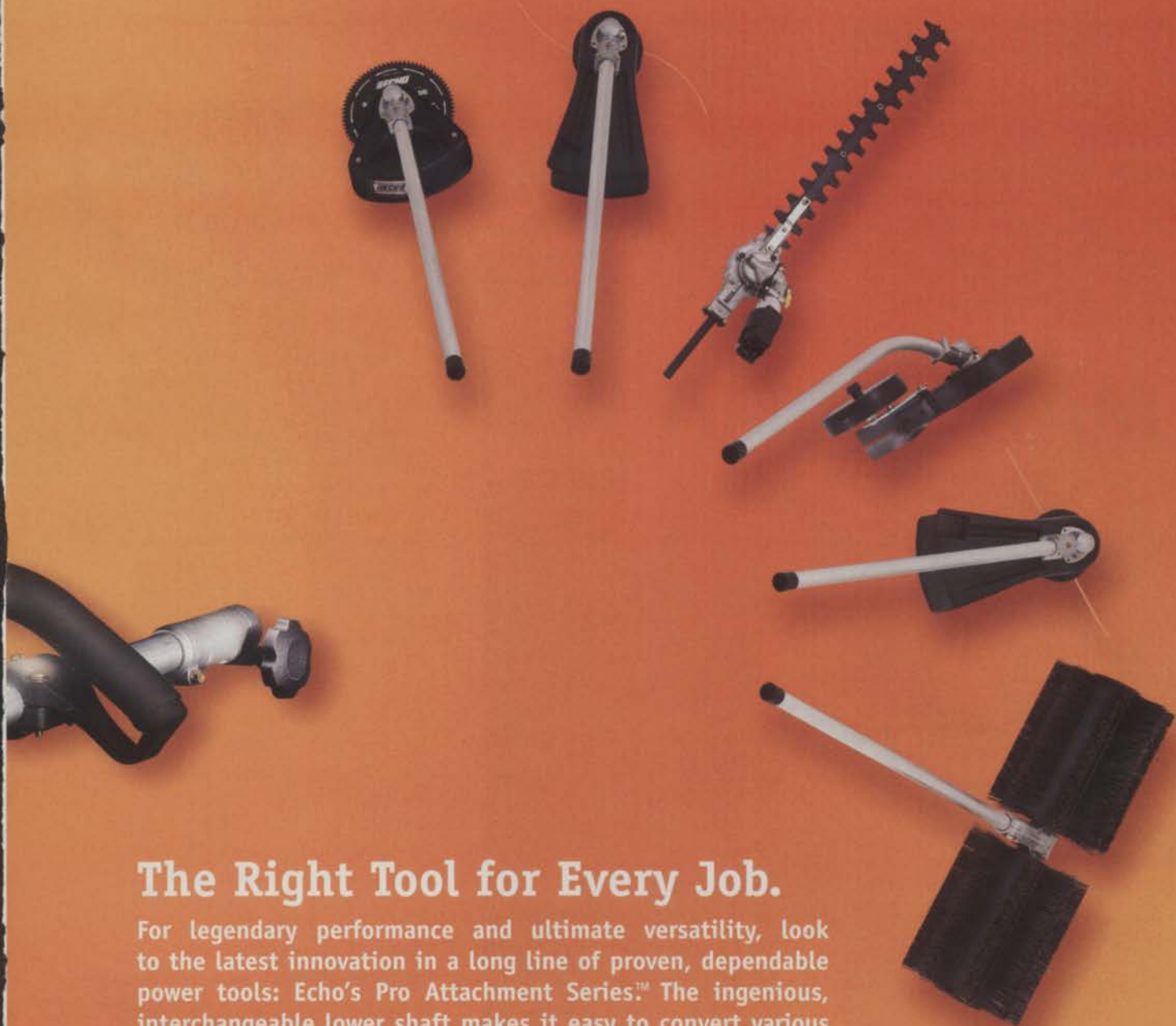


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Add-On Services

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high-margin service, and it had a low cost to us against what it could generate in money."

Similar motivations influenced Chris Wagner, president, Superior Landscapes, Loretto, Minn., to enlarge his construction division. Pavers and lighting complemented his current service mix and extended his clients' options for landscape features. Customer

demand and an open market created a feasible climate for adding the services, he noted.

"Both pavers and lighting were experiencing a boom with our high-end accounts, they really liked it – it was unique," Wagner said. "There were less companies out there fighting for the market. It's more specialty, so we found it was profitable."

"With add-on services, our profits added up."

Before adding the services, however, Wagner evaluated his company's focus. He looked in the mirror, studying his market position, clientele, quality and operations.

What he saw was a company ready to grow.

"We still do landscape maintenance and a lot of landscape construction, but the landscape lighting and pavers were like the cream – a way to really capitalize on what we were doing without having to seek out new customers to do it," Wagner said.

When Superior Landscapes added these services in 1999, it completed 18 landscape construction projects. In 2000, the tally topped 100, and the company increased sales by 500 percent in one year, Wagner said. In 2000, pavers and lighting comprised 20 percent of the company's construction sales.

Acquiring a larger, design/build company during this time, which boasted a revenue of more than \$1 million compared to Wagner's \$600,000, further buffered the sales of these add-on services, he noted. Superior Landscape gained two full-time designers, state-of-the-art design technology, new construction clients who demanded pavers and lighting, as well as landscape maintenance.

"The base benefit was more sales per customer in a dollar amount," he explained. "By sheer numbers, we were selling more lighting and there was new construction. Yes, we added customers, but more importantly, we added more dollars per customer because we started doing more for the people we worked with. The new customers found out we were doing everything and responded to that."

REMEMBERING I.D. Moves like Wagner's require planning – any move does, really, he insisted. A company may seek lateral growth through new clients, or vertically stretch its offerings by adding a rung to its service mix. Both goals call for self-evaluation.

Are current customers satisfied? Is there adequate labor to maintain quality service?

(continued on page 76)

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Add-On Services

(continued from page 74)

Are all sales possibilities exhausted with current services? "I decided yes," Wagner replied, "and that's why we figured we could earn more money by adding services."

Asking these questions assured Wagner that additional responsibilities would not crash operations. Wagner calls it "getting his house in order." Before extending his business, he researched necessary labor, training and equipment. Then, he considered his company's focus.

Such an evaluation can convince a company to eliminate a service. When Swingle Tree focused its business vision in 1992, it left the mowing portion behind, Oxley noted. Price wars were cutting the business out of the "dog eat dog" competition, he said.

"We had a fair amount of infrastructure and an overhead where we weren't able to compete with those who were running businesses out of their garages," he compared.

Fiscal figures also determine the success of a business expansion, Oxley added. He

recommended that contractors approach add-on services with the same mentality they did when starting their core businesses. "To do it right, you're looking at \$100,000 to \$125,000 in cash to get the new service off the ground with trucks and trailers, and you have to make sure you've hired the right person to run that division," he figured.

Fowlkes took his plan to the bank - literally - to ensure his budget figures matched the bank's willingness to back his investment. This support was key to adding irrigation. Now, he and the bank review his business and growth plan annually.

Cost considerations also can include franchise agreement fees and the economy's health, Oxley reminded. Today's economic conditions do not forecast a boom, Oxley observed, adding that many companies lost money in the stock market last year, which also will affect buying decisions.

"We're using our clients' expendable income," he reasoned. "Where do they want to

put their dollar?" Just as clients are tiptoeing into service agreements, companies also should proceed with caution when expanding their businesses, Oxley advised.

One way to do this is to stick with strengths, Oxley commented. "Obviously, we want to cross-penetrate and sell all of our services to our customers, but you need to stick with what you are good at," he said. "If a business came up tomorrow, someone would have to show me the golden egg to make we want to do it."

LABOR AND LEARNING. Ultimately, the people behind the project drive its success, which is why well-trained employees are the key to effectively gelling new services to the rest of a company's mix. By expecting employees to perform new services without background knowledge, "You are taking them out of their element," Oxley explained. "You are putting the person and company at risk."

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USE READER SERVICE #112



TACKLING Athletic Fields

Contractors need to develop a game plan before taking on sports field maintenance.

Companies looking for an area of business expansion may find tackling athletic fields a whole new ball game. Opportunities are numerous and varied. Just consider the different types of sports fields within the territory already being served. As with any specialized market, competition is less intense and potential profitability is great. But don't expect to hit a home run without learning the rules, scouting the home team and developing a game plan.

In sports turf, the first concern is the safety of the athletes. "A level playing field" isn't just an expression; it's a necessity. The second issue is playability. This requires dense, well-rooted turf to provide solid footing for the twists and turns of the players and cushioning for their falls. Aesthetics becomes an issue only after safety and playability are achieved.

"Sports field maintenance is a different ball game," said Jon Cundiff, president, Turf's Up Lawn Service/Weed Man, Lee's Summit, Mo. "The level of care is more

intensive than the most demanding commercial maintenance account. It takes a solid grounding in all aspects of turf management, including soils and agronomics, a knowledge of different turfgrass types and growth patterns, an understanding of irrigation, weed, insect and disease problems, and climatic influences. While all of these pieces come into play in standard maintenance programs, with sports field maintenance they're more critical because the turf must withstand the stress of athletic activity."

Despite their common use, fields can offer different challenges. For example, athletic field's soil profile may indicate native soil, amended native soil or sand-based. There are wide variations in the mix of components within each of these three basic soil profiles, all of which affect water infiltration and percolation rates, drainage and compaction issues, and turfgrass performance.

Fields might utilize internal drainage systems, crowning to assist in surface drainage or a combination of both options. The maintenance program must

(continued on page 80)

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USE READER SERVICE #128

Sports Turf

(continued from page 78)

adapt to fit specific field conditions. Any combination of these fields could be part of a single high school, college or park system.

The non-turf segment of baseball and softball fields – the home plate area, pitchers mound and basepath area – present a totally different maintenance challenge.

"While the program must be developed

to fit all these factors, event scheduling is the controlling factor in athletic field maintenance," Cundiff pointed out. "When the field will be used, how often, by whom and for what purpose, combined with the facility budget, determine the field design and construction parameters including the soil profile and grass type."

Because of the ever-growing demand for on-field practice and play, field schedules are packed. Use begins as early as weather allows in the spring and continues until late fall or early winter in the North. Field use may be year-round in warmer climates. Renovations and the more invasive maintenance practices, such as core aeration, must take place during the breaks in event scheduling, which may not be the best timing agronomically.

Despite these challenges, or maybe because of them, there are several different ways for a lawn service company to provide athletic field services.

THE TURF'S UP PLAN. Cundiff spent nearly five years working on the Kansas City Royals and Chiefs grounds crew before starting his lawn care business 15 years ago. Turf's Up provides turf maintenance and tree and shrub treatments. Approximately 85 percent of the company's accounts are residential, 10 percent are commercial, and 5 percent are sports fields.

"Our company is focusing more on targeted services than complete sports field maintenance," Cundiff said. "We see the wave toward more outsourcing of fertilization, control treatments and some aeration and seeding within the school district fields. We also see potential business in the move toward Bermudagrass fields, which demand a different maintenance schedule than cool-season grasses, with a much more aggressive summer maintenance program."

The company maintained the Kansas City Wizards soccer team's practice facility for three years, handling full maintenance, field lining and resodding. The Wizards moved last year and the company continued maintaining the field for two college teams.

"The existing field is sand-based, has an in-ground irrigation system and Bermuda-grass turf," Cundiff described. "We're looking at conversions of the other fields to similar conditions."

THE ONESOURCE PROGRAM. Ron Schmoyer, president, OneSource Landscape & Golf Services, Tampa, Fla., said sports turf management was a natural fit for his company. He noted that the expertise available in the industry allowed for a seamless service addition for the organization.

(continued on page 82)



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USE READER SERVICE #129

Sports Turf

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The company's first sports field account was a baseball field in Tampa where only spray applications were performed. Gradually, the company added more fields and expanded services, including complete maintenance of a few fields in West Palm Beach, Fla.

OneSource provides a complete maintenance program for all playing surfaces, skinned areas, game and practice fields, surrounding green spaces and parking lots on the baseball spring training facilities of the New York Yankees and Cincinnati Reds. "This level of maintenance requires full-time, onsite personnel," Schmoeyer said. "We have employees whose only job with us is to report to these facilities every day."

On facilities such as the Yankees' and Reds' fields, which were maintained by in-house personnel, OneSource presents management with a comprehensive maintenance package that describes the value of outsourcing for their organization.

The Sports Turf Managers Association (STMA) was formed in 1981 because industry leaders believed that the industry could improve sports turf through sharing knowledge and exchanging ideas. STMA members work to combine the science of growing turfgrasses and the art of maintaining both natural and artificial sports surfaces to produce safe and aesthetically pleasing playing surfaces.

STMA represents all segments of the sports turf industry, with members involved in management of school, municipal, university and professional sports facilities among its membership. Members also include educators and researchers, commercial affiliates,

landscape contractors and full-time students.

STMA currently has more than 2,000 national members. There are 23 nationally affiliated STMA chapters across the country, and additional chapters are in various stages of formation.

STMA holds an annual conference and exhibition in January each year. The next conference will be held in Las Vegas, Nevada, on Jan. 16 to 20, 2002, with educational sessions taking place in the Riviera Hotel and Casino and the trade show held at the Cashman Center.

STMA also provides members with a monthly magazine, a bi-monthly newsletter, a membership roster and resource guide, an annual compendium of articles written by and for sports turf managers, and a members-only section on the STMA Web site.

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Sharing information is a strong part of STMA.

STMA headquarters serves as a conduit to speed the process of connecting members with each other and to supply information to potential members, facilities in need of assistance, industry-related companies and associations, and the media.

The Certified Sports Field Manager (CSFM) certification program, developed and administrated by STMA, was introduced in 1999. CSFM status recognizes those professionals who have taken the extra steps to affirm their competence in sports field management. Individuals seeking certification must first qualify by demonstrating a combination of educational and industry background. They are then tested on agronomics, pest control, management and

sports specific areas. Those certified must maintain their certification with a combination of continuing education and industry service.

STMA announced the formation of the foundation for Safer Athletic Field Environments (SAFE) in 2000. This foundation was formed as a corporation for the purposes as outlined in the SAFE Mission Statement: "To support sports field specific research, educational programs and environmental concerns to promote user safety."

STMA headquarters contact information: phone 800/323-3875; fax 712/366-9119; e-mail SportsTMgr@aol.com; Web site www.sportsturfmanager.com.

- Steve & Suz Trusty

Sports Turf

"We can show on paper and in action that, because of our specialized focus, we can save them money and improve the quality of the facility," Schmoyer explained. "We also note that we'll make every effort to integrate their current employees into our program. Once an agreement is reached, we meet with their employees and explain our organization, rules, policies and procedures and benefits. Because of the size and scope of our operation, we can offer greater opportunities for advancement either within the sports turf division or in other divisions. When we took over management for the Yankees and the Reds it was a fairly seamless move."

For OneSource, sports field management accounts are multiplying. They maintain all of the sports fields in Thomasville, Ga., and work with The Villages in Leesburg, Fla.

"We believe outsourcing of sports field maintenance is a trend that will continue to

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USE READER SERVICE #130

Sports Turf

(continued from page 83)

grow because it provides value for the organization," Schmoyer pointed out. "We also think our competition in this area will be the in-house operations, whether it's a municipal, state-run or professional organization.

"It's a marketing adventure because it's an educational process for the potential customer, but we're willing to commit the time and resources for that," he continued. "We're very open about the arrangements we've made with our current clients and invite potential clients to contact anyone involved to see how the transition went. That helps establish a comfort zone so they're able to seriously consider our proposal."

THE TRUGREEN LANDCARE PLAN.

Ron Kirkpatrick, sports turf manager, TruGreen LandCare, San Diego region, Calif., said the company started its sports turf division in 1995.

Today, the company works with high school-level football and soccer field renova-

tions and maintains several different college fields, working with both sand-based and native soil fields.

Kirkpatrick offers an athletes' perspective to the company's sports field work, but he said there is still a learning curve behind this progress. "Sports field care is a continual learning process," he said. "Besides all the turf and agronomic issues, it's important to know the rules governing each of the sports, the proper field dimensions, layouts and lining. Also, anyone considering expanding into the sports turf area should be aware of the money it takes to get involved. For our company, the initial investment in equipment alone was approximately \$200,000."

The company lays out the maintenance program for every field it works with, whether the project is construction, renovation, consultation or maintenance.

"When we've made a major renovation and the existing staff will be handling the maintenance, we also work with them to be

sure they understand the program and that it must be carried out," Kirkpatrick said. "Sports turf isn't forgiving. The maintenance program functions best when it's consistently worked. Then problems are small ones that can be solved. A major mistake will set back the program and may destroy what has been accomplished in the renovation."

TIME TO STEP UP TO THE PLATE?

Cundiff, Schmoyer and Kirkpatrick all agree the sports turf market is filled with potential business. They also recommend that contractors considering this move learn as much about the industry as possible, thoroughly analyze the existing market situation in their own area and assess their company's own strengths and weaknesses before taking a swing at sports business. **LL**

Steve Trusty is Executive Director of the Sports Turf Managers Association. Suz Trusty is STMA Communications Director.

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USE READER SERVICE #89

Pricing Mowing Services

by Bob West

Three companies share their philosophies for residential maintenance jobs.

PRICING Residential Mowing

There's a saying in business that is meant to describe a particularly challenging situation that forces a company to thoroughly examine its pricing. "We really had to put pencil to paper," a business manager might say in such a predicament.

Obviously, more than a few landscape companies that maintain residential properties have put the proverbial pencil and paper to work while estimating a particularly enticing property. And through the extensive workings of the No. 2 lead pencil and pink eraser, the estimated price changes, generally decreasing every time.

While the contractor is convinced that finding a way to lower that number is the right thing to do, many other landscape firms shudder at the thought of another estimate coming out at a ridiculously low price. "The biggest mistake people make with pricing is wanting a job too badly," related Maurice Dowell, president, DowCo, Chesterfield, Mo. "They want the job because they feel it fits their niche or the location is great, but they're making a mistake."

Any company in business long enough will inevitably price a job too low. The question is, "Why?" Strategic moves that don't provide the desired results are a part of business, and most companies rebound from them without causing any negative impact on the market.

But when companies set a price too low because they don't understand pricing principles or dedicate the time to formulate an accurate estimate, then the entire market suffers. With a little preparation, a dose of sound business decision making and some attention to detail, contractors don't have to be mathematicians to come up with the right number at the bottom of the page.

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Contractors who are successful at accurately pricing maintenance jobs typically are good estimators who understand every aspect of their pricing structure.

Photo: Encore

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USE READER SERVICE #131

Pricing Mowing Services

(continued from page 88)

A MODEL START. Accurate estimating is something of an art as well as a science. But when only one of those two elements goes into formulating price, science should win out. Contractors with a track record of pricing success know exactly why they price their work at a certain cost.

"The first thing we look at is the square

footage of a property, and we measure every property we prepare an estimate for," Dowell explained. "We set price by multiplying our hourly rate for a three-man crew by the number of hours we think the job will take us."

For Dowell, estimating the hours necessary to tackle various tasks is easy, thanks to field research. Since he generates most of the

estimates for potential customers, he accompanied crews into the field and measured their average production rates for all of the services they provide, from mowing to applying fertilizer to edging. In addition, he standardized his crew setup so each crew is comprised of three individuals and three 52-inch, walk-behind mowers with sulkies. Aside from distinctive job characteristics, there's no reason for a crew's productivity to vary from company averages.

Dowell also spent time identifying his business' costs so he would know how much money the crews need to account for in addition to their own costs. So, if DowCo has \$200,000 in overhead (rent, computer software, administrative assistant salaries, accounting fees, etc.) and the crews generate a total of 20,000 billable hours throughout the year, the cost for each man-hour must include \$10 just for overhead.

"Our costs tell us where our pricing needs to be," Dowell assured. "We just had to spend the time figuring the numbers."

Some contractors, like John DeBell, president, Clippers, Chantilly, Va., point to man-hours as the most variable job cost. "We want to know how much of that risky component is on each job and price that job accordingly," DeBell shared. "A lot of people price just on square footage, but if you're going to do that you better know how many hours you're putting on your equipment and your labor—that's what really matters."

Mike Schmitt, owner, Shamrock Irrigation & Landscape, Los Angeles, Calif., employs a different approach to set pricing, but he adheres to it consistently. "I asked a lot of people about their hourly rates before I started this company, and I decided to use one of the higher hourly rates out there to see if the market would bear it," he related, adding that companies should lose at least 30 percent of the bids they submit because their prices are too high. "If you're not losing jobs that often, then you're prices are too low."

He also noted that while pricing work from the standpoint of recovering costs is logical, contractors who do this could short-change themselves in the long run. "I want to push the envelope in terms of pricing in order to yield the best gross margin," he related. "If I say that for every dollar we bill we can afford costs to be X, then I'm not

(continued on page 92)

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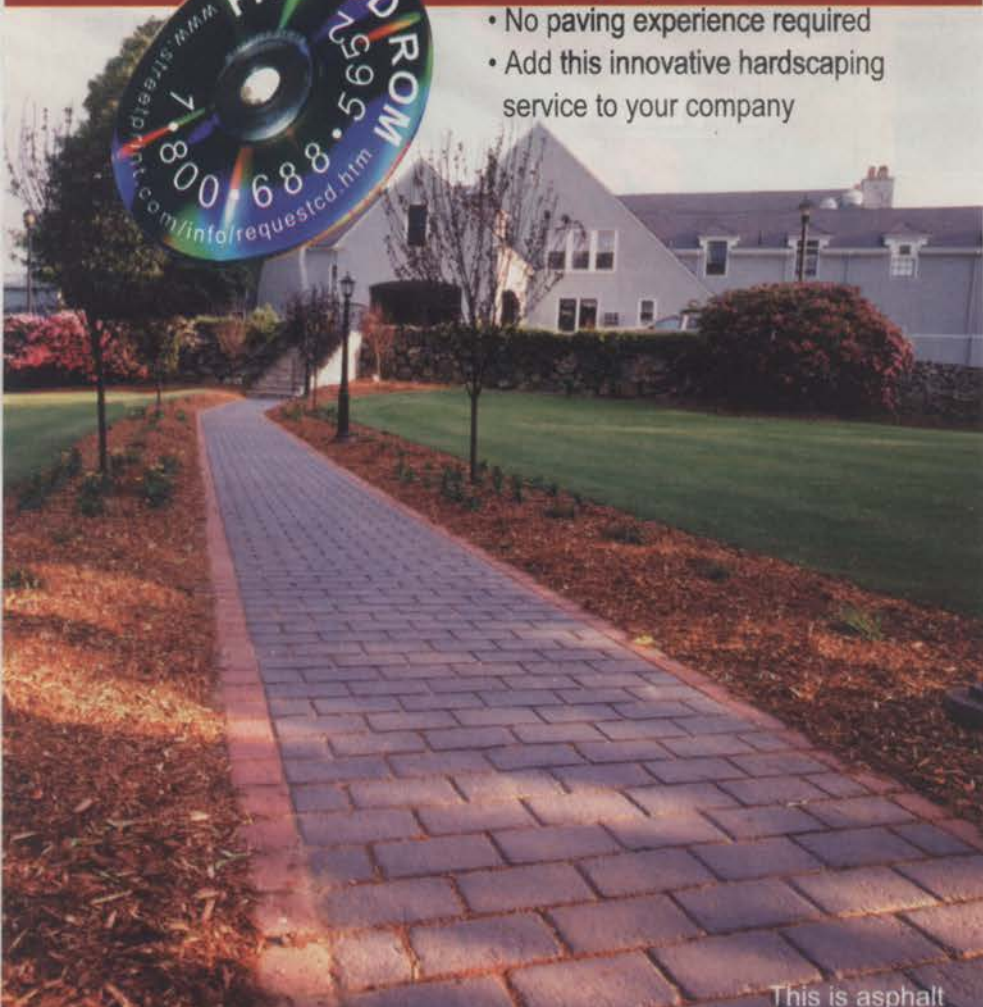
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USE READER SERVICE #63

Pricing Mowing Services

(continued from page 90)

taking into account what the market will bear and I may be undercharging."

THE PACKAGE APPROACH. Few companies only handle mowing for their residential customers, so the value of these additional services has to be considered in the pricing equation. "Typically, maintenance is not a loss leader, but it is the least profitable service," DeBell admitted. "Maintenance gets us onto a lot of accounts, which then gives us the enhancements or other work that is much more profitable."

Other contractors echoed DeBell's philosophy regarding mowing prices. "We make more money for pruning, fertilizing or checking irrigation systems than we do for mowing," Schmitt agreed. "That's why when I present an estimate to a customer I just show them one price instead of a price for every service. If they see all of those numbers, they may go through and pick all of the lowest profit portions of the business."

"Mowing is the intangible that keeps our presence on the job 32 weeks a year, but the money is in the other services," noted Dowell, adding that route density is the other key that can make an unprofitable job or service more profitable. "Density is dollars. If I've got six \$33 jobs on the same block, what does it cost me to add another one? I'm already stopped, so if I can pick up another customer by offering them a slightly lower price, that might make sense."

NEGOTIATION KNOW-HOW.

The contractors interviewed for this story agreed that most companies price their work reasonably well, but danger lurks when the client asks for a lower price or the contractor is intent on landing a particular job.

"I approach every negotiation with the idea that it's OK to walk away on price and disagree with the customer," Schmitt commented. "You need to be in business for the long haul, and that means accepting that you won't get every customer. You have to articulate your services well, convince them that you can alleviate their concerns and that you're better than whoever is handling their property now."

By the same token, certain jobs demand flexibility in pricing.

"We're a growing business, and if we

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(continued from page 92)

have the opportunity to get our truck into a new neighborhood with a prime property, I might think about cutting my price a little," Schmitt admitted. "However, there are also times when you have to raise prices. For instance, an irrigation system that is in horrible shape typically means more plant replacements, so I want to protect myself by

But neighbors talk to each other, so if you cut deals with some people the others will probably find out and you'll have to lower your price for everyone."

"Part of pricing is subjective," agreed DeBell. "If I go into a job knowing I have to have my price in a certain ballpark, then I work my estimate backwards to see if I can

The primary complaint many companies have about residential accounts is the homeowners themselves and the attention they often demand. This aspect also should be included in pricing. "I may raise my price based on my interaction with a client," Schmitt said. "If I think someone will be challenging to please, then I want to make sure it's going to be worth my time to try to do that.

"The last thing I want to do is cut my price to keep a challenging client happy, which is what a lot of companies do when a client is particularly difficult during negotiations," he continued. "The problem is that such a client may never stop beating you up." **LL**

The author is Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.

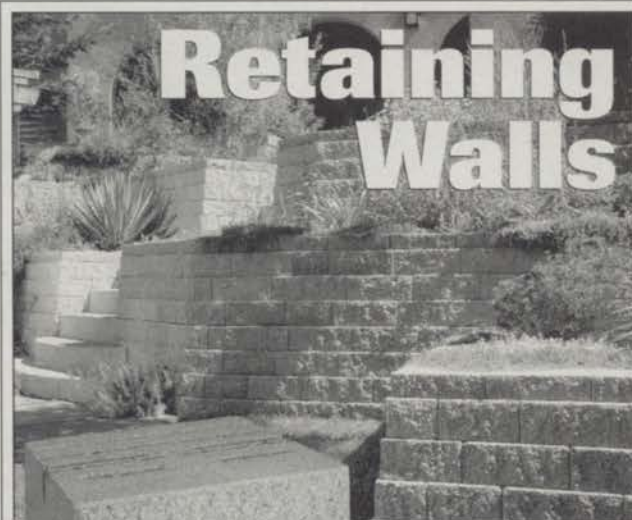
For information about how companies added commercial jobs to a residential mix, check out this article with the April issue of Lawn & Landscape online at www.lawnandlandscape.com.

"The biggest mistake people make with pricing is wanting a job too badly. They want the job because they feel it fits their niche or the location is great, but they're making a mistake." – Maurice Dowell

pricing that job higher."

Entering a new subdivision offers challenging pricing situations, Dowell countered. "If you price by the book, you might not get the work because they don't know you yet.

do that. If the mowing price they want is tough for us to offer, that's where the loss leader concept comes into play. Taking that job would make more sense if we're doing the beds, the fertilization and other services."



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USE READER SERVICE #132

String Trimmers

by Cynthia Greenleaf

Trimmers are improving tremendously as a result of regulation pressure.

A

As with all power equipment, stringent regulations play a powerful role in the evolution of string trimmers. In response to pressure from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the California Air Resources Board (CARB), equipment manufacturers are striving to build a better trimmer with impressive results.

RAISING THE BAR. While the word regulation often carries a negative connotation, these national and regional mandates have actually benefitted the trimmer industry, said Nick Jiannas, product manager, Stihl, Virginia Beach, Va. "With the regulations becoming stricter, the units now run leaner, hotter and faster," he observed. "In essence, they've required us to build a better trimmer."

The two-cycle engine trimmer – the longtime industry standard – has traditionally operated off of an

air/fuel mix with the fuel serving as the coolant. This is the primary source of emissions the EPA and CARB are targeting through regulations, Jiannas described. The challenge manufacturers have faced is designing an engine that cools effectively and cleanly, he pointed out. "We're trying to build an engine that strikes a good balance between the two."

Complying with increasingly rigid requirements transformed the trimmer into a more sophisticated piece of equipment. "Basically, the trimmer is a much more high tech product because of the need to comply with emissions and make sure the product holds up over time," Jiannas added.

This modern trimmer is a far cry from the days when trimmers were heavy, noisy and vibrated heavily, according to Malcolm Stieneker, warranty manager, RedMax, Norcross, Ga., who has been in the power equipment industry since 1969. "They really didn't have a lot of power and were very difficult to work on," he recalled. "Carburetors broke, heads flew off – it was fun," he added, laughing.

Through the years, these essential landscaping tools have become more powerful, fuel efficient and lighter, Stieneker described.

ENGINEERING FOR IMPROVEMENT. In the quest for a cleaner, quieter, lighter machine, three primary technologies are shaping the development of today's trimmer.

Stratified charge technology – Relying on careful timing to reduce harmful emissions, this technology utilizes a double barrel carburetor with two "throats" – a conventional throat containing a mixture of air and fuel and another containing only fresh air, Jiannas described. With this design, the piston moves up and down, while a stratified layer of fresh air is created on top of the air/fuel mixture. Then, when the air and fuel

(continued on page 104)

Advancements in trimmer technology cater to pending legislative issues. Photo: Husqvarna



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String Trimmers

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mix goes up into the combustion chamber, the fresh air goes in and out first, resulting in a cleaner emission.

Catalytic converter technology – This is another emission-reducing technology, relying on platinum-based metals, which create a chemical reaction. When exhaust gases

The major drawback to catalytic converters is that they tend to add weight and heat to a trimmer, which can make work unpleasant for a landscape contractor on a hot summer day, Stieneker pointed out. Another disadvantage is that catalytic converters tend to degenerate over time, eventually failing to

proach, all engine processes are self-contained in the combustion chamber so there is no “scavenging loss,” or harmful emissions, Jiannas explained. Since these engines contain an extra oil tank and additional working units compared to a two-stroke model, four-stroke engines may be heavier and bulkier, he noted.

One of the biggest advantages of a four-cycle engine is increased fuel efficiency, noted Dennis Blanton, product development administrator, American Honda Motor Co., Alpharetta, Ga. Blanton cited a study Honda conducted that compared the fuel consumption of two-stroke and four-stroke trimmers. Based on 30 hours of operation for 32 weeks (a typical season), the four-stroke engine used about half the fuel compared to the two-stroke, Blanton explained.

Based on the feedback Honda received from its contractor customers, four-stroke

(continued on page 106)

This **modern trimmer** is a **far cry** from the days when trimmers were **heavy, noisy and vibrated heavily**.

They really **didn't have a lot of power** and were very **difficult to work on**. – *Malcolm Stieneker*

come out of the cylinder, they pass through this converter which “superheats” the metals, Jiannas described. The leftover exhaust is then burned and converted into environmentally friendly carbon dioxide and water.

convert all of the gases passing through. Replacing this component is an added expense that some contractors might not want to deal with, he said.

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USE READER SERVICE #134

String Trimmers

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Having a dedicated piece of equipment for edging jobs is one landscaping rule of thumb that contractors should not disregard. While there are contractors who use a trimmer to edge, this can be a potentially dangerous and often expensive mistake, according to Nick Jiannas, product manager, Stihl, Virginia Beach, Va.

By using a trimmer to edge, "basically you're running the trimmer line right on a sidewalk," he noted. "Concrete will eat up trimmer line."

A quality and safety-conscious contractor should buy a dedicated edger upfront and avoid dealing with the possible safety issues and wear and tear on the machine. After all, "it's pay now or pay later," Jiannas noted.

Contractors have several options when choosing an edger. For one, edgers come in hand-held or a wheeled models.

Hand-held models are lighter and easier to use when maintaining existing edges, Jiannas said.

The wheeled models tend to have more restrictive emissions regulations and generally utilize four-stroke engine technology, he added. Wheeled edgers allow for larger edger blades and are generally best suited to tougher conditions, such as establishing a new flower bed, setting an edge for the first time in the spring or working in heavy dirt or clay, he advised.

Depending upon their needs, contractors can also choose an edger with a straight or curved shaft, allowing for greater speed or flexibility, according to Jiannas. "A straight shaft has less friction with much improved cutting torque," he observed. "This is important for contractors who need to speed edge. Curve shaft edgers have harder times cutting through dirt and debris."

Choosing an edger is a highly individualized decision - like buying a pickup truck, according to Dennis Blanton, product development administrator, American Honda Motor Co., Alpharetta, Ga. He said contractors should talk to equipment dealers or manufacturers to help determine what their specific edging needs are. - *Cynthia Greenleaf*

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USE READER SERVICE #140

String Trimmers

(continued from page 106)

engines have been shown to produce a lesser degree of smoke and smell and a lower noise level than their two-stroke engine counterparts, he added.

ADAPTING TO CHANGE. As old-school trimmers and other power equipment models phase out, time will tell which of these newer technologies will win over contractors, according to Jiannas. These advances, especially the four-stroke and catalytic converter trimmers, are so new to the marketplace that the industry cannot predict its favorites he pointed out. "These are so new in the game," he said. "Spring 2001, for example, is the first season that California is going to see a lot of this stuff in retail."

The four-stroke engine trimmer, in particular, has yet to penetrate the mainstream landscape market, according to Stieneker. "The four-cycle really hasn't gained in popularity yet," he observed. "Everybody's just

used to the two-cycle since there are so many out there."

Jiannas agreed. "The commercial landscape contractor right now is not buying a lot of four-stroke trimmers."

Jiannas added that most equipment dealers still have regular two-stroke trimmers and other power equipment in stock, so a shift to the newer technologies will be a gradual process, although eventually, when the regulations are stepped up, contractors will be required to buy a compliant product.

Contractors also tend to be creatures of habit and are comfortable with the older, two-stroke technology equipment, observed Dana Possick, RedMax's assistant manager of national marketing. "People are always resistant to change," he pointed out, especially with technologies that are relatively new to the marketplace. Transitioning from the old to the new will largely be a matter of industry education, he said.

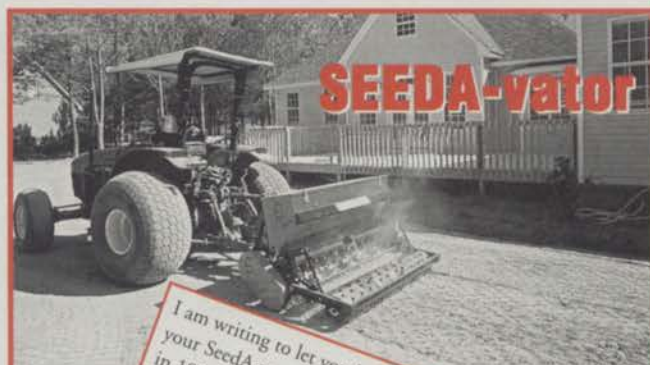
In terms of cost, landscape contractors shouldn't see a dramatic price increase with these new, advanced trimmers, Stieneker predicted.

However, prices are sure to rise, as with any new technology, Jiannas added. "There will be a price tag increase," he said. "It's a fact of life."

As trimmers and other outdoor power equipment become more technologically sophisticated, manufacturers pay more to produce these units – an increase that will most likely be passed on to end-users, i.e. landscape contractors, Jiannas said.

The exact price increase remains to be seen, however. "It's too early to tell," he pointed out, adding that he does know one thing for certain. "(Any cost increase) will be a short-term pain for long-term gain." **LL**

The author is Associate Editor of *Lawn & Landscape magazine*.



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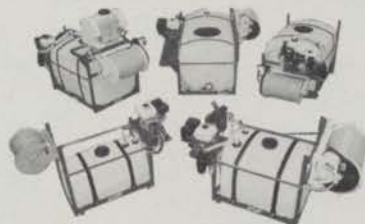
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Effective Applications

by Jason Dampier

By following a few simple guidelines, responsible lawn care operators can ensure safety.



PROPER Pesticide APPLICATIONS

Almost every pesticide applicator at one time or another has wondered, "Does it really matter how well the spreader is calibrated?" or "Do I have to wear rubber gloves just because the label says so?" Sometimes applicators become too comfortable with the products they use and start cutting corners, which often causes problems.

Lawn care operators should keep themselves safe and free from pesticide exposure at all times. If they eat lunch without washing their hands with clean water and soap, they are at risk. If they wear their work clothes for more than one workday without washing them, they are at risk. If they don't follow pesticide labels, they are at risk. If they don't carry well-stocked first aid and spill kits, they are at risk.

One of my old co-workers used to take foolish risks. One morning, he approached me as I was loading up and checking my sprayer's motor oil level. He told me he didn't want to spend the money on a new pair of workboots. Instead, he tried to make the ones that he had last as long as possible. "I think it is about time I get new boots, though," he told me. "Whenever I put these on, my feet start to tingle."

This is just one example of a foolish risk. Obviously, lawn care operators should never wait until their feet start to tingle before purchasing new boots. New boots should be replaced at least once a year. The purchase date should be written inside the boot with a permanent marker so lawn care operators know when they were purchased and when they should be replaced.

Taking such a dangerous approach to working with pesticides can result in problems with even more severe implications.

TAKE THE TEST. No, this isn't another test to add another category to a pesticide applicator's license. This test requires lawn care operators to accept the assistance of a medical doctor and give some of their blood. Lawn care operators who don't regularly get a cholinesterase test put themselves at risk.

Cholinesterase is a chemical found in the human body that is necessary for the nervous system to function normally. Pesticides classified as carbamates or organophosphates can inhibit cholinesterase in your body. Ideally, pesticide applicators should determine how much cholinesterase is in their bodies to begin with so they can use that figure as a baseline for future tests. Typically, this test should be admin-

(continued on page 112)

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Effective Applications

(continued from page 110)

istered every year or after any incidents where unhealthy exposure may have occurred. (NOTE: Cholinesterase tests are not useful for n-methyl carbamate. Consult a physician with questions about this.)

WORKING WITH LIQUIDS. Regardless of what type of liquid product a lawn care operator is applying, one of the main benefits of this type of application is its ability to be active upon application. Typically, the product begins to work immediately upon application. This provides an obvious advantage over granular applications, which need to be watered in.

The best lawn spray pattern is one that delivers uniform coverage with little overlap. The spray pattern should be continuous and uninterrupted, although some overlap might be useful at times.

Lawn care operators worried about getting good coverage, especially with new

(continued on page 114)

Every lawn care technician should make sure there is a complete first aid kit on his or her truck at all times. A complete first aid kit should include:

- A small plastic bottle of a common detergent that is used to wash pesticide quickly off the skin.
- A small package or bag of activated charcoal. Mixed with water and swallowed, activated charcoal acts as an absorber of pesticides.
- A shaped plastic airway for mouth-to-mouth resuscitation.
- A thermos or large plastic bottle (at least one quart) of clean water. If there is









no clean water in an emergency, use any pond or stream water that is available. A portable eye wash bottle should be on all trucks.

- Simple Band-Aids, bandages and tape. All cuts and scrapes should be covered to prevent pesticides from easily entering the body.
- A blanket is very useful. It should be kept in a place where it will not be contaminated by pesticides.
- Some means for two-way communication, such as a cell phone, two-way radio or coins for a pay phone taped to the inside of the first aid kit.
- A small, plastic empty jar with a tight fitting lid is useful as a drinking glass for the victim, in order to induce vomiting or feed activated charcoal. It can also be used for collecting vomitus to take to the doctor.

— Jason Dampier

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Effective Applications

(continued from page 112)

employees, should cut their application rates in half and make two applications. First, apply in east-west swaths, then in north-south swaths. The spray pattern should form an arc no more than 3 to 4 feet on either side of the applicator's line of travel. This may not always be an ideal approach because the application time will be doubled, but spending more time on an application is better than customer cancellations or callbacks.

However, applicators must be careful when working with liquid products. Lawn care operators are generally exposed to liquid formulas through their skin, where the product can penetrate and enter the blood stream. Lawn care operators should follow pesticide labels, and safeguard themselves with properly stocked first aid kits (see *Stock the Kit*, page 112).

TANK MIX TROUBLES. Sooner or later, lawn care operators have to perform liquid herbicide applications, if they haven't al-

ready. Some lawn care companies have dedicated equipment for herbicides and insecticides. Pesticide applicators who work for companies that operate this way should consider themselves fortunate because they won't have to worry about decontaminating the equipment between herbicide and non-herbicide applications.

Technicians who don't have this luxury need to ensure a clean tank before each application. First, flush the sprayer with water and spray this water on a site that is listed on the label, immediately after the application. Applicators should do this until they are confident the sprayer is free of residual product. Next, rinse the tank at least three times with water. This should be timed so that the final rinse is completed just before the tank is filled with the new non-herbicide product.

Note that not all kinds of herbicides can be totally decontaminated from a sprayer. For example, tanks that contain phenoxy products cannot be decontaminated. Check the la-

bel to be sure. The key is to make sure residual herbicides aren't being sprayed while non-herbicide products are being applied.

Recently, I heard a story where an applicator was performing a fall liquid fertilization. The applicator didn't know that the tank was previously used to apply a broad-spectrum herbicide. When the lawn started to turn chlorotic a "red flag" immediately went up. If the previous applicator had followed a few simple procedures, this mishap would not have happened.

If you apply herbicides that cannot be totally decontaminated, buy two sprayers – one for herbicides and another for other pesticide applications – and mark them clearly.

SPILL CONTROL. Spills can and do occur. What should be included in a truck's spill response kit? Remember that one of the most important components of spill management is to prevent yourself from becoming a part of

(continued on page 116)



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Effective Applications

(continued from page 114)

the spill. Wear your personal protective equipment (PPE) according to what the pesticide labels require. PPE should include:

- Chemical splash goggles
- Face shields
- Rubber gloves
- Appropriate body protection, such as protective suits and shoe or foot coverings

Once lawn care operators are protected, they can stop the spill and prevent it from spreading. This might be as simple as turning off the sprayer or standing up a tipped container. Certain supplies should be carried to help confine spills, including:

- Large, absorbent tube socks manufactured specifically for pesticide absorption
- Pillows manufactured specifically for pesticide absorption
- Absorbent sheets and pads

After the spill has been cleaned up, the residues must be managed. Use the following materials to finish the job:

- Absorbent material such as cat litter

- Broom with metal and plastic dust pans
- Large plastic freezer bags
- Five-gallon disposal container with heavy plastic garbage bags

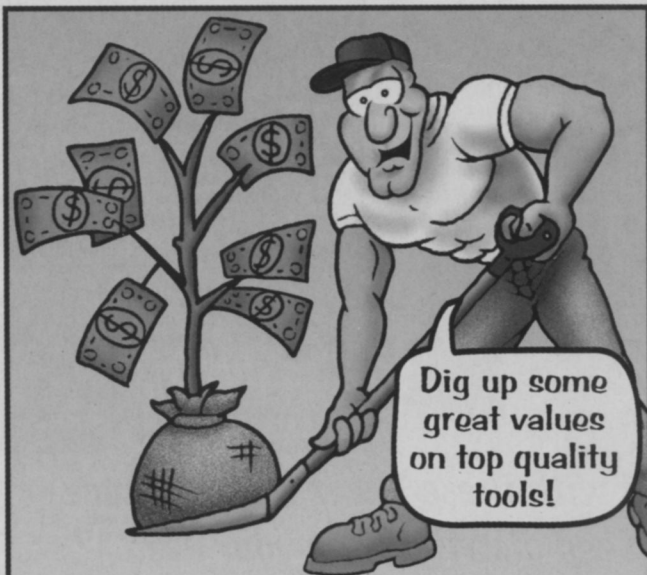
GOING GRANULAR. Granular pesticides are generally easier to clean up than liquid formulas, and many lawn care operators feel they are easier to work with. Environmental pressures and new legislation are also driving the popularity of granular products.

Case in point, new legislation has been passed in some counties in New York through the state Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) requiring pesticide applicators to give their clients' neighbors 48 hour pre-notification of pesticide applications. NYSDEC created a list of pesticides exempt from this pre-notification, one of them being granular pesticides. To avoid notifying all neighbors of a client, lawn care companies in these counties will have to switch from liquid applications to granular.

The key to an effective granular application is often the spreader. Drop and rotary spreaders are most commonly used in commercial granular applications. Drop spreaders measure the fertilizer out and drop it directly on the lawn. They are generally more precise and usually deliver a better pattern. Off-target drift is usually kept to a minimum because the product drops straight down. However, because the swath is much narrower than with a rotary spreader, more care is required to align swaths to prevent overlapping or missing areas. A helpful hint to ensure even coverage when using a drop spreader is to make sure the wheels overlap wheel marks in the grass from the previous swath.

Rotary spreaders are more forgiving if the applicator isn't as accurate. Because the application pattern is feathered to the far left and far right of the swath, some overlap is tolerable and sometimes even desirable. Rotary spreaders utilize centrifugal force which

(continued on page 118)



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Effective Applications

(continued from page 116)

provides wider swaths, thereby reducing the number of swaths required. Because of this, rotary spreaders are more likely to cause drift if they are used on windy days.

Regardless of the type of spreader a lawn care operator uses, over-application at the ends of the lawn should be avoided. Inexperienced applicators either open the spreader too early when they begin the swath or turn it off too late at the end of the swath. Never keep the spreader open when turning around at the end of the swath.

Get the spreader moving at its rated speed (often 3 miles per hour – check the owner's manual) before opening the spreader. Apply a ring around the lawn (that will act as a header strip) before starting the back and forth swaths. The perimeter of the lawn will then serve as the turn-around area where the spreader should be closed. Closing the spreader minimizes the chance of irregular or over application.

Almost every lawn pesticide applicator has at one time or another striped a lawn. Striping occurs when the swaths are applied unevenly and results in stripes of dark and light green turf. This could have happened if the spreader isn't calibrated properly for the application or if the spreader isn't being driven accurately. Some lawn applicators will run their swaths at a right angle to the home so striping is less noticeable when the homeowner looks out the window. This is no substitute for doing the job right.

Also, never operate the spreader backwards. Rotary spreaders will produce an unacceptable pattern when moved in this direction, while drop spreaders will apply granules at a different rate. If you need to operate a drop spreader backwards (such as in soft soil with new seeding where pulling the spreader may be easier than pushing), make sure it is calibrated for pulling rather than pushing.

Finally, spreaders should always be filled on a driveway or walkway instead of a lawn. Granules are much easier to sweep off of a hard surface. **LL**

The author is a horticulture and natural resource educator at Cornell Cooperative Extension of Putnam County, N.Y., and a licensed pesticide applicator in the state of New York and the Province of Ontario.

DISCLAIMER: All recommendations are for informational purposes only. Because manufacturers' recommendations change, always read and follow the manufacturers' instructions before using any pesticide. Cornell Cooperative Extension and the author assume no responsibility for the use of any pesticides or chemicals. Contact your local regulatory agency or local Cooperative Extension Service if you have questions about topics covered in this article. This article is not meant to replace the advice of a physician. Contact your doctor with questions.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Some manufacturers' listings in the March Pesticide and Fertilizer Buyers' Guide were misrepresented, so the clarified information has been reproduced.

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	Basamid	Dazomet	Granular soil fumigant	Turf renovation and seed beds	
	Drive	Quinclorae	75 DF	Turf	
	Image	Imazaquin	70 DG	Turf	

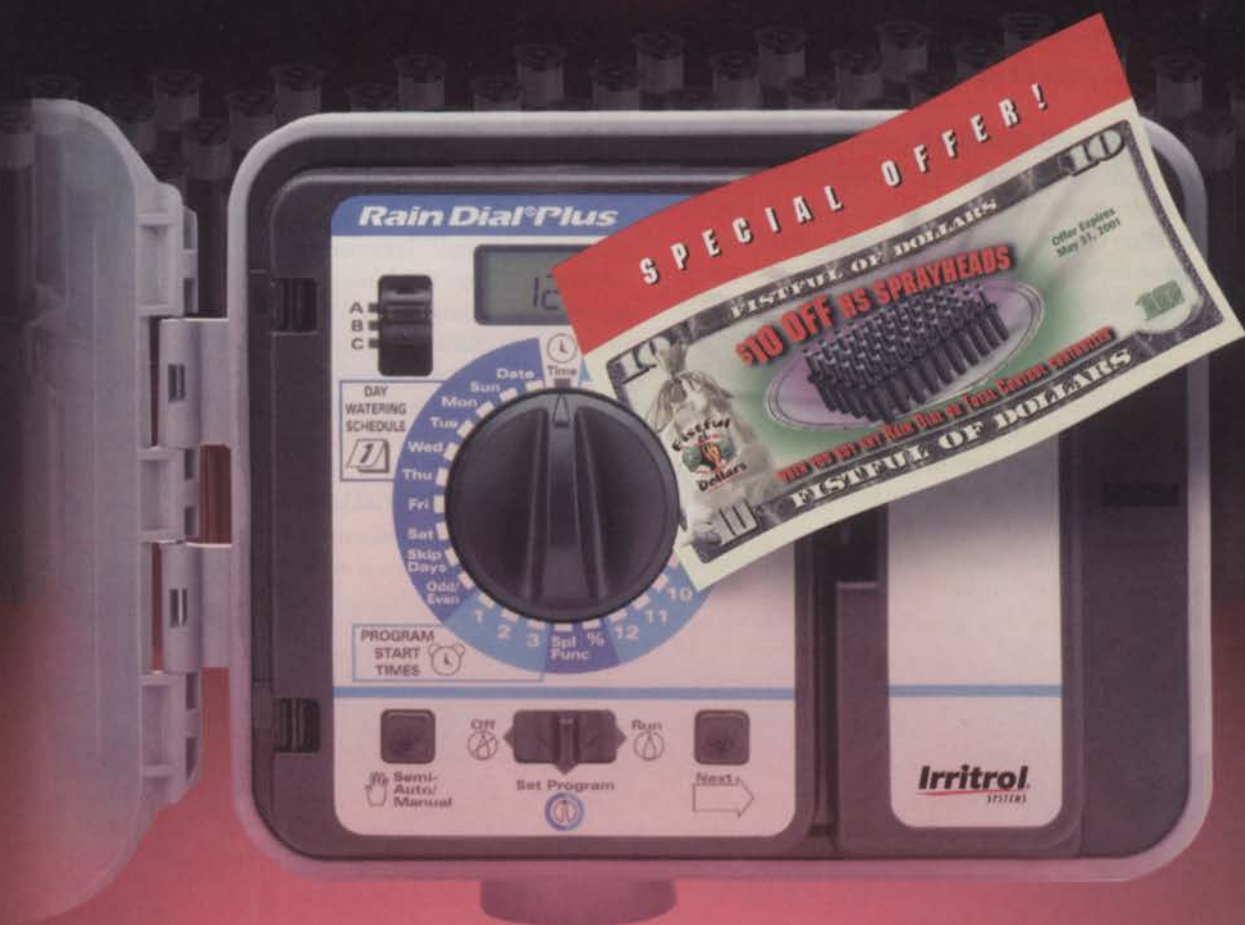
INSECTICIDES

Bayer	Merit 75 WSP	Imidacloprid	Water-soluble packets	Turfgrass, ornamentals, fruit and nut trees, etc.	Larvae of annual bluegrass weevil, asiatic garden beetle, billbugs, etc.
FMC	Talstar Lawn & Tree Flowable Insecticide/Miticide	Bifenthrin	Flowable liquid	Indoors, ornamentals and landscapes	Adelgids, annual bluegrass weevil, ants, aphids, etc.
	Talstar PL Granular Insecticide	Bifenthrin	Granular	Ants, mole crickets and other insect pests	Annual bluegrass weevil, ants, armyworms, billbugs, etc.
	Astro Insecticide	Permethrin	Flowable liquid	Lawns, ornamental trees and shrubs, and around buildings	Ant mounds, ants, armyworms, ash borer-banded, ash clearwing
RohMid	Mach 2	Halofenozide	Liquid, granular fertilizer	Turf	Grubs, cutworms, webworms, etc.

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USE READER SERVICE #139

Working with Hillsides

by Dave Clancy

While athletes seek the challenge of climbing hills, landscape contractors know hills cause ups and downs in installation. Problems, such as erosion, irrigation channels and plant failure, which are less common on level landscape projects, require extra attention on hilly areas. Landscape professionals who don't consider these risks can upset their clients, their clients' neighbors and local officials.

THE DIGGING DILEMMA. Many contractors solve hillside challenges by excavating the hill, but this comes with consequences. Changing the hillside can alter the drainage pattern and jeopardize the health of the foliage on the slopes. Attention to irrigation needs is key.

"I usually put grasses on the high part because they will get the mist and the overspray when I water with rotor heads," explained David Gatti, owner and designer, POPS Landscaping, Marietta, Ga. "I put plants that require a little more water in the middle, and even there I use plants that are more drought-tolerant.

"I put perennials at the lowest part of the hillside, so they will receive the runoff," he added.

Droughts are a major concern in Georgia when working on a hilly property, Gatti pointed out. "We had a drought last year, and all indications are we will

have one again," he said. "When your water supply runs off, as it does on hills, this is a major concern."

Another major moisture concern is erosion. Contractors need to minimize land loss by developing a landscape that channels water toward drainage paths.

Bill Trimmer, president, Professional Grounds, Arlington, Va., recommended beginning property inspections with a complete site survey. "You must look at everything, even items that are not on that property," he said.

For instance, a hilltop watershed on an adjoining property is a variable that many contractors tend to neglect because it is not on the property being serviced.

"You may have to install some hardscapes or something that will divert that water elsewhere or channel it under the ground," Trimmer explained. "If you have a hillside with trees that is not extremely steep, but the runoff makes it difficult to get turf to grow on it, that might call for channeling water underground.

"Shade could be prohibiting turf to take hold, so you might have to trim those trees for installation and let them grow back after the turf takes," he continued.

WONDER ABOUT WALLS? Some hillside solutions involve installing materials besides plants. "We have one community where the traffic pattern down the hill caused all kinds of problems with the turf,"

(continued on page 122)

Contractors

consider

erosion,

drainage

patterns and

environmental

concerns when

installing

hillside

landscapes.

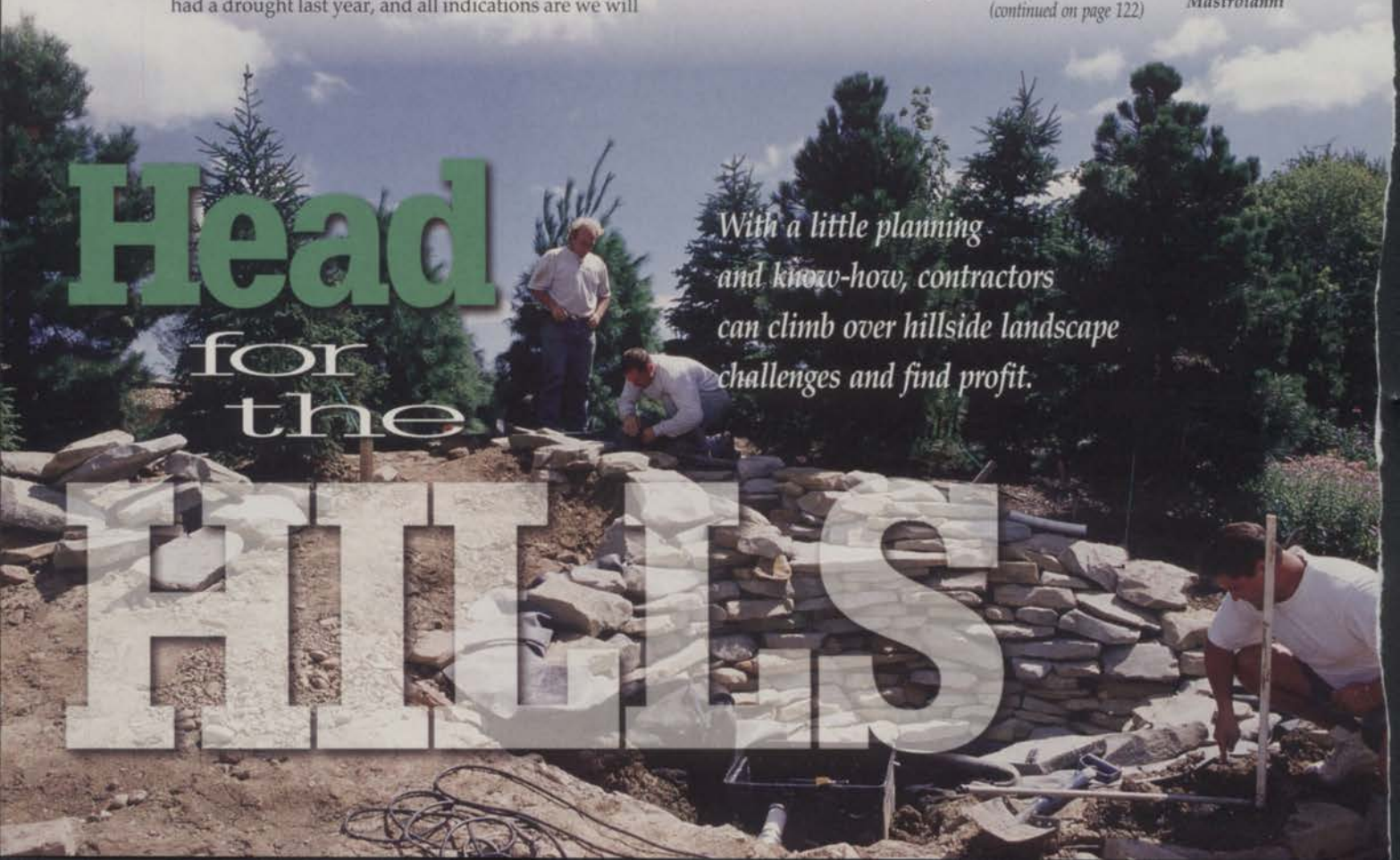
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Working with Hillsides

(continued from page 120)

Trimmer explained. "Our solution was to install a set of steps. That changed the traffic pattern on the hill and allowed the turf to gain a footing.

"You have to really analyze everything that goes on at that site and figure out the best overall solution for the entire property," Trimmer continued.

"And then, you have to stick to your guns," he added. "You are the professional and you should understand much more about what will work."

Appropriate hillside installation materials must be considered in advance.

It is **no secret** that **water running off a property** will take some of the **landscape** with it. The **trick** is to **minimize this loss**, and to **develop a landscape** that will **channel the water** toward proper drainage paths.

"It is a thought process that needs to go into the design before you implement it," Gatti agreed. "That is basically the bottom line. Too many landscape contractors don't think about these issues. They think of being creative, but they don't think long term.

"When working with hills, I think creatively and I try to also emphasize long-term solutions," Gatti continued. "I always inspect the job and look for potential short- and long-term problems. Sometimes these problems won't surface for five years, but they will eventually surface."

For Gatti, this is especially critical since POPS offers lifetime warranties on its retaining walls. "We know that if there is a problem, we will be the ones coming back to fix it," he said. "So we do what we can to make sure it is done right the first time."

Not repeating problems is one key to hillside success, Trimmer stressed. "If you go out to a hillside with sod on it that didn't take, how much sense does it make to put sod on it again?" he asked. "You have to look at why that sod did not take and work with the problem from there.

"That hill might be too steep for sod – the

slope might call for a retaining wall instead," he continued. "Or, you might need a catch basin to divert the water somewhere else. You might have to eliminate the groundcover altogether and figure out another plan."

Weighing options in advance produces more successful projects. "When you address the problems from a 'why?' standpoint, you get a better handle on what will work, what won't work, and the differences between the two," Trimmer explained.

Larry Becker, owner, Becker Landscape Contractors, Indianapolis, Ind., cited his "rules" for installation, which are crucial when dealing with variables he experiences such as glacial till, he said.

"Rule No. 1 is to make sure you get all of the water out from behind the hill," he noted. "Rule number two is to understand that not all hills are natural – many were created during site preparation."

Since glacial till is a major issue in Indiana, Becker deals with challeng-

ing drainage issues. "We'll see glacial till, which is an underground stream of water that just keeps on flowing," he explained. "With the development we have seen here over the past few years, glacial till has become more and more apparent."

Becker said that contractors often cut away part of a hill to install a wall, but this can create problems. "If we put footings in that hill and there is glacial till, the ground will always be soft and the footings will not be totally secure, especially when you are changing the complexion of that hill and the resulting hydroponics," he described.

"That is an issue we have to deal with, and it usually means putting drainage behind that wall to keep the water from eroding the property," he remarked.

The integrity of the wall is another issue to examine. "When we deal with walls, we want an engineer or engineering company to come in and build them, simply because of the risk factor," Becker shared. "If you try to build a wall and the ground is too soft, that wall will eventually give in. Then you have much bigger problems.

"We will walk away from work in certain

instances if the customer doesn't want to pay for the services of a professional engineer," he added. "That is just too important to many of our projects."

RETAINING EROSION. Retaining walls might replace plants as a hillside solution, however, this installation option is not immune to erosion conditions. Here, environmental compliance often comes into play.

"We have had some [hill] projects go pretty wrong in the past, and we have learned from that," admitted Michael Hoffman, owner Hoffman Landscapes, Hartford, Conn. "You are taking a big risk anytime you work with the erosion factor."

Hoffman said that retaining walls are limited in Connecticut because of local government requirements. Anything 6 feet or higher requires a zoning variance, and walls 4 feet or higher require a professional engineer.

"Our major concern is erosion and runoff," Hoffman noted. "When you do a long-seeded slope, you risk the seed being washed away. So if there is a potential for damage from heavy rains, we will stake hay bales down the hillside. We'll put in a fill fence and back it with hay bales to slow down water.

"Sometimes we have to do several rows to assure there is no damage," he added.

For Hoffman, the local watershed is a critical factor to recognize. "Our area drains into the Long Island Sound," he explained. "We have to make sure that we have a swale built on properties with water gathering at the bottom of a hill to slow the water enough for it to be absorbed into the soil. Any excess water will eventually flow into the Sound.

"And that becomes an issue later when pesticides and fertilizers are applied to the property," he continued. "We need to keep those out of the watershed.

"If there is water at the top of the hill, we want to make darn sure there is enough high ground between that pond and your slope to the river," he said. "If there isn't, perhaps you need to make that high ground."

Working near water sources can prevent environmental challenges, and contractors should take precautions by applying for necessary permits, Hoffman said.

When working with hillsides, "drainage is king," Becker agreed, stating that nothing else comes first when designing hillside landscapes.

(continued on page 139)

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en100	Evergreen	Asaka, Coral Bell	8		15.00	Save
en154	Evergreen	Arbutus, Tecton Globe	4		10.00	Delete
8131	Flower	Hydr. Empire Flamingo	1		35.00	
06120	Shrub	Babero, Red	1		35.00	Pay
en194	Evergreen	Arbutus, American	5		110.00	
en107	Evergreen	Burnwood, Scotch Pine	1		100.00	Exit

Quote # 1013 Tax Rate 6.5 % Taxable 1927.00 Exempt 0.00 Tax 125.26 Total 2052.26 Calculate

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Don't forget to visit www.lawnandlandscape.com where the Technology Buyers' Guide continues, offering additional information and an E-commerce Buyers' Guide.

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By Nicole Wisniewski



Plug It In

Contractors can make the right software connection by first researching their business needs and purchasing options.

To grow a business, a landscape contractor has to take control of his or her financials, determine the hours spent on labor and money spent on materials and, from there, deduce profits and losses.

A task like this can be overwhelming and time consuming, particularly when the software bought to help tally and track these numbers is crashing company computers every few hours, pointed out David Adams, job costing analyst, Hittle Landscaping, Westfield, Ind.

"We were working with a software program that was unstable," Adams said. "We couldn't get it to operate properly and the customer service was terrible. So, we were still doing most of our proposals on Excel spreadsheets. Excel will do anything you want it to do, but you have to have the time and energy to put it together. To get actuals from crews, compare those against what was estimated and come up with profits and losses on Excel - it's impractical."

Hittle Landscaping was searching for industry-specific software that could track financials, workforce effectiveness and job profitability, and was easy to use and integrate into the company. "And we didn't want to have to incorporate and

maintain an IS department to do it," Adams said.

Hittle Landscaping isn't the only company in the green industry experiencing these problems. Many contractors don't know how to properly choose and incorporate software into their companies. Paying for inexpensive software programs that go unused, purchasing the wrong software and suffering from improper integration of software can be avoided. To do so, contractors must know their business needs and properly match them to the right software.

SOFTWARE & YOUR BUSINESS. By tracking the right information the right way, contractors can pay attention to profit without taking time away from the business of running their operations, stressed David Tucker, president, CLIP - Sensible Software, Ijamsville, Md.

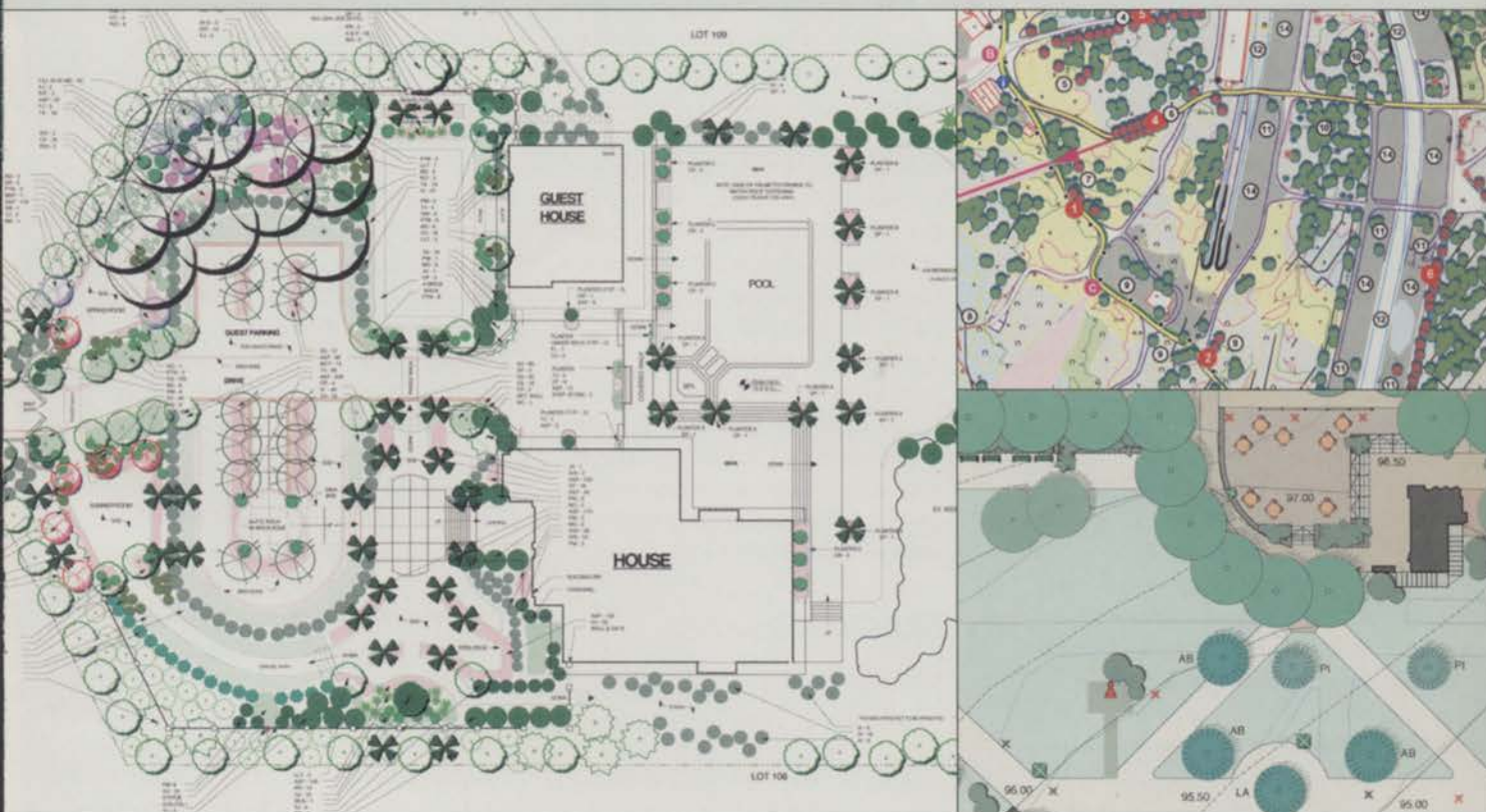
"We have seen companies go from minimum or no profit to huge profits based on the fact that they started learning where their money was coming from," Tucker said. "Since profit is the difference between income and expenses, it makes sense that controlling both of these is what will produce profit."

Company owners who track the back and forth flow of

(continued on page T6)

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(continued from page T4)

money can reap huge profit rewards. "For instance, if a contractor has 10 production employees and they work 45 hours per week and work 40 weeks per year, his total available labor hours are 10 times 45 times 40, or 18,000 man-hours," Tucker explained. "The average contractor will have some customers who will be above the average dollars per man-hour figure and some below the average dollars per man-hour. If that contractor increased his average man-hour rate by just \$1, he would still see an increase in profit of \$18,000 for that year. This is just because he paid attention to how much each customer was producing per hour."

While this is invaluable information, a landscape contractor would question whether the math was worth doing by hand, Tucker said.

The scenario is the same for job costing. "Knowing exactly how much money was spent on labor, materials, subcontractors, equipment and other miscellaneous costs and then balancing that against the price to the customer and properly assigning overhead costs to the various categories in a construction job is the name of the game," Tucker said.

Because many landscape contractors aren't mathematical wizards or don't have a lot of extra time to spend adding and subtracting these figures, integrating software may be the next logical step for a growing company.

SHOP 'TIL YOU DROP. After experiencing problems with one type of software, Hittle Landscaping wasn't about to jump into another program without careful research. "We collected some test CD demos of programs to experiment with first," Adams said. "When we found a few we liked, we started calling some of the other users of the program to find out how they use it and like it."

As a result of the time spent carefully checking out the options, Adams said the company found a perfect program match and is currently at the beginning of the software integration process, which it also is taking slowly.

"We are going to generate invoices in

the accounting package for one month to see how it goes and make sure the numbers come out right," Adams said. "We're going to run it in dummy form right now and see how it works. Then we'll integrate and link up the software to our system. It will probably take us a good four to six months to get things going."

Although once bitten, twice shy pushed the company into being extra cautious about its second major software purchase, the few short steps the company owners took before buying their new program and integrating it could provide many years of satisfaction instead of frustration.

"Much like any other smart investment, shopping around is extremely important," said Ryan Sutton, marketing manager, drafix.com, Kansas City, Mo. "A red flag for me is when a customer will call in to pur-

BY TRACKING *the right information the right way, contractors can pay attention to profit without taking time away from the business of running their operations. — David Tucker*

chase our software and they don't even know what it is they are buying. Many times this person is looking for the same benefits their competition is getting with our technology. While one type of software may work for some companies, it doesn't work for all of them. It's important to take the time to understand what it is that you expect from the software, then learn the software completely and let it work for you from there. If you expect time travel, it's going to take more than just purchasing some software to satisfy your needs."

Contractors should figure out their needs first before grabbing their checkbooks and heading out to the store. "Once needs are identified, it is much easier for contractors to focus on products that will fulfill those needs," Sutton said.

Samuel Fava, management/landscape designer, TLC Landscaping, Staten Island, N.Y., whose company recently installed a new software program, suggested contractors first devise lists detailing their needs

and expectations and then shop around and test out different programs along the way. "And always get a program that will leave room for growth and expansion," he said.

Since the goal when dealing with computers is to work smarter, not harder, Adams suggested contractors look for software that is easy to use. "Some software programs, even though they are robust programs, will be harder to use," he said. "All the complexity of the program should be behind the scenes so you can manage your crews in the field and not waste time figuring out what's going on with your business. Decent software should take you from point A to point B in a logical and chronological progression."

Since full-service landscape companies tend to use software for accounting purposes, landscape design and fleet or inventory tracking, looking for a package or company open to interface integration also is important, pointed out Amin Mufti, vice president, advanced customer solutions group, @Road, Fremont, Calif. "Look for open platforms," Mufti said. "Some software companies want to do everything themselves and sometimes that isn't possible. Look for a company that is willing to work with a third party in the future to interface other software applications with theirs and to support your changing business needs."

The only way to find out if software programs are easy to learn and use is to try them out, which means doing research and shopping around. "Be flexible," Sutton suggested. "With an open-minded attitude, any proven technology can be learned."

And since business success, i.e. profits, can be the result of an effective software program, cost shouldn't be contractors' decision-making factor. "This is not a place to save money and get the cheapest program you can," Tucker said. "You will be committed to this software for the long haul and it is important that it fit your company. Software is like shoes. If they hurt, you will be miserable, but if they fit well, you will be happy."

LOOK AT THE COMPANY. Turned on to a new software program by a friend who had some software knowledge, Fava

said so far he hasn't had any problems with his new program. "It came with a sample company so we could practice, and it was a landscape company, which helped," he said. "Otherwise, it was rather simple after setting up all the details and customizing it to fit our company better. Plus, they have a great technical support group."

Researching the software company also isn't a bad idea. "You need to choose a good supplier that will be with you for years to come," Tucker said. "Sometimes it's better to do a lot more evaluation of the software company itself and then talk to its current users and compare features."

Tucker said the three basic functions of software companies and their programs contractors should consider are stability, depth and features. While depth and features can be reviewed by talking with other software users, stability is determined by interviewing the software supplier. Some questions that show stability include:

- How many people use the software? If it's less than 500 users, contractors should be asking a lot of questions.
- How many years has the company been in business? A company that has been around for more than two years has a system that sustains them.
- Does the company do any marketing? If a company is spending money on marketing, it is a good sign that they are serious about sustainability.
- Is the company involved in your industry? A good software company will realize that being involved in the industry and contributing to it means greater success for that company.
- Is the company easy to access? Are there ways to communicate with the company and its other customers?
- Does the company share your business' core values?

While no software program can eliminate labor problems or all the stresses of running a landscape company, it's a start toward organizing some highly complicated business areas. "No software is bulletproof," Adams pointed out, "But you can find one that works." **LL**

The author is Managing Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.

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By Kristen Hampshire

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Pencil, paper, personal computer, palm pilot – the technology spectrum in the green industry leaves a range of haves and have-nots, and contractors hit every mark on the continuum.

Some are cutting edge, some are comfortably un-equipped. There are eggheads, and there are dinosaurs. There is a growing gap between those who are eager to try new technological tricks and those who prefer to stick to the tried-and-true ledger-line accounting and snail-mail billing. There is also a middle range, which seems to include most green industry companies.

Then, there is hesitation.

"There is fear of getting left behind, but fear of doing something about it," described Bruce Wilson, vice president business development, Green2Go, Lauderdale Lakes, Fla. "A lot of this is caused by lack of knowledge."

In which case, there is pressure.

Wilson estimated that the green industry is nearly four years behind in technical advancement – common in the service industry – and there is a two- to four-year gap between lawn and landscape companies wired with the latest equipment and contractors only beginning to integrate systems into their businesses.

I know my customers' names and their kids' names – and their hobbies, too. Sure, I have a computer, but machines don't build relationships, people do. Tech-



While some contractors are wired with advanced equipment, others are hesitant to turn on new technology.

Tuning into Technology

nology? Call me customer-driven.

Many business owners understand the value of technology. They know of its potential efficiencies, organizational qualities and appeal to their computer-savvy customers. But this is not always enough to convince them to take the technology plunge.

"It takes a while to learn how to do that stuff, and then you have to relearn it and it changes all the time... then you have updates," reasoned Chris Combs, owner, TransPlants, Indianapolis, Ind. Her interiorscape company's technology inventory includes several pagers, two computers to aid in billing and tracking sales, one cell phone that she operates and email – which she is admittedly stubborn to use.

"I learn customers' names and their dogs' names, and in the plant business, that's what clients want – someone with personality," she explained.

Her seven-employee business runs smoothly on this simplistic plan, she said. "I really like the hands-on – I'm too old for this," she laughed. Her concentration is building relationships – strong ones. She compares her mantra to the television commercial where a CEO passes out airline tickets to employees seated on either side of a large conference room table.

"He said, 'You're going to start seeing the customers, and I'm going to see the one we just lost,'" she described. "And I thought, you know, that makes sense. Go out and talk to your customers, don't send them email – I hate that."

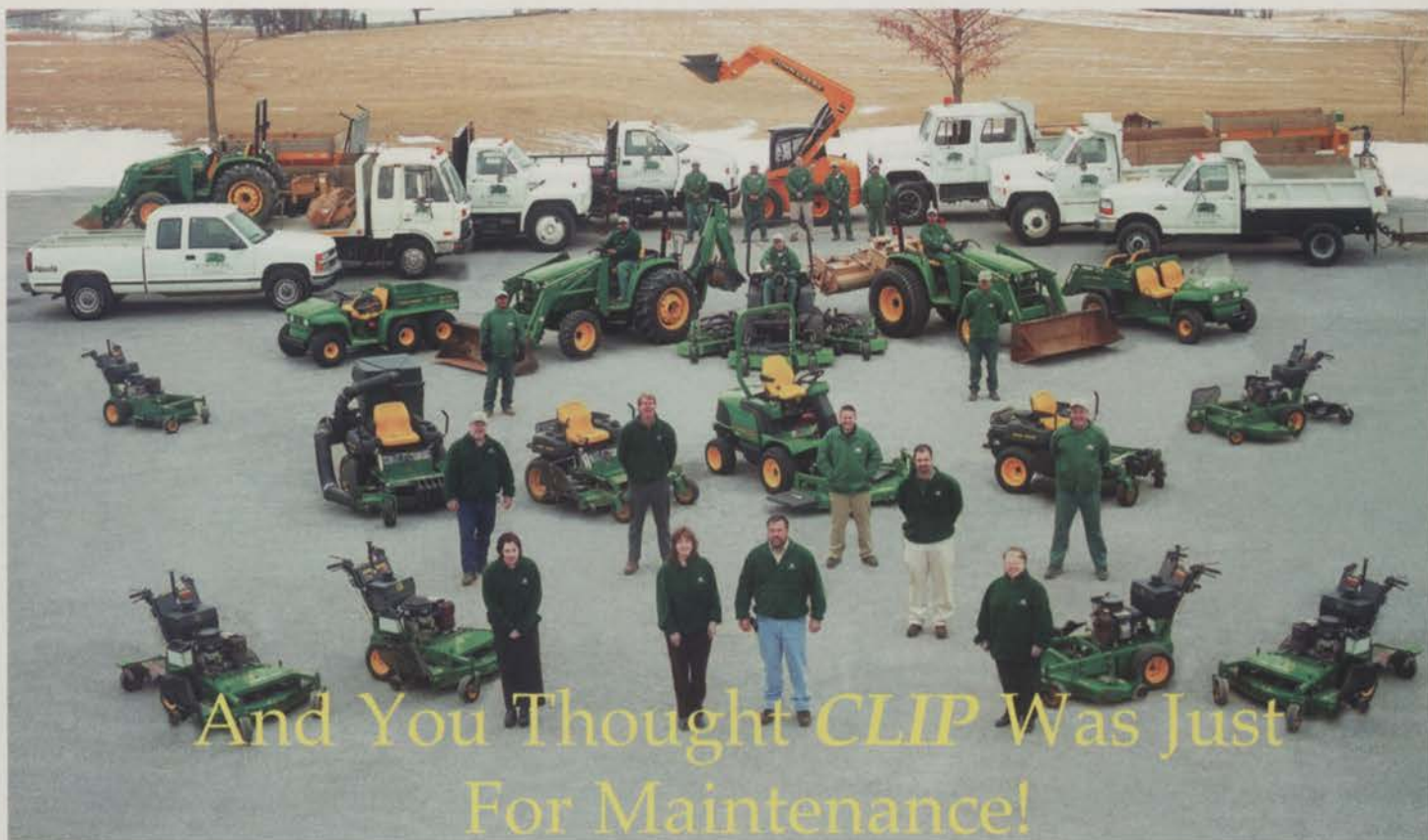
Combs is considering launching a company Web site, but she "keeps putting on the brakes. I don't know, I just don't have a good feeling about it." She said she will probably give in soon, however.

My computer does the numbers, but you can't always trust machines to do the work. I've been playing on the Internet. I'll keep learning... when I get the extra time. For now, technology? Call me comfortable.

Nick Valenta loves his fax machine. His Ridgewood-

(continued on page T10)





And You Thought CLIP Was Just For Maintenance!

In 1994, Rick Carver, Founder and President of Carver's Lawn & Landscape, Inc. was overwhelmed and frustrated. They had three people doing the scheduling, billing, and administrative work. And, with four divisions (mowing, landscape maintenance, installation, and grading), there was paper everywhere! Plain and simple, it was chaos and it had to stop.

Rick quickly went to work seeking software and systems to end this chaos. He found **CLIP** Software, and away went the chaos! They implemented **CLIP** initially in their mowing and landscape maintenance divisions - which immediately ran more efficiently and made more money.

Rick was still looking for a software program, however, that would handle the specialized needs of his installation and grading divisions. Then in 1998, Rick heard about **CLIP**'s newest software module - Projects. This program was exactly what he needed - it enabled the company to bid work with confidence. "If you could know everything

you needed to know about a job before it was done, wouldn't you want to know? Projects tells you what not to do. Everyone should use Projects. The level of professionalism would be a much higher level if they did." Also playing a huge role in Carver's success has been their **COMPASS**™ system. **COMPASS**™ is a comprehensive operations management system that Rick created and implemented in his company that integrates perfectly with **CLIP**'s Projects Module.

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Rick Carver went from working all the time, never sitting down for more than 20 seconds at a time, to working 40 hours a week just like all of his employees. "I now work 40 hours a week as do my employees because of the **COMPASS**™ system and the Projects Module. My gross is fantastic, but most importantly, my net is bigger and better than it ever has been since I've been in business."

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(continued from page T10)

N.J.-based company, Valley Landscape, treats this equipment like communication central. Since he added the fax to his business years ago, mailing costs decreased 50 percent and customers enjoy the convenience of faxing bid requests, he noted.

"I am happy with the systems we have," he confirmed. His other technological tools include Nextel radios and cell phones and two computers with accounting software. "I know companies that are completely up to date and automated, and some are still completely pencils and scraps of paper.

"I favor the middle ground - not completely automated or computerized, but partially," he continued. "It's comfortable."

However, his company is by no means at a standstill when it comes to pushing forward in technology. Like many, Valenta prefers a gradual move into more advanced systems - baby steps.

"I think for some, it's a fear of the unknown," he figured. "You hear stories of

people spending thousands of dollars and not getting the right things."

Wilson agreed this scenario is not unusual. For those unfamiliar with the latest software, purchasing a package to meet the company's needs can turn into a guessing game. Often, contractors have false expectations of technology's capabilities.

"It's like buying a tax package," Wilson compared. "It sounds like it does it all for you, but there are limitations. How much do you already need to know? That is why it is important to look at the support and training and the implementation of the new program. If you're not tech-savvy, you'll give up and put it away."

Valenta has not given up yet. He believes scheduling and routing software will eliminate math errors and increase operating efficiencies, but his primary obstacles are time, cost and knowledge.

The time investment required to fully install a new software program and train

office managers to use the system could place a hefty burden on the company's temporary financial health, Valenta noted. Plus, after 25 years of estimating the old-fashioned way, he is skeptical about change.

"When we originally put all of our books on the computer, which includes job costs and payroll, it took about two weeks of two full-time people to enter everything and set it up, and then it took a year or so of adding to the program," he remembered. Financially, Valenta knows that the efficiency of installing updated technology pays off in the long-run. When his company moved its payroll to the computer accounting system 15 years ago, the new system cut what used to be a two-day payroll task down to a half-day project - a 75-percent time savings.

"Maybe one needs lessons on technology," Valenta remarked. "To just go into it on your own is difficult. Some things I can figure out and some things I can't. If there

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are fourteen things on the screen, what do you pick out? Some people just know. Maybe it's because they've tried it 100 times and they've figured it out. If you do it enough times, you'll learn slowly."

Wilson remembers this learning stage – it wasn't too long ago when he traded his mower for a mouse after more than 30 years as a contractor. "With my previous company, if I didn't become technology proficient, I was going to hold the company back," he said. "To learn technology, you have to force yourself every day to get on a computer, otherwise you can't remember what you learned."

"Gradually, you will get it," he added.

We have computers with state-of-the-art software. Web site? Our clients log on for appointments, our technicians search it for tips, and our competitors study it before launching their own. Technology? Call me cutting edge.

Joe Loyet keeps company matters in the palm of his hand – literally. With Palm Pilots, he tracks labor, scheduling and routing. His St. Louis, Mo.-based company,

"I THINK for some it is a fear
of the unknown. You don't really know
how new technology is going to work."
— Nick Valenta

Loyet Landscape Management, traded its Franklin Planners for Palm Pilots in 1999, and is now issuing them to more than the sales staff and branch managers.

"Instead of giving crew leaders a print-out saying, 'You have to go to XYZ,' the information will be on the Palm Pilot," he explained. "You turn on your Palm Pilot when you start work. Then, when you get to your first job, you hit 'Yes,' and you begin your work. When you're done, you punch

out. So, you have all the time you are on the job and the drive time to the next job."

Quick customer turn-around and "being one step ahead of your competition" is crucial in a growing industry, Loyet stressed. "We want to be on the leading edge of things – I want to get that bid out as quickly as possible. The biggest problem in this business is people go out for a sales call and they have to come back to the office and do all of the paperwork."

Loyet cured this time-management malady last year by supplying each sales person with a laptop computer equipped with a spreadsheet program. Now, the company owns five laptops and 12 Palm Pilots, and customers are shocked at the speed they return bids, he boasted. "We want our sales person to do the initial call, do the take-off, enter it in his laptop, come back in the office, print it off, and get back into the field as quickly as possible."

(continued on page T14)



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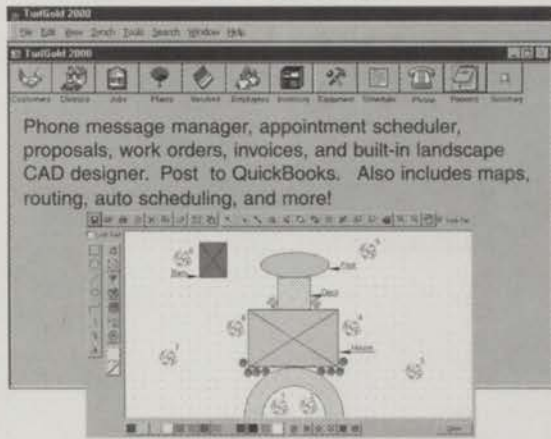
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Adkad Technology	Groundskeeper, Pro 2000 and Blizzard Buster	X		X	X			X	X	X	X	X	
@Road	Temp ASAP	X		X	X							X	
@Road	Fleet ASAP	X		X	X							X	
@Road	@Road Application Program Interface (API)	X	X	X	X							X	
@Road	Stat ASAP	X		X	X							X	
ATTI	MobilEyes Shadow Tracker & Time Traveler	X	X	X	X					X	X	X	
CLIP - Sensible Software	CLIP Lite	X		X	X				X	X		X	
CLIP - Sensible Software	QuickCLIP	X		X	X				X	X		X	
CLIP - Sensible Software	CLIP Classic	X		X	X				X	X		X	
CLIP - Sensible Software	CLIP Pro	X		X	X			X	X	X			
CLIP - Sensible Software	BidRight		X					X					
CLIP - Sensible Software	eRouter	X		X	X								X
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Creative Automation Solutions	ArborWare	X		X					X	X			
DataScapes	DataScape		X				X						
Design Imaging Group	DesignWare		X				X						
Design Imaging Group	Planscape		X			X		X					
Ditech Software	Gopher 2001 - Billing & Scheduling Software	X		X				X	X	X	X	X	
drafix.com	ProLandscape		X			X	X	X					
Eagle Point Software	LANDCADD		X		X	X							
Eagle Point Software	ColorFast		X		X	X							
Garden Graphics	Dynascope/Quotescape		X		X	X		X					
Garden Graphics	Plantmaster National	X	X	X	X								
Garden Graphics	Iris	X	X	X	X			X	X	X		X	X
GardenSoft	PlantMaster		X				X	X					
GardenSoft	GardenWorks		X				X						
Hunter Industries	Irrigation Design Tools CD				X	X							
Hunter Industries	Irrigation System Design Calculator				X	X							
Include Software	Asset	X	X	X	X			X	X	X		X	X
InterGis	Visual Control Room	X	X	X	X					X	X		X
LandPro Systems	LandPro Systems	X	X	X	X			X	X	X		X	
Lawn Monkey	Lawn Monkey Deluxe	X		X	X			X	X	X	X	X	X
Lawn Monkey	Lawn Monkey Pro	X							X	X	X	X	X
Lawn Monkey	Lawn Monkey Applicator			X				X	X	X	X	X	X
Lawn Monkey	Lawn Monkey Pro Plus	X						X	X	X	X	X	X
Lawn Monkey	Lawn Monkey QB Express	X		X	X			X	X	X	X	X	X
LSI Software	Landscape Illustrator 2001					X	X	X					
Millennium Solutions	Computer Ease	X	X	X	X				X			X	X
Millennium Solutions	ServiceTrack	X	X	X	X				X	X		X	X
Millennium Solutions	Versyss	X	X	X	X			X	X	X		X	X
Millennium Solutions	Pro-quotes	X	X	X	X			X	X			X	X
Millennium Solutions	Human Resource System	X	X	X	X							X	X
Millennium Solutions	SBT	X	X	X	X				X			X	X
Millennium Solutions	GrowTrac	X	X	X	X								X
Millennium Solutions	Purchase Control System	X	X	X	X			X					
Nemetschek North America	VentorWorks LANDMARK		X		X	X							
Performance Software Technologies	Performance Software	X		X	X			X	X	X	X	X	X
Practical Solutions	The Service Solution	X	X	X	X			X	X	X		X	
Quest Solutions	Quest Earthwork		X					X					
Real Green Systems	Lawn & Pest Assistant III	X		X				X	X	X		X	X
RND Signs	LawnLore Software	X		X									
Service Communication Software	Service Communication Software	X		X	X			X	X	X			
SLICE Technologies	SLICEplus	X	X	X	X			X	X	X		X	X
Tree Management Systems	TurfGold Software	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X		X	X
UDS Green Industry Software	Active Applications		X				X	X	X			X	X
Vander Kooi & Associates	MORS Budgeting System	X	X	X	X			X				X	
Vander Kooi & Associates	Bid Right	X	X	X	X			X				X	
VanGuard Computer Systems	Camelot	X		X	X			X	X	X			
Vista Professional	Night Vision		X				X						
Vista Professional	CD Rom Specifier's Guide		X			X							
Visual Impact Imaging	Interiorscapes Imaging & Design		X			X	X	X					
Visual Impact Imaging	Earthscaapes Imaging & Design		X			X	X	X					

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| 46 | 47 | 48 | 49 | 50 | 51 | 52 | 53 | 54 | 55 | 56 | 57 | 58 | 59 | 60 |
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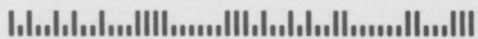


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(continued from page T11)

Sounds cut and dry. And for Loyet – a self-described “challenger” – integrating new systems addressed the inevitable.

The generation entering the industry is prepared with technological background.

“When younger people come into a company they expect a computer,” Wilson added, recommending contractors be sensitive to employees’ expectations. “Otherwise, you can easily drive them away.”

For those who consider a computer a significant step away from their trusty traditional method, now is the time to move, Loyet advised. He, too, recommends a gradual technology transition.

“There is a risk with technology – whether it will work like you want it to – but you have to look forward and go for it,” Loyet urged. “Don’t procrastinate. If you’re going to procrastinate, it’s not going to happen. Take the ball and run with it.”

Procrastination hardly explains Derek Blumburg’s attitude toward integrating technology in his Savage, Minn.-based business, Quality Seasons Landscaping. With a laptop on his truck’s passenger seat, a wireless Internet connection and a network of computers hooked up to an accounting, scheduling and routing software program, he admitted that his technology tactic is rather aggressive.

For Blumburg, connection leads to competitiveness. So, he is connecting quickly. “Technology is the way you operate, deliver quality and deliver it fast,” he said.

Quality Seasons purchased its first laptop last year, adding this tool to its basics, which includes Nextel phones, a paging system, cellular phones, email and a Web site, along with several office computers with business software. But make no mistake, Blumburg’s business didn’t

start by pointing and clicking away at the market, he confessed.

Quality Seasons started with a push mower, pencil and paper. Today, a customer might find him in the driver’s seat of his car, perched at a make-shift desk strapped to the passenger seat, which holds his laptop and office supplies. Blumburg might be sending customers an email from his truck, or checking the weather to alert his technicians of severe conditions.

His technology know-how has expanded quite a bit over the years.

“If I could start over, turn the key off and start from scratch, from all that I know now, I could be where I am in this business in three years, and most people could probably say the same thing,” he compared.

Clearly, a better operating system positions companies for success, he stressed. “Some guys have a stack of paper and they get around to entering it into the computer some day. If you’re talking about business systems, having a better operating system is an advantage, because time is money.”

Blumburg’s only fear concerning technology is that he will not have enough.

“The only intimidating thing to me is not having the information,” he said. “Most of us in this industry are go-getters, so whatever didn’t stop you from getting into business, how could that stop you from getting technology? If you are a builder of business, you won’t fear technology.” □

The author is Assistant Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.

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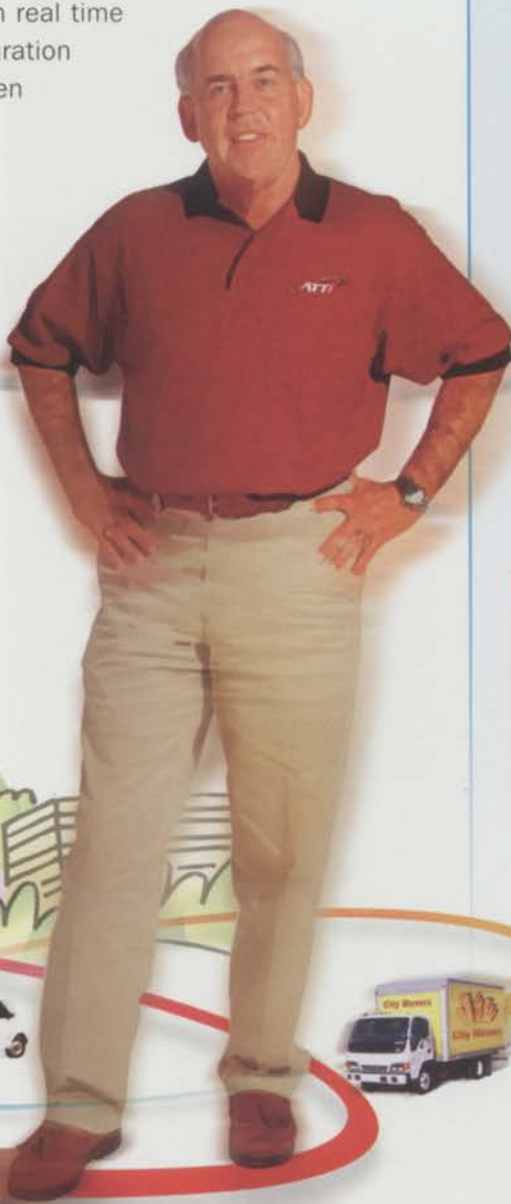
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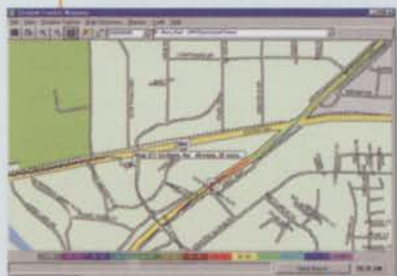
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10:00AM	11:00AM	01:00	In Transit	1.00	
11:00AM	11:00AM	00:00	L-Down the Street	0.00	
11:00AM	11:00AM	00:00	In Transit	1.00	
11:00AM	11:00AM	00:00	B-Tech Computer Office	0.00	
11:00AM	11:00AM	00:00	In Transit	1.00	
11:00AM	11:00AM	00:00	L-Down the Street	0.00	
11:00AM	11:00AM	00:00	In Transit	1.00	
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(continued from page 122)

Becker said that there are several drainage systems available to contractors, but they must consider all variables. "We use gravel as a means of drainage," he said. "We use tons of it, which allows the water to drain into the property properly.

"But, you have to cap the gravel with clay so you don't have a free flowing water problem in retaining walls," he continued.

"You can put gravel in a few times, at the bottom or at the top," he said.

Gatti also uses French drains beneath the turf to hold excess water long enough for it to soak into the soil so it won't immediately run off the slope. "The yard will be sitting in water, but not necessarily sitting in the water," he explained. "The water has to run off so the yard won't flood, but I don't want to let that water run completely off the property because water can be a valuable commodity these days."

"You may have to do some drainage work," noted Trimmer. "But you have to get

to the cause of the problem and not just try to patch up a symptom."

Trimmer warned that customers are often reluctant to pay for a proper drainage system, so they install something less expensive and effective. "Too many people think they can solve the problem by patching a lower cost 'solution' together," he noted. "But usually that is a short-lived answer.

Often, contractors who excavate a hill, install a retaining wall, and then backfill with the original soil will experience problems. "If you put too much soil in, it will retain water and possibly compromise the integrity of the retaining wall," Becker said.

He recommended replacing soil with gravel. This provides two benefits: the hillside slope will lessen due to the additional material, and the water will drain better, exerting less pressure on the retaining wall.

"Twenty tons of soil will weigh exponentially more wet than 20 tons of gravel simply because of the drainage factor," he said.

"When cutting away hills, you must be careful not to overcut," says Gatti. "You want to bring in some fill, but you don't want to bring in a lot of backfill, especially if you are using a dry set method. That backfill, when combined with water or moisture will tend to bulge the walls."

Becker has seen more than a half dozen walls fail in the past few years because contractors did not tend to the property's engineering needs. "In some of those instances, the property has seen too much damage for us to solve the problem inexpensively," he said.

Those situations support Trimmer's advice to trust instincts when recommending a hillside solution. "If you have provided your solution and the customer still thinks it is overbudget, you cannot compromise your work, and risk liability by cutting corners on the integrity of the project," he said. **L**

The author is a freelance writer based in Gahanna, Ohio.



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by Kristen Hampshire

Xeriscape ZONE

*Drought-tolerant
landscape can turn a desert
into an oasis.*

A casual observer might steal a prolonged stare at a landscape decorated with splashes of color and layers of leafy texture. Perhaps the onlooker notices carefully placed, decorative hardscape features that build layers into the site, groundcover tumbling over each level.

This unassuming eye sees variety – flair. Not Xeriscape. A motorist might glance at wild grasses on a road median or catch a glimpse of a far-off slope, scattered with thriving plants.

This unassuming eye sees ordinary grasses, not Xeriscape. “When people say Xeriscape, homeowners think of rocks, gravel and a cactus – that’s only a small component of Xeriscaping, but it’s not what I think of in the gardens I create,” clarified Jeff Powers, co-owner, Earthscape, Costa Mesa, Calif.

Conscientious planting does not translate to installing a dirtbed, he pointed out. Climate-specific landscape doesn’t mean reinventing a desert, and water-conserving varieties aren’t limited to cacti and dusty hedges. The Xeriscape concept is contrary to these misinterpretations, and more contractors and clients are embracing its environmental advantages.

“They can be very colorful, aromatic, dynamic and have a lot of color and pattern activity,” Powers described. “There is a dialogue that forms between the site and the plants, and a relationship that forms between the site and the homeowner who lives there, and that part of it makes it ever-changing.”

Slowly, Xeriscape’s overall image is changing as well.

TAKING STEPS. Xeriscape is not foreign to the Southwest, having originated in Denver, Colo., in the early 1980s. Since then, communities facing water use restrictions began emphasizing drought-tolerant planting. Xeriscaping involves water conservation through creative, appropriate landscaping and

(continued on page 144)

The Wenk Associates office, Denver, Colo., incorporates drought-tolerant plants to create a design that matches its mission statement: conscientious planting.
Photo: Wenk Associates



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USE READER SERVICE #21

Xeriscaping

(continued from page 142)

water management, including recommendations for plants, irrigation, soil preparation and maintenance.

"You design the landscaping so that it survives best in the condition that you're dealing with, whether it's temperature, insects, pests or runoff issues. It's climate-appropriate landscape," defined Vickie Driver, water resources specialist, San Diego County Water Authority, San Diego, Calif. "It also has more benefits than water conservation. If you use appropriate plant materials for your landscape, they are much more likely to be able to resist local insect and plant diseases, so they are healthier. They will need less maintenance and less fertilizer."

To accomplish a landscape that achieves environmental and aesthetic harmony, attentive installation measures are a necessary prerequisite, Driver stressed.

In its strictest sense, Xeriscape requires implementing seven installation and main-

1. Good landscape planning and design
2. Appropriate turf areas
3. Efficient irrigation
4. Use of soil amendments
5. Use of mulches
6. Incorporation of low water use plants
7. Appropriate maintenance of plants

Step by Step

tenance commandments (see *Step by Step*).

These steps provide an installation outline for contractors, said Paul Littlepage, owner, Littlepage Landscaping, San Clemente, Calif. For example, contractors who skip proper soil preparation will suffer plant loss, he added, noting that many landscape companies are discouraged by the method's requirements.

No cheating, Littlepage warned, "or it will show. A lot of landscapers don't want to do Xeriscape because they can't slam it into the ground like they can another job," he

said. "You have to be careful, using proper soil amendments and post-installation control with watering, mulching the ground and keeping the bugs off plants."

These demands can boost landscape prices 10 to 15 percent for the client, but long-

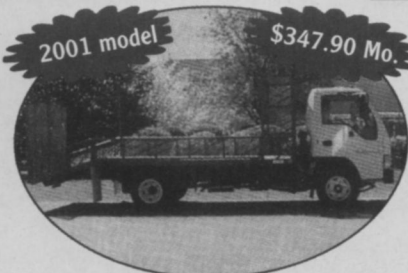
term maintenance and water savings justify the investment. A customer with conscientious plantings can realize an 80-percent water savings, Littlepage added.

This is why more southwest municipalities are supporting low water use landscape installation, and some of them, such as Denver, Colo., offer water bill credits to homeowners who install Xeriscape. Other cities, such as Phoenix, Ariz., distribute a low water use plant list that suggests climate-appropriate trees, shrubs and grasses.

(continued on page 146)



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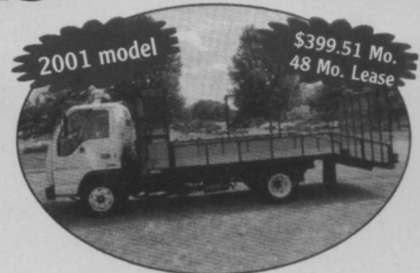
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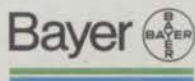
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USE READER SERVICE #22

Xeriscaping

(continued from page 144)

(Visit this article at www.lawnandlandscape.com for a list of Xeriscape plants.)

To meet the surging interest in low water use planting, nurseries are offering a wider selection of native plants, Littlepage observed. He noticed a local grower's fattening catalogue, where pages dedicated to native plants and grasses have increased from four to 26 pages in the last five years.

An extended palate allows contractors more creative license to bend Xeriscape's desert-scape preconceptions.

"We show people how they can have water-efficient plantings, and at the same time, have an ever-green, flowering landscape," Jewett said. He calls this a "mini-oasis," concentrating lush plants in visible areas near the clients' homes, and filling in remaining areas with low water use grasses.

GROUND RULES. Customers' expectations for their property are often unrealistic

Most contractors associate Xeriscape with lack of water, however, wet areas also can benefit from climate-appropriate landscape, pointed out Tom Fochtman, co-owner, CoCal Landscape Services, Denver, Colo. By strategically placing plants in areas with heavy runoff, Xeriscape plants can thrive.

"You have drainage situations that receive a lot of water through rain and irrigation runoff, and there's a lot of plant material and grasses that can be used there that do not receive irrigation water," he explained. "It is kind of reverse thinking." Using a Xeriscape state of mind, drainage areas can be beautified. "You are not going to supplement the area with any additional water, and the plant material will survive and thrive with the natural precipitation and runoff it receives," he noted.

Reverse Thinking


when choosing climate-appropriate plants, Littlepage said. "Most people who want Xeriscape are not really familiar with it," he noted. "It is a different look, and although you can get close to a lush, green look with certain plants, overall, the plant material tends to be a little less brilliant."

Grass might not be green year-round, and flowering plants might not radiate color

immediately. Attractive, mature Xeriscape landscapes take time, he stressed.

"It's a dance in a way," Littlepage compared. Wind indicates a need for stronger plants, while a prime ocean view calls for low-growing groundcover. Hillsides require deep-rooted plants to stabilize the earth, and drainage areas signal a danger zone, he said.

(continued on page 148)




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Xeriscaping

(continued from page 146)

Then, there are weather concerns.

"There are certain times of the year where we can't do drought-tolerant landscaping, because the plants don't transplant well," Littlepage said, adding that high temperatures are not ideal conditions for planting, as roots can easily dry out before they adapt to the soil.

Communicating these plant needs with customers is crucial, Littlepage reminded. Just as maintenance sustains health in traditional plantings, low-maintenance does not mean no maintenance. Ironically, clients tend to over-water Xeriscape plants.

"I try to set up a watering schedule for customers," he said. "The drip irrigation system will do the watering and that's all you need during certain periods. I usually break down the calendar to spring, summer, fall and winter. You might not have to water at all in the winter, and it's hard for people to get used to that."

Most customers have little difficulty ad-

justing to the sparse mowing schedule, which requires cutting once a month or every other week for a manicured look with native California Buffalo grass, Powers noted.

Nevertheless, Littlepage checks on installations to examine for signs of stress. "If they show signs of stress, why? Lack of water? Too much water? Fertilizer?" he listed, adding that clients can take a relaxed approach to caring for their properties if the materials were installed correctly.

DEDICATED DESIGN. Planting success originates in design plans. "Design is critical," emphasized Tom Fochtman, co-owner, CoCal Landscape Services, Denver, Colo. "It doesn't matter how well you install it, if it is designed poorly it will not be successful."

He compared Xeriscape design to a perennial bed, where overlapping varieties provide year-round interest. Now, with more plant choices, contractors can add texture

and dimension with leaves, for example.

Xeriscape is a more marketable, appealing option for residential clients than in the past, however, some commercial clients hesitate to install drought-tolerant plants on corporate properties, he added.

"Turf is accepted as that corporate campus look," Fochtman explained. "Everyone likes the look of the mowed fairway."

A heightened interest in environmental issues and an expanding awareness of Xeriscape's benefits is feeding the niche method, Littlepage said. Powers added that reaction generally follows urgent conditions.

"In the long-run, drought-tolerant landscape is in the best interest of our desert environment, and now that water use is becoming more of a concern it will continue to grow more popular," he predicted. **LL**

The author is Assistant Editor of *Lawn & Landscape* magazine.



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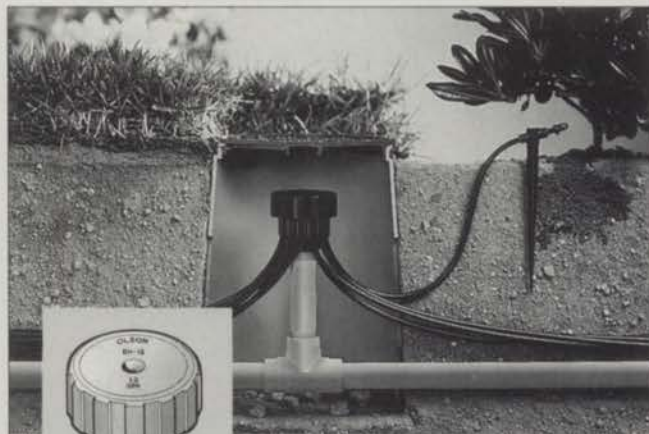
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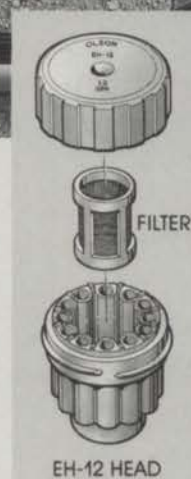
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USE READER SERVICE #24

by Bob West



Jack Robertson, Gary Clayton, Ken Wentland and Jim Campanella (left to right) discussed critical lawn care issues like regulatory affairs, product selection and working with suppliers. Photo: Carl York

A lawn care program is only as good as the products that are put down, which puts a lot of pressure on selecting the appropriate products.

The following dialogue is part two of a two-day roundtable discussion sponsored by Aventis Environmental Science, Montvale, N.J., and *Lawn & Landscape* magazine.

What issues impact your product selection?

Keith Burrell, The Lawn Co. – “A big issue when we look at products is smell. Are [clients] going to know I’ve come into this property because the product smells? Are they shutting windows, running off the lawn, making neighbors nervous?”

Gary Clayton, All-Green – “Lack of odor is important for making applicators feel safe as well.”

Gary Chamberlin, TruGreen-ChemLawn – “The reality is that if you smell something people think

it’s bad. If you don’t smell it then it must be good.”

Ken Wentland, Lied’s Landscape Design & Development – “You always hear ‘price is an issue,’ but for us, if the product works then price is never an issue.”

Burrell – “Ease of handling is also a big issue in terms of packaging.”

Jim Campanella, The Lawn Dawg – “Granular vs. liquid is also a big issue. Look at New York where liquid products are perceived of as being more dangerous for some reason. Plus, I think granular products yield greater productivity.”

John Buechner, Lawn Doctor – “Drift is another issue in New York.”

Clayton – “We’re trying to stop spraying products into the air for trees and shrubs. In New York, when you spray above 5 feet in the air you have to notify customers within 150 feet.”

Burrell – “We also try to avoid anything that requires keeping the homeowner off the lawn until they’ve watered the product in. You can’t do those applications, although ‘stay off until dry’ works because that’s such a short window.”

(continued on page 152)

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Industry Roundtable

(continued from page 150)

Gary LaScalea, GroGreen – "Personal protective equipment (PPE) requirements are important in Texas because of what requires coveralls, long sleeves and so on. The regulatory people are fining people big time in these areas, so we're making some product changes because of that."

Chris Senske, Senske Lawn & Tree Care – "PPE is often the first thing we look at."

Tom Tolkaz, Swingle Tree & Lawn Care – "I would love to see more work on the odor issue. We've tried to use a lot of the masking products so from the general public and the technician standpoint the products don't have that odor. But results and PPE still matter more than odor, so that wouldn't impact our buying decision. I just think we could have less of a negative perception of the material if we eliminated the odor."

Buechner – "Often, that's not in the hands of the manufacturer as much as it is the EPA in registration. A lot of similar products have different PPE requirements, and that can be a problem."

Chamberlin – "I see a lot of grandfathering going on with products that have been registered for a long time."

LaScalea – "It's a burden to put guys out in long sleeves in 110-degree heat."

mixing within a class of pyrethroids will help. I don't think we're limited right now because we're so limited. There will be core products, and we just need to use other products to interrupt the life cycle when necessary. There are few true miticides anyway, so mites are difficult."

Tolkacz – "We've made a major move to the injections. Control is exceeding prior levels with other application methods, but now we have the issue of soil contamination and whether or not we are going to be able to use that material three to five years from now. We're doing fall applications for certain scale applications and we're getting tremendous results. You have to get an understanding of the product and commit to it for more than one year."

Clayton – "These are messages we need to share with the public and teach them about the benefits of injections vs. spraying. Then we have to explain that the delivery systems change as well with new technologies."

Bill Hoopes, Scotts Lawn Service – "How many people monitor cholinesterase levels?"

LaScalea – "We do, largely because of the organophosphates." Again, the group generally agreed that they monitor cholinesterase levels because of organophosphates.

knockdown. Clients don't recognize or know that, but you and your field people have to understand what to expect in terms of the results after the application. People inspect, and if the insect isn't knocked down they spray again and use more material."

Buechner – "We have to change our programs a little bit because we don't have the residual any more. That's difficult because this is all about timing and you can't always hit the ideal window."

Has anyone identified who buys tree and shrub care?

Buechner – "Twenty percent of our lawn care customers buy it."

Tolkacz – "A great study would be why and how people buy tree and ornamental applications. The bulk of ours are from people more than 45 years old. Younger folks invest in the landscape and don't see the value of a \$500 to \$1,000 investment each year in fertilization and inspection."

Wentland – "We went to our other divisions and told them to present the idea of tree and ornamental care up front. We wanted them to tell customers that these plants were taken care of in the nurseries, so the installation crews can get people to lead us right into a maintenance contract."

Clayton – "It appears these customers are the ones who buy tree and shrub care because they have enough disposable income."

"The other problem is that we have people with less horticultural knowledge going out there to sell these services to our clients. When we can spend more time with our people and invest in them, we'll get more results in these areas. These people don't want the homeowner to see that they don't know what they're talking about, so they avoid these situations. I think everyone is doing 20 to 25 percent of their total sales in tree and shrub if they're a genuine lawn care company. I really think that market is there if we can get there – and our renewal on that market is probably higher."

LaScalea – "I think the tree and ornamental market is more advanced in the South. I would say 85 percent of our lawn customers have tree and shrub care, and every one of our trucks are converted to do both so the technicians don't have to call someone else. That's a huge market."

(continued on page 154)

On... **PRODUCT** SELECTION

Keith Burrell, The Lawn Co. – "A big issue when we look at products is smell. Are they going to know I've come into this property? Are they shutting windows, running off the lawn, making neighbors nervous. Applicator safety is another big issue."

How are you dealing with the loss of products as they lose registrations?

There was a consensus among the group that pyrethroids are the best alternative to Dursban.

Wentland – "My concern down the road is that there isn't an alternative, and I think we're going to see some resistance, particularly with mites in the tree care side."

Tim Doppel, Atwood Lawns – "That's especially true if you only have one class to use because then the insects aren't exposed to anything new or different."

Clayton – "A lot of the entomologists I've talked to think that resistance in the outdoor landscape won't be as big an issue. Even

Mike Young, Lawn & Shrub – "One of the problems without Dursban is that some of the products are applied in such low levels that doing the conversions from a 100-gallon tank to a backpack sprayer is difficult to do. It would be nice if that was easier to do."

Wentland – "I agree, but I'll take low-volume applications whenever possible."

LaScalea – "We're looking a lot at mixing products together trying to get more residual, and then we want to put a rotation schedule in place to be careful of resistance."

Tolkacz – "With the pyrethroids, most people would agree that you don't get the longevity of control that you would get with prior materials. The same is true with the

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USE READER SERVICE #142

Industry Roundtable

(continued from page 152)

Chamberlin – “The southern markets are stronger because they have more insect and disease incidence.”

Burrell – “Tree and shrub care can be more profitable as long as you have enough work volume per guy to keep the technician busy all year.”

LaScalea – “The cost of product is also much lower and you use less product, so it’s much more profitable for us. We’ve integrated it all with our technicians to the point that tree and shrub is on our estimate sheets.”

Tolkacz – “We’re finding that the commercial market is starting to better appreciate the value of trees. The best thing for us is when they lose five new Lindens in the first three years. That helps them recognize how a strong plant health care program helps them avoid losses.”

Where do you buy your products?

Sam Lang, Fairway Green – “We’ve done some buying off of the Internet. You bid on

some products and some are priced out. For smaller companies, this will be difficult because they wire transfer the funds and you don’t get any terms. We’re really looking at that more and more, especially for large purchases in the spring, because that can help us save 15 to 20 percent.”

Senske – “Most of our pesticide purchases are through distributors, and the fertilizer comes through manufacturers.”

Jack Robertson, Robertson Lawn Care – “We buy almost everything through distributors with convenient location. We used to buy fertilizer direct but the distributor met the price.”

Senske – “What matters to us is being able to get ‘almost just in time’ delivery.”

Doppel – “I stopped dealing with a distributor with better price because they couldn’t get us the products.”

Campanella – “What we’re looking for is ordering product on Monday and getting it on Wednesday. Terms are also important so

I don’t have to pay for my preemergent product until July. That helps keep us out of our line of credit and keep the business running on its own.”

Tolkacz – “We buy the bulk of our product through local distributors, but storage and delivery are real challenges for our distributors. We want just-in-time or we order X number of tons and tell them when we want it. These distributors may want us to take two truckloads and store it, but we can’t do that. I’ll pay more for them to hold it for me.”

“The question I have is not just about any one distributor, but I get frustrated with a lack of attention being paid to who they’re selling to and whether or not you’re a licensed applicator. They’re selling product to unlicensed applicators who just drive through the shop and load up their truck. I like our distributors to require a license on file. To an extent, that’s a reason why we won’t buy from someone – if they’re promot-

(continued on page 156)



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USE READER SERVICE #68

Industry Roundtable

(continued from page 154)

ing the application of product by unlicensed applicators. These people need to be licensed, and distributors can help them get licensed. Then we'll deflect more negative issues."

Burrell - "You have to build a good relationship with distributors. We look to get a lot of training from the distributors or the manufacturers. It really helps our crews so they don't have to listen to our managers give more instructions."

Robertson - "I see our distributor as a partner in our business. I buy a lot from them, and I expect a lot from them. So I expect to receive anything they can supply to us as far as education, and we certainly expect the product to be right and only take a phone call to fix when it's not right."

Clayton - "We've had to change as distribution has changed. Now we're in a situation where I see the distributors as observation people to let us know what they see going on in a market. Are the mole crickets running yet, and so on."

On...PRODUCT BUYING

Jack Robertson, Robertson Lawn Care - "We buy almost everything through distributors with convenient location. We used to buy fertilizer direct but the distributor met the price."

Tolkacz - "I also want the distributor to get out in the field with me and see the problems we're dealing with so they can see the results of what they're selling. We toured 15 properties in one day, focusing on weed control properties that were three to five weeks old. We've gotten special use permits in Colorado for materials because of those visits, and that has been tremendous for us."

Campanella - "I want manufacturers to tell me what's coming out and help me customize the products for my needs."

Tolkacz - "Knowing new products are coming to the market and participating in testing is excellent. Sometimes the distributors get caught up in the dilemma of trying to bring a product to market first."

LaScalea - "Manufacturers are interesting, as well, because a lot of them are visible and share information with us, and there are others you don't hear anything from."

Robertson - "If two products are equal and you have that support and relationship, that's important. I want someone who stands behind my business. If they won't stand behind us, I won't buy from them."

Wentland - "A big test is how they respond when you have a problem with one of their products and you call them. I want help instead of being asked what I could've done wrong to screw up the application." **LL**

The author is Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.

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Lessons Learn

Golfers Go Evergreen

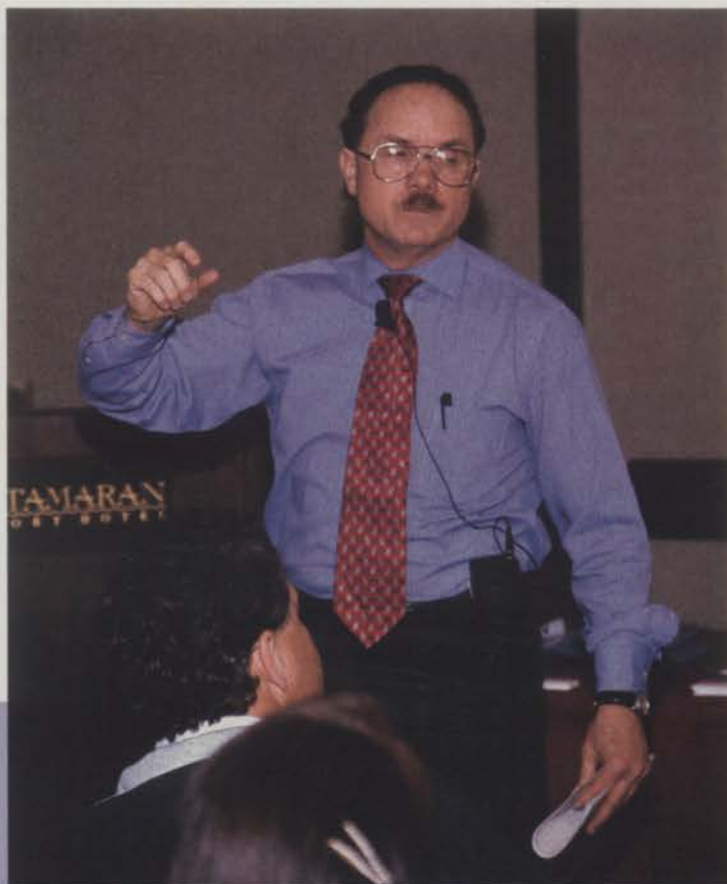


The Evergreen Foundation, a group devoted to promoting the development of public green space, benefited when *Lawn & Landscape* donated a portion of the proceeds from the 2001 School of Management Conference Golf Outing to the group. Pictured at left is: (standing, L-R) Kevin Van Dyke, Skinners Nursery; Bob West, *Lawn & Landscape*; William Tan Eyck, Skinners Nursery; who were part of the winning team, along with Den Gardner (seated,

middle). Tom Benjamin (standing, far right) represented Woods Equipment Co., sponsors of the event. In addition, Matt Boelman of Perficut Lawn & Landscape (seated, right) won the closest-to-the-pin prize, and Steve Frank of Gunitc (seated, left) won the long drive contest. Steve Scrymgeour of Prestige Landscape Construction (pictured, page 162 with Gardner and *Lawn & Landscape* Group Publisher Cindy Code), won the raffle for a Big Bertha driver.



led



Networking Like A Winner

In addition to hearing from speakers like Bill Hoopes, Scotts Lawn Service (bottom, left), Tim Lynott, Landscape Consulting Services (top, left), and Jim Huston, Smith-Huston (above), attendees at the 2001 School of Management experienced the Power of Networking Program sponsored by Shindaiwa. Moderated by Jim Paluch of JP Horizons, the program emphasized the benefits of networking with fellow attendees during the School of Management, how to turn contacts made during the conference into year-round information resources, and how to set goals for using the information from the conference in their businesses. Program participants were eligible for a prize package featuring a free registration to the 2002 *Lawn & Landscape* School of Management Conference and a Shindaiwa spreader. Ryan Ferguson of Nature Designs Landscaping, Monrovia, Calif., won the package.



School of Management

Big Winners

Three attendees from the 2001 School of Management went home winners from the conference's Resource Center daily prize drawing. The winners included:

Dan Sutherland

Gro-Pro Organic Lawn

West Warwick, R.I.

Free registration to the 2001 Lawn & Landscape Business Strategies Conference

Jose Perez

Fairway Landscape & Nursery

Atascosa, Texas

Free registration to the 2001 Lawn & Landscape Business Strategies Conference

William Furlong

Oak Tree Landscaping
Monrovia, Calif.

Free registration to the 2002 Lawn & Landscape School of Management Conference in Charlotte, N.C.



Check Out School of Management on the Web

Review 2001 School of Management sessions by visiting www.lawnandlandscape.com.

The site features summaries of presentations by speakers like Charles Vander Kooi, Vander Kooi & Associates (above, left) and Bill Arman, Environmental Care (above, right) and will provide information on next year's conference in Charlotte, N.C.

(continued on page 162)

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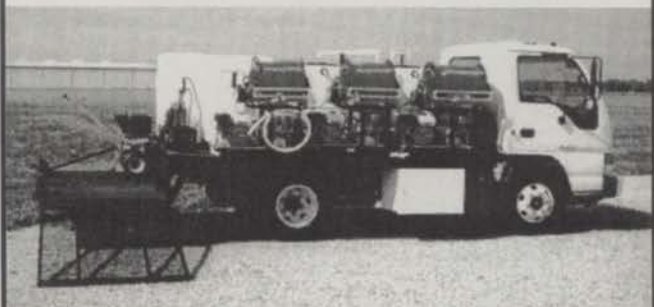
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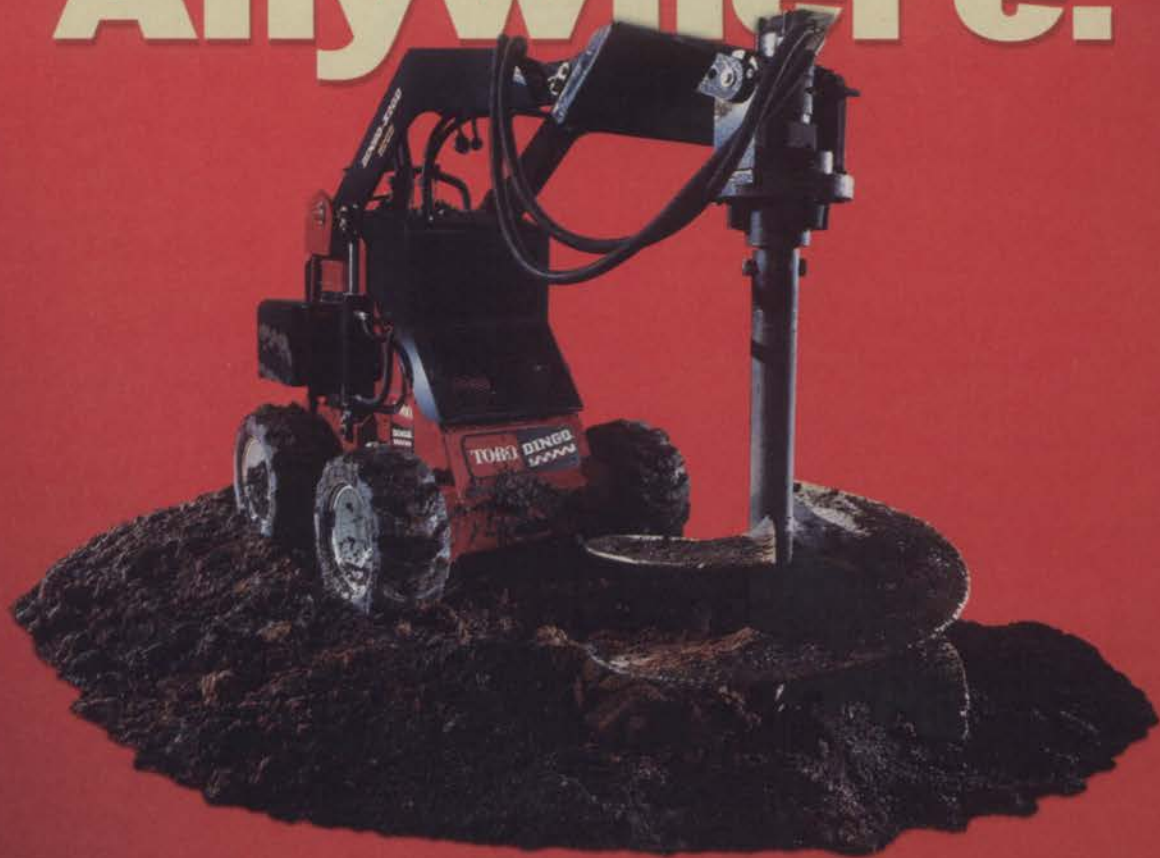
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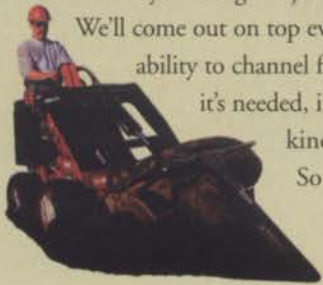
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School of Management

(continued from page 160)

Mark Your Dates for 2002 SOM

Wish you heard from speakers like Steve Gaines, KPMG (right), who talked about valuing your business? Well, *Lawn & Landscape's* 2002 School of Management Conference is set for Feb. 17-19, 2002, at the Charlotte Marriott Executive Park in Charlotte, NC. A special \$99 room rate per night at the Marriott is available to conference attendees.

To place your name on the conference mailing list, please contact Maria at 800/456-0707 and ask for the School of Management.



SOM Helps Make-A-Wish

In recognition of the sponsors' support of the 2001 School of Management Conference, *Lawn & Landscape* will make a \$500 donation in the names of all sponsor partners to the Make-A-Wish Foundation, the national charity that grants wishes to terminally ill children. *Lawn & Landscape* plans to make this an annual part of the School of Management Conference. **LL**

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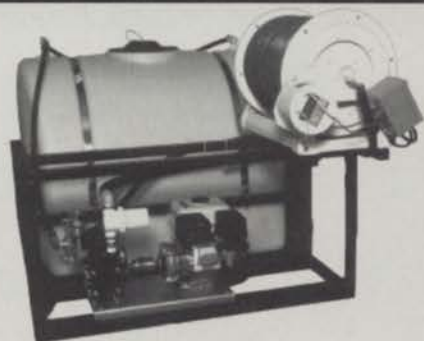
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Nu-Gro Technologies: Growing Demand Leads to New Nitrogen Production

Nu-Gro Technologies Inc. is building a new production facility to meet current and future demand for one of its leading products, Nutralene® methylene urea. The new plant, located adjacent to its existing sulfur-coated urea (SCU) nitrogen plant in Ontario, Canada, will have an annual manufacturing capacity of 20,000 tons. This major expansion improves the company's ability to consistently produce high-quality Nutralene for an ever-growing market.

In another move, Nu-Gro has increased its investment in the Missouri facility that produces Nitroform® ureaform. This new manufacturing capacity enables the company to create more customized products and better serve its customers' specialized needs. New processes have also been put in place to further improve quality control and maintain the consistency that customers have come to expect from Nu-Gro.

Nitrogen for Every Need

As golf course superintendents and other turf professionals have refined the art and science of maintaining highly tuned turf, Nu-Gro Technologies has kept pace with a full line of nitrogen products.

Nitroform is controlled-release nitrogen that can last six months and beyond. The product is a high-grade nutrient and energy source for microorganisms that are critical to healthy soil. While a small amount of the nitrogen is available to plants immediately through water solubility, the balance is gradually released through the continual digestion of Nitroform by the soil microbes.

Nutralene releases nitrogen more quickly than Nitroform. It combines hydrolysis and microbial activity to provide up to 16 weeks of controlled, sustained results.

Both Nutralene and Nitroform are formulated as homogenous granules that don't need any special coating. They have low salt indices that practically eliminate the risk of burning. Their dependability and safety make them ideal for professional turf applications.

SCU, a double-coated urea, is another popular Nu-Gro product. It's used in professional lawn maintenance and as an ingredient in consumer lawn fertilizers. SCU depends on moisture, microorganisms and abrasion for release.

IB Nitrogen (isobutylidene diurea) is a very safe nitrogen source for high-maintenance turf, as well as for turf and ornamentals under irrigation. IB Nitrogen depends on moisture and particle size for its release characteristics. It is particularly well suited for horticultural use and on turf in cool, wet climates such as the Pacific Northwest.

A polymer-coated urea (PCU) is a recent addition to the Nu-Gro line of products. It enables the company to provide quality nitrogen for virtually any application.

Nu-Gro is constantly expanding its product lines in the professional lawn care, horticultural and specialty-agriculture markets. New developments include Powder Blue® ureaform and expansion of the current IB Nitrogen briquettes.

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While you may be familiar with Nitroform and Nutralene, you may not be familiar with the company behind them – Nu-Gro Technologies Inc.

Nu-Gro is a subsidiary of Nu-Gro America Corporation, with world headquarters in Brantford, Ontario, Canada. Nu-Gro serves its customers in the United States out of offices in Grand Rapids, Michigan. In the company's five-year history, Nu-Gro has become the largest merchant marketer and manufacturer of slow- and controlled-release nitrogens in the world. Its premium-grade specialty nitrogens are used extensively by professionals in golf course, sport turf, lawn, landscape, ornamental, nursery, forestry and land reclamation applications. Nu-Gro can meet virtually any application requiring nitrogen.

Nu-Gro is committed to environmental leadership in all of its business activities. Its products are designed to ensure maximum delivery of nutrients to plants with a minimum waste or loss to the environment. Environmental responsibility and superior products can go hand in hand.



Conversation

by Bob West

The man who wants to grow John Deere's consumer and commercial business to \$6 billion by 2006 shares his vision for the future of dealers, computerized mowers and more.

John Deere was manufacturing equipment for commercial purposes before the Civil War. Since its inception 163 years ago, the John Deere name and its green and yellow colors have become one of the best known brands in the country, largely due to the company's success in the agricultural arena.

As farmers encountered new and more challenging obstacles the last few decades, John Deere realized it needed to broaden its horizons to continue growing. Consumer yard and garden equipment soon joined combines in the John Deere fleet, and commercial landscape equipment wasn't far behind.

But truth be told, John Deere never pursued the commercial landscape customer with the focus that a company with its tremendous name, resources and research and development skills could. However, that changed earlier this year when John Deere acquired Great Dane Power Equipment and McGinnis Farms within the span of one month.

Soon, people were talking of the sleeping giant awakening, and many debated why a manufacturer would purchase a distribution-focused company like McGinnis Farms. Plus, were more acquisitions planned? Would the company sell equipment outside of its dealership network?

I traveled to Moline, Ill., John Deere's world headquarters, and spent part of an afternoon with John Jenkins,

(continued on page 166)

A Conversation with

John JENKINS

(continued on page 80)

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(continued from page 164)

president, John Deere Consumer & Commercial Worldwide Equipment Division, to learn about these surprising acquisitions and gain some insight into John Deere's plans for the future. (For a story about what a visit to the heart of John Deere is like, as well as more from this interview, check out this article with the April issue of *Lawn & Landscape* at www.lawnandlandscape.com.)

BOB WEST: Why has John Deere been able to build such a powerful brand?

JOHN JENKINS: I think this is a very good company to work for. This is a company that is 163 years old, and the reason is that it has been able to renew itself about every 20 years and position itself to be reflective of the times. It's also located in a lot of smaller communities, and therefore, when you go to work for Deere you're not as apt to leave because it would require a geographic move. I've never had a reason to leave – we refer to it as the 'John Deere experience.'



On... SERVICE

"The other thing that we're well positioned on is service. We have the strongest servicing dealer organization in North America. And it's located throughout the areas that require the landscape or irrigation professional."

But I think the brand started with John Deere himself, and he said he wouldn't put his name on a piece of equipment that didn't have the best of him within it. From our start, quality has been synonymous with Deere, and I think in today's society, more and more consumers want dependability, quality and service. We were fortunate enough to have that in our heritage.

BW: Do you see that same level of demand for quality from your consumer and commercial customers?

JJ: Frankly, most of the commercial users we have demand 24/7 support because they're literally making a living with our equipment, and if our equipment is down they're not making any money. We attempt

to deliver the best service response in the industry, and I think we do.

BW: The Great Dane and McGinnis Farms acquisitions would seem to signal that John Deere has intensified its focus on the landscape industry. Is that accurate?

JJ: We view both residential and commercial markets as not only taking care of the lawns that are in place, but we really want to take care of the landscape. When we talk about a John Deere on every landscape, which is our strategic intent, we're not just talking about Mary just putting equipment on there, but trying to let the homeowner or the commercial contractor know that they only need one partner. And we'll take care of making sure that their investment is sound and that their facilities are displayed the way they want them. The green industry gives us a day-to-day touch, and we like that because our customers become better customers as we get to know each other better

Over the last 10 years, we went into the

golf business, and now we're the No. 1 supplier of equipment to golf courses. As that has happened, we got more interested in landscaping and irrigation, so the green industry has been a natural growth.

BW: Based on these two acquisitions, it seems that your goal is to be more than just involved in the green industry, though.

JJ: I think that's right. The reason for our acquisitions, especially in service-related businesses, is that we want to be sure that we know the business and how to operate in it. By buying a top company, it brings with it people who have knowledge in that part of the business. We can teach them the John Deere experience and they can teach us how to better interface.

BW: Why Great Dane and why McGinnis? What made them attractive acquisitions?

JJ: I think McGinnis had a proven track record of taking irrigation and landscape installers and bringing them together. That was interesting to us. They built that model, they built it regionally, and it looked to us like a model that could be expanded. They were looking for someone to help them expand. We were also interested in broadening our touch to that customer base

As far as Great Dane, we not only picked up very innovative products, but Dane Scag (founder of Great Dane Power Equipment) will continue to work with us in helping us better understand and design what the commercial mower needs. Again, it looked to us like a company that not only gave us products that we needed to fill out our line, but it gave us insight and expertise in design.

BW: What is it about the irrigation industry that attracted you?

JJ: Well, it's natural when you look at golf courses. One of our competitors usually gets its first connection to the golf course with irrigation and then follows on with equipment and other things. I think it was a need to round out our arsenal so we were on a level playing field.

BW: When you look at the product line for John Deere, are you satisfied with what you've got now?

JJ: I think our basic product offering with the Great Dane acquisition and the things we've done in the last half dozen years is a pretty good offering. We've got skid steers and we've got

the major commercial machines for golf and turf. All of those things are reflective of our getting the technology and the business right. Now we're getting the service right, and when we get those three lined up it looks to us like a national support network is the right thing to do.

BW: What does the Great Dane acquisition do for the John Deere product line?

JJ: Let me start by saying that I want this business to be known as the innovator in the industry, and I think in Dane's case, the equipment we are putting out there has a leading edge look. The new skid-steer tractor we're bringing into the marketplace is another reflection of that leadership vision.

(continued on page 168)

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Conversation

(continued from page 166)

We're not just about bringing yesterday's technology to this business. We want to be leading edge. I believe that very shortly we'll be able to mow golf courses at night, and the reason is because we'll have autonomous machines. The technology is here – it's a matter of refining it.

BW: Could this technology filter down to the landscape arena?

JJ: Absolutely, especially as water becomes more scarce and we need to figure out how irrigation systems can be more water efficient. We will also find technologies that our equipment division and the green industry will be able to share.

We do a lot of sensor work these days as we go through a product so we're maximizing the right seed and water concentration in each part of the field, because it varies. We're measuring those things, and we can take the knowledge we learn and we transfer it very easily to how we make better landscapes.

BW: What potential does John Deere see for the commercial market since so many manufacturers talk about the need to reduce the number of manufacturers?

JJ: That's where technology in this business is ultimately going to be the big differentiation. As we build more machines that are self-sufficient and that can use technologies like GPS or any number of positioning systems, it will get tougher for some companies to do anything but specialize in a very narrow part of that business. But I think we're still going to be able to offer the commercial customer a one-stop shop, and I think many of them will feel that is very important.

The other thing that we're well positioned on is service. We have the strongest servicing dealer organization in North America, and it's located throughout the areas that require a landscape or irrigation professional. Again, we're in a natural position, especially with McGinnis, to offer almost a complete, off-site set of services, so all the contractor has to do is get the order and put the product in at the site. We'll take care of everything else.

BW: How many dealers does John Deere have serving the commercial market?

JJ: We have 1,700 total, but I would say that 400 to 500 would be more the commercial type of dealer.

BW: Have you seen some of these dealers transition from consumer to commercial?

JJ: We're seeing a number of our dealers do

John Deere is betting that its Ready to Mow dealers (pictured right) will provide it a competitive advantage in the future as increasingly demanding consumers require dealers to actually provide service in the field for residential and commercial customers. Photo: John Deere



this, especially since we introduced our line of skid-steer loaders because, again, a lot of contractors and professionals want to get it all from one location. Now the dealers have found out that they need to dedicate part of their businesses to the commercial market. So, we haven't given the skid-steer contract to every John Deere dealer. If they're not going to make the necessary investment, we don't want to put the product out there because it won't be serviced properly.

We're really one of the few companies that has maintained its dealer organization. Besides Sears and us, there aren't a lot of brand-dedicated service centers. That's not to say dealers carrying a number of product lines don't deliver good service, but it's harder to have that kind of service network know your product, know your customer and their needs than it is for us when we train and develop dealers internally.

BW: Your dealers have probably been at the heart of a lot of your discussions in recent weeks because of these acquisitions. How do you see the organizations co-existing?

JJ: I think the McGinnis operation will be very complementary to our dealer network. I think that we are not going to have McGinnis selling equipment, but we'll certainly have McGinnis with the ability to rent and lease in harmony with the dealer.

BW: What form will that take?

JJ: Today, we have similar relationships with other locations where the dealer orders the goods and restocks and replenishes the other distribution point, and there's obviously some margin share between the two organizations. But that relationship keeps the McGinnis group from having to learn about the service side of the business, and it allows both the dealer and McGinnis to have a stronger relationship.

I fully expect that we'll have John Deere

equipment displayed in McGinnis locations, but in most cases, it will be the local dealer's floor plan equipment.

BW: Do you see this relationship working the opposite way as well? Will some of the dealers offer irrigation supplies?

JJ: I think it's probably very early in the relationship to say for sure, but my guess is yes. It's going to be a lot easier the other way, however, because the dealer is still going to be essentially delivering the machine and doing his work, but now he just has a different place to display the equipment.

BW: How many locations does McGinnis Farms have?

JJ: Initially, there are 50 McGinnis locations, but we would expect that number would need to grow pretty rapidly.

BW: Why do you say 'need to grow'?

JJ: Because today it's only regional, and we think there's a need at least through the North and Central U.S. to have a similar type of operation. There's no doubt that our strategy is one of gaining a national presence, and I don't think that we're alone in expecting that this business is growing at such a rate that the installers just don't have time to manage logistics, purchasing and all of the things that go with trying to deal with the supply base, which is literally thousands of suppliers.

BW: Is the acquisition of a distributor like a McGinnis Farms a shift in your business model and a change in the way suppliers are looking at the industry?

JJ: I think it is. I think it's a recognition of what the customer is asking for. We think the customer is asking for us to take the complexity out of his life. He's saying, 'Give me an economical way to be able to entrust and deal with one face and know that I'm getting a good deal, great service and I don't have to spend a lot of my time worrying about it.'

(continued on page 170)



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Conversation

(continued from page 168)

BW: In the past, didn't suppliers take a more specialized approach to the industry?

JJ: Oh, I think they did, but as the need for service has grown, we want to grow with that. Today, the manufacturing part of the business is an important part, but the services that customers need are immensely bigger. As the machines get more complex, the level of services probably will be less frequent, but they will require specialized knowledge.

BW: If you have to prioritize the need for service you deliver vs. the need for improved or innovative manufacturing, is there a shift going on there?

JJ: I don't think there's any less demand on being innovative in manufacturing or design. I think, though, that there is a greater need to make sure our service improves.

In fact, in today's world, the commercial customers want us to fix the machines before they break. Literally, that means you've got to be sensing wear and you've got to be sensing stress, and you've got to have an organization that's ready to respond. You can't be open 8 to 5 when a customer is working 6 a.m. to 6 p.m.

BW: Do you expect to see some of the other major manufacturers taking a different look at distribution in the future?

JJ: I think the customers are going to demand better service, and as they do, the manufacturer is going to have to either partner with a group that can do that for them or consider going into this business. It's a competitive world out there, and today's consumer is a much better consumer than 20 years ago and much less tolerant.

BW: I attended a John Deere dealer meeting at the end of 1999 where you guys made some interesting statements about changes expected for dealers. Where does that stand in terms of dealers going from a sales orientation to a service orientation?

JJ: I think that trend proved correct. I personally believe that we're not going to sell mowers over the Internet. I think, instead, we're going to make it very easy for service, so maybe the customer doesn't even need to go to the dealer organization. Or he may be able to order that equipment and have a dealer deliver it to his door and still learn as much as he cares to electronically about all of the products and comparisons.

As we get more and more equipped elec-

tronically, I don't think it will be unusual for the contractor to dispatch the dealer electronically. We'll likely have sensors that tell a dealer he needs to go call on so and so and schedule maintenance while the machine is going to be idle, and we'll know that because we'll be able to communicate electronically between each other.

The service is going to go to the field - there's no doubt in my mind that more service is going to be preventive and it will be done right on site.

BW: Do the dealers understand that?

JJ: We have 400 Ready to Mow dealers today with a trailer and/or a truck, and they have the ability to pick up machines and do a lot of the small maintenance on the spot.



On... GOALS

I want to see us complete the upgrade of our Ready to Mow fleets and make sure we've got the right amount of dealers in areas with customer concentrations. I want to complete and integrate the green industry with our supply sources so that the customer can have one face to deal with.

With some problems, such as an engine overhaul, you're going to have to have some downtime and you'll need a facility dedicated to that level of service, but a lot of work can be done in the field.

BW: If you don't see mowers being sold over the Internet, where does the Internet fit for John Deere?

JJ: I would say hand-held products would probably be the first thing that could be sold online. Today, some dealers are doing this. I think as you move to things with engines that require set up, those are jobs that we want done right, and if they aren't done right it's the customer who pays for the downtime and the inconvenience. So it's all about quality.

BW: When you benchmark for John Deere, who do you measure yourselves against?

JJ: Well, it would be foolish not to benchmark first against your direct competitors. But that's not enough for us.

We really believe that, ultimately, service

will compete across segments, and it's very hard for us to find a competitor that has a finance operation, a health care company, that builds diesel engines, farm equipment, makes equipment for consumers and professionals, and is now doing logistics for the landscape industry. So what we start to do then is look at how various service companies provide their services and what they're doing with their products, even if the product is different.

BW: Where does John Deere fit in the commercial landscape industry today as opposed to six months ago or five years ago?

JJ: Well, I think we're in the business, whereas five years ago we would have considered ourselves as just having gotten in the

business. As you start looking around at landscape sites, you see more green and yellow. But we're not satisfied that we see enough. We aren't the market leader in the landscape business, and we plan to be the market leader in any business we're in.

BW: Is there any timeframe for when you'd like to be the market leader in the landscape industry?

JJ: Yesterday. The acquisitions of McGinnis and Great Dane are clearly a signal that we think this is an important market for our customers and we haven't been serving those customers to the fullest, but now we aim to do that. ■

The author is Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.

For more from this interview, check out this article with the April issue of Lawn & Landscape at www.lawnandlandscape.com.

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 - 4. Ornamental Shrub & Tree Service
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III. DISTRIBUTOR/MANUFACTURER

- 9. Dealer
- 10. Distributor
- 11. Formulator
- 12. Manufacturer

IV. OTHERS ALLIED TO THE FIELD:

- 13. Extension Agent (Federal, State, County, City, Regulatory Agency)
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3. What services does your business offer? (please check all that apply)

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- 6. Irrigation Maintenance
- 7. Turf pesticide application
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- 10. Ornamental/tree fertilization
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- 14. Other _____

4. How many full-time (year-round) employees do you employ?

5. What year was your business founded?

6. What were your company's gross revenues for 2000?

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- 2. \$50,000 to \$99,999
- 3. \$100,000 to \$199,999
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EQUIPMENT FOCUS

Picking Proper Components

Decisions on what to use for residential and small commercial sprinkler systems help determine profitability down the road. While the right decisions can pave the way for a company to grow and prosper, the wrong decisions can create tremendous costs.

EQUIPMENT ISSUES. Reliability is the most important factor when considering valves or heads to use. You need to determine which ones will hold up over the long haul. This can be difficult without historical data, but there are other ways to help make this decision.

One simple way to choose components is to model other successful contractors, particularly if they're more experienced than you. Otherwise, start by disassembling each component and comparing it to similar components. Is it rugged or flimsy? Is it easy or difficult to assemble? Are there numerous parts? Are the parts high quality? Compare the positives and negatives of each.

The next step is to simulate the component's function. You can do this by building a valve manifold with three or four different valves. Pressurize with water, activate each solenoid and watch how they react under both high and low pressure. Also watch how fast or slow they operate. Fast-closing solenoids can create water hammer.

You can test your sprinkler heads similarly. Fabricate a multiple head stand so you can test two or three heads at once. This way you can actually compare them "head-to-head." Check out how each head reacts under different water pressures and watch how well the wiper seals work. Next, check water distribution by setting up catch cans (Dixie cups work well) in a grid pattern and firing up one head at a time. Run the water 10 minutes for spray heads and 20 minutes for rotary heads. Then, measure the amount of water in each can and compare.

Do the same for each head and compare. This information will show which heads have the best water distribution. Another easier but less accurate way to check out distribution is to set up your test on a dry, dirt area. As you run the water, watch which areas stay dry. Consistent moisture means you've got even distribution.

CONTROLLER CONSIDERATIONS. When choosing controllers, reliability is just as important as the customer's ability to use and understand it. Most residential control-

lers are programmed and operated by the homeowner, so if they are afraid to touch it, then they might under- or over-water. Many controllers on the market today offer bells and whistles, so you need to consider your customers' needs. For example, if a remote control is not important for customers in your market, then don't push a controller with this feature.

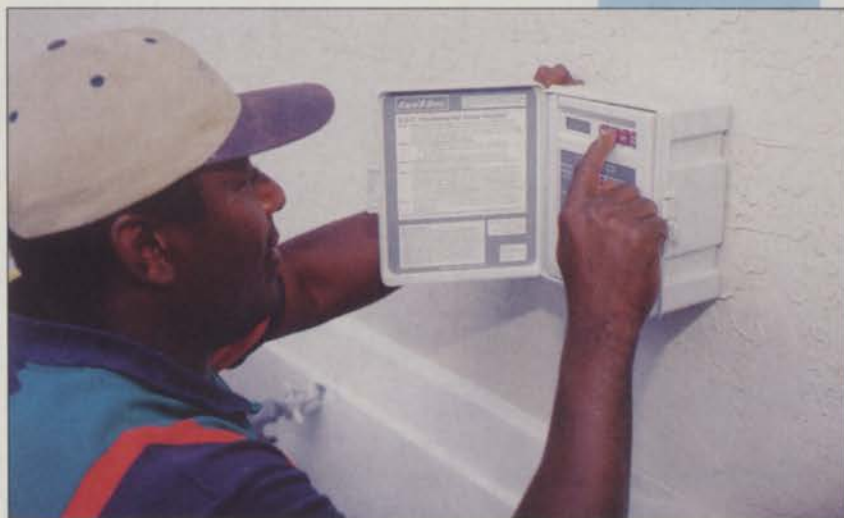
Tracking historical data is crucial after choosing components. Track and record failed valves, heads and controllers. A small percentage of failure can be expected (about 1/2 percent), but if there are high failure rates then you need to look at changing that component.

The component choices you make today will effect your profitability tomorrow and years down the road. Valves that don't open or close properly and heads that don't rotate, rise and retract properly require service calls. Controllers that people can't understand cost you time clarifying usage. When these things happen within the warranty period (all quality contractors offer one year minimum), it takes money right off your bottom line.

In addition, problem components yield irritated customers, who can create negative word-of-mouth advertising. This will cost you as your company grows and develops a reputation with clients. Picking the proper system components ensures a reputation you and your employees can be proud of. — Mike Fournier

The author is owner of Fournier Irrigation, East Hartford, Conn. He can be reached at 860/528-9397 or fournski@aol.com.

Faulty irrigation controllers can dry up a company's profits and good reputation. Consider reliability, distribution and quality for winning watering results. Photo: Rain Bird



Products

PRO Landscape

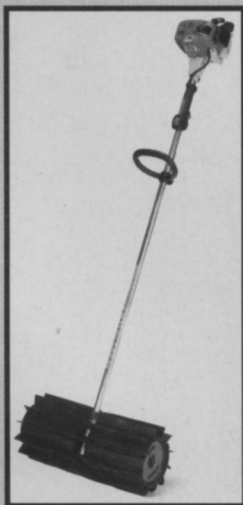
- From drafix.com, the new version 7 offers advanced CAD technology
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• Interchangeable gearbox attachment for the FS 83R and FS 85R models converts a grass trimmer into a sweeper

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- Belts and fins are constructed of Dupont Alcrin, which minimizes turf damage
- A protective rubber strip connected to the gearbox prevents drive tube from wearing down during use



Circle 201 on reader service card

Post Hole Digger Mount

- Worksaver's 924H skid-steer attachment mounts on skid-steer loaders equipped with universal quick attach
- Digger reaches over fence lines, shrubs and other obstructions
- Construction offers operator visibility, reducing fatigue
- Designed for use when building new or replacing existing fences, installing posts for new structures and landscaping
- A hydraulic motor works with systems to deliver 10 to 20 gpm of flow at 1,500 to 3,000 psi
- Hydraulic operation allows users to reverse auger to clear obstructions
- Counter weights provide constant balance for vertical holes
- Digger handles augers from 6 to 24 inches

Circle 202 on reader service card

PanAmerican Seed Nature's Décor

- Program offers a collection of seed varieties ideal for mixed containers and small garden combinations
- Seed varieties have a low input cost and no stock plant maintenance
- New varieties are being bred specifically for the Nature's Décor program

Circle 203 on reader service card

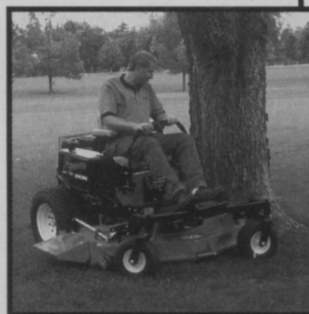
Quick-Tach Grapple

- Skid-steer loader attachment connects to the bucket or fork allowing operator to switch functions
- Detaches easily so users can remove attachment when they want to use the bucket without the grapple
- Detachable feature prevents accidental structural damage that can occur when grapples are kept in raised position while operator is using the bucket
- Four-tooth grapple is ideal for construction site clean-up, demolition, scrap recycling, land clearing, etc.
- Available in two teeth sizes with adjustable pivot angles
- Teeth are spaced 15 inches apart and composed of high-carbon steel for durability; four supporting rods further stability
- The unit's two 2- by 8-inch hydraulic cylinders are shielded to protect connections

Circle 204 on reader service card

Encore Mid Cut Prowler

- Mower features a front-cut style deck suspension on a mid-mount
- Available with 52-, 61- and 72-inch cutting decks



- Equipped with 22- to 31-hp gas and diesel engines
- Features a side-to-side articulating floating deck, low-maintenance blade spindles and no-slip disc brakes
- Includes a dual-path hydrostatic drive with a heavy, welded-steel frame and reinforced deck
- 5½-inch deep deck

Circle 205 on reader service card

Mower Sulky

- Available in a one-wheeled or two-wheeled model
- Features a swivel point that allows operator to stay centered behind the mower and allows for a smoother ride
- Sulky's rugged build allows for years of commercial use
- Attaches to most commercial mowers

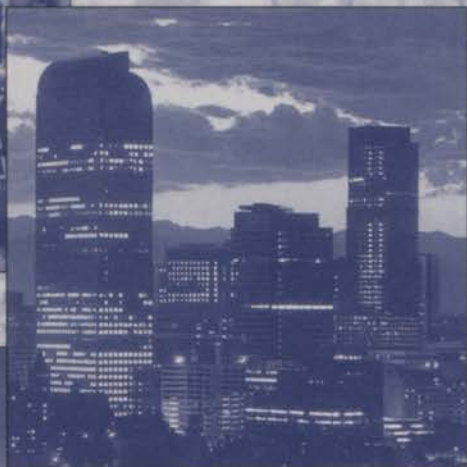
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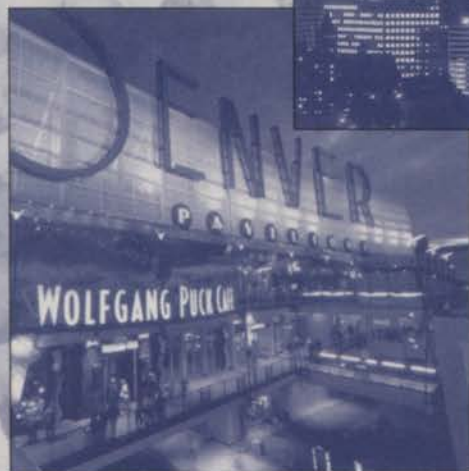
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- Toe-touch, retractable booms provide users with flexibility and mobility on changing terrain
- The ornamental gun features an adjustable sprayer width with pressure up to 300 psi
- Removable rear-mounted reel ensures easy retrieval and tangle-free storage
- Operator can switch from boom to hand gun by shifting lever
- A detachable, 100-pound capacity hopper with variable speed
- Rear utility tray carries five 50-pound bags of material

Circle 208 on reader service card

Toro Dingo Adjustable Forks

- The compact utility loader with adjustable forks can move materials through gates, into tight spots or over existing turf
- Forks can be set at many widths to accommodate various lumber, post and pallet sizes
- Forks can be attached by inserting two pins to secure them onto the universal mounting plate
- Dingo loader arms can raise, lower and tip forks, and tip the load
- Adjustable forks are one of 35 available Dingo attachments, including high-torque augers, trenchers, backhoes and tillers, etc.

Circle 209 on reader service card

Praxis Stump Machine

- Portable stump grinder is powered by a 9- or 13-hp Honda engine
- Machine features a cyclone dual-element air cleaner
- Includes low oil shut down
- AutoTorque™ drive system
- PRX13.0 model measures 76 by 29.5 by 42 inches and weighs 240 pounds

Circle 210 on reader service card

Little Wonder High-Output Blower

- Powered by a 10-hp Intek Briggs & Stratton engine
- Produces "hurricane force" air



- A patented deflector splits air-stream to move debris farther

Circle 211 on reader service card

BASF 70 DG Herbicide

- The dispersible granule formulation of Image herbicide offers ease in managing southern weeds in warm turfgrasses
- A new package contains enough product to treat 1 acre of turf
- Gradations marked on the package allow user to easily mix smaller quantities
- Tip-and-pour container reduces spillage and the need to rinse mixing equipment
- Ideal for controlling a broad spectrum of summer and winter weeds, including purple and yellow nutsedge, dollarweed, field sandbur, green kyllinga, wild onion and garlic, henbit and chickweed
- Product is absorbed through the root systems of targeted weeds, inhibiting the production of enzymes needed for photosynthesis
- Tolerant to warm-season turfgrasses such as bermudagrass, centipedegrass, St. Augustinegrass and zoysiagrass

Circle 212 on reader service card



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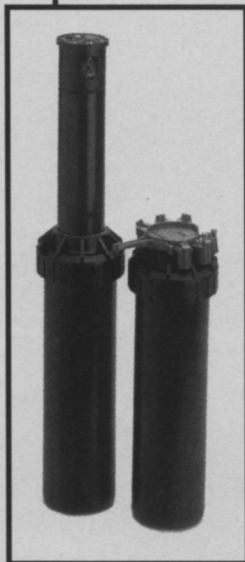
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Products

Rain Bird Top-Adjust Rotor

• 3500 series' half-inch inlet rotor allows user to adjust settings from the top with a flat-blade screwdriver

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- Rain Curtain nozzles offer a 15- to 35-foot range of throw that can be reduced up to 35 percent with a radius reduction screw
- The .75-4 gpm nozzles deliver distribution uniformity
- Dual-action wiper



seals assure dependable sealing and positive pop-up to rotor's 4-inch height

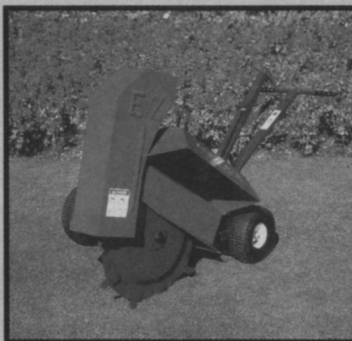
- Features a Rock Guard™ debris protection system to protect rotor internals from the elements
- Available in a 4-inch pop-up model and a 4-inch pop-up, non-potable model

Circle 213 on reader service card

Harley Power Box Rake for Trench Restoration

- Glenmac's rake is designed to grade, level and back-fill a trench in one step, while minimizing damage to existing turf
- A powered, rotating, pure carbide tooth roller lifts loose material and directs it back to the trench
- Powered-angle and collecting effect of the box-end plates replace and refill disturbed trench areas
- Suitable for tractors, skid-steers, mini skid-steers or front deck mowers
- Rake can maneuver in tight areas

Circle 214 on reader service card



E-Z Trench Groundsaw

- Mini-trencher features a heavy-duty blade with long-lasting, replaceable forged carbide bits
- Gear ratio on machine provides higher torque at the blade for harder digging conditions
- Weighs 250 pounds
- Rolls easily on pneumatic tires

Circle 215 on reader service card

Scag Tiger Compact Cub

- Equipment is available with 40-, 48- or 52-inch cutting decks
- Smaller size zero-turn rider fits easily on trailers
- Mower is now available with a 23-hp Kohler or Kawasaki engine
- Various models offer 17- to 23-hp Kawasaki engines and weigh from 985 to 1,050 pounds
- Optional accessories include a fabric grass catcher, metal grass catcher, front weights, blade buddy, soft ride seat, mulch master kit and mulch plate
- Machine features a new, spindle-driven, 10-bushel grass catcher that fits the 48- and 52-inch models
- Includes new twin stick steering controls with dual adjustable gas spring steering dampeners to allow operators responsive control
- Large drive tires ensure traction
- Reaches 10 mph

Circle 216 on reader service card

Border Magic Edging

- Available in a variety of colors and styles, including cobblestone, slate, single brick, flagstone, double brick, brick running bond, basketweave, fieldstone, paver brick and soldier course
- Concrete material provides a permanent, effective grass barrier
- Durable for use as a sidewalk
- Edging does not shift or pop out of the ground after installation
- Edging is designed for pathways, sidewalks and garden paths and other landscape installations
- Materials do not require forms to set up installation

Circle 217 on reader service card

Ski Landscape Mulch Trailer

- Features one-direction, moving floor and front conveyor
- Efficient machine can fill a wheelbarrow in five seconds
- Eliminates one man shoveling mulch, and can save up to eight hours of labor per day
- Trailer can install up to 40 cubic yards of mulch per day without using equipment such as hoses or blowers



- For fall clean-up, attach leaf blower to either the front or rear
- Powered by a 13-hp Honda engine
- Product features two large, 18-inch diameter augers
- Machine is 25 feet, 7 inches long; 8 feet, 10 inches wide; and 8 feet tall
- Weighs 5,800 pounds

Circle 218 on reader service card

Products

Gandy Slice n' Seed

- 20-inch walk-behind overseeder is self-propelled
- Features an 8-hp Honda engine with centrifugal clutch, capable of covering 22,000 square feet per hour
- Seeding width is 20 inches



- with 9-inch heat-treated slicing blades on 2-inch centers
- Seed box features precision-mated stainless steel bottom and slide with internal rotor driven by a front wheel drive engine
- A cam gauge sets opening size to meter all

- grass types, while a hand lever shuts off the flow
 - The internal rotor bar and metering bottom remove easily for servicing
 - .83-cubic-foot seed box available with traditional 10-inch disks to hold open slicing blade slit, or with a seed show assembly, which creates a wider slit
 - Overseeder weighs 400 pounds and measures 35 by 36 by 43 inches
- Circle 219 on reader service card**

Freedom Hitch Utility Trailer

- Model BK1000U is a single-axle trailer with 1,000-pound capacity
- The all-steel deck measures 74 by 46

- inches with optional 2-by-4 inch uprights for side rails
- Features a full axle and leaf-spring suspension for smooth towing
- Light-bar kit can be used while driving on highway or city streets
- Narrow bed and low profile allows maneuverability in tight, off-road areas
- A tilt bed allows user to drive equipment

- onto the bed of a trailer
 - Includes a front-end roll-bar stop for increased safety
 - Can transport an ATV
 - Attach trailer to ATV for greater off-road capabilities
 - The exterior of the trailer is finished with Diamond Black baked-on powder paint
- Circle 220 on reader service card**

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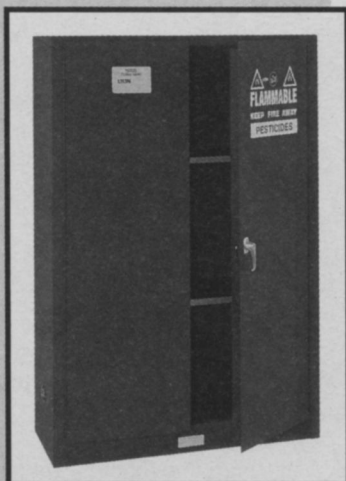
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Products

Pesticide Safety Storage Cabinets

- Versatile ½-inch shelf adjustments on numbered slots offer a solution for storing a wide variety of container sizes in the same cabinet
- Each cabinet features replaceable, leak proof, 2-inch deep polyethylene trays attached to the shelves and added to bottom of the cabinet
- Cabinet sizes and capacities range from 12 to 45 gallons
- Offers load capacity of 350 pounds per shelf
- Cabinets include a three-point latching system with a key lock
- Finished with baked-on enamel
- Constructed of double wall, 18-gauge welded steel with zinc-plated leveling legs and large warning labels

Circle 222 on reader service card



Typar Landscape Fabric

- One-time installation of the fabric prevents weed growth
- Once covered with mulch, landscape fabric is not visible
- Made from continuous polypropylene fibers bonded by heat and pressure to create a uniform, porous, non-woven fabric
- Fabric is resistant to punctures, rotting, mildew, microorganisms and chemicals
- Continuous fibers prevent fabric from unraveling or tearing
- Openings allow water and nutrients to enter soil, prevent migration of soil particles and block weeds from growing through the fabric
- Flexible fabric can follow ground contours
- Packaged in sizes ranging from 3 by 25 feet to 151 by 300 feet
- Fabric also can be used for soil retention

Circle 221 on reader service card

Echo Deluxe Backpack Sprayer

- MS-100 model features a 4½-gallon tank and is ideal for grounds maintenance, pest control and waterproofing among others
- Equipped with a sealed piston and diaphragm pump
- Tank is treated with UV-inhibitors to sustain life
- Sprayer includes a 24-inch brass wand with adjustable brass nozzle
- The long-life spray pistol features a brass shut-off pin and double O-rings
- The large, 6-inch mouth allows for easy filling
- A built-in check valve on the sprayer prevents leaks
- Produces up to 150 psi

Circle 223 on reader service



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Circle 224 on reader service card

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USE READER SERVICE #141

Cover Story

(continued from page 61)

"Our company pays as much as we can as opposed to as little as we can," Del Conte concurred. "If we're making too much profit then we aren't paying enough money to the people who earned it. We don't need profits for personal gain - we need profits to sustain, reward and invest in our people."

Above-the-norm compensation, as well as an open-door policy, has worked well for all facets of the company in terms of employee happiness and retention. In the maintenance division, for instance, Bland said he has seen how well employees respect managers if they are respected. "Personnel comes first - no matter what I'm working on," Bland said. "If an employee wants to come talk to me, I'll drop whatever I'm working on."

Del Conte's open-door policy is not only for managers and supervisors, but also production personnel. "One of the most proud and most devastating events of my career was when we had four managers and an administrator leave within two months of each other two years ago, but lost zero production personnel," Del Conte said, pointing out that many of the production people helped take on extra work while these managers were being replaced. "My production people know I'm committed to them, so none of them left even during this rough time."

Del Conte's belief that continued education equals success is the reason he also pushes and supports employee training and education. Three important employee attributes in the maintenance division are having communication skills, possessing a driver's license and having experience, Bland said. "We've had employees who have been here 12 years and can't become route leaders because they don't have a driver's license or lack communication skills," he explained.

But employees who show the desire to learn will receive company help, Bland said. "We provide the tools, resources and time necessary to learn," he explained, pointing out that in April the company will sponsor eight employees' CLT exams. "A motivated person will reach out for these opportunities."

To motivate more employees to take advantage of this benefit, the company celebrates promotions and recognizes employees who move up the ladder at all company meetings, including breakfast meetings where the entire company is treated and served by the managers and at the annual

awards banquet where 25 trophies are given out during a San Francisco Bay dinner cruise, Del Conte said.

Also, 85 percent of Del Conte Landscaping's workforce is Hispanic. To make this workforce feel a part of the organization, the company holds traditional Mexican barbecues, prints all company information in English and Spanish and shares American cultures like going to the area gym. In addition, a human resources manager acts as an employee liaison to ease the cultural transition by helping Hispanic employees purchase airline tickets and find apartments. But, more importantly, Del Conte stresses that his company does not discriminate.

"No one has any doubt that there is absolutely no discrimination at this company," he said, pointing out that he taught himself Spanish in the early 1980s to encourage communication between his Hispanic and American workers. "Even though we support different cultures, we try and embrace the person rather than the culture."

GROWING PROUD. Del Conte Landscaping's future goals include, above all else, having the right image internally, which will branch out to its clients. "We are becoming recognized in our community, and we want to continue that trend," he said.

The company is also focusing on some financial goals, but has spaced them out so they don't interfere with employees' quality of life. "While we are on an aggressive growth rate currently (35.8 percent growth expected in 2001 and 16.7 percent growth planned for 2002), the point of it is to achieve our target size of \$10 million," Del Conte stressed. "At that point, we will limit our growth to 10 percent, which will enable our company to very comfortably foster the endeavors of our staff professionally, as well as provide the most that we can personally."

Del Conte said he set this growth goal after carefully determining what his true values were. "It was a revelation to me to say out loud that money isn't all there is," he said. "It dawned on me to ask myself 'Why? When does it stop? What's the real game here? Do I really value growth? Is it that important? No. Then what is? The quality of life of the people that work here.' That conversation with myself helped shape the architecture of where we're going." **LL**

The author is Managing Editor of *Lawn & Landscape* magazine.

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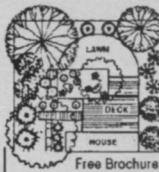
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Add-On Services

(continued from page 76)

Training was an integral portion of Swingle Tree's incorporation of holiday lighting, he noted. The company sent employees to educational seminars, while also holding on-site education sessions where equipment parts and electrical limitations were reviewed for technicians.

Wagner also was sure to deliver top-notch service, because the skilled designers who merged with his company after the acquisition were talented professionals, he said. However, before teaching other employees how to install pavers and lighting - his add-on services - he made sure they understood the basics of their existing services.

"Before I train guys on how to do lighting and pavers, I have to make sure they understand their plant material and how to install edging," Wagner said.

Then, he had to make sure there were enough technicians.

Wagner added more employees to handle extra work from new clients. An understaffed company will suffer, but an overstaffed business will suffer in profits, he said. Similarly, an uneducated staff can affect the bottom line. "It's kind of scary to use a customer's job as a learning experience," he acknowledged. "It's ideal to hire someone who has some job experience."

ALWAYS THINKING. Adding on new services can seem as easy as purchasing a pre-made system. At the same time, contractors are exploring possibilities that reach beyond traditional green industry fare, including black tops, sports turf and lighting.

And, of course, there are always more. Add-on services seem to whet an appetite for second, third - even fourth - helpings, and many contractors are creatively coming up with new ways to serve their clients.

Rorie mulls over warehouse cleaning. Wagner considers garden maintenance. Both will proceed with caution.

"You don't want to drop the ball on what you already have," Wagner remarked. "You have to keep asking yourself, 'What business am I in?' If you try to take on too much at once, then you don't know the answer to that question. And if you don't know, your customers certainly won't."

The author is Assistant of Lawn & Landscape magazine.

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Establishing & Managing On-Site Crews at Sousa's Landscape

Twenty years ago, I worked as part of an in-house crew at the 55-acre Elbow Beach Resort in Bermuda. We had 12 full-time employees at the hotel and still never seemed to keep on top of everything. The resort, like many in the area, was having a difficult time recruiting and retaining staff.

Now, 20 years later, I am president of Sousa's Landscape Management, which maintains these large resorts and hotels with on-site crews, and we have been managing the maintenance of the Elbow Beach Resort with only four full-time employees for the past four years.

To do this, we first place a high quality, hard working, hands-on site manager with a horticulture degree on the site and surround him with a good team. Then, we supply that team with the best and most up-to-date equipment, including a dump truck, a riding mower, a walk-behind mower, trimmers, edgers, blowers, a pole saw, a sprayer and miscellaneous hand tools.

Also helpful is when clients designate a portion of their sites for storerooms, workshops or small nursery areas. For instance, we convinced Elbow Beach to permit us to do this, and we fixed up the area at our cost. Having an area on our client's site assists us in reducing overhead costs as all

personnel report directly to the site, which eliminates morning and evening road time. They can then communicate with the main office by two-way radio and reduce possible damage to equipment that normally would have to be towed back and forth.

We generally rotate the team members on our on-site maintenance crews every three months so they do not become complacent. However, the team leader remains the same because clients like dealing with a familiar face.

We have weekly scheduled walkabouts with clients to maintain open communication lines and sell additional services. Getting clients outside of their offices is worth the two hours each week because they get to see what we do, and being on the site makes offering suggestions and describing what we'd like to do next easier.

Other keys are requiring all on-site personnel to wear uniforms and emblazoning trucks with our company logo. Clients like this because our on-site staff is easily recognizable.

Additionally, we perform the following on-site maintenance tasks to ensure success:

- Know our clients and establish trust. We do what we say we are going to do and finish projects by the promised time. If there are problems that may prevent a team from doing this, the production manager is notified and other arrangements are made to finish the job.

- Know our properties so we can identify trouble spots. We try to point out insects, diseases, off-color plants and turfgrasses as soon as possible.

- Set daily, weekly and long-term goals. An example of a daily goal is telling laborers that you expect all the property's mowing and edging to be done on a certain day. A weekly goal may be to have Phase One's bedlines edged by the end of the week. Long-term goals include planning winter pruning or leaf removal in the summer or doing tasks in the winter that will alleviate some of the work that needs to be done in spring, such as pruning.

- Work with the weather. For instance, mowing, edging and blowing may not need to be done every week, especially during a drought, so we use this opportunity to do time-consuming tasks, such as pruning trees or edging bedlines.

- Focus on self-reliance. Our team managers and crews use support departments only when necessary. They do all the pruning and apply all chemicals themselves, if and when possible. Only specialized, whole property, turf weed and tree applications are done by support departments. — Jeff Sousa **ll**

The author is president of Sousa's Landscape Management in Paget, Bermuda.

FIVE KEYS *to Establishing & Managing On-Site Crews*

- 1. Know your clients and their properties and establish client trust.**
- 2. Set daily, weekly and long-term goals for on-site teams.**
- 3. Rotate team members every three months so they do not become complacent, but do not rotate the team leader so the property manager can deal with a familiar face.**
- 4. Keep open communication lines by scheduling weekly meetings with on-site clients. This also is an opportunity to sell additional services.**
- 5. Encourage clients to allow you to use a portion of their site where you can store small nursery items and some equipment.**

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