



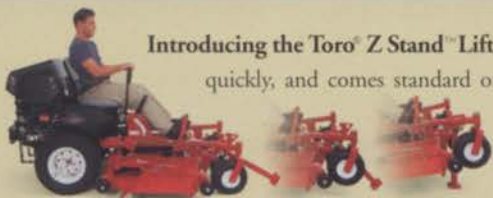
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Have you seen the pit crews at Indy?

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Introducing the Toro® Z Stand™ Lift. It's a revolutionary new way to change blades quickly, and comes standard on the Z Master® Z200 Series. Just swing the Z Stand out in front of the cutting deck, then drive forward until it locks into place.

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USE READER SERVICE #107



"LiquiGreen, of course!"

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IT GOES FARTHER, LASTS LONGER & IT'S MORE ACCURATE THAN ANY YOU'VE TRIED BEFORE.

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to use and delivers more consistent results.



release formula keeps a consistent

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USE READER SERVICE #25

Find this month's features plus exclusive online stories, industry databases and more at www.lawnandlandscape.com.

Legislative News Online

Read about the latest legislative issues that threaten the health of the lawn care and landscape industry.

From efforts to ban gasoline-powered blowers to the label losses of Dursban and Diazinon, this area of Lawn & Landscape Online is designed to help keep you up to date on national legislative issues.

If you are aware of newsworthy legislation, please e-mail shunsberger@lawnandlandscape.com. Find this section by visiting www.lawnandlandscape.com and clicking the "Legislation" button on the navigation bar.

Daily Features

L&L 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*: In February author Barbara Ellis will cover the buttercup family.

Find these features at www.lawnandlandscape.com.

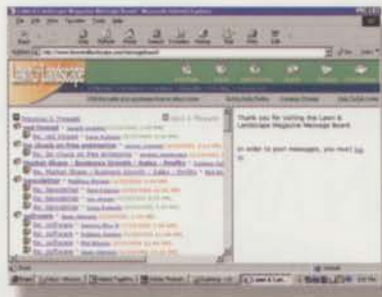
Online Community Growing and Thriving

Since the introduction of the new Lawn & Landscape Online on Dec. 19, 2000, a growing community of industry professionals have frequented the online message boards to share industry ideas and swap business practices.

At press time, there were more than 140 posters (number of users who post messages), 350 threads (messages started indicating separate topics of conversation) and 3,200 messages (thread openers and replies to messages) on the message boards, and new ideas and business solutions are posted daily.

Discussion topics range from business management issues, such as bidding, pricing and employee incentives, to equipment issues, such as backpack blowers and zero-turn radius mowers.

Join this online community today by visiting www.lawnandlandscape.com/messageboard. Be sure to register for your My Lawn & Landscape account at www.lawnandlandscape.com/my/adduser.asp to be able to post threads and replies. Where else can you swap ideas with this many contractors for free?



ONLINE Contents

Check out these links to discover the tools available on Lawn & Landscape Online to help you stay on top of the latest industry news and grow your business:

- Daily News and Features** - Catch breaking industry news and daily features. www.lawnandlandscape.com
- E-newsletter** - Receive weekly industry news via e-mail. www.lawnandlandscape.com/my/customize_newsletter.asp
- L&L Online LawnStore** - Locate the best resources to help your business grow. www.lawnandlandscape.com/store
- Message Boards** - Discuss hot-button issues with fellow industry professionals. www.lawnandlandscape.com/messageboard
- Weekly Poll** - Vote on industry-related topics and compare your answers with others. www.lawnandlandscape.com
- Events Calendar** - Locate industry events across the country. www.lawnandlandscape.com/events
- Industry Research** - Survey data and analysis of the industry as a whole. www.lawnandlandscape.com/research
- Magazine Archives** - Years of Lawn & Landscape magazine back issues. www.lawnandlandscape.com/magazine

Lawn & Landscape Online is: Scott Hunsberger, Internet editor (shunsberger@lawnandlandscape.com) and Sydney Work, Web department manager (swork@gie.net).

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*120 Day No Payment, No Finance Charge, Cub Cadet Commercial Account Promotion available to qualified buyers using the Cub Cadet Commercial Credit Card. A minimum purchase of \$1,500.00 is required. No payments and no interest will be due prior to the expiration date of the promotion, as indicated on your statement. Effective 12/01/00, the variable APR for purchases is 17.9%. Minimum finance charge is \$ 5.50. Credit provided by Conesco Bank, Inc. Financing promotions begin 01/01/01 and end 02/28/01. Financing promotions subject to change. See dealer for details.

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USE READER SERVICE #98

February 2001



Cover photo: Tom Dubanowich
Columbus, Ohio

Cover Story Fast Forward

Speedy growth and aggressive expansion plans make Scotts LawnService a company to watch.

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Flower Power

A medley of annuals and perennials creates an aesthetic arrangement.

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Established contractors offer their insights on setting up installation crews.

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SNOW BUSINESS

THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE SNOW & ICE MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION

In this issue, all Lawn & Landscape readers in northern states will receive Snow Business, the official publication of the Snow & Ice Management Association. This month, Snow Business explores alternative income options and insurance issues. **\$1**

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Lawn & Landscape ONLINE

Reintroducing the lawn and landscape industry's most interactive Web site. **4**



INSTALLATION PRODUCTS Buyers' Guide

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For contractors scouting ornamentals for an installation project, sourcing specific plants can present challenges. **L4**

Hardscape Hints
Installing these important design elements takes planning and organization. **L10**

Regulatory Roadblocks
Installation work is padded with procedures and policies from municipalities to homeowners. **L14**

Buyers' Guide **L20**

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*"If you don't make things happen,
then things will happen to you."*

— Lanes Company

It's About Time

I sat through an amazing meeting last month, and I came away optimistic about whether or not this industry can eventually find its collective voice in the political arena.

Nearly a dozen industry associations from across the states of New York and New Jersey sat down to discuss a strategy for dealing with the neighbor notification law passed in New York last summer. These groups spent three hours identifying commonalities, debating the merits of various options and, in general, working together. These groups recognize that bigger is better in the world of political influence, and the only way this industry will achieve the requisite 'bigger' status is through such teamwork.

Never before have I seen or heard of such a large and diverse group in this industry coming together in this way, which is sad because efforts like this can be invaluable to the industry's future. In this instance, these associations are working to head off an initiative that will be evaluated by each of the state's 63 counties in the coming months. However, I was disappointed during the meeting when I considered the likelihood of this law passing had these groups (and others like it around the country) held meetings like this months ago. The bill never would have seen the light of day had the industry been stronger and working more cohesively in a proactive fashion.

That's not to blame the groups, companies or individuals in New York — they are no different than the rest of the country in their refusal to recognize the reality of what government is doing to this industry. Our opponents are making steady progress setting the rules we have to play by from coast to coast. But we refuse to act until we have to react.

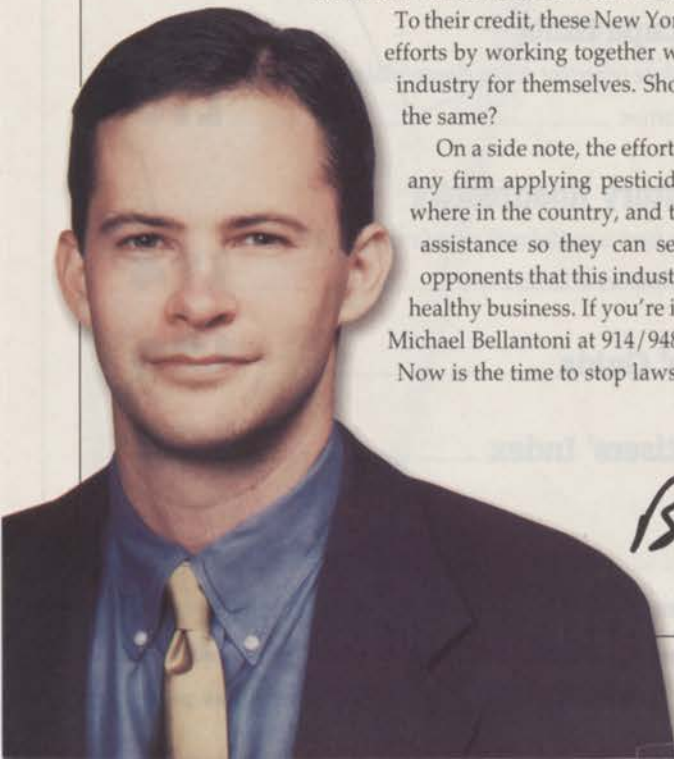
To their credit, these New York groups are strengthening their efforts by working together with the goal of building a better industry for themselves. Shouldn't you and your groups do the same?

On a side note, the efforts in New York are significant for any firm applying pesticides to trees, shrubs or turf anywhere in the country, and these groups need your financial assistance so they can send a message to all lawn care opponents that this industry will fight for the right to run a healthy business. If you're interested in helping out, contact Michael Bellantoni at 914/948-6468.

Now is the time to stop laws like this.



Bob West



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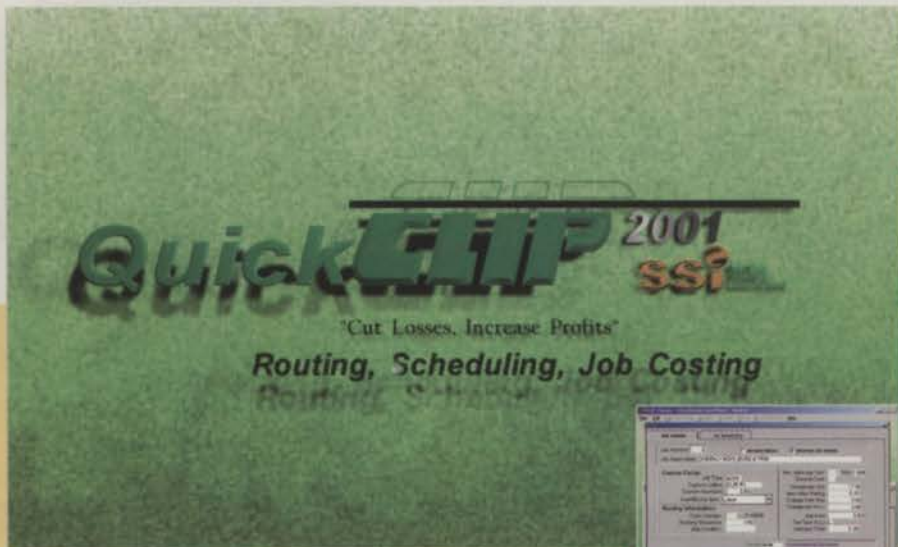
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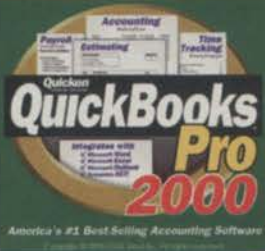
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USE READER SERVICE #99

Market Trends

IN THE NEWS

UHS Gains Rights to ABT Seed

DENVER, Colo. – With the recent bankruptcy and subsequent sell-off of AgriBioTech's (ABT) assets, many turf seed customers were left wondering what became of the grass seed varieties the company had managed to consolidate.

That mystery has been partially solved by United Horticultural Supply's (UHS) strategic agreement with the newly formed United Seed Production (USP) that provides UHS with marketing rights to most of those varieties. The agreement positions UHS as a top grass seed supplier in the turf and ornamental industry.

"There are more than 100,000 acres of turfgrass production currently in place to ensure that the supply of well-known products turfgrass managers have enjoyed in the past will continue uninterrupted from UHS," said Terry Boehm, business manager for UHS.

UHS devoted most of its recent energies to creating a national focus and developing a line of fertilizer products under its "Signature" brand name. Now, the com-

(continued on page 14)



Talk to an established lawn care or landscape professional about their pet peeves, and surely they'll vent about their unsophisticated competitors who are giving the industry a bad name every time they're in contact with a customer. Increasing industry professionalism isn't their main goal.

In particular, there is concern about people claiming to be certified pesticide applicators when this isn't the case. A recent report from the Michigan Department of Agriculture (MDA) showed that there are a certain number of individuals offering these services without the required licensing or certification. The MDA also found that even more Michigan companies are guilty of some sort of violation of the state's regulatory code. Given the fact that Michigan has a healthy number of quality contractors

Source: Michigan Department of Agriculture

(continued on page 24)

Compliance CONCERNS

TYPE OF VIOLATION	1994	2000
None	30%	50%
No certification	6%	3%
No license	4%	1%
No vehicle identification	7%	3%
No spill kit	13%	17%
No personal protective equipment	36%	31%
No long pants	1%	0%
No short sleeve/no soap	3%	9%
No protective footwear	23%	9%
No gloves	19%	14%
Equipment in poor condition	7%	1%
No posting	7%	4%
Incomplete receipts	42%	26%
Name, address and phone #	11%	4%
Full name of the applicator	16%	5%
Description of target pest	10%	3%
Common name of a.i.	31%	20%
Date and time of application	11%	6%
Precautionary warnings	25%	13%

MARKETING IDEAS

Let Your Fingers Do the Walkin'

WITCHITA, Texas – To attract its market niche – the infamous do-it-yourself homeowners – a-Perm-o-Green's Marketing Director Nancy Brown visualized a typical do-it-yourself homeowner with a hoe, shovel and bag of fertilizer in his hands and a spray tank on his back, sweating in the hot sun and looking miserable. She described this image to the company's advertising agency, who drew up a cartoon based on this depiction.

The result won a-Perm-o-Green the 2000 Professional Lawn Care Association Best Yellow Pages Ad award.

This spring will be the fourth season the ad will appear in the Texas area Yellow Pages. Each season, the company changes the ad slightly to jazz it up. One season, the homeowner was lying in a hammock drinking lemonade and the next season he was on a golf course. The slogan under both ads read, "Don't spend the weekend in your yard. Call a-Perm-o-Green."

To run the Yellow Pages ads, Brown said she spends about 1/4 of the company's \$35,000 marketing budget.

"We wanted to do something that makes a potential customer look at the ad and say, 'That's me, and that's what I don't want to be doing this summer,'" Brown said. "The ad also shows off our company's lighter side."





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TURF PRODUCTS

Our reputation is growing yours.

Market Trends

(continued from page 12)

pany hopes to build market share in the large grass seed segment, armed with an arsenal of many of the industry's best-known varieties.

Premium seed offerings will carry the Signature brand name, which UHS acquired the market rights to while building the program. Many products will also be marketed under the general UHS label, the total available list including more than 100 industry names.

One of the major components of USP is ProSeeds Marketing, a seed marketing company in Oregon's Willamette Valley. ProSeeds acquired the bulk of the turfgrass assets from the bankruptcy of ABT in August 2000, and was awarded the exclusive rights to more than 80 percent of ABT's approximate 300 turfgrass varieties. With the combination of ProSeeds' existing base of varieties and the newly acquired varieties, USP became the largest source for both improved turfgrass genetics before this acquisition.

UHS plans to continue to bring new and

(continued on page 16)

People

Jane MacMillan has been named communications manager of turf, ornamental and technical products at Dow AgroSciences LLC.

John Zajac now is responsible for marketing and product development for Robert's Seed Co.

Richard Klein joined Environmental Industries' leadership team and executive committee as senior vice president of corporate development.

Pennington Seed appointed **Charles Lohse** as western territory manager for the Professional Turfgrass Group and **Stanley Kleczynski** as southeastern territory manager for the group.

Francis Santiago was named senior vice president of operations for Osram Sylvania's general lighting business.

Calloway's Nursery named **Daniel Feehan**, president and CEO of Cash America International, and **Timothy McKibben**, chairman of the board for Ancor Holdings, to its board of directors.

William Stringfellow joined LESCO as director of product development and management.

Rick Huff accepted the position of controller for Treasure Coast Irrigation.

Florists' Mutual Insurance promoted **Luke Eckley** to account executive for the east central region, **Stan Pettiford** to senior account executive for the New England region and **Robert Dinnsen** to senior account executive for Indiana.



Kleczynski (top),
Klein (bottom)

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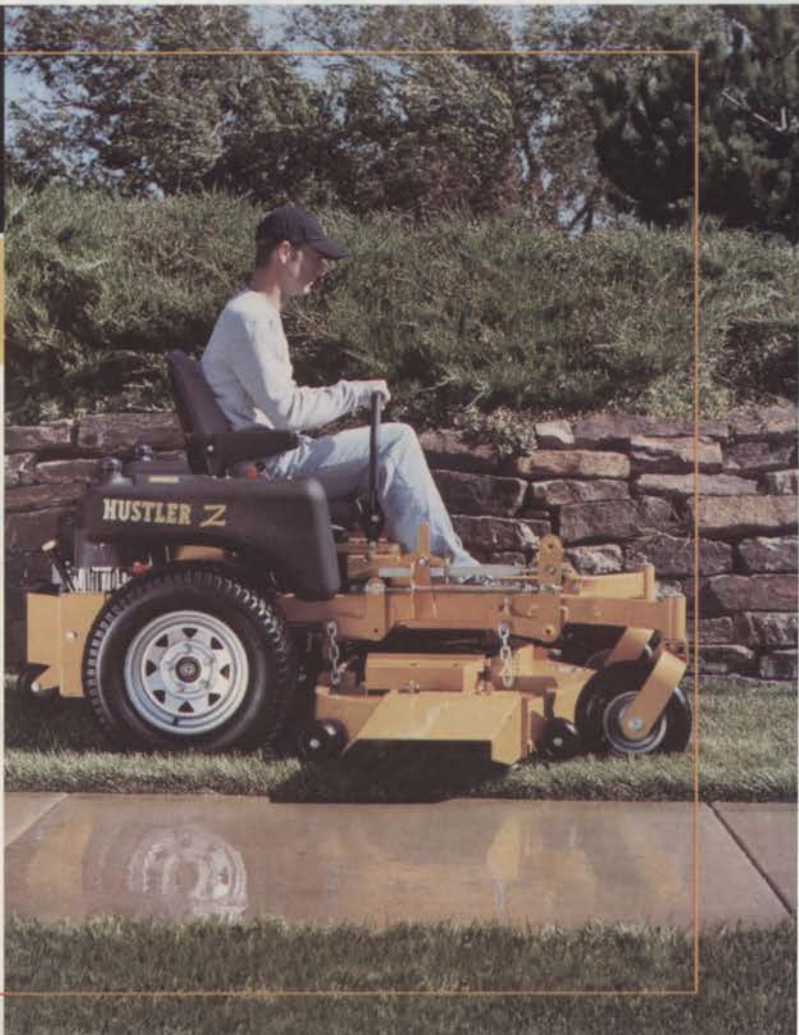
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Whatever happened to great seed varieties like Palmer III, Shenandoah II, Apollo and Crenshaw?

They landed in our bags and buckets.

After the recent disappearance of a large seed company, many seed buyers were left to wonder what became of many well-known and respected seed varieties.

Rest assured, they have a new home. United Horticultural Supply is now the nation's source for top varieties.

The varieties you've always counted on are now available individually, or formulated in new blends and mixtures, many of which carry the Signature Pure Seed Tag.™ When you ask for this tag, you are assured to receive clean seed

of the highest quality. It underscores our commitment to provide only the best products and services.

Check with your local UHS representative for more details about our outstanding selection of premium seed varieties, mixtures and blends, the best available.



R100
Ryegrass Plus



B600
Bluegrass Plus

net wt. 50
ryegra



net wt. 50 lbs. (22.68 kg)

RASS PLUS

A sampling of our varieties:

- Palmer III Perennial Ryegrass
- Prelude III Perennial Ryegrass
- Pennant II Perennial Ryegrass
- Apollo Kentucky Bluegrass
- Princeton 105 Kentucky Bluegrass
- Shenandoah II Turf-type Tall Fescue
- Falcon II Turf-type Tall Fescue
- Crenshaw Creeping Bentgrass
- A's & G's Creeping Bentgrass
- Laser Poa trivialis
- Azure Sheeps Fescue
- Reliant II Hard Fescue

plus more than 100 more varieties!
USE READER SERVICE #101



United
Horticultural Supply

www.uhsonline.com

Market Trends

(continued from page 14)

improved varieties to the market through affiliations with the nation's top breeding programs. In fact, Rutgers University has reportedly already designated several of its newest improved varieties for exclusive UHS distribution.

UHS projects turfgrass supplies for the upcoming spring season will vary substan-

tially depending on the turfgrass species. Turf-type tall fescue and elite Kentucky bluegrass will be in tight supply while the mid-range bluegrasses should be available in adequate quantities. Improved fine fescues and turf-type perennial ryegrasses are in ample supply and most varieties of creeping bentgrass should be available for the upcoming spring season.

REGIONAL NEWS

Construction Forecast Brings Good News, Bad News

WASHINGTON, D.C. - With so many contractors waiting for the first sign of an economic slowdown, the CMD Group's North American Construction Forecast announced a reassuring message: residential and commercial construction should remain strong through 2002.

Total construction is already at a record high, but Bill Toal, chief economist for the Portland Cement Association, predicted the blistering pace to climb another 1.3 percent for 2000, dip 1.9 percent in 2001 and then increase another 1.3 percent in 2002. The overall economy is a key factor in construction spending, and Toal predicts the entire economy will swell another 3 to 3.5 percent next year. "With the technology bursts we are getting, unless something really broadsides us, I see continued economic growth at a

(continued on page 20)

On the WEB

Lawn Service Information Resources - www.lawnservicing.com

GreenSearch - www.greenmatchmaker.com

Dare Living Associates Landscape Service - www.dareliving.com

Exmark - www.exmark.com

Ponds2go.Com - www.pondstogo.com

Febco Backflow Preventers - www.cmb-ind.com

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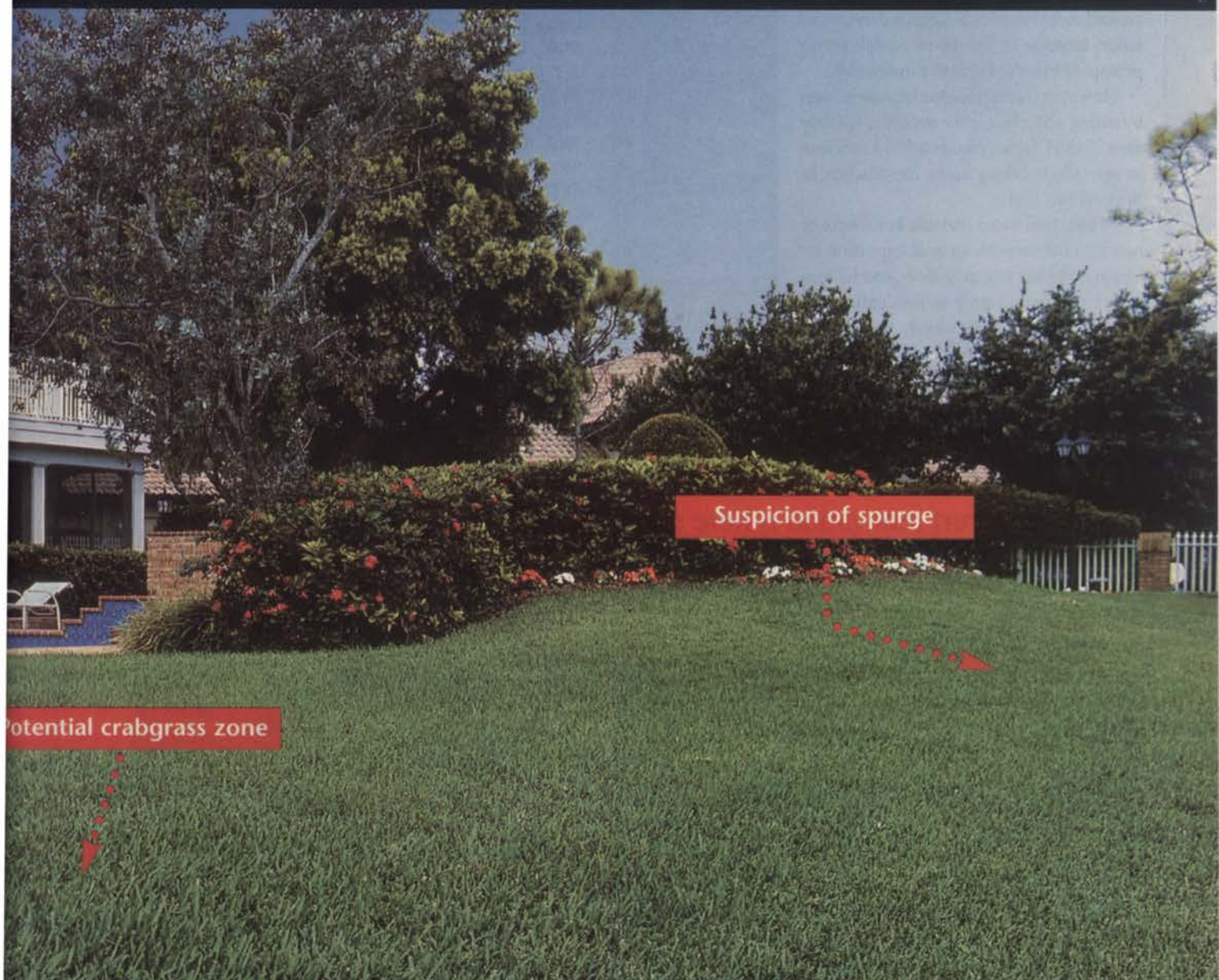
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USE READER SERVICE #103

Market Trends

(continued from page 10)

moderate pace as far as the eye can see," he noted, adding that October 2000 marked the 115th consecutive month of unprecedented economic expansion.

Population demographics also can be credited for some of the construction growth, as the rise in the grade school population created more school buildings and the population increase in the 18 to 24 age group prompted more apartment construction.

However, Toal tempered his enthusiasm by noting a decrease in the number of people ages 25 to 44, which could lead to a decrease in new single-family home construction in the next two years.

In fact, Toal noted that this key source of new installation work for landscape contractors already has begun to slow, and he predicted a 9 percent drop in residential construction for 2001. However, the growth should return in 2003, and construction of multi-family units should remain steady.

"What is dragging down single-family housing starts is multi-family housing starts,"

Calendar of Events

TO ENSURE

that your meeting date is published, send an announcement at least 12 weeks in advance to *Lawn & Landscape Calendar*, 4012 Bridge Ave., Cleveland, OH 44113.

FEB. 8-10 New England Grows! Boston, Mass. Contact: 508/653-3009.

FEB. 15-APRIL 26 Arborists' and Tree Workers' Certification Preparation Course, Thursdays from 6:30 to 9:30 p.m., Riverside, Calif. Contact: 909/656-3431.

FEB. 19 Sustainable Urban Landscape Workshop, Oklahoma City, OK. Contact: 940/483-1766.

FEB. 19-23 Turfgrass Management Short Course, Yorktown Heights, N.Y. Contact: 607/255-1792.

FEB. 20-21 Southern Illinois Grounds Maintenance School, Collinsville, Ill. Contact: 618/236-8600.

FEB. 21 Sustainable Urban Landscape Workshop, Austin, TX. Contact: 940/483-1766.

FEB. 21 Lesco Winter Turf, Landscape and Pest Control Conference, S. Attleboro, Mass. Contact: 508/65-1953.

FEB. 21-22 2001 Landscape Industry Show, Long Beach, Calif. Contact: 916/448-2522.

FEB. 22 Lesco Winter Turf, Landscape and Pest Control Conference, Danvers, Mass. Contact: 603/887-3574.

FEB. 22 Sustainable Urban Landscape Workshop, Houston, TX. Contact: 940/483-1766.

FEB. 23 Sustainable Urban Landscape Workshop, Lafayette, La. Contact: 940/483-1766.

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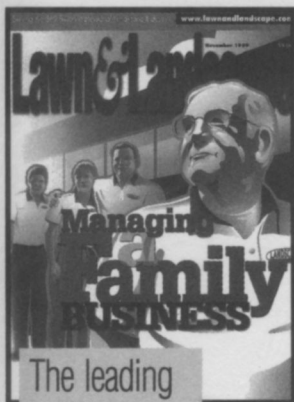
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- 5. Irrigation Contractor
- 6. Landscape Architect
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- 10. Distributor
- 11. Formulator
- 12. Manufacturer

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- 15. Trade Association, Library
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- Manager, Director, Supl., Foreman
- Agronomist, Horticulturist
- Entomologist, Plant Pathologist
- Serviceman, Technician, Crew member
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- Company, Library copy only
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- 7. Turf pesticide application
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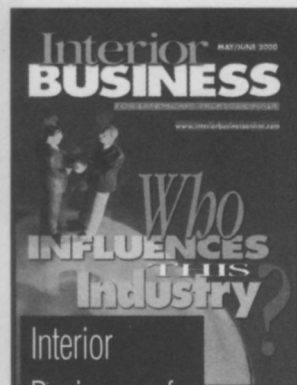
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- 4. Interior Landscape Design
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- 6. Grower
- 7. Other Contract Services (please describe) _____

III. DISTRIBUTOR/MANUFACTURER

- 8. Dealer
- 9. Distributor
- 10. Formulator
- 11. Manufacturer

IV. OTHERS ALLIED TO THE FIELD:

- 12. School, College, University
- 13. Trade Association, Library
- 14. Others (please describe) _____

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- Owner, Pres., Vice Pres., Corp. Officer
- Manager, Director, Supervisor
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Market Trends

agreed David Seiders, chief economist, the National Association of Home Builders.

Toal's forecast for non-residential construction called for a 4.6 percent increase by the end of 2000, which will then level off throughout 2001 due to fewer new hotel and retail projects. However, the aforementioned boost for educational construction equates to a 16.4 percent jump for this year and a promising future.

Fortunately, any negative impact stemming from the slowdown in commercial construction may be offset by a continued climb in the office occupancy rate, which currently stands at 91 percent and provides commercial property managers and owners with the funds necessary for maintenance and enhancement projects.

Ray Torto of Torto Wheaton Research, explained that the cities with the lowest office space vacancies for the third quarter of 2000 were: San Jose, Calif., at 1.2 percent; San Francisco, Calif., at 3.3 percent; New York, N.Y., at 2.5 percent; Seattle, Wash., at 3.4 percent; Boston, Mass., at 3.7 percent; Wash-

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FEB. 28 New Jersey Landscape 2001, Secaucus, N.J. Contact: 201/664-6310.

FEB. 11-13 Lawn & Landscape School of Management, San Diego, Calif. Contact: 800/456-0707.

FEB. 12-14 Illinois Landscape Contractors Association Winter Seminar, Lisle, Ill. Contact: 630/472-2851.

FEB. 16-17 The Florida Nurserymen and Growers Association's Jacksonville Horticultural Trade Show, Jacksonville, Fla. Contact: 904/356-5577.

FEB. 20 Reno Nevada Landscape Association Trade Show & Conference, Reno, Nev. Contact: 775/673-0404.

FEB. 23 Illinois Landscape Contractors Association Excellence in Landscape Awards Program, Oak Brook, Ill. Contact: 630/472-2851.

FEB. 23-24 2001 Tampa Spring Expo, Tampa, Fla. Contact: 813/655-1914.

FEB. 24-MAR. 4 Southern Spring Show, Charlotte, N.C. Contact: 704/376-6594.

FEB. 27 - MAR. 1 Western Pennsylvania Turf Conference & Trade Show, Monroeville, Pa. Contact: 724/837-1402.

FEB. 28 New Jersey Landscape 2001, Secaucus, N.J. Contact: 201/664-6310.

FEB. 28 Connecticut Grounds Keepers Association Turf & Landscape Conference, Hartford, Conn. Contact: 203/699-9912.

MAR. 1-4 Nashville Lawn & Garden Show, Nashville, Tenn. Contact: 615/352-3863.

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Market Trends

ington, D.C., at 4.2 percent; and Portland, Ore., at 7.1 percent. Cities with above-average vacancy rates include Los Angeles, Calif., (12.4 percent), Phoenix, Ariz., (12.5 percent), and Dallas, Texas (15.3 percent). As a result of the climbing occupancy rates, office rents rose at a 16 percent annualized rate for the first half of 2000.

Some landscape companies may find government projects more attractive since Toal thinks they represent strong opportunity next year as more communities and local governments enjoy healthy budgets and fund more public works projects.

In particular, Toal said the construction hotspots for the next few years will be California, the Pacific Northwest, the Southeast and Texas.

On the downside, forecasts for future labor are not bright. William Rodgers, chief economist for the U.S. Department of Labor, explained that what many people consider as a labor shortage can more accurately be described as a skills shortage. "The Department of Labor believes that construction employment will grow by 9 percent over the next 10 years, [which is] more slowly than the overall economy, which is expected to grow 14 percent over the same period," he said.

However, wages for construction and related industries have slipped relative to other industries since 1979. Rodgers said the

Association NEWS

The **Southern Nurserymen's Association** hired two new employees: Tamiko Lowry as customer service coordinator and Stuart Lee as director of communications. In other news, SNA established the Arthur A. "Buck" Jones Scholarship Endowment Fund in the memory of the SNA 1995 past president who died Oct. 1 after a long struggle with cancer.

The **Maryland Nurserymen's Association** established a Horticulture Research Foundation to conduct resource development, solicit research project requirements from the members of the MNA, disseminate funds for research and communicate results to the membership.

The **New York State Turfgrass Association** elected its 2000 officers and directors: Joseph Hahn is president; John Rizza is vice president; Steve Griffen is secretary/treasurer; Jim Hornung is western region director; John Halloran is at large director; and reelected for 2000 is Ken DeCerce as northeastern region director. Anthony Peca, Jr. also continues on the board as past president.

Richard Hurley was selected as the 1999 recipient of the **New Jersey Turfgrass Association** Hall of Fame Award, which is presented annually to a person who has had a continuing lifetime commitment to the advancement of the N.J. turfgrass industry.

The **Associated Landscape Contractors of America** presented its Annual Exterior Environmental Improvement Judges' Award to Hendrikus Schraven Landscape Construction & Design of Issaquah, Wash., for the Nelson residence. The project involved a new construction site on a dramatic shoreline with a steep 130-foot slope prone to severe erosion and landslides.

government is exploring ways to raise the skill level of the 13 million unemployed Americans. Since half this group are female and more than half are minorities, the industry might become more diverse in the future.

IN THE NEWS

Ariens Digs Into Construction Equipment

BRILLION, Wis. — Ariens Co. launched a new division with the hope of expanding the number of markets the company deals in. Ariens Construction Equipment will focus on construction equipment products, such as full-size skid-steer attachments and machines.

Ariens' hope is that the new division will push the company further into the construction market by providing increased focus on this segment of the industry, reported Ariens President Dan Ariens. Equipment in the new division will include Ariens Grader and Gravely-branded Skidsters and Pro-Chip series machines.

"We believe these products will serve the construction market well by boosting productivity, reducing capital costs and cutting labor," Ariens said, pointing out that newly developed sales partners will handle the bulk of sales activity for Ariens Construction Equipment. "We believe it is important to keep a broad enough product offering while avoiding channel conflict with our loyal, long-term dealers."

Compliance Concerns (continued from page 12)

and associations than many states, these findings may carry distressing implications for the rest of the country. However, the most important finding in the report was that the percent of offending companies went down from 1994 to 2000 in 18 of the 19 key categories — the only exception was the lack of spill kits on vehicles.

Joe Strzalka of the MDA provided a summary of some of the state's findings to the Metropolitan Detroit Landscape Association. The findings were based on a comparison of the results from the state's routine inspections of applicator vehicles in 1994 and 2000.

"While it appears that the industry as a whole has made some progress, there are certain areas that continue to be a problem," Strzalka noted. "These problems include applicators failing to wear personal protective equipment (PPE) and receipts left with the customer."

In fact, though the number of offending com-

panies dropped from 36 percent in 1994 to 31 percent this year, a failure to wear PPE was the most common violation in the 2000 results.

The second most prevalent problem this year was failure to leave receipts with the customers after the application, which is not only a requirement in Michigan, but an opportunity to educate customers.

Seventeen percent of all applicators stopped in the field didn't have immediate access to a spill kit, but this was often because the individuals didn't know where the kit was in the truck. Strzalka observed that technicians also had difficulty locating a spill kit when they were driving a vehicle different than their normal vehicle. "The firm should make sure that all new applicators are trained to the location of the spill kit and that all trucks have a spill kit in the same location," he remarked.

MERGERS & ACQUISITIONS

Dissecting the Deere/McGinnis Deal

ALPHARETTA, Ga. – John Deere's acquisition of irrigation distributor and nursery supplier McGinnis Farms may be the most interesting industry acquisition of the last 10 years. This is not one manufacturer buying another or one company purchasing market share. Quite the contrary, in fact.

This is one of the biggest names in equipment manufacturing breaking loose from the shackles of conventional wisdom and building a new business paradigm. Coupled with its acquisition of mower manufacturer Great Dane Power Equipment (*Lawn & Landscape*, January 2001) and McGinnis Farms' recent acquisitions of Jenco Wholesale Nursery and Pipe N' Heads in the irrigation industry, this deal seems to be a clear and bold declaration that Deere is committing itself to the professional landscape industry.

"This is an expansion of our focus on the landscape industry," confirmed Dave Werning, who was director of business development for John Deere and will function as president of McGinnis Farms, which had sales of \$150 million in 2000. "This is a vibrant industry with all of the right demographics to signify continued strength, and we want to be part of it.

"John Deere's history is as an engineering and manufacturing company, but this move is consistent with our plans and our chairman's publicly stated goal for the company to double in size and then double again in 10 years time," explained Werning. "We will do that by providing more services to our existing customers and expanding the products and services we can offer to new customers."

Werning, who confirmed that the company considered acquiring a manufacturer to enter industries such as irrigation, said Deere decided that distribution presents greater long-term potential. "We believe these markets are being well served by the manufacturers and there isn't a need for a new manufacturer," he noted. "We want to participate more broadly in the industries we serve, and if we're a manufacturer of irrigation, for example, then we're limited as to how extensively we can participate on the nursery side. And how would we participate on the fertilizer, seed, bricks and timbers sides?"

"Through this mechanism, we can participate in all elements of the product side of the industry," Werning continued. "We believe that McGinnis Farms' model has formed the basis of the final assembly of a diverse range of products that a landscape contractor needs. This model maximizes the con-

tact with the contractor to make his job easier, and the multiple product lines and industries served by McGinnis Farms, in particular, made it an even more appealing company."


The deal creates two obvious follow-up questions. First, will the company use these new 46 locations in 10 states from Georgia to Texas to sell green and yellow mowers? "We have no intent at all to move the equipment marketing and selling from the existing John Deere dealers," emphasized Werning. "At the same time, we would like to leverage the relationship McGinnis Farms has with many landscape professionals to see if we can get an invitation into their businesses to sell them equipment."

Secondly, what are Deere's long-term plans for this initiative and how much of the country do they include? Werning confirmed that Deere will likely continue acquiring companies like McGinnis Farms, although he declined to comment on rumors of negotiations between Deere and at least one of the irrigation industry's leading distributors. "What we would like to do is continue on the path that McGinnis Farms set," he related. "Stan Walker (founder of McGinnis Farms who will remain with the company and work with Werning) and his team had visions for substantial growth, and we don't see John Deere changing that vision.

"There is an interest within McGinnis Farms as well as John Deere to optimize the structure here," he continued, adding that the Deere identity means there are six brand names now involved in the company. "McGinnis Farms had plans to consolidate to one name, and we're interested in doing something that will make a connection to John Deere without creating any confusion."

Sandy Zusmann, vice president of marketing for McGinnis Farms, said this deal makes a lot of sense for both parties. "What do we do?" he asked. "We try to provide one source for solutions for our contractor customers. We do a pretty good job in nursery, irrigation and some landscape supplies as well, but there are areas that we don't even touch. Does that mean we'll start selling John Deere equipment? No, but there are probably some synergies we can take advantage of."

Neither Zusmann nor Werning thought this deal necessarily signaled the start of a trend of manufacturers moving into distribution. "The problem for any manufacturer that moves into dedicated distribution is that their philosophy is usually contrary to the idea of being the one source for all of your customers' needs," Zusmann observed. "We have customers out there who will use Rain Bird products forever, just as we do for Hunter and the other irrigation companies. If a manufacturer tries to move into distribution then it immediately puts itself in the position of not being able to serve the larger customer base."

At the same time, Zusmann sees the benefits of John Deere participating in distributor's relationship with customers. "Deere sees the contractors once every time they need a big equipment purchase, but we're touching the customers much more regularly than that," he pointed out. – Bob West 

HELP WITH 'HELP WANTED' ADS

Desperately Seeking Labor

Imagine this scenario if you can: At your weekly management meeting, the sales manager confirms that your company has won the prestigious new commercial contract everyone had been hoping for, and you start on the property in three weeks. Now, all you need are the laborers to do the work. So your maintenance manager places a 'Help Wanted' ad in the local paper, a bumper crop of applicants show up for the interviews, you hire the ones you want and go to work.

Sound like something out of a best-selling fiction novel? Well, this can be reality, according to Marty Grunder, president, Grunder's Landscaping, Miamisburg, Ohio.

The key for Grunder has been the content of the 'Help Wanted' ads his company places. Here is an example of one Grunder ran for a manager:

Director of Maintenance Services

Lazy, obnoxious slob needed to serve as director of maintenance services for national award winning company. Ideal candidate must not be able to chew gum and walk at the same time nor be able to tell the difference between taxus and taxes. We are also looking for someone who thinks Bradford pears are excellent trees and likes Canadian thistle.

This is a salaried, management position that comes with full benefits. Sense of humor required.

Please forward resume to ...

"I have the philosophy that a lot of times you have to be different from everyone else," Grunder explained. "What we were doing with our ads wasn't working, and I wanted a way to advertise that might create some interest."

Grunder looks for his company's marketing or advertising to meet at least two out of three criteria - being fun, cheap or different. "The 'Help Wanted' ads met all three criteria," he pointed out. "And I think people

notice the ad more because if you're reading ad after ad you keep seeing the same things, like 'experienced,' 'self starter,' and 'salary commensurate with experience.' We're saying the same thing, but we're saying it differently."

Other contractors borrowed Grunder's approach. Rich Beebe, president, Beebe Landscape Services, East Windsor, Conn., hired a new bookkeeper from an ad that described a position that didn't require bank reconciliation, good attendance, basic accounting principals or organizational skills. "I wanted to try this approach because all of the other ads in the paper look the same," he explained. "I also wanted to have some fun and let people know that we're a fun company to work for."

Beebe's bookkeeper ad generated nearly 60 inquiries and at least 30 resumes, and despite some reservations his managers had about the ad, Beebe plans on using the technique again. "We had one person who responded and actually thought we were serious about the ad," he recalled. "We'd definitely do this again because people don't expect to see something like that. Our ad was certainly out of character for our business in general."

"People said they had to read the ad twice in order to understand it, but then they thought this seemed like a fun place to work," continued Beebe.

Both Beebe and Grunder worried that the ad was too unique and could negatively impact the business. "Occasionally, one of our ads will make some folks uncomfortable, so I think it helps to be a cocky or confident person to do something like this," acknowledged Grunder. "Our ads in the past were more conventional, but we always included the line 'sense of humor required,' and that gave me confidence to do this."

Grunder's unconventional approach carries throughout the company's recruiting efforts. For example, you won't see simple 'Help Wanted' signs in front of Grunder Landscaping's offices. Instead, the company's 3-foot by 5-foot, stand-up sign encourages passers by to 'Get paid to get in shape. Apply now!' or 'Get paid to have fun!' The company even received tremendous publicity because of the sign when the local news channel did a story on it.

Grunder said the key to developing successful ads is thinking of the perfect person to fill a position and developing an ad that will attract them. "This isn't rocket science," he asserted, explaining how a contractor he knows runs ads for crew members in Spanish because he's looking to hire immigrant labor. "If you want Hispanic employees, why run an ad in English?"

Of course, there are no guarantees. "Our success attracting employees comes from the combination of taking a chance and working hard enough at recruiting," Beebe related. "You need to have the right company culture to pull this off, and that means you're a serious company that also likes to have fun." - Bob West

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Environmental

Forum

Stepping Up to the Plate

A New York State law signed with much fanfare last August by Governor George Pataki has resulted in only three counties—Suffolk, Nassau and Westchester—preparing to adopt a law requiring neighbors to be notified 48 hours before pesticides are applied within 150 feet of their properties. A key provision of the legislation requires each county to hold a public hearing before voting to adopt the law with no modifications.

Thankfully, one of the reasons for the lack of county response is a coalition of green industry and agriculture interest groups and organizations working together to

inform county legislators of this burdensome law's inappropriate nature.

TAKING ACTION. In an effort to assist the regulated community, Responsible Industry for a Sound Environment (RISE) organized a workshop on the neighbor notification legislation in early November at the New York State Turfgrass Association's annual meeting. The workshop was moderated by myself and included presentations on the proposed rule by New York's Department of Environmental Conservation, a discussion on how county government works to pass laws by RISE lobbyist Barbara Ahern and discussions by the New

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Environmental Forum

York State Farm Bureau, lawn care companies and state association executives on tactics and talking points to educate and inform the industry about the legislation. Key strategies to consider include:

- Contact county legislators by phone, letter or in person to discuss the legislation's impact on landscape contractors and their customers. Some contractors have surveyed customers and found they don't support the legislation.

- Discuss alternatives to the legislation such as a voluntary registry for those who want to be notified.

- Discuss implications and costs to the county if it adopts the law.

The session concluded with a discussion on how to keep people aware of county activity so the industry can be part of the legislative process and stop additional counties from adopting the law.

With the assistance of RISE, a statewide notification mechanism called County Watch has been set up in New York to monitor county legislative agendas and communi-

cate regularly with coalition members. The group held a follow-up meeting in December to review progress, share experiences and prioritize which of New York's 62 counties to target.

The group is becoming aware that there is strength in working together and is encouraged that the agricultural community, while not currently impacted, is willing to join the green industry in opposing adoption of neighbor notification laws.

We have learned the value of engaging the customer base in the debate by making them aware of the proposed legislation and the impact it will have on them. Many customers have even called and/or visited their county legislators to express their displeasure with the law.

Customers are an untapped ally our industry needs to engage when key issues impact them as well as contractors.

Another lesson has been the realization that there are no negatives for politicians voting for laws detrimental to the green industry. Activists are often able to make poli-

ticians pay a cost for opposing their views. They issue press releases that criticize those who don't support them or work to oppose them at election time. We must find ways to neutralize these impacts by creating an equal "cost" to politicians not willing to consider industry positions.

Once there is equality on both sides, perhaps the debate will return to the merits and science of the issues.

The green industry has its work cut out for it in dealing with the neighbor notification law. Continuing to be involved at the local level is essential and is no longer something that only others can do. Everyone needs to be engaged in this issue to protect their business and their future. — Fred Langley

The author is State Government Relations Manager for RISE. For more information on this legislation and how to voice your concerns, contact John Boltz at 518/371-2790; Don Burton, New York State Lawn Care Association at 716/494-1466; or Mike Maffei at 518/783-1229 or 914/279-7179.

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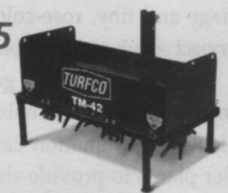
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USE READER SERVICE #17

Nursery Market Report

NEW VARIETIES

Think Spring

There may be snow on the ground and a chill in the air, but plant introductions for spring 2001 have already arrived. The season promises to offer landscape contractors plenty of innovative varieties for creating exciting designs.

Specializing in the new and unusual, EuroAmerican Propagators, Bonsall, Calif., introduced bold varieties that perform well in most USDA zones. EuroAmerican also identified market trends and introduces plants to fill these needs.

One such trend is that landscape designers consider foliage color and pattern just as important as bloom color, size or shape when selecting material for beds. As a result, EuroAmerican has introduced several new plants that offer unusual foliage patterns and colors.

'Oriental Limelight' has lemon yellow and green variegated foliage. Its mounding, self-branching habit makes a suitable companion for flowering plants in pots and flower beds from spring until fall. The plants will survive the winter in USDA zones 5 and warmer.

'Amethyst Lights' is a heat-loving variety with variegated foliage in green, white and pink. Two-tone pink flowers appear in late summer.

'Golden Lining' offers yellow and green variegated foliage and tiny, rose-colored flowers. It grows as a low, compact shrub in mixed planters and beds.

'Illumination' offers golden yellow foliage with green margins and a trailing habit. It prefers partial shade, but in a planter, 'Illumination' can be placed in full sun if there are taller plants to provide shade. The plant is frost hardy in USDA zones 4 and warmer.

Beyond these foliage plants, EuroAmerican has added a new line of *Diascias* that are more heat tolerant than previous introductions. 'Coral Belle' has delicate, coral pink flowers, lush foliage and medium growth vigor. 'Little Charmer' is the most compact variety and has pink flowers and low-growing foliage. Finally, 'Red Ace' is the most vigorous grower of all three. The plant has vibrant red flowers and a semitrailing growth habit.

In the Dandenong Daisy line, 'Pink' has pastel pink flowers displayed above compact, lush foliage. While the plant's bloom cycle peaks in spring, it also continues well into summer.

In the Festival series, 'Royal Festival' Gypsophila has large, white flowers and a compact growth habit. Festival

Dimorphotheca Dandenong Daisy 'Pink' (right) has pastel pink flowers and compact foliage. Its bloom cycle peaks in spring and continues well into summer.

Lantana 'Lavender Popcorn' (lower right) has lavender-hued flowers that die back. Long seed pods then appear with small, round, bright pink seeds the size of popcorn kernels.

Photos: EuroAmerican Propagators



Gypsophilas are frost hardy and grow best in full-sun locations.

'Laguna Blue' and 'Tioga Blue' Lobelias are heat tolerant, vigorous growers. 'Laguna Blue' has cornflower blue flowers, and 'Tioga Blue's' blooms are sky blue.

In the EuroSelect line, 'Summer Pink' is a new marguerite daisy with pastel pink blooms displayed over compact, silver-green foliage. High light levels and cool temperatures improve the plant's color intensity.

'New Light Lavender' is a heat lover with light lavender flowers and lush, shiny foliage. This new *Cuphea* variety thrives as the summer temperatures rise.

'New Gold Flash' Lotus has an extended bloom period and vibrant orange and red blooms. As long as night temperatures stay below 68 to 70 degrees Fahrenheit, the blooms appear in abundance.

In the Springstar collection, 'Aurora' has large, magenta blooms and a compact growth habit. It is suitable for both flower beds and patio planters.

Part of the Athens Select line of heat-tolerant plants, 'Lavender Popcorn' is a new Lantana with lavender flowers that die back. Then long seed pods appear with small, round, bright pink seeds the size of popcorn kernels.

'Athens Blue Spires' is a heat-tolerant rosemary with unusually soft leaves. The plant can grow up to 5 feet tall in USDA zones 7 and warmer.

'Susan's Song' is an attractive *Ranunculus* variety with variegated foliage, yellow flowers and a tolerance to heat and humidity.

'Blue Shade Ground Hugger' is a creeping *Ruellia* that covers the ground with blue flowers and has dark green foliage. — Ali Cybulski

Design Notebook

Design Notes



Scott Byron & Company was commissioned to redesign the landscape plan for Casa del Sueno, a 1929 palazzo situated on 10 lakefront acres in the resort community of Lake Geneva, Wis. At the time, the estate, whose name means "house of dreams," was undergoing extensive expansion and renovation.

DESIGN CHALLENGES. When the owners of Casa del Sueno began to redesign their vacation estate, they employed landscape architects Scott Byron & Co. (SBC) to create an ambiance of beauty, natural surroundings and privacy. In order to achieve these design goals, the architects needed to identify and correct the natural and man-made problems that existed on the property.

A land survey located natural springs below a concrete basin in the hillside 10 feet above the lake. Other springs on the property were found to be the source of flooding in the guesthouse. Given the natural flow of the rainwater, soil was carried and deposited on the tennis court.

Redevelopment of the historical residence created another drainage problem when the construction of an L-shaped addition to the main house interrupted the natural drainage from the house to the lake. In addition, the owners wanted to maintain the natural landscape while constructing new drive

PROJECT:	Casa del Sueno
LANDSCAPE COMPANY:	Scott Byron & Company, Lake Bluff, Illinois
DESIGNERS:	Tom Selinger, Scott Byron
PROJECT MANAGER:	Mike Drangines
PROPERTY SIZE:	10 acres
PROJECT TIME:	3 years
PLANTS INSTALLED:	Hosta, Astilbe, Hydrangea, flowering crab trees, hawthorns, Juneberries, redbuds, crab apples, Hyacinths and daffodils, boxwood, honey locust and flowering pear trees
AWARDS:	ALCA Environmental Improvement Gold Award
PROJECT COST:	Not Available

courts, fountains, a new tennis court and swimming pool, as well as creating multiple terraces joined by grass walkways that would be aesthetically pleasing on the property.

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USE READER SERVICE #18

Design Notebook

DESIGN SOLUTIONS. SBC took advantage of a natural option to solve the drainage problems from the storm water runoff and accumulation of onsite spring water. A grotto was designed and built into the slope in a natural open area 10 feet above the lake. The recently discovered concrete basin became the foundation of a bowl constructed of 450 tons of northern Wisconsin outcropping stone slabs to hold the soil in place. This stone pool in the center of the grotto has a lake view on one side and now functions as the main water collection point on the property.

Redbuds, crab apples, hawthorns and Juneberries form the structure planting creating a serene stone room that includes a bridge, seating area, shrubs, pe-

The stone pool in the center of the grotto has a lake view on one side and now functions as the main water feature. Photo: SBC



rennials and aquatic plantings. The planting of a honey locust tree visually separates the grotto from the house, and 3,000 hyacinth and daffodil bulbs bring a spring explosion of scent and color. With the addition of pumps and pipes, SBC created flowing waterfalls, which added soft sounds to the seductive retreat.

The design of the property creates a number of distinct spaces. A series of paths forms a strong axis linking rooms with other rooms

waiting in surprise, thus leading visitors from one experience to another through the outdoor rooms.

And the paths feature variety: lawn walkways with a drainage system underneath to keep them firm; steppers in the lawn itself; crushed gravel paths held in place by steel edging; and flagstone paths. The

pool area – including the swimming pool, spa, and fountain – incorporates Colorado stone to complement the Spanish terracotta tile roof. On the croquet court, a bentgrass lawn covers the underlying drainage system, with seating areas and perennials on the sides.

A quarter-mile winding entry drive bordered by a brick curb and a drive court with lush plantings greets guests. Plantings of Norway spruce separate the tennis court area from other areas. The tennis area also includes an Adirondack-style arbor with vines and contains a shade garden filled with Hosta, Astilbe and Hydrangea.

Casa del Sueno now serves as the secluded paradise that the owners envisioned when renovation began. The project took more than three years to complete, but the enjoyment and beauty derived from this carefully-designed and detailed plan will last for years to come. – Amy Faulk **LL**

The author is a public relations and promotional marketing consultant for Scott Byron & Co., Lake Bluff, Ill.



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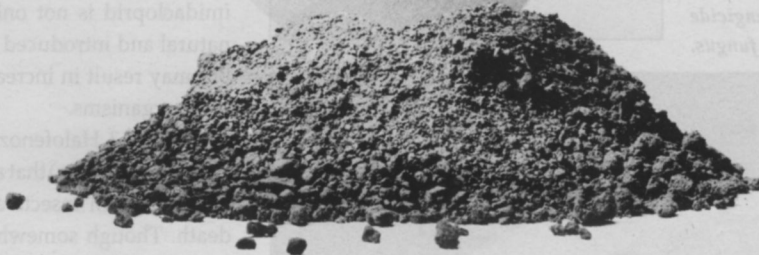
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Mixing Control Methods

Until recently, chemical and biological approaches to insect control were generally considered incompatible because many insecticides, fungicides and herbicides had at least some detrimental effect on natural controls such as: predators (spiders, mites, ground beetles, big-eyed bugs, etc.); parasites (wasps and flies); and pathogens (bacteria, fungi, nematodes). Supplemental introductions of these natural agents (biological controls) were also, to varying degrees, negatively impacted by some pesticides.

*Big-eyed bugs are important predators of chinch bugs and other turfgrass insects (right). To obtain maximum efficacy from *Beauveria* fungus application, which is what the white grub is infected with below, keep the turf thatch and soil moist for one week to 10 days after application. But remember, fungicide applications destroy this fungus.*



Nematodes, such as *Steinernema carpocapsae* (what the Japanese beetle is infected with, left), can be effective biological control agents because they are not harmful to plants. *S. carpocapsae* is the most commonly produced nematode species and is useful for control of cutworms, sod webworms, billbugs and fleas.

Recent research on the impact of the chloronicotinyl insecticide, imidacloprid, and a bisachlylhydrazine, halofenozide, on natural or biological agents has opened the door to integrating chemical, natural and introduced biological control.

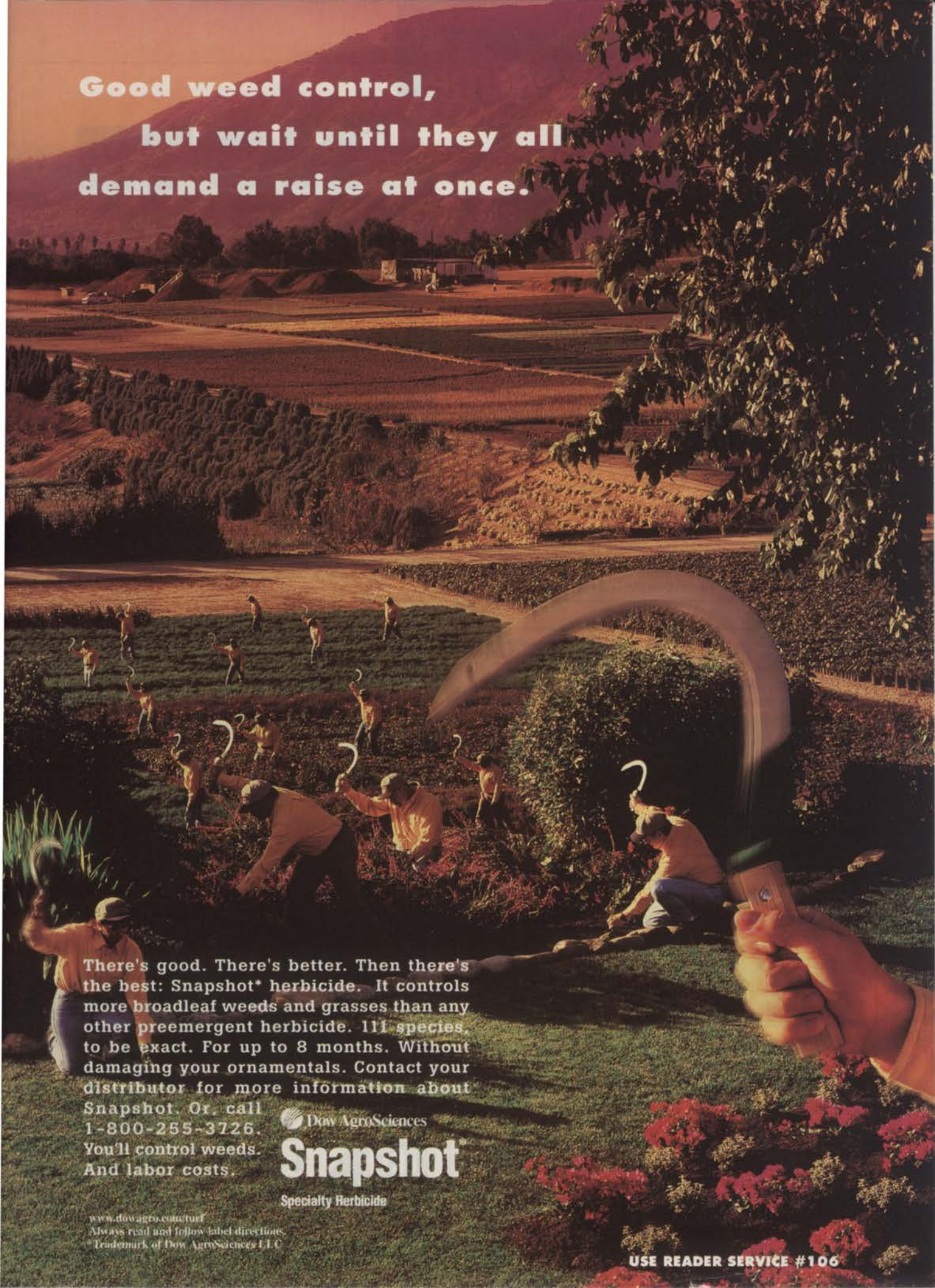
Example 1. Imidacloprid is systemic and primarily toxic to insects that ingest treated thatch or soil, plant parts or fluids. Insect predators and parasites do not feed on plant parts or thatch and soil, therefore, are not killed. Furthermore, recent research has confirmed that once ingested, the insecticide modifies the behavior of the pest to the extent that it loses its

ability to defend against natural or introduced enemies. This effect is now being called "synergistic."

Considering the 120-day half-life of imidacloprid in soil, this synergistic effect will affect any susceptible pest that occurs throughout the turf growing season. We think further research will show that imidacloprid is not only compatible with natural and introduced biological controls, but may result in increased populations of these organisms.

Example 2. Halofenozide is an IGR (Insect Growth Regulator) that accelerates the molting process in insects and thereby causes death. Though somewhat systemic, ingestion of treated soil or thatch (with a half-life of 100+ days) and other plant parts is apparently the primary mode of action. Recent studies in Kentucky showed that halofenozide caused no reduction in the abundance of any beneficial invertebrates. Additional research in Indiana indicated that application of this IGR does not inhibit or kill insect parasitic nematodes, but synergism has not been demonstrated. ■

Insect I.D. features excerpts from Destructive Turf Insects by The Ohio State University entomologists Harry Niemczyk and David Shetlar. For information on the book, call 800/456-0707 or check out the ad on page 179.



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In Minor's League

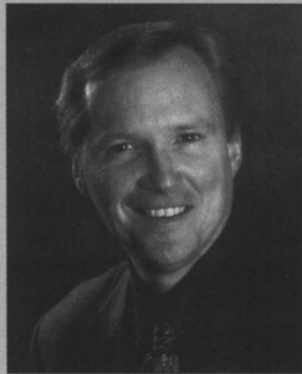
I am a landscape contractor looking to expand my business into other markets. What things should I consider before taking this next step?

This is a common scenario and dilemma encountered by many entrepreneurial ventures. You've built a good landscape business and now you're ready for the next step. Geographic expansion is usually the first thought entrepreneurs have when considering growing their businesses. Before taking that big leap, however, there are plenty of issues to consider and many points to think about that may not make this step seem so attractive for your company at this time.

For example, ask yourself: Are you absolutely sure you want the headaches associated with geographic expansion? There are many ways to grow your business and maintain quality of life without moving into different markets. Venturing into different markets usually means more time away from home or more time driving in your

Editor's

NOTE

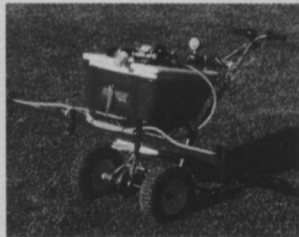


In addition to serving the industry as a consultant and speaker, David Minor is the William M. Dickey Entrepreneur in Residence and director of the James A. Ryffel Center for Entrepreneurial Studies at Texas Christian University in Fort Worth, Texas. Prior to joining TCU,

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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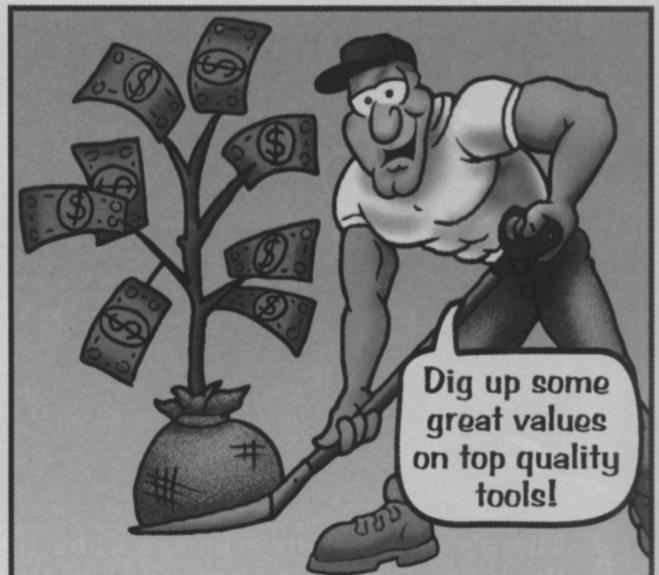


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USE READER SERVICE #22

In Minor's League

car. If you have a spouse and children, remember, there will be a trade off. Ask yourself if the appeal of a multi-site business is worth the time away from home. If having balance in your life is important, know that you will increase the challenges associated with maintaining that balance if you're always on the road. Only you can make that type of quality of life decision.

Plus, there are many other effective ways to grow your business that may be attractive options. Before opening new offices you might want to consider growing your revenue through the addition of a new product or service. For example, if you provide landscape maintenance services, you would obviously want to consider construction, design/build, irrigation or Christmas decorating as potential add-on options.

Another option is to expand your customer base. If you provide services for multi-family communities, look at corporate customers, homeowners' associations or even single-family residential work.

The other obvious way to grow is to sim-

ply improve and/or expand your marketing efforts. Many companies want to open up new branches when they have not yet maximized the potential in their existing markets. Even a business with \$3 million in annual revenue in a major market has a long way to go before exploring different markets. Why add to your headaches until you're sure you've reached your potential?

I should also mention the importance of maintaining your bottom line before branching out. Too often, I see companies with low operating margins try to increase their overall profits by expanding. Why not just improve your systems and grow the bottom line instead of just focusing on top line growth?

Improving your service delivery systems and financial controls is usually a better place to start than opening new offices. It may not be as "sexy" as owning a multi-site operation, but this approach to growth often comes

with fewer headaches, travel and risk.

If expanding your business into other markets is part of your company's growth

Geographic expansion is the first thought entrepreneurs have when considering growing their businesses. Before taking that big leap, however, there are plenty of issues to consider.

plan, first conduct a thoughtful evaluation of your current situation before tackling that next big entrepreneurial challenge. Certainly, there are many good reasons to grow by branching out, adding products and services, expanding your customer base and improving marketing tactics. Just remember to do it when you are truly prepared and for the right reasons. **LL**



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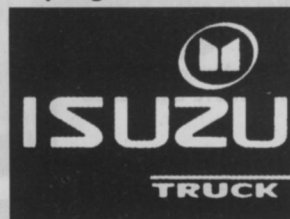
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USE READER SERVICE #23

Minding Your

Business



Everything's Relative

Smaller, family-owned and operated businesses come with their own distinct set of challenges. As the president of a third-generation landscape maintenance company, Art Kimicata Jr., knows this well.

Kimicata, whose company, Kimicata Brothers, Pittsburgh, Pa., was established in 1929 by his father and uncle, has always been careful to keep family and business matters separate – to name one tricky issue family operations contend with.

Since he joined the family enterprise 30 years ago,

Kimicata has always been careful to maintain a clear distinction between business and family. He observed this rule with his father, Arthur, as well as with his son, Paul, who entered the business in 1988.

For the sake of setting up healthy boundaries, "being 'father and son' is separate from the business relationship," he said, adding that even when he goes out to lunch with his son during the work day, they take a break from their landscape preoccupations and just talk about sports.

(continued on page 43)

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weed problem?***

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Monsanto scientists used scanning-electron microscopy to photograph the effects of weeds sprayed with Roundup Pro and an imitator. Taken just one hour after application, these images clearly show more formulation in the leaf sprayed with Roundup Pro.

Get Roundup Pro[®] herbicide with patented PROformance[™] technology.

In the first two hours, it delivers three times more power to the roots than Glypro Plus[™] herbicide.

The proof is in the roots.²

Scientists also used autoradiography to photograph and measure the amount of herbicide in the roots two hours after application. Time after time, at least three times more herbicide showed up in the weeds sprayed with Roundup Pro. With the imitator, barely any herbicide has moved to the roots.

The logo features the word "Roundup" in a bold, black, sans-serif font, with a green leaf-like graphic to its left. Below "Roundup" is the word "PRO" in a larger, bold, blue, sans-serif font. Underneath "PRO" is the word "Herbicide" in a smaller, black, sans-serif font.

Roundup
PRO
Herbicide





This is a cross-section of a weed leaf magnified 1000x. The yellow droplets mean Roundup Pro is already at work inside.

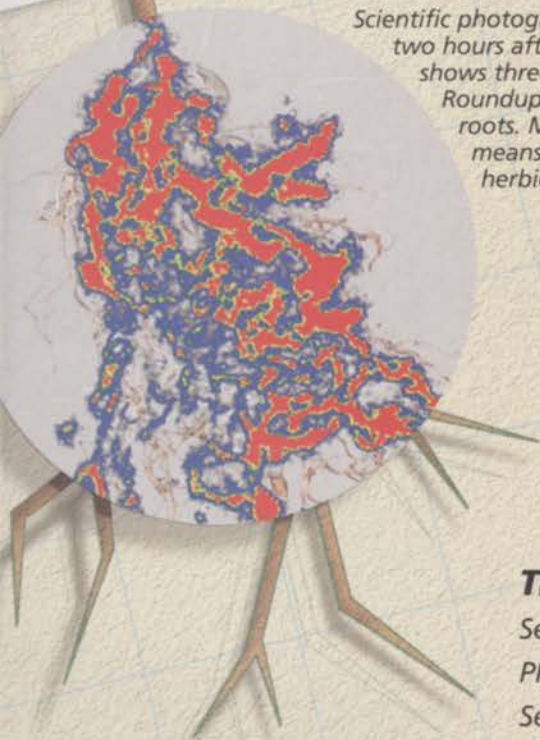
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Herbicide



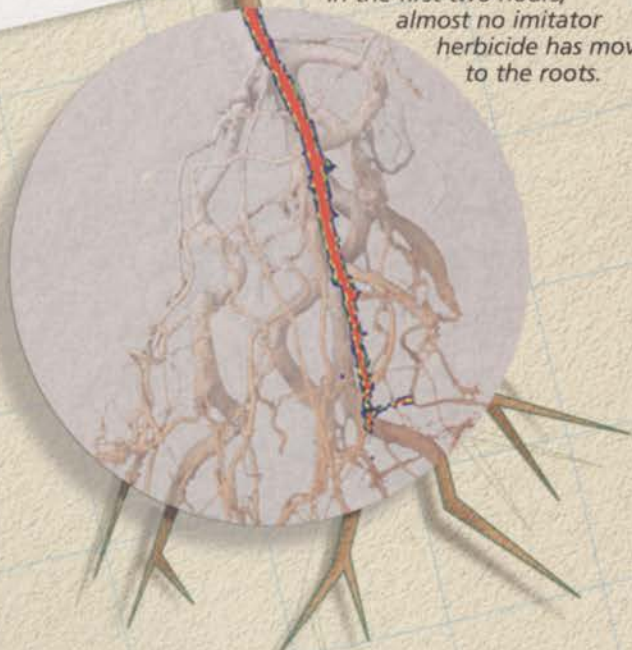
This weed, sprayed with the imitator, has almost no droplets in the leaf.

Glypro Plus

In the first two hours, almost no imitator herbicide has moved to the roots.



Scientific photography taken two hours after application shows three times more Roundup Pro in the roots. More color means more herbicide.



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See PROformance technology at work in a free, five-minute video. Scientists Dr. Tracey Reynolds, Ph.D., and Dr. Jimmy Liu, Ph.D. demonstrate the autoradiography and cryo-SEM techniques used to compare Roundup Pro with Glypro Plus on two identical weeds.

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Minding Your Business

(continued from page 38)

ALL IN THE FAMILY. Another secret to a successful family business is delegating tasks so everyone has their defined roles, according to Kimicata. The minute his son entered the business for example, "he took over the new accounts and I handled our old accounts," Kimicata related.

With two of his four children involved in the business, Kimicata noted that his son and daughter made the conscious decision to join the family landscape operation. "We didn't put any pressure on any of them to go into the business," he said. "The ones that came in, came in voluntarily. There's nothing worse than having a job that you don't want to do."

Bruce Bourassa, president, The Green Co., Danvers, Mass., agreed. Bourassa, who runs his \$2-million, first-generation family company with his brother, Robert, noted that operating a company with family members, in particular, requires a common vision. "You've got to stick with it," he pointed out. "You put in a lot of hours, so you have to like it, enjoy it and share the mindset."

One interesting aspect of a family business is that disagreements are more likely to happen with family members than with unrelated employees. Howard Miller, president, Howard Miller & Sons, Glenside, Pa., has found this to be true. Miller noted that his two sons are more willing to challenge him than his other employees. "I get a little more grief from our sons than from our other employees," he laughed.

Similarly, Bourassa noted that he and his brother are more likely to get into an argument with each other than with other employees. The flip side is that they are more resilient when conflict surfaces. "We'll fight and immediately get back to work and move forward," Bourassa described. "There's always that willingness to continue."

Kimicata added that, at times, he was at odds with his son, Paul, when he first entered the business. When one generation has

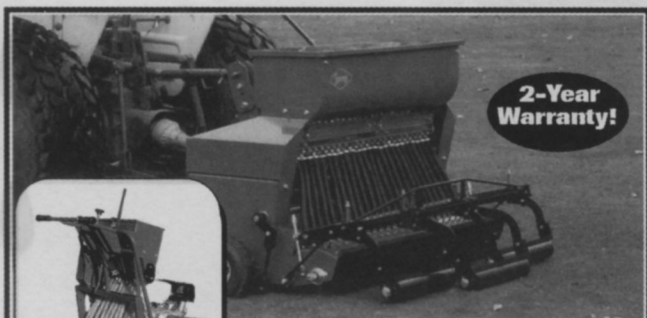
conducted business the same way for years and a new generation tries to come in and change the system, there can be friction, he described. Patience and understanding are the keys to overcoming this, he said.

Having worked with his wife, Dale, since 1988, Richard Edwards, president, Gro-Green, Baton Rouge, La., has learned a thing or two about working with a spouse. From Edwards' standpoint, the most important issue is compatibility: a husband and wife in business together have to have more in common than just marriage. "Make sure you're both suited to the work," he advised. "You have to have the dynamic to work closely together. You both have to contribute."

Separating business from personal issues is always the biggest challenge, Edwards added. "Not 'bringing it home with you' is difficult to learn," he observed.

— Cynthia Greenleaf

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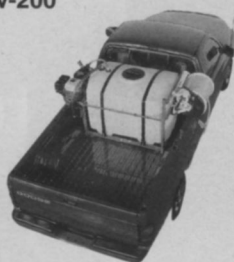
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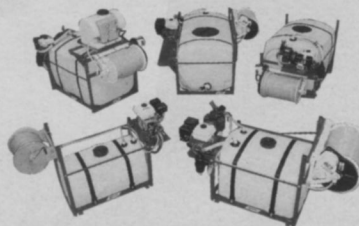
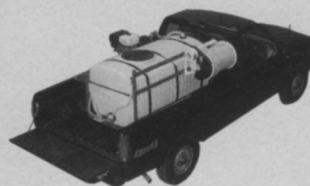
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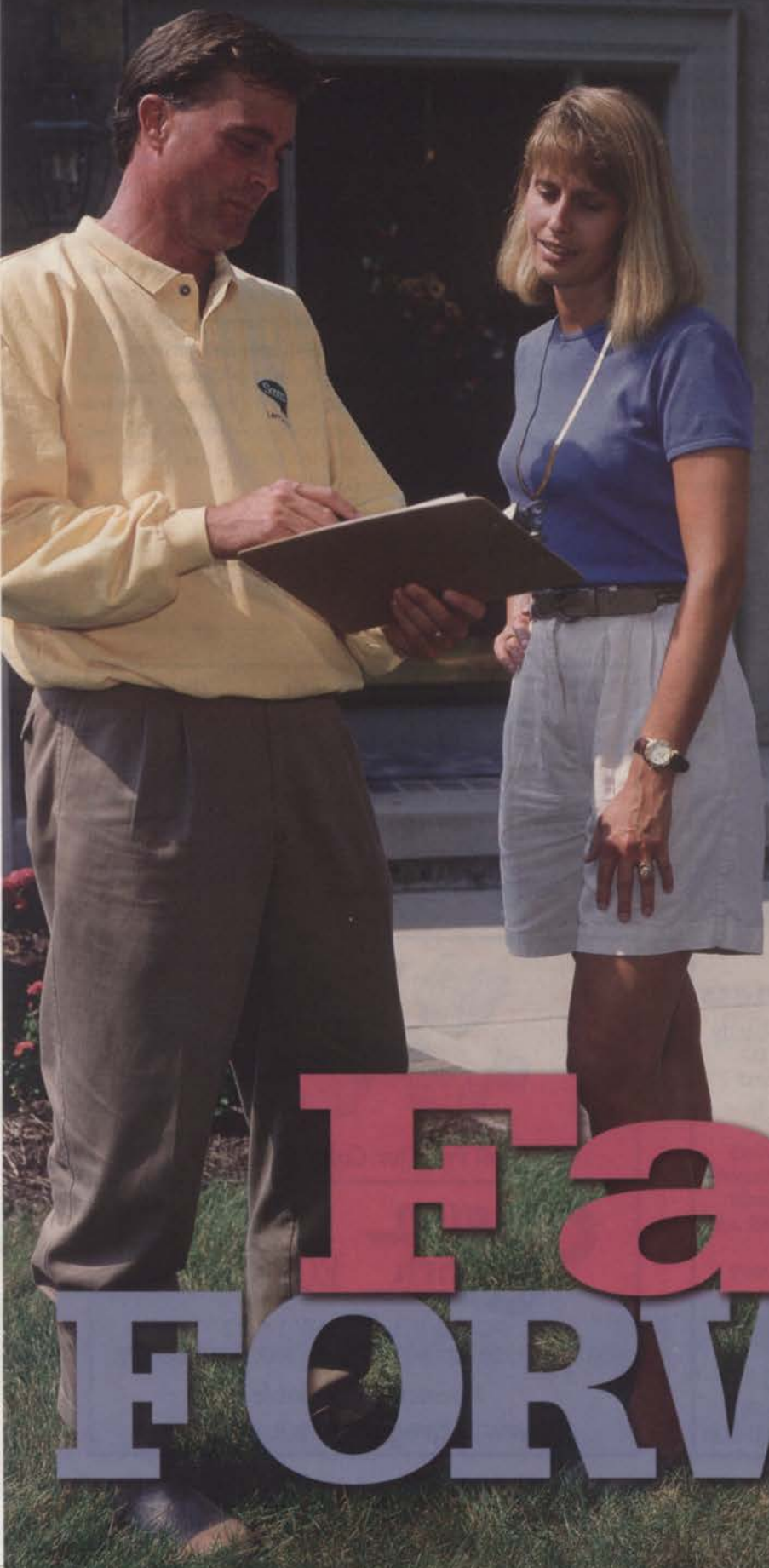
USE READER SERVICE #146

FEBRUARY 2001

43

Cover Story

by Nicole Wisniewski



Paying close attention
to customer service needs
is part of Scotts LawnService's
focused growth plan.

Photo: Tom Dubanowich

Speedy growth

and aggressive

expansion plans

make Scotts

LawnService

a company to watch.

Fast FORWARD

It's been a fast three years at Scotts LawnService.

Since its inception in 1997 via the acquisition of Emerald Green, Indianapolis, Ind., the lawn service division of the Scotts Co., Marysville, Ohio, grew from \$4 million in revenue, to \$7 million in 1998, \$14 million in 1999 and \$21.5 million in 2000, not including franchise location revenue of \$5.5 million, bringing total company revenue to \$27 million in 2000.

Scotts LawnService

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Now that Scotts executive management's anxiety over the ability to take the Scotts brand into the lawn care arena has settled, Scotts LawnService has set aggressive expansion plans. Potentially the next big buyer in the industry, the company is planning to reach \$47 million in 2001, and has hopes for becoming a \$150- to \$200-million business by 2004 through the expansion of its mostly Midwest-based corporate-owned locations across the rest of the United States, according to company Vice President Mark Long.

But aiming for the No. 2 spot in the industry requires planning. With a management team backed by more than 75 cumulative years of lawn care service experience, Scotts LawnService claims to be growing fast the right way.

GETTING INTO THE BUSINESS. The 1997 launch of Scotts LawnService was actually the company's second such attempt.

In the 1970s, Scotts LawnService implemented a test program in three markets: Baltimore, Md.; Hartford, Conn.; and Columbus, Ohio. However, the reaction from the independent retailers, largely hardware stores that sold Scotts products, was not encouraging, Long pointed out.

"They weren't happy that Scotts was selling consumer products through their retail outlets and also entering the service side of the business," Long said. "The fear was that service customers would be the same ones purchasing turf products from hardware stores."

Two years later, Scotts bowed to that pressure, exiting the business.

After researching the differences between do-it-yourselfers and consumers who pay for lawn care services, Scotts attempted once again to start a lawn care business in 1997 (see "Rebirth Through Acquisition" on page 52). But this wasn't without some concern from Scotts executive management, Long said.

"We had to prove ourselves," he explained. "There were people who remembered how Scotts tried this before. But through consumer research, we determined that service users and do-it-yourselfers are two distinct markets. People choose to use a service because of convenience. There is movement back and forth between the groups, but we thought it would be better if we lost do-it-yourself customers to Scotts than to TruGreen-ChemLawn. We had to prove to executive management that we could produce a profitable model - one that wouldn't denigrate the Scotts brand."

(continued on page 48)

SCOTTS LAWNSERVICE

HEADQUARTERS: Marysville, Ohio

FOUNDED: October 1997

BUSINESS SERVICES: 85 percent lawn care, 10 percent tree and shrub care and 5 percent pest control

2000 REVENUE: \$27 million (\$22 million in corporate revenue/\$5 million in franchise revenue)

2001 PROJECTED REVENUE: \$55 million (\$47 million in corporate revenue/\$8 million in franchise revenue)

EMPLOYEES: More than 500 field employees at Scotts' 12 corporate-owned locations

THE PHILOSOPHY

MISSION STATEMENT: To provide uniquely superior lawn, landscape and home service solutions to discriminating consumers who want consistently superior results, the convenience of home service and the confidence of knowing it's Scotts.

FUTURE CHALLENGES: Our primary expansion focus now is on continued growth in existing markets while embarking on a new market expansion program that will put Scotts LawnService in the top 40 lawn care markets by 2004. Also, to build and maintain a staff of dedicated, quality-oriented associates in our field locations across the country.

THE VICE PRESIDENT MARK LONG

BACKGROUND: 18 years of experience with Barefoot Grass. President of New Frontier, a company formed from ex-Barefoot Grass franchises shortly before 1995 after Barefoot Grass was acquired by TruGreen-ChemLawn. Resigned from New Frontier in 1997 to head the lawn service initiative launch of Scotts with the acquisition of a majority control of Emerald Green.

**At a
Glance**

ONE CUSTOMER SAID THE WAVE OF **TRUCKS** AND TRACTORS

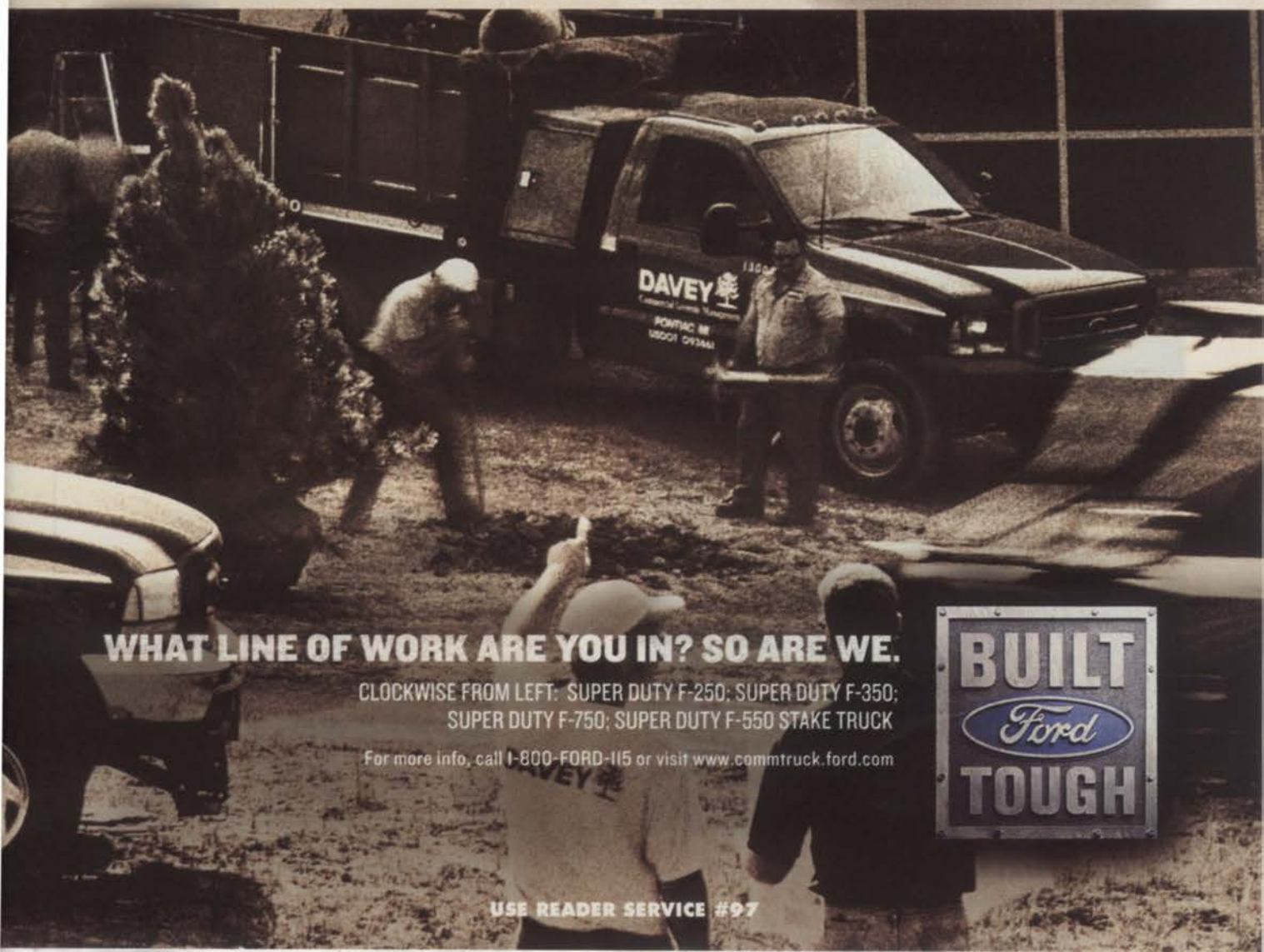


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USE READER SERVICE #97

Cover Story

(continued from page 45)

SHIFTING GOALS. Scotts LawnService's presence in the marketplace is comprised of franchises and corporate-owned locations. With the acquisition of Emerald Green, Scotts gained 25 franchises and six corporate-owned locations, rebranded the businesses and assumed operational control. While there was a solid core of individual franchisees in the mix, some were questionable or had rights to territories Scotts planned to move into with a corporate-owned location. One such area was in Scotts' backyard - Columbus, Ohio.

"If we were going to set up a test - a true organic model that can serve as a template for future Scotts LawnService locations, Columbus was the place to do it," Long said. "So we re-acquired the rights to do business in Columbus from one of the existing Emerald Green franchises."

Growth continued at a fast pace. By the end of fiscal year 2000 (September), Scotts LawnService was up to 12 corporate locations,

(continued on page 50)

Scotts LawnService corporate locations at end of year 2000 (12):

Atlanta, Ga.
Baltimore, Md.
Chicago, Ill.
Cincinnati, Ohio
Burlington, Ky.
Cleveland, Ohio
Columbus, Ohio
Evansville, Ind.
Hagerstown, Md.
Indianapolis, Ind.
Philadelphia, Pa.
St. Louis, Mo.

Augusta, Ga.
Eddington, Maine
Birmingham, Ala.
Bismarck, N.D.
Brainerd, Minn.
Eules, Texas
Fredericksburg, Va.
Greenville, S.C.
Johnson City, Tenn.
Knoxville, Tenn.
Lancaster, Pa.
Louisville, Ky.
Marlboro, N.J.
Myrtle Beach, S.C.
Owensboro, Ky.
Scarborough, Maine
Richmond, Va.
Norwalk, Conn.
Traverse City, Mich.
Westlake, Ohio

New Scotts LawnService franchises so far in 2001 (3):

Battle Creek, Mich.
Orange City, N.Y.
Portsmouth, N.H.

New Scotts LawnService corporate-owned locations opened or opening in 2001 (8):

Chicago, Ill. (second area location)
Dayton, Ohio
Pittsburgh, Pa.
Detroit, Mich. (two locations)
Harrisburg, Pa.
Kansas City, Mo.
South Jersey, N.J.

Scotts LawnService franchise locations at end of year 2000 (21):

Leicester, N.C.

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Cover Story

(continued from page 48)

21 healthy franchise locations and \$27 million.

Due to positive corporate location growth, Scotts primary expansion focus now is on continuing to grow in the existing markets while embarking on a new market expansion program to position Scotts LawnService in the top 40 lawn care markets by 2004. Forecasts for 2001 include corporate revenue of \$47 million and franchise revenue of between \$8 and \$8.5 million, pushing the system-wide revenue over the \$55-million mark.

Companies that fit into Scotts' acquisition plan will be those that have a sound business structure and solid reputation of providing good service, Long said. "We have two ways of expanding into a market - we acquire a business or we go in and start from scratch," he said. "Even integrating small 'mom and pop' operations that have done a good job and have sound customer relationships are good opportunities for us. In such instances, the economics are favorable and the return is quite attractive since we don't

have to replicate their general and administrative costs, such as building rent, office supplies, telephone, etc., because we already have the infrastructure - we just fold those customers into our infrastructure."

Since August of last year, Scotts has acquired 10 companies and has verbal agreements with another eight or nine more. Assuming these deals close, Scotts' core business will have an annualized revenue of nearly \$40 million of its \$47 million 2001 goal, Long said. The rest of the planned growth will stem from new market expansion and franchise income growth.

"The companies we look to buy, though, have to be in line with what we want to accomplish," Long explained. "They have to meet our standards - we don't want to run all over the map. We want our expansion plans to fit an organized, lockstep approach."

This year, the company plans to plant its flag in several additional Midwestern states. Next year, the company wants to tackle the

New England and Eastern seaboard states. Then New York and the Great Plains states are in the forecast. The year 2004 marks the first attempt into southern U.S. expansion for Scotts.

"But just because we have a specific plan doesn't mean we won't take advantage of a good prospect," Long said. "For instance, the Kansas City market was not in our plans for 2001, but an acquisition opportunity presented itself that is a solid company, so we have moved forward with the acquisition. We will modify our planned expansion sequence for opportunities like this."

However, one area that will rest on the back burner is the South. Scotts already has turned down some companies from that region because it wants to strengthen its Ortho pest control service delivery model first. "Many lawn care companies in the deep South do pest control work as well lawn care, so we want to make sure we can address both areas before we move aggressively in the South,"

(continued on page 52)

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USE READER SERVICE #109

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Cover Story

(continued from page 50)

Long said. "We will acquire companies as it makes sense for us. For instance, if I'm faced with the choice of opening a location in Detroit or Tampa today, Detroit makes more sense. Tampa will make sense in 2003 or 2004."

While the company considers its acquisition plans aggressive, "it's aggressive for us, not for TruGreen-ChemLawn," Long said. "Yes, it's fast growth, but it's manageable because we reset our four-year plan annually."

"We go through a disciplined, thorough annual strategic planning cycle," Long continued. "We also are paying close attention to customer service. We confirm that we're headed in the right direction by hiring an independent company to survey our customers and our competitors' customers. We ask them if they are satisfied and compare the customer satisfaction level. We also ask customers what is important to them – an 800-number? Mowing? Knowledge? Competency? Communication? They rank these things and then we use the information to restructure our business to meet their needs. For instance, if a prepay discount is important to them, then we'll offer that."

The company's target customers are high-end residential homeowners, according to Loren Rakich, Scotts LawnService's director of marketing. To narrow this target, Scotts segmented its customer base and profiled typical lawn service users, in addition to conducting market research, Rakich said. The company developed a model from these findings to appeal to a more upscale customer who's willing to pay for a higher level of service, resulting in a customer mix that is 90 percent residential.

"We have not emphasized the commercial market because it doesn't make sense for us, particularly in markets where we can't keep up with the residential demand," Rakich said. "In new markets, we are able to leverage our brand more with residential clients vs. commercial clients."

MARKETING STRATEGIES. The majority of Scotts LawnService marketing efforts are focused at direct mail, "which is 55 percent of leads and 60 percent of sales," Rakich pointed out. "Direct mail gives us a high quality lead mix and rapid sales growth as long as we send out the pieces to the areas where our target users are concentrated."

In the company's early years,

telemarketing was one of its primary marketing tools, but the company is phasing out this approach for a more visual marketing plan. In 1998, 70 percent of the company's marketing was done through telemarketing. In 1999, that figure dropped to 30 percent. The plan for 2001 places telemarketing at an even lower percentage, Rakich remarked.

"Since telemarketing is 25 percent of leads and closes at 15 percent, you have to run over six leads to make a sale," Rakich remarked. "Whereas with direct mail you only have to run two leads to make a sale. So, if you're really up against a seasonality window where you can only hire and train so many people in a short spring period, you want to close as high as possible with the leads that you do receive. We've been able to leverage direct mail and raise our overall closing rate from 25 to 40 percent over time."

"We've been able to improve the effectiveness of our direct mail pieces by tracking every aspect of our marketing campaign, including time it's sent out, responses by category, new

movers, income breakouts, responses within selling window, etc.," Rakich continued. "For example, response-within-selling-window tracking tells us how early or late we can send these pieces out during a selling season and not negatively impact the responses."

Direct mail also works as a means of selling additional services to current customers, Rakich said. "We want to be less intrusive and use less high pressure sales with current customers so we use leave behind reply cards and focused direct mail campaigns."

Although acquisitions are a significant part of Scotts' future plans, the company is not marketing this fact, Long said.

"We don't want to trump up the fact that we're acquiring and then get a bunch of people contacting us in areas that are two and three years ahead in our plans," he explained. "The fact that we're going to be in more locations will naturally market our acquisition plans."

But Long stressed that acquisition isn't the only focus of the company's growth plans.

(continued on page 56)

After the Scotts Co. determined it would make a second attempt to launch a lawn care company as another means of marketing its brand name, there was only one other hurdle to surmount. In the early 1990s, Scotts acquired a small position in Emerald Green, Indianapolis, Ind. Emerald Green, through a trademark agreement with Scotts, was permitted to use the Scotts logo on its trucks and in its advertising, and in return guaranteed Scotts a certain level of product sales. "The agreement was written in such a way that it could and was later argued that Emerald Green had exclusive rights to use the Scotts trademark in the lawn service area," pointed out Scotts LawnService Vice President Mark Long.

While Emerald Green representatives claimed that the arrangement gave them exclusive rights to promote the product in the professional lawn service market, they failed to meet business growth commitments and product purchase agreements, Long said. "Emerald Green's business wasn't well capitalized and wasn't maximizing the power of the brand, so Scotts wanted to find an exit strategy from the trademark agreement so it could enter the lawn service industry unfettered and without the potential of legal issues."

To alleviate the problem, Scotts purchased a majority position in Emerald Green and used this as the platform to launch its lawn care business, and by doing so the trademark agreement was eliminated. "Even though we were sort of forced to make this acquisition to resolve the trademark issue, it worked out well for us," Long said. "The trademark issues were really secondary to the strategic impetus to extend the brand into new categories." – *Nicole Wisniewski*

Rebirth Through Acquisition



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USE READER SERVICE #95

Cover Story

(continued from page 52)

Through a high level of service, Long said Scotts LawnService can grow to \$130 million organically by 2004. "We're not dependent on acquisition to grow. Through our current marketing program, we're paying \$80 or less for a new customer, while the going rate for acquisition is \$250 to \$400 or \$500 per cus-

tomers," he pointed out. "So, in terms of economics, it clearly makes sense to grow through marketing if you can and then take advantage of acquisition opportunities.

"There is a compelling business case to be made about doing acquisitions in cities that you are currently located in because you

don't have to duplicate administrative costs," he continued, pointing out that using acquired businesses as a platform in new locations is wise. "In 2001, for instance, we're expanding into Kansas City, Detroit, Dayton and southern New Jersey by acquiring reputable local companies and using their customer and employee bases as business platforms," Long explained. "To do this correctly, though, the target business has to have left a legacy as a good service provider in that location."

LABOR: THE USUAL SUSPECT. While a company can pick up some solid employees through acquisition, many of them tend to drift away after their company was purchased, noted Bill Hoopes, director of training, development and regulatory affairs for Scotts LawnService. "We'd love to have them and they are welcome to stay, but over time probably two of every three acquired employees leave the company," Hoopes said. "Those that buy into our philosophy stay and do very well - it's a personal choice."

One year ago, Scotts LawnService had approximately 250 employees, but by 2004, it plans to employ more than 2,000 individuals. The challenges: recruiting and retaining these people.

Recruiting employees successfully takes concentration beyond the classifieds, according to Hoopes. Scotts places classified ads, but it also works on generating referrals from current employees and customers and constantly emphasizing the Scotts LawnService image and work benefits, Hoopes said.

Employees are encouraged to recruit people through a referral bonus offer. Payouts to employees who do this successfully vary based on location and level of need. The bonus is split into three parts: an initial payment when the referred employee is hired, a second payment when the employee completes training and the first month of work and a third payment six months after the employee is hired.

"Employees who have been referred by other employees are usually our lowest turnover group," Hoopes explained. "Our intent during hiring is never to make bad hiring decisions. When current employees bring folks in, they tend to tell them what to expect,

(continued on page 58)

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(continued from page 56)

what kind of work we do and whether or not they like doing it. This means by the time they come in for an interview, they know how we work and what they'll be doing and have already accepted that and decided they would enjoy doing it."

Retaining employees is a bit trickier today than ever before, but it's getting better,

Hoopes said. "In an industry where 100 percent turnover is typical, Scotts LawnService maintains at least half of its field employees annually," he said. "Many young people try lawn care as their first career move. We all know it often does not work out. Hiring younger people has a definite negative impact on the turnover rate."

To retain employees effectively, Hoopes said he tries to make better hiring selections by being a people magnet for good employees. "If you promote a quality image internally and live it through your service, current employees will say good things about you," he offered.

The second way the company retains employees is through mandatory training programs. These programs are two-pronged – the first being a 40-hour classroom training week, the second week is in-field training backing up what employees learned in the classroom. Weekly training also is provided in small bits throughout the year.

Each employee's training is verified through four evaluations: a safety test, a comprehensive job skills test, a mandatory compulsory ride check that surveys 20 skill areas and pronounces employee competency in those categories before he or she treats lawns, and then a training summary check sheet with the days the employee was pronounced competent at performing these skills and by whom.

Last year, Scotts spent \$900 per field employee on its training program. The number of employees is expected to nearly double in 2001, Hoopes said.

Employees also are provided with career path development initiatives. This year, Scotts LawnService initiated a program where the company will pick the top 20 percent of its supervisors and those people will attend Management Operations Training School to become branch managers. This three-week program will divide the training between mid-May and late November with topics including branch operation management and leadership.

While obtaining and retaining employees is an industry-wide challenge, Hoopes refuses to believe there aren't enough good workers available. "Throughout the years, lawn care service has turned off employees because of low pay, excessively hard and thankless work, too many hours and lack of focus – meaning employees are doing 14 jobs at once," he said. "At Scotts LawnService, we've changed that. Our people do what they are good at doing. When they succeed, they tend to be more productive and turnover drops." □

The author is Managing Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.

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There are very few corporate names synonymous with "quality," regardless of the industry. Finn's 65 years of experience bringing innovative technologies to the markets it serves has firmly established it as a quality company with quality products.

From seed application to plant installation, Finn products are involved in all phases of lawn and landscape development work. And when you examine these products in light of customer testimonials – phrases like "the machine paid for itself in two years," "we'd be a different type of company today if we hadn't bought this machine," "it does everything they say it does," and "eliminate manpower" – you recognize that Finn products help contractors do more work, do a higher quality job, do it faster and for less money than ever before.

SMARTER WAYS TO

WORK



FINN

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HYDROSEEDING SUCCESS

ONE COULD SAY that Finn understands the keys to successful hydroseeding better than any other company in the world. Finn spearheaded the development of hydroseeding technology in the early 1950s. Finn even owns the trademark on the word "HydroSeeder," and the company has taken the technology to new levels.

"Hydroseeding is the best possible way to seed," noted Patrick Holubetz, sales associate for Finn's erosion control division. "Hydroseeding continues to incorporate new technology, contractors who do it look more professional. And the process combines science with productivity when you're talking about seed-to-soil contact, moisture retention and temperature fluctuation."

A weak labor market combined with

The rapidly growing hydroseeding market should remain strong for years to come.

increasingly sophisticated turf and landscape professionals, as well as technologically stronger machines, has created a rapidly growing hydroseeding market that should remain strong for years to come.

MACHINE DECISION A key characteristic of Finn machines is their construction, according to contractors with experience using the units. Holubetz explained that Finn approaches building HydroSeeders differently than other manufacturers, relying completely on hydraulically driven mechanical agitation systems

and a direct-drive engine, clutch and pump assembly for superior performance in the field.

"About 13 years ago, we went to a hydraulic system to simplify the maintenance while also providing the necessary power for contractors to mix the thickest possible slurry," he noted. "To make these thick slurries, you need independent operation with the pump separate from the agitation. The alternative is a jet agitated machine that works on more of a hot tub principle, drawing water from the bottom of the tank and shooting it back in on the



"The Future of GROWING GRASS"

ANYONE WHO uses a HydroSeeder would like to work more quickly, but veteran hydroseeders also recognize that *what you put down on the soil is every bit as important as how you put it down.*

Finn's response has been development of a new Additive System, designed for use in HydroSeeders for quicker seed germination and turf development. "We've taken science from the golf course industry and adopted it for use in HydroSeeders for an optimized one-step application," explained Al Schrand, product manager for Finn. "By spraying the seed, mulch, tackifier, along with three or four other products, we get incredible results that we've never seen before. This is the future of growing grass."

There are various types of HydroSeeder Additives for contractors to consider, including:

- **Soil amendments** – retain nutrients and moisture; also give the soil a negative charge so germinating seeds find nearby food sources.
- **Finn MB microbial bacteria** – disturbed soils and reclamation jobs often present soil with little to no organic material. This bacteria brings soil to life with hydroseeding, converting soil elements into plant-available nutrients through enzyme activity.
- **HydroGel** – a polymer that is good for non-irrigated areas. It holds moisture up to 500 percent of its own size and weight for quicker

seed germination, and it replenishes itself with rainfall or irrigation.

- **FinnHG** – a liquid biostimulant and nutrient seed dressing to maximize germination, stimulate vigorous and uniform stands of new turf, and develop superior root systems.
- **FinnHST** – a concentrated liquid humic acid designed specifically for use on compacted or sandy soils.
- **HydroStik** – a concentrated, gum-based tackifier that keeps mulch or straw from washing or blowing away.
- **FiberPlus** – a synthetic fiber that helps mulch hold together when applied and helps mulch bond to the soil.
- **StikPlus** – a blended combination of HydroStik and FiberPlus that works with any hydraulic mulch fiber for even the steepest slopes.

These products are suited for a broad range of applications, noted Schrand, pointing out that they've been used on golf courses, residential lawns and the training fields of the National Football League's San Francisco Forty-Niners. "Homeowners have called these additives 'instant lawn,' and we're saving them \$5,000 to \$10,000 depending on the acreage because they can avoid sodding," he explained. "When the homeowner wants a guaranteed lawn, this is what you use. There's still no comparison price-wise with sod because you can make an application with just two or three people."

sides with one pump to mix and spray the material. That jet agitation approach can cause problems by pumping slower, clogging and requiring the user to meter the materials in very slowly."

Finn mid-sized HydroSeeders are powered by a 33½-horsepower, Kubota diesel engine with a direct-drive pump for maximum torque and the capacity to shoot hydraulic mulch up to 180 feet. "The auxiliary drive of the engine runs a hydraulic pump to turn the agitators," Holubetz explained. "Any time you have a closed hydraulic system you'll minimize the necessary maintenance as long as you change the oil every 250 to 500 hours and keep the oil level up."

All Finn HydroSeeders use the same mechanical paddle agitation system with large steel paddles that are hydraulically con-

"If you're seeding without a HydroSeeder then you're not fully equipped."

Johnny Sides

trolled and operate in both forward and reverse directions at variable speeds. "Being able to mix the load in reverse means you can draw all of the material away from the pump for the best circulation," Holubetz noted.

A key feature for any HydroSeeder is its capacity, and Finn offers seven different models ranging from 300 gallons to 3,300 gallons. "A good example of a 300-gallon customer is a cemetery or a park district reseeding plots, parks or sports fields," Holubetz explained. "The 600-gallon unit covers 6,000 to 7,000 square feet per load with one to two loads handling most residential properties. Contractors tend to prefer the 900-gallon model so they can do two or three jobs a day."

MAKING THEM PAY Gary Triick knows all about HydroSeeders. He is vice president of Belmont, Mich.-based Bob Triick & Sons, a company that has been hydroseeding residential and commercial

properties with Finn machines since 1969. His company employs a strategy involving multiple machines to maximize efficiency. "We use different models for different-sized jobs," he explained. "Plus, different properties may need different turf blends. Our HydroSeeders give us a one-step seeding capability that makes our lives much simpler."

Johnny Sides, owner, Sides Seeding and Landscaping, Winston Salem, N.C. puts a 1,500-gallon and a 3,000-gallon unit to work on most days. Both are truck-mounted machines. "A HydroSeeder is good for two things," explained Sides. "They put seed, fertilizer and lime in areas you can't get to with a tractor, such as steep slopes and fill ponds. And they help tacking straw with paper hydromulch so you won't have problems on windy days."

Sides also noted that HydroSeeders have led to a tremendous productivity boom for companies like his. "We used to be lucky to seed three acres a day, but now we've been

Mid-sized HydroSeeders are among the most popular for residential seeding. Finn HydroSeeder Additives help speed results that compete favorably with sod.

Finn HYDROSEEDERS®

- T30 is an entry-level, 300-gallon model that mulches up to 4,000 square feet per load for residential, municipal and similar applications. This unit is generally skid-mounted.
- T60 Series II is a 600-gallon liquid capacity HydroSeeder designed for residential and small commercial jobs. One-man remote hose operation provides maximum flexibility and efficiency.
- The T90 has an 900-gallon liquid capacity with remote hose or tower discharge options.
- The T120 Series II is a gooseneck-style trailer or skid-mounted unit that covers up to one-third of an acre with its 1,200-gallon liquid capacity. Discharge distance is as high as 180 feet.
- The truck-mounted T170 will cover up to one-half of an acre with its 1,700-gallon liquid capacity load and 200-foot discharge distance.
- The T280 and T330 models offer unparalleled success for large-area hydroseeding, such as highway construction work. Load capacity covers up to 1 acre.

known to do 25 acres a day with the same amount of men because of these machines. Doing more is the name of the game."

Sides only uses Finn HydroSeeders. "If you're going to do a first-class seeding job, you need to get a HydroSeeder for those hard-to-reach areas and to do the job right," he asserted. "If you're seeding without a HydroSeeder then you're not fully equipped."



FINN

DON SHARP, product manager for Finn, knows that landscape contractors aren't easily convinced about the value of a new product, particularly if he's talking to company managers or owners who aren't in the field doing the work much anymore. Sharp recalls visiting one contractor in Virginia a few years ago and running into a mindset he sees often.

"I was explaining to this gentleman why he needed this machine for mulch applications, and he told me that he only offers mulch services because he has to in order to land a lot of maintenance accounts," Sharp noted. "In fact, he said he didn't make any money off of mulch work.

"I told him he shouldn't do any work that doesn't generate a profit," Sharp continued. "This individual had to go out of town the next day, but he arranged for me to demonstrate the machine on a job site for one of his foreman. Within 20 minutes of starting the demonstration, this foreman had radioed the company's other foremen to come see what I was doing, and they all got quite excited because they understood what this machine could do for them compared to wheelbarrows."

As a result, the contractor returned to town and was convinced by his employees to purchase the unit. "Today, that company owns four Bark Blowers," Sharp remarked. "We hear the same objections a lot, how people can't afford to buy one of these machines, but the truth is that they can't afford not to buy one. And the dollars are budgeted—they're just under 'man-hours' and not 'equipment purchases.' Bark Blowers make money and free up labor for other work."

Finn BARK BLOWERS™

- Model 302 is a trailer-mounted unit that can be easily loaded by a bucket loader. Applies material at a rate of 15 cubic yards per hour with a two-person team.
- Models 808 and 816 boost the productivity of a two-man crew to more than 20 cubic yards per hour. Comes standard with a 150 feet of hose that can be extended to over 300 feet long.



MAKING SOMETHING OUT OF NOTHING The key to the Bark Blower line is the same principle that brings value to other Finn products—this is a way to work smarter, which equates to working quicker, with fewer people and more profitably.

Jim Kelly, president, Cambridge Landscape, Cambridge, Mass., owns three Bark Blowers, so he understands how these

"We have two men putting down 90 to 120 yards of mulch a day, six days a week with our Bark Blower."

Bill Richards

machines can affect a landscape business in today's labor environment. "The season before we bought our first unit, we had 16 guys applying mulch for eight weeks in the spring," Kelly recalled. "Now, we do that same amount of work with two guys and one truck in the same amount of time. Assuming a 50-hour work week for those 14 guys we replaced, the machine saved us 700 hours in just two months time, and we put those guys to work in other areas to help us grow."

Mike Roberts is production supervisor

for R.B. Stout in Akron, Ohio. He was looking for a better way to mulch large, commercial properties because tying up 20 guys with this work each spring wasn't efficient. "We still do about 4,000 yards of mulch from late March to early June and fit in grounds maintenance starting in early April, but now we service five clients a week instead of just one."

"The key is the speed at which you can apply mulch," commented Bill Richards, president, Hydroseeding Inc., Puyallup, Wash., adding that his company is now using its second Bark Blower. "The faster you put mulch down, the more you put down and the more money you make. We run our Bark Blower six days a week, and we're generally applying 90 to 120 yards of mulch each day."

"Without our Bark Blowers, we wouldn't be as big or profitable as we are today." — Jim Kelly



A NEW SOLUTION

OPERATION BASICS Bark Blowers use air as a carrier to distribute mulch through a hose directly to the desired area. "Applying mulch, even with a machine, takes time, but these machines do more work in a day's time than any mulch crew can do. That's particularly important each spring when everyone wants their mulch applied at the same time," Sharp observed. "A two-person crew with an 8-cubic-yard unit can spread 100 yards of mulch per day. Doing that much work with shovels and wheelbarrows would take a lot of time and really wear employees out."

Sharp and Richards also explained that most crews using a Bark Blower have two or three individuals, with one working the distribution end of the hose and one moving the rest of the hose, which ranges from 150 feet to 400 feet long, around the property. Depending on the capacity of the unit – Finn's models offer an 8-, 16- or 40-cubic-yard capacity – a third person may be on the job with a dump truck or skid-steer to feed the Bark Blower.

"We purchased a separate, 51-foot-long trailer with a walking floor so we can haul an additional 90 yards of mulch out to a job, and that lets us load the Bark Blower in eight to 10 minutes," Richards added.

"The quality of the work isn't a concern because the final appearance is simply a result of the crew's thoroughness,"

Kelly noted, adding that his mulching crews all use hand-hand blowers to clean up after a job. "We keep specific crews on each machine so they get familiar with how it works and how to maintain it."

Roberts agreed with the principle behind a dedicated crew for the machine, saying they'll be most familiar with how to maintain the unit and maximize its efficiency.

MATERIAL MATTERS Another benefit to mechanizing mulch application is equally important – material cost savings. "If you apply 5 yards of mulch by hand to a residential property every year, you could do that same property with a Bark Blower, put down 3 yards and the appearance would be better," Sharp asserted. "When crews put down mulch by hand, they're never going to pick up any extra mulch they've applied. In addition, the machine gives you an even application instead of having mulch 5 inches deep in one spot and ½ inch in another spot."

In fact, Bark Blowers can easily apply the mulch anywhere from a dusting to 4 inches deep. "We have customers saving between 20 and 30 percent on their mulch without sacrificing any appearance," Sharp noted.

"When you apply mulch by hand there is a compaction factor involved, and that's where you're losing time and wasting material and money," Richards explained. "The machine spreads mulch over the area you want to cover and you just work your way across the area starting in a corner making sure the mulch is even."

"We've saved about 30 percent on material costs. That's dollars going directly to the bottom line," Kelly agreed. "We were charging \$50 per yard to do the work, and we are paying \$20 per yard for material. Combine that with our labor on the job and we were losing money. But we had to do it to compete. Now, we're making money on every mulch job we do."

Cambridge Landscape has even expanded its mulch customers, serving residential clients, commercial

clients and many of the college campuses in Massachusetts and New Hampshire. "We've even rented the machine to other contractors or acted as a subcontractor for them," he related.

The remote control system provides added flexibility. "You can easily control the flow of materials so if you are working in a bed and come to an area with a lot of annuals, you can decrease the air flow to avoid damaging or covering the plants," Sharp instructed.

"The machine saved us 700 hours in just two months time, and we put those guys to work in other areas to help us grow." Jim Kelly

Sharp noted that some customers have gone from offering one heavy mulching in the spring to selling two thinner applications over spring and summer. "This is actually better for the plant because too much mulch can be as bad as not enough mulch," he explained. "Some high-end customers even pay for a monthly dusting application so the appearance is maintained regularly."

Some customers have found other ways to put the machine to work, such as applying compost, overseeding sports fields, applying salt to icy areas in the winter or even delivering topsoil to a rooftop garden six stories high. But the key to these Bark Blowers is what they do for a company's core business.

"If we hadn't bought these machines, we would not be as big or as profitable of a company as we are," asserted Kelly.

"We got into bark blowing because we needed to get through our Pacific Northwest winter when we're not hydroseeding," Richards commented. "We were used to running in the red for the first six or seven months of the year because of the winter costs, but our Bark Blowers helped us start out this year in the black, which is a tremendous business advantage."



FINN

THE LABOR SAVER

FINN HAS A HISTORY of building innovative products that don't disappoint customers, which should excite contractors looking to minimize their dependence on labor when it comes to landscape installation, irrigation installation, nursery work and other labor-intensive tasks.

The recently introduced Finn Eagle is a powerful compact skid-steer machine that brings new capabilities to a landscape firm. "These machines are an extension of the full-sized skid-steer loaders. They're not meant to replace those larger machines," explained Dana Ellefson, maintenance division manager. "But the Eagle can get into smaller spaces and still has the same hydraulic flow rate down to the tools that the larger machines offer."

In fact, this hydraulic flow rate is a key differentiating feature between the Eagle and its competitors. Aside from offering the highest flow rate in its class, which equates to more power, the Eagle features a parallel hydraulic system that provides full power simultaneously to all functions. Other machines operate a series hydraulic system that requires flow be taken away from one hydraulic pump to go to another. As a result, the Eagle can provide maximum power to the drive wheels and the working imple-

ment at the same time. The Finn Eagle has a standard oil cooler that helps maintain power output even in hot conditions.

Ellefson said the landscape industry's labor shortage has contributed to demand for these products, although he compared the product category's position in the industry to where skid-steers were 15 years ago. "Back then, everyone wondered what they would use one of those machines for, but people found new uses every day," he observed. "That's what is happening with the Eagle right now. There are about 40

The new Finn Eagle does the same amount of work as two or three people. Plus, it has advanced features that set it apart from similar machines.

The **Finn** EAGLE

- 25-horsepower Kohler Command Pro engine
- 11-gallon fuel tank
- 13.25 gallons per minute of hydraulic flow
- 51-inch dump height with a bucket
- 35½ inches of total unit width
- 650-pound operating capacity
- More than 40 available attachments
- Universal quick-attach faceplate
- Superior ergonomics and operator comfort
- Parallel hydraulic circuits provide full power to all functions simultaneously
- Standard oil cooler



attachments for the Eagle. Plus, we created a universal face plate that fits any standard compact attachment."

Reducing contractors' dependence on labor continues to be one of the Eagle's biggest selling points. Attachments, such as the 10 different augers for planting trees and shrubs, are among the most popular. Others include a trencher, three different buckets, a power box rake, a tiller/rotary hoe, a leveler, adjustable forks and more.

"This machine performs the same amount of work as two or three people," Ellefson remarked, adding that the Eagle offers a quick connect for a hydraulic motor on an attachment that might have one, such as a rotary broom. "That means a company can take a crew of four people, buy two machines and have two, two-person crews doing twice as much work. And there aren't extra people to manage."



Getting ATTACHED

CONTRACTORS WHO have used Finn's Eagle rave about how powerful the machine is and how much more productive they are when they can either replace labor on a job site or continue growing their company without having to hire new employees. They like the smooth controls that make it easy to operate, and how engine heat is channeled away to help keep the operator cooler.

But what really makes the Eagle so valuable to its users is the vast array of tasks they can conquer with its many attachments. "The Eagle can handle augers up to 36 inches wide, with smaller augers available to operate with high speed or high torque for a variety of conditions," explained Dana Ellefson, Finn's maintenance division manager.

Power is an area where the Finn Eagle shines. "We use parallel hydraulic systems instead of a series system that takes power away from the powerhead to operate the rest of the hydraulic features," explained Ellefson. "We also have a quick connect to power any hydraulic motor on an attachment, such as an adjustable rotary broom."

Contractors can utilize more than 40 different attachments, which include:

- Trencher with chain (6-inch or 12-inch)
- Seven standard auger sizes from a 6-inch diameter to a 30-inch diameter
- High-speed/high-torque auger powerhead
- Three tree auger sizes from 18 inches to 30 inches
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- 5-cubic-foot, three-in-one bucket
- 6½-cubic-foot bark/chip bucket
- Power box rake
- Tiller/rotary hoe
- Hydraulic tilt blade
- Leveler
- Adjustable forks
- Hydraulic tree forks
- Tow bar
- Jib hoist
- Ripper
- Scarifier
- Pole driver
- Hydraulic breaker
- Snow blower
- Rotary broom



People who have incorporated an Eagle into their operations report additional labor benefits, such as reduced strain on employees who can now use the machine to do heavy lifting or moving of plants. "Mechanizing heavy work is smart and helps laborers perform better throughout the day," Ellefson added.

A machine like the Eagle is another example of Finn's commitment to providing equipment that saves labor and increases profits. "When people sit down and think about the numbers involved, it's easy to calculate the actual savings the machine will deliver," Ellefson explained. "You can hire someone to do the work and pay them year after year, or you can buy a machine to do the work and spend that money just once. You can see that the machine will pay for itself in a year or two, so there's a definite economic benefit that makes good bottom-line sense."

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Johnny Sides is the owner of Sides Seeding and Landscaping, Winston Salem, N.C., and he puts his Finn Straw Blowers to work on nearly every one of his hydroseeding jobs. Since his firm has been known to hydroseed as much as 25 acres a day, that means his straw blowers need to be durable, and Sides said they are.

"These machines do what we need them to do, which is blow straw a long way, plus they just keep on working," he attested. "They are also very easy to maintain. They've got a couple of grease points and fluid levels that need to be checked regularly, and you need to keep the radiators clean. Then you keep on working."

Finn Straw Blowers have been an industry standard since the 1950s. Each machine's flail chain system beats the straw instead of cutting it, maintaining the integrity of the straw length, which allows it to feather together nicely and form a stable straw matrix on freshly seeding ground. "These machines distribute a nice, even coat of straw," pointed out

Patrick Holubetz, Finn sales associate. "The reduction of wet clumpy material means the seed won't be obstructed from proper germination. Plus, when the straw is blown in such a uniform pattern, it gives a nice, professional, finished look to residential and commercial jobs."

Finn offers clients three Straw Blower models: the B-40, B-70 and B-260. The B-40 is an entry-level machine with a 20-hp Kohler gas engine and is rated at two to three bales per minute with a discharge of about 45 feet. The B-70 is a mid-sized machine with a 33.5-hp Kubota diesel engine, and is rated at 7 tons per hour with a discharge distance of about 70 feet. Finally, the B-260, the largest machine of its kind, is rated at 20 tons per hour with

a discharge distance of 100 feet. It is equipped with a fully automatic hydraulic feed conveyor and a 115-hp John Deere turbo engine.

"These machines are low maintenance, cost-effective and efficient," Holubetz explained. "Any one of them, as long as it is well-maintained, is bullet-proof and will last any contractor years and years."



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by Kristen Hampshire

A medley of annuals and perennials creates an aesthetic arrangement.

Flower POWER!

An attractive display of annuals and perennials can extend a homeowner's living space into the outdoors — various colors, textures, sizes and inventive plantings creating accessories to decorate an exterior living room.

"You can really create a mood with your plant selection," noted Judd Griggs, vice president of operations, Smallwood Design Group, Naples, Fla.

The desire for an aesthetically pleasing landscape drives many residential and commercial clients to explore annual and perennial installation, he observed. Infused with garden magazines, consumers are more aware of planting possibilities and are stretching their imaginations. "Their level of interest and understanding is higher, and they're really demanding more unique things," Griggs noticed.

"Annuals and perennials have become a really hot topic on the residential side, and it's a way to please your clients," he added. "On the commercial side, I'm seeing clients use color on a competitive basis to attract more shoppers. At the office level, they feel that color will attract more tenants and allow them to charge higher lease rates. And corporate clients use the plants to create a nice working environment for their employees."

More clients are calling for innovative annual and perennial plantings, producing an easy-sell installation for contractors.

COST AND CARE. Certainly, customers will not find a shortage in plant variety, with countless annual colors

and boundless perennial blooms available to mix, match and mold a desirable landscape. However, though clients might be willing to step outside the traditional design box, contractors should take measures to understand a client's expectations.

Rick Christensen, landscape division manager, Teufel Nursery, Portland, Ore., suggested showing customers color photographs of the annuals and perennials they are considering for their landscape so there aren't any surprises after the installation is complete.

Creative annual and perennial plantings are breaking traditional bed barriers as clients demand new designs.



Annuals & Perennials

"The clients have in their mind what they're expecting, but they aren't always able to articulate it," he explained. "Too often, what we install is not what the client is thinking of."

A satisfied customer is an educated customer. This is why Christensen communicates in advance the costs and maintenance requirements, including fertilizing, watering and replanting, so that clients are aware of the plants' needs. This knowledge is an essential before customers can begin to "get creative," he noted. (See sidebar below).

"When the decision is made to put in a large display of annuals, we let the customers know that the cost is not just installation," Christensen stressed. "There is a cost ramification they will live with."

Annuals' and perennials' plant care needs can be deceiving. Many homeowners assume that perennials are an inexpensive, low-care alternative since they do not need to be replaced on a yearly basis. This, however, is not the case, Christensen warned.

"We see a lot of perennial plantings, but they are not quite as maintenance-free as you hear," he noted. "Certainly, there's not the cost of replacement, but perennials do need grooming and deadheading, and a display will only last so many years before you need to redo it."

Perennial plantings are less expensive to maintain than annuals, whose bold, bright blooms last only one year, Christensen said. This cost savings motivates some customers to favor perennials. He suggested a mix of both types of plants, so the bloom times overlap and the display is lively year-round. As perennial plants mature, the owner might choose to scale back annual plantings. "Perennials only have a color display for a limited period of time, so if they want supplemental color, I resort to annuals," he noted.

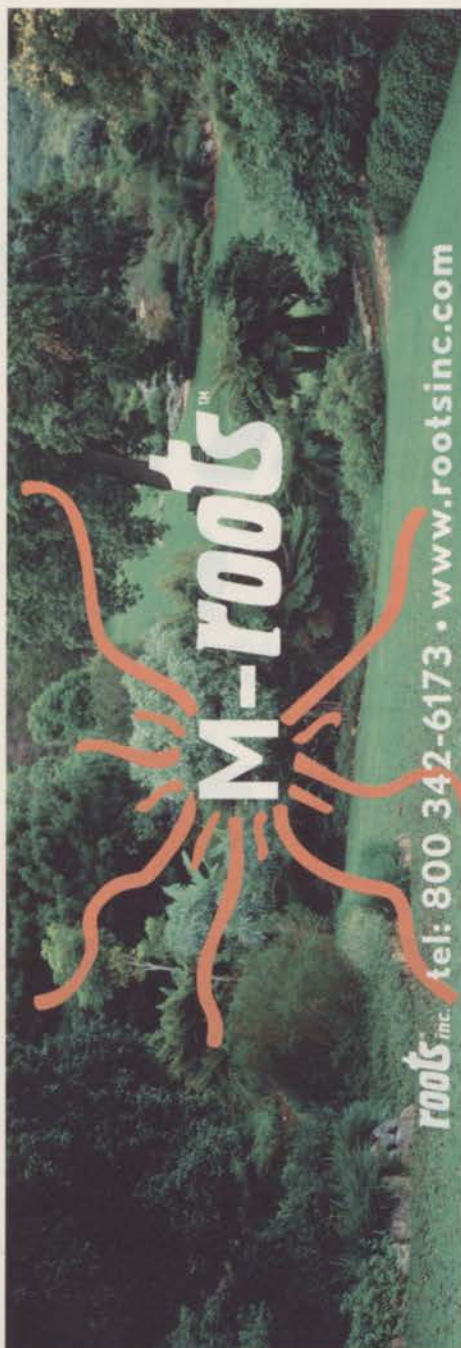
CONTAINER CREATIONS. While cost is a consideration for some clients, contractors

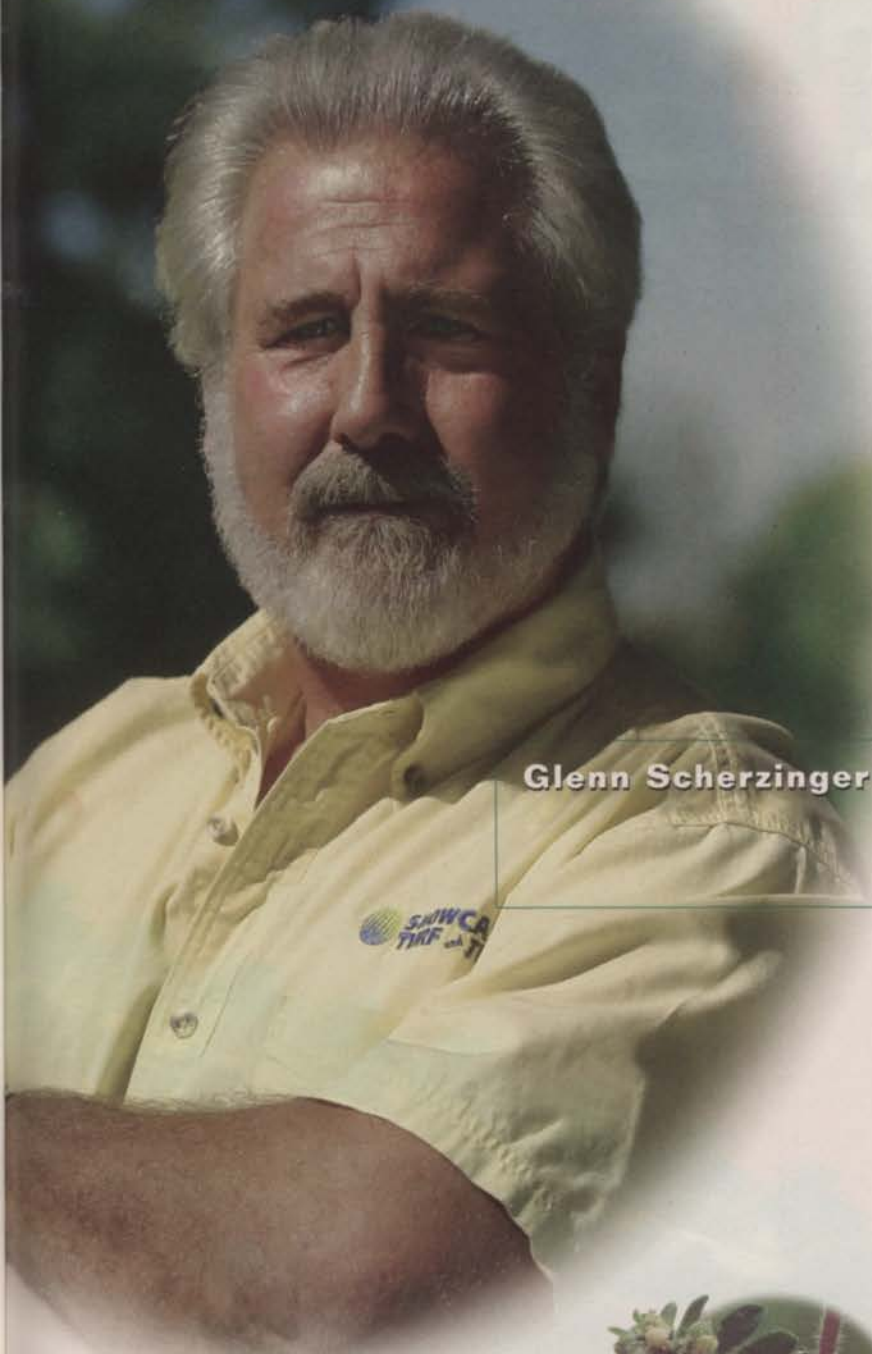
(continued on page 72)

Before contractors can install annuals and perennials on a property, Jud Griggs, vice president of operations, Smallwood Design Group, Naples, Fla., suggested considering these key factors:

- **MAINTENANCE CONSIDERATIONS.** Make sure your client is willing to do the work or willing to hire a company to do the maintenance. Large perennial gardens and annual beds are a lot of work. The pictures look wonderful in magazines, but if the customer is not ready for the work that goes along with it, they'll be disappointed.
- **LOCATION.** Look at the site and how much sun there is. You won't have the profusion of color if you're on a shaded lot.
- **SOIL PREPARATION.** This is probably the key in having a successful annual or perennial garden. If you have an area with heavy clay soil, you have to amend the soil with a lot of organic matter to break it down. If you're planting in a lot of sand, the same organic matter will help retain fertility and moisture.
- **FERTILIZING.** This is critical and must extend beyond soil preparation.
- **START SMALL.** Don't try to recreate the gardens you see in magazines right away. The best place to start is with containers because they are confined. You don't have to do a lot of weeding and cultivating like you do in beds. If you are successful there, then move onto the next step.
- **CONSULT WITH AN EXPERT.** You can read and read, but that doesn't substitute years of schooling and practical experience. Seek advice from designers and horticultural specialists.

Key Considerations





Glenn Scherzinger

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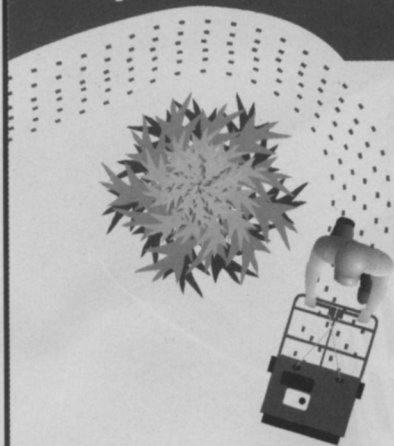
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USE READER SERVICE #35

Annuals & Perennials

(continued from page 68)

must ask other key questions when assessing a property, noted Jim Downie, sales, Pleasant View Gardens, Loudon, N.H.

"The list is endless," he described. "What are their likes? Is the property a summer home, because you don't want to plant a lot of early spring plants if they won't show up until the Fourth of July. Do they want to attract butterflies or hummingbirds? Do they like the cottage garden effect or bold colors? Do they like little maintenance or do they not mind maintenance?"

The answers to these queries build a sort of "property profile" for a contractor before he decides which plants to install, Downie noted. Understanding a client's expectations allows a contractor to choose the proper plants for the property. And lately, requests are not so conservative, he added.

"All the rules are breaking and everything is going in together now," he said, explaining that containers mixing various plant types—even herbs and vegetables—are gaining popularity.

"As time gets tighter and tighter these days and as our yards get smaller and smaller, people are mixing perennials, annuals, herbs and vegetables in mixed container situations so they can have all of the things they want without the work."

Instead of dedicating sections of a landscape to particular plants, many homeowners are taking this potted approach. Containerized plantings do not require the space or time a garden demands, Christensen noted.

"Container plantings allow flexibility in that you can add color or interest to areas where you don't have a bed," he explained. "In entrances to buildings or around pool areas in apartment complexes—there are a lot of places where containers can be used."

Here, again, low-maintenance features can be misinterpreted, Christensen added. Because the roots are above the ground, containers dry out very quickly and need to be watered generously. When the weather is hot, soil dries out faster, and when temperatures are cold the roots are exposed to the extremes, he continued.

Christensen suggested integrating containers with the property's irrigation system where possible, or alerting a crew of the plants' watering needs so they can care for plants manually with hoses or watering cans.

(continued on page 74)



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Annuals & Perennials

(continued from page 72)

The container trend, however, has opened up a market for a variety of planter options, Griggs added. "The choices are not limited to terra cotta pots," he commented. "There are different manufacturers producing containers now that look very traditional."

Mixed hanging baskets are also popular among clients, Downie noted. Wrought-iron

Shepard hooks staked in the ground also provide an eye-catching floral display. Here, too, homeowners gain the visual benefits of a garden with smaller-scale maintenance, cost and time obligations.

PERSONAL PICKS. Some clients don't mind spending time outdoors and enjoy the

opportunity to flex their green thumb. Large sections of perennials and ornamental grasses and mixed displays with numerous plant varieties allow customers to personalize their gardens. No two displays generate the same feel, and homeowners can design the landscape to reflect their vision, Griggs noted.

Contractors must consider the client's design intent – their mental picture – when selecting plants, he added. "If you have a formal landscape and you're trying to bring in a lot of perennials, it's not going to give you a formal look – it's a softer look," he explained, stressing the importance of carefully choosing varieties for a project. "The variety and different heights give you the informality."

To add interest and individuality to a landscape, Griggs recommended combining plants. "Combining is a really good way to extend the blooming time and fill in the gaps in perennial gardens," he added. "Spot annuals in areas and they will bloom from the time they're planted until the first, hard frost. This is a great way to integrate both, and then you end up having a continual profusion of color the whole season, which will add more diversity to your garden as well."

Besides simply mixing annuals and perennials, Griggs suggested paying attention to the type of foliage on plants to create different textures in the display. He noticed the increased use of ornamental grasses to add a selection of texture and color.

"You can play up dark green and coarse textures against fine-textured, wispy grasses," he described. "The play of the different textured foliage against each other really creates something spectacular."

Texture and height of plants form a spatial element to the display that intensifies with soft shades and splashes of color, Griggs said. "You can make the landscape very strong with colors like reds and yellows and oranges – bold and eye-catching," he noted. "Or you can make it subdued."

White gardens counter the bold, bright landscapes and can be striking at night, Griggs added. White, green and blue tones capture a calming effect. Chad Corso, vice president, Corso's Garden Center, Sandusky, Ohio, said these moonlight gardens are one among several customer requests for original landscape options. Water gardening is also drawing

(continued from page 76)

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USE READER SERVICE #55

Annuals & Perennials

attention, especially for those who spend time outdoors and find the sound of gurgling water appealing, he noted.

"We're putting a lot of water features into gardens - fountains, ponds and waterfalls surrounded by perennials to make it look natural," he described.

Homeowners who prefer sight over sound might install a wildlife garden enhanced with annuals and perennials that attract butterflies and birds, Corso suggested.

And for those troublesome high-traffic areas that always get beat up, some customers are choosing to plant a new perennial that is tolerant to foot tampering. can be installed between stones or in patio block sand on walkways, and handles light, moderate and heavy traffic, depending on the type, he explained. Most of these "steppable" plants are low-growing and compact with small leaves, including thyme and sedums.



BLOOMING VALUE. Customers' impressions and intentions for annual and perennial displays vary as much as the plants that bloom on their properties. While some will keep it simple, others lean toward elaborate - "bigger is better," Downie observed.

"People like instant gratification," he noted. The same time constraint that leads clients to choose containers or baskets over gardens or large displays is the pulse that pushes consumers to crave instant results.

"Don't save the customer money by getting little six-pack annuals and making a poor display," Downie added. "If you're going to plant some annuals and perennials, get some bigger sized material and they'll see it, they'll like it and they'll feel they got a good value."

Contractors also see this value when installing annuals and perennials, noted Joseph Boarini, head grower, Grande Greenhouse, Indianapolis, Ind. These plantings

will enhance the worth of a homeowner's property while providing profits to the landscape company, he added.

"From a commercial landscape standpoint, they provide a lot of color for the effort, and that makes it very profitable," he said. "They increase the property value and make it look nicer. Annual and perennial plantings give you flowers to cut and bring inside."

Christensen finds value in individuality - the factor that drives many customers to play with perennials and annuals in their landscapes. By supplying different annuals to his customers displays each year and involving customers on creative choices. His competitors, who install the same plants each year, do not have this innovative edge, he said. "There's so many wonderful combinations that we try to come up with different looks every year." L

The author is Assistant Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.

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USE READER SERVICE #56

Riding Mowers

by Cynthia Greenleaf

AAll good things must come to an end. Or, with the recent success of the commercial riding mower market, slow down a bit. While blessed with recent good fortune, the riding mower market is slated to enter a slight slowdown, according to the latest Outdoor Power Equipment Institute statistics.

Down sharply from its high of 35 percent growth in 1998, the commercial riding mower market is expected to slow to 10.7 percent growth in 2001 and then up slightly to 13.9 percent growth in 2002.

Especially in the case of the mid-mount zero-turn radius riding mower, a machine that took the landscape industry by storm a few years back and has been leading the growth the past several years, this slowdown was inevitable, noted Rick Cuddihe, executive vice president, Great Dane Power Equipment, Jeffersonville, Ind. "The riding mower market is turning into a mature market," he pointed out. "And when you have mature products, the marketing curve tends

While the boom has subsided, the commercial riding mower market continues to hold strong and steady.

to level off. Nothing can grow forever."

"The slowdown had to come sooner or later," added Dan Kilgus, product manager, residential and commercial mowing products, Kubota, Torrance, Calif.

As with any once-revolutionary product, the zero-turn radius riding mower had its introductory period of rapid growth, followed by continued growth, until eventually arriving at a mature phase, where the market levels off, Cuddihe explained.

Bob Walker, president, Walker Mfg., Ft. Collins, Colo., attributed the record growth and subsequent decline of mower shipments to manufacturer overproduction in both 1998 and 1999. "When manufacturers choose to produce more product, they can create a situation of overstocking," he pointed out. "That's what happened in those two years. Too much product was produced. Consequently, shipments will eventually slow down."

Dick Tegtmeier, president, Encore Manufacturing, Beatrice, Neb., theorized that the riding mower market fluctuations are a reflection of the larger economic picture. "The economy is flat and the stock market is going down," he noted. "Our industry reflects that. That's just how it goes."

(continued on page 80)

On the MOVE



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USE READER SERVICE #57

Riding Mowers

(continued from page 78)

HOLDING STEADY. The slight slowdown in commercial riding mower shipments is no real cause for concern, according to mower manufacturers. "The rate of growth may not be as great, but the market is still growing," noted Rick Curlett, director of market development, Exmark, Beatrice, Neb., adding that while the percent of change has fluctuated, commercial riding mowers have seen a steady increase in shipments since 1994. "Our growth has been continual and has catapulted because of the Zs," he pointed out.

Walker predicted a continued demand for riding mowers, especially with the landscape industry still in a state of expansion. He noted that there was a crossover point in the mid 1990s when, for the first time ever, more riding mowers were produced than walk behinds. "Twice more riders were produced than walk behinds," he de-

(continued on page 84)

W

hen to invest in a riding mower is always a big question for contractors. Generally speaking, the type of work done dictates whether a riding mower is necessary. For contractors primarily focused on larger residential and commercial properties, a riding mower can step up production, cutting mowing time in half, observed Dick Tegtmeier, president, Encore Manufacturing, Beatrice, Neb.

If a contractor tends to smaller residential properties, however, a riding mower isn't necessarily vital, noted Rick Curlett, director of market development, Exmark, Beatrice, Neb. When properties get larger, however, "a riding unit makes sense," he said, adding that with space and slope problems almost always an issue, "you're never going to totally eliminate the need for a walk behind of some sort."

Rick Cuddihe, executive vice president, Great Dane Power Equipment, Jeffersonville, Ind., urged contractors to buy a riding mower if it allows them to produce more income, by increasing productivity and, in turn, increasing income. If you can't cut any more grass with your current equipment, then a riding mower might be a good idea, he said.

Cuddihe also advised buying a riding mower if it can allow a company to do more work with less resources. "In a competitive market, by increasing the amount you can do, you can increase your competitive edge."

Curlett, however, advised any contractor to consider buying a riding mower the minute they go into business. "The best thing you can do is invest right away," he said. "The return on the investment is very, very reasonable."

Contractors should keep in mind that a riding mower can yield substantial savings with labor costs, noted Bob Walker, president, Walker Manufacturing, Fort Collins, Colo., adding that riding mowers "show up for work every day." — Cynthia Greenleaf

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Riding Mowers

(continued from page 80)

scribed. "We expect that to moderate, but it's not going to go back the other way."

A LITTLE FINE TUNING. Riding mower manufacturers generally agree that there are no technological advancements in the pipeline poised to replace zero-turn technology any time soon. "I don't foresee another phenomenon like the zero turn in the immediate future," Curlett noted.

Walker agreed. "As far as the future, the Z turn will continue to be the dominant piece of equipment," he said. "We don't see anything else on the horizon."

There's plenty of room to improve existing riding mower technology, however. Curlett compared the modern riding mower's evolution with that of Chrysler's minivan, a once revolutionary vehicle that is now an automotive mainstay in suburban garages across the country. Much like the riding mower, the minivan underwent im-

Unlike the bigger, less maneuverable riding mowers of the past, today's models pretty much can go anywhere and do anything. With the advent of zero-turn technology and compact construction, in particular, riding mowers can now be used where only walk behinds once dared to go, according to Bob Walker, president, Walker Manufacturing, Fort Collins, Colo. While riding mowers were once only used for large commercial areas, they now are finding their way around small- to medium-sized properties with ease, he said.

The modern riding mower allows contractors versatility, pointed out Rick Cuddihe, executive vice president, Great Dane Power Equipment, Jeffersonville, Ind. The best applications for these mowers are multiple uses, from mowing a football field to navigating a property with pine trees, bushes and flower beds, he described.

A few exceptions remain, of course. Walk behinds will almost always be better for extremely steep, tight or highly-contoured areas, Walker warned. "Even with the most compact riders, there are some places where you need to go with a smaller cutting deck," he said. "Some landscapes, for example, have such sharp contours that the riding mower will scalp or skip the lawn." — Cynthia Greenleaf

Anything Goes

provements throughout the years, but still performs its initial function, Curlett pointed out.

In terms of future fine tuning for riding mowers, Curlett predicted increased fuel

efficiency and reduced emissions. With contractors always focused on increasing their productivity, a desire for more powerful machines will also direct the future develop-

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USE READER SERVICE #60

Riding Mowers

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ment of riding mowers, he added. "More power is really a driving force," he said.

Cuddihe agreed. "Contractors want more power," he observed. "They will not buy lower horsepower if you have higher horsepower."

Mower manufacturers also are looking at ways to provide products that require less maintenance, Curlett said. "If someone

overgreases field bearings, you wind up breaking seals," he noted, pointing out an example of an area open to improvement. "If they don't need to be greased, however, that reduces the chance for human error."

Increasing operator comfort is also a priority for riding mower manufacturers, according to Cuddihe. "With guys riding faster,

they'll get their bottom beat up if they don't have deluxe, suspension seats." He added that riding mowers will continue to become lighter, since contractors don't want to encourage soil compaction or leave large tracks on lawns.

Kilgus predicted that riding mowers will be increasingly technology driven, especially in terms of tracking maintenance and other vital operating information. For example, a mower might be able to readily tell when maintenance was last done through an on-board computer, he described.

Within the next five years, Kilgus said that technology will result in primary mulching being done under the deck in a secondary processing chamber, which would allow for increased productivity and speed. "Commercial guys want to be able to get the job done faster and don't want to bag grass," he pointed out. **LI**

The author is Associate Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine



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When it comes to maintenance, a riding mower generally requires the same attention as any other mower, with one major exception: proper tire pressure. This is a critical and often overlooked maintenance issue, pointed out Bob Walker, president, Walker Manufacturing, Ft. Collins, Colo.

Because of a riding mower's weight, its tires are prone to improper inflation, which can directly affect performance, Walker said. Checking pressure should be a weekly maintenance item, he stressed.

Improper tire pressure can cause an uneven cut, resulting in an unsightly lawn and even unhappy customers, added Rick Curlett, director of market development, Exmark, Beatrice, Neb. To properly take care of tires, which are prone to expanding and contracting, Curlett recommends checking the circumference of each tire with a tape measure at least once a week, to ensure

that they
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by Bob West

Interesting ideas surface when a dozen contractors sit down together and discuss the potential of e-commerce.

Few questions have been asked more often within the lawn and landscape industry in the last few years than ones pertaining to e-commerce:

"Would you buy products online?"

"How would e-commerce change the nature of this industry?"

"How does e-commerce fit in the traditional distribution channels?"

Lawn & Landscape explored this issue with two roundtable discussions centered on e-commerce. These meetings were held in Orlando, Fla., and Chicago, Ill., and they were sponsored by XS Turf (www.xsturf.com), a company preparing its own e-commerce solution for the industry.

Here is a summary of those two discussions:

"If e-commerce is going to happen, it will have to include everyone in terms of contractors and dealers," noted Terry Culver, director of operations, ILT Vignocchi, Wauconda, Ill. "A lot of the suppliers and contractors are little businesses, and I doubt they're on the Internet. But everyone just seems focused on grabbing the bigger accounts. That little dealer may have better pricing, however, and that dealer may be more centrally located."

When contractors consider buying online, the primary products of interest to them now seem to be those basic equipment supplies that they know they'll use over the course of a year, such as belts, filters, spark plugs, wheels and so on. "We're already bulk

purchasing of a lot of equipment items we inventory and go through over the course of the year, so we could buy them online right now," noted Bill Henkelman, regional manager, The Brickman Group, Glendale Heights, Ill. "The real key would be if we could buy critical parts online in season because those are the parts that distributors can't get for us because everyone needs the same parts on the same day."

"Where the Internet can really help us is in situations where we needed products yesterday because we don't inventory them, such as engine components and spindle bearings," noted Bruce Bachand, vice president, Carol King Landscape Maintenance, Orlando, Fla. "Now, we have these things shipped to us next-day air, and we end up paying more in freight."

"That would be the ideal," agreed Gene Grant, CEO, Grant & Power Landscaping, West Chicago, Ill. "I'd love to have the mechanic diagnose the situation, click on the Internet and have the part in his hands the next day."

"That brings up the question of how comfortable our mechanics are using the Internet and making purchases on line," added Henkelman, noting that the relatively small number of companies already selling online frustrates him as he explores e-commerce options.

Grant said in-office training of his employees might acclimate more of them to e-commerce. "I would want someone to train everyone in our office so we could use their site right away," he related. "In addition, I think a good site will have to continue that education

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The E-Commerce QUESTIONS

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USE READER SERVICE #43

E-Commerce

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of users online so the process is easy because I don't want a mechanic spending 45 minutes online to buy one carburetor."

Jeff Tovar, president, Tovar Landscape Contractors, Elgin, Ill., echoed this point, adding that instruction from any e-commerce supplier would be a must for his company to purchase online.

"Someone is going to have to come into my office and show me how to get on this site and make the purchase," he related. "We're not going to go out and get the training because we don't have either the time or the inclination."

Identifying one employee within an organization to handle all online purchasing may be one way to overcome this problem.

"I envision a situation where we have a fleet manager with a PC so he's wired and can access whatever site we make available to him for purchasing parts," added Joe Janssen, president, Stiles Landscape Services, Pompano Beach, Fla. "But one of the challenges will be making sure whoever runs the shop has the capacity and latitude to go out and purchase."

Responsibility also lies with those operating these sites, who will have to continue to advance their selling and delivery services. "We tried to buy a few trucks online, but the trucks weren't at the location we were buying from," noted Tovar. "The problem was that the inventory information wasn't being updated in the site quickly enough so the site was selling product the supplier didn't actually have."

"I'm really hoping e-commerce will include better inventory systems for suppliers so we can see if someone doesn't have a part we need and we can go elsewhere to buy it," added Bachand, adding that his shop foreman has a budget of \$10,000 a month he can spend on purchases without any approval.

"Our biggest issue is identifying the right part number the first time and getting that part in our hands," related Adam Jones, division manager, Massey's Green Up, Maitland, Fla. "I would like to see a system where we're able to see parts numbers, serial numbers for parts as well as a visual identification for the parts, because I hate ordering a part, waiting to get it and then finding out we ordered the wrong part."

Long-term, contractors hope the Internet will help them achieve cost savings in return

for bundled purchasing – where they consolidate their equipment and product buying with a select group of suppliers.

"Right now, I'm interested in buying online, having the products direct shipped to me and saving any money I can by eliminating the dealer from that process," related Bachand. "By consolidating our purchasing with fewer suppliers, I think we should be able to get dealer

"I like having relationships with my suppliers so I can tell them what we need and make them responsible for getting that part, even if they have to call other suppliers."
– Gene Grant

pricing because we purchase as much as many small dealers."

Contractors also foresee using Internet purchasing power to standardize their products and supplies across multiple branches. "We think purchasing online will give us better control over what we spend vs. our budgets, and it will help a lot of our smaller branches come up with purchasing systems," explained Jamie Boynton, vice president of operations, One Source Landscape & Golf Services, Tampa, Fla.

In addition, contractors want e-commerce providers to offer services to help them run their businesses. Helping them become better product purchasers is just one example.

"Aerators are a particular challenge for us, and we have 60 or 70 of them," related Jones. "They cost \$4,000, but you can put \$600 a month into one for maintenance, so when are you better off not bringing one back from the dead?"

"We don't always keep great records in terms of how much money we have put into a particular machine, so I would love to find a vendor who could do that for me," Jones continued. "I can handle providing the technical information to our field personnel, but I would love some help generating more information on my own buying patterns."

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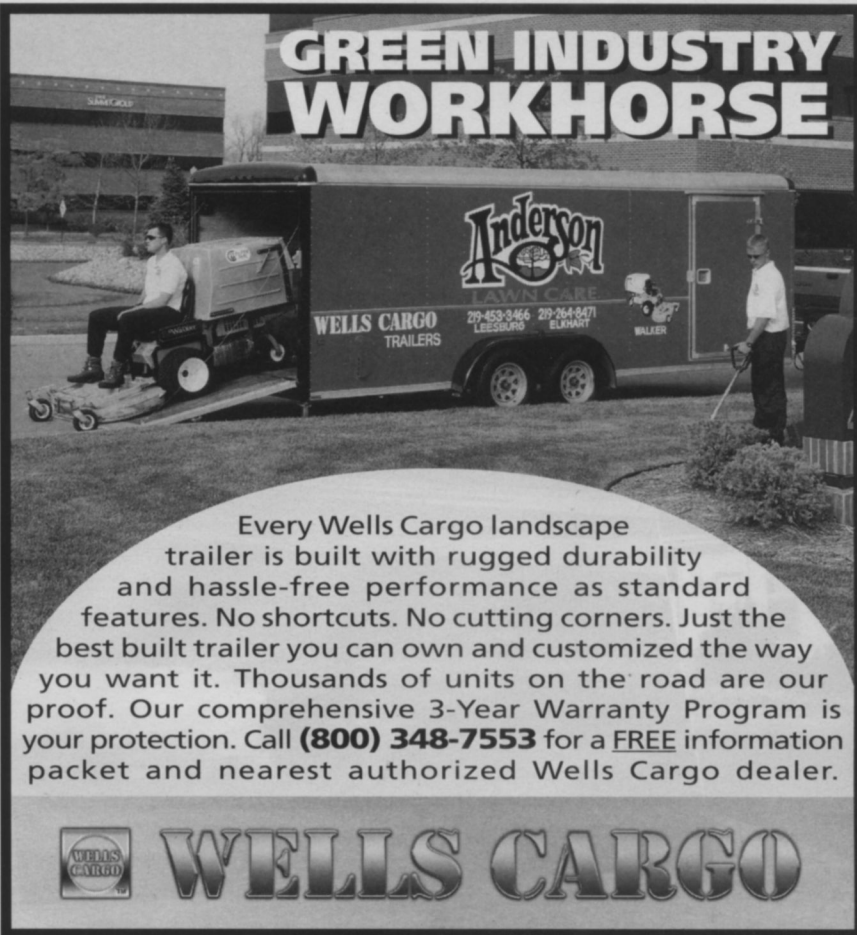
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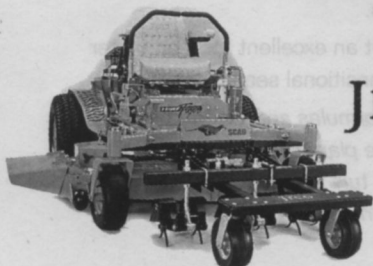
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E-Commerce

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THE DEALER DILEMMA. Clearly, contractors are accustomed to doing business with local dealers they can build working relationships with. "These dealers are in a service business just like us, and we have relationships with them that have been built over time. We can't just suddenly go in there and beat them up about price, but we're always looking for better service, related Grant. "I like having relationships with my suppliers so I can call them, tell them what we need and make them responsible for getting us that part, even if it means they have to call other suppliers to find the part."

In many cases, these relationships add value to a contractor's business. "There's no question that plant suppliers are an extension of our company," related Henkelman. "They know our expectations for a tree, and those are different depending on the varieties. So I don't know how you can buy plants online without that."

"I think you could order something like annual color online," noted Jones.

"I imagine the suppliers will have to come up with a grading system for plants so you pay based on the quality or grade of plant you purchase," offered Alison Pieters, marketing and communications manager, David J. Frank Landscape Construction, Germantown, Wis. "But then I can't imagine all of those prices being online, so we may have to call or fax in more information anyway."

"I agree," said Grant. "I can buy books online because a Stephen King novel is the same no matter who I buy it from. But every plant is different depending on the supplier. So suppliers will either have to be the cheapest and sell on price or else they'll have to build relationships with contractors who buy from them for the quality."

"And what happens if we get a plant we don't like and we want to return it?" wondered Pieters. "How will that be handled?"

Bert Clattenburg, CEO, Rood Landscape, Tequesta, Fla., discussed improvements the Internet could introduce to the plant purchasing process. "Imagine the time we could save if we didn't have to send someone out into the field, and instead the nurseries could just post digital pictures of plants to Web sites for us to shop from," he explained.

For the most part, contractors at the roundtables are only buying limited prod-

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Barricade is the cornerstone of the Syngenta Lawn & Landscape Partners Program, the system of leading-edge products designed to help you grow your business.

E-Commerce

(continued from page 94)

ucts online, such as specialty features for an installation project, but they're disappointed in the lack of information available from suppliers' sites. "Most retailers' sites just duplicate their catalog, and there isn't any new information," complained Grant.

Besides a product listing, there is plenty of additional information contractors would like to see from suppliers' sites. "We already use vendors' sites for Material Safety Data Sheets and product information," noted Henkelman, who added that most suppliers' Web sites are little more than digital catalogues right now. "Other than that, there's not a lot of information out there, such as something describing the difference between sodium chloride and potassium chloride."

Some contractors aren't inclined to switch from their current suppliers to online vendors without incentive, such as guaranteed delivery, added Henkelman.

"But quicker delivery is a promise, and everyone makes promises they can't deliver

There are plenty of options for companies that are looking to put the Internet to work in their business. Here are some green industry Web sites:

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- www.green2go.com – an online marketplace for hard and soft goods
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- www.growzone.com – connecting buyers and sellers of plant material
- www.imandi.com – an online referral service
- www.lawnandlandscape.com – an informational portal to the industry
- www.pricebreakusa.com – group purchasing opportunities
- www.servicemagic.com – connects consumers and service companies
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on," countered Tovar. "I think lower prices would make us switch sooner because price is something we can see."

"At the same time, we've learned that

"Ultimately, we'll have to evaluate how much this convenience that dealers can provide to us is really worth."

— Jamie Boynton

when you leave one vendor for another vendor just for price, you can burn some bridges," Henkelman added. "So whenever we do that we make sure we start in very small quantities with the new vendor."

"The other part of the dealer question is the support they provide," commented

Janssen. "Supplying parts is important, but where they can be invaluable is when you have a crucial piece of equipment break down and they'll provide you a loaner or a rental until your machine is fixed. There are certain pieces of equipment that we only have one of, and you can't get that sort of support online."

"I would need to save at least 10 percent in pricing and get a guarantee on delivery to switch," Grant related.

"I'd look at a change in supplier if some could save me even 5 percent because of how many thousands of dollars I have in expenditures," related Bachand. "Then I'd look to see how that supplier could help us manager our inventory and what they could do for us if we increase our expenditures with them."

"Something else that would get me to buy online if is a supplier would let me buy on consignment so I could buy the material but not pay for it until I use it," commented Henkelman. "And I would want the product

on my property without having to pay for it."

"What's most important to us is that suppliers have the product there when they say they will," added Jones. "We don't have a 200,000-square-foot warehouse to inventory something like fertilizer, so we purchase in advance for a four-week window and take delivery a couple of times a month. If the product isn't there and we have a bunch of technicians standing around with nothing to apply, that's not good."

"I would even be willing to pay a premium to anyone for the ability to have the parts delivered to us within three hours or so," Grant related. "Then I wouldn't have to tie up dollars in inventory, and I wouldn't have the problems with equipment not working."

"Ultimately, we'll have to evaluate how much this convenience dealers can provide us is worth," noted Boynton. **□**

The author is Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine

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USE READER SERVICE #69

Installation Crews

by Cynthia Greenleaf

Established contractors offer their insights on setting up installation crews.

The first rule for setting up installation crews is that there are no rules. What works for one landscape contractor might not work for another and vice versa, according to Stephen Hillenmeyer, president, Hillenmeyer Nurseries, Lexington, Ky. "There's not a right or wrong way — as long as you know your plan and it works," he said, adding that contractors, like anybody else, are creatures of habit and tend to stick with a system once it proves successful for them.

The second rule for setting up installation crews is that there is always room for improvement, so consider these insights from successful contractors.

GENERAL GUIDANCE. Overall, setting up installation crews depends on a host of variables, including available equipment, labor and job size. Contractors must consider these factors before setting up a crew, according to Joe Janssen, president, Stiles Landscape, Pompano Beach, Fla. "Your materials, and the size and complexity of the job determines which crew you assign," he said.

Specializing in large commercial projects, Stiles Landscape typically assigns nine to 12 experienced crew members to each installation job, supplemented with unskilled labor when necessary, Janssen described.

Throughout the years, the company has learned that the kind of plant material often dictates the crew size needed for the job, Janssen noted. "If you have small, containerized material, you need certain types of equipment and tools, and, in turn, a certain number of crew members to operate them."

At his company, Hillenmeyer tries to estimate the number of man-hours for a job and then assigns a crew accordingly. "If it's a 40-hour job, for example, putting a two-member crew on that job doesn't make sense," Hillenmeyer pointed out. "You're bet-

(continued on page 104)

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Installation Crews

(continued from page 100)

ter off having a three-man crew work on the job for two days."

No matter the size, crews should be kept together from job to job, if possible, advised Doug Berlin, landscape manager, New Garden Landscaping and Nursery, Greensboro, N.C. "We do feel it is important to keep a crew together," he said, adding that his company

has crews ranging from two to six people, based on the type and size of the job. "We try to build a crew based on having all the skills available to deliver a quality product. This takes a lot of pressure off our foremen and allows them more time to focus on the job and its successful execution."

Hillenmeyer agreed with the need for crew

"Less is better. When you think you need four (crew members), you probably need three, and when you think you need three, you probably need two." – Stephen Hillenmeyer

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consistency. "Keep the same people together on a daily basis. It gives continuity," he said, adding that some of his two-person crews have been together so long, it's "like they're married."

ROLE PLAYING. Assigning roles to crewmembers is essential for ensuring efficiency and encouraging individual responsibility. Even on a two-person crew, Hillenmeyer always has one person function as the leader. "They're the ones calling the shots," he said.

Stiles Landscape tries to assign employees to areas in which they're comfortable. "Some people really enjoy working with large equipment, for example," Janssen said. "We try to find the right spot for them."

Having a supervisor or foreman capable of determining what tasks crew members are most suited to is important, he added.

McHale & McHale, Upper Marlboro, Md., places new employees on an existing crew for three months, to assess their capabilities, related Kevin McHale, president.

New Garden uses a special chart that monitors each person's talents and skills, Berlin described. "Our foremen fill this in for their crews, and the crewmembers with the greater skill levels have greater responsibility and wages," he said. "Most crews are comprised of a foreman, lead person and crew people. Our larger crews often have foreman trainees who will work with an experienced foreman for one to two years before getting their own crew."

SMALLER CREW PROS AND CONS. McHale & McHale typically uses crews comprised of three people with five-man crews for larger projects and a two-man crew available for detail work, according to McHale.

Smaller crews can increase efficiency, McHale observed. If a contractor can complete an installation job with a two-person crew, labor costs are reduced, he pointed out.

"With two guys and a truck, it's either

(continued on page 106)

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Installation Crews

(continued from page 104)

(continued on page 108)

How far in advance should installation jobs be booked? This depends on whom you ask.

For Joe Janssen, president, Stiles Landscape, Pompano Beach, Fla., 18 months is the farthest out he'll book a job. "I don't like to go so far out that I can't fix prices on material," he said, adding that while equipment and labor costs are generally fixed, material pricing is always the most unpredictable variable.

McHale & McHale Landscape Design, Upper Marlboro, Md., keeps a six-month backlog of work, according to Kevin McHale, president. He noted that the company is careful to not oversell. "We watch that to make sure we have the capacity to do the work we sell," he said.


A backlog of at least two weeks to a month is the perfect time frame, according to Stephen Hillenmeyer, president, Hillenmeyer Nurseries, Lexington, Ky. For cash flow reasons, in

particular, "you want to know that you have some backlog," he pointed out, noting that certain times during the year, his company can "sell a job today and do it tomorrow."

Striking a balance between steady work and keeping customers happy is a smart idea, observed Doug Berlin, landscape manager, New Garden Landscaping and Nursery, Greensboro, N.C. "Residential customers do not like to hear that they will have to wait five or more weeks," he said. "We try hard to keep the wait to four weeks. We have expanded our crew sizes just to minimize longer than six week waits."

For both its commercial and residential jobs, New Garden has its scheduling down to a science: "We take the number of estimated hours divided by crew size to determine how many days it should take," Berlin described. "Then we post all customers and job length per crew on a schedule board to determine the next available production day. During this process, we are constantly adjusting based on each specific site and what can and cannot be accomplished and what is the optimum crew size to deliver a quality job on schedule and be profitable." — *Cynthia Greenleaf*


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Installation Crews

(continued from page 106)

"You're gonna do it or I'm gonna do it," Hillenmeyer agreed, noting that he is always trying to minimize crew sizes. "Less is better," he said. "When you think you need four (crew members), you probably need three, and when you think you need three, you probably need two."

McHale & McHale manages its 17 landscape division crews by the type of work they do best, according to McHale. "Some do excavation and set up work for masonry," he described. "Some are better at planting or stacking boulders."

Along the same lines, Janssen likes the flexibility of smaller crews. "Crews can be specialized and you can combine them to form larger crews," he said, warning that crew members with too narrow a focus can get "pigeonholed into certain jobs."

The most obvious drawback to using small crews is their performance limitations. "If there is large material, there could be a safety problem in moving or planting it,"

Berlin cautioned, adding that New Garden doesn't like to structure crews with fewer than three people — it has found this crew size to be the most profitable and it fits nicely in a truck cab.

For larger installation tasks, such as putting in a 3-inch caliper tree, using a floating crew member is always an option for smaller crews. But Hillenmeyer warned against relying on that too often — otherwise a crew will become dependent on that additional help.

LARGER CREW INS AND OUTS. Larger crews require more experienced supervisors who can effectively manage workers, Hillenmeyer pointed out. If a crew isn't overseen properly, efficiency is going to plummet, with workers just idly standing around.

"Larger crews demand greater expertise in supervision," Berlin added. "Our top foreman understands the impact of unapplied time vs. applied time, which has to be moni-

tored closely on the larger jobs."

Berlin observed that unless a contractor has a truck equipped with a crew cab, a four-man crew or more will require two trucks. "Therefore, that crew must be able to produce at a level that covers the additional costs of the truck," he said.

"You've got to have a much stronger manager on a larger crew," Janssen agreed, noting that between overseeing crew members and coordinating material and equipment, a poorly-managed larger crew can turn into a nightmare. "Imagine 12 to 15 employees and not having a sufficient amount of material ready to install," he said. "Labor costs are going to go through the roof."

Nor is Hillenmeyer a fan of larger crews, since they eventually, out of management necessity, morph into several smaller crews, anyway, he noted. **LL**

The author is Associate Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.

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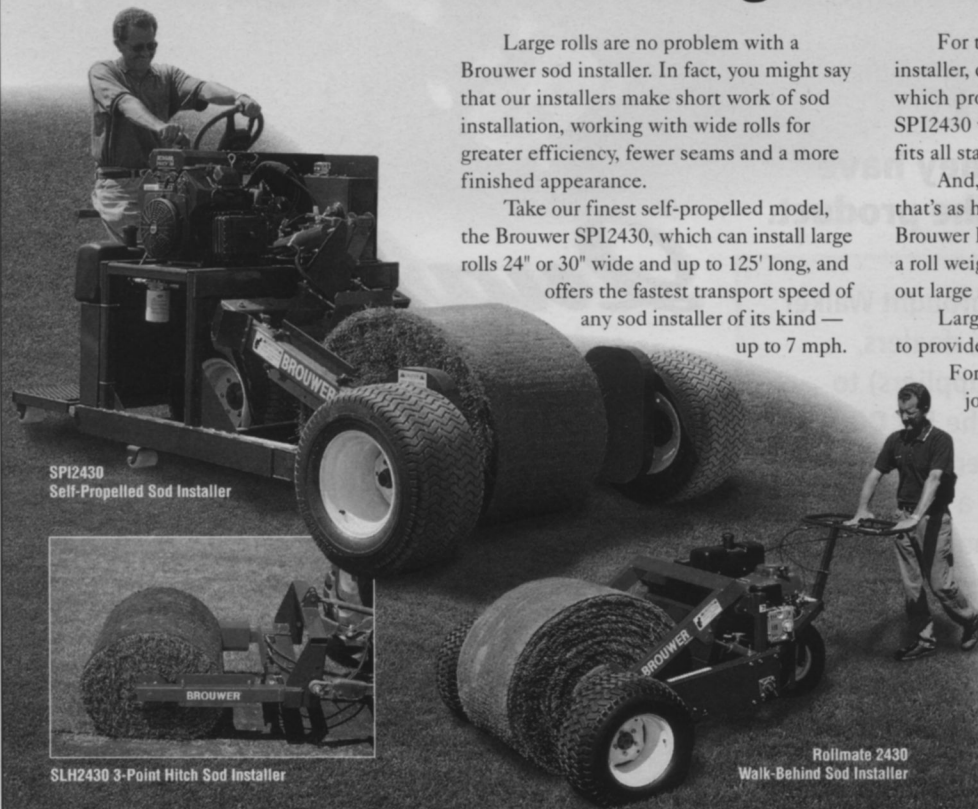
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Pricing Irrigation

by Nicole Wisniewski

Contractors must follow the first commandment of irrigation pricing to succeed in the business: Know Thy Costs.

Pricing POINTERS

Irrigation contractors who rely on the marketplace to determine how they should price their irrigation installation services are chasing their own tails, according to many landscape and irrigation contractors.

"You have to look inside your own organization and determine the price you need to charge to get a fair rate and return on your investment," pointed out Scott Fay, president, Treasure Coast Irrigation & Landscape, Hobe Sound, Fla. "You have to set your sights on a number. It sounds idealistic, but if you provide the service and don't deliver excuses, then you're setting your own market niche and customers will pay you for it."

Most landscape contractors who aren't charging enough for irrigation installation don't know their costs, including installation, parts, labor, overhead and, most importantly, profit. "If you can't at least sell your job for what it cost you then what is the point?" noted Takeshi Yamamoto, irrigation division manager, Aquatech Computerized Irrigation Control, Fremont, Calif. "Don't be afraid of profit—it is why we are in the business and is absolutely essential."

PROFIT NEVER HURTS. Andy Coleman, a 25-year industry veteran and owner of EcoSystems, Ridgefield, Conn., said contractors are suffering from low pricing.

And low pricing stems from inaccurate cost tracking, pointed out Russ Fragala, president, Fragala Landscape Co., Medford, N.Y. Landscape contractors need to know their costs before pricing their services, regardless of the specific type of work being performed or whether they are using unit or quoted prices.

"Not knowing your overhead costs can make or break your profit on every job," Fragala said. "I see competitors out there

(continued on page 114)

Photo: Roger Mastroianni



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Pricing Irrigation

(continued from page 112)

throwing in a rain sensor or a digital clock just to win the work. There are many times that we are not able to throw in these extras because of how close we are working to our cost basis. So, is this competitor including all

clients, which then often leads to further price reductions in a desperate attempt to retain clients, which then leads to further reduced service and profit ... and the cycle continues."

Most landscape contractors who aren't charging enough for irrigation installation, don't know their costs, including installation, parts, labor, overhead and, most importantly, profit.

of his costs and overhead with a fair profit to win the job, or is he just pulling prices out of the air?"

Yamamoto referred to pricing as a "vicious circle of defeat," adding that, "pricing services too low only leads to not being able to deliver the desired service at the client's level of expectation. Maintaining healthy profits, in the meantime, leads to unsatisfied

To manage pricing and profit, Fay does job costing to ensure profit and closes his books monthly to evaluate his earnings. During the months where he didn't hit his target, he rarely blames this on inefficient pricing. "If you factor in your costs and profit and you're not making money, then you aren't consistently performing like you should be," Fay said. "If this happens to us,

we know it's because we made poor decisions, whether we sent crews out with misinformation—not enough or wrong information—overstocked inventory or spent too much on uniforms or phone communications. Everyone has an off-day, but pricing shouldn't be the reason for lack of profit."

Contractors who don't already have a handle on the production times required for various common tasks performed during an irrigation installation job should head out to the jobsite with a stopwatch and clipboard to find out, Yamamoto remarked. This will help contractors determine unit- and cost-based prices.

"Once you know how long it takes to perform each task, the rest is simply a matter of performing an accurate take-off and crunching the numbers to make sure you price the job not to lose money," Yamamoto said. "The competitive marketplace will keep your prices in check, so your job obviously is to charge as

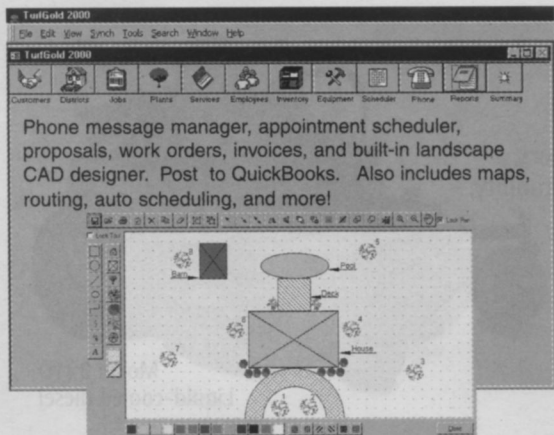
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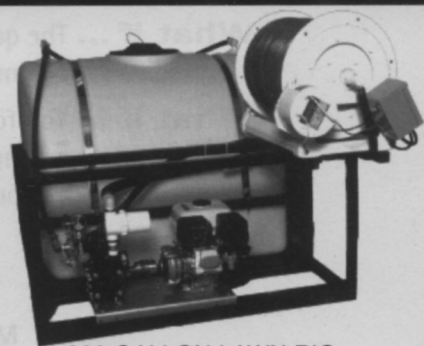
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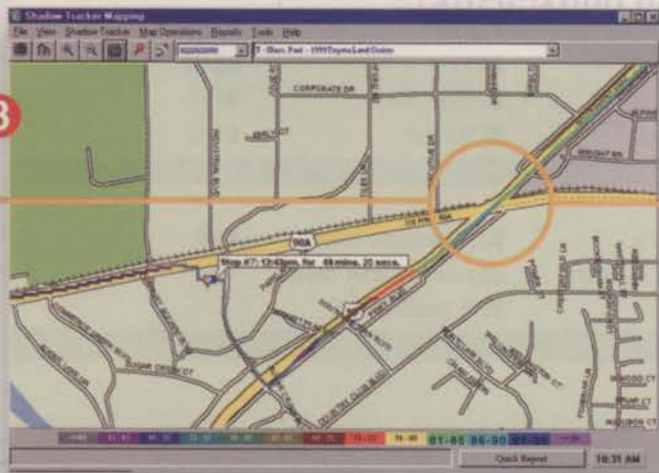
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6:28AM	11:18AM	04:50	S-Your Company Office	0.00
11:19AM	11:22AM	00:03	In Transit	1.10
11:22AM	11:27AM	00:05	L-Exxon Gas Station	0.00
11:28AM	11:31AM	00:03	In Transit	1.10
11:31AM	4:14PM	04:43	S-Your Company Office	0.00
4:14PM	4:17PM	00:03	In Transit	1.18
4:17PM	4:19PM	00:02	L-Grant & Hwy 90	0.00
4:19PM	4:36PM	00:17	In Transit	15.01
4:36PM	6:50PM	02:14	E-Home, Employee U.	0.00
6:50PM	6:54PM	00:04	In Transit	1.61
6:54PM	6:55PM	00:01	L-Stop Light at 1654 Pine	0.00

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USE READER SERVICE #63

Pricing Irrigation

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Coast-to-Coast

EQUIPMENT	LOCATION			
	SOUTHEAST	MIDWEST	EAST	WEST
ELECTRONIC CONTROLLERS				
6-zone	\$200	\$275-\$390	\$200	\$290
12-zone	\$450	\$400-\$520	\$450	\$451
24-zone	\$650	\$650-\$895	\$650	\$762
ELECTRIC VALVES				
1-inch	\$50/valve	\$45-\$100	\$50/valve	\$79/valve
2-inch	\$120/valve	\$110-\$200	\$120/valve	\$149/valve
3-inch	\$200/valve	\$200-\$250	\$200/valve	\$274/valve
HEADS (all prices include piping to head)				
4-inch spray heads	\$30/head	\$40-\$65/head	\$27.50/head	\$34/head
6-inch spray heads	\$35/head	\$40-\$65/head	\$35/head	\$40/head
Rotors	\$50/piece	\$50-\$95	\$50/piece	\$61/head
MAINLINE				
1½-inch	\$2/foot	\$2/foot	\$2/foot	\$2.65
2-inch	\$3.50/foot	\$2.95/foot	\$4/foot	\$3.13
3-inch	\$4.50/foot	\$4.25/foot	\$6/foot	\$4.68
4-inch	\$6/foot	\$5.85/foot	\$7.50/foot	\$6.03
RAIN SENSORS				
(required in some areas)	\$125	\$150-\$175 (dep. on location)	\$225 (without install/ installed at later date) \$175 (with install)	\$142
EXAMPLE TOTAL				
If have a job with:				
26 rotors				
13 spray heads				
One 6-zone controller				
5 1-inch electric valves				
100 feet of 1½-inch mainline				
the job would cost:	\$1,990	\$2,400-\$5,300	\$2,750 to \$3,000	\$3,104

Lawn & Landscape interviewed contractors from east to west to find out how irrigation prices differ. All prices quoted above are for new construction only and include labor and installation costs. These are not service or maintenance prices. Because variable installation specifications and component selection can cause significant swings in price (i.e. depth of piping, backfill requirements, type of valve/sprinkler/timer/sensor, valve manifold configurations, etc.), these prices are based on the most typical specifications encountered in each area.

much as you possibly can without being under bid by a competitor. Remember, your cost was determined using real world production rates from your company so if you can't even get a job at your cost then it is time to re-evaluate a few things. Are there efficiency/deficiency issues with your produc-

tion methods? Are your competitors 'buying jobs'? Is your take-off accurate? The list goes on."

HOW THEY DO IT. Landscape contractors who are successful at irrigation installation pricing, identify their clients and client

expectations first, Yamamoto said. Then they determine the price ceiling that the newly identified market will tolerate.

After determining the price you can obtain for your services, the trick to continue making top dollar is to deliver services in a

(continued on page 118)



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Pricing Irrigation

(continued from page 116)

high-quality fashion. "Now that you are charging as much as you possibly can, you must deliver the service that your client expects or a little bit more," Yamamoto pointed out. "With healthy pricing and profits, you can invest in personnel and equipment to further raise service levels to the highest point that your client is able to appreciate, which then enables further price increases. However, don't get carried away. You can only increase prices as far as you are able to help your client see the value that you are delivering. It is better to have to justify your 'high' prices to a client who is happy with your service than to be forced to slash your already low prices to retain an unhappy client."

Yamamoto's installation/retrofit service involves new installation or major modification to an existing system for which the client will authorize a fixed price for a pre-negotiated scope of work. For this type of work, Yamamoto uses a cost basis formula.

"We first determine our total material and labor cost to do the job - what it cost us," he explained. "Then we add mark-up (i.e. profit) based on a minimum dollar amount per man-hour guideline and/or percent gross profit desired. Although the dollar amount per man-hour and percent gross profit guidelines remain relatively consistent, there is always some margin for variability as influenced by the current booking levels."

To determine how to price his irrigation installation jobs, Fragala first figures out if the job will be difficult or easy. This depends on the type of ground (hard or soft), amount of roots in the soil, whether or not hand digging will be a major factor, sleaving under patios and walks, and whether or not there are hills involved that a pipe puller would not be able to climb, which adds more hand work. "After we estimate all of these factors, we price the job at a set rate per zone, plus any extras, i.e. rain sensors, upgraded

clocks, drip system for planters, etc.," he pointed out.

Fay doesn't price by zone like Fragala, he prices by unit cost because this helps him estimate properties quickly based on the number of different units needed for the various sizes of systems he installs. "So that means that I can walk a residential property and know that if a job needs a certain number of heads or valves, it will cost me X dollars per head or valve, including labor and installation costs," Fay said. "I add up all the equipment costs for the job and determine my pricing that way."

Over time, Fay has collected enough data to know how much time it takes to dig a trench, install the piping, fittings and flex pipe, and the labor costs for these tasks. Based on this experience, he figures total labor and installation costs into his unit costs.

Tom Laur Jr. also prices irrigation installation by unit cost because it's the quickest

(continued on page 120)



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Pricing Irrigation

(continued from page 118)

means of estimating, but the president of Acme Systems, Glendale, Wis., said it's not as accurate as the other method he uses.

In this second method, Laur adds the total materials, labor and equipment costs for the job and then adds in overhead, taxes and profit. "I sometimes use both methods

for the same job and compare numbers," Laur said. "Separating lawn areas from shrub areas or special gardens helps because small, curved areas cost more than larger, rectangular open spaces. Circular driveways and walkways add to the job because you have to keep water off of them."

WATCH OUT. While these contractors are secure in their pricing methods, they agree that jobs should be evaluated carefully to avoid hidden factors that drive up costs, such as tricky job specifications or unusual site conditions.

For instance, a residential home in a rural setting might require more mainline if the water supply is far away, so the price of the job increases, Fay said. The same is true for an irrigation system that uses a well as its water source. "If you took for granted that the well produced 20 or 30 gallons of water per minute, but in reality it only produced five or six gallons per minute of water, then you won't have enough valves on the system," he explained. "When there are more valves, the number of zones increases, and then the controller needs to be upgraded. One slight change and the cost of the job increases proportionately and exponentially."

Pricing irrigation installation services for residential jobs is fairly simple and can be accomplished using any of these contractors' methods. But Fay said commercial jobs are much larger and trickier, so he uses three different systems to determine whether he's pricing the job correctly: unit pricing, square foot pricing (square foot of lot, minus square foot of the hardscapes, which usually results in 15 to 21 cents per square foot based on the site) and the long method of pricing (materials, estimate for labor and then add profit).

"When we estimate using unit cost and square foot cost, we have two indicators that we can measure against the long method," Fay said. "We look for those numbers to be close in price. If they aren't, we try to figure out why to make sure we haven't missed anything. The square foot price will be higher than the long form price if there is a huge house on a lot, for instance."

Installing a system promptly and resourcefully also can help when pricing services. "My theory is that the end user has to buy the product from someone, and if everyone kept up their prices, there wouldn't be a problem," Coleman said. "Material costs are the same no matter who buys them. There's not a big cost differential between manufacturer's equipment—maybe 10 to 15 percent tops. So the only thing that affects you is how quickly and efficiently you do the job." **LL**

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

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USE READER SERVICE #140

Augers & Hole Diggers

by Nicole Wisniewski

A bit about purchasing and using augers and auger attachments.

Ed Wojciechowski got tired of wasting one hour of manpower to dig one hole for one tree, so he invested in an auger attachment for his compact utility loader.

"The attachment paid for itself in six months," said Wojciechowski, owner of Wojo's Lawn Care and Landscaping, a design/build and maintenance company in Youngstown, Ohio. "I use a 30-inch auger bit that digs a tree hole in less than one minute as opposed to more than an hour with a man and a shovel. It also saves us the backbreaking manual labor."

For landscape contractors whose service offerings require them to dig holes, investing in an auger or auger attachment for their skid-steer or compact utility loader can save time and manpower.

AUGER AVAILABILITY. There are a few different types of stand-alone augers and auger attachments on the market today.

Stand-alone augers are ideal for contractors who dig holes for fences, decks or utility posts. This style of auger can come pivot-mounted and attach on the back of a pick-up truck or freestanding and pivot down from a loader arm that has its own engine, pointed out Pat Cappucci, director of marketing, Toro Landscape Contractor Group, Bloomington, Minn. "Most landscape contractors, however, won't use this kind of auger because they aren't easy to manipulate, especially when planting 30 shrubs and 20 or 30 trees on one property," Cappucci said.

This explains the popularity of auger attachments in the landscape industry. They are typically used on skid-steer or compact utility loaders, which provide the hydraulic power needed to push the flow and pressure into



a head that drives the auger into the ground. So, the main part of the auger contractors purchase is the power head.

The basic power head style is chain drive, which receives its flow and pressure from a base unit with a hydraulic motor. The hydraulic motor transfers power to the auger through a transfer chain, alleviating the motor from some torque demand, Cappucci said.

A chain drive is considered "inexpensive and can cost between \$1,200 and \$1,500, depending on the features offered with it," said Bob Bethards, product manager, Alitec Attachments, Brownsburg, Ind. "But a chain drive usually requires regular maintenance. Without the maintenance, chain drives won't last as long as the other types of power heads."

Another power head type is direct-drive, where the motor runs via the unit's hydraulic power, using up available torque to run the auger. "With direct-drive, flow and pressure come right off of the unit into the power head to drive the auger," Cappucci explained. "This puts more demand on the motor, therefore the size of the motor dictates its life and power."

The last power head option is planetary drive. "This is similar to a chain drive but more expensive and requires less maintenance," Cappucci said. "With this drive, instead of a transfer chain taking up some torque demand, you have a planetary gear case that drives the head so you get greater torque output from the hydraulic pressure and flow input. A planetary drive is efficient

(continued on page 124)

Auger attachments, like the one above, are popular for landscape contractors who want to save time and manpower on the job. Photo:

Toro

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Augers & Hole Diggers

(continued from page 122)

and can be a long-life solution for the end user. But the direct-drive option can match the performance of a planetary drive, depending on the size of the motor."

A planetary drive power head will cost anywhere from \$2,300 to \$2,900, depending on its features, according to Bethards. Typically, this is the most expensive option, but Cappucci said direct-drive power heads with larger motors can be more expensive than planetary drive power heads.

Choosing a power head can be done by looking at soil conditions and landscape applications. "Sandy soils need more speed and less torque," Cappucci pointed out. "But a bigger hole needs more torque and less speed."

Contractors who use augers in rocky soil can benefit from a transfer chain or planetary gear case between the power head and motor to protect the motor from hydraulic pressure spikes caused by hitting rocks.

Cappucci said motor manufacturers are working on developing motors that with-

Landscape contractors should consider a few things before purchasing an auger attachment, according to Pat Cappucci, director of marketing, Toro Landscape Contractor Group, Bloomington, Minn.

- Digging demands
- Soil type – To determine amount of speed and torque required to dig holes
 - Soil composition (rocky, smooth, etc.) – To determine power head and motor options that will work best
 - Hole types that need to be dug – To determine amount of speed and torque required to dig a hole and to determine size of auger bits needed
 - Type of equipment the auger is going to be attached to – To determine hydraulic power available for the power head and suggested auger bit sizes – *Nicole Wisniewski*

Purchasing Tips

stand greater pressure spikes while providing the torque output needed to run augers. "This type of motor would bleed off excess pressure from a spike instead of taking the hit all at once."

A BIT ABOUT BITS. Drill bits, which come in sizes from 6 to 36 inches, Bethards said, are other crucial auger components.

"Digging post holes requires a 6- or 9-inch bit, 12-inch bits are used for shrubs, and 24-inch bits are used for trees," Bethards said.

Auger bits range in cost from \$70 to \$1,000 each, depending on bit size, Cappucci said.

Dealers can recommend bits based on the type of machine and power head the contractor owns. "Most landscape contractors buy at least two bits to get as much versatility as possible out of the power head they purchased," Cappucci remarked. **U**

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

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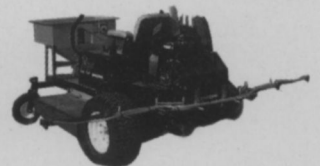
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USE READER SERVICE #142

Grub Control

by Nicole Wisniewski

Lawn care operators can improve their grub control methods by learning about the species involved and keeping track of grub activity.

White grubs in numbers have been known to destroy large areas of turf in short periods of time.

"They are among the most destructive insect pests of turfgrass, and are capable of eliminating plants' entire root systems," offered Fred Baxendale, professor of turfgrass and horticultural entomology, University of Nebraska, Lincoln, Neb.

"Grubs will always be the No. 1 most destructive turfgrass pest because they can kill the turf from their activity," agreed David Shetlar, professor of turfgrass entomology, The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio. "Most of the other pests, especially sod webworms and chinch bugs, damage turf, but they rarely kill it."

And many grub species multiplied in the north central and northeastern sections of North America after last year's above normal rainfall, Shetlar pointed out. "If this type of weather continues in 2001, grub populations will be off the scale," he said.

While no lawn care operator holds the key to locking up these notorious turfgrass villains, you can improve your grub control methods.

To become successful at managing grubs, lawn care operators need to remember the following steps, according to Shetlar:

1. Identify the species involved
2. Determine the risk of damage
3. Determine the control approach(es)
4. Assess control attempts

POSITIVE I.D. A localized patch of pale turf, discolored, dying and displaying moisture-stress symptoms, is the first evidence of white grubs on the scene, Baxendale pointed out. "Turf in such areas will have a spongy feel under foot and can be easily lifted from the soil surface or rolled like a carpet, revealing the C-shaped white grubs underneath," he described (see "Grub Search" on page 155). "Damage is most apparent from mid-August through early

(continued on page 130)



THE
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CONTROL

The 2000 presidential election was of real concern to a number of industry professionals due to its potential impact on the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), which removed key lawn care products such as chlorpyrifos and diazinon from the market last year.

Many contractors voiced concern leading up to the election about the pro-environmental stance favorable by Al Gore and his running mate, Sen. Joe Lieberman (D-Conn.). The Bush/Cheney victory was considered favorable for lawn care companies, but Bush's choice of New Jersey Governor Christie Whitman to run the EPA drew criticism from many. The *USA Today* criticized Whitman and the EPA in an editorial on Jan. 17. That editorial is reprinted below:

From President-elect Bush's perspective, tapping New Jersey Gov. Christie Whitman to head the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) makes perfect sense. As a popular, moderate two-term governor of the nation's ninth-largest state, she has an armload of managerial credentials and has grappled with thorny environmental problems.

Those skills will no doubt help her navigate the thicket of issues and political pressures that will confront the agency during the next four years. They also mean that compared to Bush's more controversial picks, including Gale Norton and John Ashcroft, Whitman's not likely to get a tough grilling at her confirmation hearing.

But where Whitman is weakest is where the EPA is most desperately in need of reform. Namely, its poor handling of science.

During the past eight years, the quality of science at the EPA has reached something of a state of crisis. Rules have been pushed despite opposition from EPA scientists, to the harm of the environment. Scientific evidence undermining existing policies has been ignored. EPA scientists who disagreed with agency policy were targeted for retribution.

This is not a new concern at the EPA. At the end of the last Bush administration in 1992, the EPA released a scathing internal report on the sorry state of science within the agency. Among its findings, science too often didn't drive

environmental policy, leaving "EPA initiatives on shaky scientific ground" and undermining agency credibility.

By largely ignoring those warnings, the Clinton-era EPA suffered a series of troubling blunders. Among them:

- The EPA championed the fuel additive MTBE for its air pollution-fighting abilities, only to later call for its ban because it contaminated water supplies. EPA scientists had been sounding that warning for years.

- The EPA issued rules in 1993 promoting the use of treated sewage sludge

as a crop fertilizer, downplaying warnings from agency scientists about possible health risks. Then last March, the EPA's inspector general concluded that the agency couldn't assure the public that its sludge policy was "protective of human health."

- During the past seven years, the EPA has seen more of its rules struck down in court than other federal regulatory agencies.

If further progress is to be made on the environment, the EPA will have to become an institution trusted for sound, credible science on environmental risks, one that can be trusted to come up with credible solutions.

But even if Whitman chooses to focus on that task, she faces a steep learning curve. When asked recently about the science behind global warming, for example, she confused that issue with the hole in the Earth's ozone layer.

Unless Whitman can fill in that troubling knowledge gap quickly, the EPA will have little chance under the new Bush administration of fixing the serious problems identified by the last one. — *Copyright 2001 USA Today. Reprinted with permission.*



CHRISTIE WHITMAN

AGE: 54

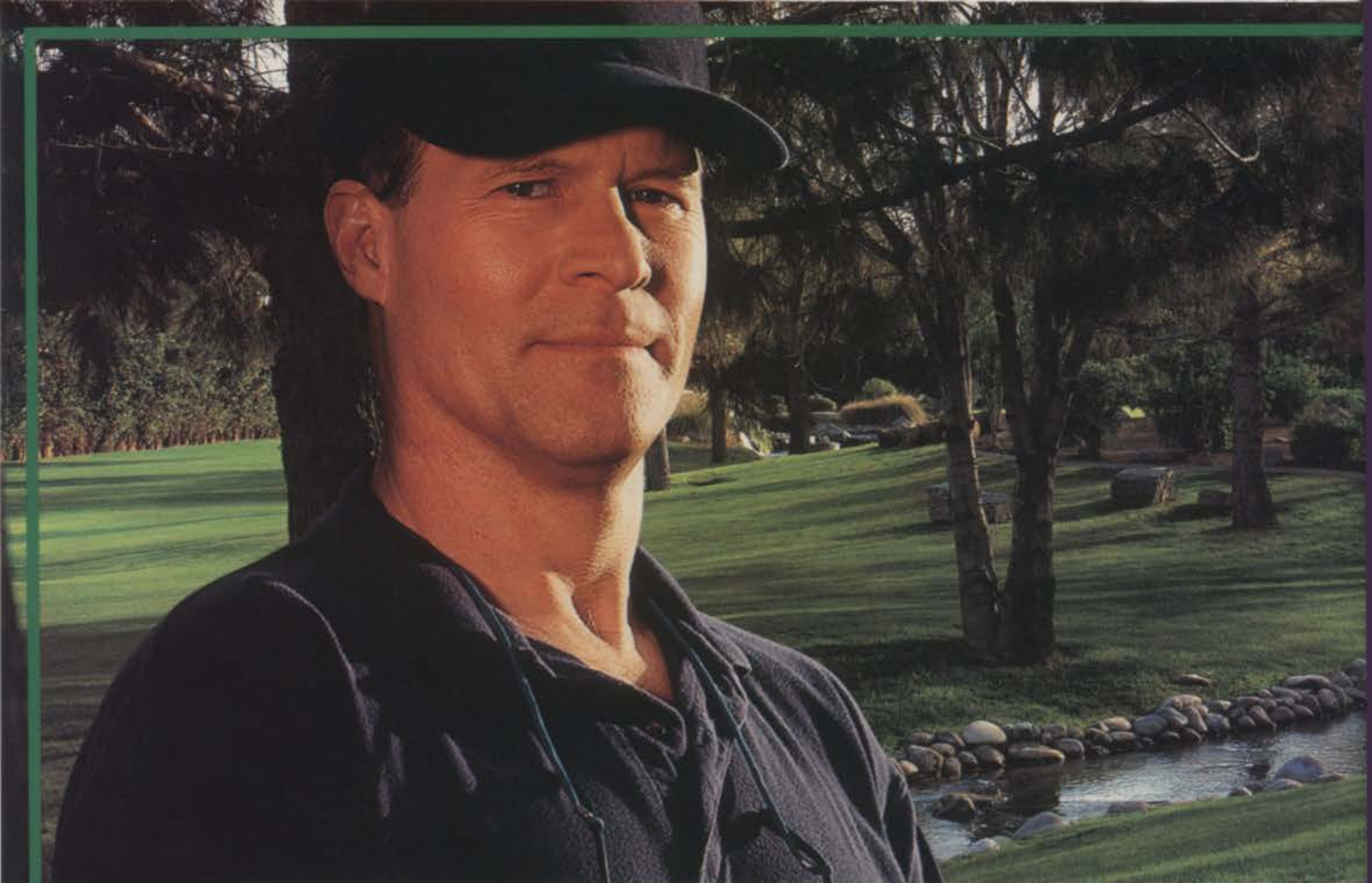
BORN: Sept. 26, 1946, in New York City.

EDUCATION: B.A., Wheaton College, 1968.

EXPERIENCE: Governor of New Jersey, 1994-2000; president, New Jersey Board of Public Utilities, 1988-1990; freeholder, Somerset County, N.J., 1983-1987.

USA Today
CRITICAL OF

EPA, Whitman

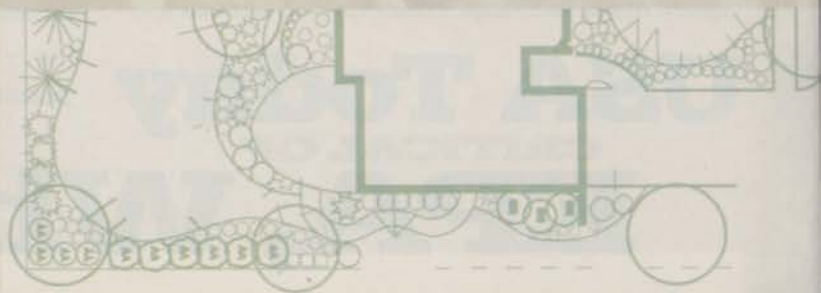


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USE READER SERVICE #144

Grub Control

(continued from page 127)

September when white grub activity is high."

Identifying the grub species before attempting control is important because various types have slightly different activity periods, susceptibility to control materials and reactions to environmental conditions, Shetlar explained.

Technicians can distinguish white grubs by examining the raster pattern, or hair and spine arrangement on the grub's underside, with a hand lens. "The arrangement of spines on masked chafers is random with no clearly defined lines, while spines on May/June beetles are arranged in two distinct parallel lines," Baxendale explained. "Japanese beetles are characterized by a pattern of rastral spines arranged in a V shape, whereas the black turfgrass atanius is distinguished by pad-like structures on the end of the abdomen."

Most lawn care operators agree that grubs are an annual problem in their areas and that many of their customers don't question the addition or inclusion of a grub control service.

"It's an easy sale," said John Buechner, director of technical services, Lawn Doctor, Holmdel, N.J. "We market our grub control service when the beetle is flying in the May-June time frame because this creates urgency. They can see or hear the beetle flying and want a preventive treatment because they know the damage grubs can cause."

Gary LaScalea, president, GroGreen, Plano, Texas, agreed. "Every summer we have problems because grubs like the cool, moist soil beneath the turf as a way to escape the heat," he explained. "We look at customers' lawns with a history of grub problems and their neighbors' lawns ahead of time to get a jump start on either treating them preventively or keeping watch of the problem so it can be treated curatively."

Grubs are typically born in August and are fully grown one month after birth, pointed out Dan Potter, professor of entomology, University of Kentucky, Lexington, Ky. Their growth stages go from first to third instar. "By mid- to late September, third instar grubs can cause visible damage, and skunks and raccoons begin digging for these large 'land shrimp,'" Shetlar pointed out.

TAKING CONTROL. Lawn care operators can use three approaches for managing grubs: preventive, curative and rescue treatments.

Ten to 15 years ago, grubs were treated

Treatment Threshold

The following thresholds are estimates of the average number of white grubs necessary per unit area of turf to produce visible injury and are provided to assist turfgrass managers in making treatment decisions.

Remember that the condition of the turf, its value and the damage caused by birds and animals searching for grubs may alter these thresholds.

In general, if white grub numbers exceed these thresholds in non-irrigated turf, an insecticide application is justified. Irrigated areas should be able to withstand substantially more white grub pressure before visual injury occurs.

Treatment decisions should be based on the average number of white grubs detected in the sampled area. If white grub numbers exceed threshold levels in only a few isolated patches, consider controlling these grubs with spot-treatments.

— Fred Baxendale

TREATMENT THRESHOLD

Grub Species	Number per Square Foot	Number per 4-Inch Core
Masked Chafer	8 to 10	1
May/June Beetle	3 to 5	1
Japanese Beetle	8 to 10	1
Black Turfgrass Ataenius	30 to 50	3 to 5

solely through the curative approach when the pests were young or just hatched – typically late July and early August, Potter said.

But, during a cool year, the treatment window for curative control usually extends to the last two weeks of August and even the first week of September, targeted toward the first and second instar grubs, according to Shetlar. "A treatment at this time, while technically a curative application, should be called a rescue treatment because we are trying to stop any further damage and discourage any animal digging – quickly," he said. "Because affected grubs do not die quickly after a rescue treatment, skunks and raccoons will continue digging. Therefore, this is why we recommend an application of a quick-acting insecticide like trichlorfon (Dylox) or diazinon (until existing stocks are used up)."

"During a curative approach, lawn care operators can typically go with a phosphate or carbamate in a liquid or granular form for control," Potter added. "But they should

also make sure to do post-treatment irrigation so the insecticide can be leached into the soil. If the product is not watered in, you can lose up to 50 percent of active ingredient due to wind and other environmental elements. Adequate sprinkler systems should do the trick. Also, according to my data, 5 to 10 percent of the tests say liquid works better in a curative approach."

While curative and rescue treatments are still practiced, Potter said these methods are going out of style due to the high risk associated with discovering and treating the grub infestation before pests reach the third instar stage, when they are large and cause significant turf damage.

Another drawback is that these methods typically mean additional costs for the customer, Buechner said. "When we do curative control, some seeding also has to be done due to the turf damage, therefore curative control costs clients roughly \$40 more per 1,000 square feet," he said.

(continued on page 155)

SUPPLEMENT TO:

Lawn & Landscape

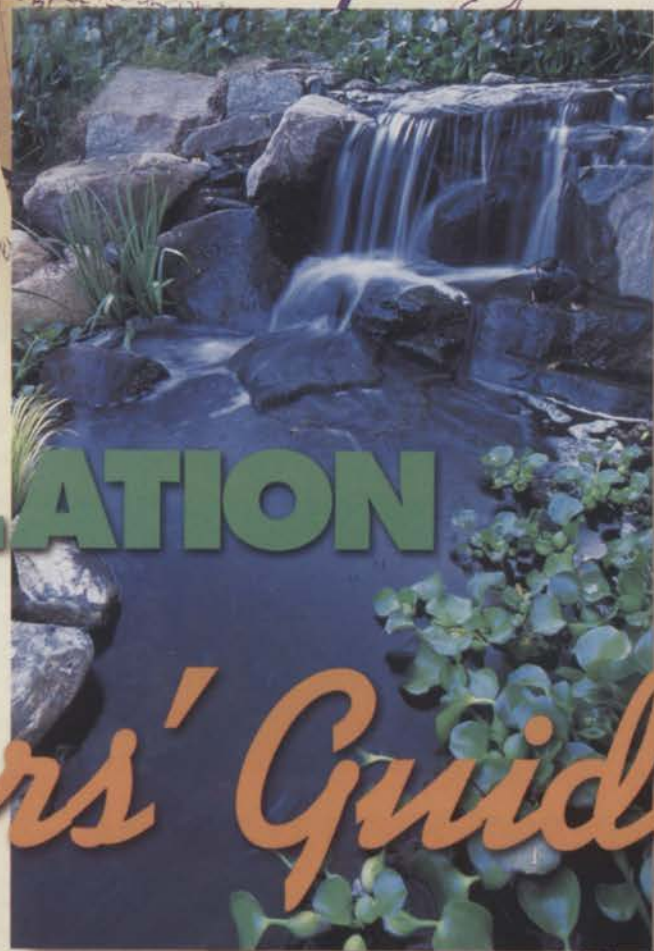
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For contractors scouting ornamentals for an installation project, sourcing specific plants can present challenges. **L4**

HARDSCAPE Hints

Installing these important design elements takes planning and organization. **L10**

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Lawn & Landscape's second Installation Buyers' Guide offers landscape solutions, from hardscapes to water features.

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Flexibility is important with properties that require several plant varieties. Unavailable selections might be substituted during the design process.

For contractors scouting ornamentals for an installation project, sourcing specific plants can present challenges.

by Kristen Hampshire



Timing is everything – especially when locating a lengthy list of trees, shrubs, annuals, perennials and groundcovers to complete an installation project.

Contractors who do not plan in advance will play detective in what can be a frustrating search for ornamentals, noted Jason Buehring, plant purchaser, Greenscape, Holly Springs, N.C. Consulting 15 different nurseries to locate ornamentals for one project is not unusual, he added.

“If you’re going to do quality work, sourcing can be a problem,” he observed. “I’ve been here for years, and each year, finding good, quality material that you can get your hands on and be able to use is more challenging.”

Buehring points to the economy, which is springboarding consumer demand for property enhancement, he said. Driving land development provides plenty of work for installation crews, but acquiring the trees and shrubs to fill design blueprints can be a “double-edged sword,” Buehring added. He books plants for Greenscape’s installation projects in July or August for the following year, tagging trees to plant during the coming season, he explained.

“But if you don’t stay in touch with the nursery, work with them and make them feel like you’re going to use the plants you said you would, they could get upset and cut you off for next year,” he noted. This means one less option for sourcing ornamentals and one less avenue for locating specific trees and shrubs.

Since trees do not sprout and grow as quickly as the economy, nurseries might not have the quantity, size or variety of plants a contractor requests. This is the starting point of many contractors’ search tactics.

DEALING WITH DEMAND. “Sourcing ornamentals is more difficult than in some years since plant supply is a finite quantity and it’s not a manufactured product,” noted Michael Currin, owner, Greenscape. “When the demand exceeds the supply, there is not a manufacturing process where you can run the assembly line longer. There’s a seasonality that, in some cases, extends over several years. That has always been a challenge in the industry.”

Balled-and-burlapped ornamentals and plants larger than 3 inches are difficult to source now, noted Andy Simmons, nursery manager, Speakman Nurseries, Stillpond, Md. Contractors seeking these plants, and other hard-to-get varieties, might choose to enlist a broker to play “search and seize” for their ornamental orders – a time-saving solution

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for contractors running into supply dead-ends, Simmons suggested.

Bill Hutchinson, president, Plant & Supply Locator, Taylors, S.C., serves as a middle-man for contractors by offering a catalogue with more than 500 ornamental suppliers that lists availability by variety, including information such as nursery location, number of plants available and contact names. "They keep their inventory current with us and we take their inventory and put it in a format so that contractors can open up the catalogue and look for live oaks, for example," he described.

Contractors can forecast supply stresses by noting which varieties have numerous listings in the catalogue, Hutchinson noted. "If they look in our magazine and they see 25 people carrying a product, they can be pretty confident that it's going to be out there," he explained. "If they see just one or two, they could be gone before the installation."

Researching availability and learning which varieties are abundant and which

Sourcing SOLUTIONS

Michael Currin, owner, Greenscape, Holly Springs, N.C., offered these tips for contractors to simplify ornamental sourcing for installation jobs:

- Know which plants are available in the marketplace.
- Develop a strong relationship with suppliers, because flexibility will help you get through changes in availability.
- Keep your company's plant specifier informed of industry trends.
- Never say never. There will always be changes in ornamental availability. We need to prepare our clients for the fact that we will work through the process and maintain value if there are changes.
- Communicate with customers. Don't set unreasonable expectations when planning plants for an installation job.
- Realize there is a cost to meeting out-of-the-ordinary requests.
- Educate your customers.
- Consult multiple vendors for substitutions. If you only purchase plants from one vendor, you could end up short on supplies.

"hot plants" will quickly deplete allows contractors to make decisions for a design or installation, such as whether or not to substitute scarce plants for varieties that are

easier to locate, Currin pointed out.

"There are always alternatives," he stressed. "I don't believe there is one plant out there that does it all, and there's not another

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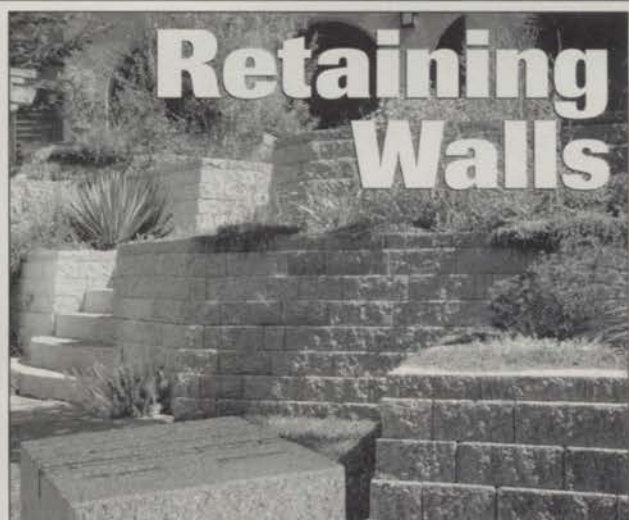
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plant that couldn't be a reasonably acceptable replacement in that situation."

When considering whether or not to search for a substitute or settle for a smaller, lower-quality version of the desired plant, Currin advised considering the costs of the substitute. "You're balancing the availability and cost as it relates to the substitute, and you're balancing aesthetic acceptance and functional equality, meaning will it be equal to the other plant."

If the substitute will not fit the bill, contractors might have to, "pay for it and eat it," said Ed Schatz, branch president, One Source Landscape Construction, Bunnell, Fla., adding that the low quality of some high-demand plants do not justify high prices. "Occasionally, the pricing will fluctuate if a plant is in short supply," he explained. "The big projects in the state might need oaks of a certain size, so nurseries will be low on supply and the quality goes down, but the price goes up or stays the same."

This is where advance plant booking,

relationships with nurseries, following market trends, communicating with landscape architects, and educating clients about varieties and expectations can build a contractor's immunity to sourcing crises. Contractors might avoid settling for replacements by forming a sourcing system.

PLANNING FOR PLANTS. A shoddy sourcing system breeds inconsistency—contractors might be left with plants that are too small, below quality expectations or the wrong variety all together, Schatz noted.

"Without an efficient sourcing system, there is inconsistency from job to job," he stressed. "If you're going to build a reputation on quality, you need to know before you install how every job is going to look, and if you don't have vendors you trust, you will get inconsistency that will scar your reputation."

This is why establishing a sourcing method can be a crucial step to satisfying customers. If clients expect a red maple and a generous display of annuals and perenni-

als, they will not be pleased if the end results leave them gazing at a bare lawn or one with a sprig-sized tree and a few scattered plants because their contractor wasn't proactive.

To avoid this scenario, Schatz suggested a sourcing system that considers plant availability, pricing and nursery contacts.

"The key is to align yourself with a few vendors that you can rely on and then keep up with their inventory and what's available," he advised. "We send our representatives to nursery offices so they can keep us informed on supply."

Schatz said his company adjusts its ornamental orders based on the information he learns at these meetings. Also, notifying nurseries of prospective plant needs helps contractors sidestep sourcing problems during the installation process, Schatz added.

When Schatz is awarded a contract where the project will not begin for months, he places a deposit on the plants needed to satisfy the design and tags the trees at the nursery so he won't run into shortages dur-

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ing the installation process, he said.

Often, contractors are looking for a little bit of everything, Simmons noted. Most projects combine shade trees, perennials and evergreens. "It runs the gamut, usually," he noted. This is why Simmons said he commonly encounters contractors who can't locate the plant size or variety for their job.

"With plants, you're speculating what

of 2001, and his "fax machines get a good workout," as contractors send lists of plants they want his nursery to hold, he said.

If there are no guarantees, how can contractors ensure that they will have access to the plants they need for a job? Schatz recommended including landscape architects in the loop and informing them of vendors' available varieties.

"During the winter, we sit down with designers and discuss the type of plant material they anticipate using in the coming year," Currin explained. "We try to keep designers informed on the market conditions."

E-SOURCING. With e-commerce gaining consumer appeal in many industries, some contractors are using nursery Web sites to check variety listings or email plant requests. The Internet provides an efficient method of updating plant availability.

However, Simmons noted that there is a certain point where contractors must see the plant they are purchasing – not simply view it on a screen. Digital images might not capture the product's essence, Currin pointed out. "This industry still sees what it does as an art form, and as long as that element exists, I don't think shopping online will replace the visit to the nursery." **LL**

The author is Assistant Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine

"...finding good, quality material that you can get your hands on and be able to use is more challenging." – Jason Buehring

the demand will be three to eight years in advance," he noted. "So you have to look at your crystal ball and see how many plants you think contractors will want. That's hard."

Often, growers' pre-planning efforts prove to be a guessing game, Simmons said. He is now filling requests for spring and fall

"The proactive approach is to contact the architect right away if you're having problems locating an ornamental," Schatz said.

Design/build firms that house designers, contractors and purchasers can cooperate and cater designs to the market's availability, Currin said.



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USE READER SERVICE #152



Photo: Anchor Walls.

Installing these important design elements takes planning and organization.

by Cynthia Greenleaf

HARDSCAPE

Hints

As trees and flowers bring harmony to landscapes, so do hardscapes, as they become increasingly invaluable design elements. A brick paver patio or a strategically placed retaining wall can spice up the drabest of properties. Here, industry experts offer their tips on installing these design elements effectively and efficiently.

POINTERS FROM THE PROS. When working with hardscapes, planning and organization is paramount, advised Doug Young, landscape department manager, Professional Grounds, Lorton, Va. "You can't wing a hardscape installation," he pointed out. "In any project, planning and organization is extremely important, especially when you're trying to organize a lot of different elements."

In addition, John Pasour, production manager, Greenscape, Holly Springs, N.C., suggested ordering materials well in advance, when possible. Two weeks ahead of a project is generally ideal, he said, adding that materials such as stamped concrete are the most popular hardscape elements with his customers these days. With a range of

patterns and colors, this is readily customizable and has a polished look, Pasour described.

Contractors should also work with several suppliers to ensure they can find the materials they need. When faced with last-minute requests to match an existing stone wall with new stones, for example, having these relationships in place is vital, Pasour advised. "You always have to have two or three different options."

He added that his North Carolina location serves him well: most of his materials – such as bricks or clay pavers – come from in-state suppliers.

Young advised customizing equipment as much as possible, to ensure efficient and effective installation. "We've customized forks on a mini skid steer to carry pavers," he said, offering a suggestion on how to streamline the hardscape installation process.

Young added that his company has found wet cutting saws to be the most useful in working with materials. "I've noticed a lot of contractors using cut-off or dry saws," he said. "Wet saws are faster, easier and more productive. They're also more durable – the blade will last longer."

Knowing when to bring in a subcontractor is another trick to successfully working with hardscapes. Subbing out this highly specialized work can be a smart move for busy contractors, pointed out John Donahue, vice president of construction, Landscape Concepts, Grayslake, Ill. "Everybody has specialties," he noted, adding that subcontractors can be less hung up on time concerns than contractors, which often makes for better hardscape installations. "When you get to things like decorative paver walks, subs can often do it in a cheaper and more artistic manner."

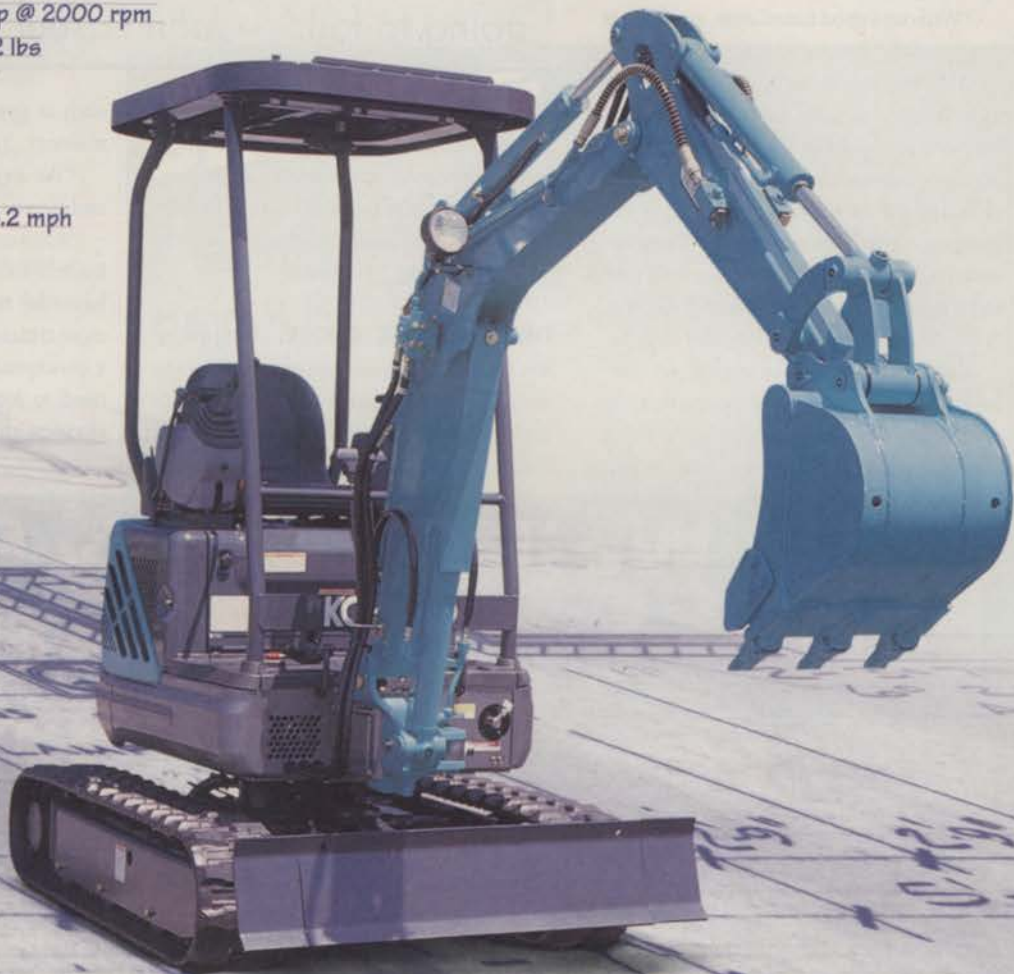
CHALLENGES TO CONSIDER. As with any installation issue, working with hardscapes presents its own distinct set of difficulties. With wall construction (see "Working With



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USE READER SERVICE #153

Walls" on page L13), a common mistake is using inappropriate materials, such as blocks that are too small or too light, Donahue pointed out. Not reinforcing materials into the subgrade can be a lethal error, he added. "Putting blocks on top of blocks without following design parameters is just asking for trouble," he noted. "Walls should be engineered, with a level base, proper drainage and pressure."

"Without a good foundation, anything is going to fail," Pasour added.

Aesthetic issues are always a challenge as well. After all, with hardscapes, customers pay a premium for the privilege of making their landscapes more attractive. A common mistake in walls, for example, is not stepping them down properly, Donahue described. "Make sure to set the wall so it steps down in a gradual fashion," he said. "Otherwise, it looks too abrupt and sloppy."

Pasour agreed. One of the biggest challenges is dealing with changes in elevation and getting crews to properly terrace or put

step downs in walls or patio landings, he pointed out. "You want stone walls to look random," he said.

One of Professional Grounds' biggest hardscape issues is working within the parameters of local building codes, which often come into play when the company is installing a

often requires a more detail-oriented, visionary employee than the average lawn mowing crew member. To learn the craft, crew members at Professional Grounds will work in an apprentice position for about six months, until they aptly demonstrate the hardscape skills needed to perform tasks

"Without a good foundation, anything is going to fail." – John Pasour

timber retaining wall, for example, according to Young. "Making sure we're up to speed with construction standards, managing projects around inspections, utility markings – that's typically the thing that's the most challenging," he related.

THE EMPLOYEE ANGLE. Using properly trained crews is critical when it comes to installing hardscapes effectively and attractively. Laying a patio or building a wall

such as dry laid installations and concrete masonry, Young related.

"We begin with less complex projects and slowly build up," he described.

When assembling a hardscape crew, contractors should know which crew members have the right qualities for the job. "The most critical thing is that someone has to be a conceptual thinker," Young said. "They need to look at a project and be able to envision all of the individual steps that the



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A POPULAR hardscape element, retaining walls require a degree of expertise to install correctly. Lynn Barnhart, marketing manager, Anchor Walls, Minneapolis, Minn., offered a few expert insights.

- Remember that retaining walls are flexible design elements. From steps and borders to terraces and tree rings, retaining walls can do most anything imaginable. "Sometimes contractors forget how many options they have," she said.
- Make sure walls are appropriately and carefully designed. If a wall is more than 4 feet high, it needs to be properly engineered for necessary stability. "These are more than just stacking blocks – these are structural systems," she said, adding that landscape contractors must keep in mind that a wall is 10 percent block and 90 percent soil, so properly preparing this foundation is critical.
- Thoroughly train installation crews. Almost every wall manufacturer offers training materials, such as instructional videos, brochures and bilingual manuals that contractors should take full advantage of.

project will take, from beginning to end in an efficient manner."

For many employees, this envisioning process is tough, Young admitted. "But it's the difference between making or breaking a job," he said, adding that his biggest challenge as a manager is keeping enough trained people on staff.

For effective training, Landscape Concepts relies on manufacturer materials to educate its employees, Donahue conveyed. Having sifted through a range of supplier-provided training material, he knows what works after a while, he said.

The company also uses a dedicated wall

crew comprised of a superintendent and six employees who have earned their place on the crew, having come up through the ranks and working for the company for at least three to four years, Donahue described.

With hardscape installations, Greenscape prefers employees who are creative, detail-oriented perfectionists, Pasour said, adding

that his company gets a lot of its training ideas from hardscape manufacturers, trade magazines and even various landscape certification exams. "We've taken ideas from those and made a training day out of it." **LL**

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

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Contractors should consult codes from the city or homeowners' association before beginning an installation project. Photo: Anchor Walls

Installation work is filled with procedures and policies, from municipalities to homeowners.

by Kristen Hampshire



Rules are rules.

Contractors who perform landscape installation work can't dodge the codes and restrictions that put parameters on many of their projects. And often, they can't avoid the headache that accompanies these regulations – extra phone calls, paperwork, inspections and fees that present time-consuming hassles, slow down projects and increase costs.

Building regulations run the gamut, from limiting a fence height to receiving approval for a new deck to locating legal documents such as site surveys. Naturally, some stipulations require more time and attention than others, noted Leo Kelly, owner, Kellygreen Design, Palatine, Ill.

He cited three primary entities that impose installation regulations that contractors can encounter. Federal codes, imposed by agencies such as the Army Corp of Engineers, post restrictions on projects such as waterways; municipal regulations bind contractors with various city and county ordinances that outline building requirements. Finally, homeowners' associations (HOAs) often write covenants that outline aesthetic limitations designed to uphold a uniform, manicured appearance in a particular neighborhood, he said.

No matter the source of the regulation, these rules cannot be broken without costly consequences. Awareness, understanding and organization can help contractors cut regulatory red tape and press through procedural paperwork, stressed Michael Girvin, owner, Designs on Nature, Mishawaka, Ind.

"The No. 1 mistake contractors make is not understanding regulations," he noted.

HOUSE RULES. Girvin learned the hard way – contractors must do the legwork before beginning an installation project. "I've gotten burned before," he admitted. "You don't trust the homeowner's word. A lot of times they are just unaware of the covenant or they don't read it."

When a customer requests an installation – whether it is a deck or a new driveway – Girvin does not assume that the project will comply with codes. His company, which specializes in natural plantings like wild flowers, often discovers that the client's wish does not match the HOA's desire. The key to these codes is beautification, and often, this concept does not align with what the customer considers appealing, he added.

"I've had people ask me to do things that are definitely violations of the homeowners' covenants," Girvin noted. "A lot of the codes consider prairie grass and wildflowers an unkempt yard and have restrictions on how close retaining walls can be to a property edge."

To verify that the customer's plan doesn't breach building codes, he will visit the HOA office or locate its president from chamber of commerce records. Often, Girvin consults with the building developer to discuss whether or not the installation project the homeowner requested matches specifications for the neighborhood, he said.

"I'm very upfront in my initial meeting with the client that I'm going to talk to those people," he added. Commu-

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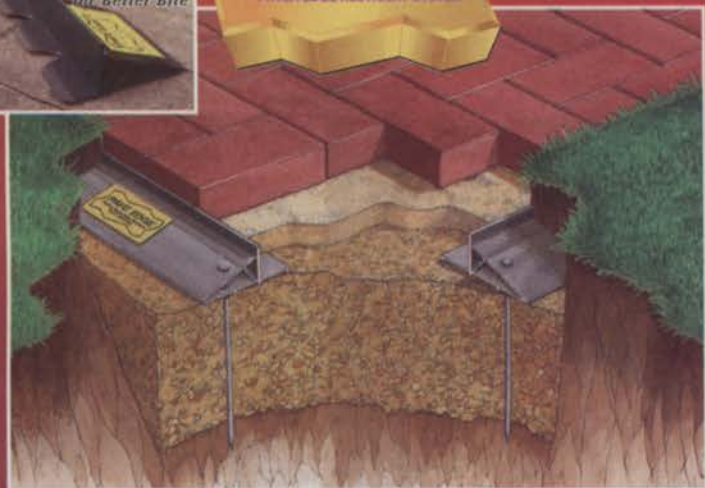
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nication is the first step to overcoming regulatory roadblocks, and Girvin will not skip a step in the paperwork process to ensure the project runs smoothly, he said.

After approving plans with the HOA, he requires a written document confirming its approval or will copy the relevant statute from the legal documents, he explained. "You just need to cross your Ts and dot your Is."

Robben Salyers, CEO, Jake's Garden, Minneapolis, Minn., said negotiations are key when dealing with HOAs. "You have to bring them reassurance that the project will beautify and enhance the neighborhood," he said. "You have to give presentations. You do drawings. You do a lot of hand-holding. You have to give reassurance that the project will enhance their neighborhood and sell the benefits."

Time constraints are plentiful on residential projects that bear these regulations, he noted, adding that while homeowners want to see pleasing end-results, they often do not want to see the equipment and debris

Ruling REGULATION

RULES, CODES and tricky paperwork preface many installation projects, noted Michael Girvin, owner, Designs on Nature, Mishawaka, Ind. "If you're starting out, the best thing is to hook up with a contractor who can be a mentor and show you the hoops you need to jump through," he suggested.

Here are some tips he offered contractors who confront installation regulations:

- 1. Introduce yourself to government officials.** This list includes the drainage board and your local environmental management official. Give them your business card and a company brochure. They can send you a tremendous amount of business and can help you develop relationships in the community.
- 2. Get in the phone book.** Start by looking at those contractors doing similar work to you and build good relationships with them.
- 3. Use the Internet.**
- 4. Use your vendors.** They know their products and can offer erosion control workshops. You can network your way out of a lot of problems on a job site by knowing who to talk to.

during the "work in progress" stage. In this case, the homeowners' need for instant gratification motivates some code stipulations.

"Time is critical because you're disturb-

ing their life," Salyers noted.

This urgency characterizes limitations on many resort area and school zone projects, noted Bill Miller, owner, All Seasons Landscaping, Ketchum, Idaho. Clients want jobs completed before vacation season begins on July Fourth or started after season crowds clear on Labor Day, he said. "We try to have enough lead time for bigger projects so that we can manage the staff accordingly," he explained.

On the school properties his company maintains, he must work around football practices and gym classes, he said. Assigning two crews to the project and keeping careful records of when classes and practices occur help his employees overcome time barriers, he explained.

Most of Miller's restrictions center on aesthetic issues, however. Homeowners want a neat landscape and a tidy mess while installation is taking place. "Customers don't want vehicles parked on their property for any length of time," he cited as an example of an appearance-based regulation. "It's important to let people know what is going on, what to expect and when they can expect to see things cleaned up so they can see an end to the job and that it isn't going to go on forever."

ORNERY ORDINANCES. Kelly related municipal procedures to a sketch on the popular late-1960s comedy show, "Laugh-In," where actress Lily Tomlin played a telephone operator who sidestepped impatient

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callers. While she responded politely to complaint calls, surely, their paperwork was lost or their service was inexplicably shut off, Kelly recalled. He also compared the frustration of regulatory red-tape to waiting in a long line.

"If you get mad because you're in a line of 200 people, you'll never get through it, like at the post office at Christmas," he reasoned. "Put up with what's in front of you, and sooner or later it will be accomplished."

The lesson: There is no cutting in the "regulation line." Contractors should plan time to follow procedures that will ensure they are complying with codes, Kelly said. He finds procedural roadblocks with municipalities the most common regulatory encounter, and admits city and county ordinances vary from strict to rather lax.

"In one municipality, you can walk right in and get a fence permit immediately if you have the proper documentation," he explained. "In another, you might deal with an office that will only accept calls to schedule inspections during a one-hour time block per day - 3:30 to 4:30. If you are busy or forget to call, you lost time."

Girvin said 20 percent of his projects cause regulatory challenges, most of them minor, he noted. Agencies he commonly encounters during the planning stages of these projects include city code enforcement, county drainage officials, the Department of Natural Resources and the Army Corp of Engineers. If ignored, city codes cause problems for landscape companies, he reminded.

"Some customers will want to turn their yard into a nature preserve, but there are noxious weed ordinances you have to read," he warned. "Cities have a myriad of laws."

If a client wanted to construct a seawall on a river, for example, he or she would first contact a contractor who would look at the site and determine the best course of action, Girvin explained. Then, the contractor would call the Department of Natural Resources, which issues a form to fill out requesting project details. The department then sends an inspector from the Division of Water to assess the site, and if it approves the project, the contractor can submit a request to the Army Corp of Engineers, he continued. After it approves the plans, the contractor can obtain a building permit and finally begin the work.

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The process contains several opportunities for potholes to form. If the paperwork rests on a department desk, the project needs to be redesigned or the plan is denied, Girvin noted. As a precautionary measure, he suggested developing a relationship with local government officials.

"Regulations are confusing, and you have to develop a relationship with people who can interpret them for you so you don't get into trouble," he noted. "When you get into all the 'whereas' and 'therefores,' a lot of people don't adequately understand it."

Involvement in local politics is another method of strengthening a company's relationship with the agencies that stamp project approvals, and this approach also can further understanding of the regulatory process that many installation plans must endure, Salyers added. "Sit on a planning commission," he suggested. "It's important that we, as an industry, engage in the political process and be a part of the solution."

If the pages of amendments, exceptions

and additions in regulation books are any indication of the complexity of some parts of project approval, contractors are wise to be informed and educate themselves and their employees on basic governmental departments, Salyers added.

First, contractors must learn about the project they are bidding on or planning, he said. A specification book for a commercial project is a valuable resource for contractors - "the constitution and framework of a project," Salyers described. This book includes project guidelines such as conditions of the contract and site work including concrete, masonry, metals, woods, plastics, thermal and moisture protection, etc. Essentially, the specification book spells out the nitty-gritty details, he said.

"In Minnesota, before you dig a hole or plant a tree you have to verify the locations," Salyers explained. "You have to make sure you're not in the public right-of-way as far as utilities, electrical lines and fiber optics."

These minor details are just a few of the

considerations contractors need to factor in to their projects, Salyer said. The water, gas and phone companies also should be contacted for projects that require digging as part of what he calls, "pre-staging the job." This includes planning erosion control methods in wetland areas and gaining approval from Watershed Districts, Salyers noted.

Girvin described a project where the client wanted to enhance a wetland area. Before he could begin installing native plants and removing non-native shrubbery, Girvin had to reference a soil and water conservation survey to verify that the wetland was on the map, he explained.

Such legal logistics can put a project in limbo for days or months, Kelly added. "I've had approval be as quick as the same day and as long as seven or eight months," he said. "One client wanted to build a wooden boardwalk through a wetland zone, we started the paperwork in February and got the approval in early October. We were able to finish the project 2½ weeks after that."

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COSTS AND CONSEQUENCES. Maneuvering through detailed codes and procedures does not come without cost to the customer, however. In fact, Kelly stressed that the time invested in filing documents, inspecting properties and awaiting approval from government agencies must be billed to justify accepting the project.

"If I don't feel the client is willing to pay to put up with the process, I will turn the work down," he said, adding that he communicates the costs in advance with customers so they are aware of the fees.

Fees can range from \$35 to more than \$800, including reviewing fees, inspection costs and charges based on a certain percentage of the project cost, he identified. An average project will run a \$500 to \$1,000 tab for regulatory fees, Kelly said. Half of these fees generally are allocated to document preparation and half are accumulated due to project slowdowns.

He is careful to note on a bill that these costs are not included in the price of the

project. If customers want their job estimate to include regulatory costs, he first requires a deposit for the project before tracking down costs. "I don't do it without my time and effort being put on the books.

"Regulations increase the direct cost for the clients and slow down the project, so the job costs more because you have to stop to get inspections at certain phases and you could do the work faster if you could continue straight through," Kelly commented.

However, the project is often worth the hassle and cost, he added. If he knows the client will bring him additional business or he has a solid relationship with the customer, he doesn't mind wading through the paperwork, he said.

Clients aren't the only party involved that shoulder regulatory fees. Companies who gloss over procedures will bear hefty fines, Salyers warned. "It's more expensive to do work today than five years ago because the technology has changed, methods are changing and the consequences have

gotten so severe if the regulations are not followed," he pointed out. "That can be devastating in the form of a lawsuit, fine or increased insurance costs."

Consequential threats keep Salyers on his toes when bidding installation jobs. He carefully reviews blueprints before committing to a project. "If the specification book has so much information compiled that it takes a lawyer to understand what's being said, I won't bid the project," he added.

He suggested starting small when taking on government work. Once a company is acclimated with procedures, these projects become less overwhelming, he noted.

"A contractor's biggest problem is not asking enough questions before starting a job," he stressed. "If you're doing something that walks the regulatory edge and you're not educated in regulation, you better become educated." **LL**

The author is Assistant Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.

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- 8. Ornamental/tree pesticide application
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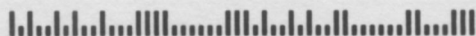


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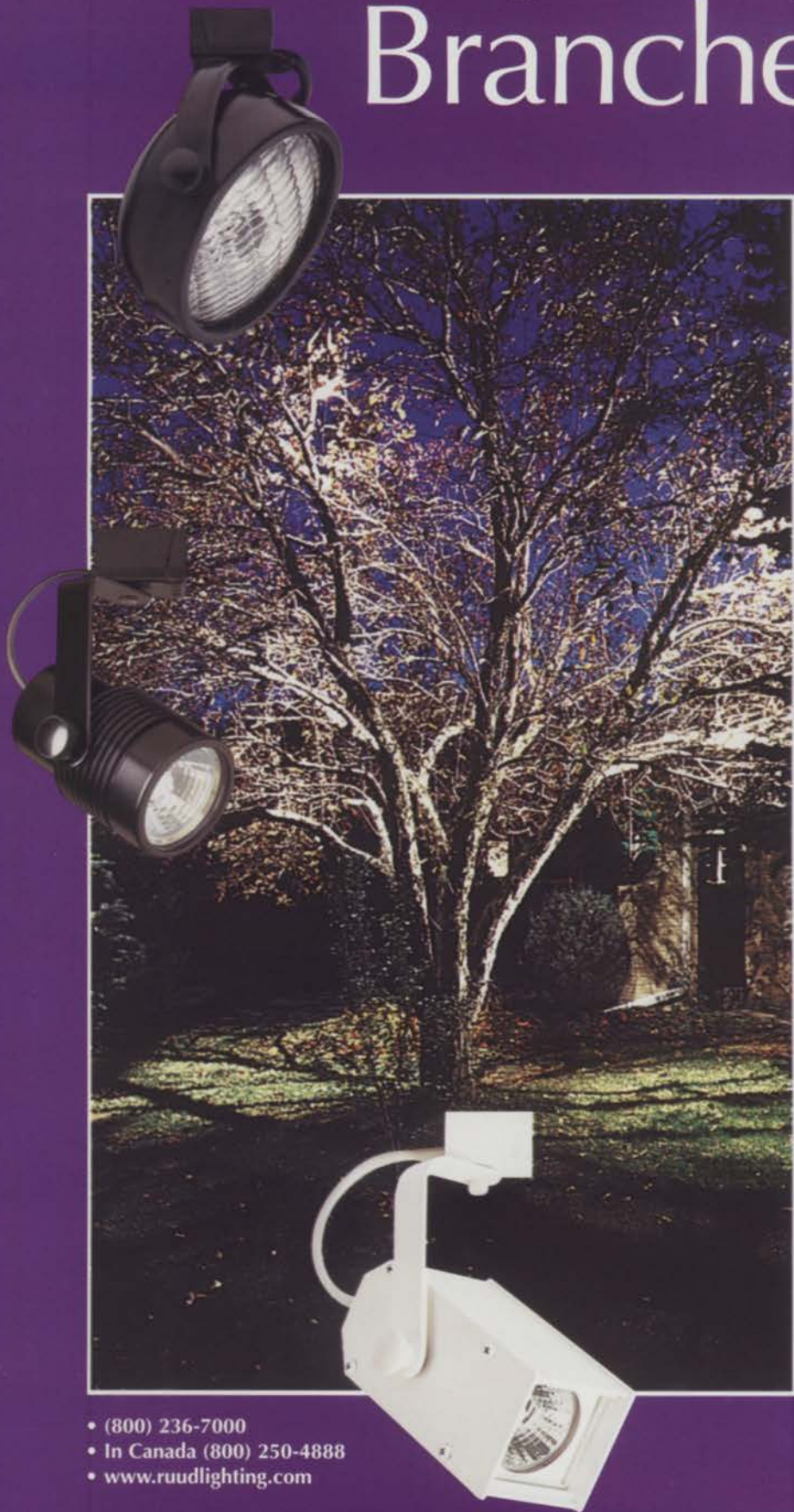
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USE READER SERVICE #156

(continued from page 130)

However, curative treatments are still popular among clients and lawn care operators who believe in the integrated pest management approach to control, Buechner said.

The final grub treatment choice – preventive control – has been growing in popularity

among lawn care operators because of new products on the market, such as Merit and Mach 2, that are specific to this control type.

Preventive control has a broader window of application that spans from late May through egg hatch in late July or the first or

second week of August, Potter said. "So far, my tests have shown better than 94 percent control with this approach on annual grub species," he said.

But preventive treatment involves applying the grub control product before a lawn care operator can sample the area for grub population, Shetlar pointed out.

Therefore, preventive control's disadvantage is that some clients and lawn care operators oppose the use of pesticides before a problem is discovered, LaScalea said. "They only want us to treat their lawns when they have problems," he explained.

But Potter insisted there are ways to integrate preventive control and IPM, such as:

- Target high risk sites first
- Keep records of grub activity
- Pay attention to adult beetle activity, which can foretell grub problems
- Use products with lower toxicity compounds

(continued on page 189)

Sampling for white grubs should begin early in the predicted grub activity period and before signs of injury are visible (once damage appears, considerable root injury will already be present).

Since white grubs do not distribute themselves evenly throughout the turf, the entire turfgrass area must be sampled in a consistent, uniform pattern.

At each sample site, cut two 6-inch by 6-inch turf sections on three sides. Peel back the turf and examine the upper 2 inches of root zone for the presence of white grubs. Shake or break the sample, and probe through the soil and roots with a sharp instrument, such as a pocketknife or screwdriver. Those with a golf course cup cutter can substitute 4-inch diameter turf-soil core samples.

If no white grubs are detected, but damage is present, examine the turf for other causes of injury, such as disease, excessive thatch, moisture stress, heat damage and/or sod webworm or billbug feeding. – Fred Baxendale

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USE READER SERVICE #81


USE READER SERVICE #82

Employee Solicitation:

Right

or

WRONG?



Employee solicitation is an age-old practice that causes many lawn and landscape contractors to cringe. However, this is also a concept that a number of industry firms rely on from time to time to acquire new employees.

Clearly, an ethical question stems from employee solicitation: Is recruiting a competitor's employees wrong or is it a fair business practice? Lawn & Landscape asked two respected contractors (and long-time friends), who have different views of this issue, to share their thoughts.

GEORGE MORRELL, president,
THE MORRELL GROUP, ATLANTA, GA.

At the Morrell Group, I instituted a policy long ago that we would not solicit other companies' employees. Times have changed, and we have modified that policy somewhat. Today, our policy is the same with one exception: If another company repeatedly attempts to hire our employees then it becomes a violation of the respect we have for that company, and it's open season. We will treat them with the same disrespect they have shown us.

Years ago, the landscape industry was smaller and more intimate. We knew each other, and we were friends in many cases. Our businesses were local and few of us ventured outside our own cities. There was always the competition for work, but not so much for the people.

Today, we are no longer mom-and-pop businesses. We have become an industry recognized by Wall Street. Not only are local

contractors soliciting my employees, but companies from all over the country, as well as headhunters, are calling on a weekly basis.

I like to think that I built a business based on fairness, openness and honesty. You have to have some guiding principles as you go down this road. If I could say that what I was doing was legal, moral and ethical, then I felt it was OK to do. The legal part is pretty well defined. Where things get cloudy is with moral and ethical issues. Then, the decision-making process becomes a matter of perspective, and what is right for me may not be right for someone else. I'm not judging people for their actions, I'm simply saying that some practices don't feel right to me.

There is another very important facet to our policy on hiring, which, to me, is the core of the issue. All companies develop a culture, and that culture is really an extension of the leadership's personality. When a prospective employee comes to you for employment and you hire, train and give that person an environment they are comfortable in, they develop a sense of loyalty and commitment to the company. Your chances of retaining a productive, motivated, long-term employee are significantly enhanced.

The process of seeking out a competitor's employees and enticing them to consider your offer creates a negative environment to start with. Being too enthusiastic and over-selling the prospect is easy to do. This leads to high expectations from the new employee who can become discouraged upon joining your firm.

Attracting, hiring and training new employees when you need them is a daunting task. Doing this correctly takes a commitment of manpower and capital to set up a human resources system. There is an investment in training as well as a time commitment to get any new employee up to speed. Shopping from other companies and hiring individuals off-the-shelf seems like a great short cut, but it's only a temporary fix. The real problem is probably a poor investment, or no investment, in your most important asset - your people.

The fact is that companies seeking skilled individuals may not have a choice but to seek help from other companies' personnel. This occurs every day in corporate America, and when this is done right for the right reasons it can be successful. However, when you develop your own employees in a system of hiring, training and promotion, the chances of a successful long-term relationship are much greater.



DICK BARE, president,
ARBOR-NOMICS, NORCROSS, GA.

Back in the day of Adam and Eve, Adam noticed that a particular stand of grass had wonderful properties for playing baseball, so he patented it with the name Kentucky Bluegrass (that's how Kentucky got its name). Soon, Adam's sod farm got really big, and he asked Eve to quit her job at the Fig Farm to join him. Cain and Abel joined the sod farm next after giving their two-week notice to the Rattlesnake Round-up Corral.

Noah and his three sons soon noticed that Adam and Eve had a new Rockmobile (candy apple red, of course) and Cain and Abel had new chariots. Noah had a chat with his sons and they decided to get out of the boat business and into the sod business (which turned out to be a bad decision). They went out to the Ribs Sod Farm and made an offer to Abel to join them that he couldn't refuse. Cain got so angry that Abel left the family farm that he slew Abel.

Adam and Eve were so upset over this whole mess that they drew up a code of ethics for the Garden of Eden. In this code of ethics, Adam and Eve stated that it is unethical and immoral to steal customers or employees. This code of ethics has been passed down for generations in the green industry and was adopted by many industry associations. However, other industries' code of ethics developed after this standard was set, and somehow this particular rule got left out.

So lawyers, doctors, hotel managers, sports teams, and, in general, most other business people operate under a different law than our industry. But, things are changing. Traditionally, our industry has consisted of small mom-and-pop operations, and these companies have operated under the Golden Rule: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. The Golden Rule of Big Business, however, is: Do unto others *before* they do unto you. As lawn and landscape firms grow larger, we must get prepared to have our employees clubbed over the head and dragged off to someone else's cave for an extra 25 cents an hour.

Let me cite some exceptions: If an employee is a company officer or has a fiduciary position (accountant, bookkeeper, etc.) in the company, he may fall under certain state laws regarding his solicitations of employees for a competing company.

When an employee is bound by a written and signed employment contract, he must abide by the rules set forth for quitting a company and trying to take a bunch of fellow employees with him.

Conversely, some states have laws governing free trade, which guarantee the right of companies to solicit employees away from competing companies, as well as allowing employees the free will to leave the company for a better job. These laws exist because, as an employer, you cannot be allowed to fire an employee and also prevent that person from being recruited by a competitor. We live in a free marketplace, and these same rules apply to customers as well.

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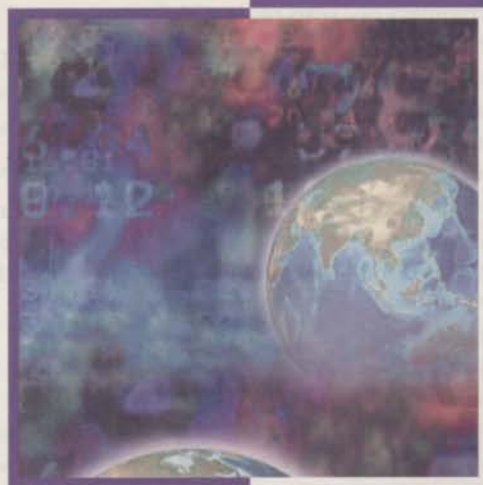
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PERSONALIZATION

Compensation Plans

by Dave St. John

A two-year-old compensation program is paying big dividends for one contractor.

Ask Rick Upchurch about what he believes it takes to be successful and the 18-year industry veteran and owner of Nature Scapes, an Atlanta, Ga.-based commercial maintenance and landscape company, will answer persistence and staying power.

Upchurch's dedication to these principles is evident in every aspect of his business, from the condition of his equipment and vehicles, and quality of services to the retention level of both his customers and employees.

When he implemented a management incentive plan in his company two years ago (see "A Compensation Program that Works," November 1999, *Lawn & Landscape*), he stayed vigorously involved analyzing and tracking its results. He saw this plan as more than just another way to pay his employees. To him, it was a significant and effective management tool. He said it helped him manage his growing company more efficiently. "The plan made me track actual-to-budgeted results more than I would have," he said. "The way we reported results made everyone more accountable in front of their peers."

Two years ago, Upchurch was looking for a way to "tweak" his company. It was a growing enterprise, but as Upchurch said, "I kept trying to give my managers more responsibility and they kept giving it back."

Sales were up, but profits were eroding and no one seemed could identify why. Clearly, there had to be a "stake" for each of the key managers that would help them identify and achieve desired results. These

Financial FOCUS

COMPANY REVENUE

Company Revenue

RESULTS ACHIEVED

+ 18.3%

Company Costs

Company Cost of Sales

- 3.5%

Maintenance Cost of Sales

- 2.8%

Landscape Cost of Sales

- 5.0%

Annual Color Material Cost

+ 1.7%

Crew Labor % Maintenance

- 3.0%

Crew Labor % Landscape

+ 1.8%

Equipment/Vehicle Costs

- 0.5%

Profitability

Company Gross Profit

+ 43.1%

Table 1. This chart shows the financial focus Nature Scapes maintained due, in part, to the results measured and tracked by the incentive plan during a particularly challenging year. See additional chart on page 162.

"stakes" became known as Key Results Areas (KRAs) and were identified and communicated to each of the participants in the plan. Specifically, the KRAs were defined as:

- Growth
- Expense management
- Profitability

A full-blown incentive plan was designed and built around these areas, including a measurement system, which defined the amount of compensation participants could earn if goals were met or exceeded. The first year's results under this plan were very positive (see Table 1).

(continued on page 162)

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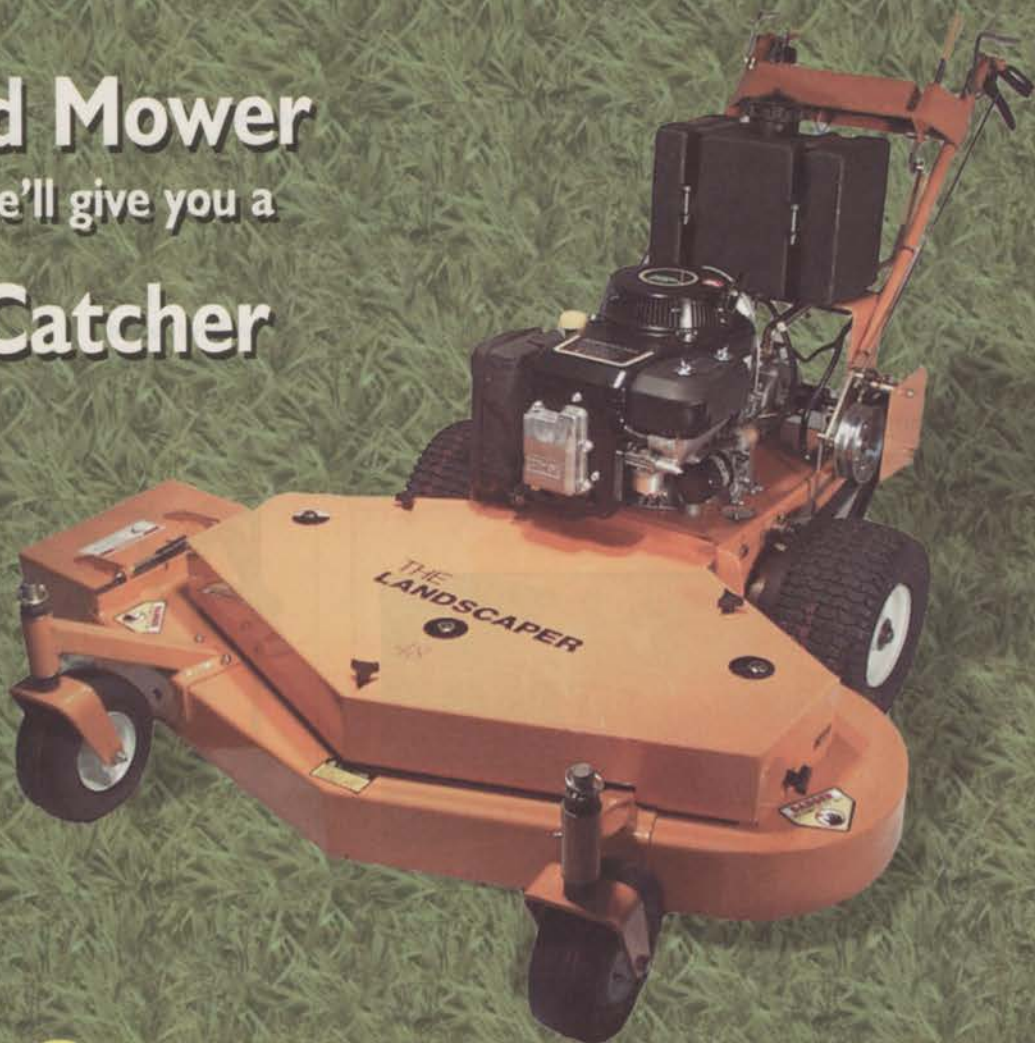
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Compensation Plans

(continued from page 160)

The results achieved after the first year were encouraging. Therefore, Upchurch decided to expand participation in the plan to include his foremen. Prior to this, the participants were comprised of his division managers, a supervisory level above the foremen. Goals for the foremen, who are largely Hispanic, were established relating to control of overtime, travel time and vehicle maintenance. Each goal was linked to the company's overall goals established for the division managers.

A major challenge was to translate these documents and definitions into Spanish so that new participants could fully understand the tasks for which they were responsible. While the division managers received annual payouts based on company results, the foremen were paid monthly based on monthly goal achievements, which has already reduced the size and frequency of hourly wage increases.

Upchurch admits that the first year was

Compared RESULTS

Year One compared to Year Two results

	YEAR ONE	YEAR TWO
Company Revenue	+18.3%	+18.7%
Company Costs		
Company Cost Of Sales	-3.5%	+5.89%
Maintenance Cost of Sales	-2.8%	+5.09%
Landscape Cost of Sales	-5.0%	+12.75%
Annual Color Materials Cost	+1.7%	-7.29%
Crew Labor % Maintenance	-3.0%	-.34%
Crew Labor % Landscape	+1.8%	+7.14%
Equipment/Vehicle Costs	-0.5%	+2.1%
Company Gross Profit	+43.1%	-15.3%

Table 2. Comparing the first and second year results.

an educational process for him and the foremen, but he said all employees have gained a better understanding of their role within the plan.

The monthly bonus payouts are variable

compensation, and adding this component.

A quick look at the first year's results show a record year for Nature Scapes. The company had to invest significantly in both

(continued on page 164)

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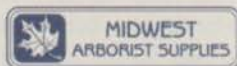


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Compensation Plans

(continued from page 162)

people and equipment to handle this surge in business. These capital outlays had a substantial impact on the results produced in the second year (see Table 2 on pg. 162).

Re-investing for growth often poses major challenges. How much do you invest and how do you control all the other financial aspects of your business during this time?

Hard-working employees deserve recognition for their time and efforts. Incentive programs can motivate employees to set goals, share ideas and perform high-quality work.

Participants in an Associated Landscape Contractors of America roundtable breakfast at the 2000 GIE Show proved that compensation carries many forms. Dan Joy, operations manager, Davey Commercial Grounds Management, Powell, Ohio, shared his fund-based system, which stresses employee accountability.

Each foreman begins the season with a \$500 fund from which deductions for vehicular accidents, safety violations and worker's compensation claims are subtracted, he explained. This way, employees are constantly tuned into the importance of safety, and often foremen will "split the pot" with their crew at the end of the season so that everyone sees the reward.

"Expected measures, like attendance, tardiness and appearance are not rewarded," Joy added. "Quality ratings keep quantity measures in line – both factors must be measured. We send alternative crews to a site to help gauge the quality measures, and we award a Crew of the Month based on efficiency and quality."

Chuck Morgan, production manager, ND Landscaping, Topsfield, Mass., relies on customers to report quality. With his company's "100 Satisfied" program, crews are rewarded with \$500 or gift

The incentive plan helped Upchurch and his people stay close to their goals and limited unanticipated costs. "My costs went up this year," Upchurch commented. "But I knew where the dollars were going and why, and so did my people."

The re-investment challenges facing Nature Scapes included hiring four new man-

certificates when they receive 100 compliments from clients.

Morgan posts the "rules" so employees understand what constitutes a viable compliment, as comments must be very specific – general compliments are not rewarded. The contest runs from May 31 through Thanksgiving, and the company hangs a large graph with each employee's name so that compliments can be posted, he said.

The challenge he faced with the system was whether to reward the crew or the person with the most compliments – a dilemma that was solved with monthly crew picnics that reward everyone, he noted. "That way, the competition is friendly."

Workers with the drive to learn more about the industry, in the form of seminars, classes or certification programs, add value to a company with their sharpened expertise. Some companies are hesitant to reward employees for education, however, claiming that certification provides self-esteem and industry knowledge that is part of growing a career – an expectation, so to speak.

Still, many companies choose to reward employees for continuing education and promote programs to prompt employees to pursue certification. Some pay for the test, and others, like Morgan, offer a one-time \$1,000 bonus. Dean Snodgrass, vice president, Dennis' Seven Dees Landscaping, Portland, Ore., will not pay for the test, but instead offers employees who pass the test a 25-cent-per-hour pay raise. "I don't pay for the test because I want to make sure they're committed," he said. "We will front them the money for the test, but that is a loan. It is important that they have something at stake because it increases the degree of commitment."

– Kristen Hampshire

agers and purchasing six new vehicles. Like many of its competitors, the company also faced increased fuel costs. All of these budgeted line items were accounted for in detail by the results the plan tracked as part of regular monthly management communication meetings.

2000 IN REVIEW. Strong annual revenue growth is now a trend at NatureScapes. If this continues, the company is well-positioned to make capital re-investment decisions for additional people and equipment. Information from the plan also provides yearly productivity comparisons, especially in the areas of crew labor hours percentages.

For example, the cost of sales increased due to a number of factors. Three new managers were hired for the maintenance division, a new irrigation division was formed and staffed, six new trucks and related equipment were purchased, dump fees increased and fuel costs rose dramatically for several months. However, these additional managers and equipment will allow the company to grow substantially.

The numbers also show that although the annual color division is only a little more than a year old, it has improved its expense management from the first year and is adding dollars to the top and bottom lines. The incentive plan has motivated this manager to use temporary and current full-time hourly employees more effectively to help get new flowers planted in a short time.

Meanwhile, commercial maintenance represents about 85 percent of the company's total business. More than \$900,000 in new revenue occurred this year in the maintenance division. All of this new work was accomplished with less than a full percentage increase in labor costs. This tremendous productivity improvement is a testimony to including both the division manager and foremen in the plan.

Unfortunately, the landscape division struggled, partly due to a major drought and watering restrictions that struck Georgia in May. As a result, many residential customers postponed installation. These weather challenges hurt many installation businesses during the year.

Upchurch reacted to this challenge by looking at how to use the landscape team's resources. He made strategic changes to benefit

Tokens of Appreciation

this group and integrate it more carefully into NatureScapes' services.

For 2001, Upchurch directed the division to cross-sell its services to the company's maintenance clients rather than seeking new customers. This will help the maintenance division provide additional value to its customers, thus avoiding the acquisition cost of new customers and improving overall cash flow.

At first glance, last year's profit appears weaker than 1999 profit. Upchurch's maintenance division, despite a substantial investment, grew and continued to show a profit. Also, the major portion of the company's direct labor costs indicate a strong increase in productivity.

Upchurch knows the cause of the diminished results from the prior year, and he views the situation pragmatically. He knows that his company cannot continue to have substantial increases in revenue without re-investing capital in additional people and equipment.

BEYOND FINANCIAL RESULTS.

Upchurch views the incentive plan as more than just another way to pay his employees more. Providing the same information to his staff on a regular basis allowed him to observe their ability to work together and collaborate on achieving strong business results. Upchurch has seen latent talents in some of his managers grow and mature.

In addition, tracking ongoing results in specific financial areas gave the company's management team fiscal discipline. The managers meet monthly to review the previous month's results. Each knows exactly how the company stands on a monthly basis.

Every employee also understands the influence they have with these results. Since this is a performance-driven incentive plan, there are no surprises at the end of the month or year. If business results are not achieved, this fact is reflected in the payouts each worker receives. As a result, each plan participant is gaining a greater understanding

of the components that comprise a successful business.

No discussion of an incentive plan is complete without considering whether the plan truly motivates the participants. Many companies pay their employees bonuses and then complain that these additional dollars have no visible impact on performance.

Incentive plans are a motivational factor when the participants understand what they contribute to the enterprise and the level of compensation they can earn. This concept is called the principle of equity. The NatureScapes incentive plan embodies this principle in both design and application. And it requires persistence and staying power. **U**

Dave St. John is a principal at GreenSearch and GreenMatchMaker.com, Atlanta, Ga. He can be contacted at info@greensearch.com. The first year of NatureScapes' plan were reviewed in an article available in the back issue archives, January 1999, at www.lawnandlandscape.com.

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USE READER SERVICE #85

by Nicole Wisniewski

Four lawn care professionals share their winning snapshots.

Picture PERFECT

A picture is worth a thousand words, according to the four winners of the Picture Perfect award.

The contest was sponsored by Lawn & Landscape and the Professional Lawn Care Association of America (PLCAA), and winners were announced during PLCAA's annual dinner at the 2000 Green Industry Expo in Indianapolis, Ind. Winners received recognition for their care of a specific property in four categories (warm-season commercial, warm-season residential, cool-season commercial, cool-season residential) and a \$200 Travel Worldwide Network travel voucher for this year's PLCAA Conference and GIE show in Tampa, Fla.

Following are some details about each winning lawn care company and the photogenic properties they maintain.

SOIL Solutions

This residential property, which has been cared for by Atwood Lawncare for the past five years, has a Kentucky bluegrass lawn and the difficulties in caring for it stem from the soil, which is more sandy or more clay in various areas.

"The front of the house has a sandier deposit and it is irrigated," pointed out Steve Martinko, North Oakland branch manager, Atwood Lawncare. "The rear of the house is clay and un-irrigated. We fluctuate the fertilizer treatments in the front and back using both slow-release liquid and granular applications, depending on how the yard is doing, and on temperatures and weather conditions."

Atwood Lawncare technicians visit the 1/2-acre property every five to six weeks and apply five treatments throughout the year – three liquid and two granular. Last year, chinch bugs were a problem and they were controlled using Integrated Pest Management, which is a method the company firmly believes in.

The property also contains 50 to 100 white pines of various heights between 12 and 15 feet. These trees are susceptible to root collar weevil, which likes white pines of this height and is drawn to the warm, soft bark of the pines in the summer. The bores tunnel around the bark layer, turning the leaves yellow and eventually girdling the pine. Six of these bores were spotted on the trees last year, Martinko said, so the company is monitoring the property more carefully.

ATWOOD LAWCARE

STERLING HTS., MICH.

Winner in the cool-season turf, residential category



BANKING on Green Spaces

SOUTHEASTERN OUTDOOR MANAGEMENT

PANAMA CITY, FLA.

Winner in the warm-season
turf, commercial category



The landscape at the corporate headquarters of Peoples First Community Bank, Panama City, Fla., was originally designed by Southeastern Outdoor Management more than one year ago. The company has been maintaining the property ever since.

A variety of landscape materials on this property are located in tight "green" spaces, pointed out Katy Harrell, the company's senior project manager/designer, which increases the challenges of caring for this property.

For instance, the clients want a well-manicured turf look in the summer, so the St. Augustinegrass is mowed to 1½ inches, which means the crew must be cautious not to scalp sod areas. In the winter, mowing height is raised to 2 inches and mowing frequency is decreased.

Insects, such as mole crickets, and fungus problems are the company's biggest challenges in dealing with St. Augustinegrass, especially in areas that are overly wet. Making sure turf areas get proper irrigation helps eliminate these problems.

A slow-release granular fertilizer, such as 16-4-8 or 13-6-6, is applied once in the spring and once in the fall. Due to the long-lasting qualities of slow-release fertilizers (according to Harrell, they last about three months), the company usually does not have to fertilize again. And switching to a liquid fertilizer made more sense this past season. "In the summertime, the humidity and the temperature combined made it too hot to apply a granular fertilizer without burning the grass," Harrell explained. "Liquid absorbs more quickly than granular and made it possible for us to fertilize in the summer."

The site also contains many varieties of Hollies and Hawthorn, which are susceptible to scale – a problematic insect in Florida the past few years, Harrell said. "The humidity seems just right for these insects to breed, and then, in many areas, the sticky residue they leave combined with the moisture content causes sooty mold on many plants," she said. "We try to locate these pests in the early stages before they become a problem, so smaller quantities of chemicals are needed to control them. Currently, we are searching for new ways to control scale. For instance, the use of drip irrigation on a majority of our job sites eliminates the excess water from leafy plant surfaces caused by standard spray irrigation and seems to help slowdown the black, sooty mold problem."



A DESERT Oasis

**J.R. LANDCARE
GROUND dba YARDS
"R" US LANDSCAPE
SERVICES**

N. LAS VEGAS, NEV.

Winner in the cool-season
turf, commercial category.



In the Mojave Desert, summer heat rises to 110 to 115 degrees, while winter temperatures plummet to 25 to 30 degrees. Yet the residents of the 320-unit Oasis Pines condominium community demand emerald green turf throughout the year, explained Rob Diaz, the company's president.

In this harsh climate, maintaining color in the tall fescue lawn is a challenge. For this purpose, the turf is mowed at 3 inches in the summer and 2¼ inches in the winter, in addition to regular aeration and the addition of organic matter. A portion of this 17.5-acre property was renovated to reflect desert landscaping for water conservation purposes. Water management is crucial in this climate to obtain maximum turf color, Diaz said.

The J.R. LandCare Ground crew is on-site 48.5 hours weekly to mow, edge, trim, fertilize and conduct soil analyses.

The lawn care program consists of five applications per year, including preemergent and postemergent weed control, using mostly granular products. "One of our applications is a sulphur application, which aids in maintaining proper pH levels due to the high pH in our soils," Diaz explained.

Specifically, the property is susceptible to aphids, white fly, white grub and summer patch. Careful water management and the use of organic products protects the property from insects and diseases.

General

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USE READER SERVICE #86

HURRICANE *Survivor*

In 2000, eastern North Carolina saw its fair share of hurricanes. And so did this three-hole private golf course, which was flooded by Hurricane Dennis twice and Hurricane Floyd once in the same year.

Water clean-up, damage repair and dealing with site drainage problems proved to be daunting tasks for Adams Gardening Services, Rocky Mountain, N.C., pointed out Joel Adams, president of the company. "It took us one year to get the irrigation system calibrated because of all the high and low areas on the property, and this was done by constantly changing the controller on different zones to find out what worked best," he said. "Clean up after the floods included picking up all the mulch, pine needles and clippings that came through the woods with the water. We had to get the water and scum off of the turf immediately so it didn't suffocate."

Adams fertilizes the property five times a year and overseeds the Bermudagrass turf with perennial ryegrass in the late fall. The crew mows the property at $\frac{7}{8}$ inches in the winter and $\frac{3}{4}$ inches in the summer. Liquid fungicide is used to control the dollar spot, which the turf is susceptible to. **LL**

The author is Managing Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.



ADAMS GARDENING SERVICES

ROCKY MOUNTAIN, N.C.

Winner in the warm-season turf, residential category



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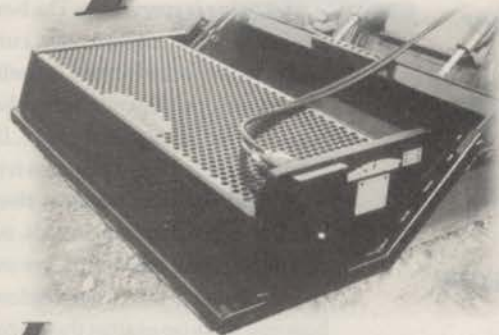
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USE READER SERVICE #88

by Pamela Jordan

At the Count of 10



Photo: Barney Taxel

An industry consultant shares her top 10 tips for selling a landscape business.

I've been involved in hundreds of company sales or purchases throughout the last 20 years.

While each situation is unique, these tips can help you sell your lawn or landscape business for top dollar – whether you're selling now or making plans for the future.

1. Timing is everything. The best time to sell your business depends on a variety of factors: market demand, interest rates, current business performance, overall industry performance and your personal reasons for selling what is probably your most valuable asset. While all of these factors influence the market value of your company, the single most important factor is your company's performance. If your business isn't operating at its peak, you won't get a premium price. If your business is operating at its peak, now is a great time to consider selling.

2. Evaluate your business through the eyes of a buyer. Buyers typically have strategic reasons for making acquisitions, such as expanding geographically, increasing market share or consolidating administrative overhead. An astute buyer also has determined the criteria your business needs to meet before he or she buys it. Knowing what those criteria are – and how you stack up against them – can add thousands of dollars to the final selling price of your landscape business.

3. Know what your business is worth before you go to the negotiating table. The average sale price ranges from about four to six times earnings before interest and taxes. The better your company performs when compared to industry standards, the higher the multiple. And increasing that multiple means big money. For instance, a recent valuation I made for a client showed that he could expect anywhere between \$1.3 to \$1.9 million for his business.

4. Prepare your business for sale before you are ready to sell. Position your business for maximum return and take full advantage of its market potential. Top priorities for buyers include increasing revenue and customer base and earnings increases of at least 20 percent annually before owner's compensation. Buyers also will expect your business to meet industry guidelines for payroll and have minimal long-term obligations (i.e. Yellow Page

(continued on page 173)

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3. What services does your business offer? (please check all that apply)

- 1. Landscape Installation
- 2. Landscape Maintenance
- 3. Landscape Renovation
- 4. Mowing and related maintenance
- 5. Irrigation Installation
- 6. Irrigation Maintenance
- 7. Turf pesticide application
- 8. Ornamental/tree pesticide application
- 9. Turf fertilization
- 10. Ornamental/tree fertilization
- 11. Tree Pruning
- 12. Snow Removal
- 13. Interiorscape
- 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?

- 1. Less than \$50,000
- 2. \$50,000 to \$99,999
- 3. \$100,000 to \$199,999
- 4. \$200,000 to \$299,999
- 5. \$300,000 to \$499,999
- 6. \$500,000 to \$699,999
- 7. \$700,000 to \$999,999
- 8. \$1,000,000 to \$1,999,999
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(continued from page 170)

advertising, leased office equipment, real estate rentals, etc.).

5. *Remember the old saying, "Only a fool represents himself."* You'd never dream of selling a house or car without help from a professional. Selling a business is even more complex. You will absolutely need an accountant and an attorney well versed in transactional contracts – not necessarily the professionals you use for day-to-day assistance. Business brokers and consultants can provide valuation services, help market your business and guide you through the sale on either an hourly or flat-fee basis. Shop carefully for the professional whose services best meet your needs and make sure you have a written contract that details the scope of services and the fee.

6. *Every time you open your mouth, it can cost you money.* Be aware of your business's strengths and weaknesses and think through

your answer before responding. Full disclosure is crucial, though, because problems are likely to be discovered during due diligence, and a relatively minor problem may become

sale before it is actually sold, an atmosphere of unrest and confusion can result. Limit the number of people who know you are selling your landscape business. Require that buy-

If your *business* is not operating at its *peak*, you will not get a *premium price*. If your business is operating at its peak, now is a *great time* to consider selling. – Pamela Jordan

a deal buster if a secret is revealed at the last minute. Minimize answers to personal questions that do not directly relate to the sale of your business. (For more information on due diligence, see sidebar below.)

7. *Confidentiality is crucial.* If customers and employees learn that your business is for

ers agree to preliminary criteria before revealing your identity. Ask pre-qualified buyers to sign confidentiality agreements before revealing detailed information. Always remember that your employees and customers are your most important assets. Employee names may be disclosed during due diligence, but do not turn over customer lists until after the closing.

8. *If it is not on paper, it doesn't exist.* Don't take a buyer's word for any important aspects involved with the sale of your business. Once the business is sold, the written contracts are all that matter.

9. *Negotiate with a win-win attitude, but know what's not negotiable.* Be very clear and focused on the fact that your business is your most valuable asset and know what is negotiable and what is not. Be prepared to walk away from a deal that does not meet your criteria. Unless the price and the terms both make economic sense, you need to be ready to pass on the deal.

10. *Don't take your eye off the business during the sales process.* I've seen many businesses begin to decline at the worst possible time because the owner is so busy selling their company they forget to run it. Sales prices are based on multiples of revenue and customer base. If these two things decline, the value of your business declines, too. Sometimes the drop is drastic enough to kill the deal. **LL**

The time between the offer, acceptance and closure of a business acquisition can be the trickiest. Contingencies must be removed, third parties must get involved and the final details need to be nailed down.

Due diligence – the process in which a purchaser will perform the tasks necessary to verify the financial and operations information represented by the seller, and a seller will verify the financial and business strength of a purchaser – is typically the first action that follows the offer and acceptance. A purchaser may have his or her accountant assist or perform due diligence.

In order to sustain a smooth transaction, and to minimize the potential damage in case of a failed sale, here are a few tips regarding due diligence:

1. Do not allow in-depth due diligence to be performed until the offer and acceptance has been reached.
2. Have a clear time frame encompassing the due diligence process. A time frame in which necessary information will be provided, and in which due diligence will be completed, keeps a transaction moving forward.
3. Do not move on to other contingencies involving third parties (lease transfer arrangements, supplier transfer agreements, etc.) until the due diligence contingency has been removed. – **Marlin Group, a business brokerage firm in**

Portland, Ore.

A Smooth Transition

The author is a consultant specializing in financial analysis, strategic planning, and mergers and acquisitions. She also is the author of *Level the Field*, a workbook written specifically for service industry professionals selling their businesses. To order the book, call 813/831-7180 or visit www.levelthefield.com.

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

Regulatory Roundup

Rain sensors will soon run rampant in New Jersey's irrigation systems, thanks to a recently passed state law. These water conservation devices, which shut off an operating irrigation system when rain is falling, are now mandatory for new commercial and residential systems.

This new law should hopefully alter the public's perception of irrigation as an unnecessary, frivolous use of water while also conveying that contractors are responsible water users and are serious about conservation, according to George McCarthy, president of Spring Irrigation, Dayton, N.J., and author of the rain sensor legislation.

In New Jersey, which has suffered through severe droughts in recent years, changing the perception of irrigation is especially critical, McCarthy said. During a water shortage, "the problem is that the first thing they're ready to do is shut off irrigation systems," he conveyed. "This puts a lot of (contractors) out of business."

The biggest challenge this legislation faces is simply educating the industry, McCarthy noted. "Unfortunately, there hasn't been enough done to let everyone know that this law exists," he said, adding that how the law will be enforced is still being determined and will likely occur in conjunction with the issuing of permits required to install lawn sprinkler systems.

Regulations regarding water use are on the rise throughout the country, especially in more densely populated areas, where water conservation is a critical issue.

WATCHING WATER USE. Massachusetts is also taking water conservation issues seriously, with its pending irrigation and landscape recommendations.

Slated for finalization in March, these statewide guidelines aim to send a consistent and comprehensive message about outdoor water use to landscape and irrigation contractors and homeowners, according to Jackie Murphy, assistant director for water policy and planning, Massachusetts Executive Office of Environmental Affairs, Boston, Mass.

Massachusetts, like many other areas across the country, is feeling increased pressure to monitor its water use carefully, due to the recent proliferation of in-ground irrigation systems in Eastern Massachusetts combined with a serious drought a few years ago, Murphy noted.

According to Murphy, the recommendations, which cover both irrigation and landscaping, will include:

- Don't water when local water use restrictions have been enacted;
- New landscapes should minimize lawn size and use native, drought-tolerant landscaping;
- Existing and new landscapes should be watered only when necessary;
- Water slowly, deeply and infrequently to encourage deep-rooted lawn growth;
- Water in off-peak hours, such as before sunrise and after sunset;
- Rain shut-off devices should be installed or retrofitted on irrigation systems;
- Sprinkler heads should be located at least 8 inches from paved areas;
- Irrigation system controls should be adjusted every two weeks at minimum;
- Rainwater should be captured and reused if possible;
- With landscape installation, a 12- to 18- inch base of organic matter is recommended to help soil hold water and minimize evaporation;
- Mow lawns at highest recommended height – generally 2½ to 3 inches.

Brian Vinchesi, president, Irrigation Consulting, Pepperell, Mass., predicted that these recommendations will serve as a wake-up call to the green industry to watch its water use. "This should be seen as eye opening for contractors – to pay more attention to water conservation in design and installation," he said.

– Cynthia Greenleaf



Massachusetts

New Jersey

TurfGold Software

- Customize crews, services, employees, equipment and inventory data
 - User can find customer job and account information
 - User can enter unlimited job sites for each customer
 - Microsoft MapPoint retrieves and records maps to print on work orders
 - Filter jobs to schedule by route
 - Enter and track pre-payments and produce statements and finance charges
 - Optional QuickBooks posting feature
 - Built-in landscape map CAD designer
 - Compatible with Microsoft Office; import/export information to other Microsoft Office programs
 - Phone center organizes calls and includes an appointment scheduler
- Circle 201 on reader service card**

STIHL FC 85 Edger

- A solid shaft drive transfers more power from engine to cutting blade
- Powered by a 25.4 cc Professional Series engine with 1.27 hp
- Quad Power cylinder technology reduces loss of fresh fuel mix and offers efficient expulsion of burnt fuel from the firing chamber



- Features an open guard assembly design, minimizing clogging from dirt and debris
 - Guide wheel provides increased maneuverability and protects gearbox
 - "Line of sight" marking allows user maximum control for precise edging
 - Utilizes a three-shoe clutch with 360 degrees of contact on the clutch drum
 - EASYSTART system with ElastroStart shock-absorbing starter handle and fuel primer bulb
 - Weighs 14.3 pounds with 8-inch blades
- Circle 202 on reader service card**

Ferris 1000Z

- Available in 48- and 52-inch cutting widths
 - Fans mounted to hydrostatic pumps allow them to run cooler, extending life of hydraulic system
 - High capacity oil lines and filter extend life of hydraulic system
 - Single pin adjusts cutter deck in ¼-inch increments, from 1½ to 4¾ inches
 - Foot-operated deck lift
 - Features twin A-section hydro drive belts
 - Includes adjustable steering control levers
 - Caster wheels with tapered roller bearings
 - 9.5 mph groundspeed
 - Easy-access dump valves and low center of gravity
- Circle 203 on reader service card**



Lil' Bubba E.P. Curb Machine

- Plunger style
 - Creates a consistent flow of concrete
 - Machine revolutions are timed 2.25 inches every 1.2 seconds
 - Plunger motion scores concrete while packing it into the mold
 - This motion prevents flat, weak spots that can cause potential cracking
 - Plunger moves 7 inches into the hopper, agitating concrete with each revolution to eliminate bridging
 - Curb machine is powered by a 4-hp, self-propelled Honda engine
 - Five mold styles available
 - Adjustable wheels match all grade changes
 - Features a lateral adjustment on the steering assembly, which caters to applications near stationary objects
 - Weighs 198 pounds
- Circle 204 on reader service card**

JRCO Electric Broadcast Spreader

- Includes stainless steel frame and electronic speed control
 - Attachment is sized to fit commercial riding and walk-behind mowers
 - Spreader attachment is available with either a stainless steel foot-operated gate or push/pull cable
 - Heavy-duty polyethylene hopper has a capacity of 2.2 cubic feet or 130 pounds
 - Attachment is ideal for spreading granular or pellet fertilizer, seed, fire ant bait and ice-melting products
- Circle 205 on reader service card**



Products

Fitch Fuel Catalyst

- Improves fuel economy while reducing noxious fumes, smoke and emissions
- Catalyst is dropped into fuel tank
- Keeps fuel fresh for up to 5,000 operating hours
- Can decrease carbon build-up in two- and four-stroke engines

Circle 206 on reader service card

Trans-Eze Ryegrass

- Transitional ryegrass produced by Roberts Seed Co. combines turf quality of perennial ryegrass with quick transition of annual ryegrass
- Developed for use as an overseeding grass in warm-season areas and as a short-lived, high-quality nursegrass in cooler areas

- Establishes a turf cover similar to perennial ryegrass during for winter overseeding of bermudagrass
- Its annual nature results in a fast transition to warm-season turfgrass in the spring
- Ideal for use with Kentucky bluegrass, fine fescue or tall fescue in northern areas

Circle 208 on reader service card

Kubota K008 Excavator



- Features a 360-degree house rotation and 140-degree boom swing
- Adjustable track frame
- Can pass through a 36-inch wide doorframe and reach restricted work areas
- Profile is 27.6 inches and tracks can be extended to 33.9 inches for a more stable platform while performing trenching and dozing operations
- Operation weight is 1,906 pounds and ground pressure is 3.27 psi
- Easy access service ports and grease fittings
- Powered by a three-cylinder D722 liquid-cooled overhead valve E-TVCS diesel engine
- Engine delivers 10.1 hp at 2,000 rpm
- Includes a 5.6-gpm hydraulic system

Circle 207 on reader service card

Tree Maxx 2000

- Tree moving attachment for skid-steer loaders functions as a tree ball lifter, carrier and planter
- Plants trees or shrubs with a ball ranging from 24 to 44 inches
- Features a hydraulically-controlled, interchangeable insert system that grasps root ball without damaging the root system
- Changes from large to small trees quickly

Circle 209 on reader service card

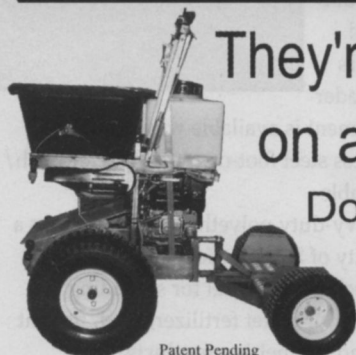


Zoecon Extinguish

- Extinguish fire ant bait eliminates fire ant colonies
- Approved in California
- Contains an insect growth regulator that controls pests by affecting the queen's reproduction
- Provides control without concern of rebounding or movement of the colony to another location
- Safe for use around flowers, shrubs, trees, citrus, fruits and vegetables
- Formula can be used on the perimeter areas of buildings, homes, sheds, pump houses, and electrical and phone boxes

Circle 210 on reader service card

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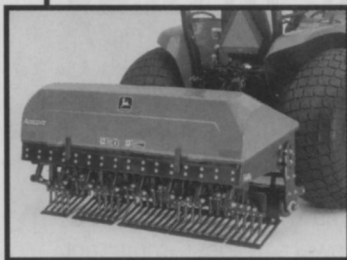
Products

John Deere Aercore Aerator

- Features a "Flexi-Link" design that ensure tines stay perpendicular to the ground for a round hole

- An 80-inch coring swath allows the tractor-mounted attachment to delivers productivity

- Machine can produce coring holes up to 4 inches deep and can cover 100,066



square feet per hour

- Attachment offers a 2.4-inch or 3.2-inch coring pattern depending on speed of movement

- Powered by belts

Circle 211 on reader service card

ShoreLand'r Utility Trailer

- BK2200U features a 2,200-pound carrying capacity and a 76- by 124-inch deck
- Constructed of heavy-duty, welded steel with black powder-coated finish
- Optional, fold-down Twin-Track ramps allow for easy loading and unloading
- Optional center track converts two ramps into one solid, full-width ramp
- Optional slide ramp kit allows operator to load ATVs and other equipment from side of trailer
- Optional rollbar-style front stop provides added safety; side-rail Stake Pockets double as tie-down points

Circle 212 on reader service card

Tanks-a-Lot Water Machines

- Available in several sizes ranging from a 1- to 16- gallon model to an 8- to 30-gallon model

- Machines eliminate bending, straining and heavy lifting while watering

- Includes a flexible 15-foot memory coil hose

- Lightweight units store easily

- Blown plastic polymer / fiber-wrapped tanks don't chip or rust
- Air cell provides constant pressure
- Can navigate stairs, curbs, decks, elevators, escalators, gravel patios and lawns
- Tilt-and-go design balances weight over axle
- Available accessories include flexwands, dramm wands, detachable work bags, extension hoses, faucet adapters, aerators, thumb valves and ball valves among others

Circle 213 on reader service card

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15-1-8 (7S) for Lawns & Shrubs (SGN 220)

12-2-8 (4S) for Golf Greens (SGN 100)

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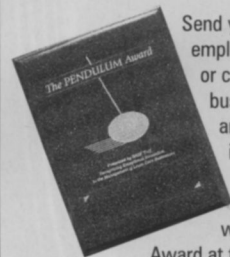


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USE READER SERVICE #91

TurfVent CoreCaster

- The model CTV-52 core plug aerator fits front-mounted commercial mowers
- Machine can aerate while turning in any direction
- Follows turf contour
- Machine contains category 1 three-point hitches
- Connections fit most commercial front-mount mowers
- Features heavy-duty caster assemblies with 360-degree, dual-quad TurfVent Ejector tine clusters
- Aerates up to a 3.5-inch depth with a 52-inch coring swath
- 5-by-8-inch coring pattern
- 46-inch tines and 40 vents per square yard
- Includes all necessary connections and hardware

Circle 214 on reader service card

Rohm and Haas Dimension Ultra WSP

- Wettable powder herbicide for turf and ornamental applications is $\frac{1}{3}$ more effective per unit of active ingredient than liquid Dimension
- Herbicide has received EPA labeling and is obtaining state registrations
- Controls crab grass, goosegrass, poa annua and other weed species
- Non-staining
- Provides preemergence and early postemergence control and season-long control of more than 25 turf weed species
- Available in 5-ounce water soluble packets with $\frac{1}{8}$ pound of active ingredient

Circle 215 on reader service card

Thomas Mini-Excavator

- 15 Series 1.5-ton excavator features a 17-hp Isuzu diesel engine with 3,175 pounds of bucket breakout force



- Includes a long dipper arm, providing an 8-feet by 5.6-inch digging depth
- Available with a variable width undercarriage, which provides 51.2 inches of flat-footed performance
- Weighs 1,500 pounds and reaches 1.4 miles per hour
- Features three hydraulic gear pumps with an 8.3 gpm pump capacity and an 8.1-gallon reservoir capacity

Circle 216 on reader service card

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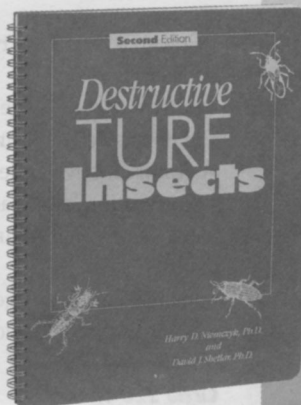
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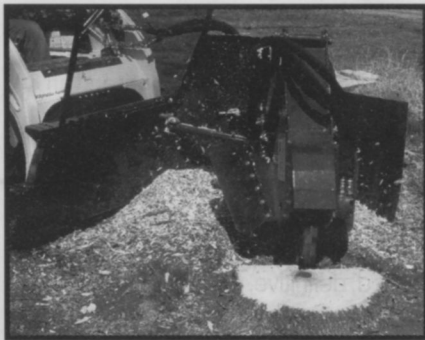
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Products

Bobcat SG60 Stump Grinder Attachment

- Ideal for Bobcat 773, 863, 873 and 864 standard and high-flow ski-steer loaders
- With the 863 high-flow loader as a power source, the SG60 can grind stumps 30 inches in diameter to a depth of 10 inches below the ground in less than 10 minutes
- Work group mounting features grinding head at a 90-degree position for increased operator visibility
- Swing cylinder allows operator to cut up to a 45-inch diameter stump without repositioning
- Cutting wheel features 32 teeth: 14 right,



14 left and four straight teeth

- Valve design control speed of swing circuit to prevent cutting wheel from stalling in the cut

Circle 217 on reader service card

Bandit Quad Wheel Feed System

- Two additional wheels on the Brush Bandit Chipper allow machine to accept large material
- The four hydraulic feed wheels can collapse limbs and branches
- Bottom wheels are positioned horizontally while top wheels are positioned diagonally and are locked in a slide box
- Wheels are chain driven from a common drive motor
- Wheel angle allows first wheel to climb and raise the back wheel when wood is fed into machine
- Wheels are standard on 18-inch models 280XP and 1890 and are an option on 12-inch models 250XP and 14-inch 254XP model

Circle 218 on reader service card

The Boss Trip-Edge Plow

- 8-foot straight-blade trip-edge plow features 1-inch diameter steel pivot pins with adjustable springs



- Includes an extension-style

trip spring mechanism, so operator can adjust the spring tension for each job

- Moldboard is constructed of 11-gauge steel and reinforced with six vertical ribs and two diagonal cross braces
- Six ½-inch thick high-abrasion steel gussets extend the life of the base angle
- Cast-iron blade shoes tuck under the base angle to prevent damage
- Comes with the BOSS RT3 quick hitch system; BOSS SmartHitch system available as an option

- Standard joystick control; SmartTouch handheld control unit option

Circle 219 on reader service card

Little Wonder Xtra Edger

- Xtra edger combines the maneuverability of a stick edger and power of a wheeled edger
- Weighs 16 pounds
- Features a cross-blade system that cuts through thick grasses
- Powered by a 34 cc two-cycle engine
- Fully enclosed blade guard and debris deflector protects operator and bystanders
- Six-position height adjustment allows precise cutting depth
- Includes a 3.5-to-1 gear reduction and fully enclosed transmission

Circle 220 on reader service card

Turfco 512 Sod Cutter

- Designed for applications that demand a light, maneuverable machine, such as cutting flower beds, tree rings, lawn repair and specialty landscape designs

- Cutter features handle grip clutch control, blade depth control, simple blade angle adjustment, sealed drive bearings and a protective roll cage
- Powered by a 5-hp Briggs & Stratton or a 5.5-hp Honda engine
- 12-inch cutting width and depth adjustable 1 to ½ inches
- Covers up to 75 feet per minute and 4,500 feet per hour
- Weighs 170 pounds
- 7-inch diameter cast iron traction wheels have replaceable rubber tread

Circle 221 on reader service card

Royer Soil Shredder-Mixer

- Equipped with an incline grizzly screen and remote computer control unit
- Shedding process allows organic material, including higher moisture and clay content products, to be blended, aerated and screened through a cleated belt



- Ideal for large-scale soil processing applications
- Produces a light, uniform and trash-free top dressing
- Unwanted debris removed through a side discharge conveyor
- Material sizing is controlled and changed with hand-operated fence gate

Circle 222 on reader service card

Fulton Receiver Mount Light

- Facilitates after-dark, vehicle-related activities
- Features a corrosion-resistant black finish
- Light unit is sealed for additional weather protection
- Light includes a swivel telescopic unit ranging from 37 to 72 inches and a 55-watt halogen bulb
- A three-way adapter allows simultaneous use of light and trailer connection
- Light attaches quickly to vehicle's hitch receiver

Circle 223 on reader service card



- Dura-Mesh shell resist collapsing in heat and humidity
- Softspun lining for increased durability
- Available in two sizes
- OSHA compliant

Circle 226 on reader service card

Gravelly Auger Attachment

- Available in 8-, 12-, 18-, 24- and 30-inch diameters
- Powered by Gravelly skidster 200
- The 8- and 12-inch augers measure 48 inches in length
- The 18-, 24- and 30-inch augers are 24 inches long

Circle 227 on reader service card

Cleary Chemical Spectro 90WDG

- Turf and ornamental fungicide has been accepted for use in California
- Combination product consist of chlorothalanil and thiophanate-methyl in a 4 to 1 ratio
- Fungicide features both contact and systemic properties for optimal disease control
- Swing cylinder allows operator to cut up to a 45-inch diameter stump without repositioning

Circle 224 on reader service card

- Features Smooth Start technology to reduce vibration from starting and stopping equipment
- Multi-positioning axle arrangement allows for easy site transportation
- Maneuvered by towing tongue and site tow positioning axle

Circle 225 on reader service card

C&S Turfcare Carrier

- Designed to fit a Class III, 2- by 2-inch receiver
- Adjustable stabilizers for secure mount
- Deck measure 40 by 70 inches
- Features an expanded metal deck and powder-coat paint
- 48-inch ramp hinges down for unloading
- Includes factory-mounted tail lights with standard four-pin flat plug
- Carrier can be attached to various equipment

Circle 228 on reader service card



Tiger Screen Screening Plant

- Model 45D portable screening plant is designed to be loaded by a skid-steer loader
- Screen separates topsoil and rocks, sand and gravel and other materials on landscape sites
- Features a 4-foot by 5-foot long double deck shaker screen with end tensioned screens
- Features a 4.5 hp Yanmar diesel engine with electric start and hour meter
- Includes a 3.5-gallon lockable fuel tank
- Removable wing plates, panels and sidewalls for easy replacement

Stellar Service Truck

- The 904 R⁴ Rapid Response Road Rescue Service Body model service truck features a 12.5-hp gas compressor and a 9-foot composite fiberglass/aluminum body
- Includes more than 52 cubic feet of storage space
- 1,300-pound powered lift gate
- Truck is tailored to the price-conscious

Circle 229 on reader service card



Back on Track

Like many contractors managing multiple crews, Tom Barry, president, Battle Creek Landscape, Battle Creek, Mich., used to have serious time troubles. When his maintenance crews turned in their time sheets, for example, there were always inexplicable discrepancies. "We had everything from unaccounted-for time to too much time spent on a given property to driving the long way to and from a job," Barry recalled. "We really wanted to be able to measure what was going on. We needed the history to compare to the production sheets."

After all, "if you can't measure, you can't manage," he pointed out.

This lack-of-data dilemma – and the inadequacies of relying on two-way radios – prompted Barry to try Mobile-Trak, a vehicle-tracking device from NeoTech Products, Naperville, Ill. Last spring, Battle Creek installed these devices in its five maintenance division trucks to better manage its crews and noticed immediate results, Barry noted.

THE BASICS. Mobile-Trak's premise is a simple one: The Windows-based device collects a broad range of data while a vehicle is in operation and then later downloads the information into a computer. "Harvesting the information is just a matter of calling up different trucks and reports," Barry noted, adding that the secure system is accessed by a password.

While Battle Creek opted for the computer-download model, NeoTech Products also offers a streaming data option that downloads information via the Internet. For his company's needs, however, the once-a-day download approach was a logical fit, Barry said.

Unlike some technology, which presents a daunting learning curve, this system was fairly simple to learn, according to Barry. "The biggest challenge has simply been with technological glitches," he said. "It's just like with anything new – you've got to work some bugs out of it."

Barry added that Neotech has been responsive in addressing any problems he experienced with the system. "They've been good with support," he said.

INCREASED ACCOUNTABILITY. By measuring and recording information such as crew members' in and out times,

break times and mileage, Mobile-Trak's biggest benefit has been increasing employee accountability, noted Barry. "This encourages more responsible behavior," he said. "They're taking more responsibility in regard to their actions. I've seen some major improvements."

He added that the system eliminates on-site employee attendance issues that have surfaced in the past. "We've had problems with customers calling and saying, 'Your guys didn't show up.' This, however, documents each account we're at and how long we're there."

The system also provides information such as how Battle Creek's employees handle the company's vehicles. "This tells us things such as how a driver is, how his habits are, whether he takes off fast or accelerates slowly," Barry described.

Every morning, Barry reviews the previous day's data and

immediately knows if he has any issues that need to be addressed with his crew. If he discovers a discrepancy between time cards and the actual data collected by the system, for example, he'll call the employee and deal with it immediately. "The moment I find it, we'll discuss it," he explained. "Then (the employee) can't say, 'Well, I don't remember...'"

Mobile-Trak is also helpful for safety purposes, recording critical information such as accidents. "It will show us on a map the location of the vehicle and how fast we were going," Barry said.

The tracking device also functions as a tool for equipment maintenance, tracking factors such as fuel economy, miles per gallon and other essential information.

As a manager, the tracking devices have given Barry increased peace of mind. "I don't feel like I'm getting

snowballed and taken advantage of," he noted.

Barry predicts that Mobile-Trak will prove most useful during the winter months, when careful time management is critical as crews rush to clear snow and ice, he observed. "This system is going to be even more important for snow removal," he said, noting that he is so pleased with the results of his initial investment that he plans on adding tracking units to the remainder of his company's trucks.

Priced from \$300 to \$1,500, depending upon the model's level of sophistication, the tracking device is a worthwhile investment, according to Barry. "I have no doubt in my mind that the system is paying for itself," he enthused.

Based on his experience, he would advise any size landscape company to try Mobile-Trak, Barry said. "We really wonder how we ever did without it." – Cynthia Greenleaf **LL**

"We had everything from unaccounted time to too much time spent on a given property to driving the long way to and from a job. We really wanted to be able to measure what was going on. We needed the history to compare to the production sheets."

– Tom Barry

Circle 200 on reader service card

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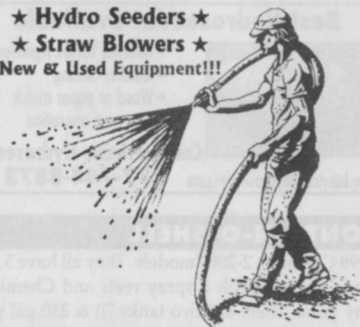


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Grub Control

(continued from page 155)

WHY GRUB TREATMENTS FAIL? Grub control methods can fail for many reasons. For instance, LaScalea said the type of turfgrass being treated can affect results. "Ninety percent of the turf in north Texas is Bermudagrass," he said. "This turf recovers well from grub damage as long as it's watered and fertilized heavily after treatment. But bluegrass and fescue do not recover well and typically need seeding or renovation, depending on the problem level."

Following are some common reasons grub management programs fail and ways to correct them, based on information collected by Potter, Shetlar and Baxendale:

- Poor application timing – too early or late. For instance, larger grubs are harder to control, therefore treating too late may not result in a high level of control.
- Unidentification of grub species present.

"Each grub species is active at slightly different times of the season," Shetlar said. "Some grub species, especially European chafers and Oriental beetles, seem to be less susceptible to the new insecticides. Most entomologists are suggesting that when one of these pests is the main grub, apply Mach 2 or Merit at egg hatch – usually mid-May."

- Too much thatch – It's a barrier between the product and the grub, and should be managed before treatment. "If the thatch layer exceeds ½ inch, a light aeration and increased post-treatment irrigation will enhance insecticide penetration and should improve white grub control," Baxendale said.

- Insufficient or lack of post application irrigation. The insecticides need to be moved to the soil-thatch interface, Shetlar said. "This is best accomplished by applying ½ to ¾ inches of water immediately after application," Baxendale said. "Repeat irrigation every four or five days to continue moving the insecticide into the soil. This also keeps the crown and root area moist to encourage re-

covery of the turf. If conditions have been hot and dry and grubs are deeper in the soil, a pretreatment irrigation of ½ inches applied 48 hours before the insecticide application should encourage grubs to move closer to the soil surface and enhance the control level."

- Incorrect rates and poor calibration. "This is specifically low application rates," Shetlar said. "Merit and Mach 2 rates have been calculated so that there is no 'fudge factors' left to reduce their rates. Older grub insecticides could often be used at reduced rates, but don't try it with Mach 2 or Merit." **LL**

The author is Managing Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.

Editor's Note: Merit is a registered trademark of Bayer Corp. Mach 2 is a registered trademark of RohMid. Dylox is a registered trademark of Bayer. Diazinon is a registered trademark of Novartis. Lawn & Landscape magazine's use or omission of product names in this article is not intended as an endorsement or criticism of the products.

Managing Design/Build Projects

The Pattie Group, Novelty, Ohio, operates a \$4-million design/build division. We have a precise way we approach a design/build sale from the initial contact with the client to finalizing and closing the deal.

Four or five people answer our phones and are trained to screen client calls and to look for high-end, design/build residential clients. We get an average of 400-plus new calls each year, so screening these calls is important.

The employee answering the phone fills out a general client information form. This form includes client name, address, phone numbers, e-mail, referral information and details about landscape design work possibilities.

If the person answering the phone recognizes the caller as a "hot" lead, meaning a client who is specific to our niche, a sales person is notified immediately. All clients are contacted by a sales person within 12 hours.

We monitor sales calls with a sheet that tracks original call date, client appointment dates, potential project cost, percent confidence in closing the deal, project phases, etc. This keeps sales personnel organized and helps them update their departments during weekly meetings.

After a salesperson is assigned to the project, a design team is selected for the job. The head of the design department chooses designers for projects. The salesperson and

designers meet regularly to discuss project updates.

During the initial meeting, we try to establish a rapport with the client and discuss budget up front. If we don't find out a client's budget, we aren't communicating with him or her and could be wasting time on a project that will not meet that client's expectations. Knowing a budget up-front also helps us sell a bigger project.

After a preliminary sketch is presented to the client and expectations are discussed, we can usually establish if we are on the right track and determine whether we can produce a final design and finalize project costs. We are trying to shy away from design-only sales, so we charge for the design and then, if the client wants us to do the job, we return 15 percent of the design cost. Three years ago, our average design cost was about \$1,400. Today, it is between \$1,800 and \$2,800.


We try to get a design proposal back to the clients within two days after the initial meeting. We also try to give them a date when we can start the work – usually within three to four weeks.

During the second meeting, we discuss project costs again. This is when we can really see where the client's budget is set, and if the presentation of the final design wowed them into spending a little more on their landscape.

If the client accepts the design, the design and sales team will go out to study the site and a preliminary plan and layout is done. Last year was the first year we tried this. It is costly because we're eating the cost of spending four to five hours on the site, but we've caught a lot of mistakes early this way. For instance, adjusting the size of a proposed patio so that it is more proportional to the site even if it's only a 2- or 3-foot change can make a big difference in the overall finished project.

Estimating project costs correctly is something we didn't do well two years ago. Conducting the preliminary plan and layout onsite has helped us improve this. For instance, checking grades on the site when laying out proposed

drainage solutions or catching omissions from the site study like the location of downspouts or underground utilities impacts our ability to install per the plan. Addressing client problems quickly also helps us avoid costly errors.

Typically, by the end of January we are booked for the first part of the season. We sell work over winter to establish this schedule. Longer three- to five-year projects are charted on a master plan so teams can focus on them while other projects are being planned and installed. – Steve Pattie 

The author is the president of The Pattie Group, Novelty, Ohio. To view the charts discussed in this article, visit www.lawnandlandscape.com.

FIVE *Keys to Managing Design/Build Work*

1. Have a specific client niche and train employees who answer the phones how to screen client calls.
2. Assign "hot" leads to sales employees immediately and make sure all clients are called back within 12 hours.
3. Track all client communication information from contact to contract.
4. Avoid design-only sales by offering a discount on the design if an installation project is planned.
5. Experiment with ideas that can help you estimate costs more precisely.

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