

Lawn & Landscape

**Win the
Commercial
Bid Game**

MAINTENANCE MATTERS
**Livin' Large: Caring
for Commercial Sites**

The Shrub Shape-Up
Pond Preservation

Balancing ACT I

**Derek Blumberg,
Quality Seasons**

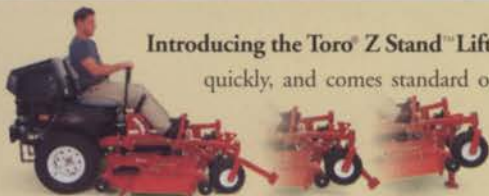


How fast does it let you change blades?

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

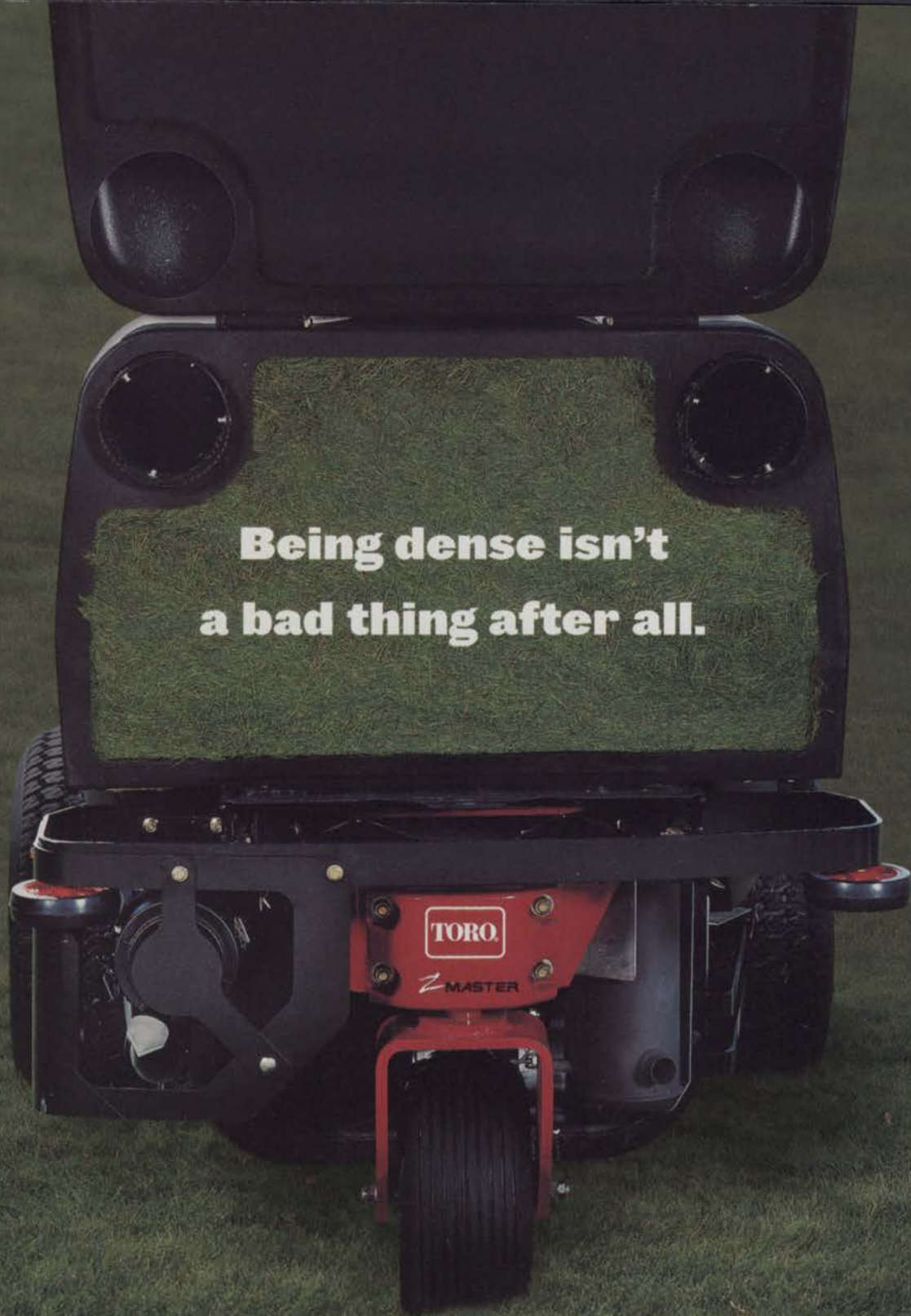


Z Stand out in front of the cutting deck, then drive forward until it locks into place. That's it. You get approximately 18 inches of clearance allowing you to work safely underneath. And it's so simple, you can even work alone. Let's see them try that at Indy. To learn more, see your Toro landscape contractor equipment dealer.

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The Toro
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Outfront ZRT.

The ultimate bagging machine featuring the Dense Pak™ collection system.

Greater bagging performance means improved productivity. A fact not lost when we developed our exclusive Dense Pak collection system. It features a patented airflow design that packs clippings to maximize the hopper's 9 bushel fill capacity. Plus, with a compact footprint, it provides superior maneuverability.

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

Keep an Eye on the Industry

Make sure you get the latest breaking industry stories each Monday evening via e-mail by signing up for *Lawn & Landscape Online's* free weekly e-newsletter. An easy-to-navigate, Web-based format provides quick access to stories of interest right from your e-mail. Join the 10,000 industry professionals using this update as a way to stay on top of important issues affecting the industry. Be sure to e-mail shunsberger@lawnandlandscape.com to receive your free copy. Please include "Newsletter Subscription" and your e-mail address in the message.

Daily Features

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

- Mon.** – *Contractor Talk*: Profiles of industry professionals and discussions of common practices.
- Tues.** – *Irrigation Issues*: An update on new products and the latest irrigation news.
- 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 Sunday of each month** – *Plant Of The Month*: *Abelmoschus*, a five-petaled, hibiscus-like flower, is July's featured plant from author Barbara Ellis.

April/May Online Sweepstakes Winner

Congratulations to Van Moore, Greener Grass Landscaping, Cleveland, Ohio, for winning a Husqvarna 325LX trimmer in the April/May online sweepstakes. Be sure to check www.lawnandlandscape.com/sweepstakes/ContestDetail.asp for this month's sweepstakes.

Watch for Supplemental Online Information

Keep your eyes peeled throughout each issue of *Lawn & Landscape* for pointers to extra information available exclusively online. When you spot the icon at right with a story, know that it's time to log on to our

lawnandlandscape.com



site to find additional information. If the icon contains a specific URL (Web page link), type that into your Web browser. Or, if the icon shows our homepage, go there and find the specific issue by clicking our "Magazine" link (www.lawnandlandscape.com/magazine) and either choosing "More Features and Departments" for the current issue of the magazine or "Back Issues" and the appropriate issue to find a list of that month's articles. Then, just choose the name of the article or department to find the additional online information.

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 key 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

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Cover photo: Randy Swanson, Prior Lake, Minn.

Balancing Act

Business success reaches beyond the bottom line for Derek Blumberg, who steadied his run-away growth by building systems to foster accountability, control costs and boost efficiency. **38**

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Shaping Up Shrubs

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Livin' Large

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A Conversation with Bob Walker

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lawnandlandscape.com

Introducing key features of the lawn and landscape industry's most interactive Web site. **4**

www.lawnandlandscape.com

Editor's Focus

Walking the Walk

S

Some people may think I wrote this column to help someone sell mowers or to help us sell advertising, but that's not the case. I'm writing this column because every once in awhile you encounter someone who demonstrates that not only can ethics and principles be part of a business, they also can be its heart and soul.

I was reminded of this on a sunny June day when I made the 60-mile drive north from Denver to Fort Collins, Colo., to spend the afternoon with Bob Walker of Walker Manufacturing. The essence of that interview comprises the latest offering in our Conversation Series, which you can find on page 118. But the insights and philosophies that matter the most in this case have little to do with mower engines or cutting decks. Bob Walker is all about the people around him and his company's impact on them.

Trade show attendees have witnessed Walker's priorities first hand, since he won't let employees work in his company's booth on Sundays. This day, after all, is about faith and family – not work – regardless of the fact that such priorities cost him an opportunity to sell that no other manufacturers pass up.

Unfortunately, people like this seem few and far between these days, with newspapers writing about the latest corporate takeover or get-rich-quick opportunity. The Walker story will likely never focus on record sales or expanding markets, which is fine with him. Instead, his is a story about starting out slowly and, ultimately, appreciating success.

To truly realize the extent of his commitment to building an organization based on more than the bottom line you have to talk with him about how the company has achieved its success. You have to hear his voice crack when he talks about being fortunate enough to have the chance to personally greet all of the attendees at the company's Family Reunion celebration for producing its 50,000th mower. "I wanted to thank each and every one of them for what they've done for us," he told me.

Today, Walker Manufacturing continues to make mowers. An average of 26 machines a day, to be exact. But the number that really matters to Bob Walker can't be counted – that's the number of people either impacted by or who have contributed to the company's success.

Like I said, I didn't write this to help someone sell mowers. I wrote this because there aren't enough stories about people who run their business this way, placing people before profit. ■

*The man without purpose is
like a ship without a rudder.
– Thomas Carlyle*

Bob West

Lawn & Landscape

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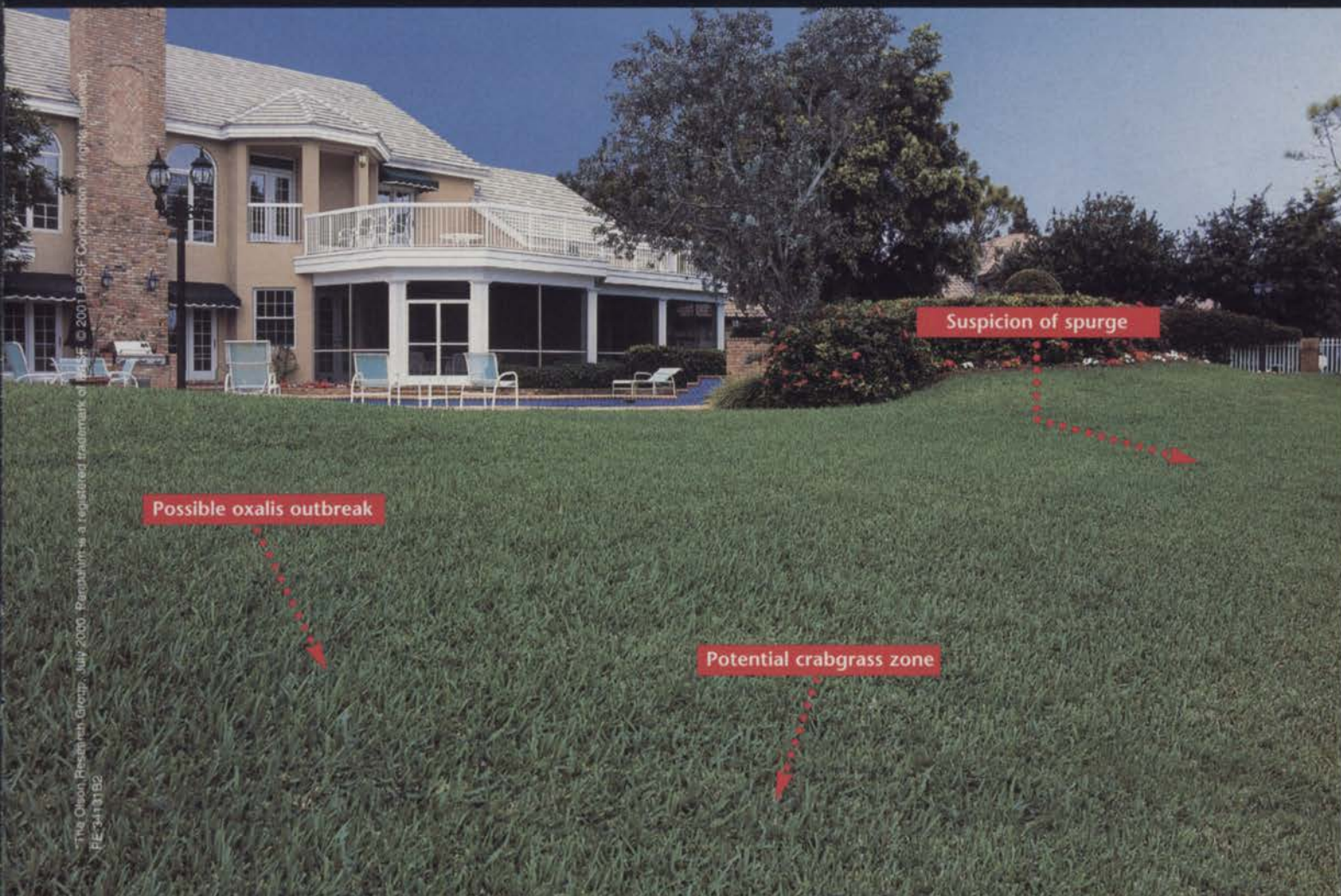
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SUMMER OUTLOOK

Growing Season

MARIETTA, Ga. – The season is off to a good beginning, according to members of the Professional Lawn Care Association of America (PLCAA).

Approximately 52 percent of PLCAA members reported a successful season so far, citing good weather, better labor supply and fewer customer cancellations. "Some also stated that the economy is not as bad as they had anticipated and that they were able to raise prices for 2001 without much flak," explained Bob Andrews, PLCAA past president.

Respondents reported an average 15.8 percent sales growth rate, with 16 percent of that being new sales.

While most of the feedback was positive, 40 percent reported that this season's growth was worse compared to last season's growth, with 35 percent stating the season is better and 25 percent saying it's comparable to last year.

When asked if they were doing anything different this year to boost sales, 64 percent said yes, listing sales improvement strategies, such as new services; more direct mail, telemarketing and add-on services; referral bonuses; more diverse advertising and improved customer contact.



As private employers, contractors are not required to provide paid holidays to employees. But in a market with limited labor resources, more contractors are adding paid holidays to their list of employee benefits as a retention tool.

Now is the ideal time to start setting up next year's holiday allowances package. To help you along, here are some paid holiday statistics from Bill Cook, president, Human Resource Associates in Manassas, Va.

When establishing your holiday allowances, remember that you cannot use the employee's sex, race, age, religion, national origin, handicap or veteran status as the basis for who gets holidays, Cook advised. "After you determine your holiday policy, take a look and see who does and doesn't get them," he said. "If there appears to be a division by race or sex, then you should re-examine your policy."

Added BENEFITS

	Percentage of participants surveyed:
Two year-end holidays	96%
Thanksgiving and Friday after	71%
Thanksgiving Day only (not Friday)	27%
Christmas Eve + Christmas Day	50%
½ day off on Christmas Eve + Christmas day	61%
Close for a week or more, Christmas through New Year's Day (all paid, non-exempts not paid)	14%
Close for a week or more, Christmas through New Year's Day (all paid)	7%
Working on any holiday, paid double time	40%
Working on any holiday, paid 2½ times regular pay	15%
Working on any holiday, paid regular pay plus two days off	5%
Holiday party (company provides food and decorations)	76%
Gift for employees (gift certificate, food, etc.)	23%
Cash or bonus (not based on employee performance)	12%

Source: Human Resource Associates

HEALTH CARE NEWS

Benefit Barriers

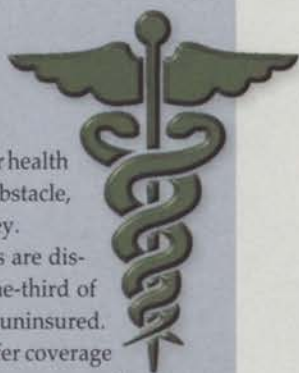
WASHINGTON, D.C. – Small employers who don't offer health insurance coverage identified affordability as a key obstacle, according to the Small Employer Health Benefits Survey.

Policymakers recognized that small firm employees are disproportionately uninsured – the survey said nearly one-third of workers at firms with 25 or fewer employees are uninsured. More than half of small employers who did not offer coverage – 53 percent – cited their inability to afford insurance as a key impediment. And more than one-third of survey respondents said another major reason they failed to offer coverage was because their employees could not afford it.

But those affordability problems may be compounded by misconceptions about the business value of offering health benefits, the availability of tax deductions for both employers and workers, and recent regulatory changes by the state and federal governments that have restructured the small employer health insurance market.

A majority of small employers – 80 percent – did not realize that

(continued on page 10)





“Never Settle For Anything Less Than the Best For Our Customers and Ourselves!”


Looking back over the years, Derek Blumberg has something to be proud of. His nine-year-old business started out with him in a 1971 Ford County Squire wagon and a 1961 Toro 21” push mower. Today, his business is grossing over the million-dollar mark. The reason? Derek refuses to settle for anything but the best just like his motto states: “Never settle for anything less than the best for our customers and ourselves!”

1996 was a big year for Derek and Quality Seasons, Inc. They moved from a two car garage into an actual professional space for their office and they found **CLIP** Software. Derek bought **CLIP** Software originally for two reasons: job costing and being able to charge service charges (since owning **CLIP**, he’s charged over \$6,800 in service charges). After buying **CLIP** and putting it to use, he discovered everything else it could do. **CLIP** helps simplify client and employee management. It automates routing, billing, and scheduling. “**CLIP** plays such a heavy roll in our day-to-day operations that we tend to take it for granted.”

“The biggest benefit besides the software that **CLIP** offers is the community. I attended my first **CLIP** Users’ Conference last year and was dumbfounded by the amount of networking, sharing, and bonding that took place. It was extremely powerful. You talk to these people everyday on the **CLIP** Forum and then you get a chance to shake hands and share even more ideas at the **CLIP** Conference. It’s great!”

Derek realizes that you can have a great team working together but you also need to have systems in place like **CLIP** Software as well as the COMPASS System developed by Rick Carver. COMPASS is a complete operations and incentive system for your business that will help your company increase efficiency and improve net profits.

- Derek Blumberg, *Quality Seasons*
Savage, MN

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USE READER SERVICE #46

Market Trends

(continued from page 8)

virtually all states require insurers to spread the claims cost of small employers with sick employees across their larger pool of small firms through the use of rating restrictions. More than 65 percent did not realize there are regulatory limits to how much insurers can charge employers with healthy workers compared to employers with sick workers.

Fifty-seven percent of small employers were unaware that their contributions toward employee health coverage were 100-percent tax deductible, and 48 percent did not realize that their workers cannot deduct their health insurance premiums when they purchase coverage on their own.

The survey also reported figures from small employers who successfully offer health benefits. Approximately 78 percent said that offering health benefits has a positive impact on employee recruitment, 75 percent said that it improves employee retention, attitude and performance, and 58 percent stated that offering a plan has an impact on lowering absenteeism.

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.

JULY 16-17 PLCAA Legislative Day on the Hill, Washington, D.C. Contact: 800/631-9675.

JULY 18 Connecticut Nursery & Landscape Association Summer Meeting, Berlin Fairgrounds. Contact: 800/562-0610.

JULY 18-22 Turfgrass Producers International Summer Convention and Field Days, Toronto, Ontario. Contact: 800/405-TURF.

JULY 19 Green Industry Field Day and Trade Show, American University, Washington, D.C. Contact: 703/250-1368.

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

JULY 20-22 Power Equipment/Lawn & Garden Show, Louisville, Ky. Contact: 812/949-9200.

JULY 24 2001 Midwest Regional Turf Field Day, West Lafayette, Ind. Contact: 765/494-8039.

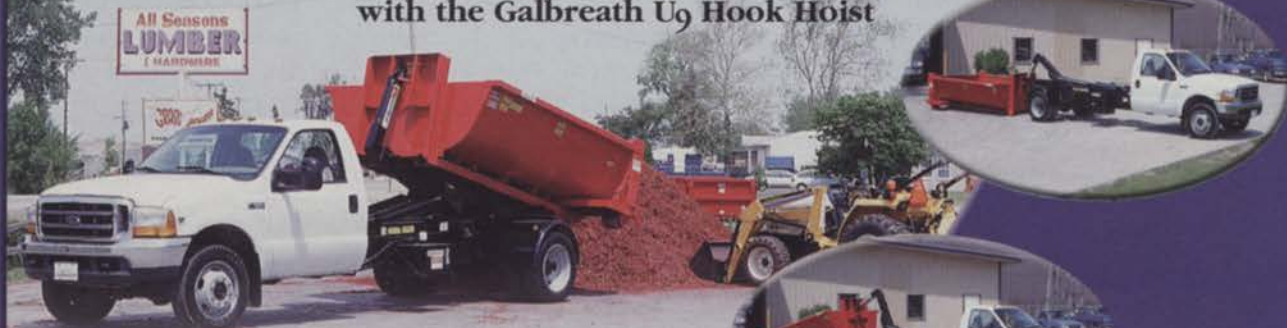
JULY 24-25 Nebraska Nursery & Landscape Association Summer Field Day, Bellwood, Neb. Contact: 816/233-1481.

JULY 24-26 Pennsylvania Landscape & Nursery Association Penn Allied Nursery Trade Show, Fort Washington, Pa. Contact: 610/544-5775.

JULY 24-27 California Association of Nurserymen Western Nursery & Garden Expo, Monterey, Calif. Contact: 916/928-3900.

JULY 26-28 Association of Professional Landscape Designers Summer 2001 Conference, Louisville, Ky. Contact: 630/579-3268.

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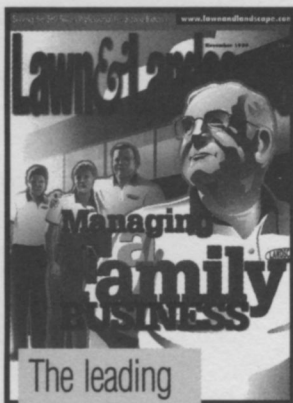
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 - 4. Ornamental Shrub & Tree Service
 - 5. Irrigation Contractor
 - 6. Landscape Architect
 - 7. Other Contract Services (please describe) _____

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- 8. In-House Maintenance including: Educational Facilities, Health Care Facilities, Government Grounds, Parks & Military Installations, Condominium Complexes, Housing Developments, Private Estates, Commercial & Industrial Parks

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

IV. OTHERS ALLIED TO THE FIELD:

- 13. Extension Agent (Federal, State, County, City, Regulatory Agency)
- 14. School, College, University
- 15. Trade Association, Library
- Others (please describe) _____

2. What best describes your title?

- Owner, Pres., Vice Pres., Corp. Officer
- Manager, Director, Supl., Foreman
- Agronomist, Horticulturist
- Entomologist, Plant Pathologist
- Serviceman, Technician, Crew member
- Scientist, Researcher
- Company, Library copy only
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- 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
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- 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
- 9. \$2,000,000 to \$3,999,999
- 10. \$4,000,000 to \$6,999,999
- 11. \$7,000,000 or more

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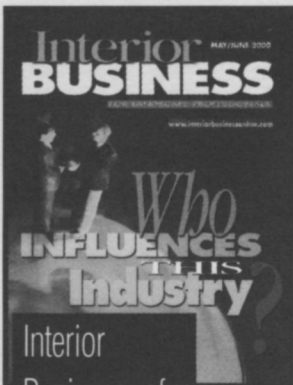
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- 7. Other Contract Services (please describe) _____

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- 14. Others (please describe) _____

2. What best describes your title?

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- JULY 31** Midwest Regional Turf Day, West Lafayette, Ind. Contact: 765/494-8039.
- AUG. 1** Massachusetts Certified Horticulturist Exam, Waltham, Mass. Contact: 413/369-4731.
- AUG. 1** Illinois Landscape Contractors Association Summer Field Day, Joliet, Ill. Contact: 630/472-2851.
- AUG. 17-19** Associated Landscape Contractors of America Design/Build Symposium, Atlanta, Georgia. Contact: 800/395-2522.
- AUG. 17-19** Texas Association of Nurserymen Nursery and Landscape Expo, Dallas, Texas. Contact: 512/280-5182
- AUG. 19-25** Garden Centers of America International Garden Centre Congress and Tour, Westbury, N.Y. Contact: 202/789-5980.
- AUG. 21** Cornell University Field Day, Ithaca, N.Y. Contact: 607/255-1792.
- AUG. 22** Michigan Turfgrass Field Day, Lansing, Mich. Contact: 517/321-1660.
- AUG. 24-26** Farwest Show and Northwest Seminars, Portland. Contact: 800/342-6401.
- AUG. 29-SEPT. 1** CalScape Expo, San Diego, Calif. Contact: 707/462-2276.
- SEPT. 9-11** ANLA Legislative Conference, Washington, D.C. Contact: 202/789-2900.
- SEPT. 11-12** Plant Health Care Multi-Lakes Conservation Association Camp, Walled Lake, Mich. Contact: 517/482-5530.
- SEPT. 12** Virginia Tech Hampton Roads Agricultural Research and Extension Center 26th annual Field Day, Virginia Beach, Va. Contact: bapple@vt.edu.

REGIONAL OUTLOOK

N.Y. Judge Orders Final Neighbor Notification Ruling

LONG ISLAND, N.Y. – Judge Stephen Bucaria upheld his original judgment in favor of the lawn care industry when he recently handed down his final ruling in the Nassau County neighbor notification law case.

“After hearing all the arguments again, he stuck to his guns,” explained Fred Eisenbud, an attorney representing the industry coalition fighting the law.

John Zaher, spokesman for the Nassau County Executive’s Office, said the county attorney’s office is reviewing the decision to determine if it is appropriate to appeal.

Despite the win in Nassau County, the coalition was dealt a blow when Justice Ralph Costello ruled one day earlier to let the law stand in Suffolk County. The judge in Westchester County had previously issued the same decision.

(continued on page 16)

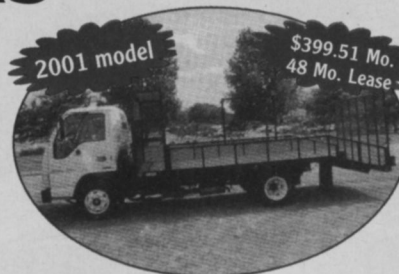


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Market Trends

(continued from page 13)

Eisenbud said the coalition will appeal Suffolk and Westchester counties' decisions.

The state pesticide notification law was passed in August 2000 and applies only in counties that adopt it. State lawmakers included a provision stating that the law must be adopted "as is," barring counties from making modifications. To date, Suffolk, Nassau, Westchester and Albany counties have adopted the law and legal challenges are pending in three of the four counties.

"We haven't filed in Albany yet," Eisenbud stated, "but we will shortly."

The industry coalition is moving forward with these lawsuits because those counties did not complete an environmental impact study in compliance with the State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQRA), which requires such a study before notification-type legislation. The counties' attorneys, however, are arguing that because the counties were forced to adopt the law "as is," no impact study was necessary.

But, the coalition refutes that argument,

People

Tom Oyler resigned as president of the U.S. Lawns division of Environmental Care. **Ken Hutcheson** was named general manager.

Irrigation Station appointed **John Raap** as branch manager and **David Wright** as sales manager for its Austin, Texas, location.

Ed Carmody joined Pursell Technologies as regional sales manager for the Midwest and **Andy Drohen** will serve as regional sales manager for the Northeast region.

Roberts Supply promoted **Rick Roberts** to director of sales and **Lorri Sklar** to director of marketing.

Kim Robinson was named senior vice president of sales for Thomas Equipment.

Simplot Partners promoted **Craig Shafer** to national accounts manager.

Steve Johnson will serve as director of research for Cebeco International Seeds.

Miramar Wholesale Nurseries named **Debbie Binczewski** controller and promoted **Kelley Smagacz** to purchasing manager. The San Juan Capistrano, Calif., and Irvine, Calif., locations appointed **Donna Johnson** and **Sam Banuelos** as managers. **Ray Medina** was promoted to key account sales.

Bob Morgan returned to Yazoo/Kees Power Equipment to serve as sales manager.



Carmody (top),
Drohen (bottom)

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Letters TO THE EDITOR

saying that where there is discretion, SEQRA requirements must be followed.

Eisenbud explained that he is hopeful for a win in Albany County because the legislature adopted the law one month after the deadline date for it to take effect on March 1.

"By any common sense reading of the law, it shouldn't have gone into effect until January 2002," he asserted. "There's language that says any law passed after Jan. 1 goes into effect the following January. But they're treating it as being in effect now."

In addition to that discrepancy, Eisenbud explained that Albany County has a sunset provision on its books that requires the measure to be readopted before Dec. 31 or the county's neighbor notification law will expire.

"If they're wrong [about the language of the law], and they don't readopt it, they've accomplished nothing," he declared.

In Suffolk County, Eisenbud hopes to win on appeal based on state law modifications. The state law requires written notification plus two alternative spraying dates,

(continued on page 20)

To the editor:

As Executive Director of The Environmental Council (EIC), I feel it necessary to comment on a statement in the Breaking News Section of the April issue.

The Connecticut Registry is not now and never has been 1.5 inches thick and there is no charge to register. EIC sat down with the Clean Water Coalition, buried the hatchet and worked out the details that served the interest of both groups, received the blessing of the Connecticut DEP and the environment committee of the legislature, worked the law through the legislature and basically have been at peace ever since. At the time, everyone in the country told us we were crazy to deal with the so-called environmentalists, but we have a very workable posting and notification law.

*Richard Tice
Executive Director
The Environmental Council*

To the editor:

I've been in the landscape industry for 41 years, and the pricing irrigation services article in your February issue is the best article I have seen anywhere on irrigation. I've done all manners of pricing trying to figure out how to arrive at something that is equitable. I didn't go far enough in my shortcuts and the long way is just too time consuming for quick pricing. This is great.

*Doug Caldwell
E. Carolina University
Greenville, N.C.*

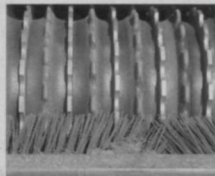
If you would like to express your opinion in a Letter to the Editor, please send your letter along with your name, title, company name and location to Letter to the Editor, Lawn & Landscape, 4012 Bridge Ave., Cleveland, Ohio 44113. Or send your letter via e-mail to nwisniewski@lawnandlandscape.com.

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Market Trends

(continued from page 16)

but in Suffolk County, the language was changed to require that the alternative spraying dates be consecutive business days.

Until cases are final, the law will stand in Westchester and Suffolk counties. Although the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) is responsible for enforcing the law, Peter Constantakes, a DEC spokesman, said the department will depend heavily on local authorities to investigate complaints and issue violations. Violation of the law carries a penalty of a \$10,000 fine and possible jail time.

Despite the complicated legal battle, Eisenbud said other counties in the state are discussing adopting the law.

MERGERS & ACQUISITIONS

Dow Closes Rohm & Haas Acquisition

INDIANAPOLIS - The Dow Chemical Co. completed the acquisition of Rohm & Haas' agricultural business for approximately \$1

billion, including working capital. The acquisition will be integrated into Dow AgroSciences, a Dow Chemical Co. subsidiary focused on turf and agriculture.

Under terms of the agreement, Dow AgroSciences acquired Rohm & Haas' Agricultural Chemicals business, including fungicides, insecticides, herbicides, other product lines, trademarks and licenses to all agricultural uses of the Rohm & Haas biotechnology assets. With this acquisition, Dow

AgroSciences' annual sales are expected to grow to approximately \$3 billion.

"This acquisition is consistent with our growth strategy of adding value through mergers, acquisitions and our own R&D efforts," said Charles Fischer, president and chief executive officer of Dow AgroSciences.

"As we re-shape our portfolio and focus on profitable growth, it is clear our ag chemicals business and employees will flourish more

(continued on page 22)

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Cedar Springs Landscape Contractors	www.cedarsprings.net
Mayer Tree Service	www.mayertree.baweb.com
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Market Trends

(continued from page 18)

as part of a global firm with a stronger market presence," added Raj Gupta, Rohm & Haas Co.'s chairman and chief executive officer.

ON THE INTERIOR SIDE

Growth Initiative Launched

HERNDON, Va. – Exceeding its initial goal of \$825,000 in 10 months, the Interior Industry Growth Initiative Task Force officially launched its Plants at Work growth plan.

A final donation of professional assistance in Web site design and other production assets valued at more than \$100,000 by the Florida Nursery & Growers Association, kicked off the plan, which is a three-year, industry-wide promotion to boost interior contractors' profitability and profile.

The promotion will include a direct mail campaign and a press conference to boost plant service value and grow the interior industry, said McRae Anderson, the Initiative's marketing plan task force coordinator. **ll**

Association NEWS

Associated Landscape Contractors of America and **CNA Insurance** announced the 2000 Employee and Fleet Safety Contest award recipients for January 1 through December 31. This program recognizes landscape contractors and suppliers that consistently promote safety in the workplace, dividing entries into three subcategories based on company size. Awards were presented to individual employees and companies were acknowledged for fleet safety, lack of vehicle accidents, no lost time accidents and most improved safety records. Recipients will be honored at the Green Industry Conference, November 9-13 in Tampa, Fla. For a list of contest winners, log onto www.alca.org.

The **Turf and Ornamental Communicators Association (TOCA)** awarded Tim Doppel of Atwood LawnCare the third TOCA Environmental Communicator of the Year Award and presented \$1,000 Publishers Scholarship awards to Beverly Moseley of the University of Florida and Kelsey Hall of the Ohio State University. The board of directors elected Pat Jones to president, Margaret McLean to vice president and Debbie Clayton to secretary/treasurer. Reelected directors are Kerry Brooks, David Cassidy, Jerry Roche and Cheryl Steelberg. Bob West, editor of *Lawn & Landscape*, and Dave Hanni are newly-elected directors.



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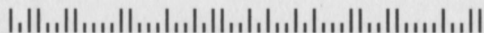
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Breaking News

MERGERS & ACQUISITIONS

John Deere Seals Deal of the Century

MOLINE, ILL. - When John Deere bought McGinnis Farms earlier this year, the company was clear about its intentions. "[McGinnis Farms] had visions for substantial growth, and we don't see John Deere changing that vision," confirmed Dave Werning, now the president of McGinnis Farms, which has been renamed John Deere Landscapes.

The announcement that John Deere reached a deal to acquire the parent company of Century Rain Aid, Madison Heights, Mich., confirmed a widespread industry rumor and immediately put this new organization at the front of the irrigation industry. John Deere Landscapes added approxi-

mately 165 locations and \$210 million in estimated annual sales to the \$150 million in annual sales and 40 locations John Deere acquired when it bought McGinnis Farms.

"With the planned creation of John Deere Landscapes, we will provide total solutions to landscape and irrigation professionals," related John Jenkins, president of John Deere's Worldwide Commercial and Consumer Equipment Division. "In addition to expanding our ability to serve irrigation customers, Century brings us more than 160 new locations and a strong team of people."

THE DEAL. John Deere is actually acquiring Richton International, the parent company of Century Rain Aid. Richton had 2000 annual revenue of about \$260 million, with its irrigation distribution division accounting for about 80 percent of those dollars. In addition, Richton owned CBE Technologies and Creative Business Concepts - two firms focused on computer services and products that John Deere likely will sell off.

John Deere agreed to pay \$125 million for Richton and assume \$45 million in debt. Richton stockholders will be paid \$36.13 per share of stock or will trade their stock for .8415 shares of John Deere stock. Richton stock closed at \$29 per share the day before the deal was announced, which is double its price one year ago.

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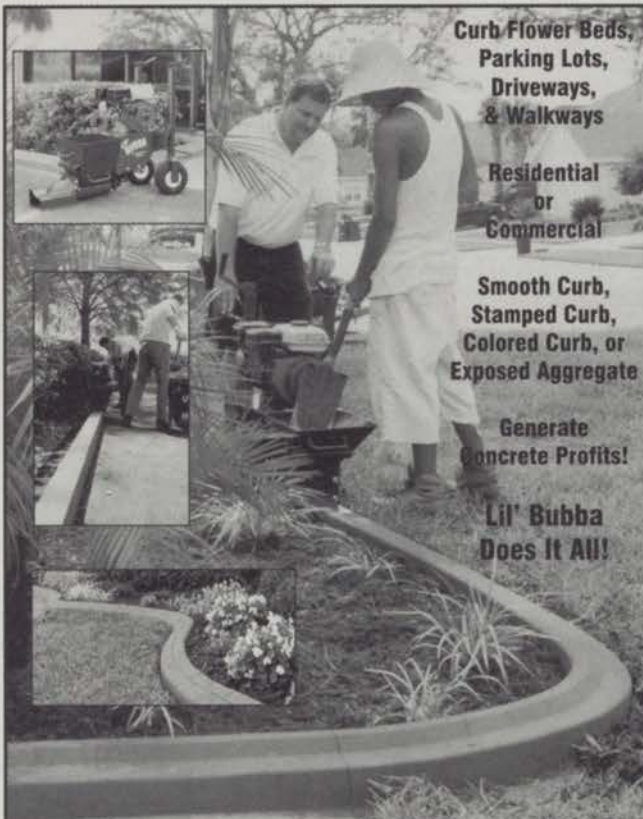
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Breaking News

The acquisition remains subject to Richton stockholder approval.


INDUSTRY REACTION. Members of the irrigation industry had a range of thoughts following the announcement, and most feedback was optimistic, seeing the deal as a positive for the industry. "This is a culmination of the industry continuing to mature," noted Brian Day, vice president, marketing for Bamboo Pipeline, Santa Barbara, Calif., and a 13-year employee of Century Rain Aid until last summer. "Companies like John Deere will continue to bring more professionalism and credibility to an industry that can use it, and that's a real positive."

"I don't see a downside to this deal at this point, and I don't know what one even could be unless someone is afraid this is an attempt by one organization to monopolize the market," noted Brian Vinchesi, president, Irrigation Consulting & Engineering, Peppermill, Mass. "While I

don't think John Deere is done buying yet, this would be a difficult market to monopolize."

From a supplier side, the acquisition could present growth opportunities, noted Jeff Carowitz, vice president of marketing, Hunter Industries, San Marcos, Calif. "As a supplier you never know what will happen

believe there's a lot of growth potential for the industry, be it in irrigation, landscape lighting, water features or installation. Now we're looking at a big company with good product lines and resources coming into this industry, and I see John Deere as a company that can help contractors grow their businesses."

With more than 200 locations in the organization, John Deere Landscapes is the country's first national distributor, although there are still areas to fill in. McGinnis Farms was located in 10 states, from the Carolinas through Texas, based on the various acquisitions it had made before selling to John Deere. Century Rain Aid's extensive buying spree has given it a presence in almost 40 states, although the company just entered Texas and California with acquisitions in recent months. — Bob West 

The announcement that John Deere reached a deal to acquire the parent company of Century Rain Aid, confirmed a widespread industry rumor and immediately put this new organization at the front of the irrigation industry.

with deals like this, but we feel that the management team on all sides of this new organization is very strong," he related. "We

The author is Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.

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TEACHING THE TROOPS

Team Training

Doing a job correctly the first time is crucial for any business trying to make a profit. This is especially true for landscaping companies, because losing an account due to poor service can amount to lost profits. Regardless of the company's size, employees must be properly trained to increase efficiency and retain customers.

"Our customers expect quality," stressed Gail Havron, vice president human resources, The Morrell Group, Atlanta, Ga. "We can't send an untrained crew out. If we did, that would do a lot of damage."

With more than 300 employees, The Morrell Group mostly services large accounts, such as corporate headquarters, hospitals, upscale retail centers and resorts. These accounts are divided into seven different divisions: grounds maintenance, installation, seasonal color, irrigation, arbor care, technical services and water management systems.

With so many services, delivering quality requires adequate training for crews and managers. As such, the company put together a three-part training program that consists of an orientation session to familiarize employees with company policies, equipment training, a defensive driving course and a certification level system.

There are typically 16 to 18 certification levels within each group, Havron explained. A new employee starts at the first level and can move up to level 18, which is for top-level supervisors. Within each level is a series of prerequisites, including voluntary classes, which are held on Fridays. Advancement to the next level depends partly on attendance, and since crews usually work four 10-hour days, they are able to attend the two-hour classes.

The training is self-paced and crew-level employees receive pay raises as they move through different phases. The management trainee program consists of 13 mod-

ules, which focus on topics to help managers work with crews, other maintenance groups and the safety committee chairman. Managers also are required to attend time-management and computer skills classes, and read management-focused books.

"The point is that they not only get an in-depth knowledge of their own group, but the company as a whole," Havron stressed.

At smaller landscaping firms, the programs might be less formal, but training is still critical. C.J. Bramer, vice president of operations, Mountain West Environments, Steamboat Springs, Colo., said the quality of training directly relates to company success. "This is a dangerous profession and your profits are based on efficiency and quality," Bramer stressed. "Without training, I don't think you'll get either one of those two things."

At the beginning of each season, his company holds a formal training session, where employees introduce themselves and review administrative policies. Then, the company focuses on its work policies and procedures to ensure employees know the "Mountain West Way" to landscape.

"There is also an afternoon or a full day of in-field training that gives hands-on examples of how we do things such as install irrigation and run equipment," Bramer said.

In addition to the formal training session, weekly training and safety meetings are held during regular work hours.

When Bob Rennebohm bought Heard Gardens Ltd., Johnstown, Iowa, 10 years ago, the three-employee company had no training program. "The training program was something I implemented to ensure our growth and success," Rennebohm explained. "There was no hesitation on my part to implement a training program, and I tried to provide a well-rounded, wholistic approach to training."

The training program for the 40 employees at Heard Gardens focuses on crew supervision. "We want to be sure the employees know how the business runs so they can appreciate the value of getting a job done on time," Rennebohm noted. "We don't just train on installation techniques, we train on a whole spectrum of things."

During the peak of the season, the company holds weekly training sessions for supervisors during work hours that last for 15 minutes to one hour, and cover not only installation topics, but also financial growth and profitability. In the off-season, the company pays for the supervisors to attend conferences held by industry associations.

Rennebohm also implements peer critique. "We'll take crew supervisors out and let them walk through a job site," he remarked. "We've found that to be beneficial because they can be critical in a constructive way."

This feedback contributes to the ongoing training process and allows employees to learn from inefficiencies. Employees who grow and learn at a business are more likely to stay there, Havron said, adding that since The Morrell Group implemented their training program six years ago, employee turnover has reduced.

"We've found that we need to do whatever it takes to find new employees, develop them and keep them," Havron related. "Trained employees have confidence in themselves and feel better about their work." — Cheryl Green **ll**

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

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USE READER SERVICE #49

Nursery Market Report

SMALL SPACE SOLUTIONS

Pots with Pizzazz



Small space dwellers are desperate to enjoy annual and perennial color, and they can with strategically placed container gardens. Not to mention that contractors can charge a premium for this service, particularly if containers are one of a kind and plants are unique. This is especially true since with containers, the contractor is only restricted by his imagination and a few guidelines.

CHOOSING CONTAINERS. Consider these characteristics to make sure a pot is suitable for the landscape.

Nonporous vs. porous.

Glazed pots and plastic, metal and glass containers are nonporous and hold moisture longer but don't look as natural as other materials. Clay pots are porous and lose moisture in

dry weather. Wooden planters are lined with plastic sheeting to protect the wood, and are nonporous.

Drainage holes. Every container should drain to ensure plant health. If holes don't exist, a few can be drilled into the bottom.

Susceptibility to frost damage. Most clay pots will crack or flake in winter, but other types of containers can be left outdoors and will not be damaged.

Weight. Some new pots are made of polystyrene and are easy to move. Heavy pots may be moved around or kept indefinitely on a wheeled platform.

CONTAINER SIZE. Keep plants in proportion to the container and the container in proportion to the location. Larger containers usually are placed on the ground for aesthetics, practicality of weight and mobility. Small ones can be placed in raised positions. Also, soil nutrients and water are used up more quickly in smaller containers.

ACCESSORIES. Think about using some functional accessories in containers to add a level of interest and increase profits. Try topiary frames or trellises made of twigs, grapevines or bamboo to support vining or tall-growing plants.

POTTING MIXES. Commercially available potting and soilless mixes are made up of different organic ingredients, including sphagnum peat moss, shredded bark and sawdust, as well as vermiculite, perlite, calcined clay and sand. Each ingredient provides certain traits.

1. Peat moss is acidic and holds water well. It is usually fibrous, brown and chunky.

2. Ground bark is cheaper than peat moss – it does not hold water and nutrients as well, but it may provide better aeration.

3. Vermiculite provides some nutrients and holds water and added nutrients.

4. Perlite is a granite-like volcanic material that loosens the mix and provides air space.

Large container mixes are blends of ground and composted fir or pine bark and peat moss. Five to 10 percent soil or loam is added to support shrubs and small container-grown trees.

POTTING MIX EVALUATION. An easy way to evaluate a potting mix is to wet it, plant in it and then water the planted container. A good mix should wet relatively easily and should not compact excessively. It should hold water without water-logging, and there should not be particles more than ¼ inch in size. – Jane Martin

The author is a horticulture extension agent, The Ohio State University Extension, Columbus.

lawndandscape.com

CHECK OUT this article online for more information on using containers in the landscape.

Because of the clay pot, these portulacas may lose moisture quickly in hot, dry weather.

Photo: Ball Horticultural Co. Above: Baskets are often lined with plastic sheeting to make them nonporous.

Photo: PanAm Seed



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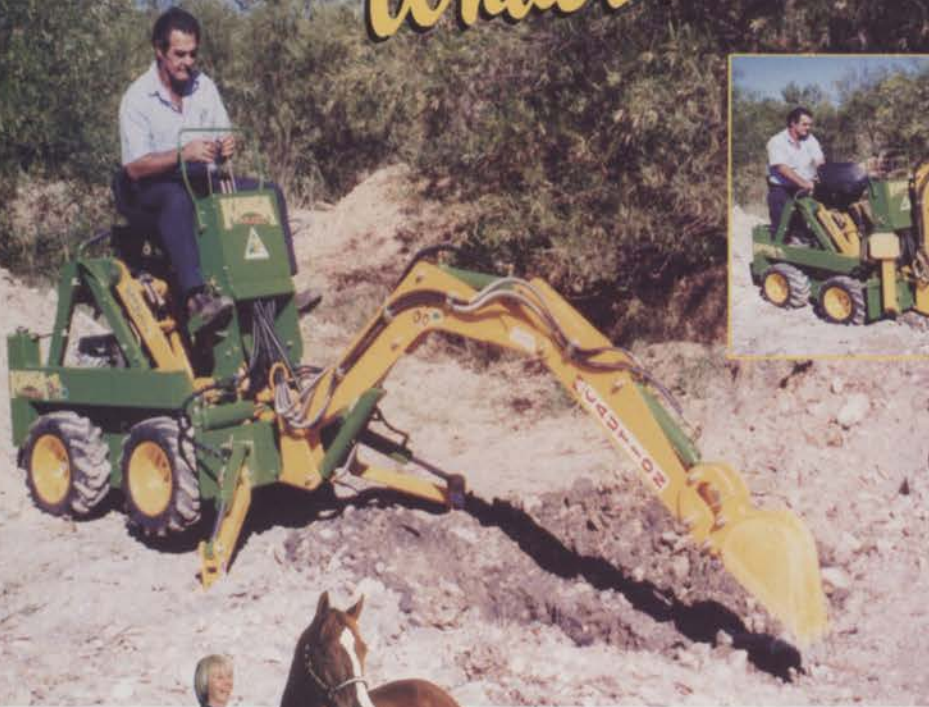
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ORNAMENTAL MAINTENANCE

Battling Tree & Shrub Diseases

Here, Jim Chatfield, assistant state and horticultural/district specialist, Ohio State University Extension, Wooster, identifies a few tree and shrub diseases and offers control suggestions.

VERTICILLIUM WILT DISEASES. Verticillium is a fungus that causes wilting of a large number of woody ornamentals and some herbaceous plants such

as maples, redbud, Russian olive and chrysanthemum. The

fungus invades injured roots, grows into the stem and plugs the plant's vascular system.

Wilting, yellowing and browning of foliage are followed by premature defoliation. Yellow-brown, brown, black or greenish-black streaks are found in the outer wood rings of infected branches or in the stems of herbaceous plants, differentiating this disease from other types of plant wilting and dieback.

Integrated control programs, such as controlling the insect vector of the fungus with proper insecticide treatments, promptly and completely pruning out infections when identified, removing and destroying dead trees in the area, isolating the root grafts of healthy trees, using resistant elm hybrids or varieties, and injecting fungicides can slow the disease's progress.

JUNIPER TIP BLIGHTS. Correctly identifying the causal agent is important because while symptoms of these various diseases are identical, their control methods differ. Visible symptoms include browning and dieback of young needles and shoot tips. Gray lesions usually girdle the shoot at the base of the dead tissue and tiny, black or grayish fungal fruiting bodies may be visible in the gray lesions. On highly susceptible hosts, the fungus may invade and girdle larger stems, browning and killing major branches; however, this degree of disease severity is rare. Both Kabatina tip blight and Phomopsis tip blight are most damaging to

younger plants.

To eliminate the sources of infection, remove and burn or bury all blighted twig tips. Prune or shear on a dry day to reduce fungus spread to other plants on wet tools, and avoid overhead irrigation, which spreads fungal spores.

Because fungi have different infection periods, fungicide application timing can differ. For instance, treatment for certain types of Juniper tip blight, such as Phomopsis tip blight, should begin in early spring and continue at 10- to 14-day intervals. But spring treatments are ineffective for Kabatina tip blight, so fungicide applications should begin in the fall.

POWDERY MILDEW DISEASES. These diseases can cause leaf reddening and distortion in addition to whitish fungal growth, and often are caused by fungi specific to the host they infect. Generally, each plant type is unique in that the powdery mildew fungus that infects it will not infect any other. Powdery mildew is common on dogwoods, roses, lilacs, English oak, sycamore, some deciduous azaleas and zinnias.

Powdery mildew fungus grows on the plant tissue surface in white blotches. Much of this growth consists of spores, which can be blown to plants nearby. Small structures, called haustoria, grow within host cells, injuring them as they obtain food. Powdery mildew will not usually kill a plant, but may weaken it and reduce winter hardiness, and the unsightly fungal growth reduces the plant's aesthetic quality.

Some mildew fungi affect older leaves first, such as on lilacs. Others affect newer shoots, such as on roses or crabapples. When new shoots are affected, leaf curling and shoot stunting and twisting is severe.

Powdery mildew can be treated with fungicides, but white spots may remain after the fungus dies. **L**

Powdery mildew, which can cause a whitish fungal growth on leaves, is often found on azaleas, zinnias, roses, lilacs and dogwoods.

Photo: A. R. Chase



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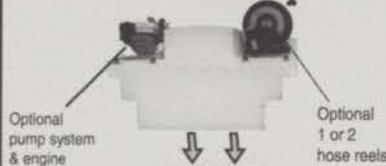
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USE READER SERVICE #25

Insect I.D.

TURF-DAMAGING CATERpillARS

A Few Words About Worms

Several species of the thick-bodied, non-hairy caterpillars in the cutworm-armyworm family may damage turfgrasses. The black cutworm is a primary pest of golf course greens, tees and fairways throughout the United States. This species rarely causes damage to lawns. The armyworm and fall and yellowstriped armyworms also occasionally damage golf course turf but are commonly associated with damage to home lawns. The bronzed, variegated and glassy cutworms are principally pests of home lawns. The glassy cutworm is common in Canada.

The black cutworm, armyworm and fall armyworm are native to North America but they have been spread worldwide by accidental introductions.

The black cutworm and fall armyworm are actually tropical and semitropical species that fly from the Gulf States to

(continued on page 32)



Black cutworm larvae, first through fifth instar. Mature armyworm larvae on a grass stem (below). Note distinct stripes and H-shaped pattern on head. Photos:

Destructive Turf Insects

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





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USE READER SERVICE #26

Insect I.D.

(continued from page 30)

cool-season turf areas each spring. The armyworm and bronzed, variegated and glassy cutworms can survive northern winters.

All species of turfgrasses are hosts to these larvae. Black cutworms and fall armyworms most commonly damage the short cut turf found on golf course greens and tees.

The adults are dull brown and gray colored moths with wingspans of $\frac{13}{16}$ to $1\frac{3}{4}$ -inch (35 to 45 mm). At rest, the wings are folded flat over the abdomen.

LARVAE. The larvae generally have hairless bodies except for a few scattered bristles. Besides the three pairs of true legs, these larvae have five pairs of fleshy prolegs on the underside of the abdomen. Most cutworms have characteristic markings on the head and body that aid in species identification. Full-grown cutworm and armyworm larvae are $\frac{3}{16}$ -inch (6.0 mm) wide and $1\frac{1}{4}$ to 2 inches (32 to 50 mm) long. Most cutworms and the armyworm coil into a spiral when disturbed.

Cutworms are named as such because of their nocturnal feeding habit of cutting off plants close to the ground. On golf course greens and tees, black cutworms and fall armyworms graze on the grass blades of short cut turf, causing circular or finger-shaped sunken areas, similar to ball marks. Armyworms feed on grasses any time of the day and are known for their habit of moving and feeding, en masse, from one turfgrass area to another. They commonly eat everything green, leaving only a few stems. Bronzed cutworms occasionally damage cool-season turf under the cover of snow. Other species of cutworms are relatively uncommon and their damage is minor.

DETECTION & MONITORING. Regular monitoring of turf for evidence of cutworm or armyworm infestations and applying treatment only when larvae are present and/or damage seems eminent, are keys to control. Monitoring includes looking for larvae, damage and/or evidence of birds (starlings) probing the turf for larvae.

To determine if larvae are present, use a flushing solution of liquid soap and water (two tablespoons of liquid Joy® dishwashing detergent in two gallons of water) spread over a 1-square-yard area to flush larvae to the surface. In our experience, this solution has not damaged turf.



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In Minor's League

Editor's

NOTE

What suggestions do you have to help me maintain a balance between my personal and professional lives?

Maintaining a balance in life is an incredible challenge for start-up entrepreneurs, or any entrepreneur for that matter. Achieving this balance has to be a priority for the entrepreneur. It is essential that you put this issue at the top of your list, which is certainly easier said than done in many cases. The obvious question the entrepreneur then asks is, "How can I do that at this stage in my business career?" My reply is always the same: "How can you not?"

I suggest that you step back and take a look at what is really important in life. Paint the picture, if you will, of your future. An effective exercise that helps is to close your eyes and picture your funeral, hopefully 30, 40 or even 50 years from now. You are being eulogized. Think about what you hope your loved ones will say. If you are like most people, your hope is that they say you were a good parent, a good spouse, a good child or a good

I suggest that you **step**

back and **take a look**

at what is *really important*

in life. **Paint the**

picture, if you will,

of your **future**.

friend. Maybe you hope they'll recognize that you gave to the community. Somewhere way down the list you would like them to say you were a good businessman or businesswoman.

So think about how you live your life. Are you doing the things needed to be perceived like you want to be? Is work your No. 1 priority or are you involved in your children's activities? Are you home for dinner on most

nights? Do you ever go on vacations and not call the office? If not, your life may be off balance.

If this is the case, try doing the following:

- Add something to do for yourself and/or your family in your daily "to do" list. Commit to accomplishing that item no matter what challenges come up in your day.

- If you have a particularly busy day that requires 12 to 15 hours of work, figure out a way to allot time for your family or for yourself. Come home for dinner, go to the kids' game, or go work out at the gym. Just do it. You can always go back to the office or sneak some work home and do it when it is not an inconvenience for the family. Many entrepreneurs who make balance a priority sacrifice a little sleep for additional family or personal time.

- When you schedule your appointments for work,



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 300-employee, 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.

schedule them around your personal priorities, not the other way around. Is that meeting with a customer really more important than Susie's dance recital? Maybe sometimes, but probably not every time.

- When you go on vacation, leave the work at home or, at the very least, save calls for the end of the day. Many vacation days have been ruined by mid-day calls during which "fires" have to be put out. Instead, save them for the end of the day or, better yet, don't call at all. Your associates or employees eventually have to learn how to handle tough situations and, frankly, when it's all said and done the "fires" you have to put out usually are not as important as you really think.

Is maintaining balance as an entrepreneur easy to do? No way. Should you do it? Definitely. Can it be done? No doubt about it, but it absolutely, unequivocally has to be at the top of your priority list. **LL**

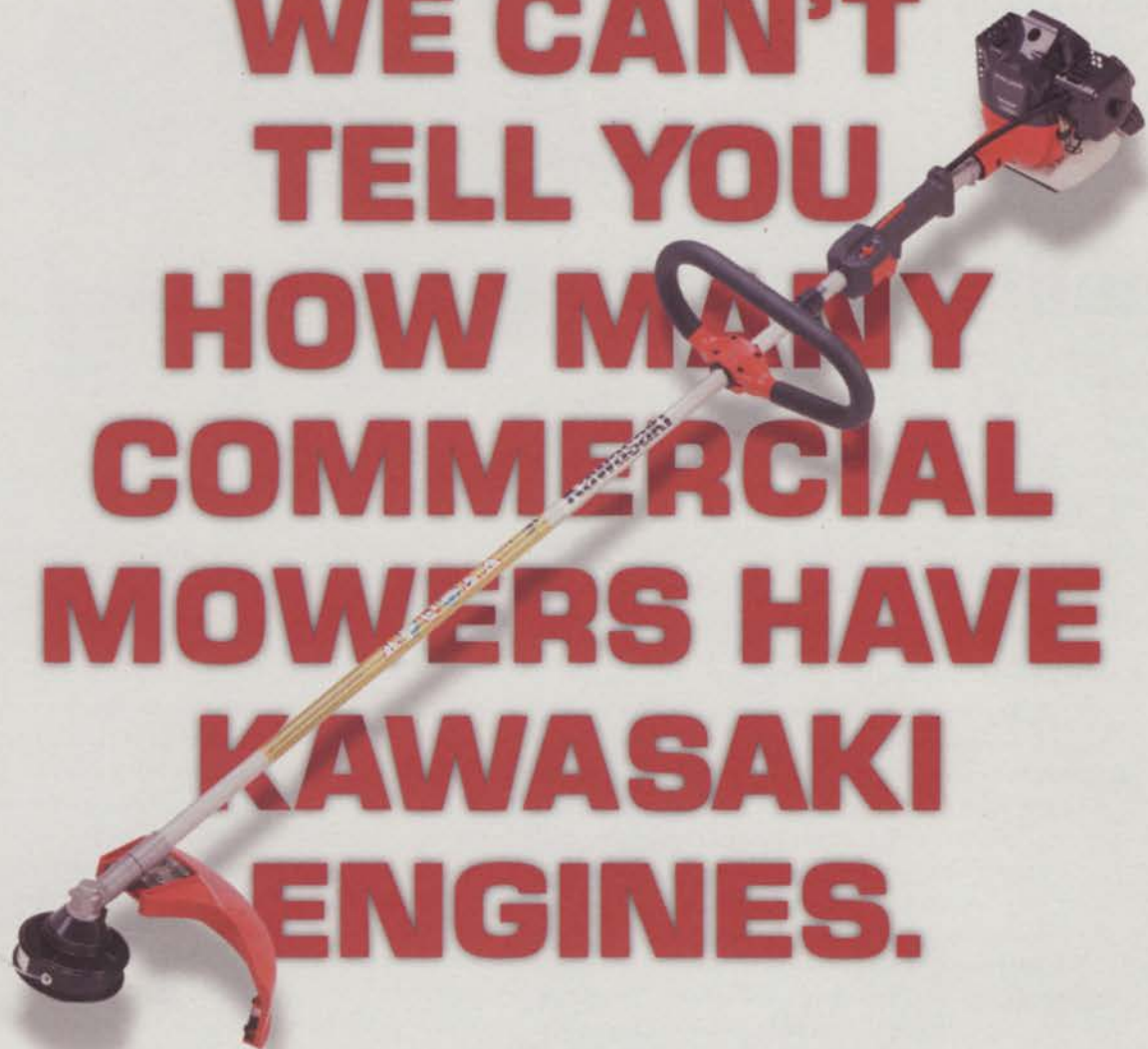
1. Add something for yourself or your family on your daily "to do" list.

2. Schedule time for yourself and your family - eat dinner together or work out at the gym.

3. Schedule work appointments around personal priorities.

4. Leave your work at home when you go on vacation.

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Quality Control

Contractors can't look into a crystal ball and find out if a caller is a price shopper or a potential client. Time is valuable, and estimating can subtract hours from an already tight schedule, emphasized Rex Mann, owner, RM Stonescaping, Medina, Ohio. This is why he prequalifies clients before setting foot on their properties.

"We use upfront qualifying because it gives us more time to concentrate on selling to the qualified people who come to our business," he explained. Mann's upfront contract, or UFC, weeds out bargain shoppers by probing into their purpose and agenda during a phone conversation. First, he tells them to expect a one-hour visit if they are interested in a proposal. This demand of potential clients' time separates serious callers from those who are looking for comparison prices, he said.

"Time is so valuable to people these days," he said. "If they feel their job is important enough that you can spend your time, then they can at least invest their time. Then, that will weed out the people who just want you to drive by and see what kind of price you can give."

But before Mann spends an hour on the property, he knows the sale fits the company's profile: hardscapes, retaining walls and paving stones. While on the phone, he follows a script that covers basic information, such as how the client heard about the company, the call date and the project type.

Then, the questions dig deeper. "What problems are they trying to solve?" Mann described. "Why do they want a retaining wall? Are they tired of their deck? Why do they need us? What are we going to solve for them?"

Mann goes through his form, checking off points after callers respond so he will not forget their feedback. After collecting and considering basic information, he continues with his UFC – the crux of the prequalifying

process, which includes these steps:

Purpose – Caller identifies reason for proposal.

Agenda – The potential client lists expectations.

Presence of decision makers – Review information the caller will need to prepare for the meeting, such as photographs. Most importantly, be sure that the decision makers will be present for the meeting.

Date, time, location – Review driving directions to the property, set up a time and stress the meeting length.

Outcome – This is the end of the first meeting. "The next step is for us to decide if we are qualified to do the job and if we want to do the job. Then, we'll proceed to the next step, which is the proposal."

Mann will not draw up a proposal for each property he visits like he did in the past – some potential customers do not allow a sufficient budget to complete the job and others do not want to wait for a delayed project start date. But still, he creates proposals for roughly 85 percent of those who progress through his UFC and initial meeting.

Andrew Aksar, owner, Outdoor Finishes, Walkersville, Md., will offer rough estimates over the phone to prequalify callers. During this call, Aksar also gives the client a ballpark idea of when the project will fit into the company's schedule. Those willing to wait most likely are serious potential customers, he figured. "The prospective clients who are serious about having a quality job performed are willing to invest the time in waiting for 'their turn' on our schedule," he observed.

Though Aksar doesn't follow a structured form for detecting price shoppers, he complements each call with a disclaimer, directly notifying the caller that he will not be the least expensive company, but quality and commitment override dollars and cents. "I feel this lets them know that we're serious about our work, we take pride in our work and that they will be paying a premium for our services," he noted. – *Kristen Hampshire*

The author is Associate Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.

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CHECK OUT this article online to see a copy of Rex Mann's prequalification form.

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USE READER SERVICE #128

QUALITY SEASONS

HEADQUARTERS: Savage, Minn.

FOUNDED: 1992

SERVICE MIX: 98 percent of the revenue comes from residential customers and 2 percent stems from commercial clients. 80 percent of Quality Seasons' work is maintenance services, 20 percent is lawn care.

2000 REVENUE: \$1.2 million

2001 PROJECTED REVENUE: \$1 million

EMPLOYEES: 9 year-round, 5 seasonal

EQUIPMENT: 15 mowers, 10 trimmers with 5 power broom attachments, 10 blowers, 6 edgers, 1 chainsaw, 6 hedge trimmers, 6 maintenance vehicles, 1 fertilization vehicle, 2 manager vehicles, 1 dump truck, 5 enclosed trailers and 2 open trailers.

TECHNOLOGY SYSTEMS: HP network server with a virtual private network (VPN), DSL Internet service, 2 HP desktop personal computers, 2 HP laptops and accounting, scheduling and routing software

THE COMPANY

MISSION STATEMENT: Never settle for anything less than the best for our clients and ourselves.

CHALLENGES: Staffing, controlling efficiencies and costs

THE OWNER

DEREK BLUMBERG

BACKGROUND: Started Quality Seasons in 1992 while earning a degree in architectural drafting and CAD design from Northwest Technical Institute in Eden Prairie, Minn. Incorporated the business in 1996, shortly after graduation.

Balance AC

There is a balance, somewhere, between work and family – between growth and control, success and burnout, profit and greed. Somewhere, there is a happy medium.

Derek Blumberg knows this to be true.

"I've made a lot of mistakes, but I've overcome a lot of them, too," he said, relating to John Maxwell's "Failing Forward." "It does not matter if you fall down 99 times, but that you get up 100 and keep trying. Success is not measured by your bank account, but by being happy with what you have and having the time to do what you want with it."

Blumberg, the owner of Quality Seasons in Savage, Minn., chooses time. This is where he strikes his balance.

First, a few things to note about Quality Seasons and its visionary owner. People are its No. 1 asset. "Understand that everyone in your world is important," Blumberg reminded. He knows firsthand that growth stems from systems that allow his employees to flourish both in and out of the work environment – he wants them to have a life. And true to its name, quality is a recurring theme for the company: quality employees with a high quality of life, quality services for quality customers and quality systems to hold this all together.

Quite frankly, Blumberg will settle for no less.

"I really want to do things right and let that be my staple – that Derek really does his best," he remarked. "And he never settles."

Now, Blumberg reflects on his 9-year-old business, remembering the wood-sided 1971 Ford Country Squire wagon he drove to his first neighborhood jobs, which he maintained with a 1961 push mower. He recalls a laundry list of past sales jobs – vacuum cleaners, knives and, of course, lawn services – before he decided to go out on his own. He also considers the influence of his father, who built houses while Blumberg helped with general labor tasks when he was young. "I grew up under the wing of hard work," he confirmed. "My dad was also a business owner, so I had a mindset about being in charge and that you could make

(continued on page 42)

At a
Glance

Business success reaches beyond the bottom line for Derek Blumberg (left), who steadied his run-away growth by building systems to foster accountability, control costs and boost efficiency.

cing
T



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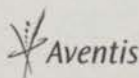
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Cover Story

(continued from page 38)

more money working for yourself."

So that's what Blumberg decided to do. After graduating in 1995, he pushed aside his degree in architectural drafting and CAD design from Northwest Technical Institute in Eden Prairie, Minn., and incorporated Quality Seasons the next winter. That year, the company grossed \$30,000—a strong start that multiplied.

Last year, the company earned \$1.2 million in revenue, netting more than 11 percent.

Still, this success came after a few falls, he admitted, though maybe not 99 of them. "I needed to learn about business," he said, noting that considerable profit casualties interrupted his growth in 1998—a time when Quality Seasons was not so balanced.

LEARNING TO GROW UP. Blumberg was rather surprised when a trusted friend—a venture capitalist—clearly wrote on the dry erase board in his office, "Derek, you are not a nonprofit organization. Your business is a for-profit company."

"It blew me away," he described. "I didn't realize that I was focusing on the company's revenue and not the net. I always bend over for my people, and you trust that people will do the same for your business that you will."

But without solid systems they don't, he discovered. In 1998, Blumberg added a fertilizer and landscape division to his core high-end residential maintenance base, increasing his staff from 10 team members to 22 and footing a hefty equipment investment. His fertilization client base grew from 100 to 900 and they liked the landscape option. But this add-on blitz caused growth that Quality Seasons could not control.

"You think, 'Boy, there's a lot of progress,' but we were servicing so many cities, and there was so much drive time, and there was no system," he said, having little control of costs and internal efficiencies, from training to bookkeeping. "It just got too big, too fast, and it affected morale, profit and the quality of the fertilizer and landscape maintenance

(continued on page 44)

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Derek Blumberg, owner, Quality Seasons, Savage, Minn., is a bit of a bookworm when it comes to learning more about business and personal development. Here, some of his favorites:

1. "Developing the Leader Within You" by John Maxwell
2. "Focus" by Al Ries
3. "Full Price" by Thom Winninger
4. "Raving Fans" by Ken Blanchard and Stephen Bowles
5. "Who Moved My Cheese" by Spencer Johnson, M.D.
6. "How To Win Friends & Influence People" by Dale Carnegie
7. The Bible

—Kristen Hampshire

Wise
Words

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USE READER SERVICE #54

Cover Story

(continued from page 42)

divisions." The company jumped from \$300,000 revenue in 1996 to \$550,000 in 1997 and \$830,000 in 1998. Sales were climbing, but the systems to drive the business were not.

In 1998, Blumberg wrote \$20,000 in bonus checks for his employees, but Quality Seasons lost \$100,000 – a debt that would burden the company for two years. This is

when Blumberg organized a five-member advisory board consisting of his accountant and four other multimillionaire mentors. They set up a plan, and the board, "in a gentlemanly way, smacked me upside the head and said, 'Wake up,'" he recalled. "I got a sharp lesson in bottom line management."

Blumberg realized he was relying on a cast of new employees to run his divisions, yet he had no system to ensure accountability. "With no system, the employees will fail and it's not their fault," he said. "It's the company's responsibility to set up a system so they can succeed." Besides refocusing his business to be a "for-profit" company, the board suggested he devise a system, cut costs and increase production.

Software programs streamlined management, providing routing, billing, pricing and job costing structures. Blumberg also listened to industry consultants and set up an intricate training, orientation and hiring process to recruit employees that would mesh with his mantra: "Never settle."

He cut costs, spending conservatively and taking advice from his advisory board. "For the first two years, my board helped me and I didn't buy anything more than \$500 before talking to someone first," he said.

Finally, production increased after refining systems, hiring reliable team members and pinching pennies. The next year, Quality Seasons generated \$870,000 – only a slight increase, as the company still was making up for losses – and it stuck to a slow growth schedule to reach last year's \$1.2 million mark. "The biggest lesson I learned from 1998 was to build a system to help our guys and gals grow in our company and feel like they were part of the success," he said.

BUILDING A TEAM. The first five minutes of each workday at Quality Seasons are dedicated to a quick meeting. This is not just to coordinate crews, finalize schedules or simply punch the time card. Every employee shares "one good thing" – a positive thought to start the day.

"This is really important for attitude," Blumberg explained. "They might say they spent quality time with their wife, they went fishing with their kids, they got an A on a test or got a new car."

This five-minute reflection is the first impression for new hires at the company, who leave the meeting inspired about their new jobs. After all, Quality Seasons doesn't hire just anyone to fill its positions. The application is nine pages long and job interviews generally last one hour, addressing questions like, "What do you like about yourself?," "What are you trying to change about yourself?," "What

(continued on page 46)

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USE READER SERVICE #29

Cover Story

(continued from page 44)

kind of people do you want to work with?" Blumberg listed.

The company also dedicates energy to its training program – a detailed system that includes both "hard" and "soft" training, Blumberg explained. The soft stuff starts when new hires enter the front door. Their uniform is ready on the front desk with their team member handbook and a sign greets them into their new workplace. From there, the production manager, Lucas Hosmer, guides new employees through a check sheet.

"We have a procedure manual they get to follow step by step," Hosmer explained. "Everything from filling up the gas tank at the beginning of the day to turning in your route sheet at the end of the day is in the manual," he said.

"We invest in our staff so that when they get started they know what makes our customers tick, what makes grass tick and how they can get the job done," he continued. "If you spend the time in the beginning, there will be a more lasting effect with fewer questions and errors."

Safety meetings every other Monday and a "goal wall," which tracks employee goals and notes achievements, drive the importance of learning. In addition, "hard training," which takes place in a property adjacent to the company's building, allows employees to test and learn how to use equipment. Actually, the empty lot is quite a landscape work-in-progress for Quality Seasons, Blumberg said, laughing. "We're over there raking, seeding, trimming, mowing."

The company rewards its workers with a 401K program and it covers 50 percent of the benefits package, which is effective after six months of employment. And Quality Seasons has a 40-hour work-week, so that its employees can "work smarter, not harder."

"We don't want Quality Seasons to be No. 1," Hosmer added. "We want family to be No. 1, then Quality Seasons."

SERVING AND SMILING. Quality resurfaces – this time in relationships. The company's high-end residential clients don't just

(continued on page 48)

Customer satisfaction can come in small packages. Just ask Derek Blumberg, owner, Quality Seasons Landscape, Savage, Minn. The pumpkins he leaves on his clients' doorsteps each fall attract attention from neighbors – who also receive the holiday treat – and spread a giving reputation, as the company's name and slogan appear on each orange globe with a greeting.

"Instead of using our employees to hand out the pumpkins, we hire a youth group and give them money to pay for their mission trips," Blumberg explained, noting the win-win marketing strategy. "The customers really appreciate it – they love to hear, 'Thank you' – especially in creative and unexpected ways."

The pumpkins are a small cost compared to the positive image that Quality Seasons gets in return, Blumberg said.

– *Kristen Hampshire*

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USE READER SERVICE #56

Cover Story

(continued from page 46)

purchase services, but an image—a promise, Blumberg noted. His employees deliver this not just by maintaining the customer's property, but asking, "Is there anything I can do for you?" he said.

Strategic alliances allow Quality Seasons to provide more than maintenance, lawn care and winter services. Blumberg dropped landscape design and installation this spring. The division he added in 1998 was profitable in 2000, but he wanted to streamline his mix and channel energy into his primary money-maker—fertilization—and his client mainstay—maintenance. Still, clients can count on his company to cover their needs.

Blumberg set up agreements with companies that handle landscape design and installation and tree, irrigation and lighting services. Quality Seasons' winter services, which include snowplowing, sanding and salting, deck shoveling, roof raking, and holiday lighting, keep clients calling year-round, especially in snowy Minnesota.

This year, Blumberg hopes to expand this division by offering his clients garage sweeping services. "You sweep out their garage, clean off their deck and clear their roof so everything is under control," he said.

This control—this balance—sets Quality Seasons apart from the pack of area landscape maintenance companies, Hosmer added. "Our focus is building a relationship with the customer," he said. "We want to build a name with them."

This name doesn't merely imply "lawn maintenance" or "service provider," but, yes, quality. And accountability.

MOVING AHEAD. Blumberg takes accountability quite seriously. He holds his employees responsible for their work and built a system to foster this. He holds himself to the same standard—perhaps higher. Once he hits a goal, he looks for another.

"Just like in the book, 'Who Moved My Cheese,' are you going to sit there without

"We want our
employees to work
smarter, not harder."

—Derek Blumberg

the cheese and die, or are you going to find some more cheese and make yourself better?" he asked.

In this case, technology is the cheese, and Blumberg is always finding more. For example, managers' trucks are equipped with a custom, portable desk that straps into the passenger seat. On this desk he keeps his laptop—a direct connection to home base and an information source that allows him to access client accounts on-site.

The set-up sounds a bit intimidating—even space-age. But this is hardly the case, Blumberg assured, explaining the virtual private network behind his portable technology, which is a computer that remotely communicates with an office server.

He can view clients' files and update ac-

(continued on page 141)



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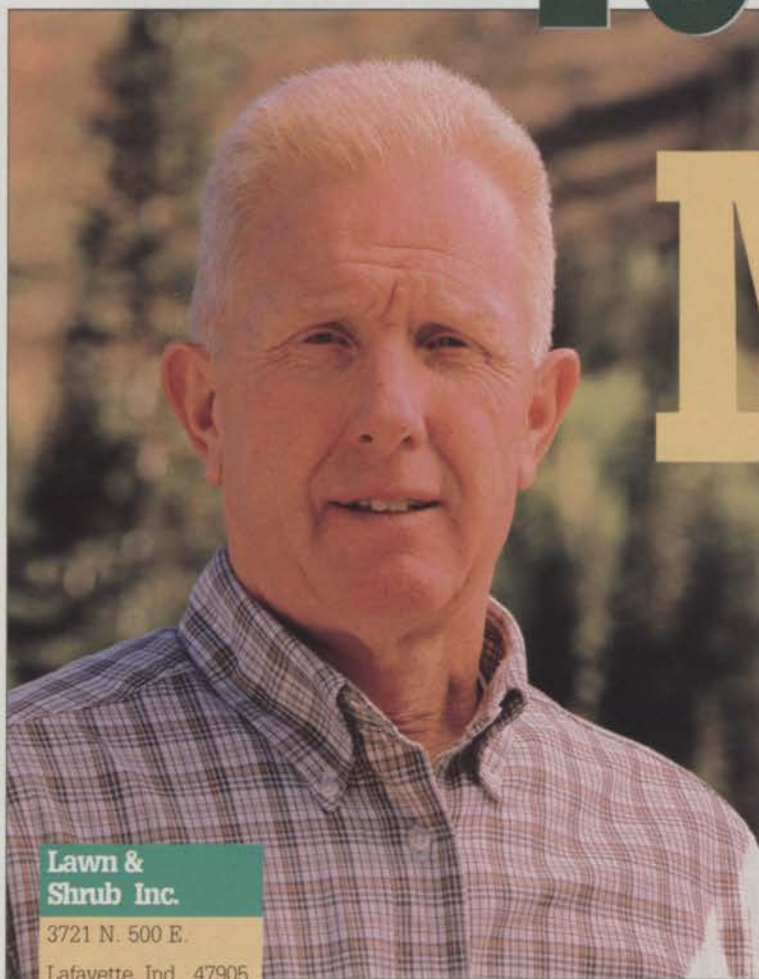
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Mike Young never set out to be in the landscape industry, nor did he intend to have his own business. But after spending one year working in a corporate environment following three years as an officer in the Navy, he knew that wasn't the place for him. A newspaper advertisement selling Lawn-a-Mat franchises in the Midwest caught his attention, so he found a partner and the two paid \$8,000 to get into the lawn care industry in 1973.

Business started off slowly for the pair, but the franchise grew and enabled Young to quit his full-time job and make lawn care his profession. Sadly, however, Lawn-a-Mat wasn't as fortunate, and many of its franchisees stopped paying their franchise fees when the organization stopped providing service and support.

The organization folded and the partners found themselves encountering their own hard times soon after. "Essentially, I felt like I was doing all of the work," recalled Young, who ultimately bought his partner's share in the business

for \$7,000 borrowed from equity in his house and life insurance policy. "That was the best \$7,000 I ever spent."

There's little chance the company will encounter similar struggles today, and its 29 employees have driven the company's growth to the point that the half of the business is worth far more than \$7,000. But an ownership transition looms on the horizon again as Young prepares to sell the business to his son and daughter-in-law.

MAKING ITS WAY. Young said his business plan in the early days resembled most contractors' approach – "It was more about hard work and less about planning," he admitted. "We worked out of our garage before we acquired some property. Now we've got about half an

(continued on page 52)



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USE READER SERVICE #58

First Look

(continued from page 50)

acre under roof, which will serve us well until we reach about \$3 million in sales."

Despite the company's relative experience, Young said he could get clients by adhering to basic sales tenets. "One of the most important lessons I learned, and it's still true today, is that when someone calls, they want service and response," he said.

Being responsive to potential customers required sacrifices for Young in terms of time away from his family while he built the business, but he said getting employees to appreciate the importance of quick reaction to customer inquiries still challenges him. "If you're the owner, you're motivated to deliver, but other employees aren't motivated that same way," he said.

Early on, Lawn & Shrub focused on fertilizer and weed control applications, but some basic market research sent the company in a new direction. "I looked in the Yellow Pages and saw that few companies were offering full landscape care," Young recalled. "Those

lawnandlandscape.com

CHECK OUT this article online to view the company's trucks and uniforms.

companies that were doing this work were billing customers for each service and each visit. We thought we could simplify this by providing total landscape care for the entire year and billing the customer a flat fee over the course of 10 months."

Customers responded to Young's approach, and the business grew quickly. Plus, now the company had money coming in the door during early season. But the winter income wasn't enough to keep Young from borrowing from the bank to survive the busy spring, so he moved all of his clients over to 10- or 12-month billing plans. "I was amazed people would write us checks for lawn care in January, but they did and we were living off their money rather than the bank's money."

IMAGE CONSCIOUS. Young also points to the company's commitment to doing the right thing as part of its success, and that means presenting a professional image. "We provide uniforms for employees at no charge to them, and we require they wear them," he explained, noting that uniforms consist of a button-up, short-sleeve shirt and standard trousers.

Each employee gets 11 uniforms – five to have at home, five that will be at the cleaning service and one to wear. "All of our managers wear golf shirts with our logo on them and the trousers," Young added. "And all of our trucks look alike with the logos."

On the job, Lawn & Shrub employees look good with clean equipment since the company stores it indoors every night. "Equipment spends a lot of time sitting, and there's no reason it has to sit outside in the weather," Young explained. "That only shortens equipment life. Plus, keeping it all inside means the crews spend less time loading and

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USE READER SERVICE #34


First Look

unloading trucks and trailers every day. This way, they start work at 7 a.m. and they're gone by 7:05 a.m. every day."

TRANSITION TIME. While Young isn't ready for retirement, he's preparing for that time. His son and daughter-in-law have committed to purchasing the business from Young and his wife, so the four focus on making a seamless transition. "We first met with our accountant last year to iron out how to get this done," Young explained. "Clients remain our top priority, but as the owner you also need to consider your income if you're going to move away from the business. We have a company pension plan and I got on the IRA bandwagon back in the 1980s. You might be able to live off of what your company sells for, but I don't think you want to depend on that as your only income."

The buyout is scheduled to take place over the next eight years, although Young doubts he'll remain with the company the entire time. He has handed over the sales responsibilities and focuses his time on fine tuning efficiency. "We haven't gotten a scorecard on the wall yet to post different crews' performance, but we want to do that so we can measure how many hours a job sold for vs. what we estimated vs. actual payroll hours," he said. "And we need to make sure the salespeople incorporate mobilization time in our prices—we've even added a line item for that cost."

In addition, Young wants to pass on lessons he's learned to his son and daughter-in-law so they're prepared to run the company when he retires. "I convinced them to start going to various conferences because, even though they can't learn it all in two or three days, I think people need to take some days away from the business to get more ideas every once in awhile," Young related.

His other challenge involves increased delegation and scaling back his decision-making role. "Some times I have to stand back and bite my tongue real hard because they aren't going to do things like I've done them," he noted. "It's like learning to delegate all over again. But if you're going to try to control everything then you might as well stay small." 

The author is Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.

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Maintaining Shrubs

by Nicole Wisniewski

By learning shrub basics, contractors can turn unfit shrubs into lean, mean, low-maintenance machines.

Shaping Up SHRUBS

Offering attractive foliage shapes, flower and fruit displays, and bark color and texture, shrubs are eye-catching anchors in a landscape design. Used for screening, privacy, windbreaks and landscape variety, shrubs lead visitors toward an entrance or view and bridge gaps between low-growing perennials and tall trees.

But shrubs' prominent landscape positions also brand them as eye-level eyesores when they aren't maintained properly. Overwatering, overpruning and overfertilizing can cause overgrown nightmares with disease-ridden leaves and sun-deprived lower branches.

To care for shrubs, contractors must learn about plant varieties and how they fit their local landscapes. "Shrubs are not that difficult to maintain," explained D.L. Hill, owner, Tri-Hill Turf Care, Fort Smith, Ariz. "It takes a basic premise – most shrubs take care of themselves with a little protection."

SHRUBS 101. When Barry Troutman, now the chief technical officer at Environmental Care, Sanford, Fla., began his career in the lawn care business, he could tell clients the details of proper mowing and edging and how to properly identify and control turfgrass weeds. But when it came to shrubs, Troutman got a little nervous.

"When you're comfortable with lawns, it's intellectually intimidating to step out of the box and learn about shrubs on a property," Troutman said. "You have to have more tools, a different sprayer, different skill sets – it can be a stretch for someone."

Once Troutman crossed that line, though, shrub care became easier to handle. "It took me four years working at it just to get comfortable," he revealed.

Many contractors feel like Troutman once did. They would rather ignore or eliminate the shrubs from the landscape than learn about their needs, he said.

But because of the range of heights available (2 to 20 feet high), and pruning and spacing possibilities, shrubs are versatile landscape performers. As long as contractors consider suitable sites, "shrubs are one of the best choices for low maintenance," pointed out Wendy Proud, product manager, new plant introductions, Monrovia, Azusa, Calif.

"Perennials and annuals require more care than shrubs do, needing more fertilization, water and pruning," she explained. "Typically, [only] overcare or miscare causes shrubs to go south into sickness."

PLACEMENT POINTERS. Improper placement is the No. 1 contribution to shrub decline.

For instance, shrubs that are popular in specific regions of the country might perform poorly due to that area's environmental conditions. Examples of

(continued on page 58)

Proper pruning should remove diseased, insect-ridden and weak shrub growth, and encourage flowering foliage.

Photo: Mickey Jones/Barney Taxel & Co.

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Maintaining Shrubs

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this are red-tipped Photinia in Atlanta and variegated Pittosporum in Orlando. "In Atlanta in the 1970s, particularly, everyone wanted red-tipped Photinia, but they had a disease problem," Troutman said. "All of them got it, especially when planted near homes. They weren't tolerant of even small frosts. Because of this problem, I haven't seen many in that area anymore."

Shrubs need to be planted in areas where they can endure the climate as well as the microclimate, including air movement, sun vs. shade and drainage patterns. "Juniper plants like dry feet so they won't grow under the downspout of a house," Troutman pointed out. "It's the same with azaleas and certain soils. Atlanta soils are acidic and azaleas do beautifully there, but azaleas in Cleveland's alkaline soils won't grow as well."

Also, changing conditions can affect plant health. "A site that was sunny four years ago
(continued on page 60)

Shrubs that don't work well on specific sites can be replaced with low-maintenance versions or other shrub-like ornamentals and provide clients with the same desired look while keeping care to a minimum.

Typically, shrubs easiest to care for are clumping in habit, meaning they don't have a central stem and spread by roots or a central mass of tissue underground, according to Wendy Proud, product manager, new plant introductions, Monrovia, Azusa, Calif.

Examples of these types of shrubs are Moraea, which grows 4 feet or less with sword-shaped leaves and clusters of multicolored iris-like flowers; and Phormium, which has tough, leathery, long leaves that are arranged fanwise with striking lily-like brownish-red or yellow flowers. Some species of Phormium have leaves that reach 9 feet and flower stalks that reach 15 feet.

For clients with shrub care problems, Proud also recommended replacing shrubs with ornamental grasses. "They are a great alternative to shrubs and shrub plagues," she said. "Ornamental grasses don't require too much watering or fertilizer. They have a height limit, also, whereas shrubs have to conform to an area." — **Nicole Wisniewski**

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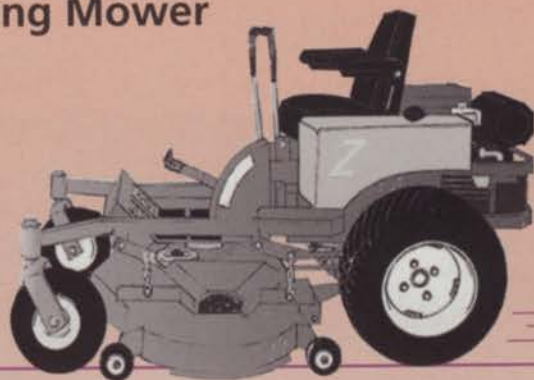
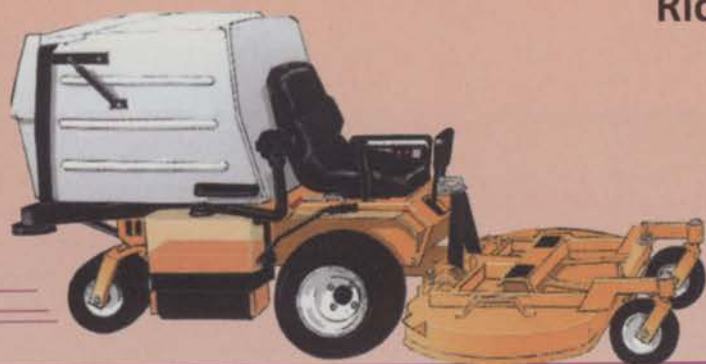
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Maintaining Shrubs

(continued from page 58)

may be shady today," Troutman explained.

Disregarding these placement essentials can be detrimental to shrubs' future health and doesn't bode well for customer satisfaction. "Ignoring the basics of proper plant placement is like trying to grow grass in the desert," Proud compared. "People think they can have anything as long as they put in the effort, but sometimes that's not true."

As a remedy, Troutman said contractors should consider shrub placement the same way they contemplate decorating a living room. "Plants are like furniture - they have to look good together," he described. "And plants that are not doing well because they are not in the right places need to be replaced or slipcovered."

To make sure shrubs are in the right place from day one, Tri-Hill uses a tree and shrub analysis form that identifies any problems and recommends corrections before maintenance begins on a client's property. "This

way we cover our bases," Hill said, pointing out that he schedules clients for monthly or six-week maintenance visits.

When Environmental Care's crews have trouble convincing clients that certain plants won't flourish on their properties, they show them the sickly shrubs in the fall, pointing out the past year's successes and failures.

"After clients spend a ton of money trying to keep a shrub going and it still looks imperfect, no one's happy," Troutman explained. "So, to build up client trust, we go to them and explain that we need to put together a program and budget that we both can live with and that will help their landscape look better. If we go to them in the fall, particularly commercial clients, we're reaching them before the budget cycle hits and we can also work on getting upgrades or enhancements included at this time."

Shrubs need to be planted in areas where they can endure the climate and the microclimate, including air movement, sun vs. shade and drainage patterns.

A LITTLE LEANER. Shrubs grown in climates, spaces and conditions they can handle are better performers, therefore maintaining them includes only the basics - proper watering, pruning, fertilization, and insect and disease control, Hill said.

Therefore, contractors who are accustomed to needy lawns should scale back when it comes to shrubs, Proud said, suggesting "leaner" maintenance.

The most common culprit is overwatering. "Everyone's response to a problem is 'let's water,'" Troutman said. "But that's not always the best thing. There needs to be room in the soil for air to reach the root system of an active plant.

(continued on page 62)

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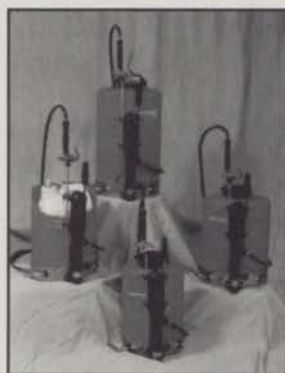
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Maintaining Shrubs

(continued from page 60)

Drainage should be so that it drains through the soil or away from the plants."

A classic watering mistake concerning shrub health is incorrect irrigation zoning, according to Proud and Troutman. "When the shrubs, turf and flowers are all on the same system, the flowers are underwatered and shrubs are overwatered," Troutman explained, pointing out that many shrub dis-

eases occur because the leaves remain wet for long periods of time. "For example, the red-tipped Photinia is sensitive to leaf spot. Once a leaf is infected, disease spores are splattered onto other leaves from rainfall or irrigation and the leaf spot spreads throughout the entire plant - new leaves being the most susceptible.

"If you don't learn these things and put

this shrub on the shady side of a house under a wet spot and put the sprinklers on risers so they spray above the plant material and don't get the leaves wet, you're going to kill that plant," Troutman continued. "But if you do know these things, you'll recommend the plant be moved to an area with a lot of air movement, where it isn't under a tree or roof and you'll use drip irrigation, pruning only when necessary. That's what creates a disease-free plant."

Contractors recommend different approaches concerning fertilization. Hill uses deep-root fertilization in the fall with a time-released fertilizer. "We often add a spring deep-root as well, using a water-soluble, balanced fertilizer," he said.

Environmental Care fertilizes shrubs one to three times per year, depending on the plant's needs and location. For example, certain shrub species in Florida need more fertilization than shrubs in other areas of the country, Troutman said, pointing out that he uses a slow-release granular fertilizer because shrubs aren't fertilized as often as lawns so the product must last longer and requires uniform application. "Occasionally, we'll do foliar applications on plants that aren't responding," he added. "Or we use micronutrients, but we are very careful with this product because it can stain buildings."

Proud, on the other hand, said overfertilizing creates maintenance nightmares. "Too much fertilizer only increases plant growth and, therefore, maintenance needs," she said. "Besides, there is plenty of fertilizer available in the soil. If you don't fertilize or fertilize less, you won't have an issue unless you are in an area with sandy soil and the nutrient retention in the soil is lousy or if the soil wasn't amended properly before the shrub was planted."

To banish weeds from shrub beds, Troutman suggested using a preemergence weed control one to three times each year. "It doesn't eliminate all the weeds, but it reduces labor," he said, explaining that preemergence herbicides save man-hours associated with labor-intensive hand weeding.

But once preemergence control is used, weeds surrounding shrubs should be spot-sprayed with a nonselective herbicide because pulling them can break the preemergence barrier, creating holes where additional weeds can sprout, Troutman added.

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ONE SNIP AT A TIME. Most people describe shrub pruning as an art, but, actually, it's a science, pointed out J.R. Feucht, retired landscape plant specialist and professor, Colorado State University Cooperative Extension, Fort Collins, Colo. "As a result, reference materials place emphasis on shape and form and less on how a plant responds to pruning," he said. "This often leads to butchering."

Shearing, which is "the process of using hedge clippers to create funky shrub shapes," Troutman said, is popular in landscaping because a shrub can be sheared very quickly and doesn't have to be trimmed again for some time. A shrub also can be clipped too closely with this method, meaning the plant takes much longer to recover.

Because shearing removes growth continually to control shrub size, correct pruning rarely can be practiced. "We've had instances where clients say, 'If this shrub grows 1/2-inch above this line, you're fired,'" Troutman related. "But if you continually shear a plant at the same level, it creates a whole bunch of buds at the tip of that plant. And as it's cut again, it produces more buds. We call those buds knuckles – the leaves that are produced there are smaller and not as healthy."

Shearing also is popular when clients require stiff, formal, English garden-like hedges that are vertically cut. "This is also bad for the plant because the lower leaves don't receive enough sunlight," Troutman explained. "The base of the shrub should always be wider than the top. If you don't do that, you're always going to see healthy growth at the top of the plant and stems at the bottom because they haven't received enough sunlight."

Selective pruning is the preferred method for shaping shrubs and is done for health improvement reasons, primarily. This includes removal of diseased, insect-ridden, dying, interfering and weak growth, Feucht pointed out. Proper pruning vs. shrub sculpting results in better flowering and healthier foliage, he said. "Pruning to shape the plant can be legitimate, but exercise care," Feucht advised. "It is too easy to end up with a sheared plant during the shaping process."

Troutman prefers a similar method, pruning stems that escape the shrub to maintain its shape and prompt healthy bud growth.

Consequently, following a regular main-

tenance schedule allows for hassle-free pruning. Since a neglected shrub is harder to prune, pruning should begin before a plant fully occupies its space. "In pruning a shrub, we normally want to encourage latent bud growth from the base," Feucht said. "If this is done in late winter, annually, or as needed,

heading-back of spring-flowering shrubs seldom is necessary. This type of pruning – thinning and renewal – not only maintains a healthier, more attractive plant, but allows the contractor to do the major pruning work in the less busy season." **LI**

The author is Managing Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.

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Commercial Properties

by Kristen Hampshire

Commercial properties require a large-scale investment in time, labor and materials to produce first-rate results.

Tom Heaviland remembers "Black Friday" at his company.

"It was like the stock market crashed," he compared.

"We had a big, commercial developer during the last recession who pulled all the funding on an industrial park, and we had to lay off 10 guys that afternoon."

The contract shrank, leaving Heaviland Enterprises, San Diego, Calif., with only a few lot owners in the housing development, and they couldn't support the costs. Though the company reconstructed the maintenance agreement to cover the bare minimum, it suffered losses in both profit and morale. "At that time, we weren't as large as we are today, so that was a huge blow," Heaviland described.

Now, his business employs 85 people and his account mix is more diverse, stirring up his 100-percent commercial maintenance company with both large and small clients. Heaviland knows firsthand that contractors put more on the line for large, commercial clients than a mow-and-go job. This includes investments in labor, time and materials,

plus an extra flurry of paperwork, added Lance Schelhammer, president, Grass Roots, Lenexa, Kan.

"It's kind of like moving from the \$5 blackjack table to the \$100 blackjack table," he compared. This is not to say that commercial work is a game of chance. Contractors who book their schedules with a collection of large, commercial accounts and organize their businesses to cater to their different needs will find quite the contrary.

RISKY BUSINESS. When a majority of a company's income stems from a handful of commercial clients, contractors cater to the accounts' needs, noted Cullen Walker, president, W.L.M. Work-A-Holics Landscape Management, Naples, Fla.

"You do have all of your eggs in one basket, but you will be dedicated to keeping that account," he said, noting that he treats his "hit list" of key clients to courtesy calls and constant communication.

"It's good to have a nice mix of small, medium and large

(continued on page 68)

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Commercial Properties

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accounts," Heaviland advised. "It's like your stock portfolio – you want a balance so if one is not going well, the others will carry you."

Heaviland isolates what he considers his "gold accounts" – the 20 percent of his clients that comprise 80 percent of his revenue. He personally takes care of these preferred cus-

– can pad larger projects and present a lower risk than jobs that require meticulous care or are located in densely populated areas, added Ed Watters, president, Watters & Chatham Landscape, Rome, Ga. Obtaining small-scale commercial accounts is also a safe way to begin building the commercial portion of a company.

said. "It could be hinged on one person not liking something."

DIFFERENT, BUT GOOD. "Commercial properties involve matching your equipment with the property and matching your people with the property manager," Schelhammer explained. "You are dealing with a business that is using landscape to draw people into their building, and the jobs are more objective than subjective. Your landscape is going to help them achieve that objective."

The objective might be an image – a visual mission statement. And most often, there is one contact that is steering the project to reach this goal. Many contractors favor this cut-and-dry communication, Heaviland pointed out.

Also, one of these large projects might earn the profit equivalent to several residential accounts, Walker added. His company's mix consists of 75 percent commercial work,

(continued on page 70)

"You do have all of your eggs in one basket, but you will be dedicated to keeping that account."

– Cullen Walker

tomers to reduce any risk of losing a valuable chunk of his business, he explained.

Key commercial customers should receive quick response to service requests, fair prices, quality work and professional crewmembers, Heaviland said. These considerations are insurance for "high-risk" accounts.

Less visible commercial accounts – properties that aren't in high-traffic areas, for example

"Do your slipping where people can't see it," Watters suggested. "You might find your niche belongs down below rather than on top, and they are both equally important."

Variegated clientele also buffers a business during a tight economy, Walker added. "It is good to have diversity, because if you lose one account and it's all of the jobs for one or two crews, you lost all of their work," he

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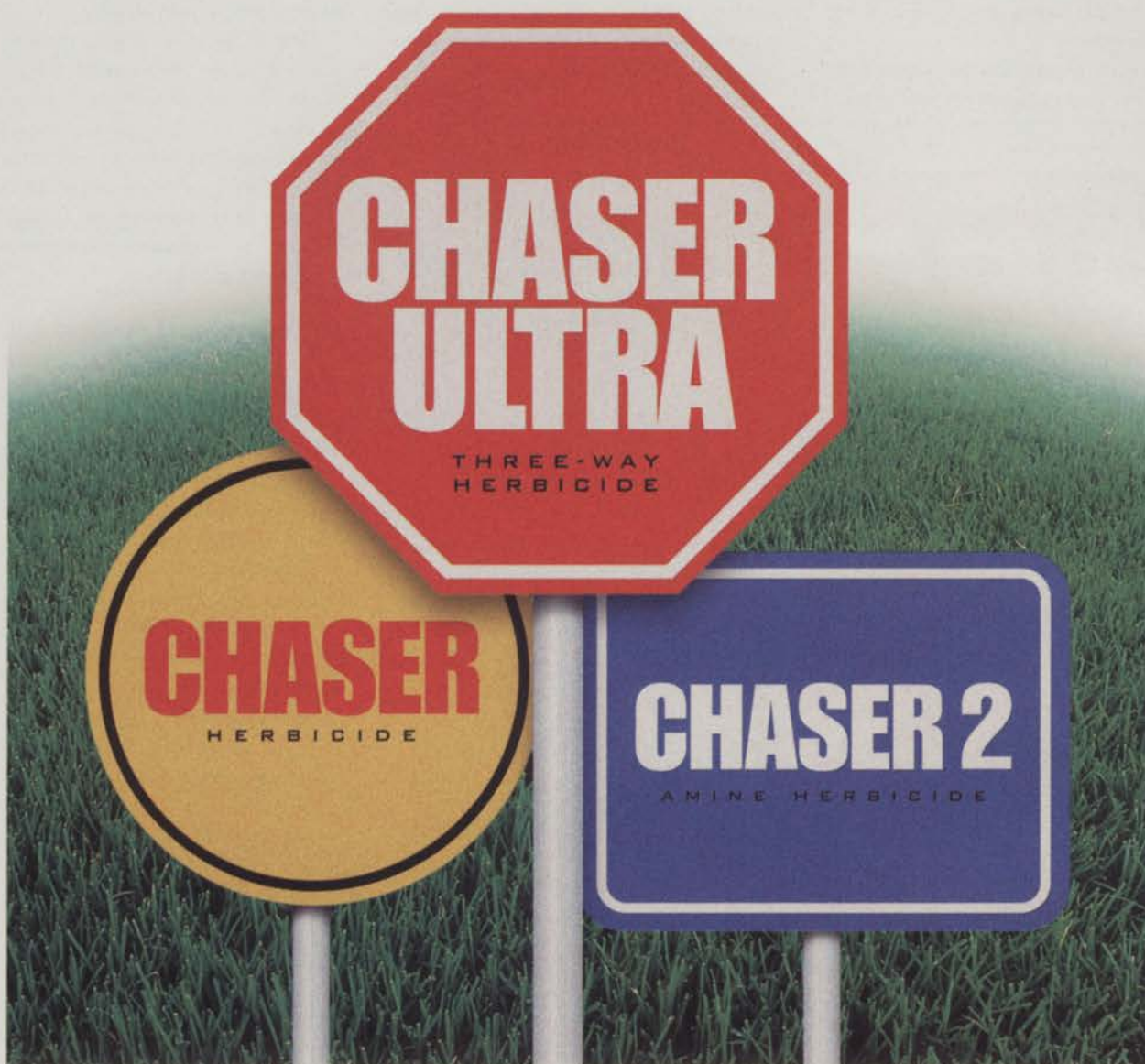
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USE READER SERVICE #100

Commercial Properties

(continued from page 68)

but his residential clients bring in less profit for the time investment, he said. "One account is almost the same as far as office, communication and time, and we find that the behind-the-scenes stuff, such as filing, takes just as long."

However, commercial properties don't mean more profit – just fewer jobs to build

up the bottom line. But these few jobs often cause less of a headache when dealing with contacts. "With the building boom, there is probably more money in residential, but you have to be geared to deal with the client on a regular basis, and they might be picky and choosy," Schelhammer warned.

"Commercial clients are still picky, just

over a broader scale."

Commercial clients look for quality, speed and price, whereas residential customers want to build relationships that reflect their investments, Watters noted.

Despite fewer small-scale requests and infrequent contact between the crew and the property owner, commercial clients are not necessarily easier to please, Heaviland pointed out. This is where residential and commercial arenas collide—organizing crews, targeting sales, checking for quality and maintaining solid client relationships are overlapping success keys.

SEALING A SALE. Commercial selling requires a little punch. Competition can be stifling for glamorous contracts, so companies that want to strengthen commercial sales can't wait by the phone.

"You have to be aggressive," Heaviland stressed. "You have the job of differentiating yourself from other contractors."

Painting a positive image helps set Heaviland's company apart from competitors. He does this with a sales presentation at his office where the field supervisor, customer relations manager and office manager discuss the company, the project and expectations with the potential client. He couples this face-to-face sales pitch with a reference list.

Commercial clients sense whether a contractor's image is poor or polished, Schelhammer added. "From the name to the logo to the way you conduct business, you have to make the client comfortable that they are dealing with a professional entity, not a schlocky operation," he emphasized.

His company builds business appeal with articulate account managers, clean trucks and neat uniforms topped with a detailed brochure that identifies the company's mission and the people who make it happen, he said. These extras are important, because most commercial clients don't hire landscape companies just to beautify their properties, but to serve as a vehicle through which to drive their image, he added.

"If the company they hire to do their landscaping has an image, they will feel that they can certainly give them one," Schelhammer noted.

The little things – like reputation, reference lists, appearance and quality – aren't so

(continued on page 74)

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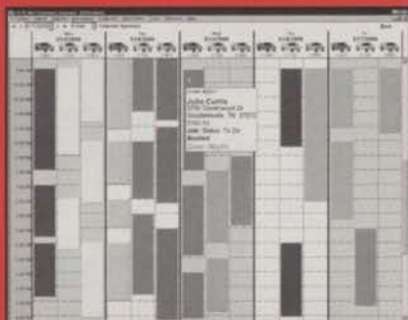
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Lawn & Landscape[®]

Commercial

PRODUCT

GUIDE

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Chipco Offers Insecticides as OP Alternatives

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Snow Products Catalog from Central Parts Warehouse

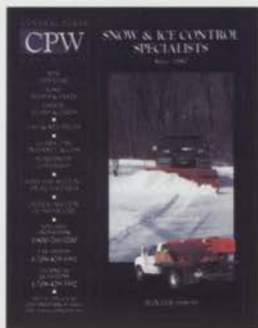
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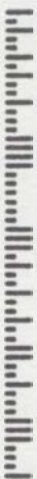
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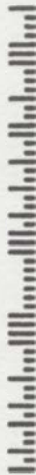


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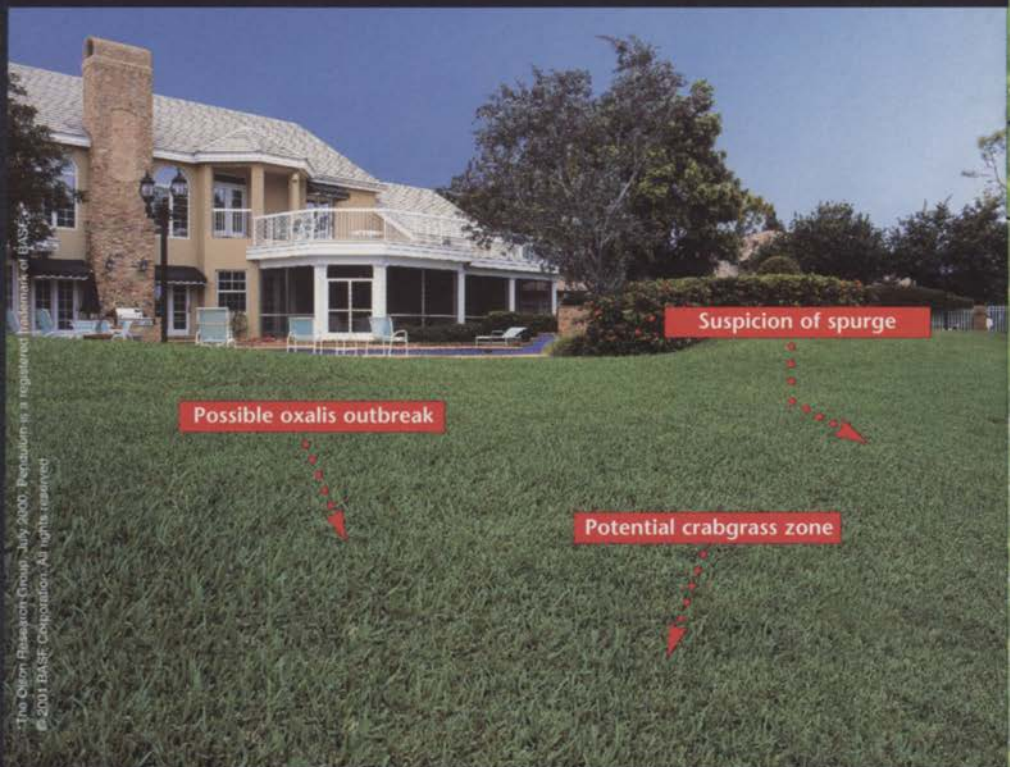
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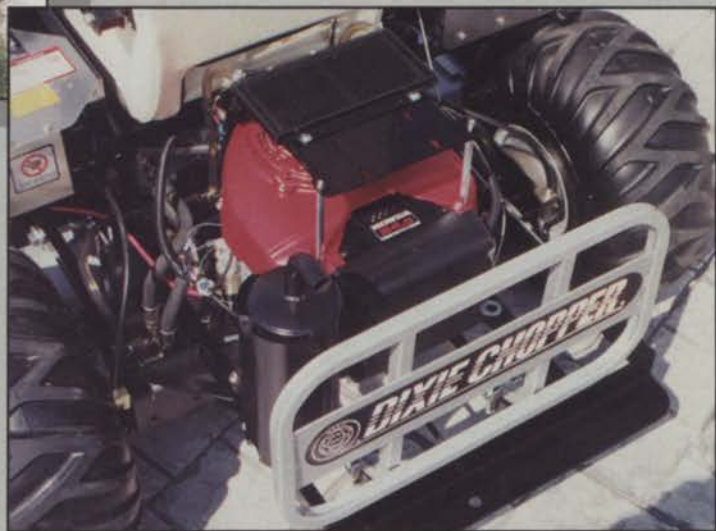
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USE READER SERVICE #94

Commercial Properties

(continued from page 70)

little when they make the difference between winning and losing a bid, Walker reminded. "Commercial clients are more intelligent, educated and experienced bidders that know their numbers," he said.

However, contractors need to make sure they are pitching their sale to the right person – the "decision maker" who calls the shots, writes the checks and often isn't so easy to track down, Walker added. Architects and installation crews on construction sites often can point to property managers or project supervisors. After asking those working on the site questions about the manager's credibility, how they treat their employees and whether they pay bills on time, contractors can decide whether or not to pursue a particular account, he said.

If the company decides to follow through with a contract and the service starts, contractors should expect to fill their promises, Schelhammer noted. "The commercial account

(continued on page 76)

Client communication can be the key to success for commercial projects. To keep customers informed of progress and allow technicians to record daily tasks, One Source's resort accounts are equipped with log books – a two-way communication tool that keeps contractors and commercial clients talking, noted Tom Freeman, district manager of the Orlando, Fla., office.

"Each morning our project supervisor checks the log book," he explained. "It gives clients an opportunity to jot down quick notes as they see something when they are walking on the property. They can make sure the property supervisor sees it."

The log also allows technicians to report any maintenance details completed during the day, Freeman added. "It gives the supervisor the opportunity to give a written notation of a herbicide application so that when clients look at the log book they are advised of it."

Freeman doesn't rely solely on the written word, however. Face-to-face interaction with customers solidifies the working relationship. "Even though we have a log book we always make a point to stop in and say, 'Hi,' so the client can place a face with the service."

In addition, project supervisors walk through properties with clients each month to ensure satisfaction, gather feedback and offer suggestions, he said. Following these meetings, the manager generates a progress report on the property's appearance and

makes enhancement recommendations. "Communication is critical," Freeman stressed.

– Kristen Hampshire

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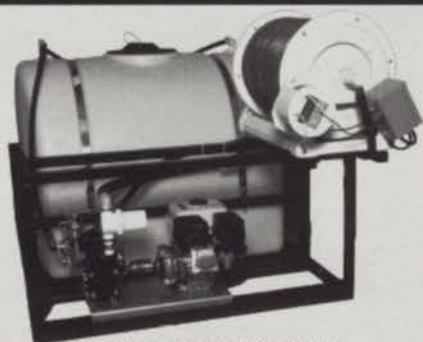
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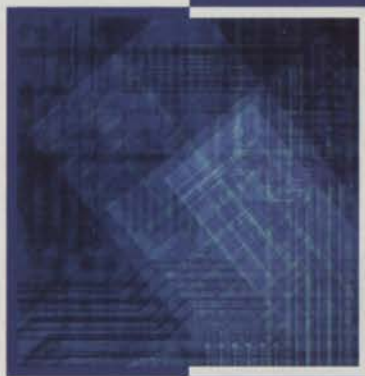
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Commercial Properties

(continued from page 74)

manager will measure you on how you live up to that claim you make in your brochure, letter or verbal dealing," he assured.

FLEX TIME. Retaining an account can come down to the crew, the schedule and the communication that keeps these together. Timing is everything – especially when a landscape company's duties coincide with other subcontractors' site work, Watters said.

"We have to coordinate with other vendors and subcontractors, and usually there are deadlines," he described. "We might have to be done with our job by June 1 for move in or final occupancy [in a new house], and sometimes the site isn't ready for us until May 15, so that time frame can be difficult."

Communication bridges these time gaps and keeps crews informed so the account manager can make necessary schedule adjustments, Watters noted.

"We try to go to the construction meetings with subcontractors and general con-

tractors [when working with new construction] to make sure we know who is going to be in what area when, what needs to get done, and who needs to be ahead of who," he said.

This is helpful to avoid dead time on a property, Watters noted. "It's all a speed game," he said. "We try to tell our customers that we would rather go in there late, after everyone is out, so we can move faster. I'd rather them be screaming for us to be there vs. screaming for us to get out of the way."

Commercial properties require flexibility in scheduling, but also can extend hiring options, Schelhammer noted. Since the account manager is the primary client contact, there is less communication between the crew and the customer, he said. People skills are less crucial. "It's hard to find people capable of dealing with the public who can do the maintenance," he said.

Since commercial projects require less client contact than residential accounts, non-

English speaking employees can adapt to the work environment without the stress of communicating with customers, added Heaviland, whose commercial crews are primarily Hispanic.

"Commercial can be more flexible with crews – especially the really big accounts," Schelhammer said. "If one crew chief is sick or it is a rainy week and we have make-ups to do, a lot of times they will go to a different account to help out."

Shuffling schedules doesn't mean shifting quality, however. Most contractors agree they can't afford to sacrifice quality.

"There are no second chances with commercial accounts," Schelhammer reminded. "You need to be very organized, you need to plan correctly and you really need to do your homework. If you lose a hand of blackjack, you don't get another free one." ■

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

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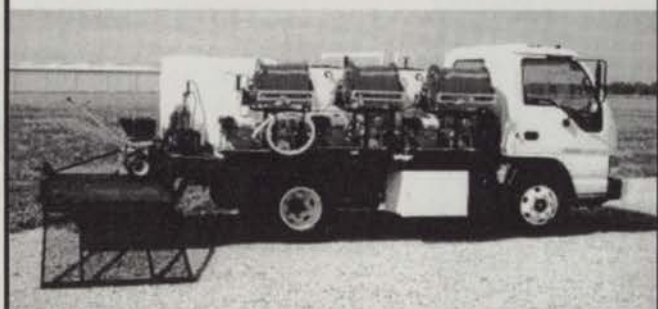
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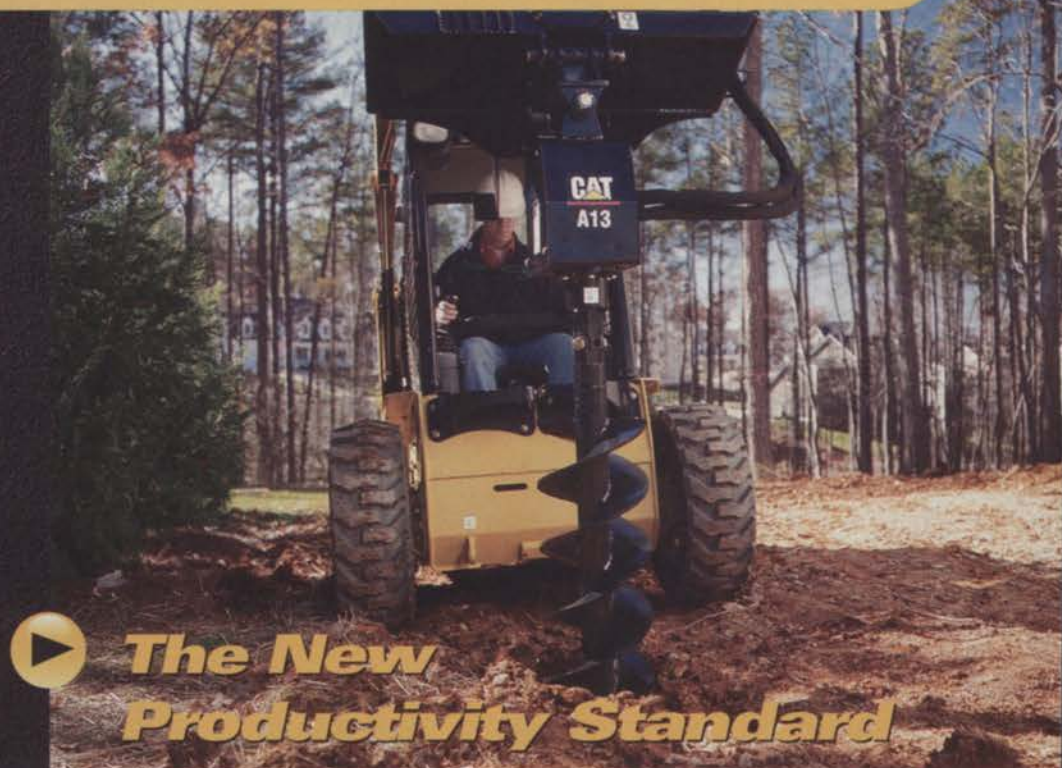
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USE READER SERVICE #95

Postemergence Treatments

by John Fech & Roch Gaussoin

Understanding postemergence products and application methods can help contractors destroy weeds.

The War on Weeds

Of all the battles lawn care operators (LCOs) face with insects, diseases, nematodes and irritating clients, weed combats prove the most challenging for many reasons.

First, the average cubic foot of soil contains between 10,000 and 50,000 weed seeds, according to weed and soil scientists – no wonder LCOs have problems.

Second, weeds provoke bad vibes with clients. Customers are aware when a few dandelions are present, particularly if they are blooming. This isn't the case with many turf insects or diseases.

Third, weeds establish easily in thin, weak grass stands. And if the turf becomes compact or damaged by drought or insects, many grass plants will die, leaving the turf open to weed invasion.

Skips and gaps in preemergence herbicide applications also can cause weed problems, leaving portions of the turf unprotected and making a postemergence herbicide application necessary. As a result, postemergence herbicides are becoming assets to LCOs because they are the only effective treatment for perennial broadleaves, such as plantain and white clover, and perennial grasses that are considered pests in sod-forming Kentucky bluegrass or buffalograss.

Even though the best defense against weed invasion is thick, healthy turf because it successfully competes with weeds for light, nutrients and water, postemergence herbicide applications can be necessary for proper control.

TIMING IS EVERYTHING. When controlling weeds, timing refers to the stage of the plant's development, as well as the actual day of the year the postemergence application is made.

Control is most effective when applications target small, healthy, actively growing weeds. As they age, changes in the leaf surface, growth habit and physiological function occur. These changes result in reduced herbicide uptake and translocation in the plant. So, weeds should be

(continued on page 80)

Preemergence herbicide application coverage gaps in turf now need a postemergence rescue treatment for weed elimination (above). Photo: John Fech

More LCOs are using post-emergence herbicides to gain control of perennial broadleaf weeds.

Photo: L&L Staff





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Postemergence

(continued from page 78)

sprayed when they are young and first observed in a landscape.

A basic strategy for enhancing postemergence control is applying the product when weeds have an adequate amount of leaf surface to absorb the herbicide. To accomplish this, let the weeds grow for a few days after mowing to create some leaf surface, then make the application. Avoid mowing for a couple of days afterward to maximize product absorption.

Accurate timing also involves spraying at the optimal time of the year. For perennial weed control, best results are achieved when postemergence products are applied in the fall. This is because most perennial broadleaves store carbohydrates and nutrients in their crowns and in underground storage organs (rhizomes, tubers, etc.) for the upcoming winter and spring. After application, the herbicide is likely to be translocated downward along with the food.

(continued on page 82)

Adding adjuvants to pesticide spray solutions to improve final results is sometimes desirable. Adjuvants have been developed to improve spray dispersion; reduce volatility, spray drift and foaming; improve plant penetration; and buffer spray solutions.

Surfactants, or surface-acting agents, are a broad category of adjuvants that facilitate and enhance the absorbing, emulsifying, dispersing, spreading, sticking, wetting or penetrating properties of pesticides. Surfactants are most often used with herbicides to help a pesticide spread over and penetrate the waxy cuticle (outer layer) of a leaf or to penetrate through the small hairs present on a leaf surface.

Some pesticide formulations contain compounds that act as surfactants. In these cases, manufacturers suggest that a surfactant should not be added to the spray mixture because adding additional materials may cause plant injury (especially with emulsifiable concentrate formulations), reduced pesticide effectiveness or insufficient benefits to justify the extra cost. Labels may emphasize the need for a surfactant to enhance effectiveness, but if chemical labels do not specify the use of adjuvants, LCOs assume the risk of undesirable results if any should occur. The safest approach is not to use adjuvants unless the label specifies.

Selecting and using adjuvants requires the same attention to detail that is given to pesticides. Read the adjuvant and pesticide labels to see if they are suitable for each other, and for the spraying conditions. Use a jar test to see if the materials are physically compatible and follow adjuvant label rates. — **John Fech and Roch Gaussoin**

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Postemergence

(continued from page 80)

Also, newly germinated winter annual weeds (henbit, chickweed, etc.) are easier to kill than large, mature ones commonly seen in spring. And if weeds don't die outright from the herbicide, they will become weak and more susceptible to winter kill.

Fall is also a good application time because neighbors with vegetable and flower gardens are less likely to worry about overspray. This also is the case with deciduous ornamentals, which lose leaves in the fall and are less likely to absorb potential drift.

Finally, fall tends to be cool, so there is less potential for injury to stressed-out turf due to herbicide phytotoxicity.

Another good opportunity for postemergence herbicide application is prior to total turf renovation, which is recommended when less than 60 percent of the turf area is comprised of desirable grasses (For tips on proper renovation steps, see Renovating Turf on page 84).

In addition to correct timing, effective use of liquid postemergence products can be greatly enhanced with the use of spray adjuvants – products added to the tank mix to improve performance, including spreaders, stickers, surfactants, anti-drift and foaming agents, and colorants (see Adjuvant-age on page 80). Consult the pesticide label and pesticide suppliers for products that suit particular operations.

APPLICATION STRATEGIES. When considering effective use strategies for postemergence herbicides, start with the pesticide label, which contains information about application techniques and guidelines to improve control, such as optimal temperature ranges and wind speed restrictions.

Also, look for the following information:

- Recommended protective clothing to minimize applicator exposure
- Agitation requirements, if necessary

- Specific guidelines for the amount of product to mix with water
- Need for herbicide mixture circulation through the hoses and spray tank
- Size of mesh screen for spray system
- Restrictions on other products that may be perceived to enhance herbicide performance
- Application timing directions
- Suggestions for spray pattern indicators
- Indications for enhancement with adjuvants, crop oil concentrates or spreader-stickers.

Reading and understanding the label instructions is important, but following them is the key. Herbicide effectiveness is improved by implementing label recommendations and product guidelines.

GRANULAR VS. LIQUID. Formulation choice is important with postemergence herbicide applications. To be effective, most postemergence herbicides must contact the

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The awards will be announced at PLCAA's annual dinner at the Green Industry Conference in November 2001. Winners will receive a plaque featuring the image of a forward-swinging pendulum that symbolizes their forward-thinking concepts. They will also receive customized press materials to help them publicize their award in their own communities. Additionally, feature articles in *Lawn & Landscape* and ProSource, the PLCAA newsletter, will be published to gain national industry exposure for the creative ideas.

The deadline for entries for the 2001 Pendulum Awards is September 1, 2001, but industry professionals are encouraged to submit entries well in advance.

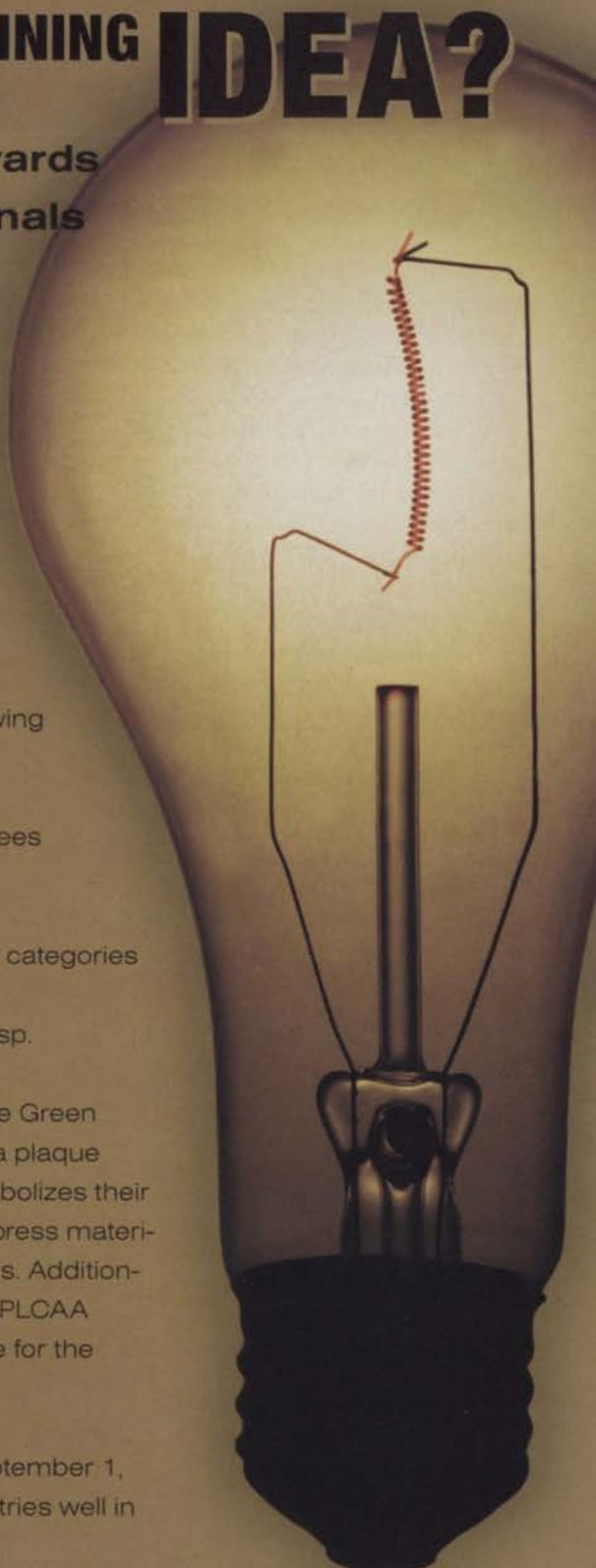
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Postemergence

(continued from page 82)


weed's leaf surface. In the past, granular products performed poorly. Once granules are applied they tend to fall to the soil surface and work their way into the thatch, greatly reducing the herbicide's effectiveness. Also, granules usually are applied to the entire turf area through a spreader, which places herbicide product on both weeds and turfgrasses. This is wasteful because herbicide also is applied to areas without weeds.

When using granular products, water the lawn to wet the weed's leaf surface before making the application. Wet herbicide granules are more likely to stay in contact with the leaves. Recently, effective granular products have been developed that rival their liquid counterparts.

Still, liquid products offer significant advantages. Liquids cover a much greater percentage of the weed's leaf surface, increasing herbicide absorption. Liquids also can be easily utilized for spot spraying. But granu-

lar products generally are easier to apply and create less potential exposure to the applicator during mixing and application. They also are less likely to drift.

NEW DEVELOPMENTS. Recent developments in postemergence products are limited. Most are the result of the reformulation of existing products in easier-to-use, safer packaging and delivery methods or increased effectiveness. Some new products can treat turfgrass species before or soon after germination.

Companies that reformulate existing products no longer available from manufacturers also are excellent resources for the turfgrass and ornamental market. 

Fech is an extension educator and Gaussoin is an associate professor in the Horticulture Department at the University of Nebraska, Omaha and Lincoln, Neb., respectively.

The first step in turf renovation is to determine why the grass died and which causal agent was involved.

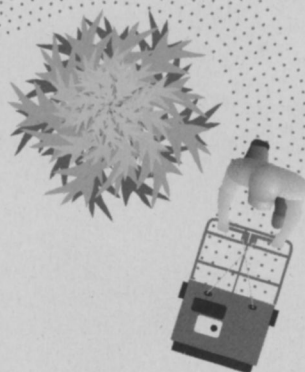
The next step in total renovation is the application of a nonselective postemergence herbicide. The best time for this application is a few weeks prior to the optimal establishment conditions for the grass species to be installed. For warm-season grasses, such as Bermudagrass, centipedegrass and St. Augustinegrass, late spring applications are best. For cool-season turfs, such as Kentucky bluegrass and turf-type tall fescue, late summer is recommended.

After the nonselective, postemergence herbicide has killed all the turf, then proceed with the remaining renovation steps: close mowing, power-raking/aeration, slit seeding, overseeding, light frequent watering, and a starter fertilizer application. — **John Fech and Roch Gaussoin**

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by Nicole Wisniewski

The GAME of Bidding

Contractors are differentiating themselves in the commercial bid market by trading in their bags of cutthroat, competitive tricks for evenhanded strategy.

The game seems simple enough.

An independent landscape architect creates a commercial site design based on the property owner's needs – the game board is set. Landscape contractors are invited bid on what it would cost to order and install the necessary materials according to the design's specifications – the game has players. And the contractor who turns in the best overall package wins.

Unfortunately, commercial bid work is never this simple. In some cases, clients seek the lowest price possible, clouding the bidding effort for contractors whose high-quality plant material or complex business structure requires them to bid high just to break even or profit from a job. Other times, general contractors and landscape architects choose the lowest bid, but pay little attention to whether or not the installed materials actually meet the design specifications. Either way, the finished landscape doesn't fulfill the original bid requirements – game over, no winner.

But despite the many obstacles associated with this type of work, the bid game can be played and won without going to jail or losing a turn.

GET READY TO PLAY. Most contractors agree that bid work is typically price-driven. Commercial clients are naturally inclined to choose the lowest price from a set of bids on identical specifications, so contractors with higher estimates find themselves at a disadvantage. In a situation where relationships are hard to build, differentiation – besides the numbers following the dollar sign at the end of the bid – becomes challenging.

Thus, terms like "cutthroat" and "ruthless" are the first contractors use to describe the competition in major bid markets. The trick, though, contractors said, is to think of bidding as less of a battle and more of a strategic game.

"It's not a war," remarked Drew St. John, vice president, landscape design and construction, Hillenmeyer Nurseries, Lex-

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Commercial Bid Work

(continued from page 86)

ington, Ky. "The key is understanding and making sure you're familiar with the qualifications. We've won several bids in the past where we weren't the low bidder, but we were the most responsive and capable bidder."

During the course of one month, Jud Griggs and his team might receive five to eight bid requests. "There's more bid work down here in Florida," said Griggs, a Wisconsin native and vice president of operations, Smallwood Design Group, Naples, Fla. "With our pricing structure, we're never going to be the low bid and we wouldn't want to be. So we constantly have to look at our process, figure out who we need to be involved with and be competitive."

CHOOSE YOUR GAME. Prequalification is a major component in bid success. Because many buyers are known for taking the lowest bid, regardless of a contractor's capabilities or reputation for timely work, choosy

contractors try to avoid dead-end bids.

"Bidding works for us when we selectively qualify which projects we bid," said Kurt Kluznik, president, Yardmaster, Painesville, Ohio. "Not making a sale to those buyers who don't meet our client niche is just as rewarding as making a good sale."

Out of every 50 bid prospects that arrive at Smallwood Design Group's door, Griggs said he might actually bid on only three or four projects. "We stay away from those builders we know aren't looking for quality work," he said, pointing out the difference between a value-oriented mass merchandiser that doesn't expect or require quality on the job vs. a high-end hotel that wants to maintain its image and reputation with impressive, bold, long-lasting plant material.

Selective prequalification also matters at

for Hillenmeyer Nurseries, even though competitive bid work only makes up about 10 percent of its work. "Our overhead structure is such that we need to charge a certain amount," St. John commented. "So when price dictates who's going to get the job, we're pretty selective on what we bid."

"We're on a few local general contractors' and several private landscape architects' selected bid lists," St. John continued. "Typically, we get one out of every five jobs that we bid. But when we're on these lists, we get one out of every three because we're competing against a limited group of contractors who are more like us and charge prices like we do. Plus, our reputation is what put us on this list, so that's automatically taken into consideration. These people already know us."

(continued on page 92)



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USE READER SERVICE #73

Recently on the *Lawn & Landscape* message boards (www.lawnandlandscape.com/messageboard), contractors discussed how they explain their high bids to clients. Here's what they had to say:

DANA ANDORETTI: Do any of you explain your bids, especially if they are high? I normally don't. But, recently, on a job with some higher costs, I gave the customer the high bid along with a letter explaining the higher-than-normal cost, and he called that afternoon wanting us to do the job.

I normally don't explain everything like that to a potential customer, but does this help any of you? Since it helped me this time, I may think about doing it more in the future.

MATTHEW MORGAN: Communication is your best friend. If you are high, or seem to be to the potential client, a brief explanation or description as to why is very helpful. Without that, many will have "sticker shock" and put your bid into file 13. Most clients don't understand all that is in-

volved that can create a high price. In many instances, an explanation is needed and a little extra effort can get the job.

ANDREW HARDSCAPE: I explain to the perspective client that we will be the higher price before I set up an appointment. I explain why we are higher and how it benefits them. I explain that if we were low, there would be a chance we wouldn't be around two years later to make repairs or perform warranty work. This is called prequalifying.

MORGAN: When explaining high bids, though, we never put down our competition. You can mention how you can perform those tasks better than others, but do not bad mouth the others. It gives the person you are talking to a bad impression of you and it may just come back to haunt you.

JOE SMITH: My bid was lower than the big guys because my company is less expensive to run. It has nothing to do with quality of work. My bids were high compared to other companies of the same size. I don't believe that a low bid equals cutting corners. Just the way a person runs a business can make his or her bid higher. — www.lawnandlandscape.com/messageboard

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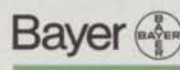
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USE READER SERVICE #101

Commercial Bid Work

(continued from page 89)

A project's potential need for maintenance pushes The Davey Tree Expert Co.'s staff to bid on it, according to Dan Joy, national operations manager for the commercial grounds management division. "We look at whether or not this client would fit into our typical maintenance client niche, such as office parks or high-end retail areas," Joy explained. "If the project doesn't fit, then we won't bid on it."

The client-contractor relationship also can make or break the bid decision. Architects or developers that need three or more bids will ask contractors they know to bid on the work even though the job may not suit them. "There are many jobs we bid out of courtesy to certain architects or developers," Griggs said. "We do this as a way of keeping up these relationships. We win 20 percent of the jobs we bid, but our success rate is closer to 40 percent if we take these favor bids out."

Having a competitive advantage is the final, yet critical, factor. To bid a job and win,

contractors must have "an angle of opportunity," or a special service or selection that few other bidding contractors possess. For instance, a contractor who can source plant materials that aren't readily available to others has this upper hand.

Griggs looks for a project niche, such as luxury, high-rise condominiums, in which Smallwood has a quality reputation, or he looks at the project's complexity, such as the need for certain tasks that take more skill and not all contractors can handle.

Smallwood Design Group's price is typically 10 to 20 percent higher and can be up to 50 percent higher than the lowest bid, Griggs said, explaining why bargaining leverage is crucial. "With our higher prices, some people won't choose us no matter what our relationship is like," he said.

As a benefit to the client, Griggs will offer "value engineering options," where he provides similar, but less expensive, plant ma-

terial or suggests alternate plant spacing to save the client money. "We can offer them significant cost-saving options and this shows them that we're working with them," he said.

Timing also can work to a contractor's advantage. "At certain times of the year, a buyer may have difficulty obtaining competitive quotes, may be under the gun to hire a contractor or may be tired of dealing with the troubles that accompany nearly every unrealistic bid," Kluznik said, pointing out that these moments can provide a natural, competitive edge.

PASS GO, COLLECT PROFIT. Winning a job isn't nearly as difficult as properly bidding it. Developing a proposal that covers all the bases and provides room for profit, while being competitive, can be tricky. Too often, contractors bid low and then realize they didn't cover their job costs.

(continued on page 94)

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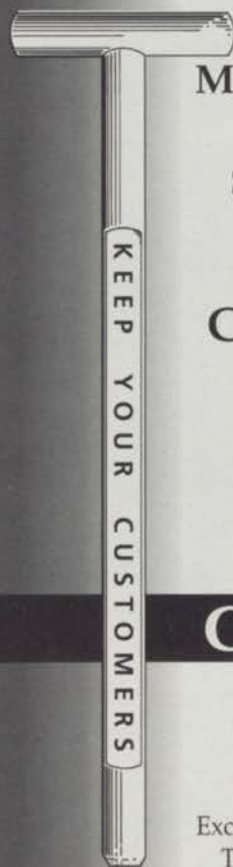
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USE READER SERVICE #83

Commercial Bid Work

(continued from page 92)

Joy first develops a materials list when he receives job specifications. "This list must be as accurate as possible because for every piece of material used on the job there is a labor cost associated with it," Joy advised.

Also, special site conditions, permits, telephones, portable toilets, site access problems and travel are commonly overlooked costs, Griggs pointed out.

lawnandlandscape.com

A rushed schedule usually accompanies and further aggravates the bidding process. Many times contractors only have one week to 10 days to develop and submit an accurate and profitable proposal, Joy said.

To appropriately bid a job with this hurried agenda, Davey Tree handles the bid process with a team approach. "We break down the shopping list of materials and assign numerous people to tackle different tasks,"

Joy explained. "Then a few days before the bid is due, we bring all the information together."

The key to effective bidding for Pieter Rossi, president, BP Landscapes, Grass Valley, Calif., is a bid checklist (go to this article at www.lawnandlandscape.com to see a copy). "This way, we're not trying to remember all the important aspects of a job at the last minute," Rossi said. "We have them on a list and whether the site uses every item on this list or not, it prevents us from forgetting an important or expensive addition to the job."

In addition to having bid systems that include drafting a materials list or using checklists, most contractors agree that gaining experience is the only way to learn how to correctly bid jobs. "I've been doing 800 to 900 bids per year and, frankly, experience is the only way to get good at it," Rossi shared, pointing out that BP Landscapes' bids are typically 40 percent higher than the lowest bid and 10 percent higher than the next bid.

"You have to be extremely thorough when bidding," he continued. "Don't assume anything. When in doubt—for example, if you're not sure whether there is proper drainage on a site—implement a clause in the contract stating that if additional excavation is needed, an additional cost will be added."

As their bidding tactics improve, contractors must learn to take control of the bid game rather than bet on a roll of the dice. "You're taking a big risk when bidding a job," St. John said. "I've been doing it for 22 years and I'm still learning. It's all about understanding access to the site and who's responsible for what. To cover ourselves, we'll do clarifications in bids to identify what's in the scope and price of the work and what's not. All those things need to be identified on the front end so folks can make an accurate evaluation of your pricing."

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

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Subcontractors can add irrigation expertise, tree trimming know-how or hardscaping skills to create a one-stop service shop for clients. Photos: Hunter, Anchor Diamond



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Subcontracting services can boost business, save time and offer clients a single service source, but contractors need to check credentials before hiring outside employees.



Gaps

Michael Hennessey didn't always rely on subcontractors to fill an empty service niche. His 20-year-old business thrived on in-house help, but his wide-lens focus pulled the business into too many sectors, compromising quality and whittling away valuable time, he admitted.

"I was trying to do everything myself, and what I found was that I was creating more of a headache," he said. "I was a jack-of-all trades and a master of none."

Now, the owner of Hennessey Landscape Services, Plainstow, N.H., sticks to his strength – managing large projects. He began subcontracting services such as hardscaping and irrigation five years ago, and now he might have more than four different companies working for him on a project during one day, he said.

"Now, I try to be a master at trying to be a good designer and working with the homeowners, realizing that they don't have all the time in the world and they need experts to get in there to manage guys to get the job done," he reasoned.

Hennessey delegates various work responsibilities, and he manages, organizes and follows up on the progress. This is what it takes to subcontract services successfully, drawing a line building significant profit, like Hennessey did when he started subcontracting, or losing credibility and falling behind schedule.

(continued on page 98)

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Subcontracting

(continued from page 96)

SENDING IN THE SUBS. Subcontracting can sprout service opportunities for contractors and serve as a shortcut for clients – one that means a single phone call, fewer checks and, ultimately, less hassle.

Andy Anderson, owner, Handy Andy's Lawn Care Service, Twin Falls, Idaho, views subcontracting as a route to customer satisfaction. "Clients will give me a list of everything they need to get done, and then they only have to write out one check to me instead of three, four or five checks to different companies," he explained.

Leasing outside skills is also a way to broaden a company's expertise, and subcontracting specialized tasks is better than committing to work without the background to finish the job properly, Hennessey noted.

After losing money on several hardscaping jobs, Hennessey decided to focus on key services, or as he puts it, "Do what we do best and forget about the rest." He lets the experts handle tasks that aren't his forte.

"It came to a point where I needed to make a decision to hire someone and advertise that we do irrigation or go through the subcontracting route where we could still offer the service," he explained. "Our irrigation subcontractor coordinates his schedule with mine so we can get the lawns done in a timely manner."

Hennessey admits this scheduling flexibility is rare among subcontractors – almost unheard of in fact, as many contractors struggle to mesh subcontractors' schedules with their own to meet project deadlines. So not only do contractors struggle to decide whether or not to branch out their businesses or rely on outside help, they must make sure this help is qualified, reliable and punctual as well.

These necessities deter some companies from subcontracting services. David Biddle rarely has subcontracted a service in his 25 years of business, for example. The owner of Biddle Lawn Care, Savoy, Ill., keeps busi-

ness ties tight. "Why have this middle man?" he figured. "I think customers should just deal directly with the people who are going to do the work." Currently, his company offers lawn care, tree care and landscape and installation design services. Customers who want mowing can look elsewhere.

"We don't have the equipment for it and a lot of other people do," he said, explaining why he hasn't brought additional services in-house. He'll offer his clients suggestions, but he won't subcontract or take on a job without the resources to handle the work. "We'd have to have more people, more equipment, more time, more training, more testing, more licensing and the list goes on. And there's already other people doing it."

BACKGROUND CHECK. An ideal subcontractor is honest, reliable, skilled and fairly priced – qualities that mirror those contractors seek in their full-time employees. After

(continued on page 100)

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Subcontracting

(continued from page 98)

all, people who work under a company's name can make or break its reputation, pointed out Fred Anderson, owner, Anderson Landscape Construction, Lancaster, Maine.

"They can promise you the world and not give you anything, or they can just tell you the way it is and come through on their work," he said. "Ninety percent of the time it's the first case."

Intuition guides Anderson when choosing subcontractors to handle specialized tasks, such as lighting, irrigation and masonry. He trusts his gut impression when he meets subcontractor candidates. Also, he considers a subcontractor's rate, comparing the estimate to his budget. Finally, a solid relationship is extra insurance, he added.

"Subcontracting can be hard – you can't control them because they're not your employees," he explained. "So, if you have a good relationship with them, meaning that you give them consistent work, they will help you when you're in a bind."

Before carefully choosing a subcontractor, Hennessey first decides whether he needs an expert for the project by determining the project's timeframe, its technical implications and whether his crew can handle the



"I find that **subcontractors** have an **expertise** in a **niche market** or a **niche field** more so than we do." – **Michael Hennessey**

responsibilities. After hiring a subcontractor, he observes their ability to overcome obstacles and cooperation with project deadlines – two factors that determine whether or not he will reinvest in their services.

A bonus subcontractor quality? "The ability to not complain," Hennessey quipped.

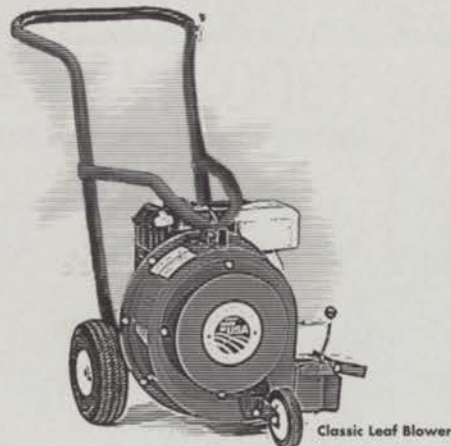
Andy avoids problem workers by talking to other companies that use subcontractors, requesting recommendations and keeping his ears open to their experiences, both good and bad. He also looks for innovators. "I

want someone who knows what they are doing and also has ideas they can throw out to try different things," he said.

In addition, he checks that all subcontractors are insured, so he lose money for their mistakes. "If they were doing some landscaping and they rip out the sprinkler sys-

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tem, then you, the contractor, would be the one to end up paying for it," he explained.

But like most contractors, Andy looks for reliability. High standards and meeting goals are image-building qualities he seeks in subcontractors. "All of the subcontractors I use know how important it is for me to keep my word to my customer, because they are also in business for themselves," he noted.

QUALITY CONTROL. Finding topnotch subcontractors doesn't guarantee first-class results. Contractors who invest in outside specialists to help with projects must also allot time to supervise their performance, Fred stressed.

"Show them a picture of what you're trying to achieve," he advised. "Say, 'This is the quality of work that we want.' You have to have a standard that they can understand."

In other words, be specific, be direct and be there to supervise. And in doing this, dedicate the time and labor to outlining the

job's details, overseeing their progress and ensuring their quality. "It's called supervision time," Fred defined. "And it comes out of your profit if you don't plan for it."

Fred considers this management time when he budgets, varying the numbers based on the job, how much instruction is needed and whether or not the project requires daily supervision or a once-a-week check-up.

A 10-percent mark-up for subcontractors allows room for profit and covers supervision, Fred reasoned. Without this padding, contractors will have to eat costs. "Don't do it for free," Hennessey emphasized. "You should be prepared to do the job yourself or find another subcontractor if the price is not right. You should have the ability to have someone take over your subcontracting needs - don't deal with just one contractor all the time. If quality starts to lack, be ready to move on to someone else."

Consistent supervision means constant communication, Andy added. When a project

is lagging or there are technical problems, both parties need to discuss options. The contractor's role in offering suggestions and creating a plan are just as important as the subcontractor's obligation to complete work according to specifications. "You both put your head together so the project will go smoothly," Andy noted.

CLOCKING IN. Smooth operators stick to a schedule. Timing is everything for contractors - it determines their profit, their efficiency and their labor needs. And many times, it is a variable over which they have little control.

"You're at their mercy," Fred said of subcontractors, adding that a company's reputation slides with each scheduling flop.

He posts a schedule board that lists the job from start to finish. "They see the responsibilities and you hold them accountable," Fred explained. "There are other contractors that may effect your work that you have no control over, and that has to be understood."



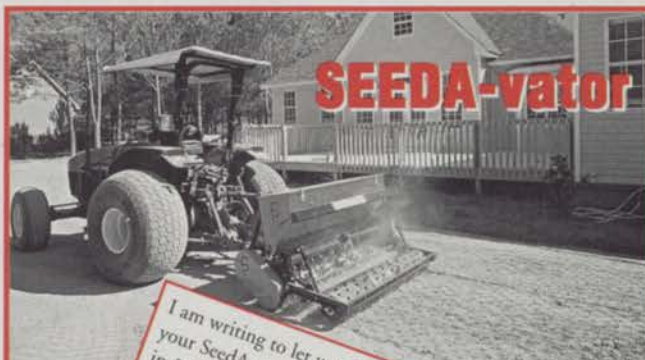
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Subcontracting

For example, if a contractor is installing the landscape for a general contractor but house construction is running behind schedule, the company can't begin its portion of the project. "You have to be flexible," he added.

Contractors also have to communicate with clients. Subcontractors must be honest with contractors if they experience challenges on a property, so that they, in turn, can explain the situation to the customer. "You might have to tell the property owner, 'We're waiting for this person to do the job because they are really good at what they do. You will be happy when they are done, but it will take longer than you anticipated,'" Fred described.

"Things don't always go as planned," he continued. "Often, subcontractors don't have time to run their business - it runs them."

Scheduling is a two-way street, however. While extra workers must meet project deadlines, contractors also need to create a realistic schedule, Andy added.

"Ask the subcontractor when they can get started, talk it over with the clients and see if it is alright, and stop in every other day or so to show the client the progress you've made, how things are going and if there is anything slowing you up," he suggested.

How quickly a subcontractor works a project into their calendar can depend on how often a contractor uses their services, Hennessey pointed out.

"Are you a contractor who can throw the subcontractor a lot of work and keep them busy so they are willing to work with you and put you on a high-priority range, or are you someone that is calling them from the Yellow Pages looking for a low price?" he reasoned. Subcontractors don't like price shoppers either.

Despite scheduling complications, some contractors find that subcontracting allows them to concentrate on their service specialties. Subcontracting can offer specialized skills without hiring in-house experts.

"I find that subcontractors have an expertise in a niche market or a niche field more than we do," Hennessey said. "I can rely on their experience and knowledge to get the job done quicker, faster, and we are still able to manage them on a project and actually make some money off of them." **LL**

The author is Associate Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.



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USE READER SERVICE #103

Pond Maintenance

by Nicole Wisniewski

A pond full of floating flowers, hypnotizing sun sparkles and glints from golden fish can form an enchanting Eden, as the soothing sounds of trickling water and the flutter-by of visiting birds and butterflies entrance pond-gazers.

But while these magical elements appease clients' senses and add to a pond's allure, they also play vital roles in pond survival. Poorly filtered water, lack of aquatic plants, poor summer algae control and the onslaught of fish diseases can throw a pond ecosystem off balance.

To deliver continuous charm, ponds must be maintained correctly. But since pond care pits the forces of Mother Nature against landscape contractors' skills, lack of knowledge can be detrimental.

In addition to continuous education, contractors must have the ability to solve problems with minimal tools because unnatural, fast fixes, such as copper-containing algacides and chlorine-based clearing products, aren't particularly pond-friendly, explained Scott Eddy, president, R-man Productions, Denver, Colo. "Copper contaminates fish's liver and kidneys, and causes slow, early death," he said.

"And that chlorine smell eliminates a pond's natural feel."

When one piece of the delicate pond puzzle is missing or damaged, the entire system can be destroyed, proving that pond maintenance is a landscape contractor's ultimate eco-challenge.

AN OUNCE OF PREVENTION. Ponds can stay clean and balanced for a long time, especially if all of the right elements and control systems are in place.

Once established, a water feature becomes "self-perpetuating," added Mark Carter, general manager and head designer, Carter's Landscape, Jackson, Tenn., asserting a common adage: "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure."

But despite their self-cleaning nature, ponds are sensitive and need preventive upkeep. Some clients easily learn how to remove leaf litter from ponds in a timely manner, feed fish properly and watch for problems. Others, however, prefer to let professionals handle their pond care.

Due to clients' varying degrees of interest in water features, scheduling consultations to deter-

(continued on page 106)



Contractors should closely observe pond fish using a koi net (above).

Photo: Carter's Landscape. A healthy pond can be made even more dynamic when it's home to exotic koi. Photo: Aquascape Designs

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USE READER SERVICE #21

Pond Maintenance

(continued from page 104)

mine maintenance needs is a good idea, Eddy said. This way contractors can become an educational source for clients while promoting pond care services.

SERVICE SOLUTIONS. Since most clients who are pleased with their installations will hire those same companies for their pond upkeep, adding this service can be simple.

Christopher Bell, president, Alliance Waterscapes, San Jose, Calif., arranges four post-installation client visits to maintain ponds and sell additional aquatic supplies. After these visits, many of Bell's clients hire him for pond care. He charges clients \$700 for annual



Removing yellow and brown leaves and spent flower blooms can benefit aquatic plants during the growing season. Photo: Carter's Landscape

pond clean-outs and others are put on a three- or six-month maintenance schedule.

Bell models his maintenance program after pool contractors, who map out their schedules to spend 10 minutes on each pool.

"We'll spend no more than 15 minutes on an 11-by-16 pond," Bell said, explaining that his jobs typically are not more than 45 minutes away. "We have a few jobs that are 70 minutes away, but we spend five hours there so it's worth the drive."

Kirk Samis, owner, Pondsaway, Soquel, Calif., also believes that timing is the trick to

profitable pond care. He suggested multi-tasking to save time on the job. "For instance, while pumping out the pond, you should be cleaning out the filters," he said, pointing out that he charges \$250 for maintenance plus needed supplies on an 11-by-16 pond. "Or while refilling the pond you can be trimming plants and fertilizing."

Most of the ponds Carter maintains receive 30 to 60 minutes of monthly maintenance. For labor and materials, he charges between \$35 and \$50 per hour, depending on

(continued on page 108)

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CHECK OUT this article online for more information on fish feeding and general care.

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USE READER SERVICE #30

Pond Maintenance

(continued from page 106)

pond size, filtration system, and number and type of fish and aquatic plants.

In addition to efficient timing and scheduling, demonstrating service value can increase sales and convey a professional image. To encourage this assessment, Eddy offers clients who prepay and schedule regu-

lar maintenance a discount. "If a normal service costs \$65, we'll suggest they buy 10 for \$450," Eddy said, explaining that it takes one employee one hour and two employees one half-hour to clean the filters and check pond pH, fish and water temperature. "Clients get excited and think, 'Wow, I saved

\$200.' The only problem with this is that since they prepay, they call more often asking us to check their ponds."

To increase profitability, Eddy also brings along extra products clients can purchase to perform pond care themselves in between visits, adding a 40- to 60-percent markup. For instance, he'll sell a \$10 pH testing kit for \$25. "PetSmart does it - why can't I?" Eddy said. "Why let clients go to PetSmart when they can come to you?"

After installing a pond, Eddy offers clients a starter kit that includes a long pole with a brush for light cleaning, a digital thermometer, a fish net, a pH kit and water conditioner. He'll sell the \$200 kit for \$160 if clients purchase it after installation. Eddy also sells nitrate and ammonia testers, and he makes his own fish food mix.

In most regions, the busiest time for pond care is from mid-July through October, when weekly maintenance is necessary. During these warm months, bacteria or enzymes are added to minimize rapid-fire algae growth, and excess string algae is removed.

During cooler months, on the other hand, maintenance can be performed monthly or

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USE READER SERVICE #118

New plants are placed in shallow pond areas, but once they are established, they must be moved further into the pond's depths, as indicated (in inches) by the following chart:

	NEW PLANT DEPTHS	ESTABLISHED PLANT DEPTHS
Water Lilies	8 to 12	18 to 24
Lotus	2 to 4	6 to 12
Shallow Water Plants	0 to 2	0 to 6
Lily-like Aquatics	4 to 6	8 to 10
Oxygenators	8 to 10	10 to 16

Source: Backyard Ponds, Beltsville, Md.

Deep Impact

During summer months, water lilies bloom often. Contractors recommend regular fertilization to maintain health and consistent blooms throughout the season. Photo: Aquascape Designs

every few months, depending on whether or not a pond is shut down for the winter.

POND PARTICULARS. Spring start-up or clean-up on ponds should be done once temperatures exceed 55 degrees, which is when beneficial bacteria begins to grow, Samis said. Clean-ups typically include re-

moving fish; draining ponds; pressure-washing rocks and rinsing out ponds; pumping out sludge and debris; cleaning mechanical and biological filters, including filter grids, rocks and skimmers; trimming and fertilizing plants; filling the pond with clean water, removing chlorine; adding bacteria and enzymes, and restoring fish (See Pond Paraphernalia on page 117).

Fish need special care so they aren't shocked during spring clean-up, Bell stressed. "We fill buckets with existing pond water and put the fish in them," he explained. "After we refill the pond with clean water, remove chlorine and add bacteria or enzymes, we check the water temperature. If there's a difference in water temperature between the bucket and the new pond, we'll set the buckets in the pond before adding the fish."

As summer nears and weather warms up, recording clients' pond temperatures can help contractors predict excess algae or other future pond changes, Eddy pointed out. "For

example, if a client's pond is fine for two years and then the third year we see more algae early in the season, we can look at the temperature record, figure out the reason and then handle the problem," he said. "Algae will be more or less of a problem based on higher or lower temperatures."

Algae also can be trouble if enough lilies aren't shading pond depths from the sun, which feeds algae growth. According to Eddy, 40 to 50 percent of the pond should be covered with aquatic plants to prevent thick, pea-soup-like algae.

Of course, adding aquatic plants to a pond creates additional challenges. They need to be planted at the proper depth and in an area where they receive appropriate sun exposure. "Most of the plant problems we see—particularly lilies that aren't flourishing—stem from lilies being planted too deep in the water or not deep enough," Bell remarked (For information on plant depths, see Deep Impact on page 108).

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Pond Maintenance

During regular check-ups, contractors should make sure insects aren't laying eggs on plant leaves and fish aren't eating lilies, Eddy added. These issues, along with yellow leaves, signal plant problems. Fertilizing plants monthly, especially during warm, summer months, can help prevent and/or cure plant decline, Carter advised.

"Water lilies and lotus are heavy feeders and they bloom a lot in the summer," Carter said, pointing out that removing yellow and brown leaves and spent flower blooms also can benefit plants during the growing season. "Fertilization during this time helps maintain their health and continue nice blooms throughout the season."

FALL INTO WINTER. Pond maintenance continues through fall because of the excessive amount of accumulating leaf litter.

Other weather changes throughout the year also can intensify maintenance needs. Excess debris can throw off an ecosystem's

balanced state. For instance, after a heavy storm when raindrops wash off turfgrass blades and drip down maple leaves, runoff may become an issue. Products, such as fertilizers and pesticides that are acceptable for landscapes, can impact ponds.

Runoff can rarely be avoided, unless ponds are located at a higher spot on the landscape or further away from nearby trees, Eddy said, which is why contractors should plan additional maintenance and be available for client calls after weather changes.

As temperatures cool and landscapes hibernate, most contractors avoid shutting down ponds. "Freeze-and-thaw cycles can happen 60 to 120 times each winter, which can break down cement ponds more quickly than if they are left running," Eddy commented. "Ice can be OK for ponds because it acts as an insulation blanket."

Carter agreed, recommending contractors encourage clients who aren't winterizing their ponds to purchase a floating heater

with an automatic shut-off device that costs less than \$100. This opens a small hole in the ice to let in needed oxygen and to release gases that, if trapped in the pond, could harm fish, Carter explained.

In mild winters, even a small pump moving water around can work, he added, but in severe winters, with excess freezing and thawing, contractors should remove, clean and store pumps in a weather-proof place.

In some areas, like California, winter shut-down is less complicated, except for the removal of certain tropical lilies that won't survive in low temperatures. "To do that, we remove any soil from the tuber, wrap the plant in newspaper and put it in clients' garages until spring," Samis said.

FISH FACTS. Eddy describes fish maintenance as an art form, observation being the key. "It becomes something you learn more about over time as you diagnose and solve

(continued on page 117)



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1:00 – 4:00 p.m.	Site Tour with Terrain Systems – A <i>Lawn & Landscape</i> Top 100 Company Phoenix, Arizona
4:00 – 6:00 p.m.	Registration/Resource Center Open
6:00 – 7:30 p.m.	Welcome Reception
MONDAY, OCTOBER 8	
7:30 a.m.	Registration & Continental Breakfast
8:00 – 9:15 a.m.	Keynote Address Putting People First: Management's Role in Making It Work <i>Keynote Speaker: Scott Brickman, President, The Brickman Group</i>
9:15 – 10:30 a.m.	Winning the Recruiting Wars for Top Employees <i>Speaker: Larry Fish, President, GreenSearch, Kathy Donahue, Consultant, GreenSearch</i>
10:30 – 10:50 a.m.	Refreshment Break
10:50 – 12:00 noon	Employment Regulations Affecting Employers <i>Speaker: Jean Seawright, President, Seawright & Associates</i>
12:00 – 1:15 p.m.	Power Lunch Discussions
1:30 – 3:00 p.m.	Creating Career Paths for Your Employees <i>Speaker: tba</i>
3:00 – 3:30 p.m.	Refreshment Break
3:30 – 5:00 p.m.	Speaker Roundtable Question & Answer Session <i>Moderator: Bob West, Editor, Lawn & Landscape</i>
5:00 – 6:30 p.m.	Networking Reception
TUESDAY, OCTOBER 9	
7:30 a.m.	Registration & Continental Breakfast
8:00 – 9:15 a.m.	Developing an Employee Management Plan for Your Business <i>Speaker: Jean Seawright, President, Seawright & Associates</i>
9:15 – 10:30 a.m.	Motivating the Troops: Creating Excitement in the Workplace <i>Speaker: Marty Grunder, President, The Winner's Circle</i>
10:30 – 10:50 a.m.	Refreshment Break
10:50 – 12:00 noon	Communicating Total Rewards to Employees <i>Speaker: Larry Fish, President, GreenSearch, Kathy Donahue, Consultant, GreenSearch</i>

What Do Industry Professionals Value Most About the Business Strategies Conference?

"My partner and I attended your Business Strategies Conference in Chicago last year and we were at the point where if we didn't get anything out of the conference, the doors were closing. Needless to say we are still here and stronger because of it."

*Joe Morrison
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Showplace Landscaping
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Sunday, October 7

8:00 a.m.

Golf Outing

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1:00 – 4:00 p.m.

Site Tour – Terrain Systems

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4:00 – 6:00 p.m.

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Welcome Reception

Reception Sponsored by Lawn & Landscape magazine

Monday, October 8

7:30 a.m.

Registration & Continental Breakfast

8:00 – 9:15 a.m.

Opening Session

Putting People First: Management's Role in Making It Work

When it comes to making a company perform at peak efficiency, it certainly helps to have the management team on the same page as its employees. Having buy in from management is a vital step to making people believe in the system and help develop a team attitude. Listen to Scott Brickman, president of The Brickman Group, one of the country's largest and most successful full-service contractors, share his ideas on how you as a manager are the key influencer when it comes to employee buy in. Hear about the commitment The Brickman Group has made in putting people first, the positive results it has yielded and how the concept can be successfully implemented in your company.

Speaker: Scott Brickman, President, The Brickman Group



Scott Brickman

9:15 – 10:30 a.m.

Winning the Recruiting Wars for Employees

Where do you find good employees? That question is asked of every green industry manager on a continual basis and the answer will be provided in this informative session. Review proven methods for attracting a greater number of higher quality candidates to fill your company's job openings. Identify strategies for making your recruitment efforts more effective – where to find the winners, how to get your message to them and what you need to make your company attractive to prospective employees. Recruiting a winning team takes time and resources and in this informative session, you will learn how to make the most of your recruiting efforts.

Speakers: Larry Fish, President, GreenSearch and Kathy Donahue, Consultant, GreenSearch



Larry Fish

10:50 – 12:00 noon

Employment Regulations Affecting Employers

In today's litigious society, employers cannot help but be overwhelmed by the potential for something to go wrong when handling an employment issue with a worker. Furthermore, not keeping up with the latest regulations can be costly to your company. In this important session, hear Jean Seawright, an expert in service industry human resources, discuss what employers need to know about regulations affecting their company and their employees. Learn how to set up a system in your company to make sure you are compliant with the latest government regulations, how to respond to employees' questions regarding regulations and how to safeguard your company.

Speaker: Jean Seawright, President, Seawright & Associates



Jean Seawright

Morning General Session Sponsored by Shindaiwa

12:00 – 1:15 p.m.

Power Lunch Discussions

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07 OR GO TO
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1:30 – 3:00 p.m.

Creating Career Paths for Your Employees

Once you have recruited and hired a talented employee the toughest part of managing is still to come – how do you keep them with your company? Creating career paths for talented employees is essential if you are to maintain the best and the brightest crew leaders, foremen, designers and crewmembers. This informative session will discuss the procedures for establishing a system that will help you offer career opportunities that benefit not only your employee but your company as well. Understand what is important to your employees and how to make career advancement a reality for them and a benefit for you.

Speaker: tba

Afternoon General Session Sponsored by Echo

3:00 – 3:30 p.m.

Refreshment Break

3:30 – 5:00 p.m.

Speaker Roundtable Question & Answer Session

How often can you pick the brains of leading green industry managers and human resource consultants about the challenges you face in managing employees? At the 2001 Business Strategies Conference, you will have direct access to these valuable resources without having to spend a penny more than your registration fee. Join fellow attendees for a lively discussion of the most important issues in employee management. Moderated by *Lawn & Landscape* Editor Bob West, this session will provide you with the answers to help improve your company's ability to respond to employee management related issues.

Session Sponsored by Great Dane Power Equipment

Monday, October 8

7:30 a.m.

Registration & Continental Breakfast

8:00 – 9:15 a.m.

Developing an Employee Management Plan for Your Business

Regardless of the size of your company, having a plan to manage the numerous aspects of human resources is essential. Without a plan, you have no basis to form policy or keep employees in the loop. From developing an employee handbook to understanding how to keep proper records, staying on top of these basic yet often overlooked tasks is essential if you are to properly grow and maintain your business. Take home valuable tips that will help you develop the

framework needed to establish a employee management program from scratch or enhance an existing system. Learn how to create a system that will make employee management easier, more productive and that will serve as an asset for your company.

Speaker: Jean Seawright, President, Seawright & Associates

9:15 – 10:30 a.m.

Motivating the Troops: Creating Excitement in the Workplace

How do you get people to listen? Are you as tired of talking to your employees as they are of listening to you? Once you attend this fast-paced session you will learn how to make your office a more exciting and productive place. Motivating employees is one of the hardest tasks a manager has to accomplish, and if you are not a Knute Rockne-type speaker you may feel frustrated. This session will show you how to motivate your employees to not only become more productive in their jobs but how to get them to believe in your systems and philosophies. A cannot miss session for managers looking to inspire themselves and their employees.

Speaker: Marty Grunder, President, The Winner's Circle

10:30 – 10:50 a.m.

Refreshment Break

10:50 – 12:00 noon

Communicating Total Rewards to Employees

Compensation is more than a paycheck. It is medical benefits, life insurance, workers' compensation, retirement plans, vacation and personal time, vehicle allowances, career opportunities, etc. The problem most managers have is communicating these items to employees and helping them see the big picture when it comes to their true level of compensation. In this informative session, learn the methodology behind total rewards and how to communicate it to your employees. Learn how to demonstrate the true value of what you are offering and how to use it as an effective recruitment and retention tool.

Speaker: Larry Fish, President, GreenSearch and Kathy Donahue, Consultant, GreenSearch

Morning General Session Sponsored by Syngenta



Marty Grunder



2001 Business Strategies

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Registration and Travel Information

CONFERENCE REGISTRATION

Conference Registration **\$245 per person**
(Includes all educational sessions, conference materials, receptions, lunch, breakfasts and refreshment breaks)

Group Conference Registration **\$195 per person** (Two or more from same company)

SPECIAL EVENTS

Golf Outing **\$80**
Sunday, October 7 (Includes greens fees, cart, lunch, prizes and transportation)

Site Tour **Free**
Advance registration is required; there are limited number of seats for this event and they are assigned on a first-come basis. The site tour is only open to registered attendees of the Business Strategies Conference.

CANCELLATION/SUBSTITUTION/REFUND POLICY

All cancellations must be made in writing. A full refund will be accepted if received before **September 21, 2001**. No refunds will be issued after September 21, 2001. Advance payment is **required** for the golf outing. No cancellations for golf outing after September 28, 2001. *No on-site refunds.* Attendees can notify the Business Strategies Conference at any time that another individual will attend the conference in their place.

CONFIRMATIONS

All registrations postmarked by September 21, 2001 will be acknowledged by mail. Registrations received after that date should be picked up at the Business Strategies Registration Desk at the Marriott Mountain Shadows Resort starting Sunday, October 7, 2001 at 4:00 p.m.

HOTEL INFORMATION

A block of rooms has been reserved for Lawn & Landscape Business Strategies attendees at the Marriott Mountain Shadows Resort. Located at the foot of Camelback Mountain in the heart of Scottsdale, the award-winning Marriott Mountain Shadows Resort is the ideal location for your trip to Arizona. Attendees should make their reservations directly with the hotel on or before **Friday, September 14, 2001** to receive the special conference room rate of **\$135 per night** (single/double). Please ask for the Lawn & Landscape Business Strategies rate. For reservations, call the Marriott Mountain Shadows Resort at **480/948-7111** or **800/228-9290**.

DISCOUNT TRAVEL INFORMATION

The Lawn & Landscape Business Strategies Conference has arranged for special discount airfares to the conference. To take advantage of the discount rates, please contact AAA Business Travel at 800/999-0038 between the hours of 8:00 AM and 5:00 PM Eastern.

GOLF OUTING Sunday, October 7, 2001 8:00 a.m.

Spend a morning testing your golf skills at the 2001 Business Strategies Golf Outing at the Marriott Mountain Shadows Golf Club. Located right on the resort grounds, the Marriott Mountain Shadows Golf Club is ranked one of the Top 10 Executive Courses in the country. The course offers a unique challenge to both the experienced or weekend golfer and is an ideal location for a quick, yet competitive round of golf. Cost for the outing includes green fees, cart rental, practice balls, lunch and prizes. Club rental is available at the course. **Advance registration and payment is required.** Registration deadline is **September 28, 2001.** (Please Note: The Marriott Mountain Shadows Golf Club is an executive style course primarily made up of par 3 and 4 holes (3,081 yards).



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Registered for the Site Tour and Golf Outing

Told An Industry Colleague or Co-Worker To Register For the Business Strategies Conference

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REGISTRATION FORM

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PHONE: Call 800/456-0707 and ask to register for the 2001 Lawn & Landscape Business Strategies Conference (weekdays 9 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. EST)

MAIL: Conference Registration, 2001 Lawn & Landscape Business Strategies Conference, 4012 Bridge Ave., Cleveland, OH 44113

FAX: Complete form and fax, with credit card information, to 216/961-0364 (24 hours)

ON THE WEB: Register on-line at www.lawnandlandscape.com

(Please print or type. Form may be photocopied for additional registrants; one form per person)

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REGISTRATION INFORMATION

Conference Registration	Number	Total
Full Conference Registration	_____ @ \$245 =	_____
Group Conference Registration (<i>two or more from same company</i>)	_____ @ \$195 =	_____
Special Events		
Golf Outing (Sunday, October 7)	_____ @ \$80 =	_____
Site Tour (Sunday, October 7)	_____ @ Free =	_____
TOTAL	_____ =	_____

For Office Use Only

Date Received _____ Registration # _____

Payment Received _____

Type _____ Amount _____

I ___ G ___ 0701

Proper pond maintenance requires the right tools. Here's a list of pond maintenance necessities contractors in this story suggested:

- Beneficial bacteria and enzymes
- A form of string algae buster
- Fertilizer tabs for plants
- A stiff-bristled, long-handled brush for scrubbing algae off rocks and lights
- Hip boots, rubber boots, wetsuit booties or chest waders to keep dry
- Gloves
- A couple of small tubs for collecting debris
- Screwdrivers, pliers or wrenches for breaking down filters or pumps
- Patch tape or kits for pond liners
- A koi fish net

- A small pump and a 1½-foot-deep "kiddy" pool to change pond water
 - Small recirculating pump
 - Dechlorinator (if city water is being used to fill the pool)
 - Devices that test pH, ammonia, salt and nitrate levels
 - Digital thermometer
 - Anti-fungus dip for fish
 - Fish food
 - A 1,500-psi pressure washer
 - Subpump and hose (2-inch pvc flexible discharge pipe at least 30 feet long so it can reach a downspout or safe drainage area)
 - Garden hose for refilling ponds
 - Garden shears for trimming plants
- Nicole Wisniewski

Pond Maintenance

(continued from page 110)

problems," he said. "Clamped fins, redness at the point where fins connect to the body and unusual or infrequent movement and sluggishness are common signs of sick fish."

Spring and summer are the worst time for fish diseases and problems, most of them due to stress from excess algae build-up or improper feeding, Carter said, recommending contractors visit www.koivet.com to learn specifics about fish diseases and optional cures.

Fortunately, fish excrete a natural disease-fighting enzyme, so they generally fend off minor troubles themselves, Eddy pointed out. Severe problems only transpire when fish are stressed and unable to release enough of this protective enzyme.

Contractors should invest in "a koi net vs. the \$1 net you buy at the grocery store for fish examination," Carter advised. "The wrong net can damage fish fins and gills." **LI**

The author is Managing Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.

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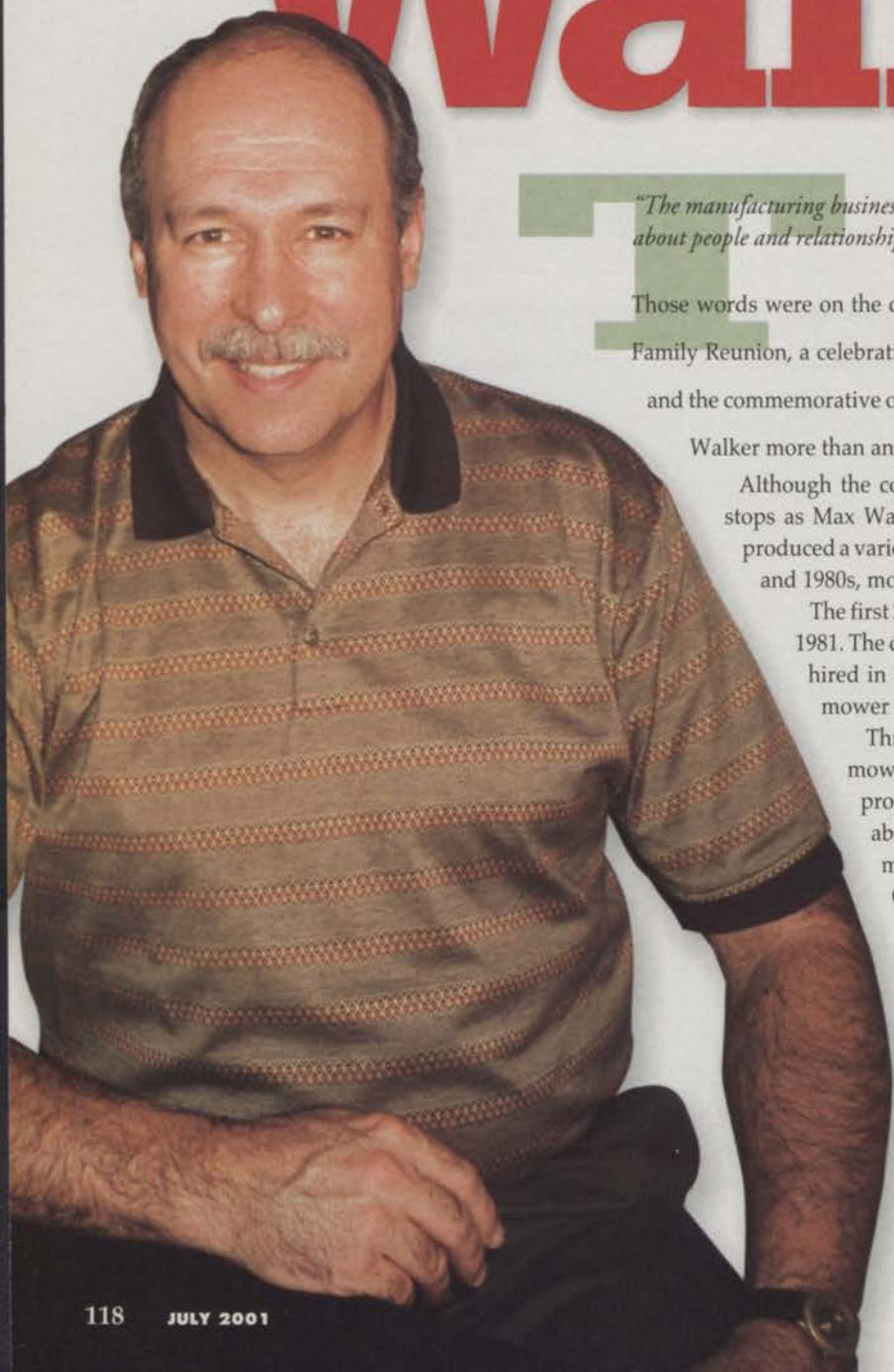
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USE READER SERVICE #125

by Bob West

An afternoon with Bob Walker turned into an emotional discussion about the value of people and the importance of business ethics.

A Conversation with BOB Walker



T *"The manufacturing business can be about iron and the bottom line, or it can be about people and relationships." – Bob Walker*

Those words were on the cover of the program to Walker Manufacturing's Family Reunion, a celebration of the company's 50,000th mower. That quote and the commemorative occasion probably represent the company and Bob Walker more than any of his yellow mowers ever will.

Although the company's history includes a series of starts and stops as Max Walker, Bob's father and founder of the company, produced a variety of products through the late 1950s, 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, mowers and people define the company today.

The first 25 Walker mowers were built and sold in 1980 and 1981. The company's first dedicated mower employees were hired in 1982, and the company fully committed itself to mower manufacturing in 1984.

Throughout the course of producing the next 49,975 mowers, Walker Manufacturing established itself as a producer of quality products, but what stands out about the company is its emphasis on being about more than just money. I traveled to Fort Collins, Colo., to sit down with Bob Walker, president of the company, and learn about what he wants this company to be, not to mention where he thinks the commercial mower industry is headed.

LAWN & LANDSCAPE (L&L): Tell me a little about the company's history.

BOB WALKER (BW): My dad started the company in 1957 by manufacturing the first gas-powered golf cart. From there, he moved on to making the Walker Power Truck.

(continued on page 120)

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Conversation

(continued from page 118)

The company moved to Casper, Wyo., but it eventually went broke. My parents lost everything, but my dad was able to get restarted again when some people had an evaporative cooler. That's when we moved here, to Fort Collins, in 1974.

After a few years, we started off on the lawn mower project, and we've had tremendous progress that we never saw with any of those other products. There is definitely an aspect of being at the right place at the right time involved in our success. Some people call that luck, but we don't necessarily believe in blind luck.

L&L: How did you come to join the company, and how thoroughly does the family approach permeate the organization?

BW: When my dad got started in Colorado, he asked me to come work with him, which had always been a dream of mine. I have a degree in mechanical engineering with some emphasis on aircraft design and structures. I worked in the aircraft industry for six years and learned a lot that has served me well in this business.

I think if you're going to work in the family business, it can be a great help to a young person to work outside of the family first and basically prove that you're able to have a degree of performance and accomplishment outside of saying if it wasn't for your mom or dad you couldn't make it in the business world.

People quite often will say, 'I'm not going to sacrifice my family for my business.' But there's a corollary point that you shouldn't sacrifice your business for your family. There have been a lot of good businesses that have been sacrificed over a fam-

ily - bringing junior in and letting him run a business that he has no real aptitude to run, and he runs it into the ground. Then look at all of the people who get hurt.

So it's a balancing act between family and business, and that's not easy to do.

L&L: But it seems as though the family philosophy includes more than just the Walker family for you.

BW: Manufacturing is an exciting business in the sense of the ripple effect. Every day we make mowers here and there's a group of people in Wisconsin and Iowa who manufacture the component parts we use, such as engines and transmissions, so there's a degree of employment created by us creating the product here. Of course, we've got our factory employees working here to produce the equipment every day, and their families, so there's a degree of livelihood. Then you produce the product and we've got a group of distributors and about 1,000 dealers that have some livelihood from selling, servicing and supporting the product out to the customer. And then you've got the customer who's using the product.

Add all that up and look at all of the jobs and all of the revenue. We make a little money when we sell a machine, and that could be the focus. But look at all of the other people, jobs and opportunity. And we're just one little company out here in Colorado.

L&L: Why has Walker Manufacturing with its 145 employees been successful competing against so many bigger companies?

BW: We compete by playing to our strengths. There are some things that little companies can do that big companies can't do. One of our strengths is that we can be close to the customer. We can go to a trade show and stand in the booth and talk face-to-face with

real customers, whereas the big companies have to stay close to their businesses because they're in a position where they can't really afford to have their top decision-making people stand in a trade show booth.

Another area of strength is focus. We consider ourselves a specialized company. So many of the bigger companies, in order to get to the size that they are, have become very diverse in their product base and market base. They're not just building a riding lawn mower like we are - they've got all kinds of power equipment. Some of them take the approach that they want to be the one source for everything you need. Well, that's a grand idea and quite a good thought, but the truth is, they're really compromising since they don't get the focus of someone who really concentrates, and that goes back to the smaller company. We can say that we're not everything - we've only got one product, so we're trying to do an exceptionally good job with that product.

The other thing I like to talk about is rapid response. While our competitors are still drinking coffee and making drawings, we've already made the design change. We've literally made design changes where we heard about a problem, my brother comes in and designs a new part, and we'll have that on the production line that afternoon.

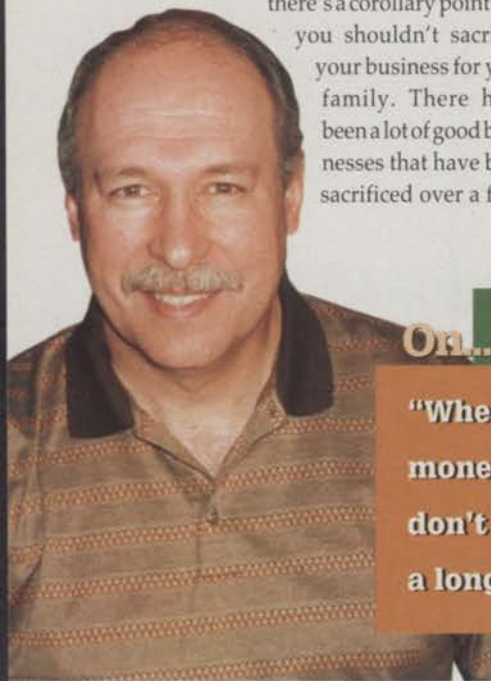
L&L: Is keeping that one-product focus difficult to do?

BW: One of the things that I think drives people in the wrong direction is ego. The desire to get big with all of the fulfillment that comes from success, but really not knowing who you are. We're not Toro and we're not going to be Toro or one of the other big manufacturers, and we're not on the fast track to try to get there. That helps you use what you do have.

I believe a lot of people have worked with that 'when my ship comes in' mentality when their biggest opportunity was right in front of them and they couldn't see it because they were so busy looking out on the horizon. The real opportunity wasn't nearly as exciting and it looked small, but it was their opportunity and they didn't take it. Companies need to keep a sense of what they are and not get drawn off into comparisons.

It has been interesting how many times in recent years we've heard about the land-

(continued on page 122)



On... BUSINESS

"When you take somebody else's money, blood, sweat and tears, I don't see that as a way to profit on a long-term basis." - Bob Walker



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Conversation

(continued from page 120)

scape contractor who started off by himself, started to build up his business, had to hire some crews and then woke up one day with the realization that he was handling a lot more money than he used to but he wasn't putting any more of it in his pocket. Yet he was still paying a big price with his family. That's a real interesting trend that you can see where people downsize their business and are more successful and happier. You think people would never want to go back and get smaller once they get to a certain level, but that's not the case.

L&L: How has the design of mowers changed since you've been involved?

BW: There's been a real move, and we think we have something to do with it, toward the compact, maneuverable rider. This was a key idea for us.

Back in 1977, my father decided to buy a riding mower, and I bought a riding mower for my yard. We made a terrible mistake. The problem was the maneuverability and the inability to fit in and trim the whole property. The rider was nice on straight-aways, but it was an awkward and clumsy machine. So that gave us the idea.

We decided to make the mower as small as we could and make a new combination using zero-turn technology. That has played out very well not only for us, but I believe the whole industry has moved in the direction of making a compact, maneuverable machine,

which has allowed riders to take a big portion of what was being done with walk-behind mowers.

Today, the figures prove that there's still a place for walk-behinds, especially mid-

size walk-behinds, but there was a crossover a few years ago so now more riders are being used and the walk-behinds have gone flat or plateaued. Last year, about 50,000 walk-behinds were produced against 100,000 riders. That's a dramatic shift.

L&L: What's driving mower design now?

BW: I believe that the productivity issue is going to continue to impact the machines – how much can one man or one woman produce? A lot of people say that we're talking about how fast the mower goes, but that's deceptive. Mowing is a combination of movement across the ground, turns and maneuvering. The more variables that go into the equation, the more important working speed contributes to the overall job time. What you're trying to do is cut grass, and if you're just cutting straight-aways mowing speed is obviously king. But a lot of mowing is trimming and maneuvering.

The perfect illustration I like to use here is the turtle and rabbit story. The turtle won the race because he consistently kept moving. The rabbit lost because he was fast but he kept stopping. This is the classic deal. We've literally beat some rabbits on the job with our little turtle machine here, and some of these machines run twice as fast as ours.

L&L: You and I talked a couple of years ago and you said there was too many mower manufacturers. Is that still true?

BW: I think so. I've heard of a manufacturer's study that was done to forecast the future and it concluded that by 2010 there would be five manufacturers of commercial mowing equipment. I think that's probably extreme, but I do think that 30-some manufacturers is too many. Again, if you divide the production levels up among 30 or so manufacturers, the volumes are just not that interesting for the investment to be in the manufactur-

ing business, so I think that will drive more consolidation than we've seen before.

L&L: What about your company's future?

BW: We have a vision of it continuing to be a family business. Some people start a business with the thought of taking it public or cashing out to do something else, but that's not an objective of ours.

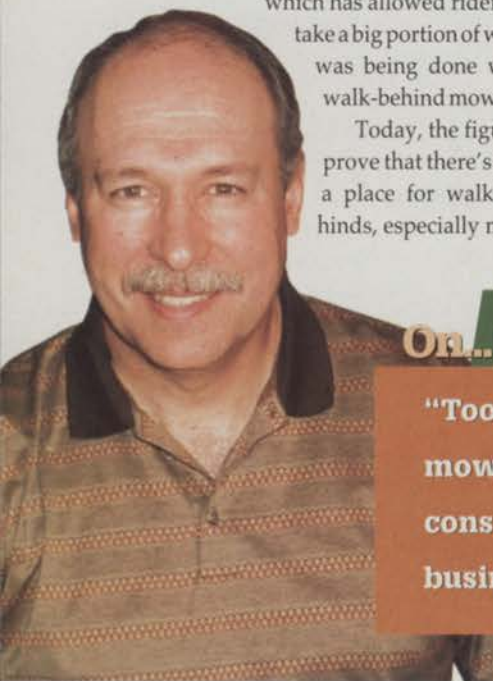
One of the reasons why we're maybe a little different from other companies is that while we think about ourselves – it would be silly talk to say we only think about other people – the important principle to us is that you should be thinking about not only yourself but other people's interests. In this case, we have a lot of other people who have invested a lot of their lives and their efforts toward what's being accomplished here.

I like to say that for every dollar we've invested here there have been four or five dollars invested by people outside of the company to help bring the product to market, sell it and service it. So when you think about selling a company or going into an acquisition or a merger, quite often you can buy and sell the assets of the company but you're skipping over the investments by the other people who really depend on their investment being protected or considered.

Of course, a common quote with mergers is, 'We're going to join forces with this other company, and everything is going to stay the same.' That never happens. When people pour money into an enterprise, they want to have a lot to say about what's going on with the business, and the original people who were part of the investment on the peripheral outside of the ownership aren't considered.

I know it's not illegal, but I think it's immoral in a lot of ways, and I believe that these companies don't prosper on that kind of stuff. When you take somebody else's money, blood, sweat and tears, I don't see that as a way to profit on a long-term basis. Even if a deal was a good thing for us personally, we're not of the mindset to walk away from a lot of people who helped us get here. That sounds pretty philosophical, but you've got to be able to live with your conscience and your morals.

Interestingly enough, we've had almost any company you can name talk to us. Of course, we're flattered that they tell us they would like to have their name on our product or have product made by us, but we haven't seriously entertained any of those offers.



On... MOWERS

"Too many contractors look at a mower as a commodity, almost a consumable, and that's not good business sense." – Bob Walker

L&L: If you could get contractors to understand one thing better than they seem to know, what would it be?

BW: What the mower will produce is more important than what it costs. The one thing I believe a lot of them don't understand is what a machine will produce for them. How much will it produce for what it costs? The actual cost really becomes a small part of the equation over the life of the machine.

The cost of ownership is also something that's not well understood. For example, a lot of times a contractor purchasing equipment will look at \$500 or \$1,000 as a big deal, but if you divide that up into the hours of production that machine can deliver, then \$500 doesn't add up to hardly anything when the mower runs for 3,000 or 4,000 hours.

Yes, the purchase price is a factor in the overall cost of ownership, and that price looms big when you're buying, but when you consider potential downtime, cost of repairs, cost of maintenance, operating costs and depreciation the purchase price doesn't mean nearly as much. But too many contractors look at a lawn mower as a commodity, almost a consumable, and that's not good business sense. You'll not be competitive with those who understand that.

L&L: When you celebrated making your 50,000th mower, why did you use a family reunion as the celebration?

BW: That was a natural for us. A lot of companies throw around terms, and a popular one is, 'We're your business partner.' Or they use the word 'team' a lot to describe the relationship they think they have with people.

But talk is cheap. Acting out and living out a relationship goes deeper than just the mechanics of selling and producing equipment. This was a natural extension of the way we try to live. A lot of our suppliers are people that we've worked with and known for quite a few years, and we consider them like family. That sounds silly in one way, but that's the way we think about it. For example, we don't try to go out to bid every year. We try to build relationships, and that stands us in good stead. Sometimes when there are problems it's amazing how you can find your way through them if you've had a long-standing relationship with a supplier.

I wanted to stand out front when the event opened and shake hands like the Wal-Mart greeter, and I was able to do that and thank those people. I had so much fun. We had 1,700 people and almost 200 of them came from overseas, and that's amazing. So the idea of a family reunion was a pretty accurate description of what happened here.

L&L: What do you expect from the mower industry in the next few years?

BW: As I said earlier, I think there's too many people producing too much product for the market, and that will cause some people to merge or sell.

I believe a real pendulum swing has taken place. Obviously, there are two styles of machines – the mid-mounts and the front-cut mowers, and we're a front-cut company. The mid-mounts have really become the dominant machine in our industry. Right now, according to OPEI figures, there are eight mid-mounts pro-

duced for each front-cut mower, so what's going to happen there?

Mid-mounts certainly are going to continue being a major factor in the market, but I think front-cut machines are not getting their due share of the market. A lot of people have jumped into manufacturing mid-mount mowers, and that has created some of the demand.

L&L: Is there anything else that's important to note about the company?

BW: I believe we have exceptionally good people. Most companies say that, but you have a keen sense in a smaller business of how much you depend on people. And we always try to recognize the divine help.

I never get into the deal of saying, 'I'm a religious person and if you'll be like I am then you'll be successful too.' There have been a lot of good people who lived a wonderful life of faith and never saw anything in business to succeed. But I think we should acknowledge and be thankful when we've received help. There are people, I suppose, who think that what they've accomplished is because of them, but we have no sense of that. That's not us. **LL**

The author is Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.

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Equipment Notebook

ILLUMINATING IDEAS:

Night Light

Lighting sparks up a landscape, accenting features that night hides.

"People spend thousands on their landscaping, and if they don't have lighting they can't enjoy it after the sun goes down," noted Michael Southard, national sales manager, Kichler Landscape Lighting, Cleveland, Ohio. "Plus, lighting is a visual thing – it's dramatic and it accentuates part of the landscape and the house itself."

Whether clients choose to brighten their properties for beauty or safety, landscape lighting is a growing add-on service that appeals to homeowners – especially those who wish to enhance architecture, light up dark areas or draw attention to specific trees or plant beds. "It can extend your living space to the outdoors – that's really the fun part of it," Southard added.

A variety of light fixtures can highlight landscapes and enhance their evening appeal.



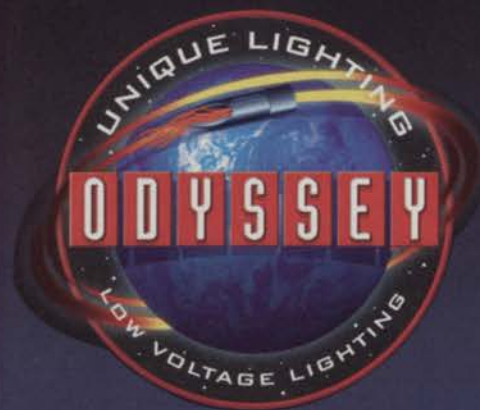
BRIGHT IDEAS.

Spread lighting, pathlighting, accent lighting, water lighting – with a variety of illuminating techniques, contractors must consider site needs before choosing a fixture. Wattage, light intensity and design are key components to lighting installation, Southard said.

Southard's installation mantra is, "less is more." Start small and then add lighting fixtures where necessary, he advised. Overlighting an area results in a "runway look."

Many contractors overlook design elements when installing lighting systems, agreed Steve Riggs, president, Illuminations U.S.A., Orlando, Fla. "Each fixture does a different job and there are many fixtures to accomplish that – you might use downlighting or backlighting," he said.

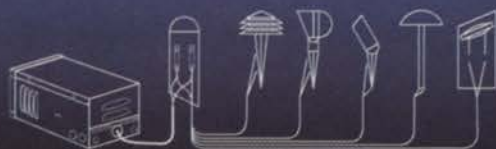
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Riggs recommends installing a variety of lighting to avoid "black holes," or dark, neglected spaces. Popular effects include a wall wash, which spews a burst of light rather than a beam, he described. This type is best to back-light or directly light an area, but is not ideal for tall trees. As with any fixture installation, "You need to determine the beam spread for what you're using – the width of the beam you're throwing out," Riggs noted.

A mini spotlight will accent the peak of a house or a far distance, Riggs explained. "But if you light up a shrub with a mini spot, you will end up with a spot of light on the shrubbery," he added. "If you have something close to the light you need to use a large spot that puts out a really wide beam."

In addition, homeowners might consider lighting areas for reasons other than aesthetic improvement. "There are studies that show that outdoor lighting cuts down on crime," Southard pointed out.

TECHNICAL TIPS. Wiring and wattage trip up many contractors during lighting

installation. "The hardest part is designing your wire run so that you avoid a voltage drop," said Southard, explaining that running more than 100 watts through 100 feet of wire can cause power problems. "Try to limit your wattage and your distance between your wire runs, and use multiple runs if you can," he suggested. "Also, make sure that you add up your wattage and don't exceed the capacity of the transformer."

Lamps that burn out quickly indicate excessive voltage, he added. Contractors should use a voltmeter when installing lighting and not surpass 12 volts for each lamp.

Clearly, contractors need more than intuition to properly install outdoor lighting displays. Nate Mullen, owner, Unique Lighting Systems, Escondido, Calif., offers additional tips for successful installation:

- **Check for proper voltage** – Use the proper formula (voltage drop = amps x distance x 2 x resistance per foot). Use Ohm's Law (amps = watts / volts) to determine amps. The resistance per foot for #12-2 wire is 0.00162.

- **Check your amperage on all secondary wire**

runs – Limit your secondary runs to 16 amps.

- **Check your amperage on the primary side (transformer)** – Use an amp meter to ensure that you haven't overloaded the transformer.

- **Use smart wiring techniques** – Use efficient wiring methods such as the Hub or Loop System to get equal voltage to lamps.

- **Use long lasting lamps** – Halogen and Xenon lamps provide the longest life available (between 4,000 to 10,000 hours).

- **Date the back of your lamps** – This tracks bulb life and provides proof of installation.

- **Use lithium-based grease on connections** – This stops corrosion from oxidation and rust.

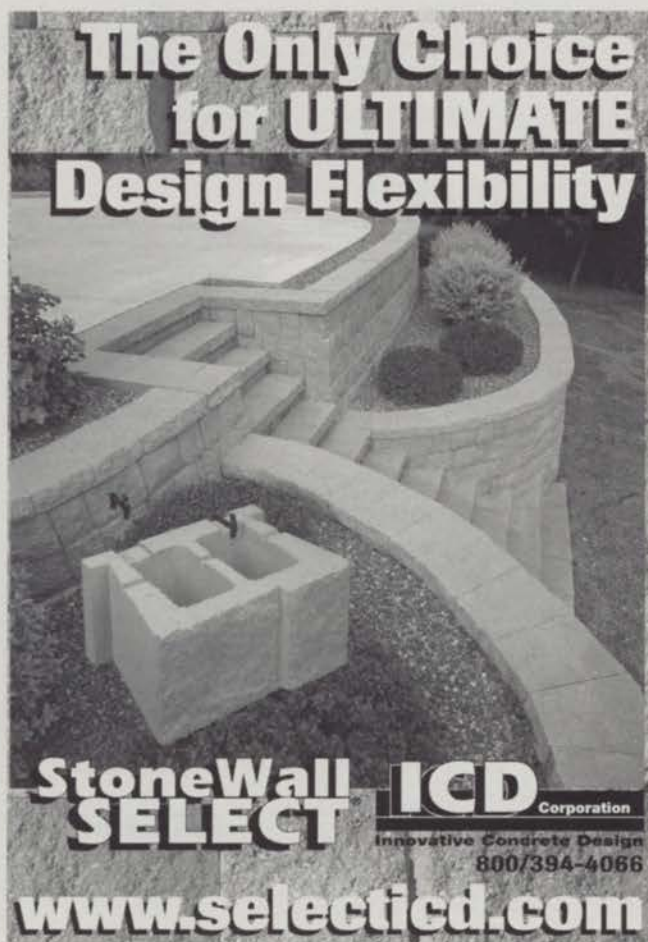
- **Size your transformer for expansion** – Allow room on the transformer to add fixtures.

- **Offer maintenance contracts** – This can provide a steady stream of revenue.

- **Document your voltage and amperage** – Write the voltage and amperage of secondary wire runs on the inside door of the transformer. – **Kristen Hampshire**

The author is Associate Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.

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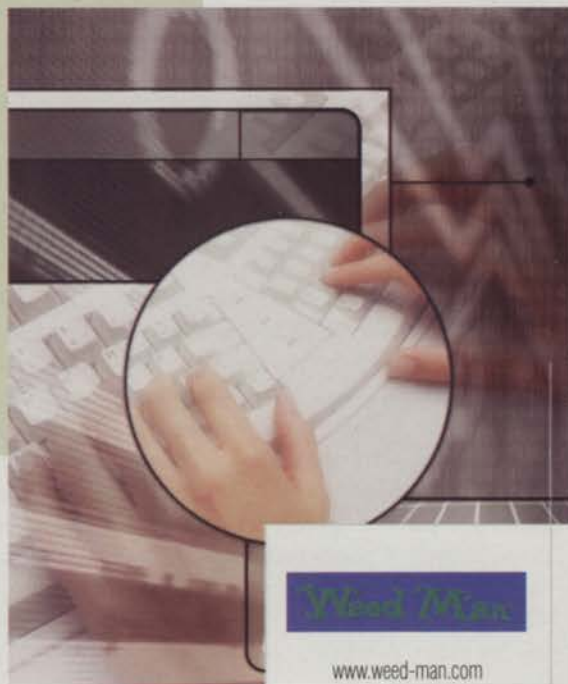
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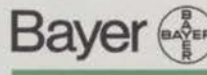
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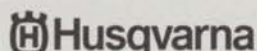
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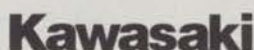
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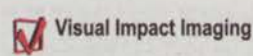
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 - Mows at a forward speed up to 11 mph and rear speed up to 5 mph
 - Includes a heavily reinforced deck, automatic parking brake, easy access oil filter and drain plug, ½-inch steel wheel yokes and 12-gallon fuel capacity
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 - Features a 36-hp direct-injected Yanmar diesel engine
 - Equipped with a multi-tach attachment mounting system, which is compatible with most industry attachment systems
 - Standard front auxiliary hydraulics with ¾-inch flat-faced couplers provide 14.4 gpm flow for powering a wide range of attachments
 - ROPS/FOPS certified cab provides operator protection and its redesigned cab offers more head, shoulder, elbow and shoulder room
 - Round-back bucket design allows for easier loading and dumping, increasing productivity on the job
 - Dual lever/foot control allows for precise maneuverability
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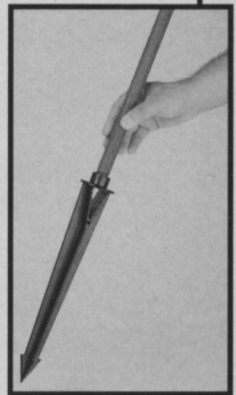
Caterpillar Vertical-Lift Skid Steer Loaders

- Model 252 and 262 skid-steers feature a linkage that provides a lift height of more than 10 feet, 8 inches and a reach of 32.5 inches at a bucket angle of 45 degrees
 - Rated capacities for the loaders are 2,250 pounds for the 252 model and 2,500 pounds for the 262 model
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- The GS-200 is a 14-inch ground stake for mounting low-voltage lighting fixtures
 - Ensures stability in high-traffic areas and is designed for use on sites with challenging soil and grade conditions
 - Features a quad blade that locks into position when placed into the ground
 - Offers extra-large wiring access with exits on either side of the stake; electrical connections can be completed before the stake is installed or after it is positioned in the ground
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Products

Textron Bob-Cat 218ES

- The zero-turn, ride-on rotary mower is powered by an 18-hp Briggs & Stratton Intek V-Twin engine
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- Includes a 9.5-gallon fuel tank
- 3-inch, anti-scalp rollers protect turf during operation
- A hinged foot plate allows easy access to deck drive belts
- Foam-padded seat tilts forward to allow linkage adjustments

and inspection of battery and fluid levels

- Manual deck lift adjusts cutting height from 1.5 to 4.5 inches
- Options include two-post rollover protection, knobby-tread rear tires and an eco-plate mulching kit
- Lever-type steer allows for increased maneuverability

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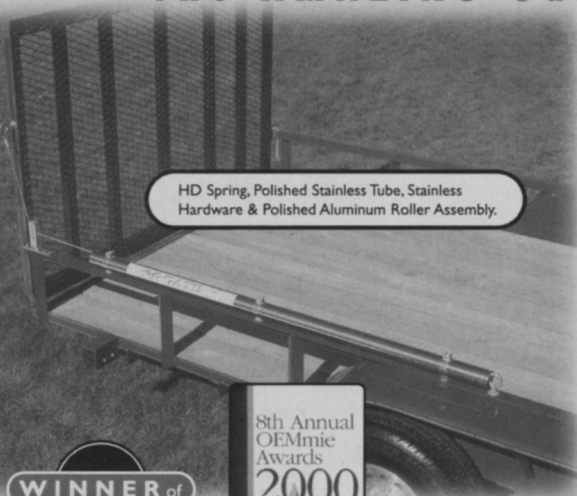
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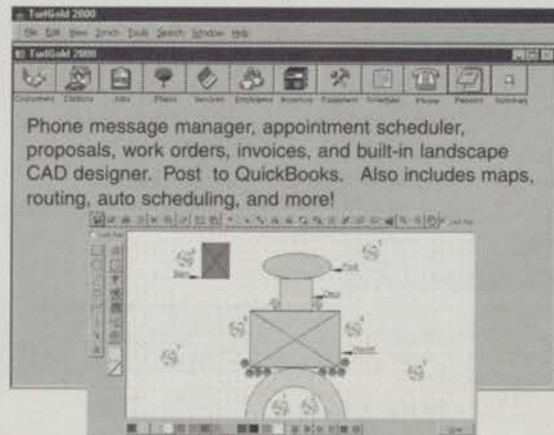
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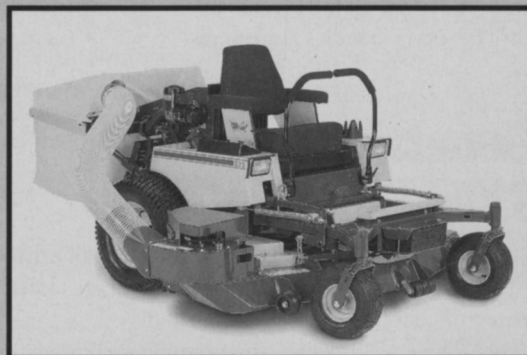
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Do you wish to receive industry related information by E-mail?

Yes No

1. What is your primary business at this location? (choose only one)

- I. CONTRACTOR or SERVICES
 - 1. Landscape Contractor (maintenance & installation)
 - 2. Chemical Lawn Care Company (excluding mowing maintenance service)
 - 3. Lawn Maintenance Contractor
 - 4. Ornamental Shrub & Tree Service
 - 5. Irrigation Contractor
 - 6. Landscape Architect
 - 7. Other Contract Services (please describe) _____

II. IN-HOUSE LAWN/CARE MAINTENANCE

- 8. In-House Maintenance including: Educational Facilities, Health Care Facilities, Government Grounds, Parks & Military Installations, Condominium Complexes, Housing Developments, Private Estates, Commercial & Industrial Parks

III. DISTRIBUTOR/MANUFACTURER

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

IV. OTHERS ALLIED TO THE FIELD:

- 13. Extension Agent (Federal, State, County, City, Regulatory Agency)
- 14. School, College, University
- 15. Trade Association, Library
- Others (please describe) _____

2. What best describes your title?

- Owner, Pres., Vice Pres., Corp. Officer
- Manager, Director, Supt., Foreman
- Agronomist, Horticulturist
- Entomologist, Plant Pathologist
- Serviceman, Technician, Crew member
- Scientist, Researcher
- Company, Library copy only
- Other (please specify) _____

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
- 9. \$2,000,000 to \$3,999,999
- 10. \$4,000,000 to \$6,999,999
- 11. \$7,000,000 or more

7. Please indicate your approximate business mix:

- 1. Residential _____ %
- 2. Commercial _____ %
- 3. Other _____ % Specify types _____

Total 100%

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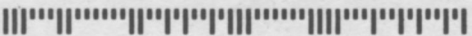
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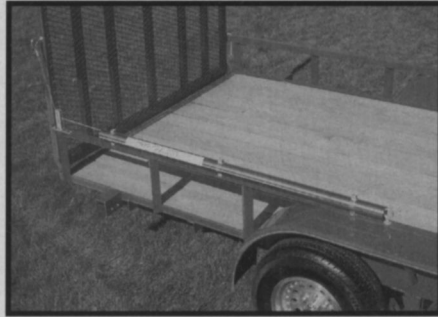
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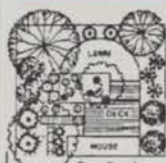
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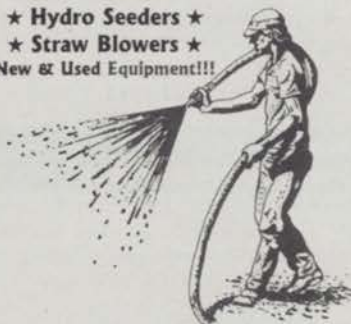
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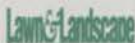
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Cover Story

(continued from page 48)

count information, schedules, notes and instructions while on the road. "You're working as if you were in the office, but your information on the clients is all there. How sweet is that?" he said, clearly excited about possibilities for improving efficiency.

This on-the-spot information pleases his high-end customers, he said, who demand rapid response. They like that Blumberg can answer their questions quickly - they can even e-mail him if they want.

STRIKING A BALANCE. Now, Blumberg is deciding what is really important. His focus is streamlining business services - profit with efficient production - and his point of concentration is workload management - less is more.

Blumberg learned that people make his company move, that trust can be risky without systems to guide accountability and that efficiency creates more time. He hopes that fine tuning the company's focus will allow him to be less critical to daily operations, "so Quality Seasons functions with the vision of Derek without Derek," he said.

Blumberg is still selling - he always will. He also oversees management, communicating with the office manager and production manager. But most of all, Blumberg is getting back to the basics.

"We lost huge in 1998, so it feels good to know we can make money like we did in 2000," he confirmed. "Our goals revolve around quality systems that produce quality lifestyles and increased profits, in that order. We want freedom. What is freedom? Time. Freedom is time, not money." ■

The author is Associate Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.

How We Do It

Employing Summer Interns at OneSource

The OneSource Landscape & Golf Services summer landscape internship program started 10 years ago to supply additional personnel during the busy season, and has proven to be a resource for both talented students and for Busch Gardens, Tampa, Fla., which is the OneSource jobsite where interns work.

To encourage students to send in their resumes, we provide program information to universities with strong horticultural curriculums. OneSource management looks for students with solid work ethics and positive, can-do attitudes. The internship often serves as a thorough screening process and audition for permanent employment. In the past, the program's top performers have been offered full-time positions upon graduation.

Our internship program offers invaluable, practical education that applies to the career goals of highly motivated and willing employees who look upon the program not simply as a job, but as experience. Because the park gets exposure to the latest horticultural knowledge and information, the basics are continually reviewed and refreshed, offering students first-hand exposure to a variety of horticultural disciplines. Busch Gardens' scope of work is fast paced and demanding, the detailing requirements are continuous and new projects are planned and scheduled in rapid-fire succession, so students know what horticulture career area they would like to pursue by summer's end.

Interns normally arrive in May or June and stay until August, although we have had participants until October. The schedule is typically 10 weeks long, but it is flexible and can be lengthened to meet a student's individual needs.

FIVE KEYS to Employing Interns

1. Provide universities with strong horticultural curriculums with your company's internship information.
2. Offer various opportunities for students with different horticultural interests.
3. Test students' creativity.
4. Choose a motivating person to run the program.
5. Keep relationships with impressive interns as a reference for future employees.

In pairs, the interns mingle with Busch Gardens' permanent staff. Some start out on the irrigation crew by installing new systems, checking zones or making repairs. Others work with the annual color crew detailing color beds or containerized materials.

Interns also have the opportunity to test their creativity by combining plant material, colors and textures in hanging baskets, pots and planters. Then, the best creations are placed on display inside the park.

Other scheduled areas interns participate in include turf or pest management, arboriculture and general landscape maintenance. The turf quality segment covers turf scouting, pesticide safety and usage, and sod installation. Arboriculture covers safe chainsaw operation, proper pruning techniques and equipment maintenance. Volunteers also can buckle up in a safety harness and get a feel for climbing. General landscape maintenance covers the basics of hand pruning, weeding, watering, raking, mulching, fertilizing and grounds detailing.

Since the park is also a large, well-respected zoo, we stress animal safety in regard to plant foraging and pesticide use. The group gets to mount a zoo feed truck and head out onto the park's 60-acre, African-themed veldt grassland for a close encounter with some of its largest animal inhabitants. To further diversify the program, students may choose to fulfill their internship requirements at the 30-acre Adventure Island water park adjacent to Busch Gardens, where OneSource also maintains landscapes.

The program costs mainly involve the managers' time to coordinate it and make it successful. Student compensation is in the \$8 to \$9 an hour range, higher than typical labor, but well worth the investment.

Karen Odden, an alumna of the internship program, ran it for the 2000-2001 season. She said the most challenging aspect of running the program was not breaking promises made to students regarding the internship. When the interns arrive we let them know exactly what to expect.

We also try to encourage the students to learn what is discussed during the internship and graduate with a good impression of OneSource and Busch Gardens. If we exceed their expectations, we will generate a positive review of the program.

Keeping up with students and getting honest feedback is important. We hold bi-weekly meetings with the students and they fill out short evaluation forms that are reviewed after each two-week rotation, so we can constantly learn how to improve the program and continue to draw in students.

We also remember to treat interns the same way a business expects its employees to treat their clients.

— Joe Parr

The author is assistant project manager at Busch Gardens, Tampa, Fla.

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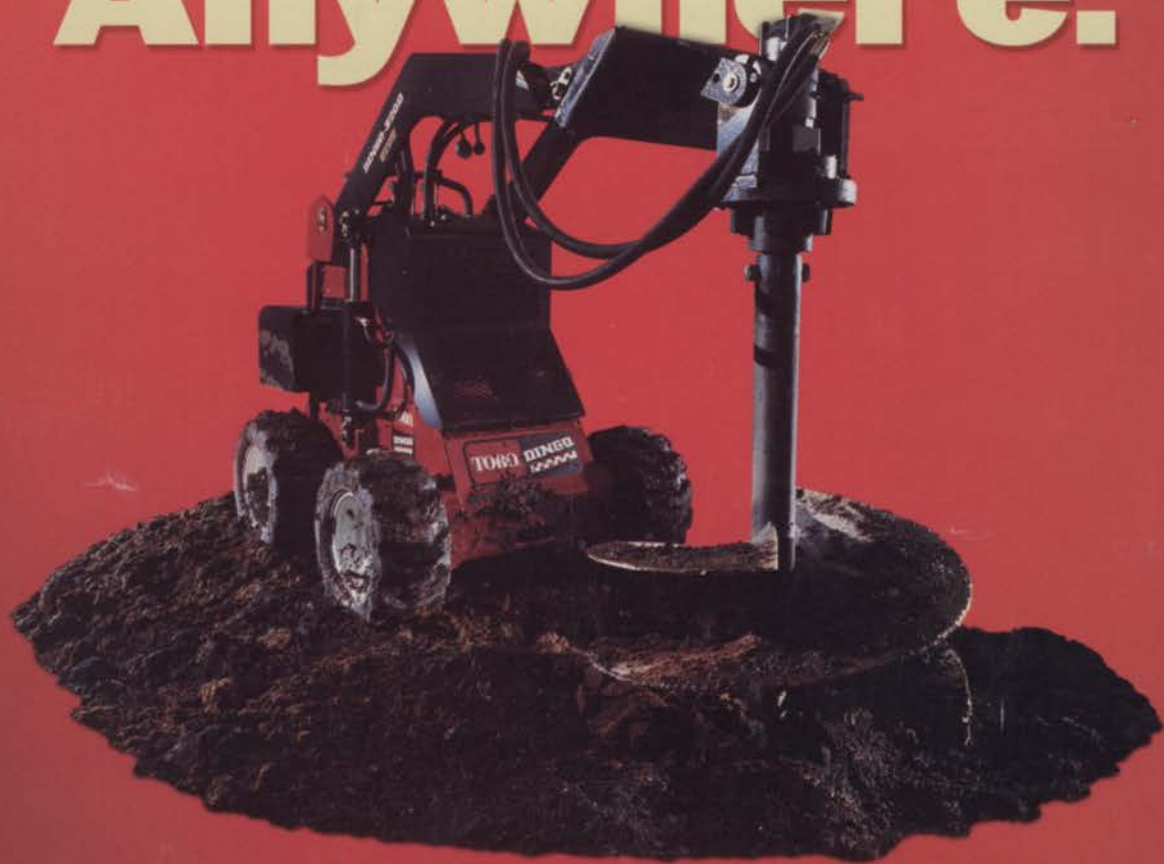
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