

November 2001

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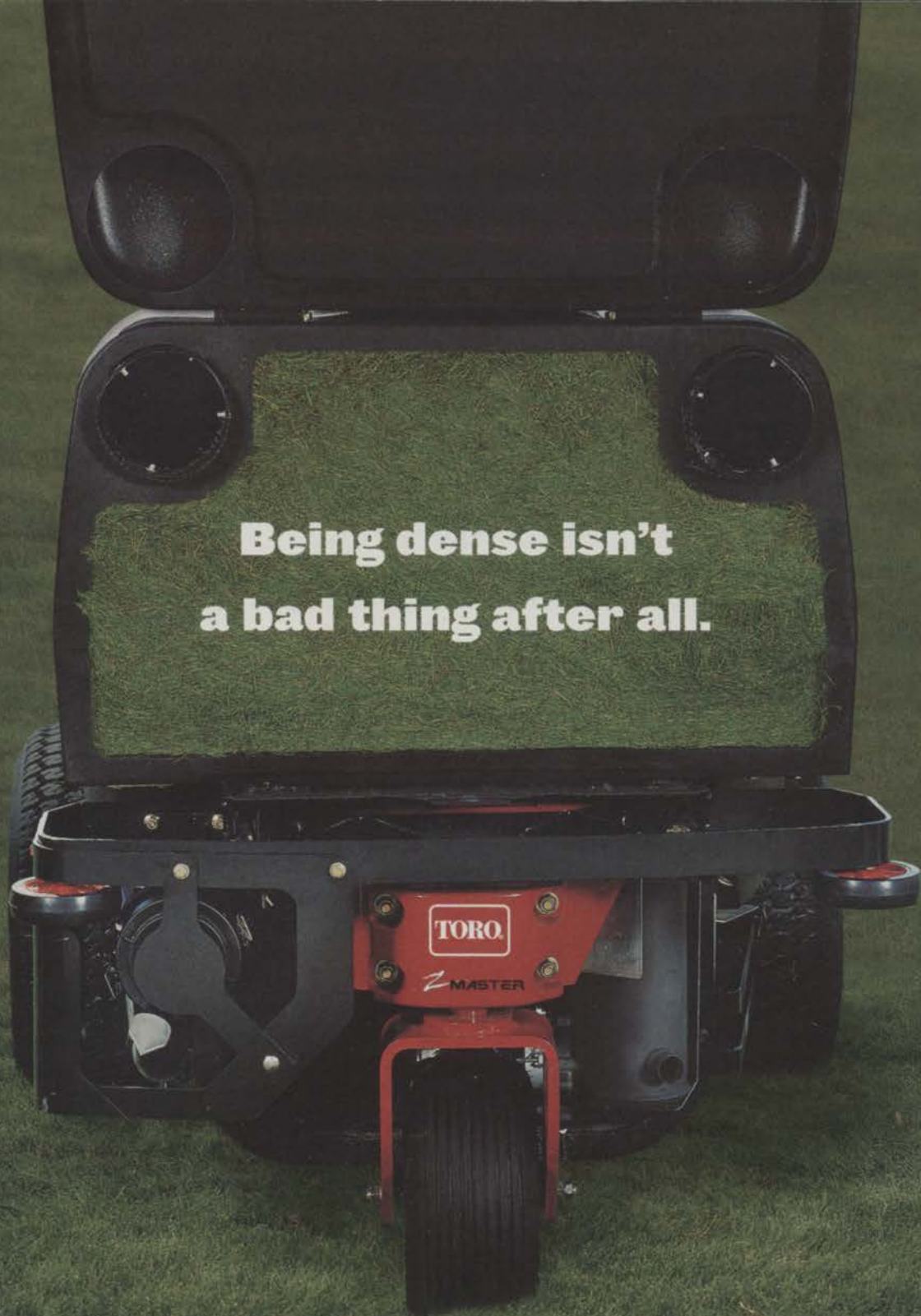
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online CONTENTS

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Daily Features

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

Mon. – *Contractor Talk*: Industry professionals discuss common practices.

Tues. – *Irrigation Issues*: Keeps visitors up-to-date on breaking irrigation news and product updates.

Wed. – *Lawn Care Roundup*: Lawn care operators and researchers share industry problems and solutions.

Thurs. – *Landscape Issues*: Contractors reveal information to bolster design, installation and maintenance skills.

Fri. – *Business Management*: Industry consultants and management firms offer business advice.

First Sunday of each month – *Plant Of The Month*: Author Barbara Ellis describes Cucurbita from the gourd family.

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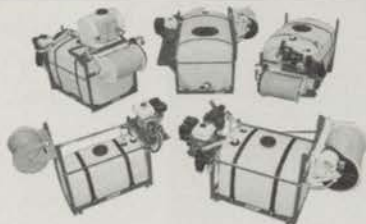


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USE READER SERVICE #10

Those %*#@!# Clients!

You can't just ask customers what they want and then try to give that to them. By the time you get it built, they'll want something new. — Steve Jobs

Rarely, if ever, does a month go by that one of our editors doesn't talk in these pages about ways to please your customers. Of course, many of you only talk about your clients when you tell us how horribly demanding, cheap and unrealistic they are, which, by the way, sounds a lot like how most equipment dealers describe landscape contractors.



But any of you who has ever thought, "Boy, I would love this business if it wasn't for the customers," should rethink that. The truth is that you are engaged in a service industry. That means you don't exist without your customers, love them or hate them. And if you're serious about your business then you should ask yourself one question each and every day: What can I do to better serve my customers?

For some reason, however, too many of you refuse to ask yourself that question, let alone actually ask your customers what they would

like you to do. So, we decided to do it for you. In fact, thanks to more than a dozen contractors across the country, we were able to survey nearly 1,000 current lawn care or landscape customers to solicit their feedback about why they hire a particular contractor, what frustrates them about their service and how they view their contractor in comparison to other professions, such as a mechanic. The results were interesting, to the say the least, but I'm not

going to give them all to you right here – check out Kristen Hampshire's article, "He Said, She Said," beginning on page 40.

After reading the article, do yourself a favor. Pick up the phone and call one of your customers, preferably one you don't have much of a relationship with, and ask them what they think about your service. Are they happy with the work you do? Are you doing what you were hired to do? Do they feel like they're getting good value for their money? Is there anything else they would like to have you do on their property? And, of course, do they know anyone else who might be interested in your services?

There's no telling what sort of feedback you'll get, which can be intimidating, but whatever you learn in those five or 10 minutes should help your business grow. Imagine the power of making just one of those phone calls every day. How many cancellations might that save you? How much work would you be able to upsell? How much longer would some of your clients stay with you?

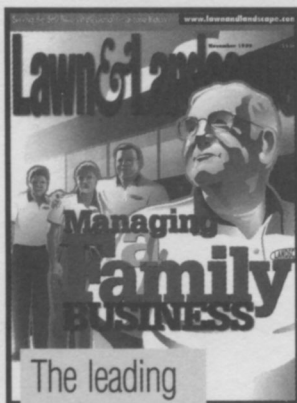
For those of you who want to get really wild and crazy, why not survey your customers to measure their satisfaction with your company? Putting together a customer survey really isn't too difficult, and we've even taken a couple of steps to make it easier for you. All you have to do is check out the new Business Forms section of *Lawn & Landscape Online* (www.lawnandlandscape.com) and use the customer surveys that have been provided by other contractors as models for a survey of your own.

Realistically, there are customers out there who will always hire a contractor to manage their landscape because they don't want to do this work themselves. But you don't have to be the contractor they hire. Why not find out why they hired you in the first place and make sure they want to keep you? **LL**

Bob West

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

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- 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
- 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
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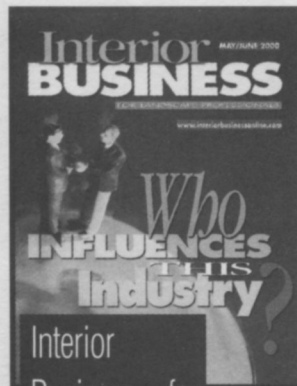
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- 4. Interior Landscape Design
- 5. In-house Interior Contractor
- 6. Grower
- 7. Other Contract Services (please describe) _____

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In Minor's League

Q I have been a design/build contractor my entire business career. I am now interested in opening a maintenance division. How should I determine the pricing for my services?

A The No. 1 factor before determining your pricing strategy is to do an evaluation of the competition. Included in this study should be an assessment of their pricing for the services you are considering offering. I would also strongly suggest that you survey potential customers or people who know the market to find out how your competitors are doing with regards to the quality of service they are providing and their level of customer service. This will help you determine whether there are opportunities for improvement in the market. For example, you may be able to provide better customer service or improved quality. Possibly you can be more efficient in the delivery of your service. You may determine that you can create a competitive advantage simply by better sales and marketing efforts.

After going through these steps, you will need to determine your selling proposition. The options are as follows: You could be the high price/high quality service provider, you could be the average price and average quality service provider or you could be the low-priced service provider with fewer bells and whistles. The ideal position most strive for is to have an average price with excellent quality and excellent customer service. The best contractors can deliver this selling proposition usually because they are more efficient in delivering the service and they understand their customer.

After you have gone through this market research and positioning evaluation of your competition, your next step would be a thorough analysis of your costs to produce this new service, including a break-even analysis. Once you have your arms around this information, apply the appropriate markup that will give you your desired profit.

For start-up or emerging businesses, pricing services at a cost similar to the leading competitor is very common albeit somewhat flawed. Using this method, determine what your competitors sell their services for, what need is not being met, how good your marketing ability is and whether you can price the service for more or need to price it slightly lower to

penetrate the market. Again, make sure your price supports profit you are comfortable with – 12 to 18 percent should be your goal.

These are some other very important components to your pricing strategy. You must absolutely, unequivocally develop a budget prior to determining your price. You simply cannot make intelligent pricing decisions without a budget. Upper management should always be involved in the pricing decisions and should keep a close watch

The No. 1 factor before
determining your pricing strategy
is to do an **evaluation of the**
competition. Included in this study
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pricing for the **services** you are
considering offering.

on the market. Once you have developed your initial pricing strategy understand it will change over time.

You also want to look for niche opportunities that allow you to sell your service at a higher price. To find those niche opportunities, survey your market and know what products or services make you the best money. You can do this through profit center accounting. Last, but certainly not least, survey your customers and understand their needs, wants and at what price points you can satisfy those needs and wants. If you do a thorough evaluation of the above, you should be able to ensure a solid profit at a competitive price. **LL**



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.

Market Trends

LAWN CARE UPDATE

Fifth N.Y. County Adopts Notification Law

ROCKLAND COUNTY, N.Y. – Industry disappointment ensued after a fifth New York county legislature voted to accept the notorious Neighbor Notification Law.

Despite warnings from the green industry regarding the law's flaws, the Rockland County legislature voted 13-3 to pass it after discussing the issue's pros and cons during a public meeting. The law, which was backed by County Executive C. Scott Vanderhoef, will go into effect Jan. 1, 2002.

"I strongly support a local neighbor notification law for Rockland County and believe it will benefit our residents by alerting them when pesticides will be applied near their homes and allowing them to take precautionary steps to avoid unnecessary contact with chemicals," Vanderhoef said.

The state pesticide notification law, which requires 48-hour written notification to neighbors within 150 feet of a planned application, was passed in August 2000 and applies only in counties

(continued on page 16)

According to a recent *Lawn & Landscape* online poll, 57 percent of landscape contractors have not finished their 2002 budgets, but claimed in October that they would finalize them shortly. Another 32 percent reported that they don't budget at all. Only 11 percent have a budget in place for the coming year.

These figures are not surprising, pointed out Jim Huston, consultant, Smith Huston, Orange, Calif. "Sadly, most contractors do not understand the budgeting and accounting process well enough to take full advantage of what is available to them," Huston stated in his book, *Estimating for Landscape & Irrigation Contractors*.

Budgeting is actually a healthy exercise in goal setting, where contractors can establish targets at which to aim throughout the business year, Huston said. "Budgets reduce the diverse aspects of the business into those symbols known as numbers," he explained. "The only difference between budgeting goals and goals written in words is that numbers can interact with each other while words cannot. More than any other tool, the numbers of your business—if properly formatted and correctly symbolized—can help you and your people run your company more effectively. However, to do so, your P&L statement, balance sheet, job costing and other reports need to be set up properly."

HAVE YOU FINISHED Your 2002 Budgeting?

ANSWER	% OF CONTRACTORS
Yes	11.36%
No, but it will be done shortly	56.81%
No, I don't budget	31.81%

Source: Lawn & Landscape Online Poll

PRODUCT ACQUISITION NEWS

MACH 2 Changes Hands

INDIANAPOLIS – Dow AgroSciences secured all rights to the MACH 2 turf insecticide through an acquisition of the remaining shares of RohMid from BASF Corp.

MACH2 (an acronym for molt-accelerating compound halofenozide), available in liquid, granular and on-fertilizer formulations, is labeled for control of white grub larvae, including Japanese beetles, northern and southern masked chafers and May/June beetles, as well as lepidopterous larvae such as cutworms, sod webworms and armyworms.

Scott Eicher, senior product marketing manager, Dow AgroSciences, explained that with the limitations placed on the use of Dursban, the acquisition of MACH 2 expands the company's insecticide business.

The product will be marketed under the MACH 2 trade name and distribution partners will be identified this month, Eicher related.

RohMid was established as a joint venture between American Cyanamid

Co. and Rohm and Haas in 1995. With the acquisition of the American Home Products crop protection business in July 2000, BASF acquired the American Cyanamid's interest in RohMid.

Dow AgroSciences acquired a 50 percent interest in RohMid with the purchase of Rohm and Haas' agricultural chemicals business last June.



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Market Trends

(continued from page 14)

that choose to adopt it. In addition, state lawmakers included a provision that the measure must be adopted "as is," barring counties from making modifications. Suffolk, Nassau, Westchester and Albany counties also have adopted the law and legal challenges from an industry coalition are pending in all four of those counties.

The debate over adoption of the neighbor notification law in Rockland County was long and involved, said Sande Leskowitz, press coordinator in the county's legislature office. "Both sides thought it was a very flawed law, but it was a first step," Leskowitz explained. "Now the county has to put everything into place."

Frank Fornario (R-17th district), said he was opposed to the notification law up until the week before the vote. "I received some vital data at a pesticide notification workshop in Westchester County that none of the problems that were anticipated had happened there," he explained. "So, I thought we should try the law to see if it's as bad as

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.

NOV. 13-15 New York State Turfgrass Association Turf and Grounds Exposition, Syracuse, N.Y. Contact: 518/783-1229.

NOV. 14-17 California Landscape Contractors Association Annual Convention, Palm Springs, Calif. Contact: 800/448-2522.

NOV. 15 Mid-America Green Industry Council recertification training seminar, Kansas City, Mo. Contact: 816/561-5323.

NOV. 16 WALP Environmental Landscape Awards Banquet, Tukwila, Wash. Contact: 800/833-2186.

NOV. 28 WALP Seminar Series - Electrical Troubleshooting, presented by the Irrigation Association, Bellevue, Wash. Contact: 800/833-2186.

NOV. 30-DEC. 1 Florida Nurserymen & Growers Association Great Southern Tree Conference, Gainesville, Fla. Contact: 800/375-3642.

DEC. 3-6 Ohio Turfgrass Conference & Show, Columbus, Ohio. Contact: 888/683-3445.

DEC. 5-7 Rocky Mountain Regional Turfgrass Association Turf Conference & Trade Show, Denver, Colo. Contact: 303/770-2220.

DEC. 11-12 Illinois Arborist Association 19th Annual Conference and Trade Show, St. Charles, Ill. Contact: 877/617-8887.

DEC. 12-13 WALP Seminar Series - Certified Landscape Irrigation Auditor presented by the Irrigation Association, Bellevue, Wash. Contact: 800/833-2186

JAN. 6-8 Western Nursery & Landscape Association Big Show - 2002, Kansas City, Mo. Contact: 816/233-1481.

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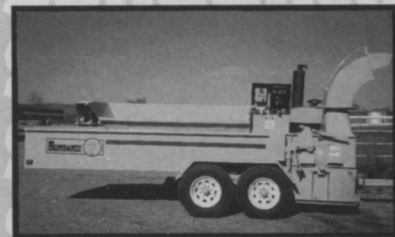
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- JAN. 7-11** Advanced Landscape Plant IPM PHC Short Course, College Park, Md. Contact: 301/405-3913.
- JAN. 9** 35th Annual New York State Professional Turf & Landscape Conference & Trade Show, White Plains, N.Y. Contact: 914/636-4195.
- JAN. 9** Maxwell Turf & Landscape Conference and Trade Show, Melville, N.Y. Contact: 631/643-8873.
- JAN. 9-11** Montana Nursery & Landscape Association Trade Show, Missoula, Mont. Contact: 406/721-7334.
- JAN. 11-12** ALCA Masters in Management for the Landscape Industry business seminar, Dallas, Texas. Contact: 703/736-9666.
- JAN. 14-16** Midwest Turf Expo, Indianapolis, Ind. Contact 765/494-8039.
- JAN. 14-17** Grow & Mow Expo, College Park, Ga. Contact: 800/687-6949.
- JAN. 16** WALP Seminar Series - Replacing Organophosphates presented by Chipco Speakers, Seattle, Wash. Contact: 800/833-2186.
- JAN. 16-18** Mid-America Horticultural Trade Show, Chicago, Ill. Contact: 847/526-2010.
- JAN. 19-21** Tennessee Nursery & Landscape Association 25th Annual Convention and Trade Show, Chattanooga, Tenn. Contact: 931/473-3951.
- JAN. 21-24** Michigan Turfgrass Conference, Lansing, Mich. Contact: 517/321-1660.
- JAN. 22-23** Missouri Landscape and Nursery Association Nuts and Bolts Employee Short Course, St. Louis and Kansas City, Mo. Contact: 816/233-1481.
- JAN. 22-24** Mid-America Green Industry Council MAGIC 2002 - The Convention, Kansas City, Mo. Contact: 816/561-5323.
- JAN. 24-26** The Gulf States Horticultural Expo, Mobile, Ala. Contact: 334/502-7777.

it's purported to be by local lawn care operators (LCOs)."

If enforcing the law is a burden for the county or for LCOs, Fornario said he would introduce a proposal to repeal the measure. "If, in fact, what the opposition groups claim is going to happen, happens, that would be grounds for me to bring a repeal."

Ken Zobrowski (D-5th district) said he realizes the financial burden this law puts on LCOs and wishes there was something he could do. "I feel [LCOs] are an important part of our commerce and industry and, had I the ability, I would certainly be willing to sponsor and support assistance to them in terms of the notification both financially and otherwise," he acknowledged, adding that Rockland County has considered passing a pesticide notification law since 1999. "But I also feel that in terms of the agents being used, that many of them are going to be outlawed in 10 to 15 years."

The idea of a voluntary registry was brought up in committee, Zobrowski noted,

(continued on page 20)

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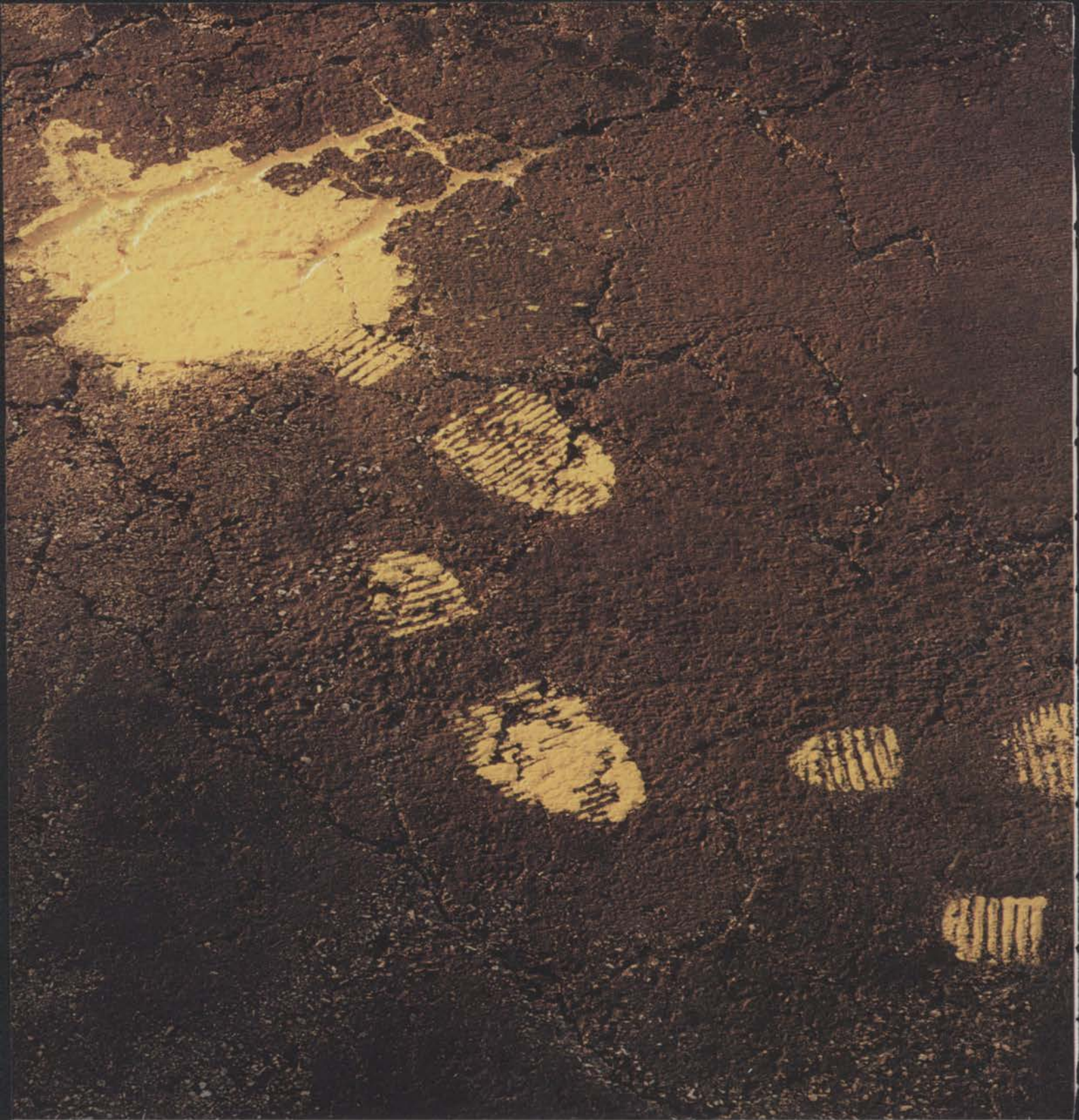
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Market Trends

(continued from page 17)

but it couldn't gain enough votes to move to the full legislature. "There was a good deal of skepticism about its (voluntary registry) effectiveness," he stated. "Therefore, the legislature chose to adopt the state's neighbor notification law because of the potential danger of pesticides to individual residents."

Larry Wilson, government affairs chairperson for the New York State Turf & Landscape Association and chairperson of the lawn care industry coalition fighting the law, admits that no strategy has been worked out yet for Rockland County. Wilson acknowledged that he's hoping that filing a notice of appeal in Rockland County will make the legislature think twice about implementing the law.

However, neither Zobrowski nor Fornario are worried about getting involved with a lawsuit over this matter. "We're sued all the time," Fornario commented. "It comes with the territory. Obviously, we don't like to see our laws challenged, but we have a battery of attorneys in case they are."

People

The Chipco Professional Products group of Aventis appointed **Marc McNulty** to the position of LCO business manager, **Travis Klosterboer** to sales representative for southern Texas and **Trey Warnock** to sales representative in western North Carolina, western Virginia and eastern Tennessee.

J.R. Simplot's Turf & Horticulture group appointed **Hiromi Yanagisawa** to vice president and general manager of the international division. Simplot's Jacklin Seed division also named **Glenn Jacklin** as location manager for Idaho and Washington.

Becker Underwood hired **Wally Boilek** as a national accounts manager. The company also promoted **John Walther** to national accounts manager and **Mike Sherman** from product manager to business development manager.

Rain Bird promoted **Ken Mills** from vice president of the commercial division to vice president of the turf division, **Janet Reilly** from director of the contractor division to vice president of the contractor division and **Karl Altergott** from plant manager to director of the commercial division.

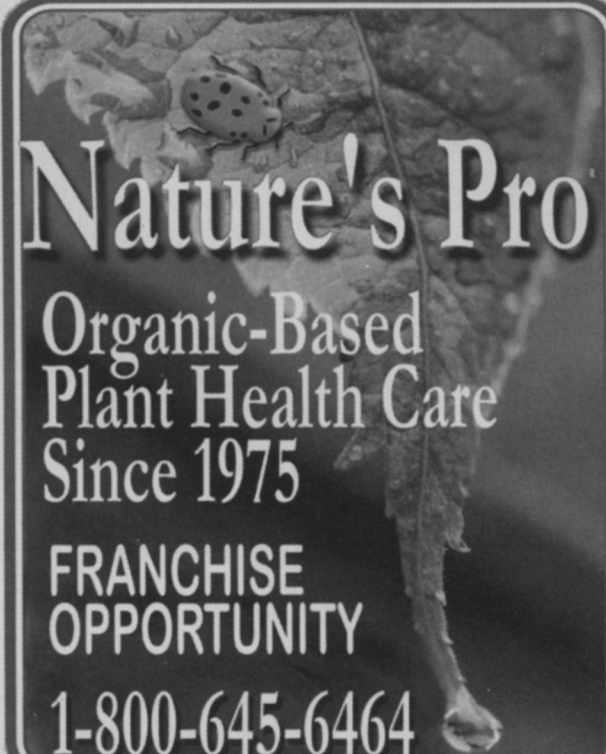
Ditch Witch Manufacturing appointed **David Woods** to chief executive officer.

Stellar Industries named **Gary Hanson** as the material handling cranes product manager.



Walther (top),
McNulty (bottom)

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Association NEWS

Grant Reid received the Bob Cannon Award for outstanding leadership in the industry during the **Associated Landscape Contractors of Colorado** Excellence in Landscape Awards presentation.

The **Outdoor Power Equipment Institute** announced its 2001 officers, directors and committee chairmanships. John Mowder is chairman, William Docherty, Jr. is vice-chairman, L. Edward Shultz is secretary/treasurer and Michael Ariens, Stephen Bly, John Jenkins, James Martinco, Kendrick Melrose, Fred Whyte, James Wier and David Zerfoss are directors.

The **Associated Landscape Contractors of America** appointed Eldon Dyk, John Allin, Christopher Raimondi and Harold Deenen to the ALCA Certification Board of Governors. Ron Kujawa will lead the Board of Governors as chairman.

Nineteen landscape and lighting contractors were honored for the best in landscaping design, maintenance and lighting at the 43rd annual Beautification Awards, presented by the **Orange County/Long Beach Chapter of the California Landscape Contractors Association**. Richard Taylor Associates of Newport Beach, Calif., earned the Sweepstakes Award and the President's Award, two of the highest local honors.

Turfgrass Producers International named its new officers and trustees. Tom Keeven is president, Stan Gardner is vice-president, Ed Zuckerman is secretary-treasurer and Brian Bouchard and Dik Murphy are trustees.

MANUFACTURER MERGERS

Bayer & Aventis Sign Acquisition Agreement

KANSAS CITY, MO. & MONTVALE, N.J. – Bayer signed an agreement to purchase Aventis CropScience, including the Aventis Environmental Science business, from Aventis and Shering AG.

Bayer's Crop Protection business and Aventis CropScience, Montvale, N.J., will group their business activities within a separate legal entity under the name Bayer CropScience, which will become the second largest global crop protection company. This new company will remain part of the Bayer Group and will be headed by Jochen Wulff, who currently heads Bayer's world-wide Crop Protection organization.

Emil E. Lansu, executive vice president, Bayer Corp., Kansas City, Mo., explained that "the formation of Bayer CropScience will create one of the leading worldwide

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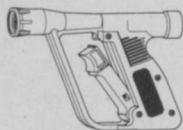


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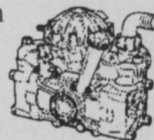
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Market Trends

crop science companies with an extensive portfolio of turf & ornamental and professional pest management products, as well as a broad range of crop protection products, a key position in the field of biotechnology and a developing presence in the seed business."

Until the merger is approved by the government, both companies will continue operating as separate entities and will remain market competitors, a Bayer press release

stated. Present business relationships Bayer and Aventis have with their customers will remain unchanged.

In November 2000, Aventis announced its intention to divest Aventis CropScience by the end of 2001 to focus on its pharmaceutical business. The company has been in negotiations with Bayer since mid-July.

The acquisition is expected to be finalized in the first quarter of 2002.

SEASONAL OUTLOOK

Old Man Winter Says: Bundle Up

LEWISTON, Maine - Landscape contractors who plow snow in the off-season will get more than they bargained for: an early and snow-filled winter, according to this year's edition of the *Farmer's Almanac*.

This extensive snowfall could begin as early as late November since El Niño or La Niña aren't around to alter the traditional winter climate. In recent years, these weather phenomena, which include warming and cooling of the Pacific Ocean, influenced high-level prevailing winds, delayed winter's arrival and minimized snowfall. That pattern changed last year, resulting in significant snowfalls through much of New England.

Peter Geiger, editor of the 185-year-old *Farmer's Almanac*, predicted the active winter will be followed by a wet summer in the Northeast, Pacific Northwest and Southeast, while the Midwest will be drier than usual.

(continued on page 24)

On the WEB

American Arborist Supplies - www.arborist.com

GreenIndustryYellowPages.com - www.greenindustryyellowpages.com

Always In Season - www.alwaysinseason.com

Bevill Landscape Management - www.bevillscapes.com

Ethan's Eden Landscaping - www.the-spa.com/ethansedenlandscaping

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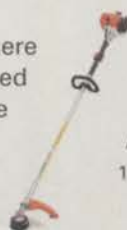
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Market Trends

(continued from page 22)

IN THE NEWS

Lesco Announces Expansion Plans

STRONGSVILLE, Ohio – A well-known green industry name prepares to dramatically expand its national presence.

Lesco, a distributor of power equipment and assorted landscape supplies, will offer independent distribution organizations the opportunity to carry proprietary Lesco products in an attempt to enter as many as 500 additional U.S. markets. Currently, Lesco serves landscape professionals through its 228 Service Centers in 38 states, as well as 78 Stores-on-Wheels that serve the golf market.

"We have the professional turf industry's most comprehensive product line, but it's not available everywhere in the U.S.," explained Bill Foley, Lesco chairman, CEO and president. "Now, we've chosen to launch an aggressive program to make our products available via independent marketers who have the infrastructure in place to market them."

Essentially, this plan is designed to create a national network of Lesco dealers, as well as add more than 100 new Service Centers beginning in the second half of 2002. Even though the company closed seven Service Centers in recent months, existing centers will not be affected by this news.

This program will strengthen Lesco's position in the industry, Foley assured. "Our desire is to extend our distribution into markets that don't have Service Centers," he pointed out. "This provides a very unique opportunity for companies to expand their business platforms."

Lesco hasn't signed any agreements for such a distribution deal yet and it is just beginning to market this concept to potential partners, but Foley said a deal that would

"provide a new business to an eight-store chain" is nearly complete. "In some situations, there are larger organizations with a broad geographic reach that may be interested," he observed. "Plus, there are also small towns where a smaller business might be the better match."

Foley, who has watched the Lesco stock fall from \$25 in 1997 to its lowest point in the last five years at \$10 a share now, said Lesco is going down this road in order to continue business growth by penetrating markets that haven't been available to it in the past. "I don't think it's any secret that the landscape industry has had a pretty tough year," Foley commented. "But we think this will expand our market penetration in a period of slowing growth." **LL**

MISSION STATEMENT

Lawn & Landscape magazine delivers superior total coverage of the continually evolving professional lawn and landscape contractor market, from in-depth business trends and technical research reports to market analysis and new product introductions. For 20 years, *Lawn & Landscape* has provided industry presidents, business owners and top-level managers the most up-to-date information needed to effectively run their businesses.

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MERGERS & ACQUISITIONS

EII Buys TruGreen Construction Work

MEMPHIS, Tenn. — When ServiceMaster, the parent company of TruGreen-ChemLawn, set out to build a landscape company via acquisitions, its executives wanted to create a business comprised of 75 percent maintenance work and 25 percent installation work. Obviously, the plan hasn't gone the way ServiceMaster hoped, and now it has a landscape company that is 100 percent maintenance after selling the construction work to Environmental Industries (EII), Calabasas, Calif.

The deal was announced by ServiceMaster in conjunction with a couple of other divestitures of commercially focused divisions. Jonathan Ward, ServiceMaster president and CEO, called these moves a "transformational event for our company" that focuses its operations almost entirely on a residential customer base going forward.

"Our future lies in the residential market," Ward explained, adding that TruGreen's landscape construction work had yet to turn a profit for the company since it was acquired. "We had hoped our integration of these businesses would work, but we've determined that it's best to exit them now because these businesses no longer fit within ServiceMaster's core competencies."

ServiceMaster will now focus on its array of residential services, including TruGreen-ChemLawn, Terminix, American Home Shield, Rescue Rooter and Merry Maids. "We believe the residential marketplace is strong," Ward noted. "The home is the foundation and often the primary investment for the homeowner. Also, we think the number of homes will grow in the next decade while there will be a move away from do-it-yourself work as people have less free time."

Now, Ward said ServiceMaster plans to focus on expanding the amount of residential maintenance work it does through existing TruGreen-ChemLawn branches. "Currently, we do residential mowing in 35 TruGreen-

ChemLawn branches, and we have the intention of growing this next year," Ward related, adding that the company did retain its commercial maintenance business because it continues to improve its profitability.

The shift toward residential goes against conventional industry wisdom that drives companies from residential to commercial work as they grow. Clearly, ServiceMaster hopes that offering mowing services will invigorate the TruGreen-ChemLawn business, which encountered consistent obstacles this year after a decade of dynamite growth. But Ward recognizes that the days of telemarketing madness and poor customer retention may have caught up with the industry's largest company.

"Clearly, we need to improve our customer acquisition efficiency," he admitted, adding that ServiceMaster brought in a new marketing team for TruGreen-ChemLawn. "Their initial perspective is that we've been buying nontargeted and nonqualified lists regardless of phone numbers and zip codes. Essentially, we've been buying every phone number and dialing for dollars."

In addition, Ward noted that the company is "also exploring residential retail channels and expects one or two joint ventures for retail distribution of our brand," although he wouldn't comment on what they may be.

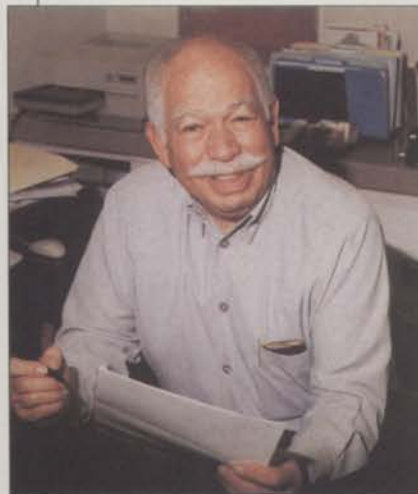
For EII, the deal provides immediate presence for its construction division, Valley Crest, in five new markets: Austin, Texas; Minneapolis, Minn.; Chicago, Ill.; Boston, Mass.; and Washington, D.C. Valley Crest also assumed responsibility for the TruGreen LandCare work, which accounted for roughly \$167 million in revenue in 2000.

"Essentially, this deal let us acquire a lot of companies," related Burt Sperber, CEO of EII, in an exclusive interview with *Lawn & Landscape*, referring to the fact that this construction work was the compilation of dozens of ServiceMaster acquisition in the late 1990s.

While Sperber declined to discuss the impact ServiceMaster had on the firms it acquired, he admitted that EII looked at many of them as acquisition targets before they were bought. "Some of these companies are just like they were when we looked at them, and some of them need some work now," he acknowledged.

ServiceMaster's challenges integrating the numerous businesses don't intimidate Sperber. "We wouldn't go into this if we didn't think it was an incredible opportunity," he emphasized. "We understand this business and have the background and knowledge necessary to integrate them into our operation in a way ServiceMaster never had."

No one would discuss the acquisition price, but Sperber is obviously pleased with what EII paid. "We're typically not interested in construction companies because they aren't very valuable with their revenue behind them, but we paid a small fraction of what ServiceMaster paid for these companies," he said. — Bob West



Burt Sperber



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SUBTRACTING STAFF

Winter Workforce

When temperatures drop, so do labor needs. Companies that take a service siesta during snow season need to cut back their staff in late fall to remain profitable.

But before contractors let go of help, they must figure out how many workers they need in the off-season and who best fills these positions, noted Richard Lehr, a Birmingham, Ala.-based lawyer and general counsel to the Professional Lawn Care Association of America.

"It's short-sighted if you lay off people at the end of the year when it's slow and then you expect to take on a growth position and you have to hire from scratch," Lehr said. "That can really scorch your plans and your year."

Before letting go of workers, employers should collect historical information, including the company's past growth rate and labor turnover, Lehr advised. After all, finding off-season jobs for competent workers can be an investment in the company's future, he said.

WHO STAYS, WHO GOES. Selecting staff to stay on during winter months can pave the company's route to growth or damage it. "You want your most productive employees – those who work safely, those who are punctual, and those who have positive attitudes," Lehr listed.

He recommended ranking employees in those areas, comparing their scores and then deciding who to keep during slow months. "Where two employees are comparable, give the benefit of the doubt to the longer-term employees," he advised.

Randy Hahn, president, Twin City Landscape/Twin Lawn, St. Louis, Mich., slims down his staff based on their skill sets. During the winter, he concentrates on equipment tune-ups and sales, so if employees excel in those areas, he will hold onto them during the off-season.

Weather also plays a role in winter employment, found David Peabody, president, Peabody Landscape Construction, Columbus, Ohio. He carries crew leaders, division managers and other salaried employees throughout the year and lays off some hourly workers at the end of the season. However, he retains some employees to manage the snowplow service and construction projects when weather allows, he said.

Either way, he tries to let employees know in advance if he will not need their help, and often, he does not have to

approach his staff about layoffs – they come to him, he noted. "Some say they are going to school in the winter or that they don't want to work out in the cold elements," he said.

Still, warning workers of layoff and using clear language is key, Lehr stressed. "Be careful with your terminology," he warned. "If you use the term layoff, that implies recall. My recommendation is not to use 'layoff' with employees that you are not going to call back. Either terminate them or let them know that the layoff is without recall if you do not expect to hire them again in the spring."

NICE COMEBACKS. Employers don't want their valuable seasonal workers to forget about the company during hibernation months. Those who trim their workforce in the winter need to keep in touch with employees, Lehr said.

He suggested offering return employees an incremental bonus, which pays out when they return to work and again during the season. Finding the employees temporary off-season tasks and involving them in the company culture while they are gone also maintains a company connection, he said. "If employees don't stay in touch, over time they will drift off and do other things," Lehr added.

Hahn usually lures back all of his employees, he said, adding that they look forward to company functions such as the Christmas party, New Years' party and soup cooking contest, which is a staff favorite.

Another way to keep employees in the company loop is to let them know they have a place in its future, Peabody added. He discusses promotions, career possibilities and the business' direction for the coming year with workers so they can see where they fit in the larger scheme.

"Winter is a good time to let people know what the focus and vision is for the future and what it has for them, and then get them involved in it," he pointed out. "We're talking to people now about positions available next year, and we want to make sure they are potentially interested."

On the other hand, this off-season period is also a time to lose touch with employees that didn't live up to expectations, Lehr added. He calls it "weeding the garden." "Layoffs are an opportunity to fix hiring mistakes," he noted. "Unless you don't think you can find someone better, don't keep a hiring mistake."

Weeding out also means deciding who to keep, Lehr added. Incentives and communication about opportunities will convey the employees' importance to the business' growth. Sometimes, it's worth finding a niche to keep valuable workers on board, Lehr noted.

"You don't want to end up with what I call 'The Cream of the Crap,'" Lehr pointed out. "If you're really pleased with an employee but you don't have winter work for them, why not make some incentive for that to occur?" **ll**

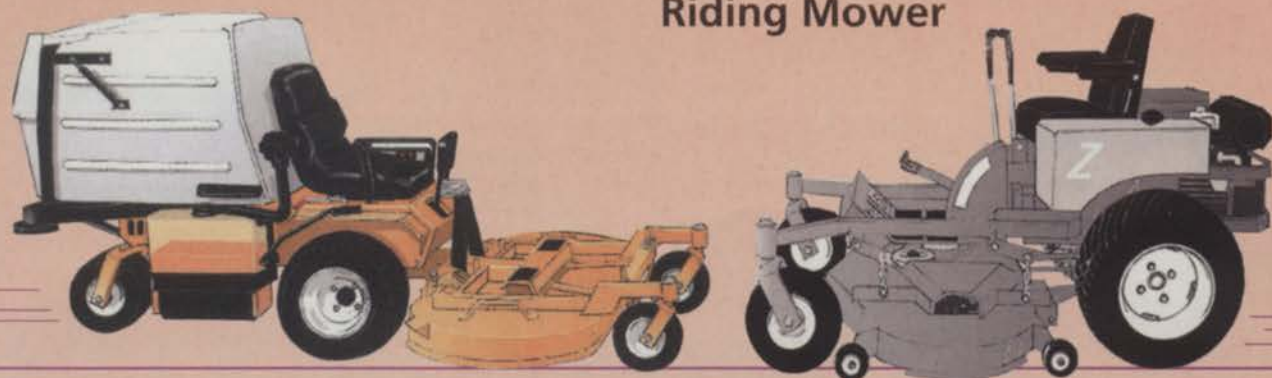
– Kristen Hampshire

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

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Nursery Market Report

COOL-SEASON ANNUALS

Flowering Cabbage and Kale

In search of options for year-round color, landscape contractors in cool climates face the dilemma of finding appropriate plants for flower beds and borders in autumn and winter. One

increasingly popular option is ornamental cabbage or kale.

Both are classified as *Brassica oleracea* – the same as edible cabbages, broccoli and cauliflower – but these ornamentals are better for coloring the landscape than for eating. These plants are grown for their colorful leaves, and while ornamental cabbages resemble edible cabbages, kales tend to have unfolded and fancy, or cut, leaves.

Here is the latest on purchasing, planting and caring for these ornamentals from Virginia Cooperative Extension.

FLOWERING CULTIVARS. Ornamental cabbage and kale flowers consist of the plant's central leaves. These leaves lose chlorophyll two to four weeks after several days of night temperatures below 50F to reveal the coloration, which ranges from white to pink to red.

Flowering cabbage and kale are divided into groups based on the shape of the leaf. Cultivars with smooth leaf margins constitute the flowering cabbage group while those with divided leaf margins are considered flowering kale.

PURCHASING PLANTS. Ornamental cabbages and kales are sold in several sizes, primarily in cell packs or in pots from 4 to 10 inches. As with any other plant, the larger the pot, the more it costs. However, this is one instance where paying more for a larger plant usually pays off for both the contractor and the client.

When ornamental cabbage or kale becomes root-bound in the pot, it won't grow even after it is planted into the landscape or a larger pot. Since the goal of planting ornamental cabbages and kales in the landscape is to have a solid mass or border of color, paying less for small plants requires planting more plants at a greater cost to fill the client's bed.

A high quality plant will have a very short or rosette-type stem, leaves of even length, no apparent damage and a large



Ornamental cabbage and kale are known for the bold, autumn color they provide in landscape beds and borders. Ranging from white to red to pink, they prefer to be planted in late August or September. Credit: Virginia Cooperative Extension

plant size. Ideally, the plants selected for late planting are nearly or fully colored. And remember that plants will generally not increase noticeably in size after planting in the landscape, particularly if the roots are pot-bound.

PLANTING. Ornamental cabbage and kale tend to prefer cool weather and should be planted in the fall. There are two main planting times – late August through September, and after garden mums have finished flowering or have been frosted out, which usually occurs in mid- to late October.

Late-season plantings have several advantages over earlier plantings. For starters, the colors for which these plants are noted don't appear until after several frosts or prolonged cool weather. Plus, planting too early – during the dog days of August – can result in a plant that stretches, becomes leggy and relatively colorless. Planting before frosts also means contending with cabbage loopers, but after frosts, plants are relatively pest-free.

Whatever the timing, cabbage or kale can be planted singly or in groups. They grow to about 1 foot wide and about 15 inches tall, so plants should be set at least 12 to 14 inches apart. Meanwhile, keep the soil moist for the best results, especially during long and dry Indian summers.

A general-purpose fertilizer, such as granular 10-10-10 or water soluble 20-20-20, is recommended. When planting, work in a root stimulator and starter fertilizer. Then fertilize once every three weeks. As lower leaves fade, remove them.

Though these plants are not tasty to humans, insects such as cabbage worms, cabbage loopers and aphids find them appetizing. Try BT, a bacteria that infects the insect but is not harmful to people or animals. Insecticidal soap can also be applied regularly at seven to 10-day intervals. **LI**

The column editor, Ali Cybulski, is a Contributing Editor to *Lawn & Landscape* magazine.

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USE READER SERVICE #105

MOUND-BUILDING INSECTS

Fire Ant Facts

Four economically important species of fire ants are found in the United States. They are: native fire ant, red imported fire ant, black imported fire ant and southern fire ant.

The red imported fire ant, the most important species, is a native of Brazil but was introduced into Alabama between 1933 and 1945. This pest now inhabits the area south of a line running from mid-North Carolina across to the Dallas-Ft. Worth, Texas area and down to Corpus Christi. The black imported fire ant is a native of Argentina and Uruguay, and was imported into the Mobile, Ala., area as early as 1918. This ant is still localized in the area where Mississippi and Alabama join. The native fire ant was originally located across the

southern states but has generally been displaced by the red imported fire ant. The southern fire ant is a native to Arkansas, Oklahoma and Texas.

DIAGNOSIS. Fire ants do not attack turf but cause problems when they build earthen mounds to warm eggs, larvae and pupae. They have a notorious sting that may cause a burning and itching sensation at minimum and serious welts or allergic shock at its maximum. Unsuspecting people, pets and cattle may be severely injured when the mounds are accidentally disturbed.

Depending on the species and locality, fire ants may be yellow to reddish brown to black in color. An expert should be consulted if species determination is necessary.

LIFE CYCLE & HABITS. Established colonies produce new queens and winged males during warm spring and summer months. These winged reproductives swarm periodically, usually five to nine times a year, often after a rain. Mated queens attempt to establish a new colony by digging a small hole in the soil and closing up the entrance. Inside this chamber, the queen lays 15 to 20 eggs in two to three days. More eggs are added over the next week by which time the first eggs hatch. The queen picks up the young larvae and sorts them into groups. The larvae are fed a liquid regurgitated by the queen.

After 20 to 25 days, the larvae pupate and tiny workers emerge four to seven days later. These first workers are about $\frac{1}{5}$ the size of the smallest workers found in an older colony. These workers break open the nesting chamber and begin foraging for insect food and start to enlarge the nest. The queen, now fed by workers, begins to lay more eggs, which are cared for by the workers. If food and water are adequate, the colony steadily grows over the next few months. If a colony is

established in June, it may contain 6,000 to 7,000 individuals by the following December.

As the soil temperature drops, the colony growth slows. By the following June, a one-year-old colony may have 10,000 to 15,000 workers and can be producing new winged forms. Colonies 2- to 3-years-old may have 20,000 to 200,000 workers. Established mounds will have a central pile of granular soil with openings and often-smaller mounds around the perimeter.

Fire ant colonies may move the mounds in search of food, when regularly disturbed by mowing or when pesticides are applied. **II**



The rounded, cone-shaped mounds of red imported fire ants (below) may be up to 2 feet in diameter and 1- to 8-inches tall.

Photos: Destructive Turf Insects



Red imported fire ant workers (above) inhabit many southern U.S. states.

Insect I.D. features excerpts from *Destructive Turf Insects* by Harry Niemczyk and David Shetlar.

For more information on the book, call 800/456-0707.

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In Print

First impressions go beyond handshakes and hellos. A slick sales packet with photographs, references and a run-down on the company history and its service options makes a mark with potential clients. Whether it's an elaborate tri-fold portfolio or a simple brochure, company literature puts information in customers' hands. "Most of us don't trust our memories, and if we have something to refer back to, we feel like we're standing firmer in our business dealings," reasoned Don Hoffman, president, Lifestyle Landscaping, North Ridgeville, Ohio.

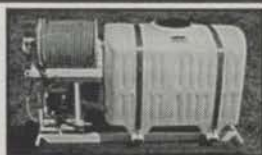
PICTURE PERFECT. If a picture truly is worth a thousand words, companies that pack their brochures with photographs and visuals will tell a sales-worthy story. Tom Brannigan, president, Home & Garden, Matteson, Ill., limits photographs to high-profile and long-term accounts, which he gears to specific commercial clients. "We're not going to put a picture of an office building if we are trying to attain retail accounts," he said.

Contractors should also double-check that all equipment in photographs belongs to the company and all accounts are active, noted Boyd Romero, sales and marketing director, Bratt, Pleasant Grove, Utah. In addition,



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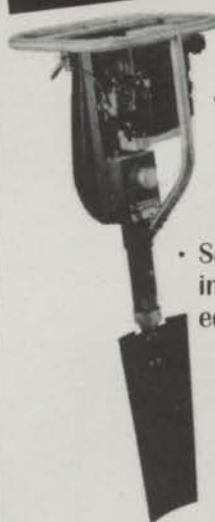
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USE READER SERVICE #400

November 2001

VOLUME 2, ISSUE 4

SB10 On Alert

Frank Dedon approaches snow removal like an emergency service.

SB14 Pass The Salt Please

Depleted inventories and increased demand will make salt hard to come by this year for some snow and ice removal professionals.

SB18 Pricing Basics

Pricing snow plowing services for maximum profits.

SB24 Gearing Up For Snow

Strategies for wintertime preparation.

SB30 Weather The Storm

Using weather knowledge to increase efficiency.

SB34 Products

The latest offerings in snow and ice removal products.

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE...

SB4 SIMA Says

SB6 SIMA News

SB38 Ad Index



*Frank Dedon,
Abraxus Snow
Removal
Cleveland, Ohio*

Continued Success

Wonderful things are happening. My snow business is exploding, SIMA membership is exceeding 850, plans are finalized for the Symposium in St. Louis next June and SIMA's new governance policy is just about in place.

It's been a privilege to be an influential part of this association's growth. Next summer, I'll leave my position with SIMA and concentrate on my own business endeavors. However, I'll leave secure in the knowledge that intelligent and dedicated individuals are guiding the association.

People often say, "You get out of an association what you put in." I don't think the statement is entirely true. I've found I've received way more from my affiliation with SIMA than I could have ever put into it. I have developed wonderful friendships with an untold number of people. I have established relationships with vendors and other plowing contractors that have benefited me greatly. I am also astounded by the birth of a movement or professionalism within our ranks. Professionalism has become the focus of hundreds of individuals that have seen fit to grow their businesses over the years. For literally thousands, the business of snow has become just that — a business, as well as a profit center.

Some have told me I've had some influence on this process. While I've come to realize this may be true, I prefer to think SIMA has just awakened long felt ideals within individuals who already had the basic building blocks in place. It would be ludicrous for anyone to think SIMA will not continue. This movement shall continue even without my day-to-day presence. And this is how it should be.

The future for SIMA is very bright. Membership continues to grow, which solidifies the belief that SIMA has a lot to offer. I am gratified to witness people in this industry freely sharing their experiences and business acumen with others, without prejudice. The new governance policy is such that ongoing benefits to members (instead of just growing membership) are now the focus of those leading and guiding the association.

To that end, we recently graduated our first class of Certified Snow Professionals. Their enthusiasm for this program is a joy to witness, and

we are already filling up the room for the next exam in November. This, and other programs being planned, shall allow our membership to achieve the level of professionalism and recognition we all deserve. This alone convinces me that SIMA is, and will continue to be, a success. **SB**



John Allin,
Board President, SIMA

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USE READER SERVICE #401

Sima Certifies First CSPs

SIMA introduced the Certified Snow Professional Program in June, as a program to foster a professional and positive industry image and create a way for serious snow professionals to demonstrate their professionalism. The program involves a written test, and those who pass the test earn the Certified Snow Professional designation. SIMA administered the test for the first time on Aug. 25, 2001. The following members passed all six sections of the exam and are now Certified Snow Professionals:

- Peggy Allin, Allin Companies, Erie, Pa.
- Rodney Anderson, Snow Services, Inc., Severna Park, Md.
- Doug Freer, Lawn Lad, Inc., Cleveland Heights, Ohio
- Chris James, Chris James Landscaping, Midland Park, N.J.
- Rick Lenth, Tovar's Snowplowing, Elgin, Ill.
- Dave Sipple, Chris James Landscaping, Midland Park, N.J.
- Jeff Tovar, Tovar's Snowplowing, Elgin, Ill.

Your next opportunities to take the exam are Nov. 11, 2001, at the Green Industry Expo, Tampa, Fla., and on June 6, 2002, at the fifth annual Snow & Ice Symposium, St. Louis, Mo.



Chris James, Chris James Landscaping, Inc., Midland Park, N.J., and six other individuals became Certified Snow Professionals.

Member-Get-A-Member Campaign

SIMA's annual Member-Get-A-Member campaign began June 1, 2001. As of early October, SIMA members have successfully recruited 30 new members. A number of manufacturers have donated prizes for the campaign, including the grand prize of an Avalanche Snowplow donated by Ledex Industries.

The campaign will run until May 31, 2002, with winners being announced at the general membership meeting on Thursday, June 6, 2002, St. Louis, Mo.

Fifth Snow Symposium Announced

SIMA will host the fifth annual Snow & Ice Symposium, June 6-8, 2002, St. Louis, Mo. This three-day event is fast becoming the premier meeting for serious snow and ice professionals. The educational session topics include time and money management, antiicing and deicing, risk management, dispatching, sales and marketing, and much more. Networking, education and equipment all await your attendance at the show. Door prizes include a Pro-Tech Sno Pusher.

In addition to the educational sessions, many top manufacturers and suppliers will be exhibiting on the trade show floor, both inside and outside.

The fifth annual Snow & Ice Symposium will make its way to St. Louis, June 6-8, 2002. Pictured here is the city's famous Gateway Arch.



Take this opportunity to talk with them about their products and services.

John Hill, Jr., MPT Inc., talking about last year's Symposium, said, "I wanted to thank you and your staff for organizing one of the best conferences and trade shows we have ever attended."

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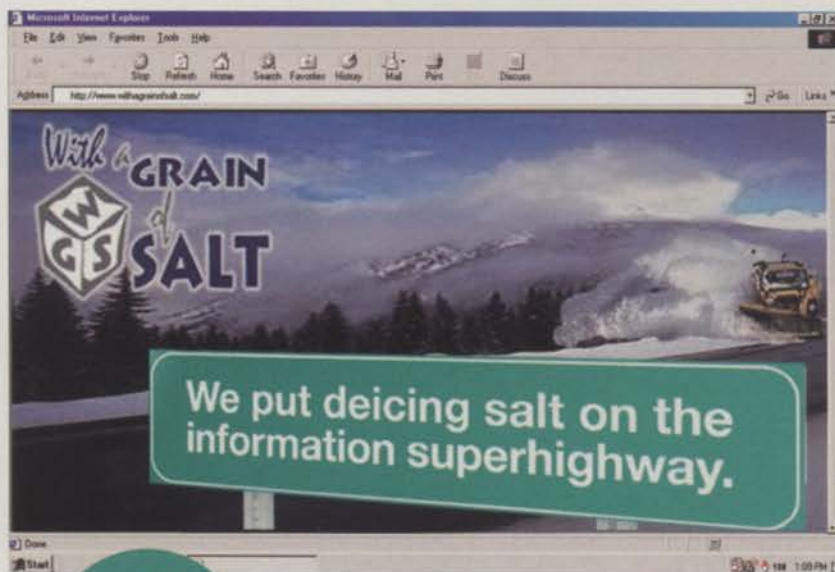
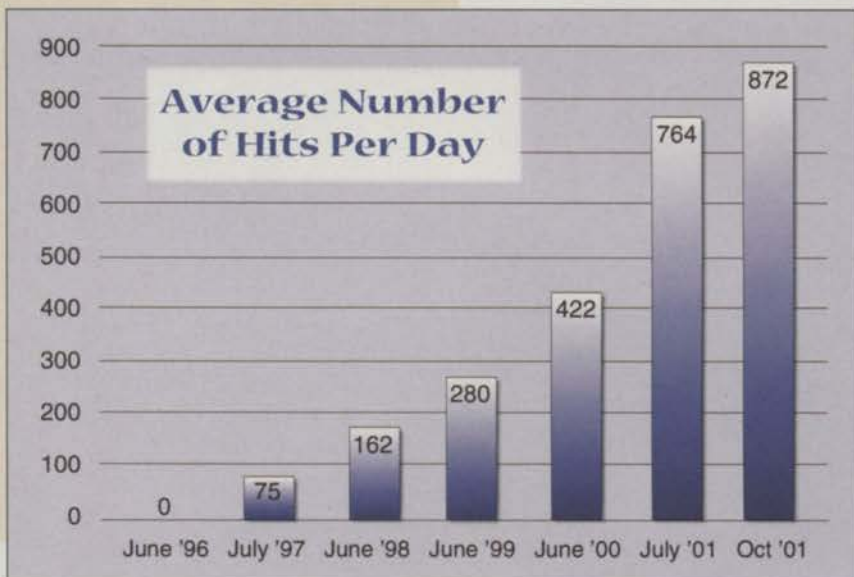
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SIMA Web Site Growing

Have you visited SIMA's Web site lately? The members' only forum is a great place to talk with your fellow members. Exchange ideas, ask questions, post a classified ad or simply say hello. The forum is a great way for our members to communicate with one another.

If you haven't visited the SIMA members' only forum, simply go to www.sima.org, log in as a member and click on "forum." Once in the forum, you will need to register and agree to abide by the forum rules by clicking on "register" and filling out a short form choosing a username and password. **SB**

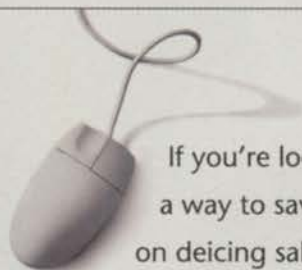
As depicted in the chart below, traffic on www.sima.org has steadily grown since June 1996.



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COVER STORY

BY STEVE SMITH



Frank Dedon, owner, Abraxus Snow Removal, Cleveland, Ohio, and the salt storage dome he built. The dome is due to be completed in early November.

Photo: Steve Cutri

On Alert

Frank Dedon approaches snow removal like an emergency service.

Frank Dedon is proud to be a snow removal professional and he wants the rest of us to be proud too. "Snow removal should be looked at as an emergency service. We provide an emergency service under harsh, emergency conditions," he said. "You ask a man to get up in the middle of the night to go out under the most hazardous conditions you could possibly imagine. There are nights when you are the first one out with the state trucks, when your life is in your hands, but nobody looks at it that way."

Dedon has good reason to be proud. Throughout 30 years, he built Abraxus Snow Removal, a Cleveland-based company focused solely on snow and ice removal for a who's who of customers including Kaiser Permanente Hospital, Union Carbide, BF Goodrich, Eveready Battery, Honeywell and Ford Motor. Abraxus earned nearly \$1.5 million in revenue in 2000 and plans on 15 percent growth this season.

The growth will be careful, however, because Dedon is picky about whom his company serves. "I'm very selective about who I work for and who works for me," Dedon said. He won't take on a new client unless it is prepared to permit Abraxus to make the decisions regarding snow and ice removal. He also won't accept a job unless Abraxus will receive fair compensation, a problem Dedon said hurts the snow and ice removal industry. "Stop accepting the job because you think you are going to make money. Start basing your prices on what it actually takes to do the job," Dedon said.

For example, Dedon recently bid for the snow removal at a major hospital. Dedon passed on the job and later learned the proposals ranged from \$23,000 to \$75,000. With that kind of disparity, Dedon said, someone isn't doing their homework. "We need to stop this nonsense of everybody trying to undercut the other person, because you end up leaving more money on the table," Dedon said.

SMART GROWTH. So what does Dedon look for when deciding when and where to grow? A lot. First, he considers the client's corporate personality. Is the facility large enough to need and afford Abraxus' top-of-the-line service? "When people do not want to appropriately address the issue of snow removal, then I have to walk away because I am not here to see people injured." That means a client allows Dedon to decide when and where to begin snow services. "If you limit us in what we need to do, we will give you a 10-day cancellation notice. If you limit us, you are shifting the liability to us," Dedon added.

Second, a potential new client has to fit logistically. "If a potential new industrial complex comes about that is one suburb away and I can then turn around and do some smaller accounts in the area, knowing that I have enough equipment on hand from the big commercial account, then I will do it," Dedon said.

And finally, Dedon carefully considers the site conditions, answering a range of questions, which include: Is it in the snow belt? (Some Cleveland suburbs are notorious for lake-effect snowfalls.) Where and how deep are the potential drifting areas? Are the docks deep, will they be buried with snow? Are there any steep inclines that need a lot of salt? What is my time window to remove snow? For example, a strip mall that includes a bar or bowling alley as one of its tenants may require late night/early morning snow removal. Or, a factory with three shifts may only have an hour of downtime in which

snow can be removed from parking lots. What are the traffic patterns? How much and what kind of equipment did the previous contractor use? How much salt did the previous contractor use? What equipment and material do I think I need, and where is that equipment going to come from?

WELL CONNECTED. Dedon can afford to be selective with his clientele because he worked tirelessly to develop strong relationships within Cleveland's corporate circles. He makes it a point to develop a strong rapport with plant engineers, operations managers and facilities superintendents, the personnel typically responsible for hiring snow services at large. The key, Dedon said, is being honest and to the point. "I talk to them straight and my word is my bond."

Ultimately, Dedon said, establishing a trusting relationship with large-scale commercial clients comes down to performance. "They know I am going to get this job done for them at any cost, without them having to listen to any of the problems I encounter," Dedon said. "When a plant engineer is driving into work and the roads are terrible, and then he pulls into his facility and the parking lots and walkways are down to bare pavement, that builds a pretty strong bond," Dedon said. In fact, Dedon credits much of his growth to facilities managers, who leave their employer, move on to a new one, and then seek out Abraxus for snow services.

THE MAGIC SHOW. Clearing clients' pavement, while surrounding roads remain snowbound, goes a long way to develop lasting clients relationships because, as Dedon put it, it's like pulling off a magic show. When word of an approaching storm comes — during winter Dedon constantly monitors his subscription weather forecasting service and The Weather Channel — Dedon and his six-person office staff alert the security personnel or plant engineers at each of the company's 126 clients, informing them of the impending activity. Dedon prints out weather reports and radar pictures for a client's vicinity every 15 minutes so he can document the snow and ice threat

VITAL STATISTICS...

ABRAXUS SNOW REMOVAL

OWNER: Frank Dedon

LOCATION: Cleveland, Ohio

FOUNDED: 1970

2000 SNOW REVENUES: \$1.47 million

2000 GROWTH: 12 percent

2001 PROJECTED GROWTH: 15 percent

NUMBER OF CUSTOMERS: 126

CUSTOMER MIX: 95 percent commercial/industrial clients, 5 percent government/municipal clients

EMPLOYEES: 6

SUBCONTRACTORS: 210

AVERAGE WINTER: 40 to 50 snow events, 55 to 100 inches

SNOW SETUP: 200 snow plows, 150 pickup trucks, 70 dump trucks, 30 snow throwers, 18 tailgate spreaders, 12 hopper spreaders, 10 skid steers, 10 loaders, four ATVs with plows, three box plows

to the client when invoicing. Once he has contacted the clients, Dedon calls his 20 foremen and dispatches them to their areas of supervision, which are strategically located throughout Abraxus' 100-mile service radius. Once alerted, the foremen, who Dedon said, "make very good money and know how to get the job done," take over and call up the subcontractors they need.

Abraxus has more than 210 subcontractors at its disposal, including roofers, cement contractors, general building contractors, dump truck operators and landscapers. Dedon has long-standing relationships with Cleveland's building industry, because it's the industry in which he got his start. While attending college, Dedon started a home remodeling business. "I was one stop short of building homes and I had 28 tradesmen who did work for me." Dedon also had a plow truck and pushed snow in the winter off season. However, in 1978, with double-digit interest rates and the housing market at

bare-bones lows, the home repair market collapsed. Then something magical happened, at least for a kid with a snowplow. Cleveland was hit by one of the worst blizzards on record and anyone with a plow made lots of money. "That's when I knew I found a business (snow removal) that was recession-proof," Dedon recalled.

Through connections formed as a young entrepreneur, Dedon now has a large stable of subcontractors, many of whom have been working with him for nearly two decades. The secret? Money, of course, Dedon said. "I pay them faster than anyone and I pay them better than anyone. I pay the best because I expect the best." Dedon is able to finance and bankroll his estimated winter payroll before the first snow ever starts and he offers subcontractors a variety of payment options from biweekly to lump-sum payments. "Some guys want it all at the same time at the end of the season, so they take home \$40,000 or \$50,000 checks at one time," Dedon said.

Dedon also asks subcontractors to sign three-to-five-year non-compete clauses. "All I ask is they not compete with me in the places that they have worked for me. I'm not saying that they can't go out on their own in other accounts. But, a lot of subs try to go out on their own and find out they make more money with me," Dedon said.

Increased pay also comes with increased responsibility, and Dedon does not tolerate anything but the highest level of professionalism and reliability from subcontractors. "If they give us any nonsense we say, 'Here's your check, we'll give you a call when we need you,' and they're gone," Dedon said.

Once Dedon's foremen arrive on scene during a snow storm, they run the show over their area of responsibility and Dedon stays in the office to help coordinate the operation and handle customer service. Foremen and subcontractors communicate via small radios and Dedon contacts the foremen with long-distance radios, coordinating snow re-

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removal like a general during combat. "The delegation of responsibility is what I do. I manage the snow business to make it profitable for our subcontractors," Dedon said. The most important part of delegation is trusting the foremen and the decisions they make. "They know I will not question how they do things, unless something is radically wrong or unless the client calls with a complaint. Everybody has their own style, and I allow them to do the job their way."

For large customers, the equipment needed to complete the job is housed onsite and stays onsite throughout a storm. To serve other smaller accounts, equipment is designated to certain zones and circles through all the accounts in that zone. Abraxus keeps 10 percent of the fleet of equipment (15 to 30 vehicles) on standby during a storm in case other equipment breaks down.

"The secret of snow removal is availability — availability of equipment, materials and personnel. You have to have the right

piece of equipment for the job," Dedon said. For matching equipment to the account, Dedon uses the initial site survey he conducts when first deciding to bid on a job.

Dedon and his office staff meticulously document all Abraxus activities before, during and after a storm. Every piece of correspondence is recorded and categorized in a computer database, such as when a customer call is received or delivered, when trucks arrive onsite, each time a foreman radios into the office and so on. "It's a way of making sure that liability doesn't fall on us," Dedon said. It's also a way of reminding clients of the activities Abraxus took on the client's behalf and what activities composed the client's bill. "I've gone into meetings with a 100-page report to show the client precisely why I did what I did and who authorized it," Dedon said.

SALT DOME. Dedon is proud of his professional approach to snow and ice manage-

ment and he believes in the industry. So much so that in early November he completed construction of a 15,000-square-foot headquarters and a \$1.3-million salt storage dome capable of housing roughly 6,000 tons of dry, bulk deicing salt. The dome is the only privately held dome from Cleveland east to the Atlantic seaboard. Abraxus uses about 5,000 tons of bulk deicing salt a year and the remainder, plus resupply, will be sold to other private contractors, corporations and hospitals through a separate corporation, called Abraxus Salt.

Though he'll be supplying competitors, Dedon said he won't go after their work. "Once you are an established customer of Abraxus Salt, I will not bid against you. After 30 years, there is no one in this business that can say that my word is not my bond," Dedon said. **SB**

The author is managing editor, Snow Business magazine.

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BY STEVE SMITH

This year's winter season may leave a salty taste in the mouth of many snow and ice removal contractors, who are struggling to find access to deicing rock salt. Increased orders from state winter maintenance agencies combined with already depleted inventories from last year's harsh winter has salt mines working overtime to produce enough salt. Whether or not they can meet the demand remains to be seen. The outcome could have a major impact on private snow removal contractors, who tend to be one of the last customers to receive deicing salt when supplies tighten.

"It's the first year in as many years as I can remember that we have a shortage of salt out there. The demand far exceeds the supply," said Mike Betts, president, With A Grain of Salt, Leo, Ind., an online salt distribution company that specializes in supplying private contractors.

Last year's winter left many state agencies scrambling for salt at the end of last season, said Andy Briscoe, director public policy, Salt Institute, Alexandria, Va. For example, Massachusetts, Illinois and Iowa declared "states of emergency" last year after running out of deicing salt. Iowa, in particular, used 131 percent more than its contracted amount of salt and, toward the end of the season, was stuck paying \$60 per ton.

Fearful of a repeat, many state agencies have increased their salt orders this year. Combine this with an already depleted inventory among U.S. salt producers and it's easy to see why salt is scarce.

"So you have a combination of not being able to get enough salt back in the market because all the stockpiles were depleted and then, on top of that, panic created by these states that increase their orders," Betts said. "Those two things together are just wreaking havoc."

Full production capacity of deicing salt in the U.S. is about 20 million tons, which comes from 15 to 20 different production

*Depleted inventories
and increased demand
will make salt hard to
come by this year for
some snow and ice
removal professionals.*

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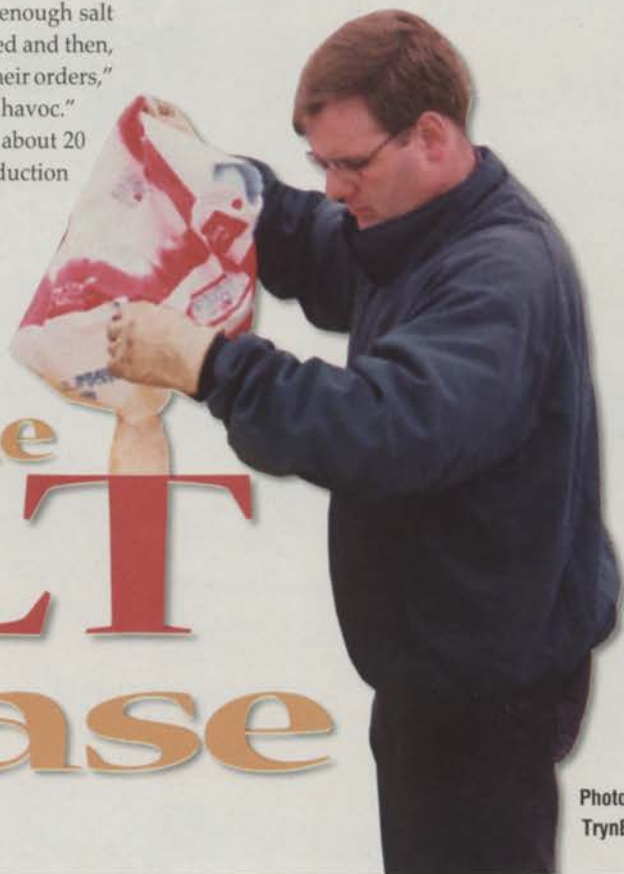


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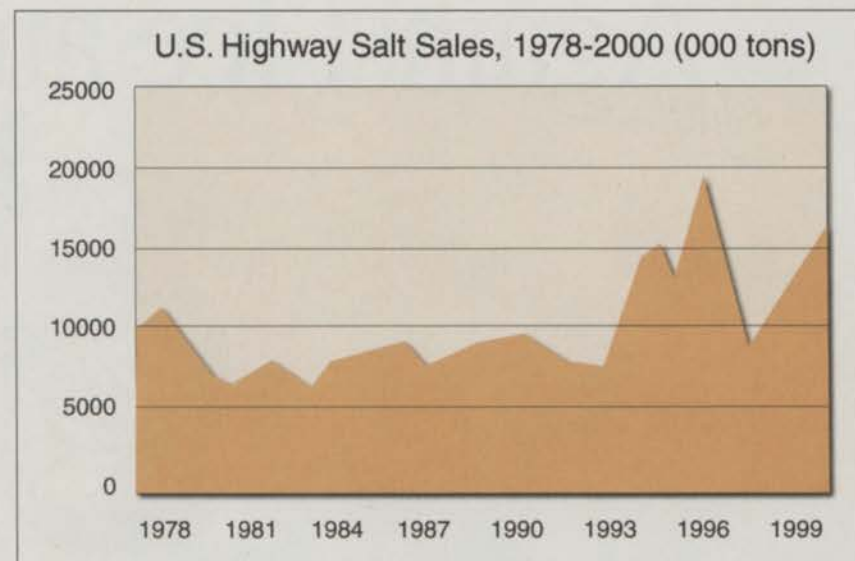
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facilities throughout the nation, Briscoe said. Salt producers have already delivered 10.1 million tons of de-icing salt in the first half of 2001, setting demand on a record pace and calling into question whether or not salt producers can keep up. "We're working seven days a week, 24 hours a day and have been for quite some time. It's just a matter of how big is the demand going to be? Whether we meet that or exceed that is yet to be determined," Briscoe said.

To date, the highest de-icing salt demand on record came was in 1996 when 20.1 million tons were delivered. The severity of this coming winter will likely determine whether or not 2001/2002 will exceed the demand seen five years ago.

PRICING. Like any commodity, short salt supply and increased demand pushes prices up. Marc Skaggs, owner, Skaggs Lawn Care and Snow Removal, Martinsville, Ind., said



he received one quote for salt at \$20 more per ton than last year. And he's none too happy. "If they want to play this salt shortage game then I will just go to straight liquid and forget the salt totally." After searching,

Skaggs was able to secure an order at \$44 per ton. Another contractor in the Chicago area said his price went from \$28 per ton last year to quotes of \$45 per ton this year.

(continued on page 38)



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BY JOHN ALLIN

Pricing BASICS

Pricing snow plowing services for maximum profits.

Setting prices can be one of the most important business decisions a snow and ice professional makes, as ultimately it is a factor in determining the profitability of your company, and therefore, its success or failure. Experience in talking with successful plowing contractors from throughout the United States and Canada indicates gross profit margins for snow removal in excess of 60 percent are normal, and gross profit margins for ice control services in excess of 70 percent are achievable. Those contractors that view snow removal as a profit center regularly state that snow is the most profitable part of their business. From contractors who project five snow events per season in a great winter, to those who project 35 snow events in a mild winter, all report gross profits at, or in excess of, those reported above. Snow plowing is profitable if priced and managed properly.

Too many contractors and customers use pricing as the motivating factor in selecting a snowplowing and ice control contractor. However, pricing snow removal services must be dealt with in a manner that is consistent with our profit goals and the needs of our customers.

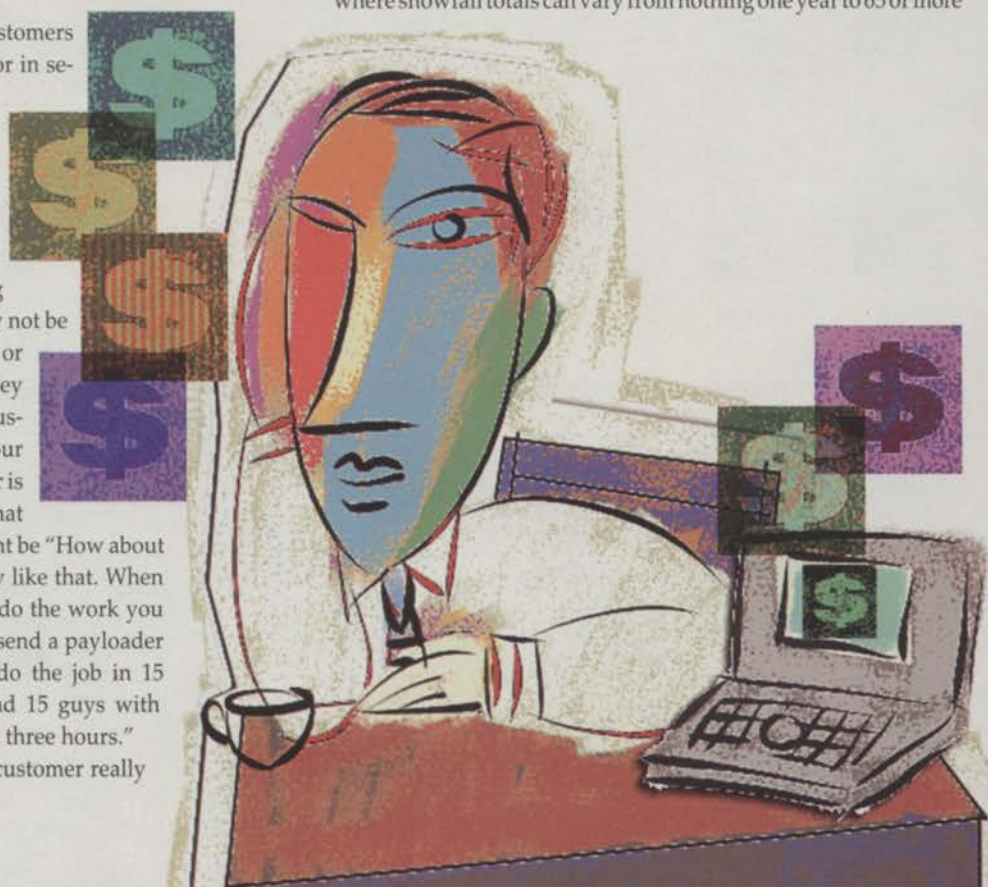
Customers who call requesting hourly rates for snow removal may not be asking the question the right way or do not realize what information they seek. For example, if a potential customer calls requesting — What is your hourly rate? — one possible answer is \$125 per hour. When they state that this seems like a lot, one reply might be “How about \$15 per hour?” They will probably like that. When you are then asked how you will do the work you might reply, “At \$125 an hour I’ll send a payload with a 14-foot scoop blade and do the job in 15 minutes. At \$15 per hour I’ll send 15 guys with shovels and they will do the job in three hours.”

Ask yourself, “What does the customer really

want to know?” They want to know how much it takes to clear their particular lot. The customer wants to know a price to do their plowing, not necessarily what the hourly rate is for your equipment. And, what difference should it make to the customer as long as the job is done right and the price is fair? Part of the pricing question is to properly ascertain what the customer seeks.

PRICING STYLES. There are several basic ways to price snowplowing service, which are per push, per hour/per truck, per season or per inch of accumulation. Most small- to medium-sized accounts will fall within the first three methods, however a review of all methods will allow for an adequate comparison.

Plowing on a per-inch basis is usually, but not always, reserved for very large accounts that are in areas of the country where snowfall totals can vary from nothing one year to 65 or more





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inches the next. Universities, airports and extremely large sites are prime examples of where per-inch contracts are normally used — if the work is subcontracted to an independent plowing concern.

Quoting such accounts requires a tremendous amount of knowledge on a variety of issues. These include accurate production times for all pieces of equipment and manpower that might be utilized, first hand knowledge of the type of snowfalls that might occur at the site, probable moisture content of the accumulated snowfalls that might occur, and prevailing wind direction of the probable snow event.

Pricing snow removal on a per-inch basis requires considerable expertise and knowledge of the intricacies of performance. The customers who usually request such pricing normally have snow removal budgets in excess of \$250,000, and often figure on spending several million dollars on snow and ice management in a given

winter season. This is normally not for the inexperienced plowing contractor with only a few pieces of equipment. These types of customers often require liquidated damages if the required equipment is not available during any given snow event. If you do not know your business inside and out, this type of pricing can put you out of business fast.

For contractors in most markets, who anticipate snow revenue less than \$1 million from snow plowing and related services in a given winter season, pricing structures normally fall in the per-push, per-hour / per-truck or per-season categories. A mixture of these three types is good as the contractor can take advantage of the best of all worlds and limit the downside of a mild winter.

If a contractor can project what revenue he or she needs to survive a mild winter (and you should know all these numbers if you are doing your cost ac-

counting properly), then securing enough per-season work allows the responsible contractor to guarantee cash flow in winter. This allows the contractor to recover overhead costs associated with the reduced work-load that winters normally bring.

Per-season pricing contracts are usually tied into other services, such as landscape maintenance, parking lot sweeping or a complete grounds maintenance service agreement. This allows for a year-round contract that is all inclusive of the summer and winter maintenance services. If you know the average number of times you plow in a given season, you can project how many times you need to bring out the equipment during the winter season.

Taking on this type of work for only one season can be disastrous, however. Someone almost always loses with a one-year contract. With a three-year contract, both the contractor and the customer can assume that the law of averages will make



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it all come out even in the end. In those years when there is little snowfall, the contractor knows how much income will be derived through the monthly payments made by the customer. In those years when there are above average snowfall totals, the contractor might lose money on this particular account. However, if the other types of pricing snow services are also used (on other accounts) then the shortfall is generally made up due to the dramatically increased revenue generated by per-push and per-hour/per-truck pricing strategies.

Per-push plowing contracts should be the most profitable. Pricing plowing sites on a per-push basis requires considerable expertise as you must know what your equipment (or subcontractors) production capabilities are in order to properly project revenue that will be generated on a particular site. Four-to-one and five-to-one ratios are common when figuring what to expect a site to produce in revenue as

compared to costs. And, an experienced snow removal contractor can project accurate per-push costs on sites as large as 150 acres of paved surface.

Pricing projects per-push also allows customers to know exactly what to expect to pay when it snows. It should be noted that all responsible contractors have a clause in their per-push contracts that allow for additional charges in the event that the snow accumulation exceeds a certain amount.

Additionally, if the contractor has to plow a particular site three or four times during the snow event, then he also generates revenue for each visit to the site. In these cases, it is recommended that the contract with the customer allows the contractor to make the decision as to when to plow.

There should also be a clause that advises customers that plowing and/or salting may not reduce the lot to bare pavement. Such language should express that

snow or ice accumulations are naturally occurring events that the contractor should not be held responsible for.

Pricing per-hour/per-truck is the easiest way to avoid learning about snow plowing as a business. Such methods of pricing allow the guy next door to get into the plowing business. Little, if any, expertise is required. Errors in judgment are the fault of the customer and not the contractor. Anybody can get into the plowing business by pricing in this fashion. The margins are generally much, much lower as contractors have a tendency to price to compete with the other guy who is pricing by the hour.

Growth patterns are accelerated (although at decidedly lower profit margins that can be obtained by alternative pricing methods) because there isn't the need to visit every site that is quoted prior to adding it to your customer list. There also needs to be a tremendous element of trust

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between the customer and the contractor who prices all of his work by the hour.

Most contractors are honest and fair, however, some unscrupulous contractors can add ghosts to a jobsite in order to increase revenue. This is because the unsuspecting customer is not usually at the site at 3 a.m. These contractors always get caught eventually, which makes it that much harder for the honest contractor to generate a trusting relationship with clients and damages the industry's image.

A lot of national accounts require per-truck/per-hour pricing because it is easier for bidding purposes and, in those cases, it is often easier to take the account than to attempt to reeducate the customer.

If all a plowing contractor's business is priced per-push or per-hour/per-truck and there is a mild winter, revenues drop below anticipated levels and cash flow problems can become prevalent. Adding a mix of per-season customers can avoid such pitfalls.

There are other, less common methods of pricing snowplowing, including use of a non-refundable retainer or minimum billing method. This method secures revenue prior to the start of the winter season. Customers are then billed against retainer for services rendered.

Using a retainer is an efficient way of projecting cash flow. If the retainer is exceeded because of above average snowfalls, the customer is invoiced for the additional services rendered at an agreed upon rate.

THE PROFIT MINDSET. No matter what pricing method (or combination of methods) you select for your company, be aware that snowplowing is a viable profit center no matter how little or how much snow your geographic area receives.

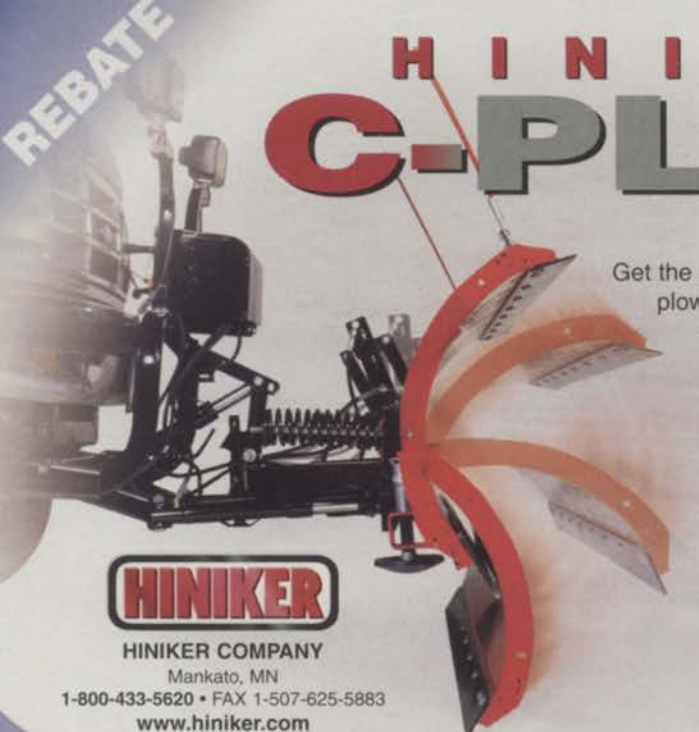
Making a profit at snow, and related snow services, is a mind set. As long as it is thought of as a profit center, like landscape installation, landscape maintenance,



Large-scale commercial clients may demand different pricing structures than smaller clients. Photo credit: Chris James Landscaping.

chemical lawn care, excavation or power sweeping, money can be made from snow and ice management services. **SB**

The author is board president of the Snow & Ice Management Association and owner of Allin Companies, Erie, Pa.



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BY STEVE SMITH

Gearing Up For SNOW

Strategies for wintertime preparation.

In fall, while most of the nation is carving pumpkins and lounging away Saturdays and Sundays by watching football, snow professionals tend to get antsy. They know that winter is coming and soon roads, parking lots and walkways will be white and slippery. The time is not far off when a normal night's sleep will be a thing of the past.

Steve Hausrath, vice president, Hausrath's Landscape Maintenance, Inc., Buffalo, N.Y., starts his snow season preparation in late July and early August by finalizing client contracts, preparing equipment and training the more than 80 employees and subcontractors on his snow-fighting staff.

Of particular importance, Hausrath said, is refreshing crews' familiarity with the company's roster of commercial snow removal clients. In September, Hausrath hosts training meetings to review snow response plans and conducts on-site inspections. "We take them around to all the jobsites to refresh their minds and so they can see the parking lot before it is completely white.

"Taking (staff) around saves a lot of aggravation and a lot of curb repairs," he added. During fall walk-a-rounds, Hausrath and the company's snow crews stake parking lots with wooden stakes to serve as guides when the snow falls and covers curbs and structural details.

PRIMED AND READY. When winter arrives, snow contractors can't afford to be caught off guard. "Because snow removal is so time sensitive, it's critical to be ready at all times," said Patrick Iwan, general manager, Kieger Enterprises, Inc., Hugo, Minn., a disaster response firm and general contractor that does snow and ice removal work.

An often-overlooked aspect of preparation, Iwan said, is knowing when to finalize snow contracts and refusing to accept new work. "We never overbook. In fact, we only route 75 percent of our crews and equipment. This allows us to handle large snowfalls and account for equipment breakdowns," Iwan added.

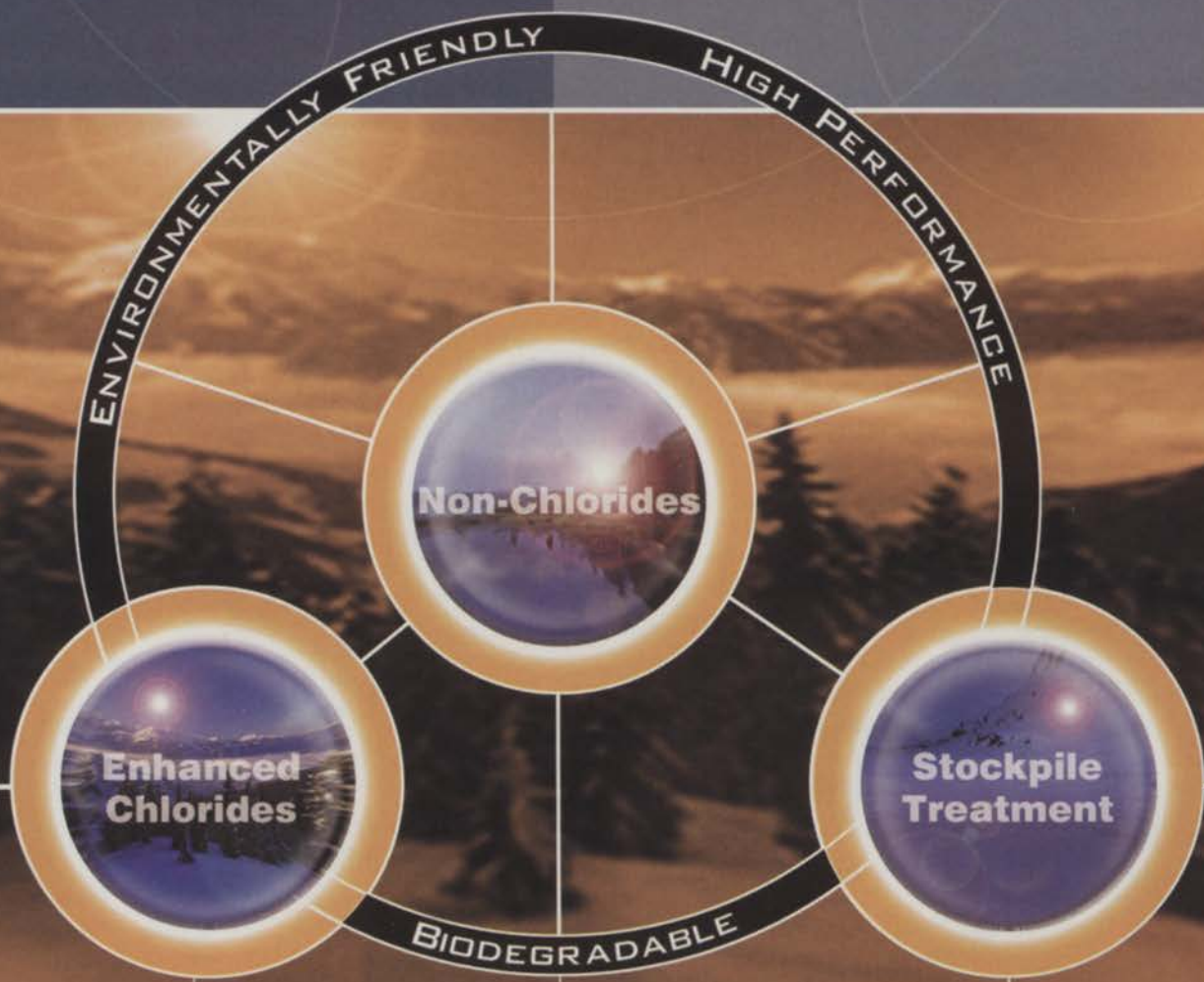
Having adequate equipment is also vital. When the mercury drops to bone-chilling temperatures, machinery may not operate as it should (or even start up for that matter). Therefore, it is important to make sure every piece of equipment is up and running every day. "We can't afford to have equipment that is not reliable," Iwan said. "Every day our crews get dispatched, so do our mechanics. This way, we know our equipment is ready



Contractors should make sure equipment is ready before the first snow of the season.

before the storm arrives."

Being prepared also means having the appropriate inventory of antiicing and deicing materials (see *Salt Shortage*, p. 14). Last year Kieger, used more than 15,000 tons of bulk deicing salt and



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SNOW PREPARATION

more than 400 tons of sidewalk ice melter. Anticipating the volume of deicing material you'll need and ordering early is crucial so you won't be left short of material in the middle of heavy snow season.

Equally important is making sure you're prepared by having the appropriate staff and technology to handle customer communications.

"If there's no one to answer the phone when our customers call, no matter what time it is, then we're sending them the wrong message," Iwan said. "Like any service business, we have to provide excellent services in a timely manner. When the snow is falling at 2 a.m., we need to be accessible."

Being open 24 hours a day is one way Kieger remains accessible to its clients. "Although voice mail is growing in popularity and is a common business communication tool, it does not fit our business," Iwan said. "If our customers call, no mat-

ter what hour, they will speak with someone in our office. We are staffed around the clock - no pre-recorded messages. We've found this gives our customers peace-of-mind, knowing we are always there, no matter the weather."

GREEN LIGHT...GO! Nick DiBenedetto, president, ND Landscaping, Topsfield, Mass., ensures each employee at his company is prepared for winter services through the use of systems and checklists. Each snowplowing employee is responsible for attaining "Green Light Readiness," by complying with a checklist from Nov. 15 through April 1. Being at "Green Light Readiness" ensures that each snow employee is armed with the proper equipment and materials to perform snow work and that the equipment is working appropriately. The checklist includes:

- inspect plow
- carry spare plow belt

- carry a long handle ice scraper and a snow brush
- carry shovels to perform hand sanding and snow removal
- carry a tarp for crawling under trucks
- keep jumper cables in trucks
- carry first aid kit
- perform preventive maintenance on trucks (this includes checking lights, keeping all trucks filled with fuel, checking fluids and carrying extra oil, automatic transmission fluid and radiator fluid.)
- clean out, inspect, grease and check fluids on sanders and snow blowers

Green Light Readiness also includes checklists for stocking equipment used during a storm and trouble-shooting techniques for when machines aren't working properly. Additionally, DiBenedetto specifies bullet points to review when hooking up a plow for the upcoming snow season, and they include:

- inspect pump fluid level

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SNOW BUSINESS

- inspect belts for cracks
- inspect plow frame bolts
- check plow lights
- inspect plow for broken parts (cutting edge, springs, pines, A-frame, chains, dirt in couplings, chaffed hoses)
- align the center of the hood with center of plow frame
- pull up slowly
- get out and check alignment, put pins in center hole, hook up chains and hoses
- inspect for leaking couplings
- check to see if lifts and angles properly

"We get as specific as possible," DiBenedetto explained. "This includes telling people to bring spare clothes because the odds are that at some point they will have to get under the truck to fix something and they don't want to be soaking wet when they plow. And we even tell them the specific clothes they should bring." Clothing requirements include extra pairs of long underwear, short and

long-sleeve tee-shirts, a turtleneck, extra pair of pants, a sweatshirt and a form of face protection. In the truck, employees are also expected to keep a gym bag with two hats, two pairs of gloves, two pairs of boots, a thermos of hot fluids, snacks and a flashlight.

FALL TRAINING. Baseball teams train in spring. Snow contractors train in fall. At Chris James Landscaping (CJL), Midland Park, N.J., the company conducts six to eight weeks of snow removal training during October and November. The training covers subjects such as snow blower safety, walkway ice control, wintertime driving, etc.

In November, the snow team participates in on-site meetings at each account, during which snow response plans are reviewed, the area is staked, and dos and don'ts are reviewed while walking around the account's location. When the first storm



Checking tires for wear and proper inflation is one of many items that need attention in preparing for winter.

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SNOW PREPARATION

of winter hits, no matter its depth or severity, Chris James, owner, CJL, dispatches all his crews and subcontractors. "It's not very cost effective, but it gets everybody back in the winter groove and it also allows us to get all the equipment out there and make sure it's working."

Each and every storm, the company preps all equipment (checks belts, hoses, proper operation, fluid levels, etc.) and reviews snowplowing tips and basics. A few of James' key preparation tips include:

- Make sure each truck has first aid kits, jumper cables, fire extinguishers, two flairs, flashlight and snow and ice brushes for cleaning windows.
- Fill up on fuel before the storm, before 11 p.m. and before you go home for the night.
- Do not let the fuel level in loaders and trucks get below ¼ tank.
- Use dry gas in trucks and kerosene or antigel for diesel to prevent freezing.

- Keep salter filled with gas
- Check tires, fluids and tire chains when you fill fuel.
- Get as much sleep as possible before a storm.
- Bring extra clothes, food and water with you.
- Read through snow response plans and snow removal deicing pages, so you know what to do ahead of time.
- Make sure you have raincoats on hand for staying dry.

WINTER DRIVING. Fall preparation is also an opportune time to review winter driving safety. James reviews the following bullet points with employees during fall preparation:

- Stay focused, aware and alert
- Drive under control
- Don't assume other drivers will be in control
- Use your seat belt

- Know where cars and fixed objects are and remember this is always changing
- Know what's behind you before you back up

CONCLUSION. Snow removal service is one of the most profitable segments of many contractors' businesses. And for those professionals whose businesses are 100 percent dedicated to snow, winter is especially crucial. As a result, putting in the time to properly prepare for winter operations should be a top priority for the fall. You don't want broken down equipment or ill-prepared crews cutting into your lucrative snow work and the resulting healthy profits. **SB**

The author is managing editor of Snow Business. He can be reached via e-mail at: ssmith@gie.net. Nicole Wisniewski, managing editor, Lawn & Landscape magazine also contributed to this feature article.

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BY RONALD SZNAIDER

Using weather knowledge to increase efficiency and cut costs.

I remember a kid in my neighborhood who couldn't get enough of the snow. At the first sign of a flake he was out shoveling the driveway. He'd then let the snow fall for another hour or so and go out again, valiantly trying to clear the drive. Invariably, he would shovel more than four or five times before the storm ended.

Well, you can guess what the neighbor kid grew up to be — a snow removal contractor. And, if you're reading this, I'm sure that by now you've started managing snow removal in a more efficient manner.

WEATHER ANALYSIS. One way contractors can boost efficiency and reduce expenses — equipment maintenance, wages, insurance, fuel and supplies to name a few — is by using weather information. Accurate weather information, interpreted correctly, can help contractors make smart decisions about how to deploy their resources. Once contractors take a more scientific approach to when to send out crews and how much supply to use, they are surprised at their ability to build in more margin at the bottom line.

If there's one thing certain about winter storms, it's that no two are alike. Variables in ice, wind and the water content of snow all make planning how to handle and staff a storm difficult. But with the right tools, contractors have an opportunity to prepare a strategic response.

For starters, detailed weather analysis can be a great device to use to determine when to start the snow removal process, schedule drivers and decide how much salt to put on the trucks. Following are some examples of how detailed knowledge of current and future weather conditions can help you make smart decisions and help your company save money.

1. If you know in advance that a snow storm is coming, you can certainly put your drivers on alert that they will be called. But if you know your clients

Weather The Storm

are probably only going to get a dusting and that the storm will be followed by sunny skies, you can make the informed decision not to call in all your drivers and only send out salt crews to handle key building and parking lot entrances.

2. Watch for signs that indicate the wind will increase. If you're sending out crews at midnight and you know the wind is going to kick up at 3 a.m., you want to defer your crews a few hours so that your drivers don't have to go over the work they've already completed due to drifting.

Pay attention to the direction of the wind speed and direct your drivers appropriately. If the wind is from the northwest, you might consider piling the snow at the southeast side of your clients' parking lot so that any blow-off goes away from the lot, saving time, effort, manpower and fuel.

3. Pay attention to the temperature trends. If the majority of the day will be at or above 20 F, then salt will be a very efficient tool to control ice throughout your clients' parking lots and walkways. However, salt loses its effectiveness as temperatures drop below 15 F. Temperatures below this mark might necessitate the use of an alternative deicer.

Will it be cloudy? If so, the asphalt surface temperatures could be anywhere from 10 to 20 F cooler than on a sunny day, adding to your equation about whether or not salt will be effective. The combination of air temperature and cloud cover monitoring and forecasts can help you make an informed decision about when and what type of deicer product to use.

4. Pay attention to water content and the ratio between snow and water. The average ratio is 10 inches of snow to 1 inch of water. But fine, fluffy snow can have a ratio in the neighborhood of 30 inches of snow to 1 inch of water, and heavy, sticky snow can be as low as 5 inches of snow to 1 inch of water. These ratios are temperature dependent. Watching temperature and understanding what type of snow to expect will help you plan for how much time it will take your drivers to cleanly

plow your clients' properties, as light, fluffy snow will lead to more passes—especially if there is a good amount of wind.

5. In addition to snow measurement forecasts, tune into ice information forecasts. A light ice event is considered to be one-tenth of an inch to one-quarter of an inch of ice, and probably won't require any more salt and sand than you'd normally send out on the trucks—depending on the day's temperatures, of course. A moderate ice event is considered to be one-quarter of an inch to one-half inch. A heavy ice event is anything more than a half-inch of build-up. If a moderate or heavy ice event is expected in your area, you'll need to plan on loading the trucks down with more salt to combat the liability issues your clients face.

6. Watch weather radar for snow bands. We've all been tricked into thinking that because the sun is starting to peek through the clouds, the storm is over. You may have even sent out crews, thinking that there would be no more precipitation and your clients' properties could be cleared quickly and easily. But then within an hour it clouds up again and snows once more. These errors in judgment can be avoided by monitoring the movement of snow on weather radar. With access to timely weather radar information, you can monitor start and stop times of incoming snow bands or squalls.

WEATHER TOOLS. As you've read through the above tips, you may have wondered how you could possibly pay attention to information like ratios of snow to water or radar screens for snow bands. The challenge is especially vexing if you rely solely on your local weather forecast for information.

Snow removal contractors who are serious about watching costs and being as efficient as possible should consider the use of a satellite-based weather system service, which can provide customized weather information right to their PC. The most advanced services offer highly accurate proprietary weather forecasts, long-term forecasts for the benefit of schedul-

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2001/2002 WINTER OUTLOOK

For most of the United States, winter 2001-2002 will feel like a sequel to last year's season, with sharp swings in temperature and precipitation, including heavy lake-effect snows in the Northeast and Midwest and the potential for Nor'easters along the East Coast, said the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Oct. 18, 2001, when it released its annual winter weather estimates.

The absence of a strong El Nino or La Nina climate pattern leaves the door open for a highly variable winter. "We don't expect a repeat of the record-breaking cold temperatures of November and December of last year, but this winter should be cooler than the warm winters of the late 1990s," said Scott Gudes, NOAA's acting administrator.

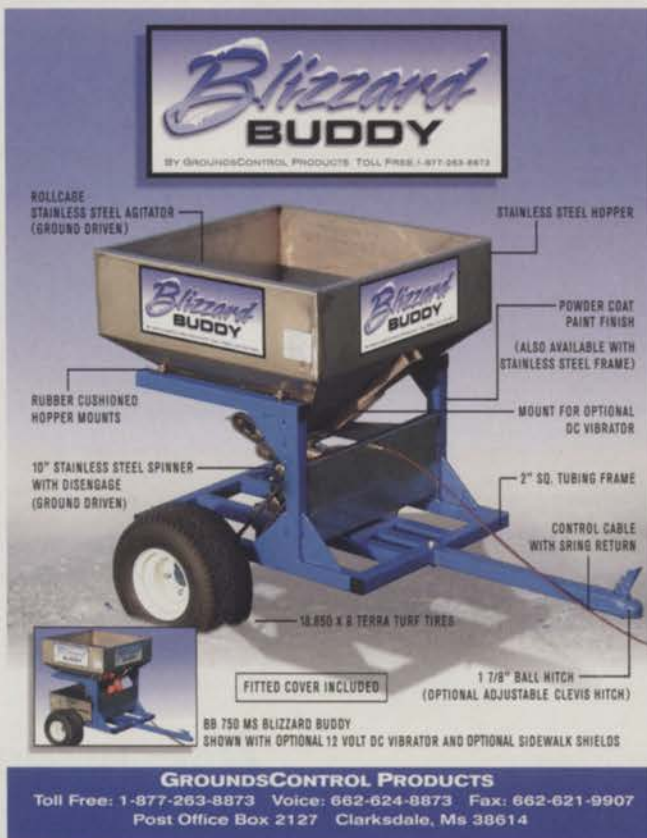
According to NOAA's report, winter weather in the follow regions will be:

- **Northeast:** Colder-than-normal temperatures are expected. Snowfall for the entire region will depend on the fluctuations of the Artic Oscillation.
- **Mid-Atlantic:** Equal chances of above normal, normal or below-normal temperatures and precipitation. Storm tracks could bring more snow than the winters of the late 1990s, but this largely depends on the Artic Oscillation.
- **Upper Midwest/Great Lakes:** Temperatures should be lower than normal, with more sub-zero days than average of recent winters. Equal chances for cumulative precipitation to be above normal, normal or below normal.
- **Northern Great Plains/Rockies:** Below-normal temperatures with more sub-zero days than experienced on average during winters of the late 1990s.
- **Northwest:** Equal chances for above normal, normal or below normal rain and snow.

ing, atmospheric temperatures to gauge how much water content will be in the snow, graphical representations of temperature and ice forecasts so that the most effective use of salt vs. sand can be determined, up to the minute weather radar images that can pinpoint client neighborhoods, enhanced radar to include depiction of areas of snow / mix / rain and information on wind conditions so that decisions about when to begin shifts can be made as well as the level of risk if wind chills are particularly severe.

Having an awareness of such weather conditions can help a contractor manage his business with increased efficiency. **SB**

The author is a meteorologist and vice president, Meteorlogix (formerly known as DTN Weather Services), a company that delivers industry-specific weather management capabilities. More information can be found at www.meteorlogix.com.



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USE READER SERVICE #428

USE READER SERVICE #429

WINTER WEATHER TERMS

- **Winter Storm Warning:** Issued when a combination of heavy snow, heavy freezing rain or heavy sleet is expected. Winter Storm Warnings are usually issued six to 24 hours before the event is expected to begin.
- **Winter Storm Watch:** Alerts the public to the possibility of a blizzard, heavy snow, freezing rain or heavy sleet. Winter Storm Watches are usually issued 12 to 36 hours before the beginning of a Winter Storm.
- **Winter Storm Outlook:** Issued prior to a Winter Storm Watch. The Outlook is given when forecasters believe winter storm conditions are possible and are usually issued 48 to 60 hours in advance of a winter storm.
- **Blizzard Warning:** Issued for winds of 35 mph or more and falling or blowing snow creating visibilities at or below 1/4 mile; conditions should persist for at least three hours.
- **Lake Effect Snow Warning:** Issued when

lake effect snow is expected to occur. A Lake Effect Snow Advisory also cautions for the possibility of snow.

- **Wind Chill Warning:** Issued when wind chill temperatures are expected to be less than 34 degrees below zero.
- **Wind Chill Advisory:** Issued when wind chill temperatures are expected to be between 20 below and 34 degrees below zero.
- **Winter Weather Advisories:** Issued for accumulations of snow, freezing rain, freezing drizzle and sleet that will cause significant inconvenience and moderately dangerous conditions.
- **Snow Flurries:** Light snow falling for short durations. Light dusting is all that is expected.
- **Snow Showers:** Snow falling at varying intensities for brief periods. Some accumulation is possible.
- **Snow Squalls:** Brief, intense snow showers accompanied by strong winds. Accumulation may be significant. Best known in the Great Lakes.

• **Blowing Snow:** Wind-driven snow that reduces visibility and causes significant drifting. Blowing snow may be snow that is falling and/or loose snow on the ground picked up by the wind.

• **Sleet:** Rain drops that freeze into ice pellets before reaching the ground. Sleet usually bounces when hitting a surface and does not stick to objects. However, it can accumulate like snow and cause a hazard to motorists.

• **Freezing Rain:** Rain that falls onto a surface with a temperature below freezing. This causes it to freeze to surfaces, such as trees, cars and roads, forming a coating of ice. Even small accumulations of ice can cause a significant hazard.

• **Nor'easter:** From the Mid-Atlantic Coast to New England, the classic storm is called a Nor'easter. The storm taps the Atlantic's moisture supply and dumps heavy snow over a densely populated region.

Source: U.S. National Weather Service



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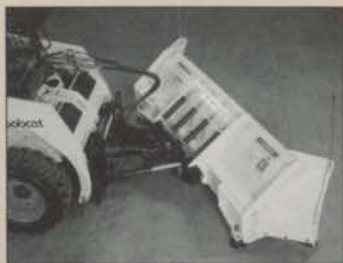
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- Moldboard 31 inches high, of 12-gauge steel

Circle 450 on reader service card



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- Spreaders for light to medium-duty snow and ice removal operations
- Mounting configurations available for a wide range of vehicles
- Three models available with either 304 stainless steel or roto cast polyethylene
- Hopper capacities range from 5.75 cubic feet, holding as much as 350 pounds, to 10.75 cubic feet, holding as much as 750 pounds

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SIDEWING SNOW PLOW BLADE

- Side-mounted plow blade
- More than 10 feet of clearing capacity
- Easy to attach and detach
- Comes with separate hydraulic system that allows control independent of front blade
- Sidewing-supplied frame mount

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Manufacturers: If you have a new product or service for the snow and ice removal marketplace, let Snow Business magazine know about it. Send a press release and four-color photo to: Steve Smith, Snow Business magazine, 4012 Bridge Ave., Cleveland, OH 44113. E-mail: ssmith@gie.net, phone: 800/456-0707.

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- Available as an option on Bobcat G Series loader models 753 and larger
- Includes hand controls, foot pedals, dash panel switch and lift-arm float control button

Circle 453 on reader service card

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- Not corrosive
- Can be used to pretreat rock salt or as a direct spray
- Ice Ban Summit: all purpose formula designed for all snow and ice control, chloride-based with Ice Ban organic inhibitor, eutectic point of -45 F
- Ice Ban Performance Plus: eutectic point of -78 F, can be used as stock pile treatment, pre-wet liquid or direct spray
- Ice Ban Ultra: for use in environmentally sensitive areas, clear and non-staining formulation

Circle 454 on reader service card

PLOW BLADE DOWN PRESSURE SYSTEM FROM SNO-WAY

- Dramatically shift weight hydraulically from the front axle to both the rear axle and the plow's cutting edge
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- Controlled by flick of a switch, which engages DPSystem for an automatic shift in weight
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- Cutting width of 46 inches
- Skid shoe cutting edge
- Driven by belt
- Overall length of 108 inches, width of 46 inches, height of 46 inches and weight of 280 pounds
- Chute rotation of 235 degrees

Circle 456 on reader service card

HINIKER 610 SALT/SAND SPREADER

- New 6½-foot hopper, which will fit full-size extended cab, short-box pickup trucks
- Capacity of 1.45 cubic yards
- Optional equipment includes hopper screens, pickup truck tie downs, 12-inch side and spinner extensions
- Spread patterns from 4 to 25 feet
- Aluminum valve block

Circle 457 on reader service card



DANIELS BOX PLOW

- Available from 10 to 32 feet
- Steel trip edge cleans hard packed snow and ice, and cuts down to pavement
- Replaceable cutting edges
- Plow attached via bucket mount or quick disconnect
- Unique hinge design for scraping, without damaging obstacles
- Steel trip edge is divided into multiple sections and spring-loaded to allow the plow to pass freely over obstacles such as manhole covers
- Equipped with two, ¾-inch cutting edges on side plates
- Box plow also provides back dragging

Circle 458 on reader service card

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403	423	443	464	484
404	424	444	465	485
405	425	445	466	486
406	426	446	467	487
407	427	447	468	488
408	428	448	469	489
409	429	449	470	490
410	430	450	471	491
411	431	451	472	492
412	432	452	473	493
413	433	453	474	494
414	434	454	475	495
415	435	456	476	496
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401	421	441	462	482
402	422	442	463	483
403	423	443	464	484
404	424	444	465	485
405	425	445	466	486
406	426	446	467	487
407	427	447	468	488
408	428	448	469	489
409	429	449	470	490
410	430	450	471	491
411	431	451	472	492
412	432	452	473	493
413	433	453	474	494
414	434	454	475	495
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Circle 459 on reader service card

BOSS HEADLIGHT PACKAGE

- New plow light package that projects light wider and further out from plow



- Features custom-designed, composite lights with dual halogen bulbs standard
- High-intensity discharge option provides as much as six times the light output as typical snow plow light
- Whiter light output reduces eye strain and helps prevent fatigue

Circle 460 on reader service card

ARTIC SALT/SAND SPREADER

- Four models from 72 to 96 inches long
- Capacity from 1.5 to 2.6 cubic yards
- Can be installed and removed manually or with light tackle
- Constructed of 12-gauge steel
- Zinc-rich protective primer
- Standard internal hopper supports, board pockets, inverted V and hold down kit
- Options include electric, 12-volt clutch, centrifugal clutch, electric throttle and top screens

Circle 461 on reader service card

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Suppliers and manufacturers.
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USE READER SERVICE #435

(continued from page 16)



Contractors will have to become more careful about how they use and store deicing salt. Photo: Chris James.

Pricing increases are highly regionalized, Betts said. "In some markets it has gone up \$10 to \$12 a ton and in other markets only \$5 to \$6 over last year." However, Betts said, prices are not as high as those seen in the early 1990s. And, from a manufacturer/supplier perspective, prices are now inline with where they should be. "Pricing had gone down steadily since the early 1990s, but the tide has turned. Pricing has gone up, but it is at a level where it belongs now," Betts added.

FINDING SALT. Like it or not, state agencies, who order deicing salt by the hundreds of thousands of tons, receive top priority from salt companies. "The salt companies bread and butter is with the states," Betts said. That means when deicing salt supply is tight, private contractors can bear the brunt of the shortage. For this year, Briscoe said private contractors who are struggling to find salt should explore non-traditional suppliers, such as salt from Canada, Mexico and Chile, all of

which have salt supplies housed in shipyards on the east and west coasts of the U.S. Smaller, second-tier salt producers also exist within U.S. borders. Briscoe suggested consulting the Salt Institute's member list at www.saltinstitute.org/6.html.

Ultimately, Briscoe said, private contractors won't truly be protected from salt shortages until they make changes in their management procedures. For example, Briscoe suggested bidding out for salt much earlier in the year than is customary in the private sector.

"When you are looking for salt in September and October, you're looking for it at the same time everybody else is," Briscoe said. "Next year (private contractors) need to put their contracts in place as early as April or May and take delivery earlier than September," he added.

Increasing salt storage capacity can also keep private snow contractors from desperation. "Most private contractors don't have storage facilities for salt. Many of them rent a parking lot and store 100 tons and put a tarp over it. I guess we are looking at the time when we need to transition into a more sophisticated situation."

Only time and weather will tell how tough access to deicing salt will be for private contractors this year and how long the so-called salt shortage will last. Savvy contractors would be wise to prepare for a possible run on salt and take steps to ensure they'll have the necessary material to satisfy the demands of customers. **SB**

The author is managing editor of Snow Business magazine. He can be reached via e-mail at ssmith@gie.net.

U.S. Deicing Salt Production

Demand for deicing salt has increased dramatically in the last 50 years, especially from 1990 to present.

Year	Tons (000s)
1940	164
1941	194
1942	211
1943	296
1944	228
1945	318
1946	320
1947	474
1948	461
1949	412
1950	591
1951	785
1952	800
1953	721
1954	1,104
1955	1,272
1956	1,494
1991	9,730
1992	10,457
1993	17,126
1994	18,885
1995	14,427
1996	20,117
1997	16,369
1998	10,196
1999	15,690
2000	18,101
First half 2001	10,100

AD INDEX

ADVERTISER	PG#	RS#
A-1 Distributing	26	421
Boss Snowplow	5	401
Buyers Products Co.	16,36 ..	415,434
Central Parts Warehouse ..	20	417
Cryotech	27	422
Curtis	39	409
Daniels	32	429
Dow Chemical	15,31 ..	404,427
DTN	23	407
Fisher	17	405
Glacial Technologies	25	408

ADVERTISER	PG#	RS#
GroundsControl	32	428
Highway Equipment Co.	20	416
Hiniker	22	419
IMC Salt	19	406
KW Mfg.	29	426
Ledex	28	423
Lesco	9	403
Loeering	7	402
Magic Salt	29	425
Metal Plessis	34	431
Meyer	13	414
Pro-Tech	40	410

ADVERTISER	PG#	RS#
RCS Sno-Pro	35	433
Rhomar Industries	12	412
Sensor Instruments	29	436
Sidewing	33	430
Simplicity	28	424
Snowman Snowplow	26	420
Stonebrooke	21	418
Sweepster	37	435
TeeJet	12	413
Tetra Chemicals	34	432
Western	2	400
With A Grain Of Salt	8	411

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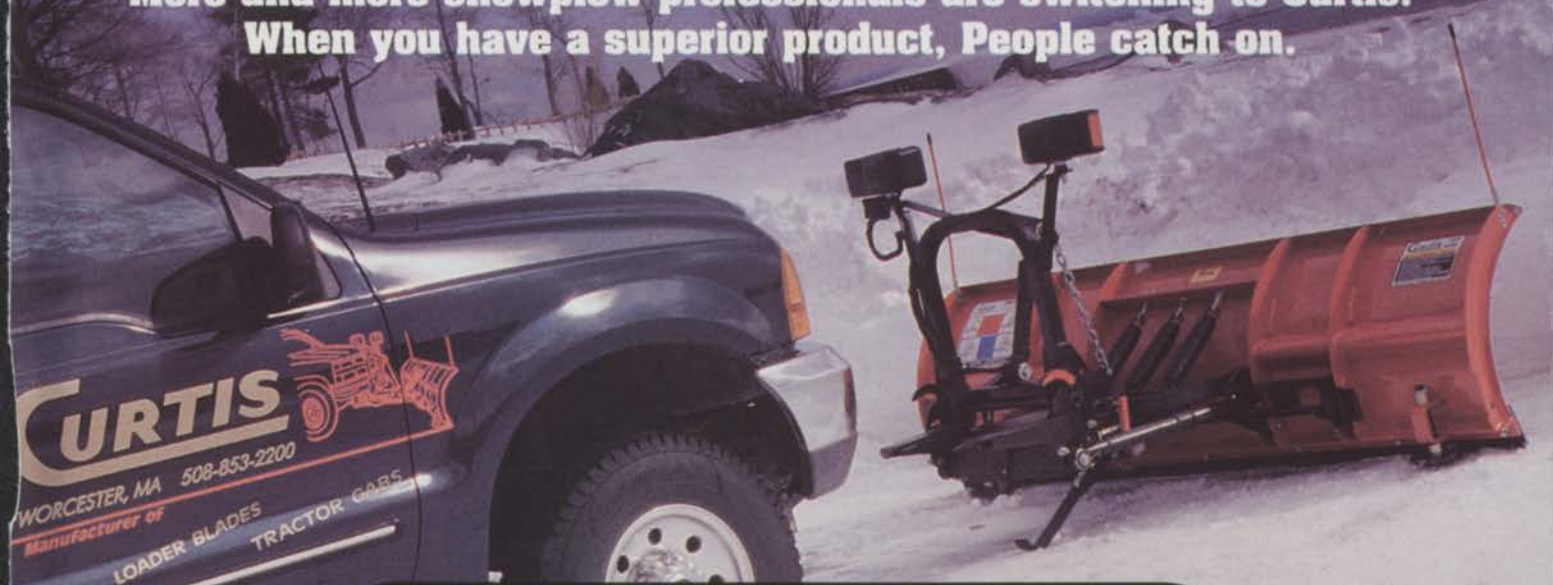


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Minding Your Business

his company includes employee headshots, which allow potential clients to put a face to a name and see who is behind the scenes. "We want the customer to understand that we are looking for a relationship, not just a one-time shot," Romero explained.

These headshots also add personality to Bratt's literature, Romero added. "We don't want [clients] to look at the brochure and say they've seen 15 million of these brochures."

Hoffman plans to also include photographs of his clients to illustrate the shared effort his projects require. "It will show that we're part of the same team trying to create the best possible work out there," he figured.

Also, other graphic elements on sales packets and informational brochures display a company's professionalism—or lack thereof. "You don't want to be working in the new millennium with something that looks like it came out of the 1980s," Brannigan quipped. "Retro is in, but not in marketing."

TARGET PRACTICE. Brannigan offers services to two distinct markets and tailors his

literature to reach these niches – high-end residential and retail commercial.

"The commercial packet is highly graphic," he described. "It deals more with cost savings measures for the client, enhancing their environment, and enhancing their retail space for the people coming to their business."

On a smaller scale, the residential packet is a simple pamphlet, since face-to-face interaction does most of the selling for this market, he said. "It is more basic and deals more with feelings and emotions," he explained.

Therefore, Brannigan invests more in his commercial packets, hiring a graphic design agency to produce the literature. Fliers might satisfy some residential clients, but most of his high-end residential clients expect professional presentation – even if it is just a pamphlet, he said.

Romero added that cost is secondary when it comes to establishing company image. "If you are trying to grow your company and trying to make it more marketable, [the investment] is worth it," he said.

However, companies that can't afford

elaborate literature can turn to simple fliers or opt for a software program to produce their own pamphlets, Brannigan suggested.

Hoffman leaves a creative impression with original mailers to remind clients of his services. One year, the company sent faux menus titled "Delicacies by the Deck" with entrees like "Spring Color" and "Lemon Beauty Daffodils." A plastic lobster bib was tucked inside each menu pamphlet. This year, the company mailed golf tees and a "Lifestyle Invitational" brochure with descriptions of each hole, like "Tulip Tee Time."

This approach stays out of the pile of junk mail, said Hoffman, who says some clients call just to say they liked his literature.

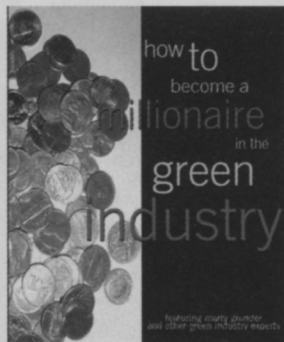
"One of the reasons we try to make it unusual is because we all get a lot of junk mail and this is one I think that people have a hard time throwing away without taking a second look," he pointed out. – *Kristen Hampshire*

The author is Associate Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.

You've got to hear my story...

**Hi! I'm Chip McClintock,
Proprietor of Green & White Outdoors
Landscape Company in Kent, Ohio.**

IT WAS this past January at the office, and I decided "THAT'S IT!" I had played my last game of solitaire on the computer wondering why I had no jobs to do, and very little money in the bank. I glanced over at the day's mail and saw another one of those "Marty Grunder – How to become a millionaire in the green industry" ads and decided to actually read it this time. I had seen them for over a year and was still very skeptical. I thought to myself, "I am a graduate from The Ohio State University, and I grew up in Lake County, Ohio, working the nursery scene. What could this Grunder guy know that I don't?" The truth is, he has steered me down the road to the destination of my choice: **Being a millionaire!**



I'm not there yet, and I haven't even known Marty for a year, but in one year, my SALES HAVE NEARLY DOUBLED. My advice to you is at the very least, purchase his new tape set: *How to become a millionaire in the green industry*. It can do for you what it has done for my family and me. It has changed my life, as well as the lives of my family, team members and the life of my company. It is a *frame of mind done by systems!*

For an investment of \$129.00, I have gotten a return of nearly a **quarter of a million dollars!** The system works, if you work it! I first compared Marty's advertisements to those that teach you how to quit smoking. A gimmick, so to speak. I am living proof! I see no reason why you would not make this investment.



In summary, if you find yourself lost, confused and having no direction or even if you feel you have "the cat by the tail" in your business, these tapes will help! By the way, Marty has plenty of other products designed to help you *get into the frame of mind that will lead you to the million dollar mark*, check them out at his web site www.grunderswinnerscircle.com.

Once confused, now on my way,

Chip McClintock

PS – If you don't like his stuff, you send it back, and Marty gives you your money back...no questions asked. How is that for a guarantee? *This investment is a productive frame of mind, not a gimmick!*

To order, visit Marty online at www.grunderswinnerscircle.com, call 937-847-9944, or fax a piece of your letterhead with \$ written on it, and he'll fax you info on this exciting, new, affordable product.

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USE READER SERVICE #38

A stylized, abstract illustration of a person's face in profile, facing right. The face is rendered in warm tones of orange, yellow, and red, with thick black outlines for the eyes, nose, and mouth. The background is a mix of purple and blue brushstrokes. A small, torn piece of paper with red text is positioned near the mouth.

Cover Story

by Kristen Hampshire

*Look who's talking
about your business –
a comprehensive
report from
your clients'
perspective.*

A stylized, abstract illustration of a person's face in profile, facing right. The face is rendered in warm tones of orange, yellow, and red, with thick black outlines for the eyes, nose, and mouth. The background is a mix of purple and blue brushstrokes. A small, torn piece of paper with red text is positioned near the mouth.

He SAI she SA

S

Some like it fast – no two-week waits for service. Some like it clean – no clippings, oil stains or scratches to the surface. Some like it cheap – never mind workers' appearance. Others like it perfect – they say their property is worth it.

He said, "We look at our lawn service as buying our time back – my wife and I work and we both have kids. If the price is reasonable, we'll do it."

She said, "If the outside doesn't look good, it doesn't matter what is on the inside."

Tom Howard and Mariann Moss are typical lawn service customers. They are pressed for time, juggling work and family, but they are willing to pay. More than ever, clients are signing up for lawn services, investing in honesty, consistency and dependability – no less.

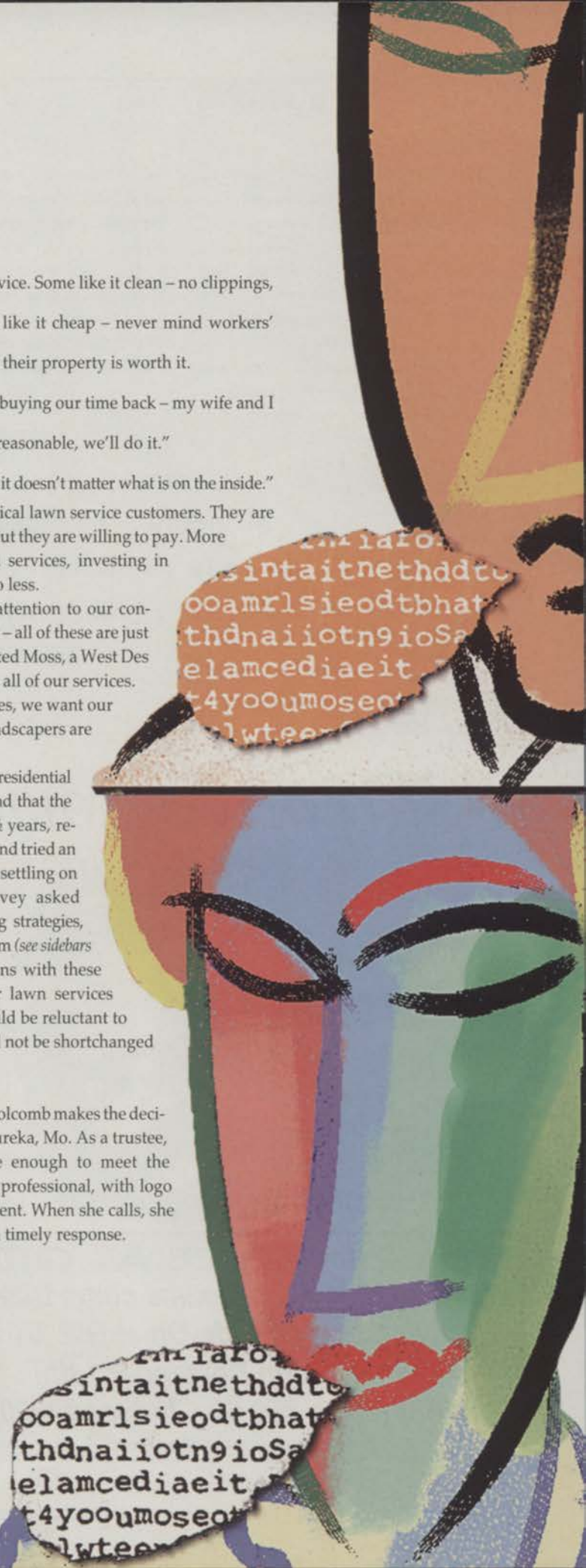
"We need quick response time, quick attention to our concerns, attention to our requests and courtesy – all of these are just necessary attributes that we need today," listed Moss, a West Des Moines, Iowa, resident. "This rolls over into all of our services. We want the express line at the grocery stores, we want our shirts from the cleaners the next day, and landscapers are no exception."

A *Lawn & Landscape* survey profiled your residential landscape and lawn care clients, and we found that the average client has purchased services for 6½ years, received estimates from two other companies and tried an average of three different companies before settling on their current service provider. The survey asked homeowners for their reactions to marketing strategies, incentives, communication and professionalism (see *sidebars on pages 46 and 50*). Paired with conversations with these clients, feedback proved that demand for lawn services remains strong and, while most clients would be reluctant to trade places with their technicians, they will not be shortchanged in quality or courtesy.

MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING. Sherry Holcomb makes the decisions for her homeowners' association in Eureka, Mo. As a trustee, she not only looks for a company large enough to meet the neighborhood's needs, but also one that is professional, with logo shirts, clean trucks and maintained equipment. When she calls, she wants answers – or at least the promise of a timely response.

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"If you have a continual problem and you bring it to their attention and you give them the opportunity to correct it and they don't, to me, it says that the vendor doesn't really care about their service," she reasoned. "And if they don't care about their service, they don't care about their customers. All they care about is the bottom line."

Slow response topped clients' complaint lists. Though 76.5 percent of respondents said their companies respond quickly, this was the first aggravation they mentioned when asked what frustrates them with lawn service. Next to shoddy service and inconsistency, poor communication caused customers to call it quits on their former service providers, the survey suggested.

Whether it is a phone call the night before a service visit, a return phone

call to a voicemail, a courtesy call to ensure satisfaction or an informative call to warn of contract expiration, clients want to hear from you.

Jim Campanella makes it easy for his customers to give feedback. Besides seasonal "report cards" that allow clients to record their lawns' color, thickness, weed control and an overall rating of the service,

"I won't stop a service because of the economy, but if people don't already get it, I envision that they might think twice."

— Tom Howard

he calls them before each visit and asks them if they need changes to their programs.

"It's not just important that we do communicate, it's important that it is easy for the customer to respond," said the president of the Nashua, N.H.-based lawn care company. He explained the impetus behind his business' reach to its clients: He wants them to stay in touch. "My worst fear isn't the customer that complains, it's the one that doesn't complain and just cancels at the end of the year. Then, we never knew the problem."

Besides communication, consistency provides comfort, which is why more than half of the residential clients surveyed — 62.5 percent — said they prefer to see the same technicians on their lawn each visit, and for 56 percent of the respondents, these visits occur weekly. Clients pay an average of \$135 per month for their services, and they want to trust those who perform the work.

Gary LaScalea, president, GroGreen, Dallas, Texas, compared the regularity of a fa-

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~ Tom Jessen

Perma-Green Supreme President and 27-year lawn care owner, 20-year sprayer manufacturer, owner of 3 patents, and fellow dreamer

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USE READER SERVICE #25

miliar technician to seeing the same milkman every week when he was young. It becomes less of a service and more of a personal visit. "When you cancel, you don't cancel the service, you cancel them."

He tries to keep technicians on regular routes, and when customers leave messages at the office, the technician assigned to that route responds. This strengthens the client relationship, he noted.

Furthermore, the technician who conducts the estimate also services the lawn, added GroGreen's office manager, Shannon Clymer. Clients find this single-contact approach appealing, and she said many homeowners comment on this structure when they call. "They like that they don't have several people to deal with," she said. "It's all one in the same. The technicians get this rapport going with the customer, and then they feel like if they have a questions, they can ask."

Besides, clients know they will not have to explain their needs each time the crew

services their lawn. "They know my yard," added Pam Eells, a 10-year lawn service customer in Marietta, Ga. "They'll say, 'Remember when you had that problem, do you want to do this now to prevent it?'"

LENDING ADVICE. Chances are, your clients can't tell dollar spot from root rot or brown patch, but that doesn't mean they don't want educated answers. "I think when people pay for a service, they want to

feel like they are getting what they pay for," Clymer remarked.

What clients pay for are answers and results – they prefer when the person who picks up the company phone can provide pertinent information. "We try to educate them when we answer the phones," said Clymer, who along with other GroGreen administrative employees, is trained to respond to common questions.

In addition, an educated staff clears up confusion to calm clients' concerns.

"If they call with a weed problem, we get a description of the weed and try to find out what kind they are, and we try to set their expectations on what kind of results they will get," Clymer said.

"With some kinds of weeds we cannot guarantee 100 percent control."

(continued on page 46)

"We want the **express line** at the **grocery stores**, we want our **shirts** from the cleaners the **next day**, and **landscapers** are no different." – Mariann Moss

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- Lawn Maintenance Invoice**: A form with a header for Cascadia Landscaping and a section for "YOUR COMPANY NAME HERE".

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- Estimate**: A red circle with the word "Estimate" in white.
- Proposals Laser & Manual**: A red circle with the text "Proposals Laser & Manual" in white.
- Lawn Maintenance Invoice**: A red circle with the text "Lawn Maintenance Invoice" in white.
- Work Order/Invoices Laser & Manual**: A red circle with the text "Work Order/Invoices Laser & Manual" in white.



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USE READER SERVICE #50

Cover Story

(continued from page 43)

Lawn care companies identified weeds as their clients' primary service criticism – too many of them, too few results.

Campanella said when his clients cry "Weeds!" he reports the problem to the branch manager, who immediately addresses the concern with a phone call. "[The manager] might explain why crabgrass was a

problem this year," he said. Then, someone will visit the property. Quality service parallels communication in importance, and Campanella said preserving his image outweighs receiving payment, so he offers reimbursements to unhappy clients.

"We don't have a lot of stipulations on our guarantee – we say that the customer

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A survey of *Lawn & Landscape* readers' customers created a potential profile for the average residential client. Here, some conclusions we drew that portray your "average Joe and Jane."

- 71 percent have a household income of more than \$75,000
- 67 percent live in suburban areas
- Respondents pay an average of \$135 per month for lawn services
- Customers have contracted lawn services for an average of 6½ years

Who's Who

should be satisfied, period," he said. "People respect the fact that you are working hard to fix things, and we tell them that when they are happy with the service, then we will start billing them again. They are surprised that we will go to that level."

Pleasantly surprised – especially since most homeowners choose their company for its reputation for quality, followed by price, professionalism, and then image and appearance, survey results pointed out.

Holcomb is like many customers who base contract renewal on quality. When asked how a company earns her trust, she said, "By giving good service consistently and correcting problems in a timely fashion.

"It takes so little to improve so much," she added, noting that she went through six companies before finding a reliable one. "It's not that people have to spend a lot of money in their businesses to improve their services, but my pet peeve is a company that takes on more than it can handle and then does a poor job for everyone."

Here is where exorbitant growth can hurt companies. When clients' questions are ignored and they feel slighted by your workload, they figure their issues move to the bottom of the list. "If I don't get a call back, I assume that their business is doing so well that they don't need mine," Moss quipped.

Showing urgency when responding to clients' requests is key, reminded Phil Fred,

(continued on page 48)

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Cover Story

(continued from page 46)

president, Philip's Lawn & Tree Therapy, Mooresville, Ind. Reply respectfully, honestly and quickly. "Some of the cranky calls are better made in the morning," he pointed out. "Sometimes, I know that if it is 5 or 6 p.m. and it's been a long day, I'll do a better job serving the customer and be more thoughtful the next morning."

Steve Rendzak, president, The Blue Moose Landscape Co., Cape May Court House, N.J., said his high-end residential maintenance customers' major beef about their former contractor is neglected calls. "People are the reason we are in business," he reminded. "They are the ones paying our paychecks, and I tell my employees that."

He also tells his employees to return calls within 24 hours.

"The customer wants to talk to someone and have that one-on-one communication – everyone wants to feel important," Rendzak emphasized. "They want to talk and vent, and the best thing an employee can do is listen."

ADDRESSING NEEDS. Perhaps clients place such significance on response because they have little time to wait. Their cramped schedules and mile-long to-do lists offer no space for extra chores, and many consider yard work a hassle rather than a hobby. This is why more residents are turning to lawn services, noted Howard, whose neighbors also invest in other conveniences such as house cleaning. The economy might be tightening, but those who rely on lawn service will be stubborn to give it up, he predicted.

"I won't stop a service because of the economy, but if people don't already get it, I envision that they might think twice," he figured. "I think those who have it will not think about cutting it."

(continued on page 50)

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People Pleasers

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USE READER SERVICE #29

Cover Story

(continued from page 48)

Lisa Stammer has noticed more landscape trucks in her suburban neighborhood. "You used to see dads out mowing the lawns and now you don't," she related. "If you have the money to pay someone else to do it, why do it yourself?"

Eells remarked that if she had to eliminate luxuries from her budget, her lawn care would be the last to go. "There are other things I could go without - dinner out," she said. "The frills are nice, but to me, it's important that my yard looks good and it's healthy, because that's an asset. If I ever had to move, the upkeep of my home and yard are very important for sale."

Besides, people notice her property - they say it looks nice - and that influences her to keep the service, along with 45 percent of other survey respondents who noted that appearance drove their purchase decision.

This image finished second to saving time, which prompted 47 percent of homeowners to hire professionals, while just 8 percent hire a contractor with hopes of boosting their real estate value.

In turn, companies are growing to meet the needs of the crowd who would rather pay for lawn service than find the time or resources to do it themselves. A recent industry survey conducted by *Lawn & Landscape* revealed that 56.1 percent of lawn and landscape companies' gross sales increased from 2000 to 2001. The industry is healthy, with 65 percent of companies' revenues stemming from single-family residential accounts.

"We want our lawn to look nice because we want our neighborhood to look nice," Stammer reasoned. Her Alpharetta, Ga., community is about 20 minutes from Atlanta. "I

(continued on page 52)

Who is more likely to impress a homeowner? The plumber, the electrician or the landscape contractor? Some clients say that no matter the line of work, an employee's attitude determines their image. Others aren't so diplomatic.

Lawn & Landscape asked some of your customers to rank the following professions according to how they perceive them. They rated electrician as the most professional - landscape contractors ranked fifth.

- | | |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. electrician | 4. car mechanic |
| 2. plumber | 5. landscape contractor |
| 3. television repair person | 6. chimney sweep |

Clean uniforms, trucks and equipment contribute to a company's image, however, courtesy, timely response to requests and business organization also figure into the equation. "There is a market for lawn care services, and it's probably a middle-upper class kind of market, so that's what the company needs to look like," reasoned Pam Eells, a lawn care customer from Marietta, Ga. She said lawn service seems to be more professional than in the past, but some "fly-by-night" companies still manage to spoil a clean image.

Knowledge cleans up inadequate operations, however.

Steve Rendzak, president, The Blue Moose Landscape, Cape May Court House, N.J., said education plays a role in boosting the industry's professionalism. "As people start getting more education and technology is changing, I think that professionalism is getting better," he remarked. "People running companies realize that they have to be more professional just to make a living." - **Kristen Hampshire**

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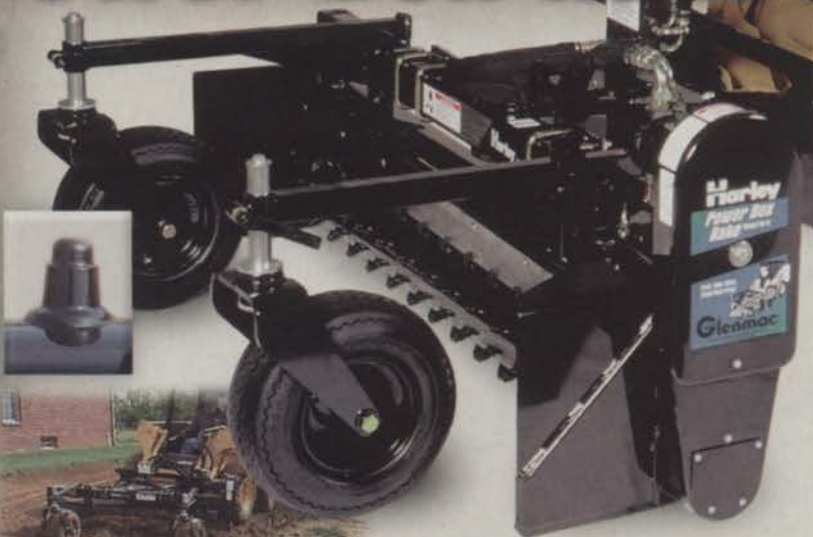


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Cover Story

(continued from page 50)

would guess that at least 75 percent have lawn services of some kind in our neighborhood."

This reflects many residential clients, with 71 percent of the homeowners touting salaries of \$75,000 or more. Forty-four percent are families with children, 33 percent are single residents and 23 percent are families without children, and most – 67 percent – live in suburban areas.

"Maintenance is a priority that people will keep getting," Rendzak said, noting his clients will continue to contract mowing services, even if they put improvements on hold. "Those people will not do that themselves."

LEARNING FROM MISTAKES. Contractors can learn from their clients. Their feedback – through surveys, conversations and phone calls – helps mold companies into more efficient, effective businesses.

Fred listed several sore spots that contractors can avoid. First, be honest with homeowners, he stressed. "We, as human beings, like to please people, but we have to avoid the temptation to tell people what they want to hear," he said.

Here, an age-old adage holds true – treat others as you would like to be treated. "Exactly," Fred agreed. "The Golden Rule."

As it turns out, most homeowners aren't hankering by the window waiting for a technician to slip up or hovering near the phone to place an immediate complaint call. Most clients are quite content, and many contractors find a good portion of those customer calls are actually thank-yous. They appreciate your "good morning" hellos, and even more so, they like to hear their neighbors comment on their golf-course green lawn.

"My yard is important to me," Eells emphasized. "I don't have the time to devote to it, but I'm willing to pay the money for someone to do it right." **LL**

The author is Associate Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.

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CHECK OUT this article online for more results from Lawn & Landscape's client survey.

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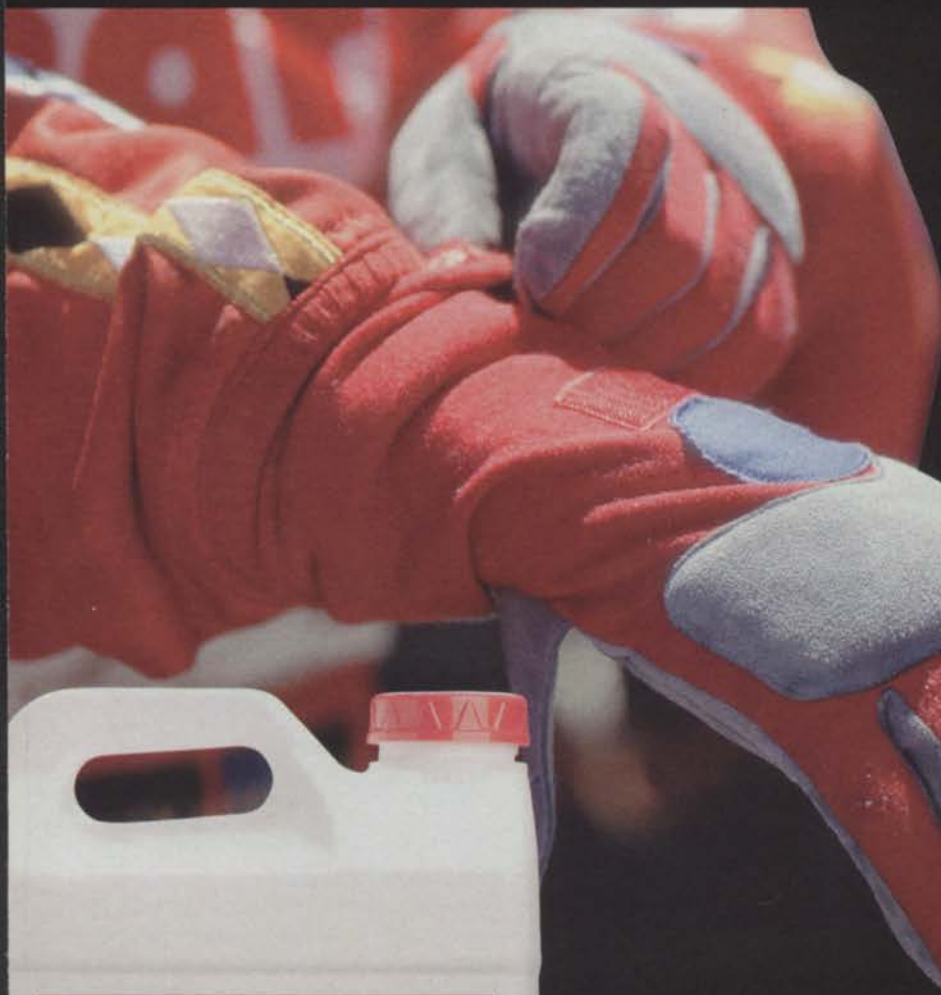
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Evan Saylor turned a mental picture into a master plan and transformed a one-man stump grinding business into a full-service landscape success.

Building a DREAM

Few dreams sneak past the safety of a deep, sound sleep. Few break the foggy barrier between subconscious and reality or find their way into the workings of a grand plan.

Then again, few come with a blueprint as detailed as the business plan Evan Saylor designed for his company, Hurst Landscaping, Richland, Pa. Each day, he molds his dream as he pecks away at his prospectus – a detailed framework that outlines the company's life from its purchase to Saylor's retirement.

"I drew a mental picture of what I wanted," described the 35-year-old owner. "I wanted the big shop, the big office, the nice, clean trucks. I wanted extra equipment and a real fancy store front. Then, I figured out how long I wanted to wait for that and how to get it."

Saylor's dream was more than a sleepy vision. After three years in the green industry, he purchased Hurst from his friend's father in 1994 and turned the one-man stump grinding stint into a company that earned \$800,000 with a 34-percent profit margin last year.

"From the time I started the business I always wanted to be big," he remembered.

He is building up to these "big" ideas each year, and hopes to increase his profits by 27 percent next year to bring in \$1 million in revenue. "I looked at where I want to end up and worked backwards."



Keeping employees happy is a priority, and fun incentives after a long day, like Swedish Fish gummy candies, can do the trick. Photo: Hurst Landscaping

THE GAME PLAN. Saylor started his business plan when he was a "one-man band," grinding stumps for local tree companies. He stayed solo for three years, growing his operation with repeat customers, until a client asked him to bid a mowing contract. He got the job, purchased a riding mower, truck and trailer, and hired his first employee in 1997.

This rapid growth might have been a surprise, but it didn't catch Saylor off-guard. "I treated my business like it was a big company because a lot of the advice I got when I was small was from bigger companies," he said, noting that he adopted programs like workmens' compensation and insurance when he hired his first employee.

"I never cheated myself by not having these things in place,

(continued on page 56)

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First Look

(continued from page 54)

because once you get bigger and you do put them in place your profit can drop."

This is also why he writes himself a check before calculating the bottom line – another tip he took away from a large company owner. "He said, 'If your profit margin sounds great and you didn't pay yourself yet, it's not a true profit,'" Saylor recalled.

Many companies deceive themselves this way, he added, drawing a difference between those who make millions and those who realize high profit percentages. And, he admits that these money matters don't come naturally to him. Like any entrepreneur, he has made a few mistakes along the way – hiring a cheap accountant, for example. Contractors hesitant to pay an accountant's retainer fee are not considering the long-term investment, he noted. "Put your money where your money is at," he said simply.

"You need someone who knows what they are doing, not just someone to fill in lines on a tax form," he stressed, adding that his worst

mistake was not using his first accountant as a financial adviser or asking him for business planning and investment pointers.

"I am a landscaper – I'm not an accountant, a lawyer or a banker," he said. "The year I hired my accountant it cost \$3,000, and that year he saved me \$6,000 in taxes."

Saylor's long-term strategy depends on more than financial advice. He imagines the worst case scenarios for his company and plans for them. Equipment casualties are quelled with a spare set of machines he keeps in the shop – a complete truck and trailer with all the trimmings. "I have a whole mowing crew ready to go with no employees to run it," he described.

Since equipment and parts are consistent throughout the company, workers easily switch to "back-up" machines, and the uniformity allows him to stock a larger inventory of spare parts, he added. Besides, these extra equipment purchases help grow the company. "At the end of the year, you have

to ask, 'Do I want to take this money and buy myself a toy, or do I want to reinvest it?'"

Then, there is the technological portion of his business strategy – one that must not be forgotten in a time when software speeds up scheduling and advanced global positioning systems track time employees spend on jobs.

"We have to be faster than any other company because that brings in the efficiency," he pointed out.

PEAK PERFORMANCE. "We see your trucks everywhere," reads Hurst Landscaping's slogan. "We didn't make that saying up," Saylor remarked. "That's what our customers have said to us for years."

His trucks might blanket Richland, Pa., but his multiplication method wasn't out of control. His three one-man maintenance crews and one three-man crew originated from a careful strategy to train, promote and delegate responsibility to workers.

"To grow, we put together a three-man

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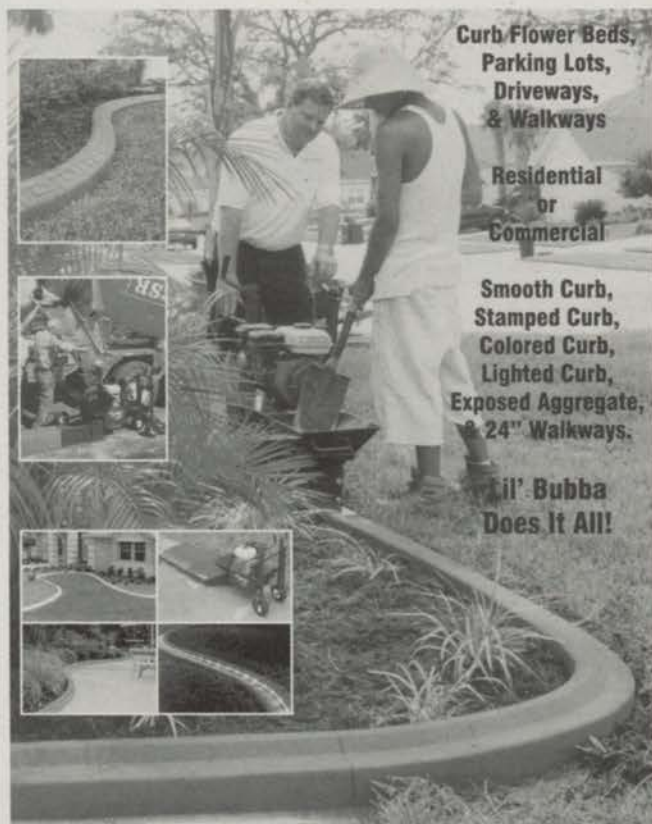
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landscape crew, and we figure out who the best employee is underneath the foreman," Saylor explained. "Then, when we start another crew, we pull that person off and start them as the foreman."

For the most part, Saylor sticks to his one-man crews – even for large, 3-acre maintenance accounts, while a three-man crew takes

Beyond crew control, Saylor stressed the importance of quality control. Just because the staff increases doesn't mean their skills do, Saylor reasoned. "When a company starts growing, the owner is trying to sell the work that he is capable of doing, which might not be the same work that his workers are capable of doing," he explained.

This is why Hurst does little stump grinding today. Once Saylor pushed past being a one-man show, he found his stump machine required dedicated maintenance attention – work most employees don't do.

So, Saylor fills the schedule with a hearty mix of 60 percent maintenance services and 40 percent installation for its client base, which consists of 65 percent commercial, 25 percent residential and 10 percent government and municipal. The only area Saylor has left alone is pesticide application, and he won't overextend the business. "You have to

know when to say, 'I'm sorry. Our company will not do that,'" he reminded.

FINISH LINE. The last stop on Saylor's plan is retirement – he planned for this, too.

"I want to retire early," he said, casually. "I want the company to run, I don't want it to run me. I built that into the plan." He has someone in mind to take the helm when he reaches the last bullet point on his long-term to-do list. "It's just like having an extra truck," he compared.

Now, Saylor's master plan is only half done, but he expects the pace to quicken. His internal operations are comfortable and labor isn't a problem. He looks to the phase where he fades out and the business and systems he built kick in. "I think it will go faster than the first part of the plan did," he predicted. "It's snowballing." **LL**

The author is Associate Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.

"I looked at where I wanted to end up and I worked backwards."

– Evan Saylor

care of commercial, high-profile facilities. "[With a one-man crew] you can personalize your service," he said, adding that the worker is on the site for half the day so the client has a chance to ask questions. "[The employee] knows the ins and outs and the customer knows him. "Also, if the job is not done right, you have one man to look at," he added.

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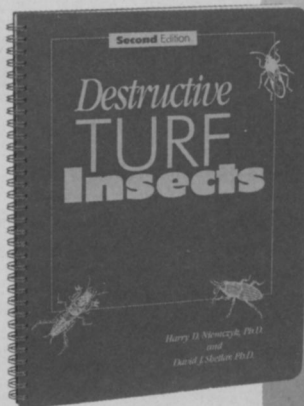
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USE READER SERVICE #69

Design Mistakes

by Nicole Wisniewski

With persistence, patience and creativity, landscape designers can discover clients' true landscape needs and create fee-worthy plans.



Dodging DESIGN Disasters

A landscape is more than just a pretty place.

A well-designed environment links a home or office to its surroundings physically and visually so interiors that open onto terraces feel expansive, while gardens that fold into living quarters impart intimacy.

As architecture's natural extensions, landscapes are meant to enhance properties, increasing their value and appearance. However, too often landscapes crowd properties, pointed out William Welch, extension landscape horticulturist, Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas. "Masses of plants in the landscape can take up space and leave little room for people," he said.

To obtain a balance between practical and attractive landscapes, designers must observe and analyze client habits, examine site views and adequately plan design

requirements. Then, designers can choose and place plants and hardscapes accordingly in fault-proof, reliable designs.

LISTENING 101. From concept to creation, each landscape blueprint acts as a separate book in a design/build contractor's Bible. Blueprints define final landscape products, which is why the design phase is so critical, pointed out Bill Lincicome, senior vice president, Post Landscape Group, Atlanta, Ga. "You have to ensure that there is enough information on the drawing in order for the crew in the field to build the product," he stressed. "Every time I look at a design, I ask myself, 'Can I look at this set of drawings and identify what needs to be purchased, ordered and built without question?'"

Computer-aided design is used to show clients what plants will look like five or 10 years after installation. Photo: Eagle Point

(continued on page 62)

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Design Mistakes

(continued from page 60)

To create plans that define handsome, efficient spaces, designers must do more than design — they must investigate properties like detectives, pinpoint specific needs based on customers' lifestyles, and solve problems.

However, some designers don't listen to clients as intently as they should. "The big-

Three-dimensional drawings help clients envision final landscape products.

Image: Post Landscape Group



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gest problem I see with young designers is that they don't listen well enough in the conception stage," Lincicome observed. "They have to listen to the criteria and then marry that with the physical problems of the site to ensure a quality outcome."

Other times, designers ask the wrong questions and collect insufficient information. "Every problem we've ever had with a design I can trace back to a breakdown in communication from the beginning," Lincicome admitted, adding that all of his managers are given cell phones to ensure accessibility. "Communication with the client and internally is critical to the whole process."

Despite the emphasis on communication many contractors advocate, sometimes these lines are broken whether the fault belongs to the lazy designer or the reluctant client. Unfortunately, designers can't lock clients in dark rooms, shine bright lights in their faces and demand answers. They must politely investigate client needs.

"Designers need to be insistent on extracting certain information, like budgets, because it defines the design's limitations," Lincicome stressed. "It's like buying a car for someone — you can spend \$5,000, \$20,000 or \$300,000. If the type of car desired or budget isn't shared, you can't successfully purchase the car because you'll either choose something that is above or below that person's expectations. It's the same with landscaping — a designer can't design to his heart's content because the final product won't match the client's needs or budget. Client problems have to be clearly defined so we can solve them accurately."

Consequently, the client interview shapes the design process. Designers must be committed to obtaining information, particularly budget goals, advised Vic Hribar, design manager, Yardmaster, Painesville, Ohio. They also need to educate clients since many of them don't know appropriate budgets for work required, Hribar pointed out. "The biggest mistake designers make when talking to clients about budget is coming up with a number and then ignoring client needs," he said. "It doesn't do

USE READER SERVICE #40

me any good to sell a \$2,000 job when what was really needed was a \$10,000 landscape. In that case, I should focus on the client's needs, explain to them the process of phasing in the work and upsell the project."

During client interviews, designers should bring a notebook and record as much information as possible, Hribar added. "Depending on the client's needs and the scope of the work, it's nothing to walk away from an interview with three, four or six pages of notes," he remarked. "That way I always have notes to go back to and don't have to rely on my memory of the meeting."

Traffic flow, entertainment requirements and maintenance concerns are other common questions that are often forgotten during client interviews. A client who entertains three or four times a year for an intimate group will have different space needs than one who throws parties for 30 to 40 people weekly, Hribar said. The same can be said for businesses in high-traffic areas that warrant designs leading people to proper entrances.

Maintenance matters also are important to discuss because they define the type of plant material used, Hribar explained. "If a client says they have a staff of 12 people who do nothing but grounds maintenance, that's one thing," he said. "But if a homeowner says they want to spend only one hour on the yard each week, that's quite another."

While designers or clients may have favorite plants, excessive maintenance requirements can keep them from enjoying positive features. Consequently, designers should avoid using plants with finicky care needs that are susceptible to insects or diseases, particularly if clients refuse to hire a maintenance contractor or commit to daily outdoor chores.

HORT BASICS. The temptation to plant immediately is difficult to ignore, but the results are more satisfying if planned first, Welch pointed out. Common design mistakes are mainly the result of anxious designers who overlook basic fundamentals.

"When you are working on an idea that has never been built before, you tend to spend a lot of time on the details to make sure it works," explained Carrie Woleben-Meade, design/sales manager, Mariani Landscape, Lake Bluff, Ill. "Sometimes it is the little, easy things that get ignored, leading to mistakes."

Proper placement is based on plant char-

acteristics and time-tested design principles. Landscape design is governed by six basic elements: scale, unity, color, texture, form and line, stated Chris Bosman, owner, Green Magic Landscaping, Sedona, Ariz. "These design principles are immutable," he explained. "For a successful design, it is impor-

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Design Mistakes

tant to have a dominant theme. Make a bold design and soften it with plantings, bearing in mind these rules."

Using these elements, designers also can create feeling in a landscape, Hribar said. "Plants can soften harsh edges and corners, making an entrance inviting and people feel welcome," he described, adding that design mistakes can do the opposite. "Walking up a 10-inch by 10-inch front yard to a home blocked by 60-foot tall trees won't feel like you're coming home."

"Landscape design should enhance and add value to a property – not conceal it," he continued. "If a client wants to screen off a neighbor, there are better ways to do it than putting up a solid barricade. I can enhance both properties by staggering plant material so that the eye is caught off-guard and whizzes past the home."

Landscapes are unique because they are ever-changing, which is a trait that needs to be explained thoroughly to clients. "Growth and change separate landscape designs from other arts," Welch explained. "Most works of art, such as architecture, look best when new. But landscape designs are at their worst when new and improve with age."

Landscape architects must learn clients' entertainment requirements before designing their outdoor rooms.

Photo: Green Magic Landscaping



While some contractors say computer design software won't aid those who don't already comprehend basic design elements, Hribar admitted that it can help clients foresee plant growth patterns. "You can use CAD to show clients what the landscape will look like in three, five, 10 and 15 years down the road," he explained.

Designers also should consider existing positive and negative property attributes. For instance, does the kitchen look out over rolling farm country or open to the back of an ill-kept building that needs screening?

Existing plant material, which is often ignored, also can be a positive site feature, Hribar shared. "When large shade trees or a natural stream are already on-site, you don't have to regrade over these elements – you can work with them," he said.

For this reason, designers who walk the site before they put pencil to paper typically are more successful than those who don't, pointed out Craig Morris, director of design, Post Landscape Group, Atlanta, Ga. "You must look at existing grades and ad-

acent properties to ensure a solid foundation for what you're planning," he said.

PICTURE THIS. Even after conducting on-site client meetings and educating them on horticulture basics, clients have difficulty examining the blueprints and visualizing a green, backyard oasis, Lincicome said.

"Most clients don't see two-dimensional drawings," he explained. "They react better to three-dimensional imagery, so we present clients with illustrative renderings to help them envision final products."

Visual elements also can reduce misunderstandings. Besides using renderings of final landscapes to aid clients' understanding of projects, Lincicome identifies softscape and hardscape specifics by showing clients sample materials or photos so they are aware of the actual products that will be used on their sites.

In some cases, preliminary drawings also are used because they provide additional visuals. Some designers, like Bosman, rely on them, because they record designers' ideas on paper and help avoid overplanting.

Woleben-Meade said preliminary drawings also help prevent disappointed clients. "Preliminary concepts allow us to put our initial ideas down on paper and get a reaction from the client before going through the time-intensive job of construction drawings – so it actually saves time in the long run and the end result matches client expectations." ■

The author is Managing Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.

As landscape designers and architects gain experience, they develop their own styles. But every once in awhile, even the most unique styles need refreshing.

Fortunately, style is a matter of taste that varies from person to person and from one area to another, so finding inspiration involves little effort, pointed out Chris Bosman, owner, Green Magic Landscaping, Sedona, Ariz., who looks to gardening magazines for new ideas and trends.

Bill Lincicome, senior vice president, Post Landscape Group, Atlanta, Ga., said he has always been a big proponent of referencing architectural history, which is why many related books can be found in the office's library.

Sharing likes and dislikes in a group atmosphere can boost creativity as well, pointed out Vic Hribar, design manager, Yardmaster, Painesville, Ohio. "We give foremen cameras to take pictures of projects as they are going from job to job so they have a record of daily progress," he explained. "We also encourage them to take pictures of good and bad examples of landscaping they see along the way. Then we get together and point out what we like and dislike."

Open communication among designers encourages discourse, and Carrie Woleben-Meade, design/sales manager, Mariani Landscape, Lake Bluff, Ill., said just this type of environment can introduce design ingenuity on various projects. "We keep creativity going by encouraging a casual studio atmosphere," she said. "It encourages the cross-pollination of ideas and critiques. And two heads are better than one, so we always try to have someone else review our work."

Architects and designers who get stuck in the studio can become brain dead, according to Lincicome, so he takes his design team on an adventure every year to look at different landscape types. This fall, the team will experience a 3½-day garden tour of Charleston, S.C. – *Nicole Wisniewski*

Sweet

Inspiration

by Kristin Mohn

The scene: A contractor and his client sit down to discuss an upcoming maintenance application. Both discuss the scope of work, the payment plan and billing dates. A sincere smile and firm handshake solidify the deal. Yet, 10 months later, the customer's bill includes a service he or she can't remember discussing. An argument erupts and, in the end, trust, payment and a valuable relationship are all lost.

In a perfect world, conversations would be remembered word for word and verbal agreements would suffice. Instead, written contracts help avoid questions – and misunderstandings – later on.

"I think it's always good business to have something in writing," said Jack Mattingly, management consultant, Mattingly Associates, Woodstock, Ga. "It's just basically a clarification that we all agree on what it is that I am to provide you and what it is that you are to pay me."

In fact, even when dealing with trusted customer-contractor relationships, contracts protect both parties against unexpected situations, said Tim Lynott, president, Landscape Consulting Services, Eldersburg, Md. "You always have to have something signed," he stressed. "If not, it's playing Russian roulette. If they think they can get away with it, they might."

HOW DO I START? While the need for contracts cannot be debated, the contents may range from a one-page agreement to an extremely specific outline. Walking the tightrope between specificity and clarity poses challenges, as does covering the bases without exhausting the customer, Lynott pointed out. "Contracts have to be written win-win," he said. "You can't write a contract that is in your favor 100 percent – make sure it is fair between you and the client."

According to a recent *Lawn & Landscape* online poll, 48 percent of respondents use formal contracts for all job types. Nevertheless, although many contractors agree on the mandatory use of contracts in business, writing a contract from scratch may be intimidating. Lynott suggested evaluating other companies' contracts for ideas and inspiration. "Get some examples," he suggested. "Go out on the street, consult [associations], buy a book at the store, etc."

Jeff Tovar, president, Tovar's Snow Plowing, Elgin, Ill., also emphasized the power of following another company's lead. "The best starting place is to get an idea

(continued on page 68)

A handshake may help seal a deal, but only contracts guarantee business agreements between landscape contractors and their clients.

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USE READER SERVICE #71

Contracts

(continued from page 65)

of how other people write their contracts," he said. "We've built relationships with different contractors in non-competing markets across the country - we take bits and pieces and create it how we want to create it."

Some contractors may want to start with smaller, fill-in-the-blank, formatted contracts that can be easily specified to a particular job, Lynott said. A smaller company may feel comfortable with such contract templates, filling in details as jobs come along. As companies move toward larger commercial or residential projects, contracts that spell out terms more clearly with insurance and indemnity become necessary. However, Lynott explained that cost defines the type of agreement, whether a job is commercial or residential. "Jobs that have a much larger dollar value - that's the term that helps sophisticate your contract," he said.

Further, contractors may wish to consult an attorney when developing a contract to
(continued on page 70)

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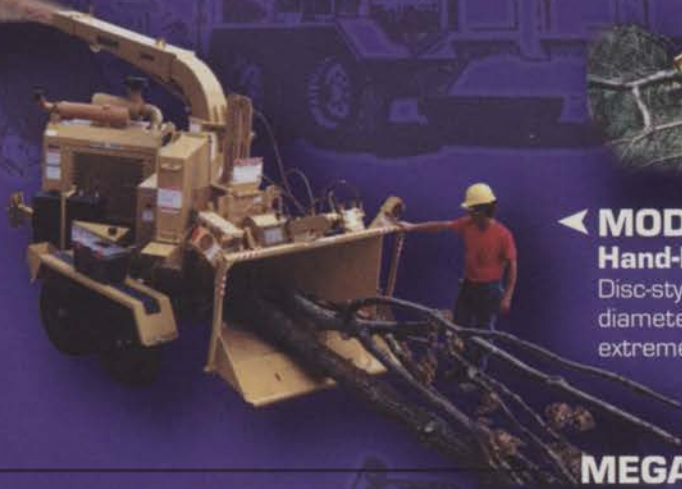
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Contracts

(continued from page 68)

verify the document's legal language, Tovar added. Nevertheless, Lynott warned against showing up at an attorney's front door with nothing but the desire for a contract. "Whenever you go to an attorney you want to be prepared – be specific and give them something to work with so they don't have to start from scratch," he advised, noting the additional business cost of hiring an attorney. "Even though they have [contracts] on file, they will charge you like they wrote it today." For example, without specifying the desire for a brief, concise contract, attorneys may turn out an overwhelming 20-page agreement, Lynott said.

Tovar also noted the need for assertiveness when developing a contract. Although the attorney provides assistance, the contract must retain individuality and be geared toward the mindset of the company's customers, he said. "The attorney will put in every last protection, which might scare the customer," he remarked. "Ask yourself: 'What is the

"Even be **wordy** so there's actually **no question** of what you're **providing** for the **client**. **Stick to your guns** in a nice way." – John Ross

chance of this really needing to be in there?' Keep it reasonable."

On the other hand, Mattingly mentioned that although an attorney can help clarify legal language and binding terms, legal consultation may not be a mandatory ingredient in the contract recipe. As long as the agreement remains clear and includes necessary information regarding a cancellation clause and billing/auditing information, contractor revision can be sufficient.

WHAT DO I INCLUDE? Probably the most daunting contract task, aside from securing the client's signature, revolves around what to include. Before categorizing the services covered in a contract, Mattingly suggested itemizing what the company does not offer. "One mistake people make is they do not write down what is *not* included," he

said. "It is just as important to put in what is not included as what is included."

After establishing the covered services, the written plan must include items such as the scope of work, terms and conditions, a payment schedule, cancellation clauses, change orders, hourly rates and property damage clauses, Lynott listed. "The [clients'] responsibilities – property lines, boundaries, etc. – [they] need to specify those," he said. "With the exclusion, the contractor must identify natural causes and acts of God, [for which] they shouldn't be held responsible."

For example, John Ross, president, John Ross, Flat Rock, N.C., states in his company contract that "it will be the responsibility of the owner or representative to have all underground utilities, including drain lines, septic systems and anything else that may be

(continued on page 72)

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USE READER SERVICE #73

Contracts

(continued from page 70)

damaged, clearly marked by a worker of the respective company involved."

Similarly, Marianne Mumford, co-owner, Landscape Images, Jefferson, La., highlighted the importance of items such as freeze protection, even in areas such as Louisiana, where freezes seldom occur. Although warmer regions may not initially target freeze protec-

tion as a necessary contract item, Mumford cited past experience as a lesson for what her company's contract now features. This also includes a protection covering transplanted materials. "We had done some transplanting 13 years ago, and [the plants] didn't make it, so we learned the hard way," she said. "It was a hard hit, and now we do not

guarantee anything that's a transplant. A lot of people get burned on that."

Contract details such as freeze protection and transplant clauses highlight the key characteristic of a successful contract: specificity. Ross said contractors must indicate not only the number and plant type, but also the exact location. In other words, describing a plan that calls for 30 shrubs "around the back of the house" may be too vague. "Just be specific to the point of being over-specific," Ross noted. "Even be wordy so there's actually no question of what you're providing for the client. Stick to your guns in a nice way."

As part of this detail, Lynott insisted on prorating services so that contractors can avoid losing money if a customer cancels during an installation. "There needs to be some form of schedule," he said. "If a customer cancels, you are compensated." He suggested breaking the contract down into segments, requiring the customer to pay a certain ongoing percentage. The payment then directly relates to the percentage of the service completed in every period.

On the other hand, Mattingly mentioned the dangers of becoming overly detailed in a contract agreement. Because the actual scope of work may vary from what the contractor visualizes months in advance, outlining service frequencies and the like may lead to frustration. "I see that a lot of contractors are itemizing the frequency with which they will do their services." For example, he said contractors might predict a mowing rate of 34 times throughout a season. "The problem with that is, what if I mow 32 times?" he asked. "Do I now reduce the price? If I mow 36 times am I going to send an extra bill? It becomes a bookkeeping nightmare."

As a solution, Mattingly stressed the efficiency of performance-based contracts - pledging to keep grass a certain height, weed as necessary, etc. By removing the nitty-gritty points, contractors still ensure quality service but avoid expectations of perfection.

Lynott maintained that sometimes, this means biting the bullet if the contractor has to perform additional services. "When you are specific, what happens is you are never right," he said. "You made an estimate, which you could call a guesstimate. If you happen to mow more or less, don't charge. Some years you win, some years you lose."

(continued on page 74)



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USE READER SERVICE #128

(continued from page 72)

HOW CAN I STRIKE A BALANCE?

Even though a contract serves to protect the contractor from missed payments and misunderstandings, the contractor-client relationship sometimes usurps the black and white. Therefore, the contractor must strike a compromise between contract specifics and consumer satisfaction. Mumford described

cases in which her company had to reschedule applications because of its growth and service rerouting. Since these changes breached contract agreements, she sent clients a letter and company gift certificate, as consolation. "We're always afraid of losing customers," she said. "But this letter kind of reflects that we're open in communications."

Similarly, Ross noted a few instances in which he extended a client's warranty clause, placing a higher value on relationship building than the by-the-numbers technical language. "For retaining clients, a lot of times we're going to go above and beyond our warranty," he said. "[Customers] are not going to tell their neighbors that they waited too long, they will tell them [the company] didn't warranty it."

Ross said he can usually tell if a client has honestly maintained a property. "If he takes pride in what he's got, we're willing to help." As an added protection in this area, Mumford encourages clients to care for their plants with the following condition: "Plants in decline must be reported to the contractor for inspection before loss of material."

To reach a balance, Mattingly warned against sacrificing necessary services, such as weeding and maintaining turf color. Items that directly affect the image of a lawn reflect the company's image, he noted. "The contract covers all the services that provide the reputation I want to have," he said. If a client argues against weeding, Mattingly urged companies to price it in the contract anyway since clients will characteristically complain when a lawn ceases to be weed-free.

As a further attempt to compromise, long-term contracts lock customers into a flat rate over several years and thus guarantee contractors revenue year after year, Tovar noted. "It saves them grief having to go shopping every year, and saves us grief renewing contracts," he said.

Yet, even with contracts' binding agreements, contractors and clients should remember not to rely on a few sheets of paper for a positive business relationship, said Tovar. "Contracts are really for when you and the customer have a disagreement," Tovar said. "The idea is to have it so you have protections that you need, but also do a good job." **LL**

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

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USE READER SERVICE #140

Future of Lawn Care

by Nicole Wisniewski

No one can accurately predict the future, but many try.

Prophets like legendary seer Nostradamus provide insight into the unknown and reveal bewildering forecasts that are strangely enticing. Fortune-tellers draw the curious into their lairs, using tarot cards and words like "the ace of cups" and "seven of swords" to predict new loves or deceptive cons. Palm-readers stare deeply into right hands, stroking lifelines and counting Xs to prophesize life paths. Even inquisitive newspaper readers turn to their daily horoscopes for potential glimpses into the next 24 hours worth of possibilities.

The truth is, when life seems uncertain, people seek explanations that bring understanding.

Lawn care operators (LCOs) also can be psychics of sorts, but without the jargon. In other words, no Miss Cleo, no Psychic Friends Network, no Nostradamus—just LCOs mapping out business plans based on their predictions of what's around the corner.

In fact, business owners who plan ahead are typically better able to weather market changes, pointed out Terry Brock, tech-

nology and marketing speaker and columnist, eBusiness Speakers, Nashville, Tenn. He said: "To succeed and thrive requires embracing the best of the past and keeping an eye on the future."

To aid LCOs in their ongoing quest to make a name for professionalism in the marketplace, *Lawn & Landscape* magazine – also without the help of Miss Cleo – discussed regulation, notification, certification, communication and other hot-button issues with industry manufacturers and lawn care professionals, resulting in a serious look at what shaped past pressures, aids today's troubles and will help LCOs bear tomorrow's burdens.

UNDER SIEGE. Ten years ago, attacking professionally used pesticides became an annual ritual for consumer media. Headlines, such as "Lethal Lawns," "Poisonous Pesticides" and "Keep Off the Grass," covered airwaves and littered print media.

As media hype increased, so did the government's interest in pesticides and their effects on people and the environment. Some municipalities enacted restrictive regulations against certain products and required applicator licensing. The actions were a result of a Supreme Court decision that permitted local governments to impose more stringent regulations under the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide and Rodenticide Act.

Into THE

Lawn care operators and manufacturers share their views on what's next for the industry.



Future of Lawn Care

While certification has become the norm today in many municipalities and is generally accepted by the industry because it keeps unprofessional applicators off of the streets, regulation laws still flare industry tempers and will continue to do so. "Based on some of the new risk cup assessments, we will prob-

ably lose more chemicals like we did with Dursban," predicted William Strickland, marketing manager, turf, ornamental and pest control, BASF, Research Triangle Park, N.C. "Constant EPA pressures will result in fewer choices. This will be a challenge for LCOs because they won't have the products

that worked so well in the past and will have to switch to a product that's not as good."

In the future, manufacturers will carry the burden of relentless pesticide research and development to ensure LCOs have new, EPA-worthy products to replace those that are lost. "The challenge is to innovate new products to enhance safety, efficiency and profitability," affirmed Rhett Clark, president, Gregson-Clark Spraying Equipment, LeRoy, N.Y.

Augmented pesticide laws will force manufacturers to continue to provide products with extended residuals and low amounts of active ingredients per square foot because of their reduced environmental load, said Marc McNulty, LCO business manager, Chipco Professional Products, Montvale, N.J.

Regulations are a result of product stereotypes created from propaganda, he said, adding that newer chemistries will address many of these issues. "There is this idea that everything being applied is harmful," McNulty commented. "In reality, products applied by the lawn service industry target specific pests and present minimal risk to beneficial pests or mammals. Many new, advanced products have very low active ingredients per acre and are very site specific.

"I think that it is important to have products that are effective with one application," McNulty added. "I also believe that lawn care companies see the value of combination products, such as insect control and herbicide control plus fertilizer."

Even with manufacturers product development efforts, some LCOs predict that other types of products may take their turn on the regulation chopping block. Tim Doppel, president, Atwood Lawn Care, Sterling Heights, Mich., thinks the regulation spotlight will shift from pesticides to fertilizers. "Today, fertilizer is becoming the issue since groundwater and surface water issues have taken the forefront," Doppel explained. "This is especially true in those areas that have already fought the pesticide wars, I think."

Despite the obvious bad taste regulation pressures of the past have left in LCOs mouths, some do see a clearer, more positive vision. "I'm hopeful that EPA pressure will not be as intense as it was in the past," declared Tom Jessen, president, Perma-Green Supreme, Crown Point, Ind. "I'm hoping that we get a couple turns out of the Bush admin-

(continued on page 82)



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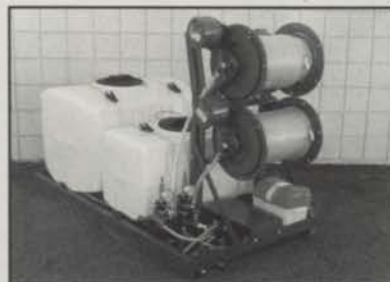
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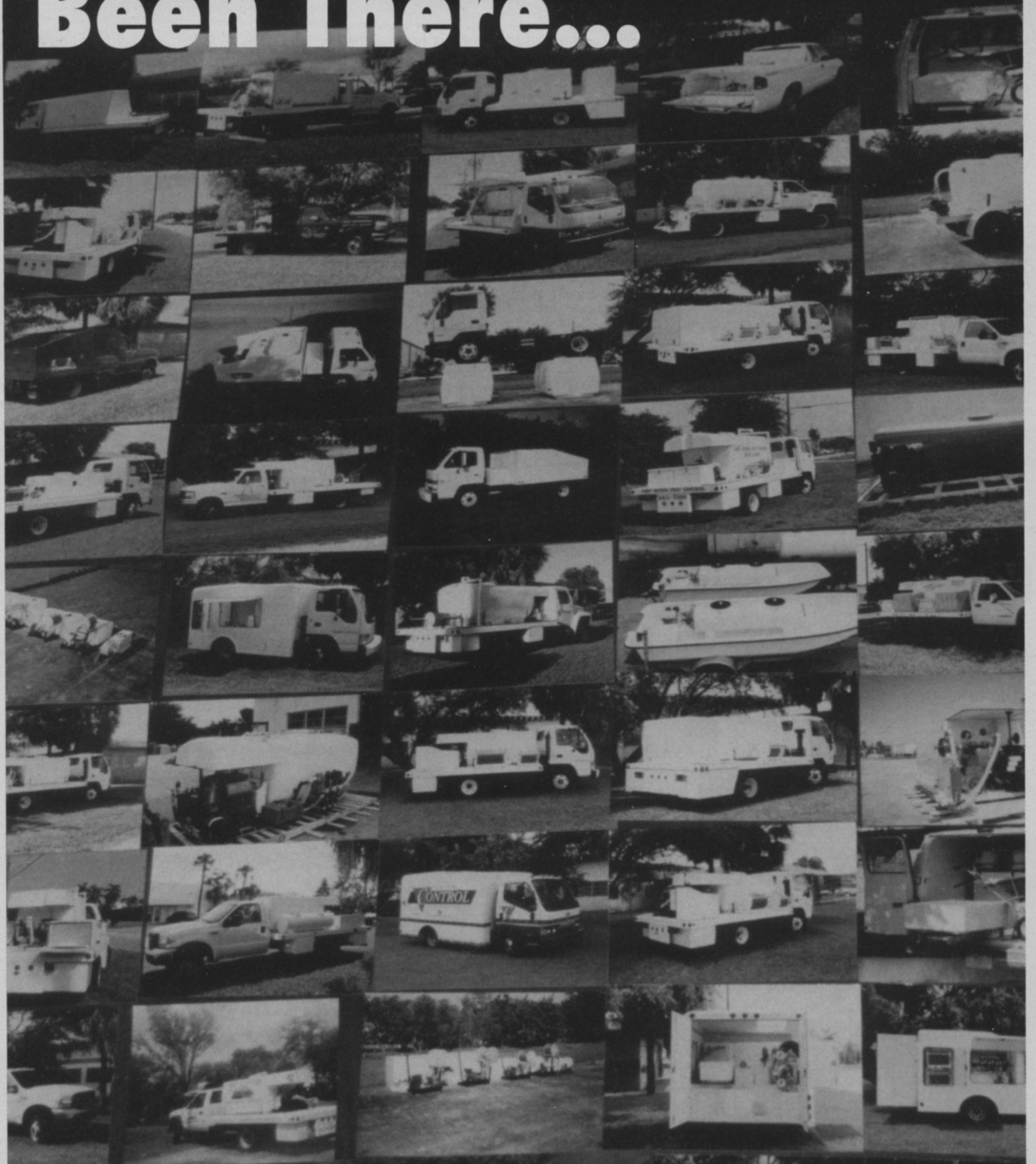


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USE READER SERVICE #130

Future of Lawn Care

(continued from page 80)

istration because I think the people involved are more friendly toward our business than past administrations were."

NOTIFICATION RAMIFICATIONS. Although Nassau County, N.Y., prenotification news saturated industry media this year, state LCOs are used to disputing the laws. Battles have been brewing there since April 1996 when the county legislature passed a five-day notification ordinance (it was later overturned because of an existing state preemption law). The industry fought the statute then, and it fights a similar one again today in five New York counties.

Although New York is a liberal state, the

possibility that other, more conservative states will follow its example exists. But because of today's wilting economy, Jessen thinks otherwise. "Legislatures have to be concerned about the economies in their states and keep people working," he said. "It doesn't make sense to come down on the industry now, put regulations on it and drive people out of the business."

Since the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, the government also may have more important issues to worry about, Jessen mentioned. "If there is any way of finding optimism out of this event, this could be it," he said. "We've been going too quickly along the road of government regulations - it's time to ease off

of that awhile. Pesticide regulations and notification laws make it difficult for people to start new lawn care businesses. The nation relies on small entrepreneurs for growth and economic improvement. So, hopefully, they'll be nicer to the green industry."

Strickland disagreed, using the all-too-familiar term "business as usual," which President George W. Bush emphasized following the attacks. "There may be some distractions," Strickland admitted, "but I don't see [government officials] taking their focus off of what they are trying to accomplish."

The good news is that today's LCOs are more prepared for the onslaught of bad publicity and business limitations, Doppel pointed out. "Ten years ago, we were in a panic, more or less - particularly in Michigan where we were in the heat of the battle over these issues," he explained. "Today, we are working with notification quite easily and certification is a way of life."

(continued on page 84)

"Ten years ago, we were in a panic. Today, we are working with notification quite easily and certification is a way of life." - Doppel

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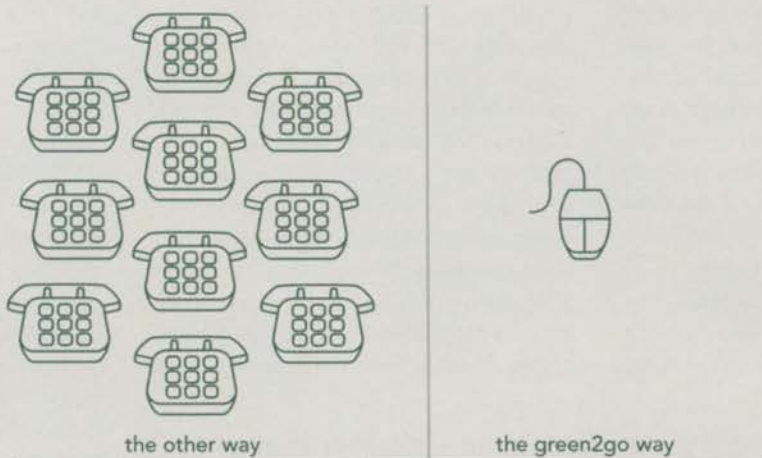
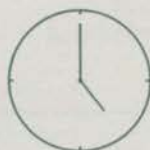


fig. 1



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fig. 2

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Future of Lawn Care

(continued from page 82)

CONSOLIDATION CONSIDERATIONS.

Faced with the aggravating reality that government officials would not stop obstructing industry growth through pesticide regulation and notification laws, many companies threw in their towels and erected "For Sale" signs. Hence, the industry's consolidation kick picked up steam more than 10 years ago with the shocking acquisition of ChemLawn by Ecolab. Then in 1992, after failing to restore ChemLawn to its lofty industry leader position, Ecolab sold the company to TruGreen for one-third of the price it originally paid.

While the pace of consolidation has slowed today, many industry observers still think it will persist. "I think we will continue

to see acquisition of small to mid-sized regional lawn care companies by the larger national lawn care companies," McNulty maintained. "Also, as EPA restrictions and limitations on product uses increase, lawn care companies will be forced to adapt or comply with regulations or rethink the direction of their companies. I think this could accelerate the amount of smaller companies consolidating with the larger companies."

In addition to consolidation, new businesses will continue to enter the market, some forecasted. "Even with more regulations, the barriers to entry in the lawn care industry are a lot less than most small businesses, meaning that new competition will

continue to force thin margins and demand increased efficiency," Clark said.

Consolidation doesn't stop here - many predict it will continue on various levels, including among product manufacturers. This may benefit the industry because as manufacturers consolidate, money spent for new product research and development often increases, McNulty said.

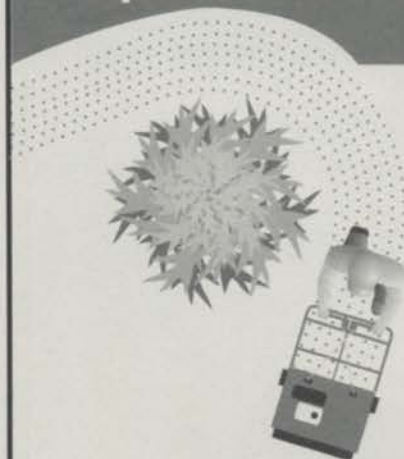
But consolidation also reduces competition, and as competition decreases, product prices are likely to rise, Jessen warned. "If there is a shrinking market, manufacturers are left to compete," he said. "One way people compete is with price."

However, history proves that consolidation will not reach the point where prices are greatly affected or only one dominant manufacturer remains, Jessen added. "There's a lot of money to be made in this industry," he explained. "If someone leaves a void in the marketplace, someone else will quickly take his place."

"For **every guy** out there who's doing it right, there's a **guy** out there who's doing it **wrong** and **getting noticed.**" - Strickland

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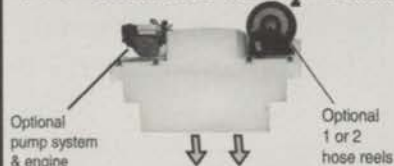
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USE READER SERVICE #55

Future of Lawn Care

Tomorrow's LCOs will be better communicators, spreading the word about proper pesticide practices and Integrated Pest Management.

PROFESSIONALS ONLY. Ten years ago, industry opposition and teamwork, not to mention client support, helped table a pesticide regulation ordinance in Lake Winnebago, Mo. This proved that positive results are possible through industry interaction.

At the same time, a *Lawn & Landscape* environmental outlook asked the question: "If pesticides are so popular then why are they under attack?"

The answer pointed to an industry com-

munications flaw. Doppel reported: "We're very good technically, but we're not good communicators." After a decade, Doppel still believes communication is an issue – one he termed "never-ending."

"I do think we have improved, but there is still a long way to go," he stated. "Most people still perceive LCOs as using pesticides indiscriminately and constantly. The professional is the last place where consumers turn for alternatives to blanket pesticide applications when, in fact, there are lots of LCOs doing a very good job with all-natural products and low-input type programs. We need to continue to get that story out."

Today, more LCOs are involved in their local communities, spreading the word about proper practices and Integrated Pest Management (IPM). For instance, the industry in Alberta, Canada wants to establish an education program with city officials, pointed out Brian Gibson, vice president, Green Drop Lawns, Calgary, Alberta, Canada. "If we can

educate people on the proper use of products and get our side of the story out on the benefits of a healthy lawn and landscape, then clients will have no need to be concerned," he said.

In the future, LCOs who embrace professional images will have to defend themselves and encourage their peers to become more reliable. Ten years ago, Tom Delaney, executive director, the Professional Lawn Care Association of America, Atlanta, Ga., said: "In this age, an applicator has to be a more sophisticated applicator than 10 years ago. More is expected of him."

Today, the same statement applies, although Doppel said the issue has improved significantly. "We have made great strides in the last 10 years," he said. "I see more LCOs working very hard at doing the job right and putting forth a professional image. They recognize that the consumer draws a great deal of comfort from a caring service and that will

(continued on page 140)

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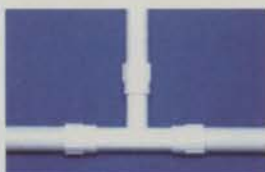
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USE READER SERVICE #75

Residential Design

by Kristen Hampshire

Personality meets property in these award-winning landscape designs.

OLD-WORLD FLAVOR

The European-style gardens in this Dallas landscape create an introduction to the home's Mediterranean architecture. Recto-linear design, crushed granite walkways, treated pavers and mature plantings lend a worn-in feel – one of the residents' desires for the property.

"The owners didn't want the landscape to appear to be newly built or even done within the last 10 to 20 years," explained Paul Fields, vice president and director of design, Lambert Landscaping, Dallas, Texas. "Also, they wanted to create a garden that tied into the style of the home so there was a seamless transition from the garden to the architecture.

"We looked at different options for the paving materials that would give the property an old feel," he added.

Atypical chopped Granbury stone achieves an established atmosphere on the property, and pavers were treated with a faux finish, some of them sprayed with buttermilk to facilitate moss and lichen growth. Large, simple plant materials, such as ear-clipped hedges and holly varieties, were installed to accentuate the developed feel. This landscape serves as the home's foyer, and those entering the front door experience the Mediterranean mood before reaching the front door, Fields pointed out.

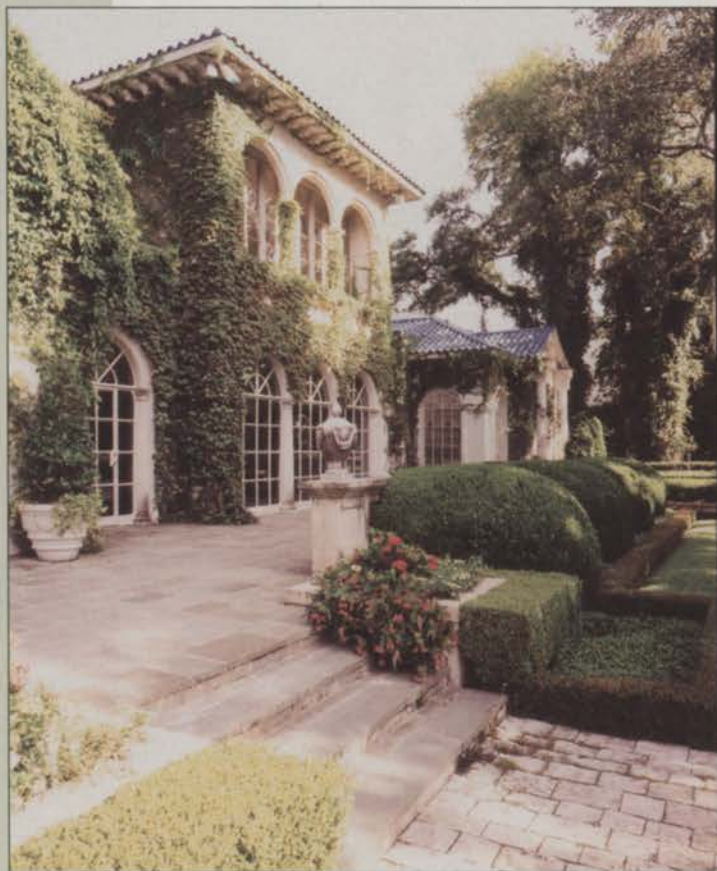
Four garden spaces, or "outdoor garden rooms," form the entryway landscape. A formal courtyard flanks an arcade in the home and is viewed from the front door, and a parterre garden with boxwood and rosemary create circles, each center holding an Italian terra cotta container with a topiary citrus tree. The pool garden accentuates the linear feel carried throughout the gardens, and the sunken lawn panels in the fourth space are surrounded by tiered, slipped hedges.

"The master plan has been modified over time and we have done additional projects," Fields said. "It's still not finished."

The project earned a first place 2000 Residential Maintenance award from the Texas Nursery & Landscape Association.

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WOODLAND WONDER

Buckthorn once invaded this 15-acre wooded Barrington Hills residence, consuming 90 percent of the wooded landscape. Large, native oaks prevented crews at Van Zelst, Wadsworth, Ill., from using large machinery to eliminate the shrubs, known for overrunning forested areas, noted David Van Zelst, owner.

Chainsaws, shovels and plenty of manpower helped clear the lot of the non-native bushes before the property could be restored with perennials and wildflowers for year-round color interest, he said.

To re-establish the forest, the two-year project required six crews with 20 to 30 people at times, Van Zelst noted. "We created a prairie situation in the cleared-out woodland areas, and around the house there is a more formal setting where we utilized native and non-native grasses, trimmed hedges and other perennials," he described. Each year, the company installs five to seven mature trees to continue the resurgence of the woody environment.

The clients are pleased with the new show of color and innovative wildflower displays.

The project was awarded the 2000 Associated Landscape Contractors of America Grand Award.

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USE READER SERVICE #76

WHERE CACTI MEET THE COAST

FENNER RESIDENCE

Rusch Landscaping,

Key Largo, Fla.



"Ouch," was a common word for the Rusch Landscaping crew that installed a desert cactus landscape at the Fenner residence in Key Largo, Fla. "Some of the cacti were huge so we wrapped them in burlap to get them into the area, but in some instances we couldn't wrap them because it was more dangerous if the needles poked through – it was better to know where the needles were," described Bill Rusch, owner of the Homestead, Fla.-based company.

Installation also presented challenges as special soil and gravel had to be premixed on the street and hauled to the back of the property, Rusch added.

The property's 25-degree slope required various levels with rock walls, rolling contours and rock steps to display the material. Tennessee river rock introduces brown shades, and native coral rock used in the large retaining areas provides a white-gray contrast. Round river rocks and Chatahoochie rock add more color and texture. European fan palms, Washingtonian palms and a 30-foot Medjool Date palm, were planted throughout the property, and cacti were arranged based on their color and anticipated growth speed to produce a long-lasting, captivating landscape.

The project earned the 1999 Florida Nurserymen and Growers Association Special Projects award.

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The Jorsts wanted a space suitable for both guests and family. A pool and patio area in the back yard provides a recreational element, while a water feature in the front yard offers contemporary elegance.

"The water feature in the front flows underneath a bridge that leads to the front door," Potter described. A complex subsurface drainage system collects water, directing it into a canyon below the house. The backyard slope was remedied with hand-stacked rock wall terraces that step the landscape down to the pool area.

Columnar evergreens fit the landscape's space limitations, and grasses lend a natural effect and landscape lighting shows off the landscape after dark, Potter added.

The project won a 2000 certification of achievement from the Nevada Landscape Association.

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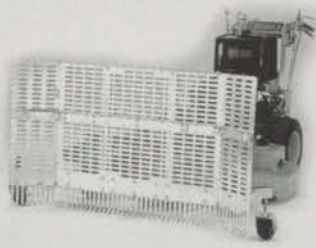
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USE READER SERVICE #113

Irrigation Renovation

by Kristin Mohn

A bright, shiny irrigation system can't last forever.

System renovation boosts performance with updated equipment and design.

Many people make purchases with today in mind, instead of 10 years from today. This explains the outdated fashions, cars and slogans that drift in and out of pop culture. From time to time, we must reevaluate our wardrobe, throwing out unrealistic outfits and replacing them with up-to-date, effective fashion statements.

Irrigation systems, although a larger investment than new clothing, also go in and out of style. Systems initially installed on a new property may wear out years later as the yard matures. Similarly, careless installation may initially go unnoticed until brown spots appear on lawns down the road. Like most material items, irrigation systems look great at first, but aren't meant to last.

Renovating a system can range anywhere from replacing a head to starting at square one. Knowing why renovations become necessary, how to best tackle an update, and what challenges may occur ease the makeover process. The fact remains that irrigation renovation exists as a necessary phase in a system's life cycle.

CULPRITS OF CHANGE. Age is not just a number when it comes to the operating ability of irrigation systems. Older irrigation systems lack efficiency in water output, conservation and cost, illustrated William Dickerson, president, Dickerson Landscaping, Tallahassee, Fla. "A lot of times, the homeowner bought the house with a system that could be old, neglected or out-of-date," he said. "If it's 25 to 30 years old, things happen to the system. The technology

(continued on page 98)

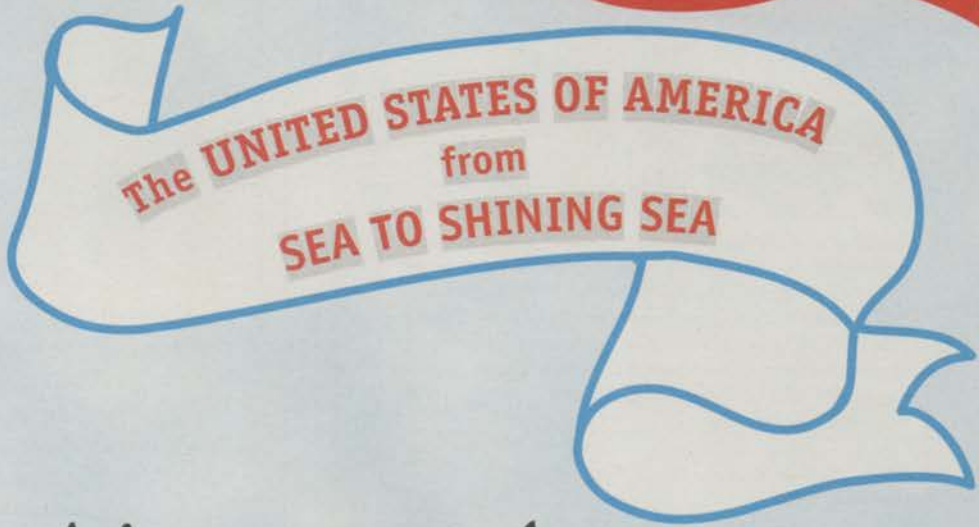
Maintenance

MAKEOVERS



Sloppy installation (right) may result in a separation of pipe at the mainline elbow, insufficient primer and excess solvent. To repair (left), avoid focusing on the leak site and simply replace the entire questionable portion.

Photo: Greg Mitchell



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USE READER SERVICE #133

Irrigation Renovation

(continued from page 96)

that they have out now saves homeowners money and water, more than the stuff from the early years." For example, the passage of time leads to corroded wire, and available advances such as improved system clocks sometimes drive system updates. "I don't think any of us in the design field really look at a landscape and say, 'Gee, I'm designing this for what it's going to look like in 30 years,'" quipped Dickerson.

Plant growth also influences the timeliness of an irrigation system, pointed out Bill Schumacher, owner, Springtime Landscaping & Irrigation, Bend, Ore. "We have to add heads because some of the irrigation is blocked out by plants totally," he said.

This often happens when a homeowner purchases a house with an existing irrigation system, Dickerson offered. "The homeowner may come in and buy this house and hate what's there, and want a completely different look," he said. "More than likely you

(continued on page 100)

Step by Step

After identifying a faulty irrigation system, Scott Fischer, owner, Fischer Irrigation, Webster, Texas, recommended these steps for thorough system renovation.

- Complete a thorough overview of the system's performance, observing each operating zone.
- Visually check head distances and other items that may be out of code and mark these items.
- Target specific problem areas as reported by the customer.
- Determine the requirements (water, pressure, etc.) for an area and compare them to the existing design; mark differences.
- Review the system design and propose changes to the customer.
- Offer the customer an estimate. — **Kristin Mohn**



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USE READER SERVICE #134

Irrigation Renovation

(continued from page 98)

have more shade in the yard than when [they] first built the house, and also the soil is more compacted."

Similarly, clients adding amenities to their lawn need to consider irrigation face-lifts because changes affect the lawn's water requirements, noted Scott Fischer, owner, Fischer Irrigation, Webster, Texas. "We of-

ten do renovations for situations where people change their landscaping," he said. "People add items such as pools, hardscapes, decks and things of that nature."

Patrick Lynch, president, Premier Irrigation, Hastings, Minn., explained that these yard expansions limit the amount of water available for irrigating purposes. "As systems

expand, what ends up happening is they run out of water," he said. "Then we get into the issue where the mainline pipe isn't large enough to accommodate the current [system], much less additions. We have to increase mainline piping, add a larger pump system, [install] different routing systems, etc."

However, a deficient original design drives renovation more often than not, Fischer said. "We do a lot of service work where situations are improperly designed, and it has to be renovated due to poor initial design."

Schumacher said improper spacing and the lack of a "big picture" mindset results in sloppy installation. "Poor installation can be due to the spacing of sprinklers - a lot of people stretch them out too far," he said. "So we have to move the heads when redesigning the irrigation systems. Also, not all people plan for plant growth, and some irrigators don't understand landscaping. The maintenance, the service and the landscaping need to be combined in the design."

RENOVATION KNOW-HOW. Determining the proper requirements for an irrigation system also necessitates examining state codes related to precipitation rates, spacing, nozzle pressure and other components, Fischer said. "Because of the state law requiring the precipitation rates and the spacing, if a system is not put in properly to start with, then it does not meet the state code," he said. "The state code is a minimum [requirement] - if it doesn't meet that, then it won't work too well."

Dry spots serve as a key indication of an improperly functioning system, Schumacher said. Customers who may not be familiar with a system's finer points also can identify this sign easily. "Then we pay attention to pipe sizing, add on more heads, [look at] gallonage, see if we have to add on extra zones or controllers, see how many stations are available on the controller, [look for] room to add on, etc.," he listed.

Fischer suggested that other system problems are less likely to be noticed by the customer. "Customers usually don't [know what's wrong], they have us out maybe because it isn't getting enough water," he said. "They don't know why we have to add a new head, we might have to add another zone because sometimes you just can't add heads, and you will lose pressure. If it's not initially

(continued on page 102)

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USE READER SERVICE #97

Irrigation Renovation

(continued from page 100)

designed correctly, the redo can become a major service call."

Lynch begins irrigation renovations by having an irrigation consultant perform an engineering analysis of the existing system, including flow, pressure and elevation changes. "From those parameters, it will evolve into a detailed design," he said.

In addition, Fischer advised contractors to have thorough conversations with customers, discussing what they eventually plan to add to their properties so that systems are prepared for further development. "The nature of how we normally do things, it kind of has [expansion] built into it automatically," he said. "We keep key components such as valves, wiring and main lines from bisecting the backyard where future amenities could be added."

Yet, predicting the future accurately can be challenging for even the most intuitive customer. Often, clients wish to add property items that warrant removing existing

systems and starting over again. "Sometimes it comes down to redoing the whole yard," Dickerson stated. "Recently, a client wanted to put in a circular driveway. It's no longer an option, and no longer cost-effective, to use the old system."

Lynch explained that many commercial properties choose gradual renovation to lower cash outlays, but he refuted this assumption. "In commercial, they don't want to bite the bullet, not [do it] all up front, because they think it's more cost effective," he stated. "It couldn't be further from the truth because of remobilization, and the more you do, the cheaper [it is] per foot. It costs them three times as much to divide it up."

Fischer insisted on accurate installation and upkeep to avoid unexpected repair costs. "A lot of times, repairing is more expensive than installing," he said. "For example, an average sprinkler system may run \$3,000, new and properly installed. People will spend

"I don't think any of us in the design field really look at a landscape and say, 'Gee, I'm designing this for what it's going to look like in 30 years.'" — William Dickerson

maybe \$1,500 or \$1,800 initially with a company. But the repair bill is going to be another \$1,500. They will have tied up enough money total where they could do it right the first time. If certain things are not done properly to start with it can be too extensive cost-wise in comparison to a new system."

MAKEOVER MADNESS. Although renovations serve to correct problems, they also come with their own set of frustrating challenges. Dickerson said that some customers might not be initially receptive to the idea of renovation, especially when it requires up-

(continued on page 104)

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Irrigation Renovation

(continued from page 102)

rooting an existing system. "It depends on the conditions - if a customer is routinely taking care of it, and you know it's an ongoing process, you have a good relationship," he said. "If it's someone you've never seen before who is calling up specifically because the irrigation system doesn't work, they tend to be rather surprised and start looking for ways to reduce the price."

Fischer said he handles customer complaints by explaining the higher water costs and the need to conserve water outlays. "It's a matter of water conservation and efficiency, and a poorly designed irrigation system is not as efficient and wastes water," he said. "Water is a precious natural resource."

On the other hand, Dickerson identified recent drought years as an impetus for customers to willingly open their wallets for renovation. In addition, if a customer plans to spend large amounts of money, the system must be up to par. "They won't put \$10,000 into their yard and have an inferior irrigation system," he said. However, as rain returns, he emphasized the need for customers to continually check their own systems to avoid major problems before they start. "You should be getting irrigation checked once a year, minimal, depending on where you are in the country," he said. "Water conditions change seasonally - so if that is going on routinely, you may not need to do any major renovation because you've been doing it all along."

Customers who may be anxious to get into the system themselves should be wary of causing further damage to a system. "People add on different types of sprinklers, have three different types of sprinklers running at the same time, plus [don't consider] the age of the system," Schumacher explained. "They should call the professional and get some consultation before they start butchering it."

Despite irrigation renovation value, Fischer feels much can be eliminated by increasing the commitment to quality service during installation. In fact, even though renovation jobs provide additional service, he suggested the remodeling can sometimes be a limiting deterrent. "It helps, but at the same time, we could be doing things for other people instead of correcting stuff that was not put in properly," he admitted. **LL**

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

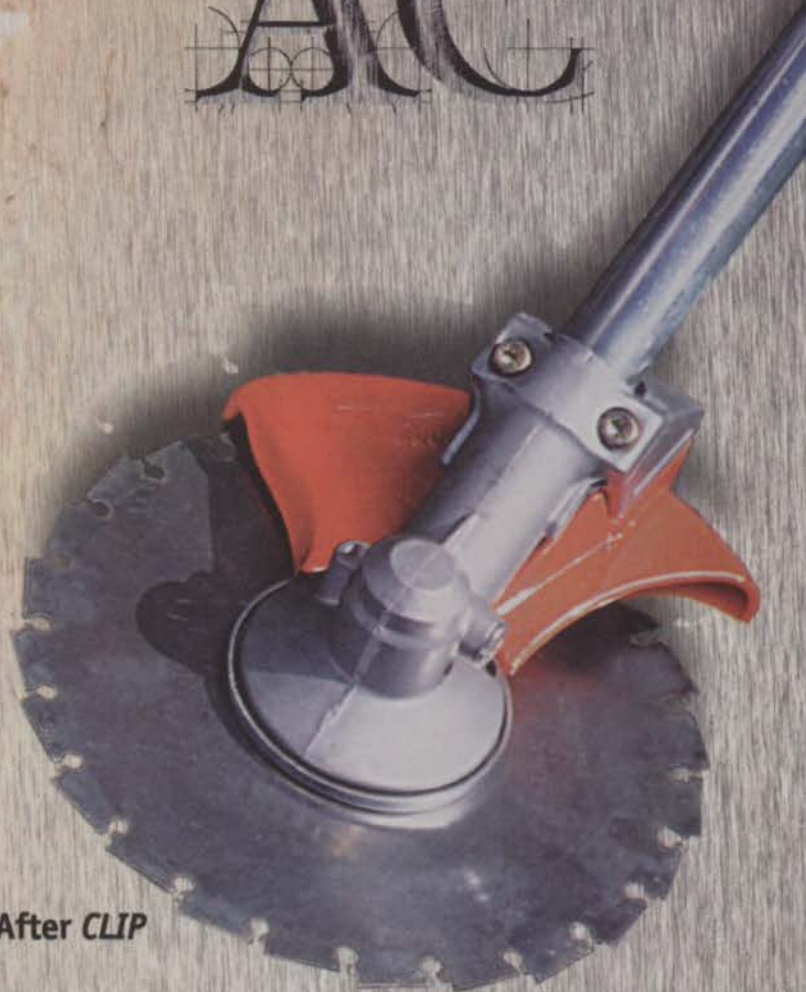
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Conversation

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CONVERSATION

with

Keelan PULLIAM

A black and white portrait of Keelan Pulliam, a middle-aged man with short, graying hair and glasses. He is wearing a light-colored dress shirt and a dark tie. He is looking slightly upwards and to the left with a thoughtful expression. The background is plain white.

Keelan Pulliam's legacy in the specialty pesticides marketplace is well-documented. A quintessential company man, Pulliam has proven time and time again that hard work, knowing your product and your industry, and providing the best care possible to all customers is critical to the company's success.

From ICI Americas to Zeneca Professional Products to Syngenta Professional Products, Pulliam created a name for himself as an innovator, focused leader and business strategist. By all accounts, he demands a lot from himself as well as the people who work with him.

He's tireless in his pursuit of growth for the specialty pesticide industry and has served countless hours on the board of the Responsible Industry for Sound Environment.

Here, Pulliam provides his perspective on the professional lawn care industry, what consolidation means to the industry, and his role in leading Syngenta into the future.

LAWN & LANDSCAPE (L&L): You've had a lengthy career in the specialty pesticides industry. Describe some of your career highlights.

KEELAN PULLIAM (KP): I've been fortunate to have had roles either in starting or growing an existing business, which has contributed to overall company growth. When I joined ICI in 1979, total sales were approximately \$25 million and the company was in its early stages of growth.

(continued on page 108)

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Conversation

(continued from page 106)

At the time of the merger to form Syngenta, sales were nearly \$1 billion, and I'd like to think I was a part of the team that delivered that growth.

Lastly, in 1994, when I moved from agricultural products to the professional products business, there was a pest management business in place but turf and ornamentals was in its infancy. It was fun to put together the team that would grow the professional pest management business while developing the turf and ornamental business.

L&L: What key qualities do you look for when hiring people?

KP: I like to believe I have a strong work ethic, and I like to work with people who share that characteristic. Fundamentally, I like people who can think, make decisions and who are competitive.

More importantly, when building a team you want to hire people who have different skill sets or competencies. You need people who are strategic thinkers, others who are conceptual thinkers and others who are analytical. Some people are more creative than others and you need this characteristic on your team as well. You need team members who can influence others, are adaptable or can be flexible. All have to be performance driven.

Of even greater importance is that all the team members understand the style of the members of their team, as well as those they are interacting with on a daily basis.

L&L: Are you a hands-on manager?

KP: I have been told over the years that I am too hands-on. I like to get into the details and understand why things are happening in order to strategize and develop tactics with the team. In recent years, I have tried to step back and depend on my team. At Syngenta Professional Products today, looking after three different business units, I have had to back away and let my teams run the business. Fortunately, I have great people in all the businesses.

L&L: How do you manage and promote both strategic and creative thinking in your business?

KP: As I said earlier, it is important to have people with different strengths and different skills on your team. I don't consider myself a strategic thinker, but I surround myself with people who are. I want that skill on my team. I don't believe I'm that far "out of the box" in my thinking. I would like to think of myself as more conceptual - as someone who can put

(continued on page 110)

On... **THINKERS**

"Creative thinking is probably the most difficult of the thinking skills either to possess yourself or to find in people."

- Keelan Pulliam

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Conversation

(continued from page 108)

different ideas together and see how they fit together and in various markets.

Strategic thinking requires someone to be focused on the future and the bigger picture – someone who not only sees how it all fits together, but who sees and understands all the forces that drive your business and the overall market. Once you have a strategic plan in place, it's important to follow your plan. There will be setbacks and you will have to adjust, but you need to have the conviction to stick to it if you believe you are right. Many companies and many individuals who are empowered end up making too many short-term decisions because of financial and other pressures. But you need to stick to your plan.

Creative thinking is probably the most difficult of the thinking skills either to possess yourself or to find in people. It is important that you let people not only be creative, but to feel they can express themselves without timidity.

On... LEADERSHIP

"Leadership is more than size. It's the quality of its products, its people and how well you support the industry."

- Keelan Pulliam

L&L: How do you challenge and motivate the team you have in place?

KP: Teams need to have clear direction and clear objectives. Then, as a manager, you need to ensure that these people have the resources, tools and support to do their jobs. You need to be available to coach and support their efforts, then empower them to get the job done. Lastly, you need to compliment and recognize their work. A simple "thank you" is a powerful tool that is never used enough, myself included.

I have tried to learn from my managers and supervisors and, throughout my career, I have tried to take away something from each one. Jim Hudson and Bob Woods stand out.

Both were very different. Jim would give

you an assignment or project and would expect you to deliver the results. He would empower you and expect you to figure it out. He was definitely not hands-on. During the early days of ICI, Jim was key to its growth, particularly its external focus with distributors. He was one of the "disciples" of distribution and he never wavered, no matter how difficult the decisions.

Bob Woods was a true believer in people and teamwork. He believed if you set targets and measurements and got everyone to understand their individual roles and importance in delivering these targets, the business would be delivered. Bob placed as much emphasis on the employees as he did the

(continued on page 112)

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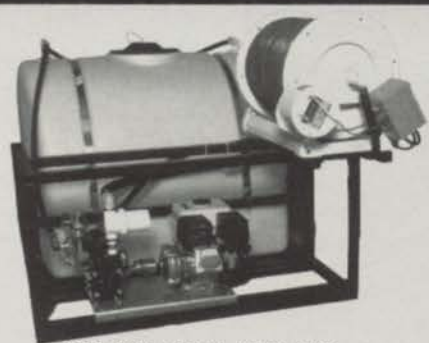
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Conversation

(continued from page 110)

business. He empowered people, but he was also there to coach and he expected every manager to be a coach as well.

Both were alike in that they managed by "walking around." They would go through the different departments and talk to employees, ask questions, visit with individuals, etc. Both made people feel they were contributing to the overall business.

L&L: Would you say then that Bob Woods and Jim Hudson were your two primary mentors? Are there others?

KP: Definitely. Those two in business and, of course, my father. My father taught me early on the value of work growing up on a small tobacco and dairy farm in Kentucky. I got all the chores. But he also taught me to be responsible and to be accountable.

In the workplace, both Hudson and Woods were great teachers and mentors. I was lucky. Hudson was tough, but he had a soft and caring side behind the scenes for people and their needs.

Woods was one of the best I have ever seen. He not only made time for me, but for anyone in the company. He always found time. He was a leader – someone who could get you to carry out his vision. Both were great teachers and good friends.

L&L: As business director, you're responsible for managing several specialty businesses. How do you personally stay involved with the daily aspects of your business?

KP: First, let me say I like to manage more informally than formally. That is more one-on-one visits, phone calls to managers in the field, visits in the halls, open door, etc. When you are involved in more than one business as I am, there are different and unique issues to deal with daily.

I try to get involved in all areas of the business and tend to move from one issue to another within the business. For some people, that would be difficult. For me, I welcome that challenge.

I enjoy sitting down with individuals

one-on-one to see how projects are going and what they need. Personally, I find this to be better than long management meetings, particularly when multiple business are involved. Of course you still need some cross-team leadership meetings.

L&L: How often are you in the field?

KP: Absolutely not as much as I used to be and not as much as I would like to be. My background is in sales and marketing and I am more comfortable on that side of the business. I like the relationship with the distributors and end users. I like the energy from talking with them. Listening to them, you will get all the ideas you need. However, when you manage three separate segments in the industry, it becomes a challenge to spend enough time in the field.

L&L: Is consolidation of pesticide suppliers good for the industry?

KP: Yes. The end result is larger companies with more resources that can be dedicated to the professional markets. If these become



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Keelan Pulliam predicted continued industry consolidation for suppliers, distributors and end users. Photo: Lenny Cohen



core markets, there can be more focus on molecule screening as well as research and development, which means more new products and technologies.

For example, here at Syngenta we now have a new and greater emphasis on all the professional products markets, starting with molecule screening for uses in turf, orna-

mentals, professional pest management, aquatics, etc. In addition, the merger strengthened our position in some segments and opened up other segments for investment.

I believe consolidation will drive a new focus in the professional markets because traditional agricultural chemical markets generally are not growing in value and the returns from investments in biotechnology are a number of years off.

L&L: How can the lawn care operator better understand the benefits of a company like Syngenta?

KP: First, customers are going to see a greater emphasis on all professional markets, including lawn care. This means we hope to bring new and better products to our customers. Because of the importance of lawn care to Syngenta, more emphasis will be placed on research and development. While the agricultural market has driven research

and development in the past, you will see more products developed earlier for the professional markets in the future, which is a huge benefit to end users. In addition, we will support the lawn care operator with a strong sales organization as well as a technical service support group.

L&L: Where do you see Syngenta five years from now?

KP: Primarily, we must prove ourselves as Syngenta Professional Products. But, ultimately, I hope we will be viewed as an industry leader, providing stewardship for our products as well as the industry. I hope the users of our products will believe we deliver high quality products and technology. I want everyone to have confidence in our products and our people.

L&L: What about the industry in general? What significant changes are taking place in the pesticide industry?

KP: First, consolidation is not finished. You

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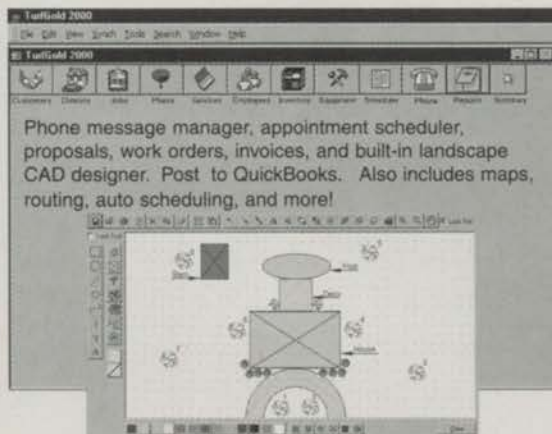
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Online provides "bonus" coverage of a wide range of business and technical topics of interest to professional contractors. Just look for the "For More Information" boxes or the "Web Buttons" throughout *Lawn & Landscape* magazine featuring the site

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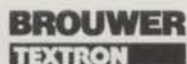
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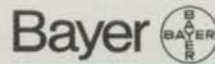
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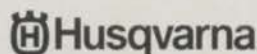
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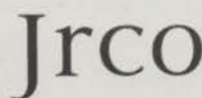
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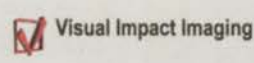
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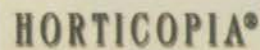
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Conversation

(continued from page 113)

will see more mergers and acquisitions at the basic supplier level as well as at the distribution level, and more consolidation will occur at the operator level.

Plus, there's a lot of investment being made in information technology. This will change how we communicate with our channel partners and with our end users and, ultimately, the homeowner.

Distributors are building technical platforms to do business with their customers. Use of information is changing how we interact with each level of the value chain all the way to the ultimate consumer. This will bring efficiencies, but I still believe no matter how sophisticated our technology becomes, the industry will always rely on good people providing value-added services.

Another change to be recognized is the need for basic suppliers, distributors and user group associations to come together to form a stronger alliance to support and steward our industry. The activist groups that

were focused on the agricultural side of the industry and food safety in the 1980s and early 1990s have landed on our doorstep.

They are promoting their agendas through our industry, generating fear of our products and how they are used, and using children's health as their focal point. As an industry, we must respond with the facts and with more resolve.

We have been very successful in many ways, most recently with the changes in the education bill that passed the Senate with the amendment on the use of pesticides in schools. It was a great example of the industry working together.

L&L: How should the industry deal with environmental activists?

KP: As an industry, we are very aware of the safety around the use of our products – when used according to the label. Our science is solid, but we have learned the general public doesn't understand our message.

There are individuals who believe pesti-

cides should not be used. We will never change the minds of those people. As long as they are active and they're providing misinformation about our industry, our products and the use of our products, they are creating a fear factor among consumers. We have a valid message to offset that.

Our approach has to be educating consumers about the benefits of our products, and that the pest is the problem. At the end of the day, our message has to be the value our products bring to individuals in that we are protecting health, protecting property and improving the quality of home and public environments. This is a powerful and very positive message.

Pesticides are a very necessary component for continuing our quality of life. We are very fortunate for the standard and quality of life we have in this country and we often take it for granted. As an industry, we have to do a much better job not only about positive



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2002 ISUZU Crewcab, 14' dump body, 48" tool box, hitch, tarp, auto., ac, am/fm cass.

USE READER SERVICE #89



Keelan Pulliam expects significant communication changes due to technology. Photo: Lenny Cohen

promotion of our products but about the fact that we protect public health, property and improve the beauty of our environment.

We have to talk about problems like Lyme disease and West Nile virus. We need to talk about examples of public school systems in the United States that quit using pesticides and the problems that occurred. One of my concerns, as the industry consolidates, is that we cannot afford to deliver this message. Our resources will be stretched.

L&L: How rapidly do you expect the industry to grow?

KP: Based on industry figures, the non-golf turf chemical purchases is in the \$300 to 350 million range. The professional lawn care market is expected to grow long-term (during the next 5 years) at an approximate rate of 3 to 5 percent. This estimate reflects the chemical application business only; services will grow at a much faster rate. With the recent downturn in the U.S. economy, we expect that 2002 will be flat through next summer. Most consumers will refrain from adding new services until they are more comfortable with their long-term financial prospects.

L&L: As industry consolidation continues, how will existing distribution change?

KP: As lawn care operators and chemical manufacturers continue to consolidate, we expect that their distribution network will consolidate as well. This is driven in part by large lawn care operators wanting to deal

with fewer suppliers. Successful distributors will provide higher levels of technical expertise and service to lawn care customers who will be focusing on customer retention over gaining new customers.

L&L: Will the amount of biological products used in the industry ever compare to the use of pesticides today?

KP: While we expect the biological product categories to continue to grow in the future, we do feel they have limitation on costs and overall effectiveness. Increased use will bring down their costs and more exposure will be in synthetic chemicals that are based on biological compounds. Examples of these are Heritage® or Medallion® fungicides.

We feel that lawn care customers will expect that their lawn service provider use reduced risk chemicals that provide excellent results. **LI**

The author is Group Publisher of Lawn & Landscape Media Group.

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Product SHOWCASE

ATTACHMENTS

ECHO PRO ATTACHMENT SERIES

- Includes seven interchangeable attachments for Echo power sources
 - Hedge clipper features 20-inch, double-sided, double-reciprocating blades
 - Power Pruner reaches branches up to 12 feet high
 - ProSweep offers more than 22 inches of swath
 - Tiller/cultivator intended for use in artistically designed flowerbeds and gardens
 - Other attachments in the series include edger, trimmer and ProThatch
- Circle 200 on reader service card

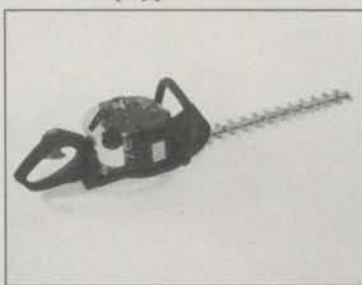
E-Z TREE FOR SKID-STEER LOADERS

- Product handles large, 200- to 2,000-pound balled-and-burlapped trees in wire baskets

- Features ability to lift, move and lower trees into desired position during the planting, harvesting and transporting processes
 - Product moves trees without disturbing their integrity
 - Cuts down on labor and time costs
- Circle 201 on reader service card

HAND-HELD POWER EQUIPMENT REDMAX DOUBLE SIDED HEDGE TRIMMER

- Equipped with Komatsu Zenoah's Strato-charged engine
- Double-sided, 30-inch, dual-reciprocating blades are at an ergonomic 1.62-inch pitch



- 25.4 cc two-cycle engine meets CARB II, EPA Phase II air standards without catalytic converter
 - Offers a 34 percent fuel savings, 73 percent fewer exhaust emissions and 5 percent less weight than traditional RedMax engines
 - Features blade speed of 2.89 feet per second
 - Includes chain saw grips to maximize operator safety
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CUB CADET COMMERCIAL STRING TRIMMERS

- Tap-n-Go head allows instant release of string trimmer line for continuous operation
- Anti-winding head eliminates grass build-up around trimmer head
- Features throttle-lock and purge pump
- Heavy-duty, anti-vibration mounts offer low vibration and ergonomic operator handles lessen fatigue

(continued on page 120)

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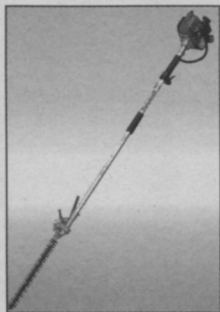
Product Review

(continued from page 118)

- Two-piece, commercial-grade filtration system increases engine protection and engine life
 - High power-to-weight ratio allows operator to handle a variety of edging jobs
 - Optional attachments include circular saw blade, bike handle kit, cultivator/tiller attachments and metal debris shield
- Circle 203 on reader service card

MARUYAMA HEDGE TRIMMER

- Includes 22½-cc Maruyama LE commercial engine
- Hedge trimmer features a 24-inch, chrome steel double blade
- Equipment weighs 10.9 pounds
- Induction-hardened chrome steel blades are polish ground sharpened on all three cutting surfaces
- Five position rotating handle of the product



allows for vertical and angled trimming

Circle 204 on reader service card

ROBIN HEDGE TRIMMER

- Features 21.7-cc displacement engine
 - Includes diaphragm carburetor
 - Weighs 11.5 pounds
 - Offers 20-ounce fuel tank and 24-inch blade length
 - Dimensions are 32-inch by 8-inch by 9-inch
 - Hedge trimmer also features 1.4-inch tooth pitch and loop handle
- Circle 205 on reader service card



INSTALLATION EQUIPMENT

HOLEY MOLEY

HD 2000 HYDRODIGGER

- Ideal to use for fencing as well as deck post supports, posts, small tree/shrub removal and tree aeration/feeding
- Can install five fence posts in 20 minutes
- Two-inch mandrel allows for digging

holes up to 4 inches in diameter

- Backfilling and tamping not required; posts set naturally in the ground with no need for ground restoration
 - Additional uses include vertical mulching, deep aeration, watering root systems and vertical fertilizing
- Circle 206 on reader service card

DESIGN PRO QUICK-RELEASE BLOCK FORMS

- Block forms into which excess concrete can be poured
- Resulting concrete blocks can be used to create straight and curved retaining walls, product divider bins and privacy walls
- V-Interlock, Knob-style and Terra-Crete large landscape blocks are available in sizes ranging from ¼ cubic yard to 1 cubic yard
- Standard features of the forms include quick-release clamps, welded-in rebar lift point insert and reinforced sidewalls on all 6-foot-long forms
- Offers many sizes and styles of form lin-

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- Last for a minimum of 100 uses

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V & B EQUIPMENT GROUNDBREAKERS LANDSCAPING TOOLS



- Dual-headed tools offered with 16-, 26- and 36-inch handle lengths
- Full-size tools in the line feature multi-purpose tool

heads with pick ends, broad mattocks, axe heads, tines and scoops that can penetrate, dig, trench, chop and till

- 16- and 26-inch tools offer the same tool head configurations in lightweight versions for smaller garden requirements
- Rectangular fit of the head to the handle eliminates problems of twisting on impact
- Range of tools now includes six models of the full-size 36-inch tools, six versions of the

26-inch and 36-inch lightweight series and three models of the 16-inch mini series

Circle 208 on reader service card

IRRIGATION

RAIN BIRD 7005 AND 8005 ROTORS

- Specially designed for use on large-scale commercial turf sites like parks, athletic fields, cemeteries and schools
- 7005 offers a throw radius of 39 to 71 feet
- 8005 offers 50- to 80-foot throw radius
- Nozzles are interchangeable from the front of the rotor with no special tools
- Both rotor types feature continuous full and part-circle operation in the same unit with independently adjustable left and right arcs
- With true 5-inch pop-up height, these rotors reach above tall turf
- Memory arc ability allows rotors to reset arc back to original pattern after being forcibly rotated out of place
- Plastic and stainless steel models are available

Circle 209 on reader service card

IRRITROL 2400 SERIES VALVES

- Designed for residential applications
- Valves are now available with male x barb and male x male connections for installation versatility
- Male x barb option ideal for quick installation with polyethylene pipe
- Male x male connection ideal for multiple connections
- Both models available with or without flow control
- Feature threaded bonnets for quick servicing, double-beaded diaphragms for leak-proof seals and heavy-duty construction
- 1-inch valves offer 5 to 30 gpm and pressure range of 10 to 150 psi
- Also features manual external bleed for easy system flushing and manual internal bleed for spray-free operation

Circle 210 on reader service card

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- Product eliminates formation of limescale deposits in water pipes, sprinkler

(continued on page 125)

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Please Note: PLCAA members are eligible for the \$195 registration rate, please note this when registering.

Hotel Information

The group hotel rate at the Marriott Executive Park for School of Management attendees is \$99 per night (plus tax). Attendees can call 800/228-9290 or 704/527-9650 to make their reservations. Deadline for reservations at the group rate is **January 25, 2002**.

Cancellation/Substitution/Refund Policy/Confirmations

All cancellations must be made in writing and faxed or mailed – voice mails and e-mails will not be accepted. A full refund will be issued if the cancellation notice is received before February 1, 2002; no refunds will be issued after that date. Advance payment is required for the golf tournament. Attendees can notify *Lawn & Landscape* at any time that another individual will attend the conference in their place. All registrations postmarked by February 1, 2002 will be acknowledged by mail.

(continued from page 121)

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- Features compact design, true zero-turn-

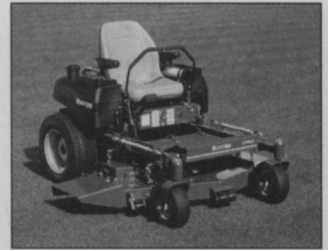
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USE READER SERVICE #100

Product Review

tioning the hands, arm and back for greater comfort and productivity

- Features a 52-inch and 60-inch UltraCut 5½-inch-deep deck design
 - Mower offers standard mechanical parking brake
 - Larger tires allow for optimum traction and performance
 - Large capacity (200 feet-per-pound) MagStop electric clutch increases reliability
 - Kohler-powered units feature a heavy-duty canister air filter and cleanout ports that improve engine life, simplify maintenance and boost productivity
- Circle 215 on reader service card

SCAG ZERO-TURN WALK-BEHIND

- Features the Advantage deck, designed with high-velocity baffles
- Travel speed is controlled by a single lever and can be changed during operation
- Cutter decks of the mower range in size from 36 to 72 inches

- Patented pump/motor drive system provides independent power to each wheel for increased operator control
 - Adjust-a-Trac tracking and neutral adjustment allow quick adjustments in the field
 - Engines range from 14-hp Kawasaki recoil to 21-hp Kawasaki electric start engine
- Circle 216 on reader service card

JRCO V-BROOM SWEEPER

- Sweeper is intended for use on commercial zero-turn mowers



- Quickly moves light snow, dirt, sand, gravel, water or grass/leaf clippings from sidewalks and pavement
- Adjustable wing angles of the sweeper

include 60-inch-wide straight position, left or right angled position, 45-inch-wide minimum V position

- Quick adjust wings lock with clevis pins
 - Features three rows of 8-inch polypropylene bristles
 - Durable brush strips spaced for snap action to sweep clean
 - Offers manual lift with latch for transport
- Circle 217 on reader service card

BEDSHAPER ATTACHMENT FOR FRONT-MOUNT WALKER MOWERS

- Creates a clean, sharp edge along flower beds and trees up to 4½ inches deep
- Can also be used for the construction of new beds
- Blade is positioned beside the mower drive wheel, allowing the blade to pivot with the wheel for smooth flowing contours
- Reduces edging time by 75 percent
- Edges more than 100 feet per minute
- Speeds clean-up time by slicing a thin ribbon of sod that can easily be picked up in



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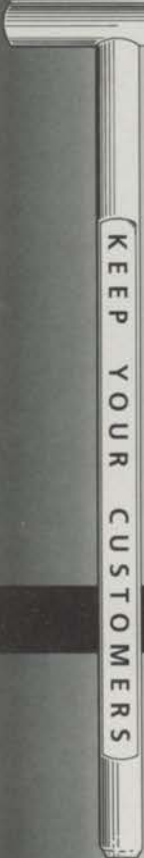
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USE READER SERVICE #102

long strips instead of pieces thrown into the bed

Circle 218 on reader service card

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BACCTO MICHIGAN PEAT

- Highly organic, dark peat screened for a uniform texture
- Provides beneficial organic material for blooming plants, shrubbery and gardens
- Low pH helps stabilize alkaline soils
- Product can be mixed with other materials for a custom formulation, used as mulch or spaded into bed or garden areas
- Available in 50-pound bags

Circle 219 on reader service card

ARCTECH ACTOSOL FERTILIZER

- Liquid organic humic acid fertilizer promotes root development and enhances turf quality
- Patented actosol fertilizers formulated with humic acid increase nutrient uptake, soil moisture and microbial activity

• Formulations available for turf and landscape applications include lawn actosol and chelated micronutrient actosol

Circle 220 on reader service card

WINDMILL SPREADER-SEEDER

- For powdered or granular fertilizers and herbicides, seeds, salt and sand
- Accurately spreads 40-foot effective swath
- Hopper formed from one single sheet of 0.08-inch thick steel
- Frame constructed from cold-drawn tubular steel of 2 3/8-inch diameter, heavy wall stock
- Simple levers turn output on or off
- Twin levers allow the operator to spread to the right, left or both sides at the same time

Circle 221 on reader service card

GROUNDSCONTROL TURFBUDDY TB750-SS

- Spreader/seeder/light topdresser features all stainless steel construction
- Offers capacity of 750 to 1,000 pounds of

fertilizer or seed or up to 1,500 pounds of dry sand

- Features spread width ranging from approximately 18 feet to 25 feet
- Width can be confined to 40 inches with installation of included topdresser shields
- Optional 12-volt DC vibrating attachment is available for ease when spreading damp materials
- Fitted vinyl cover included with each unit

Circle 222 on reader service card

SNOW EQUIPMENT

BOSS SNOWPLOW LIGHT PACKAGE

- Package features custom-designed composite lights with dual halogen bulbs
- Light package features innovative anti-glare shields that improve visibility and prevent snow blindness



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USE READER SERVICE #110

USE READER SERVICE #104

Product Review

- Reflective surfaces of headlights optimized to get the best possible width and distance from the bulb, whether on high- or low-beam
 - Light package allows for effective nighttime visibility
 - Projects white light that reduces eyestrain and helps prevent fatigue
 - Reduces vibrations so that the headlights do not lose adjustment
- Circle 223 on reader service card

HONDA HS1132TAS SNOWBLOWER

- Features 11-hp Honda OHV engine
 - Electric start
 - Self-propelled track drive
 - The snowblower offers infinitely variable speed control as well as a hydrostatic drive train
 - Includes 32-inch clearing width and 20-inch clearing height
 - 65 tons per hour clearing capacity
 - Headlight standard
- Circle 224 on reader service card

SOFTWARE/CATALOGUES DRAFIX.COM PRO LANDSCAPE

- Updated design suite includes three integrated modules to create photorealistic presentations of design plans
 - Creates a 2-D site plan that accurately represents the installation of plantings, sprinkler systems and hardscapes
 - Generates an accurate bid for the client directly from the design, eliminating errors
 - New version highlights enhancements to the CAD module of PRO Landscape
 - New content librarian brings drag and drop ease to adding solid fills, hatch patterns or symbols into the selected area
 - Features a new tutorial CD and learning tools
 - Also includes new additions to the Image Editor module of the software, allowing customers to add more realism to objects with the perspective tool
- Circle 225 on reader service card

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solution enables companies to respond instantly to changing business demands, traffic, etc.

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- Features standard power steering with 9.2-foot turning radius
- Four-point quick-mount feature allows for simple attachment and detachment of the backhoe
- Offers a 926-pound bucket lift capacity and 1,543 pounds of breakout force
- Features an automatic self-leveling anti-spill bucket mechanism
- Backhoe provides 7½-foot digging depth with a 2-foot flat bottom

Circle 227 on reader service card

VANDERMOLEN ALL-VEGETATION PROCESSOR

- All debris can be fed through one hopper
- Features non-clog processing
- Powered by a 14- or 16-hp Vanguard engine



- Processes leaves, clippings, general garden waste and 4- to 5-inch fully dressed branches
 - Can fit through 32-inch gates
 - Discharge chute swivels 360 degrees
 - Includes a 2-inch ball hitch with 1,500-pound shock absorbing torsion bar axle
- Circle 228 on reader service card

EARTH-A-PEEL PATH-A-PEEL

- 24-inch wide sod cutter and path maker
 - Includes universal frame that mounts to category-1 three point hitch
 - Features a 24-inch wide cutting bar, hardware, and tires
 - The universal frame is 26 inches wide, 15 inches deep, 22 inches high
 - Cutting bar is 24 inches wide, 6 inches deep and 17 inches high
 - Total weight is 90 pounds
- Circle 229 on reader service card

REDEXIM CHARTERHOUSE CARRARO TRACTOR LINE

- Line features an array of ergonomic and operational functions designed for simplic-

ity, comfort and increased return on investment

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 - Includes a completely reversible control system that pivots the seat, steering wheel and all operator controls in seconds
 - Offers 38-hp engine that minimizes fuel consumption
 - Able to mount a variety of attachments on the front, rear and top of the vehicle
 - Large wheel axles permit extremely heavy attachments to be lifted without sacrificing superior balance and stability
- Circle 230 on reader service card

GIANT-VAC WHISPER JET LEAF BLOWER

- Available in 6-, 8½-, 9-, 10- and 16-hp models providing from 2,100 to 2,700 cubic feet per minute
- Eight-blade cast aluminum impeller absorbs vibration and sound

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USE READER SERVICE #109

Product Review

- Counter-rotational design creates static pressure within the housing, thereby releasing, extremely high air volume at the outlet
 - Large inlet opening allow leaves and other debris to pass through
- Circle 231 on reader service card

BEDSHAPER 2001

- Edges more than 100 feet per minute
- Quickly cuts a 4½-inch deep mulch trap along flower and shrub beds
- Builds new raised beds from scratch
- Slices a thin ribbon of sod that can easily be picked up in long strips
- Optional pulverizer blade eliminates debris clean-up

Circle 232 on reader service card

MISCELLANEOUS

TUFF-BILT TRELLIS

- Trellis is available in three timeless styles – Ladder, Diamond and Fan (pictured)
- 4- or 6-foot trellis available in each of the three patterns



QUICKCRACK

- Fits all pickup trucks except super duty cabs
- Sections can be positioned anywhere along the bed rail to accommodate cargo
- Strength-tested at 1,500 pounds in extreme heat and cold
- Hauls up to 500 pounds of cargo
- Ideal for hauling PVC pipe, lawn bordering materials, lumber, etc.

Circle 234 on reader service card

- Features UV stabilization, strength and attractiveness
 - Trellis will not rot, crack or mildew
 - Resists damage from insects and climate conditions
 - Can be screwed, nailed or sawed without splitting or cracking
- Circle 233 on reader service card

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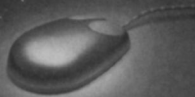
- Gazebos are made from high-impact, weather-resistant polyvinyl chloride
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USE READER SERVICE #112

Equipment Notebook

HAND-HELD EQUIPMENT

Tackling Trimmers

Purchasing a hedge trimmer resembles buying a new car. With a variety of power, safety and comfort features, a decision boggles the mind. Yet, take it for a test drive, and as you grip the controls and embrace your speed, you suddenly feel at home with your new toy.

Similarly, the discrepancies among hedge trimmer attributes complicate the intimidating task of making a purchase. However, just as you would not buy a car without driving it once around the block, a hedge trimmer requires a test drive, too. "The contractor should try the unit before they buy it," said Megan Bennett, marketing coordinator, Kawasaki Motors, Grand Rapids, Mich.

Before putting the pedal to the metal, landscape contractors must weigh their options and conclude which product will give them the best trimming mileage.

ACCELERATED OPTIONS. Keith Lutz, advertising coordinator, Husqvarna, Charlotte, N.C., described the differences between two popular types of hedge trimmers. "Hand-held trimmers reach bushes within closer proximity," he said. "The pole trimmers are for bushes out of reach—the different lengths and telescoping [capabilities] allow the operator to adjust the height."

Other hedge trimmers feature extensions, or shafts, which operate on the same principle as a telescoping handle,



Although power and speed are important hedge trimmer features, the operator should follow safety precautions, such as wearing gloves and goggles, to maintain maximum efficiency. Photo: Kawasaki

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Equipment Notebook

explained Diana Matos, marketing manager, RedMax, Norcross, Ga. "The extension allows you to do hedges that are higher – the blade is 18 inches, and it gives you an extension of 7 to 9 feet, depending on the size of the person using [the equipment]."

Matos also discussed the options of two-sided and one-sided trimmer blades. "The double-sided blade allows you to cut faster in two directions," she said. "The one-sided blade offers easier clean up, but it's a matter of preference." Tom Parpart, product manager, Echo, Lake Zurich, Ill., pointed out that longer blades offer a wider cutting area, but they require additional weight on the unit. Hedge trimmers range from 11 to 14 pounds, based on blade length.

Parpart also noted that even though longer blades offer more efficient cutting, the added weight poses an ergonomic drawback. Meanwhile, speed demons may desire a quick-cutting blade in the quest for greater productivity. "The faster the speed, the better the cut, because time is money, and you want to zip it over once and be done," Parpart stated.

Of course, when choosing a limousine over a jalopy, price will be an important factor. Typically, hedge trimmers range from approximately \$300 to \$600, depending on horsepower and blade length.

lawnandlandscape.com

CHECK OUT this article online for tips on proper hedge trimmer safety precautions.

THE DRIVER'S SEAT. Power and mileage may look impressive on paper, but operator comfort determines whether or not the equipment can be handled every day. "Look for one that is going to be the most user-friendly and ergonomically designed," Lutz advised. "When you're pruning hedges for five hours out of the day, it does make a difference." He highlighted trimmers that afford operators the ability to change hand

position and feature low vibration so as to avoid operator fatigue.

In an attempt to reduce harmful emissions, some hedge trimmers feature catalytic converters. Yet, Matos said these devices increase engine heat, something to consider when purchasing. "With the engine heating up, you reduce the number of hours you can use it," she said. "We basically want to keep workers out there as long as possible, and if you can cut down on the heat then you save not only time but money."

Ultimately, Tom Dibble, team leader, technical service, Kawasaki Motors, Grand Rapids, Mich., warned contractors against sacrificing efficiency for comfort. "You're lugging that thing around all day long, and there are various styles," he said. "But you buy these things to cut, and you don't want to skimp on the blades. Look for sharp tips, good, quality blades, heat-treated blades, [blades] closely fitted together, etc." – *Kristin Mohn*

The author is Assistant Editor of Lawn and Landscape magazine.

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- 14. Other _____

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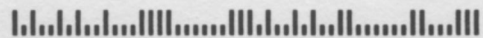
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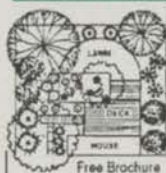
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Future of Lawn Care

(continued from page 85)

translate into increased retention. That is not to say that we don't still have some bad apples out there, but that will always be the case. We just need to keep our own operations upright and clean, so that the bad boys will look even worse."

Strickland also noticed a change. "The guys who I see today are looking to make sure they are doing it right," he said. "The problem is that for every guy out there who's doing it right, there's a guy out there who's doing it wrong and getting noticed. These guys come into the neighborhood, treat five yards at low-ball prices, burn the yards and the customers, and then a guy who's doing it right tries to enter that market and loses momentum."

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The push toward IPM also points to training as a key future issue, Delaney indicated. "Today, I think there's still a good bit of companies that have one person certified and everyone else under that person's supervision," he said. "In the future, there will be more expected of applicators. We might even see more states requiring all technicians to have some sort of verifiable training."

But LCOs who rise up to the professional challenge will gain the benefits of client attention through branding and promotion. "Those who have worked hard to make sure their applicators are educated, certified and trained will be able to distinguish themselves from the competition," Delaney assured.

For the past 20 years, the industry has weathered modifications – some of them unforeseen. But if LCOs would appear at fortune-tellers' tarot card tables today, the same death cards signifying change might appear.

Embracing change, though difficult, has been an industry strength. While dodging the issues may seem tempting, LCOs have chosen a more proactive stance. "The industry has endured by being resourceful and possessing entrepreneurial spirit," Jessen said. "We are resilient and we will survive." **U**

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

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Kanga	www.kanga-loader.com	93	77
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Lawn & Landscape Online	www.lawnandlandscape.com	8	
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Masada Consulting	www.masadaconsulting.com	90	59
Mid-Am Trade Show	www.midam.org	107	137
Middle Georgia Freightliner	www.middlegafreightliner.com	116	89
Mustang Manufacturing	www.mustangmfg.com	15	32
Nature's Pro	www.naturespro.com	20	15
NEBS	www.nebs.com	43	26
Neo-Tech	www.neotech.com	94	63
Oldham Chemical	www.oldhamchem.com	110	84
PBI Gordon	www.weedalert.com	53	66
Perma Green Supreme	www.ride-onspreader.com	42	25
Rawson Mfg.	www.rawsonscreens.com	121	96
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Riverdale	www.riverdalecc.com	33,73,101	105,128,97
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Scag	www.scag.com	103	135
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*Denotes regional advertising. This listing is provided as a courtesy to Lawn & Landscape advertisers.

How We Do It

Marketing with Fliers at Avalawn Landscaping

There are many ways that I can advertise my company's services while promoting my business. To be able to reach a direct audience, maximize my advertising dollar and keep prospective clients local, I decided to use fliers.

The first two years Avalawn passed out fliers, the response was not very promising. For our first attempt, we used the traditional method that everyone else was using. The flier was very simple and included our company name, services and phone number. We delivered fliers to every house we could walk to – about 3,000. The phone did ring, but not as often as we had hoped, with a depressing 1- to 2-percent callback rate or about 15 to 20 calls – and not even half of those resulted in jobs.

For the second attempt, we decided to spruce up the flier by rearranging our company information a little bit and putting it on colored paper. Then we put out the same number of fliers, hoping for a better outcome. We received many calls, and soon we were busy driving around looking at potential job opportunities from the 6- to 8-percent callback rate this new wave of fliers produced. The problem was driving to the properties only to find out that people were expecting a lower price or just comparing prices. We were losing precious time looking at work that we were not interested in doing or giving prices to comparison shoppers who would never become steady customers. The actual number of jobs we received from the callbacks was only about ½ percent.

I realized that the fliers did not actually need to bring in more calls, but they needed to bring in calls that resulted in solid weekly jobs. So, I decided that I had to make fliers more appealing to the clientele we really wanted to work for. I asked myself, "Who is our target audience? How can

I cater to them? How can I keep them interested in this flier while answering any questions they have?"

Our weapon of choice turned out to be a well-designed flier that informs prospective clients of our services, and this time we included pricing information.

The new and improved flier features our name and logo proudly centered along the top. Under the logo, I placed attention-grabbing statements in bold that fit our clientele. These phrases include "Senior Discounts," "100% Customer Satisfaction," "FREE flower bed maintenance," "10% Early Call Discounts" and "Commercial Contract Discounts." Finally, I included a quick description of the company history along with reasons why our service is better than our competitors'. I emphasize being punctual and professional. This is basically the sales pitch that is given to potential clients when they call. I try to keep this short and to the point. Essentially, it's a brief paragraph to answer any questions that they may have about our work. How many years have we been in business? Are we a local company? Are we insured? Then, of course, we add our phone number.

We print these fliers in three different pastel colors, each with a different price range on the bottom right corner. The blue reads, "MOWING ESTIMATE... \$35 - \$40." The yellow flyer reads "\$40 - \$45," and the green reads, "\$45 - \$50." We then choose local neighborhoods. As we walk from home to home, we quickly look at the property to judge what the approximate cost would be for the job. We then place the proper-colored flyer on the doors of clients we want to service, skipping the undesirable properties. If clients like what they read, they can look down in the corner to see what price range they can expect to pay. They also can compare prices.

Now, when our phone rings, I can be sure that it is a serious call about our service, the person on the phone agrees with our pricing, and is ready for us to do the job. I also know that it's a local property we want to service because we chose to place the flier at their home. This has eliminated the wasted time that normally accompanies the search for new clients.

Many companies may question whether or not hand-delivering fliers is the most efficient way to promote a business. They may opt to spend thousands of dollars per year on a ¼-page advertisement in the phone book vs. hand-delivered ad. But, by having a well-designed flier and correct timing, the potential customer knows our company's services, history and prices before they even consider opening up the phone book to get another company's information. — *Erich Heinrich* **LL**

The author is the president of Avalawn Landscaping in Cincinnati, Ohio.

FIVE KEYS TO Marketing With Fliers

1. Use brightly colored paper.
2. Include pricing information.
3. Use attention-grabbing statements like "100% Customer Satisfaction" and "Senior Discounts."
4. Answer common client questions on the flier.
5. Deliver fliers only to those potential customers who fit your client niche.

A FIELD GUIDE TO CATCHING A 1512LB. BLACK MARLIN USING TOYOTA TRUCKS.



THE WATERS OFF THE COAST OF PERU ARE ICY, BUT HAVE NO FEAR — YOU'RE ON THE DECK OF THE SHIP WITH A TUNA MELT.

A RELIABLE FLEET OF TRUCKS FROM US MEANS MORE FREE TIME FOR YOU. BUT BAD NEWS FOR FISH.

You've got your fleet of Toyota trucks and you haven't heard a word about them in weeks when it dawns on you that this free time could be cashed in on that marlin fishing trip you've always dreamed about. A little research on Thursday and you've booked a flight south.

Friday you take an hour and call Uncle Al who's been there twice. He's got the name of some guy in Lima, Peru, who sets you up right. Monday comes and you take your first "personal day" in years. Just so you can familiarize yourself with all the items in the equipment section at Fishing World.

A WEEK later you're strapped into the "fighting chair" on the back of a boat just about 25 miles off the coast when the line



MOUNT HIM NEXT TO YOUR PHYSICS P.H.D.
GUESS WHICH ONE PEOPLE WILL TALK ABOUT?

snaps taut. Time freezes as you reach for the pole. A whirlwind of all the decisions that got you here races through your mind. And at this precise moment you're realizing, if you'd had Toyota trucks in your fleet years ago, this might be your third or fourth trip to South America. When suddenly the line whips to the left and you're back to the moment at hand.

THE TECHNICAL name for marlin is *Makaira indica* but for now we'll just call him... let's see...how about...Stan. Stan's come all the way from the Galapagos Islands and he's doing his best to

decline your invitation to the backyard fish fry that's been planned for your return. He breaks the water and you see him staring you in the face. Winking as if to say, "How strong are your arms? How sturdy your back? My pull on this line is that of six strong men, so how's about you come in here with me in the water?"



STAN THE MARLIN'S FAVORITE DISH. THE SLANT-FACED
KONA LURE. YUM YUM YUMMY YUM.

BUT NO, you say. "My choice of a reliable fleet of trucks from Toyota (blatant sponsor plug) has put me here today and I'm going to stay on the nice boat with my sandwiches and sodas. With my support crew who'll get whatever I need on a whim. Enjoying the sweet salt air and the crystal-clear blue cobalt waters." And so the conversation goes between you and Stan from the Galapagos Islands. Minutes go by. A half hour. Forty-five minutes later you're totally spent and you're thinkin' this Stan is quite an arguer, when he finally agrees to join you on the boat. And while you know the ache in your arms will go away someday, you'll always be grateful that your fleet of Toyotas freed you up to spend some quality time with Stan.

THE RELIABILITY AND TOUGHNESS of Tacoma and Tundra mean you'll have some free time on your hands. Time not spent dealing with hassles. Just the ticket for anyone who wants a fleet they can count on. Our proof? The Tundra received the highest overall safety rating of any full-size pickup by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety.* And to rid you of even more angst, we've assigned field fleet managers to your part of the country to ensure more personal, timely service. To get started, visit fleet.toyota.com.



You'll find competitive comparison links to other industry Web sites, and once you've qualified, you can order your vehicles online.

*Tundra test date: 4/30/01 - Trucks evaluated to date: 4 (40-mph 40% frontal offset crash test). Ratings are only meaningful when comparing vehicles in the same weight class. ©2001 Toyota Motor Sales, U.S.A., Inc. Buckle Up! Do it for those who love you.

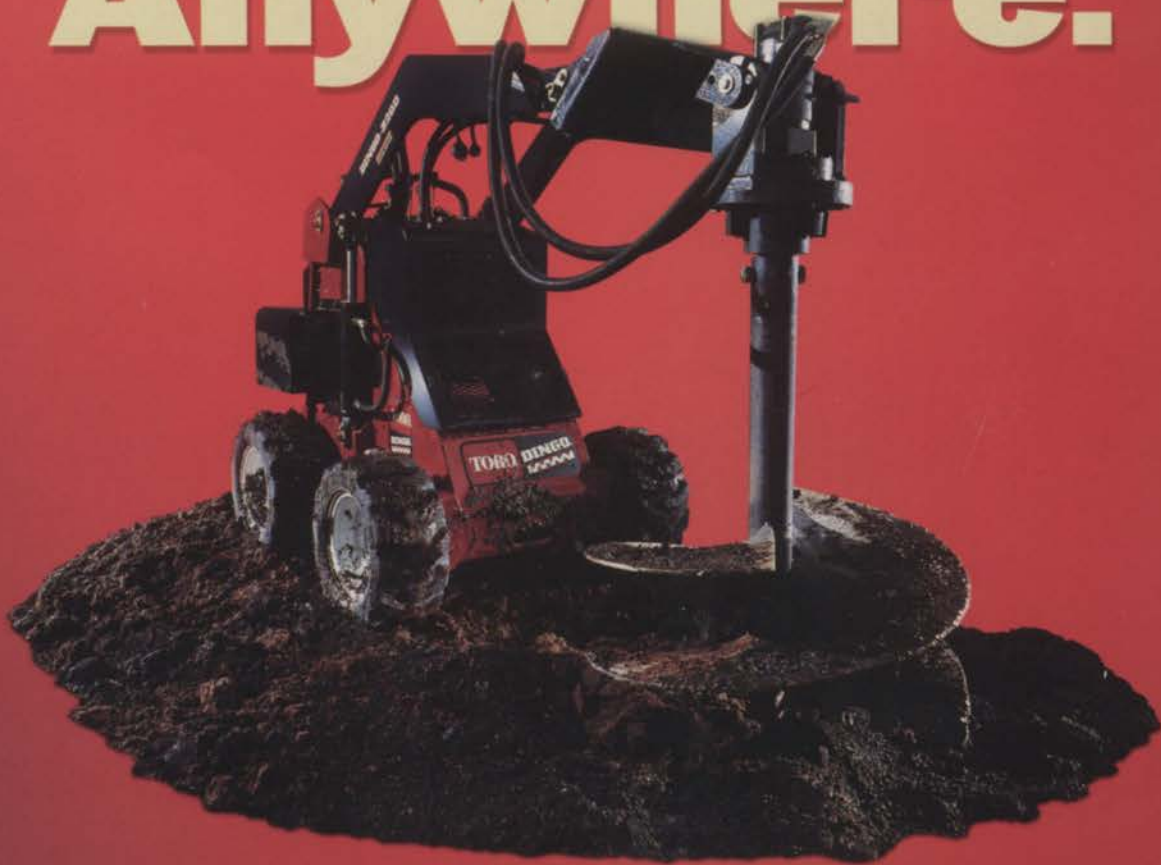
TO ORDER YOUR TOYOTA FLEET CALL US AT (800) 732-2798.

USE READER SERVICE #141

Visit us at the GIE Show, Booth #1638



Any job. Anytime. Anywhere.



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The Toro® Dingo® Compact Utility Loader.

Throw us at your toughest jobs, in your hardest conditions.

We'll come out on top every time. With the Dingo's ability to channel full power where it's needed, when it's needed, it's proven itself again and again, on every

kind of job. In every kind of environment.

So you think you've got a challenge? Bring it on.

Call 1-800-DIG-TORO for a demonstration.

Visit us at the GIE Show, Booth #1600

USE READER SERVICE #78



TORO

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SUPPLEMENT TO:

NOVEMBER 2001

Lawn & Landscape[®]

2001 LEADERSHIP AWARDS

*The Keys
To Unlocking
Leadership*

Sponsored by:

chipco[®]
Professional Products



Fireproof your world.

Now, eliminate the threat of *fire ants* for up to a full year with one broadcast application.

You have a new choice for fire ant treatment. One that works better, lasts longer, and is easier to use than the others. It's soon to be the top choice for fire ant control, so we're calling it just that - TopChoice®.

Get rid of existing fire ants in one step. Chipco TopChoice simplifies fire ant control: No multi-step treatment processes. No time-consuming mound treatments. And just one broadcast application of the ultra-low-dose granule can achieve 95 percent control in 4-6 weeks.

Prevent reinfestations for up to a year. Once fire ants are gone, expect them to stay gone for up to a full year. Chipco TopChoice has the residual power to control both developing queen cells and new queens that enter the landscape over the next 52 weeks. It's a novel concept in fire ant control: prevention.



Forget about mole crickets, too. And, the active ingredient in Chipco TopChoice (fipronil) is more than just a top-notch fire ant product. It's also the world's best mole cricket control. So while your fire ant problem is fading away, your mole crickets will be too.

Don't be burned again by fire ant treatments that are more trouble than they're worth. Choose something different. Really different.

Learning all about the possibilities Chipco TopChoice presents and how to make this innovative new fire ant control work for you requires that you talk with an authorized Chipco TopChoice agent. For more information on Chipco TopChoice and for the agent nearest you, visit our website at www.aventischipco.com.

INTRODUCING **chipco**[®]
topchoice[™]

The Chipco family of professional products includes:

chipco[®] **topchoice**[™] **chipco**[®] **firestar**[™] **ProStar**[®] **DeltaGard** **Sevin** **Acclaim** **Extra** **Finale** **RONSTAR** **Progress**



“The lawn care professionals featured in this issue are all committed to improving our industry, and we only hope that recognizing their efforts will encourage others to do the same.” — *Marc McNulty*

With the continued growth of the lawn care industry, the need to maintain a well-educated work force has never been greater. While the industry expands and evolves, confusion can surface as older chemistries exit and newer chemistries enter the marketplace, compounded further by label changes with existing products. Staying educated about industry changes and issues is vital to its growth. It takes a commitment to not only work towards improving your own business, but also ensuring the industry remains healthy as it grows.

As a specialty chemical manufacturer, Chipco Professional Products recognizes the need to commit to the overall growth of the lawn care industry. Helping ensure the vitality of the industry is paramount in maintaining a healthy customer base. When you grow, we grow too.

Chipco created the LCO Business Manager position because we are committed to furthering the lawn care industry. Though the position has been in place for less than a year, the fruits of that commitment can already be seen. But don't just take our word for it. When it comes to commitment, our actions speak even louder.

COMMITMENT IS...

Introducing innovative products for everyday problems. The recent launch of Chipco® TopChoice™ and Chipco® FireStar™ insecticides provides two new products for the control of red imported fire ants, the greatest nuisance pest in the

LEADERSHIP 2001:

Making the Comm



South. Chipco TopChoice provides unmatched control of current fire ant populations while preventing the establishment of new colonies for up to a year, all from a single broadcast application. Plus, applications for fire ants will also control mole crickets, fleas, ticks and nuisance ants. Combined with our already effective line of products, Chipco TopChoice and Chipco FireStar provide even more options for LCOs looking to Chipco for pest control solutions.

COMMITMENT IS...

Offering solutions for the most difficult problems faced by LCOs. The continued EPA phase-out of the organophosphate (OP) class of chemicals has LCOs looking for new insect control options. As EPA regulation continues, Chipco Professional Products offers LCOs an alternative to help them create a customized solution to OP replacement – the Chipco® OPtions™ Program. OPtions gives lawn care professionals four effective products for OP replacement – DeltaGard®, Sevin®, Chipco TopChoice and Chipco FireStar – that provide excellent, broad-spectrum insect control.

COMMITMENT IS...

Providing regional knowledge and support. Chipco has increased our national sales force over the past year in an effort to provide superior regionalized support for LCOs. Our sales staff understands the problems faced by lawn care professionals nationwide and will

do their best to recommend effective solutions for LCOs' unique problems. Distribution also plays a vital role in our success. Chipco is focused on working with our distribution partners to ensure their continued success, providing them with excellent products that fit the needs of the lawn care industry.

But our commitment goes beyond sales support. As an industry leader, we also understand that education is the key to the continued growth of the lawn care industry. That's why we've expanded our popular Chipco Speakers Bureau to include nine Chipco field and technical development managers. Established to help LCOs stay educated about the latest turf treatment products, maintenance tips and other industry-related news, the Speakers Bureau offers the insights of Chipco experts, providing continuing education for turfgrass professionals.

COMMITMENT IS...

Helping PLCAA make basic training a reality. Chipco Professional Products announces its sponsorship of a new video training series, "Turfgrass Training for Lawn Care Professionals," now available from the Professional Lawn Care Association of America (PLCAA).

The three-part video series provides more than 75 minutes of professional instruction for the identification and treatment of turfgrass weeds, diseases and insects (both northern and southern species).

COMMITMENT IS...

Keeping lawn care professionals abreast of the latest Chipco developments. Chipco Professional Products continues to take advantage of marketing op-

portunities to educate LCOs about innovations in turfgrass solutions. *GreenScape*, our quarterly newsletter for lawn care professionals, allows us to shine the spotlight on users like you who have worked with Chipco for more effective pest control. Informative advertising and direct mail pieces serve to provide more than just product promotion. Instead, we focus on effective solutions for everyday turf problems.

Perhaps the best resource is our new web site, www.aventischipco.com. There, lawn care professionals have access to information on Chipco solutions 24 hours a day. Be sure to look out for exciting educational opportunities via aventischipco.com in the near future.

COMMITMENT IS...

Recognizing leaders for their efforts made on behalf of the industry. For the third straight year, Chipco Professional Products partners with *Lawn & Landscape* magazine to co-sponsor the Leadership Awards.

The lawn care professionals featured in this issue are all committed to improving our industry, and we only hope that recognizing their efforts will encourage others to do the same.

Best regards,

Marc E. McNulty
LCO Business Manager
Chipco Professional Products
Montvale, N.J.

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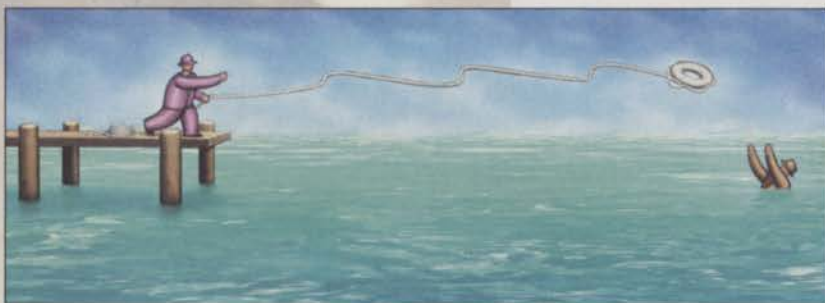
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AWARDS ★ 2001



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LEADERSHIP
AWARDS ★ 2001

Leadership Thro

Chipco Professional Products contributes to the growth of the lawn care industry by providing solutions-oriented support for LCOs

Chipco Professional Products continues to establish itself as a leader in the lawn care industry with its full line of effective pest control products. However, leadership is more than just selling products. Along with this role comes the added responsibility of furthering the lawn care industry as a whole.

As 2001 nears its end, Chipco is already implementing many of the programs that will be the focus of its 2002

TAKING THE STING *Out of Fire Ant Control*

For southern lawn care professionals, the red imported fire ant is perhaps the most difficult pest to treat...and retreat...and treat again. Fire ants resist conventional treatment methods, proving their resiliency as they continue to reestablish colonies not long after treatment. However, a new product now available from Chipco Professional Products will provide effective fire ant control for lengths unmatched by existing products – up to an entire year. That product is called Chipco® TopChoice™.

Chipco TopChoice provides unsurpassed control of current fire ant populations, while preventing the establishment of new colonies for up to a year, all from a single

broadcast application. At a rate of 0.0143% G (87 lbs. product per

acre), Chipco TopChoice delivers up to 52 weeks of up to 95 percent fire

ant control with a single quick and easy broadcast application. While it may be applied at any time throughout the year, an application of Chipco TopChoice in the fall to early spring (November to March) is ideal.

Four to six weeks following a single application, Chipco TopChoice will typically achieve up to 95 percent control of fire ants and will prevent new infestations for up to 52 weeks.

Chipco TopChoice is labeled for use on turfgrass and landscape beds. These areas include golf turf, sports fields, commercial lawns, residential lawns, cemeteries, parks, campsites, recreational areas, school grounds, sod farms and landscape beds. When applied to control fire ants, Chipco TopChoice



chipco®
topchoice™



ough Stewardship

efforts in the lawn care market. The centerpiece of that focus is a commitment to meeting the needs of the lawn care professional. From innovative new products to continuing education, Chipco will not lose sight of what is important to customers – finding solutions to their turf care needs.

also provides excellent control of mole crickets (four months), nuisance ants (three months), fleas (one month) and ticks (one month).

For applications on established fire ant colonies, Chipco® FireStar™ is an effective companion product for Chipco TopChoice. Chipco FireStar is labeled for individual mound treatments and broadcast applications on residential lawns, golf course turf, commercial and recreational turf, adjacent landscape beds and sod farms. It is also excellent for spot treatments or in areas difficult to treat with a broadcast application, including sidewalks and landscape beds.

Chipco FireStar is formulated at the extremely low concentration rate of 0.00015% bait, providing effective control of red imported fire ants at a low label rate of 1.5 lbs. product per acre and with a high rate of 15 lbs. product per acre. Control is achieved within 14 days, and lasts four to six weeks or longer, depending on the rate applied.

Whether applied alone or with Chipco FireStar, Chipco TopChoice controls fire ants longer and better than any other product on the market.

Training in a Box – Just Press “Play”

Continuing efforts to maintain an educated labor force in the professional lawn care industry, Chipco Professional Products has partnered with the Professional Lawn Care Association of America (PLCAA) to produce “Turfgrass Training for Lawn Care Professionals,” a new set of three training videos available from PLCAA.

The three-part video series combines dynamic photography with expert analysis to provide more than 75 minutes of professional instruction for the identification and treatment of turfgrass weeds, diseases and insects (both northern and southern species). Videos are \$25 each, and an order form can be found in the advertisement on page 68.



Options Abound for Insect Control

Many lawn care professionals rely on organophosphates (OPs) for insect control. However, the ongoing phase-out of OPs by the EPA leaves LCOs in search of effective, easy-to-use insecticides.

While there are several alternatives to OPs available, we at Chipco Professional Products have established an insecticide program designed to control major

OPtions™

insects on home lawns – the Chipco® OPtions™ Program.

Options combines trusted insecticides – DeltaGard® and Sevin® – with innovative new chemistries – Chipco® TopChoice™ and Chipco® FireStar™ – to effectively control the toughest insects faced by lawn care operators.

DeltaGard products provide low-dose, broad-spectrum control of more than 50 insect species. DeltaGard also provides quick knockdown and a long residual, as well as additional benefits such as minimal odor, application flexibility and economical use.

For more than 35 years, Sevin has provided broad-spectrum control of more than 130 turf and ornamental pests. Extensive research trials suggest that Sevin outperforms chlorpyrifos products against a number of pests including billbugs, cutworms, June beetles and sod webworms.

Sevin®

DeltaGard and Sevin are effective OP alternatives for control of a variety of turf insects. Both products

DeltaGard™

come in multiple formulations – DeltaGard T&O and DeltaGard T&O 5SC, as well as Sevin LP and Sevin WP – and are available in fertilizer combination products, providing convenience and flexibility.

Chipco TopChoice and Chipco FireStar provide unsurpassed control of red imported fire ants. Plus, at labeled rates, Chipco TopChoice offers excellent control of mole crickets, nuisance ants, fleas and ticks.

Products included in the OPtions program provide outstanding insect control. Plus, users will get the full support of a Chipco sales representative to build a customized program for their insect problem. For more on the Chipco OPtions Program, see your distributor or contact your local Chipco sales representative. ★

There's More to Come in 2002

Earlier this year, Chipco Professional Products took an important step to ensure its support of the lawn care industry continues in 2002. Along with hiring several additional sales representatives to provide even more regional support for lawn care professionals, Chipco promoted Marc McNulty to the newly created position of LCO Business Manager.

McNulty joined Chipco Professional Products in 2000 as a Territory Sales Representative for northeastern Ohio, western Pennsylvania, and western New York. McNulty had previously served as the Product Manager of Insecticides and as a Sales Manager for LESCO, Inc., the leading supplier to the LCO market, as well as one of the largest distributors of Chipco products.

In his new position, McNulty will oversee all current and future lawn care initiatives, from the creation of new rebate programs, to building strategic business partnerships with key lawn care partners, to working with other Chipco Business Managers in guiding product development needs for the LCO market. Lawn care operators will now have someone at Chipco that is fully focused on meeting the needs of the lawn care industry.

LET THE EXPERTS *Come To You*



With the continued growth of the lawn care industry, providing affordable training for employees has become increasingly more difficult. Responding to the challenge of finding training resources, the Chipco Speakers Bureau, a free service offering continuing education to lawn care associations, has been expanded to include nine Chipco field and technical development managers.

The Speakers Bureau was created to help lawn care professionals stay educated about the latest turf treatment products, maintenance tips and other industry-related news. Through the program, Chipco research and development experts are available to speak at association meetings on the following topics:

- **Replacing Organophosphates**

As the popular organophosphate (OP) class of chemicals is being phased out, LCOs will benefit from learning about OP alternatives for effective insect control.

- **Poa annua Control**

Poa annua (annual bluegrass) is a nuisance plant for turf professionals around the world. Keeping abreast of new and current *Poa* management strategies is the best way to achieve control of this most bothersome of grasses.

- **Summer Stress & Turf Quality**

Maintaining a turf's appearance during warmer summer months can be the most difficult task of the year. The interaction of stresses and diseases that cause Summer Decline make it paramount for turf professionals to keep informed about the latest strategies for maintaining turf quality, even under the harshest of summer conditions.

- **Fungicide Resistance Management**

Avoiding resistance is the only way to ensure current fungicide formulations will remain viable disease-control options for the future.

- **Fire Ant Safety**

Red imported fire ants are the No. 1 nuisance insect in the United States. As they continue to spread throughout the country, LCOs must be ready to fight these dangerous and destructive insects.

These nine Chipco experts come from across the country and offer a unique perspective on the regional issues faced by LCOs. Plus, there is no cost for hosting a Chipco expert, and presentation content is non-promotional. For more information, interested professionals can call 610-941-0395.

Chipco's Speakers Bureau members (from top to bottom) are Ken Kukorowski, Ph.D., Jim Merrick, Laurence Mudge, Rich Hawrahan, Don Myers, Ph.D., Larry Norton, Ann Wiese, Ph.D., David Spak, Ph.D., and Ed Vandenburg. The Speakers Bureau was created to help lawn care professionals stay educated about the latest turf treatment products, maintenance tips and other industry-related news.

Hiring Tomorrow's Leaders Today

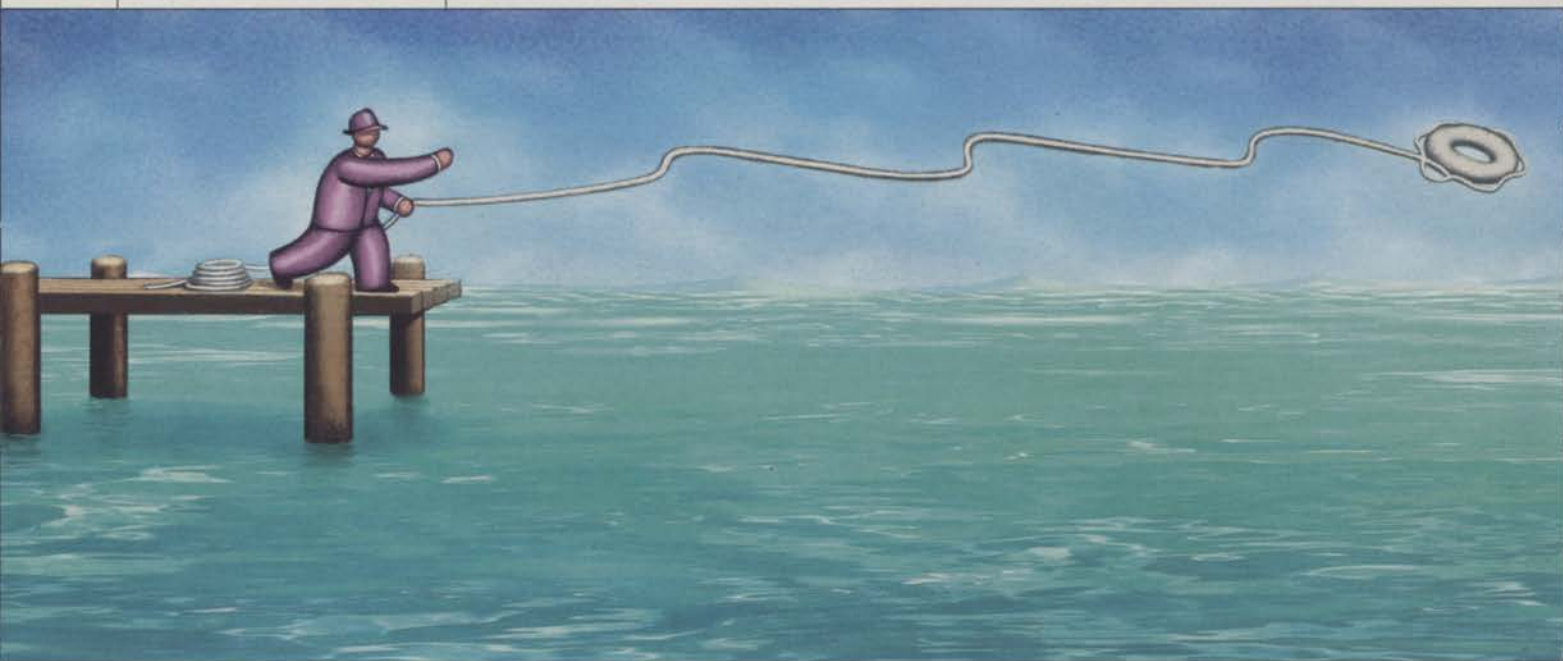
*A 2001
Leadership
Award winner's
thoughts on
finding and
hiring future
leaders for your
company.*

Editor's Note: Bill Hoopes, director of training, development and regulatory affairs, Scotts LawnService, Marysville, Ohio, shared his thoughts on hiring leaders earlier this year at the Lawn & Landscape School of Management conference. What follows is a brief overview of his presentation. Hoopes is a 2001 Leadership Award winner (see page 32.)

In life, people are everything. And in business, quality people are essential to the health of a successful organization. It stands to reason then that lawn care business owners and managers should find and hire new employees that will become true contributors and leaders within the organization.

"If we as a management group do not figure out (how to hire leaders) we can't succeed in business. We can't grow our business," said Bill Hoopes, director of training, development and regulatory affairs, Scotts LawnService, Marysville, Ohio.

ATTRACTING THE BEST. To hire the best candidates, you must find them, and that takes effort, Hoopes said. "We all have to spend more time on a comprehensive human re-



sources strategy. Hiring the exceptional candidate will deliver tomorrow's leaders. But be prepared to invest more effort," Hoopes added.

For example, classified ads are a necessary part of the recruiting process, but many contractors err by assuming advertisements are the sole recruiting method. "Recruiting is building relationships, it isn't running classified ads," Hoopes said. To find the best candidates, contractors should look for other recruiting venues such as participation in civic groups, and develop relationships with labor pools like local colleges and technical schools.

The best recruiters talk succinctly about their company's identity and the benefits of working on their team. Hoopes suggested contractors answer the question, "Why would you want to work for me?" and create bullet points of the answers. If these points are top of mind for business owners, they will be prepared to recruit potential hires in any situation, whether in the office or outside during non-work activities.

Hoopes list seven points to boost your company's recruitment efforts:

- Know and be able to communicate who you are
- Magnetize your company by building your local image (civic groups, etc.)
- Dedicate more time to the people search
- Develop your own recruiting sources (community colleges, tech schools, high schools, related business) within a 30-mile radius.
- Recognize recruiting as building relationships
- Create unique, candidate-friendly classifieds and run them in unique places
- Identify sources beyond the

classifieds, such as referral programs with existing employees

HIRING. Once you've worked hard to find potential new hires, make sure you select the right one. "We can't afford to make bad choices," Hoopes said. Selecting the right candidate requires an invest-

HIRE for attitude and train for APTITUDE.

ment in preparation time and a smart approach to the interview process.

Above all else, Hoopes selects candidates based on attitude. "I am one of those nuts that hires for attitude and trains aptitude. I don't care if you know what makes a spreader impeller go round. Give me a person who *wants* to do it and in an hour I'll make a great lawn technician."

To gauge an applicant's attitude, as well as other traits, contractors should strive to uncover past experiences that demonstrate the candidate's qualities or lack thereof. "Past experience is the best predictor of future behavior. So all my questions are about what used to be. I want to know, 'What did you do?'"

In general, Hoopes looks for the following qualities:

1. INTELLIGENCE/ COMMON SENSE

Indicators: Organizes thoughts, scholastic achievements, past success

Questions to ask: What can you offer our company? What is the toughest customer problem you faced and how did you solve it? What criteria are you using to evaluate our company? What do you think is likely to make the difference between success and failure in this position?

2. RESULTS ORIENTATION

Indicators: Tenacity, prioritization, focus

on major projects, motivated to succeed
Questions to ask: Can you give me an example of a major problem you encountered in a past job and how you solved it? What do you feel have been the strong points that helped you accomplish your goals and why? What have you accomplished in past jobs that gives you a sense of satisfaction?

3. INNOVATIVE

Indicators: Contributes new ideas that work, develops creative solutions to problems

Questions to ask: Can you think of a change in procedures which your fellow employees would credit you for making? Tell me about a situation in which you recognized a problem before your boss.

4. INTERPERSONAL SKILLS/LEADERSHIP

Indicators: Wants to influence outcomes, motivates others, coordinates activities, convincing and sincere

Questions to ask: What are your strengths in working with other people? What are some problems you encountered while working with other people? Give me an example of a situation in which you had to convince other people to agree with you.

5. PRODUCTIVITY

Indicators: Planning and scheduling time, can handle several projects at once

Questions to ask: How do you set priorities? What is your procedure for keeping track of important commitments? What did you do to get ready for this interview?

6. COMMUNICATION

Indicators: Listens effectively, and gives clear, concise and complete answers, persuasive



Questions to ask: What idea or plan have you had to communicate that was most challenging and why was it challenging? Describe your most satisfying experience in presenting your ideas or plans to others.

7. RELEVANT EXPERIENCE

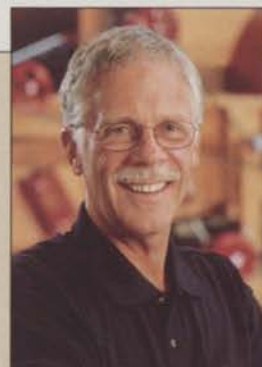
Indicators: Past success relevant to your company

Questions to ask: In other answers look for past success you can use now.

While these traits and questions work for Hoopes, he cautioned that each owner/manager should develop his or her own list specific to the organization. He suggested contractors write down specifically what they are looking for and what it is that you will ask the person to do. Then form a list of questions that will demonstrate the candidate's proficiency in those areas.

The best interview questions, Hoopes said, encourage the applicant to speak freely and at length about relevant top-

THE 2-10-10 Interview



Bill Hoopes

Hoopes developed a systematic approach to interviewing called the 2-10-10 approach. Spend two minutes explaining the position and key re-

quirements, about 10 minutes asking probing questions to form your opinion of the candidate and allocate about 10 minutes for answering the candidate's questions.

Hoopes stressed that how an interview begins is extremely important and serves as an opportunity to put the candidate at ease. "You can't overcome a disastrous opening. Practice how you open an interview. Role play with someone in your organization," Hoopes suggested. Small talk is the best ice breaker, which can relax the candidate, paving the way for honest and full answers. "Get their vocal chords going. The more they talk, the less defensive human beings become," Hoopes added.

ics. For example ask, "Tom, without limiting your answer to any one thing, I'd like to learn about the more important accomplishments you've been able to make in, say, the last four to five years." This question is preferable to asking, "I noticed you were actively involved

in a cancellation reduction drive, Tom. Did it turn out successfully?"

"Ask open ended questions and then shut up," Hoopes added. "Listen 80 percent of the time and talk 20."

Hoopes also instructed contractors to avoid the following types of questions:

- *Yes or No questions.* You learn little.
- *Leading questions.* These questions give the applicant an "out." For example a leading question would be, "I suppose that with all your production experience, you consider yourself to be well organized?" Instead try, "Tell me what you've learned as a production manager that helps you stay organized?"
- *Pointless questions.* Esoteric questions such as, "If you were a color, which color would you like to be?"

WORTH THE EFFORT. Attracting, screening and hiring new employees can be a taxing process, requiring stretching your conventional ideas of recruiting. However, building a top-notch staff is vital to the strength of your company. "We have to devote more time to people," Hoopes said.



CANDIDATE-FRIENDLY Classifieds

Classified advertisements that paint an accurate and positive picture of a green industry job are most effective in attracting candidates. As Hoopes said, "People take jobs that look good from the outside." The following are a few bullet points Hoopes suggested for an entry-level, lawn care position:

- Minimal experience required
- Full paid training provided
- Minimum supervision and you can work on your own

- Work outdoors, not in an office or factory
- Job and work schedule flexibility
- Comfortable, friendly team atmosphere
- Opportunity to grow
- Competitive compensation with outstanding benefits.



*Announcing a revolutionary way
to control crabgrass.*

Wait until you see it. Instead of spending time and money on preemergence crabgrass treatments that may or may not be necessary (not to mention harming root establishment in your customers' lawns) simply eliminate crabgrass with Acclaim[®] Extra Herbicide. It works fast, and won't damage existing turf. It's economical, because you use it only when you need it. And low application rates keep everyone happy. Any questions?
Pest control everyone can feel good about.

The Leader as Servant



*Leading
by working
for and
serving
your
organization.*

*By Ken
Melrose*

"Whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant." In my opinion, these few words from the New Testament can stand up against all the management books on the shelves today. The great leader is a great servant.

Although the model of the leader as servant has been in the canons of management for years, in actual practice it's still rare.

BECOMING A SERVANT LEADER. In *Stronger Than Steel*, Wayne Alderson, former operating head of Pittron Steel, describes how he learned that serving his people unleashed their creativity, motivation and capabilities, and directed them toward the goals of the company. A World War II veteran who survived a fox-hole grenade explosion, Alderson later played a key role in the survival of a small Pennsylvania steel company, Pittron Steel. The company was threatened in part by a protracted conflict between management and union employees. Alderson maintains that the company was actually saved by itself; his servant leadership merely allowed it to happen. He provided sound guidelines and direction, trusted his employees to contribute as he knew they could, and then held them accountable.

Pittron Steel was able to save itself once the workers realized their leader genuinely valued them, not only as employees with a job to do, but also as human beings. When they began to trust, their potential contributions were unleashed, saving Pittron from the brink of financial failure and eventually making the company a competitive U.S. steel manufacturer. Alderson was a leader who served his employees not because he knew he would get more out of them, but because he wanted them to recognize their self-worth and dignity, and wanted to help them become better human beings. That's what servant leadership is all about.

Leadership is not a position; it's a combination of something you are (character) and some things you do (competence). Leadership can be coveted by people for the wrong reasons. Some seem to thrive on enhanced personal identity and power, others may have a need to assert their presumed greater value and make it clear to everyone who's in control. Words such as chief, director and executive officer have a nice ring to them,





and the attendant benefits aren't bad either. But if we think of leadership as a position, it's almost impossible to develop an environment of trust. People who worry about preserving personal power aren't likely to accept the idea of "leader as servant." They aren't likely to give up power to benefit everyone involved, or even to understand a concept. Any service they give in the name of that concept is going to be lip service. The moment they feel threatened, they're going to yank their power back and hold onto it hard.

Leadership is as much an art as it is a science. As such, it's far from black and white. Very often, the issues we face are subtle and unclear. Then, too, there are times when the issue is clear enough, but we have blinders on. The Watergate experience shows plainly that ordinary men just "doing their jobs," may accept assignments handed down from their supervisors without questioning the right or wrong involved. Or, even if they do question the moral correctness of their orders, what kind of world is it where a leader's values can be compromised by ambition or concerns over job security?

We have, hopefully, moved out of the period when blind obedience was expected, and into a time when the concept of empowerment — moving responsibility, accountability, ownership and power down in an organization — is receiving support in the workplace. The individual is empowered to try, to fail or succeed, and to take another step toward the goal. In this way, even failure can be goal-directed. Each of us does the best we can within a host of constraints.

Whenever we step in front of the

crowd and say, "Follow me," the implication is that we know where we're going and what we want to achieve. The assumption is that we're committed to give our very best efforts. Knowing that personal values influence the quality of leadership, we must ask ourselves, "Will my values enable me and my followers to arrive at our goals with our integrity and self-esteem intact and stronger than ever?" If a leader can't offer integrity and consistent values, especially in times of crisis, followers will dwindle. As the saying goes, "Every now and then, a leader ought to look back to see if anyone is following."

If you fail to measure yourself and benchmark your performance against your best visions, norms and standards, how can you do more than pretend to lead, and how can you expect to impart vision and higher expectations to others? Leaders set the tone for everything that occurs within their organizations. For this reason, leaders must give careful attention to the stories they're writing with their deeds. As you help write your company's story, remember you have it within your power to help your company develop a new culture — with a climate of trust that is defined by a set of values that stresses the dignity and importance of every employee. This is the service you can best offer your company as a leader.

You don't have to be the perfect example of all the disciplines of excellence, especially if the corporation is firmly behind you and has sufficient forward momentum to carry you past your own weaknesses. In fact, your imperfections may enhance your humanness and thereby help set the tone for risks, innovation and trust. What you

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do need is a firm commitment to a personal development program and dedication to continuous improvement. I'm well aware that I'm in no way a perfect model, but I'm committed to continuous learning and growing.

MANAGE YOUR TURF WELL.

Over the years at Toro, I've learned a few things about managing turf, both inside the company and out on the grass. If you think of your turf as your domain — as the environment you operate in — then your turf becomes your area of influence. Turf may also refer to your organization, your work area, your home and garden, or whatever domain you occupy.

The servant-leader model is not an easy model to embrace. But the style permits the greatest number of people to experience the greatest good. In the servant-leader model, the leader's role is to provide optimal conditions for the growth, development and self improvement of all. If you are to do that, you must find and unleash new powers from within yourself, and empower others to do the same. You must discover new perspectives, commitment and passions within yourself, and inspire your followers to make their own discoveries. As a leader, you must tap into your inner strengths. You must share the power and spirit you discover there with others, for the benefit of all.

The author is chairman and CEO of The Toro Company.

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Discovering
and
developing
the qualities
of a leader.

By Liz
O'Leary



When we think of successful, high-profile leaders, we think of people such as Secretary of State Colin Powell or Bill Gates, the Harvard dropout who founded Microsoft and became one of the richest men in the world.

In your own field, you can probably name men and women who are successful leaders — people who seem almost visionary and have an intangible knack for getting things right and inspiring their subordinates.

Leaders are able to define a goal, persuade others to assist in achieving that goal, and lead their teams to victory. But what is the definition of leadership? There is not one single definition of leadership. Understanding this is the first step toward becoming an effective leader. Some common beliefs about leadership include:

- A leader is the appointed head of a group, team or organization.
- A leader is a charismatic person who is able

to make good decisions and inspire others to reach a common goal.

- Leadership is the power to communicate assertively and inspire others.
- Leadership is the ability to influence.

Not one of the preceding definitions is more correct than any of the others. All of the definitions, however, agree on one common fact — leadership involves more than one person.

You cannot be a leader without a group of people following your direction and putting their trust in you. Remember, as a leader you have a responsibility to your employees, group, organization or team to lead fairly and ethically. The title “Boss” does not automatically make you a leader.

To be a good leader, fortify yourself by keeping up with the latest leadership trends, observing other leaders (including leaders in your own company) and recognizing that your own unique brand of leadership will change as you gain experience.

LEADERSHIP QUALITIES. A leader is someone who inspires, who makes decisions that affect the organization in a positive way, and who can pull together a diverse team to work toward a common goal. But if all managers are not leaders, what are the qualities that set leaders apart? The answer:

Knowledge: Know your facts and use them. A leader must know the details of the business in order to act for the entire organization.

Trust: Don't micromanage. If your employees feel you are constantly peering over their shoulders, you will create an atmosphere of distrust. Be aware of what team members are working on, but don't make them feel like “Big Brother” is watching.

Integrity: A leader will be ineffective if subordinates and su-



What is Leadership?

periors do not trust him. The organization soon learns to work around a leader who is untrustworthy or does not keep his word. For example, a leader who tells his employees one thing but does another could be viewed as untrustworthy — even if the difference seems inconsequential to you.

Standards: As a leader, your public and private lives should be exemplary. Lead by example. A leader who expects a certain code of conduct from the employees but does not practice the same

standards can suffer a loss of respect. A staff that does not respect the leader will suffer a loss in work quality.

Decisiveness: Leaders are valued for their decision-making abilities, especially in high-pressure situations. When confronted with a tough decision, fall back on your knowledge. The best decisions are decisions made with full possession of the facts.

Assertiveness: Leaders are chosen to lead a team, group or entire organization. Your assertiveness can and must represent the employees who have put their trust in you.

Optimism: Be realistic, but not fatalistic. Your employees may soon lose confidence if they are constantly confronted with pessimism or negativity from you. Situations aren't always ideal, but as a leader you're expected to find the best way to turn the situation around. Figure it out and concentrate on the positive.

Results: A leader has a track record of solid decisions and outcomes to point to. If you've been managing for some time, try to compile a list of successful decisions and events that you're responsible for. Not only can you point out these success to others, but you can use them to build confidence in your abilities.

Vision: A leader is expected to set goals that will guide an organization in a specific direction. A leader must think broadly and far into the future to set those goals and help the team grow in the right direction.

Appearance: As "casual Friday" becomes "casual every day" at a growing number of companies, you still must give off the aura of power in your dress and surroundings.

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WHAT A LEADER IS NOT. A leader is not merely the manager who sits in the corner office, the person who controls quitting time and paychecks, or the person who can hire and fire people. Managers in this day and age must be flexible and willing to adapt to an increasingly demanding and younger workforce that questions authority. As a leader, you should avoid the following:

Micromangement: Consider whether you might be keeping too close an eye on your staff or handling too many of the responsibilities in your organization yourself. Are you being viewed as overbearing?

Temper: Put your negative emotions aside. We're all human, but as a leader you must avoid negative outbursts or personal attacks.

Arrogance: You are not a supreme deity. Remember that you wouldn't be a leader without a staff. Avoid autocratic behavior.

BECOMING A LEADER. Some people would have you believe that the best leaders are born that way, and that if you weren't captain of the preschool debate club, you're out of luck when it comes to the ability to be a leader. Usually there was a defining event or person in their lives that gave them the confidence to step out of the pack and start leading it.

For you, that moment has arrived. Now you must fortify yourself and start thinking like a leader.

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2001 LEADERSHIP

Winners

Chipco Professional Products and Lawn & Landscape magazine are proud to announce the

winners of the third annual Leadership Awards. These individuals embody the essence of leadership, whether it's in their tireless industry involvement, pioneering spirit, dedication to education, commitment

to personal improvement or environmental stewardship.

Congratulations and thanks for your outstanding contributions to the lawn and landscape industry.



THE CLASS OF 2001

DALE AMSTUTZ

Northern Lawns Corp.
Omaha, Neb.



TOM BLAND

Bland Landscaping Co., Inc.
Cary, N.C.



BILL HOOPES

Scotts LawnService
Marysville, Ohio



BRUCE HUNT

The Brickman Group
Long Grove, Ill.



ADAM JONES

Massey Services, Inc.
Maitland, Fla.



KURT KLUZNIK

Yardmaster, Inc.
Painesville, Ohio



SAM LANG

Fairway Green Lawn Care
Raleigh, N.C.



GARY LASCALEA

GroGreen Lawn, Tree & Shrub Care
Plano, Texas



BETH SEME

Elizabeth A. Seme, Inc.
Latham, N.Y.



JOSEPH VARGAS, PH.D.

Michigan State Univ.
East Lansing, Mich.



NORTH CAROLINA LANDSCAPER HAS SUDDEN-DEATH EXPERIENCE.

“I started to feel cold. I knew there was no time,” says Kay.



For Kay Gambill, time was running out. The temperature was dropping, the weeds were growing, and she and her team had a 2-acre ornamental landscape to clear and re-build in Fayetteville, NC.

“Cardinal Landscape works right through the winter,” she explained, “and that’s when most systemic weedkillers quit. But not Finale[®] Herbicide. Where it’ll take Roundup[®] a month or more, Finale does the job in a few days, even when the thermometer’s below 40°. For weeds, it’s a sudden-death experience, winter as well as summer. Kinda gives you the shivers, doesn’t it?”

Pest control everyone can feel good about.

Finale[®]
HERBICIDE

LEADERSHIP

Honor Roll



Since 1999, the Lawn & Landscape Leadership Awards, sponsored by Chipco Professional Products, have been presented annually to green industry professionals who uphold the highest standards of industry ethics and personal integrity. This prestigious award celebrates the dedication and contribution these individuals make to the betterment of our industry. Their leadership provides us with a beacon by which to pattern our own work.

The 2001 Leadership Award recipients join an illustrious group of professionals (see right) and will forever be remembered in green industry annals.



THE CLASS OF 1999

LAURIE BROCCOLO

Broccolo Tree & Lawn Care
Rochester, N.Y.

THE DAVEY TREE INSTITUTE

Kent, Ohio

TIM DOPPEL

Atwood Lawn Care
Sterling Heights, Mich.

PHIL FOGARTY

Crowley's Vegetation Management
Cleveland, Ohio

NORMAN GOLDENBERG

TruGreen-ChemLawn
Memphis, Tenn.

DAVE HANSON

Environmental Care
Calabasas, Calif

MICHAEL KERNAGHAN

The Weed Man
Mississauga, Ontario

MARK SCHLOSSBERG

Pro-Lawn
Baltimore, Md.

CHRIS SENSKE

Senske Tree & Lawn Care
Kennewick, Wash.

TOM TOLKACZ

Single Tree & Landscape Care
Denver, Colo.

THE CLASS OF 2000

BOB ANDREWS

The Greenskeeper
Carmel, Ind.

GARY CLAYTON

All Green
Marietta, Ga.

RUSSELL FRITH

Lawn Doctor
Holmdel, N.J.

RON KUJAWA

Kujawa Enterprises
Cudhay, Wis.

TOM LIED

Lied's Landscape Design & Development
Sussex, Wis.

GEORGE MORRELL

The Morrell Group
Atlanta, Ga.

LINDA NOVY

Gardeners' Guild
San Rafael, Calif.

J. LANDON REEVE

Chapel Valley Landscape
Woodbine, Md.

WAYNE RICHARDS

Cagwin & Dorward
Novato, Calif.



Dale Amstutz sold his lawn care business, but he held onto his outdoor lighting firm, and he remains president of the Evergreen Foundation.

In the end, the decision wasn't all that difficult. After 22 years in business, Dale Amstutz, owner and president of Northern Lawns in Omaha, Neb., decided the time was right.

He had been courted by the industry giants for years, but he was too young and too proud to sell. What would he do with his time?

Since his childhood, Amstutz has been working hard at whatever he was doing. Working on the farm, working to finish his homework on the way home from school, working his way through college and working in a demanding sales position.

But this time was different. His wife, Nancy, was a three-year cancer survivor. His kids, Meredith, 17, and Geoff, 12, were thinking about college and careers that didn't involve taking over the family business.

And, first and foremost, the sale of Northern Lawns to Scotts LawnService on April 24, was good for his customers and his employees.

"If it wasn't right for everyone, we

Dale Amstutz

With ethics learned on the farm and business acumen learned at college, Dale Amstutz built a thriving lawn care company.



PROFILE

DALE AMSTUTZ

COMPANY: Northern Lawns Corp.

LOCATION: Omaha, Neb.

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS:

- Over 22 years, built a prominent lawn care company.
- President, Evergreen Foundation.
- Past president, PLCAA.

lives," Amstutz says. "The name carries a tremendous amount of clout. It made a believer out of me."

With the business running as smoothly as it has in a number of years, friends constantly asked Amstutz why he would sell now.

"I turned 50 last year; you get tired," he says. "The older you get the more you realize you have limits. I decided there were things I did and didn't want to do. With both Nancy and I involved in the business and the kids in school, it had a definite impact on the business if we both wanted to attend a school function or event.

"I wouldn't go back and do anything differently, but the time was right. Business was getting tougher. It's harder to make good money at; especially competing with companies like Scotts and TruGreen."

That said, Amstutz closely scrutinized the groundwork Scotts was laying on a national level for growth. With the financial backing they had, it was only a matter of time before they were in Omaha.

weren't going to do it," Amstutz says.

Money was third on the list of what he needed to agree to the sale.

"They needed to take care of our customers, continue providing the quality and level of service they expected, and they needed to take care of my employees," he says.

Amstutz kept his employees involved in all facets of "sale" discussions from his first conversation with Scotts representatives last spring. "I told them what it could mean and why we were doing it. We wanted to keep them as an important part of the transition.

"We became friends with most of the people who worked with us," Amstutz says. "That was probably the hardest part about deciding to sell the business. Leaving the people who worked for us for a long time. We chose Scotts because of the way they portrayed the transition: Everybody keeps their jobs."

In fact, everyone did stay on, which provided Amstutz with a great deal of satisfaction in knowing that he made the right choice.

At the time of the sale, Northern Lawns reported \$700,000 in sales, a 20 percent increase in new sales and renewals for 2001. It was the best sales performance the company had reported in the last two to three years. The company is on track to post \$1 million in sales next year.

Amstutz attributes this spring's success to the new training program instituted by General Manager Bill Lewis, who was hired three years ago to improve the company's level of follow-up to service calls.

For the last year and a half, Lewis focused on hiring, training and servicing lawns, a move Amstutz said hurt the company in the short-term. But things have settled down and Northern Lawns lost only 10 percent of its renewals this year.

Amstutz admits the focus on hiring and training came amidst a time of fast

growth in the mid- to late 1990s when they were growing at a 12 to 15 percent clip. "We just weren't getting the job done. But when you keep the same people on a route, service shows really quickly in renewals."

Renewals have been key to the company's success. From day one, Amstutz incorporated an automatic renewal system into his business. Essentially, the program dictates that Northern Lawns continues to maintain a regular service program on any given property until the customer says otherwise.

"It's worked well for us. It's less than 1/10th of 1 percent we don't collect on," he says.

The program works like this: Every new customer receives a copy of an estimate form. In addition to the quote, a description of the services to be provided is included as well as a detailed explanation of continuing service. Unless they hear otherwise from the customer, they will continue the annual program. Customers receive reminder mailings over the winter to make sure they understand the program.

Customers are given the opportunity to amend their programs, as needed. For instance, if a customer is going to seed their lawn and they don't want a preemergent herbicide applied, they just let the company know.

"I don't know if it was foresight or stupidity; it's just the way we always did it," he says. "Our customers seem to like it. There's no signing and sending paper and contracts back and forth."

Under Scotts ownership, Lewis was retained as branch manager for the Omaha operations. And, the move paid off. From the day the sale was final in late April until the end of May, Northern Lawns/Scotts signed 240 plus customers.

"It boggled my mind. It's almost like they've (homeowners) been waiting for Scotts to maintain their lawn all of their



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"I could have competed, but because of age and circumstances in the market, I didn't know if I wanted to," he says. "After 20 years you reach a comfort level and you don't want to change."

While Amstutz carved out a long and successful career for himself in the lawn care industry, he claims he simply fell into the business.

At the same time he was working full time for Ciba, he agreed to go into business with a friend. Amstutz would handle the paperwork and his friend would spray the lawns.

But after a strange twist of events landed him in the unemployment line, Amstutz launched himself and his family into the entrepreneurial world of lawn care.

It was 1980, and Amstutz was busy creating and distributing marketing brochures in effort to gain customers for his new business. Seemingly, they doubled their customer base overnight from 400 to 800.

"I don't know whether I would have chosen the business for myself or not, but the timing was right so I just sort of backed into the business," he says. "But the 10 years of business and sales training I had with Ciba helped out a lot."

Nancy joined the business after a successful career with the local energy department. She worked full-time in the lawn care business handling a multitude of tasks such as accounts payable, office management, customer service and anything else required of her until their daughter, Meredith, was born in 1985. She continued to work part-time mostly from home, paying bills and handling other tasks as their daughter napped.

"It was a blessing for her to come and go as she pleased. She really is an invaluable part of the business," he says.

Several years ago, with the business running smoothly, Dale and Nancy faced their biggest competitor to date. Nancy was diagnosed with cancer.

After surgery and treatment, Nancy's health is excellent and she's experienced no recurrence with the disease.

"The whole process helped to change our perspective. It makes you look at life differently. What are your priorities if you don't have your health? It just doesn't much matter," he says softly. "When they wheel someone you love down the hall in a gurney and you don't know if you will ever see her again...it played a big part in our decisions. All of a sudden, the business was not quite so important after all."

Both Meredith and Geoff, born in 1988, worked with their parents for a couple of summers, but neither one had a great affinity for it. Over the years, the business played a big role in their lives, but the sale of the business to Scotts didn't bother them.

Meredith excels in computers and Geoff wants to be a professional baseball player.

Of late, Dale and Nancy have been spending more time with their family,

learned the busier he was the more successful he was.

"All of my work ethic came from working with my dad on the farm. We always had farm work to do in addition to our school work. Ask no questions, just do it," he says. "Do what you have to do to keep the business running. I never grew up with excuses."

Honesty, ethics, organizational skills and paying the bills on time are all characteristics need to run a business, according to Amstutz.

Those are the traits he admired most in Keith Weidler, whom he met through PLCAA. Weidler operated a lawn care business in Omaha before selling it in the mid- to late 1980s to ChemLawn. Weidler died two years ago after an organ transplant.

"We weren't good buddies, but when I first got into the business, I saw him on the lawn one day and he told me to call him with any questions," Amstutz says. "He ran the largest company in Omaha. He was in business for about 20 years and he had the same guys working for him the entire time."

Amstutz said he looked up to Weidler because he built his business the way he wanted to build his own business.

He also credits Ron Miller, who worked with him at Ciba in New England, for developing his organizational skills.

"I left the farm three years after college and went to work for Ciba. During the first six months I was really struggling. I didn't know if I would survive or not. He straightened me out," Amstutz said. "He was a military sergeant. As much as I hated it, he kept me on track from a business organizational point of view. He helped me more than he would ever know."

Association involvement has and continues to represent a core business practice for Amstutz. From a young age, his dad taught him to give something back.

"It's an obligation of a business that's successful, particularly when you've

In the end, the **DECISION** wasn't all that **difficult**. After **22 YEARS** in business, Dale Amstutz, owner and president of **Northern Lawns** in Omaha, Neb., decided the **TIME** was right.

playing golf, going to baseball games and taking time to do and see it all.

Amstutz credits his father and a former board member of the Professional Lawn Care Association of America (PLCAA) for his success in the lawn care business.

Growing up in Orrville, Ohio, 50 miles south of Cleveland, Amstutz

learned so much from the business," he says. "You can't be in an industry that many years and survive without giving back. That's my attitude. I don't know if I'm blessed, lucky or if was just part of my dad's training. It's worked out well in a lot of ways. You can't just keep taking."

On the contrary, Amstutz has a long history of serving professional organizations at the local, state and national levels.

Currently, he is the president of the Evergreen Foundation, a national organization providing expertise and funding for the building and improvement of community parks, playgrounds, trails, sports facilities and other green spaces. Since 1989, he also serves on the Nebraska Pesticide board.

Prior to that, Amstutz served as president of PLCAA in 1995. He has also served as president of the Nebraska Turfgrass Foundation, was a member of the review team and search committee for the University of Nebraska Horticulture Department and was a founding member of the Nebraska Professional Lawn Care Association.

Community activities include the chairmanship of the Permanent Endowment Fund Board, First Christian Church; a member of the Executive Dialogue Program for the Omaha Chamber of Commerce; and the board of directors for Big Brothers/Big Sisters.

Organization and commitment are the two primary characteristics that gave him the ability to juggle running a business with serving on volunteer organizations.

"His drive comes from his willingness and understanding of the green industry," says Den Gardner, executive director of the Evergreen Foundation and long-time associate of Amstutz. "He realizes that he can't just do his job every day without giving back to the industry. Dale's always thinking one step ahead of what he's doing."

Amstutz was instrumental in the transition, development and growth of the Evergreen Foundation from its initial roots as the PLCAA Research and Education Foundation.

LIGHTING A *New Path*

Northern Lawns Inc. – the corporation – was not sold; rather Scotts bought the field equipment, inventory, customer list and office equipment from the business. Amstutz signed a non-compete for lawn care only, and he opted to keep his fledgling outdoor lighting business.



Northern Lights, a division of Northern Lawns Inc., offers holiday lighting services, a business that has performed well over the last two years. Northern Lights is an independently run distributorship of Brite Ideas.

"Business is good in Omaha. Holiday lighting is so much different than lawn care. You finish the job, turn the lights on and they say, 'Wow,'" he exclaimed. "In lawn care, the difference isn't as immediate."

Dale and Nancy currently operate their business out of their home. Bill Lewis, general manager of the former lawn care business, remains a partner in Northern Lights as well. Because the existing equipment for the holiday season parallels landscape lighting, he plans to begin offering outdoor landscape lighting services in Omaha and surrounding areas. However, he has no plans to offer periphery services such as perimeter pest control.

"It's not a fair answer at this point. Nancy and I have made a real effort to not get back into that business." — *Cindy Code*

His energy and drive to promote the benefits of all that is good about the green industry motivates his peers.

"The best thing I like about Dale is that not only is he a successful businessman, but that he's always willing to look outside the box and look for opportunities to promote the green industry," Gardner says. "That's always important for me when I'm working with someone. When you're involved like that, good things are going to happen."

Friends agree that Amstutz instinctively has the ability to lead. He's contemplative, deliberative and he has the charisma to get people moving in the direction of an organization's goals.

"He's the type of leader that you look at and say, gosh, I wish I were more like him," Gardner says. "He's someone that you want to aspire to be like." ★

The author, Cindy Code, is publisher of Lawn & Landscape magazine.

Tom Bland

Tom Bland has a knack for finding and hiring good people, and then coaching them to success.

PROFILE

TOM BLAND

COMPANY: Bland Landscaping

EDUCATION: Attended
Appalachian State University

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS:

- Past president of the North Carolina Landscape Contractors board.
- Past president of the North Carolina Turfgrass Council.
- Served on the Landscape Contractors Licensing Board and North Carolina State Arboretum Board.

There's really nothing all that special about Tom Bland. Just ask him and he'll be happy to tell you just how ordinary he is, how his success in the landscape industry is more a result of his market and how he is simply the man with his name on the door while his employees are the ones who actually do the work.

"He may be the most modest person I know, and I think that has helped him," observes his son, Kurt. "The most successful people can become a failure when they start to revel in their own success, but my dad doesn't care about being in a magazine, winning awards or getting credit for things."

In truth, there are plenty of things that make Tom Bland and his company, Bland Landscaping, Cary, N.C., unique and special, especially considering Bland's introduction to the landscape industry. Back in the early 1970s, Bland was working for a construction company building apartments when the landscape contractor it hired quit toward the end of the process.

"All of a sudden, I was given the task of finishing the landscape work for this developer, and my interest in the work evolved from there as I kept doing more and more plantings," recalls Bland.

But Bland wasn't about to go overboard pursuing the landscape industry. In fact, he wasn't in any hurry at all. "I started doing more landscape work for this developer, but I just did it part-time until 1984 because I had a boss who

didn't mind me working on my own business," he notes. "All of the other employees would go in for their review each year hoping for a pay raise, and I would go in and hope for fewer hours.

"I eventually worked myself out of the construction business and into the landscape business," he continues, "and doing this at a slow pace was a tremendous asset to me. My previous employer always talked about the importance of growing into something instead of jumping into it. That enabled me to be selective about my clientele and set the business up like I wanted instead of taking every job out there to meet payroll."

AT ITS ROOTS. While Bland's introduction to landscaping came in an unexpected fashion, he grew up learning to appreciate the environment and the importance of caring for it from his father, a soil and water conservationist who consulted with farmers throughout the Carolinas. "He had an agriculture degree from North Carolina State and he spent a lot of time with farmers, so I grew up hearing all of the agriculture terms, discussing those issues and understanding them," Bland recalls.

After attending Appalachian State University and studying business for a couple of years, Bland was still wondering what his professional future would hold when he went to work for the previously mentioned construction company. Of course, such an inauspicious start in the industry reflects the fact that Bland never set out to create one of the largest landscape companies in the state. "I went into business to put food on the table and make a living," he admits, adding that the company now has about 110 employees. "I didn't plan to get this large."





For Tom Bland (left), success in business is a direct result of the talents of the people who work at it, which is why Bland Landscaping dedicates considerable time and money to training all of its employees (above) and helping them do their job and advance throughout the organization. The benefits of this commitment to people can be seen when more than 100 employees join together to celebrate the company's 25th anniversary (below). Photos: Bland Landscaping



So how does someone without any horticultural knowledge or training who doesn't even know he wants to be a landscape contractor create a company that has won at least 45 state or national awards and has grown to the size Bland Landscaping has reached?

"I think the biggest key to our success has to be our employees," offers Bland, again deflecting credit. "I seem to have a knack for surrounding myself with really good people, and then I'm able to work with them, coach them and get the most out of them."

In this case, his son agrees. "He always had the motivation to create a





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business that's not your run-of-the-mill business with a level of conscientiousness and quality that you rarely see any more," says Kurt. "But the business really got strong when he learned how to leverage himself and delegate so well."

Obviously, this is a familiar tune, one that is echoed by the majority of successful business people. But, for many contractors, employees equate to a people problem they can't ever seem to overcome, and Bland thinks he knows

what makes him and his experience different from these other businesses.

"A lot of owners want to have their hands in everything, and that will cause problems," he notes, agreeing that delegating is one of his strengths. "I guess they think that no one can do the job as well as they can or they get nervous giving others control in an area of their business.

"Instead, I believe in just letting people do their job and trusting them to do it the right way," he continues,

"I seem to have a **KNACK** for surrounding myself with really good people, and then I'm able to work with them, **COACH** them and get the **MOST** out of them." — *Tom Bland*

adding that he only has client contact now in situations where the client requests it and he focuses his responsibilities on financial management. "If you want to develop your people, that goes hand in hand with delegating responsibility to them. You should find employees who complement your weaknesses or other team members' weaknesses, and then make sure everyone has the equipment, support or training that they need to do the work you want them to do."

MORE THAN MONEY. Bland's version of empowering leadership has clearly served the company well as it just celebrated its 25th anniversary. Now, he's looking forward to being a part of the organization's 50th anniversary. Clearly, Bland is about much more than making money, and nothing illustrates this truth more than the fact that Bland Landscaping remains privately owned today.

"I've got no interest in selling the business, but we've sure had plenty of opportunities," he acknowledges. In fact, Bland says he still has a thick file of letters and inquiries from other companies interested in purchasing his organization, but he never gave any of them an opportunity to talk with him about selling. "I never even let anyone look at our business," he emphasizes. "I wasn't interested in selling, and there was more to it than the money. I'm not the only one who has built this business. It was built by the employees who have worked for us, and I didn't want to take that away from them."

THE *Four Tenets*

Landscape contractors across the country dream of the day when their business gets in tune and begins to produce sweet music on a consistent basis, and Tom Bland is no different when it comes to his 25-year-old company, Bland Landscaping, Cary, N.C., but getting everyone to harmonize beautifully together takes tremendous effort throughout the organization.

In addition, owners and managers know that before any good conductor takes the stage, he or she devotes considerable time to selecting the right music for their orchestra to play. This is a decision based largely on the musician's strengths, but that conductor's personal preferences also play a critical role, just as the business owner's philosophies shape his company's mission.

"We have done a lot of strategic planning and soul searching and have based our future niche in the marketplace around these four tenets: Quality, Service, Value and Pride," explains Bland. "We chose these words because they are the foundation upon which we have built our current success."

If Bland Landscaping's field personnel are its musicians, then the company's mission statement is surely their sheet music, setting the beat and tempo for them every day. Its mission statement reads as follows:

We at Bland Landscaping provide quality landscape work and grounds management with superior service for our clients.

Our goal is to create landscape value for our customers and maintain a continued sense of pride for our employees. We shall continue to position ourselves as a leading company in our industry committed to excellence. — *Bob West*

LIKE FATHER, *Like Sons?*

Tom Bland, president, Bland Landscaping is like many proud fathers who also happen to own their own businesses. As the father of two sons in their 20s, Bland hopes to one day have them join him in the office on a daily basis and possibly take over the company further down the road.

Before that happens, Bland wants his sons to experience the "real world" without having their father around. One of the boys, Kurt, got degrees in horticulture and agricultural business from North Carolina State University, and he's learning about the landscape industry as the maintenance division manager for Del Conte's Landscaping, Fremont, Calif. His brother, Matt, is pursuing his master's degree in accounting at North Carolina State University.

"I hope they'll eventually come to work here at the business," Bland relates. "But I only want them to work for me if it's their own decision."

Those employees remain an appreciative bunch, as they demonstrated at the company's 25th anniversary party this year. "The employees raised the money amongst themselves and started a scholarship in my wife's and my name at North Carolina State University," relates Bland, the emotion still obvious in his voice. "They raised more than \$7,600 dollars and did all of the leg work with the university themselves. To me – that was the ultimate gift, that they thought to give something like that."

Much of that appreciation obviously stems from having a leader who is committed to his employees and making their jobs and lives better. For Bland, this is exactly what leadership is all about.

"To me, leadership is setting a positive example for others to follow," he asserts. "In providing good leadership,

I want to do things in the way that I'd like people to do them. That's more than how you treat your people, how you treat your customers – it's setting the example for how they should all treat each other.

**"I've never had trouble
DELEGATING. I believe in just
letting people do their JOB and
trusting them to do it the right
way." — Tom Bland**

"I think leadership is also the ability to support other people and assist in enhancing their development," he goes on to say, continuing to focus on others. "I need to be able to give them

Part of that decision-making process for his sons is acquiring their own working experience. "They need to get experience outside of the family business, and they need to get as much education as possible," Bland emphasizes. "They need to prove themselves somewhere other than here where people can say they get certain things because they're the owner's son. If they just join us fresh out of college then they don't get the chance to prove what they can do to the other employees."

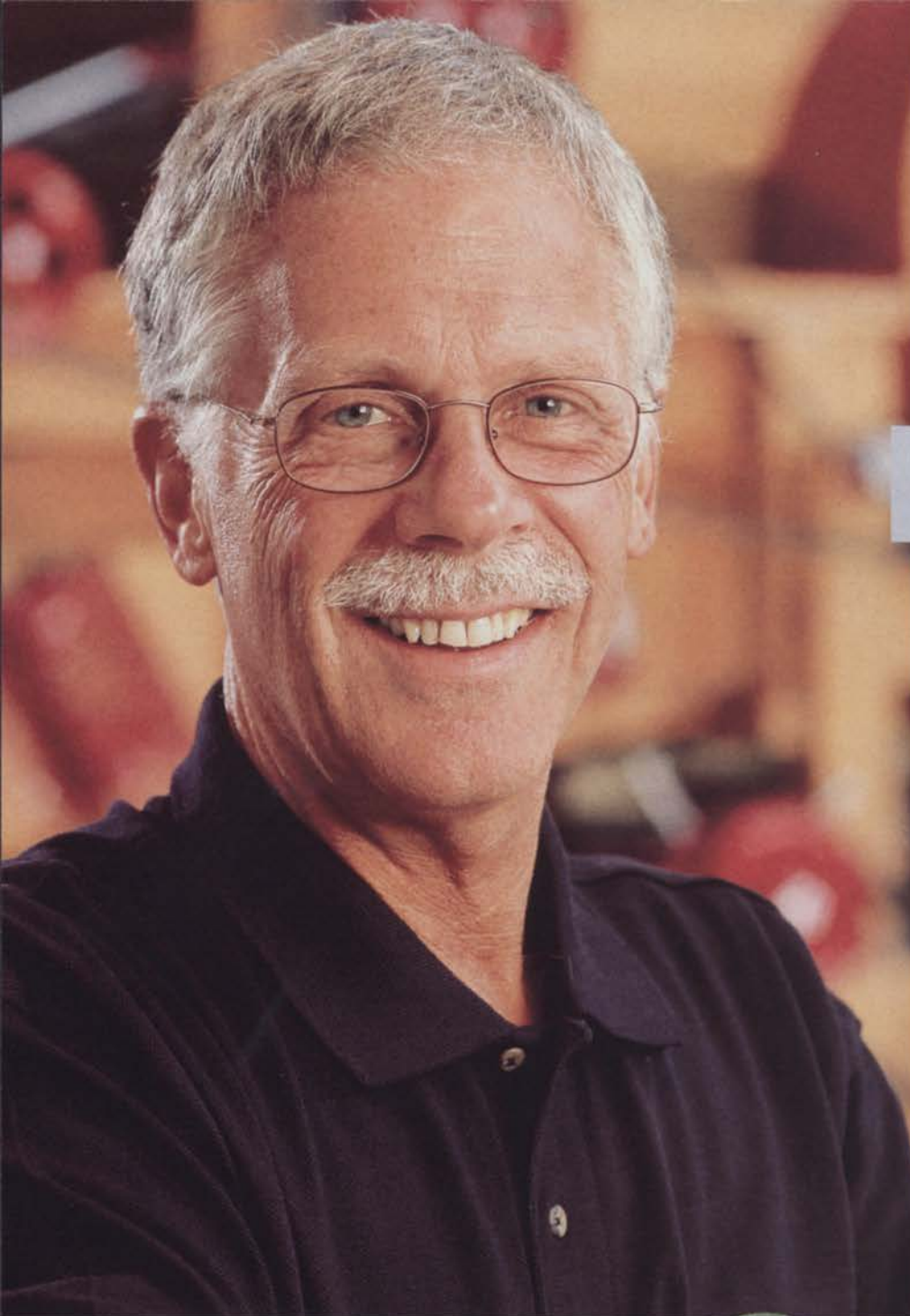
"I worked for my dad during high school, but I always felt like the owner's son," Kurt admits. "When my dad told me he thought I should work somewhere else for awhile, I resented that because I felt like I was being pushed away. Now, I feel like I can eventually go back and be integrated into the business instead of looking like the owner's son coming to take over." — Bob West

the support they need so they can do what they need to do. I think that's leadership."

And, obviously, Bland believes that leadership means giving those around him all of the credit even after they produce a series of accomplishments thanks largely to the training and support they receive from him.

"Sometimes I get frustrated that my dad won't take more credit or acknowledge the impressive things he has done," relates Kurt. "But that's the way he is. He even hates the titles of CEO or owner at work. He just wants to be known as a landscape contractor." ★

The author, Bob West, is Editor of *Lawn & Landscape magazine*.



"I want to highlight more winners," Bill Hoopes says.

"I want to shine the spotlight on people out there who are succeeding." Photo: Tom Dubanowich

No one is born with leadership skills in tow. The thought of an infant exiting the womb with the inborn guarantee of leadership ability is inconceivable. Most skills are learned – leadership among them.

Bill Hoopes – a man who preaches daily about leadership as director of training, development and regulatory affairs for Scotts LawnService, Marysville, Ohio – should know.

"George Patton was not born with two pearl-handled pistols on his side," announces Hoopes, continuing with an authentic fervor. "Leadership is a style you develop. People may be born with the basic potential to become effective leaders, but they aren't born with the skill itself."

People – this is Hoopes' hot button. Ask a question pertaining to the proper training and management of lawn care operators, and you've started an unstoppable whirlwind. The man is passionate about helping people develop communication skills.

"You only win with people," stresses Hoopes, who while growing up watching the weekly antics of Wayne Woodrow "Woody" Hayes, The Ohio State University head football coach from 1951 to 1978, learned this valuable lesson. Spend an hour talking to Hoopes and suddenly figuring out a new boss' attitude or coworker's motive seems simple. There's a basic premise to understanding people that runs through his veins. He gets it, and he wants to teach it to the rest of us. "People tend to be insecure and defensive," Hoopes explains. "They fear they are not good at expressing themselves so they become introverted. They natu-

Bill Hoopes

Ask Bill Hoopes what drives the green industry, and you better be ready for an uplifting discussion on leadership, positive attitudes and effective communication.



rally relate to things better than they relate to other people.”

Herein lies the very essence of a Bill Hoopes' lecture. Enter only if you've shouldered a positive attitude and are willing to walk away – lesson learned.

HOOPES' LESSON NO. 1: *Be prepared to work hard.* Comparable to a teacher studying students' faces for that first sign of understanding, Hoopes says the willingness to make a difference in people's communication skills starts with observation. Since the moment he stepped out on stage as the fifth grade play lead and received the grand applause of a pleased, packed house, Hoopes says he knew he wanted to be a communicator. “When the lights hit you after you get the chance to do your thing and you can see it was something of value to them and they accept it or like it – some people run from that,” Hoopes explains. “I couldn't get enough of it.”

Growing up in Marysville, Ohio, Hoopes learned inspiring lessons from his grandfather, mainly that “hard work and proper values are the critical foundation of a productive life,” he says. Consequently, by the time he was 14, Hoopes was mowing lawns for the Scotts Co. “I had an affinity for the grass business at an early age.”

Hoopes, a 20-year-old without a definite career plan who came from a musical family, experienced his first communication challenges when he spent three years playing guitar with some friends as part of a folk band. “They were like the Kingston Trio or the Eagles,” quips friend and past coworker Terry Kurth, director of development, Weed Man, Middleton, Wis., who in August 1976 was hired by Hoopes as an instructor for Scotts Co.'s Professional Turf Institute, a golf course superintendent training division. “Bill wanted to hit the road with the band, but a couple of them didn't want to

make the commitment. How Bill tells it is that they would have been the biggest thing to hit America, but then the Beatles happened, so they had to change their career paths.”

While Hoopes had an obvious talent for entertaining people and has never been nervous in front of a crowd, he still didn't know what type of work would suit him best. After graduating from Ohio Wesleyan University, Delaware, Ohio, with an economics degree, he got a job selling industrial aluminum mill products. Four years later, he left to join the Scotts Co., as an account executive in the retail division.

As a part of his Scotts' orientation, Hoopes attended a training class. Watching the instructor motivate the newcomers sparked a charge in Hoopes that forever changed his direction. “As I sat there and watched the trainer, I said, ‘That is precisely the job that I want to do,’” he explains. “So I got up out of the orientation class and went to my vice president of sales at the time and told him, ‘I have the right company but the wrong job.’”

Since there weren't any openings in Scotts' training division, Hoopes was told to go into the field anyway and get experience and that he would be moved the first time there was an opportunity. “I tried to go the straight and narrow sales path, but the second I saw that guy up there training, I knew that was me,” Hoopes reveals, explaining that he saw the job as a combination of his entertainment and communication skills and his willingness to not just motivate others, but teach them something of value.

HOOPES' LESSON NO. 2: *Believe in yourself and follow your dreams regardless of the advice others give you.* Hoopes' patience paid off and, in 1971, he joined Scotts' Training Institute. By 1973, he became the training manager. The right job fit like a tailored suit and

PROFILE


BILL HOOPES

COMPANY: Scotts LawnService

LOCATION: Marysville, Ohio

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS:

- B.A., economics, Ohio Wesleyan University, Delaware, Ohio
- Lead Barefoot Grass' training division.
- Director of training, development and regulatory affairs, Scotts LawnService.
- Current president of the Professional Lawn Care Association of America. Served PLCAA for eight years through committee and board work.



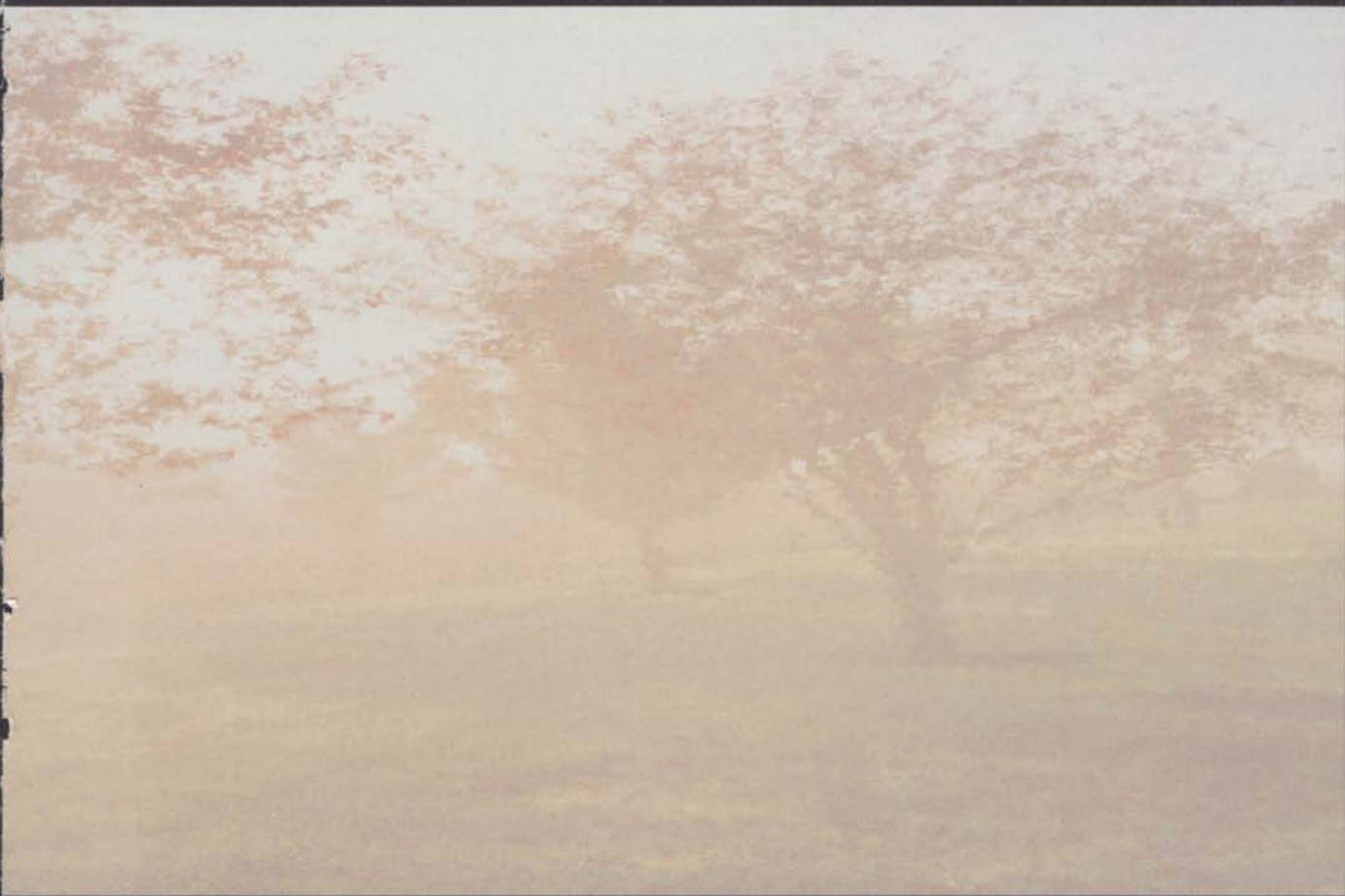
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gave Hoopes the confidence to tackle new, appealing opportunities. "Training is interesting for me," he says. "I don't care what the topic is as long as it involves helping people build skills."

Hoopes managed Scotts' Professional Turf Institute and trained golf course superintendents from 1976 to 1983. Then he directed turf and golf course training until 1985, before leaving Scotts to head Barefoot Grass' training division. He remained there until 1997 when Barefoot was sold to TruGreen-ChemLawn, Memphis, Tenn.

In November 1997, Mark Long, who worked with Hoopes at Barefoot Grass,

was searching for people to help him launch Scotts LawnService, the professional lawn care division of Scotts Co., and he says Hoopes was a perfect fit. "When I started thinking about all the people and things I needed to launch a lawn care business, it dawned on me that I needed to have an ambassador—someone who was willing and passionate," Long explains. "So, it was a no-brainer that I thought of Hoopes. He was the natural choice for the position."

Long says Hoopes' ardent enthusiasm for the industry and training its troops was evident not just to him but to others he worked with. "The thing is with Bill—if he gets excited about an idea, he's tenacious," Kurth says. "He's one of those guys we often talk about wanting to go to war with. If you need him to carry his portion through, he's the type of guy who will get his part done on time or ahead of schedule."

At Scotts LawnService, Bill heads the Management Operations Training School, where instead of training technicians he trains managers. The job demands organization, particularly since Scotts LawnService plans to employ more than 2,000 individuals by 2004. "I can't function any other way," Hoopes says, admitting that he takes five minutes to prioritize his to-do list at the start of each day. "I spend time organizing and prioritizing so I get the most out of my time. Managers do things right, but leaders do the right things effectively. So, I have to practice what I preach."

The importance of organization was something Hoopes learned early on and then taught his employees. "He always told me to hope for the best, but plan for the worst," says Kurth, remembering his days working with Hoopes. "If the plan looked

good and everything looked in place, he'd still call ahead just to double, triple check—he is very organized that way.

"He was like an older brother to me at work," Kurth continues. "He would always encourage me to learn from his mistakes. But he never suppressed me. Instead, he'd treat me like a jewel in the rough that just needed a little buffing. You work *with* Bill—you never work *for* him."

Kurth also recalls a particular incident in his personal life where Hoopes' advice and training came in handy. "I was sitting downstairs with my older son who just finished his freshman year of college," he explains. "He had an adolescent dilemma and I was giving him some advice on how to handle the situation without trying to sound like I was telling him what to do. After I finished, my son thanked me for the information and said, 'Dad, I understand. You are very good at expressing yourself.'

"See, Bill is a great public speaker and he spent time teaching me how to communicate," Kurth says. "Since I can't pay Bill back for all he's taught me, I paid it forward. Hopefully, I'm teaching my son some of those same lessons."

Like Kurth's son, Hoopes also was given some invaluable fatherly advice that he has employed throughout his life. "All my life choices have been influenced by a comment my father, a small-town lawyer, made when I asked him what it took to win in front of a jury," he remembers. "He told me, 'If you want to be able to look yourself in the mirror and feel good about the person looking back, then you simply have to be true to yourself.'"

To Hoopes, this translated to: "Ultimately, you cannot be a phony and last—people will see through it and see through you," he says. "If you're true, you'll be effective no matter what you're communicating."

HOOPES' LESSON No. 3: *Do not underestimate what you can do. You will surprise yourself if you give yourself half a chance.* Hoopes says his single biggest accomplishment is that he has

LEADER *of the Pack*

An effective leader is more than a boss who passes out holiday bonuses at Christmastime. To be truly supportive and efficient, employers must model traits they expect to see in others, points out Bill Hoopes, director of training, development and regulatory affairs for Scotts LawnService, Marysville, Ohio.

Employers must meet the following six requirements to practice competent leadership, according to Hoopes.

- Have a leadership philosophy. This is an understanding of human motivation drivers.
- Have an accurate assessment of the positive and negative elements of the working environment.
- Identify a leadership style that will work now and in the future.
- Have a commitment to balancing people and task relationships.
- Use major power sources intelligently.
- Have a detailed human resource strategy that impacts all daily operations. — Nicole Wisniewski

MOTIVATION *Accommodation*

never played on a losing team. "In any aspect of my life – work, business – I've never been a part of a losing team," he says. "In my show business days, I was selling songs and I didn't fail – I just stopped doing it. At Barefoot Grass, I helped build the second largest lawn care service company in the country. I've been able to surround myself with winning people."

A few of the people that keep Hoopes motivated daily are Debby, his wife of 23 years, and his children Bill and Carrie, who both live in San Diego. "They expect me to be good – as good as I can be – and that really keeps me going," Hoopes explains.

While Hoopes' family serves him a daily dose of encouragement, Debby says Hoopes also provides inspiration. "What I can tell you about Bill is that he is one of the most honest – maybe to a fault at times – reliable and dependable best friends anyone could ever have in his life," she says. "And I'm very fortunate and lucky to have him in mine."

This extra support helps Hoopes through his everyday challenges. In addition to his work with Scotts LawnService, Hoopes is now president of the Professional Lawn Care Association of America. After eight years of committee and board work with the organization, Hoopes says this is the 'ic-

Being an effective leader is understanding human motivation and what drives people, says Bill Hoopes, director of training, development and regulatory affairs for Scotts LawnService, Marysville, Ohio. Beyond basic needs for food, shelter and security, people crave fairness and a positive work environment. By understanding and using these motivators, employers can better satisfy employees.

Following are suggested actions employers should take to implement the practical application of motivational principles in the workplace.

- Provide a welcoming, comfortable start-up period
- Give employees challenging, but not overwhelming, tasks and goals
- Make employees feel accountable
- Allow employees to feel pride
- Reward employees
- Treat employees fairly and honestly
- Give employees room and opportunity to grow — *Nicole Wisniewski*


operators' abilities to build and manage profitable businesses.

In addition to increasing the number and quality of PLCAA educational tools and networking opportunities, Hoopes has one other goal as president: "I want to highlight more winners," he says. "I think too many of us see the negative before the positive so I want to shine the spotlight on the people out there who are succeeding."

While aiming for these targets, Hoopes also strives daily to reach his highest priority: breaking down people's barriers to effective communication. He is constantly searching for a mechanism to improve communication,

and since he has limited time with people, he must do this efficiently. "In every class, I have to break down the bad and build up the good and find ways to get people to look at themselves, see

the pluses and minuses and then accentuate the positive. And I have to catch these people when they are ready to do that."

To achieve this daily task, Hoopes must always be charged with enthusiasm. Using his personality, he has to impact the behavior of others. This means that once he walks into that classroom, he must be "on" the entire time, setting a good example for even the most skeptical members of the group. "You only become an effective leader when you impact others – and the strongest tool you have is your personality," he emphasizes. "You have to be involved on a level of honesty and fairness and show them you care. This business is all about people, not fertilizer. You have to balance your concern for the goal with your concern for the person, and you have to ignore the pressure that pushes you toward the goal and the numbers." 

The author, Nicole Wisniewski, is Managing Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.

"LEADERSHIP is a style you develop. People may be BORN with the basic potential to become EFFECTIVE leaders, but they aren't born with the SKILL ITSELF."

– *Bill Hoopes*

ing on the cake,' providing him with a vehicle through which to maximize the effectiveness of the association's member communication and government agencies that directly impact lawn care

Bruce Hunt

Bruce Hunt helped build the green industry from its early days.

PROFILE

BRUCE HUNT

COMPANY: The Brickman Group

LOCATION:

Long Grove, Ill.

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS:

- B.S. in landscape architecture from Michigan State University.
- Past president of the Associated Landscape Contractors of America (ALCA) and the Illinois Landscape Contractors' Bargaining Association.
- One of the first five employees hired by The Brickman Group.
- Received ALCA's National Landscape Service Award in 1994.
- Has spoken on landscape topics at nine universities and more than a dozen industry seminars.

Sometimes you hear about a particular event or episode in someone's life, and you come away believing that a higher power controlled the situation to lead it toward a particular outcome. Maybe that means someone meets their eventual spouse by agreeing to a double date just so a friend could go out with a particular person. Or, perhaps you know someone who avoided being in a dangerous situation simply because they forgot their keys or wallet and had to return home.

The way that Bruce Hunt got hired by a small, three-person landscape company out of Chicago called The Brickman Groups seems like that's simply where he was supposed to work all along. How else can you explain the fact that a 40-year career with a company that has grown to more than 5,000 employees in offices from coast to coast started because he took a job interview that wasn't even his interview in the first place?

As Hunt neared graduation from Michigan State University with a degree in landscape architecture, he was still looking for a job. At the time, his job search focused on professional landscape architecture offices, and he always had the offers from area nurseries that he spent summers working at to fall back on. But these organizations struck Hunt as small, unprofessional companies, which wasn't what he was looking for.

One day during the spring of his senior year, Hunt's roommate informed him that he had taken a job with a local planning department, so he was going to blow off his interview with The Brickman Group, which was looking for a new landscape designer to help it grow its fledgling design/build company. Hunt and his wife-to-be, Cammie, were planning a trip from Michigan State to St. Louis, and since Chicago and The Brickman Group's offices was essentially on the way, he decided to take the interview himself.

"The truth is, I was more impressed with Dick (Brickman) and his father than I was with the business, which was running out of an old farmhouse that Dick also lived in," Hunt recalls. "Dick had a vision, and that was very clear. You could see that there was something special there, and both Dick and his father had so much charisma and were just so nice that I wanted to be a part of what they were doing."

Taking the job didn't come without some risk on Hunt's behalf, however. In the early 1960s, landscape contractors were afforded little respect from the educational community, which strongly encouraged landscape architecture students to pursue employment with professional architecture firms or on the civil side. "Forty years ago, going to work in a landscape business as a landscape architect was the equivalent of throwing your degree away," Hunt notes. "Instructors saw this as the equivalent of doctors selling drugs."

What made this particularly difficult for Hunt was how one instructor, whom he was very close to, reacted to Hunt's decision to take this job. "I was very close to this particular teacher because my father had died when I was 18 years old, and this man had assumed something of a father-figure role in my life," he relates. "I went back to see him after graduation, and we were walking

Bruce Hunt spent 40 years with one company due in part to its vision and sensitivity to its employees' need for balance in their lives. Photo: Ron Gould

down a hallway talking. When he realized that I was working with a landscape company, he literally stopped talking, turned and walked away from me because he didn't want to have anything to do with me anymore."

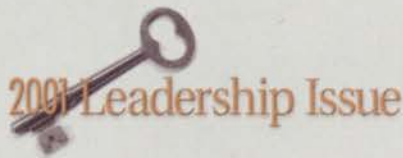
Today, Bruce Hunt isn't one to tell people, "I told you so," and his focus is on appreciating his good fortune rather than showing others that he made the right professional decision. But he takes pride in the growth and maturity of the landscape industry over the past four decades, not to mention the personal growth he experienced along the way.

FAMILY & FRIENDS. Growing up as an only child in a small town of 5,000 in Central Michigan, Bruce Hunt learned early on about the value of close relationships with the people in your life. He grew up learning how to work and how to interact with people, traveling on jobs with his father, an engineer with a mind for troubleshooting, and minding his daily chores.

Perhaps as a result of these early experiences and how he came to understand the mean of work, soon after joining The Brickman Group Hunt realized that sitting in an office behind a drafting table did little for him. "I wanted to be closer to the installation and production process, and while I wasn't a particularly creative designer, I could take somebody else's concepts and develop them," he explained.

But Hunt also learned a lot about what makes companies succeed in these early days. "The work we did was stimulating, and the fact that it was such a small firm let me get my hands in everything from design to estimating to supervision to production," he relates.





2001 Leadership Issue

"Plus, Mr. Brickman and Dick treated me like family, they were very genuine and very sharp. I've always believed you grow by having people around you who are sharper than you and who will mentor you, and that happened constantly for me. It was an incredibly lucky choice on my part."

Obviously, today the company is much more than anyone probably ever envisioned it becoming, and Hunt attributes a lot of its success to leadership and vision. "I link vision with consistency, which means you need to have

someone who constantly paints a picture of where we're going, and that message is consistent," Hunt points out. "Couple that with hiring quality people, treating them with respect and a focus on strong business practices with the customer always as the focus, and you'll succeed.

"We always knew we wanted to do the best work we could and then hold ourselves accountable internally so we knew where we were and how we were doing," he continued. "Dick was always very focused on running this as a business and not just some hobby."

Such a business focus made The Brickman Group unique, particularly in the 1960s and 1970s, before the landscape industry really started to grow and

mature. "In those early days, there were so many unprofessional companies — not that they were bad people, but the work they did and the way they went about it, the equipment they used, it was all so slipshod," Hunt comments. "I didn't really see that change until maintenance took over in the mid- to late 1980s."

Hunt said that, ironically, people would expect maintenance contractors to be less professional because of the ease with which they could enter the industry, but the systems- and process-oriented nature of maintenance work made these contractors more professional than their construction-focused counterparts. "Plus, you had some tremendous people in the industry at that time who showed everyone else that this could be a real business," Hunt noted, singling out people like Burt Sperber with Environmental Industries, Rick Randall with Randall & Blake, and Tom Lied with Lied's Landscape Design & Development.

Hunt refers back to the importance of vision when talking about what other contractors need to focus on to achieve their own success. "So many businesses fail because they don't have a clue about the big picture," he emphasizes. "They're hard workers and they conduct their business because they like the type of work that they do, but they don't have a business management vision. They see their work as a vocation instead of as a process, and that's a big difference.

"The one who looks at business with a vision and can apply those principles to the variations in what they need to do to stay competitive in business as things changes is the one who will succeed," he maintains.

A LONG LOOK BACK. At 63 years old now, Hunt has a lengthy career to look back upon. What makes his career even more unique, especially today, is that he spent every day of it working for the same company. "I think that's a generation thing," he observed. "When I started out, if you bounced around that meant you weren't stable,

LEADING A COUNTRY *In Crisis*

Bruce Hunt isn't excited about the prospects of the United States' conflict with terrorists following the events of Sept. 11, but he believes the outcome will be dictated by leadership. "Our success in the challenges that face us will take special leadership talents of building coalitions, developing strong and appropriate direction in dealing with those who want to destroy us in a very complex work, religious, ethnic and economic way," he relates. "That's going to take some exceptional leadership."

That's why Hunt gets disappointed when he hears language that would seem to indicate a return to the bi-partisan bickering we've grown so accustomed to. "I was hoping these events would've really changed people, but perhaps it takes something more personal to them to do that," he says.

But if the leaders of the U.S. as well as the rest of the world can't work together toward a solution, then Hunt has real concerns. "I've been involved in activities where all of the elements of success were there except for leadership, and it all fell apart because no one was given or took the responsibility that goes with leadership," he observes. "Leadership means you have to lead and hold people accountable, and that's hard to do and takes a lot of energy. But the next six to 18 months will key around leadership because this could be a long, hard battle." — *Bob West*

THE *Long Arm of the Law*

Landscape contractors are busy people, especially when they work for a small, growing firm. But Bruce Hunt learned a valuable lesson about the importance of balance early on in his days with The Brickman Group, and that, combined with a keen eye and a steady hand, put a badge on his chest and trophies on his wall.

"The Brickmans always talked about the importance of life away from work and they encouraged me to get involved in other activities," Hunt recalls. "They were always involved in things like associations, the local zoning board or their church, and they saw the value of this toward an individual's growth. I don't think I saw the wisdom behind this early on, but I could never say, 'No,' so I started getting involved." This meant joining the local police force for Hunt.

"Early on, Cammie and I were renting a farmhouse, and the guy who owned it was a captain of the local police force, and he also was a part of the force's pistol team," he says. "He found out that I was a pretty good shot, so he

asked me to join the team and give them a ringer. To do that, I had to join the reserve police force, but he said they would give me all of my ammunition for free, which was great for a 23-year-old kid."

Joining the team, which turned out to be one of Illinois' finest, accounted for the trophies, but perhaps more important was the perspective Hunt picked up about life through the course of his police duties. "I feel so sorry for those people who have horrific marriages or relationships, and I saw a lot of that in law enforcement," he explains. "Doing that work really showed me a whole other side of how people treat each other, and that made me appreciate that I'm not in that sort of life.

"My wife and my family are my base, and if that wasn't strong then I probably would've been all over the place career-wise," he continues. "Everything doesn't always go the way you want it to go every day, but if you've got a strong base at home then you're going to be ready for the next day." — *Bob West*

so companies avoided you. That's not the same anymore."

Hunt recognizes the rarity of spending 40 years with one company, and he

in Michigan, but the Brickmans convinced him to stay with them. "I've often thought that it would've been nice to have had the experience of another firm, and you can always think the grass is greener, but I've been fortunate to be encouraged to do more than the mundane portions of the job," he explains. "That let me see the downside to moving around."

Had he pursued other career opportunities, he may have even missed out on some of

his most influential growth experiences, particularly his involvement with the Associated Landscape Contractors of America (ALCA). After attending a

few meetings and conventions, he felt a responsibility to contribute if he was going to continue learning from others. While the business insights he acquired were certainly valuable to his work, he credits his involvement in ALCA with contributing to his personal growth as well.

"You need to have new experiences that cause you to stretch outside of yourself, even if that means being dragged into them and doing things you wouldn't normally do," he explained. "For example, if you're an association committee chairman, you're suddenly in a leadership role and you have to do something that is probably outside of your normal responsibilities. That's how people grow." ★

The author, Bob West, is Editor of *Lawn & Landscape magazine*.

"Forty years ago, going to work in a landscape business as a landscape architect was the equivalent of throwing your degree away. Instructors saw this as the equivalent of doctors selling drugs." — Bruce Hunt

admits there were times when he thought about leaving. Early on in his career, for example, he came close to purchasing a small landscape company

Adam Jones

Jones' technical mind and extensive industry knowledge lend him a wide-lens teaching edge.

PROFILE

ADAM JONES

COMPANY: Massey Services

LOCATION: Maitland, Fla.

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS:

- Variety of front-line and management positions with ChemLawn.
- Instrumental in helping create Massey Services' lawn care division.
- Service manager, general manager, technical training director, divisional manager and, currently, director of quality assurance and vice president, Massey Services.

MMr. Jones' classroom is not confined by walls covered with golf-course green chalkboards or filled with wobbly, metal-legged chairs. His students are a team of technicians and his classroom is the lawn care field. Actually, Mr. Jones is a translator of sorts, with a keen ability to convert confusing concepts into simple how-to's.

Mr. Jones is Adam Jones, and he is practiced at the art of show and tell. He will roll up his sleeves to teach a point, and join the crew to ensure understanding, says Harvey Massey, who Jones respectfully calls Mr. Massey. "He sits in meetings, absorbs things, and once it registers it is sort of like a light bulb going off," Massey describes.

Massey draws a parallel between his new vice president and a porous sponge. Jones soaks in knowledge – lawn care lessons, tree and shrub technicalities and pest control principles. He methodically digests information, filtering the language into bite-sized portions for his employees.

"Whether you are treating lawns or termites, or delivering newspapers, people want to be competent," Jones reasons. "They want to know the information so they can understand it and explain it to the customer."

So, Mr. Jones feeds his students with this knowledge – their most important tool. And if his students look at him a little funny when he reviews lessons, teaches tips or calls out questions, it's

not because they are lost or disinterested. Rather, his co-workers see a reflection of themselves as Jones transforms from boardroom manager to front-line technician, where he absorbs more knowledge to pass on to others. They see possibilities.

Barry Troutman, Jones' best man, best friend and professional mentor, sees a role model. "Technicians look at him differently," points out Troutman, who Jones' calls "Dad." "They say, 'He started where I did – he's one of us. I can do what he did if I work hard.'"

Jones did work hard, moving his way through positions in lawn care, tree and shrub care, and management at ChemLawn after finishing high school and then, joining Massey Services, where he worked as a service manager, general manager, technical training director, divisional manager and, finally, director of quality assurance and vice president, Massey lists.

"He's pretty much a complete package," Troutman adds.

Much like Jones' industry progression, his lessons stack up and build a solid foundation, and often, he'll draw comparisons to illustrate fundamentals. For example, teaching employees requires the same five steps to growing a healthy plant, he points out.

Class, sharpen your pencils.

LESSON 1: "You have to grow adapted plants – you have to put the right plant in the right location. A plant that wants to be in full sun that gets put in the shade does not grow."

"People are a lot like that, too."

The right location for Jones was his father's convenience store in Houston, Texas, where he worked when he was 17 years old. He talked with regular



Adam Jones feeds his technicians lawn care lessons, turning the technical into practical.

Photo: Massey Services

time in the lawn care industry – a serious growth time.”

And Jones was in the right place, his progress following the industry’s vertical growth shoot. He was an inquisitive mind in a technical field, and soon, he broadened his skills when he moved from his first lawn care route to the tree and shrub division.

“I became aware of the options for education, and I pursued them on my own,” he says, laughing when he says he spent his college years at “ChemLawn University.” “I’m the kind of person who if you give me a textbook, I can sit down and read it and understand it, and I can remember it. If I have the information and the material, I can take the technical information and laymanize it, and I can go teach it.”

Meet Mr. Jones – teacher and technical interpreter. “There are a lot of words in agronomy that are over most peoples’ heads,” he admits. “You can talk about leaf drop and other people say it’s nonsense.”

Jones’ appetite for opportunity led him to Orlando, Fla., where he filled an assistant branch manager position for ChemLawn’s tree and shrub division. This was in 1986, and Jones was 21 years old – and still learning.

“I don’t think you’re ever fully prepared for your first job in management, and you think you understand what the job is and that the step into a management position will be easy, but it’s not,” he says, recalling how he left Houston, where he worked in the same office with his twin brother, Alan, who remained at the branch. Jones knew nepotism would stunt his opportunity to grow at that location – the two were rather competitive

store customers, some who were technicians and managers from the ChemLawn branch around the corner. These casual relationships opened up a job opportunity when one of the managers offered him a position disassembling, cleaning and repairing trucks for the company.

Soon, Jones put his plans to pursue

automotive engineering on hold and in January 1984, he moved from making repairs to running a route.

“I decided I’d try it,” he says, remembering how his initial 100 customers multiplied to more than 500 in less than 15 weeks. “I wasn’t thinking it would be a career, but I wasn’t ready to go to school yet. Besides, it was a dynamic

when they were young. His brother stayed in the Houston area and opened his own landscape business.

Conditions in Florida were favorable for Jones, and his hungry mind tapped into the fertile lawn care market. He listened, he asked questions and he mulled over ways to train employees, increase efficiency and deliver quality. He learned and he tried and he made mistakes. But mostly, he moved forward.

Soon, Massey Services offered Jones a chance to build on his knowledge and managerial experience, and he moved into the "full sunlight," so to speak. "They were looking for my management ability, and that's what I came in to do," he says, noting that the company, which

SIGNED, SEALED & Certified

Adam Jones practices what he preaches. While he serves as a technical expert for his co-workers, he did his homework before passing on lawn care and pest control tips. Jones is certified by the state of Florida in lawn and ornamental, GHP and fumigation termite control and also earned certification as a turfgrass professional from the University of Georgia Center for Continuing Education and the Professional Lawn Care Association of America. — Kristen Hampshire

was primarily pest control, wanted to expand into the lawn care market.

So, Mr. Jones started taking roll again, and this time his class of pest control technicians needed to master lawn care. But first, he adapted to his new job conditions. Training technicians to do their jobs better meant leaving his lawn care comfort zone and into the pest control arena – a new chapter for Jones. "It was difficult to step into pest control, but I went into it with the same enthusiasm as I did the lawn and tree business," he says. "The more opportunity I have to learn, the better I do.

"I think my affinity is in the service and teaching side," he says. "It took my focus to get out there with the employees and teach them the ins and outs of their jobs. In four or five months the business really made a great turn. We started growing, the lawns started looking great and the employees had confidence in themselves."

This confidence cultivates growth, he notes. Just like plants.

LESSON 2: "You have to create healthy soil for plants to grow. And people need to be put in the right environment and the right soil, so to speak. Developing people is putting them in the right mix."

Jones remembers a misplaced student – a technician who was set up to fail in a work culture that bred complacency. This student happens to be one of Mr. Jones' most successful projects.

"This person wanted to do well, but, for whatever reason, in the environment he was in he couldn't work well with his manager," Jones says, describing the employee's autocratic boss, "whose ability to point out people's disabilities was caustic."

"This employee wasn't going anywhere as a result of it," he recalls. "I thought he was a good enough person, and if he was in the right environment, he would succeed."

Jones traded one of his most proficient workers for the chance to train

and teach the frustrated technician, determined to cultivate an effective learning environment. After six weeks, the employee gained technical competence

**"Whether you are treating
LAWNS or TERMITES, or
delivering newspapers, people
want to be COMPETENT."**

— Adam Jones

and, eventually, his faith climbed along with his field skills. "The real issue was that he didn't understand the job from a technical standpoint, so he was never confident when he went into the field," Jones explains. "He couldn't answer customers' questions and he didn't call them back because he didn't know what to say and how to say it.

"To be able to change this confidence was like a switch was turned in this person," he compares. "By the end of the year, this technician was one of my best performers."

Jones, himself, is a study in lawn care success, Massey adds, reciting that the mark of a great teacher starts with being a great student. Technological understanding, communication skills and work ethic accompanies this talent. "Even though his background was primarily in the lawn business, I wanted his work ethic, his teaching ability and his talent to influence all of our people," Massey notes.

Quite simply, Jones had the "right mix," and the qualities to positively impress his surroundings. He guides employees by stretching the peripheral picture and capturing "the greater goal" in the frame. "What is rewarding is that the more people I can teach and influence, the better our organization is – the easier the entire job becomes," he remarks. "When you can turn around and tap 15 people on the shoulder that can go do something that is different,

you have a lot more options, and that is really why I do what I do.”

These 15 people represent the 500 employees of Massey Services – Mr. Jones’ class. And while they might make it easier for him to do his job, Troutman points out that Jones simplifies work for the company, as well.

“It sure made it a lot easier to have Adam here,” he says, reflecting on their days working at the company together when Jones was technical service manager. “He’s a bright kid with a high school education who went from washing trucks to being vice president of one of the most successful companies in the southeast.”

LESSON 3: “You have to mow or prune properly. You have to practice skills that you learn.”

Jones goes to the field to practice what he teaches his technicians. He trades his tie for a uniform and slips on gloves to spray lawns, talk to customers and deal with the job’s daily nuances. He is grounded.

“I don’t even think of myself as being a manager any more,” he describes. “Management is leadership today. Management is getting things done through people. People don’t want to be managed today – they want to be led. People need to feel like they are part of the overall picture and they need to understand that they play a role and the importance of their role. They need to be recognized for the things they do, and they need to be told when they are off their reservations.”

Jones admits he is opinionated. He even calls himself “pointed,” at times. He speaks his mind, answers questions honestly and considers the politics of every situation, never acting on passion. “You’ll never question where I stand,” he says. “If you are not doing well, you’ll know it, and you’ll know why and what you can do to make it better. You’ll also know that I’ll provide you with what you need to know to do the job better.”

His emotions contain more shades of gray than when he was a young manager,

however. Experience has taught him that employees need to be managed individually, not collectively, and that accountability and fairness are essential.

“Sometimes, when you are new and managing people, you don’t really see the issues going on with people, and you look at things in a black and white way,” he explains. “Rick Beard, who gave me my first opportunity as a manager, helped me to see that you don’t have to work with everyone in the same way, and you need to see what motivates each person and provide them with the resources to grow, whether it’s incentive or training.”

LESSON 4: “Water the plants properly. Allow them to grow.”

The workplace isn’t what it used to be. Neither is the classroom. Jones notices that technicians don’t just want a job, they want convenience, comfort, security and a quick road to success.

“In today’s environment, people are looking for an easy fix,” he remarks. “They are looking for a mechanical device so they don’t have to physically

“I’m the kind of person who if you give me a **TEXTBOOK**, I can sit down and read it and **UNDERSTAND IT**, and I can **REMEMBER IT.**” — Adam Jones

work hard. You have to constantly re-think what it is that people are expecting of you.”

Employees expect technology – the want cutting edge in order to cut corners.

“You have to be looking for ways to make your employees more comfortable and not just say, ‘I had to push that sprayer when I was doing it, and so do you,’” he says.

So, Mr. Jones continues to learn and deliver these new-and-improved meth-

ods and quick-and-easy systems to his students. He works to provide his team with the nutrients to fuel their growth – the tangible equipment, top-notch technology and most recent knowledge.

And while employees demand different job requirements than in the past, their loyalty also has changed. People are more likely to play leapfrog in the job market, jumping from business to business, Jones observes. Employees figure that they can move forward by going to different places rather than going places in one company.

However, those with gumption will grow, he notes, and Jones has graduated plenty of technicians through the ranks by providing those dedicated workers with substance to feed their success. In a sense, Jones plays the role of industry steward, giving field experience and knowledge back to others.

He is a provider, and watching his employees’ flourish is one of leadership’s true rewards, he says.

“The biggest mark of a leader is the people they’ve developed,” he says with a thoughtful pause.

LESSON 5: “Control pests. Weeds, insects, diseases – the whole gamut. And if you are able to do the first four right, you will not have to spend a lot of time on the fifth.”

Mr. Jones rarely dwells on this chapter – his report card proves he followed the first four lessons rather well. Massey bets on his

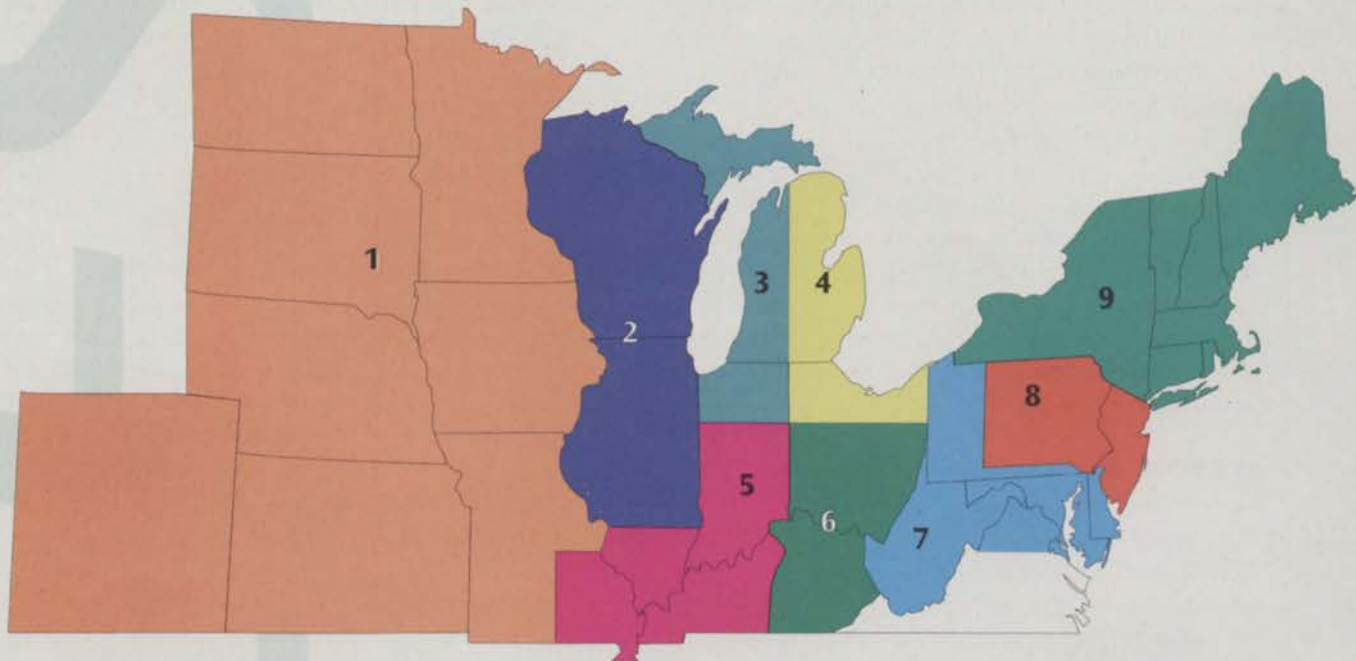
good marks, too, and he has faith in Mr. Jones’ ability to turn out a star crew for the company.

“If I tried to put a bow tie on all of this, I would tell you that Adam is not only a good person with a strong religious conviction, but I would trust him with my last dollar,” Massey says. ★

On that note, class dismissed.

The author, Kristen Hampshire, is Associate Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.

The CHIPCO Team: *Helping You Keep It Green*



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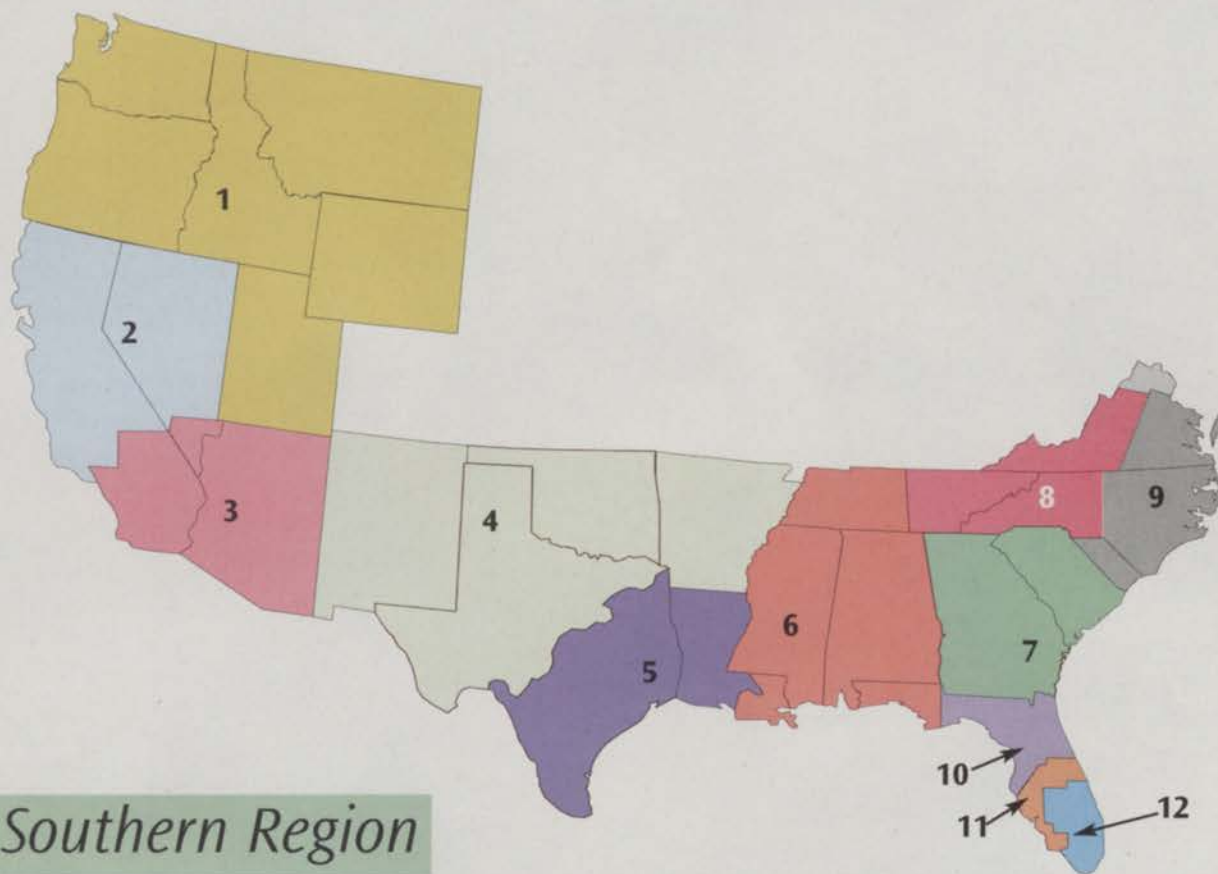
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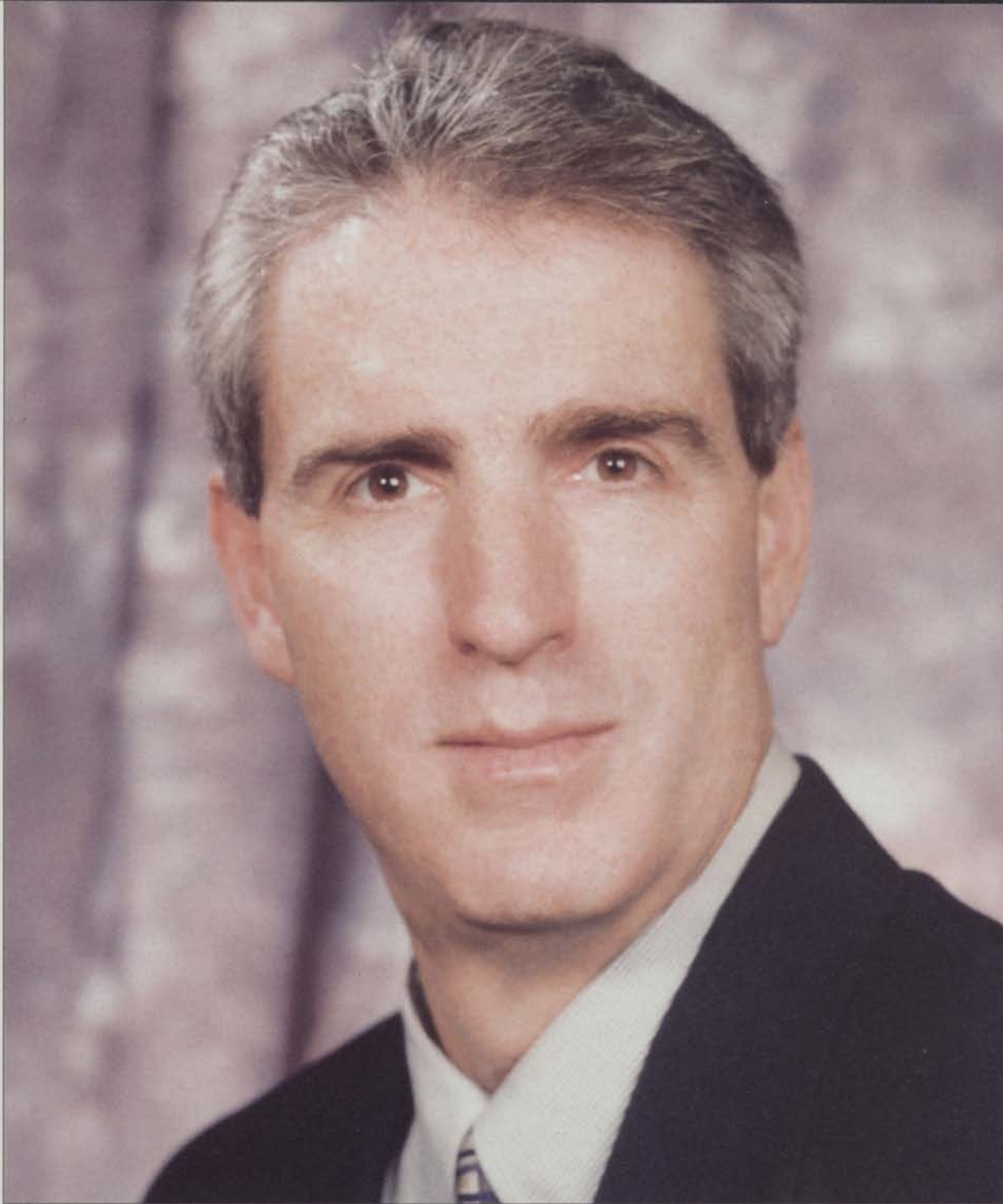
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Trey Warnock
Sales Representative
Charlotte, NC
1-800-577-5163 x6885
(8) Western Carolinas



Brian MacCurrach
Sales Representative
Lake Wales, FL
1-800-577-5163 x6857
(12) Southeast Florida



Today, Kurt Kluznik finds himself at the head of a business with nearly \$10 million in annual revenue.

Kurt Kluznik

Certification doesn't excite many business professionals, but one veteran contractor has given countless hours to the task of moving the industry forward through these tests.

PROFILE

KURT KLUZNIK

COMPANY: Yardmaster Inc.

LOCATION: Painesville, Ohio

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS:

- Is a Chartered Certified Landscape Professional.
- Currently serves as the secretary/treasurer and a member of the board of governors of the Associated Landscape Contractors of America.
- He is a registered landscape architect in the state of Ohio.
- Also part owner of a single-family home building company called Little Mountain Homes.

Kurt Kluznik never graduated college, so it's easy to assume that he's not a fan of taking tests. Truth be told, how many people really get excited at the prospect of darkening endless circles with No. 2 pencils or agonizing over an array of True or False debates?

The truth about Kluznik, however, is that in his perfect world, every lawn care and landscape business owner and employee across the country would get excited about being test takers at least once or twice in their careers. They would all willingly and gladly sign up to spend a couple hours of one day answering some straightforward questions to illustrate just how qualified they are to do the work they do every day. And, after passing their test, each of these individuals would proudly wear and promote a designation that told the world they are a certified member of the landscape industry.

This notion sounds strange and probably even a little inconceivable to many, but there are thousands of landscape professionals – technicians and managers alike – who share Kluznik's vision because they have spent their time taking the tests, and today they are certified.

"Everybody's complaint about this industry is the professionalism issue, elevating the industry and gaining respect. If there's a better vehicle out there for professionalizing our industry than certification, I don't know what it is," Kluznik says. "If you think about all of the other industries out there – accountants, doctors, lawyers, mechanics, electricians – they all have something that says to everyone they're a professional and they're good at what they do. I think certification can be that for our industry."

Being someone who grew up with dirt on his hands from his daily work in the family nursery and now runs one of the largest landscape companies in

Ohio, Kluznik is qualified to talk about what is best for the industry's future.

PLANTING A SEED. Plants were always a part of Kluznik's life, being raised on a nursery that his father started in the mid-1950s about 20 miles east of Cleveland, Ohio, and that is still run by his mother and his sister today. Through the course of his tasks in the field, Kluznik identified his love for plants. But as he spent more time interacting with customers and going out in the field to install their purchases, he identified his passion for the installation side of the business instead of the growing world.


After finishing high school, Kluznik began his own firm, with a goal of creating a company that would ultimately install the plants his family's nursery would sell. "My goal was to partner with my father, but that really wasn't his vision," Kluznik recalls. "He had always planned on me taking over the nursery from him and me being someone out in the field caring for the plants every day. But that wasn't what I wanted."

Unfortunately, as was the case so many times before and has been so many times since, a father hasn't met a match for his stubborn will until he encounters a son who has his own plans about his life. The ensuing debate led to tension between father and son.

"That time was hard for me because I had always wanted to please my father like any other son, but we really wanted different things for my life," Kluznik shares.

So, Kluznik got to work on his own. But, even in these earliest days of his career, he recognized the value of education, and he began taking business classes at area colleges so he "could run the company the right way and be a good businessperson," he explains.

After a couple of years, he hired the company's first landscape designer,



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which was like stoking the coals of a slowly burning fire. "I brought in this designer, and he started putting real plans together," notes Kluznik. "This was so much more than what I had been doing, and this really opened my eyes to the potential of this business."

Today, nearly 20 years later, Kluznik finds himself at the head of a business with nearly \$10 million in annual revenue and more than 200 employees in five different locations. In addition, he now has a mental file filled with more notes and ideas on business management than any college textbook could ever impart. Key among these lessons he learned is the importance of delegation to create a successful business and lead a company to achieve real growth.

"A lot of companies in this industry are held back because the manager or owner can't or won't delegate to his employees," Kluznik observes. This lesson was driven home for him via two developments – the company's expansion into maintenance work and opening different locations that are up to three hours from his office.

Despite the anxiety many business owners suffer through when they think about turning over responsibility for operations, customers and equipment to someone else, Kluznik assumes a very practical attitude toward the challenge. "That's what the managers are for," he says. "The problems occur and you really worry when you have turnover and you lose these key people."

"Everybody's COMPLAINT about this industry is the PROFESSIONALISM ISSUE, elevating the industry and gaining respect." –

Kurt Kluznik

"But I've learned that when you get larger the business really isn't dependent on any one person like it was when it was smaller," he continues. "You lose someone who you think is indispensable, but then you find someone beneath them who was being suppressed for whatever reason and is ready to shine once they get the chance."

Kluznik and his management team built Yardmaster into a well-run machine, but Kluznik says they haven't reached his ultimate goal, one that you wonder if he's really pursuing – having a company that runs without its owner. "I've got a lot of freedom to spend time on other projects that matter to me, but I don't think we're all the way there yet," he relates.

The obstacle that's holding them back? This student of management theory and operational innovator keeps looking for ways to improve the business. "We just can't leave the business alone to run," he acknowledges. "We're always looking for ways to improve and things we can do to make us better, and that sort of work takes a lot of time and effort."

TAKING ON THE TEST.

Of course, if Kluznik ever does achieve his goal at Yardmaster and figure out a way to spend more time outside of the business, the entire industry may be the beneficiary. In recent years, Kluznik has become one of the driving forces behind the efforts to introduce certification to the entire industry. Much of this work is done through the Associated

ARE YOU *Certifiable?*

The landscape industry has two primary certifications – the Certified Landscape Professional (CLP) for owners and managers and the Certified Landscape Technician (CLT) for field personnel. The CLP is a six-hour exam composed of 400 multiple-choice questions focusing on sales, human resources, horticulture, health and safety, and business management. "This isn't an extremely difficult test for the person who has been in the industry for awhile and is real involved in running a business," maintains Kurt Kluznik, president, Yardmaster, Painesville, Ohio.

The CLT test, meanwhile, features a combination of writ-

ten questions and a skills test in the field. Kluznik maintains that certification offers benefits to all companies.

"Certification is something that can work for either the company with one truck or 100 trucks, and it's something that small companies can use to gain credibility or to have comparable credibility when they're bumping up against a larger company," Kluznik notes.

If you want to learn more about the certification process, acquiring study materials or registering for an upcoming CLT or CLP exam, contact the Associated Landscape Contractors of America at 800/395-2522. – Bob West

Landscape Contractors of America (ALCA), which he also serves as secretary/treasurer, and Kluznik sits on ALCA's board of governors, which oversees certification efforts.

Right now, the association offers two primary certifications: Certified Landscape Professional (CLP), which is for business managers and owners; and Certified Landscape Technician (CLT), which is for front-line employees of landscape firms and is more field oriented. ALCA continues to manage and administer the CLP program, but it has reached agreements with 26 states to have them provide CLT tests in their areas, and this covers nearly 80 percent of the country's population.

The number of certified individuals in the industry remains relatively small as a percentage of the total industry – nearly 500 CLPs and almost 3,000 CLTs – but Kluznik terms this a “grassroots marketing effort” that won't really resonate with contractors until consumers and commercial property managers appreciate the value of certification and limit the contractors they deal with to certified ones.

“It's sort of a chicken-and-egg issue. We need to sell the value of certified contractors to the specifiers, architects, property managers and homeowners so they require it of our industry, but that's an uphill battle, and until we do that we have to sell the value to contractors,” he admits. But progress continues to be made, and Kluznik has seen the potential results first hand.

“We were bidding on a job at a local community college that was required to take the lowest bid, and we talked to the key person and recommended they require companies be certified to bid on the job,” Kluznik relates. “They did that, and it took the bid list from 17 companies down to five. This client has had a lot of hassles with landscape contractors in the past because they have to take these low-bid companies who can require a lot of policing. Now, everyone wins because the client knows that whoever they hire is going to be able to perform well and they are able

WALKING *The Walk*

There's a countless number of people who often stake out a position on an issue but fail to back their words up with their actions. Kurt Kluznik has staked out a very clear position about certification, calling it the key to the future of the landscape industry, and his actions reinforce his commitment to this issue.

Kluznik's firm, Painesville, Ohio-based Yardmaster, has three Certified Landscape Professionals (CLP) in its offices. But Kluznik himself is part of an even more exclusive group, those landscape experts who were among the initial group of contractors to take and pass the CLP examination, which is administered by the Associated Landscape Contractors of America. That makes him a Chartered Certified Landscape Professional, a designation he takes a great deal of pride in.

In addition, Gary Thornton, one of the authors of the first version of the exam and an administrator of the first CLP exam, recalls that Kluznik was the first person in that room to complete the exam. “To be honest, that means Kurt was the first Certified Landscape Professional ever, even though we don't really worry about what order people finish in,” notes Thornton, whom Kluznik calls a “certification guru.” “But that illustrates his commitment to certification.” – *Bob West*

to buy much smarter when they're going to spend a lot of money.”

Other states that have had certification in place for many years see clients commonly place this requirement on potential bidders, and Kluznik believes this bodes well for the landscape industry even though he knows some companies don't want to be forced to get certified.

“For some contractors, the idea of certification represents a lot of forward thinking that they're not ready to tackle yet,” he acknowledges. “But this can be a great way for the industry to police itself before someone else does. Some people complain that certification is a way for the government or unions to get in our industry, but I think it's just the opposite. If we control our own industry then no one else will have to.”

The question you must ask yourself, however, is why someone would devote so much of his time to a program designed to elevate his competition when that time could be spent working on his own company. “Certification is something I believe in,” Kluznik explains matter-of-factly. “I think about the people who have worked on this before me, and they're some of the smartest people and best contractors I know.

“These programs are a monster to manage, and people really have to keep the initiative going to avoid having it slide to the back burner,” he continues. “But I think these programs have the potential to have tremendous positive impact on our industry.”

The author, Bob West, is Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.

Sam Lang

A passion for the industry meets a spontaneity for life.

PROFILE

SAM LANG

COMPANY: Fairway Green
Lawn Care

HEADQUARTERS:
Raleigh, N.C.

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS:

- B.A. in agronomy and economics, University of Georgia, M.B.A. in finance, Georgia College.
- Founder and owner, Fairway Green Lawn Care, Raleigh, N.C.
- Widely known as an industry steward, who will rally against restrictive legislature, raising money for turfgrass research, deliver seminars to educate young industry potentials and travel overseas to observe an alternative horticultural method.

Sam Lang's untamed spirit seeps into his every word, and like thick, maple-colored molasses, his impulsive nature sticks to his stories. He accompanies each personal and professional excursion with a dynamic side trip – a character-revealing rendezvous.

"I'm a cowboy," he announces out of the blue. "I'm a crazy man."

This said, he digresses from his self-assessment into an account of a trans-Atlantic trip, where he and a friend met at the Amazon River and traveled 4,000 miles on a ragged, 40-year-old sailboat during hurricane season.

Life is an adventure and the lawn care industry is Lang's safari. His quest is exposure. "I firmly feel that if you're going to be involved in an industry, you have to promote that industry and you've got to go outside your little world of business and make sure that it survives," he says with conviction.

For Lang, developing this extension includes rallying against restrictive legislation, raising money for turfgrass research, and helping other states set up legislative agendas. He'll deliver seminars to educate young industry potentials, travel overseas to observe an alternative horticultural method, stand up to politicians and still oversee his \$1.7-million lawn care business, Fairway Green, Raleigh, N.C.

He is an ambassador of sorts, or as Lang puts it, "I know a lot of people from being involved, meeting people

from all over the world, and hanging out." His long-time friend, Eric Holmes, knows that Lang always had a way with people. "Sam never met a stranger – never," he insists.

So, Lang learned from his "friends," and he acted on his inclination to lead. "If you have the leadership ability, you have to step forward, come to the plate, and lead your industry," he says. "I am so adamant about that. You need to have a gene that's either in you or not. I know I have those abilities."

With these skills and a little wanderlust, the "Southern Gentleman" departed on a whirlwind tour, gathering a collection of experiences on the way to create a rich industry archive.

So begin the adventures of Sam Lang.

EPISODE 1: *Sam Lang prepares for take off.* Lang's journey in the lawn care industry started in Sandersville, Ga., population 5,000. Lang was still a "crazy man," just not so well traveled, and his spirit was every bit as bold.

"Sam and I stayed in trouble," Holmes remembers, laughing when he recalls their \$25-dollar weekly paychecks from Holmes' father's cannery – the remainder after Mr. Holmes subtracted money they owed him to pay for their most recent adventure.

"I don't think either one of us would have envisioned where we both ended up," he notes, pausing. "We both worked for my father's canning business starting when we were 16, and my father went out of his way to make sure Sam and I got the worst jobs. Anything that no one else wanted to do, that was our jobs. Sam started earning what he got the hard way."

But Mr. Holmes kept the two boys on track, for the most part, and his honesty and devout morals continue to carry Lang through his personal and professional challenges.

Lang attended the University of

Lang emphasizes the importance of industry participation through education, associations and legislative involvement. Photo: Gary Allen

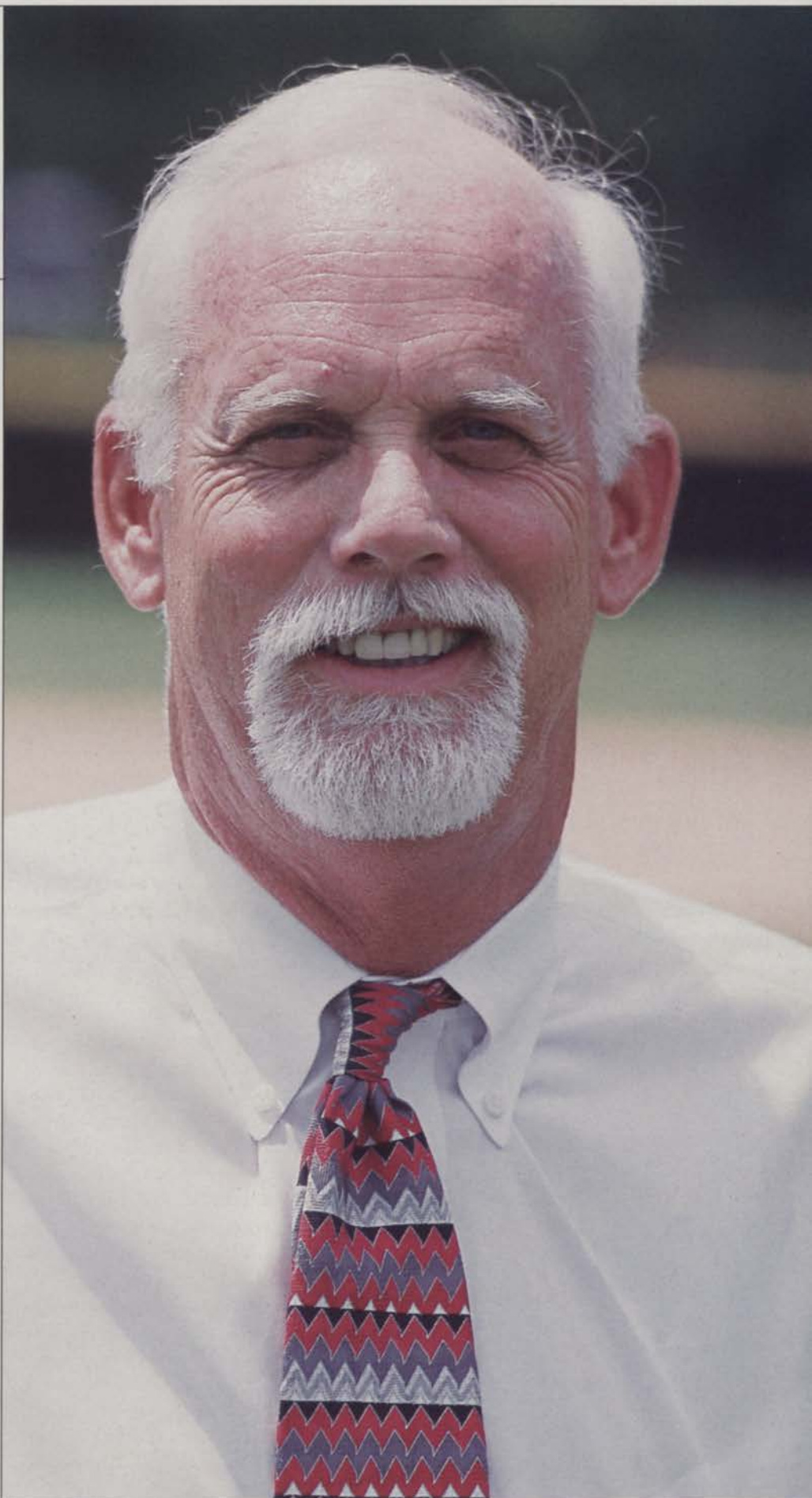
Georgia after graduating high school, and during second semester, his restless curiosity led him to Mexico, where he worked on a cotton farm for a year. When he returned, David Holmes took him back at the cannery and then scooted him back to school. "He told me, 'It's time for you to go back to college - I'll pay for it,'" Lang remembers.

In 1977, Lang completed his degree in agronomy and economics, and he went to work for Smith Sheppard, a company that custom blended and applied liquid fertilizers and pesticides on row crops. He crossed paths with Ed Nash, who sold ammonium nitrate for a fertilization company, and the twosome started a venture of their own. "We looked at a parts book, ordered the parts to build a small sprayer and started spraying grass in Sandersville, Ga., population 5,000."

Then, Lang was far from the lawn care expert he is today. He and Nash dove into the lawn care business during a lucrative time and had little background in this facet of the industry, he admits. "We had no information back then," he says. "We didn't even realize you could burn the grass."

The 30 lawns Lang started spraying might have survived his "experimental" stage, but he gained experience and his interest in lawn treatment grew. However, soon, the Zoecon division of Occidental Petroleum recruited him and he returned to the agricultural realm. He earned his MBA in finance from Georgia College during this time, and then, anxious to scout new opportunity, he went to work for Orkin Lawn Care as a division operations manager.

"They recruited me and I ran a branch for about six months to see how the system worked," he notes. "Then, I





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went to Florida and opened 11 locations and took over the rest of their operations in the South."

Orkin was "busting loose," Lang describes, and the company increased its 1984 revenue of \$11 million to \$56 million by 1989. "That was interesting to build branches," he says. "But I was not a good corporate American boy. I didn't like policies and procedures manuals – so I decided to start my own business."

So, Lang departed from his big-business encounter and entered a risky entrepreneurial endeavor – more his style, really. He shopped around different markets, including Houston and Virginia Beach, and decided on the Research Triangle Park area in Raleigh, N.C., where the demographics were

FOREIGN Exchange

Education requires paperwork and perfect attendance. This is why Sam Lang is working with North Carolina State University to develop an exchange program where students will travel to Honduras to learn South American agricultural practices.

"In remote Honduras there is a coffee plantation that runs off of a generator," he describes. "It is 30 miles to the nearest paved road. They grow corn on mountainsides like the students would not believe."

Besides broadening their horticultural horizons, students would gain exposure to a lifestyle quite different from their own, he adds. "People just don't understand how lucky we are until you've been in the third world," he says. – *Kristen Hampshire*

ideal, he explains. "I really thought that lawn care would explode here, which it has," he says. "It was a lucky guess. I came up here and started Fairway Green with not a single account."

In 1989, Lang and Izeta Winstead, his business partner with whom he has been "joined at the hip since 1989," launched a new lawn care service, and suffered growing pains like everyone else. This, however, was an expedition that Lang was determined to carry out.

"He built the business on his back and through hard work," Holmes recognizes. "Now, he is beginning to see those efforts rewarded. He is the all-American story. He started from nothing and he's earned what he's got, and he did it on his own."

EPISODE 2: *Lang lays down the law.* Lang dives into controversy with little inhibition. He tenaciously pursues his beliefs, and his passion unleashes a streak of dedication.

"There was a law I didn't like in North Carolina where you couldn't spray for fleas and ticks without being a structural pest control company," he details, outlining his first legislative stand. "So, I wanted to change it, and I went to the capital in Raleigh. I was very unsuccessful. I didn't understand how laws were made.

"There are two things you don't want to see made," he adds. "Sausage and laws. Both are really ugly."

This did not keep him from the capitol, however. His naivety about the legislative process only fueled his desire to learn and participate. He would not give up. "I thought I could go down to Raleigh and state my case, but you have to have a bill process," he notes. "It was a real learning process for me."

Since his first brush with the law, Lang has "gotten to know people" – consistent with his charismatic personality. He works with the North Carolina Turfgrass Research program and successfully has warded off regulatory agendas. In the last 10 years, he helped the program raise close to \$1 million for turfgrass research, and he expects a

bill in the legislative this summer will generate \$750,000 for research through a check-off program, where fertilizer end users will pay assessment fees.

"We've been very, very successful," he states proudly. "We've been successful at keeping negative legislation off of us. Every year they throw up the 48-hour notification of adjacent property owners, and we beat it every year."

A proactive approach can intercept these laws, he stresses. Industry professionals need to step forward as experts in their field and educate legislators on their specialties, offering them realistic background. "There is so much misinterpretation in politics and the regulatory and legislative process that you have to go down there and offer yourself as a source of information," he says, noting the cost of reversing laws far outweighs preventive measures. And solidifying political relationships keeps issues of concern in perspective, he adds.

"If there is an environmental problem, we want to develop the best management practices to address that problem, whether it is nutrients or pesticides," he says with persistence. "We want to be good stewards, and we have to have good relations with the regulatory agencies because in many cases they can't believe we are so proactive."

This rapport is even more important with the shifting composition of the legislature, Lang stresses. Instead of farmers, there are lawyers. Rather than supporting agricultural issues, political representatives question their safety – sometimes blindly, Lang comments. "Back then, whatever legislative issue came up, there was always this question: Is it going to cost the farmer one dollar more?" he relates. "Now, you never hear that question asked. I can count the number of farmers on one hand."

This doesn't mean the law can't support the agricultural and green industry, he quickly points out. It simply requires more hard work – more relationship building and problem solving.

"We have to act responsibly and put our best foot forward before these agencies," he stresses.

THE *Next Stop*

I'm up near the Guatemalan border in a remote section of Honduras, and I'm out on a coffee plantation where I run into this older, retired guy doing some consulting with the processing plant where they roast coffee. It turned out he and I were staying in the same village – he's from Holland.

He and I met at the hotel bar and were having a drink, and he says, "Let me go and get this book on Holland. I'm

so proud of my country." He brought back this beautiful picture book of all these cities and country side, and I'm thinking, "This is great. You don't have to carry a gun here. You can drink the water. They have real roads."

I think I want to go to Holland with my wife – live there for two or three months next summer instead of the third world. I've been hanging out in these crazy places – the highlands of Columbia and Bolivia – and I thought, this place is great. That's my goal now – to go to the civilized world for a while.

EPISODE 3: Lang sets out to promote professionalism. Lang's desire to positively present the industry ignites animated discussion, his devotion evident when he stresses education's crucial role in recruiting employees. Promoting professionalism is one journey that finds him running into roadblocks, and locating well-informed workers to represent the industry might be his greatest mission, though not his most exotic.

Covering ignorance with a band-aid simply isn't enough, he stresses. "We make our living off the land," he says earnestly. "You can't sweep problems under the carpet. Fix it."

Lang uses knowledge as a "fix it," which is why he lectures to agricultural classes at North Carolina State University. "You have to sell people on coming into this industry," he says.

On the other hand, some see lawn care as an easy method of self-employment during lagging economic times, he theorizes. "These people need to empower themselves with education and do their jobs the right way."

This responsibility might take Lang around the world, where he learns from conversations with South American farmers, comments from professors and feedback from co-workers. In turn, his learning initiative creates a winding path of agronomic experience.

"The image of our profession is not the best in the world, and there is a need for people to learn and develop skills to project a good image to their customers, the community and the legislature," Lang emphasizes.

EPISODE 4: Lang Returns the Favor. Lang's sense of community equals his ease with people. He acknowledges that success is not won single-handedly and that rewards are sweeter when shared with others. "I firmly believe that if you take something from the community that you better give back," he reasons.

"People don't understand how easy we have it here – what safety nets we have," he continues. "Until you see countries with no safety net, people on the street, people begging. That's what I always try to tell people."

Lang offers his employees this safety net, and in return, he trusts their ability to manage Fairway Green while he follows his intuitions. "I have a nucleus of people that have been with me since I opened my doors, and I feel that my role now is to deal with the large, commercial accounts and the planning phase of the business," he identifies.

He is proud of his staff and what pleases him most is that his employees can also feel this gratification. "It gives me great pride that we have people here that want this to be their career," he says. "I look at it as I have the responsibility to feed all of these families, and that's a huge responsibility that I don't take lightly. They look to me as their source for a paycheck, and I know them all. I know all of their children, their wives, everyone. I make it a point."

In giving back to his employees, he instills in them the importance of giv-

ing to those who are less fortunate. Every year, he donates money to various charities, picking a different one to support annually. "If you're making money, give it away," he says. "What are you going to do – take it with you?" He impresses this belief on his staff by sending them to the homeless shelter to deliver the clothes and food they collect during the holidays.

Now, Lang is looking for a way to leave an impression on a world that so impressed him. He lives by the creed that you only live once, and says he'd rather "live hard, die young and leave a good-looking corpse."

"We make our LIVING off the land. You can't sweep PROBLEMS under the carpet." — Sam Lang

Still, his penchant for a wild ride doesn't overpower his goodwill intentions. Essentially, this desire to "give back" molded his life trip's itinerary.

"I want to leave Honduras and say I did something good for the people there," he reflects. "That's a huge thing. In the Third World, if you can plant a seed, you might not see the seed grow, but at least you have the seed planted."

He pauses to speculate the possibilities. "Something might happen."

The author, Kristen Hampshire, is Associate Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.



"You can't lock yourself in the office and hide from your people or your clients," Gary LaScalea says. "You can't stand on an unreachable pedestal. To be a business owner, you must wear many hats."

Photo: Ian Halperin

Gary LaScalea's schedule is what one would call extremely flexible.

"Each day for me is all about total involvement," says the president of GroGreen, Plano, Texas. "It's hard in this business to make a firm eight-hour plan."

Having an adaptable agenda doesn't mean LaScalea doesn't have time to visit his clients or meet with his employees. In fact, an accommodating schedule actually gives the self-described "too-nice" guy more of a chance to accomplish these tasks, which he feels are the foundation of a first-rate lawn care business. For instance, on this morning, stopping at the local grocery store topped LaScalea's list. He filled the office refrigerator with eight cases of Gatorade so employees who worked in the 100-degree Texas heat had a means of cooling off.

And it's these people – his employees and his clients – who keep LaScalea involved in the business. Much like a doctor feels when he helps patients recuperate, LaScalea says providing clients the answers to their landscape questions and educating them about lawn care generates in him an over-

Gary LaScalea

The lawn care industry's 'nice guy' talks about his old ChemLawn days, entrepreneurship and the importance of a total employee and client focus.

PROFILE

GARY LASCALEA

COMPANY: GroGreen Lawn,
Tree & Shrub Care

LOCATION: Plano, Texas

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS:

- Graduated with a degree in horticulture from the University of Cincinnati.
- Hired by ChemLawn in 1976.
- Started GroGreen in 1995.
- Launched the Texas Chapter of the Professional Lawn Care Association of America in 1994, served as chapter president for seven years.

whelmingly positive feeling – and one all lawn care operators must embrace.

“People who are introverted or selfish can’t make it in this industry,” LaScalea says, stressing that lawn care business owners need to stay in tune with employees and clients daily and be willing to get their hands dirty. “This is a people-oriented industry – you can’t go out and buy people. You have to take care of your employees and customers and be involved. You have to learn about their personalities and cultures, and then you can’t walk away from that.”

GROWING UP WITH CHEM-LAWN. LaScalea became interested in landscaping during high school when he worked part time in a Cincinnati, Ohio-based garden center. This experience taught him the importance of possessing a strong work ethic and inspired him to pursue a horticulture degree at the University of Cincinnati.

Tom Smith, one of LaScalea’s professors and the head groundskeeper at Cincinnati’s Spring Grove Cemetery, became well acquainted with LaScalea since, in addition to having him as a student, he also was his part-time employer during college.

“We struck up a tremendous relationship,” Smith explains, admitting that the two network on a regular basis. “[Gary] has an unbelievable thirst for knowledge and an extreme passion for the plant kingdom. He really impressed me because he not only wanted to learn about horticulture by taking courses but he also demonstrated a desire for the practical side of the business by working at Spring Grove, getting out there and getting dirty.”

LaScalea respected Smith’s leadership and still looks to him as a special mentor and friend. “[Tom] saw that I was really interested in learning and he’d pull me aside and teach me things,” he says. “He’s very good with people –

you can feel the charisma in his voice.”

When LaScalea graduated from college in 1975, finding a job was difficult. Looking through the newspaper, he saw an ad for ChemLawn. “I was young, out of school and not sure where to go,” he admits. “I didn’t know what [ChemLawn] was, but I went on the interview anyway.” The interview was a success and LaScalea was hired as a spray technician in Cincinnati.

ChemLawn founder Dick Duke’s philosophy was a perfect match for LaScalea’s people-focused personality, and it made a lasting impression on the then new kid on the block. “Back in the 1970s, companies weren’t people-friendly,” he says. “The economy was tougher and the green industry was paying its technicians just a few dollars an hour. But Duke was taking care of people, and people were waiting in line to get in there. He had a whole focus on employees and customers, and he felt that if he took care of them his business would grow. He started the professionalism of the whole industry. He had his employees wear professional uniforms and drive nice trucks, and he paid us well – he took care of us.”

LaScalea thrived in this environment and, one year later, was transferred to Buffalo, N.Y., to open a ChemLawn branch. The next year brought another transfer – this time to Washington, D.C., where LaScalea was a branch manager from 1976 to 1986.

In Washington, D.C., LaScalea learned about the importance of networking. Although he says it was unacceptable for corporate level ChemLawn employees to be involved in associations, LaScalea didn’t think twice about joining the Professional Lawn Care Association of America (PLCAA) its first year. “I took vacation time just to go to the conferences and see things from a different perspective,” he says. As a part of PLCAA, LaScalea was influential in



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developing the original pesticide posting flags in 1983 and 1984 in Montgomery County, Md.

Local networking also interested LaScalea, who believed that clients and community members should know who their local lawn care operators are if they are going to support them. He was on the board of directors of the Washington, D.C., Chamber of Commerce and sponsored local charity events and auctions, in addition to being an active church member. "I even treated the mayor's lawn," LaScalea quips, stressing the importance of total involvement. "When I left there I felt like I was divorcing the city."

In 1986, ChemLawn offered LaScalea the opportunity to resuscitate a struggling Dallas branch. The work he did there influenced his promotion to regional manager.

But soon LaScalea would be faced with a harsh reality. In April 1987, Ecolab purchased ChemLawn for \$375 million. The deal proved disastrous as the company lost clients quickly – up to 25 percent by 1992 – and many old-time ChemLawn managers, including LaScalea, fled as a result of the company's rapidly disappearing employee/client focus. "I felt that the service wasn't there anymore and no one cared for the employees or people anymore," LaScalea explains. "I thought if I went to work for other companies it just wouldn't be the same, so the only way to bring that focus back was to start my own company."

OUT ON HIS OWN.

LaScalea learned the Dallas market's potential early on and knew he would have more success starting his lawn care company there rather than moving back home to Cincinnati to become an entrepreneur. "There's more competition in the Midwest," LaScalea explains. "In Dallas, I had more opportunities. I was involved in the community – people knew me and I knew the market. I felt that I could pick up accounts and grow quickly."

Like having an angel on his shoulder, LaScalea had a little help and encouragement in starting GroGreen from John Longstreet, who was the general manager of South Fork Ranch at that time, a site that was made famous by *Dallas*, the popular network television show. Longstreet, who is currently the mayor of Plano, Texas, promised LaScalea that if he established a lawn care business he'd offer South Fork Ranch as his first official account.

LaScalea took Longstreet up on his offer in 1995, and sacrificed an \$80,000 annual salary and a ChemLawn company car to accomplish his goal. The move was low risk – LaScalea was debt-free and already had an established fam-

Being in power isn't being a **LEADER**. A leader gives people a lot of **ROPE** as not to hinder their **CREATIVITY**. To be a leader you can't just be a **SLOGAN** – you have to practice what you **PREACH**.

ily, his wife Sallie, daughter Christina and son Anthony.

The South Fork Ranch account gave LaScalea's small business a credible reputation in the area, and quickly advanced its growth. LaScalea leveraged his relationship with Longstreet and maintenance of the ranch to build his client base, using "maintaining the world's most famous ranch" in all of his marketing literature. He also took care of his employees, paying them above average wages – his payroll is about 20 percent of sales – and rewarding them with special year-end bonuses, such as big screen televisions or camcorders. As a result, GroGreen's employee and client retention rate consistently remains at more than 90 percent.

A strong employee and customer focus is a trait LaScalea possessed from his beginning at Spring Grove Cemetery, Smith observes. "When he was here, I noticed that he looked at customers internally and externally," he says. "At GroGreen, employees are his most important resource. He always tries to find things he can do for them to make them feel great like the surprise appearance of an ice cream truck during a hot day. And while he's doing

TRAINING Techs

Since converting all of the company's trucks to offer tree and shrub care a couple of years ago, Gary LaScalea, owner, GroGreen, Plano, Texas, learned that most technicians are capable of handling a variety of services.

"Technicians run into the same plants and problems on different properties, so they learn quickly," he shares.

Aside from obvious profitability benefits of minimizing the trips a company makes to a property by cross-training technicians, LaScalea says technicians enjoy the opportunity to do different work. "Some technicians start out apprehensive because they don't know the plant material, but then they start learning," he comments. "Then they get really excited once they realize that doing more work on a property can help them hit their goals more quickly, not to mention the fact that switching services breaks up the day's monotony." – Nicole Wisniewski

LaSCALEA On...

that, he always makes sure to respond to external customers as well. I'd be awed if someone says they called Gary LaScalea and they didn't get a return call – no matter what the situation, good or bad. It's just the way the guy lives his life."

In addition to Duke's ChemLawn philosophy and Smith's constant encouragement and support as a mentor, LaScalea also says he learned a great deal about total business involvement from author and speaker Tom Peters, famous for his book "In Search of Excellence." In the book, Peters stresses the significance of what he calls "Management by Walking Around" or "MBWA." This reinforced LaScalea's open-office-door beliefs. "You can't lock yourself in the office and hide from your people or your clients," he emphasized. "You can't stand on an unreachable pedestal. To be a business owner, you must wear many hats."

Availability in his schedule not only gave LaScalea the time he needed to show appreciation to clients and employees, but it also gave him a chance to be more innovative with his business ideas and service offerings. At ChemLawn, LaScalea admits that he almost got fired for incorporating core aeration into lawn care programs, but today it's many landscape companies' service staple. "You have to be a rebel, LaScalea insists. "Pizza Hut is a good example. They realized that people weren't going to the restaurants anymore so they started delivering pizzas."

To share his knowledge and increase networking among Texas- and Southwest-based landscape contractors and lawn care operators, LaScalea started PLCAA's Texas chapter in 1994, and remained president of the chapter for seven years. He arranged training and educational events – the first one at South Fork Ranch – that attracted 40 to 50 people initially, but that quickly increased to 125 to 150 people annually. "We worked with the Texas A&M Extension Service as well, and attracted more people than any local PLCAA event except for the Green Industry

LASCALEA ON THE LANDSCAPE BUSINESS: "There's such a variety in this business – you can pick and choose what you do everyday. You can go out and see your work and be proud of what you've done. In this business, you see the green lawns, you see the results."

LASCALEA ON RECRUITING EMPLOYEES: "There was a time when you put an ad in the paper and people were waiting in line to get in – those days are gone. It's hard to find good people. If you're looking for employees, you have to be a true headhunter. They won't respond to a newspaper ad. You have to look for guys in your neighborhood, at the grocery store or at a trade show. You have to go after them."

Expo," LaScalea says. "It's important for me to step forward and help where I can in getting people together."

THE NEXT LEVEL. Besides continually promoting communication and networking among southwestern landscape and lawn care companies, LaScalea says future goals include expanding his business. "I want to get to the next level and have other branches or expand into other markets, but I haven't figured out the best way to do that yet," he explains. "I don't want it to take away from what we're doing here, and there is still a lot of marketshare available here."

Another constant professional challenge LaScalea battles is the public's perception of pesticide use. He feels the Integrated Pest Management (IPM) approach helps lawn care operators manage this dilemma. "People panic at the word pesticides, but they aren't afraid to put on makeup, deodorant and hairspray," he points out. "The public perception changed over the years and pesticides have been branded as bad, but we don't know where that came from. We, as an industry, need to play down this negative perception, but it doesn't help when companies talk about blanket spraying. You need to have

IPM. You can't sell everyone grub control if you don't know whether there are or aren't grubs in the lawn. You don't need to spray things that don't need to be sprayed. Lawn care operators need to be responsible."

For this reason, training is essential at GroGreen. LaScalea pushes continuous training where employees work together and figure out solutions to various problems, whether LaScalea is bringing in the insects for employees to identify or whether he's taking them on field trips to educational sites.

Communicating with employees and providing them training opportunities also helps business owners gain employee respect, LaScalea says. To him, a business owner cannot call him or herself a leader – it's a title that must be earned. "Too many people become promoted and they become boss and then they call all the shots, but they aren't respected as leaders," he explains. "Being in power isn't being a leader. A leader gives his people a lot of rope, as not to hinder their creativity. To be a leader, you can't just be a slogan – you have to practice what you preach." ★

The author, Nicole Wisniewski, is Managing Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.

PROFILE

BETH SEME

COMPANY:

Elizabeth A. Seme, Inc.

HEADQUARTERS:

Latham, N.Y.

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS:

- B.A., plant and soil science, University of New Hampshire.
- Extension agent, Cornell Cooperative Extension of Albany County, N.Y.
- As executive director, NYSTA, played instrumental role in growing the association and promoting legislative interests of lawn care professionals.
- Successfully led industry effort to defeat neighbor notification law.

When Beth Seme talks politics, her poised and practiced phrases skip a beat, revealing a thrill not unlike that of a child finding the way to an out-of-reach cookie jar.

"Your eyes open up as you learn a whole new skill of how to go into offices and talk to people, having those issues in your mind, and you run around the capital halls," she says, describing her first interaction in the political arena during a lobby day in Washington D.C. "You learn, too," she adds.

Picture a young woman discussing legislation, the conversation swelling as her thoughts roll off her tongue with a sense of urgency. A woman who stands up for her industry like it is her sibling – who sees challenge as opportunity.

This is Beth Seme – guided by ambition and propelled to the industry forefront by her role as a legislative sounding board, association leader and extension educator. As executive director of the New York State Turfgrass Association (NYSTA), Seme guided the organization through a political whirlpool, while growing its membership and polishing its image.

But Seme is too proud of the industry she serves to dwell on personal accomplishments.

The fire – the drive – in green industry professionals sparks her desire to work as their ambassador and educator,

she says. "I think they believe in nature – in the environment," she confirms. "They believe that they are contributing to something useful in their life. I think it comes out in so many different ways."

This environmental flair is where Seme finds her source.

PLANTING THE SEED. Seme's agricultural roots originate on a farm in Warren, N.J., where her family grew "a little bit of everything," from flowers to vegetables. "I learned very early about growing crops and nature in general."

This cultivated Seme's early interest in horticulture, and she nurtured her green thumb through the Junior Horticulture Association and 4-H, where she participated in regular contests. Seme was a natural, earning local and national recognition, and soon, she was judging 4-H entries and flowers at local fairs. "Horticulture was ongoing, and it just seemed to follow me."

She had a knack for producing perfection – still does. Besides NYSTA, she manages five other associations while operating an association management firm in Latham, N.Y., called Elizabeth A. Seme, Inc. Clearly, Seme doesn't tiptoe, she leaps.

"Whenever she gets involved in a project, she just jumps right into it," notes Mike Maffei, past-president of NYSTA, who took over the helm for the association's recent legislative efforts. "She is very organized and communicates well with other people. No matter what walk of life, she can relate to that individual."

Perhaps this ease of communication is why Seme's parents thought she should study to be a German teacher at University of New Hampshire, Durham, N.H. After a year, however, Seme enrolled in plant sciences and rediscovered her interest in horticulture. She graduated with degrees in plant and soil science, occu-

Beth Seme

When legislative controversy threatened to squelch the green industry in New York, Seme stepped up.



pational education and German, and then took her background to the Cornell Cooperative Extension of Albany County, N.Y., where she worked as a horticulture extension agent.

Seme's educational role at the extension fueled her energy for the field. She likes to teach those who like to learn, and the extension provided a captive audience. "When I got into the cooperative extension, I was working with people all the time who wanted to know and learn, and that was really cool. I was always getting great feedback and doing demonstrations."

In addition to educational responsibilities, she published press releases, distributed outreach information and delivered radio briefs. When a gypsy moth outbreak infected New York, Seme was setting up the public awareness announcement in the mayor's office. "It was fun," she recalls. "A lot of fun. Not everyone gets the opportunity to deal with issues like these."

So, Seme delved into the industry buzz, leading seminars, initiating press coverage, and programming events such as field days. Her involvement snowballed, and soon, associations were asking for her help. "People from [NYSTA] started taking notice of the things I was doing for the local industry," she says. Soon, the association asked her to apply for executive director.

Again, Seme jumped.

GROWING CONCERN. Seme's intensity drives her to constantly seek new avenues to explore the industry – to learn, manage and make an impact. Her's is a mind with limitless boundaries, and NYSTA offered her the position to expand her reach.

Seme knows what it takes to build up an association – and break through legislation.

Photo: Bruce McDonough



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"They had ideas for growth and I was in the right position in my career where I was looking to take on a new challenge," she says. The association opened up networking and programming opportunities and encouraged her to launch her own business concurrently. They wanted Seme's well-rounded background and impeccable organizational skills, and she wanted a springboard into a new facet of industry work.

In 1987, Seme dived into an organization ready for a growth spurt.

"You get a board member who shows up on your doorstep with eight boxes and a computer of which I had no experience," she says, hinting her initial disbelief. "They said, 'Learn how to run a convention,' and I go, 'Sure.'"

"I thought I was going to die the first year," she remembers. "It was so incredible, and I had some really enthusiastic board members who wanted to charge ahead so quickly."

Bill Stark was one of these members, and the vice president when Seme was hired as executive director. "He would have an idea an hour," Seme says, laughing. "He would call me three times a day – my lists were so long – new seminars, new mailings, you name it – he had a vision."

Stark noticed that Seme had some ideas of her own, and her outgoing, meticulous work ethic matched the association's progressive goals. The board formulated a long-term checklist and already had increased membership from 86 members to more than 1,000, established a trade show, and improved daily operations. Seme set more goals and raised the bar.

"She was 120 percent dedicated to doing the job the right way, and she had a big hill to climb," notes Stark, who now works as director of maintenance operations for North Syracuse Central Schools. "We had proactive long-range

goals, and the first two or three years, she was just cranking like crazy trying to get things going, and she was getting a lot of things thrown at her."

Thrown might be a bit of an understatement, as the industry was about to confront a legislative rumble centered around pending neighbor notification laws in 1987: New York's Title 10, which proposed a 75-foot posting requirement. A simple phone call pushed Seme into the political arena only six months into her position as executive director.

"All of a sudden I get this phone call, and it's June," she recalls. "It's a member – and I hardly know any members yet – and he goes, 'Now, this bill just passed. What is the association going to do about it?'"

The bill, at the time, was a three-paragraph "first shot on notification," she describes. "I thought this was going to be monumental for the industry, and I just started taking all of this stuff in," she says, wondering how she would act on behalf of the association and industry as a whole.

Relying on intuition, Seme rushed into rough legislative currents. This initiative would be her "first baby steps into the fray," though she points out, "they weren't baby steps for too long."

"There are OBSTACLES and CHALLENGES, and if you are willing to accept them and make a COMMITMENT, you can become a LEADER." — Beth Seme

LEGISLATIVE THORNS. Immediately, NYSTA plowed into the legislative currents, with Seme at the helm to absorb information, mobilize state associations into a united front, which became the New York State Green Council, and consult with lawyers to determine the industry's next move.

"We jumped into the lawsuit so quickly," Seme notes. "We had to react. What we were doing was building." Seme spent hours on the phone each day, spreading news to association members and green industry groups about what became a "roller coaster ride of ups and downs, winning in one court and losing in the next."

However, Seme learned to stick up for herself, she says. Most of all, she backed the industry. "We had to let organizations know what was happening, we had to hire lawyers to look at the issues, and we delved into a huge, massive lawsuit that involved a large amount of fund-raising and communication," she remembers.

Notification grew into certification regulation, and simple guidelines morphed into legislative hot spots, she describes, noting that the association began meeting with the Department of Environmental Conservation four times a year, each meeting churning out a new agenda.

"The issues become a political ball instead of a scientific type of understanding," she remarks. "Loving the industry and really feeling a part of it from my background, I was involved all of a sudden in something that I became passionate about because I thought there was something deadly wrong about what was going on and about the way that pesticides, in general, were viewed."

"I decided the issue was something I felt strongly about, and if you see something like this, how are you going to turn away from it?" she says incredulously. "It wasn't just me. There were a lot of industry people that put themselves in and said, 'We are going to make this change.'"

During the 2½-year period when Seme canvassed the state for support and assisted lawyers, she developed a rapport with not only other agronomic and lawn care professionals, but with legislators and lobbyists, alike. Her thorough preparation and professional ap-

WELL Associated

proach molded a solid reputation for both her and NYSTA, which actively was growing membership and promoting events during the political sideshow.

Meanwhile, Seme traveled and talked. "I would have a lawyer on one side teaching me about the legislative and regulatory system and how the one [issue] comes up and you have to shoot that down, and I'm learning more things than you can imagine," she says.

Besides the bill, the lawyers, the lobbyists and the opponents, there were sticky internal issues with the Department of Environmental Conservation that interfered with the case, she notes.

However, Dec. 30, 1990, the court struck down the bill. "The actual win might have been over a technicality," Seme admits, "but it didn't matter at that point. There were five lawsuits from various industries, including hotels and restaurants. Title 10 wasn't just a green industry thing anymore."

With a change in hands at the Department of Environmental Conservation, some of these aggressive initiatives were abandoned, but the notification issue as a whole continued to resurface as interest groups rallied against pesticides. "In New York, it's going to be a never-ending thing," Seme predicts. "The legislation has come up again, and now we have 48-hour notification, and basically, this, too was a political thing."

"So, now we're doing it again."

POLITICAL OFFSHOOTS. History repeats itself, and legislative storms continue brewing in New York still today. But Seme has stepped out of the most recent legislative front, handing the reigns over to Maffei and other industry representatives. Once again, she is expanding, accessing various industry segments through her relationships with the departments of agriculture and environmental conservation to the dean of Cornell.

"I've become very connected to the industry, and to some degree, a spokesperson," she says, "but because I understand the technical aspects, I can go into a legislative office and say I have a

Beth Seme's association involvement reaches beyond the New York State Turfgrass Association, which she took over as executive director in 1987. She runs an association management firm, Elizabeth A. Seme, Inc., in Latham, N.Y., capitalizing on her organizational experience and offering her expertise to the groups below.

"A lot of running an association requires the very business skills that people use everyday that make their companies successful," she explains. "You need to have a lot of management attributes, including organization, of course, and your staff is so vital to bring any project into fruition."

And understanding and background in the industry and solid communication skills also aid in successfully contributing to an association board, she adds.

- New York State Turfgrass Association, executive director
- New York State Green Council, executive secretary
- Northeastern Golf Course Superintendents Association, executive director
- Vermont Golf Course Superintendents Association
- New York State Wetlands Forum, executive secretary
- New York State Association of Cemeteries, Inc., executive director

— Kristen Hampshire

degree in plant science, and this is the way the industry works."

She revisits the same enthusiasm experienced at her first lobby day, when she discovered, "you really have the knowledge and all you have to do is talk about what you are doing and how you do it, and you can make a difference."

Seme believes this. She has faith in her industry and commits to its cause. She invests in education, involvement, awareness and opportunity, and knows firsthand that upholding lawn care's positive image isn't a task for just one woman.

"When you're working with people, you want to do positive things," she explains. "We cannot sit back and not be involved. More and more people are understanding the importance of being connected, understanding what they are doing and being educated. They have to understand that they must do an excellent job, or else they will be very susceptible to criticism."

Despite negative legislation that

smears lawn care's image, Seme and NYSTA focus on proactive events to paint a positive picture, such as Turfgrass Advocacy 2000 – an annual lobby day. An arbor days celebration joined professionals and politicians at the governor's mansion and the association currently is conducting a survey of the economic value of turf in New York.

"I think as a group, as a board and as an industry, we've gained such ground," Seme notes proudly. "There are obstacles and challenges, and if you are willing to accept them and make a commitment, you can become a leader," she says.

"It doesn't mean you have to work miracles," she adds, "but you can make a difference. And all of a sudden – and you don't really know it – I guess you're a leader. It happens when you become dedicated to what you're doing." ★

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



"If your research is good and you truly believe in it, then stick up for it," Joe Vargas says. "This process can take a long time so you have to have patience." Photo: Brandon Horvath

S Start a debate with Joe Vargas, and you may regret it.

Vargas, professor of plant pathology at Michigan State University, East Lansing, Mich., is one of those rare individuals who isn't afraid to lay his opinions out on the biology table as his opponents figuratively dissect and pick them apart. Vargas will even let his theories linger open for those eager to discover a weak spot, a proverbial hole in his hypothesis.

But no matter how deep the inquiry, Vargas' adversaries typically find there is not a single insecure bone in his body. Whereas most people find security in acceptance, Vargas – a true scientist – isn't like most people. He would rather be a leader fighting for something he knows to be true, than a folklore follower. In the presence of Vargas, one is never spared a good squabble.

"Being with Joe is always exciting – there's lots to argue about," quips friend and colleague Al Turgeon, who met Vargas in 1968 at Michigan State. Turgeon was a graduate student when Vargas joined on as a new professor.

Joe Vargas

Joe Vargas, the industry's self-proclaimed 'Charles Darwin,' talks about his own life story – a survival of the fittest match in which success is the final outcome.

PROFILE

JOE VARGAS

UNIVERSITY: Michigan State University

LOCATION: East Lansing, Mich.

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS:

- Professor of plant pathology, Michigan State University.
- Published more than 200 articles on turfgrass diseases and related subjects.
- Presented more than 1,000 seminars at various turfgrass conferences throughout the world, including Australia, Argentina, Europe, England, New Zealand, Japan and South Africa.
- Published *Management of Turfgrass Diseases*.
- Made countless breakthroughs in researching and understanding turfgrass pathology.

Three years later, they formed an educational duo since Vargas' experience was in turfgrass pathology and Turgeon's research was in turfgrass physiology and ecology. "We make a good team – we argue about everything. I will take one position and he always debates the opposite. Any topic is fair game, but usually we talk turfgrass.

"I'm a moderate and he's a conservative, so the debates we had during the last presidential election nearly killed us," Turgeon continues, pointing out that many a third-wheel have left the dinner table disappointed when he or she got lost during heated Turgeon-Vargas scientific debates.

But to be Joe Vargas, one has to do more than just start a good fight. Since science, unlike math, never results in clear, definite answers, one has to be an iconoclast, unconstrained by the traditional means of observation. "You have to be secure enough in yourself to question universal truths and basic faiths," Turgeon explains. "And you need to be sensible enough to know when you're wrong."

FIGHT FOR YOUR RIGHT. In the late 1960s, annual bluegrass turf was dying in cool-season, grass-growing regions, and lawn care operators relied on university research to relieve criticism from angry clients. But the only existing theory blamed summer's high temperatures, one of Mother Nature's pesky traits of which LCOs lacked control.

Luckily, Vargas was just as perplexed by this assumption, which was widely accepted by the U.S. Golf Association, Far Hills, N.J., and the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America, Lawrence, Kan. Observing the dead, brown patches of turf, Vargas noticed there was no pattern suggesting heat was responsible. He soon proved that summertime turf loss was instead the result of two diseases – an-

thrachnose and summer patch – and could be controlled easily with fungicide applications.

But Vargas' excitement in announcing his first major research feat soon turned sour when an uproar arose and angry letters arrived in the mail. "I felt dumb as Darwin when he returned from the Galapagos Islands to show us we evolved from something that was not based on religion and Adam and Eve," he says, referring to Charles Darwin's theory of evolution. "I wasn't that naïve, but I certainly caused a big uproar in the turfgrass community."

Refusing to surrender to tradition, Vargas persisted, and, fortunately, golf course superintendents with few other options tested his theory successfully, becoming "my best friends," Vargas says. "Since they started spraying, the grass hasn't died. And my revenge today is that eight of the last U.S. Opens have been played on this type of grass, so how bad can it be?"

Vargas isn't afraid of resistance. In fact, he is fueled by it, particularly when he has well-thought-out theories.

When strength in research and a belief in hypothesis rest in his corner, Vargas is able to cleverly strategize his attacks, unaffected by the absence of initial support. This trait also is apparent in his still controversial turf irrigation findings. Folklore said turf required deep, infrequent irrigation, "watering intensely and then waiting until wilting symptoms appeared before watering again," Turgeon explains. "This old axiom says that you could condition turf to withstand drought stress."

While researching necrotic ring spot, then called fusarium blight, Vargas noticed that the turf disease worsened on hillsides with southern sun exposure. Through tests he learned the key to managing the disease was to irrigate more frequently. "We set up a study and put down 1/10 inch of irrigation daily,



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and the result was healthy turf," Vargas exclaims, pointing out that he also discovered that this method discourages turf insects. "Daily irrigation improves turf health and keeps grubs away because they don't like moist soil. I found that in dry turf, six grubs were enough to cause significant damage vs. daily irrigated turf, where it took up to 30 grubs per square foot to cause damage."

Though these results are still disputed by his peers, Vargas did "point out that in closely mowed turf, intensive irrigation needs to be supplemented with some less intensive irrigation to maintain density and quality," Turgeon persists, supporting his friend's theory.

While controversial studies like these became Vargas' trademark, the reason he thrives as a turfgrass researcher is because he has "the courage to conduct an investigation even if he's convinced there will be an unfavorable outcome," Turgeon says. "Joe has been unafraid to pursue things because, even if the outcome isn't what he planned for, he had a chance to find a better way

Awards

- Michigan Turfgrass Foundation's Meritorious Service Award – 1996
- Greater Detroit Golf Course Superintendent Association of America's Distinguished Service Award – 1996
- Golf Course Superintendent Association of America's Distinguished Service Award – 1997

of doing something or gain insights he didn't have before. He's not intimidated from doing what his heart says is worth pursuing."

A NEW ATTITUDE. The ability to debate is a quality Vargas developed early in life. "I grew up poor – on the lower rung of society where things were more combative," he explains. "My parents were tough. My father was very opinionated so I was con-

stantly defending my viewpoints."

Vargas was 14 years old when he started working as a golf course caddie. One year later, he got a job helping the grounds crew of the Fall River Country Club, Fall River, Mass. Immediately interested in tending to turf, Vargas pursued a degree at the University of Rhode Island, Kingston, R.I., with hopes of becoming a golf course superintendent.

But country club members who claimed to know more about maintaining golf course turf because they "don't have these problems at home," Vargas mimics, forced a career change. During his last two years of school, he decided that he "couldn't work for 300 people who claimed to know more about growing grass than I did," Vargas says of the members. That same year, a disease that broke out on the club's greens and fairways intrigued Vargas so intensely that he immediately chose to pursue a master's degree in plant pathology at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Okla., and followed with a doctorate at the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis-St. Paul, Minn.

Comparing himself once again to Charles Darwin, Vargas said at first he was naïve to the way the industry worked and the troubles associated with

RESEARCH Accomplishments

- Demonstrated that annual bluegrass does not die from high temperatures in the cool-season grass growing regions of the world, but rather from two diseases – anthracnose and summer patch.
- Reported the first resistance of a turfgrass pathogen (the powdery mildew fungus) to a systemic fungicide in 1970 and later reported the first resistance to DMI fungicides by the dollar spot organism.
- Discovered the first bacterial disease in a turfgrass species when he found *Xanthomonas campestris* was the true

cause of what was previously called C-15 decline.

- Identified the true cause of black layer as excess sulfur in the soil.
- Helped develop the first mathematical prediction model for a turfgrass disease: the anthracnose fungicide timing model. Later helped develop a model for the timing of Embark applications for annual bluegrass seed head suppression.
- Developed a summer patch fungicide timing model that is used throughout the world.
- Helped develop the first biological control of annual bluegrass.
- Demonstrated the first effective biological control of dollar spot under field conditions.
- Developed the first true Integrated Pest Management approach to maintaining healthy Kentucky bluegrass lawns.

RESEARCH *Roundup*

battling folklore. The often negative reaction industry veterans had to positive changes in traditional theory made him angry, sparking a temper that runs in his family. "My grandfather had a good sense of humor and he was easy going ... until you backed him into a corner," Vargas remembers. "That's exactly how I am."

Cooling off when his conclusions weren't accepted with open arms was a quality Vargas learned on the job from colleagues Ken Payne, a turfgrass breeder and head of Michigan State's two-year technical program when Vargas first worked there during the 1970s, and Lagoya Fontaine, executive director, MSU Turf Foundation.

Payne's calm lectures worked as constructive criticism when Vargas' temper flared. "When I got excited, he would tell me what I ought to be doing in a calm tone – he probably made me even madder when he did this, but it always seemed to calm me down,"

Whereas most people find **SECURITY** in acceptance, Vargas – a true **SCIENTIST** – isn't like most people. He would rather be a **LEADER** fighting for something he knows to be **TRUE**, than a folklore follower.

Vargas says. "He had a good way of telling me I had the wrong attitude."

To aid in developing Vargas' positive temperament, Fontaine taught Vargas the importance of looking at a glass as if it is always half full. "I have always looked for the worst in things and people," Vargas admits. "Over a long period of time, I began to realize if I get up in the morning looking for what's wrong, that's what I'll do all day and I'll continually be argumentative. But if I get up in the morning looking for

MMy research program involves managing turfgrass diseases from an integrated approach. We are involved in a breeding program for disease resistance, as well as cultural, chemical and biological means of disease management.

The current emphasis of the program is in developing cultural practices that will help promote biological control in the turfgrass system, and also isolating and identifying bacteria and actinomycete organisms from the turfgrass ecosystem and determining if they produce substances in culture that are antagonistic to turfgrass pathogens. These organisms and their antifungal products are currently being tested to determine their potential as biological control agents in the field.

We also identify and develop controls for new turf diseases as they arise, and develop disease prediction models to predict disease occurrence for more environmentally and economically sound application of fungicides. In addition, we study resistance to fungicides by turfgrass pathogens when it occurs. – Joe Vargas

what's right, I'll find the right answers. Things still sometimes go wrong, but now I can handle it better."

Additional support came from Vargas' family, including Mary Ann, his wife of 39 years; his 36-year-old son Jay-Jay; his 33-year-old son Michael and his 26-year-old daughter Katie. "Their support at home, particularly when no one was in my corner when I presented my half of the argument, was a blessing," Vargas admits. "They understand me and who I am. My one regret in life is that I didn't spend more time with my children when they were growing up."

Friends like Turgeon also weaved a strong support system, despite their frequent, heated debates. Did the two friends ever share sides? "Once," Turgeon admits. "It was 1977 and we were traveling through Europe with Jim Beard [MSU's turfgrass physiologist, at the time]. For some reason, Joe and I always ended up on the same side when it came to debates with Jim. Poor Jim

went through a nightmare. We carried that argument through Holland, France, Germany and England.

"Joe and I never seemed to have an insecurity problem," Turgeon continues, adding that after each dispute, the two men would walk away a touch wiser and a step closer to a new scientific discovery. "We would just lash out unmercifully. We were like lawyers – we debated an issue until we gained insight from it."

Stepping one inch closer to those nearly unattainable answers in science is the main reason for the constant debate – not a hot head. Staying true to his beliefs, despite challenges and controversy, is how Vargas succeeded. To Vargas, this, in addition to dependable research, is what it takes to be a good leader. "If your research is good and you truly believe in it, then stick up for it," he says. "This process can take a long time, so you have to have patience. I think it would be worse to find out you could have changed something or that someone today figured out what you already knew yesterday, but had the guts to present it and defend it." ★

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



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