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Cover Story

SPECIAL REPORT

State of the Industry

Cautious optimism reigns as the lawn and landscape industry juggles labor, economics and an unpredictable future. **\$1**

A Constant Debate

Organic lawn care continues to drive controversy in the green industry. The question remains, what's next?



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Attention to Detail

A clear focus on proper design, thorough planning and customer education

leads to successful irrigation system installations.

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Cut Out for Success

Shawn Williamson invested his life savings and horticultural passion into The Cutting Edge – a business paced for fast-lane growth and ready to break the \$1 million mark this year.

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Solutions to Shade

Knowing your ABCs when developing a shady area will help plants live longer, ease maintenance concerns and keep customers happy.



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Commercial Break

Contractors might nab their first commercial clients with crafty sales pitches, but preparing the company to service and retain these accounts requires much more.



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The Green Streak

Urban revitalization projects may place contractors in the spotlight, but they also present a host of varied challenges.

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Lighting Your Way to Better Sales

Understanding the benefits of lighting can help contractors convince clients to brighten their properties.



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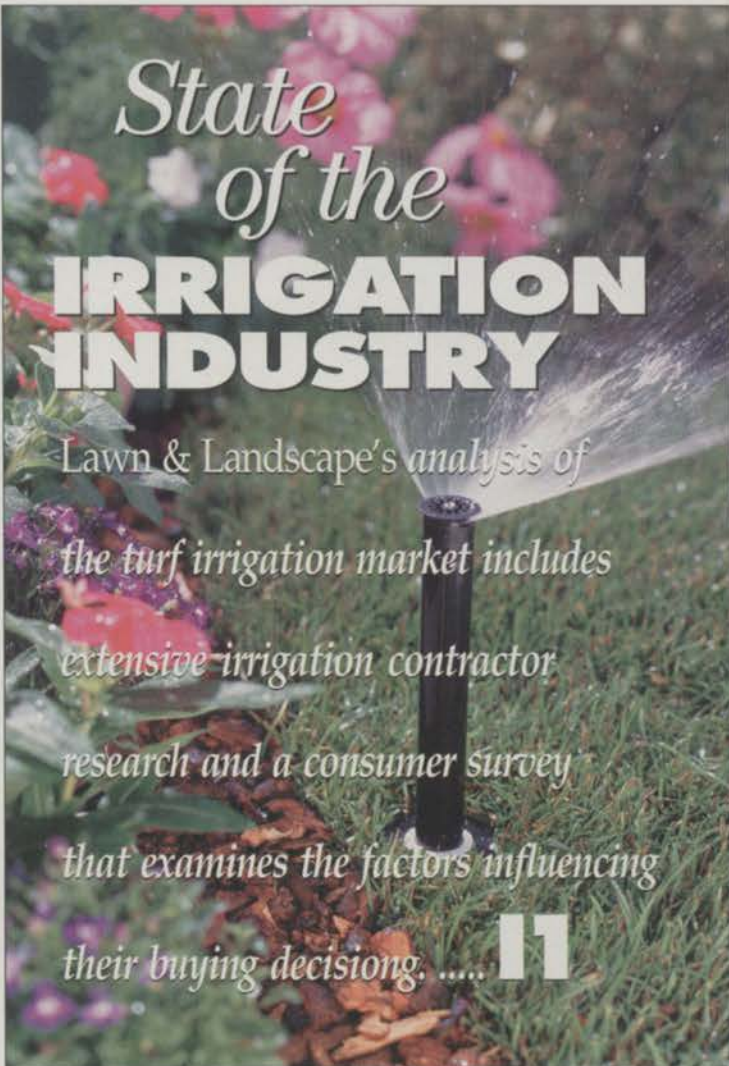
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*State
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**IRRIGATION
INDUSTRY**

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Editor's Focus

The Day We All Changed

"Individual commitment to a group effort – that is what makes a team work, a company work, a society work, a civilization work."
– Vince Lombardi

There are times when I labor to find something to write about here, and there are months when that's not a problem. Sept. 11 gave me an obvious topic for this column, but I struggled to find the right way to handle a subject that, by now, has infused our lives through endless news reports, graphic photos and heartbreaking stories.


Eventually, I realized that while years must pass and, unfortunately, brave soldiers and innocent people will most likely die before we begin to grasp what the attacks on New York and Washington, D.C., mean to us as a nation, these previously unthinkable events are already sending shock waves through your organizations, whether you know it or not.

Since the attacks, government personnel have been media darlings, but the interviews that the business executive in you should focus on are with psychologists who talk about how various individuals will personally react to what they saw, heard and continue to think about this tragedy. They are essentially talking about your family, your friends and your employees.

Numerous experts who study and understand such seemingly simple yet devastatingly powerful terms like "shock" and "trauma" have related that this event will profoundly alter how Americans view their work and home situations. Now, uncertainty occupies a more prominent role in our lives than many of us have ever known. The fear and uneasiness that stems from such widespread wondering, combined with a disturbing sense of vulnerability, means people will look for security and comfort in new places, and work will likely be one of them.

In truth, three buildings and nearly 7,000 victims weren't the target on Sept. 11. Instead, our daily lives and so much of what we take for granted could be found in those terrorists' crosshairs that morning. They attacked your right to send your crews out each day without worrying about their safety, and they attacked the sense of peace we all enjoyed every day.

With that serenity shattered, people will crave stability. You need to be more than an employer now – you need to be a foundation around which your employees can rebuild themselves. Let them know that they matter to you as people and as part of your team.

People have a natural desire to belong to something, be it a congregation, a club, a clique or some other entity. Make your company a place for them to belong and to heal. 

Bob West

Lawn & Landscape

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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

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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?"



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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.



Market Trends

CUSTOMER TRENDS

Financial Woes

Americans' pessimism about their finances has inched up steadily since January and is now at the highest level recorded by the organization since the question was first asked in 1976, according to Gallup Poll consumer trends.

The national survey reported that 41 percent of Americans say their personal financial situation is worse today than it was one year ago, while only 37 percent say it is better. This represents the first time since 1993 that more Americans feel worse off financially.

Part of the reason for this negativity could be the stock market, the Gallup News Service said. Twenty-nine percent of Americans said they lost money in the stock market this past year, a recent poll uncovered.

Politics also could be to blame. Consumer sentiment about their finances declined most sharply this year among Democrats, with a dramatic drop evident between January and February, shortly after Republican President George W. Bush was inaugurated. Republicans also are less optimistic about their finances today than they were at the height of the economic boom last year, but their attitude has changed less dramatically than that of Democrats.

Employees come and employees go. But unless an employee tells you why he or she is leaving, you may never know if there was something you could reasonably have done to keep that employee, or retain other discontented staff members.

Exit interviews fix this problem, pointed out Ed Van Istendal, WeisburgerGREEN Insurance, White Plains, N.Y. An exit interview is often combined with an

opportunity to collect company-issued materials from the departing employee, such as manuals, uniforms, phones, tools and keys. At the same time, an exit interview provides an employer with an opportunity to express disappointment in the employee's departure and a time to ask how the company might have let down the employee. "The interview can focus on improvement, not criticism," Van Istendal advised, recommending questions such as, "Why have you chosen to leave the company? How could the working conditions have been better for you? What could management do to keep others from feeling how you feel?"

Van Istendal also cited some common reasons employees resign (above).

EXIT *Stage Left*

Reason for Leaving	% of Employees
Better Career Opportunities	78
Better Compensation/ Benefits Package	65
Poor Management	21
Accompanying a Relocating Spouse/Partner	18
Returning to School	15
Retiring	14
Job Security Fears	10
Child Care Issues	8
Perceptions of Discrimination	5
Health-Related Issues	4

Source: WeisburgerGREEN Insurance

REGAINING MOMENTUM

Corporate Recovery After a Crisis



NEW YORK & WASHINGTON, D.C. – The immensity of the Sept. 11 attack on the United States affected Americans in more ways than they dared imagine – from the unprecedented loss of life to the economic disruption.

"In retrospect, life in those first few days after Sept. 11 was in a state of suspended animation – motion without movement," described John Graham, president, Graham Communications, Quincy, Mass. "Then we told ourselves it was time to get moving again – to pick ourselves up, get away from the TV and get down to business. Isn't that what we have always done?"

While Americans endure a recovery process, the landscape industry also has to heal. Some contractors, product manufacturers and association representatives are more pessimistic about the market's future, while others cling to the familiar cycle of renewed American spirit.

In the week following the strike, Karen
(continued on page 18)

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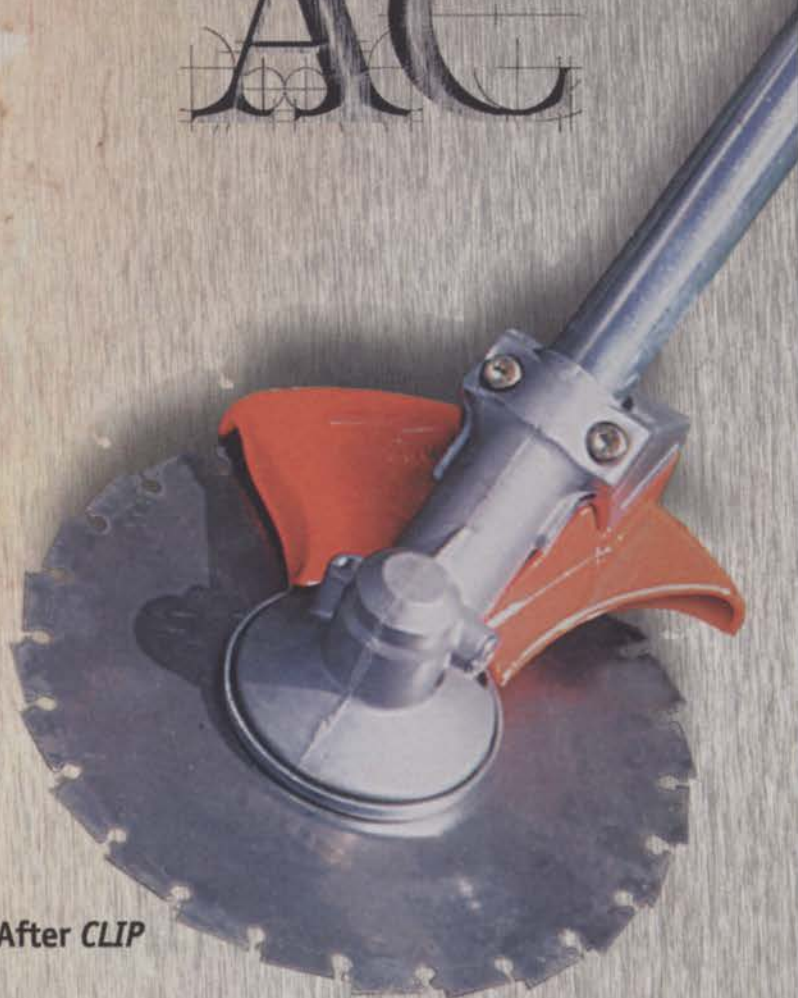
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Market Trends

(continued from page 8)

WAGE LEGALITIES

What's Your Wager?

Picture yourself in this situation: You're a landscape contractor who requires your employees to wear uniforms. The way you pay for these uniforms is by deducting the cost from your workers' wages. This causes some employees' pay to drop below the required federal minimum wage for that pay period.

Can you legally do this?

The answer, according to Attorney Chris Robinson of Fisher & Phillips, Fort Lauderdale, Fla., is "No" – not if you're covered by the federal Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA), which includes nearly every company in the lawn care and landscape industry.

"If an employer covered by the FLSA requires employee uniforms, the employer may not deduct either the cost of those uniforms or their laundering from the wages

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.

OCT. 14-17 Atlantic Seedsmen Association's conference, Annapolis, Md. Contact: 814/237-0330.

OCT. 16-17 Landscape Ontario Horticultural Trades Association Garden Expo, Toronto, Ontario, Contact: 905/875-1805.

OCT. 24 & 25 Tree Failure and Risk Management Workshop & Field Days, Pasadena & Yorba Linda, Calif. Contact: 909/880-5977.

OCT. 25 Southeast Texas Grounds Maintenance Conference, Conroe, Texas. Contact: 936/539-7822.

OCT. 28-31 National Institute on Park and Grounds Management Educational Conference, Milwaukee, Wis. Contact: 920/733-2301.

OCT. 31-NOV. 1 Southern California Turfgrass Council Turfgrass, Landscape & Equipment Expo, Pomona, Calif. Contact: 800/500-7282.

NOV. 4-6 Irrigation Show, San Antonio, Texas. Contact: 703/536-7080.

NOV. 7-9 Fifth Annual Desert Green Conference, Las Vegas, Nev. Contact: 702/454-3057.

NOV. 8 Massachusetts Nursery & Landscape Association Business Short Course, North Falmouth, Mass. Contact: 413/369-4731.

NOV. 9-10 Plant Health Inc. Plant Biology Workshop, Frogmore, S.C. Contact: 888/290-2640.

NOV. 10-13 Green Industry Expo., Tampa, Fla., 770/973-2019.

NOV. 12-15 Midwest Regional Turf & Ornamental Seminar, West Lafayette, Ind. Contact: 765/494-8039.

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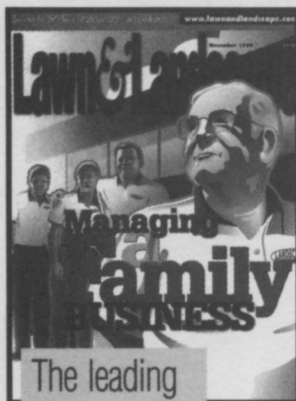
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 - 5. Irrigation Contractor
 - 6. Landscape Architect
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- 15. Trade Association, Library
- Others (please describe) _____

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- 13. Interiorscope
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- 5. \$300,000 to \$499,999
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- 7. \$700,000 to \$999,999
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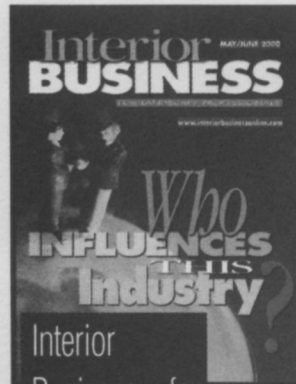
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- 13. Trade Association, Library
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- NOV. 30- DEC. 1** The Great Southern Tree Conference, Gainesville, Fla. Contact: 800/375-3642.
- DEC. 3-6** Ohio Turfgrass Conference & Show, Columbus, Ohio. Contact: 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 & Trade Show, St. Charles, Ill. Contact: 877/617-8887.
- JAN. 6-8** Western Nursery & Landscape Association "Big Show - 2002," Kansas City, Mo. Contact: 816/233-1481.
- JAN. 8-10** CONGRESS 2002, Toronto, Ont. Contact: 905/875-1805.
- 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 & 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. 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. 16-18** Mid-America Horticultural Trade Show, Chicago, Ill. Contact: 847/526-2010.
- JAN. 21-24** 72nd Annual Michigan Turfgrass Conference, Lansing, Mich. Contact: 517/321-1660.

paid to the employee if these deductions cause the employee's wages to fall below the federal minimum wage of \$5.15 per clock hour worked," said Robinson, who specializes in wage-hour law.

"And, the employer cannot avoid this problem by requiring the employee to purchase the uniform prior to the first day of employment, because the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) takes the position that such a purchase will have the effect of creating a minimum wage violation in the first week of employment if the purchase causes wages to fall below the minimum wage in that first week," he said.

The case doesn't improve if the employer simply asks the employee to pay a uniform deposit to be refunded in full upon the employee's separation and the return of the uniform(s), Robinson added.

"That deposit money cannot cause wages to cut into the minimum wage," he said, adding that state laws may be even more stringent than the FLSA when it comes to uniform-

(continued on page 16)

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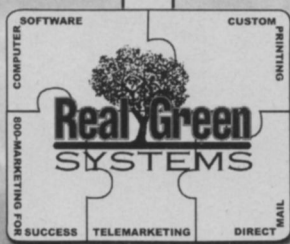


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USE READER SERVICE #99

Market Trends

(continued from page 13)

related deductions from employee wages.

The only way an employer can legally use such a deduction is if doing so doesn't cause an employee's wages to dip below minimum wage standards or cut into any overtime pay due to that employee, according to Robinson.

Following is a synopsis of what employers can and cannot deduct from their

workers' pay checks and still comply with the FLSA:

- Charges for employer-required transportation; required uniforms; or tools, pick axes or other materials necessary for employees to perform their jobs may not be deducted from employees' pay if these deductions bring wages below the required

(continued on page 25)

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Letters TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor:

In my opinion, the cover of your *Arbor Business* supplement represents the arboriculture profession very poorly for two reasons. For 30 years, the use of climbing spikes, boot spurs, gaffs, etc. worn by the climber in your photo has been against professional tree work standards created by the National Arborist Association, which are now called the A300 Standards. They should never be used unless the tree is being removed. If we find that someone has climbed one of our city trees with spikes while pruning the tree, we bill the company for damages. Spike wounds are excellent places for insect and disease problems to attack, especially pine bark beetles in the pine shown.

The second problem is that your climber is using ballistic leggings for chain saw safety. For years, OSHA has tried to mandate the use of these leggings for the tree industry as it does for the logging industry. Although a good practice while operating a chain saw on the ground, one can not safely climb while wearing leggings, and the industry safety committee has successfully opposed their use while climbing.

Steve Sandfort,
City Forester
Cincinnati, Ohio

EDITOR'S NOTE: Lawn & Landscape magazine takes photo selection very seriously and has chosen not to run photos and even advertisements in the past that portray the industry unprofessionally or in a dangerous manner. In this instance, we felt the picture in question, which was provided by a respectable landscape contractor, portrayed an individual with a professional appearance who was not tending to, but removing a tree, which is a service that some contractors provide. But we understand that some readers may think this image endorsed unprofessionalism and improper safety. This was certainly not our intention.

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

Market Trends

(continued from page 8)

Solit, horticulturist, Spring Gardens, Ijamsville, Md., said she wasn't immediately affected, but noticed how intense anxiety continues to hover over her area. "There's tension here," she stated. "But we have not seen a change in sales or cancellations. Whether we will or not remains to be seen."

Since the landscape industry has experienced years of positive growth, a bruised optimism is inevitable, but hope and continued development must reign, remarked George Van Haasteren, president, Professional Grounds Maintenance Society, Baltimore, Md. "Up until one week ago, I was very optimistic [about the industry]," he said. "With the way the world has changed, one thing I will say is that beside our patriotic duties, we have to come together – no matter what association, no matter what group – we need to come together and unite in the green industry."

To ease the shock and help contractors regain momentum in a new business environment, Graham offered a few suggestions:

(continued on page 20)

Association NEWS

The **Metro Atlanta Landscape & Turf Association (MALTA)** announced the winners of MALTA's 2000 Environmental Awards. The MALTA Awards Program recognizes those professionals who have been involved in award-winning landscape installation projects. For the list of winners, call Jean Ray, MALTA's executive director, at 770/732-9832.

The **Pennsylvania Foundation for Ornamental Horticulture** awarded six scholarships to students within horticulture programs at each of the Pennsylvania colleges and universities. This year's winners are Aimee Bentley, Delaware Valley College; Joseph Bollinget and Doug Geyet, Pennsylvania State University; Trey Gitaldi, Williamson Free School of Mechanical Trades; and Ryan Mathefka and Ian Groy, Pennsylvania College of Technology.

The **Associated Landscape Contractors of Massachusetts** named Owen Regan as secretary.

The **Pennsylvania Turfgrass Council** allocated \$175,000 to support the Turfgrass Science Project at Penn State University. Funds will support research within the fields of agronomy, entomology and plant pathology.

The **Missouri Landscape and Nursery Association** named its 2001 board of directors. Gary M. Archer is president, B.J. Hillermann is vice president, Monica Barker is secretary, Bill Harbstreet is an elected board member and Paul Ronck is ex-officio.

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Hi! My name is Derek Blumberg. You probably saw my picture on the cover of this magazine a few months ago. I am the founder and president of Quality Seasons, a million-dollar-a-year firm in beautiful Minnesota. Several years ago I purchased Marty Grunder's Marketing, Management, and Motivational System. That System, and other things such as his Selling Symposium, his Boot Camp, his newsletter, and his publicity-attracting techniques have made a tremendously positive impact on my business. I feel there is not a Green Industry related firm that wouldn't benefit from Marty's products and services. That's why I asked Marty if I could help him meet more Green Industry people like you.



Certainly you've heard of fellow mega-successful landscaper Marty Grunder. Maybe you've even heard him speak at a conference. In case you don't know Marty, he's the freckled-face entrepreneur who turned a lawn mower and one truck into a multi-million-dollar, award-winning company. I've been to his facility in Dayton, Ohio, and he's for real. The walls are full of the awards he's won including recently being named an Entrepreneur of the Year by Ernst & Young! His team of professionals is incredible and seeing them makes you understand how Marty can travel and teach so much and still have a thriving business.

Go to his website now (www.grunderswinnerscircle.com) for more details, or better yet, call Marty at 937-847-9944, although he's on the road a lot, leave a message with Nancy (his awesome assistant), and I guarantee you he'll call you back.

If you don't want to call Marty, simply write "Free Report" on your letterhead and fax it 24 hours a day to 937-847-8067. In a few days you'll receive information on how Marty can help you.

Listen, I too was skeptical of Marty and didn't think he could help me. But the fact is, he did help me, and he can help you too! But you have to ask. If you get to know him like many others and I have, you'll quickly realize his teachings work. Now go contact Marty today while it's fresh in your mind.

Derek Blumberg!

PS. – All of Marty's products and services have a money back, no questions asked guarantee.

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USE READER SERVICE #17

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USE READER SERVICE #117

Market Trends

(continued from page 18)

- *Don't fight it.* Getting back to normal may take longer than expected.

- *Be more tolerant with yourself and others.* All people react differently to crises and need to be free to operate at their own speeds. Don't expect employees or clients to pick up where they left off. Some will be able to do this, while others will need more time.

- *Don't grab on to tragedy's coattails.* Trying to benefit from tragedy will only backfire.

- *Relax.* Getting business back to the way it was is easier said than done.

The hardest part of business management is to anticipate and react to uncontrollable outside forces. But this industry is resourceful, assured Tom Jessen, president, PermaGreen Supreme, Crown Point, Ind. "There's a sense of disbelief and denial we have to get through, and things eventually will become easier to accomplish," he said. "Regardless of whether things get better or worse, the industry will continue building. It's the American way of life - we can't be stopped, no matter how bad the news gets." ■

People

Griffin LLC hired **Don Wilson** as southeast territory manager for specialty products.

Mark Miller joined PBI/Gordon as sales manager for professional turf and ornamental and agricultural products.

HK&T Landscaping Services appointed **Judith Fleming** as accounts manager and hired Manish Gooneratne as an account representative.

Irrigation Station promoted **Scott Basinger** from sales representative to sales manager of the company's Houston branch.

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

TruGreen Landcare promoted **Brett Horan** from San Diego construction operations manager to Temecula construction branch manager.

John Brader joined Landmark Seed Co.'s management team to establish an Eastern base for Landmark's sales and marketing.

RBI Cos. hired **Chris Graeber** as vice president of landscape construction.

Hal Lewis was hired by Pickseed West as plant breeder - turf grasses.

Stellar Industries hired **David Engstler** as customer service manager and promoted **James Ellefson** from tire service truck assembly technician to customer service representative.



Basinger (top), Engstler (bottom)

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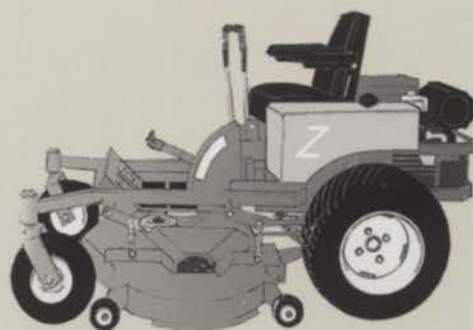


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USE READER SERVICE #18

What you
should know...

BEFORE



A Price vs. Value

Study offered by:

WALKER  MOWERS

*buying a
Mid-Mount "Z"
Riding Mower*

Working on Hills and Slopes

The Walker generally offers superior traction and handling on slopes. A low center of gravity (operator sits 8"-12" lower on a Walker than a typical mid-mount) and having most of the weight balanced on the drive wheels makes the difference. By contrast, most mid-mounts have a higher center of gravity due to the deck mount position and the weight must be shifted forward of the drive wheels to avoid "flip up" when climbing a hill (there is no tail wheel to stabilize the tractor). Since the mid-mount has weight concentrated ahead of the drive wheels, traction is good for climbing, but the weight shifts off the drive wheels and traction is lost going down the hill—loss of steering and braking going down a hill is scary to say the least. If you are looking at a mid-mount and you have hills, make sure to test the downhill handling for safety.

The same handling concerns for going up and down hills also apply to moving across slopes. The Walker offers good balance and traction on the drive wheels for handling side slopes. With the mid-mount, having weight concentrated ahead of the drive wheels, it will tend to be nose heavy on side slopes which will limit side slope handling capability (the front caster wheels do not keep the tractor going straight on a side slope).

One more point to consider about hills before making your purchase—the front-mounted Walker deck moves independently of the tractor for better following of contour. The mid-mount deck is more rigidly suspended from the tractor and has more of a tendency to scalp or skip on rolling terrain.

Trimming Capability

The front-mount deck on the Walker has more reach and better deck geometry for trimming. This is especially true when using the GHS rear-discharge deck with trimming from both sides. The operator sits low to work under overhanging areas and the operator's view of the deck in front enhances trimming work. Walker's precision steering makes it easy to work in close to edging, fences, beds, etc. Agility in maneuvering speeds the trimming portion of the job.

By contrast, the mid-mount design simply doesn't allow the same deck reach and trimming capability, and the operator sits higher on mid-mounts, limiting the ability to work under overhanging areas. More secondary trimming with a line trimmer or push mower will be required when using a mid-mount on many jobs with lots of trimming.

Operator Comfort

On the Walker, the operator has the "best seat in the house". The operator is positioned right on top of the turn radius—giving a stable ride, and the operator has an excellent view of the mower deck (mowing area) in front. The Forward Speed Control (FSC) means the operator relaxes and does not have to hold the steering levers all the time.

The mid-mount operator sits ahead of the turn radius and is jostled side-to-side when turning, and since the deck is positioned underneath, the operator has to look down to see the mowing area. Holding steering levers in position does get tiring (especially holding the levers steady on bumpy ground).

Tractor with Versatility

A compact tractor is a versatile tractor—it will fit in small work and can also reach up and do bigger work. The reverse is not true—the big tractor can only do big work. The compact Walker has this size versatility. The front-mounted deck configuration favors quickly interchanging up to 10 sizes and styles of mower decks for a variety of mowing jobs (sales statistics show 30% additional decks are purchased for Walker tractors).

Also, the front-mount configuration is an ideal platform for mounting other attachments and quick interchanging. The balance and traction of the front mount works better for attachments than the mid-mount. The mid-mount does not easily adapt to other attachments.

Precision Steering and Handling

The Walker steering control response is light, precise, responsive and nearly effortless. The patented Forward Speed Control (FSC) takes complexity out of handling a "Z" machine by setting the forward travel and acting as a cruise control. With the Walker, precision trimming, detail mowing, and beautiful mowing patterns are easily accomplished by the experienced operator.

With the mid-mount design, the necessary heavy weight on the front caster wheels (try lifting on the front end to see the weight involved) increases turning resistance and makes steering slower and less responsive. This is especially true on soft or wet ground. More turning effort means slower, less agile turns and less precise response to steering inputs. Also, there is more of a tendency to slip drive wheels when making a sharp turn. The mid-mount will need to be turned slower to avoid turf damage from slipping drive wheels.

Precision handling is not so important in open area mowing, but in areas with lots of trimming, mowing patterns and requiring a better overall appearance of the finished job, it saves time and makes a difference.

A look at the distinctive performance, not matched by mid-mount

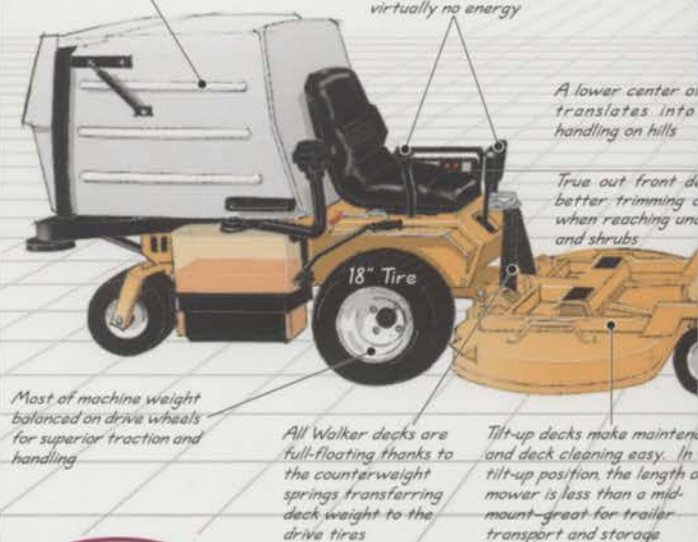
In an honest appraisal, there is a place for mid-mount "Z" advantage in commercial mowing. If your job is chop and flat ground at 10 mph (and this is perfectly satisfactory for the job). On the other hand, if the mowing job has hills, roll trimming, includes combinations of tight areas and open space, the Walker Mower has the advantage. Here is a look.

Fully integrated Grass Handling System (GHS) means the tractor maintains its compact size in all mowing conditions

The combination of the Forward Speed Control (FSC) and steering levers allow the operator to drive comfortably while exerting virtually no energy

A lower center of gravity translates into better handling on hills

True out front deck better trimming when reaching under and shrubs



Commitment to Service

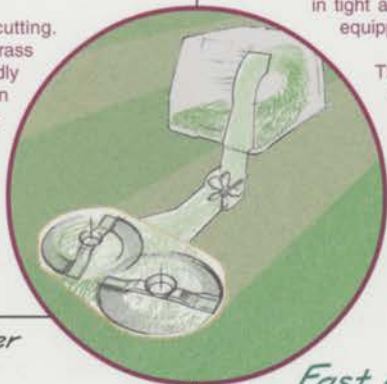
Walker Mowers are sold with an after-sale service network (servicing dealers are being sold at a discount provision for after-the-sale service. When a bargain for the customer, it is not a good service is needed and the machine is still

A servicing dealer adds value in other ways up to date with product upgrades and When it is time to trade-in for a new Walker adds to the resale value of a used Walker of ownership—a good deal for the owner

High-Quality Mowing

The Walker is designed for mowing where the finished job looks manicured and there is a beautiful mowing pattern. Careful attention has been given to the deck design for proper air pressure underneath the housing and smooth material flow. In addition, the deck suspension is important for smooth cutting. The front-mounted deck suspension "floats and flexes", moving independently from the tractor to follow ground contour and minimize scalping.

Mid-mounts have inherent design limitations to quality cutting. Heavily weighted front caster wheels track and mash the grass down before cutting and the mid-mount deck is more rigidly connected to the tractor, giving less deck suspension than the front-cut (the mid-mount deck does not move independently from the tractor).



Features, and benefits of the Walker Mower Mount "Z" riding mowers.

Walker mowers. Many of these machines are being used to good effect, mow and blow, mulchomatic, straight-ahead mowing on many applications), the mid-mount "Z" is a good machine for rough terrain, needs the manicured, vacuumed look, has lots of uses, needs the versatility of various decks and attachments, and at 10 ways the Walker is better for many mowing jobs.

Steering levers control speed and steering - the operator must hold levers forward to drive

Operator is "sitting on" the mowing deck - this restricts out-front visibility and reaching capability

Adding a grass collection system makes the mower even more out of balance and wider and longer

Center of gravity better

Deck gives stability for trees

Since the deck weight is completely on the caster wheels - this means more turf damage and more turning resistance

Deck weight is completely on the caster wheels - this means more turf damage and more turning resistance

Underside accessibility for deck and blade maintenance is not easy

Wheel base located behind operator results in poor steering control when going down a hill

Service

The dealer's on-site commitment for service and support. By contrast, many mid-mounts (and other "no-service" prices—where there is no dealer support) have the low initial price looks like a deal when efficient, expeditious service is required, waiting for repairs.

A dealer keeps the equipment up to date with improvements from the factory. Walker, availability of good service which reduces the overall cost.



Grass Collection Capability

A key question to ask in deciding between a Walker and a mid-mount is do you need grass collection capability (at least on a seasonal basis)? Grass collection may not be needed full time, but it seems many operators need vacuuming and collection part of the time. If collection capability is needed, Walker has one of the best catching systems available (the Walker Grass Handling System or GHS). First of all, the GHS is built into the tractor which means less bulk for working in tight areas (more compact overall dimensions than a mid-mount equipped with a collection system attachment).

The rear discharge GHS deck allows trimming from either side and offers superior vacuum action. The catcher has patented Powerfil® and full signal and is easily dumped. In comparison, the typical mid-mount collection system does not offer the GHS capability because it is an "add-on" to a side discharge deck.

If collecting capability is never needed, the mid-mount has the advantage of being a little more compact in length than the Walker (but this advantage is usually lost if the mid-mount is equipped with a collection system).

Fast on the Job

Don't be fooled by the popular idea that the mower with the fastest ground speed always finishes first. For many jobs, the total time is influenced by the amount of trimming and maneuvering and the required cutting quality. While many of the mid-mount "Z"s have a faster top speed than the Walker, the Walker often wins the job time race. The mid-mount ends up faster only when mowing more open areas where quality of cut is not too important and there is little maneuvering and trimming.

Even though the mid-mount may have a faster top speed, it is the actual working speed that counts on job time. This is how Walker wins the race—a consistently higher working speed. In many cases, the mid-mount has to slow down and even go slower than the Walker to do the job. For example, when maneuvering, both the fast machine and slow machine will need to slow down to make a tight turn (to avoid turf damage) and because the Walker is better balanced, it may be able to turn faster. In another illustration, when cutting heavy grass and cutting quality is important, the mid-mount may very well need to slow down to "Walker speed" or slower to get a quality cut. And then there is trimming. The mid-mount often cannot reach into all the areas for trimming, and some secondary trimming with a line trimmer or push mower is required—this extra time is an "equalizer" making the Walker faster on the job.



Why not design the Walker to go faster? It would compromise the design of the Walker and we would lose more than we gain. To get "mid-mount speed", the Walker would need less sensitive steering, more weight on the deck caster wheels (to avoid deck bouncing) and bigger drive tires (raise the center of gravity). That would spoil the essence of what a Walker is and what it does best.

Easy Maintenance

A hallmark of the Walker design is quick, easy access to the working parts for service. The raised tractor body and tilt-up mower deck save minutes and even hours of labor for regular maintenance and service. With the Walker, many repairs are made right on the tractor or in the field with the easy maintenance design (e.g., all drive belts can be changed without disassembly or tools).

A comparison will show the mid-mounts cannot match the easy maintenance of a Walker. There is no easy access to the underside of the deck and many working parts require disassembly for access on these designs.



Why was this brochure created?

We believe that in the power equipment industry these days, many people are buying zero-turn "Z" riding mowers based on some factors which are just not fundamentally sound.

Is your next riding mower purchase being determined by empty points like ground speed, price, or overkill of horsepower? We think there are a few things you need to know before you sign on the bottom line.

Walker Manufacturing Company, producers for over 20 years of the Walker Mower (a compact, maneuverable, zero-turn, front-cut mower) respectfully offers the enclosed information to help you decide which style of zero-turn riding mower will best suit you and/or your company based on the true value of the product you buy.

Many of the Walker's features discussed in this guide need to be demonstrated. Ask your Walker dealer for a demonstration today.



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THE "TO DO" LIST BEFORE BUYING A MID-MOUNT

Before you buy any commercial riding lawn mower, you should have a thorough demonstration done on your property or a property you maintain. Below is a list of points to consider for yourself during each demonstration:

- ✓ Remember, mid-mount steering levers must be pushed and held forward for driving
- ✓ Try driving down a hill
- ✓ Compare the operator's view of the area being cut
- ✓ Lift the front of the mower deck - if the deck is too heavy to lift, imagine what it will do to the grass
- ✓ Check to see how easy access is made to all moving parts and the underside of the deck
- ✓ Make sure all of your attachment needs are being met - including possible winter and landscaping needs
- ✓ Compare actual mowing job times and cutting quality of all the mowers you are considering
- ✓ Try trimming precisely with the mower - within 1/4 to 1/2 inch along a delicate area
- ✓ Ask your dealer about availability of a "No Downtime" guarantee

Wage Legalities (continued from page 16)

minimum wage during that pay period.

• The FLSA does allow deductions from employees' wages for certain items, regardless of their impact on the minimum wage. These include: Social Security, Medicare, garnishments, and federal and state income taxes; third-party deductions authorized by the employee (such as voluntary insurance premiums, union dues and church or charitable contributions); certain types of meals, utilities and housing, as long as they don't exceed reasonable costs or fair market value; and advances against earned wages.

• The FLSA does allow deductions from the actual cost of daily transportation, but only when employees know the location of the work site, alternate sources of transportation are available and employees are not required to use the employer's transportation but rather use it for convenience.

In addition to these bullet points, keeping accurate written records is important.

This includes receipts for all deducted items and copies of written, signed authorizations from employees (in a language they understand) for any deductions from wages beyond those specifically required by law.

— Barbara Mulhern

EDITOR'S NOTE: This article includes material from GEMPLER'S publication, Labor Law Compliance: A Working Guide for Ag/Hort Employers. For more information on the guide, contact Mike Klawitter at 800/382-8473, Ext. 139, or by e-mail at mklawitter@gemplers.com

The following tips are aimed to help companies comply with the FLSA's minimum wage provisions:

1. Know both the federal minimum wage and your state-required minimum wage. Be sure to pay the higher of the two wages to eligible workers.
2. Know that workers paid by the piece rate must receive at least the equivalent of the required hourly minimum wage each pay period.
3. Keep all records required by the FLSA, including records proving that any piece rate workers were paid the equivalent of the required hourly minimum wage each pay period.
4. Post the current required FLSA poster (as well as any state-required posters) in a location where you customarily post employee notices. — Barbara Mulhern

Wage Do's

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OCTOBER 2001

25

CAREER ADVANCEMENT

Paving the Way

If the workplace is a series of chutes and ladders, companies that offer opportunities to climb will attract and keep key employees.

"When you give people more responsibility, they feel like they are getting a larger piece of the pie," reasoned Mark Lay, owner, AATEX Lawn Co., Matthews, N.C. Defining job descriptions, communicating expectations for those roles and revisiting these responsibilities in regular meetings or on the jobsite will focus employees on their contributions and future at the company.

WIDENING WORKLOAD. Many employees assume that advancing on a career path means gaining new, more prestigious titles, however, they can take more responsibility through lateral expansion. As companies cut middle-management positions, workers capture opportunity by widening the peripheral view of their current positions, adding responsibilities such as overseeing more crews, managing a large project or training employees, said Scott Ziebol, president, LandCrafters, Milwaukee, Wis.

"I think it's becoming more realistic that job roles are expanding instead, and that's the career path," Ziebol observed. "People want to be challenged and have more opportunity and that can happen in the same way with

expanding roles as it used to with jumping to a new position [in the company]."

This horizontal promotion benefits employees who work for smaller companies that might not have open positions, Ziebol added. This also

allows employees to be creative and define new roles for themselves. He noticed this when hiring a production manager who specialized in masonry. "Now, we handle that work in-house," he explained. "I never intended for that to happen, but I was open to it, and hiring this person changed how we did things a little bit. I'm still able to implement my vision, but I was able to incorporate his talent."

Often, employees do not realize the untapped potential their positions offer, Ziebol noted. They might aspire to be supervisors by stretching their foreman responsibilities instead of "being fed what to do," for example.

"Think in the realm of your position," he advised. "People need somewhere to grow, and the positions are getting broader. That translates to my company, where the chain of command is flat, but you have to keep people interested."

FEEDBACK FORUM. Communication maintains enthusiasm. Employees want to feel wanted – they want a plan that includes them, and they want assurance that they are not just laborers, but team members.

Observation shows staff opportunity, Lay said. "By having other people in the company advance, that is the best signal to new people that they can do well," he said.

To truly involve employees in growth, Lay delegates tasks to employees, testing their ability to handle new responsibility, he said. Allowing them to make decisions in the field and teaching them new techniques supplies them with the knowledge to move forward. For example, he might give an employee the authority to immediately respond to client requests. "If a customer needs something extra done, I'll tell them to go ahead and do it," he said.

Ziebol ensures that employees understand their place in the company by carefully identifying and reviewing job expectations before a staff member even accepts a position, he said. With detailed job descriptions and a chart that paints a picture of the job tree at LandCrafters, he can show potential staff members opportunities.

"They can see where they fit in today and where they fit in in the future," he noted. "I share the organizational chart that changes over the course of five years for the employees' perspective, so they can see what I'm thinking."

This communication is essential, Ziebol added, and revisiting this chart on a regular basis reassures employees that their positions are not stagnant. Meetings with employees allow them to voice concerns and inspirations for growth within the company. "It's a two-way street," he explained. "I think in the performance review, you need to talk about the future, so they understand that you are not expecting them to just stay where they are."

From there, Ziebol and the employee create a plan that satisfies his goals for the company and the staff member's desire to grow.

And when employees do step ahead, rewarding them for their efforts will give them needed support as they explore new duties, Lay added. Monday morning donuts allow him time to talk to employees in a relaxed environment, and constant affirmation keeps them motivated, he said. "Money is not a satisfier, recognition is a satisfier," he pointed out. "The most important thing is a happy work force, and if you have a good, responsible group of people who want to work together for a common goal and look forward to coming to work, you'll be in good shape." ■

– Kristen Hampshire

The author is Associate Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.

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Nursery Market Report

FALL FLOWERS

Mum's the Word

It's hard to think of autumn without chrysanthemums. Garden mums provide a splash of color in the landscape as the weather cools and some annuals begin to wither.

A full artist's palette of fall colors is available to decorate the landscape. Colors range from gold to yellow, orange, bronze, deep red and maroon.

Mums can be used in mass plantings for instant impact or as individual units to provide spots of color in select locations. In either application, these cold-hardy plants are a favorite of many in the fall flowering garden.

LANDSCAPE SITE. Mums grow best when planted in full sun. Planting close to trees or shrubs should be avoided, as the fine, shallow roots do not compete well with larger plants.

The planting site should provide protection from hot, dry summer winds. Also, the location should have good surface drainage because mums are subject to soilborne diseases when planted in areas that are constantly wet.

SOIL PREPARATION. Mums grow in any soil type with good structure. However, mixing organic matter into the soil before planting is essential to maintaining soil structure for proper root aeration and drainage. About 4 inches of organic matter spread over the planting area's surface and mixed to a depth of 12 to 15 inches is sufficient. A mix of 50 percent dried blood meal and 50 percent bone meal also should be incorporated in with the organic matter at one cup per plant.

QUICK FACT

What's in a Name?

The word "chrysanthemum" is derived from the Greek words *chryso* - gold - and *anthos* - flower.

PLANTING. The best time to plant mums is from spring through mid-July. If planting must be delayed, place the mums in a shady area and do not allow them to wilt.

Space mums 18 to 24 inches apart and plant at the same depth as they were grown in the pot. If grown in a plastic pot, remove it by



One reason why mums are popular landscape plants is because of the wide variety of colors available. Colors from red to gold suit fall landscapes, while shades of pink and purple are perfect for spring.
Photo: Yoder

cutting the sides of the pot or place a hand around the stem on top of the soil and tap the edge of the pot on a hard surface. If the plant has become pot-bound, the root ball should be scored so the roots will spread out into the soil.

If the plant is grown in a paper fiber pot, any portion of the pot lip that extends above the soil surface should be cut off. The remaining pot and plant are then planted.

Keep the soil moist but not constantly wet for a couple weeks while the plant becomes established. Mulch the mums with bark mulch about 2 inches deep. Do not mulch with grass clippings and do not fertilize until spring. The blood or bone meal mixture added to the soil will feed the plants until then.

SEASONAL CARE. In winter, after the ground has become frozen, cut the plant back to 2 to 3 inches high and apply a layer of mulch over the top. Mums should not completely dry out during the winter. Occasional watering may be needed if sufficient rain or snow has not fallen.

In spring, when shoots begin to emerge, sprinkle a dry fertilizer of a 1-1-1 ratio over the soil surface at a rate of 1½ pounds per 100 square feet. Fertilize mums again in mid- to late July with a 1-2-1 fertilizer at 1 pound per 100 square feet.

Pinching off the end (1 inch) of each stem when it is 6 inches tall and each time new branches grow out 6 inches produces bushy plants. Repeat this procedure until July 10, then let the branches grow out and bloom. If plants become overcrowded, they should be dug and divided in early spring at the first sign of growth. — Alan Stevens and Nancy Anderson

Stevens is an extension specialist, floriculture and ornamental horticulture, and Anderson is an extension assistant, Kansas State University, Manhattan, Kan.

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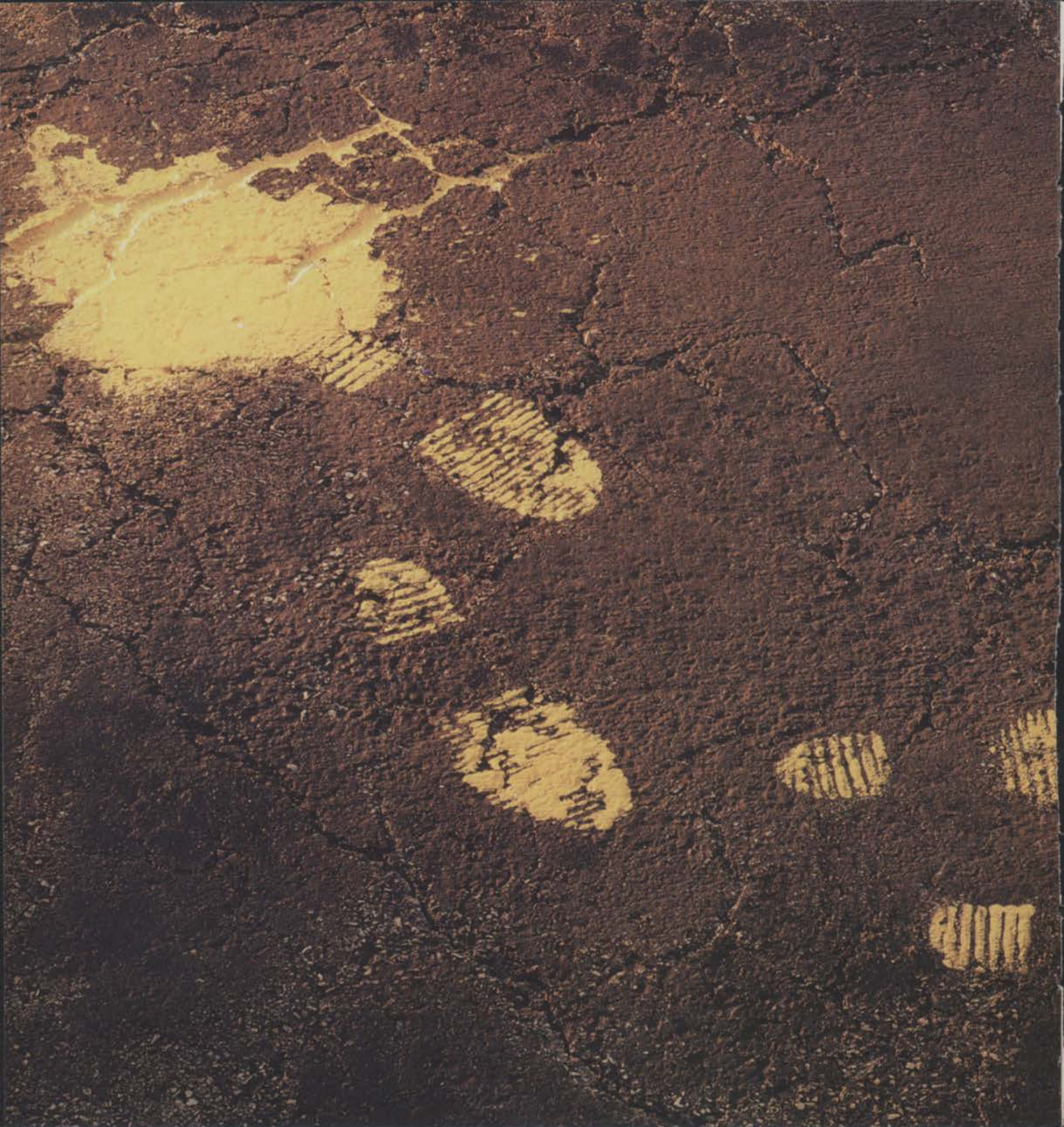
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SOIL-INHABITING PESTS

Burrowing Killer Wasps

This large wasp is found in all the states east of the Rocky Mountains but is most common in states where annual cicadas are prevalent. Neither the adult nor the other life states alone damage turf. However, because of the adult habit of creating mounds of soil, it is sometimes considered a pest of golf courses and other areas.



Cicada killer female wasps inflict a paralyzing sting, grasp their prey with their legs and return to the burrow.
Photos:
Destructive
Turf Insects

A Cicada killer male surveys the territory (right). 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.



Though not as aggressive as other wasps in defending their nesting sites, their size and the buzzing sound they make frightens people, especially golfers who find themselves in the area of their burrows. Females can inflict a painful sting, but do so only when handled or severely provoked.

The large adult wasps have rusty red heads and thoracic areas. The wings are tinted with orange and the abdomen is banded with black and yellow. The adults may be $1\frac{3}{16}$ to $1\frac{3}{4}$ inch long (30 to 45 millimeters) and have a wingspan of $2\frac{3}{8}$ to 4 inches (60 to 100 millimeters).

DIAGNOSIS. Wasps dig burrows and create mounds of soil around the entrance, which is approximately $\frac{1}{2}$ inch (12 millimeters) in diameter. Males are very protective of territory and often buzz or dive on people who enter the burrow territory being protected.

LIFE CYCLE & HABITS. This insect overwinters as a prepupa in a cocoon located 7 to 20 or more inches under the surface. When spring temperatures warm the soil, the pupal stage is formed and the adults burrow to the surface in June and July. Males tend to emerge first and establish flight territories, usually where females are to emerge and dig burrows. Males fight off other intruding males and buzz at any moving object, including people, in the area. Fortunately, males have no sting, but unsuspecting people are often shocked by the loud buzzing and their attach flight activities. Males may actually strike peoples' heads and backs.

The females are quite docile and after mating are occupied with constructing a burrow. Burrows are dug straight into the soil, are angled slightly and may extend three or more feet into the soil. At the end of each tunnel, secondary tunnels are dug that end in a chamber. The females search tree trunks and limbs for annual cicadas only. When located, the female inflicts a paralyzing sting, grasps the prey with her legs and flies back to the burrow (considering the weight of the cicada, this is an amazing feat). Each chamber is provided with one to three cicadas. An egg is laid on the cicada, it is placed in the chamber and the chamber is sealed. Additional chambers are constructed until cicadas are no longer available.

The wasp egg hatches in two to three days and the voracious larva quickly devours the inside of the paralyzed cicada. Only the cicada exoskeleton remains. The larvae mature by fall, spin a cocoon, shrink and prepare to overwinter. A single generation occurs each year. **LL**

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TURF IRRIGATION:

Will the Good Times Keep Rolling?

As 2001 ends and contractors look toward 2002, many wonder what's in store for them.

THE LAST FEW YEARS have generally been good years for the irrigation industry. Drought-type conditions hit different areas of the country, new home sales climbed to record levels, new golf courses seemingly opened every week and commercial construction took place across the country. New irrigation systems were going into the ground all the time.

As 2001 dawned, however, contractors found themselves on the brink of a new year with new levels of uncertainty. The rocketing stock market was returning to earth in a hurry, interest rates were climbing and, perhaps most importantly, the word "recession" found its way into a great many conversations. After nearly a decade of unprecedented sustained growth, economists and business people alike wondered if the United States' economy was due to slow down.



While there are essentially three primary irrigation services a company can offer – design, installation and maintenance – varying amounts of these different functions comprise different contractors' total revenue. Irrigation design is undoubtedly the key variable. Only 35.1 percent of the respondents to a survey conducted by *Lawn & Landscape* and *Irrigation Business & Technology* magazines perform irrigation design, while 97.9 percent and 100 percent perform installation and maintenance work, respectively.

In fact, design work seems to have remained the domain of landscape architects, irrigation consultants and the like since design revenue only accounts for 9.1 percent of the total irrigation revenue among those companies that do this work. By comparison, irrigation maintenance delivers 38.3 percent of the revenue and installation work generates 47.4 percent.

The Revenue MIX

PERCENT OF REVENUE FROM IRRIGATION WORK

	DESIGN	MAINTENANCE	INSTALLATION
0%	67.7%	0	2.1%
1-10%	25.8%	11.8%	4.3%
11-20%	5.4%	18.3%	4.3%
21-30%	1.1%	18.3%	5.4%
31-40%	0	14.0%	7.5%
41-50%	0	11.8%	16.1%
51-60%	0	7.5%	15.1%
61-70%	0	3.2%	10.8%
71-80%	0	5.4%	20.4%
81-90%	0	3.2%	9.7%
91-100%	0	6.5%	4.3%



Sales and installation of irrigation systems have been strong the last few years, but an economic slowdown has some contractors feeling a sense of uncertainty going into 2002.

"Last year everybody was really optimistic going into 2001. Now they're much more cautious," said Steve Battiston, co-owner, Hydro-Tech Irrigation, Herndon, Va. Of chief concern to Battiston is the effect a sluggish economy will have on commercial real estate development. "Our concern is that commercial building, which is still relatively strong now, will fall off and match the stock market."

To measure irrigation contractors' thoughts about the 2001 year, *Lawn & Landscape and Irrigation Business & Technology* magazines surveyed 1,000 randomly selected irrigation professionals from across the country. After receiving a 16.3 percent response rate, the data was tallied, and much of it is provided here. Essentially, the numbers verify what many industry observers already guessed – the irrigation industry's growth slowed noticeably this

year. But this information also shines some light on the issues that concern contractors about the future and the composition of their businesses today.

PAINTING BY NUMBERS. By and large, irrigation contractors are not large businesses.

- The vast majority of them had annual sales of less than \$500,000 in year 2000.
- The average irrigation company has 6.8 year-round employees. However, almost two-thirds of the responding companies have five or fewer year-round employees.
- Almost 72 percent of irrigation companies operate one or two irrigation crews, which isn't surprising given the number of employees they have.
- Nearly 90 percent of responding companies have at least one seasonal employee, with 60 percent employing five or fewer such workers.

Where the DOLLAR GOES

Industry estimates put the value of irrigation components around 20 percent of the total cost of materials installed on a new landscape. But that 20 percent can represent a great deal of spending on a wide range of products for irrigation contractors. What are they buying?

According to a survey by *Lawn & Landscape and Irrigation Business & Technology* magazines, irrigation contractors spent more money on rotors in 2001 than they did for any other irrigation system components. Of course, rotors are an area manufacturers have focused a great deal of design and development on in recent years to deliver water to larger areas of turf more efficiently and reduce contractors' installation labor needs by allowing them to put fewer sprinklers on a property. Pipe was the second most significant product expenditure, followed by sprayheads, valves and controllers, which were all at comparable levels. Significantly fewer dollars were spent on drip irrigation components, valve boxes and weather stations. Valve boxes simply aren't as expensive or used in the same quantity on a job as these other components, and drip irrigation and weather station manufacturers continue educating contractors about the need for these products. In fact, slightly less than 30 percent of survey respondents said they purchased weather stations this year, while 68.5 percent of respondents purchased drip irrigation components. All other system parts were purchased by nearly all of the contractors.

AVERAGE EXPENDITURES BY PRODUCT CATEGORY

Rotors	\$18,847
Pipe	\$14,255
Sprayheads	\$9,385
Valves	\$8,925
Controllers	\$8,477
Drip irrigation	\$2,744
Valve boxes	\$2,616
Weather stations	\$1,997

The State of **TURF IRRIGATION**

- New companies enter the irrigation industry all the time, but the profession is primarily populated by veteran firms. More than 62 percent of survey respondents have been in business for more than 10 years.

- Irrigation maintenance and installation represent the core service for contractors as all survey respondents noted they do maintenance work and 97.9 percent install systems. Irrigation designs for the systems these contractors put in the ground generally come from elsewhere, however, as only 35 percent of respondents do design work.

- Installation work provides for nearly half of contractors' irrigation revenue.

- The year 2000 was a good year for irrigation contractors, and while 2001 provided growth opportunities for most contractors, the industry as a whole saw tougher times this year. Scott Fay, president, Treasure Coast Irrigation, Hobe Sound, Fla.,

summed up what a lot of contractors experienced. "This has been an up and down year with each quarter drastically different than the one before it. You could plot our

tributors, although an equal amount said they bought supplies from one or two distributors as said they bought irrigation equipment from three or four distributors.

AFTER NEARLY a decade of unprecedented sustained growth, economists and business people alike wondered if the United States' economy was due to slow down.

numbers and it would look like a heart monitor printout. Overall, we were flat against last year or we'll end up doing a little better once we end."

- The vast majority of the industry buys products from four or fewer irrigation dis-

- Residential and commercial properties each accounted for about half of the industry's revenue in 2001, but more contractors compete for residential customers since commercial jobs have greater insurance/bonding requirements, call for more equipment and labor and demand a higher level of professionalism. In fact, almost 61 percent of the respondents generated 75 percent or more of their revenue from residential customers, while only 7.5 percent of contractors generated a similar amount from commercial properties. However, the increased dollar volume per job in the commercial market ultimately balances the financial value of these two segments out.

A Year of **UPS & DOWNS**

Rarely does a year come along where all irrigation professionals enjoy similar levels of good or bad fortune because of the industry's dependence on new construction and the weather, both of which can vary dramatically on a regional basis.

This year brought its own challenges, chief among them the slowing economy and flat, if not slightly depressed, amount of construction from previous years. Irrigation contractors certainly felt the impact of these obstacles, although most respondents to a survey conducted by *Lawn & Landscape* and *Irrigation Business & Technology* magazines reported that this year was better than last year.

To be specific, 62.3 percent of respondents said their irrigation sales grew this year. However, nearly 74 percent of these same contractors grew from 1999 to 2000. Meanwhile, 16.4 percent reported sales were flat this year and 21.3 percent said their sales dropped from last year. Among contractors whose revenue did grow, the amount of growth dipped slightly, to an average of 19.5 percent. Contractors whose businesses grew in 2000 reported average growth of 20.7 percent. Lastly, the pain was also greater this year for companies whose sales fell, as they did so by an average of 18.1 percent, which is nearly 3 percent more than the average loss felt by companies in 2000.

DID YOUR IRRIGATION SALES INCREASE OR DECREASE?

	INCREASE	DECREASE	NO CHANGE
2000	73.6%	11.5%	14.9%
2001	62.3%	21.3%	16.4%

Wet weather in some portions of the country made irrigation a tough sale this year. Further, poor timing on Mother Nature's part delayed some installation work and put contractors into catch-up mode.



Why BUY?

- Irrigation contractors demand a lot from their products, and performance and durability are the two most popular product selection criteria. Price always matters, but only 62.1 percent of respondents consider it one of the three most important factors to consider.

- Contractors market themselves in a number of fashions, but referrals are the most popular method (90.3 percent), with many contractors reporting that they provide customer incentives, favors or discounts in return for referrals. Yellow Page advertising is nearly as popular (84.7 percent), followed by working as a subcontractor (70.8 percent).

CHALLENGES TO GROWTH. Contractors reported they faced a number of obstacles in 2001, not the least of which was a sluggish economy. But while the economy challenged many contractors in 2001, survey respondents identified it as the third biggest challenge they encountered during the year behind finding quality help and competition. In fact, the labor issue was called the first or second biggest challenge contractors dealt with this year by more than 51 percent of the respondents.

One silver lining to the economic slowdown is a steady rise in unemployment, meaning a larger labor pool from which contractors can select new staff. "We've had a whole lot more to choose from in terms of people. It's amazing what a difference of one point in unemployment makes," Fay said.

Competition was listed by 27.8 percent of respondents, and 25.6 percent of respondents felt that the climate and the economy were a primary hurdle they had to overcome.

Indeed, many contractors reported that the weather of 2001 was less than ideal for selling irrigation systems. David Williams, co-owner, Rainy Days Irrigation Inc., Garner, N.C., said his company's sales for the first six months were off by 10 percent due, in large part, to rainy

weather. "We were wetter than we normally have been early in the year and the rains have come at a point that made irrigation not an absolute necessity."

LOOKING FORWARD. While understanding the past and present obviously offers insight into the industry, the key question people want to know is, "What does the future hold for irrigation contractors?"

Some contractors seem rather optimistic about the next few years. "We've had a great year and it's still going. We expect to continue pretty well. Things are looking pretty bright," said Jeff Pressley, co-owner, Superior Irrigation, Fort Smith, Ark.

However, uncertainty surrounding the economy and the potential for war (as of presstime) is unsettling for most. No one knows what the future holds, of course.

The housing market remained steady through the summer until dropping 6.9 percent in August. Meanwhile, economic uncertainty acted as a drag on commercial construction, and many industry observers believe the country has more golf courses than are necessary, which could hurt that market segment.

At the same time, the strong market for irrigation services over the past few years hasn't gone unnoticed by those outside the industry, which has meant more competition as landscape contractors, in particular, add irrigation installation and maintenance to their service mix.

All these factors mean irrigation contractors will probably have to work harder than in years past to sell new installations and grow their businesses. Only time will tell exactly how hard the work will be. **L**

WHAT FACTORS INFLUENCE YOUR PRODUCT PURCHASES?

CRITERIA	IMPORTANT TO:	IMPORTANCE:
Product performance	91.5%	1.5
Product durability	82.9%	1.9
Price	62.1%	1.7
Brand name	35.4%	1.8
Warranty	35.4%	2.5
Product versatility	20.7%	2.7
Distributor recommendation	7.3%	2.0



by Bob West

CUSTOMER FOCUS:

What Do Consumers Say?



A survey of 1,000 irrigation customers reveals how they perceive irrigation, how they find a contractor and what they want from a service provider.

WHY Are You Here?

Water conservation offers a great reason for installing an irrigation system, according to many irrigation professionals. Unfortunately, few consumers share that thinking. In fact, only 19 percent of respondents to a *Lawn & Landscape* and *Irrigation Business & Technology* survey of homeowners with irrigation systems said reducing water use was a reason for getting an irrigation system. Instead, consumers clearly want to minimize the time they spend taking care of their yard without sacrificing the look of their landscape. More than 71 percent of respondents said they had an irrigation system installed to "reduce their own work," while nearly 63 percent did so for the sake of their landscape.

REASONS TO BUY AN IRRIGATION SYSTEM

Reduce own work	71.1%
Maintain quality in landscape	62.8%
Water conservation	19%

WHO ELSE Was Here?

An obvious question for irrigation contractors to ask potential customers is, "How many other contractors are you soliciting prices from?" If that number is more than a few, the odds are good that consumer simply wants to find the best price, which makes them an undesirable account. A survey by *Lawn & Landscape* and *Irrigation Business & Technology* magazines, however, found that irrigation customers rarely solicit more than a couple bids for their irrigation systems, which is at least in part due to the fact that 66 percent of the respondents selected their contractor based on a referral. Meanwhile, about 14 percent of respondents selected a contractor after seeing them on a property, 14 percent selected their contractor from the Yellow Pages and 6 percent used an advertisement or direct mail to help them find a service provider.

HOW MANY CONTRACTORS DID YOU CONTACT?

0	11.3%
1	27.8%
2	23.5%
3	22.6%
4	11.3%
5 or more	3.6%

SO MUCH OF WHAT landscape and irrigation contractors talk about centers on the challenges of their own businesses – finding labor, financing growth, delegating responsibility, and so on. But the truth is that everything contractors do, if they want to succeed, needs to be centered on their clients and potential clients. After all, irrigation system installation and maintenance is a service industry.

Of course, what customers want is rather obvious and simple: The best work at the lowest price as soon as possible, right? Truth be told, much more goes into a consumer's perception of the irrigation industry, and nothing influences their thoughts more than their interaction with irrigation contractors.

To study this further, *Lawn & Landscape* and *Irrigation Business & Technology* magazines surveyed 1,000 homeowners who recently had irrigation systems installed to learn more about how they perceive irrigation contractors and, more importantly, what factors drive their decision of what contractor to hire.

SURVEY SAYS: More than 310 individuals responded to this survey, for a response rate of 31 percent. The vast majority of survey respondents (more than 95 percent) had an irrigation

Let Me TELL YOU...

Green industry professionals regularly lament the lack of respect they receive from the general public. Sales presentations, then, represent an opportunity to impress a potential customer and educate him or her about the level of expertise involved in irrigation system installation and maintenance. In addition, this client interaction affords contractors a chance to differentiate themselves from the competition that may also be bidding on the job. The *Lawn & Landscape* and *Irrigation Business & Technology* survey of 1,000 irrigation system owners found that various contractors incorporate a range of material and topics in their presentations.

DID THE IRRIGATION CONTRACTORS WHO PRESENTED BIDS FOR YOU COME INTO YOUR HOME AND:

	YES	NO
Explain their services	81.3%	18.7%
Explain what a rain sensor is	68.6%	31.4%
Explain the benefits of a professional irrigation system	68.6%	31.4%
Demonstrate the products they use	61.2%	38.8%
Offer references	56.3%	43.7%
Check your water meter	52.5%	47.5%

system installed at their home, and this was the first system for slightly more than three-quarters of these individuals.

While record levels of new home sales and booming commercial construction across the country has contributed to the irrigation industry's growth, contractors also appear to be benefiting from consumers' dwindling amount of free time. The most popular reason for having an irrigation system installed was that respondents wanted to reduce their own work (see sidebar "Why Are You Here," page I6).

Consumers find irrigation contractors through a number of ways, but referrals remain the most popular research avenue (66 percent). While consumers also hired irrigation contractors they uncovered in Yellow Pages, saw on another property or learned about through an advertisement or direct mail promotion, not one of the survey respondents found a contractor by using the Internet. Once the consumers began their contractor selection process, however, roughly 5 percent of them used the Internet to learn more about the contractor(s) they were considering.

Since so many respondents relied upon

referrals or seeing a contractor on a property as a way of finding potential service providers, it's not surprising that relatively few respondents invited a number of contractors to bid on their job. In fact, more than half of the respondents (51.3 percent) only talked to one or two contractors before hiring someone to install their irrigation system.

Obviously, contractors are responsible for their own sales and marketing success. Once the potential customer calls and in-

vites a contractor to bid on a job, the contractor has the opportunity to secure the job. In order to do that, the contractor clearly has to bid what the customer considers a fair price and be able to do the work in an acceptable timeframe. Survey respondents indicated these two factors matter more than the product the contractor wants to use, the warranty, professionalism or even the reference that may have brought the two parties together in the first place.

Most successful contractors clearly take the sales presentation seriously and use it as an opportunity to earn business. At the same time, a surprising number of contractors apparently don't use meetings with potential clients to their fullest. Nearly 40 percent of respondents indicated that contractors who presented bids to them didn't demonstrate the products they use, nearly half of the contractors didn't check the home's water meter, and almost 20 percent of the contractors didn't even explain their services to the consumer.

When all is said and done, though, results matter the most to consumers, and nearly all of them seem pleased with the contractors they hired. Nearly 90 percent said they would refer the contractor they hired to other consumers. But despite this level of satisfaction, only one-third of respondents indicated they hired the contractor who installed the system to maintain it as well. **LL**

What MATTERS MOST?

Ask any proven sales professional about the key to closing a deal, and they will invariably tell you that while having a quality product and the right price are important, sales success results from meeting the customer's need. The challenge for irrigation contractors is identifying the particular need for each client they meet with and tailoring their sales presentation appropriately. *Lawn & Landscape* and *Irrigation Business & Technology* magazines surveyed 1,000 individuals who recently had an irrigation system installed professionally, and we asked them to identify the two most important factors in their contractor selection process.

IMPORTANT FACTORS IN SELECTING AN IRRIGATION PRO

Price offered	49.2%
Available to work soon	31.3%
References	23.4%
Contractor's professionalism	20.3%
Products to be used	12.5%
Warranty	5.5%

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In Minor's League

Editor's NOTE



In addition to serving the industry as a consultant and speaker, David Minor is the William M. Dickey Entrepreneur in Residence and director of the James A. Ryffel Center for Entrepreneurial Studies at Texas Christian University in Fort Worth, Texas. Prior to joining TCU, David was the president of Minor's Landscape Services, a 300-em-

ployee, 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.

I work for an established landscape company but am interested in starting my own business. Where do I start?

Your first step is to determine if you have what it takes to be an entrepreneur. First and foremost, you must have a burning desire to go out on your own.

Second, be willing to take initiative. In the entrepreneurial world nothing happens unless you make it happen.

Third, you must be able to deal with unpredictable situations. One of the most important characteristics of an entrepreneur is the willingness to adapt to change.

Next, you should be a good problem solver. Business is an ongoing puzzle—a long series of problems that must be solved. If you don't like solving problems, particularly ones that you know little about, an entrepreneurial career may not be for you.

Lastly, are you perseverant in nature? Entrepreneurs don't quit easily, even when it would be the wisest thing to do. You've got to be determined to succeed and do whatever it takes to develop a winning attitude and never, ever quit.

The next obvious question during this evaluation stage is to determine if you have an idea. Is there a need for the product or service you are going to offer? Is there strong competition already in the market? If so, do you intend to deliver better quality, service and/or pricing? Before you venture out, think about how you are going to deliver and sell your services.

If you have an idea, the next step is to determine whether or not you can get the money to start your business. Most businesses are funded with personal savings, credit cards and loans from family or friends. There is an outside possibility that traditional bank financing is available, but this is not likely unless you have assets to back up the loan or a strong co-signer. If you do, I would strongly suggest that you pursue Small Business Association financing, as banks are more likely to grant this type of loan to startup businesses. You also should consider a home equity loan, if possible. Venture financing (venture capital), which we have heard so much about in the past few years, is in limited supply. Realistically, you cannot bank on that as a funding source.

Once you've determined you have the entrepreneurial characteristics, you have an idea, and you think you can secure funding, I would strongly advise you to write a business plan. Very few businesses go through this step, but it is an extremely valuable exercise. It forces you to think extensively about your future venture and the feasibility of your company. You also will determine the market potential of your offering and the profile of your ideal customer.

A traditional plan incorporates financials that show realistic sales estimates, profit and loss statements and a cash flow analysis for the next 12 to 36 months. The written document will quantify the startup capital you need, and the projections and cash flow analysis will help you project working capital needs for the first few years, which are essential for a new, growing business.

An effective business plan will also include a competitive analysis. You will be forced to look at the competitors in your market and assess how they deliver services and what prices they charge. Understand, however, you will need to update the plan on a regular basis.

Finally, determine the right time to launch your business. Fortunately, you've been in a position in the past few years to learn on other peoples' money. This is a common way that prospective entrepreneurs learn a field they want to enter. Be fair to your employer while working there and when you leave, resist the temptation to take employees and customers.

Preparation, experience and planning are all important when determining whether or not to go out on your own. But at the end of the day, it comes down to gut instinct. Do you have what it takes and are you willing to go for it? Are you willing to commit a lot of time, energy and resources?

No one can decide for you if starting a business is the right thing to do. But many find creating employment and opportunities for others, an environment that others like to work in and, finally, wealth for you and your associates is worth all of the challenges and struggles. ■



Take on a Trade Show

When John Allin sends staff to the Green Industry Expo, he knows that, like everything, “you get out of it what you put into it.” Whether gathering new product information, meeting with vendors or developing relationships with other contractors, an individual’s approach to a trade show determines its take-away value.

“I sent two people one year when I didn’t go and one came back and started wearing a jacket and a tie to work. The other guy came back and I said, ‘How did it go?’ and he just said, ‘Okay,’” noted Allin, president, Allin Co., Erie, Pa. “The guy with the jacket and tie went to the educational sessions and networking breakfasts and the other guy didn’t go out and meet people.”

Some companies hesitate to send employees to conferences. “It’s a huge expense to a smaller company, and it’s probably not the dollars and cents, it’s not being at the business for a few days,” Allin recognized. “But that is shortsighted, because what usually happens is the people you leave at home step up to the plate.”

In addition, trade shows offer teambuilding opportunities, added Michael LaPorte, president, Commercial Scapes, Bristow, Va. “You get to go out with your people and discuss industry issues, and people are usually excited to do that because it is out of the norm,” he said.

GETTING THERE. Before setting off to trade shows, Gary Ground, president, Forsyth Lawn Co., Forsyth, Ill., does his homework. He reads industry publications, flips through show guides and notes what products he wants to see. “That way, once I get there I won’t be overwhelmed,” he said.

Ground goes to shows armed with business cards and a list of vendors he wants to visit, categorized according to equipment: mowers, two-cycle equipment, etc.

Allin brings a camera to take pictures of new products, which is helpful if he makes purchases during the show because he can show his employees what he bought. He also suggested toting an extra bag, or not packing a full suitcase, to leave room for literature from the show.

Besides these basics, Allin prepares plenty of questions about products. At the same time, meeting other contractors opens up idea-swapping conversations. “Don’t be a wallflower,” he emphasized. “Stick your hand out. You have to be willing to take a chance. Some of these guys think this is worse than asking a lady out for a date – they get there and won’t talk to anyone.”


LaPorte adopts a divide-and-conquer plan to cover the trade show, assigning different employees to explore various aspects of the show, depending on their role in the company. For example, the landscape department meets with vendors and looks for new equipment pertaining to their department. The fleet manager focuses on trailers, trucks, accessories and pertinent new technology. The production department concentrates on visiting with pesticide suppliers. Designers talk to plant suppliers and other enhancement providers, he said.

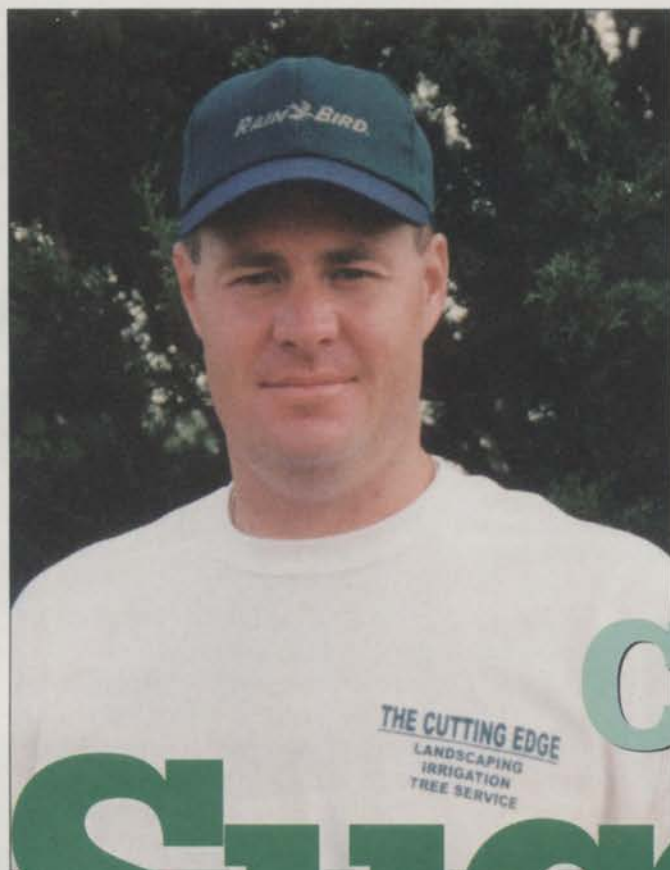
“When each department head knows specifically what they are looking for, everyone can get what they need out of the show,” he said, noting that he plans these assignments at a meeting before leaving for the show.

Many companies send only one representative to a show, or attend every other year, Ground pointed out. He and three companies in his area take turns going to shows and then meet to share what they learned.

Post-show coverage is just as important as advance planning. Every year after the OPEI Show, Ground reviews the show guide, circling booths he wants to see next year and crossing out those that didn’t apply to his company. Each year, the show is less overwhelming.

LaPorte and Allin conduct meetings the Monday after the show to gather feedback from employees who attended the event. They throw around ideas from other contractors that they could implement in their companies, share what they learned, and sometimes, what they purchased. To remember those who provided interesting business ideas, Allin writes notes on the backs of business cards he collects from other companies, such as “big operation – want to go see them,” so he can remember significant conversations, he noted.

Besides this, he follows up by booking rooms for the next year, he remarked. – *Kristen Hampshire* 



by Kristen Hampshire

Shawn Williamson invested his life savings and horticultural passion into The Cutting Edge – a business paced for fast-lane growth and ready to break the \$1 million mark this year.

CUT OUT FOR Success

(Above) Shawn Williamson doesn't assume debt to drive growth. He pays cash for equipment and saves for future investments rather than reaching for a credit line.

Photo: The Cutting Edge

Shawn Williamson always returns phone calls. He calls his customers "ma'am" and "sir" and never forgets to thank his regulars for their business. "Things like that go a long way," he said, and in a town like Granbury, Texas, these niceties are expected. "It's a small town with small town values, and the community is close knit," he described of the Fort Worth suburb. "But it's booming."

The Cutting Edge, Williamson's 4-year-old business, is riding this open market; it multiplied the 50 invoices it sent to clients each month its first year to the 300 bills that reach clients' doors today. Williamson's first full year brought in \$200,000 in sales, which climbed to \$328,133 in 1999. Last year, his company tripled this with \$931,535, and he expects a 50-percent increase in 2001.

But Williamson is far from ruthless in his growth strategy – in fact, he's a bit conservative. The "right way" for Williamson means thinking before expanding, and planning before spending. And, of course, returning those calls.

"You need to take care of what you say you're going to do and pre-think your future plans and intentions – don't go into anything blindly," he advised. The 28-year-old owner did quite a bit of planning before cracking his piggy bank in 1998 to invest his savings in the industry he grew up in. "I saved everything I worked for, and when I decided to take the plunge and start a business I had the backing, so if things didn't go well I would be in good shape for a couple of years. Luckily, that turned around quick."

MONEY AND MANPOWER. Williamson doesn't let his "Proceed with Caution" mentality interfere with his fast-lane success. A supple market, cross-trained employees, compact routes and efficient systems fuel his pace.

The Cutting Edge

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Besides this, he understands the value of saving, and attributes his steady growth to his debt-free status. "I feel fortunate that I didn't have help from anyone – that's my biggest pride in my business," he revealed. "Everything I did, I paid cash for. If I can't pay for something right then, I don't get it."

Williamson's only equipment payments are his leased trucks, which cut down his \$2,000 weekly repair bills. When he wants to buy a new mower, he waits – and saves.

Careful financial decisions are coupled with cautious hiring practices. "One of the main things is having good employees – that is the key," he remarked. "And I'll help if I call at 7:30 p.m. and they're still on the job. When they see that, they want to give more, too."

And sometimes, days end later – especially since the company added accounts so quickly – but a strong work ethic differentiates his company from others, he said, and he supplies employees with the tools to maximize their skills. Crews are prepared with detailed check sheets, and drive time is minimal with organized routing.

"Maintenance crews get sheets where they check off everything they should have on the truck – even the smallest things," Williamson explained. "Business cards, plugs for a piece of equipment, extra tools – the list is very detailed and it is cut and dry."

These checkpoints identify the shop's inventory and contribute to the communication that keeps operations running smoothly, Williamson noted. Besides touching base with crews at least every three hours, he generally is only three miles away since the

The Cutting Edge crew proves working together works. The cross-trained employees shift crews to keep the weekly schedule rolling.

Photo: The Cutting Edge



us, because I have crews to handle the Granbury and metropolitan area, so we might try a couple larger projects in a situation where we won't jeopardize anything in our area, and go from there," he speculated. However, this, too, will be a decision he makes scrupulously.

LEARNING TO GROW. Expansion doesn't necessarily mean going the distance, or even adding accounts. "I don't want more accounts, I just want to do what I do much better, and let the foremen start bidding on jobs themselves to free me up to take on other things," Williamson said.

Training will position valuable employees into decision-making positions, Williamson figured, and teaching is one skill he constantly practices. After all, his most successful employees entered the industry from another field. "You can always teach a new guy the right way, and they give me input," he said. "I always want feedback."

Training at The Cutting Edge starts with ride-alongs and continues with weekly meetings and on-the-job pointers. "I tell them about plant characteristics, and with each job I add to their vocabulary," Williamson said.

Continuing education is crucial to the company's future, he added, noting that stagnant practices breed complacency. "You have to learn new things, otherwise you'll get in a rut," he said. And Williamson not only educates his employees, but he also passes on useful tidbits to clients.

"This industry is very much a science," he said, adding that his horticultural background sets him apart from competitors.

Meanwhile, Williamson wants to gain a more panoramic view of the company, as he pulls away from daily operations and concentrates on fine-tuning internal issues, such as cutting costs. "The timing out of the day – knowing where everything is going every hour

– that is where you make money or lose money," he reasoned. "It doesn't benefit the company if I am out there doing what someone else could be doing, even though I love being out there – that's what's fun about the job."

Establishing supplier relationships to negotiate product discounts and brushing up on tax specifics, which were a surprising punch, will also improve the company's health. Hiring more employees to oversee projects will ensure quality as the company grows. "I'd like to have two or three of me out there watching over things," he said.

TESTING THE WATERS. Besides greasing the operational wheels, Williamson plans to explore some new ventures. He emphasizes native plants in his designs, and he'd like to sell them to other contractors. The 20-acre facility that houses his shop and serves as a materials holding yard has the capacity for an operation like this, he figured.

He brainstorms outdoor services to market, from gutter cleaning to dock maintenance, while continuing to tweak his existing services. Developments like these will boost his business to the next level, he predicted. "If I made less than what I do now and made more profit, that's where I want to be."

Still, he is careful, setting aside a designated pool for equipment to avoid incurring debt when acquiring new capital. His employees drive new trucks, but he won't remove dollars from this fund for his own set of wheels. "Mine's a 1995, but I keep it clean and I just like it," he explained. "And it's paid for, and that helps."

Here, he differentiates his "a penny saved is a penny earned" attitude from other risk-taking owners. "I do things different than other people," he admitted. "It might not be the right way, but it seems to be working for me." ■

The author is Associate Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.

"This industry is very much a science." – Shawn Williamson

community is contained. This allows for efficient routing – more accounts in less time, more growth with less distance.

Williamson's "bread and butter" residential customers comprise 80 percent of his clientele, the rest stemming from commercial and a few municipal accounts. Half of his service mix is dedicated to lawn care, and 40 percent is split between tree services and irrigation maintenance and installation. Maintenance and pest control comprise the remaining 10 percent of the company's offerings.

"This winter might be a stepping stone for

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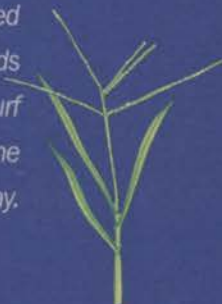


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USE READER SERVICE #125

Shady Areas

by Cheryl Green

Knowing your ABCs when developing a shady area will help plants live longer, ease maintenance concerns and keep clients happy.

Some contractors have it made in the shade. That is, rather than seeing shade as an obstacle too challenging to overcome, some know a few tricks that can take a shady part of a client's lawn and make it look just as alive as the rest of the property.

"Shade, in and of itself, is not a problem," declared Tom Dunn, president/owner, Dunn Lawn & Land, St. Louis, Mo. "It's a space and you're using it just as you would any other space. It's just a different challenge."

As with any landscape obstacle, look before you leap and gather as much information about the area as possible. A number of factors must be taken into consideration when working with shade to create a design that will thrive in a low-light area.

DEFINING SHADE. When surveying a customer's existing landscape, the first item a contractor should notice is the property's sun exposure. However, just noting the shady areas is not enough to design the proper landscape. Effective designers will determine what kind of shade the property has and work from there.

"What people don't realize is that there are different definitions of shade," stressed Justin Marotta, president/owner, Possum Run Greenhouses, Bellville, Ohio. "It's important that when we ask the client what the conditions are, we understand what the conditions are."

According to Christine Richards, Roundtree Landscaping, Dallas, Texas, there are three classifications of shade: partial, light and full. Partial shade provides plants with about two hours of direct sunlight each day, whereas a lightly shaded area receives early-morning to late-afternoon sun, but lacks direct light. Lastly, full shade can be classified as either filtered or dense. "Filtered shade comes from the shade of a tree or overhead plant," Richards explained. "This allows some light to penetrate the canopy, but no direct light hits the plant. In the case of dense shade, a structure – usually a house – doesn't allow any light to penetrate to the ground."

To determine the conditions of the area, scrutinize the lawn to determine challenging



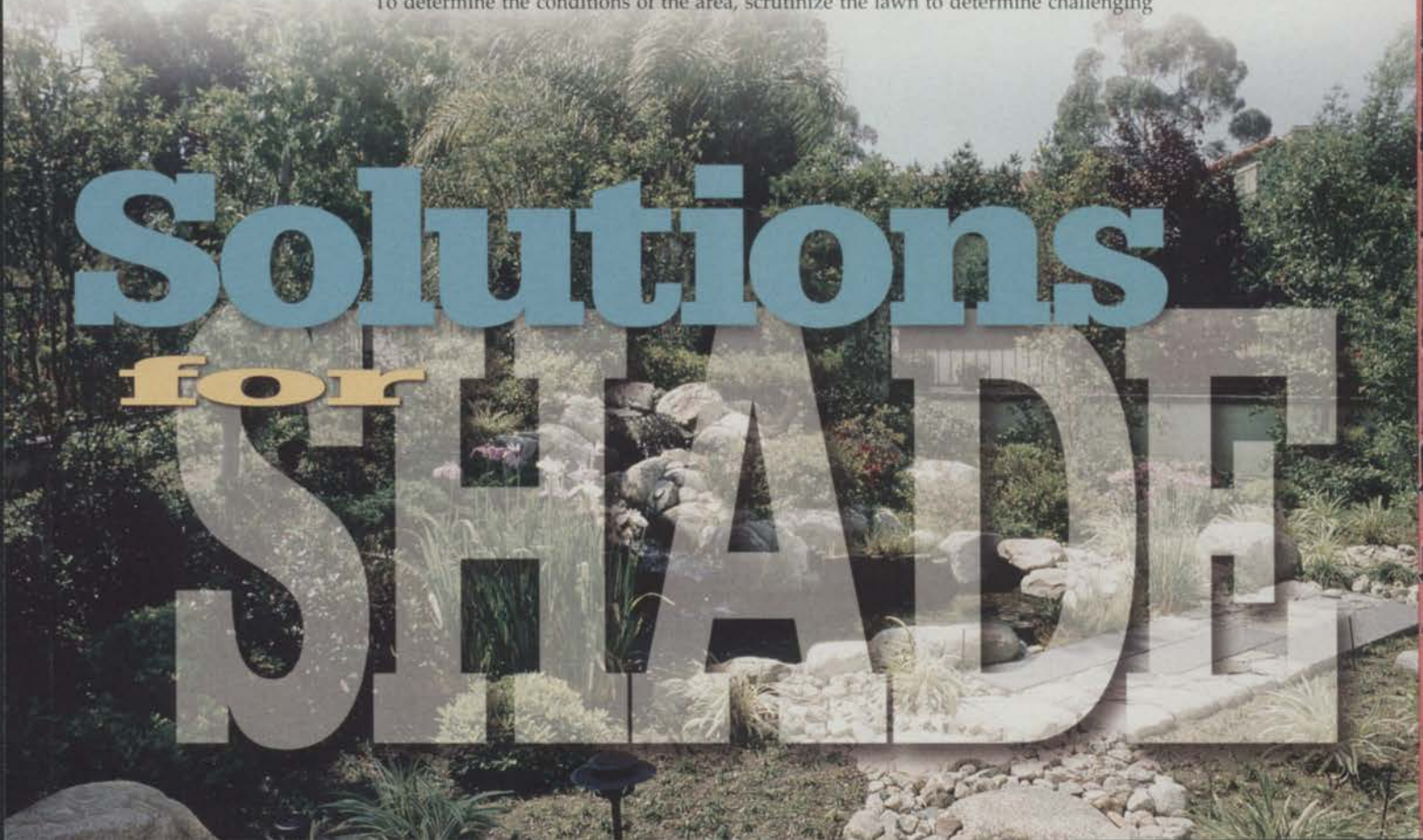
Shaded areas can add new dimensions to landscape designs.

Photos: File photo (above), Toddco Landscaping Co. (below)

Solutions

for

SHADE



sections. For example, Richards remarked that a wet, shady area will be more problematic than a dry, shady area, because many diseases develop on plants from wet flowers and foliage. So, when surveying a client's lawn, the first element she examines is the soil condition.

"You need to check the soil in the area to see if it's rich in organic matter," Richards stated. "If it is not rich in organic matter, you should amend the soil."

Dunn related that there are a few ways to evaluate soil conditions. "You can do soil samples if you feel it's necessary, but most of the time you can tell what the consistency is just by turning it over with a shovel." He said, adding that because all of his company's projects are in roughly the same area, he usually knows the general consistency of the soil from the start.

In addition to soil consistency, soil fertility also can pose problems, according to a report by Deborah Brown, extension horticulturist, the University of Minnesota Extension, St. Paul.

"Trees and shrubs fill the soil with feeder roots that greedily use up nutrients as readily as they are applied," she explained in her research paper *Gardening in the Shade*. "It often seems that the more you water and fertilize, the more roots with which you have to contend. Yet, adequate fertility is an absolute must because without it, plants are bound to be small and their growth weak."

Brown suggested applying a balanced fertilizer in the spring, followed by one or two applications as the season progresses. "If root competition continues to be a serious problem, planting in containers above ground is a viable alternative," she continued.

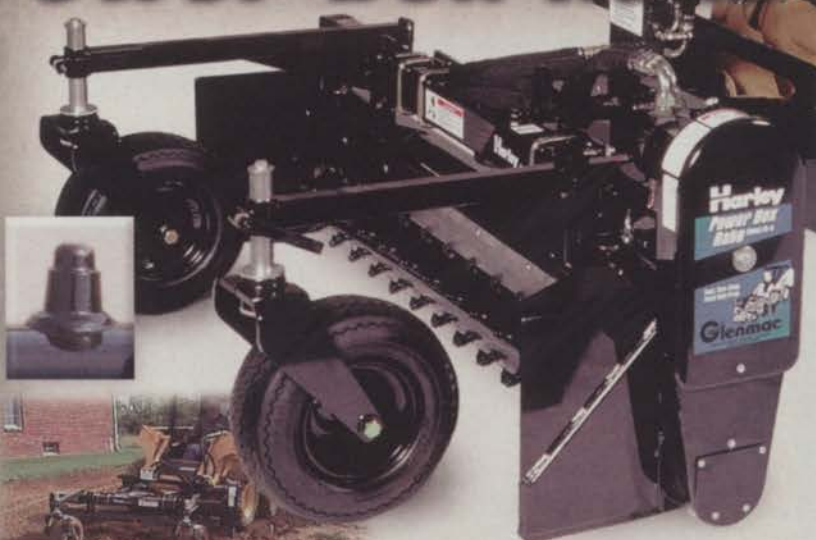
Dunn also recommended identifying other variables that could affect the landscape design, including water, wind and filtered sunlight. "The climatic conditions come into play," he advised. "The key is identifying the environment and knowing some tricks to maximize the value of that area and its impact. That just comes with good architectural principles and experience."

WORKING WITH SHADE. As with any landscaping project, after surveying the site, the next step is talking with clients to understand their vision.

(continued on page 50)

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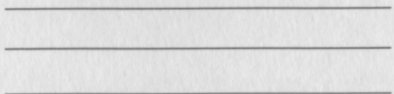
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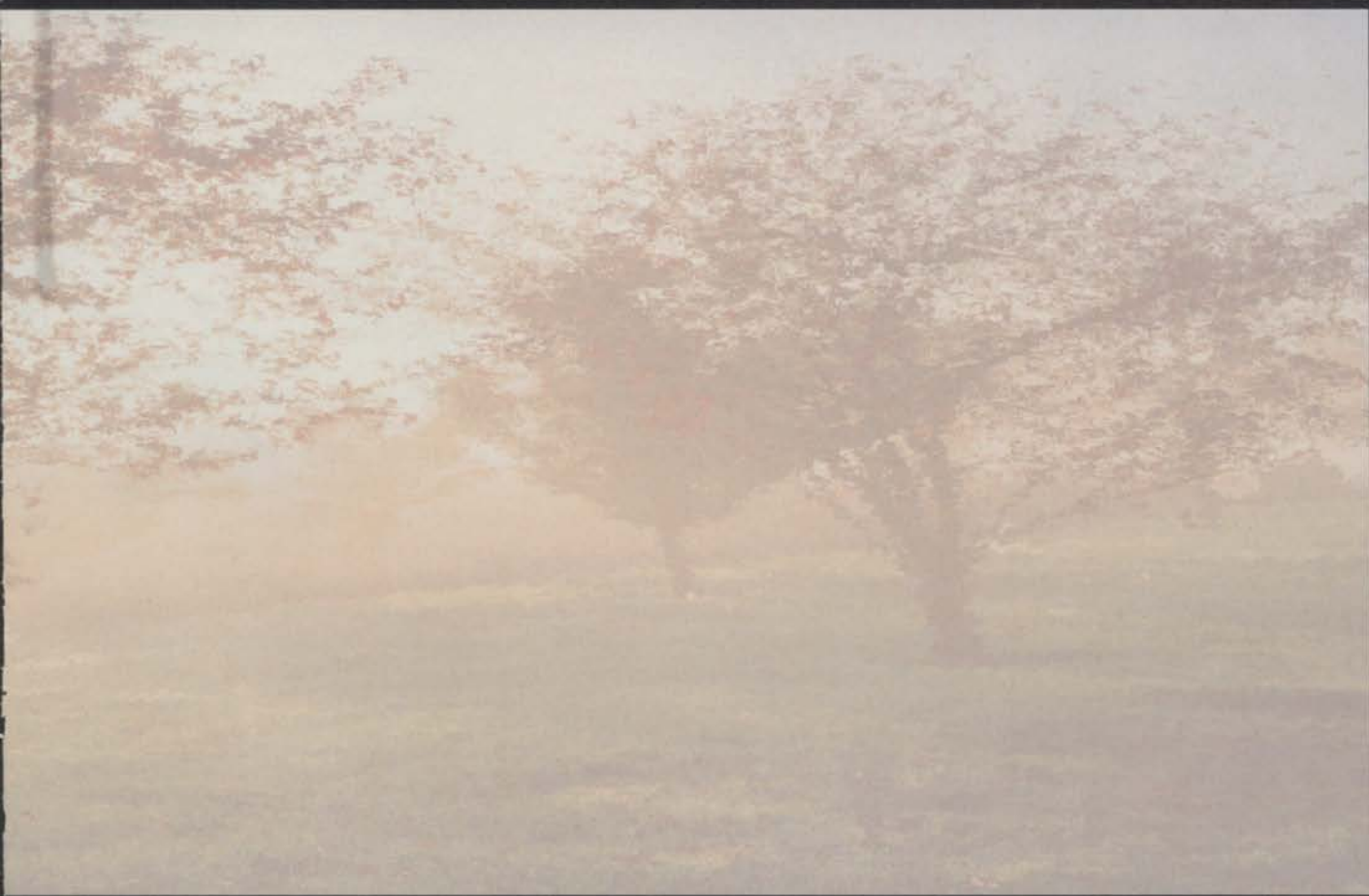
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USE READER SERVICE #121



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USE READER SERVICE #23

Shady Areas

(continued from page 47)

"Communicating with the client is very important," Dunn stated. "We're upfront with our customers about these situations. You really want to start with the client's objective, and like anything, you factor in all the information and hopefully come up with a solution that pleases the customer."

Richards explained that keeping customers informed helps them understand any special requirements and steps they should take in the future to help the plants thrive in the shaded area. "It will also help them understand why you are suggesting certain plant species," she said.

Once customers communicate their needs and wants regarding the project, contractors should decide how to flatter shady areas.

"There's not a whole lot you can do sometimes because the shade might be caused by buildings or overhangs of homes - it's not just caused by trees," Dunn advised.

When trees shade an area, contractors can thin the trees out or raise trees, which means cutting off some lower branches. "You can also remove the trees if that makes sense from an architectural standpoint," Dunn suggested. "You have to look at the whole property."

If the shady area cannot be eliminated and the customer wants the area to be developed, designers can install plants that withstand low-light conditions, noted Jim Downie, account executive, Pleasant View Gardens, Loudon, N.H. Designers should be familiar with two classifications of shade plants: shade-tolerant and shade-requiring, he said.

Downie explained that while shade-tolerant plants, such as rhododendron and hosta, can grow in the shade or sun, shade-requiring plants adapt to deeper shade.

Plants that require shade are generally large-leafed, early blooming plants, Downie explained. These types of plants, such as ferns, Lily-of-the-Valley and Ebony Spleenwort, prefer shade to the heat of midday sun and have evolved to use their broad leaves to capture the little sunlight that filters through to the shady areas.

Some popular shade-tolerant plants include Fuchsias, pansies, violas and begonias, according to Marotta. A few of Dunn's favorites are bleeding hearts and azaleas. "Those are shrubs that offer a lot of color that we really like," he said.

After installing the plants that are best suited for the shady area, Brown empha-

sized that contractors should maintain the area by watering the plants regularly. "The thick canopy of large tree or the overhang of a house will act as an umbrella, deflecting rainfall away from the ground directly beneath it," she explained. "Worse yet, trees and shrubs will compete with smaller plants for every drop of moisture that reaches the ground. It is vital that plants growing in the shade be watered regularly even during times of seemingly adequate rainfall."

CREATING SHADE. While some contractors might not like working with shady areas, others enjoy it. Pete Gluhaich, president/owner, Greenstreak Landscaping, Gilroy, Calif., remarked that he enjoys adding shade to a landscape. "Shade is a welcome part of the landscape because it provides a contrast of plant material in the garden," he said. "We love it."

Because his clients generally don't diversify their plant material, Gluhaich said he usually installs the more common shade-tolerant plants like camellias and azaleas.

In some parts of the country, however, customers beg contractors to add shade to their properties. "For us, shade is not a problem," declared Bob Howard, president, Robert Howard Associates, Boulder, Colo. "In fact, there's almost an urgency here for creating shade."

Howard's clients welcome a cool, moist environment, and because there is little cloud cover in Boulder, he often has to create shady spots. "The first thing we do is to try to put in as large a shade tree as possible," he related. "We'll also install a lattice or arbor to make a refuge on the north side, to create a cool environment."

To create shady nooks, Howard likes to install creeping oregon grape hollies on clients' properties. "Because we have so much sunlight, some plants that couldn't grow in full sun in other parts of the country are good shade trees for us," he commented. "The creeping oregon grape holly is a good tree for us, and it grows here."

In addition to these solutions, Howard uses a variegated leaf plant, such as white nancy, to lighten up an area. Even though vinca is considered a weed in other parts of the country, he likes to use it as a ground cover because it thrives in the Colorado environment, he added.

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Shady Areas

(continued from page 50)

Though Howard is used to creating shade rather than working around it, he does come across deep, problematic shade. Evergreens, such as spruces or pines, are numerous in that area and can create a dry shade, which makes growing any type of plant difficult, he said.

"Generally, the strategy would be to keep

the branches low so you can't see underneath the tree or to plant shrubs around the edge of the tree," Howard explained. "It's nice to have the needles rake the ground and not have something grow underneath."

Howard recommended sweet woodruff and geranium sanguineum (*var. Striatum*) as

plants that thrive in the Boulder area's dry, hot shade.

In the Dallas area, customers often ask contractors to install full-sun plants in partial shade areas because the shade protects the plants from heat, Richards asserted. "The heat sometimes becomes more of a factor in the placement of a plant than the amount of sunlight it requires," she said.

Dunn said he has also been asked to create shade for his clients. The most common reasons his customers want shade is to cool a backyard patio or to shade the home to help lower cooling costs, he remarked. Planting trees achieves these specific objectives. "You still want to start with the soil condition and you really want to take into account the architectural picture," Dunn explained. "You'll want to determine what will fit in best with the home, the lot and the rest of the environment."

FINDING NEW PLANTS. Because a successfully shaded landscape requires special plants that will thrive in dim environments, growers and contractors are constantly on the lookout for new plant materials.

New plant species are created by breeding old plants. This is done to reach a number of goals, some of which are to create a plant that is more resistant to disease, has a longer flowering time or has a better or different color, explained Donna Burrell, marketing manager, Ivy Acres, Baiting Hollow, N.Y.

This year, as it is in most years, the trend is to develop new types of hosta, Burrell asserted. "There's a real hunger for new and better types of hosta," she stressed. "Some of them are tiny, some of them are huge and they come in different color schemes from blue to yellow to white."

At Pleasant View Gardens, the torenia summer wave blue, which is part of the company's Proven Winter series, is the newest trend in shade plants, Downie said. "It's a hybrid out of South America," he stated. "It's a rainforest plant, so it thrives in the shade but it loves the heat."

Downie added that when placed in the sun, the torenia turns bronze and gets leggy, but in the shade, the plant stays green with beautiful blooms.

Gluhaich learns about new plant material by reading nursery trade journals and

(continued on page 54)

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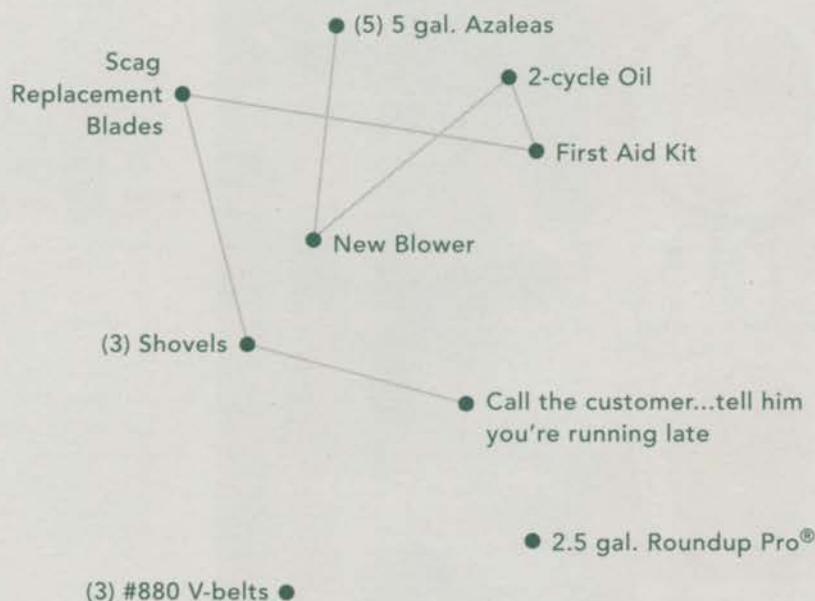
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Shady Areas

(continued from page 52)

landscape magazines. Reading these publications keeps Gluhaich up to date on new plant material and unique varieties. That way he knows what is new on the market when he does have clients who desire shady corner gardens or want to try something different in their yards. "If I know it's from a

good grower, I'll test it," he said. "[Testing new plants] can be an on-going learning process. We see how it reacts to the area and go from there." **L**

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

ANNUALS

Balsam
Begonias, wax
Browallia Coleus
Feverfew
Forget-Me-Not
(Myosotis sylvatica)
Fuchsias
Impatients
Mimulus
Pansy (Viola)
Salvia, dwarf
Some of the Lobelia genus
Wishbone Flower (Torenia)
Tuberous Begonia

PERENNIALS:

Aquilegia (Columbine)
Astilbe
Bugbane (Cimicifuga)
Caladium Campanula
Cardinal Flower (Lobelia)
Coral Bells (Heuchera)
Daylilies (Hemerocallis)
Bleeding Heart (Dicentra)
Ferns (all kinds)
Foxglove (Digitalis)
Goatsbeard (Aruncus)
Helleborus
Heuchera (Coral-bells)
Hosta
Lilly of the Valley
Lungworts (Pulmonaria)
Monkshood (Aconitum)
Phlox
Jacob's Ladder (Polemonium)
Primrose (Primula)
Siberian Iris
Some sedums
Globe Flower (Trillium)
Veronica
Virginia Bluebells (Mertensia virginica)

SHRUBS:

Boxwood (Buxus)
Cherry Laurel (Prunus laurocerasus)
Daphne
Gold Dust (Aucuba)
Holly (Ilex)
Hydrangea
Kerria
Leucothoe
Mock Orange (Philadelphus)
Mountain Laurel (Kalmia latifolia)
Nandina
Oregon Grape (Mahonia)
Privet (Ligustrum)
Rhododendron (including Azalea)
Viburnum
Yew (Taxus)

TREES:

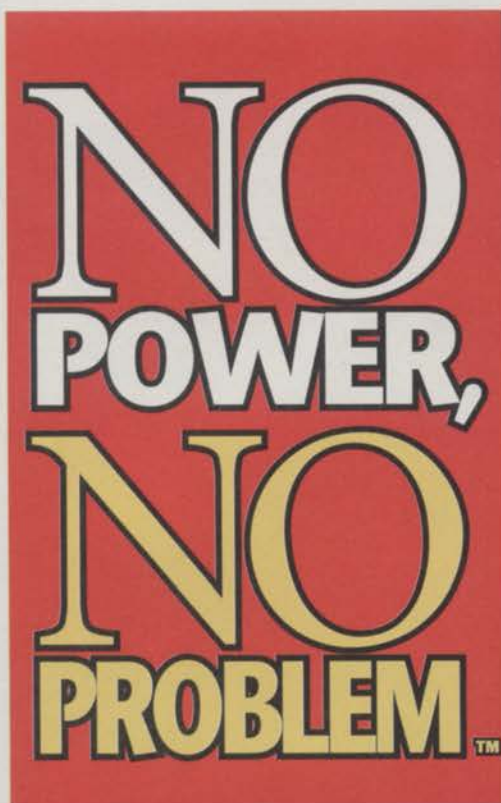
Dogwood (Cornus)
Japanese Maple (Acer plmatum)
Stewartia

List compiled from HGTV.com, The University of Minnesota Extension Service and Ivy Acres

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USE READER SERVICE #50

Commercial Properties

by Kristen Hampshire

Contractors might nab their first commercial clients with crafty sales pitches, but servicing and retaining these accounts requires much more.

It started with the church yard, and then the adjacent school. Soon, Carl Fuller added a doctor's office to his Saturday schedules, and from there he realized that his homegrown landscape business needed an overhaul of commercial proportions to handle his new accounts.

"I want the image of being professional – one thing I try not to be is shoddy," remarked the owner of Lawnescapes, College Park, Ga. "I want people to know that we are a true landscape company."

Fuller's all-inclusive company makeover covered operations and equipment straight down to the shirts on employees' backs. He implemented scheduling and routing software, added some family to his employee roster, invested in high-grade string trimmers and even modified his old moniker to appeal to commercial clients.

"The name of the company used to be He's a Miracle Worker, but when I started getting commer-

cial accounts, I thought it didn't fit the work," Fuller reasoned. "So, I changed to it Lawnescapes. That sounded more professional."

The crisp, green and white uniforms make this statement quite clear, and now, Fuller's three-man team has six commercial accounts and a revised growth strategy.

GETTING IN THE DOOR. Fuller had a few connections to jump-start his commercial venture, proving that relationships build businesses. His wife works at the doctor's office he maintains, and his family attends the church that was his first commercial property. The rest he acquired by taking a chance, he said.

"I saw opportunities in yards that I would pass daily, so on the way to my jobs, I would go in and ask the owner if they were interested in my services," he explained. "I would draw up a proposal, and they got back to me."

Cold calls are easier said than done, especially if the company lacks a reputation for handling commercial work, pointed out Dale Stell, president, Lake Lawn & Landscape, Canandaigua, N.Y. He has knocked on

(continued on page 60)

Companies that service buildings like "The King and the Queen" in Atlanta, Ga., kick it up a notch in equipment, crews and overall operations.



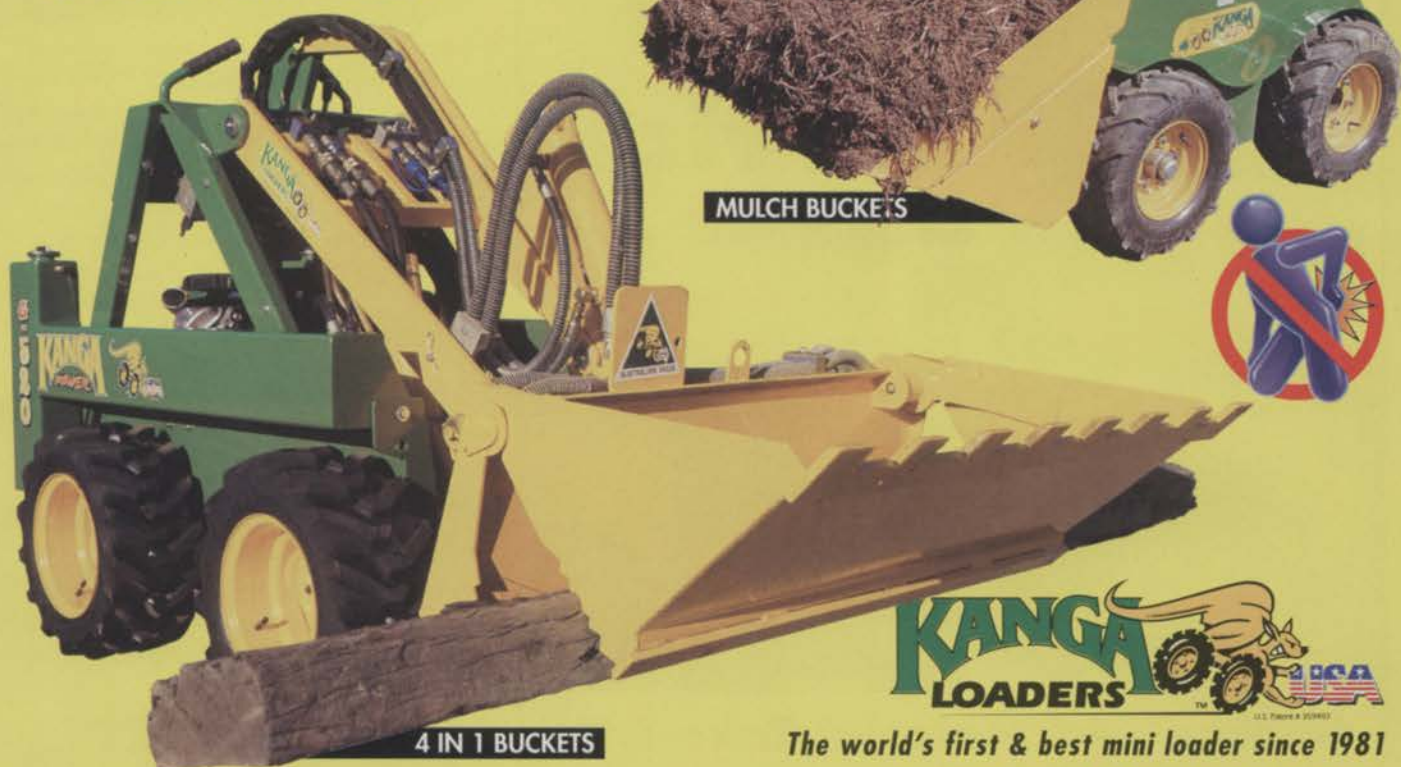
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Commercial Properties

(continued from page 58)

quite a few doors since starting his business from scratch in 1980. "It's making constant contact, just shy of being a pest," he admitted.

"[Getting into commercial] is not easy, to be quite honest with you, and it takes a while," he continued. "You're trying to get your foot in that door, and it may mean quoting a general contractor prices for months

and months, until one day you get lucky and [the contractor] has a need that someone else can't fill, and that could be your opening."

Now, his company's commercial mix consumes the entire installation division and 65 percent of the maintenance department, including accounts with offices, hospitals, apartment buildings, malls and industrial

spaces, he listed. "We're in our 22nd year now, so this growth doesn't happen overnight," he added. "It helps if you are already doing residential landscaping or some other facet of the business."

Existing residential clients can produce potential commercial clients, Ron Price learned. "We have had success in doing personal work, so the client was familiar with us from other developers by networking," said the owner of Greenscape, Holly Springs, N.C., adding that referrals produce sufficient new business.

Sometimes, however, companies need to rustle up clients to bolster their commercial businesses—they need to risk slammed doors and dead phone lines, noted Tom Brannigan, manager, Home & Garden, Matteson, Ill. Formerly a retail garden store, his company dipped into landscape services six years ago. "Some of the accounts came from our retail clients, but the other way we got customers was through cold calls—a lot of cold calls," he recalled. "We'd get 75 'Nos' for that one 'Yes.'"

Brannigan tapped into commercial possibilities by profiling properties near his crews' jobs. His ideal candidates included retail commercial sites where his company could offer complete maintenance, from mowing to irrigation, and his crews could work four to six hours at a time. With this profile in mind, his employees record names and addresses of potential clients they pass daily on routes, and from there, they learn the contact name, he explained.

"Our first cold calls, we had no information on the business at all; we'd just stop in with a business card," he said. "Well, out of sight, out of mind. We learned that you have to have a professional presentation put together—something that tells the client who your company is and what it does."

Brannigan's sales presentations concentrate on a folder marked with the Home & Garden logo and filled with its history, philosophy and photographs of various properties. The prepared literature wins over clients, who are impressed with his professionalism, and he scores new commercial clients who fit his niche.

Identifying and targeting these "model" clients allows businesses to grow their commercial divisions without stretching their equipment, manpower and time capabilities, Brannigan added. Most companies aren't

(continued on page 62)

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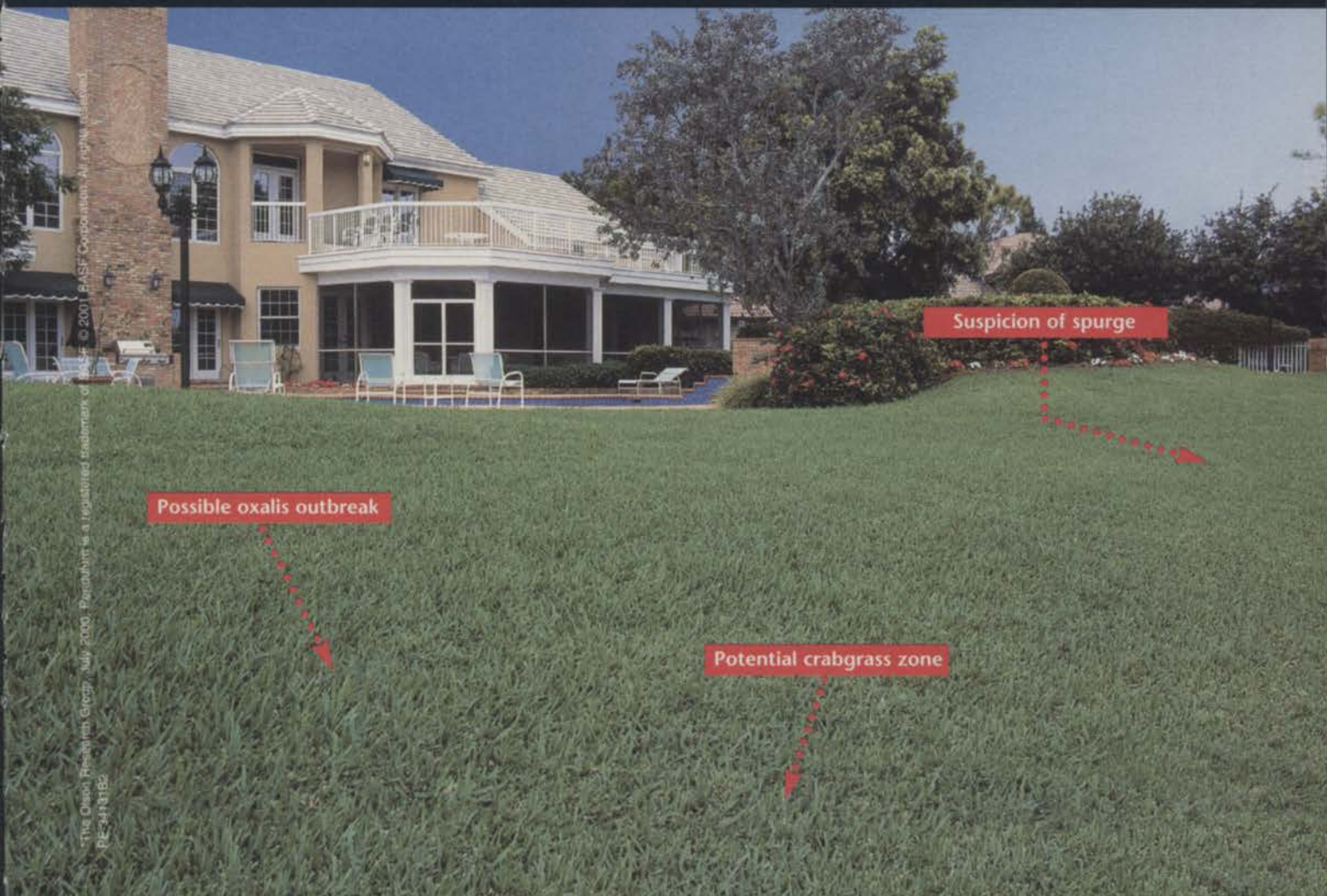
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Commercial Properties

(continued from page 60)

ready to handle installation accounts immediately. "Start slow and get to know what it takes to do commercial work," he advised.

Furthermore, establishing trust and earning project managers' respect takes time, noted Jason Sochacki, project manager, Frederick Corp., Chicago, Ill. Until this comfort zone develops, persistence earns accounts, he said,

suggesting contractors visit general contractors' plan rooms, where companies can view specifications and bid on large projects. "It is a matter of knocking on doors and asking [for jobs]," he said. "Be aggressive."

BUILDING UP THE BASICS. Brannigan will never forget the criticism from a re-

gional service manager at his first large retail maintenance account.

"It was the very first year, and we were only mowing two to three days out of the week, and one of our mowers struck a rock and the mower broke," he recalled. "I told the manager we would do the best to finish the site, and if not, we'd be back as soon as we could. His comment to me was, 'That is unacceptable. I don't care how you get it done, it's not my problem. I'm paying you to get this done, so get it done any way you can.'"

This reaction stuck with Brannigan, and he learned how to survive in the commercial market. "If we were going to be in the commercial market, we needed the resources, the labor and the equipment," he counted, "and the extra truck and extra trailer, extra mowers and trimmers - all that and the other."

Without capital to cater to these accounts, companies can lose their commercial clients due to equipment break-downs and operational kinks, such as scheduling flubs, labor shortages and billing problems. Businesses need to get rid of the "bugs" before entering the commercial sector, Brannigan said. This includes fine-tuning routing, considering timing stipulations such as rain days and project deadlines, and investing in equipment that can handle high-intensity jobs.

"Everything needs to be scaled up a notch," Stell said, adding that companies might consider skid-steer loaders, backhoes, small bulldozers and larger trucks.

"There is usually more equipment involved because of the scale of the projects, and so the size and mechanization of equipment changes," Price explained.

Brannigan noticed more wear and tear on his mowers, especially since his maintenance accounts center around large, retail parking lots that mowers pass over to reach grassy patches. "The equipment takes a beating because it is running more hours and the pavement the equipment crosses to get from area to area does a doozy on the smaller stuff," he remarked. Learning from his first commercial lesson, he keeps extra equipment at his shop and emphasizes preventive maintenance, such as sharpening blades and changing oil in mowers.

"You can't afford to be down on a commercial job, from an operational standpoint," Sochacki added. "You have to be prepared

(continued on page 64)

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USE READER SERVICE #27

Commercial Properties

(continued from page 62)



Corporate properties offer commercial opportunities and are appealing cash cows for some contractors.

for any situation and make sure that you are capable of handling the job. Think of the worst and make sure you have the equipment."

Also, companies must offer the services. Commercial clients look for comprehensive packages, which could mean acquiring equipment to handle specialized tasks, such as grading, irrigation or tree work, Brannigan added. "They want someone who will maintain their property, do plant replacement, take care of the irrigation system, etc."

Generally, this work is spelled out in lengthy agreements, he added. "Contracts go from one page for residential clients to a 50-page monster," Brannigan compared. Paperwork outlines every aspect of a commercial job, turning a project into a red-tape mess in some cases. This, too, can be an adjustment for contractors accustomed to quick sign-on-the-line service agreements. Consequently, Brannigan's company adopted more formal procedures, he said. "We have detailed routing sheets, and weekly sheets that show an overview of where the contractors have been and what they've done on a project," he said.

"Everything has to be in writing," Sochacki stressed, adding that his company's strict filing system organizes the onslaught of paperwork that accompanies commercial work. "It might be easier in residential work to just quickly type up a proposal for an add-on, but in commercial, letters are passed on and copied to three different property managers - it's more of a process."

Timing is also more of a procedure. High-billing commercial clients can be a business' lifeline; however, they also demand attention. Contractors find that flexibility is a prerequisite to many of these accounts, both installation and maintenance, as time constraints often dictate when properties are mowed and flowers are planted.

"I've found you have to be really attentive to their needs," Fuller discovered. "One of my jobs is a school, and I have to watch for safety, so I can only mow on Saturdays or in the evenings. The doctor's office has to be done on days when they don't see patients. You have to schedule around their times."

Consequently, contractors must shift their crews, fit in other residential work and strike a balance that won't leave clients sore. "Really, it all comes down to time management," Brannigan figured.

WALKING THE TALK. "Clients want to feel you're big enough to take care of the job and small enough to care," Brannigan related.

(continued on page 66)

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USE READER SERVICE #113

Commercial Properties

(continued from page 64)

"There is a certain image that commercial clients like."

For one, don't mention the home office, definitely don't forget to wash equipment and launder uniforms, and remember that business cards never hurt, he said. Image and high-standard service build reputations, and companies that ignore the communication and care that create a solid, squeaky-clean name can suffer.

Stell sets himself apart with personal touches, which are a challenge in today's technology-driven society, he said. "With fax machines and other technology, it's difficult to build relationships because you can do it all without seeing anyone face-to-face, and that's the best way to get the door open and get the chance to do a project," he said.

Stell sends thank-you notes to general contractors for allowing him to bid projects and arranges lunch dates to discuss his business with potential clients if they have time, which is rare, he added.

This constant communication continues past the proposal to translating the plan's details, Sochacki pointed out. "When you are doing commercial work, you are doing what someone else wants you to do, so you have to follow their specifications," he said, emphasizing this key especially in situations where the company works from an outside design. "You have to be willing to chase down people and make sure that everyone is on the same page."

Frederick Corp. experienced a few growing pains, which resulted in a system that includes several sets of eyes and multiple discussions. Before digging into a commercial project, a few employees study the plan and then, a second estimator reviews the project before the head of operations looks it over, Sochacki explained. "We really limit our chance of error, and things are looked at in such detail," he described. "You need to have discussions so that you know there won't be any mistakes."

Commercial project details don't allow for lax interpretation, he reminded. Scheduling, materials, labor and equipment requirements are coordinated to fit the project's specifications, and misunderstandings in the beginning often result in profit loss in the end. Ask questions, collect necessary information and relay the project's goals to crew members, he recommended.

Sifting through plans with a fine-tooth comb produces more than customer satisfaction, but also boosts the company's reputation, which often seems to sit on a delicate tight-rope. "The more work you can show people for reference, the better," Sochacki said. "But still, you really have to prove your company to them. We proved ourselves after getting the chance from a couple of large companies, and if you can put that down on your portfolio, other companies will be impressed." ■

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



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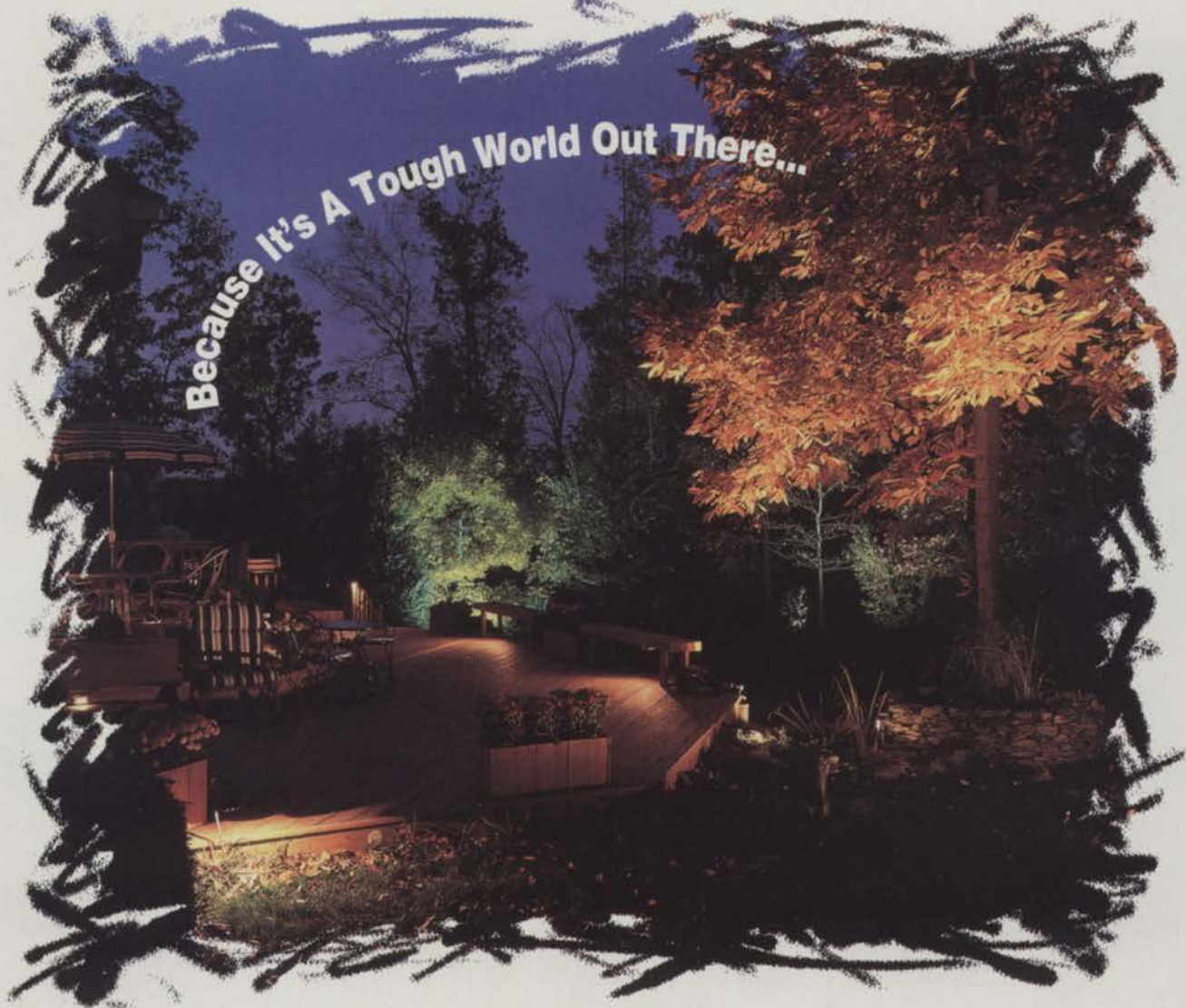
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USE READER SERVICE #127

Organic Lawn Care

by Kristin Mohn



Proper training, including turf identification, prepares a NaturaLawn of America crew for organic questions. Photo: Phil Catron

A constant DEBATE

Organic lawn care continues to spark controversy in the green industry. The question remains, what's next?

When Phil Catron explains the correct way to implement an organic lawn care program, he turns to an unlikely comparison: dieting.

"An organics program compares to a dietary solution," he said. "You can go on these special diets, lose all kinds of weight very fast, but is it helping? You need to do it the right way, and change your lifestyle."

For Catron, president, NaturaLawn of America, Frederick, Md., natural lawn care also means a change in lifestyle – business lifestyle – where patience and attention to detail lead to intended results. Of course, a lifestyle change takes time to be successful, and a switch to an organic emphasis has yet to catch on with a majority of the industry.

According to a recent *Lawn & Landscape* online poll, 53 percent of respondents feel that synthetic pesticides cannot be replaced in lawn care programs. However, 46 percent also responded that the time has come for organics to become a larger player in the lawn care industry. Clearly, this nearly 50/50 split in decision leads to a delay in finding a middle ground on the organics issue. Gary Roux, president, Grounds Crew, Monroeville, Pa., recognizes this division as a solu-

tion deterrent. "People are definitely taking sides, and it doesn't need to be that way," he admitted. "The truth lies somewhere in the middle."

THE CONTROVERSY. Most of the debate revolves around the key differences between synthetic and organic products – namely, effectiveness, action rates and price. Bill Jones, president, Terra Systems, Charlotte, N.C., explained that although most people like the idea of completely natural products, organics may not immediately seem a viable solution.

"Everyone in this country considers himself an environmentalist," he stated. "But putting those words into action takes a long time. In today's fast-paced society people almost demand immediate results, but Mother Nature doesn't tend to work that way."

Organics programs often go hand-in-hand with Integrated Pest Management (IPM) tactics, carefully balancing cultural practices, organic products and minimal chemical inputs. Roux said contractors hesitate to use IPM because of this meticulous system and the need for constant supervision. "It's more difficult for folks to be able to offer [IPM] – you need to be on the property on a regular basis, and that makes it

(continued on page 70)

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USE READER SERVICE #128

Organic Lawn Care

(continued from page 68)

difficult for the standard lawn care operator to offer IPM," he said.

Also, expense may dilute organic popularity. Lack of demand, product mark-up and shipping costs all lead to higher prices for organic products compared to their synthetic counterparts, explained Dan Sutherland, president, Gro Pro Organic Lawns, West Warwick, R.I. "It's still somewhat expensive, about 20 to 30 percent more for our product," he said.

Jones added that his partial use of synthetic products, such as when applying nitrogen to soil, revolves around cost issues. "I'd love to not have any synthetic fertilizers, but we're premium priced as it is. [Using 100 percent organic materials] would price services out of the market, and it has to do more with the economics of the business vs. what we would like to do horticulturally."

However, Sutherland mentioned he has seen prices drop approximately 40 percent throughout the past seven years, as the or-

ganics movement has slowly grown. "Now that more companies are starting out just like I am, they have gotten big enough now, and that helps bring prices down."

Sutherland continued that lowering expenditures in other aspects of the lawn care program can compensate for some of these higher costs. He mentioned that his company has cut 2 million square feet of grub prevention this year by isolating unaffected areas.

Further, Paul Sachs, technical liaison, North Country Organics, Bradford, Vt., explained costs may rise if organic products are mistakenly substituted into a synthetic program. "All you're doing is still maintaining a chemical program with earth-friendly products," he reasoned. Instead, by eliminating the need for fungicides and de-thatching, and thinking ahead, price differences between organics and synthetics become less



Customers must be educated on proper organic techniques, such as the importance of a healthy, dense root system to solid turf development. Photo: Phil Catron

staggering, Sachs said. "If you start looking at it long-term down the road, [treatments] last 15 to 20 years, and divided by the number of years, it's not expensive at all."

However, Catron maintained that the benefits of an organic program, both tangible and intangible, justify the monetary costs. "Material costs are more expensive, but do I have a customer that stays with me? Do I have less service calls?" he asked. "If you believe organics is a premium, high-quality

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Organic Lawn Care

(continued from page 70)

issue, then charge it as if it is a premium, because it is, and don't be embarrassed by it."

ORGANIC SOLUTIONS. Perhaps the most significant block to an organics approach lies simply in convincing contractors and customers to deviate from the norm.

"Generally, it's difficult in the fact that most of today's society is so urban that they do not have any type of [organics] background," Jones said. "Most people today - their parents didn't even have a garden in the back yard, much less the knowledge of what it takes time-wise in an agricultural environment."

This lack of knowledge necessitates thorough education programs to help spread the organics word, explained Roux. "It has to start with education - in the industry and at the consumer level," he stated. "Train the consumers so they start requesting it. They'll become aware of what the alternatives are."

He stressed the importance of educating

(continued on page 93)

The heated organic lawn care debate is not without its share of legislative battles. The Food Quality Protection Act of 1996 (FQPA), an amendment that changed the EPA's pesticide regulations, eliminated or phased out chlorpyrifos and diazinon, allowing organic products to serve as alternatives. Yet, the law's pesticide regulations may undermine the FQPA's success in promoting environmental awareness, suggested Gary Roux, president, Grounds Crew, Monroeville, Pa.

In addition, the up-in-the-air New York state neighbor notification law has prompted opposition from the lawn care industry. This law requires operators to provide neighbors within 150 feet 48-hour notification before spraying. The law suggests that consumers have concerns about the products that continue to be strong players in many operators' lawn

care programs, and counties' rejection of the law illustrates the controversy.

As a result, forming legislation to please everyone leans toward impossible, said Roux. "Everything now is so political, and people just don't want to step up to the plate to do the right thing," he said. "The question is, 'Which group are you going to alienate?'"

The political medium changes with the times, since popular fads come and go, said Phil Catron, president, NaturaLawn of America, Frederick, Md. "The industry - I'm not sure if they are ever really going to embrace [organics]," he said. "It's a big buzz word."

Roux hopes organics soon become recognized on a broader, political scale. "The proper use of pesticides will come about, they'll be legislated by Congress and regulated by their own people," he predicted. - Kristin Mohn

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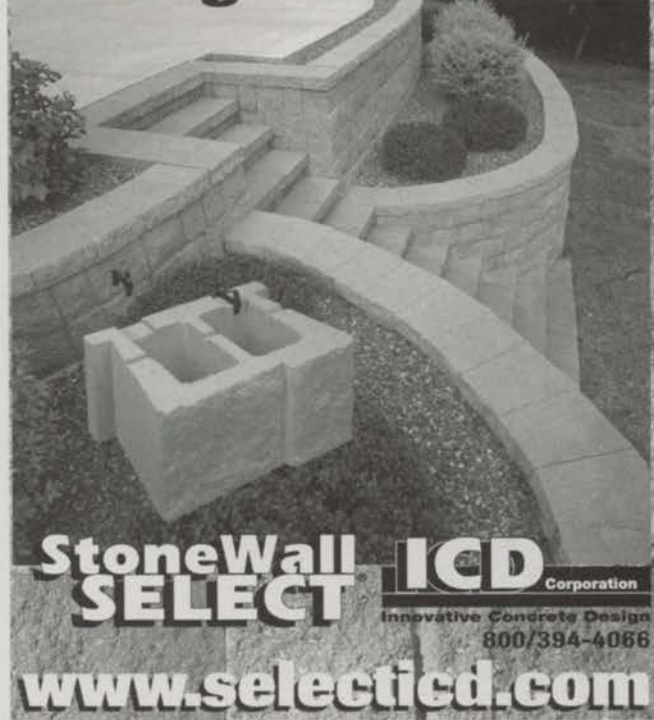
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State of the **INDUSTRY** Report:

*Cautious
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By Bob West

State of the **INDUSTRY** Report:

*Slowing
Growth in
2001*

PORTRAIT OF AN INDUSTRY

Avg. Years in Business	18
Avg. Year-Round Employees	7.0
Avg. Seasonal Employees	5.5
Revenue per Employee	\$51,360
Avg. Residential Mowing Customers	45.4 (43.2% with none)
Avg. Residential Lawn Care Customers	40.1 (53.6% with none)
Avg. Commercial Mowing Customers	11.2 (49.5% with none)
Avg. Commercial Lawn Care Customers	7.9 (67% with none)

Source: Lawn & Landscape survey

Amid uncertain economic times, the landscape industry reports slowing growth but remains optimistic about the future.

Ask a landscape contractor how this year has been, and there's no telling how he or she will answer. Some will say 2001 has been as good as any year. Others will relate that business has slowed but they still have to turn away work due to labor problems. At the same time, some contractors find themselves facing a new situation – a business slowdown.

All the while, assorted obstacles other than economic uncertainty litter contractors' paths to success.

- Labor, as always, is scarce, and the lack of qualified employees continues to stand tall atop the list of limitations.
- Anti-pesticide groups wreaked havoc with lawn care in New York this year after pushing prenotification legislation through the state government. As a result, the industry seems to be waking up to the fact that unfriendly legislation could significantly hinder business.
- Fuel prices jumped all over the board, eating away at profitability. Manufacturers and growers felt this pain even more directly in many cases as the prices for their materials and for shipping inventory around the country climbed.
- And, of course, the weather was a boon for some areas and a curse in others.

Despite all of these drags on business, landscape contractors maintain a positive, albeit more conservative, outlook for the future. More than 56 percent of respondents to a *Lawn & Landscape* survey said their business would grow its annual sales volume compared to last year. While this number illustrates the industry's continued health, this marks the fourth consecutive year this number has fallen. Approximately 64 percent of respondents to this survey last year reported that their businesses would grow.

Looking deeper into the numbers, those respondents who said their businesses will grow this year still expected growth of about 19 percent for this year, compared to 15 percent last year. This increase in growth levels would seem to indicate that the smaller, less-established firms are the ones having the greatest difficulty dealing with this year's challenges. Meanwhile, the larger, more established companies, many of which experienced economic challenges in the form of the recession of the early 1990s, learned valuable lessons about operating in a down economy, and those lessons are paying off right now. In

fact, many companies would likely grow even more this year if they could find enough employees.

About 14 percent of respondents expect sales to drop this year (compared to 11.5 percent last year), and they said sales would drop about 15 percent. Last year, respondents who suffered a downturn also predicted a 15 percent drop. Clearly, some consumers and commercial property managers are delaying or downsizing installations or reducing their regular maintenance service in order to minimize their landscape budget. Fortunately for contractors, new home sales and commercial building remained significantly higher than the levels of even a few years ago for much of the year.

In general, some contractors were surprised by the extent of the challenges this year brought, while most expected to have to work harder for sales this year. *Lawn & Landscape* research found that 31.6 percent of survey respondents said this year was worse than they expected, just slightly below the number who said this year was better than expected.

While no one wants to see fewer dollars spent on landscape services, many contractors have privately commented that a mini-recession could ultimately benefit the industry by forcing smaller businesses to either improve their management skills and level of operation or to shut their doors if they can't remain profitable. **L**

The author is Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.

REVENUE RANGES

Less than \$100,000	34.1%
\$100,000-\$499,999	40.4%
\$500,000-\$1 million	15.9%
More than \$1 million	9.6%

Source: Lawn & Landscape survey

HOME – WHERE THE CLIENTS ARE

A common stumbling block lying ominously in contractors' path to growth is the transition from a primarily residential customer base to one replete with larger, more desirable commercial customers. In 2001, nearly two-thirds of the industry's sales came from single-family residential homes.

Revenue from Single-Family Homes	65%
Revenue from Multi-Family Residential Clients	9%
Revenue from Commercial/Industrial Facilities	20%
Revenue from Government/Institutional Facilities	3%
Revenue from Other Properties	3%

Source: Lawn & Landscape survey

by Nicole Wisniewski

Embracing 'Cautious OPTIMISM'

The landscape industry moves forward ... carefully.

David Land, president, Tulsa Landscape, Tulsa, Okla., described the industry's general mood about the economy and growth appropriately when he said, "We're proceeding with cautious optimism."

Regardless of how hard increased fuel, fertilizer and insurance costs, unpredictable weather, lost clients or last year's election hit some contractors, most maintain a positive attitude, hoping the predicted recession will just waltz past the landscape industry.

Telltale figures support this mood. While

gross domestic product (GDP) is down, it's still not as bad as economists predicted, and housing starts were strong until August when they dropped to 1.527 million units. But this was before the Sept. 11 tragedy, which is expected to throw additional punches at the already fragile U.S. economy, according to Mark Zandi, chief economist, Economy.com, West Chester, Pa. "Regardless of how military and political events transpire, the U.S. economy will now suffer a recession, and the outlook for early next year appears increasingly worrisome," he stated.

Many contractors agree with this outlook. "I see the economy dipping a bit for 2002," explained Michael LaPorte, president, Commercial Scapes, Bristow, Va., adding that sales for his company rose 13 percent in 2001, but his backlog of work dropped more than 30 percent. "I believe closing sales will be more difficult and clients will be more aware of price."

Lawn & Landscape research also sup-

ports this theory, finding that 42.3 percent of contractors ranked the economy as a very critical issue affecting their businesses. But, still, contractors like LaPorte don't want to give up hope. "I do not want to sound negative about this industry," he said, mirroring Land's cautious optimism. "I believe there is a lot of room for growth and a lot of blue sky ahead."

RECESSION OBSESSION. The rumored potential recession remains just a myth to some contractors and a full-blown reality to others. Even those who consider a looming economic setback as nothing but hype are hesitant to display complete business confidence.

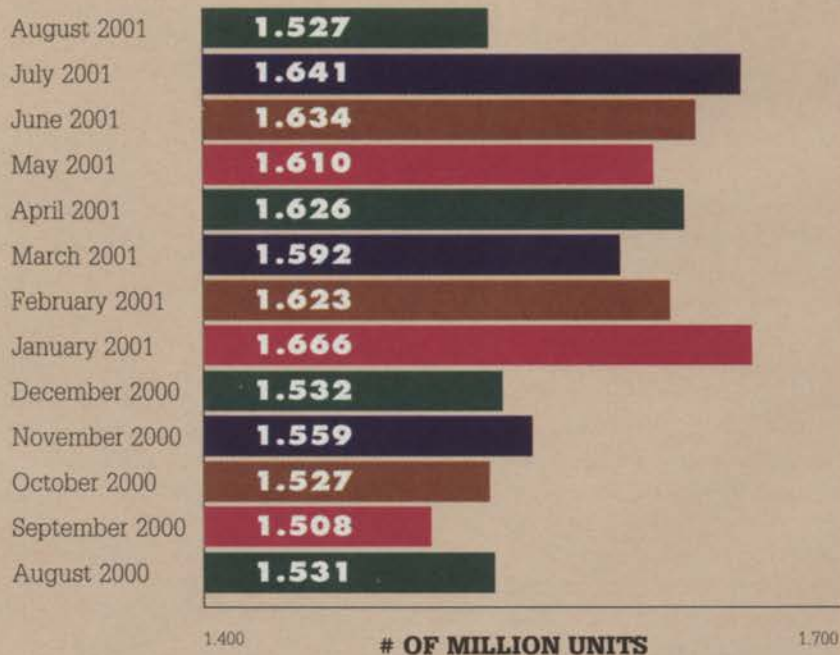
"I think the media blows [the economy] out of proportion," revealed Mike Schmitt, president, Shamrock Irrigation & Landscape, Simi Valley, Calif., adding that because his business focuses on residential clients and housing starts are stable, he has at least a 14- to 18-month window of positive growth.

The realization that contractors cannot control their clients' nerves as they cut back spending on landscape services pushes them to consider the possibility of an economic slump.

"Recession is not a rumor in our markets - it is a reality," lamented Bob Andrews, president, The Groundskeeper,

HOUSING STARTS

The housing market stabilized the economy until August when the number of new units fell to 1.527 million - a 6.9 percent drop. Whether the industry should expect a continued decline is unknown.



Source: Lawn & Landscape survey



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Carmel, Ind., stating that his older, retired clients cut back on lawn care this year because they are on fixed incomes. "What we see is customers slightly reducing their services or not buying optional treatments such as core aeration and seeding - nothing earth shaking, but enough to make a difference. What we really don't know is how many potential new customers simply did not enter the market this season because of concerns over the economy."

A recent Gallup Poll on consumer confidence reported that six out of 10 Americans say the economy is getting worse instead of better. But the situation isn't nearly as negative as it was in August and September 1992, when only 10 percent of Americans gave the U.S. economy an excellent or good rating. This is important to note since many contractors are predicting a recession similar to the one in the early 1990s.

"We're in a cycle," pointed out Michael Hornung, president, Valley Green, St. Cloud, Minn. "We've had eight or nine years of increasing boom - it has to average out. The 15-, 20- and 25-percent growth years will not be as prevalent as in the past. The whole market is more saturated."

While expenditures on goods, services and housing are keeping the economy from drowning in a sea of weak business activity, the pace of spending is sluggish, said Celia Chen, director of consumer services, Economy.com, West Chester, Pa. "Consumer spending is soft," she said. "In the second quarter, real consumer expenditures grew by only 2.2 percent, enough to maintain positive real GDP growth, despite a sharp decline in business investment. However, this is the first time spending growth has slipped below 3 percent since 1996."

Matthew Morgan, president, Morgan Lawn Care, Hoopston, Ill., identified with this. He lost a few clients this year, and others reduced their services, attempting to save money after suffering higher-than-normal utility bills and

gas prices. "With unstable fuel prices and winter just around the corner, I think next year will be even tougher," he said.

"People didn't get into the groove of spending this year," added Robben Salyers, president, Jake's Gardens, Maple Plain, Minn., who blamed this on the presidential election. "I think this lack of consumer confidence had to do with the election being in limbo and the federal reserve playing with interest rates and not responding quickly enough to the effects of energy costs."

Despite the fact that some say client spending is down, the housing market stabilized the economy the first half of the year. (see *Housing Starts* on page S4).

But housing starts may be the next "bubble to burst," many economists say, and August's decreased figures don't ease worries that this prediction may come true. Though Chen is skeptical, "The National Association of Realtors reports a 6.4 percent increase in the median existing house price in the second quarter

compared to a 4.4 percent rise in the first quarter. This acceleration in price growth has occurred even as the economic malaise that hit at the end of last year has deepened. House prices that are rising at nearly twice the pace of inflation appear to be incongruous with an economy on the brink of recession."

In addition to housing starts, GDP figures, which measure total production and consumption of U.S. goods and services, can help predict the economy's path. The second quarter 2001 GDP growth was at 0.2 percent, indicating a stagnant economy, but not as weak as many economists had feared, according to The Dismal Scientist.com, which cited business spending, continued cutbacks and inventory stockpiles as the three major economic constraints.

THE COMMERCIAL ARENA. Though residential housing starts are stable, multifamily residential construction has been less secure, falling 2.3 percent in June, according to the

PAY THE PRICE

Many contractors were forced to increase prices 3 to 5 percent this year as a result of escalating fuel and fertilizer costs. And, according to a *Lawn & Landscape* reader survey, 79.6 percent of contractors plan to raise prices for repeat application business next year.

"We did increase prices this year and probably will again next year - we can't help it," said Bob Andrews, president, The Groundskeeper, Carmel, Ind., adding that in addition to fuel costs, rising employee health insurance costs burdened his business. "Anyone in the industry who waffles here is making a big mistake. You simply cannot hold price if three or four of your major cost items continue to rise and do so in leaps."

Even though Michael Hornung, president, Valley Green, St. Cloud, Minn., had the chance to pre-buy fuel this year at \$1.39 per gallon, he also increased prices 3 to 5 percent. "We lost approximately 3 to 5 percent of our clients because of the price increases, but many of them were replaced with others willing to pay the higher prices."

Other contractors weren't as lucky. Michael LaPorte, president, Commercial Scapes, Bristow, Va., said recovering lost profits on jobs bid three to 18 months ahead of time was impossible.

Robben Salyers, president, Jake's Gardens, Maple Plain, Minn., increased prices 10 percent, but he believes contractors in his area undervalue the market, causing pricing difficulties. "I had the temptation to lower prices, but I didn't, and we got the projects," he explained. "Contractors have to overcome fear, especially during a downturn."

And for clients who are tightening their purse strings, some contractors have decided to offer additional low-cost service options in 2002. "We will be offering lower priced lawn care programs so that we have an alternative for people who simply don't feel that they can afford the full service," Andrews said. - **Nicole Wisniewski**

SERVICE SEGMENTS

For many landscape professionals, the boom times of the last decade served as a catalyst for business expansion, primarily in terms of offering new services. Landscape maintenance work and design/build services remain at the heart of the industry, accounting for 59 percent of industry revenue together and each being offered by almost 70 percent of green industry firms. While only about four out of every 10 contractors offer irrigation installation and maintenance services, this work still accounted for more than 10 percent of industry revenue.

Sales from Lawn Maintenance	30.0%
Sales from Design/Build	28.9%
Sales from Irrigation Install/Maintenance	10.1%
Sales from Other Services	10.0%
Sales from Tree & Ornamental Care	8.3%
Sales from Lawn Care	7.4%
Sales from Snow & Ice Control	5.3%

Source: Lawn & Landscape survey

U.S. Census Bureau. This same survey shows private non-residential construction, such as office, retail, warehouse and industrial sites, as barely stable, falling 2.1 percent in April, 6.5 percent in May and then increasing 0.1 percent in June. "I've noticed that commercial projects seemed to have slowed in the Midwest," maintained Steve Pattie, president, The Pattie Group, Novelty, Ohio. "When a slowdown starts, that's the first sign that something is happening."

Commercial design/build is the best-performing service for LaPorte now, but he's also concerned about how it will do next year. According to construction analyst F.W. Dodge, construction starts fell 5 percent in July, and declines were reported in all sectors, including non-residential which was down 4 percent. "New construction projects are being placed on hold, and we have seen bidding get more competitive," LaPorte said.

Joe Janssen, president, Stiles Landscape Service Co., Pompano Beach, Fla., said he already has seen commercial building reduce dramatically. "And next year it will be tighter,"

he said. "The commercial office market is overbuilt right now. There aren't a lot of projects coming out of the ground."

Morgan agreed. "If a recession occurs, I think that the installation business will be hit the hardest," he said.

Commercial maintenance has also been a challenge, said Janssen. "We have seen some renegotiations of large projects where, economically or corporately, the company has challenges, and we've been asked to evaluate the scope of the work and make some value-engineering recommendations to the client without destroying the integrity of the project," he said, adding that this alternative deters clients from completely cutting back services. "It's better to have a \$450,000 contract that used to be a \$1 million contract than nothing at all when the dust settles."

While major markets are experiencing negative economic affects, secondary markets are still growing strong. John Biehler, president, Suburban Landscape, said commercial construction market forecasts for the next 10 years are healthy in Wichita, Kan. "Commercial construction is booming here," he said. "If I didn't have competition, I wouldn't be able to get all the work done."

Kory Ballard, president, Perficut, Des Moines, Iowa, reported similar news. "Commercial work continues to stay strong in all divisions here, while residential landscaping has been our only division to see any slowdown," he said.

Despite market influences and expected changes that will result as a direct influence of the Sept. 11 tragedy, contractors all answer with a semi-confident "maybe" when asked if recession will hit the industry any deeper than it has already this year.

Embracing a positive, smart business attitude and a little "cautious optimism" seems to be the only way the landscape industry can get through a possible economic slowdown. Some contractors like Land, who are

in a strong market with low cost-of-living expenses, think the industry is already halfway through any kind of recession—one that won't cause too much more damage as it comes to a close. He predicted: "I give the economy a one in four chance of really affecting the industry." **LL**

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

SLOWED GROWTH

Many landscape professionals wonder how the troubling economic conditions they dealt with this year affected the industry. *Lawn & Landscape's* research found that fewer companies enjoyed growth over the previous year this year than in the past four years. However, more than half of the industry grew this year, and only 14.3 percent noted decreased sales compared to last year. Nearly 30 percent of the respondents said this year's sales essentially will mirror last year's numbers. In addition, the level of growth or drop off experienced this year remained consistent with previous years' changes. Companies who said business will grow this year expect an average 19 percent growth and company owners who said they lost money this year expect an average 15 percent decrease.

GROWING FIRMS

2001	56.1%
2000	64.6%
1999	72.1%
1998	72.3%
1997	66.0%

Source: Lawn & Landscape survey

by Kristin Mohn

LABOR LEADS THE WAY

Lawn & Landscape asked its readers to identify the biggest challenges for their businesses.

CHALLENGE	% TERMING IT "VERY CRITICAL"
Labor	68.4%
Weather	46.9%
Competition/Economy	42.3%
Low-ballers	29.8%
Legislative Issues	22.8%

Source: Lawn & Landscape survey

Labor. For many landscape contractors, it may as well be a four-letter word.

According to recent *Lawn & Landscape* industry research, 68.4 percent of respondents cite labor as a very critical issue concerning their business operations. Despite the roles business management, organization and experience play in improving efficiency, when it comes down to the bottom line, contractors sink or swim strictly on the basis of labor.

This year, it seems news programs cannot refrain from mentioning unemployment. According to recent Bureau of Labor Statistics data, unemployment rates have jumped .8 since last year and .4 between July and August 2001. Nevertheless, the struggle to find qualified workers continues. While programs such as the H2B worker program have rescued many companies from the brink of disaster, with 58.9 percent of reader survey respondents employing Hispanic workers, others continue to succeed without dipping into the immigrant labor pool. Additionally, regional discrepancies in dependable labor heighten frustration in areas that seriously see the green industry losing out to the high-tech sector.

Classifying the labor situation poses a dilemma, with every company telling a different story. As a result, finding an overall solution to the labor problems the industry faces remains frustratingly elusive.

LABORING FOR WORKERS. Securing workers from a competent labor source continues to pose problems for landscape contractors. Roger Myers, chief executive officer, American Beauty Landscaping, Boardman, Ohio, partly blames society's false assessment of the green industry for this dilemma. "The perception of our industry is not very high-tech, which is changing, but that's an issue," he said.

"We've seen a decline in the labor force due to a lot of factors, but not a lot of people want to get involved in manual labor," he continued. "People want to make a lot of money, and the idea of physical work is just not in their vocabulary. They're either going to college or seeking out a high-tech job where they feel they can make more money."

However, Jack Robertson, co-owner, Roberston Lawn Care, Springfield, Ill., forecasts a fading of

high-tech job popularity. "The appeal is to go toward high-tech industries, but that sector is failing pretty bad," he said. "I'm not sure I would be putting all my eggs in that basket."

In fact, according to Toni Horst, senior economist at www.economy.com, the struggle to find jobs in high-tech and similar sectors discourages the labor force, particularly young employees. Therefore, workers may drop out of the labor force for a period of time, further limiting current worker availability.

Another roadblock appears when struggling to fill foreman and manager positions, because they in turn help attract labor, said Bill Hoopes, director of training, development and regulatory affairs, Scotts Lawn Service, Marysville, Ohio. "A branch manager who believes in our business philosophy will attract employees with the same mindset," he said.

Jeff Oxley, operations manager, Swingle Tree Co., Denver, Colo., recently has experienced frustration because many potential laborers lack driver's licenses - essential prerequisites for his employees. "We can get all the general, unskilled labor we need right now, but most of our positions require a driver's license and a lot of unskilled laborers don't have licenses," he remarked.

In addition, transforming these unskilled workers into capable landscape professionals requires training, and Chuck Twist, president, TNT Lawn & Landscape Management, Stillwater, Okla., has noticed slowdowns as a result of training new employees. "I see companies going out of business every day, and when I talk to the owner, they say the labor problem was the biggest problem," he said. "[Labor] keeps you from growing because you don't just hire people and say, 'Here's the work, now go do it.' [Employ-

Some things never change. The industry continues to juggle worker shortages, wage wars and immigrant labor.

A Recurring

STRUGGLE

WATCHING WAGES

Wage rates jumped significantly this year as contractors attempted to cope with wage competition, rising prices and an unstable labor market. The following chart summarizes the average hourly wages for three categories:

	2001	2000	% RAISE
Entry-level mower operator	\$8.45	\$7.80	8.3%
Entry-level spray technician	\$10.05	\$8.97	12%
Foreman	\$13.80	\$12.25	12.7%

Source: Lawn & Landscape survey

ees] have to be supervised, you have to show them the job, teach them how to do the job, check up on them while they're doing it, and make sure they're doing it right."

In fact, Robertson owes his success this year to a dependable labor base that improves year after year, cutting down on time devoted to training. "This year was easier than last year," he described. "The long-term guys are around for us and we're fortunate to have great people on board for a long time."

THE H2B SAFETY NET. The H2B immigrant labor program was a life-saving device in 2001 for landscape contractors who said otherwise they wouldn't survive. Rick Carver, president, Carver's Lawn and Landscape, New Castle, Del., employed approximately 18 to 20 workers through the H2B program this year, significantly boosting his productivity.

Other companies wholly depended on H2B to sustain business, including Loyet Landscape Maintenance in St. Louis, Mo. Joe Loyet, president, insisted that again, the American workforce refuses to do manual labor, and the Hispanic workforce provides relief. "I feel if you're not with the H2B program, you're going to be out of business," he said bluntly. "We went to a Hispanic workforce nine years ago—the American person doesn't want to do physical labor anymore, so we're encouraging our Hispanics to become supervisors."

Twist added that he now seeks out the H2B program to secure his labor each year. Despite time-consuming applications and paperwork, Twist values the workers' de-

pendability enough to integrate the system. "It's either that program or lock the doors," he said frankly.

Loyet foresees the H2B program as a continuing solution for companies who experience disheartening labor shortages and turnover. "If something happened to H2B, I think it would be hard for any company to grow," he said. "If we grew and did not have the H2B policy, we would have a revolving door."

Still, these tried-and-true H2B features, obvious to some contractors, remain out of others' grasps simply because they lack the knowledge about the program. According to a recent *Lawn & Landscape* online poll, nearly 56 percent of respondents were not familiar with H2B, not to mention its advantages. And, even though Oxley currently brings several workers into his company through H2B, he has not seen immediate results because his productivity does not yet offset the program's expenditures. "We're just now starting to see the benefits, because it costs money," he said. "Our returns will start to show up in 2002 and 2003."

WELDING WAGES. According to 1999 Bureau of Labor Statistics wage estimates, the mean hourly wage for landscaping and groundskeeping workers was \$9.32. Meanwhile, 2001 *Lawn & Landscape* industry research pegs the entry-level mower operator wage at \$8.45, an 8.3 percent increase from the 2000 wage of \$7.80

But rather than considering these average figures, landscape contractors commonly look to competition when determining employee wages. Myers explained the frustrations of having to raise an entire crew's pay because new employees demand higher wages. "It's a constant battle, and in order to attract more people we have to increase the starting wage," he said. "In order to get them to come in, we have a higher scale than we had a year ago."

For example, an employee Myers hired a year ago may make \$8 an hour, while a new employee starts at \$8.50, he clarified. "All

benefits drive up our costs, and in order to be competitive we have to be really diligent about production and profit. We can't keep offering the moon and generating the revenue to cover expenses."

Tony DeSantis, president, DeSantis Landscapes, Salem, Ore., has also come face-to-face with wage competition with job applicants coming to Salem from Portland, Ore., where the cost of living drives compensation higher. "It's an issue, and we've lost a few applicants because we couldn't beat what other people were offering and still be fair to other employees," he said.

Hoopers is well aware of the wage war, but he refuses to alter his payroll in the face of competition. Instead, he feels that even when a job pays well, an employee will not stick around if he or she is unhappy. "We really emphasize career growth, rather than just talking about what we make this year," he said. "We talk about what the future is, and that goes for field technicians as well as everyone else in the office."

However, Carver ignores the current hub-bub regarding who's paying what. He recognizes that employees desire higher wages and, as a result, he pays more. "The edge I have is the amount of money I pay and it's not because of competition, but because of the bottom line," he said. "Too many companies in this industry are worrying about competition instead of worrying about competition within themselves." By not losing sleep over wages, Carver insists he can devote time and energy to the company culture and thus avoid turnover and increase devotion.

HISPANIC HIRING

As immigrant labor programs such as H2B grow in scope, Hispanic labor gains presence in the green industry. The following chart reflects a clear increase in Hispanic labor over the past year.

Do you employ Hispanic workers?

	2001	2000
Yes	58.9%	54.5%
No	41.1%	45.5%

Source: Lawn & Landscape survey

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LABOR LEGISLATION

Oxley offers above-average wages, simply because he can expect quality work from an employee earning his worth. "You get what you pay for, and even though money is not the only thing that will make them tick, it sure helps them make that decision." Robertson also stressed the power of offering talented workers above-average wages and flexible schedules. "They are being compensated for being that good," he stated.

According to the 2001 ALCA *Operating Cost Study*, about 25 percent of contractors' costs go toward direct labor. In light of this, Twist identified the discrepancy between paying employees fairly and the rising costs of equipment. "I feel that for the type of equipment we use, landscapers should make more than they do," he insisted.

ECONOMIC EFFECTS. Economy discussions lack a consensus as far as where the industry finds itself and where it is headed. This also applies to how the economy may or may not continue to affect labor.

Oxley optimistically views the struggling economy as potential for an increased labor pool. "I think the labor [issue] will get easier as the economy slows down," he said. "The construction industry is slowing down, so we can get those people and see skilled people walk through the door."

Robertson noted the possible trickle-down employees that may result from layoffs throughout the country, but dismissed the idea of immediate labor relief. Instead, he sees the economy adversely affecting the industry through higher product prices and labor costs. "I think, first and foremost, that labor is going to cost us more, wages are going to continue to go up for our sector and since we want very good people, [we] are going to have to pay them certainly more than minimal wage," he said.

However, rather than continually striving to increase the workforce, Oxley warned against taking current employees for granted. "We try to get skilled people here and teach them," he explained. "All it will do is put another feather in their cap, which makes them more valuable employees to us." ■

The author is Assistant Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.

Editor's note: Since immigrant labor and H2B issues raise a variety of legal questions, Lawn & Landscape asked Anthony Beddell, former director of legislative affairs for the American Nursery and Landscape Association (ANLA), to shed some light on the current state of labor legislation.

In January 2001, ANLA sent out its annual issues ballot, allowing members to send feedback to ANLA on the legislative and regulatory issues that directly affect their businesses. More than 78 percent voted labor and immigration the No. 1 legislative priority for ANLA's government relations program.

In response to this, the Essential Worker Immigration Coalition (EWIC), specifically interested in reforming the current H2B guest worker program, plans to offer an earned status adjustment for the U.S. service industry workforce without proper documentation. Although specific legislation has not yet been introduced on behalf of the landscape and service industries, legal action could be imminent for the following reasons:

1. LABOR SHORTAGES

- The Bureau of Labor Statistics predicts that by 2006, America will have 10 million more jobs than employees. This shortage may last for two decades.
- The shortage is hitting the service sector particularly hard – jobs in essential occupations (semi-skilled and unskilled) are unfilled.

2. INEFFICIENT IMMIGRATION LAWS

- The current system of legal immigration has not been updated significantly since 1990, the beginning of the current economic boom, and reflects more of the previous decade's recession rather than this decade's economic expansion.
- There is no way for employers to legally hire immigrants in a timely manner. There is no available short-term category, and the wait in the permanent (green card) category is up to 10 years.

3. VARIED CAUSES

- Before 2008, the workforce will grow by about 1 percent annually; after 2011, when the Baby Boomers retire, the workforce will actually shrink.
- Due to low unemployment, many who otherwise would consider essential service jobs are persuaded to continue their training to qualify for higher-skill jobs, although 72 percent of all jobs require only on-the-job training.

As a solution, Congress should create new, regulated visa programs: a short-term program for truly short-term needs and a long-term, legal program convertible to permanent residence. Such programs should be targeted to occupations where documented shortages exist.

This comprehensive legislation will then provide a user-friendly guest worker program and stabilize the current undocumented workforce in the landscape and service industry. It is critical that landscape contractors ask their congressmen to support efforts to change H2B and legalize the workforce.

The green industry can accomplish immigration reform for guest worker programs, but only by remaining active and supporting industry organizations.

The author began a new political appointment with the Bush Administration at the Office of Congressional and Intergovernmental Affairs in the Department of Labor on Sept. 17, 2001.

by Kristen Hampshire

Marking TIME

This year, many companies clutched their purses, capped their growth and decided to just stay home.

Some called a time-out to shape up internal systems and develop their labor team, many chose to rebuild instead of reinvest. Mike Schmitt, president, Shamrock Irrigation & Landscape, Simi Valley, Calif., described his growth tactic: "Focus on our customers, focus on our employees and build our business."

Not that businesses halted growth or hibernated while the economy reportedly lagged, qualified labor waned and Mother Nature pulled a few tricks of her own. In fact, these conditions triggered bi-polar response from contractors. Some said this year surpassed the last few – profit is up, accounts are multiplying and labor is available. Others related the contrary – the economy pulled the plug on expansion, weather extremes evaporated service frequency and the bottom line dove.

Either way, most admit that 2001 was an opportune time to take a breather from quick-draw consolidation and rapid-fire expansion and get the house in order. "We're probably having the greatest impact in just our own internal personnel development and strategically doing a better job planning for the future," noted Wayne Richards, vice president, Cagwin & Dorward, Novato, Calif.

While contractors reported a growth year and are optimistic about the coming season, a *Lawn & Landscape* survey uncovered professionalism, labor, the economy and technology as impediments to success. Here, a few resolutions – a to-do list, if you will – to mend some of the industry's sore spots.

TURN TO LABOR ALTERNATIVES.

Digging up employees to fill positions might not be such a problem, however, many said finding qualified candidates has been quite a challenge.

"Labor is still out there, you just have to look for it and go through a couple people to get the guy you want to keep," Schmitt noted. "You have to find people you're willing to put training into. Foremen don't grow on trees."

How can employers sift through applicants when they know the pile isn't endless? How can company owners find skilled employees? Despite corporate lay-offs that tend to

Reflections and resolutions – the industry's future depends on a package-deal to-do list, wrapping up labor, technology, professionalism and service with a focus on internal growth and stability.

feed the industry's labor pool, how can owners find employees looking for a career and not just a paycheck?

Cindy Halm, vice president of operations, Broccolo Tree & Lawn Care, Rochester, N.Y., suggested recruiting outside of want ads. "We need to become more creative in where we reach out to find new employees and make awareness for our industry," she stressed. "Be involved in our schools and let people know that there are careers in their industry – it's not just seasonal jobs."

Proposed amnesty programs and H2B can supply a foreign labor pool, pointed out Maurice Dowell, president, DowCo, St. Louis, Mo. "We don't have the manpower in the 18 to 35-year-old range," he observed. "Our median age is up there, and we don't have the people to man all of these mowers and equipment. I hope our visionary politicians can see this and open up the borders so that we can have the necessary staff."

In hiring those new to the industry, training needs heighten. "There is an effort on training and continuing education, and as people enter our industry, associations are reaching out and offering these services," Halm said.

PROFESSIONALISM IS MORE THAN A CLEAN UNIFORM.

Training translates to professionalism, and most agree the industry still lacks a positive image. "There are 75,000 contractors in the country, and you maybe have less than 1,000 who are doing more than \$2 million per year," Dowell figured. "That leaves 74,000 contractors doing less than that a year, and they haven't trained themselves as professionals in the business."

"I think the business acumen, the sense of timeliness, punc-

"We've always historically said that the service sector is recession proof, but how recession proof it is...we will find out." – Sam Lang

tuality and general professionalism are things that are lacking in our industry," he continued. Bill Leidecker, president, Five Seasons Landscape Management, Columbus, Ohio, added that these poor practices are not limited to how a company looks, although clean trucks and neat uniforms play a part.

Professionalism bundles training, communication, education and business sense, and according to a *Lawn & Landscape* fax survey, these issues are roadblocks to the industry's future success. Polishing image requires learning in seminars, integrating new technology, setting up internal systems, communicating with customers and, most of all, stressing these practices to employees.

Besides, people drive image, Leidecker emphasized.

"This is a customer service- and sales-driven business, and I think most in the industry are really fascinated with the type of equipment they drive around," Leidecker noted. "These are just tools we use to make a dollar. The important thing is that this is still a people business, and for those who realize it and for those who can teach [professionalism] to their employees, the sky's the limit."

Slim labor choices affect professionalism, and this isn't limited to small operations, pointed out Tom Walczyk, owner, Emerald Earth, Middletown, Conn. "I see [employees from] larger companies out there wearing shorts and tank tops and they have earrings," he observed. "It's harder to get good people, and you're forced to hire not the most desirable candidate because you have to take what you can get."

Contractors can combat this with accountability, especially in smaller businesses where employees aren't so camouflaged. "More accountability will result in more professionalism," he added. "You can't hide in a small company like you can in a larger branch where you might bang out your production and go home. There's no doubt there's more accountability there."

OFFER CLIENTS BOTH SERVICE AND SUGGESTIONS. Clients want their service providers to do more than simply provide—they want lawn and landscape companies to anticipate, identify and treat problems, Dowell noted.

"They want us to not just show up and mow and blow, but to show up and provide input," he said. "If there are wet spots, they want to know. If there are brown spots, they want input."

Training and encouragement help achieve this awareness, Dowell said. "Clients are looking for cohesiveness—they want the person to be responsible."

And they want suggestions, noticed Scott Brickman, president and chief executive officer, The Brickman Group, Chicago, Ill. Customer surveys prove this every year. "The No. 1 thing every year, for every branch, far and away is, 'I wish your people were more proactive. Tell me how I can improve my site. What can I do to make it better? Communicate with me.'"

Clients do look for professional input, and they want advice to improve their properties, he noted. "Part of what they want is for us to tell them ideas even though they're not sure they can buy them, but they want the idea," he pointed out.

"The No. 1 thing every year, for every branch far and away is, 'I wish your people were more proactive. Tell me how I can improve my site. What can I do to make it better? Communicate with me.'" — Scott Brickman

GET WIRED. A few years ago, companies didn't rely on technology to conduct daily business like they do today, Richards noted. Now, e-mail replaces faxes and Web sites serve as company catalogues. "Things we are taking for granted every day were not even in practice three years ago," he said. "I think that technology is happening so fast that we don't even think about it."

Even smaller businesses traded pencil and paper for databases and dial-up net-

works, and slipping computer prices make advancements more readily available to entrepreneurs, remarked Sam Lang, president, Fairway Green, Raleigh, N.C., predicting that Palm Pilots will likely serve as billing tools before long.

"Technology is here to stay, and it's only going to become more so in our industry," Halm noted. "I see a big difference between those who do utilize it and those who don't, and that gap does seem to be widening."

For companies to compete and also offer the professional image that clients demand, technology must fit into the plan, Dowell added. "Most companies are aware that if they are going to run a viable organization, they will have to get on the technology bandwagon and move forward," he asserted.

GET TOGETHER, GET INFORMED. Historically, industry response to legislative hoopla is not proactive, but reactive, and industry unification efforts are poor, Lang noted. An issue, such as 48-hour notification, surfaces, and then groups convene and contest the proposal. This approach leaves little competitive leeway when stringent bills start circulating through the legislative process.

"There is a need for a unified front with a full-time lobbying group in Washington D.C., and we need a political action committee," Lang recommended. "We need to address issues at the federal level. We need a clearing house for information and a call to action to help states when they get into trouble, so resources are shipped to that state."

The green industry has a significant impact on the environment and economy, which many do not realize, Halm added. The industry can look to the Farm Bureau as a model—an organized group that influences legislation, she said. Legislative concerns are Halm's greatest challenge, and though her New York county has not yet adopted the 48-hour neighbor notification law, neighboring counties have passed the bill and she expects its effects on integrated pest management will trickle down, increasing treatment costs and boosting the amount of products used to control problem.

A GLASS HALF FULL

A *Lawn & Landscape* survey reported similar concern, with 22.8 percent of respondents anxious about legislation's role in the future. In the past, these issues were overlooked by most contractors.

"I would think in the next year we will see efforts by the anti-pesticide people and our industry battling over this issue," she anticipated. "We will have to be more proactive before these issues start to arise in offering professional services."

WEATHER MOTHER NATURE WITH STABLE SERVICES. Perhaps contractors can predict rising political concerns, but they can't forecast the weather. This variable drives or drains a business, and many claimed that Mother Nature wasn't too kind to their companies this year.

"I'm more convinced than ever that you can have the best people, production and intentions, and yet you have so little control over your success and your destiny because of the weather," Walczyk said.

For companies that depend on snowplow profits, a mild winter throws off the numbers, Leidecker added. Columbus, Ohio, accumulated little more than 2 inches at a time last winter – hardly enough to send out the plows, he said. On the other hand, Minnesota and New York "got slammed," he said.

In addition, Leidecker expects extreme heat to affect plants in the long run. "Turf is pretty resilient and you can reseed it, but in terms of plant material, I think it will impact the trees for years to come." In effect, plant material prices will continue to rise – "the old supply and demand thing," he pointed out. "Trees went up 25 percent from the last drought in 1998 and they've never gone down in price because the supply isn't there."

However, there isn't a key to keeping away drought or downpour. A company's stability will determine how it weathers extreme conditions.

IF YOU CAN'T GROW IN THE MARKET, GROW WITHIN THE COMPANY.

Speaking of unpredictability, the economy stirs mixed reactions from contractors, the outlook often depending on the location. As businesses, both large and small, consider where the economy will take their opera-

Landscape contractors may be dealing with challenges they haven't encountered since the recession of the early 1990s, but their struggles this year haven't dampened their hopes for the future. In fact, contractors remain as optimistic about the landscape industry's future as they have ever been with more than 96 percent of survey respondents indicating they are either "very optimistic" or "somewhat optimistic."

Very Optimistic	40.6%
Somewhat Optimistic	56.3%
Somewhat Pessimistic	2.1%
Very Pessimistic	1.0%

Source: Lawn & Landscape survey

tions in the next year, many owners opt for conservative business management tactics, Leidecker pointed out.

"I think the economic downturn last fall was the first time in a long time people felt the pinch," he related. "And some people in their late 20s never experienced a downturn, so it caused people to manage their businesses, whether on the landscape side or on the customer side, in a fashion that they had not before."

Richards noticed that his commercial accounts are trimming their service contracts to match their budgets. This is occurring because the Silicon Valley is experiencing an economic crunch and companies are adjusting their spending accordingly, he noted. However, Lang figures that the Research Triangle, Raleigh, N.C., area will experience economic pressure later. "It will be a ripple effect," he said. "Telecommunication and computer companies are laying off, and it has to affect us sooner or later, but right now, it has not.

"We've always historically said that the service sector is recession proof," he continued. "But how recession proof it is...we will find out."

With housing starts still healthy and construction projects still rolling, many contractors have yet to experience financial tension. And many customers are leveraging their income to afford lawn and landscape services, taking on more debt to increase their

real estate value, Schmitt said. Overall, companies predict an optimistic, profitable coming year, according to the *Lawn & Landscape* survey. Just because the stock market is temperamental and consumers are more cautious does not mean companies can't grow and thrive, Richards said.

"A lot of people are still trying to grow their business and feel very comfortable doing so," he noted. "If you look at the surveys on the top 100 companies, they are showing some double digit growth, so I don't think people are sitting back at status quo. I think they see opportunity and the need to continue growing."

Whether this growth means expansion through local consolidation – which is a trend many noticed – or growth from within by enhancing internal operations, contractors may be staying home, but they aren't sitting still. To overcome challenges with professionalism, labor and technology, they simply can't.

"Our industry needs to articulate the value we provide," Schmitt emphasized. "We need to be active in their communities, focused locally and always be selling ourselves. You need to constantly focus on things that will bring in new customers and employees or help you retain the customers and employees that you have right now." ■

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

GROUNDS CONTROL DIVISION OF SANITORS

Piecing It All Together

With a sluggish economy and a possible recession come tighter pocketbooks. And the clients of Grounds Control, San Antonio, Texas, are no different.

"What we're finding is that we still do have the customer base, but they are very reluctant to spend 100 percent of what they want to," explained Russ Fragala, vice president of Northeast operations.

Fragala explained that Grounds Control's customers are still spending money, but they're doing it in phases instead of all at once.

"We're installing a \$100,000 back yard now, but the client has decided to do it \$25,000 at a time," he stated. "We're doing the whole job, it's just taking longer because it's phased out."

To deal with this challenge, Fragala explained that the company is paying very close attention to customer service issues and making sure that its employees go above and beyond the usual "110 percent" effort. "With that, it's almost a seamless transition from one phase to another," he emphasized.

With the uncertainty of the market, Fragala estimated that his company won't see the same growth patterns as seen in the late 1990s, but he explained that next year's growth should be higher than 2001 because of planned acquisitions. In addition, the fact that his is a full-service company is improving the chances that Grounds Control will be able to ride out the slowing economy, he remarked.

"I find our customers are looking for one-stop shopping," he observed. "A company that's only offering construction is not recession proof."

"It's almost like a supermarket only selling milk and bread," Fragala continued. "If you're not selling everything for the household, why would anyone want to shop there?" — Cheryl Green

INSTALLATION

COMPANY NAME	REVENUE
1 Gothic Landscape	\$44,450,000
2 Randall & Blake	\$42,625,000
3 The Brickman Group	\$37,923,000
4 Scott Byron & Co.	\$20,187,500
5 Vila & Son Landscaping Corp.	\$19,275,000
6 Jensen Corp.	\$18,675,000
7 OneSource Landscape & Golf Services	\$17,000,000
8 Landscape Concepts	\$16,800,000
9 Great Oaks Landscape Associates	\$14,881,577
10 American Landscape Cos.	\$14,620,000
11 The Bruce Co. of Wisconsin	\$13,400,000
12 Mariani Landscape	\$12,720,000
13 The Groundskeeper	\$11,890,000
14 Chapel Valley Landscape Co.	\$11,800,000
15 Nissho of California	\$11,689,418

* Landscape design/build and/or installation services

SCOTT BYRON & CO.

Time Out

Having the ability to do something, doesn't always mean that you should do it. That's how Scott Byron, president, Scott Byron & Co., Lake Bluff, Ill., feels about growth.

"We've been growing at a compounded rate of 18 to 20 percent, and we're at a point where we strategically decided that we want to stay where we are until we have the additional skilled and competent people to move forward," he emphasized.

Byron said this decision will allow the company to develop its staff's skills to provide the quality services that its high-end residential clients enjoy and expect.

To keep the staff well-trained and reliable, the company offers weekly training sessions led by an on-staff quality assurance manager along with a host of monetary and non-monetary incentives. Incentives offered to crews and field staff include subsidized uniforms, paid holidays and seasonal health insurance. The company also observes a number of Hispanic holidays. Monetary incentives include pay raises connected to advancement in the company's certification program.

"We've tried to make [the workplace] a user-friendly environment so that our seasonal folks want to come back," Byron asserted. In fact, more than 60 percent of the company's foremen are Hispanic and return year after year.

These benefits are offered because, as Byron explained, success is inevitable if a company has an experienced, knowledgeable staff.

"The No. 1 key is to know and understand what our clients' needs and expectations are and to be able to design and provide the kinds of services that they find valuable," he remarked. "No. 2 is the ability to attract, retain and develop folks who can deliver services commensurate with our clients' expectations. Everything else is a byproduct of that." — Cheryl Green

MAINTENANCE

COMPANY NAME	REVENUE
1 The Brickman Group	\$179,058,000
2 OneSource Landscape & Golf Services	\$55,250,000
3 Nanak's Landscaping	\$22,600,000
4 Omni Facility Services	\$21,560,000
5 Duke-Weeks	\$19,801,000
6 The Groundskeeper	\$17,110,000
7 Grounds Control	\$16,500,000
8 Park Landscape Maintenance	\$13,365,000
9 Cagwin & Dorward	\$12,859,528
10 Gibbs Landscape Co.	\$9,200,000
11 McFall & Berry Landscape Mgmt.	\$8,618,000
12 AAA Landscaping	\$8,600,000
13 Mariani Landscape	\$8,480,000
14 Sungrow Landscape Services	\$8,400,000
15 Landscape Specialists	\$8,004,000

* Lawn mowing and edging, shrub trimming, etc.

IRRIGATION*

THE LAWN CO.

Down, But Not Out

"We can't wait to see the first frost."

That is how Ed McGuire, president/owner, The Lawn Co., South Dennis, Mass., feels about this season. Between spring arriving late and the unrelenting heat and humidity when summer finally did arrive, McGuire said his staff just couldn't catch a break.

"We had snow in April and an early drought the first of May," McGuire related. "Then we were killed by armyworms the first 10 days in July. There has also been high heat and humidity, which made working outside very difficult."

In addition to weather challenges, McGuire explained that he also faced manpower issues. "It was hard to replace people who left over the winter," he said. "Because we got a late start, we had to try to get a lot of work done in a short amount of time with fewer experienced people."

Just when McGuire thought he might get caught up on work, the armyworms hit. "They were all over the place. They knocked us back another week," he declared. "It has been a difficult year, and it has really taken a toll on our people."

But, despite the difficult season, McGuire related that The Lawn Co. continues to do quite well. In fact, he stressed that the company should top its 2000 performance and grow again in 2002.

"When there are problems or you have a difficult year, business is usually better the next year," McGuire speculated. "This year has just been a freak year."

However, McGuire's assumption about his company's growth depends on a few different factors - some of which he can't control. "We're going to assume that the manpower problem will be better and that the economy will be better," he said. "But having a good staff is key," he advised. "If you're doing more with unskilled people, you're not really gaining much. The growth comes with well-trained, experienced people." - Cheryl Green

	COMPANY NAME	REVENUE
1	Choate Irrigation	\$16,410,400
2	Gothic Landscape	\$12,700,000
3	Marina Landscape	\$11,200,000
4	Summer Rain	\$10,000,000
5	American Landscape Cos.	\$9,860,000
6	Marc Dutton Irrigation	\$7,000,000
7	OneSource Landscape & Golf Services	\$5,950,000
8	Automatic Design	\$5,500,000
9	Teufel Nursery	\$5,450,000
10	Grounds Control	\$4,950,000
11	Terrain Systems	\$4,800,000
12	The Celtis Group	\$4,515,000
13	Randall & Blake	\$3,875,000
14	Vila & Son Landscaping Corp.	\$3,855,000
15	Lipinski Landscape & Irrigation	\$3,690,000

* Irrigation installation and/or maintenance

CHOATE IRRIGATION

Rain, Rain Go Away

If you see Maro Johnson doing a rain dance, he's not praying for more rain - he is hoping for less. An abundance of rain means a harder sell for Johnson, sales manager, Choate Irrigation, Carrollton, Texas.

"The worst challenge was the weather in the beginning of the year," he stressed. "We had to overcome rain in the first three months. Those months were killers."

However, Johnson said the company rode out that challenge and has performed better than ever in the past four months, with sales of almost \$1.9 million in August alone. But this year's record-setting performance, which can be linked in part to the company's expansion plans, has not been without growing pains.

In addition to its Carrollton location, the company also has offices in San Antonio, Austin, Houston, Atlanta, Ga., and Hilton Head, S.C.

Johnson explained that because his company has established a market in Texas for builders to offer irrigation systems as a standard option on new homes, Choate Irrigation is also trying to create this market in the newer locations. But, that hasn't been an easy sell.

"In Atlanta, it's very rare for a builder to offer a sprinkler system with a house even though a very high percentage of homeowners add an irrigation system within one or two years of moving in," he related.

Despite these and other challenges, Johnson expects that the company will grow 15 to 20 percent in 2002 through increases in the commercial market, which makes up about 40 percent of its business, growth in high-end, residential community development and increased acceptance in the builder market. Johnson also sees success on the horizon for the entire industry as long as everyone works toward making the customer's life easier.

"Homeowners want to spend less time tinkering with their landscapes," he advised. "We need to provide the homeowner with an easier-to-maintain lifestyle." - Cheryl Green

LAWN CARE*

	COMPANY NAME	REVENUE
1	TruGreen-ChemLawn	\$906,000,000
2	The Weed Man	\$70,000,000
3	Lawn Doctor	\$59,290,000
4	Greenspace Services	\$28,800,000
5	Naturalawn of America	\$21,000,000
6	Scotts LawnService	\$19,080,000
7	Centex Hometeam Lawn Care	\$9,450,000
8	Pro Grass	\$8,400,000
9	Middleton Pest Control	\$7,700,000
10	Massey Services	\$7,065,000
11	The Lawn Co.	\$6,512,000
12	Senske Lawn & Tree Care	\$6,060,000
13	OneSource Landscape & Golf Services	\$5,950,000
14	Cedar Landscape	\$5,425,000
15	J.C. Ehrlich Co.	\$4,949,000

* Chemical lawn care and fertilization

EDITOR'S NOTE: Companies that did not breakout their 2000 revenue sources are not included in the Top 15 Lists.

	COMPANY	CITY	STATE	2000 REVENUE	% INCREASE/DECREASE OVER 1999	EXPECTED % INCREASE/DECREASE FOR 2001	YEAR-ROUND EMPLOYEES	SEASONAL/PART-TIME EMPLOYEES
1	TruGreen-ChemLawn	Memphis	Tenn.	\$906,000,000	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
2	TruGreen LandCare	Memphis	Tenn.	\$690,000,000	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
3	Environmental Industries	Colababas	Calif.	\$466,000,000	4%	10%	6,100	n/a
4	The Davey Tree Expert Co.	Kent	Ohio	\$322,000,000	4.5%	4%	5,200	800
5	The Brickman Group	Langhorne	Pa.	\$239,841,000	33%	21%	1,500	2,000
6	Bartlett Tree Experts	Stamford	Conn.	\$125,000,000	10%	n/a	1,800	150
7	Rentokil Tropical Plant Services	Riverwoods	Ill.	\$90,000,000	28%	30%	1,400	650
8	OneSource Landscape & Golf Services	Tampa	Fla.	\$85,000,000	13%	15%	1,400	300
9	Randall & Blake	Littleton	Colo.	\$77,500,000	25%	20%	600	500
10	Weed Man	Mississauga	Ontario	\$70,000,000	10%	10%	500	2,500
11	Gothic Landscape	Valencia	Ind.	\$63,500,000	208%	5%	1100	n/a
12	Lawn Doctor	Holmdel	N.J.	\$60,500,000	7%	7%	900	600
13	Omni Facility Services - Landscaping Group	Norristown	Pa.	\$44,000,000	28%	18%	350	250
14	Duke-Weeks ▲	Norcross	Ga.	\$37,869,000	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
15	American Landscape Cos.	Canoga Park	Calif.	\$34,000,000	13%	10%	565	n/a
16	The Bruce Co. of Wisconsin	Middleton/Racine	Wisc.	\$33,500,000	8%	7%	264	246
17	Grounds Control Division of Sanitors	San Antonio	Texas	\$33,000,000	7%	n/a	750	n/a
	The Care of Trees	Wheeling	Ill.	\$33,000,000	12%	14%	425	n/a
19	Greenspace Services	Toronto	Ontario	\$32,000,000	8%	6%	150	600
20	The Groundskeeper	Tucson	Ariz.	\$29,000,000	17%	10%	550	30
21	Landscape Concepts	Grayslake	Ill.	\$28,000,000	10%	n/a	60	350
22	Vila & Son Landscaping Corp.	Miami	Fla.	\$25,700,000	15%	5%	305	0
23	Jensen Corp.	Cupertino	Calif.	\$24,900,000	46%	28%	250	250
24	Lipinski Landscape & Irrigation	Marlton	N.J.	\$24,600,000	10%	10%	100	250
25	Scott Byron & Co.	Lake Bluff	Ill.	\$23,750,000	10%	0%	340	n/a
26	Acres Group	Wauconda	Ill.	\$23,000,000	15%	13%	450	600
27	Nanak's Landscaping	Orlando	Fla.	\$22,600,000	12%	10%	1150	n/a
28	Teufel Nursery	Portland/Seattle	Ore./Wash.	\$21,800,000	14%	n/a	258	91
29	The Celtis Group (form. Diablo Landscape)	San Jose	Calif.	\$21,500,000	25%	10%	315	0
30	Mariani Landscape	Lake Bluff	Ill.	\$21,200,000	32%	15%	80	220
	Scotts LawnService	Marysville	Ohio	\$21,200,000	85%	100%	500	100
32	Chalet Nursery & Garden	Wilmette	Ill.	\$21,000,000	10%	5%	85	150
	Naturalawn of America	Frederick	Md.	\$21,000,000	15%	15%	12	0
34	Chapel Valley Landscape Co.	Woodbine	Md.	\$20,000,000	0%	15%	200	80
	Marina Landscape	Anaheim	Calif.	\$20,000,000	35%	20%	180	20
	Tropics North	Miami	Fla.	\$20,000,000	42%	15%	250	0
37	Cogwin & Dorward	Novato	Calif.	\$19,783,889	9%	7%	315	40
38	AAA Landscaping	Phoenix	Ariz.	\$17,200,000	14%	15%	500	n/a
39	Lucas Tree Expert Co.	Portland	Ore.	\$17,000,000	-5%	0%	n/a	n/a
40	Urban Farmer	Thornton	Colo.	\$16,780,000	4%	9%	185	130
41	Nissho of California	Vista	Calif.	\$16,699,168	27%	18%	320	n/a
42	Park Landscape Maintenance	Santa Ana	Calif.	\$16,500,000	0%	7%	470	30
43	Choate Irrigation	Carrallton	Texas	\$16,410,400	29%	18%	n/a	n/a
44	Lied's Nursery Co.	Sussex	Wisc.	\$16,348,000	10%	-10%	125	100
45	Keller Outdoor	Sanford	Fla.	\$16,000,000	23%	1-2%	200	0
	Post Landscape Group	Smyrna	Ga.	\$16,000,000	16%	9%	200	30
47	The Highridge Corp.	Issaquah	Wash.	\$15,600,000	13%	170%	200	70
48	Clarence Davids & Co.	Matteson	Ill.	\$15,000,000	8%	10%	85	200
	DuBrow's Nurseries	Livingston	N.J.	\$15,000,000	15%	6%	85	165
50	Great Oaks Landscape Associates	Novi	Mich.	\$14,881,577	39%	10%	25	75

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	COMPANY	CITY	STATE	2000 REVENUE	% INCREASE/DECREASE OVER 1999	EXPECTED % INCREASE/DECREASE FOR 2001	YEAR-ROUND EMPLOYEES	SEASONAL/PART-TIME EMPLOYEES
51	Western DuPage Landscaping	Naperville	Ill.	\$14,700,000	12%	8%	35	120
52	New Garden Landscaping & Nursery	Greensboro	N.C.	\$14,600,000	11%	10%	210	n/a
53	Hermes Landscaping	Lenexa	Kan.	\$14,000,000	25%	25%	115	160
	Sungrow Landscape Services	Austin	Texas	\$14,000,000	22%	12%	150	100
55	McFall & Berry Landscape Management	McLean	Va.	\$13,900,000	12%	3%	160	65
56	Denison Landscaping	Ft. Washington	Md.	\$13,000,000	30%	10%	65	45
57	Dora Landscaping Co.	Apopka	Fla.	\$12,400,000	-19%	n/a	130	0
58	Clintar Groundskeeping Services	Toronto	Ontario	\$12,110,000	9%	14%	120	200
59	ALDO 1 Landscaping & Lawn Service	Ocean	N.J.	\$12,100,000	15%	12%	100	150
60	Landscape Services	Las Vegas	Nev.	\$12,000,000	n/a	n/a	150	n/a
	Parker Interior Plantscape	Scotch Plains	N.J.	\$12,000,000	0%	2%	160	40
	Pro Grass	Wilsonville	Ore.	\$12,000,000	10%	10%	225	25
	Terrain Systems	Phoenix	Ariz.	\$12,000,000	8%	20%	250	n/a
64	Gibbs Landscape Co.	Smyrna	Ga.	\$11,500,000	8%	12%	165	180
65	Webb Landscape	Ketchum	Idaho	\$11,436,000	12%	10%	80	110
66	Countryside Industries	Wauconda	Ill.	\$11,401,444	11%	20%	28	150
67	Northwestern Landscape Co.	Puyallup	Wash.	\$11,200,000	20%	10%	120	60
68	Munie Outdoor Services	Caseyville	Ill.	\$11,000,000	10%	10%	75	75
69	Cocal Landscape	Denver	Colo.	\$10,900,000	26%	34%	120	180
	James Martin Associates & LID Landscapes	Vernon Hills & Boulder	Ill. & Colo.	\$10,900,000	18%	10%	75	60
71	ILT Vignocchi	Wauconda	Ill.	\$10,560,000	19%	0%	45	200
72	Centex Hometeam Lawn Care	Dallas	Texas	\$10,500,000	100%	100%	350	n/a
	Sebert Landscaping	Bartlett	Ill.	\$10,500,000	20%	10%	45	160
74	Hillenmeyer Nurseries	Lexington	Ky.	\$10,200,000	-3%	5%	80	30
75	J.C. Ehrlich Co.	Reading	Pa.	\$10,100,000	3%	8%	120	0
	Senske Lawn & Tree Care	Kennewick	Wash.	\$10,100,000	9%	12%	150	40
77	Dennis Seven Dees Landscaping	Portland	Ore.	\$10,000,000	0%	23%	160	40
	Fullbach Services	Louisville	Ky.	\$10,000,000	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Summer Rain	Greenwich	Conn.	\$10,000,000	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
80	Realty Landscaping Co.	Newton	Pa.	\$9,700,000	12%	10%	85	110
81	Swingle Tree & Landscape Care	Denver	Colo.	\$9,600,000	20%	10%	130	180
82	Bratt	Pleasant Grove	Utah	\$9,378,000	22%	25%	70	155
83	Landscape Specialists	Lake Forest	Calif.	\$9,200,000	6%	10%	240	60
84	Groundmasters	Cincinnati	Ohio	\$9,144,862	25%	10%	100	50
85	Stiles Landscape Co.	Pompano Beach	Fla.	\$9,007,000	15%	14%	130	50
86	Yardmaster	Painesville	Ohio	\$9,000,000	10%	15%	150	100
87	Bio Landscape & Maintenance	Houston	Texas	\$8,744,497	4%	50%	50	200
88	L.A. Landscape	Upland	Calif.	\$8,700,000	26%	20%	125	n/a
89	Canon Russeau Landscape	Detroit	Mich.	\$8,600,000	15%	20%	35	85
90	Landscape Management	Carrollton	Texas	\$8,355,046	-34%	50%	200	0
91	R.H. Dupper Landscaping	Tempe	Ariz.	\$8,300,000	4%	20%	120	0
92	McHale & McHale Landscape Design	McLean	Va.	\$8,200,000	13%	10%	100	135
93	Lambert's	Dallas	Texas	\$8,100,000	0%	0%	100	15
94	Landscape Workshop	Birmingham	Ala.	\$8,000,000	9%	n/a	110	30
95	Heads Up Landscape Contractors	Albuquerque	N.M.	\$7,965,000	28%	20%	120	60
96	Mainscape	Indianapolis	Ind.	\$7,948,316	23%	2%	45	125
97	Smallwood Landscape	Naples	Fla.	\$7,915,000	52%	5%	88	0
98	Decorative Plant Service	San Francisco	Calif.	\$7,880,000	-3%	21%	133	30
98	Rood Landscape	Tequesta	Fla.	\$7,800,000	14%	0%	105	25
98	Cedar Landscape	Sherwood	Ore.	\$7,750,000	22%	20%	215	0

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(continued from page 72)

customers that a flawless lawn may not be synonymous with a healthy lawn. "A weed-free and insect-free lawn is called concrete or Astro-turf," he joked. "It just does not exist."

Catron said organic use has fluctuated in recent years—a trend resulting from a lack of education when companies initially attempted an organics approach. "I think a lot of the vendors thought it was going to be a cake-walk," he reasoned. "Organics work differently, spread differently, respond differently — you have to have patience and understand what you're looking for."

This knowledge must extend to employees and customers to sell the product successfully, Catron continued. "In fact, when we first started [in 1986], there were three things that you really had to accomplish: highly trained people, price sensitivity and customer education." He achieves this through quarterly newsletters, an extensive Web site and service presentations.

Furthermore, Jones sends his employees

to various training programs and cites company knowledge as a clear advantage over his competitors. When employees are knowledgeable, they offer clients consistent organics education, and, consequently, increase business, Jones said. "It's about answering questions and being available," he noted. "In the long run, if you can make your clients happy and make them realize what is going on, they tend to stay happy, stay with you longer and then tell their friends."

For Catron, honesty is the best policy, especially when using programs that mix organic and synthetic products. "It's ideal to sit down with the consumer," he said. "They'll ask, 'Is everything you use safe? Do you use pesticides?' When you take the time to tell people what it is all about, a) Don't try to pull the wool over their eyes, and b) Don't become defensive."

DEBATE AND DIRECTION. Like many trendy diet programs, organics may be inter-

preted as a fad, destined to fade out before it can catch on. However, Sachs said organics are also applicable in the future. "It seems to me that environmental awareness does not seem to be diminishing at all," he observed. "I'm reading more about it, hearing more about it, more and more people are talking about it and it doesn't seem like the trend is fading."

The question remains as to where and how organics fit into the larger lawn care picture. Catron recognized the small-scale impact of organics companies and asserted that the trend would continue to be limited in the beginning, mainly focusing on residential properties. "The organic market niche is going to continue to be very small 'mom and pop' organizations," he predicted. "The residential market is more receptive because they have children, pets and kids, and they like to do the right thing."

However, the "right thing" continues to be a source of controversy. Jones' faith in or-

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DESTRUCTIVE TURF INSECTS



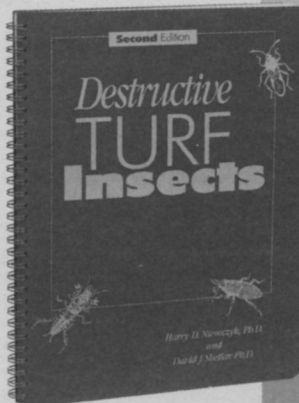
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Irrigation Installation

by Kristin Mohn

I
A clear focus on proper design, thorough planning and customer education leads to successful irrigation system installation.

Installing an irrigation system can be a tricky undertaking. Regulating pressure, setting components at the proper depth, evaluating properties – all these tasks pose potential obstacles for contractors who demand quality.

Most of these problems can be avoided initially with thorough design and background work on property specifications. However, even these precautions may fall short of preventing installation failure if the customer is not educated. "Half of [the installation] is talking to the customer, who also stresses quality," said Brandon Davis, vice president, Southeastern Landscape, Huntsville, Ala. "You need to be one-on-one with the customer, let them know what's going on, give them personal attention. People want to know what you're doing."

Jon Richardson, vice president of the construction division, Bio Landscape and Maintenance,

Installing an irrigation system effectively begins with thorough customer education and careful property analysis. Photo: Stephen Nagle

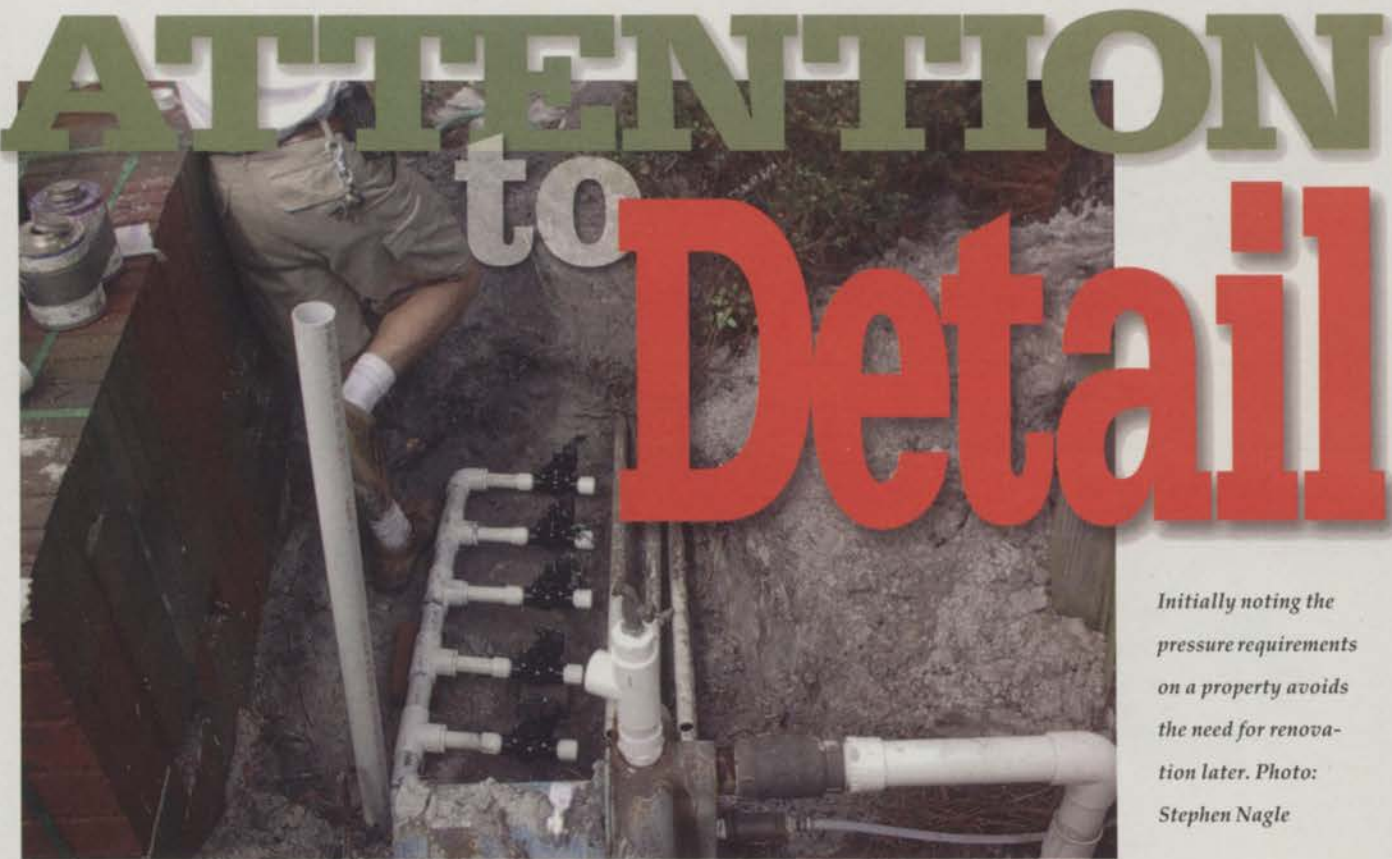


Houston, Texas, explained that an irrigation design cannot be formulated without consulting the customer – especially on a residential basis. "I think that matching the design to the customer's specific needs would be the biggest [consideration]," he said. "The first thing to do is to educate the customer, tell them what's available, what it does and give them an idea of how to tell you what they want."

PROPERTY SPECS. A significant part of this education begins with knowing the customer's spending power and tailoring a system's design to financial constraints. "A person may have a fixed budget and they can't have the 'Cadillac' system," Richardson remarked. After clearing this hurdle, contractors must strike a balance among monetary factors, available equipment and customer preferences.

Yet, determining system availability requires more than simply flipping through a catalog or

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Initially noting the pressure requirements on a property avoids the need for renovation later. Photo: Stephen Nagle

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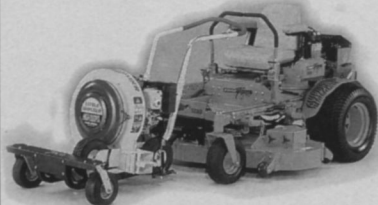
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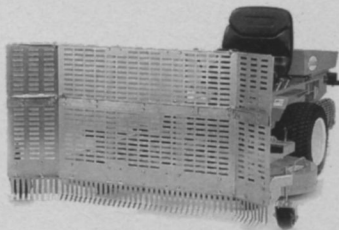
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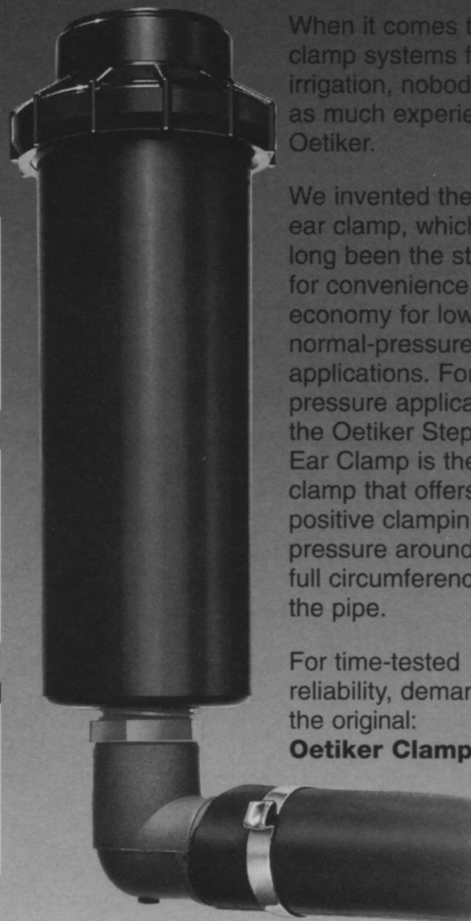
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USE READER SERVICE #34

Irrigation Installation

(continued from page 94)

choosing parts, said Michael Metcalf, president, Metcalf Landscape Contractors, Boise, Idaho. The contractor must determine where utility lines lie so they are not cut or damaged.

In addition, water pressure and availability pose valid concerns and determine what can realistically be installed on a property, said Stephen Nagle, president, Personal Touch Landscape and Irrigation, Destin, Fla. "A lot of [contractors] assume that water is available," he said. "You end up with a low flow irrigation system that just doesn't work properly."

Even if the current pressure appears sufficient, Metcalf pointed out that pressure could change as housing developments or communities develop. "A contractor needs to be aware of the maturity of the subdivision and see if the water pressure is going to be dropping in the future so he can design [the system] for those needs," Metcalf insisted.

Water quality also plays a part when deciding what type of system or source to install, Nagle explained. "When the water quality is really low, we encourage drip irrigation," he said, since low-quality water may stain houses and properties. "We try to discuss what the homeowner wants, and whether to go with a deeper, rock well rather than a sand well. Rock wells offer better quality of water, but they're more costly."

Customers can also opt for city water in residential areas and lower quality water in other areas to avoid staining, Nagle continued. "But you do have to consider in the long-term you will end up paying more for the city water as opposed to the up front cost of a deep well," he advised.

COMMERCIAL VS. RESIDENTIAL. Another consideration to take into account when installing an irrigation system lies in the discrepancies between residential and commercial clients. Besides obvious property differences, residential and commercial customers value alternate approaches to the installation, Richardson said. "I would say there are more variables with a commercial installation - there are a lot of different factors involved and deadlines as well," he said. "Maybe a store is going to open soon... a lot of times we also have more than one person to satisfy."

On the other hand, residential customers require an emphasis on quality rather than

(continued on page 98)

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Irrigation Installation

(continued from page 96)

time constraints, Richardson discussed. "A residential job is more customized, you need a more individual approach, more instruction and more relationship building with the owner," he said.

Davis added that residential customers value cleanliness during the job. He utilizes a separate clean-up crew that pressure washes

concrete, re-mulches beds and generally tidies the property after an installation. Although time-consuming, he said this extra service encourages future sales referrals. Richardson also noted the importance of neatness to a homeowner. "The [residential] job site has to be kept clean, where construction sites are usually a mess and no one cares," he noted.

Last-minute design changes tend to be more common with commercial projects, Richardson alleged. "For example, with a commercial site, sometimes they move a building on you," he said. Residential design changes pose less of a problem due to staffed designers who can alter designs on site, but since commercial designers often come from architectural firms, design changes can cause slow-downs ranging from a few days to a month, Richardson noted. Thus, envisioning all possible changes prior to an installation may help alleviate design woes.

Furthermore, manpower requirements also differ between commercial and residential jobs. Most contractors utilize a four-person crew for residential jobs and typically double that number for commercial installations, depending on the property size.

Although many contractors deal with both types of installations, Metcalf cautioned against mixing equipment to save time or costs. "Even when you get somebody who doesn't know about landscaping and wouldn't know the difference, don't install residential grade parts in commercial projects," he advised.

(continued on page 100)

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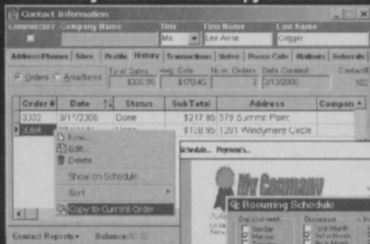
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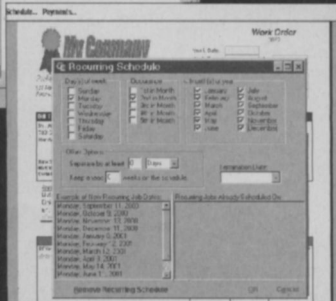
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In order to install an irrigation system correctly, careful attention must be paid to small details. Stephen Nagle, president, Personal Touch Landscape and Irrigation, Destin, Fla., offered the following tips for proper irrigation installation:

- Separate turf and shrub lines
- Separate spray and rotor heads
- Match precipitation in the system
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- Determine correct wire sizing
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Irrigation Installation

(continued from page 98)

Finally, for both commercial and residential projects, it's crucial to be observant during the bidding phase, Richardson said. "Make sure you read all the written specifications on the plan," he insisted. "Many times contractors get cornered into something they didn't bid or plan to do, and they lose a lot of money."

DURING THE INSTALLATION. Design begins with initial customer contact, but continues during installation, explained Metcalf. He said his company keeps accurate, detailed records of the system's design so if a break occurs, he knows exactly which elements make up the system.

Due to lower water availability, Metcalf

mentioned that several subdivisions have switched to pressurized irrigation systems, where one water source flows into the subdivision. Although this set-up offers the advantages of clean and inexpensive water, the water only flows at certain times, posing disadvantages during early springs and autumns. "You end up not having water in those systems," he said. "If you don't have a cross-connection into municipal water you are going to have to end up watering by hose," he warned, stressing the need to install this cross-connection option.

Many times, choosing the correct type of machinery can present a challenge, Nagle said. He bases his decision on ground material, using a vibratory plow for rocky materials and a trencher for clean clay, soil or sand. Davis also mentioned the problems caused by hard ground and rock, steep terrain or digging under driveways and sidewalks. Although a frustrating and lengthy process, he said these obstacles are just part of the procedure. "There's no way around that," he said simply. "You just kind of deal with it."

Of course, an installation would not be possible without a dedicated crew. Davis cited common sense as a valuable quality in a crew that may constantly face last-minute design changes, picky customers or water pressure problems. Similarly, Richardson identified crew supervision as a necessary component of a successful installation, with many levels in the chain of command and devoted managers who involve themselves in the design process. "A dedicated crew is very important, and having a good crew makes the supervision easier," he said.

Throughout the installation, contractors can avoid missed deadlines or equipment misuse through effective organization, Richardson identified. "You should know where you're at every day," he said. "For example, if it's supposed to be a 10-day job and on the 6th day you are not 60 percent complete, it's too late. Don't wait until the end to see you didn't do well - you won't meet a deadline or make money."

Further, Metcalf encouraged an open mind when installing an irrigation system. "All the time you have some field changes, so everything ends up being different on paper than what it is in the real field," he said.

Additionally, the rising cost of water forces
(continued on page 102)

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Irrigation Installation

(continued from page 100)

contractors to take extra precautions when installing a system, Nagle said. "Conserving water is a big issue, and with the price that water is going for now, we're running more into drip irrigation and watching overspray," he said. "I think water conservation ties into the system with the design itself, also, with planting the right plants in the right place."

POST-INSTALLATION. Even after the contractor has packed up the crew and equipment, proper installation continues with follow-up and attention to late-season procedures. Winterization is important for systems that face the threat of freezing during the winter, said Metcalf. "We pressurize the lines with air and blow out the water," he explained. "We try to time that to the latest we can possibly time it, before the first deep freeze."

Davis said some customers feel that winterization is a useless, costly procedure, but he insists on thorough consumer education. "They may feel like they're being over-

Even when an installation starts off on the right foot, its success depends on the follow-up attention paid to efficiency. Photo: Stephen Nagle

charged," he said. "But people seem to understand, they just want to know what you're doing." Also, to cut back on late-season maintenance, Davis urged contractors to initially install irrigation lines at the proper depth so they don't crack and freeze during the winter.

Metcalf also highlighted the importance of proper maintenance following installation. His maintenance crew examines systems often, adjusting heads and tending to other small details. "The little problem will turn into a big problem," he said simply. "If you do routine maintenance and routine monitoring, then you'll catch the small prob-



lems before they turn into big problems."

Ultimately, the customer has the final say in the success of an installation, said Metcalf. Clients can avoid installation slip-ups by shopping around and taking the time to hire efficient contractors. "My advice to consumers is to know who you're hiring," he said. "Hire someone with experience, who is licensed, insured and knows what [he or she is] doing." **LL**

The author is Assistant Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.

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Urban Revitalization

by Nicole Wisniewski



THE Green STRIKE

Urban revitalization projects may place contractors in the spotlight, but they also come equipped with many challenges.

When the Meredith Corp., publishers of *Better Homes & Gardens*, decided to expand its corporate offices in 1999, the new location was on three unappealing blocks of gas stations, car lots and declining apartment buildings just outside of downtown Des Moines, Iowa, in an area known as the Gateway.

The city is reviving this 14-block region that extends to the heart of Des Moines by adding more landscaping, and Meredith took the challenge as the Gateway's initial development, hiring Heard Gardens as its design/build contractor.


The project instantly became one of intense public and corporate attention and scrutiny, pointed out Bob Rennebohm, owner, Heard Gardens, West Des Moines, Iowa. In an effort to promote urban revitalization in the city, the company decided to set a trend for higher standards with its landscape design. The result provides a dramatic entrance for visitors accessing the city from the west and the south.

"The west block is characterized by its unique angles, which relate to the alignments of approaching roads, and the alternating rows of ornamental grasses symbolize Iowa's row crop and prairie grass heritage," Rennebohm explained. "The east block includes an expansive greenspace that has been gently 'wrinkled' to symbolize Iowa's rolling topography. The southern edge of the east block is bordered by a serpentine wall of black to symbolize Iowa's rich topsoil, and its form copies the Raccoon River, which is only one block to the south."

Like Heard Gardens, many landscape contractors are getting involved in urban revitalization as it continues to grow in cities like Des Moines, Chicago, Atlanta, Los Angeles and Las Vegas, stated Kelly Duke, director of pre-construction services, Valley Crest, Calabasas, Calif. "Urban landscaping, in the form of both greenery and decorative hardscape, appears

(continued on page 106)

The Meredith Corp., the first in a wave of new projects being built in the gateway to the heart of Des Moines, sets the trend for modern urban landscaping and catches visitors' eyes.
Photo: Heard Gardens



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Urban Revitalization

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to be consistent, if not increasing over past years," he said. "Parks, street trees, landscape medians added to roadways, airport landscaping, and highway erosion control and planting make up the mix of urban landscape projects that have been recently completed or are on the horizon."

While greater client exposure is the main benefit of urban revitalization projects, contractors also find many challenges associated with adding greenspace to cityscapes, including increased traffic and permit hassles. Contractors willing to handle these challenges while working 'on stage' in the middle of a busy metropolitan area reap the benefits of urban revitalization projects.

EMERALD CITY. While aesthetics drive urban revitalization in some cities, others add trees and landscapes to create cool, shaded areas.

For example, NASA aerial surveys of Atlanta, Ga., have revealed that ambient heat levels of the urban area have risen steadily

Using compact equipment is sometimes necessary to gain access to tight urban areas during construction.
Photo: Heard Gardens



over the last 20 years, creating an effect similar to a hot stove, Duke pointed out. "There is evidence to suggest that the effect creates an urban heat island that tends to elevate daytime temperatures and hold them at elevated levels into the night, well past when they would have normally dropped as the sun set," Duke explained. "This is in part because of the loss of the leaf cover afforded by the canopy hardwood maple, beech and oak forest that once covered much of the undeveloped Atlanta areas.

"We've learned from experience that as new buildings and streets are constructed, the heat reflecting quality of the leaf canopy is lost and replaced by heat-absorbing roofing surfaces and pavements," Duke continued. "Urban landscaping, green roofs and increased tree canopy can reverse this trend."

In Chicago, officials push urban revitalization more for the betterment of city aesthetics. Chicago Mayor Richard Daley has invested \$600 million since 1996 in improve-

(continued on page 108)



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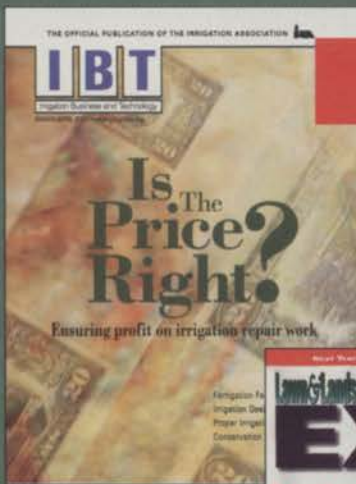
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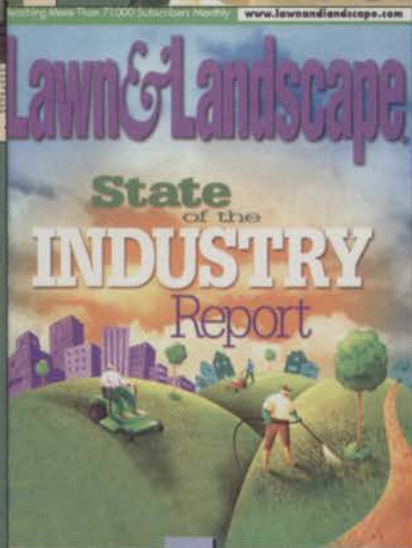
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Urban Revitalization

(continued from page 106)

ments to city parks, according to city financial records. He also supported the planting of more than 300,000 trees in the city since 1989 to reduce noise, air pollution and summer heat, and to beautify the city.

"Mayor Daley has made landscaping his highest priority," commented Bill Davids, president, Clarence Davids & Co., Matteson, Ill., who has been involved with some large planting projects on Michigan Avenue in downtown Chicago. "Landscape requirements for any corporation in the city have been beefed up. All of our downtown clients are doing bigger hanging planters and four-season rotations of plant material."

And the lack of city space that results from the majority of grounds being taken up by commercial buildings doesn't inhibit clients from adding color or greenspace, Duke said. "If the ground space is not available on some projects, designers often use vertical and elevated elements as areas outside of the traffic pattern to provide various plantings for their color or shade qualities," he explained.

BIG CITY BLUES. Landscape revitalization projects in city areas come with many challenges – from local disturbance issues and communication barriers to high traffic levels and detailed permit requirements.

Before breaking ground, landscape contractors must be cautious about locating, verifying and exposing original infrastructure on the grounds – despite whether or not the site is in-use or abandoned, Duke emphasized. This includes piping, footings, conduits, tunnels and duct banks that may be decades, if not centuries, old.

"The process requires research and a cautionary 'discovery phase' to verify such unforeseen items before design work is completed and construction work commences," he said. "Using as-built drawings, site inspections, historical research, testing and intrusive investigation through the digging



*Turf set apart by concrete waves is used to enhance the entrance of an office building in Costa Mesa, Calif.
Photo: Hal Dickey*

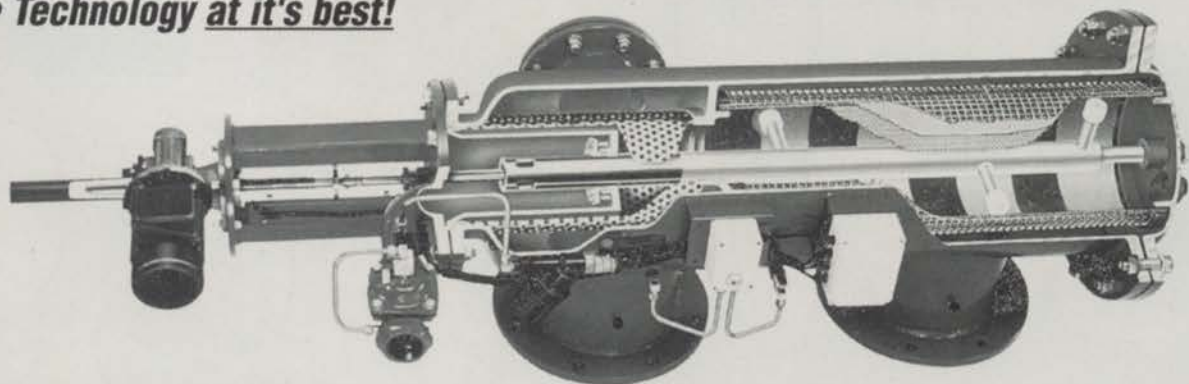
of pot holes to locate unmarked utilities and underground structures is the only real way to correctly identify and catalog the wide range of unforeseen risks confronting today's modern design/build contractor."

When locating, connecting or removing utilities and existing pavement and structures, contractors also may encounter potentially hazardous materials that were once commonly used, but not under today's laws

(continued on page 110)

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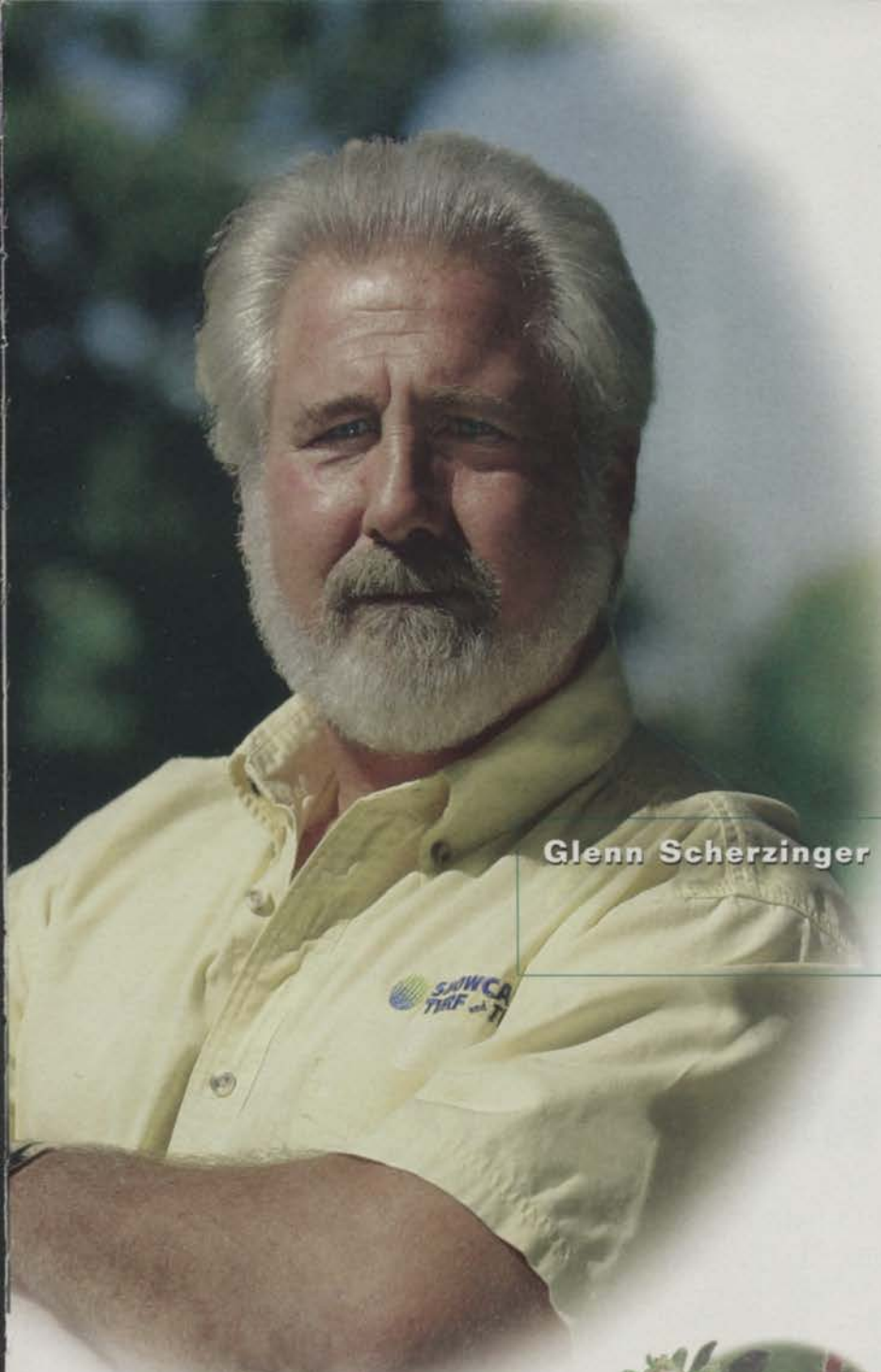


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Urban Revitalization

(continued from page 108)

and ordinances, Duke pointed out. Therefore, historical research and testing during the pre-construction phase is necessary so potentially hazardous materials can be identified and handled correctly, he advised.

Obtaining adequate permits is another preliminary step that comes with great risks if done incorrectly. "Within the city, you need a permit for everything, even breathing and taking a lunch break," Davids quipped. "Seriously, for stopping a truck in front of a building or blocking part of a roadway, you need a permit."

To overcome this challenge, Davids assigns one person on his team to obtain permits. This way, one person remains focused on the job schedule and knows what permits are needed for which jobs.

Permits also may add costs to landscape jobs, Davids warned, pointing out that his company keeps track of these separate costs, which are typically then passed on to the client.

Urban landscape construction will inevi-

(continued on page 112)

Though metropolitan landscape projects may be different than their suburban counterparts in terms of challenges and exposure, they need maintenance just like any other landscape.

But urban projects are subjected to more intense environmental pressures than their suburban equivalents, pointed out Kelly Duke, director of pre-construction services, Valley Crest, Calabasas, Calif. "There is generally less open space and more paved ground on urban sites," he said. "In terms of landscaping, this means that there will be more people vying for the same square foot of turf or walkway. This implies that the urban planted environment is subjected to greater stress and a higher potential for damage, vandalism, reflected heat, excessive shade, and ground and air

pollution than its suburban cousin."

Duke also pointed out additional difficulties, including green waste disposal, increased noise restrictions on mowers, edgers and blowers, and fewer ways to get air and water to the drip lines of mature trees.

Since little moisture retention exists in many types of downtown plantings, daily water monitoring is crucial throughout the summer months, stressed Bill Davids, president, Clarence Davids & Co., Matteson, Ill. "When there isn't adequate rain throughout the summer, we bring water trucks into the city to keep the plants maintained," he said.

Duke suggested additional solutions to city maintenance challenges. "The retrofitting of vents into paved areas to increase air exchange for tree roots can help to revitalize mature trees," he advised. "Careful pruning can decrease green waste and the predisposition of some tree species to storm damage."

- Nicole Wisniewski

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Urban Revitalization

(continued from page 110)

tably disrupt neighboring residents and businesses, and contractors must consider this interruption. "The contractor is held to quality standards, schedule milestones and deadlines, but also needs to be sensitive to the fact that he or she is the outsider and needs to respect those whose lives or livelihoods are impacted by the construction process," Duke explained. "Minimizing the impact on the community is generally a matter of addressing safety issues, noise issues, access issues and psychological issues. Safety, noise and access are relatively simple problems to solve through the use of temporary structures, ramps, barriers and fencing that can be designed, built and moved around at the site to accommodate both the construction and the public needs."

During construction on large city projects, Valley Crest uses newsletters, town meetings, telephone help lines, local print, and Internet or broadcast media to ensure two-way communication and a forum for public participation, Duke said.

"People will tolerate a high degree of disruption if they are in agreement that the end justifies the means and they have sufficient notification that allows them to plan their own lives around the construction schedule," he commented.

A big city also brings more traffic. Due to the intense traffic at various times of day, Davids said working at night is sometimes necessary to accomplish project goals. "There's less traffic, and the extra people aren't there," he explained, pointing out that he gives employees who work at night a monthly bonus similar to a foreman bonus. "It cuts the time it takes to complete the project because during the daytime it would be a nightmare."

For this reason, urban revitalization makes job scheduling more difficult, Davids

said. "We have to block out a lot of crews to work at night and we lose them during the day," he explained. "Sometimes we have to bring on extra people just to make sure we can get everything done."

In addition to traffic, the projects also

"There are so many businesses around here and they are watching what's going on. They see your name and remember it and at any moment you can lose your good public image." – Rennebohm

provide access challenges, Rennebohm said. "We used alternative equipment, such as compact utility loaders, to move massive

(continued on page 114)

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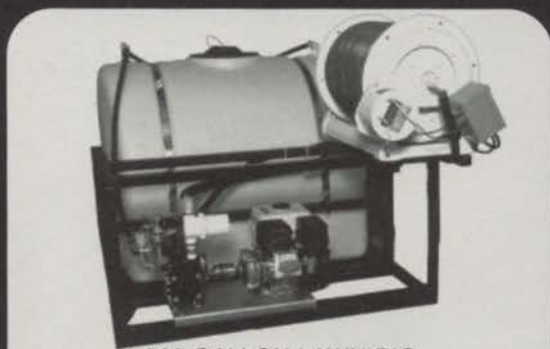
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Urban Revitalization

(continued from page 112)

quantities of landscape and hardscape materials so as to maintain a critical time schedule," he indicated.

Landscape crews receive a lot of attention while working on urban projects, so maintaining a professional image is crucial, Rennebohm pointed out. "You can quickly go from a hero to a goat if you're creating problems, particularly traffic problems," he stated. "There are so many businesses around here and they are watching what's going on. They see your name and remember it and at any moment you can lose your good public image."

On these projects, Rennebohm recommended contractors promote on-the-ball, positive, efficient crews. "The crews have to act professionally, be in clean uniforms and keep their trucks clean at all times," he said. "They have to be organized and demonstrate that they take care of their equipment as well. They're on show everyday. These could be potential customers that are watching, judging or deciding whether or not you can work at their home."

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CHECK OUT this article online to learn about city-based residential landscape projects.

BEYOND CITY LIMITS. Most contractors who are involved with urban landscape development claim that the benefits outweigh the challenges.

"This is the big city - so many people see the areas we developed," Davids pointed out. "Thousands of people work there as well. They see our trucks during the construction. They know how we work. Once they see the final result, it stems into more business."

Not only do urban revitalization projects provide colorful displays of contractors' landscapes for current and potential clients, but they also boost employee spirits. "These are exciting projects - they are fun," Davids said. "Employees are asking to work on

them, and this is good for morale."

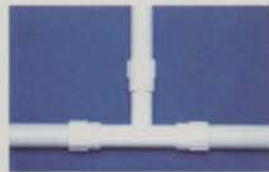
In addition, urban revitalization projects also encourage better work, Duke said. "These projects fall into the 'sweet spot' of the company's core scope of work," he stated. "The performance of these critical trades, while carrying a higher degree of risk, also affords better control of scheduling and quality, greater worker and public safety and enhanced communication between owner, contractor and design team."

He also pointed out that these projects demonstrate a contractor's professionalism and support of the community and the future establishment of greenspace in city areas. "They can be thoughtful re-investments in existing infrastructure, history and culture," he enthused. "These projects can be a way of preserving and enhancing community culture and history. They can be a source of great personal and corporate pride." **LL**

The author is Managing Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.

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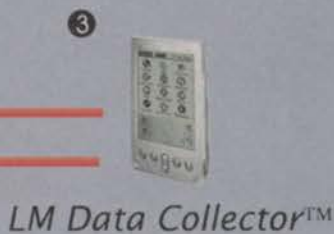
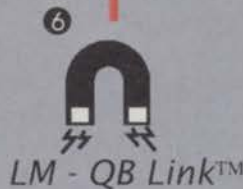
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Landscape Lighting

by John Philip Bachner

Understanding landscape lighting benefits can help contractors convince clients to brighten their properties.

It happens every day: An effective salesperson sells a product or service to people who really weren't all that interested ... until they tried it. Then, they were delighted – not only gratified by the many features and benefits of their purchase, but anxious to tell others about it. Wouldn't you love to employ salespeople who could do that? What it takes, more than anything else, are people who are familiar with what they sell and what their competitors sell, and believe their products are superior.

Realistically, your sales staff is probably already selling your company and its services well, but there's a pretty high likelihood they are not as proficient as they could be when it comes to upselling the lighting component of a landscape project because they might not be familiar with outdoor lighting's benefits.

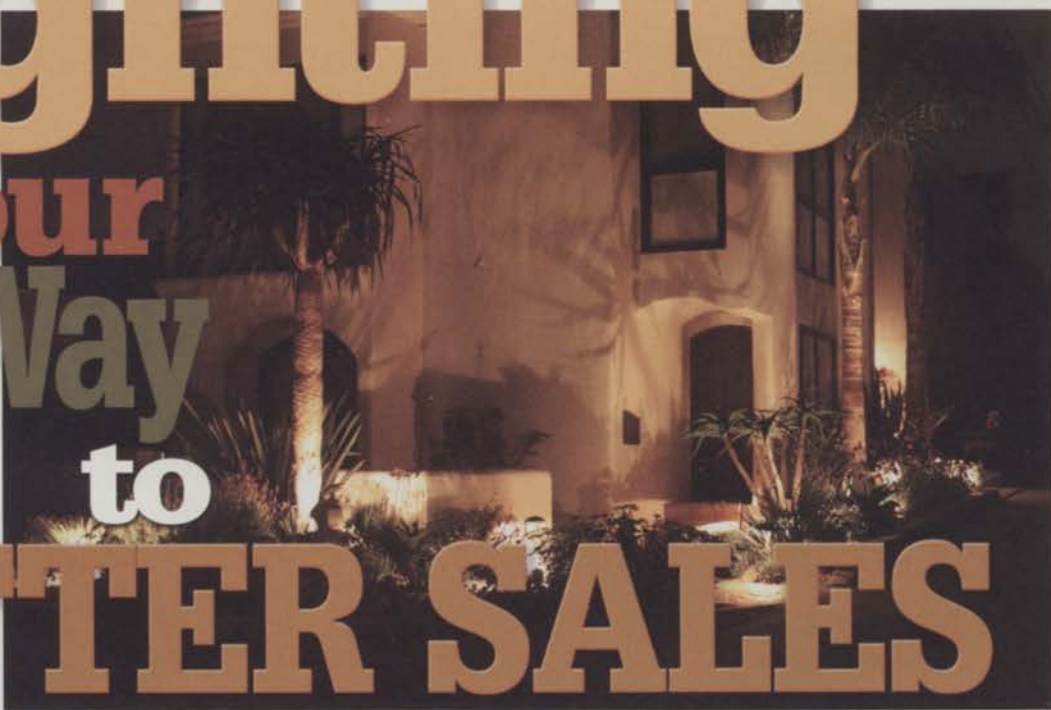
For example, in the case of Fairmount Fair Mall, Camillus, N.Y., better parking lot lighting almost eliminated vandalism to parked cars (comparing Christmas seasons), while also allowing security personnel to see more quickly. And, because security forces could do a better job in less time, management was able to decrease security patrols by 40 percent, thus reducing gasoline consumption and personnel costs.

Does your sales staff understand the benefits of effective outdoor lighting as it applies to single and multifamily residential, commercial, institutional and other sites? Can they help clients attain those benefits? They will, once they become familiar with the benefits of landscape lighting.

VISUAL BENEFITS. Beautification is the most obvious benefit of outdoor lighting. In essence, nighttime creates a blank, all-black canvas. What people see is determined by the lighting installed. Only the most attractive elements should be illuminated so that ev-

(continued on page 118)

Lighting illuminates the dark canvas created by the night. Photo: Stewart Boles



Lighting
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Landscape Lighting

(continued from page 116)

everything shown is shown in its best light. For that reason, many people would agree that Washington, D.C., a city of beautifully illuminated monuments, is more exciting at night than during the day. At night, elements that detract from appearance are not visible, and buildings or areas are illuminated in a manner to make them more attractive.

Of course, some folks may say that beau-



tification is a somewhat frivolous use of energy. However, well-designed lighting systems not only beautify – they enhance security and safety. Also, a home that is more beautiful at night will probably be worth more and a multifamily residential complex that is lit up at night can experience longer tenancies as was the case at the Watergrove Apartments in Memphis, Tenn., where residents stayed for an average 1.25 years vs. an area-wide average of one year.

Identification is another visual benefit of outdoor

lighting that makes a home or building easy to spot because it helps the structure to stand out, creating a unique appearance. For larger, campus-type facilities, identification also can differentiate certain buildings or areas by virtue of the color of light used, and it can mark roadways and walkways. Image is closely associated with this benefit, which is why some buildings that use lighting specifically for identification purposes are easier to locate at night. Therefore, lighting can give commercial buildings an advantage in the marketplace because they tend to be better known.

Outdoor lighting boosts safety on a site because it enables people to see potential hazards they might not otherwise see, like a pool.

Photo: Stewart Boles

SAFETY FIRST. People do not like to be where they feel threatened. Outdoor lighting enhances security because it denies vandals, thieves and muggers the darkness they prefer. At Spring Valley Park, San Diego, Calif., new lighting discouraged vandalism

(continued on page 120)

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Landscape Lighting

(continued from page 118)

to such an extent that, for the first time in many years, the graffiti problem was eliminated. Community center break-ins, another severe problem, also were eliminated. Together, those two benefits had a value worth more than \$35,000 annually. The new lighting also put an end to assaults on older residents, which had become a serious problem.

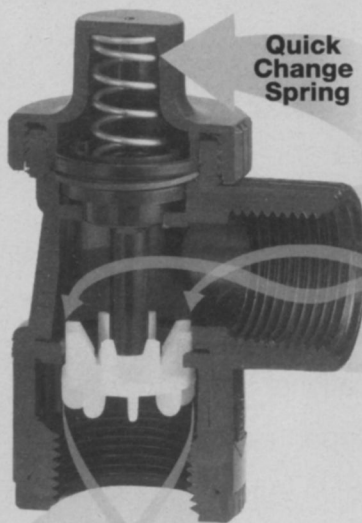
Similarly, at Watergrove Apartments, the illumination that helped lengthen average tenancies also provided a significant security benefit: far fewer car thefts than would otherwise be expected and nighttime security expenses that were about one-third of those experienced by competing rental communities. Also, improved lighting on campus walkways at Central Michigan University, Mt. Pleasant, Mich., permitted a 7-percent reduction in security patrols, saving enough money to generate a 2½-year payback on the lighting installation.

Safety is an important benefit of outdoor

These sources are readily available to contractors looking for information on outdoor lighting:

- **The National Lighting Bureau** – This is a 25-year-old public/private, not-for-profit organization that educates lighting decision-makers about lighting's bottom-line benefits. www.nlb.org.
- **The International Association of Lighting Designers** – This is a group made up of independent designers with extensive experience, albeit not all in outdoor lighting. www.iald.org.
- **The National Council of Qualifications in Lighting Professions** – This council is made up of individuals who have demonstrated their knowledge of lighting systems by passing a rigorous examination and earning lighting certified credentials. www.ncqlp.org.
- **The National Electrical Contractors Association** – This group acts as the voice of the electrical contracting industry, working to promote higher standards, quality workmanship and training for a skilled workforce. www.necanet.org.
- **National Electrical Manufacturers Association** – This organization develops technical standards for the industry, establishes and advocates policies on legislation and regulatory matters and collects, analyzes and disseminates industry data. www.nema.org. – **John Philip Bachner**

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lighting because it gives people the ability to see hazards they might not otherwise spot, such as steps, potholes, puddles, slippery surfaces, wet leaves or other wind-blown debris. Effective lighting also can help prevent pedestrian, bicycle and vehicle accidents. For instance, 50 vehicle/pedestrian accidents used to occur annually at Spring Valley Park. After new lighting was installed, that number was reduced to 12. The number of vehicle/vehicle accidents was reduced from 40 to five or six.

Since outdoor lighting that improves safety and security decreases risks, commercial clients can save on insurance costs. It can be worthwhile for property owners contemplating landscape lighting upgrades to speak with their insurance agents. For example, the reduced accident rate affected by better lighting at Metal Industries Inc., Elizabethville, Pa., led to an insurance savings of \$3,000 per year.

Home and building owners also have less

exposure to claims when they reduce the likelihood of safety and security problems, resulting in improved loss prevention.

MONETARY BENEFITS. When people are attracted to a retail facility, increased sales can occur. For example, in Camillus, N.Y., the manager of Fairmont Fair Mall said sales increased by several million dollars each year, thanks to the installation of new outdoor lighting. With so many people working during the day, nighttime shopping has increased, so safety and security are important issues, and this lighting made people feel comfortable enough to continue shopping during late hours.

Residential clients also can experience monetary benefits from outdoor lighting. Through the use of effective aiming and color filters, certain landscape elements can look even more spectacular at night. This can result not only in increased home resale value,

but also in additional value received from the money that they invested in their landscape, which is now illuminated 24 hours.

Better space utilization also can be achieved through landscape lighting because it makes a nighttime area usable. In single-family residential situations, this could mean the illumination of a new hardscaped area where the family can relax at night. The same can occur on a larger scale, such as on the grounds of multifamily communities, colleges and universities, or parks.

Altogether, no matter where landscape improvements are made, lighting improvements also can be justified. **LL**

The author served as executive vice president of the Property Management Association from 1973 to 1976 and is author of The Guide to Practical Property Management, as well as other guides and texts in the fields of energy management, contracting and lighting.

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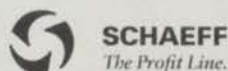
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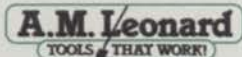
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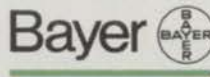
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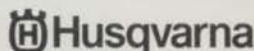
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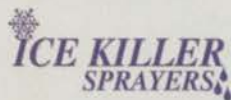
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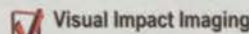
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Photo: Brian Vinchesi



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(continued on page 126)



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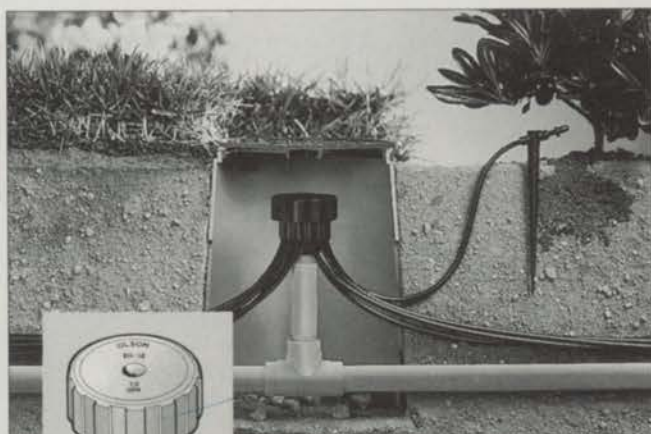
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Irrigation Notebook

(continued from page 124)

Bird Corp., Commercial Division, Tucson, Ariz., said pressure regulators work by sensing the water pressure downstream and generating pressure losses within the device, thus creating a constant downstream pressure.

Although pressure can be controlled at many points within a system, Wolfarth recommended using a sprinkler that has a pressure regulator built into the head. "Different heads have different pressure requirements and within a single zone there are differences in pressure at the head due to elevation changes and the different lengths of pipe going to the sprinkler head," he said. "Having the pressure regulator at the head results in uniform pressure and more uniform application of water at the site."

Since installing the regulator at the head is the most expensive option, Wolfarth suggested positioning the device in the remote control valve as an alternative. "It's potentially a very good solution - you always want to have all heads on a single valve to have the same operating pressure require-

ment, and putting the pressure regulator device in the valve is a good balance between economy and performance," he said.

In addition, Brian Vinchesi, irrigation consultant, Irrigation Consulting, Pepperell, Mass., described the importance of a pressure differential when using a regulator. "It will not regulate unless you have a pressure differential, and you basically need to have 10 pounds of differential across the regulator to regulate the system," he clarified.

To identify pressure problems, Reaves suggested looking at the water output. Low pressure results in large droplets of water and a reduced flow radius, generating circled green areas and brown spots where the water cannot reach, while high pressure usually creates misting. Further, Reaves pointed out that low pressure symptoms may be due to a potential blockage in the system.

ALTERNATE METHODS. If pressure regulators pose a financial obstacle, pressure can be regulated through other methods, Wolfarth said. "Assuming you want to re-

duce pressure in the system, use some sort of valve on the mainline or the manual flow control device in the valve," he explained. "Some people inappropriately use the valves on the backflow preventer to reduce pressure. This causes wear that makes them useless during the annual testing of the device. This manual approach is a last resort method of reducing pressure since there is only a constant pressure drop and no response to changes to water pressure from the source."

"Also, water pressure can only be increased by adding energy to the system with a pump," Wolfarth continued. "Some incorrectly believe that reducing the diameter of pipe increases pressure. This only increases the velocity of water in the pipe and actually causes more friction loss and low pressure."

Reaves explained that often, pressure changes result from irrigation contractors who feel rushed for time and may not examine the hydraulics thoroughly. Yet, Wolfarth highlighted several causes of pressure problems not necessarily related to inattentive contractors. "The system operates automatically

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Irrigation Notebook

during the night when not many people are using water, and the pressure goes up," he said. "The water from the city mainline is not constant. Also, over time, as more homes, businesses, schools, etc., are built on that water supply, the pressure will drop as well." He added that multiple zones operating at the same time on one system also pose regulation difficulties best solved with a pressure regulator at the valve or head.

However, Vinchesi identified current economics as playing a part in increasing pressure regulator use. "If you run the sprinkler at the right pressure and use less water you'll be a lot more efficient, and the cost of water will also force it that way," he said.

Even though pressure regulators may cost more than some of the more old-fashioned, manual methods, Wolfarth maintained the benefits outweigh the costs. "Better uniformity means you can irrigate less and apply the optimum amount of water to the driest part of the system," he said. "Over time and over the life cycle [of your system], operating costs are lower." — Kristin Mohn 

IRRIGATION TIPS

Pressure Q & A

QUESTION: What effect can high or low water pressure have on the operation of sprinkler systems? What are the signs of pressure problems? What is the solution?

ANSWER: Pressure problems are sometimes difficult to identify but are the No. 1 problem of sprinkler systems in the United States. Most of the time, pressure problems are a result of sloppy design and installation. As a rule of thumb, pop-up sprayheads should typically operate at a pressure of 30 pounds per square inch (psi), with rotors operating at 45 psi. Of course, always refer to the manufacturer's recommended operating specifications.

When water pressure is either too high or low, the result is poor coverage and wasted water. Severe misting is the most common symptom of high pressure, and doughnut-shaped dry areas in the lawn are a sign of low pressure.

To solve low pressure, irrigation contractors can either reduce the nozzle size or split irrigation zones and install additional valves. A restriction also can cause low pressure. To alleviate high pressure, install pressure-reducing valves or regulators set for 30 psi. Left unchecked, high pressure can seriously damage your irrigation system.

— Robert Reaves, landscape water conservation specialist, Lower Colorado River Authority, Austin, Texas

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- Offers advanced grading control, ease of operation, power and maneuverability for operators to execute jobs
- System provides easy turning, easy side cutting, load sensitivity and eliminates cross steering
- Hydrostatic transmission features three forward and three reverse speeds that increase productivity by reducing machine cycle-time through ground speeds, reaching up to 5.4 mph



- Palm Command Steering offers precise steering and blade control
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- Caster wheel absence allows closer access to objects and improved contact with the sweeping area
- Replaceable bolt-on bucket edge helps protect it from excessive wear
- Bi-directional movement helpful in milling applications
- Broom works on a variety of skid-steers and tractor loaders

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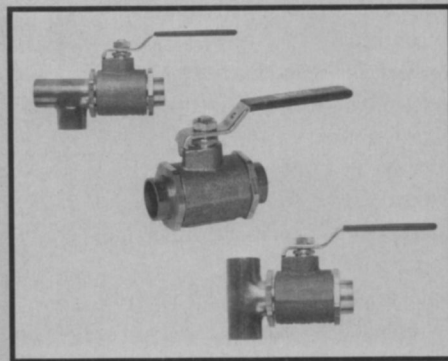
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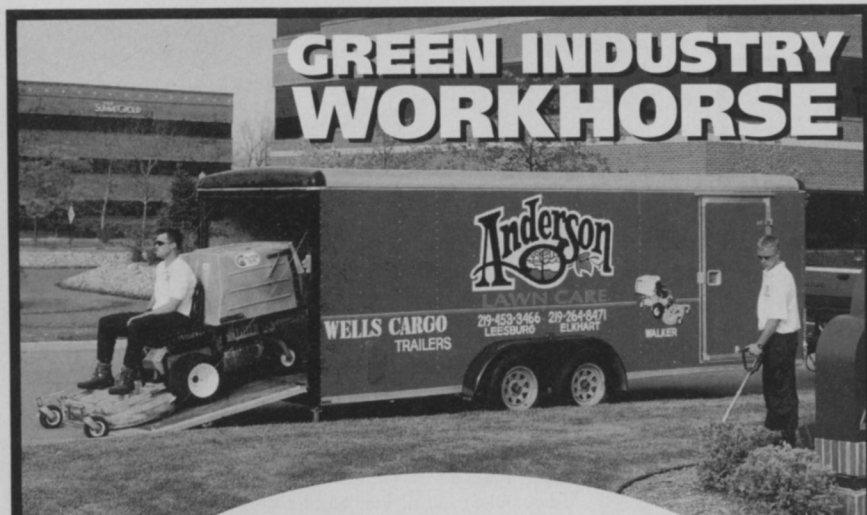
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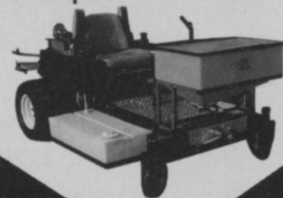
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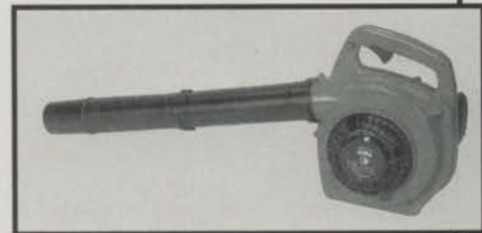
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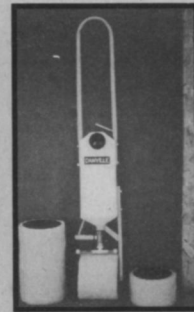
- Engineered especially for Grasshopper True Zero Turn M1 Series Models 225, 321D, 325 and 428D
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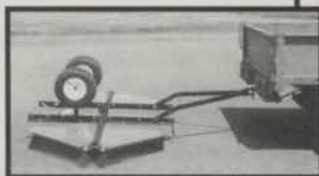
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- Gear-drive models feature a Peerless 700 Series 5-speed transmission with five forward speeds and reverse and include standard recoil start
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- Four-point quick-mount feature allows for attachment/detachment of the backhoe
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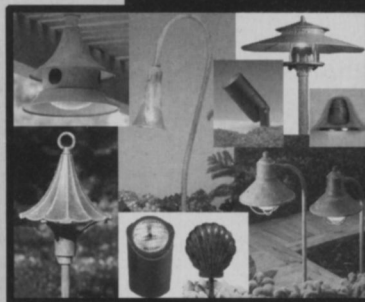
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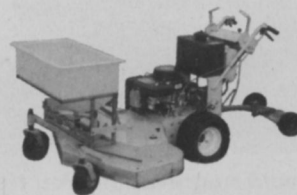


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Product Profile

Compact Incentives

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By adding compact utility loaders to their fleets, landscape contractors find similar results. Many aspects of a landscape project do not allow workers to utilize traditional equipment such as skid-steer loaders, backhoes, etc. These machines are too large to access work areas and damage existing surfaces. By using compact utility loaders, contractors reduce their crews' burden of manual labor, making them more efficient and productive as well as enhancing their quality of work.

"The more we use [the compact utility loader] and try it on different things, we discover it can be used for more jobs than we ever dreamed of."

– Webb Rowe

STABILITY AND VERSATILITY. Webb's Landscaping Co., Hollywood, Fla., is one such company, focusing on landscape design, renovation, low-voltage lighting and irrigation installation. "For the most part, we work on private, very exclusive homes in the seven-figure price range," noted Webb Rowe, president of the 10-year-old operation.

The company's narrow focus is the result of an effective business strategy Rowe implemented recently to maintain a year-round workload. "We don't go through the normal hiring and firing with the seasons," he explained. "We stay busy spring, summer, fall and winter."

To achieve year-round stability, Rowe keeps his crew small. Webb's Landscaping is a four-person operation. Last year, Rowe made an equipment selection that allowed him to control his labor force and assisted him with his business goal. "I purchased a Toro Dingo TX 420 compact

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USE READER SERVICE #81

Product Profile

utility loader from Powerhouse Systems in Deerfield Beach, Fla.," he said. "The Dingo is one reason we've been able to stay small."

One demonstration was all it took to sell Rowe on the benefits of a compact utility loader. "I [demonstrated] the machine for about half a day, and I bought it the next day," Rowe said. "When I looked at this machine, I looked at it as a labor saver and a back saver. I didn't think I would like it as much as I do. I am flat-out amazed at its power and its capabilities."

The versatility offered by this type of machine is a key benefit for Rowe. "We have both buckets, a 36-inch and an 18-inch auger, a tree broom and a leveler," he said. "We also hook up a 700-pound loader to the front of it to roll out sod. We've installed cap rock and we've set palm trees as well as small shade trees more than 15 feet in overall height with it. We have pallet forks, so we use it to move things like mulch around a property rather than using a wheelbarrow - instead of moving a couple of bags here or there, you can move half a pallet at a time."

EXPANDING OPPORTUNITIES. Like other contractors who have added compact utility loaders to their equipment fleets, Rowe thought it would replace labor. "Originally, we thought we'd eliminate some labor with the Dingo, but we are getting more work done because I don't tire my guys out doing menial labor," he said. "We're getting better quality of work, too, because our manpower does not get tired digging holes."

Rowe cited a recent job as an example of how his compact utility loader enhances his labor force. Two workers were planting four small palm trees in a new residential development. "The ground was all packed rock, so it was very hard," he explained. "I'd have two workers digging holes for half a day, so they'd be exhausted. With the Dingo and its auger attachment, we dug each hole in less than 10 minutes. It turned an exhausting half-day job into an easy, hour-long job."

For Rowe, his compact utility loader's size and light weight are big advantages. "Other companies have all the big equipment, but they can't get into a backyard like

we can," he said. "You can literally drive into a yard, drill a hole, plant a tree and drive out, and you can't tell a machine has been there."

Rowe and his crew continue to find new uses for the machine. "We take it into places we wouldn't even think about going with a full-size skid steer," he said. "The more we use it, we discover that it can be used for more jobs than we ever dreamed of."

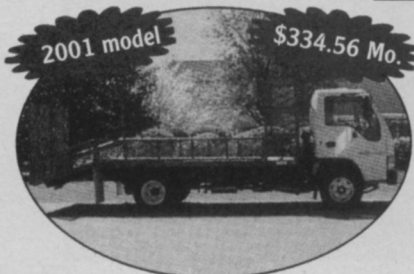
Similarly, a PC may have started as a word processor at work or even a "toy" for video games at home, but it's evolved into a time-saving tool for virtually every aspect of the home and office - a tool most people would have trouble living and working without. Webb Rowe feels the same way about his compact utility loader. "Every time I go to start it, it's there, and it's ready to go," Rowe concluded. "It has definitely drastically increased our productivity." - Scott Grand **LL**

The author is public relations specialist for The Promersberger Co., Fargo, N.D.

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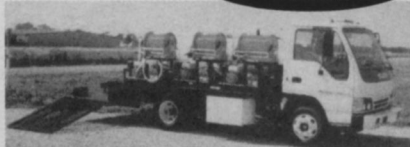


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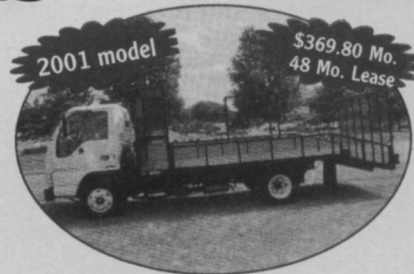
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Organic Lawn Care

(continued from page 93)

organics convinces him he can continue current success by focusing on an environmentally sound program. "We have lots of happy, long-term clients, and we wanted to get into this," he said. "It's difficult—there is a lot of information to know ahead of time, but there's no doubt in my mind that it can be successful."

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CHECK OUT this article online for tips on proper organic lawn care techniques.

Similarly, Sutherland cited a clear improvement regarding organic products since he started his company. Although currently a small segment in the industry, he foresees the trend catching on through a system of referral and word-of-mouth advertising.

Yet, Roux wondered if broad public knowledge of synthetic dangers would force

organics to gain a firmer foothold. "The population operates on two premises—greed or fear," he said. "If the general population is more fearful as far as what a misuse of pesticides can do, they might understand that IPM is a viable approach."

Since synthetics offer effective results and quick performance, while organic products appeal to the environmentally conscious, deciding which category provides maximum benefits can be difficult, said John Moriarty, vice president of sales and marketing, Harmony Products, Chesapeake, Va. "The answer lies in this fact: there are disadvantages of organics and there are disadvantages of synthetics," he said. "Organics are less responsive, slow, difficult to work with, and synthetics—there's an environmental issue with nitrate and phosphate [leaching] into the waterways."

Moriarty described the beginning years of his own company and how he dealt with this discrepancy. Due to cost issues, he soon

realized that a total shift toward organics was unrealistic. Thus, the breakthrough for him occurred when he realized the true basis behind IPM programs: compromise. "Modern technology being applied to the old ways is going to be where the solution is," he said. "It's not about being pro-synthetic or pro-organic, but making bridge products."

Due to its controversial nature, the organics debate cannot be solved overnight. Lawn care operators will continue to wonder what they can gain from organic products, while consumers will continue to desire both fast results and environmentally-conscious products. Competing camps cite strong advantages on both sides, further supporting Moriarty's claim that perhaps the solution lies not with one emphasis or the other, but in between. "The solution is through technology applied to the old way," he said. "The pendulum will rest here." **LL**

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

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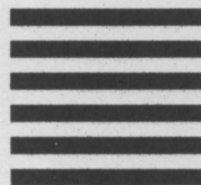
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- Tues.** – *Irrigation Issues*: Keeps visitors up-to-date on breaking irrigation news and product updates.
- Wed.** – *Lawn Care Roundup*: Lawn care operators and researchers share problems and solutions for the lawn care world.
- Thurs.** – *Landscape Issues*: Landscape 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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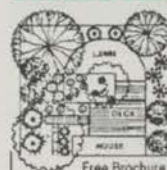
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How We Do It

Planning Special Events at Matterhorn Nursery

Matterhorn Nursery & Landscape's business is comprised of 50 percent design/build and 50 percent nursery. Since our company is located in a remote area and has a space advantage – a 40-acre property – we decided to host a few special events to draw extra client attention to our business.

The first step in planning a special event is picking the right time frame. Since 70 percent of our business is done in May and June, we decided to use events to promote our fall season and fall-related horticultural products like mums and pumpkins.

Our fall events, which we've been doing for four years, include the October Fun Fest, the Woodland and Water Walk and the Trails of Darkness.

The October Fun Fest is a two-day event for families that includes live music, food, pony rides, clowns, hayrides and crafts like face and pumpkin painting and mask making.

During the day, Matterhorn's woodland area is an environmental walk called the Woodland and Water Walk, which introduces children to different plants, gardens and animal habitats like ponds and swamps.

At night, the Woodland and Water Walk transforms into the Trails of Darkness, a haunted hayride through the woodlands every Friday and Saturday night in October.

The October Fun Fest was the first event we hosted, and it is very costly and takes a lot of preparation. We plan everything in advance. We have a landscape architect draw up the theme, traffic flow, barricades, bathrooms and food. Also, having adequate signage throughout the event is extremely important for routing people.

Because this event draws 5,000 to 7,000 people daily, there are always challenges that crop up at the last moment. The key is not to sweat the small stuff and be prepared. For instance, pony rides are very popular, but to minimize accidents we make sure all riders wear helmets and we

have the horses' veterinarian records on display at all times. We also took out extra insurance just in case of accidents or injuries during events.

We charged people a \$1 admission fee and then certain attractions also cost money. Though attendance is high, we don't profit from this event. We're thinking of raising

the cost to \$2 next year just to break even. Having food actually helps the event's profitability.

The key to these events is to make sure your whole team is involved in them and excited about them. The event visitors and employees enjoy most is Trails of Darkness.

For Trails of Darkness, we hire 17 off-Broadway actors. We charge \$15 per person admission. But due to the costs of planning, setting up and running the event, it is also not a moneymaker. We pay the actors and many of them also get college credit for the experience, and all our employees who are involved receive overtime pay. These actors don't touch visitors, but they are scary. Last year, we refunded admission costs to 10 percent of visitors because they were too scared and couldn't make it through the trail. However, this event is not for children ages 12 and under, and we promote that heavily.

We promote these events through direct mail. We have 23,000 people on our mailing list, and this list grows about 20 percent each year. We keep up this list consistently so all the names are good, i.e. they buy products or services from us. People who don't buy from us are purged from the list. We stay on top of address accuracy as well – only 300 to 400 names are returned each year due to incorrect addresses.

To limit the event to our clients and their friends, we don't advertise. We display two billboards in the neighborhoods where our customer base is strong. One of the billboards is located on a 1-acre site we purchased that is situated at a busy intersection that 25,000 people drive by daily. The sign shows the location of our company and the well-landscaped acre shows off our design/build skills. The signs we use have peel-off-and-stick labels so we can change dates and event promotions and save money on making new signs. We promote our Woodland and Water Walks by sending colorful flyers to local schools.

Special events aren't for everyone since they don't make much money and can distract you from your main focus, but that's not why we do them. As long as we keep the big picture in mind when planning and solving unexpected challenges, these events are great client boosters. I enjoy seeing the happy looks on my customers' faces and receiving thank-you letters from visitors and clients expressing gratitude and telling us we managed the events well. – *Matt Horn*

The author is president of Matterhorn Nursery & Landscape, Spring Valley, N.Y.

FIVE KEYS TO Special Event Planning

1. Pick the right time frame.
2. Plan ahead.
3. Get employees on board and excited about the event.
4. Advertise via direct mail to clients.
5. Keep the big picture in mind and don't sweat the small stuff.

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