



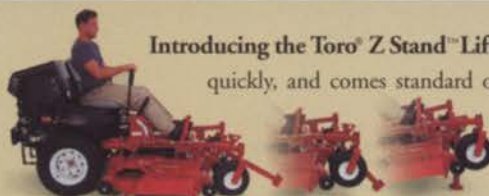




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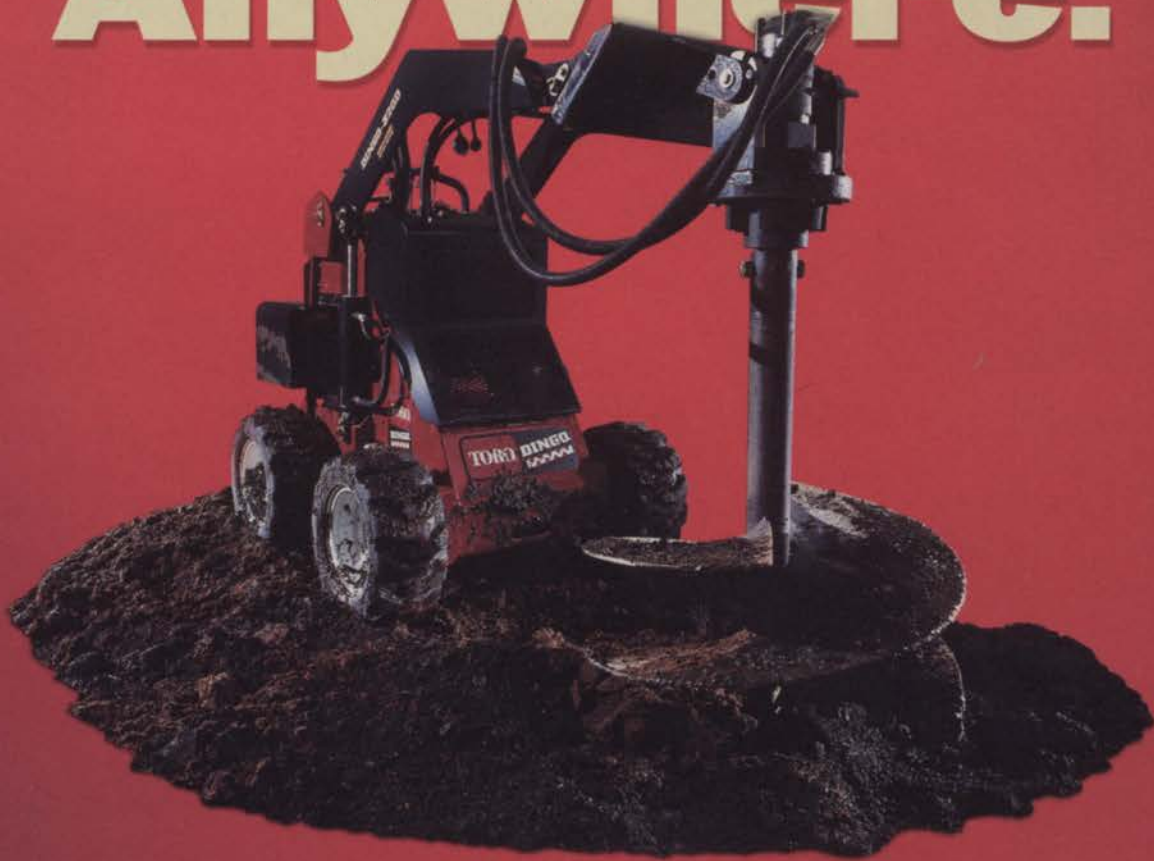
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## Forever Is A Long Time

# WW

We publish *Irrigation Business & Technology* magazine, and an article in the most recent issue talks about the number of farmers going out of business in southern Oregon and northern California because they can't irrigate their fields. These farmers aren't just suffering due to a drought. They're actually losing out to, of all things, the sucker fish.


In years past, anyone needing water during a dry spell could pull from the nearby Upper Klamath Lake or the Klamath River. However, the government decided that the sucker fish in these waters need to be protected. That means no more irrigation water, which translates into 240,000 acres of crops dying in the field and farmers relying on federal subsidies to feed their families.

I'm a capitalist at heart, so I struggle to understand how the interests of a couple-inch-long fish outweighs those of hundreds of people. At the same time, I understand the significance and intent of the Endangered Species Act, which is central to this debate, and I'm not fond of the idea of any species of plant or animal disappearing.

So where do we draw the line? I don't know how to balance the needs of man vs. environment in situations like this or any similar debate. President Bush wants to drill for oil in regions of Alaska where even the bears complain about the temperature, but the plan met with tremendous environmental resistance. The lumber industry produces products that we all use, but that didn't matter once the spotted owl population dwindled to a dangerous few.

I never understood the environmentalists' argument, but after spending a week in July in the Pacific Northwest, hiking through Olympic National Park and Glacier National Park I began to appreciate it more. The beauty of the landscape in these areas overwhelms even the nature novices such as myself. As a result, I found myself struggling to balance the reality of a society's needs and the fragility of the environment that truly is amazing.

I'm not going to offer a suggestion as to how we can appease all of the interested parties - I doubt a solution exists that will please everyone anyway. However, we all need to be cognizant of the environment, and that includes the lawns, trees and animals we see on a regular basis, as much as it does the national parks and endangered species.

Many of you have told me how your love for nature brought you into this industry. Wouldn't be ironic if we were the ones ultimately doing the most harm to it? 

*Bob West*

*"Land is the most beautiful art."  
- Andy Warhol*

### EDITORIAL

**CINDY CODE**, Group Publisher  
e-mail: ccode@lawnandlandscape.com  
**BOB WEST**, Editor  
e-mail: bwest@lawnandlandscape.com  
**NICOLE WISNIEWSKI**, Managing Editor  
e-mail: nwisniewski@lawnandlandscape.com  
**KRISTEN HAMPSHIRE**, Associate Editor  
e-mail: khampshire@lawnandlandscape.com  
**KRISTIN MOHN**, Assistant Editor  
e-mail: kmohn@lawnandlandscape.com  
**ALI CYBULSKI**, Contributing Editor  
e-mail: acybulski@lawnandlandscape.com

### GRAPHICS/PRODUCTION

**CHARLOTTE TURCOTTE**, Art Director  
**HELEN DUERR**, Production Manager  
**CHRISTIE SKRUCK**, Advertising Production Coordinator

### ADVERTISING/MARKETING

**KEVIN GILBRIDE**, National Sales Manager  
e-mail: kgilbride@lawnandlandscape.com  
**VINCENT RICCI**, Account Manager, West Coast  
e-mail: vricci@lawnandlandscape.com  
**MATT ZAHN**, Sales Representative, Midwest  
e-mail: mzahn@lawnandlandscape.com  
**DAVID BLASKO**, Sales Representative,  
New England & N.E. states  
e-mail: dblasko@lawnandlandscape.com  
**MIKE STENGER**, Sales Representative,  
Ohio, Ky., Ind., Tenn. & Canada  
e-mail: mstenger@lawnandlandscape.com  
**STEPHEN COPLEY**, Irrigation Sales Representative  
e-mail: scopley@lawnandlandscape.com  
**MAUREEN MERTZ**, Account Manager, S.E.  
1723 South Hill  
Milford, Michigan 48381  
248/685-2065 Fax: 248/685-2136  
e-mail: mmertz@lawnandlandscape.com  
**AMY PEPPERS**, Market Coordinator  
e-mail: apeppers@gie.net  
**JENNIFER HALAS**, Market Coordinator  
e-mail: jhalas@gie.net

### WEB/INTERNET

**SCOTT HUNSBERGER**, Internet Editor  
e-mail: shunsberger@lawnandlandscape.com  
**CHERYL GREEN**, Internet Project Manager  
e-mail: cgreen@lawnandlandscape.com

### CORPORATE STAFF

**RICHARD J. W. FOSTER**, President and CEO  
**DAN MORELAND**, General Manager  
**JAMI CHILDS**, Director, Business Resources  
and Operational Systems  
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**JENNIFER RENNIE**, Circulation Marketing  
& Database Manager  
**CHERYL THOMAS**, Manager, Accounting  
**LORI SKALA**, Manager, Books  
& Directories

### EDITORIAL & SALES OFFICES

4012 Bridge Avenue, Cleveland, Ohio 44113  
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# Market Trends

## IN STYLE

### Faux Grass Is Unnaturally Green

This summer, more suburbanites are installing what National Gardening Association Research Director Bruce Butterfield calls "a toupee for your lawn" – artificial turf.

While it's hardly a mass movement, phony grass spending is expected to rise 25 percent this year, the *Wall Street Journal* reported, amounting to \$250 million worth of turf that takes just a blow-dry to maintain.

Though the fad has the ability to put landscape companies out of business if it continues growing, contractors should remain hopeful. The fake stuff costs nearly 10 times as much as the real deal – about \$10 per square foot. Consequently, a 2,000-square-foot plastic yard costs \$20,000 vs. its natural counterpart, which costs \$2,000 for installation, plus the price of a sprinkler system and ongoing maintenance.

Additional downsides to artificial turf include the fact that green grass stands out like a sore thumb when neighbors' yards affected by winter or drought turn brown. Environmentalists are quick to point out that the product also is bad for biodiversity.

And based on the negatives alone, some neighborhood groups have adopted unofficial policies against faux grass or banned it entirely, such as Sun City Hilton Head in South Carolina. "It's like painting your house purple," exclaimed Steve O'Donnell, Sun City vice president. "It's just not the presentation you want."



Photo: AstroLawn

By observing weather patterns and trends, the National Weather Service forecasts above or below normal temperatures and precipitation for various U.S. regions.

For instance, in Georgia, the average December temperature last year was 11 degrees below 1999's temperature, 13 degrees below 1998's and 7 de-

grees below 1994's, pointed out Gil Landry, professor of crop and soil sciences, The University of Georgia, Athens, Ga. Since *The Farmer's Almanac* predicts a harsh winter for many states based on statistics like Georgia's, this doesn't bode well for warm-season grasses' chances of surviving winterkill in 2001.

Low-temperature (below 25 degrees Fahrenheit) stress and fungi, winter desiccation and traffic most commonly cause winter injury or kill for these turfgrass varieties, Landry pointed out.

In addition to paying attention to the relative killing temperatures of warm-season species (above), contractors can follow a few preventative practices to minimize injury, including maintaining good soil moisture, preventing desiccation with irrigation, and minimizing traffic and cultural injury.

## Winter's WRATH

Turfgrass	Relative Killing Temperatures (degrees F)
St. Augustinegrass	23
Carpetgrass	23
Bahiagrass	23
Bermudagrass	19
Centipedegrass	11
Zoysiagrass	6

Source: MALTA News

## MERGERS & ACQUISITIONS

### Brickman Acquires Duke-Weeks Landscape

LANGHORNE, PA – Scott Brickman (right) has steadfastly maintained that The Brickman Group (No. 4 on the *Lawn & Landscape* Top 100 list) should not be considered a consolidator, but that hasn't stopped him from aggressively pursuing strategic deals. The company's latest deal is its biggest to date – it acquired \$35 million in landscape work from Duke Realty.

Duke Realty, formerly known as Duke-Weeks, manages and develops more than \$800 million in commercial and multi-residential properties across the country and traditionally managed the landscapes on its properties through a combination of in-house staff and outside contractors. The Brickman Group assumed responsibility for this work immediately upon closing the deal, and Mark Flowers, the former president of Duke-Weeks Landscaping (No. 22 on the *Lawn & Landscape* Top 100 list), joined The Brickman Group as manager of its Atlanta regional office.

"This acquisition is ideal for both companies," explained Brickman, president and chief executive officer. "It allows Duke-Weeks to focus on its core real estate business while partnering with the Brickman Group to provide their tenants high quality landscape and snow removal services."

"We chose to negotiate exclusively with The Brickman Group because we were looking for a long-term partner who could provide us with the highest

(continued on page 10)





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**Bob Andrews** *President of Greenskeeper Inc., Carmel, Indiana*

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# Market Trends

(continued from page 8)

level of quality and service, and they are clearly the industry leader," related Gary Burk, executive vice president of Duke Realty's Construction and Property Management Operations.

The deal expands The Brickman Group's presence in Indianapolis, Atlanta, Raleigh, Chicago, St. Louis, Dallas and Cleveland, while providing its first work in Nashville, Minneapolis, Cincinnati, Columbus and Greenville, S.C. "There's a beauty to buying a company to go into a new market because then you've got everything right there in terms of the jobs, the people and the equipment," Brickman related. "Now we've got a lot of business with one customer in these markets, which gives us the foothold to grow our presence there."

This acquisition takes the Brickman Group's estimated 2001 revenue to more than \$300 million with 88 branches in 25 states. Most of the work it acquired is maintenance work, although there is a fair amount of installation work as well.

## Calendar of Events

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**SEPT. 14-15** WALP Certified Landscape Technician Testing, Spokane, Wash. Contact: 800/833-2186.

**SEPT. 15** CLP Interior and Exterior Exam, Cleveland, Ohio. Contact: 800/395-2522

**SEPT. 18** Turfgrass and Landscape Management Field Day, Riverside, Calif. Contact: 909/787-3575

**SEPT. 18-19** Virginia Tech and Virginia Turfgrass Council Turfgrass and Landscape Field Days, Blacksburg, Va. Contact: 540/231-5897.

**SEPT. 19** New York State Turfgrass Association Winning Fields Seminar, Oneonta, N.Y. Contact: 800/873-TURF.

**SEPT. 22-25** American Society of Landscape Architects Annual Meeting, Montreal, Canada. Contact: 202/898-2444.

**SEPT. 26** ALCA "Essentials of Success" specialty education tracks, Baltimore, Md. Contact: 703/736-9666.

**OCT. 3** Washington Landscape Trade Show & Field Day, Puyallup, Wash. Contact: 800/833-2186.

**OCT. 3** CLP Interior and Exterior Exam, Austin, Texas. Contact: 800/395-2522

**OCT. 6** Associated Landscape Contractors of America "Essentials of Success" specialty education tracks, Chicago, Ill. Contact: 703/736-9666

**OCT. 7-9** *Lawn & Landscape Business Strategies Conference*, Phoenix. Contact: 800/456-0707.

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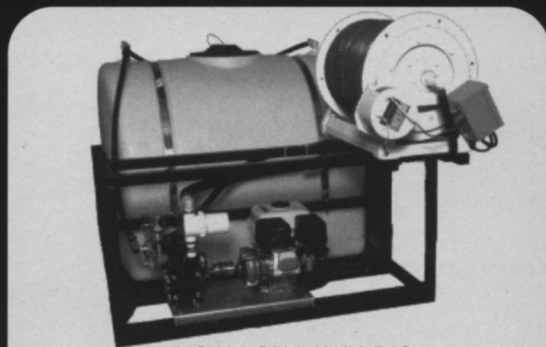
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INDUSTRY NEWS

## ServiceMaster Income Down, Revenue Up

DOWNERS GROVE, Ill. – ServiceMaster reported a 23 percent decrease in second quarter earnings to \$51 million, partly due to TruGreen ChemLawn's and TruGreen LandCare's higher labor and overhead costs.

These escalated costs, which were put in place to support expected increased revenue, hurt lawn care profits, ServiceMaster reported. And the decreased effectiveness of telemarketing, combined with the softening economy, compounded the issue.

But even though earnings were down, ServiceMaster revenues were up 4 percent to \$1.65 billion in the second quarter compared to the same quarter last year. Lawn care revenue also was up from last year, reflecting the realization of price increases, growth in ancillary services and the delay of first

(continued on page 14)

- OCT. 10-11** Southern California Turfgrass Council Turfgrass Landscape and Equipment Expo, Pomona, Calif. Contact: 800/500-7282
- OCT. 10-11** California Association of Nurserymen Western Nursery & Garden Expo, Las Vegas, Nev. Contact: 800/748-6214
- OCT. 11-13** Southern Nursery Association Southern Plant Conference, Athens, Ga. Contact: 770/953-3311
- OCT. 12-13** Plant Health Care Plant Biology Workshop, Frogmore, S.C. Contact: 888/290-2640
- OCT. 24, 25** Tree Failure and Risk Management Workshop and Outside Field Days, Pasadena, 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** Southern California Turfgrass Council Green Industry Job Fair at the Turfgrass, Landscape and Equipment Expo, Pomona, Calif. Contact: 800/500-7282
- NOV. 4-6** Annual International Irrigation Show, San Antonio, Texas. Contact: 703/536-7080
- NOV. 7-9** 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Desert Green Conference, Las Vegas, Nev. Contact: 702/454-3057
- NOV. 9-13** Green Industry Conference, Tampa, Fla. Contact: 800/395-2522, 800/458-3466 or 800/609-7467
- NOV. 10-13** Green Industry Expo., Tampa, Fla., 770/973-2019.
- NOV. 12-15** Midwest Regional Turf and Ornamental Seminar, West Lafayette, Ind. Contact: 765/494

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# Market Trends

(continued from page 11)

quarter production into the second quarter.

"We are disappointed with the results of the second quarter and how they affect our view of the full year results," said Jon Ward, ServiceMaster president and chief executive officer. "In the quarter, we also began to see indications that a slowing economy is affecting certain business offerings. In TruGreen, slower growth in the residential lawn care business and unprofitable contracts in the landscape construction business continue to put pressure on results. Our leadership team is looking into controlling costs, reducing overhead and improving labor productivity."

The TruGreen segment reported combined revenue of \$475 million for the second quarter, up 1 percent from 2000. On the down side, the segment's operating income fell \$11 million, or 18.6 percent, in the second quarter from \$59 million to \$48 million. For the first half of 2001, TruGreen reported revenue of \$733 million, consistent with the \$732 million reported in 2000, while profit was down 28.6 percent from \$91 million to \$65 million.

## IN THE NEWS

### N.Y. County Reinstates Notification Law

LONG ISLAND, N.Y. - The Appellate Division of the State Supreme Court interrupted lawn care operators (LCOs) in the middle of the summer spraying season to reinstate the pesticide notification law in Nassau County.

Legal challenges by lawn care firms

blocked implementation of the controversial law, which requires commercial pesticide applicators to give 48 hours notice to anyone living within 150 feet before spraying and took effect in March in Suffolk, Westchester and Albany counties.

Even though the law was passed statewide, it only applies in counties that choose to adopt it "as is," barring them from modifications. Only Suffolk, Nassau, Westchester and Albany counties adopted the law thus

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## Market Trends

(continued from page 14)

far, and legal challenges are pending in three of the four counties.

The appellate court's three-judge panel did not explain its one-paragraph order. The final court decision is expected in mid-2002.

Nassau officials immediately started enforcing the rules, including seeking fines against violators. A lawyer for several lawn care companies challenging the law said the ruling "throws the industry into chaos" during its busiest time of year. "This is going to create real problems for Nassau County landscapers," said attorney Fred Eisenbud, adding that the firms will continue to pursue the legal case in hopes of invalidating the law before next summer.

State Supreme Court Justice Stephen Bucaria ruled in April that Nassau County should have conducted an environmental impact statement before approving the local law and implementing the state's rules. However, the appellate court decision overturned Bucaria's ruling, reinstating the law until the judges decide the case. Additionally, Suffolk and Westchester judges rejected Bucaria's argument in similar lawsuits filed by lawn and tree care companies.

### RESEARCH UPDATE

## New Bluegrass Takes the Heat

DALLAS — What's hardy enough to stand the South's heat and sun, but soft enough to walk barefoot on? A new experiment in turf that is turning Southern U.S. homeowners' heads.

Reveille, which crosses Kentucky bluegrass with Texas native bluegrass, was developed by James Read, Texas A&M grass breeder

(continued on page 18)

## Association NEWS

The Las Vegas Chapter of the **Nevada Landscape Association** named its board of directors for 2001-2002. Don Crawford is president, Ric Jimenez is secretary-treasurer, Pete Luna and Paris Hunt are both directors and John Marman is past-president.

**The Mid-America Horticultural Trade Show (Mid-Am)** elected a new board of directors, composed of representatives from its three sponsoring associations: The Illinois Nurseryman's Association (INA), the Illinois Landscape Contractors Association (ILCA) and the Wisconsin Landscape Federation (WLF). Bliss Nicholson is president and will represent WLF for a 3-year term, Larry Thalmann III returns as vice-president and represents INA, John Hendricksen returns as treasurer and represents ILCA and Randy Jasperson, representing WLF, is secretary. Richard Harms and Thomas Kusmerz both will represent ILCA for a 3-year term.

**The New York State Turfgrass Association (NYSTA)** presented the Citation of Merit Award to Stephen Smith of BISCO at the 25<sup>th</sup> Turf & Grounds Exposition. The Citation of Merit Award, NYSTA's highest honor, is presented to an individual who has made significant contributions to the green industry and the association.






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# Market Trends

(continued from page 16)

and geneticist, and during tests showed heat and drought tolerance, insect and disease resistance and stayed green during the winter and summer, Read said.

"It may never replace Bermudagrass and St. Augustinegrass as the basic turf in this area, but it certainly has a much-needed use we haven't had before," explained James Mafee, Texas Agricultural Extension Service turfgrass specialist.

Since the mid-1970s, Read has searched for a cool-season grass suitable for Texas conditions. He got closer once he turned to native grasses in the late 1980s and found Texas bluegrass to be the most promising.

The new turf, which requires good drainage, doesn't mind the sun, is a slow grower and produces seed heads only in the spring, so it will be available as sod late this year but in very limited quantities. "We need another year to produce enough sod to supply consumers," he said. "Growers who protect sod from contamination will have larger quantities available for sale in the near future." ■

## People

Environmental Industries announced the following promotions: **Richard Sperber** to president and chief executive officer of Environmental Industries, **Thomas Donnelly** to president and chief operating officer of Valley Crest, **Robert Crudup** to president and chief operating officer of Valley Crest Tree Co., **Vicki Povah Martinez** to senior vice president of Valley Crest Tree Co., **Nada Duna** to vice president of Environmental Care, and **Andrew Mandell** to senior vice president and chief financial officer of Environmental Industries.

**Gerard Carpentier** joined Stellar Industries as Canadian sales representative for the Stellararc Power System.

J.R. Simplot appointed **Don Johnson** as vice president and general manager of the Turf & Horticulture group's fertilizer division.

**Rich Underwood** will manage Simplot's Jacklin Seed facility in Albany, Ore.

Irrigation Station promoted **J.B. Gibson** from regional sales manager to corporate sales manager. **Chris Black** will transition from warehouse manager to sales manager of the company's Oklahoma City Branch.

Seed Research of Oregon appointed **Bryan Muntz** to its sales staff.

**Doug Traxel** joined Aquarium Pharmaceuticals as sales manager of the company's western central territory, while Todd Rosendahl will serve as sales representative of the northwestern territory.



Sperber (top),  
Donnelly (bottom)

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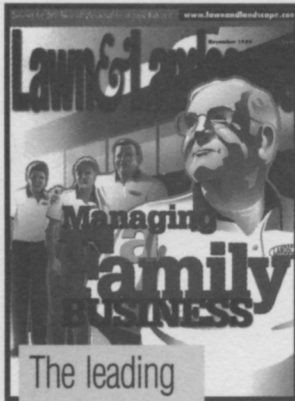
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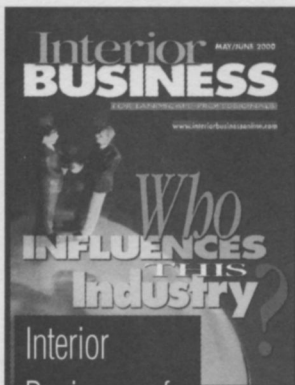
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HUMAN NATURE

## Enhancing Company Culture

Have you ever wondered, in your efforts to develop a team-oriented culture, why your employees just aren't catching on? If you've read all the books, attended seminars, set goals and made a strategic plan, yet the bottom-line results are still not there, you've probably decided, "I've got to change my employees."

My advice to you is don't even try. You cannot change your employees. We, as individuals, can't change people. It is against our human nature to be changed, and almost impossible to see our own faults and shortcomings.

In the last 12 years, we have interviewed more than 10,000 managers, middle managers and front-line employees, asking such questions as, "What are the strengths and weaknesses of your company?" For strengths, I often hear things such as great people, talent, good customers, excellent sales representatives and designers, great equipment, etc. For the weaknesses, I always hear the top five: communication, sincere appreciation, reviews, training and a vision for the future. The one thing that I have never heard from any person interviewed is, "I am one of the weaknesses here."

If hardworking people can't see their own shortcomings, odds would have it that none of your staff can either.

### SHARPEN STRENGTHS.

So, what is a leader to do? The following points will help you work with your team of employees to enhance company culture.

- *Find out what employees enjoy.* Hopefully you meet with your staff on a regular basis. Ask the question, "What do you like doing the most here?"
- *Note projects or tasks in which employees excel.* What type of project is finished on time? What do they seem to approach more enthusiastically?
- *Train them in areas they enjoy.* Focus training efforts on enhancing the areas in which employees will excel. If they enjoy it, they will learn; if they learn, they will

become more effective at those tasks and managing those areas of responsibility.

- *Allow employees to teach others.* As individuals share knowledge, they also grow in knowledge and self-respect.

**MINIMIZE WEAKNESSES.** Coach John Wooden of UCLA basketball fame said, "Do not let what you cannot do interfere with what you can do." Setting employees in positions that they do not enjoy sets them up for failure.

- *Put the right person in the right job now.* Lou Holtz, a famous football coach, explains his strategy in placing players in different positions with the example of the tight end that ran a 4.9 second 40-yard dash. This is slow for a tight end, but if that player is put at the tackle or guard position and can run a 4.9, 40, he is now "fast" and can excel in that position. Take a close look at who you have filling positions.

- *Be slow to criticize but ready to critique.* If an employee is attempting a task for the first time and making a good effort, don't ruin enthusiasm with destructive criticism. Destructive criticism takes place in front of a group of people, with a loud voice, and without firm basis for statements. Critiquing, on the other hand, takes place one-on-one, with positive phrases such as, "I appreciate your initiative," "Excellent try," "Next time give thought to this," "Keep up the good work," or "You'll get it."

**ENVIRONMENT TO EXCEL.** The Herzberg Theory of Motivation states, "Motivation comes from supplying the individual with one or all of the following: recognition, added responsibility, job enhancement, a sense of achievement and opportunity for advancement." It also states that money is not a motivator.

- *Share information.* It has been our experience that information is motivation. Share with your employees how sales are going, feedback from clients, technical information and profitability.

- *Continue to involve them in trade organizations,* where growth will come from learning more about their industry. Develop a library or "university" in-house where they can read books and periodicals on everything from technical information to leadership and management skills. Hold open houses for clients and families and allow them to show off their team.

If you have been courageous enough to implement the team building concepts that were so popular in the last decade, you are to be applauded. As Winston Churchill said, "Never, never, never give up." Continue to build your team and it will make you a greater company. **U**

*Jim Paluch has been a Green Industry author, speaker and consultant for more than 12 years. His third book, Growing Dreams, will be available in September. To find out more go to [www.jphorizons.com](http://www.jphorizons.com) or e-mail [jpaluch@jphorizons.com](mailto:jpaluch@jphorizons.com).*

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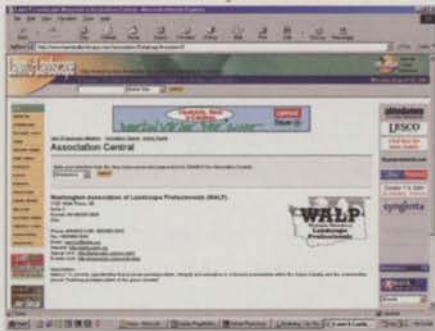
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Look online for information about the annual Lawn & Landscape Business Strategies and School of Management conferences. At [www.lawnandlandscape.com/conferences](http://www.lawnandlandscape.com/conferences) you'll find links to more information about the 2001 Business Strategies Conference, Oct. 7-9, 2001, in Scottsdale, Ariz. and the 2002 School of Management Conference, Feb. 17-19, 2002, in Charlotte, N.C. Click the links to find registration information.

## Association Central Opens Online

Lawn & Landscape Online's Association Central is your online resource for information about green industry associations. This listing of national and state associations includes Web site links, as well as contact information, mission statements and access to events and membership information. If you're not a member of an area lawn care, landscape or irrigation association, now's the time for you to get involved. Visit

[www.lawnandlandscape.com/associations](http://www.lawnandlandscape.com/associations) and highlight your state from



the drop down menu to find local associations. If your association is not listed please e-mail [cgreen@lawnandlandscape.com](mailto:cgreen@lawnandlandscape.com) with the appropriate contact information.

## Daily Features

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

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

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

**Wed.** - *Lawn Care Roundup*: Lawn care operators and researchers share 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 highlights *Verbascum*, a tall-stalked plant with spirelike clusters of blooms in September.

## Online Contents

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

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Lawn & Landscape Online staff: Scott Hunsberger, Internet editor ([shunsberger@lawnandlandscape.com](mailto:shunsberger@lawnandlandscape.com)), Cheryl Green, Internet project manager ([cgreen@lawnandlandscape.com](mailto:cgreen@lawnandlandscape.com)) and Sydney Work, Web department manager ([swork@gie.net](mailto:swork@gie.net)).

## July Online Winner

Congratulations to Ray Rogers, Planet Green Lawn Care & Maintenance, Gonzales, La., for winning a Shindaiwa T231 Grass Trimmer in the July online sweepstakes. Remember to check [www.lawnandlandscape.com/sweepstakes/ContestDetail.asp](http://www.lawnandlandscape.com/sweepstakes/ContestDetail.asp) for upcoming sweepstakes.



# In Your Turf

UNPREDICTABLE WEATHER

## The Usual Suspect

Mother Nature's drastic mood swings took their toll on turf seed crops this year.

Despite the fact that Pacific Northwest growers planted more acreage in 2000 than ever before – up 1.8 percent according to the Oregon State University Extension Service – yields in most species are below average or average due mostly to lack of rain, pointed out Scott Harer, regional sales manager, Seed Research of Oregon, Corvallis, Ore.

As if a dry spring wasn't bad enough, rain finally arrived during harvest, slowing it down at a critical time, remarked Steve Tubbs, president, Turf Merchants, Tangent, Ore. "While most of the perennial ryegrass has been cut, it is still out in the fields in windrows, and cannot be harvested until it is dried out," he said in early August. "The few fields of perennial that were processed prior to the rain came in at about 25 percent lower than last year's averages."

As of press time, the summer storms were heading up to Washington and Idaho, also delaying the Kentucky bluegrass

AT A GLANCE

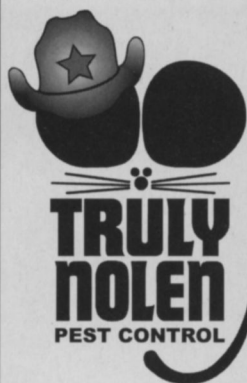
### 2001 Turf Seed Harvest

TURF SEED	SUPPLY	PRICES
annual ryegrass	below average	rising
Bermudagrass	average	stable to rising
perennial ryegrass	average to below average	down
creeping red fescue	average	down
fine fescue	average to above average	down
Kentucky bluegrass	average to below average	stable to slightly down
tall fescue	average to below average	stable to rising

The chart above represents supply and price estimates from LESCO, the Oregon Seed Council, Seed Research of Oregon and Turf Merchants.

harvest. "Yield estimates have dropped from an estimated 600 pounds per acre to 400 pounds, though on increased acres," Tubbs said. "With more rains predicted, by the time it's all said and done, this will be the latest harvest we can recall."

**THE CULPRITS.** Though the dry weather may have been nice for Oregonians who are used to wet springs, this hot, arid period



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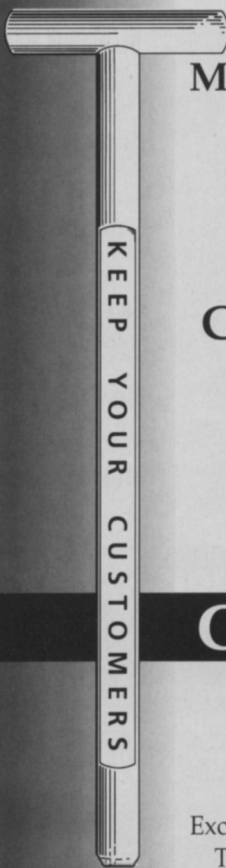
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# In Your Turf

in March and April affected the way seed heads formed on many plants, resulting in a lot of "fluffy seed or blanks," Harer said. "We really never did get enough rain this year. We're still 12 inches behind on the weather year that started Oct. 1, 2000."

Consequently, growers with irrigated fields had better results, Harer pointed out.

The lack of rain—a problem in itself—also created additional dilemmas for growers, particularly those who count on it to dilute preemergence herbicides sprayed early in the season to clean up fields, explained Dave Nelson, executive secretary, Oregon Seed Council, Salem, Ore. "The little rain we did get wasn't enough," Nelson stated, adding that 8 to 12 percent of turf seed crops were lost this year due to resulting chemical damage.

Rising natural gas prices in early March also contributed to poor yields. Since natural gas is used to produce urea and other forms of nitrogen fertilizers, many growers had to skip fertilization all together, crossing their fingers afterward, Nelson reported.

In addition to dealing with weather and

rising fertilizer prices, farmers are losing money because of plummeting prices on seed abandoned by AgriBioTech (ABT) after its bankruptcy in January 2000. "Farmers are cutting management expenses just to get by," Nelson said. "Some farmers will end up out of business because of these low prices."

ABT leftovers are putting pressure on prices throughout the market, particularly since many of these varieties are undesirable because of their old genetics, Harer said. "We can't support research and marketing of new genetics when the old genetics are being sold at such low prices," he explained.

**THE RESULTS.** Annual ryegrass, which Nelson calls "an early indicator plant," set the tone for this year's turf seed yields. The crop was down an average 25 to 30 percent, he said.

Tall fescue followed with yields that were all over the board—depending on whether or not irrigation was available—but averaged a 15 percent decrease, according to Harer.

Even though there has been significant perennial ryegrass carryover the past two

years from the ABT bankruptcy, the crop was short and yields are expected to be down an average 20 percent, Harer explained. But fine fescue carryover from last year is helping this year's yields, which reached the average to above average range, he said.

Since Kentucky bluegrass was still being harvested at press time, suppliers said there's not a good read on the supply. However, early maturing species show average yields, Harer pointed out.

Demand has not kept up its usual pace, so supply should fill demand this year despite the fact that most yields are average to below average, Harer said, adding that this demand decrease began about 18 months ago.

But contractors should still plan ahead. "Certain varieties will sell out quick this year, particularly the newer genetics," Harer warned. "Contractors should order their seed early to make sure they can get it." — *Nicole Wisniewski*

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

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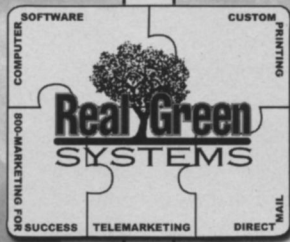


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USE READER SERVICE #27



# Nursery Market Report

LOW LIGHT SOLUTIONS

## Hooked on Hosta

Shade lovers of the landscape, hostas could never be called demanding plants.

They come back every year – surviving the coldest winters – and generally making few demands on contractors' time.

Popular for their low maintenance and low light needs, hostas offer other perks. Mainly, they are known for their bold textures and great variety of leaf colors, patterns and shapes.

lawnandlandscape.com



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

Hostas vary in height from 2 inches to 4 feet. These herbaceous perennials have tubular or trumpet-like flowers of white, lavender, blue and purple. Foliage colors are green, yellow, white and blue, often with center or edge variegation.

Leaf textures range from smooth to crinkled, with dull to glossy surfaces. Leaf shapes vary from rounded to oval, heart-shaped to strap-like. These adult foliage characteristics develop three or more years after planting.

Depending on cultivar and site, most hostas spread slowly by underground stems. Some cultivars have hori-



Hosta's wide range of colors, variegated foliage and low light tolerance makes it a popular landscape plant. Photo: Monrovia

zontal, above-ground stems, making them useful as ground covers (see cultivar guide below). While site and maintenance practices affect mature height and spread, proper location and care can make hostas long lasting, valuable landscape plants. Here are some tips from the University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension, Lincoln, Neb.

**SITE REQUIREMENTS.** For best performance, plant hostas in well-drained, slightly acidic soil. Avoid poorly drained locations, where root and crown rot are prevalent.

Select a site that receives some wind protection because low humidity combined with heavy winds causes leaf browning or desiccation. While most plants will recover from wind damage, leaves developing after damage occurs aren't as attractive as the initial foliage.

Once established, hostas are drought tolerant, but they require regular moisture for best appearance and size. To improve the soil's water and oxygen-holding capacity, add organic matter one-third by volume. Spade or rototill organic matter to an 8-inch depth.

**HOSTAS IN DESIGN.** Low-growing hostas can be placed at the front of a planting bed to form a distinct, unifying edge. Taller hostas can be used as a backdrop for short shrubs and flowers.

Hostas help direct viewers' attention to specific landscape features. For example, hostas placed near a building entrance can strongly accent and draw attention to the area. Scattered use of brightly colored or unusual colored hostas, however, can draw attention away from other important landscape features, decreasing orderliness.

Hostas can be used to influence the viewers' perceptions of size. When plants are placed near the viewer and smaller-leaved plants are used in the background, the background appears more distant. But hostas viewed in the background of a landscape with small-leaved plants in the foreground make the landscape seem smaller. – Ali Cybulski

The author is a Contributing Editor to Lawn & Landscape magazine.

### PLANT SELECTION

## Cultivar Guides

Each hosta cultivar provides its own characteristic size, ability to spread, color and leaf pattern, and tolerance to sun exposure. Carefully match these characteristics with your site and purpose. Because new cultivars are introduced each year, there are many selections.

The following plant list is a general guide to hosta cultivars.

Small hostas, adaptable to shallow soils:

- *H. 'Chartreuse Wiggles'*

- *H. venusta 'Variegata'*

Edgers, low vigorous horizontal growth (reduces edging time):

- *H. 'Blue Wedgewood'*
- *H. Ginko Craig*

Ground cover or shallow horizontal stems that allow plants to rapidly populate an area:

- *H. 'Ground Master'*
- *H. 'Ventricosa Aureomarginata'*

Background, large plants with lush, exotic appearance:

- *H. 'Big Mama'*
- *H. 'Wide Brim'*

- *H. 'Fragrant Bouquet'*



## CROWN & THATCH-INHABITING PESTS

# Summing Up Sod Webworms

Over 30 species of sod webworms have been identified in North America. Pest species vary across the United States and can be grouped into those inhabiting cool-season grasses and those inhabiting warm-season grasses.

Species that prefer cool-season grasses are: bluegrass, webworm, larger, western, striped, elegant and vagabond sod webworms, and the cranberry girdler. Some of these may also occur in the warm-season zones, but the imported tropical sod webworm is the principal pest of warm-season grasses.

Sod webworm moths are easy to identify to species by using wing color patterns. Adults of most species rest on grass blades and in shrubs during the day and characteristically roll the forewings tubelike around the body. The head has a snout-like projection extending forward, thus, they are also called snout moths. Tropical sod webworm adults hold their forewings roof-like over the body. Usually two or three sod webworm species cause damage in any given area and species complexes vary across North America.

The larvae may be light tan to light purple and often have a greenish cast due to the chlorophyll contents of their gut. All species have rectangular, shield-like spots in rows down the body. Larvae are difficult to identify to species. Consult an expert if this is needed.

**DIAGNOSIS.** Generally, cool-season sod webworm larvae construct tunnels in the soil and thatch and line them with silk. At night, the larvae follow the tunnels to the surface and feed on grass blades and stems just above the crown. The severed stems die, leaving dead spots and / or sparse

and ragged appearing turf. However, sod webworm larvae rarely kill turf. Brushing or raking away the dead stems exposes the shortened green stems left by the grazing larvae. The tropical sod webworm feeds along the tips and edges of grass blades, similar to armyworms. High populations can literally mow down turf.

An effective method of detecting infestations is to mix two tablespoons of liquid dishwashing detergent in two gallons of water (in our experience, Joy has not caused damage to the turf). Apply the solution uniformly over one square yard of turf using a sprinkling can (= soap flush). The soap solution irritates the larvae, which come to the surface in 10 to 15 minutes. Early morning is the best time to sample because the larvae are close to the surface. Larger larvae may surface first and the smallest last (after 20 minutes). This method is least successful when the thatch and / or upper soil are dry. Preirrigation may help.

**LIFE CYCLE & HABITS.** In cool-season turf areas, female moths simply drop their eggs as they fly over the turf at dusk and after dark. Eggs hatch in a week to 10 days and about six weeks are required for development from egg to adult.

The most common species on northern turfgrass (bluegrass and larger sod webworms) have two generations each year and overwinter as larvae in silken webs within the thatch or top inch of soil.



To order copies of *Destructive Turfgrass Insects*, by Dr. Harry Niemczyk and Dr. David Shetlar, call the Lawn & Landscape book department at 800/456-0707.



Typical sod webworm larva (above) showing rows of shield-like spots on body. When uncovered in turf thatch, their green frass (fecal) pellets are a sign that they have recently eaten turf tissue. Striped sod webworm (right) showing typical snout-like mouthparts and common resting position on grass blade. Photo: Destructive Turf Insects



# In Minor's League

We are halfway through the hottest summer we have had in years. The employees are drained and retention is suffering. Can you give me some quick fixes or is this just something I have to live with?

I can certainly empathize with your problem. When I ran my business in Texas, this was a constant issue. Field staff typically dislike working in 100-degree Fahrenheit temperatures. Sure, this is doable for a while, but employees will wear down over time. The hot temperatures also drain energy from the management team because they deal with weather-related staff problems all day long. Doing nothing, however, is not the answer.

I have a few quick-fix ideas to offer, but typically I think the problem needs to be addressed before summer.

To get through this year, think about creating new, short-term incentives for your staff. Hopefully, they are already on some type of reward-based compensation program, but why not sweeten the pot? Consider giving an attendance bonus to everyone who does not miss a day in the next two months. Make a big deal out of the program. Make it more effective by putting everyone's name up on a chart in your warehouse for all to see and checking off each day the employees are present.

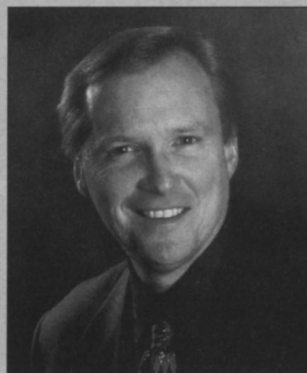
Besides progress charts, financial incentives can motivate employees to reach goals, such as production. Charting progress gives employees a financial incentive, and puts peer pressure on everyone. Not many people want to be perceived as the one who can't cut it. You might even want to consider a team-based attendance bonus with the same type of charting, but make sure you don't punish for absences arranged in advance.

Communicate regularly to your employees that you understand what they are going through and that you are going to reward them at a greater level for their efforts. Empathy during difficult times is important. If your employees know you care, they will be more inclined to go the extra mile. Show you care by spending a day in the field with them to reduce their workload. We had great success with our "manager in the field" day, during which all managers and senior administrators worked with the crews. Involve as many people as possible and end the day with hamburgers and hot dogs in the office, where the field personnel can share stories about their managers' experiences. It is a great team builder and shows your appreciation.

Little things show your concern and appreciation as well. You and/or your supervisors could distribute Gatorade and soft drinks at the jobsite in mid-afternoon on a regular basis. Visit with the field staff and show

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-employee, former INC. 500 award-winning company he founded in 1978 and sold to TruGreen-ChemLawn in 1998. Readers with questions for Minor can fax them to Lawn & Landscape at 216/961-0364 or e-mail them to [bwest@lawnandlandscape.com](mailto:bwest@lawnandlandscape.com).*

understanding for their work demands. Often, I would come in early in the morning with my truck loaded with donuts and orange juice to hand out before folks went out in the field, and I would thank the staff for their respective contributions at every opportunity.

Another angle is to consider hiring temporary staff to fill the overload in the summer months. Many college and high school students would love to work for four to six weeks during their breaks. Build into your hiring plan an "employee buffer" of backups, which can allow you to give time off to field staff in the summer and allow them to recharge for a couple of days. This buffer also ensures that there are always replacements in the wings for those who can't make it through the dog days.

Another idea is a mid-summer community service project where all of the employees chip in. A company I know of re-landscaped a park in an urban neighborhood that lacked green space. This project meant more work, but it got the employees excited and interested about more than just making money for themselves or the company. To keep your associates interested in their work, you have to engage their hearts as well as their minds and bodies.

There are many other ideas to keep staff motivated during a hot summer. Schedule a brainstorming session with your senior managers and your field staff. Have managers ask their employees what is important to them. Regardless of what ideas you have—do something. Simply writing it off as the nature of the industry is a big mistake. Put yourself in your employees' shoes and, I suspect, you will understand. **□**



# Minding Your

# BUSINESS



## Giving Thanks

R

Retaining and obtaining clients can be as simple as a two-word gesture – a thoughtful “thank-you.”

“You work for your customers all year long, and if it weren’t for them, you wouldn’t have a business,” reasoned Erich Heinrich, owner, Avalawn Landscaping, Cincinnati, Ohio. Each year at Christmastime, his company floods its commercial accounts with poinsettias – an inexpensive investment that pays dividends in smiles.

“It’s just like people giving their girlfriend flowers – they don’t expect it,” he compared. The thank-you flowers arrive at the doors of his large commercial accounts, which he contacts in advance so he can deliver them in person. With a crew in tow, he sets flowers on each employee’s desk.

**KEEPSAKES.** The money business owners invest in small thank-yous demonstrates a commitment to customer service and a genuine interest in their accounts. Whether the token is passed onto clients mid-season or during the winter lull in landscape services, these gifts spread a positive image, appealing to those considering contract renewal.

“Last year, when I took in the flowers for the Arby’s contract, I brought in seven or eight poinsettias for their entrance – the top of them were 2 feet wide, at least – and then I gave three or four for the president and directors to take home,” he said. “With an office of 40 cubicles, you’re looking at \$3 a cubicle and the large ones cost about \$10 to \$12. The account is \$90,000, so what’s \$250? It pays for itself in the end.”

Heinrich’s poinsettias aren’t stamped with blatant “buy my service” tags. In fact, he separates direct advertising from his gifts, noting that thank-yous accompanied with subliminal sales pitches defeat the purpose of the flower.


“You should be thanking them for a [contract] that you received, not for one you may get in the future from them,” he remarked, adding that he never attaches his phone number or address to the flowers. “That’s not a thank-you.”

Instead, he attaches personal cards and plant care directions to flowers. “I don’t think you should thank someone with an advertisement,” he asserted. “It’s just not as nice.” Heinrich sells more services without pushing his name on thank-yous, he said.

Same goes for the flags his company stakes in commercial properties on the Fourth of July and Memorial Day. The \$2 flags are simple tokens of consideration and nothing more, he said. However, the stars and stripes do stand out, and he admits that when customers wonder who put them in their landscape, he is proud to answer his company’s name. “I have better loyalty with my commercial accounts than some of my residential accounts because of some of the things I do throughout the year,” he figured.

**NAMESAKES.** David Pitts, owner, P & C Lawn Care, Midwest City, Okla., said a combination of timing and a phone number hint on his pen set gifts earned him more sales. “Around here, when you mow the yard for the last time, you don’t see the client again until spring,” he said. “Christmas gives you a middle point and gives the client a boost, so when February comes around and they need a lawn service, they remember me and they have my number. It gives me a little more advertising.”

This off-season exposure and the convenience of glancing at the gift to find the phone number is an effective formula, Pitts noted. “I think in the long run, we earned 10 times as much as we spent,” he said. “We kept our existing numbers and we got 15 to 20 new accounts.”

Little thank-yous score big points when they are personalized. Generic gifts are about as creative as receiving a mail-order Christmas fruitcake. “Companies are starting to get larger, and [employees can] lose track of who is working for them,” Pitts related. “It is good to be one-on-one with people and give them gifts they’ll like. You can personalize them without spending a lot and clients feel special – like they’re the only ones you’re thinking about,” he said. – *Kristen Hampshire* 

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

Want to know how other contractors handle a particular business challenge? Ask us, and we’ll find out. Send ideas for “Minding Your Business” topics to [bwest@lawnandlandscape.com](mailto:bwest@lawnandlandscape.com) or via fax at 216/961-0364.



by Nicole Wisniewski

## JACK ROBERTSON LAWN CARE

**HEADQUARTERS:** Springfield, Ill.

**FOUNDED:** 1977

**SERVICES:** 100 percent lawn care coming from 93 percent residential clients, 5 percent commercial/industrial clients and 2 percent government/municipal clients.

**2000 REVENUE:** Approximately \$1 million

**2001 PROJECTED GROWTH:** 10 to 15 percent

**EMPLOYEES:** Six to eight year-round, two to four seasonal

**AVERAGE SIZE OF PROPERTY**

**TREATED:** 8,500 square feet (residential)

### THE COMPANY

**MISSION STATEMENT:** To do the best and to be the best.

**FUTURE CHALLENGES:** To expand the business into other service avenues and keep the quality our customers are accustomed to.

### THE OWNER

#### JACK ROBERTSON

**BACKGROUND:** Earned a degree in agriculture from Western Illinois University and the University of Missouri in 1977.

**ASSOCIATIONS:** He has been a member of the Professional Lawn Care Association of America for more than 20 years and served on the board for three years.

"Keep it simple, stupid."

When asked for his advice on the fundamentals of running a lawn care business, this is Jack Robertson's reply.

To Robertson, president, Jack Robertson Lawn Care, Springfield, Ill., simplicity refers to a lawn care operator's ability to provide clients with quality service they don't need to worry about and to educate them on lawn care. Client communication happens to be Robertson's forte and, on a moment's notice, he can offer examples to further explain his theory.

"Say you go to the dealership and you want to buy a new car," Robertson started. "One car is \$15,000, but it's too complicated to drive and the other is \$20,000, but it's easier to drive. More people will buy the more expensive car because it's easier to drive.

"Here's another example," he continued. "Our office is located near an outdoor shopping complex that includes at least five fast food restaurants. One of those restaurant owners visited all the stores one day, offering all local employees a 20 percent off discount to eat there. Where do you think we go to lunch everyday? It's that simple."

This simple service focus has provided Jack Robertson Lawn Care, which has revenue of approximately \$1 million, the opportunity to grow consistently between 5 and 10 percent annually for the past 25 years, focusing on a few specific niches - fertilization, pest management, slit seeding and aeration - while maintaining a 95 percent client retention rate.

Keeping a constant, watchful eye on service and using a few business lessons he learned from his father, a background in horticulture and a love for marketing, Robertson said he's simply "taking care of business."

**BUSINESS LESSONS.** Robertson spent his summers working for his brother-in-law, who owned a Lawn Medic franchise in Springfield, Ill.,

### Jack Robertson Lawn Care

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At a  
Glance

# Simple SET





*Jack Robertson Lawn Care uses business basics and marketing know-how to stay focused and retain clients.*

*Jack Robertson (center) with senior service managers Brian Cox (left) and Mike Harris (right). Photo: Terry Farmer*

# **Y** **SERVICE**



## Cover Story

while he pursued a degree at the University of Missouri, Columbia, Mo.

The look of appreciation on clients' faces after his visits inspired Robertson to major in agriculture, which he said was a booming field in the late 1970s. "I enjoyed visiting with the customers and doing what I could to make their lawns look better," he said.

After graduation in 1977, Robertson planned to buy his brother-in-law's business, but he wasn't familiar with the process of borrowing money from a bank to make the transaction, so he asked his dad for help. After discussing the exact amount needed, Robertson and his dad made a bank appointment, where he learned a valuable business lesson. "We were sitting in the bank president's office and I was very nervous, so my dad spoke for me," Robertson admitted. "My dad said, 'Jack needs to borrow \$X amount to buy the business,' and the amount he said was \$15,000 more than what I initially intended to borrow. I couldn't believe

**J**ack Robertson won't tolerate unsafe work. Employees at Jack Robertson Lawn Care, Springfield, Ill., don't receive bonuses for safety on the job – safety is expected.

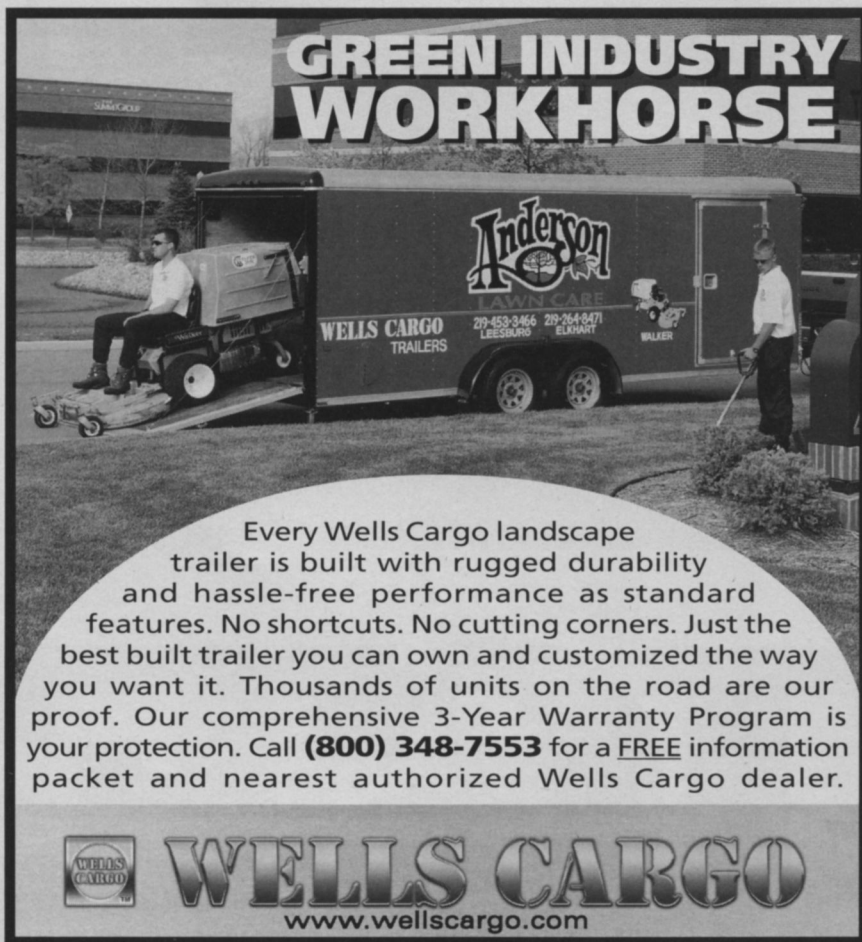
Robertson also has little tolerance for unsafe products because they put his employees in jeopardy on the job and show that he's not supporting his end of the safety bargain. "If I find that a product we're using is dusty and sticking to my employees' pant legs while they are working, then I don't want to use that product," Robertson said. "So if Product A is safer but costs more than Product B, I always go with Product A. For example, we used a product that was yellow and stained everything – equipment, trucks and clothing. For a while, we alternated between clear and yellow-colored products to see what would work best. The clear product cost more, but it turned out to be the best in terms of safety. If a product stains employees' pants, I don't want to use it."

Robertson lists his criteria for a product in this order: safety, effectiveness and ease of application. "I would rather spend more money on a product than have safety problems because of it," he explained.

That's why a uniform with long pants is essential for Jack Robertson Lawn Care employees, Robertson said. "I saw a company the other day applying product with shorts on – that won't happen here," he pointed out. "I don't want the products to get on my employees' legs and skin. We're above that. Safety is everything."

– Nicole Wisniewski

# Product Protection



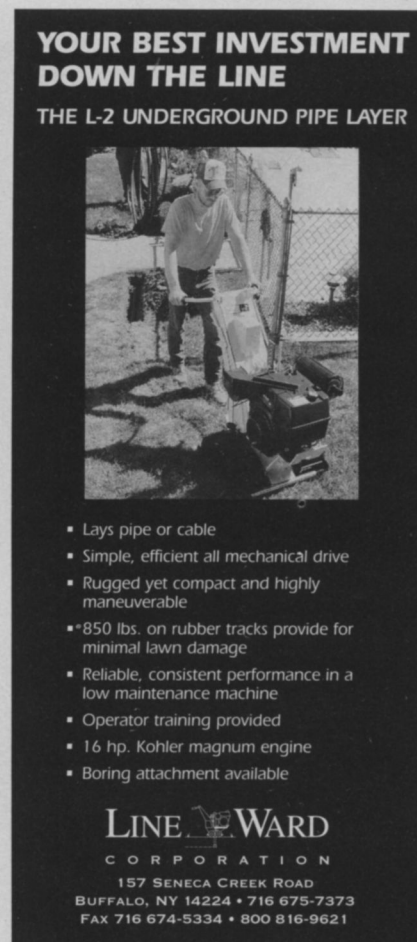
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it. I am sitting there wondering how I'm going to pay back the amount I was originally going to borrow—but now \$15,000 more?

"After we left the bank, my dad explained to me that when you start a business you should always borrow more than you need and never touch the extra money so that you start out with a positive cash flow," he continued. "This made a lot of sense. This money was a huge positive in my bank account. It also gave me security because I always knew that I had money there to start to pay off the original loan when I needed to."

Robertson ran the Springfield, Ill.-based Lawn Medic franchise until 1988 when he dropped the franchise and changed the business name to Jack Robertson Lawn Care, giving it his own identity.

Also around this time, Robertson said he had a vision that helped him make another important business change. "Twenty-five years ago, I was doing everything and worrying about everything," he explained. "I

did everything because I felt that I had to for it to be done right. Fifteen years ago, that started to change. I was concerned about all the aspects of the business to the point where I saw myself on a railroad track with another train coming straight at me. So, I made the decision to start delegating some authority. Ten years ago, I got a little better at it and, today, I'm really good at it."

The trick to delegating authority effectively is first acknowledging that employees can do additional work, Robertson advised, adding that this is difficult because anytime people are given flexibility they are bound to make mistakes.

"People don't improve and learn without making mistakes," he said. "Wanting to be in control is what usually brings entrepreneurs to the dance in the first place, so giving up some of the reigns is tough. I still don't delegate like I should or as much as I want to, but there is an evolution happening here. I do delegate a lot of duties and we've pro-

pered because of it. For instance, I have nothing to do with routing and daily work with customers anymore. Fortunately, I have good people who can manage the day-to-day things so I don't need to be here 10 hours a day anymore."

Hiring people who have a positive personality and good work ethic enabled Robertson to gain trust of long-time employees like senior service managers Brian Cox and Mike Harris, who both have worked at Jack Robertson Lawn Care more than 20 years, and give them extra responsibilities, lightening his own workload.

**TAKING ON TECHNOLOGY.** Since Robertson focuses on client retention, he doesn't believe in phone solicitation. He also doesn't believe in computer-generated form letters. He'd rather send clients personalized, hand-signed letters of business appreciation.

Robertson didn't even want to embrace

*(continued on page 36)*

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**DeltaGard** **Sevin**

# Cover Story

(continued from page 33)

cushey, convenient telephone technology like voicemail because he said, "The last thing I want to do is talk to a computer voice. I want to talk to *someone*."

But business growth, and a persuasive office manager, convinced him to add voicemail four years ago. "I'm amazed at the estimates we'll give and get over voicemail,"

said Robertson, admitting he's a bit old-fashioned when it comes to embracing the nature of face-to-face customer communication. "I guess voicemail works. It's hard for me to believe because when I first started out, the phone was everything – and to me it's still everything. When it rang, I answered it – and I answered it fast."

Despite his traditional views, Robertson uses some forms of technology to his advantage, including Caller I.D., which he considers one of his most beneficial business tools. At Jack Robertson Lawn Care, a Caller I.D. box is attached to every employee's phone.

"By the second ring, we can see who is calling, be able to spell his or her name correctly, look them up on the computer and have all the information we need right in front of us," Robertson enthused. "It's amazing how many clients are pleased just because I know how to spell their names correctly or can finish their addresses as they're repeating them to me. Even when they call with a problem, within seconds I can have the client's entire service record right in front of

(continued on page 45)

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USE READER SERVICE #33

**W**hen Jack Robertson built his new facility in 1991, he wanted to, as he put it, "stand out like a sore thumb."

In addition to meeting all lawn care and Department of Agriculture safety requirements, Robertson, president, Jack Robertson Lawn Care, Springfield, Ill., chose the busiest section of his rural community "right next to the Wal-Mart," to be sure his clients see the office and have a chance to stop by. "I chose a nice office building in a nice area of town," he said. "There's no question that it helps boost our image."

To make sure clients get a chance to witness Robertson's professional office, trucks and employees, he even invites them to stop in throughout the year, and gives them reason to by passing out free rain sensors branded with the company logo and other special thank-you gifts. "We want our representation to be at the highest level," he said.

— Nicole Wisniewski

## Location, Location, Location



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# Weed Man®

*Creating Opportunities for Growth*

## Get **GROWING**

MUCH LIKE YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD lawn care company, Weed Man started with one truck. One \$500 loan, one small office, one man – Des Rice – and one vision to launch a successful Canadian operation during the 1970s lawn care boom.

One multiplied quickly, in Weed Man's case.

"From that time to today, we pretty well sold out every corner of Canada," noted Roger Mongeon, chief executive officer, who bought his first Hull, Quebec, franchise in 1986. Today, the company boasts \$62.1 million in revenue, with more than 150 North American franchises, and has taken a firm footstep into the United States. "Our goal in the next 10 years is to grow our business in terms of systems and sales to \$200 to \$250 million, and that will position us as a No. 2 player in the lawn care industry in North America," Mongeon predicted.

Once again, Weed Man is ready to expand.

**SUCCESS ISN'T ALL ABOUT NUMBERS, HOWEVER.** The first chapters of the Weed Man story are familiar – an independent business tends to details and cares about quality, attracting clients by building a solid reputation and retaining them by keeping its promises.

This philosophy has not changed. Weed Man has outgrown its first office space and acquired a few more trucks, but its standards survived and formed a foundation for a system that caught on. "Now, we have the national brand, but we're still maintaining the local flavor,"

Mongeon described. "The owner of the Weed Man franchise is still on site, and he has the fire in his eyes that he is going to provide the best service, and we offer him the best tools.

"We built a commercial model so that everyone can be successful," Mongeon added. "We have a partnership with our franchisees, so when they see who is involved in Weed Man, they see the system and it makes sense."

After 31 years of practice, the system Weed Man passes on to its franchisees is time tested and employee approved. Weed Man polished the business tools, from routing to marketing, so that franchisees can start with a "final draft" instead of trying to launch or grow a lawn care segment from scratch. Those who stick to the model can grow healthy, competitive lawn care businesses, like Sam Morgan, president, Weed Man, Wilmington, N.C.

"The system is the backbone of Weed Man," Morgan stressed. "Each step builds on each other, and the plan is all stepped out for you. Without it, we wouldn't have grown our lawn care business – we would've done the same that we did last year."

**WEED MAN HAS EXPERIENCE BUILDING BUSINESSES,** beginning its first franchise efforts in 1976, when Rice decided to branch out his Canadian offices and formed Turf Management Systems. Soon, franchises dotted Canada, and entrepreneurs like Mongeon bought a



*The first chapters of the Weed Man story are familiar – they trace the steps of an independent company built on solid systems and steady growth.*



piece of the pie.

"Our vision was to grow in Canada and build the best possible system to grow the franchise," Mongeon said. "And while we were doing that, we were developing a lot of systems to operate lawn care."

Developing effective methods, from budgeting and marketing to scheduling and routing, was natural for Mongeon, who has an engineering background. And when he saw the franchises blanket Canada, he researched the United States market, figuring this success could move southward. He was right. "I approached Des Rice to purchase the master franchise rights for the United States and was able to secure that," he said.

From there, Mongeon continued to tweak the systems. This time, his challenge was to sufficiently support large territories. "We wanted to give franchisees a national brand with all the systems attached with the Weed Man name, but also give them the local support," he emphasized.

"We divided the United States into 17 geographical areas and recruited subfranchisors, and our strategy was to recruit the best people we could in the industry to become partners with us to execute our strategy."

These subfranchisors serve as consultants for their territories (see chart on page W4). The "cream of the crop in the industry," they function as team captains, in a sense, offering both the technical systems background and the moral support needed when breaking into a new business sector. Franchisees correspond with their subfranchisors daily over the phone and through e-mail messages. They serve as a crutch for

new entrepreneurs and prevent them from "reinventing the wheel," by offering them suggestions to avoid common pitfalls, Mongeon explained. In turn, subfranchisors expand their experience by serving as industry resources.

"This is a way for those who have been in the industry for years to ratchet and leverage their expertise," Mongeon noted. "What they've been doing for 20 years they can teach people and become a consultant, and that is a powerful thing, because now, you have people sitting next door, offering their own franchise area advice and supporting the franchisees locally."

"When you couple that with the systems that we provide and the professionalism, there is no better time to consider a franchise."

#### **NOW, ENTREPRENEURS ARE TAKING ADVANTAGE OF THIS SYSTEM.**

"We provide the opportunity to have the sophistication that comes with a national brand," Mongeon pointed out. "The marketing techniques, delivery system, computer system – when you provide that local owner with the brand name and the systems, that cannot be duplicated by an independent individual. You retain the local flavor, but we give you the materials to grow."

With 17 territories, 28 locations and 78 franchise units in the U.S., Weed Man is permeating the market. Already, franchisees note the aggressive growth in their lawn care divisions with the Weed Man system. They attest to the support, their ability to grow a sluggish lawn care department, their success in adding the service to their existing business, and the background they acquired in cases where they entered lawn care from outside the green industry. Their words capture this "local flavor," and their experiences contribute to Weed Man's growth and potential. "We want to grow from the ground up, and we're right at the starting gate," Mongeon added.

From there, anything is possible. After all, it started with just one truck.



**Roger Mongeon**

# Weed Man<sup>®</sup>

*Creating Opportunities for Growth*

LAWN CARE IS MORE than a break-even add-on service for landscape companies. Industry market reports reveal that this service fills a growing consumer demand for lush lawns, ranking third in sales volume behind mowing and landscape installation, according to a Research U.S.A. study of the green industry. Combined with industry consolidation, clearly, the market conditions are favorable for fertilization.

**"With consolidation in the industry, I think there is a huge vacuum that can be filled,"** observed Roger Mongeon, chief executive officer, Weed Man.

And clients are not hard to come by, studies show. Nearly 80 percent of lawn care sales stems from single-family residential homes, with 13.6 percent originating from commercial/industrial accounts. Consumers are investing in their properties, and companies find similar value-added results, as integrating lawn care can balance more temperamental services.

A strategy to incorporate this service division creates a smooth transition, as Heather Schuster discovered. **"Landscape contract-**

**ing can be very volatile, whereas with Weed Man, things are much more steady,"** noted Schuster, who owns a Weed Man franchise and Terra-Firma Landscape in Muskego, Wis.

Named fourth in franchise satisfaction out of 200 top franchisors in *SUCCESS* magazine's 2001 Franchisee Satisfaction Ranking, Weed Man grasps the market's favorable lawn care conditions and allows those who buy into the model to harness its opportunities.

A lawn care company's average life is 18.3 years, according to the study, proving this market potential is not just a quick bottom-line buffer, but instead, a long-term business venture. In addition, start-up capital is reasonable. With a tightening labor market, owners can't always find reliable, skilled technicians to fill positions, Schuster said, adding that she experienced difficulty hiring workers for her landscape installation crews. Research U.S.A. uncovered that most lawn care companies employ an average of 5.5 year-round employees and 2.4 seasonal employees.

"Human resources isn't getting any easier," Schuster pointed out. "With Weed Man, you need fewer staff people to do that type of work. As a business owner, that is attractive because it is less people to manage."

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BUSINESS IS BOOMING for Ned Cultrona since he and his partner, Jim Freireich, pulled Weed Man into their all-purpose landscape company, which offers the gamut, from mowing to snowplowing. As his Chesterland, Ohio-based business grew, however, he recognized a need to pump up his lawn care division. **"I always looked for a way to break into**

**lawn care in a bigger way,"** he remarked.

Cultrona soon found that "breaking into lawn care" boosted the success of his other services, namely snowplowing, which increased from the 500 drive-ways he and Freireich plowed their first year in business in 1994 to nearly 2,000 last year. **"In the pursuit of lawn care, we also increased our business in regards to lawn mowing,"** he added. **"We had to add an extra truck and we jumped from six employees to nine. We didn't expect that."**

Not to mention, the company tripled its fertilization accounts from last year, he added. "It dawned on me at that point, that there is only one aspect of the green industry where you can grow like that – you can't expect to plow 90 percent of a neighborhood," he said.

By applying Weed Man's systems Cultrona fine-tuned his business, from finances to routing, and increased his customer base to sufficiently serve accounts, he said. "I plan on adding at least one production truck per year for lawn care, and growing it in our little backyard neighborhood," he said.

"I've been doing this a long time, but on such a grassroots size and small volume," he described. "My knowledge is increasing on a daily basis."



**NED CULTRONA**

*"I always looked for a way to break into lawn care in a bigger way."*

SYSTEMS AND SUPPORT go hand in hand, especially when building a business.

Steve Russell, owner of a Weed Man franchise in Farmington Hills, Mich., knew he needed a "detailed roadmap" to refine his internal operations. His \$5-million pest control business, Eradico Services, added lawn care in 1981, most of its clients commercial. "We really wanted to expand into residential, and Weed Man gave us a great plan to do that," he noted.

Weed Man supplied the plan to energize Russell's lawn care division, and soon, he was questioning why he hadn't implemented these methods earlier.

**"I wish we'd adapted the business planning tools when we first started our lawn care business, because we would have been light years ahead of where we are now,"** he remarked.

The framework that drives this success outlines specific scheduling and routing procedures, so technicians follow an organized, efficient daily route. Financial planning techniques include a spreadsheet program that allows business owners to base budgets on careful calculations instead of blind guesses, Russell added.

"With this, you have a proven model, a proven system and you follow it," he said simply. "We've retained our individuality and autonomy, but **we are part of a huge support system where you don't feel like you're alone out there. You're working with other people that have the same goal.**"



**STEVE RUSSELL**

*"I wish we'd adapted the business planning tools when we first started our lawn care business, because we would have been light years ahead of where we are now."*

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## HEATHER SCHUSTER

*"I think it helps our design/build clients feel comfortable that when their new installations are in, we can take care of the lawns from there."*

LANDSCAPE AND LAWN CARE can form a perfect union.

**"The two really complement each other nicely,"** noticed Heather Schuster, after incorporating Weed Man into her landscape business, Terra-Firma Landscape, Muskego, Wis.

**"We finally found a system that would help us with lawn care,"** she explained. "I could never understand how you could make a profit on a \$40 application."

Schuster's high dollar volume landscape accounts generated up to \$50,000 per job, so adopting a mindset that a less expensive service could create profit was boggling, she admitted. "But when we looked at how Weed Man perfected the details as far as routing and customer service, it began to make sense to me."

The time-tested techniques created a foundation for Schuster's lawn care division, and like turning to an old friend for advice, she felt secure in implementing systems that others trusted.

While the lawn care division established solid roots for future growth, it also presented cross-marketing opportunities. "We always referred our landscape design/build customers to other companies for lawn care. **I think it helps our design/build clients feel comfortable that when their new installations are in, we can take care of the lawns from there.**"

SAM MORGAN is determined to be Weed Man's "Rookie of the Year." He diligently sticks to the specific budgeting strategy, determined to follow the system from A to Z so he can secure his goal.

**"I figured Weed Man would be a good way to grow our business – I just didn't know how good it would be."**

Morgan describes his old budgeting process – little more than pencil, paper and "random pricing." "Things would slip through the cracks," he explained. "We were definitely ready for some help."

Morgan turned a one-man lawn care department, run by his partner, Coley Maynard, into an organized, money-making facet of the company. Details drove the budgeting process, with specific spreadsheets that identify expenses all the way down to the number of envelopes ordered each year, Morgan pointed out. "Now, I know what I'll have in the bank at the end of the year," he said.

With a two-step budgeting procedure, franchisees figure their finances at the beginning of the year and then make adjustments after six months. A custom-designed software program unique to Weed Man allows business owners to access support while online. Subfranchisors can tap into the system and move around numbers as the franchisee learns and makes adjustments on his or her own screen.

In addition, the system offers the ability to efficiently route and sets up a strategy to make applications in a timely fashion, Morgan said. **"The system that they gave us did something right."**



## SAM MORGAN

*"I figured Weed Man would be a good way to grow our business – I just didn't know how good it would be."*



PHIL FOGARTY was no industry novice when he invested in Weed Man one year ago. He helped build a \$1-million lawn care company through networking and client relationships, but when he sold this business and reentered the field, he knew he needed to rework his marketing tactics.

***"I had no formula to help me go out and get the residential clients that had avoided me for so long – the sort of cookie-cutter, regular guy who just needs a lawn care program,"*** he noted.

Fogarty started from scratch, without an existing customer base from which to draw customers since he signed a non-compete contract when he turned over his business to another owner. "I went out and got more new customers this past spring than I ever did before when I was a million-dollar company," he noted.

He formed these new relationships by following a strict telemarketing campaign, which identifies a methodical approach to gaining new clients "that just rolls."

Fogarty was closing sales and matching progress predictions.

"Starting up a new system, you have a big lump in your throat and you hope that you won't do something wrong," he admitted. "When you see things fall into place as planned it's a huge relief. ***I never had the right formula or the support of a group of people to make that happen. Now, I know what I spent on my marketing campaign, so I know what it costs me to get a new customer.***

"I really felt like they brought to an old dog like me, a new trick to go to market in a much bigger way than I ever did before," he said.



### **PHIL FOGARTY**

*"I had no formula to help me go out and get the residential clients that had avoided me for so long – the sort of cookie-cutter, regular guy who just needs a lawn care program."*

WHEN DAVE THOMPSON left his 25-year law career, he didn't look back.

After negotiating a franchise purchase from Turf Management at his firm, he was intrigued by the lawn care business.

"I had been toiling for a long time in law, and it was time for me to try something different," said the owner of six franchises in Nova Scotia and New

Brunswick. Thompson tried Weed Man in 1992, and since then has acquired other branches and is looking to expand his Canadian roots into a United States territory.

***"With us, opposed to a newcomer, we're tried and true in the business – we've experienced it all,"*** he said.

After Weed Man's training, Thompson said he felt secure in his lawn care knowledge, and this base created a solid foundation for his business. ***"I think there is always an opportunity and a niche, especially in the large, American market,"*** he noted.

Now, Thompson employs a management team to run daily operations while he oversees his franchises. He serves as the support system, interacting with managers and answering questions like "How should I do it? How should I grow?" The U.S. subfranchisor set-up will foster conversations like this, he added. ***"You have the flexibility to grow and innovate."***

"My partners in my law firm used to look at me like I had three heads when I told them I was getting out of the practice," he said, laughing. "Now they don't. I look forward to the time when I can let someone else run the business and make a good living at it as I have."



### **DAVE THOMPSON**

*"With us, opposed to a newcomer, we're tried and true in the business – we've experienced it all."*

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(continued from page 36)

me. For instance, if Mrs. X is calling to tell me she has weeds, I can say, 'Yes, I can see here you had this problem last year, and that you're due for another application on X date.'"

Robertson likes Caller I.D., which he's used at his company for eight years, because it aids the office manager in routing calls to the right person more quickly, and it reduces the number of mistakes made by human error. Even when he's out of the office, Robertson can scroll through his Caller I.D. names and track his missed calls.

**CLIENTS COUNT.** Robertson is proud of his 95 percent client retention rate, and he attributes this to special customer treatment.

Every spring for 15 years, Robertson has sent clients a flyer along with their renewal letters, encouraging them to stop by the office to pick up free rain gauges. The rain gauges, which are 10 inches tall and marked with the company logo, cost \$2.50 each, but he says the expense is worth it because it

brings clients into Robertson's new facility so he can witness their pleased reactions.

Three years ago, Robertson started treating the 500 clients who have been using the company's services for 20 years or more with special gifts. He sent rain sensors in rose boxes with red tulips wrapped in bows to his female clients, and he sent golf balls or fishing lures to his male clients, based on their specific hobbies. A personalized thank-you letter accompanied each gift.

The second year of the program, he sent clients Baker's Square gift certificates for free pies, and 78 percent of those clients picked up their pies and stopped in the office, which is located in the same area, to offer gratitude. This year, Robertson made a donation to the Ronald McDonald House charities in the names of each of the clients in this group.

Even though these tokens of thanks aren't cheap – Robertson budgets \$5,000 annually for promotional items and plans to increase this for next year, his 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary in

business – he said the extra effort contributes to client retention and improves his business image, which is worth the cost. "It's really not much of a cost when you figure out the return on the investment," he said.

lawnandlandscape.com

CHECK OUT this article online to view Jack Robertson Lawn Care's service sheets.

**SERVICE WITH A SMILE.** In addition to treating and thanking clients annually, Robertson continually tries to educate them. The company, which services 93 percent residential clients, uses what it calls service sheets to inform customers of their visits, instead of just leaving bills on their doors, Robertson said.

These sheets, which are printed on both

(continued on page 150)

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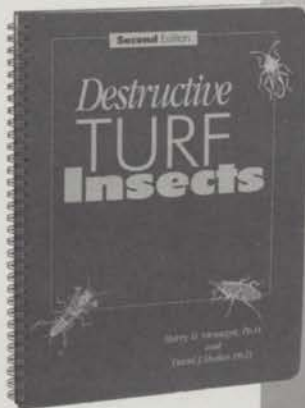
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Three years after breaking out on his own, Steven Rendzak has The Blue Moose Landscape Co. on its way to its first profitable year.

# The MOOSE Is on the LOOSE

# S

Steven Rendzak started his landscape career in a fashion that frightens most established contractors. He was a real estate professional when he and a coworker heard someone mention that they made \$14,000 cutting lawns in one summer. "We thought that sounded great because we never thought about the expenses involved as well," Rendzak recalled.

So he and his coworker put a hitch on a BMW, bought some equipment at Sears and started going door-to-door. However, Rendzak's experience selling real estate taught him a lesson that immediately differentiated him from the countless other start-up contractors. "We knew the importance of professionalism when you're selling to homeowners," he related. "So we got an insurance policy for the company and we had business cards made up. We wanted to do this the right way."

The pair grossed \$13,000 in their first summer, which enabled them to purchase a new pickup truck for the next year. In addition, they decided to start providing small landscape installations to accommodate the numerous requests from their



residential clients. From there, the growth was steady – \$27,000 in sales in 1990, \$45,000 and the company's first full-time employee in 1991 and \$90,000 in 1992.

"Once we got to \$120,000 in 1993, we knew growing the business further would be hard for us to do because of what we didn't know," Rendzak explained. As a result, the company merged with a local irrigation contractor it had been subbing work to and became Coastal Landscaping in 1994.

"Our sales were \$600,000 in 1994 with 15 employees as Coastal Landscaping, and that opened my eyes to the potential in this industry," Rendzak commented. "I saw this could be a real business."

Merging the two businesses gave Rendzak experience creating and running a larger company, which taught him lessons to remember. "The biggest challenge we had merging the companies was handling

Steven Rendzak makes sure his company's unforgettable name and logo appear on all of the company's trucks and trailers. Photo: Blue Moose Landscape Co.

(continued on page 48)

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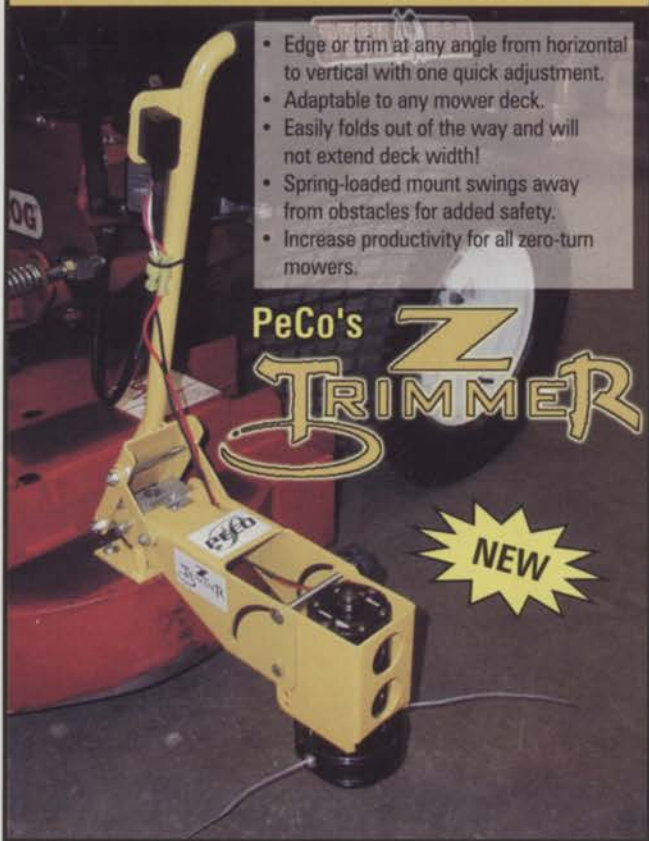


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USE READER SERVICE #34

**First Look**

(continued from page 46)

Renzak's (far right, standing) team includes nine full-time employees who comprise three different crews. Photo: The Blue Moose Landscape Co.



the employees," he pointed out. "They had a lot of fear about the deal since they had never worked together before and they didn't know who their boss was going to be or what their roles were. We had to talk to them a lot so they saw what we were doing."

Having three owners in a business also created obstacles, and Rendzak admits that he still wonders whether the trio structured the company correctly. "We each took a different division – irrigation, maintenance or installation – and we ran it ourselves," he explained. "That means the three owners were each doing the same thing in terms of going out and producing estimates, managing their crew or crews and dealing with their customers instead of having one estimator, one operations manager and one administrator."

Plus, getting three owners to agree on strategic decisions often led to disagreements and unhappiness. "We had a two-thirds vote system where we would do something if two of the owners wanted to do it, but that didn't always work because no one wanted to upset the others," he recalled.

As a result, Rendzak left the company at the end of 1998. "We had a three-year non-compete clause in our buy/sell agreement unless whoever left the company agreed to do so without any monetary compensation," he noted. "That's what I did because I wanted to stay in the industry and stay in the area."

**WHAT'S ON THE HORIZON?** Just as Rendzak was about to take a job as an account manager with another landscape company, a developer he had a relationship with asked him to bid on a condominium complex that he was going to build the next year. "He told me that he'd give me the \$100,000 contract if I had my own company, so I started The Blue Moose Landscape Co. in 1999," Rendzak commented. "Then I started from scratch again buying vehicles and getting customers."

The Blue Moose generated \$222,000 in sales its first year, thanks in large part to the aforementioned condo complex. "The hardest part for our first year was being profitable since I had to finance all of our purchases," Rendzak admitted, adding that the company's labor represented 46 percent of its total expenses. "Equipment and overtime are where you can lose money, so those areas have to be controlled."

Much of the company's equipment expense stems from Rendzak's decision to purchase new machinery instead of used. "That was one of the hardest decisions I had to make, but I saw the amount of

(continued on page 50)



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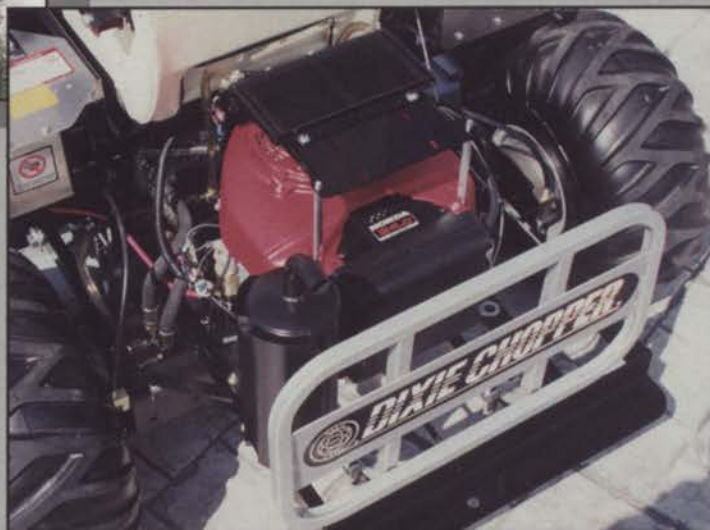
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USE READER SERVICE #28



## First Look

(continued from page 48)

equipment breakdowns and downtime we had at Coastal Landscaping, so I decided to stick with new machines," he explained. "Plus, that contributes to the professional image we want to portray."

Last year brought unexpected growth – sales jumped to \$420,000 – which necessitated the additional expenditures that accompany such development. "We wanted to run two crews last year, but we decided to get a third one started, which meant buying another truck and trailer," Rendzak pointed out. Ultimately, the company fell about \$45,000 short of profitability despite the growth.

"We knew we needed to start minimizing our expenses and turning a profit going into this year," he added. As a result, Rendzak's wife, Lisa, returned to her job at a local bank, which saved the company her salary and added those administrative responsibilities to Rendzak's plate. In order to take on more work without the capital expenses associ-

(continued on page 54)

**S**teven Rendzak, president, The Blue Moose Landscape Co., Cape May Court House, N.J., had a nice name picked out for his company – Horizon Landscaping. However, his wife vetoed the name, calling it too boring and saying it didn't make the company stand out.

"My wife had just bought some napkins with a blue moose on them, so she suggested calling the company Blue Moose Landscape," Rendzak explained. "I was afraid no one would take us seriously with that name, but I thought the name could help us if we ran the company professionally."

"We put the logo on all of our letterhead and business cards, and it goes on our trucks and our enclosed trailers as soon as we get them," he continued.

"People definitely turn their heads when they see our vehicles, and the logo and name have real recall power." – **Bob West**

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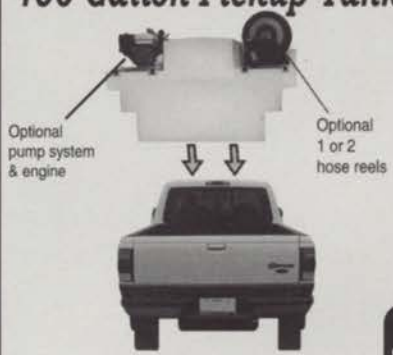


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USE READER SERVICE #29

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## First Look

(continued from page 50)

ated with equipment, the company expanded some of its crews.

"We've got nine full-time employees not counting me, with a four-man installation crew, a three-man maintenance crew and a two-man irrigation crew," Rendzak remarked. "We've got a good foreman and a

big truck for the installation crew, so we added people there to get more work out of that crew, which has really helped. Plus, if we find that our costs are getting out of hand or the business slows down, we can eliminate labor costs more easily than we can get rid of a vehicle."

So far, this year looks profitable for the company. Sales are \$90,000 ahead of last year's numbers, and the company has a profit of \$20,000 year-to-date vs. a loss of \$40,000 at this time last year. Rendzak made a number of changes, most of which were philosophical in nature, and focused on driving profitability. "Unless absolutely necessary, we put a freeze on purchasing any new, major equipment for this year," he explained. "We also took our main employees into the books to show them where the money comes from, how easily it can be spent and how this can relate to their pay. We are hoping this will give them more respect for minimizing downtime, broken or lost tools, etc."

Rendzak also revamped his pricing approach, thanks to the help of an industry consultant. "We completely revised our estimating system, and that added 20 to 25 percent to our bids without having a negative affect on sales," he related. "It taught me how to incorporate the trucks, trailers, equipment, labor burden, administrative burden and profit into all of my bids."

Now, Rendzak is happy to deal with the issue of figuring out what to do with profit. "That profit will go toward paying for some of the debt we have, but I also want to start offering more benefits to our employees," Rendzak explained. "We offer vacation time, three paid personal days, paid holidays and a simple IRA investment plan where we match 2 percent of an employee's gross pay if he invests in the plan, but I want to initiate a health insurance program next year as well."

Looking forward, Rendzak knows he needs to develop employees who can assume additional operational responsibility so he can scale back his 70-hour workweeks. "I'm grooming the foreman on the installation crew to be more of a crew manager next year so I'll focus on sales and dealing with clients and he'll get the crews set up and make sure the work gets done each day," he related. "That way I can focus on actually running the business, because when you're in the field every day you're not managing the business properly. You get caught up always saying, 'Just do this,' and you're not watching the profitability until you run the reports at the end of the year." ■

The author is Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.

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USE READER SERVICE #123



## Dormant Tree Care

by Nicole Wisniewski

**I** Dormant trees need attention, too. Contractors can convince clients to schedule preventive tree maintenance during the fall and winter months.

In autumn, nature stages a vibrant encore as tree leaves shift in color from cool greens to warm shades of scarlet, russet and ginger. Many people from all over the country travel to popular fall states like Vermont and New Hampshire just to witness this blushing transformation.

But after their annual, multihued climax, trees are typically forgotten until the spring – left to battle the cold months ahead alone. Many people don't understand that winter's high winds, heavy snow and ice, frozen soil and temperature fluctuations can damage trees, particularly those that stand isolated on residential and commercial landscapes without protection from other forest trees.

While landscape tasks become a fraction of what they are during the peak summer months, there is still work to do in the winter. Contractors can lessen the adverse effects of wintry weather on trees with preventative maintenance.

**THE BASICS.** Some tree care fundamentals like proper irrigation and adequate mulch application shouldn't be forgotten as temperatures dip and clients switch from T-shirts and shorts to sweaters and long pants.

Winter winds cause evergreens – and even some deciduous trees – to suffer from winter drying. If water is not available as moisture is drawn from living tree cells, permanent damage known as winter burn can result, warned Robert McMullin, founder and president, Keystone Tree Experts, Doylestown, Pa. "The best prevention against winter burn consists of planting only hardy species in areas of prolonged exposure, watering plants adequately in the fall and mulching to insulate the soil and roots from severe cold," he offered.

Since evergreens continue transpiring in the winter more than their deciduous counterparts,

*(continued on page 58)*



Contractors shouldn't ignore tree care basics like adequate irrigation and mulch when securing them in the fall before the effects of harsh winter weather take their toll.

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## Dormant Tree Care

(continued from page 56)

watering them two to three times throughout the winter is plenty, said Bruce Phillips, local manager, Bartlett Tree Experts, Fulton, Md.

There's even an old wives' tale that marks Thanksgiving as the time to water evergreens. "The theory behind the tale is that if you have evergreens, they will actively transpire in winter and if you don't have active moisture in the soil, they will become water stressed, especially if they get afternoon sun or wind," explained Roger Funk, vice president of the Davey Institute, Kent, Ohio. "So, you should water around Thanksgiving and then again if there is thawing in January. But if there's plenty of snow cover in January, don't water."

Contractors also can spray evergreen trees with an anti-desiccant or wax-like substance in November or December for extra protection against the wind's drying effects, McMullin pointed out.

Concerning deciduous trees, Funk recommended contractors be cautious when deciding whether or not to water. "You don't want to waterlog them," he said. "The water

Many contractors prefer to prune a tree when it is dormant because a tree's overall structure and shape is more visible without leaf cover.

from snow may be enough. Most deciduous trees die from overwatering rather than underwatering."

Renewing mulch layers in the fall also holds water and moisture in the soil and insulates tree roots from severe cold. Since the same active, absorbing tree roots can be killed in the heat of summer as well as winter, Funk said mulch offers essential root protection. "If mulch is put down in the fall before the soil temperature cools, then the soil will retain a warmer temperature, keeping it stable," he explained. "This can also extend the growing season slightly and help to prevent weeds."

Contractors should never apply mulch more than 4 inches high, McMullin warned. "Unfortunately, the practice of applying excessive, sometimes enormous, amounts of mulch around trunks just seems to be get-



ting more common," he lamented.

Funk said contractors should imagine the forest floor's natural mulch that protects trees when convincing their clients of mulching benefits. "Trees are used to a lot of organic matter in the woods," Phillips added. "Trees don't compete with turf in the woods. They have the extra organic matter from the natural mulch, and they have better root growth as a result."

Mulch should be applied 2 to 4 inches deep

(continued on page 60)

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## Dormant Tree Care

(continued from page 58)

over relatively clean, weed-free soil, McMullin stated. "Depth should be no more than 2 inches if soil is not well drained and up to 4 inches if drainage is good," he said, adding that mulch should not touch tree trunks, should be 3 to 5 inches away from the trunks of young trees and 8 to 12 inches away from older tree trunks. "More finely textured mulches should be no thicker than 1 or 2 inches because they allow less oxygen penetration than coarser materials, such as nuggets," he said.

**NO BETTER TIME.** Many contractors claim that winter is the best time to examine and treat trees for structural weaknesses. Dormancy is a particularly good time to prune deciduous trees because arborists can more easily pinpoint a tree's superstructure without leaf cover, Funk pointed out.

"It is much easier to spot defects such as cracked or overextended limbs when leaves do not restrict visibility," McMullin ex-

(continued on page 85)

**S**elling winter tree work can be easy for contractors who are looking to break up a booked summer schedule by moving some mid-summer clients' tree work.

One way to persuade customers is to offer them a discount, advised Roger Funk, vice president of the Davey Institute, Kent, Ohio. The percent of the discount varies based on a contractor's workload, Funk explained, but 10 percent is typically a fair offer, said Bruce Phillips, local manager, Bartlett Tree Experts, Fulton, Md.

Another way to sell fall and winter tree work is to explain to clients that since many of their annual and perennial gardens are gone by this time, less damage can result from cleaning up fallen branches, Phillips said.

Clients also can be persuaded through education, pointed out Robert McMullin, president, Keystone Tree Experts, Doylestown, Pa., who sends clients a newsletter explaining the benefits of winterizing trees. This year's newsletter was mailed out in late summer and includes information on fall fertilization, winter drying and pruning.

— Nicole Wisniewski

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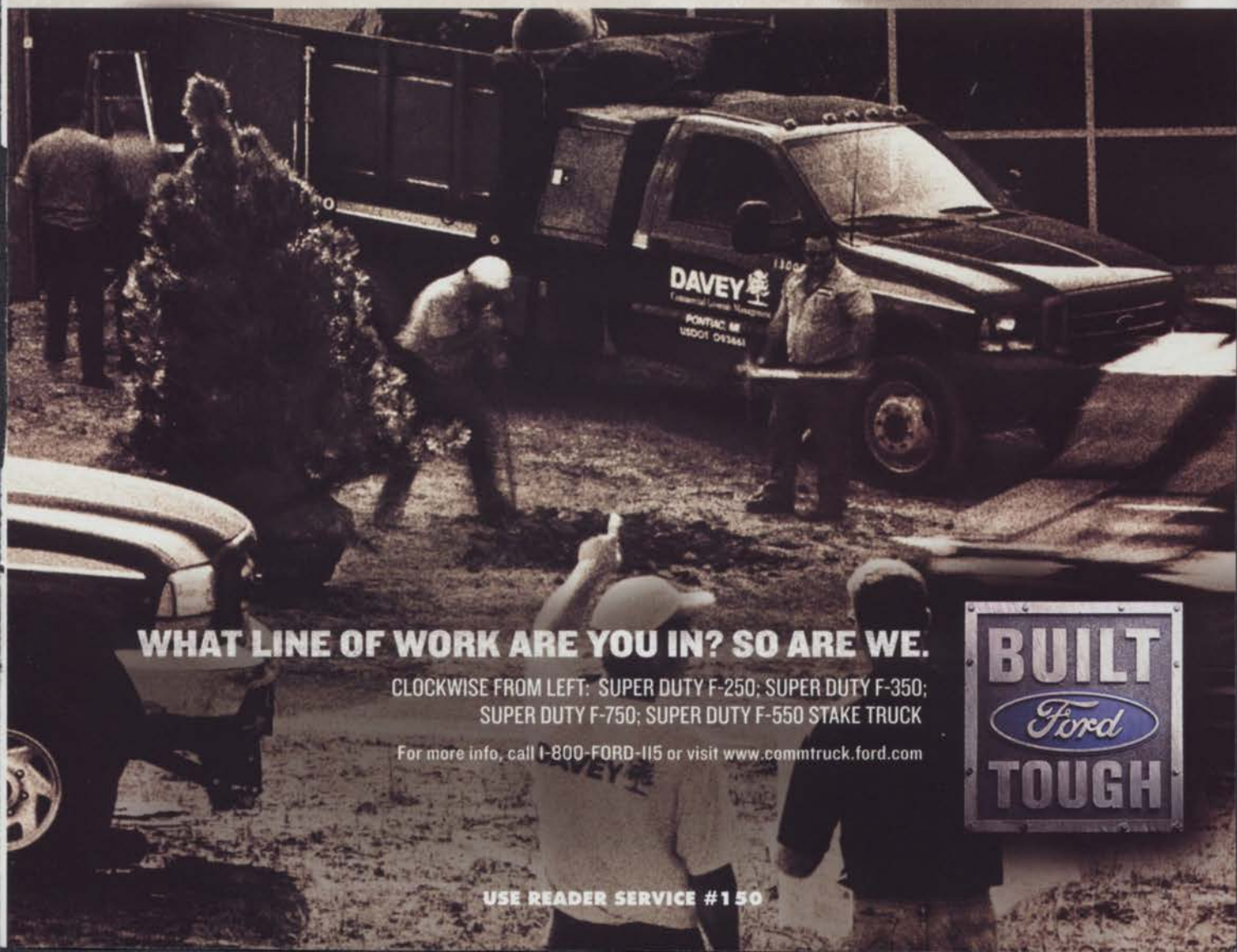
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USE READER SERVICE #150



## FOCUS ON: Trucks & Trailers

by Kristen Hampshire

Working wheels might be a contractor's most valuable capital investment.

# W

Without a nice set of wheels, business won't budge.

"If the truck isn't running, the contractor's not going anywhere," Bob Aquaro stated simply. "I don't care how many lawn mowers he has, if he can't get them to the job site, he's dead. It starts with the truck - it's an extremely valuable tool."

More than a transportation mode, trucks serve as mobile maintenance tool sheds, loaded with equipment essentials and packed with power to pull trailers and push snowplows, added Aquaro, vice president of product assurance, Mitsubishi Fuso, Bridgeport, N.J.

A truck's size, durability and versatility affect its overall performance on the job site. After all, a whole equals the sum of its parts, and a truck is much the same - cabs, beds, tires and brakes. "The people driving these vehicles are not truck drivers, they are landscapers," Aquaro pointed out, noting that despite this laundry list of checkpoints,



still there is something to be said for simplicity.

Nevertheless, to shift a truck's productivity into full gear, contractors need to break down body types, match transportation with application and couple this with maintenance and training.

**SUPER-SIZE IT.** Contractors who assess their clients' needs will outfit their garages with a customized fleet, picked for productivity and built for longevity.

"They really need to understand who their customers are, what they are going to offer in terms of service,



# ROUGH 'n Ready





*Trucks are more than transportation for landscape crews who depend on these workhorses to haul equipment and supplies to the jobsite.*

*Photos: Chevrolet*

what demands that puts on their fleet today, and then marry that with a business plan for tomorrow," advised David Armitage, president, Centex Hometeam Lawn Care LLC, Dallas, Texas.

This means identifying the company's current accounts and evaluating who the business will serve as it grows.

"Understand how your customers will evolve over time," Armitage recommended. "If you are going to offer different services that require a different platform, you need to stay flexible on the front end, and that may indicate different purchasing requirements. You may have to go bigger right from the get-go because you are going to change your business."

Size might be the most visible specification, even if not the most important. Rated in categories, most contractors choose Class II vehicles that weigh between 6,001 and 10,000 pounds. Trucks in the Class III category weigh between 10,001 and 14,000 pounds and generally encompass chassis cabs that contractors add to a body, defined Steve Spata, technical services manager, National Truck Equipment Association, Farmington Hills, Mich.

But before size, contractors must consider towing needs. Armitage works backward to figure out how sturdy his trucks must be to handle a typical load. "We start with what our service demands are based on the products we are using and the amount of the materials we carry, then we work back from there," he said.

Underestimating pulling power decreases productivity and stresses the truck, causing downtime – a clear profit killer. "Buying a truck that is too light is penny wise, but dollar foolish," Aquaro remarked, noting that trailers and dump bodies call for a more rugged construction, and the suspension, tires and brakes suffer if the truck is a lightweight.

Aquaro suggested loading a truck with equipment and testing it on a scale at a truck stop. If the reading exceeds the truck's gross vehicle weight rating (gvw), an upgrade is in order. A 13,000-pound truck generally will handle a contractor's load, though a 14,500-pound vehicle is preferable, he added. To boost towing abilities, Spata suggested larger rear axles and larger engines for a powerhorse to haul necessities.

**PRIORITY SEATING.** While materials and equipment boost scale numbers, the crew also adds pounds and consumes space. Companies that staff large crews might choose an extended cab, which provides a backseat for extra employees. Some contractors opt for roomier cab-over models that seat up to seven people, Aquaro said. "Everyone can come and leave in one truck – that's the advantage," he said.

Operator visibility and a sharp turning radius add to the appeal of cab-over designs, and the cost is competitive with the conventional pick-up, Aquaro pointed out.

Operation ease trickles down to labor, Armitage pointed out. "Cab-overs are very streamlined and not far away from having a pickup with a cab, so the vehicle is very driveable," he said. "That allows us to hire someone who has a good driving record who is comfortable driving a pick-up truck, and they will be comfortable driving our vehicles."

Still, smaller operations might find a pick-up truck can carry their payload – both manpower and machines – so they stick to the typical truck. Again, application dictates necessity, and bigger isn't better if the cost surpasses the budget and space goes unused.

"Pick-ups are readily available, the cost of acquisition is a little less than a full-size cabin chassis platform and it is a bit less customer aggressive," Armitage noted. "Some of these larger cabin chassis become a little bit overwhelming from the consumers' sight standpoint."

**BODY SHOP.** Durability is contractors' No. 1 transportation beef, Aquaro remarked, noting that tough trucks will muscle through strenuous work conditions.

Part of this common complaint stems from specification oversight, part of it results from overlooking service offerings. For example, Aquaro separates lawn service from landscape, as they require different truck features, such as tires. "If [contractors] are bringing flowers or trees to the site, they will want to go off the road and onto the site, where lawn service trucks stay on the hard top," he said.



## FOCUS ON: Trucks & Trailers

For this reason, Aquaro said he often sells four-wheel drive trucks to landscapers, suggesting they pay attention to treading. "You see more two-wheel drive units in the lawn service application because they are not going onto the dirt," he said.

Four-wheel-drive trucks also fit snowplow applications, Spata added. "Versatility and the ability to be able to do other things in the off season is important, too," he noted. "To attach a plow, the manufacturers will specify what can be attached as far as load goes—how heavy a plow is and the weight of the truck plays into this. Front axle capacity is certainly a consideration." Some manufacturers offer a snowplow package, which includes heavier axle ratings or extra suspension components, he added.

For some businesses, adaptability means transporting fertilizer, which also calls for a special order, whether that be adding spray tanks, a covered bed or

accessories such as hose reels. Also, some states' restrictions require covered beds. "When you throw 25 to 40 bags of fertilizer on a flat-bed deck, it is a little difficult to secure," Armitage noted. "We try to conceal our materials, and you can't create an environment with chemicals that can become a hazard to your operators."

Also, more contractors turn to covered beds as an anti-theft device, Spata added. Those without enclosed trailers might consider a box cap or bed cap to secure loose items. "You can even get trucks with tinted windows so you can't see what is inside," he noted.

**FILLING UP.** Ultimately, a truck is a portable storage unit—portable being the operative word. Drivers waffle between gas and diesel options, weighing fuel costs and monthly payments.

Since larger engines have heartier appetites, contractors should consider fuel

economy when looking at engine size, Spata said. "Your engine and your rear axle dictate what you'll be able to tow, and the biggest engines also consume the most fuel," he said. For gas-guzzling engines, auxiliary fuel tanks can extend the vehicle's range, increasing efficiency and preventing frequent gas station stops.

"Especially when you're pulling a trailer, the truck will burn more fuel," Spata added. "Gas engines are a little more particular than diesel engines in that their fuel consumption will change depending on what you are towing."

Diesel engines enhance towing abilities and generally accompany a heavier-duty truck, Aquaro said. "When you build a vehicle with a diesel engine in it, you arbitrarily build more strength into other components because the torque that is created by a diesel engine is much more than that of a gasoline engine," he said. "Generally speaking, you are buying a more heavy-

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TRANSPORTATION is the ticket to growth for landscape contractors – have truck, will travel. However, this capital investment ties up a hefty chunk of a business's budget, and many start-up companies can't afford to lay down the dollars to purchase a vehicle that fits their bill.

Eventually, the following question surfaces: To lease or to buy?

"It all depends on their own personal financial judgment and what works best for them," noted Steve Spata, technical services manager, National Truck Equipment Association, Farmington, Mich. Some prefer the short-term commitment that accompanies a lease, others favor the flexibility of purchasing the vehicle.

"For folks who want to have newer equipment more regularly, leasing might make a better option for them,"

Spata suggested. "And leasing also might make sense for someone at fleet level vs. an independent contractor."

However, some smaller business owners find that leases lessen the stress on budget books, pointed out David Armitage, president, Centex Hometeam Lawn Care, Dallas, Texas. "You are freeing up that capital for other things – marketing, sales, staffing, chemicals," he listed. "You take one of our trucks, which fully-equipped will be in the \$25,000 to \$27,000 range, and that is a lot of capital to tie up in cash."

Furthermore, the residual value on leased vehicles makes them more marketable, Armitage noted. However, those who require vehicles with enhancements, such as attachments, could suffer in lease agreements. "If you have a specialty vehicle with bells and whistles, you've limited the options of

who the dealer can lease to, so that lowers the residual value and will increase your monthly payment," he said.

Also, leasing means carefully watching for dents and dings, Spata added. "You don't want a bunch of scratches, because that will drive up your lease cost because it takes away from the residual value."

But leasing is a commitment, and some contractors don't know how their business will evolve – they might dip into new services or grow tremendously. "Early on, we were buying vehicles," Armitage said. "It allowed us to experiment with what platform was right. If we had leased, we'd be tied up with vehicles that were useless to us. We have been able to move around our early purchases, sell some, trade them in and decide what was right for us." – **Kristen Hampshire**

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## FOCUS ON: Trucks & Trailers

duty vehicle with more fuel capacity."

Diesel engines can cost up to \$2,000 more, so some contractors hesitate to make this initial investment. However, the additional cost pays for itself at the pump, and Armitage said fuel can cost 20 percent less in the long-run.

**ROAD RULES.** Driver's education isn't limited to pimply teens waiting for their four-wheeled ticket to freedom. New employees need a few lessons, too, remarked Preston Leyshon. As equipment manager for Chapel Valley Landscape Co. in Woodbine, Md., he realizes the liability of his 105-truck arsenal.

"Our name is all over the place, so if a technician drops something off the truck or cuts someone off [in another car], there will be a phone call," he said, adding that the company has not experienced a major accident in its 32 years of trucking. "But it is not by luck."

Training a technician to operate a truck is just as important as choosing the appropriate vehicle for the job. Chapel Valley requires technicians to clock a designated number of hours in the vehicle with a supervisor or foreman. For example, a new employee trains 10 hours to drive a pick-up truck, ranging up to 25 hours for a large truck with a trailer.

The trainer then fills out a report for each session, noting progress and topics covered during the drive-along, Leyshon noted. To accentuate accountability, each employee is then assigned to a vehicle, which they drive and maintain daily.

"Drivers are accountable for their dents and scratches," he described. "They get used to the brakes and the transmission, and if they hear a sound that is unusual, they can report it to the office. If everyone were driving different trucks all the time, they would not know if a sound were different."

Technicians familiarize themselves with their "personal" vehicle, tending to the pre-trip and post-trip maintenance schedules that include cleaning, fueling, and air and tire pressure checks. Vehicle inspection reports outline these details.

When fix-it needs outgrow onsite capabilities, Leyshon notifies the dealer, who sends out a mechanic. This convenience is a key buying consideration, and why Leyshon purchases his fleet from one dealer. "If I had a variety of equipment, it would mean more service manuals than I'm already looking at," he figured. Here, simplicity is revisited.

After all, a truck's role is essential, but not complicated, Aquaro added, and a vehicle that suits the company's profile will roll out profits. "The primary mission of the truck is to get the payload there." ■

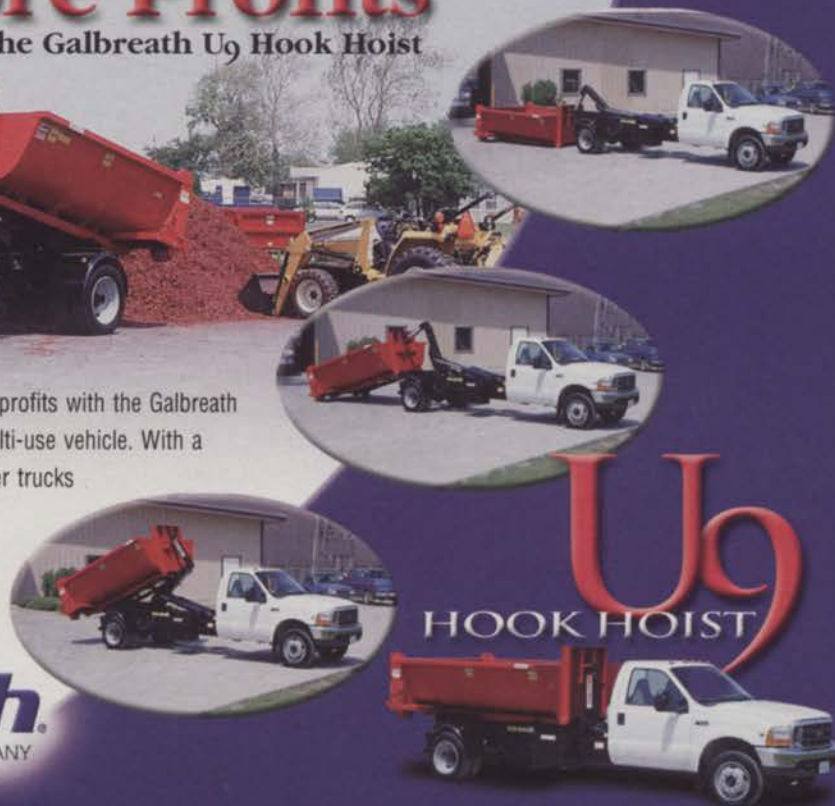
*The author is Associate Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.*

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## FOCUS ON: Trucks & Trailers

by Kristen Hampshire



# GETTING Hitched

More than an equipment tow-all, trailers offer a portable workshop that is organized, secure, efficient and spreads the company name.

What's shaped like a rectangle and sits on four wheels, blocks out the elements and conceals tempting gadgets?

What organizes horsepower to ease strain on manpower, and wears company colors to lure in new clients?

Contractors can uncover this riddle in their own parking lot, most likely. The multi-tasking unit attaches to their trucks and tows their equipment. More than a way to haul mowers and transport trimmers, a trailer is a

"warehouse on wheels," compared Tony Bass, president, Super Lawn Trucks, Bonaire, Ga.

"For too long, contractors have viewed trailers as only a way to haul their equipment and move their people around," he said. "The trend in our industry today is that they should do more for you than that."

Splashed in company colors, trailers mobilize a logo, morphing it into a moving bulletin board. Their storage abilities allow equipment to be shelved for easy access, which boosts efficiency and cuts down time spent searching for tools. In addition, a bounty of accessories, from storage racks to lift ramps, can customize a trailer to meet specific job needs, making it quite the equipment chameleon.

**THE FIGURE.** Only tough towing equipment will withstand rough roads, temperamental weather and abrasive work conditions. Trailers carry the burden of heavy machinery – they need a sturdy backbone to support their cargo.

"Landscapers make quite a few stops every day, loading and unloading equipment, so it is important that the trailer is designed and built with durability in mind,"

noted Larry Huemmer, division sales manager, Wells Cargo, Elkhart, Ind. "You want it to be dependable so that you are not working on the trailer instead of the lawn business, which brings in your income."

Construction covers not only the platform, but also tires, brakes, lights, hinges and inside compartments – both the obvious and the obscure, noted Fred Ballowe, regional sales manager, Supreme Corporation, Goshen, Ind. "For instance, something as simple as rear access, where you have the ramps

Contractors can choose from a variety of trailer options – open, enclosed, steel or wooden – to find a fit for their company's equipment profile.

Photo: Wells Cargo





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## FOCUS ON: Trucks & Trailers

hinged, is important," he said. "I've seen a number of ramps that aren't spring-loaded, and you'll see contractors straining to get the ramps up."

Inside enclosed trailers, heavy-duty sidewall lining reinforces the structure, he added. This provides a solid mount-

ing board for racks, bins and pegs to hold equipment. Stabilizer jacks fixed on the rear corners anchor the trailer so contractors can take advantage of the mobile tool chest even when it is not hitched to a truck, Huemmer noted.

Depending on its contents, a contrac-

## EXTRA,

PLAIN-JANE TRAILERS are a thing of the past. Now, contractors want to customize their tow-alls — they are looking for not just a mobile tool shed, but an organized, functional storage facility on wheels.

"No one has a basic trailer anymore," pointed out Kory Ballard, whose company, Ballard Equipment in Des Moines, Iowa, manufactures gate assists for utility trailers. "Everyone has add-ons and they are spending more money to upgrade trailers."

Accessories from trimmer racks to gate assists can clean up cluttered trailers and boost job efficiency. Ballard said gate assists also seem more popular with contractors who associate comfort with productivity. Gate assists lessen the burden of 180-pound gates, allowing operators to lift the heavy component with two fingers, he said.

"When your crews are lifting the gate 15 to 20 times a day, these assists can reduce the wear on your guys," he noted. "Sometimes those gates are brutal — it takes two guys to get them up, and when you let them down they slam to the concrete, which doesn't look good when you

tor can decide whether to outfit a trailer with a wood or steel platform, said Tony DeSantis, owner, DeSantis Landscapes, Salem, Ore. "When we have a trailer where we are loading a lot of fine materials, like topsoil or sand — something that might slip through the cracks on a wood floor — we want steel floors," he explained, noting that wood floors generally are a less-expensive, suitable option for hauling equipment that won't fall through wood seams.

Job requirements also play into which material fits a company's needs, Ballowe pointed out, noting that lawn care providers might choose stainless steel over painted black steel platforms since they deal with fertilizers.

In conjunction with the platform's material, Ballowe recommended low floor heights — accessibility means convenience. "Contractors are working on the side of the vehicle as well as the back, so the low

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are in residential maintenance."

Besides comfort, contractors look for convenience. David Sargent, office manager, Green Touch Industries, West Palm Beach, Fla., noticed increasing demand for trailer extras, such as racks, shelves and pegs. "Without organizational products, you just have a pile of junk on the trailer," he reasoned. "With them, you have a professional, working trailer."

"You can imagine if you have two backpack blowers, three line trimmers, a backpack sprayer and a hedge trimmer – if you don't have a place to secure those things on the walls, they literally sit on top of the mowers," he described. Contractors end up shuffling equipment to reach what they need.

Furthermore, accessories can deter theft, as each equipment piece can be locked individually, Sargent said. This prevention is two-fold, as contractors also can protect equipment from damage while en route.

"Without organizational racks, you will spend more money repairing and replacing your equipment than buying the racks and getting your trailer set up properly," he remarked. – **Kristen Hampshire**

bed height and low floor height is important," he said.

Furthermore, the support underneath the floor – the wheels that keep business rolling, so to speak – must be balanced, DeSantis stressed, noting that trailers with wheels too far forward can pull dangerous road antics.

"You can imagine driving down a road, and all of a sudden the trailer is going side to side with a heavy load," he described.

This fishtail effect can occur if 7,000 pounds of a 10,000-pound load is positioned on the front of the trailer, for example. "You really need to look at how you are going to load the trailer to keep it from getting too heavy or too light," DeSantis added, noting that distribution tops scale figures. "Balance is critical."

This equilibrium encompasses more than alignment. All of these structural con-

siderations – frames, platforms and axles – cooperate to form a sturdy trailer. Price determines quality, so contractors are wise to invest their dollars. "You can buy a wrench for 89 cents or you can buy a wrench for \$4," Ballowe related. "It's what you can afford, but you get what you pay for."

**THE BODY.** Trailer bodies might be tall and covered, stout and open – or even a hybrid, like DeSantis' combination trailer.

"We had just open trailers before, but we needed to have some enclosed to keep things dry and safe," he described. "There was room in the front of the trailer to

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## FOCUS ON: Trucks & Trailers

make a stationary area and still leave the back open for other equipment. The enclosed portion is a walk-in area that holds blowers, small tools and fertilizer, and has a drop-down ramp from the side."

This model works for DeSantis – he tailored the design to fit his applications,

a primary step in determining what style trailer best suits a business. The shop area of DeSantis Landscapes houses more than one trailer model, however. Flat bed trailers with sideboards haul compost and topsoil, and the combination models hold maintenance equipment. Both open and

enclosed designs serve as functional transportation tools, he said.

However, as theft incidents multiply, some sway toward enclosed versions, Huemmer said, noting that open trailers are often open targets for damage, despite equipment restraint chains. "More and more, I think people in the industry say that theft and vandalism is a real problem," he identified. "Enclosed trailers allow landscapers to keep their equipment locked up, not only when it is in storage, but also on the job site or when they go for lunch, for instance."

This lock-it and leave-it convenience doubles at the end of the day, when contractors can treat enclosed trailers as their warehouse instead of unloading all of its contents and returning it to the shop, Huemmer added. Though DeSantis said he usually parks trailers indoors, he finds that keeping the equipment on board lessens the warehouse clutter.

Those who deal with harsh snow, wind or rain also might choose enclosed models, Ballowe added.

Then, there are options to the enclosed trailer, such as enclosed cab-over trucks, which also gain interest from contractors looking to conceal and organize equipment in a vehicle that is large enough to store many machines. The enclosed body is permanently mounted on the truck, minimizing backing, mobilizing and wiring complications, Bass said.

These enclosed trucks also tend to be taller – more than 7 feet high – offering headspace and room for equipment like ladders, pole pruners and back-pack blowers, Bass added.

However, depending on a company's equipment mix, a contractor might prefer a smaller attachment. Contractors who only need to haul basic tools and want a less expensive option might turn to open trailers or smaller, enclosed wagons.

"Are you just cutting grass or fertilizing as well?" Ballowe asked. "What are the dimensions of your mowers? What else are you carrying? How big are your crews? Once you have your pieces you can figure out your square footage.

"What are you doing in the off-season?" he continued. "Are you shutting down? Is the enclosed trailer of value to

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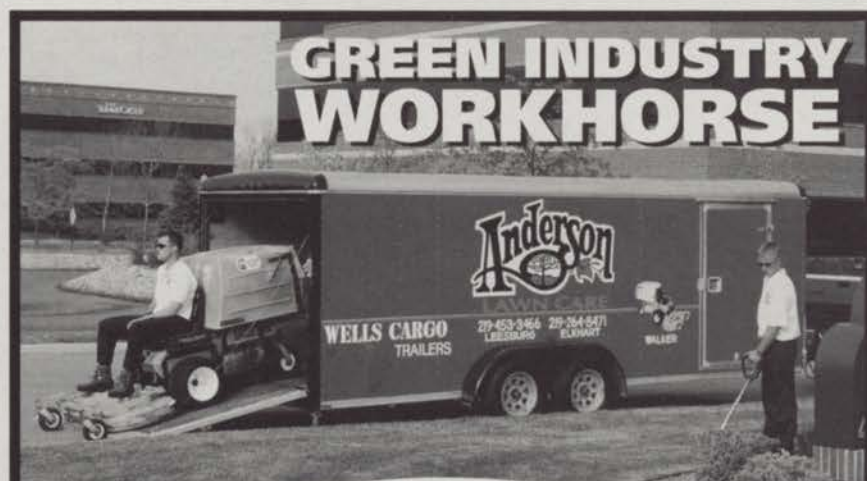
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you?" These questions should accompany an equipment inventory to determine the appropriate trailer style.

**INTERNAL ORGANS.** No matter the design, a trailer that traps equipment rather than containing it hinders efficiency. Easy in-and-out jobs require easy access.

"Access is critical," Ballowe confirmed. "Whether it is putting more on the trailer or being able to reach over the side and get the gas can - everything revolves around access. This links to time management. You can't run around the truck three times in circles trying to get this or that. You need everything in its place."

A hodgepodge of accessories, from storage racks to shelving systems to cabinets, bins and pegs, keep away clutter. After all, timing depends on how quickly and easily a technician can locate the necessary tools for the job.

"Otherwise tools are stacked on the floor," Huemmer said. "With compartments, they are out of the way and attached to the side walls where you have plenty of vacant space. This allows more room for the mowing equipment to move in and out of the trailers and there is less of a chance of damaging the hand tools."

DeSantis lined the inside of his enclosed trailers with hooks, designating a spot for each equipment piece, he said. "That way, you can walk in without fumbling over everything. Big mowers are loaded first, and they each have their own space. They have to get loaded in that order and the routine has to be kept for the system to remain efficient."

This loading order allows DeSantis to fit necessary equipment in a confined area. "We try to keep the trailers as small as possible for maneuverability, so it's important that [technicians] get the equipment in there just right, both for efficiency and for safety, so you're not work-

ing around one piece of equipment to get to another."

Also, neat, tidy trailers spread a positive image - one that attracts new clients and assures existing customers that the quality of the work parallels the employees' attention to their equipment.

"You don't want to throw in your equipment so it looks ragged when you're driving down the road," DeSantis said. "Those things are very much on display." **LL**

The author is Associate Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.

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## FOCUS ON: Trucks & Trailers

by Daryl Lengyl

# WHO IS DRIVING

# Your Trucks?

Truck safety is critical for landscape companies, but many overlook important, simple training steps.

The commercial driver's license (CDL) standards set by federal regulations have been in full force for a decade. While attending the state examiner's school in 1989, I realized that certifying truck drivers was going to be a long, rocky road for many companies. Before April of 1992, commercial drivers only had to pass certain written tests. Now, anyone who wants to drive a commercial vehicle in the United States has to take a written and complete driving test.

Here are the keys to meeting CDL standards:

**FACTS AND FINES.** Any vehicle driven in commerce to transport passengers or property requires a CDL driver if it has a gross combination weight rating of



Training staff to operate trucks before sending them to the field can protect a company's fleet and ensure workers' safety.

Photo:  
Richard Ivey

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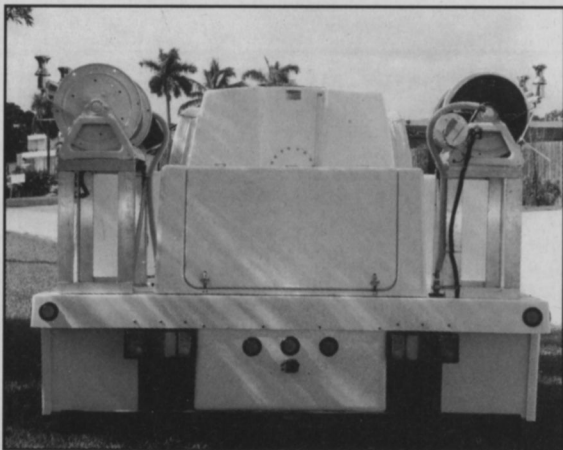
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## FOCUS ON: Trucks & Trailers

26,001 pounds, inclusive of a towed unit with a gross vehicle weight rating of more than 10,001 pounds or more. That means that if your truck or the combination of your truck and trailer exceed 26,001 pounds, someone can drive it legally only with a CDL. That rating for any vehicle or trailer is established by the manufacturer, and your truck dealer should know the rating for the vehicle you buy.

If you or one of your employees operates a CDL vehicle without the proper license, then the entire company assumes a tremendous risk. In fact, fines for driving a vehicle without a CDL can reach \$10,000. If one of these drivers has an accident, the company's liability could be astronomical. One landscape contractor had one of its employees involved in a minor accident with one of the company's trucks and trailers. Because that employee didn't have a CDL and ended up suffering back injuries, the company was sued

for more than \$100,000.

In addition, once drivers have a CDL, follow up with all the compliance issues, such as drug testing and Department of Transportation physicals.

**TESTING 1,2,3's.** The next step is the driving test, which consists of three parts. First, you will need to do a complete verbal inspection of the vehicle. During this portion of the test, the testing official will expect the test taker to verbally point out and describe more than 90 features of the vehicles and how you can tell if they are in good shape.

The other portions of the test require a demonstration of at least four different backing skills and road driving skills.

Over the course of my 30 years in the transportation industry, I have observed a number of similarities regarding various companies' perception of transportation issues. In essence, companies don't

give this part of their businesses sufficient attention, despite the tremendous liability they are subject to every time one of their trucks heads onto the street.

The owner has a great responsibility and liability. First of all, in addition to costs associated with paying employees and purchasing the requisite lawn and landscape equipment, vehicle expense and maintenance is a major part of the landscape business. Landscape contractors are not trucking companies in the business to haul material for a fee. They need to get equipment, material and people to the job site safely and in a timely manner. However, the employee usually bears the responsibility for making sure that everything is in proper working order on the vehicle, not to mention checking to see that the truck and trailer are properly loaded.

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makes sense, but these employees have to be educated about what to look for. The Federal Carrier Safety Regulation: 392.7 Equipment, Inspection and Use states: "No commercial motor vehicle shall be driven unless the driver thereof shall have satisfied himself/herself that the following parts and accessories are in good working order." These parts and accessories include:

- Lighting
- Rear vision mirror or mirrors
- Tires
- Trailer brake connections
- Coupling devices
- Steering mechanism
- Horn
- Windshield
- Parking (Hand) brake
- Service brakes

**REGULAR CHECK-UPS.** Besides checking these items every day before leaving

the company, drivers also should check their vehicles at the end of the day.

This pre-trip and post-trip inspection can be done in less than 10 minutes. Each company should have a simple checklist for the driver to fill out after completing the inspection so they are held accountable and you have a record of these inspections. This could save hundreds or even thousands of dollars for the company by catching something simple before it turns into something major.

Drivers need to consider basic items, such as functioning turn signals and brake lights, as well as taking steps to safely operate the vehicle.

Did you know that most accidents with a commercial vehicle take place while the truck is in reverse? In fact, more than 90 percent of truck accidents in this country every year result while backing up.

When was the last time one of your employees got out of the truck and di-

rected the truck driver while he was backing the truck up? It only takes about 11 seconds to do a pull-up and about 22 seconds to get out and check the situation. When crew members are in a hurry, those 11 seconds could cost hours and thousands of dollars.

The way we drive on the road means everything. Your employees are driving a company vehicle with your company name on it, and the public notices how they drive to the account. How are your more experienced drivers teaching new drivers? Are they teaching safe driving habits? When was the last time you evaluated your employee's driving habits?

I know we are all very busy, but driving these vehicles safely is also important to your business. **LL**

*The author is owner, CDL Training Consultants, Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio. He can be reached at 440/962-1515 or cdltraining@aol.com.*

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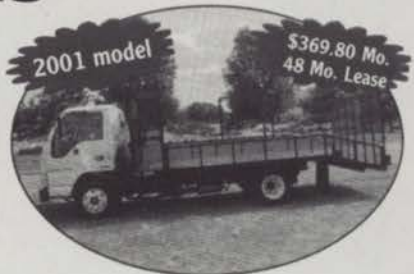
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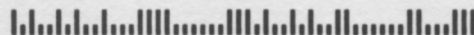


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(continued from page 60)

plained, pointing out that proper pruning encourages growth, improves plant health, repairs damage and adds aesthetic appeal. "A skilled arborist has no trouble telling the dead limbs from the live ones when there are no leaves."

Plus, winter is the only time to prune trees susceptible to boring insects, Funk stressed. "When you wound a tree through pruning, the tree gives off substances that these boring insects zero in on," he said. "Vascular wilts are spread by insects that are attracted to these wounds. But during the winter, the beetles aren't active, so this is a good time to prune. You wouldn't want to wound trees that are susceptible to this insect when they are active."

Just as orchard owners prune their trees heavily in the winter for increased fruit production, Phillips said arborists perform heavy crown reductions on clients' dormant trees. Since trees store energy for the next growing season instead of using it up, pruning tips to

reduce overall size in winter helps contractors avoid removing leaves that are providing the tree with food or energy for growth, Phillips said.

But dormant deciduous trees aren't the only ones that need a little attention in the winter. Evergreens also can be pruned in the fall and winter, particularly to cut back long ends that can break from heavy snow and ice build-up. "Pruning trees before storms occur makes them better able to carry the extra weight," McMullin commented. "Branches can be thinned to reduce their surface area and wind resistance. This encourages the formation of the strongest possible limbs as well as the strongest branch attachments."

According to Phillips, as little as 1/2 inch of ice or more on branches can cause severe damage. To prune evergreens correctly and help prevent breakage, cut back long ends to lateral limbs going in the opposite direction, he explained. "The piece you take off should not be less than one-third the size of the lateral you

cut back to," he said. "For example, when you cut back a 6-inch limb, you would not take off more than 2 inches in diameter of the branch."

**EXTRA SUPPORT.** When pruning alone isn't enough, properly installed cables, braces, stakes or guy wires can add support to a weakened part of a tree before heavy winter storms and winds hit. But this needs to be done on a case-by-case basis because tree trunks only grow stronger without stakes, Funk warned.

Contractors should keep an eye on exposed trees' reactions to winter storms as a first step in deducing whether or not a tree needs extra support. For instance, Funk remembers when a storm started to heave the wind side of one exposed 20- to 30-foot-tall tree last year. Even though he doesn't recommend staking trees smaller than 20-feet tall, this particular tree needed support. "It didn't come out of the ground, but the wind loosened it," he said. "So this year we will prob-

(continued on page 88)

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**USE READER SERVICE #50**



## Dormant Tree Care

(continued from page 85)

ably guy wire it because it will be even more sensitive to wind damage."

While staking and guying are traditionally for overall trunk and tree support, cabling and bracing can support weak branches that are higher in the tree. Phillips said cabling can be put on the top one-third of a tree for support if it has a weak fork so pressure is kept off of the tree base. A long branch with cavities or holes also can be cabled back to keep wind from whipping the branch and breaking it.

When a tree forms a wishbone where it can be pulled apart easily, bracing the two branches together with a rod also can add winter support.

In addition to wind and storm stress, trees must battle winter sun. On sunny winter days, a tree's trunk and main limbs can warm up to 15 degrees higher than the air temperature, McMullin said. As soon as the sun's rays stop reaching the stem, its temperature goes down fast, causing injury or

permanent damage to the bark in one of two main forms – sunscald or frost cracking. McMullin said contractors can protect the trunks of young, susceptible trees with a suitable tree wrap.

Extra protection also comes in the form of nutrients. The root systems of dormant trees never go dormant. When temperatures are at or below freezing, a tree's xylem flow slows down and cannot absorb water, but the minute conditions allow for growth, absorption becomes possible, Funk said. Consequently, soluble fertilizer can be injected into trees before temperatures plummet below 50 degrees Fahrenheit.

"The only problem is that if you put soluble nitrogen down and the root system can't take it up then the product is susceptible to leeching," Funk explained. "You need to do this early enough in the fall."

For this reason, using slow-release fertilizers during dormancy is typically a better bet, Phillips advised, recommending the injection

of liquid, slow-release fertilizer with a long needle about 1 foot into the tree's root system.

Despite all the protection contractors provide trees via mulch, pruning, irrigation and fertilization, sometimes Mother Nature is unmerciful and storm damage is inevitable.

After a severe storm, contractors should first remove broken limbs from clients' trees, McMullin said, advising contractors not to wait too long to perform this task. "Pruning to remove broken stubs and restore the balance of the crown can be put off a little while, but it shouldn't be delayed more than one growing season," he said, adding that damaged trees should be watched more carefully the following year.

Fully restoring trees to their former health and beauty may take some time, McMullin said, but most trees generally can make a full recovery. **LL**

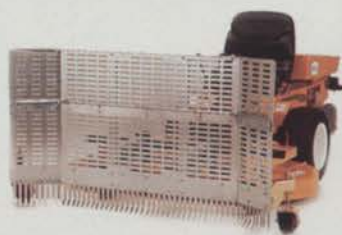
*The author is Managing Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.*

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USE READER SERVICE #113



by Bob West

### SPECIAL REPORT:

# MOWERS

## on the

# Move

A Lawn & Landscape survey identifies the latest trends in contractors' buying habits.

Sometimes, the solution to a problem is so obvious that people have trouble thinking of it. For whatever reason, the human mind seems drawn to examining the more complicated and challenging ideas instead of settling for achieving a thorough understanding of a simple thought.

The same could be said for lawn mowing. The idea of mowing is so simple that literally thousands of contractors have launched their landscape companies behind the controls of a trusty grass-cutting machine. At the same time, consumers across the country often resist paying contractors' desired prices because they see lawn maintenance as something the 16-year-old down the street can do just as well as a so-called "professional."

The truth is, however, that the sheer number of landscape firms built around the core service of mowing doesn't mean contractors necessarily understand this service and everything that influences it on the broadest scale. *Lawn & Landscape* set out to uncover the hidden truths about this simple service by surveying 1,000 of its readers and gathering their feedback about mowers. Here is a summary of their responses.

(continued on page 92)

Riding mowers' sales continue climbing, but contractors said they use more walk-behinds. Photos: Toro (left) and Scag (right)



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## Mowing Survey

(continued from page 90)

**THE BASICS.** Not surprisingly, more than 89 percent of the survey respondents provide mowing services. Of these companies, more than two-thirds are full-service landscape contractors while the remaining 31 percent defined themselves lawn maintenance companies. (Of those companies that don't currently offer mowing services, only 13.3 percent of them said they expect to offer mowing services in the next two years.)

The respondents' annual sales breaks down as follows:

- About 53 percent generate less than \$100,000 in yearly revenue
- 21 percent bring in between \$100,000 and \$250,000
- 13 percent have sales between \$250,000 and \$500,000
- 7 percent have sales between \$500,000 and \$1 million
- 6 percent of the respondents' annual sales figures tops \$1 million

We expected to find that mowing work is critical to contractors' businesses, especially given the revenue breakdown above – smaller companies tend to focus on simpler services first, such as mowing, and move into the more technically demanding services like irrigation and lawn care as they grow.

Indeed, mowing matters to these survey respondents (see Mow-

(continued on page 94)

**M**owing has long been considered one of the core functions of landscape professionals, and this survey of *Lawn & Landscape* readers supported that perception. More than half of the survey respondents said that mowing provides more than 60 percent of their companies' annual sales.

In addition, approximately 58 percent of respondents said that mowing is one of their most important services in terms of their companies' income and growth with slightly more than 16 percent reporting that mowing isn't that important to their future. – **Bob West**

0-10%	7 percent
11-20%	4 percent
21-30%	8 percent
31-40%	11 percent
41-50%	15 percent
51-60%	4 percent
61-70%	10 percent
71-80%	16 percent
81-90%	12 percent
91-100%	13 percent

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## Mowing Survey

(continued from page 92)

ing Machines, bottom of this page). In fact, mowing work accounts for at least 60 percent of the annual sales in more than half of the respondents' businesses. However, that doesn't mean these contractors operate their mowers on a year-round basis.

About 25 percent of the respondents said their mowing season only runs between 20 and 24 weeks, while the same number of respondents mow between 30 and 34 weeks, making these the most common season lengths among respondents. The next most common seasons were between 25 and 29 weeks and 45 weeks or more, both of which can be found in almost 17 percent of the respondents' markets.

More than two-thirds of the respondents indicated that single-family residential properties represent the bulk of their maintenance clientele, which was not a surprise given the fewer demands on residential contractors. On average, these contractors mow about 40 acres each week.

While the commercial properties aren't an area of emphasis for as many contractors, more than half of the respondents do mow some of these larger accounts. On average,

**"I'd like to see**

**more dedicated**

**mulching mowers.**

**Most customers want to**

**have their clippings**

**picked up."**

our survey respondents that do mow commercial turf manage the same amount of acreage each week as the residentially focused companies mow, further demonstrating how few contractors are able to success-

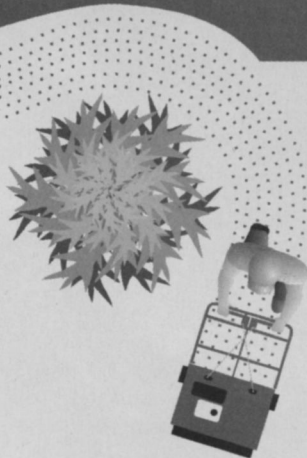
fully enter the commercial maintenance market and build their business around these customers. Those companies who succeed in this arena typically maintain significantly more acreage each week.

**THE MACHINES.** A mower means everything to a mowing contractor. Contractors that use efficient, durable machines can grow their businesses aggressively and maximize profits, while those companies choosing not to use the latest technology or that continue trying to get one more month out of a dying mower doom themselves to spending more time to do the same amount of work as their competitors.

Reports from the Outdoor Power Equipment Institute, Old Town Alexandria, Va., have highlighted the trends from gear-drive to hydrostatic mowers and from walk-behind machine to riding units, both of which are driven largely by contractors pursuing productivity. However, our survey found

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USE READER SERVICE #53



that gear-drive, walk-behind mowers still represent the most prevalent category of machines in contractors' fleets, although the competition is intensifying. More than 41 percent of respondents indicated they have more gear-drive, walk-behind machines in their garages than they do hydrostatic drive, walk-behind mowers (most common in 26.6 percent of respondents' businesses) or hydrostatic drive riding mowers (36.3 percent).

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Surprisingly, the respondents indicated that they keep their gear-drive, walk-behind mowers for just about the same length of time as they do their hydrostatic, riding

mowers - 5.3 years, which explains the presence of so many gear-drive, walk-behind mowers despite the climbing sales of newer models. These contractors said they keep their hydrostatic-drive, walk-behind counterparts for about six months less - an average of 4.7 years.

Obviously, such extended mower life mandates considerable and ongoing maintenance. For many contractors, that means going as far as replacing the engines. In fact, more than 54 percent of the survey respondents indicate they keep running machines after having the engines replaced. Almost 45 percent of these mowing contractors have their own in-house personnel who replaces the engines, which is somewhat surprising given the aforementioned revenue breakdowns. Clearly, this indicates that in a number of small landscape firms the owner or a similar key employee handles the equipment maintenance as well.

Meanwhile, about 55 percent of the re-

spondents said they rely on an independent repair shop or their servicing dealer for engine work.

While mowers all essentially function the same way, there are some variations as to how they are used by different contractors. This is especially true regarding the treatment of grass clippings on customers' properties. Slightly more than 63 percent of respondents said they discharged the clippings back onto the lawn this year, while about 30 percent said they are committed to bagging turf clippings and removing them from clients' properties.

Of course, because of their dependence on these machines, the product purchasing decision can make or break a year for mowing-oriented contractors. Almost 63 percent of the respondents said they make mower purchases or purchase decisions in the first six months of the year, while another 30 percent said they purchase mowers through-

(continued on page 98)

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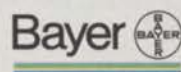
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**USE READER SERVICE #101**



## Mowing Survey

(continued from page 95)

out the year. And contractors weigh a number of different criteria before selecting their new mower.

When asked to name the different factors that have the greatest impact on their mower purchasing decision, contractors identified the following:

- Quality of cut (48 percent)

- Ease of maintenance (42 percent)
- Price (38 percent)
- Productivity (33 percent)
- Parts availability (31 percent)
- Service/support (31 percent)

The importance of being able to obtain parts immediately and get a machine serviced in a timely manner, which means right

**"As the industry moves toward more recycling, deck and baffle design is where the real difference in mowers will be."**

away for contractors, speaks to the critical role power equipment dealers play in the product purchasing decision.

Lastly, we asked these 1,000 contractors to tell us which features will be on the next mower they purchase. About 56 percent of the respondents noted that their next mower purchase would be a walk-behind mower, most likely in the 40- to 54-inch category. This mower will generally have mulching capabilities (65 percent) and hydrostatic transmission (83 percent). Air-cooled (83 percent), gas engines (92 percent) continue to dominate the market.

Riding mower customers like bigger decks for increased productivity (92 percent will buy a mower larger than 44 inches), while dual-hydrostatic transmissions are almost a given anymore (94 percent). Mulching capabilities are popular here (56 percent), while water-cooled (40 percent) and diesel engines (17 percent) are slightly more common with the bigger mowers.

**IN THEIR WORDS.** We also asked respondents to identify the most important mower feature for manufacturers to improve. Obviously, different contractors have their own pet peeves about mowers, but some commonalities can be found in their remarks.

The most heavily targeted areas for improvement were serviceability and parts availability for mowers. Some of the contractors' frustration in this area undoubtedly stems from challenges they encounter with equipment dealers and not manufacturers, but the truth is that most contractors hold the manufacturer responsible for any problems they have with their mower.

"A lift for the front end that would help someone work under the mower with ease would be great," observed one respondent.

(continued on page 100)

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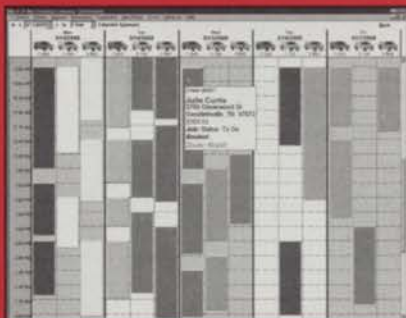
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## Mowing Survey

(continued from page 98)

"Dealers need to give mechanics a decent wage so that I'm not looking at a new face every six months," added another.

"I'd love to see more durable blades and simpler maintenance like sealed spindles that don't need grease," commented another mower user.

The other common concern voiced by respondents was deck performance and construction. "On floating decks, make scalping wheels pivot so they won't cut the ground on turns," requested one respondent.

"Simpler cutting height adjustment on walk-behinds would be nice," added another contractor.

Other commonly mentioned areas for improvements centered on bolstering operator comfort, developing flat-resistant tires and enhancing mowers' breaking performance. "I'd like a mower that could slow down better without tearing the grass," related one contractor obviously interested in being able to mow as quickly as possible.



Walk-behind mowers will always be valuable to contractors, especially when they have to mow sloped areas. Photo: Textron Turf Care and Specialty Equipment

And, of course, a number of contractors recommended that manufacturers simply improve the overall quality of the mowers they build and lower the price for these machines at the same time. We didn't ask a

question about this, but we expect that all survey respondents would like that. ■

The author is Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine. Also, Jennifer Halas contributed to this article.

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**USE READER SERVICE #73**



by Zac Reicher

# Seeding SOLUTIONS

Late summer is a suitable time to seed cool-season lawns. Here, a turfgrass specialist offers his tips to greener results.

Sometimes landscape contractors must seed a new lawn when they would rather not—it's a fact of life. And if they must seed, they should do so at the most opportune time: late summer. Seeding cool-season turfgrasses is better at this time because there is less competition from warm-season annual grasses like crabgrass, foxtails and barnyard grass.

However, at this time of year there are certain cultural practices that contractors should follow before, during and after seeding to improve stand establishment and, in turn, minimize weeds.

**TIMING MATTERS.** Late summer is the best time to seed cool-season grasses in the northern half of the country. The turf stand develops more quickly this time of year and weed pressure is at its lowest. Late summer seedings work because there is ample time and rainfall before the stand is exposed to next summer's stresses. Seeding at any other time of year is less forgiving, and shortcuts taken during establishment will become visible and magnified during summer stress.

The next best time to seed is during winter. The trick is to prepare the soil and seed when soil temperatures are below 40 degrees Fahrenheit so the seed won't germinate until the following spring. Generally, this dormant seeding should be done between Thanksgiving and Christmas, but can continue into March or April in some states.

Dormant seeding offers labor management and agronomic advantages. Contractors can schedule this work in late fall or winter when there is more scheduling flexibility and the seed can benefit from spring's warming soil temperatures. Dormant seeding also eliminates the chance for delayed seeding due to wet weather.

To achieve a green, lush lawn like the one above, contractors must pay attention to seed timing, soil preparation and other fundamentals, such as proper irrigation.  
Photo: Hal Dickey

(continued on page 104)



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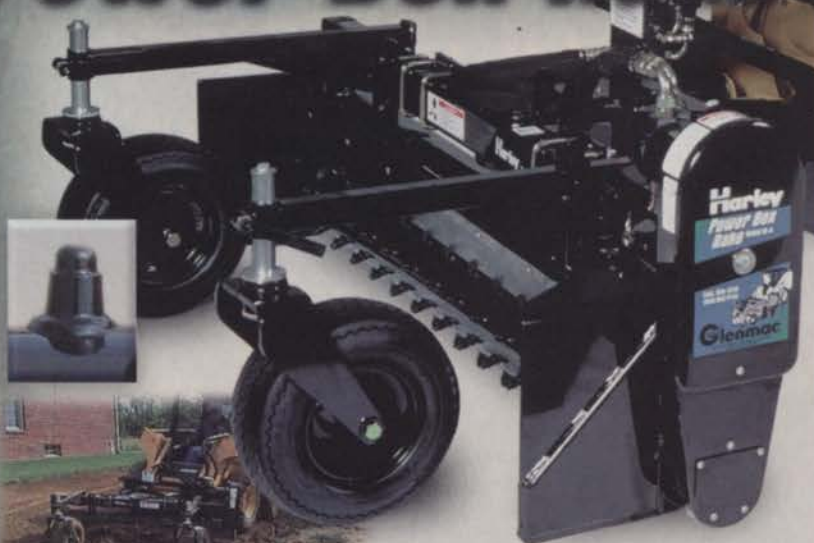
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USE READER SERVICE #60

## Establishing Turfseed

(continued from page 102)

However, avoid dormant seeding on areas prone to even mild erosion.

Even though dormant seeding Kentucky bluegrass in December can outperform spring seedings in April and May, there is some risk. A spring warm-up could initiate germination only to be followed by an extreme cold period that could kill seedlings. The risk of cold damage is greater with quick-germinating species like perennial ryegrass, so avoid dormant seeding this species. Dormant seeding is best for slow-germinating grass like Kentucky bluegrass.

**BE PREPARED.** Seedbed preparation can determine the success of stand establishment,

### Uncompacted soil

gives the turf a **better**

**chance of survival,**

so **tilling a new**

**seedbed prior to seed-**

**ing is critical.**

which, in turn, determines the amount of weed pressure.

The first step is to clear the seedbed of large rocks, concrete, lumber and other objects that inhibit growth and establishment.

Uncompacted soil gives the turf a better chance of survival, so tilling a new seedbed prior to seeding is critical. After tilling, smooth the seedbed and allow it to settle through irrigation or rainfall. After settling, lightly rake the surface, and drop the seed at the recommended rate applied in at least two directions across the lawn. To maximize seed-to-soil contact on a new area, follow seeding with a light rolling.

To further help seedling development, apply a starter fertilizer in the seedbed at 1 to 1.5 pounds P<sub>2</sub>O<sub>5</sub> per 1,000 square feet to provide phosphorus to young roots that can't explore much soil volume.

Irrigation throughout summer is crucial. Irrigate lightly and frequently as soon as temperatures are warm enough for germination. Some companies provide extra sprinklers to the clients to ensure adequate irrigation.

(continued on page 106)



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USE READER SERVICE #108

## Establishing Turfseed

(continued from page 104)

A light layer of mulch or hydromulching will conserve moisture and speed establishment. A second application of starter fertilizer within four weeks of germination also is beneficial, as well as frequent fertilization with low rates of nitrogen every four weeks. The soil type and soil test recommendations determine exact fertilization needs.

While encouraging growth with fertilization, contractors also must tend to maintenance, such as mowing. Waiting too long to mow a new seeding is a common mistake. Mowing encourages lateral growth and increased density, so mow early and often after seeding. Plus, mowing will kill many

important as controlling crabgrass because broadleaf weeds are usually not as aggressive as annual grassy weeds. Therefore, contractors can normally wait until September or October to use a postemergence product on broadleaf weeds. If control is desired before then, follow label instructions for the recommended application delay after seeding.

**TO SEED OR NOT TO SEED.** In some cases, seeding doesn't make sense. Sod is much more durable and may be more practical when establishing a site in the summer. However, sod requires at least as much, if not more, soil preparation as seeding, and

**Late summer** is the *best time* to seed **cool-season grasses** in the *northern half* of the country.

The turf stand **develops more quickly** this time of year and **weed pressure** is at its *lowest*.

of the tall-growing weeds that emerge in a new seeding. Therefore, start mowing as soon as the first few seedlings reach the desired mowing height.

### CONTROLLING WEEDS EARLY ON.

Some products can be used prior to seeding to effectively suppress annual weedy grasses like crabgrass. By far the most effective method is fumigation with methyl bromide, which kills weed seeds in the soil, as well as insects, nematodes and disease propagules. However, methyl bromide application requires specialized equipment that only a few companies offer, and it can be expensive and time-consuming in terms of area preparation. But for high-dollar areas that cannot risk weed problems, methyl bromide fumigation is still most effective.

Soil fumigants are gaining popularity in turf as the availability of methyl bromide decreases. These products can be effective when applied in the fall over an existing turf or when applied to a new turf and tilled in to kill all weed seeds. Consider this type of weed control in areas where perennial spreading weeds, such as bermudagrass, nimblewill or quackgrass, are likely.

Controlling dandelions, clover and other broadleaf weeds in spring seedings is not as

some contractors neglect this step. Poor soil preparation leads to poor sod performance and can increase the risk of patch diseases later in the life of the lawn. Using high-quality, fresh-cut sod from a reputable grower is also important.

In other cases, seeding a temporary turf like annual ryegrass is practical. Grade the site and prepare the seedbed just as you would a permanent turf, then seed with annual ryegrass. Return in August, kill the annual ryegrass with a nonselective herbicide, rough up the surface to expose the soil and increase seed-soil contact, and then seed with the desired turf. This strategy can limit erosion during the summer, provide extra organic matter to the soil and allow soil to settle under the annual ryegrass undulations.

Late summer is still the best time to seed a lawn. For dormant seeding, optimize seed-to-soil contact and post-seeding care to increase the speed of establishment, thereby minimizing weed pressure. If herbicides are needed, there are a number of options depending on the target weed and the situation. Once an herbicide is chosen, refer to the label for specific use recommendations. **LL**

*The author is an assistant professor and turfgrass extension specialist at Purdue, West LaFayette, Ind.*



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by Kristin Mohn

*Irrigation contractors rely on relationships and reputation when securing sales.*

# Personal TOUCHES

# I

In a society that values the lowest price and thrives on pushy sales deals, relationships often get lost in the mix. In particular, the rise of large home store chains pressures irrigation contractors to match falling prices and sell their customers on price rather than quality.

*Selling irrigation systems based on knowledge and personalized communication can create future market success stories.*

In response to this pressure, one might expect shady sales tactics, short cuts and false advertising, all in the name of competition. But in reality, irrigation contractors such as Charles Hagen, president, Hermes Landscaping, Lenexa, Kan., rely on the one aspect missing from many big-name sales deals – a little bit of human touch.

“In landscaping, by far, relationships are the best way to go,” said Hagen, pointing out that his company turns 60 percent of its customer referrals into business due to positive interaction. “Hands down, [selling is] about knowing the client and investing the time to develop a genuine relationship. It’s the things we learned before we got out of junior high that make us successful – we all learned early on what it takes to maintain good relationships.”



**REFERRALS BASED ON INTEGRITY.** Without a doubt, these relations drive the irrigation sales business, with most contractors reporting referrals as their largest sales source. Although Yellow Pages ads and Web sites provide some measure of sales input, personal referrals stemming from previous or current irrigation jobs significantly build a company’s customer base. Michael Strick, president, Carefree Lawn Sprinklers, New Lenox, Ill., confirmed this point.

*(continued on page 115)*



SEPTEMBER 2001

# SNOW BUSINESS

THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION  
OF THE SNOW & ICE  
MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION

**Snow Symposium  
Photo Review**

**Snow Throwers  
Buyers' Guide**

**Sales &  
Marketing  
Strategies**



Chris James,  
Chris James Landscaping, Inc.  
Midland Park, N.J.

The  
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USE READER SERVICE #52



# September 2001

VOLUME 2, ISSUE 3

**SB10 Rocky Mountain High**

*A photographic review of the Fourth Annual Snow & Ice Symposium.*

**SB12 The James Gang**

*With solid personnel and smart pricing, Chris James has built a successful snow business.*

**SB20 Snow Throwers Buyers' Guide**

*A listing of snow thrower/blower manufacturers and their products.*

**SB28 Shoestring Snow Selling**

*Low cost sales and marketing strategies for snow and ice contractors.*

**SB35 Products**

*The latest offerings in snow and ice removal products.*

**ALSO IN THIS ISSUE...**

**SB4 SIMA Says**

**SB6 SIMA News**

**SB38 Ad Index**



Chris James,  
Chris James  
Landscaping, Inc.,  
Midland Park, N.J.

Photo:  
Wayman Williams



## Certified Snow Professionals

Snow management is a viable source of revenue for winter months throughout the northern United States and Canada. Good contractors adapt to fit their market restrictions and weather conditions. For example, in markets that receive just two snowfalls a year, I know of contractors who have snow revenues far in excess of their core business revenues. These contractors structure pricing strategies to meet their needs. They don't allow the prevailing thought of "you don't understand my market" to keep them from generating revenue and making a viable profit. They run the business and don't allow the business to run them.

These forward-thinking snow contractors are true professionals, a fact I stress whenever I am privileged to speak to groups of individuals involved with our industry. One of SIMA's major goals is to foster a professional attitude and positive industry image. To that end, SIMA recently created a way for serious snow management contractors to enhance their professionalism and business acumen.

By passing a written exam, snow contractors can earn the Certified Snow Professional (CSP) designation from SIMA. The exam covers areas such as business law, business accounting, snow techniques and equipment, employee and independent contractor relationships, marketing strategies and general business knowledge. Patterned after the Associated Landscape Contractors of America's Certified Landscape Professional (CLP) program, this designation will be a testament to your dedication to operating your firm as a professional organization. This designation is not designed to determine if you can plow snow. Rather, the program is designed to determine if you can run a snow and ice removal business in a forthright and professional manner.

Will the CSP designation help you secure new business? Maybe. Will it give you a sense of accomplishment and distinguish your company? It should. Will it help you prove to yourself that you are what you say you are — a real professional? It better.

The interest shown in this new program thus far indicates that SIMA has hit another home run in its efforts to enhance the professional image of those who manage snow and ice on commercial, industrial and residential sites for profit.

With regards to the above-mentioned topics (running your operation as a business, as well as certification), I am reminded of what the late Phil Christian, a mentor to me, said, "If you think you can, or you think you can't...you're right." **SB**



**John Allin,**  
Board President, SIMA

# SIMA

Snow & Ice Management Association, Inc.

**Snow & Ice Management Association**  
1903 W. 8th Street, Suite 150  
Erie, PA 16505  
814/835-3577  
www.sima.org  
sima@erie.net

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## SNOW BUSINESS

#### EDITORIAL

**BOB WEST**, *Editor/Publisher*  
e-mail: bwest@lawncandlandscape.com  
**STEVE SMITH**, *Managing Editor*  
e-mail: ssmith@lawncandlandscape.com

#### GRAPHICS/PRODUCTION

**CHARLOTTE TURCOTTE**, *Art Director*  
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#### ADVERTISING/MARKETING

**KEVIN GILBRIDE**, *National Sales Manager*  
e-mail: kgilbride@lawncandlandscape.com  
**VINCENT RICCI**, *Account Manager, West Coast*  
e-mail: vricci@lawncandlandscape.com  
**MATT ZAHN**, *Sales Representative, Midwest*  
e-mail: mzahn@lawncandlandscape.com  
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e-mail: dblasko@lawncandlandscape.com  
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1723 South Hill  
Millford, Michigan 48381  
248/685-2065, Fax: 248/685-2136  
e-mail: mmertz@lawncandlandscape.com  
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#### EDITORIAL & SALES OFFICES

4012 Bridge Avenue, Cleveland, Ohio 44113  
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USE READER SERVICE #53



### Allin, Hansen To Resign Tovar Named 2002 President

At the June 2001 meeting of the Snow & Ice Management Association (SIMA) board of directors, two long-time members resigned from the board. SIMA Vice President Kyle Hansen, Clean Sweep Inc., Shakopee, Minn., left the board, effective immediately. SIMA President John Allin, Allin Companies, Erie, Pa., will step down as board president, effective June 2002.

Jeff Tovar, Tovar's Snowplowing, Elgin, Ill., was elected vice president of the SIMA Board, and will assume the duties of board president at the June 2002 board meeting in St. Louis.

Allin stated, "It is necessary for the membership to know that leadership roles are open to them and that they are encouraged to participate in the governance of the Association. We have always led by example and our departure from the board has been planned for two years." Allin added, "This is an association of members, for the members, and is run by the members. Kyle and I always knew that this time would come and that it would be in the best interest of the membership to have turnover in leadership."

Tovar requested that a new position of past president be

created to ease in transition from one president to another. The board of directors unanimously approved this non-voting position.

Additionally, from this point forward (beginning with Jeff Tovar), board presidents will serve one term of two years, thus ensuring steady turnover in leadership.



Jeff Tovar will serve as SIMA President, with a one-year term beginning June 2002.

### SIMA Launches Certification Program

In a continuing effort to increase the professionalism already put forth by our membership, SIMA is proud to introduce the Certified Snow Professional (CSP) program. The objectives of the certification program are:

- Raise the standards of the profession.
- Encourage self-assessment through achievement guidelines.

*(continued on page 8, Certification Program)*

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USE READER SERVICE #60



(Certification Program, continued from page 6)



- Identify persons with acceptable knowledge of principles and practices.
- Award recognition to those who have demonstrated a high level of competence.
- Improve performance within the profession by requiring participation in a continuing program of professional and educational development.
- Cooperate with other providers of educational services in the development of

training and education programs.

To be eligible to take the exam, individuals must meet one of the three educational and experience options. The application form must be approved and validated in order for individuals to be eligible to take the certification exam.

SIMA will notify individuals concerning the status of applications and eligibility to take the exam after application material has been received and processed. Applications must be received at least 30 days prior to the exam date.

CSP designation may be used only after the name of the certified individual. The CSP designation may not be used to

imply that a firm is certified. The first certification test was held at the Fall Leadership Meeting, Aug. 25, Pittsburgh. The second certification test will be at the Green Industry Conference in Tampa, Fla., in November. The third opportunity will be at the Fifth Annual Snow and Ice Symposium, St. Louis, Mo., next June. If you have any questions, or would like registration forms please contact SIMA at 814/835-3577.

## Brochure Available

A forum of SIMA members have developed a full-color brochure, *How To Find A Winter Service Provider*, to help the general public better understand the snowplowing business. The brochure can be personalized using your rubber stamp, business card or label. The brochure folds to fit into a standard #10 business envelope. For pricing information, please call 814/835-3577. **SB**

## New Training Video Package Released

SIMA's second training video package, *Sidewalk Clearing with Snowblowers*, sponsored by John Deere, is now available complete with video, workbooks, training assessments, answer key, instructor guidelines and sign off sheet. The video covers the basic tips for clearing sidewalks with snowblowers, as well as provides tips for more experienced operators. The video is available in English, Spanish and also in a package with both English and Spanish.

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USE READER SERVICE #54



# Rocky Mountain High

*A photographic review of the Fourth Annual Snow & Ice Symposium.*



Photo Credit: Huskell Photography

More than 300 snow and ice professionals attended the Fourth Annual Snow & Ice Symposium, June 7-9, 2001, Denver, Colo. Many of the contractors in attendance participated in interactive roundtable discussions, sharing their insights on topics ranging from de-icing to working with subcontractors.



Photo Credit: Huskell Photography



Photo Credit: Steve Smith



Photo Credit: Huskell Photography

A trade show component was added to this year's symposium. The exhibit hall featured 38 different manufacturers of snow and ice removal equipment.



Photo Credit: Steve Smith



Attendees were able to get a closer look at snow removal equipment by visiting the outdoor exhibit hall — a new addition to the Symposium.



Photo Credit: Steve Smith

Donald Walker, professor emeritus, University of Wisconsin, discussed the use of chemicals and abrasives during his presentation. Walker was one of 13 industry experts, who led educational events at the Symposium.



Photo Credit: Haskell Photography

Contractors participate in a team-building exercise (below) led by Philip Levy (at podium), Philip R. Levy Associates, Inc., a Denver-based business consulting firm. Levy also delivered the Symposium's keynote speech.



Photo Credit: Haskell Photography



Photo Credit: Haskell Photography



## COVER STORY

BY STEVE SMITH

An arsenal of heavy equipment helps Chris James serve his commercial customer base. Photo: Wayman Williams.

*With solid personnel  
and smart pricing,  
Chris James has  
built a successful  
snow business.*



Chris James likes to think of his snow and ice removal customers as an investment portfolio. He has a foundation of blue-chip seasonal customers, who provide steady income, combined with what he calls his "tech stocks," customers billed on the more variable per occurrence/per hour basis.

Like any smart investor, James seeks long-term gains. "I would rather have consistency. There are plenty of contractors in my market who, because they work on a per-inch or per-occurrence basis, did far better this year than I did, but I have to believe these guys were hurting in the last five lean winters," said James, owner, Chris James Landscaping, Inc. (CJL), Midland Park, N.J.

The past winter was an unusually heavy one in northern New Jersey, but prior to 2000, the area received five straight years of below average snow. These kinds of roller coaster winters would leave most contractors feeling queasy. Despite a half decade of topsy turvy winters, each year James has billed within \$10,000 of annual financial projections.

**PRICING PROWESS.** James credits his pricing philosophy — half seasonal contracts, half per-occurrence contracts — for his company's modest, but steady growth. CJL has grown in 18 out of 20 years and turned a profit in all but one year. Last year the company earned \$1.2 million in revenue, \$225,000 (18.7 percent) coming from snow and ice control work. Each summer James reviews snow division expenses (adjusted for projected growth), such as overhead, equipment and winter payroll, and adds a desired level of profit. James seeks to cover the total through sale of seasonal contracts.

# The James Gang





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- **Eliminate unnecessary risks and ensure safety.** Use warnings, advisories, forecasts, and current conditions to determine when it is too dangerous for plows to be on the road.

**NOW AVAILABLE: FIVE-MINUTE LOCAL RADAR UPDATES**

**USE READER SERVICE #55**



# COVER STORY

Seasonal customers pay a flat monthly fee for a six-month snow season (November through April). Once expenses and profit are covered through seasonal clients, James only accepts new customers on per-occurrence pricing. "When I feel that I've reached a point with my seasonal contracts that the majority of expenses are going to be covered, plus my profit, then I pursue lucrative per occurrence contracts," James said.

This year James locked up seasonal contracts by early summer. "We sent letters to our seasonal customers in March saying that if they signed up by June 1, there would be no price increases. Every customer signed up," James said.

Per occurrence customers are billed at a 5 to 15 percent higher rate than seasonal customers, James said, because of the uncertainty of variable weather. "They are going to pay more, because they are expecting me to take on all the financial risk. And the more the risk, the more compen-

sation I expect." Last winter, per occurrence customers paid dearly, as the heavens dumped more than 55 inches of snow on northern New Jersey. The area receives an average of 35 inches each winter.

Pricing new customers on a per occur-

rence basis also protects James from underbidding, while he learns the most efficient way to serve the customer. After two years, once he's streamlined operations and nailed down labor/equipment requirements, James can accurately set a monthly rate and offer

## VITAL STATISTICS...

### CHRIS JAMES LANDSCAPING AND SNOW REMOVAL INC.

**OWNER:** Chris James

**LOCATION:** Midland Park, N.J.

**FOUNDED:** 1981

**2000 REVENUES:** \$1.2 million

**2000 SNOW REVENUES:** \$225,000

**2000 GROWTH:** 35 percent

**2001 PROJECTED GROWTH:** 10 percent

**EMPLOYEES:** 6 year round, 11 seasonal

**AVERAGE WINTER:** 35 inches

**SNOW SETUP:** 12 snow plows, 8 snow throwers, 6 pickup trucks, 6 dump trucks, 6 skid steers, 5 hopper spreaders, 3 loaders, 1 box pusher, 1 all terrain vehicle and 1 liquid ice control application unit.



**RECEIVER IS MADE OF SOLID STEEL PLATE, NOT HOLLOW TUBING WHICH IS SUBJECT TO RUST FROM INSIDE**

**COMPARE THE COMPETITION**

**HOLLOW TUBING RECEIVER, EVENTUALLY RUSTS FROM INSIDE**

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SNOWBUSINESS



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USE READER SERVICE #56



the customer seasonal billing. "We want to get in there for a year or two and maximize the profitability. My attitude is the longer you are with the client the more you should be able to streamline your operations and provide them with better service. At the same time you should be able to find as much profitability in that account as you can. That's when we start to present landscaping and snow as all inclusive and offer multi-year, seasonal terms."

**SEVENTEEN AND STUPID.** CJL hasn't always been such a sophisticated operation. In 1981 CJL was born, when 20-year-old James purchased a grounds maintenance and snow removal route. James bought the route from Don Tenkate, an oil-tanker driver who provided grounds maintenance and snow removal to 50 customers as a supplement to his income. At 17, James answered a classified ad Tenkate placed and began working for him part-time, even skipping an occa-

sional high school class to help fight a snow storm. "That's how I became a snow removal contractor, I was 17 and stupid," James recalls.

In 1981, when Tenkate moved from the area, he sold James the route. Four years later, after adding two staff people, James won the company's first large commercial client. "In all honesty, I was way over my head. I went from a truck or two and 75 driveways to a 6-acre parking lot with snow pushes of a couple hundred feet in either direction," James admits. "Suddenly, I was in the big leagues."

Despite the initial uncertainty of serving his first large-scale commercial account, James quickly impressed the client and word spread. Within a few years he won five more clients in the industrial park.

Through Snow and Ice Solutions, Inc., a separate consulting business James started in 1999, he's helped several contractors make a similar transition into commercial work.



A typical plow and salt truck employed by CJL during winter snow and ice storms.

James suggests contractors take a gradual approach, first adding small office buildings or 50-unit condominium complexes. Once a contractor has learned to effectively serve these light commercial accounts, he or she can move to the next level (such as a condo complexes with 100 to 150 units) until the company is ready to approach a large-scale industrial account. "It's a matter of gaining experience and slowly adding the required new equipment and labor to your business," James said. James' advice comes from experience, as looking back he realizes the dramatic leap he took into large-scale commercial work could have significantly hurt the

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E#1-BN5ZC

**USE READER SERVICE #57**



business if his company wasn't able to satisfy that first customer.

Today, James clientele is 50 percent high-end residential, 40 percent high-end commercial and 10 percent multi-family residential units. He credits those early days plowing driveways for much of his snow removal expertise. "I truly believe that if you can plow in the residential market, because the driveways are so much tighter, you can plow anything," he said.

**CONSIDERING CONDOS.** James will likely draw on much of that residential experience this year. For the first time in nearly a decade, he's pursuing re-entry into the condominium market. In the past James avoided condos because labor requirements and an underpriced market made profitability a challenge.

However, labor shortages and a resulting decline in the number of companies that can satisfactorily serve condominium accounts have contributed to increased prices.

"Most of the grounds maintenance companies can't handle the amount of work associated with snow removal that they can with grounds maintenance. That leaves a huge void and there are just not enough qualified snow contractors to fill it," he said.

Bolstered by labor acquired via the H2B visa program and a healthy stable of subcontractors, combined with supply and demand tipping in his favor, James is aggressively pursuing condo units this year.

The H2B visa program allows for seasonal hiring of workers from Mexico and other countries through temporary work visas. James has also developed a dependable group of subcontractors through networking at state landscape industry events.

"I've reached the level in my own snow removal equipment and personnel that the only way I can effectively grow the company is through subcontractors. It reaches a point where you can't justify the equipment and personnel because they would not be used

in the summer as part of grounds maintenance," James explained.

**SNOW RESPONSE.** In addition to smart pricing strategies and assembling a reliable pool of winter labor, James has grown his business through delivering dependable service.

If weather reports call for an 80 percent or greater chance of snow or freezing precipitation, James dispatches a truck to make applications of liquid anti-icing material. The anti-icing driver also serves as a snow detector, alerting James if he sees flakes coming down. James also uses a weather reporting service and the on-site security staff at several accounts to notify him when a winter storm is beginning.

Prior to a storm, James anticipates manpower requirements based on the forecast and places personnel on standby with an approximate call-out time. Trigger depth for ice control operations is a trace of snow, and

*(continued on page 34)*



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# Snow Throwers Buyers' Guide

*A listing of  
snow thrower/blower  
manufacturers  
and their products.*

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### **Excel/Hustler Turf Equipment**

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www.excelhustler.com

### **FFC**

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### **Grasshopper**

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### **John Deere**

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### **Simplicity Manufacturing Inc.**

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www.simplicitymfg.com

### **Steiner Turf Equipment**

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sales@steinerturf.com

### **Thomas Equipment**

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info@thomasloaders.com

### **The Toro Company**

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### **Walker Mfg.**

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bob@walkermowers.com

### **Woods Equipment Co.**

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*Editor's Note: Snow Business attempted to contact and include all manufacturers of snow throwers for commercial use. A company's inclusion or exclusion in this guide should not be viewed as a comment on its products.*



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USE READER SERVICE #27



# SNOW THROWERS BUYERS' GUIDE

Model Name/Number	Clearing Width (inch.)	Cutting Height (inch.)	Horsepower	Chute Rotation*	Throw Distance (ft.)	Weight (lbs.)	Key Features
<b>Ariens</b>							
520 Compact (walk behind)	20	-	5	220	-	110	"Dura Clean" auger
522, 522E Single stage (walk behind)	22	-	5	220	35	75-80	"
624 Compact (walk behind)	24	-	6 OHV	220		129	"
722 Single stage (walk behind)	22	-	7	220	35	80	"
724 Deluxe (walk behind)	24	-	7 OHV	220	35	175	aluminum gear case
824 Deluxe (walk behind)	24	-	8	220	45	240	dual handle interlock system
1028 Deluxe (walk behind)	28	-	10	-	45	269	handwarmers, headlights
1024 Professional (walk behind)	24	-	10 OHV	-	45	266	heavy duty gear case
1128 Professional (walk behind)	28	-	11 OHV	-	45	312	cordless starting
1332 Professional (walk behind)	32	-	13 OHV	220	45	323	electric chute rotation
1336 Professional (walk behind)	36	-	13 OHV	220	50	326	electric chute rotation
<b>Bobcat Company</b>							
1412 (attachment)	48	21	n/a	190	20	390	hydraulic discharge chute
1812 (attachment)	55,61,67,73	24	n/a	225	30	855	"
2118 (attachment)	61,67,73,85	32	n/a	270	40	1,100	"
2418 (attachment)	73,85	36	n/a	270	40	1,220	"
<b>CE Attachments</b>							
SB620UD (skid steer attachment)	62	24.5	n/a	270	35	540	15 to 20 GPM @ 2000-3000 psi
SB715UD (skid steer attachment)	71.5	24.5	n/a	270	35	565	"
Edge/SB715UE (skid steer attach.)	71.5	24.5	n/a	270	35	565	20 to 25 GPM @ 2000-3000 psi
Edge/SB835UE (skid steer attach.)	83.5	24.5	n/a	270	35	590	"

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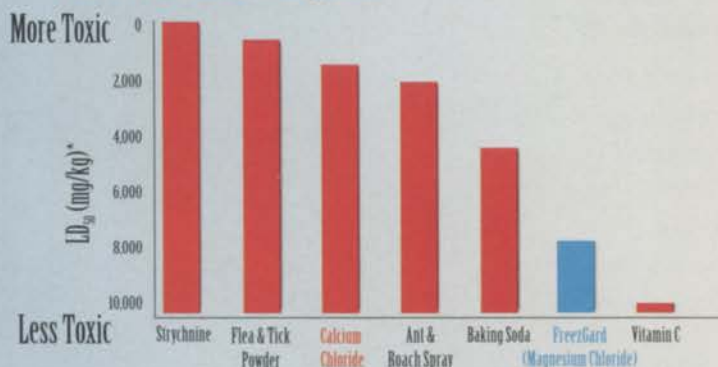
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\* LD<sub>50</sub> is the amount of substance, in mg per kg of body weight, with a 50% casualty rate of test animals in a controlled study. The larger the LD<sub>50</sub> number, the lower the toxicity and safer the substance.

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USE READER SERVICE #12





# SNOW THROWERS BUYERS' GUIDE

Model Name/Number	Clearing Width (inch.)	Cutting Height (inch.)	Horsepower	Chute Rotation*	Throw Distance (ft.)	Weight (lbs.)	Key Features
<b>Excel/Hustler Turf Equipment</b>							
3000 Series	55	-	n/a	190	45 to 60	405	attach. for Hustler turf tractor
4000 Series	54, 60	27	n/a	180	45 to 60	450	*
<b>FFC</b>							
6748 (attachment)	47.5	-	n/a	270	35	490	Electronically controlled, poly-lined chute and deflector, two-stage hydraulic blower
6764 (attachment)	62	-	n/a	270	35	540	*
6773 (attachment)	71.5	-	n/a	270	35	565	*
6785 (attachment)	83.5	-	n/a	270	35	590	*
<b>Grasshopper</b>							
412 (attachment)	48	-	n/a	180	30	206	Heavy-gauge welded steel, high-speed auger
512 (attachment)	60	-	n/a	180	30	310	* plus optional hydraulic or electric lift.
<b>John Deere</b>							
724D (walk behind)	24	16 (opening height)	7	220	-	162	Eight-speed transmission, electronically controlled discharge chute
924DE (walk behind)	24	20 (oh)	9	230	-	291	*



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**SNOWBUSINESS**



Model Name/Number	Clearing Width (inch.)	Cutting Height (inch.)	Horsepower	Chute Rotation*	Throw Distance (ft.)	Weight (lbs.)	Key Features
<b>John Deere</b>							
1128DE (walk behind)	28	20 (oh)	11	230	-	295	*
1128DDE (walk behind)	28	20 (oh)	11	230	-	340	Heated hand grips, differential lock, push-button start
1332DDE (walk behind)	32	23 (oh)	13	230	-	316	*
46-inch model (attachment)	46	6 (lift height)	n/a	180	-	250	
47-inch model (attachment)	47	6 (lh)	n/a	180	-	300	two-stage design, hydraulic chute angling
59-inch model (attachment)	59	23 (overall ht.)	n/a	n/a	-	450	two-stage design
<b>Loeering</b>							
LSB67 (attachment)	67	24	n/a	210	30	790	Reversible auger, hydraulically driven chute, 13-20 gpm flow
LSB73 (attachment)	73	32	n/a	210	40	900	*, 17-31 gpm required
LSB85 (attachment)	85	36	n/a	210	40	1,100	*, 25-32 gpm flow required
LSB85X (attachment)	85	36	n/a	210	40	1,260	*, 32-45 gpm
<b>Loftness Specialized Eq.</b>							
481L (tractor, rear mount)	48	28	n/a	270	-	452	light duty work
601L (tractor, rear mount)	60	28	n/a	270	-	467	light duty work
721L (tractor, rear mount)	72	28	n/a	270	-	514	light duty work
661S (tractor, rear mount)	66	32	n/a	270	-	829	standard duty
721S (tractor, rear mount)	72	32	n/a	270	-	869	standard duty



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# SNOW THROWERS BUYERS' GUIDE

Model Name/Number	Clearing Width (inch.)	Cutting Height (inch.)	Horsepower	Chute Rotation*	Throw Distance (ft.)	Weight (lbs.)	Key Features
<b>Loftness Specialized Eq.</b>							
841S (tractor, rear mount)	84	32	n/a	270	-	912	standard duty
842S (tractor, rear mount)	84	48	n/a	270	-	1,557	standard duty
961S (tractor, rear mount)	96	40	n/a	270	-	1,548	standard duty
962S (tractor, rear mount)	96	48	n/a	270	-	1,665	standard duty
481EL & ES (skid steer attach.)	48	28	n/a	-	-	550	
541EL, ES & EM (skid steer attach.)	54	28	n/a	-	-	560	
601EL & ES (skid steer attach.)	60	28	n/a	-	-	570	
661ES, EM, D1 & D2 (skid steer attach.)	66	28	n/a	-	-	595-900	
721ES & EM (skid steer attach.)	72	28	n/a	-	-	615	
721 D1 & D2 (skid steer attach.)	72	32	n/a	-	-	940	
841 D2, C3 & C4 (skid steer attach.)	84	32	n/a	-	-	972	C3 & C4 weigh 1,000 lbs
962H (tractor, rear mount)	96	48	n/a	270	-	1,833	heavy duty work
1028H (tractor, rear mount)	108	48	n/a	270	-	2,283	heavy duty work
1082I (tractor, rear mount)	108	48	n/a	270	-	2,283	industrial duty work
1083I (tractor, rear mount)	108	72	n/a	270	-	2,850	industrial duty work
<b>Sicard</b>							
2200M (loader mounted attach.)	102	62	n/a	320	5 to 65	5,800	
5000 Series (chassis mounted attach.)	101	129	n/a	190	4 to 150	24,000	
<b>Simplicity Manufacturing Inc.</b>							
520M/E (single stage, walk behind)	20	12.5	5	220	30	70/75	
555M (intermediate, two stage, walk behind)	22	16.5	5	190	35	176	
755M (intermediate, two stage walk behind)	22	16.5	7 OHV	190	38	178	
860DXL (two stage, walk behind)	24	21	8 OHV	200	40	240	free hand control
860M (large frame, walk behind, two-stage)	24	21	8	200	40	230	
970M (two stage, walk behind)	28	21	9 OHV	200	45	255	
1180M (two stage, walk behind)	32	21	11 OHV	200	45	265	Tecumseh Snow King engine, free hand control, remote deflector adjustment, headlight
Single-Stage Tractor Attachment	36,42	17	n/a	200	30	n/a	
Single-Stage Tractor Attachment	46	22	n/a	200	40	n/a	
Two-Stage Tractor Attachment	40	17.5	n/a	200	40	n/a	
Two-Stage Tractor Attachment	47	22	n/a	200	50	n/a	
<b>Steiner Turf Equipment</b>							
SB348 (attachment)	48	25	n/a	190	-	425	hydraulically controlled chute
<b>Thomas Equipment</b>							
1812 (attachment)	55 to 73	24	n/a	225	30	810-900	
<b>The Toro Company</b>							
CCR Powerlite 325 (single stage, walk behind)	16	-	3.25	-	25	38-40	
CCR 1000 (single stage, walk behind)	20	-	3.5	-	25	51-54	
CCR 2450 GTS (single stage)	20	-	5	-	30	71-74	
CCR 3650 (single stage, walk behind)	20	-	6.5	-	35	73-75	



Model Name/Number	Clearing Width (inch.)	Cutting Height (inch.)	Horsepower	Chute Rotation*	Throw Distance (ft.)	Weight (lbs.)	Key Features
<b>The Toro Company</b>							
522/622 (two stage, walk behind)	22	-	5, 6	-	25	145-165	
824 (two stage, walk behind)	24	-	8	-	35	195	
824 XL (two stage, walk behind)	24	-	8	-	40	225	
924 (two stage, walk behind)	24	-	9	-	40	255	
1028 (two stage, walk behind)	28	-	10	-	40	290	
1332 (two stage, walk behind)	32	-	13	-	40	316	
Snow Commander 30600/30602	24	15	7	-	35	115	
Power Shovel (electric)	12	4	n/a	-	15	12	
1200 (electric)	12	6	n/a	-	20	17	
1800 (electric)	18	10	n/a	-	30	24	
<b>Walker Manufacturing</b>							
SB6670	42	19	n/a	228	40	210	for attachment to Walker mowers
<b>Woods Equipment Company</b>							
SS52 (tractor attachment)	52	30	n/a	210	40 to 50	438	Tractor HP 15-30
SS60 (tractor attachment)	60	30	n/a	210	40 to 50	447	"
SS74 (tractor attachment)	74	30	n/a	210	40 to 50	507	Tractor HP 25-40
SS84SA (tractor attachment)	84	28	n/a	200	50 to 100	1,207	Tactor HP 60-80
SS84DA (tractor attachment)	84	38	n/a	200	50 to 100	-	-
SS96 (tractor attachment)	96	38	n/a	200	50 to 100	1,663	Tractor HP 100-160
SS108 (tractor attachment)	108	38	n/a	200	50 to 100	1,741	Tractor HP 125-200

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USE READER SERVICE #36

SNOWBUSINESS

USE READER SERVICE #20

SEPTEMBER 2001 SB27



BY STEVE SMITH

## Shoestring Snow Selling

*Low cost sales and marketing strategies  
for snow and ice contractors.*

Successful marketing doesn't have to mean high-budget television and radio advertising spots or glossy brochures and direct mail pieces. Many savvy contractors say its not *how much* money you spend, but *how* you spend it that counts.

Take Erv Denig, owner, Lawn & Turf Landscaping, Fort Wayne, Ind. Denig grows by one crew a year, he said, through highly targeted, face-to-face selling. "We don't advertise, we don't do direct mail, we go after the client we want and the client that fits our territory," he said.

Other than a small Yellow Page advertisement, the company relies solely on face-to-face sales meetings with potential clients. Each year, Denig identifies new commercial facilities he thinks would fit his snow operation and evaluates the potential jobsite. Denig makes an informal inventory of the facility by documenting the potential snow and ice removal needs and photographing damage that a previous contractor may have caused.

Denig asks office personnel at the account about who makes the decisions regarding grounds maintenance, how long the decision maker has been with the firm and which contractor conducted winter services for the facility last year — all this before ever formally calling the prospect. When he's gathered all the facts, Denig calls the decision maker, briefly discusses the facility and its snow removal needs and requests a face-to-face meeting. By completing his pre-call research before approaching a client, Denig said he's able to set up face-to-face meetings with nearly 100 percent of prospects.

During the sales meeting, Denig promotes his company's professionalism through customer testimonials and a list, including pictures, of the company's snow removal equipment. "When they see our line up of equipment, that usually convinces clients that they should have us, rather than some pickup truck operator," Denig said.

**WHAT MAKES YOU DIFFERENT?** Marketing and sales consultant Fred Berns, president, Power Promotion Inc., Lafayette, Colo., says a key to maximizing your marketing dollar is determining the unique attribute that sets your company apart from the competition.

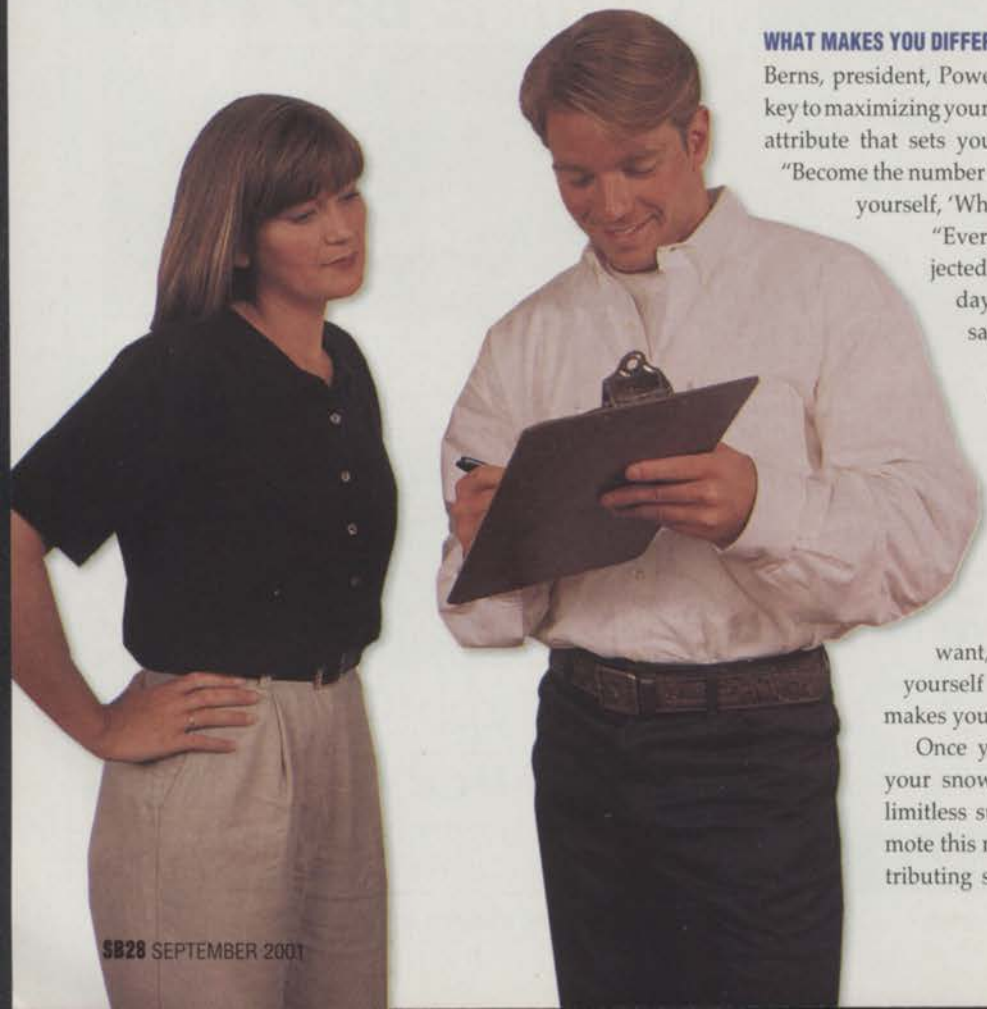
"Become the number one expert on you and your company. Ask yourself, 'What makes me outstanding at what I do?'"

"Everyone you are trying to influence is subjected to approximately 1,250 sales messages a day. So why should they listen to your message? It's a real important question."

Berns said contractors can discover their differentiating attribute by thoughtfully considering a few of the following questions. What do I specialize in? What are my special skills? What are my accomplishments? What kinds of clients do I specialize in? What special degrees or certifications do I have?

"I think you can set and get any price you want, as long as you can sufficiently differentiate yourself from competitors. Really focus on what makes you different," Berns suggested.

Once you determine the items that distinguish your snow removal operation, there is a virtually limitless supply of relatively low-cost ways to promote this message to your market. Ideas include distributing snow and ice tips to potential customers,





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sharing tips at community and local organization events, sending stories and press releases to local newspapers and including your company's unique selling point in your voice mail message. "Americans spend approximately a total of 3.2 billion hours a year talking and listening to voice mail. If your voice mail is not special, you are missing out on a major marketing opportunity," Berns said.


Other ideas include creating a customer satisfaction survey, hosting focus group meetings with small teams of customers or hosting a customer appreciation day. Such customer events can be a prime opportunity to seek the advice of clients on your service. Such events also present a great opportunity to for referrals and testimonials.

**FOLLOW-UP.** Steve Bednarz, vice president, Tovar's Snowplowing, Elgin, Ill., says the simple act of following up with a prospect can be a powerful, low-cost strategy to

## PROMOTION SUCCESS STEPS

- 1. Take Charge:** Tell yourself to sell yourself.
- 2. Take Stock:** Where are you now?
- 3. Set Goals:** Where do you want to be?
- 4. Get Different:** What makes you special?
- 5. Set Targets:** Who needs to know how good you are?
- 6. Solve Problems:** Decide what you have that they need?
- 7. Scout Competitors:** See what they do, and do it differently.
- 8. Seek Feedback:** Get testimonials and referrals from those you've served.
- 9. Establish Expertise:** Make a "how to" list.
- 10. Create Credentials:** Make a marketing kit.
- 11. Take Inventory:** What do your prospects read? What groups do they belong to?
- 12. Get Published:** Write and get written about in publications read by prospects and customers.
- 13. Get Booked:** Get invited to speak to groups whose members are potential customers
- 14. Get Recognized:** Spread the word about your accomplishments.
- 15. Stay Connected:** Follow up with those who know you – or should.

Source: Sell Yourself! 501 Ways to Get Them to Buy From You by Fred Berns. For more information visit, [www.fredberns.com](http://www.fredberns.com) or e-mail: [fredtalks@aol.com](mailto:fredtalks@aol.com).



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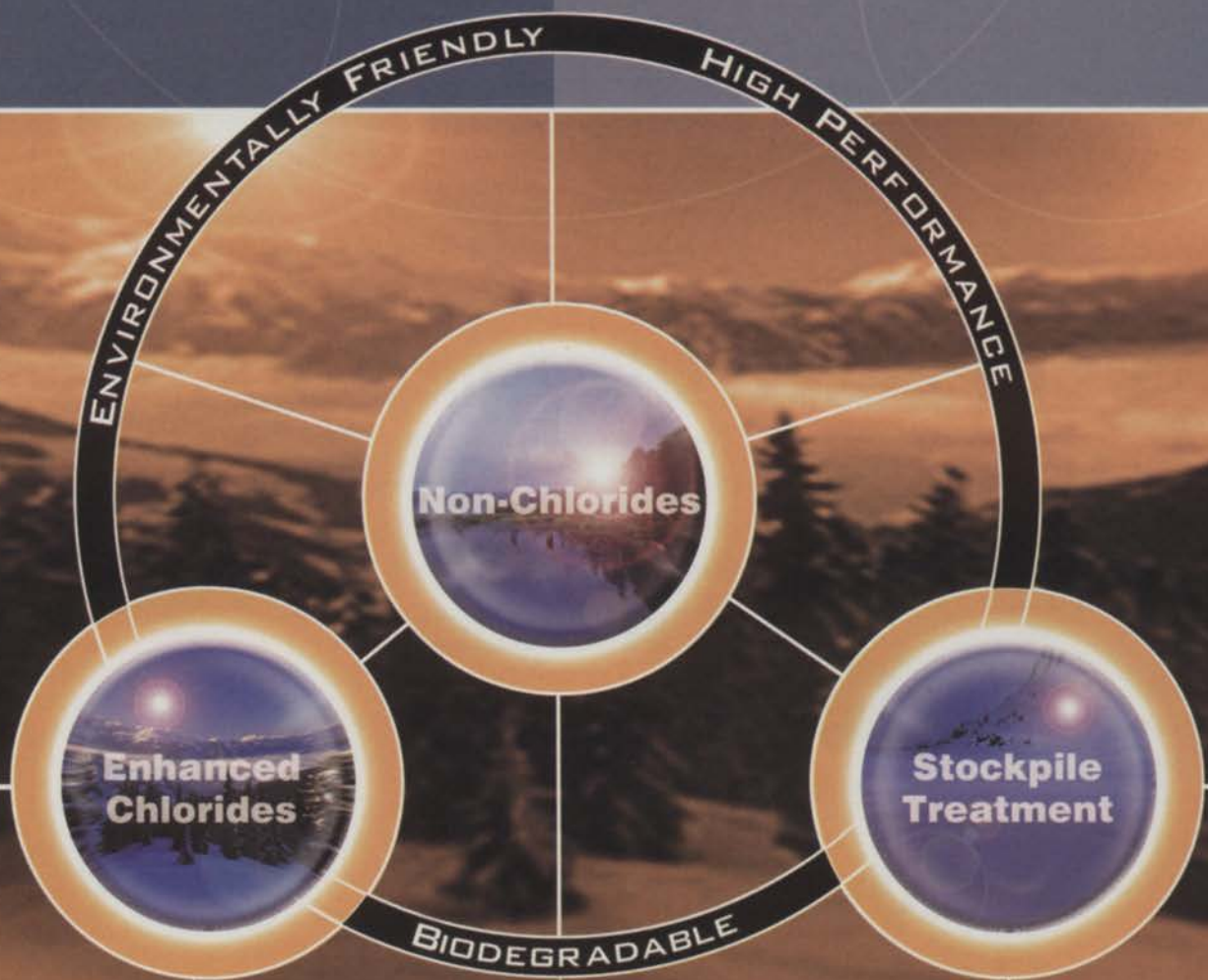
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earning new business. After a direct mail piece is sent, Bednarz contacts potential clients to make sure they've received the brochure. Bednarz also makes sure he follows up via phone after a face-to-face meeting and, most importantly, after a bid has been submitted. "We try to have a good system of

follow-ups, so we don't just drop off a bid and never talk to the client again." Follow up, Bednarz said, allows the snow contractor to uncover the client's thoughts on the proposal and make additional strides to win the business. "We can find out what we need to do to make it happen" Bednarz added.

Whether its asking customers for referrals or following up with prospects after the initial bid, there are hundreds of low-cost marketing strategies available to contractors. The key is making the effort to implement them. **SB**

*The author is managing editor of Snow Business. He can be reached at [ssmith@gie.net](mailto:ssmith@gie.net).*

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## FIVE-MINUTE MARKETERS

Consider these time- and cost-cutting marketing ideas:

- Jot down your key achievements for the day and month (these will serve as marketing ammunition when conversing with prospects).
- Create a five question customer satisfaction survey.
- Update your voice-mail recording to include a promotional message that communicates the unique services and skills your company offers.
- Ask a client for a referral and a testimonial letter.
- Ask a client for additional business.
- Contact a prospect.
- Contact a former client to renew the business relationship.
- Determine three ways that you differ from your competitors.
- Meet five people at a networking event in your market.
- Distribute 10 business cards at a local trade show.
- Send a note or e-mail message to an existing client or prospect.
- Pitch a story about your company to a reporter.
- Write a letter to the editor.
- Send out an article reprint to three top prospects.
- Get on the mailing list of top prospects and competitors.
- Give something away.
- Invite a decision maker to lunch.

*Source: Sell Yourself! 501 Ways to Get Them to Buy From You by Fred Berns. For information visit [www.fredberns.com](http://www.fredberns.com) or e-mail: [tredtalks@aol.com](mailto:tredtalks@aol.com).*



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## COVER STORY

(continued from page 18)

trigger depth for pushing snow is an inch. The company provides service through the entire storm until all paved areas are cleaned up. When a storm hits, personnel are dispatched to one of four staging areas maintained at the facilities of key customers. The clients allow James to use areas behind warehouses to store equipment and materials. An area leader, who dispatches personnel and equipment in his zone, is stationed at each of the four areas.

**PEOPLE POWER.** Ultimately, James said, it's people that have made the difference for him in building a successful snow business. With no formal business training and an education from the "school of hard knocks," James has relied heavily on his peers in the industry. James said he's spent uncountable hours and thousands of dollars attending state and national industry events, learning from presentations and from informal networking with other contractors.

He's also benefited from reliable and professional employees and associates. "I've got great people in the office and field and have some key subcontractors that have worked with me for 10 or 15 years. I didn't do this alone." **SB**

The author is managing editor of Snow Business magazine. He can be reached at [ssmith@gie.net](mailto:ssmith@gie.net).

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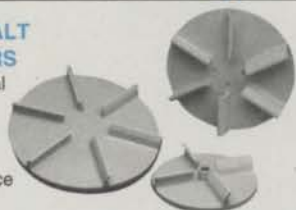


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11	31	51	71	91
12	32	52	72	92
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9	29	49	69	89
10	30	50	70	90
11	31	51	71	91
12	32	52	72	92
13	33	53	73	93
14	34	54	74	94
15	35	55	75	95
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## CONFERENCE PROGRAM

### SUNDAY, OCTOBER 7

8:00 a.m.	Golf Outing Marriott Mountain Shadows Golf Club
1:00 – 4:00 p.m.	Site Tour with Terrain Systems – A Lawn & Landscape Top 100 Company Phoenix, Arizona
4:00 – 6:00 p.m.	Registration/Resource Center Open
6:00 – 7:30 p.m.	Welcome Reception

### MONDAY, OCTOBER 8

7:30 a.m.	Registration & Continental Breakfast
8:00 – 9:15 a.m.	Putting People First: Management's Role in Making It Work <i>Keynote Speaker: Scott Brickman, President, The Brickman Group</i>
9:15 – 10:30 a.m.	Winning the Recruiting Wars for Top Employees <i>Speaker: Larry Fish, President, GreenSearch,</i>
10:30 – 10:50 a.m.	Refreshment Break
10:50 – 12:00 noon	Employment Regulations Affecting Employers <i>Speaker: Jean Seawright, President, Seawright &amp; Associates</i>
12:00 – 1:15 p.m.	Power Lunch Discussions
1:30 – 3:00 p.m.	Creating Career Paths for Your Employees <i>Speakers: Laura Bird, Director, Human Resources; Connie Brown, Training Manager, The Groundskeeper</i>
3:00 – 3:30 p.m.	Refreshment Break
3:30 – 5:00 p.m.	Speaker Roundtable Question & Answer Session <i>Moderator: Bob West, Editor, Lawn &amp; Landscape</i>
5:00 – 6:30 p.m.	Networking Reception

### TUESDAY, OCTOBER 9

7:30 a.m.	Registration & Continental Breakfast
8:00 – 9:15 a.m.	Developing an Employee Management Plan for Your Business <i>Speaker: Jean Seawright, President, Seawright &amp; Associates</i>
9:15 – 10:30 a.m.	Motivating the Troops: Creating Excitement in the Workplace <i>Speaker: Marty Grunder, President, The Winner's Circle</i>
10:30 – 10:50 a.m.	Refreshment Break
10:50 – 12:00 noon	Communicating Total Rewards to Employees <i>Speaker: Larry Fish, President, GreenSearch,</i>

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

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

*Joe Morrison  
Breakin' Ground Landscaping  
Middletown, Ohio*

"Finally, a conference that just focuses on the business management aspects of running a successful landscape business. It was very worthwhile."

*Bernard Naylor  
Naylor Landscape Management  
Kalamazoo, Michigan*

"The chance to meet with the speakers and ask questions one on one. I took home some great tips from the conference sessions."

*Pat Newman  
Outside Services  
Martinsville, Indiana*

"The topics offered at the Lawn & Landscape Business Strategies Conference were exactly what we needed to promote new ideas in our company."

*Rebekah Beigle  
Showplace Landscaping  
Crittenden, Kentucky*





## Sunday, October 7

8:00 a.m.

### Golf Outing

Marriott Mountain Shadows Golf Club  
*Sponsored by National Insurance*

1:00 – 4:00 p.m.

### Site Tour – Terrain Systems

Join fellow contractors from across the country for a site tour with the management team Phoenix-based Terrain Systems – a Lawn & Landscape Top 100 company. Tour actual work sites with the management team of Terrain Systems and see how things are done in the desert Southwest when it comes to landscape design and installation. Bring your questions for the Terrain Systems management team and see how your operation compares. This event is *free* for registered conference attendees. Space is limited and advance registration is required.

4:00 – 6:00 p.m.

### Registration/Resource Center Open

6:00 – 7:30 p.m.

### Welcome Reception

*Reception Sponsored by Lawn & Landscape magazine*

## Monday, October 8

7:30 a.m.

### Registration & Continental Breakfast

8:00 – 9:15 a.m.

### Opening Session

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

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

*Speaker: Scott Brickman, President, The Brickman Group*



*Scott Brickman*

9:15 – 10:30 a.m.

### Winning the Recruiting Wars for Employees

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

*Speakers: Larry Fish, President, GreenSearch*



*Larry Fish*

10:50 – 12:00 noon

### Employment Regulations Affecting Employers

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

*Speaker: Jean Seawright, President, Seawright & Associates*



*Jean Seawright*

### Morning General Session Sponsored by Shindaiwa

12:00 – 1:15 p.m.

### Power Lunch Discussions

At the 2001 Business Strategies Conference, you will sit down to a delicious meal as well as a discussion of leading employee management issues presented in a case study format that you can take home with you for immediate use. The discussions, led by the award-winning editorial staff of *Lawn & Landscape*, will allow you to interact with fellow contractors, hear how they handle employee management issues and pick up valuable tips on how to make your company a better place to work. The proceedings from each Power Lunch Group Discussion will be appear exclusively in a feature story in *Lawn & Landscape* magazine and on the green industry's leading web site – [www.lawnandlandscape.com](http://www.lawnandlandscape.com).



2007 OR GO TO REGISTER



1:30 – 3:00 p.m.

### **Creating Career Paths for Your Employees**

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

*Speakers: Laura Bird, Director, Human Resources and Connie Brown, Training Manager, The Groundskeeper*

### **Afternoon General Session Sponsored by Echo**

3:00 – 3:30 p.m.

### **Refreshment Break**

3:30 – 5:00 p.m.

### **Speaker Roundtable Question & Answer Session**

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

**Session Sponsored by Great Dane Power Equipment**



## **Monday, October 8**

7:30 a.m.

Registration & Continental Breakfast

8:00 – 9:15 a.m.

### **Developing an Employee Management Plan for Your Business**

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

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

*Speaker: Jean Seawright, President, Seawright & Associates*

9:15 – 10:30 a.m.

### **Motivating the Troops: Creating Excitement in the Workplace**

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



*Marty Grunder*

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

10:30 – 10:50 a.m.

### **Refreshment Break**

10:50 – 12:00 noon

### **Communicating Total Rewards to Employees**

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

*Speaker: Larry Fish, President, GreenSearch*

### **Morning General Session Sponsored by Syngenta**

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# Registration and Travel Information

## CONFERENCE REGISTRATION

### Conference Registration

**\$245 per person**

(Includes all educational sessions, conference materials, receptions, lunch, breakfasts and refreshment breaks)

### Group Conference Registration

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

## SPECIAL EVENTS

### Golf Outing

**\$80**

Sunday, October 7 (Includes greens fees, cart, lunch, prizes and transportation)

### Site Tour

**Free**

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

## CANCELLATION/SUBSTITUTION/REFUND POLICY

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

## CONFIRMATIONS

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

## HOTEL INFORMATION

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

## DISCOUNT TRAVEL INFORMATION

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

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

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



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**2001 Lawn & Landscape Business Strategies Conference Registration Check List**

Completed Registration Form

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Called for Discount Travel Information

Registered for the Site Tour and Golf Outing

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

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**REGISTRATION FORM**

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

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

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

**ON THE WEB:** Register on-line at [www.lawnandlandscape.com](http://www.lawnandlandscape.com)

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

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**Please Note:** Registrations **will not** be processed until payment information is received. All faxed and phone registrations **MUST** include credit card information. There will be a \$25 fee for returned checks.

**REGISTRATION INFORMATION**

<i>Conference Registration</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Total</i>
Full Conference Registration	_____ @ \$245 =	_____
Group Conference Registration ( <i>two or more from same company</i> )	_____ @ \$195 =	_____

**Special Events**

Golf Outing (Sunday, October 7) \_\_\_\_\_ @ \$80 = \_\_\_\_\_

Site Tour (Sunday, October 7) \_\_\_\_\_ @ Free = \_\_\_\_\_

**TOTAL** \_\_\_\_\_ = \_\_\_\_\_

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I \_\_\_ G \_\_\_ 0701



(continued from page 108)

"The majority of our customers come from referrals, either from landscapers or builders. Our referrals are usually good, qualified leads where we've already been talked up a little bit, so when customers call us they have already heard some good things about us."

Similarly, Perry Bratt, president, Bratt Inc., Pleasant Grove, Utah, found referrals such a valuable source of business that the company began using them as fodder for additional sales leads.

"In our sales packet we list 40 to 50 referrals of satisfied clients, provide contact names and phone numbers and customers can call any one of them," he said.

Since recommendations act as a driving force for business, quality service remains a mandatory goal for irrigation contractors to secure helpful referrals. Joe Goetz, president, Goetz Landscape and Irrigation, Centerville, Minn., agreed that following through the entire process, from initial customer contact to installation, results in satisfied customers and, ultimately, increased

business for his company.

"What gives us the best return is doing good quality work and relying on referrals from previous customers," Goetz identified. "That kind of opens and closes our sales. If customers are looking for a good, quality system, and looking for it to be done right, that is the customer we're looking for. We qualify the customer as much as they are qualifying us."

In fact, as another step toward earning recommendations, Goetz Landscape and Irrigation rewards customers with gift certificates for their service and referrals. Michael Hogan, owner, New England Lawn Irrigation, Plymouth, Mass., cited similar tactics.

"If we get into a neighborhood and a person does a lot of referring, what we'll do is offer discounts on a sprinkler system or service down the road," he said.

Goetz also stressed that when it comes to selling his product, irrigation and honesty go hand in hand. "We lead with integrity—if we say we're going to do something, we'll do

it," he said simply. "It helps us to be successful in all parts of what we do."

For example, Goetz illustrated, if the salesperson is running behind because of a weather-related delay, it makes sense to notify the customer even though it may not be what the customer wants to hear.

For Bratt, his company goes so far as to include integrity in its mission statement. He identified this trait as one of the most important keys to sales success, and, like Goetz, said following through with promises and providing customers with service updates result in respected business practices.

"Our clients are regularly referring us to other individuals," Bratt said. "The reason they hired us is because we do what we said we were going to do."

**THE COMPETITIVE EDGE.** Reliability also comes into play throughout the initial sales process. Contractors stressed that face-to-face meetings often help clear up custom-  
*(continued on page 118)*



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## Irrigation Sales Strategies

(continued from page 115)

ers' questions and allow clients to view system parts and diagrams. Strick pointed out these in-person meetings also help clients differentiate among the contractors.

"We go over any specific needs the customers have, sit down with them and explain what we're doing and about the products we install, as well as what makes us different from other places they got estimates," he said.

Bratt related the importance of spelling out proposals carefully and encouraging clients who are receiving alternate bids to ask the competitors to thoroughly explain proposals as well. Maintaining that his company refuses to buy into "quick fixes," he said that sometimes when competitors bid lower and sacrifice quality, he must turn jobs away rather than match low prices. Yet, he stresses that the quality of the installation usually eclipses the price.

"Some can do it for one-third of what I  
(continued on page 120)

**T**hanks to advertising, Perry Bratt has his customers seeing yellow. "Our best form of advertising, visually, is our equipment and trucks. We have a bright yellow - canary yellow - color, so if you see a yellow truck coming down the road you know it's Bratt," described Bratt, president, Bratt Inc., Pleasant Grove, Utah. Referrals are then driven by the intense yellow color that allows area customers to easily identify Bratt as "the company with the yellow trucks."

Other contractors value appearance and presentation as key selling points for their business. Joe Goetz, president, Goetz Landscape and Irrigation, Centerville, Minn., cited appearance as a driving factor when securing new customers. "One of the things I emphasize is if the truck looks good, if we're timely and in uniform, we do a lot of sales based on presentation," he explained.

Appearance also comes into play with selling materials. Carefree Lawn Sprinklers, based in New Lenox, Ill., distributes a folder of information to potential customers that includes a brochure, letter, illustrated diagram, product shots of controllers, valves, rotors and spray heads and specification sheets. Bratt's yellow sales packet includes employee photos and brief resumes, showcasing his staff's experience.

In addition, Bratt implements an employee dress standard that requires neatly trimmed hairstyles and forbids earrings. Further, Bratt holds its employees to behavior standards that ban swearing or vulgar jokes when completing a job. "We do our best to have our employees act sharp, look the part and be honest," he said. "Clients have told us that's why they wanted us on their property." - Kristin Mohn

## The Power of Appearances

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## Irrigation Sales Strategies

(continued from page 118)

can install it for," admitted Bratt, adding that system longevity plays a large part in quality. "Typically, yes you can do that, but you still have a problem. If it is not installed right, you are going to have problems. I don't want the Bratt name tarnished, and it does not make sense to cut corners."

In pursuit of jobs, contractors sometimes fall into the trap of falsely promising services to customers to match competitors or to simply impress clients. Strick cautioned against exaggeration and, again, stressed the value of integrity when competing in the industry.

"Be honest with customers, don't overcommit, don't exaggerate the reliability or that these things are completely maintenance-free," he insisted. "Any company out there is individual - what is one company's forte is not another company's forte. Some say, 'If this place is going to do this, I am going to do this.' I say, know what you're good at, do what you're good at and don't make the mistake of promising otherwise."

Some irrigation contractors score additional sales savvy from their distributors and suppliers, which provide assistance in the form of referrals, training or designs. Bob Fredericks, marketing manager, MTI Distributing, Minneapolis, Minn., said his company offers irrigation system designs to certain contractors to improve their services and products.

"We provide [design] leads to contractors in a couple of different ways: a) to those capable of that size of a project, and b) also to the contractors that are most loyal to us," he explained.

In addition to design leads, distributors serve as a valuable source of customer referrals. Perry Bratt, president, Bratt Inc., Pleasant Grove, Utah, said a contractor-distributor

relationship comes into play when seeking new clients.

"We regularly get distributors referring us to new clients," said Bratt. "They have us on the top of their list because the distributor knows they're going to have happy clients if [the customer] hires us."

Since distributors and suppliers have firsthand product knowledge, contractors can utilize this information to keep their services up-to-date, said Joe Goetz, president, Goetz Landscape and Irrigation, Centerville, Minn. "Distributors provide good information on the product in a timely fashion," he said, adding that distributors send brochures and folders of product information as well as ensure on-time arrival of products.

Some distributors offer training programs that attempt to improve a contractor's staff education and, consequently, sales strategies. Fredericks said MTI offers an annual four-day education program

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comprised of 30 to 40 classes, ranging in topic from turf to design to self-improvement. Further, Fredericks described a contractor loyalty program featuring airline miles or incentive trips as rewards for increased sales.

Fredericks pointed out that a distributor's choice to offer contractors sales assistance depends on the distributor's focus. "If they're looking for value-added items and to create loyalty, they'll do that type of thing, but not if they're just looking for lower prices," he suggested.

Goetz cautioned against relying on distributors for actual sales and said their true value lies in the "tools" they can provide to help contractors effectively secure sales. Michael Strick, president, Carefree Lawn Sprinklers, New Lenox, Ill., agreed. "Our distributor does provide leads, and it's a small percentage of what we do, but every little bit helps - all these things add up," he noted. - **Kristin Mohn**

Further, Goetz mentioned the importance of thorough service in the irrigation industry, and that many home store chains cannot offer the same level of attention. "Components are just components, but the service is based on how well [the system] is put in," he said.

Hagen recognized the presence of home stores in his market, but he said the sale comes down to different target customer populations. In other words, while home stores aim for individuals who are more "hands-on," he focuses on clients who value the service. "Our target market is people who don't want to mess with it," he quipped.

Strick said healthy competition in the current market results in more irrigation jobs than any company knows what to do with, which lessens the impact of home store sales and consolidation. Confidence in the value of quality customer service also lowers the threat of larger companies, which offer reduced prices but often require customers to install systems themselves, he said.

## Irrigation Sales Strategies

**AVERTING SALES OBSTACLES.** Aside from competition, irrigation contractors face a variety of obstacles when selling irrigation systems. Hagen cited the lack of education and experience among new salespeople as a common problem.

"First and foremost, young salesmen face pressure - No. 1, they're not prepared, and usually end up sacrificing something," he said. "If you go in unprepared and not understanding what it is that your client is all about, you sacrifice dollars, timeliness or quality."

In order to overcome these obstacles, Hermes Landscaping provides a mentor program for new employees, during which they gain exposure to processes, upgrades, seminars and system walk-throughs to gain effective sales tactics.

Goetz overcomes price obstacles in his area with a basic solution - advising his customer that they will get what they pay for. "We always stress that it's an investment they're making, and if they're going to spend

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## Irrigation Sales Strategies

the money, they might as well have something that works," he stated.

Yet, Bratt cautioned irrigation contractors against pushing customers into purchasing a system or features they cannot afford. Instead, he suggested encouraging customers to start with installing a system on the front yard and saving the back yard for another time, rather than installing both at once. "We encourage salesmen not to force customers into something they can't afford, it doesn't help them or us," he discussed, offering some basic wisdom: "You don't enjoy what you can't afford."

Bratt said convincing the customer of the products and services they need for an effective system can be difficult due to the technical nature of an irrigation plan. "One obstacle is people's misconceptions of what it takes to really cover the property properly," he explained. "We're up against fly-by-night companies who don't want to hurt the client but just haven't been educated."

Strick also returned to competition as his main obstacle within the business, especially concerning the basic irrigation system structure. "It's tough to sell quality to someone because 95 percent of a sprinkler system is buried in the ground," he said. "That's the biggest obstacle - convincing a customer that your product is better than another company's product." Strick added that this problem can be solved by differentiating design and, again, avoiding the dangerous shortcuts.

**NECESSARY KEYS TO SUCCESS.** Despite numerous roadblocks along the path to selling an irrigation system, contractors rely on specific tools when playing the fast-paced and competitive sales game. By featuring what he labels as the "best materials and products in the industry," Hagen can more confidently position himself on the high end

"If **customers** are looking for a good quality system, and looking for it to be **done right**, that is the customer **we're looking for. We qualify the customer as much as they are qualifying us.**"

- **Joe Goetz**

of the price bracket and offer customers all-inclusive packages that include service based on years of experience. From there his salespeople establish relationships with customers who respect their knowledge.

"Getting your folks out there and doing a great job are probably your most successful ways of generating new business," he stated.

Goetz maintained that efficient, knowl-

(continued on page 124)

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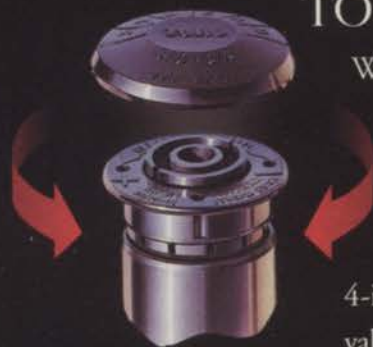
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## Irrigation Sales Strategies

(continued from page 118)

edgeable service equals satisfied customers. He ensures that phones are always manned and that customers are routed to the right contacts, resulting in quick, convenient service. "Being on time is the biggest consideration - you go with the mind that you're really providing a service, and your sale is based on knowledge," he said.

This knowledge comes into play when selling to a residential customer vs. a commercial customer. Identifying the customer's main priorities helps the salesperson develop the most effective sales pitch. "The sales pitch to a residential customer is more geared toward service because on a residential system the homeowner is the end user, and a sprinkler system is a maintenance item," he explained. "They don't want to get a sprinkler system from someone who is not going to be around next year. With commercial, you're not dealing with an end user. On commercial they're more looking at job performance, how fast can you meet deadlines,

and the quality of a sprinkler system isn't always a main issue."

Bratt focused on the importance of making a face-to-face sales visit, since property types vary in his region. "We go to the site, meet with customers and then see what the conditions are," he stressed. "It's very important we have that visual opportunity before we do it." Along with that, a detailed proposal spelling out a system's equipment will better convince a customer to choose higher quality in order to ensure longevity and satisfaction, Bratt pointed out.

**PERSONAL INTERACTION.** Bratt said human interaction, when applied within his staff, creates a domino effect that benefits customers. His open-book management policy allows salespeople to measure their progress against the company's numbers and fine-tune their sales methods accordingly. Because salespeople want to improve the company and please the managers, their tactics improve. "If

salespeople want to get brownie points with the officers of the company, they should let us hear from others that they had a chance to cut corners but didn't," he said.

In terms of pressures offered by home stores, Bratt acknowledged their presence, but again, cited interpersonal communication as a clear advantage. "I think [home stores] are here to stay, but we're just going to have to learn and do our best to educate the public about the advantages of having someone with more experience day in and day out," he stated.

For Strick, though sales policies involve any number of complex interwoven factors, he simply looks to the Golden Rule as a guide. "We have a very general business philosophy," he said. "Just treat the customers the same way you would want to be treated, no better, and no worse." **LL**

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

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# Equipment Notebook

MOWER ATTACHMENTS:

## Sulky Solutions

For Bill Wright, sulkies offer several advantages: increased productivity, lower costs, and, in some cases, salvaged relationships.

"The No. 1 one thing about sulkies is reducing fatigue," he said, since sulkies attach to walk-behind mowers and allow operators to stand. "So, we had women writing us letters thanking us for saving their marriages."

Obviously, sulkies were designed with walk-behind mowers in mind. With a sulky, operators expend less energy, explained Wright, president, Wright Mfg., Frederick, Md.

"A guy who is cutting grass in an eight-hour day, when a lot of these mowers travel at about 5 or 6 mph, can really walk between 20 and 30 miles a day," Wright said. "With a sulky, they are running the [mower] 3 or 4 mph, consistently all day long, and take less rest."



One-wheel trailing sulkies, because of their low weight, work best on gear-drive mowers. Photo: Havener Enterprises

Michael Febbie, sales manager, Landscapers Supply, Spring Valley, N.Y., agreed. He identified operator fatigue as a contractor's largest downfall, especially in a time-based industry where a higher volume of mowed property relates directly to company profit.

(continued on page 128)

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# Equipment Notebook

(continued from page 126)

"When a landscape foreman or owner sends his crew out in July's dog days, they're mowing like crazy in the morning," Febbie pointed out. "In the afternoon, they're drained after trotting behind a machine all day. If they are sent out in the morning with a sulky, mowers are productive all day long and make more money for the company."

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"With hydrostatic capability replacing belt-drive technology on walk-behind mowers in the late 1980s and early 1990s, there was increased productivity of maybe 25 percent," Wright clarified. "When sulkies were added to the equation, there was yet another 25 percent productivity gain yielding a total boost of 50 percent at the end of the day."

Although reduced fatigue is a positive feature, low costs designate a sulky as an economical alternative to riding mowers. Sulkies cost between \$100 and \$300, depend-

ing on the brand name. Wright related that companies often come in to buy their first sulky, and then return the next day for several more after realizing first-hand just how beneficial they can be.

"The fact that you can do this economically is a big driver for this phenomenon," Wright said.

Installing a sulky most often involves drilling a couple of small holes into the back of the mower, bolting on a hitch and attaching the sulky. The hitch can be removed at any time and sulkies fit onto every type of mower, although most will only fit on a hitch that matches the sulky's brand.

Kevin Giesecke, owner, Lawn-Wright Organic Lawns, Rockville, Md., has 40 to 60 walk-behind mowers in his fleet, with sulkies on almost all of them. He maintained that most, if not all, landscaping crews today utilize sulkies.

"I would be shocked if my operators didn't use sulkies," Giesecke said strongly. "I don't think there are many companies that don't use them anymore."

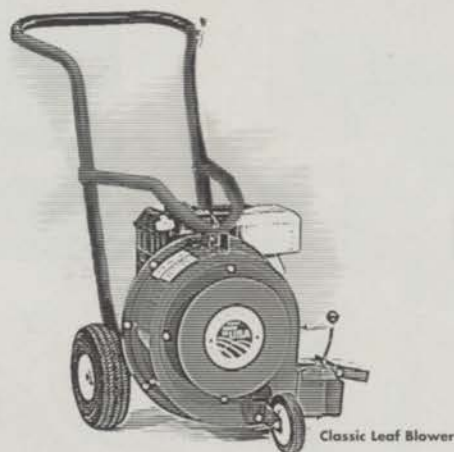
**CONSIDERING THE OPTIONS.** After deciding to purchase a sulky, an operator must consider the three primary types. Trailing sulkies have one or two wheels and swerve to the insides of turns, allowing operators to overcome momentum changes and maneuver in tight spaces. One-wheel sulkies, the lightest type, work well on gear-drive mowers, while dual-wheel trailing sulkies accommodate heavier operators and do not leave definitive lines in turf, said Chris Havener, president, Havener Enterprises, Bradley, Ill. However, Febbie noted that the dual-wheel sulky might jack-knife when trying to reverse.

Caster, or swivel-wheel, styles have two wheels and resist changes in direction and momentum more than the trailer type. Yet, they allow the operator to remain relative in position to the handlebars throughout turns. Although heavier and less maneuverable, this sulky is better equipped for larger mowers, Havener said.

Another type of sulky lacks wheels and  
(continued on page 130)

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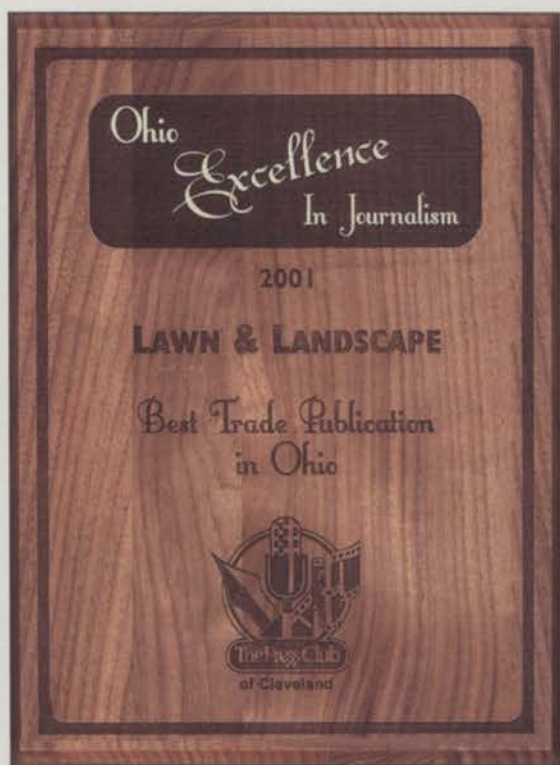
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# Equipment Notebook

(continued from page 128)

incorporates a hydraulic shock absorber so that the operator "floats" above the lawn. Febbie said this style comes in handy when customers do not want wheel tracks on their lawns.

Wright cited the trailer sulkies' ability to change directions smoothly as a clear advantage. "With the caster, the operator is the heaviest object, has momentum, and to get the operator swinging around, it requires overcoming the momentum of the operator," Wright explained. "The caster type with the operator in fixed position makes it harder to start a turn and harder to end."

Febbie backed up Wright's preference for single-wheel sulkies. "Most people who buy sulkies buy single-wheel because they're comfortable with how they operate and they are easy to maneuver," he said.

On the other hand, Havener praised the caster style for its comfort and position right behind the handlebars. He cited this style's rising popularity as a result of handlebar design changes in many walk-behinds, but added that in the end, the choice between sulkies

depends on the contractor. "It's a matter of individual preference," Havener said.

**DAY-TO-DAY BENEFITS.** All sulkies offer several other advantages, including reduced top-heaviness and a lower center of gravity, which keep the mower from tipping over when traversing hills. In addition, the small size of a walk-behind mower with a sulky translates to storing more machines at a time.

"Fifty percent more walk-behind mowers could fill the truck [with sulkies] over ride-on mowers," Wright pointed out. Further, sulkies usually lift up and attach to the handlebars so that they can be tucked away when not in use. Havener pointed to this feature as an advantage to a contractor when mowing hills. "If you get into a real steep hill situation, and you're not comfortable with the sulky, you can fold it up and you're back to walking behind," he explained.

In terms of operating risks, Wright said sulkies actually improve operator safety. "When people switch to using sulkies instead of just a walk-behind, you find a dra-

matic decrease in the number of ankle injuries," he related. "Before it wouldn't be uncommon for someone to step in a hole and twist their ankle."

Febbie asserted that sulkies pose minimal danger, and the reduced fatigue actually leads to safer conditions. "An operator who is fresher and not as fatigued is less likely to make a mistake," he clarified.

Yet, sulkies may have a few disadvantages, depending on the mowing job. Wright said a sulky might not be as efficient or necessary for smaller yards and tight spaces. However, Febbie always requires sulkies in his equipment lineup. "In my opinion, I would not allow a mower to go out without a sulky," he claimed.

Overall, Wright maintained that the productivity boost undoubtedly improves a mowing job.

"Wherever walk-behinds are, people ought to be using the stand-on sulkies," he said. "People who resist that change would not believe what they are missing in terms of what they can get done." — Kristin Mohn

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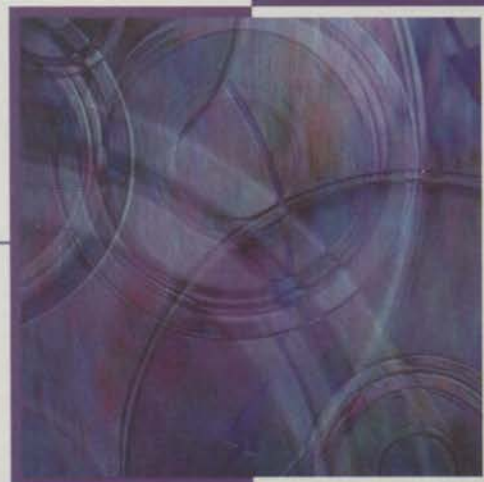
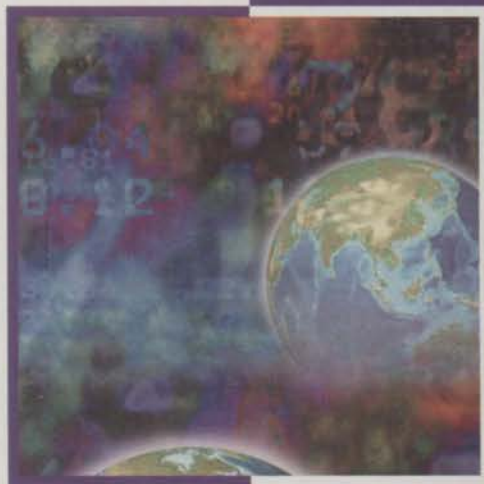
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# PERSONALIZATION



# Products

## Bobcat Midsize Series

- Expanded engine and cutting deck options can be mixed and matched
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- Features top-mounted cutter spindle with large mounting pad to protect against impact

Hydrostatic models offer choice of 15-, 17- or 21-hp Kawasaki V-Twin engines

- Offers suspended, full-floating decks in 36-, 48-, 53- and 61-inch widths
- Gear-drive models offer 5-speed transmission and five forward speeds

**Circle 200 on reader service card**

## Gandy Broadcast Spreaders

- Available in two sizes – 50- and 100-pound – in both push and tractor-tow models
- Both hoppers supported by an epoxy-coated carriage with 13-inch pneumatic tires
- Push handle models are 50H13 and 100H13; tow models are 50T13 and 100T13
- All models feature molded nylon and stainless steel metering components and enclosed gearbox
- Broadcast metering system has flow direction closures on the hopper bottom to reduce flow to right or left when desired
- Optional deflector kits available

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## Accu-Trax Degree Day Tracker

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# Products

## Sheyenne Tele-Saw Attachment

- Chain-saw attachment to Tele-Boom, a lift-arm accessory for skid steer loaders
  - Enables efficient use of skid-steer loaders for clearing, log cutting and over-head pruning
  - Hydraulics hook up quickly and provide substantial power for trimming at a height of up to 33 feet
  - Control box allows the skid-steer operator to adjust saw position, cutting angle, blade feed and more
  - Uses a .404 saw chain
  - Blade travels 90 degrees to ensure a full cut
  - Also rotates 350 degrees horizontally to prune hard-to-reach branches
- Circle 203 on reader service card

## Briggs & Stratton Fource Engine

- Designed for string trimmers and other hand-held outdoor power applications
  - Features a lubrication system that allows hand-held equipment to include 4-cycle technology
  - Provides 360 degree intermittent operation, as well as 270 degree continuous operation
  - Offers efficient starting ability and consistent power; weighs 7.8 pounds
  - Reduced emissions meet EPA emissions requirements for hand-held equipment
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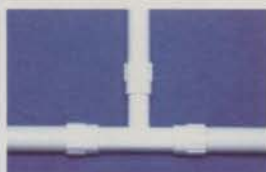


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USE READER SERVICE #86





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

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

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

### Nitrogen for Every Need

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

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

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

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

SCU, a double-coated urea, is another popular Nu-Gro product. It's used in professional lawn maintenance and as an ingredient in consumer lawn fertilizers. SCU depends on moisture, microorganisms and abrasion for release.

IB Nitrogen (isobutylidene diurea) is a very safe nitrogen source for high-maintenance turf, as well as for turf and ornamentals under irrigation. IB Nitrogen depends on moisture and particle size for its release characteristics. It is particularly well suited for horticultural use and on turf in cool, wet climates such as the Pacific Northwest.

A polymer-coated urea (PCU) is a recent addition to the Nu-Gro line of products. It enables the company to provide quality nitrogen for virtually any application.

Nu-Gro is constantly expanding its product lines in the professional lawn care, horticultural and specialty-agriculture markets. New developments include Powder Blue® ureaform and expansion of the current IB Nitrogen briquettes.

### Your Controlled-Release Nitrogen Source

While you may be familiar with Nitroform and Nutralene, you may not be familiar with the company behind them – Nu-Gro Technologies Inc.

Nu-Gro is a subsidiary of Nu-Gro America Corporation, with world headquarters in Brantford, Ontario, Canada. Nu-Gro serves its customers in the United States out of offices in Grand Rapids, Michigan. In the company's five-year history, Nu-Gro has become the largest merchant marketer and manufacturer of slow- and controlled-release nitrogens in the world. Its premium-grade specialty nitrogens are used extensively by professionals in golf course, sport turf, lawn, landscape, ornamental, nursery, forestry and land reclamation applications. Nu-Gro can meet virtually any application requiring nitrogen.

Nu-Gro is committed to environmental leadership in all of its business activities. Its products are designed to ensure maximum delivery of nutrients to plants with a minimum waste or loss to the environment. Environmental responsibility and superior products can go hand in hand.





# Products

## Morbark Model 60 Talon Debris Shear

- Designed to split and shear stumps and other bulky wood material up to 60 inches; also useful for stump removal
- Ideal for processing large material prior to grinding
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with replaceable, hard-surfaced, weld-on splitting tips

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# Products

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- Incorporates industry standard flange fittings for quick installation
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- Operates at a high speed cycle of 0.7 seconds on or off time with minimal power consumption
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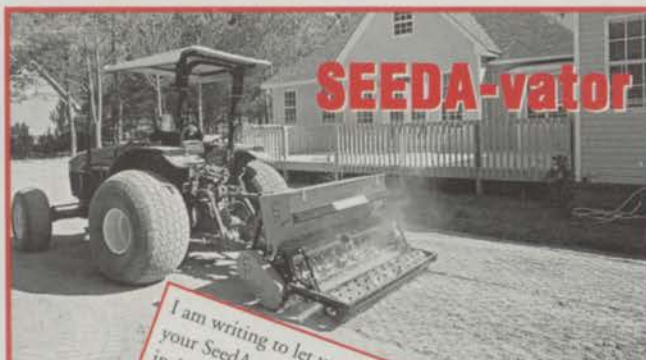
## Spectrum WatchDog 900 ET Weather Stations

- Monitors, documents and analyzes site-specific growing conditions
- When used with SpecWare 6.0 software, can be customized to let contractors manage a full spectrum of weather information using any Windows-compatible PC
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wetness, etc. can be added for an even wider site-specific information profile

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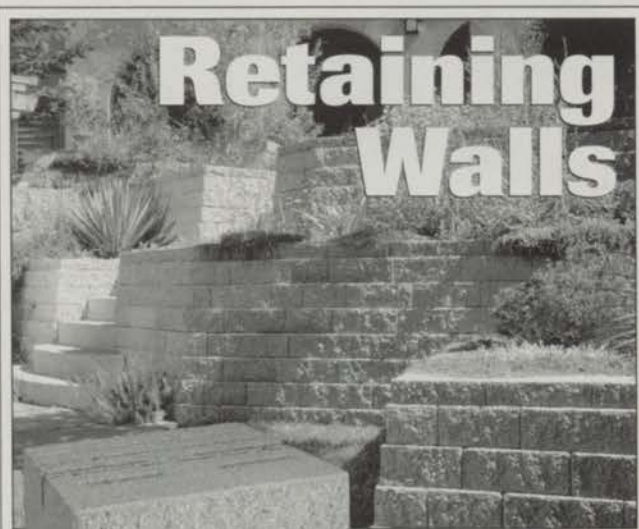


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1. What is your primary business at this location? (choose only one)

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  - 2. Chemical Lawn Care Company (excluding mowing maintenance service)
  - 3. Lawn Maintenance Contractor
  - 4. Ornamental Shrub & Tree Service
  - 5. Irrigation Contractor
  - 6. Landscape Architect
  - 7. Other Contract Services (please describe) \_\_\_\_\_

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- Manager, Director, Supt., Foreman
- Agronomist, Horticulturist
- Entomologist, Plant Pathologist
- Serviceman, Technician, Crew member
- Scientist, Researcher
- Company, Library copy only
- Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

3. What services does your business offer? (please check all that apply)

- 1. Landscape Installation
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- 3. Landscape Renovation
- 4. Mowing and related maintenance
- 5. Irrigation Installation
- 6. Irrigation Maintenance
- 7. Turf pesticide application
- 8. Ornamental/tree pesticide application
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- 10. Ornamental/tree fertilization
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- 12. Snow Removal
- 13. Interiorscape
- 14. Other \_\_\_\_\_

4. How many full-time (year-round) employees do you employ?

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5. What year was your business founded?

\_\_\_\_\_

6. What were your company's gross revenues for 2000?

- 1. Less than \$50,000
- 2. \$50,000 to \$99,999
- 3. \$100,000 to \$199,999
- 4. \$200,000 to \$299,999
- 5. \$300,000 to \$499,999
- 6. \$500,000 to \$699,999
- 7. \$700,000 to \$999,999
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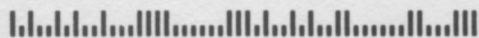
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# Products

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- Attachments may be added or removed simply with the Dingo quick-attach system
- Four-pump, independent hydraulic suspension allows the operator to direct power where and when it is needed
- Dedicated auxiliary hydraulic circuit provides 11.2 gpm of flow at 3,000 psi of hydraulic power
- "Skid-steer" style turning and 41-inch



- width allow operators to easily maneuver into tight areas
- Track drive features dual Kevlar reinforced rubber tracks that provide full ground engagement in all conditions for optimum digging power
  - Low ground pressure minimizes damage to existing grounds and work surfaces
  - Walk-behind operator position provides operators with 360-degree visibility
  - Three-joystick control system makes the unit easy to operate for experienced and first-time users
- Circle 210 on reader service card**

## STIHL BR 420 Backpack Blower

- Features a 56.5 cc engine delivering air speeds of up to 180 mph
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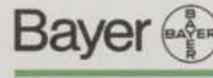
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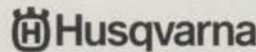
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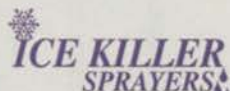
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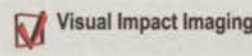
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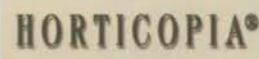
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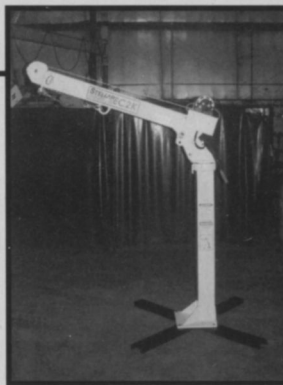


# Products

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- to 7-foot maximum reach
  - Total weight of EC2K crane is approximately 240 pounds and mounts on rear corner of a service body
- Circle 212 on reader service card**

## Orthene Turf Tree & Ornamental Spray 97

- Spray does not require irrigation after application
- Despite water restrictions, product allows lawn care professionals and turf managers to control insects like mole crickets, worms, chinch bugs and fleas
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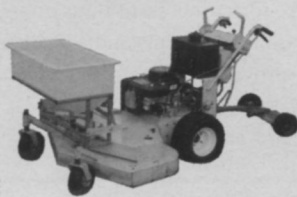
## Loeering Skid Steer Attachments

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# Products

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- Acclaim Extra features a water-based formulation resulting in flexible timing and a low rate of application
- Finale postemergence herbicide controls

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- Finale produces visible results in one to four days



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- Software developed specifically for irrigation contractors
- Enables contractors to maximize profits through improved organization and additional billable services such as prepaid service contracts
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- Can include information such as addresses, directions, balances due, billing information, service and payment history, customer proximity and more

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USE READER SERVICE #106

## Cover Story

(continued from page 45)

sides, explain what was done on a client's property and provide seasonal tips and educational notes on lawn care. Robertson hopes he not only teaches clients with these forms, but also shows them the right tasks they need to complete to enhance their service, such as proper watering and mowing habits.

In addition to service sheets, Jack Robertson Lawn Care distributes *Turf Times*, a monthly newsletter that gives clients input on current turf diseases, insects or drought. Robertson said he also distributes *Turf Times Extras* on a weekly basis, particularly if there were problems in the area. "We can turn this around fairly quickly," he explained. "I'll come in with an idea, I'll have my office manager type it up and by noon we'll have a *Turf Times Extra*."

Robertson said these sheets are helpful during grub season because "there is nothing more frustrating than grubs," he pointed out, adding that the sheets also help convince clients when the problem isn't grub-related. "After clients have paid us for two-thirds of the year and then they find brown spots on their lawns in late summer, they aren't happy. It's not fun to go through a summer where the lawns are brown, but we always need to communicate with clients. We want to tell them why things are brown before they call – we try and be proactive."

**FUTURE FOCUS.** Robertson identified business organization as his company's greatest weakness. "It's a double-edged sword," he said. "Because of the way we spend extra time doing business with customers and educating them, we tend to jump around and aren't as efficient as we could be at service. Our days aren't about doing X number of jobs per day. Because of our level of care, when you're a customer and you call in, you're at the top of our list. All of my employees have the flexibility to solve client problems during the day and take care of business. But everyday, we're trying harder to focus on rescheduling the rest of the clients who may have been bumped down on the priority list due to those calls.

"Routing and scheduling organization isn't as efficient as I want it to be, but we have to find a way to strike a balance between this and servicing the customer," he continued.

Finding employees also is a challenge for Jack Robertson Lawn Care, and will probably continue as one, Robertson said. "Keep-

ing and finding people has become tougher the past few years," he remarked. "The days of getting a \$7 or \$8 applicator are over – it takes more money and more attention."

For retention, Robertson offers employees unlimited flexibility. He gives them total control of their time off instead of one or two weeks of vacation time. "They generally stick within the normal vacation time anyway," Robertson said. "It's important for them to be there for their son's soccer game or daughter's dance recital and I feel strongly about letting them take care of family issues when they need to and then come back to work. I think just by being given this extra flexibility and control, they feel as if they are treated fairly and are getting a bonus, if you will."

In addition to focusing on employee attraction and retention, Robertson wants to continue solid growth, and even accelerate it slightly. The company grew 12 percent in 1999, 15 percent in 2000 and is looking for another 10 to 15 percent in 2001.

Robertson's long-term goal is to add two or three additional services, including tree and shrub care, which he will offer within the next two years because he already has the client base to support it. Small design/build jobs, irrigation installation and holiday lighting are other options.

Robertson admits that he is a typical procrastinator when it comes to taking steps toward adding services because the company has done well focusing on its niches. "I tend to research these services to death and then I don't follow through with adding them on," he explained. "But I'm determined to stick with this growth goal, and add-on a few more services as soon as we have the client base to support them."

The reason Robertson is stepping cautiously into adding services is because he learned early on that he should know his limitations. Robertson said he would rather do his research and be smart about expansion, instead of risking dollars to perform jobs improperly and, therefore, inefficiently. "My core business is what I have to do my best to protect," he stated. "We'll provide other services exactly the way we provide lawn care – when we can do it effectively." **LL**

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



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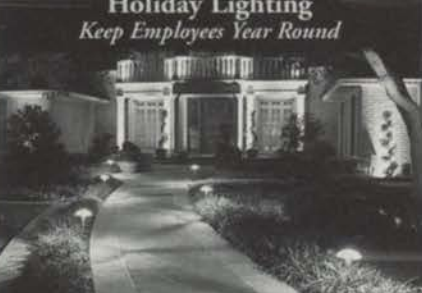
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To ensure these residential clients have a chance to send us their comments, we enclose a "How Are We Doing?" card with each monthly statement. This way, not only do our customers get a chance to grade our service without calling us, but they also can mark off any additional services that interest them.

To make these cards work, we keep them simple, informative and eye-catching, changing their color monthly so they grab clients' attention. People are busy and they will not fill out and return the card if it requires too much work. We also use these cards to promote seasonal specials. For instance, in June we had the cards on a green sheet of paper and added a bright pink label reminding clients to schedule their grub applications. For fall, we might remind our customers about our aeration special. On the cards, we ask customers to rate the quality of service they have received as excellent, good, fair or needs improvement. Then, we leave room for comments.

These cards also have become a great way for us to

## FIVE KEYS TO "How Are We Doing?" Cards

1. Include these cards with each monthly statement.
2. Keep them simple, informative and eye-catching.
3. Use the cards to promote seasonal specials and additional services.
4. Make managers accountable for resolving any problems that arise in a timely fashion.
5. Make the cards inexpensive to produce by using colored paper and a copy machine.



The Perficut Team. Photo: Perficut

promote the services we provide. At the bottom of the card, we ask customers to indicate which additional services they would like to be contacted about in the future. Then we list choices for them to check, including mowing, irrigation installation, irrigation repair, lighting, tree trimming/pruning, custom landscape design, aeration (spring and fall), lawn fertilization, tree/shrub application and holiday lighting.

Of course, these cards only work if customers take the time to fill them out. We make sure to ask for their name and date on the card so that any comments or requests for additional services can be dealt with promptly. In any company there can be problems with service, but solving them quickly is the key to customer satisfaction.

These cards are sent to all customers with a return envelope that does not include postage. We receive about 30 percent response monthly. By the 20<sup>th</sup> of each month, we have received most of these cards back. As they come in we enter them in the database and the appropriate manager receives a copy of the card immediately. All managers are responsible for resolving any problems in a timely manner. I also receive a list of all good and bad cards and have a chance to go over any concerns with my management team. Many times these will be compliments to managers or crew leaders, which we post in the office.

We use a copy machine, and print two cards on each sheet of colored paper, so the cards are relatively inexpensive to produce.

In addition to the cards, we also incorporated a call report system, where all office calls are entered into a database and every Monday each division manager receives a report of all calls logged the week before. This allows managers the chance to double check that all calls were returned. I also receive the call report and have a chance to go over any calls that concern me with my management team.

Then, our office manager prints a list of the landscape and irrigation jobs completed during the month and we send a thank-you card along with the invoice. This level of customer service sets us apart from the competition. — Kory Ballard **LL**

The author is president of Perficut Lawn & Landscape ([www.perficut.com](http://www.perficut.com)), Des Moines, Iowa.



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