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

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

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

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

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FEBRUARY 2002

"The competitor to be feared is one who never bothers about you at all, but goes on making his own business better."

— Henry Ford

Looking in the Mirror at TruGreen

I went to the top of the landscape industry in December, and the view is interesting, to say the least. "Where is the top?" you ask. Memphis, Tenn., of course, and the headquarters of TruGreen-ChemLawn and TruGreen LandCare, which, collectively, generated about \$1.5 billion in green industry revenue in 2001. That's a lot of green, indeed.

The purpose of the visit was an exclusive interview with Don Karnes, president of the TruGreen Companies. Obviously, there has been widespread talk about TruGreen in the last few years. Here was

a dynamic chance to learn about the challenges TruGreen has had since its acquisition of LandCare USA more than two years ago, find out if he plans to start buying landscape companies again soon and explore the significance of its decision to begin marketing through Home Depot stores. Much of Karnes' candid and intriguing answers can be found beginning on page 144, with the rest of the interview to appear in our March issue.

But perhaps the most interesting part of our two-hour conversation was the glimpse I got of what life is like for the industry's largest company.

As I shared with Karnes, who comes off as quite the relaxed, personable and approachable executive, the TruGreen name inspires emotional reactions from so many lawn care and landscape companies alike. The extent of the criticism of this company makes it seem as though contractors view the company as an industry-wide piñata, and they're each happy to take their swings.

As I've said in this space previously, some of the intensity of this criticism is due to TruGreen's broad presence across the country – more than 400 locations, all told. Business people will always be happy to take shots at their competitors, and TruGreen represents the competition more than anyone else, so there's more criticism of it.

But how severe can this company's flaws really be if it can grow to the extent it has and maintain the profitability levels that leave so many observers drooling? To his credit, Karnes doesn't deny the company has some problems, "just like any other business," he pointed out. But he didn't offer any excuses for these struggles, which he easily could have. Last spring did little to help lawn care companies, labor became more expensive for everyone and the company was integrating close to \$1 billion in acquisitions before the sale of its construction work to Environmental Industries late last year.

The one theme that Karnes kept coming back to was the importance of "the person we all see in the mirror each morning." That image represents his biggest competition, he pointed out, which may seem strange to many. But from where this 24-year-veteran of the lawn and landscape industry sits, he thinks that any business focused on delivering quality customer service, taking care of its employees and focusing on profitability will succeed. He obviously has to be aware of competitive threats – what company has more competitors than TruGreen, after all? But his continued focus on what goes on inside his own company and his refusal to get caught up worrying about those things he can't control represents a powerful lesson for those of you also interested in reaching the tallest peaks one day. That just may be the biggest reason TruGreen will successfully overcome the obstacles it faces. ■



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Getting outside advisers and organizations has been a weakness of mine. Any advice on who I should be actively involved with and how I can work with them?

There are many external resources that can help you grow your business. In fact, much of the work performed for your business is oftentimes done by outside organizations. The advantage in using these individuals is that they are experts in their field and you do not have to have them on the payroll. You can use them when you want.

I'll cover a few of the obvious advisers and discuss some items of importance regarding them.

First, the lawyers—a necessary evil as they say. My advice is really simple. Make sure you deal with a firm that has expertise on a variety of legal issues. Most entrepreneurs give their business to a close friend or relative. Oftentimes they use a small office—one or two lawyers—because of lower fees. The problem with this scenario is the fact that very few attorneys know all aspects of the law and they have to learn it on your nickel. With a larger firm, you get more opportunities to use specialists. They may charge a little more but the expertise is worth it. Remember that all fees are negotiable, and you can get a final cost for your work if you ask.

Be careful, though, not to get the junior attorney right out of law school. Meet with your contact and discuss this issue openly. Some final advice: Help your attorney with any investigation needed for a case. It could save you lots of money.

Your accounting firm is also an important part of your team. Unless you are doing specialized deals like acquisitions, for example, a generalist with a small- to medium-sized firm is usually sufficient. The larger firms simply are not interested in the small accounts.

The biggest mistake I see contractors make when dealing with their accountant is that they rely on them too much in advising them on how to run their business. Accountants are not operators. They are numbers people. They get your data that helps you run the business. If you do outsource your accounting work, insist on the receipt of timely information. If they can't get financials back to you by the right date then you need to hire someone else or someone in-house. The numbers are just too important. Work closely with them to set up a system that helps you manage your business. Profit center accounting and accrual-based recognition are absolutes.

Your banker is also a key player on the team. I would advise small businesses to deal with a small community bank as opposed to a large, national company. It will be vital that you get to know the person making any lending decisions. Oftentimes that is a big challenge for the larger organizations. It will also be important to ensure that the information you provide them is timely and clear. It will be in your best interest to keep these folks informed about your business and in this, including the seasonal demands on cash flow. Managing their expectations is important.

Risk management consultants for a small business are important. Realistically, you're talking about insurance brokers in your environment. Some simple advice—Shop their rates at least every other year, but try to maintain a relationship with one broker if possible. Deal with a broker who can represent a variety of lines, not just one company. Generally, they can shop rates for you and get the best cost. Large firms do have an advantage in pricing, simply because of their buying power, and this could help you.

There are consultants for just about everything you need in business: marketing, advertising, human resources—these are just a few. In the landscape industry, there are many business consultants who know a lot about a variety of topics, and I recommend using them. Some have been in the industry and know it well. Others have worked with so many companies that they can bring to your firm the best practices of a lot of organizations. I used these folks and found them to be a huge resource. The investment you make is usually multiplied many times over.

As you can see, there are many directions to go concerning advisers. The best piece of advice I can give you is do your homework, get references of their work, negotiate their fees, create expectations and manage the relationship like you would one of your own employees. **□**



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 1996. Readers with questions for Minor can fax them to Lawn & Landscape at 216/961-0364 or e-mail them to twest@lawnandlandscape.com.

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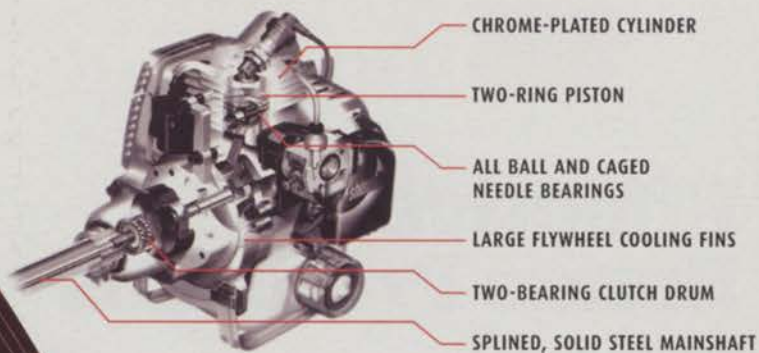
A person is shown in a dark, red-tinted environment, possibly a field or a forest at dusk or dawn. The person is wearing a dark, long-sleeved shirt and dark pants. They are holding a long, thin staff or spear that extends from the bottom right towards the center. The background is dark with some faint outlines of trees or structures. The overall mood is somber and mysterious.

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Often, pay decisions are made in haste and without careful consideration for the outcome or the potential pitfalls. This is especially true when it comes to designing bonus programs. Many times, fundamental components are overlooked during the design phase of the program.

TWELVE STEPS. To ensure your next bonus program (or update to an existing plan) doesn't miss the mark, consider these important ingredients:

1. *Define exactly what you wish to accomplish with the program.* For example, is the overall goal to increase sales of a particular product or in a specific area? Is the goal to reduce costs? To improve quality? To curtail turnover? To increase profit margins? To build long-term buy-in from

employees or to achieve a short-term goal? Whichever it is, specifically and clearly define it.

2. *Do your homework.* Ensure that your total compensation package (base pay, bonuses, commissions and benefits) is competitive with positions in your area and industry. Consider all components of a compensation package. For ex-



The author is president of Seawright & Associates, Inc., a consulting firm located in Wintet Park, Fla. She can be reached via e-mail at jpileggi@seawright.com or at 407/645-2433.

ample, if your benefits program is generous comparatively, your bonus program may be more conservative.

3. *Ensure that employees have the ability to impact bottom-line bonus dollars.* For example, if a manager's bonus is tied to reducing costs, does he or she actually have the authority to make decisions that lead to lower costs?

4. *One size does not fit all.* Don't assume that your competition's bonus program will work at your company. Businesses measure work, customer satisfaction, quality, productivity, expenses and sales differently. Plus, pay and opportunities for sales differs among organizations.

5. *Consider a tiered bonus program.* Tiered bonus programs are effective and can encourage long-term employment or greater productivity. For example, you could increase the bonus potential as the length of service increases or as sales increase.

6. *Ensure your program actually works.* Be certain that your bonus program translates into tangible actions that improve the business and make sure the goals are realistic. Listen to your employees. If the program doesn't work, fix it.


7. *Consider state and federal wage and hour regulations.* Bonuses that are classified as "non-discretionary" must include overtime if they are earned by employees who are nonexempt from overtime. There are ways to structure bonuses to avoid overtime liability.

8. *Define and document the parameters of your program.* Include which positions are eligible, the length of service required before participation, what will happen if an employee separates from the company before the bonus is paid but after it is earned, when the bonus will be paid, any disqualification factors, etc.

9. *Don't forget important disclaimers.* Your written bonus program should always include an "at will" disclaimer reminding employees that compensation and employment are not guaranteed, promised or contracted for any length of time and are subject to change, with or without notice, at the sole discretion of the owners.

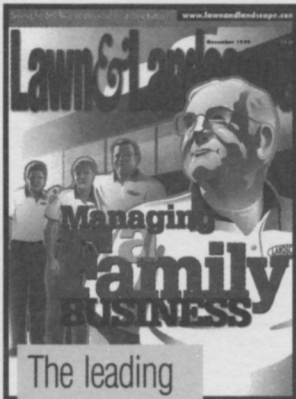
10. *Communicate, communicate, communicate.* Train managers on administering the program and how to affect the results. Provide employees with information and reports showing the progress toward the goals. Define the targets. Show employees the financial results to eliminate questions about results. Enthusiastically sell your program.

11. *Update your program periodically.* There's nothing worse than an antiquated, meaningless bonus program. If your business conditions change, reevaluate your program and make changes if necessary. Be sure to communicate changes to employees well in advance of the effective date.

12. *Remember, pay is only one piece of the puzzle.* If you want to impact the bottom line, you must invest in people and not just with money, but also with recognition and rewards. People work for more than just a paycheck. 

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- 11. Formulator
- 12. Manufacturer

IV. OTHERS ALLIED TO THE FIELD:

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

2. What best describes your title?

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

3. What services does your business offer? (please check all that apply)

- 1. Landscape Installation
- 2. Landscape Maintenance
- 3. Landscape Renovation
- 4. Mowing and related maintenance
- 5. Irrigation Installation
- 6. Irrigation Maintenance
- 7. Turf pesticide application
- 8. Ornamental/tree pesticide application
- 9. Turf fertilization
- 10. Ornamental/tree fertilization
- 11. Tree Pruning
- 12. Snow Removal
- 13. Interiorscape
- 14. Other _____

4. How many full-time (year-round) employees do you employ?

5. What year was your business founded?

6. What were your company's gross revenues for 2000?

- 1. Less than \$50,000
- 2. \$50,000 to \$99,999
- 3. \$100,000 to \$199,999
- 4. \$200,000 to \$299,999
- 5. \$300,000 to \$499,999
- 6. \$500,000 to \$699,999
- 7. \$700,000 to \$999,999
- 8. \$1,000,000 to \$1,999,999
- 9. \$2,000,000 to \$3,999,999
- 10. \$4,000,000 to \$6,999,999
- 11. \$7,000,000 or more

7. Please indicate your approximate business mix:

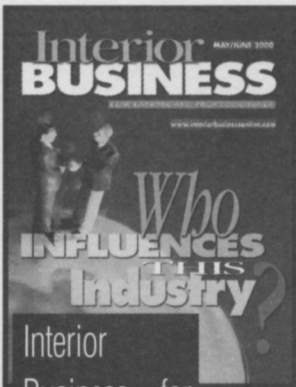
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- 2. Commercial _____ %
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2/02

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

III. DISTRIBUTOR/MANUFACTURER

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

IV. OTHERS ALLIED TO THE FIELD:

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

2. What best describes your title?

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

Thoughts for the NEW YEAR

ECONOMIC CONCERNS

Recession-Proof Your Business

This winter, perfecting marketing strategies can build business momentum, according to Roger Feit, consultant, Growing Tree Consultants, Montauk, N.Y.

"During the last major recession of the 1980s, while many tree companies were going out of business or complaining about not enough work, I raised my prices and took on 40 percent more work than the year before," Feit enthused. "What brought the business in was marketing strategies

that I spent a lot of time developing, testing and tweaking. Some marketing programs were really easy to implement while others were more complex and took more time and planning."

To proactively fish for business in a sluggish market, Feit said he focused on three marketing areas: customer nurturing, mailers and strategic alliances.

Contractors should build tight relationships with 90 percent of their client base, Feit suggested. "Record a lot of personal information about them," he said. "Ask about their hobbies and passion and their children."

After spending time visiting clients, Feit recommended contractors immediately take a few minutes jotting down the important information on the inside of clients' folders. In addition to personal reminders,

(continued on page 31)

What business area do you most want to improve in 2002?

Increasing my customer base	32%
Training/hiring skilled labor	24%
Improving systems, i.e. accounting, scheduling	18%
Following budgets more carefully	13%
Making a profit	13%

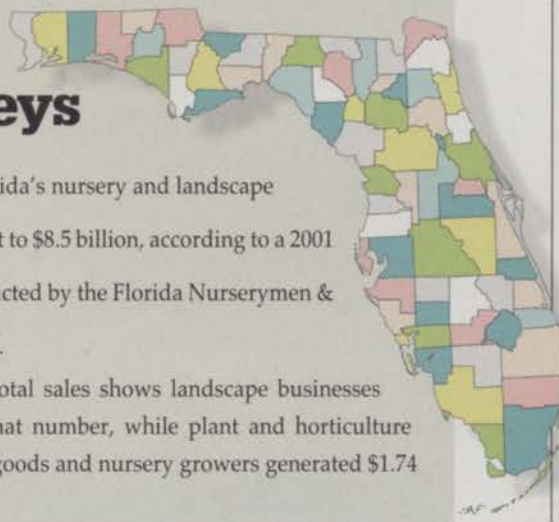
Source: www.lawnandlandscape.com

Uncertainty abounds heading into 2002, and contractors are focused on different areas. When asked what part of their business they most want to improve in the new year, 32 percent said boosting the customer base matters most. This was followed by the ever-present focus on hiring and training skilled labor (24 percent) and improving their business systems (18 percent). The financial side of the business was well represented as well – both following a budget (13 percent) and, over course, enjoying higher profitability (13 percent) make the list.

Much of the uncertainty for the new years stems from concerns about the economy, as 31 percent of respondents to a separate *Lawn & Landscape* Online poll said they think new sales will be their biggest challenge in 2002.

REGIONAL REPORT

Florida's Industry Keys



ORLANDO – Since 1997, Florida's nursery and landscape industry has grown 44 percent to \$8.5 billion, according to a 2001 economic impact study conducted by the Florida Nurserymen & Growers Association (FNGA).

The breakdown of 2000 total sales shows landscape businesses generating \$3.11 billion of that number, while plant and horticulture retailers sold \$3.64 billion in goods and nursery growers generated \$1.74 billion in plant sales.

The study also reveals total nursery and landscape industry wages and salaries, which amounted to \$2.91 billion in 2000. Employment within the industry totaled approximately 170,000 jobs.

The only factor that kept Florida's landscape industry from growing higher was the drought, reported the study, which was funded jointly by the University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences and FNGA. Nursery and landscape businesses had the potential to net an additional \$245 million in sales had the ongoing drought and water use restrictions not been factors.

Market Trends

IN THE NEWS

Syngenta, Bayer Settle Patent Disputes

BASEL, Switzerland, and LEVERKUSEN, Germany – The legal battle between Syngenta Crop Protection and Bayer over thiamethoxam patents is over after the two companies reached an agreement, the terms of which include Syngenta paying Bayer \$120 million for full access to crop protection and related markets worldwide.

Thiamethoxam, a class of neonicotinoid insecticides, is the active ingredient in two of Syngenta's products – Meridian for lawn and golf applications and Flagship for ornamental applications. Bayer had said its initial patent and a second patent granted May 15, 2001, both covered the thiamethoxam class, so Syngenta shouldn't have been allowed to use the product to directly compete against Bayer's imidacloprid-based product, Merit, which is also for lawn and golf applications.

Association NEWS

The **Professional Lawn Care Association of America** named its new officers and directors at its annual meeting in Tampa, Fla.. The officers are: Bill Hoopes, president; Jon Cundiff, president-elect; Chuck McIntire, vice president; Jim Campanella, secretary/treasurer; and Michael Kernaghan, immediate past president. The directors are Ewald Altstadt, Dave Armitage, John Bass, Rick Beard, Dan Cheslock, John Gibson, Todd Graus, Louis Kobus Jr. and Gina Neher. Associate directors are Mike Dietrich, Gilbert Pena and Jennifer Remsberg.

The **Southern Nursery Association (SNA)** presented the 2001 SNA Slater Wight Memorial Award to Dr. Michael Dirr, University of Georgia professor of horticulture. This annual award is presented to an individual who has made a significant contribution to the advancement of the industry in the South and to the association.

The **New York State Turfgrass Association** Association contributed \$2,000 in support of reference materials for students of Delhi College's golf, turf management and landscape programs.

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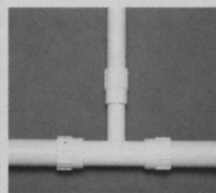
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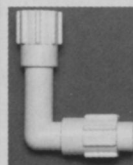
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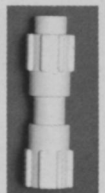
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USE READER SERVICE #54

USE READER SERVICE #55

People

Syngenta announced that **Bob Woods**, chairman of Syngenta Corp., recently assumed responsibility for Syngenta Crop Protection in North America.

RBISport, a division of the RBI Companies, announced the addition of **John Schedler** as sport facility coordinator.

The Toro Co., irrigation division, named **Leo Lovato** managing director, sales and marketing.

Bill Keneipp joined Ewing Irrigation as a turfgrass specialist.

Agrotain hired **Nick Rhodes** as regional manager.

PlantAmerica named **Lee Pryor** as chief executive officer.

Kobelco promoted **Ron Hargrave** from general manager, sales, to vice president, sales and marketing operations, and **Greg Ballwel** to general manager, North American sales.

Hortika appointed **Gus Jaworsky** to senior account executive for Oklahoma and Arkansas, and **Carlos Cabrera** to account executive for southeastern Florida.

Hadco named **Chris Hammelef** as general manager and **Bud Austin** as irrigation sales manager.

Stellar Industries promoted **Jeff Horstman** to the customer service department.

Profile Products appointed **Larry Jones** and **Bruce Lichlyter** to regional manager positions for the company's erosion control products.



Hargrave (top)
Woods (bottom)

In July 2001, the Board of Patent Appeals and Interferences decided that all claims contained in Bayer's initial patent were invalid because the product compounds were different from those described. But Bayer believed it was still positioned favorably because of its second patent.

"Reaching an agreement was not easy but we are convinced that this is in the best interest of our customers," said Jochen Wulff, president and chief executive officer of Bayer's crop protection division.

"We are pleased to have resolved these complex issues," added John Atkin, chief operating officer, Syngenta Crop Protection.

ACQUISITION NEWS

Engledow Adds Irrigation Service

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-Tim Clark, Executive Lawn & Landscape

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USE READER SERVICE #58

Market Trends

Calendar of Events

TO ENSURE

that your meeting date is published, send an announcement at least 12 weeks in advance to Kristin Mohn, *Lawn & Landscape Calendar*, 4012 Bridge Ave., Cleveland, OH 44113. You can also fax or email the information to Mohn's attention at 216/961-0364 or kmohn@gje.net.

FEB. 15-16 Jacksonville Horticultural Trade Show, Jacksonville, Fla. Contact: 904/292-1117.

FEB. 15-16 PLCAA Management Forum, Charlotte, N.C. Contact: 800/458-3466.

FEB. 17-19 2002 *Lawn & Landscape* School of Management, Charlotte, N.C. Contact: 800/456-0707.

FEB. 18-22 Cornell Turfgrass Management Short Course, Westchester County, N.Y. Contact: 607/255-1792.

FEB. 19-20 Southern Illinois Grounds Maintenance School, Collinsville, Ill. Contact: 618/692-9434.

FEB. 19, 26 Associated Landscape Contractors of Massachusetts 2002 Winter Study Course, Waltham, Mass. Contact: 508/653-3373.

FEB. 20-21 California Landscape Contractors Association Landscape Industry Show, Long Beach, Calif. Contact: 916/448-2522.

FEB. 20-22 Landscape Contractors Association Winter Workshop 2002, Bethesda, Md. Contact: 301/948-0810.

FEB. 20-23 Association of Professional Landscape Designers 2002 Winter Conference, Austin, Texas. Contact: 717/238-9780.

FEB. 22-24 Christmas Decor national franchisee conference, Dallas, Texas. Contact: 800/687-9551.

FEB. 25 New York State Turfgrass Association Southeast Regional Conference, Suffern, N.Y. Contact: 800/873-8873.

FEB. 25-MARCH 1 International Erosion Control Association 33rd Annual Conference and Expo, Orlando, Fla. Contact: 970/879-8563.

FEB. 25-26 Nebraska Nursery and Landscape Association landscape design training workshop, Lincoln, Neb. Contact: 402/554-3752.

FEB. 26-28 Southern California Procurement and Use of Compost in Turfgrass and Landscape Plantings Workshop, Montebello, San Bernardino and Cathedral City, Calif. Contact: 800/500-7282.

FEB. 26-28 Western PA Conference & Trade Show, Monroeville, Pa. Contact: 724/837-1402.

FEB. 27 New Jersey Landscape Contractors Association 2002 Show, Secaucus, N.J. Contact: 201/664-6310.

FEB. 28 The Connecticut Grounds Keepers Association Conference and Trade Show, Hartford, Conn. Contact: 203/699-69912.

MARCH 3-5 New England Turfgrass Conference & Show, Providence, R.I. Contact: 401/841-5490.

MARCH 4-5 New York Nursery & Landscape Seminar & Show, Syracuse, N.Y. Contact: 315/476-1307.

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(continued on page 26)

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USE READER SERVICE #16

Market Trends

(continued from page 24)

"We are enhancing our ability to offer truly comprehensive horticultural management to our clients," said President Ed Engledow. "Our combined expertise is a crucial customer resource."

Derrick Donnella, founder of Irrigation Specialists, will manage all irrigation operations at Engledow. "The fit is a natural one for everyone involved," Donnella stated. "We share a common concern for our customers and employees, for the quality of our work, and the desire to be the absolute best at what we do."

BUSINESS BASICS

Motivating Factors

DALLAS – Understanding the factors that motivate any one individual begins with the knowledge of the factors that motivate every individual, according to Kevin Kehoe, owner, Kehoe & Co., Laguna Niguel, Calif., who spoke at the Associated Landscape Contractors of America's Masters in Management conference, Dallas, Texas, Jan. 11-12.



L&L Book Report

THE E-MYTH

by Michael Gerber

Many entrepreneurs get trapped in their businesses and don't create the systems to allow their companies to run without their full participation. Instead of building replicable models that train employees to manage responsibilities, they create people-powered environments that require constant watch.

Michael Gerber's *E-Myth* discusses the "entrepreneurial myth," hashing out various business personalities and defining ways to run a business without letting it run you.

"A lot of small business owners get into the landscape business, and the com-

pany can't operate without them," said Barney Naylor, owner, Naylor Landscape Management, Kalamazoo, Mich. "The business is a representation of you, but it has to be able to operate without you."

Naylor recognized that many green industry entrepreneurs get trapped in the technician role, aiming for high production goals that keep them in the field. While doing this, they neglect their management role and the passion that first influenced them to start their own venture.

Naylor recommends the book to any small business owner – the scenarios, personality profiles, corporate models and suggestions are insightful and inspiring, he said. "Ordinary people can do extraordinary things if they have the right environment around them," he noted. – **Kristen Hampshire**

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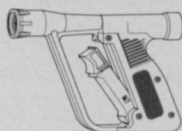
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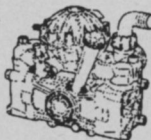


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Market Trends

During the business seminar, Kehoe highlighted 10 out of 30 factors that employees identified as ones that directly influenced their motivation and performance. In order of importance, they are: nature of the work, inclusion in the company, recognition, job security, money, growth, advancement in the company, working conditions, a good boss and benefits.

Half of these factors are tied directly to motivation, meaning employees' perfor-

MISSION STATEMENT

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

mance will dwindle if they are not confident in their current employers' abilities to offer them, Kehoe explained. Those factors include advancement in the company, nature of the work, growth, inclusion in the com-

pany and recognition. The other five factors (job security, money, working conditions, a good boss and benefits) are satisfaction-related, Kehoe said, explaining that if these issues are not dealt with at work, employees typically will leave their current companies in search of a place where they can make more money or have a better relationship with their boss, for instance.

When it comes to landscape foremen, Kehoe said the top two satisfiers, besides money, are working conditions and a good boss.

COMPANY CHALLENGES

All in the Family

Nearly 90 percent of American businesses are family owned or controlled, according to the Institute for Family-Owned Businesses at the University of Southern Maine, but

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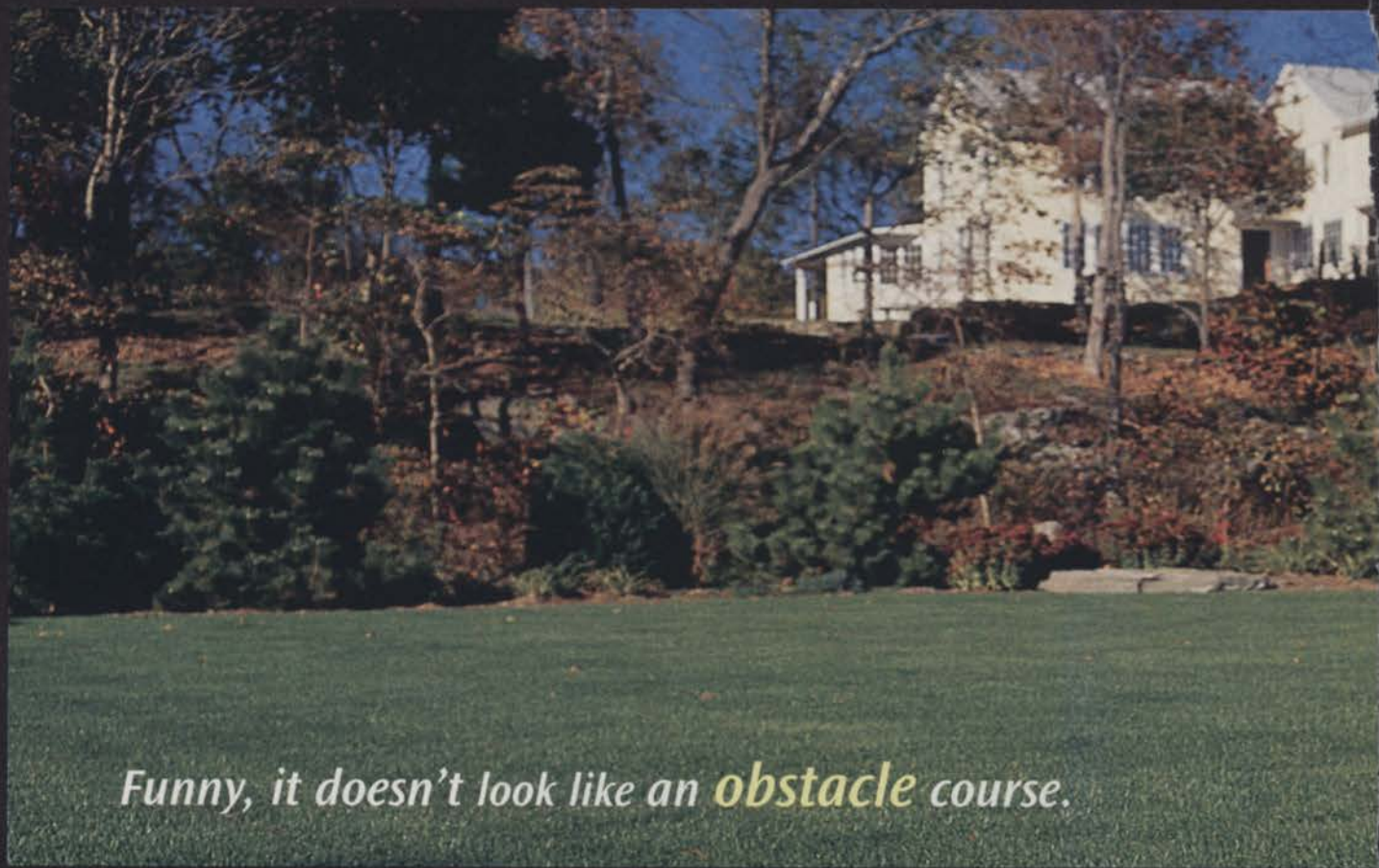
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Market Trends

Mattingly's MESSAGE

EDITOR'S NOTE: Every month, industry consultant Jack Mattingly will offer suggestions on key tasks for contractors to focus on. Here are his February thoughts.

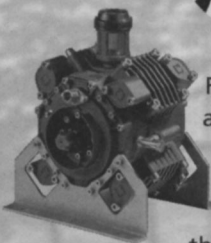
Contractors in the Midwest and North only have a few weeks before spring clean-ups commence. And those in the Sun Belt might actually be experiencing an increase in workload as the snowbirds arrive for the winter. With time running out, contractors need to consider the following areas to make sure they are well organized and prepared for spring:

- Involve your employees when compiling this year's financial budget. Ask the supervisors to give their best "guesstimate" as to how much labor and materials they will require in upcoming months. Also, obtain their input relative to vehicles, equipment, tools, etc. By involving them in the budgeting process, you will achieve buy-in, which will make it easier when you hold them accountable to the budgets.
- Solicit qualified referrals from your existing clients. Supervisors and managers should call clients or, preferably, stop by and see them. Your objective is to increase your business and sign new agreements before spring. Further, track your efforts via a chart on the wall listing all your clients, the com-

pany contact for each client, and results and comments along with the dates of these occurrences.

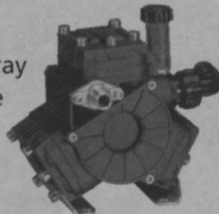
- Aggressively seek greater efficiency and lower costs. Develop a simple form that enables employees to give their opinion in two areas: 1. "List the things we did well last year," and 2. "Provide suggestions on how we can improve our efficiencies and lower our costs." You'll be pleasantly surprised at the feedback you receive. As a company, determine the action you want to take. Assign a person to be responsible for each improvement implementation and determine a completion date.
- Continue shop duties during this time of year. Are you going through all equipment and ensuring it is ready to go? Break it down in small bites such as "complete maintenance on all 61-inch walk-behind mowers by Feb. 23rd."
- Be prepared. In this economy, operation efficiency is critical. Remember, the competition will not go away.

The author is a green industry consultant with Mattingly Consulting. He can be reached at 770/517-9476 or online at www.mattinglyconsulting.com



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USE READER SERVICE #61

USE READER SERVICE #62

(continued from page 27)

only 30 percent of them survive through the second generation and only 13 percent survive into the third generation.

During an exercise to develop leadership skills to help family businesses succeed, two consultants for the University of Toledo Center for Family Business, Barbara Gill and Dale Seymour of Seymour and Associates/MassMutual abstracted Stephen Covey's *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* and suggested that family businesses who master these good habits will graduate from independence to interdependence, achieving long-term business success. Their adaptations of the Seven Habits are:

- *Be proactive.* Assume personal responsibility and establish a personal vision for the future of the firm, its owner and employees.
- *Begin with the end in mind.* Decide what successors should know ahead of time.
- *Prioritize.*
- *Think win-win on all fronts.*
- *Seek first to understand, then to be understood.* Enter the other person's playing field

Recession-Proof Your Business (continued from page 21)

contact information, inquiries, existing work and estimate history should be logged in client folders.

"And, always think of your best clients," Feit added. "Send them nice personal notes with articles that they would be interested in and [include] informative and fun handouts with each service."

Once contractors know who their best clients are, they should interview them and categorize them by age, wealth, education and taste, Feit suggested. Then mailers that pertain to specific client interests can be sent out. Mailers should always include an eye-catching headline

and be written conversationally with enough questions to include the reader, Feit stressed.

When contractors' best clients have been surveyed, strategic alliances can be formed with others they work with, such as car detailers, florists or window and pool cleaners, Feit said. "When you understand whom [your clients] are, where they shop and what other services they use, make lists of these vendors," he explained. "Then, plan ways of approaching them or initiating a relationship with these vendors. They could send you a ton of lucrative work on a steady basis."

and earn the right for them to hear your perspective.

• *Establish synergy.* The principle says that one plus one has the capacity to be a lot more. Compromise might take you to one and one-half, but synergy will provide multiples.

Family businesses have a distinct capability for synergy. The keys are communication, leadership and fairness.

• *Sharpen the saw of self-renewal.* Never stop learning and building skills and encourage your team to do the same. **LL**

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USE READER SERVICE #64

Design Notebook

The Whittles wanted more than a backyard pool.

Their two dogs like to swim – both have different doggy paddles. “One dog is a retriever and likes to jump off the edge and fetch balls, the other dog is smaller and doesn’t like deep water,” explained Jon Benson, president, Jon Benson & Associates, Atlanta, Ga.

Besides, the owners like to dive and wanted the pool to look more like a natural pond than a man-made water hole.



The Whittles can listen to the gurgle of water running from their waterfall to the pool from their backyard patio. Photo: Jon Benson & Associates



Design Notes

PROJECT:	The Whittle Residence
LANDSCAPE COMPANY:	Jon Benson & Associates, Atlanta, Ga.
DESIGNER:	Jon Benson
PROJECT MANAGER:	Jon Benson
PROPERTY SIZE:	¾ acre
PROJECT TIME:	Nine months
PLANTS INSTALLED:	Creeping Fig, Lady Banks Rose, Japanese Red Maples, Biloxi Crape Myrtle, Kwanzan Cherry, Pink Indian Hawthorne, Blush Loropetalum, George Tabor Azalea, Oakleaf Hydrangea, White Gumpo Azalea
PROJECT COST:	Not available
AWARD:	2000 Georgia Green Industry Association Grand Award

So, Benson admits, he had diverse goals for the property, all of which were achieved in less than one year.

“We needed to make sure that we understood everyone’s needs – of course, they expected to have guests and children and to be able to entertain out back,” he added. “And the owners wanted a spa and a patio area to sit. They wanted the pool to be natural and free-form – the kind that is tucked into

(continued on page 34)

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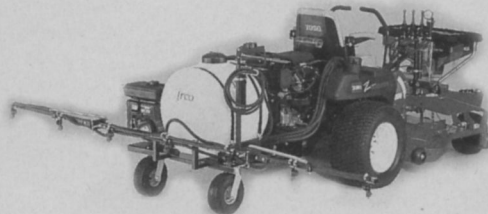
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USE READER SERVICE #68

Design Noteb

(continued from page 32)

a landscape environment so if they looked at it, it isn't just a pool, but a pond."

GROUND LEVEL. Starting with topography, Benson split an upward backyard slope by cutting into the hillside and installing a retaining wall. This sectioned off the back-

"The property is a whole

garden and **outside**

environment now...it

went from just a grass

backyard to an entire

recreation and outdoor

entertainment

space." – Jon Benson

yard, providing an area for the pool and patio in the lower portion of the yard closest to the home and a spot for a Jacuzzi and waterfall in the higher area. A waterfall flows down the 5-foot drop from the Jacuzzi spa in the upper area into the swimming pool in the lower area, which is surrounded by a patio that is accessed by the back door of the home.

Several challenges accompanied this grading project, however. Because the lot was narrow, it was not accessible to large equipment needed to grade the area and dig the hole for the pool, Benson said. "The workers had to come between the houses and build a road for their equipment, and once they dug the hole for the pool, since they were working in such a small space, they also had to deal with stockpiling the soil," he explained.

Employees managed this by working from the inside of the property to the outside, he said. "We had to build a dirt ramp to move the equipment onto the site, then, we had to maneuver around the site so when we were finished using the big equipment it was back on the road," he said. "We had to do this because once we dug the hole for the pool, we couldn't move the large equipment around. We finished the rest of the work with smaller equipment."

Limited space for excess soil required that it be transported to the home while it was under construction, since the Whittle residence

is located in an already-developed neighborhood, Benson added.

Besides dealing with tight spaces and maintaining a natural ambiance despite the man-made pool, a Jacuzzi and waterfall were important to the Whittles, Benson said. Rock walls composed of Tennessee field stone surround the pool, blending with the original environment. Vines such as Creeping Fig and Lady Banks Rose, which is a thornless climbing rose, complete the look. "We used a lot of rock walls so [the pool] has a natural look, and vines grow over the rocks and tumble down," he described.

To satisfy the dogs' swimming styles, Benson designed an underwater bench that lines the pool's perimeter so the smaller dog can trot along the edge. He increased the pool depth to 8 feet - deeper than most residential pools - so the Whittles can dive in without hitting bottom.

FOR FAMILY AND FUN. The Whittles' multi-purpose design goals didn't just include personal pursuits. They also planned to entertain.

A patio serves as an entertainment space and a grassy extension can accommodate an overflow of guests. When the area is not being used for visitors, the intimate patio space provides a place for the family to sit in a pleasing environment, Benson noted. The patio size is limited to preserve as much greenspace as possible. "That way they don't have to look at a lot of hard patio when it is just the immediate family," he reasoned.

In nine months, the property morphed from an upward sloping lawn with a modest patio to an outdoor garden entertainment space, Benson related. "It's a whole garden and outdoor environment now, whereas before they had a little wooden patio that went into a lawn that sloped up a hill," he described. "The property went from just a grass backyard to an entire recreation and outdoor entertainment space."

The clients' feedback formed a landscape designed specifically for their lifestyle, which is a reward to both the family and Benson, he pointed out. "The client told me he gets up every morning and has his cup of coffee on the patio looking at the waterfall and the pool." - Kristen Hampshire

The author is Associate Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.

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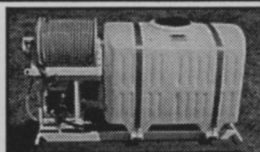
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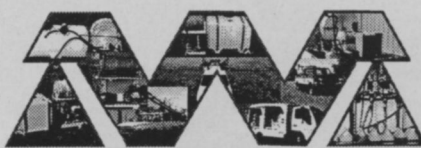
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USE READER SERVICE #69

Nursery Market Report

ORNAMENTAL WINNERS

'Great Plants' for 2002

Every landscape contractor is on the lookout for plants that are strong performers. Aiding in the process are green industry associations that continually test the latest plants, selecting the most durable, beautiful ones to promote.

As part of its annual "GreatPlants" program, The Nebraska Nursery & Landscape Association, St. Joseph, Mo., selects a tree, shrub and perennial of the year and periodically introduces new plants. This year's selections were based on research and propagation conducted by area nursery professionals and agriculture professors.

These selections are unique but provide many ornamental possibilities each season and are readily available in the nursery trade. Make plans to include these winning plants in the landscape.

TREE OF THE YEAR: Kentucky Coffeetree. *Gymnocladus dioica* is a durable native tree with a bold winter habit and handsome, ridged bark. Blue-green summer foliage covers the blemishes of winter and turns a golden yellow in fall. With age, the tree's growth habit becomes more uniform, producing a picturesque crown of rugged branches. This tree

adapts to a wide variety of conditions, including heavy clay, drought and even city environments. Female plants produce long, leathery, brown pods in fall. Male selections, however are best – especially 'Espresso' and 'Stately Manor.' Trees will grow 60 to 70 feet tall and 40 feet wide and are hardy to zone 3b.

SHRUB OF THE YEAR: Kalm St. John's Wort. *Hypericum kalmianum* is a small, dense shrub with stout, erect stems that form a perfect mound. This is a handsome, hardy plant with small, bluish-green summer foliage and bright yellow flowers from July to August. Chocolate-brown seed heads add winter interest. The shrub holds up well in sun, heat and drought and tolerates heavy soils. 'Ames,' developed at Iowa State University for improved hardiness, is recommended for a perfect mounding form, 2- to 3-foot high. Kalm St. John's Wort is native from Quebec and Ontario to Michigan and Illinois, and it is hardy to zone 4.

PERENNIAL OF THE YEAR: Crane's Bill. *Geranium sanguineum* are hardy geraniums many consider to be the workhorses of the perennial border. This durable plant forms mounds of deeply cut foliage that turn blood red in fall – hence the common name Bloody Crane's Bill. The bowl-shaped, magenta flowers cover the plant in late spring to early summer and will bloom sporadically throughout the summer if sheared after flowering.

Recommended selections in this group of undemanding perennials are 'Album,' 'Shepherds Warning' or 'Elsbeth.' Plant these geraniums in full sun to light shade as specimens in front of the border or massed to form a groundcover around upright, leggy plants. Plants will grow up to 18 inches tall and 2 feet wide and are hardy to zone 3.

NEW PLANT: Comanche Campfire. The contrast of red stems to fine silver foliage is what caught the attention of Harlan Hamernik, owner, Bluebird Nursery, Clarkson, Neb., who was on an exploration trip looking for new plants for the GreatPlants program. He found *Oenothera macrocarpa* on an oil well site in western Oklahoma. This drought-tolerant primrose, which survived zone 4 trials, is suitable for rock gardens, xeriscapes or prairie plantings. With large, silver leaves, ruby stems and bright yellow flowers, the contrast of colors on this plant is striking, making a good combination planting with prairie phlox, spiderwort, little bluestem, penstemon and other hardy natives. Plants grow 12 to 15 inches tall and 18 to 24 inches wide and thrive in full sun.

For more information about GreatPlants, contact the Nebraska Statewide Arboretum at 402/472-2971 or e-mail rhenrickson@unl.edu. – Ali Cybulski

The author is Contributing Editor to Lawn & Landscape magazine.



The Nebraska Nursery & Landscape Association selected Crane's Bill (above) as its perennial of the year. Magenta flowers cover this plant in late spring to early summer, and its foliage turns blood red in fall. Photo: Nebraska Nursery & Landscape Association

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Imagine the Potential

Challenges associated with landscape design frustrate many a contractor, but PRO Landscape software changes all of that.

TECHNOLOGY. That's a powerful word that conjures up a broad range of reactions in people's minds. Of course, most people quickly envision a computer, and for obvious reasons based on the workplace revolution that has taken place over the past two decades.

As common as computers have become, you'd be hard pressed to find a successful business in the country today that didn't rely heavily on this machine filled with wires, chips, RAM and so much more. At the same time, there's a surprising number of landscape companies that remain reluctant to embrace the opportunities and efficiencies technology can deliver. For whatever reason – cost, confusion, complacency – these businesses continue operating like they always have, or maybe they have given in to the trend and set up a computer in the office, but they know they don't maximize its power.

Perhaps there's never been a better or easier time than now for landscape professionals to welcome technology into their businesses thanks to the latest advancements in landscape design and imaging software from Drafix

Software. This 8-year-old company in Kansas City, Mo., is already well known thanks to its design software called PRO Landscape. But as the software's popularity has climbed, the company has worked with its customers to enhance the product, and the latest version of this powerful technology is receiving rave reviews.

THE BASICS. The mission behind the software is to simplify and expedite the landscape design process for the designer while also providing a tool that makes this process more of a sales opportunity. PRO Landscape accomplishes this through the combined use of computer-aided design and imaging that work in unison to produce professional-quality work with a whole new twist.

The new twist is the life-like image of the potential client's property, complete with a new landscape. Designers simply create this image by taking a photograph of



the client's house with a camera and putting that image into their computer system to serve as the foundation for the design.

Once the design is completed with the use of more than 3,500 photo-quality plant and hardscape images in the PRO Landscape database, the contractor has a plan to offer the client, including plant growth projections, shadows, various perspectives and lighting. This means no more dog-eared various pages in plant books or trying to get homeowners to envision how different trees and shrubs would look in front of their house. The imaging software *shows* them how it would look on their own property.

"For most contractors using imaging software, this computer-generated visual is the hook that closes the sale," according to Pete Lord, president. Of course, customers are still interested in talking about price, which is easy to do since the PRO Landscape software creates an automatic estimate based on the image the clients are looking at. Once a company inputs its own prices for labor and various plant materials, the software does the rest of the work.

And, for those companies that send crews out to handle installations with a graphic rendering of the plan, the software can produce a two-dimensional computer-aided drawing of the proposed landscape, including all plant placements, the irrigation system and even various hardscapes that are included.

HARDWARE REQUIREMENTS

SOFTWARE certainly doesn't work by itself, but PRO Landscape minimizes the computer requirements needed to produce these high-quality designs. Contractors who purchase the software should also have a digital camera or a scanner, access to email or a color printer to produce the rendering for customers and, of course, a computer with:

- Pentium or Athlon processor
- 32 MB RAM
- 150 MB hard disk space
- Windows XP, 2000, Me, NT 4.0 or 98



PRO Landscape's imaging software gives contractors the ability to quickly turn a digital photograph (inset) into a full-color landscape plan that will close sales.

CAN WE HELP YOU?

ONE of the most intimidating obstacles that new software buyers have to overcome is the notion of how confusing the software will be to learn and how time consuming this educational process will be. Drafix Software recognized this concern and committed to providing its users with the necessary support free of charge. This multi-faceted support includes a product manual, an online help system and a multimedia tutorial CD complete with 65 lessons featuring text and video instruction. "We also offer free technical support for as long as a user owns PRO Landscape," added Pete Lord, president.

WHY BUY IT? If you've done any sort of new landscape installation or enhancement in the last few years, you know how to design a landscape. So why should you take the time to learn how to do the same thing with computer software?

First, one of the biggest sales obstacles is differentiating yourself from the competition in customers' minds. An easy way to achieve this distinction is to use tools other companies don't use, such as design software. If you make a presentation to a homeowner for a \$20,000 installation, there's a good chance another contractor will make a similar presentation to your potential customer. If you both come in with paper-and-pencil plans and photo books, then the design and the price become the keys. But if you make a

presentation using a laptop computer or color printout that shows this individual a color image of their home with your design, that competitor becomes a non-factor in the process and you establish your company as a professional organization that does quality work.

Another benefit is the upselling potential the software offers. People considering a sizeable investment in their yard want to significantly enhance their property's appearance. Contractors using PRO Landscape indicate that once homeowners see the impact that various landscape features can have on their own property via the imaging capabilities, they become much less budget conscious and

much more interested in getting the most dramatic landscape.

Finally, there's the productivity payback. Contractors experienced with the product report they can produce five times as many designs with the software as they can by hand. And don't forget that changes can be made to a digital file without having to start from scratch, whereas making changes to a design on paper may mean recreating the entire plan. For contractors who have lamented that they have more business than they can handle or they don't have time to return all of the calls they get from potential customers, this means money in their pockets. That's the power of technology.

GETTING BETTER WITH AGE

CONTINUOUS improvement represents a primary challenge for any product supplier, and Drafix Software is no different. Since it has been selling PRO Landscape to contractors for eight years, the company has been able to make enhancements based on feedback from the thousands of landscape designers who use the product.

"We've worked hard to make the product easier to use," explained Pete Lord, president. "For example, we've

streamlined frequently used steps. Features like selecting a plant, manipulating size and perspective, and navigating around the user interface have all been improved.

"We also heard from many of our users who were not using the Planner module because of their unfamiliarity with computer-aided design," Lord continued. "We spent much of our efforts in the last version making the CAD module much more user friendly without compromising its power."

Save Time

DEAN RICCI represents the typical landscape contractor in many regards. "I'm an owner, designer, sales and production manager all rolled up in one," he explained with a laugh. His business, Ricci's Landscape Management Inc. in Hebron, Ind., generates half of its revenue from its construction business, and much of that includes custom design work such as patios, brick walls and planting arrangements that separates Ricci's from its competition in the market.

The company's jobs range anywhere from \$4,000 to \$25,000, and as with any design-focused company, sales are largely

A Series of Solutions

Five different landscape contractors talk about how PRO Landscape has boosted sales, helped customer service and saved them time.

SOLUTION #1

Handle Design Yourself

Joe Vitale tells it like it is. The president of Vitale Landscape & Drainage Contractors Inc., Roselle Park, N.J., is a third-generation landscape contractor, so he understands the industry. And one thing he has decided through his decades of experience is that outside landscape architects make the design/build process more trouble than it's usually worth.

"Landscape architects are pretty scarce in New Jersey, and the good ones are real busy working for the big firms," he explained. "I've only got about five to seven employees, so I was relying on landscape architects to work for me on a free-agent basis, and there's some real downsides to that. Plus, I couldn't find an architect who I wanted to hire and could afford at my size."

That's why he decided to take matters into his own hands and handle his design work with PRO Landscape even though he's "no Bill Gates," as he puts it, when it comes to working with computers. Now, he's using the software primarily with residential clients, which represent about 75 percent of the company's business. These jobs, which typically cost \$7,000 to \$10,000, start with Vitale providing the customer an estimate and either a hand



drawing or a computer rendering of the property depending on what the customer is willing to pay for.

"We charge for all of our designs, and we charge more for the drawings because they take three times as long to do as the images on the computer," related Vitale.

In particular, he prefers using the software on properties without any existing landscape. "If you're working with an image of a house with a landscape, you have to take the time to remove the current plants before you can put in your design," he pointed out, adding that very large properties can be a challenge if you can't get the entire property in the photo. "But once you do the design and show it to the clients in the color and splendor of full bloom, they love it."

For Vitale, the money and headaches he has saved by taking landscape architects out of the equation have paid for the software, but he has also been pleasantly surprised by how well PRO Landscape has boosted his sales. "If a client is indecisive, the image of their property with a new landscape will put them over the top," he maintained.

a function of the number of designs the company puts in front of customers. "When I did designs by hand, one design would take all day to complete with the estimating, and during busy periods when there are five or six designs to do, I couldn't get them all done in a timely fashion," he admitted.

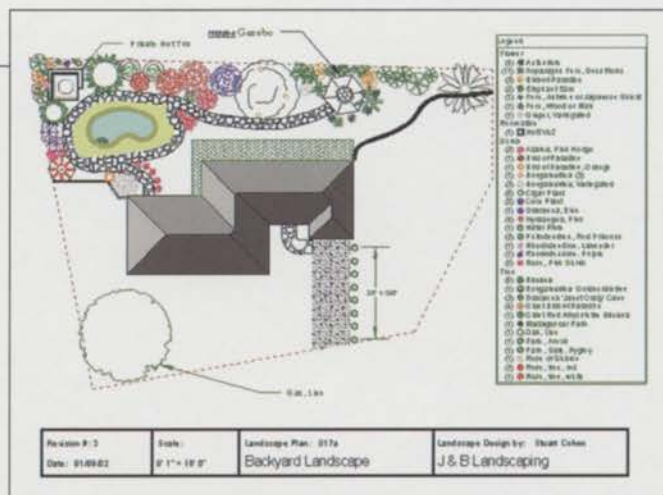
Adding to the problem was the fact that clients always have changes to make to the first or second design. "We were looking to cut down on the design time when we started looking at this software, and that includes cutting down on the time spent modifying our designs," Ricci noted. "Clients always have some little or major change to make, and if the design

is saved on the computer it's like changing a Word document on the computer vs. having to retype the entire thing on a word processor. Now we can make changes in minutes with PRO Landscape instead of erasing and redrawing as much as the whole plan."

Ricci terms himself a "mediocre draftsman," but he still considers the two-dimensional CAD drawings important because they are what he gives to his foreman who will oversee the

installation. "I can do one or two drawings a day by hand, but now I can do four or five a day on the computer," he pointed out.

(continued on page 6)



SOLUTION #3

Improve Customer Communications

Debbie Kiebler is a visual person. She prefers pictures instead of words, and she has little trouble envisioning a scene as someone describes it to her. But, the truth is, her customers at BR&D Landscape Inc., Franktown, Colo., don't have her visual talents. As a result, Kiebler often found herself struggling to help them understand the concept she had in her mind for their property.

"I had been working with customers on a small scale for years trying to convey ideas of what they might do with their yard, and I found the need to do something more visual," explained the co-owner and vice president of this firm focusing on the high-end, custom residential market. "You can flag or paint a smaller area, but I may have a picture in my head for a property, and conveying that to other people is difficult."

Selling homeowners a high-end landscape is difficult enough in today's economy, so the last thing a salesperson or designer needs is the added challenge of not being

able to get the customer to envision the finished product. Kiebler had been using a different CAD program when she purchased PRO Landscape for its three-dimensional imaging capabilities. "Then I realized that PRO Landscape's CAD was more sophisticated, so now I have an integrated two-dimensional drawing and a three-dimensional image to show someone how I would landscape their yard," she noted. "People really find these images very helpful. They need something more than spray paint on their grass if they're going to spend money on a landscape."

In addition, Kiebler considers the images to be particularly valuable on more difficult sales. "The image has a 'whiz bang' sort of effect on people," she noted, adding that imagine is also helpful when selling to new home construction where people struggle to visual anything other than dirt surrounding their house. "That's what puts them over the edge."

Kiebler, who does the majority of designs for the company, spends 90 minutes with the client talking about their needs and wants for the property before starting on the design itself. As a result, she appreciates anything that saves her time, such as the materials takeoff capabilities of the software. "That component makes our job real simple because now I can tell our crew how much edging to use and how many square feet of material they will need for the patio, for example," she remarked. "We do that all right off the design because the design is done to scale and we just have to plug in the multipliers to get the numbers."

"If we need to change a patio, for example, we can do that without starting all over, and then the software automatically gives me a new estimate for materials and prices based on the changes," she enthused.



Save Time (continued from page 5)

This increased productivity means more sales. "That really speeds up sales because we're getting the drawings or images in front of customers so much more quickly, plus they're impressed by our quick turnaround."

Now that he has completed his second full year working with the software, Ricci has a thorough understanding of what works best for him. One particular feature he appreciates is the ability to add his own digital images to the plant library that comes with the program. "That's usually a winter project for me because PRO Landscape can't cover every plant I'm going to use even though there are plenty in the library," he explained. "I make my own files of plants I use the most, like 'Dean's perennials list,' and that helps speed up the process."

Obviously, Ricci likes the software for its CAD capabilities, but he's not blind to the power of imaging either. And while certain types of jobs may be better suited than others for creating a digital image, he makes this decision based on how responsive the clients seems to be to the proposal. "I use the imaging when I think I've got a hard sale or I've got a customer who really can't read the plans," he said. "And those images really sell for me – it probably doubled my closing ratio in the first year. In fact, this year we raised our prices and our closing ratio didn't go down at all."

Today, he can't imagine running his business without PRO Landscape. "I'd never go back to the old way of drafting by hand," he asserted. "I'm just glad most of my competitors don't use this program or else I'd have a tougher time selling jobs."

Boost Your Closing Percentage

UNFORTUNATELY, putting together a design and a proposal only to have it rejected by the customer who favors a competitor's pitch is a reality of the landscape industry. But Craig Adamson considers time his most valuable commodity, so he's not particularly interested in investing countless hours in a design only to lose the sale.

At the same time, the owner of Cutting Edge Landscape Maintenance, Rockford, Ill., wants to grow his company from its current annual sales mark of \$500,000, and he knows that increasing the amount of design/build work his company does is one way to make that happen. "PRO Landscape's imaging has really boosted our landscape sales because people can see what it looks like and you can literally make changes right in front of them," explained Adamson. "What the customers want is to see a picture, and this gives that to them."

Adamson also gets excited about how the software influences customers' perception of his company. "I used to draw everything by hand, and then I'd be competing against three or four other contractors who all seemed to have digital images," he recalled. "I'd lose every single time because they all looked so much more professional."

Now Cutting Edge Landscape Maintenance enjoys the same professional perception, and Adamson similarly appreciates being able to generate more designs and proposals than ever before. "I can do a design from scratch in 30 minutes with PRO Landscape, and I'm not a computer person," he commented.

As for the impact on the success of his proposals, the change has been dramatic and obvious. "I used to get the job on about 20 percent of the designs I would do, and some of them would take a week to do at night after dinner and working all day," he observed. "Now, I'm getting about twice as many jobs and the software has improved my life at home because I can get the images done so quickly and I can spend more time with my kids and my wife after dinner."

Adamson noted that potential customers are also impressed by the fact that he presents them with a complete pricing breakdown that has been produced via computer, and that makes the ensuing conversations easier as well. "Since the entire proposal is off the computer and seems more professional, I've noticed that customers don't seem as inclined to try and negotiate my price down," he added.

Adamson has put together proposals complete with digital images for a range of customers, and he sees benefits with all of them. "We do a lot of work for condominiums, and now I can use the image to show the entire board what we're proposing instead of trying to get them all to understand," he said. "And homeowners always ask, 'My house can really look like that?'"

"If someone is looking for a way to make more sales, this is the way to do it," Adamson affirmed, adding that he probably could've done his first design after spending an hour teaching himself how to use the software.

PRO Landscape Proposal

File Tools Help

Customer Information

Name: John Galt
Address: 105 E. 5th Street
City: Kansas City
Salesperson: Lisa
State: MO
Zip Code: 64106-4114
Phone: 816 555-4123
Date: 01/21/02
Exp. Date: 02/21/02
Tax Exempt: Yes No

Option Defaults Deliver Initial Guarantee

Comments

Qty	Category	Description	Quantity	D	I	G	Price	
1	SP0120	Spandrome	1				1.00	New
1	116-001	Tree D	2				250.00	Open
1	04R172	Shrub BE	1				60.00	Save
1	04R129	Shrub BE	4				60.00	Delete
1	116-003	Tree E	2				95.00	Print
1	04R176	Shrub CE	3				45.00	End
1	FL0205	Flower Perennial	20				12.00	
1	116-106	Tree D	1				250.00	

Quote #: 1001 Tax Rate: 7.1 % Taxable: 2471.00 Exempt: 0.00 Tax: 175.44 Total: 2646.44 Calculate

SOLUTION #5

Light Up Your Sales

"IT DOESN'T matter if you're doing \$30 million or \$100,000 in sales because PRO Landscape is quick, fast and it closes deals."

Chris Walter, president, Computerized Landscape Design, has seen the light. As a result, a great many homeowners in and around Liberty, Mo., appreciate landscape lighting as well, and they're hiring Walter to install their lighting after the images generated via Pro Landscape show them what a little illumination can do for their property.

"I do all aspects of landscaping," related Walter, adding that his average job runs between \$5,000 and \$10,000. "One job might be the front of the house and a paver patio in the back, while another client might have us install some trees in front and on the side of the house along with a fish pond in the back. But one thing that almost all of my jobs have is lighting. I love to install lighting because I've found that it's one of the easiest and most profitable parts of landscaping, and my clients love what it does for their properties."

Of course, Walter rarely sells his clients a second or third lighting system, so they don't actually realize how dramatic the impact of lighting can be until he shows them a four-color image of their property using the lighting tool on PRO Landscape. "The software shows you the lights before they exist, just like it does with the plants, but it also has a lighting feature that simulates how the property will look at night with the lighting on," Walter explained. "Most people obviously just call me for landscaping, but I always make sure to produce an extra image of their property with lighting in place because the odds are that they'll buy it if they see it."

"The key is that the software really personalizes the whole design for the client," he continued. "They see their house with their yard, and they'll buy that if you can get close to their price range."

Contractors who haven't experienced the dramatic effect that imaging software can have on potential clients'



decisions by convincing them to spend more than they originally budgeted should talk to Walter. "I've had instances where I've presented clients with a range of designs that go beyond what they were planning to do and they've ended up spending as much as four times their original budget by phasing the project in over time," he commented.

While he appreciates the estimate and CAD capabilities, PRO Landscape is all about the power of the imaging as far as Walter is concerned. "If I give the average homeowner a plan looking down on their house with all of these circles for a burning bush here and a Norway spruce there, they don't understand what I'm proposing," he noted. "But the image gets a real 'wow!' from them."

Walter's clients also appreciate how the software changes the entire design process and lets them become involved. "It can be hard to get an appointment with some people because everyone is so busy, but if I can show you what you want on the spot, you'll buy from me nine times out of 10," he predicted, comparing the software to cellular phones in terms of the productivity benefits both technologies offer his business. "So I travel with the laptop, put the printer in the back of the truck and the client and I will sit on the front porch and design the landscape together in an hour or hour and a half. Then, the client has two or three images of what I can do for them along with an estimate. Meanwhile, other contractors spend the meeting jotting ideas and measurements down on a legal pad and the client won't see anything for at least a week."

Of course, not all jobs are this easy to design, but this self-taught designer estimated he uses this approach with half of his jobs—those up to about \$7,000 in size because the larger jobs require a CAD and multiple images due to their size and complexity. "It really closes sales," Walter promised.

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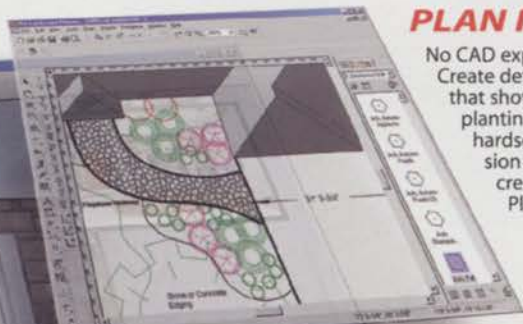
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PRO Landscape Proposal

File Tools Help

Customer Information

Name: John Galt State: MO
Address: 105 E. 5th Street Zip Code: 64106-4114
City: Kansas City Phone: 816 595-4123
Salesperson: Lisa Tax Exempt: Yes No Exp. Date: 02/13/02

Option Defaults: Delete Install Guarantee

SKU	Category	Description	Quantity	U	D	P	Price	
GRD20	Grass/Stone	Grass English	46	1	0	0	4.50	New
TRH301	Tree D	Maple Stripes	2	1	0	0	40.00	Open
SHR173	Shrub BB	Arbutus Pink	3	1	0	0	13.50	Save
SHR206	Shrub BB	Holly Blue Flamingo	4	1	0	0	14.00	Delete
TRH504	Tree E	Sycamore -Black&2	2	1	0	0	40.00	Plan
SHR428	Shrub BB	Jacobs Blue Cree	8	1	0	0	15.00	Exit
FLD500	Flower Perennial	Black&2	2	1	0	0	15.00	
FLD500	Flower Perennial	Compass Microbeam	8	1	0	0	8.50	
TRH136	Tree D	Black&2 River Gum	1	1	0	0	25.00	

Quote #: 1001 Tax Rate: 7.1 % Taxable: 1078.50 Exempt: 0.00 Tax: 76.57 Total: 1155.07

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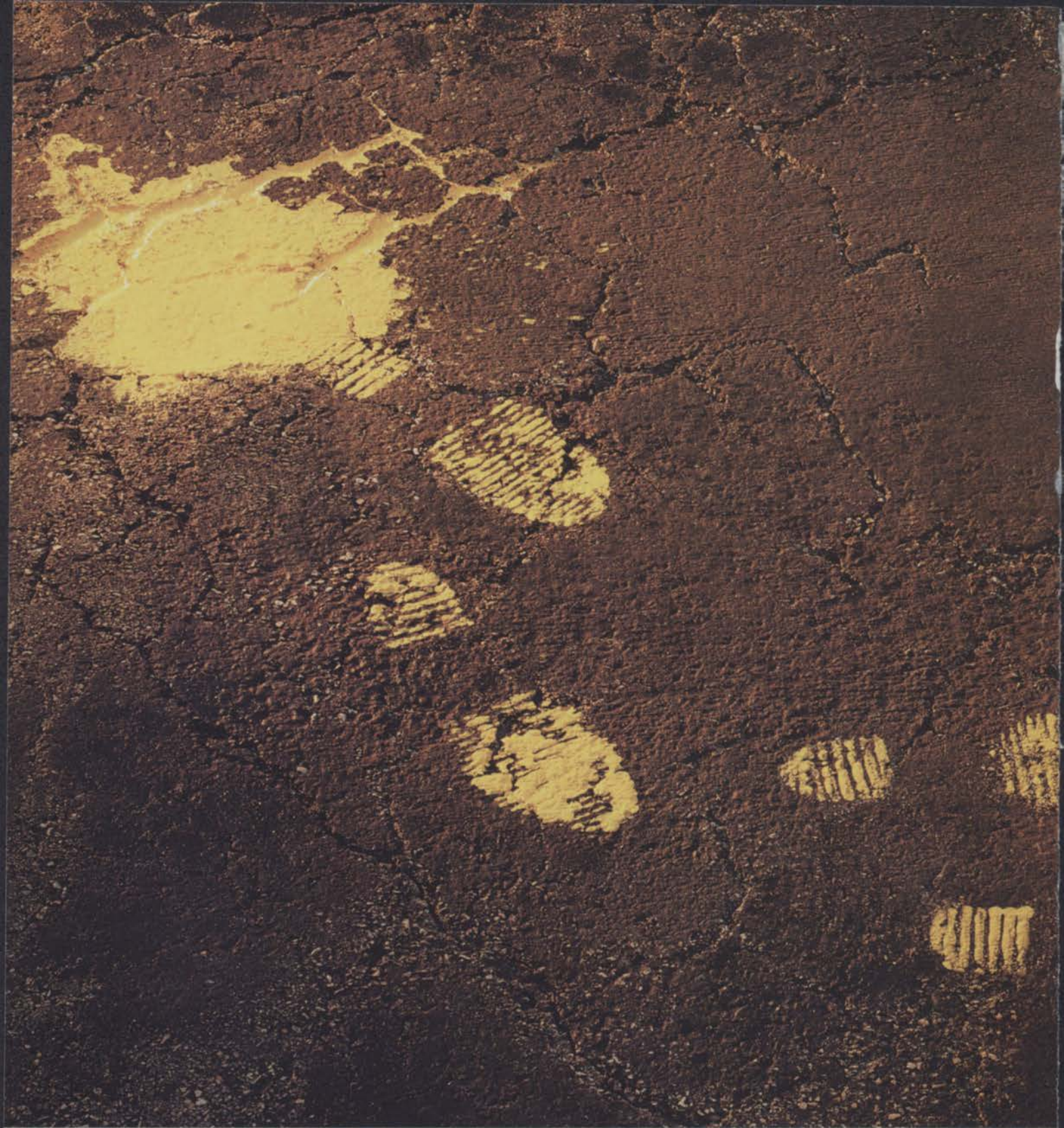
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USE READER SERVICE #120

Directly Speaking



Taking your services to market can be a gamble. Will consumers change the channel on your television promotion, will they switch past your radio jingle, will they throw out their newspapers or trash your mail fliers?

Though no marketing method is tried and true, several find luck with direct mail marketing – a tangible way to reach potential clients.

"For the smaller or mid-size contractor on a shoestring budget, they can invest X dollars and target specific customers," said Steve Buzash, national sales manager, Amercalist, North Canton, Ohio. "For \$2,000, it's an inexpensive way to get customers, and when you look at closing ratios and cost per customer, it's a trackable vehicle."

DIRECT TARGET. The key to getting the right mail in the right hands is focusing on a specific client who matches the profile of existing customers, Buzash explained. From income to buying habits, analyzing current clients' behaviors provides background information for future promotions.

"In the landscape industry, you have people that belong to country clubs, people who are out of the house and are busy, but they have a high income," he described. "Those potential clients are better than those who are home with lower incomes."

This information can be gathered through questionnaires, from which contractors can collect names from similar zip codes and demographics to focus their mailings. Laurie Birko, advertising manager, The Davey Tree Expert Co., Kent, Ohio, understands the importance of hitting the right houses with mailings. Davey Tree's direct mail program targets both potential and existing clients – the latter for upselling opportunities. For example, a database indicates specific services clients purchase, so if the company promotes aeration, it will only target those who don't already sign on for that option.

In turn, this database gives Birko guidelines for new sales targets. "We look at the demographics of areas that we work in, we know our average customer and we use those same qualities to find prospects," she noted. "We

look at things like zip codes, prospect traits such as household income, what kind of home they live in and buying habits." This detailed profile is effective, she added.

Bret Achtenhagen, owner, Bret Achtenhagen's Seasonal Services, Eagle, Wis., tunes into even tighter geographic boundaries by soliciting the post office for specific mailing routes. "We don't do a whole zip code – there are too many untargeted people," he reasoned. "It costs us more to get certain routes from the post office, but then we're hitting each subdivision that we want to hit."

After identifying the ideal addresses, companies can concentrate on frequency. Repetitive mailings receive better response, Buzash indicated. "Hit the cream of the crop multiple times, then you end up with more leads from a sales standpoint," he recommended. Instead of hitting all the names on a database, he prefers sending promotions to the top 20 percent, and instead of sending out 60,000 mailings to 60,000 different households, he suggested targeting 20,000 homes three times.

Achtenhagen agreed that the more times consumers see a company's name, the more likely they are to respond to mailings. "We'll send a 6,000-piece mailing to 2,000 households three times, and we get about a 6- to 7-percent return rate," he noted.

DIRECT MESSAGE. The promotion pitch also figures into the return rate. "You have to offer the customer something and you have to present a need for a service, otherwise it's like sending out junk mail," Birko pointed out. She learned this from a successful mailing that earned a 12-percent return rate – exceptionally high.

Timing also enhanced the success of this mailing. "You have to be really careful," she added. "In Ohio, you don't want to send out a lawn care mailing in December."

Buzash generally sends out mailings to landscape clients in spring and early fall. "You want to hit them when things are greening up and people are coming out of their caves, and again in the fall when things are winding down," he noted.

Not only when, but what you send also matters. Buzash sways toward attention-getting pieces that stick

(continued on page 50)

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USE READER SERVICE #21

Minding Your Business

(continued from page 48)

out above junk mail – a 5½- by 8½-inch postcard, for example. Also, design considerations set quality apart from low-budget efforts. Colors, text and simple designs attract consumers.

"We don't tell them everything about the company – we highlight things like the company name, services and photographs that show the services," Buzash described. "It is simple, but pretty and sharp. We find that people aren't going to read a three-page letter about a company."

Birko discovered similar findings. Her least successful mailing was too specific, she said. Now, instead of targeting customers for "brown spot" applications, she'll solicit them for "disease" treatments. Also, she learned that different areas of the country respond to various types of mailings. While northern and some southern states preferred letters, postcards appealed to southwestern and western

states. "The only way I know this is from doing it for so long and from talking to managers each year about the response they receive to the mailings," she said.

"The key to getting the right mail in the right hands is focusing on a specific client that matches the profile of existing customers." – Steve Buzash

DIRECT RESULTS. For those without direct marketing experience under their belt, Buzash recommended beginning by obtaining a list of zip codes where their company already markets and identifying new areas it would like to cover. From there, scan client files to target neighbors of customers. Then, develop a direction, he noted. "Say you want to close X percentage of sales, so you have to mail Y pieces," he said, working backwards.

Finally, a company can design a piece and go to print. From there, contractors must follow up with these contacts with another mailing, telemarketing or other marketing tactics. Buzash noticed that telemarketing efforts were easier after the prospective client receive a promotion in the mail. Achtenhagen added that direct marketing is his No. 1 tactic, but it is just one part of the whole. "Direct mail is part of the overall marketing plan – it's another piece of the puzzle," he noted.

Surrounding consumers with the company's brand through various marketing avenues produces results, Birko agreed. Newspaper, magazine, radio, television and direct mail combined form a full-circle brand-awareness campaign.

"Our society is very visual, so if we can give them something to look at and remember, the odds are that in the future they will be more likely to use our service," she said.

– Kristen Hampshire

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




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USE READER SERVICE #97

by Nicole Wisniewski

*Chris Phillips
learned
his fair share
of business
lessons –
his company's
success
proves it.*

Typically, April 1 is the day for pranksters to unload new bags of tricks while their gullible victims play the fools.

But it wasn't always like that. Prior to 1564, when the Gregorian calendar of today took effect, April 1 was considered New Year's Day by many ancient cultures because it coincided with the spring equinox and marked the beginning of new life and renewal. Even though it had been officially changed, many people resisted the new date, and were made fun of as a result – hence, they were called April Fools.

One could say Chris Phillips was going by the old calendar on April 1, 1998, when after a quick 30 days of planning, he launched Phillips Environmental Services. In three short years, the full-service, Clearwater, Fla.-based company grew to \$5 million in revenue. And with an owner who's now in a position to work on his business instead of in it, growth should continue, proving there's something to be said for a company that was started by a wise man on a fool's day.

LESSONS LEARNED. Phillips was majoring in accounting at a St. Petersburg, Fla., college when he started mowing lawns for extra income. "It wasn't very sophisticated," he said. "I charged one price for a lot and then I charged a higher price if it was a corner lot – all I did was mow." He ended up in a new development, and a couple of accounts turned into 150 residential customers.

As clients became interested in enhancing their existing landscapes with design/build projects, Phillips decided to make that his focus, selling his 150 accounts. "I liked that side better," he said. "It wasn't the same routine every day like maintenance."

Phillips' first company, Landscape Technologies, was started in 1978. The company was quite successful, reaching \$12 million in revenue at one point, he said. But investors tempted Phillips in 1996 to sell the business, promising him he could continue on as president. He took the chance, but soon became wise to the game these investors were playing.

"I found out that they bought companies, pumped them up and then sold them," he said. "I saw the writing on the wall, so to speak, and realized I was probably going to get sold."

So, in early 1998, Phillips got an idea. He'd been through the usual start-up mistakes – he had lacked service diversity, he took jobs at low margins to make ends meet and he made budgeting errors. He thought, "I've made all these mistakes, but now I can use them. I can put these learning experiences behind me. I can start over with a fresh slate and new equipment and not make these mistakes again."

Hence, Phillips Environmental Services was born. Since Phillips learned that having a one-service focus – in this case, design/build – hurts when the backlog of work starts to

(continued on page 56)

Phillips Environmental

5218 126th Ave., North
Clearwater, Fla. 33760

PH: 727/556-0700

FX: 727/556-0200

info@phillipsenvironmental.com

FOOL PRO



Marketing spreads Phillips Environmental Service's message. The company spends 2 percent of its budget on marketing, which includes targeted print advertising to high-end residential clients.

Photo: Jorge Alvarez

PHILLIPS ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

HEADQUARTERS: Clearwater, Fla.

FOUNDED: April 1, 1998

2001 REVENUE: \$5 million

2002 PROJECTED REVENUE: \$6.5 million

SERVICE MIX: 60 percent maintenance, 26 percent design/build, 14 percent irrigation

EMPLOYEES: 90 year-round, 30 seasonal

THE PHILOSOPHY

MISSION STATEMENT: Phillips Environmental Services, recognized as one of the most progressive, profitable green industry businesses in the Southeast, is committed to excellence in every phase of its operation. The company will continue to improve its position through the application of principled, financially sound business practices.

Phillips Environmental Services will:

- Strive to always exceed our customers' expectations.
- Cater to our clientele's discriminating tastes by offering a wide range of exceptional services.
- Maintain a highly professional staff that understands and responds to client's needs in a friendly, personal manner.
- Create an environment in which people can have a good time, feel comfortable, grow and progress their careers.
- Constantly seek ways to learn and improve as individuals and as an organization.

FUTURE CHALLENGES: Growing the new central control irrigation division, adding a pool division and increasing its customer base.

THE OWNER

PRESIDENT: Chris Phillips

BACKGROUND: Phillips, who has an accounting degree, started his first company, Landscape Technologies, in 1978, sold it in 1996 and then started Phillips Environmental Services in 1998.

At a Glance

OFF

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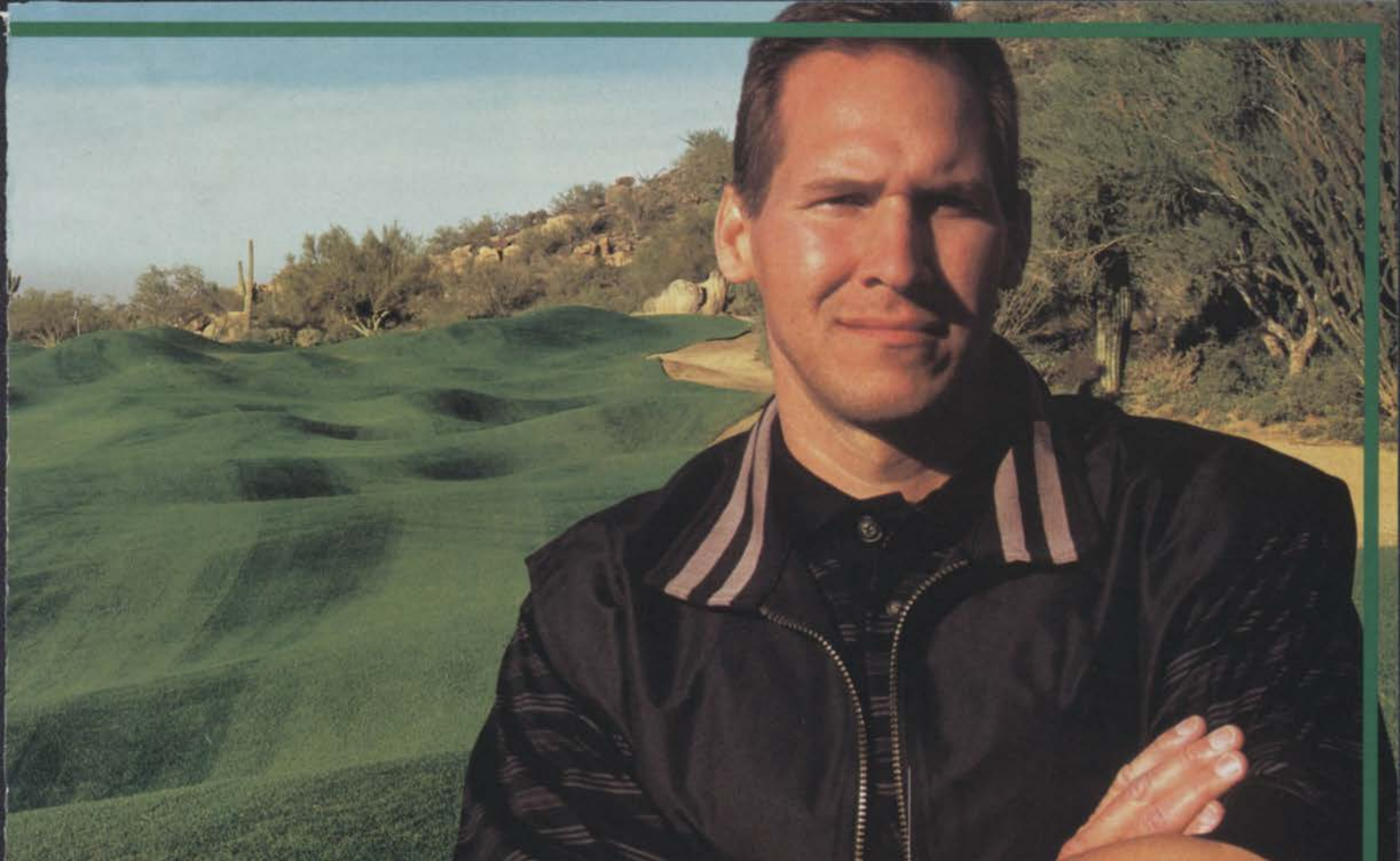
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Cover Story

(continued from page 53)

dwindle, he launched the company on a 60 percent commercial maintenance and 40 percent design/build split. His first year in business, Phillips produced \$1.3 million in revenue and jumped from 10 to 25 employees, many of whom came from his old company.

Targeting specific customers is key for Phillips. For commercial maintenance cli-

ents, Phillips prefers to deal directly with property owners. "The owner of the property is more loyal and professional — they have other things to do than take bids every year," Phillips said, adding that his main accounts typically consist of office buildings and parks, malls and retail centers. "The owner is a more stable client."

Employees at Phillips Environmental work four, 10-hour days each week and have Friday off. One Friday a month from 9 a.m. to noon, they are invited to voluntarily join in a field-training day, and they get paid for this time.

Training covers different topics, such as proper equipment maintenance and proper pruning and tree staking procedures, and is run by Phillips' managers or various equipment manufacturers.

Even though the on-going training is not required, company President Chris Phillips said he thinks employees are gaining more enthusiasm for the program. "Since it's their Friday off, I don't want to make it something mandatory," he said. "But I find that more employees show up every time." — Nicole Wisniewski

And on the Fifth Day...

To reach commercial property owners, Phillips has a database of targeted properties and clients he has identified as "quality customers with quality sites we'd like to be associated with," he said. Then, flattery is the name of the game. "We let them know we respect what they've done and built and that we'd like to be a part of it. We stay in touch and check in with them often. We let them know off the bat that we've identified them and their property as an ideal job for us."

Contact with potential commercial clients like this usually happens about four times a year in various forms, Phillips said. Sometimes the company will reprint an article about itself and send it attached to a note that says, "We're proud of this article and we thought you might find it interesting."

On the design side, Phillips prefers the highest of the high-end residential clients. This, he said, is driven by referrals.

Another contact for residential clients is the custom homebuilder. Phillips keeps in touch with a handful of successful custom homebuilders in the area, and he's built exclusive relationships with some of them. These builders will even involve Phillips in projects beforehand to help secure clients. "We'll show them where to put the house on the lot and lay out the driveways and walks for them for

(continued on page 58)

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Patent # 5,916,027 and 6,158,167

USE READER SERVICE #24

Cover Story

(continued from page 56)

presentation purposes," he said. "We'll do a hardscape plan to show a pool in the yard with a patio and outdoor structures like pergolas and pavilions. Not only does it help get the homebuilder more work and guarantee that homeowner will be our client, but it also gets us involved with the builder at the right stage – most of the hardscape work we do needs to

be done one year before the landscape."

And drawings are rarely free, Phillips said. Custom homebuilders with whom Phillips has built exclusive relationships are the only ones who have Phillips at their beckon call as an in-house design team – those drawings are usually done to help the builder, but Phillips is guaranteed the job.

Other times, drawings typically cost 5 percent of the total project value.

Hardscape work is Phillips' specialty. "It's the most overlooked aspect of a typical landscape design," Phillips said. "When the hardscape is properly designed, the landscaping takes on a more dramatic, resort-like look and feel – it's exactly the look our affluent clients want to achieve."

Phillips believes hardscapes also create drama in a landscape. "If we just left the project alone and they had a concrete driveway, sure, the customer would feel that the house looked nice," he remarked. "But they're wowed when you show them a curved driveway that sneaks around to a motor court area that's formal with a paver pattern by the front door. And maybe there's a low wall with columns or a big fountain in front of the motor court or something as simple as a wall fountain and a water feature."

This hardscape focus separates Phillips Environmental from the competition, Phillips said. "Anybody can do a planting plan," he remarked. "But if the client is looking at two or three of those, it's hard to see which one is

(continued on page 60)

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In March 2001, Phillips Environmental Services decided to turn a 2-acre section behind its shop into an on-site recycling area.

So, instead of crews disposing of clippings and prunings every night after a job, they bring it back to the office and put it in this recycling corner. Then every quarter, a tub grinder is brought in to grind the waste into utility mulch that can be used at the Phillips Environmental office, but not on clients' landscapes. This saves labor costs included in taking waste to a landfill and dump fees.

"In our area, the landfills are maxed out, so this just made sense," said company President Chris Phillips. "The only cost of this program was the expense of fencing in this 2-acre area and making sure it was locked so others wouldn't dispose of waste there as well."

– Nicole Wisniewski

On-site Strategies

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Cover Story

(continued from page 58)

superior. But if a well-thought-out hardscape plan is among them, clients get really interested. And then a well-thought-out landscape plan is icing on the cake."

Implementing hardscapes into the design also creates the necessity for Phillips to meet with the client early on to find out more about how the home is being built and help him schedule different installation stages, he said.

To ensure clients are aware of Phillips' specialty focus, marketing is essential. The company spends about 2 percent of its budget on marketing. In addition to generating new business, another positive aspect of Phillips' commitment to advertising has been the increased recognition and instant credibility among existing clients and vendors, Phillips said.

To create the right advertising message, Phillips Environmental interviewed several marketing agencies. One stood out in terms of its out-of-the-box creativity. "They offered something different and really caught us by surprise with their initial presentation,

Chris Phillips' self-designed estimating system makes providing clients with fast estimates easier. "It's a database system that any account manager or landscape architect can go into and complete a work order or a proposal for a project in minutes," enthused Phillips, president of Phillips Environmental Services, Clearwater, Fla. "Once plant materials or hardscape materials are used in the system, they are there to pick from next time. The system automatically generates an estimate and details all the costs, labor and markups."

The company's entire network is Web-based so employees can log in from home as long as they have Internet access. The same holds true for the software programmer - if Phillips wants the system upgraded or changed, the programmer can do it instantly through the Internet.

Phillips said at his previous company he was accustomed to using programs that didn't allow for overhead recovery, were too plain or had features that he didn't use. About the new program, he said: "The program I designed has not one thing more than we need and not one thing less." - **Nicole Wisniewski**

Smooth Estimating

which was great but wasn't what we wanted," Phillips said. "We thought we'd take a shot at them anyway."

Since the company wants to reach affluent homeowners and builders, its print ads play on how the landscape work feels and how Phillips can create a resort-like atmosphere. Ads titled "LandEscapes" use

hardscape-filled images and phrases like, "At long last, paradise found ... and it's home" and "Landscaping so beautiful, you may opt to live outside."

The ads, which cost about \$5,000 to \$6,000 for concept, design and placement, continue to pay off, Phillips said. "We constantly get

(continued on page 62)

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USE READER SERVICE #26

Cover Story

(continued from page 60)

comments from customers who see our ads," he said. "And we get a lot of results for our dollar. For the same amount of money we did something that's more eye-catching and different, and helps establish our credibility."

ACCELERATED GROWTH. In 1999 - Phillips Environmental's second year - the company grew from \$1.3 million to \$4.1 million in revenue - a 317 percent growth rate that added 75 more employees that year.

To find people, Phillips hired an outside recruiter who matched the company's needs with candidates who met specific criteria.

The rest Phillips attributes to a lucky market, a good company reputation and consolidation. "I find that the better employees don't enjoy working for big national companies," he said.

The organization is full of experienced landscape professionals who either worked with Phillips at his previous company or at another local company, so Phillips said handling fast growth was something everyone

seemed to comprehend. "We've all been there before - our team is pretty seasoned," he pointed out. "And with us, things go better when we're really busy."

In fact, Phillips calls that year "a blast." "We were all going somewhere really fast as a team and everybody bonded," he said.

Also, possessing systems that can be quickly replicated helped. "Each account manager has three crews, so if we get a fourth crew, we get a new account manager," Phillips explained, adding that each crew manages between \$750,000 and \$1 million worth of work. Crews typically handle weekly mowing, blowing and edging on clients' properties, while Special Projects Coordinator Linda Osborne manages other site needs, such as disease and insect control, fertilization, mulching, tree pruning and seasonal annuals. "Her customers are the account managers," Phillips explained. "They come to her with their client needs and she schedules the work."

Another aspect that made handling fast

lawnandlandscape.com

Check online to see
Phillips' budgeting sheet
and quality control form.

growth easy was Phillips obsessive nature to budget every detail. Despite his accounting background, Phillips admits that at Landscape Technologies he didn't budget as astutely as he does now.

Today, Phillips said he even budgets for new tires for the year. "We have a very detailed budget with 300-plus line items for each division," he said.

The company uses a four-division budget that includes the maintenance division of the Clearwater headquarters, the maintenance division at the Sarasota, Fla., branch office, the irrigation division and the design/build division. Each manager puts together his or her own division budget and then Phillips and the managers get together for a final approval. But the budgets are never final. "We have what

(continued on page 167)

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What started with aeration bloomed into fertilization. Now, Scott Brown is ready to take the company above the \$1 million mark.

ProGreen UNPLUGGED

Aeration is more than dirt plugs and dethatching for Scott Brown.

Tired of marketing efforts that emptied his budget and irritated potential clients, he decided to turn a one-time service into a lawn care sales opportunity. After one year, 2,100 aeration jobs and 900 new treatment customers, ProGreenLawnCare, Austell, Ga., proved that small jobs make big impressions.

But most of all, Brown found a marketing method that pays for itself and leaves clients a token of the company's quest for quality. "We provide aeration service at a price below the industry average and we generate a lead out of an economical, one-time service," explained Brown, who started his business with this service in 2000. This produces either a new lawn care client or at least an estimate to enter in a database for further marketing efforts, he pointed out. "They will have a need for our treatment services eventually."

ProGreen Lawn Care

4160 Ewing Road
Austell, Ga. 30106
PH: 770/745-6609

BREAKING GROUND. Brown's persistence stems from a resume with 11 years of industry experience that allowed him to skip a few grades when he started ProGreen. "Once you run a mile, it's easier to run the next mile," he compared, explaining how he was able to jumpstart growth to reach nearly \$280,000 in revenue the first year and more than



Scott Brown and the ProGreen team prove that a one-time aeration service can serve as an effective lawn care sales lead. Photo: ProGreen

\$500,000 in 2001 with expectations to break \$1.2 million in 2002. "Having slowly built systems in the other business, it made starting over much easier."

The lessons he took away from his eight-year stint running a commercial maintenance operation didn't translate directly to his new market, which is all high-volume, high-end residential in greater Atlanta – a rapid-fire growth area. He did learn that business know-how builds a firm foundation for growth, systems keep crews running and, most of all, quality counts. So, once he discovered lawn care was a key profit center, he took this education, shifted gears and started a new venture.

First, Brown knew he needed to offer high quality with a low price tag – at least to lure in new business. So, his \$45 aeration fee is rock-bottom compared to his competitors' \$90, but he's not losing out. These cost cuts do not reflect his lawn

(continued on page 66)

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First Look

(continued from page 64)

care pricing, which is aligned with others' prices. Brown simply uses these aeration jobs as sales leads, turning 60 percent of them into lawn care customers.

"We've eliminated the paid employee who runs around doing 100 lawn quotes a week, closing 20 to 30 percent," he explained. "By offering aeration, you go out, you do the \$45 dollar job, and our crew leaves a quote, but their time at the property is paid for by the aeration fee. It's an interesting way to recoup the costs, and then you've done something for them that says, 'We do a good job.'"

Brown's crews are trained to do more than a "good job," but instead, a well-rounded job. They know how to estimate properties – each technician carries a book complete with standard geometric property shapes and sizes to help them measure areas. Also, they are cross-trained – salespeople understand lawn care applications, aeration technicians leave quotes and applicators cover these tasks, too. This versatility is important, Brown stressed, and

If a picture is worth 1,000 words, then a digital image of a property might save 1,000 guesses when it comes to diagnosing lawn problems. Scott Brown, owner, ProGreen Lawn Care, Austell, Ga., prefers not to take chances with the words.

Digital cameras at ProGreen Lawn Care allow the company to capture conditions of its clients' lawns so technicians are not left guessing on the site. "Any occasion where the crews have a question on something they see or experience that can be photographed, they take a digital picture," he described. "Then, they can bring that back to the office and show a manager or salesperson so we don't have to make a second trip out to the property to see a problem."

This works the same for client questions. Technicians can simply snap a photo, visually record the query, and consult a manager about the problem, Brown said. "This is saving sales people tons of time from driving around and seeing what is brown patch and what is not," he pointed out, adding that he hopes to budget one camera for each crew next year.

Besides disease identification, the cameras play an integral role in the company's training program, Brown noted. If a technician spots a lawn care "don't" while on the job, he or she can take a picture, bring it to the next training meeting, and share the faux pas with other employees so they don't make the same mistake.

— Kristen Hampshire

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training eases the learning curve. Meanwhile, a dedicated employee who carries the title Customer Satisfaction Guarantee spot checks jobs, handles client calls, and even takes digital photographs of problems (see sidebar on page 66). This focus will eventually turn into a full-time job as the company continues to grow, predicted Mike Perry, chairman of the company.

Besides taking care of clients, ProGreen also concentrates on its own people. "Smaller companies are totally dependent on people, and that's why they have to train, encourage and develop them," Perry pointed out.

Brown realized that from the beginning when Perry agreed to take over the company's books. Perry's 40 years in large corporation management experience is ProGreen's financial half of the equation – Brown offers operations and marketing expertise. "We decided who had what strengths and weaknesses, and putting all egos aside, what's best for us as a whole is to realize our weaknesses and either

learn them or find someone who is better at it than we are," Brown figured.

FINISHING TOUCHES. Brown realizes that quality services stem from smooth systems. Without a solid infrastructure, the green lawns will fade, along with clients and dollars. He admits that in the past, systems were "an absolute nightmare," and resources – primarily labor – were a stretch.

Now, a staff of 22 allows crews to run more efficiently, and a software system paired with Perry's financial direction organizes accounting. Furthermore, certification and training efforts will take priority as the company expands, Brown added.

In addition, ProGreen sees plenty of activity in its lawn care division, and expects this facet to accelerate – maybe even reach 3,000 clients. The company plans to inflate its tree and shrub service, which currently makes up only 5 percent of the business. Finally, Brown wants to explore top dress-

ing and lawn sanding – a market increasing in popularity, he noted.

Of course, with these expansion tactics in mind, juggling too many balls at once is a concern, Brown remarked, adding that he will not stray from his quirky marketing mainstay. Aeration will not fade as other services strengthen, and neither will value, he emphasized. "The customer has a reminder of you in your absence, and that's their green lawn," he said.



The author is Associate Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.

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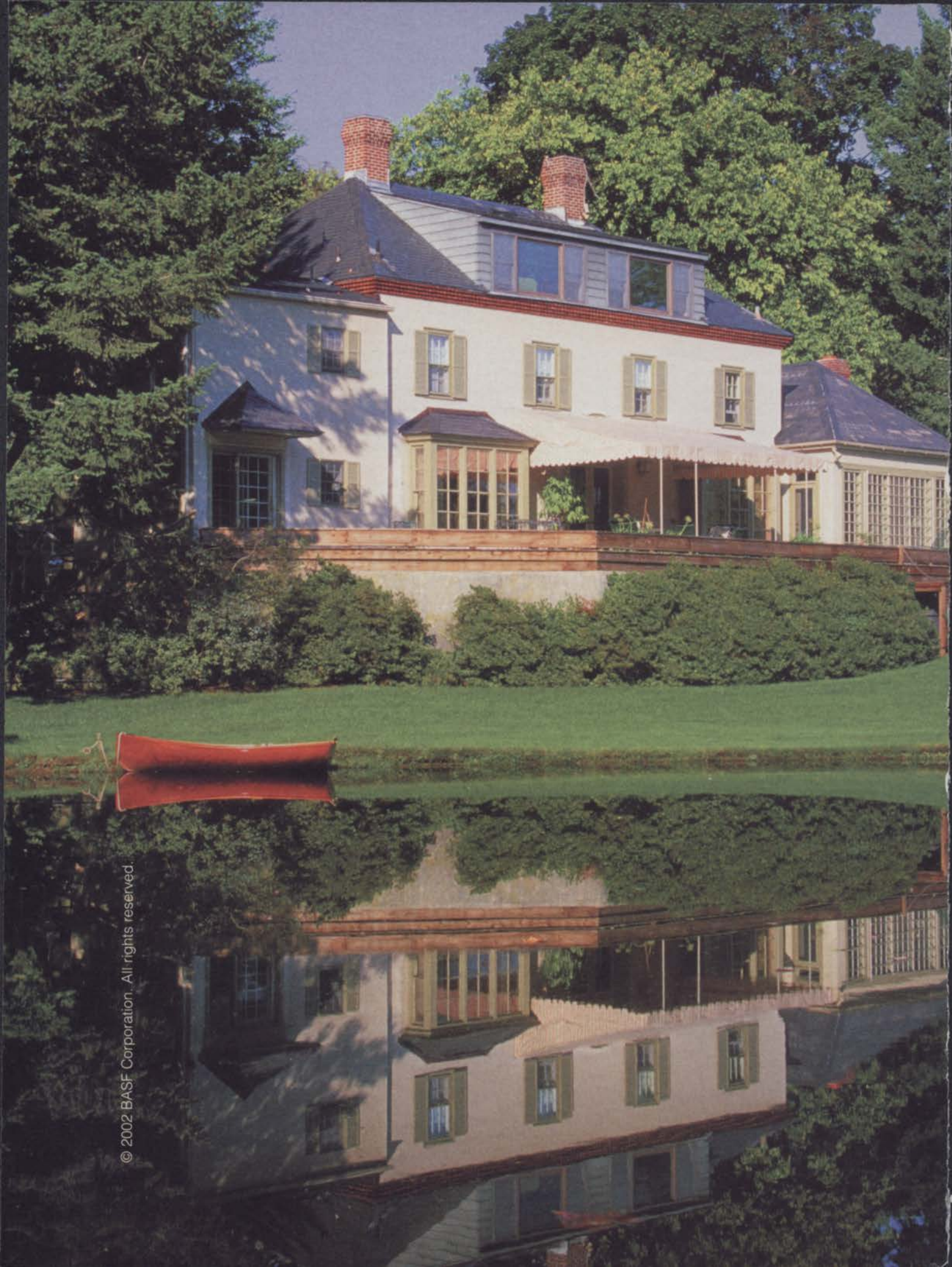


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USE READER SERVICE #17

Equipment Depreciation

by Kristin Mohr

Having a handle on equipment depreciation relates directly to balanced budgets and savvy spending.

What's It WORTH?

The idea of equipment depreciation can be enough to make one's head spin. Dealing with tax code discrepancies, understanding useful life and balancing budgets do not always come naturally. However, what does come naturally – the desire for profit and productivity – starts with a sound grip on the financial end of the business.

Depreciation begins immediately after the purchase of new equipment. A new riding mower or skid-steer loader will only be new for so long, and contractors need to take this into consideration when figuring their annual costs. An equipment purchase requires a significant investment – one that needs to be substantiated and recouped with new business and additional revenue. Balancing the value new equipment loses as it ages with revenue generated by machine use translates to booming business and investments worth the initial cost.

"Equipment holds tremendous potential, but causes real pitfalls if you don't know how to manage it effectively," noted Jim Huston, president, Smith-Huston, Englewood, Colo. "I just use the term 'busy and billable' – equipment has to be that about 50 percent of the time to be worth the investment."

Although depreciation cannot be explained in a step-by-step manner applicable to every contractor, the following tips will flush out some of the confusion stemming from depreciating costs. "Depreciation is a fairly simple concept once you grasp it," said Frank Ross, president, Ross-Payne & Associates, Chicago, Ill.

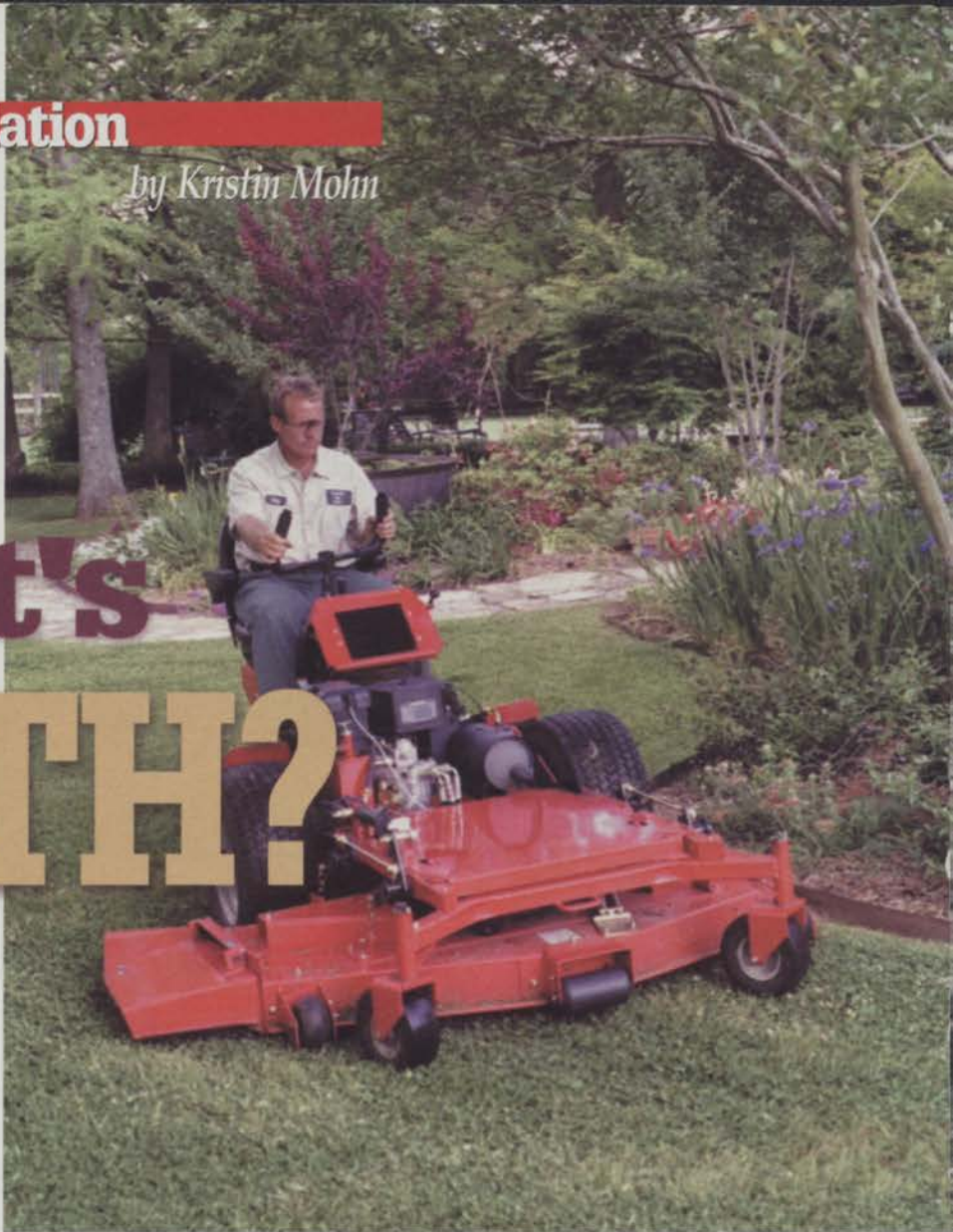
DEPRECIATION 101. Depreciation, a byproduct of the U.S. tax system, allows individuals to write off the cost of capital assets over their expected lifetime. A portion of the cost of each item is then figured into each year's business expenses. Depreciation helps business owners manage their expenses by spreading out equipment costs over several years, identified Dan Weingartz, general manager, Weingartz Supply, Utica, Mich.

"It's a better plan of what your true cost of doing business is," he said. "It allows you to replace equipment when it needs to be replaced and not when it breaks. Then, you can more effectively manage equipment inventory and not let it get out of hand."

(continued on page 72)

Balancing smart equipment purchases with depreciation know-how equals investments that pay for themselves.

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Equipment Depreciation

(continued from page 70)

Depreciation does not relate to how contractors finance the payments for new equipment. Instead, it is a representation of how assets will be used, Ross explained. "That's the easy thing – planning for depreciation – because it is truly a tax calculation," he said. Because the average useful life of most heavy equipment is seven years, contractors must

then spread the cost of an asset across the seven years and plan on recouping the cost through profit and productivity. Straight-line depreciation over seven years would then call for an annual \$1,000 business expense for a \$7,000 piece of equipment.

However, tax code depreciation for accounting purposes often will not match the

true depreciation of equipment, Weingartz advised. Although the legal useful life is set at seven years, some equipment may only have a useful life of three to four years. "When you're actually looking at the useful life, come up with a number that makes sense when coming up with a replenishment schedule," he said.

For example, a contractor may purchase a \$9,000 mower and depreciate it over seven years. Yet, the mower may only be operable and useful for approximately three years. In this case, consider the salvage or resale value of a piece of equipment. If the equipment can be sold before the seven years to overcome the depreciation loss, it may be more economical to sell, Weingartz said. If the mower had depreciated \$4,000 over three years but the contractor foresees receiving only \$4,000 in salvage value, the contractor can plan for a \$1,000 capital loss.

Weingartz went on to explain that keeping true depreciation in mind ultimately helps contractors with the big-picture mentality in terms of their equipment and replacement

(continued on page 74)

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As a general rule, you need to be able to bill out a piece of equipment approximately 50 percent of the time. For example, a tractor that has a cost per hour of \$15 should be included in bids and operated and billed to jobs at least 20 hours each week. This would generate \$300 per week in revenue (before profit and overhead markups) to cover its costs.

If you cannot bill out a piece of equipment 50 percent of the time, you will not generate enough revenue from it to cover its costs. Contractors can justify purchasing specialty equipment if they believe the convenience of ownership outweighs any lack of unbillable hours.

– Jim Huston

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USE READER SERVICE #18

Equipment Depreciation

(continued from page 72)

schedule. "At some point, equipment becomes more expensive to maintain than replace," he said. "Plan your replacement schedule so you have an idea of what your equipment expense is going to be every year in true dollars, instead of based on accounting."

This discrepancy may initially intimidate small companies or new business own-

ers and create frustration when attempting to balance accounting and true costs. "The depreciation aspect doesn't relate to reality," Huston said. "The IRS code was not meant to give the contractor operational tools, and it's important to realize we're not dealing with fair market value. [Accounting] may or may not reflect reality. Contractors

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Is this piece of equipment paying for itself? Is it justifying its existence and expense? — **Jim Huston**

Editor's Note: The sidebars on this page and page 72 are from the Jim Huston's book, Estimating for Landscape & Irrigation Contractors. The author is president of Smith Huston, Englewood, Colo. and can be reached at 800/451-5588.

Keeping Score

need to talk to an accountant and know their limitations with the tax accounting system vs. their budgeting for operational issues."

BALANCING BUDGETS. Calculating depreciation costs requires more than simply analyzing available equipment, suggested Jon Wernis, co-owner, United Lawnscape, Detroit, Mich. Counting costs from the beginning also helps contractors determine whether new equipment can be financed or not. "You have to have a firm grip on what costs are before you even worry about depreciation," he said. "You basically have to put a plan together for equipment within that cost of accounting. Figure out what you are spending over time with parts, repairs, etc."

Once business owners determine approximate annual costs, they can set up a profit-and-loss statement based on cost rates per labor hour. Huston offered an example to explain this process. If a contractor purchases a new truck for \$40,000, the tax schedule will dictate a certain time period for the asset's depreciation. To find out how much business the company will need to produce to pay for the truck, it makes sense to figure out how long the truck will be useful to the contractor.

(continued on page 76)

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USE READER SERVICE #31

Equipment Depreciation

(continued from page 74)

"The truck is going to last maybe 10 years," Huston suggested. "I take the cost of the truck, all of its fuel, the repair parts and every expense the truck will have during the course of its lifetime." These costs may equal about \$100,000, Huston figured, and the truck will probably last for about 10,000 billable hours. Subsequently, dividing the lifetime cost by the billable hours results in the cost per hour to operate the vehicle: \$10.

"Then, bill the truck out at least 1,000 hours a year, which gives us 10,000 hours over the lifetime of the truck," Huston continued. Eventually, the cost of the truck will be recouped at \$10 times 10,000 hours. This, Huston offered, is the true idea of depreciation: making the equipment pay for itself. In other words, if contractors don't think they'll use the truck this much, they shouldn't purchase the vehicle.

Although keeping a profit-and-loss statement remains important for tax purposes, being aware of productivity in terms of equipment costs and depreciation determines true

profitability. Even when a profit-and-loss statement reports a profit, measure it against true profitability and expenses to determine whether equipment costs are helping or hurting the business, Wernis said. "You need to know what your costs are, because if you don't know, how can you bid accurately?" he questioned. "Everything costs you money, and you actually need to know what it costs you on a labor per hour basis so you know where to aim your pricing."

Avoiding hasty decisions when purchasing equipment is also important, Huston remarked. Particularly when contractors attend trade shows, they see new equipment they want to purchase. Even though they may be able to afford the cost initially, contractors need to keep in mind that they'll need to boost production in order to finance the depreciation of the asset. "What happens is [the contractor] makes an emotional decision and buys it because he wants it," Huston said. "But when he can't keep busy enough, then he's in trouble. They have to have it, but they aren't asking who is going to pay for it."

"You need to know what
your **costs** are, because
if you don't know, how
can you **bid accurately?**"

— Jon Wernis

WHY DEPRECIATE? Depreciation may help lessen the impact of equipment costs from the outset, but contractors also need to realize the future implications of equipment purchases. A steady, consistent financial background may be a saving grace when a smaller company suddenly acquires a huge account and needs to boost equipment inventory, said Jack Snow, president, Sheffield Financial, Clemmons, N.C. "You have to watch depreciation and pay close attention to your credit because you never know when you'll end up with a contract," he said. For instance, one local company consistently borrowed from Sheffield Financial for five

(continued on page 93)



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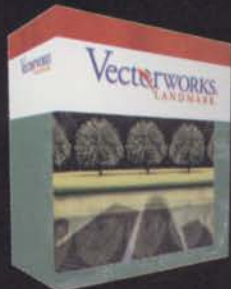


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by Kristin Mohn

IN THE

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Hand-held technology places a new spin on landscape contractors' everyday business routines.



Palm Pilots are no longer just for the three-piece-suit-clad yuppie set. Personal hand-held computer devices define the technological revolution, a trend changing the basic ways in which we receive and distribute information.

The landscape contracting industry has welcomed the revolution slowly, but surely. As the industry matures and progresses, Palm Pilot devices have begun to crop up in the field, saving time, retaining clients and preserving contractor sanity. "[The device] reminds me when I need reminding," said Joe Villines, owner, MyaScape Enterprises, Norwalk, Iowa. "At about \$200 for a Palm Pilot, it's worth it if it saves me from losing an account."

CYBER-CONSCIOUS. Hand-held devices appeared on the technology scene several years ago, but offered little assistance to the landscape industry because of their inaccessibility and fragility, insisted Joe McPhail, vice president of operations, Real Green Systems, Walled Lake, Mich. Early data collection units lacked a user-friendly interface, were bulky and inconveniently delicate. "If the computer geek was having trouble, we were not going to get a lawn care company behind it," he joked.

"We needed something that was friendly to the [contractor] and a tool he could use, not something he had to figure out."

Therefore, contractors found value in systems that required little training and emphasized durability within the field. Today, manufacturers have responded with hand-held computers better equipped for what Villines calls a "dirty business." McPhail agreed, suggesting that a contractor may be in and out of his truck more than 25 times each day, handling equipment roughly and in a variety of weather conditions. "One of the things we really looked for was durability when we selected the product we did," he identified. "The manufacturers are starting to see the uses in the field for Palm Pilots and have responded by making units specifically for those types of applications."

For Tony Neumann, president, Sprinkler Solutions, Scottsdale, Ariz., the hand-held computer investment still may not completely justify what could happen to the unit in the field. "If you drop a Palm Pilot, it will cost you a couple of hundred bucks," he said. "But if you drop a notebook, it costs 50 cents."

McPhail sees prices dropping as the uses and technology advance. And even when new models require a more significant

investment, he feels the impact on the business will be worth the cost. "When contractors look at the overall savings to the company, they won't have a problem with [the price]."

Yet, some kinks still need to be ironed out of the hand-held technology infrastructure, stressed McPhail. At the Green Industry Expo in 2001, he suddenly found himself with an inoperable Palm Pilot, miles away from his office and still a few days away from the trip home. "The matter of the issue was [the handheld] wasn't very rugged - I bumped it and it stopped working," McPhail said. Even though durability has improved since the inception of Palm Pilots, additional industry targeting could help eliminate similar snafus, he advised.

DATA INPUT. Thus far, Palm Pilot uses within the industry range from job reminders to job costing to client databases. Steve Williams, president, Stephen Williams Landscaping, Berkeley, Calif., finds the sched-

ing and communication capabilities invaluable to his business operations. "The office manager can run our calendars at the same time we update ours in the field," he said. "The Palm Pilot will be the key means of keeping in touch." However, he admitted the pen and paper still prove the most convenient means for him to keep track of messages.

Hand-held technology, when paired with appropriate software programs, also improves accuracy when tracking jobs and calculating job costing, McPhail related. The start and stop times of services can be tracked correctly with the data collection units, and when it comes time for estimating, simply typing in measurements and service specifics in the Palm Pilot yields an approximate price for the customer.

This ease in estimating travels back to the office, where an office staff "in the old days" had to set aside blocks of time to type in estimate information. "It would take hours and hours," McPhail remembered. Today,

information from the Palm Pilot can be routed directly to the computer, leaving time for more efficient business practices and eliminating tedious data-entry.

In turn, accurately filing and recording this information from the outset saves time in subsequent years, McPhail continued. "Later, if the customer calls back and wants a proposal, it's in the computer and you can pull it back up," he said. "You can give it to them over the phone and reduce work and considerably reduce costs."

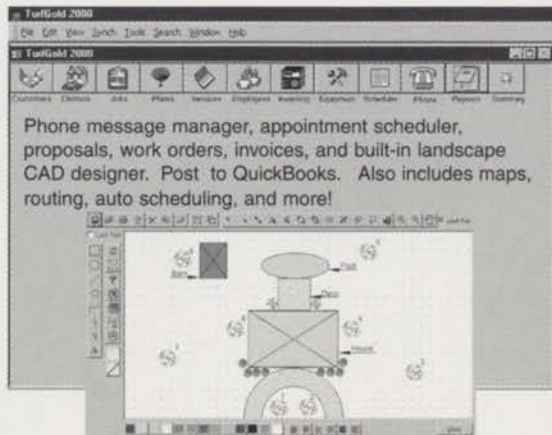
Villines again related the value of Palm Pilot reminders, which keep him on his toes when he has a multitude of appointments and responsibilities on his mind. He simply enters appointments and follow-up visits one by one into his e-mail calendar, and then receives reminders on the Palm Pilot via the calendar. However, Williams stated that some discrepancies between the actual desktop and the Palm Pilot software have lowered the value in syncing the two machines. "There

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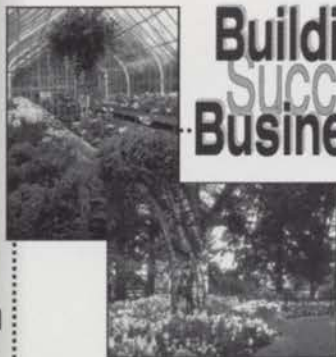
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are not many integrated packages between the desktop and the Palm Pilot, but I think that gap is closing," he said.

RIGHT FOR MY COMPANY? In truth, Palm Pilots may not be the No. 1 tool for a productive business. But, their abilities to save time, cut down costs and organize schedules establish them as a technological advance worth considering, McPhail said.

"The important thing when evaluating if [hand-helds] are valuable or not is to look at the overall productivity or value to the company as a whole," he said. "The advantage for our company is that the units automatically


collect start and stop times. The data we're collecting in the field — quantities, soil conditions, etc. — are better documented and more accurate than when done from memory at the end of the day. The data is entered into the system more quickly and it's not going to sit on someone's desk."

Convincing employees of hand-held benefits may be more difficult, Neumann countered. Because a Palm Pilot can potentially hold and deliver so much information, employees sometimes feel intimidated with information they don't necessarily need or utilize, he said. "Sometimes they don't want to learn anything new," he said. "But it's just a learning curve."

Williams trains his staff for hand-held computer use with an electronic slideshow presentation that demonstrates the unit's basic applications. Once employees learn how to work with the device, a process that usually takes only a matter of minutes, they get excited about the new technology. "Because

this is something new to them, it's been perceived almost as a toy," he said. "Most guys then pick them up and learn other things about them."

In fact, McPhail finds the Palm Pilot connotation of corporate success boosts employee reception. Just as cellular phones have exploded within society, the employees have started to view hand-held technology as a status symbol. And ultimately, as more companies begin using Palm Pilots, those companies left behind will want to join the technological revolution, predicted McPhail.

"When you get out in the field and see that the guy from a competitive company has better tools, it's the same as with a better truck or a better lawn mower," he remarked. "The guy with the best toys wins — and employees walk around with these [devices] with pride." 

The author is Assistant Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.

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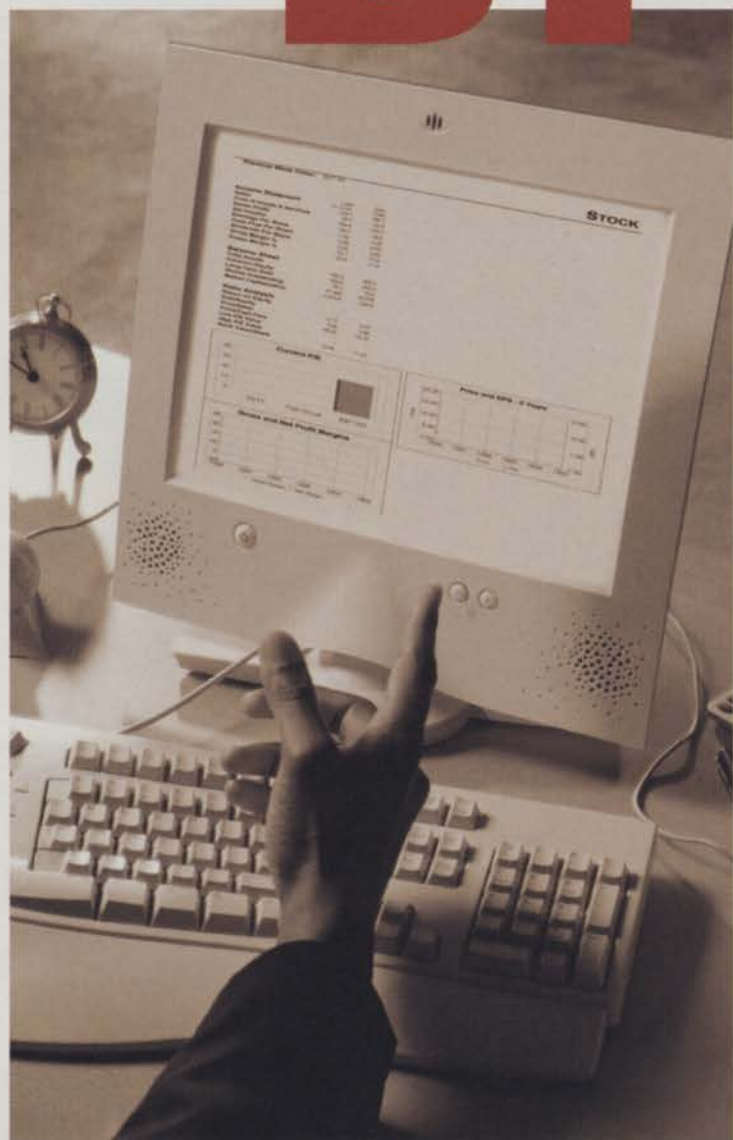
Technology • LAWN & LANDSCAPE • FEBRUARY 2002

T5

by Kristin Mohn

New software can change business operations significantly, but hands-on training ensures a smooth transition.

Reality BYTES



Try, for a moment, to imagine today's world without computers. Many of us can remember the days when we relied on a typewriter when writing a letter, used graph paper instead of a spreadsheet and calculated complicated budgets by hand. While the computer has not completely replaced the way we used to operate, it certainly has made our lives much easier.

Of course, since computers are still a relatively new invention, computer proficiency and skill varies across the board. Some people proudly label themselves computer geeks, while others struggle when logging on to the Internet. And as computers and software become more of a part of everyday business, this discrepancy presents a challenge.

Landscape contractors must keep this in mind when incorporating new software programs into their businesses. Paying attention to their employees' skill levels – as well as their reception to new technology – keeps everyone on the same page with new advances. Consistency paves the way to a comfortably wired-in company, said Bruce Moore, president, Eastern Land Management, Stamford, Conn. "The challenge is getting people to try new things," he said. "Some people are still nervous about venturing into uncharted territory."

TRADING IN THE TRADITIONAL. Initially, exchanging the tried-and-true ways of doing business with technology can create uneasiness, noted Steve Pruchansky, president, Greenscapes, Naples, Fla. "It's getting in the mindset to get rid of the pen and the paper," he said. "But my philosophy on software was that it would allow me to capture all the data coming into the office."

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Giving up traditional data-entry methods results in a trade-off between what is familiar and what will save time in the end. "We're all creatures of habit and we all resist change," Pruchansky said. "There are fears out there that you won't be able to do something as well as you do it currently, or that you're not going to be as good at it."

Therefore, employee intervention and discussion on software features must take place before blindsiding a company with new technology. Before bringing computer programs to Greenscapes, Pruchansky organized meetings with employees and discussed their fears and hopes for the software's capabilities.

"We looked at what we wanted the system to do, both immediate and long-term," he said. "We asked what we wanted to have it do today and tomorrow, and what we wanted it to accomplish." Including employees in the purchasing decision will allow them to be more receptive to training later on, he added.

Once a company chooses a software package, contractors can best prepare their staff for the new technology by bringing in the people who know the program best: its creators. Mark Harris, president, Harris Landscapes, Houston, Texas, set up a weekend training session with his employees and the software company staff to demonstrate the product. "We spent Saturday and Sunday going over things and learned basically by immersion," he noted. "Everyone was at a computer and, to me, that is the key thing: have the employees actually try it out, not just watch someone else."

Moore also stressed the hands-on approach when teaching software basics. "It's one of those things where you really have to experiment to reach your own level of comfort," he theorized. "And then, as with any program, since there is so much you can do with it, the more time you spend with it, the more you find the pitfalls and shortcuts that help you work faster and more efficiently."

In fact, when listing the best ways by which people learn, David Gabbert, owner, Inter-active Learning, Minneapolis, Minn., highlighted the hands-on approach as the most effective. "People learn by being cognitive – by actually doing something and repeating it," he identified.

SOFTWARE ABCs. Politicians often target influential or particularly visible groups and individuals during their campaign to help win over the masses. Similarly, approaching the management or crew leaders with new technology first creates a trickle-down effect that will eventually reach other employees.

"We had some concerns about electronic devices," Pruchansky said. "So we had four to five people involved in the first phase to see what the complaints and problems were before handing it out to everyone in the field."

Ultimately, after smoothing out the program's inconsistencies, the upper level's approval convinced the rest of the staff, he

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continued. "Once your senior people get behind it and support it, the team captains will handle the software from the top down." For this reason, training employees in the late summer months or early fall proves most effective because it is a slow time in the season, but usually a time period where most employees are still on staff, stated Moore.

Following the leader in this manner works well because once employees start hearing positive feedback from coworkers, they want to be part of the action, Gabbert said. If the competition has a handle on technological devices, employees will want to stay on top of their own game. "If you can get a testimonial from another company who says, 'We used to do it one way, now we do it this way,' it really works," Gabbert added.

True benefits probably speak louder than anything, Harris noted. His employees were particularly receptive when they realized they could switch from several different systems to one system for all operations. Identifying

these time-saving and productivity-boosting benefits usually wins over the employees in the end, Moore said. "One person might not be aware that there's something in the software that will help them to do their job better," he remarked.

For example, when Pruchansky updated his computer programs, he set up a dual system where the old and new software ran against each other. For 90 days, the company used the existing software as the primary model and then checked the information with the new model. In this manner, employees could easily compare both systems and check the accuracy of the new program. "We'd match results and make sure billings were coming out the same on the two systems," he said. "We'd sit down three days a week and become familiar with the system, and then every day. We did it for a 90-day period until we matched our numbers."

This training method helped Greenscapes identify features it wanted to add or remove

from the software – items that managers then passed on to the software company. Customizing the program based on each employee's input resulted in a software package that catered to everyone's needs. After switching the new system to the primary position and the old system faded out of use. "We let the [old system] go away and converted the other machines over, and the old one went off into the sunset," he related.

Methodical, organized systems like Pruchansky's eliminate the guesswork and emphasize simplicity – a key concept when demonstrating a technological product, Moore said. He identified over-emphasis on detail as a pitfall when training employees for software. "Many times keeping it as simple as possible is better even though software does give you the opportunity for a lot of detail," he said.

Again, consistency proves invaluable with software training. "Have an organized matrix so that everyone knows what the flow of

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information is and have a sheet detailing all the codes used so everyone is on the same page," Moore suggested.

SYSTEM OVERLOAD. Errors and system failures make up the dark side of computer technology – anyone who has used a computer has wanted to throw it out the window in frustration at one point. Similarly, training crews for software sometimes meets fierce resistance when they refuse to input the information. A mix of patience and creativity helps convince employees their lives are about to become much easier.

"People resisted the software at the beginning," Pruchansky said. "But we were incorporating more things onto the computer that were done manually before. Then, they started to see the benefits – certain aspects of the job only had to be done one time." For instance, crews could log the start time of their jobs on the computer with just the click of the mouse, resulting in accurate and simple job costing.

Gabbert added that the time commitment to training sometimes concerns employees. In addition, their pride in the current system of accomplishing work causes them to question a new system. They may worry about changes in productivity, but in the end they realize their overall efficiency can only be boosted with the software. This is the key point to emphasize, he said. "The better tools they have, the more effective they'll be at what they do," he shared.

Once a company breaks the ice with a new program, inevitably employees will take interest in the new and improved systems, Gabbert continued. He compared software training to the slow but steady growth of the Internet. "Until people work with the Internet and find how much time it can save them, they just don't realize [the benefits]," he said.

And, as the world moves farther into the 21st century, grasping technological concepts will become mandatory for a successful business, Pruchansky predicted. "If you don't have a computer, you're making a mistake," he said simply. "You're spending too much time doing it manually, when you could be turning attention to other things to make [your business] more profitable." **LL**

The author is Assistant Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.

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Advanced Software For The Business Side

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CLIP

by Andy Gentry

Smart software purchases require a thorough look at present and future employee concerns and business needs.

P People ask, "What is the best software for me?" My typical answer is, "It depends on your business and what you want to get out of the software." The best solution is the one that fits your business, not your neighbor's business or someone else's recommendation. I usually tell people if a software program does 80 to 85 percent of what you want, you are doing well.

So how do you go about selecting the software that fits your company? Here are some steps that will guide you along a productive search for the software that fits your business best.

STEP ONE - WHAT DO I DO? You must first assess your company's focus. It is a good idea to plan ahead. Write down what it is that you do now and what you expect to do in the next five to 10 years. For example, if you intend on opening a retail garden center, make sure the software you select has the capability to handle it.

STEP TWO - SELECT A POINT PERSON. This levelheaded individual will work for the company's common goals and have an understanding of computers, a willingness to work with the vendor on installation and implementation, an understanding of what your business does operationally and financially, and a willingness to work with others. This person should also be open minded and willing to take suggestions.

STEP THREE - FORM A REVIEW COMMITTEE. My suggestion is that you keep this committee small and manageable. A committee of two to five people, excluding the point person, should be plenty. This group should have the ability to keep company-wide interests in mind and hold a basic understanding of the big picture. The committee should then find as many vendors as possible that fit the basic software



SELECTING Software

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criteria. You are finding possible solution providers and do not want to eliminate anyone at this point.

STEP FOUR - LIST NEEDS AND WANTS.

The management will now want to sit down with the committee and answer a few questions. Do you want a Windows- or DOS-based program? Do you want a single package, or separate operations and accounting features that may or may not be able to be linked? Are you looking at industry-specific or non-industry-specific programs?

Take each of your operations and choose the capabilities you need for software. The key word here is need—not want. Get employee and manager input. Ask your employees what they need. Keep separate lists of wants and needs.

Needs for the future should be strongly considered when looking at a new package. Buy a software system that will cover your needs today and tomorrow. A short-term fix will only cost you money down the road. Decide what is absolutely essential and what is realistic for

each division and potential divisions.

STEP FIVE - REVIEW THE LIST WITH EMPLOYEES.

After surveying your employees and ranking what is important, discuss the results with your employees. This is when a good point person is essential. This person needs to review with each division what was on the needs and wants lists and make sure one division or person is not dominating the decision-making process. Make appropriate changes and make sure to cover the overall picture.

STEP SIX - SCREEN VENDORS.

Your point person will want to sit down with the committee and review each vendor. This is a simple review – no vendor should take more than five minutes to review. You are looking to see which vendors meet your basic criteria. If a vendor is above a 50 percent

match, leave them in for now. This step simply eliminates the vendors that do not meet your criteria and basic needs. Try to get to a manageable list of vendors.

STEP SEVEN - DISCUSS SOFTWARE OPTIONS.

At this point you should be down to three to seven vendors. The committee will want to assign at least two people to each software program to avoid missing important points. The mem-

THE BEST (SOFTWARE)

SOLUTION *is the one that fits your business, not your neighbor's business or someone else's recommendation.*

bers then should review each software vendor. This will give everyone a chance to discuss the different packages. This review should be positive, if possible, and based on the same criteria. Again, look for a software vendor that matches more than 50 percent of your needs. Once the committee has done this, there should be two to five vendors that you will want to review.

STEP EIGHT - DEMONSTRATE EACH PACKAGE.

Your committee should review demonstrations of the remaining software packages. The needs and wants lists created earlier should be used as checklists for each vendor. A basic overview of each software package should lead you to two or three final options.

Determine how user-friendly the software is and how compatible it is with your business. Any wants that are in the software at this point are bonuses. Sometimes it will be necessary to re-examine a software package. Just make sure that you see what the software offers and not just what the salesperson wants you to see. People sometimes get confused with flashy features and overlook the basics.

STEP NINE - NARROW THE FIELD.

Eliminate vendors who don't meet your criteria. Take your top two or three software vendors. If only one or two score well, keep them. This is not the final determi-

nation of which software to buy – this is the process to establish the finalists. These vendors should meet a majority of your criteria. If no one is more than a 50 or 60 percent match, start over. If only one vendor meets your criteria, don't immediately hand them a check. You want to finish the process to select the right vendor.

This is when you also want to talk to a few referrals. Get an idea of how other users support the software, the training the vendor can provide and peripheral hardware or software will be needed. You will now have a list of one, two or three vendors that meet most of your wants and needs.

STEP TEN - THE FINAL

DECISION. You want the company as a whole to buy into the software.

Break down the software by department or division. If it meets the basic needs and does some of the wants, employees will tell you. If the end users get involved in this stage they will get a feel for the software and what it can do. Hopefully, you will now have a vendor that meets most of your criteria and receives a satisfactory review from each group.

You are trying to satisfy the needs of you and your employees, but you will never make everyone happy. It is essential to get a package that does the bulk of what you want and need. The right software package is worth 10 times the wrong package. Many companies overlooked software because of price the first time, only to buy that software down the road. The right software package will save you time and money.

Also, remember this is not an overnight process. It will take time, and you will face growing pains with any software you select. There is no foolproof method of getting your company up and running. But if you take the time to do the research, you will end up with a package that is right for you. Finally, talk to the referrals of the winning vendor on how they implemented the software into their companies. It will take time to implement any software. Be patient. **□**

The author is a sales associate for SLICE Technologies, Cincinnati, Ohio, and can be reached at andyg@sliceplus.com.


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USE READER SERVICE #158

(continued from page 76)

years, and when it suddenly needed six new pieces of equipment, the company history helped finance the purchase.

"But if the company had jumped from one finance company to another it would have no track record," he mentioned. "Find a good finance company and stick with it - you need the experience." Carefully mapping out depreciation also impresses financial institutions when they are approving or rejecting loans, said Todd Hunt, certified public accountant and co-owner, Piedmont Landscaping, Atlanta, Ga. "I know what banks look for and it's difficult to explain away depreciation - it really hurts your credibility," he said.

Besides, depreciation can help boost business by lowering taxes and avoiding equipment value losses, Weingartz said. Avoiding a depreciation plan will only come back to haunt the contractor later. "It will hit you at some point or another," he predicted. "If your equipment has been depreciating faster

[than you've been tracking] or you've had no depreciation at all, your asset has been declining in value and you've been losing money and not tracking it. It will eventually come down to a point where you're in a real pinch from a profitability standpoint and you will have to take that hit." Sooner or later, the declining value of equipment will have to be figured into expenses, he concluded.

On the other hand, some smaller types of equipment, such as hedge trimmers and leaf blowers, generally should not be depreciated, Wernis offered. Since this equipment tends to not last as long as mowers and other large machinery, expensing the cost in one year tends to be more cost-effective than depreciating it.

Selling outdated equipment sometimes expenses the loss of depreciating equipment, Huston pointed out. In fact, figuring equipment's maximum resale value and selling it at that point avoids repairs that tend to add to the cost of the machine in the end. "Most people will offload mowers after three

seasons, right before they get into a lot of repair," he said. "That's a good rule of thumb with some of the larger mowers. Some contractors keep it forever and keep repairing, saying, 'I'm saving money,' but by the time you get that done, you can buy yourself a new machine." Again, contractors should ignore emotional attachments and focus on their productivity, he said.

A savvy business owner only becomes so by going through the motions, Wernis reminded. "You learn by hands-on experience - the actual stuff - and not right out of the book," he said. Once a contractor learns the process, expensing depreciation year after year becomes less of a challenge, Huston agreed. "A lot of it is just getting the initial concepts down," he said. "You need to systematize the business and take care of your systems so they take care of you." **LL**

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



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Mower Outlook

by Kristen Hampshire

Phones without cords? Battery-operated cars? Lights that "clap" on or off?

Years ago, people surfed waves, not the Web, and mower technology meant little more than spinning blades and a solid frame.

And, most likely, contractors didn't dream of turning in their ramshackle mowers for slick, smooth-riding, speedy models that manufacturers offer today. "What was once a wild dream for the future – now we're living it in reality," remarked Mark Meagher, advertising manager, Dixie Chopper, Evansville, Ind.

Power in the 1970s didn't surpass 6 horsepower, and engines in the 1980s were chain driven – hydrostatic technology didn't catch on until the early 1990s, Meagher pointed out.

"In the past it's been nuts and bolts and welders and drills, and even the manufacturing process over the years has improved with robotic capabilities," he noted. "It's only a matter of time before that type of computer and electronic assistance permeates its way down to our level. I don't know that mowers will ever look like Lamborghinis, but it never hurts to try."

SHARPENING DEMANDS. As the lawn and landscape market evolves and clients' needs shift, contractors' equipment demands also change. A push for professionalism has contractors seeking "the look" – striped, clean cuts. A thinning labor force prompts them to search for comfortable, reliable machines to keep employees happy and mowers out of the shop. And, as always, time is money, and efficient equipment allows crews to take on more accounts.

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USE READER SERVICE #34

Mower Outlook

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"The industry has gotten more competitive, and it seems to be continuing in that direction," noted Barry Adamski, product manager for walk-behind products, Gravely, an Ariens Co., Brillion, Wis. "The contractors I've been working with want to be more professional. They want to differentiate themselves. If you think about it – a lot of people

can hire the kid next door for \$5 an hour, so how do contractors differentiate themselves from that? How do they charge five to 10 times that amount and live running a business that way? They have to have premium quality of cut," he stressed.

Or, they have to have "the look," as Ken

"I don't know that mowers will ever look like **Lamborghinis**, but it **never hurts to try.**"

– Mark Meagher

Taylor put it. Productivity is key, but it is not a tradeoff for quality, reminded the national sales manager for corporate accounts, Husqvarna, Charlotte, N.C. To cater to this professional appearance, manufacturers are accessorizing their mowers with striping kits and double blades. "Maybe a machine cuts at 7 acres an hour, but if you have to go back and recut it, it doesn't matter how fast it cuts," he said, matter-of-factly. "Whether we call it a striping look or a professional look – people are asking for whatever creates 'the look.'"

Adamski pointed out that double blades can reduce uneven cutting – another blunder that blows a company's image. "A lot of contractors are retrofitting their own machines with the double blades, and that also helps with productivity in that rather than going over the yard twice, you might only have to go over it once," he explained.

These mechanical tweaks might not be rocket science – or really all that futuristic – but the simple improvements create a finish more appealing to clients, Adamski added. "All the manufacturers are playing with blades and attempting to provide a better cut – there's always small enhancements," he said.

And just as clients ask for fairway finish lawns, employees want easy-riding mowers to carry them over these properties while they are working eight- to 10-hour days, pointed out Roy Dust, product specialist, Ferris Industries, Munnsville, N.Y. Business owners who want to retain employees in a labor market where valuable help is hard to find consider comfort a major factor when purchasing mowers.

"Help is a continual problem," Dust emphasized. "If you want to keep quality people you have to give them some creature comforts. One of the trends we have seen is a movement from large area walk-behind mowers to smaller riding Zs. The fact that the employee is riding is perceived to be more comfortable than walking behind a machine or standing on a sulky behind a machine."

Features such as independent suspension smooth out rocky rides, allowing mowers to follow ground contours more carefully. Also,

(continued on page 100)

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USE READER SERVICE #10

Mower Outlook

(continued from page 98)

some manufacturers are repositioning controls for easier operation, as comfort becomes a key component for users, Taylor added. This saves labor from constant operation strain and also saves time in training. "From a training perspective, the controls should be easy to use and operate, and if it takes 20 minutes to an hour to teach someone to use the machine, there is a longer learning curve," he explained.

In fact, more contractors are factoring labor concerns into their buying habits, pointed out Randy Harris, marketing manager, Toro Landscape Contractor Equipment, Bloomington, Minn. "Like any other job, the work environment and tools to perform the task play a major role in job satisfaction," he said. "By investing in features like deluxe suspension seats, Z-stand lifts and operator-friendly steering, the contractor is making a statement to employees, both current and prospective, that he or she is concerned about them. This can have a dramatic effect on

employee retention and recruiting."

Besides, technicians' mowers require constant operation, unlike blowers and trimmers that they might operate for 20-minute spurts, Taylor explained. So, convenience items like location of the cut height adjust can work in favor of contractors if correctly placed. Just as many riding mowers feature cut height adjust levers within arm's reach of the seat, walk-behinds can offer the same simplicity with the adjust close to the operator handle. "We found that users were willing to pay more for the convenience of being able to adjust the cut height easily," he noted.

In fact, contractors are willing to pay more for mowers in general, Adamski noticed. "There is a big push by these contractors to act professionally and price their jobs to stay in business," he said. "In the past, everyone would get into a price war and no one would make money. We seem to be gaining business sense as an industry and we are making better decisions, and contrac-

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tors are willing to spend more money on the products that will make them more money."

POWER AND PRODUCTIVITY. People will pay for professionalism – and they will pay for productivity. If spending more means earning more, contractors don't mind coughing up dollars for mowers that cover more ground in less time, or do specialty work – such as small riding models that fit between fence gates, Adamski pointed out.

"There is an increase in people willing to spend money on productivity," he said. "If you can increase productivity with the same number of employees, you've increased profitability and you stay in business."

(continued on page 102)

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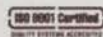
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Mower Outlook

(continued from page 100)

Mowers are robotic workers, in a sense. If a machine is efficient and stays out of trouble – or out of the shop, that is – contractors can depend on it as a hard-working part of the crew. And if these machines can save time, they earn money.

Perhaps this is why contractors shopping for mowers feel the need for speed. "Really,

it boils down to everyone wanting the same thing – the service they are providing, after all, is time-based," Meagher said. "They are going to have to mow X amount of times per year based on their climate and they are sending a crew in there with X amount of people, and the sooner they get in and out of there and do the

"Productivity is key, but it is not a tradeoff for quality,"

– Ken Taylor

job efficiently, it goes right to the bottom line.

"That generally translates to ground speed and horsepower," he added, noting that 15 years ago, mowers didn't exceed 18 to 20 horsepower. "Now, we can use all we can get," Meagher remarked.

Cutting faster requires more than just horsepower, however. Dust reminded that increasing the ground speed feeds more grass into the mower deck, which takes more power to discharge the clippings and achieve a quality cut. Covering more area doesn't mean adding more inches to the deck size. "It doesn't matter if the mower is 48 or 62 inches, if you increase the ground speed, you have to increase the power because one affects the other."

A workable mix of tip speed and air flow allows clippings to move efficiently through the mower deck, Dust figured. Also, deck depth can create more room for more grass. "Tip speed is not the total answer," he noted. "You can have tip speed but if you have poor air flow, that will create clogging and affect the quality of the cut or discharge. You need a balance of tip speed and airflow – you have to have the two working together."

While contractors once upgraded the size of their mower decks to handle larger volumes, most users realize their limits, Dust added. "Size is not the answer any longer," he stressed. "We've maxed out at that – we're not going to build an 80-inch mower and have it fit on people's trailers, and there is a much smaller percentage of users that can use a 72-inch than a 60-inch model. Sixty inches seems to be the optimum."

"The only way we will be able to increase productivity is through more efficient equipment, which relates primarily to ground-speed," he figured.

NEXT IN TECH. Comfort and speed are constants – these factors are not trends in the mower industry but, instead, steady demands that contractors continue to seek in their equipment. But, now, technology is sparking different upgrades.

"I hate to use the term 'high-tech,' but with the amount of technology out there, there is a lot that could be adapted into outdoor power equipment," Meagher pointed

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USE READER SERVICE #37

Mower Outlook

(continued from page 102)

out. Electronic intervention in engines helps fuel efficiency, and traction assist control – similar to anti-lock brakes on cars – is cropping up on some mower models. Also, fuel injection on small, air-cooled engines has improved greatly.

"The drive train and other things on the machine haven't even been touched yet," Meagher noted, adding to the list of electronic assist possibilities that could develop in coming years.

Adamski mentioned advanced liquid-cooled gas mowers and diesel models new to the market, both with increased ground speeds, higher productivity and improved efficiency. More contractors are considering diesel, liquid-cooled engines for their power capabilities and gasoline economy, even though they might be a bit more expensive initially, he said.

Contrary to the bleak economic forecast, contractors are more than willing to spend their money for all of these features. They

still have clients, work and employees, so they still need machines to run their businesses. At the same time, they enjoy financing options that some manufacturers offer today, Harris said. "It seems that contractors are looking for a variety of different finance options to choose from," he said. "Timing of the purchase and cash flow typically determine which type of financing is most appealing. It is important to offer contractors flexibility."

Most contractors share the need to purchase more equipment to fuel their company's growth. "As one contractor shared with me at the Green Industry Expo in Tampa, 'The sun is gonna shine, the grass is gonna grow and somebody will have to cut it. It might as well be me,'" Harris recalled.

And, it might as well be a Lamborghini... well, at least in the future. **LL**

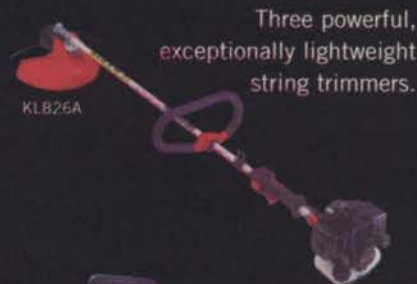
The author is Associate Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.



Comfort considerations top contractors' lists when purchasing mowers. Many manufacturers are tweaking hand control design to accommodate these demands. Photo: Husqvarna

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USE READER SERVICE #91

Irrigation Zoning

by Larry Keesen

Irrigation systems that are not built upon a foundation of proper zoning are set up to fail.

GET Into the ZONE

A An irrigation system will fail unless suitable zones and pipe routing are designed and installed properly. After completing sprinkler head layout, the next steps in the design process are to determine the size and area to be served by each zone in the system, the best location of the control valves and proper pipe routing. These steps are vital for controlling costs and improving irrigation system efficiency.

When developing zones, divide each site into areas of differing water requirements such as turf, planting beds, ground covers and so on. Cultivated planting beds require more water than areas mulched with humus or rock. Additionally, the height and density of the plant materials will provide shade for the soil surface, reducing the evaporation rate from the soil.

Many different watering requirements exist for every site. It's the job of the irrigation contractor to identify relevant terms to save water and improve the health of the landscape as well as to maintain its aesthetic value.

ZONING FOR CONTROL. Heads on the slope must be zoned separately from those at the peak or base of the slope. The heads at the base are zoned separately because of runoff and soil saturation from above. To meet

(continued on page 112)



Water requirements for turf and annual flower and shrub beds vary, so irrigation for these areas should be separated into different zones.
Photo: Hunter Industries

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Irrigation Zoning

(continued from page 108)

the needs of the landscape, proper irrigation design requires that the operating pressure within a zone never vary more than 15 percent.

Site elevation changes will increase the pressure in the lateral line by 0.433 PSI for every foot of elevation drop between the highest and lowest head. This may mean additional zones for the system unless pressure reducing devices (not flow controls) are installed at or inside the heads. If the elevation difference in a zone is 5 feet, the pressure at the lowest head is 2.17 PSI higher than the highest head. An 11-foot elevation change means an additional pressure of 4.76 PSI at the low end. If the heads are pop-up sprays operating at 30 PSI and flowing at 4 GPM, then some heads 11 feet below will be operating at a higher flow rate of 4.5 GPM.

This results in an increased flow of approximately 12 percent and a precipitation rate increase from 1.97 inches per hour to 2.17 inches, or $\frac{1}{5}$ of an inch per hour of moisture. Conversely, an 11-foot elevation

change means a pressure reduction of 4.76 PSI at the highest head. If the low head is operating at 30 PSI and a flow rate of 4 GPM, the head 11 feet higher will operate at a lower flow rate of 3.6 GPM minute due to pressure losses in pipe and fittings. When coupled with pressure losses in the lateral lines, a different zone is required when elevation changes exceed 5 feet or 6 feet in order to keep the lateral pressure variation within the required 15 percent.

Identify areas with varied exposures to sunlight. Areas on the north or east sides of a building or steep slope will require less water than the south and west side exposures, as well as any other areas of shade or sun. Also be sure to identify low places, drainage ways and storm water detention ponds, and zone these bottom areas separately from the adjacent areas.

Heads and valves should be installed adjacent to and outside of these low areas, not in the bottom where mud and water can

This article is excerpted from Larry Keesen's book, The Complete Irrigation Workbook, which includes 262 pages of suggested irrigation techniques along with 23 quizzes, making this the perfect educational tool for any irrigation contractor. Copies of the book are available for \$14.95. For more information, call Lori Skala at 800/456-0707.

affect equipment and ease of maintenance. Parking lot medians and islands, due to the surrounding asphalt and heat, will require more water and separate zones. Calculate all the head flows (GPM) for each identified area. Remember, all heads within the zone must have matched application rates, i.e., bubblers, rotors, spray heads and so on must be zoned separately. In addition, the nozzles within the zone should be matched.

Next, determine the required system capacity in water flow (GPM) and pressure. Once the maximum safe flow in GPM is determined, complete system zoning. If 30

(continued on page 114)

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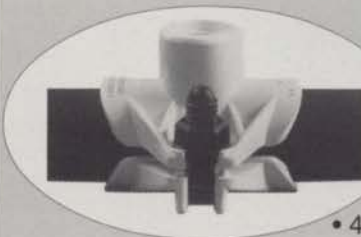
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Irrigation Zoning

(continued from page 112)

GPM is the maximum allowable flow, then an area with a total flow of 101.5 GPM requires four zones at 25.38 GPM. Subsequently, three zones is 33.83 GPM, which exceeds our maximum flow. Cheat on the maximum safe flow and it may come back to haunt you in high water costs, additional liability and water waste. When in doubt, simply add another zone.

ZONE VALVE LOCATION. The most efficient location for the electric control valve is in the middle of the zone, but because of elevation shifts, pressure controls and wire, pipe and trenching costs, this is not always cost effective for the entire irrigation system.

Cost-effective control valve placement allows the valve to be on one side of the zone it serves. If an area is two zones in width, then it would be appropriate to route the main between the two zones. This will save on the cost of pipe and installation, as well as maintain a good balance of pressure throughout the zone.

The same is true at the end of the mainline, where it is usually cost effective to stop the mainline prior to entering the last zone or two, depending on the distance and elevation change from the control valve and the closest boundary of the zone.

The mainline route, where the area widens and is more than two irrigation zones wide on any side, should have the mainline extended toward that area in order to better control the lateral pressure variation and lateral line surge. Long, straight lines have a much greater potential for surge than do shorter ones, and empty lines from low head drain-

age will increase the surge damage potential.

End feeding long, single row zones with 30 to 40 pop-up spray heads can delay by minutes the time it takes for the first and last head on the line to pop up. This affects the water distribution by placing more water closer to the zone. Center feeding the line will reduce surge potential and reduce the time between the first head pop up and the last head pop up.

A few years ago, I evaluated a parkway irrigation project in which most of the zones were composed of a long single row, several hundred feet long, with 20 feet of elevation change and the control valve located at one end. The maintenance personnel complained of both wet and dry spots throughout the turf area. The high pressure variation plus the elevation increase caused the wet and dry areas and poor uniformity of coverage. This was the first time I saw the theory in vivid reality.

If there are two or more rows of heads and little slope, shorten the rows and place several rows on the same zone, so long as all of the heads have matched application rates. Heads that are grouped together will cool the air more, resulting in less evaporation and better compensation for wind direction changes during the watering cycle.

Valves and valve boxes should also be kept away from walks, streets and driveways to avoid damage from vehicles and snow plows, lessen pedestrian liability, reduce visibility and prevent vandalism. Essentially, the irrigation system should be as invisible as possible so it doesn't detract from the landscape.

Be particularly cautious when designing irrigation slopes or berms in which the slopes are greater than 4-to-1. When berms or mounds are present, the top should be watered with a separate zone even if it consists of only one head. The peak of the berm will dry out much faster than the slopes and will require additional water.

It is particularly important that slope irrigation is designed to control the water application on the slope, using separate zones when necessary. Instead of a design that is driven by costs, the physical limits of the zone (access stairs and walks) and ease of installation must be considered. This will also help turf maintenance crews by eliminating wet spots on the lower half and bottom of the slope. — *Larry Keesen*

The Slippery Slopes

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Check this article online for additional information on proper irrigation zoning and installation tips.

MAINLINE & LATERAL PIPE ROUTING.

Determination of zones and approximate control valve locations helps route the mainline from the point of connection through the backflow preventer (if required) to the zone control valves and, in turn, the lateral piping to the heads.

The lateral piping is generally laid out in parallel rows, with up to six rows which are connected at the approximate center of the row with a header and then routed to the electric control valve. The pipe should be routed away from the control valve unless obstructions are in the way. Why waste pipe and pressure by directing the pipe backward the valve? If you know that the pipe will be pulled into the ground, then the route can be curved to the extent that the pipe and puller will allow. Routing will also be determined by the ease of construction and how the pipe and fittings are made.

Some designers try to place as much pipe as possible in the same trench and then branch off to the head locations. Any way it's done, the amount of trenching is about the same, but single head branching will always increase the costs because of the additional fittings and repositioning of the trencher or puller.

When trenchers can't get close enough to a building, branching is the only choice unless you want to dig it by hand. Trenching or pulling the pipe requires equipment that is usually several feet wide. Space must be allowed for this when routing the main and laterals.

Often, the easiest way to route the pipe is also an effective way to control pressure loss. The type of soil or rock will also affect on how the pipe may be routed. Minimize pipe routing through gardens and cultivated planting beds to avoid damage to lines. When routing the pipe, avoid obstructions and stay away from trees and their roots.

Roots can cause polyethylene pipe to be squeezed shut, restricting flows and causing leaks. PVC pipe has greater rigidity and can better withstand damage from roots. **LI**

The author is president of Keesen Water Management, Denver, Colo.



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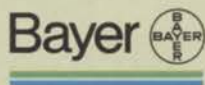


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USE READER SERVICE #41

Pre vs. Postemergence

by Tim Murphy

Lawn care operators have more than one option for controlling turfgrass weeds.

After all is said and done, there are two basic components of a turfgrass weed control program: the use of preventive, cultural and mechanical practices that promote the growth of an adapted turfgrass, and the use of herbicides to supplement the control obtained by following approved turfgrass management practices.

Each component, when used alone, usually will not control all turfgrass weeds. To consistently control weeds, one must integrate the various methods associated with each component into a comprehensive weed management plan.

Part of that plan includes the use of preemergence and/or postemergence herbicides. While some lawn care operators prefer to use one method or the other, both can be used together successfully to maintain nearly weed-free turf.

HERBICIDES 101. An herbicide is a pesticide that is used to control weed growth and development. Before an herbicide is labeled for turfgrass use, it is thoroughly investigated by manufacturers, land grant universities and various federal agencies. The herbicide must be proven to cause no adverse risk to humans and the environment, and it must effectively control weeds in turfgrasses.

One could view the use of proper turfgrass management practices (see sidebar on page 126) and herbicides as the combination, or one-two punch, for controlling weeds. Herbicides used in the absence of proper turfgrass management practices may control problem weeds, but will rarely achieve high-quality turfgrass. Similarly, weeds will be a problem on most sites if only approved cultural and mechanical methods are used.

Turfgrass managers use two basic types of herbicides to control weeds: preemer-

(continued on page 120)



Regardless of whether a lawn care operator chooses a preemergence or postemergence herbicide, the most important factor in selecting a product is the turfgrass' tolerance to it.

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Pre vs. Postemergence

(continued from page 118)

gence and postemergence. Preemergence herbicides are applied to the turfgrass prior to weed seed germination and control weeds during the germination process. When applied in the early spring months, preemergence herbicides provide season-long control of summer annual weeds such as crabgrass and goosegrass. When applied in the early fall months, this group of herbicides will control many winter annual weeds such as annual bluegrass, common chickweed and henbit.

But note that preemergence herbicides are recommended only for established turfgrasses. Consult the herbicide labels to determine the time interval from establishment to preemergence herbicide application.

Severe injury can result if a preemergence herbicide is applied after seeding turfgrasses, such as common bermudagrass, fescues, ryegrasses and centipedegrass, or after sprigging turfgrasses, such as bermudagrass hybrids, St. Augustinegrass, zoysiagrass and centipedegrass.

Preemergence herbicides do not control all weeds that may be present in a lawn, but they are effective on many of the most common lawn weeds, such as the various species of crabgrass. When weeds appear in the lawn, it is too late to apply a preemergence herbicide. Postemergence herbicides are applied directly to emerged weeds. In contrast to preemergence herbicides, this group of herbicides only controls weeds that are emerged and actively growing at the time of treatment.

Postemergence herbicides used in turfgrasses are translocated in the plant system that transports food and water. It is not necessary to drown the weed with a postemergence herbicide - apply postemergence herbicides only to the point of spray runoff. Any spray that runs off the weed is usually wasted and does not result in increased control.

PREEMERGENCE PROS. In the past 10 to 15 years, numerous preemergence and postemergence herbicides have been labeled for weed control in turfgrasses. Each major herbicide type offers advantages and disadvantages. Some of the advantages of using preemergence herbicides compared to postemergence herbicides include:

- Preemergence herbicides are applied prior to weed seed germination and emergence. Susceptible weeds are not seen in the

(continued on page 124)

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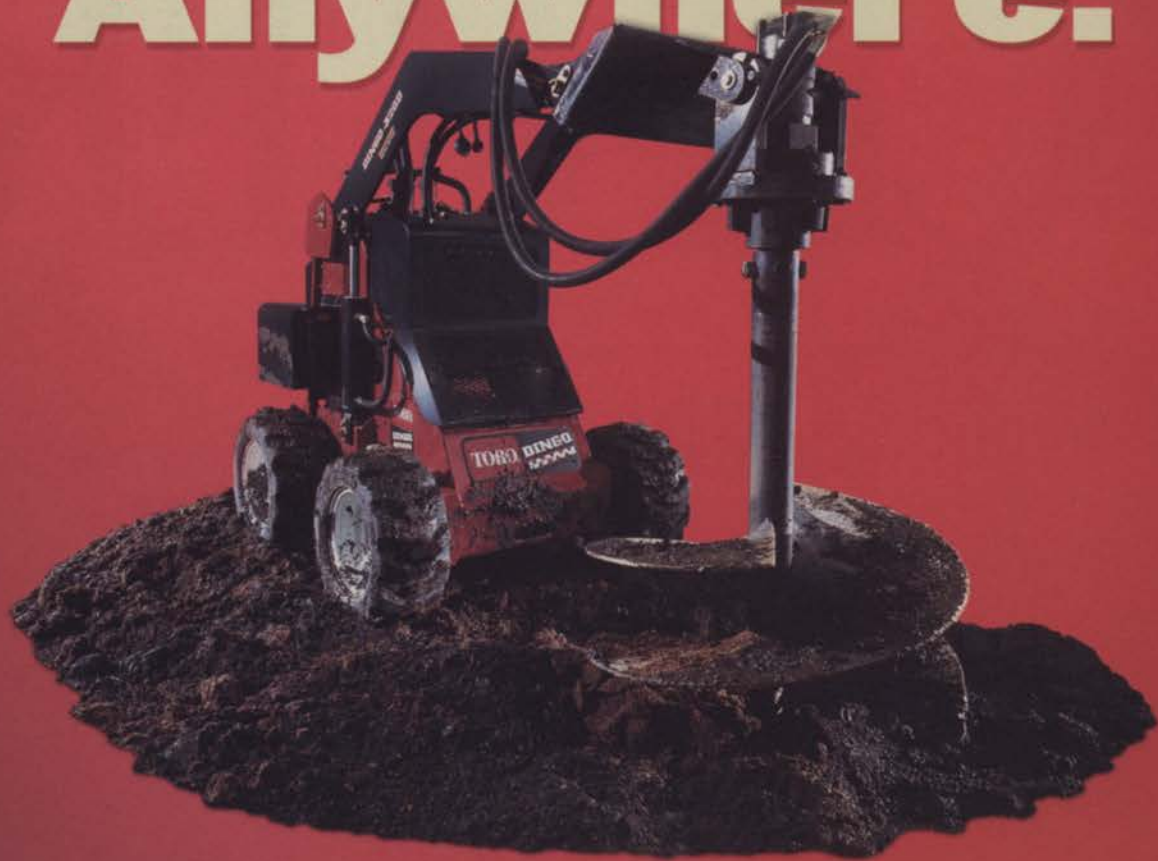
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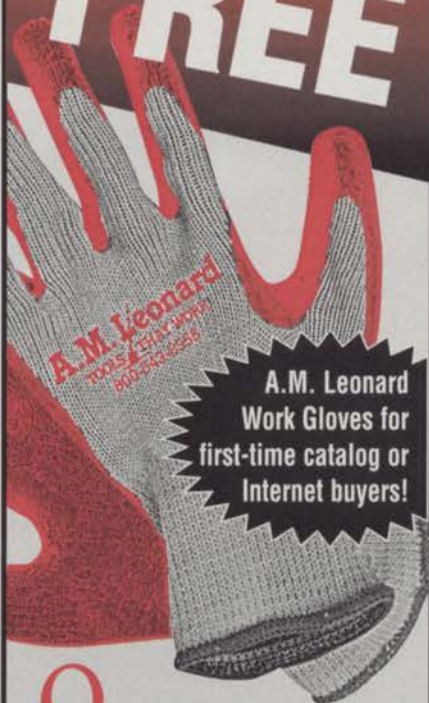
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USE READER SERVICE #98

Pre vs. Postemergence

(continued from page 120)

lawn, and control lasts for two to six months. Postemergence herbicides control weeds present at the time of application or for only a brief (days to a few weeks) time. Exceptions to this rule are herbicides such as atrazine (Aatrex, Atrazine), simazine (Princep), pronamide (Kerb) and dithiopyr (Dimension), which exhibit both preemergence and postemergence activity on certain weed species.

- **Most preemergence herbicides are available in granular formulations.** Granular formulations are generally easier to apply than sprayable formulations, and application equipment costs are lower than commercial-size sprayers. Additionally, granules are not susceptible to spray or vapor drift that can occur with sprays. And, most preemergence herbicides can be formulated on a dry fertilizer carrier, enabling a fertilizer and herbicide application at the same time. Certain postemergence herbicides are available on a granular carrier, but most postemergence herbicides are more effective when sprayed directly on the weed. A common problem with granular formulations is that they do not tend to stay in contact with the leaf surface long enough for the herbicide to be absorbed by the plant. If granular postemergence applications are necessary, improved control can be achieved by applying the material when the foliage is wet (i.e. after irrigation) to improve adherence to the leaf surface.

- **With the exception of atrazine, most ornamental shrubs, trees and flowers tolerate preemergence herbicides.** In fact, oryzalin (Surflan), benefin (Balan), pendimethalin (numerous trade names), oxadiazon (Ronstar), isoxaben (Gallery), prodiamine (Endurance) and benefin + oryzalin (XL) are labeled for use in certain ornamentals. Postemergence herbicides used for broadleaf weed control can cause foliar injury to ornamentals unless label precautions are followed. Ornamentals may be injured by postemergence herbicide spray and vapor drift or by root absorption of some herbicides, such as dicamba. Ester formulations of the phenoxy herbicides (2,4-D, dichlorprop) easily volatilize during warm temperatures and can injure sensitive ornamentals by vapor drift. Their use should be

avoided during the warm months and near sites that contain ornamentals. Spray drift damage can be prevented by spraying when the wind velocity is less than 5 mph, and selecting a nozzle tip and spray pressure that produces large spray droplets.

- **Preemergence herbicides typically will not injure established turfgrasses.** With most postemergence herbicides, turfgrasses are slightly injured or will yellow for a short period after treatment.

POSTEMERGENCE PROS. The advantages of postemergence herbicides when compared to preemergence herbicides include:

- **Postemergence herbicides can be applied as a spot treatment directly to a weed infestation on an as-needed basis.** Control-

**To consistently control weeds,
one must integrate the various
methods associated with each
component into a comprehensive
weed management plan.**

ling weeds after they have emerged allows the manager to properly identify the weed species, locate areas with the greatest infestation, and direct herbicide applications to these areas by spot spraying the weed.

In contrast, preemergence herbicides are applied to an area where weeds are suspected to occur. Postemergence applications are usually less costly than preemergence herbicides because spot treatments can often be utilized, letting you use less product.

- **Postemergence herbicides are routinely used to control problem weeds that are not controlled by preemergence herbicides.** As a group, preemergence herbicides are primarily active in controlling annual grass weeds such as crabgrass. A good selection of postemergence herbicides is available to control problem weeds such as violets, wild garlic, wild onion and various sedge species.

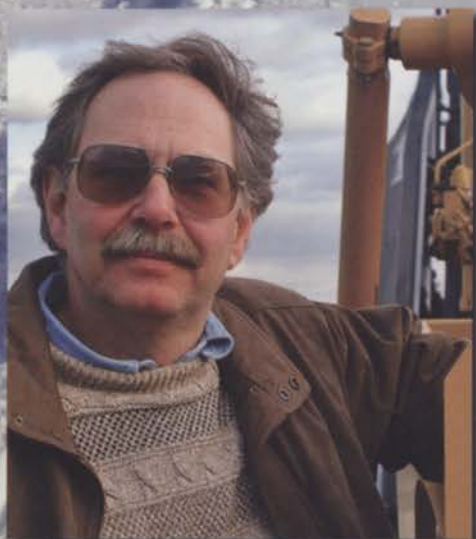
TOLERANCE TIPS. Regardless of the type of herbicide selected, the single most important factor in selecting an herbicide is the tolerance of the turfgrass to the herbicide. Generally, most preemergence herbicides

SNOW BUSINESS

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OF THE SNOW & ICE
MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION

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**Liquid Deicing
Buyers' Guide**



Mark Shearholdt,
Certified Maintenance Services Inc.,
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USE READER SERVICE #400

February 2002

VOLUME 3, ISSUE 1

SB10 Power Property

Experience in property management put Mark Shearholdt on the road to snow business success.

SB14 Foiling The Freeze

Using liquid deicers in private snow removal operations.

SB22 Liquid Deicing Buyers' Guide

A listing of companies offering liquid deicers and liquid application systems.

SB28 New Products

The latest offerings in snow and ice removal products.

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SB8 Industry News

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Mark Shearholdt, Certified Maintenance Services Inc., Manchester, N.H.

Photo: Thomas Roy

Committed to Education

Continuing education is vital to running a successful business. Learning the newest developments within one's chosen profession sets the successful businessperson apart from those just trying to survive. The Snow & Ice Management Association (SIMA) is committed to providing top-quality educational resources to its members. This commitment to education sets our association apart, and it sets the professionals apart from the plow jockeys.

To that end, the SIMA Symposium was created five years ago. The first Symposium in Pittsburgh was put together on a shoestring, with 75 total attendees. Last year, more than 500 individuals attended our fourth Symposium, which was held in Denver, Colo.

Now, plans have been finalized for the fifth SIMA Symposium in St. Louis, Mo. — in this issue you'll find the registration brochure (page 15). SIMA has surpassed the 1,000-member plateau, and we fully expect that this summer's Symposium will dwarf Denver's success both in attendees and exhibiting vendors. At this unique event, members can showcase themselves and learn about advances in our industry. What's more, the Symposium presents a wonderful chance to network with peers — a learning opportunity invaluable when growing your business, be it large or small. The friendships I have gained at these Symposiums have proven to be extremely beneficial in my quest to grow my business.

SIMA members are different. They are proven professionals who seek to improve their business practices so as to benefit themselves, their employees and their customers. The camaraderie amongst those of us who fight the elements is hard to imagine until you experience it — and you will experience it at the SIMA Symposium.

St. Louis is centrally located, and 90 percent of our membership can get there within a day's drive. St. Louis is also a hub airport making it very accessible by air from most of the United States.

You'll learn much by attending the Symposium — from how to guard against the inevitable mild winter (particularly appropriate for this year) to how to deal with monster storms. Either way, attending the Symposium is a wise investment in your business and your individual professional development.

See you in St. Louis! **SB**



John Allin, CSP,
Board President, SIMA

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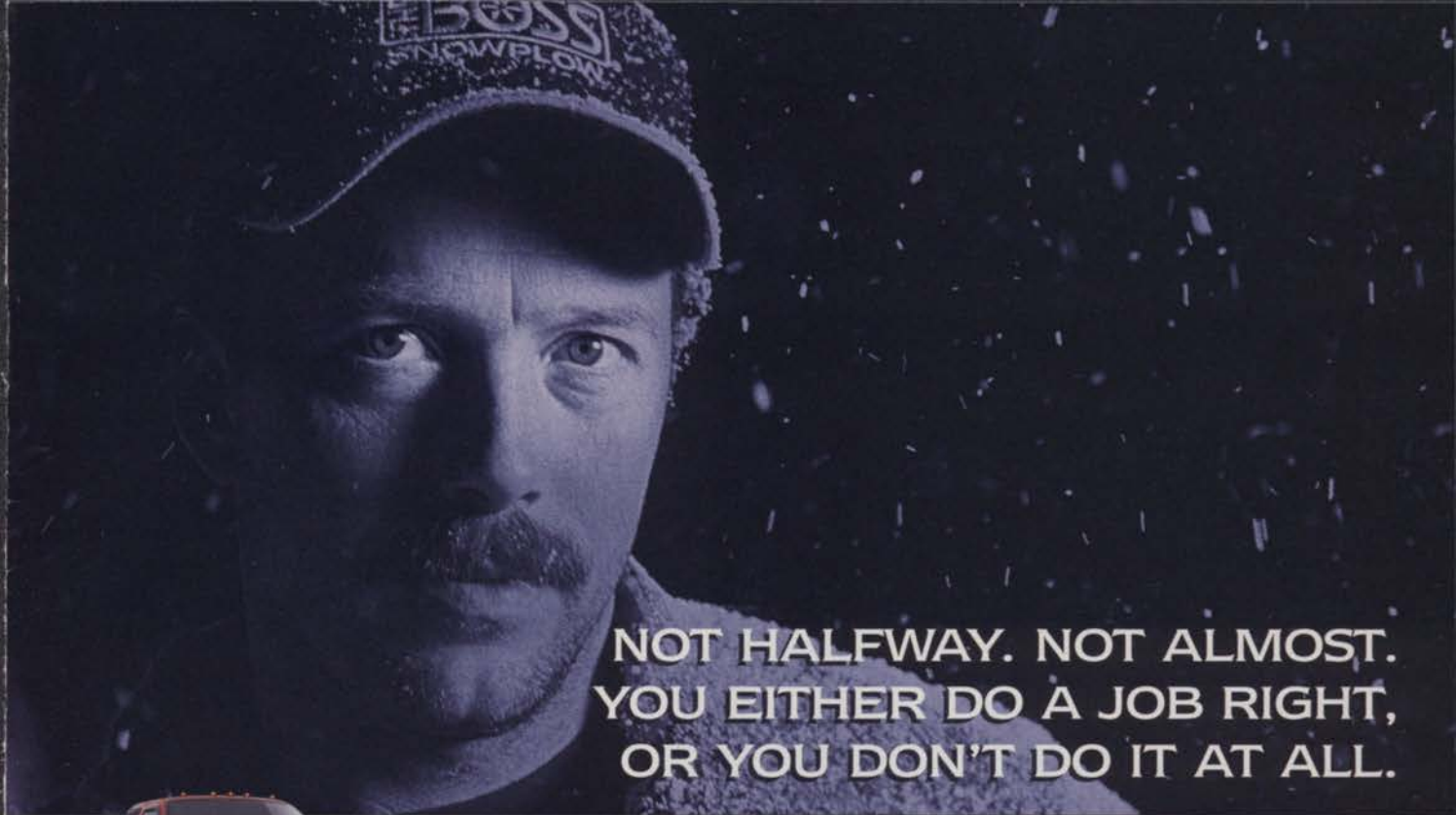
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USE READER SERVICE #401

SIMA Certifies More Members

The Snow & Ice Management Association (SIMA) certified six members on Nov. 11, during the Green Industry Expo, Tampa, Fla. The following are now Certified Snow Professionals (CSP):

- Charles Balk, Winnsapes, Gahanna, Ohio
- Steve Bednarz, Tovar's Snowplowing, Elgin, Ill.
- Allan Davis, RAR Landscaping Co. Inc., Baltimore, Md.
- Rick Kier, Pro Scapes Inc., Jamesville, N.Y.
- Jeff Korhan, Tremendous Landscape Co., Plainfield, Ill.
- Jerry Schill Jr., Schill Landscaping & Lawn Care Services, Sheffield Village, Ohio

SIMA began the CSP program in June 2001, as a program to provide serious snow professionals a means to demonstrate their professionalism. The test requires a minimum score of 70 percent to pass each section. The sections include: risk, law and contracts; business planning, accounting and management; technical aspects of snow and ice management; mechanics of snow and ice management; sales, marketing, communications and public relations; and health, safety and human resources.

The test will be offered again on Feb. 26, at New Jersey Landscape 2002, Secaucus, N.J., and on June 6 at the Fifth Annual Snow & Ice Symposium, St. Louis, Mo. For additional information, call SIMA at 814/835-3577.



New Board Member Announced

Charles Glossop, Maplecrest Landscape, Maple Plain, Minn., has joined the SIMA board of directors. Glossop was asked to fill the position left vacant when Kyle Hansen, Clean Sweep Inc., Shakopee, Minn., resigned in June.

Glossop is one of the founding members of SIMA, so he is familiar with the association's mission and its newly adopted governance policy.

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Regional Training Planned for 2002

In December, SIMA announced it would begin offering one-day regional training sessions in fall 2002. The specific details will be announced shortly.



SIMA Membership



SIMA Membership Reaches 1000

In just five years of existence, SIMA has reached an important benchmark by attracting its 1,000th member. Tim Duncan, Duncan Construction and Snow Plowing, Antioch, Ill., became the member No. 1,000 on Jan. 4, 2002. **SB**

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HEAVY SNOW POUNDS BUFFALO

BUFFALO, N.Y. — Snowfall is never a surprise to snow contractors in Buffalo, N.Y. But after a warm November in which no snow fell — the first time that has happened since modern weather record keeping began in 1884 — some Buffalo

snow pros wondered if snow would fall at all in 2001.

Did it ever.

More than 2 feet of snow hammered Buffalo, Dec. 24, effectively shutting down the city and Buffalo Niagara International

Airport. Three days later another 25.6 inches of lake-effect snow piled up in the city, creating a total of more than 4 feet between Dec. 24 and 27.

Cars, streets and sidewalks in Buffalo were buried by 81 inches of snow in late December and early January. Photo: Derek Gee, Buffalo News

The 29.8 inches of snow that fell from 8 p.m. on Wednesday, Dec. 26, to 8 p.m., Thursday, Dec. 27, is the second snowiest 24-hour period in city history, *The Associated Press* reported.

In total, nearly 7 feet of lake-effect snow fell on Buffalo between Christmas Eve and New Year's Day, prompting U.S. President George W. Bush to declare a state of emergency for areas of upstate New York and the city of Buffalo.

As part of the emergency declaration, the Federal Emergency Management Agency will reimburse local and state government agencies for 75 percent of the total eligible costs of equipment, contracts and personnel overtime related to emergency services in dealing with the snow. Federal aid to pay for snow removal could reach \$30 million, federal officials told the *Buffalo News*.



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EXTENDAPLOW

"JUST BRUTAL." As could be expected, city crews and private contractors shouldered the bulk of the storm's ferocity. "It started and didn't stop. Just brutal," said Mike Ortalano, vice president, Lushlawn Inc., Buffalo, N.Y.

Don Potenza, Lushlawn's owner, said, "The first foot of snow we had no problem, the second foot of snow was no problem, then we got one batch in 12 hours. It was snowing so hard that we couldn't even see where we were making passes."

To help keep up, Potenza hired subcontractors with front loaders at rates from \$90 to \$120 per hour, an expense passed on to the customer. "Our contracts specifically state right on the front page that any snow that requires high lift or removal from the site is not included in the contract," Potenza added.

Luckily, subcontractors were easy to find, as heavy equipment swarmed the city from neighboring areas. "We had a

couple SIMA members from out of town call us to offer help. As we were going down the road, we'd stop and talk to guys with front loaders and they were more than willing to make some extra money," Potenza added. "I've never seen so many front loaders in my life. On every corner on every street, you'd see five or six."

Steve Hausrath, vice president, Hausrath's Landscape Maintenance Inc., Buffalo, N.Y., said his company managed to keep pace with the storm by starting early and staying out during the storm's entirety. "With our accounts, we have the right equipment and our employees are trained to handle these situations, so it actually went very well."

That's not to say fighting the storm and serving customers under harsh conditions was easy. "It was a tiring three or four days," Hausrath said.

Contractors in other parts of the country might be envious of the profit potential



Treacherous conditions made it tough going for many snowplow operators, especially this city truck which slid off road.

Photo: Martha Muscarella

such a major storm brings. Not so fast, Hausrath said. "Profitable yeah, but we didn't make a killing — by the time you pay all your insurance and your people. We were running such long shifts that we were paying a lot of time and a half." **SB**

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COVER STORY

BY STEVE SMITH

*Experience
in property
management put
Mark Shearholdt
on the road to snow
business success.*



Power Property

VITAL STATISTICS...

CERTIFIED MAINTENANCE SERVICES, INC.

OWNER: Mark Shearholdt

LOCATION: Manchester, N.H.

FOUNDED: 1992

2001 SNOW REVENUES: More than \$1 million*

2001 GROWTH: 15 percent

2002 PROJECTED GROWTH: 15 percent

NUMBER OF CUSTOMERS: 53

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

EMPLOYEES: 32 full time, 60 part time

SUBCONTRACTORS: 30

AVERAGE WINTER: 12 to 15 plowing events, 60 inches of snow, average February temperature is 22 F.

SNOW SETUP: 28 snow throwers, 26 snow plows, 14 pickup trucks, 10 hopper spreaders, 10 dump trucks, 10 loaders, 8 box plows, 2 skid steers, 1 road grader

**Certified did not reveal its exact revenue figures.*



Photo: Thomas Roy

All good companies try to understand their customers. The deeper your relationship with a client, the more likely you'll serve their needs, price effectively and keep the client long term. For Mark Shearholdt, getting "inside the head" of the snow removal buyer simply means looking in the mirror.

A long-time veteran of the property management business (in which he routinely hired snow removal professionals) and owner of a 10-year-old snow removal firm, Shearholdt has been both snow removal buyer and provider.

BUILDING CMS. Shearholdt cut his entrepreneurial teeth in property management, a career that crested with his 1988 appointment as general manager of a major Boston-based firm and the opening of his own company, Manchester, N.H.-based Sentry Management Corp., in 1992. The same year, Shearholdt purchased a snowplow to serve the snow removal needs of the properties he managed.

Two years later, seeing the opportunity available in the snow market, Shearholdt spun off a snow-only firm and called it Certified Maintenance Services (CMS). That decision, Shearholdt said, "allowed us to go after accounts that we didn't manage ourselves and go after accounts that had higher profit margins."

The first challenge was convincing customers that CMS could handle the business. "We realized very early on that we would have to market ourselves as a company that was skilled doing snow removal," Shearholdt said.

That meant pounding the pavement. In the summer of 1994, Shearholdt and his staff compiled a list of target customers (high-end, commercial/industrial facilities), visited them face-to-face and

told the company's story. "Nothing takes the place of trying to identify the clients that are within your location, getting the telephone number and calling them," Shearholdt said. "(Customers) love the personal attention. Anybody who thinks you are not a pain and are there to help them, will love the personal attention."

From its inception, CMS targeted larger commercial facilities, avoiding small retail stores, gas stations, convenience markets and restaurants, because of exposure to competition with low-price contractors. "That puts you in competition with people that have one or two trucks. Someone can plow a gas station for \$75 to \$100. We don't think, based on the amount of our investment in equipment, that is the best use of our equipment." Plus, for many Fortune 500-type companies, budgeting for professional snow removal services is preferred to the liability, image and loss control issues that result from sloppy snow and ice cleanup.

But how do you tell if a facility has the requisite deep pockets and desire to hire top-of-the line snow removal? It's simple, Shearholdt said. "If it's an office building and it looks attractive

PROBLEM SOLVERS

Though separate from Certified Maintenance Services Inc., Owner Mark Shearholdt also leads Sentry Management Corp., a Manchester, N.H.-based property management firm. The position gives him a unique perspective on what property managers look for when hiring snow removal professionals.

"The property manager is someone who is constantly on the phone or out in the field," Shearholdt said. "They want to deal with somebody they can get a hold of. Somebody that will return phone calls."

And when the property manager reaches the snow contractor, he or she wants their problems solved. "They want a problem solver out in the field," Shearholdt added. "To the property manager, the most important thing is when they make that phone call, the problem is going to go away."

Further, property managers look for companies with high ethics, reliability, quality workmanship, good communication skills and professionalism. From the appearance of your trucks and equipment, to the timeliness of your invoices, they all reflect on your company's ability to serve the client, Shearholdt said.

and has significant landscaping, you know that snow removal is going to be an issue."

OPERATIONS. Maintaining tight routes has been a key to delivering top-notch service to the company's high-end clientele.

Though CMS has 53 commercial/industrial clients (including the city's major hospitals and a major shopping mall), its service radius is only 15 miles. "We made a focused decision not to go outside that area. We had some accounts that were 25

miles away, and we just let those accounts go," Shearholdt said.

The service area is divided into five areas, each with a plow supervisor and sidewalk supervisor. Five of the supervisors report to Shearholdt, and the other five report to Cory Marggraf, operations manager.

"We emphasize before-season training, using a variety of training videos, checklists and meetings," said Cory Marggraf. Prior to the season each employee and subcontractor receives a packet with sample paperwork, important numbers and snow response plans for each account. Further, Marggraf said, the company makes sure it attracts the best snow plowing talent by paying above average salaries and wages.

During winter, Shearholdt constantly monitors television, subscription and Internet weather reports and makes the calls on when, where and how much equip-

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ment to allocate. "My philosophy is that I'd rather have three or four more trucks than what we need and if I have to pay them four hours to be out there as a reserve, then they are out there as reserves and it is insurance for me," Shearholdt said.

Shearholdt considers subcontractors as true partners in the business and he allocates work accordingly. "If our equipment rolls, their equipment rolls," he said. "I'm not going to cherry pick you. I'm not going to run all my equipment and then you just be second-string quarterback. That philosophy has allowed us to retain subcontractors year after year after year."

To protect against a service failure, Shearholdt and Marggraf both spend 80 percent of their time in the field during a storm, checking accounts for quality control and responding to any problems. "When we manage the snow operations, we do it in the field," Shearholdt said. "We

very rarely are in the office, and I think that is a significant difference from some other larger firms. We are out there feeling and smelling it."

All CMS employees and subcontractors are linked via a Nextel system, allowing managers to give employees immediate feedback and evaluation. If a particular lot looks very clean and done well, the employee is praised immediately on the system. On the other hand, "We are very cautious with criticism during a storm, because 4 a.m. is not the best time to be critical of someone. But once they come in and are having a cup of coffee, we don't mix words."

"Sometimes the toughest thing we've done is to tell someone who is a real nice fellow that he is too

slow or not up to our quality level," Shearholdt said. "They walk away with their tail between their legs. But, by and large, they are a whole lot better next time."

PRICING. Ongoing employee evaluation and quality control allows CMS to satisfy high-end client needs. And serving high-end clients means commanding a higher price. The company is often not the low bidder and makes a point of not budging

(continued on page 30)

CMS uses an even split of in-house and subcontracted equipment. Photo: Thomas Roy



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LIQUID DEICING

BY STEVE SMITH

It's understandable why someone would be trepidatious about spraying liquid on a frozen parking lot. After all, creating a hockey rink out of a customer's facility isn't the best strategy if you wish to succeed in the snow and ice removal business.

Though it seems counterintuitive, application of liquid materials to fight ice might be one of the biggest technical innovations affecting the private snow and ice removal business since invention of the snowplow. "There is a lot happening with chemicals," said Don Walker, professor emeritus, University of Wisconsin — Madison. A widely recognized expert on deicing chemicals and abrasives, Walker spoke on the subject in Denver during last year's Snow & Ice Symposium, an annual trade show and convention hosted by the Snow & Ice Management Association.

Liquid deicers have been around since the late 1960s when they were first used as an agent to wet granular salt before it was spread. And though it has taken nearly 30 years, liquid deicing has begun catching on with private snow and ice professionals. Today, there's not many snow pros who haven't at least considered incorporating liquid into their service mix.

Robert Wilton, president, Clintar Groundskeeping Service, Markham, Ontario, began pre-wetting salt with liquid deicer last year and sees it as a transition to a time when he will use liquid-only applications. "We didn't have the leap of faith to give up the granular yet," Wilton said. However, recent regulatory pressure in Canada, which has deemed bulk deicing salt a "toxic substance," may force Clintar into liquid application sooner rather than later. "The Canadian government has listed salt as a toxic substance, but they aren't enforcing the issue yet. But, we see it coming," Wilton added.

"Everybody is thinking about it, but nobody has bit the bullet to do it," said Brian Akehurst, grounds maintenance operations manager, Akehurst Landscape Service Inc., Joppa, Md. "I think within the next couple years, we will be doing liquid applications."

Currently, Akehurst Landscape pre-treats bulk piles of deicing salt with a liquid deicer, but concerns about temperature have kept it from using liquid only. "Usually, when you use a liquid deicer, the ground temperature needs to be below 32 degrees to work effectively," Akehurst said. "If not, it can create major problems and create slippery pavement. You have to know your stuff before you go out and do it, because you can cause more problems."

In Maryland, temperatures don't often dip well below freezing, especially this year. "We've only had two events this year and they were two small events. Even if we were into the liquids

Using liquid deicers in private snow removal operations.

Foiling the Freeze

Fifth Annual

SNOW



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ICE



Symposium

Thursday, June 6 – Saturday, June 8, 2002

Renaissance St. Louis Hotel
St. Louis, Missouri

SIMA

Snow & Ice Management Association, Inc.

SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 5, 2002

2 - 4 p.m.: SIMA Committee Meetings

5 p.m.: SIMA Board Meeting

THURSDAY, JUNE 6, 2002

7 a.m.: Golf Tournament (Optional Event)

A shotgun start at 7 a.m. will give you a chance to play and have fun before returning to the Renaissance in time for the opening of the trade show floor.



8 a.m. - 12 p.m.: Planning For A High Profit Year (Optional Educational Session)

Kevin Kehoe, Kehoe & Co., asks that you come to this session prepared to "crunch" some of your own numbers to check the condition of your company and to learn about the kinds of decisions high-profit companies make to set goals and build an organization to succeed. Planning for profit is the key to making a profit. Too many companies fail to use capital, cost and personnel productivity ratios to form their decisions about the kind of work they do, the way they need to price, the types of customers they work for, the number of managers and salespeople they need, the number of crews and the number of administrative staff they can support. Join Kehoe for this highly informative and interactive session.

1 - 5 p.m.: Tradeshow Opens, Concourse Ballroom

Be sure to visit with each exhibitor and have your passport stamped to be eligible for the prize drawings. Grand Prize - PRO-TECH SNO PUSHER* - winners to be drawn on Friday, June 7, 5 p.m. You must be present to win! *Winner receives up to \$4,000 credit towards the model of their choice.

5:30 - 6:30 p.m.: SIMA General Membership Meeting

Please join us for our annual General Membership Meeting. Hear of the association's progress last year and let your voice be heard.

7 - 10 p.m.: Optional Awards Banquet

This elegant dinner is our chance to recognize the first Certified Snow Professionals, as well as say goodbye to Board President John Allin and welcome new Board President Jeff Tovar. Come join us for an evening of surprises.

MUST REGISTER IN ADVANCE

9 a.m. - 3 p.m.: Certified Snow Professional Exam

Take this opportunity to earn your CSP designation. You **must** register in advance to take the exam, please contact the SIMA office for details. 814/835-3577.

FRIDAY, JUNE 7, 2002

7:30 - 9 a.m.: Concurrent Sessions

Important Considerations of Chemical Use. *Speaker: Dale Keep, Owner, Ice & Snow Technologies, LLC, Walla Walla, Wash.* After being absent from the show the past two years, Dale is back by popular demand. This session will highlight the benefits of good training in terms of product selection and use, the environment, corrosion and effectiveness. This session is repeated at 9:15 a.m.

Plowing the Olympics. *Speaker: John Allin, CSP, President, Snow Management Group, Erie, Pa.* Ten months of preparation leading up to three weeks of performance under intense scrutiny

in front of a worldwide audience makes for one incredible story. Come hear and see how this massive undertaking was sold and implemented by Snow Management Group. This session repeated Saturday, 7:30 a.m.

Selecting the Right Equipment. *Speaker: Dino R. Tudisca, President, Exterior Solutions LLC/All Things Ice and Snow, Bozrah, Conn.* Selecting the right equipment for snow removal can make the difference between just getting the job done and being able to turn a profit. In this session you will discuss different types of equipment and their different applications for the snow removal industry.

Peering into the Future: What's on the Horizon in New Practices, Technologies and Products. *Speaker: Harvey Williams, Illinois State Department of Transportation.* Winter maintenance has its own futurist in Harvey Williams. Williams will guide you on a journey into snow and ice control five to 10 years in the future. This session is repeated at 9:15 a.m.

9 a.m. - 1 p.m.: Optional event for families

Discover St. Louis. Bus departs the hotel promptly at 9 a.m. and will proceed through downtown St. Louis, where you will see and hear about the history of this wonderful city. From there you will proceed to Forest Park where you can spend the morning at the Science Center and the Zoo.



9:15 - 10:45 a.m.: Concurrent Sessions

Important Considerations of Chemical Use. *Speaker: Dale Keep, Owner, Ice & Snow Technologies, LLC, Walla Walla, Wash.* Repeat session, see previous description.

Dispatching Made Easy. *Speaker: Peggy Allin, CSP, Vice President of Operations, Allin Companies, Erie, Pa.* This session will take you through the set up and preparation for dispatching of snow plowing and ice control operations. It will also include proper documentation, flow of ideas and dispatch operations.

Watch Your Step! Contracting for Snow Removal Business. *Speaker: Scott McEachern, Program Manager, Greensure, a Division of Reeds & Associates, Lindsay, Ontario.* Understand the pitfalls and solutions in reducing or shifting the liability risk arising in snow removal agreements. Gain the ammunition to powerfully negotiate with property owners and property managers. In addition you will learn how to cap expenses and take the risk of too much snow out of your flat rate contracts.

Peering into the Future: What's on the Horizon in New Practices, Technologies and Products. *Speaker: Harvey Williams, Illinois State Department of Transportation.* Repeat session, see previous description.

11 a.m. - 1 p.m.: Snack & Chat (Optional Lunch Event)

This highly popular event just keeps getting bigger and better. Choose a table from a variety of snow industry subjects and allow the table facilitator to get the conversation rolling while enjoying a hearty lunch.

1:30 - 5 p.m.: Tradeshow, Concourse Ballroom

This is your last chance to get your passport stamped, be sure to visit with each exhibitor and have your passport stamped to be eligible for the prize drawings. Grand Prize - PRO-TECH SNO PUSHER* - Winner to be drawn on Friday, June 7, at 5 p.m. You must be present to win! *Winner receives up to \$4,000 credit towards the model of their choice.

6:30 - 10 p.m.: Evening Reception

Enjoy a good mystery? Join us for an evening of intrigue and fun while networking with old friends and welcoming new ones.

SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

SATURDAY, JUNE 8, 2002

7:30 - 9 a.m.: Concurrent Sessions

Plowing the Olympics. *Speaker: John Allin, CSP, President, Snow Management Group, Erie, Pa.* Repeat session, see previous description.

Pursuing the Multi-Managed Corporate Customer. *Speaker: Frank Dedon, Owner, Abraxus Snow Removal, Cleveland, Ohio.* Association membership has its perks. When members work together for the greater good much can be accomplished. This session will touch on the many possibilities available with group buying power, including identifying, marketing to and pursuing large corporations.

Introduction to the Internet. *Speaker: Chuck Smith, CSP, Regional Sales Manager, Snow Management Group, Nutley, N.J.* Not sure what all the Internet hype is all about? This session will give you an overview of the Web. You will learn the many uses of the Internet including how to navigate through the SIMA Web site and what it can do for you.

Time and Money Management for the Successful Contractor. *Speaker: Rick Kier, CSP, President, Pro Scapes, Inc., Jamesville, N.Y.* Whether you specialize in residential or commercial contracts, you are not going to want to miss this session on time and money management. Kier will share his successes and help profitably eliminate your frustrations when it comes to time management in the snowplowing industry.

9:15 - 10:45 a.m.: Concurrent Sessions

"Real Business Is Snow Business": Go Plowing with WinnScapes. *Speaker: Rick Winnestaffer, CSP, President, WinnScapes Inc., Gahanna, Ohio.* This very popular session from last year is being repeated this year so that those new to the show and those unable to catch it last year will have the opportunity to see what everyone is raving about. Take an inside look at one of Central Ohio's leading snow removal and ice management professional organizations.

Inside the Owners' Head. *Speaker: Jim Paluch, President, J.P. Horizons, Inc., Painesville, Ohio.* There are two commonalities of business ownership: the feeling of isolation and the ability to take action. Those commonalities and a balance between the dream

and nightmare of business ownership create an exciting challenge. This session will be an open discussion on the blending of working hard and working smart; the difference between prosperity and survival thinking; and, as a leader, how to passionately sell your vision. This all will be built around the Organizational Excitement Model that has helped hundreds of companies excel and gives the owner a point of reference for improving their business.

Materials Selection for Snow & Ice Removal — Fatten your Bottom line. *Speaker: Richard Hanneman, President, Salt Institute, Alexandria, Va.* This session will offer a review of the considerations on where, when, why and how to select materials for winter roadway and parking lot maintenance.

Marketing — What Is It and How Do I Do It? *Speaker: Don Willig, Associate, Vanderkooi & Associates, Inc., Littleton, Colo.* In this session, Willig will help you to understand the true definition of marketing, its function in a company, and the variables (predictable and unpredictable) you need to focus on to develop an effective marketing plan for your company. This session is repeated at 11 a.m.

11 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.: Concurrent Sessions

Teach Me How To Think. *Speaker: Jim Paluch, President, J.P. Horizons, Inc., Painesville, Ohio.* We must continue to develop our thinking skills as information overload and mass communication bombard our brains and clutter the thinking process. Paluch will share insight and activities that will energize the thinking process in an organization, a family and you. You will learn why creative thinking is no longer enough, how to create training programs that enhance thinking, how to probe your own brain for any answer you will need and how to keep your brain alive and growing for years to come.

Job Costing: Control Your Cost - Control Your Profit. *Speakers: Jeff Tovar, CSP, President, and Rick Lentz, CSP, Vice President of Administration, Tovar's Snowplowing Inc., Elgin, Ill.* You can sell it. You can produce it. But are you making money plowing snow? Learn how one company job costs each snow and ice event to be sure costs are controlled.

Accurately Documenting the Weather. *Speaker: Frank Lombardo, President, Weatherworks, Hackettstown, N.J.* This session will include proper methods of measuring snow and ice, how to keep accurate prior and post storm weather logs to reduce your risk of liability, and suggested contract language to avoid billing disputes. Other topics that may be discussed include snow density, mixed precipitation storms and how to reconstruct weather records for a past event.

Marketing — What Is It and How Do I Do It? *Speaker: Don Willig, Associate, Vanderkooi & Associates, Inc., Littleton Colo.* Repeat session, see previous description.

12:45 - 2:30 p.m.: Snack & Chat (Optional Luncheon Event)
See previous description.

6 - 11 p.m.: Gateway Riverboat Cruise (Optional Event)

View the Gateway City while cruising on the Mississippi. A quick bus ride will take us right under the Arch to the Gateway Riverboat cruise. Enjoy a wonderful dinner and relax to a Dixieland Duo while taking in the sights of beautiful St. Louis.

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REGISTRATION INFORMATION & FORM

1. REGISTRATION INFORMATION

(If more than one person from your company will be attending, please copy this form and fill out separately for each person - mail completed registrations together.)

Name (as it should appear on badge)

Company _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____ Zip Code _____

Phone _____

Fax _____

Please indicate any special diets/needs:

In case of emergency during the symposium, please contact:

Name _____

Daytime Phone _____

Evening Phone _____

2. REGISTRATION FEES

Fees include entire symposium (Continental breakfast on Friday and Saturday, Friday's reception, all educational sessions, extensive handout materials and trade show admission) with the exception of ticketed events, which are optional. Please check appropriate box: Boxes on left are for early bird registration (on or before 4-5-02). Boxes on right are for regular registration (after 4-5-02).

HOTEL/AIR TRAVEL INFORMATION

For hotel registrations please call the Renaissance St. Louis Hotel at 800-468-3571. Ask for the SIMA Symposium rates. Renaissance room rates for the Symposium are \$95 (U.S. Funds) for single/double occupancy. Reservations must be made before April 26, 2002. For air travel use: U.S. Air, 877-874-7687, refer to gold file #80692114 American Airlines, 800-433-7300, group authorization #A4462AB Delta, 800-241-6760, refer to file #180395A

If you have any problems concerning your hotel or air travel please contact Judy Tarpley at 800-631-9576.

CANCELLATION POLICY

If an unfortunate event occurs that prevents you from attending the symposium, please send a replacement. If you prefer a cash refund, all cancellations made prior to April 5, 2002 will receive a full refund less \$25 processing fee. No requests will be fulfilled after April 5, 2002.

HOW TO REGISTER

By Fax : Fax registration form to ExpoTrac at 401/765-6677

By Mail: Mail registration form to

ExpoTrac

PO Box 1280

Woonsocket, RI 02895

Online: www.sima.org

**Please, no soliciting of employees during the conference.*

Questions regarding registration should be directed to SIMA at: 814-835-3577

Before
4-05-02

After
4-05-02

SIMA Member Fee

1st person

from company

\$250

\$300

Each additional person

from same company

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\$225

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from company

\$305

\$350

Each additional person

from same company

\$255

\$275

Trade Show Only Pass

(One day only, choose

Thursday or Friday)

\$15

\$20

3. TICKETED EVENTS

Thursday Optional Educational Session,

Planning for a High Profit Year, Kevin Kehoe

SIMA Member Pricing

\$30

\$35

Potential Member Pricing

\$35

\$40

Thursday Golf Tournament

SIMA Member Pricing

\$90

\$100

Potential Member Pricing

\$100

\$110

Thursday Evening Awards Banquet

SIMA Member Pricing

\$15

\$20

Potential Member Pricing

\$20

\$25

Friday Family Outing

(minimum of 30 required)

Per Person Pricing

\$25

\$30

Ages 12 & Younger

\$20

\$25

Friday and Saturday Snack & Chat

(pricing covers both days)

SIMA Member Pricing

\$40

\$50

Potential Member Pricing

\$50

\$60

Saturday Evening Dinner Cruise

SIMA Member Pricing

\$50

\$60

Potential Member Pricing

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\$70

4. JOIN SIMA NOW!

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Lifetime Member: \$1,500

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General Member: \$130

5. PAYMENT

Registration Fee: \$ _____

Ticketed Events Fee: \$ _____

SIMA Membership Fee: \$ _____

TOTAL: \$ _____

Enclosed is my check for \$ _____

(U.S. Funds) made payable to SIMA.

Please charge my:

Visa MasterCard American Express

Card # _____

Exp. Date _____

Signature _____

at this point, the ground temperature was not cold enough for us to use it," Akehurst said.

Sam Granados, owner, Integrated Striping Systems Inc., Golden, Colo., has used liquid deicing since 1996.

Granados credited liquids with transforming his company into a full-service operation and allowing him to pursue large

accounts. "Once we got involved with the liquids and we used them as part of our operation, we were able to offer a full level of service, everything from pre-treating to de-icing to clearing ice build up," Granados told *Snow Business* last year.

There's no question that liquid deicers, on balance, melt faster and last longer than traditional salt applications. But they

are more expensive, both in material and equipment costs and in the additional training it takes to become competent in using them. "It's not like you can go out, spray it, and call it good," Granados said.

For most companies the decision comes down to economics. "You have to look at the costs and where you are putting it down," Walker said. "Are the faster action

MATERIAL	EUTECTIC TEMP	EFFECTIVE TEMP	COST	LIQUID APPLICATION	CHARACTERISTICS
Salt (NaCl)	-6F	15-20F	\$25-\$45 per ton	Can be made into liquid by creating 23% solution known as salt brine	Requires heat and water to dissolve salt; Melting takes time; Corrosive
Magnesium Chloride (MgCl ₂)	-28F	0F	50-70 cents per gallon	Pre-wet at 6-10 gallons per ton of salt, liquid (22-30% concentration) applied at 13-33 gallons per acre	Melts ice quickly; Special handling required; More costly than salt; Corrosive
Calcium Chloride (CaCl ₂)	-60F	-20F	30-65 cents per gallon	Pre-wet (32% solution) applied to salt at 8-10 gallons per yard of salt); Liquid only (32-42% solution)	Melts ice quickly; Special handling required; Adds 10-20% to cost of salt when pre-wetting; Corrosive; May leave pavement wet
Potassium Acetate	-76F	-15F	N/A	Pre-wet at 1.25 gallons per 100 lbs. of solid deicer, 1/2 to 3 gallons per 1,000 square feet	Low corrosion; Biodegradable; Low toxicity to fish and mammals; Safe for vegetation; Does not track; Polyethylene containers for storage
Calcium Magnesium Acetate (CMA)	-18F	20F	\$1.25-\$2.10 per gallon	19 to 40 gallons per acre	Very low corrosion; Low environmental impact; Can reduce corrosion of salt when used as pre-wet; Costly
All Clear™, Caliber™, First Down™, Ice Ban™, Magic-0™, NC-1000, NC-2000, NC-3000 (All these products are quite different, and should be investigated individually.)	-30 to -85F	Varies	65 cents to \$1.20 per gallon	Application rate varies	Various deicer blends with agricultural bi-products from processed corn, sugar, distilling or brewing; Non-corrosive; Low environmental impact; Reduces corrosion when mixed with chlorides; Costly

Source: *Chemicals and Abrasives*, presented by Don M. Walker, University of Wisconsin, Madison, Wis., during 2001 SIMA Symposium. Information also drawn from deicing manufacturer's product literature. The brief format requires generalization and listing of only the most common deicers. For more detail, contact manufacturers directly (see *Liquid Deicing Buyers' Guide*, page SB22).

LIQUID DEICING

and corrosion benefits worth the cost? I can't answer that for you. But that is a tradeoff you have to look at."

There are two basic techniques to using liquid deicers — pre-wetting and anti-icing — and many liquid products available (see page SB22 for a list of manufacturers of liquid deicing materials and equipment).

PRE-WETTING. Pre-wetting involves taking a liquid product and spraying it on a dry product, usually rock salt. Pre-wet materials stick to the pavement better and begin melting the ice faster.

Rock salt needs to form a brine solution (23 percent solution) to melt ice. Pre-wetting, and the added moisture it brings, speeds the brine formation process. "To me that is what you are buying when you get into pre-wetting, the ability to act faster and stick to the surface," Walker said.

Akehurst has witnessed first-hand the time saving associated with pre-wetting.

The company had a parking lot where one portion was spread with treated salt, the other with dry rock salt. "When we were leaving the site the treated salt area was already black, it had already melted," Akehurst said. "Where we put down the regular salt it was still working and it has not melted yet. So I am definitely sold on the treated salt."

But there's a price for that quick action. Pre-treat rigs can range from \$1,150 for a pickup truck-mounted system to \$2,500 or more. Chemicals that can be used to pre-wet salt range from salt brine to chlorides to organic-based products.

"The theory is that you use substantially less salt," Wilton said. "So our cost should not be any higher, but in reality we still have to train all the operators that more isn't better," Wilton said.

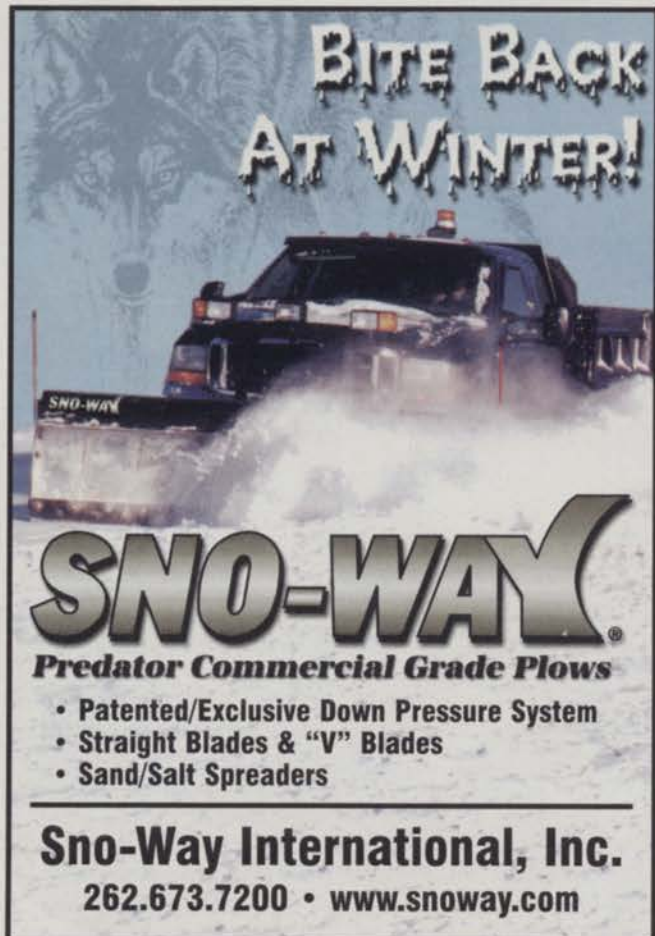
However, Wilton has passed the extra cost on to the consumer in many cases, because his Fortune 500-type clientele see

the reduction of salt use as a benefit to their overall corporate environmental strategy.


Akehurst added, "What we decided to do, and I'm not recommending this for everybody, but we told our clients that this year is our test year, so we are not going to charge more. We are going to see how it goes, prove the point and then next year we will talk about price."

Indeed, a fair amount of customer education is involved in using liquid deicers. Akehurst recently received a call from a skeptical customer who wondered why another snow company was out treating the lot next door, while she hadn't seen any Akehurst trucks that day. "So we had to explain how we didn't need to come out because (the pre-wet salt) kept (the pavement) from refreezing," he said.

ANTI-ICING. Less common than pre-wetting is the application of liquid deicers



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SNOW BUSINESS

before a snow storm to melt the first layer of precipitation and prevent the build up of snow pack, that icy layer of snow that bonds with the pavement, making removal frustrating and time consuming. "If you have areas where you want to provide a very high level of service, where you want to keep it bare and get the pavement bare as soon as possible after the storm, anti-icing may have some benefits for you," Walker said.

The beauty of anti-icing is that once the liquid is applied to the pavement, it can provide residual benefits for many days. So, if a predicted storm doesn't hit or hits late, the liquid will still be on the pavement waiting to do its ice-melting job. The chemical will be washed away by rain, however.

Temperature can also be an important factor. Using these chemicals when it is too warm can have disastrous effects by creating slippery conditions. "These

chemicals really react to temperature, not only the amount (of material) you need, but the time it takes them to work," Walker added. As a result, using liquid for anti-icing requires a well-trained and sophisticated operator.

"I suggest that if you get into anti-icing, you need to spend some money on weather forecasting," Walker said. "You have to know what is coming. If your weather forecasting is the 6 p.m. news, then you don't belong in anti-icing," Walker said. In addition to professional weather forecasting services, a hand-held thermal scanner, which can read pavement temperature, is recommended.

In addition to its trickiness, liquid anti-icing can be expensive. A pickup-mounted liquid application system can cost \$3,000 to \$8,000 depending on the gallon capacity. A high capacity tank for a 5- or 10-ton dump truck can cost \$10,000 or more.

Despite the expense, it is clear more pri-



Pickup-mounted liquid deicer application systems are becoming more common.

vate snow and ice professionals are exploring how liquid deicers might fit into their businesses. The technology is not a magic bullet, experts caution, but can be a very useful tool in many situations. **SB**

The author is managing editor of Snow Business. He can be reached at ssmith@gie.net

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BY STEVE SMITH

Liquid Deicing Buyers' Guide

Since their development in the 1960s, the use of liquid anti-icing and deicing technology has slowly, but steadily, become more prevalent among private contractors. These days it seems that most snow contractors are at least considering experimentation with liquid deicers. If you're in this category, the companies listed below may interest you — they offer liquid deicers and/or liquid application systems.

LIQUID DEICERS

AMERICA WEST

P.O. Box 730
Pasco, WA 99301
Phone: 888/547-5475
E-mail: americawest@prodigy.net
Web site: www.america-west.net

Liquid Products/Equipment: Produces All Clear and First Down liquid anti-icers/deicers, as well as calcium chloride and magnesium chloride.

CARGILL SALT

P.O. Box 5621
Minneapolis, MN 55440
Phone: 888/385-7258
E-mail: www.cargillsalt.com/cargillsalt/request_info.htm
Web site: www.cargillsalt.com

Liquid Products/Equipment: Offers Hydro Melt, a liquid deicer with corrosion inhibitor that can also be used as a pre-wetting

agent. Also manufactures ClearLane Liquid, intended for spraying on rock salt as it is applied to roads to boost brine generation and reduce corrosion.

CRYOTECH DEICING TECHNOLOGY

6103 Orthoway
Fort Madison, IA 52627
Phone: 800/346-7237
E-mail: deicers@cryotech.com
Web site: www.cryotech.com

Liquid Products/Equipment: CF7, a potassium-acetate-based clear liquid deicer that is effective to temperatures below -15 F (-26 C) and E36, a potassium-acetate-based liquid deicer.

DOW CHEMICAL COMPANY

Call for nearest distributor
Phone: 800/447-4369
E-mail: <http://www.dow.com/calcium/email.htm>

Web site: www.peladow.com

Liquid Products/Equipment: Liquidow Armor Deicer, liquid calcium chloride effective to temperatures down to -17 F. Features corrosion inhibitor and can be used as deicer, anti-icer or as a pre-wet of rock salt and abrasives.

ENVIROTECH SERVICES

P.O. Box 338
Kersey, CO 80644
Phone: 800/369-3878
E-mail: envirotech@etsvcs.com

Web site: www.envirotechservices.com
Liquid Products/Equipment: Shield GSL, an additive that reduces overall salt corrosion of liquid sodium chloride brines. Also serves as a dealer/distributor for a wide variety of liquid deicers.

GLACIAL TECHNOLOGIES

Call for local distributor.
Phone: 800/328-4150, ext. 2696

Editor's Note: A company's inclusion or exclusion in this guide should not be viewed as a comment on its products. If your company produces liquid deicing products or equipment and you were not listed in this guide, please let us know at: Snow Business magazine, 4012 Bridge Ave., Cleveland, OH 44113, fax: 216/961-0364, ssmith@gie.net.

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BUYERS' GUIDE

E-mail: mail@anti-icers.com

Web site: www.anti-icers.com

Liquid Products/Equipment: Offers a line of liquid non-chlorides for deicing (NC-1000, NC-2000, NC-3000) and Caliber 1000, a liquid deicer and pre-wetting agent, as well as Caliber M2000, a stockpile treatment.

NATURAL SOLUTIONS CORP.

100 Volvo Parkway, Suite 200

Chesapeake, VA 23320

Phone: 888/423-2261

E-mail: info@naturalsolutionscorp.com

Web site: www.iceban.com

Liquid Products/Equipment: Manufactures Ice Ban, a natural, non-toxic, non-corrosive liquid. Can be used as a stockpile treatment, pre-wetting agent or direct application deicer. Eutectic point as low as -78 F depending on the formulation.

NORTH AMERICAN SALT

(formerly IMC Salt)

8300 College Blvd.

Overland Park, KS 66210

Phone: 913/344-9405

Web site: www.nasalt.com

Liquid Products/Equipment: FreezGard Zero, a liquid magnesium chloride deicer.

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Liquid Products/Equipment: Offers Select ice melter, a potassium-acetate-based liquid deicer. Is effective below -15 F.

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445 Hutchinson Avenue, Suite 800

Columbus, OH 43235

Phone: 866/744-2436

E-mail: info@shh-chem.com

Web site: www.shh-chem.com

Liquid Products/Equipment: Manufactures Ice-MCL, a liquid deicer/anti-icer. Can also be used to pre-wet granular deicers. Formulated with corrosion inhibitor. Remains effective down to -25 F.

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E-mail: info@magicsalt.com


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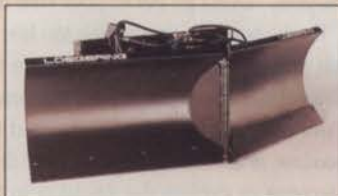
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USE READER SERVICE #424

(continued from page 13)

on price to win an account. "If we have to put seven proposals out and we only get one, we are satisfied with that." Losing an account isn't something the company has to deal with often, as last year it retained 90 percent of its customers.

To set prices, "I essentially look at (the account) and determine how long it would take me to plow it," Shearholdt said. He then puts a dollar value on each of those hours. "A snow plow is the most valuable between 3 and 7 a.m. A loader may be worth \$150 to \$200 at that time, because there are only so many accounts that equipment can handle during that critical time." But if the account doesn't need plowed until later, say a hotel that doesn't need cleaned until mid-day, when guests will begin arriving, then the equipment may only be worth \$100 an hour. Other factors considered are the traffic patterns, work shifts and operation hours of an account. For example, industrial accounts typically only need transportation lanes open, while retail/medical care facilities typically demand bare pavement and clean sidewalks from edge to edge.

Once the value of the hours are calculated and the total time it will take to complete the job is estimated, a base price is determined. The base price is then computed to include weather variability.

"Zero to 3 inches may be \$450, 3 to 6 inches may be \$650, 6 to 9 might be \$800 and every 3 inches thereafter might be an extra \$150," Shearholdt said. Shearholdt looks at the average winter in his area — 12 to 15 plowing events a year — breaks them down into average increments (how many snow events are 1 to 3 inches, 3 to 6 inches and so on) and extrapolates a final price based on those figures. Estimated rates for salt/sand application and sidewalk work are also added. On average 25 percent of the overall price is dedicated to labor-intensive sidewalk work.

The total number after all those components (plow time, sand/salt time, sidewalk time, average snow increments and average snow amounts) becomes the per-storm price offered a customer. As a check and balance, Shearholdt and Marggraf each separately evaluate a facility and estimate

a price. At the end of the process, they compare their prices, come to a middle ground and draw up a proposal for the client. "Very rarely do we have a large disparity," Shearholdt said.

To set seasonal pricing, Shearholdt takes the per-storm price and multiplies it by the average number of events to form a total for the season. He then discounts the number. "By and large, if we have an average season of 12 to 15 plowing events and if a customer stays with a seasonal contract for a number of years, he is going to be better off," Shearholdt said.

The key is having the right balance between seasonal and per-storm prices, said Shearholdt, who has 50 percent seasonal customers and 50 percent per-storm clients. "If you have a mix of both pricing, I've always found that you are going to make money. Combination increases your profitability. The reason being is that if you have the right mix, your marginal costs to plow all of your locations for both the per-season and the per-storm is less than the revenue you are going to get from just the per-storm. The more it snows, the more money you will make."

When he first started, Shearholdt found he was pricing himself out of the market. "I remember this one plaza that for a 10-inch storm I priced at \$4,500, where now I could probably do the whole thing with a loader in three hours. I bet the guy really laughed at that one. But that is how we learned what pricing is. I did a number of proposals, spent a lot of time on them and I followed up on my proposals."

Back then, each time Shearholdt lost a

bid, he called to ask how competitive his pricing was. He began to get a picture of what the market would bear and could lower or raise his prices to the edge of it.

Once prices are set, Shearholdt advises contractors not to share the pricing with employees. "Don't go out to your staff and say, 'By the way, we priced this too low so watch your hours.' Put the pricing in the vault and treat all your customers the same."

And if you learn that you've priced the job too low, at the end of the year either drop the account or explain the situation to the customer. "You sit down with the owner or property manager and say, 'How did you like my snow removal?'" Shearholdt said. Assuming they were pleased with the service, Shearholdt recommended proceeding by saying, "I wanted to let you know that we really did not price this job right. It is not your problem and I'm not asking you for a dime more. But, I'd like to provide you a proposal for next year that is more fair to all concerned."

BUSINESS SENSE. Much of the success at CMS can be attributed to good old fashion business and management acumen. Find a target market, price appropriately for that market and attract and manage high-quality employees and partners, who will deliver a high level of service to the customer. Doing all those things well is much easier said than done. And that makes the accomplishments of CMS, a company with only a decade in existence, very impressive. **SB**

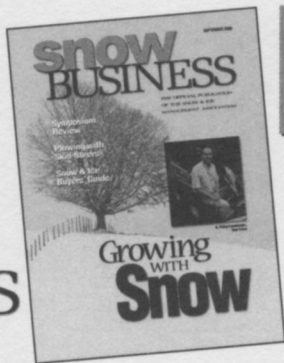
The author is managing editor of Snow Business. He can be reached at ssmith@gie.net.

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Postemergence herbicides offer turfgrass managers more flexibility in application timing than preemergence herbicides. Emerged weeds are not controlled by most preemergence herbicides. Thus, the preemergence herbicide must be applied in advance of weed seed germination.

Most preemergence herbicides require about ½ inch of rainfall or irrigation water to move the herbicide into the upper 1 to 2 inches of the soil profile. Preemergence herbicides can also undergo volatility losses and photodegradation the longer it remains on turfgrass foliage or thatch. Irrigation is advisable unless a rainfall is anticipated within four to seven days of application.

Most species of crabgrass initiate germination when soil temperatures at the 4-inch depth reach 53 to 58 degrees Fahrenheit. Depending on the geographical location, this will occur anytime between February and April in the southern United States. Goosegrass germinates at a soil temperature of 60 to 65 degrees Fahrenheit, approximately two to eight weeks later than crabgrass. On turfgrasses that are not fall-overseeded, preemergence herbicides can be used to control annual bluegrass and certain annual broadleaf weeds. Annual bluegrass germinates at soil temperatures of around 70 degrees Fahrenheit. Thus, the preemergence herbicide should be applied in the late summer to early fall months.

Postemergence herbicides should be applied to small, actively growing weeds. Perennial and annual weeds growing under good soil moisture conditions at moderate air temperatures are easier to control than weeds that are stressed due to adverse environmental conditions. Target the application to coincide with good soil moisture conditions at air temperatures of 50 to 90 degrees Fahrenheit. Applications on cold, winter days or to drought-stressed weeds will result in poor weed control. — *Tim Murphy*

Timing Tips

used for crabgrass and goosegrass control can be used on all established turfgrasses. But, there are exceptions. For example, Ronstar is not labeled for use on centipedegrass or for use on home lawns.

In addition, there is a dramatic difference in the turfgrass species' tolerance of postemergence herbicides. For example, bermudagrass has good tolerance to MSMA and DSMA, but research shows these herbicides severely injure carpetgrass, centipedegrass and St. Augustinegrass. Additionally, cultivars within a species may respond differently to the same herbicide. 'Meyer' zoysiagrass has better tolerance to MSMA than 'Emerald' or 'Matrella.' The product label should always be consulted to determine if the herbicide can be used on a particular turfgrass species.

When turfgrasses and weeds are stressed due to high air temperatures or drought, they can respond negatively to postemergence her-

bicides. Turfgrass tolerance to postemergence herbicides decreases at air temperatures greater than 90 degrees Fahrenheit, when turfgrasses are drought-stressed or when they are growing under high soil moisture and high relative humidity conditions. Herbicides that contain 2,4-D, dicamba, mecoprop, dichlorprop, imazaquin, MSMA and DSMA should not be applied at high air temperatures (greater than 90 degrees Fahrenheit) since there is an increased risk of unacceptable turfgrass injury. Always follow the most restrictive warning that is shown on the label.

Additionally, warm-season turfgrasses' tolerance to postemergence herbicides is generally lower during spring green-up than when the turfgrass is dormant or after full green-up. Fortunately, research has shown that the decrease in turfgrass quality that may result from the use of postemergence herbicides during green-up is temporary and

persists for two to six weeks after application. If a dense weed population necessitates the use of a postemergence herbicide during green-up, use only the lowest recommended or half the recommended rate to minimize herbicide injury to the turfgrass. If needed, the application can be repeated after green-up is complete.

For some herbicides — particularly postemergence products — a repeat application is necessary to effectively control the weed. For example, two applications of MSMA, at seven to 10-day intervals, are necessary to control crabgrass. Preemergence herbicides may be applied either as a full-rate single application or as sequential repeat application. With the sequential application program, one-half of the maximum labeled rate is initially applied, with the remaining one-half rate applied 60 days later. Research has shown that with most preemergence herbicides, sequential applications tend to improve crabgrass and goosegrass control over that achieved with a single application.

Preemergence herbicides effectively control crabgrass and other annual grasses and form the base of the chemical weed control program. Postemergence herbicides are useful to control weeds not controlled by preemergence herbicides. Additionally, postemergence herbicides provide a reliable backup in the event of preemergence herbicide failure due to adverse weather conditions.

ONE OR THE OTHER. There may be some turf sites where a preemergence-herbicide-only program provides acceptable weed control. But, using a postemergence herbicide to control weeds not controlled by the preemergence product is usually necessary.

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Check this article online for tips on mechanical turfgrass management practices from Tim Murphy.

Pre vs. Postemergence

It also is possible to control turfgrass weeds with only postemergence herbicides. But the necessity of repeat applications (and associated labor and equipment costs) and the temporary injury observed with postemergence herbicides renders this approach impractical on most turfgrass sites, especially for commercial lawn care companies.

The use of proper turfgrass management practices in combination with preemergence and postemergence herbicides will enable a turfgrass manager to achieve the goal of a high quality, nearly weed-free turfgrass. Always read and follow the manufacturer's recommendations shown on the herbicide label. This will ensure that the herbicide is properly applied and will provide the highest level of weed control that can be achieved with a particular product. **LI**

The author is extension weed scientist at The University of Georgia Cooperative Extension Service, Griffin, Ga.

Before using herbicides to control pesky turf weeds, lawn care operators should follow approved preventive and cultural turfgrass management practices.

Preventive practices. Turfgrass managers should strive to prevent the accidental introduction or spread of weeds over a turfgrass area. Preventive practices include using weed-free seed, sod, sprigs, container plants, mulches and topsoil.

The end buyer should purchase high-quality turfgrass seed and vegetative planting materials that do not contain weed seeds. Similarly, only mulches and topsoil that do not contain problem weed species should be purchased.

Other preventive practices are: preventing weeds from going to seed, cleaning mowers and earth moving equipment between different sites, and, if possible, controlling weeds along ditch banks, fence rows and other adjacent areas.

Cultural practices. Follow cultural practices that promote vigorous growth and turfgrass development. Weeds do not easily invade turfgrasses that are properly fertilized, watered and mowed at the correct height and frequency.

Weeds appear primarily in bare or thin turfgrass areas due to improper mowing procedures, improper watering, improper fertilization, excessive amounts of thatch, the use of nonadapted turfgrasses, and insect and disease control failure.

Adhering to recommended fertility programs, water requirements, mowing heights and schedules, and controlling diseases and insects will significantly increase turfgrass competition with weeds. And, it will also improve the tolerance of turfgrasses to herbicides and increase the effectiveness of the weed control program. The use of herbicides without following approved cultural practices will not result in a high quality, weed-free lawn.

— Tim Murphy

Turfgrass Management Review

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Bed Shapers

by Nicole Wisniewski

Bed edging machines offer quick bed shape-ups and provide contractors with a profitable add-on service.

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Bed edging creates the frame that either makes or breaks the garden picture.

Clean, crisp garden rims provide definition, and, on the practical side, keep soil and mulch in and grass out of well-tended beds.

Even though plastic, metal, concrete and brick edges have been all the rage, the natural edge is making a comeback, according to Grady Williford, sales manager for trenchers, Brown Manufacturing, Ozark, Ala. "It's one of the fastest growing segments of the industry," he said. "People like a natural look where nothing sticks out and the mulch blends with the grass."

But, in the past, clients who requested natural bed edging or shaping were ignored because, when done by hand, the service required considerable time but didn't deliver profits, explained Bob Brophy, director of the lawn products division, Turfco Direct, Minneapolis, Minn. "Contractors shied away from these jobs because labor costs were high," he said.

Today, contractors can use bed edging machines to get the work done in less time, making the service easier to successfully offer and manage.

SHIP-SHAPE. The bed edging machine actually originated in the golf industry as a sand trap edger, which kept the lines between sand and turf clean and resembled a sod cutter, Brophy noted. In the mid-1970s, this machine inspired landscape contractors, and with the change of a blade the bed edger used in the industry today was born. "Now, out of every 10 we sell, nine of them go to landscape contractors and only one goes to a golf course superintendent," Brophy observed.

In fact, none of the machines used for bed edging today were originally designed for that purpose, Williford added. Trenchers, which typically are used to install irrigation lines and low-voltage lighting, also served as inspiration for

(continued on page 132)

Reciprocating bed shapers move forward and shave dirt and turf in a back-and-forth motion. Photo: Turfco

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Director of Sales

Bed Shapers

(continued from page 130)

bed edging machines. "We actually call bed edgers mini-trenchers," he said. "They are little trenchers with special blades."

These "dirt-cutting machines," as Brophy calls them, shape flower beds and tree rings and come in two different styles: rotary, which is equipped with a spinning blade, and reciprocating, which chops dirt in a back-and-forth motion.

While reciprocating edgers shave the dirt and leave it for pickup, rotary units chew up the dirt in a hood and blow it into the flowerbed, Brophy explained. Both machines offer advantages and disadvantages. "With reciprocating machines, contractors have to go back and pick up the chunks of turf and dirt left behind, which adds some time to the job," he said. "And while rotary machines

may cut this stage out, they do blow the dirt and turf back into the beds, which usually causes weed or grass to grow in the beds later. So, in that case, contractors have to either spray a nonselective herbicide before installing bed plant material or must come back to the property on an already established bed to spot control this problem."

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While natural edging is increasing in popularity, other forms of edging are still trendy. Client preference really drives the selection, said Grady Williford, sales manager for trenchers, Brown Manufacturing, Ozark, Ala.

And, in addition to creating bed lines and shapes, bed-edging machines, when paired with the right blades, can also be used to set the stage for concrete edging machines, which form concrete borders that utilize many different shapes, sizes, colors and stamping patterns to add a unique touch to flower and tree beds.

Concrete edging machines, which range in engine horsepower from 2.5 to 4 horsepower, can put concrete curbs down at an 8- to 10-feet-per-minute rate and come in two different forms: the plunger style, which opens to let the concrete mixture through and then pushes it through a mold, repeating the process in a plunging motion until the job is complete; and the auger style, which has a hopper full of material and screws this material through a mold in a steady twisting motion, pointed out Bob Matthias, president, The Concrete Edge, Orlando, Fla.

While auger machines follow the ground closely, leaving no wasted material, plunger-style machines leave some waste that has to be cleaned up after job completion, pointed out Matthias, who sells both types of machines.

Most machines need a dry mix of concrete, what Matthias describes as a 1-inch or less slump. "Mixes of concrete are described in slumps from 1 to 8 inches or higher," he explained. "The higher the slump, the wetter the material. For these machines, zero is best, but 1 inch or less is usually good, where you can take the material and make a snowball with it and it sticks together. When it's soupy like cream of broccoli soup, it won't stick after it's been pushed through a concrete mold."

To define the slump definition more clearly, Matthias said there is a big difference between a zero- and 1-inch slump. "One is really considered a wetter type of mixture," he said, adding that the closer to zero, the better the results.

Robert Parrish, chief executive officer, Decorative Curbmaking Machines, Clearfield, Utah, said some auger-style

machines will run a wetter mixture. "Plunger machines run a drier mix than auger machines because they are not able to achieve the compaction of auger machines," he said. "If there is no moisture in the material to let hydration happen, it won't be as strong."

Auger machines come in two different styles – mechanical and hydraulic. "Hydraulic auger machines tend to last longer because they have less mechanical parts that can wear over time, but they are also about one-third more expensive than plunger machines and slightly more expensive than their mechanical auger counterparts," Parrish said.

A basic concrete edging machine can cost \$4,700, Matthias said. From there, the cost increases from \$800 to \$2,000, based on add-on packages that include different molds and trowels. Parrish said plunger machines cost between \$4,500 and \$6,000, mechanical auger machines cost about \$6,000 and hydraulic auger machines cost between \$6,000 and \$9,000. All-inclusive packages, which typically include the machine, two molds and four finish trowels, also can range from \$6,000 to \$9,000, Parrish said.

Stamps or imprint rollers can also be used to add shape and style to concrete edging. Imprint rollers by themselves cost approximately \$150 each and molds cost about \$300 to \$350 each, Parrish said.

When purchasing these machines, contractors should pay attention to equipment weight. A heavier machine will pack material more tightly, aiding in crack resistance, Matthias said. Machines range in weight from 150 to 210 pounds. "It's hard to convince someone to buy a heavier machine because they are going to be using it all day, but a heavier one is better for this type of work," he said.

Matthias said concrete edging can be a profitable service for contractors who use a machine to reduce their labor costs. "The concrete itself only costs 35 cents per foot and contractors usually charge anywhere from \$4 to \$8 dollars per foot for this service, so a considerable profit can be made," he said.

– Nicole Wisniewski

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Bed Shapers

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The other major difference between reciprocating and rotary machines is their direction of movement. Rotary machines move backwards, while reciprocating machines move forward. Some contractors argue that pulling the machine is ergonomically easier than pushing it, while others say a forward movement is better because then the work is ahead of the operator instead of behind him or her.

The difficulty of movement also may depend on the soil type rather than the machine. In smooth, soft soils, rotary machines can dig 25 to 30 feet per minute, while in hard, rocky soils they only can dig 10 to 15 feet per minute, Williford pointed out. Brophy reported slightly different numbers for reciprocating machines. He said in good soil conditions, bed edgers will dig 75 linear feet per minute, and that number is cut in half in dry, solid soil.

Bill Pritchard, owner of Bill Pritchard Lawn Service in Hilton, N.Y., uses a rotary machine and has noticed that while the machine finishes the work faster, harder soils

Rotary bed shapers move backward and have spinning blades that chew up dirt in a large hood and blow it back out in little pieces. Photo: Brown Manufacturing

he currently uses a rotary machine, he's planning on purchasing a reciprocating version because he thinks this machine will make his bed-edging service run more smoothly.

"I think the reciprocating machine has less vibration and is easier to use because on the rotary machine when the blade is rotating and gets momentum, then hits a rock or stump, it becomes teeth jarring and is hard on the operator," he said. "If you're not in debris-free soil – which never happens – you're in for a ride."

Bed edgers range in weight from 70 to 140 pounds, which can affect movement capability as well. They also vary in price – reciprocating machines can cost a little more than \$1,000, while rotary machines can range from \$2,200 to \$4,000, manufacturers reported.

In addition, most edging machines come with a basic blade, but various other blades can be purchased for \$50 to \$200 each, depending on the type of blade. For instance, a root-pruning blade may be less expensive than a specialty-trenching blade that cuts deep enough to install irrigation lines, Williford said.

SERVICE STRATEGIES. Bed shaping is proving to be a high-profit, add-on landscape service, according to many contractors and manufacturers. In fact, Brophy said clients in cold-weather regions shy away from other forms of edging because of the heaving that can result after a few years of freeze and thaw. "To them, it's almost as cost effective to have someone come by a few times a year to shape up the beds rather than rip out and replace a more permanent form of edging," he said.

The trend is gradually moving to warmer climates in the West, Williford added. "Most of our sales are in the Midwest area like



Minnesota, Wisconsin and Iowa, but sales are slowly increasing in the West."

Pritchard successfully offers this service to his current clients who crave low-maintenance landscapes. "You have to run a weed eater around concrete, plastic and metal edging all the time – you can't get a mower over that stuff," he remarked. "You can take a mower up against a natural edge and it saves my clients the extra work."

Pritchard charges his clients \$30 an hour for this service unless he knows the soil is tough on a job, and then he may charge \$35 an hour. Contractors should charge at least \$15 an hour for this service to keep up with regular preventive maintenance, he said.

"You can't move a machine for less than that," said Pritchard, who's offered bed shaping for a little over a year. "The blades are really the only part to keep an eye on, except for regular oil changes and usual wear-and-tear stuff. I've noticed the teeth of the carbide blades are already worn down a bit because I use it in tough ground. So, replacing blades adds to my costs."

Brown, who also added this service last year, charges clients 3 to 7 cents per linear foot. "My average property is about 3,000 to 4,000 linear feet so that's a \$300 job," he explained.

Both contractors said that since they introduced the service, client requests for it have increased. "Most clients don't know it's available unless they had it done in the past or see their neighbors getting it done," Brown said. "Once they see it and can visualize the huge impact bed shaping makes on a property, they become very interested." **LI**

The author is Managing Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.

"Most clients don't know [bed shaping is] available unless they had it done in the past or see their neighbors getting it done. Once they see it and can visualize the huge impact bed shaping makes on a property, they become very interested."

– Scott Brown

present a challenge. "The only disadvantage to these machines is that they aren't motorized to move as much as they are to dig," he said. "While it moves alright on a hard surface, they can be tough to pull on grass – the blades will catch a little bit. But I think pulling it is still easier than pushing it."

However, Scott Brown, president, ProGreen, Austell, Ga., disagreed. Though

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Picture Perfect

by Nicole Wisniewski

Two lawn care professionals share details about their winning projects.

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The awards, sponsored by *Lawn & Landscape* and the Professional Lawn Care Association of America (PLCAA), were given to these two lawn care operators during PLCAA's annual dinner at the Green Industry Expo (GIE) in Tampa, Fla.

Winners received recognition for their care of a specific property in two categories (cool-season turf – residential and cool-season turf – commercial) and a \$200 Travel Worldwide Network travel voucher for the 2002 PLCAA Conference and GIE in Nashville, Tenn.

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The client, upset with the poor results from another company, needed to trust a new company. Leuenberger said to build trust in a client he explains the problem and his theories on what can control it. "We never put down our competitors," he said. "We are all professional and licensed – the only difference is that we all have different theories on what it takes to grow a beautiful lawn – so there's no need to put them down."

The site, located adjacent to Lake Michigan, has somewhat sandy soil and the turf is a combination of bluegrass, ryegrass and fine fescue, Leuenberger explained. The lawn care program Chalet uses on the site consists of five applications of organic fertilizer, a synthetic fertilizer low in phosphorus to help grow out the dollar spot and weed control on an as-needed basis. "We stay away from phosphorus in the fertilizer mix because the property is near a lake and we don't want to harm the fish," he said. "We usually only put down phosphorus when we're first installing sod."

The company not only got rid of the diseases and won a lawn care client, it also won a weekly maintenance client. "It's a gorgeous property with a viewing pond that's 90 feet long and 20 feet wide and has fountains in the middle of it," Leuenberger said. "I'm glad we get to take care of the entire site."

(continued on page 138)



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Picture Perfect

(continued from page 136)

A HALL-OF-FAME PROPERTY. Spring-Green Lawn Care has maintained the Bob Symonds/Kirby Puckett Baseball Field at Triton College, in River Grove, Ill., since 1987. "It's kind of a special field," explained Armand D'Agostino, commercial branch manager for the Plainfield, Ill.-based company.

The reason being that Kirby Puckett, who played baseball for the Minnesota Twins from 1984 to 1996, was inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame in 2001 – the same year Spring-Green won the Picture Perfect award for taking care of the property Puckett once played on. Symonds still coaches at the field today, D'Agostino said. "That coach takes amazing care of the field," he said. "I always see him out there playing in the dirt."

The field is also special because it's the first official athletic field the company maintained. "So we've always taken special care of it because we didn't want to mess it up," D'Agostino said.

Spring-Green's lawn care program for the site includes three applications comprised of a balanced, slow-release granular fertilizer and a liq-

uid, three-way broad-leaf weed control applied with a turf tractor, D'Agostino explained.

Since the 18-acre account is located on a college campus, scheduling is a challenge. "We have to schedule our way around a day care facility, soccer and softball practices and state police training," D'Agostino said. "We've created a long-term relationship with them, though, so scheduling has become easy. We call one month before we come out and make sure the date is OK.

"It's not a large dollar site," D'Agostino pointed out, "but it's one we try to take special care of." **LL**

The author is Managing Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.



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CLIP

by Keith Grabow

K&G Landscaping proves that a new and improved logo can beef up business and strengthen credibility.



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K&G Landscaping's old (top) and new logos. Images: K&G Landscaping

LOGO LOGIC

Kevin Cermak and Gary Pipa formed K&G Landscaping as middle-school students earning extra cash by mowing lawns in subdivisions of Milford, Mich. After 17 years, K&G has grown into an enterprise with approximately \$1.5 million in annual sales and 38 employees.

Until last year, the boyhood partners held onto one vestige of their original partnership: the K&G logo—a one-color tree and bush emblem that they designed as 13-year-olds on a computer. In 2001, any affinity they held for the past and the old logo was overtaken by concerns about the future.

"We've been trying to move into more high-end areas, like landscaping, custom designs, waterfalls and water gardens," Pipa said. "But people would look at our old logo and what was triggered was, 'You cut grass.' When we'd remind them about all the other things we did, they'd say, 'I didn't know you do that.' People don't read—they form impressions."

So the partners agreed that the time had come to redo the logo. "We knew it was a big move," said Cermak, though in retrospect, he's not sure he appreciated just how big.

The first step was finding a designer. Cermak asked business associates and customers for recommendations, and, after viewing examples, finally hired a firm that designs logos for area companies.

The second step was to explain to the designer what they wanted in a logo. "We wanted a look that was both catchy and classy," Cermak said. How do you describe a catchy and classy look? The best the partners could do was tell the designer they wanted their name in cursive type.

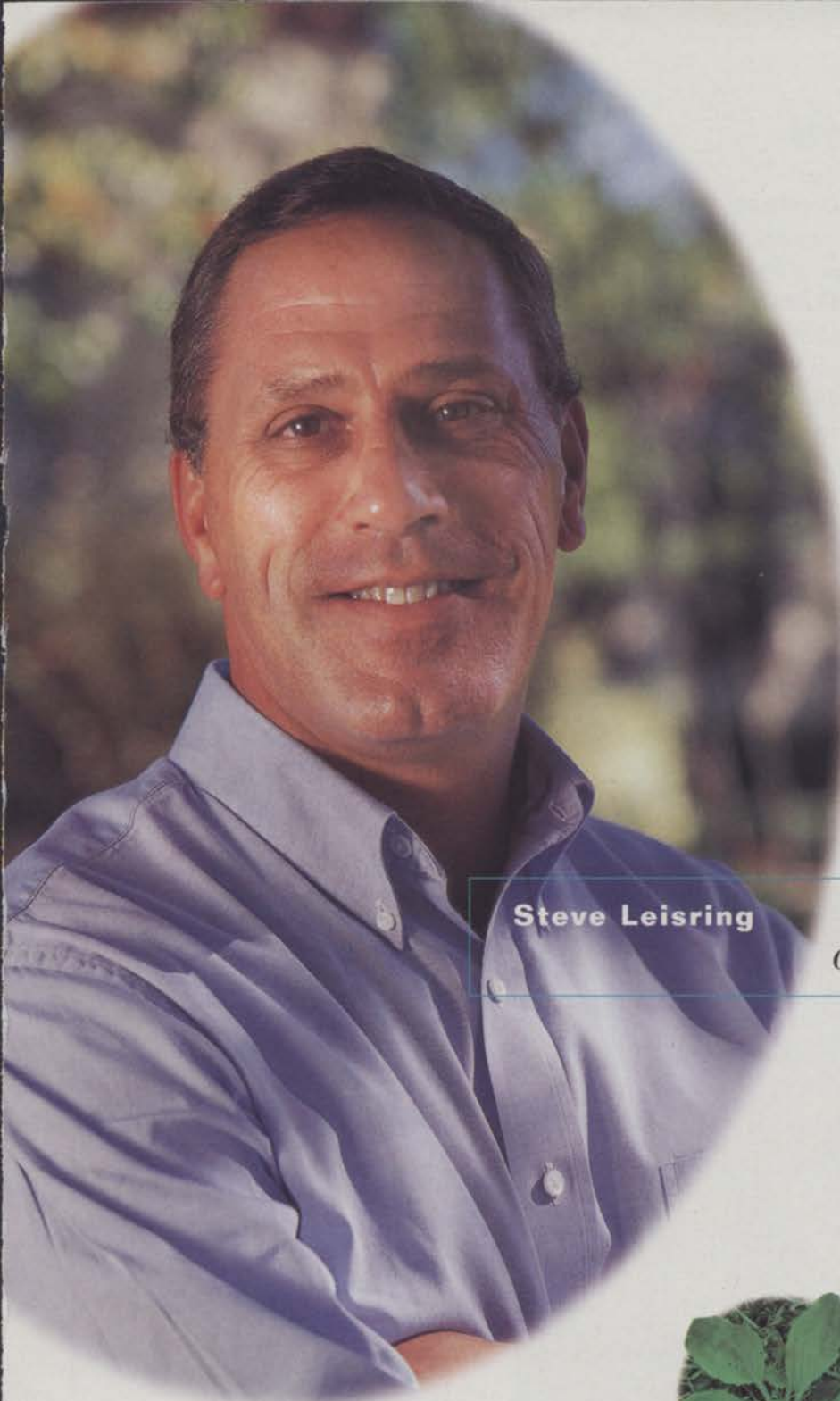
The third step required the designer to begin putting together some possibilities.

Finally, after about three months of going back and forth with designs, they overcame a key obstacle—the "G" in K&G. The designer was doing it in a Christmas font, Pipa recalled. "Neither of us liked it, so we got him to do a custom font." At this point, the partners were down to two logo variations, but they couldn't decide which one to select.

"So we began showing the two possibilities to people we trusted—employees, customers, other business associates," Cermak said. All told, they showed the two designs to about 50 people. "It was about 35 for one, and 15 for the other. Fortunately, the majority was in favor of the one Gary and I were leaning toward."

Once they settled on a new logo they had to get rid of the old logo. That meant an additional expense for putting the new logo on the company's signage, including office, truck and yard signs. For instance, K&G has eight trailer trucks,

(continued on page 142)



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Logo Redesign

(continued from page 140)

and applying the new logo cost between \$2,000 and \$2,500 per trailer, or nearly \$20,000. Also, the company had to change all logos on forms and other paper items, such as statement sheets, estimate forms, work orders and direct mail return envelopes.

So what's been the outcome of all this effort? It's hard for the partners to be precise, since customers don't usually say that they became clients because of a company's logo, but Cermak said "people say they see our trucks around and admire our logo."

And in the year since the new logo was applied, business increased from \$900,000 in sales to \$1.5 million.

"This year, we plan to hit \$2 million," Cermak enthused. "And the new logo will definitely play a big role." ■

The author is vice president of marketing for NEBS, a producer of business forms and related business items for small companies, based in Groton, Mass.

With planning, developing a new logo can be a manageable and pleasant experience. Here are some tips from Suzette Degrandpre, composition manager, NEBS, Groton, Mass., who oversees the NEBS Logo Design Service:

CONSIDER YOUR MARKET. For example, if your market consists of many elderly individuals, consider designing your logo in large type. If your market is young people, consider a modern approach.

ESTABLISH A DESIGN BUDGET. Designing a new logo usually can be accomplished for less than \$1,000. If you want to work with a designer face-to-face, you'll probably want someone local, and the budget is typically between \$500 and \$1,000.

ALLOW ENOUGH TIME. Logo creation generally takes four to six weeks from start to finish, including revisions. Rushing the process increases the risk that it won't be exactly what you or, more significantly, your customers really like best.

RESEARCH YOUR COMPETITION. Look in the *Yellow Pages* for examples of competitors' logos. Show these to your designer so he or she has a sense of what has already been done. This will help the designer produce something distinctive for your company.

COMMUNICATE LIKES AND DISLIKES. For example, are there colors that turn you off or clash with existing company uniforms or other colors you use? Are there type styles you especially like or dislike? Articulate these to the designer to save time and money.

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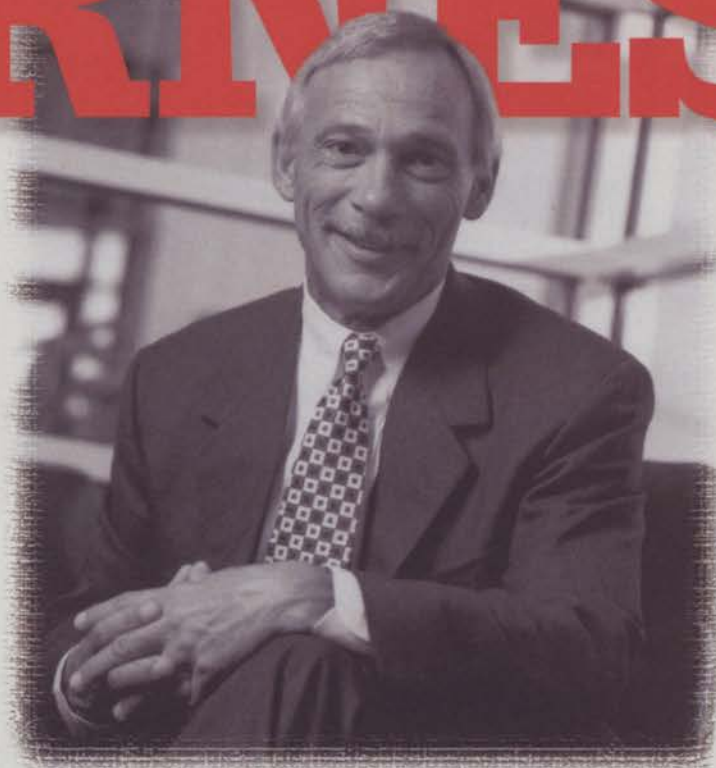
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by Bob West

Conversation with Don **KARNES**

The head of TruGreen shares his thoughts on future acquisitions, his biggest competition and the challenges of buying nearly \$1 billion of landscape companies.



There's no question what company sits atop the green industry in terms of annual sales. With 2001 revenue of nearly \$1.5 bil-

lion, the combination of TruGreen-ChemLawn and TruGreen LandCare is a dominant force across the country.

But the last few years presented numerous challenges for the industry's giant, from high customer turnover rates to the issues associated with integrating its dozens and dozens of landscape acquisitions. As 2002 begins, TruGreen President Don Karnes exhibits great enthusiasm for the organization's direction and future. He sees the landscape portion of the business growing stronger than ever, he points to new marketing methods that will hopefully bolster the lawn care segment, and he eagerly awaits the day when the company resumes making acquisitions to fulfill its national plan.

He shares these thoughts and much more in this exclusive interview with *Lawn & Landscape*.

LAWN & LANDSCAPE (L&L) – What have been the keys to the company's growth?

DON KARNES (DK) – Any success we've had in our company all comes back to the people. We have some long-tenured branch managers, of course, in TruGreen-ChemLawn and TruGreen LandCare who are very competent and do a wonderful job not only taking care of their employees but also our customers. So, it really comes back to our focus on people. You can go back to any marketplace we're in and if we have a strong manager and a strong management team then we'll have strong customer service and a strong branch. That has been proven time and time again.

Don Karnes has spent the last 24 years rising through the ranks at TruGreen after being hired by its founder in 1979.

(continued on page 146)

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Conversation

(continued from page 144)

We have 207 lawn care and 100 LandCare maintenance branches right now. We have some pretty good systems in place and a pretty good plan, but that's all pretty minor compared to the people.

L&L – You could never have envisioned 24 years ago when you started that this company would grow to the size that it has.

DK – Twenty-four years ago, we wouldn't have envisioned that ChemLawn would be part of the TruGreen organization, so at that time, I'm not sure what we did in revenue but I think it was about \$2 million. Now, we're almost over \$1.5 billion between the ChemLawn and LandCare companies, so it has been a pretty dramatic change.

But as you move along, once you're making 10 percent you're trying to make 15 percent, and then you start seeing 20 percent more clearly and the bar you set for yourself keeps getting higher. Obviously, it would have been tough for us to sit there 20 years ago and say we'll do \$1.5 billion, but you put your five-year plans out there and start sticking to your goals and see what happens.

And, again, it comes back to people. I've worked with Dave Slott for 23 years, our attorney, Bob von Gruben for 22 years, John Hayes is our executive vice president and was the president of TruGreen before, Dennis Sutton, Bob Constant, Mark Thompson have all been around here for 18 to 20 years, and I'm leaving out quite a few more. We've got three or four branch managers in Detroit with more tenure than I've got, so we're pretty excited about all that.

L&L – What was your background before you came to TruGreen?

DK – I was working in a factory and I got hired by the founder of TruGreen back in 1979 and I started out spraying lawns. I just worked my way up through the organization. We had a lot of fun. It was a difficult time with different challenges than we have today, but they were challenges just the same.

As we were talking earlier, you look at somebody running a \$5 million business and are their challenges different than mine? Sure, they're different, but it's all relative, and the challenges are just as important to them as they are to us. The one difference is that we have the challenge of being a public company, and that's one of the areas we struggled a bit with LandCare – getting our people to understand that when we project a number

and we say we're going to do something and trying to put that into the next quarter is different for us than if we were a private company. If we say we're going to do X amount of sales in a quarter, we've got to stick with that and it can't go to the next quarter.

L&L – So, do you have to run the business with more of a short-term focus?

DK – There's more of a short-term focus for projecting. You've got to be more precise in terms of what you're projecting for revenue



and profit for the next quarter. That's an area we're going to work on next year.

L&L – But there obviously has to be a balance because you don't want to manage entirely with a short-term focus.

DK – You can't manage with just a short-term focus other than meeting your responsibilities and obligations to shareholders. But when you're looking at short-term impacts in the quarter, we have to make sure those aren't detrimental to us in the long-term and we need to identify our strategies going forward for the long term.

L&L – I don't think ChemLawn was ever considered a consolidator like LandCare was, but a lot of your lawn care growth came via acquisition. Is that still going on?

DK – We'll be doing acquisitions here in 2002, but as we look at them I think we'll scrutinize them a little more than we have in the past and I think we'll see the top end of the pricing come down somewhat. We may have overpaid for some businesses in both lawn care and landscape in the past few years, and we're going to take a hard look at that whole process and put more emphasis on the due diligence side of things.

L&L – Are the growth rates that you became accustomed to still achievable?

DK – I think that this year we're going to be looking at mid- to high-single-digit growth in revenue for lawn care, and in LandCare we believe we can get double-digit top line growth, and we believe that's out there to be had, and double-digit growth in the bottom line. The TruGreen companies are about 40 percent of ServiceMaster's net income today, so we make pretty good money and we're a pretty solid company in that regard. Our whole mission right now is to get that growing and making it a continuous process of growing.

L&L – Contributing so much to the company's bottom line must be a good and bad situation. It's good because then you are a priority throughout the organization, but then it's a negative because everyone is watching you more closely than they would a less profitable business.

DK – That's probably true, but it's just like any business you run with one portion going extremely well and you're attention and support goes to where you need support. But it's a little bit of a fishbowl because we are the largest part, but that comes with the territory. The same is true for us within TruGreen because we have some branches that are unbelievably profitable and doing a wonderful job, and we have some that are on the other end of that paradigm. We have to get with those individuals and shore them up.

L&L – Obviously, one of the challenges has been customer retention and the acquisition of new customers. TruGreen has long been criticized in the market for an inability to retain customers from year to year. How valid is that criticism, and how important is customer retention to you in the future?

DK – First of all, I would say that the way we measure customer retention is a little different than most people. Our computer system would have us measure it so that anyone who reduces their service with us is viewed as a cancellation, so we actually do about 6 to 7 percent better than our reports show. But do we have some work to do in that area? Absolutely. I would say that if one person leaves and is unhappy, that's one too many.

Having said that, we've got 2 million full-program customers, 3 million customers as a whole. That's a large customer base, so we've got a tremendous amount of work to do there.

(continued on page 148)

We do more than you think: Pumps, Hose, Reels, Spreaders, Sprayers, Custom Fabrication
The Lawn Caddy Line-Up

The Pro



- Great on hills
- 180 lb hopper throws 4ft to 25ft wide
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The Original



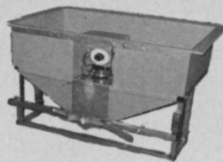
- Fits through a 42 inch gate
- 180 lb hopper throws 4ft to 25ft wide
- 30 gallon tank sprays 60k sqft
- Sprays 4ft, 8ft, 12ft passes
- Speedometer to track ground speed
- Rhino Lining coat on frame and casters

The Stand-up

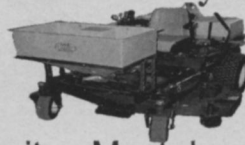


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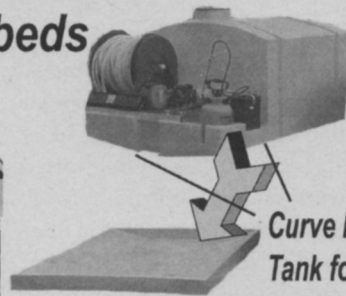
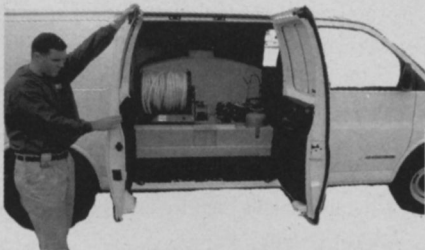


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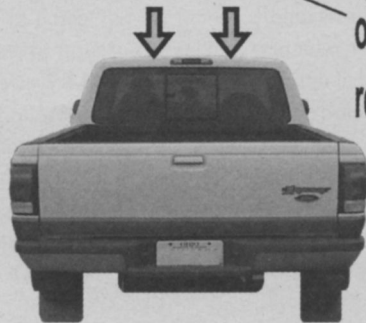


400 Gallon Pick-up Tank

Pump motor and hose reel direct mounting to the tank allows 50% of your bed for storage



Optional pump & one or two hose reels



Conversation

(continued from page 146)

We're introducing (the management philosophy) Six Sigma into the company this year, and it's a pretty exciting, metric-based continuous improvement process, so we're very excited about that. We think that really holds a tremendous advantage for us going into the future for customer retention because what that really does is focus on the customer.

And (new CEO) Jon Ward has brought in three imperatives for us to focus on: employer of choice; customer retention and quality service. Jon is an individual who is committed to these three things in a way that they are much more than just a flavor of the month. They are here to stay. That really is going to be our strategy moving forward.

But customer retention is an issue we have to work on branch by branch with the individual branch manager because our people in the location really are the ones that are going to deliver that. We give some support out of the corporate office, but the rubber meets the road in the branch. They really have all the power in dealing with the customer because they interface with the customer everyday, and that's where we have to get better and better at customer service.

L&L – Is there a target number across the company for where you'd like to see customer retention?

DK – I'd like to see us improve a couple percentage points a year. I would like to see us well above the 70 percent retention mark and approaching 75 percent. Once we're at 70 percent, then we're going to want to start inching up from there and figuring out how we get over 80. It's a continuous improvement process.

We tell our branches that it doesn't matter where they are today, but let's start there and figure out how we can continuously improve every day, branch by branch and region by region. If we do that, at the end of the day we'll all be very happy with the service we're providing our customers and where the company is headed.

L&L – Has customer retention maybe not received the attention it deserved in the past since we've always heard about TruGreen as a sales-driven company?

DK – I don't think there's any question we're putting more emphasis on retention today than we have in the past. As we all know, it's much cheaper to save a customer than it is to

sell a new one. Really, we have these customers where we have an agreement to provide a service, and we need to fulfill that. Any time that we fall down on customer service, we let the customer down and we let ourselves down.

I think we've always been concerned with customer service, but I believe that with our three-company imperatives and with Six



Sigma as our continuous improvement process you're going to see the TruGreen companies continue to improve dramatically on our customer service as we go through the next few years.

L&L – Can growth still come from telemarketing in the lawn care industry?

DK – I think there is absolutely a place for telemarketing in this industry. We look at our marketing and we would love to see a better mix with our telemarketing, direct mail, TV and leave behinds. We are trying to come up with the optimal percentage of each of those programs, and we'll be testing that in 2002. We probably have as many as 20 different tests going on this year, and we're pretty excited about that.

We're still in telemarketing because we believe there's a very viable place for it. We're going to be in it, but we'd like to enhance, improve and diversify that.

L&L – A lot of lawn care companies like to complain about having to compete against TruGreen-ChemLawn, but do you think enough of them recognize the value of having you in their market in terms of what you contribute from a marketing sense?

DK – Of course, having been on that end 25

years ago when we were challenged by ChemLawn, I do believe we help all lawn care companies by boosting the awareness of lawn care. Anybody that is putting large advertising dollars in helps the whole industry.

Having said that, we were always focused on becoming No. 1. Now that we are No. 1, our whole perspective changes to focus on how do we stay No. 1

L&L – Who is the major competitor for a TruGreen-ChemLawn? Is it the do-it-yourself store or is it the local, independently owned companies?

DK – I think the DIY is definitely one competitor, and we have some local competitors out there who are sound business people and running sound companies. At the same time, there are some large players out there who are trying to move up in size, so we have plenty of competition.

There will always be a large percentage out there who do it themselves, so we have to continue working on improving our service as well as getting to the DIYs and moving them over to the service side. If we can do that, there will be plenty of room for us to continue growing our business.

L&L – Do you have any sense of what percentage of homeowners nationwide hire professional lawn care services?

DK – I would say that's somewhere around 30 percent with the rest being DIY. And some of those individuals are always going to be DIY and some will certainly come into the professional market, and those are the ones we're after.

On the maintenance side of the business, it's a bigger industry with more competition, although we are the leader in the industry. We still have to focus on what we do best, and that's providing quality service and supporting our branch system.

L&L – Tell me a little bit about how the recent co-marketing agreement with Home Depot came about.

DK – We were looking for a number of years for new ways to go to market. If you look at telemarketing and brochures, you have to ask yourself, 'How else can we get to these customers? Where else do they go?' You won't find many places where more customers go than a Home Depot. The number of our potential customers who go through there is unbelievable.

(continued on page 152)

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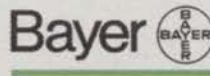
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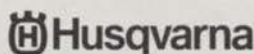
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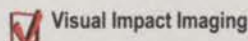
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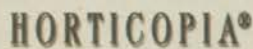
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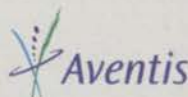
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Conversation

(continued from page 148)

That thinking started a few years ago and then Jon Ward really took the ball over the goal line. He knew and understood that we needed another avenue to the market. We met with a number of retailers and, of course, decided on Home Depot. And we're launching here on Feb. 15, and we'll be testing in three markets - Sacramento, Memphis and Orlando, and that involves about 28 Home Depot stores and three of our branches.

We're pretty excited about that, and along with that will be the Terminix business, plumbing business and ServiceMaster cleaning business. There will be a kiosk in the store, and we'll see how that goes. We're very excited about partnering with such a wonderful company with a huge customer base. We think we have a great opportunity to add some new customers and add value to some customers.

L&L - Earlier you talked about the DIY market as a competitor of yours, so it's interesting that then you would try to market directly where the DIY people shop. Are you concerned that people who have the DIY mentality simply aren't going to hire a service provider?

DK - That may be, but there's a lot of people who go into a Home Depot to buy something but they don't necessarily take care of their entire yard. Once again, there's a huge opportunity when you look at the number of people who go through a Home Depot each week, so we think this is a great opportunity to add customers. Of course, the proof will be in the test. The idea initially is to leave the test in those three markets for 2002, but like anything else, if we do well you'll see it expanded. I'm not sure how rapid that expansion would go, but I think there would be some opportunity. And then with the season for lawn care it's a little tougher to do, but we also supply residential maintenance in each of those test branches, so we'll market those services and enhancements as well.

We also do a little bit of retail fertilizers, although not a lot, and we'd like to continue looking at that area even though anything we would do there would be a long ways away.

L&L - How many branches operate LandCare and TruGreen out of the same location?

DK - We're really pretty separate operating the two businesses in terms of the facilities. Even when they are run out of the same facility they are managed separately. They

are two distinct businesses, and I don't think there's any question about that.

L&L - Would you like to see them all end up under one roof in each market?

DK - I would love to because from a commercial standpoint we have spray work and maintenance work, and the same thing with our residential spray and maintenance work, so I'd love to see that all come together to benefit our customers and us as far as a corporation. But leases would really prohibit us from doing that because we have some that are long term.

As we look forward, we'd like to put them together while maintaining the separateness of the two businesses, which we think is very important. TruGreen does about 20 percent of its revenue with commercial clients and, of course, LandCare is 100 percent commercial. That's the same with all of our companies.

So when people talk about us being in a residential business and say, 'What about commercial,?' I tell them that commercial is



a very important part of our business. TruGreen is 50/50, by the way, in terms of the two companies combined, so when we look at that business we're just as excited about our commercial business as we are our residential. When you look at commercial landscaping, I believe the industry is somewhere around \$22 billion. When you look at lawn care being about \$3.5 billion, you get very excited about landscaping because it's a huge opportunity for us.

We're in it for the long haul. Have we stumbled some? Sure, we made some mis-

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Check out this article online for *Lawn & Landscape's* 1997 conversation with TruGreen's Dave Slott.

takes, but we're getting stronger every day. We're pretty excited about where we're at with that business.

L&L - Is the TruGreen-ChemLawn revenue that is commercial subcontracted work or does it come through LandCare jobs?

DK - Well, it's both, but we're not really national in scope with LandCare today. We have 100 locations, and that means we use subcontractors if we're not present in the location. We have some great ones out there. And maybe we'll be an avenue for them one day to get out of the business.

L&L - Most companies would consider 100 locations to be a pretty national footprint, so you clearly measure yourselves differently than most contractors do.

DK - Well, we want to have a national presence in the landscape industry like we do in lawn care. That's our goal. We have 207 branches in lawn care today, and the question is how many can we have in LandCare. We would say somewhere around 250 branches, and we believe there's an opportunity out there. It's a huge marketplace, and it's a great industry to be a part of.

L&L - How many markets would those 250 branches be in?

DK - We think there are probably somewhere around 170 to 180 markets. And we'll probably be looking at some franchising in our maintenance division in the future. We're not there today, but that would be a future offering from us. That would get us into the smaller markets, and we're not sure if that would be commercial and residential together, but we'll certainly be offering that in the future.

We have a franchise organization out there on the ChemLawn side, and those are some great people who are as into their business as anyone you'll meet. We have about 94 ChemLawn franchisees in addition to the 207 company-owned positions. **L**

The author is Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine. For more from Don Karnes, check out the March issue of Lawn & Landscape for part two of this interview.

OVERCOMING OBSTACLES

Installation Glitches

The efficiently installed and operating irrigation system may be a light at the end of the tunnel, but that doesn't mean contractors won't run into bumps in the road along the way. "Customers are going to expect the whole operation to go smoothly," said Joel Korte, owner, Urban Environments, Columbus, Ohio. "But there is very little about putting in an irrigation system that is smooth." Roadblocks may cause some delay and frustration, but preparation and patience will prevent system stalling.

Call utility companies before digging to avoid hitting buried lines.

Photo: Greg Mitchell

SIDEWALKS AND DRIVEWAYS. Considerations for hardscape elements, such as sidewalks and driveways, initially depend on whether an irrigation system will be installed on a new or existing site. Arranging a meeting with the builder prior to new construction allows contractors to look over the house plans and be prepared, said Lance Gay, licensed irrigator, Moss Landscaping, Houston, Texas.

Gay also suggested installing sleeves in every location on a new-build site where a sidewalk and irrigation line will coexist. The sleeve, a piece of metal piping at least 4 inches in diameter, runs underneath the sidewalk or driveway. The contractor can then run irrigation lines through the piping without having to trench and risk the stability of the hardscape above the irrigation line. In addition, jet bores can be used to drill a hole underneath the sidewalk. The jet bore fits onto a garden hose or piece of PVC pipe and utilizes a jet stream of water to trench underneath the sidewalk.

Korte warned that boring devices, also called moles, cause potential problems if

they hit large rocks in the ground. "If a mole hits a large rock, it deflects its straight path," he said. "We've had occasions with asphalt where that thing comes right up through the driveway. But, generally, boring under a standard sized driveway and sidewalk is not that difficult."

With older construction, especially residential properties with large root systems and small walkways, the site may not have the water pressure needed for a jet bore. Instead, contractors can use a piston driver to dig beneath the driveway. "Cut a small trench and put the piston head in the trench, turn on the compressor, and the piston head will turn its way slowly underneath the driveway," Gay explained. "That type of apparatus is fine on average concrete depth, but watch the machine when dealing with pavers or slate—anything set in a sand base—because you don't want to push the concrete up," he advised.

READ BETWEEN THE LINES. Since irrigation contractors cannot use X-ray vision to see through the soil, they must call local utility companies prior to installation to determine where important utility lines are located, advised Gay. "Always call before you dig," he said. However, Korte suggested that while public utility lines are often marked, some private lines remain hidden. "Private utility lines aren't always marked, and frequently, despite your best diligence, you'll encounter downspout drain lines, private electrical lines or a gas line for a barbecue grill," he said. "There's no requirement once that [private] line is installed to have it marked, so when you call for public utilities, they'll come and mark the public lines, but these are the only ones they mark."

Gay added that contractors should keep an eye out for gas lamps at the end of the street, which are powered by lines often buried in shallow soil after house construction. Cable lines pose another potential obstacle because they are often only buried under the grass cover and not deep within the soil. Further, particular caution should be taken when dealing with gas lines. "If [contractors] mark a gas line, allow 3 feet on either side of the line and hand dig when crossing it," Gay said. "If you hit a gas line, there's no real way of capping it."

In residential situations, the contractor should always consult with the homeowner prior to installation to avoid any surprises when digging on the property, Korte offered. "Nine times out of 10 [homeowners] don't know, but at least you've covered that step with them," he said.



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Irrigation Notebook

MATERIAL MATTERS. Particularly rocky soil conditions may also cause problems when digging underneath sidewalks and driveways, but also when backfilling a trench. "When you're dealing with rocky soil, there's the tendency to go ahead and put whatever you dug back in the trench as backfill, but that's one of the worst things you can do," Korte said. "As soil shifts and rocks work their way around pipe, it can frequently cause the pipe to break."

Ideally, contractors can avoid this situation by backfilling around the pipe with fine gravel or sand, even though the additional outsourced material can drive up customer costs. "But, if you get into a really bad soil situation, that is probably a very wise step," Korte said.

Even when soil conditions appear optimal, try not to dig within a tree's root system, Gay reminded. Be sure to trench away from the tree's roots and avoid digging across the root system. Also, when a sprinkler head is positioned near a tree, use a small pipe to avoid impacting the root system, he said. "Don't even go near the tree because you could damage it," he said.

Finally, Korte identified a system's point of connection as a possible pitfall when installing in a new-build situation. "Ideally, you want the source of water to be available from the get-go, and that way you can flush out the pipes and the valves before you fine-tune everything and put the heads on," he said. However, with new construction, sometimes the plumber hasn't installed a backflow preventer at the point of connection, and contractors have to take a chance and install the system without the benefit of running water through beforehand.

"Oftentimes, you have a complete system installed, underground and backfilled before even having water available," Korte stated. "You may have a weak pipe connection or a mainline break." Korte suggested that irrigation contractors consult with construction contractors before installation so they will have control over the point of connection.

Most importantly, preventing irrigation mishaps also avoids a damaged company reputation, Korte said. "Breaks or problems that occur – the irrigation contractor absorbs them," he admitted. – *Kristin Mohn* **LL**

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

Product Profile

SEASONAL COLOR PROGRAMS

Over the Rainbow

Variety is the spice of life. Similarly, multicolored flowerbeds and variegated splashes of seasonal color add dashes of excitement to otherwise mundane landscapes.

Color programs also supply diversity to landscape contractors' services. Billed as part of a contract or an add-on service, color programs enhance customers' terrain.

"It's usually the first thing that grabs your attention," said Jennifer Bohl, seasonal color manager, Gibbs Landscape, Smyrna, Ga. Further, as organic lawn care becomes more common, biological color programs provide an alternative for environmentally conscious customers. Carefully developing these flower programs thus creates vibrant landscapes that customers desire season after season.

PETAL PUSHERS. Since Gibbs' commercial maintenance contracts already include seasonal color programs, Bohl said only a few of her company's commercial properties do not request them. On the other hand, residential clients can select the seasonal color in addition to their maintenance. Bohl said this is an add-on service approximately 80 percent of these clients request. "Once they see [the color programs] they just have to have it," she said.

Traditionally, fertility has been addressed by applying synthetic fertilizers. However, some suppliers, such as Plant Health Care, Pittsburgh, Pa., have opted to emphasize modern biological treatments. This means reducing traditional fertilizer use and relying more on the introduction of beneficial microbes.

Biological color programs have been very successful for Gibbs Landscape. "Our flowers tend to be a lot more resilient, with fewer pest problems and a longer bloom time," Bohl noted. "The keys to success are having quality plant material and scheduling the jobs well, making the most of your time."

Natural seasonal color programs such as Plant Health Care's flowerbed program may use a step-by-step approach for seasonal color similar to the one below:

1. Start with increasing the organic content of the soil with well-cured compost or a formulated organic soil amendment. Soils that are populated by a vigorous and varied population of beneficial microbes enhance stability.

2. Reduce dependence on synthetic fertilizers in favor of bio-fertilizers. These microbes can dramatically improve soil fertility and the nutritional status of host plants.

3. Maintain soil moisture throughout the growing season.

4. Use a horticultural wetting agent to improve water penetration and eliminate dry spots. Be sure to use a product designed for horticulture, since industrial wetting agents could have varying degrees of toxic effects on plants.

The third step in this process can sometimes present a challenge to successful flower programs, Bohl suggested. "Our biggest challenge is making sure that we have adequate irrigation – making sure we have all the irrigation problems resolved in advance," she said. For example, contractors must double-check a property's water requirements before flower installation and ensure they are being met by the current irrigation system. "Well before installation, we try to consult with the irrigation manager and make sure everything is up and running," Bohl insisted.

Overall, the time saved by systems like Plant Health Care's flowerbed program boosts the overall efficiency of the business, Bohl related. "I would say the program definitely has saved us a tremendous amount of time as far as maintenance is concerned," she said. "It saves us time in the long run, as far as preventing disease problems so we don't have to make repeat visits." – Michael Kernan, Ph.D. **LI**

Circle 200 on reader service card



The author is part of the technical services staff at Plant Health Care, Pittsburgh, Pa.

Before (left) the application of a biological seasonal color program, and after (right). Photos: Plant Health Care

Products

American Rolloff Hook-All Hooklifts

- One chassis can be used for multiple bodies
- Can load, unload or dump a body
- Hauls a wide variety of equipment, including hydroseeders, mulch blowers, and skid steers











- Offered for single, tandem or triaxle trucks with capacities ranging from 10,000 to 75,000 pounds
 - Dump bodies are available and can be dumped at 52 degrees.
 - All units feature pressure hydraulics
- Circle 201 on reader service card**

John Deere Mini-Frame Commercial Z-Track Mowers

- 717 model equipped with 19-hp, air-cooled Kawasaki gas engine and a 48-inch commercial mower with a 7-IRON deck
 - 727 model is powered by a 23-hp, air-cooled Kawasaki and mows with a 54-inch, 7-IRON deck
 - Both models feature drive tires and front caster wheels that provide traction, floatation and curb climbing as well as low center of gravity to increase hillside mowing capabilities
 - Zero-turn radius increases productivity and adds control
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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) _____

II. IN-HOUSE LAWN/CARE MAINTENANCE

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

III. DISTRIBUTOR/MANUFACTURER

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

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

2. What best describes your title?

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

3. What services does your business offer? (please check all that apply)

- 1. Landscape Installation
- 2. Landscape Maintenance
- 3. Landscape Renovation
- 4. Mowing and related maintenance
- 5. Irrigation Installation
- 6. Irrigation Maintenance
- 7. Turf pesticide application
- 8. Ornamental/tree pesticide application
- 9. Turf fertilization
- 10. Ornamental/tree fertilization
- 11. Tree Pruning
- 12. Snow Removal
- 13. Interiorscape
- 14. Other _____

4. How many full-time (year-round) employees do you employ?

5. What year was your business founded?

6. What were your company's gross revenues for 2000?

- 1. Less than \$50,000
- 2. \$50,000 to \$99,999
- 3. \$100,000 to \$199,999
- 4. \$200,000 to \$299,999
- 5. \$300,000 to \$499,999
- 6. \$500,000 to \$699,999
- 7. \$700,000 to \$999,999
- 8. \$1,000,000 to \$1,999,999
- 9. \$2,000,000 to \$3,999,999
- 10. \$4,000,000 to \$6,999,999
- 11. \$7,000,000 or more

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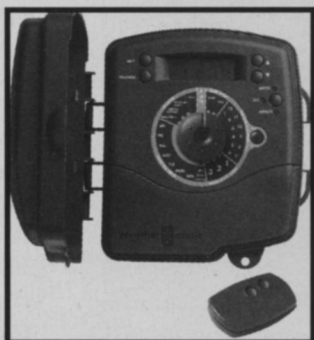
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- LSB73 exhibits a 40-foot throwing distance, a 16-inch auger diameter, a 32-inch cutting height and weighs 1,100 pounds
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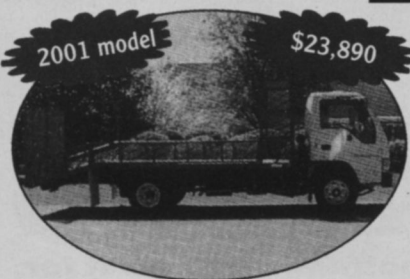


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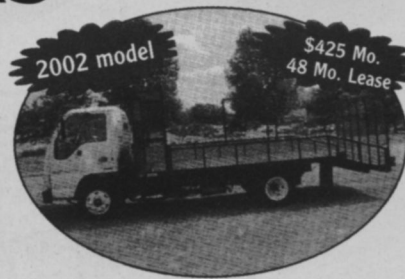
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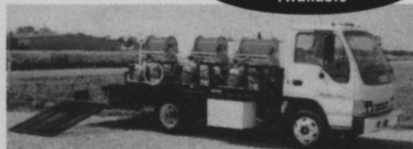
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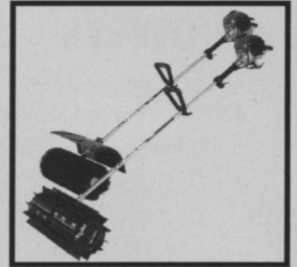
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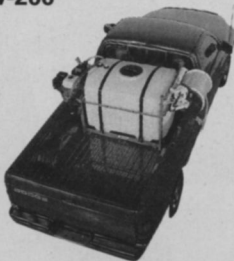


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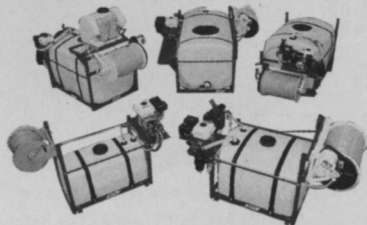
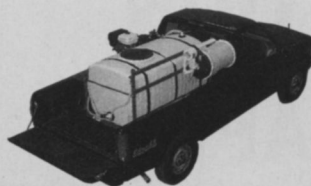
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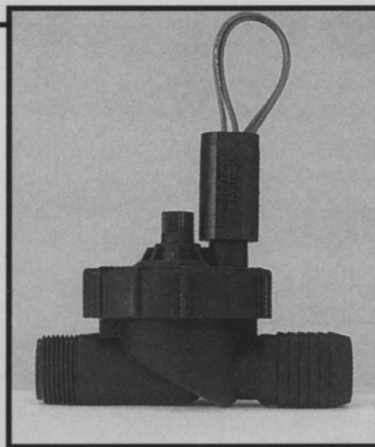
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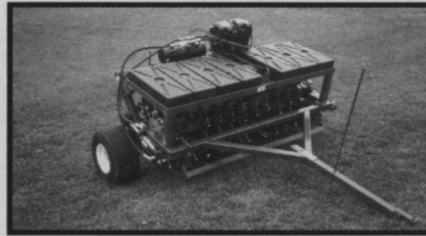
Products

Sweepster Big Dawg Sweepers

- Attachments designed specifically for contractors
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 - Available in two models: the BDA Angle Broom and the BDC Collector Sweeper
 - Includes visual indicators for safety
- Circle 213 on reader service card**

Terracare T-144 Terrator

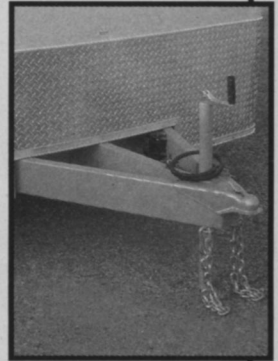
- Features 5-foot aerating width capable of completing 3 acres per hour



- Equipped with 144 free-swinging tines that can be raised in and out of the ground by remote control from the driver's seat of turf vehicle
 - Tines are designed to produce smoother hole
 - Weights included with each Terrator to achieve proper penetration depth
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Avenger Cargo Trailers

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 - Improved aluminum framed side doors
 - Re-engineered rear ramp doors
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Products

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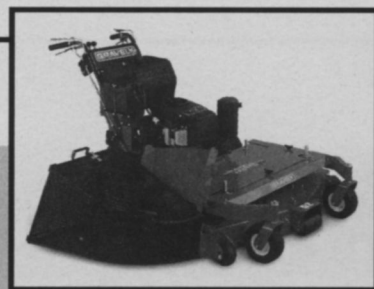
- 5½-hp Honda engine delivers cutting speed up to 150 feet per minute, cutting up to 9,000 square feet per hour
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- Available with either a 15- or 17-hp Kawasaki twin engine

Circle 217 on reader service card



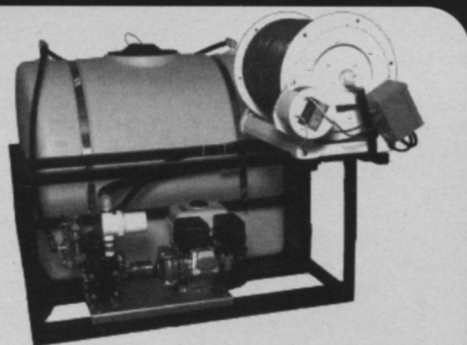
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Cover Story

(continued from page 62)

we call a rolling budget," Phillips said. "We do a budget for the beginning of the year and then we update it every month, revising it and comparing the budget to the adjusted budget. The more detail, the better. It's difficult to do the first time, but once you have a template, it's not difficult to revise."

Keeping up quality during a time of speedy growth was challenging, so quality control mechanisms were put in place. Account managers do monthly property inspections with clients, compiling a written inspection report that details customer requests and complaints to the crew and the special project coordinator. The survey rates 20 items, including overall health of the turf, trees, palms, annuals, shrubs and beds, and the presence of pavement weeds and site debris and litter. The account manager is solely responsible for his or her crews and sites and has the responsibility to correct any problems.

Account managers answer to division managers, who operate their respective division like it's their own company, Phillips said. They are responsible for getting the work and for growth, and are compensated on the performance of their divisions. In addition, each division manager's key people are in a pool where they, as a group, share in the net profits of that division as a percentage of their salary, which is essentially their bonus. "For example, if a division had X percent bottom line profit, the division manager receives a percent of their salary as a bonus," Phillips said.

Phillips said this creates a team atmosphere within the divisions, keeping each member looking over the others' shoulders and helping each other out. Since all managers' bonuses are tied to a division's performance, they all get the opportunity to sell.

Laborers receive discretionary bonuses to recognize tasks they do that go above and beyond their normal jobs, Phillips said. Pay is competitive and everyone who works at Phillips is introduced to the pay scale for various positions when they start. This way, they know the pay range for their current positions and they know they have to be able to do a specific description of work to be classified in that position. They also are shown how to move to the next pay range and position classification, which usually means they have to be able to perform their current duties plus an additional list of tasks.

"For instance, a level one technician is

entry level and has to be able to do the basics," Phillips explained. "To become a level two technician, they have to have been a level one technician for six months and be proficient at the basic tasks, plus a few others. Then to move from that position to a lead technician, they have to have been a level two technician for one year, have a CDL and do a few other tasks."


SLOWING DOWN. In 2000, Phillips Environmental went from \$4.1 million to \$4.8 million in revenue, and it closed out 2001 at a little more than \$5 million. The company manages growth better every year, Phillips said.

"We learned to say no more often to projects after our second year," he commented. "We didn't need to work for everybody who called and that was a real eye opener. We'd rather work for fewer, higher quality clients. We tweaked our client list as well and replaced those who didn't fit in our niche."

And when adding new services, Phillips stays on the cutting edge, but takes it slow. For instance, the company added central control irrigation last September, and Phillips and the company's Irrigation Manager, Kevin Shipp, spent nine months traveling to other contractors' sites to research the service before they decided to offer it. "Our clients didn't know something like this existed," Phillips said. "And it's something we figured we'd be doing in 10 years along with everyone else, so why not offer it ahead of everyone else?"

Since nearly all the company's residential design/build jobs include pools, pool design and installation is another service the company plans to offer. "More often than not, the homebuilder or homeowner is subcontracting the pool work and we're missing an opportunity on that job," he commented. "Instead of referring someone else all the time, we'd rather do it ourselves."

This spring, two Phillips' employees will receive their pool contractors licenses and, hopefully, by the summer, the business can offer the service.

Phillips maintains that the company's strengths lie in its infrastructure, including its management team, facility and reputation. As far as additional future challenges are concerned, Phillips said he's remaining hopeful that the local economy stays strong and his customer base continues to grow. 

The author is Managing Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.

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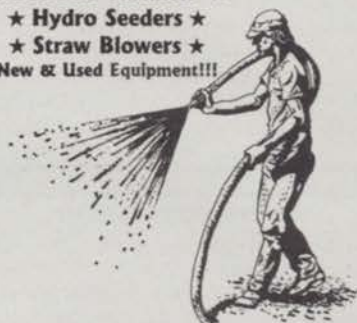
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Mr. Scott Franz, Director of Operations
PO Box 1154
LaGrange Park, Illinois 60526
708/544-1219
email: info@winklerstreeservice.com

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Wheat's Landscape Design Centre
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Fax 703/641-4792
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Landscape Foreman

Ability to oversee projects and people with limited supervision.

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Responsibilities will include carrying out marketing, business development, sales, and customer retention plans. Must be focused and goal orientated.

The right person for these jobs will be willing to travel throughout the Midwest, have an exceptionally positive work ethic and excellent communication skills. Previous experience required. All positions include excellent health insurance/benefits and 401k. Please e-mail resumes for project manager and landscape foreman to:

Tom Bohn at

twbohn@greenacreslandscape.com.

Resumes for sales and marketing can be directed to Dave Wiegman at

dcwiegman@greenacreslandscape.com.

Resumes can also be faxed to: 920/757-0915
EOE

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ND LANDSCAPING, INC.

PO Box 114, Topsfield, MA 01983

Fax to 978/352-8874 or Email to

NDLandscape@aol.com

LANDSCAPE DESIGNER

Landscape Associates, an established, growing residential landscape design firm since 1990, is one of the premier design/build landscape companies in NE WI. Developing creative design for beautiful and functional outdoor spaces complimenting architecture and environment characterize the company's quality of work. Responsibilities: In a leadership role, develop client relationships, conceptualize and sell unique landscape design projects that express client tastes, interests and meet needs. Qualifications: Associate degree in Landscape Design required. BS degree in Landscape Architecture preferred. Good computer skills. 2 to 3 years experience in landscape design and sales. Apply by February 15 to

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PO Box 112

Green Bay, WI 54305-0112

Fax 920/465-0279

klautenbach@gbonline.com

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Western Lawns has offices in Oklahoma City, OK, Tulsa, OK, and Ft. Smith, AR. Interested applicants should send or fax a resume to:

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Manager Training at The Morrell Group

The Morrell Group, a division of Omni Landscaping Group, has what we feel is an effective manager training program.

Previously, whenever we had a manager opening, we first looked for candidates within our ranks and promoted them. After all, they know the company, the policies, the properties and the other employees, and they appear to be leaders. If we did not have a current employee who appeared to be the right candidate, we would carefully screen, interview and hire someone who had a good amount of landscape and management experience. We would assign each new manager to a region, expect them to work on a crew for a few weeks and then they would assume their new managerial role. From this method, we had many people succeed, but unfortunately, we had some who did not. We realized we were not giving them the tools to succeed.

We formed a committee comprised of George Morrell, our founder; Luis Herrera, our training manager; Bert Wood, our director of irrigation; and myself, the vice president. The objective was to develop a manager-training program. First, we looked at some of our systems that did work. One that has been successful was our crew-level training certification program. In this program, crew level employees must take classes or meet certain criteria to receive pay increases and advance to the next level. What makes this program unique is that it is self-driven—if an employee wants to advance, he or she takes the initiative to attend one of the in-house classes that we offer. We decided to use this self-driven concept for our manager training program.

Since the maintenance group is our largest operations team, we developed a training program for it first. We

came up with 13 modules for each manager trainee to complete. We felt these modules represented those skills that would help our trainees succeed. A few of the modules are: working as part of a crew; meeting customers and learning properties; attending crew-level training certification program classes and a company policies and procedures class; training with two other operations managers from the group; preparing for and doing property inspections; obtaining a Georgia pesticide license; and attending a computer or time management class.

Every new manager must complete this program, whether they are being promoted from a crew level position, are hired as an unseasoned trainee to work on a crew for six months to one year, or are a seasoned manager who assumes an immediate manager position.

When someone is first named a manager trainee, he or she is assigned a mentor—an experienced manager within that person's group. The new trainee is given a manager trainee certification program booklet that outlines each module; since the program is self-driven, trainees frequently keep this close at hand. As part of my human resources role, I monitor each manager's training program. I meet with the new trainee, issue that person a book and explain the program. I then meet with the trainee approximately every 30 days to monitor his or her progress.

As our committee developed this program, we tried to decide what would motivate the trainee to complete it—something other than money. It turned out to be something fairly simple—a shirt. Each trainee wears a tan polo shirt. This identifies the trainee to everyone else in the company so that we can assist the trainee whenever possible. When the trainee completes all 13 modules and "graduates," he or she is presented with the type of shirt that our managers wear—a tan button-down shirt.

After we instituted the program for our maintenance group, we monitored the results for six months, and were very satisfied. Our next step was to institute this program for our other groups.

We have had excellent success with the program and the cost has been minimal. Most importantly, our newly promoted and hired managers are getting complete, consistent training. They are not just learning about their properties and customers, but also forming relationships with the other groups and developing a better understanding of how the company functions. —Gail Havron **LL**

The author is vice president of The Morrell Group, a division of Omni Landscaping Group, Atlanta, Ga.

FIVE KEYS TO *Manager Training*

1. Form a committee to develop the program.
2. Review current successful systems for inspiration.
3. Make the program self-driven.
4. Assign mentors to trainees.
5. Use special shirts to differentiate trainees and managers from other employees.



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