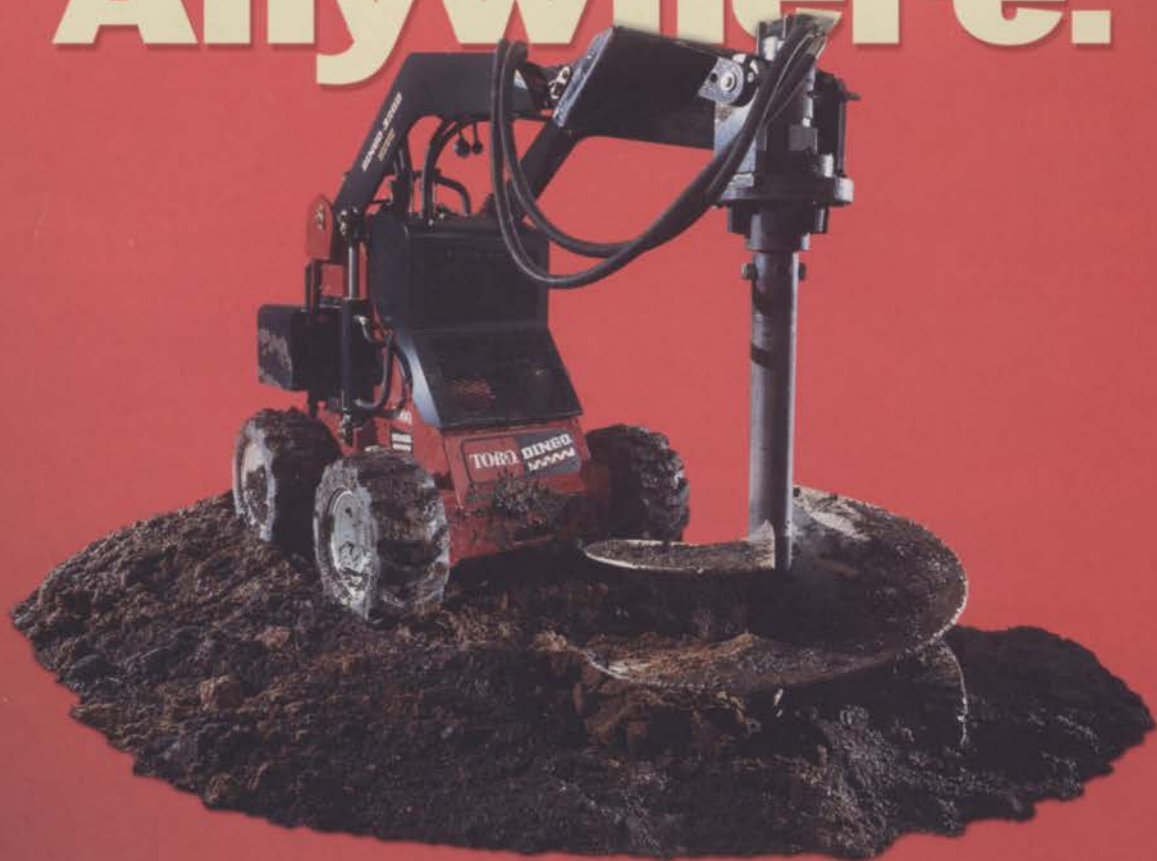


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Lawn & Landscape

MAY 2003 • VOLUME 24 • No. 5

Lawn & Landscape Sales & Marketing Bonanza

Get the round up on the Lawn & Landscape Sales & Marketing Bonanza, featuring Marty Grunder of Marty Grunder! Inc., and make plans to attend the industry's most comprehensive sales and marketing educational event. See page 114-115.

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Cover photo:
Dave Nuffer,
Albuquerque, N.M.



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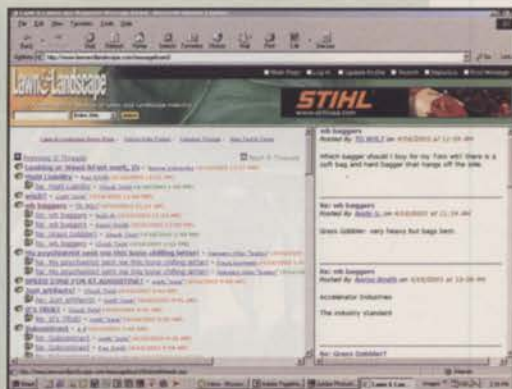
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SPECIAL Features: Lawn & Landscape Message Board

Need to know how most landscape contractors structure their budgets for the year or how they handle employee issues? We know just where you can go to get these answers from a variety of landscape contractors across the United States – the *Lawn & Landscape* Message Board. Create a My *Lawn & Landscape* account, log in and then ask a question on the board – it's that simple. And you'll be surprised at the amount of professional feedback you'll receive to help you better your business. Don't miss your chance to start your own networking circle on this free industry resource!



Extra! Extra!

Visit *Lawn & Landscape* Online for more info on this issue's articles:

- Systems set up at Head's Up
- Prep work for turf establishment
- Tips for setting up mowing crews
- Our skid-steer buyers' guide

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Don't miss original features, like our industry news and new products e-newsletters, found only on *Lawn & Landscape* Online!

Lawn & Landscape

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A Matter of Perspective

"Life is about not knowing, having to change, taking the moment and making the best of it, without knowing what's going to happen next." – Gilda Radner

A coworker and I are avid golfers. Of course, neither of us play at the level we'd like, but how many golfers actually do? The unseasonably warm weather has given us some early-season opportunities to get to the range in preparation for another summer of self-flagellation.

He was telling me how he went to range the other night and was hitting the ball uncharacteristically poor. As the bucket of balls got emptier, his frustration mounted.

At some point, a father and son set up shop next to him on the range. (What is it about golf that makes us all feel the need to introduce others to the suffering?) My coworker continued struggling, and he soon noticed that the father who was hitting balls next to him was confronting similar misfortunes. Then my coworker noticed something else – this father only had one arm.

"What an eye opener," my coworker told me the next day. "There I am getting all upset about how I'm hitting a golf ball, and this guy next to me only has one arm."


Unfortunately, we all need these reality checks from time to time. And I don't know if it has ever been easier to be aware of how fortunate we really are than it is today. I'm not sure what stage the war in Iraq will be at by the time you read this, but I imagine we're still seeing daily images from the area that boggle our minds, regardless of whether or not bombs still fall.

The pictures are what hit me the most. These photos drive home the point that these soldiers are real people, men and women who *volunteered* for this duty. These are husbands and wives, sons and daughters, and, oftentimes, fathers and mothers. And they're dealing with conditions that none of us can ever imagine, unless we've been there.

At the same time, consider the Iraqi citizens. Think about their daily lives. Look out the nearest window and imagine the building or house across the street lying there as a pile of rubble, thanks to a laser-guided bomb. Think about not having electricity or running water today, relying on the invading troops to bring you food and not trusting a word you hear from your own government. Again, we can't understand what this sort of "life" is like.

Now, think about the stress you've already felt today. Consider your problems in this light. Spring undoubtedly presents a range of pressures and demands. Seventy- and eighty-hour weeks are the norm for many. Sleep is scarce, and the to-do list continues growing.

But are these really problems? Should you really be stressed about these challenges?

Some stress is probably called for, but you'd be wise to also spend a minute or two thinking about your problems in the grand scheme of things. Hopefully, you've got your health, as do your friends and family. If that's not the case, then you know what real problems are. But the odds are that your life is going well. Sure, you've got a healthy to-do list and too little time to do it in. But, in the grand scheme of things, is that really a problem? 

Bob West

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Is That Your Final Answer?

For landscape contractors, springtime usually signals a welcome demand for services and the need for more staff. Hopefully, you are now finding it easier to attract potential candidates. However, while the lines at the door may be longer than in recent years, the quality of the candidates is not necessarily any better. The need for loyal, hardworking and talented employees has never been greater. To meet today's customer demands, profit margins and productivity goals, you must surround yourself with the right people.

This year, as you gear up for the season, why not take the time to better prepare for your interviewing and hiring? There's too much at risk to take chances. With every hire, you put your company, your customers, your reputation, your vehicles and, perhaps, your life savings on the line. Just one effective interview question, in-depth form or extra ounce of effort in the hiring process can make a difference.

Before you begin interviewing this season, evaluate your hiring process and make sure it's up to speed with legal and effective forms. Remember, your job is to become an "investigator" during the interview and the tools you use should make this task easier. Nondiscriminatory and job-related questions that elicit more than just a "yes" or "no" response will help.

To get you started, here's a list of our favorite and most popular interview questions for nonmanagement candidates. Try a few – you might be surprised by the results.

- What three adjectives best describe you? Tell me about each.
- What types of people do you find it difficult to get along with? Why?
- Which of your traits and characteristics do you find most frustrating?
- Tell me about your best/worst boss.
- For the worst boss, what did you do to improve the situation?

Jean L. Seawright is president of Seawright & Associates, Inc., a management consulting firm located in Winter Park, Fla. For the past fifteen years, she has provided human resource management and compliance advice to employers across the country. She can be contacted at 407/645-2433 or jpileggi@seawright.com.



- How were you able to stay so long at your previous job? (Or, why such a short time?)
- How long do you plan to work here?
- What is most important to you in a work environment?
- Did you have responsibilities at home as a child? Tell me about them.
- When did you start working? Did you volunteer while in school or work summer jobs?
- Tell me how your responsibilities have increased in your previous three positions.
- What is your biggest professional accomplishment?
- What is least appealing to you about this job? Why?
- Why do you want to work here?
- How many hours a week are you accustomed to working?
- Are there any days or hours you cannot work?
- Tell me about your grades in school.
- Tell me about a time when you had a major conflict with another employee or manager. What was the cause? What did you do to resolve the problem?
- Explain your understanding of this job's responsibilities.
- What can you do for us that someone else can't do?
- Give me an example of a time that you compromised one of your most basic principles and it backfired on you.
- What beliefs do you hold deeply as a result of your early life experiences?
- What plans do you have for self-improvement and personal development?
- What kinds of things do you learn quickly? What kinds of things do you find it difficult to learn?
- How do you feel about change? Tell me about large-scale changes that you have faced and how you handled each.
- How do you plan your day?
- Tell me about a complex problem you have had to solve. Who did you turn to and how did you solve it?
- Tell me about your pay history. (Discuss starting pay, raises, commissions, bonuses, expectations, needs, etc.)
- What have you done that you are proud of?
- What are your short- and long-term professional goals?
- What is your philosophy of customer service? Where did you learn it?
- Tell me about your worst customer service dilemma and how you overcame it.


With all these questions, it will be hard to violate the 80/20 rule of interviewing. (Listen 80 percent of the time; talk 20 percent of the time.) Keep in mind, however, that there is no substitute for questions that relate to the candidate's specific experiences, profile, skills and knowledge.

To hire successfully, determine precisely who and what you are looking for (develop a profile); then study the candidate's background and prepare targeted questions. Add a comprehensive, legally sound process, plus ample time, and you have the formula to identify a winner. **LL**



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Market Trends

TURF TECHNIQUES

Making the Cut

ATLANTA, Ga. – Now that spring has sprung, landscape contractors should consider their cutting techniques. Turf type dictates whether the lawn needs a close-shaven or shaggier cut.

Here are some suggested mowing heights provided by the Professional Lawn Care Association of America.

- Kentucky bluegrass – 3 inches
- Fescues and ryegrasses – 3 inches
- Bentgrass – 1 inch
- Bermudagrass – 1 to 1½ inches
- Zoysiagrass – 1 to 1½ inches
- St. Augustinegrass – 3 inches
- Bahiagrass – 3 inches
- Centipedegrass – 1½ inches

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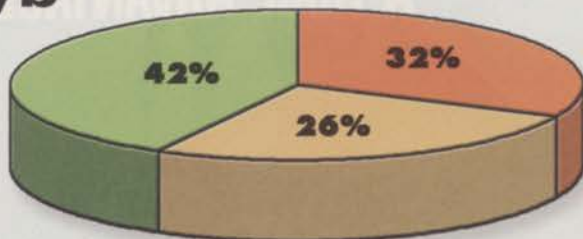
*Source: www.lawnandlandscape.com

If you haven't considered utilizing customer surveys in your business like the 42 percent of contractors who said the same in a recent *Lawn & Landscape Online* survey, you're missing out.

The use of mail surveys has increased recently, according to the American Statistical Association (ASA), Alexandria, Va. In terms of time and money, mail surveys are economical, particularly when compared to telephone and face-to-face surveys. For instance, the cost of a medium-scale mail survey in a single metropolitan area might run from \$5,000 to \$10,000, while the costs of equal-sized telephone and face-to-face surveys are estimated at 50 to 150 percent more, respectively.

But there is more to a successful mail survey than simply sending out questionnaires. In order to get higher response rates, ASA suggested implementing the following steps:

- Send a preliminary mailing announcing the survey.
- Mail the survey to all respondents at the same time with an accompanying cover letter.
- Send a reminder with contact information to request a replacement questionnaire or answer general survey questions.
- Send replacement questionnaire by First Class mail.
- Send the last replacement questionnaire by two-day Priority mail.
- Include a stamped, pre-addressed return envelope.
- Include a token of thanks – \$1 to \$5 – with your initial or replacement mailing as an incentive.
- Use printed, personalized stationery to thank respondents for their cooperation.



Do you survey customers about your company's performance?



No, we haven't considered it



Yes, more than once a year



Yes, once a year

LABOR SOLUTIONS

Legislative Update

WASHINGTON, D.C.—The American Nursery & Landscape Association (ANLA), the New Jersey Nursery & Landscape Association, the Pennsylvania Landscape & Nursery Association and the Ohio Nursery & Landscape Association recently held about 30 meetings with Congressional members and staff from a broad swath of House and Senate offices in those states. The meetings addressed many topics, but chief among the industry's concern was the need for labor legislation reform.

The lobbying teams described the unstable and worsening labor situation in agriculture and the green industry, and outlined reforms that would stabilize the existing guest worker programs as well as secure the experienced workforce.

Most of these meetings were targeted at Republican members of the House who may be unaware or only on a limited basis aware of problems that exist in the green industry and

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Market Trends

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agricultural workforces with a high percentage of the workers who are believed to be lacking proper work authorization to be in the country," explained Craig Regelbrugge, ANLA's senior director of government relations. Regelbrugge noted that given the fact that more than half of the available agricultural and landscape workforce is feared to lack proper authorization to work in the United States, the industry also wants to enhance legislators' awareness of the flaws in current guest worker programs that "limit their current and future use."

The legislative process moves slowly, but Regelbrugge said these meetings were time well spent. "Most of these meetings can't be measured in terms of win or lose, but it's safe to say that in most of them the staff was interested, attentive, asked good questions and appreciated the chance to learn more about their constituents' problems," he explained. And he's optimistic that every day brings new legislation aimed at helping businesses employ legal immigrants closer to passing.

Unfortunately, such new laws will likely mean more for the agricultural/nursery industries than they will the landscape industry at first. "There has been a dialogue between employer and worker advocates in agriculture on and off over the last several years that has led to a blueprint for labor reform in the agricultural context," Regelbrugge affirmed. "We obviously care deeply about the landscape side as well, but the reality on the landscape side is that the dialogue is not as far along and our fate there is hitched to the fate in the general business community for similar types of reforms."

In addition to paving the way for more legislation addressing the H2B program that has become so popular among landscape contractors in recent years, Regelbrugge hopes that new laws passed in the

People

John Schoch assumed new responsibilities at Profile Products as the company's new chief executive officer.

Mark Morgan joined Arborwell as district manager.

Peterson Pacific Corp. hired **Larry Cumming** to oversee day-to-day operations as general manager.

At Stellar Industries, **Gary Hanson** will focus on the western United States and Canada as regional sales manager.

Personnel moves at Valent include the hiring of **Chris Threadgill** as sales representative, and the promotions of **Anita Dale** to senior director of marketing and product management; **Robin Demouth** to vice president, general counsel and secretary; and **Donnie Taylor** to senior director of U.S. sales.

Susan Vander Veen was hired as design center manager for Great Impressions.

At Land Architects, **Joseph Wilson** was promoted to the position of project designer.

Skinner Nurseries hired two new sales representatives: **Mike Vleck** and **Roger Claybaugh** will both work in the Palm Beach, Fla., office.

At Finn Corp., **Ed Garrido** will be responsible for sales in Latin America, Spain and Portugal as international sales manager.

Jim Gabrielson was promoted to deputy general manager of sales and marketing at RedMax.

Market Trends

Association NEWS

The **Ohio Turfgrass Foundation** elected its 2003 officers and trustees. New officers serving one-year terms are: John Mowat, president; George Furrer, vice president; and Chuch Darrah, treasurer. Trustees serving 3-year terms are: Mark Grunkemeyer, Mark Jordan and Dan Walter.

The **Mid-America Green Industry Council** announced its new Board of Directors. This year's officers are: Bill Gordon, president; Duane Konrady, vice-president; and Wes Ory, secretary-treasurer.

The **California Landscape Contractors Association** named its 2003 Board of Directors. The officers are: Jerry Allison, president; Jon Singley, president-elect; Jay Tripathi, immediate past president; and Gordon Larson, secretary/treasurer.

The **New York State Turfgrass Association** elected its officers and directors for 2003. Officers are: Steve Griffen, president; Jim Hornung, vice president; and James Diermeier, secretary/treasurer. Norman Hummel and Owen Regan are new at-large board members.

The **Tree Care Industry Association (TCIA)** promoted Rusty Girouard to chairman of the board.

interim will offer some benefits to contractors. "Even the agricultural package that is a focused agenda item in the near term, if it's enacted by Congress, would provide some immediate seasonal labor relief to landscape employers and other non-agricultural industry employers," he noted.

At this point, no potential new legislation has been introduced to Congress, but Regelbrugge said the bill's framework has been worked out. This shifts the focus to selling the industry's story to congressmen and senators. "We're looking for the political support necessary to move something through," Regelbrugge related.

"But clearly the problem needs urgent resolution," he asserted.

SUPPLIER NEWS

LESCO Opens Six New Locations

CLEVELAND - In markets where it has service centers, LESCO is known by landscape professionals as the place they drive into and pick up just about any turf care product they need. The beginning of April also brings this service center concept to six new areas, with LESCO's first new service center openings in five years. The new facilities are located in: Haverhill, Mass.; Brunswick, Ga.; Douglasville, Ga.; Lawrenceville, Georgia; Arvada, Colo.; and North Aurora, Ill.

"In 2002, our store assets, that is our service centers and Stores-on-Wheels, had a total return on invested capital (ROIC) over 30 percent," stated Michael DiMino, LESCO's president and chief executive officer. "Our historical experience of significant sales growth and high returns from store locations is the catalyst for our new store



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Market Trends

opening strategy. Our goal is to return LESCO's ROIC to a level greater than 10 percent within the next three years. We will achieve that goal by investing in new stores while limiting investment in leverageable areas such as warehousing, general and administrative expenses."

LESCO previously announced its plan to open 20 to 25 new service centers during 2003. These openings bring LESCO's total number of service centers nationwide to 233.

RESEARCH REVIEW

A Look at Lawn Care

The U.S. Lawn & Garden Market, a division of MarketResearch.com, recently published a report on the lawn care industry.

According to the research, sales of professional lawn care services reached nearly \$3.9 billion in 2002, a jump of 8 percent over 2001. While this is impressive, services have actually exhibited a marked slowdown in

Calendar of Events

TO ENSURE

that your meeting date is published, send an announcement at least 12 weeks in advance to *Lawn & Landscape Calendar*, 4012 Bridge Ave., Cleveland, OH 44113.

JUNE 10 Ohio Sports Turf Managers Association's 2003 Summer Workshop, Cincinnati, Ohio. Contact: 419/824-9805 or www.ostma.org.

JUNE 12-14 Snow & Ice Symposium, Buffalo, N.Y. Contact: 814/835-3577 or www.sima.org.

JUNE 17 New York State Turfgrass Association Cornell University Field Day, Ithaca, N.Y. Contact: 518/783-1229.

JULY 12-16 Ohio Florists' Association Short Course 2003, Columbus, Ohio. Contact: 800/424-5249 or www.ofa.org.

JULY 13-15 Texas Turfgrass Association's Summer Institute, Arlington, Texas. Contact: 979/690-2201.

JULY 15-20 American Nursery & Landscape Association Convention & Executive Learning Retreat, Boston, Mass. Contact: 202/789-2900 or www.anla.org.

JULY 16 Michigan Turfgrass Field Day, Lansing, Mich. Contact: 517/321-1660 or www.michiganturfgrass.org.

JULY 22-25 Turfgrass Producers International's Summer Convention & Field Days, Dayton, Ohio. Contact: 800/405-8873 or www.TurfGrassSod.org.

JULY 24-26 Lawn & Landscape Sales and Marketing Bonanza Conference, Cincinnati, Ohio. Contact: 800/456-0707 or www.lawnandlandscape.com/events.

JULY 25 Lawn & Landscape Business Management Seminar, Baltimore, Md. Contact: 800/456-0707 or www.lawnandlandscape.com/events.

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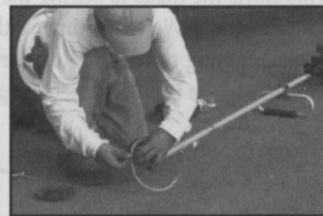
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Letters TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor,

I was concerned when I read the ONLINE EXTRA: "Patio Perks" on your Web site.

I am a Graduate Landscape Architect from Ball State University, and I have been designing and constructing decks and patios for the last 13 years. The prices given for patios were within our prices. However, the prices for decks were grossly exaggerated unless you are building with something far more expensive than treated pine. Even cedar is not that expensive.

I strongly agree that there are many more aesthetic and functional advantages of deck designs. In contrast to the article, my experience with "return on investment" with decks vs. patios is that clients will usually view the repeated maintenance of decks as a costly burden similar to having a pool or hottub.

The low maintenance appeal of a patio often outweighs design options and the higher costs of deck construction and maintenance not only

in initial sales but also in resale. I have a hard time believing that a deck will provide a higher percentage of investment return than a paver patio will. I have also seen many cases where a deck could be constructed for less than a paver patio of equal size due to limited access needed for machinery required in patio construction. In my opinion, "return on investment" is not just related to wood or pavers. It is almost completely site specific.

Dave Jefferson
sales manager
Salsbery Brothers Landscaping
Carmel, Ind.

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

growth rates compared with the late 1990s and 2000, when growth skyrocketed up to double-digit rates, the report revealed. But then the recessionary year of 2001 came along and put a brake on this upward surge with growth of just 7 percent, followed by a slightly better 2002.

During the 1998-2000 period, the double-digit growth rates exhibited by services reflected three "explosive" factors: the housing boom, the booming economy and the aging of the baby boomers. All three came together to generate an optimum environment for services growth. The record number of homeowners created a vast pool of properties that service firms could tap; the exuberant economy rendered services easily affordable for many; and the aging baby boomers – affluent but time-pressed – chose to employ services to maintain their lawns.

During 2001 and 2002, however, the economic prop was weakened as the economy moved into slow-growth mode. Nevertheless, the housing boom remained strong, and baby boomers continued to age. Though

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Market Trends

money was tighter, there was still a service demand, which the lower yet still impressive growth rates the past two years still reflect.

MarketResearch.com foresees a slow-growth economy and rising costs for lawn care services combining to soften growth rates for services over the next five years, with the days of double-digit gains gone for a while. Nevertheless, growth rates will continue to be positive, as demand will remain strong, the report said. Based on this assessment, research suggests that services will reach more than \$5 billion by 2007.

SALARY SURVEY

PGMS Reveals Rise in Lawn Salaries

BALTIMORE—A recent Professional Grounds Management Society (PGMS) study shows a continued elevation in landscape professionals' salaries even during the unstable economy.

For instance, the 2002 survey found that the average base salary of respondents in the

(continued on page 24)



L&L

Book Report

***Selling the Invisible: A Field Guide to Modern Marketing* by Harry Beckwith**

Customers can't grab services off of shelves, stick them in shopping carts or wrap them up in tidy boxes. They're simply not that tangible or even that simply marketed.

"The core of service marketing is the service itself," relates *Selling the Invisible: A Field Guide to Modern Marketing* by Harry Beckwith, a "must-read" according to Todd Reinhart, vice-president, Reinhart Grounds Maintenance, Normal, Ill., who said the quick read inspired him to reevaluate how he brands his "product."

"Everything needs to be in one package," Reinhart read from the book. "Your company needs to display one

face, whether its your employees' uniforms or your marketing materials."

Reinhart reinvented his company logo and carried it out consistently on uniforms, trucks and marketing materials after reading the book. "One image makes you easier to remember," he added.

The author shares key service selling tactics based on his marketing and advertising firm background and experience with Fortune 500 companies, offering readers insightful branding nuggets. Reinhart recites one: "Broaden your appeal, narrow your position." Focusing on commercial clients and upselling services has altered how his company conducts business, he pointed out.

"As an entrepreneur," Reinhart remarked, "the book makes you take a step back and take a look at your operation as a whole."

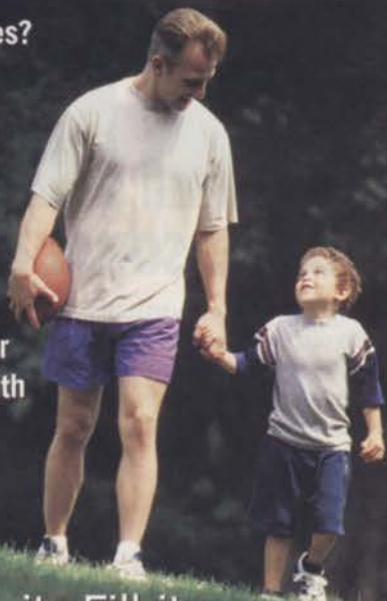
—Kristen Hampshire

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Market Trends

(continued from page 22)

manager category was \$58,145, a 6.2 percent increase over 2001's \$54,523.

Breaking out the figures, superintendents/managers said they made an average hourly wage of \$27.87 with a \$21.95 hire rate, supervisors/chiefs said they made an average hourly wage of \$19.79 with a \$16.52 hire rate, foremen reported making an average of \$15.28 per hour with a \$12.35 hire rate, equipment operators said they made an average of \$12.87 per hour with a \$10.49 hire rate, mechanics reported an average hourly wage of \$15.35 per hour with a \$12.11 hire rate, permanent laborers said they made an average of \$12.22 per hour with a \$9.90 hire rate, temporary laborers said they made an average of \$8.88 per hour with an \$8.05 hire rate and part-time laborers said they earned an average hourly wage of \$8.35 with a \$7.90 hire rate. All survey respondents reported an overall average hire rate of \$12.41 and an overall average hourly wage of \$15.07.

For a copy of the report for \$15, contact PGMS at pgms@assnhqtrs.com.

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The Nu-Gro Corp. -	www.nugro.com
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To announce a new Web site, e-mail nwisniewski@lawnandlandscape.com.

BUSINESS BASICS

A Master Mix-Up

Mike Foti, president, Leadership Builders, Cleveland, Ohio, suggested contractors consider three vital components - people, market and style - to improve their businesses.

- People. Hire competent people with similar values, and those who are willing and encouraged to have opinions that may not match yours.

- Market. Analyze your demographic mix compared to your customers. Then fill the

gaps with clients in your target demographic group. Also, spend more time with clients.

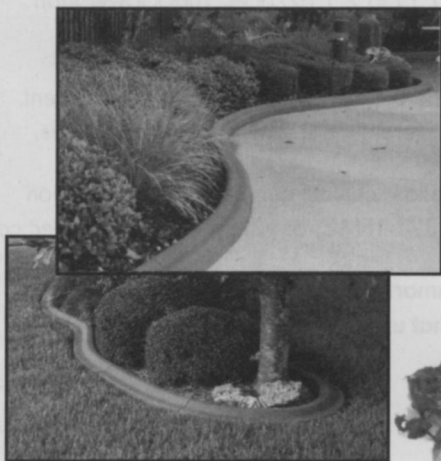
- Style. Include new people on critical projects where they can earn new experiences, challenges and money. Measure results and reward performance. **LL**

Correction

In the March Pesticide & Fertilizer Buyers' Guide, FMC's Talstar F should have been listed as a flowable liquid, and Talstar EZ was incorrectly labeled Talstar EX.

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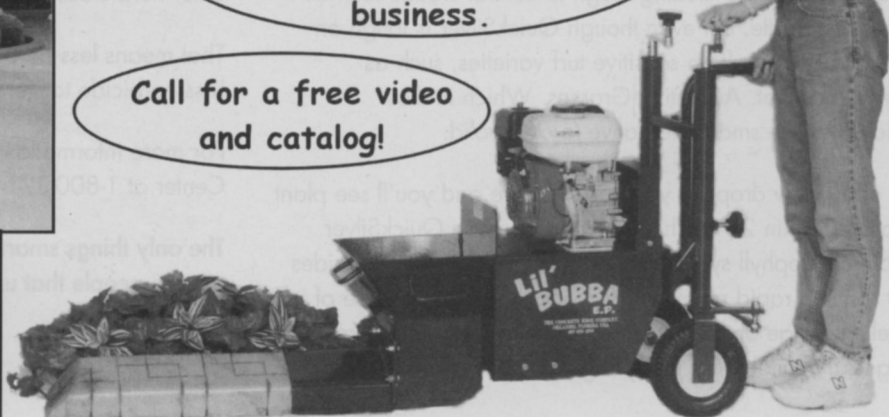
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Nursery Market Report

PERENNIAL POWER

'Becky' Blossoms

Daisies have always exuded charm and friendliness, and *Leucanthemum* 'Becky' is the quintessential daisy.

The saga of *Leucanthemum* 'Becky' started with Jimmy and Becky Stewart of Atlanta, Ga., who received a Shasta daisy from their neighbor, Mary Ann Gatlin, who originally obtained it from her mother, Ida Mae. In the 1960s, Ida Mae spotted this daisy blooming in an Atlanta garden and was so taken with it that she approached the owner and offered to buy a clump – the owner gladly accepted. Ida Mae had a successful nursery business and sold this daisy, 'Becky,' as a garden plant and as a cut flower.

Unable to find a clear identity for this plant, a visitor to the Stewart garden, Bill Funkhouser, chose to call it *Chrysanthemum* 'Becky' to honor Becky Stewart. This daisy with an intriguing history can add a notch to its belt. The Perennial Plant Association (PPA) has named *Leucanthemum* 'Becky' its 2003 Perennial Plant of the Year.

PPA members selected the Becky Shasta daisy on the basis of its bright white flowers, sturdy stems that resist lodging and long bloom season. 'Becky' also has proven to be a lovely, dependable perennial for herbaceous borders.



ABOUT BECKY. Contemporary nomenclature lists this Shasta daisy, formerly a member of the genus *Chrysanthemum*, as *Leucanthemum* 'Becky' Superbum Group. Shasta daisy is a member of the Asteraceae family and is a hybrid created by Luther Burbank in 1890.

'Becky' has sturdy,

Bright and cheery Becky is a low-maintenance selection for summer borders or container gardens. Plants grow well in full sun but do not tolerate excess moisture well. Photo: Perennial Plant Association

upright stems that do not require staking and grow 40 inches tall with a similar spread. Three-inch wide, single white flowers with contrasting yellow centers appear at the end of June or early July when other Shastas are finishing. Flowering continues throughout August and often into September.

Becky Shasta daisy grows well in hardiness zones 4 to 9, up to 2 to 3 feet tall. In addition, the daisy is praised for its ability to withstand heat and humidity, said Steven Still, PPA executive director.

LANDSCAPE USE. *Leucanthemum* 'Becky' can grow as a specimen or en masse in perennial borders, in naturalistic landscapes, to attract butterflies and in large containers. 'Becky' can even be one of the mainstays of a summer border.

Try planting Becky with Russian sage for a long bloom season, or place *Scabiosa columbaria* 'Butterfly Blue' (pincushion flower) in front and add *Veronica* 'Royal Candles' for a lovely combination of white, blue and blue-lavender. For extra punch, add *Crocsmia* 'Lucifer' – a brilliant scarlet red, summer-flowering bulb.

CULTIVATION. A top-performing cultivar of an old-fashioned favorite, Becky Shasta daisy grows best in full sun and well-drained soil. Plants, however, do not tolerate excess moisture or wet soils in winter.

Deadheading encourages rebloom and extends the flowering season into autumn. In addition, stems can be cut back to the lower foliage after flowering to tidy the plant.

Flower stems are strong enough to keep this daisy upright after a heavy rain, and the daisies – due to their robust habit – offer strong performance in both southern and northern climates.

PPA PROGRAM. The selection of *Leucanthemum* 'Becky' marks the 14th year for the Perennial Plant of the Year program. The PPA membership votes to select a perennial that is suitable for a wide range of climate types, low maintenance, easily propagated and exhibits multi-seasonal interest. "The Perennial Plant of the Year program selects plants that perennial industry experts find to be outstanding and easily grown," Still said.

For information about PPA, visit www.perennialplant.org or contact PPA at 614/771-8431 or ppa@perennialplant.org.

Landscape contractors can obtain 'Becky' through their local growers or wholesalers. – Ali Cybulski

The author is Contributing Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine and can be reached at acybulski@lawnandlandscape.com.

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Check out our Online-Only Extras for best cultural information on 'Becky' and past perennial winners.

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Jay Boyce, owner of Boyce Landscape Inc., knew just what he wanted to make the perfect landscape truck, but he needed a very special truck chassis to complete the picture.

As Jay puts it, "The body I designed had a place for everything, but to make it work, I needed a truck that could handle the load and carry a seven-man crew as well. (Legally, with seat belts.) My clients are very upscale, so the truck had to look good on the job. I also wanted a very tight turning radius, so drivers could maneuver in narrow areas. And finally, it had to be dependable, because down-time is a killer in this business. My Isuzu dealer had just the right truck, the Isuzu crew cab."

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Arbor Business

CASE STUDY

Tree Care Price Points

Pricing tree care services can be more challenging than it seems. Swingle Tree & Lawn Care, Denver, Colo., should know – they started tending to trees in 1947 and, today, the company generates 70 percent of its overall revenue from tree-related services.

One of the most difficult tree care pricing areas is tree spraying because it's so plant and pest specific, pointed out John Gibson, Swingle Tree's director of operations.

To understand Swingle Tree & Lawn Care's tree spraying pricing structure, one has to take a look at its service options. Some clients purchase a three- to four-application annual program called "Treat and Inspect," which is similar to an annual lawn care program and is used to



Dean Griess, Plant Health Care Department supervisor at Swingle Tree & Lawn Care, conducts fall tree fertilizations. Photo: Swingle Tree & Lawn Care

treat local problem pests, particularly aphids, mites and caterpillars in Colorado. "We show up in 30- to 45-day intervals and treat the plants that have problems, including preventive treatments for common insects and curative treatments for problems we spot while we're there," Gibson said. For other insect and disease problems, such as ash borers or ips beetles, the company uses a "Targeted Insect" application, treating these less common pests on a per-problem basis.

(continued on page 30)

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Arbor Business

(continued from page 28)

Both of these services are priced similarly. To start, Swingle Tree & Lawn Care crews visit clients' properties and analyze each site, counting the number of trees and shrubs and level of difficulty in spraying the various sized site plants. In the "Treat and Inspect" program, the company then determines a fixed rate that applies to each of the three annual site visits. "For instance, their program may be \$70 for each visit based on the number of trees on their property, projections of what we call primary plant additions to the site and how much time it will take to inspect and treat plants," Gibson explained. For a "Targeted Insect" visit, per tree or per hour pricing is based on the same factors, including labor costs, which can be higher due to spraying entire interior branches to control a specific problem or having to accurately cover tops of large trees.

Contracts are updated annually, and tree care crews revisit properties each year to recount trees to ensure accurate pricing.

Typically, even if clients have the same

plant material on a property each year, prices will increase 3 to 8 percent based on plant growth. This is where tree care pricing can get tricky, Gibson said. "If the tree grows faster than you're increasing the price for it, then you're losing money," he shared, adding that labor and product costs range from 23 to 40 percent, depending on the application. "Also, you have to watch product costs. If product prices increase by 10 percent and you're only raising prices 2 percent, you're losing money."

Having knowledge of plant material also is crucial in proper service and pricing. "You can train a crew to spray an ash tree, but if they get to the site and there are 15 ash trees, they have to figure out which one is infected and that makes it more difficult," Gibson explained, adding that the company tries to shorten the training curve by isolating the services technicians perform. "They can become experts by experience if we focus them on one tree and disease or pest at first vs. teaching them about spraying for aphids on one property or ash borers on another."

To aid in the pricing process, Swingle Tree & Lawn Care also developed a pricing book that has minimum service prices, including labor and equipment costs. Since the company sells more than 100 different applications, this book is a vital resource.

The book's minimum prices are listed per tree and per hour. Deciding whether to price per tree or hour is done on a site-by-site basis. "If there is a problem on a second tree next to one we're spraying, we'll add a per tree cost, but if the second problem tree is on the back of a 5-acre property where we have to drag a hose through a patio, that adds labor, so it would be based on the per-hour rate," Gibson explained. "When you do between 50,000 and 60,000 tree care applications a year, you have to develop some systems to ensure you're making a profit and pricing fairly for the customer." — Nicole Wisniewski

The author is Managing Editor of *Lawn & Landscape* magazine and can be reached at nwisniewski@lawnandlandscape.com.

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
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On

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Survey Solutions

Customer surveys are nothing new for Mike and Karin Senneff, owners of Plant Interscapes, San Antonio, Texas. The two have been taking their customers' pulses since they started their business nearly 20 years ago.

Recently, the couple took a different approach to surveying clients by turning the process into an employee "game."

The company's graphic artist designs the survey to resemble a game card in a 3-by-5 format using corporate colors. Thirty-five employees distribute the survey cards in four market locations to 1,100 customer contacts. Those technicians and their teams who receive better than a 70-percent response rate and an 80-percent overall rating on the survey are eligible for a \$200 check.

The survey game begins right after the first of the year, explained Karin Senneff, company vice president. The idea is to give technicians time to refine their accounts before they hand out surveys to their customers March 1. Then they ask their customers to return the surveys within 30 days or by the end of the month.

Surveys ask customers to rate Plant Interscapes in nine areas related to people, products and performance. A "1"

rating indicates the company doesn't meet expectations; a "3" rating means the company meets expectations; and a "5" rating shows the company exceeds expectations.

The survey also has two optional open-ended questions, asking clients to elaborate on other areas of concern, Senneff said. Clients also have the option of including their contact information for the chance of winning a two-night vacation – additional incentive for completing the survey.

Senneff said having technicians hand out the surveys to clients helps ensure a strong response rate. "It was approximately a 30-percent return rate – strong enough that the message was clear on what areas we were weak," she said.

After tallying the surveys, the Senneffs sent thank-you letters to participants, sharing survey results and congratulating the trip winner.

Overall, clients and employees have embraced the new survey format so the Senneffs plan to do this annually. "It really got the service team and our customers talking and that in itself was great," Senneff said. – *Ali Cybulski*

The author is a Contributing Editor to Lawn & Landscape magazine and can be reached at acybulski@lawnandlandscape.com.



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Thank you —
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Please rate our service performance:

	Didn't Meet Expectations	Did Meet Expectations	Exceeded Expectations	
Our People				
Professionalism of Service Technicians	1	2	3	4 5
Ability of Service Technicians to care for your plants	1	2	3	4 5
Service Technician's understanding of your expectations	1	2	3	4 5
Our Products				
Cleanliness and health of your plants	1	2	3	4 5
Variety of plants and containers offered	1	2	3	4 5
Plants and containers achieve desired results	1	2	3	4 5
Our Performance				
Timely response to your requests	1	2	3	4 5
Service is personalized to meet your needs	1	2	3	4 5
Overall, how do we perform?	1	2	3	4 5

What are your expectations? _____

Would you like us to contact you regarding your comments? Yes No

Name: _____ Company: _____

E-mail: _____ Phone: _____ Date: _____



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by Nicole Wisniewski

HEADS UP LANDSCAPE

HEADQUARTERS:

Albuquerque, N.M.

FOUNDED: 1974

2002 REVENUE:

\$8.9 million

2003 PROJECTED

REVENUE: \$9.65 million

SERVICE MIX:

75 percent landscape/
irrigation installation,
25 percent maintenance

CLIENT MIX:

90 percent commercial,
10 percent residential

EMPLOYEES: 115 full-time,
year-round employees and 50
to 85 seasonal employees.

Eighty percent of the
company's employees are
Hispanic.

EQUIPMENT LINEUP:

41 trucks, 34 trailers, 7 riding
mowers, 22 walk-behind
mowers, 22 trimmers,
22 blowers, 10 edgers,
13 skid-steer loaders,
two 50-hp tractors, five ride-
on trenchers, five walk-behind
trenchers and one backhoe

Headed in the

RIGHT DIREC

From left to
right, Maintenance
Operations Manager
Eric
Spalsbury,
President
Gary Mallory,
Vice President
David Daniell,
Construction
Operations
Manager
Richard
Broome and
John Braly,
who focuses
on construction
new development/
sales.
Photo: Dave
Nufer



Nuts & Bolts

SIGNALS

Some people make decisions on impulse – trusting their guts to guide them in the right direction. Others use signs that appear along professional paths to help lead the way.

Signals were definitely flashing on Gary Mallory's career course when he and a couple of his University of New Mexico friends, decided over a game of basketball one day in 1974 that they could make more money starting their own business vs. working for other companies. They launched Albuquerque's Heads Up Landscape, focusing solely on irrigation system installation and repair for residential clients because they had gained this experience from previous summer jobs.

The new business owners arranged all of their college classes on Tuesdays and Thursdays so they could work the rest of the week. They used friends' garages to

store equipment and operated the business out of Mallory's family's home. Mallory, who took more business courses than the rest of his friends, handled the estimating, budgeting and master plan in addition to working on crews. "We did a budget for equipment, materials and tools," explained Mallory, the company president. "The first

year, we took the profits and used them to buy more of the equipment and tools that we needed but forgot to put in our original budget. So, realistically, we didn't take home any more money with our own business than we would have working for someone else hourly. Sure, we had a nice profit at the end of the year, but we didn't have any cash because we had to use it to buy equipment and pay taxes."

The lack of cash could've been a signal to terminate the arrangement, but there were more right-of-way indicators than there were no-passing posts, including Mallory's obvious fondness for the business. "I hated being behind a desk all day, bored with repetitious stuff and I hated wearing a suit and tie," he said. "But in this job, I could dress casually and every day was different – I loved it."

Despite the business road bumps and potholes that emerged along the way, Heads Up Landscape has grown from a small irrigation-only company to a thriving \$9 million full-service venture, and now it's green lights all the way.

FORKS IN THE ROAD. After a few years, Mallory realized that landscaping was a viable business. He started attending landscape conferences and networking with other contractors across the United States.

From these interactions, Mallory learned his way around some early business mistakes. For example, he realized that he made one of the biggest business errors by taking on a job that was too big for the company – a \$1-million job when Heads Up's revenue was only at \$3 million. "I learned that you're not supposed to take on a job that's more than 25 percent of your total volume and I realized then why this job stressed the company in a lot of ways," he said. "We put the best people on this job and neglected our bread-and-butter customers."

At the time, Heads Up was the main irrigation subcontractor for many local landscape installation businesses, one of which was owned by David Daniell. Since they had worked together several times, Mallory and Daniell forged a solid friendship. Searching for additional growth opportunities, Mallory knew design/build was the next service segment he wanted to add, and in 1983 he asked Daniell to "head up" a landscape installation division at Heads Up. As luck would have it, Daniell was looking for a new opportunity as well.

But when Daniell joined the business, a majority of Heads Up's subcontracted work vanished because local landscape contractors now viewed the company as competition.

All signs read, 'Go,' for Heads Up Landscape, a \$9-million company that has paved a path for continued growth.

TION



Heads Up Landscape

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(continued on page 41)



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TORO Count on it.

USE READER SERVICE #33

(continued from page 39)

For one month, the company relied upon a backlog of clients before Daniell started gaining installation customers. At this point, Heads Up did both residential and commercial landscape jobs because the owners were scared of not having enough work. They gradually made the decision to concentrate on commercial clients.

And, instead of just taking any work that came down the pipeline, the company became more selective. To target its niche clients, Heads Up separated its customers into A, B and C status. Then, it stopped taking on C-quality clients, who pay slow and don't offer repeat business opportunities – bad for long-term growth. Type A customers, on the other hand, are repeat customers who pay on time and hire the company for a variety of services, while B clients – a mix of the two – are acceptable but secondary to A-class clients.

TWO FOR THE ROAD. As the company grew and implemented these changes, it became evident that Mallory and Daniell had a different vision than the other two partners. They wanted to increase the business' profitability and add services, while the other owners wanted to retain the company's size. "We spent a lot of time

trying to reconcile things," Mallory said.

For years, the owners tried to merge their different visions into one with which they all could agree, and sales continued to climb despite their lack of focus. "For a period, we were stuck in the \$2.5- to \$3-million range," Daniell said. "Then the economy turned around and we got a bunch of extra work so we grew dramatically from \$2.8 million to \$4.2 million to \$5.5 million to \$5.8 million. It was good growth, but only two of us were really enjoying it and wanted to move forward and the other two didn't want to do that at all. The tension increased and our focuses were so divided that we weren't able to clearly move as one team."

Eventually, the other two owners wanted to leave the business and Daniell and Mallory agreed to buy them out in 1997 when the company was at \$5.5 million. "The constant disagreements brought a considerable amount of stress and we felt we were only marginally profitable for several years because we didn't have focus," Mallory said. "After the buyout, everyone was on the same page and business became a blast again."

Of course, once Mallory and Daniell agreed on a vision of continued growth and profitability, they wanted to start imple-

attendance, equipment damage, safety, etc. "If we don't make our goals, no one gets a bonus," Daniell explained. "If we do make our goals, we all win."

The idea is to teach employees ways they can help the company become more profitable, pointed out company President Gary Mallory.

Mallory said if employees understand where the company's money goes, they'll have a better idea of how they can help. "We try to explain to employees that every dollar of profit gets split four ways – and not four equal ways," he remarked. "The majority shareholder seems to be Uncle Sam, then there's equipment and education and improving benefits. They think it all goes into the owners' pockets – sure, some does but not all of it."

The bonus program is not for crewmembers, but Mallory said this provides incentive for advancement.

– Nicole Wisniewski

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Count on it.

Heads Up Landscape, Albuquerque, N.M., implemented a bonus program this year for crew leaders and higher based on business profitability.

The plan is to reach the company's contribution margin (what's leftover after paying direct and indirect costs), said company Vice President David Daniell. "For every \$100,000 we hit beyond our goal, we set aside a pool of money and divide that up based on payroll," he said. "Employees receive 5 percent of their yearly wage as a bonus if we make our goals. If we reach further above our goal, the percentage moves up to 6 percent and can go all the way to 12 or 13 percent."

Crew leaders have additional scorecards that act as multipliers on their bonuses. For instance, if they only score a 60 out of 100 on their scorecard, they only receive 60 percent of their bonus. Scorecards track quality,

Bonus Basics

Cover Story

menting new ideas right away. "We wanted to try about eight million new ideas and we had to take a step back, narrow our ideas and prioritize," Mallory said.

First and foremost, the duo had to address their employees, explaining to them the situation and giving them a feeling of a more secure future. "We spent a lot of time together talking

about what we want out of this business," Daniell said. "We wanted to figure out what drove us so we could convey that to everyone else and make that their drivers too. We put together a five-year laundry list of needs, and we continue to revamp our annual plans all the time to make sure they are fitting in

(continued on page 50)

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USE READER SERVICE #34

About six years ago, Heads Up Landscape, Albuquerque, N.M., added another benefit for its employees - what it calls the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) - for a number of reasons.

EAP provides employees who have personal problems, such as marital issues, drug or alcohol abuse or money challenges, with a counseling type service. "We recognize that people have problems outside of work that are not work related and can affect their jobs, so we wanted to provide them with someplace to go to help solve those problems," explained Vice President David Daniell. "Secondarily, it allows us to be able to give a valued employee a second chance when he or she violates company drug or alcohol policies."

Each employee receives five free sessions, and names and information are kept confidential, Daniell explained, adding that the company can send employees who have problems that are affecting their work to the clinic for counseling. "Typically the policy is if an employee comes in and they are drunk, then they are fired. Sometimes, though, you have a very good employee who you really don't want to fire. This program allows you the opportunity to give that employee a second chance."

To offer the service, Heads Up contracted with a local health provider. For a \$9- to \$10-million company, the program only costs about \$5,000 annually. Heads Up is only charged per employee who attends a session, and this costs about \$2.70 per employee each month. The company receives reports monthly from the clinic, listing only how many visits the clinic had and the nature of each visit.

"Many things happen outside of our control in our employees' lives, like divorce and gambling problems or even the fact that people are scared or stressed about what's going on in the world right now," Daniell said. "If we can provide some help for them, in the end we'll have more productive, happy people and that makes this program a very inexpensive, but worthwhile benefit." - *Nicole Wisniewski*

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USE READER SERVICE #38

Cover Story

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line with our mission – then we make sure to express that to the employees.

“Interestingly, over about a year’s time, most of the people philosophically inclined with the other two owners left and we replaced them with people who were more philosophically inclined with what we wanted to do,” Daniell added, pointing out that during the few years after the buyout, he and Mallory have improved employee communication. “We had old mission and vision statements that we crafted with the other two owners before they left and now we badly needed a revised mission. In May 2002, we brought in a consultant and our senior management team crafted a new mission statement with values. We finalized it, signed it and then framed it in the office. That was the beginning of our new vision.”

Part of this new vision included a revamped tagline – “Growing Better” – that accompanies their logo on trucks, newsletters, etc. “It’s a play on words – as we want plants to grow better and landscapes to grow better, we also want to grow better everyday – operationally, personally, with our customers, in sales – and if we are all thinking that all of the time, the results could be amazing,” Daniell explained. “For instance, when you grow better in communication, you improve customer relations and that makes us more profitable – it all comes full circle.”

PROCEED WITH CAUTION. Heads Up originally incorporated maintenance in 1989 because it heard about the benefits it brought in terms of recurring, consistent cash flow and higher profit margins when compared to installation. But the company didn’t have the management capacity to run the division successfully, so it sold that then \$350,000- to \$400,000- business segment to a local contractor in 1993 and signed a five-year noncompete agreement. “We weren’t running it well,” Mallory explained. “We didn’t realize at first that maintenance and installation needed two different types of employees thriving in each business area. Plus, at the time, the other owners were still here and they disagreed with the idea that we should grow maintenance.”

Mallory and Daniell continued talking to other profitable maintenance contractors after abandoning the service and realized they

(continued on page 52)

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Cover Story

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should probably pursue it again, but they couldn't until after the noncompete period expired. Daniell patiently waited and then took on the venture in April 1999, setting a goal to grow it to \$2 million in three years.

Adding the service was a huge challenge. First Daniell searched for an experienced manager to run the field and gave

him the title of maintenance division manager, overseeing him as general manager. "For awhile, the two of us would sell," Daniell said. "Construction drove maintenance at first."

Now that the work was coming in and the manager's time was spent performing the work, Daniell realized he needed a main

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business driver to continue growing the service, so he hired a salesperson in August 1999. "He sold \$600,000 of work his first year and a little more the next year, so by the second year we were at \$1.3 million," he said, adding that rapid growth that first year did bring about some challenges. "We had some quality problems the first year - we may never want to go through a summer like that again," Daniell said. "Some customers weren't happy because we weren't able to keep up or fulfill some of the promises we made. We always think back to that summer as a springboard to get us planning ahead during the slow months so we can anticipate problems and be more ready for them."

To avoid recreating that summer during the second year of maintenance, Daniell and Mallory spent a lot of time planning and projecting revenue for the division. "We had to say that when we got the work, what kind of personnel are we going to need and then how are we going to get them and what are they going to need in terms of equipment," Daniell said. "We tried to list what we could do to fix those problems and try to anticipate what would happen the following year and be ready. We're still doing that - we do a lot of planning in September each year to project revenue and plan personnel needs so we're not suffering when it comes to quality."

Some structural changes also smoothed out client relations. The company used to have three account managers who did everything from scheduling crews to functioning as project managers. "The problem is that all three of them had different styles, so different crew leaders liked working with one better than another," Daniell explained. So, Heads Up put the most organized account manager in charge of scheduling and supervising crews and the other account managers focus on customer interaction and selling enhancements. "Now, account managers deal with client problems that come up and concentrate on getting client needs met quickly," Daniell said, adding that his goal is to have each account manager handle approximately \$750,000 worth of work.

(continued on page 146)



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USE READER SERVICE #41

by Bob West

Josh Gamez has always loved business. And now loves the landscape business.

A Head for BUSINESS

Josh Gamez was introduced to the landscape industry at an early age, thanks to his grandfather's landscape firm. "I still remember working for him when I was 12 years old and I had to trim the shrubs at about 30 Burger Kings a day," he recalled with a laugh.

Growing up, Gamez always knew he wanted to own his own business, and he started early. He and his brother Justin formed a window-washing business when Josh was still 13 years old.

By the time he was 18, the landscape industry beckoned, and he started his landscape company. This year marks his seventh year in business, and Gamez has set his sights on crossing the \$1 million mark by year's end.

U.S. Lawns of Bridgewater

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PART OF A TEAM. The early days for Gamez weren't all that different from most contractors' beginnings. Gamez' first customers were residential maintenance jobs – six, to be exact. After a couple of years, Gamez knew commercial maintenance was where he wanted to be. "I knew where the stability was," he reported.

Growth was slow and steady in the early years, but by 2000 Gamez decided to take a different approach. He saw the benefits of being part of a bigger team, so he purchased a U.S. Lawns franchise, renamed his business that, moved to a different market and even gave up half of his contracted business to do so. And he hasn't looked back since.

Sales topped the \$300,000 mark in 2001, winning him U.S. Lawns' Rookie of the Year award, and he surpassed \$500,000 in 2002. Gamez said being part of a franchise network gives him the best of both worlds – he still has the control associated with being the owner/operator, but he also enjoys the benefits that large firms enjoy.

"Here's the key to our business – we have the power of a national company," he observed. "My purchasing power is the same that the national companies have. And while our systems may not be exactly the same, we do have them in place and we're coordinating everything through a regional and national level.

"But the clients still want to see the owner, the person who makes the final decisions," Gamez continued. "No other com-

(continued on page 56)



Josh Gamez says being part of a franchise system offers the best of both worlds. Photo: U.S. Lawns

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First Look

(continued from page 54)

pany in the country can compete with that."

Gamez is quite the owner/operator, putting in 70- to 80-hour work weeks in the spring with his typical workload requiring 50 hours of weekly work in season. Much of this time is spent interacting with customers, particularly during the spring.

"I've been doing a lot of walkthroughs with clients this spring," he said. "I do this with all of my clients on our new jobs to make sure we're on the same page. My assistant comes with me, and we produce a quality control report and grade the account, and those documents give us something to follow up on in terms of potential enhancement sales later on."

Gamez prides himself on these critical client relationships, since he handles sales for the company. "The key [to customer

retention] is being in your customer's face, being proactive and greasing the wheel before it squeaks," he related. "I know all facets of my customers' jobs. I measured them, I sold them, and I can back up what I promised. That's a big difference from having a company where the salesperson sells the work, the branch manager administers it

and the account manager is on it. That salesperson is never seen again by the client."

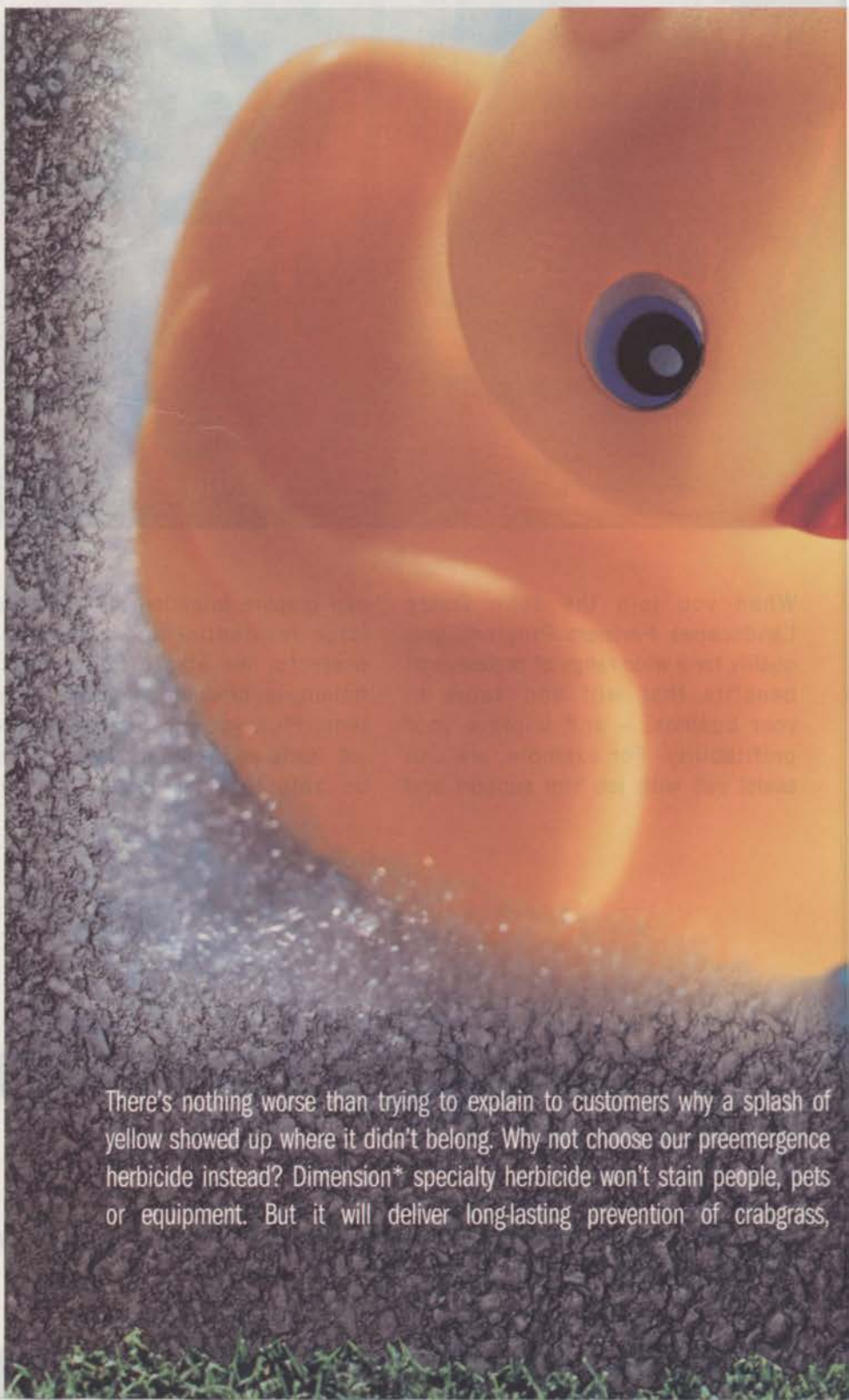
THE HAPPY TEAM. Gamez also gives credit for the company's success to his employees, who he expects will top out at 16 this summer. Gamez appreciates that a staff this size still affords him the opportunity to

Josh Gamez understands the value of selling enhancements to his customers. More than 30 percent of his company's sales come from this type of work, and enhancements contribute more heavily to the bottom line thanks to the work of his dedicated four-person enhancement crew. But Gamez doesn't necessarily agree with the way he sees many contractors sell this work.

"I think there's a bogus way of doing business out there around enhancements," he shared. "Too many people bid maintenance contracts low and then just pound the customers on the enhancements because they're only getting 5 percent margin on the maintenance work but they're getting 30 percent on the enhancements.

"I give a competitive maintenance price based on a 10 percent margin and I look for a 15 percent margin on enhancement work," he continued. "The enhancement jobs are often bigger dollar jobs for us, so they're still very profitable, but this way I'm being fair with my customers as well." — **Bob West**

Enhancing Sales



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build personal relationships with everyone. "I don't know what I'll do in the future when we have 40 or 50 employees, but right now I do things like taking everyone out to dinner together once a month," he shared. "You'd be surprised how far a few large pizzas. Secondly, I never walk through a job without stopping and talking to the crew on the

job, even if it's just to say hello or crack a joke. My employees are also well paid, and the fact that we're growing fast enough that guys who started out at \$8 an hour two years ago to run a string trimmer are foremen today really helps keep them around."

But Gamez' relationships go deeper than breaking bread and sharing a laugh. For

example, he sits down with each foreman at the start of every year to identify their goals for the coming season. "I discuss their business and personal goals with them, because work and personal goals mesh together even if people don't want to think so," he explained, citing one foreman's goal from the beginning of last season as an example. "His goal was to get a car last year, so we came up with a gameplan and I helped him with budgeting and saving his paychecks, and today he has that car."

Gamez has three foremen running mowing crews, along with a four-person enhancement crew (see "Enhancing Sales, p. 56), a two-person remedial crew and a two-person detail crew.

"Enhancement work is something that we only do for our maintenance customers," Gamez explained. "I don't want our employees working for ABC Property, who isn't a maintenance customer, and neglecting a maintenance customer at the same time. Our enhancement work is part of an entire service package."

In addition, Gamez differentiates enhancement work from remedial work, which he defines as overseeding, removing dead plants, etc., in order to maximize efficiencies. Enhancements are work such as new bed planting, retaining wall installation and patio construction.

Meanwhile, the detail crew focuses on weeding, light remedial work, bed detailing, pruning and so forth for the three mowing crews' properties. "I call that a split crew because they're on the same properties as the maintenance crews, but all the mowing crews do is mow," Gamez noted. "I don't want them to stop mowing at 3:00 each day and then walk around for two hours with a backpack sprayer."

"The efficiency we get out of this is phenomenal, and that lets us be competitive price-wise in the market," he added. "You just have to know how to synchronize crews. If you can put that puzzle together you get some real efficiency, which means you can work with less people. That means you're using fewer manhours and you've got better prices. That's what clients like." **LL**

The author is Editor/Group Publisher of *Lawn & Landscape* magazine and can be reached at bwest@lawnandlandscape.com.



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Special Focus: **SKID STEERS**

By Enloe Wilson

Skid steers offer contractors a thousand tools in one.

Task MASTERS

Perhaps the ideal machine is one that would find clients, perform complex installations, mow weekly, bill, collect and pass the chips and salsa all by itself.

Chances are, most power equipment manufacturers are a ways off from developing a toy to make life quite so carefree for landscape contractors. But in the meantime, a few other technological wunderkinds are bringing unmatched expediency to the jobsite – skid steers being chief among them.

Drilling holes, planting trees or transporting sod pallets, skid steers afford versatility equal to that of an entire garage of one-trick hardware. And because they come in a variety of sizes, powers and ergonomic and control configurations, they offer reasonable specificity to a number of scenarios.

Of course, contractors still have to do their homework before buying one.

CONSIDER THE JOB. Though a skid steer's greatest asset is its adaptability, no one model can accommodate every possible situation. For that reason, contractors should consider the circumstances for which the equipment is intended, said Brad Lemke, director, new product development, ASV, Minneapolis, Minn.

"Contractors first need to decide how they are going to use the machine," Lemke said, citing a number of questions to consider: "Are the areas small, confined spaces? Are they on an incline? What are the specific job requirements? How rigorous will the work be? What are the terrain types? Do they need to cross asphalt or delicate ground, for example, without creating damage?"

These sorts of particulars can aid in narrowing down the right skid steer, the field of which continues to grow in forms and functions. "Just a few years ago, your average skid-steer maker offered [just a few] different models," Lemke pointed out. "Today you'll see a much greater range of sizes, specifications and prices."

Regarding costs, skid steers range from about \$15,000 to \$30,000 – and \$10,000 to \$17,000 for their smaller counterparts, the compact utility loader – based on a variety of specifications, including size, power and amenities, said Lemke. Depending on what a contractor wants, the market is wide open, and for that reason, he suggested, after pausing to consider job requirements, equipment buyers should next be sure they're up to date on some of the most discussed points of the instruments themselves.

PONDER POWER. In gauging productivity, users commonly equate a machine's raw power with the notion of optimized labor. But while the two are related, explained Lance Schulz, loader product specialist, Bobcat, Fargo, N.D., a properly used machine works smart, not necessarily hard.

"In terms of power efficiency, you have only one question to answer: Can a machine spin its own wheels?" Schulz posed, explaining that just as a low-horsepower skid steer can hinder a demanding grinding or digging job, one with

(continued on page 60)



A variety of applications, sizes and configurations make the skid steer perhaps a contractor's most versatile crewmember. PHOTO: Caterpillar

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USE READER SERVICE #43

Special Focus: SKID STEERS

(continued from page 58)

too much power for a lighter task will waste energy – and your money, since engine power highly influences a unit's cost.

But Schulz cautioned that skid-steer buyers mustn't consider horsepower alone when considering a machine's muscle. "Power strictly in terms of horsepower is a fallacy. You have to look at an entire system," he argued – hydraulic pump capacity, for instance. "Horsepower is a great spec, but what we try to do is have contractors focus on other specifications that may be more important to their applications."

Of the models available, 17 gallons per minute is about the average hydraulic pump capacity, Schultz said. "For landscape contractors, that's generally sufficient, and we don't see them needing additional flow, except for those companies that frequently use more demanding attachments like stump grinders, chippers or tree spades." For those operations, high-flow pump fittings are available that afford increased hydraulic pressure to demanding jobs without contractors having to altogether upgrade to a larger machine.

Another important power gauge, according to Dan Rafferty, product sales manager, Takeuchi, Buford, Ga., is a skid steer's operating capacity. "In most applications, really what you're doing is moving materials," he said, "so it's important to look at how much of a load a machine can handle."

As manufacturers try to deliver units increasingly suited to meet the demands of even the most rugged jobs, power markers have reached ever higher. "Where operating capacity goes, 10 years ago, the most popular skid steers were in the 1,300- to 1,500-pound range," Rafferty recalled. "New models are breaking into the 3,000-pound range." Likewise, horsepower continues to climb, with some of the latest models breaching the 100-horsepower mark, he added.

But Rafferty predicted the race toward higher power will slow in coming years, pointing out that engine output in excess of 100 horsepower comes along with prohibitive pollutant emissions. Also, though the idea of increased power is attractive to some contractors, Rafferty reminded the machines' primary appeal is versatility, a quality compromised at inordinate levels of power and its corresponding size.

Down Under's SMALL WONDER

When it comes to servicing a particularly persnickety site, never call on a big guy to do a little guy's job. That's what contractors are increasingly learning with the versatility, convenience and maneuverability of mini skid steers or compact utility loaders.

Since their North American debut about six years ago, these pint-size cousins of the skid steer have gradually earned a place of respect among the equipment caches of both commercial and residential contractors, said Galen Seidner, Southeast regional manager, Kanga Loaders, Broken Arrow, Okla.

"They'd been on the market since about 1981 in Australia, but most contractors in the United States simply didn't know what they were," explained Seidner, who said manufacturers eventually began North American production of mini skids at the cue of enthusiastic and world-watching clients who'd seen or heard about what they could do.

So, what can they do?

Among other things, "[they] can normally eliminate the need of about two to three people from a job," said Seidner. "There's such versatility. Buckets, backhoes, augers – there are about 40 to 50 attachments available for compact loaders, and they're easy to change. If an attachment is non-hydraulic, simply flip and lock the quick attach brackets; if hydraulic, pumps just have to be attached." Altogether, the switching process – affording contractors innumerable machines in one – takes no more than a couple minutes, Seidner estimated, and several manufacturers are researching standardized attachment mechanisms for added convenience across makes and models, informed Trevor Jubenville, marketing manager, Ramrod Equipment, Yorkton, Saskatchewan.

Mini skids are powerful, too. With the most tenacious mini skids on the market offering engine powers up to 30 horsepower and hydraulic pump capacities reaching 20 gallons per minute at 3,000 psi of pressure, "[these machines] are compact hydraulic work platforms capable of powering dozens of applications where manual labor would be called for, but may be too rigorous or inefficient for a human crew," explained Jubenville.

Moreover, while mini skids wield impressive power and versatility rivaling larger units, their compactness avails extended utility. In fact, "the No. 1 reason contractors would want a mini skid steer remains size," Jubenville held.

He pointed out that with significantly smaller platforms than skid steers – as low as 30-inches-wide-by-51-inches long – mini skids can not only access narrowly gated areas and tight spots, but also do considerably less damage to serviced areas. "At about 1,000 pounds less than the average skid steer," he said, "the smaller machines apply only about 2 to 3½ psi to terrain."

Improved safety is another bonus of a mini skid's small size, Jubenville added. "About 60 percent of all skid steer injuries occur with a contractor getting in or out of the machine," he said. "With a mini skid's stand-behind design, that is no longer an issue, and a contractor has a full range of vision."

But despite all the assets of a skid steer, manufacturers maintain its popularity doesn't threaten the marketability of its larger relative. "Skid steers and compact loaders are two very separate pieces of machinery," Jubenville said. "Where one offers power, strength and large-capacity work for bigger, open jobs, the other provides controlled power and accessibility for more defined applications. And often the two coexist to complement one another on a job site" – *Enloe Wilson*

DAVID OR GOLIATH? Ultimately, all size ranges of skid steers and compact utility loaders have their place in the landscape – many contractors, in fact, utilize both, manufacturers agreed. But job specifics can shed light on which instrument at which size is best in a given scenario.

From a logistical standpoint, "if you're trying to get into a 34-inch-opening barn, you just can't use a 73-inch-wide loader," quipped Rafferty. But what's more, "you're not going to

use a 5-pound sledgehammer for a finishing nail." Not only would the idea be an inefficient use of power, he pointed out, but the potential to do more damage than good to the work area is greater. Mammoth units simply are less appropriate for the evolving face of grounds services, he contended.

Brad Paine, associate marketing manager, Toro, Bloomington, Minn., agreed. "Landscaping has changed over the years, with more and

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Special Focus: **SKID STEERS**

(continued from page 60)

more jobs characterizing a move toward high-end applications in smaller, more developed areas," he said. Those articulated jobs require the precision of smaller units, a fact that has heralded domestic popularity of smaller skid steers and Australia's brainchild, the compact utility loader.

While the standard skid steer commands more lifting, moving and excavating tenacity, compact utility loaders offer work at a considerably lower impact to turf, pointed out Trevor Jubenville, marketing manager, Ramrod Equipment, Yorkton, Saskatchewan. Weighing about 1,000 pounds less than a mid-sized skid steer, "you can get an average mini skid on and off a job without knowing it was even there," he said. This benefit is of importance in wetter climates and periods of high precipitation, when turf may be particularly delicate.

Other benefits of these units include unobstructed visibility, comparatively friendlier prices than those of full-size skid steers, the safety of being unfettered to a machine, easier transport and the preservation of trailer space, manufacturers cited.

Attachments are the crowning glory of these machines, and manufacturers consistently churn out an array of work tools that broaden the scope of applications for both compact utility loaders

Though a skid steer's greatest asset is its adaptability, no one model can accommodate every possible situation. For that reason, contractors should consider the circumstances for which the equipment is intended.

and full-size skid steers. (For more on attachments, see story on page 64.)

FEELIN' GOOD. Amid all other options, the best machine is one that brings maximum comfort to an environment where mud flies, trees rise and fall and the earth quakes. To this end, manufacturers are always thinking of ways to bolster the ergonomic qualities and usability of their products.

User-friendly controls, multilingual displays, improved suspension, cab sound insulation and climate control

are among the most popular amenities adding comfort and ease to the mix of sellable skid steer features, said Rafferty, who mentioned, "the purpose of all these is keeping the operator from becoming [flustered]. If after six hours, he's thinking more about clocking out than the job at hand, he's 1) less productive, and 2) not as safe."

Features like hydraulic pilot joysticks or servo-assisted arm controls not only add necessary strength to the handling of certain attachments, but they can greatly boost comfort for the operator. "They're basically the equivalent to power steering," Rafferty suggested.

Hi-tech suspension systems are another measure making skid-steer operation more pleasant, he added, describing technologies that now allow a user to dial in his/her own weight to allow for electronic shock-absorption adjustments. And air conditioning, once an option on only the most select models of skid steers, is now showing up as a standard feature on many units.

While some extras remain mere frills to frugal contractors, Lemke said increasing numbers of buyers consider the value of embellishments to be worth the added investment. "On cheaper machines, where cost is already a consideration, contractors go with some options less frequently," he shared. "But as they move to more expensive machines, they don't mind spending the little extra money to keep their guys happy, we find."

THE FUTURE. Manufacturers are tight-lipped about specific innovations for their machines, but many suggest current research and development is heavily focused on easier instrumentation, ride stability, maneuverability, speed control and conveniences such as improved attachment standardization.

But whatever's going on behind closed doors, contractors can be sure manufacturer investment to bring added functionality to these products won't be minimal, Schulz suggested. Producers recognize the aggressive demand for these versatile and laborsaving units - and in asserting their own place in that market, "every manufacturer is always trying to raise the bar with what their products have to offer," he pointed out, "so that ultimately they can sell more machines." **LL**

The author is Associate Editor of *Lawn & Landscape* magazine and can be reached at ewilson@lawnandlandscape.com.

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By Enloe Wilson

Building the **PERFECT BEAST**



Contractors certainly are taking advantage of that breadth of choices. While market researchers have only recently begun to track skid-steer attachment sales, according to Craig Hammann, general manager, CE Attachments, Cedarburg, Wis., preliminary figures suggest the global work tools industry will enjoy vigorous activity on the shoulders of an annual \$1 billion global skid-steer market.

Pricewise, work tools range based on fabrication, movable parts and hydraulic capacity, explained Gordy Stahl, national sales and applications specialist, Glenmac, Jamestown, N.D. Standard, non-moving, non-hydraulic attachments – mere slabs of metal, Stahl joked – generally fall below \$2,000. Such attachments might include pallet forks, tooth bars and buckets. More intricate, fabricated hydraulic work tools – snow throwers and 4-in-1 buckets, for instance – range from \$2,000 to \$4,000. Attachments with numerous hydraulic parts and settings – grapples, augers and power rakes, to name a few – generally sell for more than \$4,000, he continued.

“Of course, you get what you pay for,” pointed out Pellegrini, mentioning that it’s not unheard of for particularly high-end attachments to cost tens of thousands of dollars. What a contractor is willing to spend on a work tool should be largely related to the amount of work he’ll need it for, Pellegrini said, reminding attachment buyers to consider their most frequent jobs as a gauge to how much they should be investing.

WISE BUYING. Given their sometimes-weighty costs, select attachments can rival the price of a skid-steer unit itself, Pellegrini pointed out. But he reminded contractors to understand the vital significance of add-on work tools to their labor capacity and, thereby, their bottom line. “When you talk about tools, you should talk about them in terms of an investment, not a deal,” he held.

To offer maximum return on that investment, dealers and manufacturers are finding success in offering value-added incentives to potential skid steer and attachment buyers. A number of producers furnish warranties and

(continued on page 66)

From
augers to
backhoes, an
arsenal of
attachments
makes the skid
steer the
perfect
beast of
burden.

A skid steer without attachments is like a tiger without teeth, a bear without claws or a scorpion without a stinger.

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A WIDE ASSORTMENT. Estimates regarding the number of skid-steer attachments on the market range from 50 to more than 100, depending on whom you ask, and a steady stream of new arrivals – the work of both major manufacturers and third-party producers – always keeps the tally growing. When you consider not only the types of work tools available, but their various sizes, capacities and fabrications, the approximate numbers mushroom further, said Kent Pellegrini, skid-steer work tool marketing manager, Caterpillar, Peoria, Ill.

“There could easily be up to 500 different work tools out there, based on the variables you consider,” Pellegrini held. “And ongoing developments are always contributing to those numbers.”



Selecting the right attachment for the job turn skid steers into invaluable multi-task machines. Photo: Bobcat (top) and John Deere (bottom)



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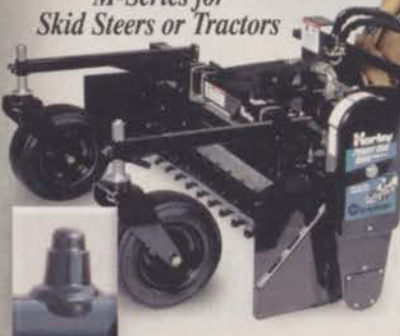
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USE READER SERVICE #47

Special Focus: SKID STEERS

(continued from page 64)

extended service agreements, Pellegrini said, and some distributors offer a package of standard attachments at a premium cost to purchasers of new machines.

Particularly with the latter option, buyers should seize the opportunity to maximize their dollar power, Pellegrini said. Because the separate retail costs of, say, five work tools could be overwhelming, the savings of buying them in a package deal could be significant. "To get the most bang for the buck, contractors should again ask themselves what their daily applications are," he suggested. "If they're going to be constructing on slopes, they may want to go with a set of augers. If they do lots of paver work, they might consider a vibratory compactor. Just like with a skid-steer purchase, companies have to know the nature of their work to make the best buying decisions."

"As a rule of thumb, contractors shouldn't buy an attachment [they use] for less than 20 percent of their job," Stahl offered.

Hammann said concerns of attachment buyers regard products' lifespan and which makes and models are the most reliable. Yet comparisons aren't easy to make, he said.

"The hardest thing about attachments is the difficulty in comparing apples to apples," he said. "Skids steers, for example, are similar, mature products with prescribed specs that are measured across the industry—pump capacity, breakout force, horsepower. Unfortunately, that's not the case with attachments—they're all so different across brands and even more so across attachment types. There aren't too many rules of thumb from a comparative specification standpoint."

Hammann said the most reliable markers in predicting a product's life will be how it's used, with what frequency and what care it's given. As with an automobile, he illustrated, frequent, rigorous use with minimal upkeep will hasten a tool's demise, while more moderate use and preventive upkeep will see an attachment last longer with fewer repair concerns. "If you're abusing a stump grinder daily with no maintenance, the lifespan might be two years," he said. "But, if you use it properly—not for prying roots and other things, for example, and you keep it lubed and change the bushings as required, it will last much longer," he said.

To make sure you're getting a quality product, Hammann advised contractors to rely on manufacturers and dealers they trust, and whose companies have a good track record of customer support and service.

Stahl agreed. "Buyers should consult manufacturer videos to see the basic characteristics of a tool, and dealer and manufacturer application experts should be available for demonstrations," he said. He further advised companies to involve their crews in purchasing decisions. "That way, when an attachment makes it to a fleet, everyone knows what was involved in picking it, how it's used and ways it can help."

Stahl stressed that contractors should pay attention to an attachment's particular specs, along with price and job requirements, when shopping. Attachments come in a variety of configurations, he cautioned, so knowing your needs comes in handy.

"While you can buy the biggest [power] rake on the market, for example, you might have to face issues of mounting compatibility, storage and even weight," he shared. "Don't forget that your trucks and machines have to burn fuel to support and transport these tools."

As compatibility goes, Stahl reminded contractors to be sure an attachment is well suited for the machine upon which it will be mounted. "Fortunately, attachments basically all use universal couplers and quick-attach mounting mechanisms," he said, but he cautioned that other specs have to be considered. A user should be aware that a loader with a 16-gallon-per-minute hydraulic capacity can't yield maximum output from an attachment with a 20-gallon-per-minute upward limit, for example.

Additionally, some manufacturers are experimenting with proprietary electrical configurations in hopes to forge cross-product brand loyalty. "Buyers should be aware of those types of things before making a purchase to save themselves the frustration of buying a work tool that just doesn't work," he explained. **LL**

The author is Associate Editor of *Lawn & Landscape* magazine and can be reached at ewilson@lawnandlandscape.com.

(continued on page 68)



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USE READER SERVICE #48

Special Focus: SKID STEERS

(continued from page 66)

WORK TOOLS 101

Once jobsite, base machine and attachment variables are covered, contractors benefit greatly from some basic familiarity with the broad range of work tools available. *Lawn & Landscape* asked several skid steer attachment manufacturers to list their most popular fixtures for the landscape industry, and based on sales information from ASV, Bobcat, Toro, Kanga Loaders, Glenmac, Caterpillar, CE Attachments and Ramrod Equipment – a division of Leon's Manufacturing, the Top 10 favored tools, along with a brief description of each, include:



10. SOIL CULTIVATORS. This attachment provides deep ground preparation for planting by breaking up, aerating and filtering large, undesired debris from soil. Various cultivator designs enable contractors to move rocks into a receptacle or bury them several inches below newly turned beds. Some models come with attachable boxes to allow cultivation and seeding in a single pass.



9. VIBRATORY PLOWS. These offsetting plows are similar to trenchers in that they burrow lengthwise, and less often vertically, within terrain. Vibratory plows produce a narrower excavation, however, than trenchers, with less disturbance to the surrounding soil because manufacturers craft them for the installation of thin, linear below-grade components like cables, wires, flexible conduits and piping. Some vibratory plows perform well even in muddy, soft and other adverse ground conditions, and can handle rocky or sandy terrain. Spool carriers to assist in running wires and cables are a popular option on some models.



8. STUMP GRINDERS. Stump grinders are fast-spinning, metal-toothed wheels that, when applied to a tree stump, will shred it down to wood chips well below the ground's surface. Some models feature an adjustable-angle wheel to allow for below-grade root chasing.

7. DOZER BLADES. Tilt and angle these blades, available in a variety of widths, right or left for easy pushing of dirt, rocks and snow. Other popular applications include backfilling and grading. Extra-thick "U" blades are available for particularly severe dozing applications and teeth and fork attachments can furnish extra load control.



6. TRENCHERS. These tools work by cutting a lateral slice through the ground like a chainsaw. Trencher models offer various torque, depth and horsepower settings, and contractors use them for the installation



of below-grade components like fence footings, lighting, cables and wiring and irrigation mechanisms. Trench compactors also are available to make quick work of firmly refilling excavations.



4. POWER RAKES. Power rakes are used for tasks such as sod, vegetation and rock removal or seedbed and site cultivation. Adjustments on many models allow contractors to control the angle of the raking pattern, and some manufacturers offer designs with adjustable edge plates, allowing the tool to double as a box scraper.



3. FORKS (PALLET, UTILITY, TREE). From tree and shrub transport to sod pallet, lumber and stackable load toting, forks serve a variety of purposes in landscaping jobs. Tree forks feature adjustable tong angles to allow the gentle yet confident grip of root balls, and pallet forks often come with adjustable tong widths to carry cargos of varying lengths and sizes.



2. AUGERS. Available in a range of diameters and drive types, augers come in configurations designed for drilling vertically through a number of materials – soil, rocks, frost, and tree and shrub stumps. Augers can quickly hollow out multiple holes with considerably less effort than manual methods, making them ideal for setting posts in the ground – for fences, decks and other footing. Reverse rotation settings allow easy withdrawal from the ground.



1. BUCKETS (STANDARD, 4-IN-1, LIGHT MATERIALS). An array of buckets facilitates removal and transport of soil, sand and other jobsite debris. Available in a number of configurations, the group ranges from narrow buckets that enable light material carrying in small spaces to larger 4-in-1 units, which allow contractors to grapple, scrape, dig and doze heavy loads and dump materials through the bucket opening into high-wall containers. – *Enloe Wilson*

Photos: Toro

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Special Focus: **SKID STEERS**

By Enloe Wilson

Need that skid steer for the long haul or just for now? Experts say consider the merits of several financing options.

While a stock of versatile and reliable equipment is the lifeblood of landscape service providers, capital purchases can drain both the sanity and coffers of many contractors. In deciding the best route to acquire these necessary tools, companies need to carefully consider several options, experts shared.

Bill Armstead, fleet and sales manager, Rental Service Corp., Denver, Colo., pointed out the trend in acquiring skid steers has moved toward rental in recent years, explaining that this option offers the comfort of trying out equipment minus the intimidation of an expensive commitment. But two other alternatives – financing a purchase and leasing – remain competitive based on varying needs, he said.

FACTS OF FINANCING. Though rentals are growing in popularity, purchasing remains the favored mode of acquiring units like skid steers, said Armstead, and the option has taken a new face with a number of competitive loan programs that suit the circumstances of would-be owners. A broad range of contract lengths, interest rates and payment arrangements, for example, offer cash outlay options.

"Generally, the longer the financing term, the higher the interest rate," reminded Terry Baumgarten, marketing manager, Caterpillar, Peoria, Ill. "Zero-percent interest for 24 months is a very attractive incentive to buy now and has become pretty much a recent standard." The two-year, no-interest arrangement is ideal for contractors who can



afford to make the quickest, cleanest purchase while avoiding accrual of interest, he said, but extended terms – 60 months at 4.9-percent interest, for instance – might be a better option for those companies that would benefit from lower interval payments.

Other options also are available to accommodate unique situations.

Some lenders offer "skip" payments portioned to those months of the year that see the heaviest contracting work, Baumgarten said. Under this arrangement, borrowers needn't worry about making payments during times of the season with the slowest revenue stream. Other lenders tend toward a "variable payment" option – requiring lower payments during slower times – to address seasonal lulls, feeling more confident with provisions that keep borrowers accustomed to interval payments, he suggested.

THE LEASING LOW DOWN. Leasing is an option for contractors who want to take advantage of extended skid-steer use without the approximate \$20,000-plus-interest commitment to buy.

"Depending on the circumstances of a company, leasing can

For
KEEPS?

Incentives designed to level the playing field between purchasing, renting and leasing are offering would-be skid steer owners widening options where financing is regarded. PHOTO: Cat Rentals



be less expensive than financing a loan, easier to get approved, less cumbersome to credit and it offers many more options at the end of the term," suggested Daniel Lynch, president, Lynch Capital, Minneapolis, Minn.

From a cash-flow standpoint, leasing requires minimal upfront fees and no down payment, allowing contractors to immediately invest funds elsewhere at the onset of a contract. And because a lessee pays only for that part of the equipment they are using, Lynch explained, monthly payments are generally lower than loan repayments.

Moreover, because leases are not loans, and the leased equipment isn't the property of a lessee, expenses related to use of the equipment are 100-percent tax-deductible as an operating expense, Lynch pointed out. "This helps many companies, because if you're a profitable operation, paying both state and federal taxes, your tax burden is about one-

third of your profits. If your profit in a given year was \$90,000 and you already bought a \$35,000 piece of machinery, after taxes your cash flow is significantly weakened."

Mark Mullowney, national finance manager, Toro, Bloomington, Minn., added that leases preserve the creditworthiness of a company. "If a company goes out and seeks a loan," he illustrated, "a bank is going to look at all its existing creditors to determine the viability of [being paid back.] Leases don't show up that way."

A number of different leasing packages also offer attractive end-of-term choices to contractors who may or may not opt to purchase equipment at the end of a contract, Lynch said. Fair market value leases end with lessees returning a unit with the option to walk away, trade in the equipment for another piece, or purchase it at a market price commensurate with its state of wear

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USE READER SERVICE #52

Special Focus: **SKID STEERS**

and tear – its residual value. Payment upon termination leases set a predetermined residual value for equipment, and contractors are liable for any wear in great excess of that condition. In exchange for the risk, monthly payments are generally lower.

RULES OF RENTING. Contractors who want to capitalize on the handiness of skid steers, but shy away from the financial obligations of a long-term loan or lease contract, are increasingly looking to the rental market for a solution.

"Most companies are still buying, but we are definitely experiencing more parties renting this sort of equipment than in years past," Armstead said. He cited a number of conveniences – alleviation of maintenance, storage and transportation issues; no payment obligations during slow or no use; no subjection to unit obsolescence and retail price increases – as reasons renting has gained popularity of late, and said the option, sort of a try-out period, often precedes a decision to buy.

Armstead said Rental Services runs utilization models to determine the level of application for a given piece of equipment. As a general guideline, products used more than roughly 50 percent of a contractor's work time are more cost-effective to purchase, he offered, while units employed less frequently are often better suited for rental.

Pricewise, skid steers rent for about \$150 per day, \$600 to \$700 per week and \$1,300 to \$1,400 per month based on model, with com-

pact utility loaders running about 10 to 15 percent less, Armstead said. Base unit rental agreements typically exclude attachments, which run anywhere from \$50 to \$100 additionally per day, he added.

"We tend to see contractors rent base units and attachments together to ensure compatibility," he shared, "but in many cases, they simply rent the loader after having purchased those attachments they know they'll use most regularly to save money over time."

Armstead noted that value-added options included in the rental price vary from outlet to outlet, and he advised contractors to shop around and negotiate, where possible, to get the most for their dollars. Like leasing, purchase options at the close of a rental period are another route lenders are venturing into, providing contractors the unique opportunity to ultimately own a unit with the means to terminate a contract unpenalized at any given time.

Often, contractors will request that rental payments be applied to a purchase long after slating a deal. Since a dealer's rental pricing is risk-based, under the assumption their marketable inventory will be eventually restocked with the unit, they cannot retroactively adjust terms to apply payments to an unplanned purchase, Armstead ex-

"Most companies are still buying, but we are definitely experiencing more parties renting this sort of equipment than in years past," - Bill Armstead

plained. "If both parties know there's a purchasing interest going into it, they can structure the deal to be mutually beneficial." For this reason, contractors should cover all contractual terms upfront, he stressed.

WHICH SUITS YOU? Deciding which financing situation is best for your company boils down to simple research, according to Doug Berlin, general manager, landscape and irrigation, New Garden Landscaping & Nursery, Greensboro, N.C.

"Ideally, you want a machine that delivers the maximum work for your investment," Berlin said, stating that depending on job specifications and how frequently a company will use a machine, it might be frugal to juggle several financing choices.

"We generally like leasing our machines and ultimately purchasing them at the end of our term because it puts the least amount of strain on our [fiscal outlay] – it allows us to work within our budget and move capital as we wish," he explained.

Still, for demonstration purposes, or in instances where New Garden immediately needs a skid steer as a breakdown replacement or to temporarily bolster its fleet, the company might go with a short-term rental, Berlin said.

Mullowney said that sort of mixed approach is common. "Fortunately, contractors are becoming more educated about financing and very often combine their choices. They'll first rent, then lease and ultimately buy," he noted, mentioning that it's all a part of using the many resources available.

"Contractors shouldn't be afraid to exercise their choices," he said. "They should contact an accountant, then sit down and figure out their situations."

"Look at your bottom-line needs and how you're going to use the equipment," he offered. "From there, you can decide what's best." **LL**

The author is Associate Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine and can be reached at ewilson@lawnandlandscape.com.

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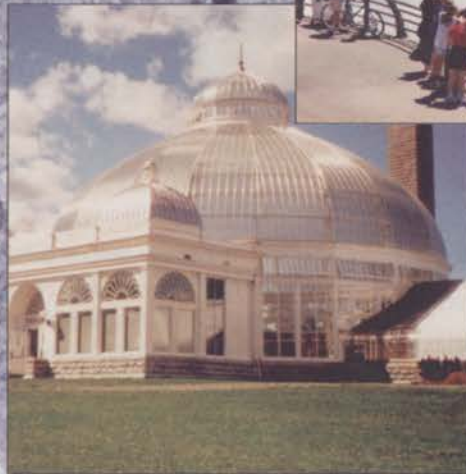
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by Lauren Spiers



Effectively scheduling and routing crews keeps customers happy and lets landscape companies run at peak efficiency.

ROUTE ROLL

GPS technology and mapping software allow contractors to label certain latitude and longitude coordinates with clients' names to identify service stops along a route. Photo: FleetBoss

Many people use their lunch hours to run errands here and there, keeping their after-work commutes as short as possible. But what's the best way to get to the bank, the post office and the dry cleaner and still have 10 minutes to scarf down a sandwich?

Proper routing.

Rather than heading to the bank, backtracking to the post office and pulling a U-turn to pick up the dry cleaning, a better approach might be post office, dry cleaner, bank, and back to work with time to spare. To service all their customers in the time allotted, landscape contractors must schedule and route their crews in a similarly organized fashion.

MAP IT OUT. James Berns, president, Berns Landscape Services, Warren, Mich., offered two simple answers to why crew routing and scheduling is so important: "It ups your efficiency and helps you be competitive," he affirmed. Remembering those two points can help landscape companies keep more money in their pockets.

"If we route crews in an inefficient manner, someone has to pay for that," Berns noted. "Berns Landscaping isn't going to pick up the bill for the time we spend on the road, so we need to apply that to the client." Although tacking on mileage and fuel costs is, generally, an advisable practice, it can increase the job cost a price some clients may not pay - especially when more local companies offer cheaper bids.

"If we're doing our job properly and being as efficient as possible with routing and scheduling, we can keep prices as low as possible and stay competitive," Berns suggested.

Additionally, extra labor and overtime are easy to regulate with effective routing and scheduling. "We use schedules to determine when [certain] services are going to be performed on the jobsites, and routes determine the workload of each individual crew," defined Kent Basnight, president, Basnight Land & Lawn, Chesapeake, Va. "Every job has budgeted hours for each visit. By routing each crew's work, we are managing overtime and in control of it."

(continued on page 76)



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Routing & Scheduling

(continued from page 74)

As expected, different companies approach routing and scheduling differently, but each method works to complete as much work done in a single day as possible.

"We pre-sell all of our maintenance contracts in the wintertime," noted Andrew Morse, director of operations, Belknap Landscape Co., Gilford, N.H. "By April 1, we know what we have for maintenance accounts. From there we consider the location."

Throughout the mowing season, Morse routes crews so all the mowing in one defined area is done on the same day. Other one- or two-time treatments by dedicated crews follow a kind of tag-team approach. Edging crews complete their work in early May, mulching crews between May and June, and pruning crews work from May to June and again from July to August.

"We'll have two or three pruning crews who are all within the same location on one day," Morse detailed. "It's the same for mulching crews and they'll feed off each other if they need some extra material or extra help to get done that day – they're all right there."

John Luznicky, general manager, Createscape Landscaping Services, Mukwonago, Wis., also must track several crews at once – eight to be exact. "The more teams you have, the more difficult it is to route and schedule," he admitted. "But if you break it into smaller pieces and try not to schedule everybody at once, it's much easier."

Likewise, Berns' employs four mowing crews, four horticultural crews and two fertilization crews. Agreeing with Luznicky's advice, Berns routes each set of crews in layers. For instance, he organizes all mowing crews, followed by the fertilization teams and finally horticulture.

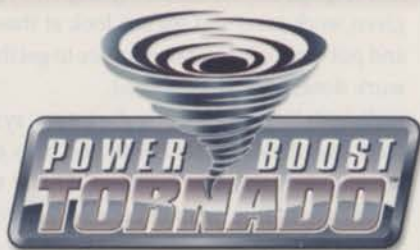
Taking the routing and scheduling process one step at a time facilitates the organizational aspect of things, and Berns also is able to see the big picture as far as which teams can work on which days. For instance, his fertilizer crews' applications are useless if the mowing crews come on the next day. "The fertilization team cannot be out two or three days prior to mowing," he explained. "If we're mowing on Wednesday, I want to make sure the fertilization is done the Friday of the prior week." In this case, efficiency and common sense go hand-in-hand.

(continued on page 78)



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Routing & Scheduling

(continued from page 76)

POST IT UP. Once the routes and schedules are mapped out and planned, keeping employees updated is the next step.

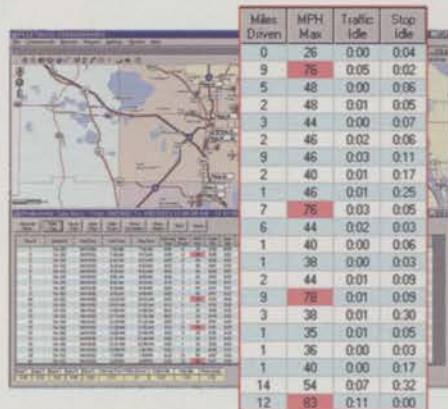
"We use an Excel spreadsheet now and it's reduced unproductive hours by 25 percent," Berns raved. "Contractors can't afford to just keep track of their routes and schedules on paper. We've really benefited from putting this database together." By honing the system to compare billable hours to actual hours, the company can see how close it is to meeting hour budgets, and it can work to increase its efficiency if discrepancies arise.

Basnight agreed. "'Day cramming' is the most ineffective method of routing," he stressed. His company uses a combination of spread sheets, software programs and simple dry-erase boards to keep everyone in the company apprised of work situations. "If work days are not planned out meticulously, there is zero control of overtime and no way to allow for rain days or equipment failures," he added, urging fellow contractors to remember this: "Prior planning prevents poor performance."

Morse's custom-made database also tracks job costing and timing information to ensure that crews complete jobs on time and on budget. For routing, the system can print job tickets for all the jobs scheduled in predetermined locations. "We can ask the system to print out all the jobs going on in [a given work area] and we can look at those and put them in a logical sequence to get the work done," Morse explained.

Scheduling software and custom systems like these (created with the help of consulting firms) can run from \$1,000 to \$4,000 depending on the available features and the ability to modify the system over time. Still, there are less expensive and equally effective ways to organize crews.

For more visual people, breaking out area maps and dry-erase boards make the scheduling and routing process easier. "I've never used any routing or scheduling software,"



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9	46	0.03	0.11
2	40	0.01	0.17
1	46	0.01	0.25
7	76	0.03	0.05
6	44	0.02	0.03
1	40	0.00	0.06
1	38	0.00	0.03
2	44	0.01	0.09
9	76	0.01	0.09
3	38	0.01	0.30
1	35	0.01	0.05
1	36	0.00	0.03
1	40	0.00	0.17
14	54	0.07	0.32
12	83	0.11	0.00

(Above) GPS technology allows users to generate reports on the speed, location and idle time of each vehicle in their fleets. Photo: FleetBoss

Luznicki noted. "I've always done everything with maps. They work better for me because I can see the whole flow of things at once." By plotting job locations on the maps, Luznicki can visualize the best routes for his crews to take in certain areas. From there, he dwrites the scheudle on dry-erase boards with dates across the top and foremen's names down the side. Luznicki plans schedules three months in advance, updating the boards weekly to take care of any conflicts.

Most contractors post schedules at least a week in advance, and though Luznicki's three months may seem like a long time, this prior notice ensures that crewmembers know when and where their jobs are, and encourages communication between departments.

"In our operations center, each of the crews has their jobs posted for the week so the fertilization and mowing crews stay in conversation to make sure something isn't overlooked," Berns commented. "If one of the mowing crewmembers realizes that they're scheduled for a job the day after the fertilization team was there, we have to move some things around."

Occasionally, clients asking for priority service can throw a wrench into the works, but most contractors have policies set up for just such occasions. "We have a client who wants to be mown every five days in the spring," Luznicki said. "In situations like that, if we can work the client into the route without going out of our way, we'll accept the job as long as they're willing to pay for more mowings."

In the case of other clients who request service on specific days or lie outside of normal service areas, most contractors either

(continued on page 80)

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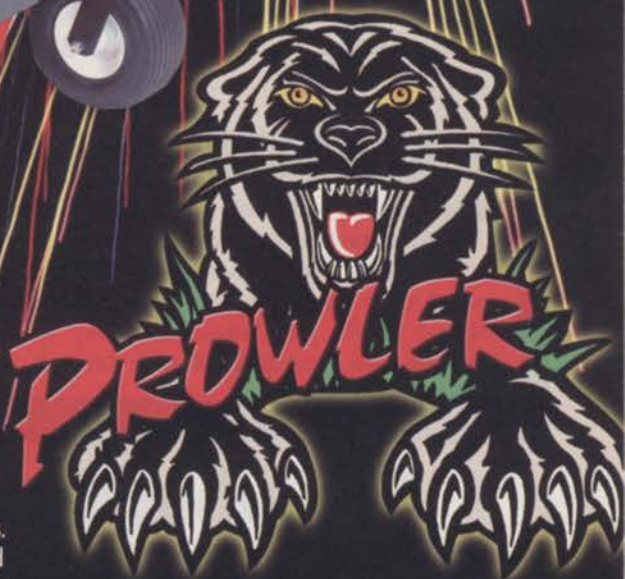
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USE READER SERVICE #58

Routing & Scheduling

(continued from page 78)

charge for the extra distance traveled or just say, "No." "We have a four-day workweek, so if a customer wants service on Fridays we may just tell them we don't work on Fridays and let them find somebody else," Berns explained. "If someone wants to have work done on Thursday afternoon every week, depending on if we have a team that can accommodate them, we'll do that. However, we would charge slightly more for going across town."

For the most part though, contractors find that once a company has a regular set of customers, scheduling and routing becomes simpler. "Once you get into a groove, things just start to roll ahead on their own," Luznicki said. Companies that find that groove by efficiently routing and scheduling their crews can look forward to happy customers and heavy wallets. **LL**

The author is Assistant Editor of *Lawn & Landscape* magazine and can be reached at lspiers@lawnandlandscape.com.

How could your mom always tell when you were up to no good? How on earth did she know you were stealing cookies from the "secret stash" or that you were about to fling a rubber band at your little brother's head?

Did she really have eyes in the back of her head? Probably not. And she most likely wasn't using global positioning technology to track your every move either.

However, service companies like those in the green industry are finding this approach a great way to keep track of vehicles while cutting costs.

Originally developed in the mid-1970s by the U.S. government for military purposes, the global positioning system (GPS) is a series of 24 satellites that determine the origin of electronic signals by their latitudes and longitudes. In the 1980s, the Department of Defense opened up use of the system to civilians. Currently, many service industries use

GPS systems to keep an eye on their vehicles while crews have them out on jobs during the day.

Naturally, some crewmembers are skeptical and untrusting of such systems, assuming their bosses are trying to spy on them or catch them doing something wrong. For the most part though, employees shouldn't worry.

"You're really tracking the vehicle and not the person," commented Mark Campagna, director of communications, FleetBoss, Orlando, Fla. "[A truck] is a business' capital asset. You have every right in the world to know where it is."

By installing a small receiving device in a vehicle's cab (usually under the front seat or dashboard) and connecting it to an antenna, GPS satellites can track the vehicle's location, start and stop times, speed and even idling time, and relay all of that data back to a computer at the contractor's main office. Company owners can use that information to determine areas where they can

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USE READER SERVICE #60

save significant amounts of money and increase their bottom lines.

"Speeding puts a lot of wear and tear on the vehicles and puts the company at risk from an insurance standpoint," Campagna mentioned. Many software programs supplied with GPS systems can generate reports showing, for example, every instance when a vehicle exceeded a certain speed. Encouraging drivers to slow down can increase maintenance, fuel and insurance savings.

Downtime can cost money as well. "We've seen several instances where [crewmembers] might spend 30 minutes at the gas station buying drinks while they're filling up," added Eron Iler, president, GPS Fleet Solutions, Tampa, Fla. "At \$10 per hour - that's \$5 for 30 minutes times four [crew members] - you just paid \$20 for people to get gas and sodas. That's a fairly routine example of what owners can pick up by looking at start-stop information."

If a long refueling stop costs \$20 for four crewmembers, how much will the average GPS system set a company back? Generally,

costs can run from \$300 to \$1,000 per vehicle for "passive" systems that download collected vehicle data at the end of the workday or workweek. But systems like these, don't offer the minute-by-minute vehicle updates most people envision when considering GPS. That feature is available on "active" systems, which costs slightly more per vehicle because monthly service fees are required. Active systems tap into the cellular network and Internet to immediately relay data from the vehicle to the office.

Though the outright cost may seem steep, manufacturers assured that if a company uses the resulting data to cut costs, a return on investment can occur in as few as three to six months. "A vehicle represents two of your most expensive costs on a monthly basis: your people and your fleet costs," Iler offered. "If you have two vehicles and one of them is inefficient, 50 percent of your productivity falls off. All you really have to do is save a couple hours a week per crew and you're making money."

Iler introduced GPS technology to the pest control company he previously worked for. By identifying each crew's strengths and weaknesses, that company was able to cut an entire crew, redistribute their workload and eliminate all associated costs, saving thousands of dollars.

While some crewmembers resent GPS systems that get them in trouble, others appreciate them. "A lot of people say, 'I want my boss to know I'm doing the right thing,'" Campagna expressed. "I want him to know I'm putting in overtime and if I do put in overtime, this is where I was and this is why I did it."

Manufacturers encourage company owners to explain to their employees that a business' top priorities are to satisfy customers and make a profit. Cutting unnecessary costs, accurately accounting for payroll time and recording every customer visit a truck and its crew makes are all easy to do with GPS technology. Now company owners really can have eyes in the backs of their heads. - **Lauren Spiers**

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USE READER SERVICE #61

Adjuvants

by Nicole Wisniewski

You know how you feel when you apply wallpaper and it just won't stick. You read the directions, apply the proper adhesive and prepare the wall, but the precisely cut paper bonds for an instant and then rolls right off atop your head.

Pesticide applications can sometimes make lawn care operators (LCOs) feel this way. They read the label instructions, prepare the spray mixture accordingly, watch the weather, yet one factor or another – whether it's timing, rainfall or applicator error – ruins the product's efficacy.

That's where adjuvants come in. When added to a pesticide spray mixture, adjuvants can boost product power, enhancing solution stickiness or amplifying a product's penetration punch.

TRANSLATING TERMS. The reason LCOs use adjuvants to enhance liquid spray mixtures is because "nothing covers more poorly than water – it runs off, doesn't spread, bounces, splashes, drifts, is invisible once sprayed, foams when mixed with foreign substances, etc.," pointed out Scott Gilliam, proprietary product manager, specialty division, Helena Chemical, Columbia, S.C.

Currently, there are 4,000 adjuvants being marketed and sold in the U.S., Gilliam said. Why are there so many? "A recent review of chemical labels reveals recommendations for at least 18 different types," answered Gilliam. "Some chemicals have recommendations for more than one type of adjuvant and sometimes as many as eight, especially considering tank mixes. The labels may require different adjuvant types when used in different types of application equipment, under different environmental conditions, in different geographic places or in different tank mixes. This is the reason you cannot buy and use just one adjuvant for all applications. There are so many different types of adjuvants because there are so many needs for different functions to maximize chemical effectiveness and spray application efficiency."

Additionally, the reason many adjuvants exist is because "spray application is perhaps the weakest link in the chain of events a pesticide follows through its development process," said W.K. Hock, professor of plant pathology, Pennsylvania State University, University Park, Pa. "Some researchers claim that up to 70 percent of the

(continued on page 84)

Adjuvants can enhance pesticides' bonding and breaching powers.

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Adjuvants

(continued from page 82)

pesticide effectiveness depends on application effectiveness. Adjuvants can minimize or eliminate many spray application problems associated with pesticide stability, solubility, incompatibility, suspension, foaming, drift, evaporation, volatilization, degradation, adherence, penetration, surface tension and coverage. No single adjuvant can perform all of these functions, but different compatible adjuvants can be combined to perform multiple functions simultaneously."

More LCOs are using adjuvants today because of the coverage loss due to the trend for low spray application volume; because pesticides have foaming, drift and compatibility problems; or because labels recommend them, Gilliam pointed out.

"Plus, LCOs can get 30 to 40 percent better control with an adjuvant or back their rate off 30 to 40 percent," added Russ Mitchell, technical director and agronomist, United Horticultural Supply, Denver, Colo., sharing the cost savings that come with adjuvant use.

But with words like adjuvants, nonionic surfactants, stickers and spreaders floating around, no wonder LCOs have a hard time figuring out which adjuvant to use. "Much of the confusion surrounding adjuvants can be attributed to the lack of understanding of adjuvant terminology," Hock maintained. "For example, many people use the terms adjuvant and surfactant interchangeably. These terms can refer to the same product because all surfactants are adjuvants; however, not all adjuvants are surfactants."

The word adjuvant is synonymous with "additive," meaning it is anything added to a spray tank or solution to increase product performance, Mitchell pointed out.

While surfactant-type adjuvants enhance products' sticking or penetrating qualities, other adjuvants – what Mitchell refers to as "problem solvers" – are those that reduce spray drift by making the product heavier and thicker, prevent foam formation or resist pH changes. These "problem solvers"

are adjuvants but are technically not surfactants, yet they are often grouped into the same category, Mitchell said.

"And in most situations, the lawn care applicator is applying an expensive tank mix in an extremely sensitive environment, such as residential or commercial areas," Gilliam added. "The applicator should be using every means feasible to get better efficacy and uptake of the chemical and decrease drift. However, having said this, the applicator needs to know which product is the correct product to use with each mix because there is not a silver bullet for every application."

TOOLBOX TACTICS. The adjuvant list can be overwhelming and LCOs may think they must have one of each type on their shelves, but realistically, they only need a few basics. "[Adjuvants] are pulled out of the tool box for specific reasons," pointed out Tim Doppel, president, Atwood

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NONIONIC SURFACTANT – having no ionizable polar end groups comprised of hydrophilic and lipophilic segments. Has properties of a wetter spreader surfactant.

PENETRANT – enhances a chemical's ability to penetrate a surface. This adjuvant is effective in improving insecticide and fungicide spray applications.

SPREADER – increases the area that a droplet of a given volume of spray mixture will cover. Better spreading equals better absorption into plant leaves and stems.

STICKER – assists the spray deposit to adhere or stick to the target and may be measured in terms of resistance to time, wind, water, mechanical action or chemical action. Helps chemicals, such as contact fungicides, stay on the leaf surface.

WETTING AGENT – synonymous with spreading agents in function.

spread, but spreaders do the spreading and penetrating and don't stick," he explained.

There are two sticker types – synthetic latex, which is similar to paint because it's clear and dries leaving a rubbery, waterproof film, and poly turbines, which come from pine sap and when light hits them, they

harden to a sticky resin on plants and become waterproof, Mitchell said.

Nonionic surfactants or spreaders, on the other hand, are neutral charged products that don't burn turf or plant material.

"Spreader have surface tension, meaning

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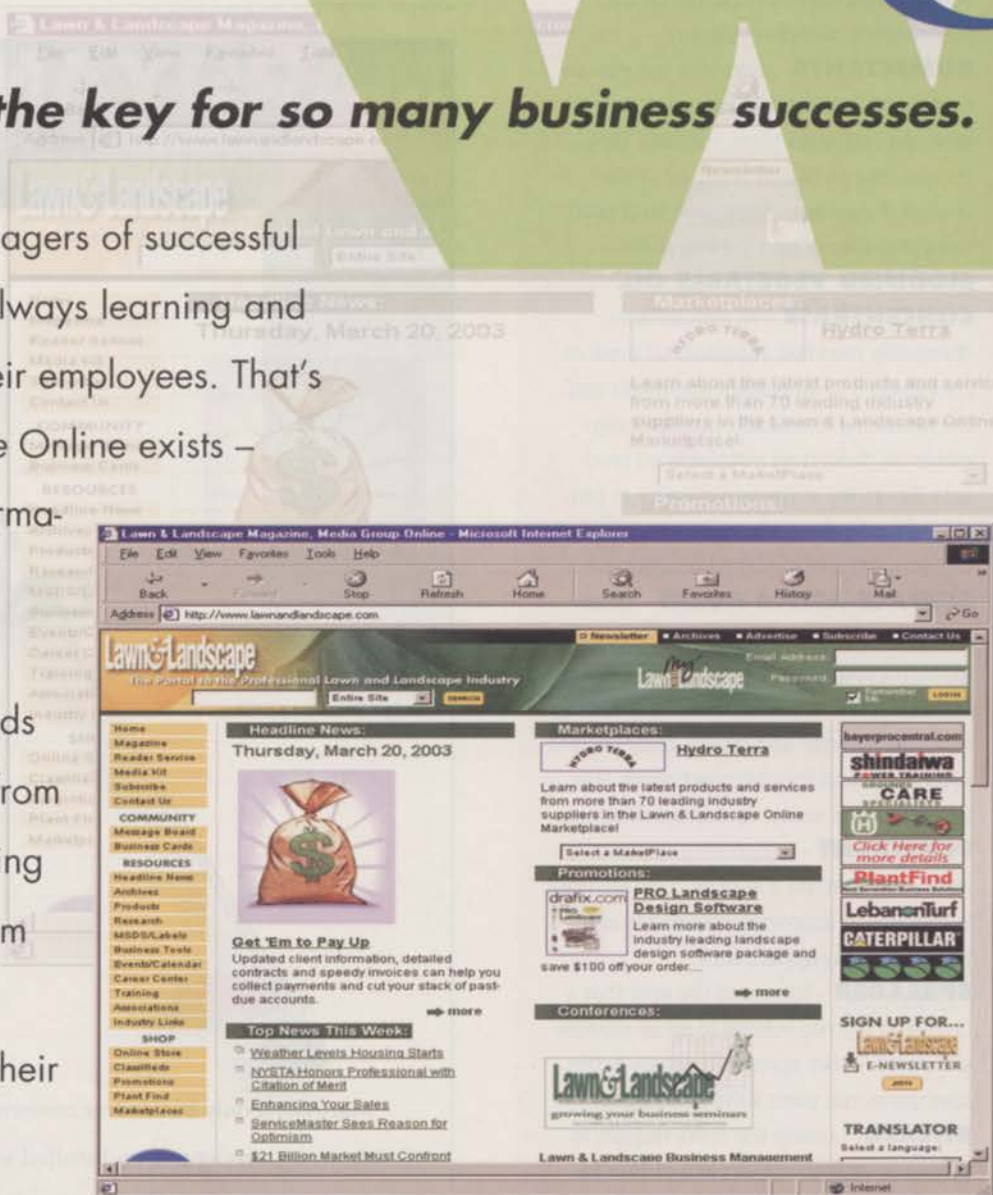
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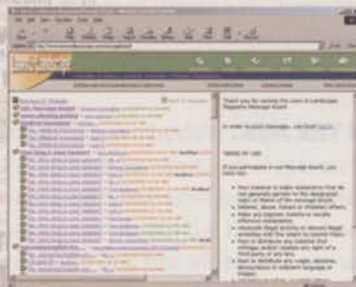
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Adjuvants

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they spread out and break bonds between water molecules," Mitchell explained.

Choosing the right adjuvant for use depends on the pesticide an LCO uses and whether it's a systemic or contact product. "For instance, if you are trying to put down an herbicide that's systemic, that herbicide is meant to go into the plant to work," Mitchell explained. "So if you want that product to cover as much of the plant as possible and penetrate into it, you should use a spreader.

"But if you are using a contact insecticide to eliminate cutworms and the product is meant to stay on the plant's surface, then you want to use a sticker because you want the product to stay on the plant as long as possible through rainfall and irrigation," Mitchell continued. "It's simple to pick the right adjuvant if you ask yourself what you're trying to do with the pesticide in the first place."

IN THE MIX. With adjuvants, "the biggest advantage is the improved pesticide performance," Doppel remarked. "But if there is a disadvantage it is if you use them incorrectly you can damage the turf and ornamentals."

First and foremost, using adjuvants correctly means following label directions. Most of the time, LCOs add 1 to 2 quarts of adjuvant per 100 gallons of water, unless a higher percent active ingredient dictates otherwise, pointed out Art Assad, president and chief executive officer, Agrisel USA, Atlanta, Ga.

And the additional cost is almost insignificant for many adjuvants, pointed out Keith Woodruff, marketing manager, ProSource One, Memphis, Tenn. "My feeling is that adjuvants are under utilized either for the reason of a lack of education on their use or an unwillingness to add any cost," he said, pointing out that he thinks many LCOs don't know how small the cost actually is.

An adjuvant's cost per 100 gallons depends on how far that 100 gallons goes for that LCO, but typically the product will add about 35 cents per 100 gallons of water, Assad said.

Many LCOs factor this additional cost into program prices, which is quite small in the overall annual cost picture, Doppel added.

Though the cost is minimal and understanding how adjuvants can enhance pesticide applications is easy once LCOs know their products, purchasing them can be challenging because adjuvants themselves have

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Adjuvants

(continued from page 90)

no pesticidal properties and therefore are not required to be registered by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Some states, however, do have modified registration requirements for these chemicals, but LCOs still have to read labels carefully and buy from reputable suppliers. "Compare the quantity of active ingredients in similar types of additives to help determine value," suggested Brent Pringnitz, extension program specialist, department of agronomy, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa. "Be wary of any product that makes exaggerated claims such as 'This additive will allow you to reduce herbicide rates by 25 to 50 percent.'"

Hock agreed. "There are no miracle adjuvants," he said. "It is generally wise to ignore claims such as 'keeps spray equipment clean' or 'causes better root penetration.'"

Also, if LCOs are located in states that do not require adjuvant registration, then Greg Richards, senior product manager for herbicides and specialty products, LESCO, Rocky River, Ohio, advised that LCOs ask suppliers for adjuvant product data. "Since no law says suppliers have to put the correct active ingredient on the label, you don't know whether a product is 10 percent active vs. 90 percent active," he said. "But many suppliers will have information on products that they can share with you."

If not, Hock said LCOs should test questionable products on limited areas before proceeding with full-scale use.

Also, many of today's pesticide products already contain an adjuvant, Hock inserted, pointing out that LCOs should check out product labels that tout advanced performance because they probably have adjuvant ingredients. "If a pesticide is already formulated property for your site, using a spreader, for example, may not give better spreading or coverage," he said, adding that knowing when *not* to use an adjuvant is as important as knowing when to use one. "Rather, it could increase runoff or even severely damage target plants. Correct use of adjuvants does require some knowledge. If you know your needs and the limitations of the products you intend to use, adjuvants can prove to be positive additions to the spray tank." **U**

The author is Managing Editor of *Lawn & Landscape* magazine and can be reached at nwisniewski@lawnandlandscape.com.



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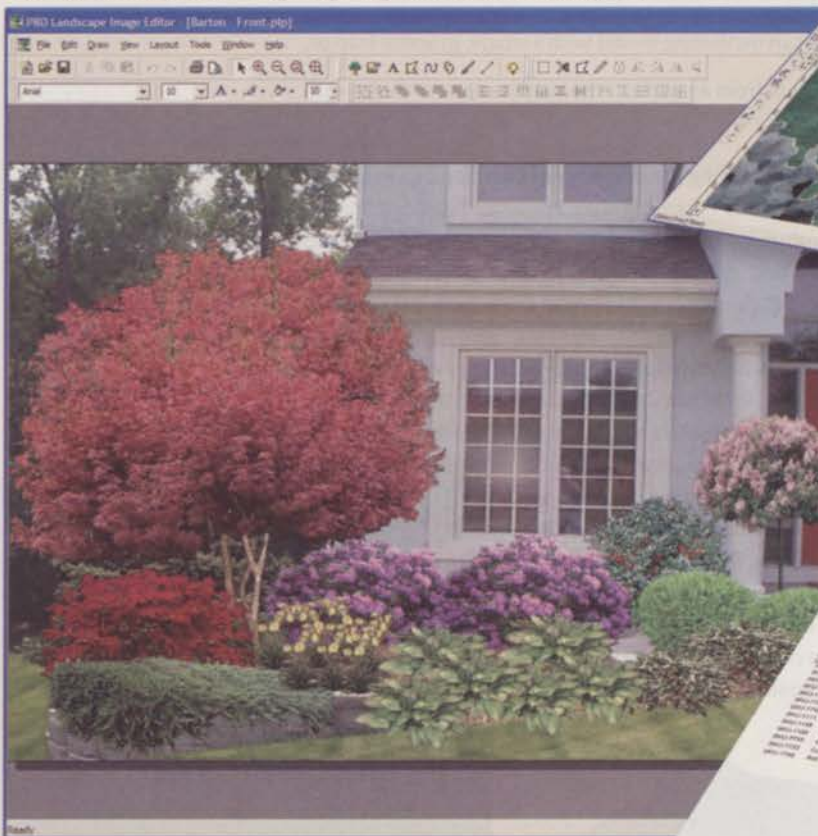
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What Are You Waiting For?

USE READER SERVICE #71

Rotors & Spray Heads

by Lauren Spiers

Irrigation rotors and spray heads each give turf a good soaking, but there are some differences to remember.

The average backyard sprinkler offers two options for summer fun:

No. 1: run through the soft, vertical spray of an oscillating model with a single, graceful leap or,

No. 2: chase or be chased by the painful stream from an impact rotor and jump over the jet with timed precision.

Both are equally entertaining pastimes for kids during the dog days of summer, but irrigation contractors have somewhat more important concerns regarding their sprinkler head options.

Choosing to install spray-style heads or rotors is the first decision, followed by deliberations over sprinkler configuration, materials costs and efficiency. Sprinkler manufacturers offered information and advice to help contractors and their clients get the most from their installations.

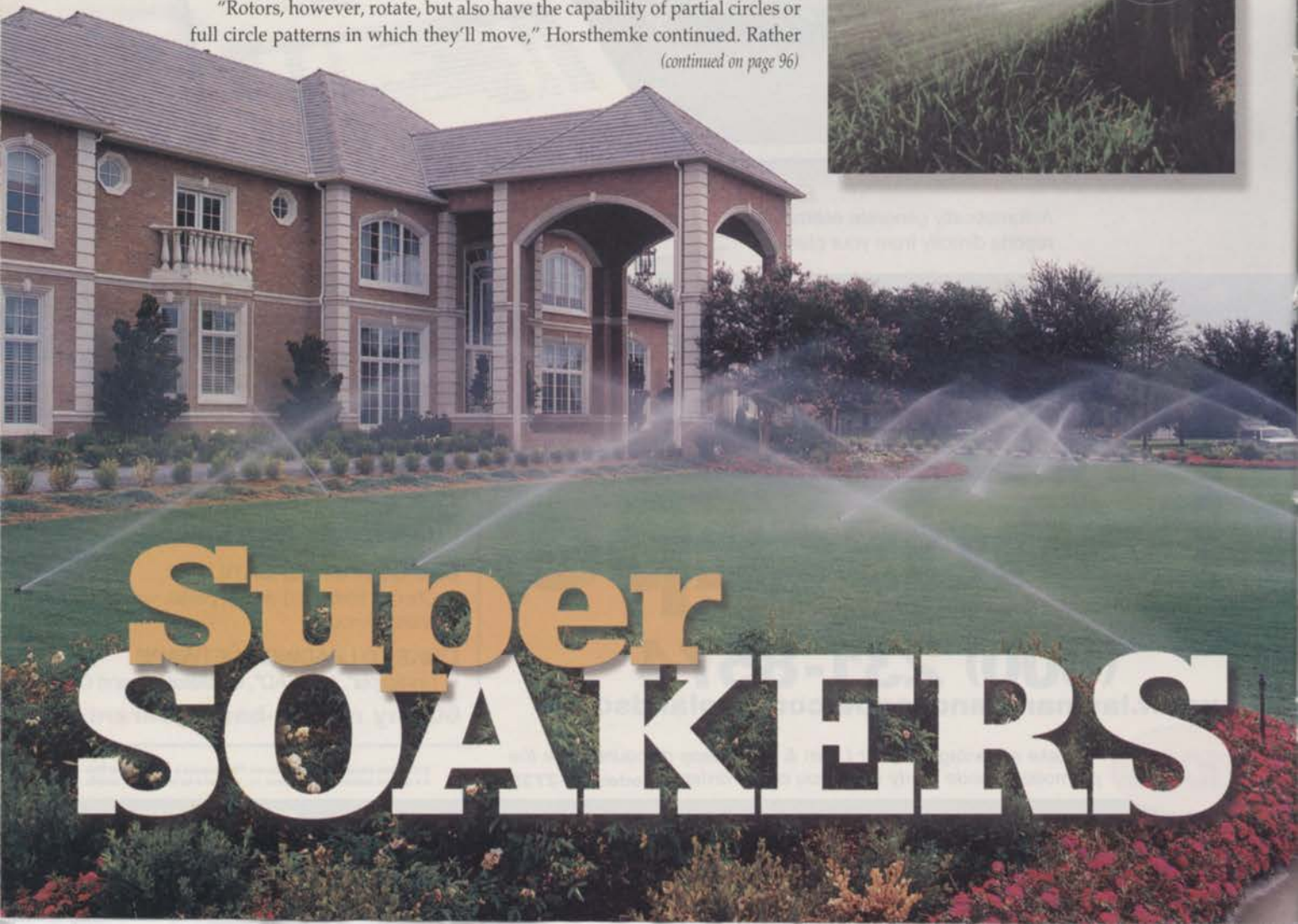
SPECIFY & APPLY. The two major differences between irrigation rotors and spray heads are the pattern of watering provided by the head and the distances those patterns can be thrown. Ultimately, these two factors determine the type of sprinkler head to use in a given situation.

"Sprays are basically on a fixed pattern anywhere from one-eighth of a circle up to 360 degrees and cover a certain area depending on the pressure and the type of nozzle used," explained Bob Horsthemke, turf marketing and communications manager, L.R. Nelson, Peoria, Ill. The resulting effect from a spray head is essentially an umbrella of water that extends over a turf area depending on the sprinkler's radius or distance of throw.

"Rotors, however, rotate, but also have the capability of partial circles or full circle patterns in which they'll move," Horsthemke continued. Rather

(continued on page 96)

On sprays and rotors, nozzles that water "close in" (near the sprinkler itself), increase efficiency and decrease water waste. Photos: Hunter Industries (bottom), Rain Bird (inset)



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USE READER SERVICE #72

Rotors & Spray Heads

(continued from page 94)

than a static spray over a portion of a circle, rotors spray a jet of water back and forth within that pattern to irrigate the area.

Combining this information with the distance of throw helps determine whether to use spray heads or rotors in certain areas. Depending on the manufacturer, spray heads

are available with radii of about 5 to 20 feet, while rotors cover distances from 20 to 40 feet. Because of this, contractors need to consider their application.

"Sprays are generally used in smaller areas, while rotors are generally used in larger areas," noted Steve Hovel, product



Because of their shorter radii, spray heads are best used in smaller areas like home lawns.

Photo: Hunter Industries



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manager, Hunter Industries, San Marcos, Calif. On an application-specific basis, spray heads are more applicable to areas such as residential lawns and gardens, while rotors cover wide-open areas like athletic fields and commercial campuses.

A contractor's next step after choosing the right sprinkler head is to plot out the best configuration in which to arrange the sprinklers. "Most areas can be irrigated with sprays, but because they have a shorter radius, more sprinklers are needed than if rotors are being used," Hovel reasoned. (See Spaced Out on page 98.) Also, manufacturers urged contractors to remember the importance of head-to-head coverage when developing a sprinkler system layout.

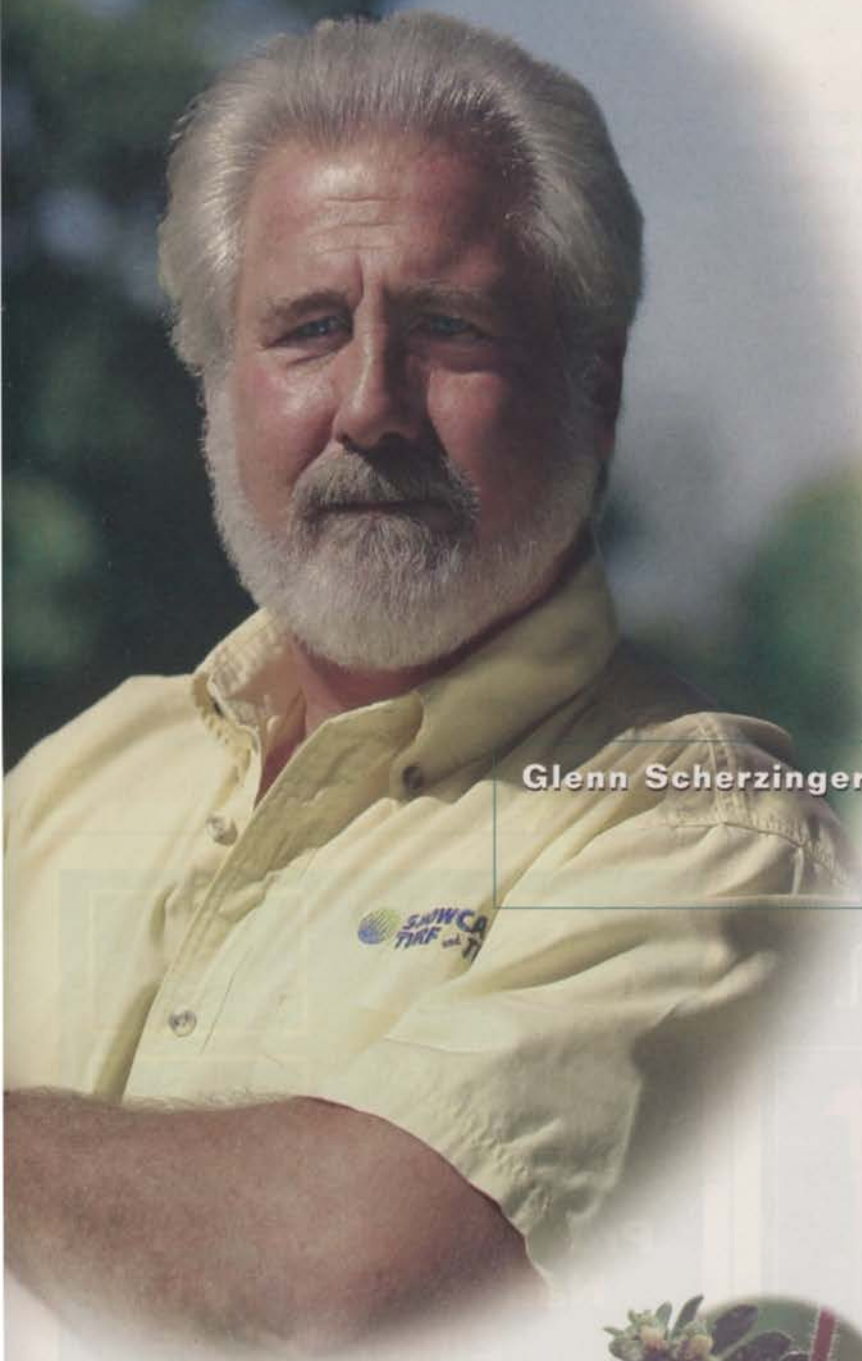
"Nozzles are designed to provide the best coverage when their patterns overlap," insisted Mike Rivers, product marketing manager, Rain Bird, Tucson, Ariz. "All nozzle performance data is generated in zero-wind conditions. It's the most repeatable environment for nozzle testing, but it's not real-world conditions. When you get outside there's going to be environmental differences like wind, temperature and air density. To account for environmental differences, we recommend being conservative and spacing rotors head-to-head at a minimum."

Additionally, manufacturers urged contractors to take advantage of all the sprinkler head models manufacturers provide – especially when dealing with rotors.

"Rotors are typically provided with a variety of nozzles that allow great flexibility for the contractors and irrigation specifiers," Hovel noted. "There are nozzles available that are specifically designed to go short distances – say 25 feet, as well as nozzles designed to have a longer radius – say 40 feet. It is not beneficial to use a nozzle designed to go 40 feet and reduce its radius down to 25 feet." Hovel warned that this

(continued on page 98)

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Glenn Scherzinger

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From a few yards out, there rarely appears to be any rhyme or reason to a sprinkler systems' layout. Heads seem randomly placed throughout yards and campuses leaving people passing through wondering which direction an all-out water attack will come from if they happen to be caught in the crossfire.

But there is a method to the madness. Proper sprinkler head spacing is an important consideration on all properties, and rotors and spray heads have different guidelines for irrigation contractors to remember.

For both rotors and sprays, a key part of installing an irrigation system is achieving head-to-head watering. This ensures the entire turf area will be properly watered and dry spots won't be a worry. When using sprays, this practice usually requires many more sprinkler heads than when using rotors. Steve Hovel, product manager, Hunter Industries, San Marcos, Calif., explained, "Sprays generally have a 20-foot radius and less, while rotors generally have a radius of 20 feet

and larger. If the front yard of a property was 30 feet square, it would require nine sprays."



At left is the resulting configuration using spray heads with 15-foot radii. Here, the sprays are set 15 feet apart for head-to-head watering.

However, covering the same area with rotors only requires four heads, since the radius of each rotor is able to span the entire length of the yard. The illustration to the right shows how head-to-head watering is achieved using rotors with 30-foot radii.



Hovel noted that contractors can irrigate most areas using sprays, but the larger number of heads requires more labor. For efficiency, manufacturers suggest using spray heads in smaller areas like home lawns and plant beds, and installing rotors in open areas such as larger residential lawns, parks and athletic fields. — **Lauren Spiers**

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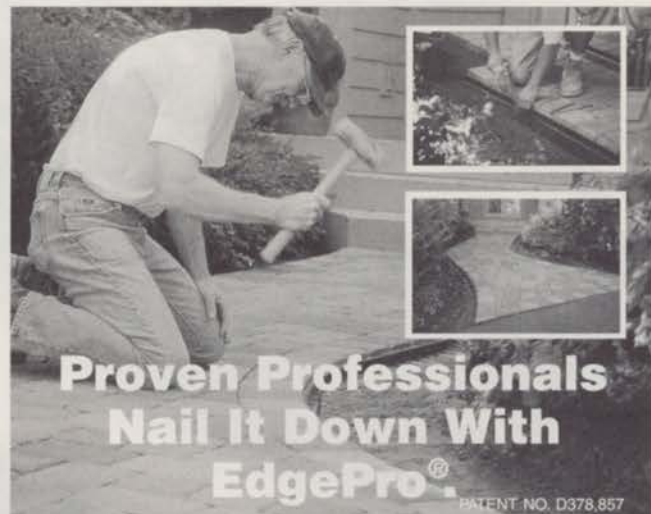


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Rotors & Spray Heads

(continued from page 98)

kind of coverage works, but using a long-range nozzle in a short-range situation is improper application and may compromise the irrigation system's overall performance.

EFFICIENCY PROFICIENCY. For sprinkler head efficiency, one important concept manufacturers consider is precipitation rate. This rate is the amount of water applied to the turf over a given amount of time. Measured in inches per hour, rotors have lower precipitation rates than spray heads, limiting the amount of water lost to runoff.

"Typically, sprays have precipitation rates of 1.5 inches per hour, while rotors have precipitation rates of approximately .5 inches per hour," Hovel detailed. "The lower application rate allows water to absorb slowly into the soil, decreasing the likelihood of runoff."

Since the application rate for spray heads can be as much as three times higher than that of rotors, ensuring that turf isn't over-watered and that irrigation water isn't

wasted is an issue many manufacturers concentrate on. Some manufacturers are turning to new technologies to optimize irrigation systems' effectiveness.

"[Manufacturers] are considering water conservation and are trying to develop products that will use water more efficiently," expressed Greg Kang, sprays products manager, Rain Bird, Azusa, Calif., noting some examples. "There are dual orifice nozzles that provide about 30 percent more uniform coverage and are 30 percent more efficient," he said. For nozzles with this structure, the main opening provides the expected spray of water, while the second focuses on "close in" watering next to the sprinkler base.

"Nozzles like these make sure that all the turf that's supposed to be irrigated by that rotor [or spray head] is receiving the water it needs," Rivers remarked. "These products need to have overall uniformity to run at maximum efficiency and that's what correct close-in watering provides."

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Check out our May Online Extras section for information on new developments with rotors and spray heads.

Another efficiency consideration is the amount of time and materials required to install an irrigation system. "One thing that professionals will avoid is ever mixing spray heads and rotors in the same zone because the application rate is so different," noted Mike Baron, MP Rotator manager, Walla Walla Sprinkler Co., Walla Walla, Wash. "They'll install their rotors at 35-foot spacing and come down to an area that's 20 or 15 feet. For a water-saving system, they have to install another valve and run pipe to operate two or three spray heads in that area."

Installing extra lines can cost a lot in parts and labor, but new combination-style products make solving the problem much easier. Using these products, a contractor can install

(continued on page 102)

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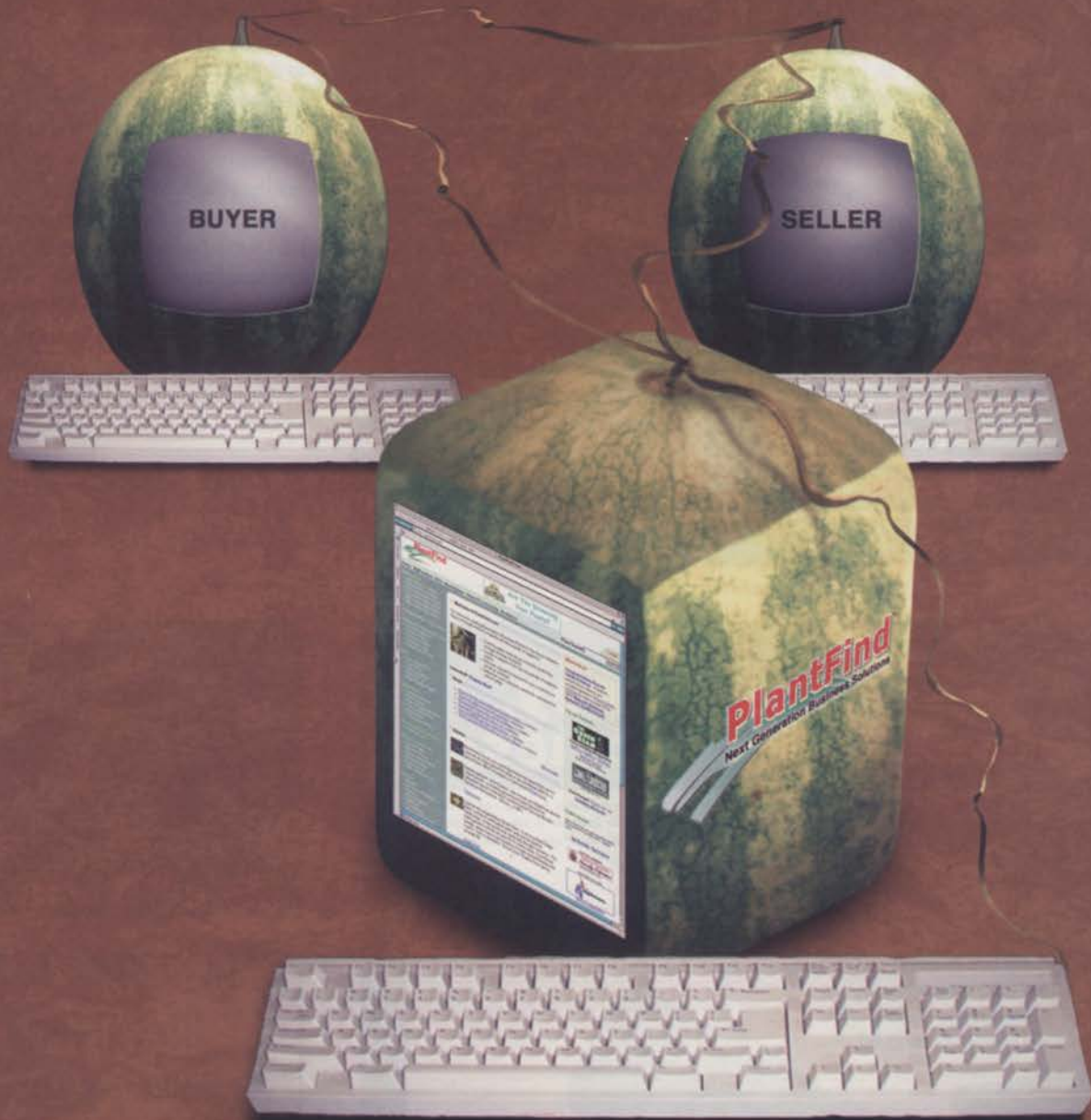
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Rotors & Spray Heads

(continued from page 100)

a spray head body in a rotor zone, but top it off with a new nozzle designed to work like a rotor. The spray fills in the smaller area without running an extra line.

These products do have higher price tags, but those costs are offset by not having to pay for labor and materials to install an additional line. "They can convert spray heads into more efficient sprinklers," Baron noted. "You can save 20 to 30 percent of the water used, so that's a big advantage."

PRICE & ADVICE. Prices of different rotors and spray heads vary widely, though

"[Manufacturers] are considering water conservation and are trying to develop products that will use water more efficiently." – Greg Kang

the use of plastic fittings (as opposed to the original brass style) keeps the cost down significantly. An expected range of cost for spray heads is between \$3 and \$12 list price, depending on the size of the pop-up body. For rotors, list prices can fall anywhere from \$15 to \$20 for residential styles, \$30 to \$55 for commercial models, and much higher prices for stainless-steel versions or those with very long-range watering features.

"Another item that increases the costs of sprays, but also increases their efficiency, is a pressure regulator that is internally installed into the sprinkler," Hovel noted.

"Pressure regulation limits the pressure out of the nozzle to 30 psi, which is the optimum operating pressure." He explained that if a line capable of running at 90 or 100 psi operated at full capacity, the resulting spray from the sprinkler head would be so atomized that the majority of the water would drift off without doing its job.

"Maximizing the droplet size is very important," Rivers agreed. "The larger the droplet size of the water, the better the chance that the water will get to where you want it to go. It will penetrate the soil better, it will be less effected by wind and have less of a tendency to drift off of course." Since smaller droplets might evaporate or blow away, Rivers added that products relying on atomized water to irrigate beside the sprinkler head might not get the results they expect.

By choosing the right sprinkler head for the job, contractors can keep clients' lawns healthy and simultaneously lower the number of callbacks they receive. "It's about doing things as effectively as you can," Horsthemke affirmed. Using manufacturer's advice, contractors will be able to please their customers in a manner as efficient as the sprinklers themselves. **LL**

The author is Assistant Editor of *Lawn & Landscape* magazine and can be reached at lspiers@lawnandlandscape.com.

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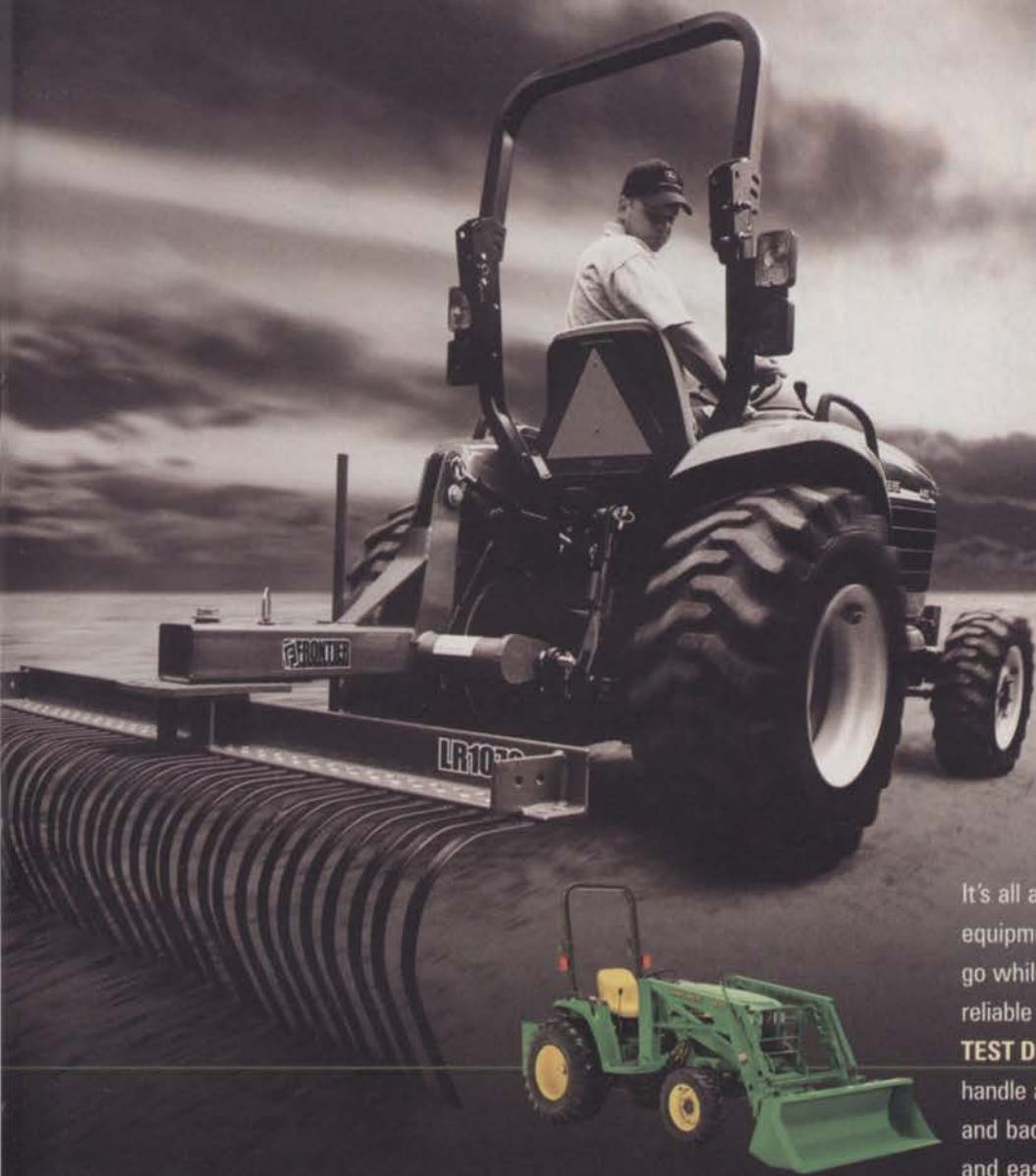
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Selling Enhancements

by Lauren Spiers

With a keen eye, contractors can offer landscape enhancements to benefit clients' yards and companies' wallets.

Something MORE

Jeffrey Johns doesn't want anything to do with the brand new \$500,000 house going in on the corner. So what if it's begging for an all-out new construction job with all the trimmings? He walks right on by.

The president of Costal Greenery, Brunswick, Ga., isn't worried about the workload. He has the expertise and the resources to handle new construction. Johns simply knows that, as lucrative as large, new projects can be, targeting existing maintenance clients can be even more profitable. How? Through enhancement sales.

"The beauty of [selling enhancements] is that it's not new construction where you're competing with other bidding contractors," Johns expressed. "The [client] has already chosen the contractor - it's me."

Unlike having to reduce the percent profit to keep an installation bid competitive, Johns and other landscape contractors who deal with enhancements can propose projects from \$200 to upwards of \$30,000 knowing they'll make a pretty penny.

A DEFINING MOMENT. Encompassed in the realm of enhancements are also add-on services, with which most landscape contractors are very familiar. Like enhancements, add-ons allow contractors to supplement the number and type of services they provide to a given customer, without the pressure of competition to drive down the percent profit. In both cases, revenue goes up.

However, the services covered under the title "enhancements" are significantly different from those in the "add-on" category. "To us [an enhancement] is anything that enhances the landscape outside the normal seasonal maintenance," explained Chris Randall, commercial grounds management department manager, Bland Landscaping Co., Apex, N.C. "It's something that changes the landscape - walkways, installing shrubs, trees, adding flower beds."

Unlike add-ons, enhancement sales can often reduce clients' maintenance needs as well as solve problems maintenance crews may have on a regular basis, such as mowing in hard-to-reach areas.

(continued on page 106)

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Selling Enhancements

(continued from page 104)

"We always look for ways to do an enhancement and potentially save on maintenance costs – especially in this economy," Randall noted. "Right now [clients] are looking to cut a lot of costs so we may end up having to cut maintenance, which reduces that revenue. By getting enhancement revenue, we can balance things out."

To help out mowing crews, Johns and his other managers suggest enhancements in strategic areas for easier maintenance. "My managers will notice that the mowing crews have to go back to the truck and pull a weedeater out because the mower doesn't fit in a certain place," Johns described. "They'll tell me, 'It might be better if we enlarged this bed or placed a giant fan palm in this spot.' Things like that can enhance the landscape and help out with our efficiency as well."

Many contractors also find that, for clients who aren't necessarily looking to cut maintenance costs, adding enhancements can actually boost the maintenance contract on that



Strategically placed flower beds make life easier for mowing crews and any property can benefit from small beautification projects. Photos: Coastal Greenery

property and bring in even more revenue. For instance, installing an ornamental tree in a yard can persuade a client to buy into mulching and pruning services as well.

EYES WIDE OPEN. After defining which services belong in the enhancement category, contractors must remember that selling enhancements also requires a different approach from selling add-ons. As opposed to being awarded a maintenance or installation job and subsequently mentioning other services a company offers, selling enhance-



ments requires a certain degree of comfort with the client and the property and a keen eye for finding problem areas. Knowing that any lawn can benefit from periodic aeration is one thing, but understanding that a strategically placed plant bed can solve a mowing problem is a different skill.

"The sales representatives and account managers always need to have their heads up and bring opportunities to my attention," stressed Ed Mason, landscape manager, Aspen Corp., Daniels, W.V. "They can tell me,

(continued on page 108)

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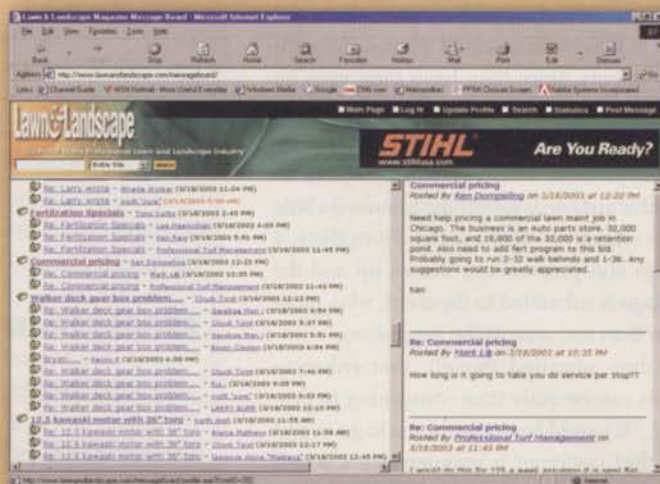
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Posted By Mark & Terry Herrin

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Re: Fuel Surcharge?

Posted By Andrew Hardscape

Terry,
I believe you can do this without paying an attorney. As far as the fuel surcharge, I would work it:

In the event fuel/gasoline prices reach and/or exceed \$1.75 at the pump a "fuel surcharge" of \$2.00 will be applied to each mowing/visit/monthly billing statement, and you get the picture.

Posted By Sammy

How much more gasoline cost per customer will you be using?

If you can mow four 10,000-sq.ft. yards with a gallon of gas at \$2.00, that is an increase of only 7.5 cents per yard. Now, why would you expect a customer to pay 2 extra bucks?

Posted By Andrew Hardscape

Not sure how you operate there Sammy, but most mowing companies must transport the equipment to the property via truck. And they also must pick up mower parts and other related objects via car and truck! Which in turn means that gasoline/fuel is used.

It all ads up!

Selling Enhancements

(continued from page 106)

"This customer could really benefit from this and we may be able to make an additional sale.' Someone has to be on the ball in order to recognize this."

Communicating with crewmembers and field managers is essential when selling enhancements, since they have their eyes on the sites most often. "I have two field managers and between the three of us we'll see certain problem areas in the landscape or an area that just needs something to make it a little more attractive," Johns noted. From there, a design and proposal are drawn up and the package is submitted to the client, who, more often than not, accepts the suggestion.

Johns admitted though, that enhancements can be quite time consuming to propose. "It would be easier for me to go in and sell that customer a maintenance job and start working on that right away," he mentioned, explaining that since some clients do waver on the idea of paying for several

(continued on page 110)

Selling enhancements and selling add-on services involve similar tactics and both increase revenue, but the range of services covered by each category is different for a couple of reasons. For one, enhancements are installations applied to existing landscapes to help beautify what is already there. Add-ons, however, are often maintenance services sold to supplement existing maintenance contracts.

"With add-ons, you could be putting down \$200 worth of mulch in a yard, and that still beautifies, but add-ons are necessary to keep that yard maintained and looking nice," commented Jeffrey Johns, president, Coastal Greenery, Brunswick, Ga.

Another reason to separate enhancements and add-ons is that enhancement work may require a different crew than the maintenance-style needs associated with add-ons. "For flower planting, we'll bring in crews that specialize in that, but the maintenance of the flowers falls under regular maintenance," noted Chris Randall, commercial grounds management department manager, Bland Landscaping, Apex, N.C.

Because of these differences, determining which jobs belong in which category is important. Here are a few examples of where most contractors felt certain extra services belonged:

ENHANCEMENTS

Tree or shrub installation
Walkway installation
Strategic plant bed installation
Reshaping of plant beds
Replacement of dead or damaged material

ADD-ONS

Pruning trees and shrubs
Mulching beds
Aerating and overseeding lawns
Spring and fall clean-up
Edging around walks or plant beds

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Selling Enhancements

(continued from page 108)

thousand dollars worth of additional work, closing sales can be tricky. Still, enhancement sales pay off. "Enhancements are more rewarding because there are always possibilities for a yard to look better and it's your job to find them."

Account managers who work with Randall look for those opportunities regularly. "When the account managers walk the sites with the clients, they see things that might need to be enhanced or changed. That's where it starts," Randall described. "We try to walk the properties at least once a quarter and some sites are every month."

Account managers note client requests or possible enhancement jobs in a lead tracking system to ensure that the potential job is on record. From there, larger jobs, like walkway installations, are routed through the commercial grounds management department where designs are drawn up, approved by the department head and proposed to the client by the account managers.

For smaller jobs where high-level involvement is unnecessary – installing a tree or shrub, for instance – account managers work directly with their supervising branch managers to get the job done.

"I find that customers really do appreciate [enhancement proposals], so the effort is good on both ends," Mason expressed. "The customer appreciates you being on top of things. They feel that they're being cared for – that's what they want you to do."

Mason admitted that he regrets not being able to be on all his properties all of the time – a problem that many contractors run into when selling enhancements.

"Right now we have a three-month backlog of enhancement work that we spent all winter selling, and we don't even push enhancement sales that hard," Johns mentioned. "Our goal this year was to focus on maintenance because as long as we're sell-

"The beauty of [selling enhancements] is that it's not new construction where you're competing with other bidding contractors." – Jeffrey Johns

ing maintenance, enhancements seem to follow. In the springtime it does consume me as a salesperson – about 80 percent of my time is focused on enhancements because that's when most people want to have things planted and looking good."

PROFITABLE POSSIBILITIES. After being in business for a few years, many contractors find that moving away from being all-purpose and specializing in one or two areas of work can increase profitability. Johns

(continued on page 112)

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Selling Enhancements

(continued from page 110)

went through that type of transition, and the move has had great benefits.

"The last few years we really got away from new construction and focused on our maintenance and landscape enhancements," Johns said. "It's great because most contractors don't see the benefits. They see the new house being built on the corner and they target it. I'll go to the older house next door and target that one." By keeping out of bidding wars and encouraging clients with established landscapes to supplement their investments, Johns is able to take on more work.

"There will be 10 contractors targeting that new construction and I'm the only one targeting the enhancement," he continued. "That's what I strive for. We go for the next-door neighbors."

For the most part, contractors offered that the average cost of the enhancement jobs they perform runs in the \$2,000 to \$8,000 range. At first blush, these figures may not seem to offset the revenue an \$80,000 new

construction would bring in, but contractors can make up the difference in increased profit margin.

"Enhancements are more profitable for a number of reasons," Mason noted. "I already know the customer and since you usually do not have to bid the work, you can get at least a 10 percent mark up on it."

"Instead of getting the typical 10- to 15-percent profit margin, you can aim up to 18, 20 or 22 percent," Johns detailed. "I don't usually go that high, but it's always more profitable."

In terms of what department collects the revenue from enhancement sales, strategies differ. Johns and Mason keep enhancement income separate from maintenance. Randall, however, applies the revenue to different department, depending on the presence of certain variables.

"Maintenance gets the revenue currently if the enhancement department does the work," Randall explained. "But if one of the other departments – such as residential in-

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Check our Online Extras section for more advice on selling landscape enhancements.

stallation – is lagging because of wet weather or another factor, if we've got a free day and there's something that needs to be done, they'll get the proposal." In a case like that, the enhancement department supervises the job, but the installation department receives revenue and expenses.

Keeping eyes open for enhancement opportunities takes a lot of time and effort, but the work keeps crews busy and revenue pouring in. Next time you're working on a high-paying (but high-stress) new construction job, take a peek at the neighbor's yard to see if it could use some sprucing up. **LL**

The author is Assistant Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine and she can be reached at lspliers@lawnandlandscape.com.



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SEMINAR DATES & LOCATIONS

Friday, July 25, 2003
Baltimore

Friday, August 1, 2003
Philadelphia

Friday, August 8, 2003
Northern New Jersey

Friday, August 15, 2003
Orlando

Friday, August 22, 2003
Ft. Lauderdale

Friday, September 5, 2003
Greensboro

Tuesday, September 9, 2003
Toronto

Friday, September 12, 2003
Atlanta

Friday, September 19, 2003
St. Louis

Friday, September 26, 2003
Chicago

Friday, October 3, 2003
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Seminar Time:
8:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.

Registration
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If you like to catch up on your sleep at out-of-town events, this conference is not for you. At my seminars we work from sun-up till sun down. I believe in giving folks their money's worth and with the power of *Lawn & Landscape* magazine and its website, I'm sure we'll sell this bad boy out.

Anyway, let me make a few more points in case you aren't sold yet. The other presenters I have coming to this event are A-1, top grade. They include sales and marketing experts and one of my very best students who will share what he has learned from my seminars on how to grow his business. Last year he grew from \$1.3 million to \$2.1 million!

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Get on your horse and come see us in July!

Cordially,

Marty Grunder

PS - If you don't come, I only hope that your chief competition does not!

PPS - We should have our heads examined for only charging \$495 for this event!



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CONFERENCE PROGRAM

Thursday, July 24, 2003

- | | |
|-------------------|--|
| 9:00 – 12:00 p.m. | Facility Tour
Groundmasters, Inc. |
| 1:00 – 5:00 p.m. | Registration |
| 2:00 – 2:30 p.m. | Welcome Cowboys: Introductions, Ice Break |
| 2:30 – 4:00 p.m. | Target Practice: Aim Your Message at the
Watch Your Results Explode
<i>Speaker: Marty Grunder, Marty Grunder! In</i> |
| 4:00 – 5:00 p.m. | Putting The Gitty Up Into Sales
<i>Speaker: Ed Eppley, Dale Carnegie</i> |
| 5:00 – 6:00 p.m. | Welcome Reception |

Friday, July 25, 2003

- | | |
|--------------------|---|
| 7:00 – 8:00 a.m. | Breakfast |
| 8:00 – 9:00 a.m. | Team Presentations & Assignments |
| 9:00 – 10:30 a.m. | 11-Step Selling Process, Part I
<i>Speaker: Marty Grunder, Marty Grunder! In</i> |
| 10:30 – 10:45 a.m. | Break |
| 10:45 – 12:00 p.m. | 11-Step Selling Process, Part II
<i>Speaker: Marty Grunder, Marty Grunder! In</i> |
| 12:00 – 1:30 p.m. | Group Networking Lunch/Team Photo |
| 1:30 – 3:00 p.m. | How To Hire The Right Sales Person
<i>Speaker: Marty Grunder, Marty Grunder! In</i> |
| 3:30 – 3:45 p.m. | Break |
| 3:45 – 4:30 p.m. | Here's What I've Done with Marty's Marke
<i>Speaker: Matt Caruso, Decra-Scape</i> |

Saturday, July 26, 2003

- | | |
|--------------------|---|
| 7:00 – 8:00 a.m. | Breakfast |
| 8:00 – 9:00 a.m. | Team Presentations |
| 9:00 – 11:00 a.m. | What To Do When The Other Guy's Price
<i>Speaker: James Bleech, Leadership Develo</i> |
| 11:00 – 12:00 p.m. | 57 Fun, Cheap, & Different Marketing Ide
<i>Speaker: Marty Grunder, Marty Grunder! In</i> |
| 12:00 – 12:30 p.m. | Closing Ceremonies |

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	NUMBER	TOTAL
Full Conference Registration	_____	@ \$495 = _____
Group Registration (two or more same company)	_____	@ \$395 = _____
Facility Tour (Thursday, July 24)	_____	@ \$20 = _____
TOTAL	_____	_____

CANCELLATION/REFUND POLICY/CONFIRMATIONS

All cancellations must be made in writing and faxed and mailed - voice mails and e-mails will not be accepted. A full refund will be issued if the cancellation notice is received by July 10, 2003 business days prior to the seminar. No refunds will be issued after that day or for no shows. Advance payment is required for registration. Attendees can notify *Lawn & Landscape* at any time that another individual will attend the conference in their place. All registrations postmarked by July 10, 2003 days prior to event will be acknowledged by mail. *Lawn & Landscape* reserves the right to cancel a program due to insufficient registration or instructor emergency. A full refund of registration fees will be issued if this occurs.

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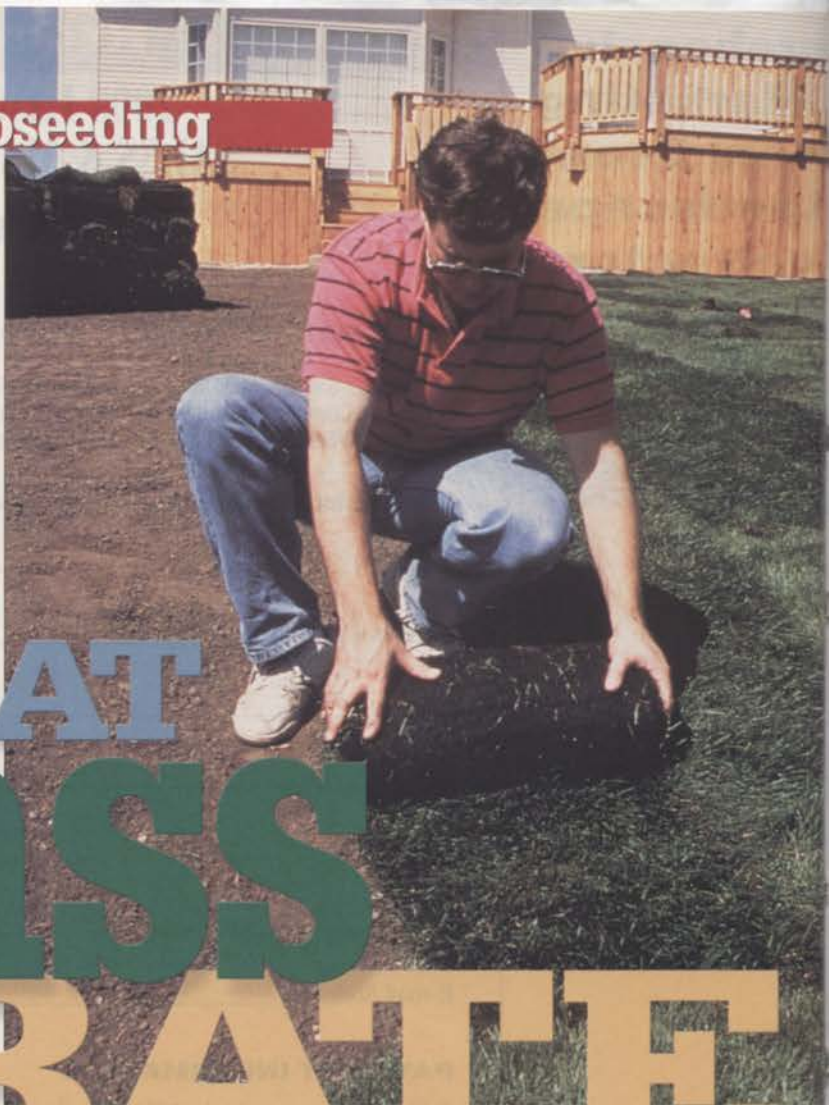
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Seeding/Sodding/Hydroseeding

By Ali Anderson

Sodding, seeding and hydroseeding. Contractors share their views about which is the best approach when establishing a luscious lawn.



The GREAT Grass DEBATE

No yard is complete without a thriving carpet of green grass.

But, while turfgrass may be the most basic element of a landscaped property, deciding on a method of grass installation can complicate matters. Contractors have three competing options when faced with the task of turf installation: sodding, seeding and hydroseeding.

- Sodding is the process of applying strips of turfgrass to prepared soil, creating an instantly mature lawn.
- Seeding refers to the application of selected turfgrass seeds to prepared soil, allowing it to grow to maturity.
- Hydroseeding is the term used to describe the application of slurry – a mixture of water, grass seed, fertilizer and fiber mulch – to a site where clients desire turf.

While these approaches may produce similar results, industry professionals insist there are obvious distinctions associated with each. Hence, the great grass debate – with “opponents” presenting arguments about price, quality and installation differences among the three application options.

PRICE POINTS. Attaching precise figures to each grass-application method is not feasible, since prices vary according to location.

“Price is really tough in terms of specifics,” explained Doug Fender, executive director, Turfgrass Producers International, Chicago, Ill. “There are regional and local variations.”

(continued on page 118)

Sod installation boasts a collection of proponents in the grassy debate over lawn-establishment methods. Similarly, hydroseeding and seeding have garnered support from industry professionals who favor other installation methods.

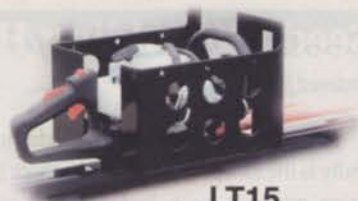
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Seeding/Sodding/Hydroseeding

(continued from page 116)

However, Fender noted that sodding generally is the most expensive of the three installation methods, with hydroseeding placing second and basic seeding boasting the least expensive prices.

"Sodding is the most costly approach," agreed Sean Gassman, owner, Fairway Greens Landscape Services, Garland, Texas,

and president, Hydro Turf Planters Association. "A consumer who is buying sod is literally paying someone else to raise the grass for them."

Costing an average of 30 cents per square foot, the price of nurtured sod for an entire property can climb easily into the thousands of dollars. Yet, the required follow-up

maintenance and potential risks are minimal.

But if a property owner wants to save money, seeding is an option, Fender noted. Although prices vary depending on location, seeding applications come out least expensive.

However, a customer who opts for seed will end up paying with personal time spent tending to the grass, Fender observed. Plus, there's the looming risk of washout, poor seed germination and weed infestation.

In the pricing discussion, hydroseeding boasts low application prices as well. Considering all materials and labor, hydroseeding costs about 2.65 cents per square foot, calculated Rob Yoakum, global sales coordinator, Finn Corp., Fairfield, Ohio.

QUALITY Q&A. Regardless of the costs associated with turf installation, quality is a top priority for contractors and property owners alike. Contractors can achieve the desired result – a vivacious, hearty lawn – through any of the three application meth-

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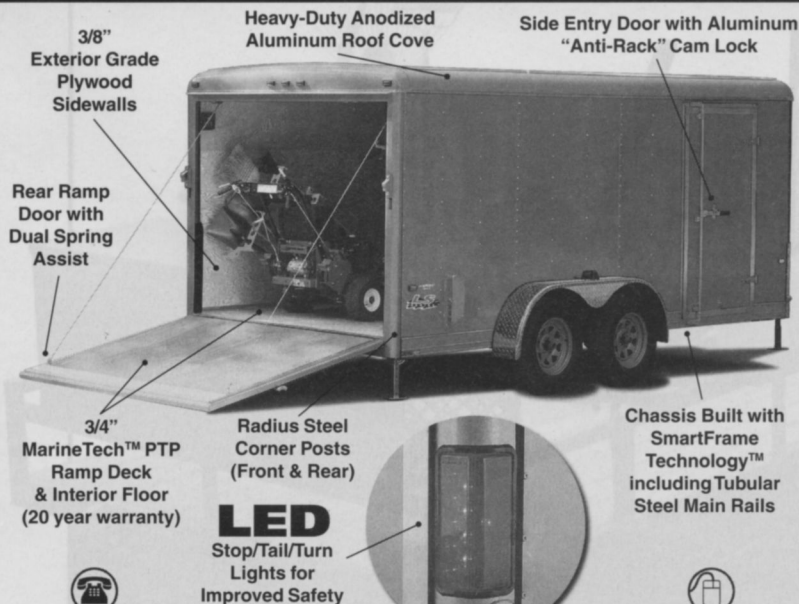
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Careful soil preparation prior to any turf application is a wise investment. Follow these eight steps before laying sod, applying hydroseed materials or spreading seed on a property to ensure high-quality results.

1. Clear the site of all building materials, as well as any buried stumps, rocks, stones or other debris larger than 2 to 3 inches in diameter.

2. Roughly grade the entire area to eliminate any drainage problems on the property. This would include sloping the grade away from building foundations, eliminating or reducing severe slopes and filling low-lying areas. A tractor-mounted blade and/or box are most often used for rough grading, but if the area is smaller, it can be done with hand tools.

3. Complete initial filling, to a depth of at least 2 inches prior to adding any topsoil or soil amendments. This will control most annual weeds, alleviate subsoil compaction, and permit a bonding of the topsoil to the subsoil, improving root penetration and water movement.



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ods. However, professionals maintain that quality varies among the methods.

"Quality refers to how healthy the plant is," described Marc Bowers, vice president of marketing, Finn Corp. "The root system should be well-developed, and the grass should be thick – not spotty. Color is also key. It should be a lush green, not brown."

Given these elements of high-quality grass, Bowers noted that any of the three methods could establish a successful lawn.

However, there generally are more complications with the basic seeding approach, Gassman asserted. "Seeding is the least efficient way to get high-quality grass," he said. "A high amount of seed is required because the majority of it will die."

Seed applications often struggle with erosion, rainfall washout and spotty growth, Bowers added.

By comparison, hydroseeding helps with erosion control by covering seeds with mulch materials that can protect it from the elements. The mulch layer locks essential ele-

ments in and keeps harmful substances out, Bowers explained. As a result, hydroseeded lawns rarely welcome weeds.

"The mulch holds everything in place and retains moisture," Gassman agreed. "It keeps the seed adequately moist for germination and establishment."

Within a few months, there may not even

be a visible difference between a hydroseeded lawn and a sodded lawn, Gassman maintained. "Often the hydroseeded lawn is healthier than the sod because it has never grown any place else. The hydroseeding material doesn't have to adapt."

Sod quality generally can be determined by a close look at the uniformity of color,

4. Add topsoil to achieve a total depth of 4 to 6 inches after firming. The topsoil should be a loamy sand, sandy loam, clay loam, loam, silt loam, sandy clay loam or other soil suitable for the area.

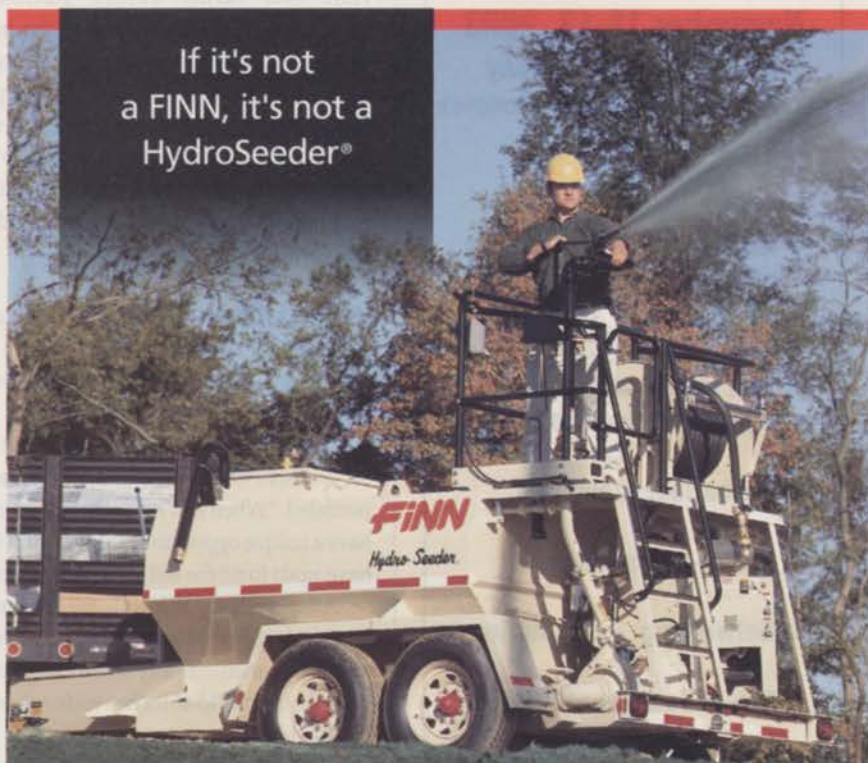
5. Test the soil pH with a chemical soil test to determine if the soil requires any pH correction materials. Improve acidic soils (pH of 6 and below) with the addition of lime. And improve alkaline soils (pH of 7.5 and higher) with the addition of sulfur or gypsum.

6. Apply "starter fertilizer" that is high in phosphate at a rate recommended for the particular product. To prevent root injury to newly installed turfgrass sod, work this fertilizer into the top 3 to 4 inches.

7. Finish grade the entire site, maintaining the rough grading contours and slopes, with a tractor-mounted box blade on large areas or heavy-duty rake on smaller sites.

8. Roll the area with a lawn roller one-third full of water to firm and settle the surface and reveal any low spots that need filling to match the surrounding grade surface. – *Turfgrass Producers International*

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Seeding/Sodding/Hydroseeding

texture and plant structure. "There is variation from species to species," Fender recalled. "However, if you walk a field and look at three pieces of sod, those within in the same species should look the same."

Strong roots also indicate high-quality sod, Fender noted. "You should be able to take hold of one end and not have the sod fall apart."

Contractors and property owners can visit sod farms before purchasing materials, to get a clear idea of the investment they intend to make. And seeing the sod up close can be a real selling point, Fender noted. "The reason people purchase sod is that they're buying a known, visible product," he reminded. "In my opinion, that's why people spend money for sod vs. a bag of seed."

INSTALLATION INSIGHTS. Actual installation for the three methods varies quite drastically. But regardless of the method, soil preparation is always necessary.

"We recommend soil prep to be the same for all three of the processes," Gassman expounded. "When you're installing a lawn, you have a unique opportunity that you may never have again to rid the soil of weeds and debris."

After priming the soil, the application process begins. When sodding, contractors and crews methodically install large rolls—ranging from 12 to 48 inches wide—of freshly cut turfgrass.

"The sod rolls are laid out and placed in a brick-like pattern," Fender expressed. "That way, you don't have one continuous line of seams, and you don't have gaps."

This repetitive process is time consuming since workers must constantly carry the



Regardless of which method a contractor chooses when installing a lawn, soil preparation is a must. The site should be cleared, graded, inspected and treated with a lawn roller. Photo: Turfgrass Producers International

sod rolls, which can weigh up to 1,000 pounds. Depending on the size of the property, application could take a few hours or a few days, Fender shared.

In contrast, seeding and hydroseeding generally require less time and less people.

The basic seeding application, often referred to as broadcast seeding, entails one person walking throughout the site, distributing seed with a spreader. The seed is spread evenly across the ground and covered with straw for protection and stability. This process, when applied to a residential property, generally takes one person a few hours.

Hydroseed applications require similar manpower and time. When applying hydroseed materials, a one-man operation can use a tank and hose to cover several acres in a day. **LL**

The author is Assistant Editor - Internet for Lawn & Landscape magazine and can be reached at aanderson@lawnandlandscape.com.

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Business-focused get-togethers offer owners valuable, outside insight.

Business Teams

by Kristen Hampshire

Outsiders know more about your company's insides than you might think.

Make small talk with an industry peer. Treat a retired executive to lunch. Introduce yourself to a new business owner in town. Call all three and form a team. The key is connections, and these outside professionals can provide valuable business growth advice without personal bias or financial stake in settings from formal meetings to casual phone conversations or e-mails.

"The best ideas business owners get often come from people outside the company who aren't caught up in day-to-day affairs or politics," confirmed Barry Cain, managing director of strategic services, Blackman Kallick Bartelstein, an accounting and consulting firm in Chicago, Ill. "People on the outside are not necessarily smarter, but they have a vision because they have separation."

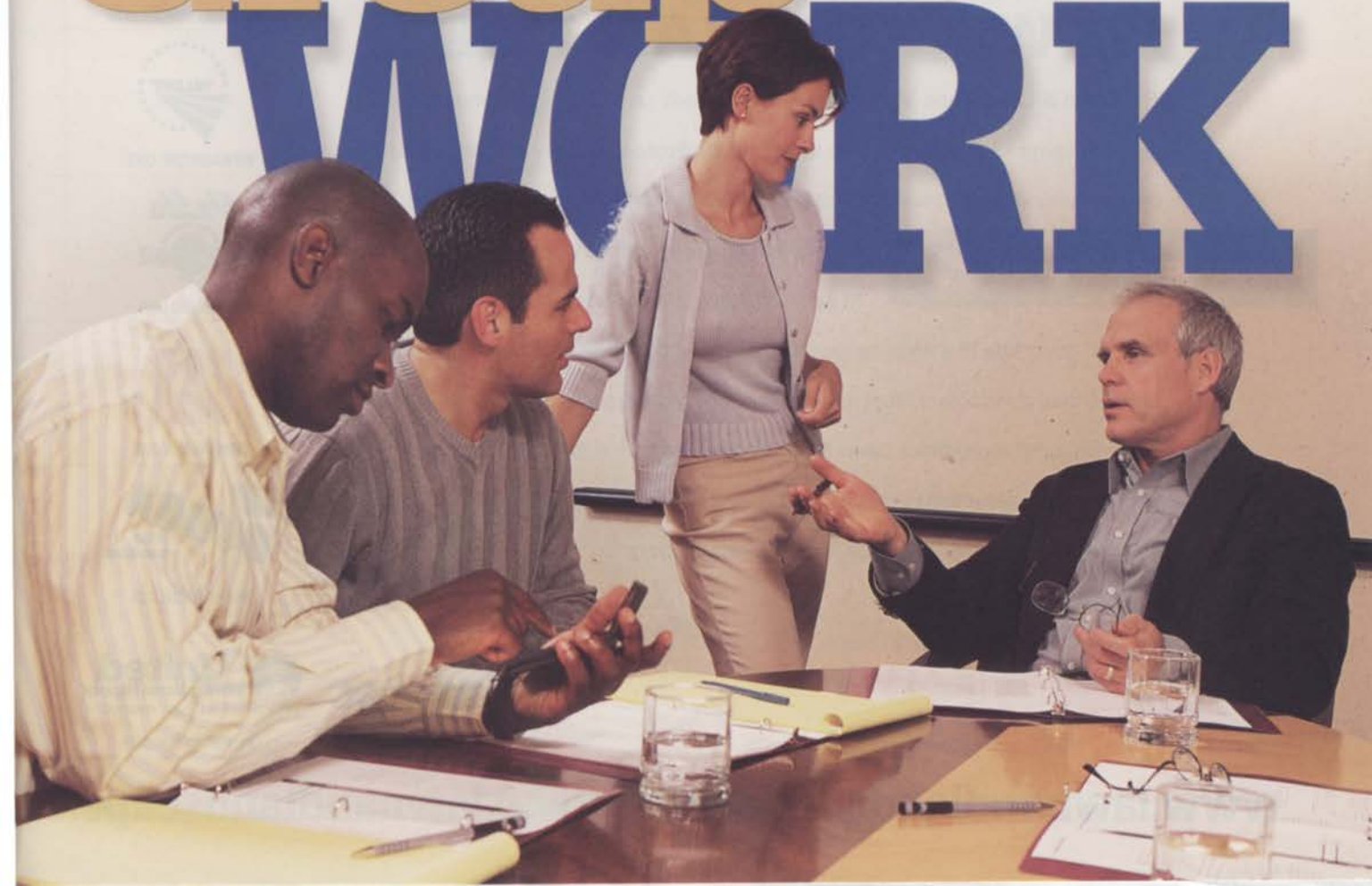
Management skills, human resources and business planning aren't contained to the green industry, and seasoned professionals from other industries can offer helpful, alternative business suggestions.

CASUAL CONTACT. Brad Miller turns to a long-time mentor, Larry, for advice—especially when he is "up against some kind of a conundrum." Miller's 20-plus years of industry experience still don't supply answers to every question, so he looks for feedback from the outside.

"Larry is similar in that we run service routes and we're in a business-to-business business," explained Miller, president of Interior Plantscapes, Ft. Myers, Fla. He shares breakfast and shop talk with Larry regularly. "He is an older, wiser guy, and I can call him up and say, 'I'm having

(continued on page 124)

Group WORK



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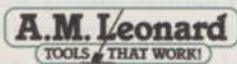
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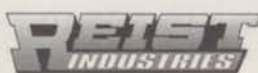
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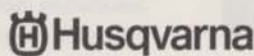
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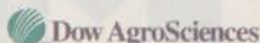
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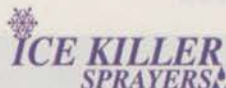
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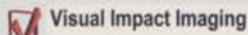
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Business Teams

(continued from page 121)

a problem with this,' and he always gives me great advice."

Advisory boards—business teams, boards of directors or mentoring groups – often sprout from this type of informal communication. And alliances like this are not difficult to form, pointed out Steve Woods, co-owner, Five Seasons Landscape Manage-

ment, Columbus, Ohio. Woods finds "spur of the moment" conversations lead to learning opportunities.

"When you talk to someone, find out a little bit about what they do," he suggested. "If you see an opportunity where they might do something similar to what you do in regards to sales, safety, employees or opera-

tions – whatever it may be – talk about it."

"Similar" doesn't narrow the field to landscape contractors. Woods gathers safety tips from his insurance agent, sales techniques from a friend in a different industry and business planning advice from a retired executive who worked at retail giant The Limited. The conversations aren't staged or scheduled – casual talk taps helpful advice.

Tom Heaviland considers a conversation with a friend who supplies him a service quite different from his own – Porta-Johns. "I got a letter from him because he is now charging a surcharge on fuel and adding it to every invoice," he explained, noting that he considered a similar practice to recover this burden. "I called him to see how it was working and to ask if he was getting any backlash from this."

Besides consulting other companies in his rolodex, Heaviland meets contacts at local association meetings like the Building Owners and Managers Association, which attract various contractors and potential customers. These strategic alliances help build his business repertoire when he can supply clients with services other contractor friends offer, he added. (See sidebar below for a list of helpful advising associations.)

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www.boma.org

U.S. Small Business Administration

www.sba.gov

The Executive Committee

www.teconline.com

Young Entrepreneurs Organization

www.yeo.org

International Facility Management Association

www.ifma.org

Associated Landscape Contractors of America

www.alca.org

Professional Lawn Care Association

www.plcaa.org

Professional Grounds Management Society

www.pgms.org

Savvy Sources

Business Teams

Matthew Morgan tightens strategic ties at a standing Friday lunch date with an eclectic group of service professionals. Seated at the table is a construction worker, a plumber, an electrician, an equipment salesman, a concrete contractor, a roofer, a fence builder, a tree technician and a couple of farmers – and Morgan, owner of Emerald Landscape Management, Danville, Ill.

"It's a nice network of people and we help each other out," he remarked. "We talk about what is going on in town, inside information on projects and our businesses, and there is usually at least one business deal that transpires each week. When one of us has a job and we need someone from another field, we use that person or company to do the sub-contracting, or just refer the work to them."

The lunch gang probably wouldn't find these contacts in their own databases, and discussing how each contractor bids, schedules or handles operational problems usually sparks ideas that Morgan digests later at the office.

Business owners without such scheduled meal reservations should practice the art of observation. Marty Grunder sticks to a simple mantra when scouting "winners" who might have something to teach him. "Success leaves clues," he recites. "Every time there is someone who is successful, there are some clues there. There are distinct reasons why that person was successful and if you ask questions, you might find answers that will help you grow your company."

STRICTLY SPEAKING. Simple connections can evolve into more formal "adviser" relationships. Rather than casual comments, these sessions usually start with an agenda, follow with goal setting and assessment, and end with deadlines.

Most of all, formal advisory boards, boards of directors or individual mentors, demand accountability. Realistically, most employees don't ask their bosses when, why or how, pin them to deadlines or measure their results. "[Outside professionals] can challenge the owner of the firm in certain ways people on the inside can't," Cain said simply.

Formal meetings challenge entrepreneurs to justify their processes, evaluate their progress and define their paths.

This is why Allan Davis and the two other high-level managers at R.A.R. Landscaping, Baltimore, Md., rely on executive



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Business Teams

coaches. "When you get high up in an organization, there are very few people to hold you accountable," noted Davis, vice president. "The executive coach functions in that way. He has assisted me in having a review process with the people who I report to or who report to me to get blind feedback on how I'm doing as a manager."

R.A.R. Landscaping connected to these resources through its lawyer. The professionals aren't free – they can cost owners up to \$150 per hour – but the two coaches' business acumen and seasoned resumes hold corporate credentials. Davis meets with his coach each month for about an hour, and he keeps a binder with notes on their discussions. He can reference these materials in between their sessions and review what goals he set to accomplish before the next meeting.

"I started off mowing lawns, and when your company gets to a certain point that you need to have other skills, you need to look for those skills, and executive coaching is one

way to do this," Davis explained, adding that his mentor's mistakes and experience with different sized companies offers insight and are always worth noting. "Landscape companies usually start off in an entrepreneurial mode, and if you are going to grow, you need to move to a corporate mode. Most of us don't have the tools to do that."

Part of bridging these two phases at R.A.R. Landscaping includes fine-tuning internal communication. Since landscape owners generally work very closely with their employees, personal ties often prevent necessary intervention.

"There are very few people who have the skill to have that very honest, open communication because there are so many things that can get in the way," he pointed out. Someone from the outside can come in and they are blunt and direct and honest, and they can cut through the garbage and get to the heart of the matter, and they force you to put issues out on the table."

Quick TIP

When Brad Miller swaps information with other business owners, he always asks for their business forms like customer surveys, service order forms, work orders and other inter-office forms. These useful tools keep him from "reinventing the wheel," and allow him to see how other businesses manage their paper trails. Find a selection of business forms by logging onto www.lawnandlandscape.com/tools/businessforms.

Of course, this honesty can blow the ego at first, admitted Grunder, and not all owners are ready to run their companies through the wringer. "I wasn't ready for strangers to rip me apart and know how to handle it," he said of his first, formal board of advisers. The dynamic is quite different now – a new board formed several years ago with carefully selected members follows a detailed, quarterly

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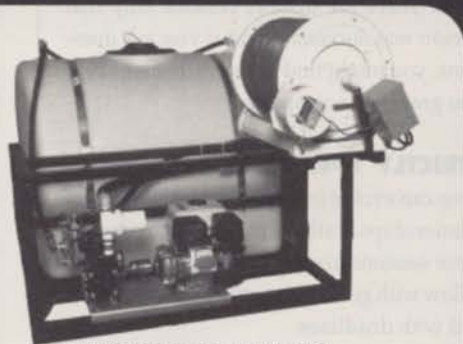
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agenda, and Grunder is ready to accept criticism – and put it to use in his business. He pays each of the three outside board members \$500 for each meeting and he provides them with industry magazines, his marketing materials and regular e-mail updates on business progress.

In return, they “shake it up.”

“One is a finance guru, the other is an expert in entrepreneurship and the other is in the area of strategic planning,” Grunder described of the members, highlighting their varying personalities. “I’ve become pretty good friends with one of them and another has been a fatherly figure to me. The other one is abrasive, he shakes me up, and I love him because I need that.”

PERSONALITY TRAITS. There are other qualities business owners need in an advisory group or individual coach – honesty, confidentiality, patience and strength to question current systems are some of them.

“You have to have someone who you can’t buffalo,” Miller translated. “If they aren’t at your same level of business or higher, you can tell them something you are doing and they might say, ‘Yeah, that sounds good.’ If you get someone a couple levels above you in business – more successful or older or more experienced – they might say, ‘No, I don’t agree with you.’”

“You want someone who is not impressed by your successes,” Miller added. “You want someone to challenge you and your ideas.”

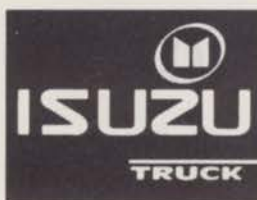
Regarding business size, Heaviland finds working with an industry peer who runs a business several times his size presents a sort of crystal ball. Specifically, when he wanted to learn more about adding tree services, his mentor, Wayne Richards, vice president, Cagwin & Dorward, Novato, Calif., supplied him from-the-trenches advice, even extending an invitation to tour his facility.

Richards and Heaviland talk each month – same time, 9 a.m. on Tuesdays, same place,

in their respective offices over the phone. Discussion on fuel prices, competition and the economy usually fills some air space each month, and the two find that despite company size – Richards’ is more than \$25 million while Heaviland’s is closer to \$4 million – they are never short on conversation.

Mark Lay experiences this variety with an eight-person group he meets for dinner after monthly Carolina Grounds Management Association meetings, and the differences draw new ideas and perspectives to the table, said the owner of AA Tex Lawn Co., Charlotte, N.C.

“We have some companies that run 20 trucks and others that run two trucks and we have a county extension agent on the board,” he described of the group, which started meeting a few years ago for dinner after their post-association meeting chatter turned into prolonged industry discussions. Since then, the landscape contractors have shared thoughts on issues ranging from Hispanic



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labor to crew structure.

"Any time you have a varied crowd, it adds to the outcome of the meeting because you get different perspectives depending on who is asking the questions," he remarked.

Lay extends his industry idea-swapping to competition, as well, figuring the "secrets" he spills during his conversations can better the industry if another contractor improves professionalism. Although, he admits that not every contractor feels so diplomatic. "I hear other people say they wouldn't talk to their competitors and I'm thinking, 'You're missing out,'" he said. "There is no better insight than someone who has been through what you are going through."

Local contacts can provide vital information on market labor rates, percentage of labor to revenues, overhead costs and even policies like rain days and vacation time, Heaviland pointed out. Contractors who work states away can't provide this targeted, regional insight, he said. This is why his

circle of "outsider" friends includes entrepreneurs from both schools.

Local owners lend specifics, national contractors allow him to talk to some of the "industry bests," he figured.

"You can get a lot of information from seminars, but through this type of forum is how you really learn – by talking to other contractors and spending time with them," Heaviland emphasized, adding that owners should lose their competitive streaks in cases where sharing information can benefit both parties, like sharing incentive ideas.

While adding regional and national voices to an outside board provides peripheral perspective, there are some individuals owners can leave out: accountants, lawyers and bankers. Cain explained that since these professionals work for owners on a regular basis, contractors should explore other professional opinions. "(Accountants, lawyers and bankers) are available to you anyway, so you have access to them," he said, noting

that owners might construct an entirely different outside board and include these professionals. "What works best is to consult with people other people who are not our normal advisers and who do not need to retain your business – and who can tell it like they see it."

All these parameters might overwhelm a business owner looking for a sounding board or just an outside opinion. But the help is readily available – if you only ask, Grunder encouraged.

"The hardest thing for an entrepreneur to say is, 'I need help,'" he related. "If you can make yourself vulnerable and ask for help, you will get help and you will find that there is a multitude of people out there willing to give you advice. You just have to learn how to ask."

The author is a Contributing Editor to Lawn & Landscape magazine and can be reached at khampshire@lawnandlandscape.com.

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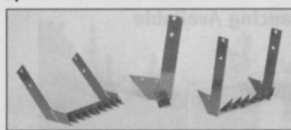
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For comfortable operation, the handles are height adjustable and can be folded flat for convenient transport and storage. A kick stand is provided to protect the blades during

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USE READER SERVICE #108

Landscape Fabrics

by Enloe Wilson

Chances are, few people consider the rough-and-tumble green industry a venue wherein participants anticipate and discuss the latest in fabric trends. What's going on in the world of textiles seems more the stuff of Madison Avenue conversation.

But in fact, fabrics do hold a significant place in landscape contracting, being an important instrument in erosion control, drainage and soil stabilization. Moreover, fitted around plant materials and then covered with a layer of mulch or rocks, landscape fabrics can save contractors hours of manual weeding for seasons to come.

In an array of sizes, compositions and constructions, there's a wide material world out there, and knowing a bit about landscape fabrics and what they can offer to the jobsite can help contractors considerably.

HISTORICAL FABRIC. Landscape fabrics or "geotextiles," as manufacturers know them, began their growth in popularity about 30 years ago. Preceded by the widespread use of herbicides as a means to control weeds and black plastic sheeted material as a way to manage erosion and separate decorative surface aggregates from substrate, these fabrics—made of a variety of synthetics—seized their niche primarily as a result of the rising environmental consciousness of the early 1970s, suggested Jason Eaton, marketing coordinator, Sikeston, Mo.-based Dewitt Co.

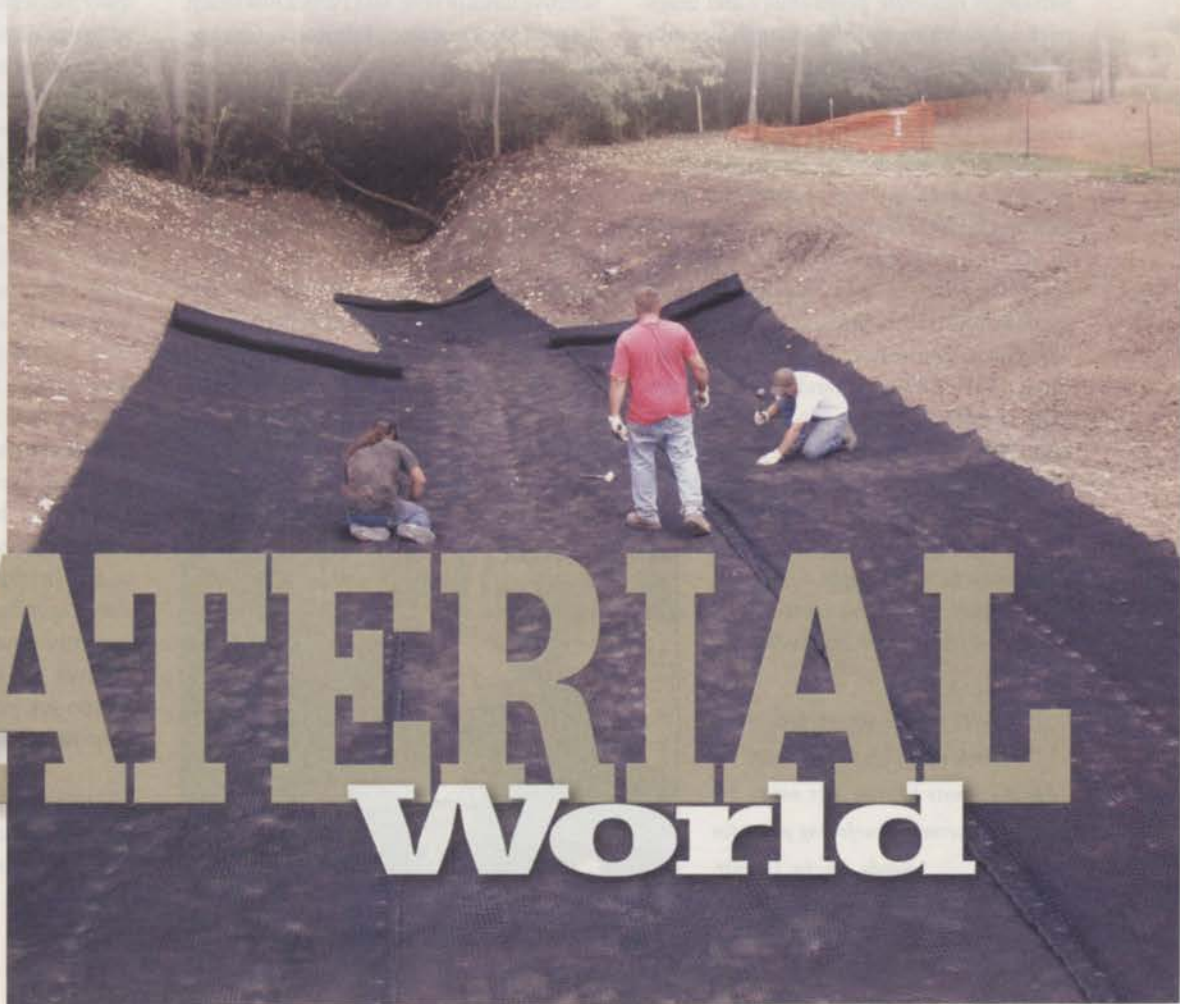
An increasing body of science at the time suggested chemical additives likely were delivering harmful side effects to terrain and helpful organisms that lived within, Eaton said. Also, "while plastic effectively served some barrier purposes—suppressing weed growth, for example—it also wasn't permeable, prohibiting infiltration of air, water and other nutrients to soil," he shared. "This can cause damage to the terrain and hindrance of plant growth or even death."

Attempts to develop more environmentally friendly applications led to experiments with a

With many uses in the landscape, textiles are more than just fashion fodder.

With proper installation, geotextiles can be instrumental in everything from weed and erosion control to slope stabilization and proper hardscape footing.

Photo: International Erosion Control Association



A
MATERIAL
World

variety of materials, and eventually polypropylene became the favored compound. "Because polypropylene is naturally black (and up to 97-percent UV-stabilized), it inhibits light to weeds," Eaton said. "Yet it breathes in woven form, allowing the transference of necessary elements."

Use of fabricated polypropylene, now largely imported, caught on like wildfire among U.S. contractors, Eaton said, and by 2000, Dewitt estimated that geotextiles comprised a domestic market commanding more than \$100 million annually.

MODERN TAILORINGS. Today, geotextiles enjoy both healthy ongoing commercial activity and rising popularity. Based on those varied applications, new landscape fabric formulations come with a variety of characteristics to suit particular needs.

Geotextiles come in two primary stocks—woven and nonwoven. Kevin Pfeifer, technical sales manager, CSI Geosynthetics, Vancouver, Wash., outlined the differences.

"Woven materials consist of two fibers, or slit tapes, woven together like clothing fabric," he explained. This traditional micromesh pattern offers moderate permeability and bears minimal stretching and high strength. Because of its durability and structural permanence, a woven fabric is excellent for heavy-duty separations (rock from underlying soil, for example), slope stabilization or ground reinforcement under pavings, construction footings and possible high-traffic areas, he said.

Nonwoven textiles are formed from fibers bonded together by punching thousands of small, threaded barbs through a loose filament web, Pfeifer contrasted. The barbs are withdrawn, leaving the fibers randomly entangled. "The overall effect is a felt-like sheet with better flow than a woven fabric," he said. This, coupled with superior elasticity, best lends nonwovens to areas where high water transport is important, but ruggedness isn't—flower beds, for example.

Spunbonded textiles, a sort of heat-fabricated subset of nonwovens, are

Experts remind contractors to cut fabric openings wide enough for desired plants to grow, yet not so big as to permit a surfacing point for weeds. Photo: Dewitt.

perhaps the most general-purpose landscape fabrics, Pfeifer continued. While thin, these fabrics offer a compromise between the strength and elasticity of wovens and nonwovens, respectively, but have a permeability superior to both, making them well-suited for mulch separation and general drainage and plant bed applications.

Commercial grades of these geotextiles range in price based on quality and thickness. According to Brad Yount, Dewitt's senior sales coordinator, prices span from roughly 3 cents for a 1.5-ounce square foot of spunbonded fabric to about 9 cents for a comparable measure of 6-ounce woven fabric. Pfeifer chimed in with a cautionary reminder, however, that "with gas prices currently going up, contractors can expect increases in [petroleum-based] polypropylene anywhere between 6 and 10 percent in coming months."

Other niche barrier materials are seeing the light of day, Pfeifer shared. Some include trifluralin-filled fabrics for root deterrence near hardscape edgings and low-permeability polymer liners for pond installations.

Other more rapidly biodegradable fabrics serve the purpose of erosion control during selective times of year, said Patrick Blackburn, national sales manager, Fabricscape, Chicago, Ill. "Many people won't go with polyethylene fabrics for certain uses because they want something temporary. For many of those cases, [manufacturers] offer materials like jute, straw or polyjute."

Pfeifer added that for the less-specialized landscape applications usually given to polypropylene fabrics, "some producers have introduced polyester-based [alternatives], which generally work well and are a bit stronger." He cautioned, however, that ester-based textiles are generally woven, providing limited flow and elasticity where contractors need those properties in the field; and they're generally more expensive to end-users, because



Check out Online Extras section for tips on how to install landscape fabrics.

the cost to produce ester fabrics is notably higher than polypropylene.

Pfeifer, Blackburn and Yount said their respective companies wouldn't rule out the research and development of useful, alternative fabrics, but they agreed polypropylene will likely maintain its dominance. With accessible costs and an average field lifespan of about 10 years, "[this favored material] remains the most cost-effective, longest-lasting product for the widest variety of uses," Pfeifer suggested.

LOOMING DEVELOPMENTS. Geotextile demand continues to grow as more and more contractors seek barrier solutions that are successful, cost-effective and environmentally sound—and manufacturers are reacting to those needs in a variety of ways.

"We're working on introducing additional common roll sizes," Pfeifer said. The move will bring better cost-effectiveness to both small maintenance jobs that might require incidental measures of fabric and large-scale installations that demand many sheets of the materials, he explained.

For some manufacturers, marketing and quality are among the upcoming focuses.

"Luckily, fewer people are using plastic these days as they're realizing just how bad it is for soil and plants," Yount said. "But chemicals still present us with some competition where weed control is concerned." To gain an ever-increasing share of the solution mix, "we're trying to establish some recognition of what landscape fabrics can do and how they are more environmentally protective," Eaton added.

"At the same time, we'll be focusing on durability," he continued. "Even at a 10-year-plus lifespan, we want to justify the cost of our product all the more. Some people think spending \$15 on a roll of fabric is expensive, but we want to drive home that if it saves the time of having to weed each season for years to come, it's definitely a solid investment." **LI**

The author is Associate Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine and can be reached at ewilson@lawnandlandscape.com.

A spotless shady site and successful sod installation highlight this year's Picture Perfect-winning Landscapes.

Picture Perfect

by Nicole Wisniewski

Best of SHOW

SUCCESS IN THE SHADE

CHALET LANDSCAPE

Lake Forest, Ill.

PICTURE PERFECT LAWN AWARD

Cool-Season

Turf – Residential

"Making a mostly shady lawn look this green and lush is hard, especially in mid- to late summer," said Bill Leuenberger, explaining why he chose this particular client's property to enter into the Picture Perfect Lawn Awards, sponsored by *Lawn & Landscape* magazine and the Professional Lawn Care Association of America. "To actually install and continue to grow such great-looking turf in shade like this – you can tell just by looking at the photo that the turf has been there awhile and is thriving."

Leuenberger, Chalet Landscape Co.'s lawn care manager, and his team have maintained this residence for three years. Throughout the year, the fine fescue and Kentucky bluegrass mix lawn receives five organic fertilizer applications and some pest control, though the shady backyard area needs minimal amounts compared to the sunnier, more weed- and disease-susceptible front yard. "We do five applications annually and go out another two times to check for problems," Leuenberger said. "Also, our maintenance team is on the site weekly doing the mowing, edging and trimming, so we can keep a close eye on the property."

Maintaining the site's many annuals takes additional work, including watering, fertilizing and deadheading. But monitoring the moisture levels the fine fescue turf receives to protect it against rotting or drying out is the most challenging part, Leuenberger said. "Either the turf doesn't get enough moisture because the tree roots take it all up or if it stays too wet, it becomes moldy," he explained. "What we've found in shaded lawns is that you get more rotting type diseases – for instance, Kentucky bluegrass gets powdery mildew. The turf gets so wet that we can't do anything about it. I tell clients that you can always add water, but you can't always take it away. Water replaces air so we have to educate clients that if rain is coming, hold off on irrigation on shady sites."

One of the ways to increase airflow and light to the turf to help reduce dampness is by properly pruning the surrounding trees so there's not so much turf cover, Leuenberger advised. Also, Chalet uses organic fertilizer on this site and Leuenberger feels that the lower nitrogen count helps discourage disease like necrotic ring spot, which feeds on nitrogen. On the other hand, for sunnier locations, fertilizers with higher nitrogen levels help guard against dollar spot, which thrives on a lack of the nutrient. "You just have to know what diseases you're fighting and what situations encourage them to thrive," Leuenberger suggested.

But Leuenberger doesn't want to take all of the credit for making this site shine. "With this lawn the customer is very interested in his property," he explained. "He calls and asks us questions about his turf if he thinks he sees a problem so we can take care of it early on. That's how we create the best lawns – when we're partners with clients in caring for their turf."



COMMERCIAL ALL-STAR

Springfield, Ill.-based Weed Man has cared for the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame's trees and lawn since 1985.

Two years ago, a downtown Springfield revitalization brought about construction of a new, 4-acre Hall of Fame. "Our related landscape company did the project installation," pointed out Tom Mauer, Weed Man - Springfield president, referring to Mountain View Landscapes, which added brick pavers with basketball-shaped insets near plaza entrances as design focal points.

Mountain View installed the Kentucky bluegrass sod on the site, and Weed Man uses four applications of granular slow-release fertilizer as well as grub and crabgrass control to keep it healthy, Mauer said.

If enough heat and humidity are present, crabgrass germination threatens Kentucky bluegrass. Weed Man keeps the turf dense and prevent crabgrass breakthroughs by continually monitoring the irrigation to ensure the turf receives proper water and applying a preemergent herbicide once annually. When a crabgrass problem does result, Weed Man eliminates it with a postemergent herbicide application. **LL**

The author is Managing Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine and can be reached at nwisniewski@lawnandlandscape.com.

WEED MAN

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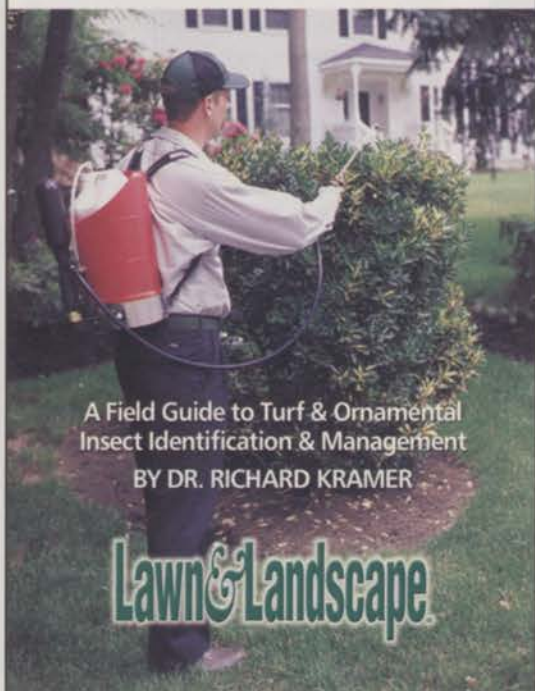
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- Features a direct-drive system with a variable-speed, bi-directional, gerotor-style hydraulic motor
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- Operates to a maximum depth of 48 inches (1219mm) and maximum width of 10 inches (254mm)

Circle 200 on reader service card

Bradley 48-inch Commercial Mower

- Industry-standard components
- Greaseable spindles
- Built for commercial use

Metal Forms' Poly Meta Forms

- Polyethylene forms for pouring concrete
- Allow contractors to put down more sidewalks, landscape curbing, driveways and other concrete features in a short time
- Lightweight and easy to use

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- Combination of copper shade and stem intended to develop natural patina
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- Includes 8-inch, non-corrosive stake

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- Zero-turning radius
- Full, floating deck suspension

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Little Beaver's Towable Unit

- Towable hydraulic earth drill
- 11-hp Honda engine and 6-gpm hydraulic system
- Holes up to 16 inches in diameter
- Removable tow bar takes only seconds to install or remove
- Forward and reverse controls allow one-person operation
- Turf tires allow maneuverability without damaging turf

Circle 204 on reader service card

Water Watcher DPS-100 System

- For use with residential and light commercial irrigation systems
- Designed to take the guesswork out of managing an irrigation system
- Simple installation requires only minutes from start to finish
- Features moisture threshold adjust dial and red/green indicator lights
- Auto/bypass switch
- Calibration button

Circle 205 on reader service card

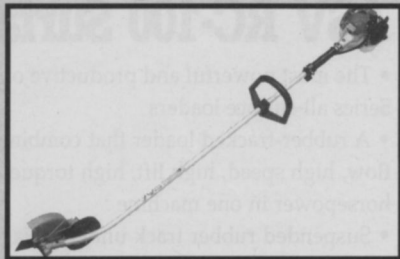
- 7-gauge fabricated steel deck
- Dual belt drive
- 5-speed Peerless transmission
- Nine spline couplers
- On/off switch
- Mulch kit (optional)
- Grass catcher (optional)
- One-year commercial warranty

Circle 206 on reader service card

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- Curved shaft allows the operator to edge hard-to-reach places
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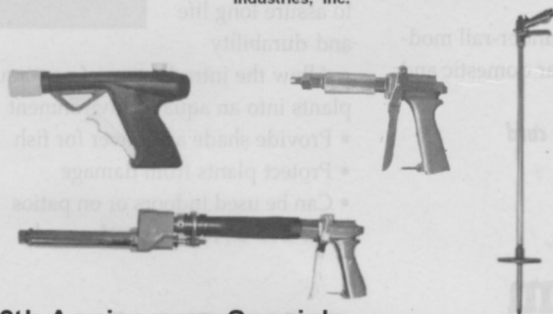


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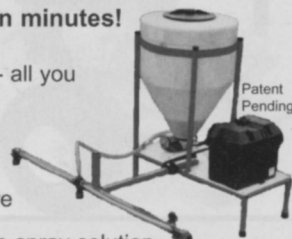
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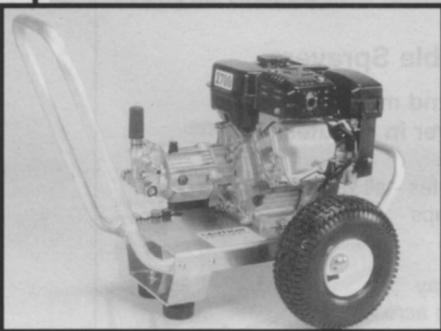
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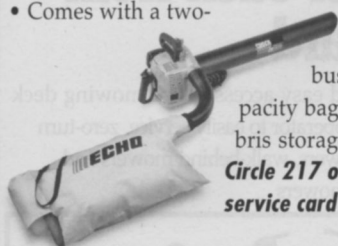
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Cargo Safety Net from Safety Web Products, Inc.

- Tie-down and sling, combination heavy-duty mesh tarp and cargo net

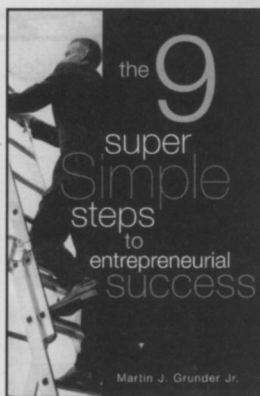
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cutting deck

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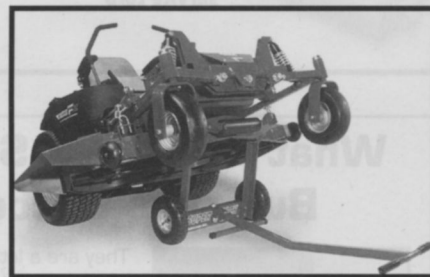
Grass Gobbler Turbo 10 from Wright Manufacturing

- High-capacity grass-catching system
- Designed to fit all Wright Stander, Sentar Velke models
- Three intake venturis and perforated steel panels function as a simple venturi system, lifting grass away from the walls
- Increased velocity results in tighter grass packing and eliminates the need for expensive PTO fans and ductwork
- Curved front directs grass to the back of the catcher, keeping it from clogging the mower

Circle 223 on reader service card

Super Jack from Ballard

- Safe and easy access under mowing deck
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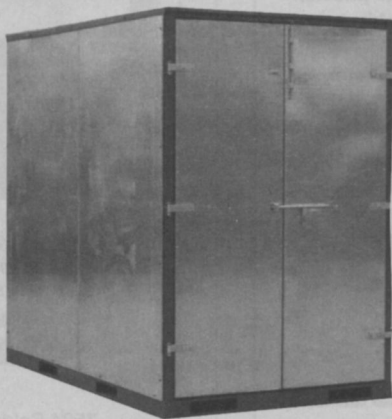
- Stronger than previous Ballard models
- Powder-coated finish
- One-year warranty

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Pro-Box by Havener Enterprises

- Portable storage container
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Bunton ZT-1250 Mower

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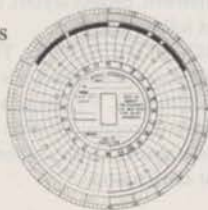
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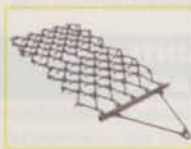
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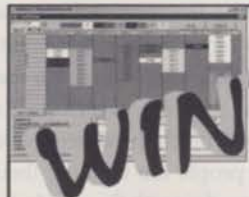
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District Sales Manager

Vista Professional Outdoor Lighting, the nation's fastest-growing landscape lighting manufacturer (located in Simi Valley, CA), is seeking highly-motivated individuals to develop new sales territories and call on existing accounts in key markets. Qualified individuals will implement sales and marketing programs, and will handle technical and field support for Vista's expanding line of low voltage and line voltage products. They will also be asked to liaison with landscape architects, designers, landscape contractors and distributor personnel. Qualified individuals will have 5 to 7 years of experience in industry sales. Various territories available. Competitive compensation and benefits package.

Send resume and salary history to: Cruz Perez, Vice President of Marketing, Vista Professional Outdoor Lighting, 1625 Surveyor Ave, Simi Valley, Calif. 93063 or Fax: 805/527-6830.

HELP WANTED

VISTA PROFESSIONAL OUTDOOR LIGHTING

Factory Trainer

Vista Professional Outdoor Lighting, the leader in landscape lighting and factory support (located in Simi Valley, CA), is looking for candidates with strong communication skills to conduct factory tours, training and seminars at the Simi Valley manufacturing facility. Qualified candidates must have 3 to 5 years of experience with installation, voltage drop, cable sizing, design layout, photometrics, and proper transformer and lamp selection.

Send resume and salary history to: Cruz Perez, Vice President of Marketing, Vista Professional Outdoor Lighting, 1625 Surveyor Ave, Simi Valley, Calif. 93063 or Fax: 805/527-6830.

HELP WANTED

VISTA PROFESSIONAL OUTDOOR LIGHTING

Field Trainer

Vista Professional Outdoor Lighting, the nation's fastest-growing landscape lighting manufacturer (located in Simi Valley, CA), is seeking motivated individuals who will work in the field to train contractors and distributor personnel on proper design, installation and troubleshooting techniques. Qualified individuals will work closely with local factory representatives and must have hands-on experience with voltage drop, cable sizing, design layout, photometrics, and proper transformer and lamp selection. Various territories available. Competitive compensation and benefits package.

Send resume and salary history to: Cruz Perez, Vice President of Marketing, Vista Professional Outdoor Lighting, 1625 Surveyor Ave, Simi Valley, Calif. 93063 or Fax: 805/527-6830.

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VISTA PROFESSIONAL OUTDOOR LIGHTING

Independent Electrical Representatives

Vista Professional Outdoor Lighting, the leader in landscape lighting for the specifier, contractor and distributor, is looking for independent electrical representatives in several markets. If you would like your company to be considered, please mail or fax a resume and line sheet to: Cruz Perez, Vice President of Marketing, Vista Professional Outdoor Lighting, 1625 Surveyor Ave., Simi Valley, Calif. 93063 or Fax: 805/527-6830.

Cover Story

(continued from page 52)

And with the new structure in place, the company also has learned the best ways of communicating with property managers. One way to please these commercial clients is by sending them weekly faxes with a checklist of what was done on their properties that week and notes on any particular problems that need their attention and if there are additional costs to fix those problems. "That way, they know we've been there even if they didn't see us and it becomes a record for us and them," Daniell said.

In 2002, the company reached \$1.7 million in maintenance revenue – short of its three-year goal of \$2 million but close enough to consider successful, and it expects to reach \$2.1 million this year, Daniell enthused.

The plan is to keep construction revenue relatively flat and grow maintenance – pushing that service's revenue to \$4 or \$4.5 million in the next five years, Daniell said, adding that the company is 75 percent construction, 25 percent maintenance now, but the goal is to move that closer to 60/40 or 50/50 over time.

WALK, DON'T RUN. A future focus area for Heads Up Landscape takes the company back to its road first traveled – irrigation. With a four-year New Mexico drought, water management has become top priority, so the company is investigating alternative water management solutions.

Heads Up is currently experimenting with central irrigation control systems for clients as well as installing cisterns that collect runoff water and help a business use less water. "We're experimenting with ways to reuse water," Mallory said, adding that the company is also researching soil amendments that can increase plants' drought tolerance and has changed its plant pallet to incorporate more drought-tolerant plants.

For instance, there's a big push to remove a lot of old bluegrass lawns that require considerable amounts of water to survive and replace them with low-water-use turf. Incorporating gravel mulches and low-water-use perennials and native plants also helps. "A good chunk of our customers are going away from turf," Daniell said. "They can't have more than 15 percent of the landscape area as high-water-use turf anyway, so

they are thinking ahead about long-term maintenance and we're helping them."

The company is also researching new ideas – namely artificial sod. "We're trying to find leading edge ideas and see if there is a need for them," Mallory said.

And as long as Mallory and Daniell keep replacing their names with others on the organization chart, they have a chance to explore new ideas and maybe even take the company down a different road. "If I'm running on a treadmill to catch up, I can't take time to investigate new opportunities," Mallory explained, highlighting the emotional reasons that keep him driving on this business street. "I installed a few park trees around this one place I pass going to work everyday. It's amazing to see how much those trees have grown and now people are teaching their kids to ride bikes underneath them and picnicking underneath them. It's a great feeling to be able to create places like this and then find ways to keep them blooming." ■

The author is Managing Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine and can be reached at mwisniewski@lawnandlandscape.com.

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Establishing a Drug Policy at American Civil Constructors

In 1988, the U.S. Department of Labor passed the Drug-Free Workplace Act requiring companies holding federal contracts to maintain a drug-free environment and holding firms legally liable for many drug-related incidents that occur in the context of the job. With national statistics suggesting a high concentration of professional drug users work in service industries like contracting, the move struck a chord with American Civil Constructors (ACC). From that point, we felt we had to verify that our employees were clean, and a solid drug policy was the clear solution to mitigate our risks.

After our attorney guided us through relevant legislation, we needed to decide our testing parameters. We settled on testing new applicants to sift out those individuals who may later prove to be liabilities, and we chose to adopt at-cause drug tests based on two important factors—they could deter use because employees would know we'll test in the event of a mishap, and a positive result could substantially reduce or eliminate an employee's worker's compensation benefit should an accident occur.

We opted to test for the major drug types outlined by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMSHA): marijuana, amphetamines, PCP, opiates and cocaine.

Next, we scouted area laboratories to conduct our tests. SAMSHA's Web site offers a list of facilities in each state

with sample-handling protocols that meet federal testing and privacy standards. Lab fees vary based on local costs—ours charge just over \$30 per test. For testing in-house, kits of varying levels of detection are available. Ours, of fairly standard quality, cost about \$13 per sample and test effectively for the drug types outlined by SAMHSA.

Law requires positive results to be reassessed by a SAMHSA-certified medical review officer (MRO). These professional reevaluations are important in the case of a legal challenge, and while their fees range, our MRO expenses—including sealed and certified specimen shipment—are about \$20 per incident.

If an employee tests positive, our rehabilitation policy directs that worker, at his or her own expense, to submit to an in-depth evaluation that determines their level of use and the course of treatment they need. The employee cannot return to work until the evaluation has taken place, and following their

return, they must adhere to scheduled treatments and submit to random drug tests for up to one year. In return for their efforts, ACC allows

the employee to remain active with the company and promises not to consider their mistake during employee reviews. If they deviate from treatment, or if tests show increasing vs. decreasing levels of drugs in their system, we terminate them.

Once we outlined a policy, ACC developed a clear, written communication of it that we require employees to sign. Importantly, we also seized the opportunity to educate workers by gathering an array of drug-related information from local organizations and online resources. We occasionally discuss the issue at company meetings and added 10 hours of drug-related instruction to our annual supervisor training sessions.

Today, testing is the rule rather than the exception for contractors, as it heightens standards and reduces costs. Since instituting our policy, not only have we earned a 5-percent discount on worker's compensation insurance, but because we advertise as a drug-free firm, we also have established a positive reputation, attracting non-using applicants and yielding respect as a responsible service provider. —John Rovedo ■

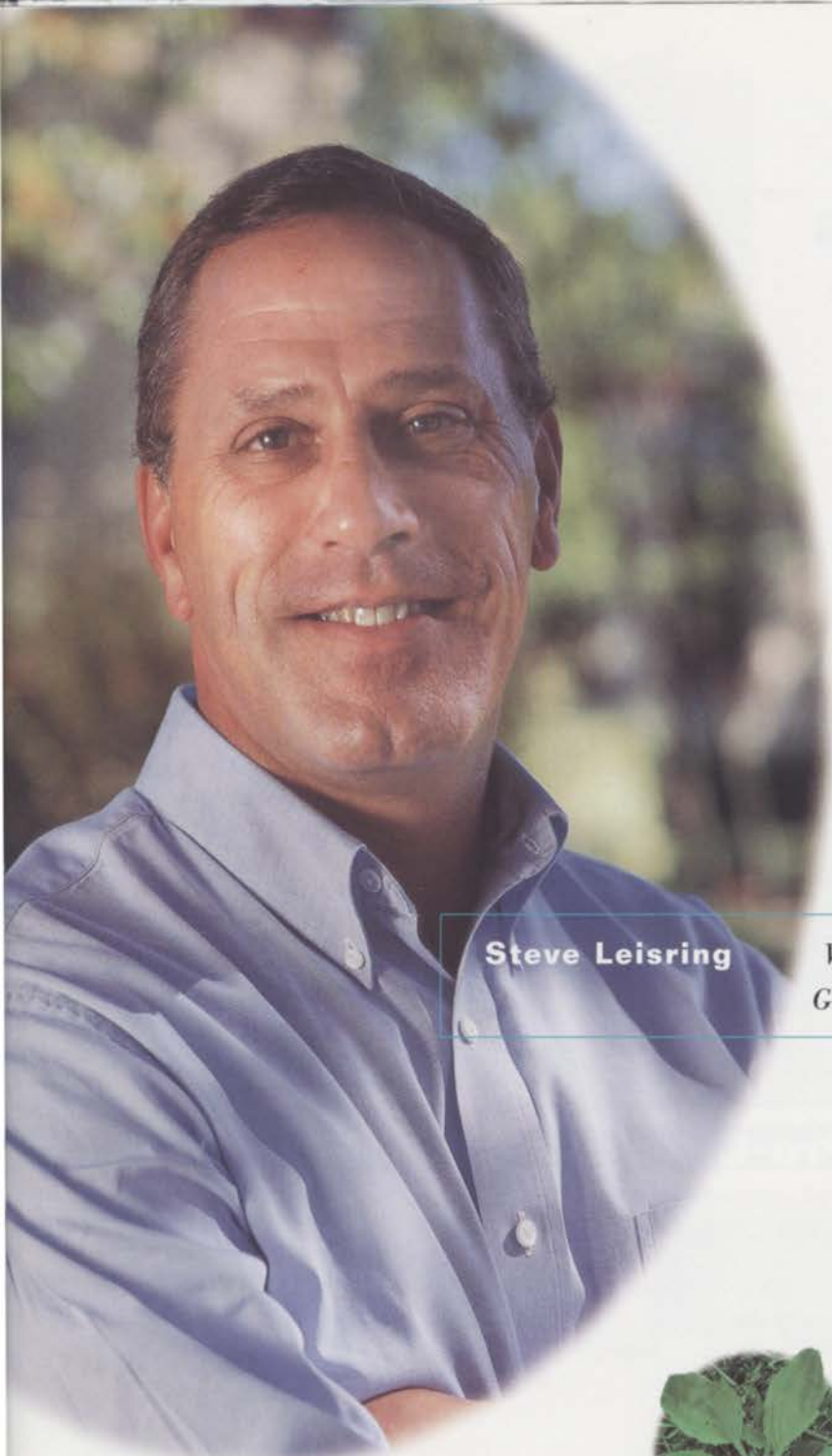
The author is senior safety manager, American Civil Constructors, Lakewood, Colo., and can be reached at 303/730-4527.

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Check our Online Extras for additional information related to company drug policy guidelines.

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1. Follow U.S. Department of Labor, state and other Federal guidelines to implement a clear, written drug policy that all employees must sign.
2. Choose testing circumstances that both curb risk to your company and appeal to your corporate culture's sense of individual privacy.
3. Choose your testing facility carefully. Pay close attention to confidence policies and specimen-handling protocols.
4. Educate employees about drug use and consider implementing rehabilitation policies.
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Steve Leisring

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