

Lawn & Landscape

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STATE
of the
INDUSTRY
report

YEAR OF RESURGENCE

Even with rising costs, weather woes and delayed season starts in some regions, contractors report 2003 as a solid growth year.



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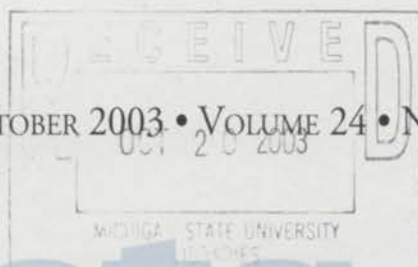
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contents

FEATURES



SPECIAL REPORT: STATE OF THE INDUSTRY

Year of Resurgence

Even with rising costs, weather woes and delayed season starts in some regions, contractors report 2003 as a solid growth year. **61**

A Conversation with Fred Whyte

Stihl's president offers his perspectives on product innovation, tightening legislation and how the company serves landscape contractors. **102**



Table Talk: Add-On Advantages

A roundtable discussion opens up ideas for profit-bearing add-on services. **110**

FEATURES

Passport to Success

Chris Sturm is quickly becoming a successful entrepreneur - 6,300 miles from home. **36**

Beyond Nitrogen

Adequate nutrition is one of the most vital components of a turfgrass management program. But nitrogen - though important - isn't the only nutrient turf needs. **54**

Up Against the Wall

Retention, drainage and increased real estate value: There are plenty of reasons to put up a wall and even more ways to fail miserably. **82**

Beating the Labor Burden Blues

When calculating the labor burden for field payroll or G&A overhead, there are many factors to consider. In part one of this three-part series on establishing annual budgets, James Huston helps you simplify the process. **92**

IRRIGATION PRODUCTS

Buyers' Guide

In this supplement, learn system troubleshooting tactics, backflow prevention solutions, sales methods for success and check out our irrigation products buyers' guide. **11**

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contents DEPARTMENTS

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Market Trends,
page 18



Look for this symbol throughout the issue for articles that have additional information online.

Editor's Focus	10
The Operating Room	14
In the Office	16
Market Trends	18
Calendar	20
On the Web	21
People	24
L&L Book Report	26
Nursery Market Report	33
On Paper	34
Product Profile	118
Products	120
Ad Index	132
Classifieds	133
How We Do It	138



Nursery
Market
Report,
page 33



Product
Profile,
page 118

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In recognition of Chain Saw Safety Month, Lawn & Landscape Online will offer detailed information throughout October to help industry professionals develop the smarts necessary for safe chain saw operation. Watch for weekly safety tips on lawnandlandscape.com, plus sound advice from industry experts. Specifically, learn how to choose the right saw, protect yourself and others with the proper apparel, safely maintain equipment and carefully operate saws.



Lawn & Landscape ONLINE Extras

ONLINE EXTRAS

Browse Lawn & Landscape Online for a collection of exclusive Web stories relative to this month's issue:

- This month, check Lawn & Landscape Online for tips to help you save time and money on retaining wall installation by planning ahead.
- Watch for detailed information about upcoming industry trade shows and conferences that may already be marked on your calendar.
- Visit Lawn & Landscape Online for detailed descriptions and photos of new products designed and manufactured specifically for the green industry.
- Look for a handful of new industry-specific business forms recently added to the collection of online business tools.

WEB TOOLS

DAILY NEWS

Green industry news updates every day. www.lawnandlandscape.com

INDUSTRY EVENTS

A comprehensive list of conferences, trade shows and seminars for the landscape professional. www.lawnandlandscape.com/events

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An easy-to-navigate directory of local, state, national and international industry associations. www.lawnandlandscape.com/associations

PRODUCT DIRECTORY

A growing compilation of industry products, complete with photos and manufacturer contact information. www.lawnandlandscape.com/product

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Searching for Value

Fickle customers, increasing competition from other mainline companies and finding ways to deliver "A-quality work on B-level budgets" were among the business issues expressed by owners of leading lawn and landscape firms at a GIE Media Industry Summit held August 13 to 15 in Cleveland. More than two-dozen leaders, representing leading landscape firms, pest control firms and industry suppliers, took part in the discussions regarding the current state of the industry.

While all of these issues are perennial business concerns, especially low-ball competition, industry leaders think the degree of the problem is increasing. In an age where virtually every product or service is a commodity, it can be difficult to justify the price

that allows a necessary profit margin. Faced with seemingly similar choices, people opt for the lower price – unless some value proposition makes paying more for more reasonable.

Dr. Deepak Siresukh, an assistant professor of marketing at North Carolina State University and the special guest speaker at the Industry Summit, has studied value creation. Dr. Siresukh shared a number of PowerPoint slides of his research regarding value creation. Here are some nuggets from his presentation that might help in your marketing and sales thinking:

- Building customer trust is central to building value. Trust is essential to the relationship that makes your company and services more valuable to your clients. Trust is also essential to drive referrals.

- Value is the sum total of the customer's perceptions of the total benefits vs. the total costs of doing business with your company. Value is what they get at the end of the day, but also the way it is delivered.

- Customer expectations of value can come from outside your industry.

- No company delivers the best of everything, so do you know what trade-offs your clients are making?

- Customer satisfaction is not enough to guarantee retention.

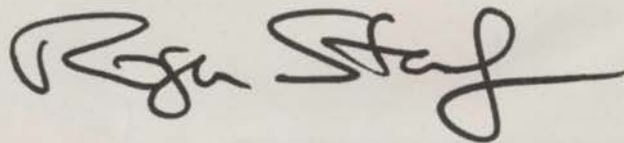
- Too many companies have a customer focus vs. a market focus. Having only a customer focus can be too narrow.

The end goal of your marketing efforts should be to create an arrangement in which your customers feel they could not get any more from any other company, and in which you feel the same regarding your customers. This last point is a challenge, Siresukh said, because it means working to get better customers, not just more customers. Profits improve with greater customer retention, but better retention begins with better customers.

To establish relationships with good customers requires four things, he added: (1) commitment to continuity, (2) mutual, voluntary motivation to share information, (3) confidence in the motives of the partner, and (4) respect for the partner.

For those gifted in details about dates, the blackout of 2003 became an unplanned part of the Industry Summit. The lights went out in Cleveland at about 4 p.m. on August 14th and didn't come back on until about 8 a.m. the next day. Witnessing a major city silent at night was eerie, but it didn't stop the group from pressing ahead with discussions. Everyone gained a new appreciation for a candlelight dinner, since that was the sum total of our lighting, and the fare was cold cut sandwiches, cold potato salad, cold rolls and, of course, wine.

The event was an interesting way for me to reconnect with some industry friends, make some new ones and hear firsthand about the business climate. I'm excited to be joining the *Lawn & Landscape* team with the goal of make the leading industry magazine even better. GIE Media has a strong tradition of creating value and a big part of my mission is to provide the information you all need to succeed in an increasingly competitive market. ■



Lawn & Landscape

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The Operating Room

Creating a Quality Scorecard

Quality is absolutely necessary if you are to succeed in the landscape business. When you observe the competition and the larger companies in particular, they all have one thing in common: Their quality is above average.

A quality result does not come easily. How often do you become frustrated with crews not producing a quality product? Green industry companies need to develop a quality-driven attitude among all employees, which becomes the cornerstone of the company culture. When everyone is focused on providing superior quality you will have a growing and profitable company, your morale will be higher and the phones will not ring with complaints. Moreover, no longer will you need to put out fires. Employees will enjoy coming to work each day and everyone's self-esteem will rise as you really start having fun.

How does all this happen? First of all, it has to start at the top. The owner needs to set the example and identify his or her definition of "quality." Oftentimes, quality is very subjective, so the standard for each company needs to be set by one individual, namely, the owner. As an owner, your challenge is to relay your quality standards to the field in a manner that they will understand and implement. My suggestion is that you literally "judge" the quality after the work is performed. This may sound unfeasible but this system is surprisingly easy and I know it works.

By developing a system that gives the crew a "score" for quality and identifying deficiencies, you are now communi-

Jack Mattingly is a green industry consultant with Mattingly Consulting and can be reached at www.mattinglyconsulting.com or 770/517-9476.



cating to the crew what needs to be corrected and what your definition of quality really is. Remember, this is somewhat subjective. This quality program must be adopted in its entirety and those in charge cannot drop the ball and stop visiting the sites and judging quality. I feel this is one of the top three job descriptions an owner must have in order to set up a company for growth and profits. Yes, there could be a time when an owner delegates this judging to a subordinate; however, I recommend that this responsibility be delegated to only one individual and not to all the managers or supervisors. Quality must be consistent.

To initiate a quality program, first establish the policies and procedures related to quality judging for landscaping installation, maintenance and any other company divisions. The policies might state that a minimum of three of each foreman's projects will be judged each month. Further, a policy may note that a score of less than "90" is unacceptable and list the reasons why. Company owners can tie quality judging to labor efficiencies on all of a crew's jobs in terms of budgeted vs. actual man-hours. Eventually, this can result in an incentive program rewarding the entire crew. With this approach, we can teach crews to walk the tightrope between quality and budgeted hours.

Owners will need to create a form to fill out in the field while judging each job. To do this, identify the areas, functions, categories, etc., that are important to your definition of quality and assign a value to each. The crew will score 100 percent in each category if all is perfect on a job. If a particular category is less than perfect, give a lower score and note the reason. Ideally, the available points in each category will add up to 100. The total points earned will give the crew its overall score on the project. (See a sample form, left.)

When developing your form, be sure to leave to make notes and comments as to what caused the score you gave. It is also very important to take this opportunity to note the "good job" when appropriate. We need to give these compliments often.

Become committed to providing quality at all times. Teach your subordinates the definition of quality and reward the achievers. **LL**

LANDSCAPING:

Plant Spacing	____(10)	Clean-up	____(10)	Patio	____(10)
Plant Depth	____(10)	Watering	____(5)	Walks	____(5)
Tree Depth	____(10)	Sod/Seeding	____(5)	Fencing	____(5)
Tree Rings	____(5)	Pruning	____(5)	Mulching	____(10)
Overall Appearance	____(10)				

Possible Score _____ Total Score _____

MAINTENANCE:

Turf Color	____(10)	Mowing	____(15)	Flowers	____(10)	Detail	____(5)
Tree Pruning	____(10)	Shrub Pruning	____(10)	Weeds	____(5)	Irrigation	____(5)
Ground Cover	____(10)	Pests	____(5)	Litter	____(5)	Overall	____(10)

Possible Score _____ Total Score _____

Judged by _____ Date _____



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USE READER SERVICE #16

So, You Want to Be a Manager?

Recently a client asked me to address a group of first-time managers and to focus my training on the top 10 things every manager must know about human resources. Wow! What a request. The challenge was limiting the list to only 10 items. Each day, managers face countless people challenges ranging from legal liabilities to personality conflicts. After reflecting on thousands of consulting engagements in hundreds of industries for more than 16 jam-packed years, I narrowed the list to the top 10 things every manager must know about human resources.

If you're considering management, you'll want to review this list carefully. If you have an aversion to any of these points, think twice about management. Becoming a successful manager takes effort, patience, wisdom, commitment and a desire to continually learn. One other point: management is about people. If you don't like working with people, management is not for you.

THE LIST. Here are the 10 things every manager must know about human resources:

1. The key to your success is to hire talent. And proper hiring takes time. If you're not willing to invest the time, you increase the risk associated with hiring. You can either hire hard and manage easy or you can hire easy and manage hard. If you choose to hire easy, your costs, risks and time investment down the road are all significantly higher.
2. It's a danger for employees to learn without training. There are four ways to train: hit-or-miss, sink-or-swim, trial-and-error or structured and systematic. You pick. Either way, developing people is your No. 1 responsibility.
3. None of us was born a good leader. Managing today is just not what it used to be. Today, it takes knowledge, wisdom, experience and, oftentimes, a trusted advisor. Find a mentor, read books, attend seminars and ask for help when you need it.
4. There are employment laws and regulations governing most of your decisions. Always run your management decisions (hiring, coaching, transfers, demotions, promotions, pay decisions and terminations) by a "jury" to ensure they are compliant, fair, legally sound and defensible.

Jean L. Seawright is president of Seawright & Associates, a management consulting firm located in Winter Park, Fla. For the past 16 years, she has provided human resource management and compliance advice to employers across the country. She can be contacted at 407/645-2433 or jlleggi@seawright.com.



5. You set the tone for the rest of the workers. As a manager, you are the company in the eyes of your employees. Your behavior and the choices you make can instill loyalty and dedication or anger and resentment in the hearts of your employees.

6. Sexual harassment = professional suicide. Don't engage in it, don't allow it, don't promote it (in jokes, e-mails, etc.) and don't ignore it if it's reported to you. The personal and professional liability is huge.

7. Little minds talk about people. Average minds talk about events. Great minds talk about ideas. Focus your efforts on objectives and outcomes, not problems or complaints about people. Influence thinking instead of trying to control results.

8. Avoid misdirected compassion. Don't keep a poor performer around because he or she is a nice person. Your actions send a strong and less-than-positive message to others (customers and co-workers) that you tolerate substandard performance. Your credibility is at stake!

9. You cannot manage everyone the same way. Get to know your employees. Focus on their strengths and learn about their unique personalities. Tailor your communication to each employee to promote buy-in, positive feelings and understanding.

10. Coach — don't discipline — your employees. You don't have to make people feel bad in order to get them to act good. Always gain agreement and a commitment to change when coaching.

FINAL THOUGHTS. Although these "truths" may sound simple, they can make the difference between your success or failure as a manager and leader. If you're a business owner, perhaps you'll want to review this list with a potential management employee to help determine if the individual is willing and able to assume responsibility for the challenges that come along with managing people.

If you're contemplating ownership, stay tuned... I will tackle the top 10 list for owners in the next issue. **LL**



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INSECT INSIGHTS

Emerald Ash Borer Devastates Michigan

In an attempt to combat an ash tree killing-insect, Michigan has added seven counties to the emerald ash borer quarantine list and put a one-year moratorium on the sale and movement of ash nursery stock to, from and within Michigan's Lower Peninsula.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture estimates that the borers have killed about 6 million of the state's estimated 700 million ash trees.

The new counties announced are Genesee, Ingham, Jackson, Lapeer, Lenawee, Shiawassee and St. Clair, bringing the number of affected counties to 13. Livingston, Macomb, Monroe, Oakland, Washtenaw and Wayne counties already have been under the state-ordered quarantine.

Under the quarantine, it is illegal to move ash trees, branches, lumber and other materials from the designated counties unless the wood is chipped to one inch in diameter. Firewood from any species within the 13 counties is banned from movement, which means that firewood purchased within the quarantined counties has to stay there.

(continued on page 28)



Photo: David Cappuett

BUSINESS BASICS

Creating Uniformity

"You never get a second chance to make a first impression."

This popular quote rings true, especially when your clients have hired your company and are seeing your crews work on their properties for the first time. To make that first impression memorable, do what more contractors are doing everyday and have your workers wear uniforms with company logos when they are on the job.

Establishing a uniformity code creates a clean-cut team and garners positive client feedback since they appreciate easy worker identification on their properties.

"The key is that employees go to a person's home and they want to project an image that the company is professional and the employees are clean and neat," stresses Neil Lazaroth, co-owner, Clean Uniform Co., St. Louis, Mo.

Uniformity means choosing a color, logo and overall image, Lazaroth adds, suggesting contractors set a company standard by ordering matching separates from a uniform service or catalog.

"A good baseball team is going to be wearing the same uniforms – the same color, same logo," he compares. "Uniformity projects quality, efficiency, reliability and a winning spirit – a winning team."

But contractors shouldn't skimp on uniform essentials. "If you send out a baseball team with just shirts on, you don't do the whole job," Lazaroth says. "They have the same socks, shoes, pants – a whole look."

Besides achieving a cohesive look, uniforms flaunt both economic and safety benefits. Studies suggest companies that provide employees with uniforms can charge more for their services, and their technicians are less prone to work-related injuries. "I think when people are in their own jeans," Lazaroth says, "then there's less concern about their personal appearance and their work tends to get sloppy."

Does your company require employees to wear uniforms?

RESPONSE	% OF CONTRACTORS
Yes	81%
No	19%

Source: Lawn & Landscape Online Survey

COST CONCERNS

Gas Prices Rise 6.3 Cents Since Mid-July

ORLANDO, Fla. – The average price of self-serve regular gasoline has increased 6.3 cents since mid-July to \$1.566 cents per gallon, according to the American Automobile Association's (AAA) daily online fuel gauge report.

This is the highest mid-August average recorded by AAA, topping the \$1.496 average of mid-August 2000.

The price increase comes after three months of relative price stability, when average prices hovered around \$1.50 per gallon.

Higher crude oil prices – currently around \$32 per barrel – and U.S. wholesale gasoline prices that remain high due primarily to low gasoline inventories and increased fuel demand from summer vacationers are the main reasons for the price jump.

One year ago, the nationwide average price of self-serve regular was \$1.404 per gallon, 16.2 cents lower than the current average.

Since mid-July, gas prices increased an average of 3.7 cents per

(continued on page 20)





Steve Leisring

*Vice President of Operations
Greenlon, Inc., Cincinnati, Ohio*

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Market Trends

(continued from page 18)

gallon in the West to \$1.712 per gallon. Average gas prices rose 8.6 cents per gallon in the Midwest to \$1.586 per gallon. Prices have climbed 7 cents in the Great Lakes region to \$1.607 per gallon, and moved 4.5 cents higher in the Southeast to \$1.486 per gallon.

Gasoline prices are up 5.5 cents in the Southwest to \$1.546 per gallon. In the Mid-Atlantic region, gasoline averages \$1.531 per gallon, an increase of 4.4 cents per gallon from one month ago. New England gasoline prices are up 4.6 cents per gallon since mid-July to average \$1.571 per gallon.

Nationwide, the price of self-serve, mid-grade averages \$1.663, 17.3 cents higher than last year. Self-serve premium averages \$1.723 per gallon, 17.9 cents higher than last year.

HOUSING STARTS

Home Builder Optimism Surges

Builders are optimistic as consumers look to buy homes before mortgage rates rise further.

Calendar of Events

TO ENSURE

that your meeting date is published, send an announcement at least 12 weeks in advance to

Lawn & Landscape Calendar,
4012 Bridge Ave.,
Cleveland,
OH 44113.

OCT. 8 Lawn & Landscape Business Management Seminar, Dallas, Texas. Contact: 800/456-0707 or www.lawnandlandscape.com/events.

OCT. 8-9 Southern California Turfgrass Council Turfgrass, Landscape and Equipment Expo, Pomona, Calif. Contact: 800/500-7282 or www.turfCouncil.org.

OCT. 11-13 American Nursery & Landscape Association Landscape Distribution Tour, N.Y. Contact: 202/789-2900.

OCT. 17-20 International Lawn, Garden & Power Equipment Exposition (OPEI), Louisville, Ky. Contact: 800/558-8767 or www.expo.mow.org.

OCT. 22-23 Garden Expo 2003, Toronto, Ontario, Canada. Contact: 800/265-5656 or www.gardenexpo.ca.

OCT. 22-23 Western Lawn & Garden Expo 2003, Las Vegas, Nev. Contact: 800/517-0391 or www.westernexpo.com.

OCT. 23-25 Northwest Green Industry Conference, Blaine, Wash. Contact: 800/833-2186 or www.walp.org/Events.htm.

OCT. 30-NOV. 4 American Society of Landscape Architect's Annual Meeting & EXPO, New Orleans, La. Contact: 202/363-4666 or www.asla.org.

NOV. 4-6 New York State Turfgrass Association Turf and Grounds Exposition, Rochester, N.Y. Contact: 518/783-1229

NOV. 5-8 Green Industry Expo, St. Louis, Mo. Contact: 888/303-3685 or www.gieonline.com.

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Market Trends

The National Association of Home Builders' (NAHB) measure of builder sentiment about sales and buyer traffic rose to 71 in August from an upwardly revised 65 in July.

Strong demand has come even as the rate on the 30-year mortgage has risen to 6.24 percent from 5.21 percent in mid-June, according to Freddie Mac.

Mark Vitner, senior economist, Wachovia Securities, Charlotte, N.C., says that rising rates will have little impact on home sales and economists say the signs of economic improvement that are pushing rates higher are also helping stoke demand for housing.

Housing sales should stay strong for at least the next several months because applications for mortgages to buy homes still are close to record levels, according to data from the Mortgage Bankers Association of America.

SUPPLIER STATISTICS

John Deere Reports Strong Third Quarter

John Deere & Co. reported worldwide net income of \$247.5 million for the third quarter

— a 68-percent increase over last year's figure of \$147.6 million for the same period.

A close look at the company's equipment division shows healthy figures. Compared with last year, division sales are up 18 percent for the quarter — and they increased 19 percent in the first nine months of the year. Operating profit increased to \$104 million for the quarter and \$237 million for nine months, compared with \$61 million and \$97 million, respectively, in 2002.

The company attributes improvements to the impact of expanded distribution channels. "These results build on the success of prior quarters and reflect strong sales of new products and the company's ongoing efforts to hold down costs and operate more efficiently at lower asset levels," observes Robert Lane, chairman and CEO.

Improved results were connected, mostly, to higher sales and growth in production volumes. Partially offsetting these factors were higher promotional and support costs related to new products, as well as

(continued on page 24)

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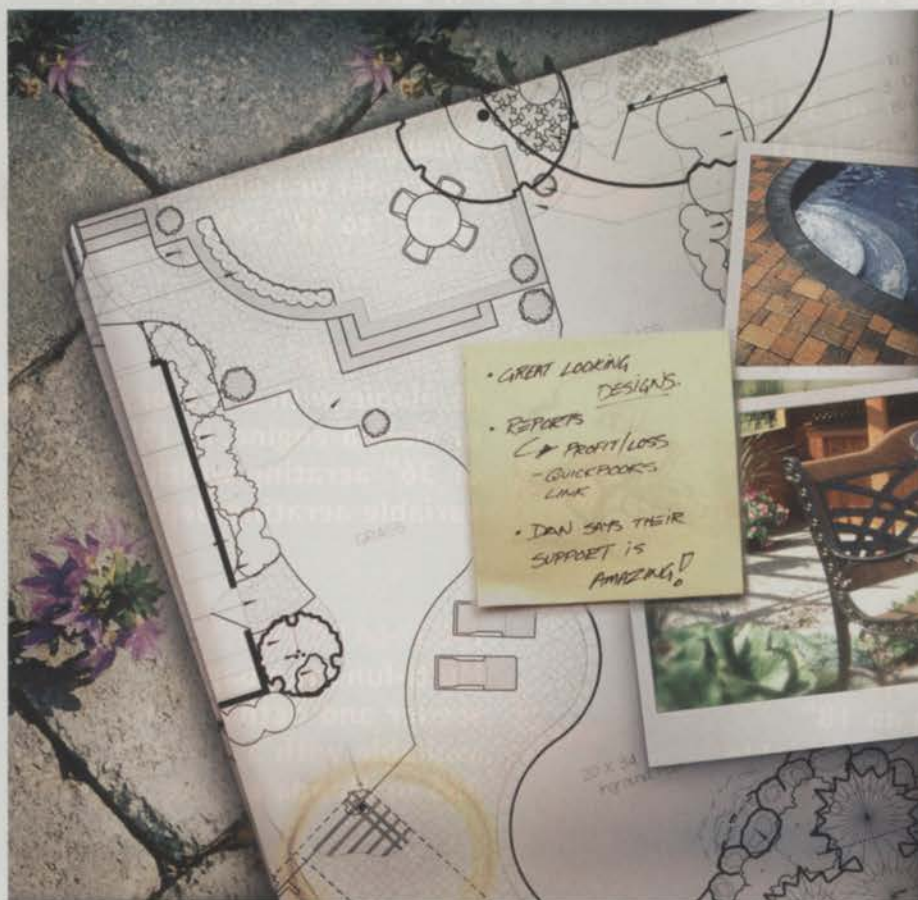
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Market Trends

(continued from page 21)

higher post-retirement benefit costs of \$7 million for the quarter and \$23 million for nine months. Growth potential for both periods last year was stifled by restructuring costs related to the closure of certain facilities.

And this upward trend in sales is expected to continue in John Deere's future. Sales should be up more than 15 percent for the year. As projected, fourth-quarter production levels are expected to be down by more than 25 percent, consistent with the division's build-to-demand strategy.

IN THE NEWS

Toro Reports Third Quarter Earnings

BLOOMINGTON, Minn. – Toro Co.'s fiscal third-quarter net income rose 23 percent, benefiting from the company's profit improvement steps, which began in fiscal 2000. Implementing a project entitled "5 by Five," the company has worked toward a 5-per-

(continued on page 26)

People

ITT Industries announced that **Dan Driscoll** will become managing director of Flowtronex PSI.

Jay Bentivegna joined Toro's National Support Network as field trainer. At ACRT, **Sean Stevens** was promoted to general manager of training.

Steven Loeffler was named chief executive officer for Force America. Lindsay Manufacturing hired **Doug Twyford** as vice resident of the international division.

Rentokil announced the promotion of **Amy Supergan** to vice president of Primescape Products.

Syngenta T&O announced the addition of sales team members: **Tom Halvorson**, Midwest district sales manager; **Hoard Jaekle**, Northeast district sales manager; and **Pablo Perez**, sales specialist in South Florida.

Eric Albert, Skyler Bureson, Peter Herbert and **James Reeser** came on as account representatives for The Astrup Co.

Lisa Nicholas was named the director of government relations for the Pennsylvania Nursery & Landscape Association.

The Landscape & Nursery Expo board of directors appointed **Eric Grady** chairman of the Expo for 2004.



Doug Twyford

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Market Trends

(continued from page 24)

cent net profit margin by the end of fiscal year 2003.

Based on the company's strong performance through the first nine months of the fiscal year to date, Toro expects full-year earnings better than last year's figures. The company earned \$27 million for the quarter, or \$1.03 a share, up from \$21.9 million, or 84 cents a share, one year ago. Compared with the fiscal 2002 third quarter, fiscal 2003 third-quarter professional segment sales increased 3.7 percent to \$244.1 million.

The company expects fiscal 2003 earnings of \$3.08 to \$3.10 a share, which includes a legal settlement, restructuring and other expenses.

IN THE NEWS

Bush Picks Utah Governor to Head EPA

WASHINGTON, D.C. — President Bush picked Utah Gov. Mike Leavitt, an advocate of shifting environmental regula-

(continued on page 28)



L&L

Book Report

Flight of the Buffalo

By James A. Belasco and Ralph Stayer
Belasco and Stayer guide business owners through the steps it took them to realize that they were to blame for their companies' problems just as much as their employees in *Flight of the Buffalo: Soaring to Excellence, Learning to Let Employees Lead*. The title comes from the idea that a company is like a herd of buffalo because buffalo follow only one leader and the paradigm never changes.

Belasco and Stayer tell readers that it is important for a business leader to communicate with and shift leadership responsibilities to their employees when it is necessary so a company can function and fly like a flock of geese.

"This book made me realize that I am not alone," says Scott Grimm, president,

Agralawn, Lakeland, Fla. "Sometimes when you are in business and things aren't going right you feel like it is only happening to you. This book shows you that other people have shared these experiences."

Grimm says he learned how to handle employee relations and how to show them that their work affects others and how their effort is appreciated.

The basis of the book is that a person can't imagine a herd of buffalo flying just as a manager can't see his or her business succeeding, Grimm says. The authors want a business manager to see that there are things that are holding his or her business on the ground and, sometimes, it isn't always the problems created by other people. — Kevin McConville

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Market Trends

(continued from page 26)

tion to the states, to become head of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

Leavitt, a three-term Republican governor, would succeed Christie Whitman, a former New Jersey governor who held the post of EPA administrator for the first 2½ years of the administration before resigning in May. The EPA post has been a lightning rod for critics of the administration's environmental policies.

Leavitt has championed the idea of increasing environmental cooperation among federal, state and local officials. Over the objections of environmentalists, he advocated a highway extension through wetlands near the Great Salt Lake. The 10th Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals halted the project, saying the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers did not pay attention to wildlife or look at alternative before approving it.

ACQUISITION NEWS

Scotts Buys Yates Ltd.

MARYSVILLE, Ohio – The Scotts Co. signed an agreement to acquire the lawn and garden business of Yates Ltd., a leader in the Australian and New Zealand markets.

The companies' combined business will generate nearly \$100 million in annual revenue, making it a big part of Scotts overall international business. The transaction, which requires approval from Australian regulators and Yates' shareholders, calls for Scotts to pay Yates up to \$26 million, subject to certain adjustments. Scotts will finance the acquisition through existing credit facilities.

David Marginson, Yates' current managing director, will lead the combined operation. **L**

EmeraldAshBorer

(continued from page 18)

The state said the beetle also has been detected in small pockets in Eaton, Kent and Saginaw counties. These sites will be treated and managed as isolated infestations unless it's determined that the beetle is widespread, agriculture officials said.

Beetle larvae live beneath the bark of ash trees, boring into its tissue until water and nutrients can no longer flow up into the branches and leaves. Michigan State University is currently conducting research to determine what can kill the pest. Deb McCullough, professor in the entomology and forestry departments at Michigan State, says the beetle problem is exacerbated because it's hard to tell when trees are first infected and there are a lot of unknowns.

Amy Frankmann, executive director of the Michigan Nursery and Landscape Association, says the losses to nurseries and growers will be high. Frankmann says a survey last summer of growers in southeast Michigan showed a loss of about \$4 million there.

"The quarantine and moratorium are just devastating to the industry," Frankmann says. "But we have too many natural stands of ash trees to jeopardize."

The state also has established a "core" area including all of Wayne County and parts of five other counties on the original quarantine list, where officials believe the problem is most severe. Ash materials from the core area must stay within that area. Firewood from that area also must stay in the core.

Association NEWS

The **Ohio State University Turfgrass Education Program** has a new fellowship opportunity available in the turfgrass physiology and biochemistry field. Turfgrass scientist and OSU graduate James Beard and his wife Harriet initiated the funding for the Beard Fellowship with a \$100,000 pledge to the school. However, an additional \$300,000 was needed to create a named fellowship, so OSU faculty and staff came to the rescue. The faculty donated \$10,000 in personal funds to the cause and initiated letter-writing campaigns to urge potential donors to help their cause.

By December 31, 2002, the campaign raised more than \$270,000, and by April 7 of this year, the group exceeded their goal of \$300,000 in pledges and cash donations. Additional contributions can still be made. Contact Lynda Heyl, OSU Agricultural Development office at 614/292-0473 for more information.

The **California Landscape Contractors Association** – San Fernando Valley Chapter recently announced the winners of their 44th annual Beautification Awards.

Visit www.lawnandlandscape.com/news/news.asp?ID=1480 for a full story and photos of winning landscape designs.

In response to petitions from the **American Society of Association Executives**, the Federal Communications Commission has delayed the enactment of a new regulation that would require trade associations and other

organizations to receive members' permission before sending them faxes. Moved back from Aug. 25, 2003, the regulation will now go into effect Jan. 1, 2005.



Photo: OSU



Photo: Majestic Pools & Landscape

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President's LETTER



Roger Mongeon

HOW MANY OF YOU have found yourself working until midnight performing a menial assignment to ensure your crews would get out on time the next morning, armed with their invoices and inspection reports?

Everyone has tedious tasks on their plates that keep them working late into the night. But many owners might not realize that poor people management prevents them from letting go of small jobs and working on bigger picture aspects.

For example, I know a business owner who hired a temporary employee

to prepare invoices and inspection reports so they'd be ready for crews the next day. After two days, the owner told me he was going to have to hire a second person to get the job done. I asked him, "How many invoices can this person process in one day?" He didn't know. So I suggested he assign the task to one of his managers so he could measure how many invoices an experienced person can prepare. The manager got the job done without a problem, and the owner realized that he hadn't shown the temporary office worker how to properly and efficiently do the job.

After explaining to the office worker how to complete the task the right way, her performance improved 300 to 400 percent, and the owner didn't have to hire another employee. By taking the time to create standards, the owner solved his business problem.

Creating business systems, even for simple tasks, can do wonders for small businesses. That's what Weed Man does for its franchisees – provides them with proven systems they can use in all business areas to improve efficiency and increase profits.

Many business experts will tell you, "If you can't measure it, don't do it." And they are absolutely right. If you can't measure how quickly a task is being finished, you don't know if you're doing it well and you don't know if your training is working – you're just spinning your wheels.

Implementing easy-to-measure systems are the key to future growth and Weed Man wants to help propel you to that next level. We're confident you'll enjoy these articles on Weed Man franchisees and how they've used our proven systems to advance their businesses. Maybe they will inspire you to continue creating systems in your business so that you can experience the same productivity and profitability boosts!

Keep on measuring!

Roger Mongeon

Roger Mongeon, CEO
Weed Man

When landscape operations purchase a Weed Man franchise, they get the business knowledge and proven systems that come with it.

TO GIVE CLIENTS the luscious green lawns they desire without promoting weed growth, lawn care operators must time and calibrate fertilizer and pest control applications correctly. The same attention to detail must be paid to lawn care businesses that want to reach their peak growth potentials without needlessly losing revenue along the way.

That is why many landscape contractors choose to purchase a Weed Man franchise when they add lawn care to their service mix – to assist the growth of their businesses without losing money and service quality to years of growing pains. Weed Man offers its franchise members the opportunity to use its business management systems to boost growth and help them reach new customer service heights.

"Before we purchased a Weed Man franchise, every time we'd grow, we'd lose our quality, but if we didn't grow we were losing revenue," explains Paul Diekevers, manager, DeVries Landscape Management, Grand Rapids, Mich. "We joined the Weed Man franchise three years ago to get all of the systems that come with it in hopes of learning how to get the best growth and maximize service quality at the same time."

BUSINESS BASICS. DeVries Landscape Management was particularly attracted to the budgeting systems Weed Man offers, Diekevers says. After joining the franchise, DeVries Landscape managers underwent two-weeks of training, including an intense budgeting session. "Everything needs to be recorded and everything needs to be separated, monitored and gauged," Diekevers says. "It makes planning for the future year a much more detailed and accurate process."

During those training days, Diekevers says he and other managers also learned not to bunch expenses. "They taught us to separate all of our expenses and incomes and to make sure we keep track of all of the money moving in and out," he says.

The company also uses the same budgeting philosophy in its other divisions by separating every loss and gain. The system was set in place for the company after DeVries purchased the franchise because division managers weren't able to develop a similar way to budget by themselves that was as effective, he says.

SYSTEM SUPPORT. Stephen Hillenmeyer, president, Hillenmeyer Landscape Services, Lexington, Ky., says he purchased a Weed Man franchise to gain the support he needed to launch a lawn care business. With the franchise, he gained

Setting & Reaching
FINANCIAL

access to a computer program that allows him to manage materials through the tracking and selling processes and to create cost projections.

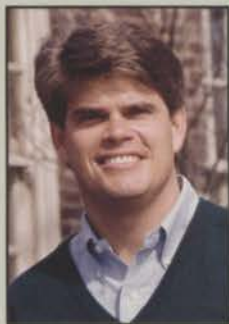
Managers can look up customers' information and service history because that information is reported to a region sub-franchisor, franchise advisor and regional representative when its first entered in the system, Diekevers adds. The Weed Man computer system features a gross sales report, which a franchise operator files weekly, to help each company analyze how much was ordered, cancelled, prepaid and what is outstanding.

Every October, Hillenmeyer meets with his regional representative, the sub-franchisor, to develop a detailed business plan for the upcoming year. It is a three-day process during which the sub-franchisor develops a budget with company managers that covers every detail of what a company plans to spend over the next year.

Then, each June, Hillenmeyer says he meets with his representative again to undergo a "June hard-look," which is an examination of the completed six months of business. "You look at the budget you made for 12 months and examine how the

previous six months fit into it," he explains. "Based on the judgments made during that meeting the company then re-adjusts the budget for the next six months according to predicted sales."

Many things can knock a company off of its projected sales path, including the weather or the economy. This June meeting allows a manager to readjust his business plan to maximize profits.



Stephen Hillenmeyer

NETWORKING KNOWLEDGE.

Weed Man franchise owners can even measure their performance against other franchisees via the computer system, Hillenmeyer says.

The comparison allows a manager to decipher labor and revenue percentages and determine whether or not his business is in the black or lagging in the red. "Your labor percent could be 30 percent and you wouldn't know if that was good or bad," Hillenmeyer explains. "So there is a real benefit to benchmarking costs and having everyone on the same system."

But simply purchasing a Weed Man franchise doesn't guarantee that a company can turn its profits around, Hillenmeyer warns. "It is like any other aspect of business in that it takes a lot of time and hard work," he says. "But with Weed Man's systems, the process is much easier than if you went out and tried to incorporate lawn care services into your business yourself."

Marketing OPPORTUNITIES

FRANCHISEES have been able to utilize Weed Man's marketing methods to network all of their services to new and existing clients as well as to other companies in the franchise. This has worked particularly well for nursery operations that want to expand into lawn care.

Robin Moeller, president, Moeller's Landscaping and Garden Center, Cincinnati, Ohio, says he bought a Weed Man franchise because he thought it would be a good addition to the existing services his company offered, which include retail garden center sales. "Through the years, I have always had people ask me about lawn care," Moeller says. "So I investigated the Weed Man franchise and I liked how they took the same approach we took with our existing businesses. I thought that I could use my existing database of customers and start up this new aspect of our company."

Lawn care becomes the perfect add-on for nurseries that want to sell additional services to customers.

SELLING SYSTEMS. Joining the Weed Man franchise organization allows nursery managers to see the processes that an experienced lawn care company has developed and to use that information in other aspects of his or her business. Cross-selling services works both ways, says Michael Shannon, operations manager, Hillenmeyer Nursery & Landscape Services, Lexington, Ky. "The more of one kind of service sales people can sell, the more those clients can find out about any others they may want," he says. "We have quadrupled our customer base in 18 months with the Weed Man franchise and the cross-selling approach they taught us. We went from 500 customers to 2,000 customers and there is no sign of the growth stopping."



Michael Shannon

IT'S ALL IN THE NAME. Tele-marketing and networking aren't the only ways in which a Weed Man franchise can market its services; Shannon says name recognition is also one of the franchise's strongest marketing tools. "Now, instead of Hillenmeyer, it's Weed Man, and everyone remembers it," he says. "It has a real trademark to it. People think the name is cool and it sells."

Now, when his employees drive down the road in company cars, other motor-



Robin Moeller

BENCHMARKS

Weed Man®

Creating Opportunities for Growth

ists and their passengers will roll their windows down to snap pictures of the trucks, which have the Weed Man logo on them.

Stephen Hillenmeyer, president, Hillenmeyer Nursery & Landscape Services, Lexington, Ky., says he even took a Volkswagen Beetle and painted it in the Weed Man colors of green and yellow

"We have quadrupled our customer base in 18 months with the Weed Man franchise and the cross-selling approach they taught us. We went from 500 customers to 2,000 customers and there is no sign of the growth stopping." — Michael Shannon

with the franchise logo on its doors for his sales manager to drive-around in. "Talk about getting a lot of attention," he says. "It has been a great marketing piece for us."

The franchise also has a 25-foot parade balloon of the Weed Man cartoon character, Hillenmeyer says. Hillenmeyer plans to sponsor a hole at a local golf tournament for the Lexington Chamber of Commerce and have the Weed Man balloon there. "A lot of current and potential clients are going to be there and we expect to get a lot of responses from this type of marketing," he says.

Despite advertising gains, many smaller companies may be concerned about buying into a Weed Man franchise because of the price, but buying a lawn care franchise isn't as expensive as most people think, Shannon says. A company will pay as much in overtime to start a lawn care service alone and it will not get the same results and gain the extensive advertising revenue that is available through the Weed Man franchise organization.

"You might as well spend the money, buy the franchise and take what they give you and build on it," Shannon says. "I already recouped the money I spent to buy the franchise during my first year."

A Weed Man lawn care franchise adds punch to pest control companies that want to expand their service offerings.

Chuck Russell, vice president, Eradico Services, Southfield, Mich., says his pest control business benefited when he decided to buy a Weed Man lawn care franchise.

"They gave us the technical, marketing and business systems to support lawn care and help us better understand it," Russell says.

Weed Man's centralized purchasing plan also has benefited Eradico Services. The simple volume discounts Russell used to get could never compete with the discounts the company now receives as a part of a larger organization.

"Before, our material costs were higher," Russell says. "Now, as a franchisee, there is a pulling of those resources that allows you to keep more on the bottom line."

Weed Man franchisees order supplies in bulk at a central purchasing Web site. Franchise owners, like Kevin Pass, Action Lawn Services, Evansville, Ill., can use their ID name and password to access the site and buy supplies. Products are shipped in a matter of days.

Basically, for pest control operators, joining a Weed Man franchise takes some of the challenge out of supplying customers with quality services, Pass says, adding, "The franchise makes it idiot-proof and they prevent you from failing."



Kevin Pass

Purchasing POWER

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Massachusetts, Rhode
Island, Connecticut, Vermont

Steve & Chuck Russell
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New Jersey,
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Nursery Market Report

SEASONAL SOLUTIONS

Fall Plant Protection

You don't need to tune into the nightly weather forecast to know that there is a chill in the air. You can feel the cool air and plants feel it, too. Like people, they need to bundle up for the winter.

Mulching is one of the best lines of defense for perennial plants against chilling temperatures. Mulching also can prevent the repeated freezing and thawing of soil that causes plants to heave out of the ground.

The trick is not to mulch too soon. Mulching has to be done after the ground starts to freeze but before the first significant snowfall of the year. If you mulch sooner, mice and other rodents may nest in the mulch, and plants may not be completely dormant.

You can use pine needles, straw, leaves or shredded bark as mulch. Straw, however, is the best mulch because it is hollow and provides good insulation. If you use leaves, be sure they are finely chopped to prevent them from matting.

Apply a mulch layer at least 3 to 4 inches thick around each plant. After you've laid it down, gently pull it away from trunks and stems to give plants room to breathe. This helps prevent disease problems.

To protect evergreens from cold, biting winter winds, build a windbreak. Place posts in the ground on the side most prone to seasonal winds – usually north and west – and wrap with old feed sacks or burlap. Avoid plastic because it will heat up, causing plants to burn on sunny days.

Though winter temperatures may be chilling, bright winter sun can scald newly planted trees. Protect them by wrapping the trunks with special tree wrapping tape. Add 4 to 6 inches of shredded bark, wood chips or leaves around the tree base and after application, gently pull mulch away from the base. Wrapping also provides some protection against hungry mice.

Roses require special care at this time of year, as well. After a freeze has occurred, mound 10 to 12 inches of soil around the base of tender bush varieties. This prevents thawing and heaving during the winter and helps moderate temperatures around grafted crowns.

Protect tender climbing roses by removing the canes from the fence or trellis and fastening them to the ground.

Although in some areas of the country, snow cover will be sufficient to protect these roses, you also can add a thick layer of mulch for protection. But avoid layers of 12 to 16 inches, which are too deep and will attract mice. In addition, hardy shrubs should not require mulch protection.

Besides mulching, other activities must take place in fall, including cleanup and soil testing, so you'll be ready once spring hits. Do not, however, add fertilizer to your landscape in late fall. Nutrients will be lost through leaching or erosion before plants can use them next spring.

Remember to rake up leaves from around fruit trees to help control insect populations and remove disease-causing organisms that overwinter on leaf debris. Reduce rodent populations by removing all fruit remaining on trees or on the ground. Applying mulch near fruit trees, though, is not recommended because it increases the likelihood of rodent damage during winter. – Leonard Perry and Vern Grubinger

Perry and Grubinger are extension professors, University of Vermont Extension, Department of Plant and Soil Science, Burlington, Vt. They can be reached at 802/656-2630 or Leonard.Perry@uvm.edu and Vernon.Grubinger@uvm.edu, respectively. See also www.uvm.edu for more information.

Roses require special care before the onset of chilly winter weather. Mound 10 to 12 inches of soil around the base of bush varieties, and protect climbers by removing canes and fastening to the ground. Photo: All-America Selections



On

Paper

A Winning Appraisal

One key to keeping employees happy and satisfied with their work is to spread the company's wealth to them through profit sharing. But determining the amount of each employee's bonus can be difficult.

Andrew Aksar, owner, Outdoor Finishes, Walkersville, Md., uses a bonus allocation idea he got from a industry consultant and combines it with an employee appraisal sheet he derived from a similar form used by the local Sheriff's office. Aksar says his appraisal sheet serves two purposes – to

update employees on their work performance and to determine bonuses.

The performance appraisal sheet features a simple layout with 12 sections on subjects ranging from the employee's job knowledge to how well he or she meets customer demands. Aksar grades employees in each section on a scale of 0 to 10, 10 being the best possible score, and tallies the total score at the bottom of the sheet.

The employee appraisal form is filled out four times a year for each employee by whomever is at the next level in the company, Aksar says. "For general laborers it is usually filled out by the crew leaders and I usually fill out the forms for crew leaders," Aksar explains.

After adding the scores, the supervisor talks with the employee about the performance indicated on the sheet and how the employee could improve. Aksar then files the form away to create a history of any long-standing strengths and weaknesses the employee may have, which is useful when determining how to handle current problems or considerations for advancement.

"[The appraisal sheet] is filled out sporadically because bonuses are tied in with this appraisal sheet," Aksar adds. "So if we do this four times a year at certain times they will be expecting their bonus."

Aksar says the point of sporadic employee appraisals is to prevent employees from planning their expenses around the possibility of a bonus.

But how do Aksar's employees rate according to his sheet? "That depends on whether they are new employees or veterans," Aksar answers. "New employees score the best on availability, reliability and productivity."

Many of Aksar's new employees are hired into the company lacking an in-depth knowledge of the industry, which can make it hard to rate them in categories such as "quality" because they are still learning how to perform their duties.

For veteran employees, Aksar says the weakest performance area on the appraisal sheet is the "paperwork" section. Outdoor Finishes uses job timesheets to record every task involved in a job but some of Aksar's employees do not like to take the time to fill out the sheets. **LL**

The author is a Contributing Editor to Lawn & Landscape and can be reached via nwisniewski@lawnandlandscape.com.

OUTDOOR FINISHES EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL SHEET

Employee Name _____

Title _____

Instructions: Read over the general factors and rate each employee's performance on a scale of 0 to 10, 0 being the most unsatisfactory and 10 being the most satisfactory.

General Factors:

Quality – accuracy, thoroughness and acceptability of work performed. **Points** _____ *Attitude towards quality is OUTSTANDING! Grading skills and knowledge has improved*

Productivity – quality and efficiency of work produced in a specified period of time. **Points** _____ *Excellent Effort & Attitude!*

Job Knowledge – job knowledge/technical skills and information used on the job. **Points** _____ *Good. Still learning, takes about 24 months to learn what you need to know*

Paperwork – proper timeliness, accuracy and legibility. Includes time etiquette. **Points** _____ *Good job, although writing sometimes isn't legible. Spelling needs slight improvement!*

Reliability – the extent to which a task employee can be relied upon regarding completion and follow up. **Points** _____ *Exceeds expectations above and beyond what is expected*

Independence – the extent of work performed with little or no supervision. **Points** _____ *Attitude is fantastic, although some things employee says and or does concerns me*

Availability – the extent to which an employee is punctual, plus his/her overall attendance record. Includes overtime and/or weekend work. **Points** _____ *THANK YOU!*

Equipment – care, proper use, upkeep, service, safety, and appearance of equipment this employee uses. **Points** _____ *Need to inspect tires on trailer before transport more frequently. Also need to monitor fuel status better. Takes excellent care of equipment, which is very much appreciated.*

Safety – the extent to which the employee adheres to company safety policies and is safety-conscious (i.e., wearing safety equipment, following designated procedures). **Points** _____

Adherence to policy – the extent to which an employee adheres to company policy, conducts him or herself, follows rules, and observes good housekeeping practices. **Points** _____ *We can do without negative cursing and temper tantrums in front of other employees, contractors, vendors, clients, etc. This sets a bad example for other employees and creates a negative atmosphere in work. Good job in getting subordinates to arrive for work on time!*

Accepts Constructive Criticism – willingness to be told / learn how to improve job tasks and employee attitude. **Points** _____ *Employee has difficulty being corrected. Often responds with excuses that are irrelevant to the matter being discussed. Part of learning is accepting constructive criticism.*

Customer / Employee Service – willingness and demonstrated ability to cooperate, work, and communicate with coworkers, supervisors, subordinates, outside contacts, and customers. Includes the stability, courtesy, personal appearance and judgment demonstrated on the job. **Points** _____ *Please try to make eye contact with immigrant workers for every command given to them. You also need to confirm that they COMPLETELY understand what you are instructing them to do.*

Total point score (1-120) _____ Discussed with individual on _____

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FAST Look

by Lauren Spiers

Chris Sturm is quickly becoming a successful entrepreneur – 6,300 miles from home.

How far would you go for your company? Would you drive out to a job site to bring a crew replacement equipment? How about opening a branch office 50 miles away? Would you fly a few states over to attend an industry educational event? Or would you span the globe to find the best business opportunity?

Chris Sturm, owner, Tropical Creations, Van Nuys, Calif., didn't create a start-up company in his hometown like many green industry professionals do. Far from it. Instead, his business endeavors blossomed after two huge jumps around the world.

Tropical Creations

7625 Hayvenhurst Ave.

Suite 17

Van Nuys, Calif. 91406

888/905-0725

Sturm comes from Koblenz, Germany, about 50 miles outside of Frankfurt. In 1991, after finishing school and completing an apprenticeship nursery retail outlet, he was given the opportunity to move to New York and work in a Long Island nursery. That first 3,800-mile leap was followed by another continent crossing when Sturm moved from New York to California in 1992.

Though he's remained in California since 1992, Sturm's business and floriculture education hasn't stopped – and neither has his business growth. Sturm opened Tropical Creations in 1996 as an interior plant care business. Since then, the com-

pany has branched into several exterior service segments and has grown from zero customers and no revenue to more than 100 high-end clients and \$900,000 projections for 2003.

CURRENCY EXCHANGE. Sturm's move from Europe to America resulted in at least one major advantage in the business world: The ability to adapt. This, along with his connection with two very different countries is mimicked in Tropical Creations' service mix.

"The company is structured in three different divisions," Sturm explains. "The original division is taking care of office and interior plants, the second is landscape maintenance and the third is landscape construction." Though interior and exterior businesses are quite different, Sturm's previous experiences in both markets makes it easy for him to blend the concepts into a single profitable business.

(continued on page 38)



Chris Sturm initially opened an interior plant care company, but has built up successful maintenance and construction departments as well.

Photo: Tropical Creations

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3.0000	3.0000	\$200.00	\$600.00
4.0000	4.0000	\$250.00	\$1000.00
5.0000	5.0000	\$300.00	\$1500.00
6.0000	6.0000	\$350.00	\$2100.00
7.0000	7.0000	\$400.00	\$2800.00
8.0000	8.0000	\$450.00	\$3600.00
9.0000	9.0000	\$500.00	\$4500.00
10.0000	10.0000	\$550.00	\$5500.00
11.0000	11.0000	\$600.00	\$6600.00
12.0000	12.0000	\$650.00	\$7800.00
13.0000	13.0000	\$700.00	\$9100.00
14.0000	14.0000	\$750.00	\$10500.00
15.0000	15.0000	\$800.00	\$12000.00
16.0000	16.0000	\$850.00	\$13600.00
17.0000	17.0000	\$900.00	\$15300.00
18.0000	18.0000	\$950.00	\$17100.00
19.0000	19.0000	\$1000.00	\$19000.00
20.0000	20.0000	\$1050.00	\$21000.00
21.0000	21.0000	\$1100.00	\$23100.00
22.0000	22.0000	\$1150.00	\$25200.00
23.0000	23.0000	\$1200.00	\$27300.00
24.0000	24.0000	\$1250.00	\$30000.00
25.0000	25.0000	\$1300.00	\$32500.00
26.0000	26.0000	\$1350.00	\$35100.00
27.0000	27.0000	\$1400.00	\$37800.00
28.0000	28.0000	\$1450.00	\$40600.00
29.0000	29.0000	\$1500.00	\$43500.00
30.0000	30.0000	\$1550.00	\$46500.00
31.0000	31.0000	\$1600.00	\$49600.00
32.0000	32.0000	\$1650.00	\$52800.00
33.0000	33.0000	\$1700.00	\$56100.00
34.0000	34.0000	\$1750.00	\$59500.00
35.0000	35.0000	\$1800.00	\$63000.00
36.0000	36.0000	\$1850.00	\$66600.00
37.0000	37.0000	\$1900.00	\$70300.00
38.0000	38.0000	\$1950.00	\$74100.00
39.0000	39.0000	\$2000.00	\$78000.00
40.0000	40.0000	\$2050.00	\$82000.00
41.0000	41.0000	\$2100.00	\$86100.00
42.0000	42.0000	\$2150.00	\$90300.00
43.0000	43.0000	\$2200.00	\$94600.00
44.0000	44.0000	\$2250.00	\$99000.00
45.0000	45.0000	\$2300.00	\$103500.00
46.0000	46.0000	\$2350.00	\$108100.00
47.0000	47.0000	\$2400.00	\$112800.00
48.0000	48.0000	\$2450.00	\$117600.00
49.0000	49.0000	\$2500.00	\$122500.00
50.0000	50.0000	\$2550.00	\$127500.00
51.0000	51.0000	\$2600.00	\$132600.00
52.0000	52.0000	\$2650.00	\$137800.00
53.0000	53.0000	\$2700.00	\$143100.00
54.0000	54.0000	\$2750.00	\$148500.00
55.0000	55.0000	\$2800.00	\$154000.00
56.0000	56.0000	\$2850.00	\$159600.00
57.0000	57.0000	\$2900.00	\$165300.00
58.0000	58.0000	\$2950.00	\$171100.00
59.0000	59.0000	\$3000.00	\$177000.00
60.0000	60.0000	\$3050.00	\$183000.00
61.0000	61.0000	\$3100.00	\$189100.00
62.0000	62.0000	\$3150.00	\$195300.00
63.0000	63.0000	\$3200.00	\$201600.00
64.0000	64.0000	\$3250.00	\$208000.00
65.0000	65.0000	\$3300.00	\$214500.00
66.0000	66.0000	\$3350.00	\$221100.00
67.0000	67.0000	\$3400.00	\$227800.00
68.0000	68.0000	\$3450.00	\$234600.00
69.0000	69.0000	\$3500.00	\$241500.00
70.0000	70.0000	\$3550.00	\$248500.00
71.0000	71.0000	\$3600.00	\$255600.00
72.0000	72.0000	\$3650.00	\$262800.00
73.0000	73.0000	\$3700.00	\$270100.00
74.0000	74.0000	\$3750.00	\$277500.00
75.0000	75.0000	\$3800.00	\$285000.00
76.0000	76.0000	\$3850.00	\$292600.00
77.0000	77.0000	\$3900.00	\$300300.00
78.0000	78.0000	\$3950.00	\$308100.00
79.0000	79.0000	\$4000.00	\$316000.00
80.0000	80.0000	\$4050.00	\$324000.00
81.0000	81.0000	\$4100.00	\$332100.00
82.0000	82.0000	\$4150.00	\$340300.00
83.0000	83.0000	\$4200.00	\$348600.00
84.0000	84.0000	\$4250.00	\$357000.00
85.0000	85.0000	\$4300.00	\$365500.00
86.0000	86.0000	\$4350.00	\$374100.00
87.0000	87.0000	\$4400.00	\$382800.00
88.0000	88.0000	\$4450.00	\$391600.00
89.0000	89.0000	\$4500.00	\$400500.00
90.0000	90.0000	\$4550.00	\$409500.00
91.0000	91.0000	\$4600.00	\$418600.00
92.0000	92.0000	\$4650.00	\$427800.00
93.0000	93.0000	\$4700.00	\$437100.00
94.0000	94.0000	\$4750.00	\$446500.00
95.0000	95.0000	\$4800.00	\$456000.00
96.0000	96.0000	\$4850.00	\$465600.00
97.0000	97.0000	\$4900.00	\$475300.00
98.0000	98.0000	\$4950.00	\$485100.00
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What Are You Waiting For?

USE READER SERVICE #29

First Look

(continued from page 36)

"We're able to do a lot of cross-selling of services," Sturm says. "Many times, we're moving in with interior plant care services and we're trying to cross-sell with exterior landscape services. The clients we're after are very high-end residential or commercial properties and both of those groups can use all of our services." Additionally, Sturm

Sturm's team is cross-trained for efficiency. Photo: Tropical Creations

mentions that selling the initial service – be it interior or exterior – is always the hardest part of a landscape contractor's job; selling additions is easier. "Once the customer knows



you, they're happy with your service and they'll be interested in more of what you offer," he adds.

By leveraging his interior and exterior services against one another, Sturm has been able to increase sales dramatically. From 1996 to 2001, growth for the interiorscaping business was only about 20 to 30 percent a year. In a huge jump, Tropical Creations doubled its revenue after adding a landscape maintenance division in 2001. Moreover, due to an impressive response to the landscape installation division, which was added in 2002, the company expects to double revenues again this year.

"Of our overall revenue mix, we do 20 percent interior plant care, 15 percent landscape maintenance and 65 percent in landscape construction," Sturm says. "When you think about it, construction has only been around for less than two years and it's overtaking everything else." Beginning next year, Tropical Creations will reach over \$1 million in sales, at which point Sturm plans to slow growth to 30 or 40 percent per year.

"Since we started growing so quickly, we've tripled the number of employees and added an office assistant," Sturm notes. Hiring employees with industry experience has helped Sturm handle the company's growth, as has having the right equipment on hand. "We purchased a lot of equipment and had many other capital expenditures, so it actually cost us a lot of money to grow, so our profits weren't that high even though we gained so much business. By next year, we'll have all the equipment we need and won't have as many expenditures, so we'll try to become much more profitable."

Tropical Creations' revenue grew from \$180,000 in 2000 to \$220,000 in 2001. From there, the company more than doubled its size to \$470,000 in 2002 and is expecting to double again this year to about \$900,000.

In addition to dealing with several high-dollar purchases to get his company started, Sturm also faced the challenge of learning how

(continued on page 40)

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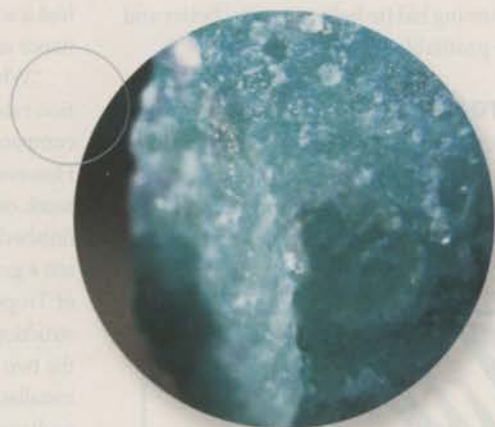
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USE READER SERVICE #39

First Look

(continued from page 38)

to bid projects profitably in order to reach these growth goals.

"We did a lot of research and compared our bids to our competition's to make sure we were doing everything properly," Sturm says. "That's something we still always try to do if we lose a bid. We'll ask the individual in charge of the account if we can see

the winning bid [to help us create] better and more profitable bids."

CUSTOMER CULTURE-SHOCK. Part of Tropical Creations' growth over the last seven years is attributable to a 95 percent customer retention rate. With so many customers buying into the original interior plant care, Sturm

had a solid customer base to build up maintenance and construction clientele as well.

"When we started, our customer retention rate was great," Sturm says. "As a small company you could really pamper everyone." However, Sturm insists on having his crews work on a given project every day until it's finished. He says that this approach has gotten a great response from clients. Because all of Tropical Creations' maintenance and construction employees are cross-trained between the two divisions, Sturm is able to see several installation projects through to completion simultaneously, even if it means rotating maintenance crewmembers onto a job.

"We stay flexible," Sturm says. The company always keeps a couple crewmembers dedicated to maintenance, but will move employees around to build up efficiencies if either construction or maintenance is slow. "That also helps overall with people's morale," Sturm adds. "That way, one crewmember doesn't have to spend all week digging the same trench - they get to move around a bit."

By completing a given project in one stretch, Sturm is able to keep his clients happy, but it is his choice of projects that helps increase employee retention.

"We're doing a lot of public works projects for the cities and municipalities now, because they're much bigger-ticket projects and are great for our bottom line," Sturm explains. "All of those are prevailing wage projects, so the hourly wages we pay for those projects [is almost double] the standard pay depending on the employee's standard wage."

In all, Sturm has on his hands a highly adaptive landscape company, which has proven to be a huge asset. "At the beginning I think I was just too afraid or too nervous about putting \$10,000 on that credit card for that truck or that piece of equipment, but now I realize that you just have to try those things and work hard to make it all work out," he says. "It's always easy to do what you've done before and keep doing the same things over and over again, but these days you have to stay flexible and try out new things to see what you're capable of." **LL**

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

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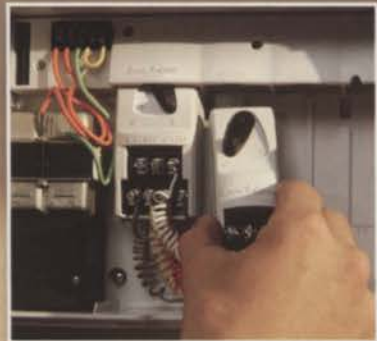
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USE READER SERVICE #31

by William Martin

IRRIGATION REPAIRS

Troubleshooting Tactics

An irrigation system repair expert shares his tips on diagnosing common symptoms and their solutions.

An irrigation system is only as good as its original design and installation. Indeed, irrigation contractors can greatly minimize the incidence of future repairs by using proper installation techniques from the outset.

But even the best designs may still require repairs.

The goal of every irrigation system repair should be to restore the system to its original, or better, level of operation. Additionally, the contractor or repair technician should replace any item that has an above average probability of failing or malfunctioning within a relatively short period of time. Any repairs that are deemed appropriate and/or advisable but not immediately vital to the system, should be thoroughly discussed with customers before improvements are made.

GENERAL DIAGNOSIS. Frequently, the customer, be it a homeowner or a commercial facility manager, does not understand how an irrigation system works, let alone what problem caused the irrigation system to function improperly. Therefore, one of the first challenges of repairing an irrigation system is diagnosing the problem. Ultimately, this involves the repair technician carefully inspecting the system and its components. Oftentimes, the technician can narrow down possible causes by first talking with the customer. A successful repair technician needs to learn to "read between the lines" of what a customer says and ask specific questions aimed at securing vital information.

For example, if the customer says, "Station Nos. 1 and 4 don't work," the problem is probably the field wires, solenoid or controller. More common scenarios include:

Customer: The last four stations do not work.

Likely Problem: Bad or cut common wire

Customer: My pump unit burned out and now the system doesn't work at all.

Likely Problem: "Dead head," bad section or master valve

Customer: My system was installed several years ago, and now I have a few dry spots in the yard.

Likely Problem: Possible clogged heads / nozzles or irrigation lines; drop in city main pressure

Customer: The spray heads barely pop up now.

Likely Problem: Wrong heads; dirt / debris in the head, nozzle or water line; broken fitting or riser; cross-threaded riser

Customer: We recently put in a fence and now the back yard is not being watered.

Likely Problem: Suspect a cut field wire.

Customer: We had a new roof put on last month. Now when the irrigation system turns on, there is a soggy spot in the front yard.

Likely Problem: Truck probably drove over a valve box, which pushed down and broke the valve outlet side and / or outlet pipe.

Customer: Water spurts out of several heads.

Likely Problem: Bad seals or nozzles

DEALING WITH VALVES.

There are two common problems with valves – they won't close or they won't open. When a valve will not close, the problem is usually due to a physical obstruction (sand, debris, etc.) that prevents the diaphragm from seating. A valve might also not close due to insufficient force above the diaphragm. This can

Every irrigation repair should restore the system to its best operation level.

Photo: Treasure Coast Irrigation & Landscape



IRRIGATION Guide

be caused by a missing plunger or one stuck in the up position, a plugged diaphragm filter, a flow control that is turned up too high, constant voltage from the controller, a leak between the bonnet and the valve body or an open manual bleed.

Valve closure problems also can be due

to a hole in the diaphragm (cracks or slits) caused by a build up of mineral deposits, resulting in a stiff rubber diaphragm.

If the valve turns off after the common wire is disconnected, the problem is controller-related. Test the controller, then repair or replace it as needed. If the valve

Repair Vs. REPLACE

If the cost of an irrigation repair will exceed 50 percent of the new cost of the component, then replacement is always recommended. Also, if the new item costs \$10 and the repair costs \$1.50, but the labor to repair the item costs \$12.50, then it is obvious that repairing the item is an exercise in futility.

Replaceable items that are typically not worth the repair include:

- Head nozzles
- Shrub/fixer riser bubblers
- Pop-up spray heads
- Controllers more than 15 years old
- Rain or freeze sensors
- Pumps too old to read the name plate and specifications
- Burned out pump motors
- Any irrigation component sold by mass retail merchandisers – *William Martin*

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seems to turn off, but water is still present at the low head, it is likely a seeping valve. This can be attributed to a leaking diaphragm, a partially clogged internal port, worn or damaged solenoid plunger, valve seat or mechanical defect. This may require replacement of the valve if the problem is not resolved after flushing and replacing the diaphragm.

When a valve will not open, the flow control might be turned all the way down, the solenoid might be burned out, valve ports might be plugged, or voltage from the controller might not be getting to the solenoids.

ELECTRICAL WOES. There are a variety of tests that can be performed on the electrical components of an irrigation system, including checking the condition of field wiring, ensuring the system is properly grounded, checking the transformer and troubleshooting controllers.

One of the most common checks is evaluating the condition of the field wiring and solenoid from the controller. To do so:

1. Disconnect the common wire from the controller.
2. Set the Volt-Ohm meter to "Ohms."

USE READER SERVICE #32

3. Connect one of the meter leads to the common wire.
4. Touch the second meter lead to each of the station terminals and record the resistance readings. (Compare readings to the 20 to 60 ohm base values of most solenoids).
5. If the ohm measurement is within the 20 to 60 ohm range, then the electrical circuit for that station is good.
6. If the ohm measurement is below 20 ohms (indicating a short), then check the valve solenoid for proper resistance and operation. Be sure to disconnect both field wires from the solenoid before performing this test.
7. Based on step 6, measure the ohms of the solenoid lead wires. If the resistance is less than 20 ohms, solenoid needs to be replaced. If the solenoid resistance is within the acceptable range, the short is in the field wiring. Note: If two solenoids are connected to a single station, the resistance will be less than the resistance for the "least resistive" solenoid. Use wire tracing equipment to locate the shorted field wiring.

PUMP PROBLEMS. The main factors to look for with a pumping system that is not working or producing enough water pressure include suction, electrical, control or relay problems or sectional valve problems.

The first thing to look at in diagnosing pump problems is the pump power and whether or not the power is appropriate for the type of pump being used.

Next, determine whether or not the pump system is running at all. If it is running, determine if the amount of water (volume) and pressure on the discharge side of the pump are adequate to run the system.

If there is a filter system in place, determine if the device is clogged with sand or other dirt, which can impede water flow.

UNIFORMITY CONCERNS. Perhaps the most obvious problems to spot are related to uniformity. For example, diagnosing a broken spray head with water dribbling, leaving turf or plant life in the area brown and parched, is easy. Replacing heads or nozzles usually solves such problems.

Other uniformity problems can be more challenging, such as an inadequate design or improper scheduling that requires a system audit and a plant and soil evaluation. Some

- other common uniformity problems include:
- Incorrect or inconsistent heads and nozzles
 - Plant growth interference
 - High pressure, requiring flow control devices and/or pressure regulators
 - Low head drainage, requiring new heads with check valves

- Soil compaction, requiring aeration or dethatching of an area

The author is owner, Lone Star Irrigation Training, Poolville, Texas. This article is excerpted from his book, *Repairing Irrigation Systems*. To order, visit www.lonetexantraining.com.



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USE READER SERVICE #33

by Kevin McConville

BACKFLOW PREVENTION

Caught in the Backflow

Backflow prevention systems protect an area's water from possible irrigation system contamination.

Water pipes under city and residential streets often resemble a confusing mess of spaghetti – twists and turns with no rhyme or reason. That is why monitoring what is going into and out of those pipes, particularly pollutants, can be difficult.

"Until someone sees discolored water, they don't worry about it," says John Krupka, sales manager, West Mart Enterprises, Santa Fe Springs, Calif., says. "So water pollution could go on residentially for a couple of years until someone becomes ill."

When an irrigation system is connected to the potable supply it can create a condition known as back-siphonage, which occurs when water from the system is pulled into the drinking water. Irrigation water, which can contain contaminants like fertilizers and other debris, is siphoned out of the system and back into the water supply when the water pressure outside drops below that of the system, says Larry Barthuly, co-owner, K & L Industries, Zionsville, Ind.

That is why few things are as necessary as the installation of a backflow prevention device for irrigation contractors. A backflow preventer connects the irrigation system to its water source at the cross-connection and keeps contaminated water from flowing back into the potable water supply, Krupka says.

When trying to visualize how a backflow preventer works, think of a surgeon washing his hands in a sink, Barthuly explains. "The faucet is 8 to 10 inches above the sink to prevent the dirty water from being sucked back through it if the sink becomes too full," he says.

Unfortunately, with a price tag around the \$200 mark, many customers will wonder why they have to pay to have the device installed, especially after they have already paid to have an irrigation system installed. "You have a choice – either put the backflow preventer in or you don't get any water," Krupka says. "Most cities and water districts mandate the use of a backflow prevention device."

Backflow preventers connect systems to their water sources at a cross-connection to keep contaminated water from flowing back into the potable water supply. Photo: Febco



UNDER PRESSURE. Krupka says there are two degrees of what is considered hazardous to the potable water supply. A non-health hazard is something that would discolor or alter the taste of the water and affects the water's aesthetic qualities, but is not harmful to public health. A high health hazard is any pollutant in the water that would be hazardous to a person's health.

"In California, every irrigation system needs a backflow prevention device," Krupka says. "Our water purveyors determined that irrigation is a high health hazard because there is always the potential for something to be siphoned back through the system."

Krupka says he remembers documented cases from cities concerning backflow problems. In each situation, an irrigation system contaminated the water supply, forcing the cities to block-off several square miles of pipeline to isolate the pollutant and flush it from the pipes.

Powell Love, owner, Love Irrigation, Ridgeland, Miss., says the use of backflow prevention devices in his state is regulated by the Southern Building Code, which explains that any time a lawn irrigation system with sprinkler heads is attached to the domestic water system it represents a low health hazard. Because of the system's classification as a low health hazard, the state legislator decided not to require backflow prevention devices. However, that ruling violated the Safe Drinking Water Act and the state lost some federal funding. "That issue comes back up in the legislator next year and, because we are in a budget crunch, I think the state will rule that irrigation systems need backflow preventers once again," Love says.

As a result, Love offers customers the option of having backflow preventers installed with their irrigation systems. But if a customer decides not to have one installed, Love has him or her sign a waiver to relieve the company of any later responsibility. "Most



of our clients choose not to have the device put into their systems, so that waiver is something we can file and bring back later if the state begins to require backflow prevention devices for irrigation systems," Love says.

Bruce Parrott, Watts Regulator, North Andover, Mass., says before an irrigation contractor even begins to install a system on a client's property he or she should first check with their local water authority for the region's regulations governing backflow preventer installation. "Depending on what part of the country, city and county you're in, you need to know what type of assembly to put in," he says.

DIFFERENT DEVICES. There are four different backflow preventer designs available for use in residential and commercial sites, but not every device is suited for use with irrigation systems.

Each design has its strengths and weaknesses, but each performs the same, primary function: prevents pollutants from entering the drinking water supply.

- Atmospheric vacuum breaker: Prevents back-siphonage only, but filters all types of hazardous materials.
- Pressure vacuum breaker: A step up over the atmospheric vacuum breaker because of the degree of protection the potable water supply receives. This device is designed for back-siphonage protection only.
- Reduced-pressure principle assembly: Affords the most protection of any of the assemblies available. It is good for back-siphonage protection and for backpressure — when the water pressure of the outside source exceeds that of the irrigation system.
- Double-check assembly: Protects against back-siphonage and backpressure, but is typically viewed as a low or non-health hazard assembly.

"There are some considerations you have to look at with every system," Parrott says. "For example, I have some reservations about the use of the double-check assembly with irrigation systems."

The water in a system connected to a double-check assembly would be discolored or taste funny, but it wouldn't be deadly if consumed, Parrott explains. An irrigation system requires a greater degree of protection for the potable water source because of contaminants that might be used.

Because of its limitations, Barthuly adds that the double-check device is better suited to commercial sites, such as restaurants and hospitals.

Also, the reduced pressure vacuum breaker and the pressure vacuum breaker both have placement restrictions, Parrott says. The reduced pressure assembly must be installed at least 12 inches above the ground and the pressure vacuum breaker must be installed 12 inches above the highest sprinkler head in the system, he says.

In California, Krupka says only the reduced pressure principle assembly and the pressure vacuum breaker are approved for use in irrigation systems because they both offer the highest level of protection available. The atmospheric vacuum breaker and the double-check assembly simply don't block enough hazardous contaminants from the drinking water.

"OUR WATER purveyors determined that irrigation is a high health hazard because there is always the potential for something to be siphoned back through the system." — John Krupka

INSTALLATION MISTAKES. Of course none of the backflow prevention devices will do anything to protect the drinkable water supply if they are installed incorrectly.

The main concern when installing a backflow preventer is the loss of water pressure the irrigation system will suffer, Barthuly says. "If you are starting with a low-pressure situation like 40 PSI, you will lose 10 to 15 PSI through a backflow prevention device," he says. "This can drop the pressure to where it is too low to run the system."

But a contractor can use a booster pump to increase an irrigation system's water pressure, Krupka says. A booster pump is a centrifugal pump that spins the water through an impeller to speed it up and build the system's pressure.

The device, which is positioned above ground, must also be protected from vandalism and freezing, Parrott says. "You have to protect the system against cold climates because if they are unprotected obviously the water freezes, expands and damages the system," he says.

Parrott says a device installed in a cold climate needs to be drained of water during the fall to keep the pipes

IRRIGATION Guide

from bursting. The process involves hooking an air compressor to the system and blowing the water out of it. In some cases, a contractor can also remove the device from the client's property and store it in a maintenance room for the winter, he says.

For these reasons, many manufacturers

offer enclosures for above-ground devices. Parrott says some enclosures resemble a rock, which is made of plastic foam, to hide the device from vandals, but the main function of an enclosure is to provide the device with a heat source for cold climates. "There is a certain amount of heat resistance in there to

hold the warmth in and, in some cases, there is even a little heater built in," he says.

MAINTAINING THE FLOW. Backflow prevention devices are mostly maintenance-free, despite cold weather treatments, Barthuly says. But many states require that backflow prevention units be tested once a year because they are necessary for public safety.

After the installation, the city is notified by the owner or the contractor that the device is in service. The local water authority then sends the property owner an annual examination notification, Parrott says.

The city also notifies a certified tester to travel to the customer's property to examine the backflow preventer, Parrott says. A certified tester is someone who has gone to a backflow certification school where he or she has learned how to properly test and repair backflow protectors. The certification process takes a minimum of 40 hours of training and, once certified, the person is typically placed on a list of certified testers, he adds.

"The testing fee is about \$50 to \$80," Love says. "But if there is damage to the device it will cost \$100 to fix it if it is done by code, and another \$85 to re-certify it."

All of the devices, except the atmospheric vacuum breaker, are considered easily testable, Parrott says. Each backflow preventer is supplied with test ports on the valves that a certified tester has to open to examine the device.

Unless the device has been installed in a cold atmosphere, it should normally last a property owner anywhere from 30 to 40 years, Parrott adds.

But Krupka disagrees, saying a device should last a property owner anywhere from seven to 10 years – depending on whether it is flowing at the right velocity, whether there is too much pressure to regulate or whether a filtration device was put in the system to protect it against debris.

"These are mechanical assemblies, with springs and rubber seals, and anything mechanical will eventually break," Parrott says. "We view these as safety products and we want to be sure that they are functioning properly." ■

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

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USE READER SERVICE #34

by John Graham

SELLING IRRIGATION SYSTEMS

10 Sales Methods that Work

Everything you know about earning new irrigation business is wrong. Follow 10 tips that scrap the conventional rules of selling in exchange for methods that actually work.

How do irrigation professionals make sales? That's easy. Watch what the competition is doing, make cold calls, set up meetings and load prospects up with information on their products and services.

That's all fine if it really works – but does it? Below are 10 selling tips that go beyond what everyone else is doing into the realm of what actually works.

1. *Embrace Differentiation.* No company is so well known that it doesn't need differentiation or branding. If there's no differentiation, then there's no reason to do business with one company in preference to another. If an irrigation contractor has nothing to offer but price, his future is bleak.

2. *Get Serious About Prospecting.* Cold calling is not prospecting. In fact, there's nothing worse than trying to eke out sales making cold calls.

Prospecting is getting together with clients who want more information on your company. It's not making calls to get appointments. It's the process of identifying prospective customers and then initiating an action plan to cultivate them so they want to do business.

3. *Ask More Questions.* Asking questions is the most effective way to reveal the extent of your knowledge of and interest in the customer's business.

Asking thoughtful questions demonstrates that a salesperson knows his or her business too. And you can count on far fewer objections when you spend your time posing

questions to the customer because objections are a sign of customer discomfort – encouraging the customer to express himself makes him comfortable.

4. *Get the Business, Not the Meeting.* Getting a meeting means nothing if an irrigation salesperson doesn't have a clue with who he or she is meeting or what is going on inside the client's head.

Rather than hitting the prospect head-on, the right strategy is to create in the prospect an awareness of who you are and what you know that can be valuable to the prospect – a need that you can fill, for instance.

5. *Find the Customer's Key.* When preparing and making presentations, salespeople tend to be so intent on what they want to accomplish they fail to focus on what motivates the customer's buying decision.

Customers know when a proposal reflects their needs and when one is little more than an attempt to go for the jugular. Make an intense effort to uncover what grabs the customer.

6. *Customers Want Value.* Customers want value on their dollar. If they cannot differentiate one product or service from another, it only makes sense that they will choose the one with the lowest price.

Today, strong support to a service after the sale is of more importance to the customer than what he pays.

7. *Slow Down.* Sales professionals know that selling is about patience and persistence. Rushing



Photo: Toro Irrigation

prospects to buy simply doesn't work.

8. *Visualize the Benefits.* Customers want to be sold. The ability to picture the possibilities – and then reduce them to writing – is important to getting the job. Ask yourself: Does my presentation have an emotional impact? Does the customer feel good about buying?

9. *Personalize Proposals.* Instant proposals let you tee off faster, but they also tick off customers who expect (and deserve) personalized service. Spend time creating individualized proposals, and get someone you trust to review them and cut out the hype before sending them off to a prospective customer.

10. *Enthusiasm Propels.* People want to do business with those who are upbeat, positive and demonstrate in their manner that they like what they're doing. If you come across as positive, your customers are likely to feel positive about you. ■

The author is president of Graham Communications, Quincy, Mass., and wrote the book *Break the Rules of Selling*, from which this article was adapted. He can be reached at 617/328-0069 or j_graham@grahamcomm.com. To purchase this book or other books from *Lawn & Landscape*, visit us online at www.lawnandlandscape.com/store or call Megan Erickson at 800/456-0707.

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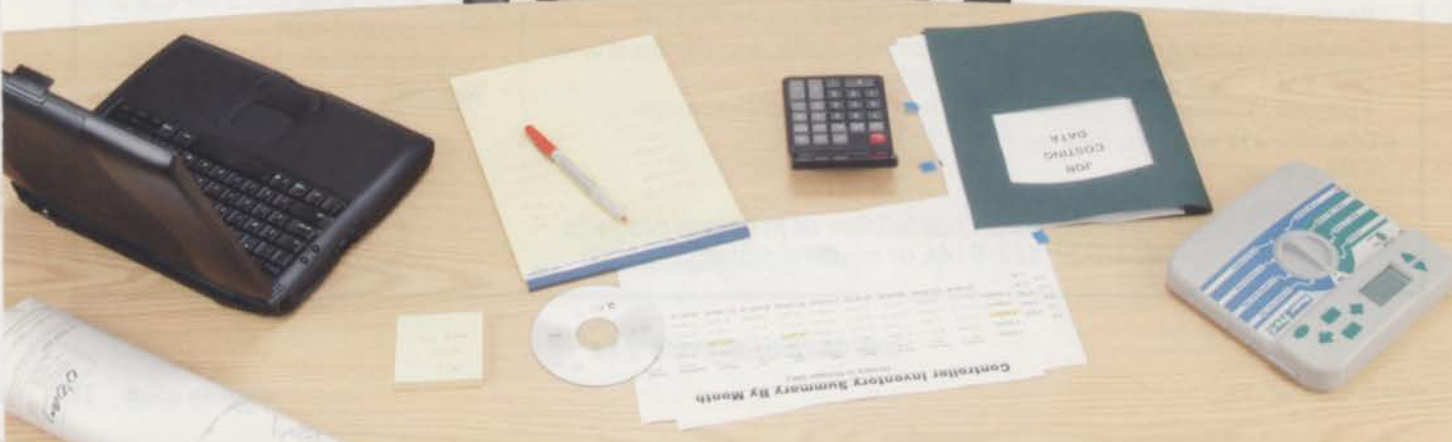


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by Larry Sagers

Adequate nutrition is one of the most vital components of a turfgrass management program. But nitrogen – though important – isn't the only nutrient turf needs.

Beyond NITROGEN

The beautiful green lawns that surround many American homes are nature's wonders. Growth factors, including light, water, pest control, soils and fertilizers, play an important part in keeping the turfgrass lush and customers happy.

The goal of any turfgrass management program is to produce turf that is attractive, healthy and able to withstand the rigors of use. While all of these factors are important, a professional turfgrass manager soon learns they are all interrelated and must be balanced.

This concept, called the "rule of limiting factors" is best illustrated by comparing the inputs in a lawn care program to the staves of a wooden barrel (see *The Principle of Limiting Factors* on page 81). If the barrel staves represent each growth factor, the barrel will never be filled unless each stave is full length. In other words, whatever growth factor represented by the barrel stave is most limiting determines what is needed for the grass to grow.

Fertilization is one growth factor represented as a stave on the barrel. Adequate nutrition is one of the most basic and important components of any turfgrass management program. Correct fertilization determines the turf color, density, uniformity and growth rate. Fertilization helps turf compete with invading weeds and helps it withstand environmental and biotic stresses, including fungi, insects and other pests.

ESSENTIAL PLANT NUTRIENTS. Turfgrass requires 16 chemical elements for growth and development. All are essential, but there is a great difference in the amounts needed for healthy turf growth.

Applying the "rule of limiting factors" to plant nutrition and assigning a stave of the barrel to each essential element illustrates how all elements are interrelated. If any element is limited, the grass will not grow as well as it should. Each

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element is just as important as the others are, but what differs is the amounts needed for turfgrass growth and health.

Living grass plants are mostly water, with a small amount of solid or dry matter composed of the 16 essential nutrients. Plant physiologists divide these plant nutrients into

two main groups based on where the turfgrass gets them. These are air or water supplied nutrients, and soil or fertilizer supplied nutrients.

The first group, carbon (C), hydrogen (H) and oxygen (O), come from atmospheric carbon dioxide and water and comprise 90 to 98 percent of the grass plant. Quantity-wise these three nutrients account for many times the percentage of the other nutrients. Although these comprise the vast majority of the grass plant, professional turf managers do not need to worry about supplying these. Mother Nature supplies them if the turf is otherwise cared for properly.

The second group is made up of minerals derived from soil or fertilizer nutrients. This group is subdivided into three groups based on the quantities of the elements used by the turfgrass.

Nitrogen (N), phosphorus (P) and potassium (K) are macronutrients because the turf uses them in relatively large quantities. However, in terms of the total weight of the plant, their amount is still very small.

Secondary nutrients include sulfur (S), calcium (Ca) and magnesium (Mg). These are used in smaller amounts by turfgrass plants. The need to apply these fertilizers varies

(continued on page 56)

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USE READER SERVICE #41

Beyond Nitrogen

(continued from page 54)

greatly depending on soil type and growing area. Arid western U.S. areas often have excessively high amounts of calcium in the soil while areas with more rainfall may need regular application of one or more of these nutrients.

Micronutrients, as the name implies, are used in much smaller amounts by the turf, and they name does not mean "unimportant." These nutrients, which are often referred to as trace minerals, are iron (Fe), manganese (Mn), zinc (Zn), copper (Cu), molybdenum (Mo), boron (B) and chlorine (Cl).

The *Turfgrass Mineral Composition* chart (below) shows relative amounts of nutrients that the turf uses. It gives the element ranges that normally occur in turfgrass as determined by tissue analysis. Maintaining nutrient levels in these ranges keeps turf healthy, and dense.

Of these mineral elements, nitrogen, potassium, phosphorus, sulfur and iron are most commonly applied to turf. Most soils supply adequate quantities of other secondary nutrients and micronutrients. Applying nitrogen, potassium, phosphorus, sulfur, and iron triggers specific growth responses in turfgrass.

Except for nitrogen and potassium, none of the soil-supplied nutrients ever comprises more than one percent of the plant. Most are present in much lower amounts.

Some recommendations erroneously include regular applications of micronutrients. Never apply micronutrients without

Turfgrass Mineral Composition

MINERAL	DRY WEIGHT PERCENTAGE
Nitrogen (N)	3 to 6
Phosphorus (P)	0.4 to 0.8
Potassium (K)	2 to 4
Sulfur (S)	0.3 to 0.7
Calcium (Ca)	0.3 to 0.6
Magnesium (Mg)	0.1 to 0.2
Iron (Fe)	0.1 to 0.3

Manganese (Mn), zinc (Zn), copper (Cu), molybdenum (Mo), boron (B), and chlorine (Cl) exist in trace amounts that are difficult to measure with most lab tests.

reason. Visual deficiency symptoms on the turf or reliable soil tests must show the need to apply these nutrients. Even small amounts of micronutrients applied unnecessarily can cause serious toxicity problems. Overusing micronutrients ties up and adversely affects the uptake of other nutrients. In addition, there are no easy ways to remove toxic nutrients from the soil nor are there antidotes for the problems.

In addition to the amount of nutrients in the soil, nutrient availability is an important issue. Considering aeration, temperature, moisture, pH and other factors when outlining a turf fertilization program is vital.

Never apply a fertilizer without considering its effect on the current nutrient levels, nutrient availability or surrounding environmental factors. Indiscriminate application of unneeded nutrients increases turf nutrition problems and, in some cases, makes correcting difficulties impossible.

NITROGEN BASICS. Most turf managers know and understand the importance of nitrogen. It goes through its cycle changing from one form to another quickly; so frequently that large amounts are applied to turf to keep it green. Plant responses to nitrogen are easy to observe. Nitrogen induces a dark green color; shoot growth and density; root growth; carbohydrate reserves; recuperative potential; heat, cold and drought hardiness; wear tolerance; and disease susceptibility.

Looking at the other nutrients and deciding how and when to use them is less easily understood. The other nutrients are just as essential, but have a far less dramatic effect. It is often difficult to recognize deficiency symptoms or relate needs based on soil test results. When developing turfgrass fertilization programs, determine what nutrients are needed, how they interact with other nutrients, and how and when to apply them.

Remember that nitrogen acts like the driving engine in promoting growth. Frequent application of high analysis nitrogen fertilizers makes grass grow quickly. That increases the nutrient absorption of other elements. More growth means more need for the other



(continued on page 60)

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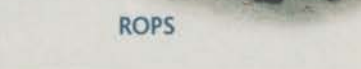
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Beyond Nitrogen

(continued from page 56)

fertilizer elements. Adjust nitrogen levels to fit the quality or management level of the turf you are trying to grow.

Examine each turf area separately. Evaluate the need for fertilizer applications based on the intended use and the quality of turf desired. Never make applications without justification.

Although nitrogen is highly touted and frequently applied, several other elements play an important part in successful turf management. Understanding how to use these elements and their relationships is vital for high quality turf.

OTHER MACRONUTRIENTS. Phosphorus (P), also known as phosphate, is the second number on a fertilizer bag. Adequate phosphorous affects establishment rate and root growth. Phosphorous is also important for improving wear tolerance and reducing the disease susceptibility of the turf.

Phosphorous compounds are usually insoluble in the soil, meaning the element does not leach away and need replacement. It is bad if the phosphorous ever gets too high in the soil because there is no easy way to remove the excess, short of growing it out, and turfgrass uses little phosphorous.

Phosphorous deficiency symptoms are usually most evident during turfgrass establishment. Symptoms include small leaves, reduced growth and a dark reddish color on the foliage. Soil concentrations of 30 pounds-per-acre of available phosphorous are the minimum levels for good turf growth.

Potassium (K), also known as potash, is the soil-supplied nutrient that is used in the second highest amounts right after nitrogen. Potassium promotes good root growth and promotes heat, cold and drought hardiness.

Potassium is very soluble and leaches easily from the soil. Unless the soil has significant phosphorous reserves, potassium needs to be replaced on a timely basis. Potassium is not likely to show toxicity symptoms in turfgrass but at high levels it contributes to salt levels and consequently may affect growth or burn the turf.

Plants frequently consume far more potassium than they need. This concept of "luxury consumption" means that plants

(continued on page 81)

Lawn & Landscape

STATE
of the

INDUSTRY
report

YEAR OF RESURGENCE

Even with rising costs, weather woes and delayed season starts in some regions, contractors report 2003 as a solid growth year.

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STATE OF THE INDUSTRY

Year of RESURGENCE

The year 2003 is shaping up as a time of rebounding growth compared to the past two years, according to recent Lawn & Landscape surveys. By Nicole Wisniewski

It hasn't been a steady year, but 2003 is looking like the year when solid industry growth resumes.

Rising health insurance costs and poor weather seem to be the most common obstacles contractors faced.

The positive news is that contractors see the slow growth and uncertainty of 2001 and 2002 dissipating.

"Business is definitely less predictable than in the past," admits Russ Frith, president, Lawn Doctor, Holmdel, N.J. "But it seems to me that we're in much better shape."

"This is a better year for us than the last two years," adds Paul Wagner, owner, Masters Green, Walled Lake, Mich. "I see the economy turning around most definitely."

Though growth seems to be gaining momentum, 2003 has been a year of ups and downs, particularly in the first few months when weather woes left contractors wondering how business would fare.

Mark Schlossberg, president, Pro-Lawns-Plus, Baltimore, Md., said his season got off to an uneven start. A snow melt in January allowed earlier than normal fertilization, then rains pushed sales back to April. In May, company sales were the highest ever for that month.

"The bottom line is that we are still behind," he says. "Our projected sales are \$70,000 ahead of last year but billings are \$80,000 behind. We're growing again, but it will cost me more to get it done."

John Chiarella's typical start date was also pushed back one month by late snow and rain. But the wet conditions boosted disease treatments, says the president of Ultimate Services, Wolcott, Conn.

A *Lawn & Landscape* survey shows that weather – and lingering economic concerns – have resulted in slow starts and cancellations. In early March, 36 percent of contractors responding to the survey said customer renewals were behind last year's pace and 59 percent of contractors said spring 2003 weather was worse than last spring, putting them behind schedule.

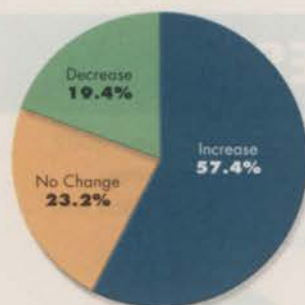
By the end of May, however, excessive rain had cleared in some regions and 75 percent of contractors were reporting a

INDUSTRY Overview

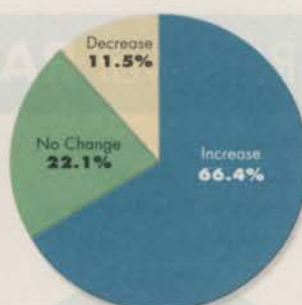
GROSS SALES	% OF THE INDUSTRY	SALES FROM:						SALES FROM:	
		LAWN MAINTENANCE	LAWN CARE	DESIGN/BUILD	IRRIGATION	TREE & ORNAMENTAL CARE	SNOW & ICE REMOVAL	SINGLE-FAMILY RESIDENTIAL	MULTI-FAMILY STRUCTURES
Less than \$50,000	18.7%	50.6%	13.6%	13.6%	3.9%	5.4%	4.4%	72.4%	3.6%
\$50,000 to \$99,999	18.5%	42.3%	13.6%	22.5%	4.6%	6.5%	4.8%	71.3%	5.7%
\$100,000 to \$199,999	20.2%	33.8%	11.5%	30.2%	6.9%	7.8%	4.5%	60.6%	7.4%
\$200,000 to \$499,999	19.4%	32.4%	13.9%	30.1%	6.7%	7.6%	4.7%	66.1%	6.3%
\$500,000 to \$999,999	9.9%	32.3%	11.2%	31.1%	5.9%	3.6%	7.7%	48.4%	13.3%
\$1 million or more	13.3%	27.8%	7.4%	34.7%	6.9%	6.6%	5.1%	48.5%	13.6%
Overall Average		36.8%	12.2%	25.8%	6.2%	7.1%	4.9%	63.3%	7.5%

Growth GOALS

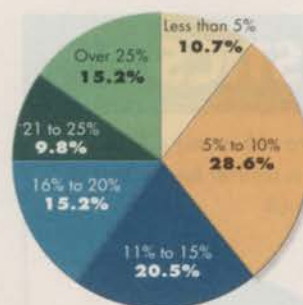
How did your 2002 gross sales compare to 2001?



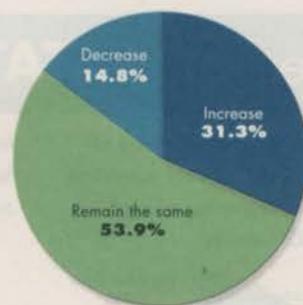
How did you expect your 2003 revenue to compare to 2002?



Approximately what was your pre-tax profit margin in 2002?



Do you expect your 2003 profit margin to increase, remain the same or decrease?



Average expected industry increase in 2003: 12.73%
Average expected industry profit margin increase in 2003: 2.8%

Source: Lawn & Landscape

better first half of 2003 compared to the first half of 2002. By mid-July, 77 percent of contractors called this summer a "boom."

Contractor projections for the rest of the year range from "normal" or "average" to "still positive" and "optimistic." Despite obstacles, 45 percent of contractors say business will be where they expect it to be by year's end, and 54 percent report that profit margins will remain near 2002 levels. The majority (29 percent) estimated profits between 5 and 10 percent in 2003, with 20 percent expecting 11 to 15 percent margins.

Contractors who weren't burdened with wet springs that slowed their season starts said the lingering effects of the recession were behind customer cutbacks early in

the year. "The economy definitely affected us this year, especially in the spring," says Tim Doppel, president Atwood LawnCare, Sterling Heights, Mich. "People were uncertain earlier this year and it showed. New sales were sluggish and cancellations were higher than anticipated. But we are seeing an improvement this summer. We have been in a recession but I really think we are seeing the end of it."

Greg Maxwell, owner, Maxwell Landscape Contractors, Fort Wayne, Ind., agrees. "This year, we've been busy, but it's not a banner year - we're working but we're not making any money and the big contributing factor is the economy," he says. "People are in debt with their credit cards. I think

they spent the money they had buying the cars they wanted and now we're all just waiting for the economy to pick up. Right now people are just being a little more conservative with the funds they're spending until they see the economy start to turn around again."

Contractors who've been in business since 1979, like Michael Currin, president of Greenscape in Holly Springs, N.C., have weathered several recessions. Though 2002 wasn't the worst he's seen, Currin says it's hanging around.

"The 1991 recession was the first really significant one we went through. This one's very different," he explains. "It seems like the 1991 recession came and went away

COMMERCIAL/ INDUSTRIAL	GOVERNMENT/ INSTITUTIONAL	GEOGRAPHIC REGION				NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES				
		NORTHEAST	MIDWEST	SOUTH	WEST	1-2	3-4	5-9	10-24	25+
18.2%	21.1%	9.6%	22.8%	23.8%	14.5%	53.0%	28.0%	6.6%	2.5%	0.0%
20.3%	2.1%	24.3%	19.9%	18.3%	10.9%	30.1%	32.2%	19.0%	2.5%	0.0%
26.7%	4.0%	23.5%	19.1%	19.0%	18.2%	15.7%	29.0%	32.2%	6.3%	1.9%
22.2%	4.1%	28.7%	17.7%	14.3%	16.4%	1.2%	9.7%	35.5%	35.4%	5.7%
31.3%	7.0%	6.0%	10.2%	10.3%	16.4%	0.0%	1.1%	6.7%	35.5%	11.3%
29.1%	6.3%	7.8%	13.2%	14.4%	23.6%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	17.8%	81.1%
23.7%	3.9%	26.5%	31.6%	29.0%	12.6%	19.3%	21.7%	28.2%	18.4%	12.4%

Source: Lawn & Landscape



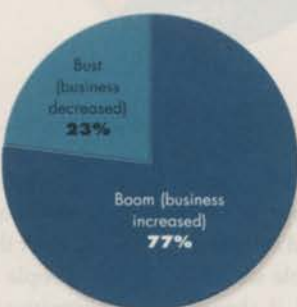
STATE OF THE INDUSTRY

Seasonal STATISTICS

How has the beginning of your 2003 season compared to the beginning of your 2002 season?



In terms of business volume, has this summer been a boom or a bust?



Source: Lawn & Landscape, May 2003

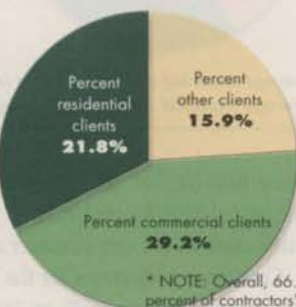
Renewal RATES

How have your customer renewals for this year compared to your customer renewals from last year?



Source: Lawn & Landscape, March 2003

What percent of your 2002 maintenance customers renewed their contracts with you in 2003?



* NOTE: Overall, 66.9 percent of contractors' clients renewed their maintenance contracts in 2003.

pretty quick. This one seems to have eased onto us and is taking its time going away."

Most landscape contractors feel the recession is vanishing. In April, 40.5 percent of contractors reported the economy as their biggest challenge, but by August the economy dropped to No. 4 on the list of business challenges, behind the weather, lack of quality laborers and competition with unprofessional or low-priced contractors.

Doppel says by the end of the year his company will only be up 1 or 2 percent ahead of last year, when his growth was 18 percent. Cancellations have leveled off to normal levels for Atwood LawnCare, lawns are recovering from the 2002 drought, customers are feeling better about their financial situations and are buying again.

Contractors in regions not affected by poor weather – and those offering a menu of services – reported positive growth in 2003.

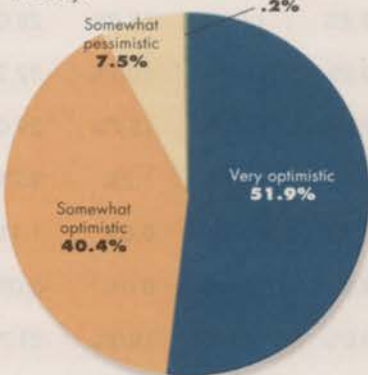
Wagner expects 25 percent growth by year's end – slightly over his target – compared to 14 percent growth in 2002, which was below his 22 percent expectation. Similarly, Scott Zaiser, owner, Zaiser's Landscaping, Burlington, Iowa, expects 7 to 12 percent growth this year,

adding that fall 2003 business looks much better than last year.

In Dallas, Texas, Lawns of Dallas also is up 8 to 10 percent and expects to reach growth of 15 percent or more, says General Manager Todd Brown. Chiarella boasts 20 to 25 percent growth expectations.

Continued OPTIMISM

How optimistic are you about the future of the lawn and landscape industry?



Source: Lawn & Landscape, May 2003

Ric Haury, president, Suncrest Gardens, Peninsula, Ohio, says his sales were up across the board. While the company projected an 8 to 10 percent increase, they are pleasantly surprised with their current 18 or 19 percent growth, and the fall months are still ahead.

TruGreen-ChemLawn's parent company ServiceMaster, Downers Grove, Ill., also expects increased 2003 earnings of about 56 cents per share, just above analysts' expectations of 55 cents per share. "We are instituting cost and wage controls to keep us on track to meet our earnings goals for the year," says the company's Chief Executive Officer Jonathan Ward.

This positive outlook is boosting confidence, and, in turn, some contractors are planning more aggressively for 2004. Doppel says he plans to "start fast and strong," while Wagner and Chiarella each strive for 20 percent.

Overall, most contractors are planning to improve upon this year's results in 2004, and as Frith puts it, "Next year will be an even better year." ■

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



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USE READER SERVICE #47



STATE OF THE INDUSTRY

Pricing PRESSURES

Clients force some contractors to be more competitive when it comes to service pricing. By Nicole Wisniewski

Overall, the numbers show that a majority of contractors were able to raise prices this year – the average 2003 increase for residential mowing clients being about 7 percent, according to a *Lawn & Landscape* survey.

Despite clients' economic or monetary concerns, many contractors had cost increases of their own and had to find ways to cover them. With a 20 percent rise in his fertilizer costs and double-digit percent climbs in health insurance premiums, not to mention higher fuel prices, Paul Wagner stuck to his guns when it came to price hikes. The owner of Walled Lake, Mich.-based Masters Green increases prices 2 percent annually, and this year was no

different. "I'd rather have a 1 to 2 percent increase per year on our existing customer base to cover my cost increases than slap an outrageous increase on them every five years," he says.

Since many of Lawns of Dallas' commercial clients are on multiple-year contracts, not all clients received a price increase this year, but many did, the average being about 2 percent as well, points out Todd Brown, the Dallas, Texas-based company's general manager. "With some clients, we negotiated an increase and with others we didn't increase prices at all and felt comfortable not doing so," he says. "The average was about 2 percent, but we had one client who we were able to increase the price by

about 10 percent since the job was underbid in the first place."

Other contractors had a more difficult time justifying price increases to clients. Tim Doppel, president, Atwood LawnCare, Sterling Heights, Mich., went against his usual philosophy and didn't raise his prices this year. "The economy was so scary and everything we heard said that customers would respond negatively to increases in price," he says. "I really don't like it, but this year needed to be an exception. We'll do a 3 to 5 percent increase for next year."

Dave Tollefson, president, Urban Farmer, Thornton, Colo., says he's installing irrigation systems for the same price he did 10 years ago. "Where do you make your money when you're paying more in labor?" he asks.

"Your clients expect you to do all the same work for less money and they know the market will force you to do that and it creates a whole different set of challenges," points out Michael Currin, president, Greenscape, Holly Springs, N.C., adding that he relies on relationships and communication to help him explain increases to customers. "In the cases where we have really good, strong client relationships, they don't necessarily want prices to change, but they recognize that the pricing levels are no longer the pricing levels that the marketplace is bearing. I think they're being wise and forcing us to be more competitive in our pricing." ■

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

Hourly Service RATES

What is your average hourly rate for each of the following services in 2003?

SERVICE	AVERAGE HOURLY RATE
Residential Mowing Per Hour	\$38.30
Commercial Mowing Per Hour	\$45.37
Chemical Lawn Care Per 1,000 Sq. Ft.	\$10.37

Average % Price Increase in 2002 – 6.1 percent
Average % Price Increase in 2003 – 7.4 percent (1.5 percent higher than contractors estimated they would raise 2003 prices in the fourth quarter of 2002)

Source: Lawn & Landscape, April 2003



STATE OF THE INDUSTRY

WEATHER Woes

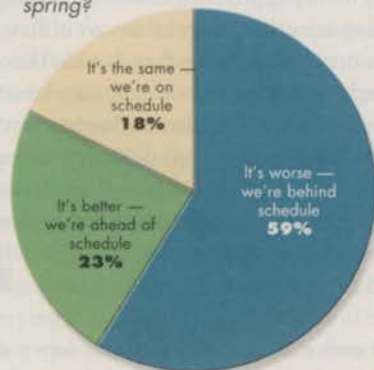
Long winters, lingering droughts and excess rainfall challenge contractors' businesses in 2003. By Nicole Wisniewski

This year, economy wasn't driving businesses' slow starts as much as Mother Nature. She started with a serious 2002 drought. Then while drought lingered in certain areas in spring 2003, some regions received enough rain to soothe dry conditions and then were soaked with excessive rain. The wet conditions boosted turf and disease growth, keeping maintenance crews busy.

In fact, the weather beat out other obstacles to growth this year with 52 percent of contractors reporting that spring weather put them behind schedule, and 53 percent of contractors listing weather as their most challenging issue in 2003.

Weathering the **STORM**

How has the weather this spring compared to your weather last spring?



Source: Lawn & Landscape, April 2003

"The weather is what hurt our business — not the economy," says Mark Schlossberg, president, Pro-Lawns-Plus, Baltimore, Md.,

"[The weather] delayed service starts," adds Russ Frith, president, Lawn Doctor, Holmdel, N.J. "Some parts of the country, like New England, will not recover. There is no way when the weather finally broke that they could make up for all the lost sales."

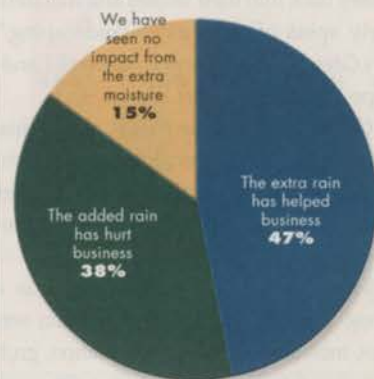
Late snowfalls that hit areas of the country in March and lingering cool weather throughout much of the Northeast also hurt TruGreen-ChemLawn's sales. The company reported that the weather delayed its production season and brought first quarter sales that were down 1 percent from the same period in 2002, noting an operating loss of \$8.8 million for the quarter, compared with a \$6.5 million gain last year. "This decline was wholly attributable to adverse weather in March in several key regions that delayed the normal completion of service anticipated to occur during the first quarter," explains Jonathan Ward, ServiceMaster chairman and chief executive officer, Downer's Grove, Ill.

July alone brought 21 days of rain in Wolcott, Conn., says John Chiarella, president, Ultimate Services. And Michael Currin, president of Greenscape, said it had rained 50 percent of all the calendar days this year in Holly Springs, N.C. "We haven't been able to be as productive in mowing because of the excess growth," he says. "We've had to prune more and our weed control has not been as effective because of the amount of rain."

While excessive wet weather plagued some areas, continued dry spells did the same to others.

The Rain GAUGE

How has the increased rainfall impacted your business this summer?



Source: Lawn & Landscape, July 2003

Dave Tollefson, president, Urban Farmer, Thornton, Colo., says he experienced a full year of drought, which has made turf health problems become apparent quicker than usual.

On the plus side, while weather was certainly a challenge, many companies benefited by some of Mother Nature's surprises. For instance, companies that offer snow removal profited from the rough winter. And though wet weather intensified leaf spot and other diseases, Chiarella was able to increase spray applications and fungicide treatments. ■

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STATE OF THE INDUSTRY

Residential R&R

Contractors focus on residential clients as they spend their extra refinancing dollars on landscape renovations. By Nicole Wisniewski

Residential clients with more disposable income as a result of refinancing are spending it on landscape renovations and additional lawn services, according to contractors.

"With the interest rates down to 4 or 5 percent rates, people are putting more money back into their homes and that definitely spins off into more landscaping," says Greg Maxwell, owner, Maxwell Landscape Contractors, Fort Wayne, Ind.

Customer spending trends reflect this. Mark Schlossberg's average customer spent about \$492 last year and this year that has increased to \$515, says the president, Pro-Lawns-Plus, Baltimore, Md.

Most contractors feel that 2003 was a strong year for residential renovation services, including hardscaping, aeration, grub control and tree and shrub care, with some

contractors touting 20 to 30 percent growth in these areas.

Russ Frith, president, Lawn Doctor, Holmdel, N.J., credits the additional spending to changes in clients' habits. "It seems to me that in the last five or 10 years, our economy has been increasingly driven by consumer spending," he says. "The baby boomers and generations behind them have an ancestral history of home ownership and buying a home, paying it off and not having a lot of debt. Generations X and Y and those after the baby boomers tend to have an entitlement mentality – they want what they want now and feel they've earned it.

HOUSE Calls

HOUSING STARTS .

Jan. 2003	1.850
Feb. 2003	1.622
Mar. 2003	1.780
April 2003	1.630
May 2003	1.732
June 2003	1.803
July 2003	1.872

HOUSING PERMITS

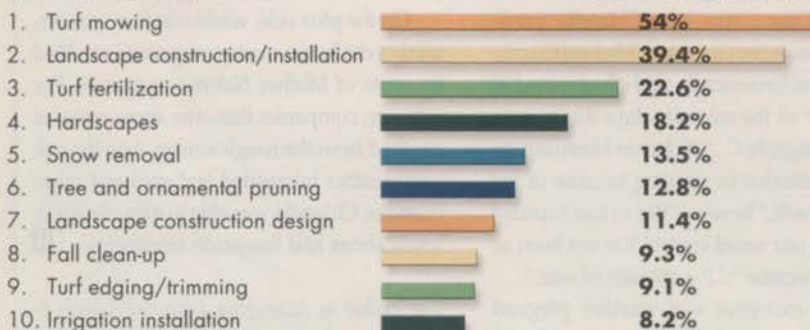
Jan. 2003	1.781
Feb. 2003	1.786
Mar. 2003	1.685
April 2003	1.708
May 2003	1.788
June 2003	1.817
July 2003	1.780

Source: Haver Analytics/Econoday

LARGE and in Charge

Which services represent the largest sales volume of business for your company?

TOP 10 SERVICES



Source: Lawn & Landscape, April 2003

"Arising out of that," Frith continues, "is a pool of capital created in consumers' hands via refinancing – somewhere around half a trillion dollars. According to the research, they used one-third of that to pay off debt, they spent the second third and may have already spent the final third. People are tapping into the appreciated value of their homes and utilizing that money to take care of things now or pay off the things they shouldn't have bought yesterday but did via easy credit. This certainly has an affect on the economy."

While most commercial work remained steady, contractors found they were focusing on the residential market for the first time in a couple of years since the push to add commercial to the mix increased. **LL**

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



STATE OF THE INDUSTRY

Fighting for FOREMEN

Finding supervisory and management-level employees has become the biggest labor issue. By Lauren Spiers

With regards to labor, 2003 brings new challenges, according to contractors.

Though some owners like Todd Brown, general manager, Lawns of Dallas, Dallas, Texas, had an easier time finding laborers this year due to rising unemployment rates, other contractors are still struggling.

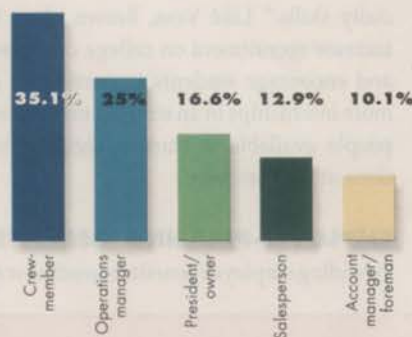
When asked in an April 2003 what they expected to be their biggest challenge for the year, only 20 percent of contractors chose labor. By August, labor reclaimed its spot as one of the top three most challenging issues of 2003. And when looking toward 2004, lack of quality laborers jumped back to the No. 1 spot, with 53.1 percent of contractors expecting it to be an issue.

Additionally, contractors are experiencing a new labor challenge – finding middle management personnel. For example, while Brown retains a high percentage of his laborers, he can only retain 75 percent of his middle managers, and this is a stronger percentage than in 2002, he says.

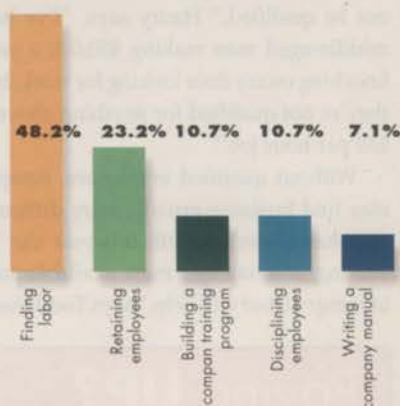
In a recent *Lawn & Landscape* poll, a combined 45 percent of respondents echoed the fact that crewmembers, crew foremen and account managers are their companies' MVPs. But at the same time, nearly half of the respondents to a second poll reported that finding labor was their biggest human resources challenge. For 2003, contractors in some areas are trying to reconcile the importance of having quality labor and middle management with a skimpy pool into which they can dip.

Crew Forming CATCH-22

What do you think is the most important position in your company?



What is your biggest human resources challenge?



Source: Lawn & Landscape, June 2003

SKILL-LEVEL THRESHOLD. In addition to competing with other companies for managers, the problem most contractors run into when recruiting new foremen or supervisors is that individuals qualified to fill these positions are branching out on their own.

"When you start to get into the crew supervisor or manager roles, you're looking at guys who either are or think they can run their own businesses," explains Ric Haury, president, Suncrest Gardens, Peninsula, Ohio. "There's a lot of entrepreneurship out there and we do compete with other companies to find labor, but mostly we're competing with guys who think they can run their own shops."

Brad Terrell, president, A Cut Above,

Columbus, Ga., has faced the same problem in his recruitment process. "Our crews usually consist of one foreman with a driver's license and enough experience that he can ensure that we've got quality control," Terrell says. "In our area, those people have a lot of other options open to them if they don't want to cut grass all day."

In an effort to bring more supervisory-level candidates into the labor pool, Haury constantly keeps his eyes open for middle managers – even when he doesn't have an opening. "The best time to look for help is when you don't need it," Haury says.

To open up his middle management labor pool, Brown beefed up his college recruitment process and started hiring from



STATE OF THE INDUSTRY

outside of the industry. "Before, we only looked inside the industry," he says. "Now, we look for a good sales person or customer service person first – no matter where their experience comes from. Then we teach them what they need to know about landscaping. That has helped open us up to the rest of the world for potential employees."

QUALIFICATION QUANDRIES. High unemployment rates in several regions including the south, southeast, and northwest, are expanding the size of the labor pool, but that doesn't necessarily make it easier to find capable employees.

"We've seen a little increase in the availability of labor, but we're seeing a diversity of people responding to our ads who may not be qualified," Haury says. "I've had middle-aged men making \$50,000 a year knocking on my door looking for work, but they're not qualified for anything above a \$10 per hour job."

Without qualified employees, companies find business growth more difficult. "We had slower growth this year due to staffing, and having a more available pool of hungry labor will help," says Todd Voss,

president, All Seasons Lawn & Tree Care, Dallas, Texas. For 2004, Voss plans to spend more time recruiting at colleges to improve his labor choices. "We're also comprising an action plan for high quality candidate referrals and direct recruiting of competitors best employees," he continues. "The latter isn't meant to hurt any one company, but is a long-term strategy to gain successful players already in the local industry."

Brown has experienced wage and recruitment wars, as well. "Licensed irrigators, for instance, used to be harder to come by so we would fight to keep them, but we pay \$17 per hour now for skilled laborers and I don't know that we're willing to keep paying higher wages for crewmen when we're already paying higher wages for licensed workers because they have specialty skills." Like Voss, Brown plans to increase recruitment on college campuses and encourage students to participate in more internships in an effort to make more people available to start in higher positions at the company.

EMPLOYEE-PLEASING BENEFITS. Providing employee benefits is another way

many companies retain employees and reduce their labor problems.

For the most part, contractors offer the following benefits to keep employees well compensated and content:

- Paid vacation, holidays, sick leave
- Uniform allowance
- Company vehicle allowance
- 401k or IRA retirement plans
- Health insurance

At most firms, company policies dictate that employees must pick up 50 percent of their insurance costs, as well as 100 percent of the cost for coverage of any family members. Why the high percentages? "Our health insurance costs have risen about 10 to 15 percent annually," Haury notes. "It's kind of a double-edged sword because you want to pick up as much of the cost as possible as an incentive for your employees to stick around, but every time a new employee chooses to buy into the program, the cost to the company goes up."

While most companies did not report a need to increase their employees' share of the costs, many are developing alternative incentive programs. Dave Tollefson, president, Urban Farmer, Thornton, Colo., is

Paying UP?

"When it comes to retaining employees, pay is certainly a factor, as well as a fair work environment," says November Nickett, office manager, Nickett's Landscaping, Doylestown, Pa. Nickett's Landscaping prides itself on paying employees above average for their region. An entry-level mower operator or landscape technician for the company makes about \$8.50 per hour, while foremen earn between \$12 and \$14, and head foremen receive about \$16.50 per hour.

Greg Maxwell, president, Maxwell Landscape Contractors, Fort Wayne, Ind., starts laborers in the company's landscape division around \$11 per hour and foremen at about \$14. "We increase wages about 3 to 5 percent per year," he explains. "We try to match the cost of living and other indicators over time."

However, most contractors currently seem to be holding

the line with wages rather than implementing annual increases.

When compared to average wages from 2002, contractors now are paying mower operators, on average, about 40 cents less per hour. Foremen's pay also is down about \$1, but spray technicians' wages are on par with last year. – Lauren Spiers

How much does your company pay per hour for each of the following positions?

POSITION	AMOUNT/HOUR 2002	AMOUNT/HOUR 2003
Entry-level mower operator	\$8.70	\$8.31
Entry-level spray technician	\$10.10	\$10.08
Foreman	\$14.10	\$13.02

Source: Lawn & Landscape, April 2003



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Promoting H-2B?

According to a *Lawn & Landscape* poll, more than 50 percent of green industry companies employ Hispanic workers either through the H-2B program or by hiring laborers from local Hispanic communities. This trend has eased some companies' labor shortages, but the lack of qualified employees now is shifting to the industry's management levels. So why aren't more companies promoting Hispanic workers to management and supervisory positions?

"What we're hoping to do is get more Hispanics who speak better English and have valid drivers' licenses so we can turn the crews over to them," says Brad Terrell, president, A Cut Above, Columbus, Ga. Terrell notes that the large Hispanic

workforce in his area could allow him to put together four or five more crews right away – but only if someone with enough skills is available to run them.

The language barrier and the inability to drive are the two major obstacles most companies face with respect to promoting Hispanic laborers to higher positions. Additionally, November Nickett, office manager, Nickett's Landscaping, Doylestown, Pa., notes that the H-2B program only applies to workers at a certain pay level.

"With middle management, we try to cultivate what we have and promote from within," Nickett comments, "We do have some senior H-2B employees, but at a certain pay level, they're no longer considered laborers and they have to come in through a different visa program." – Lauren Spiers

Does your company employ Hispanic workers?

RESPONSE	% OF CONTRACTORS
Yes	56.5%
No	43.5%

Source: Lawn & Landscape, April 2003

developing a succession plan for the company, as well as a bonus incentive program based on production and profitability.

"When it comes to employee retention, there are also things like job satisfaction and making sure employees like what they do and who they're working with," Haury notes. "Those can all set a little higher precedence than wages and compensation benefits."

Nickett's Landscaping, Doylestown, Pa., doesn't offer the regular range of benefits provided by many companies. Instead, employees are ensured at least 40 hours a week and are always paid on time.

"This is a seasonal business and you know that when you come into it," explains Office Manager November Nickett. "All of our employees are allowed to apply for unemployment and have all winter off, and we won't contest it. But that means everyone needs to work nine months for a total of 12 months of compensation. We're also flexible with our scheduling, so instead of offering paid vacations or sick days, we ask that the crewmembers tell us what their situation is, and they can take the time off."

Greg Maxwell agrees that having a fair work environment is key to retaining em-

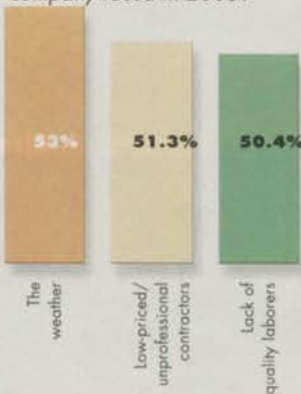
ployees. "I certainly want to be abreast of the regular market as far as paying adequately, but besides compensation, I think our employees like what they're doing here and they enjoy learning the new things that we do," says the president of Maxwell Landscape Contractors, Fort Wayne, Ind.

"As long as we're doing that and they're happy with their employment here, I don't think they're going anywhere else." ■

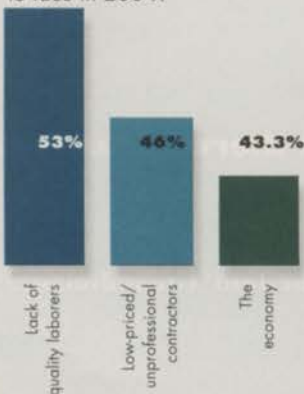
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Company CHALLENGES

What are the three most challenging issues your company faced in 2003?



What are the three most challenging issue you expect to face in 2004?



Source: Lawn & Landscape, August 2003

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STATE OF THE INDUSTRY

Healthy COMPETITION

Between low-ballers and high rollers, contractors work to hold their own against the competition. By Lauren Spiers

Mike Mitchell was only slightly surprised when he looked out his window recently and saw a Cadillac Escalade pulling a trailer of commercial mowers.

Because a large telecommunications provider in his area has recently laid off several employees, it hasn't been uncommon to see formerly well-off businesspeople looking for a second job or starting one of their own, says the vice president of operations for Signature Landscape, Olathe, Kan. "Our unemployment rate [in Kansas] has been at or above the national average," Mitchell says. "A lot of people are looking for work."

While this situation can add to the labor pool, it also has been increasing business competition. Many contractors have seen several small green industry startup companies emerge in the last year. Many of the new businesses on the scene belong to hobbyists-turned-landscapers who were let go from their jobs in other industries.

"With the continued layoffs, the labor outlook is fine - I've got people to choose from - but the market is proliferated with startups," says Greg Maxwell, president, Maxwell Landscape Contractors, Fort Wayne, Ind. "It almost seems like more companies have started in the last three years than in the previous 10 years."

The perceived barriers of entry to this business are very small, so it's easy to get into and get out of, points out Russ Frith, president, Lawn Doctor, Holmdel, N.J. "It's your classic supply-demand analysis," he says. "The industry has been through this many times before. You can be in business with almost nothing out of pocket. Some of these new contractors are willing to operate their businesses as significantly lower margins."

Despite the increase in green industry business ventures, most contractors agree that these small businesses are not competition. "We're not an entry-level company, so we have a different clientele than what they're scrambling for," Maxwell comments.

UNEMPLOYMENT On the Rise

Many lawn and landscape contractors notice that as unemployment rates rise in their regions, so do the number of startup companies with which they have to contend. According to seasonally-adjusted numbers, the national average for unemployment is at 5.5 percent, up 0.2 percent from 2002 - and projections show rates rising through 2004. Additionally, 28 states are at or above the national average and 27 states' unemployment rates rose at least 0.1 percent in the last year. Currently, the Pacific Northwest and southeastern parts of the country seem to be the hardest hit in terms of unemployment. - Lauren Spiers

Highest unemployment rates as of June 2003

STATE	UNEMPLOYMENT RATE
Oregon	8.5%
Alaska	7.9%
Washington	7.8%
Michigan	7.2%
Mississippi	7.1%
Louisiana	6.8%
California	6.8%
North Carolina	6.6%
South Carolina	6.6%
Texas	6.5%

Source: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics

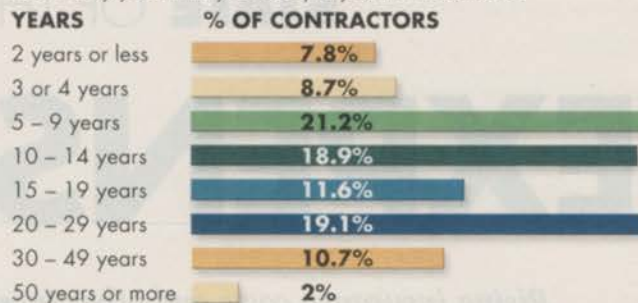
Small Business SURVIVAL

When unemployment rates rise, many individuals laid off from their existing jobs look for easy-entry trades like lawn care and maintenance to pay the bills. But despite an apparent increase in fledgling companies in 2002 and the first part of 2003, most established contractors continue to focus on their own businesses, rather than regard the new startups as competition.

"All sorts of lawn care and landscaping companies are springing up right now," says Greg Maxwell, president, Maxwell Landscape Contractors, Fort Wayne, Ind. "It's a little tight, but we really don't work in the same market as these new companies, so we don't bother trying to compete with them."

Maxwell notes the accepted rule of thumb that most new green industry companies are in and out of business in about three years. In fact, the average survival rate for small

How many years has your company been in business?



Source: Lawn & Landscape, April 2003

Unemployment projections through 2005 (national average per quarter)

2003				2004				2005			
Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
5.8	6.1	6.3	6.3	6.1	6.0	6.0	5.9	5.8	5.7	5.6	5.6

Source: Lawn & Landscape, April 2003

However, competition has intensified with some services.

"When a competitor sees one of our sharp-looking trucks and a good-looking crew on a property, they just assume we're making a killing, so they come in behind us and try to get our business," says Brad Terrell, president of A Cut Above, Columbus, Ga. "We have to make sure our employees are happy, as well, because competitors will try to pull crewmembers away too. It's competitive on both ends."

Lee Greathouse is in a similar situation. "The bid side of the market is as competitive as it's ever been and we continue to be amazed at what our competition is pricing," says the president of Greathouse Landscape Co., Nashville, Tenn. "We have to price to cover costs, but we've had to lower our prices in order to maintain a certain level of work. It's frustrating because we're not seeing any upward trend in that area."

Still, Terrell notes that putting too much energy into competing with startups is more work than the resulting accounts may be worth.

"We won't compete with the companies that are willing to do work for little or

nothing and we know that if they keep doing business that way, they won't be our competition much longer," Terrell notes.

In terms of a startup's ability to survive, many contractors accept the notion that most companies will be in and out of business within three years. Similarly, research compiled by the Small Business Administration shows that only about 50 percent of small businesses in general last four years. At the same time though, 85 percent of respondents to a recent *Lawn & Landscape* survey report that they have been in business for five years or longer, which indicates that young landscape companies may have more staying power than originally thought.

Moreover, with the U.S. economy showing signs of a rebound, a boost in the market may be just enough to turn new firms into more competitive companies. That, in combination with recent layoffs that have reduced the number of potential clients who can afford landscape services, may compound the amount of competition in the industry.

"We haven't had any problems yet, but I can see a trend toward having a smaller pool of available customers," Terrell says.

businesses in general isn't much higher than that.

According to the Small Business Administration (SBA), about

two-thirds of new employer firms survive at least two years and only about half survive at least four years. In 2002, an estimated 550,100 new small businesses started, while 584,500 closed. The SBA reports that owners of about one-third of closed firms said their companies were operating successfully at closure. — Lauren Spiers

As a result, some contractors are lowering their prices to stay competitive.

Even with pressure from new upstarts in the competition arena, contractors must still contend with what some call the industry's "green giants." But, Todd Voss, president, All Seasons Lawn & Tree Care, Dallas, Texas, explains that some healthy competition with large, national companies is a positive sign.

"There must be a leader in any industry to carry the torch of that industry," says Voss. "Success breeds success."

Despite increased competition, most industry businesses share a common approach to maintaining a competitive edge: professionalism.

More than 50 percent of respondents to a *Lawn & Landscape* survey conducted in August 2003 said that low-priced or unprofessional contractors was the single biggest issue limiting company growth. For many, emphasizing professionalism is the key to overcoming this obstacle and bringing a better image back to the industry. **LL**

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



STATE OF THE INDUSTRY

EXPENSE Reports

Rising insurance costs and other increasing expenses force contractors to reevaluate their efficiency. By Lauren Spiers

If the saying is true that "it takes money to make money," then contractors are well on their way to some record-breaking profits.

Contractors are spending increasing amounts of money to run their businesses and expenses include more than just new trucks and mowers. This year, insurance premium hikes thinned many businesses' wallets and company owners are looking for ways to combat the rising rates.

"One single person used to cost us \$110 per month for health insurance," says Todd Brown. Now, Brown, general manager, Lawns of Dallas, Dallas, Texas, reports that the company pays \$240 in health insurance

per employee. "We had a 40-percent increase last year and a 30-percent increase this year," he continues. "Our insurance has doubled in three years, but our volume of business certainly hasn't doubled in three years."

Other contractors see similar increases. "We're looking at a 10 to 15 percent increase annually and when you're overhead goes up, you have to compensate for it," says Ric Haury, president, Suncrest Gardens, Peninsula, Ohio.

Dave Tollefson agrees. "Health insurance is going up 30 percent a year and as a company you can't necessarily take a 30

percent hit every year," says the president of Urban Farmer, Thornton, Colo. "It's frustrating because it's the end user who has to pay for these things, so you look for what's going to have the least impact."

Tollefson's company covers 50 percent of an employee's health insurance costs in the first year with the company, 75 percent in the second year and 100 percent after that. Bill Leidecker, president, Five Seasons Landscape Management, Reynoldsburg, Ohio has a similar program at his company, but has had to adjust the vesting policy to accommodate insurance hikes.

"Our health care costs have gone up in excess of 20 percent every year for the past three years and we're now at the point that we have to off-load more costs to employees," Leidecker says. "Our policy used to have a 60-day wait period before coverage began, at which point the company would begin covering 50 percent of expenses. From there, we paid 75 percent at the employee's one-year anniversary and 100 percent at two years. We've now extended that one year at each level."

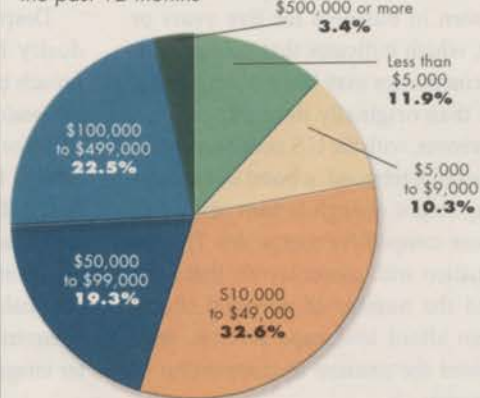
In addition to paying a certain percentage of existing employees' health care, Haury mentions that every time a company hires a new employee who is eligible for benefits, overhead costs increase that much more. For that reason, some companies plan what benefits they offer according to their income.

"In 2004 we should be able to afford a limited health program and some type of employee savings program. We'll add new benefits to the package as the bottom line

Big MONEY

Whether a company focuses on landscape installation, irrigation, lawn care or maintenance, not much work gets done if crews don't have the equipment they need. In terms of equipment and supply expenses, contractors certainly aren't skimping. The following numbers show how much money contractors surveyed by *Lawn & Landscape* spent on trade tools between April 2002 and April 2003. — Lauren Spiers

Total expenditures for equipment and supplies in the past 12 months



Average equipment/supply expenditure: \$106,414
Source: *Lawn & Landscape*, April 2003

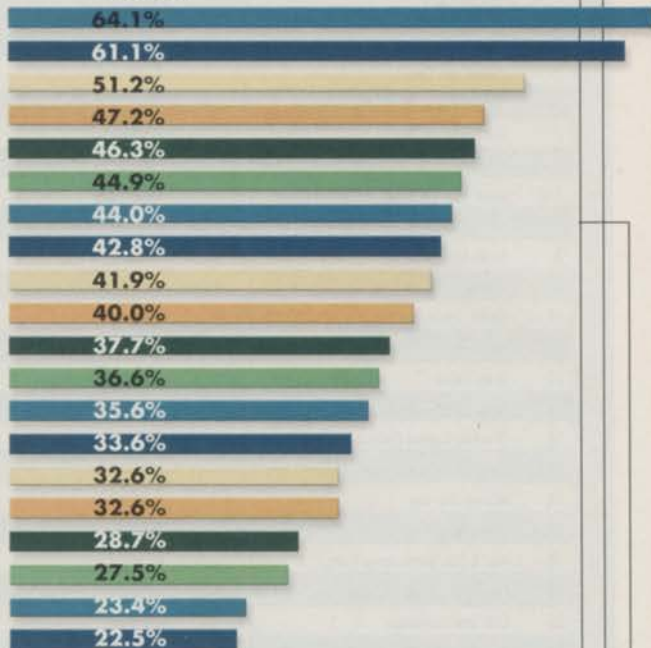
20 TOP TOOLS

According to a *Lawn & Landscape* survey, industry companies spend an average of \$106,414 on supplies and equipment – but what, exactly, are they buying? From a list of 40 common lawn and landscape expenses, survey respondents indicated any and all products they purchased in the previous twelve months. The following list indicates the most popular expenditures by the percentage of respondents who purchased them. – *Lauren Spiers*

EXPENDITURE

1. Plant materials
2. Fertilizer
3. Turf seed
4. Backpack/hand-held blowers
5. Preemergent herbicides
6. Sod
7. Postemergent herbicides
8. Trimmers/edgers
9. Trucks
10. Retaining walls/hardscapes
11. Walk-behind mowers
12. Computer equipment/software
13. Uniforms
14. Insecticides
15. Riding mowers
16. Trailers
17. Irrigation spray heads/rotors
18. Fertilizer spreaders
19. Irrigation valves
20. Fungicides

PERCENT



Source: *Lawn & Landscape*, April 2003

improves. The last thing I want to do is remove a benefit because we can't afford it due to poor performance," says Todd Voss, president, All Seasons Lawn & Tree Care, Dallas, Texas.

However, some companies are seeing a small number of employees cashing in on their available insurance benefits, which is another method of saving money.

"We do have health insurance available if the employee is willing to pay half of the cost," says November Nickett, office manager, Nickett's Doylestown, Pa. "Because most of our employees are in their mid-20s, they don't want to take advantage of health insurance."

In addition to the more youthful industry employees choosing cash over insurance, Nickett and other contractors have noticed that most H-2B workers opt out of insurance benefits.

"They like the paid vacation days and holidays, but they don't want to spend the money on health insurance – they want the cash," says Mike Mitchell, vice president of operations, Signature Landscape, Olathe, Kan.

Michael Currin, president, Greenscape, Holly Springs, N.C., sees this as well, but for Greenscape, fewer health insurance

participants impacts the company much differently. "Our Hispanic workforce chooses not to participate and therefore, because we have such a significant percentage of Hispanic employees, that hurts us," he explains. "The insurance company is looking for 75 percent participation. By not meeting that percentage, our insurance premiums could go up or the company could decide they don't want to write our policy anymore."

In addition to health insurance costs, business insurance has also increased for many contractors. For instance, Nickett's rates went up 45 percent.

Additionally, some contractors have seen huge worker's compensation hikes impact their expenses.

"Our workers' compensation costs have gone up 300 percent," Leidecker says. "This will drive out business and cause companies to close doors. We're a \$3 million company and for us, it's a \$50,000 hit. If you're running a good operation at 8 or 10 percent profitability – which is huge in a down economy – your profit could be \$240,000 and 20 percent of your profits are going to cover just the increase." Because this rate hike was only announced in Janu-

ary of 2003 and went into effect in July 2003, contractors did not have an opportunity to increase prices on their 2003 contracts, leaving them to eat the increase until 2004.

One bright spot that some contractors see is a decrease in their automobile insurance costs.

"We're starting to see a decrease in auto insurance because we implemented a safe driving program," Tollefson says. "All of our employees who drive vehicles have to go through a driver's training program. We minimized our losses by 60 percent the first year and now the insurance company looks at us as less of a risk."

All in all, many contractors recognize that the high prices they are paying for insurance actually makes them safer choices for potential clients.

"I get calls once a week asking why our prices are so much higher and I explain that we're a completely legal company and we have every insurance certificate they need" Nickett says. "We're not the cheapest, but we provide quality work, safely." ■

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

COMPANY	HEADQUARTERS CITY	STATE/ PROVINCE	2002 REVENUE (USD)	% INCREASE/ DECREASE OVER 2001	EXPECTED % INCREASE/ DECREASE FOR 2003	YEAR-ROUND EMPLOYEES	SEASONAL/ PART-TIME EMPLOYEES	
1	TruGreen Cos.	Memphis	Tenn.	\$1,400,000,000	0	4 to 5	18,500	6,000
2	ValleyCrest Cos.	Calabasas	Calif.	\$620,000,000	n/a	n/a	7,800	0
3	The Davy Tree Expert Co.	Kent	Ohio	\$319,273,000	-6	4	4,400	600
4	The Brickman Group	Gaithersburg	Md.	\$297,000,000	16	15	1,800	4,000
5	American Civil Constructors	Littleton	Colo.	\$170,000,000	13.3	12	800	1,500
6 (f)	Initial Tropical Plants (formerly Rentokil)	Riverwoods	Ill.	\$103,000,000	-6	n/a	50+	50+
7 (f)	The F.A. Bartlett Tree Expert Co.	Stamford	Conn.	\$103,000,000	3	4	1,000	0
8	Scotts LawnService	Gahanna	Ohio	\$90,000,000	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
9	OneSource Landscape & Golf Services	Tampa	Fla.	\$80,250,000*	7	n/a	1,250	350
10	Gothic Landscape	Valencia	Calif.	\$78,659,567	10	7.5	1,200	0
11	Weed Man	Mississauga	Ontario	\$75,000,000	10	13.5	1,500	0
12	Lawn Doctor	Halmdel	N.J.	\$70,000,000	6	5	1,500	1,000
13	American Landscape Cos.	Los Angeles	Calif.	\$51,000,000	28	10	850	0
14	Grounds Control Division of Sanitors	San Antonio	Texas	\$49,000,000*	40	n/a	n/a	n/a
15	Omni Landscape Group	Norristown	Pa.	\$47,903,000	3.6	4.4	350	250
16	Massey Services	Maitland	Fla.	\$41,300,000	8.9	15	534	0
17	The Care of Trees	Wheeling	Ill.	\$39,780,736	4	2	450	50
18	Vila & Son Landscaping Corp.	Miami	Fla.	\$39,500,122	39.6	15	590	0
19	The Bruce Co. of Wisconsin	Middleton	Wis.	\$38,000,000	8	2	183	522
20	Oak Leaf Landscape	Anaheim	Calif.	\$37,820,000*	22	n/a	500	0
21	Jensen Corporation Landscape Contractors	Cupertino	Calif.	\$31,584,431	-9	0	250	0
22	Landscape Concepts	Grayslake	Ill.	\$31,000,000	9	8	80	360
23	Acres Group	Wauconda	Ill.	\$30,800,000	15	14	100	500
24	Allin Cos.	Erie	Pa.	\$30,240,000	139	125	25	55
25	The Celtis Group	San Jose	Calif.	\$28,500,000	25	10	400	30
26	Chapel Valley Landscape Co.	Woodbine	Md.	\$28,300,000	6.8	14	250	150
27 (f)	Lipinski Landscape & Irrigation	Marlton	N.J.	\$27,000,000	10	10	100	250
28 (f)	Marino Landscape	Anaheim	Calif.	\$27,000,000	10	5	300	40
29	The Groundskeeper	Tucson	Ariz.	\$26,000,000	0	10	550	50
30	Greenspace Services ■	Toronto	Ontario	\$24,172,872 (\$33 mil. Can.)	3	4	75	400
31	Naturalawn of America	Frederick	Md.	\$24,100,000	9	5 to 10	n/a	n/a
32	Chalet Landscape	Wilmette	Ill.	\$24,000,000	2	2	100	200
33 (f)	Mariani Landscape	Lake Bluff	Ill.	\$23,000,000	n/a	n/a	80	220
34 (f)	Nanak's Landscaping	Longwood	Fla.	\$23,000,000	2	5	400	0
35 (f)	Teufel Nursery	Portland	Ore.	\$23,000,000	22	14	220	95
36 (f)	Scott Byron & Co.	Lake Bluff	Ill.	\$23,000,000*	0	n/a	95	325
37	Cagwin & Dorward	Novato	Calif.	\$22,886,080	12.5	3	336	0
38	Tropics North	Princeton	Fla.	\$22,500,000	0	10	290	0
39 (f)	AAA Landscape	Phoenix	Ariz.	\$22,000,000	0	10	400	50
40 (f)	Urban Farmer	Thornton	Colo.	\$22,000,000	11	10	180	180
41	The Greenery	Hilton Head Island	S.C.	\$21,000,000	6	8	320	20
42	Nissho of California	Vista	Calif.	\$20,400,000	-11	0	300	0
43	Park Landscape	Santa Ana	Calif.	\$19,475,400*	7	n/a	500	0
44	Spring-Green Lawn Care Corp.	Plainfield	Ill.	\$19,300,000	6	3	160	165
45	Choate Irrigation USA	Carrallton	Texas	\$18,500,000	8	20	250	0
46	W.H. Canon	Romulus	Mich.	\$17,500,000	50	15	115	130
47	LMI	Carrallton	Texas	\$17,299,155*	30	n/a	130	20
48	Lucas Tree Expert Co.	Portland	Maine	\$17,000,000	0	20	375	75
49	ALDO I Landscaping & Lawn Service	Ocean	N.J.	\$16,140,000	20	10	60	40
50 (f)	Clarence Davids & Co.	Moffeson	Ill.	\$16,000,000	0	0	85	215

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COMPANY	HEADQUARTERS CITY	STATE	2002 REVENUE (USD)	% INCREASE/DECREASE OVER 2001	EXPECTED % INCREASE/DECREASE FOR 2003	YEAR-ROUND EMPLOYEES	SEASONAL/PART-TIME EMPLOYEES	
51 (f)	Denison Landscaping	Fort Washington	Md.	\$16,000,000	10	5	75	50
52 (f)	Dora Landscaping Co.	Apopka	Fla.	\$16,000,000	0	0	100	0
53	CoCal Landscape	Denver	Colo.	\$15,700,000	-3	21	180	200
54	HighGrove Partners	Atlanta	Ga.	\$15,469,000	0	5	200	30
55	Shamrock Landscaping	Kent	Wash.	\$15,250,000	25	15	125	30
56	McFall & Berry Landscape Management	Vienna	Va.	\$15,100,000	4	11	160	80
57 (f)	DuBrows Nurseries	Livingston	N.J.	\$15,000,000	7	13	75	175
58 (f)	Great Oaks Landscape Associates	Novi	Mich.	\$15,000,000	4	0	40	100
59 (f)	Hermes Landscaping	Lenexa	Kan.	\$15,000,000	0	0	125	125
60 (f)	North American Landscape	Charlotte	N.C.	\$15,000,000	15	-20	150	50
61 (f)	Realty Landscape Corp.	Newtown	Pa.	\$15,000,000	15	10	100	160
62	Western Dupage Landscaping	Naperville	Ill.	\$14,900,000	-6	2	40	130
63	Bauman Landscape	Richmond	Calif.	\$14,850,000*	10	n/a	60	100
64 (f)	New Garden Landscaping & Nursery	Greensboro	N.C.	\$14,500,000	-8	10	175	50
65 (f)	Sungrow Landscape Services	Austin	Texas	\$14,500,000	n/a	n/a	300	0
66	The Highridge Corp.	Issaquah	Wash.	\$14,200,000	0.7	1.5	225	70
67	Countryside Industries	Wauconda	Ill.	\$14,161,658	14.32	10	40	150
68 (f)	ILT Vignocchi	Wauconda	Ill.	\$14,000,000	38	10	50	100
69 (f)	Pro-Grass	Wilsonville	Ore.	\$14,000,000	2	1	250	0
70	Autumn Landscaping	Englewood	Colo.	\$13,598,000	40	20	100	100
71	NutriLawn ■	Toronto	Ontario	\$13,333,906 (\$18.2 mil. Can.)	10	5	n/a	n/a
72	Northwestern Landscape Co.	Puyallup	Wash.	\$13,233,000	12	30	200	100
73	R.H. Dupper Landscaping	Tempe	Ariz.	\$13,075,354	29.72	23	165	10
74	Sebert Landscape Co.	Bartlett	Ill.	\$13,000,000	20	3	60	120
75	Groundmasters	Loveland	Ohio	\$12,700,000	23	26	125	100
76	Benchmark Landscape	San Diego	Calif.	\$12,200,000	-12	10	200	0
77	Middleton Pest Control	Orlando	Fla.	\$12,172,728	22.87	23	270	n/a
78 (f)	Dennis 7 Dees Landscaping	Portland	Ore.	\$12,000,000	11	3	160	40
79 (f)	Parker Interior Plantscape	Scotch Plains	N.J.	\$12,000,000	0	n/a	50+	20+
80 (f)	Senske Lawn & Tree Care	Kennewick	Wash.	\$12,000,000	5	8	150	50
81 (f)	Gibbs Landscape Co.	Smyrna	Ga.	\$12,000,000*	n/a	n/a	150	175
82	Webb Landscape	Ketchum	Idaho	\$11,763,495	-4	2	30	130
83	Lied's Nursery Co.	Sussex	Wis.	\$11,740,000	-20	10	75	200
84	Munie Outdoor Services	Caseyville	Ill.	\$11,098,000	26	10	75	100
85	James Martin Associates & LID Landscapes	Vernon Hills	Ill.	\$10,472,000	11	0	75	65
86	Clintar Groundskeeping Services ■	Toronto, Ontario	Canada	\$10,842,480 (\$14.8 mil. Can.)	0	10	130	200
87	Swingle Tree & Lawn Care	Denver	Colo.	\$10,700,000	-1	15	145	50
88 (f)	Landscape Specialists	Lake Forest	Calif.	\$10,500,000	14.39	20	250	100
89 (f)	McHale Landscape Design	Upper Marlboro	Md.	\$10,500,000	12	10	130	25
90	Stiles Landscape Co.	Pompano Beach	Fla.	\$10,486,000*	7	n/a	145	35
91	Naturescape dba Alpine Gardens	Greeley	Colo.	\$10,126,942	3	10	42	90
92	Landscape Workshop	Bessemer	Ala.	\$9,936,000*	8	n/a	170	25
93	Bozzuto Landscaping Co.	Laurel	Md.	\$9,413,227	27	25	70	130
94 (f)	Complete Landsculpture	Dallas	Texas	\$9,200,000*	0	n/a	100	130
95 (f)	Glen Gate Co.	Wilton	Conn.	\$9,200,000*	0	n/a	40	40
96	Heads Up Landscape Contractors	Albuquerque	N.M.	\$8,900,000	-10	8	110	60
97	Bratt Landscapes	Pleasant Grove	Utah	\$8,866,022	-29	-10	18	95
98	Mainscope	Indianapolis	Ind.	\$8,300,000	9	20	45	85
99	Complete Landsculpture	Dallas	Texas	\$8,200,000	-9	0	75	30
100	Bio Landscape & Maintenance	Houston	Texas	\$8,166,000	-22	35	160	100

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USE READER SERVICE #50

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(continued from page 60)

remove more potassium than they need for their growth. This means potassium might become deficient when nitrogen levels are high. Visible potassium deficiency symptoms are rare and excessive amounts interfere with the absorption of calcium, magnesium and other nutrients.

SECONDARY NUTRIENTS. Sulfur promotes dark green turf. It assists in root growth and the accumulation of carbohydrate reserves. Sulfur deficiency also makes turf more susceptible to some diseases.

Although the symptoms of sulfur deficiency are less visible than iron or nitrogen deficiencies, they show some similarities. Grass blades are light yellow and the grass grows slowly. Sulfur deficiencies are easy to correct by applying any sulfur containing fertilizer.

Calcium and magnesium are usually not problems for turf managers. In arid areas with high pH soils, there is an abundance of these minerals. In low pH areas, they are usually applied in sufficient quantities to adjust the pH so that more additions are unnecessary.

MICRONUTRIENTS. Iron is the only micronutrient likely to create problems for turf managers. Even though iron comprises less than .3 percent of the grass plant, its effect on the growth and appearance of the turf is dramatic. It promotes dark green color, shoot growth and density. It also enhances root growth and carbohydrate reserves. Adequate iron promotes heat and cold tolerance, makes turf more tolerant of drought and increases wear tolerance.

Lack of iron, or iron chlorosis, appears as light yellow leaves. The yellowing is more prominent near the tips of the grass blades. Iron deficiency shows the immediate color change but not the immediate clipping reduction that comes if the turf is deficient in nitrogen.

Iron deficiencies are corrected by applying ferrous sulfate or an iron-containing fertilizer. Expensive chelated products are not usually warranted except in unusually high pH situations because the material is applied as a foliar application. Excess iron can tie up phosphorous, so avoid making unneeded applications.

The first step in developing a turfgrass fertility program is determining the fertility with laboratory tests. A basic soil test includes measurements of the soil pH, phosphorus, potassium, salt and lime levels. Knowing these, a manager can make informed decisions – not guesses – about fertilizer application rates and frequencies. Follow these steps to adequately test soil:

- ✓ Use a certified soil lab. Many states have soil test labs at their Land Grant Universities or other independent labs. Use one that is familiar with conditions in your state as they can then help with recommendations if needed.
- ✓ Avoid homeowner type soil test kits or "free" tests from uncertified labs. These are usually inaccurate or are often used to sell unneeded fertilizers.
- ✓ Take soil samples in areas of similar soil type and fertilization history and make a composite sample from each

area. Soil testing prior to planting turfgrass is preferred. It is easier to change soil before planting than after the grass is established.

- ✓ Soil pH is one measurement that helps turf managers make good decisions. The amount of acidity or alkalinity is measured on a 0 to 14 scale. When the pH is below 7.0, the soil is acidic. When it is greater than 7.0, it is alkaline. A pH of 7.0 is considered to be neutral – neither acidic nor alkaline. When soil pH drops below 6.0 or rises above 7.5, some of the turfgrass nutrients become less available.
- ✓ Over time, in high rainfall areas the leaching of basic materials from the soil and the use of acidifying fertilizers makes soil more acidic. Conversely, irrigation water adds bases of calcium, magnesium, potassium and sodium that gradually increase alkalinity. Conducting periodic soil tests is the only way to monitor changes. – **Larry Sagers**

Testing Tips

Soil tests may show adequate amounts of iron in the soil, but the element is unavailable as it is tied up with other nutrients. This is common in alkaline soils. In such cases, chelated iron products help correct the problem.

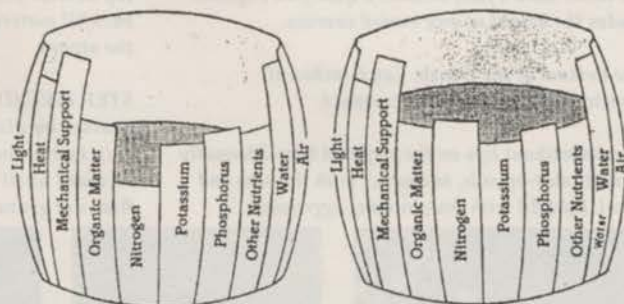
The other essential elements of manganese (Mn), zinc (Zn), copper (Cu), molybde-

num (Mo), boron (B) and chlorine (Cl) are not usually problems on turfgrass grown in soil. Chlorine is needed in such small amounts that deficiencies can only be shown under laboratory conditions. Grass growing on pure sand such as golf greens may infrequently require added trace minerals.

Giving cookbook formulas for applying nutrients to turf is impossible because of many variables involved, even within a localized area. Each manager must make those decisions after taking into account the turf species, desired use, quality, and the surrounding environmental and management conditions. Consider natural soil fertility, available fertilizers, purchase and application costs and the length of the growing season.

Base all fertilization decisions on facts, not guesses to save time, money and lost turf. **LL**

The author is regional horticulture specialist, Utah State University Extension Service, and can be reached at lsagers@extmail.usu.edu.



THE PRINCIPLE OF LIMITING FACTORS.

The level of water in the barrels above represents the level of crop production. On the left, nitrogen is represented as being the factor that is most limiting. Even though the other elements are present in more adequate amounts, crop production can be no higher than that allowed by the nitrogen. When nitrogen is added (right barrel), the level of crop production is raised until it is controlled by the next most limiting factor, which is potassium, in this case. Graph: Larry Sagers

by Will Nepper

Up Against the WALL

Retention, drainage and increased real estate value: there are plenty of reasons to put up a wall and even more ways to fail miserably.

Retaining walls can be constructed to maximize space, provide aesthetic beauty or just hold something back. But the common problem for many contractors is their inability to see a wall as nothing more than the veneer of a bigger retention system.

Many of the most problematic aspects of wall installation can be avoided if contractors take the time to consider each wall's specific purpose and then make decisions accordingly. This means choosing materials wisely, considering appropriate backfill and water drainage – but most importantly, carefully planning all of the above before construction begins.

WHY WALLS? "If you focus solely on the wall, then you're not concentrating on what the real issue is, which is trying to stabilize the ground," says Andy White, president,

STEP-BY-STEP RETAINING WALLS

STEP ONE – Using a shovel or a skid-steer loader, dig a trench about 2 feet wide and deep enough to fit the required amount of buried block and compacted base. For walls less than 4 feet high, bury one course of units. For walls taller than 4 feet, consult a qualified engineer for design feedback. Total wall height includes the height of any buried courses.

STEP TWO – Firmly compact the soil in the bottom of the trench. Lay 6 inches of compactable base (sand and gravel) in the bottom of the trench and compact.

STEP THREE (A,B) – Place the first layer of units without lips on the prepared base. Manually knock off lips before placement. Position the units side-by-side, in contact with the base and level in both directions using a carpenter's level. Backfill with free-draining aggregate.

STEP FOUR (C) – Place a filter fabric (recommended) directly behind the wall extending from the bottom of the base course to the middle of the top course. This will minimize the amount of backfill material coming through the face texture of the stones.

STEP FIVE (D) – Continue assembling additional courses by placing units in a staggered relationship to the course beneath, pulling each unit forward until secure. As you install each course, first use gravel as backfill.



Wayside Landscape Services, Asheville, N.C. "That is really important because if you don't focus on the stabilization, there are probably going to be some problems down the road."

However, Lynn Barnhart, landscape marketing manager, Anchor Wall Systems, Twin Cities, Minn., asserts that, for residential contracts, fashion and form are becoming more important. "A good retaining wall can be a complement to the overall landscape design or incorporated into a flower bed," she says, adding that retaining-wall systems are becoming much more popular with homeowners. "People are spending a little more every year on their lawns," Barnhart says, and some of that money is being allocated to the construction of retaining systems.

Although aesthetics can be more of an issue in the private sector, that does not mean other, more functional factors, are not also considerations. Suzanne Blackburn, vice president, Hilfiker Retaining Walls, Eureka, Calif., says retaining walls are often used to improve real estate. "People are building bigger homes on smaller lots," she says. "To maximize the use of their property, they need to use retaining walls."

Rob Leid, president, Lied's Nursery, Sussex, Wis., also refers to function as the primary reason for putting up a retaining system. "Grade determines the need," he says. In addition to maximizing backyard space and creating usable patio space, in many cases a wall is installed to deal with grade changes," Leid explains.



A retaining wall can add aesthetic appeal to a landscape while maximizing space. However, careful attention to detail and proper installation techniques are necessary for successful results. Photo: Anchor Wall Systems

"The main reason for putting up a retaining wall or system is to hold something back," White adds. "It's usually done for space requirement. You probably have a slope and need to get some usable ground [because] the slope is not useable for the client's purposes."

BETTING ON BACKFILL. In most cases, the construction of a retaining wall is pointless if contractors don't consider the most important factors first. The most vital of these factors is a retaining wall's backfill.

"Your wall is a vertical structure holding something back behind it – soil, roadway, a

planting bed," White explains. "But there's a lot of pressure on that wall. That soil or ground behind it has to be stabilized to take some of the pressure off of the wall."

There are a couple of ways to accomplish this. "A lot of walls have some sort of 'dead man' – some type of a material that projects into the area you are trying to stabilize, and it's attached to the wall," White says. This anchors the wall to the material – usually ground – behind it.

"If it is a wood wall like a railroad tie wall, a railroad tie might be embedded back into the soil with a cross-member at the end so it would provide resistance," he specifies.

"Another example is a geogrid, which is a plastic grid specially made to stabilize the soil, which looks a little like a plastic-welded wire fabric," he explains. "If you've ever tried to pull a piece of buried fencing out of the ground, it's very difficult. So, this provides a tremendous stabilization factor for the soil. If it is tied into your face wall, it really gives a lot of support to that wall."

Anchoring a wall is especially necessary when walls are constructed with the implicit purpose of retaining ground. The wall must not come down under any circumstances. In the unfortunate scenario where a wall has not been supported sufficiently, the price

STEP SIX (E) – Place drain tiles behind the retaining wall at a grade to allow water to drain from the backfill. Outlet the drain tile through the wall at every low point and around the ends of the wall. Then, backfill with free-draining gravel 12 inches behind the wall in 6-inch layers. Fill in the voids. (Organic soil and clay are not recommended for backfill.)

STEP SEVEN (F) – Fill in any remaining areas behind the wall with soil. Then, compact it every 12 inches. Repeat steps five, six and seven until the retaining wall reaches the desired height. For walls taller than 4 feet, consult a qualified engineer for information concerning proper design, backfill and geosynthetic reinforcement.

STEP EIGHT – Firmly compact native soil every 12 inches behind the retaining wall. However, do not compact the soil directly on top of the units.

STEP NINE (G) – To finish off the retaining wall in corners or tight areas, you may need some partial blocks. To split a block, use a hammer and chisel to score the block on all sides. Pound the chisel on the score line until the block splits. If the block does not split easily, use a circular cut-off saw with a masonry blade. Always wear eye protection when splitting blocks. Wear other recommended protective apparel when operating saws as well. – Images and information: Anchor Wall Systems



Retaining Walls

paid by a client (or the responsible contractor) can be great. Because, in many cases, on the other side of these unstable walls are flowerbeds, backyard patios and, in worst-case scenarios, homes and automobiles.

"The performance of retaining walls is a direct function of the quality of the backfill material utilized," Blackburn says. "That generally needs to be a granular free-draining material. If clay or sand is used, several things are likely to happen. There will more likely be movement of the wall during construction and post-construction settlement issues." Both, she says, threaten the integrity and aesthetics of the wall.

DOWN THE DRAIN. Water can wreak havoc on a retaining system if steps are not taken in the early design stages. As with backfill, drainage problems can mean the undoing of an otherwise secure-looking wall.

"Drainage needs to be considered early on

(continued on page 86)

It's easy to be overwhelmed by the myriad aspects of constructing a retaining system for a client. That's why contractors should come armed with a checklist of items that must be considered before the time comes to round up materials, offer quotes and, of course, break ground. Below, Unilock suggests some items to add to your checklist:

DIMENSIONS & LOCATIONS:

- Property boundaries
- House size (including the direction it faces)
- Structures such as pool houses, sheds, decks, garages, etc.
- Trees to remain or to be removed
- Entrances and windows
- Proposed or existing planters, steps, walls and stone areas

LOCATE:

- Electric meter, water taps, downspouts, etc.
- Underground services

CONSIDER:

- Elevation of entrances from ground level to top of threshold (noting the visual aspects of adjoining properties)
- Location of wall or other related installations with regard to sunlight and shade

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Retaining Walls

(continued from page 84)

in the design phase," Barnhart asserts. Blackburn also points to the mismanagement of water on the surface and subsurface of a retaining system as one of the most common mistakes made with regard to design.

"You have to relieve the water pressure somehow," White adds. "There has to be a drain system of some sort behind the wall."

White says some walls require a 1-foot-deep channel of stone behind the wall that extends from the wall's top to bottom. "At the bottom would be a drain pipe that moves all the water away," he says. "Any water moving horizontally through the soil is going to hit that drain, or gravel, and drop immediately before it gets to the wall."

But environmental water won't be the only problem Mother Nature inflicts upon a retaining wall. Sometimes frost and ice can cause problems at the wall's base where the footer meets the ground. According to Barnhart, this is one reason to wait until you are out of your area's frost season before beginning construction.

With regard to preventive medicine, White explains that you must consider the frost level of the ground at the wall's base. Inadequate footing is another common mistake to avoid.

"When you are building a stone wall in a northern climate," White says, "you have to be below the frost level. You're going to need about 28 inches of wall beneath the surface that you're not even going to see." If you don't, he continues, "you get a cracked wall. Anything more than 4 feet and you need a professional and sometimes a soil engineer who can explain what the soil properties are so you can design properly."

White specifies that frost level is less critical on a segmented block wall than on a rigid wall, primarily because a well-designed rigid-wall system should have a drain field behind it. "On a segmented block wall, the footer is usually gravel, but you need to take that gravel down to the frost level so that the soil beneath the wall isn't moving up and down as freezing and thawing occur."

WALL OF WHAT? A retaining wall can be constructed of several materials, but factoring in the wall's environment and purpose are important when making this decision. Homeowners traditionally are looking for a wall that might provide a function secondary to sprucing up the yard. Contractors who offer retention services should examine what is available on the market so they can greet their clients with a full palate of materials that best suit their needs.

What are people looking for? The look is "natural, natural, natural," Barnhart says. "People want walls that either blend in with the landscape or look like they've been there for a while."

"[Some] walls use the natural available stone," Blackburn explains. "The basket tends to blend into the environment and you don't really see it." This type of wall is sometimes incorporated as an architectural feature, pri-

(continued on page 90)

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Retaining Walls

(continued from page 86)

marily in commercial designs, she says.

White explains that the most desired material for wall construction is natural stone, "but it's also the most expensive."

"As the market grows," White says, "things are starting to look more natural." Some building blocks have been very effective but don't look like natural stone. "So, you either like it or you don't. But, like anything else, if you look at it long enough, you start to get used to it."

There are also more options in terms of color variety, White says. "There's more than just the gray concrete coloring," he continues. "I've seen a wide range of colors - a lot of tan, brown or beige. I've even seen some reddish color to blend in with [some areas] soil a little bit better."

Masonry block walls are perennially popular for low height applications, Blackburn explains. She adds that they also typically outlast the walls constructed of treated timber.

White concurs. "The [lifespan] for pressure-treated wood can be between 50 and 60 years. A lot of people are using pressure-treated hard wood, which lasts about 10 years at the most. Pressure-treated pine lasts a lot longer," he says. "As the market grows with the arrival of the segmented block retention walls, lumber is being used less. For look or longevity, lumber is the least favorite, but it's also the least expensive."

And longevity is most certainly a desirable attribute, especially if the wall in question is meant to retain sloping ground. "With the segmental wall units, it's hard to say how long they're going to last because they've only been around for about 15 or 20 years so far."

And so what of the cost? Is there a retaining wall average among contractors to consider when calculating final fees?

"For residential, we look at anywhere between \$15 to \$30 per square foot installed," Barnhart comments. "Commercial - be-

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tween \$12 and \$18 per square foot installed. These prices include labor, block, materials and, in special conditions, an engineer's fee may be involved."

White, on the other hand, asserts that it would be nearly impossible to come up with an average. "Almost every one is custom built," he says. "The low end is wood, the high end is high-quality stonework, and then there are segmental block units in between. The size of the wall is also critical. The higher a wall gets, the more expensive it gets because the more wall there is, the more area behind that wall that needs to be stabilized." ■

The author is a staff writer for Lawn & Landscape magazine and GIE Media and can be reached at wnepper@gie.net.

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Labor Costs

by James Huston

When calculating the labor burden for field payroll or G&A overhead, there are many factors to consider. In part one of this three-part series on establishing annual budgets, James Huston helps contractors simplify the process.

C

Calculating labor burden can be both laborious and a burden. If one doesn't know the methods and formulas, the accuracy and integrity of the company's annual budget could be at risk. It might seem overwhelming at first, but there are guidelines to help simplify and streamline the process.

First a basic definition: Labor burden consists of those items that can be directly correlated to office and field payroll and that vary in direct proportion to it, including Federal Insurance Contributions Act (FICA), Federal Unemployment Tax Act (FUTA), State Unemployment Tax Act (SUTA) and Workers' Compensation Insurance (WCI). The labor burden added to field labor is a direct cost. The labor burden added to general and administrative (G&A) overhead payroll is an indirect G&A cost. It is calculated as a percentage that is then applied to field and office (or G&A administrative) payroll.

When calculating the labor burden to be applied to prevailing wage or rated government jobs, reviewing the bid documents and specifications to ensure that the correct labor rates are used with the appropriate fringe benefits is important.

THE POWER OF PERCENTAGES. Most labor burden items are assigned as a fixed percentage that will vary little when calculated into the labor burden. Other labor burden items, such as sick pay, paid holidays, and vacation time, are based on accumulated paid non-work time (days or man-hours) and need to be calculated differently when bidding rated or non-rated jobs.

The usual range for labor burden in the United States is between 12 and 15 percent for office personnel and from 20 to 35 percent for field personnel. Tree crews usually will have a much higher labor-burden rate, primarily due to their high workers' compensation insurance rate.

(continued on page 94)

BEATING the Labor Burden BLUES

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Labor Costs

(continued from page 92)

The labor burden in Canada generally runs 10 to 20 percent (plus or minus 2 or 3 percent) for both office and field personnel. This is primarily due to the method by which Canada handles its health insurance, workers' compensation insurance, and FICA and FUTA equivalents.

LABOR BURDEN BASICS. Labor burden calculations should be reviewed every four to six months and adjusted whenever insurance rates change. Contractors also should review and adjust labor burden when bidding rated jobs if it hasn't been done recently.

Some companies actually have accounting software, which allows them to produce financial statements that display labor burden "budgeted" for actual field and office payroll compared to "actual" accumulated expenses for labor burden items. For example, if labor burden is calculated to be 32 percent for field-labor payroll, the accounting software will make the calculations and

Calculating the Labor Burden SUTA Rate

A. For the three employees earning more than the cap:

$$3 (\# \text{ of people}) \times \$7,000 (\text{the cap}) = \$21,000$$

$$\text{Multiply the } \$21,000 \times .035 = \$735$$

B. For the remaining five employees earning less than the cap:

$$\$25,000 (\text{combined payroll}) \times .035 = \$875$$

$$\text{Total projected SUTA payment: } \$735 + \$875 = \$1,610$$

C. Divide the total projected SUTA payment by the total projected payroll for the company (or the respective division).

$$\$1,610 \div (\$45,000 + \$25,000) = \$1,610 \div \$70,000 = .023 = 2.3\%$$

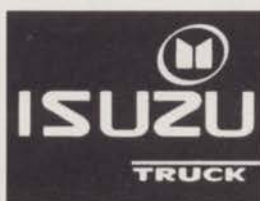
Use 2.3 percent (not 3.5 percent) for SUTA labor burden percentage.

Table 1.

then compare the result (in dollars and as a percentage) to the actual amount spent for FICA, FUTA, WCI, GLI, holiday pay, vacation pay, and so on. This is an excellent method for ensuring that calculated labor burden percentages are correct.

Another method for accomplishing the

same thing is for contractors to establish a labor burden checking account where they can deposit and accumulate labor burden funds. Determine the amount simply by multiplying payroll (e.g. \$3,000) by the labor burden percent (e.g. 32 percent). Then, deposit that amount (\$960) into the



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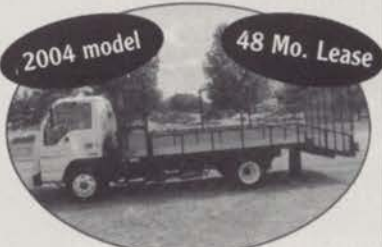
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labor-burden checking account. Then, pay all labor burden items (including holidays, vacations, etc.) from that account. If the labor-burden percentages are correct, contractors can pay all labor-burden expenses from that account. If there is not enough to cover labor-burden expenses, the calculations are probably wrong.

Contractors should not hastily assume that the excess funds accumulated in this account can be withdrawn and spent for non-labor-burden expense purposes.

INCENTIVE INSIGHTS. Accumulating labor burden costs to ensure that it's used to pay labor-burden expenses is important.

Labor burden items (such as vacation pay, holiday pay, medical and/or dental insurance, sick pay, etc.) must be earned. Many contractors often wonder if they should provide various types of benefits and whether these benefits would serve as productivity incentives. Vacation pay, holi-

day pay, health insurance plans, etc. – these things don't significantly increase productivity. They should be viewed as rewards for work well done. However, even though throwing money and benefits at employees is ineffective, there are other things that contractors can provide for employees that will produce results:

- Well-defined, reasonable goals and budgets
- Timely and accurate feedback
- Fair-market wages
- Results-oriented incentives

CALCULATION CLUES. If an entire company consists of only construction, maintenance, irrigation or tree care, the contractor may choose to lump the entire labor force into one labor division. But once a division accounts for more than 20 percent of the gross annual sales, he should separate it in the financial statements and calculate its individual labor burden. Office labor bur-

den has no labor burden percentage figure for general liability insurance, vacation pay, holiday pay, sick pay, or medical and health insurance. These items, except for general liability insurance, are included in G&A overhead totals for these people.

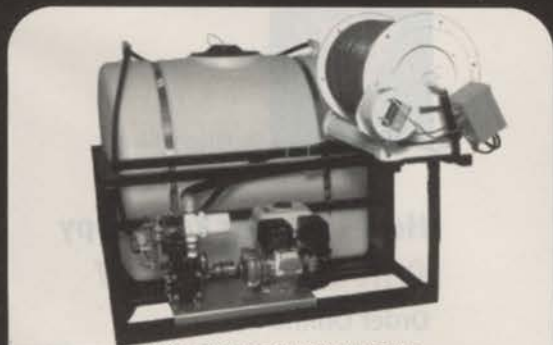
In the event an individual's payroll amount (whether based on salary or on an hourly wage) is partly in G&A overhead and partly in field payroll, the burden amounts should be split accordingly. For instance, if 50 percent of an owner's time is spent working in the field and the other 50 percent spent on administrative tasks, it follows that half of the vacation time, holiday pay, sick pay, and medical insurance premiums be put in G&A overhead and the other half in the respective field division labor-burden category. It is also important to note that labor burden includes only the portion that is paid by the company for that item. The portion for FICA, FUTA, and SUTA that is taken out

(continued on page 98)



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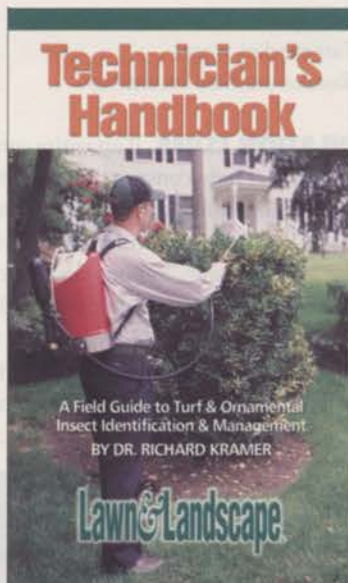
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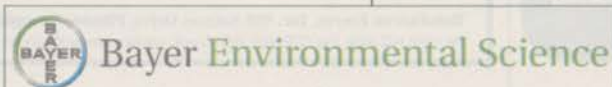
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Labor Costs

(continued from page 95)

of an individual's gross pay is not included in our labor burden calculations.

For the sake of these calculations, decimals will be used for percentages. For example: .27 is 27 percent and .008 is .8 percent. Some labor-burden items will have "caps." This means the rate only applies to a certain amount of payroll on each individual. For

instance, a state's SUTA rate may be capped at \$15,000 for any given year. This means the SUTA amount is only paid on the first \$15,000 of payroll per individual per year. Accumulated payroll amounts above the \$15,000 cap are exempt from the rate.

Caps are generally insignificant and very difficult to calculate accurately. How-

ever, when budget software is used to create a budget, caps generally are taken into consideration.

When calculating labor burden, it may be helpful to utilize the rates that correspond to the items below:

- *Federal Insurance Contributions Act (FICA)* The present FICA rate is .0765 (or 7.65 percent). Enter .0765 into the respective columns.

- *Federal Unemployment Tax Act (FUTA)*—The present FUTA rate is .008 (or .8 percent). Enter .008 into the respective columns.

- *State Unemployment Tax Act (SUTA)*—Enter the appropriate SUTA rate for your respective state and/or county, if applicable.

If there is a ceiling (or cap) on what is paid for an individual (e.g., SUTA is paid on only the first \$7,000 of an individual's gross annual payroll), the method below can be used to calculate the correct percentage that will be entered into labor burden.

Note the following example: There are eight people on payroll. The SUTA rate is 3.5 percent. The SUTA ceiling is \$7,000. Therefore, the contractor pays 3.5 percent on the first \$7,000 of payroll for a specific individual. Once payroll for the year exceeds \$7,000 for that individual, he is exempt from further SUTA taxes (in this example only).

Three employees earn more than \$7,000 per year, for a total of \$45,000. The remaining five people earn under \$7,000, for a total of \$25,000. *Table 1* (on page 94) shows how to calculate the labor burden SUTA rate.

Workers' Compensation Insurance—The respective Workers' Compensation Insurance (WCI) percentage should be entered in the appropriate division column, factoring in experience modification, if applicable. The AWCI rate of 7 percent would be adjusted to 6.3 percent if the experience modification rate was .9, or 90 percent.

- *General Liability Insurance (GLI)*—General Liability Insurance and Umbrella Insurance Policies are calculated for field company or division payroll only and are indicated as such on the policy. Both are sometimes difficult to translate into labor-burden percentages. However, with a little effort or a phone call to an insurance agent it is fairly easy to obtain the necessary information.

A policy will usually display GLI insurance rates in one of two ways:

(continued on page 100)



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Labor Costs

(continued from page 98)

First, the rate-per-thousand method indicates the rate as a dollar amount of premium for each \$1,000 of field payroll. For instance, a rate of \$29 per thousand will translate into a GLI rate of .029, or 2.9 percent. Divide \$29 by \$1,000 to obtain the rate. If there is no umbrella premium, use 2.9 percent as your GLI labor-burden percent.

Secondly, the premium per total payroll method simply states that a premium is based on a certain amount of payroll. If the company/division payroll is \$50,000 per year and the premium is \$1,450 per year, the annual premium should be divided by the projected payroll amount (i.e., $\$1,450 \div \$50,000 = .029$, or 2.9 percent). If there is no

umbrella policy, 2.9 percent should be again be used as the GLI labor-burden percent.

• **Umbrella Policy** – If a policy includes an umbrella feature, the formula is as follows: divide the premium amount by the projected payroll amount on the policy. For an annual premium of \$600, divide \$600 by \$50,000 or .012 (which is 1.2 percent). Add the .012 to the GLI portion (.029, as indicated earlier) in the GLI labor-burden percent. In this case, it would equal .041, or 4.1 percent. If the policy doesn't provide a projected annual payroll amount, or if the necessary information to calculate general liability insurance labor-burden percent is unavailable, contact an insurance agent.

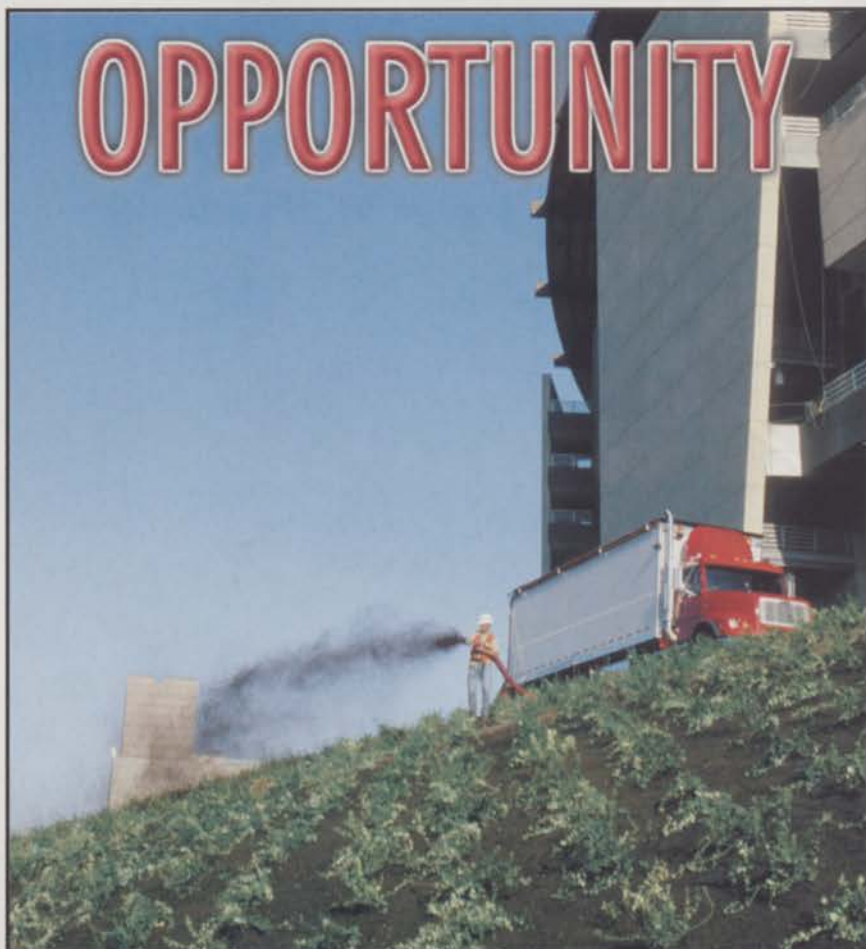
• **Average National Rates** – Rates for the GLI portion of the labor burden factor usually range from 1.5 to 3.5 percent nationally. If the GLI labor burden percent is 3.5 percent or higher, it's time to shop around for insurance coverage. Quotes from agents should be gathered three to four months before the current policy expires, making sure that the exact same information is given to each agent. That way when quotes are reviewed, comparisons will be apples to apples.

• **Vacations** – To obtain the labor-burden vacation percent, one must determine the total weeks of paid vacation for the field-labor force, for the company as a whole or for a particular division. That number is then divided by the total number of actual weeks worked by the company. Downtime, equipment repair time, paid holidays, paid vacations, paid sick days and similar circumstances should not be included here.

To illustrate, ABC Landscaping and Irrigation Co. has three field laborers who each work 40 weeks a year. The average workweek per man is 45 man-hours (five days a week times nine man-hours per day). Everyone receives four paid holidays. One individual receives two weeks paid vacation during the season, another receives one week, and the third does not qualify for a paid vacation.

From reviewing past payroll records (time cards and memory), the owner determines that he'll budget 40 man-hours per season per field crewmember for downtime. Equipment repairs will total 20 man-hours per field crewmember per season.

(continued on page 131)



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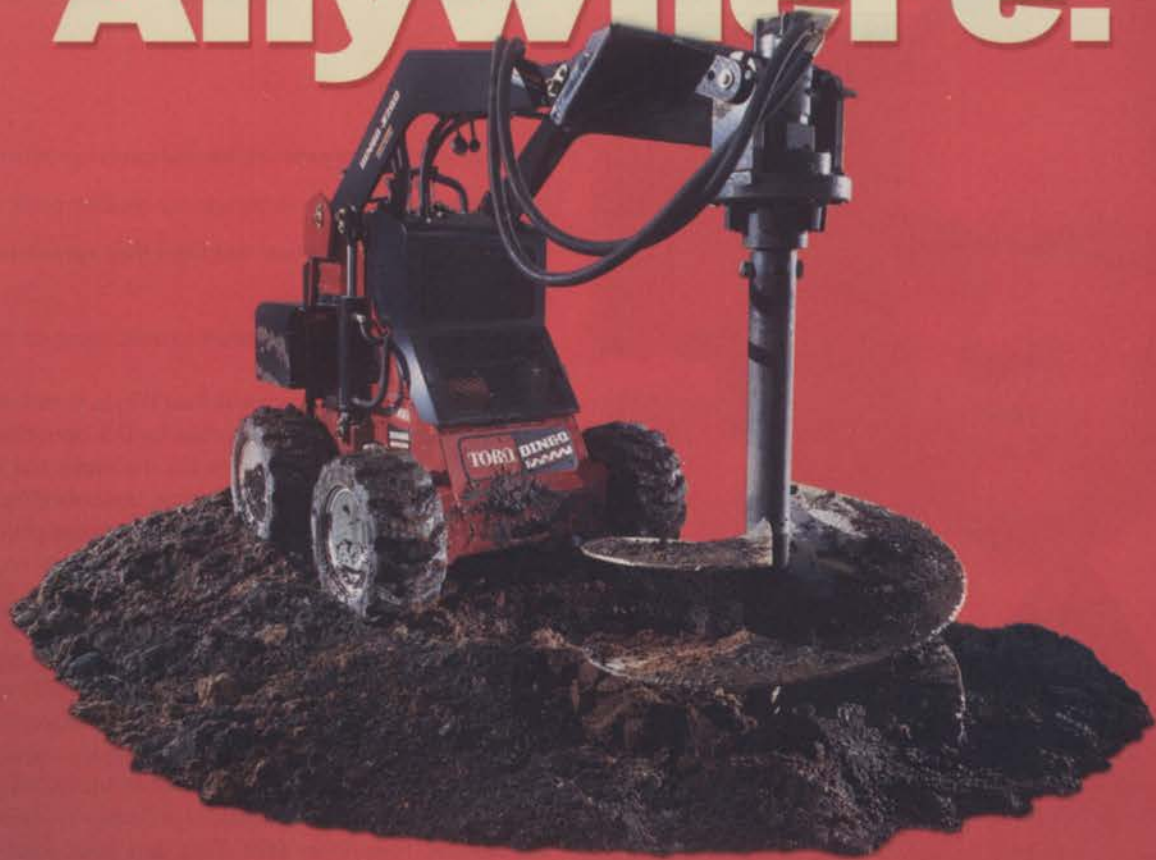
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Conversation

by Kristen Hampshire

Conversation

with

Fred

WHYTE

Stihl's president offers his perspectives on product innovation, tightening legislation and how the company serves landscape contractors.



Photos: Steve Morrisette

As emissions concerns pressure manufacturers to explore technology alternatives and box stores squeeze product profit margins, manufacturers must fine-tune and focus their operations to keep up with an evolving industry.

For Stihl, market growth means concentrating on landscape contractors.

Lawn & Landscape sat down with Fred Whyte, president of Stihl, Virginia Beach, Va. – the headquarters for U.S. operations for the Stihl Group. Here, Whyte unravels the challenges and successes Stihl confronts with meeting regulations, understanding customers, expanding product offerings and sticking to core philosophies.

LAWN & LANDSCAPE (L&L) – What have been some of the keys to Stihl's success?

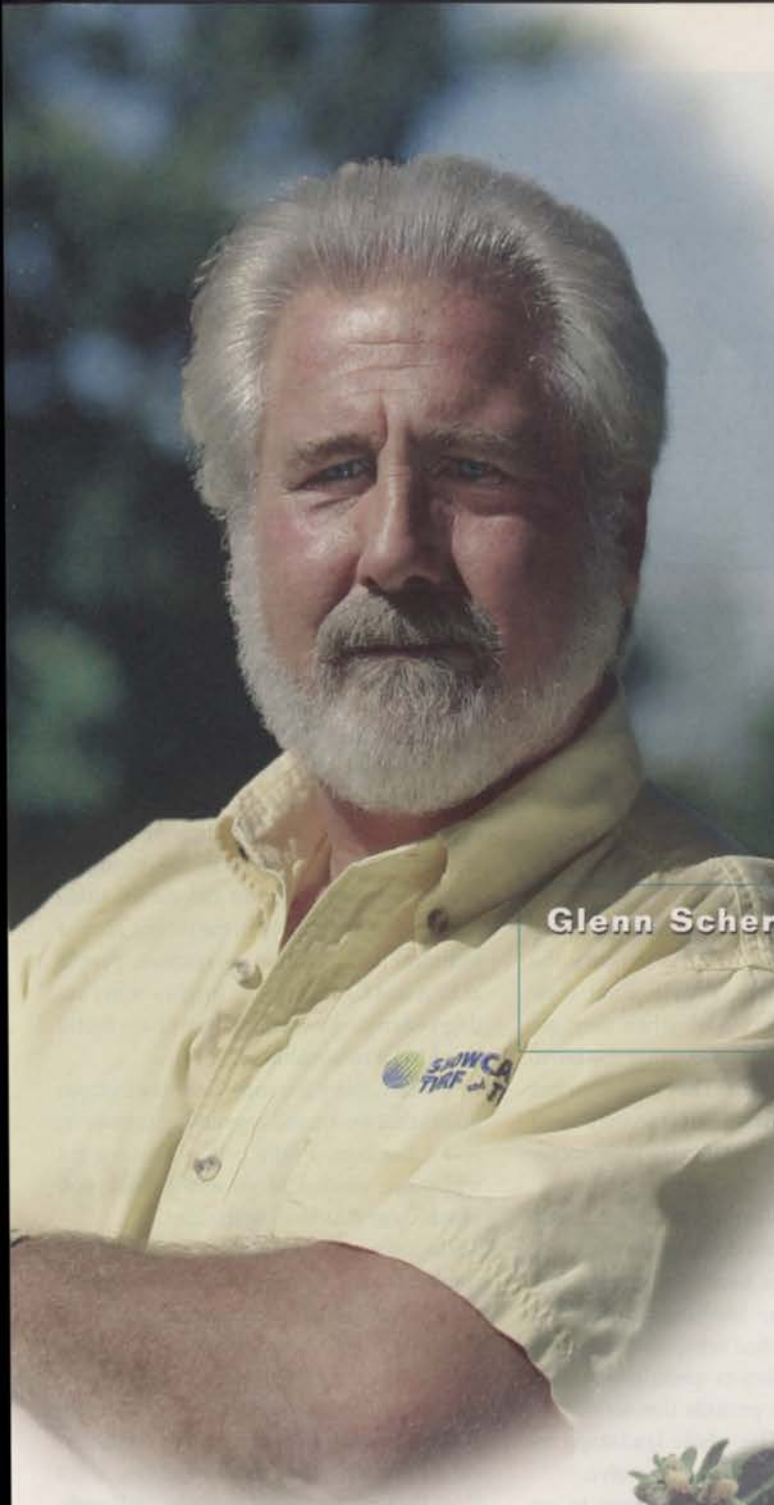
FRED WHYTE (FW) – Consistency of purpose is a very important phrase for this company. We are not a flashy company. We are sort of a blocking and tackling kind of company, and I think a lot of that stems from our European roots. Also, I think also a great deal of success can be attributed to being family-owned. Really, there have only been two key executives of Stihl AG & Co. since 1926 when the company was founded in Germany – Andreas Stihl and his son, Hans Peter Stihl. That, as a solid consistency in management philosophy, has really driven the company.

But what it really boils down to in the marketplace is focusing on building the products, and that certainly has been a cornerstone of our success at Stihl. And in order to create quality products you have to have extremely dedicated and caring employees. When I'm walking through our plant, it isn't unusual for someone to say, 'Mr. Whyte, do you have a minute? I would like to show you something. I don't think this is quite right.' Our people feel comfortable doing that, and they care enough to respond in that fashion.

L&L – What have you learned about landscape contractors that has impacted your company philosophy?

FW – Stihl branches and distributors are a hybrid of a sales and service-type person. They call on landscape companies and municipalities, spend time with crews and learn about the business.

(continued on page 104)



Glenn Scherzinger

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Conversation

(continued from page 102)

Also, we have very strong relationships with industry associations. We think the education these associations provide industry members is extremely valuable. Through these and other avenues, we've explored what is most important to landscape contractors. This information has proven invaluable in product development.

In addition, the landscaper's quest for 'zero downtime' contributes to the emphasis we place on the importance of servicing dealers.

L&L – How important is the landscape industry in Stihl's overall business?

FW – It is one of the largest growing sectors. Right now, it is close to 40 percent of our business and has probably doubled in the last 10 years.

L&L – What do you wish landscape contractors knew about Stihl?

FW – Our job as a manufacturer is to learn and understand landscape contractors' businesses – their needs and wants – because it is a very competitive business, and the better we can serve this market, the more successful we will be. It is our responsibility to have as much integrity in our products as possible and offer them at competitive prices, and then provide the service to support them.

"WHAT IT REALLY BOILS DOWN TO IN

THE MARKETPLACE IS FOCUSING ON

BUILDING THE PRODUCTS, AND THAT

CERTAINLY HAS BEEN A CORNERSTONE OF

OUR SUCCESS AT STIHL." – FRED

L&L – How is the landscape industry different today than it was 10 years ago?

FW – It is not unlike the power equipment industry, and I think the larger landscape companies will continue to evolve and get bigger through acquisitions. Of course, they have zero downtime as their ultimate goal for productivity. Just as we have to be concerned with emissions, sound and vibration regulations from the manufacturer side, they face some of these issues from the user's perspective. Landscape contractors are going to deal with these issues for some time.

L&L – What opportunities do you see in the

industry? Where is the growth?

FW – First of all, demographic research shows that there are far more double income families now than in the past. Two-thirds of all women in the United States are working. So there is less discretionary personal time, but there is more discretionary income. Second, the population is aging – that is a clear demographic, as well, and you have a sort of reurbanization. People are leaving cities, moving farther out and want a little corner of the earth or even a second home. This bodes very well for landscape contractors.

Studies also definitively show that landscaping is the No. 1 way to improve the value of your home. People want their houses to look nice. And when they get home on Friday night, they want the lawn, shrubs and hedges cut. They might go out and plant a few flowers, but then they're off to the beach or they're off to the kids' soccer game or whatever.

The same is true in the wintertime. Landscape contractors are doing snow work too, so the industry is becoming more year-round. Also, many landscape contractors are becoming certified arborists or employing certified arborists as specialists on their crews, so they can provide tree services to their customers. The whole landscape industry is going to continue to evolve.

L&L – Does the industry continue to get more sophisticated as well?

FW – Yes – there is no question about it. Landscape contractors have their profession down to a science. Now, they contract with entire neighborhoods and have systems so they don't waste time getting mowers on and off trailers and driving from location to location. They mow, they blow and they go, but that's how they make money. It is productivity, and they're good at it.

L&L – How aware or interested are landscape contractors in legislation?

FW – Emissions and noise regulations are



not all bad things. I think we all want to ensure that for the future of our children and the planet that we have clean air and water, and that we are not intruding on our neighbors with piercing decibels at 6 a.m. As a consequence, I think we all have to learn to work smarter within the system.

These regulations are not going to go away, so landscape

contractors in conjunction with manufacturers should make an effort to educate people who are drafting legislation. An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. Once regulations are cast in stone, it is very difficult to change them, but we have found it is beneficial to sit down with legislators and explain to them the limitation of the machines, what manufacturers are trying to accomplish and what we can do for them right now and possibly in the future. From a technical and scientific perspective, people at EPA and CARB are very bright – many are degreed engineers. Generally, we have found them to be reasonable.

Clearly, there are some very contentious points that we are still attempting to resolve, and it has been a little painful, but we got where we needed to go and I think you would hear that from both sides.

L&L – Do you think that the regulations will continue to tighten? Do you see more limitations on hand-held power equipment?

FW – Hand-held equipment is a moving target, and technology is evolving rapidly. We have electronic ignitions, and we are putting catalytic converters on these machines just like those in automobiles, and I think the next significant technological breakthrough you will see is electronic carburetors on hand-held equipment.

L&L – How has pressure from emissions legislation affected the way manufacturers design products? What impact has emissions legislation had on hand-held power equipment manufacturers, in particular?

FW – Legislation drives technology – there is no question about it. As manufacturers, we tend to be resourceful and entrepreneurial, and after getting over the initial shock of regulatory requirements, we figure out a way to meet them through product innovation.

(continued on page 106)

Sure Thing #1:

**A HAPPY
DOG WAGS
ITS TAIL.**



Conversation

(continued from page 104)

On the hand-held side, it's a little bit more difficult because of the weight issue. The landscape industry, in particular, is specifically concerned about ergonomics, weight and, to a lesser extent in my opinion, emissions. They expect manufacturers to take care of these issues for them. Sound is certainly going to continue to impact our industry, as well. We all have to be conscious of these issues.

L&L – How do you develop products that meet the needs of landscape contractors?

FW – We have three people who work full-time in field-testing. We are out in the field right now running and testing machines three years before we will introduce them to the market.

We run them in sandy conditions, cold temperatures and extreme heat conditions. These three dedicated employees in the field travel with laptop computers and keep detailed records. A lot of our test sites are landscape companies, and the people in the

field meet with the crews, get their likes and dislikes, and that all goes onto the laptops and over to Germany instantaneously. We track the number of hours on the machines very closely – they all have hour meters. We are constantly refining these machines to learn how to make better products for landscape contractors. So, we are very focused on the landscape business, no question. Stihl has roots as a chainsaw company but, clearly, the largest ruling professional segment of our industry is now landscape contractors.

L&L – What are some of the pros and cons of being a company that manufactures hand-held equipment vs. a supplier with a broad range of equipment?

FW – In terms of the pros, universities are full of case studies of companies that took their eyes off the ball and lost their core competency. They forgot what business they were in and became too diversified or entered into fields in which they had no expertise. In that regard, we have been very fo-

cused in two-cycle technology, including the new two-stroke/four-stroke hybrid.

We still continue to seek ample growth for our existing product line. Because our roots were in the chainsaw side of the business and we focused on the logging and pulpwood industry, we were a little later entering into the game with landscape tools. On the down side, like the hunter or fisherman, you always talk about "the one that got away." You always want to talk about the lost opportunity, and we probably over-emphasize that to some extent. Many dealers say to me, "Please offer me a Stihl mower and distribute and merchandise it the same way you do your hand-held goods." Naturally, being a salesman at heart, that sometimes pulls a few heartstrings.

Have we been approached by companies to form a partnership or type of coalition? Yes. But the foremost reason we have not made an alliance is we feel that we still have

(continued on page 108)

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Sure Thing #2:

CHILDREN WALK THROUGH PUDDLES.



Conversation

(continued from page 106)

an awful lot to do in the hand-held segment. We have some interesting new products on the very near horizon that will keep our salespeople busy.

Another thing is our financial commitment to our hand-held segment and product research and development. We have made some tremendous investments in our Virginia Beach manufacturing plant, for example, with a \$60-million expansion over the next year and a half. Our founding company in Germany is presently investing \$50 million in a new research and development center, which employs 350 research and development engineers. As you can imagine, that's a pretty big commitment. A lot of this investment is being driven by the need to develop new technologies and provide innovative products for our customers.

L&L—The company has been very straightforward and persistent in not selling its product in retailers like Home Depot and

Lowe's. Why is this important for landscape contractors?

FW—When a professional landscape contractor goes into a box store and sees his brand of choice sitting next to \$59.95 weed trimmer, there clearly has to be a seed of doubt planted in the contractor's mind: 'Wait a minute. My products are in here with the homeowner do-it-yourselfer. I'm a landscaper and I do this for a living.' As a manufacturer, you have to be concerned about the perception of your brand sitting there on the shelf. Once you get a reputation of being a 'low cost' producer, you risk alienating your landscape customers.

L&L—Is Stihl strengthening its position in the landscape contractor market?

FW—Definitely. It has become a strategic focus for this company. Some people still think of us as a chainsaw company. When someone asks what I do and I say, 'I work for Stihl,' they might say, 'Oh yeah, the chainsaw people.' Certainly chainsaws are

"THE POPULATION IS AGING — THAT IS A CLEAR DEMOGRAPHIC, AND YOU HAVE A SORT OF REURBANIZATION. PEOPLE ARE LEAVING CITIES, MOVING FARTHER OUT AND WANT A LITTLE CORNER OF THE EARTH OR EVEN A SECOND HOME. THIS BODES VERY WELL FOR THE LANDSCAPE CONTRACTOR." — FRED WHYTE

very much still a core product for us, but the fastest growing segment of our business is in the landscaping industry. **L**

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



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Roundtable Coverage

by Kristen Hampshire

Table Talk: ADD-ON ADVANTAGES

A roundtable discussion opens up ideas for profit-bearing add-on services.

Customers already slotted into a routing schedule offer considerable profit potential. Lawn care operators (LCOs) who find ways to offer more to these existing clients can solidify relationships and secure more sales, without scouting new accounts.

An industry roundtable in Atlanta, Ga., sponsored by Bayer Environmental Science and *Lawn & Landscape*, gathered 21 panelists, who shared thoughts on add-on services with bottom-line building potential.

DICK BARE, Arbor-Nomics Turf, Norcross, Ga.

JEFF MICHEL, Massey Services, Orlando, Fla.

SCOTT BROWN, LawnCo, Cumming, Ga.

KEVIN COOPER, Cooper's Landscape Management, Virginia Beach, Va.

HAROLD ENGER, Spring-Green Lawn Care, Plainfield, Ill.

JOHN GIBSON, Swingle Tree & Lawn Care, Denver, Colo.

JERRY GROSSI, ArborLawn, Lansing, Mich.

TOM SHOTZBARGER, Tomlinson Bomberger Lawn Care & Landscape, Lancaster, Pa.

MARK SCHLOSSBERG, Pro-Lawns-Plus, Baltimore, Md.

CHUCK MCINTIRE, Scotts LawnService, Norcross, Ga.

The Panel

L&L – What are some of the services you've added on within the past few years that are growing?

BARE – Tree and shrub care is extremely profitable for us. When you do the turf, you have to do the whole property. But when you spray tree and shrubs, you might not spray everything. With our tree and shrub care program, our technician sprays the lawn and looks over the trees and shrubs, as long as we train him properly. The bottom line is we get \$45 for the lawn care stop and \$60 for the tree and shrub care treatment. We might spend five minutes on that and it goes straight to the bottom line. We have separate invoices and we found it's a huge profit center as long as we train your employees.

But I'm astounded at how many people don't know that we do tree work or fungicide treatments. You need to tell them, and it really pays to tell them individually or call them. When you put information in a newsletter, people miss out on it. Communicating in a paperwork fashion is not always that effective.

MICHEL – We are primarily based in lawn care at Massey Services, and we've been aggressively growing our tree care business. We use to do lawn care and

(continued on page 112)



Photos: Steven Swietler

Lawn care professionals talked about growth and opportunity in the lawn care industry at a roundtable event sponsored by Bayer Environmental Science.

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Roundtable Coverage

(continued from page 110)

tree care separately. When gas prices went up, we were having trouble getting that tree and shrub care done at the same time. We took our existing customers who had both and we said, 'If you allow us to change our agreement and instead of coming out every month, allow us to do both services together, we will reduce your cost 30 percent.' They were receptive to that.

Then, we started encouraging our technicians to start upselling services to customers. We had them identify aphids and scale – we had technicians who were outselling the sales inspectors. It allows us to increase the price we were getting per stop. It is expensive to pull up a truck in front of a house. With us doing both services with the same technician, we get increased dollar value and price for the time spent at the house. It is a win-win for everyone.

BROWN – What incentive did you guys offer to sell the service?

MICHEL – A cut on the commission. Additionally, salespeople were sold on the fact that every time they took a customer from being a



Photos: Jeff Michael, Massey Services (left); Dick Bare, Arbor-Nomics Turf

\$55 per month to an \$85 per month customer, it's not a lot of extra work and time for them.

COOPER – Sixty percent of our customers purchase our fungicide services. We do preventive treatments on a monthly basis – May through August. Certain lawns don't get it and others get it every year.

Each month, we treat 360 accounts – a route of fungicide treatments. People who don't have a disease problem – say, 60 percent of our customers – and the other 20 percent who say they don't need the fungicide get an organic program like seaweed

extracts and iron. No matter what, we are still out on the property. We do the fungicide application first and then we launch into a roots and iron type program.

L&L – Is anyone offering perimeter pest control as an add-on service?

MICHEL – We are not doing a lot of structural pest control, but we are looking at offering it. We've looked at bait stations. A huge cross-sell is treatments for homes that have ant problems. If you get ant calls, it would be a great opportunity to treat for

(continued on page 114)

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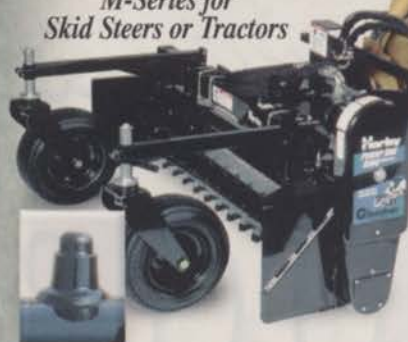


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Roundtable Coverage

(continued from page 112)

sweet-feeding ants around the exterior of the home.

L&L – What about mosquito services?

GIBSON – We are within days of putting out a marketing piece for mosquito services. We don't want to sell something that doesn't work. We have other services in which we don't guarantee results, but we can prove the efficacy of what we are doing.

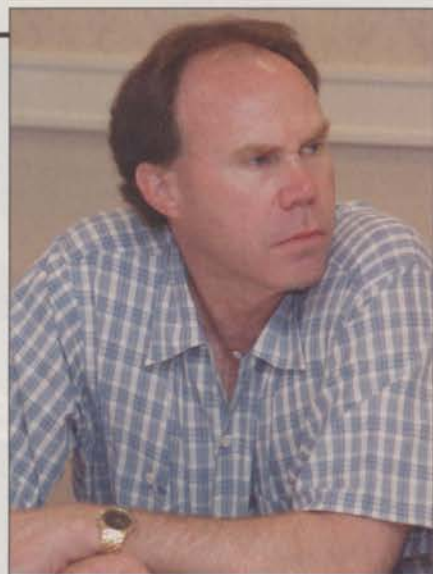
ENGER – We make that clear to customers by calling the service mosquito reduction. We spray the lawn and the surrounding shrubs – you have to do both areas. We set the price based on time. It will take 10 minutes to do this, 20 minutes to do that. I do the applications with a hose sprayer.

GROSSI – We have one mosquito route we've done for 19 years, the same 30 to 35 people. We haven't promoted the service. We bought the accounts from another company and held on to them. The service is tough on applicators because they wear a

"WHEN YOU LOOK AT ANCILLARY BUSINESSES, YOU NEED TO MAKE SURE THEY WILL WORK WELL WITH YOUR EXISTING BUSINESS." — **DICK BARE**

throw-away suit, and it's hot. It's profitable, but we just don't promote it because it's hard on our applicators.

SCHLOSSBERG – We do a flea and tick application because Lyme disease is a concern in our area. The people who are worried about pesticides want that flea and tick application, and we do 100 of them, three times per year. We wait until customers



Mark Schlossberg, president of Pro-Lawns-Plus, was one of 21 panelists at the industry roundtable event in Atlanta, Ga.

call in and we go every four to five weeks.

BROWN – We sell our fire ant applications with a flea and tick application.

L&L – What other services are booming?

SCHLOSSBERG – I'm optimistic about fall seeding. With water reservoirs being high, people will feel like they can seed this year because they can water their properties. The opportunity this fall is in the seeding area.

SCHOTZBARGER – We're expanding service offerings and we also offer tree care and landscape design/build and hard-surface

(continued on page 116)

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Roundtable Coverage

(continued from page 114)

construction, ponds and patios. We also do good business with the school district. Weed control for school districts and athletic field management are great opportunities. We have a huge market in athletic field fertilization and weed control.

Last year in Pennsylvania, the state legislature placed a requirement for schools to pre-notify parents and students who want to be notified before pesticides are applied.

"IN GENERAL, SALES MIGHT BE A LITTLE BIT FLAT THIS YEAR, BUT WE ARE SEEING THE AVERAGE PERSON PURCHASING MORE SERVICES." — CHUCK MCINTIRE

The responsibility fell on the schools. The only thing the applicators needed to do was let schools know when they were going to come out and put out some signs.

We contacted every school and bought each school three wrought-iron signs so we can post the day and time of treatment. We invested money in the signs to make

posting easier for them. Now, they have these beautiful, decal signs, we put our application time in the sign, set them on the school properties and we are growing our school district and large turf area accounts. We keep schools informed and provide them with a vehicle for posting. They are willing to pay for quality care.

L&L – What have these extra services been doing for sales?

MCINTIRE – In general, sales might be a little bit flat this year, but we are seeing the average person purchasing more services. Sales are up per person, and our theory on that has been the people who used to spend money to take big trips have cut back this



Phil Fred, Philip's Lawn & Tree Therapy; Brian Gooch, Bayer (top, left to right) and Kevin Cooper, Cooper's Landscape Management (right)



year with the restrictions on travel since 9/11. Instead, they are spending that money on their homes. **LL**

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

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Product Profile

TIME TABLES

Beat the Clock

Many landscape contractors struggle with employee time and attendance problems. Monitoring multiple crews working on multiple sites, particularly from a remote location, is virtually impossible.

Frank Adams, president, Odyssey Landscaping, Stockton, Calif., knows this all too well. "With several, even dozens, of job sites how do you ensure that your employees are on the job in a timely manner?" he asks.

"You can't be everywhere at once," agrees William Hildebrand, president, Hildebrand Landscaping, Mountain View, Calif. "You also cannot depend on a foreman to dock someone who was 10 minutes late. If you have 25 employees and 10 of them are 15 minutes late or leave 15 minutes early every day, you are losing 12.5 worker hours per week. Over the course of a year, it amounts to more than \$10,000."

Changing human behavior, especially when a routine has been established, is challenging. For instance, if an employee arrives to work 20 minutes late on Monday morning and suffers no consequences, he is likely to repeat the same behavior on Tuesday. Over time, employees grow accustomed to showing up to work late; it becomes part of their daily routine. With their employees consistently arriving late and leaving early, Adams and Hildebrand knew they had to make some changes.

Adams and Hildebrand were using handwritten timecards, but they were problematic since the accuracy of the information being entered is based on employees' memory and integrity. Some employees make honest mistakes, while others cushion their paychecks by rounding up their hours. Also, their handwritten timecards often were incomplete and illegible or even lost or damaged, causing weekly headaches for payroll personnel.

Seeking an alternative to handwritten timecards, Adams and Hildebrand discovered the Jobclock system. Stainless steel, battery-powered and weatherproof, the Jobclock can be locked down at jobsites. Employees carry green and red "Keytabs," and simply touch the face of the Jobclock to punch in and out. Additional Keytab colors are available to track specific activities, such as irrigation, mowing or planting. At any time, contractors can download attendance records from the Jobclock using the infrared port of a Palm Pilot. Back at the office, they can upload the records to a PC, and generate attendance reports for any employee, activity or site.

Introducing the Jobclock system to their employees was a bit challenging for Adams and Hildebrand. Both contractors made a gradual conversion from handwritten timecards to the Jobclock system, giving their employees time to develop a level of comfort with the system. "It took time to prove to everyone that the system worked," Adams says. With time, employees grew accustomed to the system and appreciated its convenience.

The Jobclock records the precise hour, minute and second employees clock in and out, which ensures that employees are only paid for the time they are actually working. The Jobclock system promotes punctuality and personal responsibility. If an employee does not arrive to work on time, he does not receive a full day's pay. In essence, the Jobclock acts as an on-site supervisor for contractors who do not have the means to monitor all of their employees on a regular basis.

After implementing the Jobclock system, Hildebrand noticed positive changes in his employees. "It used to be pretty common to see a couple of stragglers rolling in 10 or even 20 minutes late," he says. "Not any more. Time card disputes are now rare. You are either clocked in or you aren't."

Both Adams and Hildebrand save a substantial amount of money by using the Jobclock system. Hildebrand re-



With the Jobclock system, crewmembers use colored keytabs to clock in and out at job sites.

Photo: Exactime

IN ESSENCE, THE JOBCLOCK ACTS AS AN ON-SITE SUPERVISOR FOR CONTRACTORS WHO DO NOT HAVE THE MEANS TO MONITOR ALL OF THEIR EMPLOYEES ON A REGULAR BASIS.

ports a savings of \$250-300 per week. And, according to Adams, overtime hours have decreased by 25 percent. The average return on investment is three to four weeks.

Furthermore, Hildebrand uses the Jobclock as a selling point for new customers. "We have also used the system in sales approaches on jobs where the work is being done based on time and materials," he explains. "Customers appreciate the accuracy of the Jobclock system compared to that of a handwritten timecard." — Megan Israel

The author is from Exaktime, Van Nuys, Calif., and can be reached at 818/901-9326 or megani@exaktime.com.

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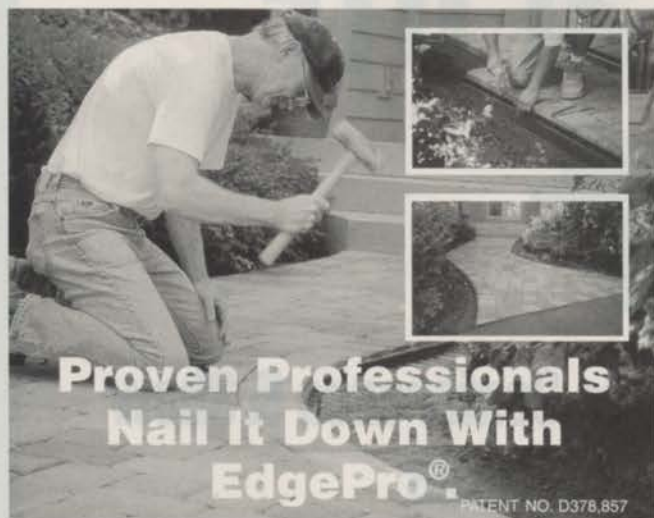
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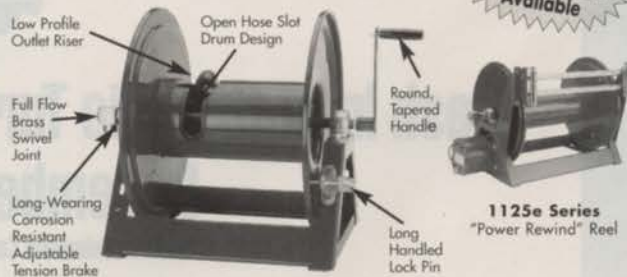
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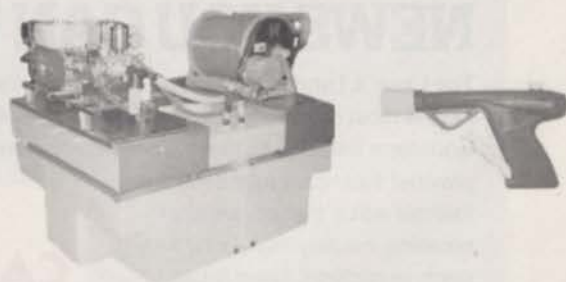
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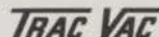
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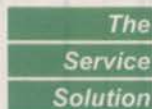
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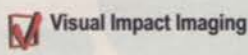
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Two Methods for Calculating Worksheets

A. Dividing weeks by weeks

Total paid vacation weeks:	3
45 (hrs/wk) × 40 (wks/yr) × 3 (men)	5,400
Minus paid holiday man-hours: 3 (men) × 4 (days) × 8 (hrs/day)	- 96
Minus paid vacation man-hours: 3 (wks) × 40 (hrs/wk)	- 120
Minus projected downtime: 3 (men) × 40 (hrs/yr)	- 120
Minus equipment repair time: 3 (men) × 20 (hrs/yr)	- 60
Actual field worked	5,004

Convert to actual weeks worked:	
5,004 man-hours ÷ 45 average man-hours/week	111

Convert to vacation labor-burden decimal:	
Divide vacation weeks by actual weeks worked.	.027
3 paid vacation weeks ÷ 111 work weeks = .027 or 2.7%	

B. Dividing man-hours by man-hours (a more accurate method)

Total vacation man-hours:	
3 paid vacation weeks × 40 hrs/wk	120
Total actual man-hours worked	5,004
Vacation labor burden percent:	
120 man-hours ÷ 5,004 man-hours worked	= .024 or 2.4%

Table 2.

Table 2 (above) shows how to compute actual workweeks.

If downtime man-hours, holidays and so on had not been deducted from actual weeks worked, the vacation labor-burden decimal would be higher in both cases. In the case of the example discussed in part "A" of Table 2 (below), 5,400 man-hours ÷ 45 man-hours/week = 120 actual weeks worked. Three paid vacation weeks ÷ 120 = .025 or 2.5 percent. With method "B": Paid vacation man-hours = 120 ÷ 5,400 (approximate total man-hours paid) = .0222 or 2.2 percent. It's not a lot of difference, but the higher decimals (.024 and .027) are more accurate calculations.

• **Holidays** - Calculating the holiday labor burden is much easier after most of the work determining the vacation labor burden decimal has been done. Regard the following examples:

A. Dividing days by days

Total paid holidays: 3 (men) × 4 (paid holidays) = 12 total paid holidays

Total man-days worked per year: 5,004 actual man-hours worked per year ÷ 9 man hours per day per man = 5,004 ÷ 9 = 556 man-days per year.

Then, the holiday labor burden decimal = 12 ÷ 556 = .0216 or 2.16 percent.

B. Dividing man-hours by man-hours

Total paid holiday man-hours: (12 days × 8 man-hours/day) = 96. Total man-hours worked per year = 5,004. Then the holiday labor burden decimal = 96 ÷ 5,004 = .0192 or 1.92 percent.

Of the two methods, "B" is the more accurate, although a little more complex. But either example is accurate enough to be acceptable.

• **Sick Days** - If paid time off is provided to field employees when they're sick, sick days should be computed into the appropriate company/division labor burden decimal just as would be done for the holiday labor burden calculations. The same method can be used for other, similar types of benefits provided by a company.

• **Medical/Health Insurance** - Total annual medical/health insurance premiums paid by the company, which are not reimbursed by the employees, should be divided by the company/division projected total annual field payroll. Consider this formula: Total premiums paid by company are \$3,300. Divide that number by the total projected field payroll of \$75,000 = \$3,300 ÷ \$75,000 = .044 or 4.4 percent.

Labor Costs

(continued from page 100)

In the United States, the labor burden percent for field divisions will normally fall between 20 and 35 percent. In Canada (and elsewhere outside the United States), it normally runs from the high teens to the mid-twenties.

SUMMARY STATS. In summary, labor burden is primarily comprised of payroll taxes, unemployment taxes, and various forms of insurance. Field-labor burden also includes general liability insurance, paid holidays, sick days, vacation time and medical insurance benefits. Both field-labor burden and office-labor burden are calculated as percentages and added to payroll costs in the budget. Field-labor burden is a direct cost, while office-labor burden is an indirect G&A cost. **LI**

This article was adapted from James Huston's book, *How to Price Landscape & Irrigation Projects*. The author is president, J.R. Huston Enterprises. For further information on purchasing this book, please call 800/451-5588, e-mail jrhei@jrhuston.biz or visit www.jrhuston.biz.

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

5. What year was your business founded?

6. What were your company's gross revenues for 2002?

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

7. Please indicate your approximate business mix:

- 1. Residential % _____
- 2. Commercial % _____
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Specify types _____

Total 100%



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How We Do It

Employee Meetings at B&B Landscaping & Irrigation

When I first started my business, I was able to visit every job site every day and build several strong client relationships that helped grow the business. Over time though, our business growth demanded more and more production time, which turned our attention away from internal and external communication.

Not unexpectedly, a lack of communication with my clients and employees caused the company's quality of work to drop dramatically. I realized we had to get on top of things and do everything we could to make our clients happy. We stopped all new work and devoted two full weeks to getting all of our accounts looking their best.

During this period I spoke with all my clients, apologized for our lack of service and asked their opinions on how they felt our service could improve. Many of my clients who also own their own businesses suggested that having employee meetings was the most effective way they've found of keeping communication up and delivering the best possible customer service. That was the first change we made.

We had our first company meeting on the day we finally got caught up on all our work. I let my eight employees know that we would be having a cook out after they finished cleaning their trucks, and that we would spend some time talking about some important company matters.

I could tell most of my employees did not want to have a meeting – they were all for the food and drink but were dreading having to listen to me gripe. However,

after spending two weeks cleaning up all the properties I had plenty of compliments for them. Before the meeting I wrote down a game plan so I wouldn't forget anything I wanted to go over. My plan was to start the meeting and to keep it simple:

1. Thank everyone for staying and for working so hard in the previous weeks.

2. Let them know that company operations could not continue as they had been and outline some of the major changes in store.

3. Ask for their thoughts and ideas on things they saw that needed to change. Let them air their own complaints and concerns about the company.

This first meeting was the best thing that has happened to the way we run our business. It really helped clear the air and get everyone on the same page about the work we needed to do to get the company back on track. We now have a meeting every Friday at our home office. This lets us discuss everything in a familiar environment and keeps business discussions at the office instead of dragging work to someone's house for a meeting.

We take an hour or two at the employee meetings to go over individual projects, how each job is going and what each crew might need to work on to complete projects on time. Also, we discuss problem areas where crewmembers might need guidance and look at any new jobs we have to prepare for. Everyone has an opportunity to bring up questions or comments and crewmembers often use employee meetings as an opportunity to suggest routing or scheduling changes to keep their energy and productivity up, rather than facing a monotonous week.

Sitting down to discuss each crew and each project doesn't cost a dime, but because we serve lunch – either delivery or a cookout – there are some food expenses involved. Also, to build morale, I award \$50 to the foreman-of-the-week and each crew votes on a laborer-of-the-week who receives \$25. On the last Friday of the month, employees' families are invited to the meetings and we have drawings for Toys R Us gift certificates for the kids, as well as a drawing for one \$100 grocery store gift. The cost involved averages out to about \$800 per month, which is a small price to pay for knowing that jobs are getting done properly and that all employees and clients are happy. – Gary Batho

The author is owner of B & B Landscaping & Irrigation, Clarkesville, Ga., and can be reached at 706-754-6325

5 KEYS TO *Having a Company Meeting*

1. Write out an agenda for each meeting.
2. Take time to complement your employees and offer constructive criticism to help them do even better work on the job.
3. Allow employees to speak freely and encourage their participation.
4. Ask for employees' ideas on how they think things should change to improve your business.
5. Make the meetings enjoyable so employees do not dread going to them.

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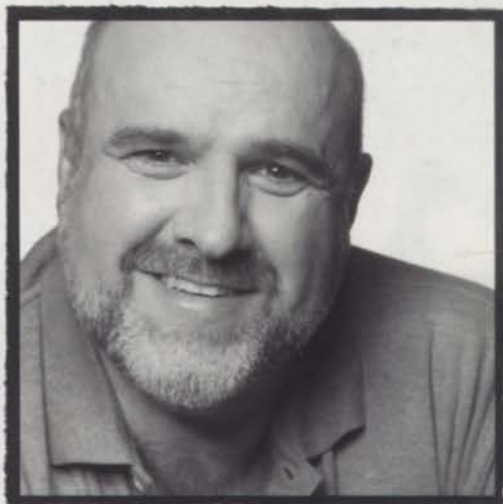
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