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November 2004

# Lawn & Landscape

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# Win

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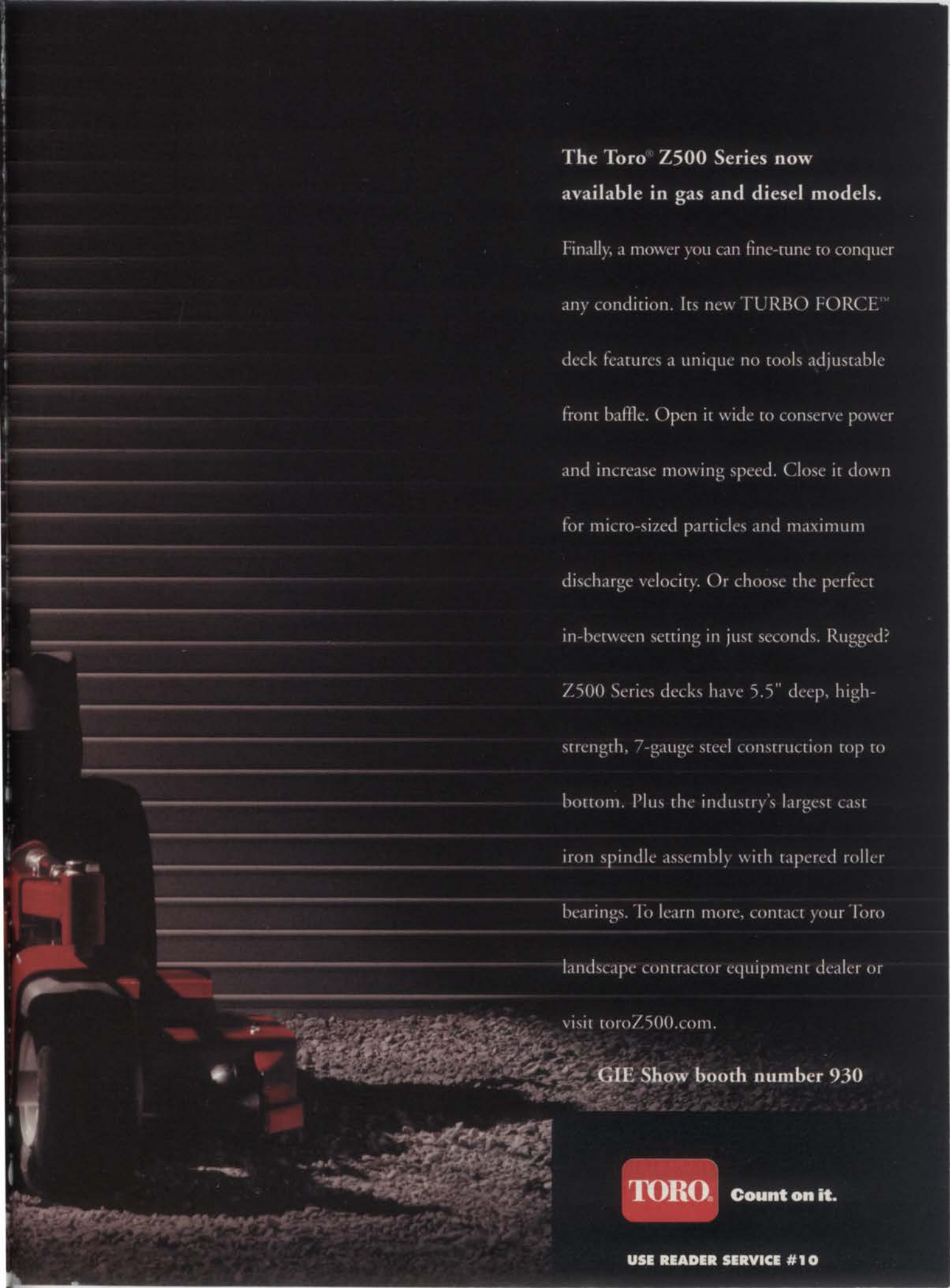
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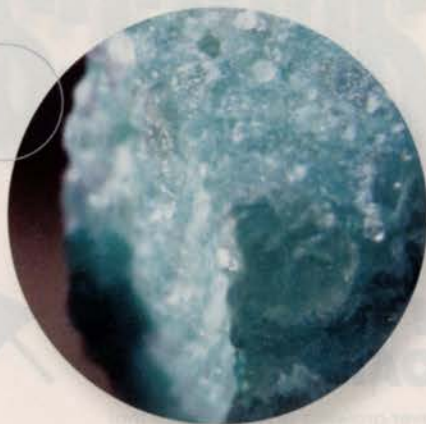
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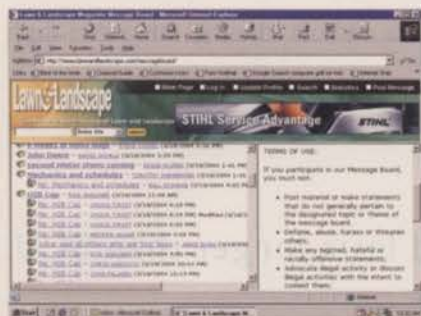
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## LAWN & LANDSCAPE ONLINE MESSAGE BOARD

Have a question, comment or insight about the ever-growing green industry that you'd like to share? Visit the Lawn & Landscape Online Message Board for dynamic discussion on topics ranging from equipment choices to employee relations to how legislation impacts your business. Trade tips and tricks with other industry professionals and learn how different industry issues are affecting your colleagues around the country. And now, with improvements made to the "My Preferences" portion of Lawn & Landscape Online, Message Board users can choose which portions of their My Lawn & Landscape accounts they would like

to share with other users. Join this dynamic online community today to increase communication and professionalism within in the industry.



## Best of the Web

Charging for lawn and landscape services means more than putting a price tag on an hour of mowing or adding a markup to materials for an installation job. Designing a landscape masterpiece or walking a property to assess its difficulty level takes time out of a contractor's day, and many professionals believe compensation is in order for the time spent on a job before any installation or maintenance begins. Read this month's Best of the Web feature on page 90 to find out how Lawn & Landscape Online users weighed in when the "time is money" topic came up on the Message Board.

## 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's State of the Irrigation Industry report continues on the Web with an Online Extra on irrigation sales techniques. Learn how the team at Just Sprinklers, Albuquerque, N.M., uses an irrigation showroom to educate first-time buyers.
- Even the most up-and-coming water feature design will dry up if contractors aren't educated on proper pond-building techniques. Visit the November Online Extras section to stay educated on water feature installation.
- Check the Online Extras section each month at [www.lawnandlandscape.com](http://www.lawnandlandscape.com) to find valuable information not appearing in print! Use the "Search" function at the top of the site to find articles on hundreds of industry topics.

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## Change that Makes Sense

Roger Stanley is editor-in-chief/associate publisher of *Lawn & Landscape*. He can be reached at 800/456-0707 or [rstanley@gie.net](mailto:rstanley@gie.net).



The Associated Landscape Contractors of America (ALCA) and the Professional Lawn Care Association of America (PLCAA) will become a new association on January 1, 2005. Following overwhelming approval – more than 90 percent among all who voted were for the merger – the two association boards held separate and joint meetings in Scottsdale, Ariz., at the end of September.

I've been told the big question was how the two boards would get along in terms of chemistry. Working together during the Legislative Days in Washington, DC, or at the GIE Show is like dating. A merger is more like marriage. According to a number of sources, the big question turned out to be a non-issue.

Two associations walked into the building, reports Kurt Kluznik, president of ALCA, and one walked out. In just three days the boards hammered out a mission statement, a 2005-2006 plan, a budget and a set of strategic goals. That's an impressive amount for even an existing organization to accomplish in three days. The key was that as the two dug deeper into their goals there was more synergy than expected.

One reason for the synergy is that legal and regulatory challenges and the industry's need to create a more positive image with the general public are unifying factors for all lawn and landscape companies. When both associations were founded the goal was to represent the specific needs of their members. Today, the need to represent the entire industry is becoming increasingly important.

Another reason is that many companies are involved in a range of services. Our own readership research, done in August for our October State of the Industry Report, shows that more than 10 percent of all lawn care companies also do construction and more than 20 percent do mowing and maintenance. Almost 60 percent of companies that primarily do construction also mow and half do fertilization and weed control.

To help assimilate the lawn care membership, the new association will add a lawn care group to the three that existed within ALCA – interior business, maintenance and design/build. Both associations' certification pro-

grams will be combined. And all education will reflect the new membership. Already the content has been modified for the ALCA Executive Forum, to be held February 10-13 in Puerto Rico – the meeting at which the new board will officially be introduced.

Two facts make the creation of a new association important for the green industry.

First, anticipated budget savings due to the elimination of duplicate overhead puts more on the 2005 "to do" list. Both associations have had long wish lists that were not possible due to revenue limitations.

Second, the new association will have a total of more than 4,000 members. Greater representation is important not only as a lobbying factor, but it also means the new association can speak with one clear voice. As one board member said, "We want to be the voice of the green industry." More members are needed, of course, and perhaps the new association will be able to fund the programs and make the progress to get more companies involved.

One remaining need is to come up with a new name. To make sure that fits for the long term, an outside consulting firm has been hired to do the research and legal actions necessary for trademark protection.

The other significant task is to find a new executive leader. Debra Holder, who has served ALCA for 25 years, announced her retirement in October. Holder will remain as a consultant for at least the remainder of 2004. And Gary Clayton, executive vice president of PLCAA, is not seeking the leadership position. For personal reasons, Clayton plans to continue living in the Atlanta area, but says he will remain active in the green industry and in the new association.

The creation of a new association is an exciting opportunity for the green industry. And it comes at an opportune time. ■

A stylized, handwritten signature of Roger Stanley in black ink.



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## Questions Worth Answering

Marty Grunder is a speaker, consultant, author and landscape contractor with Grunder Landscaping Co. He can be reached at 937/847-9944 and via [www.martygrunder.com](http://www.martygrunder.com).



In the last few months, I have been asked several marketing questions. Here are the five best ones that I want to share with you:

1. *What do you think of Yellow Pages ads?* I think there are far better, more effective ways to market your company. *Yellow Pages* ads are not only expensive, they say to everyone, including those looking for the best price, that you are everyone's landscaper. For brand new companies, *Yellow Pages* ads are helpful, but if you have a business that is 10 years old or more and you still get most of your work from the *Yellow Pages*, I'd say you need to look at your company. Many companies are amazed at the amount of business they can generate from doing more for their existing clients than trying to sell things to new people. Companies need to find ways to increase the value of their businesses by securing client relationships. While I understand that caring for a client's garden is not as exciting as installing it, maintenance is an excellent way to stabilize cash flow and increase the value of your company.

Targeted marketing – messages directed right at the people who use your services – is a much more effective way of marketing than *Yellow Pages* advertising. If *Yellow Pages* advertising were very cheap, I'd recommend it, but it is not. Like any investment, measure the return and you'll know for sure if it's right for you.

2. *How important is the name of your company?* It is very important. The name of your company should be something people can easily remember. If you have a last name that is easy to pronounce, I strongly urge you to use your last name in the name of your company. If your last name is not easy to pronounce, consider using your first name. What name you pick has a lot to do with what you plan to do with the company. If you want to serve primarily homeowners, I think the more personal you can make your company, the better. Also, I feel a great brand to create and then reaffirm daily is the landscape company that is named after the owner and then that owner is featured as the personality of the company. It ties all the marketing together and people will remember you more easily.

If you are in the commercial maintenance, lawn care

or landscape business, a name like Landmasters, as an example, might be great for you. The most important thing you need to think about is your strategy, where do you see yourself in five, 10 or 20 years?

Finally, I strongly urge you to have a name that stands alone and says what you do. A name like The Springwater Group might sound neat and trendy, but it does not say what you do, and it doesn't tell someone new to town who sees one of your trucks what you do.

3. *I like the technical side of landscaping more than the business side; In fact, I hate to sell. Is that wrong and can I be successful without having a passion for selling?* I think that if you don't enjoy selling and you own the company, you're going to have a tough time being successful. I have met very few successful entrepreneurs in any line of business that were not excellent salespeople. Sometimes you can be so good at what you do that your work sells itself, but this is very tough to pull off and generally new companies can't do this.

4. *What has been the most effective way you have marketed your company?* Nothing sells more work than having clients happy with your work. Every company's marketing plan should have a segment dedicated totally to following up and making certain their clients are happy.

5. *Should I hire a marketing consultant to help me grow my business?* That all depends. Have you really tried to learn more about marketing on your own? Have you read any books, attended any seminars, gone to green industry trade shows and talked with other successful landscapers? If you have not done all of those things first, don't hire a consultant. You need to have a very good understanding of marketing for someone to come in and help you. If you do hire a consultant, make certain that the person you hire has experience with your type of business and talk to a few of the consultant's clients to make sure they were happy with the work. Also, you can learn a lot from books. The finest marketing book I have ever read is titled *Jump Start Your Business Brain* written by Doug Hall. Buy it and read it; it provides excellent education on marketing.


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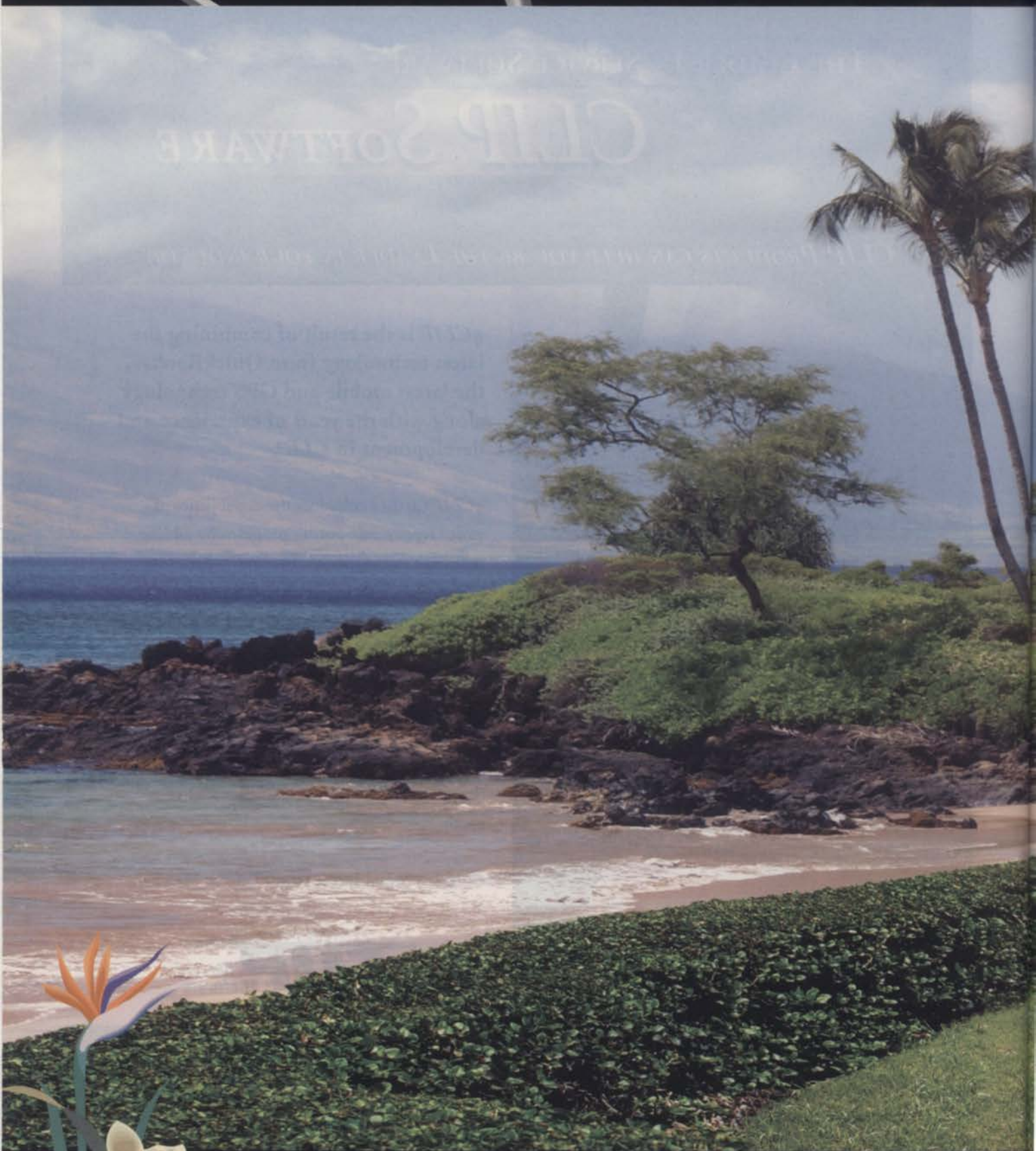


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# The Operating Room

## Where Are Your Dollars Going?

Jack Mattingly is a green industry consultant with Mattingly Consulting. He can be reached via email at [jkmattlingly@comcast.net](mailto:jkmattlingly@comcast.net), through his Web site [www.mattinglyconsulting.com](http://www.mattinglyconsulting.com) or at 770/517-9476.



This is the time of year to consider exactly how you have used your business's financial information for the past 11 months. Are you an owner who struggles with or doesn't fully understand the financial information that your accountant, QuickBooks or other software provides you on a monthly basis? Have you used the information to make decisions in your business? Do you compare numbers from month to month? Do you know whether or not landscape installation is making more gross profit than your maintenance operation? Have you used the information to determine your pricing and ensure recovery of overhead expenses? These are a few areas where financial information can help you grow your business wisely and improve operations and profits.

This whole process starts with having the correct layout of your chart of accounts, which makes your monthly income statement easier to understand. Compare your current listings with the sample I have itemized at right. You will see four categories of expenses that are organized in a logical manner according to our unique industry. Here's a quick explanation:

**Direct Costs** – Expenses that are associated to a specific job and can be charged directly to that job.

**Equipment Overhead** – Expenses that pertain to equipment purchases and maintenance.

**Indirect Job Overhead** – Expenses incurred while producing work but are difficult to accurately "charge" to a specific job.

**Administrative Overhead** – The typical expense of running your business on a day-to-day basis.

This sample chart of accounts works well for a landscape contractor, though your list may include more or fewer items. The main concern is to format the list in a way that is easy to understand and lets you make comparisons during the year. Also, when you ask QuickBooks or your accountant to print this income statement, include an additional column that shows the percentage of income for each expense. This will help you make quick comparisons easily. You have until Dec. 31 to make any changes for next year. Here's to your profits!

### Income Statement

#### Sales:

#### Direct Costs:

- Direct Labor
- Labor Tax
- Labor Workers' Compensation
- Materials
- Subcontractors
- Equipment Rental

#### Gross Profit:

#### Equipment Overhead:

- Gas and Oil
- Tires and Tubes
- Outside Repairs
- Replacement motors
- Depreciation Equipment
- Depreciation Vehicles
- Insurance Vehicles & Equipment
- Mechanic Labor
- Mechanic Labor Taxes & Workers' Compensation
- Vehicle Registration
- Shop Tools

#### Indirect Overhead:

- Supervisors' Salaries
- Supervisors' Taxes & Workers' Compensation
- Small Tools & Supplies
- Non-billable Labor
- Non-billable Labor – Taxes & Workers' Compensation
- Uniforms
- Dump fees
- Estimating/Bidding

#### Administrative Overhead:

Accountant	Insurance – Group
Advertising	Licenses & Fees
Attorney	Office Supplies
Consultant	Salaries – Office
Contributions	Salaries – Owner/Officers
Depreciation – Furniture	Salaries – Taxes & Workers' Compensation
Depreciation – Computers	Travel
Dues & Subscriptions	Rent
Education Expenses	Repairs – Office/Yard
Interest Expense	Utilities
Insurance – Comprehensive/General Liability	

#### Net Profit:





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## Communication 101, Part Two

Jean L. Seawright is president of Seawright & Associates in Winter Park, Fla.

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*EDITOR'S NOTE: Last month, Jean explained six different communication styles and how they can impact personnel management. This month, she offers tips on how to communicate more effectively.*

Many managers have never learned the art of effective communication, which ultimately leads to a personal connection with others. The reality is that miscommunication over seemingly simple matters can lead to broken trust and broken relationships in life and in business. Don't let this happen to you. To help, here are some principles of effective communication:

- **Put Yourself Last.** To effectively communicate, we must learn some humility. Stop worrying about your own agenda and needs. Listen with your ears, your mind and your "heart." (My 10-year-old daughter keeps telling me that my heart pumps blood and doesn't have feelings...I'm sure you get what I mean.)

- **Don't Delay Important Messages.** It's human nature that we tend to fill a void in communication with a negative thought or worry that builds and overcomplicates the matter. What you don't say can have as great an impact as what you do say. Little problems become big problems and, next thing you know, you're dealing with Goliath and your slingshot is nowhere in sight.

- **Expand Your Vocabulary.** If you don't have the words in your head that are necessary to communicate a message, work on your vocabulary. Each time you see a new word, stop, write it down, look it up in the dictionary (or the Internet) and commit the meaning to memory. If you add one new word each week, you'll see a dramatic change in your ability to communicate.

- **Don't Communicate Through Others.** If you have something important to say, don't rely on someone else to deliver your message. The person you are trying to communicate with will appreciate it much more if it comes from you—good news or bad. And, you eliminate the potential for miscommunication.

- **Don't Burn Bridges.** You never have to make a person feel bad in order for him or her to act properly. Stop and think about what you are saying. Plan communications carefully. Choose words that don't insult/harm another's dignity.

Effective communication requires practice—keep working on it and you can become a great communicator. Ignore it and you will find that, eventually, all the skill in the world will not make up for lacking the ability to artfully communicate. ■

## Management Interview Tips

Communication styles will differ from one manager to the next and the tips outlined at left can help you assess a management candidate's communication skills. Of course, the best way to avoid communication difficulties is to hire managers who already possess the skills necessary to effectively connect with employees. If you follow the tips and ask the right interview questions, you can effectively evaluate the candidate's communication ability.

1. **Ask the right questions.** Ask the candidate pointed, open-ended questions to help you discern his or her communication skills, such as, "What is the toughest idea you have ever had to sell? How did you go about it and what was the outcome?" or "What examples can you give that demonstrate your ability to relate well to others?" or "Tell me when you had a conflict with another employee or manager. What was the cause and how did you resolve the issue?"

2. **Look for nonverbal communication cues.** Does the candidate project a tough, formal or "closed" demeanor? Is he or she relaxed and easy to converse with? Does he or she smile often and laugh with ease or scowl and appear unhappy? Does body language communicate self-confidence and professionalism? Is he or she dressed appropriately for the interview?

3. **Assess the candidate's listening ability.** Good communication begins with good listening skills. Does the candidate listen actively? Interrupt you often? Look you in the eye when you are talking? Pick up on details of your questions?

4. **Consider writing skills.** Good communicators can effectively deliver a message in person or in writing. To assess writing ability, provide a challenging scenario and ask him to develop a memo to employees. Assess ability to compose the message with tact and diplomacy. Evaluate grammar and punctuation.

5. **Ask questions 20 percent of the time and listen 80 percent of the time.** If you talk too much you'll never know if the candidate is a good communicator. Listen carefully. Can he or she think quickly, convince you with reasoning and respond intelligently? Is he or she a concise and clear communicator? Does he or she know when to stop talking? Effectively articulate his or her answers? Communicate with tact and diplomacy?



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## MERGERS & ACQUISITIONS

# ValleyCrest Buys Omni Landscape Group's Assets

ValleyCrest Cos. Aug. 20 agreement to purchase the Omni Landscape Group, South Plainfield, N.J., for an undisclosed amount is viewed by executives of the Calabasas, Calif.-based landscape firm as an opportunity to expand its presence in new and existing markets by taking over Omni's Atlanta, Washington, D.C., Philadelphia, Destin, Fla., and Birmingham, Ala., operations.

"We've been in Atlanta, but this gives us the top market position in the Atlanta marketplace," says Roger Zino, president, ValleyCrest Landscape Maintenance. "Washington, D.C. is a thriving and growing area, and we have a strong presence there but not as much in the commercial market so this balances our portfolio. It's a very nice compliment to our book of business."

The acquisition also introduces ValleyCrest to the Philadelphia area and the East Coast, which Zino says is one of the last major markets the company is not fully servicing. ValleyCrest plans to utilize Omni's existing facilities in these regions.

The acquisition will add 600 to 700 Omni employees to ValleyCrest's workforce, making the transition effort easier for customers. "We're going to take care of those customers, and we want the customers to know that they're going to get the same people at their doorstep and the same service that they had before, hopefully with some renewed energy and renewed vigor, and they should expect at least what they've seen, if not more, going forward," Zino says.

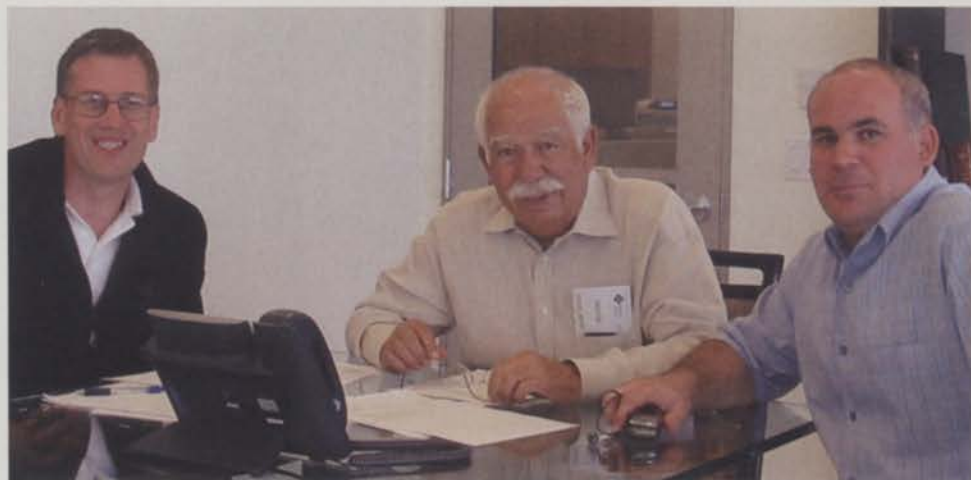
To better service these new markets, ValleyCrest will survey its new customers to determine their expectations. The company is also assessing Omni's equipment and plans to invest millions of dollars in upgrades, according to Zino.

"Everyone who I have visited has told me what is important is the people who they interact with on a daily basis, and as long as those people stay the same and as long as the service is the same, they don't care what color the uniforms are or what names are on the truck," says George Morrell, Omni consultant and founder of the Atlanta-based Morrell Group, which Omni acquired in 1999.

ValleyCrest has never purchased a company in bankruptcy before. When asked how buying a company in bankruptcy differs from its previous acquisitions, ValleyCrest CEO Burton Sperber said: "We don't know how it will turn out. It's yet to be seen. It's certainly different. We know it's going to be good for the employees and customers. What it's going to be for us, we have yet to

to the company's bankruptcy than the landscape operations, says ValleyCrest President Richard Sperber. "The Omni Group as a whole didn't go out of business because of the Omni Landscape Division," Richard Sperber says. "It went into bankruptcy for decisions they made in their other businesses that they ran. The landscape group was the shining star in that sinking ship."

ValleyCrest plans to take advantage of The Morrell Group's reputation as a leader in the turf industry by learning from its success and transferring that into ValleyCrest's business practices, Richard Sperber says. "Our whole company is very excited about it because it gives us an opportunity to learn about another company that did a really good job out there that was a competitor of ours for many years - how they did it and what they did right," Richard Sperber says.



Roger Zino, Burton Sperber and Richard Sperber of ValleyCrest Cos.

learn, so our fingers are crossed on that."

After Omni filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy in June, ValleyCrest immediately seized the opportunity based on Omni's and The Morrell Group's reputation in the green industry.

Omni's other divisions contributed more

As for possible future acquisitions, there's currently nothing on ValleyCrest's radar screen, according to Richard Sperber. "We're on the conservative side as far as how many acquisitions we like to do in a year," he says. "We've never done more than one or two a year." - Jonathan Katz



## Blower Ban Considered In N.C. City

CHAPEL HILL, N.C. – Landscape contractors in Chapel Hill, N.C., might have to find a new way to pick up leaves, according to *The Raleigh News & Observer*. Just as autumn begins to thin the canopy, and contractors begin to think about clearing fallen leaves from lawns, along comes Councilman Cam Hill. After suggesting a ban on all leaf blowers three years ago during an offbeat campaign for mayor, the native Chapel Hillian says he now has a serious blower ban proposal for his council colleagues to consider.

According to Hill, it's not just the noise. Hill pointed to the noise and air pollution generated by gas-powered leaf blowers as his main reasons for wanting to outlaw them within Chapel Hill town limits. He said that, if not an outright ban, then he might favor some kind of limit on the hours when blowers could be used.

"A leaf blower doesn't do any real work, in my opinion," he says. "People use them for so many other things, and it just doesn't work. All it does is move dust from my yard to your yard."

Hill contended there were other ways to deal with leaves and other functions for which people use blowers. "If you're going to wait for the federal government to clean up the air, we're going to be waiting for a while," Hill says. "Everybody's got to do

something. This could be one of the ways we could start."

Eight people spoke on Hill's petition, including local landscapers Brad Williams and Ken Robinson, who were strongly opposed to the idea of banning blowers. Williams said it would have a "drastic economic impact" on his business and others.

Representatives of Mid-Atlantic Stihl and Outdoor Equipment Distributors also spoke against the idea, while residents Dan Coleman, Joe Herzenberg and Diana Steele expressed support.

Jane Hudson also backed Hill's request, on behalf of UNC's Student Environmental Action Coalition.

Sam Jordan, of Mid-Atlantic Stihl in Hillsborough, described leaf blowers as versatile, thorough, efficient and easy to use, while Mason Farm Road resident Steele called them a "real abomination."

The council almost always agrees to receive petitions and refer them to the town manager, particularly when the request comes from a council member. It's never a sure thing that a vote

in favor would follow. In Chapel Hill, though, politically active environmentalists are encouraging Hill. They see such a move as part of a global responsibility. Even Environmentalist Dan Coleman offered this suggestion to landscape contractors. "The best solution," he says, "is a rake."



### OBITUARY

## Robert Snodgrass, Dennis' Seven Dees Founder, Dies

PORTLAND, Ore. – Robert Snodgrass, founder of Portland, Ore.-based Dennis' Seven Dees Landscaping, died Sept. 20 at 87 years old, *The Oregonian* reported. Snodgrass started the company in 1956 and named it after his seven children – Daryle, Dennis, Drake, David, Dan, Drew and Dean.

Snodgrass eventually expanded the nursery into three retail garden centers and four wholesale stores in the Portland area. In 1975, Snodgrass' two oldest sons, Dennis and Drake, took over the business and formed two separate companies, Dennis' Seven Dees Landscaping and Drake's Seven Dees Landscaping, according to David Snodgrass.

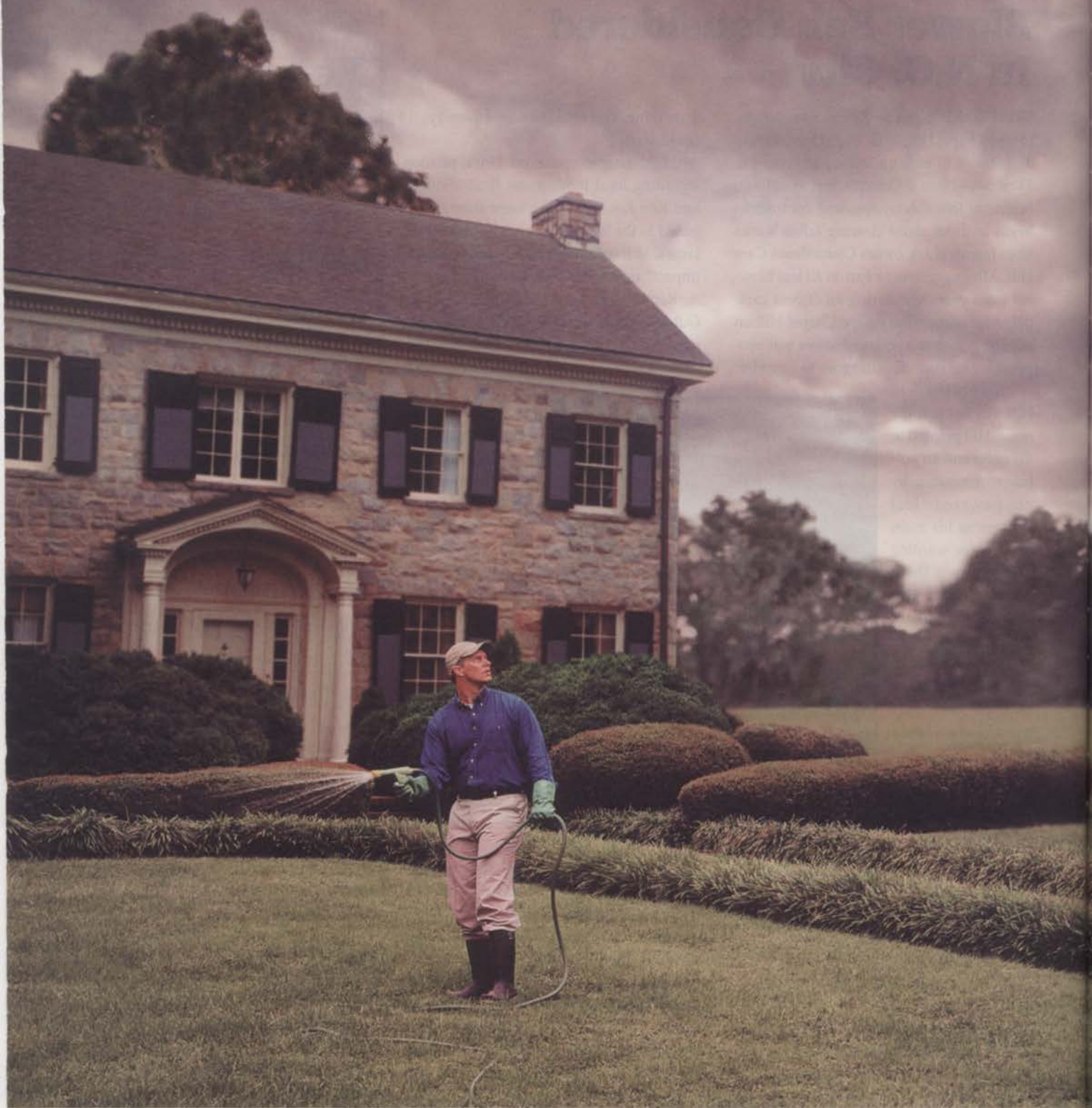
In 1977, David, Drew and Dean bought the landscape division from Dennis. Snodgrass was president of the Landscape Gardeners Association, the Oregon Landscape Association, the Oregon Association of Nurserymen and the local chapter of the American Association of Nurserymen.

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## Ask Dr. Tattar

**Q:** I have hemlock woolly adelgids (HWA) in some of my trees; how can I protect the "clean ones" and control the infested trees?

**A:** Imidacloprid insecticide has shown efficacy in both eradication and protection against HWA infestation. In mature landscape trees, microinjection of Imicide has been an effective control/eradication tool. Trunk injection is the most environmentally friendly application method of imidacloprid delivery that results in no impact on soil or in surface and ground water.

**Q:** What can I do for my trees after they have been damaged by frost? Can I help trees become less likely to be damaged by frost?

**A:** Frost damage causes sudden and substantial loss of leaf and shoot tissue which is needed to produce energy for the tree during the growing season. One thing that can be done to quickly restore the lost minerals is to microinject the frost injured trees with a complete essential nutrient solution. While it is impossible to completely prevent frost injury, trees should not be given excessive nitrogen fertilizer that will stimulate abundant production of succulent foliage. A better choice is the newly developed injectable phosphorus fertilizers which provide mineral nutrition for normal growth, and have also been shown to help trees resist invasions of pathogens.

**Q:** Will microinjected insecticides have any effect on beneficial insects?

**A:** Most beneficial insects are carnivores that feed almost exclusively on insect pests. Systemic insecticides will only kill those insects that feed on tree tissues, such as foliage and sap. Since beneficial insects only feed on healthy, live insects, they usually are not affected by microinjected insecticides.

Dr. Terry Tattar, Professor Emeritus, Dept. of Microbiology, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, MA

## Industry News

### HURRICANE HELP

## FNGLA Accepting Donations for Hurricane Relief

**FLORIDA** – To offer disaster relief to affected industry businesses, the Florida Nursery, Growers & Landscape Association (FNGLA) is working closely with Florida's Commissioner of Agriculture Charles Bronson, Governor Jeb Bush, and the state's congressional delegation in seeking the needed federal assistance to Florida's \$9.9 billion nursery and landscape industry and the 158,000 Floridians it employs.

Additionally, the association is continuing to sponsor a relief fund that was established after Hurricane Charley rolled through the state several weeks ago.

"This is a very generous industry and after Charley, a lot of people were calling to offer assistance and supplies," says Linda Adams, associate vice president of FNGLA. "People were sending supplies and wanted to send money, as well, so we set up a fund that people could donate to."

As it stands, FNGLA is still accepting monetary donations, however Adams requests that donations of supplies such as food and toiletry items, generators and nursery supplies like shade cloth be postponed until the association can assess the damage and get a better impression of the hardest-hit areas and the landscape and nursery businesses that will benefit most from those provisions.

Currently, FNGLA has received more than \$10,000 in donations and expects all of it to go toward disaster relief within the landscape industry and the association's membership.

If you would like to donate, send checks made payable to FNGLA to:

FNGLA, 1533 Park Center Drive, Orlando, Fla. 32835

FNGLA will also post updates regarding hurricane damage and relief efforts on their Web site at [www.fn gla.org](http://www.fn gla.org).

## Ruppert Makes Commercial Division Acquisition

**LAYTONSVILLE, Md.** – Ruppert Nurseries announced the acquisition of selected assets from landscape company A Neater Nature, including its commercial landscape management contracts, trucks and equipment. The commercial clients are all

based in the Frederick, Md., area.

"This agreement gives us more opportunity in an area that we have targeted for growth," said Ruppert Nurseries President Chris Davitt. "This acquisition puts us in direct contact with an important group of customers that might have taken us years to develop, and we look forward to being more involved in the Frederick area, marketing and servicing these clients for years to come."

Ruppert also retained all of A Neater Nature's commercial landscape management employees, who will join the firm's Laytonsville, Md., landscape management branch.



Chris Davitt



Craig Ruppert



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# Industry News

## REGIONAL REPORT

### The Fury of Frances

*One hurricane after another challenges Florida landscape contractors.*

Whether they were holding it from a near miss with Hurricane Charley or trying to catch it in the rush to clean up, Florida contractors barely had time to take a breath before Hurricane Frances, the second storm to hit the state in less than a month, showed up on their doorstep, followed by Hurricanes Ivan and Jeanne shortly afterward.

"Hurricane Charley hit our area and the Fort Myers area pretty hard, and then Hurricane Frances came through with some pretty heavy wind and high rain, but the damage wasn't that intense," says Lawrence Perillo, director of horticultural management, Smallwood Landscape, Naples, Fla. "It has caused us to mobilize literally seven days a week working 15, 16 and 17-hour days. A couple of us have worked around the clock for more than three weeks and things are kind of tapering off now."

Perillo says that everybody from the Smallwood office staff on up participated in a team effort to get things cleaned up. They also contacted some affiliates from other areas of the state and subcontracted them to come over and help with the effort.

Other contractors' staffs have also pitched in to keep things running. When Hurricane Frances destroyed the offices of Images of Green in Stuart, Fla., its secretary, Dusty MacPherson, opened up her home to serve as a temporary headquarters, as she was the only employee who had power.

By the time Frances reached contractors on the west coast of Florida, it had been downgraded to a tropical storm, but still packed enough power to cause damage.

"For the Tampa Bay area it was almost a pseudo wake-up call because we were in direct line for Charley and it turned," says Dean Akers, president, Akers Holdings, Tampa, Fla.

He says people quickly changed their cavalier view of Frances once the storm

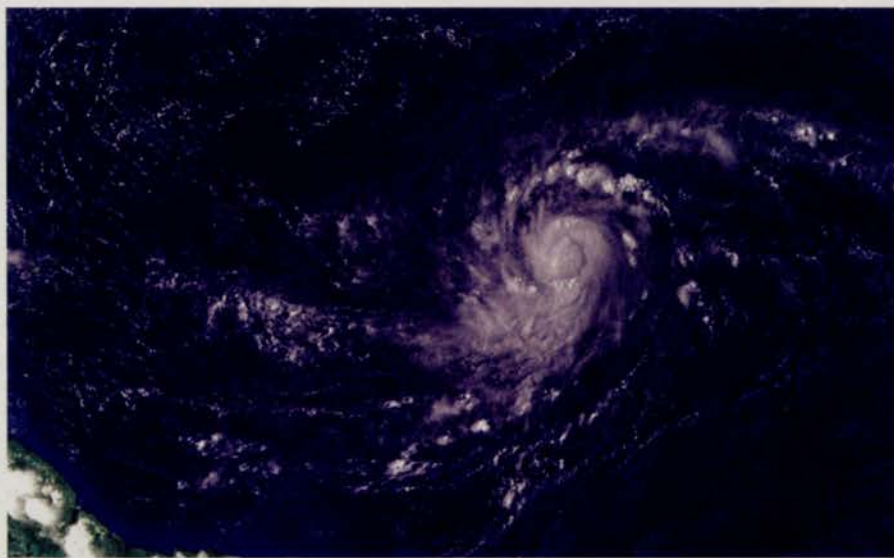
hit them. "I think people finally saw a tropical storm as a big deal. We had a lot of trees down. We had a lot of landscape damage for sure, but we didn't have a lot of structural damage – other than the mobile homes – that you would traditionally see in a full-blown hurricane."

The extra rainfall generated by Hurricane Charley pushed back Akers' construction business, which generates 70 percent of the company's revenue. He says waterlogged construction sites have kept building contractors from being able to finish their work, so his company can't start their jobs. To compensate, he's shifted some of his construction workers to the maintenance side of the business to help

canes have brought extra business in the form of new customers. "We've actually gone ahead and serviced some past clients and a handful of new clients who were in desperate need. But our main focus is and will always be our existing client base from a horticultural management standpoint."

Some clients are even calling contractors asking them to remove trees that aren't damaged just because they want to prevent damage to their home in case of another hurricane, Akers says.

Additionally, contractors say the price of renting equipment has remained stable despite the high demand that came as a result of the hurricanes, however locating this extra



with handling the influx of customer calls seeking immediate attention. "It's creating work for our maintenance crews and in order to help our client base, we've actually pulled off some of our contracting crews to do cleanup," he says.

Contractors also say they haven't had competition from fly-by-night clean-up crews. "Our customer base is calling us because they need somebody to respond immediately who knows their property," Akers says.

Perillo agrees, pointing out that the hurri-

equipment has been challenging.

According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) Web site, the statistical peak of hurricane season falls on Sept. 10, and the 2004 Atlantic hurricane season officially ends on Nov. 30. "You know, I've been here 10 years in this location in Florida and we've had some close calls and you just never anticipate that it's going to come your way," Perillo says. "This year, between rain and tropical storms and hurricanes, we're a marked target."





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## WEED & INSECT MANAGEMENT SUMMIT SECRETS

# The Economic Value of Landscapes

If you ever feel like your customers' interest in their landscapes is fading, just drive down a residential street on a clear Saturday morning to put your mind at ease. Whether they spend their time pushing mowers, spraying weeds or trimming shrubs, many homeowners take a great pride in their lawns and landscapes.

"The well-mowed lawn is ingrained in our psychology now," says Parvinder Grewal, associate professor in the urban ecology program at The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio. "This is personally eye-opening for me because I was born in India and I know that many countries in that area of the world do not have the neighborhood style of landscaping with turfgrass and continuous planting of trees along roads. Visitors to the United States and Canada see these and say, 'America is beautiful.' Not only does it look good, it gives an increased sense of neighborhood and also improves communication among neighbors. People are meeting their neighbors and talking to each other when they're taking care of their lawns and will even mow neighbors lawns while they're away."

As part of his presentation "The Economic Value of Landscapes" at the Lawn & Landscape Weed & Insect Management Summit held in Aug. 18 to 20 in Chicago, Ill., Grewal highlighted the psychological benefits that landscapes have on homeowners and the general public, but also brought out some of the more hidden benefits of landscapes that can drive interest in lawn care and landscaping services.



Parvinder Grewal, associate professor, urban ecology, The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio, talks to Weed & Insect Management Summit attendees about "The Economic Value of Landscapes."

**INCREASED PROPERTY VALUE.** In terms of the economy, turfgrass has become a major component of American landscapes, Grewal notes, adding that the country has roughly 30 million acres of turf comprised of 50 million lawns, 14,500 golf courses and countless parks, athletic fields, cemeteries, sod farms, etc.

"In 2000, 26.4 million households spent \$17.4 billion dollars on professional lawn care and landscape services," Grewal says. "Also, the top 100 lawn care companies had a combined revenue of \$5.05 billion dollars with 55,768 full time employees. These are not small numbers and it shows how much this industry contributes to the economy and it also shows that there's a demand for these services and a tremendous amount of expansion possibility."

For contractors working to increase their marketshare, this high level of demand is promising. Even more helpful is the fact that research has shown that professional landscaping increases property values – an intriguing selling point for potential clients.

"This is something we really need economists to look at more," Grewal explains. "Studies have shown that landscaping can raise the value of a home by 7.5 percent and can decrease its time on the market by five to six weeks. Also, *The Wall Street Journal* reported that, in many cases, landscaping costs are fully recovered in the sale of a home and sometimes are even doubled. Moreover, landscape values increase over time as the landscapes fill in and mature."

Also, as a benefit to homeowners, landscaping can reduce air conditioning costs, Grewal notes. "The urban heat island effect shows that the air can be 2 to 10 degrees warmer in urban areas than in the surrounding suburbs. This increases air conditioning costs and also results in problems like smog," he explains.

(continued on page 32)



*Sure Thing #2:*

**THREE OF  
A KIND BEATS  
TWO PAIR.**



# Market Trends

(continued from page 30)

"Turfgrass plants, as well as trees that provide visible shade can reduce this energy demand, which translates into the reduced production of climate-altering emissions such as bad ozone, in addition to air conditioning costs. You're using less energy and giving off fewer emissions in terms of global warming."

Grewal cited a study from the University of Texas showing that a green turfgrass lawn can reduce the temperature by 11 or 12 degrees Celsius, compared to a brown lawn. Additionally, he noted Ohio data indicating that a lawn's height of cut can influence the ambient temperature through evapotranspiration. A lawn cut at 3.5 inches, Grewal says, is cooler than a lawn cut at only 2 inches.

## COMMERCIAL PROPERTY PROS.

Beyond benefits to homeowners, contractors who work with commercial properties also can tout the hidden value of landscaping to property managers and business owners.

"Landscaping improves worker productivity and attracts customers to business districts," Grewal says. "There has been a study that indicated that well maintained landscapes in business areas can convey a 'We care' message, lower perceived job stress and improve worker productivity. The same study indicated that more customers will return to areas that are well landscaped, which can benefit area businesses."

But shopping centers and business parks aren't the only commercial sites that can realize the benefits of greenspace. Contractors whose accounts include health care facilities can draw on data showing that landscaping enhances

recreation and improves physical health.

"Landscapes are therapeutic and the medical community has started using them to cure patients with long-term diseases," Grewal says, noting famed scientist E.O. Wilson's "biophilia hypothesis" that says humans are innately attracted to other liv-



ing organisms, which suggests that there should be a health benefit in landscapes. "Taking this theory, the medical community has done research and confirmed that this is the case. In addition to the health benefits of engaging in landscaping, such as getting some exercise behind a mower or weeding a garden, this research shows that even just looking at well managed landscapes improves mental health."

Grewal says hospital research shows that patients with rooms overlooking vegetation required less pain medication and recovered faster than those without a view of nature. Moreover, he notes a study in Peoria, Ill., by the Illinois School of Medicine in which participants were paid to not mow their lawns. The results

were intriguing, to say the least. "For the Illinois study, the doctors were trying to learn about the impact of lawn care on homeowners—how would people take it? How would neighbors respond?" Grewal explains. "Many participants actually quit the study as the unmowed lawns were having a psychological impact on

them and, in many cases, the homeowners' neighbors ended up mowing the lawns themselves or called the police to complain. The doctors conducting the study found that the homeowners suffered psychological abnormalities such as depression, suicidal tendencies, child abuse, anorexia, bulimia, societal withdrawal, poor sexual function, increased ulcer

formation, high blood pressure and increased susceptibility to cancer."

With these severe physical and psychological impacts, to say that a well-mowed lawn is ingrained in our culture may be an understatement. But landscape contractors don't have to go to extremes to educate their clients about the economic value of landscapes. In addition to increased property values, lower energy bills and therapeutic properties, Grewal adds that landscapes have been found to reduce crimes by deterring graffiti, as well as by involving members of the community in landscaping projects and keeping teens and at-risk youth out of trouble.

"We know that landscaping can reduce soil erosion and help in areas like dust prevention, noise abatement, glare reduction, air pollution control and nuisance animal control, but it is the hidden values of landscaping that can boost the industry," Grewal says. "There's money to be made here, and a lot of interest in landscaping and lawn care can be generated by sharing the benefits that aren't as obvious to homeowners and property managers." — Lauren Spiers





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<sup>†</sup>Prior to tillering

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# Market Trends

## Calendar of Events

**NOV. 10-11** Power Expo 2004, Harrisburg, Pa. Contact: 800/898-3411 or [www.plna.com](http://www.plna.com)

**NOV. 14-16** International Irrigation Conference & Show, Tampa, Fla. Contact: 703/536-7080 or [www.irrigation.org](http://www.irrigation.org)

**NOV. 16-18** Turf and Grounds Exposition, Rochester, N.Y. Contact: 800/873-8873 or [www.nysta.org](http://www.nysta.org)

**NOV. 18** Ohio Landscapers Association Meeting, Broadview Hts., Ohio. Contact: 440/717-0002 or [www.ohiolandscapers.org](http://www.ohiolandscapers.org)

**NOV. 30 - DEC. 2** California Landscape Contractors Association Leadership Summit, Newport Beach, Calif. Contact: 916/830-2780 or [www.clca.org](http://www.clca.org)

**DEC. 7-10** Ohio Turfgrass Conference & Trade Show, Columbus, Ohio. Contact: 888/683-3445 or [www.ohioturfgrass.org](http://www.ohioturfgrass.org)

**DEC. 15** 10<sup>th</sup> Annual Indiana Professional Lawn & Landscape Association Winter Workshop, Carmel, Ind. Contact: 317/575-9010

**JAN. 9-11** WESTERN 2005 Convention & Trade Show, Kansas City, Mo. Contact: 816/233-1481 or [www.wnla.com](http://www.wnla.com)

**JAN. 11-13** CONGRESS 2005, Toronto, Ontario, Canada. Contact: 800/265-5656 or [www.hort-trades.com](http://www.hort-trades.com)

**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.

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USE READER SERVICE #22**



# Weed Man®

## Franchising FACTORS

As a service that provides recurring revenue, lawn care is an attractive addition to any landscape business. Some people try to add the service themselves, but the savvy contractor will buy a lawn care franchise instead as a way to ease the service's learning curve and boost growth.

Take Todd Reinhart of Reinhart Grounds Maintenance, Bloomington/Normal, Ill., for example. For years, Reinhart subcontracted lawn care because he didn't feel he had the expertise to enter the market. When he became dissatisfied with the job his competitors were doing, he thought about starting his own lawn care service. "We could see how the work needed to be done," he says, "but when it came to creating an operational plan and a business growth plan and checking our financials - these were our weak points," he says.

As a result, Reinhart began looking into franchising and discovered the Weed Man organization.

Corbin and Audrey Schlatter of Nature's Way Landscaping in Defiance, Ohio, also began looking into buying a lawn care franchise when they realized the way they were running their company was not going to be sustainable in the long term. Corbin explains, "I wanted to have a long-term relationship with somebody who could help me with the business side of my business vs. just the technical work."



For the Schlatters, the appeal of joining a franchise lay in the consistency and support a brand name offered.

In addition to these benefits, long-term planning is another perk of owning a franchise. For instance, a franchise offered Sam Morgan, Southern Quest Corp/Dream Green, Wilmington/Lake Norman, N.C., the opportunity to get into something enduring that would allow his family to maintain their lifestyle. A franchise was also something that would help him build equity and finance his retirement. "If you have a Weed Man

business doing \$1.6 million, you can sell it for \$1.6 million - the going rates are dollar-for-dollar when you have a good, profitable, successful company like Weed Man."

Not only do contractors gain retirement advantages when they buy a franchise, but they also obtain instant service-improving benefits, adds Reinhart. "I've talked to people about franchising who say, 'Why would I pay somebody else to come in and tell me what to do?'" he says. "But it's not that way at all. You're basically paying for a huge jumpstart. You pay for 30 or 40 years of operational experience. And that's worth every penny."

WM

## The WEED MAN Way

The partners in Reinhart Grounds Maintenance researched other lawn care franchises before they bought a Weed Man franchise. "The other franchises we looked at were all about dollars and cents," says Josh Fromme. "Weed Man was looking at growing a company and doing it the right way with a focus on customer service."

Fromme also watched industry trends and noticed the best of the best were starting Weed Man franchises. He says, "We realized that with this kind of talent behind us, our company is going to do nothing but grow."

**LAWN CARE - THE SMART CHOICE.** Purchasing a Weed Man lawn care franchise provides contractors with a service that secures recurring revenue - a luxury many contractors, particularly design/build contractors who rely only on checks that come in after a three- to six-month or longer job is complete, want for their businesses. "Lawn care is a different ballgame," explains Sam Morgan of Southern Quest Corp./Dream Green, Wilmington/Lake Norman, N.C. "You're not just a gardener with a Weed Man franchise - you get to become your clients' power company, like the exterminator, that eliminates their weeds. They need a Weed Man technician to service their lawn every six to eight weeks to make it green and lush - it's not something you can do just one time and then stop. It's repeat business."

A little client education goes a long way in terms of building these repeat-business relationships, Morgan adds. "Once you build the relationships with your customers, and you maintain quality service, you will retain them year after year, giving you the opportunity to build and grow."



**THE TRAINING TO DO THE JOB RIGHT.** The Weed Man system offers a mix of training, budgeting, computer systems and marketing. "When you get done with the initial training, you've basically earned your MBA," says Todd Reinhart of Reinhart Grounds Maintenance, Bloomington/Normal, Ill. "Weed Man has financial tools, management tools, operational tools - they've got them all."

New Weed Man franchise owners go through an intensive two-week training session in Canada where they also set up their budgets.

"The systems they provide you with can be used on your landscape maintenance or design/build side of the business as well," says Corbin Schlatter of Nature's Way Landscaping, Defiance, Ohio. "Not only are you going to get added benefits from a new service and a profitable service, you're going to be able to increase the growth in the other areas of your business."

The Weed Man system includes a computer program that allows franchisees to make sure their businesses are on track through bud-

(continued on back)



# Weed Man®

*Creating Opportunities for Growth*



**Corbin & Audrey Schlatter**

and don't think that the homeowners don't see that either," he says. "They know exactly who we are, even if they're not customers yet."

**A SUPPORTIVE NETWORK.** Weed Man franchise owners often speak about their fellow franchise owners and sub-franchisors using their first names. This is how closely franchise owners work with their sub-franchisors and fellow franchisees. Weed Man franchisees sit down with their sub-franchisors twice a year to take an in-depth look at their budgets, but many speak with them on a weekly or daily basis.

The networking opportunities that joining a Weed Man franchise present also give new franchise owners a sounding board to bounce ideas and business challenges off of and gain solutions and suggestions from experienced industry experts. "I use my fellow franchise owners as my network of contacts to learn their best practices for my Weed Man franchise and for my grounds maintenance business too," Reinhart says.

For Reinhart, Weed Man's business systems attracted Reinhart

*(continued from front)*

gets, tracking and scheduling - all right at their fingertips.

When it comes to marketing, Fromme says he has gained a lot of customers just by driving down the street in his green and yellow Weed Man trucks. "If I'm driving on the highway, I can see the other trucks from a mile away,

Grounds Maintenance to the franchise. "You have all the numbers in front of you that show what can and should happen in your first two or three years," he says. "Now, I look back and think where I would be in five years by myself and where I can be in five years with the Weed Man system, and I realize that we made the right decision to purchase a franchise. It was really a no-brainer."

Having a Weed Man franchise proved so profitable for Sam Morgan that last year he sold his landscape company in order to open a second Weed Man franchise in Charlotte, N.C.



**Sam Morgan**

**PROMISES KEPT.** One of Weed Man's main slogans is "Promises Kept," and many franchise owners find that embracing this concept helps them attract new clients and get employees excited about the business. "I really love it and believe the homeowner does too," Fromme says. "When we tell clients something, we come through for them and they're very attracted to that. That is why I believe we have really good customer retention and that's why I believe we're expanding the way we are."

According to Audrey Schlatter of Nature's Way Landscaping, Defiance, Ohio, Weed Man keeps its promises to franchise owners as well. "Weed Man's really been good to us and good for us," she says. "It's been everything they said it was going to be." **WM**

## Is Weed Man right for you?

### Are you interested in purchasing a Weed Man franchise?

**Ask yourself these questions to determine whether it's a good fit for you and your business.**

1. Are you interested in greater margins?
2. Do you want more market share?
3. Is your lawn fertilization business growing at a sufficient rate?
4. Is your organization as productive as it could and should be?
5. Are you feeling pressures from national and regional competitors?
6. Is your business creating wealth or just paying you a salary?
7. Are you tired of giving money to subcontractors that you could be putting in your pocket?
8. Have you always wanted to offer fertilization and weed control but felt it was too hard to start from scratch?
9. Are you interested in having the benefit of national buying power?

These are the questions that many of your industry peers across the country asked themselves and it is the answers to these questions that have led them to become Weed Man dealers. Weed Man continues to be the fastest growing franchised lawn care system in North America.

The first step is to schedule an initial consultation. This process helps you to determine whether or not Weed Man is right for you and your organization. Available markets are rapidly disappearing so don't let the opportunity pass you by without first determining if this system can help you reach your professional goals.

To schedule an initial consultation to see if Weed Man is right for you, contact your local Weed Man sub-franchisor (right) at 888/321-9333 or visit [www.weed-man.com](http://www.weed-man.com).

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### Sound Engineering

Simply put, the Walker Mower was designed to do a job and not just fill a market. No product studies were used and teams of engineers were not part of the inception. The innovative, time-tested design of the Walker is the result of years of improvement by listening to customers and implementing various industry advancements. Key to this elegant design has been discipline and staying true to the original idea—the current Walker chassis is within inches of the original overall size, even with larger, more advanced engines. Simple, practical construction of the Walker has made it a distinguished original.



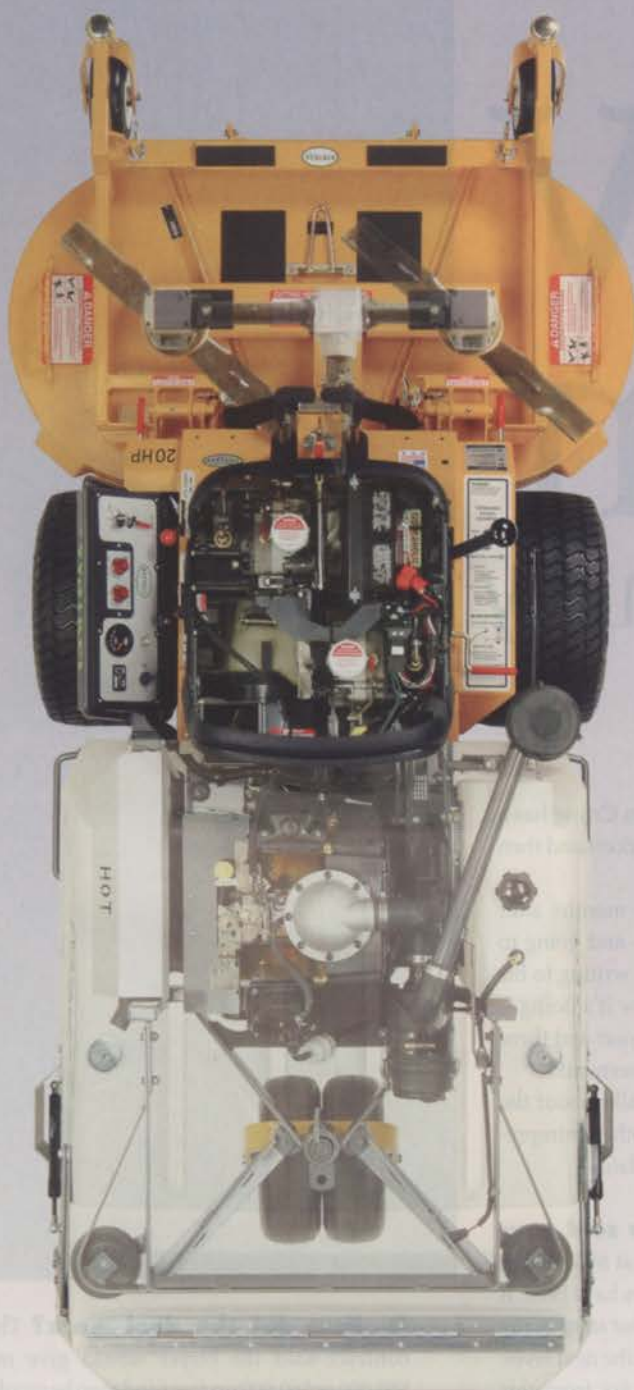
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USE READER SERVICE #24



# Show Him The Money

Remember in *Jerry McGuire* when a sports agent played by Tom Cruise has a moral epiphany that he outlines in a report to his boss and coworkers and then is immediately fired for expressing it?

A similar thing happened to Jeff Telgenhoff when seven months after selling his company – Pacific Landscape, Snohomish, Wash. – and going to work for the buyer, he was let go after responding honestly in writing to his boss' request: "Give me your opinion on my company and how it's doing."

To make matters worse, Telgenhoff says he lost out on one year and three months payout on the sale of his business, per the contract agreement.

Today, Telgenhoff is back in the landscape business and talks about the lessons he learned from this experience and shares tips on how other entrepreneurs considering selling their businesses can avoid a similar fate.

**Q. In what state of mind were you in when you sold your business?** I had run my business for 15 years and we were at \$900,000 in revenue by February 2002 when I sold it. I'm a field guy – I always have been. It was hard for me to get out of the field and into the office. And at that stage of my business, I needed to get out of the field to move the company to the next level.

So, the day I got the solicitation to buy my business via fax from this company, I think it really just hit me on the wrong day. I was frustrated with how things were going in my business and in my life, so I checked "Yes" and faxed back the form. Then I met with the buyer and he threw out some attractive business opportunities that I wanted to explore. Four months later, I was signing the final agreement.

**Q. How did the deal work?** The contract said the buyer would give me \$50,000 or \$60,000 up front and then he would make payments to me for the next two years for my business as long as I remained employed at his company. The payments were based on the buyer continually retaining a certain percentage of my former clients.







I was careful when reading all of the paperwork – I had two lawyers look it over. They said the agreement was in order as long as I bought into what it said.

There were only two things I didn't think about. First, the fact that in my new position at this company, I would have no control over the retention of my former clients, and

that would affect the amount of money I got for my business. Second, I never thought I would get fired, and never realized that if I got fired, I wouldn't get paid fully for the business that I had sold.

**Q. What happened next?** The owner gave me the title of senior manager and I was

slated to run the new branch he was opening. I had been at the main office for about seven months and some of my former clients were telling me they didn't like how their customer service had changed since I sold and became a part of this new business. This really started to bother me since I had built these client relationships.

Then the owner of the business asked me to give him my opinion on his company and thoughts I had for improvement since I was about to take over the new branch office. I was so excited that I wrote out a letter in one hour, detailing how I thought we needed to spend more time with clients and how he needed to structure the branch offices so the managers could run them as separate businesses.

One week later, I was fired – just two weeks before the opening of the new branch. Not only did I lose my job, but I lost one year and three months of payments on my business' sale.

I can honestly say I went there with the intention of making the company better. So when he asked my opinion, I gave it to him. I wasn't going to lie. I've never been fired from a job in my life. I assumed I'd be employed there forever.

**Q. What did you do after you were let go?** I took two weeks off just to recover, and then I decided that I better pick myself up and keep going. It gave me a lot of motivation – I told myself, "This experience isn't going to keep me down."

I had some time to recuperate since I signed a one-year noncompete agreement with the buyer. Despite the fact that I had lost all of my equipment and clients, in addition to all of that money that I should have received for the sale of my business, I decided in February 2003 that I was going to start back up again.

Luckily, the buyer only bought my clients and not my company name, so that helped. And

*(continued on page 40)*



## Lessons Learned

When I joined the new company, I was given a tour of the main office for which I was responsible. I was told that the new company was a part of the new business. This was a good thing to know. I had been told that the new company was a part of the new business. This was a good thing to know.

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The new company was a part of the new business. I was told that the new company was a part of the new business. This was a good thing to know. I had been told that the new company was a part of the new business. This was a good thing to know.

**Q. What did you do after you were let go?** I took two weeks off to recover. I was told that I should take two weeks off to recover. I was told that I should take two weeks off to recover. I was told that I should take two weeks off to recover.

I had more time to recuperate than I needed. I was told that I should take two weeks off to recover. I was told that I should take two weeks off to recover. I was told that I should take two weeks off to recover.

Looking for a new job was not my first priority. I was told that I should take two weeks off to recover. I was told that I should take two weeks off to recover. I was told that I should take two weeks off to recover.




but would affect the amount of money I got for my business. I was told that I should take two weeks off to recover. I was told that I should take two weeks off to recover. I was told that I should take two weeks off to recover.

**Q. What happened next?** The owner gave me the title of sales manager and I was

I was careful when dealing all of the paperwork. I had two weeks off to recover. I was told that I should take two weeks off to recover. I was told that I should take two weeks off to recover.

There were two things I didn't want to do. First, I didn't want to be in my new position. I was told that I should take two weeks off to recover. I was told that I should take two weeks off to recover. I was told that I should take two weeks off to recover.





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## Lessons Learned

(continued from page 37)

I had developed really good banking relationships running my previous business so even though I had no money and horrible financials, the banks were kind to me. They believed in what I could do and took a chance on me.

To start up a company is more money than you think – I'm probably in debt about \$350,000 right now compared to my past business when I had zero debt, but with such low interest rates, I decided to bite the bullet. I'm keeping my cash flow up and making payments and building equity. Even looking at the money I owe, I'm still way ahead of the game compared to my former business. By December 2003, I had \$258,000 in revenue and we'll break \$1.2 million this year. I have 15 employees and some of my current clients are from my former company, but 75 percent are new business.

**Q. What did you learn from this experience?** Honestly, I'm better for going through it. It's difficult to go from having everything paid off and establishing good cash flow to starting from scratch again, but I'm a much better manager now than I was. I'm trusting my employees more and letting them take over different areas of the business instead of trying to do everything myself. Not only does this save me from burning out like I did when I sold my business, it also gives my employees more growth opportunities.

**Q. Do you regret selling your business or writing that letter?** No. The only thing I wish is that the owner of that company would have been more forthright with me. He asked me to come be a part of his company so I could grow in a different direction than I did before. And he told me exactly what I wanted to hear at that time – that I needed a bit of a change, a new experience. I never expected his reaction to my letter. If he felt we had different business philosophies, I wish he would have expressed that to me vs. just letting me go.

But I realized after going through this that I'm not one of those guys who can be a puppet. If he would have given me more leeway in my job, maybe it would have been different. But I'm an entrepreneur through and through. It's hard for any entrepreneur to sell and work for another landscaper unless he wants to dial down his responsibilities and live by someone else's principles.

**Q. What would you change, if anything, about your experience?** I would have agreed to money up front and just got out of the industry. But I was just 38, so it was hard for me to think of retirement at that time.

If I would have known how it would have turned out, I wouldn't have done it, but in retrospect it helped my company be better than we were before.

**Q. Would you sell your business again?** I don't think so. I left my employees in the lurch, to be honest, and I think that was selfish of me as an owner. Every owner is a little selfish. The business is your life when you're the owner – it's a lot different than working for someone else.

I've been in the landscape industry for nearly 20 years and have seen an increasing number of small companies being purchased by larger ones. Even though I'm not against this type of transaction, people need to realize that, in many cases, false expectations are conveyed from the purchasing company to the principals of the selling company.

You don't have to think negatively, but seriously ask yourself, "What happens if I'm not here in one year or two years – what then?"

**Q. In your opinion, what are some potential pitfalls of selling a business that contractors should watch out for? How can they avoid false expectations and promises from a buyer?** If someone approaches you about buying your business, first take two weeks to really think about it. Don't make a quick, rash decision. Go away for two weeks and consider all of the possibilities. Take what the buyer is telling you with a grain of salt. Question everything.

If you proceed forward, get your money up front and do not assume that you'll be employed there after the deal is made. If you don't get all of your money up front and you agree to be paid over the course of a few years while you work for the new company, make sure the contract says that you have to quit in order to not get paid the rest of the money. I realize now that by signing that contract the way it was, I left him in control of me and the sale of my business.

All in all, try to trust people as much as you can, but remember that business is money, and sometimes you can't trust the money. – Nicole Wisniewski

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# SPRAY GREEN SEE GREEN

*For many contractors, hydroseeding offers a labor-and cost-friendly edge that will turn their competition green with envy.*

*by Leslie Stroope*

What is the method of lawn establishment contractors say prepares like a cake mix, applies like watering your lawn and looks like a St. Patrick's Day prank gone awry?

The answer is hydroseeding.

Hydroseeding is a method of establishing a lawn where seeds, fertilizer, tackifier, tracer dye and mulch – comprised of either wood or paper – are mixed in a giant tank. This mix, or slurry, is then sprayed out on a prepared bed. The mix helps keep seeds moist and protects them from the elements, allowing them to germinate faster. By the time the water-soluble dyes begin to fade, the client is already seeing green.

Landscape contractors are finding hydroseeding to be a cost- and labor-effective, not to mention fast, way to grow a lawn, both for them and for customers. Originally used for industrial applications, hydroseeding gained popularity for residential applications in the 1980s and has grown 10 to 15 percent each year since then, according to Ray Badger, President, Turbo Technologies, Beaver Falls, Pa. Contractors say hydroseeding's growth has been fueled by Environmental Protection Agency erosion control laws and because of the growing demand for the service.

"Everybody's so environmentally-conscious about ground pollution, stream pollution and water pollution that hydroseeding has stepped forward and met these challenges," says Peter Lyford, owner, Peter A. Lyford dba Scott's LawnService, Bangor, Maine. "Today, you can buy a poly tank for hydroseeding, and it's much more affordable for most landscape companies to actually own one of these machines."

In addition to residential lawn seeding, hydroseeding is a versatile technology that can also be used for overseeding.

"You have a lot of variety in what you can hydroseed, so you could do basically any

(continued on page 44)



Photo: Finn Corp.



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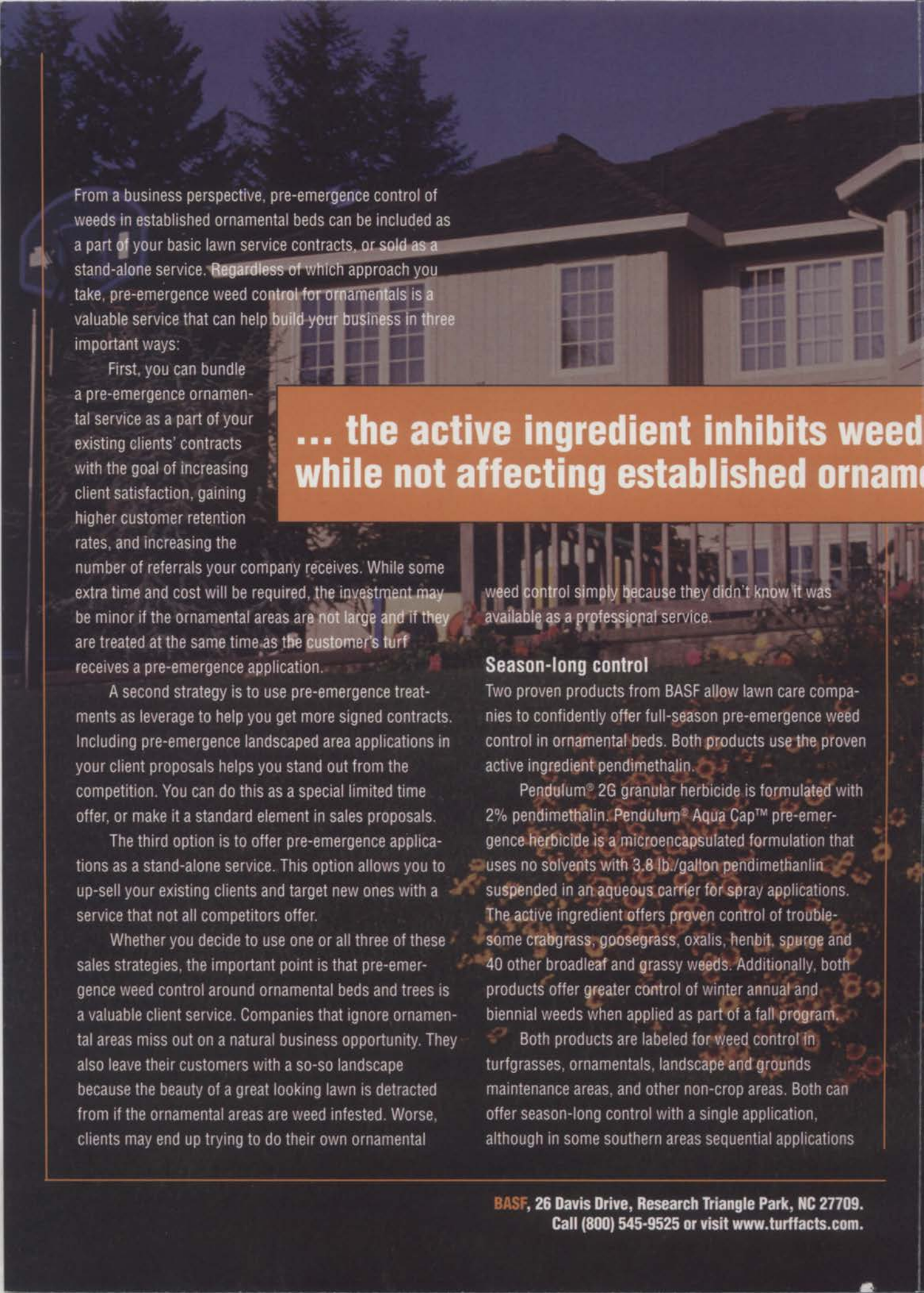
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From a business perspective, pre-emergence control of weeds in established ornamental beds can be included as a part of your basic lawn service contracts, or sold as a stand-alone service. Regardless of which approach you take, pre-emergence weed control for ornamentals is a valuable service that can help build your business in three important ways:

First, you can bundle a pre-emergence ornamental service as a part of your existing clients' contracts with the goal of increasing client satisfaction, gaining higher customer retention rates, and increasing the number of referrals your company receives. While some extra time and cost will be required, the investment may be minor if the ornamental areas are not large and if they are treated at the same time as the customer's turf receives a pre-emergence application.

A second strategy is to use pre-emergence treatments as leverage to help you get more signed contracts. Including pre-emergence landscaped area applications in your client proposals helps you stand out from the competition. You can do this as a special limited time offer, or make it a standard element in sales proposals.

The third option is to offer pre-emergence applications as a stand-alone service. This option allows you to up-sell your existing clients and target new ones with a service that not all competitors offer.

Whether you decide to use one or all three of these sales strategies, the important point is that pre-emergence weed control around ornamental beds and trees is a valuable client service. Companies that ignore ornamental areas miss out on a natural business opportunity. They also leave their customers with a so-so landscape because the beauty of a great looking lawn is detracted from if the ornamental areas are weed infested. Worse, clients may end up trying to do their own ornamental

**... the active ingredient inhibits weed  
while not affecting established ornamentals**

weed control simply because they didn't know it was available as a professional service.

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Both products are labeled for weed control in turfgrasses, ornamentals, landscape and grounds maintenance areas, and other non-crop areas. Both can offer season-long control with a single application, although in some southern areas sequential applications





## development mentals.

may be necessary for year-round control.

Pendulum® Aqua Cap™ and Pendulum® 2G are DNA herbicides, so once applied the active ingredient remains in the top ½ inch to 1 inch of the soil (the thin zone where most weed seeds germinate). Once in place the active ingredient inhibits weed development while not affecting established ornamentals or transplants that have root systems deeper than the top 1 inch of soil.

The active ingredient assures weed control without having to worry about possible off-target damage to plants and Pendulum® will not cause damage when applied over the top of plants in landscaped areas, unlike post-emergence herbicides. Used according to label directions, Pendulum® 2G or Pendulum® Aqua Cap™ are safe for ornamental beds when application is made at the plant base or over the top. Pendulum® is labeled for over-the-top application of more than 335 species of ornamentals, including many woody ornamentals, perennials, wildflowers, ground covers and established bedding plants.

Best of all, pre-emergence treatments of ornamental beds are very cost-effective when priced over 120 to 160

days of control. Few products give the length of control to price ratio that Pendulum® 2G or Pendulum® Aqua Cap™ provide. Additionally, the granular formulation offers the convenience of no mixing and less equipment loading and clean up. A Pendulum® 2G application is as easy as using a handheld or chest spreader.

### Gaining excellent results

Two Pendulum® formulations offer lawn care professionals important application flexibility. If ornamental areas are to be treated at the same time as the lawn, then Pendulum® Aqua Cap™ allows both areas to be treated at the same time. The only caution is that if a tank mix is used all of the products must be labeled for ornamental areas and safe for ornamental plants.

Once applied, Pendulum® incorporates with as little as ¼ inch of rainfall and remains for two to four months. Efficacy with either formulation is the same. If desired, higher rates may be used in ornamental beds to extend the product's residual activity.

For recommendations on application timing and other use directions please refer to the product label ([www.turffacts.com](http://www.turffacts.com)).



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## Business Opportunities

(continued from page 42)

type of grass; you could even do wildflowers, crown vetch or other erosion control materials," says Badger.

"The economics of hydroseeding are actually quite good and it gives landscape contractors another service to offer," adds Marc Bowers, vice-president of marketing, Finn Corp., Cincinnati, Ohio.

**SODDING AND SEEDING.** "The advantage of hydroseeding over sodding and/or seeding in general is that through hydroseeding you can minimize weeds, you can improve the quality of the health of the plant and you can put back into the soil what you need to optimize the growing environment," explains Bowers. "If you core

sample hydroseeding done correctly vs. sod after it has been on the ground for a month or two, you'll see the root structure is much, much deeper."

Contractors say that hydroseeding using paper or wood mulch eliminates the problem of weed seed contamination from the hay. "Birds tend to eat the seed less, it's a lot neater application and you can do hillsides, which are tough to do with other seeding methods," Badger says.

In addition to its aesthetic value, hydroseeding costs considerably less than traditional sodding, contractors say. "We can go out there and let's say it costs me two-thirds of what I'm charging - right around \$300 on a minimum tank," says Mike Phelps, owner and operator, Sprout's Seeding Service/Hydrotech Erosion Systems, Baton Rouge, La. "I go out there, mixing it takes about 45 minutes, spraying it takes about 15 to 20, so in a little over an hour I've made my a hundred and something dollars. It's a third of the cost of sod, and you can get just as good of results as sod, if not better, depending on what you spray."

"Comparing hydroseeding to sod, one of the biggest advantages is cost," adds Badger. "You'll get probably 75 percent savings or more. With sod, you're bringing in grass that was grown in one of type soil and it might be placed on a different type of soil and there's a problem with it not taking. So you're eliminating that problem. I heard one guy say that hydroseeding is just like sodding except you're eliminating the middleman."

**MIXING IT UP.** When it comes to adding hydroseeding to the services contractors offer, the machines from which the ingredients are mixed and sprayed are the largest investment. There are two types of machines: jet agitation, which uses jets to circulate and mix the ingredients in a plastic tank, and mechanical agitation, which uses paddles to mix the ingredients.

"There are good sides to both," explains Phelps. "It would be unfair to say agitation's better or mechanical is better. Now, mechanical has a wider range of applications and I can say that because there's two types of mulch that would be more adaptable to that."

Bowers says that jet agitation machines

(continued on page 46)

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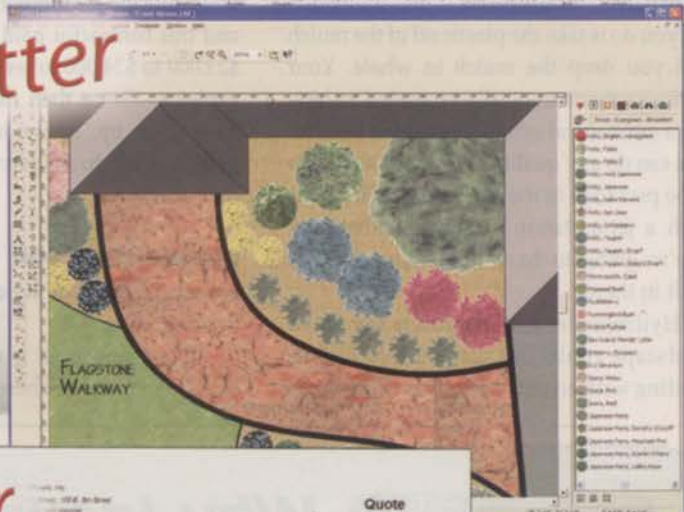
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W00104	4 Gal	Boxwood	2.00	\$25.00	\$50.00
W00102	2 Gal	Juniper, Blue Chip	2.00	\$97.50	\$195.00
W00104	2.5	Heads, Japanese Laurel	1.00	\$275.00	\$275.00
W00103	Box	Heads, Japanese Laurel	8.00	\$10.00	\$80.00
W00103	4x10	Corner Stone	9.00	\$10.00	\$90.00
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## Business Opportunities

(continued from page 44)

have a lower threshold when it comes to mixing heavier mulches, such as wood.

"You're probably going to be using a paper fiber, which is a lower-quality fiber," Bowers explains. "You're probably going to be pre-grinding it because the jet agitation won't be able to break it up. And you're not going to be able to put as many pounds of it in per application, whereas in a mechanically-agitated hydroseeder, it's like taking a strawberry and dropping it into a blender. All you do is take the plastic off of the mulch and you drop the mulch in whole. Your options are automatically expanded by having a mechanical agitation machine because you can do any quality level that's available to be provided in the marketplace. Whereas with a jet-agitation machine, realistically you're going to have limitations that are built in there."

Hydroseeder manufacturers say that a landscape contractor can get into hydroseeding with an entry-level machine rang-

ing from \$4,000 for a jet-agitation machine on up to about \$10,000 for a mechanical agitation machine.

Contractors and manufacturers say the time it takes to recuperate these costs depends on how often the machine is being used. When Lyford bought his first machine for \$15,000 used, it took him a single day to make back the money.

"We had two large homes being built on a big hillside overlooking the countryside and this contractor paid us something like \$23,000 to \$24,000 to seed the two," Lyford explains. "Since then the machinery costs have gone up, so we just work away at getting a 20- to 40-percent return on our investment."

**INGREDIENTS FOR SUCCESS.** There are several kinds of mulches one can use in hydroseeding.

"Fiber mulch is a regional supply," explains Person. "There's either going to

be paper fiber, which is either recycled newspaper or cardboard. There's wood fiber, which is ground-up wood chips or there's blended fibers, which are part paper and part wood. You've got three choices and they're all regionally available."

Hydroseeding also requires a tackifier, which helps hold the mulch to the landscape in case of rain, Badger says. "There's basically two types of tackifiers, one's water-based and the other's poly-acrylimide-based," he explains. "They work like a glue, they also lubricate the system and make it mix better. There's a product called a polymer gel that will help hold moisture, it will cut the water requirements 50 percent, so if you have a situation where the lawn can't be watered as much as it should be, that can help solve the problem."

The thickness of the hydroseeding spray needed for an area depends on the climate, say many landscape contractors. A thicker application may be necessary in



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drier climates where the seed would otherwise dry out.

Fertilizer also needs to be added to the mix.

But one of the most important ingredients is water. There are sources that contractors can pull from and they vary from town to town. In some areas, landscape contractors can rent a meter from the fire department that allows them to pull water from fire hydrants and pay for it at the end of the month. Some use their clients' hoses. And some contractors are allowed to use natural sources from which to draw their water.

"We're very fortunate that the state of Maine has just thousands and thousands of lakes and streams and it is legal for us to go up to any lake or stream and pump the water out," Lyford says, adding that he leaves a 6-inch air gap between where the water comes out of the spout in the lake and dumps in the tank, so there's no potential for the water to backflow and pollute the source from which they are drawing. He says they also have hooked into hydrants, which costs him 35 cents to fill a 1,700-gallon seeder.

**THE PRICE IS RIGHT.** Contractors say that when it comes to setting prices, there are several factors to take into consideration. Lyford says he takes the costs of goods purchased, truck time and man time into account before adding a percentage to it.

"The way we price ours out is if we had to go back and oversee as a warranty issue we don't make any money on the job but we cover our expenses," explains Phelps. "That's pretty much what the profit will cover - it's a third of what you're going to charge."

Badger says a common pricing mistake he sees is contractors not taking all of their costs into effect and setting prices lower than they should be.

"Your costs for hydroseeding might be a penny and a half to two cents a square foot but you do have equipment depreciation and travel time to consider as well, in addition to labor costs, and you need to realize that you need to get a fair price for your job," Badger says. "I think that's an important thing and what I find is a lot of people start in and price their jobs cheaply hoping just to get jobs and as they go they find they can get a lot more money for their work and still get all the jobs they need."

Contractors say that there are still a lot of places where hydroseeding is not understood and they have to do a lot of client education. Some have been able to use hydroseeding to augment other aspects of their landscape business and use it as another angle by which to draw in customers. For example, when Lyford finishes a hydroseeding job, he'll leave a business card with his lawn service name and number to try and generate repeat business.

"Most consumers probably don't know that if you hydroseed correctly, you're going to have a healthier yard," Bowers states. "Most contractors probably don't know that if they hydroseed correctly, they can put a guarantee of performance on the back end of the job because they know what their callbacks are going to be. They're going to be nominal, minimal. When you start doing things like that, you differentiate yourself in the marketplace not on price, but on quality. And that's always a much more defensible margin position."



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Jack Robertson, owner of Jack Robertson Lawn Care in Springfield, Ill., also has a high level of trust in Merit performance. In fact, 95 percent of his customers use Merit. "We used to have difficulties with application timing before Merit came along," says this 27-year lawn care veteran. "Merit's flexible timing allows us to apply in late spring or summer without making an extra trip. That saves us time, sweat and money. I think a lot less about grub control since I know Merit is taking care of it."

Both Robertson and Buechner see a bright future for Merit. "It's such a unique product with no resistance issues, I think we're still just learning how to use it," Buechner adds.

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# What it takes to Win

Finish first with these proven business strategies. by Roger Stanley

Getting into the lawn and landscape business can be as simple buying a mower and printing business cards. Staying in business is not so simple.

Every new company is in a race that ends in success or failure. In fact, more than 90 percent of all business startups fail within three years, and the rate may be even higher for lawn and landscape companies given the relative ease and low investment needed to start a company.

Despite hard work and the best of intentions, business failure can happen quickly or follow years of struggle. Failure can be attributed to finances, personnel, competition or bad luck.

The primary factor in success or failure, however, is the owner, agree presidents of leading companies. "Low-ball" competitors, a tight labor market, foul weather and bad luck are problems every owner faces. Owners who cannot work around these problems ultimately see their companies fail, while those who beat the odds succeed.

What does it take to win in the landscape business? Three company owners share their perspectives and advice on what it takes to overcome such challenging odds.

## Winning Strategy #1: Connect with smart people.

Over the past 33 years, Kurt Kluznik has grown Yardmaster of Painesville, Ohio, from a high school venture into a nationally respected, full-service company with more than 250 full-time employees. Kluznik says the smartest thing he did as an owner was to seek out talented people and learn from them. The challenge for a young owner, he says, is to learn new things.

"The biggest single factor in my success was hiring a consultant early on," Kluznik says. "When you are young, you can easily be full of yourself and your ideas. But when you try to sell those ideas to a consultant, he will challenge your assumptions. At the time, we didn't think we could afford to hire a consultant, but it turned out to be a very wise move."

One of the first things the consultant did for Yardmaster was to set up business systems to run the company. "We still use that same system. Try amortizing the cost and benefit of that over 25 years," Kluznik says.

The consultant also helped Kluznik learn the difference between revenue and profit. "When we started out, we would do anything for a buck," Kluznik says. "We did spring cleanups, Christmas decorating and for a time we were huge in firewood sales, but we didn't do the math. Our consultant showed us that we were not making any money selling firewood. Sure, we had revenue coming in, but when you factored in all the work and costs, there was no real profit. Just because you see someone else doing something, don't assume you can make money at it."

A related lesson was the need to focus on what you do best. During the energy crisis in



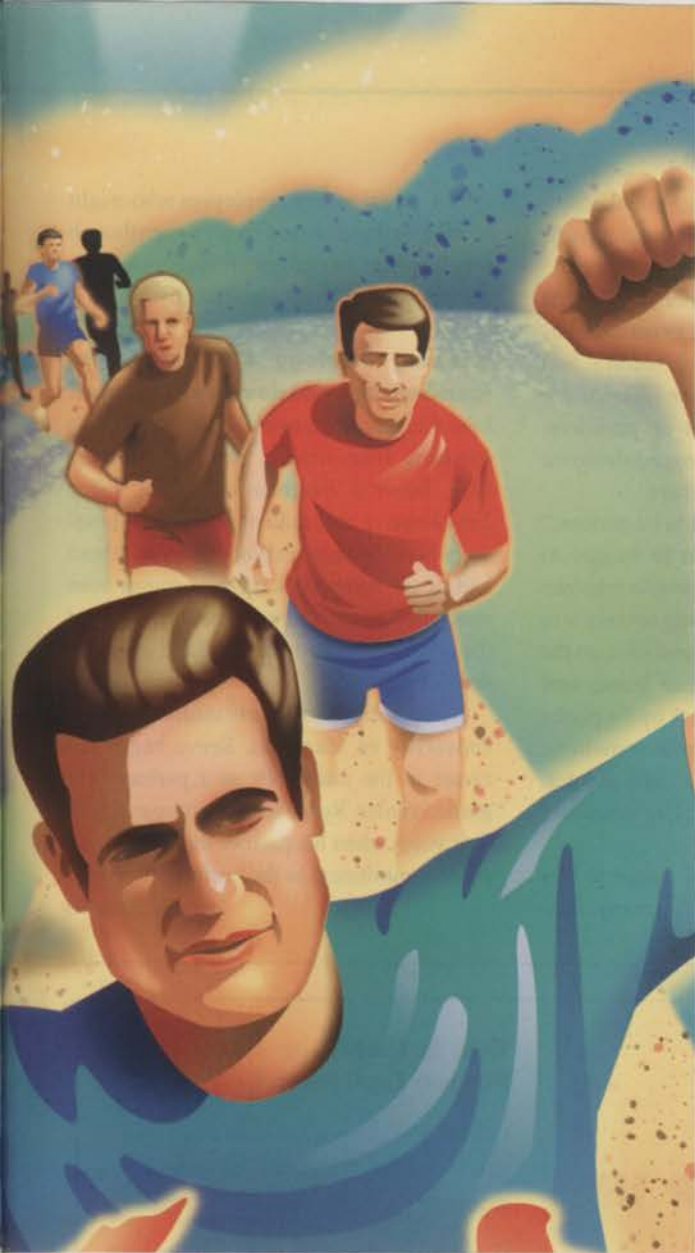


Illustration: Mark Harvey

the late 1970s, Yardmaster got into the home insulation business. Home insulation was booming, and Yardmaster had trucks and crews with little to do during the winter months. It looked like a natural fit, so a number of trucks were converted to handle blow-in insulation during the off-season. Next, a manager who really knew the insulation business was hired to run it. The problem was that the lawn crews did not like doing this type of work, and the business was not profitable, so Yardmaster dropped it.

"My advice to young contractors is that getting into a 'sideline business' means that you're now in that business," he says. "Bigger picture: If you are trying to be a jack of all trades, then you risk being a master of none. Trying to be everything confuses the marketplace about who you are and what you do. It also ignores the value of the economies of scale gained by doing a few things very well. In our first 10 years of business, we tried adding a new service every year. In the past 10 years, we have worked to drop services and narrow our focus."

Industry peers also have helped Kluznik's professional development. Kluznik joined and got involved with a local association, but he says the experience was often de-motivating because many of the owners had worked all day, and when they came to the meeting, there was a tendency to sit around and complain.

## A Business Coach's Perspective

**W**hy do so many entrepreneurs fail to take the actions they know they need to take? Keith Rosen, an accredited business coach, says much of the challenge of owning your own business is in being accountable to your business, your staff and yourself.

"Owners face problems on a daily basis, so there is always a reason why they can't do something," Rosen says. "Being the owner is more about taking ownership of the situation around you than getting everything done."

What a professional business coach does is help the owner decide what he or she needs to do, develop a strategy and time table to accomplish it and then create the necessary structure for accountability. Because the owner sets the goals and pays for the coach's expertise and time, there is plenty of incentive to follow through on commitments.

In particular, the coach helps owners recognize their own diversionary tactics and excuses.

"The coach's role is to provide owners with the tools and resources they need, to challenge them and hold them accountable for their own goals," Rosen says.

The steps to achieving business success largely depend upon the owner's vision, Rosen adds. "There is a lot of talk about vision, but it's really a matter of knowing where you want the company to go and how to get there," he says. "Too many owners fail to plan a direction for their company. What complicates this is if the company is making money. If so, the owner has no burning need to work on the business. He or she might not ask the question, 'What could I be doing to work less and make more money?'"

Once a vision is in place, owners then need a strategy to accomplish their goals and establish systems and procedures to make sure the necessary work is being executed. Execution is an owner's responsibility.

"The challenge is in just paying lip service instead of acting," Rosen says. "It's easy for an owner to get fired up in a seminar and decide that on Monday he's going to start a training program for his people or start some other initiative. The problem is that on Monday morning, the phone rings and the owner is now off doing something else."

While owners can get a measure of advice and accountability from their spouses, industry peers or friends, Rosen says a professional coach offers expertise, third-party perspective, targeted advice and a safe sounding board to talk about challenges regularly over the phone.

"Experienced coaches also have heard most of the excuses, so we make sure the client stays focused on making the progress they seek," Rosen says.

*Keith Rosen is a certified business coach, owner of Profit Builders, Merrick, N.Y., and author of The Complete Idiot's Guide to Cold Calling. Rosen can be reached at 888/262-2450 or [info@ProfitBuilders.com](mailto:info@ProfitBuilders.com).*



What Kluznik dreamed of was managing a business vs. working for wages. And he wanted to have 10 crews – not one or two. When he attended an Associated Landscape Contractors of America (ALCA) meeting, Kluznik says the lights came on.

"Part of my motivation was to do what others weren't doing," he says. "I went to my first ALCA meeting and saw all these people who had great companies – some even had full-time employees. To be exposed to the professionalism and learn from it was huge for me and ultimately important for my company."

"As an owner, you need to find people you can learn from in order to make improvements in your business," he adds. "Many of the smart moves we have made over the years – learning to watch our debt, running lean and mean, being focused on profitable work and establishing and maintaining a good company reputation – either originated from consultants or other own-

ers, or they gave us the courage to make these changes. Good ideas improve your company, and good ideas come from smart people."

Today, Kluznik says owner education is easier to get than it was 30 years ago. His advice is to join a local association – and preferably, the national one. ALCA, for which Kluznik now serves as president, even has a free mentoring program designed specifically for younger owners.

"A business owner need to be curious," Kluznik says. "You have to be hungry to learn and then go find the people who can teach you. My advice to young owners is to go to professional meetings and sit in on the roundtable discussions. Read books and industry trade magazines. Pick up the phone and call someone who wrote something that really interested you. Find a mentor. You can't think you know it all or you won't learn any new things."

Kluznik also advises any owner to hire smart, experienced people. Too many own-

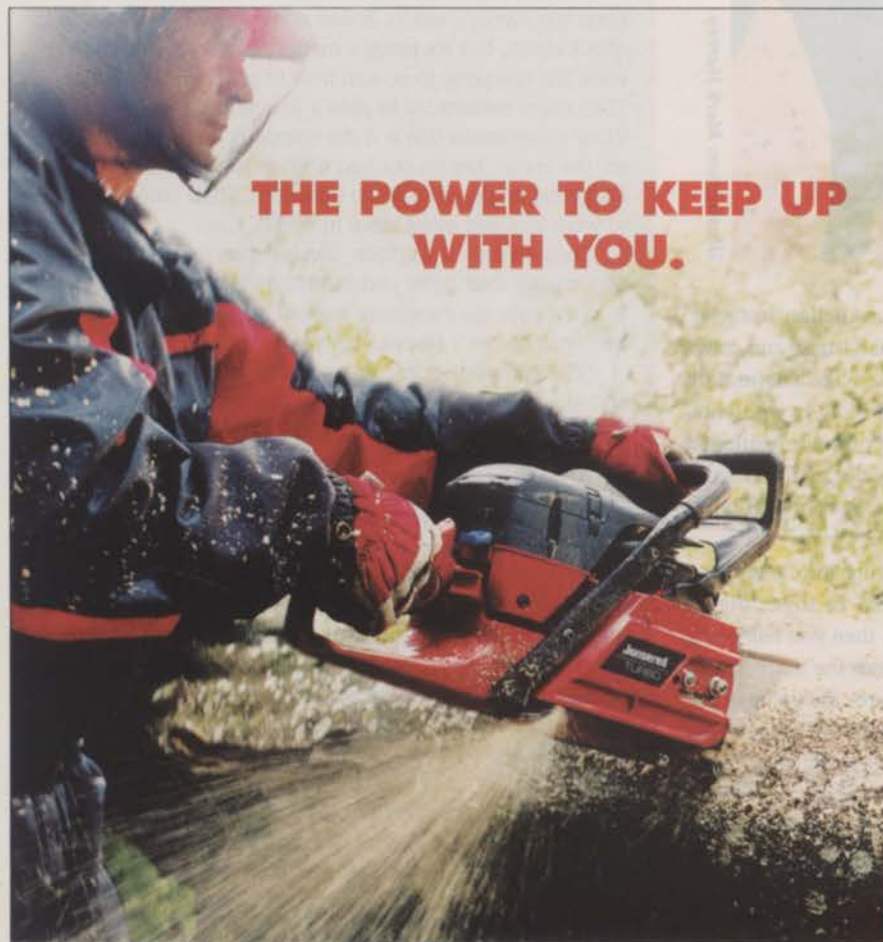
ers are afraid to hire employees who might be smarter than they are, he says, even though they can learn from these employees and the company will benefit significantly.

### **Winning Strategy #2: Commit to learning, but also develop a balance.**

Like Kluznik, J. Landon Reeve created his company from scratch. Thirty-seven years later, Reeve is chairman of Chapel Valley Landscape, a \$40-million diversified landscape business based in Woodbine, Md. About half of the company's revenue comes from residential and commercial maintenance and the other half from residential and commercial design/build.

With a degree in horticulture from the University of Maryland, Reeve began his career in the mid-1960s as a partner in a garden center. Reeve left the company after four years when his partner didn't show an equal commitment to the business to launch

*(continued on page 54)*



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## Breakthrough Series

(continued from page 52)

a landscape company with "less than zero funds," but with a firm conviction that he wanted his own business on his own terms.

Reeve says business success is not rocket science. The foundation is to do two simple things: Do what you said you would do for customers, and do it right the first time. If you do both, he says, customers will call you back

the next year to do more work, and they will refer you to neighbors and friends.

Sounds simple enough, but he says it takes a skillful owner to make this happen as a company grows and evolves.

"Most companies start out wanting to do the right thing," Reeve says. "That was central in my own case. I decided right from

the start that my business would be trustworthy and honest in its dealings with customers, employees, bankers—everyone. Business relationships are critical, and trust and integrity were to serve as my guiding lights.

"The problem in some companies is that they eventually overcommit, which forces taking shortcuts, damages the customer's trust and then they fail," he continues. "Most failed companies did the right things at the start, but later made compromises. In some cases, failure followed success when the owner overreached and the company grew too fast."

To avoid this, the owner has to master new business skills at every stage of the company's growth. Unfortunately, few owners are successful at this, Reeve says.

"In my situation, I started out with a good technical background in horticulture, so for me, difficult things to learn were finances and sales," he says. "I had a basic knowledge of finances, but needed to learn much more. And learning to sell was difficult because no one teaches you about sales. You learn to sell when you get into the real world. Probably the hardest aspect was learning to be more aggressive in my relationships with people. When you are young, the toughness is just not there. As you gain experience, you have the confidence of knowing what you're doing."

"Now, here's the critical thing: Once you find out what you need to learn, then you must take the time and make the effort to learn it," Reeve adds. "Of course, the challenge is that you are working a lot of hours. You work until maybe 8 p.m. every night and then go home to do the paperwork. But success depends upon balance. You have to find the way to balance your time to go get the work, to do the work and to track the work. And you have to train yourself, not just your employees. All this has to be tied together somehow. The key is deciding you will learn new things. That is critical to success."

At the garden center, Reeve says he worked 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. seven days a week, from March to July, and almost every day during the off season. When he started Chapel Valley Landscape, he decided against working a solid seven days per week, but rather to put in long workdays.

"To be an owner means the job will consume you to an extent," he says, "but you can't be so busy chopping wood that you

(continued on page 56)



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## Breakthrough Series

(continued from page 54)

don't have time to sharpen the axe. You need some balance between work and your personal life."

Another thing many owners do not understand, Reeve says, is that businesses do not grow in a straight line. Rather, they grow and plateau, then grow again until they reach the next plateau. The owner

must take a company from a plateau to the next growth stage. And doing this during the first two or three years of business is the most difficult—the "terror part" where you live hand-to-mouth.

"In the first year, everything is new and exciting. In the second year, customers call you back to replace plants that died, which

you failed to include in your pricing. In the third year, things start coming together and you get a rhythm going," he says.

"My big goal was to hit \$1 million," he adds. "That took about six years. By that point we had enough momentum to start budgeting accurately and increase every year. But along the way, we hit growth issues at the \$300,000 to \$400,000 range, then more changes at \$1.5 million and again at \$3 million. Beyond the \$3-million mark, you need real management help. A number of companies fail at that point. For some owners, it would have been better to stay at the \$500,000 level because growth means new problems and new things you have to learn."

Owners who think they want large companies should consider what that will mean for them personally. For some people, staying smaller is a good decision.

"I think people can get work in our industry easily," Reeve says. "It's doing the work that is the challenge and doing it so that you earn a profit. That is the essence of the owner's job. To do so requires learning new things. My perspective is that the more you learn, the more you realize what you do not know. The good news is that the more you learn, the easier learning becomes."

### Winning Strategy #3: Determine your role.

An easily overlooked business pitfall is the owner's role, says Tom Lied, president of Lied's Nursery in Sussex, Wis. All owners launch their businesses with an exciting vision, but if that fails to happen, the feeling of being trapped, disillusioned and unhappy can contribute to business failure.

"A business exists to serve the owner vs. the other way around," Lied says, "so business success is about knowing where to go and where not to go. Growth in revenue and complexity of services is not always effective, desirable or the best way to go. My observation is that companies that become large are only successful if the owner has stepped back to become the manager and developer of people."

Transitioning to the job of holding people accountable and sharing an exciting company vision can be very difficult.

"Becoming the business manager is a change a lot of owners can't make," Lied

(continued on page 58)

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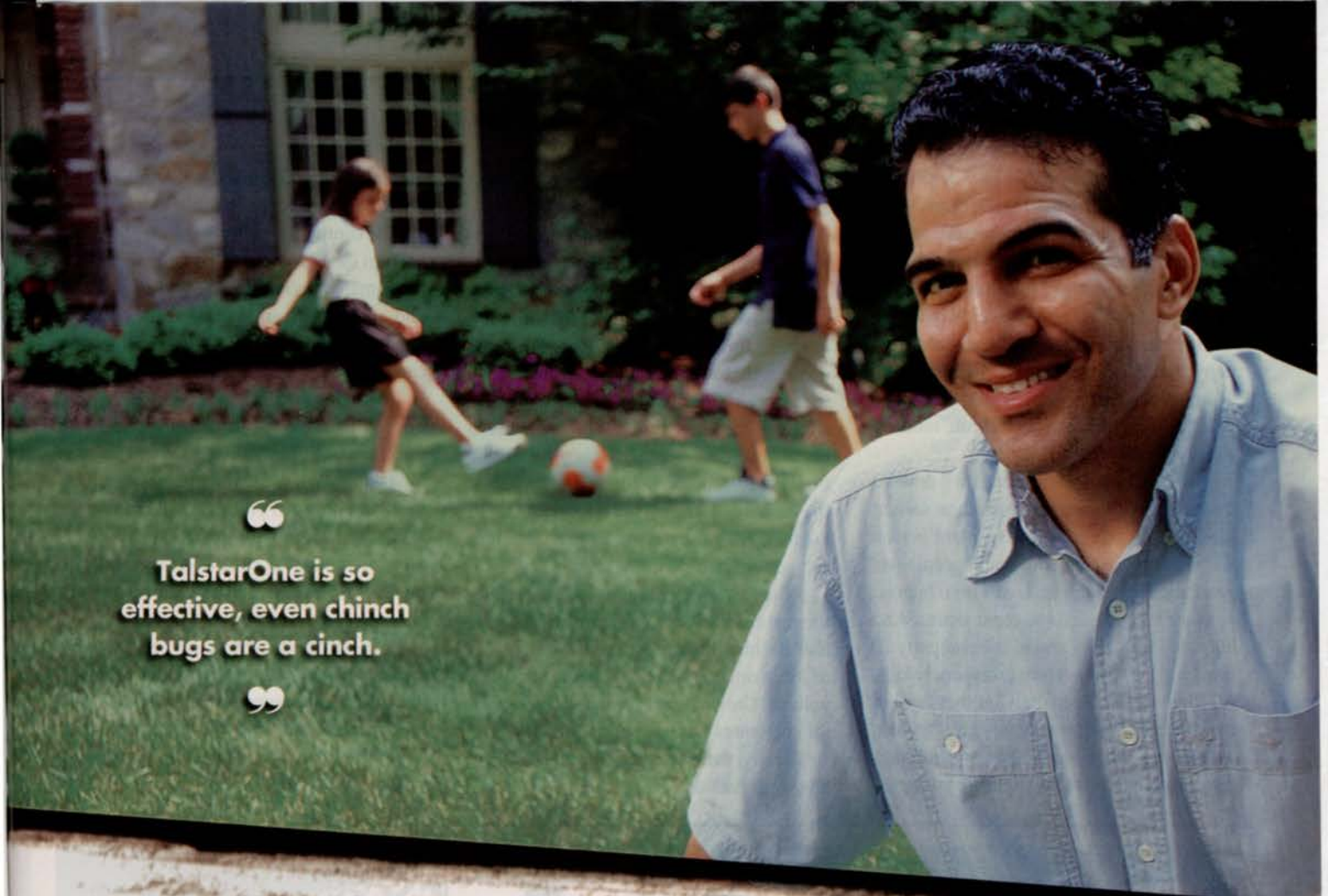
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## Breakthrough Series

(continued from page 56)

says. "I couldn't do it. To be a landscape architect, which is what I really want to be, has meant developing the necessary administrative procedures upfront. Being in the field doing the things I love has meant that we did not grow as fast as we could have, but we have become a nice, medium-sized company that is extraordinarily client-focused. As an owner, I can take personal and professional satisfaction from a well-run, modest-sized operation."

Unlike Kluznik and Reeve, Lied entered the business as a second-generation owner. Lied says his late father was a plant person and a people person who made people feel good about themselves. Lied's own interest was landscape design and construction. And his son, Robb, who joined the company 20 years ago, is strong in organizational skills. All three were able to do what they love in the context of their business – grow plants, design and build landscapes and manage the company. The ability to fulfill your pas-

sion within the business is one of the best reasons to own a business.

"I don't agree that an owner must eventually become 'hands off' when it comes to doing real customer work," he says. "However, an owner must recognize that the management function must be done. For some owners, that requires getting over the idea that working in the field is real work and sitting in the office is not. If the owner is to be the business manager, then he or she needs to back off on fieldwork and manage the business. If the owner does not want to do that, then they need to find and hire someone else to do it."

What can't be compromised is serving the customer and earning a profit. Lied says that for him, the appropriate decision was to focus on more profit without increasing volume. Growth was to be in quality service for customers who demanded it.

Clearly, there is a place for this strategy. Lied observes that some clients are in the

market to buy Cadillacs, while others will always want Chevrolets.

The competitive advantage for Lied's has been in design/build. Lied adds that striking a match between what you want to do and are good at, and clients who want that service, makes building a reputation and commanding higher prices possible.

"Growing your business, whether in size or profitability, happens when you focus on the client or yourself," Lied says. "It begins by asking, 'What do your potential clients need and how can you satisfy them?'"

Growth simply for growth's sake actually produces a subtle change in the owner's focus, which can detract from client service, Lied says.

"My advice to young owners is to be more interested in profit than sales volume," he says. "It's the owner's job to decide where the organization needs to go to be profitable. The goal is to put together a group of people to accomplish this."

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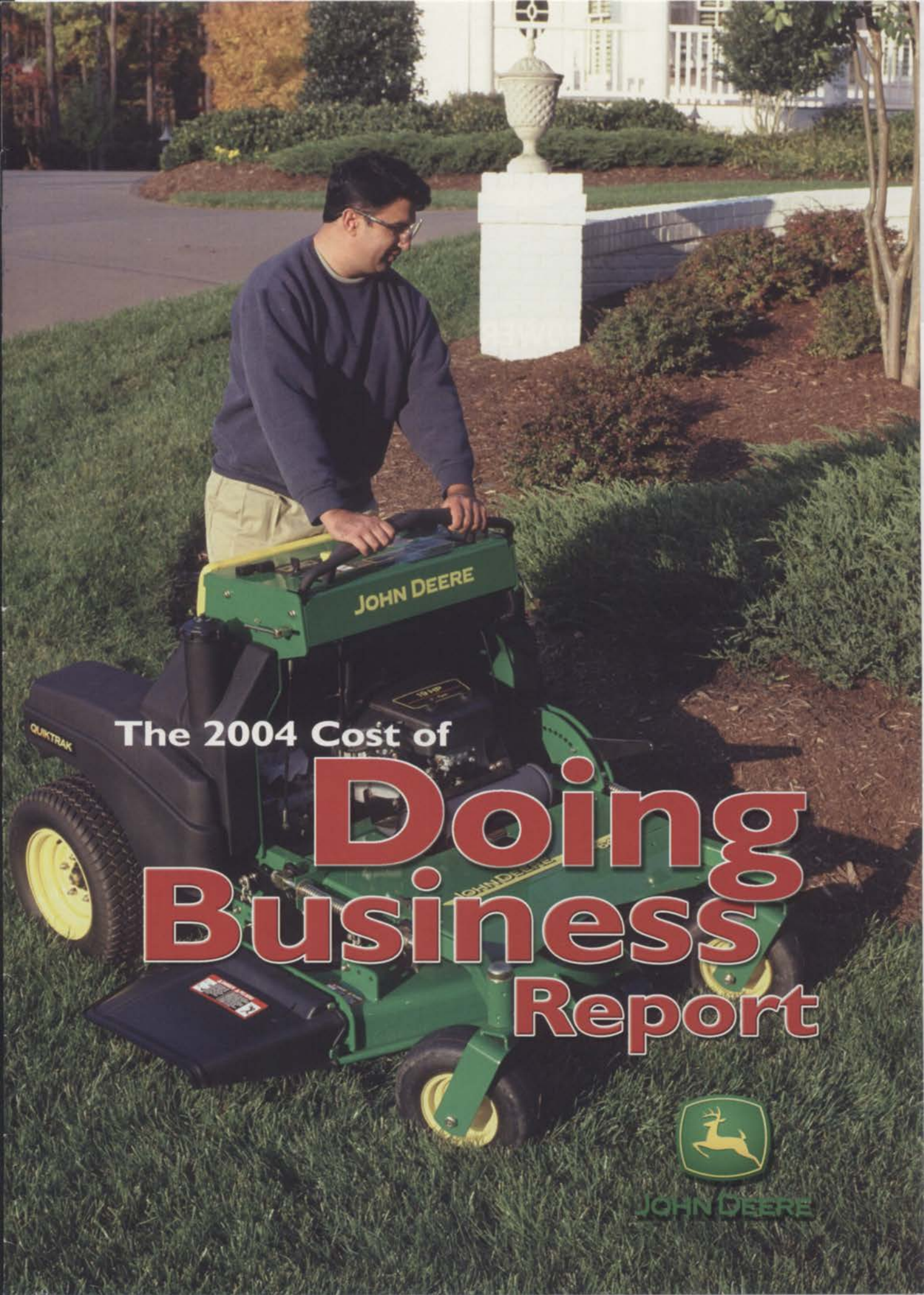
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We aim to be your business partner and resource. As we strive to create value through the pursuit of continuous improvement and profitable growth, we know you are out in the field with the same daily goal. We hope this report helps you obtain your goal and we wish you the same that we wish for our own business – performance that endures.

Gilbert Pena  
Brand Manager, Commercial Mowing  
John Deere



*"We hope this report helps you obtain your goal and we wish you the same as we wish for our own business – performance that endures."*

**- Gilbert Pena**

A stylized, handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Gilbert Pena'.





# Focus On Rewards

**Despite some challenges, the green industry is thriving.**

**"Y**ou have to spend money to make money" is an old adage. A discussion about the cost of doing business should focus not only on costs themselves, but also on positive issues, such as profits and growth. Owners are cognizant of gross sales figures and net profit and must use all information available to form sound judgments regarding budgeting from year to year.

Tom Del Conte, president of Del Conte's Landscaping in Fremont, Calif., believes he sees a trend. "I think you're going to see more contractors paying closer attention to the numbers as the information becomes better available," he says. This added insight could allow companies to better assess their clients, and even "fire" clients who may not be as profitable.

**SERVICES OFFERED.** Many companies offer multiple services. On average, turf services are offered by 84 percent of the respondents to a recent Research USA Cost of Doing Business survey conducted for John Deere. Three-quarters indicate they provide other services, which could include fall cleanup, snow removal and pest control.

Tree and ornamental services follow closely as the second most commonly offered service, with 73 percent of responding companies providing such services. The percentages are almost equal across all of the regions – the South/Southeast, the Northeast/Midwest and the West/Southwest. Nearly 70 percent of the respondents offer landscape construction and 40 percent provide irrigation services. As one might expect, the West/Southwest far exceeds this average, registering more than 63 percent, while only 27 percent offer this service in the Northeast/Midwest.

Owners say they consciously decide which services and client sectors to concentrate on – either commercial, residential or a combination – to maximize profitability in their region. Sometimes the focus shifts over time.

For instance, Timothy Kilgallon, owner, CSI Landscaping, Scarsdale, N.Y., has deliberately moved away from commercial accounts, such as multifamily housing like condos and townhouses, to focus primarily on high-end residential. "We have very few companies that compete with us in that area, so it just makes sense for us," he says.

In Portland, Ore., David Snodgrass, president of Dennis' Seven Dees Landscaping, offers design/build and maintenance, including residential and com-

BY DARLENE TAYLOR



mercial. "Each of these areas are developed so they have proven themselves in the past to be profitable, so we're building on what is already a sound business system," he states. "We're focused on overhead recovery, so we know when we have recovered our overhead and then we're working on our profit goal."

According to the survey, the areas of turf maintenance and construction generate the largest portion of a companies' sales revenue, both checking in at near 43 percent. A virtual flipping of percentages occurs between the companies with less than \$100,000 sales revenue and those with more than \$1 million in revenue. Turf maintenance averages are 59 percent to 20 percent, respectively, and construction is 28 percent to 65 percent, respectively. For the breakdown between companies with \$100,000 to \$299,999 yearly sales revenue and those with \$300,000 to \$999,999, the averages are nearly identical in both categories. The turf maintenance averages are 33 percent and 32 percent, respectively, and the construction averages are 51 percent and 52 percent, respectively.

The difference in regions appears logical – the South/Southeast has a higher percentage of sales revenue generated by turf maintenance (55 percent), and the West/Southwest ranks higher in construction with nearly 55 percent.

**SALES REVENUE AND GROWTH.** Owners were generally optimistic that sales revenue for 2004 would exceed or, at the very least, remain unchanged from 2003. Sixty percent predicted their total sales revenue would increase, while 12 percent predicted a decrease in revenue.

Snodgrass looked at the trend in his business. Be-

cause of larger commercial projects, his company experienced 22 percent growth in 2002. The number of commercial projects was reduced in 2003, and his growth dipped to 9 percent. "We're going to blow past our growth goals for 2004," he says. "We were looking at about a 12-percent increase, but we're going to end up with 40-plus percent." His goal is to focus on relationships and try to be included on the short list of projects on which they bid, "because only on a short list can you maintain any kind of margin and maintain any kind of quality product," Snodgrass explains, predicting a 15-percent growth rate for 2005.

Another company experiencing an increase in growth in 2004 is Sposato Landscaping in Melton, Del. The president, Tony Sposato, estimates his company will grow about 30 percent in 2004, up 10 percent from 2003. A variety of factors have contributed to this growth, according to Sposato. "We're just becoming more efficient," he says. "And our systems are working better." Sposato estimates growth for 2005 in the 20- to 30-percent range.

Del Conte believes in setting aggressive growth goals, and he admits his company will fall a little short of the 20 percent he predicted. Even so, at this point he's leaning toward the same percentage of growth next year.

**MARKETING EFFORTS.** Many contractors, such as Bob Grover, president of Pacific Landscape Management, Hillsboro, Ore., believe in constantly promoting their companies to boost sales. Some of Grover's top marketing methods include the publication of a newsletter to existing and prospective customers to relay information

## Perception or Reality?

*Members of the green industry offer their perspectives on 2004, and their predictions for 2005.*

**Albert Arazoza, president, Arazoza Brothers Corp., Homestead, Fla.**

- 2004 Interesting. "I still see people bidding lower and lower to stockpile work. It's driving price down instead of up."
- 2005 Hopeful. "We're in a time now where consolidation has ended for the most part and everybody's just trying to get back to work."

**David Chenoweth, president and CEO, Western States Reclamation, Frederick, Colo.**

- 2004 Challenging. "It's been a pretty flat year."
- 2005 More optimistic. "We're in a competitive market. We need to keep our name out there and push for business development and building relationships with new clients."

**Mike Davidson, CFO, Gardeners' Guild, San Rafael, Calif.**

- 2004 Optimistic. "We're exceeding net profit and growth goals."
- 2005 Excited. "I see a 30 to 40 percent decrease in workers' compensation costs due to our improvements in our safety performance."

**Tom Del Conte, president, Del Conte's Landscaping, Fremont, Calif.**

- 2004 Know the numbers. "We're in an informative age and the only way to succeed is to understand all the figures that make your business profitable or not profitable."
- 2005 Greater scrutinization of clients. "I think you'll see companies are not afraid to fire clients or refuse to take on more clients if they don't fit their niche markets."

*(continued on page 6)*



about landscaping and provide seasonal tips and golf outing sponsorships for the local real estate trade associations. His efforts have helped his company grow 50 percent in 2003, and Grover predicts growth in 2004 will be nearly 40 percent.

Marketing, in the estimation of Tom Delaney, vice president of government affairs for the Professional Lawn Care Association of America (PLCAA), should not be an afterthought of landscape company owners. "I think that one of the things that people time and time again have erred in doing is when times have gotten tough, they've cut back on marketing, and that's the time when you almost have to increase it," he remarks. "So, if you can control costs, you've always got to be out there increasing marketing so that your growth is there. And anybody who's just trying to maintain is going to end up going backward."

**ACCOUNT FLUCTUATION.** An emphasis on marketing enables companies to recruit new clients. With the economy performing at different levels throughout the U.S., owners also worked hard to maintain their current client bases this year.

Dan Foley, president of D. Foley Landscape, Walpole, Mass., faced some cutbacks from his clients. One of the strategies Foley employed against this was actually implemented three years ago. "Knowing that the economy was slowing, we invested in a dedicated salesperson, and we're putting more of an effort into bidding more volume and getting our name out there, whereas prior to three years ago, I was the primary lead salesper-

son for the company," Foley says.

Another company experiencing a small percentage of scaled back services by its clients was Sunrise Lawn & Landscaping Services in Herndon, Va. "But for every person who scaled back, we added three more," says company Owner Joe Markell. "I think that's because we spent time educating clients on the services we provide and how they are done." He expects to grow 15 to 20 percent in 2005.

One company that seemed to benefit from the downturn in the economy, even though it seemed counterintuitive, was Pacific Landscape Management. Its strengths lie in commercial maintenance and renovation construction. Grover indicates that very few of his clients scaled back services. "We found our customers who have significantly large vacancies in buildings are, on the maintenance side, almost hypersensitive to it because they want to lease out space," he says. "So we've found that there's actually a contrarian view: 'How can we make our property look a little bit better, a little bit sharper?' So there really hasn't been the 'Oh, vacancy is high so we're going to cut back on our services.' It's been the other way around."

David Van Zelst, president of Van Zelst, Wadsworth, Ill., sums up his success of 2004 and his optimism for 2005: "To continue the positive movement, we focus on our main core values as a company," he says. "These include mainly project quality and customer service. This is where we outperform our competitors. Our business is based upon personal relationships – not just throwing plants in the ground or cutting grass."

## Perception or Reality? *(continued from page 5)*

### Dan Foley, president, D. Foley Landscape, Walpole, Mass.

- 2004 Encouraging. "I feel a lot of the things we've been working on have been coming into play."
- 2005 Awesome. "I think we're going to be able to build off of this year's growth."

### Joe Goetz, president, Goetz Landscape & Irrigation, Centerville, Minn.

- 2004 Challenging. "Our spring wasn't the best, but we still have an opportunity with the good weather to continue to do well this year."
- 2005 Continued growth. "We are always looking to grow and do things better but not at the price of jeopardizing quality or overworking folks."

### Bob Grover, president, Pacific Landscape Management, Hillsboro, Ore.

- 2004 Holding on. "It has been challenging, and I think better times are coming."
- 2005 Hopefully next year is "the year." "Everybody's projection is, 'Oh, we've turned the corner and next year's going to be better' and I've heard that for a couple of years now, and hopefully next year is the year."

### David Snodgrass, president, Dennis' Seven Dees Landscaping, Portland, Ore.

- 2004 Thriving. "There's a trend that people care more about their outdoor living spaces – it's synonymous with quality of life."
- 2005 Optimistic. "We feel good and strong, and I don't see any stepping backward."





**Employee  
retention  
provides  
cost savings  
and peace  
of mind for  
owners.**

**O**ne variable in the green industry that cannot be controlled is the weather. The headlines this summer revolved around the plethora of hurricanes that battered Florida and the Southeast. Certainly hurricane season arrives annually, but no one could have predicted the severity and number of storms that hit this year.

However, the industry knows that seasonal employees are a mainstay, and owners hope that previous seasonal employees will return each spring. According to a recent Research USA Cost of Doing Business survey conducted for John Deere, the higher a company's revenue, the more employees it retains.

For instance, a company with more than \$1 million in revenue retains, on average, 2.6 seasonal employees with three to four years of employment. By contrast, a company with \$100,000 to \$299,999 in yearly revenue retains an average of 0.4 seasonal employees.

Timothy Kilgallon, president, of CSI Landscaping, Scarsdale, N.Y., battles this dilemma each year. "We probably get 75 percent of our employees back each year, but it's that other 25 percent that's a killer," he says. His company maintains recruiting year-round to anticipate the shortage in the spring.

**H-2B PROGRAM.** A small percentage of respondents in the survey participate in the government-sponsored H-2B program. This allows Hispanic workers to receive a nine-month visa to accept seasonal employment in the green industry in the United States.

The percentage of companies utilizing this program dipped in 2004, mostly due to government regulations. A cap of 66,000 workers was enforced, with earlier deadlines for applications. Only one region, the South/Southeast, actually increased its percentage of H-2B workers, from 1.7 percent in 2003 to 1.9 percent in 2004. The Northeast/Midwest region dropped from 3.2 percent to 2.4 percent, and the West/Southwest fell from 5 percent to 3.2 percent, in the same time period.

One company feeling the effects of the tightened guidelines is Carol King Landscape Maintenance of Orlando, Fla. "Normally we use 40 H-2B workers but this year we had zero because we were affected by the cap," states Bruce Bachand, vice president and COO. "Not having those 40 employees has had a very negative effect on our business in terms of quality of work, productivity, cost of doing business by not having those folks and things of that nature."

Sposato Landscape Co. in Melton, Del., has participated in the H-2B program

BY DARLENE TAYLOR



for five years. Tony Sposato, president of the company, explains that he's located in a resort area. The high school and college students normally tapped for seasonal employment are instead working in motels, restaurants and other hospitality venues, which is why he relies on H-2B workers.

Dan Foley, president of D. Foley Landscape, Walpole, Mass., depends on his H-2B labor force to fill positions at the crewmember level. His philosophy encourages crewmembers to climb the ladder in the company. However, he foresees potential problems in the future. "If we fill the pool of great talent on the crewmember level with these awesome H-2B employees and their desires may not be to climb up, then we've got to look at filling our backbone positions, such as crew foremen and project managers, in other ways," he comments. With a yearly growth goal of 20 to 25 percent, Foley understands the importance of training and retaining employees.

Possible solutions being investigated are recruiting from outside the company, attending career fairs at high schools and colleges, and participating in the Associated Landscape Contractors of America's Student Career Days.

**TURNOVER IS COSTLY.** Employee turnover certainly has a monetary disadvantage associated with it, due to advertising and training, but other issues should also be considered. Customer service and interaction may not be performed to the standards of the company. Systems running efficiently with more seasoned employees may experience bumps in productivity with new hires. Basically, each company operates with a goal of providing services to clients, but each company also fosters its own identity and method of doing business. Therefore, it can take time for a new hire to understand and assimilate into the company culture.

Like Foley, Mike Davidson, CFO of Gardeners' Guild in San Rafael, Calif., has stressed promotion from within to reinforce continuity. "We try to identify strong candidates for growth in our crewmember pool early and fast track them into crew leaders," Davidson remarks.

In an effort to recruit hires more suitable initially, Davidson concentrates on optimal interviewing techniques. Gardeners' Guild also implemented an incentive program for referrals, which has proven to be successful in reducing advertising costs.

Bachand indicates his company sought to replace the 40 employees denied by the government through the H-2B program through advertising. The company ultimately hired people it might not have if the H-2B pool had been available. "It's had a dramatic effect on productivity, turnover and the cost of training — all the

things that go with a lack of stability in your employment pool," he adds.

Unemployment figures vary by region, and interpretation of the general economy also varies. However, many of the respondents agreed that more people seemed to be available for work in the green industry. "I will tell you, though," says Foley, "that there are more people applying for work who don't have experience. They could be coming from other industries and they've only mowed their

home lawn, so they require additional training."

**YEAR-ROUND EMPLOYEES.** Retention of year-round employees, according to the Research USA survey, mirrors the results of the seasonal employees. For example, the companies with \$1 million and more of projected revenue retain 3.5 year-round employees, on average, with three to four years of employment. Using the same length of employment, a company with \$100,000 to \$299,999 projected revenue retains, on average, 0.3 employees.

However, as length of employment rises, so does the average number of retained employees in both revenue brackets. With five to nine years of employment, 4.2 employees, on average, are retained in the higher revenue bracket, and 0.4 employees in the lower revenue bracket. In the more than 10 years of employment category, the averages jump to 4.5 and 0.7, respectively.

By region, the West/Southwest retains the most year-round employees on average in all years of employment categories, but the averages are much closer than the projected revenue breakdowns. In the three to four years of employment category, for instance, the West/Southwest retains an average of 0.9 employees, while the South/Southeast averages 0.7 employees, and the Northeast/Midwest retains 0.5 employees.

Looking at the results from the survey of the total number of employees, a logical progression occurs between projected revenue categories. Combined seasonal and year-round employees average 3.5 at companies with less than \$100,000 revenue; 6.0 employees at the \$100,000 to \$299,999 level; 11.3 at the \$300,000 to \$999,999 level; and a jump to 40.2 at companies with a projected revenue more than \$1 million.

In the two higher revenue categories, year-round employees outnumber seasonal employees, but in the two lesser revenue categories, the split is nearly equal.

The West/Southwest region also averages more total employees with 10.5, while the Northeast/Midwest averages 8.1 and the South/Southeast registers 7.6.

Albert Arazoza, president of Arazoza Brothers Corp. in Homestead, Fla., acknowledges the difficulties that some owners have in attracting eligible workers to the green industry. "The industry needs to spend more on education," he says. "Over the years it's been known as an uneducated industry. We have to realize this is a multi-billion dollar industry and it needs to be treated as such."





Photo: John Deere



**Wages and  
benefits  
combine  
tangible and  
intangible  
items to lure  
and retain  
employees.**

In the most simplistic terms, one person can ask another person to perform work to satisfy the request of another person. When this relationship is ongoing, the parties are known as employer, employee and customer. The employer rewards the employee with wages, because the customer paid the employer for the services rendered. However, in many industries, including the green industry, compensation is not measured solely by wages. Benefits ranging from insurance plans to paid vacation to retirement accounts are routinely being offered by employers.

**WAGES.** As evidenced by the chart based on survey results by Research USA on the Cost of Doing Business commissioned by John Deere, a comparison of wages from 2003 to 2004 showed an increase in base pay for all categories except salesperson and mechanic. In fact, the average wage of the salesperson decreased by nearly 5 percent.

One of the explanations for this decrease could be a change in compensation methods. Respondents indicated that, by a wide margin, they paid salespeople a straight salary (47.9 percent). Other options include salary and commission (13.5 percent), salary and bonus (16.5 percent), salary and commission and bonus (4.9 percent), straight commission (11.6 percent), and draw and commission (2.1 percent). Based on projected revenue, the smallest companies, with revenue of less than \$100,000 per year, paid a higher percentage of straight salary, an average of 74.7 percent, compared to companies with more than \$1 million in revenue, at 32.5 percent straight salary.

On average, most positions enjoyed an increase above the normal cost-of-living allowance. Sunrise Lawn & Landscaping Services, located in Herndon, Va., averaged higher percentage increases than the mean average found in the survey. "I increased wages about 10 percent in 2003 and 2004," comments Joe Markell, owner. "Here, the cost of real estate and the cost of living has increased considerably. In 2005, I'll probably have to increase again to keep pace to some degree, but maybe not as much as in the past."

Joe Goetz, president of Goetz Landscape & Irrigation in Centerville, Minn., gave his workers 3 to 5 percent cost-of-living increases in 2003 and

BY DARLENE TAYLOR



## Average Hourly Wage by Position

POSITION	2003	2004	Increase/(Decrease)
Entry-level Laborer	\$7.93	\$8.35	5.3%
Entry-level Mower	\$8.01	\$8.35	4.24%
Entry-level Irrigation Crewmember	\$8.52	\$8.83	3.64%
Entry-level Spray Technician	\$9.38	\$10.03	6.92%
Senior Laborer	\$10.86	\$11.49	5.8%
Senior Mower Operator	\$10.54	\$10.76	2.09%
Senior Irrigation Crew Member	\$12.35	\$13.40	8.5%
Senior Spray Technician	\$12.59	\$13.60	8.02%
Crew Foreman	\$13.03	\$14.16	8.67%
Salesperson	\$13.30	\$12.65	(4.88%)
Mechanic	\$14.57	\$14.39	(1.23%)
Landscape Designer	\$18.58	\$23.76	27.88%
Landscape Architect	\$22.36	\$32.20	44%

2004, and expects to do the same in 2005. His wages for laborers and crew leaders fall nearly in tandem with the averages of the survey.

A tactic utilized by Dennis' Seven Dees Landscaping in Portland, Ore., centered around an emphasis on promotion rather than an increase in wages across the board. "We're experiencing an incredibly high unemployment rate so there's an abundance of workers," says David Snodgrass, president. "We're looking for good people who are looking for work, or good people who aren't happy where they're working."

This philosophy is shared by Albert Arazoza, the president of Arazoza Brothers Corp. in Homestead, Fla. He offers an entry-level laborer \$6.50 per hour, which is below the average of the survey for the South/Southeast region of \$7.92 per hour. However, a foreman position ranges from \$12 to \$15 per hour, higher than the average of \$12.91 for the region.

Arazoza feels that employees should consider the entire benefits package and not just the wage. "If someone

wants to leave over 50 cents, they're welcome to go," he states.

David Chenoweth is the president and CEO of Western States Reclamation, Frederick, Colo. When he started the company in 1983, the emphasis was centered around reclamation and revegetation of large surface coal mines. He has since added traditional landscaping and irrigation services. Project managers received a 3.5 percent increase in 2004, but irrigation foremen and technicians received higher percentage increases. These incentives were

necessary for recruitment and retention, he says.

**BENEFITS.** In nearly every category of benefit tracked in the survey, the more projected revenue earned by a company translates into a higher average percentage of that benefit being offered. For instance, paid vacation for hourly/seasonal workers averages 3.3 percent of these companies earning less than \$100,000 a year. This is contrasted with 23.3 percent in the \$100,000 to \$299,999 level; 37.8 percent in the \$300,000 to \$999,999 level; and 57.2 percent in the more than \$1 million level. One benefit found nearly equally between the least revenue level and the most is the use of a company car. Using the revenue levels from least to most, the averages run 6.7 percent, 14.9 percent, 21.9 percent and 7.0 percent, respectively.

Another interesting fact to consider is the relative importance of benefits between hourly/seasonal, salaried and executive management categories. The benefit of a raise in 2004 ranked first in all benefits provided to hourly/seasonal workers.



Photo: John Deere



sonal employees, with an average of 33.5 percent of the companies surveyed providing this. For salaried, this benefit ranked third, at 17.9 percent, and for executive management, a raise in 2004 ranked sixth, with an average of 15 percent of the companies supplying this benefit. Surprisingly, the No. 1 benefit for both salaried and executive management is the use of a company cell phone, which ranks fourth for hourly/seasonal.

Markell offers benefits to full-time employees only. These include paid vacation, holidays, inclusion in the retirement program after three years of employment, as well as insurance. "We've had to offer more benefits to keep people because that seems to be what people are looking for, even over salary sometimes," he states.

Other owners view employment as a relationship. "Many of our employees have been with our company 10 plus years, and some 15 plus years," says David Van Zelst, president of Van Zelst, Wadsworth, Ill. "We take good care of our staff and they take good care of our company and our clients. The same can be said for middle and upper management." By treating employees fairly, providing good benefits and a good working environment, along with a decent salary, Van Zelst says he has retained a dedicated core of employees.

**INSURANCE.** One of the costliest benefits that owners may provide is insurance. The survey broke this category down further into health, dental, vision, life and disability. An interesting contrast occurs with both health and dental and the breakdown between hourly/seasonal and salaried employees. The average of companies supplying this benefit is higher for hourly/seasonal than salaried. Health insurance registers 13.9 percent for hourly/seasonal and 13.5 percent for salaried. Likewise, dental is 5.0 percent and 4.5 percent, respectively. Executive management levels rise to 22.6 percent for health and 6.7 percent for dental.

However, salaried laborers do receive other benefits. For instance, companies offer this employment level more paid personal days and paid sick days than their hourly/seasonal labor counterparts. On average, 8.1 and 10.1 percent of companies provide salaried laborers with personal and sick days, respectively, whereas only 5.5 and 6.9 percent of companies provide hourly/seasonal laborers

with these benefits, respectively. The greatest number of companies offer employees at the executive management level personal and sick days with 11.9 and 14.5, respectively. Profit sharing benefits also rise with rank. Only 1.8 percent of companies provide hourly/seasonal employees with profit sharing, 2.7 percent provide salaried laborers with profit sharing and 5.6 percent provide executive managers with profit sharing. However, more companies provide hourly/seasonal workers with performance-based bonuses and holiday/year-end bonuses than they do their salaried and executive-level employees. Nineteen percent and 31.3 percent of companies, respectively, pass along these perks to hourly/seasonal workers, 12.8 and 17.5 percent of companies, respectively, provide this benefit to salaried workers and only 10.1 and 14.1 percent of companies, respectively, pass along performance-based bonuses and holiday/year-end bonuses to executive managers.

Many companies do not absorb the entire cost of health insurance premiums. In this case, the average percentage of premiums paid increases as the job level increases, per the survey. Hourly/seasonal employees, on average, are required to pay one-third of their health insurance premiums, while salaried will pay slightly less than one-quarter, and executive management less than one-fifth.

## Top Benefits Provided To Each Employment Level

### Hourly/Seasonal Workers % of Companies

Raise in 2004 .....	33.5
Year-end Bonus .....	31.3
Company-supplied Uniforms .....	24.9
Use of Company Cell Phone .....	23.6
Paid Holidays .....	21.8

### Salaried Workers % of Companies

Raise in 2004 .....	17.9
Year-end Bonus .....	17.5
Company-supplied Uniforms .....	14.7
Use of Company Cell Phone .....	18.9
Paid Holidays .....	16.8

### Executive Management % of Companies

Raise in 2004 .....	15.0
Year-end Bonus .....	14.1
Company-supplied Uniforms .....	14.4
Use of Company Cell Phone .....	25.3
Paid Holidays .....	19.9





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# Operating a Business

**Operating costs continue to rise for landscape businesses in 2004.**

**O**wners generally tend to enjoy some numbers that rise consistently – revenue, profit and even number of employees. Operating costs would not make this list, however.

The expectations of rising operating costs in 2004 as compared to 2003 shows clearly in the Research USA Cost of Doing Business survey conducted for John Deere. Each category, including labor, equipment, materials and overhead, as well as total operating costs, showed more than half the respondents expecting an increase. In the case of total operating costs, nearly three-quarters predicted an increase.

In the labor category, the more revenue a company earns raises the probability of an increase in its labor costs. For example, 59 percent of the companies earning \$100,000 to \$299,999 in revenue expect their labor costs to increase. In comparison, more than 77 percent of the companies earning \$1 million or more expect an increase in labor costs.

Across the board, very few expect costs to actually decrease. The highest average percentage of those predicting a decrease – nearly 10 percent in the total operating cost category – comes from companies earning less than \$100,000 a year.

The owners in the Northeast/Midwest region anticipate higher costs in all categories when compared to the South/Southeast and West/Southwest.

**EQUIPMENT.** Based on the survey results, walk-behind and riding mowers are kept slightly longer than five years, while tractors, skid steers and utility vehicles are kept for more than seven years. In all the equipment categories, companies earning more than \$1 million tend to replace equipment sooner. In fact, mowers are replaced almost one year earlier. However, by region, the Northeast/Midwest retains its mowers longer than the average.

For instance, Timothy Kilgallon, owner of CSI Landscaping, Scarsdale, N.Y., maintains a strict equipment replacement schedule. "We made a mistake on some of the vehicles by keeping them seven or eight years, and we were spending \$1,000 here, \$2,000 there, \$4,000 there, and at the end of the year we could have paid a loan on a new vehicle," he explains.

"I try to keep my trucks for five years and then turn them in and buy new ones, because I know if we take out at least a five-year loan on the vehicle, with

BY DARLENE TAYLOR



the warranties and everything except for normal maintenance and diesel in the trucks, I know what my expected outcome is," Kilgallon adds.

Taking the opposite approach is Mike Davidson, chief financial officer for Gardeners' Guild, San Rafael, Calif. "We haven't scaled back on equipment, but instead of buying a new piece of equipment, we'll try to get another year out of an existing one."

Two options available to owners regarding equipment are leasing and buying. According to the survey, leasing is the less desirable option. Many factors could have an impact on this option. Owners may feel the actual cost of leasing ends up higher than buying due to the wear and tear on the vehicles, or insurance costs could be prohibitive.

Once again, the largest companies are more likely to lease tractors, riding mowers, pickup trucks and other vehicles.

The South/Southeast region led the other regions in leasing tractors, with 6 percent spending in the \$1 to \$999 range, and 5.2 percent in the \$1,000 to \$4,999 range. This region also sets the pace for pickup truck leasing.

In the West/Southwest region, handheld equipment is the only other category weighing in with more than 10 percent of respondents saying they lease. All other categories yielded minimal positive responses.

Prospects for buying equipment are definitely brighter. To contrast leasing vs. buying for tractors in the South/Southeast region, 17 percent plan to buy and 5.3 percent plan to spend \$5,000 to \$9,999. In the next price bracket \$10,000 to \$24,999, 4.9 percent of owners predict spending this amount.

On an overall basis, nearly half of the respondents said they purchased pickup trucks in 2004, and more than two-thirds purchases handheld equipment.

One company that spent \$80,000 to \$100,000 more in equipment in 2004 is Sunrise Lawn & Landscaping in Herndon, Va. Joe Markell, owner, estimates the company will grow 10 to 15 percent this year, combined with 10 percent growth in 2003. He is setting a realistic growth goal of 20 percent for 2005. The company needed more equipment for the growth and bought mowers, aerators and a skid steer. "We're also trying to make crews more efficient by buying trucks that are more efficiently set up," Markell remarks.

Dan Foley, president of D. Foley Landscape, Walpole, Mass., adopted a more extreme approach. Over the past two years, his company has embarked on a standardization of equipment. "The unique thing that we did this year is that we sold every single piece of equipment we owned and went to one brand and bought all new. It was a gutsy move," he acknowledges.

Several benefits arise from this procedure, according to Foley — training is more streamlined and efficient, the cost of stocked parts reduces with bulk buying and maintenance costs are also reduced.

Many owners are buying equipment with increased fuel prices in mind. Bruce Bachand, vice president and chief operating officer of Orlando, Fla.'s Carol King Landscape Maintenance, indicates that his company continues to purchase the equipment it needs. However, "we're looking to be as fuel-efficient as possible," he says. "In a few cases, we've even purchased diesel equipment instead of gasoline."

Kilgallon has also adopted that strategy. "I'm pretty much running all diesel trucks, and I actually did switch to cargo vans," he says, adding that the change has saved him about 25 percent in fuel costs.

Nearly half of the respondents to the survey mentioned that another major cost is fuel. The companies with revenue of less than \$100,000 seemed to be most affected. Nearly two-thirds named fuel as a major cost for their company, and the Northeast/Midwest regions had the strongest average percentage of respondents.

For instance, Walpole, Mass.-based Foley remembers budgeting for 2004. "We thought we were smart forecasting a fuel increase and when we did our budgets, I think we were talking \$1.35 to \$1.85 and the prices went right by that," he says.

His company decided against any price increases or surcharges, but will factor increases into its 2005 budget. Other companies raised prices, some charged a fuel surcharge, some decided to leave prices alone, and some are building increases into their 2005 budgets to combat rising gas expenses.

**MAINTENANCE.** Unfortunately, even the most reliable equipment will need parts or repairs at some point. Nearly one-quarter of the respondents spent in the \$250 to \$499 range for riding mower parts in 2004, with an average of \$382 spent. The Northeast/Midwest region averaged an expenditure of \$445, which could correlate to the fact that companies in this region keep their mowers almost a year longer than the national average determined in this survey.

Walk-behind mower parts averaged only \$266. The amount of revenue directly corresponds to the average amount spent on parts — the smallest companies spent the least, and the averages followed a stair-step pattern to the largest companies.

Information regarding the repair of riding and walk-behind mowers shows that 40 percent of the companies had no expenditures in 2004. The average cost experienced by companies with repairs was \$361 for riding mowers and \$248 for walk-behind mowers.

Cost isn't the only factor related to maintenance and repairs. Equipment in disrepair cannot be used, which can adversely affect projects and deadlines. Owners' perceptions of dealer turnaround times for repairs average 2.3 days. That estimate is nearly universal across regions and company size.

However, the turnaround time actually received averages 2.9 days. Again, the percentages are nearly the same for all categories.

An option available to nearly 25 percent of the respondents is a dealer mobile maintenance/service program. This service is more likely to be available in the West/Southwest region, and to companies at the highest level of revenue. Almost 60 percent of companies responding to the survey, on average, utilize this service, with nearly three-quarters of the largest revenue companies using it. For those who do not have the service, 55 percent indicate they would use the service if offered.

**FUTURE COSTS.** The green industry cannot, unfortunately, access a crystal ball to assist in 2005 budgeting. Davidson felt frustrated with the mounting costs in 2004. He echoes the sentiments of many: "We want to price our work in a manner that plans for and covers unexpected costs and costs that we're aware of in an effective manner."



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Contractors and suppliers alike can keep up with industry happenings by visiting *Lawn & Landscape Online* regularly. Read more about some of the popular features of the site and how you can participate in this dynamic online community:

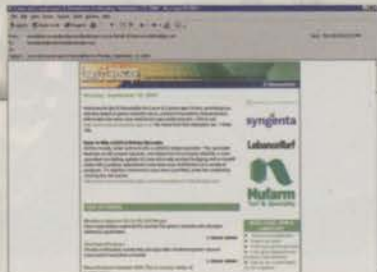


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*Despite watering restrictions, most irrigation contractors report increased sales in 2003 and expect the same in 2004.*

*by Lauren Spiers*

# Steady Stream

# W

Water may be colorless, odorless and tasteless, but don't let its simplicity fool you. H<sub>2</sub>O is the lifeblood of plants and animals; it's a cleanser and a coolant; it's an ingredient in everything from paint to copy paper. It's an essential, and it seems to be everywhere.

However, according to Rain Bird Corp.'s white paper, "Irrigation for a Growing World," only 1 percent of all the Earth's water is accessible freshwater. Furthermore, growing water shortages could negatively impact health and wellness, as well as business and industry. While the U.S. population has doubled since 1900, water use has increased eightfold, and per-capita water

consumption is up to 101 gallons per day, though only 20.5 gallons are necessary to maintain life, hygiene and food production.

Water use and availability are especially important to landscape contractors. *Lawn & Landscape* research shows that 82 percent offer irrigation services and an additional 10 percent of businesses subcontract irrigation. As a result, water availability for landscape purposes is a must, which is why conservation has become such a prominent topic.

Luckily, in spite of any challenges with restrictions, most irrigation contractors expect to end the year on a high note, with increased sales over 2003.







Photo: Hunter Industries

**A CONSERVATIVE APPROACH.** For 2004, 90.9 percent of companies offering irrigation are predicting growth for these services, either installation or maintenance. Broken down further, 52.3 percent of companies expect installation to grow the fastest, with an average increase of 32.6 percent, while 38.6 percent expect to see an average increase in maintenance of 23.5 percent. This follows a banner 2003 year when 92.6 percent of irrigation companies reported growth.

One reason for the dynamic growth trend in this sector carries with it a slight irony: water restrictions. Manufacturers and contractors agree that tight restrictions

actually influence homeowners and property managers to hire professionals for their water management needs.

"In some cases when there are water restrictions, it actually creates business because people need to become more efficient," explains Jeff Carowitz, vice president of marketing, Hunter Industries, San Marcos, Calif.

Carowitz says wet weather in the South and southeastern United States have dampened irrigation sales a bit, but easing watering bans in the West have simultaneously increased sales in that part of the country. "Most of the watering restrictions were lifted in most of the critical areas to where they can



# 2004 State of the Irrigation Industry Report

now install and run irrigation when they need to, so that's been less of a factor this season than two or three years ago," Carowitz says.

Moreover, Carowitz sees contractors and municipalities collaborating on positive conservation solutions. "Instead of banning watering altogether, many states are requiring the installation of rain sensors to save water," he says. "In Florida, this type of law has already saved 30 billion gallons of water. Other places allow watering only on certain days of the week or during certain hours. There's a lot of positive legislation that can make for good conservation."

## Irrigation Industry Profile

### The 2004 Irrigation Company

Average company age .....	12.3 years
Average annual company revenue .....	\$1.6 million
Average percent of sales from irrigation .....	22.6
Average number of employees .....	23.5
Average number of irrigation crews .....	2.02
Average number of technicians per crew .....	1.21
Average client mix .....	56.7% residential, 43.2% commercial
Average property size .....	3.2 acres
Average percent profit for irrigation work .....	22.3

Source: Lawn & Landscape Research Study, April 2004

Other states also have enacted rain sensor legislation, opening up sales opportunities for many contractors. While only 3.4 percent of contractors reported that rain/moisture/weather sensors were among their top three irrigation equipment expenditures annually, manufacturers expect sales for this product category to increase as more states pass legislation and more contractors and customers become aware of the water savings these small \$50 parts can afford.

**CONTROLLING EXPENSES.** Other products promising water conservation and increasing sales are irrigation controllers. As core irrigation components, controllers came in as the third most common irrigation expenditure, with 40.6 percent of contractors placing controllers within the top three products that make up the majority of their annual irrigation expenditures. Additionally, central control systems are gaining popularity, especially on commercial sites. These systems let controllers monitor sites via the Internet.

In fact, 32.3 percent of respondents said they use central control systems on their smaller commercial properties, while 10.1

(continued on page 82)



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## 2004 State of the Irrigation Industry Report

(continued from page 80)

percent prefer this approach for larger commercial jobs and 7.9 percent use central control systems on every commercial account. While 38.2 percent of contractors said they do not use central control systems, 15.2 percent said they are looking into it.

Dean Akers says his company is beginning to use central control-style systems.

"We're in the process of implementing Web-based controllers that really promote responsible water management," he says. "It's something that we may implement as standard equipment for accounts that are more than \$50,000 or \$60,000. These systems can cost \$4,000 to \$5,000, but when the landscape you're trying to grow and protect is

worth tens or hundreds of thousands of dollars, it's something that our larger clients would consider buying into."

Besides central control systems, other expenditures on irrigation parts, pieces and systems is increasing along with overall sales. For 2004, 38.2 percent of contractors expect to see increased spending on irrigation, while 54.9 percent expect expenditures to be in line with last year. Only 2.4 percent expect decreases in expenditures. Irrigation equipment expenditures are expected to increase 8.1 percent this year, resulting in the overall market value increasing by roughly \$44 million to \$590 million.

In addition, *Lawn & Landscape* research shows a link between the type of business growth irrigation contractors are seeing and how these contractors are spending their money. In 2003, 45.9 percent of contractors saw installation growth, while 46.7 percent saw maintenance business increases. This even split is reflected in expenditures, as 33.9 percent of contractors note spending less than \$5,000 in 2003 and 40.4 percent spending \$10,000 or more. Survey data shows that the lower dollar expenditures were reported by a higher number of maintenance companies. These firms are spending money on less expensive parts and pieces, while contractors busy with installation work are investing in higher-priced products like controllers, as well as a larger volume of materials necessary for new system installation.

Further, growth in maintenance has pulled up valves to the top spot on contractors' lists of irrigation expenditures by product category. When contractors were last surveyed in 2001 on specific product expenditures, rotors ranked as the No. 1 expenditure, while valves came in fourth. This year, valves top the list, with 63 percent of contractors reporting them as one of their top three irrigation expenditures. Rotors follow at 57 percent. Additionally, increased installation work moved controller expenditures up the list from fifth place to third place, with 40.6 percent of contractors naming it one of their top three irrigation expenditures.

On average, contractors keep \$1,342 worth of irrigation inventory on hand, with the majority of respondents (24 percent) reporting average inventory between \$1,000 and \$2,499.

(continued on page 84)

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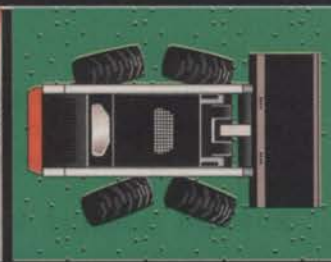
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## 2004 State of the Irrigation Industry Report

(continued from page 82)

Another 19.5 percent of contractors keep less than \$500 in inventory on hand, and 14.8 percent manage inventory of \$5,000 to \$9,999.

**HOPPING HOUSING MARKET.** Historically low interest rates and a steady increase in housing starts also is helping irrigation contractors earn more business.

According to CNNMoney.com, housing starts numbered 2 million in August, up 0.6 percent from July and 3.6 percent higher than expected. Likewise, the U.S. Census Bureau reports that the current housing rate is 9 percent higher than the same month a year ago. Though the Fed continued to raise interest rates through September to 1.75

percent, Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan noted that despite a soft patch related to rising oil prices over the summer, the economy is again in a position to grow.

This is good news for the 27.3 percent of contractors who named the economy as their second biggest business challenge for 2004. "The economy can have a positive or negative impact on the industry and currently it's fairly positive," says Ken Mills, vice president of the contractor division at Rain Bird, Tucson, Ariz. "This industry tends to follow what goes on in the construction business and interest rates have been low, so home building and commercial construction is stronger than if interest rates were higher."

Jeff Sutter says economic indicators help his company gauge sales for the upcoming year. "Each year, we look at the economy and the housing market and we'll make a projection for our sales for the next year," explains the managing director of the irrigation division at Mickman Brothers, Ham Lake, Minn. "Three of the last four years, we have met or beat our goals for the year. This year, we're expecting around \$1.5 million in sales, which exceeds our goals."

Sutter says low interest rates have helped his residential business because the company has strong relationships with area builders.

Brent Bottlinger sees a similar trend in the South. "In Texas, an irrigation system is a must-have, even for a starter home," says the vice president of operations for Choate Irrigation, Plano, Texas. "Also, with water restrictions, people don't want to worry about going out to water in the middle of the night. They want a system that will automatically water the right amount at the right time. Installing irrigation systems has become expected, so the business for the builders we work with has exploded."

Though Bottlinger sees a trend toward more commercial work as cities require property managers to comply with water restrictions, residential work stays strong. "The market is telling us that 70 percent of the people who spend \$150,000 on a new home will install an irrigation system within the first year," he says. "This year has been pretty wet, which generally means lower sales, but as the weather gets better, the housing market and conservation efforts are going to keep bringing us business."

(continued on page 86)



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(continued from page 84)

(continued on page 88)

## Irrigation Workforce & Wages

While 2004 sales have been strong for irrigation companies, finding qualified technicians to handle increased business remains a concern for 29.9 percent of respondents to a *Lawn & Landscape* survey.

"Finding technicians who have any level of experience and who are knowledgeable, especially with electrical aspects, is a big challenge," says Paul Boling, sprinkler services manager, Hermes Landscaping, Lenexa, Kan. "We go through a lot of turnover and that's something I've encountered at other operations, as well."

To alleviate this problem, Hermes Landscaping and other companies have turned to the H-2B program for dependable employees who tend to return each year and usually require less training.

Brent Bottlinger, vice president of op-

erations for Choate Irrigation, Plano, Texas, says his company has taken a similar approach. "We have several Hispanic workers—some are citizens and others are H-2B—and we really grow our own technicians from this staff," he says. "It's hard to find an English-speaking repair technician, but we start a lot of our employees out as laborers and then train them for higher positions—pipelayer, installer, crew foreman and on up."

Adequately compensating employees also has helped companies retain their employees longer and increase their value to the company as they gain more experience over time. "We study labor rates in our area and there's quite a fluctuation," says Jeff Sutter, managing director of the irrigation division at Mickman Brothers, Ham Lake, Minn. Sutter adds that his

staff earns competitive wages in his area. Laborers start around \$9 per hour, while upper-level crewmembers make \$13 to \$16 per hour and foreman earn \$16 to \$22 per hour.

According to *Lawn & Landscape* research, wages for members of irrigation crews are increasing, which is contrary to other industry jobs, such as mower operators and lawn care technicians, both of which decreased from 2003 to 2004. Irrigation contractors noted an increase in entry-level technicians average wages from \$9.86 in 2003 to \$9.91 in 2004. Technicians with five years of experience saw wages increase a full 10 cents to \$13.97 year over year, and technicians with 10 years of experience saw the greatest wage increase—from \$18.09 last year to \$18.30 in 2004.

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# 2004 State of the Irrigation Industry Report

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## Supplier Selection

As different companies experience growth in their irrigation installation and maintenance services, their needs for certain pieces of equipment change (see *Controlling Expenses on page 80*). But regardless of whether contractors need controllers and weather stations or rotors and sprayheads, *Lawn & Landscape* research shows that in addition to cost, impressions made by manufacturers play a significant role in purchasing decisions. Take a look at the top 10 factors that contractors said they consider before opening their wallets.

### Which THREE factors have the most influence on your irrigation product purchasing decisions?

Cost .....	45.1%
Brand Name .....	40.4%
Manufacturer Reputation .....	40%
Supplier Location .....	38.8%
Support for Product .....	31.1%
Dealer Suggestion/Salesperson Recommendation .....	11.7%
Delivery Schedule/Shipping .....	11.1%
Payment Programs .....	6.1%
Manufacturer Reward Programs .....	5.3%
Colleague Suggestions .....	4.6%

Source: Lawn & Landscape Research Study, April 2004

*Lawn & Landscape* research shows revenue increases for contractors in both residential and commercial markets. For 2004, 39 percent expect to see commercial revenue grow, while 49.1 predict no change, and 1.2 percent expect a drop in revenue. At the same time, 48.9 percent of contractors say residential revenue will grow in 2004, while 42.2 percent see residential revenue holding steady and 1.2 percent expect a decrease. Overall, this translates to a net increase in commercial revenue of 9.2 percent, while residential revenue will see a net increase of 15.2 percent. Overall revenue growth for irrigation is expected to be 12.6 percent for 2004, and contractors are confident that sales will remain solid. **LI**

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# Time is Money

*Quoting prices is often a job in itself, which is why many landscape contractors charge for estimates. Lawn & Landscape Online Message Board users discuss when these fees are appropriate.*

by Jonathan Katz

Customers can be fickle. They often seem interested in hiring landscape contractors for projects only to back out in the end because of price or simple indecision. This creates headaches for contractors who spend hours figuring estimates or designs.

A recent thread on the *Lawn & Landscape Online Message Board* questioned whether landscape contractors should charge for designs, consultations or estimates. Most agree that designs and consultations require enough time and effort to warrant some type of price tag.

"Designs involve time, creativity, experience, formal education and knowledge," writes Andrew Aksar, owner, Outdoor Finishes, Walkersville, Md. "There is no way we will offer our creativity and experience for free. You cannot bring back time."

Mike Kulp, owner, Grass Roots Landscaping, Broadway, Va., agrees that contractors should charge design fees but notes that he doesn't charge for estimates. "On the smaller jobs, I don't sweat it," he writes. "I just make an appointment for when I'm in the area, and it doesn't take much of my time."

Kulp adds that he has an effective system for weeding out price shoppers by asking what their budget is, which typically chases away the "tire kickers."

**MONEY TALKS.** While most contractors agree that design and consultations should come at a price, opinions varied on how much to charge. Aksar's design fees generally start at \$500 and go up to \$1,500 for jobs in the \$20,000 range. He charges \$25 to \$40 for

(continued on page 95)



## BEST OF THE WEB

The *Lawn & Landscape Message Board* is a hotbed of green industry chatter and professional dialogue. Playing host to a diverse collection of opinions and ideas, the online forum often bounces between detailed discussion and dynamic debate.

To better educate readers, *Lawn & Landscape* will expand upon a Message Board discussion each month and offer forum-related insights from professionals in this "Best of the Web" section.



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Being truly global requires a strong presence in the United States. To accomplish this, Nufarm needed a respected U.S. company with a solid manufacturing, marketing and sales presence. After an extensive search, Nufarm acquired Riverdale Chemical Company in 1999 and created Nufarm Turf & Specialty, which is based near Chicago, IL. The acquisition gave Nufarm instant market knowledge and presence, but also the added bonus of a reputation for extensive formulation expertise.

Riverdale's innovation began as one of the first license holders of 2,4-D, but company growth came through researching and introducing new actives, combinations of actives and formulation improvements. Turf and golf course customers wanted enhanced weed control, reduced environmental loads and other benefits, and the company responded with innovative solutions that included Millennium Ultra®, Cool Power®, Horsepower™ and many private label products.

The vision of Nufarm Turf & Specialty is to provide customers with world-class turf protection products. One aspect of this means drawing on the global resources of Nufarm, which sells and supports specialty chemicals in more than 100 nations, and manufactures and formulates products in 13 countries, including in the United States. The other aspect is to retain the customer relationships founded on a respected sales and service team and a nationwide distribution network. Above all else, Nufarm Turf & Specialty values a hard-won reputation for service excellence to the individual customer.



Sean F. Casey  
National Sales Manager  
Nufarm Turf & Specialty

*Change is somewhat unnerving, especially when it involves the unfamiliar. So when Nufarm Limited from Australia purchased Riverdale five years ago, our main objective was a seamless and transparent transition. Our customers rely on us for quality products and dependable service, so we wanted to do everything in our power to ensure they experienced no interruption in service while we transitioned into becoming Nufarm.*

*Some people we meet in business ask us "Who is Nufarm?" The answer is that Nufarm is a major player in the U.S. turf and specialty market. We are proud of the fact that we are Nufarm Turf & Specialty and believe it is high time to make a big deal about it.*

*Nufarm Turf & Specialty is still comprised of the people, products and service you depend on and have grown to trust. But we now have additional global resources for sourcing materials, formulation development and product/business acquisitions to allow us to improve operations and function more effectively. We have the resources and critical mass to meet the demands of the stringently regulated business environment we operate in.*

*What does this mean for our customers? Innovative and industry-leading products, better service and stronger support than ever before. Nufarm Turf & Specialty is delivering Local Solutions Through Global Resources. We are investing in our business to help better your's.*

*Currently we are launching three new premium products: Escalade™, Escalade™ Low Odor and Triplet® Low Odor. All are designed to meet the demands of your customers for better weed control with less impact on their lives. Whether through the reduction of active ingredient loads or offensive product odor, these products are the first in a large pipeline of new and improved products we will be introducing. We know these products will make a difference.*

*Nufarm Turf & Specialty. We're still here for you. Proven, reliable and stronger than ever.*

*Sean F. Casey*





## Vision for the Future

Nufarm's vision to deliver customer solutions through formulation excellence begins by listening carefully to customers to learn their needs. According to Frans Jager, CEO of Primera Turf, *"Just like their predecessor, Riverdale, Nufarm Turf & Specialty is very customer focused and they are good listeners. That's why they are an important supply partner for Primera Turf."*

Nufarm responds to customers needs with new products, labeling and support. Nufarm product research and development always begins with a focus on solving the problem. Developing customer solutions may mean using a new active ingredient, developing a new or improved formulation, or finding an innovative combination of chemistries. Whatever the solution, Nufarm's formulation expertise is put to work in state of the art manufacturing facilities.

A four-year, \$12 million renovation of Nufarm's manufacturing facility in Chicago Heights, IL, has expanded production capabilities to meet growing demand.

Research is a Nufarm strength, says Scott Eicher, Senior Product Marketing Manager, Turf, Ornamental & Technical Products for Dow AgroSciences: *"What Nufarm accomplished with the rapid formulation development and registration of*

*Escalade™ and Escalade™ Low Odor was a pleasant surprise, as has been the fact that Nufarm has not changed what was good about Riverdale, like the experienced professional sales people in the field. Today, Nufarm is like a small family-owned quality business that is owned by a global company. They have already demonstrated that they will invest the capital to improve manufacturing facilities in a way that will make it possible to handle future growth."*

Having a customer-focused philosophy means that Nufarm addresses niche market needs faster and more thoroughly than most major manufacturers and distributors. Nufarm's central competitive advantage is delivering formulator innovation. The result is an ever-expanding line of quality solutions for golf course, professional turf, forestry and industrial vegetation management customers.



## Trust

The turf and specialty chemical business is based on trust. Turf professionals put their reputations on the line every day, so selecting and using products from companies and distributors they know is essential. Nufarm Turf & Specialty understands that in the final analysis a plant protection product can only be as good as the people who stand behind it. For this reason, Nufarm is dedicated to providing world-class support for its customers.

## Innovation

Professional turf protection is rapidly evolving business with new and difficult weed, disease and insect challenges, new regulatory requirements and increasing customer demands. Nufarm Turf & Specialty is responding with innovative new product options, new labeling and new solutions to meet the needs of its professional turf management customers.

## > The Tradition of Service

Product support is ensured through a veteran sales and technical staff known and active in the turf industry, and a distributor network serving all 50 states. Nufarm field staff serve as consultants for distributors and end-use customers, and call upon the company's Chicago-based technical and regulatory staff whenever necessary.

Nufarm services Lesco like a real business partner, says Dave Woznicki, Lesco product manager for herbicides and specialty products. *"Nufarm ensures that we have the right products at the right time. With Nufarm we are able to buy the technical material or finished products when needed. Nufarm not only supports our sales initiatives, they also provide help in management and control of inventory, production and scheduling."*

Committed to the success of the industries they serve, Nufarm personnel support and are active in GCSAA, ALCA, RISE, PLCAA, CPDA, NRVMA and many other local and nationwide task forces and organizations.



# Local Solutions Through Global Resources

Nufarm Turf & Specialty manufactures and formulates leading plant protection products for weed and disease control. Dedicated to the professional turf market, Nufarm serves the golf, residential and commercial turf, forestry, aquatic and vegetation management markets.

**New!**

**ESCALADE™**

Another premium innovation from Nufarm Turf & Specialty, Escalade™ is a post-emergent herbicide containing 2,4-D, dicamba and Spotlight™ Specialty Herbicide, an advanced new active from Dow AgroSciences. More competitively priced than the low odor version, Escalade™ still delivers some serious weed crushing power, especially when it comes to clover. With Escalade™ you can devastate weeds ... and keep your customers happy.

**New!**

**ESCALADE™ Low Odor**

At last, homeowners and applicators can see superior broadleaf weed control and not smell it! Escalade™ Low Odor is a groundbreaking new herbicide formulation that contains Spotlight™ Specialty Herbicide, a unique fluroxypyr active from Dow AgroSciences. In combination with dicamba and a highly-refined 2,4-D TIPA, customers get a premium product that is tough on clover and other broadleaf weeds and easy on the nose. Lay those customer concerns to rest — and let them enjoy a beautiful lawn and the smell of backyard barbeques.

**New!**

**TRIPLET™ Low Odor**

Finally, a three-way herbicide that is truly low odor! Nufarm has taken the proven performance of MCPP-p and dicamba and combined it with a highly advanced, unique 2,4-D TIPA. The result is a reliably effective product without the customer concerns that accompany a harsh chemical smell. So, whether you are a homeowner, applicator, or golf course superintendent, you know the turf will be beautiful and weed-free ... and golf games and backyard barbeques can continue uninterrupted.

**New Label!**

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(continued from page 90)

the initial consultation, which he uses to attract only serious prospects, he says.

"Today, a guy phoned about an estimate for a patio," Aksar writes. "I could tell he was serious about doing the work, but I still informed him that there is a \$30 fee for me to come visit him. His reply was, 'No problem - I'll have the cash ready.'"

"Then, 5 minutes later, a guy called about a retaining wall replacement, and he said, 'We just want an estimate,' so I informed him that there would be a \$30 fee. His reply: 'I'll talk to my wife and get back with you.' He hasn't called back."

Other participants say design fees give companies credibility. "It's a perceived value, too," Kulp writes. "It's kind of like putting furniture in your yard with a 'Free' sign. No one wants it. Put a sign on it that says '\$100' and someone will steal it in no time."

Aksar explains that the \$30 fee saved him 40 minutes in wasted drive time, 30 minutes of client meeting time and 30 minutes of job-costing and proposal-writing time and postage costs for that one client alone.

Another Message Board participant says he charges a \$125 to \$150 design fee, and Turf & Shrub Management, Dartmouth, Mass., charges \$45 for a 30-minute turf, tree or shrub consultation, says Owner Ken Reis. Advanced Applications, Deerfield, N.Y., doesn't charge design fees but does charge \$200 per hour for consulting, says Owner Robert Shauger.

But in another Message Board discussion on a related topic, Sal Mortilla, owner of Long Island, N.Y.-based Landscaping Unlimited, says customers in his region aren't receptive to fees.

"If anyone tried to charge a fee for an estimate in New York they would be sitting home all season," Mortilla writes. "The average potential customer here on Long Island gets three estimates. There have been many times that we were the seventh, eighth or 10th in without knowing it and still got the job."

"I think it's the presentation and what you can offer for the price you quote that matters," he adds. "Of course, personality plays a big role in the selling factor. The general rule we follow is we don't care how many bids or estimates a person gets, we do ask, however, at the time of appointment if

they received other estimates. This gives us a great advantage as it tells us what the competition is trying to sell and for how much. I can then modify the presentation."

**SCRAP DESIGNS?** John Palasek, owner, JonKar Design Group, Yaphank, N.Y., says some design fees seem exorbitant because he doesn't always need an intricate blueprint to show clients. "I'm still trying to get my head around someone charging a \$1,500 design fee for a \$20,000 landscape," writes Palasek, referring to Aksar's design fees. "I can, and have, come up with a design for a \$20,000 job in my head. For the life of me, I can't think of a single \$20,000 job that would require \$1,500 worth of design work. But hey, if you can get away with it, more power to you."

Aksar responds by writing that designs should be detailed plans that show customers exactly how the project will unfold. That

who can't see its value either don't know how to use it or are not artistic enough to make it sing," Palasek writes.

However, Aksar explains that imaging is not scaled and that when planning for features, contractors need a detailed plan. "I don't see many Wal-Mart stores built off of an image," he says.

Once the basic measurements are determined, Palasek can develop a materials list without much effort. "If you've done similar jobs, then you already have a basic plan to the customer," he explains. "But what gets their attention in the first place is the rendering. Scaled plans are helpful but not always necessary."

**BAKED-IN BILLS.** For contractors who are hesitant about upfront charges, some suggest refunding fees or including the design or consultation costs in the actual estimate.

"Those of you who do not want to refund design fees, why can't you just 'refund' the fee for them and then bake a portion of the design fee into the price of the install?" asks Chad Stern, owner, Mow-

ing & More, Chevy Chase, Md.

But Aksar cautions that by using this method, contractors risk getting nothing. "If you bake fees into the job cost, then how do you recover the money if you do not get the work?" Aksar writes. "The only time you can bake fees in is when a client gives you a deposit for the whole job up front on the spot."

If contractors do "bake in" fees or do not offer a refund, another Message Board writer asks if the client owns the designs even if the contractor doesn't get the job. Aksar responds by writing: "You get what you pay for. If you pay for something, it's yours. Once our clients pay for the design, they can elect to do the work themselves, shop around with other contractors or have us do it 24 months later. It's tough to charge someone \$1,250 for a design and then say, 'Oh, you can't keep this unless we do the work.'" **LL**

**"DESIGNS INVOLVE TIME, CREATIVITY, EXPERIENCE, FORMAL EDUCATION AND KNOWLEDGE. THERE IS NO WAY WE WILL OFFER OUR CREATIVITY AND EXPERIENCE FOR FREE. YOU CANNOT BRING BACK TIME." — ANDREW AKSAR**

way there's no confusion between the client and contractor when the project is finished, Aksar says.

"Would you build a home without a plan?" he asks. "Would you build the foundation, then decide where to put the master bath? Then once that's done, maybe figure out where the baby's nursery is going? That may work for some, but from a busy-pace perspective of a landscape professional, we don't have the time to ad-lib."

But with computer imaging today, detailed designs aren't always necessary, according to Palasek. Designs are useful for showing architectural designs, but decorative features such as plantings, waterfalls, pergolas, walks, walls, ponds and patios are displayed better through imaging, Palasek says.

"I rely a lot on imaging as a means of getting my point across and frankly those





*Neglecting your fleet's recommended maintenance schedule could be a prescription for expensive surgery down the road.*

*—by Will Nepper*

# Maintaining Mower Health

Photo: Toro

There are all kinds of things we should do that we don't do. Changing the batteries in the smoke detector, regularly rotating the tires on the family sedan and drinking eight glasses of water daily are the types of chores many people become accustomed to letting slip through the cracks. No doubt there are some contractors who could add regular mower maintenance to that list. And even though rotating your tires doesn't equate to certain death and fewer than eight glasses of water won't make you pass out from thirst, failure to give a mower the regular TLC that it deserves almost certainly means costly problems down the road.

**LIVING LONGER.** In addition to being preventive, regular maintenance can extend a mower's life, allowing contractors to push their machine until its absolute last sputter.

To fully understand the impact of lengthening a mower's life, it helps to know the machine's potential. "We target a design performance of about 5,000 hours and I think that would be about the same for most manufacturers," says Bob Walker, president, Walker Manufacturing, Fort Collins, Colo. "You could achieve about 1,000 hours per year with some machines, but the average is about 500 to 700 hours. That means a 5,000-hour machine would give you a life of about 10 or 12 years."

(continued on page 98)



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WHAT TO *DEPEND* ON.



(continued from page 96)

## Mower Maintenance Dos and Don'ts

Here's a quick list of suggestions that mower manufacturers advise you include in your mower maintenance schedule.

- **DON'T** skip early belt adjustments, says Rod Roberts, service manager, Ferris, Munnsville, N.Y. "After the first hours of operation, this is critical so that you don't end up with a stretch in the belt or rapid wear later," he says.

- **DO** take the battery out before shutting a mower down for the winter, says Bruce Dunning, co-owner, Creekside Shop, East Syracuse, N.Y. "Put it in a nice warm place, but not on a concrete floor," he says. "And if that's too much effort, then unhook one battery terminal and make sure it's filled up with fluid."

- Contrary to popular belief, Bob Walker, president, Walker Manufacturing, Fort Collins, Colo., says **DON'T** handle your air filter every day. "It's okay to check your oil, but the air filter should not be checked every day," he says. "If you handle it numerous times, there's a good chance you're going to damage the seals or the filtration media. I see more engines ruined that way than any other way."

- **DO** change your radiator hoses often, says Brendston Williams, assistant training manager, Kubota, Torrence, Calif. "It's very important to change the hoses on a liquid-cooled, ride-on mower about every two years," he says. "After awhile they get sunburned and alternating heat and cool does damage to them."

The gap in the life span of a riding or walk-behind mower isn't great, but there are some differences worth noting. "Comparing the two is comparing apples and oranges," says Brendston Williams, assistant training manager, Kubota, Calif. "A walk-behind typically is a gasoline engine and if it's well taken care of, I'd think you could get five or six good years out of it. With a ride-on you may be looking at a diesel engine and, in that case, the engine is one of the strongest components of the entire mower. It could outlast the rest of the mower if it's well taken care of. That could get you 3,000 or 4,000 hours easily."

Alternately, Brendston says a neglected engine might last only 500 or 600 hours.

Bruce Dunning, co-owner, Creekside Shop, East Syracuse, N.Y., points out that the real difference between riding and walk-behinds is in the number of hours put on the machine in its overall life-span. "You generally put more hours on a riding mower in a year than you do on a walk-behind mower," he says. "So a 5-year-old walk-behind would probably have far fewer hours on it than a rider."

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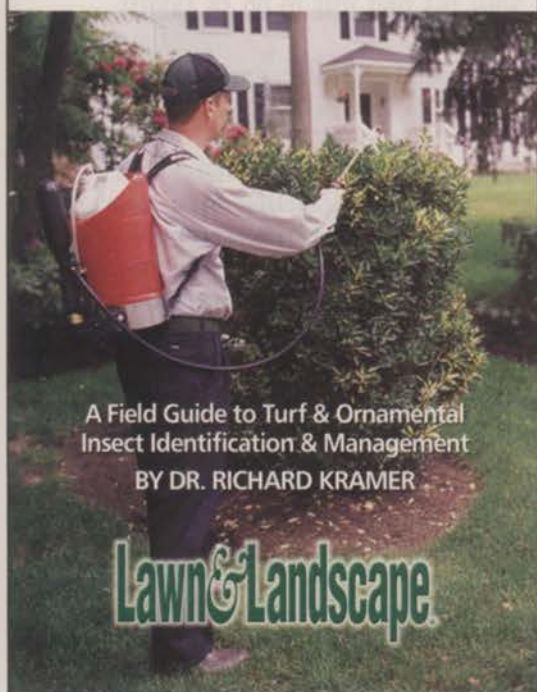
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## Mower TLC

(continued from page 98)

**SCHEDULE A CHECK-UP.** Many landscape contractors want to provide their mowers with four-star maintenance but can't find a convenient time. One way to make the time is to follow a strict maintenance schedule that becomes a part of the routine rather than interrupting it. "You need to have a preoperational system for preventive maintenance," says Williams. "It should be a checklist sheet that is maintained by a manager or fleet owner who routinely gathers this material and ensures that someone is going through and checking those various things before operating the equipment."

Rod Roberts, service manager, Ferris, Munnsville, N.Y., says that most maintenance schedules are standard because manufacturers usually specify maintenance intervals in their owner operating manuals. "So most contractors do their own maintenance programs based on our guidelines."

"Most programs are spelled out in hours," Roberts explains, adding that air filter and engine oil should be checked before every use. "For example, after the first five hours, check the machine for loose hardware and the engine oil level. And at your first 25 hours you should adjust the PTO (power takeoff) clutch."

Walker explains that proper maintenance should revolve around three main systems on a mower. "The first is lubrication – both grease and oil," he says. "This also includes looking after your engine and boxes."

The second system involves the engine and related components: the cooling system, air filter, air intake and crank case oil, Walker says.

"The third area on a mower to be maintained is the cutting system – the mowing

deck itself," Walker continues. "That involves the blades and the cleaning and maintaining of the deck."

Then maintenance can be recommended daily for some parts and every two years for others. "There are different levels of maintenance and some things should be addressed on a less frequent

**"WINTER IS A REAL OPPORTUNITY TO COMPLETELY INSPECT  
MACHINES. SOME USE THAT TIME TO DO AN ANNUAL  
CHECK-UP THAT IS FAIRLY EXTENSIVE." — BOB WALKER**

basis than others," Walker says.

Dunning explains that it doesn't matter how you keep track of maintenance as long as you are keeping track. "Whenever we change the oil on a machine, we put the hours and the date right on the filter," he says. "The reason is a lot of people will change the oil every three weeks but the same filter has been in there since the last time the mower was serviced."

**SEASONAL SUPPLEMENTS.** Some maintenance tasks won't come up on a daily/



Photo: Hustler Turf Equipment

weekly/monthly schedule but are equally important. In climates with seasonal weather changes, winter means it's time to put the equipment away until spring, locked-down

(continued on page 102)



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## Mower TLC

(continued from page 100)

in garages or sheds. However, just because a mower is not in use, one shouldn't assume that it would be exactly the same when it makes its debut in spring. While it sits dormant, grass clippings, fuel in the tank, and even mice are doing their own unique kind of damage.

"One thing you should do when you're shutting down a mower for the winter is to shut the fuel off and run your engine until you completely run it out," Williams says. "You have gas in the carburetor that will eventually run itself out if you do that and if it remains there through the off-season it will do damage to your seals, which plug the openings around the carburetor to prevent leaking.

Also gas, which will stale, can do damage if it's sitting in your carburetor." As an alternative to this, Dunning suggests adding fuel stabilizer to the tanks and then filling them with gas before running the machine for five minutes to push it through the carburetion system.

Dunning also strongly suggests thoroughly cleaning a mower before putting it away. "If you leave grass on those decks, the

"Some use that time to do an annual check-up that is fairly extensive."

Doing this right, Walker says, may mean pulling the engine out of the mower. "If it's an air-cooled engine, you really need to do that once a year and that includes pulling off the shrouds and the cooling system and really washing them out. It's almost impos-



Photo: John Deere

sible to be that thorough without removing the engine."

Dunning agrees, adding that spring is a good time to do this as well. "You can't imagine how often you'll find debris brought in by mice. Unless you look, you don't know it and that causes extensive damage and the repairs will not be cheap."

Williams offers several other procedures that landscape contractors should

consider before revving up their mowers for the busy spring. "Change all fluids - especially in a walk-behind mower," Williams says. In addition to changing the oil this means changing the oil filter, air filter and fuel filter. "I'd also make sure

I had a nice sharp blade."

Roberts adds that because of moisture it's a good idea to grease a mower when bringing it out. Some contractors also choose to do this before the winter, Dunning says.

**"WHEN YOU'RE SHUTTING DOWN YOUR MOWER FOR THE WINTER, YOU SHOULD SHUT THE FUEL OFF AND RUN YOUR ENGINE UNTIL YOU COMPLETELY RUN OUT TO GET RID OF GAS IN THE CARBURETOR."**

**— BRENDSTON WILLIAMS**

acid is just going to eat right through them and it will be rusty in the spring," he says. "Take the deck lid off and get in there where the pulleys, belts and spindles are and wash it clean."

"Winter is a real opportunity to completely inspect machines," Walker adds.

(continued on page 104)



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## Mower TLC

(continued from page 102)

**THE PRICE OF MAINTENANCE.** Certainly, adhering to the suggestions above and strictly following the recommended maintenance of a mower's owner's manual is not going to be free and easy. Quality

**"THE CONTRACTORS WHO MAINTAIN  
THEIR MOWERS RELIGIOUSLY  
DO IT BECAUSE OF THE  
DOWNTIME IT SAVES THEM."  
— BRUCE DUNNING**

maintenance costs money, but that's nothing compared to what will be saved by keeping things in tip-top order.

"We have a round figure for the annual cost of maintenance," offers Walker. "If you take all of your direct costs – gas, oil and your replaceable items like filters and so forth and then you add in your insurance on the machine and your depreciation – wrap that all in a bundle and your cost of ownership and use of the machine is usually about \$4 or \$5 an hour."

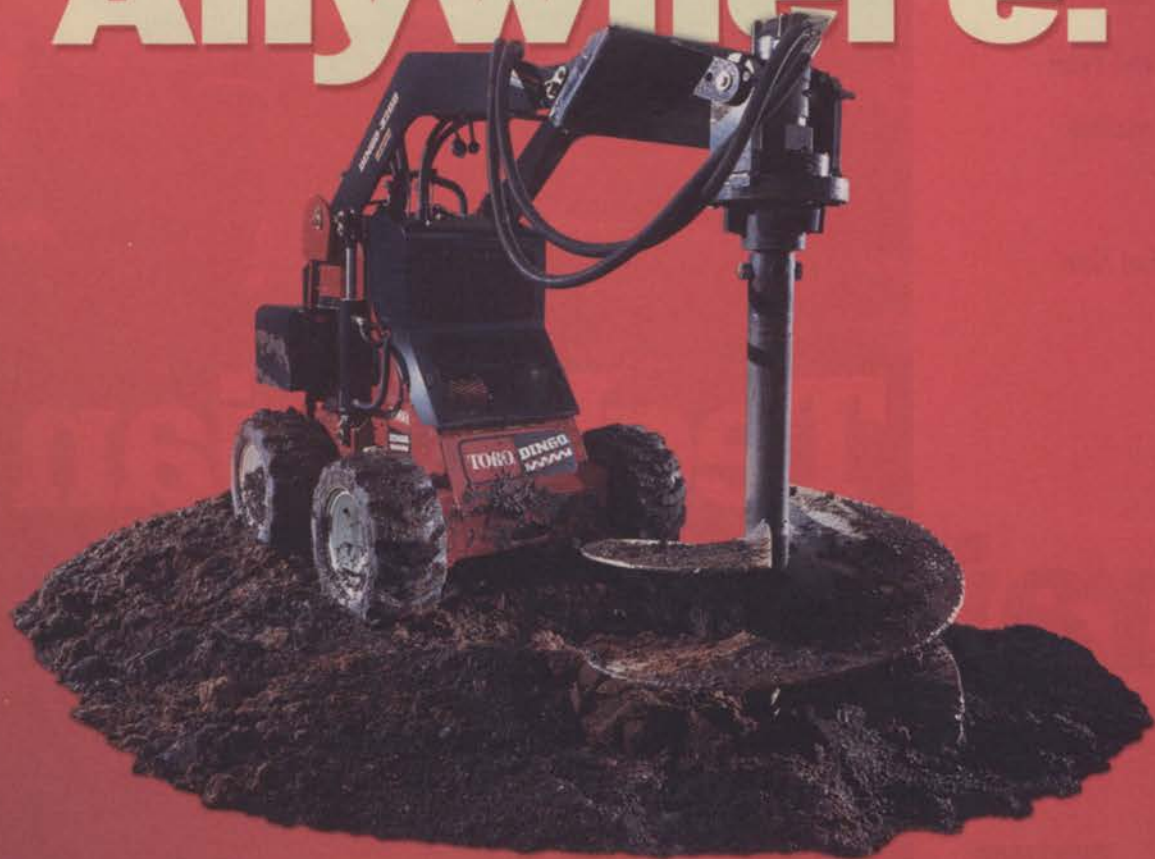
Walker says some may find that a high price, but that there's really no way around it. "Some contractors ignore those costs and they're really just fooling themselves," he says.

Dunning illustrates the difference between the price of good maintenance vs. the cost of not maintaining by offering the example of a mower's tire going flat on the job. "You have to take the time to load that mower onto a truck, take it to a shop and now suddenly you've got a crew of two standing around with nothing to do," he relates. "Add the repair cost to the truck time and the lost revenue of having a crew out of commission for the day and suddenly a \$15 repair could be costing you \$100. So imagine what a more serious breakdown would cost."

The contractors who maintain their mowers religiously "do it because of the downtime it saves them," Dunning says. "Because, down the road, the downtime always costs more than the repair."



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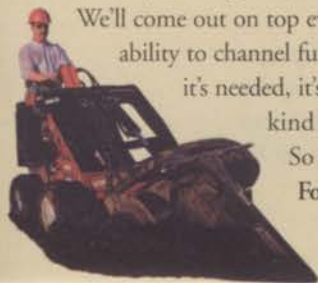
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*Lawn care operators share step-by-step training methods they use to reduce accidents, increase efficiency and build customer relations.*

*by Jonathan Katz*

# Technician Training Camp

Lawn care is a tough job. Not only is it physically challenging but technicians are mentally tested everyday in the field – from having to know mix rates to identifying plant and weed species.

Preparing technicians for the daily grind can be even more difficult. For weeks or even months, lawn care operators (LCOs) must review with trainees basic mathematics that many haven't seen since grade school, teach proper safety procedures and educate their new employees on regional and federal environmental laws.

This translates into a lot of time and money for LCOs, so having a comprehensive training program to get the best return out of their investment is essential. Otherwise, companies become strapped with employees who are unprepared for the daily hurdles.

**BACK TO SCHOOL.** Imagine being away from school for more than 10 years and having to relive those dreaded story problems that caused cold sweats before a test. Technicians in training must know similar calculations before taking a related exam, which can sometimes be a challenge.

*(continued on page 108)*

*Photo: Massey Ser*





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## Lawn Care Applicators

(continued from page 106)

"The area they have the biggest problem with is math – doing the calculations to determine application rates, determining the amount of active ingredient per 1,000 square feet or per maximum labeled rates," says Dan Warehime, vice president of Senske Lawn & Tree Care, Kennewick, Wash. "The small amount of math associated with those things can be confusing to someone without a lot of background in those areas."

Some companies provide a refresher course on applicable math problems before state-required testing. Prior to the test, Senske Lawn & Tree Care trainees receive state-issued handbooks to review possible test material. The classroom and field training are conducted by a salaried supervisor, and the trainees are paid \$9 to \$10 per hour for the two-week training period. They review the handbook for two to three hours during the first three or four days of training, Warehime says.

Supervisors then administer a practice test at the end of each chapter. At Senske

Lawn & Tree Care, an employee might see the following problem on a test: "The label reads, 'Apply 1.5 ounces of this product in 1 to 10 gallons of water per 1,000 square feet. How much of this material will you put in a 100-gallon tank if you are going to apply the product at 4 gallons per 1,000 square feet?'"

Then, for regulations, employees may be asked questions like, "Which department enforces pesticide regulations while they are being transported on the road?" Warehime says.

Senske Lawn & Tree Care trainees take three tests with 100 multiple-choice questions, which are administered by the state where they're located. The company has locations in four states, which include Washington, Oregon, Idaho and Utah, and tests range in cost from \$60 to \$120. The first test covers laws and safety, the second is ornamental and weed control and the third is ornamental insect and disease control.

Senske Lawn & Tree Care covers test fees

and study manuals and any travel costs incurred on the first two tries. The company allows technicians three chances to pass the test, Warehime says. Employees cover all costs on the third test and are terminated if they still cannot pass. "That either tells me they don't care to study or they can't mentally comprehend the materials to pass it," Warehime says.

Senske's annual training costs total \$5,000, which includes staff fees, some airline expenses, lodging, food and facilities. Trainees receive 20 hours of classroom instruction and 60 hours in the field before taking the test.

Technicians at Denver, Colo.-based Swingle Tree & Lawn Care spend one week in the classroom where they'll learn weed and turf identification, proper pesticide use, pesticide safety and pesticide formulations before supervisors administer a state-mandated test, and technicians with passing grades are allowed in the field, says Swingle Director of Operations John Gibson. Classroom size is usually 10 stu-

(continued on page 110)

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# Blades of Steel

## *F.O.E. Unveils Green Guardians*

BY DANTE GREENFIELD  
*Daily Fescue Great Plains*  
 Correspondent

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## Lawn Care Applicators

(continued from page 108)

dents to one instructor, who is a staff supervisor, according to Gibson. The first round of classroom training prepares Swingle technicians to become verifiably trained technicians (VTT). In Colorado, technicians must receive at least 24 hours of classroom instruction and 40 hours in the field before they can conduct applications with a supervisor present.

Swingle Tree & Lawn Care pays employees their regular rate during training, which is \$9 to \$18 per hour and supervisors receive their regular salary, according to Gibson.

After VTT certification, technicians have opportunities to move up in rank by obtaining either a certified operator's license or a qualified supervisor's license - the highest-ranking certification. The company usually won't offer the certified operator's test or qualified supervisor's test until an employee has six to eight month's experience, Gibson says. Without the certified operator's license or qualified supervisor's license, technicians cannot make applications without supervision.

Qualified supervisors can evaluate pest problems, recommend control products, sell application services, operate pest-control devices or supervise others in any of these functions, according to the Colorado Department of Agriculture. Certified operators can only apply restricted-use pesticides without the presence of a qualified supervisor.

The tests for the qualified supervisor's license and the certified operator's license cost \$100 each and are administered by the Colorado Department of Agriculture, Gibson says. Swingle Tree & Lawn Care technicians purchase their own \$40-training manuals and are reimbursed for test fees if they pass, Gibson says. They pay for their own licenses, which also cost \$100, because they're considered the technicians' property. Technicians receive 50-cent-per-hour raises for certified operator's licenses and \$1-per-hour advances for qualified supervisor's licenses, Gibson says.

At Massey Services, Maitland, Fla., techni-

cians are first assigned 45 minutes to an hour of reading material each night during their two-week training period, says Adam Jones, vice president of quality assurance. In the classroom, new hires learn how to identify different grass plants, 15 to 20 most common ornamental plants, soil pH and structure, equipment maintenance and application procedures.

In Florida, lawn care companies must document that technicians have received at least 40 hours of classroom training before they can obtain an identification card, according to Jones. Florida does not require that technicians take a state-administered test. The training is documented when supervisors sign off on the identification card application.

The entire training process costs Massey Services at least \$1,200 per day in lost revenue to have supervisors teach the courses and to outfit trainees in uniforms and safety equipment, according to Jones. Trainees are typically paid about \$65 per day during train-

(continued on page 115)

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In July 2004, Weisburger was acquired by Program Brokerage Corporation (PBC), a division of Hub International Limited (NYSE: HBG), a leading wholesale insurance brokerage in North America. Joining forces with Program Brokerage Corporation will enable Weisburger to tap the many additional resources of an excellent program specialist that has an impressive history of growth and innovation.





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ing, and class sizes are usually 25 to 30 people, Jones says. Instructors are typically staff managers who receive their regular salary or university professors. Massey Services pays a \$200- to \$400-donation to the professors' universities for their services, according to Jones. "Everyday that the service person is not out being fully productive that costs us in terms of lost revenue," Jones explains. "We make it up with other people. Other technicians have to carry the load or management has to help carry the load."

Jones says there's no way to offset training costs and that they're just accepted as a business expense. He estimates that 99 percent of technicians make it through the two-week process and that the highest turnover rate usually occurs after three to six months, adding that the physical and technical demands can contribute to employee losses during this time.

**IN THE FIELD.** Seasoned lawn care operators know technicians learn best through experience. At Massey Services, trainees get hands-on practice after just three days. During the first three days of training, new hires watch a supervisor perform an entire service stop—from routing their calls and driving safety to actually performing the application, Jones says.

After the observation period, trainees practice applications on a 40-by-25-foot-company driveway with a supervisor at their side. The driveway is diagramed with starting and end points and strategically placed dots that represent patches, which the employees cannot miss, Jones explains.

Field training teaches applicators proper arm movement, walking pace and how to turn and overlap properly, Jones says. On liquid applications, for instance, trainees are timed on spraying pace. The company applies 3 gallons of product per 1,000 square feet, and calibrates its trucks to pump 3 gallons of liquid per minute, meaning trainees must treat that area in one minute, Jones explains.

"They keep doing it until their pace is proper, until their overlap is accurate and until their arm movement is accurate, and they're supervised through the whole process," Jones says. "They'll probably make 20 to 30 trips through that area before they do it properly. Some people do it in five, but

## Staying Safe

**T**here's potential danger at every corner for lawn care applicators if they don't receive proper safety training. That's why most lawn care companies make issues such as driver safety, proper mixing procedures and spill response a major part of their training programs. Massey Services, Maitland, Fla., provides a defensive driving course as part of the company's basic training, which is a three-day course taught at the corporate office, says Adam Jones, vice president and director of quality assurance.

Massey Services technicians review basic safety fundamentals with a service manager or experienced technician. Some topics include the importance of wearing a seat belt, how to check the vehicle before moving it and the proper speed limit to abide by in subdivisions.

Also, the company tells drivers to make sure they have at least three seconds of reaction time between other drivers. This can be accomplished by driving slightly slower than the posted speed limit in residential communities, Jones says. "Even though the speed limit may be 25 or 30 mph, that speed seems like 100 mph to somebody standing on the side of a road with a child next to them, so we try to focus on driving no faster than 20 mph in a neighborhood," he shares. "That gives you plenty of reaction time in case somebody should dart out in front of you."

Stopping distance can become an issue for employees who have never driven a truck, particularly one carrying 600 gallons of water, says Dan Warehime, vice president of Senske Lawn & Tree Care, Kennewick, Wash.

In addition to reviewing stopping distances, Senske Lawn & Tree Care technicians are trained to make sure their truckload is properly secured and that their signals and breaks are working, Warehime explains. They also must report any mechanical problems. "It is amazing how some technicians will continue to drive a vehicle that has a mechanical failure of some kind without reporting it," he says.

Another challenge new technicians face is driving without a rearview mirror. Senske Lawn & Tree Care supervisors encourage trainees to look out their side mirrors when backing up. "Most accidents occur when backing up, so we need to educate people on putting the vehicle in a position where you don't have to back up," Warehime says.

Pre-employment driving record checks can also help prevent accidents. Swingle Tree & Lawn Care, Denver, Colo., won't accept anybody with more than two moving violations two years prior to employment or any major offenses in the last five years, such as drunken driving arrests, says the company's Director of Operations John Gibson.

During the first two days of training at Swingle Tree & Lawn Care, technicians take a driving test on standard and automatic transmission trucks, Gibson says. After the test, technicians take a two-hour defensive driving course and watch a video that discusses required stopping time for heavy loads, according to Gibson.

When accidents do happen, employees need to know standard procedures, especially when there's a spill. The company's technicians are trained on spill response and have a page in their route books dedicated to spill procedures, Gibson says. Supervisors there teach technicians how to shut off valves in the truck, how to dam the fluid and to contact a supervisor once the situation is somewhat contained.

Massey Services employees are instructed how to contain a spill, how to help any injured people and move them from the scene, how to report the incident and document it correctly, how to determine the amount of material lost, how to respond to media inquiries and what to do if emergency response teams arrive.

As Jones explains, "The last thing we want is the fire department to show up and hose down a chemical spill and run it down a storm drain."



## Lawn Care Applicators

they'll probably practice for a good hour and a half or two hours until they feel comfortable and understand the dynamics of it."

For arm movement, trainees learn how to hold the spray gun at a certain angle and move at the right pace for optimal particle distribution. "The most common mistakes are in the proper arm movement and making turns," Jones says. "We usually get them dialed in on walking pace pretty quickly, but getting them to turn the right distance can take longer."

When turning, technicians learn how far to overlap, Jones explains. Technicians learn this by walking in a straight line and turning in a square pattern. They must also pick a distant target and walk directly to it without wandering and are instructed to keep their head up instead of looking at their feet.

Senske Lawn & Tree Care technicians go through a similar field training procedure. Supervisors first train technicians on turf and asphalt surfaces at the company's facilities, Warehime says. At the facility, supervisors

demonstrate the correct technique to the trainees. For instance, they'll tell the technicians there must be equal amounts of material delivered to both sides as they walk because right-handed people tend to be heavy on the left, Warehime says. "Your right wrist bends easily to the left but not well to the right," he explains. "Too much material to one side as you walk is the major cause of striped lawns."

After observing, trainees take a dry run with an empty tank and gun to master the footwork and wrist movement. They then spray water on the asphalt so they can see their pattern before moving onto the lawn where they get a feel for the edges and undulations in the yard, Warehime says.

Trainees then go to a customer's property where they observe for several yards before they begin spraying actual material on a portion of a lawn. Once a supervisor is comfortable with their spraying competency, trainees will spray an entire lawn and be checked for application rate.

When spraying, new technicians work from a truck and spray gun that are set to disburse 4 gallons per minute, which should cover 4,000 square feet, according to Warehime. Before the application, trainees will test their guns to make sure they're delivering the proper amount. When a lawn is completed, they will check the meter to see how many gallons they applied to the pre-measured turf. An instructor will then provide the trainee with a feedback form, pointing out the light and heavy application areas.

Swingle provides trainees with field experience before any classroom training to "weed out" candidates having second thoughts, according to Gibson. Swingle Tree & Lawn Care supervisors take new technicians through a route, teach them how to set up their trucks and have them perform applications during the first two days of training. The company conducts field training on a customer's lawn where a supervisor stays by the technician's

(continued on page 118)

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## Lawn Care Applicators

(continued from page 116)

side for every step, Gibson says.

New Swingle Tree & Lawn Care technicians first observe a supervisor who gives them a recommended pace based on their height, which impacts the length of their stride. Trainees are then taught how to calibrate their spreaders to match their pace. The company's employees must know some basic math to calculate their pace. For instance, technicians are supposed to use 4 pounds of fertilizer per 1,000 square feet, Gibson explains. So if a technician applied fertilizer to 110,000 square feet that day, that technician should have used 440 pounds of fertilizer.

"If they find out they used 390 pounds of product that day, then we take the difference, which is 50 pounds, divide that by 440, and find out they're roughly 12 percent light in their product usage for the day," Gibson says. "Then we tell them they have to be within 10 percent. We'd actually like them to be within 5 percent of their usage, but we

know that our lawn measurements aren't 100 percent accurate, so we give them that fudge factor."

Employees at Baltimore, Md.-based Pro-Lawn-Plus typically go through a 30-day field apprenticeship before taking over their own routes, says President Mark Schlossberg. Trainees there also learn how to calibrate spreaders, keep a constant walking speed and mix products through observation and experience. One of the more critical training segments occurs when technicians learn how rate ranges vary depending on weather conditions. "With some of the broadleaf herbicides, rates can be lower or higher with weather changes, so we have to adjust to that quickly to avoid burning shallow-rooted grasses," Schlossberg says.

**CUSTOMER RELATIONS.** The old saying that "the customer is always right" may not always be true, but technicians need to follow it anyway if they want to maintain

business, Schlossberg says. Pro-Lawn-Plus instructs technicians on how to properly deal with neighborhood and customer complaints.

Pro-Lawn-Plus supervisors tell new hires that they can't take complaints personally and to empathize with customers instead of getting defensive. The company also encourages positive neighborhood relations by telling technicians to be sensitive to property managers' and tenants' concerns when spraying nearby. Technicians learn they should try to accommodate sensitive neighbors by notifying them prior to applications.

Knowledge is sometimes the best way to prevent such customer-service problems, adds Tim Doppel, owner of Atwood LawnCare, Sterling Heights, Mich. "A new trainee will typically be amazed at just how passionate the customers are about their lawns, and they have to respect that passion and respond to it," Doppel says. "Once they understand how important people's lawns are to them, they usually respond well." ■

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USE READER SERVICE #106



*Contractors can flood their sales department with solid residential irrigation leads through innovative marketing.*

*by Jonathan Katz*

# Saturated With Sales

What a potential customer can't see can hurt business. That's why contractors must sometimes put more effort into selling irrigation services than they do with more visual forms of business, such as lawn maintenance, construction and lighting.


"A lot of times commercial clients don't see how necessary irrigation is until somebody explains it to them," says Mark Trendell, service manager for Chapel Valley Landscape Co., Woodbine, Md. "Also, it's not aesthetically pleasing. An irrigation system is just there to support the landscape."

While standard marketing tools such as phone directories, direct mail pieces and door hangers are still being used, contractors today often depend more on referrals, networking and the Internet to generate new irrigation business.

**REFERRALS RULE.** About 85 percent of Grand Rapids, Mich.-based Grapids Irrigation's new business is acquired through referrals, says company President Will Katerberg. The

*(continued on page 122)*



A close-up photograph of two hands shaking over a wooden table. The hands are positioned in the center of the frame, with fingers interlaced. The background is a warm, textured wooden surface. The lighting is soft, highlighting the skin tones and the texture of the wood.

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# Irrigation Sales Suggestions

(continued from page 120)

Chapel Valley Landscape Co. obtains 90 percent of its business through referrals, Trendell says. Referrals are generally spread through good work and reputation, but there are methods contractors can utilize that sometimes increase referral rates.

For instance, curious neighbors can present marketing opportunities for contractors. Grapids Irrigation workers occasionally attach door-hanger advertisements at neighboring houses when they're on a job.

The cardboard cutouts notify nearby residents that the company is working in the area and offers a chance to view the completed project or the work in progress. Grapids Irrigation's distributor provides the hangers for less than 1 cent each, according to Katerberg.

HydroPoint Data Systems, an irrigation systems manufacturer in Petaluma, Calif., even provides free door hangers to contractors who install the company's specialized controllers, says Dale Hansen, HydroPoint's vice president of sales.

Despite being a low- or no-cost marketing method, not everyone is convinced door hangers are worth distributing. Because of time constraints, Grapids Irrigation distributes only 300 to 400 door hangers each year, Katerberg says. "If we're busy, we get lazy and don't bother," he explains. "You're taking a guy away from his job. I think it's effective, but most of the time we haven't needed it."

Another way to remind neighbors you're working down the street is with truck advertisements. Grapids Irrigation's name, logo, number and

Web site are on the side of all the company's trucks. Katerberg estimates that half the customers who inquire about service say they've seen the trucks and that he closes 20 to 25 percent of those calls.

Contractors should keep continuity with colors and logos so residents can immediately identify a company when they receive mailings or other advertisements, Katerberg suggests. He compares this marketing method to repetitive radio or television advertisements, which typically convey the same message each time.

Logos also convey credibility. "People might ask, 'Are they going to be here tomorrow if they can't even logo their truck?'" Katerberg says. "Put your name on it if you're not ashamed of who you are."

**THE INTERNET.** What would any business be today without the Internet? More contractors are embracing the Web as a marketing tool to attract computer-savvy clients.

Katerberg is investing more money into the company's Web site, which he says attracts younger clientele than the *Yellow Pages*. "We feel that the jobs we close quickly and easily are the ones where the clients have done all their research," Katerberg explains. "They know who we are, and they've checked out our list of customers, affiliations, looked at jobs we've done and know as much about us as any of our employees."

(continued on page 124)



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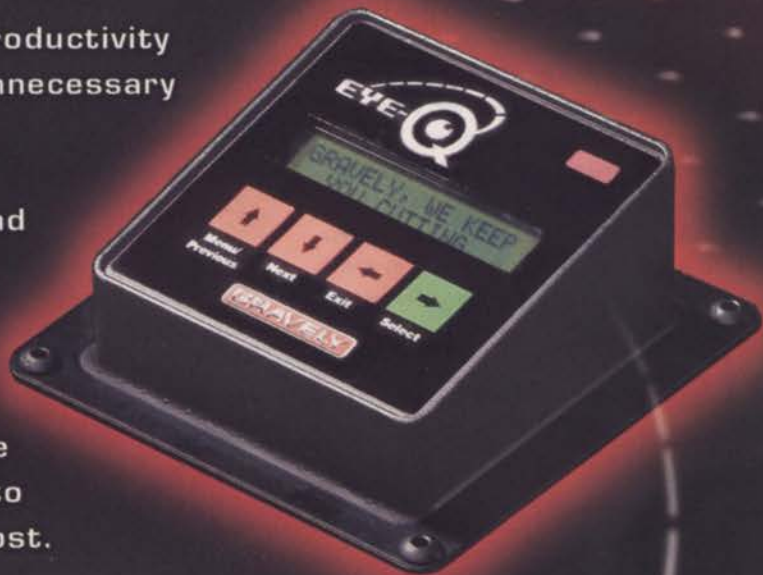
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## Irrigation Sales Suggestions

(continued from page 122)

The company first posted its Web site about five years ago and has made several upgrades since, including improved graphics, links to the company's major manufacturers and faster navigating and downloading speed, Katerberg says, adding that he spent about \$4,000 this year tweaking the company's Web page.

About 80 to 85 percent of Grapids Irrigation's clients say they've viewed the company's Web site prior to calling, says Katerberg. He estimates the closure rate for people who have viewed the Web site at 40 to 50 percent. Katerberg attributes higher success rates to Internet access because it provides customers with instant, detailed information about the company's services and history.

"Today's younger consumer is much more knowledgeable and discerning," Katerberg explains. "They'll go to Google and look for lawn sprinklers, look at our Web page, and then they'll look to see if

(continued on page 126)

## Commercial Appeal

**W**inning commercial irrigation contracts is often based on who's offering the lowest price. But actually getting the bid opportunity takes a little effort. Contractors can network with commercial property managers by attending association conferences, offering ways to cut costs and forming relationships.

"Commercial work is: Do the work, do it perfectly, do it on time, and be the cheapest bid," says Will Katerberg, president, Grapids Irrigation, Grand Rapids, Mich. "Price is the determining factor. A dollar costs you the job even if you're good."

One way to network is through property owner associations. The management team at JLS Landscape & Sprinkler, Sedalia, Colo., attends regional Building Owners and Managers Association (BOMA) meetings once a month where they can meet property owners who may be looking to install irrigation systems, says company President John Reffel.

BOMA, which has 99 local associations throughout North America, gives contractors access to what Reffel calls "class A" properties. These are upscale high-rise buildings or office complexes that will "dump \$15,000 to \$20,000 just in flowers every year," says Reffel.

BOMA also presents public relations opportunities for contractors. Every year,

(continued on page 128)

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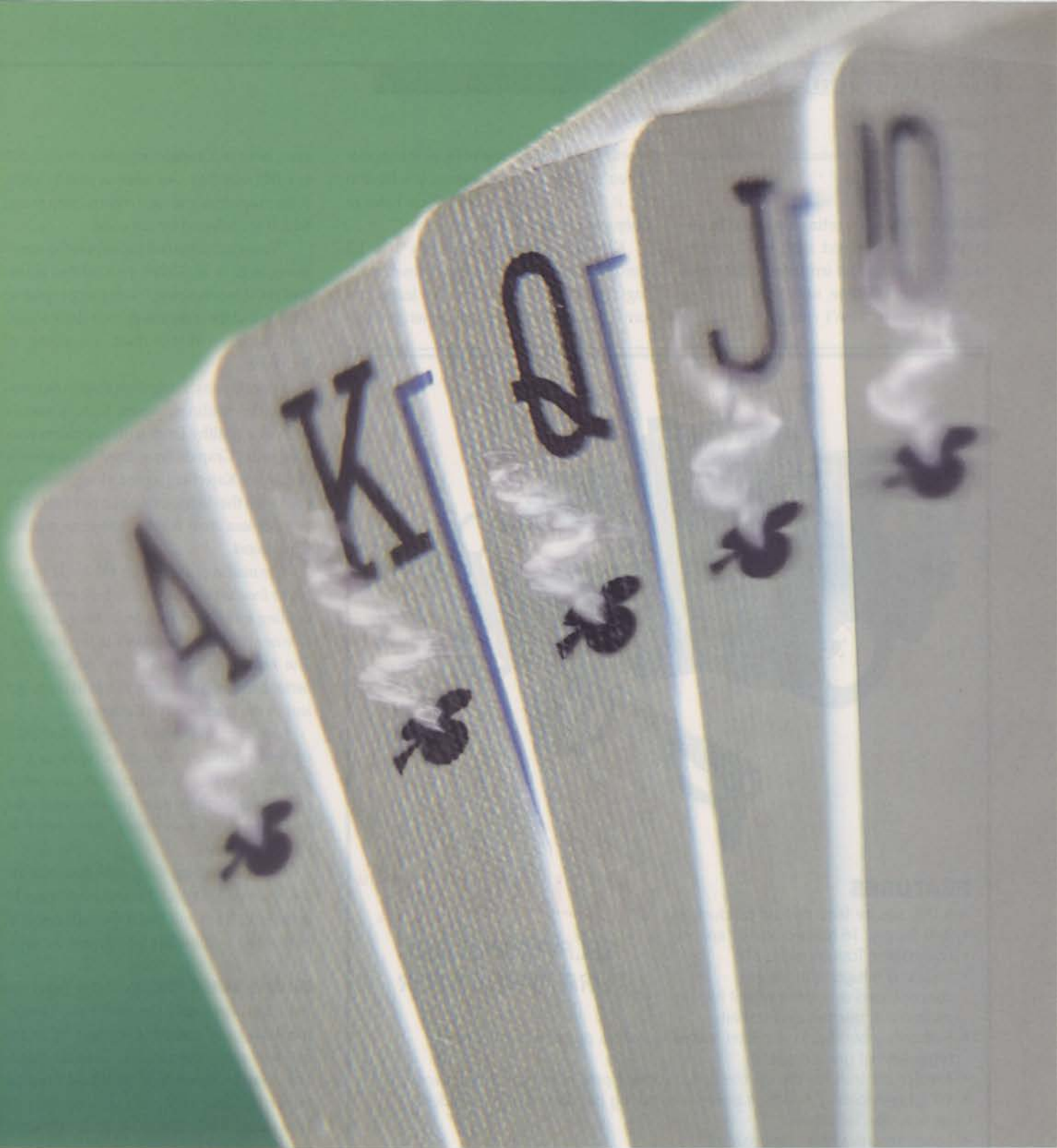
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## Irrigation Sales Suggestions

(continued from page 124)

you're linked with manufacturers who approve of your ability."

**DIRECT MAIL.** Targeting a specific demographic through direct mail is a popular marketing method for irrigation contractors but isn't very effective, says Katerberg.

"The returns aren't enough to make it

worthwhile, but it's one of those things that if you're going to be in business, you have to do it," Katerberg explains. "You have to keep your name in front of people."

Katerberg estimates that only 1 to 1.5 percent of Grapids Irrigation's direct mailings results in leads. Of those leads, approximately 4 to 5 percent generate busi-

ness, he says. Grapids Irrigation sends 5,000 to 6,000 mailings four times a year to high-scale properties and new construction areas, which are selected by zip code.

"You want to market to people who aren't going to go to Wal-Mart, pick up two plants and call it landscaping," Katerberg explains, adding that the company spends about \$3,000 each year on direct mail, according to Katerberg.

The company's irrigation distributor produces the mailings, which feature visuals such as a healthy lawn with sprinklers running and "Grapids Irrigation" prominently displayed. Katerberg signed a long-term contract with the distributor, so he pays about 75 percent less than what a one-time mailing would cost.

The mailings are sent as 8½-by-11 newspaper inserts or mailed in Valpak or private-mailing envelopes in which there are only five or six other advertisers in the package. The fewer advertisers in the package, the better because a company is less likely to get lost in the shuffle, says Katerberg.

Katerberg also mails coupons that offer current customers discounts, such as free irrigation system winterization, for referrals. But Katerberg says he only sends the mailings about once every three years to increase returns.

When Katerberg does mail coupons, he sends about 2,000 to 3,000 and might gain 15 promising leads and that if the calls result in sales, it's a worthwhile investment, he says.

**PHONE DIRECTORIES.** Yellow Pages advertising is probably the most basic form of marketing any company engages in, but it can also yield low returns. Grapids Irrigation recently downsized its Yellow Pages ad for the first time in 20 years because the costs kept rising while legitimate leads remained low, Katerberg says.

Katerberg had spent about \$1,000 per month on a Yellow Pages ad and is now paying \$660 each month. The previous ad was 6-by-2½, and the current ad is about half that size, he says. Katerberg keeps the ads simple by just displaying the company's name and phone number, and telling shoppers they provide residential and commercial irrigation work. "Otherwise, we get too many leads that are not good leads," Katerberg

(continued on page 128)



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**USE READER SERVICE #77**



## Innovations keep landscape drip contractors in the green.

By SheriLynne Hansen



Mike Scheck, Naturalistic Gardens

Anything that can help save time, conserve water, trim costs and increase reliability is bound to make landscape drip contractors sit up and take notice.

Rain Bird® has turned more heads than any other landscape drip equipment manufacturer, continuing the company's time-honored tradition of producing product innovations that make a contractor's job easier and more profitable, while using water intelligently. In the spring of 2004, Rain Bird introduced Easy Fit Compression Fittings (coupling, elbow, tee, adapters and a flush cap) that produce over 160 different configurations and are compatible with any manufacturer's 1/2" tubing (16-18mm outside diameter).



Just a few months after the industry welcomed the Easy Fit Compression Fittings, Rain Bird presented another innovation: Low Flow Control Zone Kits, designed specifically to work in low-volume applications. The kits feature Rain Bird's new Low Flow Valve, the only valve that always seals water-tight, despite particles that clog other valves. The Low Flow Valve not only prevents water waste that comes from weeping valves but also the loss of valuable time for contractors.

Mike Scheck of Naturalistic Gardens in Alpharetta, Ga., was immediately interested in the new Rain Bird Low Flow Control Zone Kits when he first heard of them. "I'm definitely one of the first to try a new Rain Bird product," he said. "I think they have the best quality products on the market."

Mike understands that the patent-pending double-knife diaphragm is the key to the Low Flow Valve. It lifts higher to let more debris through at lower flows, plus the diaphragm will seal completely, even if a

particle is present. Tests show the PGV and 2500 TF valves will both clog when the water isn't filtered, while Rain Bird's Low Flow Valve seals firmly every time under the same circumstances. This gives Mike extra confidence on the job.

With the Low Flow Valve, it's proven you no longer need to filter the water before it enters the valve. You can put the filter downstream of the valve and no ball valve is needed. Mike sees this as a significant advantage, both in time and cost savings.

The other advantages to these Low Flow Control Zone Kits are their reliability, simplicity and convenience. Citing the complex installations that he handles on a daily basis, Mike said, "I think this is something that can suit every need."

The revolutionary Low Flow Valves are matched with Rain Bird filters and pressure



regulators that contractors already use and trust for optimum reliability. For added convenience, Rain Bird offers four different Low Flow Control Zone Kits, so there's one that is just right for any given installation.

"I'm very particular about the products I install, and Rain Bird is fantastic," Mike concluded. "If it wasn't, we wouldn't be using it."

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## Irrigation Sales Suggestions

(continued from page 126)

explains. "Your phone will ring, but you're chasing for stuff where the potential client is calling 100 other people, too."

Phone directories tend to attract more price shoppers rather than consumers searching for quality and reputation, according to Katerberg. "When I get calls from the *Yellow Pages*, they say, 'How cheap are you?' And that means the cheapest guy wins," Katerberg says. But the ads are still necessary, he explains, because it helps establish a company's legitimacy by showing it has a location and a phone number.

Grapiads Irrigation's ad generates maybe 30 calls a month that results in about 5 percent of business, Katerberg says. However, some irrigation contractors have more luck with *Yellow Pages* ads. Albuquerque, N.M.-based Just Sprinklers' *Yellow Pages* ad results in about 20 percent of the company's irrigation sales, according to company President John Seaver, who spends about \$20,000 to \$25,000 for a half-page ad. 

(continued from page 126)

JLS employees volunteer their time, and the company spends \$1,000 to \$2,000 on materials to maintain a children's home in Colorado. At the volunteer work sites, Reffel says there may be 20 to 30 builders there who the company may never see any other time. The company has received awards from BOMA for their help on the project. "It never hurts to stand on a podium in front of 200 to 300 people who are seeing you receive an award," he says. "Those two volunteer days a year and a couple thousand dollars has brought us 20 or 30 fold in business."

These meet-and-greet methods will get a contractor a chance to bid, but winning the bid is another story. Reffel describes the process as a negotiation rather than a bid. Knowledgeable contractors can win bids by finding ways to slash excess costs.

Reffel will usually present two proposals when making a bid. The first offer is based directly off the blueprints provided by the builder. The second one shows how JLS Landscape & Sprinkler can save the potential client 10 to 15 percent and, in some cases, the company will extend its warranty an extra year as an extra incentive.

Contractors can also find marketing opportunities at commercial maintenance accounts by recommending ways their current clients can become more water efficient, especially in areas where drought conditions have forced water restrictions, Reffel says. Some irrigation systems manufacturers even offer contractors a return on investment calculation sheet that takes into account the particulars of a customer's property, the water costs in that customer's area and the cost of the equipment so customers can see future savings on paper.



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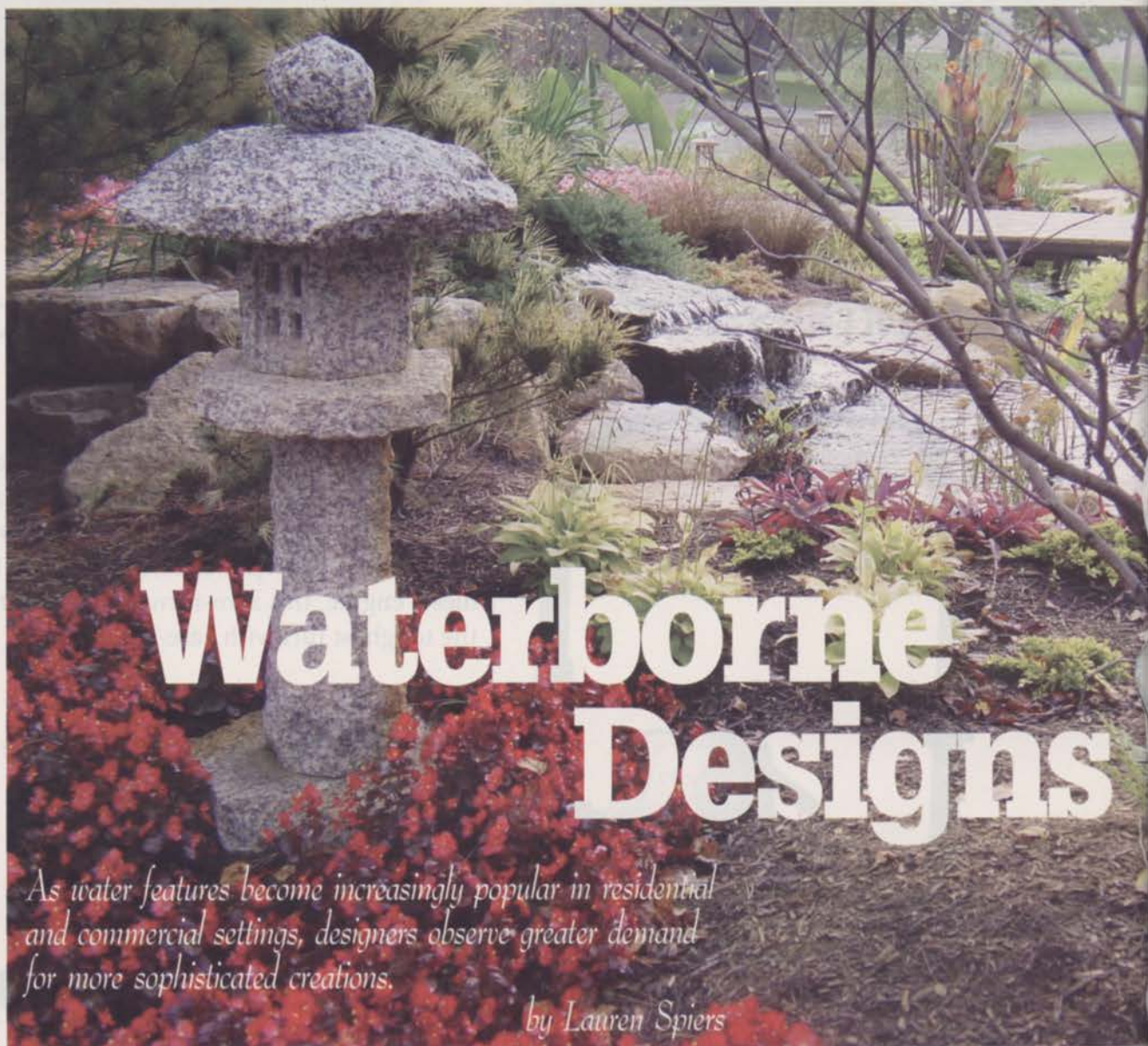
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USE READER SERVICE #80

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# Waterborne Designs

*As water features become increasingly popular in residential and commercial settings, designers observe greater demand for more sophisticated creations.*

*by Lauren Spiers*

There's something inherently captivating about flowing water. Whether people are drawn to lapping waves and a crisp ocean mist, the cool currents of swiftly moving rivers or the strength of rushing waterfalls, everyone from honeymooners to families taking weekend vacations flock to destinations promising the calming influence of water.

Lately, however, more people are forgoing long hours of drive time and the hassle of packing for a trip in favor of creating private oases in their own back yards. "Water features are very popular among our clients," says Jay Marino, landscape architect and director of landscape operations for Landmark Landscapes, Asheville, N.C. "We try to include water in any design where it fits the site, and for landscape clients the best money they can spend is on water. There are a lot of psychological benefits to having a water feature in a landscape – it's a calming, soothing, natural retreat at your own home."

As both homeowners and commercial property managers invest in water features on their properties, designers report specific trends among their customers' requests. From new pondless waterfall styles to modern architectural looks, contractors can sample some of these up-and-coming concepts to boost water feature sales among prospective and existing landscape clients.





Photo: Effective Enhancements

## PONDLESS PREFERENCES.

While water features are landscape focal points in and of themselves, clients' eyes and ears are instantly drawn to waterfalls within water features. Indeed, waterfalls are the lifeblood of well-crafted ponds, providing aeration to keep fish and aquatic plants healthy and offering the comforting, fluid sounds customers crave.

Knowing the strong impression waterfalls make on their own, contractors and suppliers report that many customers are requesting to do away with the pond elements of water features altogether. Instead, they're opting to install less traditional pondless waterfalls.

"The newest thing that's showing a lot of potential is the pondless water feature," says Mike Masterson, president, Masterson's Aquatic Nursery & Garden Center, East Aurora, N.Y. "Those will be very hot for a while, and there are a lot of

manufacturers coming into the market with their takes on this style. There will be a lot of products available come next spring."

Richard Walsh agrees, adding that he has been installing pondless waterfalls for three years. "The pondless waterfalls are really great for a couple of client groups in particular – commercial projects and families with small children," says the president of RikRock, Northbrook, Ill. "Homeowners like these designs because they're a lot safer when you have little kids running around. Instead of the waterfall ending in a pool that children could fall into, our pondless designs fall into a gravel base that's much safer. You still get the water sound, which is what most people are after when they install water features. We also create bog pockets

with plants and streams that maintain the feel of a water feature with a much more unique design."

Mark Beitler, owner of Effective Enhancements, White Lake, Mich., agrees that safety is a good selling point for pondless waterfalls, especially on commercial sites. "Property managers also appreciate that pondless water features require less maintenance," he says. "You're creating the sound and movement without the upkeep of an actual pond. For our pondless features, we only have to visit the site once a year during March or April to clean it out."

Beitler and other contractors say maintenance for pondless waterfalls is as easy as emptying the basin and refilling it with fresh water once a year. Occasionally, it may be necessary to add water to the system to compensate for evaporation. A few drops of algae control also helps to maintain these systems.

In terms of cost, pondless waterfall kits can start at \$1,500. Walsh says his pondless designs usually carry price tags of \$6,000 to \$7,000. However, prices can vary widely, depending on a project's extent.

**MODERN MYSTIQUE.** Though pondless waterfalls often are intended to have a natural look and feel, their designs are more modern than the typical traditional water feature. This reflects another trend some contractors are seeing among their high-end residential clients.

"Lately, we've been designing much more modern, contemporary water features rather

than the natural look that has been popular for so long," says Kathy Swehla, senior designer, Land Expressions, Mead, Wash. "We've been doing natural-looking designs for so long that they're becoming commonplace. When someone comes to us asking for a water feature, we like to suggest something more unique than a natural design they may be used to."

Swehla says her recent architectural water features have included more cut rocks and sculptural pieces, as well as metal accents. "Our upper-end residential clients are moving away from more natural looks because these are people who travel a lot and are influenced by other design styles," she explains. "They spend more time researching these types of projects when they're designing their homes, and they work with interior designers and architects who also travel a lot and realize that most of the water features out there are natural-looking. These clients want something more unique."

Additionally, Swehla says clients who spend less time in their homes and more time traveling want water features that are low maintenance. As a result, she says Land Expressions rarely incorporates fish or high-maintenance plants into its water features, which reinforces the modern feel.

Moreover, clients requesting pricey water feature designs that include copper basins or cut granite walls also can afford the extra filtration these designs require.

"When you do a non-natural system,

your filtration has to be much better – more like a swimming pool or hot tub," she explains. "The copper and granite aren't going to hurt the water, but if algae starts to grow in the water feature, that really takes away from the sleek, contemporary design. Whenever we do a water feature, we always ask our clients what level of water quality they expect. A little algae might be



Photo: Larry Allain, USDA-NRCS Plants Database



OK in a natural-looking design, but customers who are looking for architectural water features will probably want crystal-clear water, which requires extra filtration."

Harry North, owner of Santa Rosa, Calif.-based Creative Environments, also sees some of his clients moving toward new water feature aesthetics. "We do a lot of waterfalls with natural stone, but we also get requests for more ornate fountains and other designs," he says. "We've done some designs with tile fountains and patios that are more trend-setting than old-looking. People are willing to do more artistic things outside with sculpture and pre-cast bronze, as well."

**NATURAL SELECTION.** While requests for more streamlined water features are becoming more common, not all landscapes or homeowners are suited to contemporary designs. Eric Meyers, president, Aquapro Services, Rockville, Ill., notes that the natural look is actually becoming more popular in his area.

"The latest and most popular trend we've noticed is the naturalization of water features," he says. "We're actually getting away from the cut wall and stone-type water feature you might see along a pool. Our customers want the water feature to appear as though it's coming out of the ground, goes through a stream and then disappears back into the ground."

Marino agrees, noting that the typical water feature he builds is natural-looking, with a stream and often a uniquely installed waterfall. "We're in the Appalachian Mountains and a lot of our clients have steep terrain, so we install a lot of boulder retaining walls," he explains. "One installation technique I've started using for water features is to run tubes up behind the boulders during the retaining wall installation and use the wall as a backdrop for a waterfall."

Marino says these types of water features have gotten rave reviews and are especially useful when sites are restricted on space.

Still, these natural features require different types of materials. For example, to keep natural water features in tune with their surroundings, Marino uses local rock that fits better in the landscape. At the same time, however, Marino says he likes to go all out when it comes to aquatic and other plants

(continued on page 134)

## Water Feature Flora

**W**hile sleek, contemporary water feature designs may incorporate few, if any, plants and flowers, natural-looking ponds and waterfalls that are filled with foliage are still popular among most landscape clients. To effectively accentuate the lush look of a natural water feature, try incorporating some of the following ornamentals into your next water feature design.

**Lobelia cardinalis** – Hardy through USDA Zones 3 through 10, the "cardinal flower" requires moist soil and can tolerate flooding, making it an excellent aquatic plant. The only Lobelia with red flowers, clumps can grow 1 to 3 feet tall and attract hummingbirds.

**Creeping phlox** – With full sun, this low-growing evergreen creates a carpet of color around rocky stream beds and waterfalls. Generally hardy from zones 3 to 8, phlox can be found in a range of colors, from deep blue to pink-and-white striped.

**Water hyacinth** – While attractive with blue and yellow blooms, water hyacinth and water lettuce can be serious weed problems in the South. Still, because they are not winter hardy, there is no spreading problem in northern climates. With the growing popularity of water gardening, many nurseries sell water hyacinth, but the plant should never be introduced into natural lakes, rivers or streams. Also, watch this aquatic plant in man-made water features – its dense root system can become a breeding ground for insects and limit pond oxygenation by impeding water movement.

**Lotus** – Hardy to zone 4, many contractors say lotus is a favorite accent plant. Available in a variety of colors ranging from white to yellow to deep pink, lotus is one of the easiest water garden plants to care for, requiring 2 to 6 inches of water to maintain the plant's large blooms and leaves.

**Water lilies** – Among the most recognizable water plants, water lilies are focal points for many water gardens, and their large, floating leaves provide cover for fish. Generally, water lilies should be planted in containers submersed 12 to 24 inches deep. Dwarf varieties do best when planted 6 to 8 inches deep in small ponds where they won't have to compete with more robust growers.

**Sedges** – For ground cover options around water features, sedges and other ornamental grasses offer vertical contrast to free-flowing streams and ponds. Varieties like the Japanese variegated sedge (pictured) are hardy to zone 5 and clumps spread to about 1 foot in diameter. Divide clumps every two to three years.



Photo: [www.flowerpictures.net](http://www.flowerpictures.net)



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(continued from page 132)

he uses. "I always like to use lots of flowers with a good evergreen background," he says. "Outside the pond, any kind of plant that spreads, such as creeping phlox, gives a soft, natural look to the water feature, while adding a punch of color. I also use a lot of ornamental grasses for texture, as well as dianthus and irises for color and interest."

For aquatic plants, Marino says he always uses lotus flowers if there is room, as well as hardy water lilies and plants that offer vertical interest, such as rushes and cattails. "When the client and I determine the perennial budget, I go through some perennial books and make a shopping list of the plants I want to include in the feature," he explains. "I don't pre-design the plantings because, just like the overall look of the water feature, the design is really site-driven. The rocks of the water feature determine what the lines will be, and then I go back and use the plants as paint to fill in the canvas. The process requires a certain level of trust from the homeowners, but I sell this as art – flowing sculptures – and that really keeps clients interested."

**SALES CINCH.** Promoting aesthetic value is just one way to sell clients on water features, though most contractors say selling these landscape elements is rarely difficult.

In fact, a recent survey by lifestyle and how-to publisher Taunton Press showed that adding a water feature took the top slot as the improvement homeowners would most like to make to their yards. Also, water gardening sales have grown at a compound rate of 20 percent since 1997, reaching \$1.4 billion last year. Aquascape Designs President Greg Wittstock, West Chicago, Ill., even estimates that the potential market for water feature sales in the residential sector alone could be as high as 50 percent of owner-occupied, single-family U.S. homes.

Swehla confirms this market segment's growth. "We have water features in 50 percent of the landscapes we install, so we have a wide portfolio for our clients to

## Water Feature Trends

**What is the most prominent trend your company is seeing in water feature design and installation?**

RESPONSE	% OF CONTRACTORS
More interest in natural-looking designs .....	40
Clients spending more on large, new installations .....	16
Clients expanding water features .....	8
Interest in pondless waterfalls .....	4
Clients adding fish/snails .....	4

Source: Lawn & Landscape Online.

Total does not equal 100 percent because some responses were not included in this chart.

look through," she says. "They can look through the portfolio to see the type of work we do and get a feel for what kind of design they might like, but any time a client is wavering about whether or not to install a water feature, the best sales tool is letting them visit a landscape you've installed and showing the impact a strong water feature can make."

North agrees, noting that clients may rework their budgets after seeing a water feature up close. "It's inexpensive to dream

on paper and a lot of times architects' creative juices aren't hampered by a budget," he says. "Still, we have our clients create a wish list and then we put some dollars against it. A lot of times, the client will extend their budget if they really love a design."

Clients also are spending more to get what they want from the start instead of adding on to a feature later.

"More people are investing more money upfront with the pond instead of coming back in a

few years because they didn't do it right the first time," Masterson says. "Our average sale has probably doubled for new customers in the last couple of years, and if you stretch that overall, we've probably seen a 20- to 25-percent increase across the board."

Some contractors even note that clients are requesting bigger ponds and waterfalls than in the past. "Three years ago, we were selling a lot more 8-foot-by-11-foot ponds. Now, it's uncommon for our installations to

(continued on page 136)



Photo: Effective Enhancements



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## Design/Build – Waterscapes

(continued from page 134)

be smaller than 11-by-16," Meyers says. "A lot of our customers choose to increase the size from there with custom designs and they're adding long streams, as well."

Because size impacts sales, Walsh adds that he uses visual aids to encourage customers to increase the scale of their water feature designs. "Once the client is sold on adding a water feature to their landscape, the second thing we do is go in and lay out the area," he explains. "We paint out the basic area of where the water feature would sit and explain to the client, 'This is the size of water feature you'll get for \$8,000.' Sometimes when it's laid out, their original idea starts to look a little contrived and doesn't quite fit in the space. From there, you can upsell the design by bumping up the size of the pond, upgrading the stone and things of that nature. You're accessorizing their water feature."

Marino agrees that upselling during the design and early construction phases

is easier and more fruitful than coming back a year later to amend water feature designs. "Our projects have mostly been on new construction or total renovation," he says. "I do all my upselling upfront to ensure that the client has a really nice package for their site that works into their budget. Our profit margins get smaller if we go back and retrofit a water feature because you're working in an established landscape and a lot of other elements can get in the way."

Beitler adds that larger outdoor landscape elements, like gazebos, fire pits and pergolas, also are good upselling opportunities on the front-end of water feature construction. "These are the features that allow people to use their water features more, so they really can be sold as extensions of the client's house," he says. "We tell them we're decorating their largest room and they see the benefit of putting money into exterior designs. It lets them

use the space more often and enjoy it when they're entertaining."

Beitler says the majority of his clients buy in to additional construction projects when their water features are installed, and 30 percent will come back the following year to upgrade the landscape.

Marino adds that fish, plants and lighting are usually the elements clients choose to cut when faced with budget constraints. Though customers must be educated that a pond won't be ecologically balanced without an appropriate number of live elements, these are easy to add later when homeowners are ready to expand their liquid landscapes.

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Visit the November Online Extras section for additional pond-building education, as well as more photos of these designers' water features and flora.

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*Contractors today have more handheld equipment options as manufacturers develop new engine technology.*

*by Jonathan Katz*

In the old days, handheld equipment was much simpler. Contractors didn't think much about their engine-style options because there really weren't any. The two-cycle engine was standard on handheld equipment, and landscape professionals became accustomed to mixing oil with gas.

But in recent years, federal emissions standards have forced manufacturers to seek other options, including catalytic converters on two-stroke engines, four-stroke engines and combinations of two-stroke and four-stroke technology, as well as stratified-charged engines.

Two-stroke manufacturers face the challenge of meeting emissions requirements without drastically increasing costs and weight and decreasing power. At the same time, manufacturers of other engine technologies are trying to convince contractors that their equipment is the future because emissions standards will make two-cycle engines harder to find.

**TWO-CYCLE TRADITION.** Even some four-cycle engine manufacturers say two cycles are still the engines of choice among landscape contractors, mainly because of their lighter weight.

"We talked with landscape contractors in focus groups, and the No. 1 issue for them, without a doubt, is they do not want to add more weight to their products because it reduces their productivity," says Rob Stegall, director of emissions compliance and development, Echo, Lake Zurich, Ill.

Four-cycle engines can be a ½ to 1 pound heavier than two-stroke engines, according to engine manufacturers. A 25-cc two-cycle engine is approximately 1.1 pounds lighter than an equivalent-sized four cycle, says

*(continued on page 140)*

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## Special Focus: Handheld Equipment

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Bob Jensen, territory sales manager for Robin America, Wood Dale, Ill. "Landscape contractors themselves would prefer two-cycles because of the weight and simplicity," Jensen says.

Roscoe Klausing, president of Lexington, Ky.-based Klausing Group, tried a four-cycle trimmer but said it was too heavy and not

powerful enough. "I am looking for a four stroke, but so far all the ones we tested have not worked as well as the two cycles," he says.

Two-cycle engines are lighter because they have 30 to 40 fewer moving parts than the standard and hybrid four-cycle engine, Stegall says, adding that 20 of those parts are moving. "That's 20 more times probab-

ity that something can break, and moving parts rubbing together create friction, which causes more chance for overheating and product failure," he explains.

Tom Dibble, supervisor of technical services for Kawasaki, Grand Rapids, Mich., agrees that because two-stroke engines have fewer moving parts and no valves, they have less maintenance concerns. "With a four stroke, you need opening and closing valves and associated hardware," Dibble explains.

Two cycles also don't require oil maintenance because the intake uses mixed fuel instead of an oil sump like four-cycle and hybrid engines, Stegall notes. Some four-cycle operators have complained that the engine stalls when turned on its side or upside down because it needs proper oil distribution, Stegall says.

Klausing says he's noticed some of these problems with the four-cycle trimmer he tried two years ago. "You get in tall grass, and it bogs down faster than something else would," he says. "We've also noticed that the compression doesn't seem to be as good when you are flipping it upside down or sideways, and the power decreases by 80 percent."

In addition to weight and performance concerns, four-cycle engines add at least \$40 to \$50 to the retail price of a handheld product, says Echo Vice President of Marketing Joe Fahey. Jensen estimates a higher number, saying that four-cycle engines add about \$100 to a product's retail cost.

"If I have to add 35 additional parts to a machine, that's going to increase its costs," Stegall adds.

As such, two-cycle engine costs will increase in retail price by \$10 to \$20 in the near future with the addition of catalysts to comply with future emissions regulations, Fahey says. By 2005, engineers must reduce emissions from this year's 74 grams per brake horsepower hour (g/bhp-hr) to 37 g/bhp-hr. Two-cycle manufacturers say catalysts will keep their products EPA compliant without significantly increasing costs. "Yes, it has an effect on cost because of the catalyst and some manufacturing technologies, but it's probably the smallest impact in cost compared to some other technologies," Stegall explains.

Other than the catalyst, currently two-cycle engines require no additional parts, Stegall notes. "We're not talking about weight in-

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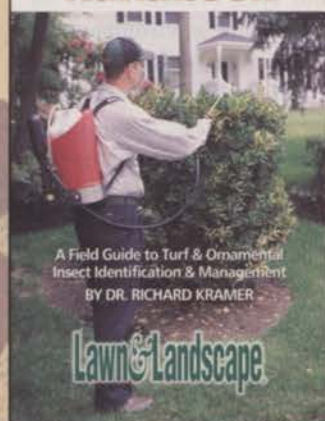
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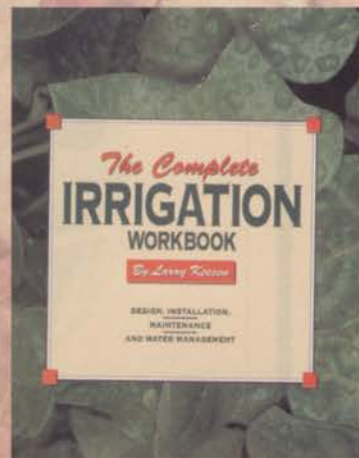
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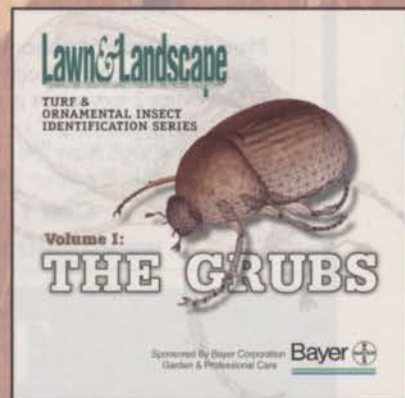
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## Special Focus: Handheld Equipment

(continued from page 140)

creases, and we're not talking about increased reliability concerns," he says. Also, increasingly stringent emissions standards have not affected engine power, according to Stegall. By experimenting with different piston shapes and catalyst designs, two-cycle manufacturers have maintained or even increased power.

"In the very beginning we, like every-

body else, suffered some performance loss," Stegall explains. "We have actually regained all that power and have more power per cc now than we had before the regulations."

Decreased emissions have also improved fuel efficiency by 20 to 30 percent since regulations first went into effect, according to Fahey, because less fuel escapes through the muffler.

**FOUR-CYCLE TREND.** Landscape contractors may prefer the lower weight and price of two-cycle engines, but as regulations tighten, more manufacturers have been moving toward four-cycle technology because they're able to meet emissions standards without significantly impacting performance.

"Rather than invest in two cycles, we felt everything was eventually going to have to be four cycle because it was the most economical and environmentally sound thing to do," Jensen says. "If you look at EPA and California regulations, they're getting stricter, and it will get to the point where no two-cycle engine will be available. I'm sure that's what's going to happen."

Two-cycle manufacturers are struggling with how to design a catalyst that will reduce emissions without becoming too hot. They're accomplishing this by adding sheet metal and guarding, making the product heavier and lessening its weight advantage over four cycles, explains Mike Braun, director of product development for the micro-engine unit at Briggs & Stratton, Milwaukee, Wis.

Power comparisons are also similar, according to Braun. For instance, one 34-cc four-cycle engine currently being marketed has the same or more horsepower as most 34-cc two-stroke models, Braun says.

In addition, two cycles typically spread their maximum torque over a smaller rpm range than four-cycle engines while four cycles' torque spans a broader range of lower speeds, resulting in less wear and tear on the engine's moving parts, Braun says. It also translates into improved sound characteristics.

Four cycles can also be 25 percent more fuel efficient than two-cycle engines because no fuel is used to push the exhaust gases out of the cylinder, Jensen says. Fuel may be four cycles' No. 1 selling point. Contractors top complaint about two-cycle engines is the gas/oil mixture requirement.

"One of the things that surprised us is the number of people who disliked mixing fuel," says Ann Roche, vice president and general manager of Briggs & Stratton micro-engine business unit. Eliminating gas and oil mixtures may reduce some maintenance issues related to equipment users mixing the wrong grade of oil, Braun notes.

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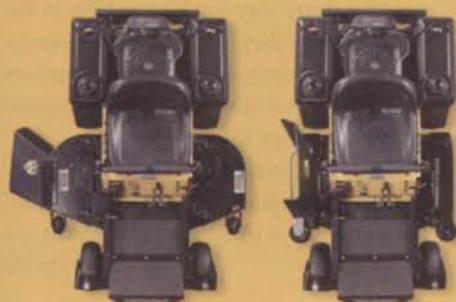


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## Special Focus: Handheld Equipment

(continued from page 142)

**TWO-FOUR PUNCH.** Some manufacturers are combining two- and four-cycle technology to comply with emissions standards. Like a typical four stroke, a hybrid features an overhead intake and exhaust valve and performs four piston strokes for each power stroke. But instead of an oil reservoir, the hybrid uses a gas/oil mixture.

No oil sump means less maintenance than typical four strokes while easily achieving the same cleaner fuel emissions identified with pure four-cycle engines, says Jay Larsen, product marketing and communications manager, Shindaiwa, Tualatin, Ore. It also reduces or eliminates the tendency that four strokes have for stalling during

multi-positioned use, according to Larsen.

Some hybrids also contain a "supercharging" chamber that helps the engine to develop more horsepower and torque compared to traditional four strokes, Larsen says.

These engines are about a half-pound heavier than two strokes and can cost approximately \$380 for a trimmer equipped with a 24-cc engine, Larsen explains, adding that hybrids run about \$20 more at retail than two-cycle engines.

Another technology recently introduced is the stratified-charged engine. This engine reduces scavenging losses by introducing fresh air into the engine between exhaust gases and a fresh air/fuel mix.

These engines can reduce emissions by about one-third of conventional two-cycle engines, according to Tommy Tanaka, marketing manager, RedMax/Komatsu Zenoah America, Norcross, Ga. These engines require slightly more parts than a two-stroke engine but less than a traditional four stroke or hybrid.

Stratified-charged engines also use a gas/oil mixture and some have larger mufflers to reduce noise levels. These engines are similar in price and power to two-stroke engines, Tanaka says.

More contractors are showing interest in stratified-charged engines because they don't require a catalytic converter, which can overheat the engine, and they don't require as much maintenance as the hybrid and standard four-stroke engines, Tanaka explains.

**REGULATORY IMPACT.** Despite more alternatives to two-cycle engines, some manufacturers say two-stroke engines are still the best option and are here to stay.

"The emissions levels, as of Jan. 1, 2005 are going to stabilize with two strokes, and we feel confident that two strokes are not going away," Fahey explains. But two-cycle engines may continue to face challenges ahead if emissions standards increase again.

"Some of the old favorites that have been used for years may not be available in the future because they just can't meet the emissions requirements, so many contractors are going to end up searching for replacement products," Fahey says.

Two-cycle manufacturers can currently meet federal requirements by adding catalysts, but Larsen says if emissions standards get

(continued on page 146)

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(continued from page 144)

# On a Smaller Scale

**L**andscape crews perform most of their lawn maintenance tasks with large commercial mowers, but many crews need smaller mowers, such as 21-inch walk-behinds, to maneuver around hard-to-reach areas.


Similar to handheld equipment, some manufacturers of these mower engines are trying to sell contractors on lighter weight and power. During the last several years, horsepower has risen from about 4 hp to 5.5 hp on some engines, according to Rock Reed, power equipment product planning and marketing manager, Honda, Alpharetta, Ga. The additional power allows contractors to plow through taller or thicker grass and provides leeway for more add-on options, Reed says. Contractors can then add features, such as twin blades, or change the air movement inside the deck with a higher lift blade, which requires more torque.

But some manufacturers are capping engine size off at 160 cc to keep mower weight down and avoid turf tracking and tearing, Reed says.

When shopping for these engines, Reed suggests asking the dealer what the life expectancy is, if the parts are easy to obtain, if there's a servicing dealer in the area for repairs and if the engine is a sleeved, which is a steel sleeve placed inside the cylinder wall that increases durability. "When you're buying a product, determine the return on investment for you," Reed explains. "You might pay more for something because you know it will last twice as long or require less maintenance."

tighter, two-cycle manufacturers will have to search for more solutions. One way two-cycle manufacturers can combat increasing costs is by earning credits from the EPA for meeting standards on other equipment they manufacture, which can then be applied toward non-compliant engines, Dibble says.

"Certainly, two stroke is not dead, but two stroke as we know it today is changing dramatically and, someday, may die off completely," Larsen says. "The simple straight-forward two-stroke engines from yesterday are gone. Replacing them are leaner-burning two strokes, which register much higher exhaust gas temperatures and are less forgiving to engine failure."

Environmentally conscious contractors, such as Klausing, may also impact the demand for more four-cycle products. "I want to see manufacturers move toward things that aren't polluting," he says. "But I know it's going to take a while because two cycles have been perfected for 20 years." 



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# Keeping Crews Handy

*Strategies for outfitting landscape crews with proper handheld equipment can reduce downtime and maximize profits.*

by Jonathan Katz

Every landscape contractor uses handheld equipment for a variety of tasks, but companies differ in how they select and outfit crews with handheld machinery.

Contractors typically make these decisions based on crew size, projected growth and personal preference. For instance, when handheld equipment is necessary, Kurt Kluznik, president, Yardmaster, Painesville, Ohio, suggests having enough to keep all crewmembers productive. Yardmaster runs between two- and three-man crews and equips them with one stick edger, at least two string trimmers and two backpack blowers. This way, more than one crewmember can trim or cleanup while the other is still mowing.

Work-A-Holics Landscape Management, Naples, Fla., tries to avoid downtime from broken equipment by outfitting crews with backup tools, says company President Cullen Walker. For two and three-man crews, Cullen supplies his employees with two stick edgers, two string trimmers, two blowers and two hedge trimmers. Cullen outfits crews larger than three with at least three of everything, he says.

(continued on page 150)



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## Special Focus: Handheld Equipment

(continued from page 148)

Similarly, Lexington, Ky.-based Klausing Group makes sure crews have enough handheld machines to keep all employees busy, says company President Roscoe Klausing. The company runs three-man crews and supplies its trucks with two backpack blowers, one stick edger and two string trimmers, Klausing says.

But unlike other companies that may have several large walk-behind, riding and push mowers, Klausing only supplies crews with one of each to maximize the company's investments. "If you look at the amount of time of mowing vs. trimming or blower use, the three handheld units take 60 to 70 percent of your time on a property even though the perception is you're mowing grass all the time," Klausing says, adding that he'd rather have a \$300 or \$400 trimmer sitting in the truck than a \$1,200 mower. "Our goal is for the mowers to be operating 100 percent of the time when we're on a property, and then everybody kind of works around the mower," says Klausing.

**WHAT TO BUDGET.** Once contractors decide how much equipment their jobs require, they can determine how much they'll spend each year on handheld products. Yardmaster spends about \$30,000 to \$40,000 each year to buy new handheld equipment for its 40-plus crews, Kluznik says, adding that he generally replaces equipment every two years. Walker buys a new piece of handheld equipment every year for his two- and

three-man crews and two new handheld machines for his five- and six-man crews, he says. He budgets about \$2,800 for his two- and three-man crews and approximately \$5,700 for five- or six-man crews.

Tom Heaviland, president, Heaviland Enterprises, budgets approximately \$15,000 each year for handheld equipment. The company determines its handheld equipment by taking into account its expected growth and equipment age, Heaviland explains. The company replaces handheld equipment every two to three years, but some items may be turned over sooner if it requires too much maintenance.

The company determines this by tracking every piece of handheld equipment with an identification number, so if the company has a trimmer that's already required \$200 in repairs, they know it's time for a replacement, Heaviland says. They do this by sticking a numbered tab on each handheld machine and then entering that number into a computer database, which shows when and where that equipment was purchased and can then be updated to show any maintenance or repairs.

Klausing spends \$4,000 annually on new equipment. He replaces 25 percent of his four crews' handheld stock annually. "We've kept track of our small tools and expenses and we know on any given year we're going to be replacing 'X' percentage of equipment, and if we're expanding we know we have to add to that budget," Klausing explains.

(continued on page 152)

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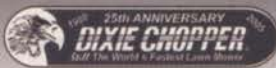
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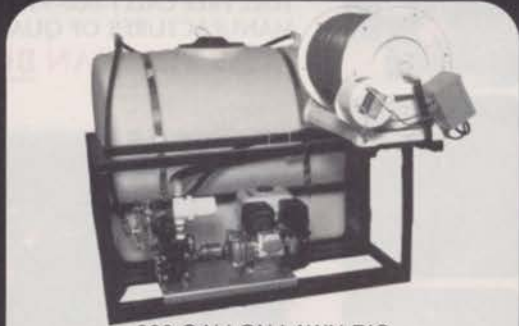


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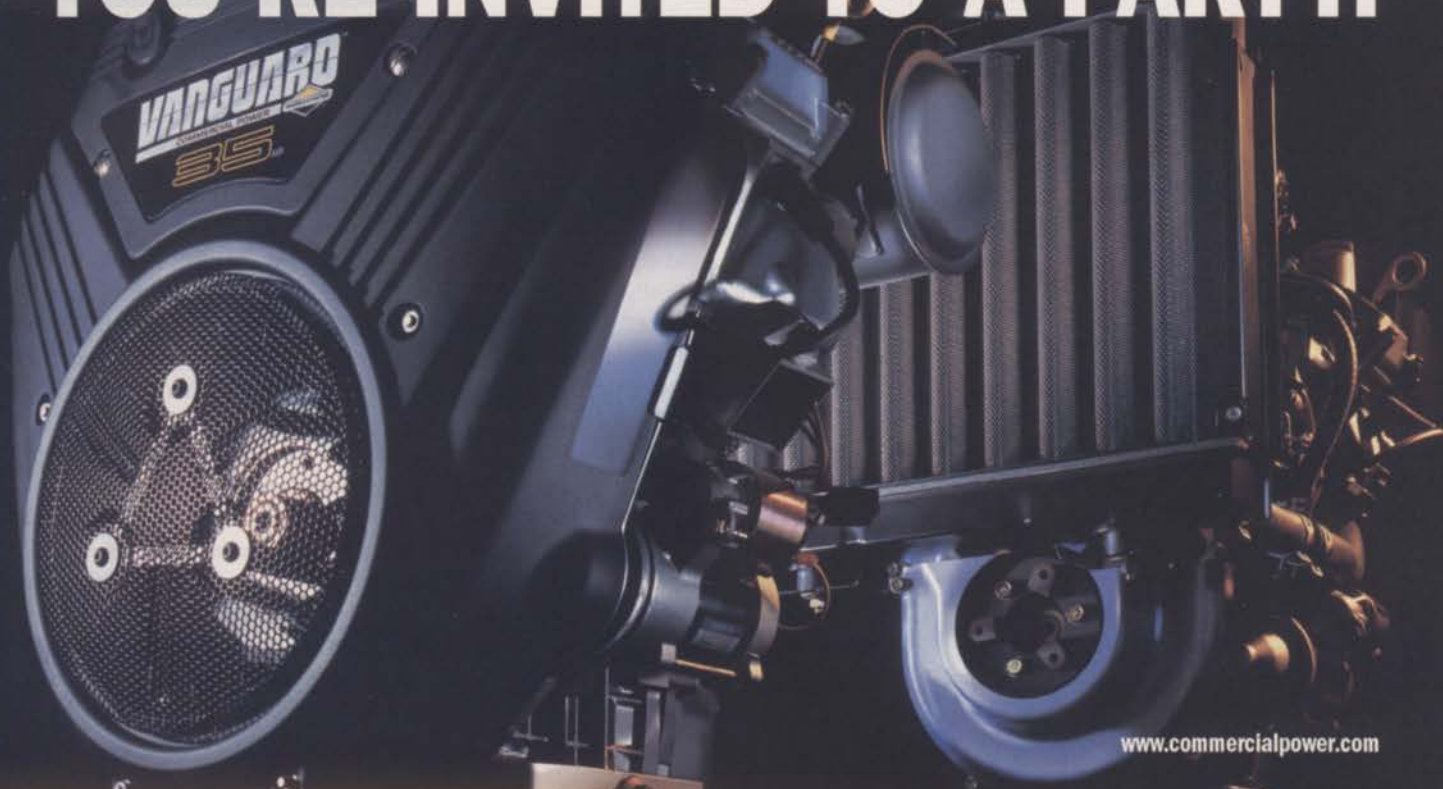


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## Special Focus: Handheld Equipment

(continued from page 150)

**BUYING TIME.** When shopping for handheld equipment, contractors should ask dealers about weight, fuel consumption, power and, of course, price, says Jim Herbert, owner, Bud Herbert Motors, Cincinnati, Ohio. Contractors may also want to inform the dealer about usage frequency and consider buying one brand for all handheld equipment.

Contractors who have detail crews who use trimmers for prolonged periods at properties such as cemeteries might want to consider four-cycle trimmers for fuel efficiency, Herbert suggests. Some of the newer four-cycle or hybrid trimmers can run twice as long on the same-sized fuel tank as traditional two cycles, according to Herbert.

Contractors could save up to \$1,000 in fuel annually if they're running trimmers all day, Herbert says. Another important consideration is weight. Backpack blowers weigh and cost more than handheld blowers, but the operator doesn't have to carry them, making the task less cumbersome dur-

ing extended use, Herbert explains. They're also more powerful – backpack blowers usually cost about double its handheld counterpart, and they're approximately 25 percent more powerful, Herbert says.

"The biggest mistake contractors make when buying handheld equipment is not spending the money initially to buy a high-quality piece of equipment," Herbert says. "Instead, they go to a box store and find a trimmer for \$100 – they're just not going to hold up, and it becomes a waste of money."

Cullen says he equips his crews with only backpack blowers because they're more powerful and easier to operate. Klausung also says weight and speed are his top concerns when shopping for handheld equipment. Klausung determines whether a handheld item is too heavy simply by lifting it.

Klausung also buys all his handheld equipment from the same manufacturer to speed up repair time. "If a manufacturer has a weak shrub and hedge trimmer, we're

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Visit the November issue of *Lawn & Landscape* Online to learn about how contractors train their crewmembers on proper handheld equipment usage.

probably not going to buy all of their hedge trimmers, so we really look for a good product across all the different types of equipment they manufacture," Klausung says.

This makes equipment maintenance easier by familiarizing the company mechanic with just one handheld product line. Some parts also are interchangeable, which can save time and money by not having to order replacements, Klausung explains.

Kluznik agrees that sticking to one brand can reduce maintenance time. "Having a consistent brand of equipment makes a lot of sense even if you're paying a little bit more for some of the pieces than you would by mixing brands," he says. "A lot of those parts are interchangeable, the fuel mix is going to be consistent, and you're going to save on downtime, repairs, maintenance, parts and inventory."

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(continued on page 156)





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## Product Spotlight

(continued from page 154)

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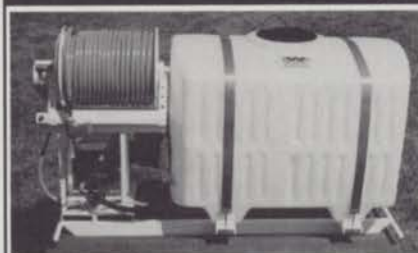
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# Mulch Ado About Something

*Mulching mowers provide an attractive and cost-effective alternative to catching, but how can landscape contractors tell if mulching is right for them?*

*by Will Nepper*



Photo: Toro

Mowers cut grass. But mulching mowers *really* cut grass. That's the primary distinction in a nutshell. But there's much more worth knowing about this particular client-pleasing powerhouse.

As parts of the country begin to pass legislation to keep grass clippings out of landfills, and environmentally conscious contractors look for cost-effective ways to fertilize, mulching mowers are beginning to take a more prominent place in the landscape market. Apart from the aesthetic appeal of the finer turf clippings they discharge, mulching mowers have also proven themselves to be a time-efficient alternative to catching, hauling and disposing.

**WHY MULCH?** The first patent on a mulching mower design was filed in 1961, according to Ruthanne Stucky, marketing director, Grasshopper, Moundridge, Kan. "When this patent expired in 1978, a couple of other companies came out with mulching models, but it wasn't until the early 1990s that mulching experienced a major resurgence," she says, pointing out that one reason for the resurgence was the dilemma of turf clipping disposal. "When landfills began increasing their tipping fees and eventually closing to landscape debris, contractors discovered the advantages of mulching. By returning clippings to the soil, they can reduce fertilizer inputs and improve the health of the turf while reducing disposal costs and the quantity of yard waste."

"Catching used to be the big thing," explains Ken Raney, advertising manager, Hustler Turf Equipment, Hesston, Kan. "People would say, 'I'll just pick it up. It looks better.' But that was before the environmental issues really began surfacing," he says. "People became more aware of the fact that when you haul that stuff away, it's just being piled into a landfill."

"Mulching leaves a better finished appearance than regular side discharge, while it's returning most of the nutrients to the soil," Raney adds.

Another related benefit of mulching turf is that it reduces thatch buildup. As Stucky explains: "Microorganisms that thrive while decomposing mulch clippings also break down adjacent thatch," she



says. "This combination of microbial activity and decomposition improves the texture and nutrient contents of the soil."

"Catching will always look better because it leaves nothing behind, but it's also a lot more labor intensive and it also removes all the nutrients in the clipped grass blade," Raney points out, adding that he's heard many contractors complain that when they catch, they also have to fertilize more often. "So there's a lot of value right there. We all want our grass to look nice, and if you don't want to catch, mulching is about the only other thing you can do."

**HOW IT'S DONE.** But what exactly does a mulching mower do that leaves a yard looking cosmetically better than it would if cut by a standard mower? Raney explains that a mulching unit chops the grass more times than a regular blade on a typical mower. "With a regular mower you could have 2-inch blades lying on the grass and the

problem with long blades is that they don't filter down between growing blades to the soil," he says. "They sit on top, dry out in the sun and look bad."

Stucky explains that discharging clippings to the side distributes longer clippings on the surface of the lawn. "However, a mower with a mulching deck cuts and recuts clippings and directs these smaller clippings downward, deep into the grass bed."

The difference between a mulching mower and a standard mower is that a mulching mower is equipped with a deck that provides that second thorough chop to the turf blades. Raney explains that most mulching decks are just a traditional deck with a pan (or restriction plate) underneath it. "It isolates each mower blade so that they are essentially like an independent mower," he says, adding that the pans deflect the grass back up into the blades to get chopped up a few more times.

Stucky explains that mulching decks are

generally purchased in the form of kits that can easily be installed on a standard mower. "They usually include shrouding, blades and a restriction plate, which are designed to work together creating the air flow that suspends clippings for repeated cutting and then discharges them down into the grass bed," she clarifies.

"There are three pans under a typical mulching deck, so to install you'd have to take the blades off, bolt the pans in there and put the blades back on," Raney describes. "And most are mid-mount machines, which means they'd have to be hoisted up to do this. So there's a lot that can go into installation and removal with the non-dedicated mulching kits but most decks can be installed fairly quickly. It might take up to two hours, but after a few times most contractors can get that installation time down to a half-hour or so."

Raney adds that some manufacturers now offer dedicated mulching decks. "There are

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## Product Trends

also catching decks that can be switched out to side discharge decks," he says.

According to Stucky, an optional mulching package costs about \$200 to \$250, dependent on deck size. Raney estimates their cost at a comparable \$150 to \$350, dependent on the manufacturer. "That's the cost of mulching components—about \$100—plus blades," he says.

However, even after a mulching deck is purchased and installed, there are still a few things to consider before hitting the turf.

**TIPS FOR SUCCESS.** While mulching is overall less labor intensive than bagging, taking a mulching deck out onto a customer's property requires some forethought and knowledge of the most appropriate conditions for mulching. For example, Stucky explains that the best results for mulching occur with

regular mowing so that not more than one-third of the length of the grass blade will be removed. "Also, sharp blades are essential, and mulching blades may require more fre-

**"THERE'S ALSO TIME SAVED WHEN MULCHING BECAUSE YOU DON'T HAVE TO EMPTY A COLLECTOR PERIODICALLY. ALSO, FEWER INPUTS ARE REQUIRED TO MAINTAIN THE HEALTH OF THE LAWN WHEN USING A MULCHING MOWER BECAUSE MOISTURE, NITROGEN AND ORGANIC MATTER THAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN REMOVED BY BAGGING ARE INSTEAD RETURNED TO THE TURF." — RUTHANNE STUCKY**

quent sharpening since clippings are cut finer and recut several times," she says.

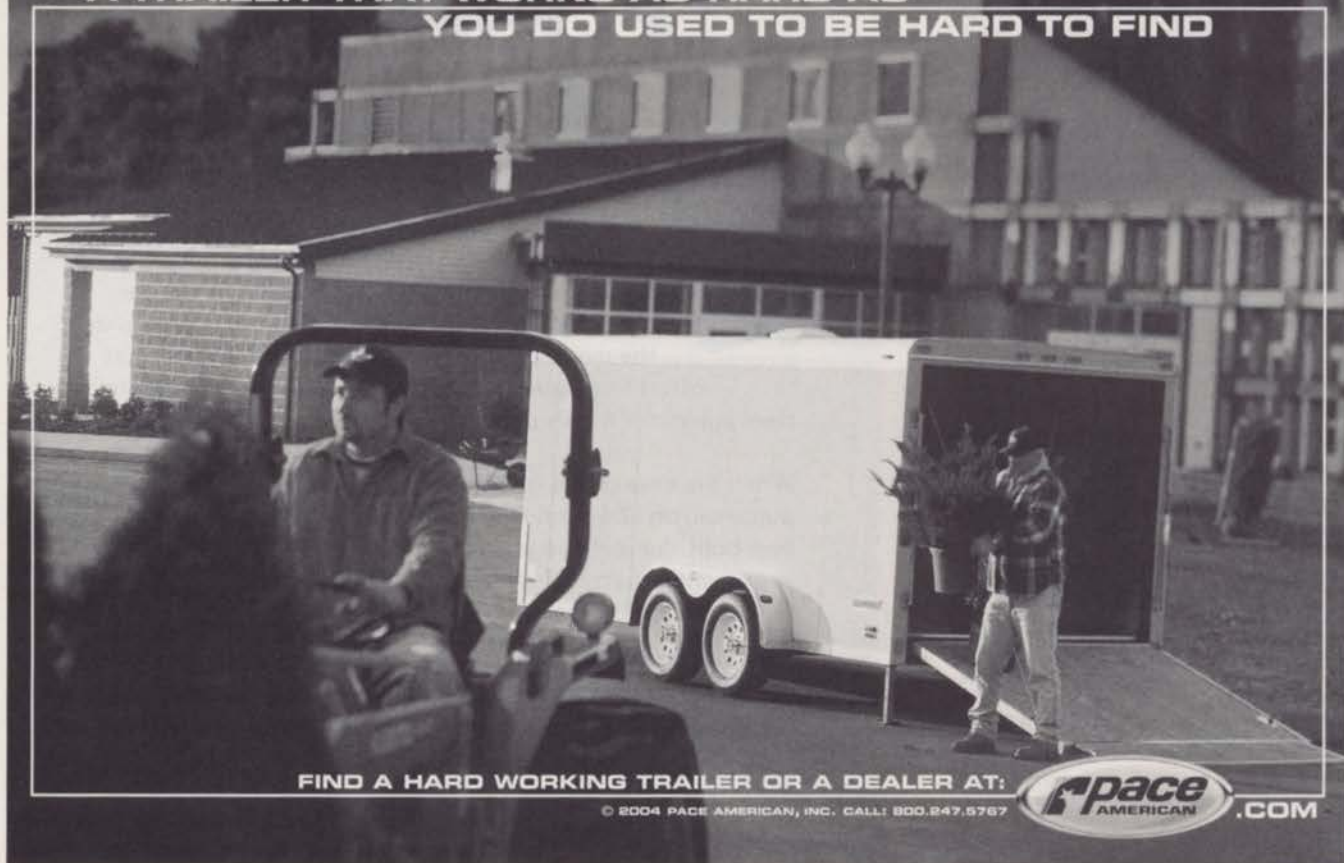
"Mowing grass about ½-inch taller than normal will aid in hiding the clippings and, incidentally, help to conserve moisture and

allow grass plants to develop a good canopy and stronger root system," Stucky instructs. She also points out that, depending on the material and the ground speed of the mower, clippings will be reduced to about 3/8-inch in length before being discharged down into the grass bed. At this size, the clippings tend to disappear into the turf. "Many people say they can't tell whether the clippings have been mulched or collected," Stucky shares. "When mulching leaves, most leaves are reduced to disappearing fragments on the first pass, but if leaves are tougher varieties or leaf cover is especially deep, they may require two passes."

Stucky also points out that mulching and collecting can be accomplished at about the same mowing speed, depending on turf conditions.

However, Raney explains that moving

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slower than one would with a side-discharging mower may be beneficial when using a mulching mower. "A mulcher uses more horsepower and, depending on the turf, you might have to slow down a little because it's holding the grass up with suction underneath the deck," he says, adding that with a mulching deck, blades have more to do and moving slower provides them the time they need. "But if you move too fast with a catcher you can get clogged up and that's no good either."

Raney also points out that this is not to say that mulching decks are clump-free. "If you are mowing straight ahead, you'll be do fine, but when you stop, they have a tendency to drop a big green donut," he says, adding that one more pass with the mower is usually enough to break up the clump and redistribute the clippings with less density.

Raney estimates mulching to be about 10 to 20 percent faster than bagging.

"There's also time saved when mulching because you don't have to empty a collector periodically," Stucky says. "Also, fewer inputs are required to maintain the health of the lawn when using a mulching mower because moisture, nitrogen and organic matter that might have been removed by bagging are instead returned to the turf."



**THE FINE PRINT.** However, mulching is not always the most appropriate way to mow. The decision to mulch often hinges on climate, location and customer preference. For instance, Stucky reports that damp conditions require a much slower ground speed, hence mulching in wet conditions is generally a bad idea. "It's best to mow later in the day so that dew has dried," she says.

In fact, in some regions mulching is significantly more difficult during the spring. "In April or May, you'd have to be mowing every three days to keep up with mulching," Raney explains. "But in hotter conditions, like in June and July, when the grass doesn't grow as fast, mulching is great."

"What the customer expects is important too," Raney continues. "If you're doing a really nice pristine property – for example, a million dollar home whose owner wants the yard to look immaculate – mulching might be a risk. Personally I'd catch in a situation like that rather than have them be upset

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## Product Trends

because there were little clumps in places where I turned or little sticks and leaves that get by without being completely mulched."

Raney believes that the popularity of mulching technology has leveled out over the past few years. "About five years ago, there was kind of a surge towards mulching and there was a lot of activity among manufacturers to have dedicated mulching decks available." He points to sporadic use across the U.S. map as one reason that mulching popularity has plateaued so quickly. "Here in Kansas they

still do a lot of catching because we don't have a problem getting rid of the clippings," he explains. "Certain other parts of the county have problems with that and have to pay to dump clippings. And there are some contractors who have their own land where they dump their clippings and then turn it over and into top soil."

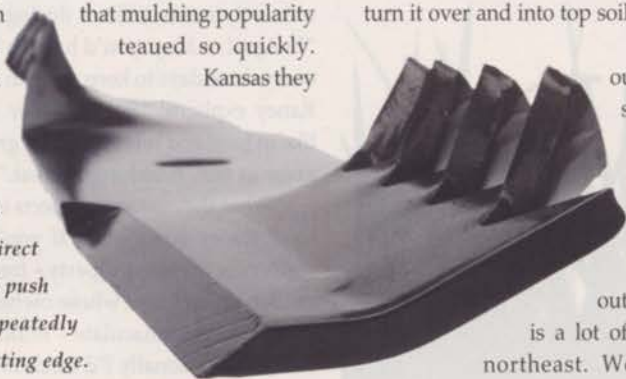
He also points out that there are some regions of the country where manufacturers simply cannot sell a mower without a catcher. "There

is a lot of catching in the northeast. We rarely sell a lawnmower in Connecticut without a

catcher," he asserts. "Florida on the other hand doesn't seem to do much catching at all. They have different kinds of grasses and tend to cut their grass higher – sometimes at up to 4 inches tall. Mulching in those conditions is not difficult because there is a lot of area for that grass to fall between the blades."

Raney points out the cold hard fact that catching will always look cleaner and more aesthetically pleasing than mulching, but that mulching is, cosmetically, the next best thing. "That's the whole point of the mulching mower – to get a finished appearance that resembles catching without the labor and without stripping the turf of extra nutrients." **LL**

Mulching blades have teeth to redirect airflow and push clippings repeatedly over the cutting edge.  
Photo: Frederick Mfg.



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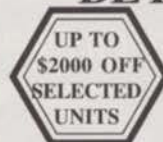
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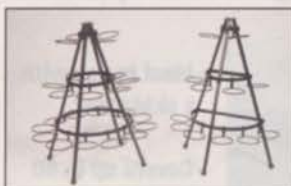


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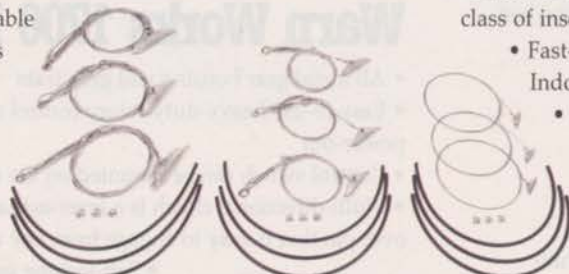


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Circle 223 on reader service form



## DuPont Advion Fire Ant Bait

- Developed to combat the red imported fire ant
- Provides control of fire ants within 24 to 72 hours after application
- Contains the active ingredient Indoxacarb that belongs to a new class of insecticide chemistry
  - Fast-action results from the metabolic activation of Indoxacarb by developing larvae within the colony
  - Activated metabolite is distributed to other members of the colony, including the queen

Circle 224 on reader service form

## Do you have a new product you'd like to see in this section?

If so, send your company name, product name, a list of the product's key features, your contact name, e-mail, Web site and address, in addition to a high-resolution color image of the product to Nicole Wisniewski, 4012 Bridge Ave., Cleveland, Ohio 44113, or e-mail this information to [nwisniewski@gie.net](mailto:nwisniewski@gie.net).

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City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

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Fax \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail Address \_\_\_\_\_

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NOVEMBER 2004

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- ☐ YES, I would like to receive/continue to receive *Lawn & Landscape* free of charge.  
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### 1. What is your primary business at this location? (choose only one)

#### I. CONTRACTOR or SERVICES

- ☐ 1. Landscape Contractor  
☐ 2. Chemical Lawn Care Company (excluding mowing maintenance service)  
☐ 3. Lawn Maintenance Contractor  
☐ 4. Ornamental Shrub & Tree Service  
☐ 5. Irrigation Contractor  
☐ 6. Landscape Architect  
☐ 7. Other Contract Services (please describe) \_\_\_\_\_

#### II. IN-HOUSE LAWN/CARE MAINTENANCE

- ☐ 8. In-House Maintenance including: Educational Facilities, Health Care Facilities, Government Grounds, Parks & Military Installations, Condominium Complexes, Housing Developments, Private Estates, Commercial & Industrial Parks

#### III. DISTRIBUTOR/MANUFACTURER

- ☐ 9. Dealer  
☐ 10. Distributor  
☐ 11. Formulator  
☐ 12. Manufacturer

#### IV. OTHERS ALLIED TO THE FIELD:

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

### 2. What services does your business offer?

- ☐ 1. Landscape Design  
☐ 2. Seeding or Sodding  
☐ 3. Turf & Ornamental Installation  
☐ 4. Bedding Plants & Color Installation  
☐ 5. Irrigation Installation

- ☐ 6. Landscape Lighting  
☐ 7. Hardscape Installation  
☐ 8. Water Features

#### Landscape Maintenance

- ☐ 9. Landscape Renovation  
☐ 10. Turf Fertilization  
☐ 11. Turf Aeration  
☐ 12. Tree & Ornamental Care  
☐ 13. Tree & Stump Removal  
☐ 14. Irrigation Maintenance  
☐ 15. Erosion Control

#### Pesticide Application

- ☐ 16. Turf Disease Control  
☐ 17. Turf Insect Control  
☐ 18. Turf Weed Control  
☐ 19. Tree & Ornamental Pesticide Application

#### Other

- ☐ 20. Mowing  
☐ 21. Hydroseeding  
☐ 22. Snow Removal  
☐ 23. Interior Landscape Services  
☐ 24. Structural Pest Control  
☐ 25. Holiday Lighting  
☐ 26. Other

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

### 4. What are your company's approximate annual gross revenues?

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

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# Ad Index

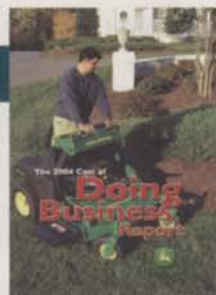
**TO INQUIRE ABOUT OUR ADVERTISERS' PRODUCTS, PLEASE SEE THE READER SERVICE CARD IN THIS ISSUE.**

COMPANY NAME	WEB ADDRESS	PG#	RS#	COMPANY NAME	WEB ADDRESS	PG#	RS#
Adkad Technologies	www.adkad.com	104	59	Lebanon Turf Products	www.lebanonturf.com	7	11
Massey Ferguson	www.masseyferguson.com	97	51	Lehman Mfg.	www.lhc-equipment.com	122	73
Altumamats	www.altumamats.com	46	30	LESCO	www.lesco.com	58	38
American Honda	www.honda.com	117	68	Line-Ward Corp.	www.lineward.com	98	53
American Isuzu Motors	www.isuzucv.com	85	45	Marcus Drake Consultants	www.marcusdrakeconsultants.com	149	95
American Roll-Off	www.americanrolloff.com	104	60	McCullough Innovations	www.mcculloughcoverup.com	170	118
Ariens/Gravely	www.gravely.com	123	74	MTD Pro	www.mtdproducts.com	143	89
Ball Horticultural	www.ballhort.com	87	48	New England Grows	www.negrows.org	141*	86
BASF	www.turfacts.com	43	27	NGK Spark Plugs	www.ngksparkplugs.com	145	91
Bayer Environmental Science	www.bayerprocentral.com	5,47,121		Novozymes Biologicals	www.novozymes.com	101	56
Blizzard Corp.	www.blizzardplows.com	158	105	Nufarm Turf & Specialty	www.us.nufarm.com	91-94,137	125,83
Bobcat	www.bobcat.com	83	43	Ohio Turfgrass Foundation	www.ohioturfgrass.org	155	101
Briggs & Stratton Corp.	www.commercialpower.com	151	98	Oldham Chemicals Co.	www.oldhamchem.com	150	97
Brite Ideas	www.sayitwithlights.com	116	67	Otterbine Barebo	www.otterbine.com	122	72
C&S Turf Care	www.csturfecquip.com	54	34	Pace American	www.paceamerican.com	162	108
Carl Black GMC	www.carlblack.com	99*	54	PBI Gordon Corp.	www.weedalert.com	133	81
Carson Industries	www.hosenclose.com	56	36	Perma Green Supreme	www.ride-onspreader.com	16-17	17
Cascade Lighting	www.cascadelighting.com	86	46	Pioneer Cover-All	www.pioneercoverall.com	124	75
Caterpillar	www.cat.com	139,157	84,104	Plant Health Care	www.planthealthcare.com	102	57
CDS John Blue	www.johnblue.com	161	107	Practical Solutions	www.theservicesolution.com	34	23
Chemical Containers		110	66	Project Evergreen	www.projectevergreen.com	159	111
Compact Power/Boxer	www.boxerequipment.com	9	12	Pro-Tech	www.snopusher.com	84	44
Compact Power/Kanga	www.kangaequipment.com	80	39	QCM International		156	103
Coxreels	www.coxreels.com	80	40	Rain Bird	www.rainbird.com	10-11,81,127	144,178
Creative Displays	www.creativedisplays.com	169	116	Real Green Systems	www.realgreen.com	164	110
Curbworld	www.curbworld.com	169	115	RND Signs	www.rndsigns.com	152	99
Cutter's Choice	www.cutterschoice.com	146	93	RotaDairon Emrex	www.mge-dairon.com	100	55
DIG Corp.	www.digcorp.com	167	112	SavaLawn	www.savalawn.com	86	47
Dixie Chopper	www.dixiechopper.com	150	96	Scag Power Equipment	www.scag.com	89	50
Dow AgroSciences	www.dowagro.com/turf	29,31,33,125		Sensible Software	www.clip.com	15	16
Drafix.com	www.drafix.com	45	29	Simplicity Mfg./Snapper	www.simplicitymfg.com	105	62
DuPont	www.proproducts.dupont.com	38-39	25	Sipcam Agro USA	www.sipcamagrousa.com	103	58
Easy Lawn	www.easylawn.com	168	113	Software Republic	www.raincad.com	118	70
Echo	www.echo-usa.com	179	119	Spraying Systems Co.		108	63
EverRide Mowers	www.everridemowers.com	109	64	Stellar Industries	www.stellar-industries.com	118	69
Express Blower	www.expressblower.com	44	28	Stihl	www.stihlusa.com	19	18
Fabricscape	www.fabricscape.com	152	100	Symbiot Business Group	www.symbiot.biz	88	49
Ferris Industries	www.ferrisindustries.com	55	35	Syngenta Professional Products	www.syngentaprofessionalproducts.com	24-25,34	20,22
First Products	www.1stproducts.com	168	114	Teletrac	www.teletrac.net	142	88
FMC Corp.	www.pestsolutions.fmc.com	57	37	Tifsport Growers Association	www.tifsport.com	40-41	26
Force America	www.forceamerica.com	136	82	Tilton Equipment Co.	www.tiltonequipment.com	52	32
Ford Motor Co.	www.ford.com	76-77		Toro	www.toro.com	2-3,105	10,62
Frog Lights	www.frog-lights.com	149	127	Tree Tech Microinjection	www.treetech.net	163	109
Garden Graphics	www.gardengraphics.com	128	79	Tuflex Mfg.	www.tuflexmfg.com	144	90
Glenmac	www.glenmac.com	140	85	Turbo Technologies	www.turboturf.com	124	76
GMC	www.gmc.com	107,135		ValleyCrest Cos.	www.valleycrest.com	119	106
GNC Industries	www.gncindustries.com	9	13	Visual Impact Imaging	www.visualimpactimaging.com	98	52
Grasshopper	www.grasshoppermower.com	147	94	Walker Mfg. Co.	www.walkermowers.com	35	24
Gregson-Clark	www.gregsonclark.com	126	77	Walla Walla Sprinkler	www.mprotator.com	53	33
Hannay Reels	www.hannay.com	82	42	Weed Man	www.weed-man.com	110	65
Hunter Industries	www.hunterindustries.com	180	120	Wells Cargo	www.wellsargo.com	146	92
Husqvarna Forest & Garden	www.husqvarna.com	48-49	31	Weisburger Insurance Brokerage	www.weisbuger.com	111	126
Hustler Turf Equipment	www.excelhustler.com	13	15	Westem Nursery & Landscape Assn.	www.wnla.org	170	117
J.J. Mauget	www.mauget.com	26-27	21	Westheffer Co.	www.westheffer.com	156	102
JRCO	www.jrcoinc.com	104	61				
Kelley Commercial Truck Center	www.isuzutruckcenter.com	141*	87				
Kohler Co.	www.kohler.com	21	19				
Kubota Tractor Corp.	www.kubota.com	129	80				

\*Denotes regional advertising. This listing provided as a service to Lawn & Landscape advertisers.

## The Cost of Doing Business Report Ad Index

COMPANY NAME	WEB ADDRESS	PG#	RS#
John Deere CUTS	www.mowpro.com	2	121
John Deere Construction	www.skidsteer.com	12	122
John Deere Landscapes	www.johndeerelandscapes.com	15	123
John Deere Commercial	www.mowpro.com	16	124





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EOE/AAP M/F/D/DV

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Web Site: www.wheats.com

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Interested candidates should submit a resume to Lawn & Landscape, 4012 Bridge Ave., Box 417, Cleveland, OH 44113. We offer a competitive salary and benefits package.

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### SALES & MARKETING MANAGER

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This is a new position and career opportunity for a proven leader with the ability to excite veteran account managers and hire/train additional sales staff. Qualified candidates will be growth-oriented and have 5+ years of successful green industry experience. Excellent communication and organizational skills with the ability to implement accountability systems is necessary. Develops, coordinates and implements year round marketing and advertising efforts. Experience with Real Green's LA3 software is desired but good facility with computers is a must. Compensation negotiable.

Check out our website at [www.tbll.com](http://www.tbll.com) then contact Clark Tomlinson 717/399-1991 for confidential handling of your inquiry.



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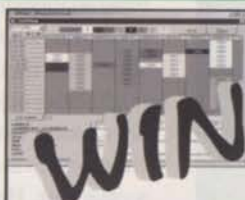
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# How We Do It

## Working with the Local News at The Chalet

In the green industry, many of us are viewed as experts in lawn care and landscaping. At Chalet in Wilmette, Ill., we've expanded that trust to a wider area of potential customers by working with our local television news.

Every two weeks, our company is featured in a gardening segment on a local news channel's morning show. Once a month, an anchor from the station's morning team comes to our facility and we broadcast live from our nursery, greenhouse or retail center. Two weeks later, our horticultural information specialist visits the station to do the morning segment live from the studio.

The news affiliate we work with broadcasts their morning show from 5 to 7 a.m. everyday. Chalet's garden segment is featured every other Tuesday and is coordinated with the weather segments because weather and landscaping are so closely connected. Our three segments are usually at 5:45, 6:20 and 6:55 a.m. However, on days when we broadcast from our facility, our horticulture information specialist meets the camera crew at 4 a.m. to unlock the facility and let them set up the cameras and satellite feed. Because the segments start so early, we always prepare the plants, materials or equipment we need for the broadcast the night before.

Depending on the season, we share information on a number of different aspects of horticulture, lawn care and landscaping. In the fall, we'll discuss topics like planting bulbs, or we may talk about core aeration and have a member of our lawn care staff demonstrate how to use an aerator.

After working with the news station for six years, the anchors and producers respect our topic choices for the segments. To keep everyone informed, we provide them with a 12-month calendar every January that lists appropriate topic ideas for each month, including indoor and outdoor topics. Broadcasting from outside can be refreshing and looks good on camera, but if the weather doesn't cooperate, we always make sure to have an indoor alternative in place about a week in advance.

For each show, the gardening segments have nine minutes of airtime, which we split into three-minute interviews. For a discussion on bulbs, we'll spend the first three minutes on bulb selection, the second three minutes on proper planting and the final three minutes on details like bloom time, fertilization and mulching. Splitting up the topics allows us to cover each aspect in sufficient detail and keeps viewers tuned in.

As a result of our work with the local news, our company has become more recognized in and around the Chicago area, and business has increased in all divisions. Customers regularly tell us they saw us on the news and want to find out more about how we can help them with their landscapes. Also, during our weekly education seminars, we survey attendees to find out how they heard about us. We have an 85-percent return rate on those surveys and 30 percent of the people who respond say they heard about us through the local news.

While we do not get paid for the garden segments we host, they also don't cost us anything. In fact, we've looked at different advertising rates for our area and determined that the nine minutes of airtime we receive every two weeks would cost us \$80,000 to \$120,000 each year if we purchased television advertising space.

Though our horticulture information specialist had existing relationships with local news organizations, these relationships are easy to create by contacting shows' producers with topic ideas that you are knowledgeable about and comfortable with. And while "stage fright" might be an objection to doing live, on-air segments, we have found that being interviewed by a television anchor is much like having a one-on-one conversation with a customer. However, through the local news, we are able to reach numerous potential customers at once and maintain our status as experts and professionals in the green industry for our area. — Jennifer Brennan

*The author is horticulture information specialist for The Chalet, Wilmette, Ill., and can be reached at 847/256-0561, ext. 225.*

### 5 KEYS TO *Working with the Local News*

1. Develop a relationship with a local news affiliate by contacting a producer at the station and offering your services and expertise.
2. Create a list of seasonal topic options and prepare to change plans in case weather moves an outdoor segment inside. Stay in touch with producers to ensure that everything remains on schedule.
3. Prepare all necessary props the night before a morning broadcast to ensure that everything is ready on time and to eliminate rushing early in the morning.
4. Conduct on-air interviews as if you're speaking to a client. This will keep you relaxed and also show your personality while letting your expertise come through.
5. Survey clients in all aspects of your business to determine the effectiveness of your on-air presentations.



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Supplement to:

# Lawn & Landscape

November 2004

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## 2004 LEADERSHIP Awards

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# 2004 LEADERSHIP Awards

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NOV 24 2004

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### 46 Maria Candler

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### 52 Kirk Hurto

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### 70 David Snodgrass

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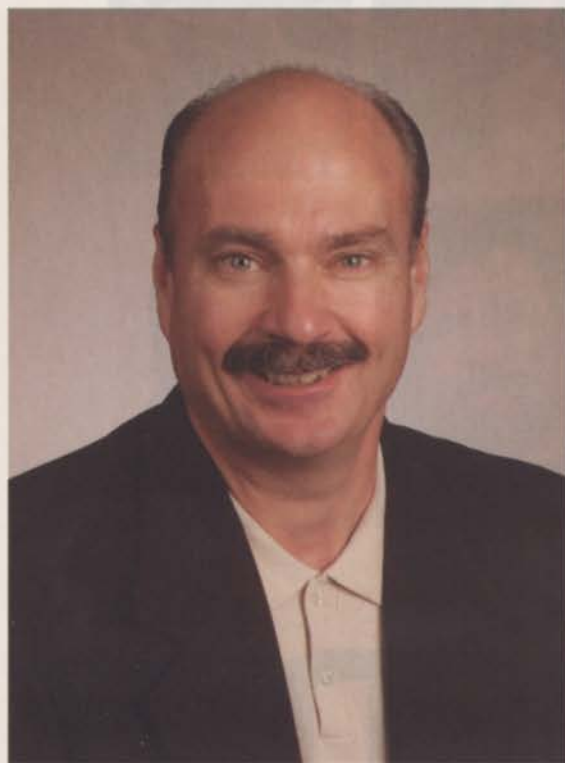
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# DELIVER What You

Part of being a leader is delivering on what you promise. Last year, I talked about how Bayer changed the structure of its sales division in order to better serve the lawn and landscape/grounds maintenance industry. When I wrote that letter we had three sales representatives in place with plans to add a key accounts manager as well as seven additional representatives. Well, we've delivered on that promise. All 10 sales representative positions are filled and Marc McNulty is locked in as our key accounts manager.

The reason we made such a concerted effort to put these experienced representatives in place was to better listen to our customers and address their needs. We're delivering on this initiative as well. Thus far, our representatives have personally sat down with more than 600 lawn and landscape professionals.



Dan Carrothers

Connecting one-on-one provides tremendous insight into how we can best support lawn care professionals. We're learning how we fit into your business in a way that is relevant, and at the same time allows us to grow. We're partnering with distributors in this grass roots strategy so that lawn care professionals view us as a resource for growing their businesses.

Although we'd like to think otherwise, the chemical decision is not first and foremost on your mind. Other concerns, such as staffing, regulatory issues, and new business, take precedence. Armed with that knowledge, Bayer is working directly with lawn care professionals to develop business plans for their particular needs and objectives. Our reps are helping to identify profit opportunities, train business owners in marketing and sales strategies, and develop add-on services, like fungicide treatments and tree care.

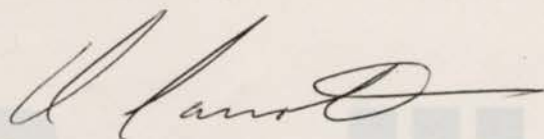


# PROMISE

On a broader scale, we continue to build demand for product and create new opportunities for your business. One of those areas where we are creating demand is preventive fire ant treatment. By growing awareness for the fire ant health threat and increasing demand for preventative treatment, Bayer has created a unique niche in the fire ant market with TopChoice™. We'll also be launching several new products next year that will help you better satisfy customer demands. And we'll continue reaching out to lawn care professionals who move this industry forward day in and day out.

The 2004 *Lawn & Landscape Leadership Award* winners profiled in this issue have also achieved success by delivering on their promises. While continuing to satisfy their customers' needs, they've raised the bar in terms of integrated pest management, ethical business administration and community contributions. All of us at Bayer congratulate each of you on a job well done.

Best wishes for a successful year,



Dan Carrothers  
*Vice President*

Chipco Professional Products, Bayer Environmental Science

**"We're learning how we fit into your business in a way that is relevant, and at the same time allows us to grow. We're partnering with distributors in this grassroots strategy so that lawn care professionals view us as a resource for growing their businesses."**



It goes without saying that good leadership is crucial to any successful business. But, what makes a good leader and how can someone develop him or herself into one if he or she is not one to begin with? Fortunately, there are many factors that contribute to fair leadership, and whether a person is a natural good leader or not, anyone can become one with a little study. Follow these tips to achieve superior leadership status.

**HAVE A FAITH.** I'm not promoting a religion of any kind, but if you have a faith, practice it. Some of the greatest leaders the world has ever known have said that what sustained them, more than anything else, in their greatest times of stress and danger was their faith.

**GIVE BACK.** As the years roll along you'll start to accumulate assets, and the daily struggle to make it to payroll will begin to lessen. Some people respond to this by working harder to accumulate more. Others will start to take occasional time off, take up a hobby, spend more time with family and friends and enjoy the fruits of their labor. Yet for others, a need to help people in less fortunate circumstances will arise.

They have a desire to give back to the community some of their good fortune. It's not a matter of throwing an extra \$5 in the collection plate on a Sunday. In fact, giving back isn't always about money as much as it is about sharing your time and your life experiences – your basic desire – to help someone. Some examples of this could include helping a needy family man find a job, helping a Salvation Army food kitchen feed the homeless, mentoring a young man or woman who has promise but doesn't have the life experience to succeed or volunteering your time to a worthwhile cause.

By Ted Tate

There is something you

should know however. If you are looking for people to make a big deal out of your kindness and generosity, you may be disappointed. Sometimes all you get is a mumbled "Thanks" or maybe nothing. If you can accept that many people in this world, even if they are very appreciative, don't know how to show their appreciation, then allow the very act of your kindness to be its own reward.

You won't know how you'll feel until on some cold, miserable night, you crawl into your warm bed and know that somewhere, some person in this world is better off because they crossed your path.

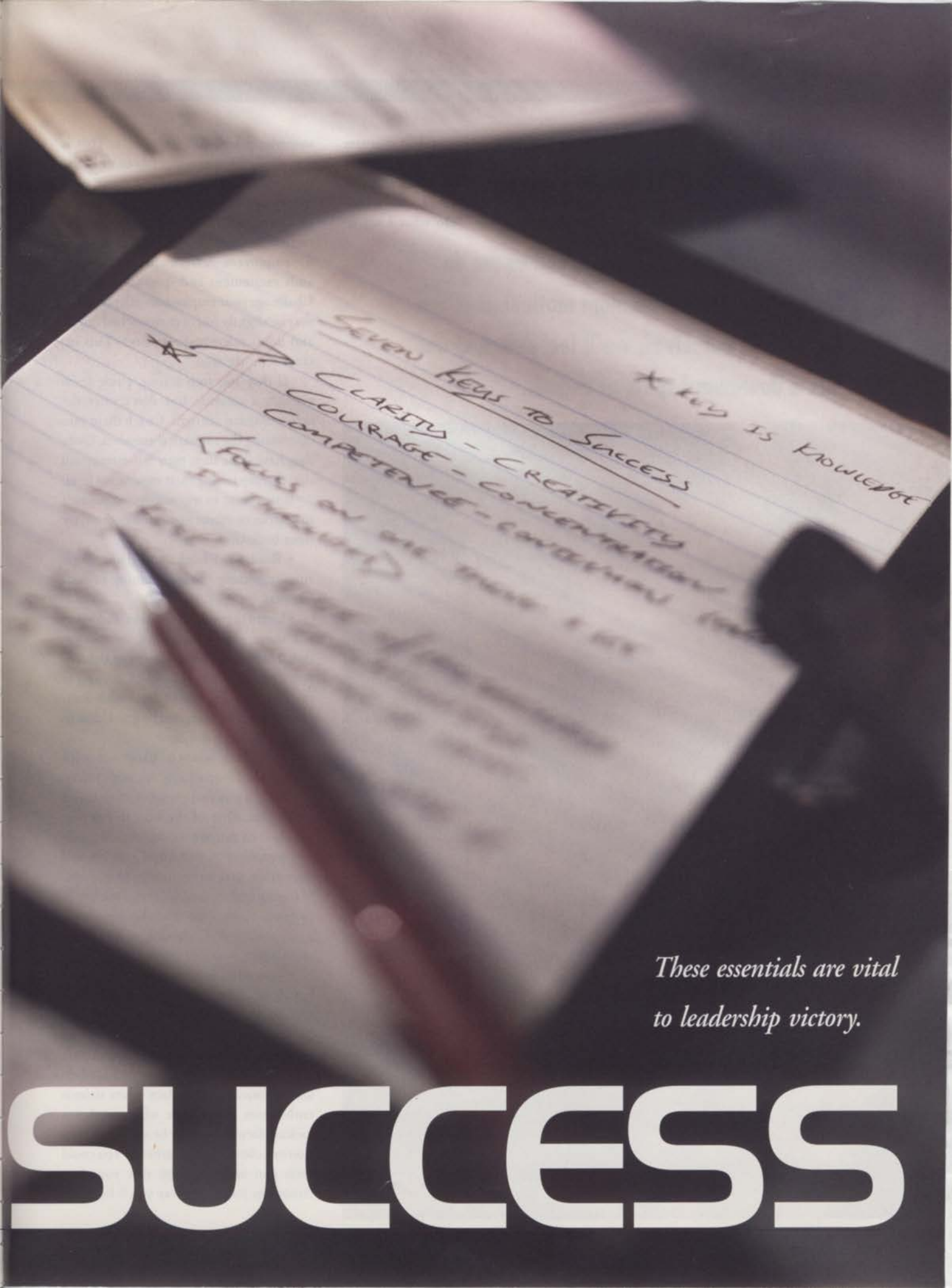
**BE CREDITABLE.** This is very simple – as a leader, you must be a man or woman of your word. Never go back on promises to either employees or customers. Don't vacillate on making decisions. If you are one of those people who fear making a decision because you might be wrong, get over it. Consider all possibilities and make your best guess as to the right course of action promptly. Otherwise to those around you your indecision will look to be a weakness and you will quickly lose their respect.

**COMMUNICATE PROPERLY.** To effectively become a good leader or manager, you must be a good communicator. When communication occurs, as a leader you should be able to accurately convey your ideas and thoughts to those who work for you. In fact, simply being able to convey these things in the first place, much less accurately, puts you in the right direction for leadership. If employees have no idea what is on your mind, your leadership is going to falter. Employees typically are not mind readers.

If there is a problem a certain employee is experiencing, good communication can filter the problem out. You, as a leader, can dissect the problem and offer solutions in various ways. Ideas that are given to employees work both ways, as well. Employees can give helpful feedback and generate new

# Skills for





Seven Keys to Success

X key is Knowledge

★ → CLARITY - CREATIVITY  
COURAGE - CONCENTRATION  
COMPETENCE - CONFIDENCE  
Focus on one thing & do it  
it through

*These essentials are vital  
to leadership victory.*

# SUCCESS



ideas to you that help the company when good communication is present.

**MOTIVATE OTHERS.** Motivation is another variable that plays into good

leadership. Employees tend to stagnate when motivation decreases – and it will decrease if ignored. Many leaders try to motivate the old-fashioned way, which is through fear (i.e. “Do what I say or

something bad will happen.”). This is not advisable, since it tends to only deliver short-term results and cause even less competent work in the long run, due to resentment resulting from the fear tactics. Instead, try adding challenges for employees. A fresh challenge always adds excitement and spawns creativity. Challenge your employees with tasks that may be slightly out of their normal range, and don’t micromanage them. This increases motivation.

If they run into a snag, guide them towards a solution but don’t offer the actual solution outright. Coach them into discovering the solution themselves. Once they have done that, their self-esteem will rise, thereby raising their motivation level.

If you want to stay motivated yourself so you can continue to motivate others, try these basic tips:

- Read good books and trade magazines, especially those pertaining to your business.
- Listen to good information. Get yourself some good educational or motivational tapes or CDs and listen to them as you drive to work. Instead of arriving at the office all aggravated from rush hour traffic, you’ll be energized by good ideas to make it through the day.
- I believe winners hang out with winners and losers hang out with losers. Maintain a positive group of friends and colleagues. One of the best things you can do is to surround yourself with positive people who will build you up and encourage you to pursue your dreams. Hanging out with people who see life in negative terms – people who are always complaining and whining – will bring you down.
- Join a business organization – not a bunch of them – just one that reflects success. I suggest that you join only one because unless you can attend the meetings on a regular basis and get involved, there is no point. Seek a place where the members are now successful. A place where there is enthusiasm and people who are always looking forward. It may be a trade association or a chamber of commerce. You could even join an association that your best customers join. That way you’ll be meet-

**We have to discipline ourselves, and as we do, we’ll find that we become more motivated. If we don’t discipline ourselves, we’ll feel defeated and fall into a downward spiral of despair.**





ing prospective customers every time you attend a meeting.

For instance, a friend of mine sells commercial burglar and fire alarm systems. My friend could have joined his local trade association, but there he would only be among competitors. Instead, he opted to join a local chapter for a national association of security directors – most being from large corporations. He said at first it was slow going, but he persevered, got involved in a couple of committees and started to make friends at the monthly luncheons. He often found himself making small talk with corporate leaders of numerous big corporations. Knowing what he did for a living, they'd sometime ask his advice. Often it would lead to an invitation to stop by their office and discuss this in greater detail. He reported he had sold thousands of dollars in new business to these corporate giants. These, he said, were the same executives he could never even get a call through to, let alone an appointment.

**TWO HEADS ARE BETTER THAN ONE.** Teamwork is always something to consider when striving to become a good leader. This means not only teaching your employees to work together but to become part of the team yourself. Use others potential. Many times, employees potential is wasted. A good leader recognizes that his or her employees are more than just employees—they are people too. These people have lives outside of work where they have to make decisions on a daily basis, from how to deal with house and car payments, to raising children to countless everyday tasks. Yet, at work, their decision making skills are not trusted enough to choose what type of toner needs to be ordered for a set of printers.

The point here is that employees need to be trusted to do more. A good leader doesn't manage every single detail. Use others' potential to your benefit. You will find that you have become a better leader for it.

**BACK TO SCHOOL.** As always, increasing your education is definitely a good thing when trying to improve leadership,

# 7 Leadership Rules To Live By

**Rule No. 1 – The world is full of leaders who say one thing, and do another.** Do what you say you will do – every time and in every instance.

**Rule No. 2 – Begin and end meetings on time.** Let's say you're a leader, and you have 30 people come to a weekly meeting. If you start that meeting 15 minutes late and end 15 minutes late, you've just wasted 15 man-hours of work. Sure, maybe you've got time to burn – but some of those people may actually be doing something. Meetings are a necessary evil, but they really shouldn't be too evil.

**Rule No. 3 – Be worthy of your team.** If you hire great people, they deserve a great leader to motivate them. If you're not good enough, have the decency to either make yourself better or get out of the way for someone who can. Be as great a person as you are capable of. Be worthy of the team of individuals who follow you. You will never be able to do everything – and you shouldn't try to be all things to all people – but you should be the best person you are capable of becoming.

**Rule No. 4 – Set grand goals and then shoot for them.** People expect their leaders to set goals – mainly because they don't set goals themselves. Set a target to hit, and then shoot for the target.

**Rule No. 5 – Give credit where credit is due.** Some leaders take all the credit when things go well – and place all the blame on their associates. Truly effective leaders give praise where it's due – and although they may share the blame, they do it in an effective, positive way.

**Rule No. 6 – Lead.** Seems stupid to say it, but it's a common mistake. I like the line that's attributed to Chester Nimitz: "When you're in command, command." Too many would-be leaders never get down to the business of leading. Start out toward your destination, and expect people to follow you. If they respect you, they'll follow. If they don't follow, you either haven't explained the destination clearly enough or they don't consider you worthy of being a leader.

**Rule No. 7 – Take control of your time and your life.** One of the best ways to motivate yourself is take a time management course. You'll learn how to get more done every day. You'll also learn how to control interruptions, avoid time-wasting habits and people and reducing the daily stress of always rushing to keep up.



but the school that really needs to be brought at attention here is the kind of school that you don't get a degree for.

Take the time to learn as much about your position of being a leader as possible. Do some reading at the nearest bookstore or library. Talk to other leaders and see how they do things; trade notes. The more you continually evaluate yourself and your practices and search for as much information on leadership as possible, the more you will be able to keep up with the changing times and the better leader you will be for it.

#### **FOCUS CLEARLY ON YOUR GOALS.**

Be able to say, "I know where I am going and what I want to accomplish. My goals are firmly rooted in my mind and heart. Because of this, my mind and heart are in an attitude of motivation all of the time. I want to hit my goals and since they are present in my heart and mind, I put my energies into them."

Have you actually put your goals in writing, along with an action plan and timetable for achieving them? Only about 10 percent of us do that. The rest will tell you they have some vague idea in their head, but for the most part their goals are really daydreams. Unless you can put it in writing, it's really not a serious or achievable goal.

**DISCIPLINE YOURSELF.** We have to discipline ourselves, and as we do we'll find that we become more motivated. If we discipline ourselves, it gives us wins and victories, which make us feel good and motivate us for further action. If we don't discipline ourselves, we'll feel defeated and fall into a downward spiral of despair.

*The author is a sales training expert. He offers additional free sales and time management tips at [www.trainingexpert.com](http://www.trainingexpert.com).*

## **Principles of Leadership**

Follow these 11 key principles, to become a solid, secure leader.

- 1. Seek self-improvement.** This means continually strengthening your best attributes through reading, self-study, classes, etc.
- 2. Be technically proficient.** As a leader, you must know your job and have a solid familiarity with your employees' jobs.
- 3. Take responsibility for your actions.** Search for ways to guide your organization to new heights. And when things go wrong, do not blame others. Analyze the situation, take corrective action and move on to the next challenge.
- 4. Make sound and timely decisions.** Use good problem-solving, decision-making and planning tools.
- 5. Set the example.** Be a good role model for your employees.
- 6. Know your people and look out for their well-being.**
- 7. Keep your people informed.** Know how to communicate with your employees, seniors and other key people within the organization.
- 8. Develop a sense of responsibility in your people.** Develop good character traits within your people that will help them carry out their professional responsibilities.
- 9. Ensure that tasks are understood, supervised and accomplished.**
- 10. Train your people as a team.** Although many so-called leaders call their organization a team, they are not really teams – they are just a group of people doing their jobs.
- 11. Use your organization's full capabilities.** By developing a team spirit, you will be able to employ your organization to its fullest capabilities. – Donald Clark





# The COMMUNICATION Cycle

A photograph of a woman with dark hair tied back, wearing a light blue cardigan over a white top and dark pants. She is looking down at a folder held by another person whose face is partially visible on the left. The background is a blurred office setting.

*True company leaders master the art of employee communication. These tips can help any business owner become a flawless communicator.*

How important is it to keep the lines of communication open between you and your employees? It's imperative – if you want them to support the company's mission and goals and to perform to your expectations.

Regular and relevant communication from the top down – and vice versa – results in employees feeling a strong sense of identification with and a connection to the company. This is the very foundation of employee loyalty and team spirit. A lack of connection, on the other hand, can breed uncertainty, distrust and alienation that frequently results in costly turnover. Today, with technological advances, such as e-mail, voice mail and teleconferencing, you have more means than ever before to keep

in regular touch with employees. But technology also can be a barrier to communication, if you rely on it too much.

When necessary, use it as a fast, efficient way to connect. Never forget the value of more personal – including face-to-face – communication.

You might think you have great communication within

By Ted Tate



your company, but would your employees agree? If you want to know how to improve communication, ask them. Chances are they're just waiting for the opportunity to tell you.

You might discover that employees feel they need more of the kind of information that allows them to do their jobs well. They may want clearer instructions for

handling certain tasks or deeper insight into how the work they do contributes to company goals.

Most employees would appreciate knowing: "How is my company doing? What are management's short- and long-range plans? Are we in good financial health?" If your employees indicate they want this information, share it, unless you

have a very good reason not to. Putting them in the picture will pay off in goodwill and productivity.

Many employees have great ideas for solving problems or improving processes that could boost your business. But you won't hear about those ideas if people think you aren't interested. They might also be afraid they'll be penalized for over-





stepping their bounds if they pass their ideas on to management.

Employees need to feel it's safe to speak up. They need to know that their ideas will be welcomed and valued. This communicative culture must be cultivated. Simply inviting employee feedback isn't enough. What you do with it will determine whether that flow of information continues. You

must respond promptly and positively. Otherwise, the feedback will stop as employees realize you don't really mean it when you say, "We want to hear your ideas!"

Don't be offended when employees challenge the way things are done in the company. Trust that they're speaking out in good faith. If an employee says, "Every second customer complains that this form is too complicated and takes too long to fill out," don't respond with, "Tell them that's just the way we do it here." Instead say, "I'm glad you brought this up; we obviously need to make some changes. I'd like to hear your ideas."

**SPEAKING SOLUTIONS.** Effective speaking is a plus in the business world. The higher you progress in a company, the more crucial this skill becomes. In today's business environment, the ability to speak in public is the norm for senior executives. Even if you are not a senior executive explaining a crisis to a group of managers or investors, you often will find yourself speaking before peers in your day-to-day responsibilities.

As a small business owner, you may speak for a living – in the sense that you may talk to customers and clients daily to sell your products or services. Your speak-

ing success relates directly to your bottom-line.

We all know that it is not necessarily the brightest or most capable who get ahead. Often it is those who make a strong impact on people who end up in positions to buy from them. People who speak well generally are considered more intelligent, forceful and respectable than their quieter counterparts.

Outside the business world, you will find chances to put your speaking skills to use at club fund-raisers, on political issues, at farewell gatherings for departing colleagues and friends, and on behalf of non-profit organizations and causes.

Speaking well is a must for the successful individual and particularly for the successful business owner. There are a couple of books by Dale Carnegie, that will vastly improve your communication skills. These two books were written in the 1930s and have been in print continuously since. Most local bookstores as well as [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com) carry these.

• ***How to Win Friends and Influence People* by Dale Carnegie** – This book alone has sold more than 15 million copies and is still a best seller. I read it when I took the Dale Carnegie Course many years ago and I must tell you I often find myself applying the principles from this book

## Communication 101

When communicating person-to-person, remember these basics:

- **Listen attentively.** Don't multitask or let your mind wander. They'll see your inattention for what it really is – a sign that, "I don't have time for you."
- **Offer praise.** When employees do a great job, tell them so – and thank them for their contribution to the company.
- **Know when to say you're sorry.** Admit when you're wrong or make a mistake. Nothing is more effective in winning your employees' trust and respect.
- **Stay cool, calm and collected under pressure.** Never be drawn into emotional conflicts. If your company already is very good at communicating through one medium – say, e-mail – using an additional (different) medium for an especially important message will ensure that it is heard.
- **Ask your employees, "How would you improve communication within our company?"** Then listen carefully to the responses and seriously consider putting the most viable into action.





today. I have never encountered anyone who read it and didn't praise it to high heaven – anyone in sales, any manager, any business executive or business owner, anyone who deals in any way with the public will benefit from these books. The book is in paperback from Pocket Books, and its ISBN number is 0671723650.

• *The Quick and Easy Way to Effective Speaking* by Dale Carnegie – This is one of the finest books ever written on the topic. It is easy reading and it shows you how to make your speaking simple and highly effective. This book is in paperback from Pocket Books, and its ISBN number is 0671724002.

Another way to learn effective speaking

skills is to check out Toastmasters in your community, which is a national organization with chapters all over the country of people who want to improve their public speaking and communication skills. Not only is it fun, it gives you the chance to practice your communication skills in a positive and learning atmosphere. Their Web site, [www.toastmasters.org](http://www.toastmasters.org), will give you the locations of their various chapters.

**LISTENING LOGIC.** The secret to being a good listener is to focus on what is being said. Too many people only listen to the first few words, then tune out as they think up a rebuttal of some sort. Big mistake.

Listening means the difference between making or losing a sale, gaining or losing a client, motivating or discouraging a team, mending or destroying an employee relationship, etc. Not a passive state of mind, listening is the beginning to all successful business activity.

Listen to others as you try to understand where the other person is coming from, stay focused on the issue without being defensive or making excuses. Keep an open mind. It's amazing how many problems are created in business and our home lives because we fail to see someone else's side.

**WRITE IT DOWN.** Everything official sooner or later gets written down. Unfortunately, to the small business owner most of the difficult writing or at least reviewing of others drafts ends up on your desk – large customer proposals, important supplier agreements, strategic partnerships, policy statements, press releases to the public, letters to investors, etc. What you say is what you get. It has to be clear, concise and correct.

One of the most common forms of business communication is e-mail. Some people think because it's fast it's not very important how well it's written. In the business world today, some folks just type as they think, often using all lower case letters and including badly misspelled words – even the common ones, as well as poor paragraph skills or just running paragraphs all together.

In business, many of your clients or prospective clients will expect to hear from you by e-mail. And how well or how poorly you communicate may well determine how much business you do. If your letter writing skills are poor, there are many high schools and colleges that have inexpensive evening and weekend continuing education classes for adults. Remember that many people will never see you or your facility, so they will be forced to make a decision to do business with you based upon what you write. Consequently, you must learn to write well.

**LEAD A MEETING.** Meetings can kill many hours a week for even the best time

## Employees' Communication Responsibilities

Make sure that employees clearly understand:

- What is expected of them. What kind of job standards and accomplishments they will be measured by.
- How free they are to make decisions without checking with a higher authority.
- It is equally important for managers to be good listeners. Listen with an open mind – and say, "Thanks" – when employees pass along complaints from customers or clients. Welcome this feedback as an opportunity to make changes that could help your business grow.
- Relationship building helps employees to communicate more freely with each other and helps them feel more comfortable in communicating with supervisors and managers. Connect personally with all of your employees. Don't be the distant boss everyone is too intimidated to approach. Don't make the, "You're fired" meeting be the only face-to-face meeting you ever have.
- Make direct eye contact and acknowledge people when you're walking down the hall or sharing the elevator. Learn something about their personal background so you can ask, "How's that grandson of yours?" or "How's your team doing in the league this year?"
- Contribute a regular column to the company newsletter. Remind readers of the company's mission and goals, and draw attention to how individual or team projects are "making it happen." Share success stories. Let everyone know the company had record sales this month or won an industry award. Post the good news on bulletin boards or announce it at staff meetings. Send personal letters of praise and appreciation to employees for special achievements, contributions to the company or outstanding work on a project.



manager. Business owners meet with clients to sign the big contract, meet with suppliers to negotiate better terms, brainstorm with their own teams to set up strategies for the next quarter or year, and lead staff meetings to tackle day-to-day issues. How well they lead determines who follows and what they achieve – either time wasted or valuable outcomes.

Some of the time wasted at meetings is caused by poor or no specific agendas. Whoever is in charge should create an agenda in writing and send it out in advance so those attending can be prepared.

To facilitate meetings for effective results:

- Set a time limit for meetings and stick to it no matter what. People will love you for that and you'll find if your meetings really end when you say they will, people will be more enthusiastic about attending and precipitating.

- End the practice of people getting pages and phone calls during a meeting,

especially if they return them. Make a rule that these items must be left outside or turned off. Nobody, no call is so important that it can't wait until the meeting ends. Also, stop people from going in and out of the meeting constantly except for bathroom breaks.

- Keep anyone who doesn't belong out. You are not in the entertainment business.

- Have a written agenda distributed in advance to attendees.

- When people speak on topics other than the agenda ask them to hold their comments until the end of the meeting or another meeting more appropriate. Don't allow people to drag out meetings with all kinds of extraneous material.

- Don't rehash old items over and over unless there is something new.

- Don't procrastinate on coming to a decision at another meeting – get the business finished now.

- Ask people to turn off pagers and phones and certainly not to conduct busi-

ness on a phone call during a meeting.

- Don't allow people to hog the floor while others sit silently – everyone should have an opportunity to speak.

- Don't hold meetings at all if issues can be dealt with by e-mails or phone calls. Some people become insecure in their job and want the reassurance of a group decision when they should simply make a decision on their own.

- When someone from the meeting is given an assignment, give them a specific deadline to complete the task and confirm that they really have the time. The person who facilitates the meeting should check on the progress of the assignment about half way to the due date. Sometimes people will accept assignments to feel important even if they are taking on more than they can accomplish.

*The author is a sales training expert. He offers additional free sales and time management tips at [www.trainingexpert.com](http://www.trainingexpert.com).*

## Barriers to Communication

Anything that prevents message understanding is a communication barrier. Many physical and psychological barriers exist, such as:

**Culture, background and bias** – We allow our past experiences to change the meaning of the message. Our culture, background and bias can be good as they allow us to use our past experiences to understand something new; it is when they change the meaning of the message that they interfere with the communication process.

**Noise** – Equipment or environmental noise impedes clear communication. The sender and the receiver must both be able to concentrate on the messages being sent to each other.

**Ourselves** – Focusing on ourselves, rather than the other person can lead to confusion and conflict. The "Me Generation" is out when it comes to effective communication. Some of the factors that cause this are defensiveness (we feel someone is attacking us), superiority (we feel we know more than others), and ego (we feel we are the center of the activity).

**Perception** – If we feel the person is talking too fast, not fluently, does not articulate clearly, etc., we may dismiss the person. Our preconceived attitudes can affect our ability to listen – we listen uncritically to persons of high status and dismiss those of low status.

**Message** – Distractions happen when we focus on the facts rather than the idea. Our educational institutions reinforce this with tests and questions. Semantic distractions occur when a word is used differently than you prefer. For example, the word chairman instead of chairperson, may cause you to focus on the word and not the message.

**Environmental** – Bright lights, an attractive person, unusual sights or any other stimulus can provide a potential distraction.

**Smothering** – We take it for granted that the impulse to send useful information is automatic. Not true! Too often we believe that certain information has no value to others or they are already aware of the facts.

**Stress** – People do not see things the same way when under stress. What we see and believe at a given moment is influenced by our psychological frames of reference – our beliefs, values, knowledge, experiences and goals.

These barriers can be thought of as filters, that is, the message leaves the sender, goes through the above filters and is then heard by the receiver. These filters muffle the message. And the way to overcome filters is through active listening and feedback. – Donald Clark





## IT'S ABOUT knowing YOU COME FIRST

These days it seems the term "customer service" has almost become an oxymoron. As customers, we've become all too familiar with the runaround. But at Bayer we don't run from problems, we run to them. We have the only sales and tech support team solely dedicated to the green industry. Recognizing different customer needs, we dedicate sales and marketing staff to lawn care operators, grounds managers, superintendents and formulators. They'll come out and get their knees dirty to help sort out whatever problem you're facing. To learn more, call 1-800-331-2867 or visit [BayerProCentral.com](http://BayerProCentral.com).

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Bayer Environmental Science



it's not about  
WHO'S TO BLAME





*Keeping a balance  
between work and  
home life can help  
business leaders stay  
on solid ground.*

**A** Are you a small business owner? Do you work for a large organization? Or perhaps you work for a medium-sized company? No matter, in all areas of business today, the workload seems to keep increasing and the days seem to continue shrinking for many working Americans.

In the high pressure of our busy, fast-paced society, it is often easy to lose one's perspective. Too often, we are controlled by our jobs and careers instead of controlling them. We somehow come to believe that there is something noble about working too many long, hard hours while ignoring our personal and recreational lives. That's a bad trap to fall into.

It is important to remember that the distinction between our personal and professional lives is only in our minds. We have one life with a limited number of years, weeks, days and minutes. How we invest this precious time can make all the difference. Most of us have intense schedules with lists or day planners that budget every moment throughout the day. We have tasks that demand our attention that we struggle to find time to deal with. In this environment, our recreational time or personal time often gets relegated to whatever is left over. Unfortunately, too often there is no time left over, and we find

ourselves getting rundown and burned out.

What is even worse is that

By Ted Tate

# Balancing







# BASICS



some employers will encourage employees to stay late and come in early, making comments, such as, "You are not keeping pace with others" or "We have to get these items completed and we need your help to be more of a team player." Somehow they indicate that work isn't getting done and that it's your responsibility to make it happen. But this is a big lie.

Many companies are cutting back their work forces to make more money and then squeezing employees to work harder. If you go to your work every day and allow the job to control your time instead of you controlling your time, you may find that your work will take every bit of time, effort and energy

you have – and maybe a little bit more. In any job, there is always more to do and something awaiting your attention.

You have got to ask yourself these critical questions:

1. What if I don't do this now?
2. What if I don't do this at all?
3. Is this my project or priority or is it someone else's?
4. Is this activity critical to get me from where I am to where I want to be?
5. Can anyone accomplish this task other than me?

The truth is that we need to apply at least as much focus and energy to our personal and recreational time as we do to

**Think of a positive reward you can give yourself for finishing a big project. The reward can be taking a nature walk, leaving work 15 minutes early or taking a weekend getaway.**

our business and professional lives. Hopefully, you have a maintenance schedule for your car, your home appliances, etc.

These are important because they help us take care of valuable, expensive equipment; however, your most valuable equipment is you. Recreation, vacation and personal time are critical to your success. You may find that you can get more done in less time if you took care of your own mental and physical health than if you continuously worked overtime and didn't maintain your own equipment.

As you go through your day today, be sure to enjoy your work and plan your fun.

**ALL WORK AND NO PLAY.** People who can't do anything but work will never find what they want the most – a happy life. They substitute work at all hours for relationships with people because they fear failure except at work, where they feel successful. I know a guy who is a millionaire many times over, and owns several office buildings and other properties. He's been divorced for more than 20 years, his grown children live thousands of miles away and he constantly refuses opportunities to date. He never accepts invitations to spend holidays with people. He's completely alone and all he has is his business. He goes to his office to work seven days a week, holidays included.

So there he sits, alone in a huge, empty office building on holidays, working hard at making money he doesn't need and could never spend. If this isn't sad, even pathetic, I'm not sure what would be.





To avoid this man's fate, take breaks at work as often as possible, even if it's just for five minutes. Listen to some music you enjoy. Get up from your desk and stretch a little. If you work under artificial light, go outside in the sunshine for some Vitamin D therapy. At lunch time, even if you bring your lunch, don't eat inside. Instead, go to a park or open area in good weather. In bad weather, just sit in your car and enjoy the radio as you eat.

Schedule a vacation well in advance so you are sure to take it and don't use the excuse that you're just too busy to get away. When you do take your vacation, consider leaving your cell phone and laptop at home and check in with the office only periodically if necessary. If you can't relax, what's the point of a vacation?

#### CREATE SYNERGY BY PARTNERING.

Partnering means working with others toward a mutual goal. Look within your organization for people with whom you can align and from whom you can learn. If you can't identify anyone in your organization, look outside to mentoring groups, professional organizations and business development groups.

When partnering, you discuss everyone's assignments, understand the role of the process, challenge each other, respect each other and get ideas from each other. Since each person has both strengths and weakness, look for supportive partners who have different skills and talents from yours so you can generate new and better ideas than you would have alone. Allow other people's good ideas to motivate you; it can be invigorating.

**DON'T ALLOW PEOPLE TO SABOTAGE YOUR LIFE.** Do you know anyone in life who sees the negative side consistently? Even if you get a promotion or close a big deal, tell them and they'll be happy for you for a few minutes, then they will slowly start to point out the negative side and all of the things that might go wrong. On and on they'll speak, draining the joy and happiness you feel until you began to wonder if your news is really any good at all.

It's tough when these people are close to you, maybe your mother or father,

brother or sister, husband or wife, etc. It's difficult to challenge them and, of course, it's easy to get into a fight with people so close to you which of course makes you feel even worse.

What you are doing is seeking affirmation of your skills and talents from others, and these people, even your family members, may never let you have the satisfaction. It's their way of controlling you. Many people spend their entire life seeking acceptance and never getting it. In these situations, you have to force yourself not to share everything and not to let these people get to you with their negative opinions. Instead, settle for acceptance from others who recognize you

for the great person that you are.

Identify the saboteurs in your life and avoid them. Saboteurs may be friends who drain you with their negativity or they could be family members who are too demanding of your time and energy. You may not be able to totally avoid your saboteurs, but you can set limits with them so they don't zap your resilience.

If you can't identify any saboteurs around you, ask yourself if you are your own worst saboteur. Do you have negative messages playing in your head? Do you manage your time poorly? Do you procrastinate? Do you busy yourself with menial tasks at work rather than with productive ones? If so, the first step is to become aware





of your behaviors. Then, get some support to help you. Pay for the help if you need to, whether it's a therapist, a business advisor, a coach or even an assistant who can help with routine tasks so you can focus on your long-range goals.

**REWARD YOURSELF AFTER A CHALLENGE.** Keep a positive goal in mind as you tackle those tasks you dislike. For example, if you say, "I hate writing reports – I'm just not good at it," then you are going to hate the project. Every minute you struggle with the report, your resilience will decline.

Instead, think of a positive goal or a reward you can give yourself for finishing the project and focus on that. Depending on the project, the reward can be taking a nature walk, leaving work 15 minutes early or even taking a weekend getaway. Whatever you decide, make sure the reward equals the effort and that the reward isn't really a negative in disguise, such as a supersized hot fudge sundae or a six-pack of beer.



**Laughing is great medicine for stress, so laugh often.**  
**The best laugh is when you laugh at yourself. Before bed each night, ask yourself if you did anything silly or funny today, and then allow yourself to laugh at it.**

**YOU'RE ALLOWED TO SAY 'NO.'** While you certainly want to do your best and make a good impression on clients, coworkers and supervisors, realize that you're not a super human being and cannot do everything that's asked of you. So if you can't possibly take on any more work, then politely say "No" to the project. Remember, if you say "Yes" to everything, you're not going to have the time or the energy to do your best on anything.

If you feel that you can't say "No" to your supervisor, then politely say, "I need your help. I have all these other projects that are also due by the end of the week. Help me determine which one is priority No. 1." It is very likely that when you say that, your boss will realize you're overloaded and push back the due date on a project or reassign it to a coworker.

Another problem in some companies is coworkers will ask for help in doing what should be their job. Sometimes it's someone you like and would prefer not to offend so you reluctantly agree only to wind up immersed in someone else's problem and find your own work not getting done.

Have the courage to say "No." If you really want to help, explain that you have certain things you need to complete first and if you have time you'll try to help. Also suggest alternate ways they can get help if you know of any. Don't allow others to trap you into projects or work you can't or don't want to do.

**EAT SMART.** Often when we're under pressure, we don't eat right. We either forget to eat regularly and then overeat when we finally do or we exercise poor judgment by stopping for a burger and fries on the way home from work instead of fixing a healthy dinner. But the times when we are the most stressed are precisely when we need proper nutrition. So make the time for healthy food choices.

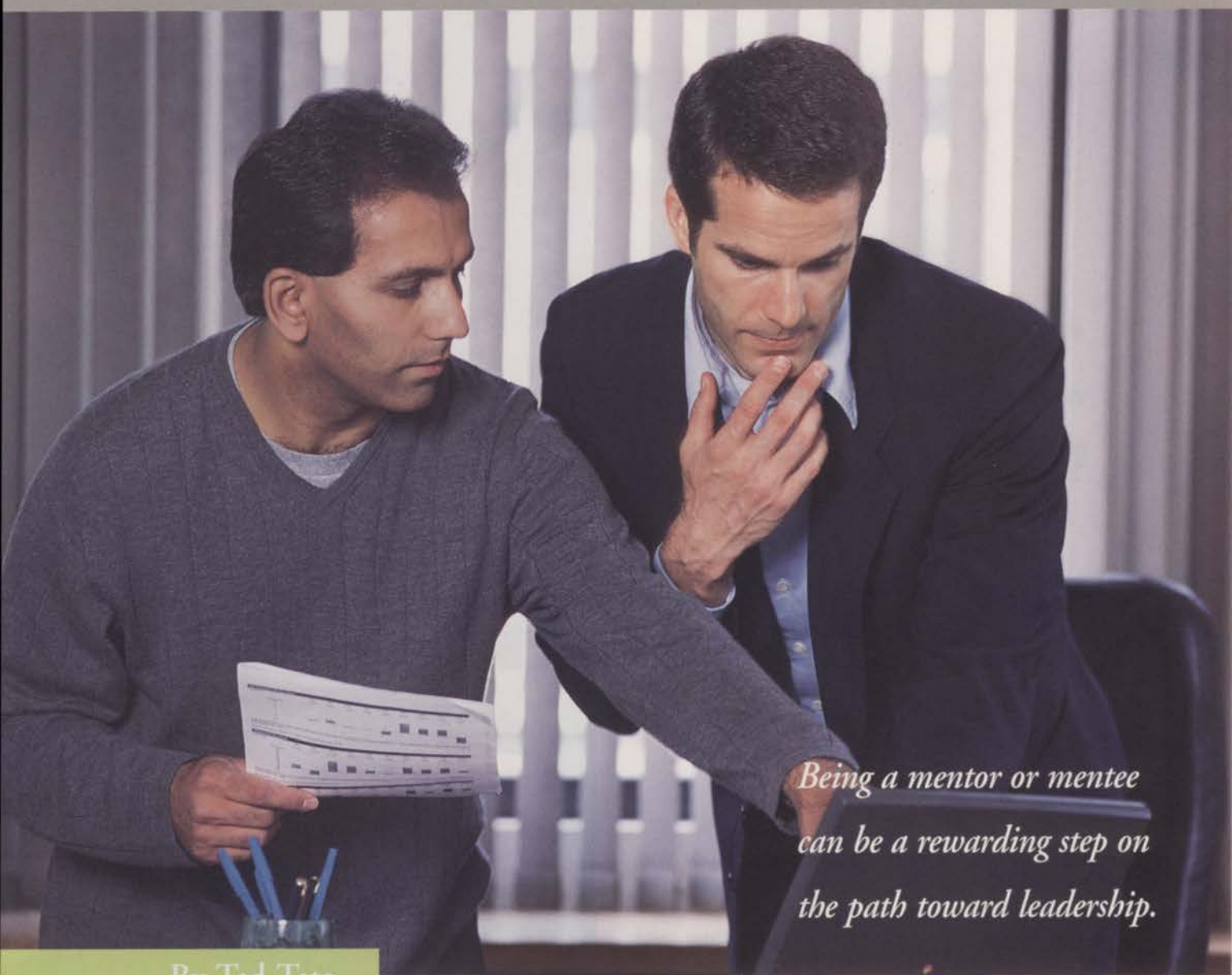
**REGULAR EXERCISE.** It helps keep stress levels down. If you find an exercise you enjoy, you are likely to stick with it. Think back to your younger days and identify which sports you liked. If you were on the basketball team, consider joining an adult league. If you used to love spending the summer at the pool, take a water aerobics class or swim laps. Realize that exercise doesn't mean you have to go to a gym or join an organized activity; you can take a walk around the block, play ball with your kids or do anything you enjoy that's physically active. Of course, before changing your diet or starting any exercise program, consult with your physician.

**LAUGHTER IS A GREAT STRESS REMOVER.** Laughing is great medicine for stress, so laugh often. Watch a funny movie or go to see a comedy act. Get together with your old friends and rehash the funny stories from your youth. Have a tickle fight with your kids. Do whatever makes you smile and feel good.

The best laugh is when you laugh at yourself. Looking inward at your life and actions can provide great material. Before you go to bed each night, ask yourself if you did anything silly or funny today, and then allow yourself to laugh at it.

*The author is a sales training expert. He offers additional free sales and time management tips at [www.trainingexpert.com](http://www.trainingexpert.com).*





*Being a mentor or mentee  
can be a rewarding step on  
the path toward leadership.*

By Ted Tate

# The Importance of Mentoring PROGRAMS



**"The best way to get what you want in life is to help other people get what they want." – Zig Ziglar**

Why should you take the time to mentor an employee? Why should you bother asking someone to mentor you? You'd be astonished at how easy and rewarding it can be.

Mentoring your promising employees can benefit them – and your company. Mentoring means taking personal interest in seeing that a mentee develops the talent and knowledge needed to succeed – to have a successful career and contribute as much as possible to the company and society. Mentoring differs from coaching and advising in its emphasis on developing a personal relationship and advancing the career of the mentee.

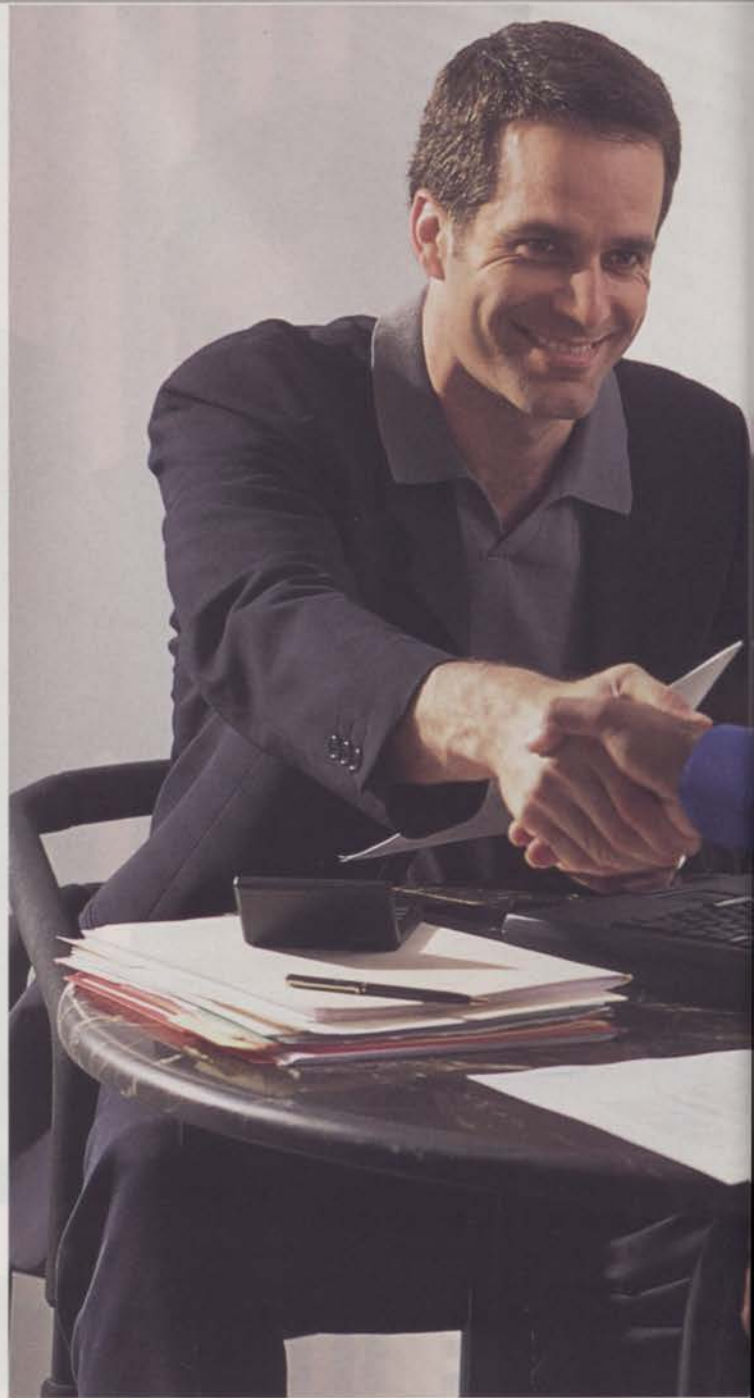
It's not just giving advice on how to work more effectively or handle a specific problem. Once you've hired the best and the brightest, you want to retain them long past the training period. You can earn their loyalty by putting them on the fast track under senior executive guidance. Some companies have formal mentoring programs, with senior executives establishing counseling relationships with junior executives, and old hands assigned to mentor new hires. Some mentoring connections develop when senior and junior staff members are drawn together by common interests and one or the other decides to pursue a mentor-mentee relationship.

A mentored employee is likely to form a strong bond with you and your company and to be someone you can count on in tough times. You'll find ways to channel the energies of terrific employees

who may be feeling bored or underutilized. You can help them renew their enthusiasm and become more productive. You can reduce costly turnover by developing employees and increasing their productivity and job satisfaction.

**MENTORING PROGRAM SETUP.** When structuring a mentoring program, remember the following key essentials.

- *Recruit mentors who are committed to the process.* Even the most accomplished executive who has been with your company for years may not be enthusiastic or qualified for one-on-one mentoring.







easy as possible. They may find it helpful, for instance, to receive a list of useful suggestions for dealing with certain personal and professional issues that arise with the mentee.

- *Provide a "shadow mentor."* Provide a "shadow mentor." Mentoring relationships may suffer from misunderstandings or personality differences. The shadow mentor – perhaps your mentoring trainer – can help coach both parties back together.

- *Allow enough relief time for mentors.* They shouldn't feel so squeezed by other responsibilities that mentoring becomes just a nuisance or an added source of stress. When setting up a mentoring program, encourage your company mentors to:

- 1.) *Listen at least as much as they talk.* With encouragement, mentees will ask lots of questions. Make sure the mentors don't interpret a question as a challenge. Instead, encourage them to answer as openly and honestly as possible. Share information generously. Of course you'll want them to keep certain information confidential; but the more trust they are able to place in mentees, the stronger the relationship can be.

- 2.) *Stay focused on helping their mentees grow.* The goal should be to provide guidance – not to impress by displaying knowledge or expertise. Have your company mentors treat mentees as equals. Be flexible. Encourage mentors to set regular times to meet or talk on the phone, yet be ready also to give spur-of-the-moment assistance. Mentees might occasionally ask for a last-minute breakfast or lunch meeting to discuss an urgent matter.

**MENTOR TRAITS.** So, what does it take to be a mentor? First, you do NOT need to be a teacher nor have a senior position in a large company. What you DO need is enthusiasm, commitment and a desire to see your mentee achieve their goals. Mentors essentially have the following characteristics:

- *Set criteria for selecting mentee candidates.* How will you choose the "best and brightest" for fast-track mentoring? Or you may want mentoring for all employees at a certain level in the company.

- *Allow mentees to have a say in selecting their mentors.* The mentoring process won't work if the two parties are mismatched. Set up a training program. Few people are "natural" mentors. Have an HR staff member or outside consultant help managers develop the necessary skills.

- *Give mentors guidelines to follow.* Aim to make the process as

- *They are good listeners.* That means active listening. In other words, paying attention to the words they use as well as the other things they are saying with their body language. It also means ensuring you have understood what they mean. This is especially important when your mentee comes from a different background than yours.

- *They ask questions.* This is probably the biggest trap that mentors fall into – expecting to know all the answers and feeling deflated when they don't. Your role is to ask questions to help the mentee figure it out for themselves. If you keep answering their



questions, not only will they not develop the ability to successfully answer their own questions, but you may be wrong and this could damage your relationship and their career.

• **They share knowledge and experience.** You have a lifetime's worth of experience (whether you're 20 or 80) and this experience is invaluable. Life is too short to make all the mistakes yourself, which is why it is so vital to learn from other people's mistakes and successes. Just remember to share your knowledge and experience as an alternative, not the suggested nor preferred way ahead for your mentee. Let them make up their own minds.

• **They encourage the mentee to fail.** You may think this is a 'typo' but it is very true. There is a saying that the man who fails to make a mistake usually fails to make anything. We learn more from our mistakes than from our successes. When your mentee is reluctant to take a course of action because he or she may not succeed, encourage them to take the course they believe best, regardless of the chance of failure. Nothing is certain. Nothing is guaranteed. Only by 'doing' (whether we succeed or not), will we go forward and learn.

• **They open doors.** 'It's not what you know but who you know that makes all the difference'—how true that is. As a mentor, you have the opportunity to open doors for your mentee. This includes inviting them to certain functions where they can meet people, and directly putting them in touch with people who can assist in their career development. Remember that your role is to open the door—not push them through it.

• **They are honest.** There are times when you may feel let down but be honest with your mentee. Only in an open relationship can your mentee develop. Being empathetic or even sympathetic does not mean being soft. Some mentees need and want a hard taskmaster. But, whatever course the two of you take, honesty needs to underpin the entire relationship.

• **Walk the talk.** Make sure mentors model the behavior you want to see encouraged in the company. Let's say a mentor urges a mentee to show respect to

people at all levels of the organization. The lesson would be lost if the mentor treats subordinates rudely.

• **Be ready to learn.** Mentees can teach, too. By listening carefully, the mentor could get fresh and helpful perspectives on your company.

**MENTEE ADVICE.** Pass these tips on to your mentees to ensure a successful dialogue:

• **Don't be shy.** Successful people are generally pleased to be asked to share their knowledge and expertise. Encourage the mentee to seek mentors.

• **Feel free to look outside the company for mentors.** The person who will be able to help most may not be inside the organization. The important thing is to find someone who can provide perspective and guidance.

• **Contact prospective mentors by letter or by e-mail.** A phone call puts the other person on the spot. In your letter, explain what kind of advice you're looking for and ask if the entrepreneur would be willing to share information with you. Cultivate multiple mentors. Networking with peers at industry and community functions can lead to many productive and mutual mentoring relationships. Trade associations are very good.

• **Be receptive.** Listen to your mentor's responses to your questions. Don't argue. A mentoring session isn't a showdown to prove who's right.

• **Be willing to share in return.** Mentor others who may want to learn from or draw on your expertise.

• **Be realistic.** Don't promise too much time to mentees. If you're too busy to deliver, you'll feel pressured and the mentee will resent being shortchanged.

**AVOID MENTORING MISTAKES.** Steer clear of these common mentoring blunders:

• **Intervening too quickly with advice.** Mentees need to learn by trial-and-error.

• **Taking sides when a mentee is in conflict with a colleague.** Encourage the mentee to work through the problem. Ask: "How would you like this to turn out?" and "How do you think that could be

achieved at this point?"

• **Expecting mentees to stroke your ego.** Don't look for frequent praise and compliments.

• **Offering advice on personal problems.** Stick to how those problems may impact the mentees' work lives. If necessary, provide referrals to a qualified professional.

• **Know when to let go.** At some point, you'll need to move on and mentor others. Your mentees' priorities will also shift, and they may need to seek guidance from other people.

• **Keep an open door.** Let your mentees know that you're always available for further occasional consultation.

• **Risk management.** Although there are relatively few 'risks' associated with mentoring, it is worth noting the possible risks and putting in place some risk management practices.

**MISMATCHES.** This is where it becomes obvious that the mentor and mentee are not suited to each other. Please note, no one is at fault in this situation—sometimes this just happens, your personal styles may clash or you may not be able to find mutually agreeable times/places to meet. There are many reasons why mismatches occur.

If you put sufficient time into the relationship in the early stages a mismatch will usually appear during this time. Whenever the mismatch reveals itself, it is up to the two of you to decide whether the relationship is worth saving and working through your differences or whether terminating the relationship and finding other partners would serve both interests.

**COMPETITION OR RIVALRY?** It may sound childish, however rivalry between mentor and mentee can ruin a relationship. Be on the lookout for any actions taken by your mentee that may signal they are feeling a level of competition with you. This may be particularly evident if you work within the same organization or industry.

If rivalry is a problem, rarely can this effectively be dealt with so that it does not



negatively impact the relationship. Remember though, most mentoring relationships occur for a purpose and rarely do they last a lifetime. If you feel that rivalry has developed, speak with your mentee and discuss whether the best option may be to wind up the relationship.

**WHAT IF I FAIL AS A MENTOR?** First, there is no such thing as failure, unless you don't give something a go in the first place. When you elect to mentor someone, you have considered the role ahead of you and have given your commitment to assist this person with their development. Whether they actually develop and grow within their career/business is basically up to them. You can't do it for them. All you can do is help them find the right questions and answers.

**"[Those] who try to do something and fail are infinitely better than those who try to do nothing and succeed." – Lloyd James**

**I NO LONGER HAVE TIME.** When you took on the mentoring commitment you had different circumstances – you had time available to work with your mentee – but now that the responsibility is upon you, things have changed. That's life. Explain your changed circumstances to your mentee and maybe the two of you can work around it.

If not, speak with your mentee as to whether he or she would like you to do what you can to find a replacement mentor or ask him or her about alternate plans. (The mentee may even be willing to wait until your circumstances change again). Either way, this is a common occurrence and should not be looked upon as a failure.

*The author is a sales training expert. He offers additional free sales and time management tips at [www.trainingexpert.com](http://www.trainingexpert.com).*

## 6 A Leader's Goal-Setting Secrets

Although finding a vision can be quite a creative challenge, the process of getting that vision implemented can be quite easy if you follow these six key steps.

**Step 1 – Vision.** The first step in setting goals and priorities is to personally develop what the organization should look like at some future point, i.e. the vision. While the senior leaders set the vision for the entire organization, supervisors and/or managers should set the visions for their specific teams. And those visions need to support the organization's goals.

Your vision needs to coincide with the "big picture." The term "vision" suggests a mental picture of what the future organization will look like. The concept also implies a later time horizon. This time horizon tends to be mid to long term in nature, focusing on as much as 10, 20 or even 50 years in the future for visions affecting the entire organization. Manager or supervisor level visions should be on much shorter time horizons, such as 6 months to one year.

The vision you want, should be a picture of where you want your department to be at a future date. For example, try to picture what your department would look like if it was perfect, or what the most efficient way to produce your product would look like, or perhaps if your budget was reduced by 10 percent, how you could still achieve the same quality product.

Once you have your vision, it needs to be framed in general, unmeasurable terms and communicated to your team. Your team then develops the ends (objectives), ways (concepts), and means (resources) to achieve the vision.

**Step 2 – Goals.** The second step involves establishing goals, with the active participation of the team. Goals are also stated in unmeasurable terms, but they are more focused. For example, "The organization must reduce overtime costs." This establishes the framework of the your vision.

**Step 3 – Objectives.** Now you establish objectives, again with the active participation of your team. Definable objectives provide a way of measuring the evaluating movement toward vision achievement. This is the strategy of turning visions into reality. It is the crossover mechanism between your forecast of the future and the envisioned, desired future. Objectives should be stated in precise, measurable terms. The aim is to get general ownership by the entire team.

**Step 4 – Tasks.** The fourth step is to determine tasks. Through tasks, objectives are accomplished. Tasks are concrete, measurable events that must occur.

**Step 5 – Time Lines.** Now it is time to establish a priority for the tasks. Since time is precious and many tasks must be accomplished before others can begin, establishing priorities helps your team to determine the order in which the tasks must be accomplished and by what date.

**Step 6 – Follow-up.** The final step is to follow up, measure and check to see if the team is doing what is required. This kind of leader involvement validates that the stated priorities are worthy of action. For the leader, it demonstrates his or her commitment to see the matter through to a successful conclusion. – Donald Clark



# LEADING

What does leadership mean? How does one know it when they see it? And how can we get our hands on some? Take heart – there are answers below. However, it would be naïve for a reader to believe that after setting this article aside they'll have all the secrets to success. There's no better resource to tap for leadership guidance and inspiration than the industry leaders who've appeared here in the past. Despite their own different styles, beliefs and motivations, they're all leaders worth learning from. Their various perspectives could be that little extra nudge a potential leader is looking for before moving to the head of the pack. Whether one's leadership style is that of a motivator or a communicator, there's something to be learned from each industry voice below.



**SAM LANG**

Operation: Fairway Green,  
Raleigh, N.C.

## THE DO-AS-I-DOER

**"My style is lead by example –  
get as many people to follow  
you as you can."**

Sam Lang has seen many companies manage with fear and intimidation. That's not his style.

"This isn't a depression and you can't say, 'You're lucky to have this job' anymore," Lang explains. "If you try to lead people like that, it's never going to be effective."

Lang has tweaked his leadership style over the years but the basics have remained the same. He says the best he can offer his employees is the example he sets on the job on a day-to-day basis. "I'm dressed appropriately. I treat everyone the way that I would want to be treated," he says. "I also exhibit a good work ethic and treat everybody fairly because they respond to that."

Lang believes that leadership is genetic, and he tries to recognize that in his employees. "I personally believe leadership is a trait that you're born with," he says. "I think it's something that can be refined and honed, but it's something you're either born with or you're not."

Finding leadership among employees and peers is less daunting to someone like Lang who believes he knows what to look for. "You have to identify those people with leadership traits," he explains. "I often identify those people as the people who get in the most trouble. They can lead."

He offers for example the fraternity brother who throws the biggest party. "Just channeling that into something positive could make him a leader. They might not be headed in the right direction, but they can lead."

## THE MOTIVATOR

**"Responsibility is a motivator  
to the type of people I work with."**

"I think leadership starts with giving people opportunity and then letting them make mistakes along the way, hoping that they learn from them," John Buechner says.

"My job is diverse and I see leadership defined as seeing a task, determining what needs to be done and then doing it," he shares. "And that's a multifaceted process that involves selecting the right people to work with you and setting an example of what needs to be done."

Buechner explains that sometimes delegating work as a leader means having an open mind with regard to technique. "Often there's more than one way to do something to get the outcome you desire, so you have to give people the freedom to make their own choices and a certain amount of latitude in decision making," he says.

Motivation and freedom come first, according to Buechner, but the follow-up should always include recognition. "Recognition is as important as motivating. You have to recognize and thank people for doing a good job." Buechner adds that positive reviews accomplish this, as do pay increases – though one should never underestimate the power of a pat on the back and an "Attaboy!"



**JOHN BUECHNER**

Operation: Lawn Doctor,  
Holmdel, N.J.



# in Style

By Jennifer Lash and Will Nepper

*These past Leadership Award winners share their leadership styles.*



**LAURIE BROCCOLO**

Operation: Broccolo Tree & Lawn Care, Rochester, N.Y.

## THE STUDENT

**"Leadership comes from that personal sense of wanting to learn all the time, and looking to learn from other leaders."**

"Leadership is definitely something that can be developed," says Laurie Broccolo, Broccolo Tree & Lawn Care, Rochester, N.Y. But developing leadership doesn't come without effort, she says — it's a continual educational process. "You have to work

at it. My goal is to keep meeting more people and learning from them and developing my own skills."

One of the best ways Broccolo has found to gain knowledge is through networking. "I tend to look to other businesses outside of my industry," she explains. "Whether it's a large construction company or a printing company — I've forced myself to network with other small companies and they all have the same kinds of problems with growth and development."

"That's why we hire people who have a real interest in learning, growth opportunities and chance," she asserts. This is why her company supports continuing education among employees and multiple certifications within the industry. "That gives them a vested interest and opens the door for them to participate in different ways."

"I never look at leadership in terms of me, personally being the leader," Broccolo says. "That's why my leadership style is somewhat open. I don't want to be the one taking the credit for the business growth. It all comes back to the people working out in the field every single day, whether it's the foreman or the summer helper."

Instead, Broccolo sees her job as being the one to set quality control and set the standard for work ethic. "And I want to be around other people like that because it creates an excitement within the culture of our business," Broccolo says. "They're excited about the job that they're doing."

## THE COMMUNICATOR

**"How can you lose when you're upfront and letting every one know what's going on?"**

"I try to build trust in all of our employees and leaders at the company. How can you lose when you're upfront and letting everyone know what's going on?" Senske asks. His foundations of leadership reflect combinations of leadership style he's gleaned from numerous people that he's looked up to and respected.

"I think leadership is something you learn a little bit about every day," Senske says, rationalizing that leaders need not be born when you can definitely teach leadership. "And I don't think you need to necessarily be charismatic to be a leader. But there are qualities you need to have — most importantly being honest, upfront and developing trust in your employees, suppliers and advisors."

Senske says that communicating allows him to extract from individuals their individual path for leadership — "To help them find a way to shine on their own." He says he is able to gauge how he's doing as a leader by looking at the successes that people have created for themselves with his guidance. "Whether it's what they're doing at work or on the hockey team they coach or with the other things they do in the community — it's all a reflection of how they've developed as individuals. Good leaders spawn other leaders."



**CHRIS SENSKE**

Senske Tree & Lawn Care, Kennewick, Wash.



# Leaders'

Every time you turn a page of a good book and absorb the information it provides, something magical happens – but what happens depends on which stage of your life you're currently in. A child, for instance, might be enlightened by the lesson given in a fairytale's far-off land, while a young adult might learn how to better handle a friendship falling out from a great adventure novel.

When it comes to landscape contractors, their lessons come from books that improve their relationships with their employees and customers. These books give basic and advanced business lessons. To get an idea of some of *Lawn & Landscape* readers' favorite titles, we tapped a few past Leadership Award winners, and asked them about their favorite leadership-inspiring books. Browse their bookshelves and discover what makes these books influential in their thinking and their careers.



**TIM DOPPEL**  
Atwood Lawn Care,  
Sterling Hts., Mich.

## THE 21 IRREFUTABLE LAWS OF LEADERSHIP by John C. Maxwell

You can't argue with a leadership book with the word "leadership" in the title. Tim Doppel, Atwood Lawn Care, Sterling Hts., Mich., recommends *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership* because it has helped him "quantify his strengths and weaknesses so I can hire the appropriate people to balance out my abilities and inabilities."

"It's exactly what the title says it is – 21 laws," Doppel explains. "If you understand these laws and apply them to your management style you can be a much better leader."

Doppel says that, as the owner of a company, he's saddled with the responsibility of bringing both customers, as well as his employees, the best that a large company could offer. "But you don't want to lose focus on the individual," he says. "As the owner of the company I need to stay connected with all of my employees. I need to know their dreams and aspirations and I need to stay in touch with their personal and family situations." Doppel adds that this becomes more of a challenge as his company continues to grow and *21 Laws* still gives him good advice on how to do this successfully.

Doppel also credits the book for helping him identify weaknesses that might prevent him from hiring and promoting employees who are strong in the areas that he's weakest. "In that way, we create a management structure that is well-balanced and strong, even if I'm personally weak in a given area. I try not to portray myself as anything I am not and I think my employees appreciate that honesty and, in return, are open with me."

Finally Doppel adds that the book influenced leadership in other facets of his life. "Being a good dad or mom requires the use of lots of leadership skills," he says. "It's not for me to say if I've done a good or bad job raising my son, but I'm very proud of the fine young man he is."

## GOOD TO GREAT: WHY SOME COMPANIES MAKE THE LEAP...AND OTHERS DON'T by Jim Collins

"Good companies become great companies by improving a lot of things over an extended period of time," says Russ Frith, Lawn Doctor, Holmdel, NJ. It's a lesson he learned from *Good to Great* by Jim Collins.

In addition to a lot of "neat stories," the book compares publicly traded companies and their stock over time, Frith says. "There's analysis of what companies and CEOs did to make those companies what they've become and set a culture in those companies to achieve success," he explains, adding that the book argues that it is many changes over time that impact a business vs. what are sometimes referred to as "fad changes."

Frith says that *Good to Great* helped him learn that you can really only grow a successful business through people. "Identifying and achieving their goals as part of your goals is important," he says. "You have to try to match people's own individual needs with the needs of your organization. I think most people want to be treated and compensated fairly but they want to make a contribution too. If you can create opportunities for individuals to make contributions that they feel good about, then it's a win-win situation."



**RUSS FRITH**  
Lawn Doctor,  
Holmdel, N.J.



# Little Black Books

*Past Leadership Award winners  
talk about the books that in-  
spired them.*



**TERRY KURTH**  
Weed Man,  
Middleton, Wis.

## **PSYCHO-CYBERNETICS** by Maxwell Maltz

It's all about attitude. That's what Terry Kurth, Weed Man, Middleton, Wis. learned about leadership from Psycho-Cybernetics. It also taught him a thing or two about reaching goals and defeating stress – the monster that lurks around the corner for many lead-

ers. One way to deal with this menace is by envisioning what you want, Kurth says. "It's using the strength of your mind and controlling the way it most enables you to be successful, both personally and in business," Kurth explains. "For instance, instead of saying I'm at point A and how do I get to point B, you should imagine yourself at point B and work backwards. It helps you understand that if people took the stress and the energy they burn with stress and use it to fix the problems causing them stress, they'd be much further ahead."

Kurth says that the book has taught him how to put stress aside when he's being looked to as a leader. "Just having that self-assuredness helps," he says. "People don't like uncertainty and the book helps enable you to lessen that uncertainty in terms of making decisions."

Whether he's setting up new franchises or dealing with changes in the dynamics of the lawn care business, Kurth says this book has helped. "It provides the ability to envision positive changes or solutions to perceived problems so we can make sure we stay on the forefront and run our companies as efficiently as possible with successful results."

By Jennifer Lash, Will Nepper  
& Nicole Wisniewski

## **FIRST BREAK ALL THE RULES: WHAT THE WORLDS GREATEST MANAGERS DO DIFFERENTLY** by Marcus Buckingham and Curt Coffman **THE E-MYTH** by Michael Gerber **WAY OF THE PEACEFUL WARRIOR** by Dan Millman

Some landscape contractors, like Phil Fogarty, Crowley's/Weed Man, Cleveland, Ohio, are avid readers and instead of sharing just one book recommendation, he shared three.

*First Break All the Rules* helped him realize what he could and couldn't change about people. "It helped me see more clearly how I could help others succeed," Fogarty explains. "For instance, you can't make a good salesperson or technician a manager and then have them not be a good manager and also lose your good salesperson."

Michael Gerber's *The E-Myth* taught Fogarty how to systemize his business so he didn't have to continue doing everything himself. "You have to realize that you can't do everything, and this book helps entrepreneurs do that," Fogarty points out. "You have to pretend that your business is a franchise that will be duplicated by a million people and everything has to be systemized in order to do anything with it."

Finally, *The Way of the Peaceful Warrior* by Dan Millman is a novel about a man who won a gold medal in the Olympics. As Fogarty shares, "This is a great book for realizing how much more we're all capable of in life."



**PHIL FOGARTY,**  
Crowley's/Weed Man,  
Cleveland, Ohio



# LEADERSHIP



**MARTY ERBAUGH**  
LESCO  
Strongsville, Ohio



**CHRIS LEMCKE**  
Weed Man  
Scarborough,  
Ontario



**GERALD GROSSI**  
Arborlawn  
Lansing, Mich.



**BILL LEUENBERGER**  
The Chalet  
Wilmette, Ill.



**TOM HOFER**  
Spring-Green Lawn Care  
Plainfield, Ill.



**CHUCK MCINTIRE**  
Scotts LawnService  
Norcross, Ga.

## The Class of 2003



# HONOR ROLL



**JOHN BUECHNER**  
Lawn Doctor  
Holmdel, N.J.



**TERRY KURTH**  
Weed Man  
Middleton, Wis.



**TOM DELANEY**  
PLCAA  
Marietta, Ga.



**JOE REYNOLDS**  
Black Diamond  
Lawn Care  
Toledo, Ohio



**SAM FARISON**  
Farison Lawn  
Care  
Louisville, Ky.



**BARRY TROUTMAN**  
ValleyCrest Cos.  
Calabasas, Calif.

## The Class of 2002





**DALE AMSTUTZ**  
Northern Lawns Corp.  
Omaha, Neb.



**KURT KLUZNIK**  
Yardmaster  
Painesville, Ohio



**TOM BLAND**  
Bland Landscaping  
Co.  
Cary, N.C.



**SAM LANG**  
Fairway Green  
Lawn Care  
Raleigh, N.C.



**BILL HOOPES**  
Scotts LawnService  
Marysville, Ohio



**GARY LASCALEA**  
GroGreen Lawn, Tree &  
Shrub Care  
Plano, Texas



**BRUCE HUNT**  
The Brickman Group  
Long Grove, Ill.



**BETH SEME**  
Elizabeth A. Seme  
Latham, N.Y.



**ADAM JONES**  
Massey Services  
Maitland, Fla.



**JOSEPH VARGAS, Ph.D.**  
Michigan State University  
East Lansing, Mich.

# The Class of 2001





**BOB ANDREWS**  
The Greenskeeper  
Carmel, Ind.



**TOM LIED**  
Lied's Landscape Design  
& Development  
Sussex, Wis.



**GARY CLAYTON**  
PLCAA  
Marietta, Ga.



**GEORGE MORRELL**  
The Morrell Group  
Atlanta, Ga.



**RUSSELL FRITH**  
Lawn Doctor  
Holmdel, N.J.



**LINDA NOVY**  
Gardeners' Guild  
San Rafael, Calif.



**RON KUJAWA**  
Kujawa Enterprises  
Cudahy, Wis.



**J. LANDON REEVE**  
Chapel Valley  
Landscape  
Woodbine, Md.



**WAYNE RICHARDS**  
Cagwin & Dorward  
Novato, Calif.

# The Class of 2000





**LAURIE BROCCOLO**  
Broccolo Tree &  
Lawn Care  
Rochester, N.Y.



**DAVE HANSON**  
ValleyCrest Cos.  
Calabasas, Calif.



**DAVEY**  
**TREE INSTITUTE**  
Kent, Ohio



**MICHAEL KERNAGHAN**  
Weed Man  
Mississauga, Ontario



**TIM DOPPEL**  
Atwood Lawn Care  
Sterling Heights, Mich.



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



**PHIL FOGARTY**  
Weed Man/  
Crowley's Vegetation  
Management  
Cleveland, Ohio



**CHRIS SENSKE**  
Senske Tree &  
Lawn Care  
Kennewick, Wash.



**NORMAN**  
**GOLDENBERG**  
TruGreen-ChemLawn  
Memphis, Tenn.



**TOM TOLKACZ**  
Swingle Tree &  
Lawn Care  
Denver, Colo.

# The Class of 1999



# INTRODUCING...

*Lawn & Landscape* magazine and Bayer Environmental Science are proud to announce the winners of the sixth annual Leadership Awards. These individuals embody the essence of leadership, whether it's in their tireless industry involvement, pioneering spirit, dedication to education, commitment to personal improvement or environmental stewardship. We congratulate and thank them for their outstanding contributions to the lawn and landscape industry.



**SCOTT BRICKMAN**  
The Brickman Group  
Gaithersburg, Md.



**MARIA CANDLER**  
James River Grounds  
Management  
Glen Allen, Va.



**KIRK HURTO**  
TruGreen-ChemLawn  
Delaware, Ohio



**LOU KOBUS**  
Village Turf  
Mount Vernon, Va.



**JACK ROBERTSON**  
Jack Robertson Lawn  
Care  
Springfield, Ill.



**DAVID SNODGRASS**  
Dennis' Seven Dees  
Landscaping and Nurseries  
Portland, Ore.

# The Class of 2004



*As a third-generation CEO,  
Scott Brickman effectively  
grows a family business in an  
age of competition.*

Landscape crewmembers depend on each other. As teams simultaneously tackle mowing, trimming, edging, pruning and more, ensuring that jobs are completed on time, on budget and to the client's satisfaction. If one crewmember falls behind, others can jump in to bring the team up to speed. When improvements need to be made, all team members push for progress. And when work is done well, everyone joins in the success.

Often behind these teams' efforts is a single company owner or manager – a leader inspiring employee dedication, but one who rarely gets behind the wheel of a mower. These individuals have paid their dues and worked hard to create quality, growing businesses. The teams work for them now, rather than the other way around.

With these two operations models, combining the concepts of teamwork and leadership is difficult. Leaders stand out from a crowd and make definitive decisions, while team members work collaboratively to reach a consensus. When a group of people comes together to work on a project, should any team member choose to go his or her own direction on an issue, that teamwork can be disrupted.

As an organization of nearly 6,000 people, employees of The Brickman Group, Gaithersburg, Md., tread the fine line between working as a team and singling out individuals as branch, regional and corporate leaders. As chief executive officer, Scott Brickman is a leader among leaders and just one collaborator among many as he heads the 65-year-old company where leadership and teamwork collide.

**Name: SCOTT BRICKMAN**

**Company: The Brickman Group**

**Location: Gaithersburg, Md.**

**Career Highlights:**

- Bachelor's degree, landscape architecture, Penn State University
- Member, Young Presidents' Organization
- Board Member, Landscape Architecture Foundation
- Member, American Landscape Contractors Association
- Member, American Nursery & Landscape Association
- Member, American Society of Landscape Architects
- Took over CEO responsibilities at The Brickman Group from his father Dick Brickman in 1998

**TEAM MEMBER IN TRAINING.** Part of the reason Brickman is able to steer his company with a unique combination of leadership and teamwork is because he grew up working alongside other Brickman employees, some of whom are still with the company. "My grandfather started the company in 1939 and my father joined him as a 50/50 partner after receiving his landscape architecture degree," Brickman explains. "I really grew up in the business. I worked every summer in the nursery starting when I was 8 years old."

By age 12, Brickman was allowed to work on job sites with other crewmembers and, starting when he was 14 years old, teamed up with a driver's license-bearing intern and became a crew leader on a handful of accounts. "At that time, my dad told me that if I was going to work with them, I had to be willing to work harder than the next guy because my name was on the work," he remembers. "In reality, can a 12-year-old work as hard as a man? Probably not, but I tried."

Needless to say, Brickman continued to follow in the horticultural footsteps of his father and grandfather. After receiving a landscape architecture degree in 1985 from Penn State University, he promptly went to back to work – for Fort Lauderdale, Fla.-based EDSA.

"I didn't go back to work with my dad right away because I wanted a little different experience," Brickman says. "Being at EDSA allowed me to work for a company that was an allied business but not a competitor. Plus, my starting salary was \$14,000 – I was at the bottom of the totem pole."

**THE BUSINESS OF FAMILY.** Two years later, in 1987, Brickman returned to The Brickman Group and began to

By Lauren Spiers

SCOTT



# Brickman



Photo Credits: The Brickman Group



**"When making leadership decisions, my father taught me to keep two things in mind. The first is the golden rule – treat others as you would like to be treated yourself – and the second is that the overall health of the team is more important than any one individual."**

**– Scott Brickman**



Scott's father, Dick Brickman.

focus on sales and marketing rather than field work. Specifically, he took over leadership of the Baltimore/Washington region. All the while, a close father-son relationship reinforced Brickman's focus on building and preserving company integrity.

"My father has, far and away, had the greatest impact on my career," he says. "Since I was a kid, he's been teaching me about leadership, service and values. He's been a great role model and he still gives me advice, mostly about staying focused on what has made us successful – providing great quality service while nurturing an environment of trust, honesty and respect."

After 65 years, The Brickman Group remains very much a family business. Brickman credits this feat to two guiding principles he learned from his dad. "When making leadership decisions, my father taught me to keep two things in mind," he says. "The first is the Golden Rule – treat others as you would like to be treated yourself – and the second is that the overall health of the team is more important than any one individual." These values were key to certain business decisions in the late 1990s that could have led the company down a different corporate path.

When Brickman took over for his father in 1998, he sold roughly two-thirds of the company to private equity firms that were keen on seeing the company grow. "We ended up making some acquisitions that weren't as good as others that we have done and that reminded me that we had to slow down and focus on the fundamentals the company was built on," Brickman says.

This meant looking for individuals and companies that share the same values as The Brickman Group. As a result, Brickman's longtime belief has proven true: Honesty, trust and respect will appeal to the types of people the company needs and when those people join the organization, profits and growth will follow. In the last four years, The Brickman Group has doubled in size and continues to grow by fostering the company's culture where teamwork and leadership are often one and the same.

"We've got around 6,000 employees, so events like our annual managers conference are important to keep people con-



nected to our organization, to our values and to understanding our vision," Brickman says. "Even though we do have a hierarchy, it isn't so formal that people are afraid to share ideas. We don't have that kind of whisper-down-the-lane leadership where what I say goes and our employees are trying to play "telephone" to decipher the message. We give people a lot of autonomy so there are hundreds of leaders within our big family."

Indeed, getting a group of Brickman employees together is a lot like a family reunion where catching up with old friends outplays business and financial talk. Brickman notes how proud he is that The Brickman Group has been able to grow dramatically without disrupting the company's culture. "My No. 1 goal as the company's leader is to protect and grow our culture of trust, honesty and respect for one another and our dedication to providing outstanding quality, service and value to our customers, as well as our commitment to be a learning organization that strives to constantly improve," he says.

How will Brickman find time to guide such a dynamic vision? With the love and understanding from his own family. "My wife, Patrice, is a huge support and she very much keeps me grounded," he says. "She has a marketing background, so she's a great sounding board, but more importantly she does a fabulous job of taking care of our 8-, 6-, and 2-year-old daughters and our newborn son – and an incredibly busy house. As soon as I think my job is tough, I look at what she accomplishes in a day and I realize it's not so tough."

Brickman says he cherishes the time he spends with his family and tries to instill in his children the same values he learned growing up. "The world is a lot different now than it was when I was going to work with my dad, but we're teaching our kids the same values," he says. "My 8-year-old is in 4-H and shows pigs. She takes care of the animals, cleans out the barn and does all of the work associated with the organization. We know she's learning about hard work and responsibility. My daughters aren't concerned with playing in the dirt like I was when I was their age, but my wife and I know they're gaining a lot from the experience."

## Scott Brickman Shares His Leadership Secrets

### 1. What is your favorite book on leadership and why?

My favorite book on leadership is *Good to Great* by Jim Collins. It does a great job describing how great leaders lead and gives compelling examples. It also spells out how to create a great organization. We've studied this book extensively and work hard to apply what we have learned within our company. *Monday Morning Leadership* is another book that gets passed around the company and is really part of our culture. We have book clubs in different regions and it started with my dad who was always passing out books. If you're not learning, you're not growing.

### 2. Who has been the greatest influence on your leadership style and what did he or she teach you?

My father has had the greatest impact on my leadership style. Since I was a kid, he has been teaching me about leadership, service and values. He's been a great role model for me and continues to give me advice.

I also had the opportunity in the mid-1980s to attend quite a few seminars led by Dr. W.E. Deming and to work extensively with some of the top total quality management consultants in the world. Dr. Deming's philosophies (see sidebar on page 48) have had a great deal of influence on our organization and on me individually. As a result of Dr. Deming's influence on our organization, we've worked to eliminate internal competition and work as one team.

### 3. How do you develop leadership skills in your employees?

We start by looking for people who have a passion for doing great work and provide outstanding customer service. We look for people who have proven they can follow through, get things done and earn their team's respect. We look for leaders who are team players and have the ability to grow other leaders.

### 4. What has been your biggest leadership challenge and how did you overcome that challenge?

The biggest leadership challenge I've faced came when I took over as CEO from my dad. I realized at that point that the most important thing for me to do was to create stability by focusing the team on quality and service – the areas we've always focused on. There were a lot of changes going on and I think people were wondering what would happen with me in a new position and with new financial partners coming on board. It was my responsibility to make sure everyone knew that we would be sticking to our core values and that, even though a lot of organizational changes were being made around the company, the values that we stood for as a group would remain intact.

### 5. In your opinion, what are the top five foundations of being a leader and why are they important?

1. High integrity, trusted, walks the talk
2. Energy, strong bias for action
3. Energizer – ability to motivate and energize others, infectious enthusiasm to maximize organization potential, team builder
4. Competitive spirit, instinctive drive for speed/impact, strong convictions, self-confidence
5. Execution – gets results



**INSPIRING OPPORTUNITIES.** With a supportive family and a hardworking staff, Brickman successfully implements his own definition of leadership on a daily basis. "I would define leadership as having a vision of what you want to achieve and the ability to get people to follow that vision and take the necessary action to achieve it," he explains. "I believe a great leader sticks to his values and is there to serve and inspires the people he leads."

But Brickman says that inspiring leadership is a reciprocal endeavor. "Other leaders in this company and other companies inspire me," he says. "You can look at this group and say, 'What a big business,' but I read *Fortune* magazine and think that we're hardly a speck compared to other companies. There are companies out there that make me wonder how people manage the work when there are 50,000 employees or \$10 billion in revenue. Seeing how they do it reminds me that we can do it ourselves."

Moreover, Brickman reminds his staff that business mistakes also can inspire great work. "We're fortunate to have a successful company and a great culture and people who stay with the company for a long time, but we also make a lot of mistakes," he says. "We make business mistakes and people mistakes, but what makes this company what it is that we always see opportunities where things didn't go how we had planned and we focus on those — we have the opportunity to continually improve."

For the future of the industry, Brickman sees the need for professionals to band together to promote service, quality and industry improvement. "The biggest challenge we will face will be regulatory with immigration policy being at the top of the list," he says. "The challenges many people faced this year with the H-2B program underscores this. We need to work together to influence these policies through an effective lobbying effort."

Also, Brickman says customer expectations also are more sophisticated now. "We have become more service-oriented as an industry and this is the area where we are going to see the greatest change in expectations and where technology will play a greater role," he says. "It will be an exciting challenge for us to keep up with these expectations, but I believe this is also the best way to grow our industry."

True to form, Brickman calls on the leadership of his colleagues to help boost the industry's image. As a group, these leaders can inspire awareness and achievement while realizing individual success within their own organizations. Brickman agrees that teamwork and leadership go hand-in-hand. "I am by no means an expert on leadership, but one thing I know is that successful leaders all have great people around them who make them successful," he says. "That's one thing I have going for me. I am very fortunate to have an incredible team."

## Guiding Principles

With a background in electrical engineering, mathematics and physics, Dr. W. Edwards Deming, has had a profound impact on thousands of businesses and individuals with his philosophies on quality control. Though Deming passed away in 1993, Scott Brickman, chief executive officer of The Brickman Group, Gaithersburg, Md., still refers to the management expert's 14 Points in both his business and personal lives.

### DR. DEMING'S 14 POINTS:

1. Create constancy of purpose toward improvement of product and service with the aim to become competitive, stay in business and provide jobs.
2. Adopt the new philosophy. We are in a new economic age. Western management must awaken to the challenge, must learn their responsibilities and take on leadership for change.
3. Cease dependence on inspection to achieve quality. Eliminate the need for inspection on a mass basis by building quality into the product.
4. End the practice of awarding business on the basis of price tag. Instead, minimize total cost. Move toward a single supplier for any one item on a long-term relationship of loyalty and trust.
5. Constantly improve the system of production and service to improve quality and productivity, and thus constantly decrease costs.
6. Institute training on the job.
7. Institute leadership. The aim of supervision should be to help people and machines and gadgets do a better job.
8. Drive out fear, so that everyone may work effectively for the company.
9. Break down barriers between departments. People must work as a team to foresee problems that may be encountered.
10. Eliminate slogans, exhortations and targets for the workforce asking for zero defects and new levels of productivity. Such exhortations create adversarial relationships. Eliminate quotas on the factory floor and management by objective. Substitute leadership.
11. Remove barriers that rob the hourly worker of his right to pride of workmanship. Supervisors' responsibilities must change from numbers to quality.
12. Remove barriers that rob people in management and in engineering of their right to pride of workmanship.
13. Institute a vigorous program of education and self-improvement.
14. Put everybody in the company to work to accomplish the transformation. The transformation is everybody's job.





# BAYER Takes Leadership Position on Public Health Threats



For lawn care professionals, integrated pest management (IPM) has been essential for delivering healthier lawns to customers. But pest management also positively affects the health of customers. Common insects carry dangerous diseases and cause allergic reactions that threaten the health of millions of Americans.

Bayer Environmental Science has a vested interest in actively addressing these health threats. Bayer's Lawn & Landscape division is working hand-in-hand with the Professional Pest Management division to provide the most effective and profitable solutions to these key pests – solutions that both serve the public and provide business opportunities for LCOs.

**WEST NILE.** In recent summers, throughout much of the United States, the West Nile virus has become a hot topic and raised concern. In a new survey by the Professional Pest Management Alliance, half of surveyed homeowners believe mosquitoes pose the greatest health risk to themselves and/or their families.

Bayer's answer is **Tempo® Ultra** or **Suspend® SC**, advanced generation pyrethroids that control mosquitoes for more than 60 days. Both can be applied in a residual barrier treatment around structures and in places where mosquitos like to gather. LCOs can also turn to an improved formulation of **DeltaGard® G** insecticide to treat for mosquitoes. Containing the same active ingredient found in Suspend, DeltaGard uses a new water-dispersible carrier to provide quick knockdown and lasting control.

**LYME DISEASE.** Health officials estimate that more than 75 percent of Lyme disease cases are contracted within 100 feet of the home, making Lyme a true "backyard disease." Today, homeowners have a new tool in the fight against Lyme disease. Developed by Bayer in conjunction with the CDC, **Maxforce® Tick Management System** reduces tick populations by 96 percent. The product works where the ticks themselves contract the Lyme bacteria – field mice and rodents.

**FIRE ANTS.** Meanwhile in southern states, consumers and businesses spend \$2 billion annually fighting fire ants. More than 50 percent of people in infested areas are stung each year. Few long-term solutions are available. Bayer's **TopChoice™**, a professionally applied broadcast granular treatment, takes the battle directly to fire ant homes. Within four to six weeks, ants unknowingly come in contact with the product, which contaminates and eliminates the rest of the mound. Unlike temporary fixes, TopChoice is both a curative and a preventative method for destroying the entire ant colony, not just surface ants.

**ROACHES.** One of the most common health issues directly linked to pest infestation are cockroach allergens and asthma. Studies show that children allergic to cockroaches are more likely to miss school and even be hospitalized. Especially prevalent in urban environments, concern about this problem has heightened over the past few years due to the bait aversion problem.

To help address this issue, Bayer developed **Maxforce® FC Select** gel bait, which has been proven to effectively control cockroach populations. This news is especially relevant, as recent university research found that baits alone can effectively reduce cockroach allergens.

**LEADING THE WAY.** The threat of disease and allergic reactions from ever-present insects will never truly cease to exist. But Bayer will continue its efforts to provide new solutions that will help control the public health threat.



**Name: MARIA CANDLER**

**Company: James River Grounds Management**

**Location: Glen Allen, Va.**

**Career Highlights:**

- Joined James River Grounds Management in 1992
- Legislative chair, Associated Landscape Contractors of America (ALCA)
- Board member, ALCA
- Secretary/treasurer, ALCA
- Regularly travels to Washington, D.C. to represent the green industry as an advocate for H-2B and other green industry issues
- CLP, vice president of James River Grounds Management

*Maria Candler is only 33 and has only been in the industry for 12 years, but she has a story to tell and she encourages the rest of the green industry to tell its story as well.*

Maria Candler hesitates when asked about being a leader. Not because her mind is occupied with too much work and not because of false modesty. Candler hesitates because she knows that leadership is an abstract concept, and that there's no guaranteed path to finding it, creating it or becoming it. But whether leaders are born or made, Candler has proven her gift for it. With the winning combination of experience, tenacity, hope and passion, she has catapulted herself to great heights in the green industry.

After entering the fray of a generally male-dominated industry at 21 she now finds herself, at a mere 33, a respected leader in her field, a leader in her work place, a leading political advocate for the green industry and an inspirational leader to professional women. But how did she get here? Candler can define leadership, recognize its power and see it in the faces of potential leaders of the future, but as far as



she's concerned, her recipe for success amounts to simply believing in her own decisions and in herself and never giving up.

**ACCIDENTAL CAREER.** Despite the fact that her entire career trajectory has taken place at one company, and despite the fact that she has risen to the top as one of the industry's leaders, Maria Candler did *not* choose the landscape industry from the

**By Will Nepper**





Photos: Eric Dobbs

# Candler



get-go. "My background was in destination marketing, which is basically travel and tourism," Candler explains. "I wasn't ready for a real job yet. I was 21 and without a clue."

It was her roommate, a property manager, who pointed Candler in the direction of a small landscape company she had worked with. "I was still just trying to figure it all out and my roommate told me she had developed a good relationship with the salesman for this company and that I should go and check that opportunity out. At the time it just sounded kind of fun to me and since I was still trying to decide on my life strategy, I looked into it."

This would be as good a time as any to add "*and the rest is history.*" Maria never left James River Grounds Management and she's still there today having climbed the ranks of the business from the lowly job-hungry college student to an undeniable leader in the company. "It was the diversity of the company, the clients and the employees that I liked," she says. "And it didn't take long before I fell in love with the industry."

In the beginning of her career with James River she was "just doing whatever," but that didn't last. "I think the wonderful thing about this company and the owners of James River is that they really allowed a lot of freedom from the beginning – to make my own decisions and mistakes and create my own environment and path in the company," Candler says.

Plotting her own course would become a theme in Candler's professional life soon after her introduction to the industry and the management style of James River. "At that young age, I hadn't yet realized that freedom to fail or succeed was something that I not only needed, but enjoyed."

Candler is a self-described "control person" and says that being employed by a company that allowed her to be in charge of her own fate and navigate her career was one of the main compelling reasons for sticking with the company. "I saw an opportunity to create my own way," she says.

Creating her way involved several factors not limited to what's done between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. Her 12 years in the green industry has seen her active in ALCA at the committee level and traveling to Washington, D.C. to represent the green industry

as an advocate for H-2B. "It was something that began developing about eight years ago when we started using the H-2B program," she relates. Many have since looked to her as an inspirational example of how to organize green industry advocacy and fight for legislation on Capitol Hill.

Candler's association with ALCA was established after about a year of working with the H-2B program. It wasn't long before Candler was involved with ALCA at the committee level with employee recruiting, ALCA publications and education. She was making a name for herself –

or at the very least a nickname. "We call her 'The Doer,'" says Dan Foley, president, D. Foley Landscape, Walpole, Mass. Candler serves with Foley on the ALCA board of directors. "I'm fortunate that she's an officer for ALCA with me right now because you can count on her to get things done." This year, Candler became ALCA's secretary/treasurer at 32.

**INDEPENDENT SPIRIT.** One might wonder how someone like Candler, who never expected or sought a career in the green industry, could end up as one of its most





# Maria Candler Shares Her Leadership Secrets

## 1. What is your favorite book on leadership and why is it your favorite?

I've read several of the top sellers, like *Good to Great* and *Execution*. But I have to say that one of my favorites was called *Listen Up Leader*. It's one of those 20-minute reads that you get unsolicited in the mail, asking you to buy them in bulk, which I did and distributed to all of my employees. I liked this book because it was from the perspective of the employee craving to be led. It was insightful and it really got me thinking about my leadership style and how I was likely perceived by my employees and the assumptions that I made as a leader about my team and where we were headed.

## 2. Who has been the greatest influence on your leadership style and what did he or she teach you?

I've been fortunate enough to work with so many amazing people through my involvements with ALCA, but I would have to give most of the credit to the owner of my company, Ray Lazarchic. I've worked for Ray for almost 12 years now and I feel as though he's "raised" me as a leader. He and I have completely different management styles, but we usually come to the same conclusions about things in the end. He's taught me so much that it's impossible to list. Most importantly, I think it was his faith in me and his general support of the decisions that I made – whether he agreed or disagreed – that created an amazing environment for testing my wings. I really owe him a great deal.

## 3. How do you develop leadership skills in your employees?

We've definitely created a culture here at James River Grounds Management of allowing people the freedoms within their jobs to make their own decisions and solve their own problems. The unwritten gospel in the management hierarchy is "Don't ever bring me a problem unless you bring three solutions with you." It's amazing how this concept empowers and develops middle managers into leaders.

## 4. What has been your biggest challenge of being a leader and how did you overcome that challenge?

My biggest leadership challenge has probably been continuing to believe in myself and having confidence in my leadership abilities. I came into my role as a leader pretty much by default. We had a serious leadership void for many years because no one really wanted the job. Basically sheer frustration led me to take on the job and learn as I went. I had many years of self-doubt as I tried to figure out what path was best for our company and who the right people were to be on the team to get us there. ALCA (Associated Landscape Contractors of America) really helped with my confidence in leadership. In the organization, I had great opportunities to network with other contractors. Many times I would leave ALCA events thinking – "Wow, we're not as screwed up as I thought we were." After having a conversation with a business owner whose company is three times the size of yours and you realize they share your same problems just on a larger scale or maybe they have even more problems, it can inspire you. I also learned that size doesn't matter so much when it comes to running a successful business. I've learned just as much from small companies as I have from larger ones.

## 5. In your opinion, what are the top five foundations of being a leader and why are they important?

1. Be a good listener.
2. Learn how to administer the proper blend of support and direction. Too much or too little of either can be detrimental, depending upon the situation.
3. Know and enjoy the fact that every person you lead is a completely different human being with their own personality, style and motivators.
4. Never hesitate to make a decision. The decision to not make a decision is the worst decision to make.
5. Never assume that your team knows the path that you have created. You have to constantly look back to make sure they are following you down the same road. There are just too many detours and roadblocks along the way.



important advocates and leaders. Because she's been with one company for her entire career, playing connect the dots along her career path would only lead to two stops: the beginning and now. There's little doubt that Candler knows how to navigate her career, but there is evidently more to it than hard work and luck. Influences also play a role.

Like any successful person, Candler's background before James River shaped who she has become. And though other role models would come later, in the beginning, it was Candler's single mother who inspired her to work for the life she wanted. Candler, who describes her mother as very hard working, says she was taught at an early age to take control of her destiny.

"She'd say, 'Whatever you get in life, you have because you got it for yourself,'" Candler remembers. "We don't just take. We're not here for a handout. You're not a victim.' That was my whole message growing up: 'It's up to me. It's up to me!'"

Candler is surprisingly thankful that her mother didn't pay her way through college. "She'd tell me, 'If you want this you're going to appreciate it more if you work for it,'" she relates. "I appreciate her forcing me to be very independent at a very young age. That was very helpful."

It's this kind of independence that Candler seems to inspire in those who watch her closely as an example, whether they be green industry peers or fellow ALCA members. Coworkers who operate under Candler at James River also get a pretty potent dose of independence in a work environment where it's encouraged.

It's telling that Candler cites her greatest career accomplishment as creating opportunities for other people and enabling them to find their own paths. In other words, it's not what she's done for herself that she's most proud of, it's what she's been able to do for others. Many recognize this as a clear sign of selfless leadership.

"There were 12 employees at our peak time when I started with the company and now at the peak time of year we're at about 107 employees. And looking at all the opportunities that we've been able to create for our employees – I'm very proud of that."

"For me, leadership isn't solving problems or making decisions for people," she explains. "I'm there to offer support and to keep people

on the right path and to create a path that everyone feels good about as a team. My job is to keep people *wanting* to be on the same path. I'm not here to drive them, but I am here to make sure they want to be in the car – which is easier said than done a lot of days."

Candler says the corporate atmosphere and diversity of people at James River has helped her learn how to lead, but also challenged her to find creative ways to motivate. "I think the No. 1 thing that I've learned is that everyone is so different that you almost have to manage each personality separate from the one before it," she says. "What works for one employee doesn't work for the other and what motivates one employee may not motivate another. You can't make assumptions."

**LIVING AS A LEADER.** Another challenge of leadership, according to Candler, is knowing how to embrace it when it finds you. Part of this, may mean letting go of some responsibilities as newer more important ones begin to come around.

"It was never easy for me to let go of the day to day things," she explains. "It's difficult being OK with the fact that you don't know every single thing that's going on in your organization. That is such an amazing shift for someone that's a doer and who's been in lots of different roles in a company." She reduces the philosophy to that old standard: Working on your business, not in it.

However, getting things done and knowing when to let other people take the reigns was difficult at one time for Candler. She expresses that it's easy to get locked into a mindset that fools you in to thinking that because you *know* how to do a job, you *should* do that job. "You have to learn to let go of things and trust your staff to make it happen," she says. "It's one of the biggest challenges – just managing the growth and really personally letting go and moving myself into a higher level of thinking."

In Candler's case, some of that higher level of thinking probably pertains to legislative issues, educating the industry and advocating for immigrant workers. That's a lot to contribute to one industry by her early 30s and impressive by practically anyone's definition of the word. Still, Candler says she's unsure how her peers in the industry view her. "There are the two things that stand out – that I'm younger and that I'm a woman."

But neither of these considerations has seemed to pose much of a problem for Candler who's never resisted rolling up her sleeves and getting involved.

"Legislatively, I contribute a lot and often about what I consider to be the value of our industry," she says. It's a theme that pops up often with Candler, who believes that one of the most important things the green industry can do is to speak up for itself. It's something that Candler, as a leader in the industry, works very hard at.

"I think we need to tell our story more," she says. "I think we need to take every opportunity to let our clients and the public know that what we do is technical in nature," she says. "It's very business oriented. Running a successful landscape or lawn care company involves a lot of the same skills it takes to run a bank. We have to teach people that this is not just a job. This is not just a guy with a couple of mowers in the back of his truck – though there is some of that – But this is a big business and it's important and necessary."

But Candler knows that it's all just empty hyperbole without leadership to set an example. "We have to *be* the part too," she says. "Contractors have to believe they *are* professional."

Because Candler has accepted the call of leadership, she views it as her responsibility to get the green industry recognized as an essential service and an important business. "I think every time you do something for the community, you need to talk to the newspapers and send out a press release," she says, citing one way that the industry can run its own public relations. "I think you can also do this by joining professional groups in your market, whether it's the chamber of commerce or any professional group in your area." She explains that these are ways to network the industry and spread the word about its positive contributions.

Candler will continue in her many leadership roles adding "mother" to that list this summer with the arrival of her first born. Naturally motherhood is more than just another challenge she's taken on; it's a major life change. But don't expect it to slow her down. Being a leader is clearly in Candler's blood and there is little doubt that she will continue to be one of the industry's most valuable assets – an advocate, an inspiration, a leader and, now, a mom.





Bayer  
Environmental Science

# Rescue the Fescue

*Use Compass™ and Bayleton®  
to fight brown patch and dollar  
spot in tall fescue.*

Most of Kevin Cooper's lawn care customers in the Virginia Beach area have tall fescue. This differs from warm-season grass like Bermudagrass and St. Augustinegrass because it doesn't need fertilizing in the summer months. Cooper's team does make preventive fungicide treatments to protect the plant through the heat of the summer, though. They also use biostimulants to promote an emerald green color, make stronger plants and fortify cell walls. "We give the lawns all the good stuff – kind of like a multivitamin," he says. "And it always changes, depending on the weather and the season." One thing he has learned is, "You can't fight Mother Nature. She always wins."

To work harmoniously with Mother Nature, Cooper's crew follows an integrated pest management (IPM) program. "Our IPM program consists of scouting for the problem before trying to control it," he says. "In our business we call it plant healthcare when you're dealing with nutrition, and disease, insect and weed management."

In addition to insects and weeds, Cooper's crews scout for symptoms of common, local disease problems, especially brown patch and dollar spot. When they find these diseases, Cooper's crews use a tank mix of Compass™ and Bayleton® fungicides to control them. He knows what to expect from these products and feels they provide excellent value for the money.

Modeled after a fungicide that mushrooms produce naturally, Compass has a mode of action



that allows it to securely lock into the plant surface. This mesostemic action permits it to be absorbed into the waxy layer of a plant, resulting in a protective reservoir for long-lasting disease control. After application, Compass remains as a barrier to disease infection for up to 28 days. Bayleton was the first fungicide in the sterol inhibitor class, also known as the DMI's (demethylase inhibitors). The product moves systemically in the plant, providing longer residual than the older contact materials, such as chlorothalonil.



Kevin Cooper



# Kirk

*Sometimes serious and always inspired, Kirk Hurto views leadership the same way he approaches science – with a blend of structure and creativity.*

**Name: KIRK HURTO**

**Company: TruGreen-ChemLawn**

**Location: Delaware, Ohio**

**Career Highlights:**

- Received BS and MS from Southern Illinois University
- Received PhD from the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign
- Assistant professor of turfgrass science at University of Massachusetts, 1978-1981
- Joined TruGreen-ChemLawn in 1981 (Research scientist from 1981 to 1989, director technical services from 1989 to 1995, vice president of technical services from 1995 to present)
- Former Member, EPA Advisory Board
- Member, Ohio Pesticide Applicators for Responsible Regulations
- Member, Lawns & Environment Coalition

The lawn care industry revolves around science and research. Pesticide manufacturers spend months and years testing active ingredients for EPA approval. Lawn care operators use soil samples to balance lawns' pH levels, and most companies take a few application seasons to fine-tune lawn care programs with trial-and-error-style investigation.

Science and research go hand in hand, but once all the data is collected and the products and application methods are perfected, it's back to the drawing board to make things work. For 23 years, Kirk Hurto has been guiding and coaching researchers at TruGreen-ChemLawn in endeavors just like these.

"On the scientific side of what we do, we use established principles to develop new strategies and approaches to examine work practices and products we use to meet our customers' needs," says the vice president of technical services for TruGreen, Delaware, Ohio. "While science and research help identify possible solutions, the real challenge is to find what will work in the field."

In particular, Hurto and his team have worked to bring new products to market and, in terms of technical support, delve into the precarious world of consumer perception to keep TruGreen at the leading edge of the industry.

**POPULAR SCIENTIST.** As a child, Hurto says he remembers watching and helping his grandmother in the garden, but didn't imagine that he would receive a PhD in plant sciences. While in high school, his initial professional aspirations were

geared toward structures more solid than leaf tissues and slightly higher off the ground. "I always thought I would study architecture," he says. "It's a field that's creative and yet requires knowledge of structure." Thankfully, Hurto didn't have to sacrifice the always-intriguing balance between form and function when he entered the green industry.

"I've been reminded throughout my career that successful scientists must have a creative bent," Hurto says. "Science and research are very structured and organized – it has to be so that the data we develop is valid and considers all factors critical to the project's outcome. At the same time, you have to be innovative in asking the right questions about the products you're testing and determining what resources you have to develop solutions to your clients' problems."

When Hurto first started with TruGreen in 1981, his focus was on weed science, which put him in the thick of the company's technical research. Surrounded by other talented scientists, Hurto says this environment taught him a great deal about leadership as he took on more responsibility and began to assign projects to others on his staff.

"One notion we used in developing our young scientists was to be willing to take calculated risks," he says. "One phrase we would use to convey this was the rope story. A rope can be useful if you learn to use it as a lifeline. Taking on more rope – or risk – than you can handle can turn that rope into a noose around your neck. I think the message there is that when opportunities arise in your work, you need to take a look at what's in front of you. Act upon the opportunities, but be aware of your limitations and ask for help when it is needed. Our function as research leaders is to take the basics

By Lauren Spiers



# HURTO



Photos: Rycus Associates



of what we know and creatively turn new concepts into practical applications our field staff can use."

As vice president of technical services, Hurto oversees a field staff of 17 region technical managers who support 205

TruGreen-ChemLawn branch locations when they have questions on operations, applications and customer concerns. Hurto continues to use advice given to him early on to encourage younger technical managers on leadership and responsibility.



"Good researchers and technical managers should be asking additional questions before they can fully answer the question asked of them," he says. "When I first started studying plant and soil science, I never thought I would enter academia, but I always wanted to understand more about the basic problem at hand. Now that I've had the experience of being an educator, I'm glad I did it. What I'm most impressed with by today's students is how creative many of them are. Newer scientists are a lot smarter – they use their knowledge to solve more complex issues confronting our industry today."

**TEAM PLAYER, TEAM COACH.** Having spent much of his career collaborating on everything from research teams to technical writings to in-house committees at TruGreen, Hurto's leadership skills are a combination of partnership and management experience. His participation in organizations outside of the office have influenced his leadership style, as well.

"In my earlier days, I coached youth soccer," he says, remembering how his green industry background caused him to look at the fields he was coaching on with a bit of consternation. "These fields were not in good shape and I mentioned that to someone, and the next thing you know I was nominated to our parks board."

As a board member, Hurto worked on projects including land use planning and greenspace management. Through his work, Hurto says one of the best lessons he learned was the importance of reaching a consensus. "When you get involved in these types of projects and community groups, you meet people from all different walks of life," he says. "When those people's points of view are different from yours, it becomes important to really understand where they're coming from. Sometimes you have to agree to disagree, but an effective team sticks to the issues at hand, regardless of the personalities behind the issues. As a team, members work to reach a reasonable compromise and recommend a solution that best meets the common good for our community."

Hurto acknowledges that effectively communicating issues and goals in a team



setting is a challenge leaders have to face head on. "Sometimes, leaders' awareness of an issue because of their background can impede them if they fail to consider that others may not have their experience," he notes. "You may be so close to the topic that you forget what it took for you to get to that level of understanding and acceptance of new ideas. It's important to realize your team's level of understanding of an issue and not assume they are on par with your understanding."

To keep everyone on his large staff of technical managers on the same page, Hurto says he stays in contact with his team in the field and frequently travels to meet with those managers to coach them on current company initiatives. Hurto's colleague of 23 years, Bobby Joyner, director of research for TruGreen, explains how challenging this arrangement can be. "Kirk and I interact with the regional staff and technical managers almost on a day-to-day basis – those are really our customers," he says. "It's difficult because you don't have a direct responsibility over these individuals, so as leadership goes, it's really a matter of attaining these individuals' respect first and then guiding them through the project."

Joyner adds that he can attest to Hurto's strength as a leader in these situations. "From a technical standpoint, Kirk really has an incredible amount of knowledge and experience," he says. "It's always amazed me because he's obviously a weed and herbicide specialist, but it goes beyond that. He's a great go-between with the technical side and the operations side and keeps our clients' best interests in mind."

The trust and rapport that Hurto built on both the technical and operations sides of the business was tested when TruGreen disbanded its research division in September 2003. "The company did a restructuring of its business units and decided to phase out internal research, which left a lot of people wondering what was going to happen next," he says. "My role then turned to helping several members of our team find new positions within the company and encouraging everyone through the situation."

During this tough transition, Joyner adds that Hurto exemplified the faith and commitment leaders make to their teams.

## Kirk Hurto Shares His Leadership Secrets

### 1. What is your favorite book on leadership and why?

Two books that speak to personal strength and leadership come to mind: Lance Armstrong's *It's Not About the Bike* and Tom Brokaw's *America's Greatest Generation*. Both speak to the power of the human spirit and its role in developing an individual's character and ability to achieve their goals even when faced with hardship and situations they may not directly control. What I found most interesting was the common leadership traits of courage and vision exhibited by Lance's battle with cancer and American soldiers' sense of duty in World War II.

### 2. Who has been the greatest influence on your leadership style and what did he or she teach you?

There are many positive role models that I try to emulate, but leadership is not something one can mimic. More importantly, the exposure to these leaders and understanding what makes them effective helps you become a better leader. Their personal style of interaction with others and their ability to influence others to achieve common goals is worthy to note. I try to learn from others whom I admire by examining their strengths and how I may apply select elements of their style in my interactions with others.

### 3. How do you develop leadership skills in your employees?

Lead by example. I don't ask someone to perform a task that I would not do myself. Allow for mistakes, but make sure they learn from the experience. It's important to allow employees to develop their own management styles, rather than always directing their decisions. Make suggestions and challenge them to be better performers at their work and influence others they lead.

### 4. What has been your biggest leadership challenge and how did you overcome that challenge?

Communicating shared visions is a challenge that all leaders have to overcome. Leaders accomplish little if they work alone. To be effective, it's important that others believe in and understand your goals. Communication is key to influencing others' actions, so leaders must encourage input from those who they lead, set clear objectives that people will understand and then allow them to act. I find that coaching rather than directing people's actions builds support and positive actions to achieve shared goals.



"As a group, we were in a position to make a big impact in the company and the industry. Instead, the company went a different route and our department was gone," Joyner says. "Kirk was very sympathetic and really went to bat for all of us and struggled to help everyone out. It took several months to reassign everyone, but that shows the loyalty that Kirk has to the people he works with and to his company."

**FUTURE FOCUS.** With a new structure in place for the division, Hurto recently began focusing on the consumer perception of pesticides—a challenge many companies are facing in terms of customers' concerns regarding exposure.

"The science is starting to get lost, especially in the face of ongoing controversy in

Toronto," Hurto says. "We used to feel confident that the science would win our argument for responsible use, but advocacy groups against lawn pesticide use have become better organized and are appealing to consumer concerns about chemical risks. We used to assume the facts would favor our position, but some groups have distorted the facts and people are getting confused."

Hurto says the industry is now dealing with consumers' emotions, which makes pesticide use a much more delicate topic. Additionally, the information age has made masses of information available to the public, though not all of that information is accurate. "It's not enough for us to tell people what we know to be true," Hurto explains. "There are groups who believe lawn care poses an unacceptable risk. It's virtually im-

possible to prove a negative; therefore proving something is risk-free is a challenge. Because of that, scientists need to put the data into context. What are the benefits of the products and services we offer? What approaches can we take to show our customers that the products can be used responsibly and provide benefits with acceptable risk."

This challenge is something Hurto says he hasn't seen since the 1980s, another time of public outcry against pesticides. A push to counteract this, he says, must involve professionals in the field, the corporate offices and the laboratories. "Today, the assumption is that lawns don't provide value and that inputs we use to care for lawns and landscapes pose too much risk," he explains. "What makes this theory palpable to civic leaders is it that makes people feel good when they act out against lawns in their communities. It's as if they feel like they're doing something positive for the environment but those 'feel goods' are based on misinformation. Current industry and academic leaders, as well as the leaders of the future have to get more engaged in public dialogues to challenge these assumptions."

Despite public pressures, Hurto maintains a positive outlook and believes that, as a group, the industry can increase professionalism and positive public perception. "The backyard lawn and garden is alive and well, but today's consumers are more savvy about their lawns' needs and have concerns about the inputs we use and their possible effects on our communities. To earn the right to service customers, we need to address their concerns. We're being challenged to provide cost-effective services that incorporate low-impact strategies to control problems and enhance the lawn's utilization of resources applied."

A changing workforce will also impact the customer service, Hurto adds, giving a glimpse into how the industry will change over the next five to 10 years. "We'll need to offer better training on communicating with customers about the service we provide, its benefits and our responsible management of the perceived risks," he says. "These are issues that the next generation of leaders will need to deal with. As an industry group we need to ensure the service experience we provide customers meets their lawn and personal needs in a responsible manner."

## InspirationManagement

Kirk Hurto spends a lot of time on the road. With a team of 17 region technical managers who look after 205 branch offices, the vice president of technical services for TruGreen-ChemLawn, Delaware, Ohio, racks up frequent flier miles as he keeps in touch with more than 70 to 80 colleagues each year.

With a schedule like this, you would think Hurto would have a hard time keeping thoughts, ideas and projects organized. But on the other hand, Hurto's background as a research scientist implies that organization and tracking data are among his management strengths. So which is it?

"I wouldn't say I'm overly organized," Hurto says with a laugh in response to friend and coworker Bobby Joyner's comment that Hurto's desk is "way too neat and clean." However, Hurto does note that having a busy schedule of field time and office time is actually beneficial to the type of work that the TruGreen technical staff handles.

"I think you need a good mix of time in and out of the office," he says. "If you're out in the field, you need time to collect your thoughts and transfer what you learn from one field visit and apply it to other locations. There's so many good ideas that originate in the field and a lot of times we get so busy that we really don't make time to collect the good ones and share with others."

That's when office time works wonders. "Time in the office allows me to collect the data as well as catch up on activities I missed while on the road," Hurto says. "It's amazing how dominant e-mail has become as a conduit for information exchange. It's not unusual to spend several hours responding to e-mails received while on the road. I also use the office time to collect my thoughts on new ideas I observe while in the field and polish them into a format that can be shared with others."





# Bayer Educating Public on Fire Ant Threat

*Bayer donates TopChoice™ to high-profile parks, schools and historic sites to turn the public's attention to local companies battling fire ants.*

In 2004, hundreds of acres of well-traveled turf – from Dallas' Southfork Ranch to the Miami Baptist Hospital to the grounds surrounding the USS Battleship North Carolina – were treated with TopChoice™ preventative fire ant technology, donated by Bayer Environmental Science. At each donation event, lawn care and pest control professionals spoke to the media about the importance of fire ant control, and how professionally-applied products like TopChoice are a property owner's best approach to fire ant control.



"We wanted to get the word out that there is a better way to control fire ants," says Larry McKinney, president of Ft. Myers-based Lan Mac Pest Control, which donated more than 30 acres of TopChoice to McGregor Baptist Church and School on May 26, 2004. "This donation will protect the families who visit this property every day. Plus, it gives us a chance to let local residents know about the year-long benefits of TopChoice." A news story on the donation ran twice that night on the local NBC station, reaching more than 800,000 viewers.

Also on May 26, Freedom Lawns USA of Wilmington, N.C. donated 5 acres of TopChoice to the riverside park surrounding the USS Battleship North Carolina, Wilmington's most popular tourist attraction. Reporters from the local FOX, NBC and ABC affiliates interviewed company representatives about the donation.

"Fire ants have become a bigger and bigger problem here, with the entire southeastern part of the state now infested," explains Mark Tamn, president of Freedom Lawns. "We provided the



Roger Miller, assistant director of Battleship North Carolina, is interviewed on the grounds treated with TopChoice fire ant technology. Freedom Lawns donated their time for the application; Bayer Environmental Science donated the product.

reporters with tips for people worried about fire ants as well as explanations on how TopChoice works. We hope it will lead to a better awareness of the problem in the Cape Fear area."

The donation events are part of a Bayer national outreach program aimed at educating families and homeowners of the danger fire ants pose, especially to children and pets. To help increase the chance of media coverage, high-profile and well-trafficked sites were chosen. Other TopChoice donation events include:

- Southfork Ranch and the YMCA, Plano, Texas, GroGreen
- Beauvoir, The Jefferson Davis Historic Home and Presidential Library, Biloxi, Miss., Redd Pest Control
- Miami Baptist Hospital grounds, Miami, Fla., TruGreen-ChemLawn
- Murray Park, Little Rock, Ark., Command Pest Control & Fairway Lawn Services
- Saluda Shoals Park, Seven Oaks Park and Crooked Creek Park, Columbia, S.C., Clarks' Lawn and Pest Control
- Space Coast Stadium, Melbourne, Fla., Slug-A-Bug Pest Control
- Rio Cibolo Ranch, San Antonio, Tex., Custom Pest and Lawn Service
- And more!

TopChoice from Bayer is a low-dose, granular insecticide that is spread over lawns and beds like fertilizer. It is unique in that it both cures and prevents fire ants for a full year with just one application. TopChoice is labeled for use on home and commercial lawns, golf courses, sports fields, cemeteries, parks, school grounds and other recreational areas. For more information, visit [www.topchoice.com](http://www.topchoice.com) or contact your local field sales representative.



Photos: Walter P. Calahan

By Nicole Wisniewski

# Lou KOBUS

*Your friendly Virginia dirt farmer shares stories about how his 'date with fate' a la Casablanca got him into the green industry and how time in the military taught him the essence of true leadership.*

The life of Lou Kobus, Jr. — president, Village Turf, Mount Vernon, Va. — reads like the pages of an epic novel chock full of good, old-fashioned moral obligation, yet alive with the comedic dance and wisecracking dialogue of *Casablanca*.

In fact, Kobus, 56, can reminisce about how when he was a youth and traveled with his parents, Lou, Sr., and Eleanor, they would dress for the occasion — in a suit and tie and a nice skirt and blouse — vs. today's travelers in sloppy shorts-and-t-shirts in one moment, and then share the story of a dance competition at a recent Mid-Atlantic Nursery Trade Show in Baltimore, Md., where the music of Big Willie and the Hubcaps guided him toward victory during the next. "I'm not a wallflower, and I'm not a follower," Kobus maintains proudly, "but I'll admit that I can get drunk, obnoxious and loud."



**Name: LOU KOBUS**

**Company: Village Turf**

**Location: Mount Vernon, Va.**

**Career Highlights:**

- Master's degree, civil engineering, Rutgers
- Master's degree, agronomy, Virginia Tech
- Director, Professional Lawn Care Association of America
- Member, Associated Landscape Contractors of America
- Member, Sports Turf Managers' Association
- Member, American Nursery & Landscape Association
- Member, Southern Nursery Association
- Director, Virginia Agribusiness Council
- Director, Virginia Turfgrass Council
- Legislative Chairman, Virginia Green Industry Council
- Member, Virginia Tech Landscape Contracting Advisory Council
- Member, Virginia Tech Turfgrass Advisory Council
- Director, Virginia Nursery & Landscape Association
- Legislative Chairman, Virginia Sports Turf Managers' Association
- Member, Northern Virginia Nursery & Landscape Association
- President, Mount Vernon Citizen's Coalition
- Member of the following fraternal organizations: Knights of Columbus; Master Mason; Shriner, Kona Temple; Scottish Rite; York Rite; Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks; Fraternal Order of Eagles; International Order of Odd Fellows; Veterans of Foreign Wars; American Legion

Then it's back to recent traveling tales, one in particular where he used his intimidating 6-foot-5-inch, 270-pound frame to hold an overanxious man back, so a "little old lady" could take her seat on a Southwest Airlines flight.

From comedian to nice guy to agronomist, Kobus freely admits he's an opportunist, seizing most of the chances with which he has been presented – even those others may have shied away from – and the result is a rich life woven with stories that have not only shaped him into the leader he is today, but that no one expects to hear being told from a man known to his industry peers as "your friendly Virginia dirt farmer."

**'WELCOME TO THE FIGHT.'** Lou Kobus was born on May 24, 1948 in St. Michael's Hospital on High Street in North New Jersey at 11:52 a.m. – "just in time for lunch," he says.

In 1959, his family moved from Newark to Union, N.J., where Kobus went to Livingston Elementary and then Union High School, graduating in 1966. Growing up, Lou was close to his Grandfather Kobus, a falconer and naturalist who kept birds and grew perfect roses with tender care. "My true appreciation of outdoor life and growing things came from him," Kobus says.

Other big influences for Kobus as a child were his Uncle Stosh

and Aunt Lottie Iwinski. Uncle Stosh was a baker who worked for Wagner's Pies, and an outdoorsman like Grandfather Kobus. "My Uncle Stosh and Grandfather Kobus were the ones I fished and crabbed with, and who taught me early on how to cook, clean and sew with the help of Aunt Lottie," Kobus says.

Kobus' brother, Jimmy, who is currently the Dean of Students for five schools in Council Bluffs, Iowa, is just shy of two years younger than Kobus, and would accompany the crew on these outdoor adventures.

Jimmy joined the Marine Corp. in 1967, and Kobus joined shortly thereafter in 1969 after receiving his bachelor's degree in agricultural engineering from the University of Wisconsin, "because the country was calling and that was the thing we felt we had to do," Kobus says, reminiscing about how his Uncle Stosh didn't say much about World War II specifics but would often talk about the whole experience in glowing generalities, sharing stories of being the lead scout for Gen. George Patton's tanks, earning two silver stars and one bronze star during combat, and how it was important for a person to have strong Americanism.

However, the Vietnam War wasn't easy on Jimmy or Lou. "Jimmy lost some high school buddies and I lost two college friends – one during the first week I was there," Kobus says. "Jimmy also got shot up a bit and had Malaria, and I'm about 30 percent disabled from my military operations."

But the ever-optimistic Kobus moves on. After serving as an enlisted marine for seven years, Kobus was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant in 1975. During his Marine Corps. career, Kobus became the facilities maintenance officer of several major commands and the facilities engineer at Marine Corp. Headquarters. For a decade of this time, Kobus was stationed in Japan, where he learned to speak fluent Japanese. For the U.S. Marine Corp., Kobus also played four years of international rugby, which took him to South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, China, Germany, France and England for games. Kobus calls himself a "halfway decent player," and he continues to play the sport now in Virginia for what he calls "the old man's league."

**'OF ALL THE GIN JOINTS IN THE WORLD...'** Some could say that Lou Kobus' future in the green industry was predicted long before he really knew what he wanted to do with his life. For instance, next to his high school yearbook photo, one can see that when Kobus grew up he wanted to be a "good agriculturist." And despite the fact that the nickname for his Union High School sports team was "The Farmers," Lou didn't get into the green industry until the early 1990s.

On Nov. 1, 1992, when he was 42 years old, Kobus retired from the Marines. "I did my 23 years and quit," he says. "I could have continued to work for the government, but I grew bored to tears of the endless stream of paperwork. I felt that I had more to give and offer. I was tired of traveling. You get to a point where you want to put down roots."

That year, on Thanksgiving Day, opportunity knocked. Kobus was having dinner with his family when his Uncle John and Aunt



Joyce Brown from Virginia announced that they were retiring from their \$70,000-landscape business, which they called Brown's Landscaping. The business was originally established on the Eastern Shore of Virginia in 1647 by Johannes Wise. As the family business grew, the operation was moved to Prince William County in 1856.

Kobus immediately offered to buy the business. He moved it to Fairfax County, renamed it Village Turf and incorporated the company in May of 1993. "I realized that I wanted to get back out there and grow things and this just seemed like the best way to do it," Kobus says.

As in each chapter of his life, Kobus didn't take the job of running a landscape business lightly. He jumped in with both feet without fear, first taking courses at Virginia Tech, earning his master's degree in agronomy in 1993, where he credits his success to two professors – Rajandra Waghray and John Shoulders, an entomologist and agronomist, respectively, "who took care of me," Kobus explains. Then he joined every major local and national landscape association, becoming a truly active member.

For instance, in 1998, as legislative affairs chairperson for the Virginia Turfgrass Council, Kobus played a key role in gaining monetary support from the state to do a Virginia Turfgrass Industry Economic Impact Survey, shares Erik Ervin, turf specialist and assistant professor, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, Va., adding that Kobus even helped to gain continued funding for a follow-up survey in 2005.

"Lou has made sure that the landscape and turf industry has a voice with the governor and state legislature when policy that directly affects the landscape industry is being considered," Ervin says. "He's really kept us on the forefront of being proactive rather than reactive when drought or nutrient management regulations have come through. He's also funded a couple of research projects with me, looking at taking landfill soils and turning them into beneficial topsoils. Overall, Lou has had a huge impact on our industry and our state."

Today, Village Turf is a \$5-million business, offering installation, maintenance, lawn care, tree and shrub care and other services, such as drought management and revegetation, to 50 percent government, 30 percent commercial and 20 percent residential clients.

In addition to Village Turf, Kobus also started Southern States, a retail store with a full-service nursery that caters to farm and home and garden customers, as well as Clay Outdoor Power Equipment, a sales and service dealer offering a complete line of outdoor equipment, including repair and replacement services. As Ervin explains, "Lou is quite the entrepreneur – he's always looking at new products and new ways to make old products useful again."

**'PLAY IT AGAIN.'** Though Kobus' tall, initially intimidating frame can give passersby a Humphrey Bogart-esque, "I stick my neck out for nobody," impression, once Kobus smiles and shakes your hand, you realize he's there to help.

Conventional wisdom says that military units are most likely to succeed in the field when they follow strict command-and-control procedures – when they operate within a rigid, top-down hierarchical organization where officers issue orders and the grunts on the ground swiftly and unquestioningly obey and execute those orders.

But according to Kobus, that's an outdated leadership model. The leaders who will wage successful campaigns of any kind will be those who marshal "creative solutions in ambiguous circumstances," he says. "Everybody's got to know how to be a leader."

In Kobus' opinion, the best way to be a leader is to be a good example and embrace the "work hard, play hard" philosophy.

For instance, if an owner is tardy to work everyday and his clothes are wrinkled and covered with dirt and coffee stains and his paperwork is illegible, sooner or later he'll find that his employees' work quality also will decrease. "How can you inspect and lead the troops if you always come in late looking like a soup sandwich – unshaven and unprofessionally dressed?" Kobus asks. "How can you instill professionalism this way or establish a business identity? You can't make your employees work 12- to 14-hour days if you leave early everyday to play golf. That doesn't motivate or inspire people. You have to set the standard."





# Lou Kobus Shares His Leadership Secrets

## 1. What is your favorite book on leadership and why is it your favorite?

My favorite book is Lee's *Lieutenants* by Douglas Southall Freeman. It is an in-depth study of the officers of the Army of Northern Virginia. As a general, Robert Edward Lee was a very broad-brushed, big picture guy and Jackson Stonewall was his Chief of Staff, so it was actually Stonewall putting the orders together to the brigade commanders and then down to the lieutenants who implemented the plan. To me, it's idealistic and romantic that Lee had this grand plan and the details went down to each level and the plan was carried out. It's the same for a CEO in a large company. The leader has an objective and it doesn't mean anything to anyone until someone goes back and says, 'This is what the boss wants and this is how we're going to do it.' That's a specific leadership style that works.

## 2. Who has been the greatest influence on your leadership style and what did he or she teach you?

My leadership style comes from my Grandfather Kobus and was honed by my military influences. Grandfather Kobus was a naturalist who grew award-winning roses. My brother and I spent a lot of time with him and he taught us how to treat people and how to work hard and play hard. The military taught me the importance of leadership by example.

## 3. How do you develop leadership skills in your employees?

I believe in leadership by example. I can't expect my employees to be on time if I'm not there 30 to 45 minutes early watching them punch in. Of course, employees are going to make mistakes. We go over these mistakes together in an action report and talk about what they could have done better. This is the best way for them to learn.

## 4. What has been your biggest challenge of being a leader and how did you overcome that challenge?

My biggest challenge has been recognizing the difference between leadership and management. Leadership is thinking creatively to permanently solve a problem, while management is quickly taking care of the problem at hand without fixing the big picture issues. For instance, if you need to get more employees, the manager would go see if they could get some temporary employees from a temp agency while a leader might have his supervisors check the local high schools or get a list of people getting out of the military or check with the unemployment commission and go from there.

Leaders are also creative – they talk to the school board, they teach classes, they do some plant remediation. They plan for the future every day.

## 5. In your opinion, what are the top five foundations of leadership?

1. Practice leadership by example.
2. Never lose your cool.
3. Do your homework. Learn as much as you can about your industry.
4. Know your numbers. Learn how to use a computer and have all the areas of your business available from a PC anytime, anywhere so you always know the status of your business.
5. Remember why you're doing the job.



Kobus' theory is that employees will be motivated if they feel their leader is a part of the team. Kobus shares a story from his military days to make his point. "When I was an officer for the Marine Corp., I was always the last to eat because I stood on the serving line making sure my team got the right servings," he says. "Respect is a two-way street. If your employees see that you will go out there and dig holes alongside them, then they will dig in their heels and work hard too."

Kobus doesn't deny that "leadership is a lonely position," but he maintains that this is the price of achieving true business success. "You have to worry about your mission and the welfare of your men and equipment," he explains. "As a leader, you make decisions that aren't popular and that don't make people happy, but once the mission and its objectives are defined, that is your No. 1 goal."

And when seeking out future leaders among his 60 employees, Kobus looks to a lesson his Grandfather Kobus taught him. "My Grandfather Kobus used to say, 'You'll dig up a lot of coal before you'll find a diamond,'" Kobus explains. "People are either on your team or off your team. The bad guys surface real quick. I'm impressed when I notice people looking ahead – further down the road than their 5 p.m. beer, like when they get the trucks ready for an oil change when it's due without being told first. That impresses me. Seeking out the true leaders in your organization can take some time, but many times they surface just as quickly as the bad ones."

**'HERE'S LOOKING AT YOU.'** Other than a brief 13-month stint at marriage, Kobus remains a bachelor, referring to his two loyal companions – Turf the Wonder Dog, a 5-year-old, shaggy, blonde Briard, and his buddy J.D., a 3-year-old black Labrador Retriever, whose initials stand for "not Jack Daniels, not John Deere, but Just Dog," Kobus explains – as his immediate family. These dogs, particularly Turf, can be seen trotting at Kobus' heels when he's on jobs "checking to make sure that when we're installing turf the brown side is down and the green side is up," Kobus jokes, calling Turf his company's security guard.

Today, Kobus says he still works in the field with his employees at least two or three days a week. "I work a lot of hours and Turf doesn't mind if I'm a little late coming home," he says, laughing.

In the spare time that Kobus does create for himself, he seems to be checking specific tasks off of a long list of most-wanted experiences. He has a passionate interest in history and architecture. He's also a big fan of attending professional sports games as well as visiting sports fields, such as Camden Yards and Jacobs Field, to experience their architecture and design.

And don't expect to conduct mindless small talk with Kobus. Not only does he challenge you with historical questions about your youth and hometown, but he also openly shares intriguing stories about his own history that slowly unveil what seems like an endless treasure chest into his personality. In one breathe, he'll tell you how it was an honor to be in charge of the marines along Pennsylvania Avenue during President Ronald Reagan's second inauguration and then reveal that he spent last Saturday, with the

permission of the local school board and the Fairfax County Health Department, alongside the 60 doctors he recruited to admit physicals to 160 children whose families couldn't afford to send them to medical professionals for their school checkups. "He is a great mentor to students and to young people coming into the industry," Ervin shares.

Kobus has an office but doesn't truly operate out of one. He is always reachable from a mobile phone at a job site, where he'll tell you he's overlooking turf fields, as Turf and J.D. inspect his work. "My happiest times are when I'm on the job or on a tractor and taking an ugly site and turning it into an aesthetic beauty," he says.

Kobus would rather form a partnership with Mother Nature vs. constantly challenging her to achieve his goals. His current project is seeking out land to build a turf center at Virginia Tech. "I'd like to create a place where landscape contractors can get the most up-to-date research available," he says. "I am an environmentalist. I believe if we work with Mother Nature instead of against her, a lot of our environmental problems will go away. The turf center is a lofty goal, but wouldn't it be great to be able to give contractors all the information they need to keep the grass growing?"

A reviewer of *Casablanca* was once quoted saying, "It's not much of a stretch to say that Hollywood doesn't make movies like this any more, because the bittersweet ending has gone the way of black-and-white cinematography. One of the things that makes *Casablanca* unique is that it stays true to itself without giving in to commonly held perceptions of crowd-pleasing tactics. And because of this, not despite it, *Casablanca* has become known as one of the greatest movies ever made."

Similarly, old-fashioned leaders like Kobus, who form partnerships and sign contracts with handshakes and call even the youngest, newest person in his employment "boss" to make them feel special, are around for the long haul to aid the industry through good and bad times, proudly sharing his motto: "The mark of a man can be measured by what concerns him."

And what concerns Kobus? When asked the question, "What are your future goals?" Kobus replies, "You mean before I close my eyes to God? I'm living life now. How many people do you know who have swam out of a submarine 25 feet below the ocean, flew planes on and off aircraft carriers, fired gun shots in anger, learned to speak fluent Japanese and have been around the world two and one-half times? I'm very proud of my time in the military – it's part of the fabric of my life. I'm very blessed and very humble to God."

And yet his initial goals are further away from personal gain than one would expect. "I would like to see the industry have a strong national organization," he says. "I would like to see the lawn care industry become a professional industry. There is room for everyone – there is nothing wrong with the guy who has one truck and is trying to make it. My goal is to try to help those people. A lot of people say I'm an opportunist, and they're right. I take a look at the opportunities before me and I move on them."

While some people would say Kobus has taken some risky chances in life, most would agree that, despite these ventures, his mark on the industry is immeasurable – "the beginning of a beautiful friendship."





# Revolver Tackles RYEGRASS

The Charlotte Christian Academy needed to mount a strong offense against the ryegrass, bluegrass and *Poa annua* that had been gaining yards on their football field. Luckily, Revolver™ herbicide is now registered for use on sports fields, and it "worked like a champ," according to Jason Crenshaw of Fairway Green in Charlotte, NC.

The field was in bad shape – beat up and lacking the proper chemical treatments needed for regular upkeep. There were weeds and clumps of unwanted grasses covering what long ago used to be a manicured field of Bermudagrass. As is typical with any customer, David Houseton, athletic facilities coordinator at the Academy, was looking for fast results.

Crenshaw had recently begun using Revolver on his other accounts and knew the herbicide effectively removed cool-season grasses without damaging the Bermudagrass turf. "I had used Revolver mostly on residential properties up until this point in

areas where ryegrass, *Poa annua* and fescue clumps were present, and I was more than pleased with the results," says Crenshaw.

Revolver was applied to the entire 6 acres in the early summer at the 0.4 ounce rate – a rate recommended by Bayer. Within just two weeks following application, the 6 acres turned into a whole new playing field. The ryegrass, bluegrass and *Poa annua* that had been plaguing the field were all but gone.

"I was really impressed at the speed and efficacy at which Revolver worked. I was shocked at the complete difference in the field within such a short amount of time," remarked Houseton. "It worked so well that Fairway Green went on to apply it to all of our other sports fields – and I have to say so far, so good."

Fairway Green has yet to be back for any type of reapplication – saving both time and money for both parties involved. Crenshaw adds: "Saving labor and increasing customer satisfaction – you can't beat that!"

## Paperless Points Now Available for Accolades Program

Bayer recently launched Paperless Points™ for its Accolades® Program, and earning rewards has never been so easy.

"Customers no longer have to submit invoices to receive Accolades points," remarked Jeff Weld, programs manager. "All you have to do is choose the rewards you want."

The new method for collecting points eliminates the paperwork and hassles. When you buy Bayer products through a participating distributor, Accolades points are deposited into your account automatically. Points are deposited into your Accolades account within four to six weeks after your purchase.

The only situation where you'll need to submit an invoice are:

1. When you pay cash for your purchases.
2. When you buy through a non-participating distributor.

In all other scenarios, Accolades paperwork is a thing of the past.

If you're new to Accolades, the program allows users to earn points toward rewards by purchasing products. Rewards include turf equipment, electronic items, fishing and hunting gear, sports equipment, trips and donations to turfgrass associations. And Accolades points have a long life – four years – so you can save them up for the rewards you want.

Last year, Bayer established different membership levels that customers can attain within the program. Each ascending level increases the earning power of each point.

- **Standard Accolades Membership** (less than 10,000 points earned per year)
- **Accolades Preferred Membership** (between 10,000 and 24,999 points earned per year)
  - Earn 10 percent bonus points on all Bayer product purchases
- **Accolades Elite Membership** (25,000 points or more per year)
  - Earn 25 percent bonus points on all Bayer product purchases

For more information on the Accolades Program, call 1-888-456-6464 or visit us online at [www.AccoladesRewards.com](http://www.AccoladesRewards.com).



By Jennifer Lash



Photo: Terry Farmer



# Jack ROBERTSON

*Superior customer service and marketing know-how is the name of the leadership game for Jack Robertson.*

While passing through Springfield, Ill., a customer might get the urge to stop by the inviting office of Jack Robertson Lawn Care, which is complete with hunting trophies on the walls and a fireplace. Depending on who has control of the radio, the customer might hear some oldies-but-goodies wafting through the air or sports talk radio. However, whether customers are dropping by for a free rain gauge or looking for the man behind the business – casually clad in a polo shirt and shorts – they best arrive before the clock strikes 5 p.m.

"I come in and troubleshoot whatever I need to troubleshoot from about 9 a.m. until 5 in the afternoon," says Jack Robertson, owner of his self-titled lawn care company. "A typical day for everyone here – we're out of the office by 5 p.m., even in spring when it's busiest. I want to make sure everyone's got a life and we're not doing this until 8 p.m."

To Robertson, there is no better place than Springfield, Ill., to live life. He grew up there and earned his agronomy degree at Western Illinois University, Macomb, Ill. His older brother and sister, Joe and Judy, also both still live in the area

and they see each other often. Robertson describes his hometown "as Midwest as Midwest gets," and says he feels fortunate to work in an environment that he has grown up in. All these years later, with the majority of his business being conducted within 5 miles of the office, Robertson continues to provide the community with top-notch lawn care and extraordinary customer service.

**FATHER FIGURE.** Robertson is both a father at home and at the workplace – although he might not be aware of his "double duty."

"His nickname around here is 'Dad,'" admits Debbie Reid, office manager at Jack Robertson Lawn Care. "He doesn't know that. I'm sure he'd get a kick out of it though."

Robertson's lawn care staff is small, with around 10 employees. Senior Service Managers Brian Cox and Mike Harris have been with the company for more than 20 years, and Reid is approaching 10 years. Robertson says finding good labor is never easy and having a staff he is able to work with is a blessing. But he really gives his employees no reason to leave, because taking care of his employees is just as important to him as taking care of his customers.

"It's really a fun office to work in," Reid says. "After nine years, you really get to know somebody, so we're all pretty relaxed together. We're a family. I've had some bad jobs in the past, but you just can't beat a good working relationship and a good personal relationship combination – you just don't find that anymore."

Something else that might be hard to come by these days is a manager who will tell an employee to take off early to make it to their daughter's dance recital or their son's baseball game. But family is the No. 1 priority in Robertson's book, and he exercises that philosophy at the workplace. "He is extremely family oriented," Reid declares. "He very much believes that if your kids have a ball game, then that's where you need to be. He would never tell anybody they can't have time off to be with their family."

Robertson sometimes even makes the decision to take time off for his employees. Reid says, on occasion, Robertson will come into the office and "be in a mood" where he'll say, "We're going to lock the doors today and go have some fun." Robertson, who owns a couple

## **Name: JACK ROBERTSON**

**Company: Jack Robertson Lawn Care**

**Location: Springfield, Ill.**

## **Career Highlights:**

- Bought Lawn Medic franchise in 1977 from brother-in-law
- Dropped the franchise 10 years later in 1988 and began working as Jack Robertson Lawn Care
- Has been a member of the Professional Lawn Care Association of America for more than 20 years and has served on its board of directors
- Earned an agronomy degree from Western Illinois University



of family farms in the area, will take his employees out to do anything from fishing to snowmobile racing. Reid recalls the time she caught the biggest fish while out with all of the guys and, even though she is a self-proclaimed "farm girl," Robertson has shown her a new skill. "He taught me how to shoot a gun," Reid admits. "It scared the tar out of me, but it was fun."

Fun is what Robertson is all about. He and his wife, Debbie, of 25 years and their two children, Andy and Samantha, utilize the farms to hunt and fish together. Robertson says they are an "outdoor family" and that it's a love for the outdoors that has him traveling around the country to turkey hunt in the spring or pheasant hunt in the fall. His son and daughter were exposed to the outdoors from an early age, but only Andy continues to be "an avid outdoorsman."

"Today Samantha probably prefers the mall to the woods, but the outdoor environment was brought to her early on," Robertson says with a chuckle. "At some point we might get her back from the mall again."

**COMMON SENSE SUCCESS.** When asked if he knew much about business when he first started in 1977, Robertson immediately fires back, "Heck no!" As he started to realize college might end someday, he remembers that he began to pay closer attention to what his father was doing and he "has been learning since Day 1." Robertson bought the Lawn Medic franchise from his brother-in-law before graduating from Western Illinois in 1978. At that time, lawn care was a "fledgling industry" and he credits both Western Illinois and the University of Missouri as influences for him embracing the opportunity to get into the industry.

"I studied fisheries and wildlife at Missouri, but the opportunities in that field didn't exist the way I wanted them to," Robertson recalls. "So I went back and pursued agronomy and agriculture at Illinois. In the late 1970s that was a big boom, and that's how I ended up getting into lawn care. I wasn't sure what I was going to do with agriculture but it really fit with lawn care."

When Robertson first started out, he learned an invaluable lesson from his father—his most influential mentor. Robertson was living at home and the phone for the business

rang into the house because, as he says, "that's how you started out, right?" He came home one day after selling a few accounts and was flying high. "I told my dad, 'Things are pretty good today,' and he said, 'They are?' and I said, 'Yes, sir.' He said, 'If things are going so well, you need to go back out there.' It took me a second to realize what he was telling me, but what are you doing home if things are going so well? So if things are going well, stay at it. That was really important to me—it made a lot of sense."

Robertson stuck with it, although he admits he made a lot of mistakes the first several years. But those mistakes allowed him to see what he wanted to do differently in the future. In 1988, he dropped the franchise and went with Jack Robertson Lawn Care. It was a growing company, as he had purchased two or three smaller companies by then, and today he considers his company a home-grown medium-sized business.

For 28 years, Robertson says he and his employees have done the best job they could, and with 28 years of consistent growth, they apparently have done a lot right. "Knock on wood, we've never had a down year," Robertson says. Perhaps one of the most important things to keep in mind when running a successful business is to use common sense, and Robertson learned that early on. "Common sense applies to most everything that we do," Robertson explains. "In our industry, this isn't microsurgery. What we do, the homeowner can generally do on their own. Do the kind of job that you would want done for you. Respect the customer and do the job in a timely fashion."

This seemingly simple strategy might come from the fact that Robertson expects good customer service himself. Jennifer Remsberg, lawn care and landscape market specialist at Bayer Environmental Science, Montvale, N.J., says one of Robertson's pet peeves is how technology has, in some ways, removed the intimacy of customer service.

"It's about his relationship with the customers—technology just gets in the way of that for him," Remsberg explains. "Why would he send a customer to a Web site or voicemail when he can talk to that customer himself? Jack is not an old fogey, a stick in the mud or a 'technology-is-bad-

I'm-not-going-to-progress' kind of guy. He's just so incredibly protective of the value of the relationship that he has with his customers. If there's a perception in Jack's mind that technology could come between him and his customers, you'll have to fight hard to convince him that ultimately it will be a good thing."

Fighting Robertson is just what Reid has done over the years. As for introducing technology into the company, Reid says, "He doesn't, I do. He fights me tooth and nail on that issue. Very slowly, we're getting there—he's come a long way."

In the past few years, Robertson has added such technology as voicemail, e-mail and a Web site, but "customer contact is still what we're always trying to create." He and his crew encourage customers to stop by the office, which customers often do to pick up the free rain gauges Robertson distributes as a token of appreciation.

"We get to say, 'Thank you' in person," Robertson says. "Many times they're not home while we're doing the work. If a customer stops in the office, A) they know we're here when they have questions and B) we're able to say, 'Thank you' and that we appreciate their business."

Realizing the importance of customers is perhaps why Robertson "jumps when a customer says, 'Jump,'" Reid explains. She says Robertson likes to show off the office when customers come in. He will take them around and talk about things, trying to find out a little bit about them. While customers more than likely remain with Robertson for more reasons than a free rain gauge, the extra effort on Robertson's part gets them into the office.

"We're giving them no reason to change to someone else. In this very competitive business, I see we have an advantage to doing this," Robertson says. "It would be like going to the doctor's office, never seeing the doctor and only talking to the nurse. It'd be real easy to change doctors then. But when you see the doctor, you'll stay."

**SERVICE WITH A SMILE.** Although Robertson has a "tough exterior," Reid says they joke around a lot and he's a real sweetheart. Robertson's easygoing, caring demeanor helps him serve his customers to



# Jack Robertson Shares His Leadership Secrets

## 1. What is your favorite book on leadership and why is it your favorite?

*Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap... And Others Don't*, by Jim Collins. It says a lot about leadership. It reinforces many of the things that I thought I was doing. There are a lot of new, innovative ideas, like making sure the people underneath you feel like they're leaders also – which in our case, they are. To me, this business is successful because we've all worked together as a team. We all have our own certain thing that we do and that's how we get things done.

## 2. Who has been the greatest influence on your leadership style and what did he or she teach you?

My biggest mentor was my father, just in growing up and watching him. He was self-employed, so as a child I observed him on a daily basis. I knew what I saw him doing was probably going to be what I would do when I got older. He passed away several years ago, but learning some of the subtle lessons he taught me – those are things that have lasted a lifetime for me. One lesson my dad showed me early on is when it comes to managing money, make sure you've always got money to manage. It's easier said than done. I've always saved and understood why I was saving. That's carried over into the business.

## 3. How do you develop leadership skills in your employees?

One way is you give them opportunity. A leader will give employees opportunities to make decisions themselves. I think it's important that they have the feeling that they can make a decision. And I'm going to stand by that decision because I've entrusted them to do that. We can always talk about things and make adjustments if need be, but it's an important thing to do. You need to, as a leader, go ahead and do things the best way you know how, and you have to encourage others to do that, too.

## 4. What has been your biggest challenge of being a leader and how did you overcome that challenge?

I think being a leader is nothing more than being a director. Certainly, a leader leads by example, but I think a leader is a director within the organization, sharing with his people how he wants things to go. A leader tries to grow and improve daily.

## 5. In your opinion, what are the top five foundations of being a leader and why are they important?

1. Have goals and objectives. Here we work to make the lawn look its very best with the products we have and to make customers happy at the same time.


2. Give people opportunity and authority. I think I'm a leader because every team needs a leader. But I also think I'm a partner and a teammate as much as anything. I'm working *with* them. They're not doing the same thing I am and I'm not doing the same thing they are, but we make the team work. We try to make all the pieces fit together as best as we can, and I think you need a leader to make that happen.

3. Take chances. I think, as a leader, you do need to step outside the box and take chances every once in a while. Sometimes you might fall on your face but at least you tried. There are things we've tried to sell here that I thought would be good and they've just flopped. But the bottom line is that you took the chance and went outside the box a little bit.

4. Know when to lead and when to follow. When I was on the PLCAA board of directors, I think I was a good listener because I was interested in what other leaders had to say. At that point, I'm a follower. They certainly led other operations differently than mine, so I was just listening and following.

5. Start with good people. That's not always the easiest thing to do, but we've tried our best. We don't work to the point of burnout, and because of that, people tend to stay with the job for a longer period of time. Good people will find ways to get work done.





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the best of his ability, and even after all these years, he still is perfectly satisfied with what he does.

"I really don't get bored because of the people," Robertson admits. "On a daily basis, I enjoy dealing with the customers, lawns and people in general. I think I'd be bored if I didn't do it. I *know* I'd be bored if I didn't do it."

Obviously he has been doing it right from the beginning, because a handful of original customers are still utilizing his lawn care services almost three decades later. Robertson's company has a retention rate well over 90 percent, which he proudly declares as one of the best in the industry. Retaining customers is no easy task, but, as Robertson points out, "without them, nothing else happens."

The fact that customers are necessary for there to be a business is a valuable lesson that Robertson has taught Remsburg. She is impressed by how Robertson, an "astute businessman," gives his customers his utmost attention and does not take them for granted. "Even before the marketing buzzword of 'customer retention' came about, Jack was retaining his customers," Remsburg recalls. "And his customers are incredibly devoted to him."

Remsburg said she is willing to bet the percentage of customers who have been with Robertson since the beginning is the highest in the industry. His "open door policy" at the office in Springfield, Ill., allows a somewhat more intimate relationship with his customers, and Remsburg says there's probably not one of them who he doesn't know.

"He recognizes they are more than just customers — they are people, with their own likes, dislikes and things going on in their own lives," Remsburg says. "He has taken all of that and has created this incredibly successful lawn care business."

Part of that success comes from how Robertson interacts with his employees. He says he is more understanding thanks to all the situations he has encountered in his 28 years of business, and if he has a job to do, he's going to do it — period. He tries to get that philosophy to carry over to his employees, and Robertson says it does not matter if he has worked with someone for 24 days or 24 years — customer service is always the top priority. "You don't put the customer off

until next Friday if you're going to be in the area," Robertson explains. "I think everyone on the team understands that you take care of the problem — you don't let the problem go on. To me that's just basic business. It doesn't mean you'll please everybody, but it sure means you're going to try."

**SMARTER IS BETTER.** After 28 successful years, Robertson knows a thing or two about the industry. While he says he thinks the industry is more intelligent than it used to be and will continue to gain in the future, he admits that it really hasn't changed much.

"We're still applying fertilizer the same as we did 28 years ago," Robertson says. "We're just smarter about what we do. Just fertilizer isn't the fix today as it was years ago. But the way we do business — I don't know that we'll really be doing it any different. It's still a matter of getting down to the basics and taking care of the customers."

Robertson says an improvement in the industry over the years has been customer education. One way Robertson tries to keep his customers educated is through his in-house monthly publication, *Turf Times*. He and his staff evaluate the newsletter weekly to see what information needs to be added and updated. Robertson says the point of the publication is to tell customers about potential problems before they occur, which keeps the customers in the know.

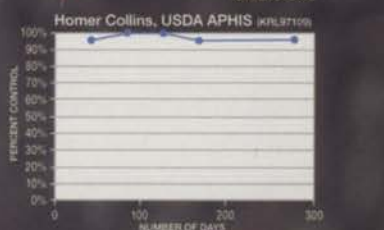
The continued education of himself and his staff also is important. "If I have a question about what database system to go with or whatnot, I'll pick up the phone and call people I know," Robertson says. "A leader is able to do that, they have that network available to them. I'm not shy. I can pick up the phone and get the information I need, and that helps me manage and lead my team."

Robertson says he runs his business a bit different than many others, but it has been successful for him. He does not expect a 70-hour work week from his employees because he feels that is too big of a demand. As long as they get things done and get it done in the "proper fashion," Robertson says that is all he can ask. "We don't work to the point of burnout," he explains. "Just give good people opportunity and they'll make things happen."

## "Sure, I was skeptical, too."

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*The industry's leading safety advisor has transformed a family business into a multi-million dollar operation.*

**NAME: DAVID SNODGRASS**

**COMPANY:** Dennis' Seven Dees Landscaping and Nurseries

**LOCATION:** Portland, Ore.

**CAREER HIGHLIGHTS:**

- Chairman of the Associated Landscape Contractors of America's (ALCA) Safety/Insurance Committee
- Member of ALCA's Board of Directors
- In 1977 bought landscape division of Dennis' Seven Dees Landscaping along with brothers Dean and Drew from older brother Dennis
- In 1994, president of the Oregon Landscape Contractors Association
- In 2001, moved into 19,000-square-foot office and warehouse space
- Reached \$10-million revenue mark in 2002
- In 2004, David, Drew and Dean bought Dennis' Seven Dees Nurseries, which comprises three garden centers, from Dennis

Never one to take the easy way out, David Snodgrass strategically positioned himself behind the starting line of the 2002 Portland Marathon with the eight-mile-minute runners. Snodgrass, who was making his first marathon appearance, had never run any faster than a nine-minute per-mile pace during the previous six months of training.

Snodgrass, 50, philosophized that the faster runners would motivate him to move quicker. The plan must have worked because Snodgrass

shaved 20 minutes off his four-hour target and finished in three hours and 41 minutes. That same drive and intensity has helped Snodgrass grow his Portland, Ore.-based Dennis' Seven Dees Landscaping and Nurseries into a \$20-million enterprise.

"I learned two things: anybody can run a marathon, and I can do anything I set my mind to do, and I really do believe that," Snodgrass says. "The only obstacles in life or in business are the ones you place in front of yourself. If somebody else places it in front of you and

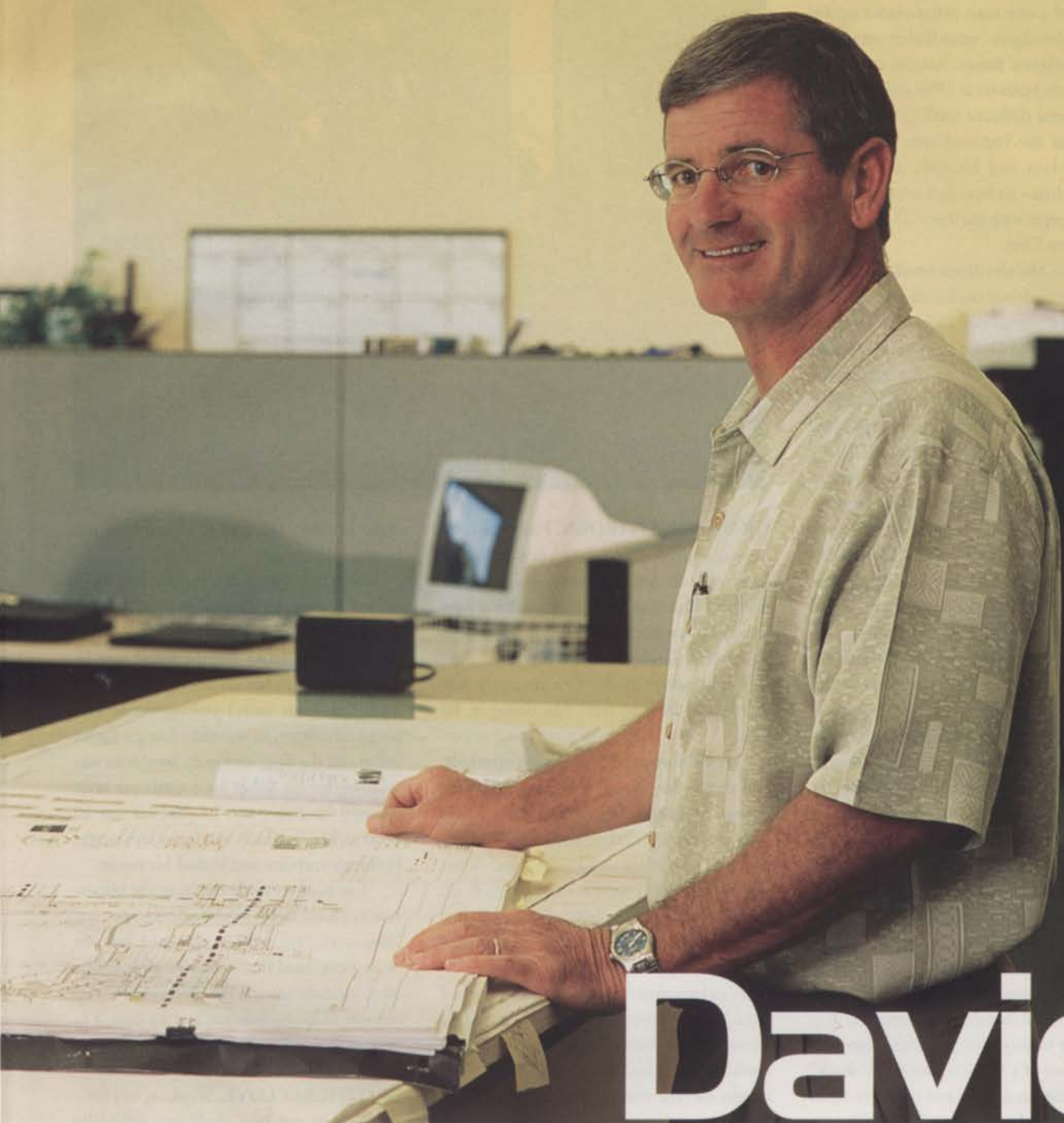
you're determined and enthusiastic, the obstacle goes away because you focus on what you want to do."

And keeping focused isn't always easy when you're working with your two younger brothers. Dennis' Seven Dees Landscaping and

Photos: David Papazian

**By Jonathan Katz**





# David SNODGRASS



Nurseries is a family business that is an offshoot of a one-man maintenance operation that Snodgrass' grandfather started in 1927. Snodgrass' father, Robert, eventually took over the business in 1956 and expanded it into several different retail garden centers throughout the Portland area. By the late 1950s, Robert and his wife, Meryle, had seven children—six boys and one girl—whose names all begin with the letter "D," hence the name Seven Dees.

In 1975, the two oldest brothers, Dennis and Drake, took over the business and formed two separate companies, Dennis' Seven Dees Landscaping and Drake's Seven Dees Landscaping. Two years later, after graduating from Oregon State University with a degree in business administration, Snodgrass and his two younger brothers, Drew and Dean, bought the landscape division from Dennis. At the time, the company had nine employees and \$70,000 in revenue, according to Snodgrass, who is the company's president.

The company now has 170 employees, and Snodgrass projects 2004 revenue at \$20 million. In May, the three brothers purchased the garden center from Dennis and now control the company's landscape operations and nursery.

Dennis' Seven Dees has grown exponentially since its inception in 1977, and Snodgrass says he sees that trend continuing with the addition of the garden center, which is expected to add \$4 million in revenue this year. The company's services include residential design/build, commercial construction, landscape maintenance, irrigation and lighting, and Snodgrass says he may soon add interior landscaping to the company's service resume.

Just three years ago, Snodgrass says the company made its most important move in its 48-year history. For years, the company operated out of a 1,000-square-foot "shack" that was used as a shop and modular office trailers in an industrial zone. The facility was so primitive there wasn't even a bathroom. Employees had to use an outhouse, Snodgrass recalls. After 10 years of discussions, the company finally moved into a 19,000-square-foot office and warehouse complex.

"Now it has that consistent message—we are who we are outside the gate and inside the gate," Snodgrass says. "We have a sense of permanence—we're not here temporarily."



**GRANDMA'S GARDEN.** From the time he was a child, Snodgrass knew he had a green thumb. Snodgrass credits his grandmother, Florence Esch, for teaching him the basic fundamentals that led him to a successful landscape career. Grandma showed Snodgrass how to properly hoe weeds and how to have fun doing it, he says.

"As a kid, you're just churning up weeds, and there's no pattern to it," Snodgrass explains. "She stopped me and said, 'No, here's how you do it. You hoe your way forward, and you take every weed as you go.' What that taught me is there's a right way to do everything, so throughout my career I've stopped and done a little bit of planning before I jump in and do it."

Another valuable lesson Snodgrass learned from his grandmother was to whistle while he worked, he shares. "She was always happy working and whistling or singing, and she taught me that work can be fun and should be fun, so we were always whistling while we worked," Snodgrass recalls.

Grandma also taught Snodgrass about fairness, he says. When Snodgrass' parents were busy trying to run the business, Esch helped raise the seven children and never showed favoritism toward any of the siblings. "If she gave one of us 6 cents, she gave all of us 6 cents," Snodgrass says. "She did not treat any one of us differently. I look at all of those

three lessons, and they're all parts of my business philosophy."

Snodgrass' father says his son is a "true leader" because of the way he treats people. "He treats everybody fairly, and he's forthright, and he looks for the good side in everybody," says Robert Snodgrass.

If Snodgrass wasn't pulling weeds with his grandmother, he was often doing it for his father. By the time he was 8, Snodgrass was working for his father for 5 cents per hour (though his father says he paid his son 10 cents an hour), which Snodgrass says taught him responsibility and started his career.

"I've tried to teach the boys the importance of hard work," Robert Snodgrass says. "You work hard and you play hard, but you must work hard first—they've all had that same attitude toward life. Whatever David sets out to do he finishes, and he does it to perfection."

**BROTHERLY LOVE.** Working in a family business can be a challenge, especially when sibling rivalry comes into play. When Robert Snodgrass, 84, turned the company over to Dennis and Drake, the two oldest brothers split the company into two separate businesses. "I guess that's the competitive part of it," Snodgrass says. "They each took a store and went their own direction."

Despite this natural tendency to outdo



# David Snodgrass Shares His Leadership Secrets

## 1. What is your favorite book on leadership?

I'm not so much a reader. I'm more hands on and learn from experience. Though I guess I really have enjoyed Dale Carnegie's book *How to Win Friends and Influence People*. I think every one of those principles are great principles, and there are some real secrets to success in there. I also read Steven Covey's *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*. They help to substantiate what you believe in or what you think is good business practice, and it's good to hear it from an authority or somebody else in an organized way.

## 2. Who has been the greatest influence on your leadership style and what did he or she teach you?

There are a lot of heroes in my world. My dad has taught me a whole bunch about being optimistic and loving the industry and dealing with people. My leadership style is really team management and working through people, and I don't know where I got that. I think I always knew from the start that I wanted to play big, and I knew that my formula for playing big meant that I needed to work through people so I've always had several sales people. I've always had a sales staff rather than most companies that start off as the owner and the sales person.

## 3. How do you develop leadership skills in your employees?

A lot of our managers and sales people have been through Dale Carnegie's leadership class and that offers some good training. I think leadership is a big part of our company, and we let people play at the top of their game and that forces them to be leaders because that's where leaders operate. People are responsible for career development for others under them and that kind of forces them into a leadership role.

## 4. What has been your biggest challenge of being a leader and how did you overcome that challenge?

Growing up I really was uncomfortable in the public or being the center of attention, so I knew that in order to be a leader in a strong, successful company you needed to be visible, you needed to be able to stand up and speak like a leader and you needed to be able to inspire people. There are things you just have to do in order to be effective, so I guess I was just driven or committed to have a successful company and to play big I had to figure that out and overcome it. So that's the reason I went to my first Dale Carnegie leadership and public speaking class because I said, 'Hey, I need to work on myself and to gain comfort,' and that class really made a huge difference in my life.

## 5. In your opinion, what are the top five foundations of being a leader and why are they important?

1. You have to be optimistic. I think that brings energy to the cause and to the group and you can bring people up or you can bring people down. You can build a company up or you can build a company down. If you're negative, then you're going to have a negative impact on people.
2. I think a leader needs to be concerned but not worried because worrying will kill you.
3. I think you need to believe in people and believe that they come to work for the right reasons. You need to believe that they want to grow, that they want to do well. And most importantly, believe that they have incredible potential to do great things and you have to see that in others because they don't see it themselves. I think a good leader can shake that out of them and show them they have the potential to do great things.
4. I think you need to be passionate. This means you have to throw yourself at serving the client and being efficient completely without holding back.
5. Have pride because that is what motivates and really inspires people.



each other, Snodgrass says, working with his brothers has been a positive experience. "I like my brothers, and our relationships are good on a personal level. I think business with brothers has those challenges."

All of Robert Snodgrass' grown children still go on family vacations together and maintain close relationships. "They all have their own businesses, and each has a mutual respect for one another," he says. "They just seem to get along beautifully, and each one respects each other's success."

Snodgrass characterizes himself as optimistic and aggressive, while Drew is more cautious and Dean is more conservative. But Snodgrass says these differences can be an asset to the business. "In one sense, that could hold back the aggressive person, but in another sense, that offers a good balance so everybody contributes, and out of the mix, you then plot a balanced course."

In recent years, when the economy faltered and business wasn't as strong, the three brothers began playing the blame game, according to Snodgrass. "When things go south and you're looking at losing money – that's something we faced during that period and it tested our relationship for sure, but really, when I look back at it, it could have been avoided," Snodgrass says. "We needed to have more regular communication."

Dean Snodgrass, who is vice president and a business partner with David, agrees that communication is key. "It's really not much different than a marriage," he says. "You have to commit and care enough and take time to talk."

Working with family sometimes makes it easier to express opinions and feelings that you normally wouldn't with those unrelated to you, which can work in positive and negative ways, Snodgrass says. The three brothers improved communications by holding weekly meetings and laying out each person's roles and responsibilities, according to Snodgrass. The executive team then discussed the company's goals and made sure they were all on the same page.

**SAFETY FIRST.** At work, Snodgrass' family extends beyond his brothers to the entire staff, he says. Keeping 170 employees happy requires a great deal of trust, according to Snodgrass. "I believe people

will do the right thing if you give them freedom," Snodgrass explains. "I believe in people, and I believe they're capable of doing great things."

Snodgrass has discovered that leading such a large staff is easier when employing a team-management philosophy because more input equals better decisions, he says. "If you have a team of five, that's like five times the potential that you could do if you were just sitting at the top," he says.

His management style differs in some ways from his father's, according to Robert Snodgrass. Snodgrass is more skilled at delegating authority than his father, Robert Snodgrass concedes. "He could see my shortcomings, and he wasn't going to be that way," Robert Snodgrass says. "He is very good at delegating."

Snodgrass has faith in his entire workforce, which is 70 percent Hispanic, he says. The company's field laborers are 90 percent Hispanic, the foreman positions are 60 percent Hispanic and the office staff is only 5 percent Hispanic. But Snodgrass says one of his goals is to move more Hispanic employees into management positions.

The company offers English courses instructed by bilingual staff members to its Spanish-speaking employees. This opens up more opportunities by removing the language barrier that often prevents Hispanic workers from moving up, Snodgrass explains. The company also involves Hispanic employees in company operations by having them lead meetings. "We want them to participate at a management level in our company, and there's some resistance to that," Snodgrass says. "It's part of their culture. They don't want to be reprimanded or control their fellow Hispanic workers, but they get past that, and you just have to keep working to move them up."

In addition to advancing employees within the company, Snodgrass adds safety to his priorities list. As the chairman of the Associated Landscape Contractors of America's (ALCA) Safety/Insurance Committee, Snodgrass' job is to help create greater awareness in the industry about safety measures and procedures.

Snodgrass is considered the "minister of safety" within the landscape industry, says ALCA President Kurt Kluznik. "If there's

any one thing David is known for it's his passion for safety," Kluznik says. "He was just a natural fit, and we were really looking for somebody to take our safety program to a higher level, and David's done just that."

Snodgrass developed the STARS Safe Company Program, which is a safety training and awareness program that asks ALCA members to sign a "Pledge of Honor" to move the profession toward safety excellence. Participants are asked to comply with all Occupational Safety and Health Administration standards, to investigate and document all accidents, to encourage other companies to become ALCA STARS members, and to share best practices with fellow STARS members. Safety consciousness not only protects employees but it's cost effective, according to Snodgrass.

Fewer workplace injuries translate into higher efficiency by having reducing sick days and lower insurance premiums, Snodgrass explains. The company's record for consecutive days without a time-loss accident is 1,876 days, according to Snodgrass. The company issues verbal and written safety instructions in English and Spanish for all employees.

**INDUSTRY GURU.** Snodgrass isn't considered just a leader for his team at Dennis' Seven Dees Landscaping and Nurseries but for the entire green industry. Whether via his Web newsletter or through his efforts with ALCA, Snodgrass offers opinions and advice on critical issues facing most landscape contractors today.

Keeping up with industry trends is critical for any contractor seeking the type of success Snodgrass has accomplished. Snodgrass suggests contractors step out of their companies and see the "big picture" and manage their companies with that overall vision in mind.

He recommends contractors read trade publications and Web sites, such as OSHA's, join industry organizations and attend conferences to stay informed on the latest issues.

"If you're not reading, if you're not out there in touch with the bigger industry and the trends," Snodgrass says, "then you're going to be working in isolation and your competition is going to have an easy one up on you because it's so readily available."





# Follow the Leader

*Bayer aims to make school grounds safer.*

This past July, Bayer launched its Fire Ant-Free Schools Program, which offered qualified public and private schools a nonprofit rate of 50 percent off of all purchases for early fall applications.

"At Bayer, we believe the best way to treat fire ants is to prevent them in the first place. Realizing that budgets are tight, we are offering a nonprofit rate to ensure that more schools can treat more acres, which can help protect millions of children from the threat of fire ants stings," says Bryan Gooch, business manager, insecticides, Bayer Environmental Science. "We hope all schools battling fire ants will apply TopChoice™ to become fire ant-free zones."

School grounds directors received a packet introducing the Fire Ant-Free Schools Program in mid-July. The packet contained a letter describing the program as well as informational material on how TopChoice works, where it can be applied, and who they can contact.

Arthur Carroscio, maintenance director for the Pflugerville Independent School District in Austin, Texas, contacted his local LESCO dealer when he heard about the program. Kevin Wilhite, manager of the Austin North LESCO Service Center®, was happy to oblige. "Arthur told me he was going to buy enough product to fulfill his budget this year, but use the offer to obtain even more free product to show his school board how it works in other areas," explains Wilhite.

Wilhite took Arthur Carroscio's idea and ran with it. He convinced all the school districts in the area to take advantage of

the Bayer program. Since school districts account for roughly 10 percent of the North Austin service center sales, Wilhite knew he was assuring higher sales for 2005. Not to mention, it was a great deal for the school districts, as well. "It was a win-win situation," he notes.

Since 2001, lawn care professionals have successfully treated tens of thousands of acres across the southern United States with TopChoice. It has already been used commercially in parks, playgrounds and schools.

TopChoice is a low-dose, non-bait granular insecticide that requires just one annual application by a licensed professional. It provides unsurpassed control of fire ants for one year, eliminating existing mounds and preventing new mounds from forming.

TopChoice takes advantage of the natural behavior of fire ants. "Within the first four to six weeks of a TopChoice application, ants unknowingly come in contact with the product and bring it back to contaminate and eliminate the rest of the mound in what is known as the Domino Effect™," explains Gooch. "Unlike temporary fixes like baits, the Domino Effect means the entire ant colony is destroyed, not just surface ants. The product remains in the soil to prevent new colonies from forming."

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