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# Lawn & Landscape

04 05

## RIDING THE BID WAVE

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masters the ebbs and  
flows of commercial bid  
work in San Diego's  
endless summer

\$5.00

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**25**  
YEARS

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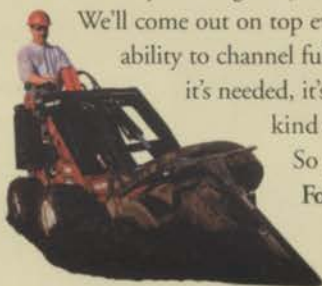
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## Cover Story – Riding the Bid Wave

# 60

*Benchmark Landscape masters the ebbs and flows of commercial bid work in San Diego's endless summer.*

# 04.05

## > > > Features

### 70 Breakthrough Series – Well Oiled Machines

*Through experience and innovation, contractors are finding the most efficient ways to use equipment.*

### 84 Best Of Web – One Piece of the Business Puzzle

*Marketing can generate business, but tight budgets sometimes limit how much landscape contractors can spend on promotional communications. Here, Lawn & Landscape Online Message Board users discuss how they optimize their advertising investments.*

### 92 Shot Through the Bark

*Manufacturers are fine tuning tree injection products to keep pace with increasing demand for systemic treatments that are less invasive and more efficient.*



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APR 13 2005

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LIBRARIES



*New Confront 3 has arrived,  
your weeds will be leaving town very soon!*

Periodical Reading Room  
DO NOT CIRCULATE





## > > > Features

**106 Room for Improvement**  
*Irrigation system upgrades are a profitable – and often overlooked – service opportunity for contractors.*

**116 Hit the Skids**  
*Skid-steer loaders are becoming multi-functional tools that landscape contractors can rely on for increased productivity.*

**128 Successful Seeding**  
*Landscape contractors and turf seed professionals share the keys to choosing the best turf seed and applying it effectively.*

**140 Product Spotlight — Tractor Factor**  
*If you're looking to add power and versatility to your equipment lineup, check out these tractors and accessories.*

**150 Product Spotlight — Thatch Take Over**  
*Removing thatch build-up is a vital step to keeping turf healthy. Try these dethatchers to get the job done.*

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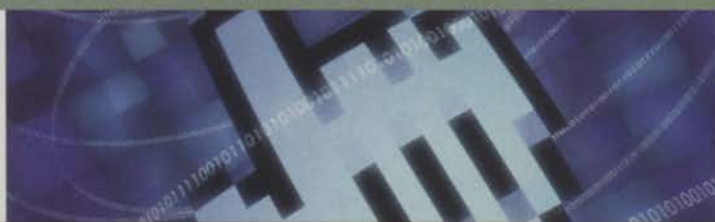
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> > > best of the web

**F**rom fliers and door hangers to telemarketing and the Internet, lawn and landscape contractors have dozens of marketing options available to get the word out about their companies. But it's not always possible to get great TV ads on a home-video budget. This month's *Best of the Web* feature eavesdrops on the *Lawn & Landscape* Online Message Board where business owners share their tips and tricks on getting the most out of a marketing budget. Check out the story on page 84, then visit [www.lawnandlandscape.com](http://www.lawnandlandscape.com) to offer your comments.



MSDS/labels section updated

**E**ight new companies have been added to the MSDS/Labels section of *Lawn & Landscape's* Online database. The new companies are: Certis USA, Dupont, Gro-Pro, JH Biotech, McLaughlin Gormley King Co., Monterey Lawn & Garden Products, Scimetrics and SePro Corp. Visitors to *Lawn & Landscape* Online can now access label and safety information for 566 products from 34 different chemical companies serving the industry. To take advantage of this section of the Web site, click the "MSDS/Lables" button in the left-hand column of the homepage to access labels and Material Safety Data Sheet (MSDS) information. Then, click the "Add to My MSDS" link next to the product listing to add it to you're My *Lawn & Landscape* account.



Lawn & Landscape Launches Off-Topic Message Board

*Lawn & Landscape* knows you do more than just work all day, which is why we're proud to announce the introduction of the *Lawn & Landscape* Off-Topic Message Board.

Maintaining the user-friendly format of the original Message Board, participants may use the Off-Topic Message Board to discuss everything from sports and vacations to politics and entertainment. Stop by [www.lawnandlandscape.com/messagebdOT/](http://www.lawnandlandscape.com/messagebdOT/) to continue building the green industry network that the original *Lawn & Landscape* Online Message Board successfully initiated.



online extras

Check the April Online Extras section of *Lawn & Landscape Online* for additional information not appearing in print. This month, look for these features:

- Check out this issue's Online Extras to learn about a training CD that John Mohns, president of Benchmark Landscape, Poway, Calif., was involved in developing with the California Landscape Contractors Association.
- To sod or to seed? Some contractors have differences of opinion when it comes to this decision. Visit the Online Extras section to read their arguments.
- Interested in some of the products in this issue of *Lawn & Landscape*? Find hundreds more by visiting [www.lawnandlandscape.com](http://www.lawnandlandscape.com) and searching our Products page.

web tools

### Daily News

Green industry news updates every day.  
[www.lawnandlandscape.com](http://www.lawnandlandscape.com)

### Industry Events

A comprehensive list of conferences, trade shows and seminars throughout the industry.  
[www.lawnandlandscape.com/events](http://www.lawnandlandscape.com/events)

### Business Forms

A diverse collection of forms to help you run your business more effectively.  
[www.lawnandlandscape.com/tools](http://www.lawnandlandscape.com/tools)

### Message Board

The industry's most interactive message board.  
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### Industry Links

A user-friendly industry index containing categorized information about contractors, dealers and suppliers.  
[www.lawnandlandscape.com/links](http://www.lawnandlandscape.com/links)

### Associations

An easy-to-navigate directory of local, state, national and international trade associations.  
[www.lawnandlandscape.com/associations](http://www.lawnandlandscape.com/associations)

### Product Directory

A growing database of industry products, including photos and supplier contacts.  
[www.lawnandlandscape.com/product](http://www.lawnandlandscape.com/product)

### Marketplaces

An interactive listing of manufacturers and suppliers.  
[www.lawnandlandscape.com/marketplace](http://www.lawnandlandscape.com/marketplace)

### Online Store

A one-stop shop for industry-related books, software and more.

[www.lawnandlandscape.com/store](http://www.lawnandlandscape.com/store)  
*(GIE Media has decided to support relief efforts for the victims of the Tsunami in Asia. While we feel strongly in this cause, we realize your choices may not reflect ours. Upon your request, we can contribute 10 percent of our revenue from your online book order to Habitat for Humanity's Asia Tsunami Response Fund. If you wish your sales to be included with this effort, please enter HABILITAT in the promotional code box when placing your order.)*



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# 26

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more grass in less time than typical 21" mowers. And its enhanced durability will help you stay productive over the long haul. Exmark has created a whole new category of walk-behind mower—the **Metro 26**.

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## Green for Project Evergreen

**P**roject Evergreen is asking for your financial support. The organization needs to raise \$1.1 million in 2005 to "raise the awareness of the environmental, economic and lifestyle benefits of landscapes and promote the significance of those who preserve and enhance green spaces at home, work and play." Put simply, Project Evergreen needs money to make sure people see the many benefits the green industry provides.

The organization has the plans and people in place to promote the positive spin the industry deserves and needs, but doing so requires money. You can help by sending a check. The goal of \$1.1 million is not overly ambitious if enough people contribute. The challenge is to take the time to write a check. So, if you are one of those willing to invest in a better future then please mail a check to: Project Evergreen, 120 W. Main Street, New Prague, MN 56071.

The need to reach people with a positive message is universal. Last September, I participated in the Responsible Industry for a Sound Environment annual meeting in Washington, D.C. During a free afternoon I decided to check out the new World War II Memorial. I also walked up the National Mall to the Vietnam War Memorial to the Lincoln Monument and on the way back visited the Korean War Memorial.

I've walked the National Mall before, but this time I could not believe how run down it was. The paved walkway had wide strips of bare dirt on both sides. The turf was pockmarked with broadleaf weeds and some weed clumps were a foot high – it had not been mowed. Even the trees lining the path looked sorry. Broken limbs lay on the ground and all the trees were full of suckers. The condition of the grounds detracted to what should be one of the most important green spaces in our nation.

I had to ask about this sorry situation, so I stopped by the Park Ranger booth located near the World War II Memorial. When I told the next available Park Ranger that the Mall grounds looked terrible he said they were being maintained to standards. When I mentioned weed clumps you could trip over, he responded: "Well, we are concerned about the use of pesticides." Apparently this person, and others, prefer the more "natural" look of a neglected empty lot in an inner city over the judicious use of an herbicide. (My Ranger friend might even question the concept that an herbicide could be used in a judicious manner.) Apparently there was equal concern about the judicious use of fertilizer, mowers and chainsaws.

Countering the "anti" mindset is where Project Evergreen comes into the play. Please understand, Project Evergreen is not a large fund raising organization that seeks money primarily to sustain itself. It's a small group of mostly volunteers trying to improve our industry's image and the public perceptions about what we all do.

The Park Ranger's comment to me was not all that extreme. Go to [www.projectevergreen.com](http://www.projectevergreen.com) and visit the "press room" to see some live challenges our industry faces. While at the site you can also learn more about Project Evergreen's goals and resources produced for you. ☺

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**Dear Editor:**

The article you did on Barry Morton Sr. (January 2005 *Lawn & Landscape*) was great. You were the first person to really capture what contractors should be doing. If more contractors could be more innovative, and if they would hire consultants, they would be more successful.

Sincerely,

Michael Monji,  
Garden Guru Show and  
The Garden Party Radio,  
Bakersfield, Calif.

**To the Editor:**

The new layout of the magazine looks great! Here's to another 25 years! Keep up the great work!

Rob Shauger  
Advanced Applications and  
Compass Systems,  
Marcy, N.Y.

**Dear Editor:**

I recently started receiving *Lawn & Landscape* magazine. I have found it quite interesting – so much in fact that I have been going online to check out back issues.

Thank you for doing the special report in the February 2005 issue called *What Your Customers Really Think*. It had a lot of useful information.

I have one suggested change for the next one you (hopefully) do. The survey asked people, "What would you be willing to pay *per year* for professional landscape services?" The price points you used were exceedingly low. Two (out of four) choices were \$249 or less *per year*. That comes to less than \$20 per month or less than \$5 a week. Even in snow country that's less than \$7 a week.

Even *asking* about such low prices unintentionally does our industry a disservice by undervaluing the skills and knowledge (and insurance!) our profession requires now; and perpetuates the image of a cheap guy in an old pickup who competes with the kid down the street (except, even the kid down the street won't touch the lawn for \$5).

Ask people how much they spend *per year* for their cappuccino or dry-cleaning. Would they say \$500 for coffee and \$1,500 for dry-cleaning? Aaack! No way! Yet they do – \$10 a week at Starbucks and \$60 every two weeks at the cleaners.

Here in California paying \$75 to \$150 a month to a professional is common for a

front and back lawn properly cared for. Per week it sounds even better at \$17 to \$35 a week – that's a good value. But if you say per year – \$900 to \$1,800, forget it.

I would suggest that the next survey question ask about costs per month or, even better, per week (with price points that reflect where we are and where we need to go). In addition, I would define "profes-

sional" (i.e. a well-managed business with good people who are responsible, knowledgeable, skilled, licensed and insured) for the respondents.

Thank you,

Alan Day  
DayDreams Landscape Design,  
El Dorado Hills, Calif.



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USE READER SERVICE # 14




IT'S ABOUT HELPING when YOU NEED IT MOST

Anybody can sell you a load of goods. Being around when you have a question or a problem is another matter. At Bayer, we think it matters a lot. We also think getting in front of a problem is smart too. Which is why we have a relentless commitment to finding new ways to improve plant quality. Our research and training facility in Clayton, N.C., is the largest think tank in the turf, ornamental and pest control industries. It's a production line of solutions aimed at helping your business thrive. To learn more, call 1-800-331-2867 or visit [BayerProCentral.com](http://BayerProCentral.com).



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it's not about  
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## Three's Company

Recently, a reader asked me: "What is the most cost effective marketing program for an entry level company like mine? My time is valuable and I do not wish to split my efforts between cold-calling, passing out flyers or pestering my existing clients for referrals."

I agree that your time is valuable and that you need to make certain that you are spending your time on efforts that will attract new clients. To completely understand what makes someone decide to do business with you, you must make it a habit to ask a few questions. So, I have some homework for you to do. There are three questions you need to go out and ask every current client you have. The answers to each of these questions will provide you with some valuable information.

### 1. Why do you work with our firm?

Knowing the answer to this question will help provide you with some ideas on what message you should be communicating in your marketing. For example, if several of your clients say they do business with you because they 'trust you', then the word 'trust' should be in your marketing message.

**2. What changes would you make if you owned our company?** Your clients know your business better than most and for next to nothing you can gain some incredible ideas. Not only could you get some great ideas, you're showing your clients you care about what they think. The only down side to asking this question is that you must be willing to make changes and improvements.


**3. Would you recommend us to a friend or family member?** If your client says, 'No,' you better find out why not. If it is because they are not happy with your work in any way, shape or form, you need to make things right as soon as possible. Why? Studies show that an unhappy client will tell 10 people about their bad experience with your company

and, for obvious reasons, we don't want that to happen.

The answers to these three questions will give you a good foundation of what you need to work on. Once you have done this homework, I would recommend you consider the following three marketing tips.

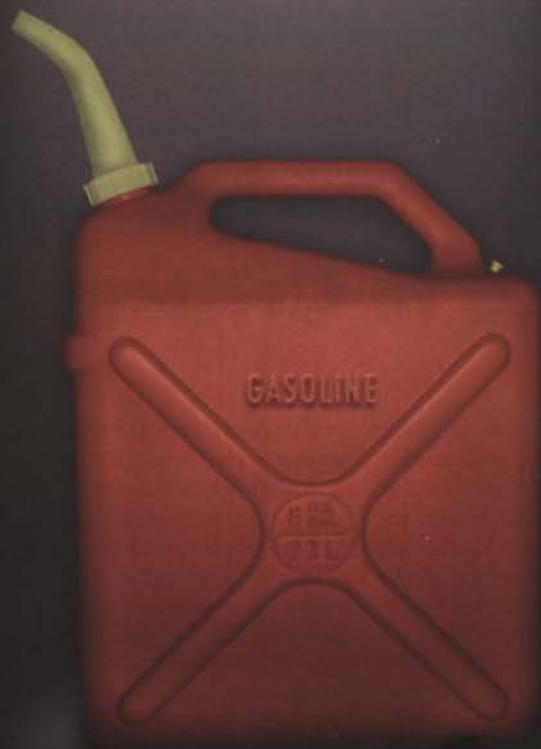
For starters, door hangers do work. If you have a couple of clients in one neighborhood, there is a good chance you can get more with door hangers.

Secondly, do a newsletter. To see a copy of the Grunder Landscaping Co. newsletter, visit [www.martygrunder.com](http://www.martygrunder.com) – it is featured on the home page this month. Newsletters are a terrific way to communicate what your company stands for, how you can help your customers and prospects and share success stories with others. Keep your newsletter simple. Have a feature article, introduce other members of your team and share a few testimonials from your current clients. Mail them at least four times a year and more if your budget allows.

Finally, call, write or visit every client you have and try to sell them other services that you offer. Other companies have done it for years. The fast food industry does it by asking you if you would like some fries with your cheeseburger. The automobile dealership does it by asking you if you want your car rust proofed. And the shoe salesperson does it by asking you if you need any socks. Why can't you ask your clients if they want their beds mulched, their leaves cleaned up, flowers planted, their lawn aerated, their gutters cleaned, their trees trimmed, their driveway sealed, their back yard landscaped or their landscape maintained? Your existing clients are easy to sell other things to because they trust you, like you and want to do business with you. And, it costs next to nothing to make a phone call, and that's something every budget can handle. 

marty grunder

is a speaker, consultant and author, as well as owner of Grunder Landscaping Co., Miamisburg, Ohio. He can be reached at 866/478-6337 and via [www.martygrunder.com](http://www.martygrunder.com).



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## Scheduling is Critical

Running your company without a basic operations schedule isn't a good practice, but we've all done it. My wife and I recently spent two months in Southeast Asia and encountered similar stress. While in Vietnam, the Dec. 26 tsunami hit Phuket, Thailand—a place we were planning to visit in less than a week. We obviously had to scramble to change our schedule, dealing with non-English-speaking individuals, foreign visas, etc. Thankfully, we had a basic schedule to start with and were able to review all of our options and make adjustments to our tour.

In business you do the same thing, but it is much harder when you don't have a schedule to begin with. To outline how company operations should run, I strongly recommend giving every crew an individual schedule board to track its progress. Display these boards on a common-room wall for everyone to review regularly, keeping everyone organized and accountable.

Maintenance crews work best with a two-week schedule board, as they usually visit the same jobs each day of the week. However, landscape, irrigation, lawn care and similar crews require full five-week (one month) schedule boards. These crews go to different jobs each week and, therefore, must be able to see what is scheduled even a few weeks out.

The schedule boards should be made of dry-erase material so you can mark them up and make changes easily. Lay out the boards with Monday-thru-Friday schedules and avoid making Saturday a regular workday. Remember, overtime is a killer. If you must work on a Saturday, it's always possible to squeeze the details of those jobs into Friday's space.


Above each board, write the crew leader and crewmembers' names. You may even post pictures of each person above their schedule boards to help everyone in the organization

put faces with names, particularly in the spring when new employees are coming on board.

In the block for each day, write the names of the jobs to be serviced in the appropriate order. Next to each job—*this is the most important step*—write its total budgeted labor-hours. Also include indirect or non-productive labor for each day's jobs and the budgeted labor-hours for each portion of the crew's day. This lets you schedule every function the crews are to perform and exactly how long you expect them to take, creating accountability for the single highest expense you incur. Total up the hours and write this in the same block so the crew knows how long they should be out that particular day.

At the end of each day, have the crew leaders write the total hours the crews worked next to the budgeted hours and put a red circle around it. This sends crew leaders a message of the importance to the company that their crews stay within allotted hours. Also, everyone who looks at the schedule board knows if they were on target. When the next week begins, supervisors can erase the circled hours while the crews work from the second week's board. Remember, never schedule work without providing the budgeted hours to the crew leader.

One giveaway that a company does not schedule well or hold its people accountable is to see all the maintenance crews arrive back at the yard close to the same time each day. How can that be with the variety of jobs and their sizes? When this happens, some crews could possibly (or purposefully) be lagging behind when coming in and others might be sacrificing quality in order to be in at a certain time.

This spring, when you've created these schedule boards you'll have developed a good game plan. As your phone starts ringing, your plans will change, but you'll be able to take out your dry-erase marker and reschedule the week's work much more easily. Good luck! 

jack mattingly

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





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## By The Book, Chapter 2

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** In last month's column, Jean Seawright outlined the importance of having a clear, current and compliant employee manual, as well as three sections all manuals should include. Here are four additional items Jean says no employee manual should be without.

### 7 ITEMS TO INCLUDE—CONTINUED.

Beyond the introduction, employee development and benefits sections, all employee manuals should include:

**4. Payroll Policies.** Your handbook should include a section that addresses issues related to pay, such as hours of work, position classifications (full-time, part-time, temporary, and/or seasonal definitions), pay classifications (salaried, hourly, commissioned, variable workweek, or piece rate and whether each is exempt or nonexempt from overtime) lunch and meal breaks, deductions, expenses, overtime, pay periods and pay days, advances or loans, and how final pay is handled.


**5. Employment Policies & Procedures.** This section of your manual should include all of the important policies related to your business philosophy and applicable state or federal employment regulations. Some items to include in this section are: Equal employment opportunity, policy against harassment, alcohol and drug abuse, confidential information, outside work, conflicts of interest, code of conduct, employment of relatives or significant others, references, violence, open door policy, 90-day introductory period and grievance procedure.

**6. Employee Responsibilities.** This section should include all the policies related to general employee conduct. For example, you'll likely want to include dress standards, customer relations, smoking in the workplace (and in company vehicles), tardiness and absenteeism, company property, safety rules, solicitation,

company vehicles, employee search policy, telephone use, computer use, ethical business behavior, corrective measures, inappropriate conduct, separation of employment, personnel records/privacy and more.

**7. Closing Words.** In this final section, to bring the handbook to a close, you'll want to share some final thoughts about the purpose and use of the manual. You should include an acknowledgment receipt that the employee can sign and date to acknowledge that he or she received the handbook, read it, had a chance to obtain answers to any questions and agrees to abide by all of the policies contained within.

**HAVE HANDBOOK, WILL READ.** Last, but not least, please—for the sake of employees everywhere—don't implement a handbook that nobody wants to read. Unless your business is named "Internal Revenue Service," don't settle for a handbook that reads like the IRS code—confusing jargon that's poorly worded, threatening or punitive, and completely lacking in any character whatsoever. It's no wonder employees don't want to read them and managers don't want to use them. When it comes time to writing or revising your employee handbook, utilize the expertise of someone who can design a manual that is creative, interesting, fun-to-read, compliant and suitable for your culture. Make certain your policies are written in plain English and (where appropriate) lighten it up and use a little humor and references to your industry.

I assure you, if you implement a well-written, comprehensive handbook, it will save you time, help solve your employee problems, promote understanding among your workers, build morale, enhance compliance, improve the image of your organization, and, of course, help you meet the burden of proof. Not bad for a few pieces of paper... 

jean l. seawright

is president of Seawright & Associates, and she can be reached at 407/645-2433 or [jseawright@seawright.com](mailto:jseawright@seawright.com).

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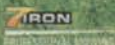
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USE READER SERVICE # 17

research report



Research at the Ohio State University shows that certain varieties of birch, including the paper birch and river birch pictured here, are less susceptible to bronze birch borer infestation. Landscape contractors should look for resistant varieties of ornamentals to use on clients' properties as insecticide use becomes more restricted. Photos: Paper birch: Paul Wray, Iowa State University; river birch: Chris Evans, The University of Georgia. Both images courtesy of [www.forestryimages.org](http://www.forestryimages.org)

## As Insecticides Disappear, Consider Resistance Plants

In the past few years, landscape contractors have seen the loss of several insecticides previously used to manage insect pests. The challenge of minimizing insect damage to valued plants, however, continues.

First, let's look at other avenues of insect pest management. Initial plant selection speaks loudly for the success of a given plant at a site. Knowing the soil texture and pH, amount of sunlight, average rainfall, how well water drains from the site, U.S. Department of Agriculture Plant Hardiness Zone, expected soil-compacting sources, and distance from buildings and hard surfaces are among the factors to consider when selecting a tree species.

If you take this process a step further, consider natural resistance. In general, there are three mechanisms by which plants resist insect attack: Tolerance, antixenosis and antibiosis. Tolerance centers on the plant's ability to recover from any insect damage or to replace damaged plant tissues during growth phases following the insect attack.

Antixenosis (also called nonpreference) is the ability of a plant to repel an insect. This can involve volatile chemicals given off by the plant, which causes the insect to turn away before it contacts the tree. Other times, defensive chemicals are picked up by the insect once

## MANUFACTURER MINUTES

### Husqvarna President: 'Business As Usual' After Separation from Electrolux



**CHARLOTTE, N.C.** — In the wake of the announcement that Electrolux Outdoor Products will separate from its parent company, The Electrolux Group, Dallas, Texas, Husqvarna North America President David Zerfoss says, "There will not be any significant changes you will see externally. It will be pretty much business as usual."

Almost 30 years after Electrolux bought Husqvarna, the company intends to separate Electrolux Outdoor Products by dividing it to shareholders. The news was released in a letter from Zerfoss to Husqvarna's dealers in February.

Electrolux Outdoor Products includes a professional products division with brand names such as Husqvarna, Jonsered, Partner and Dimas. Zerfoss says each brand will retain its brand identity and dealers and contractors

should expect all brands to "continue to operate as they have been."

The new outdoor products-focused company is expected to be listed on the Stockholm stock exchange no later than mid-2006. Zerfoss says the process of becoming an independent company should take about 16 months, which includes a two- to three-month period during which the new company will have to report to the Stockholm stock exchange as its own entity.

"The name of the new company will most likely be Husqvarna as Husqvarna is our strongest and most well-known worldwide brand," Zerfoss says.

In an exclusive interview with sister publications *Commercial Dealer* and *Lawn & Landscape* magazines, Zerfoss added that the new board, once chosen, will vote on the name.

it lands on the plant or begins feeding on it. In other cases, antixenosis entails hairs on leaves or stems, surface waxes, copious sap flow or toughness of the tissue.

Antibiosis is plant resistance that directly affects the insect's survival. These chemical or physical defenses are either a normal part of plant growth or are induced by the feeding of an insect. The result is longer development, fewer eggs laid or direct insect mortality.

Research has identified some tree species, cultivars and varieties that are pest resistant, as well as ornamental. One example is birch trees and the bronze birch borer. Twenty years of research at Ohio State University revealed that paper birch (*Betula papyrifera*), grey birch (*B. populifolia* 'Whitespire') and river birch (*B. nigra*) had high survival rates (80 percent), while neighboring European white birch (*B. pendula*), mountain

birch (*B. pubescens*), monarch birch (*B. maximowicziana*) and Asian white birch (*B. platyphylla*) had been completely destroyed by this boring pest.

Another example involves crabapples and the Japanese beetle. Research from Purdue University found the following crabapples to have high resistance to adult feeding and to apple scab: Bob White, Louisa, Prairifire, Red Jewel and Sargent. Similar studies are reported in the literature for other tree species and this defoliating pest.

Searching the Internet and current periodicals will result in additional examples of trees that resist insect pests. Alternatively, landscape contractors can

keep notes on those plants that do not seem to be bombarded by common pests (aphids, beetles, caterpillars). After a period of time, plant selections can be modified based on this list of apparently pest-free species. — **Mark Shou, entomologist, Iowa State University Extension, Ames, Iowa**



The new company is expected to have annual sales of approximately \$3.7 billion and 12,000 employees worldwide. Zerfoss expects some of the new company's central staff to be carried over from the current Electrolux staff.

The reason for the separation is that Electrolux wants to concentrate on its core business of indoor products and appliances. Zerfoss says the appliance end of Electrolux's business is currently facing challenges from low-cost competitors, deflation and higher demand for premium products at lower prices. "When you're serving two different industries, it does take away some of that focus," Zerfoss says. "The result is a win-win for our stockholders and it's a win-win for us as equipment companies. We will not be distracted by the things going on on the appliance side of the business and they will not be distracted by what's happening on our side. At the end of the day, it's going to provide us with more focus and more investment on a day-to-day basis." — **Kevin Brosien**

## ASIAN TSUNAMI DISASTER

### GIE Media Continues its Widespread Support for Tsunami Relief

**CLEVELAND, OHIO** — GIE Media, parent company of *Lawn & Landscape* magazine, announced that its corporate-wide initiative to aid the victims of the recent tsunami tragedy has been met with overwhelming enthusiasm by its readership.

The extensive Tsunami Relief plan, which was instituted by GIE Media in January, supports the victims of the tragedy through specific relief organization advertising, financial assistance and ongoing editorial coverage urging readers to continue to lend support.

"As the leading voice in the industries we serve, we felt we had a responsibility to support the victims of the recent tsunami tragedy, and to show our readers that they can make a difference in the lives

*continued on page 24*





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continued from page 21

of those suffering," explains GIE Media Chief Executive Officer Richard Foster.

GIE Media continues to appeal for tsunami relief to its readership of more than 220,000 professionals within the landscaping, recycling, construction, pest control and golf industries. GIE also plans to donate a portion of the firm's pretax dollars to aid orphanages both in Thailand and Africa. "Our commitment is long term," explains Dan Moreland, vice president of GIE Media, "As the preeminent voice within our industries, we feel it is our obligation to lead by example."

Specific relief organizations that GIE Media will continue to support include Habitat for Humanity, The Red Cross, The Salvation Army, Save the Children, Unicef, and World Vision. GIE Media also has established a Tsunami Relief Web site at <http://tsunami.gie.net>. *Lawn & Landscape* magazine readers may submit Tsunami-related news by e-mailing Web Editor Lauren Spiers at [lspiers@gie.net](mailto:lspiers@gie.net).



## INDUSTRY RESOURCES

### Snow Magazine Becomes Independent Voice For Snow Management Professionals

**CLEVELAND, OHIO** – In a move to serve all professionals in the snow and ice removal industry, GIE Media, publisher of *Lawn & Landscape* magazine, announced that the former publisher of *Snow Business* magazine will now publish *Snow* magazine.

GIE Media's *Snow* magazine will contain all of the publication's copyrighted content and materials formerly appearing in *Snow Business*, a registered trademark of the Snow & Ice Management Association (SIMA). This shift, coinciding with a less-formal association with SIMA, is the next logical step as GIE Media strives to provide a truly independent voice for the industry.

GIE Media's circulation base offers unmatched reach among industry owners and managers, who comprise a majority of the 36,000 snow and ice removal professionals to receive *Snow* magazine. *Snow* will be the only snow management industry publication audited by the BPA.

Subscribers will continue to receive comprehensive industry news and

continued on page 26



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continued from page 24

## Industry Resources

information in the pages of *Snow* magazine. *Snow* magazine will feature unprecedented industry coverage, achieved through the guidance of a newly hired Editor-in-Chief Mike Zawacki, the continuing contributions of *Snow* magazine's industry-leading editorial staff, SIMA and other respected industry pundits.

"We're delighted to announce *Snow* magazine and its mission to be the consummate source of news and information, while presenting all sides to every issue," says Ron Lowy, publisher of *Snow* magazine. "We are committed to remaining a strong partner of SIMA through sponsorships, complimentary advertisements and by providing a platform for their continued industry correspondence."

*Snow Business* readers can now visit *Snow* magazine online at [www.snowmagazineonline.com](http://www.snowmagazineonline.com).



## WEED & INSECT MANAGEMENT

### 2005 Seminar Dates Announced

**CLEVELAND, OHIO** – The *Lawn & Landscape* Weed & Insect Management Seminars will bring together top lawn and landscape professionals for an in-depth educational experience dedicated solely to the discussion of current trends in weed and insect management for turf, trees and ornamentals.

The geographic diversities and challenges provided when servicing lawn care customers will be addressed through two targeted seminars: the North Seminar will take place August 3-4 in Cleveland and the South Seminar will take place August 17-18 in New Orleans, La.

These events will provide attendees in both regions access to the latest technical information and business trends specific to their market – a customized educational event like no other. Highlights for the seminars include:

- Seminar content dedicated solely to the topic of servicing and selling weed and insect management services.
- An array of speakers and diverse topics that will provide a fresh approach to business and technical issues.
- Two uniquely different seminars focused on regional interests for industry professionals in the North and South.



continued on page 28

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## FINDING NEVERLAND

Now that I have your attention, I would like to capture your imagination. In the movie, "Finding Neverland," we are reminded of the great loss in leaving our imagination behind when we leave our youth to become adults. As adults facing the challenges of business, we need our imaginations more than ever. Training, when conducted properly, will rekindle the flame of imagination in the people that make up our companies and will be reflected in our service, teamwork and the indicators that predict strong financials.

*Influencing your company's imagination through training is possible by following these key concepts.*

- Training sessions need to be fast-paced and thought-provoking. It's the pace and format that awakens their imagination, and the content that directs their actions.
- Find ways that allow employees to actively participate in training rather than simply listening.
- There is unlimited opportunity to laugh and have fun in training. This unleashes a powerful energy in the group and opens minds to the concepts being presented.
- Be aware of opportunities to recognize participation during your training. It's a powerful tool to fill a session with applause and appreciation. As recognition increases participation does as well.
- Continually expect success from your training efforts. Success or failure is influenced by the company's attitude toward training.

Imagination for some of us may have been lost the instant a well-meaning teacher told us to "color within the lines." Our challenge, as leaders, is to ignite the spirit of our team through a journey that rediscovers the "Neverland" in each of us. This will lead to training and business success for everyone that finds it.

*Jim Paluch is president of JP Horizons, a group of training professionals that have been helping green industry companies develop a culture of learning for over 15 years.*



**JP Horizons**  
INCORPORATED

## industry news > >

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### Weed and Insect Management

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## MANUFACTURER MINUTES

### Toro Names Hoffman Chief Executive Officer, Announces First Quarter Results

**BLOOMINGTON, MINN.**—The Toro Co. announced that its board of directors has elected Michael Hoffman, 49, to the position of chief executive officer. Hoffman, a 27-year veteran with the company, was elected president and chief operating officer on Oct. 18, 2004, and has since been responsible for all the company's businesses and operations. Kendrick Melrose stepped down as chief executive officer and assumed the role of executive chairman for Toro's board of directors.

Hoffman joined Toro in 1977, serving the company in various sales, service and marketing roles for nearly all company business in the professional and residential segments. Over the past 10 years as a key executive, he successfully directed these divisions toward increased market share, revenue growth and profitability.

Melrose joined The Toro Co. in 1970 as director of marketing for the consumer products division. He was named chief executive officer in December 1983 and chairman of the board in December of 1987. Melrose currently serves as a director on the

boards of directors of SurModics, the Center for Ethical Business Cultures, the National Association of Manufacturers, the Outdoor Power Equipment Institute, and the Guthrie Theater.

In other news, Toro reported net earnings of \$11.2 million, or \$0.47 per diluted share, on net sales of \$346.9 million for its fiscal 2005 first quarter ended Jan. 28. In its fiscal 2004 first quarter, the company reported net earnings of \$9.3 million, or \$0.36 per diluted share, on net sales of \$313.6 million.

"Our strong momentum continued into the new fiscal year as our ongoing efforts to increase sales and improve profitability benefited overall performance," Melrose says, adding that results for Toro's first quarter, typically the seasonally smallest sales period, were fueled in part by double-digit sales growth in its professional segment.

Compared with the prior year, fiscal 2005 first quarter professional segment sales increased 18.1 percent to \$245.2 million. Volume increased in nearly all product categories, reflecting Toro's leadership position in professional segment products, positive market

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## Manufacturer Minutes

conditions and strong retail demand.

"Our customers expressed increasing optimism about the business," says Melrose. "Landscape contractors and sports turf professionals were very bullish about their business and the outlook for this season."

Earnings for the first quarter totaled \$38.9 million, up 36.6 percent compared with \$28.4 million in the prior year first quarter resulting from higher sales volume and improved leveraging of expenses.

For fiscal 2005, the company continues to expect net earnings per diluted share to grow 12 to 15 percent compared with 2004, and sales growth of 9 to 11 percent for the year.

For its fiscal 2005 second quarter, Toro expects to report net earnings per diluted share of \$2.30 to \$2.40. —PRNewswire

**TORO**



## MANUFACTURER MINUTES

### Deere Reports Record First-Quarter Results

**MOLINE, Ill** — Deere & Co. said first-quarter profits increased 30 percent as demand for farm and construction equipment rose.

First quarter net income increased to \$222.8 million, or 89 cents per share, compared with net income for the same period last year of \$170.8 million, or 68 cents per share. Net sales and revenues grew 18 percent to \$4.127 billion compared with \$3.484 billion a year ago.

Agricultural equipment increased 26 percent for the first quarter because of higher shipments resulting from strong

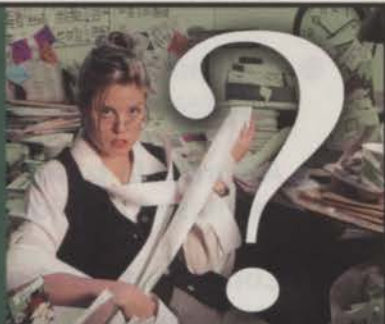
retail demand. Additionally, first quarter operating profit in this division nearly doubled to \$163 million compared with \$85 million last year. The operating-profit improvement was primarily driven by higher worldwide sales and efficiencies related to stronger production volumes.

Construction and forestry division sales rose 33 percent for the first quarter, reflecting strong retail sales. Operating profit in this division improved to \$101 million compared with \$93 million



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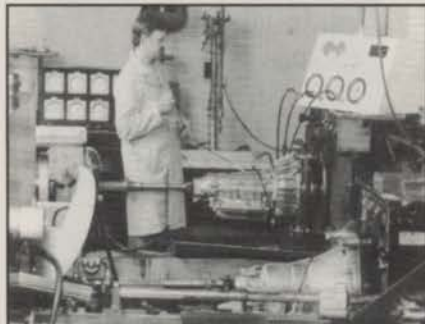
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USE READER SERVICE # 25

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## Manufacturer Minutes

for the same period last year. Excluding last year's \$30 million pretax gain from the sale of an equipment rental company, operating profit improved 60 percent.

Commercial and consumer equipment sales declined 8 percent for the quarter as the division further aligned shipments and production levels with seasonal demand. The lower shipments and production volumes contributed to an operating loss of \$2 million for the quarter vs. an operating profit of \$20 million last year. — **Jonathan Katz**



## MANUFACTURER MINUTES

### Ewing Expands to Pacific Northwest

**PHOENIX** — Ewing Irrigation, Golf & Industrial has opened its first location in the Pacific Northwest. Geoffrey Simpson has been appointed manager of Ewing's premiere Washington facility in Tacoma, Wash.

Simpson, who previously served as assistant manager of Ewing's facility in Deer Valley, Ariz., has 11 years of distribution experience serving the green industry. Simpson holds a BA degree in English from Washington State University, and is also a certified flight instructor.

Simpson will be assisted by Matt Purdy and Nick Cutting. Purdy, who for-

merly served Ewing's Ontario, Calif., location, has six years of distribution experience. Cutting will handle delivery processes and assist with day-to-day operations. Future expansion plans include additional locations in Washington and Oregon.



Ewing offers commercial and residential irrigation supplies, landscape and agronomic products, water management solutions, low-voltage lighting, erosion control, water features and industrial plastics to professionals serving the golf, landscaping, turf and industrial industries. Ewing offers 145 branch locations from coast to coast.

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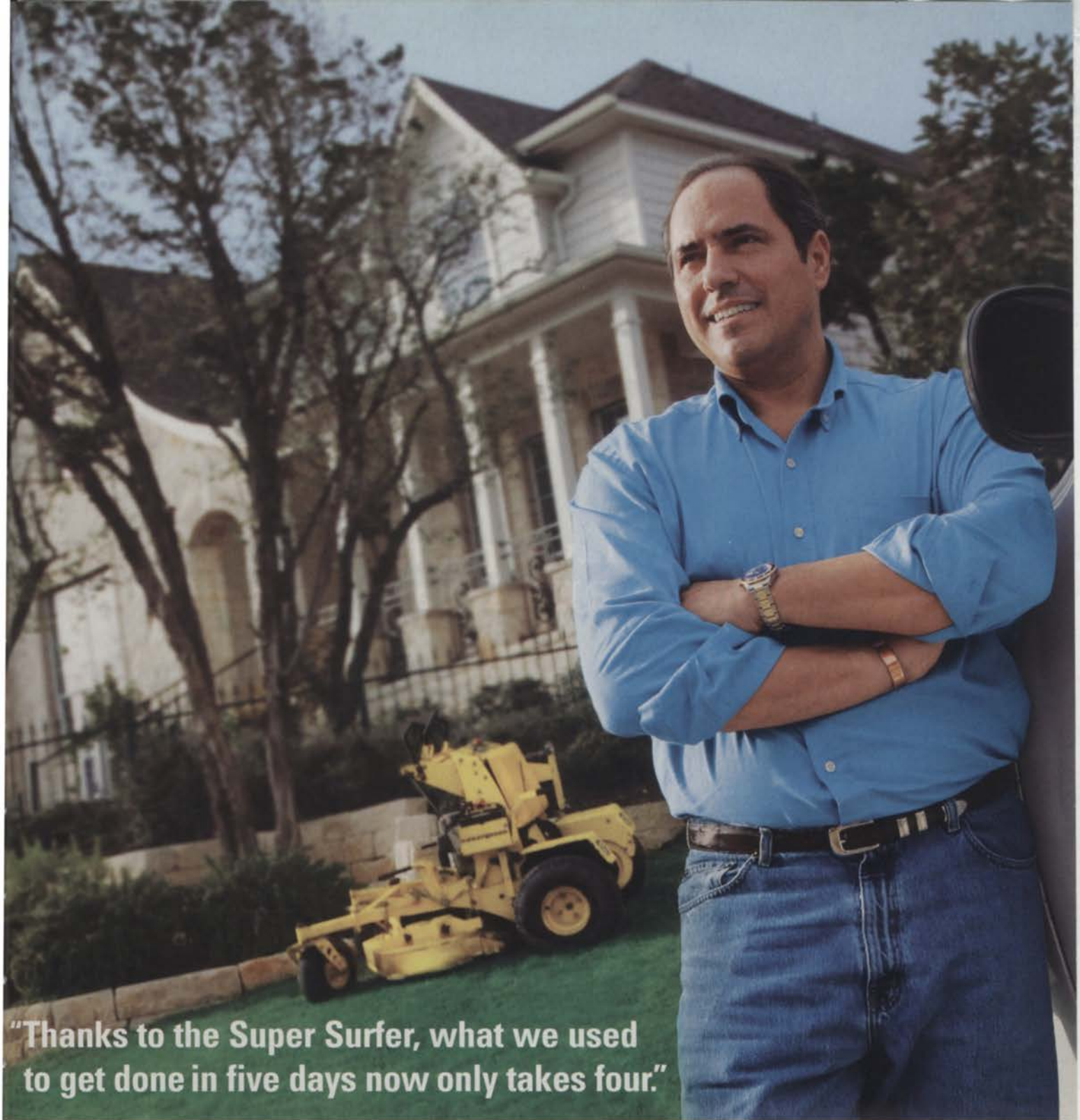
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USE READER SERVICE # 26





**"Thanks to the Super Surfer, what we used to get done in five days now only takes four."**

**John Hill, owner, Hill Horticulture, San Antonio, Texas**

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A golden retriever dog is shown in a lush green lawn, actively digging a hole with its front paws. The dog's fur is light golden, and its front legs are covered in dark soil. In the background, a white house with dark shutters and a well-manicured lawn with several trees are visible under soft, natural light.

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RESEARCH REPORT

THE TOOL CHEST

Light hand tools – though they don't get as much attention as their engine-powered counterparts – are still backbones in a contractor's tool arsenal.

As such, *Lawn & Landscape* was curious to find out exactly how much per year contractors spend on this type of equipment and where they purchase these easy-to-find supplies. According to our research, most contractors spend less than \$1,000 per year on these necessities, which include shovels and rakes. And nearly 80 percent of contractors purchase these tools from their nearest Home Depot, Lowe's or other retail outlet.

BETTER BUSINESS SOLUTIONS

Why Entrepreneurs Should Delegate

Do you need more hours in your day? Do you have so much work you're not even sure where to dig in? If so, you're like hundreds of other entrepreneurs who say they're overwhelmed with work. But why is that? Some of the most common excuses include:

- You're too busy to take the time to delegate or train someone else.
- You're the "best" or "only" person who can do the job right.
- No one else is available or responsible enough.
- If you delegate responsibility, you'll lose control over the project.

And here's the result: Projects get backed up, you get too busy to fulfill other important responsibilities. Employees who are interested in growth go unsatisfied. And, inevitably, productivity and profitability suffer.

Delegation can be your answer, especially when employees feel they're being given an opportunity to learn new skills, gain more knowledge and feel more connected to the organization – but not if they feel the boss is simply "dumping" unwanted tasks on them.

Just how do you go about handing over some of your tasks? **First, identify the best person for the job.** The best person is the one who's eager to learn, motivated and demonstrates the poten-

tial to assume greater responsibilities.

**Next, clearly and logically identify the goal of the project as well as the key steps involved.** Be careful not to ask these two useless questions: "Did you understand me?" and "Did you hear me?" The answers to these questions are always "Yes," whether or not that response is true. No one wants their boss to know they didn't understand instructions. Instead, ask: "What part of this process will you implement first, second, etc.?" "What part will you need additional resources for?" "What part will be most challenging or easiest for you or others?" "What part seems unclear or needs further discussion?"

**Third, establish clear milestones and deadlines.** Lay out some clearly understood milestones and the times and dates by which the employee will have accomplished a certain part of the task and will report back to you on their progress.

**Provide frequent feedback.** A novice needs to hear well-balanced feedback – both positive and negative – to understand how they're doing and whether they're meeting your expectations regarding the project and its time frames.

**After the project is complete, review the process with the employee.** Taking this extra step allows all the people involved in the task to identify what they would repeat or modify next time around. This review process also gives you the chance to see what was learned, who learned it and whether or not you can assign increasing levels of responsibility and authority to the project manager.

*The author is David Javitch, an organizational psychologist and president of Javitch Associates, an organizational consulting firm in Newton, Mass. For more information, visit [www.javitch.com](http://www.javitch.com).*

what is your average annual expenditure for light hand tools

EXPENDITURE	PERCENT OF CONTRACTORS
\$0 to \$499	58 percent
\$500 to \$999	28 percent
\$1,000 to \$1,499	7 percent
More than \$2,000	5 percent
\$1,500 to \$1,999	2 percent

Source: *Lawn & Landscape Online*

where do you purchase light hand tools most frequently?

LOCATION	PERCENT OF CONTRACTORS
Retail Outlet	79 percent
Local Power Equipment Dealer	10 percent
Distributor/Dealer	5 percent
Other	5 percent
Nursery or Garden Center	1 percent

Source: *Lawn & Landscape Online*

# Lawn & Landscape

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- **Conversations with Peers**
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All subscribers to **Lawn & Landscape magazine** have exclusive access to our industry-leading website. However, some of our subscribers have indicated that our login procedures were too complicated, so we have changed them to suit your needs, Please follow the instructions below to access the website:

- 1 Visit the LAWN & LANDSCAPE login set up at [www.lawnandlandscape.com/rsdefault.asp](http://www.lawnandlandscape.com/rsdefault.asp)**
- 2 Enter your name ID XXXXX (located above your name on the mailing label) and 5 digit zip code XXXXX (as it appears on the mailing label)**
- 3 Click on "CONFIRM SUBSCRIPTION"**
- 4 The system will ask you to confirm your information. At this point you may enter an email address but an email address is NOT required. Click "CONTINUE" and you will receive your unique username and password.**

Through May 15th, 2005 Lawn & Landscape will donate \$1<sup>00</sup> to Habitat for Humanity's Tsunami relief efforts for each new web user!

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## CALENDAR

### Calendar Note

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.

**APR. 11-13** Grandy & Associates' Basic Business Boot Camp, Las Vegas, Nev. Contact: 800/432-7963

**APR. 17-20** American Public Works Association North American Snow Conference, Kansas City, Mo. Contact: 816/472-6100 or [www.apwa.net/meetings/snow/2005](http://www.apwa.net/meetings/snow/2005)

**APR. 18-20** Trees & Utilities National Conference, Omaha, Neb. Contact: 402/464-5655 or [www.arborday.org](http://www.arborday.org)

**APR. 26-28** Grandy & Associates' Basic Business Boot Camp, Dallas, Texas. Contact: 800/432-7963

**MAY 10-12** Grandy & Associates' Basic Business Boot Camp, Philadelphia, Penn. Contact: 800/432-7963

**MAY 12** University of California – Davis Extension Managing Low-Budget Sports Fields Workshop, South Davis, Calif. Contact: 800/752-0881

**MAY 17-19** Grandy & Associates' Basic Business Boot Camp, Philadelphia, Pa. Contact: 800/432-7963

**MAY 19** Alabama Cooperative Extension Comprehensive Fire Ant Management Workshop, Anniston, Ala. Contact: 256/237-1621 or [www.ag.auburn.edu/landscape/whats.html](http://www.ag.auburn.edu/landscape/whats.html)

**JUNE 7-9, JULY 12-14, AUG. 23-25, SEPT. 20-22** Grandy & Associates' Basic Business Boot Camp, Owensboro, Ky. Contact: 800/432-7963

**JULY 14-17** Professional Landcare Network Summer Leadership Meeting – PLANET, Washington, D.C. Contact: 800/395-2522 or [www.landcarenetwork.org](http://www.landcarenetwork.org)

**JULY 17-19** Professional Landcare Network Legislative Day on the Hill and Renewal & Remembrance at Arlington National Cemetery, Washington, D.C. Contact: 800/395-2522 or [www.landcarenetwork.org](http://www.landcarenetwork.org)

**JULY 17-24** Perennial Plant Association Symposium, Knoxville/Nashville, Ky. Contact: 614/771-8431 or [www.perennialplant.org/symposium/sym05.htm](http://www.perennialplant.org/symposium/sym05.htm)

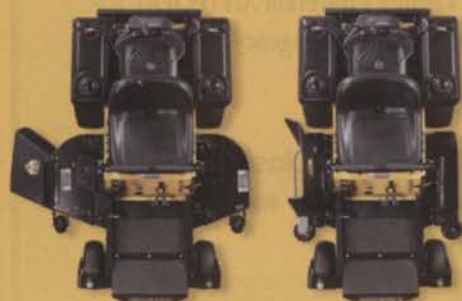
**JULY 26-27** Chattanooga Association of Landscape Professionals Summer Express 2-day Short Course, Collegedale, Tenn. Contact: 432/886-8874

**AUG. 3-4** Lawn & Landscape Weed & Insect Summit – North, Cleveland, Ohio. Contact: 800/456-0707 or [www.weedinsectseminar.com](http://www.weedinsectseminar.com)



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## Top headlines from 1995-1999 Lawn & Landscape's first 25 years

### January 1995 – Entering the Interior Market.

A number of contractors who successfully adapt to serving this specialized client base are finding interior work a natural business extension.



### June 1995 – Professional Services Continue to Grow.

A Gallup survey shows that the number of households using a professional lawn or landscape service increased by 300,000 from 1993 to 1994 to a total of 17.6 million customers.

### March 1996 – Substance Abuse: Can You Afford Not to Test?

Employee substance abuse is being championed as a means to head off employee issues and reduce overall business risk.



*EDITOR'S NOTE: This year, Lawn & Landscape begins its 25<sup>th</sup> year of service to the industry. To help celebrate this milestone, each 2005 issue of Lawn & Landscape will reflect on the people, companies and events that have shaped our industry.*



### October 1996 – Labor Crunch is Job 1.

Finding quality employees is the top business concern according to a recent survey with 49 percent of respondents calling it their top factor limiting growth. Second was cash flow for 19.6 percent of respondents and regulations by 5.6 percent.

### March 1997 – Computerized Irrigation Controls: The Wave of the Future?

With irrigation acreage constantly increasing, contractors say computerized controls are beginning to prove their value on larger-scale landscape irrigation projects.

### July 1997 – Winds of Change.

Los Angeles, Calif., has enacted a ban on use of gas-powered blowers within 500 feet of a residence backed with a maximum \$1,000 fine.

### January 1998 – OPEI Predictions.

The Outdoor Power Equipment Institute (OPEI) said that 1998 shipments of commercial rotary mowers reached 53,396 units and predicts a 4.3 percent increase in 1999.

### October 1998 – Fertigation: It's for Contractors Too.

Technology used in agriculture and sports turf is now being adapted to allow "spoon feeding" of nutrients.

### March 1999 – EPA Moves Forward with FQPA.

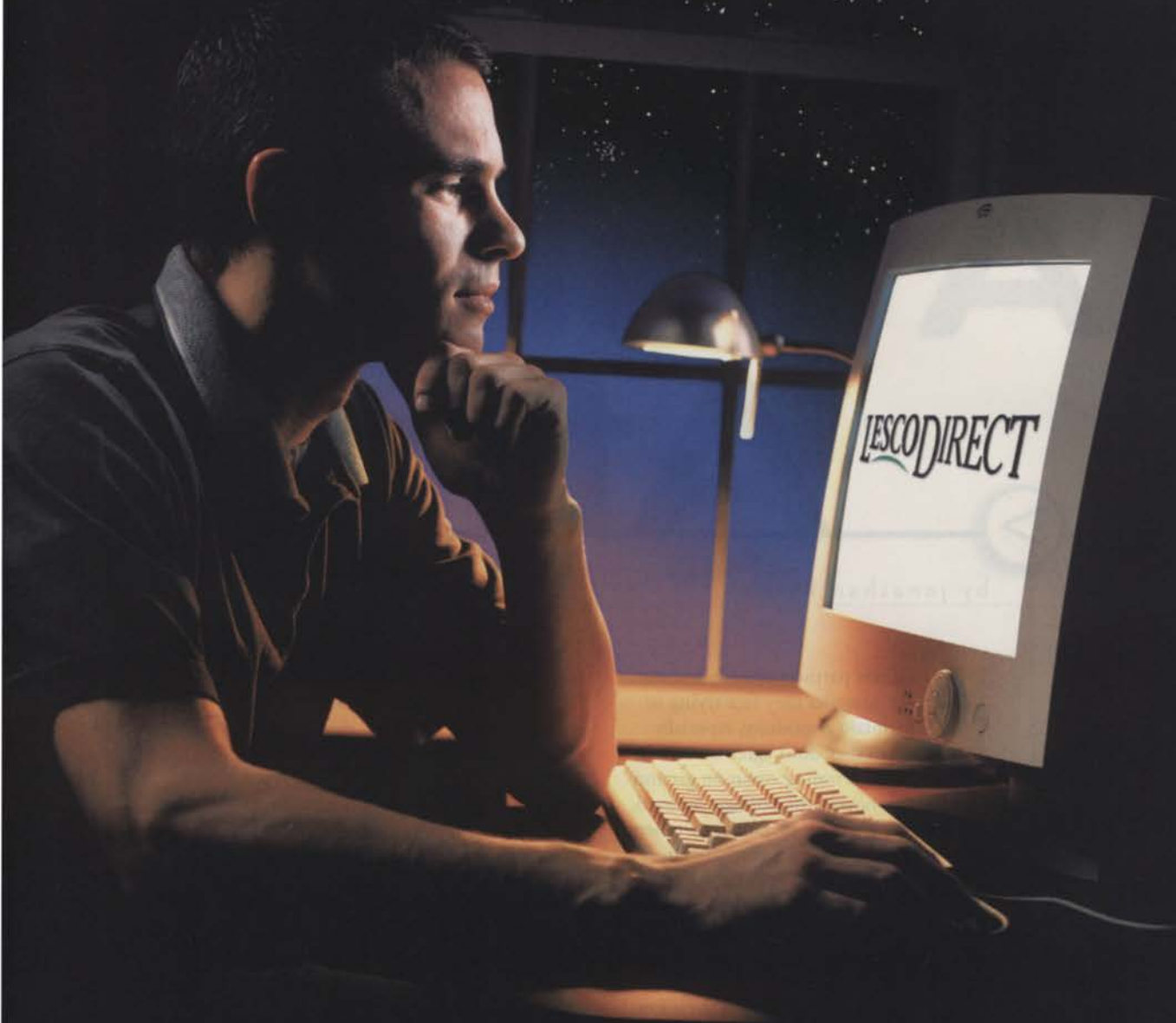
Despite challenges, the federal Food Quality Protection Act (FQPA) is being enforced by the Environmental Protection Agency.

### April 1999 – Landcare, TruGreen-ChemLawn Deal Closes.

Two industry giants have joined forces to form a new organization with expected sales of \$600 million per year.



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# A Family Affair

by jonathan katz

**B**usiness partners often talk about the struggles they face trying to maintain continuity, especially when they don't agree on certain company issues. Finding common ground is critical for moving the business forward, but when the partners are family members, there's often more at stake than just the company's well being.

Whether it's a husband/wife team or two siblings sharing ownership duties, business partners who are related must often overcome the emotional ties that bind them together to make sound business decisions. Achieving such stability can become even more challenging when multiple family members are all equal owners in a company. That's the situation at Maxalea, a Baltimore, Md. landscape design/build company, where five members of the McWilliams family share ownership responsibilities.

The company began in 1929 when brothers James, Robert and George McWilliams began selling sod in the Baltimore area. In 1946, James McWilliams and his wife, Marion, opened a nursery called Mac's Azaleas, which was eventually shortened to Maxalea. The business was later passed on

to James and Marion McWilliams' sons, Don and Jack, who formed a landscape-contracting firm. In 1998, the third generation of McWilliams purchased the company, which at that time had grown to approximately \$3 million in revenue. The company is now a \$7.3-million operation with more than 80 employees.

For the most part, common goals and interests have helped keep this current ownership team operating smoothly. But there are times when disagreements occur, which is why the team has decision-making procedures in place. The owners also do not hesitate to look outside the company for help. In 1999, the company hired a consultant to help the new owners decide whether to close Maxalea's garden center, says Executive Vice President Jim McWilliams. "In the third generation, my older brother was the last of the five current owners to realize that the retail garden center had to go," Jim McWilliams recalls. "Having an outside consultant look at our business was really the deciding factor." Jim McWilliams, 41, is one of the five current Maxalea owners and oversees the



Photo: Maxalea

Left to right: David, Michael, Stephen, James and John McWilliams.

company's sales staff. *Lawn & Landscape* magazine spoke with McWilliams about how the company has continued to progress with multiple owners steering the ship.

**What are some of the biggest challenges of working with so many family members, and how do you overcome them?** There are five owners, and although we all have pretty much the same common interest, the goal is to funnel that interest so that we are all going in the same direction. In 1999, we brought a consultant in from Chicago and had him assess our business. We sat down with him and he interviewed us, as well as key personnel who are within the company. He thought we were beating a dead horse with the retail side of the business and that it wasn't enabling us to focus our attention on the land-

scape design, contracting, maintenance, carpentry, lighting and irrigation end of the business. We needed someone from the outside to look in and say, 'Hey this is what you need to do.' He worked for us and this allowed us to evaluate our various positions and personnel and helped us to reorganize as to take advantage of each individual skill set we had here. He also helped us set up a pricing model and an operating budget. I think that process was a turning point for us in terms of having someone come in and help us set up systems that we could all agree with and follow.

**Why didn't the garden center work out?** I think it didn't work out because of our location. We're not on a major thoroughfare, and customers only knew about that part of our business by word of mouth. When we talked to most

people running profitable garden centers, they said it's all about location, location, location. They were near major traffic arteries, and we're near residential neighborhoods. The final factor was pressure from Home Depot, the Lowe's and Wal-Mart. They were branching into some of what we were selling and taking away our customers. In the end, closing the garden center was the best decision for us.

**Does sibling rivalry ever come into play at your company?** It's not a factor at all. We all have different talents and expertise in different areas. That's what makes us unique and unusual. Most of us have our own clients because we're each designing or selling a different facet of the business, so that's helped keep some separation there.

**What are some of the benefits of working in a family business?** The

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## lessons learned > > >

biggest benefit is knowing there are trustworthy individuals to back me up in any situation. I am able to take a vacation and know my partners will keep things operating smoothly. If any one of us has a personal issue to deal with, others will cover for him – no questions asked.

**How do you make decisions with five owners working together?** The majority rules on a major issue. If one does not agree, he still has to support the others. No one is allowed to undermine the decisions that are made. We have titles such as president and vice president, but we have majority rule on any major issue.

**What is the process for deciding on issues? Do you vote on them?** We do. We actually evaluate the pros and cons of all major decisions. And I think the biggest decision goes back to closing the retail part of our operation. That's probably one of the biggest decisions we had to make together. We had someone who had been here for more than 35 years as an owner and grew up with that part of the business, and it was tough to push him, in essence, over the fence. Having that outside person come in and run the hard, true numbers showed that individual that it doesn't make sense to continue to upgrade that part of the business. Since then, we've had a plan that we all agree upon. It's a five- to 10-year plan, and we have followed it. We're now trying to agree on the amount of growth that we should achieve each year. We also rely upon support staff to give us their thoughts and ideas. Other people have decision-making powers and keep us informed of the impact of various decisions. We have three or four individuals helping us with issues on a daily basis. We also have professionals who support us from outside the organization, ranging on issues from insurance to accounting. These individuals provide expertise within particular fields and share experiences from other companies in the same industry.

**What's the purpose of your weekly Monday night meetings?** These meetings are very important to us. Every Monday the owners convene to review minutes from the previous meeting. At many of the meetings, our operations manager and our financial officer also attend. We look through our accounts and review where we are financially and talk about production issues. It is a roundtable format. Everyone participates. Major decisions are made here. Meetings generally last one to two hours. Concise minutes are taken and e-mailed following the meeting. We elect one person from the group to take the minutes. These minutes have proven valuable as a source for recording decisions and actions to be take. You would be amazed at what can be forgotten in a short period of time. Our minutes are our record of activity.

**What was your parents' strategy behind transferring non-business assets to children who weren't in the company?** There are two sisters in the family who are not involved in the business. They were when they were younger but chose not to take it up as a profession, so some insurance policies were purchased for them to cover them from any value they would get but no ownership of the company, so they don't have any ties to the business. It was because advisors had told that generation that there had been and would be problems if something wasn't written up ahead of time. We heard about it in our own dealings with other companies about how siblings not involved in the company all of the sudden had an interest upon the death of an owner. But that's no longer a factor because we bought the business from the second generation.

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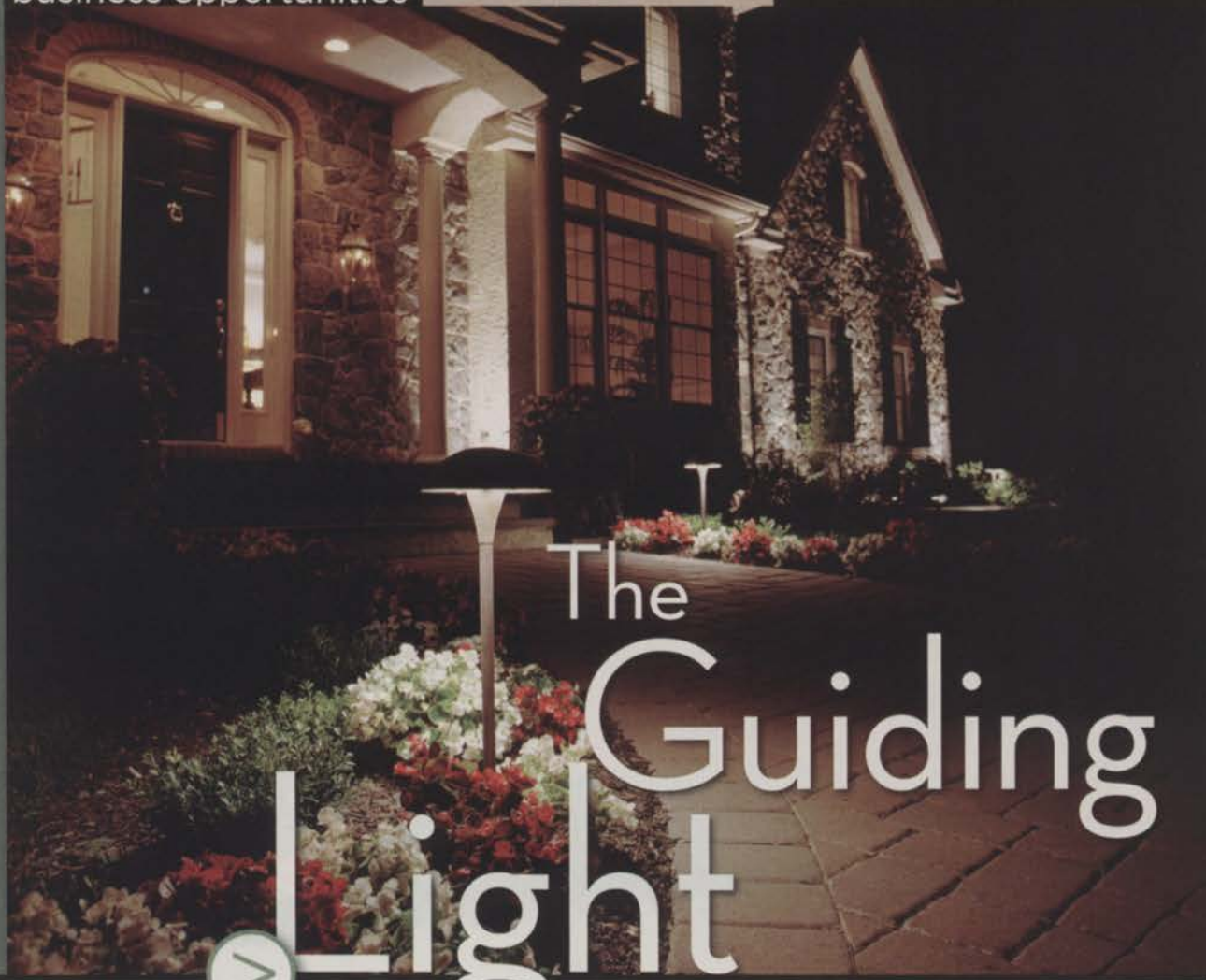
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USE READER SERVICE # 33



Photos: Cast Lighting

# The Guiding Light

by kathleen franzinger

When more customers started asking for landscape lighting, the light bulb turned on for Del Vacchio Landscapes.

Vince Del Vacchio says the decision to start offering landscaping lighting three years ago was an easy one. With more customers requesting lighting, the president of Del Vacchio Landscapes in Edgemont, Pa., realized the service was a natural fit with the landscapes and hardscapes his company designs and builds. "More people were asking us when we were going to do installations that incorporated lighting," he says. "We saw a market for it."

After first fooling around with the lower quality lighting materials available, Del Vacchio decided to get serious about offering the service. When he researched the types of installation and systems, as well as the equipment involved, he discovered he could start a lighting service for a fairly small investment.


Lighting doesn't really require any

special equipment, he says. Most of the tools are the same ones used in landscaping work. One minor investment he made was converting a bed edger he owned into a trenching machine. "But other than that, we pretty much had everything we needed," he says.

He and his staff then took installation training at seminars offered by the industry and various manufacturers. Once armed with the knowledge and the right equipment, Del Vacchio's lighting service was ready to go.

The service accounted for only about 8 percent of the company's total revenue last year, but without it, Del Vacchio says he would lose landscape jobs. "If somebody else came along and offered lighting with an installation project, that could have

*continued on page 50*



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USE READER SERVICE # 34

continued from page 46

been a reason for a customer to choose them instead of us," he says.

**SPARKING SALES.** Del Vacchio markets lighting the same way he does his other services: by sending four-color mailers, about the size of large postcards, to targeted areas that include existing and potential clients. Mailers promoting the lighting service are usually sent in late spring or early summer. He also mentions the lighting service in all advertising. But he says the best selling tool is the on-site demonstration.

When it comes to lighting, seeing is believing. Customers can't visualize the final product simply by looking at fixtures, and it's difficult to explain it to them. That's why Del Vacchio started offering free overnight demonstrations.

"People aren't going to see much of the fixtures because they're hidden pretty well behind bushes," he says. "When people think they're not going to see the fixtures, they get kind of wor-



ried until you show them the results. When customers see the house lit up, it's a pretty powerful tool."

The demonstrations are offered to

qualified customers only. During an initial consultation, Del Vacchio will make sure the property is in his company's service area, is the type of property they want to work on, and that the client's budget and time line are realistic. For instance, his typical client is residential with a 1-acre property and a home that costs between \$600,000 and \$750,000. Qualifying customers for a demonstration can prevent hours of wasted time, says Del Vacchio.

Once a customer is qualified, the salesperson will go out and set up the lights. "We'll leave the lights on the property for at least a few nights and up to a week," he says. "The longer the lights are there, the more customers miss them when they're gone."

But that's not to say there aren't challenges to selling the service. Customers want lighting, but not a high price tag. "We decided to go with higher end systems, and they aren't by

continued on page 57

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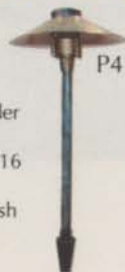
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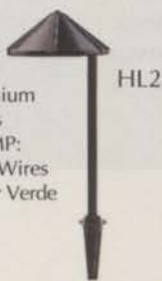
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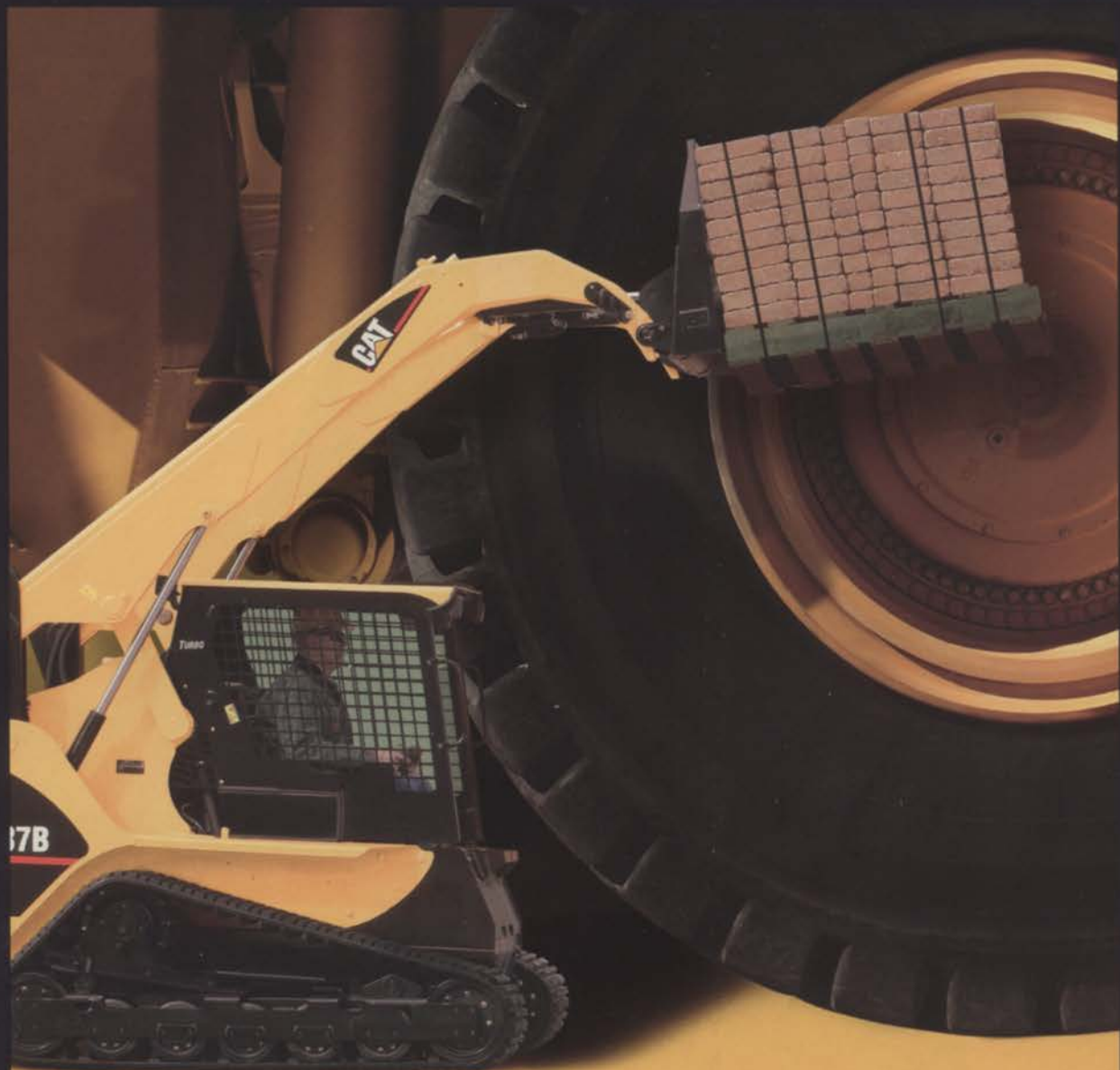


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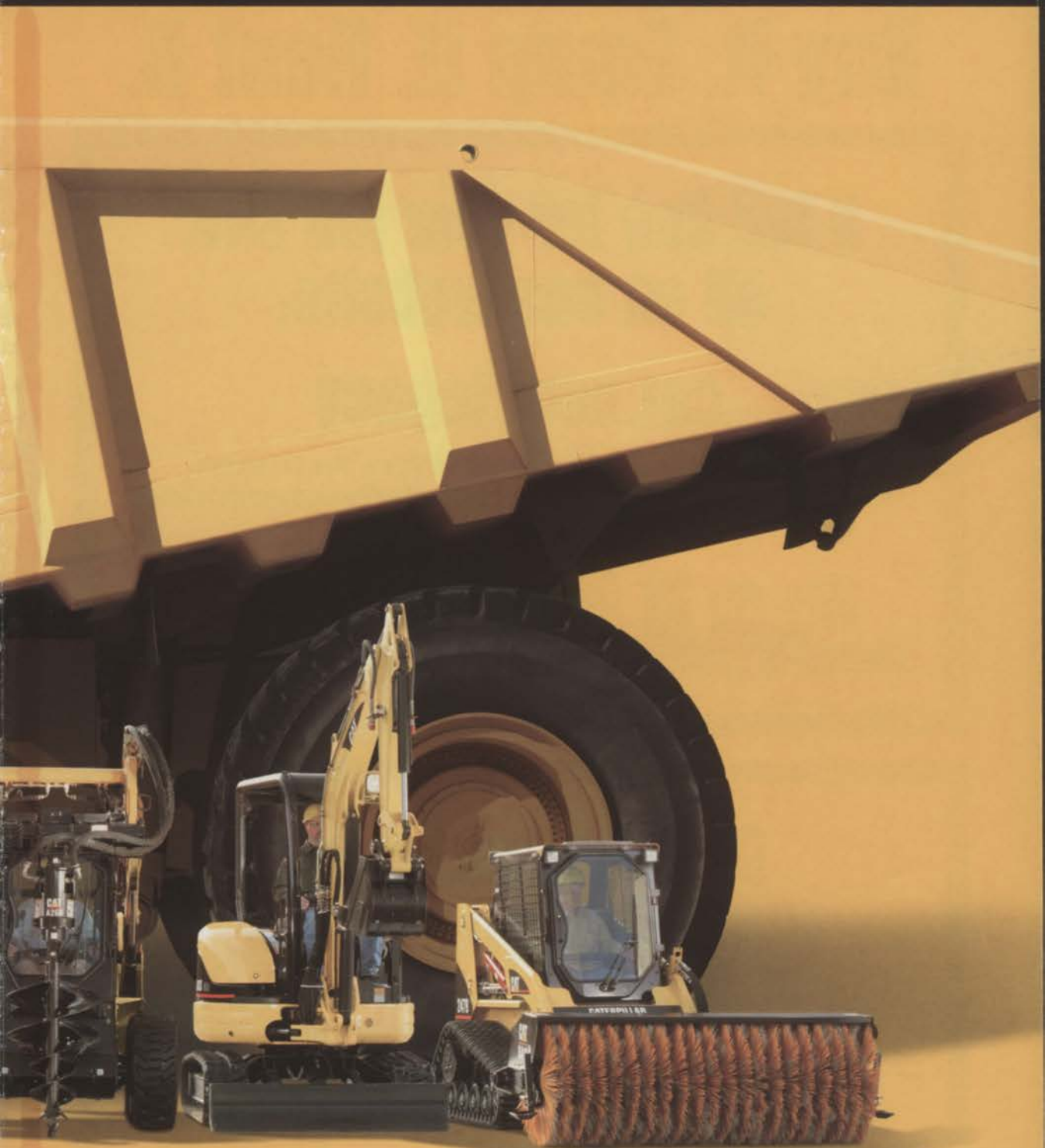
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continued from page 50

any means cheap. People can go buy off-the-shelf stuff for much cheaper," says Del Vacchio.

He is careful to explain to customers the benefits of having lighting professionally installed. It costs more, but it's also serviceable, more durable and lasts longer. He usually finds that most customers are all too familiar with the lower quality lighting. "They know it breaks, they know it doesn't last, and they know the bulbs always burn out," he says.

Del Vacchio says his customers usually fall into two types. The first are people with established landscapes, who are looking to accent their home or landscape, or both. Generally these are older homes, he says, with mature landscapes. "We find these to be our larger sales because they aren't spending money on hardscaping and landscaping along with the lighting," he says.

On the other side are customers with newer homes that have little or no mature landscaping. "These are the properties we are creating an overall design for, then installing hardscaping, landscaping and lighting," he says. "The lighting sale on these properties is generally a little lower because they are spending more on the project overall. But we always build the system so it's expandable in the future."

In the last two years, sales in general have been relatively level for Del

Vacchio, but he is expecting to grow this year. He hopes to boost sales by offering lighting as an option on every design/build job. "We'll be pushing it with every job that we do – landscape or hardscape," he says. "We want to make sure our entire market is aware that we're doing it."

The annual growth of the lighting service has been consistent with growth in other divisions of his company, but "in the next two years, we project lighting will be one of two divisions that will grow faster for us," Del Vacchio says. In fact, he projects the service will be 10 to 12 percent of the company's total revenue this year.

**PRICE IS RIGHT.** When he started out, Del Vacchio had no idea what to charge for lighting. So he used manufacturer recommendations as a guideline for pricing jobs and has found it useful. "Had we priced it ourselves, we probably would have underpriced ourselves a little bit at first," he says.

Some manufacturers help out contractors by recommending a minimum price per fixture that factors in all of the costs, including the fixture itself, transformer, wire and labor. The number serves as a good starting point when contractors price lighting jobs. As an example, Steve Parrott, director of marketing, Cast Lighting, Hawthorne,

N.J., points to the most common fixture they make. Contractors can buy the fixture for \$50, and they recommend contractors sell it for \$200, a 25-percent increase when all the costs are added in.

There is a tendency to want to charge a flat price, like \$150 per fixture. But Del Vacchio compares price-per-fixture pricing to square-footage pricing for pavers. "We don't do it because there are too many variables on each job," he explains.

Once the manufacturer's pricing is applied, "we always check our estimate to make sure it's going to be a profitable job," he says. On average, he charges anywhere from \$150 to \$250 per fixture, depending on job size, difficulty, labor and fixture type.

With an estimated gross profit of about 15 percent, Del Vacchio says lighting is slightly more profitable than other services his company offers. He contributes this to the higher markup of lighting materials compared with the bigger materials he uses for his landscaping and hardscaping work.

**LIGHT LESSONS.** Despite the best-laid plans, mistakes will be made. Beginning a lighting service may not be overly complicated, but it does have its challenges. One lesson Del Vacchio learned was the value of a layout. "Ini-



## tools of the trade

**F**or the most part, the tools required to install landscape lights are the same as those contractors already use for landscape jobs, such as rakes and shovels. Vince Del Vacchio, president, Del Vacchio Landscapes, Edgemont, Pa., offers a list of the basic tools needed to start a lighting service.

- Trenching machine – "Many bed edgers double as trenching machines now, eliminating the need to buy two units," says Del Vacchio. "Just make sure it goes at least 6 inches deep."
- Hand trenching tools
- Volt/Amp meter
- Label machine – "This is to wire label runs at

the transformer," he says. "When you get 15 or 20 wire runs with two wires each, it can get confusing remembering what goes where."

- Demonstration kit – "A demonstration kit has a transformer and a sampling of fixtures with quick-connect wiring so it can be setup and broken down easily," he says. "One can be made for a few hundred dollars, or you can buy a complete kit from a manufacturer for more."
- Solder pot – A portable container filled with solder used for dip-soldering wires in the field.
- Wire snips
- Wire stripper
- Conduit and couplings
- Cordless drill & circular saw

tially, we didn't do much layout before we started a job and we found it cost us some time," says Del Vacchio.

Now his crew lays out jobs two ways. They draw out where everything will go, including fixtures, transform-

fixture, eliminating the guesswork for the installers.

Lighting can also be a challenge simply because it's different than installing landscapes or hardscapes. "Lighting involves running little wires

their garage, they want them neat, not sloppy. That's one of the things that can really set you apart and make a big difference on the installation."

And all of those details, including voltages, wire type and run lengths, require close attention. If something is overlooked, it can lead to major maintenance problems down the road. "It's well worth spending the extra time while you're there," says Del Vacchio.

Del Vacchio is careful to ensure his lighting work is of the highest quality. "We use a quality check to make sure things are done properly on every job," he says. Throughout the job, crew leaders will check that voltages are correct. Once a job is finished, either Del Vacchio or an operations manager will again check the voltages and make sure everything looks clean and neat before doing a walk-around with the customer. He says, "Although it's low voltage, we are playing with electricity so we want to make sure that everything is absolutely perfect." **LL**



"If somebody else came along and offered lighting with an installation project, that could have been a reason for a customer to choose them instead of us."

- Vince Del Vacchio

ers and hubs, which saves time on the initial installation. This also uncovers any potential problems, such as a client needing a new outlet installed. In addition, the designer will use colored flags to indicate where to install each type of

and trying to make everything neat and organized," he says. "Obviously, landscape and hardscape jobs need that too, but on a bigger scale. There's more finite work involved in lighting. When someone sees wires running into

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# Riding the Bid Wave

Benchmark Landscape masters the ebbs and flows of commercial bid work in San Diego's endless summer.

by nicole wisniewski

Surfing a wave above razor sharp coral in dangerously shallow water with the whole ocean overhead can be risky.

Navigating the turbulent and unpredictable waves of commercial bid work can be just as uncertain. In the feast or famine-like ups and downs of this service, a bad year is one where the water is as still as glass – no equipment or employees required – as you wait with your longboard prepped, starting out into the sea for your chance. But in a good year, there are more perfect waves than you can catch available, so the object becomes embracing patience, choosing the right waves and following the rules of etiquette so you stand out to your clients and don't collide with your competition – or worse yet – yourself.

Nowhere does smart surf culture mesh more seamlessly with tough-minded commercial bid culture than in Poway, Calif., at Benchmark Landscape. While many contractors become frustrated with commercial bid

work and choose to head back to the beach and try a new sport – namely residential design/build work – company President John Mohns refined his already established niche and created a continuous sea of catchable waves for himself in San Diego County.

**PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT.** There is no way around it – surfing takes practice; mastering even the basic surfing fundamentals takes weeks. The ocean is a sometimes chaotic environment – you have to learn how waves behave, what your surfboard can do, and the skills of catching a wave, standing up, and riding and judging bulging, tumbling water.

Getting used to the tides of commercial bid work also takes practice before one can enjoy reaping the rewards of boosted revenue. Mohns describes his start in business from 1984 to 1990 as “jumping on the train,” he says. “Growth was just phenomenal in the building industry in San Diego. But growth

## benchmark landscape

**HEADQUARTERS:** Poway, California

**FOUNDED:** 1984

**BRANCHES:** Will open one branch in Vista, Calif., by 2006 and another one in southern San Diego County in 2007.

**CLIENT MIX:** 75 percent commercial residential (condominiums, apartment buildings, HOAs, etc.) and 25 percent commercial (office parks, hospitals, educational facilities, etc.)

**SERVICE MIX:** 55 percent installation only (no design), 30 percent maintenance, 10 percent irrigation services and 5 percent design/build

**YEAR-ROUND EMPLOYEES:**  
300 (90 percent Hispanic)

**GREATEST LABOR CHALLENGE:**  
Developing future leaders, such as field supervisors, account managers and project managers.

### REVENUE BREAKDOWN:

<b>2005 Expected Revenue:</b>	.....\$18,000,000
<b>2004 Revenue:</b>	.....\$16,732,000
<b>2003 Revenue:</b>	.....\$12,152,000
<b>2002 Revenue:</b>	.....\$13,993,000
<b>2001 Revenue:</b>	.....\$12,386,000
<b>2000 Revenue:</b>	.....\$12,353,000
<b>1999 Revenue:</b>	.....\$10,966,000

### MANAGEMENT TEAM:

President: John Mohns  
 Vice President: Craig Mohns  
 Installation General Manager: Bill Hoffman  
 Maintenance Branch Manager: Ed Drobnicki  
 Controller: John DeMoss



in this business has never been consistent – we grew in spurts.”

Mastering the commercial bid arena means mastering this up and down nature of the service, which equates to constant estimating with no response one minute vs. gaining three new jobs a week the next. “You try to schedule and calculate and create consistency in this service, but that’s challenging,” Mohns says. Instead, Benchmark tries to flow with the service tides. For instance, when work is slow, we try to keep our people busy and boost quality and efficiency – we probably end up overmanning jobs a bit but it’s worth it to keep people on board. That way, when it gets busy, we’re using the lessons we learned while we were slower to get us through those fast periods where people have to work a little harder and be more productive.”

Employees become used to the rising and falling work levels, and the company utilizes this same labor force for both situations. “We go through periods where work keeps coming in but we’re a little slower at increasing our overhead to handle that,” Mohns says. “So there are years where revenue and profit margin jumps,

## entering the surf

**W**hen riding a wave, there are certain obstacles one encounters – paddling against the current, waiting patiently for the perfect moment, moving forward without hesitation to dominate rushing gallons of water and making it back to the shore.

This is similar to the ups and downs one deals with when building a business. Take John Mohns, president, Benchmark Landscape, Poway, Calif., for instance. As soon as he missed his first chance and was denied acceptance by the landscape architecture program at California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, Mohns seized his second option by enrolling in the school's ornamental horticulture program, which proved to be a better fit for Mohns because it put him in the field instead of behind a drafting table.

Once he obtained his bachelor's degree, Mohns took a job as a laborer for a small design/build firm in San Luis Obispo. He stayed there for one year and then had the opportunity to move back to San Diego and retain a project manager position for a commercial landscape contractor.

Mohns spent half a decade with this company before he felt internal management problems compelled him to seek out a new challenge. Subsequently, he and a coworker decided to start their own venture – Benchmark Landscape Construction – in July 1984. Mohns went from being a manager with 80 employees, a full equipment fleet, established customers and an overflowing plate of work to being an owner with a partner, two new Ford Rangers, a few hand tools, a mower and about three months worth of cash flow.

The duo had a business plan in their heads, which initially consisted of contacting clients they had built relationships with at their old company to reintroduce themselves, as well as generating sales from new clients. Their first jobs consisted of small residential work, such as renovating a lawn or repairing a sprinkler head or drain.

Though informal, the plan worked. By the end of its first year, Benchmark Landscape had \$750,000 in revenue and a staff of 15 to 20 employees. By year two, the company's revenue grew to \$2 million.

In fact, the commercial bid work wave was so great, that Mohns and his partner opened up a

second branch in the then booming Rancho California, Calif., in Riverside County, 45 minutes north of San Diego County. Mohns partner operated the Rancho California facility while Mohns remained in San Diego. Quickly the two branches lost their connection. The Rancho California office was losing money and the San Diego office was making money. The partners started to compete with each other and the work environment became unhealthy.

So, in 1990, the San Diego branch of Benchmark bought out the Rancho California branch, essentially buying out Mohns' partner, and the two continued running separate businesses. Mohns was able to keep the Benchmark name. That same year, Benchmark hit the \$5-million mark, and remained there for four years, where the recession meant "staying alive until 1995," Mohns says. "Many contractors went out of business, but we secured one strong builder relationship, and the job lasted four years and kept a third of our employees busy."

Then in 1996, Benchmark jumped from \$5 to \$8 million. By 1998, the company started dabbling in residential design/build, but soon realized that the overhead costs and management time associated with keeping the service alive were too high considering the service only made up 5 to 10 percent of the company's overall revenue. So Mohns began phasing out the service.

Benchmark Landscape continued growing consistently until a building boom brought in an unusually high level of competitors who were bidding low to gain clients. "We dropped \$1 to \$2 million that year, but gained many of those clients back the following year when they realized that low price meant cutting corners to get the job done," Mohns says.

Today, the company has grown to more than \$16 million in revenue and 300 employees. And like his days surfing 20 years ago, Mohns remembers that there were times when he wasn't having any fun, the waves beating him down and the current too risky to keep going, and there were other times when the sun was shining and the waves were perfect, creating unlimited thrill rides. Business over the years, he says, has been a similar experience. "It takes a lot of hard work and commitment to build a business, and we're proud of what we've created here."

but our overhead remains consistent so we become more efficient. When we can go a couple of years and control our overhead, it benefits us in the long run."

Honing commercial bid work also means being selective in the clients with which a contractor does business. "We've built relationships with a handful of builders in the area who we

feel make up a reasonable portion of the market share, are fairly consistent in the work they need done and who appreciate the high level of service and workmanship we're providing," Mohns says, adding that they refine these relationships by keeping in regular contact with project managers and bidding their work in a timely and consistent manner.

**CROSS TRAINING.** Ninety-five percent of a surfer's time is spent paddling rather than riding waves. A surfer can't experience the rush of the ride without paddling out to wait for the perfect peak.

Similarly, once Benchmark mastered commercial bid work, maintenance became an add-on to boost business security during installation's low tides. Now, one feeds the other and vice-versa. "Ultimately, I think maintenance's recurring revenue is what's going to provide strength and value for this company in the long run," Mohns explains.

The company started offering commercial maintenance early on because clients continually requested the service. At first, the company only offered it to installation clients, but they soon realized that to sustain client relationships and build this area of the business, they would also have to take on jobs they did not install.

In Benchmark's maintenance department, five account managers each oversee two to five crews that range from two- to six-men per crew. There are 18 total crews maintaining jobs that range from a couple of hundred dollars to \$20,000 per month. Each account manager will manage approximately \$1 million each in maintenance work and also have goals of generating different amounts from enhancement sales based on their work portfolio and job details, specifically landscape age. "A newly installed job won't have as much enhancement potential as a 25-year-old landscape that will need updating and renovation," explains Benchmark's Vice President and John Mohns' brother Craig Mohns. "So an account manager who oversees older landscapes will have to manage \$1 million worth of maintenance and also have a goal of 25 to 35 percent more in enhancement sales."

One big labor challenge for Benchmark is securing account managers – key company positions because they are the lifelines to clients. The company has four solid account managers on staff but filling the fifth position has been challenging. "We've lost five account managers in the past two years," Craig says, adding that they try and secure account managers via word-of-mouth, taking part in college student forums and soliciting their vendors for suggestions. "Above all, we look for people who can communicate effectively with clients in this position because that's the

continued on page 66

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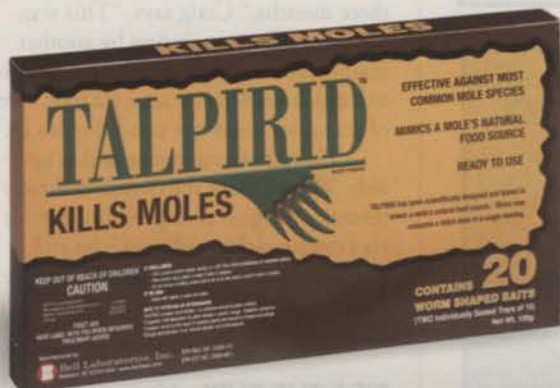
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## cover story

continued from page 64

most important part of their job."

To enhance maintenance sales from commercial installation work four years ago, Benchmark developed a maintenance and warranty transition team, consisting of two crews. "We realized that regardless of whether we're doing the maintenance after the installation or someone else is doing it, there are tricks to maintaining a newly installed landscape," Craig says. "So, basically, every installation contract includes on average a 90-day maintenance period after the job is finished. We get it to the point where it's in great shape and then turn it over to the ongoing maintenance department."

For Benchmark, the 90 days of maintenance is more of a value-added service than a revenue generator. "We may have to adjust the hours in our bid to meet this need or we may not make any money on the contract maintenance part of the job but we keep the client happy and set ourselves up to get the ongoing maintenance job," Craig says. "Plus, we get to know the maintenance side enough to improve our maintenance estimating when it comes time to bid that work. We know how many hours it should take to get certain tasks done because we've done them for three months. Then when we get the job, we can make back what we lost by including the 90 days of maintenance in the installation contract. Obviously we want to bid in a way where we win both times, but we can't bid too fat on the installation bid or we won't get the job."

Finally, this 90-day transition period also helps Benchmark to keep track of the plants it installs under warranty. "We know how they are doing and can monitor their progress for three months," Craig says. "This way, there is no finger pointing by another maintenance company if a plant dies six months from now because we took care of it and we know the condition it's in."

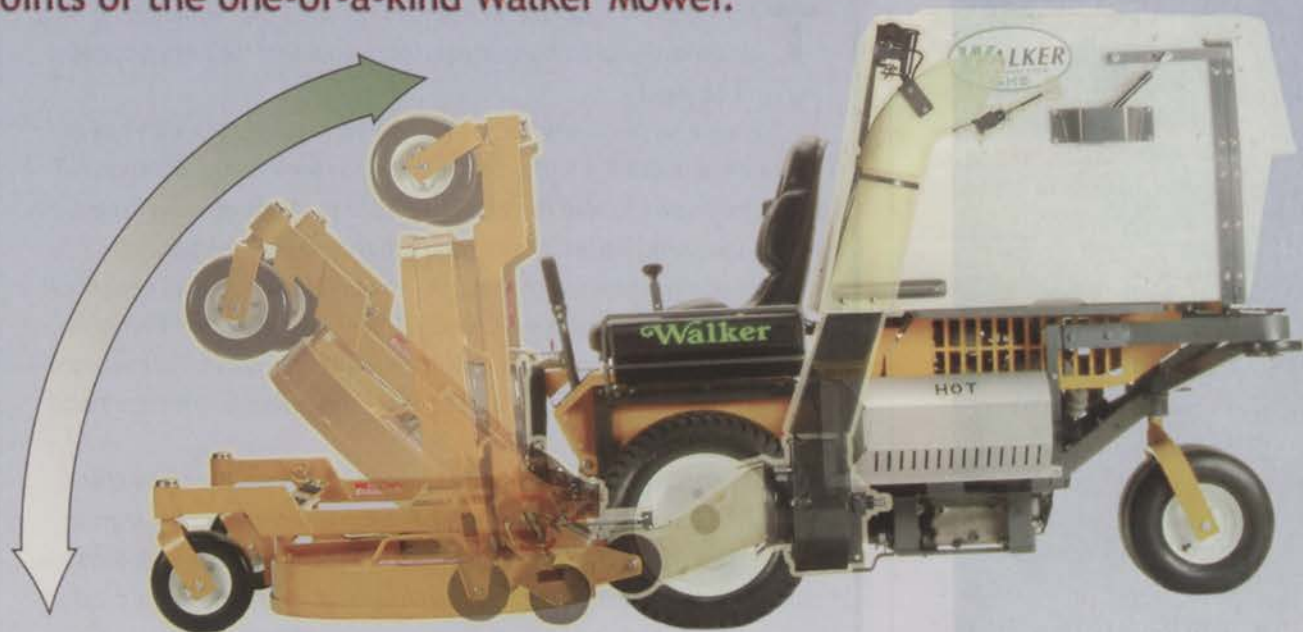
Though maintenance makes up only 30 percent of the overall company revenue, the goal is to grow this service via commercial installation jobs and enhancement sales to bring the balance closer to 50 percent maintenance and 50 percent installation.

**RIDE THE CURL.** After a surfer gets the hang of riding whitewater, it's time to paddle out farther and ride the curl — a spot that separates the whitewater

continued on page 68

# What Makes Walker Different?

For almost 25 years, the Walker Mower has stood apart from the competition as a unique option for productive, high quality mowing. So, what makes the Walker different? This 3-part ad series takes a detailed look at the finer points of the one-of-a-kind Walker Mower.



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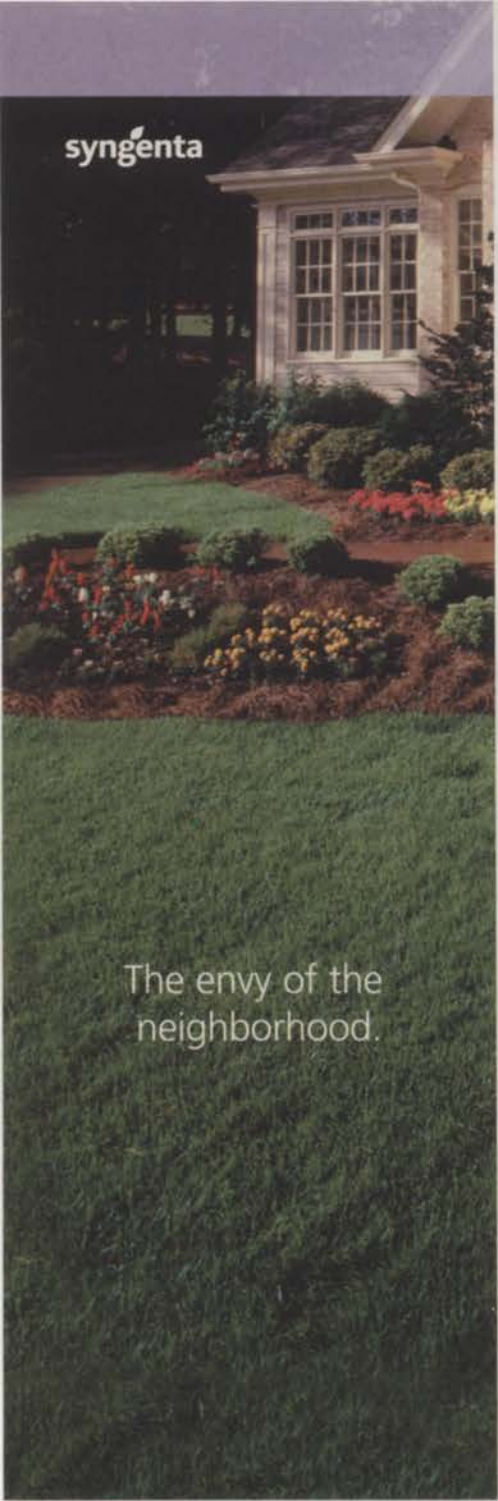
Walker's outfront design lends itself to many unique advantages compared to other mower styles. One of the most convenient features is the tilt-up deck allowing easy access to the underside for blade and deck maintenance. The Walker design uses true deck suspension allowing the deck to "float and flex" and deliver a smooth, even cut; the deck moves independently from the tractor to follow ground contour and minimize scalping. The front-mount deck has more reach and better deck geometry for trimming closer than mid-mount decks typically used on other riding mowers. This is beneficial when working in tight areas and around low-hanging trees and shrubs. The outfront configuration is also an ideal platform for quickly mounting other highly productive attachments. Walker's outfront deck configuration distinctly sets it apart from others.

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cover story > > >

## board positioning

There are few experiences more stimulating than standing up on a stiff board and trying to steer it with your feet through a collapsing gyre of water.

When a surfer starts out, he tries to avoid surf spots with heavy shore breaks. But if a surfer finds himself in the middle of a shore break, he knows to wait for a lull, paddle to the back of a swell, keep his eye on incoming waves and exit the water as quickly as possible.

In surfing, there are challenges – no one said it was an easy sport to master. Commercial bid work has similar challenges. In California, one of Benchmark's greatest challenges with this service is the high level of risk construction defect litigation and unfair builder contracts are generating for contractors.

Construction defect lawsuits against builders have increased so rapidly in California that builders are forcing all contractors to sign an indemnification clause in their contracts that says they must defend the builder if a lawsuit should ensue, regardless of who caused the problem.

According to Craig Mohns, Benchmark vice president and John Mohns' brother, this can be unfair to the professional contractor. "For instance, if your home was built and the roof started leaking, you could sue the builder," he explains. "But this clause says that the builder can legally demand that the landscape contractor and other contractors who worked on the job defend the builder because they signed this agreement, even if they had nothing to do with the roof installation. It's challenging because if you don't sign the agreement, some builders will hire someone else despite the relationship they have with you just to protect themselves against lawsuits. If you do sign the agreement, you can potentially be sued for something that has nothing to do with you. And why should we defend a contractor who may not have constructed to the standards of the industry?"

So to tackle this situation on a daily basis, Benchmark uses its membership with California building associations to its advantage. Some associations Benchmark belongs to that are working to help contractors in this situation are the California Professional Association of Specialty Contractors (CALPASC) and the Building Industry Association – Mohns is on a board of this association called the Specialty Contractors Council. This council is working to encourage California builders to let contractors sign an agreement that restricts their liability solely to the work they do vs. to the entire building project. This agreement is also known as a comparative fault agreement.

Additionally, Benchmark also remains active with CALPASC to help educate other contractors on the situation, unite members and work with legislators to effect change.



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from the unbroken swells. It's what gives surfers that true feeling of glide – a whole new world of speed, options and maneuverability.

Enter enhancements – a profitable service that takes simple maintenance to new heights. Benchmark refers to its six-crew enhancement division (consisting of two to four men each) as its service or work order department, which handles repair work, as well as color installations and small landscape renovation projects ranging in cost from “the high hundreds all the way up to the low thousands,” Craig points out, adding that though these jobs bring in less overall revenue when compared to commercial installation jobs they have a much higher profit margin. “We get about a 5-percent profit margin in maintenance. The industry in our area warrants about a 6- to 7-percent profit margin in commercial installation work – and that's where we need to stay to be competitive in a bid situation. But in enhancement work, we can get anywhere from a 10- to 15-percent profit margin.”

The service can also boost client relationships, if done correctly – one of the keys being completing a job in a timely fashion. “There are a lot of last-minute requests in enhancements,” Craig says. “For instance, a business owner is coming into town on Thursday and the management team calls on Monday to say they want to spruce up the property with \$1,200 worth of color – can we get the job done? That's the kind of situation we want – they don't have the time to bid the work out so there's no competition. They are basically handing us the job and all we have to do is accommodate their schedule.”

“That's why we have crews dedicated to this work – so they can respond to little emergencies and provide service at a high level because they aren't distracted by other regular maintenance duties,” Mohns adds.

The one challenge in enhancements is keeping the crews consistently busy, which is why this division's employee responsibilities are very broad – including services like having a drain system put in or fixing a backflow preventer, etc. – and why account managers have the goal of building this portfolio of work.

**SAFETY FIRST.** Though surfing can be intimidating, safety is a must. Surf-

ers must know the beach where they surf, know where the rocks are, how the currents work, never paddle out farther than they can swim back in without their board, never go out into wave conditions they aren't prepared for and know their limits. A tired surfer who has turned his back on the ocean may suffer the consequences.

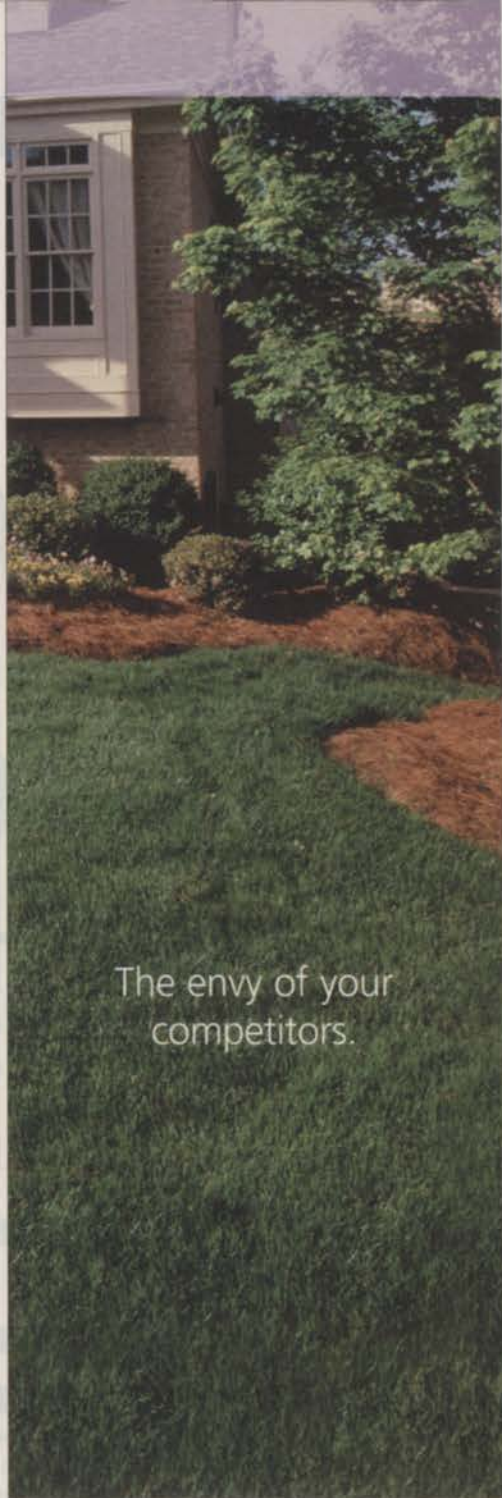
Similarly, in landscaping, unsafe operations can mean increased workman's compensation claims and higher insurance premiums down the road.

For 15 years in business, Benchmark worked with a conventional insurance company. “I met with their risk person,” Mohns says. “We would spend an hour or two together and then he would walk out the door and I would get back to work. If I built a good safety program as a result of this meeting and reduced my workman's compensation claims, a conventional insurance company would keep the dollars I gave them. There is no financial incentive or tie to reducing claims.”

Then it got to a point where two years in a row a conventional insurance company doubled Benchmark's insurance costs, despite improved safety and reduced claims. So, Benchmark Landscape escaped the traditional market, and instead chose to partner with the 14 original members of Artisan's Insurance, a group that evolved from a newly formed organization called the California Professional Association of Specialty Contractors, which now has 430 members statewide and fights for the welfare of California specialty contractors. Artisan's Insurance is underwritten by Zurich North America and today has 65 members.

“Insurance is a funny thing – there isn't an insurance company out there that will lose money for too long,” Mohns says. “I also know that in conventional situations, good companies end up subsidizing bad companies – it's a reality no one wants to believe. For instance, if I can't control my claims and the insurance company ends up paying out two to three times the money I had saved up for my claims, I win, but I also lose because they have to collect that from someone – and that could be me the next time around. No way in the world is anyone going to go in and pay less with a conventional insurance company

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# Well-Oiled Machines



Through experience and innovation, contractors are finding the most efficient ways to use equipment.

by jonathan katz

**E**very year lawn care equipment manufacturers introduce high-performing products that are designed to reduce labor costs for landscape contractors. Many contractors are making these upgrades to save money in the long run and to remain competitive, despite the up-front costs involved.

And while new equipment cannot replace quality labor, it can improve efficiency by reducing time spent on certain jobs and freeing up workers to take on other tasks.

Landscape contractors have unique ways of utilizing equipment to ensure optimum usage. That does not mean these landscape professionals are buying the fastest, slickest machines they can find. Sometimes simply switching to smaller mowers or lighter excavating tools can help

overcome certain obstacles when in the field. Other contractors have realized that proper machine training and renting instead of buying have helped cut expenses.

Whatever strategy contractors take, it's becoming more evident that their equipment-related decisions can significantly impact a day's work.

**MACHINE MANAGEMENT.** Riding mowers may seem like the logical choice for reducing mowing time. The Brickman Group's Schenectady, N.Y. branch had primarily been using riding mowers until several years ago when a company consultant convinced the management team that walk-behind mowers would be more efficient, says Branch Superintendent Rob Panarese. At the time, the Schenectady group was fairly successful but thought it could do better, Panarese says.

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So the branch managers invited the company's in-house consultants over to evaluate how effectively their employees were using equipment. The consultants spent two days observing the group and three days working along side the employees to assess how they work with equipment, Panarese says. These production specialists, who are also

superintendents and branch managers within the company, determined that the Schenectady group could save time by using walk-behind mowers instead of riders on properties with tighter-to-reach areas.

"The rider is good for wide-open mowing," Panarese says. "It's known for speed and being able to mow a lot of

grass quickly. Larger walk-behinds are similar, but they're easier to maneuver in tighter spaces and hills are easier to deal with. You're getting the job done quicker vs. with a rider where you're turning more, so you're losing time."

The walk-behind mowers have reduced the amount of time employees spend trimming and edging because now they can reach many of those areas with the walk-behind mowers, Panarese says, adding that the group has saved an estimated half hour at each job by making the switch.

The branch's employees eventually bought into the equipment change, but it took some time. Employees questioned management on why they wouldn't want to use bigger, faster mowers, Panarese says. "There was a little confusion, but once they understood why, they grasped it and went with it and started changing where mowers went to see if they could use them differently," he explains.

And employees should have faith in the equipment they're using and be comfortable with the machines if contractors want the best returns on their investments. That's what Tom Heaviland, owner of Vista, Calif.-based Heaviland Enterprises had in mind when two years ago he switched from belt-driven mowers to all hydraulic mowers. The new machines mean less physical exertion for Heaviland's crews, resulting in more productivity, he says. The hydraulic mowers cost the company an additional \$500 per unit, but the up-front costs pale in comparison to the 30 minutes or more per day that Heaviland estimates he's saved in man-hours.

"With the belt-driven mowers there's a lot more muscling that has to go on," Heaviland says. "With the hydraulic mowers they pretty much motor themselves. When these guys are walking for six or seven hours behind a walk-behind, it can tire them out. But when you don't have to do a lot of the work, it's certainly going to save us and make us more efficient."

Sometimes the little things can make all the difference when trying to optimize efficiency. Heaviland's crews have saved time by adding mulching attachments to their mowers. "We try to

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# Growing Relationships

**S**uccessful business owners know smooth-running operations require great teams. In the green industry, this goes beyond crewmembers, managers and office personnel. In many respects, vendor relationships are highly important to helping companies achieve their goals. For landscape installation firms, one particular vendor is essential to design and planting success: The commercial grower.

Recently, Ball Horticultural Co., a leading provider and marketer of ornamental crops, worked with *Lawn & Landscape* magazine to learn more about landscape contractor-grower relationships and what makes them succeed. In a roundtable event attended by representatives from nine high-end design/build firms and two professional grower operations, topics ranging from communication to favorite annual and perennial plant varieties came up. Here's a taste of the most revealing areas of discussion.

**COMMUNICATION & LONGEVITY.** In order for landscape contractors to bring their clients' colorful planting ideas to life, roundtable participants agreed that maintaining constant contact with growers is key.

"I'm very hands-on with our grower," noted Melissa Scherb, seasonal color department manager for Landscape Concepts Management, Grayslake, Ill.

"I like to meet with the grower in person and see the product. I like to keep on top of it so I can tell if (the plant material is) not where I want it to be in terms of growth, and then I

can ask the grower to either hold it or push it faster. For the summer season, I visit the grower at least twice before the time of delivery."

Purchasing Manager Ron O'Hara of Mariani Landscape, Lake Bluff, Ill., added that his company works with growers all winter so everything is ready in time for spring. "The biggest issue for us in the past was finding out that the grower shipped plant material that wasn't up to (our) quality standards," he says. "We resolve problems like that by visiting every week."

Speaking for growers, Gary Granby, owner of Granby's Greenhouse, Verona, Ill., said frequent

communication is much appreciated, adding that it can take as long as two years to truly understand contractors' expectations and those of their clients. In-person visits during that period are especially helpful, he said.

Contractors in attendance agreed that the longevity of their relationships with growers has helped them satisfy clients and strengthen their businesses. "Our company has long five- to seven-year histories with growers, so even though I'm new to the firm, they'll work with me," says Gayle Kruckenberg, client development director for Tecza Environmental Group, Elgin, Ill.



Roundtable participants Drew Johnson, Rocco Fiore & Sons, and Erin Maurer, Lied's, share ideas on specifying plant varieties and other ways to work with growers.

**IMPORTANCE OF LEAD TIME.** One aspect of grower-contractor communication that attendees said takes priority is placing orders in a timely fashion.

"The biggest issue for us is lead time," said Michael Gonzales of Bella Flowers & Greenhouse, Oak Lawn, Ill. "When we know what the landscaper wants ahead of time, we'll bring in that seed, sign a purchase order for it and make sure that purchase order follows the plant material so we can find the customer at any stage of production and let them know what's going on."

Contractors like Kurt Pfloderer, vice president of design for Clarence Davids & Co., Plainfield, Ill., recognize this need and work with landscape designers to develop a master annuals order early. "Our design team meets in December and as a group we establish a list of about 100 annuals as our stock list and give that to our growers early," Pfloderer says. "By May or June we'll have good-quality plant material ready from our growers. If orders come in late, we can use what's still available in our stock and only have to order about 10 percent of our material on shorter notice."

Other contractors make pre-ordering easy by getting clients comfortable with consistent plantings or color schemes. Drew Johnson, construction manager for Rocco Fiore & Sons, Libertyville, Ill., says he prefers to stabilize customers on landscape plantings and change up container plants instead. "With beds, you try to get clients on the same color palate to make

Ball Horticultural Co. and *Lawn & Landscape* magazine spoke with seasonal color professionals to learn how they collaborate.

Jim Graslme, Scott Byron & Co.; Ron O'Hara, Mariani Landscape; and Kurt Pfloderer, Clarence Davids & Co.; listened to fellow attendees share their techniques for communicating with growers.

Photos: Lawn & Landscape



it easier for the growers," Johnson said. "We know which clients will take the same thing year after year and we try to keep them steady so they don't get into the habit of changing color every year. Instead, pots can change annually."

In terms of pre-ordering, Gonzales says the more time you give the grower, the better. Acknowledging Scherb's comment that some clients may not make final decisions until May or June, Gonzales said: "Fourteen to 16 weeks is our ideal prebooking time, but that's not always realistic. For instance, May is always a crazy time period and we end up reacting to orders rather than having time to plan for them. If it's a common item, that's okay, but it's really about getting growers and landscapers on the same page. Lead time affects service – our ability to serve you and your ability to serve your customer."

**TIPS & TRICKS.** Focusing the roundtable discussion on annual and perennial plants, participants shared some thoughts on their favorite varieties, new varieties, client input and other operational issues.

For both commercial and residential jobs, attendees said they look for varieties that offer fast fill-in, big show and long lasting performance. Scherb and Kruckenberg touted Wave® petunias, lantana, angelonia, zinnia angustifolia and blue salvia. Johnson also noted that foliage plants like Coleus and grasses are gaining popularity and offer interesting color and texture without relying strictly on blooms.

Contractors noted unique sources of information for their plant choices. "I look through garden design magazines that my customers might be reading to find out what they'll be expecting," said Melisa Bell, maintenance manager for ILT Vignocchi, Wauconda, Ill. Public displays like the Chicago Botanic were mentioned as sources of information, as well as other landscape installations. Bell said she tests new varieties herself before recommending them to customers.

Other participants agreed that having a trial period is an important step in using new varieties. Johnson said monitoring plants' performance in different landscape and soil conditions is essential. Also, Gonzales said contractors shouldn't

hesitate to ask growers for help with new varieties as well. "It's your privilege, to come to us with those requests," he said. "In those cases, I'll call the Ball technical staff and find out about the varieties and we can bring in new material to try it out ourselves. Not all landscapers have the time to do the legwork. Definitely use us – pick our brains and if we don't know the answer, we can do a trial run and give you our experience."

Tracking experience is something Scherb does for her clients and growers, as well. "Digital photos are great to remind clients what worked well on their properties in the past," she said. "Also, the grower doesn't get to see product after it leaves their greenhouse, so I like to work for them and take pictures of different plants' habits over a few weeks. That way I can show them what's performing well and how it really looks in a landscape."

Indeed, this level of communication is what roundtable attendees agreed keeps both contractors and the growers well informed about each other's businesses. Keeping that in mind can truly help contractor-grower relationships bloom.

## Imagine the Possibilities

Spring 2005 is here and many landscape customers are enjoying their annual and perennial plant installations – and looking forward to the varieties that will fill their gardens next. Take a look at these landscape and mixed container plantings developed by Ball Horticultural Co. and imagine your clients' reactions to these designs. Visit [www.BallLandscape.com](http://www.BallLandscape.com) for more information on certain varieties, and be sure to let your grower know what you're interested in for upcoming seasonal color changeouts.

### BabyWing® Begonia, Kong™ Coleus and Magilla® Perilla

In this lush landscape planting, BabyWing Pink begonia (front) offers heat tolerance, continuous color and low maintenance. It's set off by the vivid leaves of Kong Coleus, which is available in five unique color patterns and is great for containers or shady mass plantings. Nestled between these two is Perilla Magilla whose heat-loving, coleus-like foliage makes a striking statement in garden beds and large mixed containers and is a great combination with annuals.



dark purple as they grow in full sun, perfectly setting off Tidal Wave petunia, also in purple. The Tidal Wave series petunias first grow outward, then up, then in both directions, to create a beautifully full, hedge-like plant.

### Easy Wave® Petunia, Luna™ Hibiscus, Wind Dancer Eragrostis

Wind Dancer Eragrostis shows its landscape planting prowess here. The Native American grass with bluish-green foliage is flanked by red Luna Hibiscus that can grow into bushy, 2- to 3-foot plants in the garden and don't require pinching. In front, the Easy Wave petunia will bloom all season long in a more mounded, but controlled spread than its predecessor.



### Wind Dancer Eragrostis, Wave® Petunia, Marvel Marigold

Trusted favorites fill this container with graceful plumes of drought-tolerant Wind Dancer, perennial Eragrostis, grounded by orange Marvel Marigolds and popular Wave petunias with a trailing nature

that's great for container plantings and hanging baskets.



### Tidal Wave® Petunia, Purple Majesty Ornamental Millet

Ornamental millet and Wave petunias prove to be a great combination in landscape plantings. Here, the Purple Majesty ornamental millet – a 2004 All-America Selections Gold Medal winner – makes a fantastic border. It's foliage darkens from green to



### Purple Majesty Ornamental Millet, Wave® Petunia, Silver Shield Plectranthus

Here, the striking, cattail-like plumes of ornamental millet in Purple Majesty is grounded by Silver Shield Plectranthus and softened by flowy Wave petunia.



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mulch as much as we can when we cut grass, so we use a mulching attachment at every opportunity," he says. "It's a time saver because we're not having to empty bags of grass, and it saves us on dump fees, as well."

Heaviland estimates that the mulching attachments, which cost about \$100 a piece, save about 20 percent in grass-cutting time. Another potential labor saver that Heaviland is considering for 2005 is an auger to dig holes for shrubs. Rather than resorting to the old-fashioned labor-intensive process of digging holes with a shovel, an auger can quickly prepare holes and backfill for shrubs with less physical strain on the laborer, Heaviland says, adding that he plans to purchase two augers after

recently testing one. The machines cost between \$600 and \$800, according to Heaviland.

Lawn maintenance has been a staple of landscape work, but many companies are now branching into construction and installation work and purchasing larger equipment for those applications, according to Bill Harley, president, Outdoor Power Equipment Institute, Old Town Alexandria, Va. "Contractors are using some of the light construction equipment to not only do some jobs that will save them on labor but because their businesses are diversifying a little bit," he says. "For some of the light construction applications they're using skid-steers and trenchers."

Heads Up Landscape Contractors,

Albuquerque, N.M. used to have only five skid-steers for 10 crews but as the company has grown it's added skid-steers and now has one for every crew, says company Vice President Dave Daniell. The company spends about \$28,000 for each skid-steer and has purchased two or three per year during the last three to four years. And the additions have significantly reduced labor time, according to Daniell, who estimates that the skid-steers have earned him a \$6 to \$7 per man-hour savings.

"You can certainly do a lot more grading and you can install a lot more gravel and mulch per man hour using a skid-steer than you can by hand, and the labor rates by hand are typically one man-hour to one and a half man-hours



## heavy hitters

**C**ontractors thinking about trading that shovel for a trencher or skid-steer should keep in mind that their drivers might need additional licensing to transport the equipment. When truckloads reach a certain capacity, drivers must possess a commercial driver's license (CDL). This can present a problem for companies whose employees are reluctant to obtain a CDL.

R.M. Landscape, Hilton, N.Y., has enough equipment for most jobs but doesn't always have enough operators with CDLs to haul the machines, says Eric Purdy, a company foreman. The problem with CDLs is that many crewmembers don't want to go through the certification process, and those who do are more likely to quit and take higher-paying jobs, says Jim Gorsline, maintenance manager, Scott Byron & Co., Lake Bluff, Ill. But there are ways contractors can utilize heavier equipment without needing CDL-certified drivers, says Andrew Blanchford, president, Blanchford Landscape Contractors, Bozeman, Mont.

Contractors should be aware of how heavy their trailers are and how much of that weight is really necessary, Blanchford says. So instead of opting for a trailer that weighs 7,000 pounds empty, a contractor may want to consider a 5,000-

pound trailer to increase the available payload. This way, if a truck weighs 8,000 pounds, the operator can transport equipment up to 13,000 pounds to stay under the 26,001-pound minimum gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR) required for a CDL, Blanchford says. For instance, Blanchford's company has put about 400 hours on a 9,700-pound mini excavator that is light enough to transport on a trailer without a CDL.

Contractors who think their drivers may need CDLs should know the requirements for the following CDL classifications, according to the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration:

- Class A – any combination of vehicles with a GVWR of 26,001 or more pounds, provided the GVWR of the vehicle(s) being towed is in excess of 10,000 pounds.
- Class B – any single vehicle with a GVWR of 26,001 or more pounds or any such vehicle towing a vehicle not in excess of 10,000 pounds GVWR.
- Class C – any single vehicle or combination of vehicles that does not meet the definition of Class A or Class B but is either designed to transport 16 or more passengers, including the driver, or is placarded for hazardous materials.

per cubic yard," Daniell says. "With a skid-steer, you get 3 or 4 yards per man-hour."

**TEST DRIVE.** Many landscape laborers aren't shy about letting supervisors know their opinions on equipment. Their feedback can help steer contractors in the right direction when making equipment choices. Unfortunately,

contractors often hear complaints after they've already purchased that new mower or skid-steer. Contractors can avoid getting stuck with unwanted equipment by renting or demonstrating equipment prior to purchasing.

"We'll rent something for however long is necessary to evaluate it," says Jim Gorsline, maintenance manager, Scott Byron & Co., Lake Bluff, Ill.

"Renting is an excellent way to try something out. One of the things we all do is use equipment in places we probably shouldn't. That's why we do a lot of rentals to start with to either get through a short crunch or to just try something."

Heads Up Landscape Contractors will sometimes rent skid-steers for several months and then buy out the balance of the machines,

says Daniell, who estimates the company pays about \$2,400 a month to rent a skid-steer. Rentals provide an opportunity to not only try out the equipment but to use machines only when they are needed.

"By renting, we don't have to buy the thing if we really

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**"We'll rent something for however long is necessary to evaluate it. Renting is an excellent way to try something out. One of the things we all do is use equipment in places we probably shouldn't. That's why we do a lot of rentals to start with to either get through a short crunch or to just try something." - Jim Gorsline**

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don't want to or if we don't think our work load in the future requires us to buy it, but it always has," Daniell says. "I guess the biggest advantage we have by renting is that we can use it for three months, and then we can apply that to the purchase price, and we know that we have equipment that is good."

Blanchford cautions that contractors should carefully plan where they are renting equipment from because it can become costly. "You can eat up a lot of money just driving back and forth to dealers," he says.

If renting isn't an option, some dealers will allow contractors to try out equipment for a day or two at no charge before purchasing. When Heaviland is shopping for mowers, he always has his employees demonstrate the equipment before making a purchase. "I think the best thing you can do is allow the people who are using your equipment to make the choices for you vs. you selecting the equipment.

Certainly you have to take cost into consideration, but you want the people in the field to have some voice in the purchase."

For mowers, the company will demonstrate several different models for two or three days before making a decision, Heaviland says. Management will then ask employees questions about the products' ease of operation or any difficulties they noticed while operating the equipment, according to Heaviland.

Industry trade shows can also present opportunities to try out equipment. The Brickman Group's Schenectady branch will sometimes take advantage of product field days during trade shows to test products, Panarese says.

**BREAKING POINT.** One reality of purchasing any type of equipment is that they are bound to have maintenance issues at some point. And while well-trained employees might be experts in operating the machines, many aren't

skilled in repairing or maintaining them. R.M. Landscape, Hilton, N.Y., has its own in-house maintenance division to deal with repair issues, says company Foreman Eric Purdy. "It's got to be cheaper than paying a mechanic \$15 to \$16 an hour," he says.

But Panarese says he doesn't need an in-house mechanic because the company buys equipment with two-year warranties and purchases new machines when the warranties expire. Panarese's branch used to staff in-house mechanics, who were paid an estimated \$36,000 annually, until the company realized that it cost more to fix the machines than to buy new ones.

"Originally, when we had mechanics and the machines would get to be 2 and 3 years old, they would require a lot of work and then there was the cost of paying the mechanics, the mechanics' burden and the mechanics driving here and there," Panarese says.

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USE READER SERVICE # 56

## breakthrough series > > >

*continued from page 76*

"That's why we went to this two-year lease program and, with that, we lose that mechanic's wage and mechanic's burden, which is 20 to 30 percent of their salary."

Panarese estimates that his branch is saving \$150,000 annually by purchasing new mowers instead of repairing them in house. The company outsources repairs for larger equipment, Panarese says. The company also tries to stick with one brand of equipment to make repairs easier. "You learn the mower and equipment by sticking with one brand, and in the event that something does happen to it, you kind of know a quick way to fix it if you have to in the field," he says. "Using the same brand also helps your relationship with the dealer and the manufacturer."

Even if companies don't have their own maintenance department, they can take their own steps to improve equipment longevity. Scott Byron & Co. implemented a preventive maintenance program in which the company evaluates equipment based on hours by turning the machines over when they reach a certain usage limit, Gorsline says. R.M. Landscape asks employees to note in a logbook when they notice problems to prevent larger repair issues.

If employees are hesitant about

reporting maintenance issues, it might be because they're causing some of the problems. Contractors can reduce the number of operator-related malfunctions through proper training. In the past, Blanchford's employees were not allowed to operate heavier equipment until they received basic training on all aspects of the machine, including how to check for oil and fuel the machine and basic operations procedures. But the company did not have a formal training program to ensure all employees were proficient in equipment use, and the company was experiencing higher-than-expected machine breakdowns, according to Blanchford.

To that end, Blanchford is now in the process of setting up a formal training program in which supervisors will thoroughly evaluate an employee's skills on a particular machine before they're allowed to operate the equipment. "Basically, people were not using the equipment effectively and were breaking it, so we weren't getting the productivity we were paying for in the equipment, and we weren't getting the job done," he explains.

The company will likely train and evaluate employees on approximately 20 pieces of equipment and then issue certification to each worker who

*continued on page 82*

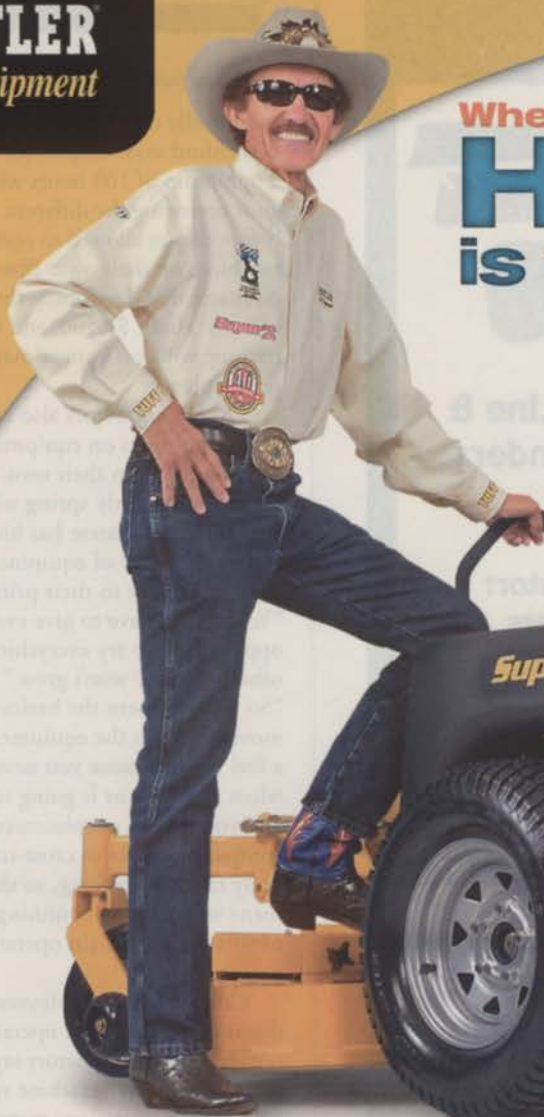
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Daniell began purchasing enclosed trailers about six years ago and paid \$3,500 to \$4,000 per trailer, which is approximately \$2,000 more than an open trailer, he says. With the enclosed trailers, the company can lock up its equipment overnight and have it ready for the next day, Daniell says. "Instead of unloading and reloading tools on a regular basis, they're in the vehicle and sitting out there overnight, so there's not a lot of indirect labor."



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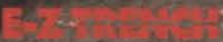
## breakthrough series

continued from page 80

successfully completes the program, Blanchford says. Employees will spend a minimum of 100 hours with a supervisor reviewing the different equipment before they're allowed to operate the machines on their own. Blanchford estimates that developing the program will cost about \$2,500, and the actual training will cost approximately \$2,000 per employee.

Other contractors also say they observe employees on equipment before sending them on their own. During the winter or early spring when business is slow, Panarese has his employees try all pieces of equipment even if it's not relevant to their primary jobs. "You always have to give everybody an opportunity to try everything because otherwise they won't grow," he says. "So we give them the basics on how to move and turn the equipment and get a feel for it because you never know when an operator is going to get sick and you'll need a replacement. As a company, we like to cross-train everybody to do everything, so that equipment will always be running regardless of whether that main operator is there or not."

Cross-training employees can reduce downtime when other operators are out, but some contractors say it's still preferable to have machine specialists. Erik Dailey, operations manager at Kalispell, Mont.-based TLC Landscaping & Irrigation, says employees often tell him they're experienced at tasks, such as grading, but can't do the job the way he wants. Dailey says he gets best results on such tasks by having one operator whose primary responsibility is operating a skid-steer. Gorsline agrees with Dailey, saying he has specific crews that do grading. "Even if you pay him a little more it's worth it," he says. "It's operated by someone who knows how to do it efficiently."

Having this type of equipment knowledge can reduce breakdowns and downtime from injuries, Harley adds. "Contractors need to really understand and take the time with dealers and manufacturers to understand the full capabilities of equipment and the appropriate use of attachments," he says. "If you're using a piece of equipment for a use that it's not intended for, your machine can go down and there goes your labor savings." 

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# Marketing— One Piece of the Business Puzzle

by jonathan katz

Marketing can generate business, but tight budgets sometimes limit how much landscape contractors can spend on promotional communications. Here, Lawn & Landscape Online Message Board users discuss how they optimize their advertising investments.

Seasoned landscape contractors know that promoting their services usually requires an investment in advertising. But how much should contractors spend on marketing? *Lawn & Landscape* Online Message Board users shared ideas about how contractors can determine their marketing budgets and how to maximize their advertising returns.

The decision often depends on a number of variables, including profit goals, market niche and company size, participants say. Jim Meloche kicked off the discussion by asking participants for input on his 2005 advertising budget. In 2004, his company, Novi, Mich.-based Treasured Earth Landscape Design & Construction, spent more on advertising than in previous years.

"We're a \$375,000 company, and we spent roughly 4 percent, \$12,000, on advertising (*Yellow Pages*, direct mail, targeted print, etc.)," he says. "As I talk with other contractors, they are spending much less. What do you plan on spending in 2005?"

**PICK YOUR PRICE.** Successful contractors who are thinking about cutting their advertising budgets may want to consider where they might be without making the investment. Todd McCabe, president of the

McCabe Landscape Group, Wrightsville Beach, N.C., says his company will spend 3.5 percent of its budget on advertising in 2005. That number may be higher than other companies, but McCabe says he wants potential clients to identify Landscapes Unlimited with anything landscape related.

"The question you should ask yourself is, 'Would you have done \$375,000 if you did not spend the \$12,000 on advertising?'" says McCabe in response to Meloche's comment.

Fairfax, Va.-based Patton Property Maintenance spends even more than Landscapes Unlimited on marketing, according to company President Todd Patton. His company spent 8 percent of its budget on advertising in 2004 and plans to spend an additional 1 to 2 percent in 2005, he says. These numbers often vary for landscape companies depending on what type of services they provide, and more established companies may be able to spend less on advertising because they're already well known, Patton says.

Robert Shauger agrees with Patton that company size can determine advertising budgets. "Smaller companies may be spending a higher percentage to get

*continued on page 86*

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continued from page 84

growth," says Shauger, owner of Advanced Applications, Deerfield, N.Y.

McCabe also says certain landscape services require more advertising than others. For instance, a company that does 100-percent commercial bid work

advertising and their sales goals, says Rich Walker, owner, Dreamscapes Unlimited, Cincinnati, Ohio. "I have seen some companies only budget 1 percent for advertising, but when they have annual sales more than \$12 million that

you do. Where I am, you can take out a full *Yellow Pages* ad and spend more than \$20,000 per year just on that."

**PROMOTIONAL PRACTICES.**

Contractors can optimize their advertising dollars by learning from past experiences and selecting methods that suit their services. Dreamscapes Unlimited spent approximately \$5,000 on advertising, which included direct mail and flyers, in 2004 and will likely triple that number in 2005, Walker says. In the past, the company advertised in phone directories and magazines, which did not result in high returns.

Landscape design companies often sell their services with visually appealing marketing tools so potential clients can see the finished product. Long Island Dreamscapes, a Long Island, N.Y.-based landscape design and construction company, has realized high returns from its Web site, says company

continued on page 90, sidebar on page 88

**"Direct marketing and cheap marketing are the keys. Get a Web site. It brings me 80 percent of my work. Combine other forms of advertising with that, and you will do well. Do not think that you have to spend a large percentage of your earnings to get business. It's just not true."**

**- David Huber**

will likely spend nothing on advertising while a company that is 100-percent residential lawn care could spend between 10 and 15 percent just on its spring marketing campaign, he says.

The size of contractors' marketing budgets can also depend on the type of

still is \$120,000, which can generate a significant amount of new work," he says. "Another one that does \$6 million in annual sales is budgeting 8 percent. It depends on the individual owner and where they are taking their company. It also depends on the types of advertising



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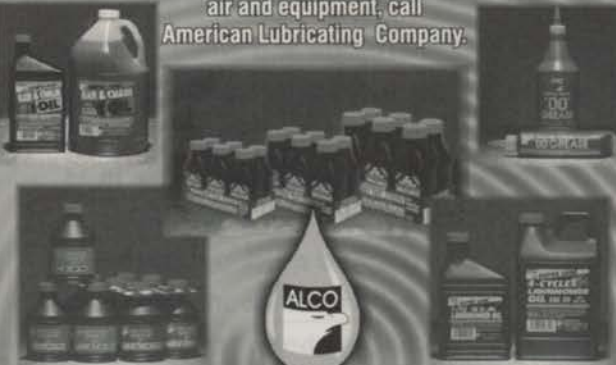
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Example of shoots from Cutless Granular treated plant (left) and untreated plant (right).



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USE READER SERVICE # 63



## the business of brochures

Contractors often use brochures to help clients visualize the services they offer. Todd Patton told fellow *Lawn & Landscape* Online Message Board participants in a recent discussion that he was thinking about designing brochures to promote his Fairfax, Va.-based business Patton Property Maintenance. But Patton says he isn't sure what to include in the brochure because the company provides a variety of services. "Should I try to pack all that into one brochure?" he asks. "The one part I'd really like to push is full maintenance, but I don't think that market would be impressed with a fancy brochure. What do you think?"

Responses varied from including everything in the brochure to keeping it as focused as possible. Andrew Aksar says companies should develop a specialty and promote it to customers. "I disagree

with including as much info as you can," says Aksar, owner of Walkersville, Md.-based Outdoor Finishes. "Todd, I could see you listing all those services if you were in the West, but you're in a terrific market where you need to separate yourself from all the others and make a trademark for yourself by focusing on one service. Also, you need to find a way to get your point across without clutter and a lot of text."

But Chris Haddock, owner of CBH Landscape Contractors, Laconia, N.H., says Patton should include all his services but keep it simple and emphasize the most important aspects of his business. Michael Sisti agrees. "While it's important to list all of the services you provide, be sure you maintain focus – that's what makes you different from your competition," says Sisti, owner of Alpine Lawn & Tree Care, Freehold, N.J.

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USE READER SERVICE # 66

continued from page 86

President David Huber. The company knows this because Huber says he tracks every service inquiry by entering each call into a client prospect sheet. The sheet includes a list of questions that Huber asks callers, the most important being, "How did you hear of us?" he says. The \$600,000 company spends less than \$1,000 a year on advertising.

"Direct marketing and cheap marketing are the keys," Huber says. "Get a Web site. It brings me 80 percent of my work. Combine other forms of advertising with that, and you will do well. Do not think that you have to spend a large percentage of your earnings to get business. It's just not true."

CBH Landscape Contractors, Laconia, N.H., also monitors inquiries by potential clients to narrow its marketing focus, says company Owner Chris Haddock. "I think it's better to track your incoming calls so you find what advertising is working for you," he says.


Other companies, such as Clarkes-

ville, Ga.-based B & B Landscaping & Irrigation, don't find advertising necessary at all. Referrals comprise the bulk of B & B Landscaping's jobs, according to company Owner Gary Batho.

**DISCOUNT DAYS.** Contractors who do advertise sometimes include coupons to increase sales and referrals. But some Message Board participants say coupons are counterproductive because they can appear unprofessional or because they can sometimes force contractors to underbid projects.

Instead, contractors should sell their work instead of their price, says Patrick Johnson, owner, Reflective Gardens, Knoxville, Tenn. For instance, coupons that offer free gifts might be more effective than discounts because they don't devalue the work a contractor is providing, says Steve Cissel, founder and chief executive officer of the online green industry directory GIYP.com. "I don't like the idea of eroding the value of

products or services offered," he says. "I would be more inclined to offer a bonus or a gift to a client that reaches a certain spend threshold. What we're really trying to accomplish with the discount is to create a call to action, not necessarily give away part of the farm. Coupons are a call to action and they have been used in the *Yellow Pages* for more than 100 years. They work. Coupon idea: Sign a contract for X dollars by X date and receive two free first-class round-trip airline tickets anywhere in the continental U.S. or something like that."

Discounts can be profitable if they lead to additional business, adds Frank Connerney, president, Castle Landcare, Tampa, Fla. Castle Landcare provides 3 percent discounts to each customer if the company picks up additional business on that street. "So far, so good," he says. "We've filled two neighborhoods that we previously were only servicing two houses in. The discount is more than made up for by the lack of windshield time." 



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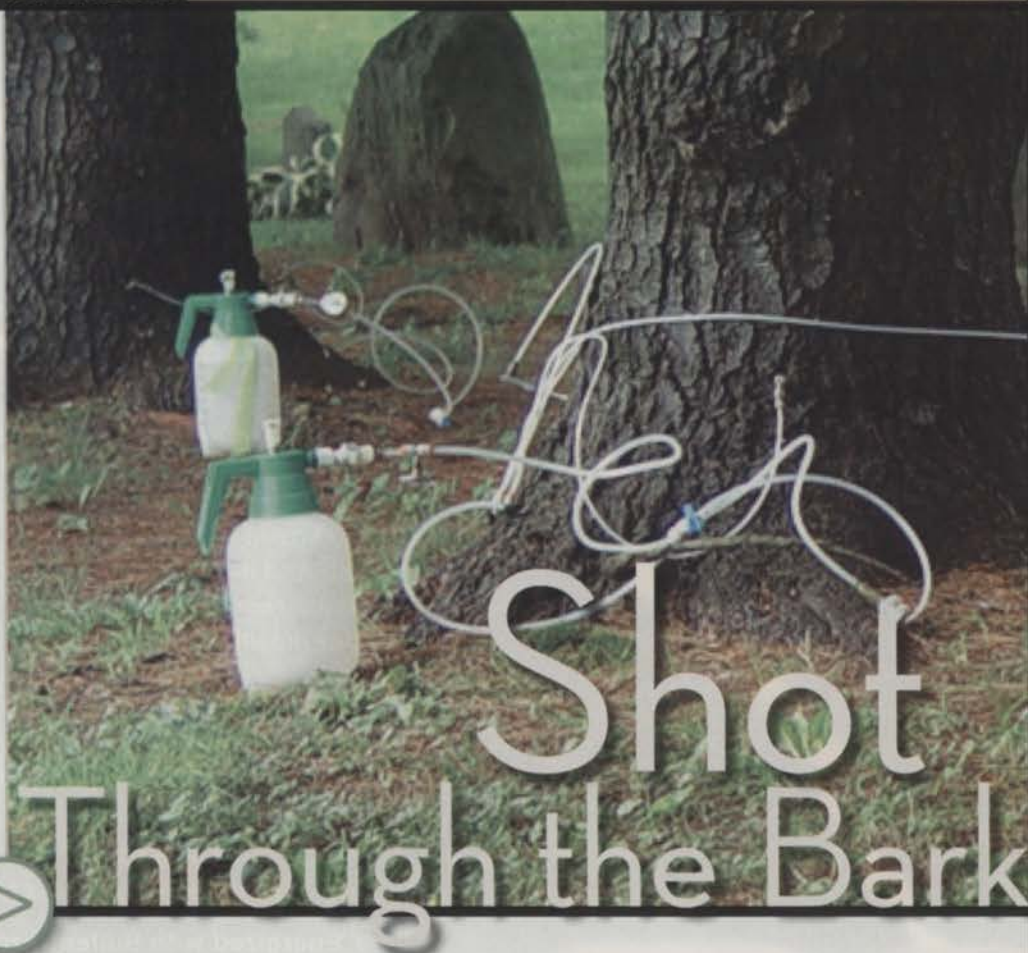
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USE READER SERVICE # 68



Photos: Arborjet, Rainbow Treecare Scientific Advancements (below)

# Shot Through the Bark

by jonathan katz

Manufacturers are fine tuning tree injection products to keep pace with the increasing demand for systemic treatments that are less invasive and more efficient.

**T**ree injections have been around for several years, but the delivery methods continue to evolve. Manufacturers are now providing products designed for specific trees or tree health problems. These devices can inject, or "infuse," materials at varying pressures or volumes depending on what the tree care technician is treating.

Some newer advancements are in response to the perception that tree injections can actually damage trees by wounding them. Manufacturers are also providing products that can perform injections faster, so arborists can treat more trees in less time. The increase in injection options provides tree care contractors with opportunities to expand their services while environmental awareness in the industry continues to grow.

"Larger national tree service companies and municipal governments are moving into a more defensive posture of applying pesticides just for fear of liability of soil or water contamination or pesticide drift on cars and buildings," says Roger Webb, owner, Tree Tech Microinjection Systems, Morriston, Fla. "That's only going to get worse, so the market for microinjections will be there and may expand."

The majority of arborists still use foliar treatments, but environmental regulations are expected to push tree care specialists toward more systemic approaches, such as injections, says Mike Ruizzo, business manager, neonicotinoids, Bayer Environmental Science, Montvale, N.J. "Large tree

*continued on page 94*





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continued from page 92

care companies are very interested in tree injections because they feel pressure from environmental concerns, so this is another avenue to get the job done with minimal exposure," he says.

**MINIMAL IMPACT.** More manufacturers are designing injection systems that are less invasive because of contractors' fears that drilling into a tree's tissue

can cause damage. One such system allows tree care technicians to insert a blunt-edged needle just under the bark without entering the xylem or drilling a hole, says Chip Doolittle, president, ArborSystems, Omaha, Neb. The needle is attached to a device similar to a syringe with two handles that release the material and an opening where a bottle of injection material empties into a metal

syringe. This system works on the premise that most of the tree's uptake occurs within the cambial zone slightly beneath the bark, Doolittle says, adding that one of the system's main advantages is that it requires less material than some other injection methods, which may need 2 to 7 milliliters of product to be effective.

"Virtually all of the uptake done by a tree is in the outer three rings of the xylem and, in most trees, the outer ring of the xylem," Doolittle says. "If you put a chemical into the tree past this active uptake area, you'd better put a lot of chemical into the tree and hope it wicks out to the xylem area. On the other hand, if you deposit the chemical in the outer area where 95 percent of the tree movement happens, you won't waste anything."

A complete start-up kit costs \$1,200, which includes all the necessary accessories and four bottles of tree care materials, Doolittle says. Included in the set are two needle sizes. Typically, technicians will use the 3/4-inch needle except for trees with thick, corky bark, such as hemlocks, eucalyptus, cottonwoods or elms, which require a 1 1/2-inch needle. Technicians can determine the bark's thickness by slowly inserting the needle into a fissure of the bark until they feel resistance. If the needle penetrates farther than the length of the plug, technicians should make the injection in the fissure. If the injection tip enters at a distance shorter than plug length, technicians should perform the injection in the thicker part of the bark. When technicians don't feel any resistance, they should use the longer tip.

After determining the needle size, technicians then punch a hole into the tree's root flare or the base of the tree with a type of hole-punch gun that removes a bark core and creates an opening that is 1/8-inch wide and 1/4-inch deep, according to Doolittle. The bark core should be about the same size as the plug that the technician will fit into the hole. The plug is designed to prevent the injected material from seeping out of the orifice and keeps air and pests from entering the opening, Doolittle says. Technicians leave the plug in the tree after completing the injection. Tree growth will eventually force the plug out, he adds.

With a straight motion, the technician then inserts the needle through the plug opening. The tip will automati-

continued on page 96

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cally stop when it reaches the injection point. The technician can then release the material by squeezing both handles, at which point a pre-measured dose of the chemical is released into the edge of the tree's outer layer of wood. The system is designed to release 1 milliliter of material with each full stroke of the handles, but some units can be adjusted to release a 1/2-milliliter dose. Once the material is released, residual effects can vary depending on the type of product used. Insecticides can last anywhere from 45 days to two years depending on the product's solubility, Doolittle says.

**UNDER PRESSURE.** Some manufacturers are selling or planning to produce higher-pressure microinjection systems that will allow arborists to perform multiple injections in a shorter period of time. "We're looking at higher-pressure delivery to facilitate faster movement into the tree without creating cell damage," says Nate Dodds, president,

J.J. Mauget, Arcadia, Calif. "With that, we're going to be able to put larger volumes into one individual site in a shorter period of time."

One system currently on the market is powered by compressed air and features an injection gun equipped with a tank that can operate at 50 to 200 pounds per square inch (psi), says Peter Wild, president, Arborjet, Winchester, Mass. It's designed to treat a high volume of deciduous trees – anywhere from 200 to 300 trees per day – such as oaks and maples. The pressure is higher than passive microinjection systems, which typically reach a maximum of 6 psi, but not so high that cellular damage will likely occur, Wild says. A technician would need to inject material at 900 to 1,000 psi to cause damage, according to Wild.

With the air-pressurized system, technicians need fewer wound sites and can perform injections in less than one minute per caliper inch. The hydrau-

lic device can infuse 2 milliliters to hundreds of milliliters per injection site. Products injected using this system can last up to three years with approximately half the number of injection sites as other microinjection methods, Wild says.

But at \$4,500 this device isn't priced for start-up tree care companies or lower-production contractors. "It's a high-production device, so you wouldn't buy it if you had a plant health care program and treated a few trees a week," Wild says. "But if all of the sudden a tree care company has to treat hundreds of trees per week for a large plant health care program, this device is like having a spray rig in your back pocket."

This requires drilling a 7/32- to 9/32-inch hole 5/8 of an inch into the xylem, Wild says. Technicians can determine drilling depth by test drilling until they reach the sapwood and then adding 5/8 of an inch to the xylem. After determining how far to drill, the technician

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## fast forward

**T**ree-injection technology is rapidly changing as manufacturers of injection devices try to keep pace with increasing demand for quicker delivery methods. "There's a lot of research right now that's looking at ways to increase the ability to treat trees more rapidly," says Terry Tattar, a microbiologist and director of the Shade Tree Laboratory at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, Mass.

In the next year, tree care contractors can expect more products that feature some type of pressure assist to increase product delivery, Tattar says. These devices will come in different shapes and sizes designed to be more user friendly and to keep material contained to its targeted area.

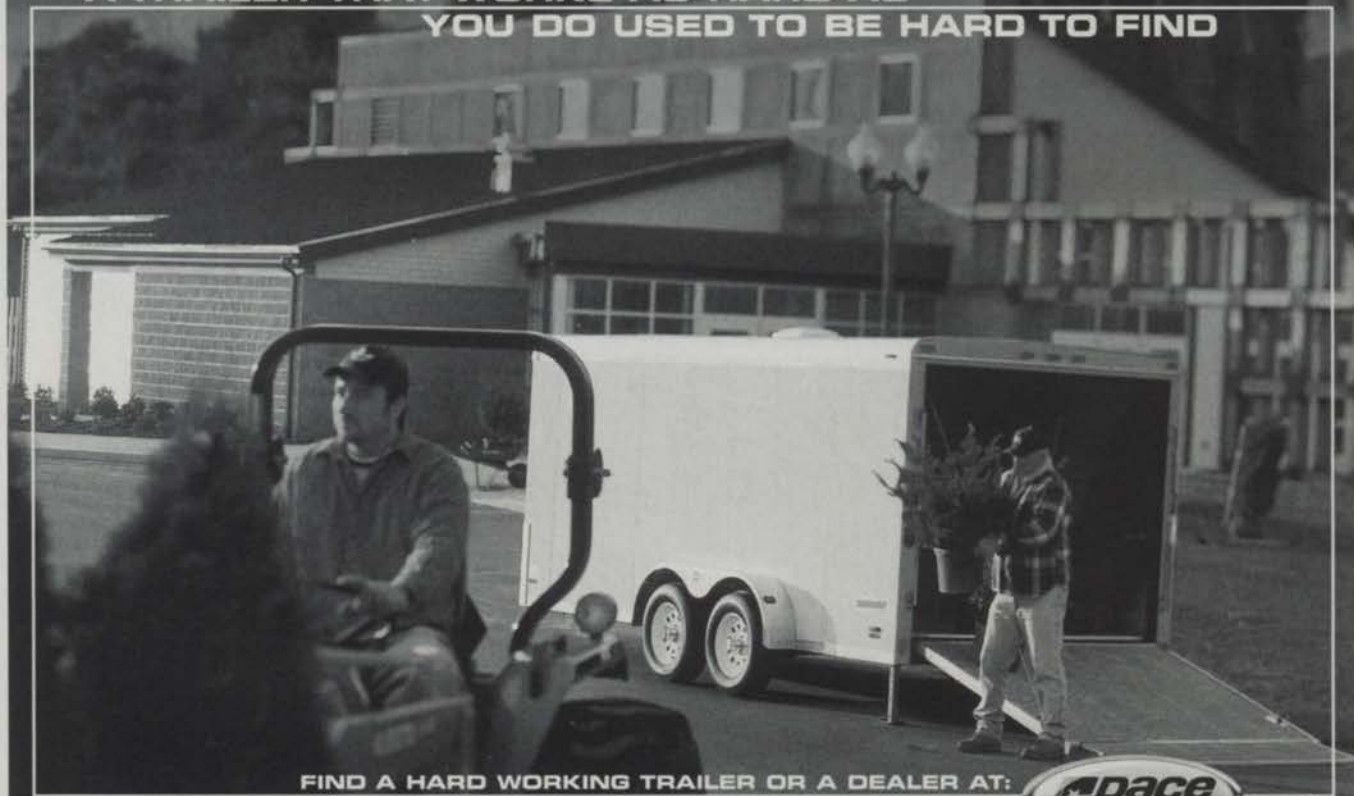
Tree care specialists can expect more systems that utilize a Co2 cartridge or bicycle pump to deliver additional air pressure, according to Tattar. Research-

ers are conducting evaluations on many of these products, some of which are already available to contractors and others should be available by the end of the summer, Tattar says. The cost of these products could actually decrease with these advancements as well, Tattar adds.

Manufacturers of injection products are also working on new product formulations to speed up delivery time. "Whether it's a fungicide or insecticide, tree injection manufacturers are checking to see if they can meet certain solubility characteristics," says Mike Ruizzo, business manager, neonicotinoids, Bayer Environmental Science, Montvale, N.J.

Newer material chemistries have raised the cost of performing injections, but some product patents are expiring soon, which should result in lower prices, say industry experts.

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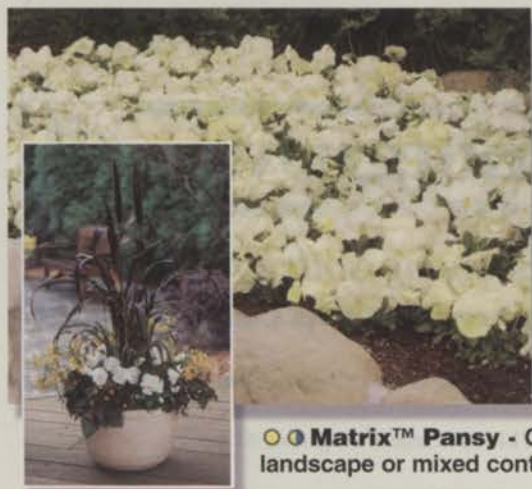
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would then set a plug into the opening to prevent the product from seeping out and insert the needle through the plug's septum. The technician can then release the material into the tree.

The hydraulic system does have its limitations on resin-based trees. Because evergreens have a vascular system that is 20 times smaller than deciduous trees, the trees can't accept large volumes at such high pressures, Wild says. In this case, technicians can use a system similar to an intravenous drip. This method features tubes connected to a pump and operates at 45 psi, still higher than traditional passive methods, but low enough that the evergreens can successfully distribute the product. The equipment costs \$399 and takes 10 minutes to set up, according to Wild. The tree takes five to 20 minutes to distribute the material. "It takes about one minute per caliper inch, but you don't need to monitor it; you can move on to the next tree, so two people can do a couple hundred trees a day," he says.



By injecting fertilizers, insecticides and fungicides directly into the sap stream of the tree, microinjection utilizes the tree's own natural transport system. Photo: J.J. Mauget

**PASSING TIME.** Higher-pressure systems are fast and efficient, but their higher price tags may not make them economically feasible for some contrac-

tors. Instead, they may want to consider more conventional passive systems that take longer but don't carry such high price tags.

"The advantage of a passive system is that it's very cheap, and you only need a cordless drill and a mallet," Dodds says. "It's for the smaller operator who doesn't want to spend hundreds and thousands of dollars, and waiting time becomes a moot point if you're providing other services."

The passive system can be the perfect add-on service for landscape contractors because they can perform other job functions while waiting for the materials to distribute throughout the tree, Dodds says. Contractors can expect to pay \$23 to \$50 for materials to treat a 20-inch diameter tree using the passive method, according to Dodds.

Unlike high-pressure systems, which force the material into the tree's vascular system, passive systems depend on the

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tree's sap flow to suck the material up through the tree, Dodds says. "This is truly a systemic approach because it becomes part of the tree's system in a more natural form," he says. "With high-pressure systems, you force the chemical in and you risk causing damage."

As a result, uptake can range from minutes to hours, according to Dodds. This method works by drilling an 1 1/64-inch-wide hole downward at a 45-degree angle 6 to 12 inches from the base of the tree 1/4 to 1/8 of an inch into the xylem. The technician would then insert into the drill site a plastic tube connected to a capsule filled with material, Webb says. To secure the injection unit, the technician must gently tap the cap with a rubber or plastic-faced mallet. The technician can pressurize the unit by pushing in the cap end. When finished, the unit should be removed within 72 hours of installation.



## quick tip

One of the most common mistakes tree care technicians make is underpricing tree injections, says Chip Doolittle, president, ArborSystems, Omaha, Neb. "I see a lot of guys that go from spraying a tree three times a year for \$50 to injecting and saying 'I can't get a whole \$150,' so they underprice their injection. They'll still make money, but not as much as they could have."

Contractors need to communicate to their clients that injections can often achieve in one application what may take other methods several visits and multiple charges, Doolittle says, adding: "If you do that in one application a year, aren't you bringing value to the homeowner?"

**BIG MAC.** Microinjection is effective against most insect-related problems, but diseases sometimes need a little extra punch before they're under control. That's when macroinjection comes into

play. Macroinjection involves distributing 30 to 60 gallons of material into a tree at pressures more than 40 psi. Macroinjection also requires drilling a

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hole more than  $\frac{3}{8}$  inch in diameter. The holes are drilled into the root flares about 1 inch past the bark, according to Rainbow Treecare Scientific Advancements, St. Louis Park, Minn. The technician would then insert the tees by hand and lightly tap them with a small hammer. The tees are then connected to tubing that is feeding from a solution reservoir. The technician should then turn the pump on and adjust the air pressure at 15 to 30 psi.

This is most commonly used as a preventative measure against Dutch elm disease, oak wilt, sycamore anthracnose and chlorosis, which is a condition caused by trees that don't produce enough chlorophyll, says Tom Prosser, president, Rainbow Treecare Scientific Advancements.

A full set of macroinjection equipment, which includes needles that are attached to a harness and a pump, costs

\$285, Prosser says. A technician will spend approximately \$100 for most materials to treat an average size tree, which is approximately 27 inches in diameter. The process typically takes about one hour to complete.

The two major advantages that macroinjection has over microinjection are lower application frequency and higher efficacy against some major diseases, Prosser says. "The other issue with microinjectors is that you have to wound the tree every single year, and that has some pretty negative consequences, whereas with this you only do it every three years."

In fact, Prosser says noninvasive treatments, such as soil drenches, are preferable over trunk or root-flare injections when treating certain tree conditions. Contractors should be aware of each injection system's limitations. For instance, foliar sprays usually work better against

diseases such as apple scab and bacterial leaf scorch, Doolittle says. And trees with poor-functioning vascular systems or trees showing signs of stress may not respond well to injections, Dodds says. "Sometimes we're the last-ditch effort, and there are some trees like the American beech that are very sensitive to injections," Dodds says. "If the tree is weeping and hasn't put a good effort into healing, then you may want to think twice about drilling into the tree and injecting."

Doolittle agrees, saying that contractors need to have realistic expectations when dealing with tree injections, especially when communicating with customers. "If you have a vascular system that is so destroyed that you can't do anything, I think that's something the contractor has to watch," he says. "They need to know the liabilities of that particular tree and can't go to a heavily damaged tree and promise the moon." **LL**

## common problems and solutions with macroinjections

**T**ree injections should work smoothly if the all the proper procedures are followed. But nobody is perfect, and sometimes complications occur. Rainbow Treecare Scientific Advancements, St. Louis Park, Minn. offers the following troubleshooting tips for macroinjection:

- **PROBLEM:** Tee will not stop leaking. **SOLUTION:** Turn off the system and re-drill a new hole above the old hole.
- **PROBLEM:** Excessive amounts of material leaked out. **SOLUTION:** Replace the material.
- **PROBLEM:** Solution not going into the tree. **SOLUTION:** Make sure pump is working properly. Adjust pump pressure. Do not pound tees in further.
- **PROBLEM:** Tree taking up solution very slowly. **SOLUTION:** The drill bit may have been dull. The tees may be plugged. The material may have fallen out of solution. The elm may have Dutch elm disease. Some trees just go slowly. Smaller trees are more prone to this than larger trees. Mornings tend to be faster than afternoons. Very hot days and drought conditions will slow the uptake. Watering the lawn around the tree the night before will increase uptake and is essential during drought periods.
- **PROBLEM:** Tree took up solution fast then suddenly slowed or stopped. **SOLUTION:** Make sure the dosage was accurate for the size and condition of the tree. Small trees usually need less material per diameter inch than larger trees. If the material is still going into the tree, it is necessary to wait. It is possible to turn off the pump, raise the bucket higher than the tees, and allow the solution to seep in slowly; this usually takes 10 to 12 hours.

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# Room for Improvement



Irrigation system upgrades are a profitable - and often overlooked - service opportunity for contractors.

by kathleen franzinger

**W**hen it comes to irrigation services, most contractors think of installation and maintenance, but upgrades are made to irrigation systems all the time. With the talk of water conservation bringing irrigation under the microscope, now is an opportune time to make upgrades a regular service.

Better components will improve system efficiency and save on water and energy bills, and the irrigation industry has seen a number of technological advancements within the last 10 years. "The biggest change to the irrigation industry is the knowledge we've gained as far as how efficient a system can be," says Rick Hall, technical service manager, K-Rain, Riviera Beach, Fla. As a result, there are many existing systems that could benefit from an upgrade.

The fact is that every irrigation system

will need an upgrade at some point, and that's not a bad thing. "Every upgrade is an opportunity to help your customer make their system more efficient," says Jeff Carowitz, vice-president of marketing, Hunter Industries, San Marcos, Calif. "It's also an opportunity to make a sale."

**TIME TO CHANGE.** In the 1950s, irrigation systems used galvanized or copper pipe. But that material, underground for years, quickly corroded. When Meyer Landscape and Design in Moline, Ill., began offering upgrades in 1989, these old systems were a huge part of the company's business. "As soon as the word got out we were doing irrigation maintenance, we started getting calls from people who had some older systems," says Larry McMullin, irrigation division manager. "Back then, there were still a lot of systems out there

*continued on page 108*



Photo: Rain Bird

Nozzles are a great upgrade opportunity for irrigation systems. This one offers multiple rotating streams that uniformly distribute water.

*continued from page 106*

that had been installed 20 to 30 years prior – when the technology wasn't there to install plastic pipe."

The old pipes were too corroded to repair, and upgrading the system turned out to be less expensive than trying to mix the old components with new. McMullin says in the beginning they would do two to three of these upgrades per year. The jobs were equivalent to putting in a new system, with prices ranging anywhere from \$1,000 to \$7,000, depending on system size. Although not many of these irrigation systems are around today, there is no shortage of old, leaky or worn-out components waiting for an upgrade.

Landscape changes are another opportunity for upgrades, particularly when it comes to sprinkler heads. Different plant materials have different watering needs and, therefore, require different sprinklers. Rotors are designed to water large turf areas, and pop-up spray heads target beds, shrubs and bushes. If



Photo: Hunter Industries

bushes were planted where there used to be only turf, then the spray heads need to be modified. "You don't want to water different kinds of landscaping with the same type of head," says Hall. "If you didn't have bushes, and now you do, you should be putting in pop-up sprays, as

opposed to using the large rotors."

Another issue with sprinkler heads is spacing. Greg Parker, marketing and product manager, Toro Irrigation, Riverside, Calif., says every manufacturer recommends spacing requirements based on the sprinkler type and amount of pressure. "If those parameters are violated, then you have to overirrigate to keep that area green," he says. "If you have proper spacing and you apply water at the right pressure with the right nozzles, then you can increase efficiency considerably."

Expanding an irrigation system may also necessitate upgrades. For example, if a system was installed to irrigate the front yard, but now the homeowner wants to irrigate the back yard as well, pipe size and controller size have to be able to support the added zones, says Hall. If they can't, an upgrade is in order. "Controllers are sized based on the number of zones," he explains. "If you had only four zones in front of your property

*continued on page 110*



## spend a little, save a lot

**D**espite the benefits of upgrades, contractors may have trouble getting customers to buy into an irrigation system renovation. "Usually, someone won't replace a system unless it has reached a point of failure or they want more control," says Greg Parker, marketing and product manager, Toro Irrigation, Riverside, Calif. But if contractors take the time, they can show customers how an upgrade may be more efficient or provide them with additional control.

If price is an issue, Rick Hall, technical service manager, K-Rain, Riviera Beach, Fla., suggests capitalizing on the fact that water conservation is a hot topic right now. "Customers may not realize how much an irrigation system can actually save them as opposed to how much it's costing them," he says. "Contractors need to find a way of reaching out to the homeowner and letting them know that spending a little bit of money is going to save them a lot of money."

Talking to and educating customers about

upgrades can and should be done throughout the year, but a great time to do it is when business is slow. "That's a good time to go back to the customer and, maybe through a mailing or coupon, send out a little message letting them know it's a great time to add a rain sensor or remote control," says Jeff Carowitz, vice-president of marketing, Hunter Industries, San Marcos, Calif.

A solid customer relationship can also be built by offering maintenance contracts, which will help when it comes to selling an upgrade. "Part of maintaining a customer base is doing repeat business every year and gaining the trust of the customer right from the installation forward," says Mike Todd, owner, Milwaukee Lawn Sprinkler Corp., Menomonee Falls, Wis. "Customers hired you because they trust you will recommend only those upgrades that would be beneficial and practical. The key is to be honest with the presentation and spell out the advantages and the costs so that the customer can make the decision with all the pros and cons spelled out for them."



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continued from page 108

and you have a four-zone controller, and now you increased to eight or 12 zones, that original controller would no longer be adequate."

**SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE.**

The types of upgrades are as varied as the reasons for needing them, and manufacturers are constantly developing new products. "There's always new technology being developed, so I think it's important, as well as potentially profitable, for contractors to know what's available and to be ready and able to suggest that to their clients," says Michael Rivers, director of the commercial division, Rain Bird, Tucson, Ariz. He recommends frequent trips to manufacturers' Web sites, reading trade publications and contacting a manufacturer's local sales representative to learn about new products.

One common upgrade is a rain shut-off device. These sensors prevent water waste by turning an irrigation

system off during rainfall and keeping it off for a certain period of time to compensate for natural moisture.

Rain sensors can be added to any system and offer a good sales opportunity for contractors because of their low cost and the water savings they provide, Carowitz says. He estimates that one can be added for about \$150, including the contractor's cost of labor. On the savings side, Bryan Robinson, sales/manager, Midwest Turf & Irrigation, Lincoln, Neb. says, "We've seen water savings of 40 percent with a rain sensor. On average, you can save about 2,000 gallons of water per rainfall."

According to Carowitz, rain sensors are so effective, some states have mandated they be retrofitted onto existing



Photo: Hunter Industries

irrigation systems and installed on new ones. For example, Dallas recently implemented a law requiring all irrigation systems within city limits have a rain sensor and freeze sensor. The latter turns a system off in freezing weather to reduce the possibility that water will fall on a walkway and create an icy patch.

Another upgrade is a remote control, which gives property owners the ability

continued on page 114, sidebar on page 112



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## ET for home

**P**recipitation rates, or how much water a system puts down in a certain amount of time, help ensure efficient watering schedules. "We can tell you a certain head with a certain nozzle will put down this much water in a certain period of time, but that can change," says Rick Hall, technical service manager, K-Rain, Riviera Beach, Fla. "If you run your irrigation system at noon, you're going to need to water more because you're losing roughly 25 to 35 percent of that water to evaporation."

That's why ET-based controllers are generating big buzz in the irrigation industry. ET stands for evapotranspiration, defined as the water lost from an area through the combined effects of evaporation from the ground surface and transpiration from vegetation. By monitoring climatic conditions, such as humidity, wind speed and air temperature, ET-based controllers can measure how much wa-

ter is lost to evaporation daily and generate automated watering schedules based on the real-time data.

ET-based watering has been used for years on golf courses and large municipalities, but their high cost has kept them out the residential market. But the more affordable the technology becomes, the more of a reality it is for contractors to sell to clients.

Bryan Robinson, sales, Midwest Turf & Irrigation, Lincoln, Neb., estimates ET-based controllers to be about three times more expensive than average controllers, but he says homeowners will gain the money back in water savings. "The average expectancy of a sprinkler system is 15 to 20 years, so homeowners will have years of usage where they're going to gain that money back," he says.

But the technology still has a ways to go until it's affordable enough for the residential market. Hall says, "It's up and coming, but it's going to be slow coming."



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USE READER SERVICE # 87

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to control specific zones of their system without constantly reprogramming the controller. "Upgrading the controller to remote control makes the system easier to check for proper operation, trouble shoot and service," says Brian Vinchesi, president, Irrigation Consulting, Pepperell, Mass. The upgrade is especially beneficial on large commercial properties, he says, because it eliminates the need to walk back and forth to the

controller, allowing one person to perform service. But remote controls can benefit residential properties as well. Say a homeowner decides their roses need more water, the remote control lets them turn on only those sprinklers. "Remote controls are well liked by people who have a lot of interaction with their yard," adds Carowitz. He estimates one can be added, including labor, for about \$300 on residential properties and about \$1,000 on commercial sites.

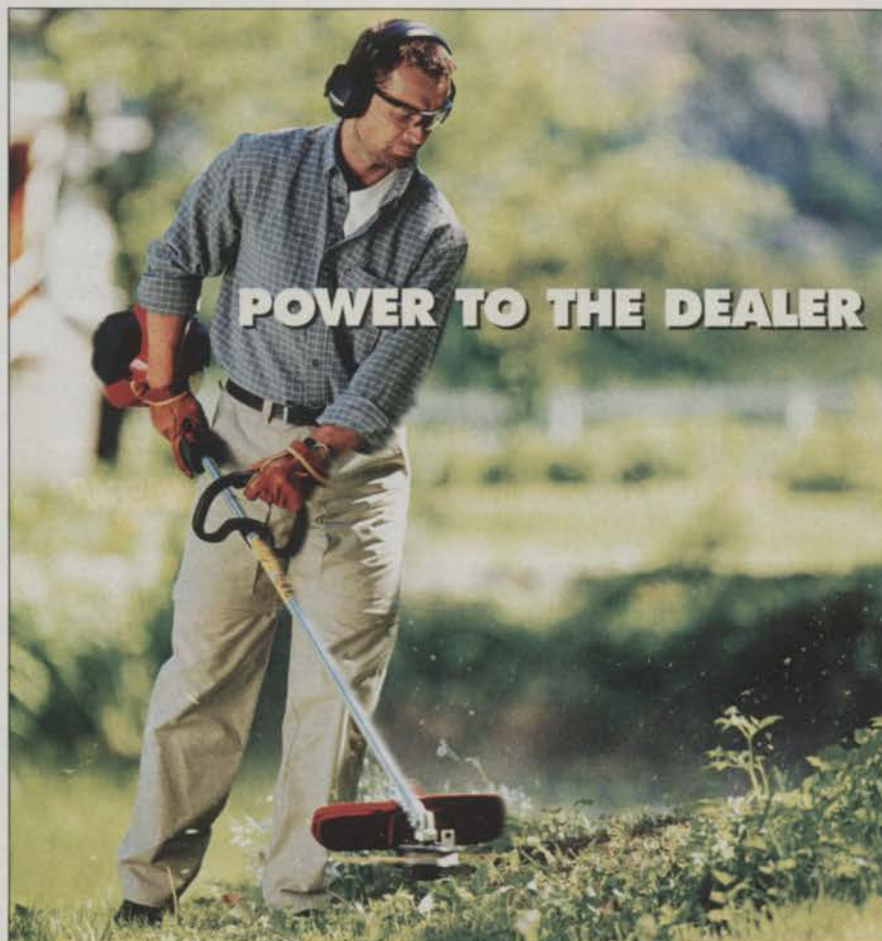
There are also upgrades aimed at more uniformly delivering water to landscapes, including pressure regulating devices, nozzle improvements and higher pop-up sprays. Nozzle improvements have enhanced a sprinkler's ability to uniformly apply water when operated at the right pressure, says Vinchesi. Pressure regulation is important, he explains,



because sprinklers working at the proper pressure provide a droplet size mix that lays out a uniform pattern of water. Improper pressure provides droplets of a similar size, resulting in uneven coverage. And when plant material grows and blocks the spray, causing uneven cover-

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USE READER SERVICE # 89



# Hit the Skids



Skid-steer loaders are becoming multi-functional tools that landscape contractors can rely on for increased productivity.

by jonathan katz

If a landscape contractor could instantaneously morph into a giant, muscle-bound monster like the Incredible Hulk, he could probably do without large equipment purchases. Of course, contractors aren't comic-book characters with super-human strength and must sometimes work in rugged conditions that require a little help.

For years, contractors have relied on skid-steer loaders to perform functions like transporting sod pallets, digging holes or smoothing surfaces. These machines have always helped contractors increase productivity, but the newer skid-steer loaders are even more versatile and user-friendly than previous models.

Today's skid-steer loaders are being built for comfort with more ergonomically friendly features. They also come equipped with more attachments so contractors can complete more tasks in less time. And the added versatility does not mean skid-steer

loaders are more likely to cause turf damage from increased weight. Manufacturers are building more machines with rubber tracks instead of wheels to reduce ground pressure.

**SMOOTH OPERATORS.** Skid-steer loaders are becoming more like cars every year. Contractors can now choose from options that include heat and air conditioning, low-effort controls and keyless startup. The most significant change on skid-steer loaders in the last three years has been technological advancements in operation and comfort, says Rob Otterson, marketing manager, Bobcat, West Fargo, N.D.

Air conditioning and heat are becoming more common in skid-steer cabs today compared with several years ago when very few manufacturers offered climate control as an option, says Larry Foster, product marketing manager, John Deere Construction & For-



Photos: Caterpillar (this page and page 116, right); Case Construction Equipment (page 116, left)

estry Division, Moline, Ill. Enclosed cabs with heat and air conditioning can lower operator fatigue and are popular options for contractors who work in various weather conditions, Otterson says. An enclosed cab with heat and air conditioning can raise the skid-steer loader's retail price \$2,500 to \$4,100 without installation, points out Otterson, adding that the heat-only option can add \$1,600 to \$2,500 not including installation.

Some instrument panels now feature a multilingual reporting func-

tion that can be beneficial for service notifications or attachment operation, Otterson says. "For instance, a Spanish-speaking operator can read information on the display panel in his or her own language without needing additional assistance from the owner," he explains.

These deluxe instrument panels, featuring the multilingual reporting and keyless startup, cost approximately \$545, Otterson says. Several manufacturers are also offering joystick controls

*continued on page 120*



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that allow the operator to steer and advance the machine with one hand and operate boom and bucket functions with the other hand, says Jorge DeHoyos, brand marketing manager, New Holland Construction, Carol Stream, Ill. Joystick controls can add \$1,500 to \$2,000 to the machine's base price, according to DeHoyos.

Some of these joysticks feature speed-reduction buttons that provide contractors with more control when using different attachments by reducing the skid-steer loader's speed while maintaining full engine power. This built-in "inching" button allows the operator to select speeds, in 1 percent increments, from 3 to 99 percent of the loader's standard travel speed, Otterson says.

Operators will also have the ability to switch between hand and foot controls on some machines. In the past, skid-steer loaders featured either hand or foot controls, but newer machines

now come equipped with both controls, which operators can activate by flipping a switch, DeHoyos says. Contractors will pay an additional \$1,000 for this function, according to DeHoyos.

Attachments are becoming easier to connect and remove with quick-attach buttons. The quick-attach feature is typically an option on skid-steer loaders and adds \$700 to \$800 to the machine's price, according to Foster. With the quick-attach feature, operators can drive up to an attachment, connect it and push a button to lock in the attachment, Foster says. "This way, you don't have to climb in and out, you don't have to exert effort or force like you would with a manual quick-attach system, so it takes seconds vs. maybe minutes to change an attachment," he explains.

In addition to ease of operation, manufacturers are making skid-steer loaders easier to maintain. Contractors can purchase skid-steer loaders

that contain small ports in the engine compartment where they can take oil samples and send them to a dealer to test the oil quality, says Eric Mangum, marketing project engineer for skid-steer loaders, Caterpillar, Peoria, Ill. "You can find out if there's trash or other types of particles in the oil that you can get taken care of before you have a major failure," he says.

More skid-steer engines are also being designed to last longer between oil changes. Contractors can now find engines that can run 500 hours before an oil change is necessary, Foster says.

**GENTLE GIANTS.** One option that's becoming more popular with landscape contractors every year is a type of loader similar to skid-steers that moves on rubberized tracks rather than wheels. These machines have grown industrywide in sales from \$10 million in the late 1990s

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USE READER SERVICE # 92

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to \$300 million presently, according to Jay Lemke, director of product development, ASV, Grand Rapids, Minn.

Rubber-track units cost an estimated 25 percent more than traditional skid-steer loaders, DeHoyos says, explaining that a \$32,000 skid-steer loader would cost approximately \$40,000 with the rubber track. Lemke

says the units can range from \$22,000 to \$50,000 for the largest model, but the extra cost should be offset by the additional tasks contractors can accomplish with these machines.

These machines are ideal for the green industry because they can minimize ground damage when working in sensitive, soft-soil areas, DeHoyos says.

"You can work in more applications and on more surfaces than you could with a wheeled vehicle, so the amount of rain delays are minimized and the amount of applications extended," he explains. "And you don't need to cover up the tracks that a normal wheeled skid-steer loader would leave."

These vehicles also are reportedly more stable than traditional skid-steer loaders because they're about 30 percent heavier and the weight is distributed over a larger area, DeHoyos says. A wheeled unit applies 25 to 28 pounds of ground pressure per square inch whereas a rubber-track unit applies less than 5 pounds per square inch, he adds. Some tracks contain small wheels inside that help spread the vehicle weight over a larger area, providing even more stability, Lemke says.

"The contractor is going to notice it's heavier than the wheeled skid-steer loader," DeHoyos says. "The wheeled skid-steer loaders are traditionally known as being rough on the operator because it does jiggle and move you around as you work. The rubber-track machines are going to be a little more stable because of their weight. Therefore, you can expect the operator to get tossed around a lot less."

The added traction also means that some of these units can operate at a 3-1 slope, Mangum says. "The undercarriage has a suspension that gives a smoother ride than a skid-steer loader and also gives you better traction, especially when there are wet, soft conditions," he explains. "It's also a lot more stable for slope work."

Achieving this extra traction does mean more maintenance. Operators must keep the undercarriage clean just as they would with a track-type tractor or a bulldozer, Mangum says, adding that contractors typically accomplish this with a pressure washer.

**GO WITH THE FLOW.** Landscape contractors obviously have more design options than ever before on skid-steer loaders. And as skid-steer loaders become more diverse, engine power is increasing to provide the extra push needed for the added functionality. Each manufacturer offers skid-steer loaders with a wide range of horsepower. But contractors should take more into

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account than simply engine horsepower. Hydraulic performance is critical, especially when adding attachments.

To determine the optimum hydraulic horsepower, contractors should consider hydraulic flow and pressure. "People tend to look at gallons per minute (gpm), and they don't understand that it's gallons per minute times pressure," Foster says. "You can have a lot of flow but no pressure behind it, and it's not going to do any work for you. You can have a lot of pressure and no flow, and the attachment is not going to work."

Skid-steer loaders typically range in hydraulic pressure from 2,500 to 3,500 psi, DeHoyos says. The higher the hydraulic flow and pressure, the more attachments the skid-steer loader can accommodate. High-flow skid-steer loaders typically run between 35 and 40 gpm, says Neil Rosenbaum, service training coordinator, Case Construction Equipment, Racine, Wis. High-flow machines are \$1,500 to \$2,000 more expensive than standard-flow skid-steer loaders, according to DeHoyos. A standard-flow skid-steer loader will operate basic attachments, such as augers, hammers, sweepers and brooms. Standard-flow skid-steer loaders operate between 12 and 22 gpm, Rosenbaum says. A high-flow, high-pressure skid-steer loader is ideal for more rugged attachments such as cold planers, augers with higher diameters and dual-function or six-way buckets, DeHoyos says.

"The standard flow is adequate flow to run the loader attachments, and then if you want to run certain hydraulic attachments that don't need a lot of horsepower, then that's a very good system for that," says Rusty Schaefer, marketing manager, Case Construction. "But let's say you have an attachment that has the capability to take all of the engine horsepower, then you need a higher flow system."

The best way to determine the necessary amount of hydraulic power needed is by asking the dealer, Otterson says. "The dealership should help the customer determine how much auxiliary hydraulic flow is needed to power the attachments the customer will be operating," he says. Matching the skid-steer loader's auxiliary hydraulic flow to an attachment is important because if there's too much flow, the owner can

## the right connections

**W**hat would a skid-steer loader be without an attachment? Landscape contractors depend on a variety of attachments to complete different tasks. The most popular attachments landscape contractors are purchasing include augers, trenchers, landscape rakes, sweeper buckets and soil conditioners, says Rob Otterson, marketing manager, Bobcat, West Fargo, N.D.

Soil conditioners are ideal for clearing rocks, weeds, existing turf and creating a final grade for preparing landscapes, planting seeds or laying sod, Otterson says. Trencher attachments are useful for contractors who are installing irrigation lines and drain tile. Augers can efficiently dig holes for planting trees and shrubs and installing fence posts. Landscape rakes are effective for removing small rocks or stone for soil preparation.

As most landscape contractors know, jobsites can get messy. That's when a sweeper attachment can come in handy. Typical sweepers feature a powered, enclosed broom combined with a bucket to scrape and collect material, eliminating a time-consuming task normally done by hand and keeping landscape contractors within the clean jobsite guidelines of a city or development, Otterson says.

There are several other attachments that Otterson says many landscape contractors don't seem to know about. "Manufacturers are constantly adding new models to fill customer requests, many of which can be used on different types and brands of carriers, further increasing their utilization," Otterson says. "Stump grinders, rotary cutters, combination buckets, sod layers, snow-removal attachments and many others can quickly and easily increase their business. The landscape contractors who research and are aware of these additions will be presented with more opportunities to grow their businesses."

Price ranges for landscape-related attachments vary depending on the manufacturer, but most attachments with a primary or single hydraulic function, such as an auger or box blade, typically start at \$1,200, according to Otterson. Attachments with multiple hydraulic functions, such as soil conditioners or landscape rakes, can start at \$4,000, he says.

experience problems long term with the attachment's durability."

In addition to power, contractors should consider lift capacity. Skid-steer loaders can range in operating capacities from 700 pounds to 3,000 pounds, according to Otterson. Most landscape contractors will need lift capacities between 1,750 to 2,200 pounds, De-

Hoyos says. At this range, contractors can operate buckets, forks, landscape rakes and augers, Schaefer says. Skid-steer loaders with a lift capacity less than 1,000 pounds will range in price from \$12,000 to \$16,000, according to DeHoyos. Lift capacities between 1,001 pounds and 2,000 pounds generally

continued on page 126



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continued from page 124

cost \$16,000 to \$25,000, and heavy-lift machines with operating capacities more than 2,000 pounds can cost up to \$40,000, DeHoyos adds.

Overall, lift capacity, horsepower and hydraulic power should be examined closely when shopping for a skid-steer loader. Foster recommends testing skid-steer loaders before purchasing them. Many dealers will provide free one- to two-day trials, he says. "Contractors should try the machine out in their applications, and if possible, try it at the same time or same day as other machines so you get a side-by-side comparison in the same conditions," Foster says. "Make sure the salesman gives you a professional walk around, driving home the benefits they feel would be good attributes to consider when running a machine. Those things can be breakout forces on the motor, tractive effort, visibility, the variety of attachments it's capable of running and serviceability." ■

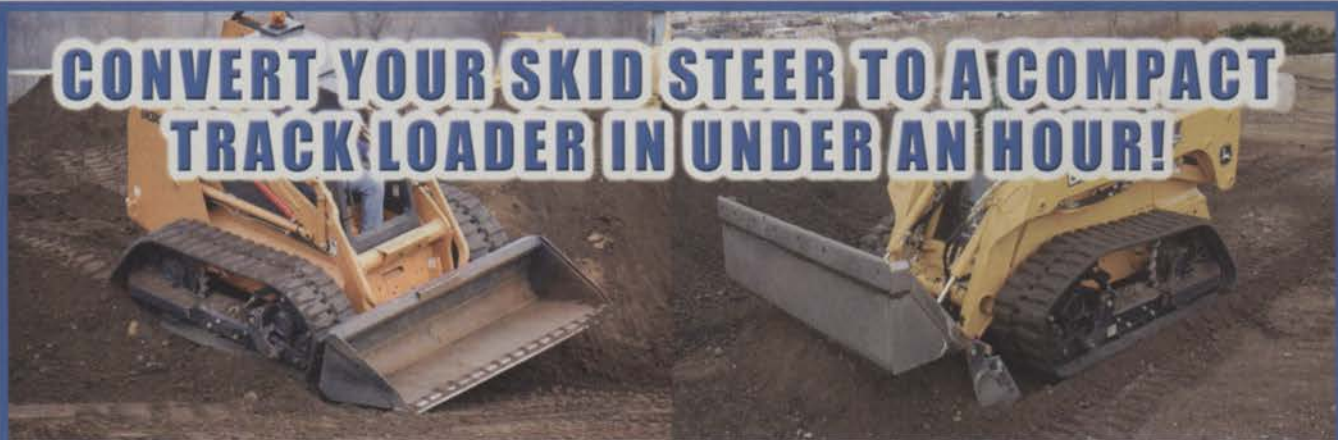


## ask away

Skid-steer loaders can be major investments for landscape contractors. That's why it's critical that contractors know exactly what applications the equipment will perform and to communicate that to their dealers. Rob Otterson, marketing manager, Bobcat, West Fargo, N.D. says to get the best use out of skid-steer loaders, contractors should ask their dealers the following questions:

- What is the machine's rated operating capacity?
- What is the auxiliary hydraulic flow?
- How much auxiliary hydraulic flow do I need for the attachment I want to use?
- What attachments are approved for the skid-steer loader?
- What options are available?
- What safety features are included?
- What is the ground pressure (for a track machine)?
- What training opportunities are available?
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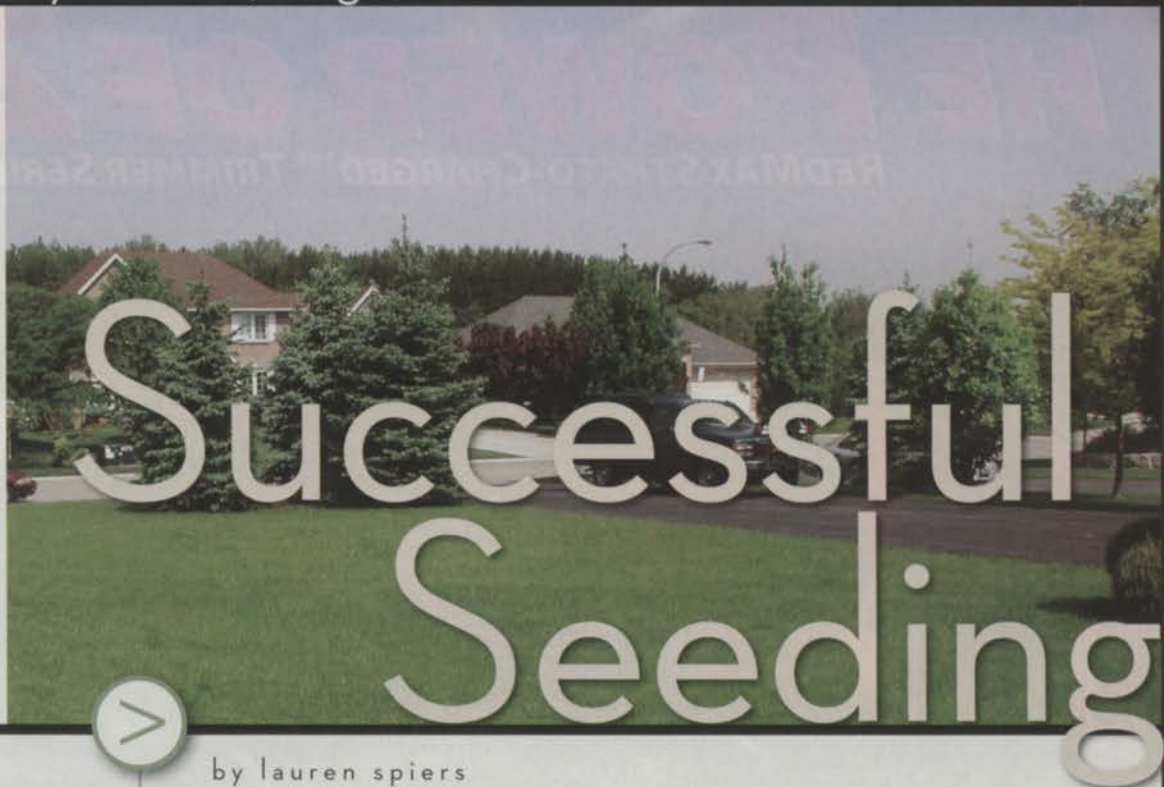


Photo: Heritage Green

by lauren spiers

Landscape contractors and turf seed professionals share the keys to choosing the best turf seed and applying it effectively.

In many respects, turfgrass is what makes the green industry run. Homeowners and property managers take pride in great-looking lawns, and sports turf managers ask a lot of their green spaces. To care for these expanses of tough turf, contractors have developed extensive maintenance regimens. Using arsenals of equipment, they mow turf, feed it, water it, patch it, aerate it, weed it and spray it, and then start all over again.

Of course, maintenance programs have little purpose without established turfgrass to work with. *Lawn & Landscape* research shows that 58.4 percent of contractors offer sodding services, while 66.4 percent offer seeding and 17.4 percent hydroseed. Because many companies offer all of these services, providing them based on the situation and their clients' needs, even contractors who prefer to lay sod must understand the keys behind proper seeding.

**CHOOSING WISELY.** Whether a company's primary seeding service is new lawn establishment or annual slit seeding, most contractors and seed suppliers agree that identifying the right type of seed to use is step No. 1 in a successful application.

"Geographic location is critical to seed

selection," notes Evelyn Dennis, seed product manager, LESCO, Cleveland, Ohio. "Warm-season grasses, including Bermuda, St. Augustine, bahia, paspalum, zoysia, centipede and several native grasses, are normally planted in the spring and are more suited for warmer climates. Cool-season grasses, including bluegrass, fescue and ryegrass, are usually planted in late summer or fall and are more suited for cooler areas."

Moreover, Dennis says seed suppliers are knowledgeable about which species are suitable to certain climates and can provide information on the characteristics of the seed, including its shade or drought tolerance.

Doug Brede, research director and operating officer of Simplot/Jacklin Seed, Post Falls, Idaho, agrees that knowing turf species' differences is a good idea, as that knowledge allows contractors to truly understand the products they're being sold. "When you're selecting seed for a project or investigating a new variety, knowing a bit about the different species allows you to give a little pushback when someone's trying to sell you something you don't really need," he says. "Turfgrasses can tend to

*continued on page 130*

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become trendy and move away from the mainstream, so sometimes it's best to stick with what you know. By understanding the basic use of a species, you can stay away from any hype that might steer you away from the tried and true varieties."

Contractors have a number of informative sources at their disposal when investigating seed varieties. "We usually look in industry magazines for some of the seed surveys that come out every year," says Bill Akehurst, vice president and director of the landscape department at Akehurst Landscape Services, Joppa, Md. "Some of what we're looking for has to do with supply and demand – what's available in our area – and the price is important, too. We look at those seed surveys annually and make our determinations."

While seed surveys are a concise tool that can help seasoned seeding companies narrow their choices on the best varieties to use, contractors that are looking for more up-close-and-per-

sonal information can take advantage of seed trials conducted by the National Turfgrass Evaluation Program (NTEP) or university extension agencies. For the annual trials, turfgrass varieties are grown into stands with specific levels of maintenance. This allows contractors to see how well varieties grow in certain conditions, looking specifically at turf color, texture and resistance qualities.

**IT'S ALL IN THE MIX.** So the experts say that understanding the basic turf types and specific varieties' positive and negative characteristics and maintenance requirements can help contractors narrow the field to the one seed variety that will perform best in his or her area, right? Not exactly. While these tips will help identify the best – or worst – performers, contractors shouldn't be looking for a silver-bullet turf seed.

On the contrary, most contractors prefer to use turf seed blends that address a range of conditions on their

clients' properties. Brede says having diversity is essential for successful seeding. "The biggest mistake a contractor can make is to use 100 percent of anything," he explains. "Lawns do not have all one makeup to them and seed shouldn't either. Mixing species gives you a diversity that's especially important if a disease or insect comes along and kills off one variety in the blend. Rather than a completely dead lawn, you've still got some living color there to work with."

Brede says stock blends available from seed suppliers generally contain the most advanced seed varieties in terms of pest and stress resistance. However, another way to ensure confidence in how a blend will perform is to work with a seed supplier to develop a custom blend with specific amounts of certain seed varieties. Akehurst takes full advantage of this option.

"Here in the transition zone, we use a blend of 50-percent turf-type tall fescue  
*continued on page 134; sidebar on page 132*

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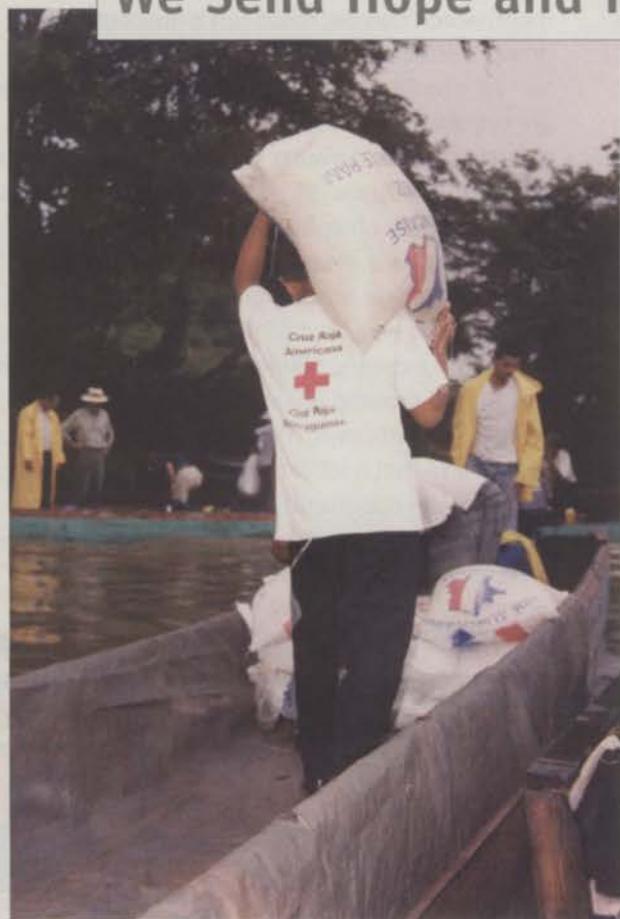


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**W**hile some U.S. cities are grappling with pesticide bans, many Canadian companies already use pesticide-free lawn care programs. At Heritage Green, Ancaster, Ontario, Canada, the challenge of limited pesticide use has actually been a boon to the company's seeding program.

"For the last six years, I've been developing new methods that our company can use as more pesticides get restricted," explains Turf Specialist Jeff Lowartz. "What we've come up with is a weed control method that's really nothing but overseeding. If you can continually make the turf denser with regular overseeding, weeds won't be able to compete with it."

Lowartz says he looks for turf seed varieties that produce dense lawns and are high in endophytes, which offer natural insect resistance. Additionally, Lowartz says he likes to use compost as a soil amend-

ment, which can decrease turf's susceptibility to drought stress dramatically.

All clients on Heritage Green's pest-free program are overseeded annually in the fall. To promote a diverse turf area, Lowartz uses a blend of 35 percent Kentucky bluegrass, 35 percent perennial ryegrass and 30 percent creeping red fescue. The pricing for the company's overseeding services starts at \$159 for 3,000 square feet and the company's 100-percent pest-free program begins at \$310 for the same size area.

"As an industry, I think we've gotten turned around and started growing an unhealthy plant that just looks healthy," Lowartz says. "I'm a licensed pesticide applicator, but now that a lot of pesticides are being removed, it gives us an opportunity to get back to growing healthy lawns by creating a biodiverse situation and overseeding is one of the easiest ways to do that."

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USE READER SERVICE # 102

continued from page 130

cue and 50-percent perennial ryegrass," Akehurst says. "In our area, a lot of people only want to see the fescue and will strictly utilize that. But because our blend includes both warm- and cool-season grasses, it really gives a multiseasonal mix that works well throughout the year."

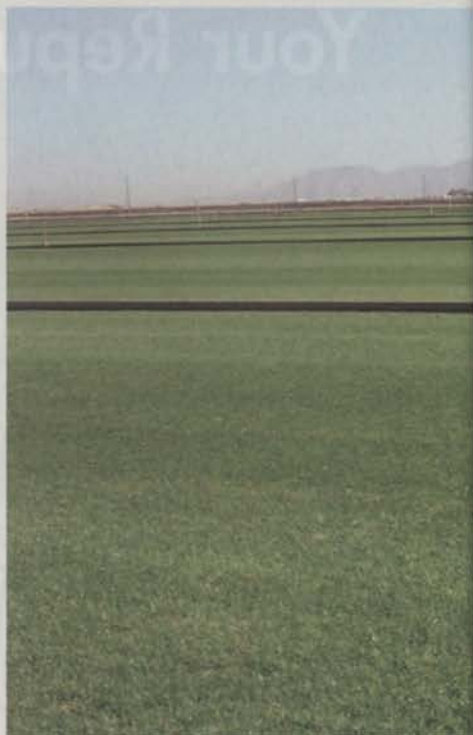
Akehurst's blend includes 25 percent each of two turf-type tall fescues and 25 percent each of two perennial ryegrass varieties. Going through roughly 100,000 pounds of "The Akehurst Mix" annually, the company contracts with a local seed supplier to handle the blending.

Similarly, Lowartz says Heritage Green's "Elite Mix" is a custom blend of 35-percent Kentucky bluegrass, 35-percent perennial ryegrass and 30-percent creeping red fescue. "We've found that the Kentucky bluegrass grows well in irrigated, sunny conditions, while the ryegrass and fescue grow well in shady conditions," he explains. "On most

properties, you'll have a blend of shade and sun, and the residential lawns we work on are usually watered. Using this blend for the entire lawn, as certain areas start to get shadier and the sun-loving varieties fade out, you get a nice transition from sun to shade."

When creating a custom blend, Russ Nicholson, national sales manager for Pennington Seed, Madison, Ga., notes that contractors should expect prices to be a few dollars per pound higher than if they ordered a stock blend. "This is especially true if you're doing a much smaller batch, such as 2,000 pounds or so, because it requires cleaning out the blender, which takes time, and you also have the cost of additional labor to cover," he says.

Nicholson says turf seed prices can range from \$1 to \$25 per pound, with ryegrasses and turf-type tall fescues around \$1 or \$1.25 per pound, bluegrasses at \$3 per pound and Bermudagrasses from \$5 to \$25. He adds that



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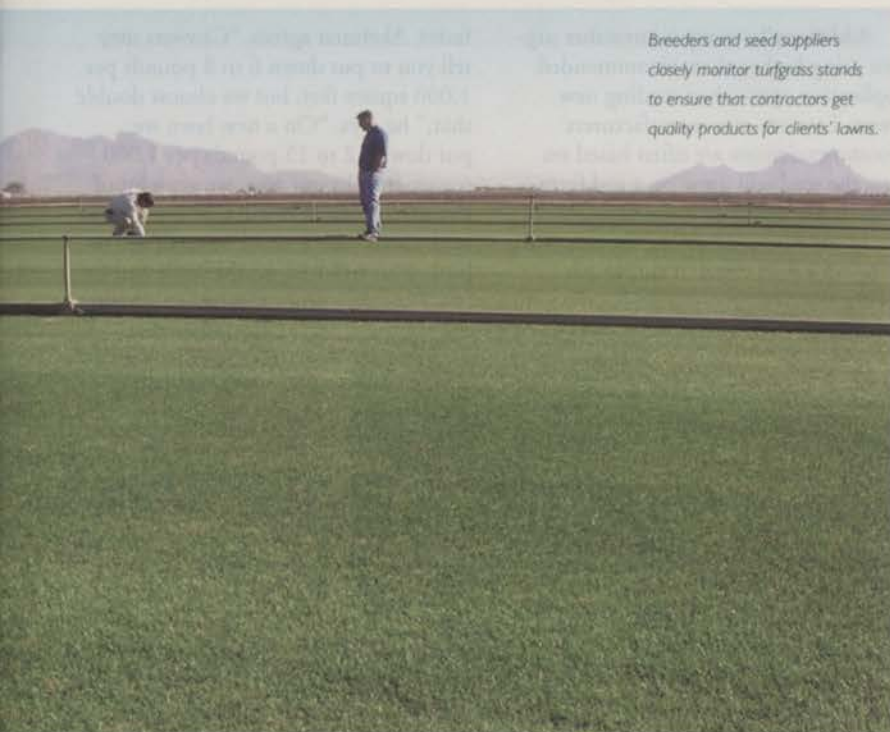
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Breeders and seed suppliers closely monitor turfgrass stands to ensure that contractors get quality products for clients' lawns.

Photo: Pennington Seed

there can be ranges of prices for each species depending on the seed's quality. "One mistake I see contractors make is choosing their seed based on price," he notes. "Keep in mind when you're making your purchases that a lower price could mean poorer quality. A lot of times, seed is the last thing to go down on a site, but it's always the most visible. Even if it costs a penny or 10 cents more per pound, make sure you're getting a good quality seed because that will reflect on the company making the application."

**LAY DOWN THE LAWN.** Once chosen, contractors can apply their seed blends effectively by remembering a few key points.

"The first step for a good application is definitely bed preparation," Akehurst says. "Rake it out and get the soil loose so the seed can penetrate the soil and get better contact. This also helps the roots get started."

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Preparing beds can be especially important on commercial sites or for contractors who work with home builders on new house lots. "On those sites, you might have to bring out a rake to prepare the soil because builders have compacted the site and stripped the topsoil," Akehurst says. "We also add a slow-release fertilizer to make sure there are enough nutrients available to help the seed thrive."

Bob Franey agrees, noting that his company uses a starter fertilizer on seeding jobs and prefers to use a slit seeder, rather than an overseeder, to apply seed. "Slit seeding is preferable to overseeding because the slit seeder's blades cut into the soil and provide greater seed-to-soil contact," says the president of Total Landscape, St. Louis, Mo.

Additionally, many contractors suggest using higher-than-recommended application rates when seeding new lawns. Lowartz says manufacturers' recommendations are often based on how the seed will grow on a sod farm when it has a year or more to establish. On home lawns, doubling the rate will bring up a new stand of turf much

faster. Akehurst agrees. "Growers may tell you to put down 6 to 8 pounds per 1,000 square feet, but we almost double that," he says. "On a new lawn we put down 12 to 15 pounds per 1,000 square feet. In our area, we get a lot of thunderstorms that will take away some of the seed. You'll also lose seedlings to birds who will feed on the seeds and for other reasons, so a higher rate helps offset that."

Franey notes another key to effective seeding: Timing. "As with the establishment of any turf, the time of year is critical," he says. "Seeding projects are ideal in the fall when there are three seasons of establishment — fall, winter and spring. Our clients are informed about the value of aerating and slit seeding in the fall



Dead and gone? Not this lawn. Ancaster, Ontario-based Heritage Green overseeded this lawn in October and by May it was full and green again — see the results on page 128. Photo: Heritage Green

continued on page 138

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**D**ifferent turfgrasses thrive in various conditions. Selecting the right type of turfgrass depends on a number of factors, including the lawn's intended use, whether an irrigation system will be included and the amount of shade available, according to Doug Brede, research director and operating officer, Simplot/Jacklin Seed, Post Falls, Idaho. Here are his lists of the top-performing species in certain situations:

**Heavy Traffic:** Brede says turfgrass species that will sustain heavy wear typically display stiff leaves, creeping stems, broad blades and top growth. Wear-tolerant species from best to worst, according to Brede, include:

- |                       |                    |
|-----------------------|--------------------|
| 1. Bermuda, zoysia    | 5. Fine fescue     |
| 2. Tall fescue        | 6. Bentgrass       |
| 3. Perennial ryegrass | 7. Rough bluegrass |
| 4. Kentucky bluegrass |                    |

**Shade:** Shade often dictates what grasses can be planted where. Oftentimes, a mixture of four or five turfgrass types can produce the best results in these situations. Fine fescue grows best in shady conditions, but a blend of bluegrass can

help even out the fine fescue's rough texture, Brede says. Grasses that thrive in shady conditions from best to worst are:

- |                    |                       |
|--------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Fine fescue     | 5. Creeping bentgrass |
| 2. Idaho bentgrass | 6. Kentucky bluegrass |
| 3. Rough bluegrass | 7. Perennial ryegrass |
| 4. Tall fescue     |                       |

**Drought:** Some grasses are ideal for flooding or drought conditions. Canada bluegrass, Idaho bentgrass or redtop, though not as aesthetically pleasing, can work well in areas where there's poor drainage or standing water, Brede says. For dry conditions, try these top performing turf types:

- |                       |                       |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Sheep fescue       | 5. Red fescue         |
| 2. Hard fescue        | 6. Perennial ryegrass |
| 3. Tall fescue        | 7. Creeping bentgrass |
| 4. Kentucky bluegrass | 8. Rough bluegrass    |

**Salt:** Salt tolerance is key for grasses that are exposed to deicing salts along roadways or sidewalks. They're also ideal for coping with high-sodium irrigation water, recycled water and naturally salty soils. Fulfs alkaligrass is considered the most salt-tolerant grass, according to Brede. — **Jonathan Katz**

*continued from page 136*

and how this helps throughout the year."

Franey says Total Landscape markets seeding services in August for September and October applications. Lowartz also ensures that Heritage Green's seeding applications are made during the fall. "We get calls throughout the year, especially in the summer when the lawns turn brown," he says. "We'll have the customer change their nutrient practice so they have a healthier summer lawn and then get them on a program where they're overseeded every fall."

One thing most companies' marketing information doesn't include is a price list. Rather than a flat rate, most companies price seeding by the job in order to cover their costs on different sized properties. "We price our seeding services by the job in order to determine labor cost, materials cost and our mark-up goal," Franey says. "Our seeding charges average 7 cents per square foot."


Lowartz uses a similar technique,

referring to wage grids provided by a national landscaping association in Canada. "Landscape Ontario provides some standard wage grids that we try to follow," he says. "The basic rates up here are around \$40 to \$50 per labor-hour, plus the cost of the material, plus product. That covers the tax and handling costs that we have to pay in Canada."

Beginning with a 3,000-square-foot minimum, Heritage Green charges \$159 for overseeding. It's pest-free program, including annual overseeding, aeration, fertilization and other cultural practices starts at \$310 for 3,000 square feet and goes up to \$410 for 4,000 square feet. The cost per 1,000 square feet goes down as the lawn size increases.

Akehurst says his company has used different pricing strategies in certain situations when working with builders. "We did 700 lots for one builder and took the total price for all the seeding and divided it by the number of lots,"

he explains. "Whether the lot was 5,000 square feet or 25,000, it was the same price. This strategy worked well for the builder, and because of the law of averages, we still ended up getting paid for all of the work, even though the money came in a little differently."

When contractors take the time to prep beds and recover their costs, Lowartz says growing grass isn't difficult. "Grass is probably one of the easiest things in the world to grow," he says. "As you have moisture and good soil contact along with heat, which comes from proper timing of the application, you can get seeds to germinate." 



Check our April Online Extras section for four more stories related to proper seeding, from choosing the right species and blending ratios to arguments for sodding vs. seeding.



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▶ compiled by kathleen franzinger

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- Performance tracking lets operators monitor all functions with the touch of a button
- Standard options include dual selective control valves, loader joystick and 4-wheel drive
- Ranges from 29.5 to 44 gross hp
- Feature Yanmar, Tier II compliant diesel engines; the 3520 and 3720 have turbocharged engines
- Transmission options include 12F/12R PowrReverser, which lets operators quickly change directions through a lever and eHydro hydrostatic transmission
- Attachments include quick-attach loader and bucket, mid-mower and backhoe
- John Deere – 800/537-8233, [www.johndeere.com](http://www.johndeere.com)

Circle 201 on reader service card



## Kubota B Series Tractors

- B3030 features factory-installed, all-season cab and four-cylinder, liquid-cooled diesel engine that generates 23 PTO hp
- B2630 includes three-cylinder, liquid-cooled diesel engine that generates 19.5 PTO hp
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- Include hydrostatic power steering, easy-to-read instrument panel, multi-reflective headlights and tilt steering wheel
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continued on page 142



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continued on page 144



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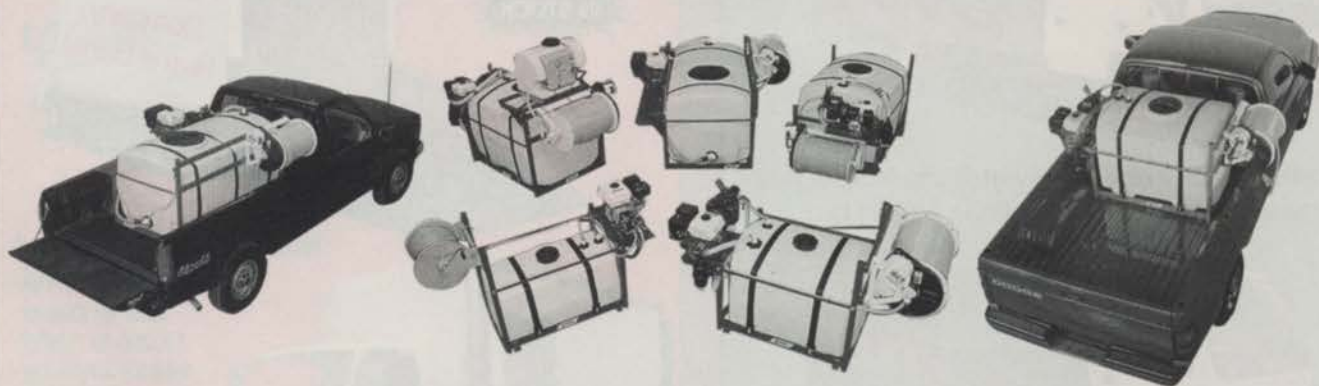
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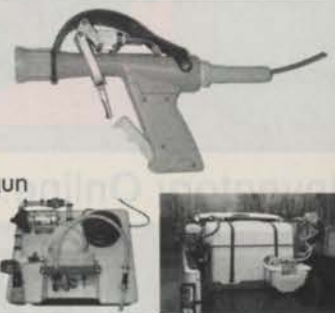
*continued on page 146*



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www.ditchwitch.com

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continued on page 148

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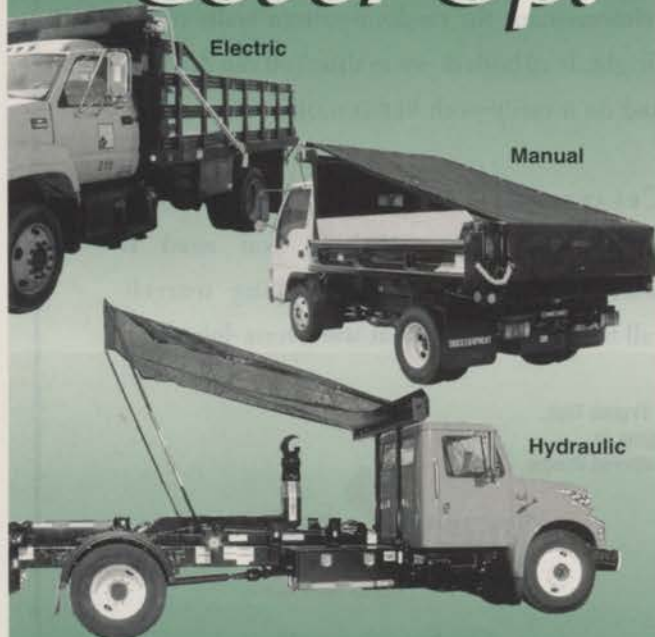
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Removing thatch build-up is a vital step to keeping turf healthy. Try these detachers to get the job done.

▶ compiled by kathleen franzinger

## Gandy Dethatcher/Overseeder

- 2-inch seed spacing, 24 outlet seeding
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## JRCO Tine Rake Dethatcher

- Removes embedded thatch and leaves
- Combs up matted turfgrass while mowing
- Flexible tines allow zero-turning while raking
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- Quickly attaches to company's



- universal mount bar with clevis pins
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## Turfco Direct Dethatcher 20

- 10-gauge welded steel body
- Features 52 heavy-duty flail blades to easily handle thick, heavy thatch
- Easy-to-use micro-screw depth adjustment
- Available with 5-hp Briggs & Stratton or 5.5-hp Honda engine
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*continued on page 152*

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continued on page 154

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continued from page 152

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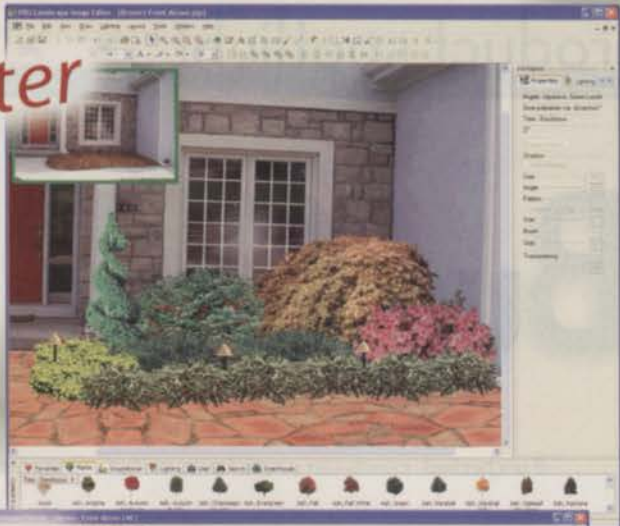
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Estimate Number: 1007  
Quote Date: November 09, 2011  
Estimate Status: Draft  
Estimate Date: December 02, 2011

Item	Qty	Description	Quantity	Unit	Estimated Price
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PL0411	4.00	4.00	4.00	HR	360.00
PL0402	4.00	4.00	4.00	HR	360.00
PL0414	3.00	3.00	3.00	HR	270.00
PL0402	3.00	3.00	3.00	HR	270.00
PL0411	1.00	1.00	1.00	HR	90.00
PL0396	4.00	4.00	4.00	HR	360.00
PL0392	4.00	4.00	4.00	HR	360.00
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USE READER SERVICE # 121

# Bug Off!

If unchecked, insects can wreak havoc on turf. Consider these insecticides to put pests in their place.

▶ compiled by kathleen franzinger

## Cleary TriStar 70 WSP

◀ **TRISTAR**

- Controls a variety of insects, including whiteflies, aphids, thrips, mealybugs, leafhoppers and other greenhouse and field-grown ornamental pests
- Belongs to the neonicotinoid family
- Fast-acting, broad spectrum systemic insecticide with long residual control
- Water soluble packets come sealed in a protective outer bag
- Compatible with many commonly used surfactants, miticides and insecticides
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Circle 215 on reader service card

## Bayer Allectus

◀ **allectus**

- Controls all major surface-feeding and subsurface insects
- Works on white grubs, billbug larvae, mole crickets, chinch bugs, cutworms, fire ants, sod webworms and more
- Available in liquid and granular formulations and on fertilizer
- One application provides eight to 12 weeks of residual control
- Minimal personal protective equipment required
- Bayer Environmental Science – 800/331-2867, [www.bayerprocentral.com](http://www.bayerprocentral.com)

Circle 216 on reader service card

## Arvesta Arena

▶ **Arena**

- Controls grubs, chinch bugs and web worms, as well as cutworms and mole crickets
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- Available as a 0.5-percent granular or as a 50-percent water dispersible granule
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## PBI/Gordon Azatrol EC

- Controls insects on turf, as well as ornamental shrubs, trees and flowers
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continued on page 158





# “Showoff”

Need a skid steer that's not afraid to strut with your stuff? Get a new 300 Series Skid Steer. Its optimal 60/40-weight distribution, low center of gravity, long wheelbase, and high ground clearance deliver unsurpassed balance and agility. But getting there is only half the battle. Deere skid steers also excel at putting material in its place with a patented vertical-lift boom that delivers exceptional lift height and reach. And numerous Worksite Pro™ attachments put a wide variety of material-handling tasks easily within your grasp. Stop by today and check out all five Deere skid steers. We'll be glad to show you what they can do.



**Dow AgroSciences  
MACH 2  
Specialty Insecticide**

- Provides grub prevention for season-long control
- Controls a broad spectrum of grubs at a 2-pound active ingredient per acre rate
- Available in a granular formulation for use on home lawns and commercial sites
- Controls lepidoptera larvae
- No need for immediate watering
- No photodegradation
- Provides residual control
- Dow AgroSciences – 317/337-3000, [www.dowagro.com](http://www.dowagro.com)

Circle 219 on reader service card



**DuPont Advion  
For Fire Ants**

- Controls red imported fire ants 24 to 72 hours after application
- Active ingredient Indoxacarb provides fast results through metabolic activation
- Primary entry is through ingestion, but product is also absorbed through the cuticle
- Can be used as broadcast applications or mound treatments
- Available in 25-pound bags and 2-pound jugs
- DuPont Professional Products – 888/6DuPont, [www.proproducts.dupont.com](http://www.proproducts.dupont.com)

Circle 220 on reader service card

continued on page 160

**LESS WEIGHT  
FEEL GREAT**



If you're tired of using heavy, poorly balanced hedgers, try Tanaka's new THT-210S - the lightest in its class! At 11.0 lbs., the THT-210S reduces fatigue so you can increase productivity and profits.



**NEW! 5-POSITION LOCKING REAR HANDLE SYSTEM** improves operator safety.

**NEW! 5 START** reduces pull-force by 60 percent.

**NEW! IMPROVED HEAVY-DUTY ANTI-VIBRATION SYSTEM** reduces fatigue.

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POWER EQUIPMENT

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**Grubs Eating Your Profits?**

Continual Control with Applications in the Spring & Fall!

Technical Support Provided

Organic!

No Re-Entry Interval



**GrubStake<sup>®</sup>**

GrubStake<sup>®</sup> contains the best Beneficial Nematode for your location. You can use GrubStake<sup>®</sup> to control many soil pests, including the Japanese beetle, Masked chaffer, May/June beetle, Black vine weevil, Asiatic beetle and fleas.

**EASY TO APPLY**

GrubStake<sup>®</sup> is applied using conventional spray equipment, hose-end sprayers, watering cans, or distributed through pressurized irrigation systems.



**BioControl Systems**  
P.O. Box 96  
Aurora, IN 47001  
1-888-793-4227

Shop on-line at  
[www.nematodary.com](http://www.nematodary.com)

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# SWEEPSTAKES

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- Train the trainer facilitator's guidebook.
- Topics include people skills, strategic planning, business practices, customer service, equipment maintenance, fertilization and more.

Visit [www.jphorizons.com](http://www.jphorizons.com) for more information. Package Value: \$2,000

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## Questions?

Call 800/456-0707

- Chances to Win New Products
- Daily News
- Archived Magazine Articles
- Message Boards
- Sign Up for Your Personalized My Lawn & Landscape Account

**FMC Talstar EZ  
Insecticide**

- Product controls ants, chinch bugs, mole crickets, sod webworms and other insect pests
- Granular insecticide with an easy-to-spread formulation
- Particles disperse and disappear upon wetting
- Larger particle size won't stain concrete or damage plants
- Comes in a resealable plastic package
- Labeled for lawns, landscape areas and perimeters
- FMC – 800/321-1FMC, [www.pestsolutions.fmc.com](http://www.pestsolutions.fmc.com)

Circle 221 on reader service card

# Talstar® EZ

# UP-Star®

**United Phosphorous  
UP-Star SC**

- Generic product developed for turf and ornamental pest control and other non-crop markets
- Active ingredient is bifenthrin
- Granted section 3 EPA approval
- Restricted use pesticide
- United Phosphorous – 800/247-1557, [www.upi-usa.com](http://www.upi-usa.com)

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USE READER SERVICE # 125

## BioControl Systems Grubstake

- Contains one of two beneficial insect parasitic nematodes: heterorhabditis indica for southern climates or heterorhabditis marelatus for northern climates
- Nematodes are worm-like organisms found living naturally in soil
- Infects and kills pest insects, such as black vine weevil larvae, Japanese beetle grubs, masked chafer grubs, May/June beetle grubs, Asiatic beetle grubs and other white grub species
- Easy application, no rotations needed, no re-entry interval
- Safe for environment, pets and children
- BioControl Systems – 888/793-4227, [www.nematodary.com](http://www.nematodary.com)

Circle 223 on reader service card

**Grubs Eating Your Profits?**

Control Grubs with Applications in the Spring & Fall

**GrubStake®**

GrubStake® contains the best beneficial nematode for your location. You can use GrubStake® on paved areas and lawns, including the popular lawn: Masked Chafer, May/June beetle, Black vine weevil, Asian beetle and more.

**EASY TO APPLY**

GrubStake® is applied using conventional spot equipment, broadcast equipment, watering cans or discharge through professional irrigation systems.

BioControl P.O. Box 96  
Spartanburg, SC 29581  
1-888-793-4227

Shop on-line at [www.nematodary.com](http://www.nematodary.com)

## Syngenta Scimitar CS Insecticide

- Controls turf and ornamental insects, including chinch bugs, sod webworms, cutworms and bluegrass billbugs
- Advanced pyrethroid technology
- Fast-acting; provides long residual
- Active ingredient lambda-cyhalothrin
- Syngenta – 800/395-8873, [www.syngentaprofessionalproducts.com](http://www.syngentaprofessionalproducts.com)

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- Peabody Landscape Construction  
Columbus, Ohio
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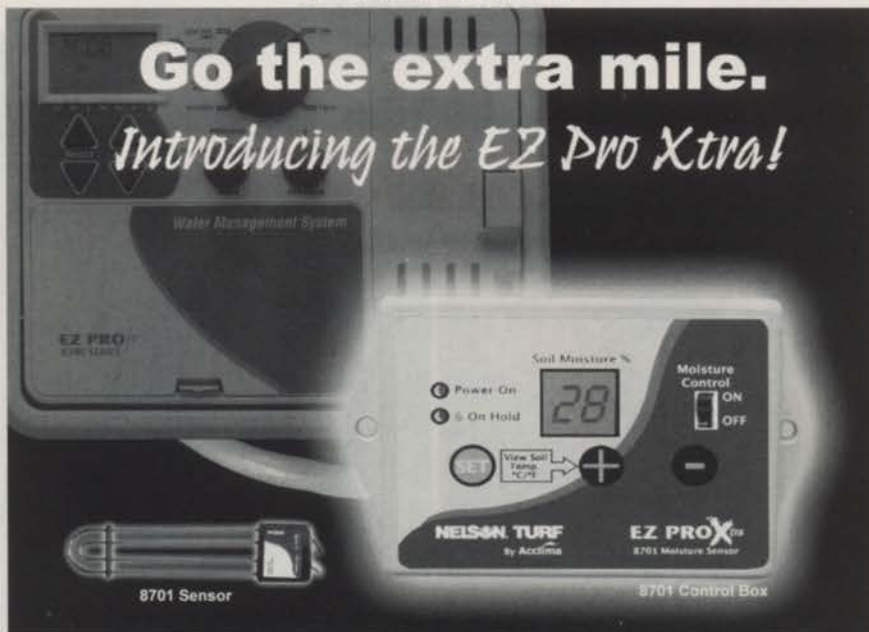
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- Easily adapts to any time-based controller!
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product spotlight > >

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- Long-term solution for fire ant control
- Contains the active ingredient hydra-methylon
- Offers flexible dose and application options for entire yards and single mounds
- Kills queen and eliminates both visible and hidden fire ant mounds
- Eliminates queen and colony within three to seven days of mound treatment
- Rids entire area of fire ants within two weeks of broadcast application
- No mixing, mess or smell
- BASF – 800/545-9525, www.turfacts.com



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**LESCO CrossCheck Plus**

- New insecticide with active ingredient bifenthrin
- 7.9 percent flowable formulation
- Labeled for use on residential and commercial lawns as well as ornamentals
- Packaged in 1-pint containers as well as .75-gallon jugs
- Controls chinch bugs, armyworms, sod webworms, cutworms, mole crickets and more
- LESCO – 800/321-5325, www.lesco.com



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APRIL 2005

# Lawn & Landscape

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#### I. What is your primary business at this location? (choose only one)

- 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

- Landscape Installation
- 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
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- \_\_\_ 11. \$7,000,000 or more

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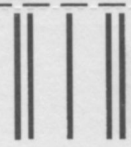
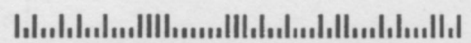


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## Exmark Metro 21 Commercial Walk-behind

- Updates include a reduced drive handle diameter and a flattened top bail lever surface
- New lever fits flush against the primary handle when engaged, creating a slimmer, more comfortable grasping surface
- Rubber discs have also been added to the handle mount to better isolate the handle from engine and deck vibration
- Redesigned lower drive engagement bail lever features a 50-percent reduction in engagement travel as well as a refined shape
- Standard three-position height adjustment system allows the handle height to be optimized for operators of varying stature
- Speed selector lever has been moved to the upper right-hand side of the handle
- Redesigned control cables minimize protrusion below the main handle
- Extended front bumper protects the height adjustment levers from contact-related damage
- Features a 21-inch TriVantage deck that offers the ability to bag, mulch or side discharge with the addition of the optional side discharge chute
- Choice of 5.5-hp Honda or 6-hp Kawasaki engines
- Heavy-duty gusseted steel wheels with sealed ball bearings
- Three drive styles available: hand-push, self-propelled and self-propelled with a blade brake clutch
- Exmark – 402/223-6300, [www.exmark.com](http://www.exmark.com)

Circle 227 on reader service card



## Gizmow Zero Turn Mid-Z Rider

- Equipped with a steering system that links the angle of the front wheels to the power of the rear wheels; the machine has two steerable caster wheels on front
- Steering system has sprockets on each front wheel that allow the casters to turn perpendicular to the frame
- A pair of cams are attached to the steering shaft so when you turn the steering wheel, one cam acts against a roller that mechanically pushes the pump arm backwards to slow down the hydraulic motor for that wheel
- The front wheels have enough traction to steer the machine in the direction the operator wants to go; as a result, the weight is transferred to the rear wheels improving performance on hillsides
- Extra-heavy welded mower deck and reinforced frame
- Unit is undercoated with an automotive E-coat primer
- Comfortable padded steering wheel and thick-back suspension seat
- Electric actuator lets you raise or lower the cutting deck on the go
- Two models available – a 52-inch deck with a 25- or 27-hp engine or a 61-inch deck with a 27-hp engine
- Gizmow – 866/463-2628, [www.gizmow.com](http://www.gizmow.com)

Circle 228 on reader service card



## Drafix PRO Landscape Version 11

- Offers three integrated modules to help landscape contractors and designers with all aspects of any landscaping project: The PRO Landscape Image Editor that provides customers with a photo realistic presentation of the proposed project, the PRO Landscape Planner that creates a 2D-site plan and the PRO Landscape Proposal that generates an accurate bid for the client directly from the design
- Incorporates a new function that allows designers to change the seasons of their projects, creating multiple looks for plant material to reflect the changes from season to season
- Includes an expanded image library with more than 4,000 images of plant materials, hardscapes, water features, etc.
- New image adjustment tools allow the user to adjust images by changing color, grouping objects or altering object contrast, brightness, etc.
- Time lapse viewing options allow designer to show client views of the landscape from the initial planting to 10 years growth projection
- Other features include a dashboard interface, new picture annotations, updated AutoCAD filters, improved retaining wall tools, symbol shadowing options and a new sloping tool
- Drafix Software – 800/231-8574, [www.prolandscape.com](http://www.prolandscape.com)

Circle 229 on reader service card

## Walla Walla Sprinkler MP Rotator

- A multi-stream rotor the size of a spray nozzle
- Fits on any conventional spray head body or shrub adapter, transforming it into a high uniformity, low application rate sprinkler with matched precipitation even after arc and radius adjustment
- Low application rate reduces runoff on slopes and tight soils
- Patented "double-pop" flushes on start-up and shut-down without increasing spray head flow-by
- One moving part
- Easy arc adjustment; easy radius adjustment up to 25 percent
- Removable inlet filter for easy cleaning
- Fills the gap between 16 to 30 foot spacings
- Walla Walla Sprinkler Co. (a subsidiary of Nelson Irrigation Corp.) – [www.mprotator.com](http://www.mprotator.com)

Circle 230 on reader service card



## Quick Attach Quick Snow-Away Snow Blower

- A snow blower attachment for a skid-steer loader
- Throws snow up to 40 feet while clearing paths down to the ground
- Features a No-Freeze-Up design
- Optional hydraulic chute rotation and deflector that eliminates metal-to-metal contact between blower and rotating chute base preventing freeze-up
- No chains, sprockets or PTO shafts
- Quick Attach Attachments – 866/428-8224

Circle 231 on reader service card

### Encore X-treme Mower

- Mower has a 52-inch deck
- Powered by a 23-hp air-cooled Kawasaki engine
- Can mow at speeds up to 10 mph
- This machine's cutting height adjusts from 1 to 4½ inches with a foot pedal lift for easy changing
- Other features include a height-of-cut indicator and auto deck lock
- Operator comforts include a high back cushioned seat, arm rests and responsive controls
- 24-inch rear tires also define the X-treme with heavy-duty larger wheel motors for maximum performance and traction on all surfaces and inclines
- Have positive locking drum-style brakes with a gentle hand lever



- brake activation
  - Covered by Encore's 10-year deck shell and two-year parts and labor warranty
  - Encore – 800/267-4255  
www.encoreequipment.com
- Circle 232 on reader service card

### Kichler Mythological Lighted Fish 153800Z

- Serving not only as a garden or pond sculpture, this 24-inch-by-15¾-inch mythological fish can also act as a functional spitter/fountain when vinyl tubing and pump are added (equipment not included), while creating a subtle light for its surroundings
- Constructed for durability in premium grade solid brass
- Equipped with a 10,000-hour, 16.25-watt xenon lamp
- Can be installed in any garden using the 14-inch mounting stake or can be submerged in a pond as an edition to any water feature

Circle 233 on reader service card

**KICHLER**  
LANDSCAPE LIGHTING



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**www.wellscargo.com**

USE READER SERVICE # 131

## Teletrac Vehicle Diagnostics Module

**Teletrac**  
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Are Not Created Equal

- Vehicle tracking and fleet management system
- Collects key vehicle operating data which is captured and transmitted through the FleetDirector onboard unit
- Teletrac proprietary software produces a detailed vehicle performance report
- Report provides fleet managers and owners with both live and historical fleet operating information that can be used to chart trends, spot and correct problem areas and make better informed management decisions based on drivers and equipment
- Provides number of miles logged by each vehicle, hours engine was running, total in-motion time, total idling time and fuel consumption
- Teletrac - 800/835-3872, [www.teletrac.net](http://www.teletrac.net)

Circle 234 on reader service card

## Rittenhouse Eco-Lawn Top Dresser

- Self-propelled, 34-inch wide top dressing machine
- Can also be used for spreading organic fertilizers
- Holds 1/2 yard of soil mix
- Rittenhouse - 800/461-1041, [www.rittenhouse.ca](http://www.rittenhouse.ca)

Circle 235 on reader service card



## Bell Laboratories Talpid Mole Bait

- Contains the active ingredient bromethalin
- The product's size, shape and feel allow a mole to consume it in the same manner as its primary food source - the earthworm; one worm contains a lethal dose and can kill in 24 hours
- Comes in a tray of 10 worms that release freely from the tray
- Each box of Talpid contains two trays; Talpid is also available in cases containing 10 typical treatments
- Bell Laboratories - 800/323-6628, [www.talpid.com](http://www.talpid.com)

Circle 236 on reader service card



## Turfco TurnAer 26 Chariot Ride-on Aerator System

- Chariot pull-behind sulky reduces operator fatigue
- Brake-assisted turning
- Features heavy-duty, low-profile steel frame with wide-set pneumatic tires
- Chariot easily disconnects from the TurnAer 26 so it can function as a walk-behind
- Includes 4-hp Honda engine, 359-feet-per-minute transport speed, spring-assist lift and 2.75-inch coring depth
- Turfco - 800/679-8201, [www.turfco.com](http://www.turfco.com)

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## Sipcam Echo Ultimate

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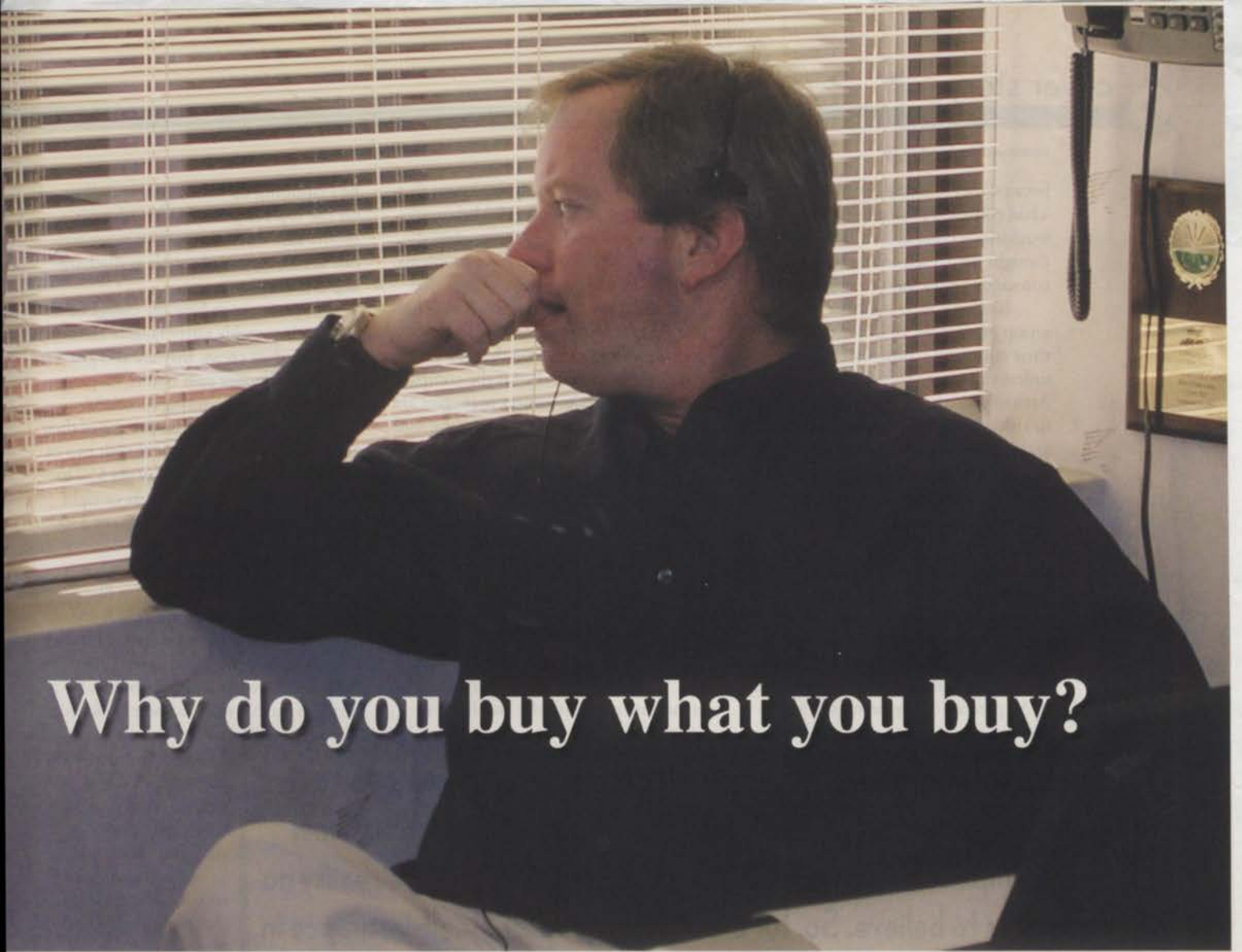


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# Why do you buy what you buy?

Do you shop only for the best...or always for the lowest price? Most of us likely wind up somewhere in the middle, depending what we're in the market for.

Lots of factors shape the decision to buy – price, features, quality, service. But feelings and impressions weigh in, too: What a friend or neighbor says about the product or service. How an ad, TV commercial or mall display strikes you. Any good or bad personal experience you've had or heard about. What the intangibles count for, like how the seller stands behind his name.

To put us in the comfort zone, to make us pull out our wallets, it's no surprise that gut feeling counts as much as comparison shopping – sometimes more.

In this highly competitive world of ours, I find myself shopping more and more for value, the best buy for the long haul. And there's usually something more than dollars involved.

A trendy label adds to the cost of a pair of jeans or a summer shirt, but does it add value (beyond the snob appeal)? When brand-name office computers become commodities, like soap or shampoo, what do you base your decision on then?

We've all felt that twinge when you realize that what you bought isn't worth what you paid. It's hard to keep ignoring the twice-worn jacket in the back of the closet or that piece of gear gathering dust in the corner. They tell us the decision we made was wrong, for whatever reason. And we feel better when those things are gone from sight.

Maybe Value is when you feel you got more than you paid for. When you feel as good (or better) about your purchase today (or five years from now) as the day you bought it.

In any business transaction, both sides are usually very much aware of what they want and what they're getting (or giving up) for the price that's paid.

So next time you're calculating what you're about to get for your dollar, ask yourself this question:

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because they're safety conscious, while a bad company pays more – the rates wouldn't be competitive. So, for us, we thought partial self-insurance in a safety conscious group was the way to go."

Basically, each member of the group must work to improve safety in their company – businesses cannot join unless they agree to this pledge. And Artisan's Insurance has staff dedicated to risk control, risk assessment and accident investigation, so they conduct annual reviews of each of the 65 members to look at their safety programs and verify that the companies are not slipping in their duties.

"The insurance premium is broken into two pieces – fees on one side and dollars dedicated to claims on the other side," Mohns explains. "I still have to pay the fees but if I don't have claims, those dollars are mine. I can recoup up to 35 percent of my premiums down

let everyone in the company know that we're serious about safety," Mohns says. "If we entrusted this job to a safety director, then I think we'd have problems. A lot of employees would look at that person and say, 'He's not my boss – he's just a guy who comes around every once in awhile to tell me that the job I'm doing is unsafe.' But if the company ownership and the project managers are in charge of it, then we are sending leaders and mentors into the field and they are the example for others to follow."

Quarterly safety incentive programs keep safety top-of-mind for all employees, who receive rewards or gifts each quarter as a result of continued safety practices and reduced injuries. For example, the first quarter reward is a colored shirt affixed with the company logo, and the third quarter reward is a jacket.

When an injury does occur, managers meet with the employee to

he's climbing up a ladder or standing on the top rung of a ladder where it clearly says not to step, then more serious action can result, such as discharging that employee.

Since foremen have the charge of conducting weekly safety tailgate meetings with their crews, they are also given an end-of-the-year cash bonus, ranging from \$50 to \$300, during successful safety years, depending on the size of their crew. For instance, a foreman with two or three people on his crew may get \$50 to \$100, while a foreman with six or eight people on his crew will get \$200 to \$300.

**STOKED FOR SUCCESS.** When a wave starts to steepen, inclining like a small stepladder, it becomes catchable. A surfer can also ride a wave after it breaks into an on-rush of white water. Essentially, there are as many possibilities for a surfer to catch a wave as there are for him

**"Insurance is a funny thing – there isn't an insurance company out there that will lose money for too long. In conventional situations, good companies end up subsidizing bad companies – it's a reality no one wants to believe. So, for us, we thought partial self-insurance in a safety conscious group was the way to go." – John Mohns**

to avoid the wrong type of wave – he just has to know which waves are right. And sometimes that means catching the wrong wave first in order to understand why he should avoid that same swell in the future.

In business, decisions are made in a similar fashion. Sometimes it

the road. But if I can't control my claims, I'm subject to an assessment of up to 35 percent of the funds. My premium stands on my loss history only – not on the state fund average. So if I build a good safety program, I see the results not only on the premium but in future I know I'll have dividends coming back to me, especially if others in the group follow the same safety rules and can control their losses."

Benchmark's safety program is one where everyone knows that safety is important from the top down, which is why Mohns takes on the responsibility of running it and then ensures that each of his managers are enforcing it with their employees. Mohns conducts safety meetings with his management team six times a year and the managers conduct safety site inspections on every foreman once a month. The foremen conduct safety tailgate meetings once a week. "For us, this is the most effective way to

file an accident report and discuss what happened and how it's not going to happen again. When true accidents occur, the employee is reminded of the safety standards and sent on his or her way – "But I won't hold back in giving that person a shirt – how does that improve someone's safety?" says Mohns, adding that after he set up the initial safety system, he only needs to commit about four hours a month to keep it running smoothly. "I definitely don't want to create a company where people are afraid to report injuries. That's what we found happening – someone wanted a shirt so he didn't report an accident. So, instead of holding back a reward, we will make sure we have talked to that person about the accident or safety hazard and discuss ways to prevent it from happening again."

However, if an employee is caught regularly violating simple safety standards, such as not using a spotter when

takes knowing what you do best, which in this case for Benchmark was commercial bid work – and sticking with it, despite the challenges involved and the other tempting services a business can venture into instead. Other times, it takes understanding a business situation and how to improve upon it to reap the rewards, such as improving a safety program, reducing claims and benefiting from a return on investment. And, many times, it just takes guts – knowing when to jump into a service like maintenance or enhancements that will help grow the company and advance it forward.

Surfer culture exudes youthful energy, vibrant individualism and a taste of risk and speed – all experiences similar to a landscape company's day-to-day trials. When you go on to make your next business decision, remember what the Benchmark team has done. Getting "stoked" on the longboard just might help you catch your next wave into business nirvana. **LL**



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age, higher pop-up sprays are needed. The cost for adding nozzle improvements varies depending on system size, says Carowitz. The upgrades themselves aren't expensive, but labor time could add up, depending on the number of sprinkler heads.

**AT YOUR SERVICE.** Offering a service agreement that includes regular system evaluations gives contractors the opportunity to look for and recommend upgrades. Carowitz sees contractors making upgrades a regular service by offering annual service contracts, which include turning on the system in the spring and, in colder climates, winterization. "In some parts of the country, they also offer a mid-summer checkup where they go out and fine tune the system to make sure the landscape stays green, but also that the right amount of water is being applied," he says.

Rivers agrees that contractors are having success selling maintenance contracts, especially in areas of the country where systems require startup and shutdown services. "And when you also include a maintenance check, that's an opportunity to offer an upgrade," he says.

Mike Todd, owner, Milwaukee Lawn Sprinkler Corp., Menomonee Falls, Wis., says service agreements have worked for him. "Every year we send a service proposal and cover letter to all of our customers," he says. "We ask them to renew their agreement with us for spring startups and fall winterizing. We get those written authorizations back in late February or early March, and then we schedule turn-on services. That is clearly an opportunity to offer a rain sensor." Todd establishes customer trust by doing quality work on the installation, and once clients see the high level of work, they want him to perform turn-on and shut-off services each year. With an estimated customer retention rate of 95 percent, it seems to be working.

In addition, his service crew is trained to look for upgrade opportunities during routine maintenance checkups. Because his company has been around for more than 30 years, they still maintain systems they installed back then, and some of them have mechanical controllers that have seen their day. "Before they fail in the middle of the season, our service men might suggest it's time to replace the controller," he



Photo: Hunter Industries

says. "It's done on an informal basis, but our service guys are trained to point out things that perhaps are still working but are close to the end of their useful life."

According to Carowitz, service agreements benefit the contractor and the property owner. "By offering a service agreement, the contractor can create a revenue opportunity and a revenue stream for himself, and the property owner gets their system working in tip-top condition," he says, adding that service agreements are a great way to make sure systems are well maintained. "There are many systems out there that have had 30 or more years of solid operation due to regular good maintenance practices. Of course, as the components wear out, they're replaced, but the system itself, because it's so well maintained each season, can last the lifetime of a home."

Audits go one step further than periodic checks, offering a more specific system evaluation that examines efficiency and uniformity. Primarily used for commercial irrigation systems, audits are required in some parts of the country, and if a system fails to meet certain criteria, an upgrade is required.

"There are a lot of people out there with very inefficient systems, but they

don't know the difference between one that runs efficiently and one that doesn't," says Greg Parker, marketing and product manager, Toro Irrigation, Riverside, Calif. "The best way to tell is through the amount of water you use. The best demonstrative way to communicate that to a customer is through an audit."

Contractors can receive auditor certification through the Irrigation Association (IA). Becoming a professional auditor requires investing about two-days time and \$300 to \$400, depending on IA membership, but once you gain this accreditation, clients will recognize and seek you out for your higher level of professionalism, says Hall.

When recommending upgrades, keep in mind they aren't solely for existing systems, Carowitz says. They can work just as well on new systems. He compares it to buying a new car: A person can buy a car with all the standard features, or they can upgrade to heated seats or a sunroof. Irrigation installations can work in a similar manner. "Contractors can say 'Here's my price for the standard system, but I do have some options I can make available to you,'" he says. That's a good time for contractors to offer a more advanced timer, more durable sprinkler heads or even a remote control. 

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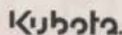
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The author is vice president of sales and marketing for Nature Scapes, an award-winning full-service landscape company in Lilburn, Ga. He holds a bachelor of science degree in horticulture and can be reached at 770/923-7023.

## The Payroll Evolution at Nature Scapes

**N**ature Scapes, a full-service landscape company, recently began its 22<sup>nd</sup> year in the metropolitan Atlanta market. We employ just over 150 people during the peak season and most of our work, including landscape design and installation, irrigation and drainage, horticultural and arbor services is related to landscape maintenance in multi-family residential and commercial markets.

With a large staff of both full-time and part-time employees, Nature Scapes has managed payroll in-house for more than 20 years. Most of the advantages in doing so were perceived ones: Closer handling of cash-flow, better job costing, more flexibility in processing – if you made errors, you had more time to go back and correct them.

In 2003, with a three-person administrative staff (one of which was facing maternity leave) and several challenges associated with processing W-2 forms, our company decided it was a good time to outsource payroll beginning in early 2004. Our Accounting Manager

Susan Brown explained that, although payroll was never a full-time job for any one person, facing that personnel shortage provided ample motivation to look at payroll companies.

Additionally, Susan and the rest of the management staff recognized payroll outsourcing as a way to relieve stress associated with the company payday, which comes every other Thursday. Everything from software and check-printing failures to check and tax-filing errors and their accompanying penalties had come up in the past, and having a professional company handle payroll could alleviate that.

In our search for a trustworthy company, we interviewed the two largest payroll handlers in the country and selected the one that seemed to be the most service-oriented. Susan notes that part of our search involved finding a firm that could handle the size of our company and also checking references of companies the payroll firm already works with. Representatives from the company came to the Nature Scapes offices for about half a day to train Susan and

### 5 Keys to Outsourcing Payroll

1. Evaluate the status of your in-house payroll system to identify inefficiencies and stressful management details.
2. Interview multiple payroll companies to find one that offers services best suited to your company.
3. Work one-on-one with representatives from the payroll company for a day or so to train necessary staff on new payroll software.
4. Purchase a new time clock, if necessary, that ties into the software provided by the payroll firm. Ensure that all employees know how to use the time clock correctly so payroll is accurate.
5. Avoid errors by reviewing and verifying wages and deductions before transmitting data to the payroll company for processing.

another member of our administrative staff on how to use the new software and process the payroll information. Prior to this meeting, we had provided the payroll company with all of our employees' information, including names, addresses and pay rates, which they entered into the system for us. Because the software

said, the change-over was a non-event and paychecks arrived on time.

When Nature Scapes handled its own payroll, the accounting process started on Monday with all the time information for the pay period entered into the computer from paper time sheets. Checks usually were ready to be run by Wednesday, which didn't account for time spent reloading information if the computer crashed, having to replace ink cartridges in the printer or stuffing envelopes. Come tax time, it also took several weeks to properly sort out W-2 information.

Now, we have a new time clock linked to the payroll software. Our crew supervisors still keep time sheets for their crews, which we use as a check against the computerized system. This helps us spot errors and track information, such as vacation time, sick days or days when an employee forgets to clock out. Once the payroll calculations are made, one withdrawal is made from the payroll account to cover all costs for that pay period, including tax deposits. Payroll checks are delivered to the office the next day with the checks already signed, in envelopes and ready for distribution.

Our payroll company assesses a per-check fee for their services. For Nature Scapes, the cost is about \$250 per pay period. The fee includes everything from processing the checks to handling tax deposits and W-2 forms. Susan notes

that when you consider the cost of missing a federal tax deposit or making other errors, the monthly cost to outsource payroll is well worth it. Likewise, even over just one year, outsourcing has resulted in more accurate payroll and W-2 reporting, eliminated late filing of payroll tax deposits, provided employees with additional benefits like direct deposit, hasn't interfered with job costing and resulted in less activity in the payroll account. With the reduced stress in the office, our administrative staff has become more productive and employees are even more satisfied come payday. — Rick Barnes LL



Left to right: Rick Barnes, vice president of sales and marketing; Mike Kneeland, chief financial officer; Rick Upchurch, president; Nancy Allen, director of business development; Susan Brown, accounting manager; Don Smith, chief operating officer.  
Photo: Nature Scapes

was easy to use and already included all of our employees' information, the learning curve for the new program was small.

The changeover process from in-house to out-of-house payroll was relatively simple, but took some adjustments over the first couple of pay periods. Initially, we provided the payroll service with a report showing each employee's year-to-date balance. The new pay-period information was put in and the checks were run. While Susan remembers dealing with differences in how withholdings were calculated, by the second pay-period, everything was worked out. For most employees, she



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TRANSPORT



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# What Kind of People Own a Gravely?

## 260Z features:

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- Hydrostatic drive system
- 60" cutting width
- Powerful 27 HP engine
- Maintenance-free Gravely XL Spindles™

It's the kind of folks who aren't afraid to get their hands dirty and thrive on an honest, hard day's work. The kind who settle for nothing less than rock-solid machines that handle the harshest of jobs without a hitch. The kind who appreciate a hard-working partner willing to sweat it out with them — a partner like Gravely — who will better their business savvy, slash downtime, help hoist their business to a higher level and hike up their bottom line.

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