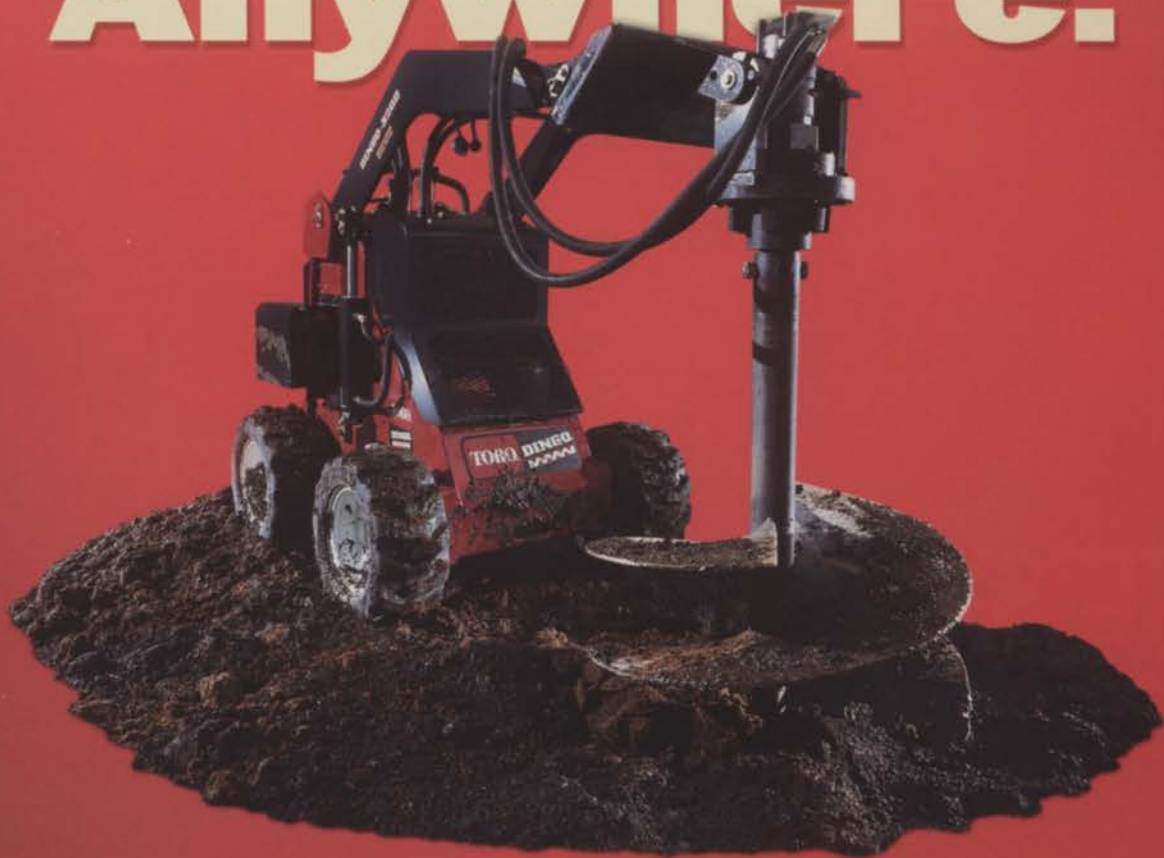


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USE READER SERVICE # 11

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**Cover Story –
The System
is the Secret**

48

The E-Myth advises entrepreneurs to act bigger than they are. Second Nature Lawn Care owners took this advice and now enjoy the success and operational sanity all owners crave.

SERIALS

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USE READER SERVICE # 12



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USE READER SERVICE # 13



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best of the web

Is your staff "out of the gate by 8" every morning or do you have some stragglers walk in late once in a while? Every company has had to deal with employees coming in late, but what's the best way to tackle this topic so as to discourage future tardiness? *Lawn & Landscape* Online Message Board users recently discussed how their companies handle tardiness and enforce their policies consistently. Check the *Best of the Web* feature on page 64 to follow the discussion.

> Save The Date!

Get out your calendars because there are dozens of great learning opportunities coming this summer all across the country. From the 2005 Southeast Green Industry Conference in Greenville, S.C. from June 22 through 25, to the Pennsylvania Allied Nursery Trade Show July 26 through 28 in Fort Washington, Pa., the *Lawn & Landscape* Events/Calendar page is your resource for educational and trade show opportunities throughout the industry.

There, you'll also find dates for exciting conferences hosted by *Lawn & Landscape*, including the *Lawn & Landscape* Growing Your Business seminar series featuring Jack Mattingly, to the northern and southern Weed & Insect Management Summits coming in August. Find contact information for these and loads of other industry events on <http://www.lawnandlandscape.com/events/>.

Also, if you know of or are hosting an industry event and you don't see it on our calendar, contact Lauren Spiers with the appropriate information. Remember, your event dates and details will be posted online right away, but we must receive your information at least 12 weeks in advance of the event in order for it to appear in print in a timely fashion.

> online extras

Like what you see in this month's issue of *Lawn & Landscape*? Chances are there's additional information and related articles on *Lawn & Landscape* Online. Look for these May Online Extras on www.lawnandlandscape.com and search the rest of the site for more quality industry news and information:

- Have a point to make? Question to ask? Visit the *Lawn & Landscape* Online Message Board to discuss business-related topics with other industry contractors. Chances are, they've been where you are – or maybe you've got some great advice to share with business owners who are new to the industry. Find this dynamic forum at www.lawnandlandscape.com/messageboard.
- The May issue of *Lawn & Landscape* is chock full of product profiles for trucks, ornamental tools and even GPS systems. Find hundreds of products in these categories and more in the products section of *Lawn & Landscape* Online.
- Visit the May issue online to learn more about the following topics covered in this issue – water features, container gardening, residential irrigation systems, fungicides and the cover story.

web tools

Daily News

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

Industry Events

A comprehensive list of conferences, trade shows and seminars throughout the industry.
www.lawnandlandscape.com/events

Business Forms

A diverse collection of forms to help you run your business more effectively.
www.lawnandlandscape.com/tools

Message Board

The industry's most interactive message board.
www.lawnandlandscape.com/messageboard

Industry Links

A user-friendly industry index containing categorized information about contractors, dealers and suppliers.
www.lawnandlandscape.com/links

Associations

An easy-to-navigate directory of local, state, national and international trade associations.
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(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 HABITAT in the promotional code box when placing your order.)

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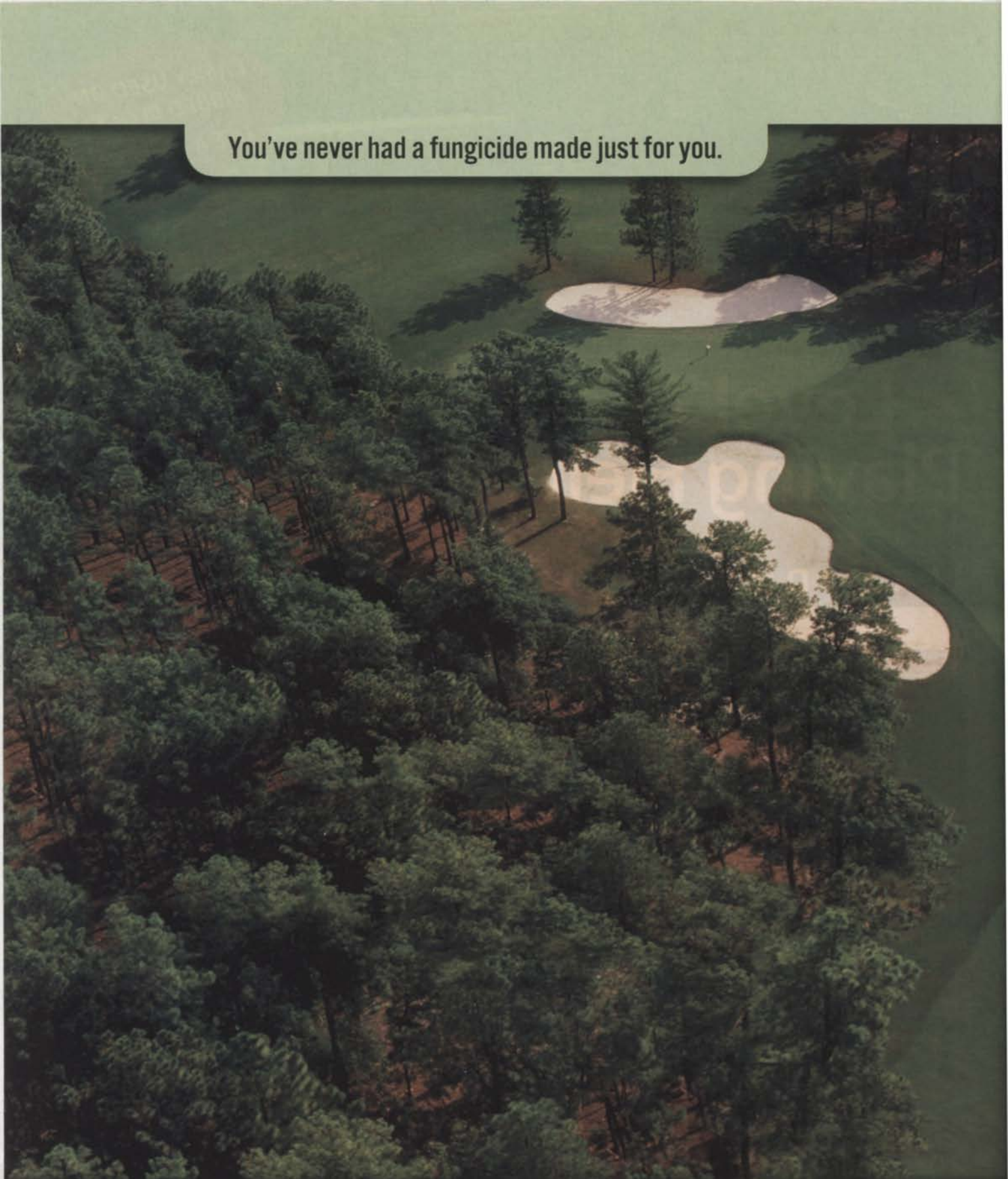
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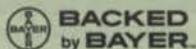


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Quality Matters

One thing you learn as a magazine editor is that you will get called on your mistakes. Sometimes it comes in the mail as a photocopied page with a typo circled in red. Or the message might be delivered via e-mail, or a phone call with a pregnant pause at the end to hammer home the message: "You misspelled such-and-such on page 28 in your last issue...." Translation: "You're supposed to be the editor and I'm smarter than you!" And the caller's point is what?

I actually don't mind getting called on errors. Well, that's not exactly true when it comes to my columns. Helen Duerr, our production director, likes to stop by my office and hand me a copy of my column with any errors circled. The standing joke between she and I is that every typo costs me \$5. I'm running up a hefty tab, even if Social Security does make it, I'm not sure there is enough money for me to settle up with Helen.

Mistakes do happen. In fact, it's nearly impossible to prevent every typo from getting through. But you have to be eternally vigilant to try to stop them. On a previous magazine I once took a third and final look at a cover. My heart almost stopped when I noticed the issue date and year – the month was right, the year was the previous year. I had already looked at this cover twice before as had two other editors on staff. How did it almost slip through all those eyes? We just took it for granted that the year was right. How did it happen in the first place? The art director combined the graphic template from last year's cover with the new image and headlines but neglected to update the year in the process.

Accepting mistakes as mistakes is a dangerous practice. A few years back a quality control specialist provided statistics that illustrate how important quality really is. He said that if 99.9 percent were an acceptable quality standard it would mean:

- 32,000 missed heartbeats per person per year.
- 22,000 checks deducted from the wrong bank every hour.
- 500 incorrect surgical operations per week.
- One hour of unsafe drinking water each month.
- 16,000 pieces of mail lost by the U.S. Postal Service every hour.

In my business the concept of functional quality is clear: Words have to be spelled correctly and proper grammar used. Captions need to match photos. Page numbers need to be in sequence.

How about in your business? Do your crews have a clear concept of what quality is and what it looks like? Here's a suggestion: The next time you meet with your crews, ask them to define quality for their jobs. Write down what they say and discuss it. You might also ask them about quality work as it relates to "internal" customers – mechanics, supervisors and office staff. The answers could be enlightening. **LL**

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USE READER SERVICE # 15



10 Sales Improvement Tips

1. Listen. Good salespeople get to the root of the problem and/or need. Many times if you listen well to your client and encourage them to tell you more or to tell you everything they don't like about their landscape, you can uncover all kinds of other potential jobs to perform.
2. Sell the result, not the feature. For a lawn care company the fact that your fertilizer is a ratio of 32-5-10 means little or nothing to most clients. But an incredible, healthy weed-free lawn does appeal to the prospect.
3. Take the prospect's point of view. Put yourself in your client's shoes and speak to their needs. It doesn't matter what you think; it matters what your client thinks.
4. Keep in contact with "old" clients. They bought from you in the past and will buy from you again if you ask. Ways to keep in contact: Do a newsletter, call them, e-mail them, stop by and inspect their landscape or send them a note.
5. Deliver as promised. Good salespeople don't stop selling once the sale is made. They stay on top of things to make sure they are done exactly as promised.
6. Take the consultative approach. Sales professionals who always have their client's best interests in mind will do better than those who don't.
7. Show your clients what's possible. Even though your client might have said they only want to spend \$5,000 on new landscaping, show them what they can do for \$10,000. Always be respectful of their budget, but there's nothing wrong with showing them the landscaping for \$5,000 and some nightlighting and a water garden for another \$5,000. How many French Fries do you think fast food restaurants sell just by asking? This is frequently referred to as suggestive selling, and it works.
8. Ask your clients for referrals. People who were good clients for you probably have friends, family and neighbors who could also be clients. Tell your clients this, "We consider a referral the ultimate compliment. If you ever know someone who could benefit from our services, would you please send them our way?" Then if they do send you someone, make sure you send them a thank-you note or a small, special gift, if that's appropriate.
9. Send clients unsolicited proposals. This one really works well for most companies. If your staff is slow, instruct them to go through their "proposal pending" files. These are the files every salesperson should keep that have copies of proposals that you did not sell. Take them out, put a fresh date on them and resend them to your prospects and clients with a note that reminds them you'd still like to work with them.
10. Lastly, don't try any tricks or high pressure tactics. There's nothing wrong with creating a sense of urgency or by reminding clients spring is your busiest time of the year and if they want their work done before July, they'd better let you know. However, telling them they have to sign a contract right there on the spot or the price goes up tomorrow is silly and will cost you sales in the long run.

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.

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Improve Profits

All companies must improve operations from year to year. This requires a focus on running your business in the most efficient, ethical and employee friendly way possible. Improvements boost a company's bottom line, which is a win for both the company owners and the employees. This is a good time of the year to review a few key areas that will assist in producing the desired profits.

LABOR HOURS. In my opinion, companies that prioritize labor hours as a top concern will be successful. Without this focus you're asking for some unpleasant surprises when the financials arrive on your desk. Keep labor hours in line all year by:


- Providing each foreman with the budgeted labor hours for every job, whether it is for maintenance, installation, enhancements or remedial work. This is essential.
- Offering feedback to foremen at least once a week regarding the status of their budgeted hours. These regular reports let the crew know how they're doing relative to the detail most important to determining profit.
- Recognizing crews that produce the best labor efficiency. This may be a monthly reward for each crewmember, such as a gift certificate or cash, but recognition alone is powerful.

The bottom line is that all labor hours must be tracked on every job. Accomplishing this requires an accurate estimating system for all the work you produce, as well as systems to accurately track hours using time sheets. And, most importantly, you'll need office staff that will systematically collect and report all of this on a timely basis. Your office staff should focus on these labor-monitoring systems first, making the production of payroll checks a second priority. Consider farming out payroll services as it is inexpensive and leaves your office staff with time for more important projects.

QUALITY. You can't survive in business very long without providing clients with the highest quality. You can "talk the talk," but unless you have a system in place to ensure your crews are "walking the walk," you might receive a surprise from a client who cancels their contract or refuses to make the final payment.

As the owner or operations manager, a better way to stay on top of your company's quality standards is for you, yourself, to visit projects on a regular basis. At many companies I work with, I see owners captured in the office by duties that are less important than checking the quality of work in the field. I recommend setting aside as much as one full day each week, depending on the size of your organization, to visit sites and judge crews' work quality.

Taking this task to another level, try developing a system that will enable you to "score" jobs and identify areas of deficiency vs. high quality. Job scores are yet another piece of information that can be posted to keep crews informed of the work they're doing and also provide another opportunity for rewards and recognition. To do this successfully, you must commit to visiting sites regularly. If you begin this type of system and then decide you don't have time to follow through, you'll quickly find that the focus on quality will also wane. Make the commitment and be consistent – your clients will notice.

These labor and quality concepts are probably not new to you, but unless you have the systems in place to instill them in your culture, it's easy to have another year just like the last one. Make a commitment to growing your business each and every year in order to provide the opportunities for your employees. Provide high quality and track labor hours – you can't do that and not make money. Develop the systems, ask for help if you need it and have some fun this year. Here's to your profits. 

jack mattingly

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



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USE READER SERVICE # 17



Sexual Harassment: Same Problem, Greater Liability

Just about anything can constitute harassment depending on who is defining the terms. Today, employees who refuse unwanted sexual advances, but who suffer no negative job consequences, can file suits. In other words, threats alone create liability. Perhaps most unbelievable of all is that an employer can be held liable for sexual harassment by a supervisor even if he or she had no knowledge of the supervisor's misconduct. Today, if your business receives a charge of sexual harassment discrimination and you can't prove that you attempted to prevent or eliminate the liability, you're guilty.

No question, the rules have changed. And, let's not forget virtual communication. With e-mail, graphic Web sites and photographic scanning ability, employers have a whole new set of challenges. Regardless, the bottom line from the government agencies and courts is clear: Whether or not a company has seen or knows about harassment, there is a responsibility for preventing and eradicating it.

So, what can you do to reduce exposure to sexual harassment? We recommend a three-prong triangle of protection:

1. Develop, disseminate, and vigorously enforce a policy against harassment. Ensure your policy prohibits same-sex harassment and cyber-sexual harassment, provides multiple channels for making complaints known to management, ensures confidentiality to the extent possible and prohibits retaliation.

2. Conduct periodic sexual harassment training at all levels. Include the CEO or president and all managers. Document attendance. We recommend that training be conducted annually.


3. Take every complaint seriously and investigate immediately. It doesn't matter if the complaint is lodged by a "habitual trouble-maker," if it seems trivial or if the complainant will not submit the complaint

in writing. Investigate it immediately. Better yet, hire a third-party, qualified HR professional to conduct a neutral, comprehensive investigation. Then, take appropriate action based on the results.

Many sexual harassment incidents in the workplace could be avoided by simply ensuring professional communication in the workplace. Managers must "model the behavior desired and required."

Employers may also be liable for acts of non-employees with regard to sexual harassment of employees in the workplace. Furthermore, employers could be liable for claims of sexual harassment when an employee is sexually harassing people outside the company. In cases like these, employers relieve much of their liability when they respond quickly to complaints.

The best way to reduce your exposure and limit liability is to take proactive measures to discourage harassment in the workplace including proper and ongoing training of managers and supervisors. An annual management workshop covering this topic and updating managers on trends, changes in employment regulations, and enforcement guidelines, is smart. If you haven't had a training session on sexual harassment within the last year, now is the time.

Don't wait until it's too late. One claim can ruin careers, tarnish the company image, demotivate other workers, and result in significant monetary liability. Wouldn't it be much wiser to prevent all this? 

www.lawnandlandscape.com

Jean Seawright shares more tips on eradicating workplace sexual harassment in the May Online Extras section, including 14 tips for reducing exposure to harassment claims.

jean seawright

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

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NY Turf Industry Statistics Revealed

ALBANY, N.Y. – The New York Agricultural Statistics Service released its New York Turfgrass Survey, which contains 2003 statistics. The survey was compiled in November 2004 and was supported by the New York State Turfgrass Association and the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets.

"In recent years, the turf industry has become an increasingly important sector of New York's economy," said Nathan Rudgers, commissioner, Department of Agriculture and Markets, the State of New York. "As a result of this survey, we are better able to understand the actual impact of this industry on our businesses, our homes and on our state's economy."

According to the survey results, New York's lawn care service companies accounted for 649,350 service accounts in 2003, an average of 333 accounts per company. These New York lawn care companies maintained a total of 278,850 acres.

The survey also established that a total of 21,450 new turf acres were established by lawn care service companies at a cost of more than \$43 million.

In 2003, New York lawn care service companies employed 5,850 full-time and 7,800 part-time employees for a total of 13,650 employees. Total payroll for these employees was more than \$154 million. The value of turf equipment owned

EQUIPMENT OUTLOOK

NTEA Says Truck Production to Decline, Exports to Rise

According to the National Truck Equipment Association's (NTEA) truck equipment sales index, commercial truck equipment sales increased steadily throughout 2004, growing 6.8 percent in the first quarter, 19.9 percent in the second quarter and 23.6 percent in the third quarter. Sales data for the fourth quarter was not available as of press time.

According to the Federal Reserve, truck production numbers were also on an upswing in 2004. Class 8 chassis production grew by 48.2 percent, while medium-duty production increased 44.9 percent. Since the medium-duty production data includes Classes 3 through 7, and none of those classes registered a rate of growth as high as 44.9 percent in 2004, it appears that me-

diu-duty chassis inventories were increasing. This is also true for Class 8, but the difference in sales and production growth rates was not as significant for the heavy-duty segment of the market.

The trailer segment of the industry also saw impressive growth in 2004. Production increased 25.3 percent for the year. This rise in production was necessary to support continued increases in freight shipments throughout 2004. However, the growth rate of freight shipments decelerated from 7.6 percent in the second quarter to 6.3 percent in the third quarter and closed the year with a growth of 2.4 percent. Freight shipments in the first quarter of 2005 will determine if trailer manufacturers need to continue increasing production at a high rate of growth.

The forecast for 2005 remains quite





LABOR SOLUTIONS

or leased by lawn care service companies totaled more than \$174 million.

Weeds were the top turf management problem for New York private residences in 2003, with 58 percent reporting. Another 36 percent said insects and grubs were the top problem, 28 percent said poor soil was a top issue, 22 percent said excessive shade was a problem and 20 percent said moles/voles were an issue. Poor drainage and drought came in at 17 and 16 percent, respectively.

Private New York residences spent more than \$3.24 billion on turf maintenance expenses in 2003, with paid labor accounting for \$965 million – or 29.8 percent – of their total expenses.

As Rudgers explained, "Economically, environmentally and aesthetically, the turf industry is important to all New Yorkers." – Nicole Wisniewski

positive, one reason being expected growth in the industrialized world – namely primary trading partners. That would normally bode well for U.S. exports of commercial truck equipment, but for the first half of 2005, exports should be boosted beyond normal by the depreciated dollar. In addition, capital expenditures are expected to continue increasing while interest rates remain historically low.

NTEA also points out that in 2005 the trend of rising steel prices established in 2002, which continued through 2003 and 2004, appears to be nearing an end. – Steve Latin-Kasper, *NTEA Truck Equipment Outlook*



more information

To see new products introduced at the NTEA's Work Truck Show, go to page 122.

Student Career Days 2005 – Not Just a Student Competition

The 29th Annual PLANET Student Career Days held March 19 - 22 at the University of Maryland, College Park, Md., proved to be more than just a competition among students proving themselves in landscape and horticulture events. For more than 80 lawn and landscape contracting companies with booths at the event's career fair, recruitment was just as much a competitive event as paver installation or irrigation assembly.

"The industry has become so strong that there's a huge demand for landscape students – so much so that there aren't enough students to fill all the available positions," said Steve Cohan, program coordinator for the University of Maryland's department of natural resource sciences and landscape architecture. "We've never seen a career fair so aggressive as it has been this year. In the future I'd like to coordinate a career fair that's open to the whole university to showcase the opportunities in the green industry to other students."

Several first-time participants in the career fair were among the companies vying for qualified graduates to fill full-time and internship positions. Juan Vila, president of Vila & Son, Miami, Fla., said he was hoping to find soon-to-be graduates for each of the company's three branches in Miami, Orlando, and West Palm Beach.

Likewise, Tony Sposato, owner of Sposato Landscape, Milton, Del., was interested in finding some new full-time employees and said he enjoyed the atmosphere and opportunity the career fair afforded his company as an employer. "This is our first time at Student Career Days, so we're really gathering resumes and meeting people," he said. "Whether we find new employees or not, it's the networking that's really the important part. This kind of event helps us get our name out and the students will remember us when we come to future career days. A lot of the students are underclassmen and aren't getting ready to graduate, so even though they might just be looking for internships now, by the time next year rolls around, they'll be looking for full-time jobs."

Southern Illinois University junior Bekah Bruns echoed

continued on page 24






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† Based on 2003 Commercial Truck Quality Study.

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continued from page 21

Labor Solutions

these comments. "This is my first Student Career Days and all the students who attended last year told us that it would great – and they were right," she said. "It's really amaz-

ing the number of employers that are here and how many opportunities the students have to get their names and experience out there and find a job in their field."

So what are those employers looking for in potential new employees? Some seasoned career fair participants shared some insights into the characteristics successful candidates exhibit.

"Over the course of the Student Career Days event, we'll probably interview 15 to 20 candidates and it's great if we get one or two new hires from that," said Ben Gandy, director of horticulture for Scapes, Atlanta, Ga. "What we do is take names and prequalify candidates during the career fair and set up times for interviews later in the day. We're not necessarily looking for someone with technical experience – at this point, it's really about their character. Are they ready to work? Are they enthusiastic? Are they passionate about what they do and the career field they're getting into? Those are the real characteristics we look for."



such, wide-eyed amazement, nerves and a less-than-formal state of dress aren't uncommon, and employers should keep these states of mind in perspective when interviewing candidates.

Damian Barber, a branch manager for TruGreen LandCare, agreed that ambitious students are what his company looks for at career fairs and mentioned that his original position with TruGreen LandCare came when he was a student at the State University of New York at Cobleskill. "I participated in Student Career Days when I was in college and that's when the opportunities at TruGreen LandCare were presented to me," said the career fair veteran. "Since then, TruGreen and a number of other companies have made tremendous

Gandy also said employers need to remember that, for many students, career fairs may be their first ever interviews. As

commitments to events like Student Career Days, and that's really important in such a growing industry."

Barber said TruGreen is looking to expand and was expecting double-digit hiring at the career fair to fill positions at branches throughout the country.

All in all, Cohan had positive comments to say about this year's event. "The career fair is a really important adjunct to the whole campus event and we're very proud of how well it went and the response it got from both employers and students," he said. "Speaking for the University of Mary-



land in particular, we find that a lot of students seek out job opportunities locally, and I'm sure that's true at other institutions as well. In addition

to helping students and employers come together to network and form partnerships, we really hope career fair participants take a look at their entire field and see the scope of jobs and internships available to them throughout the industry and around the country." – Lauren Spiers



FOCUS ON DESIGN

TNLA Presents Landscaping Awards

The Texas Nursery & Landscape Association (TNLA) presented its 2004 Texas Excellence in Landscaping (TEIL) Awards at its awards dinner in San Antonio, Texas. The TEIL Awards program recognizes excellence in landscape design, installation and maintenance. Presenting the awards was TNLA Chairman Mike Branch. Co-masters of ceremonies were TNLA State Landscape Director Mark Harris and TNLA Landscape Committee Advisor Mike Arnold, a professor at Texas A&M University. TEIL Awards are presented annually in several categories and on three levels of recognition, with bronze, silver and gold winners, and a special TNLA Grand Platinum Award. Take a photo tour of the 2004 winning landscapes at www.lawnandlandscape.com.



Photo: TNLA Grand Platinum Award-winning landscape by McDugald-Steele in Houston



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MERGERS & ACQUISITIONS

Bartlett Tree Experts Acquires Waterworks Irrigation



OSTERVILLE, MASS. – The F.A. Bartlett Tree Expert Co. adds design, installation and maintenance of watering and sprinkler systems to its tree and shrub care services in the Cape Cod, Mass. area with the acquisition of Waterworks Irrigation, Osterville, Mass.

While Greg Daniels, president of Bartlett Tree Experts, notes that Bartlett has no immediate plans to extend irrigation services beyond the Cape Cod market, this arrangement affords the company the opportunity to evaluate its ability to provide water management services. "If we find that customers embrace this new offering, we may consider adding these services in other areas that we operate," he says, adding that any acquisitions of tree care or other services will continue to operate under the Bartlett brand and management of the company's executive staff.

This acquisition is the seventh completed this year by Bartlett Tree Experts. The acquired companies include Jordan Tree Care in North Carolina, Bailey Tree Service in Connecticut, Arbor Care in California, Arbour Care in Canada and Branchline Tree Solutions and Four Seasons Tree Care in Great Britain. Bartlett is in the process of integrating these companies into its organization.

MANUFACTURER MINUTES

Bayer to Move its North American Headquarters

Bayer Environmental Science announced that its business group will move its North American operations from Montvale, N.J., and Birmingham, Ala., to Research Triangle Park, N.C., the Region Americas headquarters for Bayer CropScience.

The move is intended to increase efficiencies within the company overall by bringing together all three of its business groups, BioScience, Crop Protection, and now Environmental Science, in one location. The move, projected for mid-2005, will allow closer coordination among these three business groups and the company's support functions.

Bayer Environmental Science employs approximately 90 people collectively in Montvale and Birmingham. Currently, Bayer CropScience employs about 375 people at its Research Triangle Park headquarters.

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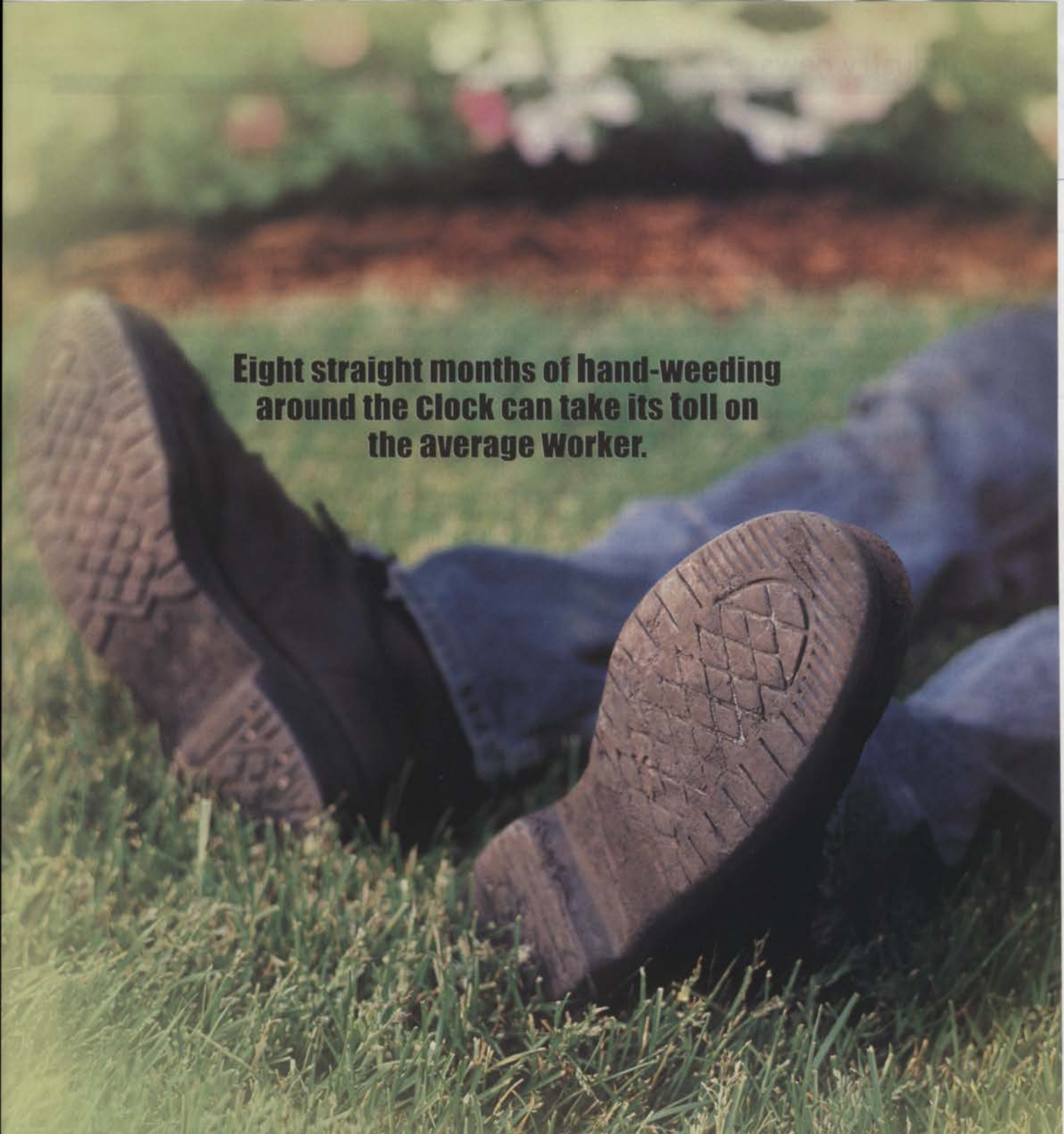
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ASIAN TSUNAMI DISASTER



Save the Children.

Bayer Makes \$260,000 Relief Contribution

Bayer Corp., parent company of Bayer Environmental Science, made a \$260,000 donation to Save the Children, a nonprofit organization focusing on the welfare of children in crisis and emergency situations. The donation will go to help children victimized by the earthquake and tsunami that struck Southeast Asia in December 2004.

Bayer had organized a program to match U.S. employees' monetary donations dollar-for-dollar. Just three weeks after establishing the program, donations topped the quarter-of-a-million-dollar mark.

Bayer's \$260,000 donation will help Save the Children carry out long-term rebuilding and recovery projects, including skills training; loan assistance; repairing and rebuilding of schools, homes and health centers; and providing emotional support for trauma victims.

In other news from Bayer Corp., corporate lead Bayer AG, headquartered in Leverkusen, Germany, also announced that it has increased its aid for the tsunami-region flood victims. The sum of EUR 10 million (approximately

\$13,243,544) in cash and non-cash donations promised just a few days after the tsunami has now been raised to around EUR 13 million (approximately \$17,217,074).

Together with other German companies, Bayer is also involved in setting up a number of medical centers in India and contributing towards the salaries of the medical staff. The possibility of building centers such as these in Sri Lanka is also being examined. Bayer has promised a total of EUR 500,000 (approximately \$662,253) to support this aspect of the campaign.

In the "Indogerm-direct" initiative in Indonesia, which is being run under the German Embassy and the German-Indonesian Chamber of Trade and Industry, some companies, including Bayer, have decided to finance medium and long-term reconstruction measures via a trust account. Bayer will subsidize this project with a sum of EUR 500,000 (approximately \$662,253).

"It is now a matter of continuing to support people in Southeast Asia who are in dire need," said Werner Wenning, chairman of the board of management of Bayer AG, "and helping to rebuild the countries over the long term."

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- 3. Use custom-designed stationery.** Only the first page needs the designed letterhead, so purchase identical blank paper for the rest.
- 4. Have classy business cards.** Your cards should stand up in quality to those of the largest companies. The letterhead and cards can be carried out without designing a new logo. Logos can be pricey – \$1,000 to \$2,000. If this stretches your budget too much, put it off for later.
- 5. Write articles for trade publications.** These articles, when published, can be used in your marketing and give your company credibility and the image of professionalism. Speak with editors of targeted publications to select topics on which you're an expert. Hire a writer to help you if you don't feel confident to write the articles yourself. Don't expect the editor of the magazine to write them for you.
- 6. Send out press releases.** Press releases are free publicity. If you're not experienced in writing releases, pick up a book on the subject or consult with a professional press-release writer.
- 7. Dress the part.** Put on business attire for meetings with customers, financial sources, networking contacts and others with whom you do business. – Jeffrey Moses, National Federation of Independent Businesses (www.nfib.com)

MONEY MANAGEMENT

Plug Those Cash Flow Leaks

Stop making the same old mistakes year after year that drain your business of cash. Make a commitment today to better understand your cash flow leaks and stop them. Here are three tips to help you plug cash flow leaks in your company.

1. Understand Your Peak and Trough Cash Months.

The peak cash month is that month (or months) where your cash balance is generally at its highest point during the year. The trough cash month is just the opposite. It is the month (or months) where your cash balance is generally at its lowest point during the year. Here's where many business owners make a big mistake with their cash flow. When they are in their peak cash month, they feel really good about their cash flow because they have a nice cash balance. Then they make decisions that use or commit that money not realizing that they are using cash they will need in order to get them through the trough month. The result is a "cash flow problem" when the inevitable trough month arrives and there is not enough cash to get through that period. This is one of the major killers of small businesses today.

2. Pay Special Attention to Capital Expenditures.

Capital expenditures is a category that can surprise you unless you actively manage and control it each month. A capital expenditure is recorded on your balance sheet rather than as an expense in your income statement. The cost of the asset you purchased is then depreciated over the life of the asset. As a result, you don't see the cost of that expenditure show up immediately in your income statement. It's this accounting treatment for capital expenditures that makes it so important that you manage it closely – very closely. I worked with a client once that learned this lesson the hard way. They did a good job during the year of keeping their expenses in line with the budget. The big surprise came at the end of the year when the president realized that capital expenditures had more than doubled during the year. Capital expenditures totaled almost \$200,000 for the year compared to less than \$100,000 the previous year. What happened? Management was so focused on the income statement and keeping expenses down that they let over \$100,000 leak out of the company through the "back door." There was no capital expenditures budget. There was no accountability for how this cash was being used in the company.

3. Watch Accounts Payable Closely.

One of the things you want to watch out for is whether you are improving your cash flow by not paying your bills as they become due. I can't tell you how many businesses I have seen that boosted their cash flow temporarily by dragging out payments to vendors without ever addressing the underlying problem. The problem that needs to be addressed is the one causing cash flow to be so tight in the first place. If you ever get to the point of not being able to pay your bills on time, stop and take the time to find out why. Is it an accounts receivable problem, an inventory problem, a revenue or expense problem, etc. Find the cause of the problem. This will put your attention on the area of your business that is leaking the cash. Then you can put your time and energy into plugging the leak. Remember, your success in business will ultimately be determined by the degree to which you create, and hang onto, your cash flow. One of the most rewarding activities you can undertake is to become maniacal about understanding and closely managing each area of your business that creates or uses cash. – Philip Campbell, www.lnc.com





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Top headlines from 2000-2005 Lawn & Landscape's first 25 years

July 2000 –

Dursban Defeated.

Dow AgroSciences voluntarily withdraws chlorpyrifos from most residential uses in an agreement with the Environmental Protection Agency. The organophosphate insecticide came under intense scrutiny as part of the Food Quality Protection Act.

November 2000 – Environment Won't Rock Votes.

An election-year Gallup Poll shows that the environment ranked ninth among 14 voter issues. The top concern was education, followed closely by the economy and health care.

April 2001 – Proposed H-2B Bill May Increase Visas.

A proposed bill is being pushed to increase the cap for work-related visas from 66,000 per year to 120,000.

September 2001 – New York County Reinstates Notification Law.

The Appellate Division of the State Supreme Court ruled to reinstate a pesticide notification law in Nassau County, N.Y. The law requires 48 hours advanced notice before spraying to anyone living within 150 feet.

October 2001 – Corporate Recovery After a Crisis.

Following the tragic events of 9-11 contractors say they hope public anxiety is not detrimental to business.

EDITOR'S NOTE: This year, Lawn & Landscape begins its 25th 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.



January 2002 –

Contractors Have a New Competitor: Home Depot.

TruGreen-ChemLawn announces plans to test co-branding its services through 30 Home Depot stores. (In August, the companies announced the program's end as the results failed to meet expectations.)

December 2002 – Telemarketing Rules and Regulations: Hanging Up.

Contractors are reconsidering telemarketing in their market efforts due to state and national proposals to limit it.

January 2003 – The Great Outdoors.

A survey of readers shows that 65 percent entered the landscape industry because they "loved the work and being outdoors." The No. 2 reason was that it was a good business opportunity (15 percent) and No. 3 was the need for a job (10 percent).

June 2003 – EPA Proposes to Reduce Engine Emissions.

Plans to reduce emissions from non-road diesel engines are being considered to improve air quality.

August 2003 – Toronto Pesticide Battle Turns Contractors into Activists.

Toronto-area contractors have turned to grass roots lobbying to counter a proposed ban of "cosmetic" use of pesticides.

July 2004 – Gas Prices Generate Internal Combustion.

Sharply higher gas prices are causing concern among contractors and prices are expected to hit the \$1.60 to \$1.70 per gallon range by fall.

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Overhead Awareness

by jonathan katz

Rick Girard never received a college degree. And in retrospect, Girard says maybe he didn't need one. Girard's business lessons came from real-world experiences while running his own landscape companies. When he started his first business at 19, Girard was like many young entrepreneurs: ambitious but unprepared for the responsibilities that accompany a growing enterprise.

By the time Girard turned 26, his South Florida business, Girard's Landscaping & General Maintenance, had an annual revenue of almost \$1 million and more than 30 full-time employees. But by Girard's own admission, he wasn't mature enough to make the "tough decisions" that define successful business owners.

Girard was paying salaries he couldn't afford, eventually forcing the company into bankruptcy. He later rebounded after a stint with a nationally recognized landscape firm before starting another company called Outdoor Concepts in 1996. Still in debt from his previous business, Girard sought partners to help him invest in the company.

After financial disputes with two different associates, Girard left Outdoor Concepts in 1998 and created Sanford,

Fla.-based Girard Environmental Services with his brother Randy, who is an equal owner and chief operating officer of the company. Now 35, Girard has used his past mistakes to help the company grow from first-year revenues of \$73,000 to more than \$15 million in 2004.

You say some bad decisions led to your first company's bankruptcy. What were they? I didn't have the guts to make the decisions that I needed to make to save the company. Our total gross sales were less than \$1 million, and we grew too fast without having direction. We had way too much overhead, and we didn't pay our payroll taxes – so not being profitable and subsidizing our profit with payroll money is what ultimately put us out of business.

Also, my dad had recently been laid off from a large corporation and came to work for us, and we couldn't afford to pay my salary, my brother's salary and my dad's salary, so we basically had three families trying to make a living off of a company that was doing about \$70,000 a month in gross sales, and that just didn't work. On top of that, I was new in the business. It was the first time I had ever hired manag-



Rick (left) and Randy Girard. Photo: Girard Environmental Services

ers and the first time I had ever run my own business. Things went great the first four years. We started getting our own warehouse, started hiring more overhead positions – just not realizing that it all cost money. The company didn't grow fast enough to keep up with all of the overhead. We struggled through it for two years instead of saying, 'Hey this ain't working.'

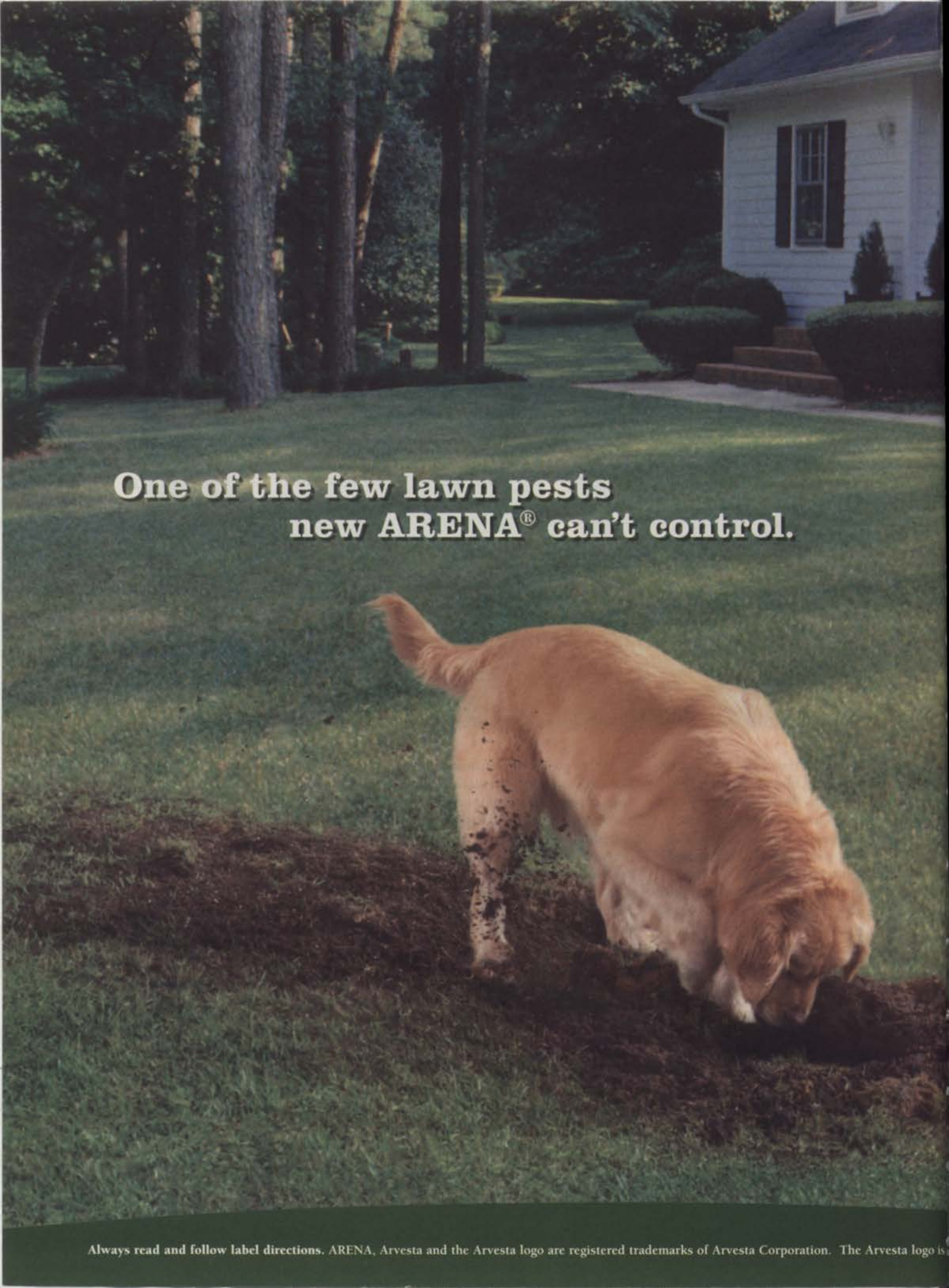
How did you rebound from that business experience? I didn't have my truck, and I didn't have a job, so I borrowed \$1,000 from my father-in-law, bought a truck, put \$1,000 down on it, and that was the beginning of getting back on my feet. I made our guest bedroom my office. Two people helped me out considerably – one was Chris Hine. He was always a good customer, and he gave me

\$1,000 to go out and buy materials. He also ran a company that was one of our large commercial accounts here in town, and he gave me that job back when nobody else would give me a job. The other person was Steve Gegner at D&J Equipment, and he allowed me to buy a mower, an edger and a weed eater, and he financed that out of his pocket. With these things, I got back on my feet. That was the beginning of Outdoor Concepts.

So what does that say about the importance of forming relationships in business? Hine felt comfortable with me doing his work even though I wasn't very good at managing money because he liked my quality of work. With Gegner, I remember when we were going out of business and we didn't have the \$800 we owed him, so

we paid him \$100 a month, and my dad hand-delivered the \$100 to him every month. That was significant to Gegner because he deals with a lot of lawn guys, and it just wasn't something those guys do. They either avoid you or just send you a check. They don't want to see you just because of the pride factor. He was impressed with the way we handled it. I think relationships are very important, and I think always doing what you say you're going to do, no matter how hard it is, is also very important.

What was the most challenging part about restarting a business? The most challenging part was being in the same industry in the same town as we were before. When Girard's Landscaping went out of business, everybody started

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

**One of the few lawn pests
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blaming Girard for why they had a bad year: 'You know, we didn't get paid by Girard's Landscaping or companies like Girard's Landscaping make it hard on our industry.' We were blamed for a lot of people's misfortunes. That's why I named the business Outdoor Concepts.

How did you overcome that? We got

over it by doing business with other people. I had to have partners because of my credit, but unfortunately everybody has a greedy side. The partnership didn't work, so I had a meeting with my three employees and told them you can either work for my old partner or come work for us, and they chose to work for us. We started an \$8,000 cleanup job,

took my brother's credit card to Home Depot and bought \$2,000 worth of equipment. We got paid the \$8,000, and that was the seed money. There was no investment or outside money.

What did this teach you about working with partners? The difference now is we're family. Another thing that I think is significant is my brother and I are very different when it comes to our abilities. We compliment each other well. I'm more of the executive-type financial planner – more of a forward-thinking person. My brother is more the day-to-day function of the company – the scheduling and dealing with the employees. I enabled him to focus on the operations side of the business, and he enabled me to focus on the vision side of the business.

So it helps having that separation of duties? Absolutely. And we always help each other. It is just an unwritten rule that that is his job and this is my job. That doesn't mean I don't go out in the field and help, but it also doesn't mean that he doesn't sit in the office and give his opinion on how he feels things should be done here. He assists me in what I do, and I assist him in what he does, but each of us has our own clear direction.

What are you doing differently today to make sure you have more control over the company's finances? With the old business, I didn't really even know what a balance sheet was. I'm not a landscaper anymore – I'm a businessman. Instead of waiting until the end of the month to see what the profit is, I track it more closely. Right now, we have nine departments and three different divisions, so we don't just track the profit of the company, we track profit and we allocate corporate overhead to each department, so each department is responsible for carrying their share of the overhead. All of our managers carry purchase-order books, so they're authorized to buy for the company. Instead of controlling our managers on their spending, we educate our managers on how to spend and we share our financials. This way, they see what they spend every month and what net profits and gross profits are. It gives them a lot more insight into what makes our company profitable. ^{LL}

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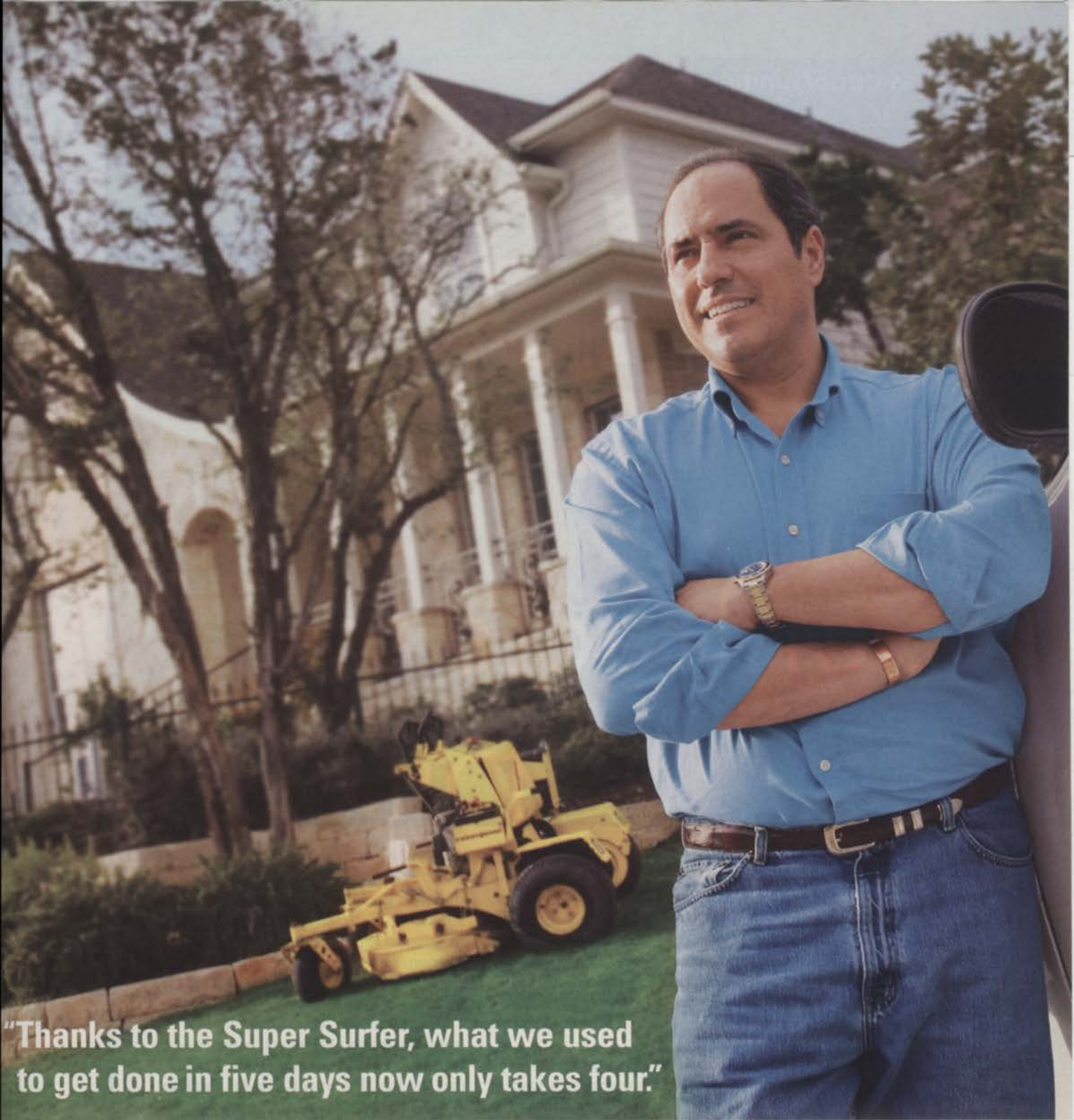
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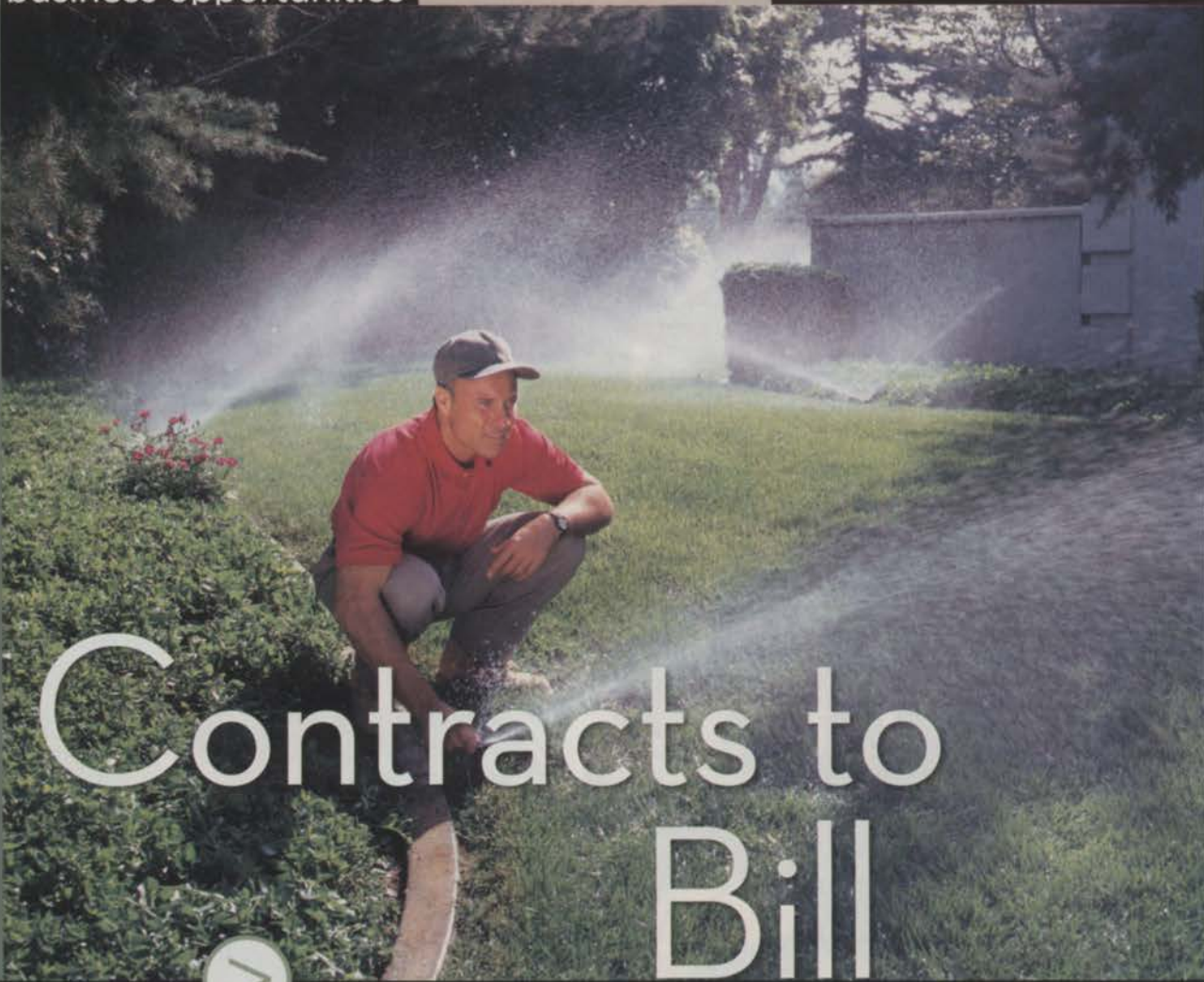
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John Hill, owner, Hill Horticulture, San Antonio, Texas

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Photos: Hunter Industries

Contracts to Bill

by kathleen franzinger

Annual irrigation maintenance contracts increase business and revenue.

When deciding whether or not to offer annual contracts for irrigation maintenance, there is no gray area for Steve Rogers, president, American Lawn Sprinkler Co., Morganville, N.J. "You've got to have them," he says. "They're a better way to run your business."

Most contractors sell irrigation start-up and shutdown services separately each year. But Rogers has found selling the two services, along with a mid-summer checkup via a maintenance contract in the beginning of the year, to be even more effective. For one, it guarantees business for the entire year. "It's very nice to know that you secured the work for the year," says Rogers. "And that it's paid for."

Besides the comfort of knowing he has jobs lined up, Rogers can better schedule

the work. Because he knows early on what service calls he has to make and where, he can plan ahead and organize calls by location. This makes his crew's routes more efficient and allows his men to get more service calls done in a day.

Contractors are aware of the need for irrigation system turn-on and winterization services, but not many add in a mid-summer checkup. Rogers describes the checkup as a quick service, usually performed at the end of July or beginning of August, during which his servicemen seasonally adjust the timer and check sprinkler heads. "Basically, we go through the system again and make sure everything is working properly," he says.

The mid-summer check serves two purposes: It generates income and creates work. "It gets you in the door again to



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evaluate the system," Rogers says, adding that it creates a revenue opportunity. In addition, it keeps his crews busy during the lull in service that typically occurs during that time of the season. "The whole idea is that you want to find more work," he says.

PRICED FOR PROFIT.

Work is something Rogers hasn't had a problem finding. He has about 4,000 active residential and commercial customers. He defines an active customer as anyone he has done business with in the last 12 months. Out of that 4,000, he estimates that 25 to 35 percent sign an irrigation maintenance contract, which equates to about 1,000 contracts per year. On service contracts alone, Rogers is expecting to make



between \$200,000 and \$225,000 in revenue this year, which he estimates to be 5 to 7 percent of his total annual revenue.

He estimates that his annual maintenance contracts bring in a net profit between 12 to 14 percent. "I'm a larger company," he explains. "The average

company is running two trucks, and I'm running 23. I have a 25-percent gross profit, but it's 12 to 14 percent at the end of the day."

To ensure he hits that number, Rogers prices maintenance contracts based on the number of sprinkler heads a system has. He calculates that it costs him \$2 to \$3 a head to service a system, including the cost of the transportation expenses and labor. "When you charge by sprinkler head,

you're really charging by time," he says. "With the cost of gas, insurance and other overhead, you have to get your money back."

To do that, he charges between \$5 and \$6 per sprinkler head, starting with a minimum contract price of \$195. If



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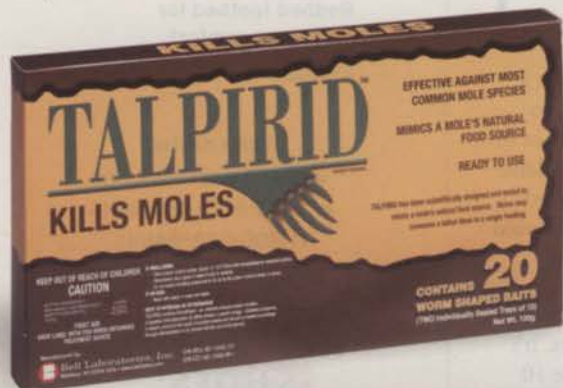
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USE READER SERVICE # 31

there are fewer heads, the charge per head is higher. If there are more heads, the charge per head is less. "So if a customer has 100 heads, we bill them around \$550 for that maintenance agreement," explains Rogers. "If they have 40 sprinklers, it's going to be \$240."

SIGN ON THE DOTTED LINE. To get customers to sign the contract, you have to give them a good reason, says Rogers. That's why he gives customers who sign a contract a 15-percent discount on materials for the entire season. "If somebody knows they have a good amount of work to do in their yard, they'll get a maintenance agreement because it gets them material at a discount," he says.

That brings up an important point about maintenance contracts. Rogers is specific about what the service includes and does not include. For example, materials are not included as part of his contract, so he makes sure the contract clearly states that. "Make sure there are no vague points within the contracts," he advises. "You don't want customers to think that all the parts are included if they're not. You have to be up front and say materials are not included."

Although some contractors do include materials in their maintenance

"People want a contract. They like the peace of mind that comes with only having to write one check for the year" - Steve Rogers

contracts, Rogers steers clear of it. "Some contractors make it like an insurance policy, and they say they'll fix whatever is broken," he says. "But to me, you'll lose your shirt if a job needs a ton of materials." So when customers buy a contract from him, he lets them know it's the labor they're buying, not the materials.

But no matter what contractors do, they can't satisfy everyone. With maintenance contracts, like most services, contractors will always have a few prob-

lem customers. For instance, Rogers keeps a detailed record of when he calls clients to set up service calls. "But I still get that customer who says you never called me to set something up," he says. But that's definitely the minority of customers. Only 1 or 2 percent of the customers Rogers sells contracts to ask for their money back.

MAKING THE SALE. Rogers mails out his maintenance contracts during January and February. Getting an early start ensures enough time to schedule all the service calls. It also generates money during the wintertime. The latter is especially critical for Rogers because he is open year-round.

Contracts are sent in two separate mailings. The first mailing goes out the third week in January and is sent to all active customers. To get the contracts back quickly, he offers customers an incentive: Anyone who buys a contract by March 1 gets a 10-percent discount. "You'd be amazed by what hits the mailbox by March 1," he says. "I get 800 of them back by that date."

The second mailing is sent out a couple of weeks later to customers who haven't used him within the past year. Again, he offers a 10-percent discount to anyone who buys the contract by the deadline, which is usually around March 15th.

The contracts are sent out with a cover letter in which Rogers tries to convey to customers the importance of maintaining their systems. He explains to them that irrigation systems need regular maintenance, just like cars need oil changes. "We tell them maintenance is vital to keep the sprinkler system operating," he says. "You want your system to last 25 to 30 years. It's outside, and whether it's negative 10 or 100 degrees, it affects your sprinkler system."



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The cover letter also offers another opportunity to make income during the winter. Rogers will use the cover letter to let customers know he is having a sale on certain products, such as rain sensors. "I could sell 150 rain sensors over the winter by offering them for \$175 instead of \$225," he says.

But despite incentives or benefits, not every customer will sign a contract.



And despite the money he makes from contracts, Rogers prefers it that way. "When you go to do winterization at the end of the year, you still need to generate revenue," he explains. "You need to generate some income in November, so I'm not after everybody to buy it. I'm happy to get 25 percent of my customers to sign irrigation maintenance agreements."

And he hasn't found it difficult to hit that number, give or take 10 percent, year after year. "People want a contract," he says. "They like the peace of mind that comes with only having to write one check for the year." **LL**

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Visit the *Lawn & Landscape* Online Business Forms section to view copies of maintenance agreements other contractors have in place. Also, to read more irrigation-related stories or to chat about irrigation topics with other contractors, visit *Lawn & Landscape* Online's Magazine Back Issues or Message Board sections.

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USE READER SERVICE # 35

The System is the Secret

Big business principles bring operational sanity and success to Second Nature Lawn Care.

by nicole wisniewski

Before they started Second Nature Lawn Care, Nashville, Tenn. in 1993, Wade Walden and Steve White did what many future business owners have done – they worked hard for others. And they were good at their respective jobs – Walden as a salesman for a binder manufacturer and White as executive assistant manager of a local Walgreen's.

Then one day, for no apparent reason, something happened. For Walden, it was the sheer boredom of selling binders that finally got to him. For White, it was sitting in the break room at Walgreen's during another 80-hour workweek and reading the company's annual report that featured a story on Charles Walgreen III. The article revealed how Walgreen earned \$800,000 in salary before his stock options and showcased a photo of him on the back of a yacht, White says. "I was a manager in waiting and my next promotion

would have put me in the position of managing the whole store and the pharmacy, and after I read this story I said to myself, 'I've got to do something now or I won't be able to walk away from the money. If I'm going to work 100 hours a week, I'm going to do it for me.'"

Two college friends started talking and an idea swelled into an entrepreneurial seizure. But instead of suffering the common demise that befalls many contractors who try to form businesses that encompass services at which they excel, the duo discovered Michael Gerber's *The E-Myth* early on and, as a result, avoided many of these pitfalls.

SKIPPING THE INFANCY STAGE. In the beginning, nothing is too much for the newfound business owner who has finally escaped the boss and is on his own. Most owners revel in this stage because they are doing what they love to do – no hours are too many, no work is too hard.



Steve White (left) and Wade Walden. Photo: Seth Mayer, Seth Mayer Photography



second nature lawn care

HEADQUARTERS: Nashville, Tenn.
FOUNDED: 1993
BRANCHES: Spring Hill and Gallatin, Tenn.
CLIENT MIX: 80 percent residential, 18 percent commercial (office parks, hospitals, educational facilities, etc.) and 3 percent commercial residential (condominiums, apartment buildings, etc.)
SERVICE MIX: 74 percent chemical lawn care, 15 percent seeding and renovation, 10 percent tree and ornamental services and less than 1 percent maintenance/mowing

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2003 Revenue:	\$1.4 million
2002 Revenue:	\$1.2 million
2001 Revenue:	\$1 million
2000 Revenue:	\$1.1 million
1999 Revenue:	\$883,000
1998 Revenue:	\$650,000
1997 Revenue:	\$280,000

MANAGEMENT TEAM:
Co-Owners: Steve White & Wade Walden
CONTACT INFO:
6611 Cool Springs Road,
Thompson Station, Tenn. 37179
PH: 615/254-1005
www.secondnature.net

According to Gerber, three business roles embody each owner – the technician, the manager and the entrepreneur. During the infancy stage, the owner is the technician – the productive doer. But what happens to many owners during these early years is that they continue to do everything themselves and work longer and harder hours to meet customer demands, suffering burnout as a result. Here is where an owner must realize that the purpose of going into business is to get free of a job so he can create jobs for other people – he must advance to the manager level and create systems for the work he does so others can perform tasks to his quality standards. These are *The E-Myth* principles that White and Walden followed.

"First, we made an organizational chart and put our names in the slots," White says. "The goal was to set up systems for performing the tasks in our various roles and then replace ourselves with

employees who could do that work. This way, each time we took off a hat of responsibility as our client base grew, we would have a technician there to wear it and push ourselves to the top of the chart."

To set up systems, White and Walden looked at all of the functions they performed. They broke down daily activities in each area and systemized them. This involved recording the precise steps and timing of each task. "As we recorded this information, we learned new ways to cut down time, and then would incorporate those timesavers into our systems," White says.

Each new employee receives an employee handbook and training manual that includes these systems, and they must sign a form stating that they received these items and were shown various training videos. These signed forms are stored in employee's personnel files.

Also, all new technicians must be ride-along trainees until they get certi-

fied, which must be within the first 90 days of working for Second Nature, based on state law. "We train them and pay for the \$30 study materials and \$15 test," Walden says. "After one year, we give technicians the option of getting their license in addition to their certification, but it's not required. To motivate new employees to become certified route foreman, we tell them that this is the only way they will gain access to bonuses and sales commissions."

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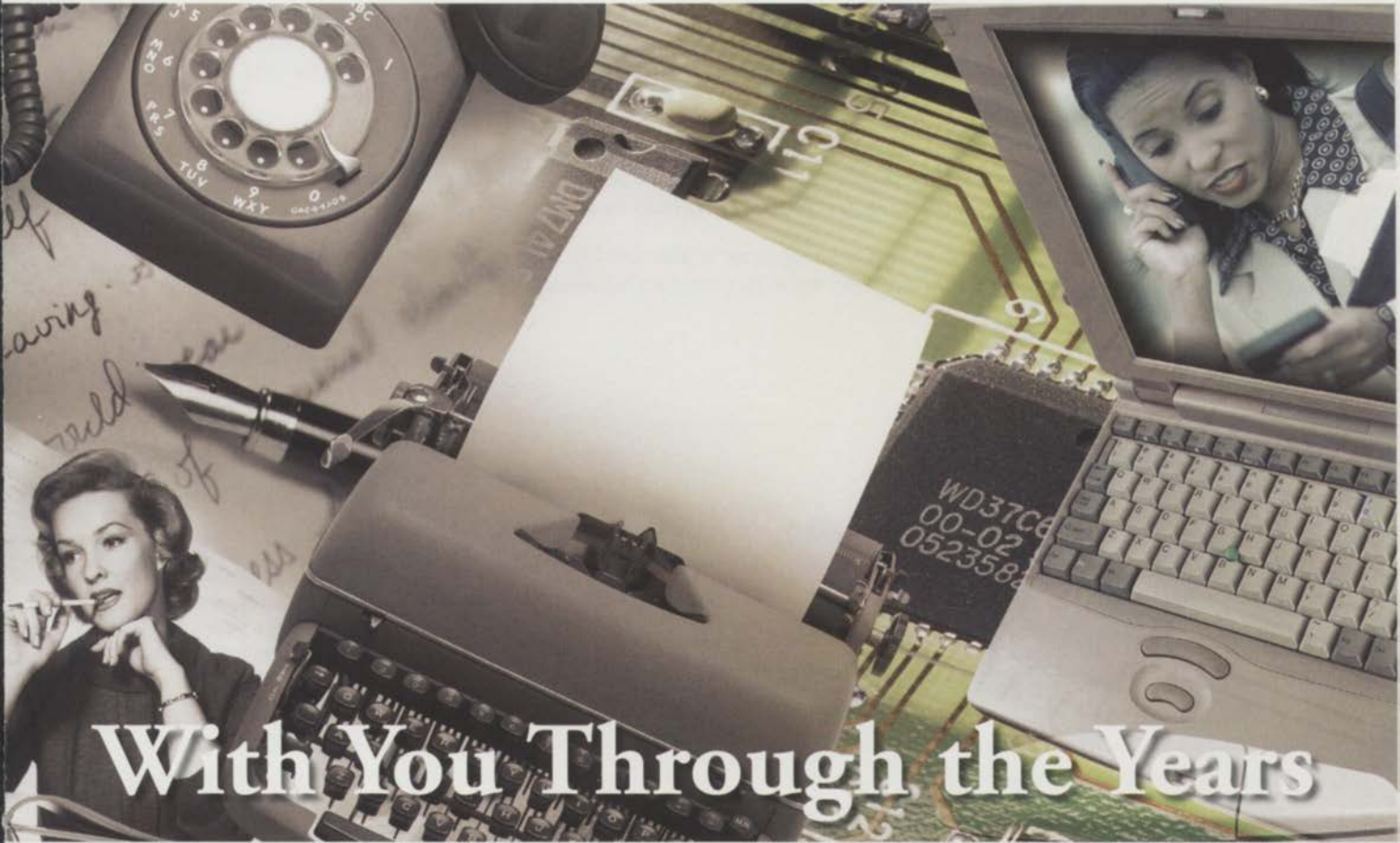
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Dear Clients,

We're all spruced up for spring with a new logo, a new look to the famous Weisburger pen and some new faces around the office eager to help serve you.

At lunch recently, I brought up the subject of where we've been at Weisburger and where we're going.

"Times change over four generations, and a company has got to change with them or quit the business," my father Mark pointed out. "Over the years, we've switched insurers and the way we handle claims, for example – every time it's been for the good of our customers. But some things never change, and we're still committed to delivering the same dependable service in this century that we did in the last one."

Charlie Carnesi chimed in with: "We don't collect premiums door-to-door anymore. In my 40 years and counting with this company, I've seen typewriters give way to computers, and today we're doing business via fax, e-mail, image scanning, voicemail and specialized software – all to help us serve our customers faster and better."

I can tell you that joining forces with a larger company is just another step in our goal of keeping dependable service up to date. Read on and find out why we're so proud of Weisburger's role in the industry and what's new in our offerings.



Working with the Community

You can recognize good citizens by the way they give something back to their community. To be a good corporate citizen, you've got to take part in the life of the business community.

For example, Weisburger Insurance has been a charter member of what is now the National Pest Management Association since it was founded in 1934. We're active participants at NPMA functions like annual and regional meetings and Legislative Day. And members of our staff attend more than 100 industry meetings a year to keep in touch.

Under the Weisburger banner, consultant Dr. Austin Frishman presides at a number of invited speaking engagements each year. And, because we see the business landscape gradually

changing, we keep sponsoring any number of supplemental get-togethers, like events for the Professional Women in Pest Management.

Not everybody knows that the company supports an annual scholarship at Purdue University's Department of Entomology, and has for the past 15 years. On the other hand, most everybody knows that Mark Weisburger, our industry elder statesman, was inducted into the Pest Management Hall of Fame in recognition of his many personal and professional contributions to the pest management industry.

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Michael Weisburger
with this year's Purdue
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Tamika Cunningham, one of the new faces at the office, manages our new commercial auto program. It's open only to clients who have their general liability insurance with us and, for now, is restricted to Arkansas, Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Maryland, Michigan, Missouri, Nebraska, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, Washington and Wisconsin.

According to Tamika, if you prefer the convenience of one-stop shopping for your insurance needs, if you like speed, efficiency and reaching a live human on the phone, the Weisburger auto insurance program is for you. Claims service, on call 24/7, is provided by Midlands who has been handling our claims program very successfully for more than a decade.

Underwriting is flexible and rates competitive, says Tamika, but good driver records and healthy recent claims experience are requirements for signing up. For more information, you can reach her at 800-431-2794/x215 or tcunningham@weisburger.com.



Tamika Cunningham

On another note, Weisburger is now writing umbrella policies nationwide (except for Alabama, Hawaii and Wyoming). Our policy will cover you for losses — up to \$25 million worth — that don't fit under your other policies. For further information reach Courtney Maggio at X241 or cmaggio@weisburger.com.

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understanding business roles

Everybody who goes into business is actually three people in one – the entrepreneur, the manager and the technician.

THE ENTREPRENEUR. The entrepreneurial personality turns the most trivial condition into an opportunity. He is the visionary and dreamer. The entrepreneur lives in the future, never in the past and rarely in the present. Every strong entrepreneurial personality needs control of the people and events in the present so that he can concentrate on his dreams.

Given his need for change, the entrepreneur creates a great deal of havoc around him, which is predictably unsettling for those he enlists in his projects. To the entrepreneur, most people are problems that get in the way of the dream.

THE MANAGER. If the entrepreneur lives in the future, the manager lives in the past. Where the entrepreneur craves control, the manager craves order. Where the entrepreneur thrives on change, the manager compulsively clings to the status quo. Where the entrepreneur sees the opportunity in events, the manager sees the problems. It is the tension between the entrepreneur's vision and the manager's pragmatism that creates the synthesis from which all great works are born.

THE TECHNICIAN. The technician is the doer. If the entrepreneur lives in the future and the manager lives in the past, the technician lives in the present.

As long as the technician is in control of the workflow, he is happy. As a result, the technician mistrusts those he works for because they are always trying to get more work done than is either possible or necessary.

The entrepreneur is always throwing a monkey wrench into the technician's day with the creation of yet another "new idea." But the entrepreneur is always creating new and interesting work for the technician to do, thus establishing a potentially symbiotic relationship.

To the manager, the technician becomes a problem to be managed. To the technician, the manager becomes a meddler to be avoided. To both of them, the entrepreneur is the one who got them into trouble in the first place. – *Michael Gerber's The E-Myth*



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continued from page 50

problem of technicians wasting time on the side of the road reading maps. "With the GPS system, the trucks are geographically coded and mapped," Walden says. "When a technician is lost, all he has to do is call the office and the office manager will punch in his destination address and tell him where he needs to go."

The system also helps managers answer client questions. For instance, if a customer calls saying that the technician did not perform a required service on their property, the salesman can pull up a two-week saved history of roads traveled per truck and inform the customer that the technician was actually there 45 minutes on Monday to conduct the service, Walden points out.

Another big benefit of GPS technology for Second Nature is on-going training and quality improvement. "Typically, you cover 1,000 square feet per minute with a spreader, so a 40,000-square-foot

lawn should take 40 minutes to fertilize, so if I look at the history and notice that a technician was only at the property 15 minutes, then I know he didn't do the work or did it incorrectly," White says. "So I'll tell that technician that we need him to slow down and do the job right. I'll explain to him that the spreader is calibrated to put out 1 gallon of product for 1,000 square feet or that a sprayer is calibrated to put out 1.5 gallons of product for 1,000 square feet, and that his walking speed should be 3 mph. This saves managers some trouble down the road, fixing problems before they get out of control and reinforcing systems to employees."

The initial expense to implement a GPS system was \$400 per truck, and Second Nature has 16 trucks. The company also pays a \$39 monthly service charge. "Right after installing it, we noticed a 17-percent increase in production just by having it in the trucks," White says. "Technicians don't take care of personal

business on company time now. Just knowing someone was watching helped cut down on this."

Another system Second Nature implemented later in 2004 was a follow-up phone call service on every job as a means of reducing service calls. "We kept looking at how we acquired customers, but weren't paying enough attention to retaining them," White says. "Turnover is the biggest thorn in the lawn care market. If you are adding 1,000 customers each year but losing 800, you're just spinning your wheels. Our one competitor has a 62-percent customer turnover rate and our number is in the teens, so this is helping us to grow and take more of their marketshare every year."

Each morning, yesterday's work is entered into the computer by the office manager. Once the production is entered, Second Nature's software program allows a manager to automatically export the finished jobs into a call log,

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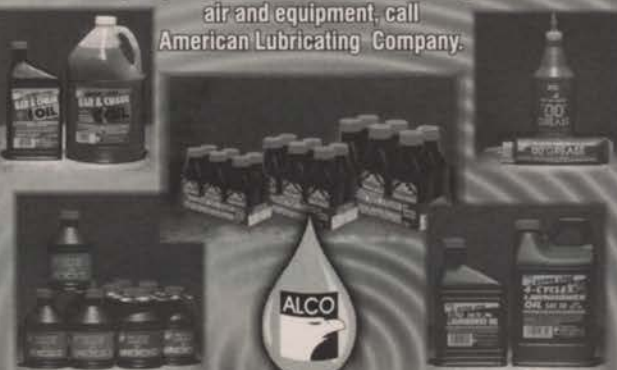
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
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which assigns them to our customer service person for follow-up calls within two weeks from the service dates, Walden explains. "Our part-time customer service person works three days a week," he says. "As he makes these calls, he types in notes from the call into their client file and checks them off of the service call list. Since customers are so afraid we're calling to upsell them, we make sure this is strictly a service call. The caller says, 'We treated your lawn two weeks ago and we want to see if we're exceeding your expectations.'"

It's a positive call that saved several customers who weren't happy and were ready to cancel, Walden says. "Out of 100 follow-up calls, we only generate three customer complaints," he shares.

When service calls do occur, Second Nature ensures clients a 48-hour turnaround. Once a client calls and the office manager records the information, he prints the service call to the general office

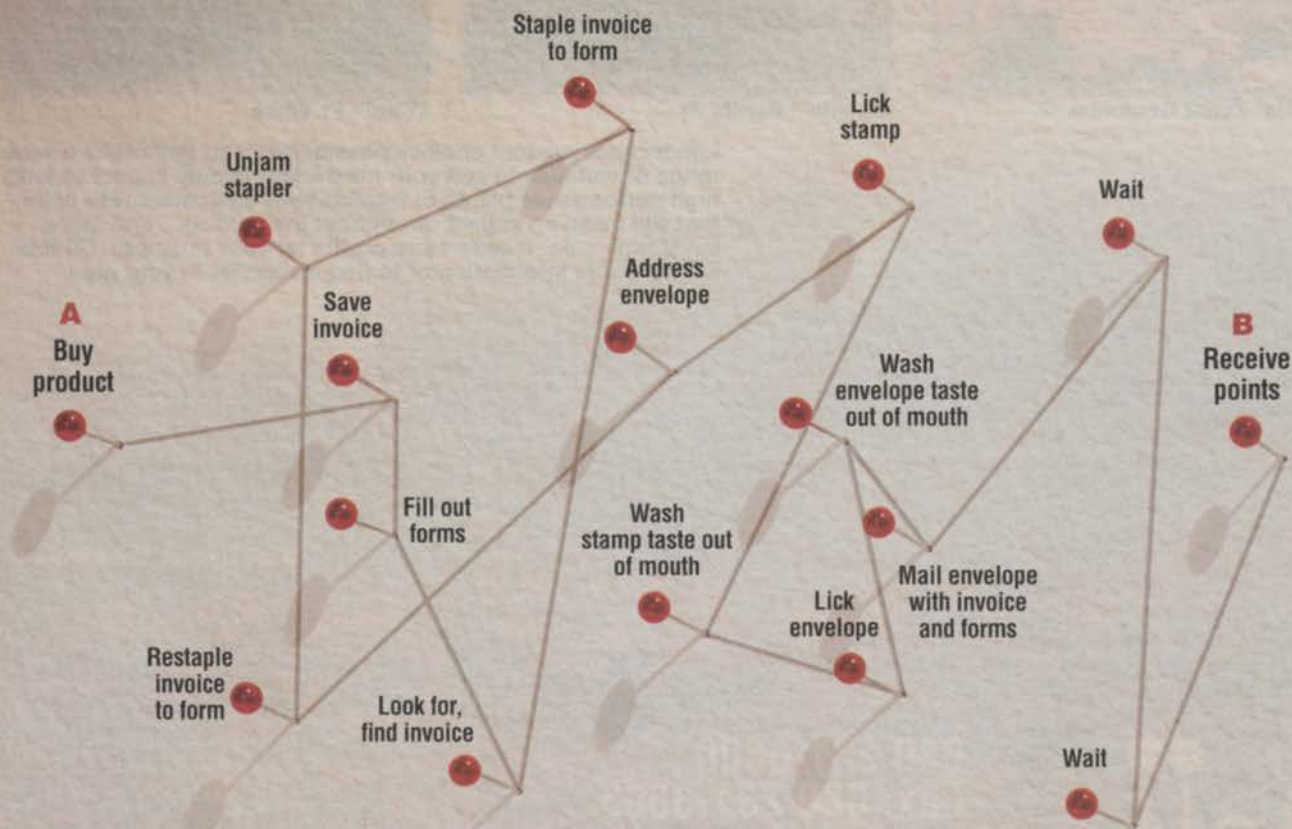
printer and the production manager grabs the printout and establishes which technician the call goes to. Each printout records the time and date the call was made and also has a barcode. Each morning, the office manager scans invoices and the required service calls are added to technicians' routes in a 48-hour period based on optimal routes to save time. Reports are run daily. "To ensure that calls nearing the deadline are completed, the office manager pulls reports each morning and sends text messages to technicians reminding of them any service calls that need done that day," Walden explains. "Then he calls them to verify that they received the messages. As technicians return to the office, the operations managers reviews their work and if those service calls aren't complete, he will send them back into the field to complete them."

In the same fashion, a time threshold is also placed on estimates - 24 hours. When a client calls, the office manager

records the information and sends a text message to the salesperson in the field. When they have some downtime or are near the area, they fulfill these estimate requests. "And it's our policy that at 10 a.m., 2 p.m. and 4 p.m., the salespeople know to check the office for any estimate requests to ensure they are completed in 24 hours," Walden says.

MAINTAINING AN ENTREPRENEURIAL VISION.

During a business' existence, every owner reaches that awkward stage where how much he can do as a technician is threatened, how many technicians he can supervise effectively as a manager is jeopardized, and how many managers he can engage in pursuit of his vision as an entrepreneur is put at risk. As a business grows, it exceeds the owner's ability to control it. Here's where a business must groom others to take on managerial responsibilities.



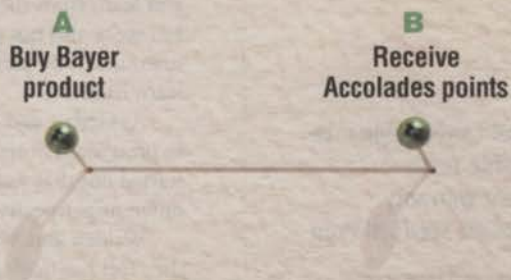
A problem position for Second Nature is the production manager, who hires and fires people and acts as a role model for technicians. To empower the production manager and to motivate him to help keep productivity up and cancellations and service calls down, Second Nature implemented a monetary incentive. "We set reduction goals to meet and each production manager receives a flat monthly fee (the most being \$250) based on the goal," White explains. "We give production managers the control to influence efficiency, employee turnover, equipment costs for maintenance and repair work and customer service calls. Basically, we want them to think before they make decisions that have costs tied to them. For instance, if a technician's truck doesn't start, they should try to jump it before calling a tow truck to tow it to the mechanic. We try to explain to them that if they take time to manage their resources,

they will make more money. And if they don't, they will get paid less. We push the fact that if they don't do a job well, there's less money for their bonus at the end of the year. We give them examples - 'You're bonus would have been \$500 if you met your goals vs. \$250.'"

End-of-year bonuses are based on tenure, number of customer service calls and production dollars per hour for the year. "Some guys average \$50 in production per hour and others average \$97 in production per hour, but then we compare that to the service calls," White says. "For instance, the guy who averages \$100 an hour but has 27 callbacks is comparable to the guy who is at \$50 an hour with no callbacks. We spend a lot of time looking at all of the employees individually and comparing that to how we did collectively and come up with a way to disperse the funds. Individual performance holds more weight in the decision than tenure."

Explaining the concept to employees is essential. "We use examples to get them to understand," White says. "For example, if a route foreman is working on a 10-percent profit margin, he is producing roughly \$100 an hour. If he forgets to do a service call when he was in the neighborhood and then has to drive 45 minutes back to get there and take care of the problem, he's wasting an hour of his day, so he's only produced \$700 vs. \$800, which affects his numbers and any additional funds he could earn. He could have done it while he was out there and saved some time or done the job right the first time and avoided having the service call in the first place."

In addition to the bonus, Second Nature has a weekly reward program for increased and consistent professionalism tied into its Tuesday meetings. The incentive is based on points - the person who earns the highest points on their field inspection reports is named the



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Technician of the Week and earns \$50 and recognition at the meeting. The lawn care manager does two field inspections per week using the GPS system to locate crews, and the report is used to score various tasks, such as truck safety, attire, application patterns and door hanger placement. "For instance, when we see their truck in the field, we check to see that it's parked properly, the engine is off, there are no leaks, safety cones are used, and that it has a clean appearance," White says.

FOCUSING ON THE FUTURE. The whole purpose of structuring systems and training employees on these systems is so the owners can focus on business growth and planning.

Second Nature currently has 3,200 customers, 74 percent of whom are residential and the majority of whom are lawn care. The company hopes to reach the \$5-million mark in five years. One option is to buy other companies. That would probably entail borrowing money, according to White and Walden, and they aren't sure this is what they want to do or if their competitor will accept this proposal.

In the meantime, White and Walden are pushing the company into commercial work to grow the business. And this has also driven the company into providing more of a full plate of services vs. just lawn and tree care. For instance, in spring the company went from 30 to 120 mowing customers.

The benefits of diversifying the business are great, White says. "First of all, we're providing more services to the customer," he explains. "Second, when we lose customers in other service areas, we won't feel it as much, revenue-wise, because maybe that customer dropped lawn care but is still a mowing customer. We just have to make sure the cash cow keeps producing and that the cash flow is there when we need it to make payroll. We will continue to watch successful companies and learn from them. We're not trying to emulate everybody, but we're also not going to reinvent the wheel when we are surrounded by plenty of good business models and resources to learn from."

As Gerber says, "companies like McDonald's, Federal Express and Disney didn't end up as mature companies — they started out that way. The people who started them had a totally different perspective about what a business is and why it works."

Walden and White's entrepreneurial perspective is what they feel has made the difference. Instead of asking, "What work has to be done?" they asked "How must the business work?" Instead of starting with the present and looking forward, hoping to maintain current business, they started with a picture of a well-defined future and then came back to the present with the intention of changing it to match the vision. "You're the boss, the technician and the sales guy — sure it's hard to make yourself do it but you have to check yourself in and out of each role every day," White explains. "If you don't develop a system to manage yourself right away, then when will you — after your first year, second year, never? You have to act big before you are big. Only that can make you successful." LL

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Visit the May issue online to see a copy of Second Nature Lawn Care's Field Inspection Report, to learn why the company incorporated under one name and does business under another, to discover why the business has purchased customers in the past vs. marketed to obtain them, and much more.

Tackling Tardiness

by jonathan katz

Lawn & Landscape Online Message Board users discuss different approaches to establishing and enforcing attendance policies.

If you have been in the working world long enough, chances are you have known a coworker who calls off sick on a monthly basis or attends multiple funerals for the same dead aunt. Granted, employees are human and will become ill or need personal time off on occasion. But how should landscape contractors deal with chronically absent or late workers?

Lawn & Landscape Online Message Board participant Justin Rasmussen, chief executive officer of Seattle-based Urban Landscaping NW, asked other discussion-group members what policies they have implemented to cope with habitually late or absent employees. "I don't think any of us live in a perfect world with perfect employees," Rasmussen writes. "I am looking for details – like how much tardiness are you going to accept and what defines a tardy – one minute late, three minutes late – do you have a grace period? How many absences are you going to permit and over what time period? What are your penalty phases for such violations of the policy? I just want to have a solid written policy in place. I was hoping there would be someone out there to share one to compare to what my idea of one is."

Contractors responded to Rasmussen

by sharing how they enforce employee promptness and dependability. Some participants say a strict written policy is necessary while others suggest that verbal communication works best.

SPELL IT OUT. Rasmussen started the conversation by providing Message Board participants with his written policy on absenteeism and tardiness. Employees who are unable to report to work on time must contact their supervisor before their starting time, according to his company's policy. If that employee cannot reach a supervisor, he or she must leave a message.

The company may request that employees submit medical certification that an illness or injury has occurred, the policy states. The company also has a three-minute grace period, which means employees are considered on time if they arrive within three minutes after their starting time. However, abuse of the grace period may result in disciplinary action or termination.

Rasmussen thinks his policy on late arrivals is too lenient and that he would like to make some changes. Message Board participant Patrick Johnson disagrees, saying Rasmussen might be making "a

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mountain out of a molehill." "I think what you already have should work fine," says Johnson, owner of Knoxville, Tenn.-based Reflective Gardens.

Johnson suggests that a verbal policy might work fine if Rasmussen is running a smaller company. If not, Johnson says Rasmussen's current policy should be adequate. "If you've got 20 employees, then what you've already got should be spelled out pretty well," he

explains. "It ain't rocket science to me."

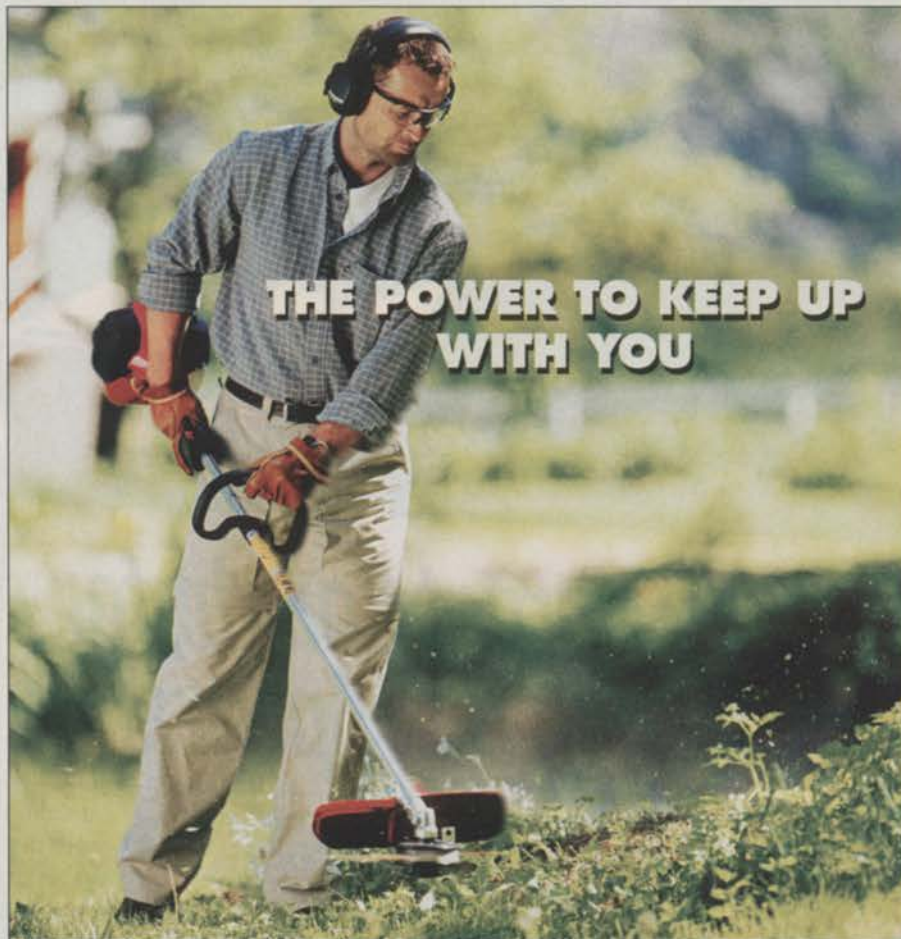
But Rasmussen says "it's business 101" that landscape contractors should have written guidelines for tardiness or absenteeism. "Have all policies and guidelines in writing," he says. "Most other corporations do, so why not you guys? It is called covering your bases, crossing your T's, dotting the I's. This is one way to get your business to operate without your presence and to limit your

liability. Consistency is key."

Like Rasmussen, Message Board member Paul Rapoza has implemented a written policy on lateness and absenteeism that is reviewed with employees during their first-day orientation. He agrees with Rasmussen that a written policy is necessary but questions his grace period.

"Are you there on time 'up to three minutes late' or are you setting the example of being early?" says Rapoza, owner of Rapoza Landscape & Lawn Care, East Falmouth, Mass. "It's all about managing your employees' expectations and company culture. If you allow a senior employee to come in late, you're in trouble. The guys I have had with me the longest put the pressure on the new guys, and it works well. To me, it comes down to consideration, too. If an

"Have all policies and guidelines in writing. Most other corporations do, so why not you guys? It is called covering your bases, crossing your T's, dotting the I's. This is one way to get your business to operate without your presence and to limit your liability. Consistency is key." - Justin Rasmussen



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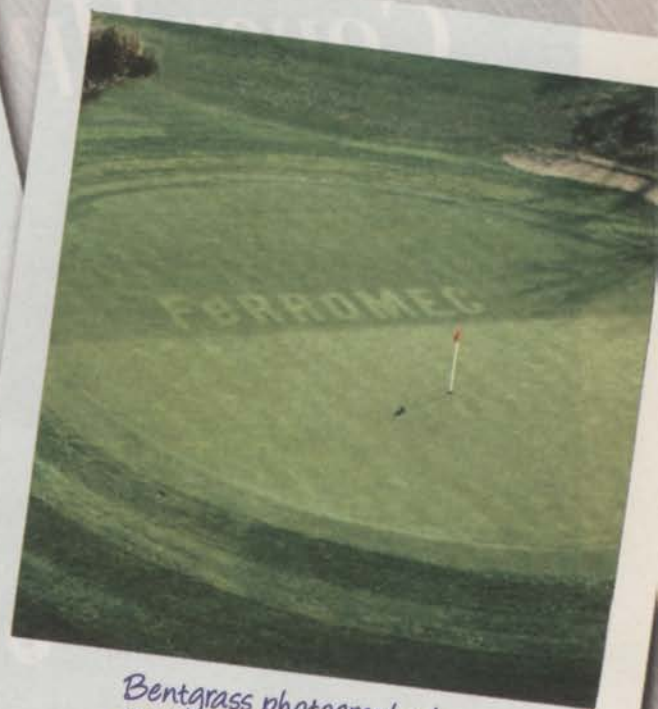
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employee calls to let me know he'll be five minutes late, then no problem. If they show up five minutes late without a word about it, then see you later. The world doesn't revolve around any of us."

Jeff Pozniak, president of Appleton, Wis.-based Stonehenge Brick Paving & Landscaping, agrees that a grace period could backfire on a contractor. "Tardiness is not something I accept," he says. "Three minutes late and the employee might come in to an empty shop."

Rasmussen responds by saying his grace period is based on other corporate standards and that it takes into account heavy street traffic in his region. "It is called being sympathetic to what is some of the worst traffic in the nation," he says. "I have not had an issue with tardiness or attendance over one year — lucky I guess. If a guy is late, say five or 10 minutes, then he gets left behind and misses a day of work. Of course, like lots of other companies here, one



guy may pick up two or three other guys. Are you going to fire all of these employees for being late and not calling in? I doubt it. But this is what I wanted to gauge by this topic: What should I or shouldn't I alter in my policy? The grace period will probably go,

and less late arrivals will be tolerated."

THE CONSEQUENCES. At Urban Landscaping, excessive tardiness or absenteeism may result in disciplinary action, including possible termination. In addition, the company may consider an employee's attendance record when assessing qualifications for new assignments, promotions, transfers, leaves of absence, approved time off and other employment-related decisions, Rasmussen writes. According to Rasmussen's policy, chronic lateness will result in the following: probation for four late arrivals in one month, termination for five late arrivals in one month and termination for six late arrivals in two months during a probationary period.

Will Sharp, president of Lawn Dawg Services in Matthews, N.C., says he takes the following approach to cope with tardy employees:

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the company docks that employee's pay 15 minutes for every five minutes.

- If an employee is late twice, that employee will be "called out in front of everyone" and written up. The company may then reduce an employee's pay by \$1 per hour until the next review.
- The third tardy results in termination.

"The \$1 deal works well," Sharp says. "They all sign the manual and understand. I just don't have a problem. Everyone shows up 10 to 15 minutes early. If there is a person who is late, they have even more problems and probably won't work out anyway. The lateness is the first clue. You have to be consistent, maybe even set an example. Rules were made to be followed."

Rapoza has adopted what some might consider a zero-tolerance policy toward tardiness. "If you are one second late, you're late," Rapoza explains. "If you don't call in and let us know more than twice, you're fired. I let everyone

who works for me know upfront that I have a thing about time."

OTHER APPROACHES. Not all Message Board participants agree that written policies are always necessary. Verbal communication can be more direct and just as effective. For instance, landscape contractor James Binns does not have a written policy for tardiness or absenteeism but will instead tell employees when they've crossed the line.

"For me, if someone occasionally calls in with a good excuse, I understand," says Binns, president of Fayetteville, Ark.-based Earthworks Landscape Gardening. "If it is habitual – twice a month – 'Bye, Bye.' We always have a talk first. However, my state allows one to be fired for virtually any reason."

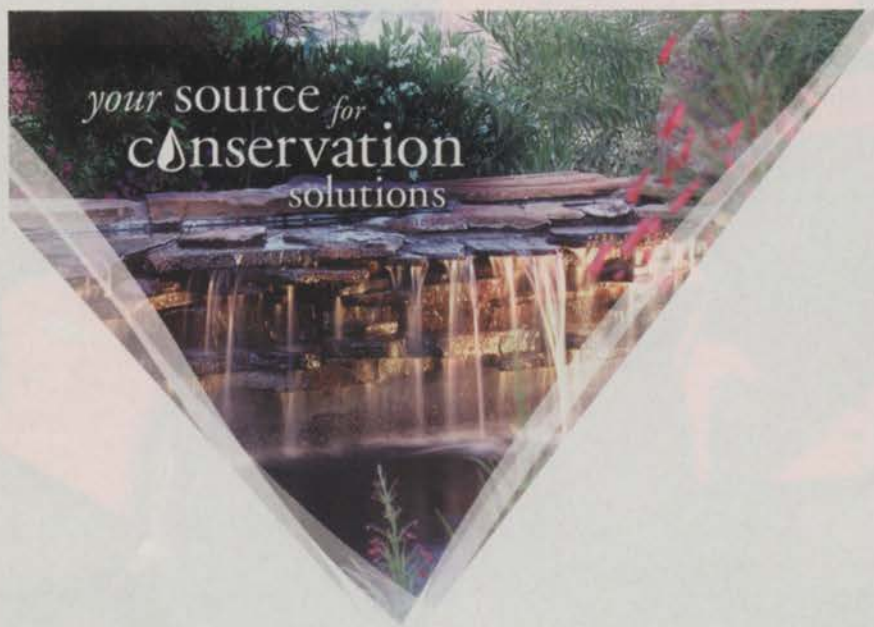
Johnson agrees with Binns that contractors should first talk to employees who are chronically late or absent. "Go up to the employee, put your arm

around their shoulder and say, 'Hey man, if you continue to be late, I'm gonna have to let you go, and I know we both don't want that, right?'"

But not every contractor focuses on negative consequences to encourage promptness. Chris Haddock, owner of Laconia, N.H.-based CBH Landscape Contractors, offers incentives to employees who show up on time. Employees can accrue one hour of "earned time" for every 40 hours worked if they show up on time every day and don't call off sick, Haddock says. The earned time can then be used as sick time or vacation time. **ll**

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To further discuss this topic or others, please visit the *Lawn & Landscape Online Message Board* at www.lawnandlandscape.com/messageboard. Frequent topics include pricing information, new product reviews, how-to tips and industry trends.



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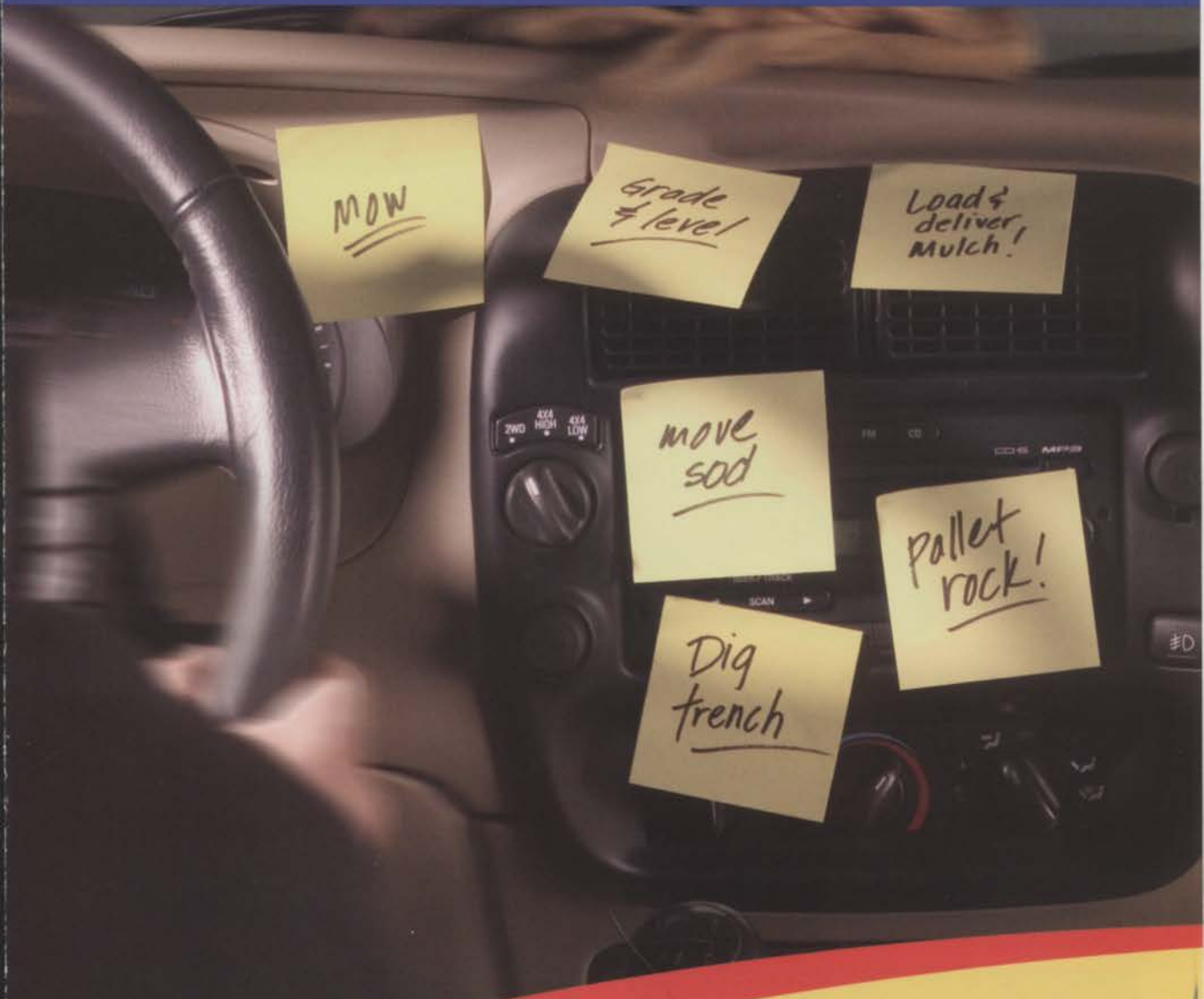
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Photos: Walker Manufacturing, Grasshopper (page 80)

Multipurpose Mowers

by jonathan katz

Attachments can turn mowers into multiuse machines, but there are tradeoffs to consider.

A mower can be a significant investment for a landscape contractor. By the time contractors are finished stocking their trucks with enough mowers to keep everyone busy, their budgets may be stretched too thin for any more large purchases. Fortunately for contractors, mowers are becoming more versatile with attachments.

Contractors can blow debris, aerate or dethatch lawns and edge flower beds with only one piece of equipment. These attachments can save 75 percent on time and labor, according to Ruthanne Stucky, marketing director, The Grasshopper Co., Moundridge, Kan. Attachments are ideal for the landscape contractor who provides other added-value services that aren't worth the significant investment that a dedicated machine might require.

"With an attachment, you have expanded capability without a huge outlay of cost," says Peter Andonian, president, Accelerator Industries, Bellevue, Wash. "The tradeoff is that when you get further away from the primary function of the mower, the less performance you will get. For instance, say you put a thatching attachment on a mower. A dedicated machine will probably do a better job than something you put on the front of a mower that's not powered."

Most attachments work best with riding mowers, but some walk-behind mowers can accommodate equipment like fertilizer spreaders. "As more people buy riding mowers, your options for attachments increase," Andonian says. "With riders you often have greater horsepower and space. You are also sitting higher up, so you have better attachment visibility."



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CHANGE IS GOOD.

The availability of so many attachments means that contractors today can perform most maintenance functions on one machine at less cost than is involved in buying dedicated equipment. For instance, a ride-on fertilizer spreader costs approximately \$4,000, whereas a spreader attachment can cost about \$400, says Mark Wyne, president, Combined Manufacturing, St. Louis.

In colder climates, rotary brooms, blowers and dozer blades are becoming popular additions for snow removal, says Bob Walker, president, Walker Manufacturing Co., Fort Collins, Colo. The rotary broom costs about \$2,200, the snow blower attachment sells for about \$1,900 and the dozer blade can add \$500 to the machine's cost, according to Walker. These costs don't include



\$800 for a power-lift hitch, which is necessary to raise and lower the implements, Walker advises.

This may seem like a significant upfront cost for an attachment, but mower engines may be more powerful, resulting in wider coverage areas and greater efficiency, says Tim Cromley, marketing manager for Walker Manufacturing. For instance, the typical snow blower ranges from 5 to 8 horsepower

compared with a snow-blower attachment that may be powered by a 20-horsepower mower engine, Cromley notes.

Similarly, an aerator attachment can cost \$3,700 but they can cover larger areas than dedicated aerators can, Cromley says. "For \$3,700 you can have a 47-inch aerator that you ride behind and cover 60,000 square feet per hour," Cromley explains. For almost the same amount of money, maybe \$3,000, you can walk behind a 28-inch aerator and cover about 20,000 square feet per hour."

Attachments, such as the aerator, also remove the cost and labor of maintaining an additional engine, Cromley says. "An aerator is a perfect example - you only use it for a few weeks in the spring and fall, but the maintenance of another engine for only a few weeks can be hard for some people to swallow," he says.

And because aerators are typically used seasonally, the machines could

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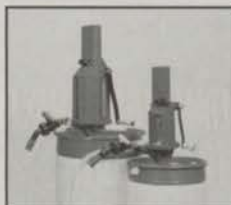
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develop more serious maintenance issues than an engine that is regularly serviced, Stucky says. "There will be more maintenance with the attachment because you are operating it longer, but you don't have the investment of that dedicated equipment that you also have to maintain," she says. "Also, the dedicated machine has been sitting for a while, so you might have to do more intense maintenance whereas with this universal machine, you've been operating it routinely and doing routine maintenance."

CONSIDER THIS. Although mower attachments are designed to improve efficiency, they can actually result in more downtime if contractors don't carefully examine their options. Contractors should test attachments before buying them to check how quickly they can be removed and reattached, Walker says.

"You're talking about versatility,

being able to do more than one thing with your piece of equipment – that's the concept of the attachment to begin with – but the more difficult it is, the less versatile in practice it's going to be," Walker explains. "Let's just say it takes a day of work to change an attachment. They're going to get less use out of it because it's just too big of a job to change it back and forth."

Some mowers come equipped with "quick-change" features that utilize hitch pins so operators can remove or secure the attachment without tools or extensive labor, Walker says. Also, when shopping for an attachment, contractors should test whether the attachment reduces the mower's ability to maneuver up and down hills and around obstacles such as trees, Walker says. Wyne agrees, saying attachments could affect a mower's turning radius or deck movement. "It might keep you from going under

and the winner is...

Landscape contractors are known for playing favorites. They have their preferred equipment brands, trucks and materials. When it comes to mower attachments, dethatchers seem to be the most popular choice for contractors, according to sales statistics provided by the Walker Manufacturing Co., Fort Collins, Colo.

"The dethatcher is a simple, inexpensive attachment that does a lot of good," says company President Bob Walker, adding that dethatchers cost between \$300 and \$400. "In the springtime the first work that should be done is to rake with a dethatcher that picks up matted-down grass or any dead debris. It's amazing what it will do to freshen up a lawn and get it going again."

Here, Walker describes some other big-selling mower attachments ranked from the highest sellers to the lowest:

- Snow blowers – "Some contractors say for snow removal, especially if they use a lot of salt, 'I'm not going to put my mower through that because the salt is too hard on my equipment,' but others have found that the investment in their tractor is justified if they could put a snow thrower on it and use it."
- Dozer blade and broom – "They're both primarily snow-removal items, but some contractors also use the brooms for sweeping."
- Aerator – "Aeration on a ride-on unit is relatively new in the market. Maneuvering a stand-alone, walk-behind aerator can cause wear and tear on the body, but mounting an aerator on a ride-on unit means the operator is basically just sitting there running the controls on the machine just like they do when they mow. By riding, they are also able to cover bigger areas rather quickly."

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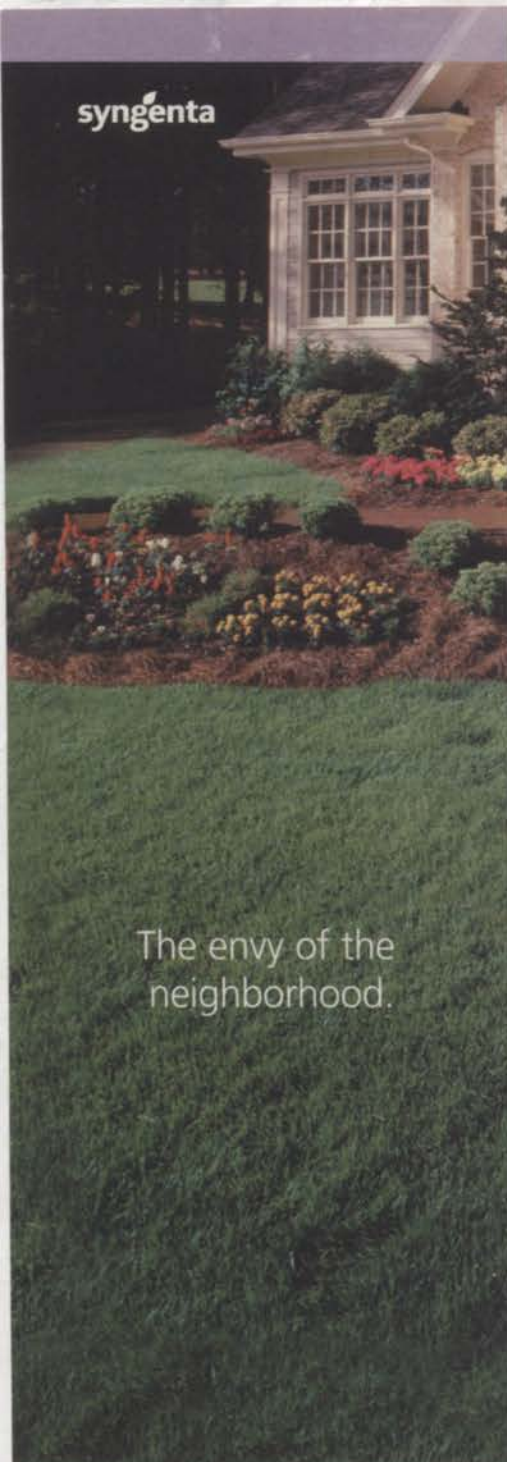
trees or there might be more physical constraints than anything else," he explains. "Is it going to offset the balance of the machine where the tires won't turn or spin or reduce its capability on hills?"

Contractors can check with dealers or manufacturers to determine how much weight their mowers can handle. This is particularly important with hydrostatic-driven mowers, Walker says. "You are going to need to look at what the recommendations are for ground engagement," he explains. "A heavy drum-type aerator can take a lot of power, and you could be overloading the mower's transmission. These mowers weren't designed for that kind of work."

In addition to performance considerations, contractors also have the option of purchasing attachments from the mower manufacturer or buying the equipment aftermarket. Contractors may want to purchase attachments from the

mower manufacturers because they usually know how their equipment works better than anyone else, Walker says. On the other hand, mower manufacturers may not be as focused on attachment capabilities because they're often more concerned with other major features that are more marketable, Andonian says.

If contractors are confused about which route to take, they can get some reassurance on the product's reliability by asking the sales representative for references. "I would encourage that the contractors ask for some referrals by the manufacturer or by the dealer so they can speak with some people who have used these attachments themselves – get them to give some first-hand experience with the use of that attachment on that particular piece of equipment," Walker says. "That would be a really good way to make sure you didn't buy something or make an investment just on talk." **ll**



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> catch up

Customers with high-end properties usually expect neat lawns with little or no grass clippings within plain view. Despite a number of mulching mowers on the market, grass catchers continue to be popular with contractors who want to reduce cleanup time and keep lawns looking sharp.

"The catcher still has its place in certain markets," says Peter Andonian, president, Accelerator Industries, Bellevue, Wash. "It's popular with cool-season grasses, which sometimes have to be bagged to have a good appearance. Warm-season grasses are easier to mulch."

Catchers range in price from \$150 to \$500, and vacuum systems can range from \$1,500 to \$3,500, according to Andonian. The advantage of vacuum systems is that they provide more power and are ideal for removing debris from wet grasses, but they are more costly and more complex to remove and reattach, Andonian says. Steel catchers cost the lowest, ranging from \$150 to \$250, depending on size. Rustproof and lighter-weight aluminum catchers cost between \$300 and \$500, Andonian adds.

When purchasing a bagging attachment, contractors should consider the capabilities of their crews and how far they'll have to carry the debris, Andonian says. To eliminate this problem, some mowers are now equipped with a \$2,700-electric/hydraulic dumping system that can raise the grass catcher to a truck's bed or trailer, says Bob Walker, president, Walker Manufacturing Co., Fort Collins, Colo.

In addition to making grass collection less labor intensive, catching systems work closer with a mower's natural functions than other attachments, Andonian says.

How to Spot Brown Patch

The symptoms of brown patch can vary depending on the grass cultivar, soil, climactic and atmospheric



conditions, as well as intensity of the turfgrass management. Brown patch typically causes

rings or patches of blighted turfgrass that measure 5 inches to more than 10 feet in diameter. It also causes leaf spots and "smoke rings"—thin, brown borders around the diseased patches that appear most frequently in the early morning. After the leaves die in the blighted area, new leaves can emerge from the surviving crowns. On wide-bladed species, leaf lesions develop with tan centers and dark brown to black margins.

Brown patch favors high humidity as well as temperatures of over 85 degrees Fahrenheit during the day and over 60 degrees Fahrenheit at night. Brown patch can be quite active at cool temperatures on warm-season grasses in the spring and fall. It also occurs in areas that experience more than 10 hours a day of foliar wetness for several consecutive days.

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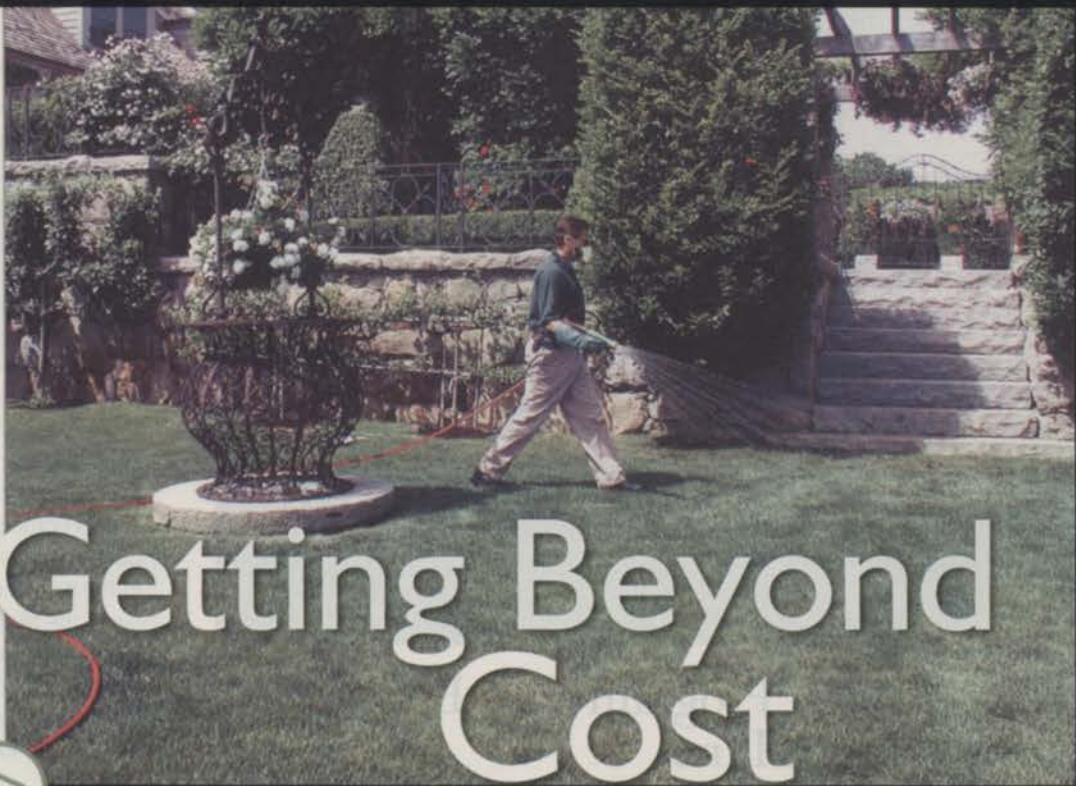


Photo: Ultimate Services

Getting Beyond Cost

Fungicide treatments are a business opportunity for lawn care operators and are often necessary to maintain turfgrass health.

by jonathan katz

Fungicide applications have not seemed to make much business sense for most lawn care operators (LCOs). Fungicides are more expensive than typical fertilizers and pesticides. The service also requires knowledge about turf diseases, possible multiple treatments and proper timing. All this makes the service challenging to sell.

"Lawn care operators still have a difficult time getting customers interested in fungicide applications on lawns," says Kyle Miller, senior technical specialist for BASF's Turf and Ornamental Products Group, Raleigh, N.C.

Despite this challenge, disease is a turfgrass reality and customers tend to not be forgiving when their lawns are infected and damaged. LCOs who provide the service separate themselves from the competition – even if their profits are not as high as for other services provided. "Lawn care

operators are looking for ways to add value to their business and customers, and fungicides offer that opportunity," says John Price, technical account manager, Dow AgroSciences, Marysville, Ohio.

That's the strategy many LCOs, such as William Hildebolt, owner, Nature's Select Premium Turf Services, Winston-Salem, N.C., have taken to maintain customer satisfaction without drastically increasing prices. "Clients with showcase properties want you to cure their disease problems," he says.

WHAT IT COSTS. Fungicide prices vary based on whether the product is a systemic or contact fungicide, and whether it is labeled for a broad- or narrow-range of diseases. A typical fungicide application will be at least double the cost of other lawn care applications, says Steven Vandervest, president, Turf Management Lawn Care, Lawrenceville, Ga.

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Miller says LCOs used to paying 50 cents per 1,000 square feet for an herbicide may be shocked to find that an application with a narrow-spectrum fungicide costs \$3 per 1,000 square feet and \$6 to \$7 per 1,000 square feet for a broad-spectrum fungicide.

Vandervest says a contact fungicide may cost about \$45 for a 2.5-gallon container, whereas a systemic product may cost \$200 to \$300 per gallon. However, such costs can be deceiving if LCOs don't consider the product's residual effect and application rates, adds Harold Enger, assistant director of franchise support, Spring-Green Lawn Care, Plainfield, Ill. For instance, a contact fungicide may cost less upfront but only provides seven to 14 days of control. In contrast the systemic fungicide may last 14 to 28 days, or 21 to 28 days for some newer products.

"Systemics cost more initially, but the length of control is longer," Vandervest explains. "This reduces the cost per day

of control by the product. Contact fungicides generally need to be applied two to three times more often depending on disease pressure. We have to justify the additional expense of the product and factor that into our pricing structure. It is not feasible to use the contacts during high disease pressure because the applications on high-end accounts will need to be done every seven to 14 days. The higher the disease pressure, the shorter the frequency between treatments."

LCOs should also take application rates into account, Vandervest says. In general, contact fungicides are applied at a heavier rate because they control the fungus on contact. Systemic products tend to have a lighter rate because they get translocated throughout the plant, he explains. Enger suggests LCOs look at their cost per 1,000 square feet to determine their product expenses.

PURCHASING POWER. LCOs can keep some fungicide costs in check with

strategic purchasing practices. Historically, fungicide manufacturers have marketed and designed fungicides for the golf course industry, selling them in large quantities. But "current products in the marketplace better suit LCOs so they don't feel like they have to buy products in bulk quantities," says Steve Stansell, market manager for Syngenta Professional Products, Greensboro, N.C.

Several manufacturers are or soon plan to begin offering fungicides in pint, quart or water-soluble packets for LCOs who do fungicide applications on a limited basis. "Newer packaging like 3-ounce packets that each cover up to 5,000 square feet is more lawn care specific, even geared more toward the use of backpack sprayers," says Eric Kalasz, Bayer Environmental Science, business manager for fungicides, Montvale, N.J.

LCOs have different approaches for purchasing fungicides. Hildebolt buys a powder-form product by the pound
continued on page 92; sidebar on page 90

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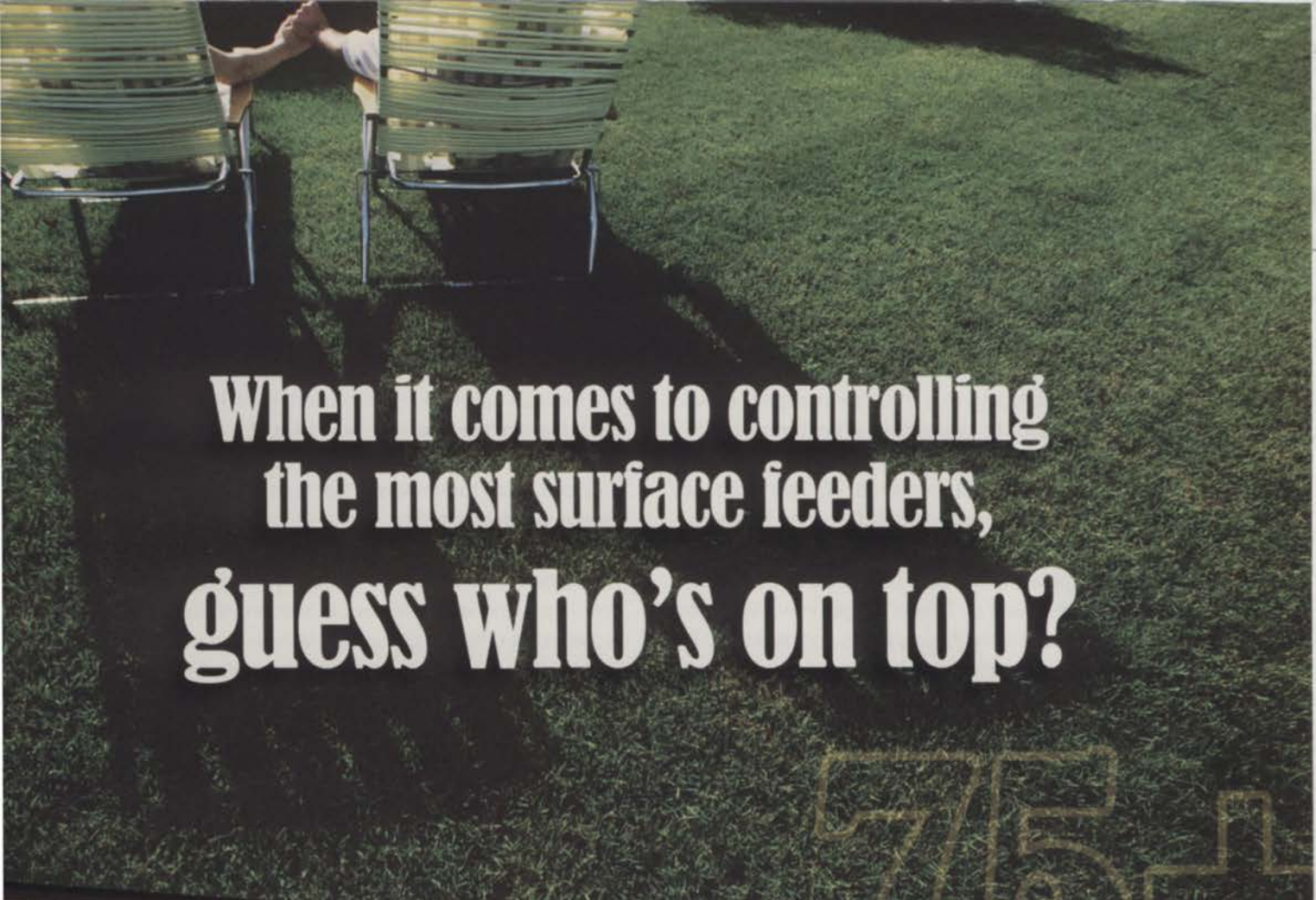
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* Trials conducted by Dr. Steve Alm, University of Rhode Island, 2001; by Dr. Dave Shetlar, Ohio State University, 1999; and by Dr. Dave Shetlar and Dr. Harry Niemczyk, Ohio State University, 1997.

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educate your customers

Some customers might be hesitant to pay for a fungicide application. But most lawn care operators (LCOs) know that without fungicide treatments, they can eventually lose clients who don't understand why their lawns appear sickly.

One way to overcome the cost hurdle is to educate clients about why their lawns might require fungicide treatments. William Hildebolt, owner of Winston-Salem, N.C.-based Nature's Select Premium Services, informs customers about potential disease problems by posting a newsletter and an "alerts" page on his Web site at www.naturesselect.com/alerts-specials.htm. The company usually posts the disease alerts in early to mid-spring, and then Hildebolt says he continues to monitor weather conditions throughout the year for potential outbreaks.

Steven Vandervest, owner of Lawrenceville, Ga.-based Turf Management Lawn Care, also posts disease updates in his online newsletter at www.turfmanagementusa.com/newsletters.htm. If there is a disease outbreak, the newsletter will notify customers of the problem, how to spot it and what treatments are available, he says, adding that he provides a link to the newsletter for customers who receive electronic billing.

The information from the newsletter comes from employees who are trained to closely monitor disease conditions and keep a historical account of disease problems at different properties, Vandervest says. The employees are trained to spot diseases and treat them at a putting green located outside the company's shop. The putting green will typically show signs of disease before customers' lawns, Vandervest says.

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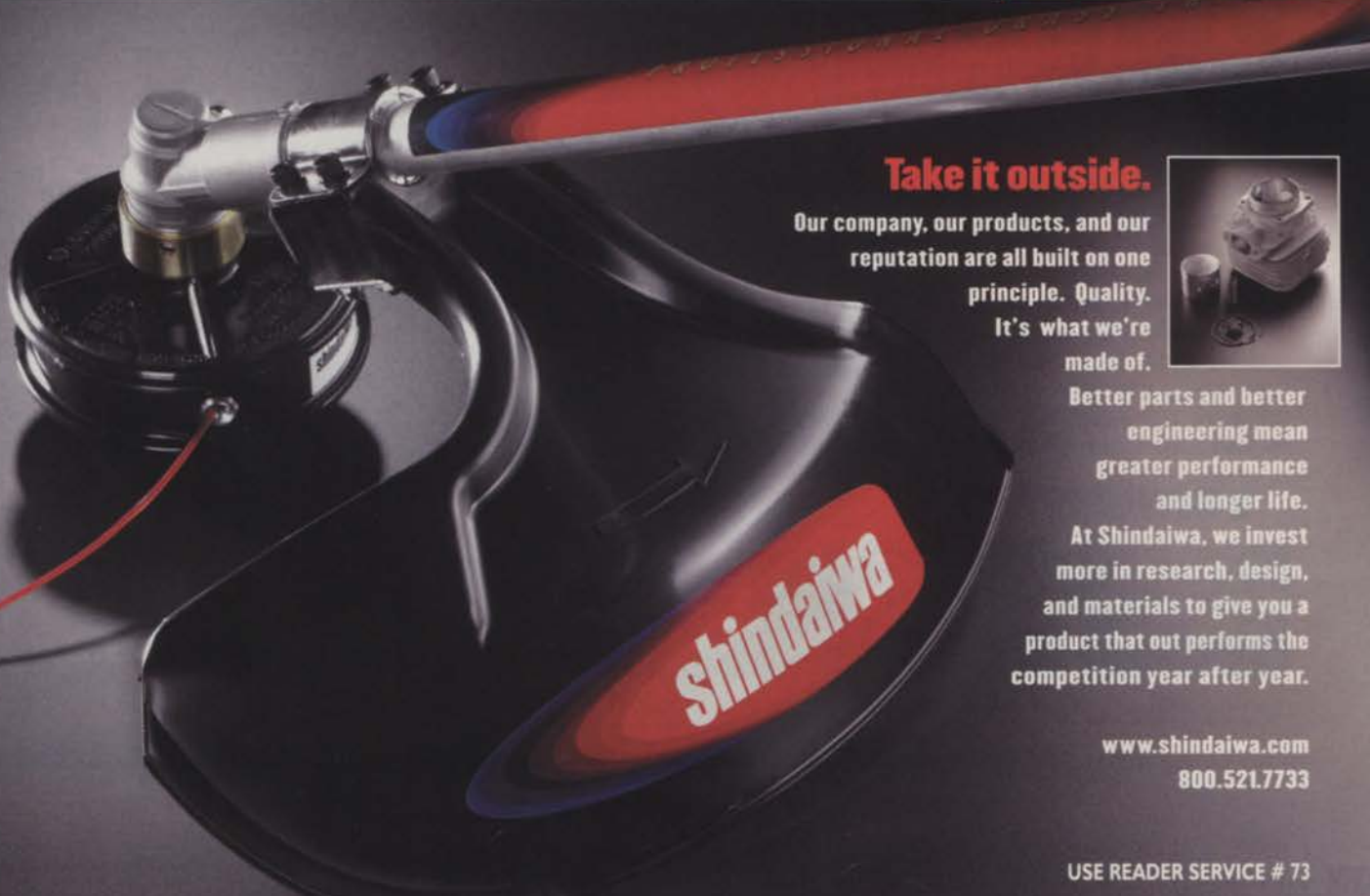


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USE READER SERVICE # 73

continued from page 88

and says he pays \$372 plus 7-percent tax. Citing label instructions, Hildebolt says he uses 0.2 to 0.4 ounces of product per 1,000 square feet for brown patch, but rates vary depending upon the targeted disease.

Each year, Hildebolt sends bid lists to several vendors and selects the lowest price. The bid lists include materials he's requesting and the volume of product he typically uses. Hildebolt says he tries to buy the product as needed to avoid excessive inventory.

Other contractors like John Chiarella, president, Ultimate Services Professional Grounds Maintenance, Wolcott, Conn., purchase products in bulk quantities because, in Chiarella's case, 75 percent of his clients receive fungicide treatments. "We do so much of it, so we buy it in either gallons or bags," he says, adding that he pays \$150 to \$200 per bag or \$500 per gallon for the products. Miller estimates that LCOs can save up to 25 percent in

fungicide costs by purchasing this way.

Vandervest estimates that 25 to 30 percent of his clients purchase fungicide treatments. He purchases a variety of systemic and curative products in different package sizes. He sometimes uses water-soluble packets because they're easy to handle. He also purchases fungicides in liquid form that come in 1- or 2.5-gallon containers. "We use different products at different rates and rotate them," he says. "There's a contact and a systemic fungicide, and if you use the systemic over and over again, diseases start to get resistance to that product."

Vandervest buys the water-soluble packets at a wholesale price for approximately \$50 per packet. He pays \$200 to \$300 for a 1-gallon systemic fungicide and \$45 for a 2.5-gallon contact fungicide. He purchases his fungicides on an as-needed basis because the company is located 10 minutes from a service center that keeps most of the products in stock.

Like Vandervest, Enger says LCOs

with Spring-Green's Midwest franchises often purchase fungicides as needed because disease pressure there is typically lower than in more humid regions. "We purchase them when we see a problem, and we buy them in a 2-ounce bottle or a 2.5-gallon jug, depending on the material we're using," he says. "We generally don't go out and buy a case. Treating a lawn is not like treating a golf course."

CHARGED UP. Once LCOs determine their product costs, they have a starting point for pricing applications. Turf Management Lawn Care charges \$9 to \$10 per 1,000 square feet for most fungicide applications, according to Vandervest. Included in that price is a 25-percent markup for materials.

Preventive programs are the most profitable fungicide applications because the company can include them in routine lawn care routes, says Vandervest, who estimates that 25 to 30 percent of the company's clients are

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USE READER SERVICE # 75

on a preventive program. Turf Management's preventive programs are usually targeted toward cool-season grasses and begin at the end of March when temperatures near 80 degrees and humidity reaches 70 percent, says Vandervest.

Curative applications are typically less profitable because they require that technicians make multiple stops, which means Vandervest must pay for ad-

ditional labor and fuel costs. In general, he says fungicide applications result in 15-percent profit margins for the company compared with 25-percent profit margins for other lawn care applications.

Spring-Green typically charges one to two times the price of its regular lawn care rates for its fungicide services, Enger says. The company charges on average \$80 per application, but that

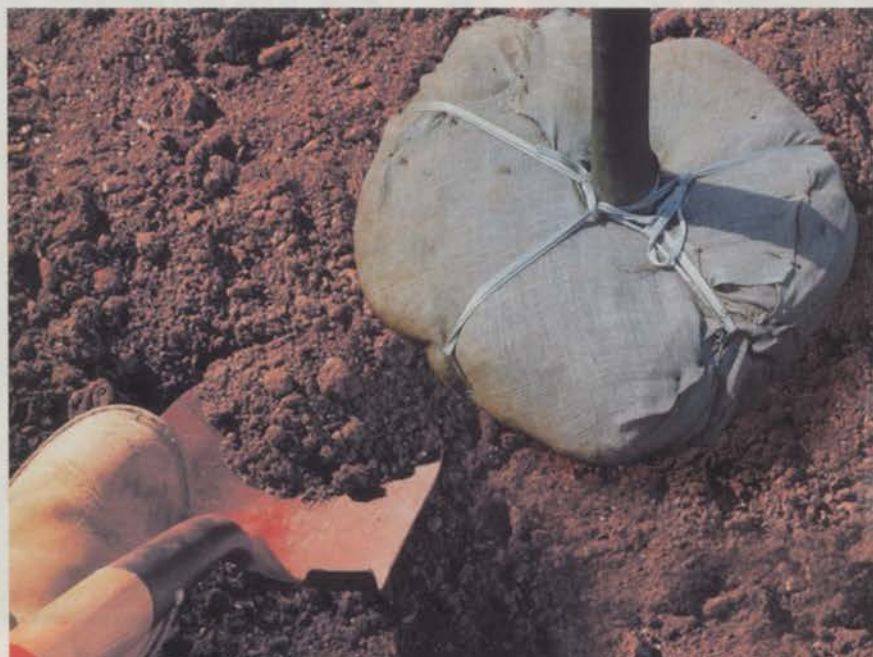
rate varies depending on lawn size and the amount of material used, Enger says. Most of these applications are not included in a regular lawn care program, except in warmer, more humid regions where the fungi problems are more prevalent.

Likewise, Hildebolt says that because of weather variables his company's fungicide services are not built into a program unless requested by a client. "We do have some lawns in which we can predict brown patch will occur, and they would be signed up for routine applications," he says. "For those clients, we would perform applications every 28 days after the environmental conditions become ideal for spore activity."

In the Winston-Salem area where Hildebolt is located, the company begins its preventive programs in May when the first disease pressure usually occurs. Nature's Select charges about 25 percent more for its fungicide applications, according to Hildebolt. But that doesn't mean the service is more profitable than typical lawn care applications. "We're trying to get the same margins as other services, but I don't think fungicide applications are any more profitable, and in some cases, can be less profitable because the materials are so expensive," he explains. "For instance, if you formulate a 10-percent overage, you have just shot your margin."

But not all LCOs are experiencing lower profit margins with fungicide applications. Chiarella estimates that fungicide treatments are 25 percent more profitable than traditional lawn care applications because he factors in profit for the company's horticulture specialists whom he dispatches to properties to diagnose disease problems.

Chiarella typically marks up fungicide applications 100 percent, but markups can vary depending on the type of fungus, how difficult it is to eradicate and how many applications it requires. The company might charge \$600 if the product costs \$100 per ounce for 1,000 to 3,000 square feet, he says. **LL**



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Visit the May issue of *Lawn & Landscape* online to read about what lawn care operators and manufacturers have to say about the pros and cons of offering preventive vs. curative fungicide treatments.

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USE READER SERVICE # 77



Drown Low-Ball Competitors



Increased competition can make residential irrigation systems more difficult to sell, but quality work and added-value can win over price.

by jonathan katz

Photo: R&R Water Management

It seems nowadays that anyone with a shovel and a truck can start an irrigation company, and some are fly-by-night operations that make it difficult for established irrigation contractors to sell residential irrigation systems profitably. But reputation can outweigh price, so contractors can stay competitive without drastically cutting profit margins.

Even though inexperienced installers often underbid them, contractors such as Martin Thomas, owner of Dayton, Ohio-based Hydroscares, can still account for profit when pricing residential installations and remain successful. These companies are fighting back by selling clients on services and innovative irrigation technology.

CREDIBILITY RULES. One advantage that experienced irrigation contractors have over less-knowledgeable installers is confidence in their work. Thomas offers

his customers a three-year warranty on every system. The company also makes return visits after installations to ensure that the system is running properly and to answer any questions or concerns that a client may have.

After an installation, a Hydroscares technician will typically make one to three return trips to a property at no charge, Thomas says. The follow-up trips may include educating the customer on how to manage the system as the weather changes. These post-installation checkups and warranties have proved to be major selling points for the company, Thomas explains, sharing that 95 percent of his business is generated by referrals.

Clarksville, Ga.-based B&B Landscaping & Irrigation also depends on referrals for new business, says Owner Gary Batho, adding that 99 percent of his work comes via word-of-mouth.



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extra-long for extra reach when you need it and are also extra kind to your back. And permanent head-to-handle connections will not twist or pull out under the toughest work stress. Specialized irrigation tools include Kenyon's unique line of SPRINKLER HEAD TRIMMERS featuring aggressive sickle style blades with scalloped edges that produce a clean, round divot around sprinkler heads or utility covers for easy mower pick up.



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SYSTEM UPSOLLS. Advertising can also come in the form of high-tech system components that inexperienced contractors may not know about. Water conservation efforts have given way to new products that can save homeowners money in the long run. Contractors can use the new systems as an upsell by educating potential clients about the ben-

efits. Alamo, Calif.-based R&R Water Management now installs an automated controller that is about 20 percent more costly than traditional controllers but can result in significant long-term water savings for the system's user, says company President Roger Waters.

Waters says customers do not need much convincing on the controller's

benefits after he shows them on paper how much money they could save. With information provided by the city's water department, Waters can determine how much water a potential client is using and how much that homeowner is paying. Using a calculation sheet provided by the controller's manufacturer, Waters can then show how much



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ELECTRONIC CONTROLLERS				
6-zone	\$250	\$435	\$225	\$290
12-zone	\$450	\$525	\$370	\$450
24-zone	\$725	\$925	\$850	\$760
ELECTRIC VALVES				
1-inch	\$70/valve	\$100/valve	\$95/valve	\$80/valve
2-inch	\$150/valve	\$225/valve	\$185/valve	\$150/valve
3-inch	\$220/valve	\$300/valve	\$300/valve	\$275/valve
HEADS (all prices include piping to head)				
4-inch spray heads	\$35/head	\$70/head	\$55/head	\$35/head
6-inch spray heads	\$40/head	\$95/head	\$68/head	\$40/head
Rotors	\$55/piece	\$125/piece	\$105/head	\$80/piece
MAINLINE				
1½-inch	\$2.50/foot	\$2.25/foot	\$2.11/foot	\$2.65/foot
2-inch	\$4/foot	\$3.55/foot	\$2.35/foot	\$3.15/foot
3-inch	\$5/foot	\$4.85/foot	\$4.33/foot	\$4.70/foot
4-inch	\$8/foot	\$6.75/foot	\$6.10/foot	\$6/foot
RAIN SENSORS (required in some areas)				
	\$150	\$150	\$160	\$140


EXAMPLE TOTAL

If one has a job with: 26 rotors; 13 spray heads; one 6-zone controller; five 1-inch electric valves; 100 feet of 1½-inch mainline the job would cost:

\$2,800 to \$3,500 \$5,000 to \$5,400 \$4,550 \$3,750 to \$4,250

(\$750-\$850 per valve depending on sprinkler type)

Lawn & Landscape interviewed contractors from east to west to find out how irrigation prices differ. All prices quoted above are for new construction only and include labor and installation costs. These are not service or maintenance prices. Because variable installation specifications and component selection can cause significant swings in price (i.e. depth of piping, backfill requirements, type of valve/sprinkler/timer/sensor, valve manifold configurations, etc.), these prices are based on the most typical specifications encountered in each area.



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water the property owner should be using. The calculations are performed in an Excel spreadsheet where Waters can input the square footage of plant material that's being irrigated, the average rainfall for the area, the price of water and water usage.

Controller manufacturer Hydro-Point Data Systems, Petaluma, Calif., provides such a calculation formula for contractors. The calculation sheets can do the selling for the contractor by showing homeowners how they can cut their future irrigation costs, says HydroPoint Chief Executive Officer Chris Spain. By thoroughly explaining how these systems work, contractors can encourage prospective clients to look past the upfront costs and realize the long-term benefits. "It's an opportunity to leverage a solution to increase services but decrease costs," Spain says. "It represents a transformation in the selling process, from trying to convince somebody to spend more for a host of compelling reasons to a much more compelling

reason, which is saving money."

Controllers are the No. 1 selling point for B&B Landscaping & Irrigation. That's because homeowners typically want worry-free watering. "When I go out and sell an irrigation system, one of the most important factors is that neither I nor the homeowner have time to actually go out and water sufficiently," Batho explains. "The most important selling factor is telling them that they don't have to worry about it at all, and the clock takes care of everything."

For newly built houses where Batho may be doing other landscape construction work, he will explain to customers that he cannot guarantee their new lawn will be properly maintained without an irrigation system and a clock. Clients who want new irrigation systems for their existing lawns that are already poorly irrigated have already sold themselves on the system, Batho says.

CASHING IN. Brochures and other marketing tools can help seal the deal,

but if contractors don't account for all their costs, their efforts may result in minimal returns. Batho determines his costs by first measuring the property. He then figures out the amount of pressure available, which will determine what size main line to use, how many zones and valves are needed, what size zone line is required, the number of heads to install per zone, wire length and other necessary components.

After he knows all the materials involved and other variables, Batho is able to begin pricing the job. He comes up with a base price that includes materials and labor and then adds 10 percent to the materials cost and 10 percent to his labor cost. If the job is on a hilly site, Batho says he may add another 10 percent to the labor.

He will then layout each zone by posting flags where the heads will be located. At that point, he can begin trenching and assembling the system. The typical residential job takes B&B Landscaping three days to finish. The

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> plan for the worst

Many properties feature obstacles that can complicate pricing formulas for residential irrigation systems. Experienced contractors have methods for foreseeing these potential pitfalls. If contractors don't account for major stumbling blocks, they can lose money on labor, says Martin Thomas, owner, Hydroscaapes, Dayton, Ohio.

Thomas accounts for minor cost overruns by including a 2- to 4-percent labor overage in his prices, but experience ultimately tells contractors how to spot these unexpected expenses. "Experience and time is the best teacher," Thomas says. "You learn what questions to ask and what the potential pitfalls are. I do a thorough survey of the site and ask a lot of questions before I put a price together to try to account for anything unseen,

and then whatever we do know is all detailed in our proposal so the customer is aware."

East Coast Irrigation factors in an unforeseen site cost for larger jobs but will absorb cost overruns on smaller jobs because the company can usually work around obstacles such as roots and small rocks, says Mike DiGiorgio, the company's operations manager.

Accounting for unforeseen challenges is critical in Clarkesville, Ga.-based B & B Landscaping & Irrigation's region where soil can be rockier than other areas, says company Owner Gary Batho. "If it's something simple, I don't charge extra," he says. "But if we run into a situation where we have to do something difficult I contact the client and tell them this is the problem we ran into and this is how much it will cost to fix the problem, and that's in every contract."

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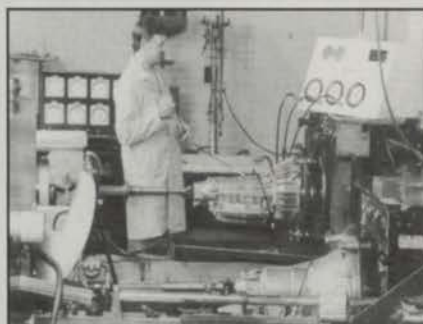
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first day is spent excavating, trenching and boring. The second day is spent installing all pipes, valves and wires, and the third day involves covering up the excavated areas and testing and adjusting the system.

Batho says he knows how long each step should take by tracking his employees' time. He requires that his employees fill out a daily log sheet where they must write how much time they spent doing each task. The sheet includes a list of about 25 different job functions where his workers write what time they started and what time they ended each task, Batho says. The spreadsheet also contains a section where his workers can write in any tasks not already listed.

Thomas tracks his costs through a computerized spreadsheet. With the spreadsheet, Thomas says he can input all expenses, which include labor and materials. The spreadsheet will then calculate those costs. Thomas also brings a handheld computer to jobsites where he can input data and compute a rough

on-site estimate. Data from the handheld computer can then be transferred to the company's desktop computer. The system allows Thomas to provide immediate estimates for price-shoppers.

Thomas prices jobs by factoring in labor and materials plus overhead, travel time, restocking time and profit. He marks up materials about 35 percent and labor 50 percent. Hydroscares' prices are set so the company can achieve a year-end profit margin of 15 percent, Thomas says. The company sometimes estimates jobs by adding labor and materials at cost and then adding a figure based on historical data to recoup overhead and then add profit to it. "When I bid both ways, it gives me a comparison to work off of because some jobs are more labor intensive than others, and some of them are less labor intensive," Thomas says. "Sometimes the numbers don't bring the final selling price up to where it needs to be, so I compare the two formats and decide which one is the best or combine the two and average it out."

There are several pricing methods, but in the end, the law of averages usually plays out, Waters says. R&R Water Management's residential installation prices are calculated per valve. The typical charge is \$750 to \$800 per valve, Waters says. "Over the years, it's become a pretty good rule of thumb," he explains.

Mike DiGiorgio, operations manager, East Coast Irrigation, Tewksbury, Mass., determines his prices by "pacing off" a yard and counting how many heads will be required. He typically charges \$100 per head plus plumbing. Pricing per head allows him to stay consistent with most contractors in its area. "Around here most guys price by the head," he says. "And if I price by the head, everybody is in the same comparison." **LE**

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Pools of Profit



With the right skills, contractors can turn water-feature installation into a money-making service.

by kathleen franzinger

A tranquil oasis in your own backyard is hard to resist. So it's no surprise that more people are investing in water features to transform boring yards into relaxing retreats.

According to a *Lawn & Landscape* survey conducted in August 2004, 35 percent of contractors said they now offer waterscapes as a service and 24.6 percent purchased water features in the past 12 months, an increase of 18.1 percent from 2003.

This is good news for contractors because, unlike other forms of landscaping, water features bring clients out of their homes, says Greg Wittstock, president, Aquascape Designs, Battavia, Ill. "People won't sit outside and watch their tulips grow for hours on end," he says. "But they will sit next to the edge of their waterfalls, feeding their fish and dangling their toes in the water for hours."

And the more time clients spend outside, the more money they're willing to invest in that environment.

HIGHER EDUCATION. To some contractors, water features bring to mind an image of money floating away. "The myth is that it's hard to make money with water features," Greg says.

But that's because contractors too often plunge into water feature services before educating themselves on the correct way to install them.

Contractors who improvise on installation will experience a multitude of headaches and hassles. "If you don't set up water features correctly, the water could turn green, it could breed mosquitoes, raccoons could eat the fish and the water could leak and erode the landscape," says Greg.

When Mark Carter, vice president



Photo: Russell Watergardens

and general manager, Carter's Nursery, Pond & Patio, Jackson, Tenn., started offering water features, he underestimated what it took to put in a functioning, low-maintenance water system. "I jumped in before I had the full knowledge of what it involved," he says. "That, of course, made me lose money on a few jobs, but it also made me start looking for better ways to do it."

Carter says getting an education and training from manufacturers and through the industry were what most helped him make money selling water features. The various classes and seminars he attended ranged from as short as one day to as long as a week – and they weren't free. "You can spend anywhere from \$200 to \$1,000 on the different courses," he says.

Because his water feature business has become so profitable, he recently changed the name of his company from Carter's Nursery and Landscape to Carter's Nursery, Pond & Patio. Today, he estimates that 70 percent of his business falls into water features, including sales of water features, aquatic plants,

fish and pond maintenance.

As Carter found, the industry is a great resource for learning how to install water features. Several manufacturers and pond specialists offer training on their installation methods, including one-day classes that cost \$100 to \$150, where contractors build a pond from start to finish. Physically building a pond is the best way to learn, says David Shuman, vice president of marketing, PondSweep Manufacturing, Yorkville, Ill. Building helps contractors identify the steps in the process, he explains, as well as learn how long it should take to build a certain size pond.

Gary Wittstock, president, PondSweep Manufacturing, recommends subbing out jobs to a pond specialist as another way to learn the ins and outs of water features. "If you sub it out, you can learn how to build ponds quickly while the responsibility of that pond rests on the shoulders of the subcontractor," he says. "That's another way I encourage people to get into ponds quickly, while actually making money in the process."

Once contractors learn how to

properly install water features, the same system should be applied to every pond. "Don't try to build ponds differently every time," advises Shane Wagner, sales consultant, The Pond Shop, Middleton, Wis. "As the ponds get bigger, you're still doing them the same way, using the same simple steps."

If contractors learn and stick to a system, Greg says they can see a 40 to 60 percent gross profit per project. A standard-sized pond is 11 by 16 feet, and it sells for about \$6,000 to \$8,000. "A typical four- to five-man crew is going to gross \$3,000 to \$4,000 a day installing water features without any heavy equipment," he says.

That's because using a system doesn't mean building cookie-cutter ponds. In fact, it's just the opposite. Water features give contractors a lot of room for creative freedom, which enables them to easily differentiate themselves in the market and charge more for their artistic talents, Greg says.

BUILD IT AND THEY WILL BUY.
Greg has a simple philosophy on water



the wisdom of waterfalls

Water feature designs are subject to the ebb and flow of client preferences, but most customers can't help but be drawn to the beauty of waterfalls. In fact, waterfalls aren't only visually appealing, they also circulate the water, providing the aeration needed to keep the pond healthy. "Waterfalls are huge," says Mark Carter, vice president and general manager, Carter's Nursery, Pond & Patio, Jackson, Tenn. "I don't think a lot of people come looking for the pond as much as they do the waterfall."

In fact, some people want only the waterfall. "The biggest trend right now is pondless waterfalls," says Greg Wittstock, president, Aquascape Designs, Battavia, Ill. With these, the water falls into a gravel base, rather than a pond.

One pondless waterfall feature Pam Russell, vice president, Russell Watergardens, Redmond, Wash., is seeing more of in the Pacific Northwest

are drilled rock columns. These tall rock columns are cored through the center, so that water can be pumped up through the rock and spill out the top. Not only are they attractive, but with no water depth, pondless waterfall features are a good option where liability or safety is a concern, such as in commercial applications and at homes with small children, she adds.

And even though ponds are becoming lower maintenance, the pondless waterfall requires even less. "The only thing you have to do is add water when it gets really low," says Shane Wagner, sales consultant, The Pond Shop, Middleton, Wis.

But Bill Soeder, partner, Bill Soeder Landscaping, Westlake, Ohio, finds the meandering, natural stream is popular with his clients. "When we first did water features, we made more falls and less streams," he says. "And now we're going toward more of a stream effect." He sees a smaller fall coupled with a larger stream, typically 10- to 15-foot long, as a current trend.

features: "Everybody wants a pond," he says. "They just don't know it yet."

So how can contractors get clients to realize it? The answer is simple: Have them stand next to one. What draws customers to water features is their tranquil effect, but that isn't easy to convey in a brochure or photograph. But seeing a water feature in person helps customers envision it in their backyards. "An actual pond will sell a pond over pictures or literature any day," Wagner says. "We've found that a lot of times ponds will sell themselves."

Knowing that seeing is believing, Russell Watergardens, Redmond, Wash., has about 12 to 15 water features constantly going on their 3-acre site. "Customers can see our work and we have everything priced out in the display so they can get an idea of general pricing," says Pam Russell, vice president.

One way Wagner gets his work in front of a lot of people is by building free demonstration ponds in high-foot traffic areas, such as high-end restaurants, where he knows a lot of potential customers will walk by. He offers to build the pond for free, explaining that he's going to use it in his marketing. In return, the restaurant hands out Wagner's business cards when people ask about the water feature. Because they got the pond for free, they are more than happy to talk it up. Indeed, no one has turned down Wagner's free pond offer yet.

He says spending \$2,500 to \$3,000 to build a pond and waterfalls is more effective than advertising in the *Yellow Pages*. For instance, one pond he built at the entranceway to a local restaurant cost him \$3,500 to install, including time and materials. But because of that demonstration pond, he has sold more than 10 ponds in a year and a half, generating \$65,000 in revenue. In comparison, a decent, half-page *Yellow Pages* ad would cost him about \$8,000 to \$9,000 – and that's for only one year. "If you build a pond at a restaurant, it's there for life," he says.

CUSTOMER CONCERNS. As great as paradise sounds, customers don't want to buy a water feature and end up all wet. They don't want hours of maintenance or a bug breeding ground. Manufacturers are constantly coming out with new products that reduce pond maintenance, such as more efficient

pumps and skimmer boxes. It's up to the contractor to make sure the pond is as easy as possible for the owner to maintain. Too often, Shuman says, contractors go for the low-cost solutions to keep the price down, forgoing important features that reduce maintenance. "The failures in the past with ponds are because contractors short cut the price," he says. "They have to get away from thinking about

price and start thinking about what's going to build a long-term customer."

For example, autofills connect to an existing irrigation system and automatically fill a pond when the water level gets too low. "It might cost \$30 to \$50 plus labor to add one, but it's a huge time-saver because owners don't have to stand there for hours refilling the pond with a hose," says Shuman. Autofills can also

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USE READER SERVICE # 89

prevent bigger expenses down the line. If the water isn't kept to a certain level, the pump will burn out and replacing it could cost anywhere from \$200 to \$1,000 depending on pond size.

If contractors focus on bare-bones pricing and skip features like this, the customers are the ones who get burned and, in turn, they blame the contractor for their headaches. "Every pond you install is an investment in the future of your business," Shuman says. "If you do a good job, the pond will be marketing for you indefinitely."

Besides pond upkeep, another big worry of clients is that a pool of water in their back yards will be an open invitation to mosquitoes. Always an unwelcome guest, the insects have become even more of a concern as awareness of West Nile Virus increases.

If a pond is stagnant, meaning there is no movement, it will be a mosquito haven, says Wagner. But if a pond is set up so that the water is constantly moving, mosquitoes can't breed and

leave their larvae on the surface. Skimmers, which circulate the water, are a key component in the battle against mosquitoes.

Having fish is another plus. If mosquitoes breed on the surface of the pond, the fish will eat their larvae. "Even if they do breed on the surface of the pond, they'll get skimmed off or eaten," says Wagner. "So you can actually have less mosquitoes in the same size back yard with a pond versus just a grassy area."

MAINTENANCE REVENUE.

Installations aren't the only way to make money with ponds. "Once you install a pond, that pond is alive for life," Wagner says. Therefore, it's going to need maintenance for life, which is a big plus when it comes to making money in ponds.

Wagner sets up customers on yearly maintenance contracts, so that he can take care of them from the time he starts up the pond to when he shuts it

down. Plus performing regular maintenance service keeps his name fresh in customers' minds, so they'll think of him when they need an upgrade or want another pond.

Russell offers a limited maintenance service that includes an annual cleaning in the spring for customers who request it. "It entails draining about 75 percent of the water from the pond, hosing off the rocks, removing larger debris and algae and cleaning the filters," she explains. It also includes cutting back the plants and detailing the gravel edge to conceal the liner. She prices the service based on square-footage, charging \$325 for her average pond size of 300 square feet. **LL**

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Visit the May issue of *Lawn & Landscape* online to learn more about how landscape contractors incorporate fish like koi and goldfish and aquatic plants, such as water lilies, into their clients ponds.

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One Tough Animal.

An Un-contain-able Idea

Containers increase profit while brightening bland spaces.

by kathleen franzinger

Contractors seeking to expand their businesses need look no further than their clients' patios. "If you're on a job and you notice a client doesn't have pots on the patio or around the pool or by the entrance, that's an opportunity to offer one," says Deirdre Toner, project director, Mariani Landscape, Lake Bluff, Ill. "In a residential setting, containers should always be suggested because they are the frosting on the cake in a complete landscape project."

Flower-filled planters and pots bring the beauty of gardens to areas where planting beds aren't possible. "Those are often areas where people spend most of their time outside," says Kerstin Ouellet, president of Pen & Petal, Fallbrook, Calif., and author of two container gardening books. Patios, balconies, decks and pools are ideal places for containers, she says, but containers can also brighten a front door, a walkway, or

even the middle of the landscape.

Besides adding color to otherwise drab locations, containers are becoming a necessity in some applications. More contractors are being forced to use containers because water efficiency is critical in areas with drought conditions or water restrictions, says Chris Lyon, president, Planter Technology and Tournesol Siteworks, Hayward, Calif. "In general, plants in pots tend to be more water efficient or lose less water to run off," he says. "And it's easier to use a smaller amount of water for a plant in a pot than a plant in the ground."

In commercial jobs, contractors are using containers more with on-structure applications, like rooftops, where clients want a garden but not water damage. Containers also work for low-budget commercial projects, says Amy Olson, project director, Moore Landscapes, Northbrook, Ill. "There may not be a budget to do a huge



Photo: Mariani Landscape

flower display on the grounds," she says. "So we put a cluster of a few pots by the entrance to jazz up the building."

PLANT TO SELL. Containers are an add-on sale, and contractors should think of them that way. "You don't want to have to go out of your sales cycle to sell containers," says Lyon.

For example, a great time to offer containers is during spring start-up work, when contractors already plan on going out to a property. Ouellet

agrees that spring is the best time to sell containers. "That's when people think about plants and planting after the danger of frost has passed," she explains.

When it comes to pricing container installation, add materials and labor. But be sure to factor in all costs, not just the price of the container. "Plants are only as good as the soil they are planted in," says Olson, which is why she recommends custom soil mixes. Specialty soil mixes are readily available and can cost an average of \$15 to \$30

THE WORST TRAINING

A friend of mine at a meeting a few years ago was discussing with a few men how difficult it was for them to coach their own children in sports. The dads agreed because they were so close to their kids, they found it tricky to navigate between the roles of parent and coach. As they talked, they heard a voice say, "You guys have it hard? I can't get my kids to listen to anything I say!" The group was shocked to discover John Elway expressing similar aggravation.

This story illustrates how people too close to a situation can be unfit to train. I can't stress enough that as green industry professionals we must realize the worst training we provide our employees is the training we do ourselves. Owners are too close to the situation to be effective. And if John Elway, a proven football leader, can admit he's got trouble leading his own kids, we owners should admit maybe we can't train our own staffs.

First, realize as an owner you're not the best person for the job. Designate a company training coordinator who understands the purpose of training in all aspects of your firm.

Next, train in snippets. People absorb information readily in bite-size morsels, not in day-long seminars, especially led by you.

Finally, seek innovative training opportunities. Make it fun with interaction and team building. Also, people enjoy learning from outside experts who bring new perspectives. Many companies have participated in JP Horizons' Training Challenge to keep training an important, yet fun part of routine work.

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



containers > > >

for a 2-cubic-foot bag.

Another important factor is freight and delivery charges for the containers. "With materials costs and freight increases, we advise getting quotes within 30 days of installation," says Joan Archibald, branch manager, Garden Art International, Santa Ana, Calif.

Contractors also need to figure out how water is going to get to the plants, and then charge for it. One option involves running a drip from an existing irrigation system. Another option is container irrigation systems, which can be dropped into any container. For typical residential applications, these systems cost anywhere from \$10 to \$100, depending on the size of the pot, Lyon says.

STYLE SELECTION. Containers come in an assortment of styles and materials. Sleek, metal planters offer a contemporary feel, while clay and terra cotta containers provide a more natural look.

Try to select containers that match the architectural style of the building and the surrounding hardscape colors and textures. "Consider the outdoor décor and choose containers accordingly," Ouellet says. For example, if a house has terra cotta tile on the patio, she suggests terra cotta or glazed pots in warm colors like brown and red. If

the house has gray tile or granite, she recommends stone planters, gray pots or pots glazed in cool colors, such as blue and teal-green.

Sometimes container style is dictated by the area's weather conditions. In order to ensure healthy plant life, contractors need to factor in how much sun or shade a planter will be exposed to, says Toner. For example, metal containers heat up and cool down quickly. Because they will get hot in the sun, a layer of insulation is needed to deflect the heat and protect the plant inside. Without one, the roots will burn, she explains.

Terra cotta containers work well in sun, which makes them great for warmer climates, but they're porous and absorb more water. Therefore, they'll need more water than, say, a concrete pot. Concrete pots can also handle freezing winters, whereas terra cotta planters need to be covered or brought inside during the winter so they don't crack as moisture freezes and expands within the pot, says Olson. If customers want to avoid the maintenance of terra cotta and the bulk of concrete, Olson recommends using fiberglass and plastic containers.

Wind affects containers, as well. If a container gets hit with a lot of wind, the plants will quickly dry out. "In big areas like parks, the wind just whips the

> container watering 101

Another big trend hitting the container market is more about substance than style. "You have to figure out how to get water to plants in containers," says Chris Lyon, president, Planter Technology and Tournesol Siteworks, Hayward, Calif.

One option is to run a drip line from an existing irrigation system to the containers. But another idea quickly gaining favor is the self-watering insert that can be added to any container. Some manufacturers offer container irrigation systems designed to reduce watering. Such systems hold a reservoir of water for the plant, which is released into the soil from the bottom via a simple moisture sensor. When the soil is dry, the sensor opens and allows air to flow into the reservoir while water flows into the soil. When the soil is moist, the sensor closes and creates a vacuum above the reservoir, preventing more water from going into the soil. In effect, the sensor keeps an even moisture level for the plant at all times.

"The reservoirs are hand-filled and typically allow someone to go four times longer between watering," Lyon says. "So if you were watering every four days, you could now go every 16 days."

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plants and dries them out," says Olson, adding that if a container doesn't get a lot of wind circulation, the plants could develop fungus. "Fungus will grow and take off when there is not enough air circulation," she says. "In cases of low air flow, and if the plant is weakened, other parasites such as bugs and diseases will also hop on board."

Client budget also factors into container choice. Plastic and foam containers are generally the least expensive, with Lyon estimating the retail price for an 18-inch-wide pot to be around \$50. Cost for ceramic and clay pots varies depending on quality. Lyon calculates that an 18-inch pot made of low-quality ceramic, which typically comes from China or Vietnam, would be around \$75. The same sized pot made of high-end material, usually from Italy, costs about \$250.

Fiberglass also has a wide price range that depends on quality. An 18-inch pot might cost \$100 on the low end, says Lyon, but it might be \$250 for high-end

fiberglass. Concrete also depends on the quality. An 18-inch pot can cost anywhere from \$50 to \$250. Concrete is generally the most expensive material, partially because of freight costs.

Concrete is a popular option on commercial sites where durability is a must because planters are left outside year-round, Olson says. However, concrete might not be the best option for a residential installation. "A lot of contractors like to give their customers the flexibility of a light-weight pot, as opposed to a concrete style container," says Lyon.

If homeowners want to be able to move their containers around, Ouellet recommends light-weight plastic or foam pots that look like clay or stone. But if the homeowner plans on keeping the pot in the same place, "you can use clay, stone or cast-iron pots."

Size is another consideration. Residential applications typically use pots smaller than 24 inches in diameter and commercial jobs generally use sizes start-

ing at 18 inches, says Lyon. "This mostly has to do with the size of the installation," he explains. "A 5-foot diameter pot looks pretty big on a 20-by-20 patio but looks small in a parking lot."

But scale isn't the only reason to use large containers on commercial sites. "Larger containers are also easier to maintain, because they dry out slower," Ouellet says. "They're also harder to steal, if that's a concern."

Whatever style you choose, Lyon recommends making sure there are a variety of sizes and shapes to match the installation style. "If pots come in only one or two sizes, what happens when the customer wants more?" he says. "You want to pick a line to sell that has enough options so you can give the customer what they want." ■

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Visit the May issue of *Lawn & Landscape* online to learn more about trendy container designs.

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Welded steel frame with lifetime warranty.

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USE READER SERVICE # 92



Richard Hedahl
Hedahl Landscape Construction & Design
Silverdale, Washington

Toro® Dingo® Gets it Done

Compact Utility Loader

Think of how your company would look with 50 more employees. You could open a branch office, expand your service menu and multiply your sales. Then again, 50 employees creates a great deal of overhead. In today's marketplace, running lean – doing more work with fewer people – is a more profitable option for many small businesses.

Thankfully, for landscape contractors, Toro offers the best of both worlds with the Toro Dingo® compact utility loader (CUL). A mighty force in a small package, one Dingo unit can be fitted with more than 35 interchangeable attachments, helping you boost your bottom line without bulking up your workforce. And with Toro's reputation backing every machine, you don't have to worry about the Dingo loader's quality or durability. Its impressive performance grows with your company – and with a Dingo CUL in your equipment fleet, there's no telling how much you can grow.

YOUR WORKFORCE MULTIPLIED. Whether you're pulling out shrubs with the multipurpose attachment, clearing a sidewalk with the snowthrower or hauling away debris with one of the available buckets, the Dingo CUL can help you and your crews finish jobs more efficiently, effectively serving as that additional team member or two! More than one landscape contractor has already had this experience.

"We work a lot of jobs with just two-person crews, and the Dingo really acts as our third or fourth person," says Paul McCaslin, owner of Redbird Landscaping, Fenton, Mo. "There are jobs when we could be taking on a two-

day project, and we're able to finish it in one day with just two crew members and the Dingo. There's not a day that we don't use the Dingo for one project or another."

Bob Maffei agrees, noting that he's used a Dingo CUL on almost every job his company has completed during the last seven years. "Each crew in our construction department and seasonal services department, which handles heavy maintenance, carries a Dingo," says the owner of Maffei Landscape Contractors, Mashpee, Mass., adding that the company currently has 11 Dingo CULs in its fleet. "If we didn't have the Dingos, we'd have to put more people on the road, we'd have to invest in more training for all types of work, and we'd displace management that much more to handle all the additional people and overhead."

Currently, Maffei Landscape Contractors has a

A Dingo loader can help you...

- Maximize manpower and minimize hand labor
- Finish jobs faster so you can take on more work
- Handle virtually any task, with versatile attachments
- Maneuver in tight spaces
- Go almost anywhere with a light footprint

TORO.

Count on it.

staff of 70, which Maffei says would be dramatically increased if they didn't have the Dingo loaders. "We would have to run four- or five-person crews to replace a three-person crew and a Dingo," he says. "The bottom line is that the Dingo was able to reduce our need for labor, which is a tremendous cost savings."

As a result of savings on labor and associated costs, Dingo equipment users can attribute their profitability to the machines and their unmatched utility. "I'm not the best businessperson, but there are a lot of contractors who have the same problem – we're good at the work, but not always at the business," says Richard Hedahl, owner of Hedahl Landscape Construction & Design, Silverdale, Wash. "I know that I have to mark-up my products and services to generate a profit and make a living, and I would say the mark-up and profit I collect is very much



in the cost-savings of the Dingo. My overhead is high for having a small crew, but I demand the best equipment and the best employees and that costs more – but it also produces a better product and happier clients that will come back and let us do more work for them."

Hedahl, who's been using Dingo CULs for four years, doesn't know what it would cost to do the work by hand anymore, but he's certain of the edge the machine gives him over his competitors. "Our typical jobs range from \$10,000 to \$15,000, but we've done award-winning projects that were as high as \$55,000, all of them with the Dingo," he says. "On jobs like that, I know I can be in and out of the project with two crew members and a Dingo in the same amount of time it would have taken another contractor with six crew members and no Dingos. The cost savings in labor, insurance, unemployment and downtime is, to me, the value of at least two or three crew members."

UNMATCHED VERSATILITY. Undoubtedly, the most attractive aspect of the Dingo CUL is its ability to serve as 35 different pieces of construction and maintenance equipment – or more – in one, compact machine. With a wide range of attachments from which to choose, there's almost no job the Dingo loader can't do. Moreover, its compact size means there's almost no property the Dingo CUL can't access.



Getting Attached

Because labor is the single biggest expense landscape companies face, finding tools and equipment that heighten efficiency is essential. With more than 35 hardworking attachments that offer cost-effective alternatives to the jobs you and your crews are used to doing by hand, the Toro® Dingo® compact utility loader (CUL) is the one machine your company can't be without.

Designed specifically for the Dingo machine, Toro's full line of CUL attachments offers contractors a perfect fit plus superior performance. Since generic aftermarket attachments aren't matched to the capabilities of a Dingo, performance can be compromised. With these and other hardworking attachments, you can eliminate

Dingo

"My client base is almost 100-percent residential, so we have tight, small, narrow areas to work in a lot of the time," Hedahl says. "Who wants to bring a mammoth skid-steer loader on the property when you only have 10 or 20 feet of space to move around in?" While he'll occasionally rent a skid steer for larger jobs if necessary, Hedahl says his Dingo CULs rarely need to be set aside for bigger machines. "There's so much you can use it for," he emphasizes. "We do irrigation, retaining walls, fences, arbors, gates, decks, plantings, lawn amendments, water features – the more attachments you have and the speed with which you can change them out, the more versatile and efficient you can be in your own work."

Maffei agrees. "The attachments are a big deal – they're what really make the Dingo such an important piece of equipment that helps us with all different types of landscape needs," he says. "There's something that each of our departments can take advantage of. We have the construction

e d

the need for shovels, rakes, wheelbarrows, axes, pry bars and other time-consuming tools...

Auger Power Head	Adjustable Forks	Trencher
Standard Bucket	Stump Grinder	Tree Forks
Snowthrower	Hydraulic Breaker	Backhoe
Rotary Broom	Power Box Rake	Leveler
Grading Rake	Vibratory Plow	Tiller
Bore Drive Head	Soil Cultivator	Cement Bowl

The purchase of one loader with multiple attachments can replace several dedicated pieces of equipment. This kind of flexibility can greatly reduce your overall fleet costs and trailer requirements. With the simple addition of rotary brooms, hydraulic blades or snow throwers, the Dingo CUL enables even small businesses to easily expand into year-round service offerings. And because attachments are quick and easy to change out – by simply turning two locking pins and connecting hydraulic lines – a Dingo machine maximizes productivity while remaining extremely efficient.

s i t D o n e



The Toro® Dingo® TX Control System operates with just three easy controls.

crews that will use the auger for planting or the leveler for carrying plants or sod around the site, our maintenance crews can use the buckets for debris removal, and even our snow operation can use the Dingo to clear walkways or use the power broom for parking lot sweeping or light snow removal."

Not only is the Dingo CUL ideal for yard work, offering a light footprint that's safe for turf, it's also safe for the operator. Without a skid steer-style cage or lower-set vantage point to

hamper visibility, Dingo machine operators are able to see all around themselves at all times, which makes using the CUL safer for them and other crew members in their vicinity.

DINGO POWER, TORO PRIDE. So the Dingo CUL can go virtually anywhere and do anything a contractor asks of it – but at an operating capacity of 500 pounds and lifting capacity of 1,500 pounds, does it really stand up to its larger competition? Count on it.

"In terms of its size compared to its weight, the power of the machine is impressive," Hedahl says. "When we're building a waterfall or pond, we can use the Dingo to set huge boulders in place, but it's also light enough that we don't need a heavy-duty trailer to get it to the job. It's also a great help on multilevel retaining wall projects – we can drive the machine into a dump trailer, raise the trailer to the next level and just drive the Dingo right off and keep working."

Maffei agrees that the machine's power is something to be reckoned with. "The Dingo can carry a 3- or 4-inch caliper tree back to the planting site and we can use the auger to dig the hole in no time," he says. "You could put three guys with shovels next to the Dingo and they wouldn't be able to match its digging power. This is an invaluable machine."

Not only is it powerful – it's easy to use. "People get nervous about operating a new piece of equipment, but the Dingo you can teach in five minutes, and within half-an-hour, a new employee is pretty proficient," McCaslin says. He uses the tracked version of the Dingo CUL, which operates with the patented TX Control System steering. Hedahl agrees that the tracked model's steering system is the way to go for contractors looking for ease of use.

"Most of the compact utility loaders on the market have a number of joysticks to operate the machines, but I find those difficult to use – I don't have enough fingers!" Hedahl says. "The controls on the tracked units are very easy to handle and they're easy for a new person to understand as well."

Additionally, Hedahl comments that Toro's stewardship of Dingo equipment has been exceptional. "Toro is always making improvements to their machines, and those changes are as a result of comments we've made to them about how the equipment operates," he says. "I've also really enjoyed working with our dealer – they're always helpful in getting us demos to try out or use if our machine is being repaired, and we can always get parts quickly if we need them."

Maffei, who opts for wheeled Dingo models in his fleet, agrees that the options available to Dingo CUL users – as well as the durability and strength of the machines on the whole – are a direct result of operators' interaction with Toro dealers and engineers. "The bottom line is that they've listened to us," Maffei says. "We own multiple pieces of Toro equipment, and we'll talk to the engineers about fixing or improving certain aspects. They really want to know what contractors need, and they've incorporated a lot of our suggestions into upgraded versions of their equipment. Not only that, but the Dingos have proven parts – from the engines to the hydraulics, everything is of a quality that you know will last. These machines are bulletproof."

TORO.**Count on it.**

Meet the Powerful Toro® Dingo® Family...

At Toro, innovative product development teams keep working to make the series of Dingo compact utility loaders better, stronger, and more versatile. Currently, the family includes six models, encompassing both wheeled and tracked units in walk-behind and ride-on designs. All offer incredible hydraulic power in a compact, maneuverable package:

What's Right for you... Wheels or Tracks?

Though similar in function and versatility, the wheeled and tracked models each offer their own advantages. The wheeled Dingo units (220, 323, and 320D) are ideally suited for hard surfaces and long-distance riding. Plus, their shorter wheel base creates a more compact design that helps them maneuver in tight spaces.

The tracked models (TX 413, TX 420, and TX 425) accommodate difficult turf conditions and terrains such as mud or sand. The patented TX Control System makes them easy to learn and operate, with only three controls.

"The choice of a wheeled vs. tracked model really comes down to personal preference," explains Greg Lawrence, product manager for the Toro Dingo® line. "Both models have their own advantages - it depends on who will be using the machine and how. Your best bet is to demo both machines to determine which one best suits your needs."

When paired with any of our more than 35 rugged Dingo attachments, either the tracked or wheeled models can tackle virtually any job, any time, anywhere.

Dingo 220 - Provides exceptional value for its economical price. This 41.5"-wide, ride-on, wheeled unit is packed with 3000 psi and 14.8 gpm of hydraulic power and a 20hp Kohler® gas engine.

Dingo 323 - Equipped with the Toro-designed 4-Paw, independent 4-wheel drive system and a 23hp Kohler engine, this 41.5"-wide, ride-on, wheeled unit offers incredible power and durability. Its two gas tanks provide expanded fuel capacity, plus a front cover prevents dirt from entering the engine.

Dingo 320D - This 41.5"-wide, ride-on, wheeled unit is powered by a 20hp, liquid cooled, Kubota® diesel engine. It includes the Toro-designed 4-Paw, independent 4-wheel drive system. This is an ideal choice for contractors who prefer diesel equipment.

Dingo TX 413 - This value-packed tracked unit offers a dedicated system trailer; our easy-to-use, patented TX Control System; and a 13 hp Honda® gas engine. Multiple attachment options make this 33.7"-wide machine a great choice for anyone buying their first compact utility loader.

Dingo TX 420 - The patented TX Control System on this tracked unit means it's simple to operate and easy to learn, with only three controls. With a 20hp Kohler gas engine in a 34.5" wide machine, it's perfect for maneuvering in tight spaces. Great for demolition applications.

Dingo TX 425 Wide Track - This 41.5"-wide model includes our most powerful gas engine, at 25hp, and the easy-to-use, patented TX Control System. Its Kevlar-reinforced wide track is 60% wider than the Dingo TX 420 to increase flotation and traction. A hydraulic system with 3000 psi and 16.7 gpm provides plenty of power to the versatile attachments.

CONTACT US to locate the dealer nearest you, or to receive your free demo video and brochure:

The Toro Company
Siteworks Systems

Bloomington, Minn.

800-DIG-TORO

(800-344-8676)

www.toro.com/Dingo



Toro offers innovative finance programs to meet your purchase needs. Visit Toro.com/Dingo and click on "Special Financing for Sitework Systems."

Products depicted in this advertisement are for demonstration purposes only. Actual products offered for sale may vary in design, required attachments, and safety features.

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PRODUCTS!

This Month Win up to 200 Commercial Series NGK Sparkplugs for your small-engine power equipment!

The NGK Commercial Series Spark Plugs offer superior performance in a wide range of small-engine Green Industry applications -- lawn mowers, weed eaters, chain saws, generators, snow blowers, tillers, edgers.

From the highly pure alumina silicate insulator to the extra long insulator nose, and all points in between, the new Commercial Series plugs deliver a knockout performance.

As the world's leading OEM spark plug manufacturer, NGK has great brand acceptance, and our new packaging includes part conversion information to make switching to our easy-starting, anti-foul plugs a breeze.

The NGK Commercial Series Spark Plugs will deliver the power you need to get the job done!



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The Fully-Equipped Truck

Explore this wide range of aftermarket truck accessories debuted at The National Truck Equipment Association's Work Truck Show.

► compiled by kathleen franzinger

Aftermarket accessories can make trucks more productive, safer and convenient. The 41st annual National Truck Equipment Association (NTEA) Convention and Work Truck Show, held March 2-4 in Indianapolis, Ind., featured products to make any contractor's truck complete. Most of the truck accessories shown here are available through your local light truck accessory retailer, as is professional installation.

In 2006, the Work Truck Show will be held March 1-3 in the Georgia Congress Center, Atlanta, Ga. For more information about NTEA, visit www.ntea.com. Another useful site is the Specialty Equipment Market Association (SEMA) site at www.enjoythedriver.com, which includes an "Auto Glossary" of industry lingo.



Soft Bed Liner

Wise Industries' BedRug bed liner is an alternative to hard plastic or sprayed-in liners. The BedRug is made of polypropylene plastic – a bottom layer of foam bonded to a top layer of plastic fiber. The surface will not absorb liquids or stains and resists most dents and scratches. Gasoline, oil and dirt can be cleaned off with a garden hose. The non-skid surface helps keep equipment secure in transport. Sizes are available for most pickups, and liners can be custom-molded for special makes and models. For more information, visit www.bedrug.com.

◀ **Circle 202 on reader service card**

Rolling Storage Shed

A.R.E.'s Deluxe Commercial Unit (DCU) fiberglass truck cap features tool bins, dividers, fold-down shelves, a welded aluminum roof rack and a steel locking ladder rack. Has a fully welded frame and weather-sealed doors with gas props, heavy-duty hinges and automotive style locks. The cap is available in 23", 26", 29" and 36" heights, and with a choice of hatchback lift, single walk-in or double walk-in door. Models fit any domestic or import truck. For more information, visit www.4are.com.

◀ **Circle 201 on reader service card**



Some things naturally **STINK!**

Your herbicide shouldn't be one of them.

Everyone wants weed-killing power but no one wants a lingering odor that makes being near treated turf an unpleasant experience.

Triplet® Low Odor's unique formulation of 2,4-D, Mecoprop-p and Dicamba delivers the proven triple-whammy you need to control dandelion, clover, henbit, plantains and other broadleaf invaders with deadly certainty. It's perfect for all turf uses, including lawns and golf course fairways, roughs, tees and aprons.

But your nose and eyes will notice the real difference when you open the jug – less odor and a much clearer liquid. The reason is the addition of 2,4-D TIPA, a highly refined ingredient available only from Nufarm.

*Make everyone – especially their noses – happy.
Use Triplet Low Odor.*

TRIPLET Low Odor

Contact a Nufarm representative or your local distributor for more information:
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Home of Riverdale Brands



Accident Prevention

Backing accidents mean costly repair bills, damaged equipment, down time, legal expenses and higher insurance premiums. Like an extra set of eyes, Rostra Precision Controls' Rear Obstacle Sensing System Pro (ROSS Pro) detects objects behind your truck or trailer as you back up. State-of-the-art microwave motion sensing technology detects objects as far as 12 feet behind a vehicle. It alerts drivers through audible beeps that increase in intensity the closer the object gets, and from an in-cab LED display that changes from green to yellow to red. A bracket mounts the sensor to plastic or steel bumpers, and an extension harness and connector allow it to be mounted on trailers. For more information, visit www.rostra.com.

Circle 203 on reader service card



Improved Traction

Firestone's new Transforce tire line is designed for commercial and light trucks. The Transforce HT is an all-season highway-terrain tread design. The tires are chip and tear resistant, and can be used in either single- or dual-rear-wheel applications. The Transforce AT delivers all-terrain wet and dry performance for professionals who drive on and off-road. It's features include a two-ply polyester body, steel belts, a spiral-wrap nylon cap ply and continuous shoulder ribs with deep shoulder slots. Firestone Transforce tires are offered in 15-, 16- and 17-inch load range and C, D and E sizes. For more information, visit www.firestonetire.com.

Circle 204 on reader service card



Stopping Power

Valley Industries' Odyssey brake controller features double-axis accelerometer technology that continually adjusts (self-leveling) for varying road terrain. When braking, the unit senses the vehicle's rate of deceleration and applies a proportionate amount of braking force at precise intervals for a smooth stop. It is designed for light- to heavy-duty applications, allows four independent power level settings for different trailer types and loads, and creates no output interference with electrical, cruise control or anti-lock brake systems. An adjustable manual override allows the user to manually apply the trailer brakes if needed. For more information, visit www.valleyindustries.com.

Circle 205 on reader service card



MAKE THE CUT

Oregon® knows cutting. For more than 50 years, we've been proving it with our world-class saw chain. Now we're also setting performance standards for lawnmower blades.

The Gator Mulcher™ blade is a prime example. Aerodynamic fins create the lift and turbulence necessary to keep clippings "in play" so that they are cut and cut

and cut. Mulched and pulverized. With Oregon® Gator Mulcher™ blades, you can mulch at bagging pace. Or choose to bag, and cover more ground without dumping. Plus, the Oregon® Gator Mulcher™ blade creates the correct under-deck pressure to pull up the grass for an even, professional cut. Fast work, great finish...and more.

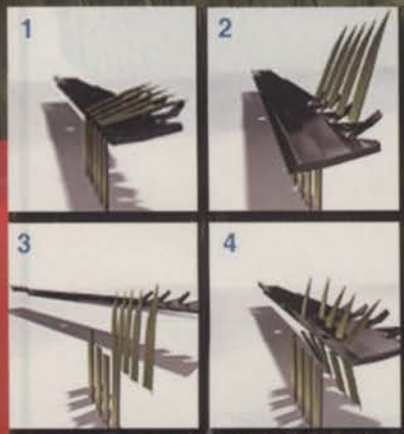
All Oregon® lawnmower

blades are Austempered for long life and robotically-straightened to fit your machine just right. If quality, professional work is important to you, you owe it to yourself to use genuine Oregon® lawnmower blades.

GATOR MULCHER



www.oregonchain.com/oep



Advanced Cutting Technology



USE READER SERVICE # 95



Added Cargo Capacity

Let's Go Aero's GearDeck is a hitch-mounted, modular carrier with a maximum 300-pound cargo capacity. It can be used as an enclosed and securable hauler or as an open platform carrier for plants. The weatherproof lid creates 17 cubic feet of watertight and lockable storage. The open platform also incorporates attachment points for equipment. Drain channels and removable plugs prevent water accumulation. For more information, visit www.letsgoaero.com.

Circle 206 on reader service card

Combination Fuel/Tool Storage

Transfer Flow lets you haul extra fuel and tools in a container that combines a toolbox and a 30-gallon refueling tank. The fuel tank, constructed of 14-gauge aluminized steel, is mounted inside the shell of the bright aluminum diamond plate toolbox. A 12-volt pump located inside the locking storage compartment directs fuel through an 8-foot hose to the nozzle. The toolbox compartment provides 5 cubic feet of storage space. The all-in-one container bolts to the pickup floor in four optional locations. A Department of Transportation exemption number allows the legal transport of gasoline, diesel, ethanol and methanol fuels. Models are available to fit all Ford, GM and Dodge pickups. For more information, visit www.transferflow.com.

Circle 207 on reader service card



Brake Upgrades

Stainless Steel Brakes Corporation's (SSBC) Truck Stop program upgrades original disc brakes. The Force 10 Tri-Power kit uses three-piston Tri-Power calipers to generate up to 36-percent greater clamping force than factory calipers. The lightweight aluminum and stainless steel pistons resist corrosion and minimize fade. Tri-Power kits fit practically any stock or larger wheel and are designed for the Ford F-150, Dodge Ram 1500 and 1999-2004 GM 1/2-ton, 3/4-ton and 1-ton trucks. For more information, visit www.ssbrakes.com.

Circle 208 on reader service card

What does **MESA** look like? If you've used it you know **MESA** slow release nitrogen provides brilliant green color, fast response, and lasts longer than SCU. But now something's different. Rip open a bag that contains **MESA**. It will be easy to spot, just look for the dark blue granules. That's right, **MESA** is now dark blue! **MESA** is another Practical Innovation available only from LebanonTurf. Each dark blue granule combines ammonium sulfate for fast response and great color, with our MethEx



How can something that works so fast...last so long?

Extended-release **MESA** greens faster and lasts longer than SCU.

methylene urea. MethEx methylene urea is released by soil microbes and provides reliable long feeding. Patented **MESA** is the only slow release nitrogen technology to combine the benefits of ammonium sulfate and methylene urea in a single slow release homogeneous granule. So, if it's not blue it's not **MESA**. To learn more, and get a free 40 page Agronomy Manual, visit our web site at www.LebanonTurf.com, click on promotions and enter coupon code LL2055.

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End Load Shifting

Sliding cargo can cause damaged tools, upset containers and spilled liquids. The Save-A-Load cargo-bracing bar helps keep tools and equipment in place in transport. The Save-A-Load Bar locks in place with a hydraulic pump, while a pressure-limiting valve protects the walls of your truck bed from dents. Pivoting feet and ultra-high friction rubber pads grip any surface, including bed liners. Positioning the bar is as easy as adjusting the extension end to the desired length and pumping the handle to lock it in place. A push button instantly releases it. The telescoping design adjusts to 47 inch to 75 inch widths. The bar is made using 1¼-inch square anodized aluminum tubing to give it a bending strength of more than 700 pounds. For more information, visit www.saveload.com.

Circle 210 on reader service card



Landscaper Truck Bodies

Knapheide's truck body packages are designed to meet landscapers' needs. They offer a bulk cargo area and side and rear cargo doors. A double-acting tailgate allows for multiple drop-down and bottom spreading positions. A center metering gate provides a 17-inch opening for metering into a wheelbarrow. A lockable tool storage, personal compartment and dumping hoist are optional. For more information, visit www.knapheide.com.

Circle 209 on reader service card



Safer Entry and Exit

Muddy boots and grass-covered shoes can make even getting in and out of your truck a potentially painful experience. More than bothersome bruises, these common jobsite injuries can interrupt a day's work or even lead to lost time. The new Luverne Truck Equipment XX Bar Grip Step by Luverne Truck Equipment gives contractors a firm foothold when entering and exiting their trucks. The innovative step design provides added traction and safety against cracked shins, stubbed toes or twisted ankles. Special Armor coating provides unsurpassed abrasion and impact resistance. XX Bar Grip Step models fit 1999 to 2005 Ford, Dodge and GM heavy-duty trucks. The step installs with no drilling required. For more information, visit www.luvernetruck.com.

Circle 211 on reader service card

THERE'S A NEW CHAMPION IN SMALL ENGINE SPARK PLUGS.

Commercial Series spark plugs from NGK.

Commercial Quality – Commercial Price – Uncompromising Performance!



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NGK, The World Leader in spark plug technology, engineered the new Commercial Series spark plug to power small engines – the backbone of your business. The easy starting, anti-fouling design helps deliver longer life in heavy-duty and commercial applications.

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Try NGK's new Commercial Series spark plugs and see for yourself how we won the title of *new champion*. For more information visit us on the Web at ngksparkplugs.com, call toll-free 1-877-473-6767 or contact your local NGK distributor.



- HIGHLY PURE ALUMINA SILICATE INSULATOR – for extra strength
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- LONGER INSULATOR NOSE – prevents fouling



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THE WORLD LEADER

USE READER SERVICE # 97

Far-Reaching Crane

The Model 6628 telescopic crane from Stellar Industries offers 28 feet of hydraulic reach. With a 38,000-foot pound capacity, the crane can lift a maximum of 6,000 pounds at 6 feet and 1,350 pounds at 28 feet. It uses a planetary winch system with a hydraulic and mechanical brake system. The 6628 comes by itself or in a package, which includes a chassis, service crane body, an air compressor and drawer system, and a truck-mounted



power system. For more information, visit www.mechanicktruck.com.
Circle 212 on reader service card

Easy Pull Tarp

Aero Industries' Easy Pull Tarp is an automated tarping system. An extruded aluminum roller rewinds the vinyl tarp, which comes with or without side flaps. The system comes in widths and lengths to fit many dump bodies. For more information, visit www.aeroindustries.com.

Circle 213 on reader service card



Need a Lift?

The 1614 scissor hoist from Heil Environmental lifts dump bodies on vehicles with a gross vehicle weight up to 20,000 pounds. The 1614 features a 6-inch cylinder with a 14-inch stroke and a body/payload capacity of more than 25 tons. High-pressure hydraulics give an extra boost to the cylinder's lifting capacity. For more information, visit www.heil.com.

Circle 214 on reader service card

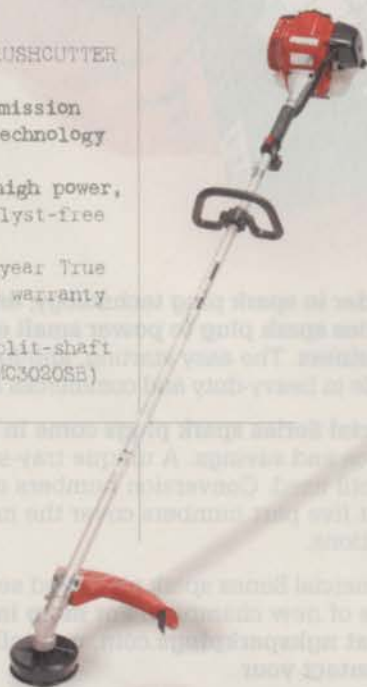
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low weight, catalyst-free

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Commercial Extra warranty


available in a split-shaft
configuration (MC3020SB)



demand
more

innovation power
value performance

Demand more. Because good enough isn't good enough. Demand Maruyama. Because extraordinary quality, proven durability and superior performance still matter. Because commitment to service and support still count. Because we build the tools of your trade, the tools you depend on, everyday. Demand Maruyama. Because anything less just isn't good enough. All commercial outdoor power equipment is not created equal.

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PREFERRED SUPPLIER OF PORTABLE OUTDOOR POWER EQUIPMENT

UNIVERSAL *Orlando*

USE READER SERVICE # 98

Unleash The Power!

ZAP[®] Warm-Weather Weeds

Spurge, knotweed and clover are no match for the power of new Surge[®] Broadleaf Herbicide For Turf. Energized with sulfentrazone, Surge has the power and speed to knock out tough broadleaf weeds fast. And it even suppresses yellow nutsedge! **Visual results in 48 hours** – now that has a powerful effect on call-backs.

Your customers will be pleased with the speed and performance. You'll be pleased with the economy of Surge's water-based amine formulation!

Put the power of Surge to work for your business this year!

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USE READER SERVICE # 99

Truck Stop

Check out these work trucks to keep your crews and materials on the move.

compiled by kathleen franzinger

Toyota Tundra Work Truck

The Toyota Tundra Work Truck offers a five-speed automatic transmission with a 4.7-liter i-Force V8 engine that produces 282 hp and 282 pound-foot of torque. The truck, available in 2WD or 4WD, comes with a bed more than 8-feet long, vinyl floors, and a towing capacity of 7,100 pounds. An optional vehicle electronic stability control is designed to help the driver maintain vehicle control under adverse conditions. Options shown include an after-market utility rack and a toolbox available through Knaack Manufacturing. For more information, visit www.toyota.com.

Circle 215 on reader service card



GMC Sierra 1500

GMC engineered the Sierra 1500 for strength and flexibility. A choice of Vortec engines, including a 4300 V6, a 4800 V8 and a 5300 V8, delivers up to 310 hp. The Sierra 1500, which comes in three cab configurations, offers a 7,000-pound gross vehicle weight rating and a towing capacity of 9,000 pounds. Available automatic locking rear differential is designed to evenly distribute to both rear wheels in difficult traction conditions. For 2005, the Sierra 1500 Extended Cab 2WD and 4WD models are available with an all-new hybrid system. This gasoline/electric hybrid is up to 10 percent more fuel efficient than the gasoline version. In addition, it features a built-in generator, which offers 120-Vac power via four outlets – two in the cab and two in the truck bed. It is available in limited quantities and geographical areas. For more information, visit www.gmc.com.

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USE READER SERVICE # 100

Ford Super Duty Chassis Cab

Ford's Super Duty Chassis cab offers a 5,800-pound Best-In-Class payload capacity when properly equipped. It is available with the exclusive TowCommand system, which features the first available fully integrated trailer brake controller with Tow/Haul Mode. With the available TowCommand system and TowBoss package, DRW F-350 can fifth-wheel tow up to 19,200 pounds. The truck features Power Stroke® Turbo Diesel and Triton™ engines. For more information, visit www.com-truck.ford.com.

Circle 217 on reader service card



Isuzu N-Series

The Isuzu N-Series truck gets a fresh face for 2006, with a host of enhancements aimed at driver comfort and convenience. It features a lighter interior cab color to create a sense of spaciousness, as well as a Jacquard flat-woven breathable cloth seat material that is more resistant to tears and stains. Additional features include a tachometer to aid PTO operation, a rear steel engine cover, a new engine control module mounting bracket and a Donaldson polypropylene air cleaner. Under the hood is a choice of a 5.2-liter diesel engine, which puts out 190 hp and 387 pound-foot of torque, or the Vortec 6000 6-liter engine, which produces 300 hp and 358 pound-foot of torque. For more information, visit www.isuzucv.com.

Circle 218 on reader service card



International Truck & Engine CF Series

Two cab-forward model trucks are available from International Truck & Engine. The International CF 500 model targets the Class-4 market with a 16,000-pound gross vehicle weight rating, and the International CF 600 model is for the Class-5 market with a 19,500-pound gross vehicle weight rating. Both models offer an optional transmission with PTO capability to operate specialized body equipment. The VT 275 diesel engine features a regulated two-stage turbocharger that produces 200 hp and 440 pound-foot of torque. A standard five-speed overdrive automatic transmission delivers responsiveness. The CF Series is designed for maneuverability, providing a 53-degree wheel cut to handle sharp turns. It offers a 48-month unlimited mileage frame warranty, a three-coat paint process to ensure quality cab finish and high payload capacity for tough handling needs. For more information, visit www.internationaldelivers.com.

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USE READER SERVICE # 102



Chevy Kodiak C4500/5500

The Chevy Kodiak C4500/5500 comes with a choice of Vortec 8100 V8 gas or Duramax 6600 diesel engines. It's available in 2WD and 4x4 configurations and delivers a gross vehicle weight rating to 26,000 pounds. For driver comfort, it features a car-like interior and a switch-panel cockpit, as well as a large windshield and sloped hood for good visibility.

It offers true medium-duty frame strength and front axles. In addition, a snowplow can attach to the Kodiak for all-season use. For more information, visit www.chevy.com/mediumduty.

Circle 222 on reader service card

Dodge Ram

The Dodge Ram is part of a powerful and long-lasting line of pickups. Models include the Regular and Quad Cab, as well as the Power Wagon. Available engines include 3.7-liter Magnum V6, 4.7-liter Magnum V8, 5.7-liter HEMI V8 and Cummins 610 Turbo Diesel. Maximum trailer weight is 6,300 pounds (3500 Quad 4x2 with Cummins). In addition, the vehicle comes with a fully transferable seven-year/70,000-mile Powertrain Limited Warranty. For more information, visit www.dodge.com.

Circle 220 on reader service card



Mitsubishi Fuso FE Series

Mitsubishi offers a complete line of diesel-powered, medium-duty cab-over-vehicles operating in Classes 3 to 7. FE 145 CrewCab has room for seven passengers and features a 175-hp diesel engine. It offers smooth six-speed Aisin automatic transmission and a gross vehicle weight rating to 14,500 pounds. For more information, visit www.mitfuso.com.

Circle 223 on reader service card

Nissan Titan

The Nissan Titan pick-up, available in 2WD and 4WD, features a 305-hp, 5.6-liter V8 engine that puts out 379 pound foot of torque. It comes in Crew Cab or King Cab models. When properly equipped, the Crew Cab offers a towing capacity to 9,400 pounds, and the King Cab has a towing capacity to 9,500 pounds. Both feature a fully boxed ladder frame and come equipped with five-speed automatic transmission with Tow/Haul mode. For more information, visit www.nissanusa.com.

Circle 221 on reader service card



I DESIGNED THE BODY, BUT MY ISUZU CREW CAB MAKES IT WORK.



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

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

Would a perfect landscape truck work for you? It's as near as your phone, just call 800-785-5445 ext. 2362, or visit us at www.isuzucv.com/ll.



USE READER SERVICE # 103

Making the Cut

Using the right tool, whether it's mechanical or manual, is a must when cutting or pruning live material. Try these tools to keep trees and shrubs in shape.

▶ compiled by kathleen franzinger

Husqvarna 326HS99X Hedge Trimmer

- Single-sided trimmer
- Designed for extended reach
- Equipped with a 40-inch blade
- Low weight and balanced center of gravity allow for easy handling in varied positions
- Constructed using a hard chromium plated cylinder bore, forged connecting rod and three-piece crankshaft
- Husqvarna – 800/438-7297, www.husqvarna.com

Circle 235 on reader service card



Little Wonder Extended Reach Gas Hedge Trimmer

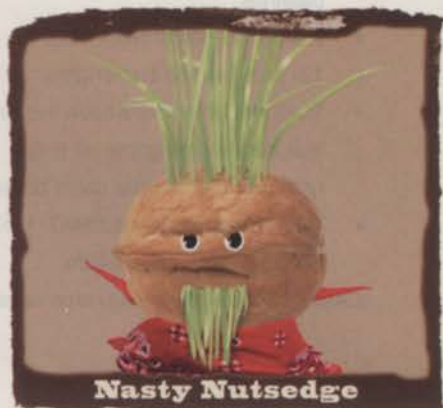
- Features dual-reciprocating, double-edge, high-carbon steel blades that cut growth up to 1/2-inch thick
- Maintains blade speed of 4,900 cuts per minute
- Provides 180-degree blade rotation, many locking positions
- Powered by a 22.5-cc commercial-grade engine
- Short-shaft models weigh 12.9 pounds and have a 36-inch shaft and 25-inch blade
- Long-shaft models weigh 14.2 pounds and have a 60-inch shaft and a 20-inch blade
- Both models feature a quick-release system, which lets operators dismantle the unit or add an extension without tools
- An optional 24-inch extension shaft is available for the short-shaft model
- Little Wonder – 877/596-6337, www.littlewonder.com

Circle 236 on reader service card



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Dandelion



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USE READER SERVICE # 104

Tilton Equipment Efco 932 Chainsaw

- Commercial-duty top handle saw
- Includes a 30-cc engine with a chrome cylinder and a three-piece crankshaft supported by ball bearings
- 7.5-pound powerhead weight
- 12- and 14-inch bar lengths
- Features an anti-vibration system, textured handle grips, air purge primer and an inertia chain brake
- Tilton Equipment – 800/447-1152, www.tiltonequipment.com

Circle 237 on reader service card



Maruyama HT2300DR Hedge Trimmer

- Includes company's 22.5-cc LE two-cycle commercial engine
- Weighs 10.9 pounds
- Five-position rotating handle eases vertical and angled trimming
- Features a 24-inch double-sided blade
- Induction hardened chrome steel blades are polish ground sharpened on all three cutting surfaces
- Maruyama – 253/735-7368, www.maruyama-us.com

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USE READER SERVICE # 106

Corona Clipper Loppers

- Feature forged and heat-treated hook and blade
- Deep hook design traps branches close to the pivot axis
- Dual-Arc bypass blade is easy to replace and re-sharpen
- Includes shock-absorbing bumpers
- Orchard model has a cutting capacity of 2¼ inches and comes in handle lengths of 26, 32 and 36 inches
- Vineyard model has a smaller head, cuts up to 1¼ inches and comes in handle lengths of 16 and 19 inches
- Corona Clipper – 800/847-7863, www.coronaclipper.com

Circle 239 on reader service card



John Deere CS36 and CS40 Lightweight Professional Saws

- CS36 features a 35.2-cc, 2.1-hp engine; CS40 has a 39-cc, 2.4-hp engine
- Both saws come with 12- to 18-inch bars and 3/8 inch, low-profile, semichisel chains
- CS36 has a powerhead weight of 9.1 pounds; CS40 has a powerhead weight of 9.3 pounds
- No-oil-at-idle feature reduces oil consumption
- Ergonomically designed
- John Deere – 800/537-8233, www.johndeere.com

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The Mesa® Systems now offer a superior unit for your low-height wall needs. Easy to handle and install, Plateau Units are the economical solution for wall heights up to ten feet. These units use a unique lug design in combination with aggregate fill to interlock the geogrid reinforcement to the wall face. This creates a built-in setback and eliminates the need for pins, clips or mortar.

For more information and local availability, please call **888-828-5007** or visit www.tensarcorp.com/m9.

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USE READER SERVICE # 107

RedMax GZ4000 Chain Saw

- Powered by RedMax's Strato-charged engine
- Meets 2005 EPA and CARB standards
- 40.1-cc engine is rated 2.45 hp with a maximum speed of 13,000 rpm
- Features a dust-free system to prevent debris from clogging the engine intake
- Choice of a 14-, 16- or 18-inch bar
- Weighs 9.67 pounds
- RedMax – 800/291-8251, www.redmax.com

Circle 241 on reader service card



Shindaiwa HT2510 Hedge Trimmer

- High-torque, 24.5-cc engine delivers 1.1 hp at 7,500 rpm
- Features Shindaiwa's C4 Technology four-stroke engine
- Chrome-plated, self-adjusting blades
- High blade speed delivers fast, clean cuts
- Quiet operation
- Uses 50:1 two-cycle mix
- Shindaiwa – 800/521-7733, www.shindaiwa.com

Circle 242 on reader service card

Landscape Attachments

Unleash Your Potential

Turn your tractor into the ultimate workhorse with the Frontier family of landscape attachments. Frontier rear blades, box blades, grooming mowers, rotary tillers, and pendular spreaders are just some of the tools that can help you unleash your property's potential. Each one is compatibility tested to maximize the performance of your John Deere tractor.

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Learn about industry suppliers, complete with product images and information, articles, videos and more.

Barnel B308 Pruner

- Features heavy-duty, light weight, drop forged aluminum body
- Thermoplastic-rubber-coated handles offer nonslip grip and ergonomic cushioning
- Includes SK3 replaceable Japanese sword steel blade
- Center Oiler Bolt Technology eases maintenance
- Two-position lock allows operation at smaller handle spread for small cuts; at the flick of the lock, a fully open cutting head can make cuts up to 1 inch
- Rotating handle is also available
- Barnel International – 503/291-1400, www.barnel.com

Circle 243 on reader service card



Porter Ferguson Pruners and Brush Cutters

- Line consists of one pruner and two heavy-duty brush cutters designed to cut cleanly so that trees and shrubs heal quickly
- Point Cut pruner cuts down to its tips with minimal handle spread and handles open wide to cut material up to 1¼-inch thick

- Forester Model 0290F brush cutter has a cutting capacity of 1½ inches; Forester Model 0390F has a cutting capacity of 2 inches
- Both Forester brush cutters have a slide power shift
- Pruner and brush cutters feature two cutting blades
- Porter Ferguson – 800/456-9355, www.lowellcorp.com

Circle 244 on reader service card



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- Features bearing supported, 7-millimeter, solid-steel drive shaft
- 5-inch semiautomatic cutting head holds 25 feet of line
- Fuel tank holds 19.3 fluid ounces
- Designed to be blade capable
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Circle 245 on reader service card



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- 16.1 pound, 31.4-cc, 1.3-hp pruner
- Features low-emissions engine
- Telescoping shaft extends from 5.6 to 11.5 feet
- Equipped with a 12-inch bar and chain
- Automatic bar and chain oiling system is said to provide smooth, efficient operation
- Stihl – 800/467-8445, www.stihlusa.com

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Echo USA HC-150i Hedge Clipper

- Powered by a commercial-grade 21.2-cc Power Boost Vortex engine
- The i-start system reduces starting effort by 75 percent
- Includes 20-inch double-sided, double-reciprocating blades
- Throttle lockout on rear handle helps prevent accidental throttle engagement
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- Echo – 800/673-1558, www.echo-usa.com

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USE READER SERVICE # 90

Be Sure and Insure

Insurance is essential to keep your company safe. These programs are designed to meet the green industry's protection needs.

compiled by kathleen franzinger

Weisburger Insurance Brokerage



- Full service insurance company specializing in the pest control and green industries
- In business since 1915
- General liability policy includes pollution and contamination coverage, transit pollution, care/custody/control and blanket additional insured
- Commercial auto coverage also includes transit pollution
- Workers' compensation with increased limits is available, as well as fire/property coverage, contractor equipment coverage and umbrella coverage (including job site pollution and contamination)
- Weisburger Insurance Brokerage – 800/431-2794, www.weisburger.com

Circle 224 on reader service card

CNA PLANT Business Insurance Program



- Designed for landscape contractors, lawn care companies, nurseries and tree care companies
- Basic coverages available include property, liability, commercial crime and workers' compensation
- Installation floater covers trees, shrubs

- and plants as property at the job site
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- Landscape contractor limited pollution liability protects against certain losses from accidental release of pollutants at or from job sites or from owned properties, including coverage for liability claims from pesticide and herbicide applications
- Transportation of Designated Pollutants provides third-party pollution liability coverage for claims and certain clean-up costs that result from the collision or overturn of a covered automobile and involving designated pollutants
- CNA – 800/262-6241, www.cna.com

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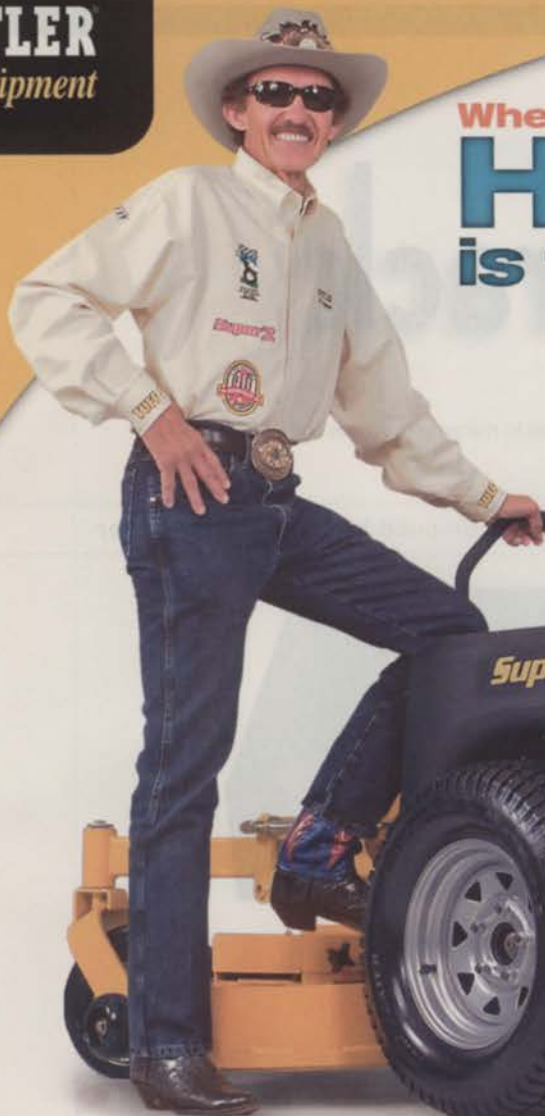
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- Insurance specialists for the horticultural industry
- Founded in 1887
- Provides insurance products and coverages including Business Package Policy, commercial automobile, workers' compensation and excess liability
- Hortica Insurance – 800/851-7740, www.hortica-insurance.com

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• www.hustlerturfequipment.com

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compiled by kathleen franzinger

Locarta GPRS Vehicle Tracking Units

- Locarta 2020 in-vehicle units send information to the tracking computer via the General Packet Radio Service (GPRS) communication network
- MapPoint map display shows where vehicles are located at any given moment
- Memory is built into the unit
- When vehicles are out of GPRS coverage, the location data is stored and then retrieved and sent to the tracking computer upon reentry to coverage areas
- Features message alerts that can be delivered via e-mail or cellular phone and a built-in help system
- Easy to use and non-hosted, so all information is stored on user's personal computer
- Locarta Technologies – 405/841-2020, www.locarta.com

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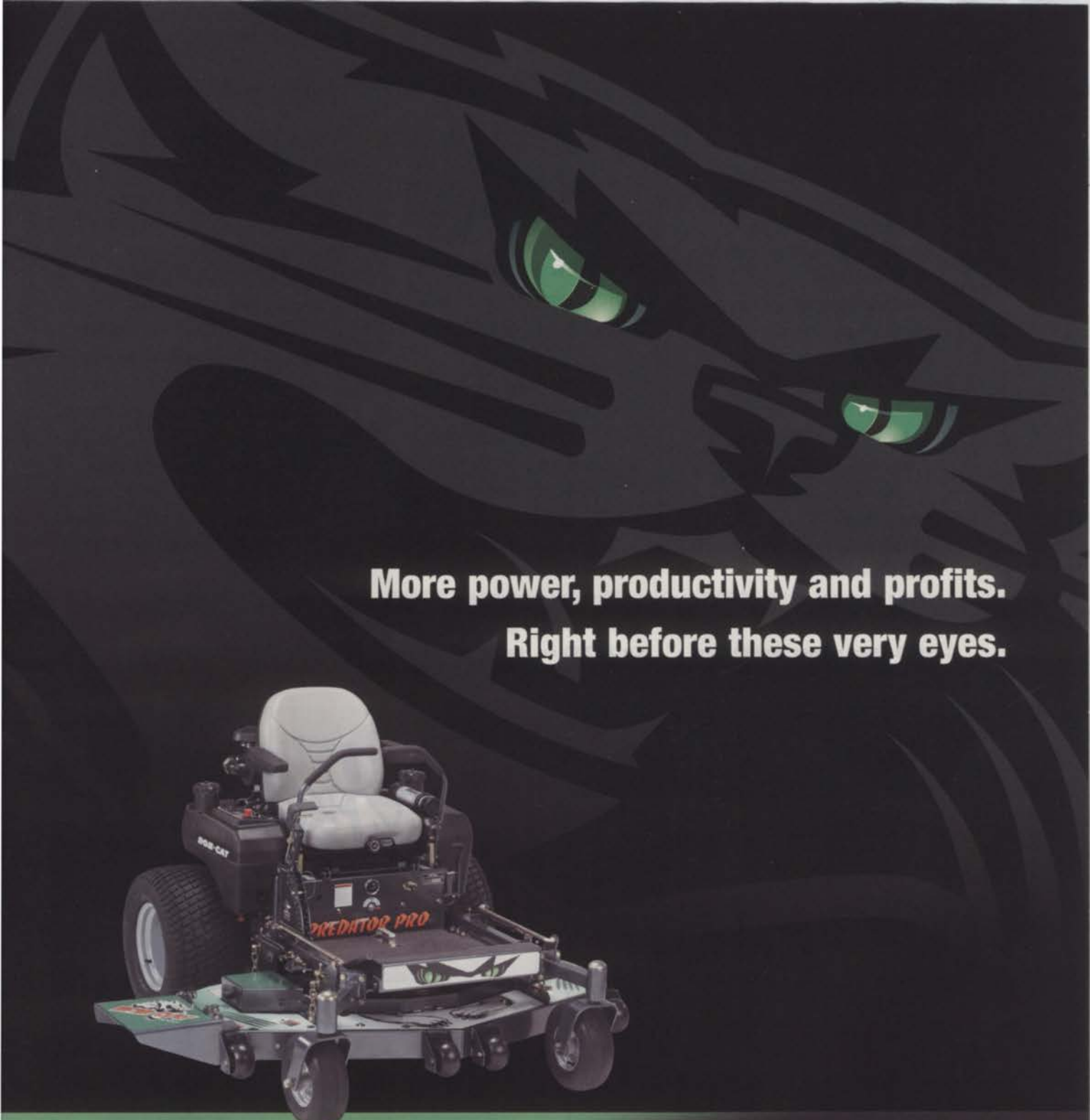


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- All information transmitted via the Internet
- Teletrac – 800/835-3872, www.teletrac.net

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USE READER SERVICE # 118

WiredTime WT 500 Scanner System

WIREDTIME

- Single-button, point-and-scan, wireless barcode reader instantly tracks and transmits onsite workflow information without any cell-phone attachments or costs
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Longview Advantage vShepherd Commercial Fleet Management

- Protects and manages vehicle and equipment fleets
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- Longview Advantage – 877/562-8287, www.longviewadvantage.com

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Xora GPS TimeTrack



- Mobile workforce management via GPS-enabled phones
- Tracks employee location, records times and breaks and captures job information
- Employees carry GPS-enabled phones throughout the day
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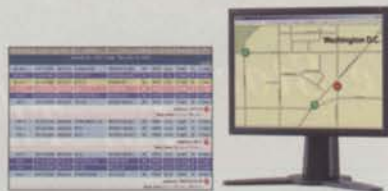
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Spencer Pest Control Discovers Revenue in Mole Treatments

Spencer Pest Control is a full-service company offering lawn care and pest control services to commercial and residential clients. Seventy-five percent of their business is residential, according to company President Sheri Spencer. The company has offices in Vero Beach and Melbourne, Fla., as well as in Georgia and South Carolina. Through the years, Spencer has been contacted many times by potential and existing

clients requesting mole control. There are many mole control products on the market, but the only thing that historically has worked was trapping. This was not an option for Spencer, so she turned away the business. Not only are traps cumbersome, but Spencer

did not want to leave these frightening contraptions on her clients' properties.

In November 2004, Spencer discovered Bell Laboratories' Talpirid, a mole bait that mimics a mole's natural food source, the earthworm. The bait is placed underground inside the active mole tunnels. Moles need to consume 80 to 100 percent of their body weight each day to stay alive. One worm is a lethal dose and kills a mole in 24 hours.

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trained Spencer Pest Control employees on the proper use of the product. The first step is to identify the active mole runs. This is done by taking a dowel and poking assessment holes within all of the mole tunnels approximately 5 to 10 feet apart. To make subsequent visits more efficient, Spencer places lawn flags next to the assessment holes. Then, her crews return to the site 24 to 48 hours later to inspect the assessment holes. The moles will repair or "plug" the assessment holes if the tunnel is active. To bait, Spencer creates new holes approximately 3 feet down the tunnel on each side of a plugged assessment hole. She places one worm inside each new hole, being careful to make sure it is completely inside the tunnel and pinches the hole closed to

repair the tunnel where the bait was placed. Then, Spencer lawn care technicians re-open the original assessment hole. This helps in determining success during the follow-up visit. Consumption of the bait can be confirmed by checking to see if the assessment hole has been plugged again. Each of the site visits take less than 20 minutes but can vary due to the size of the infestation.

Since Spencer began using Talpirid, the company has treated more than 40 properties with the product. Spencer prices each account individually based on the total square footage and the size of the infestation (number of runs). Based on this information, they are



able to estimate the amount of time and product it will take to service the account. Like many pests, moles can

be a recurring problem. Once one mole has died, its vacant tunnel may be discovered and re-occupied by a neighboring mole. For this reason, Spencer has established a repetitive maintenance program including eight follow-up visits, which take place every other month. If retreatment is necessary, there is an additional charge. Their mole service is priced with a substantial margin, but clients are willing to pay a premium to get rid of moles. — Sarah Danes, product manager, Bell Laboratories **LL**
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 - 5. Irrigation Contractor
 - 6. Landscape Architect
 - 7. Other Contract Services (please describe) _____

- 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

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 - 11. Formulator
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- IV. OTHERS ALLIED TO THE FIELD:
- 13. Extension Agent (Federal, State, County, City, Regulatory Agency)
 - 14. School, College, University
 - 15. Trade Association, Library
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2. What services does your business offer?
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- Landscape Installation
- 2. Seeding or Sodding
 - 3. Turf & Ornamental Installation
 - 4. Bedding Plants & Color Installation
 - 5. Irrigation Installation

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
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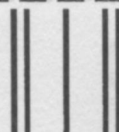
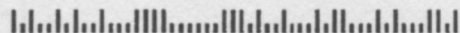
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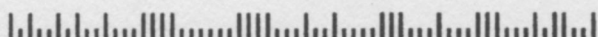
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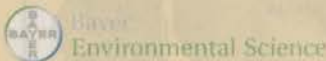
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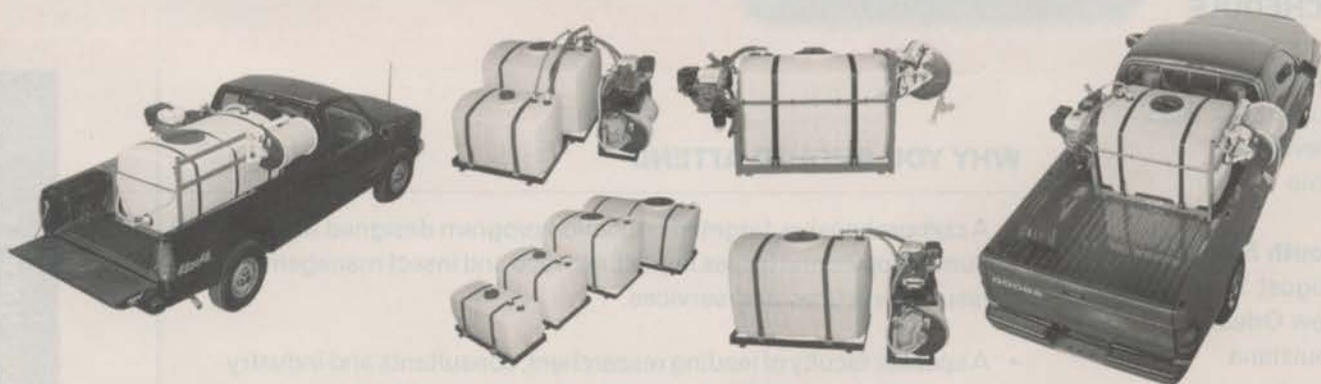
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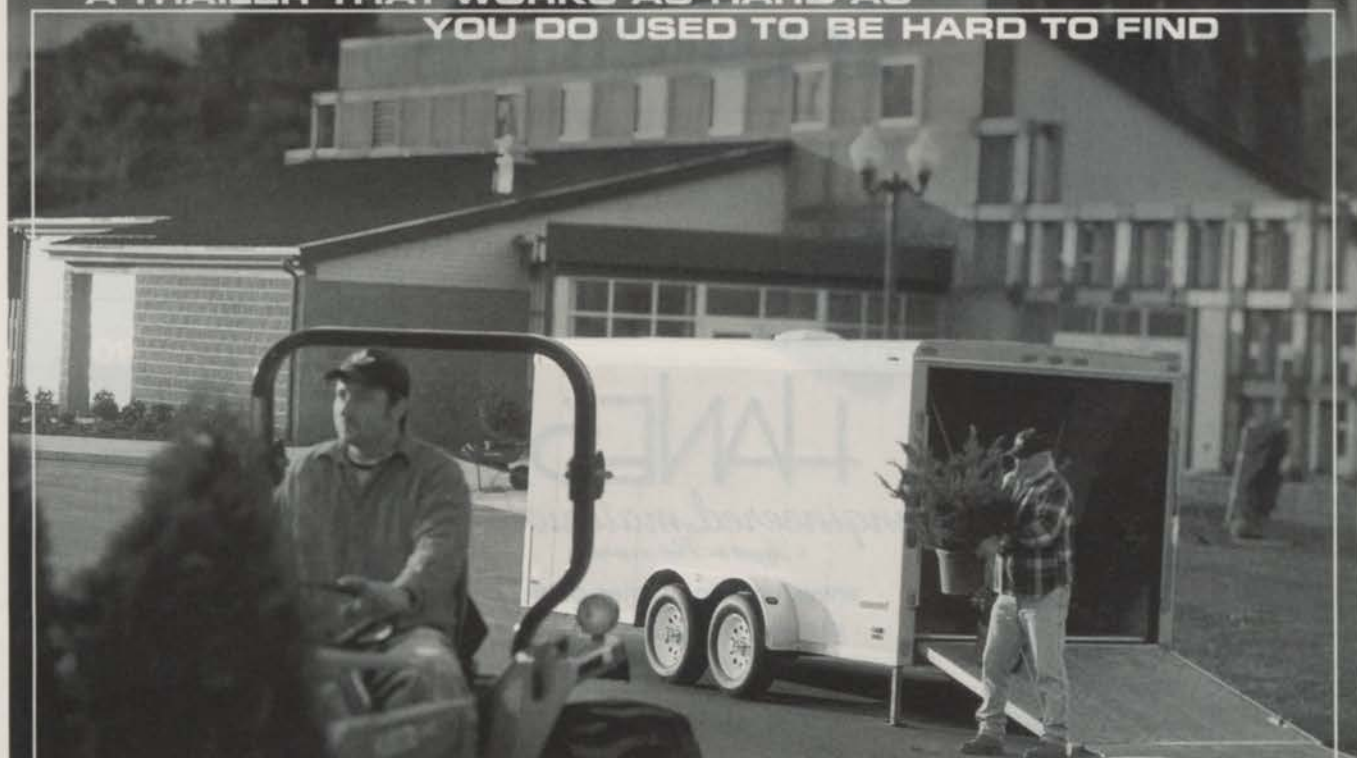


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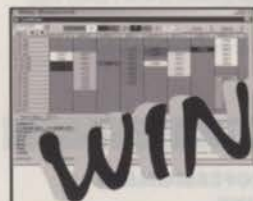
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Irrigation Inventory at Hermes Landscaping



Celebrating our 40th year in business, Hermes Landscaping, Lenexa, Kansas, has grown into one of the largest landscape contracting companies in the Kansas City metropolitan area. Our Hermes Nursery has more than 600 acres of growing fields throughout the city. Our services include commercial and residential landscape and sprinkler design & installation and full service landscape management (sprinkler maintenance, lawn care applications, seasonal color, horticulture services).

Our 40 years of sustained growth is a result not only of the company's ability to adapt externally, but also to monitor and improve internal practices. Recently we implemented a new sprinkler parts inventory system. A few simple changes led to dramatic increases in efficiency and, in turn, a reduction in costs. Here's what we did.

We worked to add structure to our inventory system. Our sprinkler services manager uses a simple Excel spreadsheet to create a database of all parts in stock. Each item is counted weekly and maintained in color-coded bins.

We also strengthened our controls on inventory. We worked with our irrigation technicians in changing our procedures. We now track inventory daily, and technicians access the supply area at a specific time.

For example, from 7 a.m. to 7:30 a.m. each day, technicians gather all of the parts they will need for the day. Technicians report what supplies they gather. After that time frame, the supply area is closed and locked.

This system has the added benefit of disciplining technicians to plan ahead. They must know the previous night what jobs are lined up for the morning.



5 Keys to Inventory Success



1. **Keep the process simple.** Using spreadsheets, for example, can be a simple way to track inventory.
2. **Limit employees' access to inventory.** Provide a controlled window each day for inventory access. Require that employees record what they remove from inventory.
3. **Assign a dependable employee to monitor inventory access.**
4. **Establish systems/policies that address unplanned circumstances,** such as those times when technicians may find unexpected problems and require parts they might not have anticipated.
5. **Use inventory-tracking sheets to reorder parts.** Track materials used by different departments within the company.



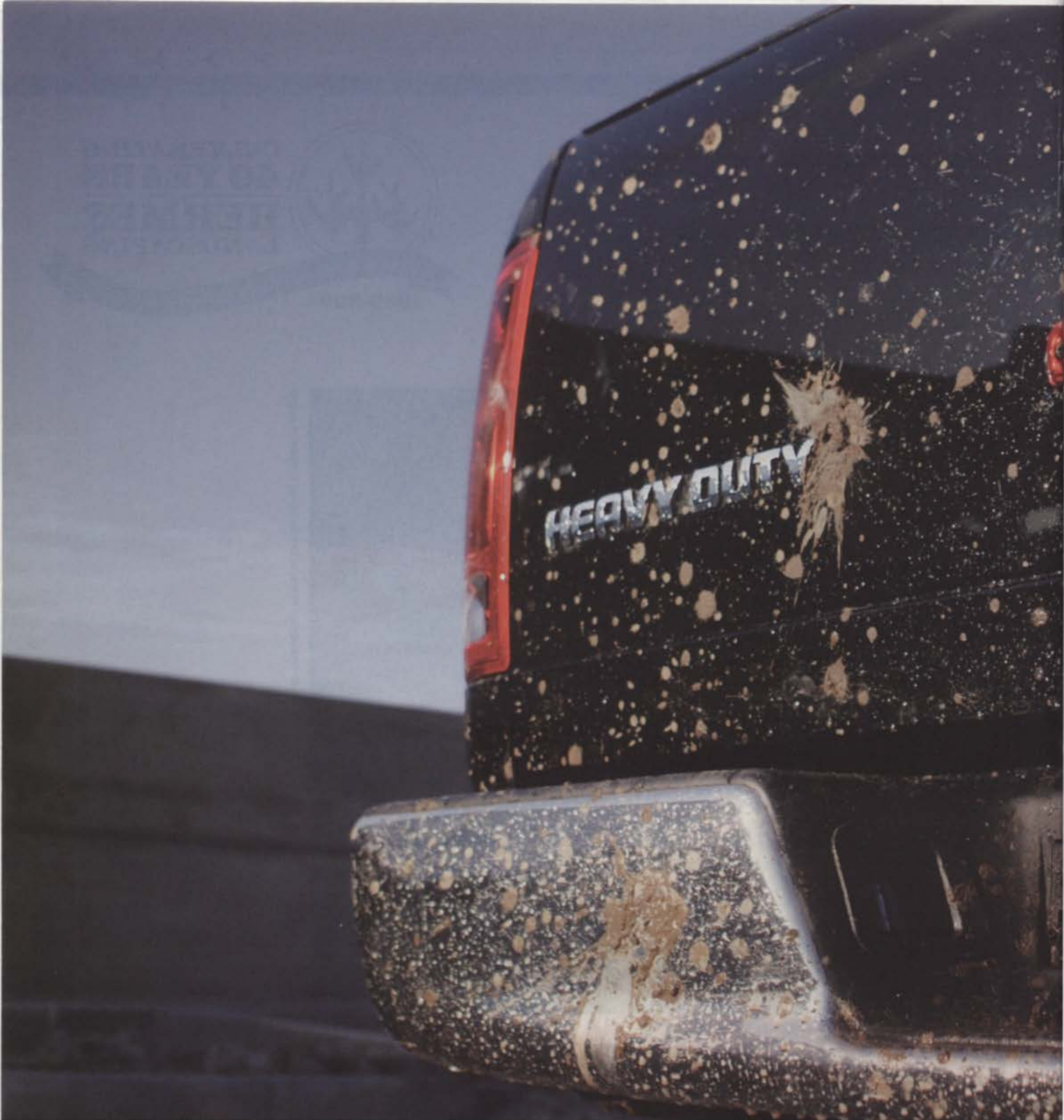
Photos: Hunter Industries, Hermes Landscaping (opposite page)

There are times when technicians run into unexpected circumstances on a job and find they need additional supplies. For those cases, Hermes maintains a purchase order system with local dealers. This enables technicians to access parts without having to wait a day to access the supply area. These orders are tracked by the sprinkler services manager and kept separate from the inventory system.

We have seen numerous benefits to this new system. It enables us to monitor job material costs more effectively and to ensure supply costs are allocated to the appropriate division. The system enables our inventory managers to efficiently store parts when new orders arrive. Plus, we can determine easily whether or not we receive the amount we ordered of a particular part.

And these simple changes have made a significant savings for the company. We estimate that we save as much as \$500 per month. The procedure eliminates potential costs for lost supplies or over-ordering.

The new irrigation inventory system is one way Hermes Landscaping improves internal efficiencies as it sees continued success in the marketplace. - Paul Boling ^{LL}



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