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# Lawn & Landscape

11 05



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**Cover Story –  
Searching for Profit**

**52**

*A detailed approach to estimating landscape construction jobs can raise profit margins for contractors who are utilizing less sophisticated pricing methods. Also, contractors can effectively estimate maintenance jobs by establishing solid production rates and tracking their costs.*

*Mower image on cover: Epley Associates*

11.05

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# Lawn & Landscape

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# Reaching New Heights



## Weed Man®

In the landscape industry, growth opportunities are plentiful. Adding new services to increase business from your core customers is one opportunity to drive expansion and help turn employees into your company's future managers and leaders. Other reasons to diversify a business include:

- To boost stagnated growth and create a long-term growth strategy for your core business.
- To enhance customer satisfaction.
- To become more competitive against local, regional and national companies.
- To increase revenue and profit margins.
- To create efficiencies from a new service offering.
- To improve customer and employee retention.

But when companies diversify they also face many challenges. For instance, if done poorly, diversification can increase chaos and confusion to the core business and ultimately decrease revenue and profits.

Aware of these potential obstacles, Landscape Contractor Brian Light purchased a Weed Man franchise so he could establish a lawn care business with a recognized system for success. "I knew I wanted to make a change, so I researched different options and came across Weed Man," says Light, president, Luminary Landscapes, Knoxville, Tenn. "They have proven systems that work, they give me the guidance I need, and I'm doing it on my own, so there's a profit motive there as well."

**PLANNING AHEAD.** Successful businesses usually begin with a vision and goals. Weed Man provided Light with the foundation the company needed to reach its profit potential. "Most franchises don't provide any kind of budgeting for you," he explains. "Weed Man sat down with us and came up with true numbers that we knew were attainable from an income and expense report, and we are 98 percent on track with our first-year budget."

Weed Man's business planning system even detailed all of the company's expenses, including the number of computers and desks needed to get started, says Light.

**HIGH-TECH HELP.** The computer system provided by Weed Man to its franchises has played an integral role in the growth of Light's company. With the click of a mouse, Light knows how much product his technicians are applying, the square footage of

all of his lawns and how many clients are in a particular zone. "It's very easy to use," he says. "If you need customer information, it will quickly pull up what you need."

Scott Hall has also realized success with the Weed Man computer system. "It's the best I've ever seen," says Hall, owner, Classic Landscaping, Frederick, Md. "Our whole business wraps around that software. It does take some time to learn and utilize, but once you learn it you can know what your business is doing at any point in time – even by the hour."

**SUPPORTING CAST.** Once a Weed Man franchise has been established, the subfranchisor provides invaluable support to the company. Whenever Hall has a business or technical question, he says the company can turn to the subfranchisor for immediate advice. "They're terrific," he says. "I call them all of the time and ask them questions, and I don't know of any other franchise system where you would get that kind of support."

Hall also schedules weekly conference calls with his subfranchisor and meets regularly to review his franchise's financial performance. "There's a constant stream of e-mail support, information and tips," he says.

**TRAINED FOR SUCCESS.** Without Weed Man's startup training sessions, Light says he doubts his franchise would have achieved its current success. The subfranchisor reviewed fertilizer formulations, weed identification, customer service practices and estimating and billing procedures with Light and his employees. "You can't beat on-the-job training, but if we didn't have that advanced technical training in the beginning, we wouldn't have been as successful as we are now," he shares.

**THE RESULTS.** Weed Man has become more than just another new business opportunity for Light – it's helped his landscape maintenance division increase revenues by 20 percent. He says, "When we market to our Weed Man clients, they say, 'Since you did such a great job on my yard with lawn care, would you also be available to take care of our landscape mowing and trimming needs?'"

Weed Man franchise opportunities are available by calling 888/321-9333 or visiting [www.weed-man.com](http://www.weed-man.com) for more information.

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## web tools

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Green industry news updates every day.  
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### Industry Events

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

### Business Forms

A diverse collection of forms to help you run your business more effectively.  
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### Message Board

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### Industry Links

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### Associations

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### Marketplaces

An interactive listing of manufacturers and suppliers.  
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A one-stop shop for industry-related books, software and more.

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*(We at GIE Media have decided to support relief efforts for the victims of the Tsunami in Asia as well as the relief efforts for the victims of Hurricane Katrina. While we feel strongly in this cause, we realize your choices may not reflect ours. Upon your request, we will contribute 10% of our revenue from your online book order to Habitat for Humanity's Asia Tsunami or Habitat for Humanity's Hurricane Katrina Response Fund. If you wish your sales to be included with this effort please enter HABITAT or KATRINA in the promotional code box when placing your order.)*

## > > > best of the web

The calendar says Sunday, but somehow you're spending time on someone else's property instead of your own. *Lawn & Landscape* Online Message Board users commiserated over working weekends and discussed how extra long hours take their toll on mind, body and spirit. Check out the article on page 84.



### Do You Download?

Believe it or not, there's more to *Lawn & Landscape* Online than industry-leading news coverage and a dynamic online message board community. The following were the four most downloaded items from [www.lawnandlandscape.com](http://www.lawnandlandscape.com) in September 2005 – and there's plenty more where these come from:

- 2004 Cost of Doing Business Report.** Sponsored by John Deere, this valuable report on what it takes to be in business was downloaded more than 5,000 times. Visit [www.lawnandlandscape.com/files/2004CostofBusiness.pdf](http://www.lawnandlandscape.com/files/2004CostofBusiness.pdf) to read it yourself.
- 2005 Media Kit.** Thinking of advertising in *Lawn & Landscape* magazine or on *Lawn & Landscape* Online? Find out how our 360 Marketing can bring your products and services to a qualified industry audience. Visit [www.lawnandlandscape.com](http://www.lawnandlandscape.com), click "Magazine" on the menu bar and then choose "Media Kit" to learn more.
- Rating the States.** Our September 2005 Rating the States report has been very popular, illustrating just how business friendly each state is. Visit this link: [www.lawnandlandscape.com/files/pdf/RatingStates2005.pdf](http://www.lawnandlandscape.com/files/pdf/RatingStates2005.pdf).
- Sales/Estimating Forms.** Did you know free business forms are on *Lawn & Landscape* Online, available to download and customize to your own business? Visit [www.lawnandlandscape.com/tools/businessforms](http://www.lawnandlandscape.com/tools/businessforms) today to start browsing.



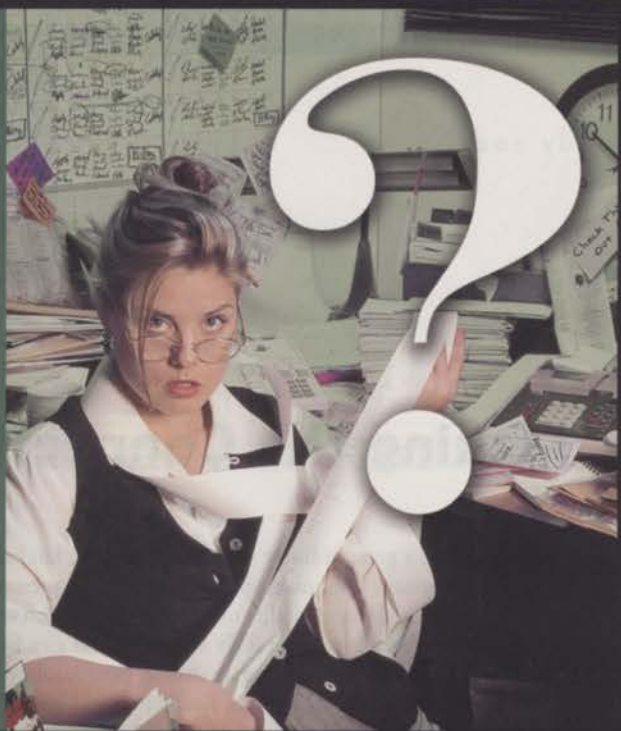
### online extras

Looking for more valuable content related to this issue of *Lawn & Landscape*? Visit [www.lawnandlandscape.com](http://www.lawnandlandscape.com), scroll over "Magazine" on the homepage menu and select "Current Issue Online Extras" for more award-winning content, including:

- Check out our November Online Extras section for a look at the common ways to sell landscape lighting.
- For the don'ts of blowout irrigation winterization, provided by Hunter Industries, check out our November Online Extras section.
- For news on the industry's contributions to Hurricane Katrina relief and recovery efforts, check out the Headline News section of the homepage regularly at [www.lawnandlandscape.com](http://www.lawnandlandscape.com).



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## Making the Connection

What a great industry we work in. Lawns, landscapes, trees, shrubs, annuals, perennials, sports fields and play grounds all contribute to the health and vitality of consumers and professionals alike.

Young athletes hone their skills on school and city fields. Boys and girls run across their yards playing tag or chasing pets. Adults entertain family and friends in serene backyard settings. Ill children and adults gain hope from the sights and smells of gardens.

Landscapes are more than dirt, grass, shrubs and seeds. Landscapes make a house a home. They connect neighbors and a neighborhood together. They bring value to a home and self-worth to the family residing within the home.

Recently, landscape contractors and industry suppliers collaborated with Habitat for Humanity to install yards and landscapes for several homes in the Twin Cities. This partnership was initiated by Project EverGreen and embraced by local contractors, suppliers and Habitat.

The mission of Habitat is well known: they seek to eliminate poverty housing and homelessness from the world, and to make decent shelter a matter of conscience and action.

Habitat has built more than 200,000 houses around the world, providing more than 1 million people in more than 3,000 communities with safe, decent, affordable shelter.

It makes sense to provide these homes with landscapes and Project EverGreen intends to expand its partnership with this group and others such as America in Bloom – a national beautification campaign and contest that fosters community involvement and civic pride through the use of flowers, plants, trees and other environmental enhancements.

Our industry contributes billions of dollars to the U.S. economy. As we reported last month in *Lawn & Landscape's* annual State of the Industry report, the overall landscape industry grew by about 9 percent in 2005. Operating costs are up, but so are gross revenues and, most importantly, net profit.

Contractors are providing valuable services in five key service areas: turf, irrigation, landscape construction, trees and ornamentals and lawn care. The demand for our services is spread primarily through word of mouth, which equates to satisfied customers.

But local issues are a huge concern and growing daily. The activists, similar to the late 1980s and early 1990s, are coming after the professional landscape industry. Activists are attacking schools and their use of pesticides. City governments are paying residents not to landscape their properties. Bans on irrigation systems are being mandated from officials who don't understand the water-saving value of properly installed irrigation systems.

Your industry needs your voice. It needs you to be vocal at your local city council, school board, Kiwanis club and church meetings. It's up to you to be local educators on the environmental and economic importance of yards, landscapes, sports fields and green spaces.

Get involved. Promote your industry. Promote the value of green. **LL**

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## CALENDAR

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### Calendar Note

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

**NOV. 14-16** Hardscape Expo & Conference, Las Vegas, Nev. Contact: Holly Whitlock, holly@hardscapeexpo.com, www.hardscapeexpo.com, 847/277-0244

**NOV. 15-17** Grandy & Associates' Basic Business Boot Camp, Owensboro, Ky., Contact: Linda Haddix, 800/432-7963

**NOV. 15-17** Empire State Green Industry Show (Formerly NYSTA Turf & Grounds Expo), Rochester, N.Y., Contact: NYSTA, nysta@nysta.org, www.nysta.org, 800/873-8873

**NOV. 16-18** Aqua Show 2005, Las Vegas, Nev. Contact: Kathy Newkirk, www.aquashow.com, 800/536-3630

**DEC. 1-2** Great Southern Tree Conference, Gainesville, Fla. Contact: FNGLA, lreindl@fn gla.org, www.fn gla.org, 800/375-3642

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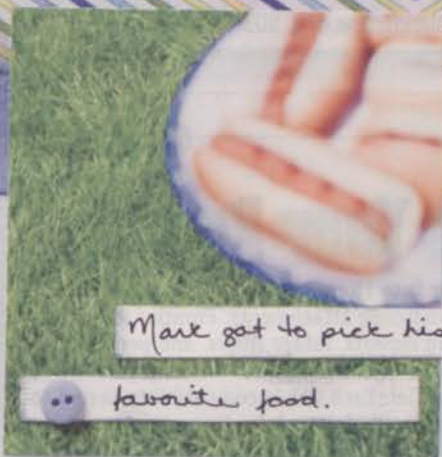
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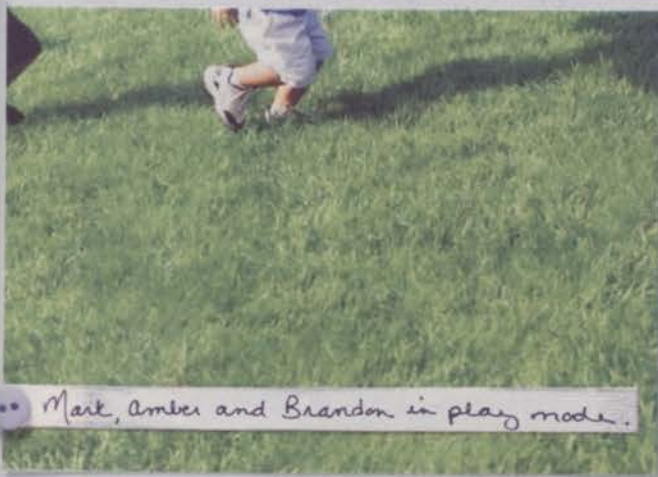


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**DEC. 1-2** Lawn & Landscape Growing Your Business Seminars with Jack Mattingly, Portland, Ore. on Dec. 1, Los Angeles, Calif. on Dec. 2. Contact: Michelle Fitzpatrick, mfitzpatrick@gje.net, www.lawnbizseminars.com, 800/456-0707

**DEC. 5-8** 2005 Virginia Turfgrass and Sports Turf Short Course, Blacksburg, Va. Contact: www.thevtc.org, 757/464-1004

**DEC. 6-7** Georgia Turfgrass Association Turfgrass Institute & Trade Show, Duluth, Ga. Contact: gta@turfgrass.org, www.turfgrass.org, 800/687-6949

**DEC. 6-8** New Jersey Turfgrass & Landscape Expo, Trump Taj Mahal Casino & Resort, Atlantic City, N.J. Contact: New Jersey Turfgrass Association, www.njturfgrass.org, 215/757-NJTA

**DEC. 6-9** Ohio Turfgrass Conference & Show, Columbus, Ohio. Contact: Ohio Turfgrass Foundation, www.ohioturfgrass.org, 888/683-3445

**DEC. 6-8** Rocky Mountain Turfgrass Conference & Trade Show, Denver, Colo. Contact: www.rmra.org, 303/770-2220

**DEC. 8** Oregon Landscape Expo, Portland, Ore. Contact: info@oregonlandscape.org, www.oregonlandscape.org, 503/253-9091

Landscape Attachments

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## Tell Them, Tell Them, Tell Them

In sales, we make countless presentations — some better than others. So I wanted to share with you some tips I've learned from speaking that will make your sales presentations better.

Organize your presentations around the Three Ts: (1) Tell them what you're going to tell them, (2) tell them, and (3) tell them what you told them.

First of all, tell them what you intend to say. Open your presentation by giving a very brief overview of what you're going to go over. For example, if you are making a presentation to a facility manager at a local office complex, you might say, "Thanks for your time; in less than five minutes, I'm going to tell you succinctly why Holland Landscaping is the best choice for maintaining your grounds." Most people are very busy, especially those you are calling on in the commercial sector. When you let them know you are going to be brief, they tend to focus on your message.

Secondly, tell them. In as few words as possible, you need to clearly convince the prospect how and why you are the best choice for the job. Here are some things you might say to that commercial client. "Since 1984, Holland Landscaping has been caring for some of the area's most prestigious office complexes. Our clients use us year after year and refer us to others because not only do we offer fair prices, we are extremely talented and reliable at maintaining commercial properties like yours. Let's go through our proposal to improve your property." Then go over the proposal, highlighting the important parts. Keep in mind — the prospect might not want to read all the fine print. Touch on the best, most important points and move on. Talk about price at the end and don't dwell on it. Ask them if they have any questions about the proposal and then tell them the reasons why

they should do business with your firm.

Remember, rarely does someone only get one price. Your job is to differentiate you and your company from all other options. Some ways to do that are with some "leave behinds." For example, you might take photos of some of your best work, get a testimonial letter from these clients and put it on the back of the photo. I would present the photos like this: "Here are photos of three of the properties in your area that we care for. A testimonial letter from each client is on the back of each photo. Please, call them and ask them about our work. Also, here's a list of 10 other references that have properties similar in size and/or scope to yours. I hope you'll call them as well." You've done a lot. It's time to wind down and answer any questions your prospect might have and ask for the sale. Then, it's time for the close.

The last thing you do in any good presentation is tell them what you told them. In this case, you should review the best reasons upon which your prospect should base their decision and remind them of your desire to work with them. Enthusiasm sells and while proposals help sell work, it's people who do most of the work. I always close my presentations by thanking my prospect for their time and leaving them with some great parting words, "Mr. Jones, thanks for your time. I'm sure this is a big decision for you and one you won't take lightly. I have met with countless professionals like yourself who were faced with the same, tough decision you are facing right now. And when most of them see all the value and expertise we bring to the table, we get the job. So I wanted to stress to you, that when you do business with Holland Landscaping, you get me. And if there is someone more passionate about landscaping and taking care of their clients, I'd like to meet him. Give me a chance; I will not disappoint you." ■

marty grunder

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

Star Daily

## HOROSCOPE



**ARIES** (March 21 - April 19): A new friendship is blossoming. Take your time and really get to know this person. You will be pleasantly surprised when you find out.



**TAURUS** (April 20 - May 20): Money seems to flow from your hand lately. But also remember, you have great fortune in other aspects of your life. Enrich your family and you will get through this.



**GEMINI** (May 21 - June 21): Your career is on the fast track. Now is not the time to slow down. Make the most of every available opportunity that your work presents to you.



**CANCER** (June 22 - July 22): Happiness is on your side to shine. Be sure to take some time just for you. You truly deserve it!



**LEO** (July 23 - August 22): You are the center of attention. People rely on you not only for advice, but also for a good laugh. So keep it up, your fun spirit is contagious.



**VIRGO** (August 23 - September 22): It's time to take a stand. You should no longer remain on both sides of an issue. Instead, put your foot down and let others know exactly what you think.



**LIBRA** (September 23 - October 22): Love is in the air. Your relationship with the one you love will soon get even stronger. You are about to receive an even greater commitment.



**SCORPIO** (October 23 - November 21): It's time to let things go. The past is the past, and you should only be looking forward. "Forgive and forget" is the new motto you should live by.



**SAGITTARIUS** (November 22 - December 21): Knowledge truly is power. It's time to use your brain to its full advantage. Seek out opportunities in the workplace to show off your capabilities. Expect rewards!



**CAPRICORN** (December 22 - January 19): Be sure to listen carefully. Your ears are your most effective form of communication. Others will appreciate your willingness to hear them out.

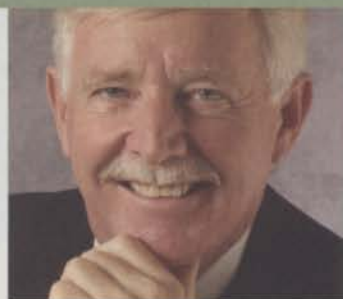


**AQUARIUS** (January 20 - February 18): It's time for a break. Use that vacation time you've been saving up for a spontaneous trip. It will re-energize your mind and body for the rest of the year.



**PISCES** (February 19 - March 20): Do you like surprises? There is a big one in your future. Be alert, because this is one surprise that is going to change your life for the better.

**DON'T COUNT ON THIS.**



## Winter Operations Checklist

As you look toward 2006, now is the time to pay attention to contract renewals, winter customer service and off-season business operations.

To make a run for new or renewed service accounts, get out of the office and inspect as many projects as possible now. During your visits, develop a checklist of items for crews to address on their next visits. Also, take time to greet clients and ask if there is anything else you can do for them. Let them know you appreciate their business and look forward to working for them next year. They need to hear this from the company owner. The primary objective here is to get face-to-face with as many clients as possible before the winter doldrums set in.

Ensure that your crews take extra time to provide the best quality and leave sites looking impeccable. A nice touch is for crew leaders to leave notes saying, "My crew and I enjoyed working with you this season and we look forward to working for you next spring. Have a great holiday season. Thank You!" Be sure the note is hand written, as this is more personal and means a lot to the client.

While there are only a few weeks left in the year, you still can incur some unnecessary expenses – or have opportunities to increase profits even more. Keep an eye on labor requirements this time of year. Some companies have employees leaving too soon and others have too many employees for the work remaining. Remember the old saying "Hire Slowly, Fire Quickly" – don't keep unnecessary labor on the books. Also keep an eye on overtime. Aim to keep overtime hours at zero, if possible. Determine your backlog of work and establish the budgeted labor hours to accomplish it.


Some companies in the warmer climates also have reduced workloads during the winter months. Don't continue with the same schedule

and budgeted hours on your maintenance jobs. The workload is different. Generate new to-do lists and new budgeted hours per job or visit. Consider reducing the number of people on a crew and/or the total number of crews performing the work. Your objective is to reduce payroll, which is your single biggest expense.

Now is also the time to determine your holiday schedule, if you haven't already, and let your employees know the plan in advance. I suggest shutting down the majority, if not all, of your operations during the Christmas and New Year's time. Try this schedule:

- **Thanksgiving three-day workweek:** Work three days (Nov. 21 to 23) and take off Thursday (Thanksgiving Day) and Friday.
- **December holiday schedule:** Last work day is Friday, Dec. 23. Stay closed for the full week of Dec. 26 and reopen on Jan. 2.

This plan helps save direct labor costs and also gives your employees some time off. But don't forget about your clients during the holidays. While you may not be performing work, it's still necessary to have someone answer phones (no answering machines, please) in case anything comes up. Additionally, if you provide snow removal services, be prepared in case it snows during this time off. Develop a game plan whereby crews are on standby for snow removal or any emergency that may arise. This can all be planned in advance so as not to jeopardize client services, but still have a greatly reduced labor force. Make sure your key people are involved in decisions to reduce your holiday workforce.

Finally, take this time of year to determine your equipment needs for 2006. Contact dealers now for favorable pricing and develop a plan for the winter refurbishment of each machine already in your fleet, even if it's only cleaning, sharpening or repainting. Make a to-do list for each piece and prioritize your list to make sure everything is ready to go come spring. 

jack mattingly

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## Dress for Success

In the 1990's dot-com era, under relentless pressure from their younger counterparts and in an effort to shed the perception that they were old-fashioned, many companies began adopting "casual Friday" dress. This was a challenge for die-hard professional dressers (PDers) like me. For whatever reason, I was more productive, more pumped, and more efficient when I dressed the part of a professional consultant – even if I never saw a client or left my desk for the entire day. Eventually, however, after attending board meetings where I was the only one wearing a suit, and my bank's branch manager wore a t-shirt to work, I gave in and made the transition to a more casual style of dress.

To this day, however, I still believe that I perform better when I feel better and, I hate to admit it, but I still feel better dressed up. Apparently, I'm not alone in this thinking. According to a new survey by OfficeTeam, a California staffing service, most employees feel that dress does, indeed, make the man or the woman. More than 80 percent of surveyed professionals said a person's work attire affects his or her professional image. A 2003 survey by No Nonsense, the pantyhose manufacturer, found that 70 percent of executives said that workplace dress affects an employee's productivity, while 63 percent said that wearing more professional clothing makes employees advance faster in their careers.

If you believe that dress does impact image, then it's imperative that you develop a specific dress code for your employees. (If your employees are perceived as unprofessional in their image, this *will* reflect on the image of your organization.)

Your dress code should be appropriate for your business, your culture, your workforce and your industry. This doesn't mean, however, that just because 75 percent of your industry dresses like slob that you should, too. Remember the old adage – you never get

a second chance to make a first impression? It's true. Every business should strive to ensure their employees look and sound better than the competition.

The dress codes we're writing for employee handbooks today contain very specific "do not even attempt to wear these" lists that consider workforce characteristics and often include such items as (for ladies) sheer blouses, low-cut tops, cocktail or spiked shoes, items with sequins or excessive beads, and skirts that are shorter than 2 inches above the knee. For men, the "prohibited" list usually includes shorts, sockless shoes, and baseball caps and visors. For both men and women, most policies prohibit athletic and beach-wear, exposed undergarments, low-cut or excessively baggy pants, clothing with holes, tight or suggestive clothing, leather clothing, tennis shoes, overalls, and visible or offensive clothing and tattoos (judgment call on management's part). Some policies prohibit body ornaments, although it may be necessary to make a religious accommodation.

Clearly, these lists are not all inclusive and any dress policy that you implement should address the following: (1) accommodations based on medical conditions (i.e., a skin condition that precludes a male employee from shaving) or religious faith (i.e., the wearing of a turban for Hindu and Sikh employees, a head scarf for Muslim employees, or yarmulke for Jewish men), (2) any special requirements based on safety standards (including jewelry and headsets, among others), (3) any special uniform provisions, and (4) general grooming standards related to cleanliness, neatness and, don't forget, everyone's favorite – hygiene.

When developing your dress code, be mindful of uniformity – that is, whatever standard is required of men should also be required of women. Also, be sure to include consequences for non-compliance and then follow-through with them in a consistent and non-discriminatory fashion. **LL**

jean seawright

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USE READER SERVICE # 20

## hurricane katrina

## A New Orleans-based Contractor's Story

Dan Standley has one request: "Tell them all, 'We're Back.'"

The owner of Dan's Landscaping & Lawn Care, Terrytown, La., was the host of visitors to the *Lawn & Landscape Weed & Insect Management Seminars – South* in mid-August. Little did attendees to the event and facility tour know that The Big Easy would be soaked with hurricane and flood waters in just a matter of weeks. With his facility located just 5 miles outside of New Orleans – and only about 5 feet above sea level – Standley's business could well have been a casualty of Hurricane Katrina, but thankfully beat the odds.



Dan Standley

"We have some roof and siding damage at the shop, but we've got power and everything's running now," Standley tells *Lawn & Landscape* magazine. All he's waiting for now is the return of more employees. "So far, four of our 12 employees are back and I've got them working as much as I can during the week, and then leaving them the weekends to get all of their personal needs straightened out. We've got two more guys returning soon as well, so we're getting back to business."

Standley says the challenge with his employees is that they evacuated the region before Katrina made landfall, but now have nowhere to come "home" to. In fact, Standley said he set up "Hotel Dan's Landscaping" for a short time, turning part of the company's front office areas into sleeping quarters until his workers were able to secure housing. "We had to get a little creative on housing for awhile," Standley says, "but we had a generator and an air conditioner and did the best we could for our employees."

**STORIES OF KATRINA.** Meanwhile, on the north side of flooded Lake Pontchartrain, Standley says his family's home was also spared the flooding that the New Orleans area experienced, sustaining mostly tree and wind damage. Ever the optimist, "I ended up with a

skylight in my office," Standley jokes.

Prior to the hurricane, Standley says he and his family temporarily relocated to Montgomery, Ala., for a couple of weeks to stay with relatives. "The town welcomed us with open arms," Standley says. "We were able to enroll our kids in school and the residents there were so generous."

In one story of generosity, Standley says he stopped at a gas station prior to making a return trip to New Orleans in order to fill up his vehicle, and hopefully some gas cans, which were difficult to find. "You couldn't find gas anywhere within a two-hour drive of New Orleans, so we knew we'd need to get some before we left in order to be self-sufficient," he explains. "We stopped at every home improvement and hardware store, but we couldn't find gas cans anywhere." When he stopped at the gas station, Standley made his case to another gentleman there, offering to pay cash for the man's own gas cans from his home. "He turned out to be a county commissioner in the area and not only was he able to get us four gas cans for our trip back, but he also paid for our fill-up," Standley says.

A woman in the area also showed Standley and his family kindness, offering a sack of toys for the kids, as well as some clothing and a Bible – with \$100 sneakily tucked inside. "We were doing OK and didn't need the money," Standley says, "but the generosity of the people who we met was overwhelming. It's nice to know that so many people still have that kind of spirit to help out strangers when they need it."

Standley says the story that hit him the hardest was of a woman he met in a Home Depot parking lot. The woman, heavily medicated and weak, was accompanied by a friend who explained that the woman had lost not only her car and her home as a result of the hurricane, but her family as well. "Just seeing the look on her face I know that everything that's happened to me up to this point is just a grain of sand on the beach compared to what this woman has gone through," Standley says. "Now, when my 5-year-old daughter asks if I'll play with her, I put down whatever I'm doing to spend that time with her."





do you have enough insurance?

**D**an Standley, owner of Dan's Landscaping & Lawn Care, Terrytown, La., was recently forced to close up shop for a short period during the Aug. 29 landfall and immediate aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

Thankfully, Standley says he was prepared for the worst, including carrying insurance coverage, such as business interruption insurance.

"Business interruption insurance basically pays for your losses of profits after a disaster," explains Mark Weisburger, of Weisburger Insurance Brokerage, White Plains, N.Y. "This is the coverage that will let you continue to pay rent, compensate your employees and cover your lost profits for the time that your business is unable to function."

Weisburger says business interruption coverage is something all business owners should consider – not just those operating in disaster-prone regions. "Our offices are on the fourth floor of an office building in White Plains and we've never had a hurricane here – but we could have a fire tomorrow," Weisburger says. "It's not just about being somewhere susceptible to disasters; it's about making sure you're covered for this particular type of peril."

Weisburger also refers to "extra expense" insurance policies, which are similar. If a fire damages your facility, for instance, you may be able to move your business across the street; however, that costs money. Extra expense policies cover things like getting new phone lines installed at a new location or paying rent on a temporary office space while yours is being repaired.

Weisburger says some business interruption or extra expense coverage may be included in your regular business insurance policies, but that contractors can purchase additional coverage if they're so inclined. Watch out for stipulations and exclusions, though. For example, Weisburger says if your company doesn't have flood insurance, business interruption caused by a flood may not be covered.

**BACK TO BUSINESS.** According to Standley, news coverage of the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, though accurate in some respects, shouldn't be generalized to represent all of New Orleans and the surrounding towns and parishes. "You hear all of these stories about the flooding and the looting, but our parish is just a dot on the map, compared to the New Orleans metro area," he says. "The national news portrays all of southern Louisiana as New Orleans, but that's not the case. Going through this hurricane certainly wasn't the best of circumstances, but we have power, people are driving through the streets and rebuilding their homes, kids are going back to school – a lot of things are coming back on line."

Dan's Landscaping & Lawn Care is coming back  
*continued on page 28*

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USE READER SERVICE # 21

continued from page 25

## A New Orleans-based Contractor's Story

on line as well, tending to its commercial maintenance accounts during the clean up, and anticipating additional renovation and installation work once the clean up has been taken care of. "Having had a relationship with a tree care company in the area turned out to be incredibly important," Standley says. "We're starting clean-up jobs at some of our big shopping center properties that were hit hard – one of which had 60 trees downed all on its own. Without the business relationship we have with that tree care company, we wouldn't have been able to get in there so fast and take care of our clients."

Standley says while there will be three weeks of work for which the company will not bill these clients, he sees a good deal of restoration work coming around the corner. "There are

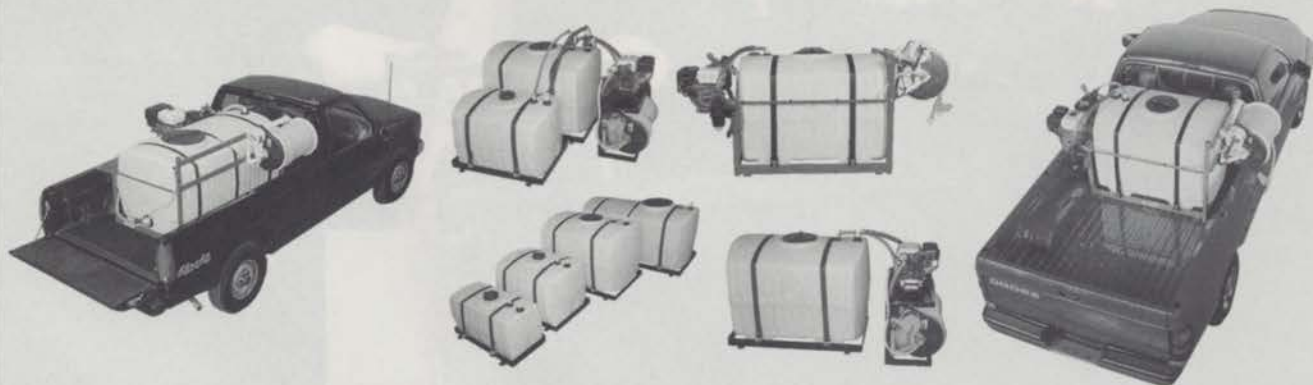
parishes (counties) in the area that look like the surface of the moon right now," Standley describes. "All of the green that used to be there will need to be replaced."

And while Dan's Landscaping & Lawn Care did lose two apartment complex accounts as a result of major water damage on the properties, the company will likely pick up accounts from contractors whose businesses aren't able to handle the aftermath.

In the meantime, the challenge will be to find employees to handle the incoming workload. "Right now, everywhere you go you see 'Help Wanted' signs in the windows," Standley says. "Each of the major home improvement stores around here need 100 people or more and until they get those people they have to close early because they don't have the staff

to stay open. Initially, it's going to be a big hit to the economy, but things will turn back around eventually."

For his own business, Standley says he learned some important lessons that other contractors should take note of, as well. "When we evacuated, I brought my computer hard drive and some of our business files with us, which would have been very important if the conditions had been worse," he says. "I also learned the value of business continuation insurance and making sure you have access to emergency funds if you need them. It's also important to have those local business relationships with equipment dealers, leasing companies, subcontractors, etc., so you'll be at the top of the list as a customer and maybe get the resources you need ahead of the masses when disaster occurs." – Lauren Spiers Hunter



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**USE READER SERVICE # 23**





## HURRICANE KATRINA

A number of companies are making the American Red Cross their charity of choice to help victims of Hurricane Katrina. To find out how to donate, visit [www.redcross.org](http://www.redcross.org).



**American Red Cross**

### The Green Industry Contributes to Hurricane Relief

**H**urricane Katrina is having a devastating financial impact on the United States, particularly in the states most severely impacted: Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama. In an effort to alleviate some of the financial impact, donations are pouring in from private individuals and public corporations alike, with a number of donations being made by organizations and companies in the green industry. Here are some of the industry's contributions:

- The Professional Landcare Network (PLANET) has organized a disaster support program to help put contractors who want to donate supplies, labor and money in contact with affected con-

tractors who need their help. Click on PLANET's Emergency Disaster Support Program link at [www.landcarenetwork.org](http://www.landcarenetwork.org) for more information.

- Phoenix Environmental Care has added disaster relief for victims of the Mississippi Gulf Coast tragedy to the list of programs qualifying for the company's PERKS program. The PERKS program provides purchasers of Phoenix Environmental Care products with incentives that may be converted into donations, contributions or sponsorships of turf-related activities and organizations. For more information, visit [www.phoenixenvcare.com](http://www.phoenixenvcare.com).



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- Dow, parent company of Dow AgroSciences, contributed \$3 million to the hurricane relief efforts, consisting of \$1 million in a cash donation to the American Red Cross, \$1 million match to employee and retiree donations to the American Red Cross and \$1 million in products and technology donations for the longer-term reconstruction effort.
- The Florida Turfgrass Association collected \$2,000 in donations and sent them to the American Red Cross in support of hurricane victims during



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USE READER SERVICE # 25**

its industry conference Sept. 11-14 in Bonita Springs, Fla.

**Hunter**

• Hunter Industries created a donation program in partnership with its Preferred Contractors to support ongoing relief efforts for hurricane victims. All proceeds will go to the American Red Cross Disaster Relief Fund.

• The Southern Nursery Association (SNA) established an Industry Disaster Support Program to respond to the needs of contractors in the southern portion of the United States devastated by the hurricane. SNA expects the majority of assistance to come in the form of loaned equipment, such as generators, chain saws, pumps, etc., and donated crews to help southern nurseries get back up and running and



salvage plant inventories. Call SNA at 770/953-3311 for more information.

• The Davey Tree Expert Co., Kent, Ohio, sent hundreds of its employees to the damaged regions of Mississippi, Louisiana and Alabama to trim and remove trees from power lines and work hand-in-hand with utility companies to help restore power to the Southeast. Employees drove down from as far as Wisconsin, Ohio and Pennsylvania.

• Scott Brickman, president and CEO of The Brickman Group, challenged his team to raise \$500,000 for hurricane

relief. The Brickman family made personal contributions totaling \$250,000 to the Red Cross Disaster Relief Fund. And the company will also match its employee contributions to its Katrina Relief Fund two for one (\$2 for every \$1 contributed by employees). Brickman regional offices are also collecting donations of items requested by the American Red Cross that Scott Brickman and his wife, Patrice, will load up and drive to Gulfport, Miss. There they will hand the donations off to a U.S. Navy chaplain they know who oversees five shelters in the area.

The Brickman Group President and CEO Scott Brickman says his company will match two-for-one all employee contributions to its Katrina Relief Fund.

Photo: The Brickman Group



Scott Brickman



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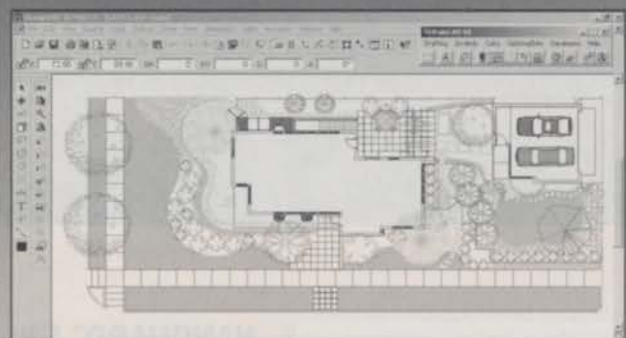
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• Honeywell is donating up to \$500,000 to support multiple programs to help those who have been affected by the hurricane. Specifically, Honeywell will contribute \$100,000 to the Honeywell Humanitarian Relief Fund and will match all employee donations dollar-for-dollar to the fund. Monies from the fund will be used to support local Honeywell employees and local fire and emergency squads. In addition, Honeywell made the company's Sikorsky 76 helicopter and its supporting air and ground crews available to the U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to help with search and rescue and emergency supply efforts.



*These photos show the type of utility line damage that Davey crews are dealing with in areas of the southeastern United States damaged by Hurricane Katrina. Restoring power was crucial to helping the recovery and rebuilding effort for the region, and Davey crews worked closely with local utility officials to rectify the situation quickly and safely. Photos: The Davey Tree Expert Co.*

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RESEARCH RESULTS

## Green Building Practices on the Rise

Landscape contractors with commercial or interiorscape accounts could have a growing sales opportunity on the horizon. According to the International Facility Management Association (IFMA), the majority of respondents to a recent online survey reported implementing green concepts within their organization's facilities.

Findings from IFMA's 2005 Sustainability Study showed that 70 percent of companies are implementing "green building" concepts. The aim of green (sustainable) building is to minimize the disturbance to and improve the function of ecosystems during a building's construction and service life.

Using natural daylight, purchasing recycled office products, embracing water conservation, participating in incentive programs offered by local utilities or state/provincial agencies, and adding environmental criteria to the vendor and product selection process topped the list of the most common green building practices.

Landscape contractors may be able to help commercial office buildings meet these green building objectives through water-saving irrigation and energy-saving landscape designs. In addition to recognizing that turf and shade trees can lower summer air conditioning bills, and that interior landscapes can bring with them better work environments, many buildings also are turning to "green roofs" whereby rooftop landscapes further lower a building's energy costs.

According to an IFMA news release, when asked about the motivation behind implementing green policies, facility managers reported concern for improved employee health and productivity, cost savings, environmental responsibility, reduced liability and life cycle cost strategy. Slightly of less importance were public opinion and corporate or government mandates.

Compared to the 2002 survey results, there has been a 3 percent increase in those who have reported adhering to a master plan to implement all feasible green concepts. In this year's study, the majority of facility managers – 59 percent – reported implementing selected green building concepts, unguided by a master plan; 11 percent are following a master plan to implement all feasible green concepts; 17 percent haven't implemented any green strategies but will do so within the next two years; and 13 percent haven't implemented



An example of a "green roof," installed by Bozzuto Landscape Co., that is becoming popular atop commercial buildings, according to an IFMA research study. Photo: Bozzuto Landscape Co.

any green strategies and do not plan to do so.

"The rewards of green building, like improved employee health, cost savings and environmental responsibility, have really started to emerge, so we were not surprised that more facility managers are adopting green building policies now," says Shari Epstein, associate director of research for IFMA.

The data for this study was based on 341 respondents to a Web-based questionnaire sent to 3,510 U.S. and Canadian professional members of IFMA on May 12. Full results of the study can be viewed at IFMA's Web site, [www.ifma.org](http://www.ifma.org).

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USE READER SERVICE # 31

# Growing Too Fast

by jonathan katz

Life in the mid-1990s appeared to be good for Christopher Curtis. He was working and living in a tropical paradise, and his design/build and landscape maintenance company had reached nearly \$3 million in revenue. But the growth was more than Curtis could handle.

Curtis began pouring money into the company's infrastructure to accommodate the growth and was depending on a staff that wasn't prepared for the increased responsibilities. As competition heated up and the economy turned sour, Curtis was left with more assets than he needed, lower profit margins and an overworked staff producing unsatisfactory work.

Curtis, 61, eventually realized that he needed to slow things down for his Haiku, Hawaii-based company if he wanted to produce the financial and aesthetic results he desired from his work.

**As your current business began growing what challenges did you face?** There's always a lot of work out there, and if you're good everyone wants you to do their work. If you're doing \$2 million dollars worth of work a year and you've got good guys you

can depend on to produce that amount of gross return and you see an opportunity to double that, which is already a more-than-comfortable living, it's easy to get greedy and think you could be making more. It's very tempting to expand that bubble, but there's a whole bunch of things wrong with that picture. I'm not trying to say people shouldn't grow their companies. They should, but you have to be careful. No. 1, you can't reproduce the crew that you have. You can't clone them. What you get is a lot more Indians and no more chiefs, so the guys who are running the jobs are going to get stressed out. They're going to have double the amount of guys working for them, and you're going to have to break crews off to run jobs with crew chiefs who are not really up to par, which is what happened to me. And on top of that, I had to buy trucks, tools, toolboxes – all of the equipment for these guys. I'm spending all of this infrastructure money and building up the company, and they're producing inferior work because they're not on that level.

Then, as if that wasn't enough, the economy went sour. This was in 1995 or 1996. In Maui, everything went downhill. I had made all these investments. I had all of these guys, tools, trucks, equip-



ment and work out there, but it was marginal work. More competitors had come along and saw what I was doing and thought they could do it too. So I had more competition as well, and they didn't know what they were doing, what overhead was or what their costs were, so they were underbidding and forcing my bids down. As a result, I was working on a very narrow margin with money I borrowed to invest to get the company up to this level.

**How did you get back to a comfortable level?** I pulled back to about \$1.5 million a year from about \$3 million and began rebuilding. Now I think we do about \$2.2 million or \$2.3 million, and that's fine. I'm just trying to maintain everything at this level, and

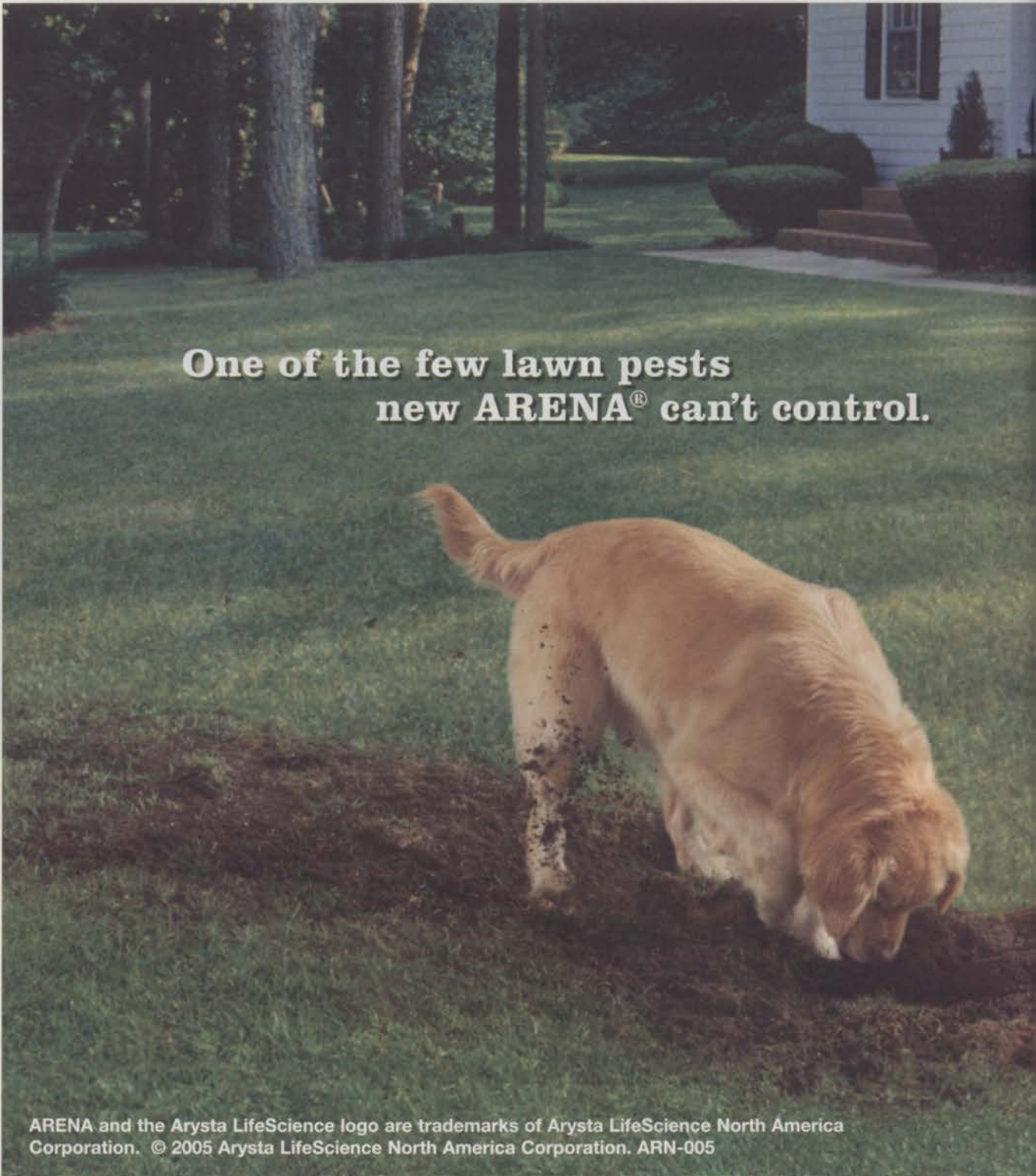
the more I'm able to hold the company at this level, the more I can improve the quality and be involved in innovation in terms of design ideas and take risks I could never take when I was growing the company. Before I was never involved in new ideas. I was just involved in the financial burden and management burden of building the company, but the aesthetic work of my company wasn't growing, and that's very important to me. We have a very high-quality product, and we want to maintain that.

**You mentioned that this happened before with the nursery. Why did you make the same mistake twice?** I think I blamed it on my partner. It was the same scenario, but I think I blamed it on him. I didn't really recognize that it's

not somebody's fault. It's the fault of getting sucked into that view that the more money that turns over, the more that drops to the bottom line. Everybody in business knows that's not how it always works, but I didn't know that. I didn't go to business school.

**Once you discovered that you were growing too fast, how did your business approach change?** I'm much more selective about the kind of work I take. If you can afford to do that, that's great because that means every job we have, the whole company is excited about. We do a lot of \$400,000 to \$500,000 landscape work now.

**What are you looking for in your new accounts now?** Clients who care



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about what we're going to do. I really interview the clients. I talk to them. I feel them out to see if they're really interested in the kind of work that I provide. I'd much rather be with somebody who is excited about and involved in the work because together we can create a much more unique atmosphere that fits their particular needs.

**When you encountered problems from growing too fast, did you seek help or advice from anyone in the industry, such as business consultants or other contractors?** No, but I had a friend 20 years ago who had a large residential construction firm on Maui, and I did all of his landscape work, and he went bankrupt. I went to see him because I

wanted to know what happened to his business because I didn't want this to happen to me. He said, 'What happened is I started saying, 'No' to the small local jobs. I only took the fancy, fancy jobs.' I learned from him that you can't do that. That's kind of why I have a maintenance company. In maintenance, you're always the goat and never the hero, but it's cash flow. It takes care of your clients, and it takes care of your design work. In a sense, that is my bread and butter. The checks from maintenance always come at the same time, and it is a way for us to serve the local clientele, who aren't the out-of-state people who are buying here and building. The people who live here need help too, but they don't have the kind of money these other people do.

**So is the maintenance portion of your business kind of like insurance?** It sure is. It's in every way insurance. It ensures we have a paycheck every week. It ensures our jobs stay true to intent.

**What are your plans to deal with rising expenses in Hawaii?** We're going to have to pay more because you must have people to do the work. The county is always trying to put together affordable housing for people, but they can't possibly keep up with the power of the almighty inflated dollar over here, so we have to pay more. But if I can pay somebody a lot more and he can produce a lot more, then it's worth it, and I don't have to pass that on to the clients. In other words, the same way I'm becoming more selective with clients, I'm becoming more selective with my employees.

**What are your future plans for growing the company?** I'm giving the company to my employees. I have three top guys – one who runs each division – who have been with me for 20 years, so I'm giving each a percent of the company stock every year over a 10-year period and at the end of that 10-year period I'll be 72 years old. Then over the following 10-year period they'll buy the rest from me. I'm trying to set it up so they can be comfortable and pass that to the rest of the people in the company. Other than that, I'm just trying to do a better job to make more profits so I'll have more money to share with the people here who deserve it.



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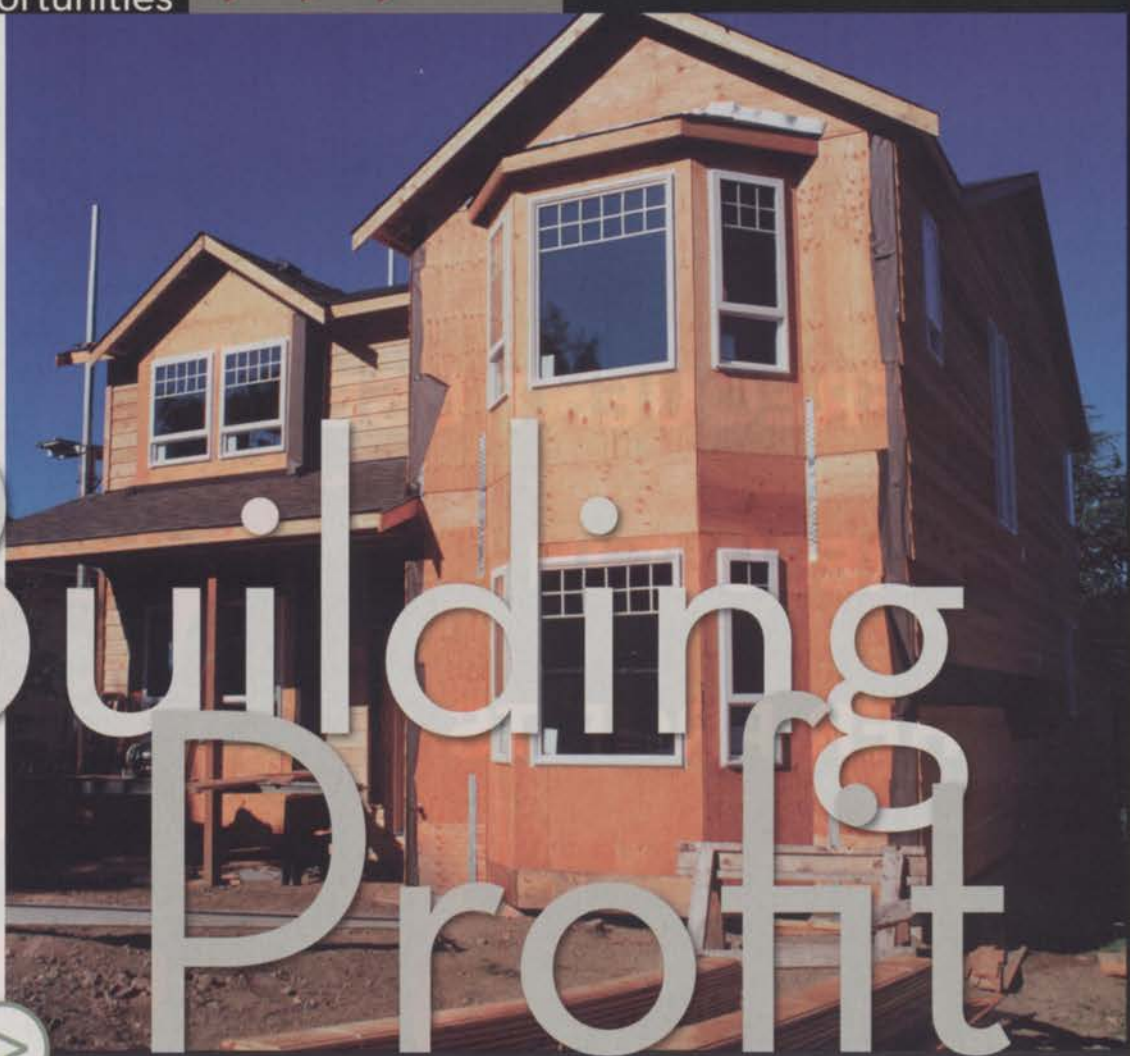
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USE READER SERVICE # 34



# Building Profit

by kathleen franzinger

Working with a homebuilder guarantees steady work, but it also requires a consistently high level of quality.

**W**hen it comes to working with a homebuilder, Landscape Contractor Mark Osinski says the pros definitely outweigh any cons. The president of Naturescape, Chagrin Falls, Ohio, has partnered with Kingdom Home Builders since the early 1990s, and he has installed landscapes on more than 250 homes as part of the business relationship.

Forming the relationship was a matter of skill, mixed with a little luck of being in the right place at the right time. "The builder saw the quality of our work and asked us to submit a bid for one of his model homes," Osinski says. His bid was accepted, and that one model home led to another, which led to another, and the

relationship grew from there.

Today, business from the builder represents about 10 percent of Naturescape's gross sales. The relationship is a win-win, says Osinski. "The builder can control costs, and I have a steady workflow," he shares. "It's good for both of us."

A steady workflow cuts down on Osinski's need to generate new business. He can also purchase material in volume, which gets him special pricing and helps him offer discounts to the builder. "If I buy a truckload of trees, I can pass on a portion of the savings to the builder because he is going to buy those trees throughout the season," he says.

Another benefit to the relationship is the prestige and opportunity that comes with the builder. For example, Osinski has been able to participate in several widely

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Tues	↓	↓	3:30	↓	↓	8
Wed	↓	↓	4:00	↓	↓	8.5
Thurs	↓	↓	4:00	↓	↓	8.5
Fri	↓	↓	4:00	↓	↓	8.5
Employee Signature: <u>Bill Kemp</u>						Total Hours: <u>41.5</u>



## REALITY?

**Employee Report**

**Bill Kemp**

Jobsite Name: Walby Property Date Range: 12/12/2005 through 12/16/2005

Day	Start	End	Activity	Hours
Mon 12/12	7:08 AM	12:05 PM	Irrigation	4:57 hours
	12:41 PM	3:22 PM	Irrigation	2:41 hours 7:38 hours
Tue 12/13	7:12 AM	12:07 PM	Irrigation	4:55 hours
	12:43 PM	3:23 PM	Irrigation	2:40 hours 7:35 hours
Wed 12/14	7:12 AM	12:02 PM	Irrigation	4:50 hours
	12:46 PM	3:49 PM	Irrigation	3:03 hours 7:53 hours
Thu 12/15	7:17 AM	12:19 PM	Planting	5:02 hours
	12:50 PM	3:46 PM	Planting	2:56 hours 7:58 hours
Fri 12/16	7:13 AM	12:07 PM	Planting	4:54 hours
	12:44 PM	3:39 PM	Planting	2:55 hours 7:49 hours
Employee total				<b>38:53 hours</b>

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publicized home shows. These shows let potential customers see first-hand the quality of Naturescape's work. Osinski can count on the shows to bring in a few leads that turn into sales. "The decision-makers come to these shows," he says. "They're serious buyers who are ready to build. You're hitting a target market with a great deal of exposure."

**GET IN ON THE GROUND**

**FLOOR.** Osinski admits that it's rare for a builder to approach a contractor. In fact, it's a highly sought after, yet difficult, relationship for a contractor to form. "If you're good and the builder likes you, they'll keep you," he says. "The builder is likely to use the same subcontractor once a favorable relationship has been established."

This is good news for the contractor doing the work, but it makes it challenging for someone to enter the game. Osinski suggests contractors call local

homebuilders to request to be placed on their bidders list. But don't give up if there isn't a response right away. "Sometimes you will have to call and ask more than once," he says. "It's up to the contractor to keep calling and pursuing leads. You can't expect the builder to come to you."

And the hard work doesn't stop once the bid is won. Just as builders will keep a contractor if they like his work, they'll just as quickly let him go if the work isn't up to their standards. "These are high-end homes and high-end landscapes, so builders expect more from you," he says, adding that some contracts say the builder has the right to terminate the relationship at any time, as long as they provide written notice within 30 days.

A contractor's work is a reflection of the builder, so most builders look for someone who can provide high quality, not just a low price. "In trying

to form a relationship, a contractor must provide quality service and value in order to win the trust of the builder," he says. "Everyone always wants a good price, but follow-up and warranty service in this type of relationship is just as important to the customer because it proves the builder chose a reputable subcontractor to represent his firm."

All Naturescape's products and services come with a one-year warranty. They follow-up several times after an installation to ensure the work is satisfactory. The first is one month after the initial installation. Six months later, they review the installation again. In the 11th month, the homeowner will contact Naturescape with any concerns, giving them enough time to correct a situation before the warranty expires.

Keeping up a consistent level of quality can be one of the biggest challenges of working with a builder. "Every job has to come out the same," Osinski

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says. "But it's not a perfect world. It might rain one day and wash out some grass seed. So we have to return to that property and bring it to the level acceptable to the builder and the homeowner."

Time management can also be a challenge when working with a builder. "When you're working in a development, all the residents in that area are your customers," Osinski says.

When going to one appointment, Osinski can find himself being pulled in multiple directions at once. If another homeowner sees him in the area, they'll call him over to ask a question, which can be a problem when he has another appointment scheduled. "Once they see you, they want to talk to you," he says. Scheduled appointments are his priority, but it can be difficult to tell a customer he doesn't have time for them, especially when they "just need a second."

**WORKING TOGETHER.** Naturescape is currently working on one of Kingdom's cluster home subdivisions located within a prestigious gated community. The homes start at \$500,000, and included in that price is the front landscaping, lawn and irrigation. Naturescape also does any hardscaping on the property, which oftentimes is an upgrade to the basic package the builder sells – for example, if the homeowner wants a brick patio rather than the standard cement patio.

Many times, Osinski's involvement in these projects starts with the design phase. But in this case, the builder had the design work completed beforehand, creating five different landscape designs to match the various architectural styles of the homes. "Sometimes these projects are done so far in advance, they have landscaping designs done before they even break ground," he says. "The architect firm that designs the house

subcontracts that out sometimes on large commercial projects because the city wants to see some semblance before they approve it."

Generally, Osinski says his staff holds weekly production meetings to forecast upcoming jobs. Over the years, he has developed a good working relationship with the builder's field staff. "The project supervisor will call and give us the projected start date," he says. "We schedule that into our workforce on a weekly basis."

Naturescape is responsible for doing final grading before the lawn is put down, so they work in association with the excavator digging the basement. "After the excavator finishes the rough grade, we take it from there," Osinski explains.

Because of the high volume of work, Osinski has a dedicated crew whose first priority is Kingdom. "If there is a project scheduled at a certain time,

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that crew's first responsibility is to the builder," he says. He typically runs three crews a day, depending on the size of the job. "But a minimum of three men are available when needed for Kingdom."

**SIGNING A CONTRACT.** Once a builder accepts a bid, it becomes a contract. "That way the builder knows up front what their costs will be," Osinski says.

Rather than signing, say, a five-year contract, the contracts are site-specific, lasting until the builder has finished the project or reached build-out. If it's a long-term project, as most generally are, Osinski says it takes about four to five years for a build-out.

Because of this, contractors should make sure their contracts with builders include a provision for a cost of living increase, in addition to the base price. Osinski suggests contracts contain

wording to the effect of "a percentage increase on an annual basis to cover the cost of living."

"If contractors get locked into a certain price, they could lose a great deal of money without some provision for when costs, such as steel and gas, go up," he says. "The builder doesn't automatically increase your contract so you can have a higher profit margin."

When it comes to pricing the service, it's critical for contractors to know their actual cost of doing business. In exchange for the volume of work they're giving, builders will expect a discount.

"If it's two or three houses, they don't care about a discount," he says. "But if there are 10 houses, they'll want one."

The percent discount builders expect differ based on the size of the projects. But in general, Osinski says a 5 percent discount is appropriate when starting out. "You can't really give any

more and still offer high quality," he points out.

But figuring out how much of a discount to give is not a guessing game. "You have to know your cost of doing business so you can evaluate the opportunity," Osinski says. "The bigger the job, the more of a discount you can offer. You have to know your costs to determine any sort of discount."

Osinski says the volume of the work he receives makes up for the discount he gives the builder. In turn, contractors should realize it's common practice in the home-building industry for the builder to charge a markup on the contractor's service.

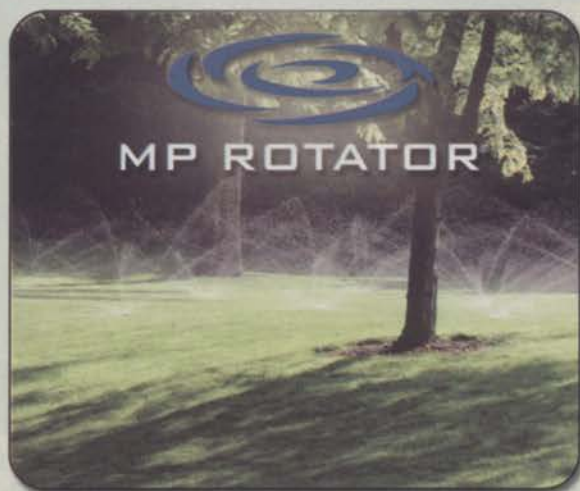
But make no mistake. When starting this type of relationship, contractors are definitely taking a gamble. "You are putting yourself at risk," Osinski says. "You may not be profitable at first, but you do it in the hopes that it will result in a large volume of work." ■



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# Searching for Profit

by jonathan katz

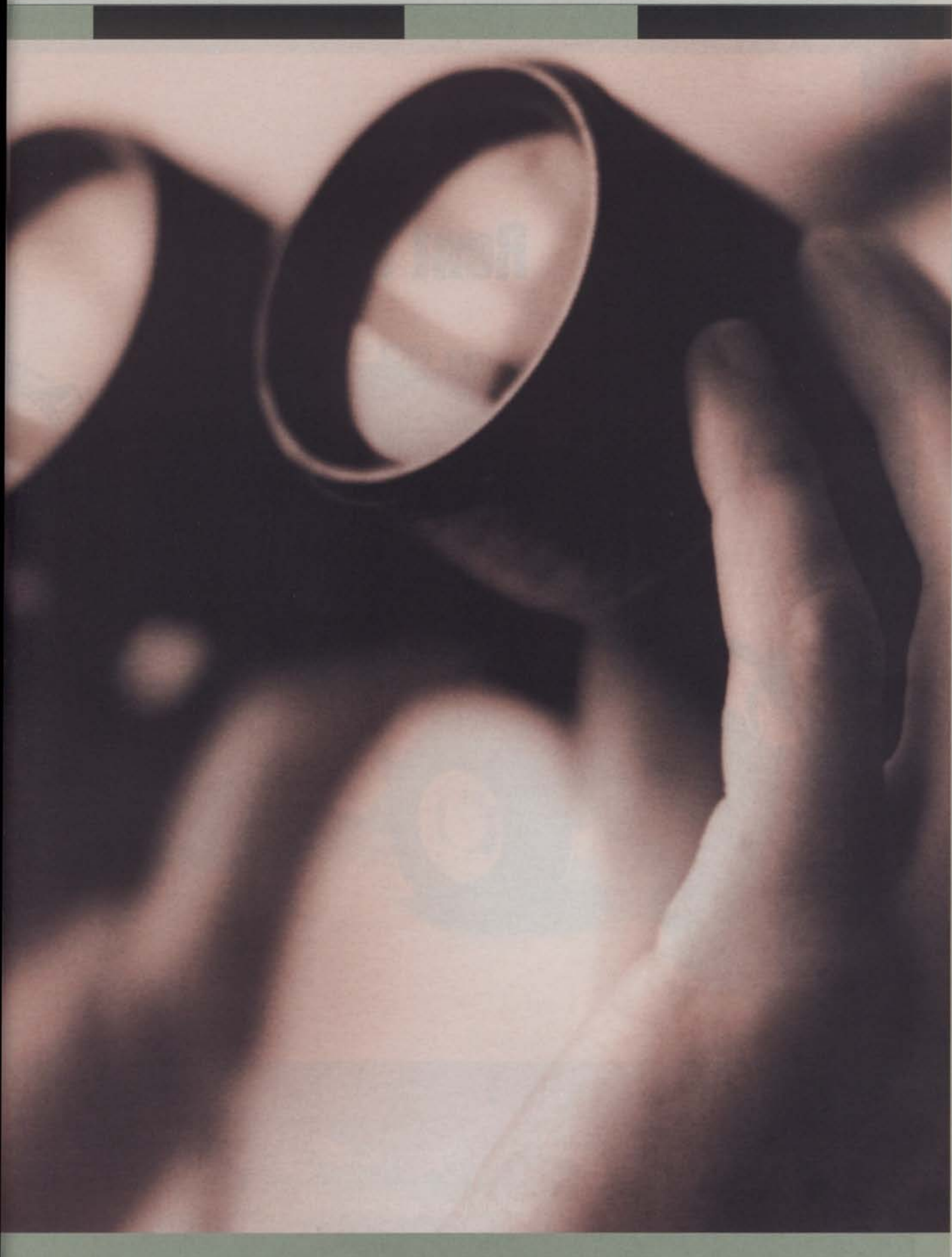
A detailed approach to estimating landscape construction jobs can raise profit margins for contractors who are utilizing less sophisticated pricing methods.

**T**hey're considered public-enemy No. 1 by many landscape contractors. The alleged culprits are lowball competitors, and they're driving down industry profits, according to contractors who were surveyed for *Lawn & Landscape's* 2005 State of the Industry Report. Since 1997, contractors surveyed for the annual report have ranked lowball competitors as the third-highest business-limiting factor in the industry.

But contractors whose profit margins have decreased in recent years might be searching too far from home for an answer on why profits are falling. Instead, contractors own estimating procedures could be the reason their profits have suffered.

"I think there are lowballers in every industry," says Marty Grunder, an industry consultant and president of the Grunder Landscaping Co., Dayton, Ohio. "I think we probably get a little too excited about it. Worry about yourself and that you know your costs well and that you run a lean, mean organization. If there are contractors who bid work you can't compete with, don't worry about it and move on. Think of it this way – they're just having a slow going-out-of-business sale."

In landscape construction, cost awareness is especially critical because the jobs typically require more materials, labor, equipment and unexpected expenses than maintenance. When contractors take a simplistic pricing approach, they sometimes



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don't include all of these factors in their estimates and risk losing money, says industry consultant James Huston, president of J.R. Huston Enterprises, Englewood, Colo. Huston attributes some of the estimating difficulties contractors face to an industry that's still growing. "The green industry, in general, I think is a little less sophisticated than the other trades," Huston says. "Let's take plumbing, for instance – the plumber has been around a long time.

The green industry is a much newer industry. Because of that, the plumber and other trades have well-established pricing methods, so they're a little further ahead of us as far as production rates and standardized pricing methods are concerned."

Contractors can reach the estimating level that similar industries have achieved by accurately measuring job sites, tracking job costs and establishing scientifically based production rates.

## commercial bidding

Let the bidding wars begin. When estimating commercial construction jobs, contractors are typically competing with several other contractors for the lowest price. This means that contractors need to be conscious of industry pricing standards and differences in client expectations between residential and commercial jobs.

In general, gross profit margins for commercial jobs are 10 to 20 percent less than residential accounts, says James Huston, an industry consultant and president of J.R. Huston Enterprises, Englewood, Colo. The competitive nature and increased production rates associated with commercial work contribute to the lower margins. Contractors should also be aware of differences in materials costs for commercial and residential jobs. For commercial jobs, contractors can typically charge a retail price for materials, whereas with a commercial job, contractors should charge a wholesale price, Huston says.

Production rates are usually faster in commercial jobs because they require a different "quality standard," Huston says. In other words, homeowners tend to be pickier than developers or commercial property owners. "In residential, you have to make sure the trees really look good and that the homeowner is happy with them – you might even have an architect pick them out," he explains. "Whereas on a commercial project you might have the same type of tree, but it doesn't have to be as full, so this is where you're going to have a different quality standard and production rate. You're going to put these things in the ground and move on, whereas in residential you have to put them in the ground, move it around and make sure everything is perfect. So residential is much more labor intensive."

Additionally, commercial jobs sometimes require less physical labor because they provide better site access for large equipment, such as mini-excavators and skid-steer loaders, than residential jobsites. But to realize maximum productivity from these machines, contractors should first train their employees on how to properly operate equipment, Huston says.

The key to maximizing profits on commercial jobs is repeat business, Huston says. Contractors should try to establish a relationship with a builder who will provide ongoing business instead of playing the open-bid market. "Negotiate as much work as possible," he explains. "Negotiated work and repeat work are less risky and garner the highest profits vs. open-bid work, which is much lower."

Gross profit margins for negotiated bids are 5 to 10 percent higher than open bids, according to Huston. If contractors do join the open-bid market, they should do their homework by asking other subcontractors on the job about their experiences with the client, Huston recommends. He also suggests that contractors have an attorney review the contract before signing it to make sure it covers all the bases.



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**FORGET FACTORING.** Estimating should be fairly simple, right? All contractors need to do is multiply their materials costs by a figure to cover overhead and profit. Sometimes referred to as the factoring method, this approach works well in retail businesses, such as nurseries, but in the design/build business, contractors face too many variables to use such a simplistic approach, say industry experts. "It's flying by the seat of your pants," warns Jack Mattingly, president, Mattingly Consulting, Woodstock, Ga. "If you're doing that, I guarantee you're losing money. If you're not, you're lucky, but you will get killed on other jobs."

A better approach is establishing a detailed estimating system that pinpoints each cost associated with doing business, Huston says. "When you just factor things, that doesn't identify any costs, such as overhead, labor or equipment," he explains. "In other words,

what's the cost of the tree, the labor to install it and the truck to get it to the job site?"

Knowing how long each job function takes to complete can help contractors establish their budgeted hours for particular jobs. This is usually accomplished by timing different tasks over a period of time, recording the information and using the averages as guidelines for future jobs, Huston says. When performing the audit, often referred to as a time and motion study, contractors would also record the job size. The data can then be entered into a computer spreadsheet that will calculate a price based on job type, job size and the contractor's selected markup.

Monitoring production rates should be an ongoing process. Mattingly recommends that contractors perform a time and motion study at least twice annually.

Another way to track production

rates is with job costing. Contractor Andrew Aksar requires that his crewleaders record on a timesheet how long each step of a job took, including travel time to and from the job and truck loading and unloading time. Also included is each material used on the job, from topsoil to marking-paint cans, says Aksar, owner, Outdoor Finishes, Walkersville, Md.

"As we're doing the job, we track actual production hours and actual material expenses, and I track every little penny spent," Aksar explains. "It allows me to compare estimated material expenses vs. actual expenses and allows me to compare estimated production hours vs. actual production hours, which will allow me to see if we made the estimated net profit or went over or under the estimated net profit."

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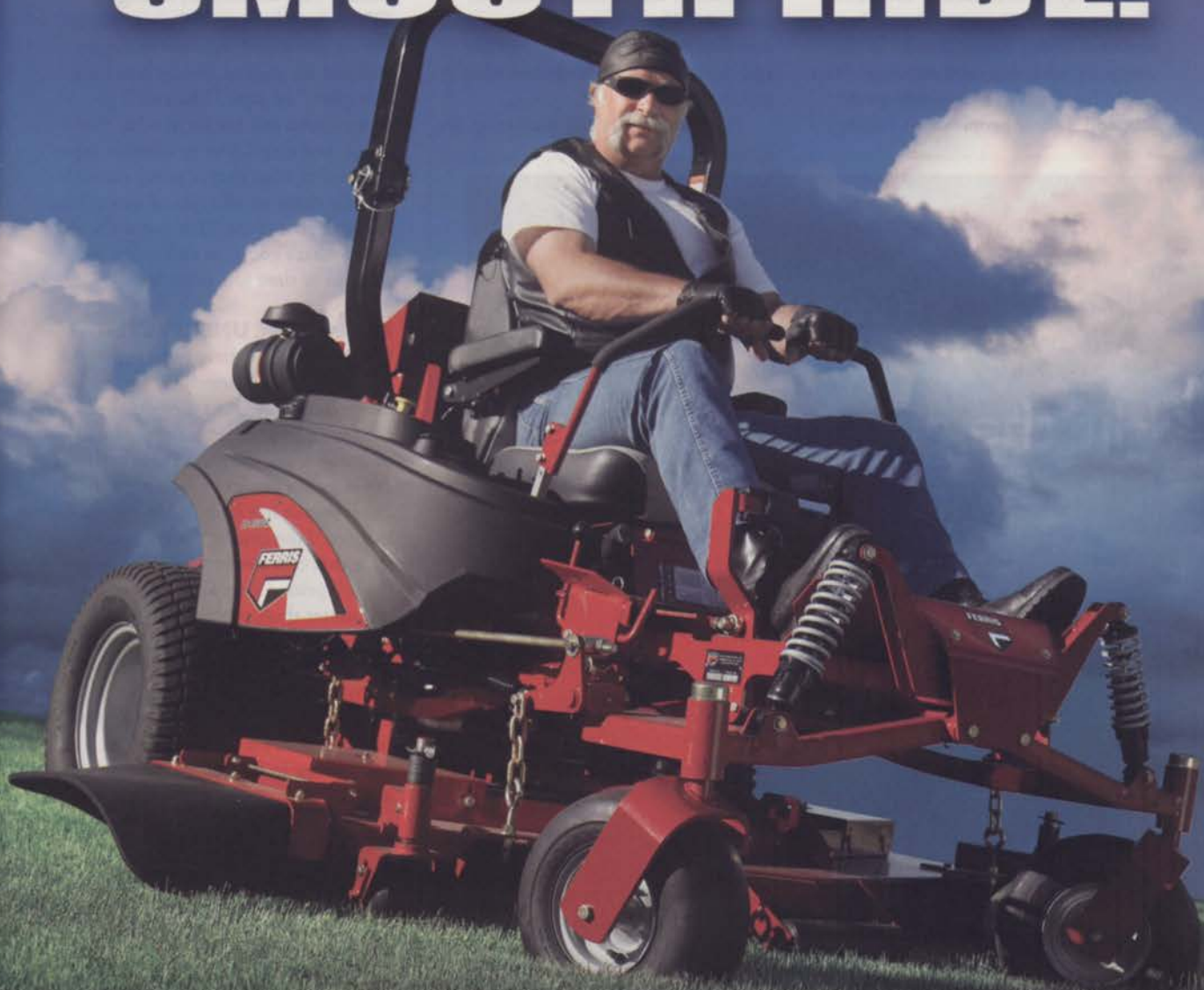
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USE READER SERVICE # 47

tors should have one staff member who is in charge of making sure the job is moving forward according to plans and is relaying that back to the crews, Huston says. This person should be someone with a financial stake in the company, such as a sales associate. "You might have two to five people on the job, and if these people aren't talking,

that opens a huge gap for problems – people don't know exactly what is expected; crews don't know precise materials or the nuances of the job," he explains. "The sales person has to make sure that everything is tied together and that the crewleader knows what is expected."

Ed Koenig, sales and marketing di-

rector for Grafton, Ohio-based Lifestyle Landscaping says he determines average production rates by keeping in constant contact with his account managers. "There have been several times where I've sat down with account managers and said we need to look at how long this takes," he says. "Then we'll go to our crews and ask them what they think, and they'll give us valuable input in terms of what they're going through because there are all types of intangibles we don't always see. That way we're able to see what's going on and assign an amount of time to a given task."

**EXPECT THE UNEXPECTED.**

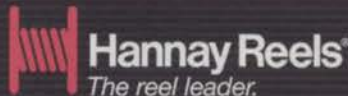
Contractors don't have to be fortune-tellers to accurately estimate design/build jobs, but they do need the foresight to account for potential obstacles along the way. These variables can decrease profits or even wipe them out if they're not included in the estimate or if the contract doesn't clearly state that cost overruns could increase the job price. Contractors sometimes encounter these problems on jobs where soil conditions impede progress. Huston recommends that contractors include a rock or ledge clause in their contracts to protect them against potential pitfalls on the job. Such a clause would state in the contract that prices are subject to change if a ledge or rocky soil conditions require additional time and materials.

In some instances, contractors can tailor the clause to fit certain conditions common in their regions. That's exactly what Grunder says he does for jobs that require concrete demolition. "One thing we run into a lot that you can lose your tail on is tearing out concrete that has fencing or rebar in it," he says. "So you need to have clauses in your contract to make sure you're covered in case you come into some hidden conditions."

In Grunder's case, he says the contract would typically state the following: "It is assumed that the material we're demolishing is free of rebar and is 4 inches thick. If it is more than 4 inches thick or contains rebar or reinforcement, there shall be an extra charge to remove it."

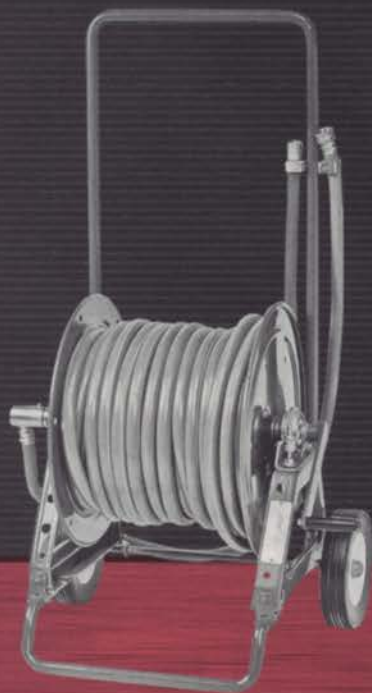
In addition to clauses, landscape contractors should add a risk factor

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of at least 10 percent to the crew's average wage on all estimates, Huston advises. This number can be higher if contractors think the job will present additional challenges. "If you're on a job and you feel comfortable about the production rates, you're still going to add 10 percent to your average wage because things happen and you have to

protect yourself," Huston says.

But Grunder says a risk factor isn't always necessary because the rock or ledge clause should take care of any unforeseen circumstances that occur on the job. "We don't like putting in an extra fudge factor," he explains. "We like to assume that everything is going to be OK but have a clause in the contract

that we can execute if we need to."

The key to executing contract clauses is effectively communicating with the customer potential problems before they happen, Grunder says. "Be realistic and honest and say, 'We're going to work with you and do everything we possibly can to make this a pleasant experience, but anytime you do a project of this scope, there can be issues that come up, and we want to prepare you for those; here are a couple of things that might happen,'" he explains. "Clients don't like surprises, and that's how you tick people off, so you want to have conversations upfront that let them know everything may not go perfectly."

**PEOPLE PROBLEMS.** Physical roadblocks aren't the only obstacles contractors can encounter on the job. There's also the human factor. Difficult customers can cause slowdowns and decrease profits, as well. This is when a contractor's experience and intuition come into play. If a contractor gets "bad vibes" from a customer, the contractor might want to consider a contingency factor, Huston says. "I tell guys once you put the whole bid together, step back and take a look at it, sometimes your risk factor is the homeowner from hell, so you add an extra \$1,000," he explains.

Although experience typically tells contractors when to include a contingency factor, there are ways contractors can learn more about a client before proceeding with a job. One sign contractors should be wary of is an overly meticulous customer. "If a customer is trying to nickel and dime you upfront, that's a sign," Huston points out. Another way contractors can read clients is by asking other contractors on the job about their experiences with the customer, he adds.

Contractor David Rykbost says he usually includes a 10-percent risk factor in his jobs but will increase it by 5 to 10 percent if he thinks the customer will cause problems. "If they're just asking 10 million questions about things that are really insignificant, you have to wonder if they're going to hammer you for every little thing when the job is done, in which case you can put in a higher risk factor," says Rykbost,

*continued on page 66*

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Photo: Dowco Enterprises



# Maintaining Margins

by jonathan katz

Contractors can effectively estimate maintenance jobs by establishing solid production rates and tracking their costs.

**T**here's a disclaimer on every automobile's side-view mirror that says, "Objects may be closer than they appear." Maybe landscape contractors should heed a similar warning that says, "Eyeball estimates may be less accurate than they appear." Such a mantra could protect contractors from basing their lawn maintenance estimates only on experience rather than measuring the property for precise numbers.

Indeed, contractors who derive their prices from measured production rates should increase their chances of obtaining their targeted profit margins, say industry experts. General, unscientific estimates might work for smaller one- or two-man operations, in which case the contractor is usually pricing

jobs himself, but larger companies with multiple employees could suffer from such a simplistic approach, says Frank Ross, president, Ross-Payne & Associates, Chicago, Ill.

"I don't have a problem with an experienced eye," Ross explains. "If you're a one-man show and you're doing it all yourself, then fine. But if you're going to delegate estimating to someone else in your business, all of the sudden that person doesn't have the same eye and you have a job that's been horribly misestimated, and it's either overestimated and you lose the job or underestimated and you lose money on the job. There are guys in the industry who can do that, but few in number who do it well."

Industry consultant Marty Grunder agrees that only the most experienced maintenance contractors



should depend on intuition to produce estimates. "If you're a rookie or new in this business, you better measure because you can't afford to blow a bid," says Grunder, president of the Grunder Landscaping Co., Dayton, Ohio. "You have to understand that doing that bid is a building-block for your company's future."

**IT'S IN THE CONTRACT.** A poor maintenance estimate can hinder a company's future growth when contractors don't spell out all the terms and conditions of a contract for potential clients. In such cases, clients may expect more services than what's stated in the contract. One way to avoid these problems is to specify that any services beyond what's worded in the contract are subject to hourly fees. That's how Ed Koenig, sales marketing director for Grafton, Ohio-based Lifestyle Landscaping, says he keeps client expectations in check.

"With maintenance it's all about building a relationship with the client and establishing the trust that's necessary to have that sort of working relationship," Koenig explains. "A lot of the clients we work with are upper-end residential, and their needs are not always typical. It's not something you can script real easily."

When Koenig writes his maintenance contracts he lists in detail all of the services the customer will receive, the frequency of visits and the billing schedule. Then he specifies that anything beyond the scope of work he outlined will cost additional time and materials and provides the customer with an hourly rate.

Contractor David Rykbost charges a set rate for mowing jobs but charges hourly for other maintenance jobs, such as spring cleanups and fall leaf pickups, that can vary in time. Rykbost, president of Dave's Landscape Management Co. in Hudson, Mass., also insists that each year when customers renew their contracts they check off each service they want and sign the document. The process saved Rykbost from providing a mulching service for free. He relates an incident in which a customer already

mulched his beds but checked off and signed a service request sheet for Rykbost to provide the mulching. Per the customer's request, Rykbost's crews showed up and mulched the yard. The customer was upset but when Rykbost showed him the signed request form, he accepted the charge. "He ended up paying us because he told us to do it, so it's important to get those signatures," he says.

**MEASURABLE MOTIONS.** Contractor Maurice Dowell knows from experience how long jobs should take but even this 27-year veteran says to remain competitive a more exact approach may be necessary. "We realize estimating has to be brought to a science to the point that I could take an employee out there and by following steps one through three he can account for the price of that particular property. That is our goal," says Dowell, owner of Dowco Enterprises, Chesterfield, Mo.

Dowell is considering a software program that can determine prices based on the size of the property and the type of equipment being used. To gather the data necessary for such a software program, Dowell will likely need to quantify his production rates by conducting time and motion studies, which are performed by observing employees in action, recording the type of equipment they're using, and timing how long it takes them to finish specific jobs.

"Contractors need quantifiable production rates for all of the services they perform," says Jack Mattingly, president, Mattingly Consulting, Woodstock, Ga. "That means they need to determine how long it takes to mow 1,000 square feet with a 21-inch mower, how long it takes with a 36-inch mower and all other aspects of the job, including trimming and edging. Only then have they taken the guesswork out of it."

Mattingly recommends contractors transfer the data from the study to a computer spreadsheet or estimating program that will calculate prices based on the information gathered. From there, contractors should continue

tracking production rates throughout the year so they can make adjustments, when necessary, Ross says.

Contractors can track production hours by requiring that employees fill out time sheets for each task they perform. "You want to collect time whenever your crew goes out to a site, and you want to see how many hours they're actually spending to mow the site," Ross explains. "If you're over the estimated value that you sold the job for, you then want to know how the job is performed – it might be the mowing patterns being used or the crew is doing more than what you sold the job for. If it were to go unmeasured or untracked, you may end up the year thinking you had a great job, but you actually lost money because you didn't pay any attention to it."

Industry consultant James Huston agrees that tracking production hours is useful for commercial jobs and larger residential jobs but says it's not as necessary with residential jobs because they're smaller and less risky. "It's so time consuming to measure everything that very few people actually do it," says Huston, president of J.R. Huston Enterprises, Englewood, Colo. "You're whipping out prices left and right and you just don't always have the time to measure everything."

Huston's approach for estimating residential jobs is less analytical. After contractors determine their overhead and materials costs, he recommends they set daily billable goals for their crews when working smaller residential accounts. So if a contractor sets his daily rate at \$600 for an eight-hour day, he would charge \$75 per man-hour, which is derived by dividing the daily goal by the hours worked.

The result is a simpler method of tracking profitability, Huston says. "The hourly rate is important, but what is more important is that every day you bill \$600," he explains. "In other words, at the end of the day, you better be able to bill \$600, if you can they're heroes, if you can't, there's a problem. That is a great way for maintenance guys to see if they're making money." ■

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breakthrough series

continued from page 62

president, Dave's Landscape Management Co., Hudson, Mass.

Sometimes it's best to simply turn down a job if the customer appears too picky or combative, Grunder says. "Put it this way, if you're having problems with the prospect before you even put a shovel in the ground, that's a bad sign, and you need to walk away from it and devote your efforts toward your better customers," he says. "It takes a lot of courage and experience to do that. We do it a couple of times a year when we become concerned that we can't meet expectations."

Clients aren't the only ones who can cause job slowdowns, as Aksar realized on a recent project. Crewmembers are subject to fatigue, which can increase labor costs and reduce profits as much as client interference. By the second week of June, temperatures in Aksar's region had reached the high 80s and low 90s. At this particular job, workers had to wheelbarrow everything into the yard because of limited site access. The heat combined with the additional labor resulted in a loss of a day's worth of production hours, Aksar says, adding that contractors need to put themselves in their laborers' shoes when estimating a job. "When you're not working in the field, it's easy to sit back and not think about those little details," he says. "When we're job costing, we seem to think employees are working all day long with big smiles on their faces. But with poor worksite conditions, they're taking breaks and catching their breath."

The experience has made Aksar more conscious of how access and employees' physical limitations can impact a job. Now, before finalizing an estimate, Aksar checks whether his skid-steer loaders will fit through certain entrance points or whether land conditions will hinder the equipment's performance, such as hill steepness. A wet or muddy slope could prevent a skid-steer loader from proceeding up the hill.

In the future, Aksar says he will add production hours to the job if he knows it will require a significant amount of manual labor, especially in high temperatures. "This is a labor issue," he explains. I have to put myself in the laborers' shoes because they're the ones hauling the wheelbarrow up and down a hill all day long." ■



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We recognize that fall and winter mark the important seasons when businesses take a close look at their books, reflect on the past year's ups and downs, and strategize about how to make the upcoming year even more successful. Knowing that, we're excited to bring you this third-annual in-depth Benchmarking Your Business report. Packed with national and regional data on the business numbers you deal with every day, we know this report will be something you can use to see where your company stands right now and establish goals to help you continue growing your business and your profits.

Knowing the importance of numbers to your business's bottom line, this year's Benchmarking Your Business report includes more charts and graphs, allowing you to easily insert yourself into the report to see where your own company's challenges and opportunities lay, as well as data interpretation that truly goes beyond the numbers.

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Gilbert Pena  
Brand Manager, Commercial Mowing  
John Deere



*"We at John Deere strive to be more than just a supplier for your business. We're eager to be your business partner, helping to meet your goals."*

**- Gilbert Pena**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Gilbert Pena', written in a cursive style.

# Benchmarking Your Business 2005

by Lauren Spiers Hunter

## methodology

In July 2005, *Lawn & Landscape* and operations consultant Jack Mattingly developed the 2005 Benchmarking Your Business survey, which was sent to lawn and landscape business owners randomly selected from *Lawn & Landscape's* circulation list of presidents and owners. Along with a questionnaire, a \$1 incentive was mailed to each recipient, inviting their participation.

A total of 796 surveys were completed and returned to *Lawn & Landscape*, which commissioned independent research firm Research USA to tabulate the results. In addition to providing industry averages and median results, the data was broken down by revenue and region for a more accurate picture of each segment of the industry.

Average revenue and other averages and percentages are based on response data from this report only. Results have a margin of error of +/- 3.5 percent.

**K**nowledgeable account managers, a well-designed Web site, skilled crews and a friendly receptionist all help end-users feel comfortable in their decisions to hire certain companies; but what would happen if they looked beyond the talent and insight of their professional contractors? If homeowners and property managers looked at their service providers' books, would they still feel sure about their services?

Beyond providing a professional service, most lawn and landscape professionals know that running a successful business is all about numbers. Good rapport with clients is essential, but a business that doesn't make money won't be around long enough to offer continued service to those customers.

Knowing that, the 2005 Benchmarking Your Business report was developed to serve as a starting point on your road to success. The charts included here are designed to let you compare your company to others on both national and regional scales. Moreover, industry consultant Jack Mattingly has offered his insight into what these numbers mean. After all, it's one thing to be able to compare your company's costs to national averages, but it's quite another to identify how to track those costs on a regular basis and watch your bottom line improve as a result. As you make your way through the report, take a look at the "Take Note" items for helpful analysis of many charts.

**COST/PROFIT ANALYSIS.** Whether it's pounds of fertilizer or hours of labor, direct costs will vary by company. Service mix, job size, number of accounts and numerous other factors all play into what percentage of a company's expenses are directly related to their jobs. But according to Mattingly, the general direct expense categories will be the same for every business: Labor, materials, subcontractors and equipment rental.

"Direct costs are the costs directly associated with performing a certain piece of work," says Mattingly of Mattingly Consulting, Woodstock, Ga. "Everything else is some type of overhead, broken out into equipment costs, indirect job costs and administrative costs." Mattingly says that landscape design/build companies will sometimes have a higher percentage of direct costs than maintenance companies, which generally gives maintenance companies higher gross profit. Moreover, he notes that lawn care companies likely have the lowest direct costs, making these services among the most profitable.

### How do you project your total gross revenue to change from 2004 to 2005

	National Average	<\$100k	\$100k-\$299k	\$300k-\$999k	\$1M+
Increase	53.6	41.2	59	68.3	68.4
No Change	37.4	44.6	35.3	27.5	28.2
Decrease	9	14.2	5.7	4.3	3.5
Average Expected Increase	16.6	18.1	6.6	14	17.6
Average Expected Decrease	19.8	22.9	13.8	15.5	8.5

**Take Note:** Overall, a majority of green industry companies (53.6 percent) expect revenue increases from 2004 to 2005. One trend we see here is that more large companies expect revenue to increase, while more small companies expect revenue decreases. Moreover, the smallest companies are expecting the largest revenue decreases - an average 22.9 percent loss - compared to only 8.5 percent losses reported among the largest companies expecting decreases. Industry consultant Jack Mattingly suggests that smaller companies may need to keep closer tabs on their numbers in order to reverse this trend.

### What percentage of your gross sales revenue does your company spend for the following expenses in each service area?

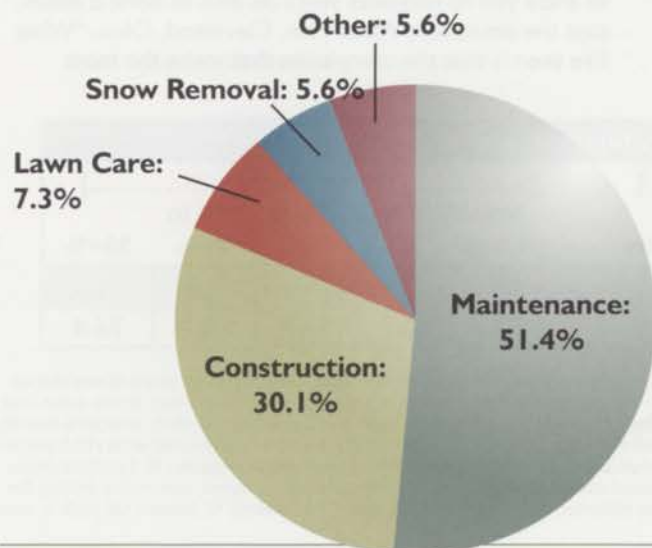
	[.....Labor.....]					[.....Materials.....]				
	Total	\$100-\$299k		\$300-\$999k	\$1M+	Total	\$100-\$300		\$1M+	
		<\$100k	>\$100k				<\$100k	>\$100k		
Maintenance	12.1	9.8	13.4	18	16.4	8.4	10	7.4	5.7	3.8
Construction	8.2	4.1	11.7	14.2	17.2	11.8	7.9	15.4	19	15.9
Lawn Care	3.8	4	3.9	3.8	1.5	5.3	6.3	4.8	3.1	0.7

Understanding these numbers is essential, according to Mattingly - if the former isn't taken care of, the latter won't exist. "Most companies have in the neighborhood of 50 percent direct costs, which means if a client pays me \$100, I have \$50 to spend to get the work done and I have \$50 left to pay for all my overhead, including my salary and profit," he explains. "I see a lot of contractors that have problems determining what to charge in order to recoup those costs. They're selling labor and materi-

als, but they don't know how much to mark up their direct costs in order to cover their overhead."

Focusing on gross profit is one way to get started on the right track to managing costs. "Generally, gross profit is all the monies you have left over after you've paid for your direct costs," Mattingly says. "Net profit, on the other hand, is what you have left after you pay your overhead, but before taxes. The gross profit is key because if that amount isn't high enough, you won't have

### WHAT PERCENTAGE OF YOUR REVENUE IS GENERATED BY EACH OF THE FOLLOWING SERVICE AREAS?



**Take Note:** While the average lawn and landscape company reports nearly a third (30.1 percent) of its revenue coming from construction, it's no surprise that maintenance comes out as the largest service segment, earning more than half (51.4 percent) of the average company's revenue. In fact, 50 percent of companies report that at least 55 percent of their revenue comes from maintenance and 25 percent of respondents say maintenance is more than 80 percent of their business. Respondents to this survey only expect 7.3 percent of their revenue to come from lawn care. Because small companies made up the bulk of respondents to the Benchmarking Your Business report, this smaller percentage could be due to the fact that many small companies tend to lump lawn care revenue in with maintenance revenue. Phil Fogarty, president, Weed Man, Cleveland, Ohio, says this service segment is among the most profitable in the green industry due to efficient routing, per-application (rather than hourly) payment structures and lower materials costs. Finally, the regionality of snow removal explains its small 5.6-percent slice of the pie.

An interesting dynamic exists when comparing maintenance and construction revenue to companies' overall revenue. The 2005 Benchmarking Your Business research shows that the smallest companies (\$100,000 or less) make 64.3 percent of their money in the maintenance sector, while the largest companies (\$1 million or more) earn only 28.7 percent of their revenue in this segment. The reverse is true in construction where the smallest companies only make an average of 18.8 percent of their revenue, while the largest companies make more than half (52 percent) of their money here.

### What do you project your company's 2005 net profit to be as a percentage of gross sales?

	Total	<\$100k	\$100- \$299k	\$300- \$999k	\$1M
None/loss	9.6	4	1.6	4.1	--
1 to 3%	13	16.5	12.3	7.1	9.1
4 to 5%	13.2	15	12.9	9.7	12.3
6 to 9%	10.1	7	7.8	15.7	23.6
10 to 14%	16.3	11.9	14.8	24.7	26.6
15 to 19%	15	11.2	16.1	21	18
20 to 29%	13.3	13.3	14.2	15	6.2
30 % or more	13.1	15.5	17.8	5.1	--

enough left over to pay your overhead, let alone make any money."

Creating a simple chart of accounts – either in a spreadsheet or a formal computer program – is one way for business owners to break down costs in a format that's easy to track. This helps ensure costs are being recovered with money left over to grow the business.

**READ YOUR FINANCIALS.** Acknowledging the need to track business costs, many business owners will next ask how often to track those numbers. Mattingly says looking at financial statements on a monthly basis is sufficient, but the 2005 Benchmarking Your Business survey shows that a remarkably low number of contractors – only 34.2 percent on average – actually take this step. According to the data, the likelihood of a company to receive monthly financial statements is directly related to its size. The smallest companies (under \$100,000) are least likely to receive these reports with only 18.1 percent reporting that they do so, while 78.2 percent of the largest companies (\$1 million or larger) receive them, suggesting that the most successful companies are the ones that watch their numbers.

"Overall, I think it's unbelievable how few business owners receive their monthly financial statements," Mattingly says, "but what the data does show is that if

they're receiving them, they're reading them." According to the data, of the 34.2 percent of contractors receiving monthly statements, 96.1 percent report reading those statements as well.

Mattingly believes that smaller companies may be less inclined to look at financial statements regularly because they're unclear of how to track their costs in the first place. However, small companies should have an easier time setting up a chart of accounts, compared to larger companies that may have expanded service menus. "When you're small, even if you offer both installation and maintenance, there's not really enough work there to justify itemizing each division," Mattingly says. "But as you get larger, then you really want to start looking at your financial statements separately because you need to find out which of your service lines is generating the most gross profit. In my opinion, that's the service you want to sell the most of, rather than focusing on the work you like to do the most."

Phil Fogarty agrees that business success and numbers go hand in hand. "Running a successful business in this industry starts with good business planning and even if you don't have it right the first year, if you take the time to track you're numbers you'll be able to hone it down," says the president, Weed Man, Cleveland, Ohio. "What I've seen is that the companies that make the most

### Do you receive monthly financial statements?

	[.....Revenue.....]					[.....Net Profit.....]				
	Total	<\$100k	\$100- \$299k	\$300- \$999k	\$1M+	None/ Loss	1 to 9%	10 to 14%	15 to 29%	30+%
Yes	34.2	18.1	37.1	49.4	78.2	25.6	41.8	45.2	37.3	25.6
No	65.8	81.9	62.9	50.6	21.8	74.4	58.2	54.8	62.7	74.4

**Take Note:** In looking at companies' overall revenue compared to their tendency to receive monthly financial statements, it was no shock to see that as revenue increased, so did monitoring of financials. That is, reviewing of numbers improves companies' financial stature – or vice-versa. At the same time, when compared to net profit, a bell curve appears. Companies that report expecting 10 to 14 percent net profit for 2005 were most likely to receive monthly financial statements, with 45.2 percent of companies regularly receiving their numbers. This makes sense, as the average expected net profit (15.3 percent) falls within this category, and because 10 to 14 percent was the most common expected profit range reported by survey respondents (16.3 percent chose this category). From there, however, companies' tendencies to receive financial statements fall off in both directions. As expected, companies making the lowest profit margins are less likely to receive monthly financial statements; however, the same is true for companies making 15 percent net profit or more.



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money are the ones that track their numbers the most, and many of them are tracking constantly.

"The challenge is that we're in an industry of people that love getting out in the field and doing the work," Fogarty continues. "But in order to meet those goals, many people find themselves in management or ownership positions that require them to look at reports that they wouldn't normally be interested in. We need to refocus that mentality so those business owners are doing the work they love in business they're eager to work on."

Following financials also can ensure that business owners get paid what they deserve. "There's a disparity in the data that tells me business owners either don't pay themselves correctly or don't know how much of their costs go to their own salaries," Mattingly says. "On one hand, companies are reporting that an average of 4.4 percent of their overhead goes toward salaries for company officers. For an average size company – about \$419,000 for this report – that's only \$18,436. At the same time, the average annual salary for a company president alone is \$53,084."

There's nothing wrong with paying yourself a salary of \$50,000, Mattingly says; but the discrepancy in these dollar amounts could come from contractors misunderstanding how their numbers are reported. Less-than-structured salary payments can contribute to this problem. "A lot of small-business owners don't pay themselves correctly," Mattingly explains. "They may only pay themselves every three months, or even wait until the end of the year to keep the profit at a minimum and avoid higher taxes. Those kinds of practices may seem to work, but the message is that people that don't accurately follow their financials are really shooting in the dark. The minute things start to turn out of favor, they won't know why. If everyone looked at their financials, they'd see that those reports tell a story of what's working and what's not, and it gives the business owner a chance to change their practices for the better."

**CONTROL WHAT YOU CAN.** For business owners that want to adopt the practice of reviewing monthly financials, Mattingly suggests generating a given month's reports on the 10<sup>th</sup> or 15<sup>th</sup> of the following month. For instance, wait until Dec. 10 to look at November's financial statement. This will allow plenty of time for the books to be officially closed on November.

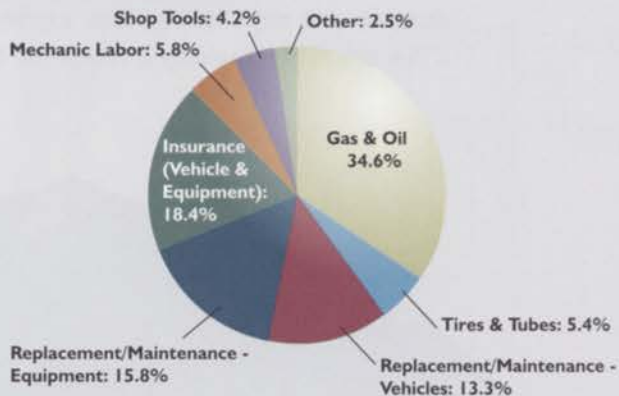
"When you read your financial statements and you're looking for places where you can make adjustments, the most important thing is to look at the numbers you control on a daily basis," Mattingly says. "You can't control rent and you can't control gas prices – but you can control your direct costs."

To this end, Mattingly says start by focusing on labor, which is generally a company's biggest expense. In the

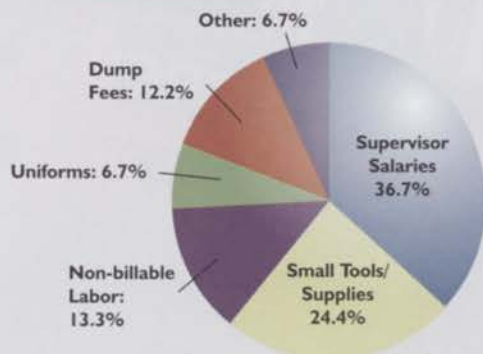
*continued on page J10*

**What are your company's projected costs in 2005 for each of the following expense areas?**

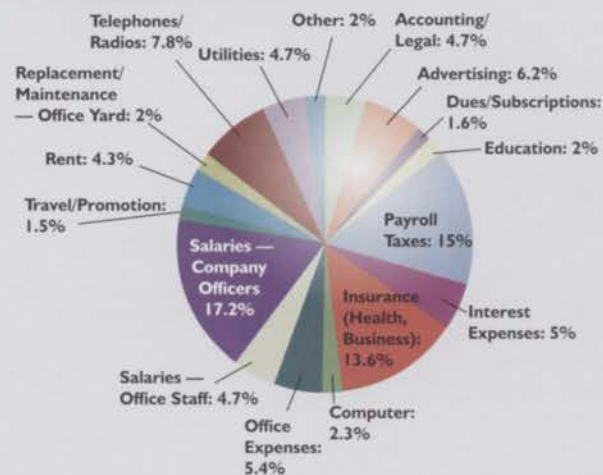
#### Equipment Costs:



#### Indirect Job Costs:



#### Administrative Costs:



# South / Southeast



Combine a 12-month service season, an entrepreneurial spirit and a laid-back atmosphere and you get the South/Southeast (S/SE) region of the United States, which has struck a balance between the expenses of running a business and the opportunity for success in the lawn and landscape industry.

According to the recent Benchmarking Your Business survey, companies in the 13 states comprising the S/SE region have higher equipment, indirect and administrative costs compared to businesses in the Northeast/Midwest (NE/MW) or West/Southwest (W/SW) regions. However, those business costs may be offset by lower wages paid by S/SE companies, which only pay the highest average wages in two out of 15 categories highlighted by the survey (See chart on page J12 for more information). Likewise, more companies in this region operate on four-day workweeks than companies in other areas, which often points to better management of overtime labor and other overhead costs. On average, 11.2 percent of S/SE companies run four-day workweeks, while 8.8 percent work fewer than four days each week. The majority of companies – 64.6 percent – have traditional five-day operations, though 2.1 percent of respondents said they plan on moving from five-day to four-day workweeks.

Costwise, S/SE companies have higher equipment costs than the other two regions, including an average 11.4 percent of expenses going toward oil and fuel costs, compared to only 7.6 percent in the NE/MW and W/SW regions. This could be due to these companies' year-long service season, requiring them to stay gassed up while other companies are powering down for the winter.

Despite costs, S/SE companies maintain successful operations, reporting that they expect both the highest revenue increases and lowest revenue decreases for 2005 among the three regions. Nearly two-thirds (60.3 percent) of S/SE companies expect revenue increases from 2004 to 2005, with an average expected increase of 19.5 percent. Likewise, only 8.4 percent of companies in this region expect to lose money over the year, with an average expected decrease of 17.5 percent. Presumably because of their long service season, the percentage of revenue coming from maintenance (60.5 percent) and lawn care (8.3 percent) are higher than those of companies in the NE/MW and W/SW; however, S/SE companies come in last with regards to revenue from construction, reporting only 25 percent of their income from that business segment.

On the lawn care side, S/SE companies are expecting both the largest increase and largest decrease in revenue from this service segment. Overall, 43.7 percent of companies expect a revenue increase in

*continued on page J15*

## south/southeast

**Percentage of Total Respondents:** 22.8

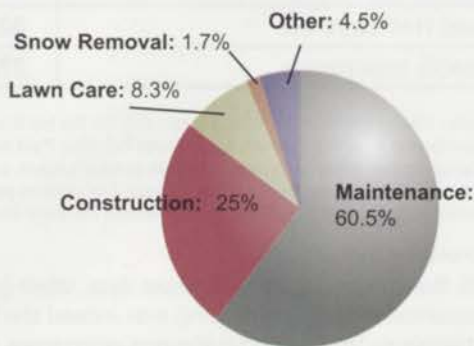
**Average Projected Revenue for 2005:** \$430,915

**Median Projected Revenue for 2005:** \$107,143\*

**Average Number of Employees:** 9.3

\*The median is the revenue amount that divides the data set in half. Fifty percent of companies reported revenue below this amount.

## Percentage of Revenue by Service



2005 Annual Revenue	% of Cos.	Year Founded	% of Cos.
Less than \$100,000	48.5	Before 1970	.8
\$100,000-\$299,000	29.5	1970 to 1979	9.1
\$300,000-\$999,999	15	1980 to 1989	28.9
\$1 Million or more	7	1990 to 1999	40.6
		2000 to 2002	15.1
		2003 to 2005	5.5

Which of the following benefits does your company provide to employees?

[.....Tenure in years.....]

Benefit Offered	% of Cos. Offering	Tenure in years					
		<1	<2	<3	3 to 4	5 to 9	10+
<b>Hourly/Seasonal Labor</b>							
1. Raise/Salary Increase in 2004	50.6%	49.4	59	56.3	55	49.7	44.1
2. Year-end/Holiday Bonus	47.6%	44.6	49.4	47.6	51	47.1	41.2
3. Company-supplied Uniforms	40.5%	43.1	51.5	47.6	46.6	43	38.6
4. Paid Holidays Off	38.3%	35.7	45.1	47.6	42.1	41.7	38.6
5. Paid Vacation	34.3%	32.3	39.8	39.6	40.3	36.9	35.7

<b>Seasonal Labor</b>							
1. Paid Vacation	31%	34.7	40.7	41	40	39.2	37.9
2. (t) Raise/Salary Increase in 2004	30.8%	33	38	39.9	38.6	38.5	34.6
3. (t) Year-end/Holiday Bonus	30.8%	32.8	36.4	38.5	35.9	36.6	36.8
4. Use of Company Cell Phone	30.4%	32.8	36.7	39.6	37.2	36	32.4
5. Paid Holidays off	29.2%	32.3	37.3	37.5	36.2	36.3	36.8

<b>Executive Management Team</b>							
1. Use of Company Cell Phone	38.3%	34	39.5	39.2	43.4	36.6	43
2. Paid Vacation	34.4%	34.2	38.9	42.4	43.8	37.3	40.1
3. Use of Company Car	33.6%	28.9	33	33.7	36.9	31.8	37.9
4. Paid Holidays off	30.6%	31.8	36.7	37.5	39	35	38.2
5. Health Insurance	27.6%	25.8	32.1	32.3	33.1	29.3	36.4

**Take Note:** Due to space constraints, we can only list the top five benefits for each level of employment. In addition to the benefits named here, survey respondents also reported their offering of these benefits: Paid personal and sick days; dental, vision, life and disability insurance; 401(k), profit sharing, and performance bonus. When compared to length of employment, companies reported being more likely to offer each of the top five benefits at each personnel level if the employee stayed on for at least 1 year. For salaried labor, benefit offerings became more frequent at the two-year mark. Likewise, company executives/managers are more likely to see benefits increase after three or four years, and again if they remain with the company for 10 years or more.

continued from page J8

2005 Benchmarking Your Business data, labor (compared to materials or subcontractors) was indeed the biggest expense for lawn maintenance companies, with an average of 12.1 percent of gross sales going toward this expense. However, construction and lawn care companies seem to see their highest costs in the materials sector. Construction companies report 11.8 percent of their gross sales revenue going toward materials, compared to only 8.2 percent for labor, while lawn care companies spend 5.3 percent of their gross sales on materials and only 3.8 percent on labor.

Overall, Mattingly says he's surprised by the labor cost percentages. "I think 12 percent of labor is low; most companies I see are usually around 25 percent, so business owners looking at these numbers shouldn't immediately jump to the conclusion that they're doing something wrong if their labor is more than 12 percent." Generally speaking, Mattingly says labor *should* be, proportionately, a

company's biggest expense. Low numbers here may again be a result of inaccurate tracking of company expenses.

As it is, the numbers suggest that lawn care and construction companies have their labor costs under control – it's materials costs that weigh heavier on these companies. "Managing your materials costs is very doable," Fogarty says. "It's all based on the integrity of your measurements. At some companies, measurements aren't that critical, but a lot of mismeasured properties end up underpriced, the calculations of materials you need are incorrect, and calibration is off as well. In our company, everything is based on measurements and we track materials to the point where the amounts we request are always within a few bags or a few gallons of what we actually use, which eliminates waste."

According to our Benchmarking Your Business data, many companies are already working on managing costs that are within their control. For better or for worse,



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**How much, on average, do your company's employees earn in the following positions:**

Position	[.....Region.....]				[.....Revenue.....]			
	Total	S/SE	NE/MS	W/SW	\$100k- \$300k-			\$1M+
					<100k	\$299k	\$999k	
Entry-level mower operator	\$8.33	\$8.38	\$8.55	\$7.94	\$8.13	\$8.38	\$8.48	\$8.42
Senior mower operator	\$11.18	\$10.69	\$11.62	\$10.88	\$10.87	\$11.33	\$11.19	\$11.44
Entry-level spray technician	\$9.88	\$9.36	\$10.87	\$9.19	\$9.75	\$9.67	\$9.95	\$10.12
Senior spray technician	\$13.92	\$13.82	\$14.19	\$13.61	\$11.14	\$15.28	\$13.48	\$14.54
Entry-level irrigation crewmember	\$8.93	\$8.84	\$9.49	\$8.71	\$9.16	\$8.61	\$9.08	\$9
Senior irrigation crewmember	\$13.12	\$14.01	\$13.43	\$12.68	\$14.25	\$11.89	\$12.79	\$14.26
Entry-level laborer	\$8.32	\$8.16	\$8.71	\$7.82	\$8.19	\$8.26	\$8.52	\$8.24
Senior level laborer	\$11.32	\$10.88	\$11.96	\$10.71	\$11.04	\$11.25	\$11.66	\$11.20
Crew foreman/supervisor	\$14.16	\$13.44	\$14.91	\$13.45	\$13.15	\$13.67	\$14.57	\$15.23
Field supervisor/account manager	\$16.61	\$15.42	\$18.45	\$15.80	\$13.02	\$16.98	\$16.50	\$18.12
Equipment mechanic	\$16.31	\$16.11	\$16.85	\$15.23	\$14.77	\$15.83	\$16.27	\$17.35
Landscape architect/designer	\$25.97	\$35.45	\$21.56	\$27.66	\$36.39	\$26.66	\$20.40	\$22.99
Salesperson	\$14.75	\$11.75	\$15.18	\$18.16	\$9.94	\$19.02	\$12.46	\$18.24
Operations manager/vice president	\$26.95	\$31.83	\$27.23	\$23.51	\$22.68	\$25.11	\$25.70	\$33.81
President/CEO/owner	\$30.13	\$30.13	\$27.51	\$34.19	\$27.25	\$31.79	\$30.84	\$45.42

one of these areas is employee benefits. "When you talk about benefits, people immediately start thinking of health benefits – medical, dental, vision, etc.," Mattingly says. "I have some clients who just give away the farm when it comes to these kinds of things. But with this data, I was pleasantly surprised to see that most companies are scaling back their benefits relative to health. This may not be so great if you're an employee, but this is the big issue with businesses right now – health insurance is getting really costly and it will probably get worse."

While health insurance is in the top five benefits offered to executives and company managers (offered by 27.6 percent of companies), hourly/seasonal and salaried employees are more likely to see benefits such as paid vacations and holidays, annual raises and holiday bonuses.

However, health insurance is more likely to become available to hourly/seasonal and salaried workers if they remain with a company for several years.

Non-billable labor is another area in which Mattingly is pleased with the industry's performance. "The average projected costs of non-billable labor is below 2.5 percent across the board and it seems like most companies are below 2 percent, which is good," he says. "But the trend I see here is that smaller companies are doing a much better job with this than larger companies." In this respect, larger companies may have more non-billable hours simply because they have more employees. According to the data, companies larger than \$1 million have an average of 46.9 employees, compared to companies under \$100,000 that have only 2.5.

*continued on page J15*

**How many pieces of the following equipment does your company own?**

Equipment	% Owning One or More	Average Number Owned
Hand-held equipment	94	12.7
Trailers	90.9	2.8
Push/Walk-behind mowers	73.6	4.4
Riding Mowers	72.1	2.1
Utility vehicles	53.6	1.6
Tractors	47.3	1.1
Skid Steers	31	.5

**Take Note:** In the green industry, equipment ownership far exceeds contractors' propensity for leasing, with an average of only 1.2 percent of contractors reporting that they lease heavy equipment. The remaining 98.8 percent choose to purchase equipment, with hand-held equipment having the most popularity, by far. Contractors report that they are least likely to own skid steers, with only 31 percent of companies owning one or more. Sixty-nine percent of respondents own zero skid steers; of those who do own one or more, 65.8 percent own only one. Because skid steers and similar pieces of equipment are used infrequently, many contractors are more likely to rent the machines when they need them, rather than make payments on a machine that isn't generating regular revenue.

# Northeast / Midwest



**T**he heartland of America: Warm summers, strong winters and an expanse of turf area that needs constant attention. The vast majority – 57 percent – of respondents to the Benchmarking Your Business Survey hail from this Northeast/Midwest (NE/MW) region. Contractors here seem to be maintaining the status quo in their businesses this year, with many regional responses coming closer to national averages than those of the other South/Southeast (S/SE) and West/Southwest (W/SW) contractors.

The majority of NE/MW companies (17 percent) report expecting 10 to 14 percent net profit for 2005; the majority of total respondents to the survey (16.3 percent) also expect their net profit to fall into this range for the year.

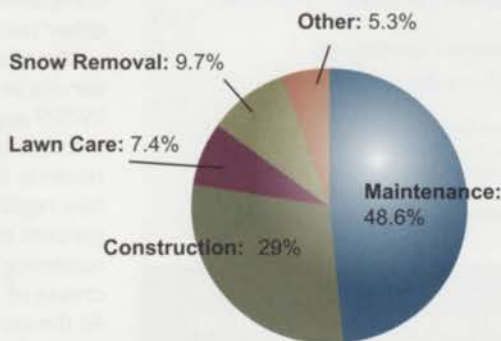
Keeping the region in balance with regard to revenue, 50.6 percent of NE/MW companies expect an increase in revenue from 2004 to 2005. At the same time, 38.9 percent of NE/MW companies expect no change in revenue over the year and 0.5 percent – a larger percentage than the other two regions – expect a revenue decrease. Among companies expecting increases, the average expected revenue increase is 15.2 percent (the lowest expectation among the three regions), compared to an average 19.5 percent decrease among companies expecting revenue to dip. This decrease is closest to the national average of 19.8 percent.

As the NE/MW expects the lowest 2005 net profit among the regions (14.5 percent, on average), it's worth noting that only 33.1 percent of companies in this region say they receive monthly financial statements.

While this is not the smallest percentage among the three regions, NE/MW contractors who do receive their number regularly are least likely to actually read them. Only 93.5 percent of NE/MW contractors that receive their monthly financials read the reports, compared to 98.7 percent of S/SE contractors and 98.3 percent in the W/SW region.)

While NE/MW companies are staying relatively flat revenue-wise, crewmembers at these businesses are likely quite happy. Companies in this region offer the highest wages in 11 of 15 categories, compared to the other two regions. Moreover, wages in 13 of 15 categories are above the national averages. (See page J12 for more information). Moreover, hourly/seasonal employees in this region are more likely than those employees in other regions to receive health insurance (17.6 percent of companies offer this benefit), 401(k) (10 percent), raise/salary increase in 2004 (53.6 percent) and a year-end holiday bonus (50.8). These benefits may compensate for NE/MW hourly/seasonal workers receiving only 4.8 paid days off. (See more about industry benefits on page J10.)

Percentage of Revenue by Service



## northeast/midwest

Percentage of Total Respondents: 57.1

Average Projected Revenue for 2005: \$424,573

Median Projected Revenue for 2005: \$138,144\*

Average Number of Employees: 7.9

*\*The median is the revenue amount that divides the data set in half. Fifty percent of companies reported revenue above this amount and fifty percent reported revenue below this amount.*

2005 Annual Revenue	% of Cos.	Year Founded	% of Cos.
Less than \$100,000	42	Before 1970	7.2
\$100,000-\$299,000	31.2	1970 to 1979	11.5
\$300,000-\$999,999	18.8	1980 to 1989	29.7
\$1 Million or more	8	1990 to 1999	35.4
		2000 to 2002	11.9
		2003 to 2005	4.3



# West/Southwest

## west/southwest

**Percentage of Total Respondents:** 20.1

**Average Projected Revenue for 2005:** \$400,157

**Median Projected Revenue for 2005:** \$134,848\*

**Average Number of Employees:** 7.3

*\*The median is the revenue amount that divides the data set in half. Fifty percent of companies reported revenue above this amount and fifty percent reported revenue below this amount.*

2005 Annual Revenue	% of Cos.	Year Founded	% of Cos.
Less than \$100,000	43.1	Before 1970	4
\$100,000-\$299,000	29.9	1970 to 1979	10.4
\$300,000-\$999,999	17.6	1980 to 1989	24.5
\$1 Million or more	9.4	1990 to 1999	43.5
		2000 to 2002	13.5
		2003 to 2005	4.1

**F**rom the height of the Rocky Mountains to the depths of the Grand Canyon, the American West is defined by its landscape. Inspiration abounds for lawn and landscape companies in the West/Southwest (W/SW) region of the country. And while this region may be small in terms of the concentration of businesses (only 20.1 percent of total respondents are based in the W/SW), it certainly isn't weak.

Along with silver-screen hopefuls, a number of lawn and landscape contractors flock to the West Coast and many are able to turn their big dreams into reality. With a long service season in much of the region and many high-dollar account prospects, the W/SW boasts more \$1 million-plus companies than the South/Southeast (S/SE) or Northeast/Midwest (NE/MW) regions (9.4 percent of companies, compared to 7 and 8 percent, respectively). It appears that more businesses are on their way to that benchmark as well, as 52.9 percent of companies expect a revenue increase from 2004 to 2005, with an average expected increase of 16.2 percent. Forty percent of companies expect their revenue to stay the same year over year, while only 6.9 percent of companies expect revenue to dip – a smaller percentage of companies than in the other two regions.

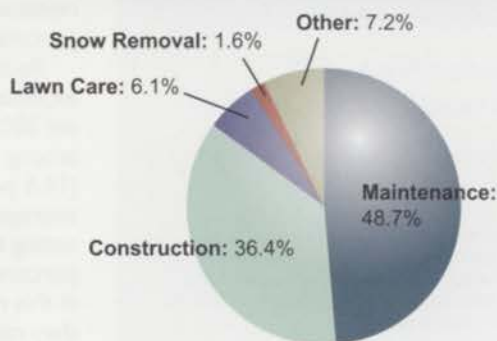
Across the major service segments, the W/SW expects a greater increase in construction revenue than the other two regions with 46.8 percent of respondents expecting an average increase of 16.3 percent.

At the same time, 9.9 percent of companies (more than in the other two regions) expect a revenue decrease in construction of an average 19.6 percent. On the lawn care side of the business, fewer companies in the W/SW expect an increase in lawn care revenue (29.7 percent compared to 43.7 in the S/SE and 30.6 in the NE/MW). This may be due to a trend toward smaller turf areas in the region, with more of an emphasis on drought-tolerant or low-water use plants and landscape areas.

While fewer companies in the W/SW expect revenue to decrease in 2005, those companies that do expect declines are expecting much higher revenue decrease than in the S/SE or NE/MW regions – 22.8 percent, on average. This suggests that while the rewards may be great in the W/SW, companies have to pay their dues to make it to the big time. According to the data, the W/SW spends more on health and business insurance than the other two regions – 4.5 percent of total expenses, compared to 3.3 percent in the NE/MW and 2.9 percent in the S/SE.

While some costs like Workers' compensation is mandated, W/SW

## Percentage of Revenue by Service



continued on J15




continued from J12

Finally, Mattingly says he's pleased to learn that only 16.1 percent of companies employ either a full-time or part-time mechanic. While it may be handy to have someone dedicated to keeping your company's equipment and vehicles in working order, Mattingly says a full-time mechanic is unnecessary for companies under \$750,000. "I was surprised that 40 percent of \$1 million companies do not employ a mechanic. I thought more of them would – but that's a good thing," he notes. "A lot of times, you're not quite at the size you need to be to have your own mechanic. The smallest companies – those under \$100,000 – really don't have a need for this type of role in their organization. It's probably not necessary until you're closer to \$750,000 to \$1 million, and even then it's dependent upon the size of your equipment and vehicle fleet – not the amount of revenue your bring in."

**KNOW IT TO GROW IT.** Overall, Mattingly saw a number of positive trends as reported in the 2005 Benchmarking Your Business data. If more companies followed their financials, those trends could become even stronger down the line, he suggests.

"One thing that's surprising is the number of companies that expect not to grow and those that expect their revenue to decrease," Mattingly says. "To me, there's a sales issue there. Why aren't they growing? Do they not know how? Is there not enough money? I think almost every company wants to grow, but many business owners will tell you there's too much competition and they're not getting enough marketshare, so they don't expect to grow."

"To this, we should say, 'All the more reason to start looking at monthly financials,'" Mattingly continues. "If you're following your financials and know where your costs are, you should be able to manage your business to the point where you don't need to worry about losing money. Keep tabs on your monthly financials so you can grow despite competition or economic challenges." 




West/Southwest continued from J14

companies are finding other ways to offset the cost of insurance in their region. Only 7.9 percent of companies report offering health care to hourly/seasonal employees, and only 16 percent offer the benefit to salaried employees (the lowest among the regions).

At the same time, W/SW employers could do a bit more to help keep their costs in line – a few key expenses are much higher than when compared to companies in the other two regions. A boon to higher-level employees, companies in this region offer more paid days off for executive managers (17.2 days per year) than S/SE and NE/MW companies. Moreover, the W/SW also spends more on supervisor salaries than the other two regions (3.7 percent

of total costs, compared to 2.5 and 3.3 percent in the S/SE and NE/MW, respectively) and on company officer salaries (5.3 percent of total expenses); W/SW presidents/CEOs make an average \$34.91 per hour – the highest pay rate among the three regions. Remembering that the W/SW also has more \$1 million companies than the other two regions, it's worth noting that presidents/CEOs of these size businesses make an average of \$45.42 when their salaries are worked out hourly.


Despite high costs, W/SW contractors are least likely to receive monthly financial statements. Only 30.6 percent of respondents say they do, with 98.3 percent of those who receive monthly financials reading them on a regular basis. 



South/Southeast continued from J9

lawn care for 2005, with an average increase of 18.5 percent – more than in the other two regions. At the same time, 52.5 percent of companies expect revenue in lawn care to decrease by an average of 42.3 percent.

In terms of personnel, S/SE companies generally have the most employees in the nation, with 8.7 percent of companies having 20 employees or more, and 3.8 percent having 50 or more. Likewise, companies in this region report more permanent employees with longer tenures than in other regions, which could be related to benefits that companies in this region offer. S/SE companies offer more paid days off (holidays, sick days, personal days and paid vacation) to both permanent and hourly/seasonal employees (13.2 and 6.4, respectively) than other regions of the country. And while the S/SE comes in last regarding tenure of seasonal employees, the benefits they extend to hourly/seasonal workers may be an effort to increase employee loyalty. S/SE companies are more likely than NE/MW and S/SW companies to offer nine of 17 benefits, including the paid days off mentioned above, as well as life, disability and vision insurance; company-supplied uniforms and use of a company cell phone. (See page J10 for more on benefits.)

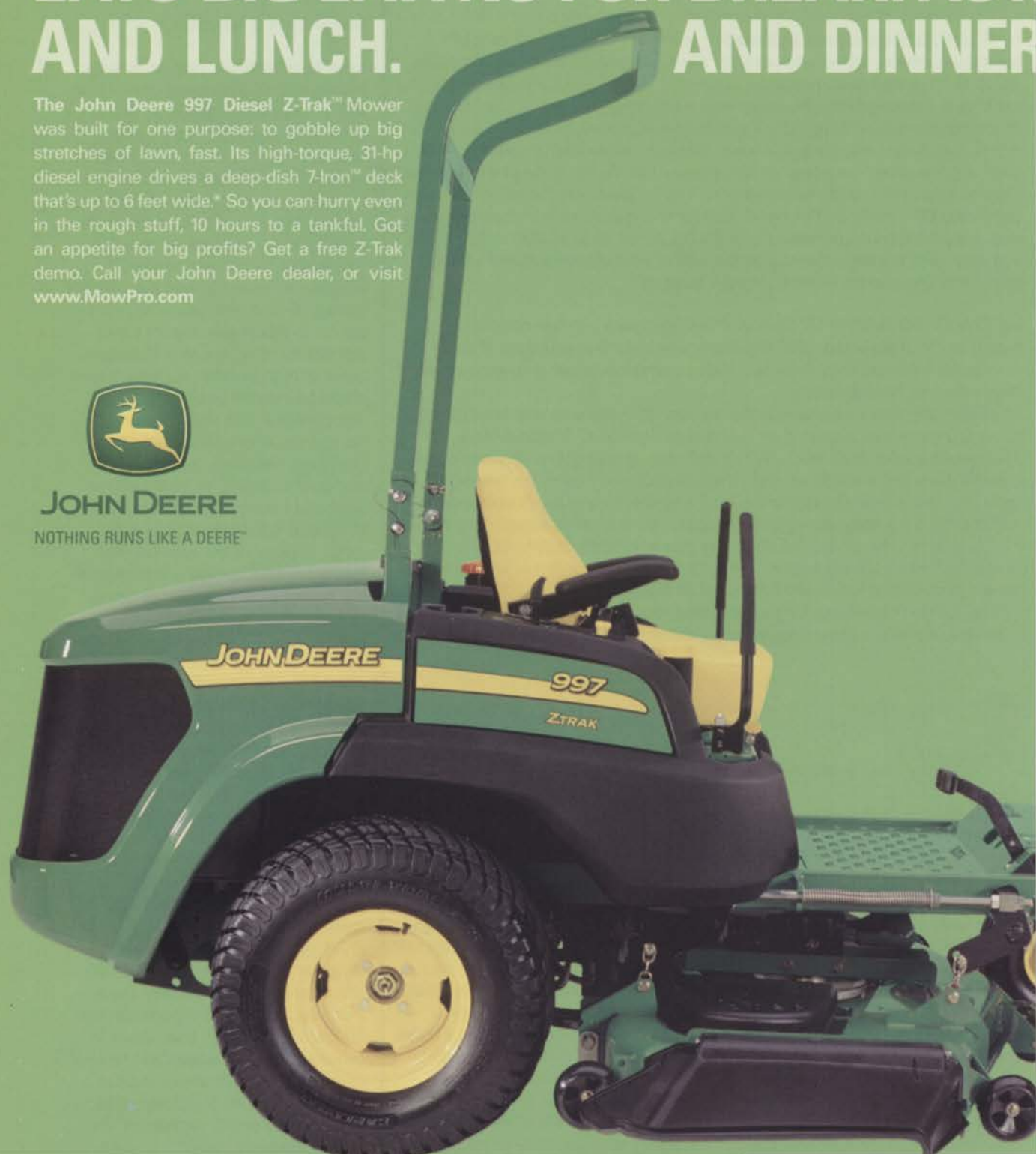
Overall, green industry companies in the S/SE report that they expect solid net profit for 2005. The majority of companies in this region (17.4 percent) expect profit in the range of 20 to 29 percent. Part of this strong profitability may stem from the fact that companies in the S/SE are more likely than those in other regions to receive and review monthly financial statements. On a monthly basis, 40.5 percent of business owners in this region say they receive financial statements on their companies and 98.7 percent of those individuals say they review those reports when they get them. The S/SE region leads the states in these practices. 

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# Take Back Your Weekend

by jonathan katz

Too many weekend phone calls have some *Lawn & Landscape Online* Message Board users just saying 'No' to off-hours inquiries.

**S**unday is supposed to be a day of rest. But busy schedules and customer demands force some landscape professionals to work on their off-days. Contractor Justin Rasmussen faced such a situation when he fell behind two business days on calls to potential clients. The increased workload prompted Rasmussen to ask *Lawn & Landscape Online* Message Board users whether they return client calls on off-days.

"My typical policy is to return all calls within one business day," writes Rasmussen, owner, Urban Lawscapes Northwest, Burien, Wash. "I usually do not answer my phone or return calls at all on the weekend unless it is for a client who has a project in progress. I am thinking about calling a few people on Sunday. It doesn't look like I will have time to make calls this Monday — thus, the Sunday conversations."

Most Message Board participants responded by writing that contractors should value their personal time by setting boundaries for when the workweek starts and ends.

**GIVE IT A REST.** Perhaps nobody knows how working too much can impact a contractor's personal life more than Sal Mortilla. At one point in his career, Mortilla says he worked 15 hours per day. He did this for 15 years until the long workdays took its toll.

"The cost was far more than any profit was worth," writes Mortilla, owner, Landscapes Unlimited, Long Island, N.Y. "Cost one: Divorce after 18 years and three children. Reason: Total devotion to the business. I didn't have a clue until it was too late. Cost two: A diminished relationship with my children, which was far more devastating than the divorce. Cost three: At 32 years old, I had a total physical breakdown from overwork."

Contractor Dennis Watson experienced a situation similar to Mortilla's. Like Mortilla, Watson was divorced and lost time with his daughters from overworking himself. "You have to have balance in your life, and if you are a driven-type of person it is real easy to work, work and work," writes Watson, owner, Double D Lawn



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Care & Landscaping, Big Sandy, Tenn. "Although this happened 19 years ago, I still find myself getting caught up in the business. Step back, take a breather, regroup, and you will gain far more than the income you were seeking.

learned that lesson early," says Musolf, president, MJM Lawn & Landscaping, Cockeysville, Md. "We did the same as everyone else – long hours, etc. But once we both started having kids, we changed everything we did. The office

**ALTERNATIVES TO ANSWERING.** Mortilla's health problems forced him to establish new business hours and policies. During the busy season, the company is in the field five days a week and provides estimates seven days per week, including from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Sunday. But the Sunday hours stop the first week of July. The result for Mortilla has been more customer respect and a better relationship with his family, he says.

**"You have to have balance in your life, and if you are a driven type of person it is real easy to work, work and work. I still find myself getting caught up in the business. Step back, take a breather, regroup, and you will gain far more than the income you were seeking. That said, Sunday calls are few and far between."**

**- Dennis Watson**

That said, Sunday calls are few and far between."

When contractor Mark Musolf had his first children, he quickly realized that more work wasn't necessarily better. "Luckily for me and my brother we

is not in either of our homes, so if someone does call on the weekend, we don't know until Monday. It did take a while to shake the feeling of having to go in and check messages but well worth it."

Musolf says he's noticed customers tend to be more understanding about off-days if he explains the situation. "Our landscape side generally works four- to 10-hour days," he writes. "We could be on a three-week project, and when it comes to the end of the day Thursday,

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the client says, 'So will you be back Friday?' We explain to them that the crew has already worked 40 hours, and they need time with their family. We get a whole lot of respect for that."

But not everyone is comfortable letting business go unfinished for the weekend. The prospect of losing to other contractors in the bidding process means Michael LaPorte can't miss a beat when it comes to returning phone calls. "I guess I am too insecure from getting my brains beat out at the bid table every day," writes LaPorte, president, Commercial Scapes, Bristow, Va. "If someone wanted me to bid work, I would at least call them back. I have seen when attitudes get like this, then aggressive start-up companies get a foothold in the market. It's great to have a lot of work booked, but fat and happy can be dangerous."

In such situations, one possible solution is to screen messages and return

the calls in order of priority. That's how Matthew Schattner says he deals with weekend calls. "If it's someone who's only time to pay me is on Sunday, then I'll make a special trip out to their place on a Sunday," writes Schattner, owner, Mat'z Snow & Lawn, Kansasville, Wis. "If it's some price shopper, they'll wait for me to call back on Monday. I really don't have a set policy, but I do, more or less, shy away from doing business on Sundays, if possible."

Andrew Aksar will respond to current and pending client requests on the weekends but will wait until the following Monday to return calls from first-time inquiries. After an initial consultation, Aksar, president of Outdoor Finishes in Walkersville, Md., says he tells customers that typically they'll need to leave a message on the weekends, but there's a "strong chance" he'll call them back Sunday evening.

"One of the services our clients pay

for when they use us is the fact that I am accessible," Aksar writes. "People, in general, want answers and they want them on the spot, and I do not want to have my guys show up on a current job in the morning and find out the client is not happy with something or find out that the client changed their minds and we don't have the tools needed at the site to accommodate the change. I want to know all there is to know before they show up."

Melissa Brodsky will return phone calls on the weekend if they were made during normal business hours and she couldn't get back to the customers during the week, says Brodsky, owner, Honeybee Landscaping, Grafton, W.Va. But during off hours she turns her mobile phone off and the volume down on her home business line. "I am trying to set a precedent so people will honor my boundaries," she writes. **LL**

sidebar on page 90

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getting personal

The simplest solution to handling customer calls during off hours is letting the answering machine take over and returning inquiries during normal hours. But what should contractors do when customers start calling their personal phones when business is closed?

Patrick Johnson, owner of Reflective Gardens in Knoxville, Tenn., says he changed his home phone to an unlisted number after someone obtained it by calling information, he says. After the incident, Johnson wanted to know from other Message Board users if they provide their personal phone numbers to clients.


"I do not give my personal phone number to anyone," says Andrew Aksar, president, Reflective Gardens, Walkersville, Md. "You have to draw a line between work and your personal life."

Aksar doesn't give his mobile phone number to clients either and when he makes outgoing calls from his mobile phone the number is automatically blocked.

But Dale Wiley, owner of Landscape Specialty Services in Forest Grove, Ore., says there's a benefit to providing your personal phone numbers to clients. "Being very accessible leads to happy clients and larger margins," he writes. "If I don't want to talk to them, it goes to voice mail."

Some contractors, like James Binns, are selective about which clients receive their personal numbers. "There are times that I do give my home number to clients who I am having a hard time getting in contact with," writes Binns, Earthworks Landscape Gardening, Fayetteville, Ark. "I screen all of my calls."

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# Mower Health Boost

by jonathan katz

Regular mower maintenance can reduce the chances of frequent repairs and prolonged downtime.

**M**anufacturers continually change mowers to increase their lifespans and make them more durable. But this doesn't mean much if they're not regularly and properly maintained. Neglecting scheduled maintenance tasks can cost contractors time, money and eventually the entire machine.

Whether contractors maintain their mowers in-house or rely on dealerships to perform service, regular checkups can prevent problems before they start and maximize equipment investments.

**MISSED MAINTENANCE.** Some maintenance tasks seem so simple and routine it

can be easy to forget how critical they are. One of the most common tasks contractors forget to perform is greasing the spindles, says John Hollenbeck, technical service specialist, Everride, Auburn Neb. Contractors should check their owner's manual or the bottom of the floor plate to determine all the grease points, he suggests. On some mowers, the floor plate will show where the grease fittings are located and how often they should be lubricated. In general, spindles should be greased at least every 24 hours, according to Hollenbeck. This may need to be done more frequently if the mowers are being operated in dry, dusty conditions, he says.

When greasing spindles, it's critical that contractors check the mower's manual to ensure the right type of grease is applied.

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Mixing different greases or applying the wrong type of grease can cause more problems than not greasing at all. "If you put a barium-based grease or calcium-based grease in with a lithium-complex grease, it turns to a plastic-like substance and locks everything up," Hollenbeck says. "The incorrect grease usage or lack of greasing is the No. 1 enemy of a

greaseable roller bearing spindle."

The price for neglecting proper spindle care can be significant. Retail price for a new spindle is \$150 to \$250, and if all spindles fail at once, contractors could pay \$600 to \$700 for parts and labor to fix the problem, Hollenbeck says.

Spindle performance can also be affected by dirt and debris buildup

under the deck. When grass clippings and other dry material aren't removed from the deck's underside they can get trapped inside the spindles and shorten the life of the bearings, says Fred Hemmer, field service manager for the Toro Co.'s Consumer and Landscape Contractor Division, Bloomington, Minn. The deck's underside should be cleaned each day using a pressure washer or a putty knife to remove hardened material, says Bob Walker, president, Walker Mfg., Fort Collins, Colo.

Other maintenance tasks that should be performed daily include checking the engine and hydraulic oil, the air filter and blade sharpness. Typically, engine oil needs to be changed every 100 hours, but that can vary depending on manufacturer recommendations, Hemmer says. Gabe Freda, the head shop mechanic at KW Landscaping in Severn, Md., says he checks the oil in every company mower once per week, performs oil changes every 100 hours and changes oil filters every 200 hours.

Freda says he knows how many hours each mower has been operating because each one is equipped with an hour meter. The meter is located on the control panel of the mower. It's either preinstalled or can be purchased as an after-market item for less than \$10, he shares.

Contractors should check the hydraulic oil when the machine is cold to get an accurate reading because the fluid will expand when it's hot. If the hydraulic fluid has a milky appearance that likely means there's water in the oil and it needs to be changed, says Hemmer, adding that typically hydraulic oil should be changed once each year along with the hydraulic oil filter. Some manufacturers also recommend that contractors change the hydraulic oil filter after the first eight hours of operation because the original filter may contain some debris left over from the manufacturing process.

The air filter can be checked daily, but operators shouldn't remove the air cleaner on a regular basis or blow on it with an air gun, Walker says. "The No. 1 way engines are ruined is by overservicing air filters," he explains. "If you're taking them on and off every day, you have a high probability of damaging the ceiling of that air filter to the point where you will let dust into the engine by dam-



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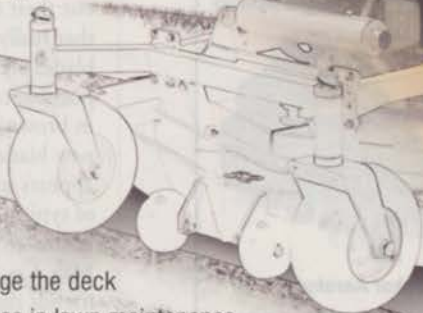
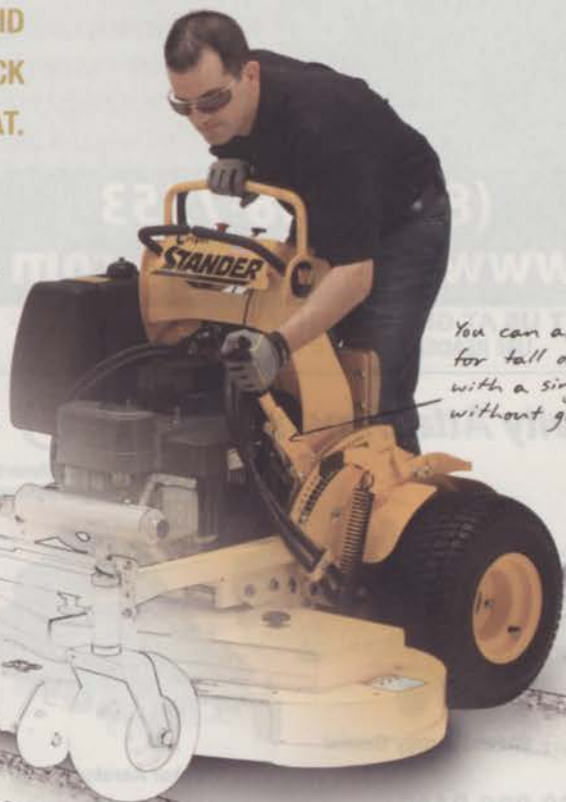
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aging the media itself, blowing on it with an air gun or mechanically damaging the sealing that seals the filter in place."

Nowadays, many air filters are protected by a pre-cleaner that catches most dust and debris before it reaches the filter. Oftentimes with pre-cleaners, air filters can remain unchanged for six months to a year, according to Walker. Perhaps the simplest way to determine whether the air filter needs to be changed is by checking the restriction indicator, which is a gauge located on the intake side of the filter on some mowers. This gauge notifies the operator when airflow has become too restricted for the engine to operate properly, Walker says.

The mower's cooling fins should also be cleaned anytime dirt or debris collect inside of them because dirt that collects inside the fins and isn't removed can shorten the engine's life by 60 percent, Hemmer says. In the worst-case scenario, it can cause the engine's head gasket to blow. The best way to clean the cooling fins is blowing out the dirt with an air compressor by following the same path as air that's drawn into the engine, Hemmer recommends.

These maintenance tasks should help contractors get the maximum life out their mowers, but it's cut quality that really matters to customers. Sharp blades are essential for ensuring the best possible cut. Dull blades will result in browning of the grass blade tips. A new blade might be required if the end appears to be coming to a point instead of typical full-body width, says Jim Forrester, distributor manager, Encore Mfg. Co., Beatrice, Neb. Walker recommends that contractors inspect mower blades daily and sharpen them at least every other day. Hemmer suggests sharpening blades after no more than 10 hours of use.

Tire pressure will also affect the cut quality. Uneven tire pressure on a zero-turn mower can impede the machine's ability to turn, Hollenbeck says. Overfilling a tire can cause the mower to damage or leave unsightly marks on the turf, Hemmer says. Typically, mower tires should be filled between 12 and 13 psi, according to Hemmer.

**IN-HOUSE MECHANICS.** With so many maintenance tasks to manage, contractors can have a difficult time



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## mowers/power equipment > > >

keeping tabs on how often and how well the mowers are being serviced. In a move made to standardize maintenance practices, South Walpole, Mass.-based D. Foley Landscape hired a full-time fleet supervisor to regularly service the company's equipment.

All of the company's crews get an equipment inspection once a week by the company's fleet supervisor, says John Dinsmore, the company's operations manager. Every week, each crew will trade its set of equipment at the company shop for backup machines. This ensures all routine maintenance tasks are performed on a regular basis.

During the weekly service, company mechanic Rick McComb pressure washes all the mowers, scrapes the decks, sharpens the blades, greases all critical points, checks for wear and tear

and other typical maintenance tasks, Dinsmore says.

Having this regular service schedule has made D. Foley Landscape less dependent on dealerships for repairs and has brought consistency to the company's maintenance program. "In the past, we had seven crews doing maintenance seven different ways," Dinsmore explains. "Before, one crew might have invested a lot of time in cleaning their mowers, whereas another crew invested very little."

Since hiring an in-house mechanic, D. Foley Landscape has sped up turnaround time on repairs by several days and in some cases, several weeks, Dinsmore says. Also, when a mower is out of service, crews are immediately provided a backup machine, which helps prevent downtime. **LL**

## > cold starts

**T**o prevent startup problems or potential repair issues when a new season arrives, contractors should consider preventive maintenance before storing their machines away for the winter.

For starters, contractors should clean the mowers using either pressurized air or water, says Bob Walker, president, Walker Mfg., Fort Collins, Colo. If water is being applied, contractors should cover all electrical components with plastic bags, he says. Removing grass buildup, especially under the deck, is a good way to prevent corrosion.

From there, contractors should lubricate the spindles just in case the water from the pressure washer forces the old grease out, Walker says. As for the gas tank, Mike Anderson, technical service representative, Toro's Consumer and Landscape Contractor Businesses Division, Bloomington, Minn., recommends operating the engine until it quits and then pouring a fuel stabilizer in the tank to treat any remaining fuel in the system. The fuel cap should be left loose for evaporation.

After completing the final maintenance tasks, mowers should be stored in cool, dry areas where temperatures are between 0 and 40 degrees, Hollenbeck says. The battery also should be fully charged before storing the mower. A fully charged battery should have 12.5 volts or more, says Fred Hemmer, field service manager for the Toro Co. To minimize battery power loss during storage, Hemmer also recommends disconnecting the negative cable on the battery.

Whenever possible, mowers should be stored in a sheltered area, like a garage, but if they are being stored outdoors, they should be covered with a breathable material to minimize corrosion buildup, Anderson says. Even if the mower is stored indoors, it's still a good idea to at least cover cushioned areas such as seats and armrests to protect them from damage caused by rodents and other animals. Hemmer recommends placing some type of rodent control near or around the mower to prevent mice or rats from building nests under the engine shrouds.

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# Maximizing Broadleaf Weed Control

by zac reicher

Assess your fall weed control now to improve your applications next year.

**T**hough we are out of the fall window for broadleaf weed control, now is a good time to evaluate your fall applications in order to make improvements for next year.

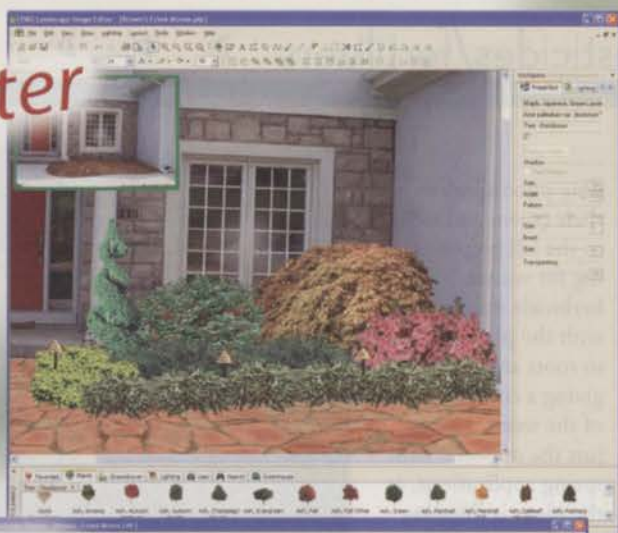
Though a good rating of your fall applications is the number of flowering dandelions in April and May, germinating winter annuals and some perennials may skew your judgment. A good habit after any application is to return to some of the lawns in 10 to 14 days to check for results. Waiting until next round in a month or so may allow regrowth of partially controlled weeds as well as germination of new weeds.

**WHY FALL APPLICATIONS?** Though good cultural practices go a long way in preventing weed invasion in turf, chemical control is often needed on new accounts, neglected lawns, and after tough growing years. Though some spring weed control may be needed to control escaped dandelions, fall is easily the best time of the year to control broadleaf weeds in cool-season turf.

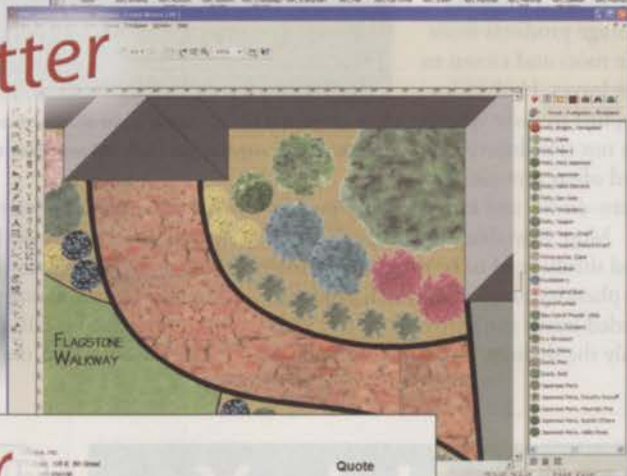
There are a number reasons why professionals prefer to apply herbicides in the fall to control broadleaf weeds. The herbicides that we use for broadleaves are systemic, meaning they move generally with the photosynthate in the plants. Perennial weeds like dandelion and clover are actively ship-

Above: Ground ivy or creeping Charlie is one of the most difficult weeds to control in lawns. Photos: Zac Reicher

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ping photosynthate to their crown and roots in the fall preparing for winter. The herbicide translocates with the photosynthate to roots and crown giving a complete kill of the weed. This is just the opposite with spring applications, as the plant is shipping storage products from the roots and crown to the leaves. Herbicides applied in early spring do not translocate well and often provide only burn-down, and rarely a complete kill.

Most vegetables, ornamentals, trees and shrubs tend to be extremely sensitive to phenoxy herbicides, which produce curled leaves and shriveled flowers with only the slightest drift onto buds and



Though dandelions are easily controlled with broadleaf herbicides in the fall, infestations to this degree suggest poor cultural practices that must be corrected first.

newly expanding leaves. Since the majority of these plants are finished flowering and growing new leaves in the fall, herbicide drift damage is rare.

Effective broadleaf weed control can leave holes in the turf that can be

populated by a different weed. If this occurs in the fall, these holes are usually filled in by the desired turfgrasses as opposed to crabgrass or other weeds that would germinate and fill in voids left with spring weed control.

**DON'T RUSH.** Most lawn care operators focus on broadleaf weed control with their rounds in September. However, our relatively recent data as well as

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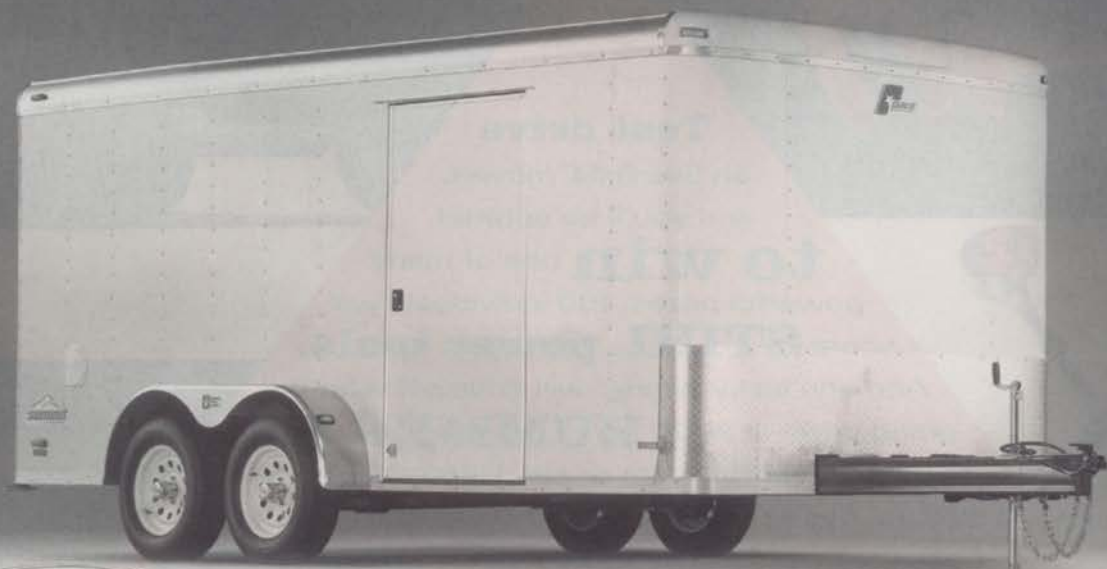
term broadleaf weed control compared to the same herbicides applied in September. Our speculation is that weeds are killed either directly by the herbicide when applied later in the fall or weakened to the point that they succumb to winter-kill. Herbicides applied earlier in the fall may allow the plant to recover and survive the winter. This was validated by researchers in Scottsbluff, Neb., who found that applications of 2,4-D and/or dicamba were far more effective in controlling dandelions and Canada thistle when applied one to 10 days after the first frost than when applied five to 11 days before the frost. These researchers found that the herbicides indirectly reduced concentrations of total sugars, thus increasing the plants susceptibility to freezing temperatures and winter-kill.

We have found that even tough-to-control weeds can be controlled effectively in October and November



Though white clover becomes obvious when it flowers in the early summer, it is a perennial and best controlled in late fall. Clover outcompetes turfgrasses at low nitrogen and is a good indication that the lawn is not receiving enough annual nitrogen.

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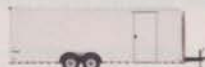
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with herbicides that would be considered marginal at other times of the year. Another benefit in waiting until after the first frost to control weeds is that germinating winter annuals like common chickweed and henbit can be better controlled. Applications made in September may miss some of these later-germinating winter annuals.

A problem with applying herbicides in late fall is a lack of immediate satisfaction for the client. Weeds are slow to respond to late fall applications and they may not show any damage by winter. This could be overcome by using carfentrazone, a fast-acting contact herbicide. Adding carfentrazone to your favorite broadleaf herbicide or using an herbicide containing carfentrazone like carfentrazone will provide a quicker knockdown for those late fall applications. This can increase the cost of application, but will give a quick visual response for the customer. We have also

found that adding carfentrazone in a late fall application should not diminish long-term control from the systemic active ingredients in the herbicide.


#### WHICH HERBICIDE TO USE?

Most practitioners will use herbicides that contain two to four active ingredients. These compounds are often synergistic; increasing efficacy and combining active ingredients also expands the spectrum of weeds controlled. For instance, 2,4-D is good on dandelions, but not one of the best herbicides for clover control. Mixing 2,4-D with dicamba allows control of both dandelion and clover. We have also found that within a weed species, there may be different biotypes (populations) that differ in their susceptibility to a single active ingredient. By using multiple active ingredients, we should be able to overcome that effect and control all biotypes equally.

**SPRING APPLICATIONS.** Though fall applications are most effective for controlling broadleaf weeds, spring applications are often warranted. Avoid the temptation to treat too early because applications will be most effective if you wait until dandelions are just beginning to flower. Applications before this tend to only burn back leaves and the plant regrows within a few weeks.

Esters formulations are more effective than amines in spring probably because of better leaf penetration in cooler temperatures. Though control improves later in the spring as temperatures warm with esters, unfortunately so does the chance of off-site target damage to ornamentals and vegetables as they start to break bud, germinate or flower. Since amines tend to be less volatile than esters and reduces the chance for off-target damage, it is important to switch to amines as soon as possible. Realizing that spring broadleaf control is always less effective than fall

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applications, try to maximize control by making applications when the product has a chance to dry on the leaf, avoid mowing prior to application to maximize the leaf surface area, and do not mow for three days following application to allow the products to translocate.

### TACKLING TOUGH WEEDS.

Weeds like Canada thistle, ground ivy (creeping Charlie), and violet are tough to control for a variety of reasons. We have learned quite a bit from our research on ground ivy that can be extrapolated to other tough-to-control weeds.

Always use the full labeled rate and best control can be expected with applications in the late fall (October 1 to



Fall applications of herbicides allow translocation to even the deepest taproots of dandelions.

November 1). Two applications about four weeks apart will improve control over a single application. This is because ground ivy spreads by stolons, but herbicides do not translocate well through stolons. Many buds survive along the stolons and start to germinate in about four weeks, even though the mother plant was killed by initial application.

We also found that the preemergence broadleaf herbicide isoxaben helps limit spread of ground ivy by preventing stolons of ground ivy from "pegging down." Thus combining with your favorite postemergence herbicide will improve long-term control of ground ivy.

Multiple biotypes of ground ivy exist that vary in their sensitivity to herbicides. For instance, you might easily control ground ivy in the front lawn with 2,4-D

but ground ivy in the back lawn is unaffected by the same product. We found that the 2,4-D-tolerant biotypes were usually controlled with triclopyr and vice versa, so alternating active ingredients should improve control. However, an exhaustive screen with all commercially available products over thousands of ground ivy biotypes was impossible. The bottom line is that if you are having trouble controlling a specific species in spite of maximizing other strategies, consider changing your active ingredient.

### WEED CONTROL IN NEWLY SEEDED/OVERSEEDED LAWNS.

With the above-average temperatures throughout the Midwest this summer, many lawns will require reseeding or overseeding next spring. Seeding always takes precedence over weed control because the window for successful seeding is far narrower than the window of effective weed control. The general rule is seed as early in the fall as possible and then worry about treating the broadleaf weeds later. The same goes in the spring, seed as early as possible and then treat for broadleaves later. Most broadleaf herbicides require waiting to apply until after the second mowing of the seedlings, but check the label for specifics. Seeding after a broadleaf herbicide application usually requires a thorough irrigation or precipitation between application and seeding. Herbicide use before or after seeding gets tricky because they can be damaging to the seedlings, so be sure to check your herbicide label for the most accurate information.

In late fall and early spring, evaluate your fall broadleaf herbicide control. Hopefully, your applications were effective, but if not, try a few ideas from this article to maximize control next year. **LL**

*Zac Reicher is a professor and turfgrass extension specialist at Purdue University, [www.agry.purdue.edu/turf](http://www.agry.purdue.edu/turf). Reach him at [zreicher@purdue.edu](mailto:zreicher@purdue.edu) or 765/494-9737.*

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** The inclusion or omission of active ingredient or product brand mentions in this article should not be considered endorsements or exclusions by Lawn & Landscape magazine.

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# Lawn & Landscape

11 05

IRRIGATION:  
**2005 STATE OF THE  
INDUSTRY REPORT**

- Irrigation: A Growing Service Sector
- Residential vs. Commercial Irrigation Work
- Contractors Respond to Water Restrictions

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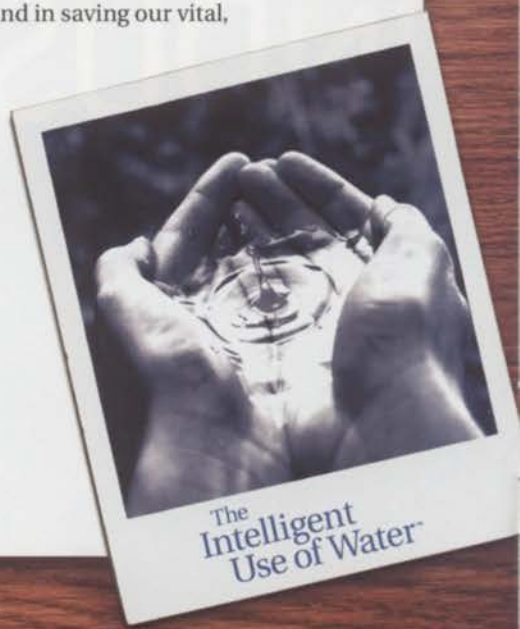
Rain Bird follows the guiding philosophy of The Intelligent Use of Water by producing water- and cost-efficient products and by informing others of how to practice water conservation. Rain Bird accomplishes this through our training programs available to irrigation contractors and through education programs. For example, we've developed environmental education curriculums in conjunction with Cal Poly Pomona aimed at helping teachers and students better understand the vital role water plays in various types of ecosystems. Through our annual participation in the Rose Parade, we have used our floats to draw attention to animal species and natural habitats that have been adversely impacted by water shortages. And we have authored the white paper, *Irrigation for a Growing World*, which discusses both causes and potential solutions to the growing global water crisis.

As the incoming Irrigation Association president in 2006, I feel it's an honor to be able to utilize my experience with Rain Bird to lead an organization committed to conserving our natural resources. The irrigation industry promotes the development of new technology and methods to best conserve water, and it is my goal to further these efforts. Rain Bird will continue to manufacture water-conserving products for landscapes, agriculture and golf and will continue to educate others on how they, too, can conserve water. By working together, we can all have a hand in saving our vital, life-sustaining resource.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ken Mills".

Ken Mills  
General Manager – Contractor Division

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Photo: Rain Bird

# Irrigation: A Growing Service Sector

By Nicole Wisniewski

## WHAT PERCENTAGE OF YOUR NEW IRRIGATION BUSINESS COMES FROM THE FOLLOWING?

MARKETING TYPE	% OF CONTRACTORS
Word-of-mouth referrals	59.93
Lead/referral services	12.75
Yellow Page ads	7.34
Project/yard signs	3.29
Newspaper advertising	2.39
Company Web site	1.69
Direct Mail	1.37
Billboard advertising	0.44
Radio advertising	0.32
Other	10.48

## YEARS OF EXPERIENCE

	YEARS IN BUSINESS	YEARS OFFERING IRRIGATION SERVICES
Average Contractor	12.00	6.72

*Contractors offering irrigation services forecast double-digit growth for 2006.*

Irrigation services have become assets in a contractor's offerings menu for the basic reason that plants need water to grow. And in today's busy world, more and more homeowners and property managers do not want to waste the time and rising water bills standing on their properties with a hose to thoroughly soak thirsty roots. By installing irrigation systems, contractors provide landscapes with adequate water during the correct times of the day, giving clients a peace-of-mind that is worth paying for.

In fact, according to *Lawn & Landscape* research, nearly half (41 percent) of contractors offer irrigation maintenance services and 31 percent of contractors offer irrigation installation services. And the 2005 State of the Irrigation Industry Survey, conducted by InsightExpress, reveals that this service area continues to grow annually, particularly as water preservation becomes more important. This study shows that the average contractor reported an 11.67 percent increase from 2004 to 2005 and 82.7 percent of survey respondents expect an average 17.16 percent increase in 2006 revenue.

## A LOOK AT REVENUE

	2004 REVENUE	2005 REVENUE	% CHANGE	2006 EXPECTED INCREASE
Overall	\$603,094	\$673,452	+11.67%	82.7% say +17.16%
Northeast/ Midwest	\$702,747	\$767,582	+9.23%	79.1% say +11.86%
Southeast	\$570,108	\$730,978	+28.22%	87.0% say +21.36%
West/ Southwest	\$538,725	\$654,411	+21.47%	79.4% say +19.74%

## PEAK-SEASON EMPLOYEES

	FULL-TIME	PART-TIME	TOTAL	AVERAGE REVENUE PER EMPLOYEE
Overall	23.61	17.44	41.05	\$16,406
Northeast/ Midwest	9.00	4.45	13.45	\$57,069
Southeast	12.38	2.97	15.35	\$47,621
West/ Southwest	11.31	2.03	13.34	\$49,056



While more than 80 percent are projecting double-digit growth in 2006, another 15.6 percent project stable revenue and only 1.6 percent projected a decrease in 2006 revenue.

Expenses are also on the rise, reflecting a continued investment in irrigation systems. Between 2004 and 2005, contractors increased their irrigation expenditures by 12.08 percent from \$18,973 to \$21,265. Pipe topped the list with contractors reporting that this system asset made up 18.36 percent of their purchases this year. Spray heads followed closely at 18.25 percent, and rotors were next on the list at 16.32 percent. Controllers and valves came in at 12.55 and 11.87 percent, respectively.

HOW DO YOU TRAIN YOUR EMPLOYEES ON IRRIGATION MAINTENANCE AND INSTALLATION?	
TRAINING TYPE	% OF CONTRACTORS
Learn on the job, observing others	87.0%
Professional training and/or certification classes	33.2%
Instruction manuals	27.7%
Online services	4.2%
Other training types not mentioned here	7.8%

WHAT PERCENT OF YOUR IRRIGATION SYSTEM AND PARTS PURCHASES IN 2005 WERE FOR THE FOLLOWING?	
PART	% OF RESPONDENTS
Pipe	18.36%
Spray heads	18.25%
Rotors	16.32%
Controllers	12.55%
Valves	11.87%
Drip systems/components	9.32%
Pumps	3.13%
Rain moisture sensors	2.91%
Other parts not mentioned here	7.30%

## Contractors Respond to Water Restrictions

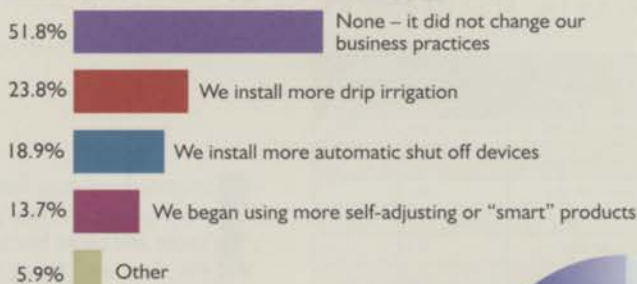
Despite the fact that nearly half of respondents to our irrigation survey point out that water use restrictions or regulations have been put into effect in their regions during the past two years, 51.8 percent of contractors did not change their business practices as a result. With some municipalities paying increasing attention to water use levels, this could become a problem for those contractors who do not adapt to changing times. For the 62.3 percent who reported that water restrictions had an affect on their businesses, 23.8 percent install more drip irrigation, 18.9 percent install more automatic shut-off devices, 13.7 percent are using more self-adjusting or "smart" irrigation products and 5.9 percent experienced other impacts.

However, overall the percentage of system upgrade, replacement and new installation sales that have been in direct response to increase water use regulations remains below 10 percent for both residential and commercial jobs (9.68 and 8.19 percent, respectively). The same can be said for the percent of total 2005 irrigation installation revenue that is made up of drip or low-pressure irrigation systems – 9.23 percent for residential jobs and 7.14 percent for commercial jobs.

Approximately 6 percent of contractors also reported other business consequences as a result of water use limitations in addition to the ones we listed. These included increasing water prices, removing lawn areas altogether, the incorporation of pressure release valves on all systems, the use of reclaimed water, and charging for coming out to set clients' timers.

## INCREASING IMPACTS?

What impacts have water use restrictions had on your business (select all that apply)?



## Rising Restrictions

Have new water use restrictions or water use regulations come into effect in your area in the past two years?



## Audit Alert

Do you perform irrigation audits?



Though irrigation experts say audits can help contractors determine a system's efficiency and the resulting renovations could reduce water use, only 32.8 percent of contractors conduct audits, including catch-can audits, water usage bill audits and audit subcontracting.

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Photo: Rain Bird

# Residential vs. Commercial Irrigation Outlook

By Nicole Wisniewski

**A**ccording to our State of the Irrigation Industry research, the majority of landscape companies (67.4 percent) offer irrigation services to both commercial and residential clients. *Lawn & Landscape* decided to split the research in half by these two client types to uncover the resulting similarities and differences.

The average residential irrigation-focused company is approximately five years younger (10.19 years) than the typical commercial irrigation business (15.69 years). Many landscape business owners start out offering services to people they relate the most to – their next door neighbors. Therefore, it's understandable that younger businesses would be focused on primarily residential clients and discover the revenue potential of commercial clients as they grow.

The average company that focuses on commercial clients also has offered irrigation services for a longer period of time compared to companies focused on residential customers – 12.65 vs. 5.76 years.

Commercial-based businesses also bring in more revenue on an average annual basis than their residential counterparts - \$1.42 million in 2004 and \$1.56 million in 2005 vs. \$419,178 in 2004 and \$503,082 in 2005 for residential companies. However, residential companies grew an average of 20 percent, double what their commercial-focused counterparts grew – an average of 10 percent. The majority of both business types (85 percent) project an increase in 2006 sales of approximately 17 percent.

Word-of-mouth referrals top the list in terms of where new irrigation business originates for both commercial and residential businesses. But this marketing type plays a much greater role for residential businesses with those contractors reporting that its responsible for 67.99 percent of their new business and commercial contractors

saying its only responsible for 36.15 percent of their new business. Lead/referral services play a larger role for commercial-based companies at 25.33 percent of new business vs. only 13.99 percent of new business for residential-based companies.

## CLIENT BREAKDOWN

	RESIDENTIAL	COMMERCIAL	RESIDENTIAL & COMMERCIAL
Overall	23.8%	8.8%	67.4%
Northeast/Midwest	24.2%	4.4%	71.4%
Southeast	29.3%	7.6%	63% <sup>1</sup>
West/Southwest	22.5%	11.8%	65.7% <sup>1</sup>



Naturally, larger jobs call for more employees to handle the work – the average commercial-focused irrigation company employs 70.33 people full-time and 12.48 people part-time during peak season while the average residential-focused company employs 6.99 full time and 1.63 part time people during the spring and summer months.

Not surprisingly, larger jobs also call for more equipment, therefore commercial companies spent more than double their residential counterparts on irrigation system and component expenditures in both 2004 and 2005 (\$27,250 and \$27,092 vs. \$11,962 and \$12,431, respectively).

Water use regulations affected more commercial companies during the past two years than residential with 48.1 percent reporting. Only 30.1 residential-focused companies said water limitations were affecting business. Maybe that's why more commercial companies audit water usage bills compared to residential companies at 14.8 percent vs. 5.5 percent, respectively. However, residential companies are reacting to these regulations in other ways more than commercial companies – 27.4 percent say they install more drip irrigation and 17.8 percent install more automatic shut-off devices. Only 18.5 and 7.4 percent of commercial companies are adapting their businesses in these two ways to the limitations.

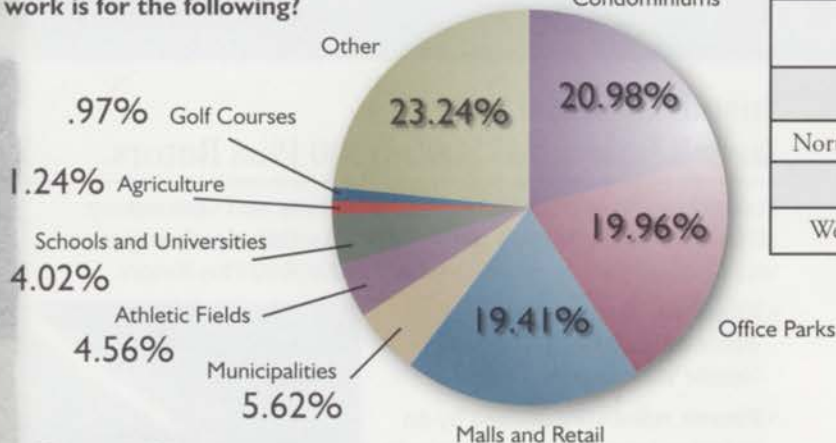
When it comes to training irrigation technicians, 40.7 percent of commercial companies offer professional training and/or certification classes compared to only 27.4 percent of residential companies. The majority of both types of companies' workers learn on the job, observing others.

When conducting client comparisons in the three U.S. regions, West/Southwest contractors handle the most acreage in the commercial irrigation market, with the largest property sizes in both installation and maintenance. This region also reported the largest properties for residential maintenance. However, Southeast businesses install residential systems on the largest lots compared to the other two regions.

When reporting price, Northeast/Midwest contractors charged the most per hour for irrigation maintenance work on both residential and commercial jobs – at more than \$3 per hour higher than the other two regions in both categories.

**What percent of your commercial irrigation work is for the following?**

Apartments and Condominiums



## Cost Concerns

REGION	AVERAGE MAINTENANCE CHARGE PER HOUR – RESIDENTIAL	AVERAGE MAINTENANCE CHARGE PER HOUR – COMMERCIAL
Overall	\$45.47	\$50.60
Northeast/Midwest	\$47.64	\$52.88
Southeast	\$40.14	\$47.42
West/Southwest	\$44.54	\$49.51

## SIZE MATTERS

RESIDENTIAL INSTALLATION	
REGION	AVERAGE PROPERTY SIZE
Overall	0.41 acres
Northeast/Midwest	0.32 acres
Southeast	0.59 acres
West/Southwest	0.35 acres
RESIDENTIAL MAINTENANCE	
REGION	AVERAGE PROPERTY SIZE
Overall	0.83 acres
Northeast/Midwest	0.81 acres
Southeast	0.68 acres
West/Southwest	0.98 acres
COMMERCIAL INSTALLATION	
REGION	AVERAGE PROPERTY SIZE
Overall	9.15 acres
Northeast/Midwest	4.59 acres
Southeast	7.57 acres
West/Southwest	8.59 acres
COMMERCIAL MAINTENANCE	
REGION	AVERAGE PROPERTY SIZE
Overall	8.64 acres
Northeast/Midwest	6.95 acres
Southeast	6.10 acres
West/Southwest	7.63 acres

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# Frozen Assets

by jonathan katz and will nepper

Contractors who conduct irrigation business in states with cold winter climates know that it's always wise to winterize.

**L**awn care professionals who offer irrigation services quickly learn that there are more equipment and staffing requirements, not to mention new pricing, scheduling and customer demands involved. Contractors located far enough north to feel the effects of Old Man Winter have even more to consider.

Irrigation systems installed in ground are likely to freeze in the winter and need special care before the seasonal shut-down to assure top performance when spring signals the beginning of a new irrigation season. Systems that are not properly winterized can be damaged to the point of uselessness, meaning customer callbacks that unnecessarily waste everyone's time and money.

"Winterization is protecting your assets," explains Doug Stewart, contractor account manager, Rain Bird, Wichita, Kan. "It means protecting your sprinkler system in freezing climates and protecting the pipes underneath the ground and the sprinkler heads and valves from damage that occurs when water left in the pipes freezes."

"In northern climates there will be frost on the ground," says Will Katerberg, president, Grapids Irrigation, Grand Rapids, Mich. "The pipes underground and the exposed pipes above ground will freeze. Ice in the pipes will expand and split the pipes. You winterize to prevent this."



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**STEP BY STEP.** Scheduling winterization commonly occurs between the middle of September until the first of November, Stewart says. "Some states have already had some freezing weather but it typically takes more than a few freezes to really hurt the pipes underground," he points out. "But the backflow preventers, which are above

ground, are more quickly susceptible to freezing conditions. You could have a quick freeze of 30 degrees and that could potentially damage an above-ground backflow preventer."

In parts of the country susceptible to an early freeze, interim safeguards, such as covering exposed backflow preventers with blankets or other insulat-

ing materials, can help protect systems until a full winterization is performed, Stewart adds. Because winterization scheduling will vary from region to region, contractors should be aware of their local climate conditions, weather patterns and the size of their client list so they can determine the best time to begin winterizing systems, says Kevin Gordon, senior product development manager, Hunter Industries, San Marcos, Calif.

"The bigger the client list, the more resources it will take and the more time you'll need to fulfill your winterization needs," he says. "So it's a combination of what kind of staffing you have available, how many clients you have to service and what weather patterns look like."

Complete winterization occurs in several steps and even though every contractor might tackle the job with their own nuanced system, the basics are generally the same.

The first step is turning off the system's water at its source. "If it's a domestic water supply then you want to winterize the backflow by opening the ports to clear those chambers of water," Katerberg says. Because the point of winterization is to prevent freezing, obviously the water source will need to be cut off before the pipes can be cleared of residual water.

"There are three different ways to drain the system for the three different types of systems out there," Stewart says. "Some have manual drains which require you to manually open a valve to drain the water out of the system. Others have automatic drains that will independently drain the water out of the system every time the system is shut down," he explains.

To manually drain a system, first shut off the irrigation water supply and open all the manual drain valves, according to information on Hunter Industries Web site at [www.hunterindustries.com](http://www.hunterindustries.com). After the water has drained from the mainline, open the boiler drain valve or drain cap on the stop and waste valve and drain all the remaining water that is between the irrigation shut-off valve and the backflow device. Then open the test cocks on the backflow device. If the system has check valves, the sprinklers

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will need to be pulled up so water can drain out of the bottom of the sprinkler body. Once all the water has drained out, close all the manual drain valves.

The automatic drain method works by opening the automatic drain valves when they're located at the end and low points of the irrigation piping, according to Hunter Industries. These will automatically open and drain water if the pressure in the piping is less than 10 psi. To activate the automatic drain valves, shut off the irrigation water supply and activate a station to relieve the system pressure. After the water has drained out of the mainline, contractors would follow the same steps as the manual drainage procedure.

But the most common method of clearing water from an irrigation system requires an air compressor to evacuate water by pushing pressurized air through the chambers. "The most thorough way is to hook on an air compressor that has high volume and low pressure," Katerberg says, adding that somewhere between 50 and 55 pounds of pressure is sufficient. "Then you blow each zone clear until it is virtually free of water," he says.

Stewart asserts that it is best to blow out each zone clear twice. "A good rule of thumb is to go through each zone for about two minutes at a time and then, once you've completed all of the zones, go through them all for two minutes again," he says.

Katerberg explains that systems that pump water from a natural source require removing the suction line from that source to prevent ice damage. "Then you have to open up the different chambers in the pump or remove the plugs on those chambers to remove the water," he says.

Stewart says that there is a misconception among those new to irrigation winterization that the greater the air pressure being pumped through the system, the better. "The opposite is true," he explains. "You really need volume to push the water out. You do not want a high-pressure compressor for winterizing. Some compressors run at 120 to 160 psi, and that kind of pressure could damage the system quite a bit because the viscosity of air

is much lower than water and it creates high stress on the system."

Stewart says that a good rule of thumb to follow is use the same amount of pressure that the system would normally run on. "So if the system usually runs at 50 or 60 psi water pressure, that's what you'd want from your air compressor," he explains.

"Finally, you make sure the controller is in the off position so that you can make sure it doesn't inadvertently go off in the winter," Stewart explains.

On the other hand, Katerberg asserts that the electric systems should be run once a week for two or three minutes. "Some people set them up for twice a week but the important thing

## Introducing



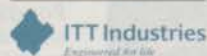
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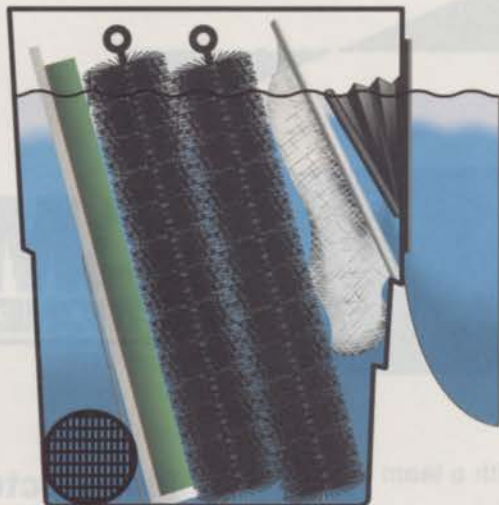
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USE READER SERVICE # 91

is that they activate occasionally. We've found that when they're unplugged minerals stick to them over the winter," he says. "We've rarely had problems from activating them occasionally in the winter."

**PRICING POINTERS.** Pricing irrigation winterization isn't any more complicated than pricing other services, but Stewart says that there are few commonly used strategies. "Some contractors will offer a maintenance program and service program where they provide a start-up in the spring and a winterization in the fall," he says. "Sometimes people will offer this kind of package with the winterization free, included with the first year purchase of the irrigation system. Thereafter, they'll charge a set fee for winterization." Stewart says that maintenance packages that include both spring startup and winterization typically cost from \$150 to \$200.

Stewart says that set fees can range from \$50 on the low end for a residential winterization to several hundred dollars for larger commercial sites. "Sometimes the larger commercial sites might require more than one compressor to fill the 4-inch or 6-inch main lines which would raise the price," he explains.

Scheduling is particularly important to the business of winterization in that there is a small window of time to tackle every job. "Some contractors will have to use all of their available resources, and all of their manpower and trucks to get everything done in that short window," Stewart says.

"Often contractors will arrange their winterization jobs according to zip code or neighborhood," Stewart explains. "That way they are practically next door to their next job. There are several ways to do it, but you always

want to make sure that you arrange your routes so that jobs are as close to one another as possible, because time is money."

"To do the job properly, a contractor could expect to get about 10 residential jobs completed in a work day," Katerberg says. "It usually averages out to an hour getting there, setting up properly and setting the controller."

"The number of commercial jobs in a day is difficult to say," explains Stewart. "It depends on the size of the business, obviously, and how many service people a contractor has. Some smaller companies do between 200 and 300 each winter, while others do as many as 2,000 or 3,000." LL

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For the don'ts of blowout irrigation winterization, provided by Hunter Industries, check out our November Online Extras section.

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# Switch On Sales

by kathleen franzinger

A number of methods can help contractors ramp up landscape lighting sales.

Once contractors learn how to install landscape lighting systems, many are left in the dark about the best way to sell them. Unfortunately, there isn't one surefire way to sell lighting. Direct mail might work great for one contractor, but not as well for another. Nighttime demonstrations are almost imperative for those new to the market, while contractors with more experience can rely on a portfolio and referrals.

How to figure out which method works best is mostly a matter of trial and error. Try a few different tactics and track them to see

which ones yield results. "A combination of two or more methods is most effective," says Eric Borden, vice president, Ambiance Lighting Systems, Riverside, N.J. "You can't rely on just one."

But before stocking up on direct mail pieces or placing a full-page advertisement in the *Yellow Pages*, the first step is to include lighting as part of every installation design. "Contractors should be including lighting with every package they offer, whether or not the customer asks for it," says Mike Southard, national sales manager, Kichler Landscape Lighting, Cleveland.

Mark Moore, president, Green Earth



Image: Vista



Photo: Johnson Landscape Lighting

Landscaping & Design, Montville, N.J., estimates that 60 to 70 percent of his installation customers request to see lighting in their design. For the other 30 to 40 percent who don't mention lighting, he includes it anyway. "Over 50 percent of the customers who weren't thinking about it decide to go with it," he says.

Offering lighting as part of an installation package can eliminate potential sticker shock. Many homeowners think of lighting as something they can buy at a local store. When they don't understand the high quality of a professional job, they don't understand the price. "Customers may find it hard to swallow a \$4,000 lighting installation," says Todd Hostetler, sales manager, Cascade Lighting, Akron, Ohio. "But when you say this is a \$10,000 to \$15,000 landscape installation and the lighting is already included, they'll say OK."

But perhaps the best advice when it comes to selling lighting is to know the product. "You need a good knowl-

edge of what it is you're trying to sell and install," says Cruz Perez, vice president of marketing, Vista Professional Outdoor Lighting, a Simi Valley, Calif.-based manufacturer. "The more knowledge you have, the more comfortable you'll feel about selling it."

**MAIL CALL.** Most contractors at some point or another have tried direct mail. But how well it works depends on whom you talk to. Contractors in some markets rely on it heavily, while others don't at all. The benefit to direct mail is that it lets contractors target homeowners who make good lighting prospects.

"It typically costs a minimum of \$2,000 for a lighting installation," Southard says. "So you have to make sure you're mailing to potential customers who can afford that."

This usually means targeting houses with a certain property value. "The customer base for professional landscape lighting is in the mid- to upper-end residential



demographic," Perez says. "Of course, property values depend on the part of country a contractor is in. A mid-price home in California may be \$480,000, while it's \$180,000 in North Carolina."

Chris Johnson, owner of Johnson Landscape Lighting in Jacksonville, Fla., targets homes with values starting at \$300,000. He finds targeting property values more effective than targeting income levels. "You miss the market of retirees and empty nesters," he explains. "They may not have an income anymore, but they might be a wealthy group of people."

Johnson buys a list of target customers, usually about 20,000 names, for about \$50 per 1,000 names. He mails a 6-by-9-inch, full-color postcard with an application photograph on the front and the company's contact information on the back. He mails the postcard every 45 days. "The key with direct mail is to be consistent and repetitious," he

says. "It would cost you more in the long run to mail 50,000 cards at one time and never do it again. It's better to mail 1,000 cards three or four times to the same people."

Johnson pays about \$5,500 to mail 20,000 postcards. "It costs about 40 cents each with printing, production and postage," he says, adding that direct mail is cheaper in bulk. "If you only do 1,000, the cost per piece is going to be higher, maybe 50 or 55 cents a piece."

Moore does direct mail for other landscape services he offers, but not lighting specifically. He says his mailings, including printing and postage, cost about \$1 each for 3,000 pieces. He has tried one mailing for landscape lighting, but he found it ineffective. "It was around 9/11," he explains. "So it may have just been bad timing. Down the road, I may try it again."

To help defer the cost of direct mail,

many manufacturers offer free postcards with room on the back for contractors to put their contact information. Contractors are then only responsible for the cost of postage.

The downside is that direct mail doesn't have a reputation for yielding the highest leads. And even targeting the right customers doesn't necessarily guarantee great results. "If contractors do canvas and target the right area, they're still only going to get a 2 or 3 percent return rate," Hostetler says.

**GETTING LISTED.** *Yellow Pages* advertisements are another popular selling strategy. But like direct mail, their effectiveness varies. Hostetler knows contractors who buy a half-page or a full-page advertisement, but he feels it isn't money well spent. He estimates a half-page ad costs at least \$1,000 a month, and it offers less than a 1 percent return.

*continued on page 129*

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# MAKING <sup>the</sup> COMMERCIAL CUT

Snapper Pro commercial products  
work overtime for professionals  
who demand equipment built to last.

**S**napper Pro wrote the first chapters of its commitment to quality long before the landscape contractor boom. Then, the company's philosophy was simple, but solid: Build quality products that deliver results.

Not much has changed if you ask Dick Felder, vice president and general manager of the Snapper Pro commercial division, who compares their durable products to the most basic, functional tool. "Like a hammer," he says, "our mowers do what they are supposed to do. Snapper has always been popular because it is bullet-proof."

Landscape contractors appreciate this rugged mentality. "Professionals live and die for the features and benefits of these products," Felder says, explaining the brand's logical transition into the commercial market – a suitable fit for a manufacturer focused on building equipment that can work overtime. "We've never won a pretty contest – although we are working more on aesthetics – but we build equipment that is extraordinarily heavy-duty and durable," Felder says. "That philosophy started with our first rear-engine rider and has carried over to our commercial equipment line."

## Uncompromised Quality

Quality is obvious to landscape contractors. "They can look at the equipment and tell the difference between a mid-or low-level product and one that is built to last," Felder says.

Snapper Pro fulfills landscape contractors' requirements for rugged construction, and that translates to longevity, Felder adds. Professionals can rely on Snapper Pro equipment to expertly handle tough terrain, tight areas and long days in the field without sacrificing performance.

Premium product design incorporates features such as twin belt drives, Felder points out. "If you snap a belt, you can still operate the machine and, chances are, you probably wouldn't know [it was broken]," he says.

Control panels positioned below operators' legs are accessible, but protected from obstacles like branches or brush, which can accidentally engage side controls. Meanwhile, removable floor panels provide easy access to major maintenance points.

"Our philosophy is to make equipment easy to repair should it need repairs," Felder says, adding that a two-year warranty protects all components. Regardless, Snapper Pro is confident even year-round landscape contractors won't be knocking on their dealers' doors with repair requests. "We build in durability so our hope is that you won't have to worry about [going in for service,]" he says.

When professionals do require replacement parts or service, Snapper Pro servicing dealers provide immediate solutions. Dealers



carry robust parts inventories so their in-house technicians can tend to service needs on the spot. After all, landscape contractors can't afford to wait in line while they accumulate costly downtime that eats away revenues.

"Our dealers are accessible and their in-house technicians stock an excellent supply of replacement parts," Felder says.

Durability, innovation and longevity are hallmarks of Snapper Pro.

"We snug right up to the limit," Felder says, referring to blade tip speed among other technologies. Blade speed combined with advanced under-deck air dynamics allows Snapper Pro products to stand up to what Felder considers the ultimate turf test: southern-style mowing.

"We develop these products in the south," he explains. "We are used to cutting St. Augustine grass, Bahai grass, Zoysia grass – and we also cut Bermuda grass and fescues. We design products that cut every turf variety."

Meanwhile, Snapper Pro searches for ways to give landscape contractors even more edge with new products on the drawing board that will provide more innovative solutions.

"The marketplace is evolving, and we watch what commercial cutters do and what they like," Felder says. "We are constantly looking for features that will give our dealers the edge in supplying reputable products that fulfill commercial needs."

### Quality Equipment, Competitive Price

We tried a Snapper Pro eight years ago because we were having a lot of downtime with the brand we were using at the time. We used our first mower for a season and decided to switch over completely to Snapper Pro. We began trading in our other mowers to Snapper Pros and we've never looked back. I've used a lot of mower brands, and to me the Snapper Pro brand means a good machine at a competitive price. We've even converted some of our competitors – good people – to Snapper Pro.

Damien Seltzer, president  
Seltzer Services  
Winston, N.C.



### Growing with Snapper Pro

When I was getting into the business, I was using traditional residential equipment and it wasn't durable enough. I wanted to invest in a commercial mower, so I bought my first Snapper 21-inch walk-behind. That was three years ago, and it's still on my truck. Since then, I've never bought anything but a Snapper Pro. I have a 36-inch, 52-inch, joystick control 52-inch and a Z-Master 52-inch mower. Plus, they give me a high-quality cut. I cut some hearty fields and they cut them remarkably.

I've been growing steadily, and without the dependability of my Snapper Pro equipment, I couldn't have done it.

Lucious Parks  
Lou's Lawn Care  
Memphis, Tenn.

### Powered by Snapper

Quality is why I've been using Snappers for seven years. The Snapper Pro has good, solid construction. The seats are comfortable, and you have plenty of leg room. If I start mowing at 8 a.m. until 8 p.m., minus two hours for driving time, I am still comfortable. What I really like is the joystick control. It's easy to operate, you are comfortable, and you use one hand to operate the machine rather than having both hands tied up.

Snapper has a solid line of products. As a matter of fact, I'll buy a couple more next year.

Robert Etheridge  
Etheridge Lawn Care  
Bahala, Miss.







continued from page 126

But he says that it's important to be listed. "It's always good to be in the *Yellow Pages*, even though it may not be a good return rate," he explains. "When customers see it, they perceive you as a legitimate company."

Johnson agrees it's important to be listed. "Your customer might tell his neighbor your name and that neighbor will look you up in the phone book," he says, adding that listing his name and phone number costs him about \$16 to \$20 per month.

Another potential downside is that customers calling because of an advertisement are typically only looking for quotes. "They've probably talked to someone already and they're looking for pricing," Hostetler says. "You just end up in a bidding war."

Another concern is the increasingly tight market for the books themselves. Josh Bruner, division sales manager for The Highridge Corp., Issaquah,

Wash., cut back on advertising because of the growing number of directories, as well as increased prices and the large number of contractors who advertise in the media. "We used to invest heavily in *Yellow Pages* advertising, but in the last two years, we have cut back and taken those monies and used them for advertising on television," he says. "We still have a presence in the various books, but *Yellow Pages* advertising now only represents 10 to 15 percent of our lead generation."

But if contractors already use the *Yellow Pages* to advertise other services, it's important to mention the fact that they offer lighting as well. In addition, many phone books offer a separate landscape lighting category, so contractors should list there if available.

**SHOW THEM THE LIGHT.** Lighting is a visual business, which is why nighttime demonstrations are a useful

tool for closing a sale, especially for landscape contractors new to the market. When Johnson started out five years ago, he had no customers, no references and no photographs. "I had to do on-site demonstrations to show customers what they'd be getting," he explains. "The demo was almost imperative."

Hostetler thinks of nighttime demonstrations as marketing, but because of their high closing rate, he also thinks of them as the goal of marketing. In other words, contractors should use their marketing to get to the demonstration stage. "If a contractor can demo a system, it's almost a 90 percent closing rate," he says. "Once customers see their house lit, they want it."

Demonstrations also show customers what a professional design means. "A good lighting job is not six lights from the sidewalk to the door along

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the driveway," Perez says. "With the demo, you pick one section of the yard or house and say this is what I can do for the rest of the yard. Just give them a little taste to show them how good it's going to look."

Demonstrations kits vary in cost, depending on the quality. Most manufacturers offer kits, or contractors can create one of their own. A few fixtures and a battery pack can cost \$200, but one with transformers and more lights can cost \$1,500.

The negative to demonstrations is that they have to be done at night, which in the summer means 9 p.m. Setting up demonstrations that late every night isn't always ideal for contractors. In addition, there is only time for about one demonstration per night, which equates to five to six sales calls per week.

"If you do six demonstrations and close 80 percent, that is four or five

jobs," Johnson says. "That's great, but you're working all of the time and getting home at 11 p.m."

As Johnson has built references and a portfolio, he says the need for demonstrations has decreased. "If you have a solid reference list, you can go into a neighborhood and do 20 estimates in a week," he says, adding that even if the closing percentage drops to 50 percent, it's still 10 jobs instead of four or five.

As business grows, it helps to carry a portfolio of previous jobs to show potential customers how great their homes can look. Hostetler recommends showing customers a portfolio that lists the addresses of three or four jobs with designs similar to the one a new customer will have. "If customers actually go out and look, it's about a 75 to 80 percent return rate," he says. "If they're taking the time to look at previous jobs, it's probably going to lead to a demo at some point."

**SIGN OF THE TIMES.** When homeowners see a professional landscape lighting system installed at their home, the effect is dramatic. Seeing one on their neighbors' house can also be powerful. "If it's a well-done installation, the rest of the block will want the same thing," Borden says. "It creates a little bit of envy and desire to have the same thing as their neighbors have."

When doing an installation, contractors need to be aware of the potential customers driving, walking or living nearby. To cash in on this business, contractors need to establish a presence in the neighborhoods they're working in. One way to do this is with a yard sign. "When the neighbors see a house with new lighting, they'll want to know who did it," Borden says. "Having a sign in the front yard guarantees you're going to get the first telephone call."

Hostetler estimates the rate of return for yard signs at 30 percent. That

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may not seem like a lot, "but if you're talking to 10 people, that's three jobs," he says. Borden says the return may be even higher. "All a contractor has to do is get a job in a neighborhood and put a sign in the front, and I'd bet they'd probably receive more calls from that than anything else they try," he says.

Of course, contractors have to ask customers for permission to post the sign while doing the installation, as well as to leave it for a few days once the job is finished. It's also important to make sure the sign is readable from the road.

Johnson uses vinyl yard signs with a metal frame that measure roughly 2-by-2 feet and cost him around \$6 to \$10 a piece. He likes to draw attention to his signs by installing one extra light in the yard and positioning it directly on the sign. "Yard signs are terrific because you're getting several things accomplished," he says. "Potential customers are seeing your work and seeing your

number displayed at the same time. You're getting the best of everything all rolled into one."

Bruner has used yard signs in the past, but he found they could be problematic. "It was a hassle keeping track of them and keeping them in shape as they moved from site to site," he says. "We found it more effective to use logos on our trucks and trailers to establish our presence," he says, adding that his trucks and trailers have company contact information and mention the lighting installation service.

Another great way to get the information out is via door hangers. "After we do an installation, we hang up door hangers two houses down on either side and six or seven houses across the street," Johnson says.

Like direct mail pieces, some manufacturers offer yard signs and door hangers. Door hangers are usually free, but there is typically a small fee for yard

signs. Contractors should check directly with manufacturers or their distributors about available marketing materials.

Door hangers and yard signs aren't allowed in some developments and communities, so contractors should check local ordinances before using either one. But whenever possible, it's a good idea to use both. A high-quality, professional lighting job is a great sales tool that shouldn't be wasted.

As an example, Perez points to one contractor he knows who installed a job on a house toward the front of a subdivision. He says, "Because of that one job, he was able to line up six to nine months of work." **LL**

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Check out our November Online Extras section for a look at the common ways to sell landscape lighting.

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USE READER SERVICE # 102

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Grasshopper Lawns, Inc. has been a family-owned business for more than 40 years and has built a reputation as a caring company who takes pride in their service and does not cut corners when it comes to either their customers or their employees.

When brothers Michael and Shawn Kravitsky introduced Triplet Low Odor into their weed control program this past year, they had hoped this new, high quality herbicide would live up to its promise of better performance and increased applicator and customer satisfaction. Still, they were not prepared for the positive feedback and financial benefits they eventually realized.

The low odor feature was what initially intrigued them and they were not disappointed. “Our crews first commented on the clearer color of the herbicide, but then we started to notice that there were far fewer complaints from applicators – their clothes didn’t smell after using Triplet Low Odor and the mixing/storage area didn’t have that usual lingering chemical odor,” says Shawn. “While we did not feel it was entirely necessary to promote the low odor benefit to customers, the internal benefit to us was huge.”

Michael adds, “What’s even better is that we found that the first two rounds of applications took care of most weed problems and we had significantly fewer weed calls – in fact, an average of 75 to 80% less complaints than the previous few years. The only thing different in our program has been the addition of Triplet Low Odor. The reduced callbacks actually save us quite a bit of money in the long run.”

While they both agree that they would continue to use Triplet Low Odor strictly on the merits of its low odor qualities, they are even more sold on it now that they understand the financial benefits of reduced complaints from slow or incomplete weed control.

Find out what the Kravitskys already know, Triplet Low Odor is a smart investment in your business and weed control program.

Please read and follow all label directions.  
Contact a Nufarm representative or your local distributor for more information:

800-345-3330  
[www.turf.us.nufarm.com](http://www.turf.us.nufarm.com)



Home of Riverdale Brands

## TRIplet<sup>®</sup> Low Odor

“...we had significantly fewer weed calls – in fact, an average of 75% to 80% less complaints than the previous few years.

The only thing different in our program has been the addition of Triplet Low Odor.”

*Michael and Shawn Kravitsky, Grasshopper Lawns, Inc., confer with Mark Phipps, Nufarm Turf & Specialty Regional Sales Manager, about the benefits of using Triplet Low Odor herbicide*





Photos: Ron Gould Studios

The entire group poses for a photo to commemorate Lawn & Landscape's 25th anniversary (left). GIE Media's CEO and President & COO Richard and Chris Foster (below).



# Celebrating 25 Years

by nicole wisniewski



Attendees to *Lawn & Landscape's* 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration learned about newly released industry statistics and integrated marketing tactics.

**G**ood business means establishing long-standing relationships with customers based on a foundation of trust. This was the message Paul Wang, associate professor of integrated marketing communications, Northwestern University, Evanston, Ill., shared with attendees to *Lawn & Landscape's* 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration on July 14-16 in Chicago, Ill. *Lawn & Landscape* is a GIE Media publication.

Word-of-mouth, which is how a majority of landscape companies obtain new clients, is considered a powerful means of marketing, but from Wang's perspective, needs to be something contractors earn. "For referrals to happen, your customer satisfaction rating has to be a five on a

scale of one to five – a below five rating is considered in the zone of indifference, where clients aren't truly 100 percent satisfied," he says. "The value of being a five in customer satisfaction means greater customer intimacy, better customer retention and higher profit margins. One way to move to a five is to identify and reward the top performers in your company based on client comments and customer retention."

After soaking in marketing knowledge, attendees, who included industry contractors and suppliers, attended the Pittsburgh Pirates vs. Chicago Cubs game on a rooftop overlooking Wrigley Field.

On day two of the event, Paul McDonough, president, Project Evergreen, and president, LESCO, Cleveland, Ohio, shared



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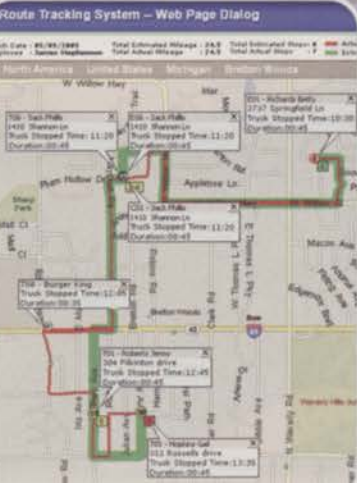
### LA.NET GPS Vehicle Tracking

Report Date and Time: 05/19/04 13:08  
Time Interval: 1 Second  
Speed Filter: 10 mph

Begin	End	Duration	Action Type	Location Name
05:56PM	05:56PM		Power	Power ON
05:56PM	05:59PM		Begin	Begin: 6701 -
05:56PM	06:03PM	00:07	In Transit	In-Transit
06:03PM	06:56PM	00:53	Stop 1	5317 - 5398
06:56PM	06:57PM	00:01	In Transit	In-Transit
06:57PM	06:59PM	00:02	Stop 2	L-Customer
06:59PM	07:05PM	00:06	In Transit	In-Transit
07:05PM	07:06PM	00:01	Stop 3	5501 - 5398
07:06PM	07:09PM	00:03	In Transit	In-Transit
07:09PM	07:10PM	00:01	Stop 4	5317 - 5398
07:10PM	07:13PM	00:03	In Transit	In-Transit
07:13PM	08:26PM	01:13	Stop 5	L-Buffalo Blv
08:26PM	09:38PM	00:12	In Transit	In-Transit
09:38PM	09:38PM		End	End:5401 - 54

Here Accrued Statistics:

Steps	In Transit	Stop	Mileage
Number of Steps	5	Number of Stops	5
Total Stop Time	00:19	Total Transit Time	00:52
Avg Stop Time	00:04	Avg Mile per Transit	00:00
% Stop Time	80	% Transit Time	20
Total Accrued Time			



### Invoice Listing

Name	Address	Serial
Edt Robison, Rich	305 21st St	CO1
Edt Gray, Carolyn	319 7th St	CO1
Edt Spector,	6720 Aberdeen	CO1
Edt Cable, Martha	614 Ada St	CO1
Edt White, Steve	620 Ada St	CO1
Edt Blueborn,	709 Ada St	CO1
Edt Sumbers,	814 Ada St	CO1
Edt Sanders,	916 Ada St	CO1
Edt Campbell,	610 Adams St	CO1
Edt Norton, Lori	637 Adams St	CO1
Edt Carey, Diane	652 Adams St	CO1
Edt Adado, Bob	1526 Alan Ln	CO1
Edt Sykes, Gerald	862 Albright Dr	CO1
Edt Weiss,	1855 W Argyle St	CO1

#### Production Entry

Inv 62639 Perimeter Pest Ct

Beach, Frederick 247 E 1st St

Date: 5/10/2005

Employee Code - Name: MTM - MIKE MARTIN

Condition: Lawn Rate

Stark does in lawn

#### Production Entry

Inv 62639 Perimeter Pest Ct

Beach, Frederick 247 E 1st St

STEP 1: 12-24-04

Wind Spd: 8

Dir: SW

Temp: 64

pH:

#### Production Entry

Inv 62639 Perimeter Pest Ctrl Visit

Beach, Frederick 247 E 1st St

STEP 1: 10:00

Charge: 49.95

Tax: 0.00

Crew: 1

Notes: customer going to have irrigation system installed

### Data Collection

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information with the group about the goals and progress of Project Evergreen ([www.projectevergreen.com](http://www.projectevergreen.com)), an alliance of green industry members who promote the benefits of creating green spaces and maintaining them responsibly.

He also revealed new results to a recent Project Evergreen consumer survey. Here are some of the key facts his



research report highlighted:

- 90 percent of consumers said lawn care and landscape companies provide a needed service.
- 95 percent of consumers said landscaping adds value to a home's worth.
- 85 percent of consumers said they are satisfied with

their irrigation, lawn care and landscape providers.

- 87 percent of consumers said the services of lawn care and landscape companies improves their lawns and landscapes.
- 75 percent of consumers said professional irrigation companies help conserve water.



The Chicago skyline (top). Northwestern University's Paul Wang educates contractors and suppliers on marketing. The unique rooftop view of the Pittsburgh Pirates vs. Chicago Cubs game (right).



Photos: Ron Gould Studios

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# DuPont™ Advion™

fire ant bait

A hand holding a flag on a mound of soil. The hand is a reddish-brown color, and the flag is white with a frayed edge. The mound is made of dark brown soil. The background is a blue sky with white clouds. The entire scene is framed within a large, light blue oval shape.

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Your customers will claim victory over fire ants when you use DuPont™ Advion™ fire ant bait. This unique chemistry provides control within 24 to 72 hours, allowing your customers back outdoors fast. There's no quicker, more effective solution than Advion™, and it reduces callbacks, resulting in higher customer satisfaction.

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# Save the Trees

Check out the following products that help protect trees from insects and disease.

compiled by kathleen franzinger

## ArborSystems Wedge Direct-Inject Tree Treatment System

- Treat one tree in five minutes; no guarding caplets
- No drilling means no sapwood damage
- Pointer insecticide controls most beetles, adelgids, aphids and other tree pests
- Other insecticides and fungicides available
- Hardware kit costs \$525
- ArborSystems – 800/698-4641, [www.arborsystems.com](http://www.arborsystems.com)

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## Rootgrow Soil Inoculant For Trees

- Can transform poor soils into fertile growing environments
- Includes 90 species of beneficial bacteria, 65 species of fungi, 30 species of protozoa and 30 species of nematodes
- Can be used to enhance compost or used directly out of the bottle on trees
- Includes a range of endo- and ecto-mycorrhizae spores, as well as sea kelp and liquid humus
- Tree care kit can be deep-root injected
- Rootgrow – 866/766-8476, [www.rootgrow.com](http://www.rootgrow.com)

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## J.J. Mauget ArborFos Fungicide

- Developed specifically for trees
- Encapsulated injectable fungicide labeled for sudden oak death, as well as other phytophthora species
- Also controls such diseases as anthracnose, apple scab and bacterial blight
- Carries a caution label
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- Environmentally friendly with a target-specific application that eliminates drift, spills and groundwater contamination
- J.J. Mauget – 800/873-3779, [www.mauget.com](http://www.mauget.com)

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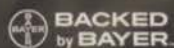
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## Water Cannon Replacement Pumps

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- Include tank-feed models and continuous-duty versions that can run 23.5 hours per day
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# Fall profits. Year-round control.

"Our biggest success this year has been with TopChoice," so we're looking into a big push in the fall when people don't normally think about yards and landscape and we're less busy. We've finally found an answer to fire ants. TopChoice doesn't fail."

Gary LaScalea  
GroGreen  
Austin, Texas

"After the summer rains, we gear up for fall applications of TopChoice so lawns are fire ant-free throughout the winter holidays. Many home and commercial accounts change out ornamentals to work in more fall colors. We don't want fire ants coming back ever, so our fall TopChoice applications aren't only for lawns, they're for flowerbeds, too. Wouldn't it be great if we could eliminate fire ants for everyone?"

Mark Govan  
ABC Pest Control  
St. Petersburg, Florida

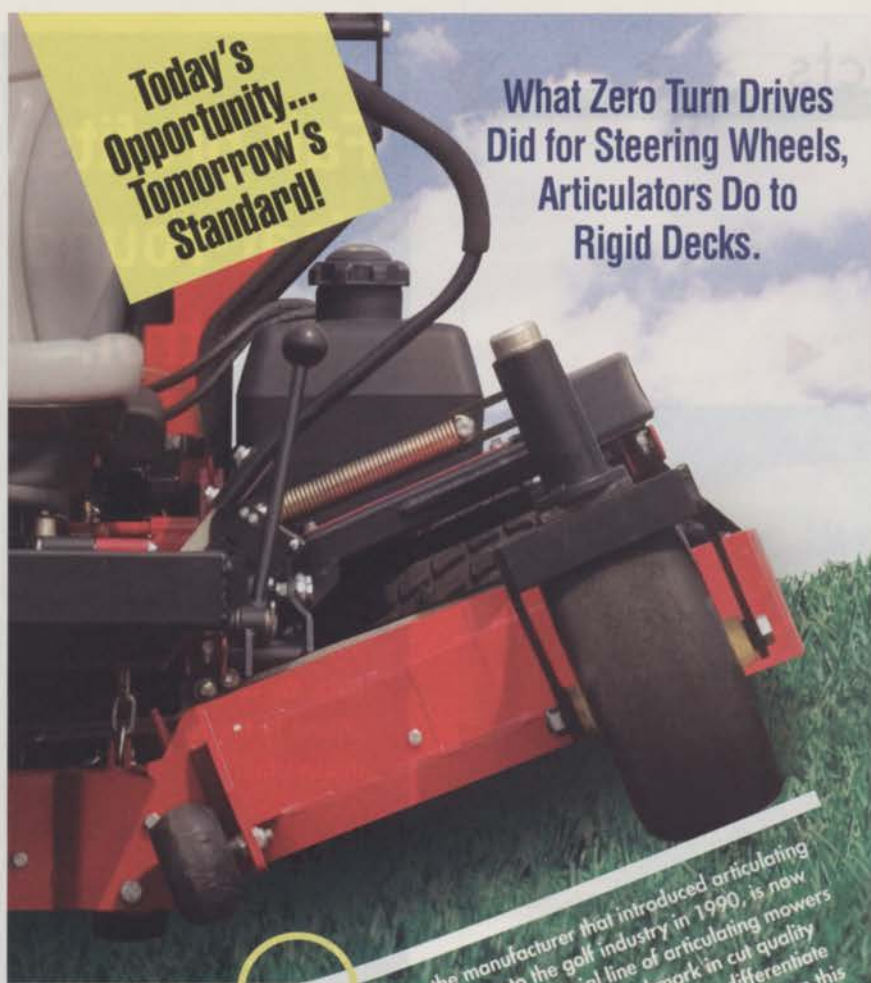
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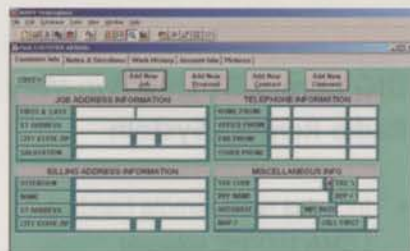
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- Features call center, appointment schedules, field inspections, estimates, estimate follow-up, work orders, invoices, statements, job costing and sales reports
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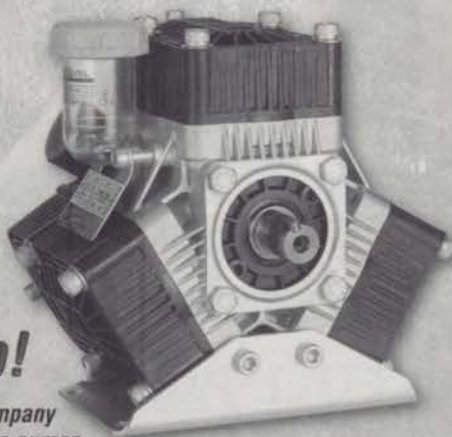
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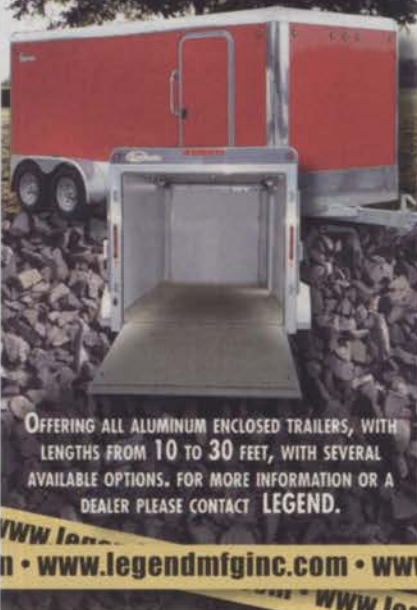
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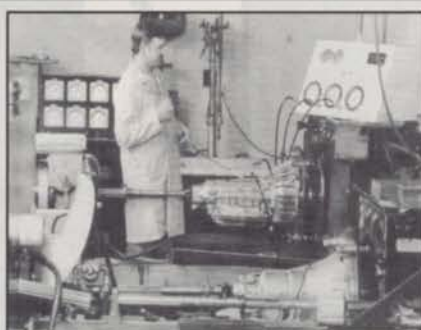
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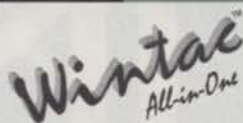
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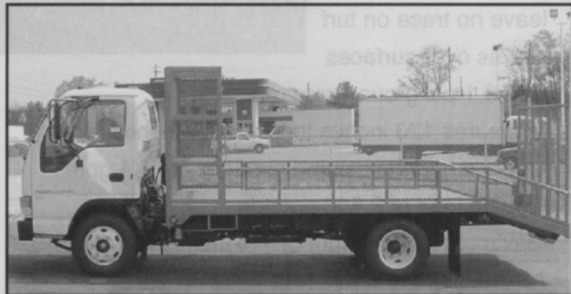
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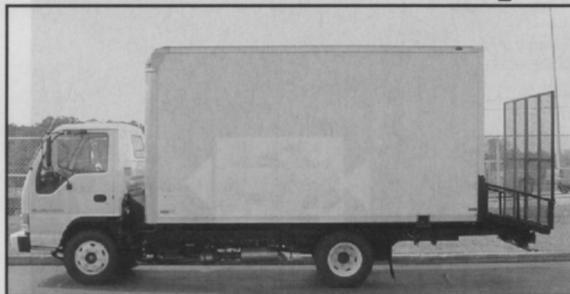


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**\$532 MO**  
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**2006 ISUZU NPR DIESEL**

Auto, A/C, 16ft Landscape Body

**\$496 MO**  
 48 MONTHS

**2006 ISUZU NPR CREW CAB DIESEL**

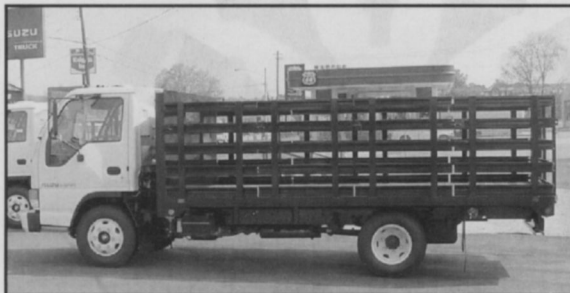
Auto, 16ft Landscape Body

**\$36,405**

**2005 ISUZU NPR GAS**

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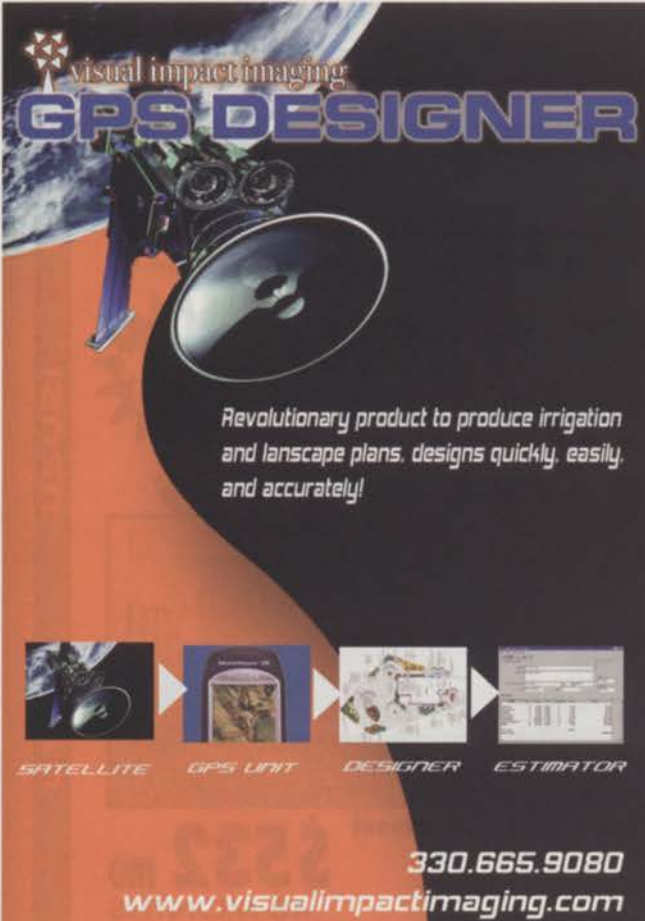
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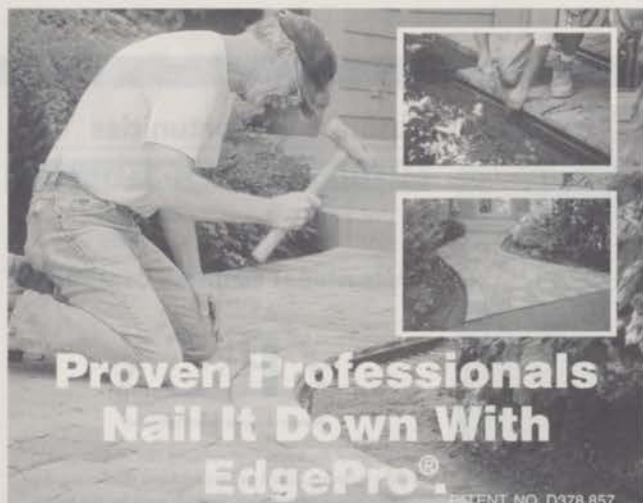
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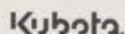
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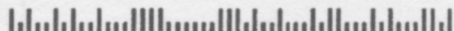
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For more information, visit: [www.gothiclandscape.com](http://www.gothiclandscape.com) or Email: [hr@gothiclandscape.com](mailto:hr@gothiclandscape.com) or contact Elisabeth Stimson, HR Director at:  
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To find out more information about Heads Up Landscape please visit our website at [www.headsuplandscape.com](http://www.headsuplandscape.com)

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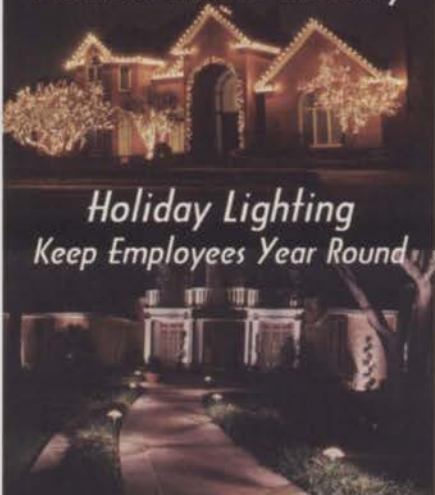
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1. Visit the Lawn & Landscape login set up at [www.lawnandlandscape.com/rs/default.asp](http://www.lawnandlandscape.com/rs/default.asp).
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The following is a statement required by the Act of October 1962, Section 4369, Title 39, United States Code, showing ownership of *Lawn & Landscape*, published at 4012 Bridge Ave., Cleveland, Ohio 44113-3399 Cuyahoga County.

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The owner is: Richard J. W. Foster, 4012 Bridge Avenue, Cleveland, Ohio 44113-3399.

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I certify that the statements made by me above are correct and complete.

Ron Lowy, Publisher

The author is vice president of Cooper's Landscape Management, Virginia Beach, Va., and can be contacted at [cooperslandscapemanagement@cox.net](mailto:cooperslandscapemanagement@cox.net)

## Customized Calendars at Cooper's Landscape Management

**A**t Cooper's Landscape Management in Virginia Beach, Va., we've always been of the opinion that thanking our clients is an essential part of maintaining great customer service, as well as a high retention rate. However, we've always tried to be unique in the way we thank our customers, often passing on admission tickets to the local Norfolk Botanical Garden, historic homes in our area, or even the local zoo.

In the winter of 2004, we developed a new "thank you" for some of our best customers – customized calendars. As a company, we had been working on ideas for holiday gifts and trying to come up with something unique to each client, as well as something that regularly reminded our clients of our company and services. Having received calendars from vendors and other service providers in the past, we decided to take that idea and improve on

it by using the calendars to showcase our clients' properties when they're looking their best.

To get started, we needed good quality photos of our clients' properties. Conveniently, I had already set aside a day to visit several of our high-end properties with one of our company's suppliers. The supplier was having a photo contest of its own and, together with a representative of the company, we visited several sites and took pictures of our clients' homes with their landscapes beautifully in bloom.

These same photos were perfect to use for our customized calendars. I had anticipated using a traditional film camera, however our digital camera worked well. While it is a 3.2 megapixel camera, it has a setting that enhances the quality of the images, effectively producing images that appear to have been taken on a 4 or 5 megapixel camera.

### 5 Keys for Great Customized Calendars

1. **Identify your best clients and have crews watch these properties to identify when the landscapes will be at their peaks.**
2. **Set aside a full day, or a few half-days, to photograph your best clients' properties. Consider photographing properties regularly when you check in on job sites.**
3. **Use a good quality camera that will create print-quality pictures, or use a traditional film camera and have the images digitized onto a CD.**
4. **Work with a local copy center or printer that you know will give you good quality at a good value.**
5. **Deliver calendars around the holidays and follow-up with a company newsletter or contract renewal letter after the first of the year.**

# 2005

JANUARY			FEBRUARY							MARCH							APRIL						
S	M	T	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S
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6	7	8	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
13	14	15	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
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Image: Cooper's Landscape Management

After burning the images to a disk, we brought them to a local copy center for printing. At a cost of less than \$5 each by having the calendars printed by a company like Office Max or Staples, it was easy to get great quality without the expense of hiring a professional printer. We had also considered printing the calendars in-house, however the cost of purchasing additional ink-jet print cartridges for the project made this a much more expensive option. Moreover, the copy center we used was able to turn the project around in just one day, saving us a lot of time.

Altogether for our last holiday thank you, we printed 33 calendars in two different formats. A few of the calendars for our best clients were 8½-by-11-inch versions with a photo of the property in the middle and the calendar months around the outside edge. The rest of the calendars were smaller with the photo

situated above tear-off months. These came with stick-on magnets, making them perfect for refrigerator doors, filing cabinets and other places where our customers could access them easily.

The smaller calendars, we found, fit inside a large holiday card, letting us send a hand-written note thanking the client, along with the special calendar gift showing off their home and landscape in bloom. The larger calendars we delivered in person, along with an orchid for the client.

This year, Cooper's Landscape Management will be customizing gift calendars for some of our customers, though we'll have fewer than last year. While we were able to set aside three days to take all of our calendar photos last year, this year we found it more difficult to do that. We want to make sure we take the photos when the customers' landscapes look their best, which may mean visit-

ing some properties in April when the azaleas are in bloom or waiting until June for other parts of the landscape to come into season. We've found that it's helpful to let our technicians know about the calendar project and to keep an eye on their properties so they can tell us when they think the landscape will look its best.

A few of the clients for whom we created calendars last year let us know how much they liked the gift, so we'll certainly keep this project in mind for the 2005 holiday season and beyond. Come January, when we send out the first of our two semi-annual newsletters with updated service and pricing information, we hope those clients will take a look at their calendars from Cooper's Landscape Management throughout the year and remember how much our services have benefited their properties.

- Kevin Cooper LL



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Supplement to:

# Lawn & Landscape

11 . 05

## GRASSROOTS ISSUES:

Take Action Now!

Regulations on the use of pesticides, water, plant materials and equipment threaten the future of the industry. Leadership Award winners encourage all lawn and landscape professionals to take action before time runs out.

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 Bayer Environmental Science



it's not about  
**EMPTY PROMISES**



# ( c o n t e n t s )

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### 52 Connie Hom

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Like growing and maintaining your customers' lawns, protecting and promoting your business is a multi-step process.



**Mites give up so easily, it's almost not fair.**

Make it impossible for mites to hide. Combining a brand-new class of chemistry and translaminar activity—which allows the miticide to move completely through the leaf—Forbid™ from Bayer is a powerful new weapon in your fight against mites and whiteflies. Forbid's unique mode of action disrupts water balance causing insects to dehydrate and die. It works against all life stages, from egg to adult, so no mite is safe—they just surrender. For more information on Forbid and its potent mode of action, call 1-800-331-2867 or visit [BayerProCentral.com](http://BayerProCentral.com).

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# raising the bar

True leaders raise the standards by which they judge themselves and the group they lead. We at Bayer Environmental Science are constantly striving to raise the bar for our company and for the Green Industry as a whole.

It's not enough to set goals for one year and work to achieve them – leadership is an ongoing process requiring continual revision and adaptation.

Ever since the merger of Aventis and Bayer Corporation three years ago, our goal has been relatively simple: To help Green Industry members meet the challenges confronting them.

Nothing embodies our efforts to achieve that goal better than the Backed by Bayer initiative.

We started by creating a new national sales region dedicated to lawn and landscape professionals. We expanded that region the second year by more than doubling our sales force. Dedicating personnel to the market brings us closer to the customer.



*Dan Carrothers*

Getting closer to the customer encourages Proximity Innovation, an initiative we started to design products that better suit your needs. Products including Top-Choice™, Revolver™ and Allectus™ are examples of superior solutions provided by Bayer Environmental Science. This year, we have two new products for the lawn and landscape industry: Armada™ and Forbid™. Armada, in particular, was designed and priced with the lawn care operator in mind. A cost-effective fungicide, Armada provides both preventative and curative disease control for up to 30 days.

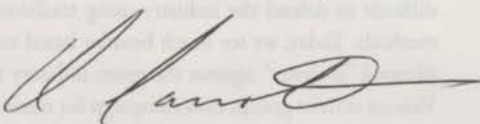
We also provide added value to your business by funding

Green Industry organizations, such as Responsible Industry for a Sound Environment (RISE) and Project Evergreen. In the first pages of this special supplement, you'll read articles explaining the work these organizations perform and why it is so vital for protecting our industry's interests on pesticides. One message is clear: local involvement by lawn care professionals is integral for success.

Lastly, the Backed by Bayer initiative is anchored by our vision for the future. We realize that our success in the lawn and landscape market is directly tied to making you successful. Our goal – helping Green Industry members meet the challenges confronting them – extends beyond chemical products. It's about providing the support and resources you need to run a profitable business.

The 2005 *Lawn & Landscape* Leadership Award winners profiled in this issue are raising the bar for their companies and their fellow industry professionals. All of us at Bayer congratulate each of you on a job well done.

Best wishes for a successful year,



Dan Carrothers,  
Vice President, Chipco Professional Products  
Bayer Environmental Science

**“We realize that our success in the lawn and landscape market is directly tied to making you successful. Our goal – helping Green Industry members meet the challenges confronting them – extends beyond chemical products. It’s about providing the support and resources you need to run a profitable business.”**

**– Dan Carrothers**



(By Frank Gasperini)

# BEST DEFENSE

*As activist attacks against the green industry increase, lawn care operators and landscape*

*contractors can do their part by staying informed of the issues and taking a stand.*

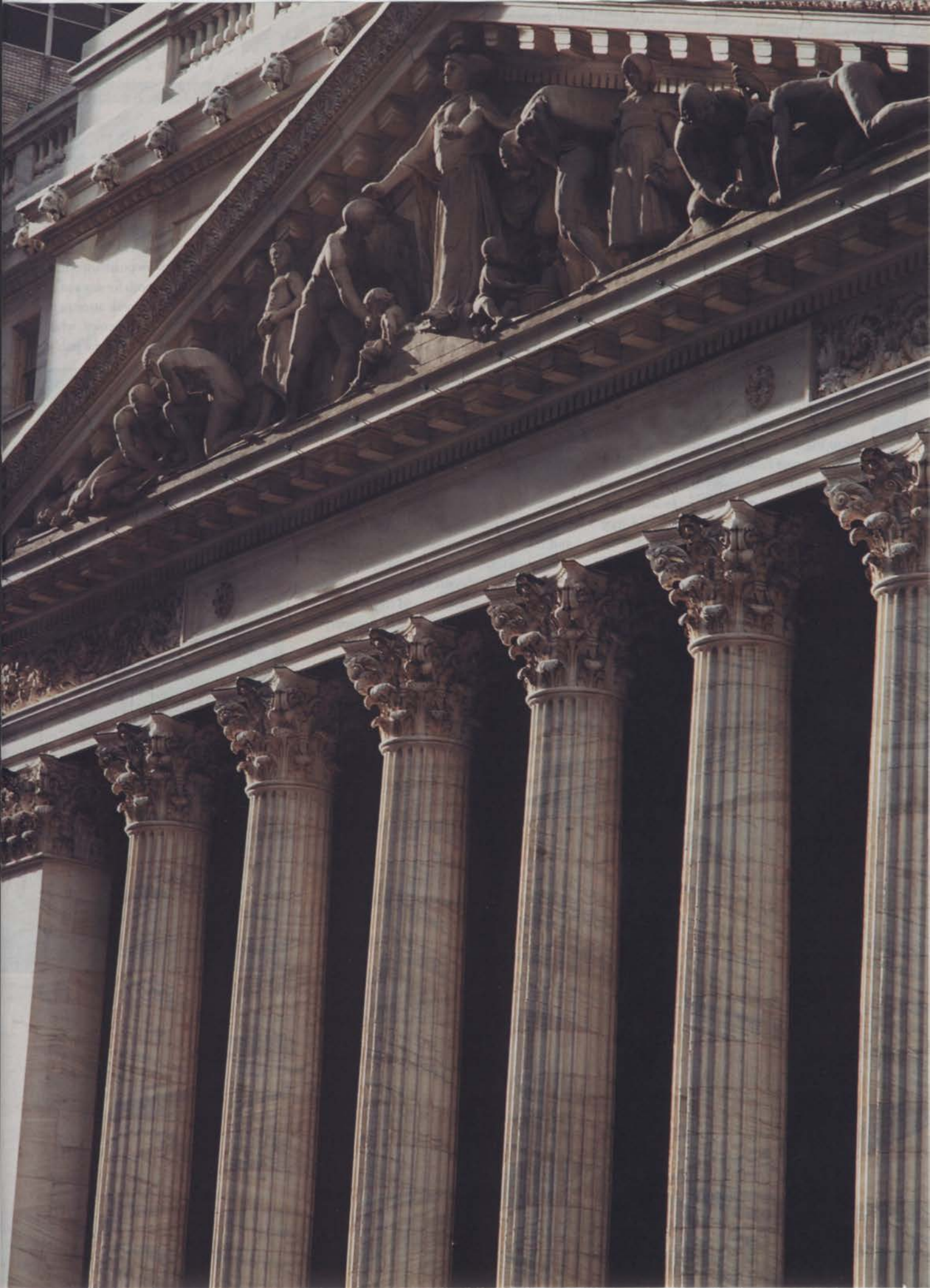
**T**he green industry is a wonderful industry to be affiliated with. It is also under attack by activist groups like never before. The future of the green industry, as we know it, may well be determined within the next three to five years. The question of who will decide what the future looks like—green industry participants or the activists—has yet to be answered. This great industry is worth defending.

Responsible Industry for a Sound Environment (RISE)® is an association that was created in 1991 to address the critical needs of the specialty pest management and plant health industry.

When RISE was formed in 1991, its primary focus was on federal issues, including “lawn care hearings” held in the U.S. Senate with a secondary focus on state issues. In 1991, the emphasis on “local” issues was primarily directed toward ensuring adequate state preemption of local pesticide regulations was in place.

While activist attacks against the use of pesticides and other inputs necessary for the production and maintenance of sod, lawns, landscapes, golf courses, water features, nurseries, trees and other green industry activities is not new, the numbers, intensity and degree of organization within the activist community has noticeably escalated recently. Through widespread use of the Internet for communication, activist groups have shared ideas and strategic plans quickly across the United States and internationally. As a result, our industry suffers similar organized attacks simultaneously at federal, state and multiple local levels making it increasingly difficult to defend the industry using traditional resources and methods. Today, we see much broader based and more carefully planned “activism” against the green industry than ever before. Various activist groups now campaign for restrictions or outright bans not only on pesticide use but also use of fertilizers, water, energy, land-use and even plant types and species. In short, the entire concept of lawns, landscapes, water features and other outdoor spaces is under attack.

The activist community currently appears to have a relatively cohesive strategy to carefully separate their attacks on specialty



pesticide and fertilizer uses from agriculture in a clear effort to divide and conquer. At the same time, they will make every effort to separate segments of the specialty industry, attempting to get a particular group of professional users to help them work against consumer use, or against some other segment of the professional use market, in exchange for less stringent regulations. In the end, bad regulations spread and as soon as one segment of the industry is lost to protect another, the activist's focus turns to the remaining segments.

A key focus of the activist community is to ingrain misuse of a concept called the Precautionary Principle into the U.S. political system at all levels. Activists continue to misuse this concept and will continue to attempt to sneak precautionary language into federal, state and local legislation and regulation. See the text from a recent bill proposed in New York: S.4545, (4): "it shall further be the policy of the state that where threats of harm to human health or the environment exist, lack of full scientific certainty about the cause and effect shall not be viewed as sufficient reason for state or local government to postpone precautionary measures to protect public health or the environment."

As you can see from the proposal, regulation would not be based on "harm" or scientific evidence, but of fear or perception of possible harm. Language such as this nullifies the validity of our current science based federal and state regulatory systems and the concept of state pre-emption at the same time, and would ultimately be fatal to our industry, and to your business.

The most important battlegrounds for this concept will continue to be the federal and state legislatures and, to a lesser extent, federal and state judicial branches. Defense against this threat will use traditional RISE and allied association's lobbying tactics and methods at the federal and state level. This will require added resources and volunteers, on a state-to-state basis, to address specific legislative introductions and will continue to require direct association and grassroots involvement by our industry.

Tools the activist community use to promote and advance the concept of the Precautionary Principle include attempts to roll back both federal and state preemptive

statutes and regulations, biomonitoring for pesticides and other chemicals in the human body, and imposition of bans or restrictions on "cosmetic use" of pesticides.

While many of the issues that threaten our industry at the federal, state and local level are similar, the speed and intensity of the action and the strategies and tactics needed to defend ourselves varies by venue.

#### FEDERAL PESTICIDE & FERTILIZER ISSUES.

Federal or national issues of concern to the green industry may take the form of legislation, regulation or legal action taken by federal legislative bodies. The U.S. Congress and/or U.S. Senate pass legislation. Federal regulatory agencies such as the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) regulate and enforce based on the legislation passed in Congress. Law suits and subsequent rulings by the federal court system may impact how legislation, regulation and enforcement are implemented. RISE, other industry associations, individual companies as well as anti-pesticide and anti-fertilizer activist groups regularly engage in advocacy activities to impact the outcome of federal legislation, regulation, enforcement and litigation.

RISE and other green industry associations work to maintain rational legislation and regulation at the federal level, while continuing to assure that science-based regulation is in place to protect people and the environment.

In general, federal legislation and regulation progresses relatively slowly and with the exception of an occasional legislative "push" there is adequate time to plan and react appropriately to provide input in defense of our industry. This does not mean that our industry can reduce our federal efforts, only that there is generally time to plan and prepare our efforts and coalitions with other industry or allied groups to address federal issues.

Some of the most active federal issues in 2005 include:

- **Endangered Species Act (ESA).** This has been the subject of litigation in federal courts where activist groups have sued the EPA resulting in potential restrictions on the use of pesticides in certain areas.
- **Children's Health & Biomonitoring**

**Issues.** Children's health and "biomonitoring" issues will be heard again in 2005 and 2006. Senator Clinton and Representative Pelosi will likely re-introduce onerous "cradle-to-grave" human "biomonitoring" proposals in continued efforts to blame chemicals for any and all human illnesses. These proposals attempt to play on public fears of the unknown, while discounting the huge benefits to the public



health and well-being provided by turfgrass, green spaces, vegetation management, aquatic management and public health programs.

The issue of biomonitoring, or chemical trespass, lends credence to the activist's intentional misuse of the precautionary principle. By proving that there are chemicals present in people's bodies, under their definition of the precautionary principle, there need be no evidence that any harm or risk really exists



— the fear is enough to stop use of legitimate and beneficial products.

• **Clean Water Act.** Clean Water Act enforcement and litigation relative to pesticides and fertilizers continues to be of concern. The most important areas focus on the issues of spray drift and non-point-source pollution.

Your role as a grassroots member of the green industry in federal affairs is to respond quickly

know your U.S. Congressional representative and be sure he/she has a basic understanding of your business. Beyond participating in the "normal duties of a citizen," you should be prepared to provide input to your national associations, either directly or through your state and regional association and be willing to act quickly as requested to support industry positions.

**STATE & LOCAL PESTICIDE & FERTILIZER ISSUES.** State legislation and regulation moves much more quickly than federal and compared to the federal timetable, local regulation of our industry can appear to move at the speed of light!

Many state legislatures are in session only a few weeks or months each year, resulting in compressed decision making agendas with a flurry of activity the last week or two. In the states, RISE and many other national, regional and statewide advocacy groups retain the services of contract lobbyists to manage issues for us, within the parameters of the association's agreed upon positions.

Some of the most active and potentially damaging issues facing our industry in 2005 and returning in 2006 include:

• **The Precautionary Principle.** While only one state legislature, New York, introduced specific legislation to implement the precautionary principle in 2005, we expect similar legislation to be introduced in five to six more states in 2006.

• **State Preemption of Local Pesticide or Fertilizer Regulation.** The activist community is well pleased with Canadian outcomes the past two years. They recognize that the key legal hurdle to achieve similar results in the United States is state preemption. If you have followed this issue, you know that Toronto and several other Canadian cities have virtually banned the use of pesticides in lawn care for homeowners and professional users alike. Several U.S. cities and counties have considered regulations, or passed non-binding "resolutions" restrictive of so called "cosmetic use of pesticides." Other U.S. cities and counties have already restricted the use of fertilizer on turfgrass and others are currently working on restrictive regulations.

The activists understand that their federal

and state efforts to severely restrict/ban use of our industry products are slow and costly. In the end, science and logic do carry at least some weight at the federal and state legislative and regulatory levels and the processes are relatively slow. At the level of local politics however, ordinances and regulations can often be conceived, proposed and enacted in a matter of days and may be determined on the basis of emotion with no justification in science and/or fact. Due to the number of political subdivisions, the level of difficulty monitoring and reacting to "local issues," as well as the financial and human resources required, underscores the critical importance of maintaining and strengthening current preemption and obtaining additional pesticide and fertilizer preemption statutes.

During 2005, seven states proposed legislation to weaken or eliminate preemption of local pesticide regulation. These states are reacting to activist pressure being applied from the local level. While none of these bills passed, we will be forced to use scarce resources to oppose them in the same states again in 2006, as well as several other states where legislatures are already working to draft legislation.

Defending, maintaining and strengthening preemption for both pesticide and fertilizer products, along with combating individual attempts to implement local restrictions or bans is likely to be the most time and resource intensive activity RISE and many allied associations will face during the next two to five years.

• **Proposed Bans on "Cosmetic Use" of Pesticides.** While the issue of "cosmetic" and/or "aesthetic" use of pesticides and fertilizer will remain a high priority, it is generally addressed in conjunction with the overall issues of preemption and/or the precautionary principle. (Water, energy and labor uses are also under attack and these issues are among the highest priorities for other associations and industry groups). Generally, the "cosmetic/aesthetic" use issue is a tool the activists have found to resonate with some segments and can be used to move toward their ultimate goals of banning all chemical pesticides and fertilizers.

Combating "cosmetic/aesthetic" use bans will continue to be a high priority. However,



when asked to contact your federal legislators or regulators. For the most part, your national associations will take the lead in monitoring and lobbying relative to federal legislation and regulation on a day-to-day basis. As citizens, you should be aware of your legislators and federal agencies, cast an informed vote in every election, participate in and contribute to individual campaigns if you desire, and if you are a business owner you should make efforts to meet and

they are merely tools activists use to attack pre-emption and precautionary principle issues.

• **Biomonitoring.** Responding to a recent CDC (Centers for Disease Control) report on chemicals detected in human blood, the American Chemical Council said, "The mere detection of a chemical does not necessarily indicate a risk to health. Thus, the information in the report should not be undue cause for concern, but a springboard for better understanding." The activists disagree, under their interpretation of the precautionary principle detection is reason to act – even to ban – products and services.

The State of California recently passed Senate Bill 600, legislating human biomonitoring. Several other states have considered

such bills in 2005. In 2006, we expect to see as many as six to eight states consider requiring biomonitoring of the general population.

**"Our industry is under attack like never before. Therefore, we must fight, like never before, to defend and preserve it." – Frank Gasperini**

such bills in 2005. In 2006, we expect to see as many as six to eight states consider requiring biomonitoring of the general population.

• **Local Ordinances to Ban or Otherwise Limit or Restrict the Use of Pesticides or Fertilizers.** While federal issues may move slowly, offering many opportunities for stakeholder input over months or even years, legislation and regulation at the state level can be introduced, debated and passed in a matter of months or weeks, and at the local level your world could be turned upside-down overnight.

With 50 state legislatures and more than 80,000 smaller governmental units, one can easily understand the potential for massive "overload" simply attempting to track all potential legislation or regulation, much less actively defending the industry for any trade or professional association acting alone. When we look at the entire green industry, however, adding all of the hundreds of thousands people who are employed in manufacturing, researching, registering, selling, servicing, and using pesticides and fertilizers, the numbers are more manageable if we can get more grassroots participation.

Because of the huge number of opportuni-

ties, activists continue their attempts to pass legislation or to litigate for elimination of state preemption. At the local level legislation and regulation are not science-based as they are at the federal level. Local politics are steeped in emotion and issues are decided by the numbers and passions of those who show up for meetings and hearings. It is indeed time to hang together to defend the green industry.

• **Container Recycling.** This is an emerging issue. If you have not heard about pesticide container recycling in your state, you will during 2006. You will hear it from your associations, your state regulators, your Co-operative Extension and your suppliers. The specialty pesticide industry will partner closely with agriculture to substantially increase the

percentage of our plastic Professional Use pesticide containers that are recycled.

**TAKE A STAND.** Our industry is under attack like never before. Therefore, we must fight, like never before, to defend and preserve it. As the activists continue to focus on state and local regulation, each and every one of you who work in the green industry must become involved. It is no longer enough for association staff, manufacturers, distributors and a few large professional user groups to carry the burden.

Also, continued negative comments by our own industry, directed at other segments must stop. Finger pointing and blaming other groups may be what Winston Churchill had in mind when he said "appeasement is feeding others to the crocodiles, in hopes that they will eat you last." If we do not stand and defend our industry together, we will all eventually be eaten by the activist agenda. Appeasement of the activist demands will not work.

It is time to heed the words of Benjamin Franklin who said, "Now we must all hang to-

gether, or we will assuredly hang separately."

What can you, personally, do to defend the industry? The first priority is to ALWAYS do your own job well, project a positive and professional image and be known to your own customers as a person or company who does the right things. Additionally, it is imperative that you participate in our democracy and vote for candidates whom you believe will legislate and regulate fairly, ethically and with consideration of real science.

If you are the owner or manager of a business, you should know and be known by your state, county and local elected officials whose districts encompass your home and business. Those elected officials should know who you are, what business you are in and how many people you employ.

Everyone in our great industry must work to stay informed of what is going on relative to legislation, regulation, news and activist actions of impact to our industry. The only way RISE or your other associations will find out about local threats in time to act is if you tell us. Then, once local threats are identified, the industry needs you to be willing to attend local hearings and testify to defend it. While associations can help you prepare, provide talking points and encourage you, no one has the positive impact at a local hearing as someone who lives and works in that town. We must not allow the activists to win in local political arenas because they showed up and we did not.

Take your place, stand up and defend the best industry I know. It is time for us to hang together, hang tough and work cohesively to assure that we have a viable green industry to pass along to future generations.

*Frank Gasperini is Director of State Issues for RISE (Responsible Industry for a Sound Environment)®. RISE can provide current and accurate information on issues and research affecting the specialty pesticide industry. RISE is able to provide viewpoints from its members – as well as legislative viewpoints – as it monitors legislative and regulatory issues in Washington, D.C. and the states. To contact RISE, call 202/872-3860, fax 202/463-0474 or write 1156 15th St. NW, Suite 400; Washington, D.C. 20005.*



*Fairway Green uses education and prevention to keep customers happy and generate additional revenue.*

# disease is good for business

Customers who are knowledgeable about turf pests are a rarity. However, the damage caused by turf diseases such as brown patch and dollar spot are easily recognized by the majority of Kevin Herrmann's customers. As the manager of Fairway Green: The Lawn and Shrub Care Pros in Raleigh, North Carolina, Herrmann has gone to great lengths to keep his customers educated. By doing so, Herrmann has been able to use fungicides and other preventative measures to grow his business by selling add-on services to many of his customers.

**SUCCESS WITH FUNGICIDES.** To ensure that his customers were happy with the preventative program that he provides, Herrmann decided to try a new product that had received great reviews. In 2004, Bayer Environmental Science sales representative, Michael Owen, offered Herrmann the opportunity to participate in a trial of Armada™, the manufacturer's newest fungicide product.

Designed specifically for lawn care professionals, Armada controls the two toughest lawn diseases, brown patch and dollar spot, and provides control for up to 30 days. The Armada trial turned out to be quite a success for Fairway Green. Even though hot and dry weather conditions had not been optimal for disease problems, Herrmann was able to use the fungicide on the fescue that is prevalent in the area and it provided curative disease control in only four days.

Fairway Green completed the trial in Raleigh on two lawns with two applications. If using Armada, Herrmann estimates that he could dial back his fungicide program to four or five applications per year. The company's current turf programs consist of six fungicide applications in the Raleigh area and seven applications in the Charlotte area.

Although fungicide applications are not included in Herrmann's standard program, disease control is always offered as an add-on service. "Typically, the homeowners interested



Kevin Herrmann

in the service fall into the high-end of my customer base," says Herrmann. "A major advantage of using Armada is that it costs less. That will allow me to expand the universe of customers and prospects while achieving better margins on my high-end customers that already receive the service."

Herrmann also added that as an add-on service, Armada has been easy to sell to customers who aren't interested in spending a fortune on preventative control. "Armada's price point has been a welcome relief for lawn care professionals like me who offer fungicide programs."

#### TAKE AWAY TIP

Take advantage of free customer education materials available from Bayer at [fungicidetools.com](http://fungicidetools.com).



(By Jonathan Katz)

# A CANADIAN PESTICIDE UPDATE

*Pesticide bans are spreading in Canada. Could the U.S. be next?*

**A**lan White fears the tools of his trade are being taken away from him. White is a lawn care operator (LCO) in Canada where pesticide bans and restrictions in more than 70 municipalities have hampered LCOs' abilities to combat weed, pest and disease problems.

The bylaws have been spurred by environmental activists' demands and public concern regarding the safety of pesticides. Proponents of the lawn care industry's right to use pesticides say the laws are based on misinformation and that they unfairly target LCOs while letting homeowners and municipalities off the hook.

The double standard is taking business away from trained professionals and putting it in the hands of novices, say several LCOs and industry experts. "My biggest concern is that if all of the tools of the trade are taken out of the toolbox and the consumer is still allowed to purchase them readily at an economical cost, why would the consumer hire a professional to use an inferior product at a greater cost?" says White, president, Turf Systems,

Burlington, Ontario." The product that is left as an alternative for the lawn care operator won't manage the job as well."

Even more disconcerting for some LCOs is the prospect of U.S. municipalities adopting pesticide laws similar to Canada. "This year, we've seen bills introduced in Connecticut and New York where they refer to the success of Canada doing it," says Tom Delaney, director of government affairs, the Professional Landcare Network, Herndon, Va.

As a result of such pesticide restrictions spreading in Canada and the United States, industry professionals are organizing efforts to overturn current laws and to prevent proposed legislation from taking effect.

**FIGHTING BACK.** Although some U.S. municipalities have taken steps to reduce or limit pesticide use, Canadian anti-pesticide activists have been much more successful in their attempts to ban pesticides. It's unclear exactly why the issue has impacted Canada more than it has the United States, but LCOs in Canada and industry experts seem to agree that the lawmaking author-



ity of Canadian municipalities has played a major role.

In the United States, federal laws often preempt state or local legislation. But in Canada, recent court rulings have given local governments more lawmaking power. The first ruling that impacted LCOs stemmed

from a 1991 bylaw enacted by the Montreal suburb of Hudson to ban the cosmetic use of pesticides. In 1992, two lawn care companies challenged the bylaw after they were cited for unlawfully applying pesticides. The companies lost challenges in two Quebec courts before appealing the decisions to the

Supreme Court of Canada.

The companies argued that the bylaw conflicted with federal legislation and that local governments don't have the authority to enact such laws. In 2001, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled against the lawn care companies, upholding the Hudson bylaw. By then, at least 36 municipalities in Quebec had established similar laws and other municipalities throughout the country began enacting pesticide bans or restrictions.

One of those cities was Toronto where in 2003 the city passed a law that limited what pesticides could be used and where they could be applied. This time, CropLife Canada, an association representing pesticide manufacturers, challenged the law and lost. The organization unsuccessfully appealed the decision in the Ontario Court of Appeals in November 2004 and is now asking the Supreme Court to

overturn the ruling. Meanwhile, LCOs throughout Canada are trying to understand the nuances of the law, which took effect in September of this year.

## IPM SCHOOL

Convincing activists and the public that your lawn care company is environmentally friendly requires more than words. That's why an integrated pest management (IPM) accreditation program has been established in Ontario, Canada to add credibility to lawn care operators' (LCO) claims that they're being environmental stewards.

The program is not mandatory for LCOs in Ontario, but it helps lawn care companies convey a message that they're doing everything they can to minimize the use of pesticides. "It's something we felt we needed to do in order to maintain trust in an industry where trust is eroding quickly because of activist messages that are not always true," says Tony DiGiovanni, executive director of the Landscape Ontario Horticultural Trades Association, Milton, Ontario.

To obtain IPM accreditation, LCOs must pass an exam and agree to run the company based on IPM principals, says DiGiovanni, whose association established the program, which costs \$400 annually to complete. The program is also audited by a third party to ensure it's credible.

The first step toward obtaining accreditation is passing a test based on a turf IPM manual. The test ensures the LCO understands what IPM means, DiGiovanni says. The LCO must also agree to provide IPM training for the company's staff and to divulge his pesticides purchases.

The purpose of reporting pesticide purchases is to establish a benchmark for how much of the product is necessary to obtain optimal control. "Companies that are below that benchmark are fine," explains DiGiovanni. "If they're above that benchmark, they have to look at why they're using more than others for the same results."



### THE FALLOUT.

The Toronto law permits pesticide applications, provided disease or pest infestations exceed a certain threshold, which

is defined in the bylaw as "the presence of pests in numbers or under conditions which involve an immediate or potential risk of substantial loss or damage." Weed control is not listed as a permissible use for pesticides. But currently the law doesn't apply to Toronto homeowners, who can purchase and apply pesticides until Sept. 1, 2007, which White says could hurt business for LCOs.

"The health department has said the products, in their view, are unsafe," White says. "Commercial applicators had to cease using registered products as of Sept. 1 or they're subject to fines. The argument here

is if the products are dangerous, homeowners shouldn't be allowed to use them as well, but they are. It kind of makes you wonder what their motives are."

Additionally, the homeowner could pose a financial risk to LCOs. During the first two years of the Greater Montreal Area ban, LCO Chris Lemcke estimates that customer renewal rates decreased by 10 percent. "The first year of the bylaw was certainly more difficult," says Lemcke, technical coordinator for Weed Man USA. "A big concern in Toronto is that once we can't provide the pristine lawns that clients are used to that they're going to get frustrated and just do the lawn work themselves."

White says he doesn't anticipate losing too many customers from the Toronto ban because most of his customers are on lawn care programs that incorporate more than just weed control. But he adds that some of his lower-income customers who could only afford weed control may be lost.

Another exemption from the bylaw is the use of pesticides in some circumstances on

ment officers before one confirmed that he could apply pesticides at the cemetery.

Similarly, fatty acids are exempt from the bylaw, but LCOs are still required to post a sign saying a pesticide was applied at that location. Some enforcement officers say if a sign must be posted, the applied product is a pesticide and cannot be used. "There's just total confusion in this, and hopefully we're not going to get fined in the meantime," Lemcke shares.

Muddling the situation even more are different laws for neighboring municipalities. "What drives us crazy is every bylaw is different," DiGiovanni says. "We say if you feel you need bylaws, why go from municipality to municipality reinventing the whole process. Do it at the provincial level and create one piece of legislation for everybody."

At one point, Lemcke operated in 20 different jurisdictions in Quebec before they became a part of Greater Montreal. "It's less complicated now that it's the Greater Montreal area, but you still have cities outside the

the first thing they see is 'Pesticides Banned in Toronto,' but they're still using them at their house in Mississauga. There's a lot of confusion right now."

**THE ALTERNATIVES.** Pesticide bans in Canada have forced LCOs to experiment with different lawn care approaches. Cultural practices, such as proper irrigation, pruning and careful plant handling, are known to make plants less susceptible to disease and infestations. Anti-pesticide activists often cite cultural practices as an effective alternative to pesticides, but White says this was already a standard lawn care method for LCOs. "When you look at the alternatives, they're all the cultural practices we've been preaching for the last 30 to 40 years," he says. "It's not so much the alternative to plant health care, but the first offense. But first offenses don't always work."

White compares cultural approaches for turf to people practicing healthy lifestyles. For instance, people can eat low-fat foods, exercise regularly and abstain from smoking and still become sick. When this happens, a trip to the doctor and some medication can help alleviate the symptoms and restore a person's health. The same can be said for turf that is diagnosed with a weed, insect or disease problem despite the fact that it's been cared for and is in good shape.

Now that many LCOs in Canada don't have certain products at their disposal, they're left with organic or biological pesticides. In Montreal, Weed Man is applying a beet extract that shows promising results over time but costs 10 to 20 percent more and is much less effective than traditional pesticides, Lemcke says.

Some LCOs in Canada are using corn gluten to battle weed infestations, but Lemcke says the product is only effective in large concentrations. It takes about 20 pounds of corn gluten per square foot to achieve results. "I would have to have a warehouse of an impossible size to store the product and you would



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public parks, sports fields and golf courses, a clause that makes another industry professional question the law's rationale. "It makes no sense at all because if the whole premise is that you can't use pesticides because they're too dangerous why aren't they dangerous in these areas?" argues Tony DiGiovanni, executive director, Landscape Ontario Horticultural Trades Association, Milton, Ontario. "The logic is not there."

The bylaws also are not clearly defined. For example, in some circumstances cemeteries are exempt from the Toronto law, but Lemcke says it took him five phone calls to bylaw enforce-

area that don't have bylaws, so you have to send a different renewal letter to them for a different program, which makes running a business more complicated."

White says the varying standards make it difficult for him to explain to customers and employees why pesticides are OK to use in some areas but not OK in others. "Why is it not safe in Toronto, but it's OK for the city right beside it?" he relates. "And if it isn't safe for Toronto, then as a company should we be applying it next door? As a result, you have to explain to your customers all the time the science because they open the headlines and

have drag trailers around everywhere because you have to use so much of it," Lemcke says. "And I'm not sure whether it's doing anything to stop weeds or just smothering weeds. Then you have dogs rolling around in it because it's in dog food, and it actually smells like rotting bodies after it rains."

Because organic products are less effective than traditional pesticides, Lemcke says he can no longer guarantee his customers the treatments will work. "You can't make promises anymore to customers because you don't have the reliable products, so you lose customers because you can't provide results or reliability," he explains.

The other problem with biological pesticides is the misconception that they're safer, Delaney says. Traditional pesticides are subject to rigorous testing procedures in the

ada because LCOs there didn't take action immediately. "We missed the boat in Canada when we didn't fight the posting issue right at the beginning," he explains. "That's where we lost the battle because it provides the activists an opportunity to say the product is not safe because they see signs all around town."

When posting laws took effect more than 10 years ago, MacDonald says the activists would gather hundreds of signatures while LCOs and the rest of the "silent majority" did little to combat their efforts. Fighting for the right to grow healthy lawns doesn't rouse the public like other environmental issues, says Debra Conlon, executive director, The Urban Pest Management Council of Canada, Etobicoke, Ontario. "We're trying to stop something, and there isn't a lot of informa-

as evidenced by posting laws in New York state and elsewhere. Delaney recommends that U.S. LCOs remain vigilant of proposed changes in pesticide laws and that they organize much like the activists do. "The No. 1 defense is going to be monitoring changes in legislation," he explains. "You have to mobilize and teach members of the industry to watch for this stuff and then teach them to testify."

Delaney adds that LCOs need to get their customers involved in the battle. "We have to mobilize our customers and get them to understand the science and testify at some of these hearings, so they can say, 'This isn't what we want.' We have to be as vocal and passionate as some of the activists have been."

But MacDonald says getting customers involved could be a risky venture. His concern is if customers write letters to city council, the letters will become public record and make them activist targets. Instead, the industry must take responsibility for fighting pesticide legislation, he says. "We have to constantly be in touch with politicians because activists are constantly badgering them about the issue," he says. "We almost need to send a weekly one-paragraph e-mail bulletin to each councilor across Canada to make our point. Otherwise, we're going to have an uphill battle."

The Urban Pest Management Council of Canada is doing its part to educate the public on pesticide issues with a public relations program. "What we've found is that this isn't an issue that's at the top of the public's mind, but they have a latent concern, so what we want to do is provide them with some balanced information," Conlon says. "I think that's the way to deal with it long term."

Part of the public relations message LCOs need to convey to consumers is that they're environmentalists, too. "If you ever ask anyone in the green industry why they chose this profession, they'll tell you it's because it works with the environment," White says. "Most people got into this profession not to do harm to the environment, but to do good. Unfortunately, the public feels that we don't really manage the environment, and it's probably happened because we never really communicated where our passion lies."

**"The health department has said the products, in their view, are unsafe.**

**Commercial applicators had to cease using registered products as of Sept. 1**

**or they're subject to fines. The argument here is if the products are danger-**

**ous, homeowners shouldn't be allowed to use them as well, but they are.**

**It kind of makes you wonder what their motives are." — Alan White**

United States and Canada before they can be registered. In some cases, pesticides are scrutinized more than pharmaceutical drugs before they're made available to the public, according to Delaney.

In fact, traditional pesticides may be safer than some organic substances, Delaney says, citing an incident in which a university researcher in California said he suffered a severe allergic reaction after experimenting with a castor bean-based pesticide. "Just because something is natural or organic does not mean it is safe for 100 percent of the population," he says.

**CHANGING PERCEPTIONS.** The only way to stop more laws from being enacted in Canada and in the United States is for LCOs to become more vocal, says Bob MacDonald, owner, Weed Man Orillia, Orillia, Ontario. Pesticide regulations spread throughout Can-

ada because LCOs there didn't take action immediately. "We missed the boat in Canada when we didn't fight the posting issue right at the beginning," he explains. "That's where we lost the battle because it provides the activists an opportunity to say the product is not safe because they see signs all around town."

When posting laws took effect more than 10 years ago, MacDonald says the activists would gather hundreds of signatures while LCOs and the rest of the "silent majority" did little to combat their efforts. Fighting for the right to grow healthy lawns doesn't rouse the public like other environmental issues, says Debra Conlon, executive director, The Urban Pest Management Council of Canada, Etobicoke, Ontario. "We're trying to stop something, and there isn't a lot of informa-

tion out there that tells municipalities they should stop," she says. "You don't see people marching so they can kill their grubs, but you do see people marching because they have a cause. So we don't have that general population that's active even though they do buy the product and enjoy the product."

Delaney speculates that a more vocal public has helped the United States resist sweeping changes in pesticide laws. "Part of the problem is Canadian customers aren't as verbal and independent as some of the U.S. public is, and they've taken some of this lying down," he concludes. "It's the result of a little different personality of the Canadian public vs. the U.S. public. In other words, it ain't worth fighting over. But for Americans, everything is worth fighting over."

However, Delaney cautions that the United States is not immune to pesticide restrictions,





Bayer  
Environmental Science

Educational campaign aims to bite back against fire ants in key affected markets.

## Bayer Environmental Science and TopChoice™ Fuel Fire Ant Awareness



Southern states labeled the "Fire Ant 13" know too well the fury imposed by the voracious fire ant. While most residents who live with fire ants think of the pest as merely a nuisance, few realize the serious public health threat that lurks right below ground. So, in 2005, Bayer Environmental Science (Bayer ES), embarked on a 13-state educational tour to provide consumers with the knowledge necessary to protect their families and pets. The campaign consisted of fire ant awareness days, free TopChoice™ donations, and local event sponsorships.

In Jacksonville, Fla., Bayer ES representatives, along with local lawn care operators (LCO) and fire ant crusader, Captain TopChoice, worked with the office of Mayor John Peyton and proclaimed "Fire Ant Awareness Day."

Mayor Peyton said, "The city of Jacksonville wants to raise awareness in our community and contribute to the quality of life of its citizens. I urge all to join in the national effort to raise awareness and help prevent fire ant infestation and damage."

Bayer ES also donated TopChoice fire ant control to the baseball grounds and sponsored a Jacksonville Suns game. Captain TopChoice was present at the game, where he appeared on the "fire ant-free" field to throw the first pitch. Children interacted with the fire ant-fighting superhero, while parents were armed with valuable fire ant tips and LCO contact information.

In Plano, Texas, Bayer coordinated with Deputy Mayor Pro Tem Scott Johnson and Plano YMCA vice president of operations, Tim Stitzer, to keep a popular public play-

ing area for kids fire ant free. On July 7, Top Choice fire ant control was donated and applied to protect children and adults who frequently use the grounds and athletic fields for outdoor activities.

During the event, Plano YMCA vice president of operations, Tim Stitzer noted, "Though bug bites and stings are a part of every Texas summer, we're happy to have a fun, educational way to inform all of our guests of the threats fire ants pose – and we're thrilled that Deputy Mayor Johnson is here to help us kick it off!"

By attracting the attention of consumer and trade media, as well as through direct contact, Bayer was able to reach more than 73,251,149 consumers to date with fire ant prevention tips and information.

Below is a list of other TopChoice donations and sponsorships, which took place this season – to name a few,

- Atlanta Dogwood Festival, Ga.
- Marshall Fire Ant Festival, Texas
- New Orleans Zephyrs Field, La.
- Savannah Sand Gnats Field, Ga.
- Joseph P. Riley, Jr. Park, Charleston, S.C.
- Thomas Brooks Park, Spring Green, Cary, N.C.
- Whitewater Park, Rudy's Termite & Pest Control, Rancho Mirage, Calif.
- Atlanta PAWS, Top Turf, Decatur, Ga.
- 2005 Clarksville Hydroplane Challenge, Va.

For more information, visit [www.topchoicetools.com](http://www.topchoicetools.com) or contact your local field sales representative.

Fire ants a problem at your school?





# AN INDUSTRY DEFENSE CASE STUDY

(By Terry Kurth)

*Lawn Care Operator Terry Kurth shares the strategies he used during the Wisconsin phosphorous ban fight.*

Madison, Wis., in particular and the surrounding county of Dane in general have a long history of being extremely "politically correct" and full of hotbeds of environmental activism. A couple of relatively recent elections to key positions created the perfect storm to which the desire to ban phosphorous in all lawn fertilizers was spawned. Let me lay out the players involved and the chain of events they initiated.

Kathleen Falk, a member of the activist group called Environmental Decade and an attorney within the former office of the Public Intervenor, was elected Dane County Executive about five years ago. The Public Intervenor personnel acted like Don Quixote's in that they could pursue any injustice they felt was occurring within any state governmental branch. They had all but free rein to try to sue various entities to try to make policy changes and about 90

percent of their efforts were geared towards environmental activism. When this department was finally abolished by a sensible legislature and governor about 10 years ago, Falk decided to enter the political arena. Upon winning the very powerful position of Dane County Executive she immediately began to push many of her misguided environmental initiatives.

In 2003, she gained a very strong ally when Dave Cieslewicz, the former head of an environmental activist group called *100 Friends of Wisconsin*, became Mayor of Madison.

Almost immediately they gave marching orders to their staffs to begin the concurrent process of getting both a county resolution and a city ordinance passed that would ban the use of phosphorous on home lawns. Madison is a gorgeous city that sits amongst four lakes of which two are quite large, Mendota and Monona. Keep-



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ing them as weed and algae free as possible has long been a goal of all of the citizens of this area. Over the last few years, there have been increased amounts of weeds as well as algal blooms. There was a report of a dog dying due to inhalation of the poisonous blue-green algae a year ago. The stench of decaying weeds washing up on the shore also added to the dismay of many. This has caused swimming, boating and aesthetic problems for lakeshore owners and all users of our precious lakes creating much frustration amongst Dane County residents. Thus the mood was right to begin an emotional plea, along with including some cherry picked science, to get the ban of phosphorous in place.

They immediately got the media involved by calling a press conference on the lakeshore and announcing their intentions to try to save our lakes. Our afternoon daily newspaper has always been proud to call themselves "progressive" and thus was an immediate, biased sign-on to the cause. The morning daily has a significantly higher readership and is considered more moderate/conservative, but it's editorial staff leans a little left when considering environmental issues. Thus both papers definitely were more in the camp of the misguided. The University of Wisconsin is located in Madison and has the most well-known and respected Limnology Department (study of lakes) in the country. The advocates enlisted the help of a Ph.D. candidate from Limnology – Elena Bennett – to do all kinds of public speaking and research sharing promoting the phosphorous ban. Dr. Steve Carpenter from the Limnology Department also made a number of comments and released supporting articles to the media, the City Council and the Dane County Board. Falk's staff also brought in a hired limnology expert from the Minneapolis area – John Barten – who had research showing that other lake communities had shown distinct improvements in water quality after banning phosphorous. They then enlisted various advocacy groups, such as the Friends of Lake Wingra, Yahara Fisherman's Club, lakeshore homeowners and paddling groups. These groups were to not only write letters to the editors at newspapers and to various

lected officials but to also show up at public hearings in support of the ban.

Once the needed players were pretty well in place for the supporters of the ban, it was time to get the proposal introduced. Andy Olsen, a liberal member of the County Board soon introduced it with a lot of support from fellow Supervisor Brett Hulsey, who just happens to be the local head of the Sierra Club. Over at the City Council, Greg Markle proposed the ordinance banning phosphorous. Once again there were many stories in the local papers talking about this new proposal and how it may help clean up our treasured lakes.

In the meantime, those of us who were pretty clear that a small amount of available phosphorous was necessary for proper turf nutrition, due to past and recently presented research, began to get better organized for the oncoming debate. Brian Swingle, executive director of the Wisconsin Green Industry Federation (WGIF), became the coordinator of the overall effort and the most visible spokesperson. The WGIF is a federation whose intent is to protect and promote the best interests of the various professional groups involved in the Green Industry in Wisconsin. It is made up of more than 700 members who are also members of their individual professional groups: Lawn Association of Wisconsin Network, Wisconsin State Nurseryman's Association, Wisconsin Landscape Contractors Association, Commercial Flower Growers of Wisconsin (CFGW), Wisconsin Sod Producers Association and Garden's Beautiful Garden Centers.

Terry Kurth, chairman of the Legislative

Committee of the WGIF and Ed Knapton of the CFGW helped spearhead the turnout for public hearings that were to be coming up as the city ordinance and county resolutions moved forward. It was immediately recognized that we needed to get some of our UW-Madison turf researchers involved in giving their opinion on whether banning phosphorous was a good idea. Dr. John Stier, UW Turf



extension specialist, and Dr. Wayne Kussow, soil scientist with many published research papers on nutrient runoff from turf were both convinced that they needed to give unbiased testimony on the issue. The Wisconsin Golf Course Superintendents Association was also extremely helpful in getting people to testify and to write letters as needed. We also got Kurt Steinke, a Soils Department Ph.D. candidate,

to give written and verbal testimony on his research on nutrient runoff issues from turf areas. Knowing that a dangerous precedent was being set, Jim Skillen from CropLife America gave great testimony on the need for phosphorous to be available for turf vigor. He also kept telling any local official who would listen that any local ordinance or resolution banning phosphorous would not only be misguided but also illegal due to non-compliance with the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide and Rodenticide Act (FIFRA). He also felt it unfairly restricted fair trade.

As you can see from some of the parties mentioned in the previous few paragraphs, this created some interesting conflicts of

ning phosphorous and that of the county were running roughly two weeks apart. In essence both proposals were the same with the exception that initially the county resolution would also in effect ban the use of organics because they contain phosphorous as well. The city ordinance had an exclusion of organics being banned.

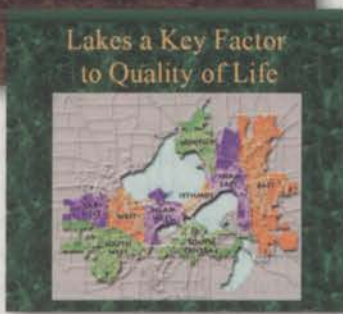
Let me now tell you of the main arguments for banning phosphorous in turf fertilizers which came across as quite effective. Elena Bennett, the Limnology Ph.D. candidate, had gone out and soil tested more than 100 lawns in the Madison area (some just happened to be of the supporting alderpersons) and found that all had sufficient levels of phosphorous available

and thus did not need phosphorous from other sources. The rule changes did allow for applying phosphorous where tests showed that phosphorous was below accepted available amounts or in the case of a new seeding. Dr. Carpenter claimed that he felt that by banning phosphorous in lawn fertilizer there would be two to three fewer algae blooms in a

typical summer on our Madison lakes. In effect, lowering this nasty occurrence by about 25 to 30 percent. This in turn would greatly reduce the chance of any pet or human getting sick or dying due to being exposed to

blue-green algae. They also claimed that weed growth would be reduced from less available phosphorous in our lakes due to reduced runoff from yards.

From our standpoint, we agreed that most lawns do not need a lot of phosphorous but there are times that it becomes available to



*Soil erosion near a Wisconsin lake due to thin and unhealthy turf (above, left). City workers store phosphorous-ridden grass clippings near a lake – could this be the reason for some run-off (above, right). John Hendrick's own dirt driveway – another example of poor erosion control by this Dane County Supervisor and Secretary of the county's Environment, Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee (far left). The many lakes of Madison, Wis. (far right). LCO Terry Kurth (previous page).*

opinions. You had two different Ph.D. candidates jousting on the issue based on their research findings. You also had the Soils and Horticulture Ph.D. turf experts not agreeing with the way the findings were forthcoming out of the Limnology Department and the so-called water quality expert out of Minnesota. This is not something that is seen that frequently on a public-debated issue and certainly to my knowledge had never happened within our industry before this conflict.

The timetables of the city ordinance ban-

plant uptake and therefore 3 percent phosphorous should be the maximum allowed in fertilizer. We also stated that allowing organics to be used and not inorganic sources was counter-productive to their argument. The ratio of nitrogen to phosphorous in an organic fertilizer is generally either 2:1 or 3:1 (6-3-0 or 6-2-0, etc.). This means that to get one pound of nitrogen down at the time of fertilizing you will be applying either one-third or one-half of a pound of phosphorous as well, which Bennett's soil tests show would be excessive. If allowing a 3 percent maximum of phosphorous in an inorganic fertilizer (24-3-16, etc.) the resulting phosphorous amounts applied would be considerably less. The Madison and Milwaukee Sewerage Districts both manufacture fertilizers out of recycled human waste and therefore

in a thicker, more vigorous condition this problem would not have occurred or at least been deemed negligible. Quality research had shown that most phosphorous runoff came from decaying leave matter from both trees and grass in late fall, winter and spring – not the times when fertilizer was being applied. Thus banning of small amounts of phosphorous being applied would have minute or no positive end results. Even the limnology experts, when pushed, admitted that in the whole pie chart, best case scenario, banning phosphorous from lawn fertilizers would only have a .5-1 percent affect on phosphorous entering our lakes. We handed out copies of the articles that RISE and CropLife had put together on the value of turf in increasing our quality of life and it's positive effects on our environment.

were being played by those who were pushing the ban. Brian Swingle, a registered lobbyist, was told by a Madison city staffer that he didn't have to register with the city as a lobbyist. When an alderman became aware that he hadn't registered, and that indeed a city ordinance required it, he sought financial fines. A staffer for another one of the proponents subliminally threatened Dr. Kussow that he would be fined for testifying without being registered as a lobbyist. As a UW Professor his job is to share information, just like the limnology professor and his Ph.D. candidate. The other side's experts were not threatened. Both sides actively jockeyed for sound bites with the media that was there to cover the hearings. Whenever Brian Swingle or myself would see a media person interviewing one of the proponents, we would stand near by, listen and then go up to give a rebuttal to the reporter. There was much political pressure "to look green" to the readers, listeners and viewers of the media coverage.

**"The city of Madison, Wis., and the surrounding county of Dane have a long history of being extremely politically correct and full of hotbeds of environmental activism. A couple of relatively recent elections to key positions created the perfect storm to which the desire to ban phosphorous in all lawn fertilizers was spawned." – Terry Kurth**

There were a number of other things we learned as this process unfolded. Most committees, with the chairs appointed by the Mayor and County Executive, were "kangaroo courts" who were going through the legal process but whose majority of members already had their minds made up to ban phosphorous. We learned how to do some procedural maneuvering that delayed the process but ultimately couldn't stop it from coming to a vote. Our group met before various hearings started to set up an order of speaking so that we weren't redundant with our points and that we had a "cleanup man." I'd wait till the end of the speakers before talking so I could rebut any new arguments the proponents brought up at that hearing. We made sure many of us attended an increased amount of political fund-raisers to enhance our image as players in the game of politics.

lobbied hard for the organic exclusion. They did eventually get it in both city and county proposed ban versions.

We shared research from both local and national experts that showed little or no runoff occurs from properly fertilized turf. We showed statistics that most of the phosphorous entering our lakes was from pollen (majority of pollen is phosphorous), farms, leaves degrading and exposed urban soil runoff from thin, non fertilized lawns and areas where soil is bare due to new construction. We showed research that runoff of phosphorous from lawns is not due to fertilizer runoff but due to erosion of soil particles due to thin or no turf. Those soil particles eroding into the lakes carry phosphorous that has become affixed to them and not as readily available to the plants. If the turf had become kept

We had stated that we were the real "active environmentalists" on this issue as this ban would not cost us any more money but actually save us a little on product cost due to not having to pay for the phosphorous content. We told all who would listen that not allowing phosphorous in the fertilizer would eventually cause a thinning of turf thus allowing more runoff of phosphorous carrying soil sediment.

At the initial public hearings before various committees for both the city and county we had people giving excellent testimony using the above arguments. We did a very good job of having more of our people at these hearings than did the activists, which really was a first.

There were solid arguments made by both sides of the issue. Some dirty politics

After all delaying maneuvers were exhausted regarding the city ordinance, it invariably came time for the city council to have discussion on the proposal and take a vote. We knew this council was stacked in favor of proceeding with the ban but at least we had a number of alderpersons speak on the detriments of its passage. Ultimately a

vote was taken and it passed in February of 2004. At the end of the previous year, our Weed Man franchise had made the decision to take an early order opportunity of fertilizer and decided it should be of the phosphorous-free variety. We did this because we had no idea if the misguided electorate would make a potentially passed ban on phosphorous effective immediately after its passage. The ordinance became active Jan. 1, 2005.

Now the attention of the fight swung hard to the upcoming vote at the county level. We knew if we could get compromise language allowing a 3 percent maximum amount of phosphorous in lawn fertilizer used in Dane County this would supersede the recently passed City of Madison ordinance banning phosphorous. I went and took pictures of thin turf, exposed soil areas and piles of leaves that were all located in city or county parks near the lakeshore. The point being driven that why not first clean up your own problem areas before attacking someone else's proper environmental practices.

At Weed Man in Madison, we sent our customers all a letter showing the misguidance of the city's action in banning phosphorous and included comments from Dr. John Stier on why the 3 percent usage of phosphorous should be allowed. We asked them if they could help by contacting their Dane County Supervisor and telling them to support the compromise language of 3 percent phosphorous.

Finally, it came to the evening of the actual final public hearing, supervisor debate period and eventual vote of the County Board. In anticipation, we had organized a busload of green industry supporters to come in from the Greater Milwaukee area and had a large number of friends, relatives, neighbors and customers living in Dane County show up in support of the compromise language. They all did a fantastic job of giving verbal and/or written testimony and any non-biased observer would have been moved to vote for the compromise instead of the outright ban. Alas, back door political maneuvering and the emotion or science argument once again won out. Brett Hulsey, the Dane County board member who works for the Sierra Club, even had the audacity to go up to Brian Swingle and

say that they already had the votes necessary for the ban. This obviously made a mockery of why the testimony efforts were even made and many upon hearing this were infuriated. There was an overall consensus that though the vote wasn't going to go our way, we had many new contacts and friends amongst the electorate, gained their respect and had created a much stronger green industry organization

a much more liberal judge than her alternative. Both sides asked for an expedited opinion from the federal judge and we received that back in July stating that the county resolution was legal. Her reasons why left much to be contested so therefore upon further discussion it was decided to appeal her decision. We are currently in that process. We also have decided to hedge our bet by also trying to get state

**"There's an old expression that goes like this, 'It isn't important how many times you get knocked down in life, but you are judged by how many times you get up.' We may have lost an early battle or two but we in the agriculture arena of Wisconsin will continue to get up and fight misguided legislation whether local or state initiated." – Terry Kurth**

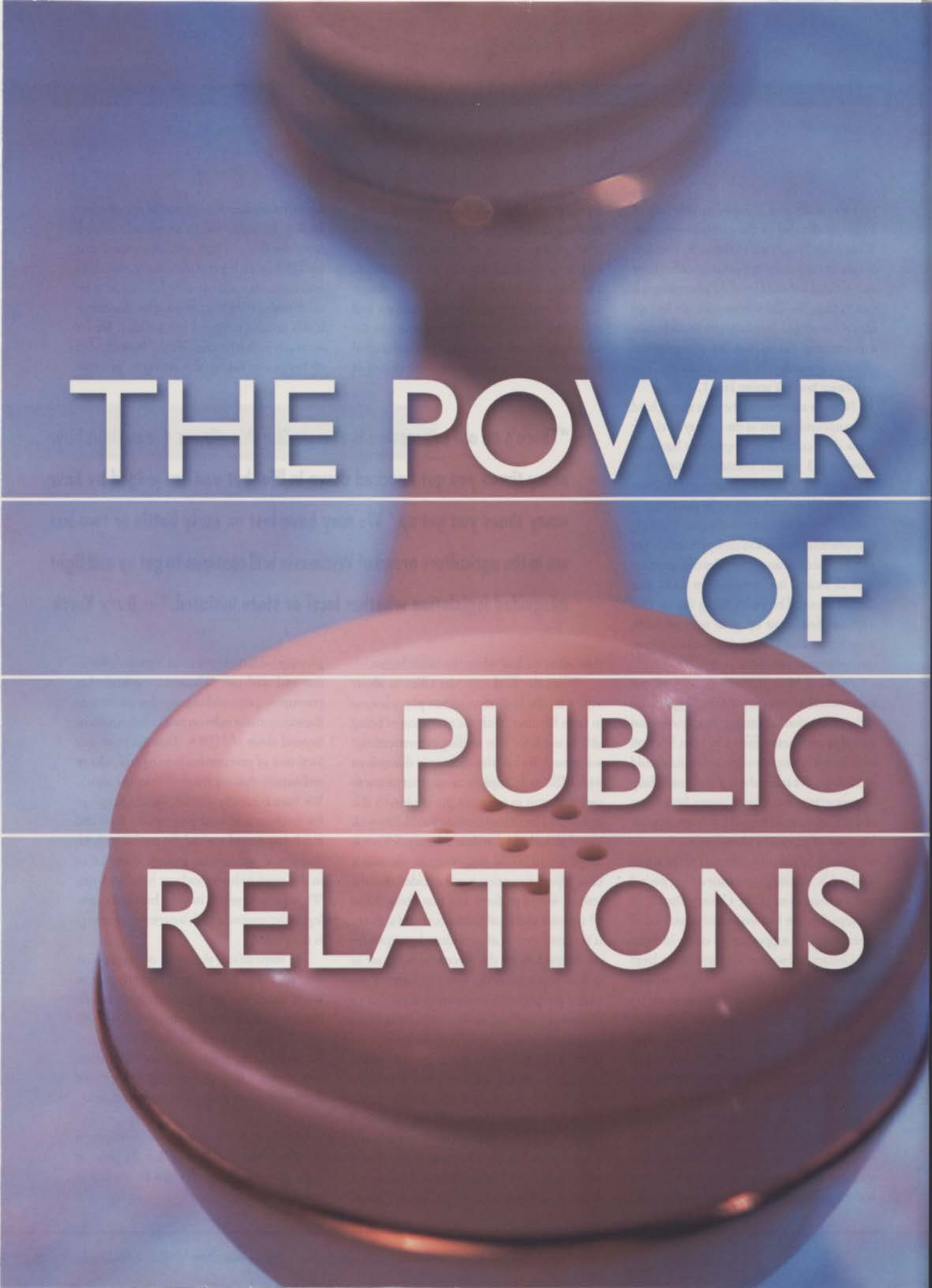
than what we had when the battle began.

When the final vote was taken at about 1:30 a.m. the resolution to ban phosphorous in lawn fertilizer (with the exception of being able to use it for new seeding or overseeding) was passed. We had already been in discussions with RISE and CropLife on whether or not to seek a lawsuit to overturn the resolution if it passed. As I mentioned earlier, Jim Skillen with CropLife had said that their attorneys felt it was illegal due to FIFRA and interstate commerce laws. Upon discussion it was decided that the lawsuit would go forth and that about 12 to 15 national and local plaintiffs would sign on. It is a cross section of agricultural groups who are worried about the precedent being set as well as many from the green industry. I am one of the plaintiffs contending harm due to this lawsuit and had to file a court declaration to that effect with the help of our group's attorneys. We had asked that it go to a federal judge, not a county one, due to our objections to the legality being based on federal laws. We felt our odds were better with an appointed federal judge also rather than a periodically elected county judge. The good news is that it was assigned to a Madison's federal bench but unfortunately it went to Judge Barbara Crabb,

preemptive language passed regarding fertilizer and seed use. Wisconsin currently has preemptive pesticide language that allows only the state to make rules on pesticide limitations beyond those of FIFRA. This disallows any local unit of government passing any rules or ordinances that are tougher than the state's. We have currently drafted similar language for fertilizer and seed preemption laws and it is being passed around the capital by both traditional agricultural groups, those of us in the green industry and our hired lobbyist. We hope to have this in place before the next legislative session (which is currently meeting) is concluded.

In summation, there's an old expression that goes like this, "It isn't important how many times you get knocked down in life, but you are judged by how many time you get up." We may have lost an early battle or two but we in the agricultural arena of Wisconsin will continue to get up and fight misguided legislation whether local or state initiated.

*Terry Kurth is the director of development for Weed Man USA, and has 25 years of lawn care experience. He can be reached at [takurth@msn.com](mailto:takurth@msn.com).*



**THE POWER  
OF  
PUBLIC  
RELATIONS**



( By Angela Bendorf Jamison )

*Like growing and maintaining your customers' lawns, protecting and promoting your business is a multi-step process.*

As any lawn care operator or landscape contractor knows, a healthy lawn and landscape doesn't happen overnight. The same is true about grassroots public relations. Promoting and protecting your business in your community takes time and effort. You won't accomplish it with a single news release or through one-time contact with a local politician. Here, I offer steps and suggestions lawn and landscape professionals can use to implement grassroots public relations in their businesses.

**PR DEFINED.** Public relations (PR) has as many definitions as integrated pest management. The textbook definition of public relations is, "Establishing and maintaining mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the publics on whom its success or failure depends." As a lawn and landscape professional, you may say that your success or failure depends on your customers. That's correct, but others can also determine your success or failure, like the media. What if the local newspaper or television news portrays you or your company in a negative way?

What about local government officials? What if the city councilwoman representing your district casts the winning vote to ban products you need to do your job? There are many people or "publics" in your community on whom your success or failure depends. It's important that you identify who they are and work toward building relationships with them now.

**GRASSROOTS PR.** Grassroots public relations is defined as, "Anticipating, analyzing and interpreting public opinion, attitudes and issues that impact, for good or bad, the operations

and plans of the organization.

In the green industry, "issues" is the operative word. Issues, such as pesticide/fertilizer use, water quality, equipment noise and emissions and the hiring of workers are just a few that can impact, for good or bad, the operations and plans of your company.

In 1989, I wrote a magazine insert for a client titled, "The 1990s: Decade of the Environment." Issues highlighted in the piece included pesticide usage, regulations, bans, posting and notification – all issues we still face today. The only difference was those issues in the 1990s were being fought on the Federal level; now pesticide opposition groups are taking their fight to the local level – local media, local politicians, local moms, local dads, local children. The good news is it's often easier and less expensive to get involved on the local level, than on the national or Federal level. But it still takes resources and a concentrated effort.

**LOOMING LAW SPURS ACTION.** Laurie Broccolo, president and co-owner of Broccolo Tree and Lawn Care in Rochester, N.Y., knows how PR can help when a local issue arises. She hired a PR firm when the Monroe County Legislature was considering an optional state Neighbor Notification Law that would require lawn care companies like hers to provide written notification to neighbors two days before spraying pesticides.

"Pure frustration motivated me. This was a personal attack on my business. I wanted to get the other side of the story out," Broccolo explains. She called local politicians when the law was being considered for vote, but didn't have much luck compared to the opposition group Breast Cancer Coalition that lobbied





county legislators with their emotional demands. "I asked one legislator, who said he was voting for the notification law, what we could have done to change his mind. He advised me, 'Put pressure on the local community and the voters through the media,' so that's what I did with the help of a professional PR firm," Broccolo says.

She also did something very newsworthy – a key component to garnering media attention. In June, the law passed and Broccolo began a pilot in one of the communities her company services to calculate the cost to comply with the Neighbor Notification law. It took 70 hours of time to gather addresses, develop a database and send notification letters at a cost that will require the company to raise fees \$4 - \$10 per visit.

**"In your business you need to sell your services to attract customers. In PR, you need to sell yourself. You need to be the lawn care or landscape expert in your community – the turn-to guy or gal for all things green. You do this by getting involved in your local, state and national lawn and landscape organizations." – Angela Bendorf Jamison**

"When customers call to question the increase, I will tell them it's a result of the notification law and encourage them to contact their county legislators," Broccolo explains.

Through the pilot, Broccolo was the first to implement the new law which doesn't go into effect until January 2006. That generated news coverage by local television stations and newspapers.

"Even though the politics didn't go our way, the receptiveness of the community has been overwhelming," she says. "I'm amazed by the empathy we've received as a small, committed business being attacked for no reason. People see our plight caused by activism at its worst."

Broccolo says for less money than she imagined, her company received "thou-

sands of dollars of return in positive articles and publicity."

Whether you hire a PR professional or manage your own publicity campaign, there are many important points to ponder regarding grassroots public relations.

**BE YOUR COMPANY'S HIGH PROFILE LEADER.** There's no better example of a high profile leader than Dave Thomas from the fast-food restaurant Wendy's. He was the face of Wendy's, appearing in more than 700 ads since 1989. He holds the Guinness record for the longest TV campaign by a company founder.

Sadly, Dave died in 2002 from liver cancer, leaving Wendy's without one of its most potent PR forces. I believe the

recent incident in which a woman wrongly accused the fast-food chain of serving a severed finger in a bowl of chili would have been handled quickly and effectively if Dave were still alive. If he did the television talk show circuit right after the incident to set the record straight, little damage would have been done.

You may not be Dave Thomas, but you can be a high profile leader in your community for your company. The public believes in people. Whether a company has good news or bad news to share, a company's CEO or president delivering that message can be reassuring to the public. Through key message development and training, you can confidently be the voice of your company. If that's something that you don't think you'll ever feel comfortable doing,

assign someone from your company to be the spokesperson.

#### **ANALYZE THE LOCAL SITUATION.**

I've always been told that the first step toward a healthy lawn and landscape is to conduct a soil test. It helps you analyze the nutrients in your lawn – what's there and what's needed. For PR, you need to analyze the local situation or do a so-called "community soil test." An easy way to do this is to read the local newspaper or visit the online version. Do a search on the newspaper Web site by putting in the word "lawn care" or "pesticides" and see what kind of articles have been written and which reporters are covering those topics.

Also analyze what opposition groups are active in your state, county and city. Monitor their activity. What is their message? Who or what are they targeting?

What issues are your local government officials considering? If it's anything to do with your livelihood as a business owner, make sure to attend the meetings or share your opinion through a personal letter or e-mail message. Also, alert others who can help. You're not alone in this fight. Associations like Responsible Industry for a Sound Environment and the Professional Landcare Network, have resources to assist you on the local level.

#### **BE PREPARED; HAVE A PLAN.**

Local issues that can affect your business may already be on Main Street or in your own backyard. However, it's never too late to develop a simple plan and take action. After analyzing the local situation, here are a few steps to consider taking:

1. Create a list or database of key influencers – those who you need to know, such as people in your community, government officials, cooperative extension agents, newspaper reporters and editors, talk radio hosts, television news reporters, regulators and competitors with whom you will need to join forces to fight the really big issues.

2. Develop key messages and talking points about your business practices and the tools you use to do your job (see *Pes-*

icide/Fertilizer Messages sidebar, right, for examples of key messages to use).

3. Conduct key message training among your managers and other employees who you may need to turn to when issues arise. Develop a policy of who will talk to who should an issue or company crisis occur. This kind of training not only helps prepare a company, but improves communication with customers as well.

4. How will you inform and involve your employees? Keep an open line of communication among employees about the company's involvement with the issues. Don't let them learn it by reading the newspaper or seeing a segment on the television news. Also consider how you can engage employees and get them involved with the issue. They may be your strongest allies and your link to the community, depending on their contacts and local involvement.

**BECOME THE LAWN CARE EXPERT.** In your business you need to sell your services to attract customers. In PR, you need to sell yourself. You need to be *the* lawn care or landscape expert in your community – the turn-to guy or gal for all things green. You do this by getting involved in your local, state and national lawn and landscape organizations. You get involved in local issues related to green spaces. And you give back to the community through green causes, like renovating athletic fields, mowing lawns for non-profits or offering your company's services for charity fundraising events.

Contact the media and let them know if they ever need a source for an article they are doing on lawn care, landscapes or issues around these topics, that you'd be happy to provide them information. My local newspaper recently wrote a front-page article titled "Drought brings yard doubts," featuring two local lawn care companies in a positive, informative way.

Provide the media with your contact information, including an after-hours home or cell phone number and your e-mail address. Send them story ideas. Write letters to the editor about lawn care issues. Even

## PESTICIDE/FERTILIZER MESSAGES

**W**hen discussing the topic of pesticides and fertilizers, it's important to keep your message clear and concise as well as bring your passion and convictions into the conversation. Here are some key messages to consider when people turn to you as an authority on pesticide and fertilizer use.

- When used according to label directions, pesticides pose minimal risks to humans, animals and the environment.

- Healthy turf grass filters groundwater, absorbs gas pollutants, dust and pollen, retards the spread of fire and acts as a cooling agent. Well-maintained turfgrass produces generous amounts of oxygen and acts as an air-conditioner for the atmosphere.

- Herbicides, insecticides and fungicides help protect turf grass for healthy growth. Studies prove there is very little likelihood that pest control products used on lawns will end up in groundwater.

- All pesticides undergo rigorous testing. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) requires up to 120 tests, many to evaluate environmental and health impacts. The testing, evaluation, EPA registration and label approval takes eight to 10 years and costs between \$150 and \$185 million. Only one in 140,000 potential products make it from the research lab to the market.

- Integrated Pest Management (IPM) is a sustainable approach to managing pests by combining biological, chemical, cultural and physical tools in a way that minimizes economic, health and environmental risks.

- Modern lawn fertilizers have been formulated to provide the minimum amounts of phosphorous necessary to maintain healthy turfgrass. University research studies have determined that phosphorus from lawn fertilizer does not significantly contribute to nutrient runoff under natural conditions and normal situations. When the fertilizer is properly applied, the fertilizer will not degrade water quality. – Source: [www.pestfacts.org](http://www.pestfacts.org)

if your letter isn't published, reporters will often contact letter writers about particular issues for articles they are writing.

Is there a city or county government committee or activity you can join, like local beautification efforts or park renovations? Can your knowledge and expertise be put to work to help solve a local problem? How can you become a trusted resource that government officials can turn to for information? Be proactive and become involved now to get to know the key influencers in your community before an issue arises. As the lawn care or landscape expert in your community, you have a valuable service and expertise to offer local leaders.

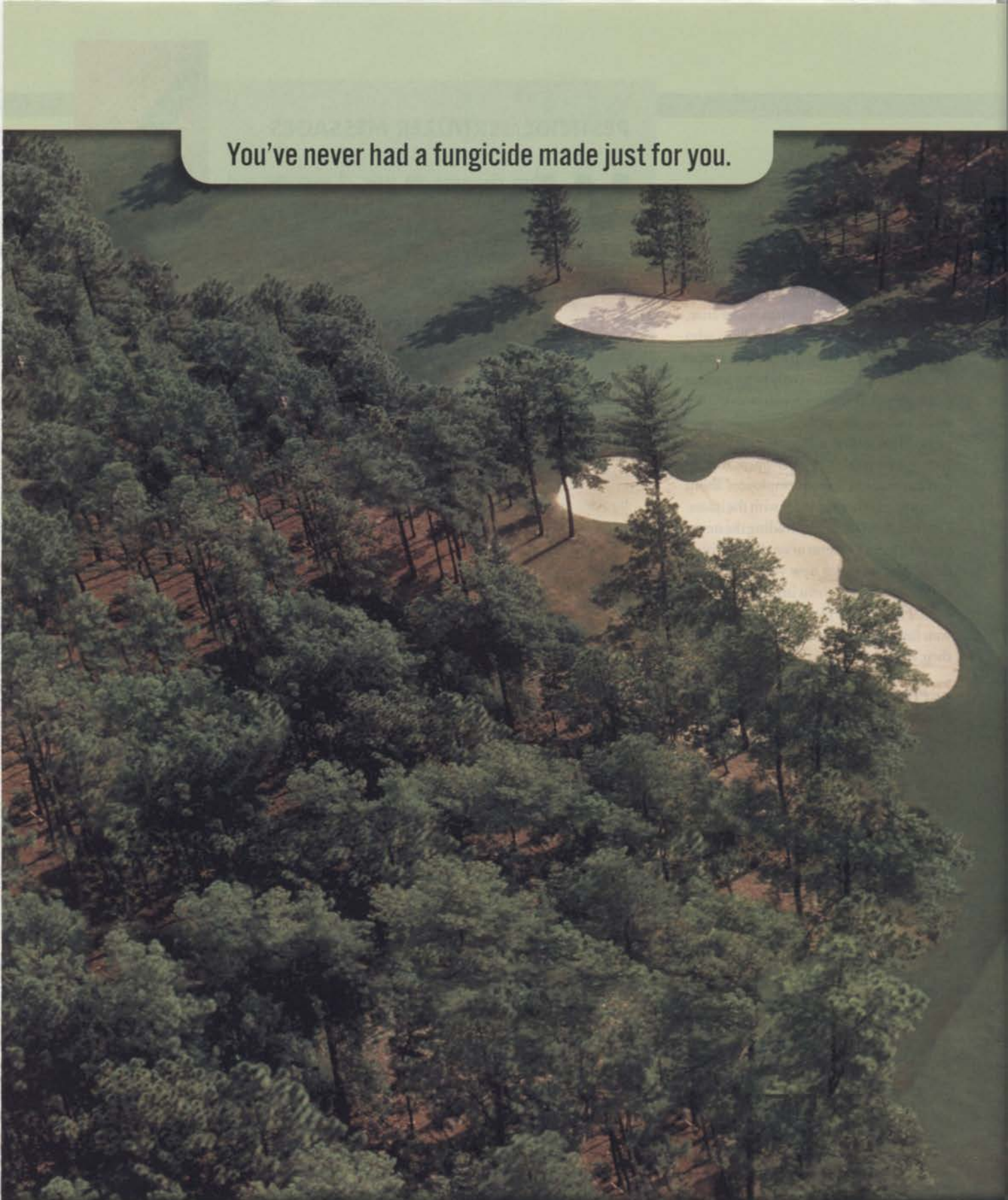
### CARE & FEEDING OF LOCAL TURF.

If a local issue hasn't already beckoned you to consider grassroots public relations tactics, one will unfortunately find its way to your community sooner or later. Just as a vibrant lawn and landscape needs attentive care and feeding, so does the way you protect and promote your business.

Acting now to prepare yourself and your company will give you peace of mind and the courage to face any issue that may invade your local turf.

*Angela Bendorf Jamison is the owner of Communicopia, Wake Forest, N.C. She's worked in the green industry for 18 years, and can be reached at [angela@communicopiapr.com](mailto:angela@communicopiapr.com).*





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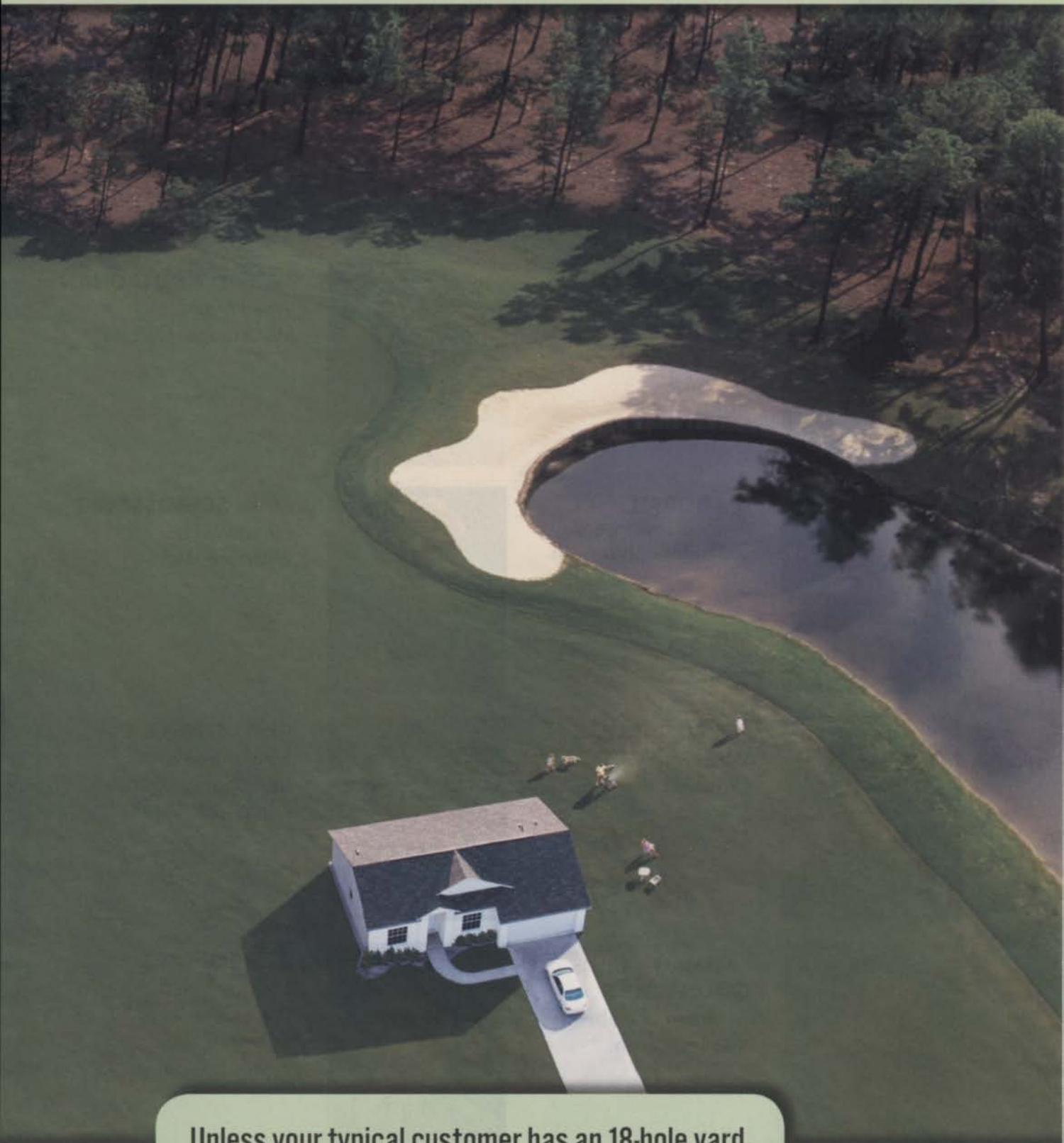
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**Dave Hanson**  
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Calabasas, Calif.



**Davey Tree Institute**  
Kent, Ohio



**Michael Kernaghan**  
Weed Man  
Mississauga, Ontario



**Tim Doppel**  
Atwood Lawn Care  
Sterling Heights, Mich.



**Mark Schlossberg**  
Pro-Lawns-Plus  
Baltimore, Md.



**Phil Fogarty**  
Weed Man/  
Crowley's Vegetation  
Management  
Cleveland, Ohio



**Chris Senske**  
Senske Tree &  
Lawn Care  
Kennewick, Wash.



**Norman Goldenberg**  
TruGreen ChemLawn  
Memphis, Tenn.



**Tom Tolkacz**  
Swingle Tree &  
Lawn Care  
Denver, Colo.

## The Class of 1999



**BOB ANDREWS**  
The Greenskeeper  
Carmel, Ind.



**TOM LIED**  
Lied's Landscape  
Design & Development  
Sussex, Wis.



**GARY CLAYTON**  
Agriliance  
Kennesaw, Ga.



**GEORGE MORRELL**  
ValleyCrest Cos.  
Atlanta, Ga.



**RUSSELL FRITH**  
Lawn Doctor  
Holmdel, N.J.



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Gardeners' Guild  
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**J. LANDON REEVE**  
Chapel Valley  
Landscape  
Woodbine, Md.



**WAYNE RICHARDS**  
Cagwin & Dorward  
Novato, Calif.

# The Class of 2000



DALE **AMSTUTZ**  
Northern Lawns Corp.  
Omaha, Neb.



KURT **KLUZNIK**  
Yardmaster  
Painesville, Ohio



TOM **BLAND**  
Bland Landscaping  
Cary, N.C.



SAM **LANG**  
Fairway Green  
Lawn Care  
Raleigh, N.C.



BILL **HOOPES**  
Grass Roots Training  
Delaware, Ohio



GARY **LASCALEA**  
GroGreen Lawn,  
Tree & Shrub Care  
Plano, Texas



BRUCE **HUNT**  
The Brickman Group  
Long Grove, Ill.



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Elizabeth A. Seme  
Latham, N.Y.



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Massey Services  
Maitland, Fla.



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East Lansing, Mich.

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Lawn Doctor  
Holmdel, N.J.



**TERRY KURTH**  
Weed Man  
Middleton, Wis.



**TOM DELANEY**  
Professional  
Landcare Network  
Marietta, Ga.



**JOE REYNOLDS**  
Black Diamond  
Lawn Care  
Toledo, Ohio



**SAM FARISON**  
Farison  
Lawn Care  
Louisville, Ky.



**BARRY  
TROUTMAN**  
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Calabasas, Calif.

# The Class of 2002



**MARTY ERBAUGH**  
LESCO  
Strongsville, Ohio



**CHRIS LEMCKE**  
Weed Man  
Scarborough,  
Ontario



**GERALD GROSSI**  
Arborlawn  
Lansing, Mich.



**BILL LEUENBERGER**  
The Chalet  
Wilmette, Ill.



**TOM HOFER**  
Spring-Green Lawn Care  
Plainfield, Ill.



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Professional Land-  
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TruGreen ChemLawn  
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Landscaping and Nurseries  
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# The Class of 2004



Tom Poen realizes success with a lawn care company focusing on commercial clients.

# A Commercial Success

Four years ago, Tom Poen decided it was time for a change. Trading his home state of Iowa for the warmer Texas climate, Poen came equipped with just one thing: a business idea. Seeing an opportunity in the lawn care business, he seized his chance. "We realized that almost everyone in the lawn care business is servicing more residential clients than commercial clients," said Poen. "So we came up with a business that caters to the industry and provides a service strictly for the commercial guys."

Today that idea has germinated into his own commercial lawn care company, Weedex, which he started with his uncle, Ron Poen. Now boasting five employees to help balance the workload, the company services clients, such as business parks and institutions, in the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex and San Antonio.

**SUCCESS WITH REVOLVER™.** The company's standard program includes a spring preemergent treatment, two summer postemergent applications, a fall preemergent treatment and four granular fertilizations. He also offers several add-on services, depending on client needs. One of his newest add-on services includes helping transition lawns from cool-season to warm-season grasses. He added this service after realizing the versatility of a new postemergent herbicide product.

"In Texas we have a problem with winter grasses, especially ryegrass and *Poa annua*, appearing in dormant Bermudagrass," said Poen.

So prevalent was the problem that Tom and Ron Poen started looking into new solutions for their customers. That's when they discovered Revolver™ herbicide, which could remove cool season grasses with just one application.

Revolver, a postemergent sulfonylurea herbicide, is registered for use on residential and commercial lawns, golf



Seeing a need, Tom and Ron Poen started a company solely for commercial clients.

courses, sod farms, sports fields, roadsides, school grounds, cemeteries and recreational areas. Applied as a foliar spray, it is primarily used to remove unwanted cool season grasses, such as *Poa annua*, *Poa trivialis*, perennial ryegrass, bentgrass, bluegrass and tall fescue, as well as henbit and goosegrass from actively growing bermudagrass and zoysiagrass. Labeled rates for Revolver range from 0.1 to 0.6 ounces per 1,000 square feet. Higher rates and warmer air temperatures result in quicker removal of unwanted grasses.

In addition to removing cool-season grasses from dormant Bermudagrass, Revolver also can be used as a transition aid on sites that are overseeded in the winter months. "With Revolver, you can apply it earlier in the fall if you need to or you can do it later in the spring," Poen said. "For transitioning lawns and cleaning up undesirable ryegrass, you couldn't ask for a more efficient product."

# INTRODUCING...

*Lawn & Landscape* magazine and Bayer Environmental Science are proud to announce the winners of the seventh annual Leadership Awards. These individuals embody the essence of leadership, whether it's in their tireless industry involvement, pioneering spirit, dedication to education, commitment to personal improvement or environmental stewardship. We congratulate and thank them for their outstanding contributions to the lawn and landscape industry.



**DAN FOLEY**  
D. Foley Landscape  
Walpole, Mass.



**DAVID SHETLAR**  
The Ohio State  
University  
Columbus, Ohio



**JIM MCCUTCHEON**  
HighGrove Partners  
Austell, Ga.



**CONNIE HOM**  
Buckingham Greenery  
Buckingham, Va.



**BOB OTTLEY**  
One Step  
Tree & Lawn Care  
N. Chili, N.Y.



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

# The Class of 2005



Photos: Ron Gould

(By Carol Wissmann)

*Leading by example is the way Harold Enger chooses to advance his employees and his company.*

While it might appear logical to trace Harold Enger's career in lawn care from its earliest beginnings as a summer job in high school to his current position as assistant director, franchise support for Spring-Green, such a succession would tell only half the story.

Enger's success lies as much below ground-level as above. Granted, his 27 years of experience in the industry assures that he knows how to keep grass green and growing. But like a plant grounded firmly in the soil, Enger's strength begins at root line. It's his character and commitment to doing the right thing that defines him as much as does his career path.

"The values you have – your personal development and work ethic, even the Golden Rule – all those early experiences surface later in life," says Enger. As a Star Scout with the Boy Scouts he acquired an appreciation for beauty in the out-of-doors and for the pride of accomplishment. And working for Spring-Green, a company whose mission statement includes "making the world a better place to live," has provided a professional extension to Enger's personality.

**CLIMBING THE CORPORATE TRELLIS.** Because he enjoyed being outdoors, Enger worked in landscaping while attending Western Illinois University, where he graduated with a degree in elementary education. He was offered employment as a teacher after graduation. However, he

**Name: HAROLD ENGER**

**Company: Spring-Green Lawn Care Corp.**

**Location: Plainfield, Ill.**

**Career Highlights:**

- Spring-Green Lawn Care, Plainfield, Ill.  
Assistant Director, Franchise Support, 1997 to present
- Barefoot Grass Lawn Service, Inc., Arlington Heights, Ill.  
Regional Manager, 1995-1997  
Branch Manager, 1987-1994
- Tempo 21/Lawn Beautiful, Carol Stream and Wheeling, Ill.  
Regional Manager, 1985-1986  
Branch Manager, 1983-1985  
Service Supervisor, 1979-1982  
Account Supervisor, 1978
- Suburban Lawn Nursery and Landscaping, Warrenville, Ill.  
Garden Center Manager and Landscape Foreman,  
Summers 1974 and 1975
- D'Lime Nursery and Landscaping, Naperville, Ill.  
Garden Center Manager, Summer 1973
- Hopperton Nursery and Landscaping, Naperville, Ill.  
Garden Center Manager, Summer 1972

wanted to marry, start a family and purchase a home, so he opted for a better-paying position with Tempo 21/Lawn Beautiful, a regional firm based in Chicago.

"I started as an account supervisor in 1978 – that means I sprayed lawns all day," laughs Enger.

# harold enger

**"You don't have to be an actor or great orator to persuade or motivate others. But you need to be excited about what you do."**

**— Harold Enger**

The firm recognized Enger's commitment to quality work. Within a year, he was promoted to supervisor; branch manager followed. In 1987, Tempo 21 was sold to Barefoot Grass. Enger was promoted to manager of their largest region in 1995, where he oversaw the \$8 million revenue-producing Chicago operation. Two years later, the company sold again, this time to TruGreen.

When Enger saw a classified ad for a director of training for Spring-Green, he seized the opportunity to make a change and focus on the education end of the business. "Training's always been my love," he confesses.

Like a plant in the perfect pot, Enger blossomed in his training-focused position. Now, early spring finds him conducting workshops in 13 locations – from Seattle in the Northwest, south to Tulsa, and then east to Charlotte. Franchise owners send their employees to sessions on all aspects of the business, from sales and customer service to weed and disease control. And some states grant continuing education units for class attendance.

Enger keeps the workshops informative but fun – an easy reach for his playful personality. Afternoons are spent in team-building exercises. "It's what they like best and request year after year," he says. Past projects have included building an electric Mars surface rover, a helicopter and tinker toy creations.

Enger admits, "For the first couple of years, the trainees were a bit tentative wondering what it was all about. But now they return with smiles."

They're happy to see him and talk with attendees from other cities. Enger prefers that managers don't attend, so discussions will be more open.

The training appears to pay off. Employees who remained with the company through the spring, exceeded their sales goals by 50 percent. The increase is impressive considering one of the biggest industry challenges is combating the tendency to shy away from talking with a customer in favor of concentrating on landscape issues.

"I realize they may not share the same



Harold Enger



passion for lawn care that I have," says Enger. "But I want them involved, excited, and enjoying what they do. To me, leadership means instilling the enthusiasm of doing a good job because they want to, not because they have to. And it's great when they return the following year and tell me how something they learned really worked."

Enger stresses personal accountability "with your heart, not just your head." Helping employees set goals, he reminds them that they've given their word, and he expects their integrity in seeing their goals through. Indeed, he'd be the first to recommend finding different employment if an employee doesn't really want to be in the landscape business. People-person, yes; pusher-over, no.

Roxanne (Roxie) is Enger's wife. "Harold always keeps up his end, and he expects no less from others," she says. "If someone's sloughing, he's not afraid to let them know they need to improve, and show them how. But he always corrects in a positive way so they don't feel bad about themselves. Harold likes people."

She recalls that when Enger managed employees, he garnered a lot of respect from them. "He looks for, stresses, and tries to appeal to the best in others," Roxie says. "I think that's why he was successful with the people he managed. He treated them with respect and worked to build on their strengths."

Tom Hofer, Spring-Green Lawn Care's president, adds, "It's important to Harold to do the right thing. It's basic to who he is. He's had to make some difficult decisions in his career, and he's been very successful at it."

Roxie remembers a particularly difficult situation when her husband realized he needed to fire a long-time friend. "But Harold's a very fair and even-handed man," she says. "Still, it was really hard on him."

"I'm most frustrated with people who don't want to accept responsibility for their own actions," says Enger. "Instilling that character can be the biggest challenge with some folks. I tell them that as long as

**Q. What does the term grassroots mean to you?**

A. "Grassroots" is basic, down-to-earth, and fundamental. I think the advantage I have when I'm training employees is that I've been there and done most everything in this business. A hands-on approach really lends credibility. Pushing a spreader with an employee makes all the difference.

**Q. Describe a situation where you feel you had to defend the industry and how this impacted you in your career.**

A. I've not had to really go toe-to-toe with someone to defend the industry. When talking with a customer or potential customer, and they raise pesticide objections, I just explain the benefits of a weed-free and insect-free lawn. Being informed and knowing your product goes a long way.

Pesticide regulations will make up the industry's biggest challenges. While the majority of pest control products are used by farmers, lawn care, which has no large voice or lobby, is an easier target for regulation. Yet, there are very few products used by operators that a homeowner can't purchase at their local hardware store or garden center. Our biggest competitor is the homeowner.

When they tell you to write your Congressman, do it. I realize it's hard because you have other responsibilities pulling you six ways at once. But these are the important issues and you have to get involved.

**Q. Who is one person you admire most for taking a stand on an issue and why?**

A. There's no one person who I admire most. There are too many to mention. Take Harry Hopperton, the man who hired me for my first job. He taught me the basics of the job. Then there's Juan and Cruz, the two I worked next to, who showed me how to work. And there's Bob Parmley, Bill Hoopes and Tom Hofer.

And, of course, my wife, Roxie, whose been very understanding and supportive. Many springs, she's put up with my 60- to 70-hour workweeks, with me sometimes coming home grouchy.

**Q. What is one thing you do to ensure your employees are reflecting a positive and professional image on your company when they are out in the field?**

A. I'm a believer in uniforms and following rules and regulations. Nothing makes me crazier than a lawn care vehicle with a dripping spray tank or someone wearing a T-shirt and shorts when spraying. First of all, not following the label is against the law. Secondly, it doesn't project a professional image. I've been known to quietly ask an employee to turn an inappropriate T-shirt inside out or send them home to replace a torn one.

**Q. In your opinion, what are the top three things a lawn care operator or landscape contractor can do today to help defend the industry against negative perceptions?**

A. A beautiful work environment leads employees to feel better about, and show greater respect for their workplace, so having well-trained team members is important. I wore the same uniform the field staff wore when I was a regional manager. Today, I dress in business-casual clothes. When I'm with franchise owners, I wear Spring-Green apparel in an effort to encourage company identification.

So, in general, I suggest combating any negative image of the industry with the following:

1. Well-trained team members.
2. Projection of a professional image.
3. Involvement in PLANET or a state organization.

I'm talking with them, telling them what's wrong and how to improve, they're basically doing great. It's the day I stop talking – when I've given up – that they need to worry."

And when looking for leadership in others, Enger's drawn to those with the ability to listen and discern before reacting. Quoting Stephen R. Covey's "7 Habits of Highly Effective People," he says he admires those who seek to understand before being understood. And you can add to that his favoritism for those who are passionate about their work. "You don't have to be an actor or great orator to persuade or motivate others. But you need to be excited about what you do," he says.

**"Harold always keeps up his end, and he expects no less from others. If someone's sloughing, he's not afraid to let them know they need to improve, and show them how. But he always corrects in a positive way, so they don't feel bad about themselves."**

**– Roxie Enger**

And Enger adds, "If there's one lesson I wish I'd known from the beginning, it's not to worry when you lose a perfect employee. People move on. Unless it's something easily fixed, don't try to sell them on staying if they've made up their mind to go. Always wondering whether they should

have chosen the other job, they're never the same employee. It may take awhile to replace them – or you may already have their replacement and not know it – but wish them well, and let them go."

Conversely, while Enger admits that firing someone is a difficult task, it's also

## a garden, green grass and home

**H**arold Enger and Roxie met in college and married in 1977 upon graduation.

For most of their life together, they've lived in Roselle, Ill., a suburb 45 minutes by train from Chicago. During the busy season, Roxie sometimes helped in the office of the lawn care companies where her husband worked.

Today, they and their daughter, Sara, a recent special education graduate of Northern Illinois University, share a two-story farm-style home built in 1895 and now surrounded by giant maples. A rose garden, vegetable garden, and perennials are rimmed by the grapevine that clings to the perimeter fence. And, not surprisingly, the lush lawn is maintained by Spring-Green.

It's here that Enger spends off-hours working on an old house that demands perpetual projects. Whether replacing a staircase or fashioning furniture, such as a desk for his daughter, he enjoys working with his hands. And like a mailperson who relaxes by walking on his day-off, Enger finds enjoyment in gardening. It's the same pride in accomplishment and appearances that he brings to his job.

Both Harold and Roxie are active in church programs and mission work, and with what Roxie describes as "a beautiful singing voice," Enger participates in the choir. "We're very connected to the community," she says.

So lives Harold Enger, who Roxie describes as a happy, positive and loving man. Playful and people-focused, "he likes to have fun," she shares. "Harold jokes around, and tells the same bad jokes over and over. He knows they're bad. It's just part of who he is."

But beneath Enger's upbeat exterior lies a serious commitment to excellence. "I like taking a lawn that looked bad, and in a short time, making it look great," he says. It's not just taking care of grass, which even if left alone will return to green. Rather it's creating an environment where there's pride of ownership. I see that as my role – modeling for others that with hard work, they can move up through the ranks, if they have that same passion when looking at lawns."



imperative (assuming there's no discrimination issues) to let go of someone not meeting minimum standards. "If you're not successful in helping them improve, they'll only bring down the others," he says. "Often they're just biding their time, hanging on as long as you continue to pay them. The rest of the team is only getting frustrated. They know the loafer needs to go long before you do."

He points out that while one laggard in a team of 10 may cause the remaining workers only 10 percent extra in exertion, a team of three has to cover 50 percent more work when one person doesn't do their share. Enger recommends overhiring to cover such eventualities.

While some franchises have employees and some do not, Enger sees a smaller company with fewer employees, and consequently fewer personalities, as a bit easier to manage. "When you start to get 10 to 15 people, it's more of a challenge," he says. He recalls that as a branch manager for Barefoot, with 18 workers under him, he could expect to have a core of five or six great people, six to eight who do good work, but for whom it's just a job, and a couple that he was always working to improve.

Enger sees turnover as an inevitable part of the business, affected by the economy and the job market. "When there are plenty of unskilled factory jobs available, it's more difficult to find lawn care people," he says. And it's from personal experience that he has an appreciation for the difficulty of lifting 50-pound bags of fertilizer, and pushing a spreader across a lawn in Chicago's 85-degree, 80-percent humidity summers, and during the 40-degree, 30 mph winds of October. "It's just plain hard work," he says.

Management responsibilities require a dedication of their own. "March 15, 1997, was the first Saturday in spring that I had off since I began in the industry. I felt guilty for about 10 minutes," Enger laughs. "Then I got over it."

**T**om Hofer is president of Spring-Green, the lawn and tree care company for which Harold Enger works. "Harold's a very people-focused person," he says. And while he points out that Enger's education degree certainly helps in his ability to conduct training sessions, he adds that his personality brings the fun, but meaningful, emphasis necessary in teaching adults.

"Harold's a very real-world guy," Hofer continues. "He doesn't bring a whole lot of idealism to the table. It's all practical information that attendees can use the next day. I describe him as 'the old pro.'"

Spring-Green has developed an on-line learning center where franchise owners and employees can log-on at their own convenience to educate themselves in technical skills, office operations and customer service/sales skills. Enger has written a good portion of the material – a laborious multi-year project – highlighting not only what is important in the organization, but why.

Spring-Green purchased the course design software, and then wrote the online program themselves. Basic, intermediate and advanced-level courses are available for three field positions: field service professional (eleven courses), customer service professional (nine courses) and sales professional (nine courses).

The company is currently working on their manager-level course. Since the program launched in December of 2003, 342 people have enrolled and completed 534 courses.

"The biggest obstacle to training is time and tools," says Enger. The online program offers the means for learning at their convenience. He points out that skills are easily acquired. But a lot of workers have limited customer service abilities or experience in how to speak to people. Plus there's a resistance to sales to be overcome. Spring-Green even has a session on what to say when you don't know the answer.

Enger reads, attends seminars and encourages others to do so also. Interestingly, his commitment to the development of others goes hand-in-hand with his own advancement. "Spring-Green, probably more than any other company, has given me the freedom to grow professionally, to improve as a leader and contributor to the industry," he says. "It's that freedom to progress that I appreciate the most."

"Moving up in Spring-Green is an extension of Harold's entire career," says Hofer. "He began on the frontline, then moved into various management positions, actually operating the business. That's when he came to us. In his franchise support role, he's part of our executive team. Except for training, he's not working with employees anymore, but rather with franchise owners, influencing and leading them so they can be successful."

Hofer points out that Enger's current position doesn't have a great deal of structure. "Harold's responsible for certain outcomes, but often with no guidelines as to how to accomplish them," he says. "But, if Harold says something's going to happen, it happens. He gets things done. With franchises, keeping commitments is critical. It takes personal discipline and dedication to be successful in his role."

Enger's wife, "Roxie," concurs. "People know they can count on Harold. He'll do just about whatever someone asks. If they need his help, he's there. He keeps up his end and requires no less from others. He's always doing his best, and expects others to follow that example."



( By Kathleen Franzinger )

*Running a landscape company, heading a national association and spending time with his family doesn't leave Dan Foley with much spare time. But he wouldn't change a thing.*

Unlike most contractors who love landscaping and learn business basics out of necessity, Dan Foley has always been passionate about both. A Babson College graduate of entrepreneurial studies, Foley has always loved the idea of starting and building a business. This same desire to create something from nothing also drew him to landscaping, especially installation. "I was definitely lured by the emotion of being able to build and create things," he says.

His experience working landscaping jobs during high school and college fostered his love of the outdoors. So, in addition to his business studies, Foley started taking horticulture classes at Massachusetts Bay Community College to learn more about the industry.

As if he wasn't busy enough attending two colleges, Foley started his business as a 19-year old college sophomore. Although it was stressful at times, the real-life experience added value to his studies. "I could better relate to some of the lessons my professors were talking about that day because I was experiencing much of it in real-time," he says.

Twenty years later, Foley's calendar is just as full. In addition to running his South Walpole, Mass.-based D. Foley Landscape, he has served as president of the Professional Landcare Network (PLANET) since its formation in January. He jokes that he got into landscaping so that he could be outdoors, and now he's a bureaucrat who sits at a desk all day. "When I retire, I plan on going into the landscaping business," he says with a laugh.

**Name: DAN FOLEY**

**Company: D. Foley Landscape**

**Location: South Walpole, Mass.**

**Career Highlights:**

- Bachelor's degree, entrepreneurial studies, Babson College
- Founded D. Foley Landscape in 1987
- Open-book management company since 1998
- Started CampusCare division in 2002
- President, Associated Landscape Contractors of Massachusetts (ALCM) in 1995
- Secretary/Treasurer, Associated Landscape Contractors of America (ALCA) in 2003
- President-elect, ALCA in 2004
- President, Professional Landcare Network (PLANET) in 2005

Along with work and volunteerism, Foley also finds time for his family. Married for 12 years to his wife Holly and father to 7-year-old Courtney and 5-year-old Caitlin, Foley credits his family for providing the support and encouragement to continue with his industrious work schedule. "Everything in life starts with a good foundation," Foley says. "I am fortunate to have that with a great family and home life. I love every single minute that I get to spend with my family and it really helps me try to achieve some balance in my life."

With all the roles he plays on a daily basis, the ones of

# dan foley

Photos: Bob LaVallee



**"I always try to assess a situation, ask questions and then step away. I go with my heart and my gut, but I make sure my decisions are based on the facts and implications of every decision." – Dan Foley**



Dan Foley

husband and father make him most proud. "Becoming important in the life of a child has been one of my biggest accomplishments," he says. "I enjoy continuing to learn how to be the best parent that I can be."

**PARENTAL GUIDANCE.** In addition to his wife and children, Foley's parents, Joanne and Tom, have been constant sources of support since he started his business in their basement. Dan's entrepreneurial spirit doesn't surprise them. "Dan always seemed to know what he wanted even at a young age," Joanne says.

But Foley wasn't always as enterprising as he is now. Joanne recalls him being shy as a young child, which she says would surprise a lot of people who know him now. Things changed when some of his friends encouraged him to run for president of his third grade class. He won the election, and something about leadership seemed to agree with him. "From that point on, he really seemed to blossom," Joanne says.

After seeing Foley's success in his college business courses – he won a prize for a business plan he developed for D. Foley Landscape as a junior at Babson – Tom knew his son would run some type of business someday. Joanne knew her son was good at business, and she thought landscaping was something he really enjoyed. But that didn't stop her maternal instinct from kicking in. So she did what any good mother would do: She went to work for him. Every day when she came home from her job as a schoolteacher, Joanne would head to the basement to help with administrative tasks, such as bookkeeping.

To this day, Joanne still works at D. Foley Landscape 20 to 25 hours per week primarily processing payroll and handling accounts payable. And while she may have worked out of motherly concern in the early days, Joanne says she works now because she enjoys it.

With Joanne working for the company, Foley laughs that Tom no doubt heard about everything at the dinner table. But he didn't mind. Even though their work experiences were different (Tom worked for a major corporation most of his career), Foley would often talk to his father about the business and ask him for advice. "He taught me so

much directly and indirectly," Foley says.

When making business decisions, Tom always stressed the importance of not getting caught up in the emotion of a situation and to step back and look at the big picture. "He taught me the importance of being prepared and analyzing each situation, problem or opportunity before reacting," Foley says. His father was mainly referring to financial decisions, but Foley learned the advice applied to almost any business situation.

Foley is self-admittedly action oriented, so stepping back can be difficult for him. When he wants to immediately jump into situations and fix them, Foley hears his father's words in his head. "I always try to assess a situation, ask questions and then step away," Foley says. "I go with my heart and my gut, but I make sure my decisions are based on the facts and implications of every decision."

**DOWN TO BUSINESS.** When Foley started his company in March of 1987, he hoped to keep it small until he finished college. The business focused on residential installation, but when customers started asking for maintenance work, Foley knew he couldn't pass up the revenue opportunity. With the help of a high-school friend as his first full-time employee, the business generated \$50,000 its first year.

As Foley entered his junior year, work continued to pick up to the point when he served about 25 clients. Still handling a full course load at school, Foley relied on his pager to communicate with customers, most of whom didn't know he was a college student. "Customers would be paging me and I'd have to get out of class to return their calls," he says.

The economy was tough in 1989, but Foley's business background, youthful determination and responsiveness helped him – so much so that he budgeted to do \$90,000 in revenue his second year in business, but ending up doing \$225,000. "I realized early on that even though you have a good plan in place, things in business don't always go as planned," he says.

Foley's business has come a long way since those early days. Today, the company has 33 employees and is projected to do about \$4 million in sales this year. Most

**Q. What does the term grassroots mean to you?**

A. Grassroots means there is strength in numbers that allows a message to be communicated or a change to be initiated. It harnesses the power of the masses to spread the word or explain a position to communicate a message quickly and effectively.

**Q. Describe a situation where you feel you had to defend the industry and how this impacted you in your career.**

A. When the H-2B cap was reached and the process was closed in early January of this year, I had the opportunity as president of PLANET to become personally involved in the role the association would take. I went to Washington and was able to quickly learn how the government works and begin the process of formulating and communicating our association's position. During the weekly conference calls and meetings, I was able to have input into the direction that we would take to encourage the passing of the Save Small Business Act. In addition, I had to work to gain time from our members during a very busy time for them and convince them it was worth their time to try to make a difference by going to Washington, making local visits, making calls, sending e-mails and faxing information.

I now have a keen interest in further understanding government relations for our industry and my own company. It's imperative that we continue to monitor issues and have a voice locally, regionally and nationally.

**Q. Who is one person you admire most for taking a stand on an issue and why?**

A. I was fortunate to serve as president-elect of ALCA when Kurt Kluznik from Yardmaster was president in 2004. It was interesting for me to watch and work with Kurt through all of the discussions, debates, strategies and actions related to the potential changes in the ALCA legacy association during the merger with PLCAA in 2004. Many times Kurt could have taken the safe route and remain with the typical annual plan of a national association, but instead he chose to push us all by asking the important questions. He continued to exhibit the ability to do what was right for the long-term industry legacy rather than his own legacy. His drive helped to lead us to the historic merger of two great associations to form PLANET.

**Q. What is one thing you do to ensure your employees are reflecting a positive and professional image on your company when they are out in the field?**

A. One thing I'm doing now is continually reinforcing the importance of viewing things from the customer perspective. There are so many variables that it's easy to focus on yourself and what you're dealing with in an organization's operations. However, the only really important thing is what is important to the client. I have found that you can change your entire paradigm by trying to frame each situation on how the customer experiences it, views it and benefits from it. It is very easy to project a positive and professional image when you think like a customer. This is something that I would like to continually improve upon and expand within our culture.

**Q. In your opinion, what are the top three things a lawn care operator or landscape contractor can do today to help defend the industry against negative perceptions?**

A. I think the top three things are communicate, communicate and communicate. In our industry, we often get too busy delivering the work that we don't take the time to communicate well. We need to communicate to employees, vendors, customers, subcontractors, our children, the general public and so on. I have found that many issues in life and business can all be rooted back to communication. It's critical that we are ambassadors for our industry and invest the time to make sure everyone understands the positive aspects of our work. This will help in public relations, recruiting, marketing for new work and legislative issues.

notably, the business has moved from residential installation and maintenance to full service commercial work. Foley estimates services are 50 percent maintenance; 30 percent enhancements, special projects and landscape construction; and 20 percent snow and ice removal services.

Foley's business background definitely helped him make the shift from residential to commercial. "I think we were successful in that transition because we did it deliberately with a strategic plan," he says. "We determined where we wanted to go and then developed an action plan to implement. The benefit was that we are able to focus on our strengths and learned to say, 'No' to work that didn't fit our model."

When it comes to leading his company to even more success, Foley says he follows

Foley explains that the goal of open-book management is to teach employees what financial numbers mean and how the business runs in hopes that the knowledge will encourage them to think about their job and how it impacts business. Foley holds weekly meetings with his managers to forecast what the numbers will be for the upcoming month compared to budgeted figures. If the predicted numbers aren't good, every employee has the rest of the month to make it better. "Most business owners use numbers from what happened in the past," Foley says. "Their accountants tell them what happened last week, last quarter or last year. But next month is too late to fix this month's low numbers."

Another part of open-book management is giving employees a stake in the outcome,

has always played an active role. "I have always felt that you get what you give, and I certainly benefited from being involved at the local and national level," he says. "I have learned so much from the people that I have volunteered and worked with."

But one fateful meeting took his volunteer work to a new level. Foley met Michael Byrne when he was a young board member of the Associated Landscape Contractors of Massachusetts in 1991. The two became good friends, and Byrne is the one who motivated Foley to join the Associated Landscape Contractors of America (ALCA), which merged with PLCAA to form PLANET. As part of ALCA, Foley served on numerous committees and the board of directors. He also served as an officer of the association as secretary/treasurer and then president-elect.

When Foley became president of PLANET in January, he knew he was going to have to make some changes in his company in order to serve both to the best of his ability. In October and November of last year, he and his staff restructured the company so that instead of eight direct reports, Foley now only has three. The restructuring involved breaking the business into three core functions: operations, finance and administration and sales. The leaders of each core function now report to Foley. "If we hadn't done that, I would be really struggling to balance both jobs," he says, adding that his staff deserves the credit for being willing to step up and take on extra responsibilities.

Foley tries to keep all his plates spinning by planning ahead and keeping focus on his daily priorities. "It's easy for me to get caught up in what is urgent rather than what is important," Foley says. Therefore, he tries to plan for tomorrow today. Before he leaves his office each night, he outlines the most critical priorities for the next day. "I lay out the important goals I have to meet in order to call tomorrow a success."

But all of the time and effort is worth it to Foley. He says, "It is the ultimate compliment to get a 'Thank you' from your industry peers."

## "Good leaders engage their employee's hearts and heads, not just their hands." — Dan Foley

the philosophy of looking out and looking down. "Leaders have to look down at what's going on today, but also look out to see the future," he explains. "I really enjoy appreciating our company as what it is and thrive off of looking ahead to plan for what it can become."

In the spirit of constantly trying to improve business, Foley was drawn to the practice of open-book management — a term he feels is misleading because it implies that business owners simply open their checkbook and show it to employees. In reality, it involves considerable more. "It teaches your employees to think and act like business owners," Foley explains.

Jack Stack, owner of Springfield Re-Manufacturing Corp., Springfield, Mo., developed open-book management and outlined it in his book *The Great Game of Business*. Intrigued by the idea, Foley hired the company as consultants in the fall of 1997 to implement the process at D. Foley Landscape. The team at D. Foley Landscape has been active practitioners of open-book management since 1998.

which is why four times a year Foley's employees have an opportunity to receive a bonus. And they win or lose as a team. If an employee on the operations team out in the field doesn't get a bonus, Foley doesn't either. When he first introduced the idea of open-book management, Foley asked his employees if they would be willing to give up their Christmas bonus in favor of the quarterly, performance-driven bonus. Foley explained that he would pay out bonuses totaling \$7,000, which was more than the annual holiday and periodic production bonuses.

The goal was \$7,000, but Foley paid out \$41,000 in bonuses that year. "Open-book management has been unbelievably powerful for our company," he says. "But it's more than money. It's changing the way we think, lead, manage and make decisions."

Foley feels open-book management is helping him be a better leader, too. "Good leaders engage their employee's hearts and heads, not just their hands," he says.

**PRIDE BY ASSOCIATION.** Seeing the value of industry professions, Foley





( By David Shetlar )

# On Target

*An entomologist shares the evolution of Allectus, a broad spectrum insecticide by Bayer Environmental Science, and how it should be used in application situations to perfect insect control.*

In order to fill a gap in the activity spectrum of pesticide products on the market, Bayer and FMC began looking at the possibility of combining a pyrethroid with excellent surface insect activity with imidacloprid, which has superior control of sub-surface insects. After a couple of years of field research, a combination product was born – Allectus™.

**ABOUT ALLECTUS.** Allectus comes as a premix of imidacloprid plus bifenthrin in granular and liquid formulations, as well as on fertilizer.

The combination of bifenthrin and imidacloprid brings together two different modes of action. Bifenthrin, being a pyrethroid, is a quick acting compound that has significant contact toxicity to insects and significant residual activity once absorbed onto the plant surfaces. Imidacloprid has significant systemic action, being absorbed by the leaf tissues and translocated upward through the roots. It has a very different mode of action, blocking neural transmission so that affected insects don't behave normally. Affected insects lose interest in feeding, mating, laying eggs or protecting themselves from predators or diseases.

**USE STRATEGIES FOR ALLECTUS.** "Is there an optimal time when multiple pests have susceptible stages that could be taken out with a single application?"

Let's say that annual white grubs were my primary target and I'm used to applying a specific grub control in mid- to late July. If we look at the potential spectrum of insects and their stages at this time (for cool-season turf), we would see that the new adult billbugs have emerged and will be feeding on grass stems for a few weeks. The first generation of chinch bugs will have been completed and the new adults are either laying eggs or getting ready to lay eggs. The sod

webworms are in the middle of their summer generation (medium sized larvae). And, my primary target, the white grubs, have laid their eggs and these should hatch within two weeks. If I apply Allectus at its full rate (e.g., 0.2 pounds bifenthrin + 0.25 pounds imidacloprid), I will eliminate the actively feeding billbug adults, the feeding chinch bugs (nymphs and adults) and the sod webworms. There will then be sufficient imidacloprid to catch any second generation billbug larvae, second generation chinch bug nymphs and white grub larvae that hatch and move to the soil-thatch interface to feed.

If we look at the spectrum of pests in southern turf, we have to add mole crickets and armyworms to the mix of pests. We also have to change our billbug species (to hunting billbug) and chinch bug species (to the southern). Again, looking at a mid-May application, let's say in northern Florida, Allectus would knock out any hunting billbug adults that have overwintered or have recently emerged, eliminate the southern chinch bugs which may be well within their second generation, any armyworms that are present and catch the new mole cricket nymphs that should be hatching over the next three weeks. Where this gets interesting is that the Merit component should also provide sufficient residual action to knock out the various species of white grubs that commonly hatch in late May into June and catch any billbug larvae that hatched from eggs that had already been laid.

The real benefit of using a combination product like Allectus is that you have a better chance of eliminating a broader spectrum of insect pests over a wider window of application timing. Allectus is probably one of the first combination insecticide products that we will see, but it's hard to envision that any other combinations will have the spectrum of activity and unique modes of action that the combination of bifenthrin and imidacloprid provide.

( By Roger Stanley )

*The industry's cheerleader promotes a positive and professional image and embodies a passion for plants.*

Meet Connie Hom for the first time and you will quickly learn that she is passionate about plants and has an infectious "can do" attitude. Given those two facts, it's no surprise that in the past 20 years Hom has built her interior landscaping company from scratch into an award-winning, \$2.45 million business. Her 36 full-time and four part-time employees serve clients from Maryland to Florida.

Seeing what's possible and making it happen is at the center of Hom's definition of leadership. Her favorite role model for leadership is Thomas Jefferson.

"The thing that was so great about Thomas Jefferson was that he was able to rally people around a vision," Hom says. "Leaders do that. The Lewis and Clark expedition was an awesome accomplishment and it began with Jefferson's foresight and passion for America. He loved this country. Of course, it's popular today to point out that he was far from a perfect individual, but students of Jefferson know that his first draft of the Declaration of Independence would have abolished slavery even though he had slaves. "I quote Jefferson. On my desk I have a paperweight with one of his quotes - 'I'm a great believer in luck and I find the harder I work the more I have of it.' Another one of his sayings I like is, 'Delay is preferable to error.' Jefferson loved poetry, plants and gardens. I do too."

Hom's vision for Buckingham Greenery began in October 1982 when she and her former husband, George, decided to relocate from the New Jersey to Buckingham,

**Name: CONNIE HOM**

**Company: Buckingham Greenery Inc.**

**Location: Buckingham, Va.**

**Career Highlights:**

- Started Buckingham Greenery in October 1982
- Key Results Area director for PLANET; member of PLANET Student Career Days, Education Foundation and Crystal Ball Committee
- Member of the International Facility Management Association and Building Owners and Managers Association
- Received her bachelor of arts in sociology and social work at the College of New Rochelle in New York
- Has completed courses toward a masters in business administration from PACE University in New York
- Executive education programs completed at university of Wisconsin, Tuck Business School at Dartmouth, The Darden School of Business at the University of Virginia and the CEO Course at the University of Richmond Business School
- Member of Buckingham Friends of the Library, Historical Society and the Arts Council

Va. They enjoyed Virginia when visiting their family's farm in Buckingham for vacations and family get-togethers. So, when Hom's marketing position with New Jersey Bell Telephone was affected as a part of federal deregulation to break up AT&T, the couple decided to move to Virginia and combine their love of plants with business.

In New Jersey, Hom and her husband had started a small

# connie hom



Photos: John A. Hewlett, Jr.

**"I've tried to live my life and run my business based on Connie's three "Ps" – purpose, passion and people. To me, leadership is all about having a positive attitude. I think it means believing you can accomplish a venture and have some fun doing so." – Connie Hom**



Connie Hom

interior plants business for word-of-mouth clients. While the business was a side venture to their corporate jobs, it had grown large enough to require a 25-by-50-foot greenhouse.

"I've always loved plants," Hom says. "Even in college my roommate, Patty, and I were known as the girls who had a dorm room full of plants. When I first got married our apartment had a beautiful sunroom and not far from us there was a plant wholesaler. So plants became a part of our furniture. It was a hobby – we had some friends who were architects, so eventually some of them hired us to help with the interior designs. I did a little marketing while George did the installations."

The experience convinced Hom that she could do what she loved for a living. Before launching Buckingham Greenery, however, she researched the market around Buckingham, wrote a business plan and then visited with a local banker in Virginia to gain start-up funding. The banker turned down the loan request, but said the business idea was "nice" and he wished Hom luck. The banker's sentiments were not unusual at the time. While there were established interior landscape companies in the nation, Hom says the idea of creating and maintaining interior green spaces was not recognized as a viable stand-alone business in most areas.

Despite the banker's reaction, Hom says she never doubted the business would work. Here and her husband's families believed in the company. "To them I was a bit of a dreamer, but they also knew that I had made something out of everything I had done." Hom also knew that there were successful, dedicated interior companies out there, such as John Mini's business in New York.

Hom's next step was to contact the *Yellow Pages* to place an advertisement for the new company. She turned the local *Yellow Pages* office into the company's first account by selling them on the need for plants for their reception area. When she heard the Lynchburg, Va., General Hospital was being renovated she convinced them to hire Buckingham Greenery to design, install and maintain live plants in the lobby area.

"The gentleman who hired us for the hospital project really went out on a limb,"

Hom says. "We were totally new in the area yet we still convinced him to hire us."

Hom says she really wanted to have a good design to showcase the company's expertise. The hospital has been a client of Buckingham Greenery now for 22 years. "As a start-up company we definitely needed the hospital as a client, but we decided against showing photos of what we had done in New York or using references from that area," Hom says. "Virginia is a different market than New York and you have to know your marketplace. Plus, we had never done a job as large as the hospital before, so we decided to just sell ourselves, our expertise and our passion. I'm all about a positive attitude and believe that if you express your passion and your expertise, then it will happen."

Hom's market research showed that the area was going to grow in population. Her core strategy was not to try to take over any existing interior accounts from area companies. "We wanted new accounts that we had designed and created to show what we could do," she says. "When you take over someone else's work it takes awhile to show your horticultural knowledge and expertise. In fact, it takes 3 to 6 months before you see a difference in live plant material – it doesn't happen overnight. So our strategy in the beginning was to take on new installations."

A major break came when the company met the manager of the JCPenney's store in Roanoke, Va. The area JCPenney's stores were slated for a renovation at the time and that included replacing artificial plants in the entry areas with live ones and adding live plants in other areas of the stores.

"JCPenney's was one of the businesses that had discovered the value of live plants," she says. "We were hired to design the green areas for one store and we installed it on time and on budget. Our design then served as the prototype for 10 additional stores in the area. We ended up doing the installation and maintenance for all 11 stores. JCPenney's was our first major account."

Work for JCPenney led to the company's first hire, the wife of one of the JCPenney's employees Hom got to know from her work for them. "I realized we were going to make it as a business once we hired our

## **Q. What does the term grassroots mean to you?**

A. Grassroots is simply being an ambassador at the local level. I am a champion of the Plants at Work initiative. For me that is going to a middle school science class where children are studying the physiology of plants and learning that plants exchange carbon monoxide and oxygen. They teach those facts in science class, but it's up to us to help them understand what plants mean for humans. I have talked to students, garden clubs and anyone who will listen for years about plants in their homes or apartments and what they do for them – keeping us calm, relaxed and healthy. And I don't just talk about interior plants – all plants offer many benefits.

One issue in grassroots activity is that we have not done enough research about the benefits of plants or promoted the facts that we already know. Plants and landscape design gets some public attention, but we don't talk enough about the psychological and physiological benefits of plants. In terms of economics, everyone knows that food is essential but we have not learned enough about the economic benefits of non-food plants.

## **Q. Describe a situation where you felt you had to defend the industry and how it impacted you in your career.**

A. My involvement with the public has been proactive through Plants at Work and the previous Plants for Clean Air Council. Others in our industry – for example, McRae Anderson, Dick Ott and Gary Mangum, just to name a few – have been great spokespeople in defending the interior landscaping industry. I'm also very active in promoting the green industry through the Professional Landcare Network.

## **Q. Who is the person you admire most for taking a stand on an issue and why?**

A. One of the people I admire most for taking a stand is Thomas Jefferson for the reasons I mentioned in the article. It's also been my pleasure to have worked with some awesome leaders in the ALCA and PLANET organization. I admire them for taking stands on issues pertinent to our industry.

## **Q. What is the one thing you do to ensure that employees are reflecting a positive and professional image on your company when they are out in the field?**

A. One of the things I do to ensure our team is reflecting a positive and professional image is always reviewing our vision and mission statement. Everything we do for our clients reflects our company's core values. Because of what we believe in, we have clean, professional uniforms; we are educated and knowledgeable in our maintenance service practices; we are continually trained; and we practice the latest state-of-the-art techniques. Those things are there because we have these core values in place.

## **Q. In your opinion, what are the top three things a lawn care operator or landscape contractor can do today to help defend the industry against future negative perceptions?**

A. We need to focus on quality work, professional image and customer service. In my business, we are working inside people's buildings every day, not outside. In the interior business it is essential to have people skills and to convey a positive image. I think exterior companies could learn from their interior counterparts. Having said that, it is also important for interior companies to take customer service to a higher level. Bottom line: I think actions and professionalism in action speak louder than words. My vision for the green industry is that it is more professional, better educated and more safety conscious. End-users want our products and services. If we are more professional, the result can only be a win-win for everyone.



first employee. When workload gets to the point where you need to hire people you see your business in a different light."

The work for JCPenney's, and referrals from clients such as the hospital, led to more work for financial, health care and retail clients.

In 1986, Henry Faison, a regional developer, hired Buckingham Greenery to handle The James Center, an office complex in Richmond, Va. The center involved two 20-story-high towers. While an architect did the interior design, the company handled the purchase, installation and maintenance of the plants. "The complex had a huge atrium which allowed us to plant 18 20-foot-tall *Ficus benjamina* trees," Hom says. "We finished the job on schedule. It was a beautiful entryway, yet when it was finished the owner thought the lobby was too crowded, so he made us cut down three of the trees."

Hom says the complex is still a client of Buckingham Greenery.

Company work on the James Center led to a long-term partnership between Buckingham Greenery and the company, Faison Associates. Because Buckingham Greenery demonstrated that they could deliver a quality product with no hassle, Faison Associates began hiring them for work for office complexes, mall developments and

larger projects as far away as Florida.

"Our business principles are to show that we know what we are doing, we follow through and we do what we say we are going to do," Hom says. "The great thing about Henry Faison is that he loves plants and sees their potential in interior spaces. Together, we have created a win-win business relationship."

Today, Buckingham Greenery has a diversified portfolio that includes malls, corporate, atriums, health care, hospitality and more. As a full-service interior landscaping company it offers design, specification, installation, horticultural service management, holiday decorating and special event services. The only exterior service is containerized gardens and plantings around building entryways.

**LEARNING LEADERSHIP.** While attitude is everything to Hom, she believes environment plays a big role in shaping a positive life attitude. In her own case, she says her late father and her mother had a huge role in passing along a can-do approach to life.

Hom's father was born in Pittsburgh to Chinese immigrants. He was sent to China by his parents to attend high school. In World War II he served as a tailgunner in Europe and after being shot down was a

prisoner of war in Germany. When Hom was younger, her father owned a vegetable farm near Free Hold, N.J. with his brothers. Later, he sold his interest in the farm to work for a heating contractor.

"My dad had an excellent work ethic. He never missed work, and when he became a heating contractor he would never say 'No' to anyone who was having a heating problem. I remember that he often would go out in the middle of the night to help a customer in need. He also always made sure we went on a family vacation every summer. Those are very memorable times. And we had a nice house in the country, which is why I really love living in the country so much."

Hom's mother, Teresa, was a working mom, which was not that common in the 1950s. While she only had a high school diploma, Hom's mother had trained at a state science laboratory and was employed as a researcher at Worthington Labs to do DNA testing and enzymatic research.

"My mother has been the single biggest influence in my life," Hom says. "She has always been a great role model. She's so positive and has such a can-do attitude. And because she worked full-time when I was young I just assumed it was normal for a woman to have a career. My dad never saw my dream of a successful company fulfilled,

## association involvement

Connie Hom sees the investment of being involved in associations as being important for giving back to the industry and for her own education. "I get a lot of ideas from spending time benchmarking with industry people, and I enjoy the friendships that I have made," she says.

Hom's introduction into the association world began when she joined the Interior Plantscape Association (IPA), which then merged into ALCA. Her commitment was to be an active member of ALCA, not just as a member, so she became the co-chairperson then the chairperson of the ALCA Interior Council. Those positions gave her a voice on the association board of directors.

Hom has worked on the ALCA Education, Public Relations and Marketing committees. She participated in the Crystal Ball committee one year and has been a member ever since. She attended Student Career Days one year, which led to serving as the committee co-chairperson and then the chairperson for three years. She has also contributed to the Educational Foundation planning. Hom is also been active in the Plants at Work organization and the previous Plants for Clean Air Council.

Hom says being active within PLANET ensures that interior landscape contractors are represented within the association and that their special concerns are addressed. Beyond PLANET, Hom is active in her church, on the board of a local YMCA, and for the past five years has been a member of a CEO Council in Virginia where she meets with a group of nine owners of diverse businesses so they can learn from each other.

he died in my second year of business, but after he died my mom became a PLANET groupie. She wanted to travel and started going on trips with me. Some people in the industry now know her as 'Mom Hom.'"

Having two working parents meant that Hom and her two older sisters and one younger brother had regular duties after school. "We all had our chores to do right after school," Hom explains. "And we all helped with dinner, which was served when my dad got home from work. After dinner we would play with the neighbors and do our homework."

On Saturday mornings there were weekend chores to do. After getting the work out of the way, Hom and her younger brother liked to go buy comic books, which she still enjoys. Their parents encouraged them to be active, so they were involved in school clubs and sports.

Hom's mother was raised Catholic and raised the family accordingly. When a Catholic high school was built 20 miles away, it provided unique opportunities for Hom. "It was a brand new high school and they had decided to start it with just one class," she says. "So, my class was the very first freshman class and there were no upperclassmen. We were then in turn the first sophomores, juniors and seniors. What this meant was that everyone in my class was in leadership positions for everything—sports, glee club, drama club and everything else. I was a cheerleader for all four years. The experience affected our entire class."

Students were bused to the high school, but to make sure they could be active after school, Hom's parents belonged to a group that would pick them and their friends up after extracurricular activities. "My parents sacrificed time and money so my siblings and I could go to a parochial school," Hom says. "That gave me opportunities and led me to believe that as an individual I can do whatever I want to do. As a child, I don't recall any barriers because of race, gender or religion."

**ENTREPRENEURIAL INTEREST.** Looking back, Hom says her parent's work

ethic and passion for what they were doing served as a model for having her own business. Like her older sisters, Hom attended a small, all women's Catholic college. Since there were no men at the school, the women took all of the leadership positions. Hom majored in sociology and social work.

"I was going to save the world," Hom says. "I wouldn't go as far as to say I was a feminist, but I was going to save the world. I did an internship in Yonkers to help create a teen center for minorities. I also worked at the United Nations during the International Women's Year. And I worked at a juvenile delinquent center and at nursing homes. All that exposed me to bureaucracy and politics."

Instead of social work, Hom took a job with New Jersey Bell, who at the time had a program to attract women professionals. She joined the marketing department and handled special projects that involved finding ways that communications could help small businesses.

Hom was married by this time and taking classes toward an MBA. She and her husband's love of plants led them to making it a side business. But both were becoming disillusioned with the corporate life. "We both worked in the corporate world and both with utility companies," Hom says. "It quickly became just a job. Coming out of college I liked what I was doing, but saw that some of the people who had been doing this for 25 years had no passion or fire for what they were doing. They used to tell me that I was young and naive. I never wanted to get where they were."

When AT&T was broken up by deregulation, Hom and her former husband decided to make a big change in their lives. "George had been taking an interior landscaping program at New York Botanical Gardens," Hom says. "I was not an expert in horticulture. I loved plants and my business background told me there was opportunity. I viewed Buckingham as a home base yet I knew the surrounding area had growth potential."

Hom says she had some book knowledge about interior landscaping, but did not know how to put it into practice. When her and George joined the Interior

Plantscape Association prior to its merger with ALCA, they quickly gained a working knowledge of what was necessary and this allowed them to meet people who were already successful in interior landscaping from across the country. "The vision was to create a company that would be the best in its marketplace," Hom says. "We wanted to be known for professionalism – to have a reputation for expertise with no hassle service. We strived to follow through and do what we said we were going to do."

These core values still remain with the business today. "What I am most proud of is what we have all accomplished together," Hom says. "I am proud to have a team that has passion for what we do, for being loyal and for individual growth. Our company has won many awards, including environmental and safety awards – we've had one year with no lost time accidents and no vehicle accidents. I am very proud of that. Individuals in our company have also won awards. Buckingham Greenery is recognized in the interior landscaping industry."

Despite all of the success and growth, Hom says her love of plants and passion for life remains at the same level as when the company was first launched. "Leadership means different things to different people. I've tried to live my life and run my business based on Connie's three 'Ps' – purpose, passion and people. To me leadership is all about having a positive attitude. I think it means believing you can accomplish a venture and have some fun doing so. There will be ups and downs, of course, but leadership involves the ability to maintain the same attitude when things are bad as when they were good."

Whenever Hom thinks about leadership, she looks at a picture hanging in the Buckingham Greenery office that symbolizes the company's vision – a huge tree standing among a forest full of smaller trees. The quote beneath the picture by Pauline R. Kezer reads, "Continuity gives us roots; change gives us branches letting us stretch and grow and reach new heights."

To Hom, this means "you and your company have to always be stretching and growing – that's what leaders do."

( By Lauren Spiers Hunter )

*Thinking ahead, but never getting ahead of himself, Jim McCutcheon leads the industry with a long-term vision of raising the standards of professionalism.*

Anyone who meets him would likely agree that Jim McCutcheon is as energized by his job as a person can be. Even in a short conversation with the president and partner of HighGrove Partners, Austell, Ga., you can hear in his voice his pride in the company, his eagerness to educate future industry professionals, and, if you listen very closely, you can hear gears turning.

"People say I'm a '30,000-foot' person," McCutcheon says. "I look at our business and opportunities from a bird's-eye view and I get stifled if I'm looking at charts and reports every day. I'm definitely more the idea guy. I work best when I can present big plans to our management staff and let them shoot holes in it and work out the details. That really fosters a great team environment."

As an "idea guy," McCutcheon jokes that he may have caused an accident or two on the road between HighGrove's Georgia office and its branch in Charlotte, N.C. "The long drive gives me a lot of time to think about new ideas, and I tend to scribble and write myself notes while I'm driving," he says. "By the time I get back to the office I'll have a notebook full of new ideas and the team will roll their eyes and ask, 'What's he thinking about now?'"

Right now, McCutcheon is thinking of ways to increase industry professionalism. Already, his ability to instill confidence, courage and compassion into those he leads helps McCutcheon grow professional employees within HighGrove Partners. Moreover, his connection to horticulture and landscape students around the country provides

**Name: JIM MCCUTCHEON**

**Company: HighGrove Partners**

**Location: Austell, Ga.**

**Career Highlights:**

- Received a BA in landscape architecture from the University of Georgia
- 1990 – Joined Post Properties, Atlanta, Ga., as a landscape architect
- 1995 – Took on sales position with Post Properties
- 1996 – Became Post Properties' maintenance division manager
- 2001 – Formed HighGrove Partners with partners Bill Lincicome and Ken Rogers after purchasing Post Landscape Group from Post Properties
- Former marketing committee chair for Associated Landscape Contractors of America (ALCA) (2000)
- Professional Landcare Network (PLANET) Crystal Ball Committee member (2002-present)
- Former ALCA board member (2003)
- Student Career Days committee chair (2004-05) – first Student Career Days event held under PLANET name; will serve as co-chair for 2006 Student Career Days
- Board member, Cobb Christmas, a nonprofit organization providing food and toys for underprivileged families in Cobb County, Ga., during the holidays

jim mccutcheon





graduated from  
the University of

Photos: Rod Smith

**"We have to demand excellence, focus on training and have high expectations of future leadership." – Jim McCutcheon**



Jim McCutcheon

McCutcheon with an unequalled opportunity to educate and inspire tomorrow's industry leaders.

**GUT INSTINCT.** Unlike a number of lawn and landscape professionals, McCutcheon didn't get his start mowing yards for neighbors. An only child, McCutcheon grew up with the support and guidance of a single mom who gave him a great appreciation for personal independence and working hard to reach goals.

"I can remember as a kid, a few years when my mom and I went through some rough times. But even when she was working a couple of jobs, she always made sure I had what I needed so I could play baseball and football like the other kids in the neighborhood," McCutcheon says. "No matter how much we were struggling, she always made sure I had the foundation necessary to grow into whoever I was going to be."

Part of that foundation was a healthy self confidence that has given McCutcheon the courage to take a series of personal and professional leaps, all of which have contributed to his role as a green industry leader. The first leap brought him to the green industry in the first place—he changed his major at the University of Georgia from business to landscape architecture. From there, a calculated professional risk launched him into an exciting leadership role.

"By the time I earned my landscape architecture degree, I had spent seven years in college – but after a few years in that career I realized there were a lot of landscape architects who were better than me and it wasn't the job I wanted," McCutcheon says. Instead, in 1995, five years after joining Atlanta-based Post Properties, McCutcheon moved into a sales position and then made another decision that still makes his wife shake her head. "I walked into my boss's office and said, 'I want to take over the maintenance division,'" McCutcheon remembers. "He looked at me cross-eyed and said, 'Do you know anything about maintenance?' and I didn't, but I told him I was a fast learner and thought I could bring a whole new perspective to that division and that I thought I could grow it."

McCutcheon says his supervisor at the time, Bill Lincicome, made him a deal: He

could take over the maintenance division, but with no salary increase for a year. "At that point, I was making about \$35,000, which meant I would go from just managing myself to managing 15 or 20 people, all our maintenance clients and all the equipment without a raise," he says. "Bill told me if I was willing to take that risk, the position was mine; I said 'I'll take it!'"

Occasional risk-taking, McCutcheon says, is an important leadership quality. "People sometimes think to themselves, 'Maybe I can do this,' but more important than wondering if you can do something is having the confidence and the courage to take a risk," he says. "Changing my major and taking over the maintenance department at Post Landscape Group, were both instances where I felt like I had to follow my gut instinct. There's always got to be some planning behind the scenes, but even the most deliberate thinkers in business sometimes need to make quick decisions."

**PARTNERS IN THEIR PRIME.** Still, some decisions need more measured consideration. As such, McCutcheon took another business opportunity to lead his team with more purposeful professionalism. "One of the most difficult challenges for someone on their way to becoming a leader is understanding that, over time, the further you go, the less your success has to do with what you do every day and the more it has to do with how you motivate people," he says. "When we took Post Landscape Group private in 2001, we had a lot of learning and growing to do as owners. In other situations, I had taken risks that had worked out with great success, but all of a sudden we were in a recession and we had to be honest with ourselves and our staff."

By "we," McCutcheon refers to himself, Lincicome and Ken Rogers, the three "Partners" behind HighGrove. Their purchase of Post Landscape Group just after Sept. 11 put the new owners in a difficult spot, requiring them to share more business details with the staff than they had been used to. "In those situations, being a leader means you have to have absolute faith that you'll get through," McCutcheon says. "You have to keep an even head and get everyone involved in a plan."

**Q. What does the term grassroots mean to you?**

A. The first thing that comes to my mind is "the foundation." For me, being involved in building HighGrove Partners has been a grassroots effort – we took a small landscape division and built it into a very large, established company almost from the ground up. We developed a foundation for the company and we couldn't have gotten this far without that beginning.

**Q. Describe a situation where you feel you had to defend the industry and how this impacted you in your career.**

A. When I think back to the beginning of my career, I remember telling my dad I was going to become a landscape architect and he told me, "All you're going to do is get dirty and never make any money." Thankfully, it didn't work out that way and my dad is proud of what I've accomplished in my career. But at the point when I told him about my decision and heard his reaction, everything became about defending my position. Even today, it still bothers me that there's a perception that our industry isn't professional – even within the industry there are people who feel that way. So, building up and emphasizing professionalism within our industry and defending the professionalism that exists is essential.

**Q. Who is one person you admire most for taking a stand on an issue and why?**

A. Ronald Reagan. He took over this country during a very down-trodden time. Interest rates were high, times were tough, and there was a great deal of political tension internationally. Somehow, through all of that, he was able to make Americans feel better about their situations and what was going on. He defeated our greatest enemy and did it at the same time that his opponents were vilifying him – and he kept a sense of humor the entire time.

**Q. What is one thing you do to ensure your employees are reflecting a positive and professional image on your company when they are out in the field?**

A. This goes back to being compassionate in business. We try very hard to make people feel good about themselves and what they're doing. It's very rare that we'll dress someone down – never in public, for sure, but even in a bad situation, we try to find a way to turn it into a learning experience and build from it. By having that type of approach, our people feel good about themselves and that comes across to our customers.

**Q. In your opinion, what are the top three things a lawn care operator or landscape contractor can do today to help defend the industry against negative perceptions?**

A. That's easy: 1) Don't feed the perception. 2) Help develop solutions – get involved in the industry. 3) Train and invest in your people.

Because there are so few barriers to this business, we've ended up with too many companies in the industry and that's allowed a number of those companies to act unprofessionally but fly under the radar and get away with it. The news media will often shine lights on poor contracting jobs in lots of industries and that ends up feeding the perception that service providers, in general, are bad. It's up to us in the industry to make sure we're trained and certified and to meet or exceed our customers' expectations to separate ourselves from unprofessional companies and raise the profile of our industry. I think the Professional Landcare Network, *Lawn & Landscape* and all the companies that participate in and sponsor these Leadership Awards are doing a great job promoting professionalism in the industry and I look forward to seeing that increase in the future.



Thankfully, McCutcheon, Lincicome and Rogers powered through, and HighGrove Partners is a stronger company for it. Ask the trio why their partnership works so well and they'll tell you they balance each other out, though Lincicome and Rogers agree that McCutcheon has a leadership gift that's difficult to duplicate.

"When I was approached by Post about purchasing the landscape division, I knew I wanted Jim in an ownership role from the beginning," says Lincicome, now HighGrove CEO and partner. "In the green industry, you have to deal with all types of people from minimum-wage workers to very sophisticated clients and Jim is easily able to transition between those groups. He has that range and a wonderful ability to work with people."

Rogers agrees. "Jim has a unique ability to bring out the best in people and at the

same time get them to understand what we need to get done," says HighGrove's chief financial officer and partner. "He's the cheerleader behind HighGrove. We all have strengths and weaknesses that complement each other, and Jim's strength is in his dynamic personality and ability to explain the vision better than anyone else."

McCutcheon says having a vision is important for any successful company and that Lincicome and Rogers have taught him some key leadership qualities that make HighGrove's vision come alive. "The traits that make a great leader are confidence, courage and compassion, and those are three things that my partners and I strive for every day—along with having a great sense of humor," McCutcheon says. "Every day, we work on those traits and I'm reminded that having 250 employees actually means we have 250 families to take care of and,

to me, that's a bigger responsibility. As my supervisor, Bill showed me the need to make sure the decisions we make are fair to everyone, and that can be tough, but it's necessary. As partners, Bill and Ken and I are always supportive of each other in those situations when we have to make decisions that may not be the best for the individual but are best for the company."

Speaking to McCutcheon's skill for leadership and motivation, Rogers adds, "Something that makes Jim a great leader is that he won't ask anything of you that he wouldn't do himself," he says. "He's really taught me that it's easier to motivate people when you take the time to understand and respect them first."

**STUDENT SUCCESS.** As a green-industry leader, McCutcheon takes on the responsibility of encouraging more than

## jim mccutcheon's recommended reading

An avid reader, Jim McCutcheon, president of HighGrove Partners, Austell, Ga., has a number of books—fiction and non-fiction—to recommend to fellow business owners and managers. "I read a lot of business books, but I find that if you read too many books on management, you can end up building walls in your mind that keep you thinking all business all the time," he says. "I make myself switch to fiction once in a while because it really helps engender creativity and get me out of a business rut."

Here are some of McCutcheon's favorite titles for business and pleasure:

- "Atlas Shrugged," Ayn Rand. "There are some great themes of self-reliance that you can take away from this novel," McCutcheon says. "There are characters that show very independent attitudes and don't wait for someone else to take care of them. It's about taking risks and being courageous in your own life." At 1,000 pages, "Atlas Shrugged" isn't an easy read for everyone, but McCutcheon offers a tip: "Try it on tape," he says. "I read a lot of books on tape because I spend so much time driving between our offices in Atlanta and Charlotte. I've suggested that to a lot of people for this book in particular."
- "The Great Game of Business," Jack Stack. Another management title, McCutcheon says he likes this book because of the personal story behind it. "'The Great Game of Business' is about open-book management and why that's important to your company, but it's based on a personal experience," he explains. "The information in the book is based on what the author went through himself—he lived it, so there's a lot of credibility there."
- "Red Storm Rising," Tom Clancy. "I really liked Tom Clancy's early stuff and 'Red Storm Rising' is one of my favorites," McCutcheon says. "It's really important to indulge yourself in reading something you enjoy, even if it's fiction and you don't have to really concentrate on the message like with a business book. Give your mind that time to unwind."
- "Winning Behavior," Terry R. Bacon and David G. Pugh. "This book is about how to differentiate your company in the marketplace," McCutcheon says. "It's one I've really enjoyed and a lot of companies can learn from this."

McCutcheon says he deliberately makes time to read at least once a week. "The best time for me is Sunday afternoons," he says. "After church is my time with a good book and a good cigar, just taking some time to sit out by the creek near our house and read for a while. It's great." McCutcheon is also writing his own book, of sorts. "Over the last year, I've started keeping a journal and it's brought me a lot of joy," he says. "I always thought it would have been neat to see what was going on in my parents' lives and all the experiences that they went through and how they handled them. By keeping a journal of my experiences and the lessons I'm learning even as an adult, I hope this is something that can give my children some guidance as they get older."

his own company and employees. During an Associated Landscape Contractors of America (ALCA) meeting a few years ago, McCutcheon accepted the opportunity to chair what's now the Professional Landcare Network's Student Career Days event. Ultimately, this most recent professional leap turned out to be one of McCutcheon's most rewarding leadership roles.

"Education in the classroom is important to build a foundation of knowledge, but being able to come out of college and immediately be a success in this industry is a fallacy," McCutcheon says. "You have to have real-world experience and Student Career Days is a fantastic opportunity to bring those experiences to the next wave of industry leaders."

**"One of the most difficult challenges for someone on their way to becoming a leader is understanding that, over time, the further you go, the less your success has to do with what you do every day and the more it has to do with how you motivate people." — Jim McCutcheon**

In 2001, McCutcheon attended Student Career Days for the first time at Colorado State University. That was all it took to get him interested. "I went out and saw it for the first time and fell in love with it," he says. "It was the most energizing thing in the world, but when ALCA approached me about running the committee for it, I didn't realize how much work it would be!"

Nevertheless, McCutcheon used his leadership savvy to bring multiple audiences together for the largest Student Career Days to date: nearly 1,500 students, faculty and volunteers attended the event at the University of Maryland in March 2005. "Imagine having professors, students, sponsors and industry representatives all wanting the event a certain way," McCutcheon says. "They all come from different directions and you have to navigate those waters to get the event done and make it great. It was a challenge, but truly rewarding."

McCutcheon says Student Career Days, which he'll co-chair for the 2006 event at Brigham Young University, is a golden opportunity for the green industry to build leadership among the young people to whom the industry will be entrusted over the years. "The smart companies are the ones that attend year after year because they can begin to see, in just a short period of time, the nucleus of folks that could be great leaders in the industry," he says. "You really need to chase those kids down and take the opportunity to talk."

Part of growing new industry leaders, McCutcheon adds, is to help Student Career Days participants and other industry newcomers to think past the "What have you done for me lately?" mentality. "They've got

to put more energy into long-term thinking and planning," he says. "What the industry needs is *not* a lot more like-minded thinking. We need true leaders and visionaries who can create the path to the future. My advice to those potential leaders is to stop thinking about the short-term details, like "How much will I be paid?" and think first about where you're going to learn the most and how you're going to get the best education to become successful in the industry."

McCutcheon's own long-term visions are working on bringing in concepts from outside the green industry with an aim to advance both HighGrove and the industry as a whole. "A limiting factor in our industry is that we look too much to our peers and inside our own industry," he says. "I think if we're truly going to grow and thrive and be competitive in what really amounts to a world marketplace, we have to get out of that box a little bit. Right now, we're

studying other industries to determine how we can apply their techniques, systems and practices in a way that will benefit our own clients because they're at the center of what we do."

McCutcheon hopes that by considering industry advancements, lawn and landscape contractors will adopt a more professional appreciation for their own careers, thereby building up the industry's profile. "One thing that frustrates me is that this industry isn't viewed as a profession, sometimes even by people within the industry, and too many times we end up feeding that perception," he says. "As we bring on new employees and follow the college students that enter the job market, we have to demand excellence, focus on training and have high expectations of future leadership."

In the meantime, McCutcheon and his family have taken a leap of their own in purchasing and renovating 2 acres and a house built in the 1850s, which coincidentally once belonged to an ancestor of McCutcheon's wife Mary Jo. "Part of me can't separate business and personal," McCutcheon says. "Professionally, I'm incredibly proud of making my dream to own my own company come true, especially because that happened sooner than I thought it would. But personally, that means I can also achieve many of my family goals."

McCutcheon says Mary Jo has been his partner in life and his best friend, often keeping him on track when his big visions take him on a new path. Likewise, McCutcheon says their children Anna Reeves, Brenner and Wills are his inspiration. "I wake up every day and go do what I do because I want to provide the best life I can for my family," he says. "Leadership isn't just about business. It's also about being a teacher and a provider to my family so they know there will be good days and bad days, unconditional love and to give them the foundations to be able to grow into the people they're going to become. At HighGrove, we try to engender the same type of atmosphere so we know the people around us are realizing their potential and I hope to see more of that as we pass the industry onto its next leaders."



Photos: Jeffrey Frew

(By Jonathan Katz)

*Rather than talk about issues, Bob Ottley prefers to face them head-on.*

**R**egulatory issues are almost always divisive. Each side has its extremists who believe their way is the only way. When Monroe County, N.Y., legislators proposed a law in January that would limit when lawn care operators (LCOs) could spray pesticides, it appeared that such a tug-of-war was at hand.

If there was one person who could narrow the gap between the two sides, it was Bob Ottley, president of One Step Tree & Lawncare in N. Chili, N.Y. He was concerned that if the law passed, it could threaten the livelihood of LCOs in his region and possibly elsewhere. He responded by partnering with other LCOs from the Rochester, N.Y., area to combat the proposed law.

When Ottley, 50, first formed the group, only one of 29 county legislators sided with the LCOs. In the end, the group lost but won a moral victory by gaining seven more votes in just three months.

Those who know Ottley say his calm demeanor and the leadership skills he developed as a business owner, town councilman, association president and family man, helped convey the group's message in a way that made people listen.

"Bob was the central figure for neutralizing the emotional issues on both sides," says Laurie Broccolo, chief executive officer, Broccolo Tree & Lawn Care, Rochester, N.Y. "You know that he's very passionate about what he does, and you know he's very dedicated. But he holds his

**Name: BOB OTTLEY**

**Company: One Step Tree & Lawncare**

**Location: N, Chili, N.Y.**

**Career Highlights:**

- In 1976, founded One Step Tree & Lawncare
- Business hit the \$1-million revenue mark in 1994
- Elected to Riga, N.Y., town council in 1998
- Named president of the Professional Lawn Care Association of America in 1999
- Entered into partnership in 2000 with Phil Fogarty to subfranchise Weed Man USA operations
- Leads a coalition of lawn care operators to fight a pesticide notification law in Monroe County, N.Y.

emotions and impulses in check, and he's good at listening to different sides and ideas."

Responding to challenging situations in a patient and understanding manner wasn't something new to Ottley. It's how he built a \$2.7 million company during a 29-year period.

**THE BUSINESS OWNER.** Ottley knew early on that college wasn't for him. Like many high school students, he enjoyed the social part of school but wasn't too fond of studying and homework. Instead, Ottley focused his

# bob ottley



**"Bob Ottley's company has been synonymous with innovative ways to serve the customers. His company services thousands of customers and has a high retention rate because of his customer service and response time and that points to his ability to lead." — Phil Fogarty**

attention toward starting his own lawn maintenance business. He embarked on his entrepreneurial career by mowing lawns for neighbors until he accepted a job with a Rochester-area landscape company after graduating from high school in 1973.

Ottley worked there for a full season with the intention of eventually continuing his education but quickly realized his future was in the green industry. At 19, Ottley accepted a job as a manager for a garden center where he says he learned the ins and outs of business management.

About a year later, the company was struggling financially, so Ottley plotted his next course of action. While still employed at the garden center, Ottley purchased some equipment with money he had saved from working full time and financing from his parents. Shortly thereafter, in the spring of 1976, One Step Tree & Lawncare was born.

Ottley offered a mix of maintenance and lawn care services during the first several years of business. He learned the lawn treatment side of the business from attending university extension seminars, training sessions and from becoming involved with the Professional Lawn Care Association of America. It was at those PLCAA meetings where Ottley began developing some of his leadership skills.

"The people I met at PLCAA were probably the biggest influence on me from their preaching about customer service, the sharing of ideas and how they motivated people," he says. "There was one board member in particular who taught me it was OK to make money. I would feel guilty if I made too much money, and he kind of changed my mind on that."

Like many successful PLCAA mem-

bers, Ottley involved his employees in the company's decision-making process and involved himself in his workers' activities. "I'm one who likes to listen to my people before making a decision," he says. "I've always been one to lead by example, as well. I don't ask my people to do something I wouldn't do, and I think that's important. It's not below me to run the vacuum cleaner if the floor gets dirty."

After his first PLCAA conference in 1979, Ottley realized how much the lawn care industry was growing and decided to drop the company's landscape services and focus on treating lawns. During that time, lawn care was relatively new to the Rochester area, so Ottley had no problem growing the business. Ottley estimates revenues doubled each year during the first several years after starting out at just \$9,000 the first year.

Throughout much of the 1980s, Ottley continued focusing his efforts on generating new business. But as competition heated up in the 1990s, growth slowed, forcing Ottley to take a different approach. He decided to place more emphasis on providing quality service, which included increased employee training and adding an application to the company's lawn care program.

Employees became more than just service technicians. They all had their own accounts and they were responsible for selling the service, performing the applications and responding to customer inquiries. "They needed to build a relationship with the customers, so we put a focus on trying to give them ownership of the customers they were responsible for," Ottley says.

The improved service helped the company reach the \$1-million revenue mark

by 1994 and increased customer retention rates from 67 percent from 1987 to 1988 to no lower than 83 percent since the changes were implemented. "We focused on simple things like training, but it was also other things, like keeping the same guy on the same lawns all of the time so they would start to learn the customers and what each customer wants, that helped."

Ottley's business savvy and involvement in PLCAA eventually led him to another lawn care venture. In 2000, he and longtime PLCAA associate Phil Fogarty partnered to subfranchise Weed Man USA operations in Ohio, Western Pennsylvania and parts of Upstate New York. As part of the deal, Ottley was not required to turn One Step Tree & Lawncare into a Weed Man operation because a Weed Man franchise already existed in his area. In the five years since, Ottley and Fogarty have established 11 franchises, 10 in Ohio and one in Buffalo, N.Y.

Ottley's business intuition was one reason Fogarty says he partnered with him. "Bob Ottley's company has been synonymous with innovative ways to serve the customers," Fogarty explains. "His company services thousands of customers and has a high retention rate because of his customer service and response time and that points to his ability to lead."

Ottley says he saw the partnership as more than just an investment opportunity. "I realized it was an opportunity and a way I could use my experience in starting a business and running an operation to help franchises do the same thing, as well as help people in my own company because they may someday be able to graduate from this company and go into their own franchise somewhere," he explains.

**THE POLITICIAN.** While Ottley was busy building successful lawn care operations, he was also establishing himself as a leader in the industry. Reserved but not shy about expressing his opinions, Ottley became a voice of reason amid increased concern about the industry's potential environmental impact, say many of his colleagues.

"It takes someone who is going to be persistent in conveying information correctly in the face of radical activism,"



Fogarty says. "When something doesn't make any sense, you have to be able to calmly and persistently convey the truth, and he's done that in New York State time and time again."

Ottley started speaking out at hearings in the 1980s when New York passed sign-posting laws for applications. "I realized then that government regulation was a big issue for the business and that I should get involved with government if I'm going to be able to have any effect with this," he says.

So Ottley applied for a job on his town's conservation board in Riga, N.Y., to empower himself and the industry by entering the very circles that were making his job more difficult. Even though Ottley says he's been described by colleagues as "a little further right than Rush Limbaugh," he says he's an environmentalist.

"We are the ones who are out there in the environment every single day, and our job is to protect the environment in many, many ways," he says. "One way is making sure the plants we plant are the right varieties so they're resistant to certain diseases so we don't need to continually deal with pest controls to correct problems. Our next step is making sure we're feeding the plants correctly so we know what fertilizers to use, what's needed and when and how it should be used and all the cultural practices, including watering, mowing and aerating.

"All these types of things can create a beautiful environment in a way that doesn't harm it by using products as tools – using them only when we need to use them and then knowing which ones are going to do the least harm to the environment."

With that attitude in mind, Ottley eventually worked his way up to chairman of the conservation board and worked on several county committees. In 1998, Ottley decided to run for a seat as a town councilman. He was elected and has been serving ever since. A year later, Ottley was named president of PLCAA where he was also known as a leader.

"Bob really showed his leadership when he was running PLCAA," says Tom Delaney, director of government affairs, the Professional Landcare Network, Herndon, Va. "He's very knowledgeable in finances

**Q. What does the term grassroots mean to you?**

A. It has two different meanings. One is starting at the bottom and working your way up as far as how you've advanced within the company. The other part I look at from the political side – starting with your local governments and working your way up the food chain of your town, your county, your state and then nationally. If you get the people who elect these people involved and understanding your issues, then it becomes easier as you move up the food chain.

**Q. Describe a situation where you feel you had to defend the industry and how this impacted you in your career.**

A. The situation was the fight here at the county level on the 48-hour notification, and it's definitely going to affect our service and the products that we use and the way we deliver our service. It impacted me from a business standpoint that way, and it also impacted me from a further understanding of how government works. I learned that science and common sense and business practices don't really matter. We'd like to think they do, but they don't. It's emotion, and in the political process, it's where am I going to get my votes and who's telling me how I should vote on this? What I found – and this was the rude awakening – is that we've elected people who are willing to let the administration tell them how they should vote. They look at an issue and they look at it mostly from a political side and then they tell them how they should vote and very few members will do what's right. They listen to what the party tells them to do.

**Q. Who is one person you admire most for taking a stand on an issue and why?**

A. I admire Ronald Reagan. His handling of the Cold War was something we could all learn from. It was certainly against public opinion around the world when he told Gorbachev to "Stick it," basically. But you know what? That was the right thing to do, and he knew it was and didn't falter from that. I have a lot of respect for that.

**Q. What is one thing you do to ensure your employees are reflecting a positive and professional image on your company when they are out in the field?**

A. We're real sticklers for that. The equipment has to look good and the employees have to look good. We have a dress and appearance code, and before they're hired they're given that code and they have to agree to abide by it. So rule No. 1 is you need to look the part of a professional, and we don't falter from that. The next thing is giving them the training – not just the technical training but also training on customer service and continually hounding them on taking care of the customer and never letting that slip.

**Q. In your opinion, what are the top three things a lawn care operator or landscape contractor can do today to help defend the industry against negative perceptions?**

A. They need to get involved. They have to get involved whether it be with an association or a political party or part of their local government. Secondly, they need to be honest. One of the things that helped me the most in this debate here is I made sure I had my numbers correct and double-checked them and every statement I was making I could back up. Having honesty and that reputation goes a long, long way in these things. And perseverance is the third thing. When you're dealing with these groups, especially some of the environmental groups, you have to go and you have to keep singing your song and telling your story over and over again. You can't give up because they won't and if we get tired and quit, we lose.

and helped PLCAA be financially sound.”

**THE ACTIVIST.** Ottley's introduction to government and the political process prepared him for an ensuing battle with county legislators over a proposed law that would require LCOs to notify customers' neighbors of an application 48 hours prior to spraying. The impact of the law could be staggering, Ottley remembers thinking.

Companies would have to first find all the adjoining properties, then send notifications, then wait a couple of days for the notifications to arrive and then hope the weather cooperates so they aren't delayed even further. "For a small company, it's going to be a full-time job just to do the notifications, and they generally don't have the resources to do that, and I don't know that you'll be able to pass all of the additional

out a compromise. Ottley met with a breast cancer coalition that supported the law and a county executive to explain the LCOs position and represented the coalition at public hearings.

Ottley's political background helped the LCOs communicate their message, Broccolo says. "His experience in those areas made it very comfortable for him to sit down in those meetings," she recalls. "He actually said he understood where some of the politicians were coming from."

Ottley and the team battled the bill for five months until county legislators finally approved it in June. The law takes effect in January 2006. Some LCOs have talked about getting the law overturned, but Ottley says he doesn't see that happening. He's now putting his efforts into how he's going to operate his business successfully while fol-

the bill. "Our industry has a lack of public image – that we're just a bunch of laborers who are maybe not quite so educated, and this effort showed the politicians, the community leaders, our newspaper editors and, most importantly, our customers how highly educated and how truly professional we are as business people," Broccolo says.

Ottley is convinced if more LCOs don't get involved in the political process, the industry will lose more than just its image. "I really think the reason we're dealing with the pesticide laws we're seeing passed in our state and probably the rest of the country is because small business owners are not getting involved in government," Ottley says. "We're leaving it to people who have never had to make sure the people working for them get their paycheck at the end of the day. It seems like we've created a bureaucracy, and we've got bureaucrats running it, and I blame small business owners – not just lawn care guys but everybody who owns small businesses.

"They have to get involved, and I don't care whether it's joining a political party and participating in that process or sitting on one of your zoning boards or planning boards or running for office. But you need to get involved because if you don't, somebody is going to do it for you, and they're not doing a very good job."

For Ottley, getting involved means more than just industry-related activism. When U.S. troops were deployed to Iraq in 2003 for Operation Iraqi Freedom, Ottley offered free lawn care services to immediate family members of troops in the Rochester area, Delaney notes. He's also volunteered with his employees and family members to help beautify Arlington National Cemetery in Washington. "He's certainly showed his leadership in the community and the industry," Delaney says. "He goes beyond what's required of running a successful business. He's always taken the time to have his people participate in activities in Washington, D.C., with the Arlington Cemetery and lobbying federally on the Hill. You add all of those things together and it adds up to a remarkable person."

**"I really think the reason we're dealing with the pesticide laws we're seeing passed in our state and probably the rest of the country is because small business owners are not getting involved in government. We're leaving it to people who have never had to make sure the people working for them get their paycheck at the end of the day. It seems like we've created a bureaucracy, and we've got bureaucrats running it, and I blame small business owners – not just lawn care guys but everybody who owns small businesses." – Bob Ottley**

costs on to the customer," he explains.

After the law was proposed in January, Ottley decided his only recourse was to join forces with competing lawn and tree care companies to effectively fight the bill. The group hired an attorney and a public relations firm to help present its case. Ottley says he invested \$8,000 to \$10,000 and 95 percent of his time from February to May fighting the bill.

Ottley and his colleagues spread the word around town about the law's potential implications for the lawn care industry. They visited legislators, sent letters to customers and other green-industry businesses to garner support.

When it was time for the LCOs to make their case, instead of being combative, Ottley worked to bring both sides together in the hopes of working

lowing the new law. Ottley knows it won't be easy but says he's confident his business will remain profitable. "We do have some ideas to the point where I think we've got it figured out how we'll be able to do this and stay profitable," he says. "We're not one of the little guys who is really going to struggle because of this, and I do expect to make some acquisitions."

Other companies may not be so fortunate. "The fact is the way this law is written, it's going to reduce the amount of competition in this industry," Ottley explains. "Now, you would think I would be happy about that, but, again, I go back to my political beliefs that competition is good and when you start to eliminate or reduce it, you're not doing the marketplace any favors."

But the industry as a whole may have still benefited from Ottley's efforts to fight



# Knowledge is Power

Bayer educates LCOs and PMPs about fire ants at regional summits.

During the first three months of 2005, Bayer conducted eight educational summits for LCOs and PMPs on fire ants and TopChoice™, a professionally-applied fire ant control product from Bayer Environmental Science.

"It's important for LCOs and PMPs to not only be knowledgeable about our products, but the pests they treat, and the most efficient ways to sell to their customers," says Bryan Gooch, business manager, insecticides, Bayer Environmental Science. "These summits provide a forum for LCOs and PMPs to offer feedback and learn new techniques from some of the most renowned experts in the field."

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"No one else in the industry does a program like this, and I find it very helpful for myself and my employees, not only because of the educational and sales talks, but also for the



Attendees at fire ant summits conducted by Bayer Environmental Science

CEU credits," says Gary LaScalea, GroGreen, Dallas, Texas.

TopChoice is a low-dose, non-bait granular insecticide that requires just one annual application by a licensed professional. It provides unsurpassed control of fire ants for one year, eliminating existing mounds and preventing new mounds from forming.

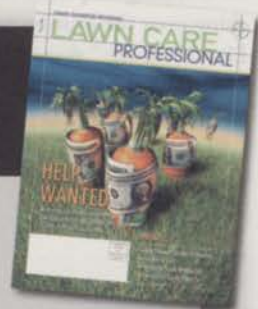
Bayer is currently planning 10 summits during the first two months of 2006. For more information visit [www.nofireants.com](http://www.nofireants.com) or speak to your local Bayer sales representative.

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(By Nicole Wisniewski)

*The industry's "BugDoc" is a happy-go-lucky insect lover who lives anything but a bug-sized life.*

Looking at the turf, even closely, most people just see slick blades of vivid green standing at attention, all points reaching for the sun. Get a magnifying glass out, and one might even catch glimpses of torn turf edges or ants carrying a tasty discarded bread crumb to their mound.

But ask David Shetlar what he sees when he looks at one square foot of turf and like an episode of "CSI: Crime Scene Investigation" your vision is abruptly zoomed forward into what he calls a microscopic subtropical biorainforest. "The normal event that happens on most turf everyday – the dew event – is like that which happens in a rainforest," explains Shetlar, eagerly. "It's a mutation of water that contains sugars and proteins. If you look at it from a microscopic level, there are thousands of insects, arthropods, hundreds of thousands of bacteria and fungi inhabiting turf. They are not big things like tigers and cheetahs, but they are comparable, just at a microscopic scale. I see sod webworms and white grubs as the equivalent of grazing animals on the Savannah. There's more biodiversity going on in turf than most people give it credit for."

And just like that – Shetlar, assistant professor of landscape entomology, The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio, showcases his tireless dedication to passing bits of knowledge on to willing recipients. Shetlar's goal – to make science something even the least interested can enjoy. "Teaching – that's Dave's real ace," shares Harry Niemczyk, professor emeritus, OARDC/The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio. "He's a consummate teacher, very patient. He's enthusiastic about what he does and he presents information in an enthusiastic and challenging way."

**Name: DAVID SHETLAR**

**Company: The Ohio State University**

**Location: Columbus, Ohio**

**Career Highlights:**

- Received his bachelor's and master's of science degrees in zoology from the University of Oklahoma in 1969 and 1970, respectively; received a Ph.D. in entomology from The Pennsylvania State University in 1976
- Job history: 1971 – instructor, Department of Zoology, University of Oklahoma; 1971-1983 – graduate assistant, assistant professor, Department of Entomology, The Pennsylvania State University; 1983-1984 – owner, P.E.S.T. Co.; 1984-1990 – research scientist, ChemLawn Services Corp.; 1990-present – association professor, Department of Entomology, The Ohio State University
- Started a reciprocal International Turfgrass Internship Program for foreign exchange students at The Ohio State University
- Took part in more than 20 refereed publications, more than 100 reviewed journal articles, 14 book chapters, 3 books, more than 45 trade journal articles, more than 30 extension fact sheets and bulletins, more than 25 scientific presentations at professional society meetings, more than 75 workshop presentations, more than 100 presentations at trade society meetings, more than 75 radio and television presentations, more than 400 extension presentations
- Some research accomplishments: Developed microplot evaluation systems to test chemical and biorational controls for efficacy against turfgrass insects; developed and evaluated entomopathogenic nematodes for control of turfgrass caterpillars, billbugs, white grubs and mole crickets; development and testing of degree-day predictive models for turfgrass insects, especially bluegrass bill bug and sod webworms

david shetlar



  
TURFGRASS  
ENTOMOLOGY

Photos: Tom Dubanowich

**"I can be a bastard in class and demand that my students memorize information and make the experience dry and boring or I can make it fun. If I make it fun, the students will be more inclined to learn the material and they will also be more inclined to seek out additional information or take another course if they want to. People who have a painful experience don't repeat it, but if it's fun, they will try it again. That's my general underlying philosophy – science doesn't have to be boring." – David Shetlar**



David Shetlar

Those who know Shetlar today may think he's been this outgoing all of his life – after all, it's not uncommon to invite him to a party only to find him snooping around the backyard shrubs after cocktails are served, seeking out a fresh pest specimen or unique insect photo opportunity, or chatting up a fearless group of pint-sized guests about a bug he found on a nearby tree branch. In fact, Shetlar describes his youthful self as extremely shy. "I was part of the briefcase nerd pack in high school – the math and science crowd," he says.

But careful nurturing from some professors, as well as his artistic wife, brought out the best in Shetlar, instilling in him their most venerable teaching traits.

**THE LOVE BUG.** Shetlar was born in Columbus, Ohio, six months before his father, Marvin, finished his Ph.D. in chemistry at The Ohio State University and took a job at an Oklahoma-based medical school, where he conducted biomedical research and taught biochemistry courses in human physiology.

Growing up in Oklahoma, Shetlar was encouraged by his microbiologist mom, Clara, to pursue an interest in the creepy-crawlies. "I blame my mother and her incredible tolerance for letting me have jars and containers of stinking and rotting critters in my room," he says, laughing.

The family also enjoyed the outdoors together, regularly going camping and taking nature hikes with other academics from the University of Oklahoma, including herpetologists and ornithologists, who according to Shetlar, were always pointing out neat facts about the various species they discovered along the way.

This interest in insects only grew stronger with age. Shetlar's wife, Renee, remembers hearing Marvin tell the story of his car breaking down, only to have the mechanic find that a very young Shetlar had filled the gas tank up with grasshoppers when he was playing outside the previous day. "He had started collecting insects even then and just thought the gas tank was a good place to store them," she explains, chuckling.

In fact, when the couple first met in high school, Renee says dates with Shetlar were never dull. On their fifth date, Shetlar

came to the door with something behind his back, asking her mother very politely if he could have a plastic bag. "It was a tarantula – they were everywhere in Oklahoma and Dave couldn't help but pick them up," Renee says. "And on our dates we would go around to lit areas at night with a jar between us and collect beetles and spiders. I had to overcome my fear of critters pretty quickly and get used to a refrigerator full of vials and bags of bugs after we got married."

Renee's adventurous spirit is what turned Shetlar's head. "We went to the movies that night and she asked me what was in the bag," he says. "I said, 'You can look if you want.' She looked. That was it – I was smitten."

"The knowledge he had about insects and science always floored me," Renee adds. "Plus, I was impressed with his sense of humor, his incredible patience and the fact that he was a really good dresser."

Shetlar also excelled in mathematics, a major he pursued for awhile after testing out of math courses through his second semester junior year of college as a high school senior. Though the topic was interesting and challenging, Shetlar says he moved up too rapidly to a level of professors who he felt didn't care. "They enjoyed throwing math tricks at you to let you figure out their solutions," he explains. "I didn't think it was right – it wasn't education. They never taught us how to figure out these problems. I had a bad reaction to that form of teaching."

So it seemed only natural for Shetlar to continue pursuing his interest in insects. Because the University of Oklahoma, Norman, Okla., didn't have an entomology program, Shetlar majored in zoology, specifically invertebrate zoology, the study of insects like worms, slugs and snails.

One professor, Shetlar remembers, played a lot of mental games with students to get them to think. "Once a week, he would give a quiz," Shetlar says. "Out of 15 quizzes, he was only going to count 10 toward our grade and we got to decide which ones counted – before the grades were given. His philosophy was that if we truly knew the answers to the quiz questions, we would know it before the grades were handed out. He was building our confidence in what we really knew vs. what we only thought we knew."

This philosophy is something Shetlar uses

**Q. What does the term grassroots mean to you?**

A. My feeling is that grassroots in the lawn and landscape arena used to come from the big contractors who had the money to support research arms. But today I think it comes more from the small operators who are willing to try and test new products to see if they work or not. These mom and pop shops are working in upscale neighborhoods, have a total commitment to service, customize their programs to each specific property and charge a premium for their services.

**Q. Describe a situation where you feel you had to defend the industry and how this impacted you in your career.**

A. I do this all of the time. I take no guff from environmentalists – I'll stand toe-to-toe with them any day.

**Q. Who is one person you admire most for taking a stand on an issue and why?**

A. Bob Miller with ChemLawn because he had high standards and Chuck Darrah, who I also knew from ChemLawn, because he wasn't afraid to scold a branch manager for not following the proper protocols. And I will always admire Dr. Hubert "Huby" Frings for putting me down the right career path and encouraging me to experience teaching. Good teachers pick up on the talents of their students and try to cultivate them. Huby did this for me – he saw a spark in me that no one else picked up on. Now I try to do this for others in my courses.

**Q. What is one thing you do to ensure your employees are reflecting a positive and professional image on your company when they are out in the field?**

A. When you have a poor performing employee, you get rid of them – this works in any situation. I explain to my graduate students the values and standards I want them to have, and they need to follow these values if they want to work with me. I have yet to catch a graduate student deliberately doing anything against these standards – I try to communicate this in the beginning so they know what is expected.

**Q. In your opinion, what are the top three things a lawn care operator or landscape contractor can do today to help defend the industry against negative perceptions, pesticide legislation, etc.?**

A. Communication is the key, but it has to be done the right way. When I give lectures about pesticide use, I always start by talking about the charged words people use – natural, organic, synthetic, chemical, cancer, risk, safety, etc. I talk about how people combine them to make them sound better or worse – for instance, naturally occurring biological control vs. synthetic man-made chemical. One sounds good to people, one sounds bad. There are always two sides to everything. For example, everything is synthetic in Diet Dr. Pepper, but I still drink five to six cans of it a day. Why? And if people drink synthetic fluids, why are they sometimes so reluctant to have pesticides used on their lawns? One of the ways lawn care operators can spread the positive message about lawn care is by talking to their customers about how they provide them with a convenience so they can do the other things they might want to do with that saved time. They are helping their customers maintain a certain lifestyle. This is the message they need to drive home.

in his teaching today. "You have to play some games with young minds to get them to start thinking more so they can realize what they've committed to their short term memory vs. their long term memory. Many students are clueless of what they know and don't know. This professor spent time choosing quiz questions that were made up of bits and pieces that the average student will pick up and miss. He knew what he was doing when he came up with this system."

When Shetlar entered his senior year, another professor became influential in his future career path – Dr. Hubert Frings, who taught Zoology 101 to a room full of more than 600 students in the spring and fall semesters. By offering a zoology research credit, Frings, or as Shetlar called him "Huby," wooed Shetlar into filling a laboratory instructor position. "Half way through that semester, he came to me again and said, 'You're doing really well and I'm getting good reports from the students about your work, so can you teach one of the lectures?'" Shetlar explains. "A teaching lab for 30 students was OK – they were all younger and I could bluff my way through it. But in a lecture course, there are 600 students, and I was an extremely shy person."

The course Huby wanted Shetlar to teach was genetics, a subject Shetlar nearly flunked, so Huby provided Shetlar with his notes to make it easier for him to teach the course. "He also told me it'd be a means for me to take a refresher on a subject that I did so poorly in," Shetlar remembers. "His notes were meticulous – highlighted, emphasized, explained and well-choreographed."

Huby coached Shetlar on the secrets of good teaching. "He said, 'Dave, I handle my lectures as if they were each one act, one person plays.' That stuck with me," Shetlar shares. "He said that when the lights go down and I was up on that stage, I was the actor and the act was for me to deliver information that was well explained in a somewhat entertaining method and at a reasonable pace. He reminded me to interject a few jokes and a few tear-jerkers to keep the audience interested."

Needless to say, on his first day, Shetlar

was terrified. "I made the mistake of standing up at the podium when the students came pouring in," he says. "I was looking out into a sea of faces, all talking with each other. But when the lights went down and everyone became quiet, I could only see a half a dozen or so people in the front row – the rest were hidden. I thought, 'This doesn't seem so bad.' So, I introduced myself and let out the first joke – there was some laughter. I thought to myself, 'Oh, this is kind of neat. I do have control. I am communicating to these people.' I had memorized Huby's notes, but found out that I had a talent for taking information and modifying it into my own words."

Afterward, Huby asked Shetlar to teach two more courses that semester. "He was grooming me," Shetlar soon realized. "He cultivated a talent in me that I didn't even know I had. Being a teacher was the furthest thing from my mind. I thought I was going to be a scientist running around in a rain forest discovering new things until Huby opened my eyes and I finally understood – science without education was useless."

**THE BUG BUSINESS.** In research, it is not a common practice for scientists to get all of their degrees from the same institution or pursue work at that college after concluding their education. And since Shetlar received his bachelor's and master's degrees from the University of Oklahoma (in 1969 and 1975, respectively), Huby pushed him to leave the state. So, Shetlar packed up his belongings, his wife and 3-year-old daughter, Norann, and drove their Dodge Dart to Pennsylvania to pursue a graduate teaching assistantship at The Pennsylvania State University.

After receiving his Ph.D. in 1977, he was offered a position to teach general entomology as an assistant professor. However, after a few years some faculty at the university felt that as a Penn State student, Shetlar should have gone elsewhere to teach. So Shetlar left and started a private consulting firm he called P.E.S.T. Co. in 1983. Here, he did research for pesticide manufacturers as well as testified in court cases where his expertise was needed. However, the company was

what Shetlar called a "zero-profit" one. "It basically made me enough money to travel for research or a 'working' vacation, where I took photos of insects or turf damage on golf courses," he says.

Consequently, one year later, Shetlar took a position with ChemLawn as a research scientist in entomology in Delaware, Ohio. Here, he was intimately involved in the implementation of all turfgrass care programs that the company offered its clients. The researchers studied different turf types, and then presented their findings to the various ChemLawn branches. "Because we each had to sit through all of the areas of expertise – weed, disease, fertility, insect and cultural practices – we all got a total turf management education," Shetlar says. "We also learned the business background of lawn care."

After Ecolab purchased ChemLawn in 1987, research became less important to the company and cost cutting became a common practice. Shetlar recalls one day when the research department was chopped from six to two people. "We felt that research was such an important cog in the wheel that they would never get rid of it, but the reality was that they did," he says. "Then, not long after the new CEOs made their display that they were bringing the budget in line and things settled down, they hired a few people back. But it was never the same."

In 1990, Shetlar left ChemLawn and took a position as an associate professor in landscape entomology at The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio, where he continues to work today. In this position, his work is made up of 20 percent turf research, 60 percent extension education and 20 percent teaching.

Shetlar also inherited an industry-specific newsletter after working only a couple of years at Ohio State when another entomologist, Dick Miller, retired. Industry professionals had grown attached to Miller's *Bug Dope* newsletter, and asked Shetlar if he could recreate it. He agreed, releasing the *PEST Newsletter*, which provides readers with regular turf insect forecasts.

"I like to think of myself as the grandfa-



ther in the industry who will give you that sage advice you need," Shetlar says. "I'm not going to tell you how to operate your business or tell you how to retain customers, but I will try to help you find the most cost efficient techniques for managing the insect problems you have on clients' lawns. The key is increasing the consistency of your results – that's where I can help you shave maybe 10 percent off of your failure rate and boost your efficiency."

In his education of the industry, Niemczyk says Shetlar has bridged an overdue gap. "He has a reputation for having a wealth of up-to-date turf insect information and photographs that no other researcher has in the industry," Niemczyk shares. "It took researchers a long time to develop a relationship with the turfgrass industry and Dave has made it stronger than it ever was."

**NOT BUGGIN' OUT.** Being a student in one of Shetlar's courses is anything but dull. As a teacher, he likes to seek out clever ways to help students retain knowledge.

For instance, students might steadily grow nervous watching the clear plastic bag of wasps sitting on Shetlar's desk one morning, twisted – not tied – shut. As students try to focus, wasps buzz and eventually one unravels the loose coil and escapes. "Dr. Shetlar!" the students shout and point, as Shetlar calmly grabs the free wasp with his hand and puts it back in the bag. "Aren't you going to get stung?" the students ask. And here's where the lesson comes in. "Eventually, I bring out another bag full of wasps closed tightly and explain to them that I did this little scare tactic on purpose to show them that the male wasps in the open bag do not sting and the female wasps in the closed bag do," he explains. "I have them come close and examine the difference in antenna between the male and female, so they can actually see and learn from the experience."

Renee chuckles when she hears this story, knowing it's a telltale sign of her husband's personality. "He really tries to get students to think for themselves," she says. "He may make bizarre statements in class just to see if the students are listening. He wants them

to challenge him – he doesn't want them to just take what he says as gospel."

"Too many professors try to give facts and don't challenge kids to be investigative and to think," Shetlar adds. "I have a sense of humor and I think life can either be a bitch or it can be fun, so why not try to make it fun. I can be a bastard in class and demand that my students memorize information and make the experience dry and boring or I can make it fun. If I make it fun, the students will be more inclined to learn the material and they will also be more inclined to seek out additional information or take another course if they want to. People who have a painful experience don't repeat it, but if it's fun, they will try it again. That's my general underlying philosophy – science doesn't have to be boring."

To industry professionals, fellow researchers and students, Shetlar is known as the "BugDoc," a nickname that Renee helped him obtain. "When I joined Ohio State, I thought I should have a moniker that I could hang my hat on, and I mentioned that once I figured out what it was I wanted to get it printed on vanity plates for my car," Shetlar says. "Renee went onto the Web site and entered in 'Bug Doctor' – that was taken. Then she tried 'Dr. Bug' – that was taken too. But 'BugDoc' was available, so that became my moniker."

In this way, Niemczyk calls Shetlar "the entomologist's entomologist," which he defines as "an entomologist 24-7, no matter where he goes, whether it's in the middle of New York City or the desert. If you invite him to your house, I assure you that he won't leave without checking out what sort of insects are hiding in your trees, turf and shrubs."

**BEYOND BUGS.** Shetlar's office is what he describes as organized chaos. "If a student or coworker needs to reference a publication I showed them earlier, I just reach down 2 inches into the pile on my desk and pull it out," he says. "Many people wonder how I do that. My feeling is that there are two types of people – people who organize in file cabinets and complicated rows and others

who embrace mental organization – they know where they put something and can find it in chaos."

But in his office, as well as his home, one can identify Shetlar's many hobbies, which include collecting old pest control equipment, old woodworking tools and antique stretch glass – the latter being his favorite.

Shetlar and Renee discovered iridescent stretch glass when Shetlar was a graduate student living in Pennsylvania. They first became interested in other types of glass, such as Tiffany, which were too pricey for a graduate student to afford. So a furniture maker and antique dealer acquaintance suggested to them iridescent stretch glass as one that was less expensive that they could enjoy. The glass is like carnival or other art glass in that it is pressed or blown and then sprayed with a metallic salt to give it a multicolored, iridescent surface. The Shetlars have acquired approximately 3,000 pieces of the art glass. "We have collector's syndrome," Shetlar says. "I think people are either born with an accumulator gene or they like their life clean and simple. I'm definitely an accumulator – my parents had it and I have it too."

How can someone who's so passionate about science and mathematics also have such a strong interest in the art of glassmaking? Renee says it's in her husband's blood. "He has the same intensity in his work as he does in all areas of his life," she explains. "He always goes one step beyond what is normally expected. And I think his interest in pottery, glassmaking and certain types of art all comes from his love of math – he tends to love things that have symmetry."

Considering his deep passions for family, entomology and stretch glass, Shetlar wants his legacy to be surprisingly simple. He says, "the best that can be said about anybody is that they tried their best, did what was right and delivered information when asked in a knowledgeable and entertaining fashion."

Beyond that, Shetlar continues to hope that with each science fair he judges and insect discovery day he teaches that he can influence just one more child to remain fearless of all insects, great and small.



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