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S1

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09.05

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Lawn & Landscape

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> > > best of the web

From rocks and twigs to children's and pets' toys, lawns can be full of debris that should be removed from a lawn mower's pathway before mowing begins, lest the mower turn debris into projectiles. Of course, it's not always possible to catch every hazard in a lawn, especially when they're obscured by tall grass. As a result, most contractors will have to deal with flying-debris damage at some point in their careers. What's the best way to prevent these problems and handle them if they do arise? *Lawn & Landscape's* Online Message Board participants discussed this topic and its associated liability recently. Turn to page 51 to find out what they had to say.

> I & L Online Sweepstakes



Lawn & Landscape knows how busy you are as you keep your company and employees up and running all day, but we also know that keeping on top of industry and business news is essential to your success. So while you may not have time to visit www.lawnandlandscape.com every day, we have a solution for you: the *Lawn & Landscape* Online Weekly e-newsletter. Arriving in your inbox every Monday, the e-newsletter is a culmination of all the week's headlines, along with opportunities to enter the *Lawn & Landscape* Online sweepstakes and participate in the weekly online poll. Moreover, find information about upcoming *Lawn & Landscape* events.

Of course, we know it's not just news that brings you to *Lawn & Landscape* Online – it's also our extensive products database and Dealer Search option. Knowing that, signing up for the e-newsletter also puts you on our e-mailing list for the *Lawn & Landscape* Online Weekly Product e-newsletter, coming to you every Thursday.

To start receiving great information on industry news and new products to boost your business potential, contact Web Editor Lauren Spiers at lspiers@gie.net or by phone at 800/456-0707.

> online extras

Want to learn more about the features in this month's issue of *Lawn & Landscape*? Just visit the Online Extras section of *Lawn & Landscape* Online for content not appearing in print.

- For fall fertilization tips from LESCO, check out the *Lawn & Landscape* September Online Extras.
- Intrigued by the industry's first Rating the States study? Find more information about how the economy affects your business in the *Lawn & Landscape* September Online Extras section.
- Visit the September Online Extras section to learn calculations for data analysis on low-volume irrigation systems.
- Find more products on www.lawnandlandscape.com to help you boost your business potential. Visit the Products section as well as the *Lawn & Landscape* Online Store for more information.
- Next time you go online, make it a point to read the September Online Extras section for even more business tips pertaining to the stories in this issue.

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USE READER SERVICE # 13

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Got Complaints?

No one enjoys hearing a customer complaint, but if company owners better understood their value they would take action to get more complaints on the record. That's one powerful take home message from our Weed & Insect Conference held in Chicago August 3 and 4.

The messenger was Chris Senske, president of Senske Lawn & Tree Care in Kennewick, Wash. Senske's presentation, titled "Keeping Lawn Care Customer Retention High," was based on his more than 15 years of exploring how to keep more customers. A critical factor in retention is getting complaints. Senske says consumer research and his company's own experience show that getting a dissatisfied customer to complain increases their likelihood of repurchasing your service by 250 percent – even if their complaint was not satisfied!

Senske's extensive tracking of complaints also parallels consumer research that shows that complainers tend to be your longer-term and larger volume customers. This makes sense because these customers are investing more and have higher expectations. While just 3 percent of customers complain about a minor inconvenience, 69 percent of customers who pay \$140 or more for a service will complain if they are not satisfied. Fifty percent will complain a second time if their problem was not satisfied after the first complaint.

Overall, Senske says many customers don't bother to complain because they don't feel it will be worth the effort, that the company won't do anything about the problem anyway and, in some cases, they fear possible retribution.

Many customers simply do not know where or how to complain. Field employees tend to block or filter out complaints. And only 2 percent of dissatisfied customers will write a letter to management.

So, how do you get more complaints registered? Senske's advice is to make it as easy as possible for customers to complain. He also advises a shift from blame to viewing complaints as opportunities to help.

To "attract" complaints from his customers Senske offers a toll-free number, a feedback button on his company's Web site and he trains field staff to tell customers the company can only solve problems they know about. He also uses customer satisfaction surveys regularly.

Senske's staff is educated about the value of complaints to the company's reputation. To get to the root of the problem and fix it – rather than to just find blame – all complaints are analyzed against four criteria: First, what was the symptom or reason for the contact? Second, what was the general cause – was it an employee, a company process breakdown or the customer? Third, what was the specific, "root" cause? Fourth, if applicable, the reason for escalation to the manager level – usually a factor other than the original problem, for example, the attitude or indifference of an employee when being told about the problem?

Senske says his diligence in tracking complaints and working to resolve them has paid off with an improved company reputation and improved customer retention. **LL**

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True Stories on Bad Service

As a husband, father of four and frequent traveler, I do business with a lot of companies. Through the years I have encountered many incredible instances of terrible service by all kinds of companies. Following are five great stories. I hope you'll learn a little in the process.

1. While dining at a country club my family belongs to, I ordered a patty melt. Ten or so minutes later the waiter came out with the burger and placed it in front of me. He then said, "Is there anything else I can get you?" "Yes," I replied, "some ketchup." "Oh, I'm sorry, sir, we're out of ketchup." So I ate a patty melt with no ketchup. There is a grocery store less than 1 mile from this place, but apparently no one was smart enough to think of that.


2. Recently I went to a shoe store to buy my children some shoes. I bought four pairs of children's shoes and while paying I asked the clerk where the shoelaces were as I needed some for a pair of dress shoes. They told me they didn't carry shoelaces. How can that be? While they might not make much money from selling shoe laces, you do some things just to make clients happy. A shoe store not selling shoe laces makes about as much sense as a grocery store not selling milk.

3. A few years ago, while dining in a hotel restaurant with some clients of mine in Orlando, Fla., one of my clients ordered fettuccine alfredo. The waitress came out with a plate of spaghetti and meatballs. My client politely said, "I ordered fettuccine alfredo." The waitress replied, "I know, but we're out of that so you'll just have to eat this." By the way, this was at a large, very well known hotel. Needless to say, we did not tip her and I will never return to that hotel.

4. My wife's dentist kept canceling her appointments. They would call and say the


hygienist was sick. This happened twice in two weeks. My wife, a very patient person, let them reschedule her again. The day of this appointment, at 6:35 a.m., I was eating my oatmeal and reading the paper when the phone rang. I was worried—rarely when the phone rings that early is it something good. I answered the phone and a young lady asked for my wife. Reluctantly, I went and woke up my wife to tell her she had a phone call. My kids were wakened by the ringing phone so I went to tend to them. I got them settled down and went to ask my wife who called. It was the dental hygienist canceling the 11:20 a.m. appointment. Needless to say, my wife found a new dentist.

5. One winter day, the temperature was negative 10 degrees Fahrenheit, and I went to the camera store to get some film developed. I knew almost everyone in the place as I went there often. They normally opened at 10 a.m. I arrived at 9:55 a.m. and could see from my truck that all of the employees were standing close to the door. So I got out and ran to the door, assuming they would let me in—after all, I'm a good customer, right? Shivering in the cold, I found the door locked. I motioned for one of them to open the door and the manager pointed to his watch. I went back to my truck and watched as the manager stood at the door until it was 10 a.m. and then opened it. I went inside and he said, "Hello, Mr. Grunder, sure is cold out there, eh?" "Yes," I replied, "How come you couldn't let me in?" He said, "Because it wasn't 10 a.m." I asked him, "What would happen if you unlocked the door five minutes early?" He said, "Nothing, we'd just be open too early." Some people really don't get it, do they?

Take a look at your operation. Is common sense present in your company? Do you give your team the license to help clients? Is your operation customer friendly? Don't let any of these things happen at your company. 

marty grunder

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



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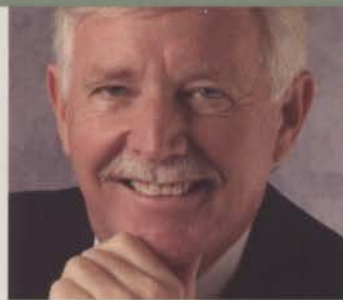
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Staying on Target

While this is not the time of year to implement new systems or changes, it is time to review what you're doing and begin to plan the changes you'll make this winter. Let's review a few key points that will help you become a better, more efficient contractor.

1. Are you comparing your financials to a budget each month? If not, create an annual budget with a monthly breakdown for all your expenses next year. This is an absolute must if you are to work *on* your business instead of *in* your business.

2. Are your estimates created via a system that incorporates production rates and difficulty factors? Do you measure properties, count obstacles, measure lineal footage, etc.? If not, consider developing this type of estimating program for 2006. If you're already using this system, now is the time to get out your stopwatch and measuring wheel so you can review your company's production rates.

3. Are your clients happy? Are you sure? You'll be renewing maintenance contracts soon and you always want to have referrals from your current clients. Considering that, start making friendly phone calls to all your clients now to check their pulse. And guess what? You might even sell them some extra work to complete before winter.

4. Are your employees happy? Are you sure? Have you held a cook-out or company outing lately? Now is a good time for these types of events while things are a little slow. If you have seasonal employees, be sure that you're all on the same page relative to when they will leave you for the winter. You don't want them to leave in the middle of leaf season or at the first sign of cold weather. Communicate.


5. Are you managing your crews with budgeted vs. actual hours? Budgeting hours is one thing that I recommend every day. Track crews' actual time on jobs against the

hours budgeted for the work and do this in a manner that lets each crew know how they're performing week over week. If you're not doing this, develop a system that makes it part of your business. This is a great winter project and a must if you want to make money.

6. What is your quality, really? Your crews' work quality will dictate the future growth and reputation of your company. As the owner or manager, get out there now and visit each site. You don't have much time left to make corrections before asking for a renewal or a referral. Do you have a specific Quality Judging Program that enables you to judge a site and give it an overall score to report back to the crew? Take the winter to develop this program as well.

7. Do your employees know what's expected of them? Job descriptions are important for all employees. Communicate what your expectations are of the individuals in your organization. They will be happy to finally know what's expected of them. Involve employees in the development of job descriptions.

8. At what point do you make the seasonal layoffs this fall? Do you have a plan? Will the budget dictate? Yes, the weather contributes to when layoffs must begin, but too often I see companies keep employees on from one to six weeks too long and it really costs. Discuss the layoff plan with your team and get at least a tentative game plan together. Attach your payroll dollars to your plan so the impact of keeping people too long is clear. Remember also to be fair because you'll want these people to come back in the spring.

All business owners must continue to grow in order to provide opportunities for their employees and their families. To do this, companies in this industry need to be quality, efficient, profitable machines. Step back for a minute and evaluate where you are now and look at how you really do things. We can always improve. 

jack mattingly

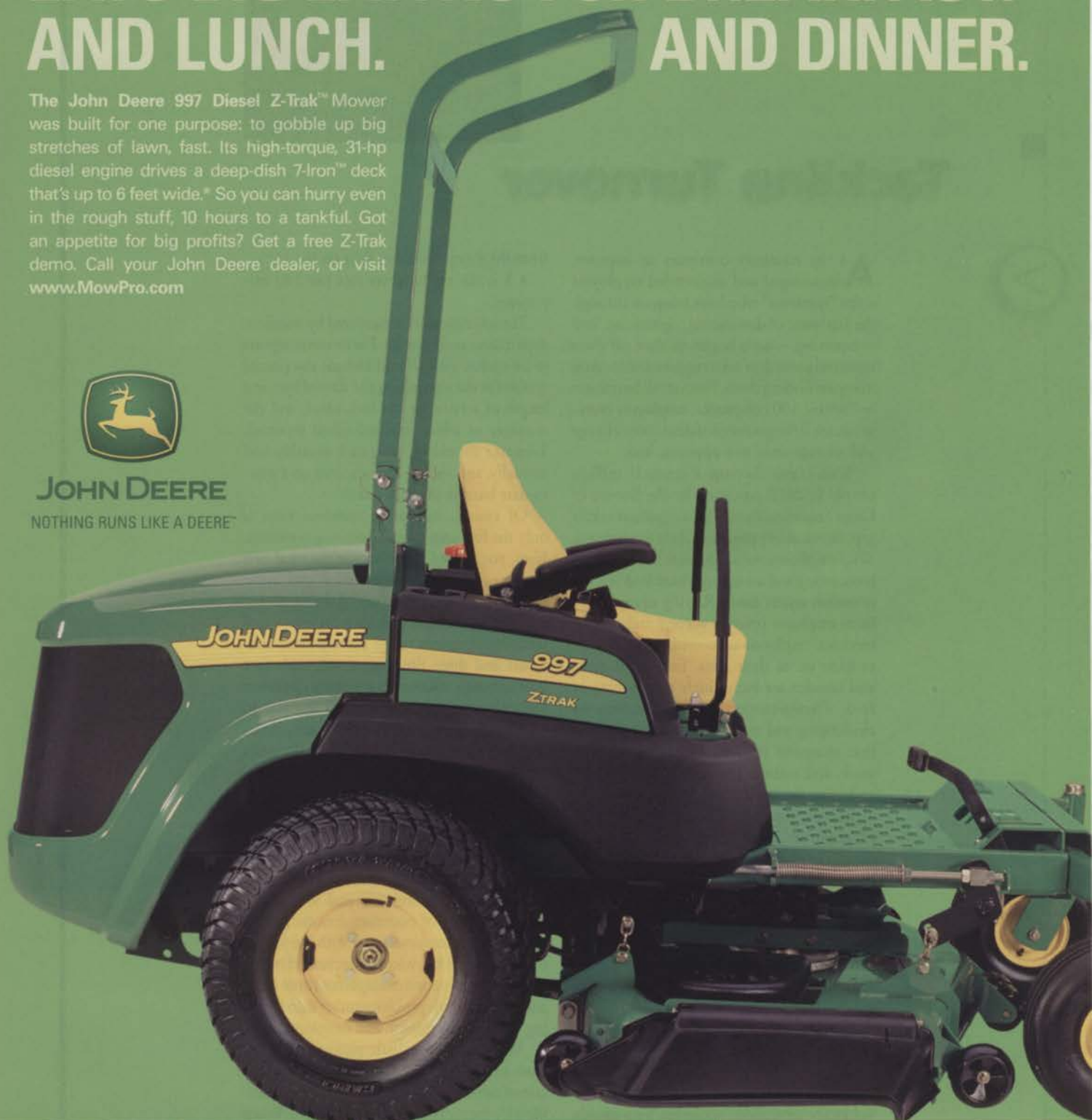
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USE READER SERVICE # 15

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Tackling Turnover

As the economy continues to improve, discouraged and disgruntled employees – the “survivors” who have hung on through the last wave of downsizing, rightsizing, and outsourcing – have begun to dust off their resumes in search of better opportunities. And many are finding them. From small businesses to Fortune 500 companies, employees everywhere are feeling more confident about change and are exploring new opportunities.

With a labor shortage of nearly 10 million people in 2010 predicted by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, along with a significant skills gap, the vacancy problem is likely to get worse. Wise employers realize the shift in power that is occurring and are taking a hard look at their retention report cards. Relying upon results from employee opinion surveys and exit interviews, employers are considering new ways to hang on to their stars. Traditional perks and benefits are increasingly diminishing in favor of new retention strategies that focus on challenging and meaningful work, programs that recognize the importance of life after work, and cultures that are less bureaucratic and more flexible and supportive.

Many companies are sitting on gold mines of opportunity to reduce turnover costs. Turnover is particularly expensive in the service industry with its heavy reliance on people for its success, and although turnover can never be eliminated entirely, it can and should be controlled. Before an organization can begin to fix a turnover problem, it must start by measuring turnover and determining the associated costs.

The most common formula for computing net monthly turnover is $S/M \times 100 = T$, with each element defined as follows:

- S is the total number of voluntary and involuntary separations occurring for a month.
- M is the average number of employees on the payroll during the month (usually taken

from the pay period that falls on the 15th).

- T is the net turnover rate per 100 employees.

Turnover should be measured by position, department and location. For turnover reports to be useful, they should include the precise reason for the separation, the date of hire and length of service for the individual, and the manager to whom the individual reported. Turnover should be measured monthly and annually, and should be compared on a year-to-date basis to identify trends.

Of course, measuring turnover rates is only the first step toward boosting retention. Next, you'll need to determine the total cost of turnover to your organization and, most importantly, the root causes of the turnover.

The Department of Labor estimates that turnover costs can range between one-and-a-half and three times an employee's first year earnings. Generally speaking, there are three elements of turnover costs that should be measured: direct costs, opportunity costs, and indirect costs. Direct costs are the costs of replacing the departing employee and include such things as recruiting, training and overtime from employees who must fill the void. Opportunity costs are associated with lost opportunities including lost revenue due to lower productivity because of more inexperienced incumbents and loss of accounts because of customer dissatisfaction. Indirect costs are associated with the loss of organizational knowledge, decreased bench strength and diverted management time spent addressing people problems rather than focusing on business growth and development.

Armed with a realistic picture of what it costs to lose an employee, coupled with the rate of turnover, an organization can begin to identify the root causes of the problem. When it comes to retaining talent, the best way to predict the future is to invent it. **ll**

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USE READER SERVICE # 16

regional report



Boston Businesses Spend More

A recent study shows that Boston has surpassed New York City as the costliest metropolitan area in which to do business — one of the rare occasions when surpassing its New York rival isn't cause for celebration.

The study, conducted by forecasting firm Economy.com, cites Boston's labor costs, which are the highest in the nation, as the primary cause. New York City now ranks fifth on the list, with San Diego, Los Angeles and Sacramento ranked second, third and fourth, respectively. In fact, Boston and New York are the only two metropolitan areas among the top 10 that are not located in California.

Geographically, the Northeast retains its status as the nation's costliest region in which to do business. Five of the 10 costliest states in the nation are located in the Northeast, including Massachusetts, which ranks as the state with the highest business cost index for the second year running. The West had the second highest costs, while the South is the least costly region of the U.S.

The Economy.com study echoes some of the findings of *Inc.* magazine's recent rankings of the 274 best cities for doing business. Though *Inc.*'s survey used employment growth by business sector as its primary rubric, the two studies show some similarities.

According to Economy.com, New Mexico is the least expensive state in which to do business. *Inc.*'s list includes two New Mexico cities in the top 75: Las Cruces at No. 58 and Albuquerque at No. 73. Likewise, the *Inc.* rankings are flooded with Southern cities, reflecting strong job growth in the area.

Economy.com's study was compiled using statistics for the costs of labor, energy, taxes and office rents. The statistics were weighted with labor costs counting for 65 percent, energy costs for 15 percent, tax burdens for 10 percent and office rents for 10 percent.

For more information on how your state ranks in terms of green industry business viability, turn to page S1 for our *Rating the States* special report. — Nicole Wisniewski



contractor headlines

Davey Tree Turns 125



Doug Cowan now serves as chairman and CEO of The Davey Tree Expert Co.

In the late 1800s, a man from England landed in the United States with a dream — to preserve ailing trees and provide horticultural services. Celebrating its 125th anniversary this year, The Davey Tree Expert Co., with 5,000 employees across North America, still retains John Davey's passion.

In the early years, the company mostly served to give Davey a platform to demonstrate his tree surgery practices. However, it wasn't until he recruited his son Martin in 1906 that the company really began to grow as a business.

One of the early struggles for the fledgling company was how to keep its field force employed during the slower winter months. Establishing The Davey Institute of Tree Surgery in 1909 allowed for a consistent field force while teaching them new techniques and horticultural practices.

At the end of World War II, the company experienced a shift in leadership as Martin Davey, Sr., died and was replaced by his son, Martin (Brub) Davey, Jr. In the late 1960s and 1970s, the company's leadership changed hands again between Brub Davey, Paul Hershey, Joe Myers and Alexander Smith. Finally in early 1977, the family announced its intention to sell the company. This announcement started a domino effect among employees that ultimately led to employee ownership. After four offers and countless hours of negotiations,

continued on page 21



Tree moving has come a long way since The Davey Tree Expert Co. took on such challenges in the early 20th century. Photos: The Davey Tree Expert Co.

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USE READER SERVICE # 17



> LEGISLATIVE DAY 2005

Bearing the Heat for Heroes

With high humidity, temperatures in the mid 90s and a heat index over 100, the Professional Landcare Network (PLANET) certainly wasn't blessed with the most comfortable day for its ninth annual Renewal & Remembrance event at Arlington National Cemetery. But participants, well aware of their surroundings and its reason for being, acknowledged that there were many sacrifices greater than simply going without air conditioning for a day.

"It's a good feeling to give back and show our appreciation personally and professionally," said Frank Dudek of Carroll Tree Service, Owings Mills, Md. Dudek was among an estimated 250 green industry professionals visiting Washington, D.C. for the Renewal & Remembrance project—the largest turnout yet for the event.

Additionally, about half of the attendees were participating for the first time. Susan Haynes, who owns North Carolina-based Lawn Master Landscaping Services with her husband Chad, was one of them. And their inaugural experience at Arlington National Cemetery was part of another first: a large-scale landscaping aspect to the usually lawn-related event.

"We're so happy to see some sorely needed landscaping going in at the visitor's center," Arlington National Cemetery Superintendent Jack Metzler said during his welcome speech to attendees.

Indeed, having a vision was an important aspect of the day's work. During the day's opening ceremony in the amphitheater near the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, industry veteran Gus Pionke of The Brickman Group dedicated the event to the military veterans' who found their final resting place at Arlington. "The men and women buried here have made the ultimate sacrifice and I'm proud to be associated with an industry that gives of itself in remembrance of those sacrifices," he said. "But today, I want everyone here to take a more personal approach to remembering the fallen men and women who served our country."

Pionke encouraged each attendee to pick out a headstone in the cemetery, read the name, rank and service the soldier performed and imagine what he or she might look like. "We're all aware of the significance of our work here today, but what would these people think of it if they could see you here today? What would they say?"

According to project coordinator Phil Fogarty,



his chosen soldier told him to "live gratefully" and "keep earning it." "Our participation in the Renewal & Remembrance Project and the associated Legislative Day on the Hill is all about what it really means to be a citizen in the United States," Fogarty said at a dinner held for attendees later Monday evening. "All of us here for this event are earning our citizenship by taking advantage of our access to the nation's history and its future through our lawmakers. When we meet with senators and congressmen and their staffs tomorrow, we'll be walking right into the middle of 'government of the people, by the people and for the people,' and we'll really be able to 'keep earning it.'"

As the PLANET Renewal & Remembrance Project

continues to grow (the first event had just 60 attendees), the group is able to cover more ground than ever at Arlington National Cemetery. Fogarty announced that the roughly 250-member team limed 280



acres of cemetery grounds in less than five hours; applied weed control to 40 acres; provided \$30,000 worth of tree pruning, cabling and grounding; and landscaped the visitor's center with 1,000 plants and 960 labor hours. Additionally, clean-up efforts at Old Congressional Cemetery, southeast of the Capitol building, has yielded a more beautiful property than when the group first started donating time there two years ago. Efforts across both cemeteries, including donations of a blower, bed edger, glyphosate, pre- and postemergent weed control, time, and labor, yielded a total donation of \$164,000 to Arlington National Cemetery and Old Congressional Cemetery.

Besides the thanks of the Arlington staff and feeling uplifted about such a generous donation, some Renewal & Remembrance participants noted that, over time, the event has brought about stronger, more positive recognition of the green industry as a whole.

"This is our third year participating and I can tell that the image of our industry is really changing because of it," said Jeffrey Bisker, owner of Your Lawn, Ashville, Ohio. "They don't just see us as an industry that works with 'chemicals' and 'pesticides' without any regard for people's well-being. Instead, when they see that we've put together a program like Renewal & Remembrance and that we're trusted by an institution like Arlington National Cemetery, people start looking at us differently – better." - Lauren Spiers



continued from page 18

Davey Tree

ownership transferred to the employees of the company in 1979.

Over the ensuing months and years, the number of employees working at the company doubled, the revenues increased eight-fold and the number of employee shareholders increased from 113 to more than 2,000.

The company also experienced growth through more than 40 acquisitions.

At the 10-year anniversary of employee ownership, the company offered a second stock subscription. When the company offered its third stock subscription in 2002, 365 employees subscribed for more than 800,000 shares for a total subscription amount of more than \$10 million.

In the 1990s, the company reorganized around customer groups, launched the Davey Resource Group, the technical consulting division, and the Commercial Service Group – the grounds management division.

At the turn of the century, the company's



This year, The Davey Tree Expert Co. celebrates its 125th anniversary. Today, the company has 5,000 employees across North America. Photo: Davey Tree

acquisition of National Shade established a national presence and capability in the large tree moving market. With the addition of the golf and sports turf division, Davey's host of offerings included everything from urban forestry to vegetation management and from commercial

grounds management to large tree moving.

"Over the past 125 years, Davey Tree has changed from a regional tree care operation to a North American company providing complete horticultural services in the residential, utility, commercial and governmental markets," says R. Douglas Cowan, chairman and CEO. "I think 'Father John' would be impressed with our growth. I know I'm proud of our accomplishments and am certain that the next 125 years will be as impressive as the last." – Nicole Wisniewski



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PEOPLE

Hoopes to Retire from Scotts, Focus on Training



Bill Hoopes

Photo: Tom Dammann

MARYSVILLE, Ohio – On July 29, Bill Hoopes announced his retirement from his position as director of training for Scotts LawnService, but plans to take his people-development expertise to a new level with a consulting business of his own. Hoopes tells *Lawn & Landscape* that the most meaningful aspect of his career thus far has been working with talented people, and that inspiration is fueling his new professional venture.

Certainly, Hoopes' own industry experience gives him insight into what makes an effective leader. Since joining Scotts in the 1960s, Hoopes moved up the company's ranks with a position as a retail account executive before becoming Scotts Training Institute instructor in the early 1970s. He also ran the company's Professional Turf Institute before leaving to lead the training division of Barefoot Grass in the 1980s. Hoopes rejoined Scotts LawnService in 1997 as director of training.

Moreover, Hoopes received *Lawn & Landscape's* Leadership Award in 2001. "People – this is Hoopes' hot button," wrote *Lawn & Landscape* Managing Editor Nicole Wisniewski in the 2001 article highlighting Hoopes' leadership philosophies. "The man is passionate about helping people develop communication skills." That hasn't changed.

"Training is the single biggest challenge we've got, period, and there aren't enough resources in the industry to address that," Hoopes says. "My business objective is to provide practical, useful, basic people development information to people who, for whatever reason, either don't have access to those resources now or don't know they have access."

Hoopes will remain in the Columbus, Ohio area to run his new consulting venture and can be reached at hoopes@columbus.rr.com. – Lauren Spiers

Symbiot Announces Management Changes

DRAPER, Utah – Symbiot Business Group names Michael Edwards as its new CEO.

Edwards brings more than 23 years of experience to his new post. Before joining Symbiot, he served as global property development officer for Intel Corp. Previously, Edwards was director and executive assistant to the CEO of McDonnell Douglas Corp. and a member of the new facility start-up team for PepsiCo.

"Mike's experience will enhance our integration of the Snow Management Group into Symbiot," says Symbiot Chairman Steve Glover.

Edwards says he will take advantage of the opportunity to influence and accelerate the integration of the

property services supply chain.

The change in leadership was effective July 5 and occurs at a planned transition point for Symbiot. During the past 18 months, Bruce Wilson has functioned as CEO and Steve Glover as chairman, leading the company from \$2.1 million to a projected \$20.8 million in annual revenue by the end of 2005. Wilson and Glover, who were recruited for this short period of time, plan to resume their previous level of involvement with Symbiot – Wilson as a member of its board of directors and Glover as chairman of the board.

Symbiot has developed consortiums in the landscape, interior, snow and pest industries, representing nearly 1,000 partner companies.



IN THE NEWS

ADVAN

Advan Enters the Turf and Ornamental Market

ROSWELL, Ga. – A new plant health company focused on serving the turf and ornamental, specialty agriculture and home and garden markets in the U.S. and Mexico entered the market in August. The new company, Advan, Roswell, Ga., is being formed by Mitsui & Co. of Japan and the Sipcam-Oxon Groups of Italy and is owned 50/50 by their respective U.S. subsidiaries.

Advan expects to generate sales of more than \$40 million in 2006 from a product line enriched through a number of new marketing agreements with Certis USA, Sipcam Agro USA and Mitsui Chemical.

Anchoring Advan's new management staff is Lynn Brookhouser who becomes president and chief executive officer while retaining his position as president of Roswell-based Sipcam Agro USA. Tim Damico serves as chief operating officer of Advan and will direct sales and marketing operations, customer service and logistics from the company's Columbia, Md. office. Kurt Schwartau becomes business development and marketing director; he reports to Brookhouser.

Additionally, Advan is managed by three business area managers reporting to Damico: Robert Yarborough, turf and ornamentals, home and garden business manager; Bret Menagh, U.S. agricultural business manager; and Luis Gerardo Gonzales Ruelas, Mexico business manager.

Brookhouser says Advan's strategic focus will be on "earning a preferred position" with its customer base in the three markets the company plans to serve. The company says it intends to earn this position by providing what it calls "personalized service" and by bringing to market a line of biorational and traditional synthetic chemical products.

For more information about Advan, visit the company's Web site on the Internet at www.advanllc.com. – Lauren Spiers

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USE READER SERVICE # 20

Some of the Worst Invasive Pests of the Past 25 Years

June 1995

CAROLINA'S MOLE CRICKET INVASION

Although mole crickets have been found in Florida for at least 75 years, their migration northward has accelerated in the last 20 years. They have spread rapidly along the coastlines, then inland. Tawny mole crickets are the most troublesome variety and have a high potential for killing grass. Their rapid expansion into the Carolinas has taken the area by surprise and some researchers estimate that the tawny mole cricket may already be the No. 1 insect pest in the Southeast, surpassing grubs.



July 1999

USDA TARGETS ASIAN LONGHORNED BEETLE

The ALB has caused the removal of more than 4,000 trees in the state of New York and 700 in Chicago. The ALB is a quarantined pest in the United States and, at this time, the only means to control the pest is to destroy the infested tree. Infested trees are cut down at the base, chipped, then burned.

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



March 2002 INVASIVE PLANT TAKEOVER

Before 1870, native plants occupied more than one-third of U.S. land area, but now they only cover one-half of 1 percent of those spaces.

September 2002 ASH TREE ALERT

The tree-boring pest killing ash trees in southeastern Michigan was recently identified as the emerald ash borer, an Asian pest previously unknown in the U.S.

Because of the misdiagnosis of some of the ash tree deaths, the emerald ash borer gained a strong footing in Michigan ... and is also rumored to be moving to the surrounding states.



July 2002

FIGHTING FIRE ANTS

Ever since they crawled off South American coffee ships docked in a Mobile, Ala. harbor in the 1930s, red imported fire ants have been a concern. By the mid-1970s, due to their lack of natural U.S. predators, they spread into much of the southeastern U.S., and now inhabit mounds in the Southwest, along the Pacific coast and as far north as North Carolina, occupying more than 250 million acres.

April 2003

CRABGRASS CONTROL

Death and taxes are inevitable, or so goes the saying. And so, it seems, is crabgrass. Crabgrass was first introduced into the United States in 1844 as a potential forage crop. Prior to that it was grown as a grain crop in China in 2700 B.C. With the possible exception of dandelions, no other weed creates as many headaches or is responsible for as much of the lawn care product market. In addition to being one of the most persistent weeds, crabgrass is very difficult to control once it has sprouted.



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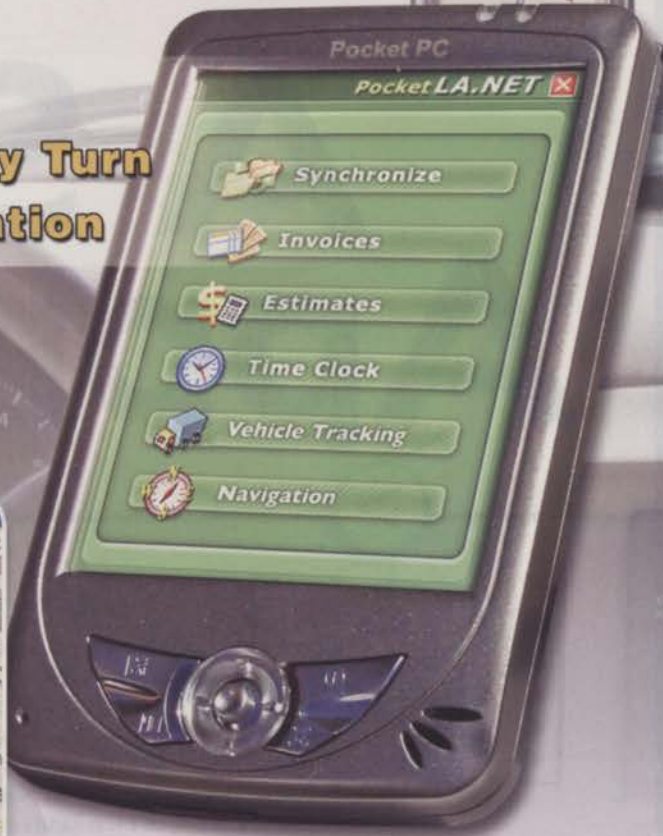
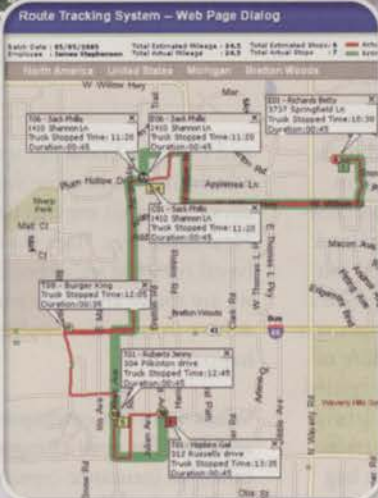
LA.NET GPS Vehicle Tracking

Report Date and Time: 03/19/04 12:00
Time Interval: 1 Hour
Speed Setting: 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	06:16PM	00:13	Stop 1	5317 - 5398,
06:16PM	06:57PM	00:41	In Transit	In-Transit
06:57PM	06:59PM	00:02	Stop 2	L-Customer
06:59PM	07:08PM	00:09	In Transit	In-Transit
07:08PM	07:06PM	00:01	Stop 3	5581 - 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 Bus
08:26PM	08:38PM	00:12	In Transit	In-Transit
08:38PM	08:38PM		End	End:5402 - 54

Days Accrued Statistics:

Stops	In Transit	Mileage
Number of Stops	1	Number of Transits
Total Stop Time	00:10	Total Transit Time
Avg Stop Time	00:24	Avg Transit Time
%Stop Time	80	% Transit Time



Vehicle Tracking

Invoice Listing

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

Production Entry

Inv: 62639 Perimeter Pest C

Beach, Frederick 247 E 1st St

Date: 5/10/2005

Employee Code - Name: MTM - MIKE MARTIN

Condition: Lawn Rat

Wind Spd: 8

Dir: SW

Temp: 68

pH:

Production Entry

Inv: 62639 Perimeter Pest C

Beach, Frederick 247 E 1st St

STEP 1 STEP 2 STEP 3

P.Code: (12) 12-24- Amt: 54 Local: Entre

Size: 10.00 Man.Hrs.: 00:01

Charge: 49.95 Start: 11:58 AM

Tax: 0.00 Stop: 11:59 AM

Crew: 1 Elapsed: 1

Notes: customer going to have irrigation system installed

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A Safer Approach



by jonathan katz

What was supposed to be a festive day for Tom Heaviland and his crew members at Heaviland Enterprises turned out disastrous. It was 1:30 p.m. on New Year's Eve 2003 and one of Heaviland's crews was heading back to the company's satellite office in Poway, Calif. As the crew proceeded down the highway, a burlap bag of debris flew out of the truck's bed and into traffic. A female driver swerved to avoid the bag and was hit by several cars, resulting in a serious accident.

Not knowing that someone was injured, the crew pulled over, checked the load to make sure everything was secure and proceeded back to the shop. Another driver witnessed the accident, which led to an investigation. The accident has resulted in an ongoing legal battle and a stronger emphasis on safety at Heaviland Enterprises.

Heaviland, 47, who founded the \$4-million commercial landscape company in 1985, says he's now more focused than ever on making safety part of the "company culture" by talking, inspecting and "thinking, thinking, thinking" safety.

"If we are monitoring safety regularly

and the guys know the seriousness of it, which they do because we've talked a lot about it, I can't see this happening again," Heaviland says. "Is it possible? Sure. But based on what we've been through, where we are today and if we really monitor and adhere to our safety policy, it shouldn't happen."

What were the consequences from this accident for your company? I'm in what's called an insurance captive. It's not your traditional workers' compensation or vehicle insurance program. A group of specialty contractors have come together and we've formed our own insurance company, and it's brokered through a local company here, but we're set up offshore. With this type of insurance, if we have a great year with no claims, then we'll get money back after about a three-year period with interest because our money is currently earning interest as it sits offshore vs. a traditional insurance company where if your premium is \$100,000 and you have zero claims, the insurance company keeps the \$100,000. With our program, if you have a \$100,000 premium and no claims, you'll pay approximately \$40,000 in associated fees and





Tom Heaviland, Heaviland Enterprises. Photo: Heaviland Enterprises

administrative costs, so you get \$60,000 back with interest. If you maintain a loss ratio of 60 percent or better, you should get something back. Basically, what this means to me is that I lost out on probably more than \$100,000 with interest that would have come back in 2006. Instead, I'm going to get nothing.

If you had a traditional insurance program, would you be better off? In this case, yes. The accident would have cost the insurance company. If I were in a traditional program, my rates probably would go up to some degree. Since this accident was so serious, and it's not like I will have one or two of these a year, the insurance company is going to look at this and say this isn't an incident that is common and chances of it happening again are very slim. In a captive, your

rate is determined by a five-year loss history, so one catastrophic claim will have some impact, but won't adversely affect you because it's based on a five-year history. So while there will probably be an increase in my rate, when they look at a five-year picture, it shouldn't impact rates that much. Plus, the insurance company is also very interested in finding out what we have done to prevent this from happening again.

Is there anything you feel you could have done differently as the owner of the business to prevent this accident from happening? We take a lot of things for granted, including whether our employees are doing things right. You try to cover every base, you try to look at everything that can go wrong out there. But we're driving vehicles;

we're operating equipment. We are in a very risky business, and once you get to a certain size, the odds increase that you're going to have the occasional thing go wrong. What you want to do is make sure that it's not something that could have been prevented and that it doesn't happen again. If this were to happen to us again where a bag blows out, then I'm really negligent, and I haven't done my job. But we're a very safe company. I wouldn't have been able to get into this captive program if I wasn't because the guidelines to get in are very difficult. They want solid, safe companies. As the owner, I'm ultimately responsible and accountable for anything that happens.

Since it was an accident, what was the lesson? When you're driving, you've got to make sure that everything, and not just your load, but your equipment or anything that is on the vehicle, is secured and strapped down. We log hundreds of thousands of miles a year with stuff on our trucks, and the larger your company, the larger the chances



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that something can fall off. If you can just reduce risk and do everything you can, and make the crewleaders aware of it, then you're doing your job.

How are you making crewleaders aware of it now? We've talked about it a lot at crewleader meetings. We have a risk-control company that works with our captive and they have a guy who goes around and inspects companies and observes us in the field. We also do some additional training. We have a step-by-step process in securing the load. Now, we use cargo netting that goes over the load with crisscross ropes from one corner of the truck to another. And when crews drive in, on occasion they'll be inspected by an account manager or field manager. Every single load has to look like that, and if it doesn't, they better have a very good reason why not. Otherwise, this is a companywide policy, and they're breaking policy if they don't follow it.

How do you enforce the safety rules now? We've always enforced them well. If there's a violation, they're written up. If it happens again, it's a suspension. A third time would result in termination. One of the things we do more frequently now is safety inspections. It's required by our captive, so we're doing at least a couple safety inspections per month where we go out to a crew and just observe: Are they wearing all the protective gear? Is the truck properly parked with the cones out? Do they have Material Safety Data Sheets in the truck? Is their code of safe practices in the truck? We use a safety checklist when inspecting a crew.

How has employee response been to the inspections? We explain to employees what we're doing and show them where maybe they're missing a few things, but the one thing we need to couple with that is some sort of immediate reward if they do very well on an inspection – maybe give them a gift certificate somewhere or a monetary gift so they're thinking about it. But our employees know we're a safety-conscious company because we remind them of this often. It has to be a part of your culture, just like quality. You want to do quality work, but safe work is just as important, maybe even more so.

Has anything changed with your training because of this accident?

We're required by our captive and this risk-control company to have two tail-gate topics, minimum, per month that a manager will go out to each crew and discuss. I think this month (June) was importance of wearing eye protection, and properly securing loads will be the second topic. And then before every crewleader meeting – we have crewleader meeting at least monthly – we'll have a safety topic associated with that just because we've got everybody together. We've also implemented a full day every spring of safety training. We just started this a couple years ago. Someone comes in and does first-aid training for everybody and then all the managers and crewleaders go through CPR training. Around our building we set up all these stations and we had all our certified landscape technicians and our managers doing these different training spots. One area was on lifting, one was on all the safety gear and what you use on each piece of equipment. So we have these different stations and we rotate through, and it's a full day dedicated to safety. Sometimes, the day will focus on equipment, so we have different stations with all the safety related to each piece of equipment, how to operate it and how to operate it safely and what safety gear to wear with it. We're doing this every year – just putting a huge emphasis on safety with a specific theme or topic.

What else needs to be done? There's always room for improvement. I don't know that I'll ever be satisfied. I have to get everybody just thinking, thinking, thinking. Something I took from David Snodgrass over at Dennis' Seven Dees, Portland, Ore., is stretching. Every morning, before our guys do anything, they go through 10 minutes of stretching. That gets them thinking safety right away. Because when we get out in the field, they're pushing, pulling, lifting, and if they're not stretched out, more than likely they're going to pull or strain or injure something. So every so often when we have our crewleader training, I expound on the importance of this stretching and why we need to take it seriously. I'm there quite a bit. If I'm in early, I'll stretch with them, so they know that it's important. LL

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Paul Perrotti shares how his company has successfully offered fall cleanup services.

Raking in Profits

by kathleen franzinger

Autumn has arrived, which means those brightly colored leaves decorating the trees outside will soon be on the ground. To keep customers' properties looking summer-perfect during this transition into winter, many contractors offer fall cleanup or leaf pickup services. The service gives Northern U.S. contractors an opportunity to rake in more revenue before they shut down for the winter.

"Fall cleanup is a necessary and routine part of a maintenance program," says Paul Perrotti, president of Perco, New Haven, Conn. "Any site looks 100 percent better right after a fall cleanup."

But there is more to the service than looks and money. If not removed, leaves can get matted into the turf and impede future growth. "Fall cleanup is important because the leaves block out sunlight and

air movement, both of which can cause fungus buildup," Perrotti says.

PART OF THE PROGRAM. Perco has offered fall cleanup as part of its complete landscape management program for 20 years. The company's 60 customers are strictly commercial accounts. With a customer retention rate around 95 percent, it seems once customers sign up for the maintenance program, they're likely to do so again. But to sell the program initially, Perrotti says they rely on direct mail marketing.

The company mails large four-color postcards, roughly 7-by-9 inches in size, to a targeted list of potential clients once a month. But during the first three months of the year, Perrotti says they mail the fliers on a weekly basis. "That's the time when customers are really thinking about buying



Photo: Perco

maintenance contracts," he explains, adding that it also helps generate sales in the winter. While an outside communications company produces the postcards, the text is written in-house. It cost Perco less than \$5,000 to purchase the materials needed for a two-year direct-mailing campaign, which included the postcards as well as brochures, which are mailed quarterly.

The current mailing list has less than 1,000 names, and although response from the mailings varies, Perrotti stands by the strategy. "It's important to remember that even if the response from a particular mailing is less than

expected, you are still building a brand name in the mind of the prospect."

Perco offers its customers a choice of how often leaves are picked up. "It's either once the majority of leaves have fallen or weekly, usually over a six-week period," Perrotti says. He points out that it's crucial to find out the client's expectations about how often the service will occur. "Any agreement should specifically state how many times the cleanup will be performed," he says. "Will there be multiple occurrences or just one? If there are multiple times, how often will they occur?"

Fall cleanup can also help sell clients

on renewing their maintenance contracts, Perrotti says, adding that his company renews about half of its customers in the fall. "It's refreshing for the customers to see their properties when they have been newly cleaned of leaves — it makes an immediate impact," he says.

THE GREAT ESTIMATOR. Perrotti prices fall cleanup based on an hourly rate of \$30 to \$40. He estimates an average job on a 3- to 4-acre property takes his crews about 25 hours to complete.

Perrotti admits it's not easy to estimate how long jobs will take, and there

is no clear-cut formula to apply. "People have tried to establish production rates for leaf cleanup by measuring lawn and bed areas or even by measuring leaf canopy," Perrotti says. "But we haven't been able to make any of these work. It was difficult to establish a production rate, which made pricing inconsistent." Because of these challenges, Perrotti says fall cleanup is the one area of the business where jobs are estimated based on experience. But there are certain factors to take into account. The number of cleanups the client requests affects price, of course, but specific property characteristics should also be considered. One is accessibility. After the crew has piled the leaves, it's important to figure out if a vacuum truck can drive right up to the pile or if the leaves will have to be hauled out to the curbside by hand. Another factor is whether or not the client allows on-site disposal. "If they don't, we have to figure out

where the leaves will be dumped and how many hours will be involved in the hauling," he says, adding that in those cases dumping fees may be an issue. "If hauling and dumping expenses are not being recovered in the overhead component of your pricing structure, these expenses should be considered and marked up accordingly in your bid," he explains.

EFFICIENT OPERATION. The way Perco operates leaf collection depends on the size of the property. Its accounts range from 1 to 80 acres, but most are less than 10 acres. For properties 5 acres and larger, the crews use 30-hp front mowers with the mowing decks removed and blowers attached. For smaller sites – anything less than 5 acres – the crews use push blowers and backpack blowers. The crews also use grass collection systems on zero-turn mowers to help with leaf pickup, says Perrotti.

Once the leaves have been collected, the next step is removal. For this, Perco uses a vacuum truck, which can hold 20 yards of leaves. Perrotti says the truck, along with 3 or 4 dumpsters and a leaf box, cost the company about \$80,000.

The vacuum truck works independently of the cleanup crew to improve efficiency. "We think efficiency is increased when the foreman stays with the crew and the hauling work is handled by a separate unit," he says. "In the parts of our service area where we don't yet have a high market density, the foreman will do his own hauling so that two trucks won't have to travel to an outlying area."

www.lawnandlandscape.com

Check out the September issue online to find out how Perco boosts efficiency in fall cleanup services and how he transitions his crews from mowing to fall cleanup duties.

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Supplement to *Lawn & Landscape*

RATING THE STATES

What key indicators reveal about
the business potential in your state





The lawn and landscape industry has grown dramatically in size and professionalism in recent decades. Economic and demographic indicators promise further industry growth, though the opportunity will vary from state by state.

Major changes and trends that will impact our industry in the next two decades include an aging population, movement of a greater proportion of the population to the South and West, record levels of home ownership, multiple home ownership and lifestyle changes that include investment in green spaces and more.

Ariens is pleased to be a partner in bringing this special report to you to help bring light to some of the major trends. Knowledge in the form of data is the planning tool for continuous improvement in every aspect of our business. Pushing ourselves toward continuous improvement, while staying true to our heritage, has served Ariens and the Gravely brand well.

Tomorrow's success will be based on turning knowledge into action. Understanding the factors that will shape the green industry at both the national and state levels helps all of us prepare for change and seize opportunities.

This is an exciting industry with tremendous growth ahead. I encourage you to use this report as a planning tool as you envision the future of your industry and your company.

Dan Ariens
President

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USE READER SERVICE # 103



By Roger Stanley

2005 Ratings

Small business is the lifeblood of the American economy. As defined by the Small Business Administration (SBA), a small business is a company having fewer than 500 employees. While limited in size per company, the sheer volume of small business in the economy makes it a huge economic force. According to the SBA's Office of Advocacy, small business creates 60 to 80 percent of all new jobs, employs 39 percent of all high-tech workers and generates 13 times more patents per employee than do large companies. Small business makes up 99.7 percent of all employers. Small business employs half of all private sector (non-government) workers. In terms of foreign trade, 97 percent of all exporting companies are small businesses. Finally, more than half of the nation's nonfarm private Gross Domestic Product is produced by small business.

Small business has grown dramatically in recent decades. For example, from 1975 to 2002 the total U.S. population increased 34 percent. That same timeframe witnessed an increase in the number of small businesses of 111 percent based on tax returns, according to the SBA.

The lawn and landscape industry has been a major player in the small business boom. From 1997 to 2001 alone, the landscape services sector has grown from about \$15 billion to nearly \$40 billion, an average annual growth rate of 11 percent, according to a newly released study, *Economic Impacts of the Green Industry in the United States*. (Note: Comparable economic growth information from 2002 is not available due to a changeover in the federal reporting system.)

Rapid lawn and landscape industry growth is

being fueled by a number of factors, including rising homeowner expectations and lifestyle demands, home appreciation, record home ownership levels and new lawn and landscape technologies and products that make it possible to meeting rising customer expectations. Company growth has come from both an expansion of the customer base and deeper sales to existing customers for increasingly specialized services.



RATING THE STATES

While the American free enterprise system is the foundation for small business creation and growth, the business climate varies from state to state and conditions are constantly changing. This special Rating the States section attempts to shed light on some of the factors that make up the small business environment – big picture factors that are and will impact the future of lawn and landscape companies. While the number of factors that could be compared are exhaustive, including climate, turf acres, average household income levels and more, this report focuses on three: Population, housing and public policy.

While the conclusions are somewhat subjective, Rating the States helps provide perspective on business challenges and opportunities for lawn and landscape companies. Some factors simply must be recognized and adapted to, such as population growth, housing sales or new home construction. Other factors, such as tax rates and insurance requirements, allow companies to work for change.

A number of expert data sources were used to create the ratings, including data from the Census Bureau, the National Association of Home Builders, the National Association of Realtors and the Small Business and Entrepreneurship Council. A number of industry-specific facts come from a study published

The Ratings

in June 2005, *Economic Impacts of the Green Industry in the United States*. The research was made possible by a grant from the USDA Forest Service's National Urban and Community Forestry Advisory Committee and funding from the Professional Landcare Network (PLANET). The principal researchers were Charles Hall, Ph.D., University of Tennessee at Knoxville; Alan Hodges, Ph.D., the University of Florida at Gainesville, Fla.; and John Haydu, Ph.D., the University of Florida at Apopka, Fla.

DETERMINING THE STATE RATINGS

The criteria used were selected to rank the business environment within each state using the most current data and projections available. All states were rated in three areas – demographics, housing and public policy. The goal was to look at the relative business changes in each state and to compare state to state. Assigning a relative weight to the criteria was the most difficult and subjective aspect of the evaluation, and a number of professional economists were consulted for their advice.

POPULATION RATING

Highly important demographic indicators are state population and the projected increase by 2030 (based on the 2000 Census). These two criteria account for 50 percent of the overall demographic ranking. The increase in the Baby Boomer population was counted as 25 percent of the total. The increase (or decrease in some states) in workers in the important 18 to 44 age group was counted as the remaining 25 percent.

HOUSING RATING

The housing indicators represent both sale of existing housing and new home construction: Total housing units per state, sales of existing homes, 2004 housing permits vs. 2002 housing permits, and the National Association of Home Builder estimates for 2006 housing starts. Total housing stock counted for 40 percent of the overall housing category ranking and the other three criteria counted for 20 percent each.

PUBLIC POLICY RATING

The ratings for public policy were provided by the Small Business and Entrepreneurship Council, a Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit organization that has been tracking and ranking states based on current public policy burdens for 10 years. The overall rating is from SBEC's 2004 Index, the most current, and it and the four specific criteria listed are shared with SBEC's permission.

NATIONAL RATING

National rankings were based on an equal weighting of the final rankings from the population, housing and public policy categories.

Overall Ranking		Demographics Rank	Housing Rank	Public Policy Rank
1.	Florida	1	3	5
2.	Washington	6	1	4
3.	Nevada	5	5	2
4.	Texas	2	10	11
5.	Arizona	3	8	17
6.	Virginia	9	6	15
7.	Georgia (tie)	4	12	22
7.	Tennessee (tie)	16	6	16
9.	Alabama	34	2	8
10.	Missouri	21	11	18
11.	South Carolina	17	21	13
12.	Maryland	13	19	21
13.	Colorado (tie)	13	35	9
13.	North Carolina (tie)	8	12	37
15.	California	6	4	50
16.	Idaho (tie)	11	25	25
16.	Indiana (tie)	27	24	10
18.	Pennsylvania	42	9	12
19.	Illinois	32	14	19
20.	Michigan	31	31	6
21.	Delaware (tie)	22	25	23
21.	Oregon (tie)	15	16	39
23.	New Hampshire	18	44	14
24.	Utah (tie)	10	39	28
24.	Wisconsin (tie)	22	28	27
26.	Alaska	12	46	20
27.	Arkansas	25	30	24
28.	Mississippi	41	32	7
29.	Massachusetts (tie)	30	14	41
29.	Oklahoma (tie)	33	22	30
31.	New Jersey	20	23	44
32.	Kentucky (tie)	28	32	29
32.	Wyoming (tie)	44	42	3
34.	New Mexico	26	32	36
35.	Louisiana	36	27	32
36.	South Dakota	47	49	1
37.	Kansas (tie)	40	28	31
37.	New York (tie)	37	17	45
39.	Ohio	43	18	40
40.	West Virginia	50	19	33
41.	Minnesota	19	40	47
42.	Connecticut	38	37	34
43.	Hawaii	24	37	49
44.	North Dakota	49	43	26
45.	Vermont (tie)	29	50	42
45.	Montana (tie)	35	48	38
47.	Nebraska	46	41	35
48.	Iowa	48	36	43
49.	Maine	38	45	46
50.	Rhode Island	45	46	48



By Roger Stanley and Nicole Wisniewski

Northeast Region

No. 18 Pennsylvania

Notable: Projected to hold its No. 6 population ranking. Key data: 3,488 landscaping services firms, 18,960 jobs and \$490 million in annual wages. Landscaping services economic output: \$1.501 billion.

No. 23 New Hampshire

Notable: Gains in rankings from No. 41 to No. 40 in population. Key data: 555 landscaping services firms, 2,110 jobs and \$62 million in annual wages. Economic output: \$190 million.

No. 29 Massachusetts

Notable: Population projected to drop from No. 13 to No. 17. Key data: 2,468 landscaping services firms, 9,515 jobs, and \$350 million in annual wages. Economic output: \$1.070 billion.

No. 31 New Jersey

Notable: Projected to drop out of Top 10 in population by 2030, from No. 9 to No. 13. Key data: 3,568 landscaping services firms, 16,163 jobs, and \$462 million in annual wages. Economic output: \$1.414 billion.

No. 37 New York

Notable: Third largest state in 2000 is projected to drop to No. 4 in population by 2030. A top state for immigration, but some population gain is lost as residents migrate to other states (similar to California). Key data: 4,807 landscaping services firms, 15,907 jobs, and \$512 million annual wages. Economic output: \$1.567 billion.

No. 42 Connecticut

Notable: To drop from No. 29 to No. 30 in population. Key data: 1,791 landscaping service firms, 6,900 jobs and \$233 in annual wages. Economic output: \$715 million.

No. 45 Vermont

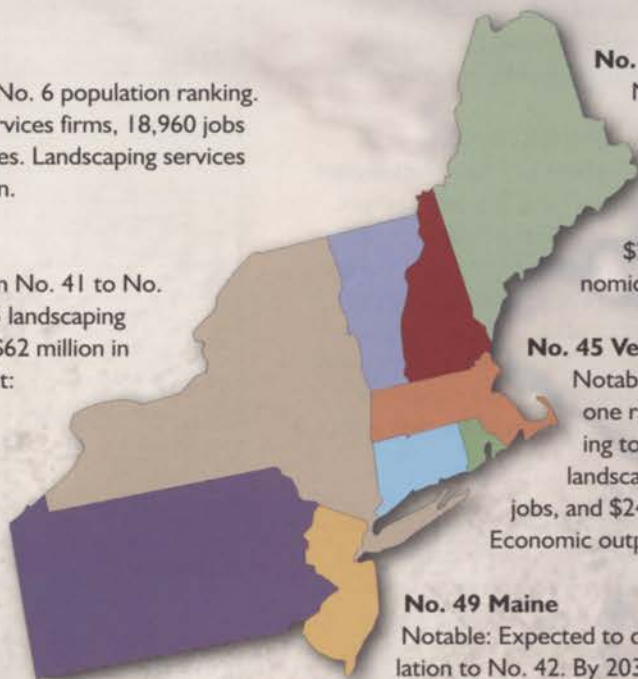
Notable: Projected to move up one rank in population standing to No. 48. Key data: 282 landscaping services firms, 726 jobs, and \$24 million in annual wages. Economic output: \$73 million.

No. 49 Maine

Notable: Expected to drop from No. 40 in population to No. 42. By 2030 one in four residents is 65 or older. Key data: 452 landscaping services firms, 1,686 jobs and \$45 million in annual wages. Economic output: \$137 million.

No. 50 Rhode Island

Notable: Population ranking to remain at No. 43. Key data: 502 landscaping service firms, 1,185 jobs, and \$42 million in annual wages. Economic output: \$129 million.



Notes

1. Regional breakouts are those used by the Census Bureau.
2. Demographic data from U.S. Census Bureau.
3. Housing data from Census Bureau and National Association of Home Builders.
4. Public Policy data from Small Business Entrepreneurship Council.
5. Industry facts from *Economic Impacts of the Green Industry in the United States*.



Midwest Region

No. 10 Missouri

Notable: No. 17 drops to No. 19 in population. Key data: 1,468 landscaping service firms, 8,936 jobs and \$202 million in annual wages. Economic output: \$619 million.

No. 16 Indiana

Notable: Projected to drop all the way from No. 14 to No. 18. Key data: 1,592 landscaping service firms, 9,992 jobs and \$251 million in annual wages. Economic output: \$768 million.

No. 19 Illinois

Notable: Large state projected to stay at No. 5 in population. Key data: 2,997 landscape service firms, 16,952 jobs and \$614 million in annual wages. Economic output: \$1.879 billion.

No. 20 Michigan

Notable: Another big state projected to drop out of Top 10 in population rating by 2030 – from No. 8 to No. 11. Key data: 2,933 firms, 12,539 jobs and \$410 million in annual wages. Economic output: \$1.254 billion.

No. 24 Wisconsin

Notable: Expected to drop in population rankings from No. 18 to No. 21. Key data: 1,475 landscaping service firms, 6,829 jobs and \$213 million in annual wages. Economic output: \$653 million.

No. 36 South Dakota

Notable: No. 46 drops to No. 47 in population. The most business-friendly state in terms of public policy. Key data: 173 landscaping service firms, 541 jobs and \$11 million in annual wages. Economic output: \$34 million.

No. 37 Kansas

Notable: No. 32 in population drops to No. 35. Key data: 619 landscaping service firms, 3,859 jobs and \$87 million in annual wages. Economic output: \$266 million.

No. 39 Ohio

Notable: Big state expected to drop two places in population – from No. 7 to No. 9. Key data: 3,431 landscaping service firms, 22,854 jobs and \$537 million in annual wages. Economic output: \$1.644 billion.

No. 41 Minnesota

Notable: A rare Midwestern state expected to gain in the population ranking, moving up from No. 21 to No. 20. Key data: 1,501 firms, 5,883 jobs and \$184 million in annual wages. Economic output: \$562 million.

No. 44 North Dakota

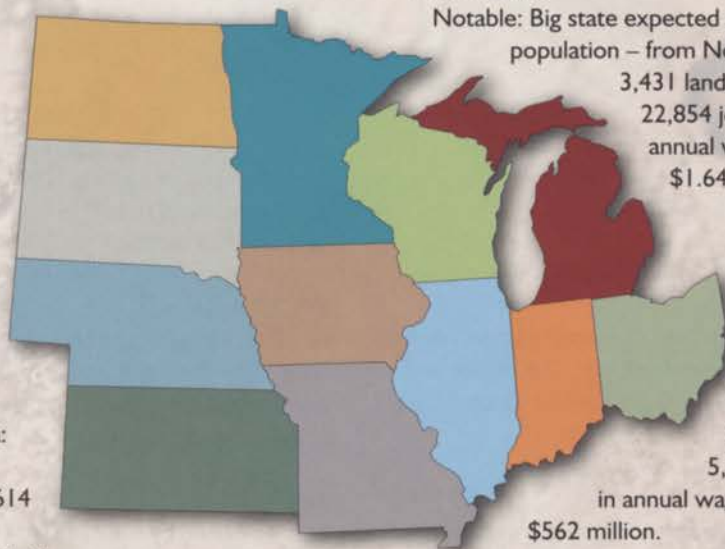
Notable: No. 47 drops to No. 49 in population. By 2030 one in four residents is 65 or older. Key data: 149 service firms, 345 jobs and \$8 million in annual wages. Economic output: \$25 million.

No. 47 Nebraska

Notable: Expected to hold at No. 38 in population. Key data: 540 landscaping service firms, 2,064 jobs and \$52 million in annual wages. Economic output: \$159 million.

No. 48 Iowa

Notable: Drops from No. 30 to No. 34 in population standings. Key data: 658 landscaping service firms, 3,134 jobs and \$76 million in annual wages. Economic output: \$233 million.





South Region

No. 1 Florida

Notable: Top state over all. Key data: 6,308 landscaping service firms, 45,096 jobs and \$843 million in annual wages. Economic output: \$2.58 billion.

No. 4 Texas

Notable: Retains the No. 2 population position. Key data: 3,617 landscaping service firms, 36,772 jobs and \$726 million in wages. Economic output: \$2.223 billion.

No. 6 Virginia

Notable: Stays ranked at No. 12 in total population. Key data: 2,040 landscaping service firms, 17,829 jobs and \$387 million in annual wages. Economic output: \$1.183 billion.

No. 7 Georgia (tie)

Notable: No. 10 in population becomes No. 8. Key data: 2,268 landscaping service firms, 18,886 jobs and \$392 million in annual wages. Economic output: \$1.199 billion.

No. 7 Tennessee (tie)

Notable: No. 16 in population moves up to No. 15. Key data: 1,193 landscaping service firms, 8,913 jobs and \$194 million in annual wages. Economic output: \$593 million.

No. 9 Alabama

Notable: Moves down from No. 23 to No. 24 in population. Key data: 833 landscaping service firms, 6,994 jobs and \$131 million in annual wages. Economic output: \$402 million.

No. 11 South Carolina

Notable: Moves up from No. 26 to No. 23. Key data: 1,306 landscaping service firms, 8,900 jobs and \$163 million in annual wages. Economic output: \$499 million.

No. 12 Maryland

Notable: No. 19 in population moves up three places in the rankings to No. 16. Key data: 1,598 landscaping service firms, 13,940 jobs and \$344 million in annual wages. Economic output: \$1.054 billion.



No. 13 North Carolina

Notable: Enters Top 10 population ranking by moving up from No. 11 to No. 7. Key data: 2,620 landscaping service firms, 17,939 jobs and \$337 million in annual wages. Economic output: \$1.033 billion.

No. 21 Delaware

Notable: Holds at No. 45 in population. Key data: 259 landscaping service firms, 1,939 jobs and \$41 million in annual wages. Economic output: \$125 million.

No. 27 Arkansas

Notable: Gains one notch from No. 33 to No. 32 in population. Key data: 435 landscaping service firms, 2,916 jobs and \$54 million in annual wages. Economic output: \$166 million.

No. 28 Mississippi

Notable: Drops from No. 31 to No. 33 in population. Key data: 429 landscaping service firms, 2,210 jobs and \$37 million in annual wages. Economic output: \$114 million.

No. 29 Oklahoma

Notable: Moves down from No. 27 to No. 29 in population. Key data: 551 landscaping service firms, 6,469 jobs and \$89 million in wages. Economic output: \$273 million.

No. 32 Kentucky

Notable: Drops from No. 25 to No. 27 in population. Key data: 755 landscaping service firms, 4,098 jobs and \$85 million in annual wages. Economic output: \$259 million.

No. 35 Louisiana

Notable: Drops in population rankings from No. 22 to No. 26. Key data: 662 landscaping service firms, 4,035 jobs and \$71 million in annual wages. Economic output: \$217 million.

No. 40 West Virginia

Notable: Drops from No. 37 to No. 39 in population rankings. Key data: 229 landscaping service firms, 1,822 jobs and \$37 million in annual wages. Economic output: \$114 million.

West Region

No. 2 Washington

Notable: Gains in population ranking from No. 15 to No. 14. Key data: 1,952 landscaping service firms, 10,331 jobs and \$248 million in wages. Economic output: \$760 million.

No. 3 Nevada

Notable: Fastest growing state and second largest gainer in total population rankings – only Arizona beats it – moving all the way up from No. 35 to No. 28. Projected to be the top state in gain of total population and Baby Boomer retirees. Key data: 576 landscaping service firms, 7,719 jobs and \$168 million in wages. Economic output: \$516 million.

No. 5 Arizona

Notable: Will crack the Top 10 population list by 2030, moving up 10 full places from No. 20 to No. 10. Holds top ranking in projected percentage gain of 18 to 44 year olds by 2030 – up 68 percent. Key data: 1,373 landscaping service firms, 15,461 jobs and \$281 million in wages. Economic output: \$860 million.

No. 13 Colorado

Notable: Moves up from No. 24 to No. 22 in population. Key data: 1,523 landscaping service firms, 11,552 jobs and \$296 million in wages. Economic output: \$907 million.

No. 15 California

Notable: Number two in projected housing starts for 2006 with a total of 191,000. Key data: 7,271 landscaping service firms, 86,446 jobs and \$1.79 billion in wages. Economic output: \$5.48 billion.

No. 16 Idaho

Notable: Continues population growth moving up from No. 39 to No. 37. Key data: 453 landscaping service firms, 2,205 jobs and \$52 million in wages. Economic output: \$159 million.

No. 21 Oregon

Notable: The No. 28 state in population becomes No. 25. Key data: 1,079 landscaping service firms, 6,324 jobs and \$143 million in wages. Economic output: \$439 million.

No. 24 Utah

Relatively low population limits ranking, but that will change as it gains in total population, retirees and workers. Moves up from No. 34 to No. 31 in population by 2030. Key data: 680 landscaping service firms, 2,740 jobs and \$63 million in wages. Economic output: \$192 million.

No. 26 Alaska

Notable: Moves up from No. 48 to No. 46. Key data: 93 landscaping service firms, 349 jobs and \$14 million in wages. Economic output: \$42 million.

No. 32 Wyoming

Notable: By 2030 one in four residents is 65 or older. Projected 35 percent decrease in 18 to 44 population by 2030. Key data: 164 landscaping service firms, 437 jobs and \$15 million in wages. Economic output: \$46 million.

No. 34 New Mexico

Notable: Stays at No. 36 in the population rankings. Key data: 235 landscaping service firms, 2,408 jobs and \$44 million in wages. Economic output: \$135 million.

No. 43 Hawaii

Notable: It's paradise, but cost of living limits retiree residency. Moves up from No. 42 to No. 41 in population. Key data: 251 landscaping service firms, 2,514 jobs and \$52 million in wages. Economic output: \$158 million.

No. 45 Montana

Notable: By 2030 one in four residents is 65 or older. Key data: 254 landscaping service firms, 641 jobs and \$16 million in wages. Economic output: \$48 million.





By Roger Stanley

Demographics

To help identify business trends and growth opportunities, pay attention to coming change in the population and its makeup.

America's total population by 2030 will have increased by almost 30 percent, which means there will be something on the order of 82 million more of us. We will also be

different in a number of respects — the population will be older on average, more racially diverse and more of us will be living in the South and West. Those are among the major trends based on predictions using 2000 Census data.

While Census Bureau staff are still crunching the numbers gathered almost five years ago, they have made some interim projections using the most recent Census estimates in combination with historic population data for birth rates, deaths, immigration, emigration, state-to-state migration and more.

POPULATION MOVEMENT. The non-news in population projections is that the giant states will continue to get bigger. Three states alone — California, Texas and Florida — will account for almost half the total anticipated population increase. Perhaps more impactful is the ongoing shift in the population away from the East and Midwest in favor of residence in the Sun Belt states.

BOOMERS TO GO OUT WITH A BANG.

Since their births in the 1946 to 1964 period, the Baby Boomer generation has dominated the demographic landscape in the U.S. and will continue to do so. The potential impact of this generation on the economy is enormous as it reaches retirement age in the years 2011 to 2029. Baby Boomers are expected to live longer and more active lives than previous retiring generations. Since they control 70 percent of the nation's wealth and spend more than \$1 trillion per

year, the decision of Baby Boomers to retire in place or move to a warmer climate has huge business implications. And for lawn and landscape companies and other service businesses, many in this generation

represent a lifestyle that is becoming longer on enjoyment and shorter on doing it yourself.

The chart at right projects the percentage increase of retirement age people in each state from the year 2000 (the Census year) until 2030. This percentage is most important in determining the impact of Baby



Boomer retirement relative to each state.

WHAT ABOUT THE WORKERS? A corollary to the aging of America is a looming shortage of workers. While the total population is expected to grow by 29 percent by 2030, the number of workers between the prime ages of 18 and 44 will only increase 10 percent. While technology, immigration and perhaps worker permit programs (H-2B) may factor into the overall labor situation, competition for workers will continue within the lawn and landscape industry as well as against other businesses.

DIGGING DEEPER. Space does not permit for an in-depth analysis of demographic state trends, but detailed state information is available on the Census Bureau Web site (www.census.gov). Be sure to look for information based on the 2000 Census (rather than the 1990 Census), and then look for the key words "estimates" and "projections". Another site offering information specific to your state is available at www.projectionscentral.com.

	Numeric Ranking	Demographics Ranking ¹	2005 Population (Projected) ²	2030 Population (Projected) ²	2030 65+ Population Gain (Projected) ²	2030 18-44 Population Gain or Loss (Projected) ²
1	FL	CA	CA	NV	AZ	
		(36,038,859)	(46,444,861)	(+364%)	(+68%)	
2	TX	TX	TX	AK	NV	
		(22,775,044)	(33,317,744)	(+356%)	(+66%)	
3	AZ	NY	FL	AZ	FL	
		(19,258,082)	(28,685,769)	(+355%)	(+42%)	
4	GA	FL	NY	FL	TX	
		(17,509,827)	(19,477,429)	(+276%)	(+39%)	
5	NV	IL	IL	NM	UT	
		(12,699,336)	(13,432,892)	(+261%)	(+36%)	
6t	CA	PA	PA	TX	WA	
		(12,426,603)	(12,768,184)	(+250%)	(+33%)	
6t	WA	OH	NC	ID	AK	
		(11,477,557)	(12,227,739)	(+247%)	(+29%)	
8	NC	MI	GA	GA	ID	
		(10,207,421)	(12,017,836)	(+242%)	(+28%)	
9	VA	GA	OH	UT	NC	
		(8,925,796)	(11,550,528)	(+242%)	(+28%)	
10	UT	NJ	AZ	WY	OR	
		(8,745,279)	(10,712,397)	(+240%)	(+27%)	
11	ID	NC	MI	NH	GA	
		(8,702,410)	(10,694,172)	(+238%)	(+22%)	
12	AK	VA	VA	WA	CA	
		(7,552,581)	(9,825,019)	(+236%)	(+22%)	
13t	CO	MA	NJ	DE	VA	
		(6,518,868)	(9,802,440)	(+234%)	(+21%)	
13t	MD	IN	WA	SC	MD	
		(6,249,617)	(8,624,801)	(+233%)	(+20%)	
15	OR	WA	TN	VA	CO	
		(6,204,632)	(7,380,634)	(+232%)	(+16%)	
16	TN	TN	MD	CA	NH	
		(5,965,317)	(7,022,251)	(+230%)	(+11%)	
17	SC	AZ	MA	CO	TN	
		(5,868,004)	(7,012,009)	(+229%)	(+10%)	
18	NH	MO	IN	VT	MN	
		(5,765,166)	(6,801,108)	(+225%)	(+9%)	
19	MN	MD	MO	NC	HI	
		(5,600,563)	(6,430,173)	(+224%)	(+8%)	
20	NJ	WI	MN	MT	SC	
		(5,554,343)	(6,306,130)	(+222%)	(+3%)	
21	MO	MN	WI	MD	AR	
		(5,174,743)	(6,150,764)	(+206%)	(+1%)	
22t	DE	CO	CO	ME	MO	
		(4,617,962)	(5,792,357)	(+204%)	(+1%)	
22t	WI	LA	SC	HI	NJ	
		(4,534,310)	(5,148,569)	(+203%)	(-1%)	
24	HI	AL	AL	TN	OK	
		(4,527,166)	(4,874,243)	(+202%)	(-2%)	
25	AR	SC	OR	OR	VT	
		(4,239,310)	(4,833,918)	(+201%)	(-2%)	

	Numeric Ranking	Demographics Ranking ¹	2005 Population (Projected) ²	2030 Population (Projected) ²	2030 65+ Population Gain (Projected) ²	2030 18-44 Population Gain or Loss (Projected) ²
26	NM	KY	LA	MN	DE	
		(4,163,360)	(4,802,633)	(+200%)	(-2%)	
27	IN	OR	KY	WI	IN	
		(3,596,083)	(4,554,998)	(+186%)	(-3%)	
28	KY	OK	NV	MS	KY	
		(3,521,379)	(4,282,102)	(+184%)	(-5%)	
29	VT	CT	OK	LA	WI	
		(3,503,185)	(3,913,251)	(+182%)	(-5%)	
30	MA	IA	CT	AL	IL	
		(2,973,700)	(3,688,630)	(+179%)	(-6%)	
31	MI	MS	UT	KY	KS	
		(2,915,696)	(3,485,367)	(+178%)	(-6%)	
32	IL	AR	AR	NJ	CT	
		(2,777,007)	(3,240,208)	(+176%)	(-7%)	
33	OK	KS	MS	AR	MA	
		(2,751,509)	(3,092,410)	(+175%)	(-7%)	
34	AL	UT	IA	MO	MI	
		(2,417,998)	(2,955,172)	(+172%)	(-7%)	
35	MT	NV	KS	SD	RI	
		(2,352,086)	(2,940,084)	(+171%)	(-7%)	
36	LA	NM	NM	MI	LA	
		(1,902,057)	(2,099,708)	(+171%)	(-9%)	
37	NY	WV	ID	MA	AL	
		(1,818,887)	(1,969,624)	(+170%)	(-11%)	
38t	CT	NE	NE	CT	MT	
		(1,744,370)	(1,820,247)	(+168%)	(-11%)	
38t	ME	ID	WV	KS	NE	
		(1,407,060)	(1,719,959)	(+167%)	(-11%)	
40	KS	ME	NH	OK	PA	
		(1,318,557)	(1,646,471)	(+166%)	(-11%)	
41	MS	NH	HI	IN	NY	
		(1,314,821)	(1,466,046)	(+163%)	(-12%)	
42	PA	HA	ME	NE	OH	
		(1,276,552)	(1,411,097)	(+162%)	(-13%)	
43	OH	RI	RI	RI	ME	
		(1,086,575)	(1,152,941)	(+161%)	(-15%)	
44	WY	MT	MT	ND	MS	
		(933,005)	(1,044,898)	(+161%)	(-15%)	
45	RI	DE	DE	IL	NM	
		(836,687)	(1,012,658)	(+160%)	(-15%)	
46	NE	SD	AK	NY	SD	
		(771,803)	(867,674)	(+159%)	(-20%)	
47	SD	AK	SD	OH	IA	
		(661,110)	(800,462)	(+156%)	(-20%)	
48	IA	ND	VT	WV	WY	
		(635,468)	(711,867)	(+154%)	(-24%)	
49	ND	VT	ND	IA	ND	
		(630,979)	(606,566)	(+152%)	(-31%)	
50	WV	WY	WY	PA	WV	
		(507,268)	(522,979)	(+150%)	(-35%)	



Footnotes

1. Demographic category final rankings based on population (40%), projected population growth (20%), projected Baby Boomer population increase (20%) and projected 18-44 age group population increase or decrease (20%).
2. Source: Census Bureau, 2005 Projection based on 2000 Census.



By Jonathan Katz

Housing Boom

Despite some concern about a possible housing pricing bubble, analysts remain optimistic about continued demand for new and existing housing.

Nearly every aspect of the housing market directly impacts the green industry. Virtually every new property requires turf and tree installation, landscape beds, patios or decks and other hardscape features designed, installed and often maintained by professionals.

The good news is that in 2004, records were set in almost every housing category. While new construction is expected to slow in most states in 2006, the market remains strong, says Al Schuler, a USDA Forest Service economist in Princeton, W. Va.

TOTAL HOUSING UNITS. It's no surprise that the states with the largest populations represented the highest housing totals in 2004. Housing units represent a house, apartment, mobile home or trailer, a group of rooms, or any single room that is occupied or, if vacant, is intended for occupancy as separate living quarters, according to the Census Bureau definition.

Total housing units indicates the current housing market volume in each state, but is not a measure of possible housing growth or past trends.

EXISTING SALES. One positive trend for contractors is an ongoing strong market for existing home sales, as reflected in gains in 2004 when compared against 2002. Many home buyers renovate or remodel their homes shortly after purchasing them, including the property.

"If you buy a new home, the first thing you do within 12 months after buying it is a lot of painting, remodeling and landscaping, Schuler says. "Existing home sales is about six times the size of new home

sales, so it's a pretty important market, particularly if you're looking at landscape sales."

A good market for existing sales actually helps drive new construction demand. "Most new home buyers are trade-up buyers who are selling an existing home. So, if there's a good market for their existing home, then they're more likely to build or buy a new home," says Michael Carliner, an economist with the National Association of Home Builders in Washington, D.C.



HOUSING PERMITS. A strong indicator of recent housing construction and future trends is housing permits. The chart at right shows the percentage increase or decrease of 2004 housing permits issued for single-family homes in each state in comparison to an average of permits for the previous five years.

Most states are showing increases in permits issued, but there are reports in the Midwest of overbuilding, Carliner says. "We're getting indications in some places in the Midwest that they need to slow down, and our survey of builders suggests they're headed for a slowdown," he says.

HOUSING STARTS. In 2006, most states can expect a slowdown from the previous record year. Florida, California, Texas, Georgia and Arizona will hold the top five spots for total housing unit construction, according to the NAHB. Most of the new homes will be single-family, which often means larger homes and often larger lots, according to Schuler.

In 2004, 1.6 million single-family homes were built vs. 1.5 million in 2003. In general, bigger houses are also being built with larger landscapes, Schuler says, adding that single-family homes today are 40 percent larger than they were in 1980.

	Numeric Ranking	Housing Ranking ¹	Total Housing Units (2004) ²	Existing Home Sales (2004 versus 2002) ³	Housing Permits (2004 vs. 1999-2003 average) ⁴	2006 Housing Starts Forecast (% change 2006 vs. 2005) ⁵		Numeric Ranking	Housing Ranking ¹	Total Housing Units (2004) ²	Existing Home Sales (2004 versus 2002) ³	Housing Permits (2004 vs. 1999-2003 average) ⁴	2006 Housing Starts Forecast (% change 2006 vs. 2005) ⁵
1	WA	CA	(12,804,702)	NV	MT	MD	25t	ID	KY	MD	HI	OK	
				(57.1%)	(83.4%)	(+3.0%)			(1,842,971)	(19.5%)	(25.0%)		(-6.0%)
2	AL	TX	(8,846,728)	AZ	WY	NY	27	LA	OK	ND	OR	NE	
				(45.7%)	(66.3%)	(+2.0%)			(1,572,756)	(17.8%)	(23.6%)		(-6.4%)
3	FL	FL	(8,009,427)	TN	ND	NV	28t	KS	OR	OK	NM	HI	
				(39.3%)	(51.8%)	(+1.6%)			(1,535,381)	(17.7%)	(21.7%)		(-6.5%)
4	CA	NY	(7,819,359)	SC	FL	RI	28t	WI	CT	TX	NC	CO	
				(36.5%)	(51.7%)	(+0.9%)			(1,414,433)	(17.7%)	(20.9%)		(-6.6%)
5	NV	PA	(5,385,729)	AL	AL	IN	30	AR	IA	AR	GA	AK	
				(36.2%)	(48.4%)	(+0.3%)			(1,292,976)	(16.6%)	(19.2%)		(-6.9%)
6t	TN	IL	(5,094,186)	NC	AZ	WA	31	MI	AR	ME	MN	GA	
				(35.5%)	(46.6%)	(-1.4%)			(1,233,203)	(16.6%)	(15.9%)		(-6.9%)
6t	VA	OH	(4,966,746)	AK	DE	KS	32t	KY	MS	OH	VT	LA	
				(33.7%)	(45.1%)	(-1.5%)			(1,221,240)	(16.3%)	(15.5%)		(-6.9%)
8	AZ	MI	(4,433,482)	DE	ID	OR	32t	MS	KS	SD	KY	MI	
				(30.3%)	(43.1%)	(-1.6%)			(1,185,114)	(16.1%)	(15.4%)		(-7.1%)
9	PA	NC	(3,860,078)	NM	NV	MA	32t	NM	NV	NE	WI	MS	
				(30.0%)	(41.2%)	(-1.8%)			(976,446)	(16.0%)	(15.2%)		(-7.1%)
10	TX	GA	(3,672,677)	WV	LA	VA	35	CO	WV	CO	VA	AR	
				(28.1%)	(38.5%)	(-1.9%)			(866,944)	(15.1%)	(13.7%)		(-7.3%)
11	MO	NJ	(3,414,739)	WA	SD	NH	36	IA	UT	IL	PA	NM	
				(26.9%)	(34.3%)	(-3.8%)			(848,737)	(14.3%)	(13.3%)		(-7.3%)
12t	GA	VA	(3,116,827)	HI	TN	UT	37t	CT	NM	NH	IL	ND	
				(26.3%)	(33.4%)	(-3.9%)			(825,540)	(14.2%)	(13.1%)		(-7.3%)
12t	NC	IN	(2,690,619)	OR	SC	CT	37t	HI	NE	NJ	NH	KY	
				(25.7%)	(31.7%)	(-4.1%)			(757,743)	(13.6%)	(12.7%)		(-7.4%)
14t	IL	MA	(2,672,061)	WY	AR	AL	39	UT	ME	CT	CO	TN	
				(24.5%)	(31.3%)	(-4.2%)			(676,667)	(12.9%)	(11.8%)		(-7.4%)
14t	MA	WA	(2,606,623)	ID	CA	IL	40	MN	ID	RI	CT	TX	
				(24.5%)	(31.1%)	(-4.2%)			(578,774)	(12.2%)	(10.5%)		(-7.4%)
16	OR	TN	(2,595,060)	GA	OK	CA	41	NE	NH	MN	KS	AZ	
				(24.0%)	(31.0%)	(-4.4%)			(575,671)	(12.0%)	(9.9%)		(-7.8%)
17	NY	MO	(2,564,340)	VA	WV	VT	42	WY	HI	LA	MA	IA	
				(23.9%)	(31.0%)	(-4.5%)			(482,873)	(11.0%)	(7.0%)		(-8.0%)
18	OH	WI	(2,463,802)	MO	ME	NJ	43	ND	RI	WI	OH	MN	
				(23.0%)	(30.7%)	(-4.9%)			(446,305)	(10.7%)	(6.7%)		(-8.2%)
19t	MD	AZ	(2,458,231)	FL	MO	WV	44	NH	MT	VT	MI	NC	
				(22.6%)	(30.2%)	(-5.0%)			(423,262)	(9.2%)	(6.6%)		(-8.2%)
19t	WV	MD	(2,250,339)	KS	TX	OH	45	ME	DE	CA	AK	WY	
				(22.3%)	(28.7%)	(-5.4%)			(367,448)	(7.9%)	(5.4%)		(-8.4%)
21	SC	MN	(2,212,701)	MA	NE	WI	46t	AK	SD	MT	IN	FL	
				(22.2%)	(27.1%)	(-5.6%)			(342,620)	(7.0%)	(1.2%)		(-8.9%)
22	OK	AL	(2,058,951)	PA	WA	PA	46t	RI	VT	UT	NY	ME	
				(22.1%)	(27.0%)	(-5.7%)			(304,291)	(6.6%)	(-1.7%)		(-9.8%)
23	NJ	CO	(2,010,806)	IA	IA	DE	48	MT	ND	NY	NJ	MT	
				(21.7%)	(26.9%)	(-5.9%)			(300,815)	(5.8%)	(-3.6%)		(-10.3%)
24	IN	LA	(1,919,859)	KY	MS	MO	48	SD	AK	MI	MD	SD	
				(21.4%)	(26.4%)	(-6.0%)			(271,533)	(4.6%)	(-10.5%)		(-12.5%)
25t	DE	SC	(1,890,682)	MS	UT	ID	50	VT	WY	IN	RI	SC	
				(21.0%)	(25.7%)	(-6.0%)			(232,637)	(4.2%)	(-15.8%)		(-14.1%)



Footnotes

1. Ranking based on housing total (40 percent), and sales, permits and starts (20 percent each).
2. Source: Census Bureau, 2004 data.
3. Source: National Association of Realtors.
4. Source: Census Bureau.
5. Source: National Association of Home Builders, 2005 starts vs. 2006 projected starts as a percentage increase or decrease.



By Lauren Spiers

Taxation Nation

While taxes are inevitable, the tax and other public policy burdens put on small businesses vary sharply from state to state.

To benchmark and track public policy impact on business, the Small Business & Entrepreneurship Council (SBEC) in Washington, D.C., produces its annual *Small Business Survival Index* (www.sbecouncil.org). Based on 23 government-imposed economic barometers, the Index ranks states based on their tax rates and public policy burdens. The chart at right lists four key public policy indicators: personal income tax rates, property tax, health care costs and unemployment tax.

"You can use the Index to compare states that have no income tax and others that have very weighty income taxes, but each column stands on its own," explains SBEC Chief Economist Raymond Keating. "Our overall objective is to show the broad impact of taxes on small business from state to state. Each of the items we index will impact a landscaping business, manufacturing company or private consultant the same way within that state."

PERSONAL INCOME TAX.

Personal income tax rate varies sharply from state to state, but the five most business-friendly states levy no income tax, while the least business-friendly states tax rates are high: 7.85 percent for Minnesota and 9.3 percent for California. "Roughly 90 percent of small businesses file taxes as individuals – sole proprietorships, partnerships and S-Corps," Keating says. "Income-based taxes really have one of the biggest economic effects overall for small businesses because they affect the costs of working, saving, investing and risk taking."

PROPERTY TAX. Property taxes impact the decision on whether to invest in property or to operate

out of a home, and if a business is located near a state line, taxes can be an important factor in the owner's decision on which state in which to base his or her business.

HEALTH CARE COSTS. Because service businesses are so dependent on personnel, they are significantly impacted by health care costs. "Health insurance represents a significant public policy cost for businesses," Keating says. According to SBEC's rating, a state coming in with a score below one has

lower-than-average health care costs, while states with more than a one have higher-than-average health care costs. "Taxes, mandates and regulations increase health care costs, raise the cost of insurance, increase the number of uninsured and act as a disincentive to starting up or locating a business in a high-cost state," Keating says. With the exception of Florida, the top five states in the Index have favorable health care scores.



UNEMPLOYMENT TAX RATE.

State unemployment tax rates affect the relative cost of labor vs. capitol.

Seasonal businesses, including the green industry, must often lay off employees in the winter, making these employees eligible for unemployment benefits. Unemployment tax rates are set by states and must be paid into a pool from which unemployed workers will draw benefits. Higher state unemployment tax rates increase the relative cost of labor vs. capitol can be a disincentive to hiring seasonal help. It may also be a factor in deciding where to base the company. Keating notes that there is no correlation between a state's unemployment rate and its unemployment tax rate.

	Numeric Ranking	Public Policy Ranking ¹	Personal Income Tax ²	Property Tax Rate ³	Health Care Costs ⁴	Unemployment Tax Rates ⁵
1	SD	SD (0.00)	AL (1.29)	UT (0.73)	CA (1.05)	
2	NV	NV (0.00)	DE (1.54)	ID (0.81)	AZ (1.11)	
3	WY	WY (0.00)	AR (1.57)	AZ (0.82)	FLA (1.16)	
4	WA	WA (0.00)	OK (1.64)	NV (0.84)	IN (1.18)	
5	FL	FL (0.00)	NM (1.64)	NM (0.85)	NE (1.28)	
6	MI	TX (0.00)	HA (1.66)	VA (0.87)	PA (1.38)	
7	MS	NH (0.00)	LA (1.71)	MT (0.88)	VT (1.39)	
8	AL	TN (0.00)	KY (1.90)	COL (0.89)	VA (1.41)	
9	CO	AK (0.00)	WV (2.10)	OR (0.89)	MS (1.42)	
10	IN	IL (3.00)	TN (2.16)	WY (0.90)	SC (1.42)	
11	TX	PA (3.07)	NC (2.35)	WA (0.90)	NH (1.44)	
12	PA	AL (3.25)	MO (2.40)	TX (0.90)	LA (1.44)	
13	SC	IN (3.40)	UT (2.49)	OK (0.90)	MO (1.45)	
14	NH	MI (3.90)	MS (2.55)	CA (0.91)	MD (1.62)	
15	VA	LA (3.90)	NV (2.57)	MS (0.92)	AL (1.65)	
16	TN	CO (4.63)	CA (2.62)	AK (0.92)	GA (1.67)	
17	AZ	MD (4.75)	GA (2.70)	GA (0.93)	DE (1.76)	
18	MO	MS (5.00)	CO (2.74)	SC (0.94)	CO (1.77)	
19	IL	CT (5.00)	MD (2.74)	AR (0.94)	NY (1.82)	
20	AK	AZ (5.04)	ID (2.80)	NC (0.94)	SD (1.86)	
21	MD	MA (5.30)	VA (2.81)	IN (0.95)	KS (1.92)	
22	GA	ND (5.54)	PA (2.84)	NE (0.96)	OH (1.97)	
23	DE	VA (5.75)	WA (2.92)	SD (0.97)	TX (2.05)	
24	AR	UT (5.78)	SC (2.96)	AL (0.97)	IL (2.12)	
25	ID	IA (5.84)	AZ (2.97)	VT (0.97)	TN (2.15)	

	Numeric Ranking	Public Policy Ranking ¹	Personal Income Tax ²	Property Tax Rate ³	Health Care Costs ⁴	Unemployment Tax Rates ⁵
26	ND	DE (5.95)	OR (3.10)	MI (0.98)	ME (2.18)	
27	WI	MO (6.00)	MN (3.11)	KY (0.99)	CT (2.21)	
28	UT	GA (6.00)	ND (3.13)	KS (0.99)	WV (2.38)	
29	KY	KY (6.00)	FL (3.17)	MO (1.00)	MI (2.43)	
30	OK	KS (6.45)	OH (3.20)	LA (1.00)	KY (2.59)	
31	KS	WV (6.50)	KS (3.22)	OH (1.00)	NC (2.82)	
32	LA	WI (6.75)	SD (3.26)	IA (1.00)	NJ (2.90)	
33	WV	NM (6.80)	MO (3.27)	HI (1.00)	NM (3.08)	
34	CT	NE (6.84)	IN (3.46)	TN (1.01)	WI (3.15)	
35	NE	SC (7.00)	NE (3.47)	IL (1.01)	MA (3.41)	
36	NM	OK (7.00)	MA (3.47)	NH (1.02)	NV (3.49)	
37	NC	MT (7.15)	IA (3.49)	MD (1.02)	AR (3.81)	
38	MT	AR (7.21)	MT (3.77)	WI (1.02)	OK (3.89)	
39	OR	OH (7.50)	IL (3.82)	ND (1.03)	AK (3.94)	
40	OH	NY (7.70)	TX (3.88)	MN (1.06)	RI (3.94)	
41	MA	ID (7.80)	NY (3.92)	ME (1.07)	WY (4.17)	
42	VT	MN (7.85)	AK (3.94)	FL (1.08)	WA (4.26)	
43	IA	NC (8.25)	WI (3.96)	WV (1.08)	OR (4.33)	
44	NJ	HI (8.25)	CT (4.08)	PA (1.11)	MT (5.07)	
45	NY	ME (8.50)	RI (4.44)	NJ (1.12)	HI (5.12)	
46	ME	NJ (8.97)	WY (4.47)	DE (1.13)	ID (5.29)	
47	MN	OR (9.00)	VT (4.49)	RI (1.20)	IA (5.31)	
48	RI	CA (9.30)	NJ (4.74)	CT (1.24)	UT (6.23)	
49	HI	VT (9.30)	NH (5.01)	NY (1.25)	MN (6.32)	
50	CA	RI (9.50)	ME (5.27)	MA (1.28)	ND (7.03)	

Footnotes

1. Small Business Survival Guide, 2004. Used with permission of the Small Business & Entrepreneurship Council, Washington, DC (www.tbccouncil.org).
2. Maximum personal income tax rate.
3. Property tax rates as a share of personal income.
4. Health care costs index of per capita health care spending relative to the U.S. average.
5. Maximum state unemployment tax applied to state wage base as a share of state average annual pay.



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by jonathan katz

It's almost inevitable that flying debris from lawn equipment will damage property at some point in a contractor's career. *Lawn & Landscape Online Message Board* users share tips for handling such incidents.

Pricey Projectiles

Not only can sticks and stones break your bones, but they can also damage windows, cars and other nearby objects when you're operating lawn equipment. The longer landscape contractors are in the business, the more likely a string trimmer or mower will hurtle debris into the air and cause property damage.

That's what one *Lawn & Landscape Online Message Board* participant says happened to him when a woman accused him of breaking her car window with his string trimmer when she was driving by. He says the driver was visibly upset and confrontational and that he planned not to pay the woman because of her "horrible attitude." His comments stirred a lively discussion about how contractors should handle accusations of property damage from anyone, including customers.

Some Message Board participants recommend that contractors carefully consider the circumstances before owning up to these incidents or refer the matter to their insurance company. But others, such as Gary Batho, agree that it's best to pay for the damages and move on. "You broke it, you bought it," says Batho, owner of B&B

Landscaping & Irrigation, Clarkesville, Ga. "Pay the lady with a smile."

BE COURTEOUS. Customers may not always be right, but you should still treat them that way, say many Message Board users. Put yourself in the customer's shoes, writes Will Sharp, owner, Lawn Dawg Services, Matthews, N.C. "Write her a check and buy her dinner since bad news travels fast," he suggests. For instance, if you found a fly in your coffee, you'd probably demand another at no charge, analogizes Chad Stern, owner, Mowing & More, Chevy Chase, Md.

"Let's say that you were dealing with a shrewd employee and he said, 'Well, it's not as though we put the fly in there,'" Stern writes. "'The fly entered the drink only after we gave it to you. And even if the fly was in the cup before we gave it to you, you have the burden of proving so. Could you please step aside - other customers are in line.' Would you ever do business there again?"

Also, landscape contractors risk tarnishing their images by arguing with customers about property damage that could have been caused by lawn equip-

ment. "You know the old saying, 'Kill 'em with kindness,'" writes Ronald Skover, owner, Green Lawn, North Street, Mich. "You really need to bend over backwards to some of these people. I do it all the time. Word of mouth travels fast about you and your company with bad news."

And not only does the company risk damaging its reputation, but the industry as a whole can suffer when contractors don't take responsibility for such accidents, notes Bill Smallwood, owner, W.J. Smallwood Landscaping, Salem, N.H. Poor customer-relations skills could be why customers are willing to pay other skilled workers, such as plumbers and electricians, more money than landscape contractors, Smallwood writes. "Did you break the window? Maybe not, but quite likely so," he explains. "You want out of the problem, prove there were no pebbles to be thrown. To win a civil court case, all that is needed is proof beyond a reasonable doubt – not a unanimous decision. Pay for

the window and move on. Why spend hundreds paying for a cheap piece of glass? Don't you have more important things to be doing?"

By taking responsibility and acting fast, contractors can keep such incidents from snowballing into something worse, says Patrick Johnson, owner, Reflective Gardens, Knoxville, Tenn. "I'd call it a bad one and take care of it now before it blows up into something bigger," he recommends. "You'll just think about it at night until it's resolved. Don't lose sleep over it. It was an accident and they will happen. Luckily, it didn't cause a bigger accident."

Smallwood relates the following experience: "Today, one of my employees was edging a bed with the power edger, as we have done the same way for the past five years, and he cut a cable TV wire that was 2 inches below grade. Being a professional, I went directly to the homeowner's office, explained to him what happened, offered to call the cable company to have any repairs

taken care of and reassured him that we would cover any expense. Is it my fault the wire was improperly buried? Absolutely not. But it wasn't my client's fault either, and we were the ones operating the slicing instrument, therefore, we pay. I find it troubling that so many 'professionals' want to find the easy way out all of the time and not take responsibility for their actions. To condone that behavior is to lower yourself to that level."

Sometimes it might be worth conceding fault even if you know the customer is wrong to save a major account, writes Clint Christman, owner, Baja Landscape Co., Sacramento, Calif. Christman explains that he always writes a check if he knows his employees were at fault or if he has little doubt they were responsible. When Christman has serious doubts, he stalls for a moment by telling the customer there is an "internal investigation" or mentions that he's in the process of filing an insurance claim or a police report.

ask an expert

So what should a landscape contractor do when accused of causing property damage? In the event of something minor, such as a cracked windshield or a small dent from flying debris, it's usually best to just absorb the cost, says Rick Bersnak, president, M.F.P. Insurance Agency, Lewis Center, Ohio. "My recommendation would be to pay them," says Bersnak, whose firm represents more than 300 green industry companies nationwide. "Get the checkbook, and write out the check for \$100 or \$125. If you start fighting, whatever time and aggravation you spend is going to be a detriment."

More often than not, contractors will lose in the end with smaller claims because of the time and money involved in fighting them, Bersnak says. "If you fight them, it's a lose, lose," he explains. "Sometimes you have to go to small claims court, and then you have to take a day off of work. And in all likelihood, it probably did happen. A lot of guys wear headgear or ear protectors and don't even realize it happened."

Besides, about 75 percent of the time, property-damage claims against contractors are legitimate,

according to Bersnak. If the contractor is at fault, it's usually best to not file an insurance claim unless the damage is major, Bersnak advises. Some smaller claims may be less than the deductible, which is typically between \$250 and \$500. In addition, too many minor claims can raise a contractor's insurance rates or even result in nonrenewal of the policy, Bersnak says.

"We advise people not to turn in anything under \$200," Bersnak says. "If an insurance company gets too many of those nickel and dime claims, they won't renew their insurance. They expect mowing/maintenance guys to eat those small ones. If you have one or two of those a season, you should be eating them as a cost of doing business."

Multiple minor claims can increase a contractor's insurance costs by 25 to 100 percent, according to Bersnak. "They should only be using an insurance claim for something that would really hurt them in the pocketbook," Bersnak says. "We have bigger guys with five to six crews who won't turn anything in under \$1,000."

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"That usually discourages bogus claim-makers," he writes. "However, I have to admit that I've paid off on bogus claims by employees of 'important' clients just to save an account. But when I did it, I let the client know that I knew the claim was bogus and that I was only doing it to save the account. The client would then put the word out to the employees that they would not support any claims by their own employees without absolute proof. It's all about PR."

DON'T BE A PUSHOVER.

Other Message Board participants say if contractors know they're innocent, the burden of proof should be on the accusing party, especially if the incident didn't involve a customer. "I could go either way on this," says Jamie Bush, president, Jamie's Lawn Service, Plano, Texas. "Who's to say her window wasn't broken already, and she is trying

to scam him? Are you supposed to just write a check to everybody who claims you broke something? Is there no burden of proof? What about these guys who drive gravel trucks with signs posted, 'not responsible for broken windshields?' How does that work? I think all requests and accusations should be made in a courteous way. If someone is downright rude from the onset, they lower their chances of getting what they want."

Dale Wiley, owner of Landscape Specialty Services in Forest Grove, Ore., says he knows from experience that people can make dishonest claims about damage caused to their property. "There are people who go around and do this," he writes. "If you roll over for every one that comes along and says you did this, you will be an easy mark." In the event that contractors are to blame, sometimes it's best to let their insurance companies take over, accord-

ing to some Message Board members. "She has to prove that you did it, and she may not want to go through that expense," writes Rick Brauneis, owner, Vision Designs, Orlando, Fla. "But if in fact you did break it, just let your insurance handle it - that is the reason we carry it. Or just cut her a check yourself."

Michael Laport, president of Commercial Scapes in Bristow, Va., concurred with Brauneis, saying the contractor who broke the window should give his insurance company the facts, and "let them sort it out." **u**



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Photo: John Deere



Lean Machines

by jonathan katz

Mower engine selection and preventive maintenance could be the keys to combating rising fuel prices.

Whether it's fuel injection or the introduction of hybrid gas/electric-powered cars, it's obvious fuel economy and emissions standards have impacted the modern-day automobile. Although such advancements haven't come quite so quickly for mower engines, there are signs small-engine makers could follow suit.

Some mowers are being equipped with electronic fuel injection (EFI), and some manufacturers are exploring the possibility of alternative-fueled mowers. Recent trends suggest such technology isn't the primary concern for landscape contractors when shopping for new mowers. Instead, the demand for more horsepower and increased durability are driving engine designs, according to Kevin Lund, commercial mowing product manager, John Deere, Moline, Ill.

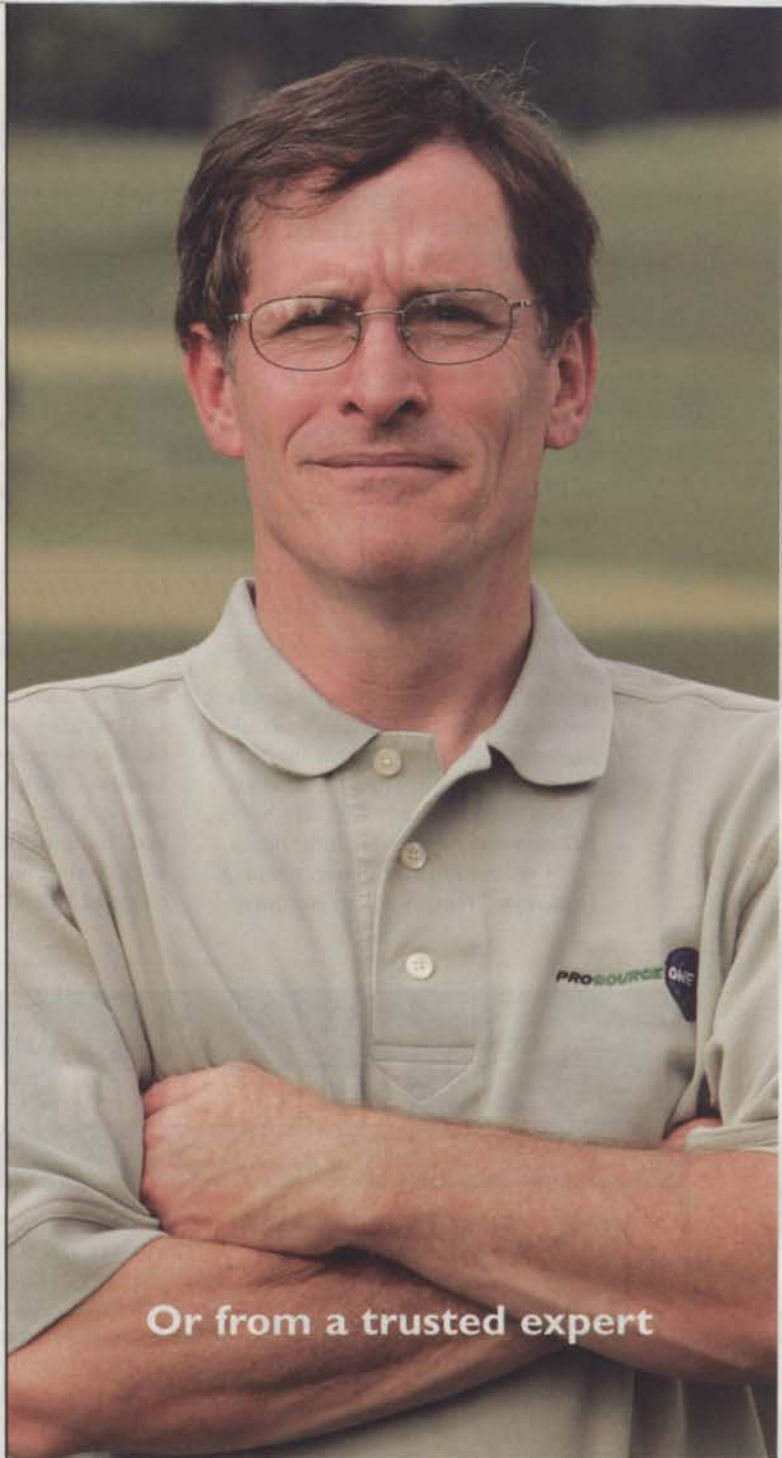
"Fuel economy tends to drive selection less than things like durability," Lund says. "Fuel prices are much higher than they were, but I don't know that it's at a critical point yet where this becomes a bigger issue."

But if the current trend of rising gas prices continues, the concept of fuel-efficient mowers could be pushed to the forefront, as evidenced by the addition of EFI. "We're really excited about EFI and the opportunity to help operators save money," says Ann Roche, vice president of commercial engines for Briggs & Stratton, Milwaukee, Wis. "I think contractors can see some pretty interesting paybacks on fuel savings alone."

EFFICIENT WITH EFI. It's debatable how much gas an EFI system can save. At minimum, EFI should result in 10 percent



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more fuel savings than a carbureted engine, according to Roche. In the best-case scenario, operators may cut fuel consumption by 20 to 30 percent with an EFI system, Roche says. The figures vary from manufacturer to manufacturer because the technology is still fairly

new for mowers, and customer feedback varies, says Roy Dust, product specialist, Ferris Industries, Munnsville, N.Y. He reaffirms Roche's figure of at least 10-percent fuel savings with EFI but he, too, says that number might be higher.

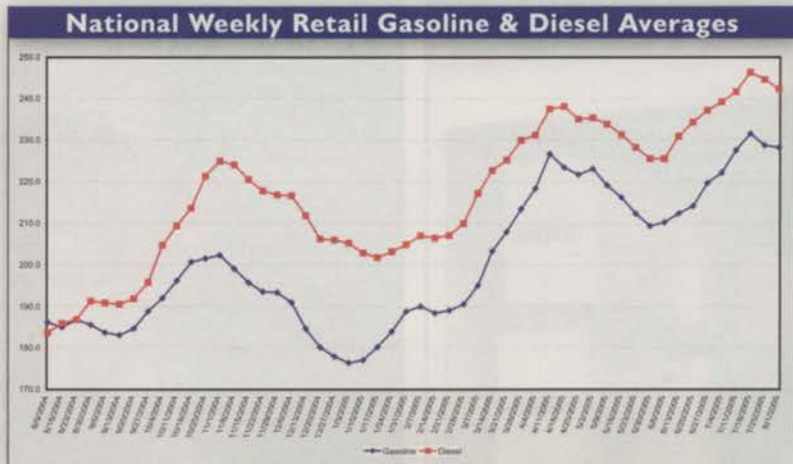
"I've heard figures all over the map," Dust says. "When I talk to customers

and they ask if they're going to get better fuel efficiency with EFI, I say you are, but I'm not going to tell you how much because I don't have enough experience with it. I rely on the input that comes back from the field. When enough landscapers come back to me and say, 'I've chopped 10 or 15 percent off of my fuel

er that month because it rained. If your conditions are constant, you could see some savings, but because conditions vary, it's a small step to go to EFI."

Regardless, EFI is an option contractors may want to at least inquire about as fuel prices continue rising.

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bill because I went to this engine,' then I'm going to tell people that. All I know is that with the limited personal experience I've had with it, I feel comfortable in saying it's a 10-percent difference."



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diesel developments

By 2008, diesel engines less than 100 horsepower will undergo major changes that could make the engines less fuel efficient. At that time, the Environmental Protection Agency's most stringent emissions standards for off-road diesel engines will take effect. As a result, diesel-engine operators can expect a 5 to 10 percent reduction in fuel efficiency, says Christopher Kete, director of the light construction utility market for Cummins, a Columbus, Ind.-based engine manufacturer.

"Every time you clean up the emissions you're usually taking a fuel-economy hit," Kete explains. "So we're actually fighting a battle of how do we deliver a product that's legal and environmentally friendly with minimum damage to the fuel economy."

One way manufacturers are trying to increase

the fuel economy in off-road diesel engines is by implementing a system that works similar to electronic fuel injection (EFI). High-pressure common-rail (HPCR) fuel systems can save operators 10 to 20 percent more fuel than mechanical diesel fuel systems, according to Kete. But like EFI systems, HPCR adds \$500 to \$1,000 to the engine's cost. Because of the higher cost, HPCR systems are more common on engines that are more than 100 horsepower, Kete says.

But beyond 2008, as HPCR technology becomes more affordable and gas prices remain high, Kete says HPCR could become a more realistic option for contractors. "Certainly the payback on high-pressure common-rail becomes more attractive as fuel prices rise," he says. "In the long-term, I do expect that we'll see quite a bit of that technology."



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Contractors can expect to pay an additional \$700 to \$1,000 to purchase a mower equipped with EFI, according to industry experts. But contractors can experience a return on investment (ROI) in one to two years, says Cam Litt, product manager of twin-cylinder engines, Kohler Co., Kohler, Wis. "The guys who really benefit from EFI are

the ones with five, six or 10 units going out every day and cutting eight to 10 hours a day. If a contractor is running 10 to 15 units and he can save 30 percent on fuel consumption in the course of a year, that's \$400 to \$500 a year he's saving on fuel per unit."

In the meantime, engineers are exploring ways to make EFI more af-

fordable. "A lot of the EFI systems are pretty fancy – similar to what's used on automobiles – and a lot of mower manufacturers can't afford another \$300 to \$400," Roche says. "But as fuel costs continue to rise, that differential gets less and less. What we have been working on is a less complicated EFI system that still gets us fuel savings but doesn't have the high cost that some of the systems on the market have."

To keep costs down, future EFI systems may not feature some of the diagnostic capabilities that current EFI-equipped engines have, Roche says. By doing so, EFI costs may be cut in half, she adds. However, the current diagnostic features make troubleshooting fairly simple, says Bob Hamann, manager of current product design engineering for Kohler. Similar to a car when the check-engine light appears, a mower's EFI system will flash codes when it needs servicing. "It makes it easier for the service technician to diagnose what's wrong so you're back in production much faster," Litt says. "It takes the guesswork out for the service technician and tells him what's wrong."

Diagnostic capabilities can speed up repair time but only if the technician is familiar with EFI systems. This isn't always the case because EFI is still a fairly new concept for mower engines. Most mower-repair technicians are familiar with carbureted engines but many don't have the necessary training to work on EFI, Dust says. And although engine and mower manufacturers are providing training programs for technicians, many shops don't have the resources to send all their mechanics, Dust explains. "If you have a shop with eight technicians in there, they don't close their shop the day school is going on and send all their technicians," he says. "They send one, and he's supposed to teach everyone else, and that's where things fall through the cracks."

But Litt says technicians are much more educated about EFI than they were in 1999 and 2000 when EFI was first introduced. Nowadays, some manufacturers provide mobile classes where they conduct onsite training sessions for technicians. "So I think there are enough dealers in the country who can handle it, and we work with the original equipment manufacturers who buy engines and their service departments," he says.

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USE READER SERVICE # 33

DEBATING DIESEL. Like EFI, the diesel engine is considered a fuel-efficient option, but contractors should be prepared to pay a higher upfront cost. In general, diesel engines are 20 percent more fuel efficient than gas engines, according to Tim Buszkiewicz, Vanguard engine manager for Briggs & Stratton. Some operators may even experience a 50-percent savings, Dust says. And according to Lund, diesel is likely the best option for fuel savings. "Diesel is probably the biggest leap in terms of more efficient combustion, and people will cite lower operating costs with diesel," he says.

Switching from an air-cooled gas engine to a liquid-cooled diesel will cost an additional \$1,500 to \$2,000, Dust says. Determining whether diesels are worth the investment will depend on the mower's durability, operating conditions and quality of maintenance. Diesel engines last longer than gas engines (estimates range from a 20- to 30-percent lifespan increase), but if the mower fails before the engine, contractors may realize little or no return on investment. "As long as you're buying a diesel engine in a product that will last long enough to give you the return, that's a good deal," Dust says. "If you have a lot more upfront purchase cost and you can't get longevity out of the machine, it's tough to recoup that."

Dust recommends that contractors purchase a mower brand with an "unquestionable" reputation and be skeptical of unusually low-priced diesel-powered mowers. "If one of those engines ends up on a product that is a lot less expensive than the premium brands that are using those engines, there's a reason for that - corners have probably been cut, and you're not going to buy a machine that is going to hold up to the value of that engine. So in the end, you have a great engine, but what are you going to do with it when the rest of that machine falls apart?"

Frequency of use and mowing conditions also play a role in ROI for diesel engines. For instance, a contractor in the South who mows 1,100 hours per year might realize more savings than a contractor up North who mows 600 hours annually, Dust says. In addition, liquid-cooled diesel engines may be more advantageous for operation in warmer climates because

they reduce the likelihood of overheating, Dust explains.

But because diesel engines are equipped with radiators, operators must move a heavier load. Diesel engines weigh about 70 pounds more than gas engines, according to Litt. The radiator also means more maintenance, which is vital for obtaining maximum ROI. The

radiator must be kept debris-free to operate properly and prolong the engine's life, Dust says. ☐

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USE READER SERVICE # 34

Fall Fertilization Facts

by cale bigelow

Throughout the cool-humid region and upper transition zone of the United States, cool-season turf species like the fescues, bluegrasses and ryegrasses are the primary turfgrasses planted for lawns. These grasses are favored over warm-season species like zoysiagrass and Bermudagrass because they remain green for most of the year and rarely go completely dormant (e.g. turn straw-brown) during the winter months.

Maintaining a persistent, high quality, and aesthetically pleasing cool-season lawn requires properly timed fertilizations that maximize and maintain green color, shoot density and promote consistent growth, all of which create dense turf areas that are less prone to weed invasion and can better withstand heat, drought, traffic and pest stresses. Exact fertilizer needs for individual turf areas

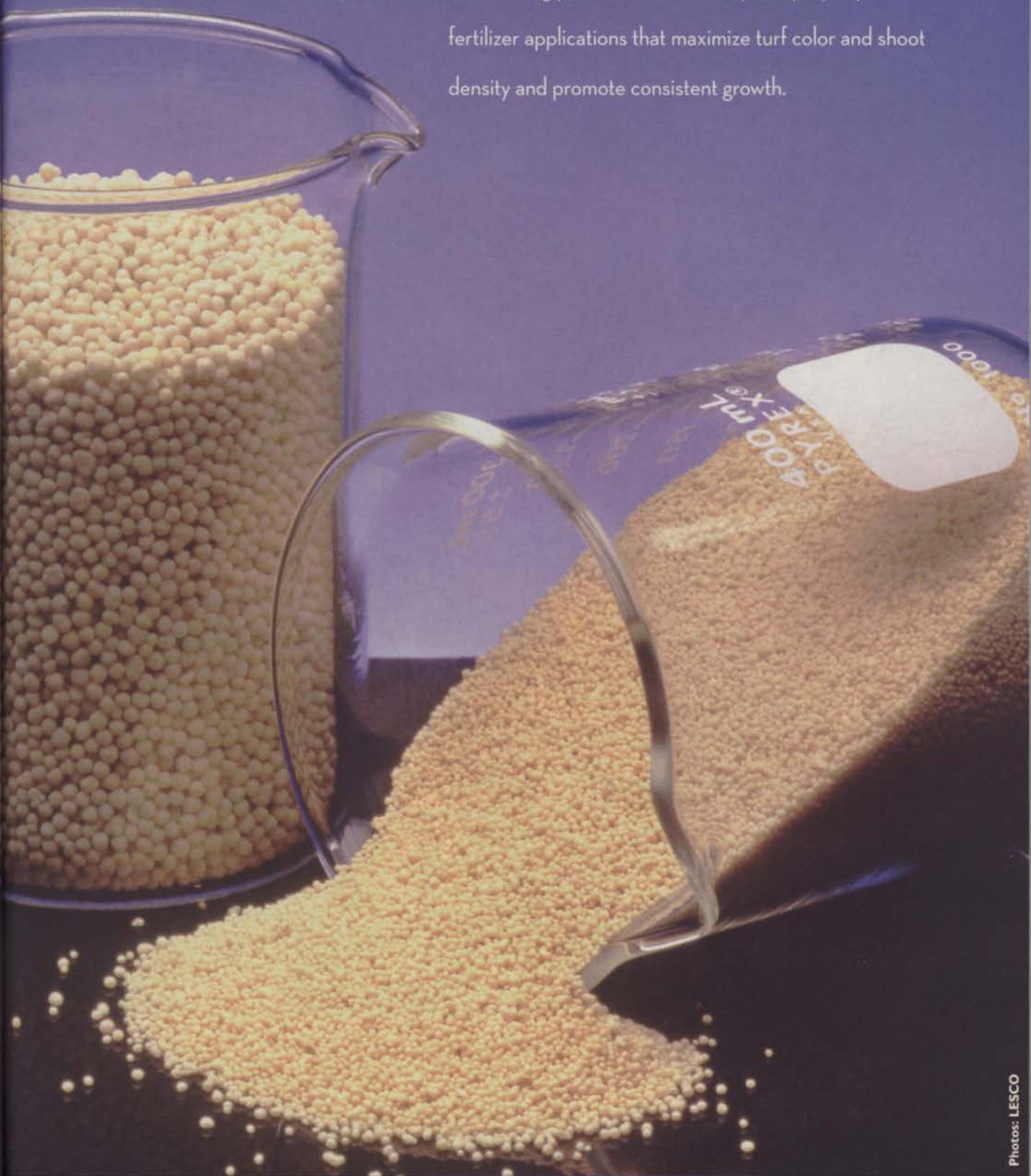
will vary by site and the prevailing weather conditions. Additionally, specific fertilization programs need to be periodically adjusted to apply slightly more or less nutrients depending on the following factors:

- **Desired appearance:** A dark green, dense lawn will require more fertilizer than a thin, lighter colored lawn. Remember, any time more fertilizer is applied, more mowing and irrigation may also be required. Choosing naturally dark green turfgrass cultivars may be one solution for reducing nutrient applications while ensuring a dark green turf. These cultivars can be identified in the National Turfgrass Evaluation Program turfgrass species database at www.ntep.org.
- **Turfgrass species:** Compared to Kentucky bluegrass and perennial ryegrass, deeper

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Maintaining your clients' lawns requires properly timed fall fertilizer applications that maximize turf color and shoot density and promote consistent growth.



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continued from page 64

rooted species like turf-type tall fescue may perform adequately with lower annual fertilizer because they are able to extract nutrients from greater soil depths.

- Turf maturity and existing health: Newly planted lawns, both seeded and sodded, usually require 25 to 50 percent more annual fertilizer for the first few years to encourage rapid turf coverage

and deep rooting. In addition many turf areas are established on disturbed urban soils which lack sufficient readily available nutrients. The same principle holds true for neglected or thin lawns that are being renovated with increased fertilization on a temporary basis.

- Geographic location: The growing season in the upper transition zone is

longer than in Northern U.S. states. Therefore, slightly more fertilizer may be needed to sustain similar turf quality in more Southern U.S. states.

- Growing environment: Turf in moderate to heavy shade will require approximately 50 percent less annual nitrogen than turf grown in full sun with irrigation. Shaded turf simply grows slower and should not be heavily fertilized to minimize disease incidence and ensure turf persistence.
- Soil type: Turf grown on high sand content soils, like those found near the ocean, the Great Lakes or heavy clay soils, will require more fertilizer than turf grown on silt loams or organic soils. Sandy soils are prone to nutrient leaching losses and many heavy clay soils sometimes bind and complex nutrients making them more slowly available.
- Weather and irrigation: Readily available moisture stimulates shoot growth and frequent rain or irrigation can flush nutrients from the soil. Thus, more frequent fertilization will be required in wet years or irrigated sites than where the soil is typically dry.
- Mowing height and clipping management: Higher mowed turf, more than 3 inches, may require less frequent fertilization because the more extensive and deeper root system is able to extract more nutrients from the soil. Where clippings are regularly removed, 25 to 50 percent more annual fertilizer will be required to sustain turf quality.
- Traffic and use: Turf areas receiving heavy use will require more annual fertilizer to maintain shoot density, promote growth and recover from damage.

All of the aforementioned factors are important considerations when developing a fertilizer program. Keep in mind, however, that the overall goal of any turfgrass fertilizer program should be sustainability – in other words, implementing a program that maximizes turf health, balances aesthetic needs (color, density, etc.), minimizes mowing requirements and limits nutrient losses.

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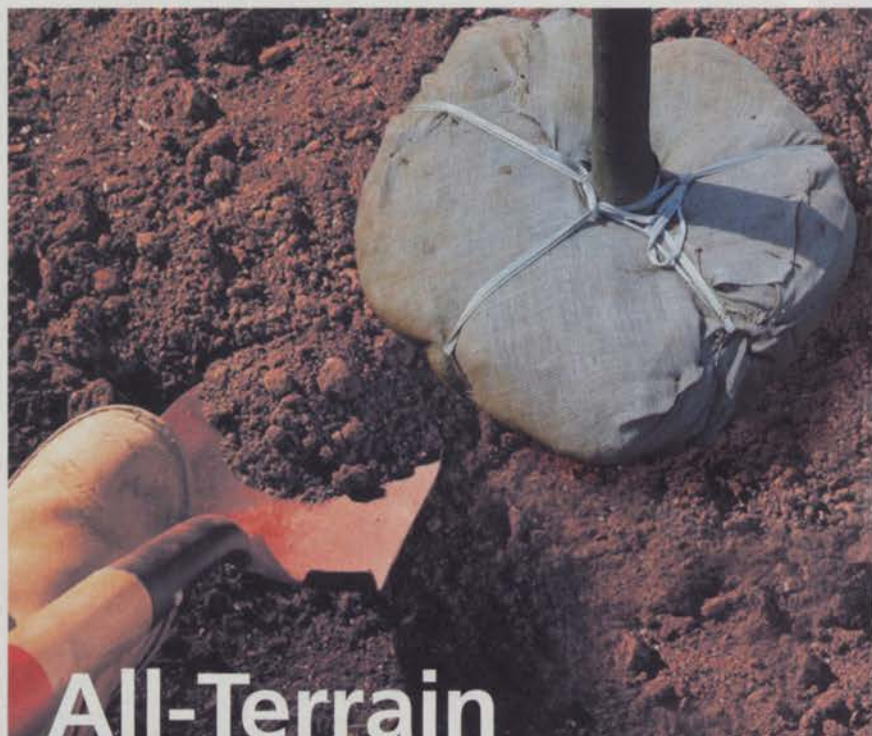
macronutrients are simply required by the plant in greater amounts. For micronutrients like iron or copper, very small deficiencies can result in poor turf appearance and slow growth. Whenever the topic of lawn fertilization arises the discussion usually revolves around three major plant nutrients – nitrogen (N), phosphorous (P) and potassium (K),

contained in a complete fertilizer. In reality, however, most fertilizer programs are constructed around an annual N requirement. This is because N is the most abundant nutrient in the plant tissue, normally 3 to 5 percent by dry weight and elicits the strongest growth response. Nitrogen helps produce chlorophyll, the plant pigment that confers the green

appearance to leaf tissue. Generally, the higher the tissue N content, the more green the leaves appear. Turf with a high leaf tissue N content will require more N to sustain that level of greenness.

In general, a mature, high quality turf will typically require three or more annual N applications totaling 2 to 5 pounds of actual N per 1000 square feet to maintain greenness and density. For cool-season grasses the bulk (50 to 75 percent) of the annual N needs should be applied using several applications, the first occurring in late-summer (first week of September) and continuing once or twice more through the autumn months. Nitrogen applications during this period maximize turf health while minimizing unwanted growth surges. It works because during the autumn months cool-season turfgrass shoot growth gradually slows and the plant is able to store carbohydrates made during photosynthesis. This enables the plant to better survive winters and results in faster spring green-up. The remaining 25 percent of annual N needs should be applied during the middle to late spring months (mid-May-early June). This application helps maintain green color and shoot density into summer. Little to no N should be applied during the summer months to minimize disease incidence and prevent possible damage where turf may be under heat and/or drought stress.

A wide variety of N sources are commercially available to supply turfgrass N needs. Traditionally, N sources have been divided into two broad categories, quick release or readily water soluble and slow release or water insoluble. A good N fertilizer program will utilize both sources and various quick and slow mixtures at different points during the growing season. Quick-release N sources like urea or ammonium sulfate dissolve easily in the presence of water and are capable of greening turf in a matter of hours. These N sources are relatively inexpensive but are also short lived (a few weeks) and produce unpredictable growth flushes. The traditional rule of thumb for quick-release N sources has been that you should never apply more than 1 pound of N per 1,000 square feet. This guideline was established long ago to minimize burn potential, avoid significant growth surges and minimize environmental losses. With this in



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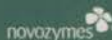
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**Source: Publisher's Third Party Research

mind, quick-release fertilizers by themselves are best used at reduced rates, applied frequently or as a smaller part of a fertilizer blend. When used alone at higher rates, these sources work best when applied during the late part of the growing season, just prior to winter dormancy. Applied at this time, most of the N taken up by the plant is partitioned into carbohydrate storage where it can be used by the plant as a slower release N source during spring regrowth.

The most commonly used slow-release N sources for lawns include sulfur-coated urea (SCU), polymer-coated urea (PCU), methylene ureas, and the natural organics (e.g. manures, etc.). Slow-release N sources require more than just water to release their N. Several mechanisms like protective coatings and microbial decomposition all control how quickly the N is released. Slow-release N sources can be applied at higher N application rates – 2 pounds of N per 1,000 square

application advice

Nitrogen fertilizers are best applied with a rotary style spreader rather than a drop spreader. The fertilizer should be applied in two directions each perpendicular to the other. This will help ensure proper product overlap and minimize green streaking, often visible as the classic zebra-striped lawn. Fertilizer should always be watered into the turf to ensure rapid root uptake and minimize any chance of foliar tip burn. Additionally, care should be taken so that fertilizer nutrients are not applied to areas that do not contain plants. Fertilizer particles falling onto impervious surfaces like sidewalks or driveways should be swept or blown back into the turf so that nutrients do not enter sensitive waterways via the storm sewer drains. Lastly, avoid fertilizer applications near surface waters like ponds and streams keeping a 5 to 10 foot buffer strip between the fertilized area and the surface water.

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feet without significant risk of foliar burn or environmental losses. Unlike quick-release sources, they do not cause rapid greening but provide extended feeding, often for two to three months or more. This sometimes makes them more economical than the quick-release sources because they do not need to be applied as frequently, reducing overall labor costs.

OTHER NUTRIENT NEEDS. With the exception of nitrogen, the old adage: "Don't guess, soil test" is appropriate to reliably determining appropriate nutrient needs. This is especially true for nutrients used in large quantities like phosphorus and potassium. In addition, there is growing public concern regarding nitrogen and phosphorus losses to the environment and their potential effects on drinking water quality. In fact, several large cities in the United States have limited or banned phosphorus use on turf areas because of its

potential role in declining water quality. Research, however, shows that when applied correctly, lawn fertilizers remain where they are applied. The root system of an actively growing healthy turf is very efficient in taking up nutrients and few, if any, nutrients actually move off-site. Improperly timed (e.g. dormant turf) or excess nitrogen, however, can leach into groundwater and both nitrogen and phosphorus may contaminate surface waters via runoff from low density turf under certain conditions. Completely eliminating phosphorus from many fertilizer programs to protect water quality is a double-edged sword since a poorly established, low density turf due to a phosphorus deficiency may exaggerate sediment and possibly other nutrient losses.

The importance of phosphorus to plant health is well documented. Adequate soil phosphorus is essential for newly planted turf, especially when

planted on many urban soils. These soils typically comprise of construction spoils or "fill" which consist of severely disturbed soil profiles where the original topsoil has either been scraped off or buried. The new surface soil where the turf is being planted most often possesses an inherently low overall nutrient status. Thus, the most accurate way to determine nutrient needs for these soils is to submit a soil test for analysis. It is not uncommon for some soils to require 3 or 4 pounds of phosphate (P_2O_5) prior to planting. Your local county cooperative extension office will have recommendations for appropriate soil testing labs in your area. For new establishment either from seed or sod, sufficient phosphorus levels are critical for rapid turf cover and maximum root development. If soil phosphorus levels are deficient, seedlings will establish slowly, the stand will be thin and prone to weed invasion and the soil may easily

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erode due to poor turf cover. For new establishments, a general rule of thumb is to incorporate approximately 1.5 pounds of P_2O_5 per 1,000 square feet into the top 1/2 inch of soil prior to seeding or sodding. Smaller surface applications may also be required throughout establishment – about the first year or two.

For established turfgrasses, in lieu of

a soil test, a general recommendation is to apply one-fourth as much phosphorus and one-half as much potassium as nitrogen. For instance, if your turf requires 4 pounds of N per 1,000 square feet annually, you should also supply 1 pound P_2O_5 and 2 pounds K_2O . Single application rates should be similar to N – 0.5 to 1.5 pounds per

1,000 square feet are appropriate. Grass clipping return or removal also affects P and K needs. Where clippings are returned or mulched back into the turf, 0.5 pounds of P_2O_5 will be required to maintain soil P levels. Where clippings are removed or the soil is severely deficient, approximately 1.0 pound of P_2O_5 should be supplied annually to replace removed phosphorus or until the soil reaches a sufficient status. Like N, K is subject to leaching losses and may need to be applied more regularly on sandy soils, during wet years or on regularly irrigated sites. Where soil phosphorus levels are sufficient, fertilizer products without phosphorus like an 18-0-18 should be used to supply potassium and avoid unnecessary phosphorus fertilization and potential environmental loss.

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The author is an assistant professor of agronomy and turfgrass science at Purdue University, West Lafayette, Ind., and he can be reached at 765/494-4692 or cbigelow@purdue.edu.

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Check out our September Online Extras section for more fall fertilization tips.

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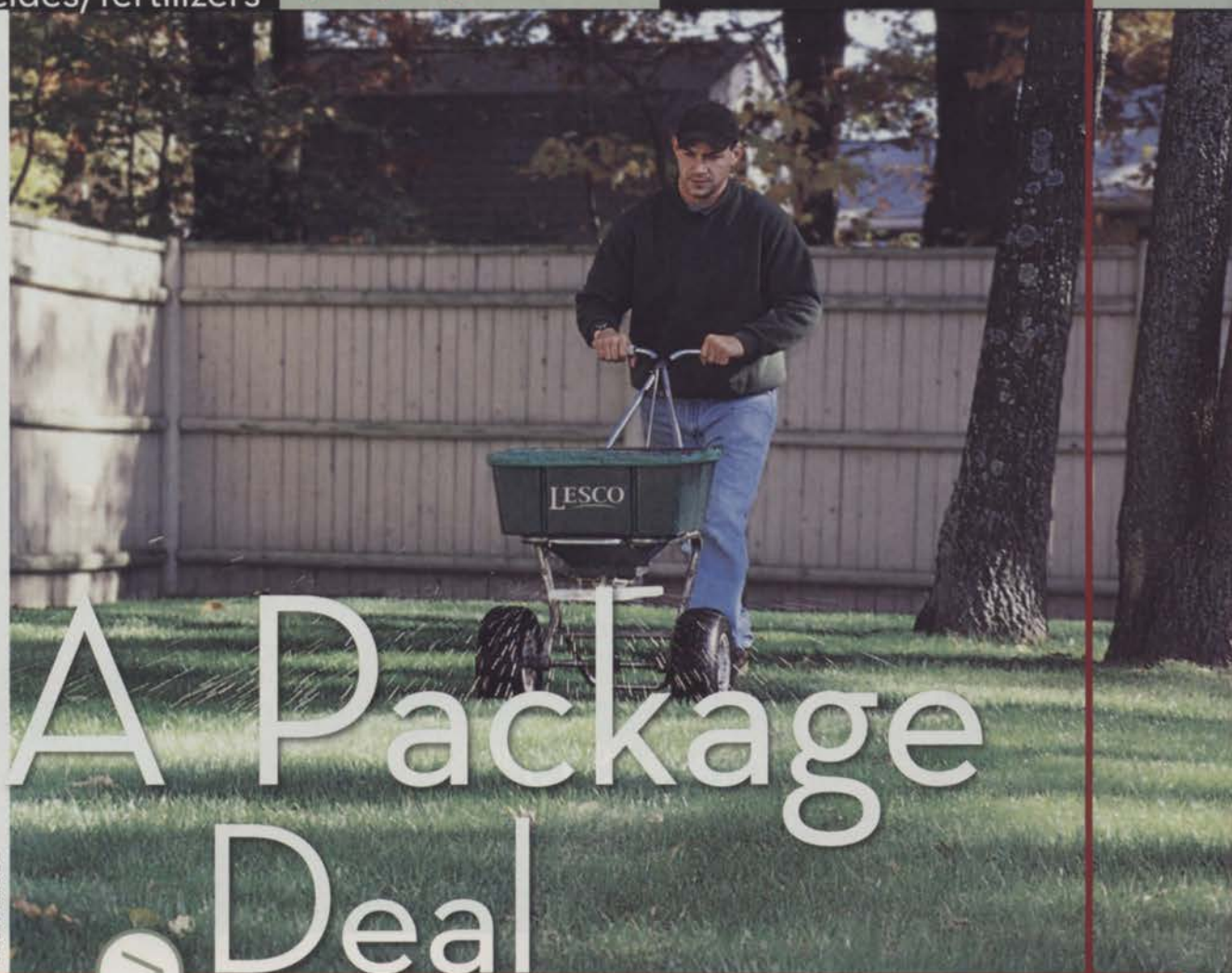


Photo: LESCO

A Package Deal

LESCO Bob Ottley has made fall fertilization a profitable part of his lawn care program.

Most lawn care customers don't understand the importance of fall fertilization. As winter approaches, the last thing on their minds is lawn care. "Once the end of September comes, people forget about their lawns," says Bob Ottley, president of One Step Tree & Lawncare, North Chili, N.Y. "That's a shame because it is the perfect time to fertilize."

It may seem like a waste to fertilize a lawn with snow on the way, but the fall is when plant roots soak up the nutrients they need to produce thick, green turf come springtime. Missing a fall fertilization means missing the best opportunity for a healthy lawn next year.

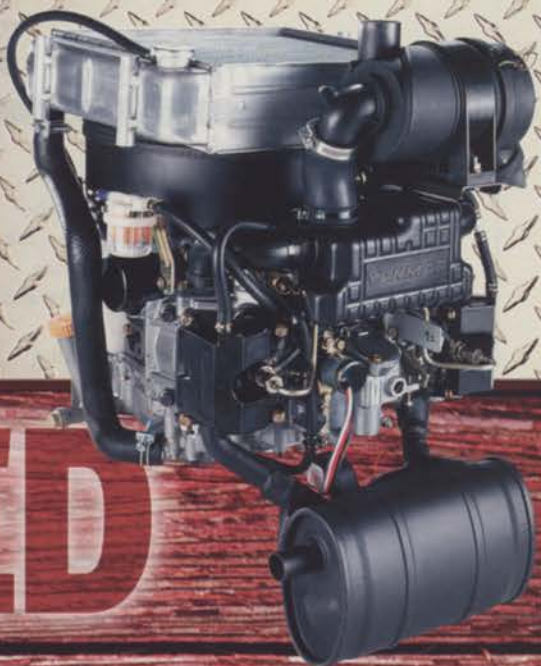
Ottley says One Step Tree & Lawncare has offered fall fertilization as part of its complete lawn care program for 29 years. The Integrated Pest Management program

by kathleen franzinger

consists of five visits. At least three visits are fertilizer applications, and two are for treating pests and weeds as needed, depending on the season and specific property. "It's a balanced fertilizing program with pest and weed controls where necessary," he explains.

The company currently has 4,500 customers, 80 percent of which are residential. To find new customers, Ottley relies on his current ones. And while he says he doesn't lavishly reward customers for referring the company, he makes sure to send a \$20 check as a thank you. Apparently it's working because more than half of One Step's new business comes from referrals.

When it comes to offering fall fertilization specifically, Ottley notes two main challenges. For one, lawn care operators are at the mercy of the weather. So while he tries to apply fertilizer before the leaves fall, that is not always possible. "Customers think if you spread the fertilizer over the



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leaves, they will lose all of it when the leaves are raked," he says. "So when the leaves do start to fall, scheduling can become a bit of a challenge." To handle the scheduling difficulties, Ottley says his employees leave notes asking customers to call when their leaves are cleaned up. In some situations, "we will blow the leaves off and put the fertilizer down," he says. But that's only if the crews need to finish the work, and the leaf cleanup is minor.

The second challenge is dealing with customers' aforementioned lack of understanding about the importance of fall fertilization. "They think the fall is too late to do anything," he says. "Some customer education needs to take place." Most of that education occurs when a client first calls to inquire about the lawn care program. If they seem hesitant about the fall fertilization or ask to skip it, Ottley explains its significance. "We tell our customers if they're

only going to do one thing, they should do it in the fall," he says. "We tell them they miss the best application of the year by not having a fall fertilization."

Ottley applies a slow-release nitrogen fertilizer in October and early November. "During this time, the grass is slowing down its top growth, but the color is still very green," he says. The old rule said a high phosphorus fertilizer should be used to stimulate root growth in the fall, Ottley says, but those rules have changed. "The plant needs a lot of nitrogen in the fall to help thicken the grass," he says. "This is especially true when we also apply a weed control in the fall, which can create thin spots." High nitrogen fertilizers in the late fall take advantage of what is left of the warm soil temperature, and the plant uses the nitrogen to stimulate root growth. Because the soil in his location is high in phosphorus already, Ottley says the fertilizer they use has none.

No matter what season the fertilization occurs, Ottley's pricing structure remains the same. He includes the cost of fall fertilization in his complete package price, which he calculates by averaging the cost for all visits. To figure out how much one fertilizer application costs, he looks at the property's square footage. The larger the lawn, the less it is per square foot, but Ottley estimates he charges about \$7 to \$9 per 1,000 square feet. Ottley notes his material costs typically run around 20 percent and direct labor – labor costs directly related to the delivery of the service – is around 35 percent. All these factors must be considered when determining a fertilization price in order to ensure a profit at the end of the day. The biggest mistake LCOs make is not charging enough for their services, says Ottley. "You have to know and understand your expenses and come up with a good hourly rate. It's hard to grow a business profitably if you're too cheap." LL

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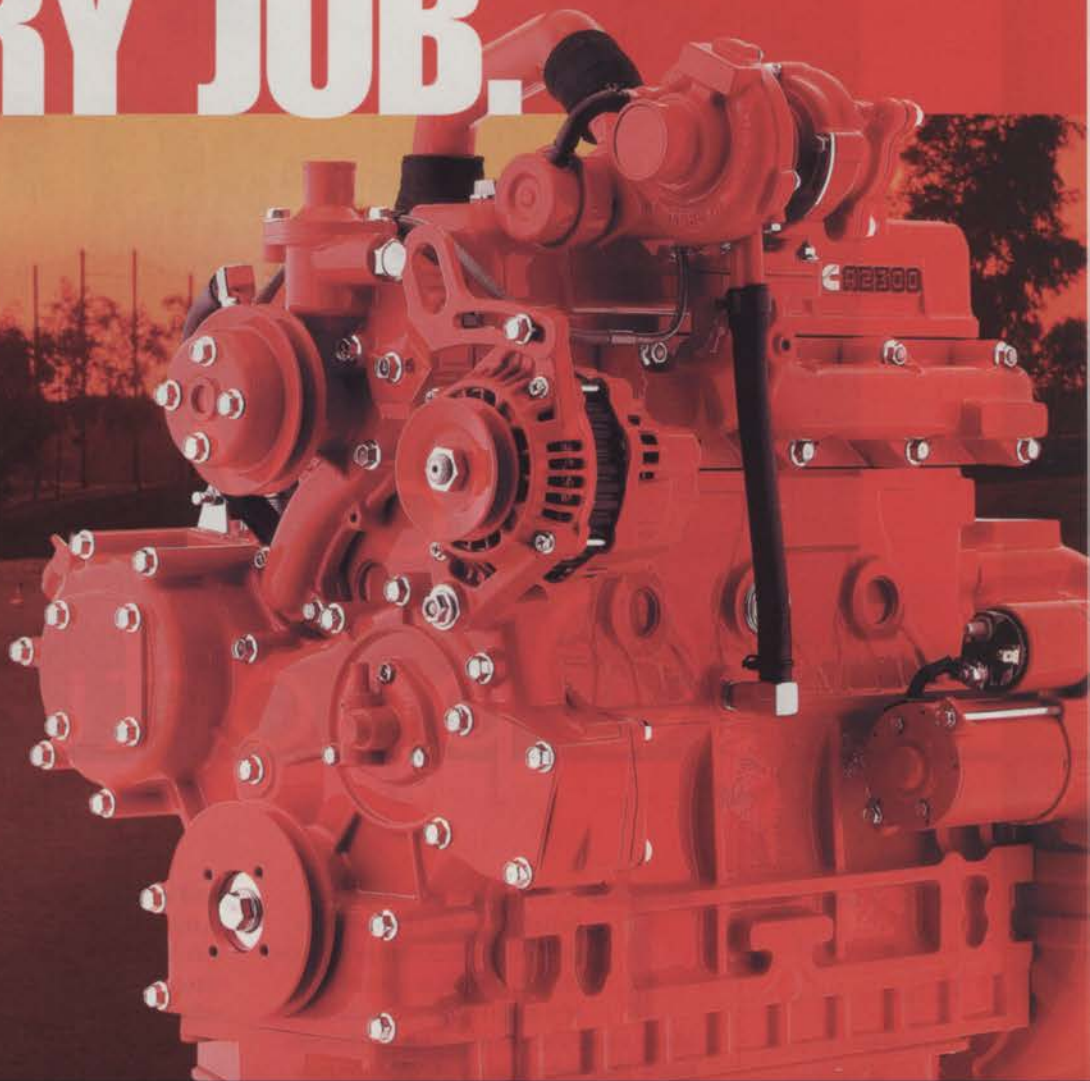
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No Wasted Opportunity

by jonathan katz

Irrigation system audits and other efficiency measurements can provide contractors with the firepower needed to sell water-saving solutions.

The irrigation industry has benefited from the wonders of modern technology – from climate-sensitive controllers to variable-arc nozzles.

Many experienced irrigation contractors know that these high-tech components can vastly improve the performance of an irrigation system. But convincing a property owner that irrigation system upgrades are worth the investment can be another story. Without hard data that the system is wasting water, a customer might mistake the contractor for a snake-oil salesman.

By measuring a system's efficiency, landscape and irrigation contractors can provide customers with visual evidence that their systems are underperforming.

And as water rates continually rise in many drought-stricken regions, contractors have an opportunity to sell long-term water savings with different irrigation solutions.

"From an economics perspective, at least in the West, the availability of water is going down and the price of water is going up, so contractors can provide a service to their customers by minimizing the amount of water the landscape will need to perform its function and value," says Dennis Pit-tenger, area environmental horticulturist at the University of California Cooperative Extension, Riverside, Calif.

Indeed, if contractors and their clients don't become more water-efficiency conscious, they can both suffer the consequences, says Tom Ash, director of

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conservation, Hydropoint Datasystems, Petaluma, Calif. "We need to make irrigation systems as efficient as possible, and if we don't, public agencies are going to increase and speed up the regulation of landscapes," he says. "So for the landscape industry, it's kind of a double-edged sword - that efficiency creates more business and helps the

community to manage its resources as best as possible."

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Before conducting any sophisticated evaluation of an irrigation system, contractors can sometimes expose an efficiency problem by simply observing the irrigated areas. Contractors should look

for brown spots in the lawn or asphalt erosion, which can be a sign of water runoff, Ash says. While the system is operating, contractors should check for water runoff onto the sidewalk or street and look for any leaks or heads that aren't working properly.

From there, contractors can recommend to a client or potential customer an irrigation audit. One common audit method is the catch-can test, which measures the system's uniformity. Oftentimes, when a system isn't dispersing water evenly, it must operate at longer periods to compensate for the areas that aren't receiving enough water. The catch-can test is the best way to measure this, say several irrigation experts. "It can be valuable for contractors if they think they have an irrigation problem because they can pinpoint where the problem is," Pittenger says.

Brian Vinchesi, president of Irrigation Consulting in Pepperell, Mass., agrees. "The best way to do an audit is when you put out cups to determine how fast the system is distributing water and how evenly," he says. "It's probably the most time-consuming method, but it will give you a very accurate representation of what is going on with the system. There are some cities even requiring you to do that now."

Using this procedure, a contractor would place one can 2 to 3 feet from the irrigation head and another halfway between the heads. Contractors can use plastic drinking cups, coffee mugs and soup, tuna or cat food cans to capture the water. They can also use conical catch cans with graduations marked on the sides, but these cost at least \$1 to \$2 each, Pittenger says.

The next step is operating the system. The best time to perform the test is in the morning when wind is minimal. Contractors should operate sprayheads for 10 to 15 minutes to get an adequate sample in each container. For rotary heads, contractors may need to run the system an extra 10 minutes because they have slower precipitation rates, Pittenger says. If the system has a controller, the contractor should use a stopwatch to verify the controller clock's accuracy, Pittenger recommends. The catch-can volumes can be recorded by sticking a ruler in the can or by simply looking to see if one can has

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USE READER SERVICE # 52

more water than the other. "When I tell people to do audits, I tell them don't even do the math – just look because that will tell you even more than the math will," Vinchesi says.

With this information, contractors can make recommendations for upgrades to a system, but they should be prepared to spend some time getting to this point. The catch-can test can take one hour or more to complete for each zone, Vinchesi says. Because of the time and labor involved, a more practical evaluation method could be analyzing a customer's historical water use, says Larry Keesen, president, Keesen Water Management, Denver, Colo. "It's too time consuming to do the catch-can test," Keesen says. "I can tell more on total water usage and by checking the pressure and looking at the system. Sometimes the catch-can test doesn't give you enough information. I think there are easier ways."



A catch can test can be used to measure the uniformity of an irrigation system. Photo: Brian Vinchesi

Instead of the catch-can method, Keesen divides the total square footage of a property's irrigated areas by the total gallons of water used for the year, which he obtains from the customer's water bill. If the property's meter measures indoor and outdoor use, Keesen says he averages the usage for the winter months – when outdoor systems are used less frequently or not at all in colder climates – and subtracts that number from the other months. The equation gives Keesen the total gallons used per square foot, which he converts into inches. He then compares that

number to the evapotranspiration (ET) rate for his area.

Many university extensions and agricultural departments provide ET rates for particular regions. Contractors can also check with irrigation manufacturers to determine their ET rate. Typically, a system is inefficient if it's using 20 to 30 percent more water than the ET rate, according to Keesen.

If this seems too complicated, several Web sites, including www.h2ouse.org, provide water budget calculators that contractors can use to show customers how much water they're wasting. The calculator allows contractors to input the square footage of the customer's landscaped areas and water-usage information obtained from the customer's water bill. It then provides a figure for how much water is being overused or underused on the landscape.

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measuring low-volume irrigation

Irrigation audits aren't limited to systems designed for turf.

Contractors can also determine precipitation rates and uniformity of low-volume systems, including small sprayheads, mini-sprinklers and drip systems, that irrigate specific plant material. This is accomplished by measuring the output and spacing of the heads or by measuring the mainline flow and the irrigated area, according to a published report by Dennis Pittenger and David Shaw, horticulturists at the University of California Cooperative Extension, Riverside, Calif.

Because these systems are used to irrigate the extensive root systems of plants, complete coverage of the soil is not as critical as grass and other

groundcovers. According to the report, contractors should use the following method:

- Measure the head or emitter spacing or the total number of heads and the entire area of the system.
- Measure the output by directing the water through a flow director, such as a hose, into a bucket or a graduated cylinder for sprayheads or mini-sprinklers. A 35-millimeter (ml) film canister works well for drip emitters.
- Use a stopwatch to determine the flow rate or time it takes to fill a specific volume.
- To simplify analysis, convert the measured values to gallons per minute or hour. For drip calculations, 63 mls per minute equals 1 gallon per hour.

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irrigation > > >

time and money than the catch-can analysis. Keesen says he can produce an irrigation efficiency analysis in two hours, whereas a catch-can audit could take an additional hour or more. Keesen charges an average of \$150 per site, which includes checking the system's water pressure, operating the system and observing the system for leaks or other malfunctions and providing a water usage report. For a catch-can audit, Keesen says he would charge

"We need to make irrigation systems as efficient as possible, and if we don't, public agencies are going to increase and speed up the regulation of landscapes. So for the landscape industry, it's kind of a double-edged sword - that efficiency creates more business and helps the community to manage its resources as best as possible." - Tom Ash

\$75 to \$100 more than he would for a water-usage analysis.

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The first step is demonstrating to the property owner why the changes are necessary and how they can benefit from them. It's easy to tell a customer that a new part or system will result in significant savings. But if contractors can't prove it, customers might be skeptical. To show this, contractors can compare the customer's water usage to what a similar-sized landscape should consume based on data from the local water department, Vinchesi says. In areas where water restrictions are tight, such as California, customers may face increased water rate hikes if they're using more than their budgeted amount. They can also show customers the results of Web-based calculation guides.

If the system shows visual signs of inefficiencies, such as puddling or pooling, contractors should walk clients to the areas where the problems are evident, Vinchesi says. Contractors can also use a soil probe to show clients where water is seeping past the root zones. Once contractors convince property owners their systems are inefficient, they can begin selling water-saving solutions.

Contractors can offer new irrigation heads or adjustable-arc nozzles that provide better uniformity. But when contractors make these changes, they sometimes need to adjust the controller schedule to match new precipitation rates. This can present another sales opportunity for contractors, Ash says. Weather-based or ET-based controllers can automatically change irrigation schedules as the weather changes without the contractor returning to the site. Some of these controllers can reduce water waste by 40 to 50 percent, according to Ash. "That's a huge water-saving benefit for the customer, and it's good for the contractor in that he doesn't have to work harder," Ash explains.

Some of these controllers cost up to \$650, but contractors can usually buy them for less from local distributors, Ash says. If customers aren't interested in changing the controller, contractors can try selling system management services, Vinchesi says. "Most homeowners never change their controller, no matter how the weather changes," he says. "So you can sell a service where you will change the schedule on a weekly or biweekly basis. That should make the system more efficient because it's being scheduled better."

However, contractors might have better luck selling a regular maintenance schedule to commercial accounts than homeowners because of the cost involved, Vinchesi says. If the system is poorly designed or improperly installed, contractors may be able to sell the client on an entirely new system, Keesen says.

The bottom line, Ash says, is that contractors can open up a new business opportunity for the entire industry. "It's kind of like the computer industry," he explains. "When a computer can't run as fast, you buy a new one. That's the model the irrigation world should try to emulate. We need to keep on top of it as an industry. I think sometimes people in this industry are afraid to think like that. We say, 'This controller lasts 20 or 30 years,' when we should be saying, 'When new technology comes out, I'll let you know.'" LL

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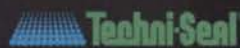
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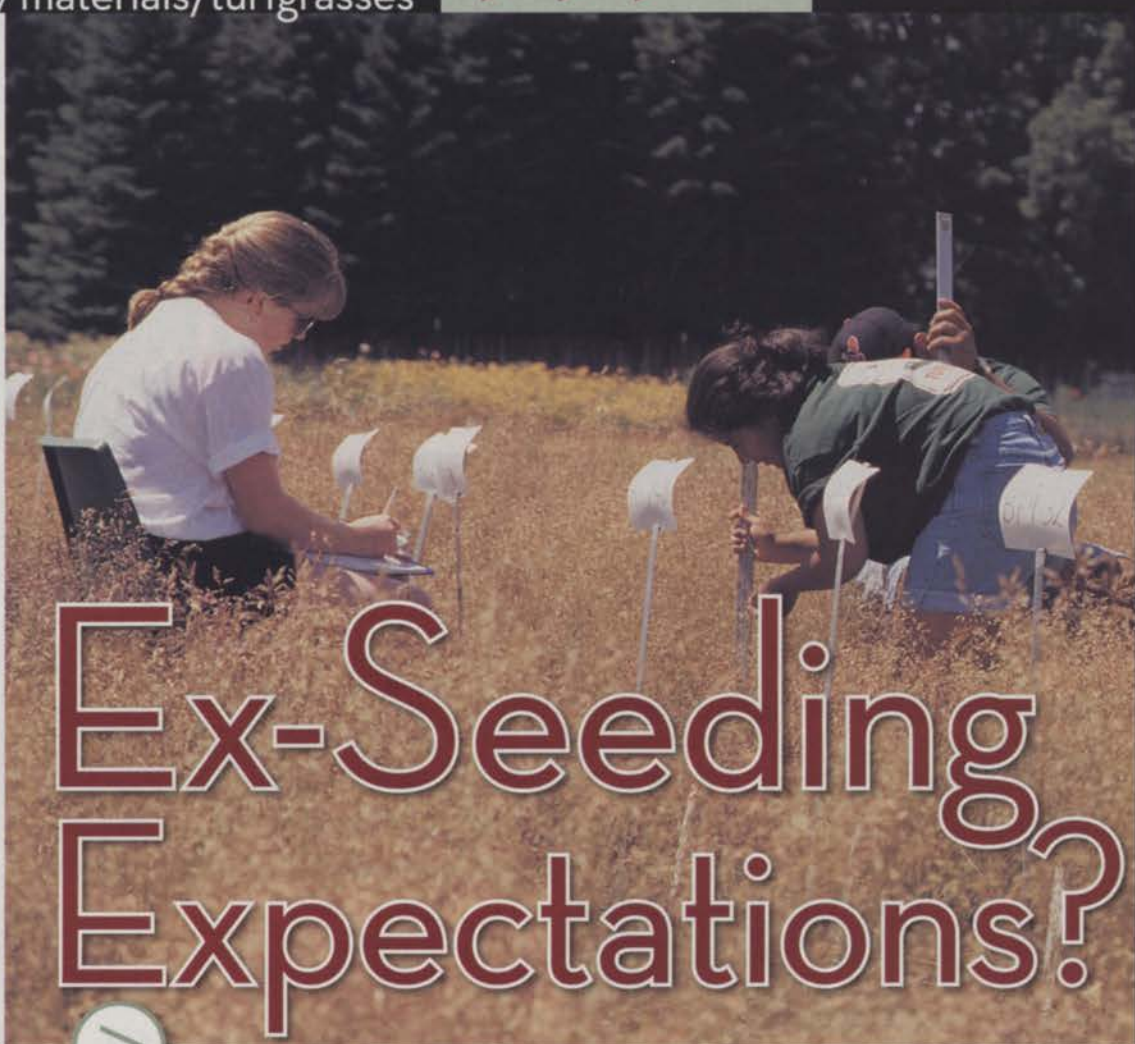
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Turf's fall harvest. Photo: Turf-Seed



Ex-Seeding Expectations?



Turf seed breeders are thankful for the late spring rains that helped their crops. Find out if it was enough to bring in normal yields at harvest.

Susan Samudio breathed a sigh of relief in recent weeks. In an April 2005 article on *Lawn & Landscape* Online, Samudio, plant breeder with Jacklin Seed/Simplot, Post Falls Idaho, predicted significantly lower seed yields if the Pacific Northwest didn't receive the necessary rainfall for a normal harvest. At the time, Samudio noted, "estimates are that an additional 10 to 12 inches of water is needed before harvest for turfgrasses to reach their full seed yield potential" – a great deal of rain in a short amount of time.

Thankfully, "we got our rain," Samudio told *Lawn & Landscape* in July as the turf seed harvest progressed through Washington, Oregon and Idaho. "It looks like proprietary bluegrasses will be off about 12 to 15 percent, but everything else looks OK.

by lauren spiers hunter

I'm kind of amazed that we're getting an average crop for the most part. In February and March, it looked like we would be really short, but the plants did tremendously well making up for stress in the fall."

In the same way contractors depend on cooperative weather for their clients' lawns and landscapes to grow, seed breeders must have adequate rain – though not too much – to ensure a fruitful harvest. This year, breeders expect to be able to provide adequate amounts of seed for the expected usage, though working with suppliers early is recommended.

HOPEFUL HARVEST. Overall, turf seed producers across the country are reporting average to slightly below average yields for a range of seed species. While fine fescues and perennial ryegrasses are expected to



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have good to above-average supplies this year as a result of strong carryovers from last season, uncooperative weather affected many crops around the nation. Here's what breeders are expecting for the 2005 harvest, keeping in mind that many suppliers can speak only to their own companies' supplies:

BLUEGRASSES. According to breeders, both proprietary and common bluegrasses are expected to be average to below average in supply, with prices rising slightly. With Samudio noting that proprietary bluegrass harvests could be down 12 to 15 percent, an average carryover of seed from last season will only slightly help boost the supply.

"There are millions of pounds of bluegrass produced each year and pretty much all of it is sold," Samudio says. "A 20-million pound carryover isn't that much – in normal processing, it could be used up in three to four months. With an additional 15 percent loss, the supply may end up being short for a month or two. It's a little loss, but most people will get what they need."

Russ Nicholson agrees. "The Kentucky-31 (common bluegrass) harvest in Missouri will be relatively short compared to a normal year," says the national sales manager for Pennington Seed, Madison, Ga. "All of this is really

about the weather. Last year, we had all that rain from the hurricanes that came through and this year is not that much different. A normal to larger crop was needed to ensure an adequate supply, though the crop in this portion of the country could be 25 to 30 percent lower than expected."

Moreover, Nicholson anticipates a shortage in turf-type tall fescue and expects that some contractors may choose bluegrass over this species for new seedings in order to sidestep short supplies. "Because of higher pricing on tall fescue, there may be a larger consumption of Kentucky bluegrass, and once that's consumed those prices could go up as well," he explains.

TALL FESCUE. According to Nicholson, Oregon produces about 210 million pounds of turf-type tall fescue annually and about 100 million pounds of Kentucky-31. Ordinarily, a carryover of 45 million pounds is average between the two species. But, "This year, there will be less than 10 million in carryover," he warns. "The production on turf-type tall fescue is also down and that's going to create a very tight market, so prices for the species will increase significantly." Nicholson predicts a 20- to 25-cent-per-pound increase for turf-type tall fescue, with

prices exceeding the typical 80 cents to \$1-per-pound.

RYEGRASSES. While supplies of some seed species are down this year, no one's worrying about perennial ryegrass. The favorite in seed blends for its client-satisfying quick growth, breeders note a strong supply and lower prices for the coming season. "Perennial ryegrass looks to have an excellent current supply and the expected harvest is good," notes Evelyn Dennis, seed and mulch merchant for LESCO, Cleveland, Ohio.

Samudio says Jacklin Seed still has four of 11 perennial ryegrass varieties in stock and Nicholson also notes an overstock of the species for 2005. "As a result of oversupply, the prices on perennial rye have come down by as much as 5 to 8 cents per pound compared to last year," he says. This is in contrast to below average supplies of annual ryegrass, which could see prices 10 to 12 cents per pound higher than last year.

So, can contractors who usually use annual ryegrass switch to perennial rye varieties to offset costs? Not exactly, Nicholson notes. "Perennial ryegrass is an upgrade from annual rye – the varieties have different growth characteristics, such as a finer leaf blade and darker green color on the perennial

2005 harvest expectations

In researching this year's turf seed harvest, *Lawn & Landscape* interviewed a number of seed suppliers and asked their opinions on the current supplies, expected harvests and anticipated prices of a range of seed species. The following chart combines those suppliers' opinions for the 2005 harvest outlook. The suppliers we interviewed all noted that seed stocks and prices can vary from supplier to supplier.

	Current Supply	Expected Harvest	Anticipated Prices
Proprietary Bluegrass	Average	Below Average	Stable to up a bit
Common Bluegrass	Average	Average	Stable
Tall Fescue	Below Average	Below Average	Up 20 to 25 cents/pound
Creeping Bentgrass	Good	Average	Stable
Perennial Ryegrass	Excellent	Above Average	Down 5 to 8 cents/pound
Annual Ryegrass	N/A	Below Average	Up 10 to 12 cents/pound
Fine Fescue	Above Average	Average	Stable to down a bit
Bermudagrass	Below Average	Below Average	Up as much as 40 percent

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varieties," he says. "Generally, perennial ryegrasses sell in the mid-80- to mid-90-cent range, while annual rye sells in the mid-40- and mid-50-cent range. So, if contractors choose to upgrade to perennial ryegrass because the supply is better and prices are down, they may still end up paying a bit more than for annual ryegrass even though those prices are down."

BERMUDAGRASS. While prices for some turf seed species may be up a few cents here or a quarter there, contractors who seed with Bermudagrass better hold onto their wallets. According to Nicholson, prices for Bermudagrass seed could be up 40 percent from last year.

"There's been great usage of this species over the last couple of years and the supply around the world is largely consumed," Nicholson says. "We've got a tight supply prior to harvest and we expect the price at the grower's level to be about 40 percent higher than last year. Consumers can expect at least that much of an increase, so if they paid \$3 per pound last year, they'll probably be looking more at \$4 per pound this year."

Marc Cool, vice president of marketing and sales, Barenbrug USA, Tangent, Ore., suggests the weakened supply could be weather-related. "Warm-season species

like Bermuda, Bahia, carpet-grass and St. Augustine are harvested one to two months later than the cool-season species in the Pacific Northwest, but the early hurricanes in the Southeast may delay harvest in this area by a little bit," he says.

SIDESTEPPING SHORT-AGES.

With some expected shortfalls, should contractors be worried that they won't be able to find the seed they need, when they need it? According to seed growers, contractors that anticipate their needs and work closely with suppliers should be OK.

"For the most part, with some exceptions, the seed harvest and total supplies are good for the expected usage," Cool says. "To ensure you are not caught in a short or long situation, it's important to remain in constant contact with your seed dealer regarding the supply/demand balance, and base all sales on the current supply and price conditions."

Cool says the relative demand for each species of turf seed is pretty stable from year to year, though fluctuations in weather can impact supplies and, therefore, prices. While most contrac-



watch those ratios

When turf-type tall fescue is running low, as is expected for this year's seed harvest, it may be tempting to adjust your fescue/Kentucky bluegrass blend to include more bluegrass, which is in greater supply and costs less. But Russ Nicholson, national sales manager, Pennington Seed, Madison, Ga., reminds contractors to pay attention to the seed count in their blends if they do choose to change the amounts of each species they're using.

"Tall fescue has approximately 300,000 seeds in a pound, while bluegrass has 3 million seeds in a pound," Nicholson says. "If you have a mix that includes 90 percent tall fescue and 10 percent bluegrass, that ends up being about a 50/50 seed count. If you tweak that blend too much, you'll end up with a predominantly bluegrass lawn. What we recommend is using 7 to 10 percent bluegrass to make sure to keep the 50/50 ratio."

The situation is similar for ryegrass and tall fescue, he says, noting that perennial ryegrass has a tendency to dominate over the tall fescue if the seed count ends up too skewed.

Photo: Barenbrug USA



tors use seed blends to create the best turf for their clients – and blending is preferred to using a single species of seed – Cool suggests contractors should stick to the blends they trust, rather than alter blends to include turf seed species or varieties that are in greater supply and cost less. Using species that are in greater demand may end up costing a little more, but customers will be happier if there is consistency in their

seed applications.

“Contractors are wise to use the combination of species that works best for his conditions and needs,” Cool explains. “His competitors will face the same supply and price issues, so all players are on a level field. Customers and users of turf seed will want the varieties, species and mixes that work best for their conditions, so it’s unwise to change formulations and offer a potentially inferior product.”

Nicholson agrees. “There are different levels of quality among each species of turf seed – everything from what we would call a ‘contractor mix’ to sod-grade,” he explains. “You might be able to tweak a blend to a small percentage, but ultimately you want to make sure you’re providing a quality product to your customers so they’re satisfied.”

For the most part, contractors’ best bet to ensure their seed supplies will be available when they need them means

anticipating needs and ordering early.

“If contractors don’t know what they need or how much seed they want, that’s something they really need to start researching,” Samudio says. “That usually ends up being more of a problem at the tail end of the season when they haven’t anticipated their needs for March or April and supplies start dwindling.”

Granted, it can be difficult to work out just how many pounds of turf seed a company will go through in a given season. Still, Nicholson says even coming up with a ballpark figure can give contractors something to discuss with their suppliers early on. “If you know you’re going to need 1,000 pounds of Bermudagrass to put down in 2006, work with your supplier today so they can have that supply in the spring,” he says. “If the Bermuda stock starts going down, you’ll already have that purchase order in place with seed set aside with your name on it.” **U**

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The Big Picture Show



by kathleen franzinger

Three lawn care professionals share the details on their award-winning projects.

Everyone knows pictures don't lie. That's why Picture Perfect award-winning photographs testify to the high-quality work of lawn care operators.

The awards, sponsored by *Lawn & Landscape* and the Professional Lawn Care Association (PLCAA), now The Professional Landcare Network, recognize lawn care professionals for their care of specific properties in five categories (cool-season turf – public service, cool-season turf – residential, cool-season turf – commercial, warm-season turf – commercial and warm-season turf – residential). The winners, announced during PLCAA's 2004 Annual Conference in Charlotte, N.C., Nov. 3-6, received a \$200 travel voucher from Travel WorldWide Network for expenses to this year's Green Industry Conference & Green Industry Expo in Orlando, Fla., Nov. 2-5.





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SKB Industries, Lilburn, Ga., took over maintenance of the property in 2003. The turf surrounding the office and studio complex is about 1 acre of emerald zoysiagrass, which is located in two gardens. The front garden, seen in the photograph above, borders Atlanta's prominent Peachtree Street. The second garden, the White Columns garden, is less public and serves as a gathering spot for WSB employees to celebrate the traditions of the Cox family, the founders of the media empire who own WSB. The gardens are built around a replica of the white columns that once graced the Cox family home that stood on this site.

SKB Industries performs a full landscape maintenance service program, including seasonal color, irrigation and fertilization, on this property, says Alison Hughes, marketing director. The turf area's soil is sampled, and the fertilization program is tailored based on the test results.

A commercial granular fertilizer is usually sufficient to deliver the right amount of nutrients. The program is delivered in six separate applications during the growing season of April through October. The first application is a complete nutrient package during which 2 pounds of a 50 percent controlled

release nitrogen source is applied in April. Four subsequent applications – one every four to six weeks – of a water-soluble nitrogen source are made typically at the 1 pound per 1,000 square-foot rate. The last fertilization made in late October is a potassium source to winterize the turf. "We may supplement these applications with chelated iron if the color is not where we want it to be," Hughes adds.

The program also includes three applications of preemergent weed control. The turf is vigorous enough to withstand weed invasions, but crabgrass and goosegrass can be problems, Hughes says. *Poa annua* and other late winter weeds are controlled with a September application of a preemergent herbicide. "If the cultural conditions are conducive, we may experience stem rust during the late spring," Hughes says. "This problem is minimized by spraying two applications of a fine fungicide two weeks apart. So diseases don't spread, the most important step is to thoroughly wash the equipment used on the property's infected areas with a diluted bleach mixture before using the equipment again outside of the infected areas."

Hughes says they chose to enter this property in the Picture Perfect contest because of how well it photographs, as well as the wonderful history behind it. "WSB really means Welcome South Brother," Hughes says. "And you could not start at a nicer place than the gardens of WSB."



Natural Lawns

Merrifield, Va.

Cool Season Turf – Commercial

COMMERCIAL SUCCESS. Ninety-nine percent of the customers Natural Lawns, Merrifield, Va., serves are residential. But when a residential customer asked Natural Lawns to take care of the landscape at his more commercial horse training and boarding farm as well, the company accepted the challenge.

When the company started servicing the turf at The Red Hill Farm in August 2001, the biggest problem was that the customer's mowing crew was cutting the grass too short. "It was an old farm that didn't have much done to it," explains Bern Bonifant, vice president. "Numerous trees around the property had been cleared off, which put the sun on a lot of grass that was not set well for full sun." The problem was easily remedied by recommending the mowing height be adjusted from 2 to 3½ inches. The next challenge was ridding the turf of weeds. Natural Lawns removed numerous weeds, Bonifant says, including poison ivy, which doesn't usually grow in full sunlight.

The turf on the 62,000-square-foot property is mostly tall fescue. Technicians make two light applications of granular fertilizer in the spring and two heavy applications in the fall. In total, they apply about 3¼ pounds of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet and less than two-tenths of a pound of phosphorus per 1,000 square feet. In addition, a lime treatment is applied in the winter – a necessity because of the soil's high acidity and clay makeup.

To prevent new weeds from emerging, Natural Lawns technicians apply a preemergent herbicide in the spring and fall. The program also consists of five postemergent herbicide treatments throughout the year.

Last summer, the client asked Natural Lawns to take care of the shrubs on the property as well, a service the company does for about 18 percent of its clients.

Bonifant is especially proud of how this property looks because it can't be watered on a regular basis. "The Red Hill Farm is on a well, but the well would go dry if you just pumped out water and dumped it on the ground," he says. "Even though the property can't be watered, it still looks really good."

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Natural Lawns

Merrifield, Va.
Cool Season Turf – Residential

LONG-TERM CARE. Natural Lawns, Merrifield, Va., opened its doors in 1986 and since then has grown to an annual revenue of \$3.3 million. The company has been caring for this residential lawn in Falls Church, Va., almost from the start. “We’ve been taking care of it for such a long time that it’s easy to keep it looking extraordinarily good,” says Bern Bonifant, vice president.

But it does require some work to keep the tall fescue turf on this 4,700-square foot property healthy. Two light fertilizations are made in the spring, and three heavier fertilizations are applied in the fall. The fertilizer is made up of about 60 percent slow-release nitrogen. “We apply about 3¾ pounds of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet and less than two-tenths of a pound of phosphorus per 1,000 square feet per year,” Bonifant says.

During the summer, a Natural Lawns technician visits the site to check for disease and insects. A lime treatment in the winter helps keep the lawn looking green.

To control weeds, a preemergent herbicide is applied in the spring and late fall. The program also consists of seven postemergent herbicide treatments to treat weeds the pre-emergent doesn’t cover, such as violets, says Bonifant. “But once you’ve been doing a yard like this for this long, there’s hardly anything on it you need to worry about,” he adds.

Technicians also make one application of a preventive grub control product to keep grubs at bay. But the customer’s main concern is disease, which is why they switched to a more extensive lawn care program in 2003. In addition to eight yearly visits, the program includes automatic fungicide treatments on an as-needed basis. Before that, the client had to make special calls for Natural Lawns to come out and treat for disease, such as brown patch. “It happened to them several times, so they switched programs so that they didn’t have to make that call,” Bonifant says. Now if technicians find a sign of disease, say when the customer is on vacation, it can be treated right away.



Natural Lawns

Merrifield, Va.
Cool Season Turf – Public Service

HISTORIC GROUND. Built in the 1700s, The Falls Church in Falls Church, Va., boasts a rich history. Once the worshipping place of George Washington, the church also served as a recruiting station during the Revolutionary War and a stable for Union troops in the Civil War.

When Natural Lawns, Merrifield, Va., began caring for the turf in 1986, its age was showing.

Because of that, occasional overseeding has been necessary on the property. The last overseeding happened in September of 2002. In addition, regular seeding is done about once every other year on some portion of the property. Seeding can be a challenge because the church lacks the necessary personnel and sprinkler system to water the entire 30,000-square feet of turf. “We have to block out one 5,000- to 6,000-square foot section at a time to seed,” says Bern Bonifant, vice president. “We’ve had to build the lawn up over time.”

Natural Lawns technicians visit the site six times a year to keep the lawn, which is primarily tall fescue, looking its best. Light amounts of granular fertilizer are applied twice in the spring and heavy amounts are applied twice in the fall. They also lay lime in the winter and, in the summer, check the site for any problems with insects or disease.

“Because the church is flanked on three sides by high-traffic roads, there is a substantial potential for weed problems,” Bonifant says. Despite that high potential, weeds have not been an issue since Natural Lawns started its lawn care program. A granular preemergent herbicide is applied in the spring to treat for crabgrass and other summer grasses. And five spot weed controls are performed throughout the year.

Starting in 2001, Natural Lawns technicians also visit the site five times a year to treat the ornamentals, which mainly consist of several large boxwoods, with disease and insect controls.

Along with its proximity to three major roads, the church receives substantial foot traffic from churchgoers and history buffs. Because of the property’s historic relevance and prominence, “we like to make sure it looks as appealing as possible,” says Bonifant.

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Herbi-Systems

Bartlett, Tenn.

Warm Season Turf – Residential

HOMETOWN PRIDE. Herbi-Systems, Bartlett, Tenn., has cared for the lawn on this 5,500-square foot residential property (above) since 1996. Located on a corner lot off of a busy street, the property gets a lot of exposure. "It's in a central area of Bartlett," says Eve Keller, sales and marketing manager. "Since we're locally owned and operated, we feel like it's a testament to our business."

The turf, which is common Bermudagrass, receives seven applications throughout the year consisting of fertilizer, weed control and lime. Preemergent treatments twice in the spring and once in the fall keep weeds at bay. "The customer hasn't had many weeds since he has been on the program," Keller says. "But he does get some broadleaf weeds occasionally, and fireweeds have been a problem recently."

To keep the lawn healthy, the technician makes three summer applications of dry fertilizer with a 34-3-11 blend and a lime application in the winter. Lime was permanently added to Herbi-Systems' program several years ago. "It does make a difference as far as the greenness of lawns," Keller says. Lime helps the soil, which is naturally acidic and does have some clay. In addition, the lime helps counteract the high levels of nitrogen in the fertilizer.

To decide which of the company's 6,000 customers' properties to enter into this contest, technicians made recommendations on which lawns looked most attractive. "This one always looks the best, according to them," Keller says. The same technician has been servicing the account since 1999.

But Herbi-Systems can't take all of the credit. It always helps lawn care operators when customers actively care for their lawn. "This particular client always asks his technician for tips," Keller says. "He really takes care of his lawn as far as mowing and watering. He loves to work on his lawn, which does help us out a lot."

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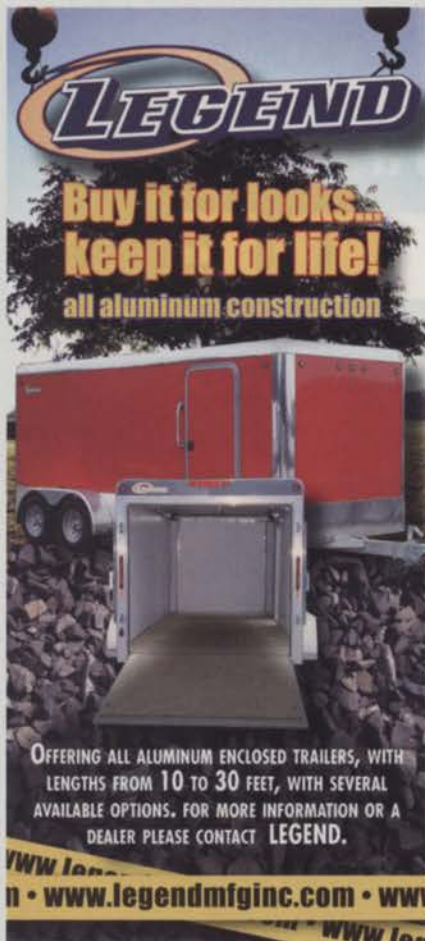
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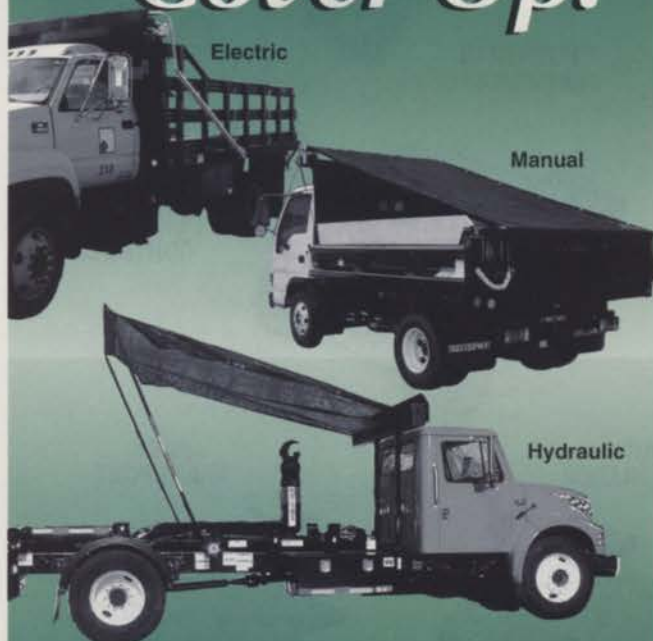


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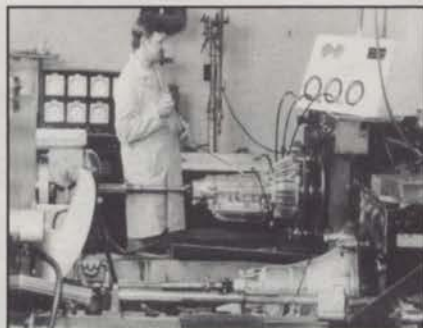


At **WELLS CARGO** we've always preferred to push the envelope, continually searching for better ways to make better trailers. The **LS Series Landscape Trailer** is a perfect example of that mind-set in action. From the ground up, the **LS Series** is engineered to be long on durability and short on maintenance. Consider the rugged tubular steel frame, the LED stop/tail/turn lights, and the pressure treated plywood flooring with a 20 year limited warranty. Everything about the **LS Series** means business. And remember, "With a Wells Cargo Behind... You Never Look Back!"



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www.wellscargo.com

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importtransmissionfactory.com

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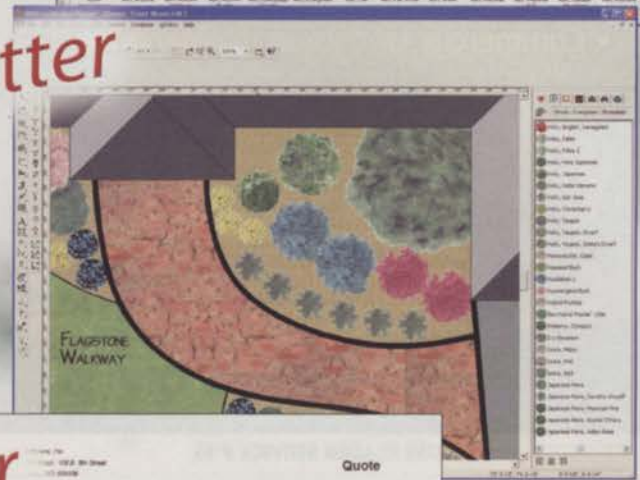
Fax: 321-268-3242

USE READER SERVICE # 82

Sell Better



Plan Better



Bid Better

Quote

Customer: 410 Street, 2100 So St, Orlando, FL 32811, 407-838-0000

Customer Number: 107
Quote Date: December 08, 2010
Sales Person: JLD
Estimate Date: December 08, 2010
Terms: Net 30
Project Name: Beverly Front Yard
Project #1: Beverly Front Yard
Project #2: 200-810

Vendor Number: 1

Item	Tree Code	Description	Quantity	Unit	Subtotal Price
302214	2-06	Holly Blue Princess	1.00	600.00	600.00
PL2247	8-00	Aluminum Composite	3.00	140.00	420.00
79000	1-0	Stonewall Stone Bed	1.00	600.00	600.00
301714	0-24	Junco PK	2.00	60.00	120.00
844-02	0-06	Junco Blue Chip	2.00	67.50	135.00
79070	2-7	Thick Japanese Camellia	1.00	925.00	925.00
PL2288	8-00	Alum. Trim	8.00	110.00	880.00
PL2282	Co 19	Curbed Walk	1.11	50.00	55.50
Custom	20	Flagstone Entrance	200.00	60.00	12,000.00
		Project	1.00	900.00	900.00
Totals:					65,512.50
Tax Amount:					\$0.00
Tax:					\$994.17
Total:					66,506.67

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version

11

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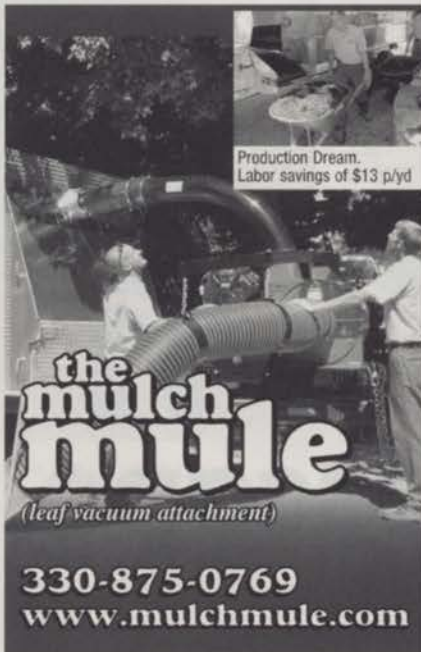
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landscapeleads.com

Enroll toll-free:
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Mike Rorie, CEO GroundMasters
(Owner of 3 Mulch Mules)

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Cincinnati, Ohio

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product spotlight > >



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Circle 213 on reader service card



Thieman Tailgates Toplifter Series Liftgate TT-15

- Available with 42-inch steel or 44-inch aluminum platform
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- Features Knapheide utility side compartments combined with fiberglass van body upper
- Comes standard with 50-inch-wide rear swing-out doors, pine floor, plywood-lined upper walls and an integrated skylight
- Available in the Classicube or Aerocell body model and in lengths of 12 and 14 feet
- Unicell Body Co. – 800/628-8914, www.unicell.com

Circle 215 on reader service card



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Landscape Trailer**

- 6-year warranty program
- Features LED stop, tail and turn lights
- ¾-inch pressure-treated plywood flooring with 20-year warranty
- Includes flow-thru side vents
- Variety of custom options
- Wells Cargo – 800/348-7553, www.wellscargo.com

Circle 216 on reader service card



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Tarping System**

- Choice of aluminum or steel arms and two different front ends
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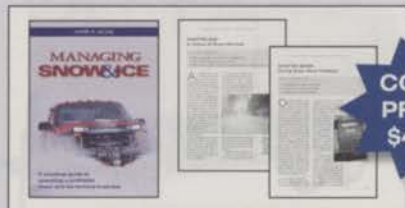
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- ❖ 224 pages in a durable softcover

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- ❖ Financial statements
- ❖ Snow response plans
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- ❖ Time sheets
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Adapted from the system used by successful snow removal contractor **John Allin**, this software system will ease the estimating process. A user-friendly platform walks contractors through the estimating process, computes the information entered and delivers a time, material and cost estimate per job. The system delivers price in per-push, per-event and per-season formats.

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with FREE
Thermos**

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- Tag-hitch trailer available in several lengths
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- Features vents for air circulation, interior lighting and easy-access rear and curbside doors

- 3/4-inch plywood floor
- 3/8-inch interior wall lining
- Variety of colors available
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USE READER SERVICE # 71



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You shift your weight forward, backward, or from side to side to compensate for changing terrain, "Operator Balance Control" (OBC).



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Wright's Stander and Sentar give you the same freedom dirt bikers have—you feel the hills under you, and shift your weight to take the terrain "on the fly." You use your weight to keep traction on the higher wheels so you cross slopes at speeds no other mower can handle. So you mow faster with greater control—and without switching to a walk-behind.

Power, performance, and a little excitement. That's the Wright way to mow.

THE WRIGHT WAY TO MOW.

WRIGHT STANDER



WRIGHT SENTAR



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wright
commercial products

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USE READER SERVICE # 91

The Cutting Edge

Contractors can tackle a variety of tree shapes and sizes with these trimming tools.

compiled by kathleen franzinger

Husqvarna 326P5x and 326P4 Pole Chain Saws

- 326P4 can reach up to 13 feet; the 326P5x can reach 16 feet
- Both feature a 1.2-hp E-TECH II engine said to offer low emissions, low noise and low weight
- Provides high power-to-weight ratio
- Each saw's cutter head has adjustable and automatic chain lubrication
- 326P5x includes a quick disconnecting shaft that shortens the unit to less than 7 feet for easy transport
- Husqvarna – 800/487-5962, www.husqvarna.com

Circle 220 on reader service card

RedMax PSZ2500S Pole Saw

- 8-foot reach
- Powered by a 25.4-cc Strato-Charged two-cycle engine
- Engine meets clean air standards by introducing fresh air into the engine between the exhaust gases and the fresh charge of air/fuel mix
- Doesn't require a catalytic converter
- Dry weight of 12.3 pounds
- RedMax – 800/291-8251, www.redmax.com

Circle 221 on reader service card



Porter Ferguson Dual Blade Pole Pruners

- Cut through bark and cambium cleanly on both sides to speed healing
- Cutting capacity of 1 inch
- Blades are tough, heat-treated, forged alloy tool steel
- Pivot bolts designed to stay tight and function smoothly
- Type QP short-arm and Type RP long-arm pole pruners come with choice of solid, two-section jointed or three-section jointed poles
- Replacement pruner poles also available
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Shindaiwa 352s Chain Saw

- Powered by a 35.2-cc displacement, 2.5-hp engine
- Dry weight of 9.5 pounds
- Features a two-ring piston with chrome-plated cylinder
- Equipped with a Walbro all-position carburetor
- Includes an inertia chain brake system, dual bar studs, easy-pull recoil starting system and a convenient thumb screw access
- Available in 14- or 16-inch bar lengths
- Shindaiwa – 800/521-7733, www.shindaiwa.com



Circle 223 on reader service card

John Deere PS2683LE Extended-Reach Pole Saw

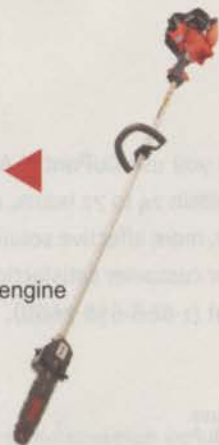
- Equipped with a 1.6-hp, low-emission Commercial M-Series engine
- Cuts branches up to 8 inches in diameter
- 83-inch boom detaches for storage and transportation
- Reaches branches up to 12 feet above ground
- Weighs 12.4 pounds
- Includes a gear-driven oiler with a no-oil-at-idle feature
- John Deere – 800/537-8233, www.johndeere.com



Circle 224 on reader service card

Tanaka TPS-250PF Pole Saw

- Cuts branches up to 8 inches in diameter
- Powered by a 24-cc, 1.3-hp PureFire two-stroke engine
- Comes with a 10-inch bar and chain
- Measures 90 inches long
- Weighs 11.4 pounds
- Tanaka – 888/482-6252, www.tanaka-usa.com



Circle 225 on reader service card

Barnel OR26A and OR32 Loppers

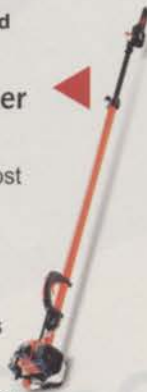
- OR26A lopper weighs 39 ounces and is 26 inches long
- OR32A lopper weighs 43 ounces and is 32 inches long
- Both loppers cut up to 2 inches in diameter
- Feature a forged cutting blank and anvil blade
- Patented Center Oiler Bolt Technology eases maintenance
- Includes extra large, nonslip thermoplastic rubber grips for comfort
- Barnel International – 503/291-1400, www.barnel.com



Circle 226 on reader service card

Echo PPT-260 Power Pruner

- Powered by 25.4-cc Power Boost Tornado engine
- Meets current EPA and CARB emissions regulations
- Said to provide fast, easy starts and smooth acceleration
- Telescoping shaft allows pruning to 12 feet, 10 inches in normal use and 17 feet, 10 inches with optional 5-foot extension (ranges do not include operator's reach)
- Lightweight magnesium gear case houses a fully adjustable, gear-driven automatic oiler system
- Features a 19.6-fluid ounce fuel tank
- Includes spark-arresting, low-tone muffler
- Echo – 847/540-8400, www.echo-usa.com



Circle 227 on reader service card



Corona Clipper Razor Tooth Saw

- Cuts branches larger than 2 inches in diameter
- Each whetstone-ground razor tooth is sharpened on three sides
- Curved blades are said to produce fast, smooth and clean cuts
- Available with a variety of comfortable handles made of comolded plastic and wood
- Comes in folding and fixed piston grip styles
- Complete line of scabbards available to protect the saw blade when not in use
- Corona Clipper – 800/847-7863, www.coronaclipper.com

Circle 228 on reader service card



Fiskars PowerGear Bypass Lopper

- Includes replaceable high-carbon steel blade
- Cuts branches up to 2 inches in diameter
- PTFE blade coating reduces cutting friction and resists rust
- Special gear design is said to maximize leverage during the middle of the cut for an easier cut of large branches
- Features lightweight aluminum handle
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The traditional holiday colors are red and green. This season, we suggest you avoid the red and keep more "green" for yourself. For true commercial-grade holiday lighting products without the franchise fees, e-mail paul@creativedisplays.com or call (800) 733-9617.

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USE READER SERVICE # 94

Tilton Equipment Efc0 932 Chain Saw

- Commercial-duty top handle saw
- Equipped with a 30-cc engine
- 7.5-pound powerhead weight
- Available in 12- and 14-inch bar lengths
- Features an antivibration system, textured handle grips, air purge primer and an inertia chain brake
- Tilton Equipment – 800/447-1152, www.tiltonequipment.com

Circle 230 on reader service card



Forestry Suppliers Solo 633 Top Handle Chain Saw

- Features a 14-inch bar
- Powered by a 36.3-cc, two-cycle, 2-hp engine
- Includes a large lanyard connection molded into the case
- Features a special antivibration system, easy-start electronic ignition and Nikasil cylinder sleeves
- Forestry Suppliers – 601/354-3565, www.forestry-suppliers.com

Circle 231 on reader service card

Stihl MS 192 T Chain Saw

- Weighs 6.6 pounds
- Powered by a 1.75-hp, 30-cc engine
- Fuel capacity of 8.3 ounces
- Features a built-in, retractable lanyard ring
- Includes the company's IntelliCarb compensating carburetor and a choice of 3/8-inch PMN or 3/8-inch PM1 OILOMATIC saw chain
- Stihl – 800/467-8445, www.stihlusa.com

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USE READER SERVICE # 97

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- One 2-gallon polyethylene hand-held sprayer
- One 3-gallon polyethylene hand-held sprayer
- One LESCO backpack sprayer

Hand-held sprayers

- LESCO's hand-held sprayers are easy to use and lightweight, so they are perfect for spraying turf and ornamentals
- They are made of safe, durable, non-reactive polyethylene tanks and tough polypropylene pumps
- These sprayers include adjustable and fixed fan spray tips

Backpack sprayer

- These durable sprayers have a 4-gallon, UV-stabilized polypropylene tank
- They provide pressure up to 90 PSI
- Include adjustable nylon harness, comfortable shoulder pads, fixed-fan and adjustable brass nozzles



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Festive lights help clients celebrate the holiday season while extending a contractor's window of service.

▶ compiled by kathleen franzinger

Creative Displays Pro Grade Light Strings

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- PVC-coated, soft wire jacket stays pliable in extreme cold
- UV inhibitor helps prevent cracking from sun damage
- Sockets are said to be easy to remove for custom installation on jobsites
- Come in 250-foot spools with 18-inch centers; 12- and 15-inch centers available
- Offered with a 5-year warranty
- Creative Displays – 800/733-9617, www.creativedisplays.com

Circle 233 on reader service card



Christmas Décor Holiday Lighting Franchise

- Fills an off-season void and provides year-round work for employees
- Helps contractors cross-sell to existing customers, offset overhead, expand customer base and offer a higher margin service
- Process is said to be easy to learn and teach
- Benefits include quick product availability, wide inventory and soft sales presentations
- Applications available online
- Christmas Décor – 800/687-9551, www.christmasdecor.net

Circle 234 on reader service card



Labor Savers

This equipment helps contractors get jobs done faster and easier.

▶ compiled by kathleen franzinger

Corona Clipper SS 64300 Trench Digging Shovels

- Suitable for digging narrow trenches when laying irrigation piping
- Sturdy, 13-gauge steel heads
- Heads are V-angled to ease soil penetration and increase strength
- Feature a 28 degree lift angle
- Corona Clipper – 800/847-7863, www.coronaclipper.com

Circle 235 on reader service card



Hunter Industries ACC Controller

- Modular design allows configuration to a desired number of stations and offers the opportunity to add central control communication capability
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- Acts as a self-sufficient weather station with full ET capabilities
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Circle 237 on reader service card



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- Hook mount boot offers installation and

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- Features dual trim capabilities for productivity and safety
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- Hustler Turf Equipment – 800/395-4757, www.hustlerturfequipment.com

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Equipment Solutions

There are two approaches to acquiring the right equipment balance for grounds maintenance – 1) Purchasing specialized equipment for every aspect of work or 2) Selecting a grounds maintenance system that can be adapted for many tasks.

With so many styles and brands of grounds maintenance equipment from which to choose, selecting the right combination of equipment can be challenging. Whether you buy individual, task-specific equipment or go with a grounds maintenance system, the investment can be significant. So to truly make an educated decision, first compare a stand-alone snow thrower, a separate dethatcher, an aerator and other specialized equipment with grounds maintenance systems that use attachments.

To compare the two philosophies, add the initial cost of 1) a mower, 2) the separate stand-alone items and 3) the cost of their combined upkeep. Then, 4) subtract the total from the equipment's earning potential.

Then you must calculate the cost of an equivalent system and the various attachments. Add the cost of 1) the power unit and a cutting deck, 2) the cost of each task-specific attachment you will need, 3) the maintenance costs and 4) subtract that total from the system's revenue potential and compare the two totals.

When you make an initial cost comparison between a zero-turn-



ing radius mower that can accept attachments and a "mower-only" unit, depending on the brands, there may or may not be much difference in price. One recent study compared each mower type's costs-to-cutting capacity and found the mowers that accepted attachments were actually less expensive to purchase than mower-only units. However, even if there is a slight difference between a unit that can accept attachments and a mower-only unit, that differential can be offset because the attachments are most likely less expensive than stand-alone gear that performs the same function. For instance, the Grasshopper AERAvator (the 40-inch lists for \$2,950) can be less expensive than a walk-behind one, some of which of a comparable width can sell for up to \$16,000.

By using a central power unit that operates a cutting deck and attachments, a grounds maintenance system can also be less expensive to maintain. In general, the cost of powered, stand-alone or walk behind

implements vs. the PTO-driven Grasshopper implements would cost more than PTO-driven ones by at least the cost of the extra engine. Maintenance costs would be estimated to be more for parts and labor because of working two different engines (Grasshopper's 4-stroke vs. a 2-stroke walk-behind). That

would include keeping more parts in stock to maintain the extra engine.

Here is an example of the difference between separate units and a grounds maintenance system. Scott Brewer, owner, Rotolo Consultants, Jackson, Mississippi, had a contract to clear debris from curbing along a 26-mile stretch of highway in Louisiana. Using four employees, each equipped with a back-pack blower unit, the task regularly took several days to complete. When Brewer switched to a Grasshopper grounds maintenance system equipped with a turbine blower, he discovered the same job could be completed in one-fourth of the time it had taken before using just one-fourth of the number of employees the job previously required. Brewer's decision reduced the contract's labor and time costs by a factor of 16, leaving a significantly larger portion of the contract revenue on the bottom line. - Carl Williams

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- DSD International – 877/532-5252, www.dsdinternational.net

Circle 245 on reader service card



Kichler Landscape Lighting 2005 Catalog

- Includes an expanded offering of cast brass and copper fixtures
- Details two new transformers
- New product families include Lafayette traditional lanterns and Cross Creek Arts and Crafts style fixtures
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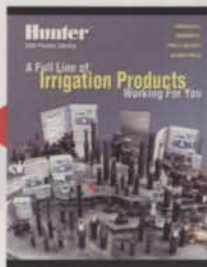
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Hunter Industries 2005 Irrigation Products Catalog



- Spiral-bound reference book is free to industry professionals
- Details complete line of rotors, sprays, valves, controllers and central systems
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- Includes information on the company's reclaimed water products and central computerized control tool
- Equipment is shown in full-color with application photos and information on water-saving benefits
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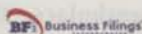
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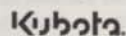
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The author is president of One Step Tree & Lawn Care, North Chili, N.Y., and can be reached at 585/594-1095.

'One Step' Up To Compensation Incentives

Back in the early 1990s, our company, One Step Tree & Lawn Care, North Chili, N.Y., was struggling to maintain a good client retention rate and, unfortunately, had to deal with some unhappy customers. We had to make a change that focused on building better relationships with our customers. The way we found to do this successfully was to adjust our approach to selling accounts and compensating our technicians.

Like many companies, One Step Tree & Lawn Care originally had a salesperson on staff to sell residential lawn, tree and shrub care, and a number of technicians to take care of the applications the salesperson sold. A simple change in that approach turned all of our residential service technicians into their own salespeople, with each technician responsible for selling new work – including measuring a lawn and recommending an appropriate

program – and making applications on those same lawns.

Along with the change in responsibilities, we also adjusted the pay schedule for our technicians. In addition to a base hourly wage of \$8 to \$10 per hour, our technicians also are compensated with a percentage of the total sale for each new account, as well as production pay as a percentage of each job completed on time. Altogether, this creates an incentive pay structure for residential lawn care work that encourages our technicians to build more relationships on their routes in order to sell and retain more work.

Originally, our technicians were given 5 percent of each sale and 5 percent of completed jobs. From this setup, we found a need to put more emphasis on the production end of the account, which led to some adjustments in the commissions. Now, our 12 lawn care technicians and

5 Keys To Incentivizing Employee Pay

1. **Relate compensation to customer satisfaction by making technicians responsible for sales as well as applications.**
2. **Provide employees with a sales commission, but ensure that production remains top of mind with a strong focus on production pay for timely work.**
3. **Be fair to employees by including an hourly wage in the pay structure that can be adjusted up if the amount of work available is low.**
4. **Hold back a portion of employees' commissions to compensate for sales lost during the year and slow production periods as in the winter months.**
5. **Ease new employees into incentive pay structures by paying hourly wages and then smaller incentives before introducing them to the full incentive program.**



Photo: Jeffrey Frew

Bob Ottley, One Step Tree & Lawn Care

three tree and shrub care technicians on our staff make 3 percent of sales and 6 percent of production. Each technician is responsible for 450 to 500 accounts on average, with customers paying \$300 annually for a typical lawn care account.

In just one year of using this pay structure, our renewal rate jumped from 67 to 80 percent – a huge improvement. Because our customers saw the same technician from the time of sale throughout the entire application cycle, we were able to build stronger relationships with those customers. Another benefit to the company was that our technicians were no longer moving mechanically from lawn to lawn just to make applications. Instead, giving our technicians a stake in the sales helped them see how their day-to-day work impacted the company, giving them more ownership in their accounts. By starting customer-company relationships at the sale and seeing them

through the application process, the technicians become familiar with both the lawn and the customer.


Moreover, at our company, the 3 percent/6 percent setup applies to both new sales and renewals, which means that technicians who build stronger relationships with customers can get the bulk of their sales compensation easily. A satisfied customer who trusts his or her technician is usually quick to renew their account. As technicians gain more experience, they're able to earn pay raises by selling more work along their routes and may also receive increases in their hourly pay.

When we implemented this new pay structure 15 years ago, in addition to learning about customer satisfaction, we also learned about employee satisfaction. While we lost a few technicians who were reluctant to take on the sales aspect of the job, the compensation approach was pretty well accepted. For companies

considering a non-traditional pay structure like this, we found that having a base hourly pay helps keep the payment fair, especially when their isn't a lot of production to go around. In those cases, technicians can receive a higher hourly wage to keep total compensation from dropping below minimum wage and prevent the need for overtime.

Additionally, rather than paying employees at the time they make their sales, we withhold a portion of the commissions until later in the year. This helps us account for sales that ultimately fall through or customers that cancel. It also ensures that our technicians receive paychecks they are comfortable with when work slows at the end of the season.

One challenge we have with the pay structure is introducing it to new employees. Most recruits are unfamiliar with this type of compensation and focus more on how much they'll be paid per hour. Because of that, our trainees remain hourly employees during their training, which could be as long as a year. Toward the end of that period, we introduce the production payment incentives at a much lower percentage – perhaps just 1 percent – to get the trainee familiar with the concept. Once the training phase is finished, he or she is fully integrated into the incentive program. We also show the individual how much they would have made during their first year using the sales and production pay model.

Overall, the incentive pay structure we use at One Step Tree & Lawn Care has helped us build a stronger customer retention rate, which currently stands at 84 to 85 percent. – Bob Ottley 



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