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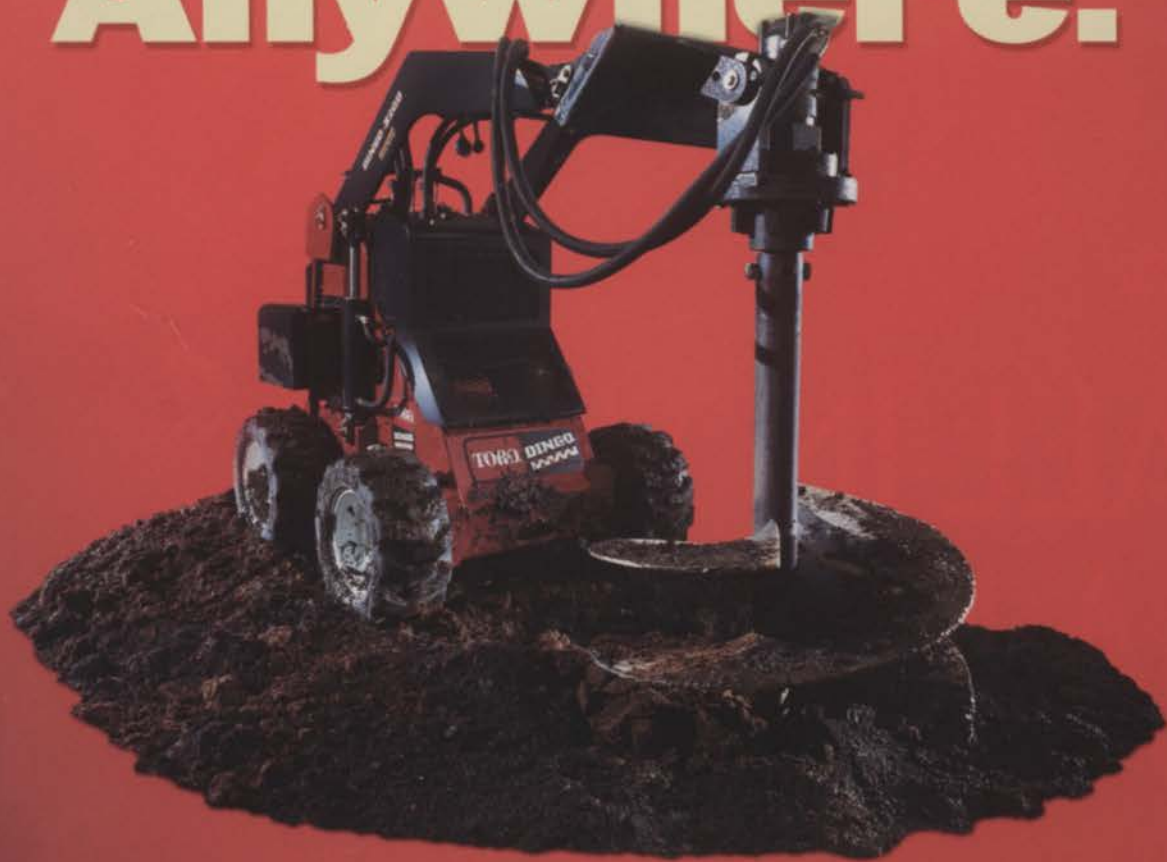
ALL IN THE FAMILY

Mike Young spent 30 years building Lawn & Shrub and in one morning signed it over to his son, Kirk. How one father successfully entrusted the family business to the next generation.

Inside >>

Issue Focus: Weed Control
An Insurance Update
Walk-Behind Mower Trends
Lighting Design Techniques

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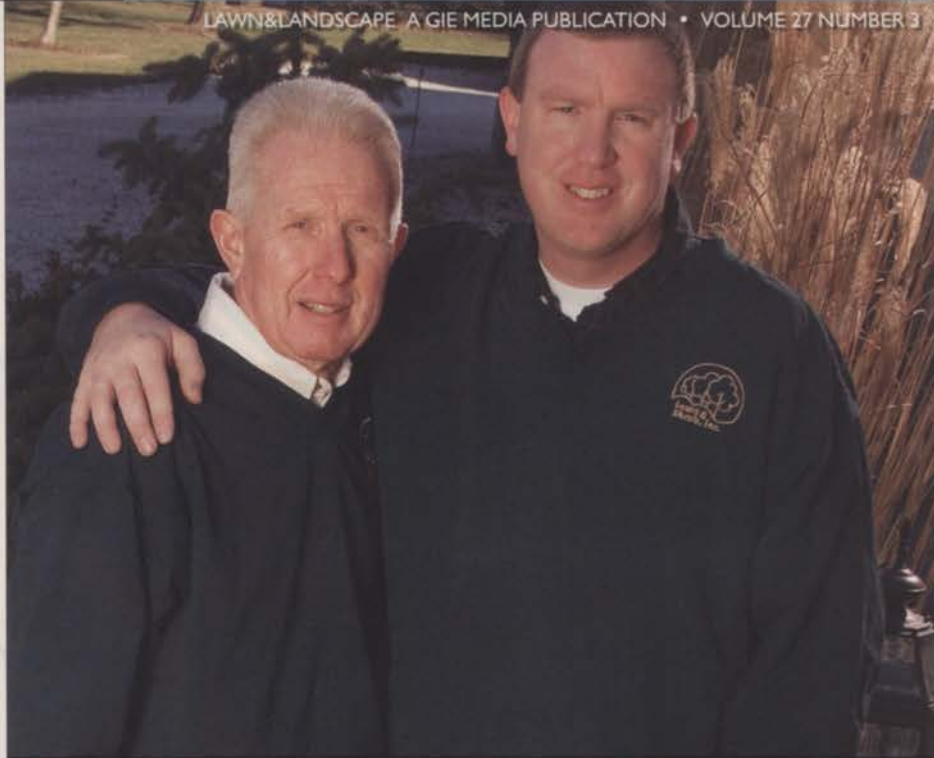
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USE READER SERVICE # 11



**Cover Story –
All In The Family**

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Mike Young spent 30 years building Lawn & Sh... and in one morning signed it over to his son, Ki... How one father successfully entrusted the family business to the next generation.

Cover Image by Michael St. Andre

03.06

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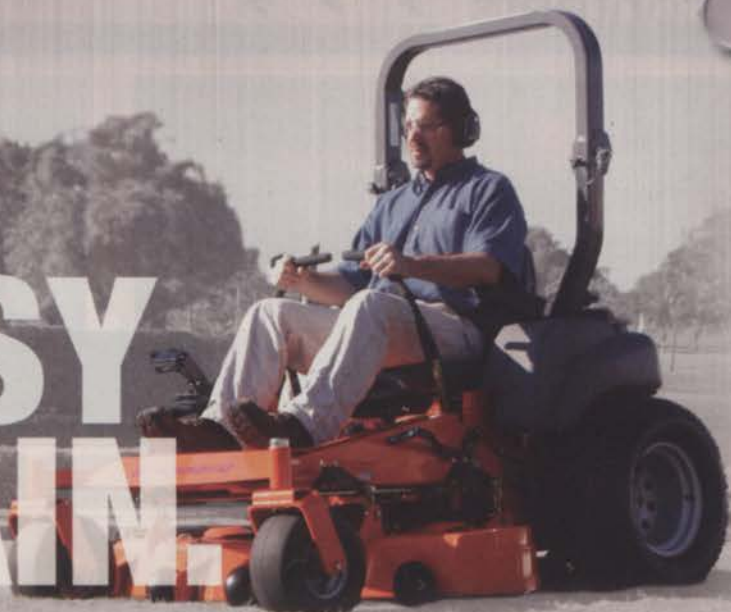
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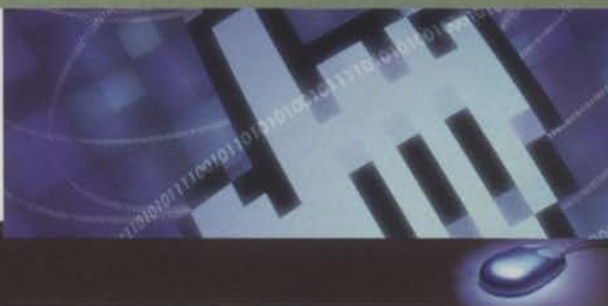
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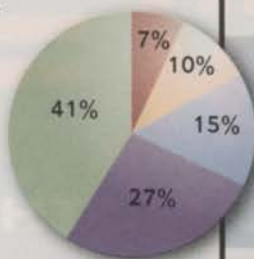
The Seven-Day Itch

For lawn and landscape companies, maximizing productivity means getting the most out of both employees and equipment. After all, machines that sit unused don't make any more money for a business than an employee on a lunch break.

This topic was recently discussed on the *Lawn & Landscape* Online Message Board where participants tossed around ideas of how to get their fleets to stop being a drain on the bottom line and start generating cash flow. In some cases, the "Seven-Day Itch" of seven-day workweeks are the answer – an intriguing proposition in an industry where compressed four-day workweeks are gaining popularity.

Read more about how companies are tackling the productivity issue in this month's Best of the Web feature on page 96. Then, be sure to visit the *Lawn & Landscape* Online Message Board to ask your own questions, offer advice and maybe find yourself in an upcoming Best of the Web article in the pages of *Lawn & Landscape*!

Between March 13 and 19, log onto *Lawn & Landscape* Online to participate in our weekly online poll where we ask, "What new add-on service are you most likely to add this spring?" Will it be landscape lighting? Aeration? Something else? Let us know at www.lawnandlandscape.com/poll.



Have You Heard the Buzz?

This month, *Lawn & Landscape* Online kicks off a new series of Web-only columnists to bring you the insight and advice on a range of topics affecting your business every day. "Industry Buzz" premieres on *Lawn & Landscape* Online on March 6 and will run every Monday. Each week, our industry experts will tackle one of four topics – Business, Legislation, Water Use and Noise & Air Pollution – and discuss how those issues can impact you as a green industry professional.

In addition to reading **Industry Buzz** on www.lawnandlandscape.com, you'll also be able to access these articles through the *Lawn & Landscape* e-Newsletter, reaching e-mail inboxes on Mondays. To sign up for the e-Newsletter, visit www.lawnandlandscape.com or e-mail lspliers@gie.net.

Remember, **Industry Buzz** can only be found on *Lawn & Landscape* Online – the No. 1 online resource for green industry professionals. *Lawn & Landscape* looks forward to generating an informative dialogue on these important topics. If you have questions related to business, legislation, water use or noise and air pollution that you'd like our columnists to address, be sure to let us know by e-mailing lspliers@gie.net with your questions and suggestions. *Let's get the buzz going!*

join in!

If you've made a resolution to join an industry association in 2006, *Lawn & Landscape* Online has a great resource to get you started. We've just finished updating our Associations page where information on more than 120 green industry and business organizations is just a click away. Just visit www.lawnandlandscape.com/associations (or click "Associations" under the "Community" menu on the home page), choose your state and get a list of all the associations available in your immediate area. Or, search "Everywhere" for a full list of organizations ready to earn your membership.

Lawn & Landscape welcomes your input to keep its Associations pages up-to-date. If you belong to or know of an industry-related association that you don't see on our list, or if you have updated information for an association listed, please let us know by e-mailing lspliers@gie.net. Go out there and get active!

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Networking With Your Peers

Throughout my extensive travels in the lawn and landscape industry, I've had the privilege of visiting quite a few professional contracting firms.

These companies come in all shapes and sizes: large full-service firms, medium size maintenance businesses, firms specializing in lawn care or irrigation and a prevailing number of family-owned businesses.

In every instance, the owner or proprietor of the company is working diligently to create a name for himself or herself in their local market, or in some cases a national standing. Walking through these operations, listening to the humble company beginnings, watching employees carefully prepare their trucks for a full day of service – the enthusiasm is contagious.

After all, the benefits the landscape industry brings to the quality of life are tremendous. And, every day the men and women in this industry are responsible for improving residential and commercial properties, ball fields and parks.

We can learn a lot from one another. Networking with your fellow contractors at an industry event or at the service counter of the local equipment dealer while you are waiting for a new part represents one of the best opportunities in the landscape industry.

Wherever you travel, you never fail to meet someone who's eager and willing to share a big win or "I learned the hard way" story.

For instance, one fairly good-sized company in the Northeast told me they were having a hard time returning all of their phone calls. Their phone was ringing off the hook, but they didn't have the time or personnel to do justice to the inquiries they were receiving.

This isn't uncommon in the landscape industry. And, while we all know there isn't anything worse than not returning phone calls to current or prospective customers, it happens.


So, although they couldn't afford the annual salary for a full-time receptionist, they contended they couldn't afford not to hire someone. They made the move and soon more than paid for their new receptionist.

This is a no-brainer. Answering your phone and returning phone calls should be a basic staple of running a business. Unfortunately, the landscape industry has somewhat of a reputation for not returning phone calls or following up on quotes. We can easily change this.

Many firms will tell you about weekly tailgate meetings they hold with their crews. Topics range from safety to consumer service to recognizing opportunities for add-on services while walking currently maintained properties.

You can learn first hand the pros and cons of adding a new division or service within your company. We've reported on the benefits of balance within your landscape business and the potential slow downs or challenges that may be offset by running both installation and maintenance divisions.

On the other hand, we've had lawn and landscape owners share with us the benefits of specializing in lawn care or tree care or irrigation installation and maintenance.

This industry is bursting with quality entrepreneurs with stories and experiences to share. Get out and network with your peers – in person or via our online community at www.lawnandlandscape.com. Their knowledge will amaze you and, in turn, you'll astonish your customers with a wealth of new ideas. 

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Dear Editor,

I have read your 2005 *Benchmarking your Business Report* (*Lawn & Landscape*, November 2005) several times now, and would like to comment on how useful it is.

However, I do have a question. You have listed the average wages for different employee types based upon region. The problem is that different companies have different titles for the same positions. For example, a foreman in one company may have more or less responsibilities in one company vs. another.

My question is what are your definitions for a senior level laborer and crew foreman?

Thanks,

Jason C Peterson
Weiler's Lawn and Landscape
info@weilers-lawn.com

ANSWER:

A senior level laborer is the highest paid laborer on the crew directly underneath the foreman. This person is generally the one who is being trained to become the foreman of the next crew. He's willing to take on some responsibility, has a driver's license, and has respect from his fellow workers.

I hope this helps!

Jack Mattingly
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letters

Lawn & Landscape magazine welcomes letters from its readers. We feel that your honest feedback about our publication – whether it's positive or negative – is crucial to our future success. We take your comments very seriously and are always willing to respond or answer any questions you might have. To submit a Letter to the Editor, please send the letter via mail to Nicole Wisniewski's attention at 4012 Bridge Ave., Cleveland, Ohio 44113, or e-mail it to her at wisniewski@gie.net. You can also call her at 800/456-0707.

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Stop, Think and Prosper

I've been a landscape contractor for 23 years and I've enjoyed every single minute. I've also gleaned countless ideas from professional seminars, business books and mentors.

It was not until this past year, though, that I learned the most important lesson of all – a successful businessperson needs to take time to think.

We live in an exceedingly busy world. We are connected 24 hours a day to cell phones, e-mail, voice mail and cable news. I try to take advantage of any and all advances in technology. I do my shopping online after the kids have gone to bed, I've always got my cell phone at the ready, and I take my laptop everywhere but church.

But the danger in this link to the world is we lose the connection to ourselves. In the rush to know what everyone else has to say, we lose sight of what we ourselves have to say and think. As I get older and wiser, I have discovered the value in taking the time to step back and think.

As a self-confessed workaholic, I force myself to relax. It's when you're relaxed and quiet that new ideas tend to flow. When you're working you get caught up in day-to-day demands and the future becomes an abstraction. But you must make the time to think. Otherwise, you'll never move beyond the status quo. Here are some tactics that have worked for me.

I work out a couple of times a week and it's when I'm doing so that I have my best ideas. There's a nature preserve near my house where I go to run. Sometimes I listen to a motivational tape, podcast or CD. Other times I don't. When it's just me and the birds and the trees, my daily troubles tend to fall by the wayside. I can think about the bigger picture, about where I want my business to be in the years ahead and the best way to get there.

Working out also creates balance in one's life. I recommend Jim Joehr and Tony Schwartz's book *The Power of Full Engagement* to learn in detail about the relationship between exercise and success. And if it's been a while since you've hit the trails or elevated your heart rate, don't think exercise is not for you. Just going on a walk can be terrific exercise for your body and your brain.

Another tactic for making time to think is to choose a favorite quiet spot where you can go and be alone without distraction. Maybe it's at home, or in your backyard hammock, or at the library, or even Starbucks. Get into the habit of going to your designated place and with a pad of paper and a pen. You'll be surprised by how establishing such a routine can make creative thinking a routine, too.

Lastly, you want to plan a weekend away every now and then to recharge and rethink. It doesn't have to be somewhere exotic and far away. Sometimes just traveling a couple hours from home can change your perspective, generate new ideas and reinvigorate your ambitions.

Regardless of how you go about making time, do not feel guilty. For the longest time I felt any minute I spent in a chair thinking was a minute less I could spend improving my business. I was wrong. Not only has slowing down from time to time actually grown my company, but also it's improved my overall health and outlook.

To start thinking, I'll give you an assignment. In the next week, set aside one hour when you can go to your favorite quiet place. Once there, ask yourself two questions: What would you do if you knew that you could not fail? And how would the person you want to become do the things you want to do? The answers to these questions might make some things clear that were not already clear. **tt**

marty grunder

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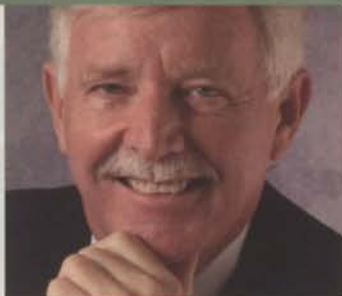
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Spring into Spring

The sap is rising and so are the clients' expectations. Are you ready? This is the time when we need to get off on the right foot and set the stage to provide clients the optimum in quality and customer service. Here are a couple of tips:

1. Think about last year. Did you accomplish what you wanted in 2005? Do you need to reposition your company or departments to take advantage of the future? If changes are needed, develop a game plan with specific completion dates.

2. Aggressively seek improvements. Think efficiency and lower costs. Solicit ideas from your employees. Developing a simple form that enables them to give their opinion in two areas: list the things we did well last year; provide suggestions on how to improve efficiencies and lower costs.

For best results, these responses should remain anonymous. Then, gather your key people and share the information. As a group, determine the action to take. Make a person responsible for each improvement, determine a completion date and hold that individual accountable.

3. Solicit qualified referrals from existing clients. Supervisors and managers should give each client a call, or preferably, stop by and see him or her. The call might sound like this: "We're planning for the spring and have a couple of openings for one of our crews. Would you know of anyone who would be interested in our services?" Your objective is to increase business and sign new agreements before spring.

Further, track your sales efforts with a wall chart listing the clients, who makes contact, results/comments and the date. This will hold the managers accountable.

As the owner or the account manager, you must develop a schedule to visit each client. Shake their hand and look them in the eye. If they are a maintenance client, ask if they would like to walk the site with you and discuss the service menu.

What a great time to fully understand their expectations for this season. And please, do not go away without a proposal for "extra work".

4. Set expectations for selling extras. Every client can be provided with an unsolicited proposal to enhance their landscaping once a month. Remember, the client hired you because you're the expert. They expect you to recommend how to improve the appearance of their lawns and landscapes. Be pro-active. Add-ons also should be your highest margin work.

You should also track and display your upselling efforts by posting the number of proposals made by each individual, each month. A little peer pressure never hurts.

Someone from your company – the owner, account manager or supervisor – should visit the client each month. If not practical, at least call the client monthly to check in and ask if there is anything else you can do for them. Understand that this client is receiving calls from your competitors regularly. You need to be No. 1 in their minds. Remember, out of sight-out of mind.

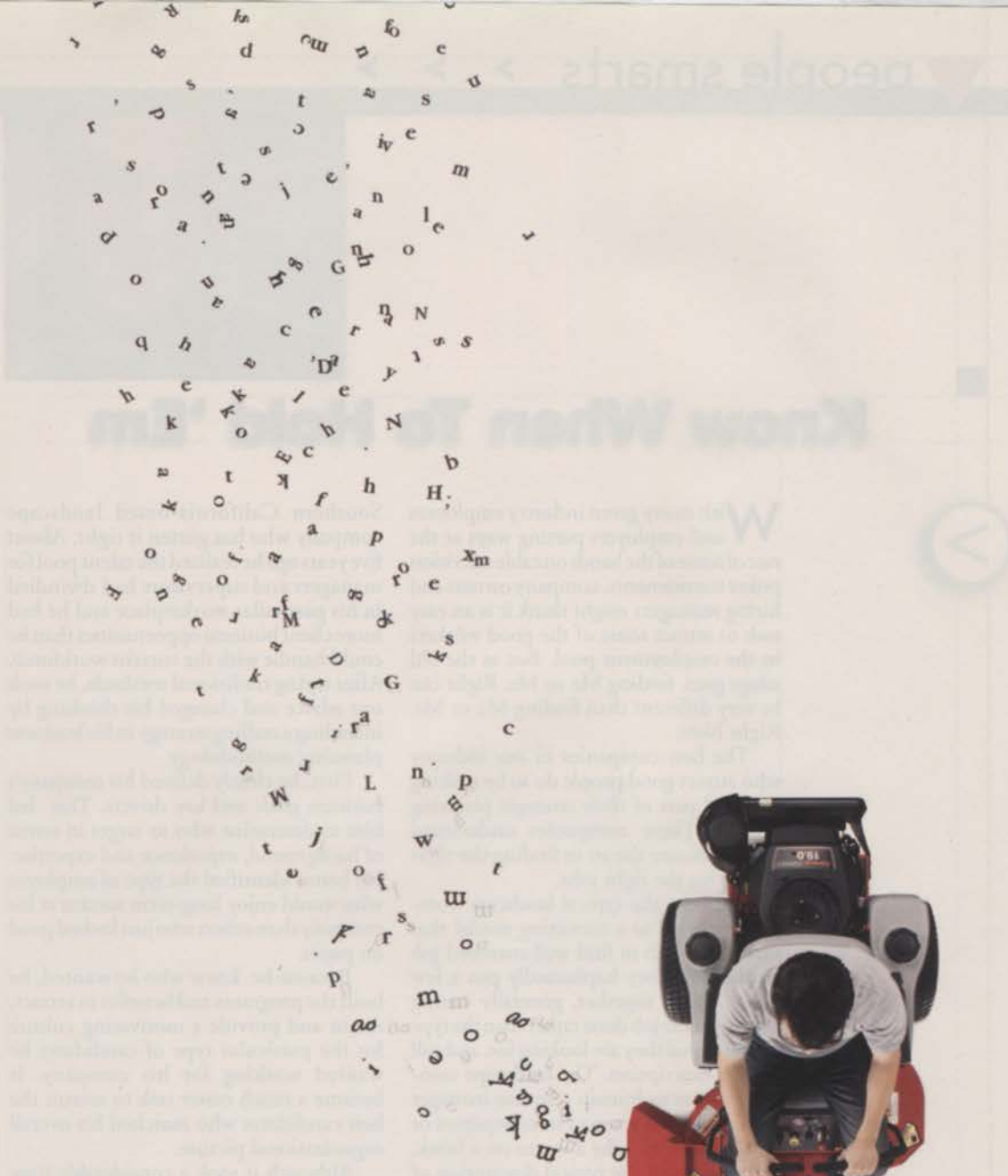
5. Quash Overtime. With the spring rush, it's easy to get trapped in the cycle of working overtime. Don't let this become a habit. You know how many hours of overtime are acceptable and you're responsible for keeping employees within those hours. Create a policy to have all overtime for the previous week reported to you by Tuesday mornings to help you keep on top of it.

Your primary focus should be labor hours and quality. These areas will get you in trouble with either the client (quality) or the owner (hours). This tool is absolutely necessary if you are to manage the labor.

6. Fasten your seat belts. Spring will kick your butt if you're not prepared. Make this the year that you make a few changes, increase your sales, find a mentor, and make more money than last year. ☐

jack mattingly

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Know When To Hold 'Em

With many green industry employees and employers parting ways at the rate of some of the hands on cable television poker tournaments, company owners and hiring managers might think it is an easy task to attract some of the good workers in the employment pool. But as the old adage goes, finding Mr. or Ms. Right can be very different than finding Mr. or Ms. Right Now.

The best companies in our industry who attract good people do so by making it a vital part of their strategic planning process. These companies understand and appreciate the art in finding the right people for the right jobs.

Consider the typical landscape company married to a recruiting model that makes it tough to find well-matched job candidates. They haphazardly put a few bullet points together, generally noting how to get the job done rather than the type of individual they are looking for, and call it a job description. The landscape company owner or human resource manager then places this want ad in newspapers or on the Internet. Like a worm on a hook, the ad dangles the typical description of company benefits and programs in the hopes the right candidate bites.

The process concludes with prayers that the recent hire, picked from the lot of job seekers, understands the business and its culture. After a few months, the manager wonders why the person hasn't worked out and starts this process all over again.

Companies need to look at recruiting in a more strategic and cultural way in order to attract and retain the best people. If not, they risk their business going down the drain.

Here's an example of a client of ours who operates a very profitable mid-sized

Southern California-based landscape company who has gotten it right. About five years ago he realized the talent pool for managers and supervisors had dwindled in his particular marketplace and he had more client business opportunities than he could handle with the current workforce. After trying traditional methods, he took our advice and changed his thinking by including a staffing strategy in his business planning methodology.

First, he clearly defined his company's business goals and key drivers. This led him to determine who to target in terms of background, experience and expertise. He better identified the type of employee who would enjoy long-term success at his company than others who just looked good on paper.

Because he knew who he wanted, he built the programs and benefits to attract, retain and provide a motivating culture for the particular type of candidates he wanted working for his company. It became a much easier task to recruit the best candidates who matched his overall organizational picture.

Although it took a considerable time investment up front, this strategic recruiting approach resulted in saving time during the attraction and selection phase while targeting only those candidates who met his experience and personality criteria. He also implemented rewards, benefits and other more contemporary employee-centered programs (flexible work days, personal development, etc.) that complement his targeted/strategic workforce. Turnover in the managerial and supervisory ranks was around 15 percent in 2005 and their business is growing at a 22 percent clip.

Life can be good if you not only play your cards right, but also make sure to play the right cards, too. **ll**

larry fish

is president of GreenSearch, a human resource consulting organization. He can be reached at 888/375-7787, larry@greensearch.com, or via www.greensearch.com. PeopleSmarts® is a registered trademark of GreenSearch.



WWW.BALLARD-INC.COM

1.877.965.0951

WELCOME to **BALLARD, Inc.**

We thank you for your interest in the Ballard Inc. line of green industry accessories. As a fellow landscape professional I understand the need for top quality accessories. These products were designed, built and proven by landscapers over the last 10 years. They are guaranteed to withstand the everyday use and abuse of the commercial landscaper. These products will help you portray a professional image while making your daily efforts much more efficient. We use all of these products daily in our lawn & landscape company. Your satisfaction with our products means a great deal to us at Ballard Inc. Please call us direct with any questions, or comments on our professional products.



Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "K Ballard". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Kory Ballard

President

Ballard Inc.

Perficut Lawn & Landscape Inc.

Des Moines, Iowa

Direct Pricing 2006

Part #	Product	Direct	Shipping (Est. 1)	Total
<u>Mowers & Accessories:</u>				
GT-PF106	36" Piranha Walk Behind	\$ 1999.00	\$ 250.00	\$2249.00
GT-MB112	48" Piranha Walk Behind	\$ 2099.00	\$ 250.00	\$2349.00
GT-SC103	Sulky (1 wheel)	\$ 199.00	\$ 20.00	\$ 219.00
GT-SC104	Sulky (2 wheel)	\$ 209.00	\$ 20.00	\$ 229.00
AC-101	Advanced Chute Cover	\$ 199.00	\$ 20.00	\$ 219.00
KJ-01	Kwik Jack (fixed mount)	\$ 69.00	\$ 12.00	\$ 81.00
ZH-01	Z Hitch	\$ 45.00	\$ 12.00	\$ 57.00
WE-EBB01	Econo Bag (buckle strap)	\$ 17.00	\$ 10.00	\$ 27.00
WE-MMRs01	Mini Mesh Seat Bag ZTR	\$ 17.00	\$ 10.00	\$ 27.00
WE-ARB01	Arm Rest Bag ZTR	\$ 13.00	\$ 10.00	\$ 23.00
WE-MMN01	Walk Behind Cover (non insulate)	\$ 65.00	\$ 15.00	\$ 80.00
WE-RZN01	Zero Turn Cover (non insulate)	\$ 95.00	\$ 15.00	\$ 110.00
WE-DRZN01	Deluxe Full ZTR Cover (non insulate)	\$ 145.00	\$ 15.00	\$ 160.00
WE-TCN01	Trimmer Head Cover (non insulate)	\$ 25.00	\$ 10.00	\$ 35.00
WE-HHN01	Blower - Hand Held Cover (non insulate)	\$ 25.00	\$ 10.00	\$ 35.00
WE-ECN01	Engine Cover (10hp-17hp)	\$ 30.00	\$ 10.00	\$ 40.00
WE-PBN01	Backpack Blower Cover (non insulate)	\$ 25.00	\$ 10.00	\$ 35.00
CF-350W	Solid Tire 9 x 3.50-4 with wheel	\$ 45.00	\$ 10.00	\$ 55.00
CF-350NW	Solid Tire 9 x 3.50-4 without wheel	\$ 24.00	\$ 10.00	\$ 34.00

Trailer Racks & Accessories:

EZ-01	Ez Gate (ultimate lifting system)	\$ 179.95	\$ 25.00	\$ 204.95
GT-LA011	Trimmer Rack 2 Line (open)	\$ 175.00	\$ 20.00	\$ 195.00
GT-LD014	Trimmer Rack 2 Line (enclosed)	\$ 175.00	\$ 20.00	\$ 195.00
GT-LB012	Trimmer Rack 3 Line (open)	\$ 190.00	\$ 20.00	\$ 210.00
GT-LE015	Trimmer Rack 3 Line (enclosed)	\$ 190.00	\$ 20.00	\$ 210.00
T-LG017	Trimmer Rack 4 Line (open)	\$ 205.00	\$ 25.00	\$ 230.00
GT-LF016	Trimmer Rack 4 Line (enclosed)	\$ 205.00	\$ 25.00	\$ 230.00
GT-BA031	Backpack Blower Rack	\$ 92.00	\$ 15.00	\$ 107.00
GT-BB032	Backpack Spayer Rack	\$ 92.00	\$ 15.00	\$ 107.00
GT-BC033	Water Cooler Rack (5 Gal.)	\$ 75.00	\$ 15.00	\$ 90.00
GT-BH038	Gas Can Rack 2 Gal. (w/ can)	\$ 75.00	\$ 15.00	\$ 90.00
GT-BH034	Gas Can Rack 5 Gal. (w/can)	\$ 95.00	\$ 15.00	\$ 110.00
GT-TA051	Hand Tool Rack (6 place)	\$ 95.00	\$ 15.00	\$ 110.00
GT-TB052	Hand Tool Holder (enclosed)	\$ 35.00	\$ 10.00	\$ 45.00
GT-HAO41	Hedge Trimmer Rack* (1 unit)	\$ 95.00	\$ 15.00	\$ 110.00
GT-BG037	Line Spool Rack	\$ 27.00	\$ 10.00	\$ 37.00
GT-WC011	Fastrap (set of 2)	\$ 55.00	\$ 10.00	\$ 65.00

*GT-ED081 Enclosed Trailer Attachment For Part # HA041 \$ 9.95

** Utility Vehicle Racks ** Call with make and model for rack prices **

Service Tools & Miscellaneous

MJ-01	Mini Jack (w.b. mowers)	\$ 179.00	\$ 25.00	\$ 204.00
SJ-01	Super Jack (ztr and w.b mowers)	\$ 249.00	\$ 25.00	\$ 274.00
BA-01	Blade Assist (sharpening guide)	\$ 69.00	\$ 20.00	\$ 89.00
HEZ-01	EZ Hitch (automotive)	\$ 65.00	\$ 15.00	\$ 80.00
TG-101	Treegrator Irrigation Bag	\$ 24.95	\$ 6.00	\$ 31.95



1-877-965-0951

www.ballard-inc.com

36" AND 48" PIRANHA WALK BEHINDS



36" PART
NUMBER:
GT-PF106

48" PART
NUMBER:
GT-MB112

THE **MOST**
AFFORDABLE
GEAR DRIVE ON
THE MARKET!

"They work great on our crews, I wish we would have known about these last season. There the same as our other walk behinds, but we saved a ton of money!" Shawn Heuss, Do It All Services Inc.

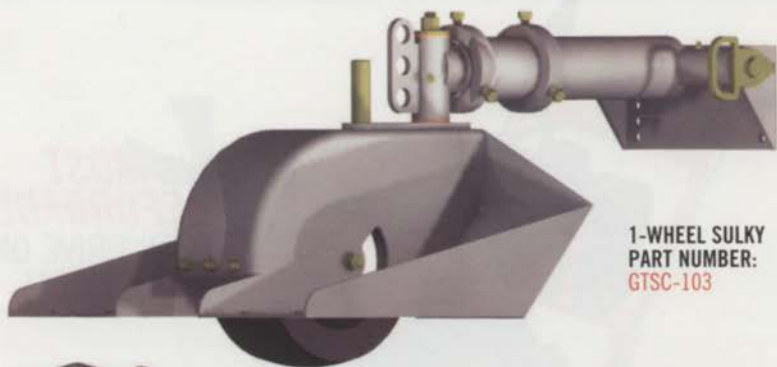
PIRANHA WALK BEHIND FEATURES:

- > 15 HP Kawasaki Engine
- > Easy Pull Start
- > Self-Propelled
- > Adjustable Five Speed Transmission
- > Low Maintenance Unit
- > Quality 1-Year Warranty

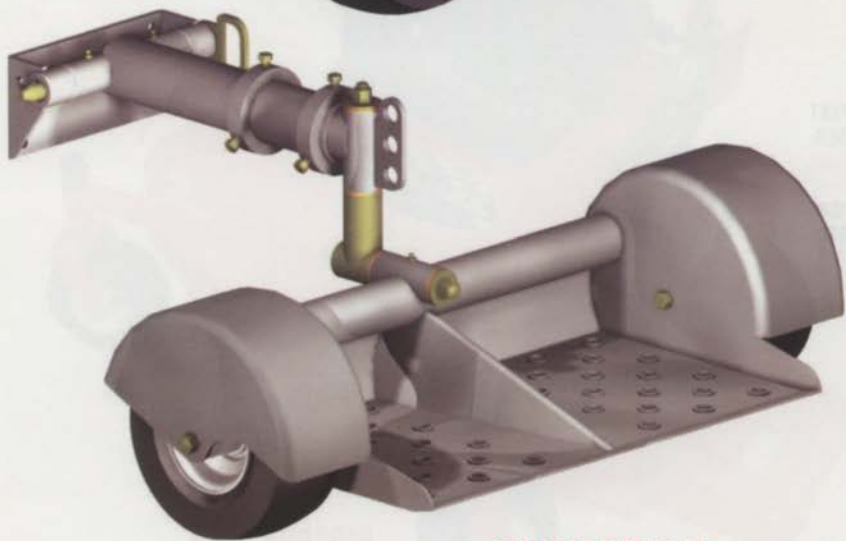
*Ask about **discount pricing** on Mini & Super Jack with mower purchase.

CUSTOMER SERVICE 1.877.965.0951

SULKY



**1-WHEEL SULKY
PART NUMBER:
GTSC-103**



**2-WHEEL SULKY
PART NUMBER:
GTSC-104**

SULKY FEATURES:

- > 1 & 2 Wheel Design
- > Reduces Operator Fatigue
- > Increases Productivity
- > Universal Attachment fits all Walk Behinds
- > Heavy Duty Commercial Design

***GALVANIZED STEEL FINISH = NO RUST,
NO SCRATCHES, MORE DURABILITY**

ADVANCED CHUTE



PART
NUMBER:
AC-101

ADVANCED CHUTE FEATURES:

- > Save Time – reduce raking, blowing, and re-mowing
- > Save Money – Using fewer man hours and less fuel
- > Increase Safety – By protecting motorist, pedestrians, workers, and equipment from debris
- > Decrease Liability – By stopping costly debris from damaging windows, vehicles, and people

"I have to say that this thing is a time saver for sure! I have already shaved off 3 hours this week using it. I love it. I only wish I would have found it earlier. Thanks for making such a great product!" Craig Thompson,
Owner of C.T. Lawn and Landscape

Z HITCH + KWIK JACK



Z HITCH
PART NUMBER:
ZH-01

Z HITCH FEATURES:

- Universal Mount for Most Commercial Riders
- Great for Pulling Aerators & Small Trailers
- Red Powercoat Finish *(only)*



KWIK JACK FEATURES:

- Quick & Safe Access Under Mower Deck
- Safety Locks in Both Positions
- No Jacks, Stands or Lifting
- Mounts on all Walk Behinds in Minutes
- Powdercoated Finish
- Quality 1-Year Warranty



KWIK JACK
PART NUMBER:
KJ-01

"It's much easier than using jack stands or buckets. Its great on the job site and in the shop. Thanks for your products!"

Brian Foddrill, BTM, Des Moines, IA

EZ GATE

THE ULTIMATE GATE LIFTING SYSTEM



"I have the Ez Gate "S-Series". I got it at the Expo last summer. In my opinion, it's the best thing I've bought since I've been in business."

Bob Armentrout, *Endless Summer Lawncare*,
Portsmouth, VA

> ADJUSTABLE TENSION



EZ GATE FEATURES:

- > No Rattle Spring Insert
- > Quality 1-Year Warranty
- > Reduces the Lifting by 90%
- > Universal 1-Hour Installation
- > Winner of the OEMmie Award
- > 1 Kit Works on Gates up to 200lbs.
- > Stainless Housing and Aluminum Hardware
- > Saves on Work Comp Claims Due to Back Injury

Note: Works on all utility trailers with side rails

US Patent #6183031

LINE TRIMMER RACKS



HEAVY DUTY STEEL GAUGE TUBING

TRIMMER RACK FEATURES:

- > Made of Vinyl Coated Steel to Protect the Rack from Rust and Your Equipment from Vibration
- > Each Slot can be Individually Locked to Keep Your Equipment from Moving and to Prevent Theft
- > For Open and Enclosed Trailers

1/4" HEAVY DUTY STEEL MOUNTING BASE

2 LINE (OPEN)
TRIMMER RACK
PART NUMBER:
GT-LA011

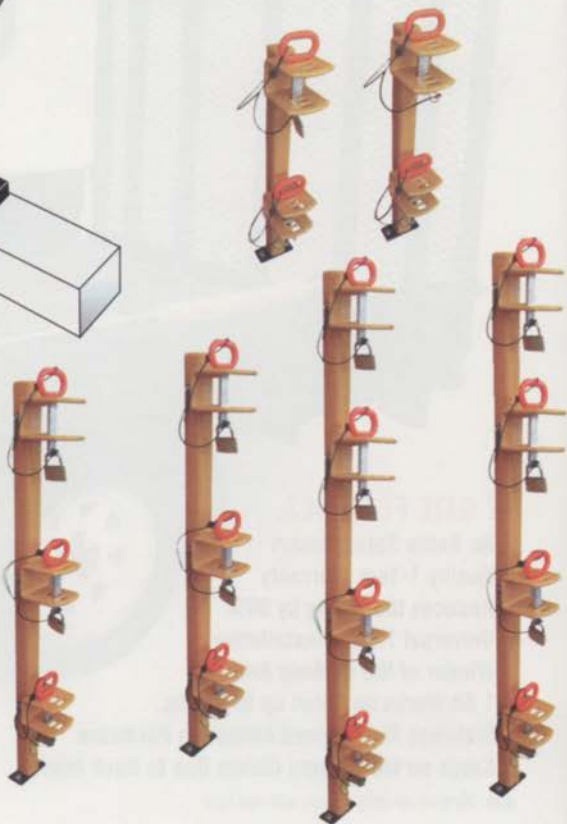
2 LINE (ENCLOSED)
TRIMMER RACK
PART NUMBER:
GT-LD014

3 LINE (OPEN)
TRIMMER RACK
PART NUMBER:
GT-LB012

3 LINE (ENCLOSED)
TRIMMER RACK
PART NUMBER:
GT-LE015

4 LINE (OPEN)
TRIMMER RACK
PART NUMBER:
GT-LG017

4 LINE (ENCLOSED)
TRIMMER RACK
PART NUMBER:
GT-LF016



* **ULTRA-THICK** BAKED ON VINYL

CUSTOMER SERVICE 1.877.965.0951

LOCKABLE GAS CAN + RACKS



5 GALLON
PART NUMBER:
GT-BD034



2 GALLON
PART NUMBER:
GT-BH038

LOCKABLE GAS CAN FEATURES:

- > Heavy Gauge Steel Construction
- > 2 Step Coating Process
- > Steel Pin Locks Can in Place
- > Rack can be Mounted to Open or Enclosed Trailers
- > Includes: Gas Can, Lock, and Pin



WATERCOOLER RACK
PART NUMBER:
GT-BC033



HEDGE TRIMMER RACK
PART NUMBER:
GT-HA041



HAND TOOL RACKS
(ENCLOSED TRAILER)
PART NUMBER:
GT-TB052



HAND TOOL RACK
(OPEN TRAILER)
PART NUMBER:
GT-TA051



BACKPACK SPRAYER
PART NUMBER:
GT-BA031



BACKPACK BLOWER
PART NUMBER:
GT-BB032

Backpack Blower Brackets



ECHO Model
PART NUMBER:
GT-EG084



RED MAX Model
PART NUMBER:
GT-EH085

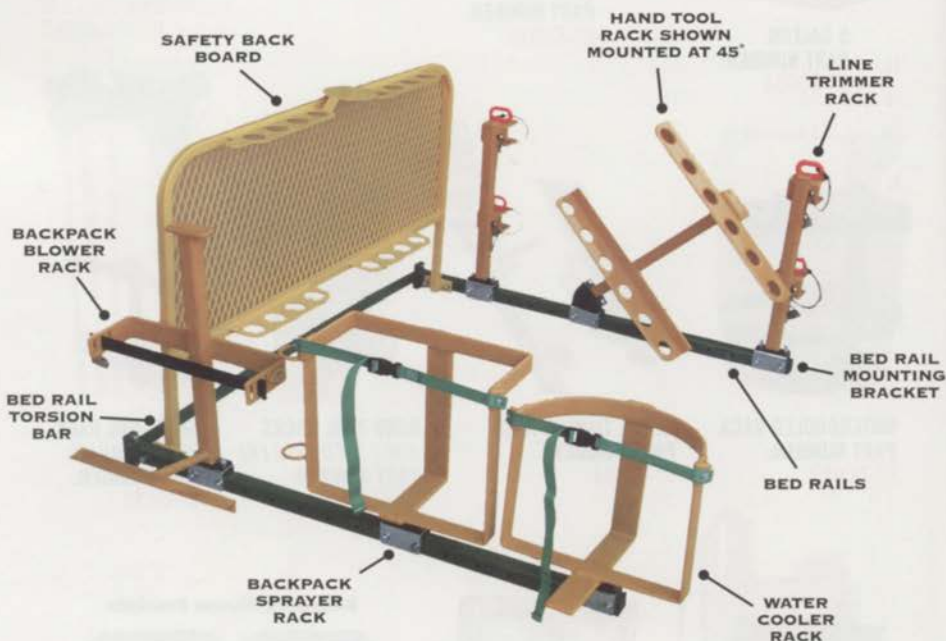
* **ULTRA-THICK** BAKED ON VINYL

UTILITY VEHICLE RACKS

The Bed Rail System is used as a support to mount racks on Utility Vehicles. The racks are mounted to the Bed Rail System with the use of Bed Rail Mounting Brackets.

(Some Bed Rails are connected side to side with a Torsion Bar to eliminate twisting of bed sides.)

PLEASE CALL WITH MAKE & MODEL TO GET CORRECT RACKS & MOUNTING COMPONENTS



JOHN DEERE GATORS



TORO HEAVY DUTY WORKMAN



CLUB CAR CARRY ALL 2



KAWASAKI MULE

CUSTOMER SERVICE 1.877.965.0951

ECONO BAG + COVERS



ECONO BAG (16"x14")



MINI MESH SEAT BAG



ARM REST BAG

ECONO BAG
PART NUMBER:
WE-EBB01

MINI MESH
SEAT BAG
PART NUMBER:
WE-MMRS01

ARM REST BAG
PART NUMBER:
WE-ARB01

BAG FEATURES:

- > Attaches to Handle Bars of All Mowers and Seats of ZTR's
- > Weather Resistant Material for Long Life
- > Buckle Straps for Easy On & Off



HAND HELD BLOWER COVER



BACKPACK BLOWER COVER



DELUXE RIDER Z COVER

HAND HELD
BLOWER PART
NUMBER:
WE-HHN01

BACKPACK
BLOWER PART
NUMBER:
WE-BPN0

DELUXE RIDER Z
PART NUMBER:
WE-DRZN01



ENGINE COVER



TRIMMER HEAD COVERS



ZERO TURN COVER

ENGINE PART
NUMBER:
WE-ECN01

TRIMMER HEAD
PART NUMBER:
WE-TCN01

ZERO TURN
PART NUMBER:
WE-RZN01

WALK BEHIND
PART NUMBER:
WE-MMN01



WALK BEHIND COVER

ALL COVER FEATURES:

- > Protects from Harsh Weather Conditions
- > Protects Engine, Pulleys, Hydro Pumps, Controls & Electronics
- > Quick Release Buckles
- > Universal Fit

SUPER JACK

DON'T SETTLE FOR IMITATIONS!

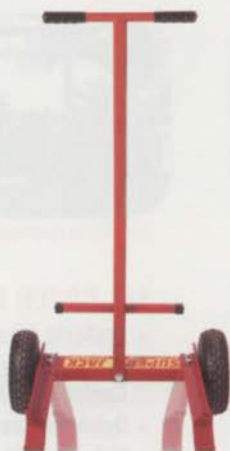


SUPER JACK FEATURES:

- Safe and Easy Access Under Deck
- Stable 2 Arm Adjustable Design
- Works on all ZTR's and Walk Behinds
- Works on Stand on Walk Behind also
- Heavy Duty Design
- Powdercoated Finish
- Quality 1-Year Warranty

"Super Jack make servicing my ZTR's easy and safe. No more floor jacks, my guys love it."

Bob Franey, Total Landscape, St. Louis, MO



>> ADJUSTABLE ARMS <<

**PART
NUMBER:
SJ-01**

CUSTOMER SERVICE 1.877.965.0951

MINI JACK



20° CLEARANCE

MINI JACK FEATURES:

- > Safe and Fast Access Under Deck
- > Stable 2 Arm Adjustable Design
- > Universal Design Works Front and Back of All Walk Behinds
- > Heavy Duty Folding Mechanism for Easy Storage
 - > Powdercoated Finish
 - > Quality 1-Year Warranty
- > Works on Walk Behinds Only



PART
NUMBER:
MJ-01

>> ADJUSTABLE ARMS <<

*"The Mini Jack works great on our walkbehinds.
We use them everyday, thanks."*

Steve Clark, Clark Ind.

BLADE ASSIST + EZ HITCH

FINALLY AN INEXPENSIVE BLADE SHARPENING SETUP!

BLADE ASSIST FEATURES:

- > Easily Mounts Under All Existing Bench Grinders
- > Safer and Less Fatigue than with Other Methods
- > Fast Consistent Sharpening of All Types of Blades
- > Adjustable to Any Angle
- > Powdercoated Finish with Lifetime Guarantee

NOTE: BALLARD, INC. RECOMMENDS THE FOLLOWING

- Mount Grinder on weighted drum or equivalent stand
- Use 1 hp and up Benchgrinders
- For less fatigue keep grinder at waist height



*Stand and Bench Grinder Not Included

BLADE ASSIST PART
NUMBER: BA-01



EZ HITCH PART
NUMBER: HEZ-01

EZ HITCH FEATURES:

- > EZ-Hitch is a patented self centering hitch attachment that is easy to install
- > Allows for one person hookup. Works great!
- > Keeps dents and scratches off your bumper, license plate and tailgate!
- > Eliminates having to get in and out of vehicle numerous times to hook up a trailer
- > Works with all type couplers, works on bumpers or drop hitches

CUSTOMER SERVICE 1.877.965.0951

CAREFREE TIRES



W/O WHEEL
PART NUMBER:
CF-350NW



WITH WHEEL
PART NUMBER:
CF-350W



CAREFREE TIRE FEATURES:

- > Replace pneumatic tires that continually go flat causing unwanted down time and lose of profit
- > Constructed of micro-cellular polyurethane creating a flat-free completely maintenance free tire
- > Easy to replace on existing wheels / sold with or without wheel
- > Unbolt and remove pneumatic tire and tube and replace with Carefree Tire
- > The last time you will ever need to replace a flat

SIZES:

- > 9 x 350-4 Smooth Carefree Tire, 4" Centered hub, 5/8" Roller cage, silver powdercoated wheel
- > 9 x 350-4 Smooth Carefree Tire Only & 9 x 350-4 Turf Carefree Tire only

*** CALL FOR ADDITIONAL SIZES**

FASTRAP+ ADJUSTABLE LINE SPOOL RACKS



SAFELY TRANSPORT:

- > Secures Anything with Wheels in Seconds
- > 4-Wheelers
- > Z-Turn Mowers
- > Walk Behind Mowers
- > Race Cars
- > 1-Kit Contains a Pair

FASTRAP PART
NUMBER: GT-WC001



LINE SPOOL FEATURES:

- > Unique Innovative Design
- > Heavy Gauge Steel Construction
- > Zinc Plated Coating Process
- > Secures 3 & 5 lb. Line Spools

LINE SPOOL
PART NUMBER:
GT-B6037

CUSTOMER SERVICE 1.877.965.0951

TREEGATOR



IF YOU PLANT TREES, YOU NEED TREEGATOR



PART NUMBER:
TG-101



SPECIFICATIONS:

- > Single bag holds approx. 20 gallons of water.
- > Fits minimum 1 inch tree trunk up to a maximum 4 inch tree trunk*
*(*Zip 2 bags together to water 5 to 8 inch trees / 2 bags = 50 gallon setup)*
- > Made of green polyethylene with nylon webbing, black polypro straps & green nylon zippers.
- > UV treated to withstand exposure to sunlight.
- > 2 drip hole locations per bag = Standard drip time of 6 to 10 hours.
- > Fill opening fits up to 3" diameter hose.

MEASUREMENTS:

- > Full - 30" tall x 18" wide *(at base)*

BENEFITS:

- > Landscapers, love its simple, affordable patented tree watering technology.
- > Reduces watering frequency - Fill just once a week for most new tree plantings.
- > Reduce the amount of time spent at tree - Setup and fill in less than 5 minutes.
- > Saves water resources - 100% water absorption with little or no run-off.
- > Deep water penetration with each application - Promotes deep root growth and reduces transplant shock.



Dealer And Distributor Inquiries,

Thank you for your interest in becoming a dealer or distributor for our products. We are continuing to improve and add to our line of accessories. You will find that our products are quality built to withstand the abuse of the commercial landscaper. We offer excellent quantity discounts on our line as well as great manufacture support. Please call our office for more pricing, questions or if you have comments.



CALL US TODAY!
>>> **1.877.965.0951**

WWW.BALLARD-INC.COM



6550 NE 14TH STREET, DES MOINES, IOWA 50313

WWW.BALLARD-INC.COM

TOLL FREE 877-965-0951

PHONE 515-289-3722

FAX 515-965-8934



Authorized Ballard Dealer

NUMBER S02-06



10 Ounces of Prevention

We all know the old saying about the value of an ounce of prevention, and nowhere is this more prevalent than in pre-season mower care. Here are 10 simple maintenance tips.

1. Changing the mower's oil and oil filter (if your mower engine is equipped with an oil filter, which is true for most new mowers) and changing the engine fuel filter are simple and straightforward items that are part of any basic tune up. For a mower that has been sitting in the garage for the last few months, you want to protect against any build ups in the engine or fuel line that would slow the flow of fuel to the carburetor or fuel injection system. Plus, fuel and oil filters are designed to keep unwanted particles out of key areas to keep your engine running smoothly and for as long as possible. But these filters deteriorate over time, which is why spring calls for their replacement.

2. Check the air filter and replace it, if necessary. While checking the filter, be sure to check the pre-cleaner around the filter to make sure it still appears to be in working order.

3. Install new spark plugs. You cannot afford to have your mowers not start for something this simple in the spring, so be sure new plugs are in your mowers.

4. Check for debris in the engine's cooling fins, which serve an often unappreciated yet important purpose for ensuring smooth engine operation. When rotating, these fins pull air into the engine for cooling, but they often suck in dirt, dust, grass clippings, etc., which clog the screen and fins.

5. Be sure to consult your owner's manual for specific instructions on when and how often to grease your equipment throughout the year. But when getting mowers ready to go each spring we recommend greasing all wear points.

6. Any equipment dealer should be able

to sharpen blades for you (if you don't have your own tool) and sell you a blade balancing tool. We know that many maintenance companies ignore this advice, and their turf suffers as a result. Sharper blades result in healthier turf. Balancing is important because sharpening removes material from the blades, which can negatively impact their balance and the resulting air flow beneath the mowing deck.

7. Clean the underside of the cutting deck. Turf or other debris building up under there will ultimately create an unwanted baffle system, which dictates air flow and clippings discharge. If your goal is a quality appearance on your lawns, you do not want this problem. Such clogging can also reduce cut quality by creating a situation where the air flow beneath the deck pushes grass blades down before they get cut, instead of lifting them up for the best, most even cut.

8. Check belts for wear, and replace as necessary. Also check belt tension – too much slack indicates excessive wear.

9. Lube and adjust all cables and check the mower body for cracks, broken welds, etc. Such problems are rare, but they are also safety hazards so you want to find them before the mowers are out in the field.

10. Start the mower and test its safety systems. For a riding mower, simply turn on the mower, sit in the seat, leave the brake on and pull lap bars in. If the engine doesn't cut off, then the lap bars switch is bad and needs to be repaired. For walk-behind units, turn on the mowers and engage the engine blades. Then take your hands off the steering levers – if the mower doesn't cut off, then you have found a safety switch that needs to be repaired.

These steps are all important if you care about the quality of your work, your customers' satisfaction, your employees' safety and your bottom line. **LL**

j.b. toorish and michael steve

are part of LESCO's Tech Services Department. They can be reached at techguys@lesco.com or at 800/321-5325 ext. 3150 to answer technical questions.

breaking news

TPI President Offers Turf Outlook

EAST DUNDEE, III. – As the spring season nears, Warren Bell, president of Turfgrass Producers International (TPI), offers insight into the challenges he believes turfgrass sod producers and the green industry as a whole may have to face this year in his annual state of the industry report.

"A projected slowdown in housing starts, the cost and availability of labor, increasing insurance and health care costs and many other economic indicators may leave you scratching your head this year," says Bell, who is also co-owner of Biograss Sod Farm, Sandy, Utah. "Add to that the numerous forecasts and predictions of respected economists and industry professionals and you could become a bit overwhelmed. The key in projecting what the future may offer requires that you take into account all of the information that's available, keep it in proper perspective, and evaluate the information so you can plan effectively based on what might or might not unfold."

UPCOMING CHALLENGES. The White House projected the U.S. economy would expand 3.4 percent in 2006 and would record a growth rate of 3.5 percent for 2005, Bell says. "Reuters news service commented that despite the vibrant growth, many Americans have been anxious about rising oil prices, a reality that certainly impacted the agriculture industry and business and commerce nationwide in recent months," he also points out.

According to Bell, another economic equation that has to be taken into account is new home construc-

tion. David Seiders, chief economist for The National Association of Home Builders, says, "We see a flattening of housing starts and the beginning of a cooling process." Seiders' forecast predicts housing construction will drop by 4.8 percent to around 1.92 million starts in 2006.

Other considerations Bell referred to include a mixed labor market, unpredictable energy prices and changing interest rates. Bell says he expects the cost of oil – diesel more than gasoline – to have the biggest negative impact on the industry. "Out here in Utah, we hired an agricultural economist from Utah State to work with us and try to help us understand the relationships with price increases in gas and diesel and the overall impact it would have on turf producers in our area," Bell says. "What he told us was pretty staggering. When one considers the cost of transporting your products, turf production and trucking, fuel to run around and visit customers and the very important impact of how these prices affect your employees' daily lives, we're looking at an increase of about half a cent per square foot on our cost of operation."

Bell emphasizes that increased costs will affect every company differently depending on their location and their advance planning. He notes that his own company is already working to offset costs.

INDUSTRY ADVOCACY. Green industry legislation and advocacy are also among the issues Bell says should be priorities in 2006. "In looking ahead to 2006, one has to consider recent events that may influence decision makers in the coming



continued on page 22



**They say many
hands make light work.**

**What they don't say is
how much a bunch of
hands goes for
these days.**

Sprayable PREEMERGENT BROADLEAF Herbicide

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continued from page 20

TPI President Offers Turf Outlook



year," he says, noting the value that The Professional Landscape Network's (PLANET) annual Legislative Day on the Hill brings to making industry issues heard on Capitol Hill.

"This is an opportunity for our members to see how Congress works and to lobby their elected officials on issues facing our industry," explains Tom Delaney, director of government affairs for PLANET, adding that this year's event takes place July 23-25 in Washington, D.C. "This is also how legislators become aware of the issues facing small businesses as well as larger corporations in the green industry."

Similarly, in September 2005, representatives of the turfgrass industry had a face-to-face meeting with Secretary of Agriculture Mike Johanns to discuss the turfgrass industry and the National Turfgrass Research Initiative (NTRI). During the course of that meeting Johanns was provided with current information conveying the breadth and scope of the turfgrass industry and its importance to the U.S. economy, restrictions and/or regulations that challenge the turfgrass industry, and the need for government support in the area of basic turfgrass research to address issues facing the industry.

"We have so much tremendous scientifically-based data supporting the fact that green landscapes are healthy, not only to the environment, but also to people's lifestyles and to the economy," Bell tells *Lawn & Landscape*. "The turf industry is a \$40 billion dollar part of the U.S. economy, but that's not common knowledge. That makes advocacy of our industry within the legislative process so important. While a lot of people have become cynical over the years with the political process, we actually have the best political system imaginable because of that opportunity to have face to face time with our legislators. As a constituent, my senators and my congressional delegation have shown that they appreciate meeting with me and they really do listen to what we have to say. More of us need to show up and let them know what we're interested in to ensure that things like the NTRI continue to help our industry."



FACING THE CHALLENGES. Bell says weather will be, as always, an unpredictable factor throughout 2006, but that learning from the monstrous weather events of 2005 can help.

"There's no denying that the global natural disasters of 2005 impacted the lives of families worldwide and recent natural disasters in the U.S. impacted our nation's economy and the lives of thousands of families in ways that are far too numerous to mention," he says. "What the 2006 spring and summer seasons

have in store for us in terms of weather is anybody's guess. As for realizing success, a great deal depends on how well we plan, our ability to anticipate the possibilities, how well we adapt to change and our readiness to expect the unexpected."

Considering the size of the industry – \$40 billion, with contributions of an additional \$147

billion in related business – as well as its environmental significance and scope, Bell says it is apparent that to increase business, the industry must continue to send a positive message on the benefits of turfgrass and green spaces.

"If we commit ourselves to address these challenges through effective communication, we can soften the blow of any less than promising economic forecast and most certainly reap the rewards that come with positive economic growth," Bell says, noting that TPI will spend 2006 continuing to build on its developing relationship with extension specialists, county agents, university researchers, scientists, educators and the general public. Moreover, Bell encourages all industry professionals to participate in industry and business associations at all levels to help increase the industry's professionalism.

"It's about education and conferences, staying abreast of things like the impact of fuel prices and rising interest rates and what that's going to do," Bell says. "Associations are great at keeping tabs on how these economic factors are affecting their members and can often provide opportunities to help members manage their effects throughout the year." – Lauren Spiers Hunter

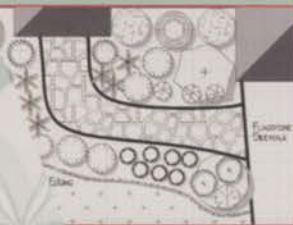
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MANUFACTURER MINUTES



Ariens Invests \$6.5 Million in Increased Productivity

BRILLION, WIS. – Ariens Co. announced it is making a \$6.5 million capital investment in the company's production and training this year. Part of an ongoing effort to improve production efficiency, much of the investment will focus on reducing delivery lead times for the company's walk-behind power equipment products. The new production cells are scheduled to be operational for the 2006-2007 production season, which will begin in May.

"This investment will allow us to take on the challenges of worldwide sources of supply," says Dan Ariens, president of Ariens Co.

Part of the capital investment will be implementing four new powder-coating systems in the company's Plant 3 location, allowing Ariens to convert raw materials to finished goods in a single location for all of the company's walk-behind power equipment products, including Sno-Thro machines, walk-behind mowers and wheeled string trimmers. To fully utilize the efficiency of the new powder-coating systems, the company is also making location changes within its plant

operations that allow for fully integrated one-piece flow manufacturing.

"We're right in the middle of a fairly inclusive move across the company," Ariens told *Lawn & Landscape*. "A lot of systems will be moving within our plants and that's going to require a lot of effort and man power, but it will help us be much more productive overall."

Other plant upgrades will include the creation of a new state-of-the-art production and engineering training facility. Upon completion of the training center, each Ariens plant will have its own independent learning centers.

"The addition of this third training facility provides opportunities for all of our associates to learn the techniques of the Ariens Production System in a classroom setting, reinforcing what they are learning as part of hands-on training," says Ariens. "It will also be used to teach the company's 15 Guiding Principles of the Ariens management system as part of new employee orientation." – *Lauren Spiers Hunter*

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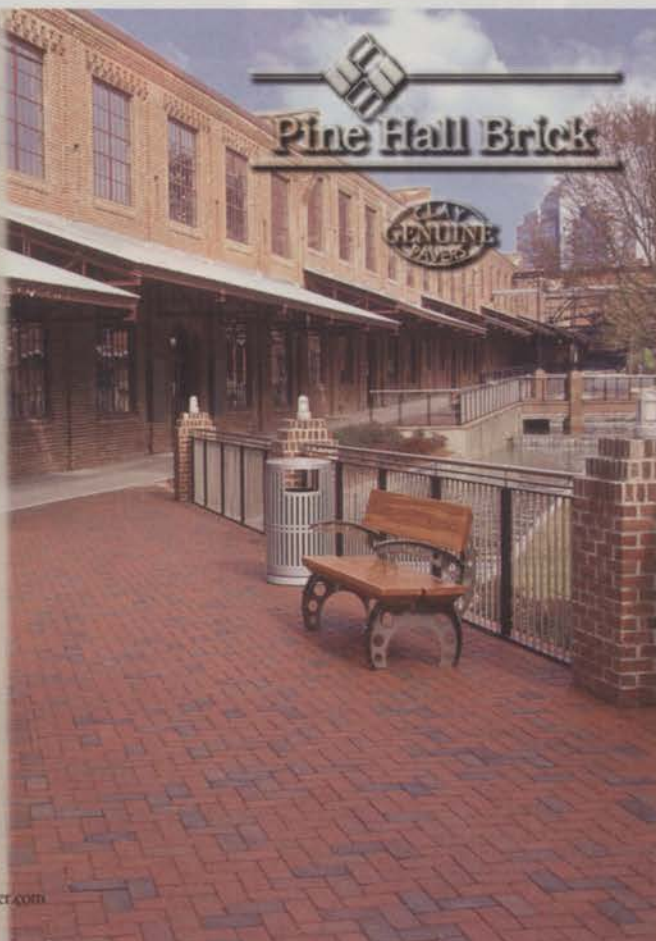
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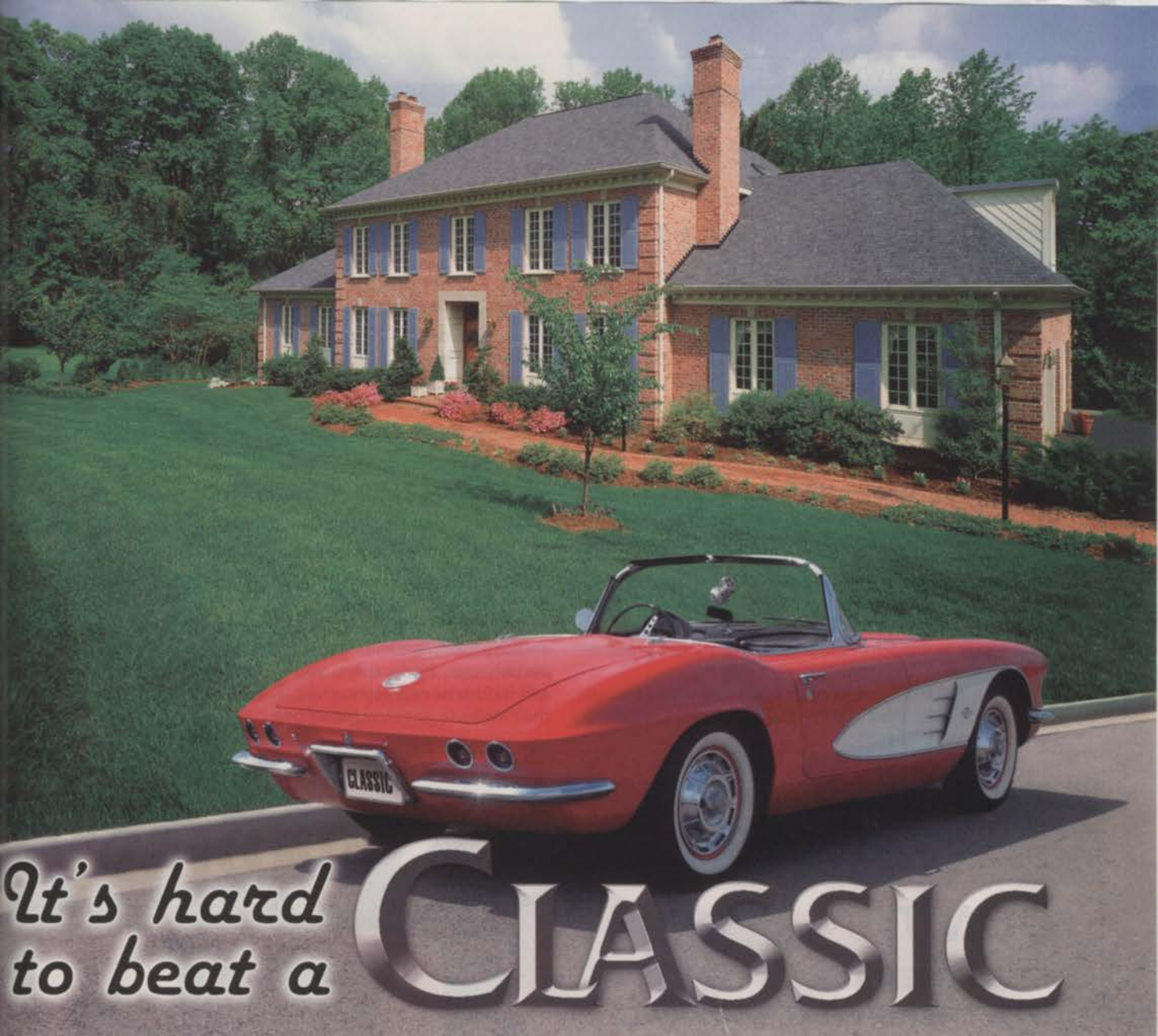
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ASSOCIATION NEWS



PTC Announces 2006 Leadership

John Chassard, director of grounds at the Lehigh Country Club, Allentown, Pa., will serve as president of the Pennsylvania Turfgrass Council (PTC) for 2006. He has been a member of the board since 1993, and a member of PTC since 1987.

Vice President of the organization will be Jeffrey Fry, Lebanon Country Club, Lebanon, Pa. and Secretary-Treasurer will be Matt Shaffer, Merion Golf Club, Ardmore, Pa. Jerred Golden, Hersheys Mill Golf Club and Landscape Co., West Chester, Pa., is the immediate past president. The officers serve one-year terms. Shaffer replaces Terry Laurent who moved out of Pennsylvania.

Chassard says he will continue to work to raise awareness of the Penn State Turfgrass Research Fund and its important "Growing the Game" program, which raises funds to support research. He is a 1984 graduate of Penn State.

Joining the PTD board of director are Sam Stimmel, Profile Products, Washington, Pa. and Mark DelSantro,

Syngenta Professional Products, Glenmoore, Pa., whose terms will expire in 2008. Those continuing service on the board for 2006 include:

- Darrin Batsky, Chartiers Country Club, Pittsburgh, Pa.
- Thomas Bettle, Birdsfoot Golf Club, Leechburg, Pa.
- Daniel Douglas, Reading Phillies Baseball Club, Reading, Pa.
- James Loke, Bent Creek Country Club, Lititz, Pa.
- Richard Pagett, Centre Hills Country Club, State College, Pa.
- Scott Schukraft, Huntsville Golf Club, Shavertown, Pa.
- Daniel Douglas, Reading Phillies Baseball Club, Reading, Pa.

Members of the Pennsylvania Turfgrass Council include golf course superintendents, owners/operators of lawn care services, nurserymen, landscapers, sod growers, sports field managers and industrial representatives. For more information, contact their website at www.paturf.org.



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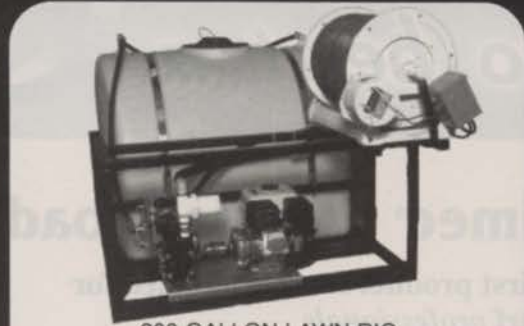
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USE READER SERVICE # 27

Garden Graphics Changes Name to DynaSCAPE

BURLINGTON, ONTARIO – Green industry software manufacturer Garden Graphics has changed its name to DynaSCAPE Software. The name change also encompasses updated names for its design, estimating and management software programs.

"This change simplifies our product line and strengthens our marketing message as a source of professional quality software that uniquely integrates design, quotation and comprehensive business management tools," says Everett DeJong, senior vice president of marketing and communications for the company.

DynaSCAPE Marketing Director Dave Malda tells *Lawn & Landscape* that the former Garden Graphics name was sometimes misconstrued by tradeshow goers and other potential clients who were unaware that the company produced software. "We also found that a lot of people liked the name of our DynaSCAPE software and would often refer to us as

'DynaSCAPE,' instead of 'Garden Graphics,'" he explains. "We took our cue from there and decided to pick up on the DynaSCAPE word and use it across the board."

Malda says the process of changing over identities has taken about three months, and that there's still some work to do behind the scenes. "We're continually uncovering things that will need to be updated, but we're trying to make the process as smooth as possible so as not to confuse our current or potential clients," he says.

In addition to updating the corporate name, DynaSCAPE also is renaming the products in its line of software offerings. While the products will remain the same, DynaSCAPE says their new names will more effectively demonstrate each component's strength.

Additionally, DynaSCAPE launched an updated Web site to match its new identity. The new site, DynaSCAPE.com, replaces www.gardengraphics.com.

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PERSONNEL ANNOUNCEMENTS

- **Karen Reardon** joined the Responsible Industry for a Sound Environment as its new director of communications.
- **John Turner** returned to field sales as a lawn and landscape sales representative for Bayer Environmental Science, covering Illinois, Indiana, Wisconsin and Kentucky. Additionally, **Jason Kuhlemeier** joined Bayer Environmental Science's marketing team as a marketing specialist.
- Chemilizer appointed **Todd Macon** to horticulture retail specialist.
- **Jim Boike** joined the sales team at Vista Professional Outdoor Lighting named as district manager for San Diego and Orange counties in Southern California.
- Syngenta Professional Products announced that **Fred Montgomery** and **Steve Abler** joined its turf and ornamental team as sales representatives. Montgomery will serve customers in New York and Abler will serve customers in Wisconsin and the upper peninsula of Michigan.
- Advan appointed **Brady Surrena** as Midwest area manager of the company's turf and ornamental division.



Karen Reardon



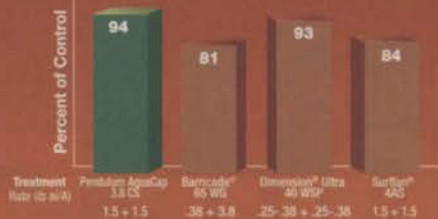
John Turner

- **Ken Loder** joined Wright Manufacturing as regional sales and marketing manager, serving distributors located throughout the Northeastern United States.
- Otterbine Barebo made **John Ouellette** the company's new northeast regional sales manager.
- Solo named **David Longfield** as its new president. He succeeds former company President **James Dunne**, who retired in June.
- RSC Equipment Rental named **Phil Hobson** to the new position of vice president of customer service and process innovation.
- Quixote Transportation Technologies (QTT) appointed **Greg Friend** as senior international sales manager and **Dale Bader** as southern regional sales manager for Sur-

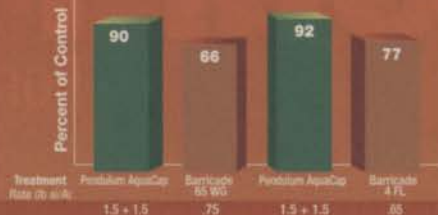


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1. North Carolina State University and Clemson University (mean from two locations), 2003. Evaluated 146-164 days after application of first treatment in March. Partial Data Shown.
 2. University of Maryland, 2004. Evaluated 145 days after first treatment in March. Partial Data Shown.
 3. Penn State University, 2004. Evaluated 130 days after application of first treatment in March. Partial Data Shown.



Phil Hobson



David Longfield



Ken Lader



Greg Friend



John Ouellette



Stephen Johnston

face Systems (SSI), a member of QTT. Surface Systems also changed Dale Bader's role, making him responsible for sales of all SSI and QTT products and services in the southern region, as well as giving him a supporting position for the sales and marketing team on sales of SSI's weather forecasting services.

· Allmand Bros. promoted **Brad Allmand** to marketing manager and assigned Tom Martin to an expanded sales territory (regional sales manager for Iowa, Nebraska, Kansas, Colorado, Utah, New Mexico, North and South Dakota, Montana, Wyoming and Idaho).

· The F.A. Bartlett Tree Expert Co. has promoted **Stephen Johnston** to vice president. Johnston has been responsible for the company's operations in the southeastern United

States for more than five years. As vice president, he will continue this work and further the company's growth and development in this area of the country. Prior to joining Bartlett, Johnston owned Johnston Tree, Boca Raton, Fla., for six years.

· Highland Outdoor, Olathe, Kan., announced recently that **Jason Cupp** has been named chairman of the board for the company. In his new position, Cupp will focus on strategic initiatives for the high-end design/build/maintenance firm and will be the voice of the company. Moving into the position of president and chief executive officer at the company is **Chad Fulk**, who will focus on achieving sales, operational and financial goals on daily basis.

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IN BUSINESS

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· Husqvarna and Shindaiwa both recently announced that they have been given preferred vendor status with the TruGreen Cos.

· Hunter Industries established a voluntary matching contribution program whereby its Preferred Contractors can redeem points earned on Hunter product purchases for donations to Project EverGreen. Hunter Preferred Contractors earn one point for every \$10 they spend and can redeem those points for merchandise and other items. Via this new matching program, they now have the option to submit a claim for the points in Project EverGreen's name, and, in doing so, 45 cents will be donated to Project EverGreen for every point the contractor redeems. Hunter will also match 100 percent of the contributions made by its Preferred Contractors in the U.S. and Canada. Additionally, Hunter has plans to provide irrigation system components and materials, free of charge, for use in selected Project Evergreen landscape renovations and consumer outreach projects in 2006.

· Shindaiwa recently hosted its North American Distributor Meeting, where it debuted its new assembly operation and warehouse location in Tualatin, Ore. Additionally, Shindaiwa entered into an agreement with the Symbiot Business Group to supply Symbiot's member companies with Shindaiwa handheld power equipment.

CORRECTION

In its January 2006 issue on page 32, *Lawn & Landscape* inadvertently announced that Ariens was celebrating its 90th anniversary. This year actually marks Gravely's 90th anniversary. *Lawn & Landscape* regrets the error.



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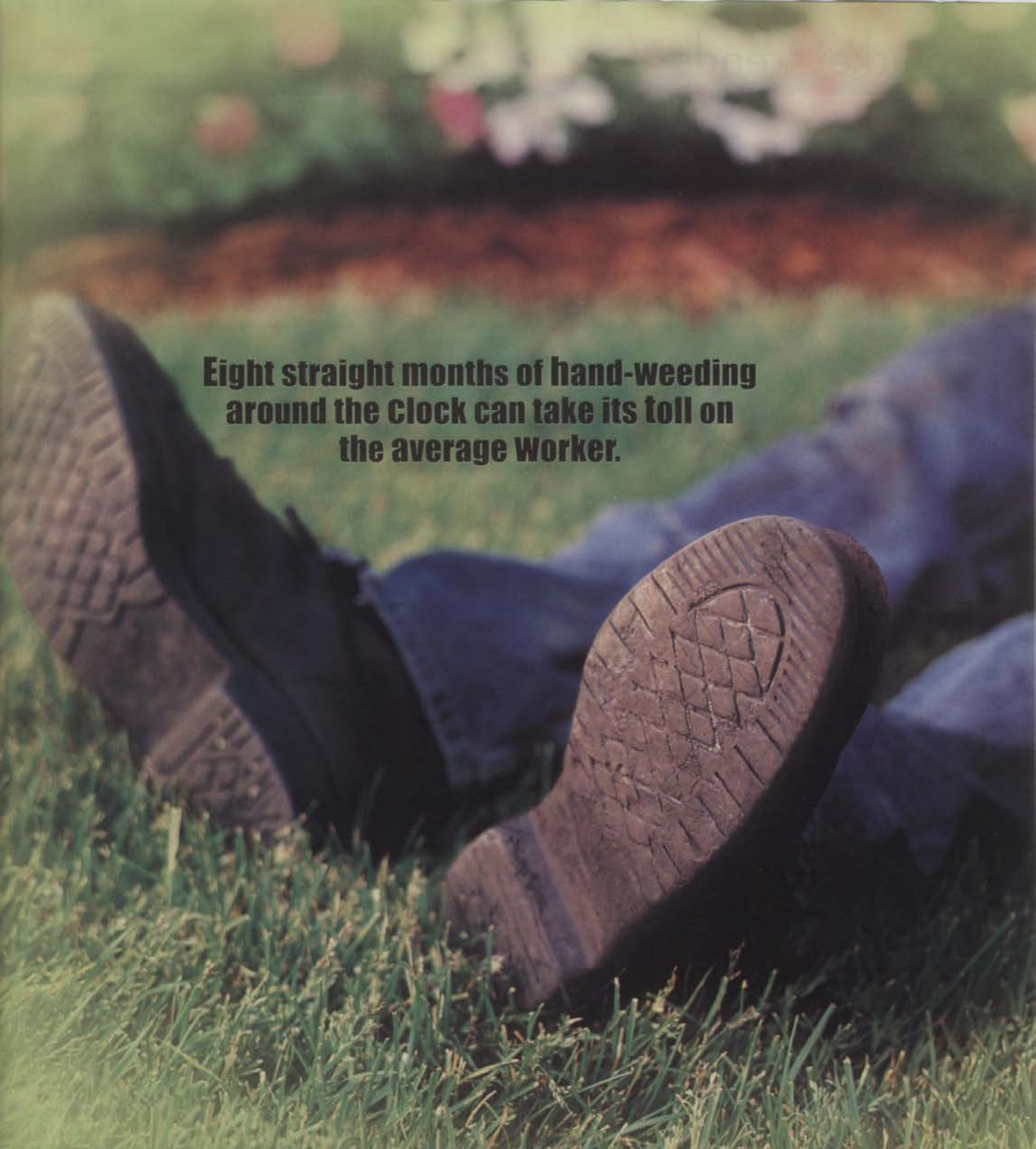
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Pricing Pressures, Labor Lead Business Owner Challenges



Small business owners find it difficult to pass on their rising costs to customers, according to a recent study.

Nearly 21 percent of small business owners indicated pricing pressures as a major issue for their businesses over the next 12 months, nearly double those who reported this a year ago, according to the study conducted by Merrill Lynch. The study also discovered labor costs posed the greatest threat to small business margins in 2006.

A remarkable 40 percent of respondents cite pricing as their primary tool for addressing competition in 2006, up from 35 percent in the first quarter of last year. This data, combined with the finding that around 36 percent of the sample describes competitive pressures as "fierce," suggests that inflationary fears in the wider economy may be overblown.

Labor-related costs are shaping up to be a risk to operating margins. More than 29 percent of respondents cite labor as a major threat to operating margins over the next 12 months, a 7-percent increase compared to the first quarter of 2005. Business services is the sector most threatened by labor costs, with 55 percent of these managers naming labor costs as their No. 1 concern. In addition to rising wage bills, survey participants fret over increases in benefit and health insurance costs.

A focus on growth by expanding into existing markets is a consistent theme in this survey. A total of 59 percent say higher market share is their primary goal, up from 50 percent who put it at No. 1 in the first quarter of last year. — Mike Zawacki

THE CUSTOMER CONNECTION



Help Your Clients Help You — and Themselves

With its goal of educating the public on the benefits of green spaces, Project Evergreen (www.projectevergreen.com) offers the following tips that you can pass onto your clients.

PET-FRIENDLY TURF. Educate your clients on these options for healthy, pet-friendly lawns.

- Water to prevent dog and cat urine from burning your lawn.
- Modify your pet's diet to decrease high nitrogen levels in urine, thus preventing brown spots on your lawn.
- Build fences or use wire cages to keep pets away from plants, trees and shrubs.
- To prevent dog paths if a fence surrounds your property, do not try to grow any plants in

the area immediately adjacent to the fence.

- Rather than fighting it, plan your yard around your dog's predictability.
- Install walkways over existing dog paths.
- Train your dog to use a designated area.
- Beware of planting poisonous plants.

GET GREEN, GET FIT. This year more than ever, Americans will find a calendar full of events encouraging them to get outside and increase their fitness levels. "And green space can provide a definite incentive to get outside and get moving," says Den Gardner, executive director of Project EverGreen. In addition, green space benefits people by reducing air conditioning costs and increasing property values. — Heather Wood



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USE READER SERVICE # 32



CALENDAR

Calendar Note

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

MARCH 13 - 14 Illinois Landscape Contractors Association Institute: Foreman Training, Supervisory & Technical Worksite Safety, Rolling Meadows, Ill.
Contact: www.ilca.net, 630/472-2851

MARCH 13 - 16 World of Asphalt 2006 Show & Conference, Orlando, Fla.
Contact: www.worldofasphalt.com, 800/867-6060

MARCH 14 Beacon Athletics Field Maintenance Seminar, Plano, Texas.
Contact: www.beaconathletics.com, 800/747-5985

MARCH 14 - 16 Michigan Green Industry Association CARTS 2006 - Certified Applicator/Registered Technician Seminar. Location: TBD
Contact: www.landscape.org, 248/646-4992

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DIRECTIONS FOR USE: This LESCO product is a professional quality turf fertilizer for use on fairways, tees, and greens. The best results with this product are obtained when applied to dry turf and actively growing grass. Avoid application after application. Avoid mowing immediately following application. Avoid fertilizing off walks and paths to avoid discoloration. Apply to five applications per 1,000 sq ft per year. Use with weather.

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MARCH 15 – 19 San Francisco Flower & Garden Show, San Francisco, Calif. Contact: www.gardenshow.com, 800/569-2832

MARCH 16 Associated Landscape Contractors of Colorado "Managing For Productivity" seminar Presented by Gary Harvey of Achievement Dynamics, Denver, Colo. Contact: www.alcc.com, 303/757-5611

MARCH 16 Illinois Landscape Contractors Association Institute: Technical Skills – Equipment Training, Wheaton, Ill. Contact: www.ilca.net, 630/472-2851

MARCH 16 – 19 GardenScape 2006 Greater Rochester Flower & Garden Show, Rochester, N.Y. Contact: bob@gardenscapepros.com, www.rochesterflowershow.com/, 585/381-9710

MARCH 18 Southwest Virginia Nursery & Landscape Association "Plant Introduction - Georgia Style," Blacksburg, Va. Contact: info@swvnla.org, www.swvnla.org/, 540/721-2081

MARCH 20 – 23 University of Washington Vehicle Maintenance Management Conference, Seattle, Wash. Contact: www.engr.washington.edu, 206/543-0340

MARCH 23 – 26 Professional Landcare Network Student Career Days, Provo, Utah. Contact: www.landcarenetwork.org, 800/395-2522

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For example, throughout Michigan, grubs attack about twice a year to devour the succulent roots of the turf grass you've so painstakingly been tending for your clients.

To make matters more difficult, the second feasting takes place so late in the season that, if unattended, the damage isn't noticeable until the following spring. By then, says Chris Ostrander, operations

manager at Battle Creek Landscape Service in Battle Creek, Mich., it's too late.

This is why lawn care operators (LCOs) who do battle with white grubs attempt to convince their clients that a preventive control service is more effective than eradicating the problem only curatively. In the process, a preventive grub control program can become an easy add-on service LCOs can rely on for early- and late-season revenues.

THE BATTLE OF BATTLE CREEK. Battle Creek Landscape Service first offered grub control services seven years ago in response to client demand. However,



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the service didn't become a company staple until the summer 2004 when entire lawns in the Battle Creek area were devastated by the insect.

By then, local LCOs had already locked horns with Japanese beetles, but the dry, hot weather that season – beetle-friendly conditions – contributed to a population explosion.

The late-season larvae hatch the previous year killed the lawns, but the true extent of the damage wasn't noticeable until spring 2004, when many Battle Creek lawns showed signs of damage.

That season's infestation actually helped their cause because now that customers had seen the damage, they were more willing to add a grub control program to their routine service. Ostrander says their services are offered a la carte.

While they didn't lose customers, Battle Creek Landscape Service, which today includes grub-control programs in every job proposal, did

have to begin educating their clients that grub infestation doesn't happen over night.

Battle Creek Landscape Service recognized an opportunity to educate their client base so they could begin to make intelligent service choices rather than just considering the financial bottom line, says Tom Barry, the firm's founder.

To address the need to educate clients, Barry produces a quarterly, black-and-white, two-to-four page newsletter, written in-house by his employees, and distributes it to current and past customers. The content highlights landscaping issues and warns customers of each season's hazards. Nearly 90 percent of Battle Creek Landscape Service clients will purchase the preventive service once they are educated on the severity of lawn damage, not only from the root-hungry grubs, but also from the raccoons and other critters that dig them up, Barry says.

Today, aside from maintenance and mowing, grub control is one of Battle Creek Landscape Service's most profitable services because customers believe the treatment process is beyond their expertise and they're less willing to risk it themselves because the condition of their lawn is at stake.

ON THE ATTACK. Putting a program in place to educate clients was only one phase of Battle Creek Landscape Services plan to eradicate the underground grub menace.

Timing is the key for successful grub control because the pesticides need to be active in the ground at specific times of the year in order to effectively control an infestation. To remain true to this timetable, Battle Creek Landscape Service sends their proposals to their customer base by Feb. 1 and attempts to get them signed by March 1.

Then, the first grub control application goes down in June after the



deciphering the damage

White grubs eat organic matter including the roots of plants. Therefore, turf damage first appears to be drought stress, explains David Shetlar, assistant professor of landscape entomology, The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio.

"Heavily infested turf first appears gray-green and wilts rapidly in the hot sun," Shetlar describes, adding that continued feeding can cause the turf to die in large irregular patches. "The tunneling of the larvae cause the turf to feel spongy under foot and the turf can often be rolled back like a loose carpet."

And though grub populations may not cause turf injury that is quickly apparent, predatory mammals, such as skunks, raccoons, opossums and moles, dig into the turf in search of a grub meal when they are present. Once turf reaches this level of damage,

overseeding is usually required in spots, in addition to insecticide treatments to eliminate the grubs.

When it comes to controlling grubs, Shetlar says lawn care technicians should apply pesticides when the grubs are small and actively feeding yet late enough to catch all of the population.

In general, reducing thatch and using good irrigation after making a pesticide application will increase control. It is also recommended that grass clippings be returned to the lawn for one to two mowings after a grub insecticide application. Do not wait more than 30 days to recheck the grub infestation, especially if the original population was high. If the grub population has not been reduced below six grubs per square foot consider reapplication of another pesticide. — *Nicole Wisniewski*

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USE READER SERVICE # 35

first hatch of the season, Ostrander says. The second application should be completed around end of July to the middle of August, right after the second hatch.

"The two applications ensure both hatches are killed before too much damage is done," Ostrander says. "You can't kill the egg, so you have to wait until they hatch. Then the grubs grow pretty rapidly. But after you apply the product, instead of a newly hatched grub eating the lawn, it eats the grub control product and dies."

Battle Creek Landscape Service chose two grub control products, and the particular product used correlates with the time the client requests the service. One product lasts longer, Barry says, and it's applied in a low dosage. The second product works faster but doesn't remain active in the soil for as long.

Although one product is more expensive, Barry made the decision to charge a flat fee of \$7 per 1,000

square feet for the pesticide in order to alleviate the client confusion often encountered when dealing with price differences. Barry covers the cost difference by basing the prices off the more expensive brand. "The biggest challenge with grub control is the timing of the application," Ostrander says. "The more expensive product works longer so if the application is a little too early or late, it has a better chance of still being effective. We use this product more often."

For treatment, Battle Creek Landscape Service charges about \$8 per 1,000 square feet plus a \$15 base fee, less if the client has a larger area to cover, Barry says. "As we approach an acre or more we start giving discounts," Barry says. "We have a rate sheet. As square footage increases, the price per 1,000 square feet decreases. For half an acre we charge \$178, but for an entire acre, we charge \$289. We know the cost of labor and the cost of the product and we know it doesn't take much

longer to treat an acre than it does to treat a half acre. If it takes a half hour to treat half an acre, it will take 45 minutes to treat an entire acre."

Since they utilized granular grub-control products, Battle Creek Landscape Service was able to use its existing spreaders and didn't need to incur new equipment costs. Likewise, labor costs were not impacted by the program. The labor involved is just one certified technician, making about \$12 an hour. That technician checks the label and treats the square footage, according to the rate printed on the product label.

Battle Creek Landscape Service also develops a job cost report for each job. When they return the following season, they have history on that job and know exactly how much everything is going to cost. They have a formula for pricing each service based on square footage. They adjust their prices depending on the profit they made the previous season. **LL**

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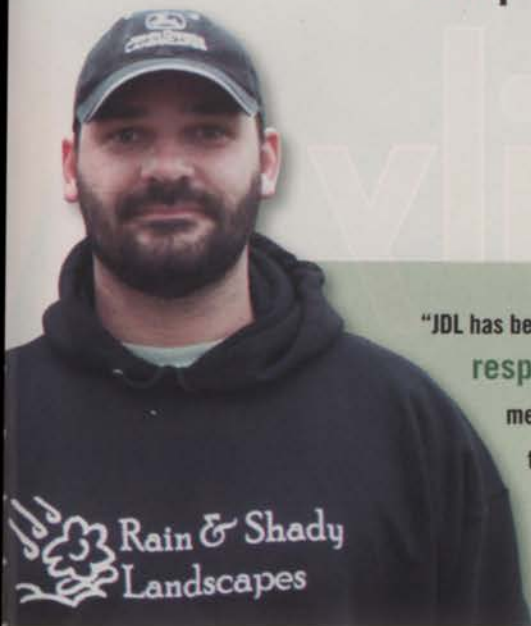


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USE READER SERVICE # 37

by mike zawacki

All in the Family

Mike Young spent 32 years building Lawn & Shrub and in one morning signed it over to his son, Kirk. How one father successfully entrusted the family business to the next generation.

Photo: Michael St. Andre

M

ike Young needed a vacation.

And it was about time, too. At last count, the owner of Lafayette-Ind.-based Lawn & Shrub figured the last three decades owed him about 51 weeks of vacation. The then 62-year-old landscape contractor knew he wasn't getting any younger and his wife, Pat, was growing more impatient for the couple to finally do some serious traveling together.

"And I thought about taking it all at once, too," Mike Young says about the prospects of a nearly year-long absence from his landscape business. But he couldn't, at least not in good conscience. His workaholic Type-A personality would tie his insides up in knots if he left his \$2.5 million-per-year landscaping business for any extended period of time.



lawn & shrub

OWNER/PRESIDENT: Kirk Young
HEADQUARTERS: Lafayette, Ind.
FOUNDED: In May 1973, Mike Young started the landscape firm as Lawn-A-Mat of Greater Lafayette, a lawn-care franchise. Young changed the name in 1978 when the New York-based franchisor declared bankruptcy.

EMPLOYEES: 23 year-round field officers, nine office employees and managers and no seasonal employees.

SERVICE BREAKOUT: 31 percent mowing and landscape maintenance, 31 percent landscape and hardscape installation, 19 percent irrigation installation and service, 9 percent turf and ornamental fertilizing and pesticide applications, 9 percent snow and ice removal services, 1 percent power washing.

CLIENT BREAKOUT: 60 percent residential, 40 percent commercial

REVENUE BREAKOUT:

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2005 Revenue:\$2.6 million

TOP CHALLENGES IN 2006:

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"My dad wanted to leave and not feel guilty about not doing a job or being here in person for two to three weeks at a time," Kirk Young, his son, says. "In his mind, he felt that it wasn't right."

There remained one option. "I was ready to be cut loose," Mike Young says.

Together, the Young family embarked on a journey nearly every family-owned business finds itself taking at some point, passing the baton of ownership from one generation to the next.

IT'S TIME TO SELL. Selling the family's landscape business wasn't a hasty decision for Mike Young.

"In my 40s I wanted the choice when I was in my 50s and 60s whether to work or not," he says. "I looked at my family and I considered our needs now and in the future, and I said to myself, 'I don't have to work any longer if I don't want to.' I had the means to shed this responsibility



the best advice

Every parent passes on the wisdom of their years to their sons or daughters, whether they want to hear it or not. In the case of running the family business, those pearls are keys to success.

So when Mike Young turned over Lafayette, Ind.-based Lawn & Shrub to his son, Kirk, what advice did he give the new owner? "Be more patient than your father," Mike Young says. "My impatience and intolerance to half-hearted work probably drove a lot of people away from the business over the years. For those who understood what *work* is, I didn't offend them as those who might have just been here for a job."

More important than words, Kirk Young spent a lifetime observing his father's hard work transform Lawn & Shrub into a success. This work ethic left an indelible impression on him, and today it serves as his inspiration. "But if he had any advice it was about how important your reputation and your word is in this industry," he says. "If you say to someone you'll get something done, get it done."

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USE READER SERVICE # 39

and had the ability to cash out and live a comfortable retirement.”

He expected to transfer the business over to his son, Kirk, at some point. In fact, they were in the third year of an eight-year transition plan. Kirk Young and his wife, Lori, had already purchased 37.5 percent – or three-eighths – of Lawn & Shrub private stock from

his parents, who were the company's majority owners. The plan called for a gradual transition, which would allow Kirk and Lori time to save the funds for a 100 percent stock buyout at the end of the eight years.

“We decided to do it over a certain amount of years to minimize the financial stress on me and my wife,”

Kirk Young says.

On the business side, Kirk had begun managing the majority of the landscape operations. Mike Young had reached the point in his career where he wasn't tending to sales calls and was doing less and less field work. As business owner, Mike Young concerned himself with more administrative chores while Kirk carried the bulk of Lawn & Shrub's sales duties.

Even though they are a tight-knit family group, the Youngs realized this process shouldn't be a simple handshake deal. For success, they would have to proceed step by step to make sure every aspect of the transition was carefully considered and completed correctly.

One problem in family businesses succession planning is the son or daughter is never as committed or as entrepreneurial as the parent, Mike Young says. Often, he adds, the new generation never appreciates the amount of work that really goes into making a successful business.

“I've seen other businesses transferred and all the son initially sees as the new owner is that dad made lots of money,” he says. “What takes a little longer to see is that dad worked a lot harder than they knew to become that successful.”

But Kirk was different and Mike Young was confident his son didn't fit this mold. “Without my prodding Kirk was here getting things done, doing the right things and bringing in money,” he says. “I was watching him take hold of the company.”

While Kirk Young may have had the mental commitment, there were other issues to consider. Taking control of Lawn & Shrub was a major financial commitment for his son, Mike Young says, adding he had a slight advantage when he started out.

“Thirty years ago, I took \$2,000 out of life insurance and borrowed \$2,000 to get into the business,” he says. “If it failed, it was not a big loss. But for Kirk, to buy the business, that's a promise of hundreds of thousands of dollars to somebody and that's a big commitment for someone his age.”

Before they would move forward, Mike Young needed Kirk's assurance that he truly wanted to run the family business, and wasn't hanging in out of some misguided loyalty to his father.

“Early on I said, ‘Hey Kirk, if this is not what you want to do, then don't stay here and do this because I'm your father,’” he says. “I told him that I was

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confident he could work someplace else and do quite well for himself and his family. I didn't want him to feel he was obligated to do this and then spend 10, 20 maybe 30 years doing this just because his dad started the business."

WORKING THE DEAL. Essentially, the transfer of ownership from Mike to Kirk would involve successfully determining the value of Lawn & Shrub, getting a proposal on paper and resolving how Kirk would finance the purchase. No big deal if you have an MBA, but this is much more of a challenge for small business owners.

"Dad and I are tree planters and grass mowers," Kirk Young says. "We'll both tell you we're not primo business people."

The first step was research. Mike Young consulted various business trade publications, from both within and outside the landscape industry, for articles written about family businesses and succession planning.

"I wanted to find out from some good sources what other business owners in my position had done," he says. "Their experience proved invaluable in determining how much a business may be worth and the selling process."

After the initial background research, Mike Young sketched out a rough business plan that demonstrated Lawn & Shrub had cash flow to support itself and that it would remain a strong and viable business following the transition.

"Sufficient cash flow makes the sale much easier," he says. "If the buyer can see there is cash to pay the debt and to pay himself an adequate salary, then it becomes a much easier transaction."

Next, the Youngs consulted their accountant and attorney. Fortunately, not only were they both knowledgeable of the Youngs' business affairs, but also both were experienced in family business transfers.

It's intimidating to reach out for this level of professional help, Kirk Young says, but what quelled the uneasiness was consulting with an accountant and attorney with which the family had a long-term working relationship.

"They knew me, they knew my dad and that really helped out a bunch," he says. "When they know you and they understand what's happening, I believe they care more and are not just interested in getting you in and getting you out of their office

before the next scheduled meeting."

"They were very helpful in this process," Mike Young says. "A lot of things could have changed this from being a relatively easy business transfer."

While the attorney assisted in drawing up the legal documents for the transfer of ownership, the Youngs' accountant helped them determine

the valuation of their business operations, which is a difficult task when examining a landscape company.

"For a company like ours the valuation is vague because we don't own a lot of property or products," Kirk Young says. "There's not a lot you can put your finger on and assign value to. We've got signed contracts, but that's about it."

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Much of the valuation came down to issues of trust and instinct. Some years back, Mike Young had conducted an initial evaluation of the company to determine its value. At the time, he made an offer to sell Lawn & Shrub to some key employees, however, that proposed business deal never transpired.

"In the end, they didn't buy into it and I'm glad they didn't because my son, who was just in high school at the time, wouldn't have had an opportunity to buy the business later on," Mike Young says.

However, this previous valuation of Lawn & Shrub gave the Youngs and their accountant a fairly

solid starting point in assessing the company's sale price.

"I trusted dad a lot during this process because I knew he wouldn't steer me wrong," Kirk Young says.

"If you work the numbers several different ways and the answer falls within a reasonable range, then you must be close to a fair price," Mike Young says. "It was somewhat like doing a quote on a large job. I would work the price a couple of ways, if we came up with answers that were close, it must be about right. If not, rework them until you get the right answer and are satisfied with the answer. And if you can't get the answer that fits your needs, then I guess it's a no sale."

With a selling price agreed upon, Kirk Young's next step was to secure financing. He approached two local banks in the Lafayette area, the first had a reputation for working with local entrepreneurs and the second the Youngs had a prior long-term relationship with and ultimately was who they sought their financing package from to complete their transaction.

Again, similar to the valuation, a landscape business lacks tangible business assets and makes the lending process more challenging. Also, Kirk was only purchasing Lawn & Shrub as a business entity. His parents would continue to own the land and building in Lafayette, which they would lease to Kirk.

"Sure, we own trucks and equipment, but to a bank, they see that and say, 'Big deal,'" Kirk Young says. "It was a very humbling experience."

To securing financing, Kirk Young mortgaged his family's house and the 10 acres of land it sat on. With so much on the line financially, Kirk Young sat down with his wife, Lori, for some serious soul searching. Did they really want to risk everything to pursue ownership of Lawn & Shrub?

"My wife knows this is all my family has ever done," he says. "She knows I work hard and she understands that landscaping is what we do and that this company has kept our family afloat for 30 years."

Secure in their abilities, Kirk and Lori ventured forward.

"In the end we said, 'Let's work hard and let the success be for us,'" Kirk Young says.

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one generation to the next.

Waiting in the office of the company's attorney on the 8th floor of a Lafayette business building, Kirk Young admits to some feelings of apprehension – butterflies that felt more like stampeding bulls in his stomach – about the deal on the table.

"If there was any, this was the time

to be a little bit scared," he says laughing. "There were a lot of dollar bills flying around in finalizing this deal."

Despite the pressures of the financial commitment he and his wife were taking on and the reputation they were about to become guardians of, Kirk Young found solitude in the fact that, no matter what, his father would

be there for him.

"It all comes back to the fact that this is what the Young family has done for a long time," he says. "I knew I knew the business, and I knew my father would be there to help me if I needed it."

After what seemed an endless array of paperwork and signatures, the deal was complete. And with the papers signed and ownership transferred from father to son, the Youngs returned to work.

EPILOGUE. As business owners, there are differences between father and son.

In terms of their management philosophies, Kirk isn't the stickler for detail that his father might have been. However, he's grown Lawn & Shrub by 20 percent in 2005.

And while he finds himself biting his tongue once in a while in regards to business matters, Mike Young is glad he hasn't totally removed himself from Lawn & Shrub daily activities.

"I like to help out but I have to watch what I say," Mike Young says. "I don't have that authority anymore."

Kirk Young hasn't dramatically changed the business his father spent the better part of 30 years building. He laughs and admits the only real "rebellious act" he and Lori made as the business' new owners was to finally purchase a post office box for Lawn & Shrub. "I don't think my parents ever wanted to spend the \$20," he says.

But for the most part, it's business as usual at Lawn & Shrub.

Kirk Young describes the last year as a crash course in business management, bringing him up to speed on duties vastly different than his previous role as a manager or salesman.

"I jump between sales, equipment repair, managing the crews and many other tasks throughout the day," he says. "I must learn to minimize some of these lesser tasks and keep my eye on the company as a whole."

Ultimately, Mike Young believes their success in transferring the business from one generation to the next comes from the fact that everyone involved was happy with the deal's eventual outcome.

"In fact, a vendor came in the other day and says to me, 'Kirk thinks he got a good deal,'" Mike Young says. "I laughed. 'Well, I think I got a good deal, too,' I told the vendor. 'So I guess everyone is happy.'" ■

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T Sub. Terrain

by lauren spiers hunter

Hiring subcontractors is a great way to expand your service menu without spreading yourself too thin. But experienced contractors note that there are pitfalls to watch out for.

When business is growing, it's hard to pass up the opportunity for an upsell. But plenty of green industry businesses have found that expanding a service menu can be a slippery slope. "A lot of folks, including myself when I was younger, tried to be good at everything and it's not easy," says John Gachina, president of Gachina Landscape Management, Menlo Park, Calif. "You really want to pick your niche and focus on it. When you come up against things that are out of that scope, it's time to tell your customers you don't do that kind of work or hire someone else to take care of it for you."

Derek Blumberg agrees. "More revenue isn't always better," says the owner of Quality Seasons, Savage, Minn. "There was a point where we were doing a lot of work in a lot of areas, but our bottom line wasn't looking so hot, and we had to fix it. The book *Good to Great* inspired me to find out what our company was really good at and focus on that."

While Blumberg's niche is high-end residential work and Gachina's is commercial contract maintenance and enhancements, both industry veterans found subcontracting to be the best way to address business growth and service

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management issues, though their approaches are very different.

A TALE OF TWO BUSINESSES.

Quality Seasons. In 2001, Blumberg was getting Quality Seasons back on track after episodes of overspending and a lack of systems put the company

subcontracted all of its snow removal services. By the spring of 2004, independent contractors handled the business's entire service menu.

"Subcontracting was the best decision I could have made," Blumberg says. "My natural skill is in business organization, setting up and develop-

to the subcontractor and I can focus on what I'm good at, which is making more sales."

With three subcontractors (13 employees total) working for Quality Seasons, Blumberg notes the importance of hiring trustworthy individuals that meet company standards.

"Any time I meet with a potential subcontractor, I ask them what they were really after. What interests them about subcontracting? I make them define what kind of work they want – if they're just looking for a few extra jobs or if they want to be dedicated to their work – and I make sure they know that to work for Quality Seasons, they're going to

have to put our accounts first." Quality Seasons uses only dedicated subcontractors; that is, they work for Blumberg and no one else. The

**"By taking all of our services out-of-house, now the responsibility of dealing with employees falls to the subcontractor and I can focus on what I'm good at, which is making more sales."
- Derek Blumberg**

in a tough position in the late 1990s. Part of the solution, he found, was to streamline services with the help of subcontractors. That year, the com-

ing sales – managing employees isn't my sweet spot. By taking all of our services out-of-house, now the responsibility of dealing with employees falls



workers wear the Quality Seasons logo and display it on their trailers. This unique relationship allows Blumberg to have a staff of full-time, brand-building employees without the hassle of personnel management, employment taxes and other administrative costs. Additionally, he doesn't have to worry that the subcontractor will shirk its duties on Quality Seasons accounts in favor of another competitor.

Blumberg notes, however, the importance of keeping subcontractors independent in their work, lest certain

employment regulations be breached. "It's essential to make sure that the subcontractor is independent from you and not defined as an employee of your company," he explains. "The way we do that is by having two inputs on every item. For instance, the subcontractor purchases shirts and hats, while we pay for the embroidery. We require that they have enclosed trailers, but we pay for the logoing. This reinforces our brand while the subcontractors are on the job, but legally keeps us separate profession-

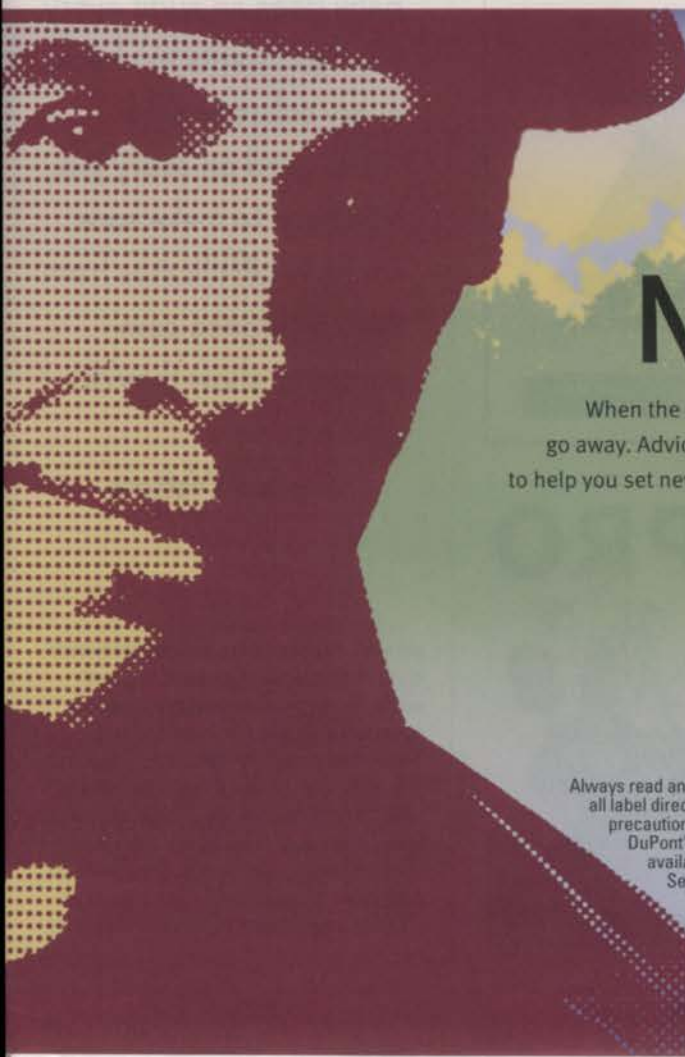
ally." (Read more in Define Your Relationship on page 70). Also in that regard, Blumberg says his subcontractors can sell and perform their own work on their own time, as long as those jobs are outside Quality Seasons' service area.

Gachina Landscape Management.

While Quality Seasons operates almost solely on the power of subcontractors, Gachina Landscape Management takes a more traditional approach, keeping most of its work in-house and hiring independent contractors for specific tasks in which the company doesn't specialize.

"On the contract maintenance side of the business, we'll work with subcontractors on things like tree work, pest control and paver installation," Gachina says. "These are things

"A lot of customers don't want to hire the landscaper, the tree care company, the pest control operation and then manage all three contractors. They want to receive one bill and that's what makes subcontracting a good option." - John Gachina



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operational advantages >>>

we don't do routinely, so we bring in professionals we know and trust will do a good job for our clients. A lot of customers don't want to hire the landscaper, the tree care company, the pest control operator and then manage all three contractors. They want to receive one bill and that's what makes subcontracting a good option."

Like Blumberg, Gachina ensures that subcontractors meet certain requirements of professionalism that match those of his own company. "Just like hiring someone as an employee of the company, you want to know who they are and hear about their background," he says. "We always check references of other contractors they've worked for and may even visit jobsites they've worked on to get a feel for the quality of their work and if it's in line with our expectations."

From there, Gachina says he'll hire a new subcontractor for a small

"Our insurance company does an audit every year and wants to check every subcontractor we've used on every job. We have to make sure we have certificates from their insurance companies to show they're covered."

- Ed Watters

project to give them experience with the company. If the work is good and the company cultures match, more and larger projects follow. More importantly, because Gachina's subcontractors work for themselves and for other area landscape companies, trust and respect are essential. "If I'm giving you work, you have to take care of me, too," Gachina says. "There are factors of ethics, integrity



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and business etiquette, so in doing my job to give you a good experience and pay you on time, I also expect you to respect my business. I would never expect a subcontractor to jeopardize their relationships with other companies they work for, nor would I expect them to discuss our relationship with

we really call a 'strategic alliance,'" says Peter Sortwell, owner of the Castro Valley, Calif.-based tree care company. "It might sound trite, but in a subcontracting relationship, the two companies have to match. John and I do well together because we both have the same vision of what we want our

proud to present independent contractors and their expertise to his clients. "Arborwell has some really professional representatives and we know they're experts in fields that we're not," Gachina says. "Whenever we bring a subcontractor in, we're able to tell our customers with confidence that we

"It might sound trite, but in a subcontracting relationship, the two companies have to match. John (Gachina) and I do well together because we both have the same vision of what we want our companies to be and we have similar management styles."

- Peter Sortwell

trust these workers to be on their properties. We don't worry about outfitting the workers or vehicles with Gachina gear. For me, the team is my employees, myself, my managers and my subcontractor - we've worked together for years. We trust them and we guarantee the work will be done right.

my competitors."

Arborwell is one company that has a longstanding relationship with Gachina. "Our relationship has been close for many years and is one that

companies to be and we have similar management styles."

Gachina adds that Arborwell's professionalism - and that of the other subcontractors he hires - makes him

PROPER PAPERS. For business owners hiring subcontractors, getting the work done right means more than just

continued on page 69, sidebar on page 67



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subcontractor auditions

At Watters & Associates Landscape, Rome, Ga., President Ed Watters says he's hired a number of subcontractors over the years to handle everything from swimming pool installation and fencing work to stone masonry and major grading. While the company is trying to keep more work in house these days, subcontractors' contact information is never far away.

"We keep a list of subcontracting sources on our wall and in our weekly meetings with designers, if someone says they need to get in touch with a stone mason, we know who to call," Watters says.

Staying on the subcontractor list depends on the work quality and professional relationship between Watters & Associates and the independent contractor. Adding your company's name to the list requires a short audition of sorts. "If someone has expressed interest in working with us, we'll invite that person to our office to give a presentation to our designers," Watters says. "We'll have them bring samples to our Monday afternoon meetings and let them take 30 minutes or so to show us what they can do, tell us about their company and experience, give us a look at the products they use, and go from there."

Watters says his designers meet with about one new vendor every month to build relationships. "We're far enough outside the Metro Atlanta market that it's too expensive to bring in a subcontractor from the city every time we need one, unless it's a \$20,000 or \$30,000 job," Watters says. "Keeping in touch with professionals in our local market gives us access to their expertise when we need it."

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continued from page 66

on time and on budget. Up-to-date documentation of insurance coverage, workers' compensation and necessary licenses should all be on contractors' checklists before approving a subcontractor's work. "Our insurance company does an audit every year and wants to check on every subcontractor we've used on every job," says Ed Watters, president, Watters & Associates, Rome, Ga. "We have to make sure we have certificates from their insurance companies to show they're covered."

Blumberg notes that a subcontractor's insurance coverages for general liability and workers' compensation should match those of your own company. "If you have \$2 million in coverage and you don't think the crew you're hiring can do \$2 million in damage, coverage up to \$1 million might be OK," he says.

"But more often than not, the coverage should mirror your own. Don't give the insurance companies or the IRS (Internal Revenue Service) an unnecessary gray area."

Watters says the insurance issue is one reason his company is scaling back the frequency with which they hire subcontractors. "We've had some trouble finding subcontractors with the proper insurance," he says. "If a subcontractor hires a laborer who ends up hurting his back, we don't want to find out later that we're liable for the injury because of our subcontractor's lack of coverage." As such, Watters & Associates may withhold a subcontractor's final check – as much as 50 percent

of a job – until insurance papers and a Social Security number (to get a 1099 Form from the IRS) are produced.

Sortwell says landscape contractors faced with technical and somewhat dangerous work, such as tree care, should seriously consider subcontracting because of the insurance risk. "When I started Arborwell, one of my strategic marketing focuses was to be a supplier to companies that don't want to deal with the high risk and insurance costs associated with tree care," he says. "Any landscape contractor looking to outsource some work needs to be sure to work with someone who's legitimate and being insured is a big part of that."

Blumberg reminds that "contract" is the operative phrase in "subcon-

tracting." "Handshakes are no good for this type of work, even if you have a longstanding relationship," he says. "I recommend having a contract that says you're obligated to provide work for your subcontractors and if you fail to do so, they should be released of the obligation to do the work." Blumberg adds that contracts should include a 30-day cancellation clause allowing the hiring company to end the relationship if need be. "The good news is that if everyone's doing their part, the contract can sit in a drawer and get dusty."

Editor's Note: Lawn & Landscape advises its readers to consult their own legal counsel when drafting contracts of any kind.



MONEY FOR MANAGEMENT.

Among the details outlined in any business contract are the financial terms of the agreement. In this respect, subcontracting can sometimes seem like free money – another business is doing the work and while they're getting paid, so are you. But Watters notes that some subcontracted work requires a good deal of management and it's that time for which an overseeing contractor must be paid.

Watters & Associates works with three pricing models depending on the level of management required. "If we oversee a subcontractor, we'll normally charge a 25-percent markup on that work," he explains. "But if we find that the work is going to take

continued on page 72, sidebar on page 70

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"Before we hired our subcontractors, we hired an attorney," says Derek Blumberg, owner of Quality Seasons, Savage, Minn. "There are a number of questions you need to answer, according to the IRS (Internal Revenue Service), to determine if the person you hire is a subcontractor or an employee." Blumberg says he spent about \$3,000 for the attorney's fees, but it was worth it.

The IRS says, "anyone who performs services for you is your employee if you can control what will be done and how it will be done," while "you, the payer, have the right to control or direct only the result of the work done by an independent contractor, and not the means and methods of accomplishing the result." For employers, an official distinction helps identify how the individual must be compensated and what taxes need to be paid. The determination also is important for the subcontractor (or employee), because it affects how that individual pays income tax, Social Security and Medicare taxes, and how they'll file a tax return.

Employers concerned that one of their subcontractors may be considered an employee (or vice-versa) can request a determination from the IRS using form SS-8 "Determination of Worker Status for Purposes of Federal Employment Taxes and Income Tax Withholding." The form asks several questions, including:

- What training or instruction is the worker given by the firm?
- How does the worker receive assignments?
- Who determines the method by which work is performed?
- If substitutes or helpers are needed, who hires them?
- Can the relationship be terminated by either party without incurring liability or penalty?
- Who determines the worker's territory?

There's no magic question on Form SS-8 that will determine a worker's status. Questions cover three categories including behavioral control, financial control and the relationship of the parties. Upon determination, individuals classified as "independent contractors" must pay their own income tax and self-employment tax and the employer firm may be required to give you Form 1099-MISC to report "miscellaneous income" that it has paid to you.

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Take a closer look at Form SS-8 and other employee/independent contractor information provided by the IRS at the *Lawn & Landscape* March Online Extras Section.

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continued from page 69



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USE READER SERVICE # 57

a lot of extra supervision or would require our designer to be on-site during much of the work, we charge an hourly rate, just like we would if we were charging for a design. If the landscape architect has to be out there laying out a driveway or sidewalk and making sure the grades are right, we need to make sure our company is compensated for their time."

In a third approach, Watters says that some customers prefer to supervise subcontractors themselves, rather than pay a marked-up fee. That's fine, though Watters still makes sure to charge the other contractor a referral fee. "If the client wants to oversee the subcontractor, we'll tell that subcontractor that we've recommended them for work on this property," he explains. "In their bid, we request that they build in a 10-percent referral fee for our legwork in making sure they're the preferred company for this work." Referring work to subcontractors helps build relationships, Watters adds, so his company's subcontractors also are likely to refer landscape work to them later on.

Gachina says his company and Arborwell have several mutual clients who have chosen to work with Arborwell directly, rather than pay a higher fee for subcontracted services. When Gachina Landscape Management does serve as the general contractor, Gachina says his markup varies. "We'll usually mark up a subcontractor's work between 5 and 15 percent depending on the size and scope of the job, our relationship with the property owner, and how bad we want the account," he says. "There have been a number of deals where we needed a competitive edge and tightened up our bid by not marking up the subcontractors at all. In commercial landscaping, you really have to look at the bigger picture. If it's a customer you want to do a lot of work for, not making a few dollars on subcontracted work may make your bid a little more together."

At Quality Seasons, Blumberg approaches pricing to ensure that both he and his subcontractors make a good living. "A contractor has to figure out what his or her costs are to sell the work and make a profit, then add onto that what they'll pay their subcontractor – that's simple," he explains. "From there, I broke down my subcontractor's model and determined how much they would need to pay their bills."

Some of Blumberg's subcontractors are year-round, while others handle snow removal only, which requires a different payment structure. In the winter, Blumberg draws up guaranteed-minimum contracts for 12 plows, which he passes onto his subcontractors. Even if there are only 9 snow events, as there were in the winter of 2004/2005, Blumberg and his subcontractors still get paid the minimum. For more than 12 events, and Quality Seasons bills per-time. "In the winter, it works out that our subcontractors are earning about \$100 per hour, per truck, which is unheard of, especially for residential plowing," Blumberg says. "Our drivers are also required to have a shoveler in their trucks with them and they usually earn \$15 to \$20, which still leaves a great amount of profit coming in."

For mowing contracts, Blumberg takes a pay-for-production approach. "We don't pay by the hour – we pay a percentage of what the job makes," he explains. "The more lawns the subcontractor mows, the more he makes. We also charge more for things like shrub care, so if the subcontractor offers that service they're able to bring in more money on that job." Moreover, Blumberg says that his mowing subcontractors are given a list of 80 hours of mowing for two people for the week. If they're able to complete more than 80 hours of work during the week, they can increase their own income. "I didn't create a cap for my subcontractors, so if they want more work, they can get more, as long as they're completing the required work with the right levels of quality."

Blumberg says his subcontractors bring home most of the gross revenue on a job – about \$30 to \$40 per hour, on average to pay their bills and themselves – and he still meets the minimums he needs while making a nice profit. "When I got started, I knew the minimum I needed to make to get out the door in the morning and I started thinking about how much someone could make mowing lawns if they had no administrative costs to pay and only a small amount of rent that we charge them," he says. "When these subcontractors are working most of the time – billing 10 hours a day – they'll make more money partnering with me than if they were working on their own and had all the expenses of a small business." ■

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USE READER SERVICE # 58

by michael a. weisburger

Rising insurance costs can decrease profit margins – no matter how much growth you plan. For that reason, know what's happening in the insurance industry and how to cut costs.

Inurance is a necessary business expense. Why? Because being a landscape contractor or lawn care operator can be a risky business. Just in the ordinary course of operations, you can easily identify sources of potential trouble – equipment misuse, spills, personnel nightmares, theft, regulatory infractions – you name it.

Even on the business side of things, each area poses its own types of hazards, from paperwork mismanagement to third party liability.

For this reason, insurance is a necessity, but as rising costs continue to become a challenge for small business owners to manage, landscape professionals must understand the current statistics as well as explore their options for cutting their insurance costs.

continued on page 78



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USE READER SERVICE # 60

continued from page 74

SMALL BUSINESS & HEALTH CARE. The percentage of businesses offering health insurance to their workers has declined steadily over the last five years, as the cost of providing coverage continues to outpace inflation and wage growth. That's according to a recent survey by the Kaiser Family Foundation's prestigious

Health Research and Education Trust. The survey found that only three in five firms offered coverage to workers in 2005, down significantly from 69 percent in 2000. The drop stems almost entirely from fewer small businesses (200 workers or less) offering health benefits. "It is low-wage workers who are being hurt the most by the

steady drip, drip, drip of coverage draining out of the employer-based health insurance system," according to Kaiser Family Foundation President and CEO Drew E. Altman, Ph.D.

According to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, more than 45 million Americans are uninsured, with nearly 60 percent of those employed by small businesses. To make health care more affordable and accessible for small businesses, the Chamber promotes passage of legislation that would create federally regulated small business health plans, also known as association health plans (AHPs). Allowing small businesses to arrange their health benefits through associations can make coverage more affordable by spreading risk among a much

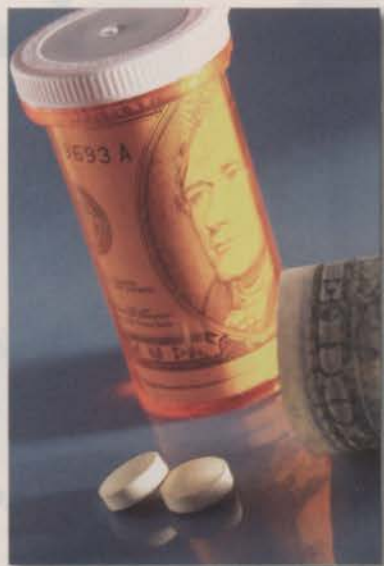
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Currently, Sen. Mike Enzi (R-Wyo.) chairman of the Senate Health Education, Labor and Pensions Committee is offering the Health Insurance Marketplace Modernization and Affordability Act. Similar measures have passed the U.S. House of Representatives a half dozen times before — but come up short each time in the Senate. In a positive note, the bill has gained the support of the National Association of Health Underwriters.

Another new wrinkle is the health savings account (HSA), designed to put consumers in charge of health care decision-making while curbing rising health care costs.

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USE READER SERVICE # 62

Folks with a regular health insurance plan or who are on Medicare don't qualify for a health savings account. But for those who do qualify, both employees and employers can contribute. This year, the limits on contributions, which are tax deductible, are \$2,700 per individual and \$5,450 per family. The money grows and can be withdrawn tax free, and may be spent on qualified expenses such as drugs and checkups. There is one catch – to get an HSA, you must also buy catastrophic health insurance with a high deductible – about \$2,000 for family coverage.

From the employer's point of view, HSAs are generating savings on payroll taxes for companies that adopt them that mirror gains made in the shift to 401(k)s. On the other hand, while HSAs offer employees greater flexibility, they could hasten a shift of health care costs from companies to employees, increasing their financial burden and risk.

CUT YOUR PREMIUMS. Since insurance premiums are a part of all of our budgets, here are some ways to cut the cost of that line item.

Increase Deductibles. You can save money by increasing your deductible: Going from a \$500 to a \$1,000 deductible per general liability claim, for example, could save you hundreds in premium dollars each year. Raising auto or home insurance deductibles can save you from 15 to 30 percent, according to the Insurance Information Institute (III). And, with increased deductibles, some insurers have been willing to hold the line on their

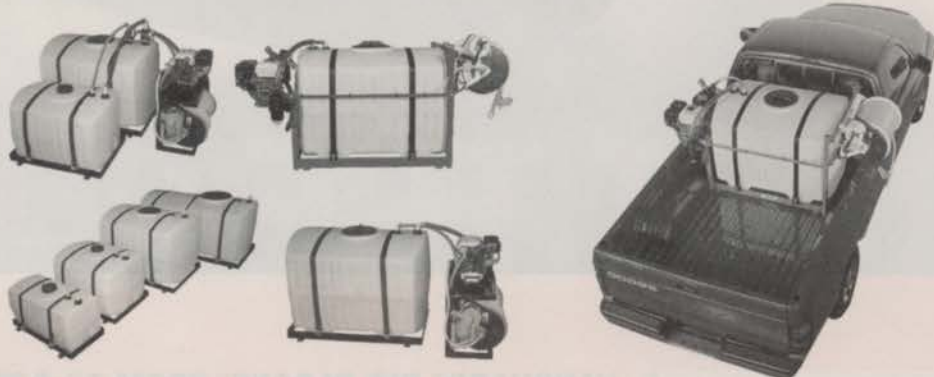
*continued on page 84,
sidebars on pages 82, 86*

how to manage risk

Mention "risk," and the first thought that comes to mind might be gambling in Las Vegas or playing the stock market.

But risk is something we face each day. Because we never really do know what tomorrow might bring: from lightning strikes to trips and falls, from accidents to floods, in the office or at a jobsite.

Managing everyday job risks is not always easy. It means that every member of your employment team must bring his or her own level of risk management to the table. And it's your job to make that very clear to your entire staff – through example, posted procedures and, most important of all, a continuous training cycle.



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An excellent way to approach handling risk is to imagine that you're NOT protected by insurance – and then do what you think will help minimize the risks that put you in the most jeopardy. Because insurance is no cure-all. It's designed to protect you from financial disaster, not be a safety net for everyday mishaps that commonsense precautions – and training – could help avoid.

And yet your people have to drive, come to work, handle equipment, use strong chemicals, deal with customers, pets and property. That means you must examine your operation carefully, identifying anything that could cause damage, injury or loss; evaluating their potential to do you harm; and taking the appropriate steps to control any possible damage. Remember, troubles can arise from considerations of property, general liability, product liability, business interrup-

tions, disasters, workers' compensation or the use of motor vehicles.

Review your insurance protection, look at loss control as if it were an operating issue, assign responsibility for controlling hazards on the job (or do it yourself). And don't forget to involve your employees; they are sure to have good ideas about how to protect your business.

Managing risk is more than putting up job safety posters. Because it touches every aspect of all your operations, you should:

- Try to foresee the hazards inherent in typical situations.
- Develop procedures for avoiding or handling each potential hazard.
- Train your personnel constantly to respond accordingly.
- Monitor your success and seek ways to improve it.
- Reinforce your employees' participation in, and individual responsibility for, the overall risk management effort.

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fighting insurance fraud

Adding to already rising costs, health-insurance fraud schemes are running rampant in the United States. They account for \$1 out of every \$10 spent on health care, amounting to billions in Medicare expenses alone.

According to an article in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, nearly one in three physicians said it's necessary to play games with the health-care system to provide high quality medical care. In the past year, approximately one in 10 medical professionals reported medical signs or symptoms a patient didn't have to help secure coverage for needed treatment or services.

Some consumers aren't blame-free. According to a survey by consulting firm Accenture Ltd., nearly one of four Americans believes it's accept-

able to defraud insurers. This even normally honest people sometimes do by padding legitimate claims, say, or intentionally understating the number of miles they drive each day.

As for businesses, experts say owners often list fewer employees or misrepresent the work they do to get a lower premium. Workers' compensation, health care, auto insurance – some lines of the insurance business are more vulnerable to fraud than others.

But the good guys are fighting back. Equipped with anti-fraud technology, internal investigation units and fraud hot lines, many insurers are joining forces with local and federal law enforcement agencies, state insurance fraud bureaus, insurance commissioners and others to help stop the scams.

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USE READER SERVICE # 132

continued from page 80

ever-rising health care premiums.

Reduce Limits. Similarly, reducing the amount of your coverage will also cut your premium. Go from a \$1 million to a \$500,000 general liability limit, and savings could range from a couple to a few hundred dollars. On older cars in your fleet, consider dropping collision and/or comprehensive

coverage which, the III says, may not be cost-effective to continue on cars worth less than 10 times what you would pay for the coverage.

Share Costs or Self-Insure. Raising deductibles and reducing or eliminating certain coverages are really examples of self-insuring; you take on the risk, you save money. Many com-

panies these days, large and small, are also sharing insurance costs – especially in health care – by raising employee annual contributions to individual programs and/or by increasing their per-visit co-payments.


Audits. Most general liability policies permit insurers to audit their books to see whether, based on their company receipts and/or payroll, they've paid too little in premiums. If you've done significantly less business than usual, you can request an audit and perhaps qualify for a refund.

More Rigorous Employee Screening. Technical advances have reduced the costs of background checks, making it cheaper to check somebody's record beforehand rather than to fire them later – not to mention the lost time, payroll expense and management attention involved. Drug testing, motor vehicle record reviews, checking references – all can also save you money in the long run.

Garage Locations. Auto insurance rates vary depending on where you house your vehicles. Since each vehicle in a fleet is rated individually, make sure your policy accurately reflects where each one is garaged.

Review Loss Runs Annually. Take a moment to look back at your insurance loss record over the past 12 months. Try to figure what you might have been doing wrong. Making corrections now can help limit future losses.

Comparison Shop. Prices vary from company to company, so comparison shopping can sometimes pay off. Ask your broker, approach various companies directly, or access information on the Internet. Your state insurance department may also provide comparisons of prices charged by major insurers. Or the state authority that regulates your industry may keep a list of insurers who specialize in your field.

Another tip: Many companies offer discounts for placing multiple lines of coverage through them. Other things to consider: The expertise of your agent, what you'll pay compared with the actual coverage you'll receive (the value), the insurer's industry rating and their claims service track record. Always ask around. 

The author is president, Weisburger Insurance Brokerage, White Plains, N.Y. He can be reached at 800/431-2794, ext. 224, info@weisburger.com or via www.weisburger.com.

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what litigation costs you

Because every employee, every day, makes decisions that involve risk to your business in some way or another. If each of your employees makes a serious error just once a month, how many potential lawsuits is that you'll have to face over the course of a year?

Whether you and I ever spend a day in court or not, litigation in this country takes money out of our pockets anyway. The American legal system is the most expensive civil justice system in the world – nearly double that of other industrialized nations. According to some estimates, costs to you and every other citizen rose from around \$800 in 2002 to more than \$1,000 by 2005.

U.S. consumers, all of us, are paying the high cost of going to trial over claims – directly in higher liability insurance premiums because those rates reflect what insurance companies have to pay out for their policyholders' legal defense and for any judgments against them. Indirectly, we also pay in higher prices for goods and services, since businesses naturally pass on to us the expenses they incur protecting themselves against these lawsuits.

But there are other costs as well. A research report developed for the Small Business Administration said recently that, because most small business owners are invested personally in their business (as most of us certainly are), litigation causes not just financial loss, but also substantial emotional hardship and often changes the spirit of the business.

Other findings:

- Many owners try to settle prior to trial with mixed results – the main reason being that the opposing party refuses to negotiate. Owners said they'd go to great lengths to stay out of court.
- Legal costs for actual litigation ranged from \$3,000 to \$150,000, with a third around \$10,000. Owners feel they have to recoup these losses by cutting operating expenses, acquiring new customers or expanding their services to existing customers. Raising prices is not an option because of the competitive disadvantage involved.
- Most companies use business assets to pay damages, although insurance covers some. Payment nearly put others out of business, they say, which affected them for a long time as they worked to rebuild. For those with small reserves, litigation caused a huge burden. Small business owners surveyed became more wary

of employees and customers as a result of their litigation experience.

Litigation fell into three categories:

1. Employee Complaints (EEOC complaints, workers compensation claims, employee theft) – Participants commented that some complaints were due to employee negligence, but felt there were claims filed or demands made in hope of a financial settlement or an increased level of responsibility/salary.
2. Business Specific Reasons – Issues of customers blaming a contractor, say, for problems or results the client could not initially envision.
3. Customer Satisfaction – All small businesses are concerned with customer satisfaction. Nearly all rely on word of mouth to obtain clients. Ever optimists, small businesses try to avoid litigation by reducing an invoice or providing additional services to smooth things over, even if the customer is known to be incorrect.

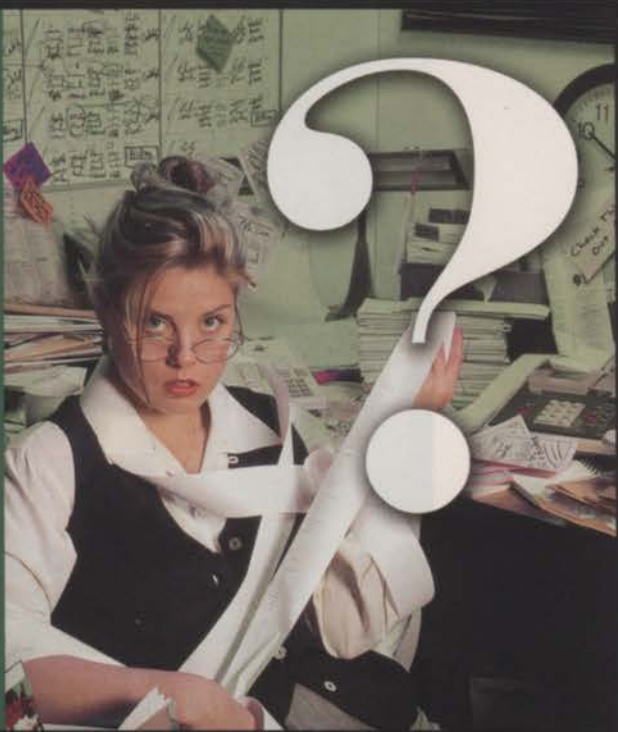
Lawsuits affect small businesses four ways. Financial costs include attorneys, damages and the time involved. Emotional costs include the strain on owners and on the job with workers and customers. There is also the loss of business from bad publicity or confusion in the marketplace. In addition, it takes time to make changes to procedures or the business structure to handle complaints better, such as the need for an employee handbook, improved contracts, increased type and amounts of insurance, etc., all of which put additional pressure on the business (and its owner).

Some lessons learned:

- Address all concerns in a timely manner.
- Exert tighter control on the firm's (and owner's) assets and how the business is actually run on a daily basis.
- Understand that insurance is mandatory.
- Check to see that all required EEOC posters are up.
- Last but very much not least: Make sure your paper work covers your back. Document everything.

One lesson from the SBA report that bothered me (and why I didn't want to list it) was "Be less trusting of employees, customers and other companies." I'd like to think that if you paid mind to the list above, you wouldn't have to shoulder the burden of mistrust beyond a healthy watchfulness.

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Are you satisfied with your company's sales numbers? Happy with the number of accounts you currently have? Could both be better? Sure, but expanding can mean either more cost or more headaches as a result of the time needed to plan accordingly. To have a successful year, put some real thought and effort

into these tips for how you can grow your customer base today.

SET GOALS. First, you need some goals. Start small – just make an outline or write down a couple of phrases. Then fill in some of the blanks. Then a few more. Put them aside for a couple of days. Then bring them out and polish them a bit.

Well written goals describe the action

by john c. fech

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to be taken as well as how you plan to measure progress. Start with a good description of the planned action and include some sort of way to track the outcome in a tangible way. For example, "Start up a tree care division; offer pruning, fertilization and removals," should not stand alone. Add "Secure 30 new accounts, each bringing in a net profit of \$400" to help you document and evaluate the success of the new venture.

LOOK ELSEWHERE.

Very few ideas are original. Most are gleaned and adapted from someone else. One way to explore new ideas is to travel 500 miles away and visit some other companies like yours or, better yet, that provide the types of services that match up with your new goals and objectives. Most business owners in other markets won't feel the need to keep important competitive details to themselves. In fact, you might be able to tell them about some ideas and techniques that have worked for you, and develop a relationship that provides a sounding board to listen to the merits of future projects. The visit might not provide any new ideas, but at least it should help refine your goals, making them more realistic or practical.

LOOK AT HOME. Start with a client review. Your current clients are probably your best leads for expanded work. You've already established a good relationship with them, they know you, you know them, etc. If you have several thousand clients, you'll probably want to gather your staff and pare it down to a workable number. Call the client and schedule an appointment to appraise their lawn and landscape.

During the review, discuss and evaluate the success of each service

that you have provided in the past few years. Anything you did for the client is fair game – lawn fertilization, installation of annuals, brick work, etc. Five outcomes are possible in the review:

1. Satisfaction of a job well done, happy customer, no new jobs wanted.



2. Satisfaction of a job well done, happy customer; new job requested; "You've done a great job with our landscape ... you know, I've always wanted to screen my view of the neighbor's dog kennel. Can you help?"

3. Dissatisfaction, unhappy customer, "Why did you remind me how bad that project turned out? I'm calling another company."

4. Dissatisfaction, understanding customer. "OK, so that didn't work out exactly as we had planned, but with a few small changes, it's going to

be great in 2006. When can we get started on those?"

5. Satisfaction of a job well done, no new jobs wanted, but referral to a friend, neighbor, relative or work associate.

If you're careful as a staff to contact only the clients with a track record of few or no complaints, outcomes 1, 2, 4 and 5 are likely to result. Of course, if outcome 3 occurs, embrace it as an opportunity to enhance your ability to calm a client down and re-focus their attention on the parts of your service that were positive.

CROSS SELL.

Chances are, you don't provide complete grounds maintenance services to each and every customer you have. Consider cross-selling to your existing clients. Grow your business by enlarging the service you provide to current customers. Some examples:

1. Market aeration to your lawn care accounts. The best procedure you can perform on a compacted lawn is aeration. Sell the aeration; then make an attempt at up-selling the aeration

by offering double and triple pass, and/or spring and fall aeration. After all, how good is a single pass aeration anyway? Your customers hear that aeration is good so now is the time to cash in on it.

2. Market landscape maintenance to lawn care customers. Older neighborhoods have large trees and shrubs that need to be pruned and fertilized, as well as the leaves raked. Someone needs to mow the grass, and it might as well be your company, as

long as you charge enough for it to make some profit. Every time you rip out a dying or diseased plant, your landscape designer should be trying to sell the client on a landscape appraisal and renovation.

3. Market lawn renovation to your irrigation customers. In many parts of the country, the fall and winter has been dry, with above average temperatures and below average rainfall or snowfall. Many lawns stand a good chance of being thin in the spring. Why is an irrigation customer a good target for a lawn renovation pitch? Generally, the biggest factor in the success of a renovation is if the homeowner is dedicated to watering correctly and for the time necessary to produce a good stand of turf. A client with an irrigation system has the equipment to do that. With a few instructions from your staff, lawn renovation can make your customer's lawn the envy of the neighborhood.

4. Market irrigation installation or repair services to your lawn care accounts. Let's face it, every one of your customer's lawn sprinkler systems is broken. That may sound like a bold statement, but consider this – they either have actual broken parts or the system in place doesn't function at a reasonable rate of efficiency or distribution uniformity. The matter in doubt is the extent of malfunction. Just how bad is it? Recently, I was chatting with the owner of a lawn and landscape maintenance company who said he's finding there is big money to be made in irrigation auditing, repair and maintenance. As your lawn applicators are putting down product, instruct them to look for low heads, wetter than normal areas, brown turf, etc. These are all signs of a lawn irrigation system that needs to be checked out and possibly repaired. Once you offer to repair the system, you have your foot in the door to upgrade the system or sell a related product.

GET FOCUSED. After you select your theme, get focused. Why? Most lawn care companies don't have the resources to utilize every selling strategy, every advertising method and every marketing technique known to man. Narrowing your approach can be an efficient way of marketing your services. Try these:

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2. Get focused with mailings.

Buy a mailing list for ONE zip code. Pick one with some of your best looking lawns in it, so that you can make it easy for prospective clients to buy from you. Make it easier by placing a small yard sign in these good lawns.

3. Get focused intentionally and strategically.

Be right up front with prospective clients and tell them what strategies you are using. For example, you'll be concentrating your trucks in a small area, which means that any extra product necessary is handy, and sharing expertise for diagnosis is convenient. The line would go

be simple and clear. Try to center your efforts around a central theme, using any legitimate reason or tactic for selling. These are some themes that grounds managers and lawn care operators have reported to work for business expansion:

1. Weather-related themes.

Use the weather to provide an topic of conversation. The pitch might go something like "The recent dry weather has caused a short term drought. Your lawn is likely to have suffered some damage, so let our experts show it some extra care. We can inspect it for insect problems, root dieback, excessive thatch, etc."

2. Lock in now at 2005/06

prices. If you can afford it, consider holding prices flat. Here's your message to the customer: "I can't think



something like, "Yes, sir, on that rare occasion that your lawn applicator isn't sure why your lawn is suffering, another technician's opinion is only two minutes away."

4. Get focused with age and other demographics.

Many demographic groups have a certain reasons to choose lawn care. Once you figure out those reasons, you can use them again without re-inventing the wheel. For example, widows may have relied on their spouse to tend the lawn while he/she was alive. Now that he/she is gone, they need you.

USE SALES THEMES. Whether the method is telemarketing, direct mail, door to door, radio, television or billboards, your approach should

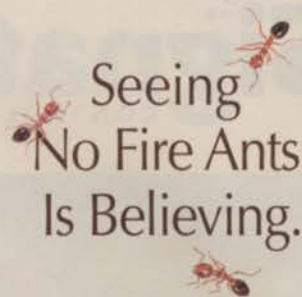
of too many other goods or services that won't raise in price in a year's time, can you? So, take advantage of this opportunity before we come to our senses, or talk to our accountant, whichever comes first."

3. Couponing.

Provide an added bonus for signing up. The customer can receive their first application free, receive a free irrigation audit, or even something non lawn related such as a car wash or steak dinner.

4. Brag on your success.

Identify a property (preferably a nice looking one) near to the household that you are trying to sell to. Your message would be "Hey, have you seen Mr. Brown's house across the street? We service his lawn, and we're proud of the way it looks..."



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PIGGYBACK. Try piggybacking your marketing efforts with another service company, either horticultural or general. Consider builders, nurseries, garden centers, cable installers, house cleaning, plumbers, irrigation installers, tree care, snow removal and dry cleaning. Join forces with someone else and work the client together. After the house cleaner services the client's home, ask them to leave a card, or smoothly compliment the client on their landscape, pointing out that if they ever needed some more work done, they should call your company.

Some homeowners will hire almost everything done these days. In fact, in some neighborhoods it's a status symbol to have the greatest number of service companies



visit your home in a given week. One day last year, I visited a homeowner to inspect the lawn in a nice neighborhood, and counted more service vehicles in a two-block area than regular cars. This indicates that the potential wage earners in the family have all gone to work outside the home, and can now afford your service. Because they work, they don't have time to take care of the lawn themselves.

EQUIPMENT NEEDS. Finally, if you are successful at growing your business, you'll probably need to buy some more equipment to service the new accounts. Plus, you'll want to overhaul your existing stuff to make sure that it's ready to go. If any pieces are found to be unrepairable, add them to the list of new stuff to buy. Try to avoid the temptation to stretch your existing machines to be able to service a bunch of new customers. **U**

The author is a horticulturist and certified arborist at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln, Neb. He can be reached at 402/444-7804 or jfech1@unl.edu.

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Want more tips on how you can grow your business today? Then check out the *Lawn & Landscape* Web site and message board. The Web site opens visitors to a long list of back issue business article archives, and the message board lets visitors ask fellow landscape contractors how they conduct business. Log on today!

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The Seven-Day Itch

Do you hate the fact that your equipment sits on nights and weekends, bringing in zero dollars? Looking for a way to get more out of these high-priced business assets? Extend your workweek and reap the rewards.

Instead of buying and equipping another truck, have you ever wondered how you could leverage the equipment you already have to a greater extent?

That was one landscape contractor's thinking in a recent *Lawn & Landscape* Message Board discussion. "Has anyone tried working a seven day workweek?" she asked. "I'm thinking about working crews Monday through Thursday and another crew Friday through Sunday. It would cost a great deal of money to buy and equip another truck so this would solve my problem. This would be for new installations on new homes so there is not a problem with being on a jobsite on Sunday. What do you think?"

Paul Sessel liked this approach. "That is a smart way to keep your equipment going without having to pay overtime – I think you'd see your bottom line go up,"

says the president of Creative Displays, Overland Park, Kan.

"Not a bad idea at all," agreed another landscape contractor. "Work seven days in the field during busy season while you get to relax on weekends while the work is being done. Nice."

But is this strategy really that simple? Fellow landscape contractors chimed in with their comments on this scheduling technique.

EMPLOYEES, OVERTIME, CUSTOMERS, OH MY. Though many Message Board participants agreed that the seven-day-workweek idea was sound, they had some questions to work out.

"The first question is would you be able to find crew members who would want to work Friday through Sunday?" asks Chris Haddock, owner of Laconia, N.H.-based CBH Landscape Contractors.



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Aaron Smith, owner of S&D Lawnservice, Essex Junction, Vt., thought so. "You could find such workers, but it would be two different crews – a set for Friday and Saturday and a Sunday crew (everyone wants at least one day off per week)," he explained.

Also, "in my area, overtime is a fact of our industry and many crew-

members count on that overtime as part of their annual pay," Haddock shares. "By having the split week it would reduce overtime but would the crewmembers like that reduction in overtime?"

Darin Bowers runs his full-time crews Monday through Thursday, leaving Friday open in case of rain on another day. The owner of Pro-Mow

Lawn Care in Charleston, Ill., hires part-time college students to work on Saturday and/or Sunday to cut down on overtime.

In fact, the seven-day strategy might keep overtime to a minimum – a good thing for business, wrote Paul Wiering, Seagull Lawn Services, Houston, Texas. "If you have the business to work your guys a lot more than 40 hours during the busy season, then perhaps when things slow down, you'll still have enough business to keep most of your workforce employed at 40 hours. Of course, the extra profit would also be nice. The thing to be careful of is crew fatigue and burnout."

In addition to employee concerns, contractors wondered about client-related worries relating to a weekend schedule. "Would you find customers who would want you on their properties on the weekend, especially on Sundays?" Haddock asks. "I have a lot of contracts that state there is no work to be performed on weekends."

"Commercial properties are easier to mow on weekends, Bowers says. "There are no cars in the parking lots and fewer people around."

THE EQUIPMENT EQUATION. Maximizing equipment was the No. 1 reason to extend the workweek, according to contractors. Some contractors even thought about extending the workday to get the most out of their units. Bowers leases most of his mowers – he's allowed unlimited hours on these units with two-year leases. "We've even thought about adding some night crews to spread the overhead a little further," he shares.

Though the thought of extending equipment life and spreading out the cost is appealing, Message Board participants had the most questions in this area.

"You would be able to maximize your equipment, but at what cost?" Haddock asks. "A piece of equipment is good for only so many hours. So you would have to replace that piece in half the time. You would have



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less time to maintain the equipment because of less down time."

Though the contractors agreed on the reduced maintenance time – adding that they could schedule this in during evenings or one specific day each week – many contractors thought that if they are working more hours, they should be bringing in more money, which evens out the extra cost going into replacing equipment more often.

Smith recalls a previous landscape company experience he had where the owner didn't like the trucks sitting nights and weekends and wanted to maximize their use. "He turned over

trucks every one or two years anyway, so wear meant nothing to him," he says. "But we had to keep those trucks so clean so you would be unable to know truly how hard they were used."

Michigan-based landscape contractor Jeff Patterson thought this additional equipment wear, assuming a contractor still had time for maintenance, shouldn't even be an issue. "This is because any piece of equipment should be bringing in more per hour than it costs per hour (initial cost divided by hours of life)," he explains. "So if the machine is paying for itself and wears out, just turn it over for a new one and you're not out anything. So as long as the equipment is paying for itself, the fact that it would have to be replaced more often shouldn't enter into the equation."

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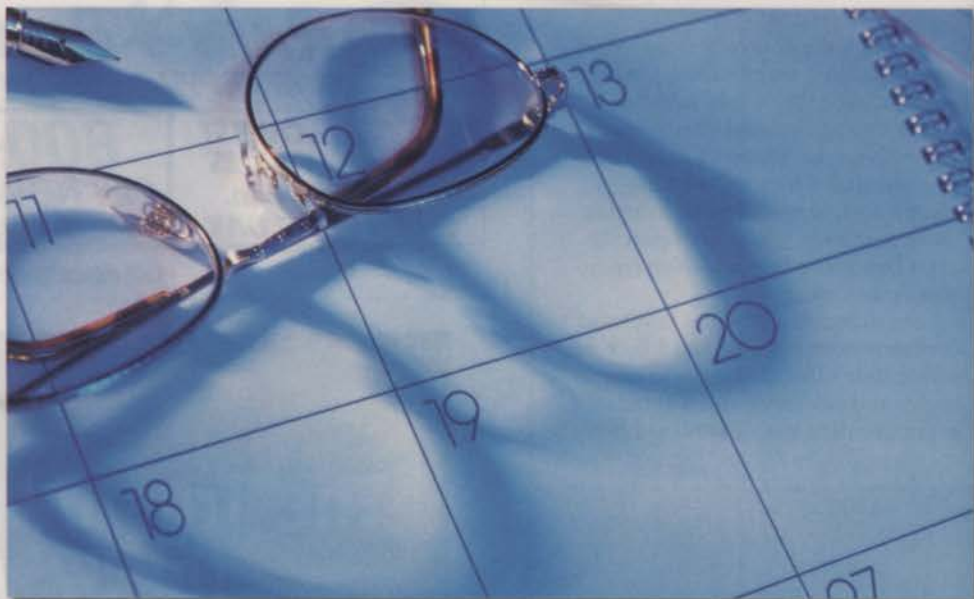
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Equipment is also considered a sunk cost and should not necessarily be used for these types of accounting exercises."

But the number Patterson thinks *should* be considered is overhead burden. "This is really where adding more work can make a difference," he says. "Your hourly overhead burden would get divided by the number of billable hours (example: \$200,000 divided by 10,000 equals \$20 of overhead per billable hour). This means, the more hours billed, the less overhead per hour billed. This works because overhead is a fixed cost – it exists whether you work one hour or 100. So if you are wondering if working extra hours will help the bottom line, look at your overhead



burden rather than equipment costs. Equipment should be viewed as a consumable rather than a concrete fixed cost, almost more akin to a

variable cost. For the typical business, the more billable hours, the more profit you will see as overhead burden falls." ■

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While weeds are the bane of the lawn care industry, there's no reason the control of these vile plants can't help you improve your business and boost profits.



Southern crabgrass. Photo: Ted Bodner, Southern Weed Science Society, www.forestryimages.org



Getting More Green From Weed Control

They grow like, well, they grow like weeds, and a lawn care operator can pull them or treat them, but they always seem to keep coming back.

But a weed's resilience and tenacity also keep LCOs busy and in business, whether it's treating with a preemergent for broadleaf pests or using a postemergent to combat grassy intruders

that pop up in a summer lawn.

However, LCOs often do not fully realize the full value in their weed control programs, or the cost of not providing one to customers. When LCOs don't have a solid handle on the full cost of offering an effective weed control program to their clients, they undervalue their services and fail to maximize their profits.

by mike zawacki

“Low odor is important, but Triplet Low Odor herbicide has been an even better investment than that”

— Michael Kravitsky, Vice President of Grasshopper Lawns, Inc.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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




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SELLING SEASON. Homeowners hate weeds in their lawns and it's the main reason they subscribe to an LCO's weed control program.

"The main reason clients call on us and want the service is to kill the weeds," says Jim Campanella, president of The Lawn Dawg in Nashua, N.H.

But successfully selling a five-step weed-control program is more complicated than just tacking on a simple price point.

"Weed control is a standard

application and most homeowners recognize the problem with weeds in their yards," says Jim Fetter, regional sales manager for Bayer's lawn and landscape group, Research Triangle, N.C. Weed control is the starter sale, he says, and clients should be introduced to other services such as disease and insect control.

And a weed control service isn't exclusive to lawns. Over the last few years, Campanella has introduced an additional service that treats weeds in

shrub beds. The three-step program treats the shrub beds with a pre and postemergent product in late spring, and then again with a postemergent product at six-week intervals.

"We just started to offer the service and it's become quite popular among our clients," Campanella says. "No one likes to have to weed their shrub beds."

To increase sales effectiveness, LCOs should take a consultative approach to selling their weed-control services, says Justin Gayliard, specialty products sales representative for Dow AgroSciences, Indianapolis, Ind. One approach that is effective is developing a partnership with the client in order to understand their needs and their limits, he says.

"Ask the homeowner what their expectations are," Gayliard says. "Just

continued on page 108

"Ask the homeowner what their expectations are. Just offering a weed-control program and not asking what the homeowner wants will lead to not matching your services to the particular homeowner's needs." - Justin Gayliard

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USE READER SERVICE # 86

common mistakes

Weed control may be a routine lawn care procedure, but there are ways to muck up the service. And poor service leads to costly call backs for a lawn care operator. Furthermore, a poor sales strategy will also prevent an LCO from reaching his or her sales potential. Here are a couple of common mistakes LCOs should be on the lookout for in order to boost profits and optimize weed fighting potential.

➤ **Poor client communication.** A failure to educate the customer on the merits of proactive weed control is a major setback for LCOs. Listen to what the customer actually wants, says Justin Gayliard, a specialty products sales representative for Dow AgroSciences, Indianapolis, Ind. Some clients may not mind seeing the occasional weed, while others expect total eradication.

➤ **Prohibitive pricing.** Understand your marketplace what your clients are willing to spend for weed-control services. Develop price points based on client expectations and sales opportunities in your community, says Steve Stansell, lawn care marketing manager with Syngenta, Greensboro, N.C.

➤ **Careless application.** When providing the service, make sure you have good coverage, says Jim Fetter, regional sales manager for Bayer's lawn and landscape group, Research Triangle, N.C. Routinely check equipment. Make sure spreaders and sprayers are calibrated properly.

➤ **Know your weeds.** Identify the weeds you're treating correctly the first time, Fetter says. Consult the local university and extension service to understand what you're dealing with.

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Turbo TeeJet® Induction 	---	Excellent		Turbo TwinJet® 	Excellent	Excellent	
AIC TeeJet® 	Good	Excellent		XP BoomJet® 	---	Very Good	

Very Fine Fine Medium Coarse Very Coarse Extremely Coarse
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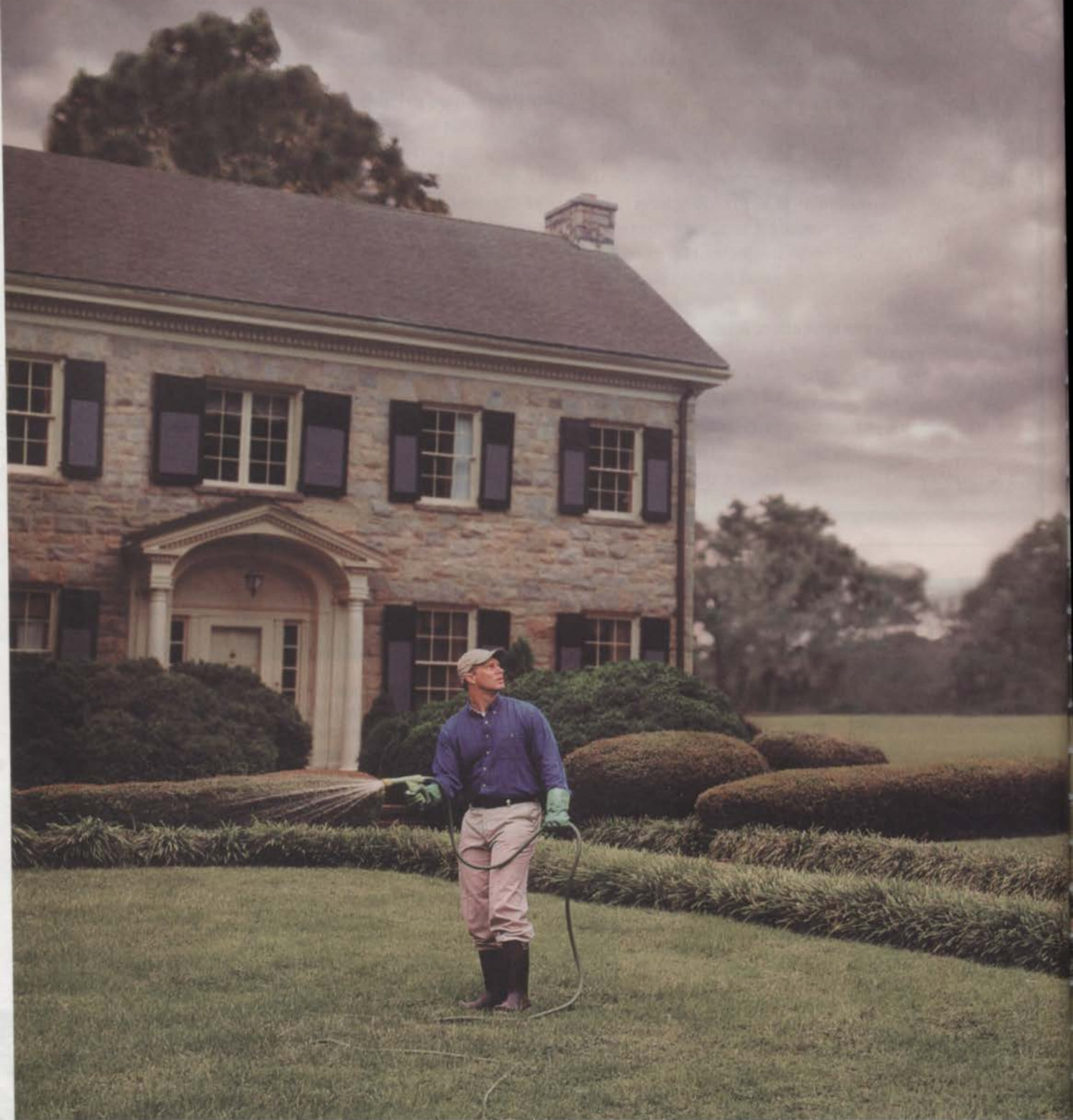
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USE READER SERVICE # 88

continued from page 104

offering a weed control program and not asking what the homeowner wants will lead to not matching your services to the particular homeowner's needs."

And mismatched services create dissatisfied customers, says Gayliard. To increase customer satisfaction and repeat business, he suggests LCOs tai-

lor a particular weed-control program to each individual customer, especially when handling new clients.

But clients aren't the only ones who need a thorough education on weed control services.

An LCO's sales force, as well as any employees who deal directly with clients, such as technicians, must

learn how to strategically position the positive attributes of a comprehensive weed control service to lawn care customers, says Scott Potter, a senior sales specialist at Dow AgroSciences, Indianapolis, Ind.

"I'm a strong believer in under promising and over delivering," Potter says. "A lot of employees, especially newer employees, over promise and under deliver. For example, guaranteeing weed control is dangerous business. New employees may be working on incentive and it's easy to make promises you then can't deliver on. Make sure the technicians and sales people know how to correctly position the weed-control service."

PRICING POINTERS. Correctly pricing out weed control services may hinge on any combination of variables, including an area's economic makeup, geographic location and length of season. It's a valuation



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"Using a preventive product first will help generate less trips to the lawn. Good service and no callbacks, while minimizing time spent on the client's lawn, is more money the LCO will make."

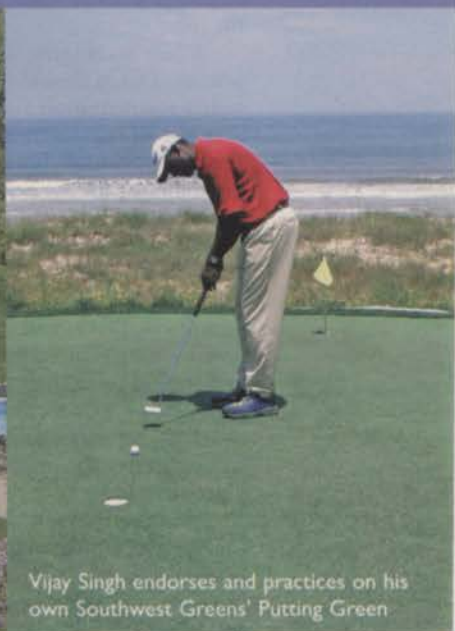
— Scott Potter

each LCO needs to examine closely. Ultimately, the majority of homeowners care only about how much it will cost to keep their lawn weed-free and looking lush, full and green. Often LCOs forget that most clients only want the bottom line.

"The average customer doesn't want a square footage price," Potter says. "The LCO should know their

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cost per thousand square feet, but the customer doesn't. Price the service by the job."

When developing weed-control pricing, LCOs should focus on customer segmentation and remember that not all customers are the same, says Steve Stansell, lawn care marketing manager for Syngenta, Greensboro, N.C.

For example, some cost-conscious clients want only the very basic services, Stansell says. With these customers, LCOs will only walk these lawns a couple times during the year and should price their services accordingly. However, an estate will have much higher expectations and will be willing to pay the price for a show-place, weed-free lawn, Stansell says.

"Successful LCOs clearly segment their services and can price that way," Stansell says. "The level of weed-control service changes from customer to customer, so a lawn care company should offer variable prices accordingly."

Likewise, LCOs can price their services in regard to the use of a particular pesticide and individual weed varieties, Fetter says. For example, there are opportunities to use specialty applications and cleanup products, such as a postemergent for crabgrass control, or an herbicide that controls cool-season grass in a warm season lawn, he says.

"To a large degree the LCO has to differentiate the prices based on the service, the convenience and the guarantee," Fetter says. "But it may be the best way to get additional profit/premium out of weed-control services."

FOCUS ON PROFIT. In their approach to weed control, LCOs should focus on being more preventive than reactive in their service in order to maximize their profits.

"Taking a proactive response and using preventive products in a weed control program will help decrease the hidden costs of having to use a postemergent pesticide," Gayliard says. "If the LCO has a callback because the postemergent product isn't working as fast as the homeowner wants, or weeds continue to pop up after they spray, it will lead to dissatisfied customers who may cancel their service."

There is a distinct difference between treating for grassy weeds and



customer feedback

Ignorance isn't bliss when it comes to providing affective weed-control service, that's why Jim Campanella, president of The Lawn Dawg in Nashua, N.H., spends as much time and resources on customer retention as in new customer attraction.

"Many firms are very aggressive with their sales, but half of those resources are wasted in re-signing customer they've lost because of poor service the previous year," he says. "Just imagine what they could do with those resources if they just paid attention to their clients' needs during the season."

Campanella's efforts start at the end of the fall season when a renewal letter is mailed to clients offering a zero price increase deal they re-sign before Dec. 31.

"This puts a lot of money in the bank for use and keeps us out of our line of credit," Campanella says.

In mid January, another renew letter is sent to clients who didn't re-sign before Dec. 31. Then, an aggressive phone campaign begins for those customers who still haven't recommitted to spring weed-fighting services.

In season, Campanella contacts each customer 48 hours prior to the scheduled lawn treatment.

"We call, let them know we'll be in the area and ask if they have any questions or issues in regard to our service that we should be paying attention to while where out there," Campanella says.

In early fall, Campanella leaves report cards on prepaid post cards for each client to fill out that has them grade his services for the year. An online version is also available for customers.

"The negative feedback allows us to fix whatever is bothering a client and helps increase our customer retention rate," Campanella says. "But the positive feedback is good, too, because it helps motivate our employees."

broadleaf weeds, Potter says. Grassy weeds, as a rule, are easier to control than broadleaf weeds with preemergent treatments, he says. Broadleaf weeds, though, are hidden profit robbers.

"Broadleaf weeds in the homeowner's lawn are the biggest profit robber," Potter says. "The number one reason a customer will cancel service is the

lack of broadleaf weed control. For some reason, crabgrass here or there is ok, but when a dandelion shows up, that one weed seems to irritate the customer enough to cancel service."

Traditionally, LCOs battled broadleaf weeds with a postemergent strategy, hitting them after they've come up in the lawn. However, the newer, and possibly the best oppor-



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tunity, is to treat broadleaf weeds with a preemergent herbicide, Potter says.

"Using the preemergent reduces the number of postemergent sprays on broadleaf weeds," Potter says. "When (a preemergent) was used, we've been able to reduce callbacks on broadleaf weeds alone by 85 percent."

Gayliard suggests LCO consider using blended products, combination pesticide formulations that treat with an herbicide and feed with a fertilizer. A "three-way" formulation – two herbicides and a fertilizer – may also be employed.

"The fewer trips you have to make to the client's lawn, the more profitable and more efficient you'll be," Gayliard says. "If they can use their liquid weed control, along with their crabgrass prevention, and along with a fertilizer, that's one trip to the lawn, but three line items they're billing the client. Less trips



Weed tenacity, like that of this Canadian thistle, keeps LCOs in business. Photo: Michael Shephard, USDA Forest Service, www.forestryimages.org

with more service is always better for the customer."

"Using a preventive product first will help generate less trips to the lawn," Gayliard says. "Good service, no callbacks while minimizing time spent on the client's lawn, is more money the LCO will make."

In addition, choosing between liquid or granular pesticide treatments, or using a combination of the two, is dependent on an LCO's personal preferences and experience with the products, Stansell says.

"An LCO has to look at their area and determine what kind of flexibility they would like to have in using a liquid or granular product," he says. "Most use a little bit of both."

Settling on a proactive approach to weed control, such as in the battle against broadleaf pests, can increase an LCO's chances of generating greater profit margins. However, some weed-fighting experts suggest treating with high-quality weed-con-

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ontrol products, while more expensive in the short term, will help boost overall, long-term profits.

"LCOs should make sure they're using a good quality product with the proper rating and timing for their particular area," Stansell says. "Quality products are the first line of defense. Consider the few extra dollars against the cost of a callback or the loss of a customer."

Likewise, trying to shave costs by using poor fertilizer blends with a preemergent herbicide is not a good idea," Fetter says. "If the LCO is using a fertilizer plus a preemergent herbicide, it's important to use a high-quality fertilizer. Because particle size counts, if the LCO is using a product with small particles they can get a better count per square foot and they can get better control."

Callbacks for weed eradication can severely cut into an LCO's profit margins. For example, at many small- to mid-sized lawn care companies

the same individual who applies the weed-control treatment is the same person who has to deal with the callback, creating excess labor costs and reducing efficiencies.

"A callback can cost about \$44 - \$55 (in technician wages and benefits, chemical cost and overhead) just to go back on the lawn," Gayliard says.

"That half hour spent dealing with an unhappy customer is time not treating another customer's lawn and making revenue," Potter says.

In order to better manage treatment schedules, Campanella suggests LCOs examine their callback data and determine when there is a spike in service calls.

"Keeping on top of your treatment schedules is a huge factor in reducing your callbacks," Campanella says. "You'll probably begin to see the biggest increase in service request come after about five weeks. If you can narrow down that date you begin treatment right before the weeds be-

gin to appear in your clients yard and this should reduce the need to make service calls"

While callbacks can set back profits, LCOs shouldn't discount the financial impact of losing a customer to poor service or repeated callbacks due to a weed-infested lawn.

"The cost of a callback from poor weed control and unsatisfied customers gets more expensive for the LCO every year in the poor customer return rate," Stansell says. "And the cost of losing a customer is expensive."

"The objective of an LCO's weed-control program is to eliminate that to the greatest degree that you can," Fetter says.

Therefore, when establishing a weed control program LCOs need to take additional profit-prohibiting variables into account, such as the quality of the pesticide, the amount of rain fail and whether or not the LCO has experience with a particular pesticide brand or formulation. **LL**



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Photos: Bobcat (left and page 118); John Deere (page 122)



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When contractor Attila Varga started his excavating business in 1998, he invested in a backhoe loader, a machine he thought would be efficient and give him the most return on his money. In the span of eight years, the owner of Varko Contracting & Excavating in Calgary, Alberta, Canada has added three more backhoes to his fleet, and he plans to add yet another machine this year.

Varga learned early on the right piece of equipment doesn't only increase efficiency on the work site, but profitability as well. Investing in the right machines can make all the difference in a landscaping business. "We can do pretty much anything with them," Varga says.

by heather wood



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LOADERS DEFINED. The first step in purchasing the right piece of equipment is to dig in and learn the difference between a contractor's basic machines. Each manufacturer has a different variation or name for each piece of equipment, but they all are made to perform virtually the same tasks.

Most versions of the backhoe

loader include both front and rear dig components. It is often billed as the contractor's jack-of-all-trades. The machine can run on wheels or tracks. It is not to be confused with the excavator, which has a similar digging device, but only on one end.

An end loader, by contrast, only has a loader (not a digging compo-

ment) on one end. On most models, the loader piece can be replaced with different attachments to better suit various jobs.

The skid-steer loader is another piece of construction equipment contractors use. This is a smaller machine than the backhoe or end loader, it has a tight turning radius and can maneuver in small spaces.

Bob Tyler, product marketing manager for backhoes and landscape loaders for the construction and forestry division of Moline, Ill.-based John Deere, explains a skid-steer turns in this manner because wheels on one side of the machine move forward while wheels on the other side simultaneously slow down or move backward. The equipment usually is controlled with two levers rather than a steering wheel.

Some manufacturers make loaders in four-wheel drive models as well. The backhoe loader, on the other hand, is a two-wheel drive machine, allowing it to be driven like a car.

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Contractors often overlook the landscape loader, or "skip loader." The machine looks similar to a backhoe and is used widely in the Southwest United States. It has a loader on the front and is often fitted with a box blade rather than a backhoe on the rear for fine grading applications. "Despite its outward similarities to a backhoe, the landscape loader is in fact a purpose built machine with a lower center of gravity for enhanced side slope stability," Tyler says.

OPTIMUM USE. When Varga started his search for a backhoe, he already was familiar with how they operate because of previous work in the field. However, not all prospective buyers

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are as experienced or know the duties each piece of machinery can take on.

The key to finding the right piece of equipment is to consider tasks involved in common jobs. A backhoe just may be able to perform several of those tasks, Tyler says.

For example, if a contractor needs to bury a pipe 4 feet in the ground, and then cover it up afterwards, a backhoe would save on buying

"In addition to lifting and hauling dirt, landscapers can use the same machine to dig pits for tree and shrub installations and trenches for utility operations. Operators can switch between loader and backhoe operations by simply rotating the chair."

- Paul Anderson

two separate pieces of equipment, Tyler says. The backhoe consists of both an excavator to dig the trench, and a four-wheel drive loader to fill the trench after the pipe is set.

"If the task at hand is to spend all day unloading pallets of sod from a truck or stockpiling topsoil, then a four-wheel drive loader might be the better choice, since it is purpose built for loading and unloading operations," Tyler says. All of these machines can be fitted with a wide variety of attachments including multi-purpose buckets, pallet forks, angle brooms and snow blades.

Paul Anderson, loader backhoe product manager for Fargo, N.D.-based Bobcat, says the backhoe is convenient for multi-task landscaping jobs. "In addition to lifting and hauling dirt, landscapers can use the same machine to dig pits for tree and shrub installations and trenches for utility



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operations," he says. "Operators can switch between loader and backhoe operations by simply rotating the chair."

On the other hand, continuous loader operations, such as spreading wood chips from a bucket, loading trucks with topsoil or moving pallets, may be better suited for an end loader. For tight spaces, lighter

loads and a smaller budget, a skid-steer or compact machine might prove a more viable option.

THE COMPACT QUESTION. Some landscape contractors may have more use for a smaller machine than its giant construction-sized cousin, as Bobcat can attest. Some manufactur-

ers sell compact loader backhoes that combine features of a skid-steer loader and a compact excavator.

Landscapers often find the smaller models to be more beneficial to their businesses, Anderson says. "A smaller machine's compact size enables operators to work in close quarters, such as in between homes and buildings," he says, adding ideal practices for landscapers with compact loaders and attachments include installing trees and shrubs and moving pelletized materials like sod and fertilizer.

Other product managers confirm that skid-steer loaders, a smaller piece of construction equipment, are also ideal for confined spaces. Tyler warns, though, that this type of machine has its drawbacks. "From a landscaping point of view, this may not be desirable in all instances where there is a desire to avoid tearing up the surface



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that the machine is running on – grassy areas and freshly graded soil comes to mind," he says. Another downside, says Tyler, is skid steers have one of the smallest capacity loader bucket attachments available.

MAKING THE INVESTMENT. Just as machines are sold in various shapes and sizes, expect to find a variety of sticker prices. For a tractor loader backhoe with up to 30 horsepower, expect to pay from \$1,900 to \$3,300, says John Ryan, product manager at Kubota Tractor in Torrance, Calif. The final cost depends on the attachments, Ryan says. The end loaders, which can contain anywhere from 50 to 135 horsepower, cost up to \$10,000.

A four-wheel drive loader, starting at 59 horsepower and reaching 330 horsepower can cost anywhere from \$67,000 to around \$450,000, depending on how the machine is equipped, Tyler says. A landscape loader of the same brand starts at \$61,500.

Skid-steer list prices can range from \$24,000 to around \$47,000 for horsepower in the 40s up to the 90s

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> try before you buy

Just as potential buyers test drive cars, testing construction equipment before making the investment is not uncommon. Attila Varga of Varko Contracting & Excavating in Calgary, Alberta, Canada, tried out three different brands of machinery before deciding on his preferred brand of backhoe loader. "Each brand has its own gimmick," he says.

Fortunately for contractors, dealers offer rentals and trials so the prospective buyer can explore which machine will work best for the task at hand. "By all means ask your local dealer for a demonstration of the equipment you are looking at," says Bob Tyler, product marketing manager for backhoes & landscape loaders in the John Deere Construction and Forestry Division, located in Moline, Ill. "The best place to hold the demo is on your own

site to match the equipment to your exact needs."

In addition, renting equipment first is an option. Many manufacturers have rent-to-own or similar programs. "A lot of contractors have employees to operate the equipment and they rent to have the employees operate it and see how it performs," says John Ryan, product manager at Kubota Tractor, based in Torrance, Calif. "This way they will know if they're getting their money's worth."

For those who decide to take the plunge and buy a machine, financing plans are available. Varga has elected this option a few times, adding he generally pays off his backhoes in three years. Manufacturers recommend buyers talk to their local dealers to find a plan that best suits their individual needs. Dealer locators can often be found on manufacturers' Web sites.



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construction equipment >>>

and backhoes can cost from \$43,000 to around \$200,000 for horsepower ranging from the 40s to more than 100. Compact loader backhoes, which have horsepower ranging from 31 to 46, can cost anywhere from \$20,000 to over \$40,000, Anderson says. Varga says he paid about \$117,000 Canadian, or just under \$100,000 in U.S. currency for his first backhoe. He says his four backhoes are useful for multiple types of jobs, from sewer and foundation work to tree holes and rock walls.

Likewise, before any contractor decides to shell out that much money for the machinery, he or she must determine whether it will be used enough to make it worth the cost. There are a few things to consider when scoping out new equipment. "Those who often take on odd jobs, including digging trenches, craning heavy loads, unloading trucks or preparing a site to rough grade, may do best with a backhoe," Tyler says.

A contractor must also keep the job site size in mind when purchasing construction equipment. Compact equipment at times may not be enough to get the job done in a timely manner. But there is also such a thing as a machine that's too big.

"Say you want to put in a pool," Ryan says. "If the equipment is too big, you'll have to tear down the fence to get it to the site. But with a smaller machine, it can fit through the fence."

Getting the equipment from site to site is another consideration. An average skid-steer, with a top speed of up to 11 mph, may need a truck and trailer for transport. On the other hand, a backhoe that can reach 23 mph can be driven to a site.

Anderson says that even a compact backhoe, if hauled, requires only a 1-ton truck and a smaller, less expensive trailer, which could save a landscaper the cost of additional, heavy-duty hauling equipment.

The contractor should consider not only the initial purchase price, but also how much work can be done in one day in terms of productivity, if the machine will be available to do work when it is needed and whether choosing a machine with low daily operating costs can create a large saving over a business year.

Varga says an added benefit is that the backhoe is like a Swiss Army knife: "It's something that can do the job of two machines with one machine." □

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Riding mowers may offer more power and productivity, but walk-behinds still have a place in a landscape contractor's equipment fleet.



Photo: Exmark

Still Standing

When most contractors talk about mowers, they talk about riders. The productivity and power of riders often leave walk-behinds in the shadows. But even though they're not the lead actor any more, walk-behind mowers still play a pivotal role.

The sales of walk-behinds aren't as high as they were 10 to 15 years ago, but the machines are in no danger of becom-

ing extinct. Referencing numbers from the Outdoor Power Equipment Institute (OPEI), Luke Prussa, senior marketing manager, Exmark Mfg., Beatrice, Neb., says there has been a steady market for midsize walk-behind mowers. "Total shipments are about 15 percent less than they were 10 years ago," he says. "But the market has been fairly steady in terms of volume since 2000."

The numbers seem to show that despite advancements in riders, contrac-

by kathleen franzinger



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tors still find walk-behinds a valuable and necessary component in their equipment lineup.

WHEN TO WALK. So when is a walk-behind better than a rider? For one, the compact size of walk-behinds makes them a better – and more efficient – choice for small properties. “Residential sites are usually smaller areas so you’ll see walk-behinds more often than not on residential job sites,” says Gilbert Pena, commercial segment strategy manager, John Deere, Cary, N.C.

Their small size also means walk-behinds are more gate-accessible, as well as more adept at maneuvering around highly landscaped areas, such as flowerbeds and shrubs. These areas can be found on residential, as well as commercial, properties. “You need walk-behinds on commercial properties with islands or courtyards,” says Frank Nuss, northeast territory sales manager, Hustler Turf Equipment, Hesston, Kan. “You need them to maneuver around ornamental trees on the island.”

This also makes walk-behinds a good choice for trim work. Large,



Walk-behind mowers can be more capable of maneuvering around heavily landscaped residential yards and commercial properties, according to contractors. Photo: John Deere

riders will vary by manufacturer, but in general, most riders shouldn't be used on slopes of more than 10 to 15 degrees. For example, walk-behinds are proving to be an asset on berms, or man-made hills, designed to reduce street noise in subdivisions.

landscaped and visible to the public, such as berms, tracking can be avoided with walk-behinds. “The lighter the unit, the lower the pounds per square inch,” Pena says. “Therefore, the less likely you’ll have the tracking effect. Weight is sometimes an issue that dictates you don’t use anything but a walk-behind.”

In addition, if contractors usually mow a property with a rider, they may want to consider using a walk-behind on rainy days. “On a wet day or when you have a rainy week and you still have to keep up with the mowing, you would switch over to a walk-behind to avoid tracking,” Pena says. “When wet, riders will track more.”

There is also an economical reason contractors turn to walk-behind mowers. “Walk-behinds are the lowest investment you can get away with and still make a living in the landscaping business,” Pena says.

The cost for walk-behind mowers depends on the type, Prussa says. Midsize gear-drive units range from a retail price of \$2,000 to \$3,000 and

“No way is the walk-behind going to be phased out. You can look at the biggest contractor and you will always find a walk-behind on their truck. There are just too many places where you can’t use a rider.” – Frank Nuss

open properties can be mowed more efficiently with a rider, but many contractors will finish by trimming with a walk-behind. “You can get closer and be more careful and not damage the landscaping, such as shrubbery and flowers,” Pena says.

Walk-behinds are also better at mowing on slopes. Limitations for

Riders may be getting smaller and lighter each year, but because walk-behinds don't have the operator's weight, they'll always win in the weight category. One benefit to their light weight is the reduced tracking. When turf is mowed often with a heavy machine, visible tracking marks will stay on the landscape. On areas that are highly



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hydrostatic-drive mowers range from about \$4,000 to \$7,000.

DIFFERENT WALKS OF LIFE. Walk-behinds may be the workhorse of the maintenance sector, but that doesn't mean they're all the same. Contractors have a choice of hydrostatic or gear drive, as well as various controls, horsepower and deck size.

2005 OPEI numbers show the market for midsize walk-behinds is

more productive. Sean Dwyer, associate product manager for turf care products, Husqvarna, Charlotte, N.C. says at one time, hydrostatic units were said to offer as much as a 40 percent increase in productivity.

With that higher productivity comes a higher price tag. Prussa estimates gear-drive walk-behinds with 32 to 48-inch decks cost about \$2,000 to \$3,000 retail, whereas hydrostatic units with 36 to 60-inch

productive machine possible. For example, in areas of the country that have a high number of small properties requiring walk-behinds, there will likely be more hydrostatic than gear-drive units, Pena says.

Walk-behinds are also available with a choice of deck widths to handle a variety of tasks. For example, the 21-inch mower, one of the smallest commercial walk-behinds, is especially good for trimming work, Prussa says. But contractors in coastal areas such as Texas and California also use the 21-inch machines to mow the smaller lawns commonly found in the area.

T.J. Justice, partner, Just Mowing, Houston, uses only 21-inch mowers. Working on small residential tract homes – with only 3,000 to 6,000 square feet of turf – he says the mowers just make sense. “We think it takes longer to load and unload larger walk-behinds and riders,” he says. “And there is more liability if you try to squeeze one of them through a gate.”

The mowers are also faster, considering his customers' property size, noting that it only takes 8 to 12 minutes for them to cut a lawn, Justice says. The other benefit is the resale value. Justice resells 100 percent of his equipment at the year's end, and buys all new. He resells the mowers for about 40 to 45 percent of the original cost, adding that the retail price for a 21-inch mower is about \$1,300.

A step above the 21-inch mower are the 32 and 36-inch walk-behinds. These are best for contractors who mow smaller properties or need to fit through gates. Above that are 48 to 60-inch mowers. “The 48-inch from a volume standpoint is the largest in the industry in terms of units,” Prussa says. “It's large enough to bring with it productivity, but small enough to fit in most properties.”

Seeing the benefits of walk-behinds and riders, many contractors send their crews out with both types of equipment. Outside Unlimited in Hampstead, Md., owns six walk-behinds and three riders. Grounds Maintenance Manager Cary Doyle sends crews out with both types of mowers, and then the crews determine which they'll need. “Open areas are done more efficiently with a rider, but some areas need a walk-behind,” Doyle says. “Walk-behinds are used where the riders can't be, such as smaller areas or on hills.”

On areas with small turf gaps between landscape beds, walk-behinds can fit in to get the job done. On wet turf, they can also leave fewer tracks compared to their riding counterparts. Photo: John Deere.



about 57 percent gear drive and 43 percent hydrostatic. “The trend is slowly switching from gear drive to hydro,” Prussa says.

The main advantage to hydrostatic walk-behinds is they are easier to operate. “The hydro drive lets operators reverse quickly,” Prussa says. “The gear drive is more laborious to turn and move.”

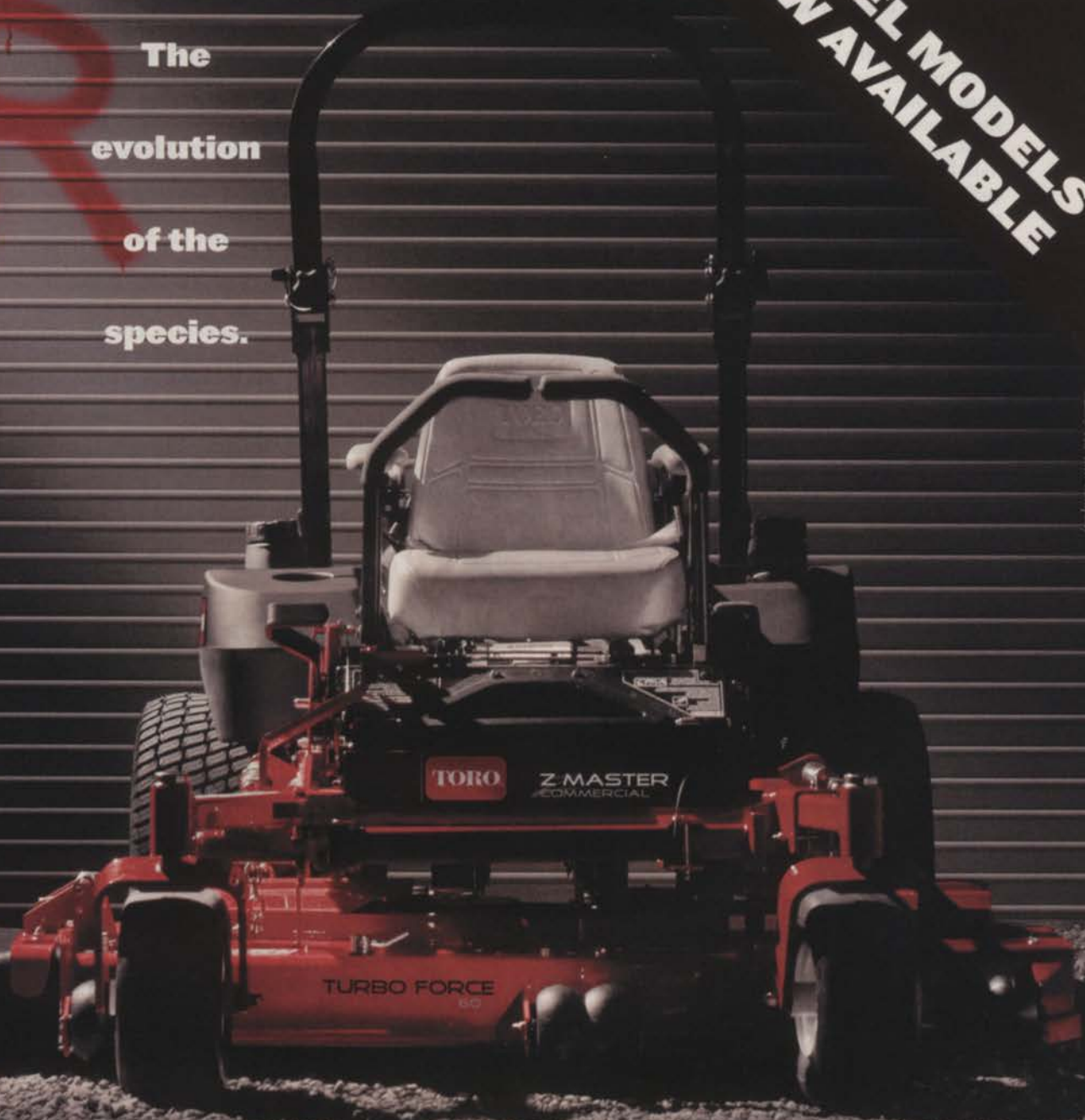
In short, hydrostatic units are

decks cost \$4,000 to \$7,000. When comparing a 48-inch gear drive with a 48-inch hydrostatic walk-behind with the same engine, Prussa estimates the hydro would cost about \$1,000 more. If the hydro has extra features, it could cost \$1,500 more.

For contractors whose properties dictate they use a walk-behind a lot, the extra price for a hydrostatic unit is worth it because they want the most

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WALKING AHEAD. Most mower advancements in recent years have been focused on riders, but manufacturers aren't ignoring the walk-behind. The three areas seeing the most development are horsepower, attachments and ergonomics.

When it comes to advancements, walk-behinds generally pick up the qualities of riders. When operators saw the benefit to electric starts on their riders, they started requesting it on walk-behinds. Likewise, contractors who like the high horsepower of their riding mowers are asking for higher horsepower on their walk-behinds. The demand has been met, with some manufacturers offering walk-behinds with horsepower as high as 23 hp. "Some contractors even want a walk-behind with a 60-inch deck and 25 hp," says Ken Raney, advertising manager, Hustler Turf Equipment, Hesston, Kan.

"For the price, which is moderate, many contractors like the extra


horsepower," Prussa says, adding extra horsepower usually costs \$100 to \$200 more.

Why the demand for higher horsepower? Some contractors find these larger walk-behinds very productive on large commercial properties, such as corporate campuses, banks and shopping centers. "A lot of times these properties have a lot of sloped areas between the road and parking lot," Prussa says. "The area is open, but a lot of times they have a pretty significant slope."

Large landscaping companies will buy the bigger walk-behinds because they're even more productive than riders in certain cases, Prussa says. "They have found in their own studies that they can be more productive than riders on certain properties, based on if it has significant slope or lots of obstacles to mow around," he says.

Listening to contractors' demands, manufacturers are also coming out with more attachments. Contractors

want to use a walk-behind when the have to, but there are also times when they'd like to ride. Ride-on attachments let them do just that. "One of the most popular attachments is the stand-on sulky," Prussa says, explaining they have one or two tires and are similar to riding, but the operator is standing up. "It allows operators to go faster than they would walking. Plus, it saves a lot of wear and tear on the operator not having to walk all day."

Walk-behind mower design may not be changing as quickly as the rider, and the product may not be as glamorous, but the walk-behind mower has definitely earned its place on the landscape trailer. Not many contractors can be found who don't own at least one. "No way is the walk-behind going to be phased out," Nuss says. "You can look at the biggest contractor and you will always find a walk-behind on their truck. There are just too many places where you can't use a rider." 

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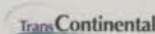
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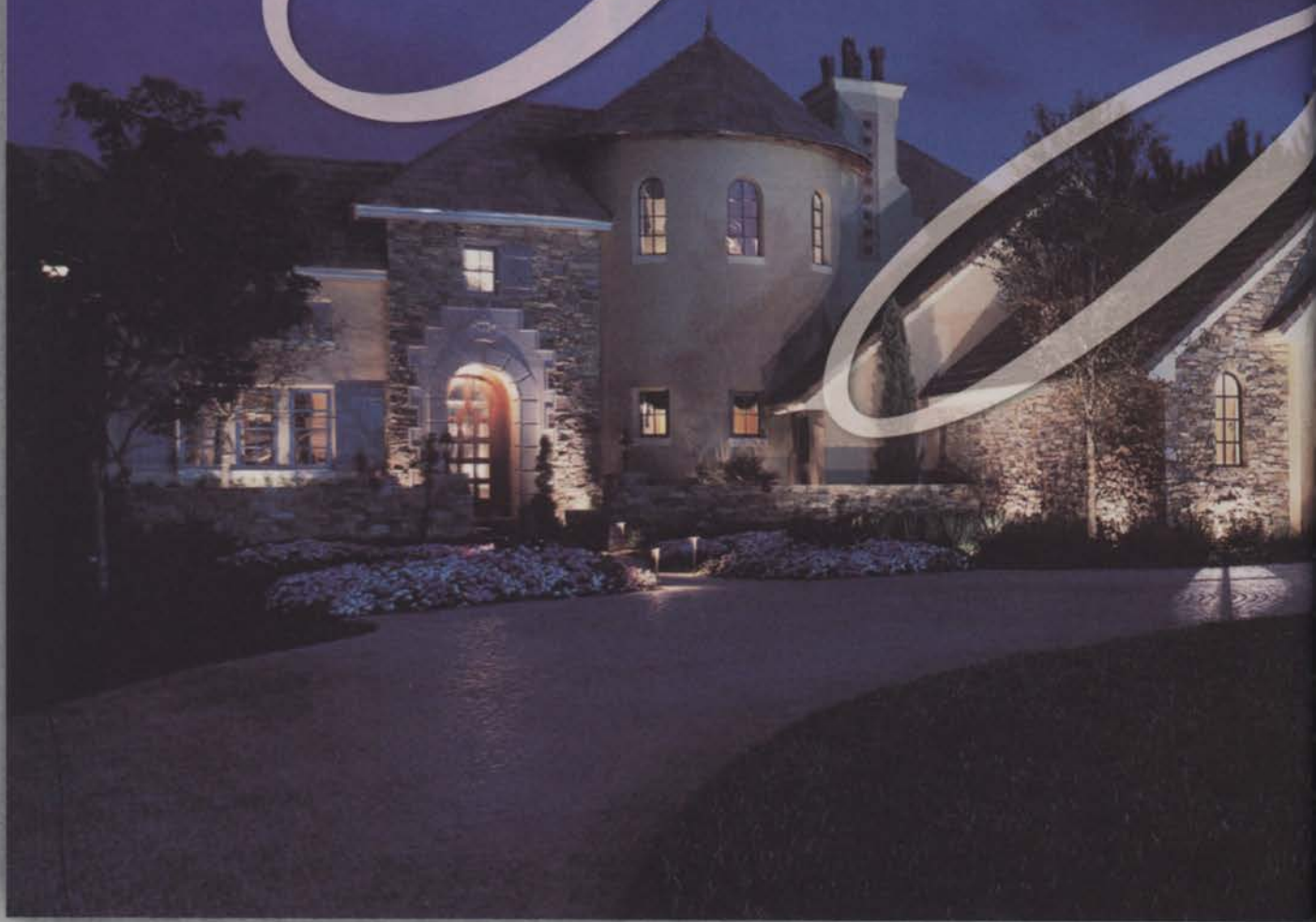
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Designing

Landscape





by kathleen franzinger



Follow these dos and don'ts for great landscape lighting design.

Landscape lighting design isn't rocket science, but it also isn't a matter of sticking a few fixtures in the ground and calling it a day. Before designing any lighting system, Eric Borden, vice president of Ambiance Lighting Systems, Sea Gull Lighting, Riverside, N.J., suggests contractors ask themselves three things: What do I want to light? How do I want to light it? What do I want to light it with?

The answers to those questions can serve as the basis for the system's design. But for a little extra help, here is a list of tips and tricks for successful landscape lighting designs.

DON'T OVERLIGHT. The key with low-voltage landscape lighting is to keep it simple. "In outdoor lighting, less is more," Borden says. He recommends that contractors lighting a home with low shrubbery and plant material "use 12- to 18-watt Xenon lamps for path lighting. For shrubs and smaller trees, they can

Photos (left, pages 140, 142): Seagull Lighting

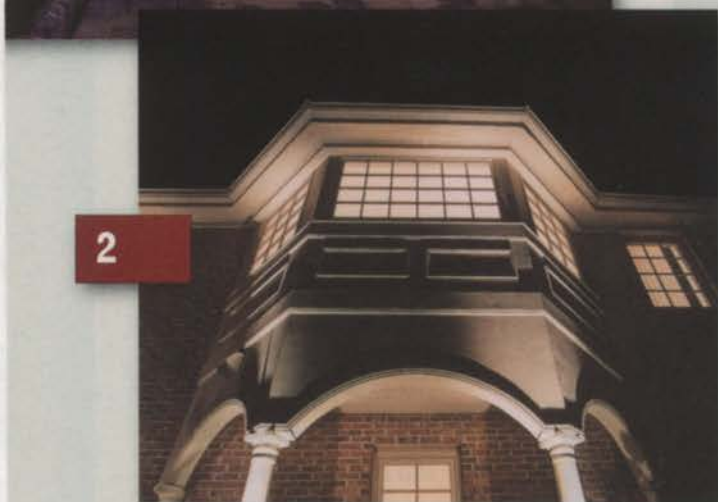
6 LIGHTING DESIGN PRINCIPLES



1

Principle 1: Depth – Lighting design is the process of directing the visual experience. The designer controls the viewer's gaze, setting focal points, transition areas and visual destinations.

The principle of "depth" refers to the distance the viewer's gaze travels as he or she views the scene. In Photo No. 1, moonlighting creates a subtle yet fascinating foreground focal area that acts as a starting point for the viewer's experience. The gaze naturally travels down the driveway finally ending at the visual destination of the house. A lighting design with "depth" can turn a viewer into a participant – the difference between good lighting and great lighting.



2

Principle 2: Perspective – The landscape of a homeowner's property is a three-dimensional canvas for the lighting designer. The viewer experiences this from outside the property, at its boundary and in many locations within. Therefore, the designer needs to consider all points-of-view (perspectives) and create a continuous rich experience – he must light the landscape with the knowledge that homeowners will move from place to place.



3

Principle 3: Focal Points – Try to slowly and smoothly sweep your gaze across the far side of the room. You'll notice it's nearly impossible to do. Instead, your eyes move from one point to another, stopping briefly each time. The brain forces this stop-and-go action because it cannot process a moving image. As lighting designers, we use this knowledge to create an overall design consisting of visual destinations (focal points) and the illuminated spaces between them.

We need focal points in the landscape to act as stepping stones for the eyes. A good design will take the viewer through the landscape, directing the visual experience to take in the statuary, the specimen trees, the water features or whatever combination of elements elicit the desired experience. Just as with real stepping stones, focal points should not be too far apart and there should not be complete darkness between them.

Principle 4: Quality and Direction – Just as a painter carefully selects brush type, size and shape, the lighting designer selects fixtures that paint light broadly or narrowly, with soft or hard edges, with elliptical or round beams. The painter also applies brush strokes in well defined directions; in the same way, the lighting designer directs light from upward or downward, from behind, or in front, or from the side.

In lighting, quality is a term that refers to a combination of factors, such as beam spread and shape, level of diffusion

Photos (138, 139): CAST Lighting



and the overall appearance of lights relative to each other. Lighting quality is what sets the mood. Some typical quality terms: dramatic, natural, inviting, romantic and subdued. If a homeowner asks for romantic lighting, it is the lighting quality she is specifying. The designer learns with experience how to achieve various qualities using the right tools and techniques.

Direction simply refers to the direction that fixtures project their light. Here are the various lighting directions and some qualities they can elicit:

- Down lighting: natural, subdued, romantic, mellow
 - Up lighting: dramatic, uplifting, grand, spooky
 - Side lighting: textural, defining, dramatic
 - Back lighting: ethereal, understated, defining, mysterious
 - Front lighting: revealing, dramatic, flattening
- Some other tools and techniques that affect quality are:

1. Using narrower beams to up light a structure is more dramatic than using a wall wash.
2. Using a diffusion lens with an MR-16 fixture softens the edges of the light beam making it less dramatic and more subdued and natural.
3. Using tree lights to spread a low level of light across unlit areas creates a moonlit effect, making the scene more natural, romantic and welcoming.

Principle 5: Symmetry and Balance – Symmetry abounds in the natural world – animals have symmetrical limbs, eyes and ears and plants have symmetrical branches and leaves, for instance. Homeowners find symmetry beautiful, so landscape designers use symmetry to evoke a positive emotional response.

Lighting designers look for any symmetry that may be present in the landscape or in the structures. If they find symmetry, they illuminate it so that it becomes recognizable to the nighttime viewer. In the landscape, typical symmetrical components may be bushes that flank either end of a wall, stones that border the edges of a walkway or posts that frame an entrance to a property. On the structure, we find symmetrical columns, windows or other architectural features.

Principle 6. Cohesion – Cohesion refers to the connection between the various visual elements. To create a cohesive design, we keep in mind the desired overall look and feel, the focal points, and the safety and security needs. We then look at how we can tie together visual destinations to achieve cohesion between the separate elements. – *Steve Parrott, media and marketing director, CAST Lighting*

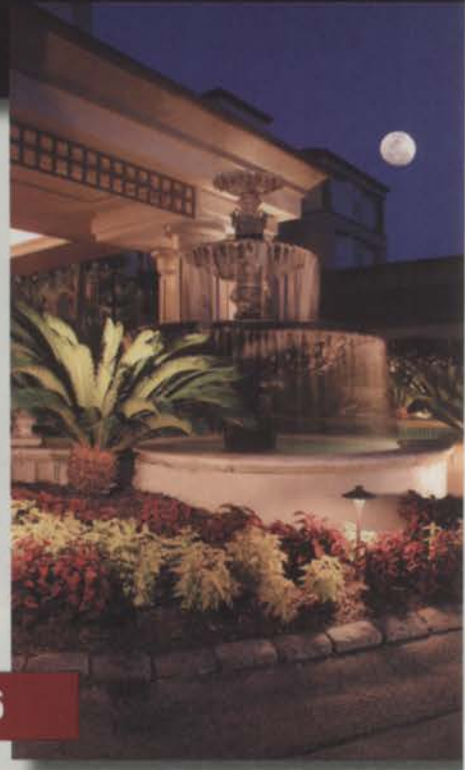
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5



6





use 10- to 20-watt halogen lamps."

The less-is-more philosophy also includes fixtures. Professor Joe Rey-Barreau, University of Kentucky College of Design, suggests that contractors use a limited number of fixtures, such as two or three that offer universal appeal. This keeps the design simple, as well as reduces inventory.

DO PICK A FOCAL POINT. To avoid overlighting, contractors need to decide what they want to light on a property. Mike Southard, national sales manager, Kichler Landscape Lighting, Cleveland, Ohio, says he looks at the house first, noting any architectural features he or the customer may want to highlight. Next he looks at the property for other items he can light, such as decks and patios, a tree the customer likes, or a water garden. "If there is a beautiful statue in front of the house, I'll light it," he says. "But you have to be careful about what you're lighting. You need to make sure the focus is where you want it."

The first item Rey-Barreau suggests lighting is the house. "My rule of thumb for lighting a house is to keep



An eye-catching lighting design should include a combination of various lighting techniques. Photos: Seagull Lighting

it very low," he says. "I think the key is to do a very soft glow on the house."

The second thing he suggests is uplighting trees and vegetation. Next, he recommends lighting the special features of the property, such as an outside sculpture or an interesting accent on the house.

DO MIX UPLIGHTING WITH DOWNLIGHTING.

There are two basic techniques: uplighting and downlighting. Installing uplights is the easier of the two, making it a popular choice with new lighting contractors. Downlighting, on the other hand, requires more skill and is more often used by experienced contractors, Southard says.

Each technique delivers a different effect. Uplighting is dramatic, Southard says, adding that he usually puts uplighting on the house. "It's for people who want the wow and punch," he says.

According to Rey-Barreau, uplights work well on the walls of a house and on interesting features such as a chimney. Trees, too, often get uplights. Rey-Barreau recommends putting at least two uplights on trees. "You don't want to put just one light on trees because that can give you an unbal-

anced light pattern," he says.

Downlighting, also called moonlighting, offers a softer look. "The effect is that it looks more like natural moonlight, which is why a lot of homeowners like it," Southard says. "It can set you heads and shoulders above other contractors."

Downlighting is also good for contractors working in colder climates that get a lot of snow. Downlighting avoids issues of snow covering the lights or burying a fixture, making it more susceptible to being hit with a snowplow or other vehicle.

But quality design should include "a combination of up and down lighting for contrast," Borden says, adding that mixing techniques, such as path lighting with up and down lighting is also good. "Mixing light sources that portray different colors is another option," he says.

DO PROPERLY SHIELD THE LIGHTS.

The key with any landscape lighting design is to see the effect, not the fixture itself. This means contractors must properly shield the lights. Rey-Barreau recommends using fixtures that conceal the bulb. "If the bulb is visible in any way, your eye is not going to go to what you're lighting," he says. "It will go to the fixture. Try to conceal the bulb as much as possible."

DO GET THE CUSTOMER'S INPUT.

Contractors should remember that they are more than a lighting system installer. "Contractors have to act as the design consultant as well," Borden says. But this doesn't mean taking off on a design without any input from the customer. The homeowner needs to be involved so they can tell the contractor what they're trying to achieve with the lighting system. Is it to extend their outdoor living space? Is it for aesthetic reasons? Is it for security? The answers to these questions should move the contractor in the right direction.

For example, say a homeowner comes home late at night. If that's the case, Borden says contractors may then want to light the pathways. "You can light the porch or deck," he says. "You can light the backyard to extend the living space outdoors."

It's important for contractors to talk to the customer about the light-



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ing system first, Southard says. "Customers will help with the design," he explains. "They'll ask you to light their deck, pathway or stone on the house. Be sure to ask if there is any specific thing they want to highlight." Southard recommends asking the customer how they entertain. If they have a pond or deck, they should be lit. If they like to entertain outside in their back yard, contractors will know where to include lights.

DO UNDERSTAND THE TECHNOLOGY. It may not be rocket science, but there is a science involved with landscape lighting. It isn't simply a matter of pointing a light at a tree. Contractors need to understand foot candles, beam spread, and other pertinent photometric information on lamps, often provided by manufacturers. "For example, if you want to light a 15-foot-tall tree with an 8-foot canopy, look at the manufacturer data to find a light bulb that will reach 15 feet or more," Borden says.

With uplighting, the main objective is to try to get 1 foot-candle of light at the top of the tree, says Rey-Barreau. A foot-candle is a measurement of how much light reaches a surface. "When you turn off all the lights in a space and light a



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candle, the amount of light you have 1 foot away from that candle is one foot-candle," he explains. "That may not seem like a lot of light, but at night, it's very bright."

The amount of light actually being produced by the light bulb is called candle power. According to Rey-Barreau, there is a fairly simple formula called the inverse square law that says 1 foot-candle multiplied by the distance squared equals candle power. Distance is measured from the ground to the top of the tree.

Therefore, a 40-foot tree would be 40 squared, which equals 1,600 feet. One times 1,600 equals 1,600 candle power. "So you would need to find the bulb that gets you 1,600 candle power in order to get 1 foot-candle at the top of the tree," Rey-Barreau says. "This shows a contractor that he has to understand and dig a little deeper into the foot-candle and candle power aspect."

Part of a good design also requires that contractors know the bulb. "You

don't want it to be too bright or overpowering," Southard says. "You need to know the wattage and whether it's a flood or spot effect."

For instance, Southard says the MR16, one of the most commonly used fixtures, has an 8-degree spot beam or 60-degree flood beam. "Narrow spot lighting is good for a statue, but a tree with a large canopy should be lit with a flood."

And if at first contractors don't succeed, lighting is easy to try again. If something looks off when the lights are turned on, it's easy to move a fixture to better light an object. "The good thing about landscape lighting is the flexibility," Borden says. "If you're 2 feet off, you can pull it out of the ground and move it."

No matter how good a design, as time goes on it will need to change, which is a definite bonus to contractors who want to increase sales. By offering a service program, contractor can replace the lamp and adjust

fixtures for a fee, Borden says. "You design a system based on the angle of the fixtures and using the proper lamp in that fixture," he says. "But as trees and shrubs grow, the angle will need to be changed and bulbs will burn out. A service program lets contractors replace the lamp and adjust the fixture."

Keeping up on education can also benefit a contractor's designs. New technology does arise, so it's important for contractors to attend classes or seminars offered by manufacturers, distributors or organizations such as the Low Voltage Lighting Association of America. LEDs are one emerging technology, offering lower wattage and longer life, that contractors should stay educated on. "But they're still new," Southard says. "The fixtures are expensive, and there are some issues with light output. Technology in landscape lighting doesn't change too rapidly, but it does change." □

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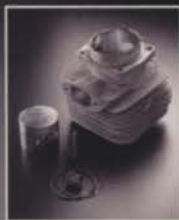
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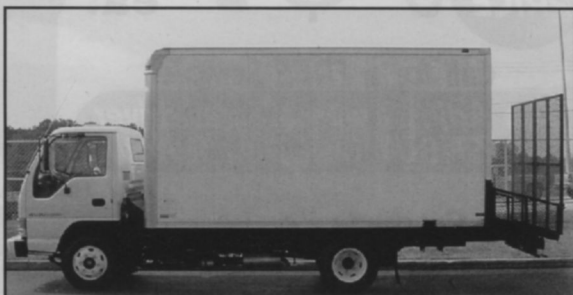
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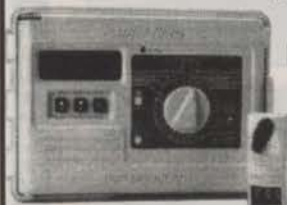
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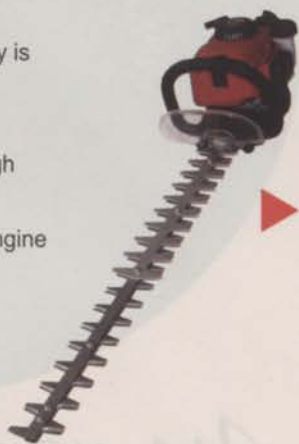
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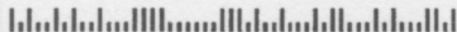
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- Facilitate efficient watering of higher cut turf
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- Features a bright gold color and large individual flowers the size of quarters
- Strong, even, upright growth habit reaches 4- to 5-feet high
- Frost hardy and easy to cultivate in well-drained fertile soil
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- Monrovia Growers – 888/752-6848, www.monrovia.com



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Vista Professional Outdoor Lighting LED Lamps

- Full line of fixtures with optional, solid-state LED lamps
- Deliver up to 50,000 hours of operation
- Available in more than 190 fixtures, including up and accent lights, ground and well lights
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- Line includes hand pruners, aluminum loppers and a turbo-blade folding saw
- The pruners are made of stainless steel and feature slip-proof handles
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- All tools carry a one-year warranty
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Rain Bird 5512 Rotor

- Built to withstand harsh conditions and vandalism
- Offers a 12-inch pop-up height and optional side inlet
- Memory Arc automatically returns rotor to its original arc setting
- Non-strippable drive mechanism prevents damage
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Cleary Chemical TriStar 70 WSP Insecticide

- A neonicotinyl foliar insect spray for greenhouse, field, nursery and landscape markets
- Granted a new expanded label by the EPA
- New label includes control of aphids, mealy bugs, caterpillars, scales, whiteflies, thrips, leaf-eating beetles and leaf miners
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Versa-Lok Retaining Wall Installation DVDs

- "The Base Course" step-by-step instructional DVDs are available for the company's Standard or Mosaic retaining wall systems
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- Each nozzle comes with two chemical resistant O rings
- Made to last to eliminate the need for replacement
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- Features two spreader holding capacity
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- Able to hold fully loaded spreaders (not recommended)
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- Neurotoxin formula combined with high palatability said to result in rodent death after single dose
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- Agrisel USA, Inc. – 877/480-0880, www.agrisel.com

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SnowWolf Alpha Series Snow Plow

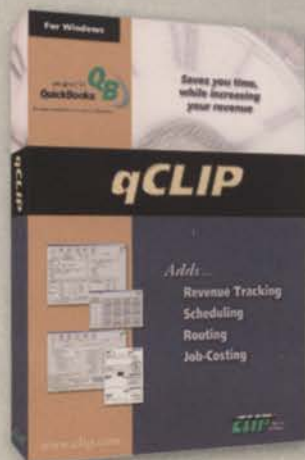
- Designed for 10,000-28,000 pound equipment
- Features blade with continuous welded construction
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- Offers dual pivot A-frame and trip edge
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Circle 231 on reader service card

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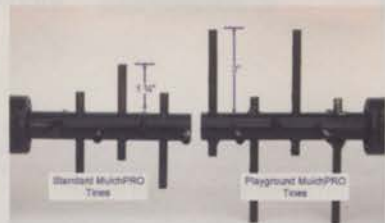
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- Longer tines dig deeper to create more "bounce"
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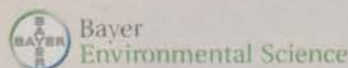


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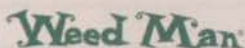
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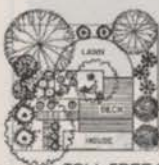
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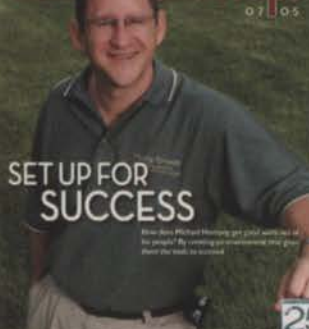
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Total Landscape Moves to a New Office



Since 1989, Total Landscape, St. Louis, Mo., has had the mission statement "Building relationships one landscape at a time." In early 2005, with 15 crews and \$3 million in commercial and residential sales, we made a big change to accommodate that mission and the company's size and potential growth: We moved to a new facility.

Our old facility included yard space of about 1 acre and a 2,500-square-foot building. Our actual office space was only 600 square feet and it was painfully obvious that our team was too cramped to operate effectively.

Rather than try to have our staff operate from two locations, as some of our industry friends had done successfully, we determined that moving to a bigger facility was our best option. Also, acquiring existing space rather than building from scratch made the most sense for our move, though building a custom facility may be a viable option for us in the future.

As we went facility-hunting, our team considered several factors, including proximity to major highways and

routing efficiency. Our new site allows us to service clients within approximately 30 minutes from any point. This is critical in job costing and eliminating windshield time, which affects our ability to bid competitively. Also, our new facility offers 4,500 square feet of office space and a 3,000-square-foot garage. Altogether, this space will allow us to address both our current space issues and also grow in the future. Moreover, the recent acquisition of an adjoining building gives us additional office space of 3,000 square feet and a $\frac{3}{4}$ -acre yard, both of which keep us well poised to grow if we stay at this facility long-term.

We're very proud of the planning that took place before our facility move. At Total Landscape, we believe that "failure to plan is a plan to fail," and "planning is magic." In October 2004, our management team met and appointed one person from each department to our "move team." With an anticipated move date of February 2005, our design team laid out the new facility using a computer-aided design tool as a guideline for the move. The move team was responsible

5 Keys to a Successful Facility Move



1. Determine whether buying, leasing or building a new facility is the best option.
2. Choose a location that lets you service clients most efficiently. Obtain the necessary zoning and occupancy permits with plenty of time to move in.
3. Create a plan and timeline for how your anticipated move will go. Involve staff members from all departments at all levels. Make sure your plan includes "what-ifs" in case problems arise.
4. Create an office and shop layout that will maximize the facility's efficiency and appearance once your team moves in. Let customers and suppliers know about your new location to keep business running smoothly.
5. Communicate with utility companies and others to coordinate the dates and times when your office services will be moved to the new facility.



Total Landscape has a new office facility (left) and garage/shop (above) to celebrate this spring. The growing company invested time and money in finding a new facility from which to operate. Altogether, the new location offers three times more space than the old site. Photos: Total Landscape



for acquiring new furniture, coordinating with our vendors (Internet, e-mail, computer, phone, voicemail, etc.), and scheduling everything necessary to have the building ready for moving day. Our plan detailed exactly what time we would move and how long our phone and computer systems would be down on moving day. This was critical because our goal was to move and not miss a beat.

We officially moved our office team on March 4, 2005. That morning, everyone in the office reported to work with their moving clothes on and ready to go. With a teamwork mentality, trucks were loaded by 10 a.m. and we were moved in by the end of the day. Our computers and phone systems were installed prior to our arrival, so we cut off the systems at the old facility at 3 p.m. and were live at our new facility by 5 p.m. The office was completely functional and running at full capacity by the following Monday, March 7.

Of course, bumps in the road are inevitable. Though we had spent many hours planning the move, we experienced some zoning- and occupancy-permit problems prior to moving day. While our office staff moved in March, our production team remained at the old facility until the end of May. We communicated and operated through our Nextel network, but this nearly three-month delay was a challenge during the busiest time of the season. We neither anticipated nor budgeted for the extra expense of having two facilities at once. The setup kept us from operating at top efficiency. Since then, we have incorporated "what-ifs" into all of our business planning processes. As with most business problems, we found that communication is the key to overcoming unanticipated obstacles.

Overall, about \$60,000 in hard cost went into the move and setting up the new facility the way we needed it. Right now, we're leasing the space

for \$4,500 per month, which will increase over the 15-year term of the lease. Our goal in the next five years is to negotiate a purchase of the property or eventually own our own site.

Our official grand opening will be in spring 2006. We've made sure to let our clients know where our new office is located so they can send payments and other items and so they know where to find us for our new facility celebration.

Because we can now operate more efficiently, we've been able to execute a growth plan to help us build to well over \$10 million in our new facility. Our team is truly energized by the move. Taking the time to create an effective workspace helps our office team operate with top efficiency. Our shop also has more space for a better working environment. Best of all, our staff is excited to come to work at the new Total Landscape and we're proud to have clients and vendors stop by to visit. — Bob Franey LL



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