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11 06

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JUST THE

**FACTS.**

What you need to know and what you can do concerning 11 critical industry issues.

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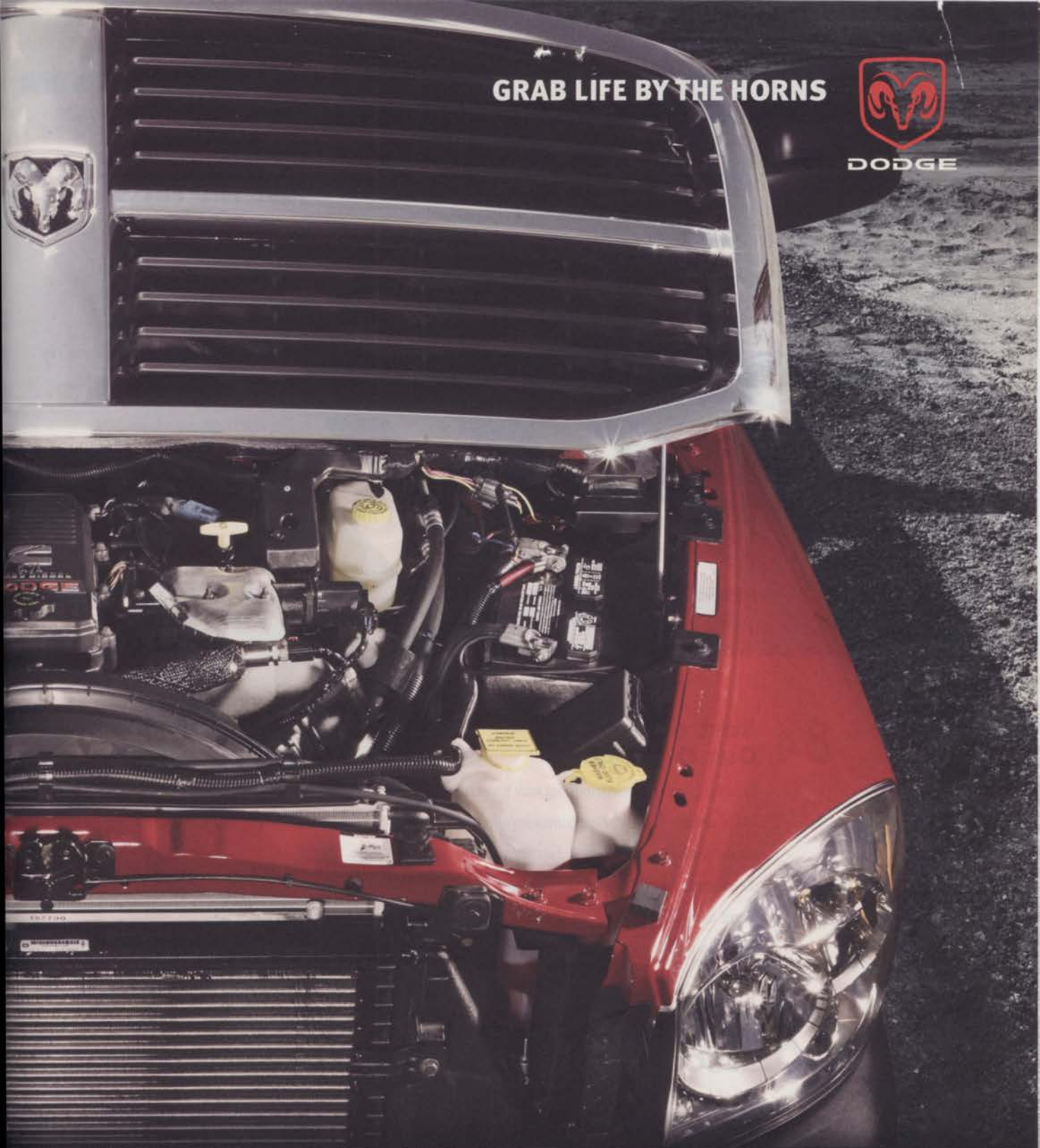
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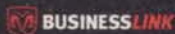
GRAB LIFE BY THE HORNS



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## Cover Story – Just The Facts.

# 44

What you need to know and what you can do concerning 11 critical industry issues.

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## Lawn & Landscape

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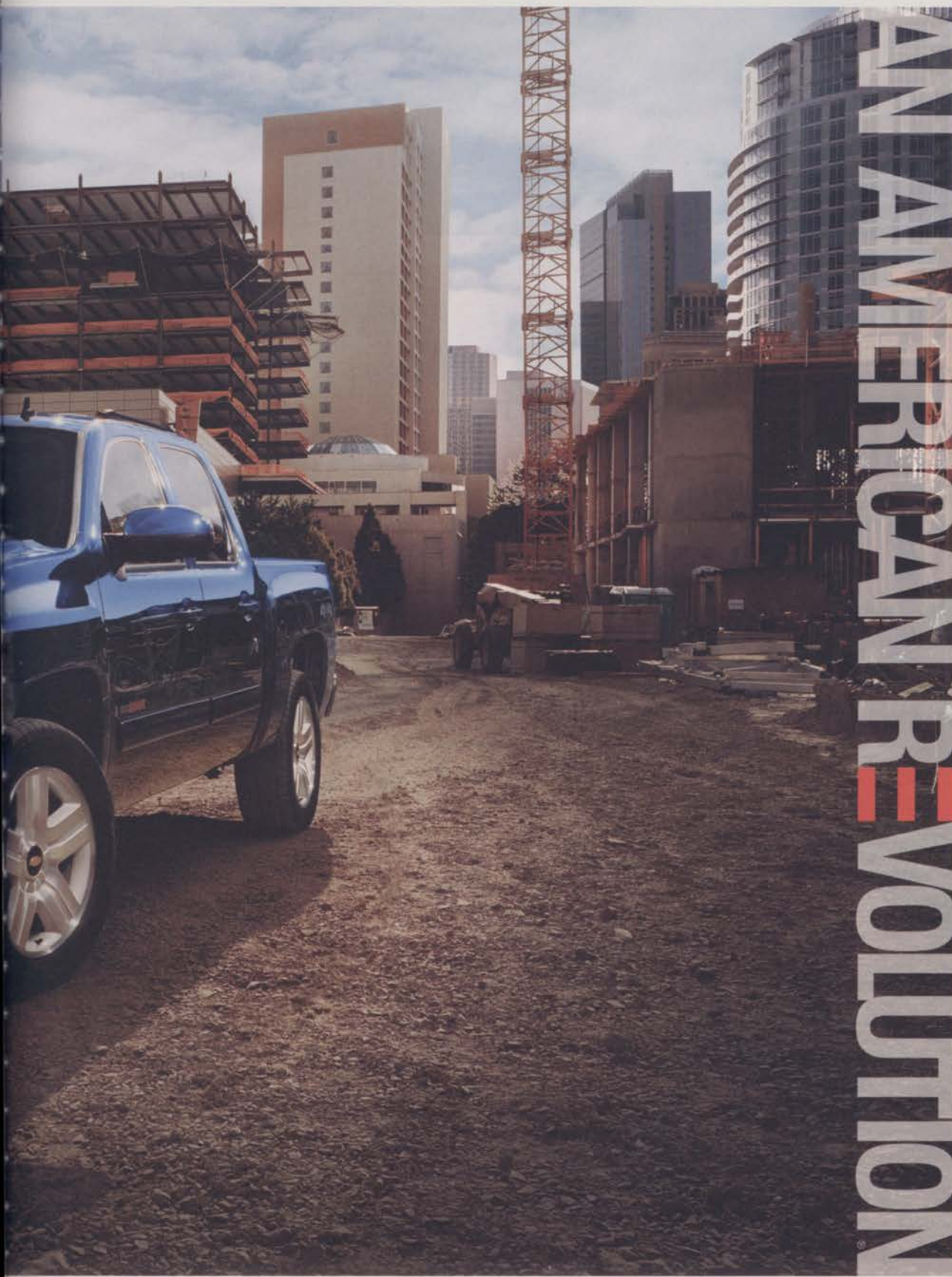




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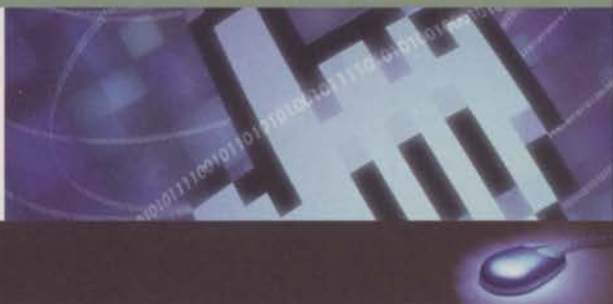


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## out on a limb

**F**or contractors looking to branch out and add a service to their existing businesses, tree trimming services appear to be an attractive option. But first, business owners must consider whether the benefits outweigh the costs. Will you charge enough to cover insurance costs and other considerations?

Contractors shared their tales of tree service on the *Lawn & Landscape* online Message Board, and we summed up those ideas in this month's Best of the Web feature, which can be found on page 84.

The discussion doesn't have to end. Contribute to the tree care discussion by logging on to [www.lawnandlandscape.com/messageboard](http://www.lawnandlandscape.com/messageboard). If you're still on the fence, others in the online forum may have the answers you've been looking for.

## GIE show

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**T**he *Lawn & Landscape* Web site is your home for extensive Green Industry Expo coverage throughout the show, which is Nov. 1-4 in Columbus, Ohio. You'll find photos, stories and information on the latest products being unveiled at the annual event.

In addition, log on for the latest information about next year's show, which will mark the first combined GIE and International Lawn, Garden and Power Equipment Exposition and will be held in Louisville, Ky. Then sit back and watch for your e-newsletter that will recap the weekend the Monday after the show.



## online poll: fee or free?

When it comes to charging for landscape lighting consultation, there is no right or wrong answer. Contractors who offer the service disagree over whether it's a good idea to charge a fee for providing design ideas.

Turn to "Design Consultation: Fee or Free?" on 104, and read one contractor's take. Then put in your two cents on our Online Poll during the week of Nov. 13, where we ask, "If you offer landscape lighting, do you collect a design fee?" While you're visiting the industry's leading Web site, visit our Message Board and expand the conversation.



## Online Book Store

*Lawn & Landscape* is helping to keep you in communication with all your employees. New to our online store is "The Lingo Guide for Landscapers." The coil bound, pocket-sized book features bilingual translations of the industry's most commonly used phrases to help keep the work flowing.

To obtain access to translations of more than 800 words and 400 phrases, visit [www.lawnandlandscape.com/store](http://www.lawnandlandscape.com/store) to secure a copy of the guide.

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cindy code | editorial director



## Giving Back

**T**he enthusiasm and passion professional landscape contractors show for the green industry is overwhelming at times.

I've participated in our industry's Renewal and Remembrance event, held annually at Arlington National Cemetery, and it makes my skin tingle watching and listening to fellow colleagues feverishly undertaking their responsibilities to enrich the grounds surrounding the graves of our nation's heroes.

In particular, I have great admiration for Phil Fogarty, long-time chair of the event, who's energy, optimism and relentlessness shepherded this event from infancy to national prominence over the past decade.

Fogarty, whose wife and sons have also participated at Arlington, said he's stepping down as this event's leader, however, he will continue to lend his passion to the project. Tom Shotzbarger of Tomlinson Bomberger will pick up the gauntlet.

When Hurricane Katrina hit, a number of suppliers and contractors throughout the green industry generously contributed to clean-up efforts and a variety of relief funds. One discernable example was the personal commitment by Scott Brickman, and his wife Patrice, who drove a truck full of needed goods from the company's Gaithersburg, Md., headquarters to Gulfport, Miss.

Brickman, CEO and president of The Brickman Group, also challenged his team to raise half a million dollars for hurricane relief. The company agreed to match contributions two for one.

Natural disasters have an inimitable way of bringing people together; both friends and competitors alike. Jack Robertson, president of Jack Robertson Lawn Care in Springfield, Mo., was the recipient of unexpected offers of help this spring from about a dozen competitors after his landscape facility was destroyed by a tornado. Through the generosity of family, customers and fellow lawn care operators, Robertson's crews were able to make applications within days of the tornado.

And no matter our individual political views, more than 350 lawn and landscape contractors have participated in Project EverGreen's Green Care for Troops program which is designed to provide lawn and landscape maintenance help for families of armed forces personnel whose major breadwinner is serving in the Middle East. Consumer demand for this program remains strong as nearly 2,000 families have signed up to participate. See [www.projectevergreen.com](http://www.projectevergreen.com) for more details.

Giving back to the industry is nothing new. Acts of generosity occur every day without our knowledge. However, in a time of business belt tightening, and demands from all facets of our lives, it's refreshing to be reminded of forthright acts of kindness.

With this in mind, we decided to dedicate the theme of our annual Leadership issue to "giving back." In this issue, we've highlighted the personal experiences of a few of our industry leaders. While the leadership issue comes out once a year, there's no reason we can't continue to share your stories in print and on the Web. If you have a story to share, please submit it to us and we'll take care of the rest.

Thanks for giving back to this amazing industry that we work in. **LL**

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USE READER SERVICE # 12

# Viewpoint:

## Pressure-Regulating Sprayheads vs. Flow Control Valves

Reader feedback and expert opinions on a controversial topic.

*Lawn & Landscape* received an e-mail from reader David Wickham, president of David Wickham & Associates, a Lake Mary, Fla.-based landscape architecture firm, regarding an irrigation article in our September issue. Here's what he said:

"I generally enjoyed your article 'Sprinkler Smarts' in the September 2006 issue of *Lawn & Landscape* magazine. But there is one item that I wish your article had strongly come out against. At a minimum, half of all landscape and irrigation contractors usually turn to using the flow control device on a control valve to fine-tune pressure regulation within an irrigation system – without fully understanding the short- and/or long-term operational and maintenance problems and costs they have just created. By not using a valve's flow control device to control pressure regulation, probably another 5 to 15 percent in operational and maintenance savings could be added to the 25 to 30 percent savings you mentioned in the article through using proper, and manufacturer-available, head pressure-regulating devices."

We asked for a response from Bill Savelle, sales director from Weathermatic, who we quoted in the article as saying flow control valves are a viable option in achieving pressure regulation. His comments and a response from Andy Smith, the Irrigation Association's state and affiliate relations director, appear below.

### Bill Savelle, sales director, Weathermatic:

"Flow control valves are designed to provide static regulation/pressure compensation. Typically, a flow control valve is more reliable in a residential system than a valve with a dynamic regulator because there are fewer moving parts.

"There are some limitations with flow control valves: They are unable to sense upstream pressure or adjust dynamically if the pressure on the system increases. When the pressure on the system is consistent (or lower when tuned during initial installation), flow control valves provide a reliable pressure compensation device. Flow control valves also give contractors an affordable solution to improving overall system efficiency. Dynamic



A pressure regulating stem (PRS) sprayhead in action (top), physical PRS dial (center), valve control handle and PRS (bottom). Photos: Rain Bird

regulators – when used on valves or pre-installed into sprayheads – are the most accurate devices for pressure-regulating irrigation. They provide upstream sensing capabilities and allow dynamic regulation with pre-tuned specific pressure.

"However, pre-installed dynamic valve regulators typically require a higher level of crew training and a higher level of maintenance for optimum performance over the life of the system. Dynamic pressure regulators, when purchased pre-installed in sprayheads, also require an understanding of the overall system hydraulics in order to bring the regulators into ranges where they will perform properly.

"These hydraulic requirements should be clearly indicated by the specifier or the project water manager in order for the sprinklers to function properly – and to ensure the benefits these more costly devices offer."

### Andy Smith, state and affiliate relations director, the Irrigation Association:

"They are both right and they are both wrong. Without seeing the big picture of the application discussed, no one can honestly say they have the best solution. An irrigation system is an assemblage of components used to deliver supplemental water to the plant on a particular site. Knowing that each site is unique in physical features, soil type, available water sources, etc.

is key. There is always more than one way to irrigate a site and there is always more than one way to save water – some are more hands-on than others.

"As for the specifics of this debate, flow and pressure are two different things that have an impact on each other. By reducing pressure, we decrease flow; by decreasing flow, we decrease pressure. Where that occurs and how that occurs are site-specific and very subjective. I have often said that capable hands are what create irrigation efficiency. Too often, irrigation culture focuses on what to use rather than who should be using it. You can purchase the finest equipment available and create catastrophic results by using it incorrectly. Conversely, a skilled individual can take some archaic equipment and create outstanding results.

"There is no question that irrigation equipment has made significant strides toward efficiency. In many cases, the equipment has become a means to compensate for poor design and installation practices. My opinion? The people are far more important than the product. Each site is unique and there is no one size fits all. Give me a well educated designer, contractor and water manager and we can create efficient irrigation."

*What are your thoughts? Weigh in on this topic or others on our Message Board at [www.lawnandlandscape.com/messageboard](http://www.lawnandlandscape.com/messageboard).*

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So give your John Deere dealer a call. You'll see making the switch is way easier than you think. I know I did.



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## Do You Plan Before You Call?

Sales are to a company what gas is to a car. If your beautiful convertible has an empty tank of gas, you're not going anywhere. Sure, you can sit in the garage and dream a little, but without the fuel, all you can do is dream. A landscaping company without sales is just like the pretty car with an empty tank of gas. That's why I love the statement "nothing happens 'til somebody sells something."

One sales tip is to engage in call planning. Call Planning is the process a professional salesperson goes through before he or she goes on a call. Notice I said "before." By planning for the call, you can spend your time more efficiently and improve your closing ratio. A simple sheet can help with this process.

Create a call planning sheet and for each client or prospect, note the date, time, address, source of referral and any other pertinent information. On that sheet note the type of service the prospect or client requested as well as your objectives in making the call. Under those objectives list the reasons that the prospect or client should buy your product or service. Be clear and concise: the fact you have clean trucks is not a reason to buy – the fact that you offer a lifetime warranty on your plants is.

Next list all the possible objectives a prospect or client might have for hiring your company note what your response will be for each objection if it is proposed. Lastly, list all the things you need to take with you on the call: your laptop with photos of jobs on it that are similar to what the prospect has requested; copies of brochures on pavers, plants, lights, etc.; and product information.


Also consider testimonial letters from other happy clients and anything else you might need to convince the prospect or client to buy from you. Yes, this is a lot

of work, but it is time well spent.

Planning for a call can and will help you improve your sales efforts. In addition to using the suggested call planning sheet, keep in mind the following simple tips for sales calls:

- Be on time for all appointments; people appreciate this and, trust me, it is noticed.
- Address clients as Mr. or Mrs. until they tell you otherwise. You're showing them respect by doing this.
- Make doing business with you as easy as possible – be accommodating with your meeting times, meeting places and the like.
- Put all the details in writing for the client. Prospects and clients appreciate sales professionals who listen well and demonstrate their desire to "get it right."
- Take your time. When you appear to be in a hurry, you certainly don't show the client you want their business.
- Never, ever pressure clients to sign up right away. Rather, let them know you're going to give them a couple of days to think it over. Be professionally pushy. By the way, I'm amazed at the prospects I have that sign up right away when I say, "Now why don't you take a couple of days to think about this?" Many say, "There's nothing to think about, where do we sign?" By me making them feel comfortable and not pushing anything, I gain their trust.
- Always say thank you, even if you don't get the job. Even though you don't get a job now, you might get one later.

Selling is a critical function in all companies. Remember, nothing happens till somebody sells something.

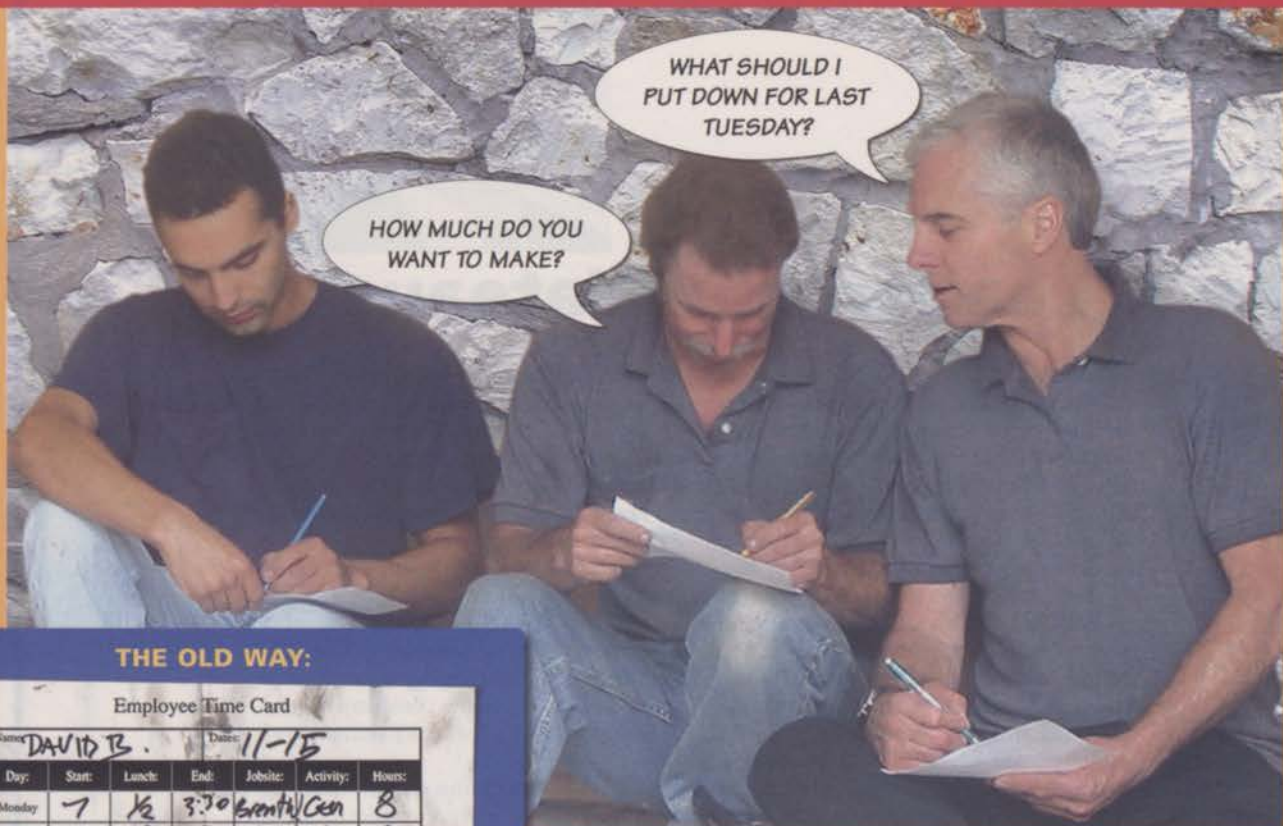
For a copy of the exact call planning sheet we use at Grunder Landscaping Co., e-mail [help@martygrunder.com](mailto:help@martygrunder.com) with "call sheet" in the subject line and we'll send it to you. 

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is a speaker, consultant and author, as well as owner of Grunder Landscaping Co., Miamisburg, Ohio. Reach him at 866/478-6337, [landscapesales@gie.net](mailto:landscapesales@gie.net) or via [www.martygrunder.com](http://www.martygrunder.com).



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Tuesday	7	1/2	3:30	'	'	9
Wednesday	7	1/2	4	'	'	8 1/2
Thursday	7	1/2	4	Crestview	'	8 1/2
Friday	7	1/2	4	'	'	8 1/2
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			12:41 PM	3:22 PM	Irrigation	2:41	7:38 hours
Tue	12/12	Brentwood	7:12 AM	12:07 PM	Irrigation	4:55	
			12:43 PM	3:23 PM	Irrigation	2:40	7:35 hours
Wed	12/13	Brentwood	7:12 AM	12:02 PM	Planting	4:50	
			12:46 PM	3:49 PM	Planting	3:03	7:53 hours
Thu	12/14	Crestview	7:17 AM	12:19 PM	Irrigation	5:02	
			12:50 PM	3:46 PM	Irrigation	2:56	7:58 hours
Fri	12/15	Crestview	7:13 AM	12:07 PM	Irrigation	4:54	
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## The 5 Leadership Plateaus

There are about 100,000 irrigation, landscape and tree service contractors in the United States. Approximately 11 percent of these contractors report annual sales of \$1 million. One percent report \$5 million or more in annual revenue. About 75 percent of the total group records annual sales of \$500,000 or less.

I've often asked myself why only 11 percent make it to the \$1 million mark and why so many contractors get stuck. I've found part of the answer by studying some industry benchmarks regarding company structure and growth patterns.

There are five structural plateaus in a green industry company as it grows from zero to \$5 million in annual sales. Surprisingly, while these levels are general in nature, the pattern is fairly consistent throughout the U.S.

Please note, however, this model doesn't take into account all administrative staff members such as designers and sales personnel.

**Level 1:** This plateau peaks at about \$350,000 in annual sales. Owner/CEO runs a full-time construction crew of three people or a five- to six-member maintenance crew. This company normally has a part-time office person.

**Level 2:** This level peaks at about \$650,000 in annual sales. The owner/CEO directs two full-time construction crews or 10-12 full-time maintenance personnel. The crews need strong crew leaders in place who manage labor and require minimal supervision. At this level, the company normally has a full-time office person/manager.

**Level 3:** This level takes the company to sales of \$2 to \$3 million. Initially, owners at this level need full-time division managers, who in turn manage crew leaders. Field crews increase proportionally with sales. The company needs a full-time office manager with assistants to handle

calls, accounting, ordering materials, filing, job costing, human resources, etc.

**Level 4:** Normally an operations manager or general manager is brought in; office staff and field crews increase as needed. Level 4 should get you to roughly \$4 million in annual sales.

**Level 5:** The final transition occurs at about the \$4-million level. This is when a company brings in a controller, who supervises finances, insurance, HR, IT, systems, etc. With strong managers in place and a solid controller, a company should be able to attain sales of \$5 million and beyond.


What's the common denominator of owners who grow their companies through these levels? It's the ability to build, coach and sustain a team of high-performance professionals.

Effective CEOs are able to reinvent themselves to a new job description as they transition through the different levels. Assuming your market allows you to grow, if you build a high-performance team focused on customer satisfaction, solid production and accurate cost measurement, growth is virtually automatic.

So how do you begin the transition from one level to the next level at your landscape company? Here are some take-aways:

- Study the company structure levels;
- Analyze your company's structure;
- Identify weak team members who require excessive supervision;
- Plan to make changes in staff or employee training;
- Realize that you manage laborers, crew leaders and managers differently. This is why 75 percent of contractors cannot make the transition and grow more than \$500,000 in annual sales.

Remember, assume that you operate in a market that allows for growth, "If you build it right, sales will come!"

But you gotta build it right. 

jim huston

The author is president of J.R. Huston Enterprises, a Denver-based green industry consulting firm. Reach him at 800/451-5588, [benchmarking@gie.net](mailto:benchmarking@gie.net) or via [www.jrhuston.biz](http://www.jrhuston.biz).



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## Essential Employee Communications

Imagine improving overall employee communications and, at the same time, holding your employees accountable for their actions. How about employing managers and supervisors who are more consistent and impartial in dealing with workers? How about reducing your exposure to employee lawsuits? If you would like to see any or all of these objectives accomplished in your landscape firm, you need to know about the benefits of a well-constructed employee handbook.

Here are reasons landscape companies of all sizes should have one:

### **Improved morale and productivity.**

Studies show morale and productivity are highest when employees know what is expected of them and, in turn, what they can expect from the company. A carefully written employee handbook communicates your expectations in a clear and comprehensive way, using language (translated in English and Spanish) that is easy to read and understand. Once employees know what your expectations are, then they can be held accountable for their behavior.

### **Consistent application of company policy.**

Bringing policies relating to employment, personnel status, compensation, safety, training and development together in an employee handbook eliminates much of the misunderstanding between employees and management. Everybody in the company would now have the same reference point for answering questions and interpreting company policy. It also promotes the uniform application of company policy by managers.

### **A cost-effective employee benefit.**


Employee benefits experts consider the employee handbook to be one of the most

important and cost-effective benefits an employer can provide employees. An employee handbook makes it easier to attract and retain good employees because good employees want to work for companies committed to maintaining a positive employee relations climate. In addition, the employee handbook plays an important role in communicating to employees all of the benefits provided to them, such as health and welfare, time off with pay, government mandated benefits, etc.

### **Reduced exposure to employee claims and lawsuits.**

One of the most important benefits an employer realizes from an employee handbook is the protection it provides from employee claims and lawsuits. Most of the media attention surrounding employee claims and lawsuits these days focuses on the multi-million dollar awards assessed against major employers. In truth, more than 90 percent of all wrongful termination, discrimination, wage and hour and sexual harassment complaints are filed against employers with fewer than 150 employees. The reason for this is smaller employers tend to be more arbitrary in their employment decisions than large companies and are not as well organized in managing their workforce. Sometimes having that extra bit of documentation will save employers months of hassles.

**It's good business.** Good customers want to do business with companies who have their act together. Self-motivated employees who portray consistent delight with and confidence in their employer best provide great customer service.

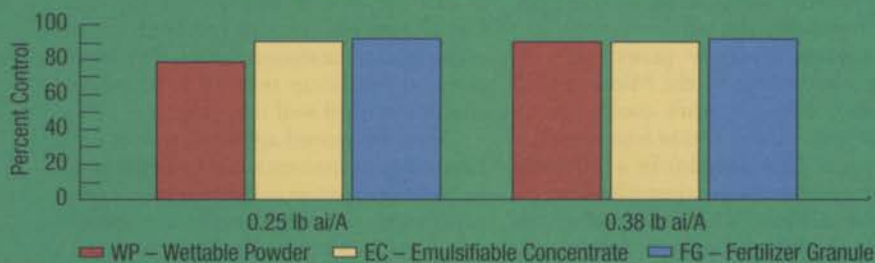
If you have an employee handbook, good for you. If you do not, read this article once again and do something about it today. 

**larry fish**


is president of GreenSearch, a human resource consulting organization. He can be reached at 888/375-7787, peoplesmarts@gie.net or via [www.greensearch.com](http://www.greensearch.com). PeopleSmarts® is a registered trademark of GreenSearch.

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Virginia Tech; Application June 13, 2001; 78 DAA

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## Early Planning for Weeds

Simply put, 2006 was a lousy year for crabgrass control. Much of the country experienced cool, dry spring months, followed by periods of heavy rainfall. The result was widespread breakthrough that created customer satisfaction headaches no one wants to revisit in 2007.

This comes on the heels of a couple of other years where preemergent products were particularly challenged. As a result, it's never too early to start thinking about new approaches to preemergent weed control for next spring.

**WAR OF THE WEEDS.** This discussion all starts with the assumption that crabgrass or goosegrass is your No. 1 target with your preemergent application, as is the case most often. Crabgrass, in particular, germinates when soil temperatures at a 2-inch depth hit 55 to 60 degrees Fahrenheit for a few consecutive days.

When will that happen next spring? Obviously, no one knows. If anything, spring weather seems to be increasingly inconsistent over the last few years.

Crabgrass typically germinates in late May/early June in the Midwest and Northeast, but this year's cooler spring delayed germination two to four weeks in many areas. That wouldn't be a problem, but lawn care firms are always looking to get more efficient, which means they are applying their preemergent products earlier and earlier. In fact, we saw some companies in Northeast Ohio making applications in late February during a break in the weather. Yes, a preemergent application can go down this early so long as there's no snow cover — especially since most preemergent applications are a granular fertilizer/weed control combination — but remember the following when timing your applications:

1. These products need to be watered in — are your properties irrigated?

2. Product left on the soil level will experience degradation due to UV light exposure, which can compromise control.


3. While label claims vary, most preemergents offer approximately 12 to 16 weeks of control (when properly incorporated into the soil after application and under normal environmental conditions).

If crabgrass germinates in early June, even applications made in early April are somewhat vulnerable to poor results. And delayed germination can result in what we saw this year — widespread infestations.

**SPLITSVILLE.** With split applications, you make two separate applications of a product at a reduced rate. The idea behind this approach is that spreading out the application of the control product — in this case, the herbicide — will provide control for a longer period of time.

Many product labels include directions for making split applications, and most call for simply making two applications at half the labeled rate. By making the first of two applications on April 1, for example, and the second in mid-May, lawn care companies can reasonably count on effective control well into July.

Also, the second application does not have to equate to an extra trip to the property. Many companies make their round two applications six to eight weeks after round one. These postemergent applications are typically sprayable tank mixes. Why not simply include a liquid formulation of the preemergent product in the tank?

In addition to extended control, making two applications reduces the odds of product not being applied to a particular area in a property due to applicator error, and it provides insurance against unpredictable weather. After experiencing a crabgrass year like 2006, a little extra insurance sounds pretty good, doesn't it? 

j.b. toorish and brian kelley

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

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Association News



**PLANET Names First CEO**

**T**he Professional Landcare Network (PLANET) named Tanya Tolpegin the association's first chief executive officer, effective immediately. The PLANET board of directors voted on Oct. 4 to appoint the former chief operating officer to the organization's helm. PLANET was formed in 2005 when the Associated Landscape Contractors of America and the Professional Lawn Care Association merged.

Since she joined the staff in 2004, Tolpegin helped sustain PLANET's alliance with the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) to provide safety resources to the green industry, contributed to membership growth (from 3,580 in 2004 to 4,400 today)

and played a role in the alliance between the Green Industry Expo/Green Industry Conference and the Outdoor Power Equipment Institute's Expo, which will debut in 2007, says PLANET President John Gibson.

Prior to joining PLANET, Tolpegin served as vice president of strategic planning at Hillenbrand Industries' Medeco Security Locks Division and managed operations for a distribution team at Pepsi-Cola. She received a master's degree in business administration from the University of Virginia's Darden School of Business Administration.

"Tanya's unique mix of vision, passion and discipline make her the right person to become PLANET's CEO," Gibson says.

In other news, PLANET proposed a new slate of board members for 2007. At its annual meeting

MERGERS & ACQUISITIONS

**MSD Capital Buys Majority Ownership in ValleyCrest Cos.**



Richard Sperber

**T**his year has been a year of investment for the ValleyCrest Cos., which has acquired two design/build firms and launched a full-service high-end residential business.

Investment continues today at the high-profile national firm; however, it's not strictly ValleyCrest's capital managing the venture. Rather, the Calabasas, Calif.-based company announced that MSD Capital, the private investment firm of Michael S. Dell, founder and chairman of Dell, has obtained a majority ownership interest in the company. Financial terms of the transaction were not disclosed.

Day-to-day operations at ValleyCrest will not change as members of its management team, including ValleyCrest founder and CEO Burton S. Sperber, President Richard Sperber and Stuart Sperber, CEO of Valley Crest Tree Co., have retained significant equity ownership in the company and will

continue to lead the business.

"Over our 57-year history, ValleyCrest has always made decisions that we feel best benefit the people most important to us—our employees and our customers—and this new partnership is no different," Burt Sperber says. "MSD Capital shares our values and long-term perspective of the \$50-billion landscape industry and we welcome them to the ValleyCrest family."

ValleyCrest, founded in 1949, is ranked No. 2 on *Lawn & Landscape's* Top 100 list, reporting more than \$700 million in annual revenue. ValleyCrest remains a privately held company and reports no plans to go public.

"We're really excited about the MSD partnership," Richard Sperber says. "They really understand what we want to do, which is to



on Nov. 4 at the Green Industry Expo in Columbus, Ohio (at the Greater Columbus Convention Center in room E150 at 3:45 p.m.), PLANET will vote to accept the proposed board, which includes: Jim Martin for president, Jason Cupp for president-elect, Bill Hildebolt for treasurer, John Gibson as immediate past president, Miles Kuperus for design/build specialty group, Joe Kujawa for interior plantscaping specialty group, Bruce Moore Sr. for landscape management specialty group, Fred Haskett for lawn care specialty group, Rachel Kelly for KRA 1 – membership, Rich Wilbert for KRA 2 – products and services, Matt Triplett for KRA 3 – certification, Dave Snodgrass for KRA 4 – industry development, Jeff Korhan for KRA 5 – marketing, Jerry Grossi for KRA 6 – business development, Maria Candler for KRA 7 – leadership development, Gerry McCarthy for KRA 8 – GIE/GIC, Norman Goldenberg for KRA 9 – government affairs, Barbara Schiebe for state association, and Ron Marcellus and Jim Fetter as supplier board members.

be a world-class customer service company and to continue to take care of our employees and customers. Who's better at customer service? Michael Dell is an innovator in developing customer service. In the end, it came down to a new partner who understands our customer base, understands our business and will let us continue to do what we want to do."

Richard Sperber added that the partnership with MSD enables ValleyCrest to continue to invest in the capabilities required to meet all of its customers' landscape needs, including landscape architecture, design/build, installation, maintenance, tree care and tree growing and moving.

With a 95 percent commercial customer base, ValleyCrest discovered significant synergies with MSD, which manages a large commercial portfolio as well.

ValleyCrest also plans to test the high-end residential market through its new Estate Garden initiative. While ValleyCrest has been heavily focused on the design/build service segment of the landscape industry for much of the year, the investment from MSD may help accelerate its pace.

"All the impact is positive," Richard Sperber says. "Design/build is really a major focus for us. We have a specific plan behind how we will continue to grow that business and we're on target."

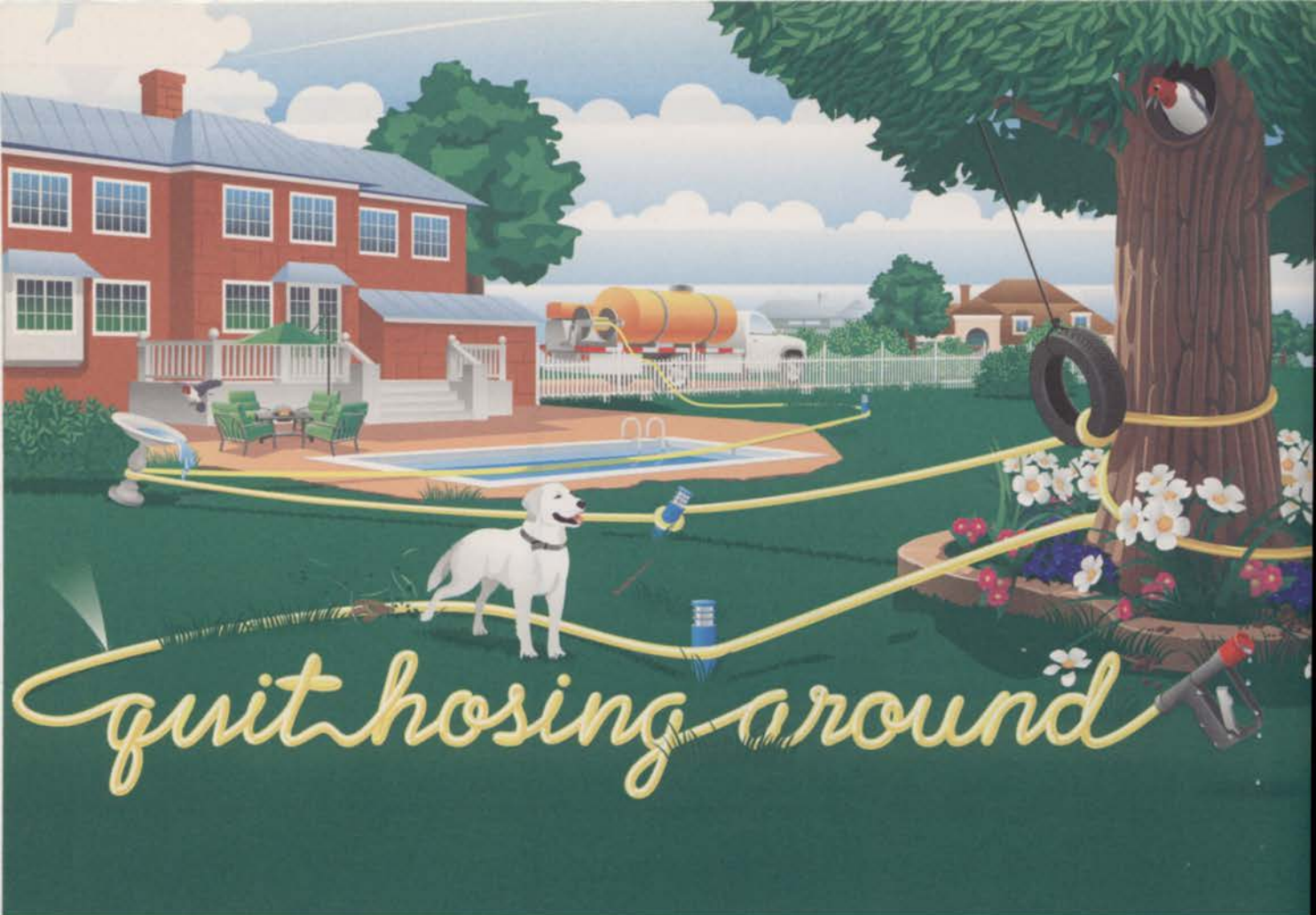
MSD Capital was formed in 1998 to exclusively manage the capital of Michael Dell and his family. The firm engages in a multi-disciplinary investment strategy encompassing traditional private equity activities, real estate and investments in publicly



In October, ValleyCrest Cos. launched Estate Gardens by ValleyCrest, a full-service residential landscape design, construction and maintenance practice. The firm says the division represents a new breed of luxury landscaping – from contemporary sanctuaries to exotic tropical oases. Photo: ValleyCrest

traded securities, in each case with the objective of building an investment portfolio focused on maximizing long-term capital appreciation.

Eric J. Rosen, head of private equity at MSD Capital, considers ValleyCrest "an extraordinary business which has a unique service offering and a premier brand within the landscape services industry." – *Cindy Code*



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## H-2B Cap Extension Bill Passes

Hours before Congress was scheduled to adjourn for recess, Sen. Barbara A. Mikulski (D-Md.) announced she successfully included language in the Department of Defense authorization bill to extend – for one year – a provision from her Save Our Small and Seasonal Businesses Act that will allow for the extension of a new portion of the H-2B program to be renewed for a year.

The bill was the very last measure approved before Congress adjourned for the pre-election recess in the early hours of the morning on Sept. 29.

The H-2B extension exempts returning workers from fiscal years 2004, 2005 or 2006 from being counted against each of two 33,000-person caps in fiscal year 2007.

Unfortunately, the original bill this year asked for a three-year extension of the returning worker exemption, but election, border security and comprehensive immigration reform issues limited the number of cosponsors to the bill, as well as the number of extension years.

The Save Our Small and Seasonal Businesses Act was first signed into law by President Bush in May 2005.

“The cap exemption provides significant relief for many industries that rely on seasonal and temporary workers each year,” says Tom Delaney, director of government affairs for the Professional Landcare Network. “While we welcome the one-year extension, it may now be time to fight for the permanent fix of the cap.”

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USE READER SERVICE # 16

## AN EYE ON FUEL COSTS

### Low Prices Aren't Causing Windfalls

Lately, contractors have been seeing fuel prices dip lower than they have been in months, hovering as low as \$2 in some areas. This came as a relief to many who are hoping they will pick up more business as they drop surcharges. And others who didn't add a charge in the first place are relieved. But the chatter on the *Lawn & Landscape* message board suggests most contractors are staying alert, skeptical that the prices won't stay low for very long.

Oklahoma-based landscape contractor Nick Auxer has been adding a fuel surcharge to clients' bills as long as gas has been more than \$2.50 per gallon. "I had one commercial account tell me they would no longer pay a fuel surcharge if it was put on any of my invoices," he says. "Wouldn't



you know, that's when gas went down to \$2.19 here in Tulsa. So there's no need to surcharge, at least this month anyway."

Gary Batho, owner of B&B Landscaping & Irrigation, Clarkesville, Ga., added surcharges as well, but started dropping the extra charges as fuel prices decreased.

Chad Stern, owner, Mowing & More, Chevy Chase, Md., has never added a fuel surcharge, but is keeping his options open. "I have them in my contracts, which allows

me to recoup if gas doubles over the price at the time of the contract," he says.

Sal Mortilla of Landscaping Unlimited in Farmingville, N.Y., doesn't see gas prices getting that high any time soon. In fact, he predicts more of a decrease by mid-winter or sooner. — Heather Wood

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FRANCHISE FOCUS



## Weed Man Announces Two New Dealers

Two new Weed Man franchises have recently opened in the United States. There are now 95 license agreements in the U.S. covering 208 territories.

Corbin and Audrey Schatter, who bought their first Weed Man franchise in 2003, purchased the geographic rights to northwest Franklin County and Delaware and Union counties in Ohio. Joe Barone, a first-time dealer, operates his Weed Man franchise in Buffalo, N.Y., Kenmore, N.Y. and the southern tier of Erie County.

Barone just completed several weeks of intensive training in Toronto with the master franchiser, Turf Holdings. In the 12-day workshop, the new franchisee learned about every aspect of the business from sales and marketing to turf technology and fertilizer applications.

Turf Holdings owns the rights to sell sub-franchises in the United States. The 13 U.S. sub-franchisors have exclusive geographic rights in which to sell dealerships or franchises. Most dealers purchase rights to multiple territories, which are based upon population.

For more information about Weed Man go to [www.weed-man.com](http://www.weed-man.com).

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## HOUSING STATS

### Housing Market Activity Expected To Stabilize by Mid-2007

The housing downswing still has some distance to go, if only to work off excess supply in markets for both new and existing homes, according to the National Association of Home Builders.

Builders are doing their part by cutting back on starts of new units, trimming prices and offering sizeable non-price sales incentives to limit cancellations and bolster sales. Furthermore, various economic and financial market fundamentals figure to be supportive of housing demand for the foreseeable future, helping to facilitate the inventory correction.

As long as the economy remains in good shape, interest rates remain close to current levels, energy prices remain below recent highs and sellers of new and existing homes adjust prices or offer incentives to meet current market realities, the rest of the housing market correction should be of limited depth and duration, the NAHB says.

It's likely that the bulk of the downswing in home sales and housing production will occur this year, with market activity stabilizing during 2007 and moving back up toward trend in 2008, the organization adds. The cumulative below-trend levels of housing market activity it projects roughly offset the above-trend performances in 2004-2005.



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## SPANISH LESSONS

Considering that more and more landscape contractors are employing Hispanic or H-2B workers, improving communication is becoming more crucial to ensure quality work done right the first time.

In an effort to aid industry professionals in their communication efforts, *Lawn & Landscape* will be running a few phrases each month in English and Spanish, including a pronunciation guide, courtesy of the book *Spanish Phrases for Landscape Professionals* by Jason Holben and Dominic Arbini. To inquire about ordering the book, which costs \$24, visit [www.lawnandlandscape.com/store](http://www.lawnandlandscape.com/store) or contact the *Lawn & Landscape* Book Department at 800/456-0707. If there is a phrase you are having trouble with, let us know at [nwisniewski@gie.net](mailto:nwisniewski@gie.net).

1. ENGLISH: You will plow today.  
SPANISH: Tu guartaras la nieve hoy. (Too gwar-tahr-ahs la nee-eh-bay oy.)
2. ENGLISH: You will shovel today.  
SPANISH: Tu escavaras hoy./Tu usas la pala hoy.  
(Too s-cah-bah-rahs oy./Too ooh-sahs la pah-lah oy.)
3. ENGLISH: Clean the sidewalks first. Clean all doorways first.  
SPANISH: Limpia todos los aceras primeros. Limpia todas las portales primero. (Leem-p-ah toe-dohs lohs ah-sehr-ahs pre-mare-ohs. Leem-p-ah toe-dahs lahs pohr-tahl-ehs pre-mare-oh.)
4. ENGLISH: Use the salt to melt the ice.  
SPANISH: Usa la sal para derretir la nieve. (Ooh-sah lah sahl pah-rah dehr-reh-teer lah nee-eh-bay.)
5. ENGLISH: Don't/do push snow into the grass. Don't/do push snow into the street.  
SPANISH: No/empujes la nieve hacia el cesp ed. No/empujes la nieve hacia la calle. (No/eem-poo-hays la nee-eh-bay ah-c-ah L chehs-pehd. No/eem-poo-hays la nee-eh-bay ah-c-ah lah cah-yay.)

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USE READER SERVICE # 19



## Florida Nursery and Landscape Industry's Impact on Economy Soars

Florida nursery and landscape industry sales soared to a record \$15.2 billion last year despite being pummeled by the eight major hurricanes that hit the Sunshine State in 2004 and 2005, according to the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services. This 54 percent increase in just five years eclipsed the \$9.9 billion in 2000 sales reported by the previous University of Florida-IFAS economic impact study.

"This study showcases the nursery and landscape industry as one of Florida's most robust economic engines," said Ben Bolusky, Florida Nursery, Growers and Landscape Association's executive vice president. "Florida's nursery and landscape industry is comprised overwhelmingly of family farms and businesses. It is truly a small business industry with a big business impact on Florida's economy."

Florida's nursery and foliage growers generated \$3 billion in farm gate sales in 2005, positioning Florida as the nation's second largest nursery crop production state after California. Nearly half of all nursery grower sales were to markets outside Florida.

Landscape installation, maintenance and design services represented \$5.26 billion in sales, while the garden center retail segment racked up sales of \$6.97 billion. Total sales impacts were highest in the counties of Miami-Dade, Palm Beach, Orange, Hillsborough, Broward, Pinellas, Duval, Volusia, Lee and Lake.

In the aftermath of the 2004 and '05 hurricanes, 60 percent of Florida's nursery growing operations suffered costly business interruptions for at least three weeks. Business for nearly a quarter of all of Florida's nurseries was interrupted

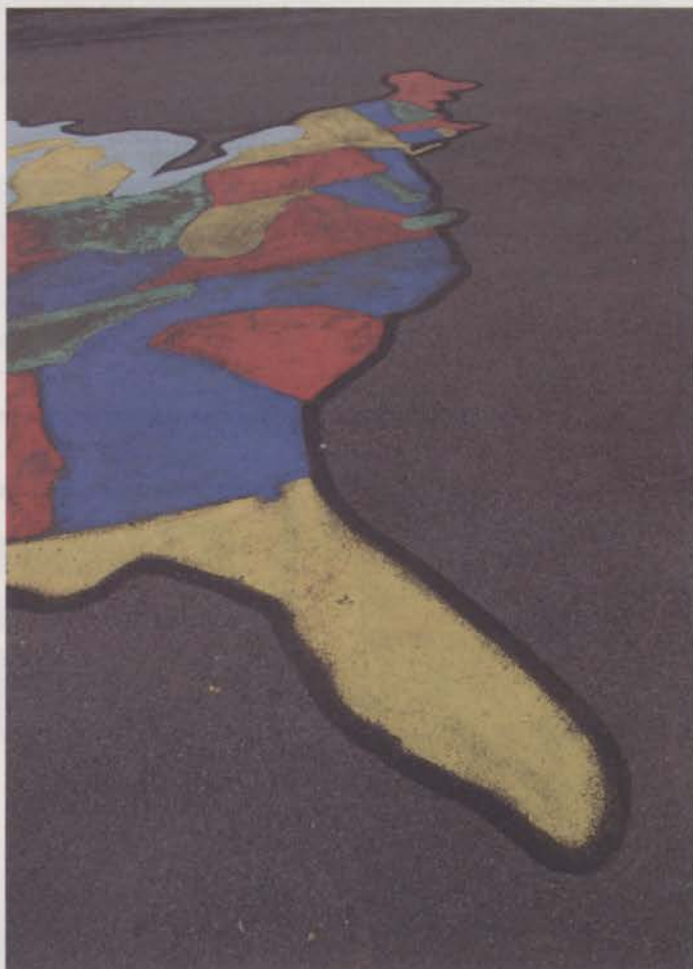


Photo: Jay Schultz/Dreamstime.com

for four months or more. The 2004 and '05 hurricanes hit the industry hard with an estimated \$2.1 billion in nursery crop losses, structural damage and clean-up costs.

"To have an industry grow so expansively in the face of the recent tropical punches thrown by Mother Nature is a true testimonial to the resiliency of the hardworking professionals in Florida's nursery and landscape industry," said FNGLA president Paul Polomsky.

The Florida nursery and landscape industry's total employment impact increased by 131,000 jobs in the last five years representing an average annual increase of 11 percent. It directly employs 294,000 people statewide with a value-added impact of \$5.19 billion in wages and salaries. Total employment impacts were highest in the counties of Miami-Dade, Palm Beach, Orange, Hillsborough, Broward, Duval, Volusia, Pinellas, Lee and Lake.

Florida's Commissioner of Agriculture, Charles Bronson, joined the Florida Nursery, Growers & Landscape Association (FNGLA) as the results were announced during FNGLA's annual industry trade show at the Orange County Convention Center.

The industry's economic impacts were evaluated and compared with results from the previous 1997 and 2000 studies also conducted by the University of Florida-IFAS. Each study was funded in part by the Farm Credit Associations of Florida.

For a complete version of the 40-page economic impact report, access the following: <http://economicimpact.ifas.ufl.edu>.



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.

**NOV. 14** *Lawn & Landscape* Benchmarking Your Business Seminar, Detroit. Contact: [www.lawnbizseminars.com](http://www.lawnbizseminars.com), 800/456-0707

**NOV. 14 - 16** Empire State Green Industry Show, Rochester, N.Y. Contact: [www.nysta.org](http://www.nysta.org), 800/873-8873

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**DEC. 10 – 13** Entomological Society of America Annual Meeting, Indianapolis, Ind. Contact: [www.entsoc.org](http://www.entsoc.org)

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# Weed Control Beyond Turf

How one lawn care company successfully added industrial vegetation control to its service mix.

**L**awn care operators know that all weeds aren't created equal. Their customers don't always recognize this fact, however. That's what Phil Fogarty and colleagues at his Euclid, Ohio-based lawn care company

found out 11 years ago. "We were killing weeds for people in lawns, and they had the need outside their lawns, as well," Fogarty says. "They thought 'If you can kill them in the lawn, than you could kill them in the parking lot.'"

What these customers were asking for isn't as easy as it sounds. Fogarty and crew couldn't simply apply a broad-spectrum herbicide down in a gravel parking lot like they would to turf. Entirely different chemistry is required and, as a result, the Environmental Protection Agency requires different licensure. Also, Fogarty notes, "It's much more difficult to kill a weed in a barren area and to keep it away."

What these customers were asking for, it turns out, was industrial vegetation

by marisa palmieri | associate editor

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USE READER SERVICE # 26

management, or the eradication or control of noxious/invasive weeds at industrial, roadside, railway, forestry, aquatic and other non-turf sites.

After identifying this need among its customers, Fogarty's lawn care company, which operates today as a Weed Man franchise, started Crowley's Vegetation Control. Today Fogarty is the president of Crowley's, in addition to his duties as submaster franchisor for Weed Man in Ohio, Pennsylvania and New York.

Crowley's two main sources of business are industrial bareground work and invasive species control for small government bodies (cities, townships, etc.) that need their roadways, ditches, signage, railways and natural areas kept clear.

After Crowley's applicators earned vegetation management licenses, the company began marketing to its current clients. "We started by doing work for our commercial customers on gravel and in parking lots," he says.

"We were able to land a big account from within our lawn care customer base and once we had that, we bought a little more equipment and did some more marketing and kept selling it."

The next step was to market externally. "We started looking for other customers and we saw that vegetation control could be a division in itself," Fogarty says.

Today, three full-time crews provide nothing but vegetation management services for the entire growing season. "We have grown by 50 percent a year in this side of things for the last four or five years," Fogarty says. "We're doing, all told, between \$350,000 and \$400,000 worth of vegetation management per year."

**CHALLENGES.** One challenge Crowley's encountered was a lack of information on the service's best practices, Fogarty says. "There aren't enough people doing it as a core business," he says, noting that vegetation

control is the certification designation that pesticide applicators add on most frequently, but it's the category with the fewest number of primary applicators. "Consequently, there aren't enough seminars, classes and experts out there," he says. "We had to learn most of this from suppliers and from trial and error."

On the sales side, when Crowley's initiated the service it made sense to most of its current commercial lawn care customers who had weeds growing outside of their lawns. These customers were candidates for Crowley's bareground service, as many organizations' safety and productivity requirements dictate that certain industrial and utility sites and other commercial properties be kept weed-free.

Acquiring new customers in need of bareground work can be difficult, however, because one pool of potential customers includes overgrown, abandoned or for-sale properties that haven't been used in a while, and as

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such do not have a decision maker on site. "Often, we know we can save the customers a lot of money on damage to the building and pavement caused by weeds, but we can't find the owner," Fogarty says. One tip he offers is to contact property managers or realtors dealing with vacant properties. Often, they can name the owner.

Once a contractor reaches an owner, however, he or she may hesitate to invest in vegetation management. "You've found someone that's not getting any revenue from this source," he says, explaining why some people balk at the service. Contractors should stick to the typical selling points, Fogarty notes. Vegetation control prevents pavement damage, reduces the long-term costs associated with maintenance and – most importantly for properties on the real estate market – offers aesthetic advantages.

The other type of vegetation control that Crowley's offers – invasive and noxious weed control for

municipalities – relates more to safety and protecting natural areas. For motor safety-related factors like visibility and drainage, rights-of-way, highways and railways need to be cleared. Also, untreated alien species of weeds can take over a once-productive piece of land and render it useless, destroying the natural ecosystem.

Another sales challenge, one that lawn care operators may be familiar with, is beating the weed growth to the punch. The value of the service is prevention; however that point can be difficult to convey to a customer who's never experienced the ramifications of an overgrown gravel lot, for example. "The need is most apparent once the growing season is in full gear, but the value in what we supply is greater before the growing season starts," Fogarty says. "If the customer calls after growth begins, even though we can kill those weeds, they're still left with a stalk they have to deal with." As a result, Crowley's focuses on sell-

ing to and servicing current customers as soon as the weather allows and signs up new accounts during the rest of the summer.

In terms of profitability, Fogarty says vegetation control beats lawn care. "We feel it's more profitable because the cost of the sale isn't as much as it is in lawn care," he says, noting that margins vary, but "could easily be in the neighborhood of 20 percent." However, vegetation control is not as reliable as lawn care in terms of recurring revenue. "If you fix a problem for someone, they might not call you for several years," Fogarty explains.

Due to the differences in customer and application types, price points vary. Crowley's prices bareground areas by acreage. Fence lines, however, are priced by linear running feet. "Each job is based on size, products needed, difficulty – sometimes we're walking through woods or swamp – and customer expectations," Fogarty says. Generally, per-acre pricing for



vegetation control can range from \$450 to \$1,000 depending on products used and degree of difficulty in reaching the target site.

**TECHNICAL TALK.** Although vegetation management has boded well for Crowley's, it hasn't been entirely seamless. Because of the different chemistry required to combat invasive species and weeds in unwanted areas, the EPA and state regulators require applicators to earn vegetation-control specific designations on their licenses. "Even though it seemed like such a natural transition for the customer," Fogarty says, "it was very different for us to perform vegetation management compared to lawn care."

Although vegetation control uses different chemistry than lawn care, the equipment and techniques are generally the same. Sprayers and spray trucks are standard; however, applicators may need longer hoses and platforms on trucks to treat overtop

of overgrown vegetation. Also, the application tends to be lower volume to avoid any possible drift.

Regarding equipment, Fogarty stresses one pertinent procedure: "You need equipment that's going to do nothing but this work," he says. "You can't mix hard vegetation control products and have them lingering as a residual for residential weed control on a lawn."

Crowley's is extremely vigilant about this practice, segregating vegetation control equipment from anything that resembles selective and horticultural services to avoid any mix ups.

Although the company already uses different tools, applicators, uniforms, shoes and storage, it has considered moving the vegetation control division entirely off site from the lawn care business – just to ensure there's no potential for crossover.

Another technical challenge relates to pest resistance. "We definitely learned the need for understand-

ing your target pest because Mother Nature is an amazing force and she adapts and evolves to survive," Fogarty says. "For years we would have a product that worked fine in a situation and all of the sudden one year it didn't work."

Monoculture breakthroughs, where one weed pops up all over a property, aren't unlikely, even after expansive, thorough pesticide applications that have worked in years past. To customers, these single weed pop ups can look as if the contractor didn't do a thing, Fogarty says. "But what we did is get rid of everything except that one weed that developed resistance, but they don't care that just this one weed slipped through."

To combat resistance, applicators have to be flexible, Fogarty says, and change chemistry from time to time. He explains: "In time Mother Nature will figure out a way to beat you, so you have to stay ahead of her – just like any woman." ☞

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USE READER SERVICE # 29



# JUST THE FACTS.

What you need to know and what you can do concerning 11 critical industry issues.

**S**ometimes all you want are the cold, hard facts on an issue. This month, *Lawn & Landscape* editors boil down some of the industry's most pressing topics and provide you with the information you need to know to intelligently deal with issues such as labor and immigration, noise and emissions and branded vs. generic pesticides, to name a few. Some of the information will come as welcome news, such as the one-year extension to the H-2B program. Others, such as the prediction of a mild winter, will undoubtedly not be as welcome to some segments of the industry, such as contractors offering snow removal services. Then we follow each topic up with some action tips on what you can do to face each business challenge head-on and, just maybe, influence some change for the betterment of the industry and your business.

But the discussion on these industry issues shouldn't end here. We encourage you to take your ideas, beliefs and convictions on these topical issues and post your insight on the *Lawn & Landscape* Message Board at [www.lawnandlandscape.com/messageboard](http://www.lawnandlandscape.com/messageboard).



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# issue #1: energy costs

## WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW:

In addition to affecting operating costs and profitability, rising gasoline, diesel and natural gas prices cause landscape contractors to rethink service areas and routing, increase prices or add fuel surcharges and often pay more for products and equipment, notably fertilizer.

The greatest factor that influences gasoline and diesel prices is the price of crude oil, which is generally driven by supply and demand. But even when crude oil prices are stable, seasonality, product supply/demand and location cause gasoline and diesel prices to fluctuate.

After starting out 2005 at about \$42 per barrel, crude oil prices hit \$70 per barrel after Hurricane Katrina in September 2005, and didn't depart from that range until a year later, when the West Texas Intermediate Crude Oil Price averaged \$63.80 per barrel. The Energy Information Administration's Short-Term Energy Outlook, released in October, expects crude oil prices in 2007 to be only slightly less than their average 2006 levels. As a result, the EIA projects retail regular gasoline prices to average about \$2.65 during that time.

The West Coast – especially California – generally sees higher, more volatile energy prices than the rest of the country, mainly because of supply, but taxes, proximity to the Gulf Coast and foreign refineries and environmental issues also come into play. For gasoline, California operates its own reformulated program with more stringent requirements than the federal government mandates. There are relatively few supply sources of this unique blend of gasoline outside of the state, so California refineries need to be running near full capacity to meet state demand. Supply is the main issue affecting diesel on the West Coast.

Natural gas prices affect contractors who purchase fertilizer, too. Natural gas accounts for as much as 90 percent of the cost of producing nitrogen fertilizer, according to The Fertilizer Institute. Due to last year's warm winter, the EIA expects this winter's heating season to start with the highest natural gas inventory since 1990. This will create natural gas spot prices to be lower than last year. "Low prices now should allow domestic producers to run at full capacity into the spring – assuming no major weather changes, such as another hurricane or a cold winter," reports *Green Markets*, a fertilizer industry publication, in its Sept. 18 issue. As economics 101 would dictate, if supply is up, prices are down.

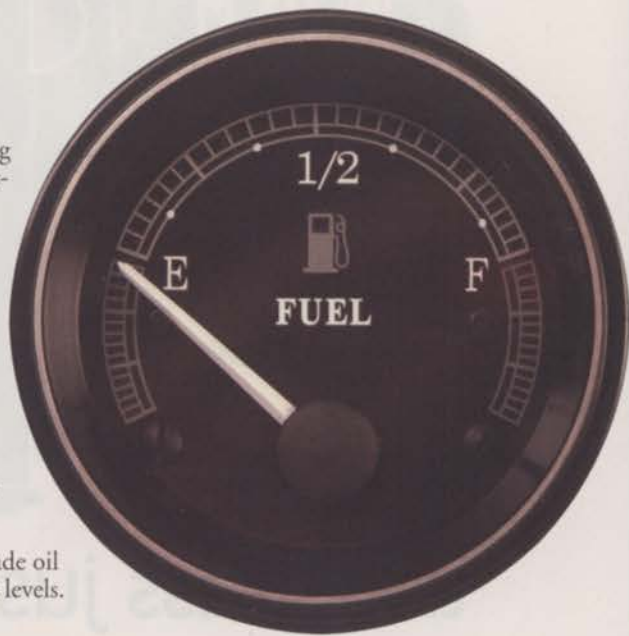


Photo: Phil Berry/Dreamstime.com

## ISSUE HOT ZONES:

California

Washington

Oregon

Major metropolitan areas

## WHAT YOU CAN DO:

- **Protect profits.** Raising prices to keep up with operating cost increases is essential for contractors to protect profits. Whether a firm chooses a general "cost of doing business" price increase or a fuel surcharge, it's important to set prices based on target profit margins.
- **Research alternatives.** While the country's dependence on oil is a national political issue, the burden is on the contractor to make changes in his business. Research alternatives – fuel sources as well as practices.

For example, consider using technology like GPS fleet tracking to monitor the location, routes and speed of trucks. Conduct routine maintenance on all equipment and consider passing on or subbing out work that's outside of a designated service area.

In terms of fuel sources, contractors should research alternatives. One popular alternative is liquefied petroleum gas (LPG), or propane, (several manufacturers make commercial propane mowers). Propane produces fewer emissions than gasoline and can extend equipment lifespan. Another option is biodiesel, or fuel manufactured from vegetable oils, animal fats or recycled restaurant greases. B20, or a 20/80 biodiesel to petroleum diesel blend, can generally be used in unmodified diesel engines, but users should consult their OEM and engine warranty statement. Ethanol is another alternative fuel that contractors should be familiar with. This alcohol-based fuel is made from corn, barley, wheat and other starch crops. E85, or a 85/15 ethanol to gasoline blend, can reduce emission by 25 percent compared to gasoline.

To learn more about alternative fuels including the costs in your area, visit the Department of Energy's Alternative Fuels Data Center at [www.eere.energy.gov/afdc/](http://www.eere.energy.gov/afdc/). – **Marisa Palmieri**



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## issue #2:

## weather



Photo: Daniel Gustavson/Dreamstime.com

**WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW:**

Weather is one intangible factor that every green industry professional must manage. And over the last year, Mother Nature proved to be quite unpredictable.

To the dismay of some and delight of others, the past winter of 2005-06 will be remembered as one of the warmest on record. Winter temperatures, on average, were 36.3 degrees, making it the fifth warmest winter on record.

And while the nation experienced a handful of significant snow storms, including a powerful storm that hit the East Coast on Feb. 11-12, for many contractors performing snow removal duties it was not enough to sustain a profitable winter.

Summer 2006 was the second warmest on record, with July's blistering heat wave impacting most of the nation. Likewise, moderate-to-extreme drought conditions impacted nearly 40 percent of the United States. The summer's heat, combined with

below-average precipitation, worsened drought conditions throughout much of the summer for most of the country.

On the horizon, climatologists report El Nino conditions have developed in the tropical Pacific and are likely to continue into early 2007.

While only "weak" El Nino conditions exist, weather scientists say there is a potential for this event to strengthen into a moderate event by winter. El Nino describes the large-scale ocean-atmosphere climate phenomenon linked to a periodic warming in sea surface temperatures in the Pacific Ocean. It's sometimes referred to as a Pacific warm episode.

So what do this mean for North American landscape contractors?

For one, weak El Nino conditions help explain why this Atlantic hurricane season, the one that spawned Katrina last year, has been less active than previously anticipated. By design, El Nino conditions suppress hurricane activity in the Atlantic Basin, which includes the Gulf Coast.

Original predictions called for no less than eight to 10 hurricanes, four to six of which would grow to Category 3 strength or higher. So far, hurricanes Florence, Gordon, Helene and Tropical Storm Isaac remained far from land. The 2006 hurricane season runs until Nov. 30.

Other El Nino-related weather includes warmer-than-average temperatures over western and Central Canada and over the western and northern United States, which mean snow contractors are looking at another weak winter. Wetter-than-average conditions are likely to develop over portions of the U.S. Gulf Coast region and Florida, while drier-than-average conditions may be seen in the Ohio Valley and Pacific Northwest.

**WHAT YOU CAN DO:**

- **Subscribe to a professional weather service.** Weather services provide you up-to-the-minute climate details on current and future conditions and helps you better plan your operations schedule.

If engaged in winter snow and ice removal, having access to accurate and detailed weather information not only allows you to plan your snow services, but it assists in defending against billing disputes and slip-and-fall claims.

If you can't afford this investment, investigate the free Web-based weather information available on the Internet. While not as detailed as a subscription service, free sites can provide a clearer perspective on climate conditions and predictions.

- **Educate yourself on how the weather impacts landscape services.** For example, "How much rain must fall for it to be unsafe to mow?" or "Will the day's high temperature at noon render a morning fertilization or pesticide application ineffective?"
- **Instruct your clients.** Educate your customers on the limits of what you can do when faced with unfavorable weather conditions. Clients are more reasonable and appreciative when they feel they're up-to-speed on all the facts of their service.

— **Mike Zawacki**

**ISSUE HOT ZONES:**

Gulf Coast states – hurricane

Northern states – mild/warm winter

Drought states – Montana, Dakotas, Oklahoma, Pacific Northwest and Southern California



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# issue #3: water right



Photo: Piotr Przeszlo/Dreamstime.com

## WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW:

Water is one of the earth's most in-demand – and taken for granted – resources. Although 75 percent of the earth's surface is covered with water, only 1 percent is available for human use. An ever-increasing U.S. population (the Census Bureau expects it to top 300 million this year) poses serious demand on this finite resource, making conservation more important now than ever.

Other threats to the world's water supply include global warming, pollution and an inadequate water supply infrastructure – there's a \$224 billion gap in planned infrastructure investment as compared to needs, reported Joanna Kind, an environmental scientist consulting for the EPA's WaterSense program at The Intelligent Use of Water Summit III sponsored by Rain Bird in August.

Experts estimate commercial and residential outdoor water use is responsible for 7 billion gallons of water each day, mainly for landscape irrigation. As much as half of that may be wasted due to overwatering, Kind said.

One way municipalities cope with water shortages is to enact water restrictions like every-other-day watering programs or all out landscape irrigation bans. Experts say some

of these rules are well-thought-out, calculated decisions, but others are knee-jerk reactions that often backfire, spurring increased consumption.

Thankfully, some locales are promoting the industry's available technology by offering incentives for homeowners and property managers to install smart irrigation systems. Others have taken incentives to the next level. In Las Vegas, the Southern Nevada Water Authority has for the last several years offered homeowners \$1 per square foot to remove turf and replace it with xeriscape.

Considering 36 states expect to suffer water shortages over the next 10 years, Kind said, restrictions and incentives like these are imminent, creating challenges for landscape and irrigation contractors.

This summer, the EPA introduced

its WaterSense program ([www.epa.gov/watersense](http://www.epa.gov/watersense)), similar to the EnergyStar program for energy conservation. WaterSense promotes water efficiency and water-efficient products and services.

## WHAT YOU CAN DO:

- **TAKE ADVANTAGE OF TECHNOLOGY.** Design, install and sell smart irrigation systems. Manufacturers are introducing increasingly efficient products. Research the benefits of "smart," ET-based controllers, pressure-regulating devices, automatic shut-off devices, check valves, micro irrigation and other high-efficiency products. The EPA's WaterSense product labeling program soon will help make selecting water efficient products easier for contractors and consumers alike.

- **PROMOTE WATER AND COST SAVINGS.** Customers often need to be educated on the benefits of installing or upgrading to smart systems. While they may have to spend a little more up front, often they will realize a quick return on investment as their high-efficiency systems shave dollars off monthly water bills. Contact manufacturers for estimated water and cost savings to demonstrate to customers their expected ROI, or consider using case studies (also often made available by manufacturers) to show them the cost savings.

- **GET SMART-CERTIFIED.** If you're not already certified with the Irrigation Association, do so. Also look out for WaterSense certification specifications, which the EPA expects to release by the end of 2006. WaterSense certification programs will require experience, examinations and regular renewal. Initially, certification categories available for WaterSense labeling include irrigation auditor, irrigation installation and maintenance professional and irrigation designer.

- **STAND UP TO REGULATIONS.** Some local and regional irrigation restrictions are unfair and hastily enacted. To combat restrictions harmful to the environment and economy, the Green Industries Water Conservation Council suggests irrigation and landscape contractors form local coalitions to educate water boards and elected officials. The GIWCC suggests working with the media and lobbying decision makers before they cast their votes. For a step-by-step guide, visit [www.wateractionguide.org](http://www.wateractionguide.org).

– **Marisa Palmieri**

## ISSUE HOT ZONES:

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Nevada  
Texas  
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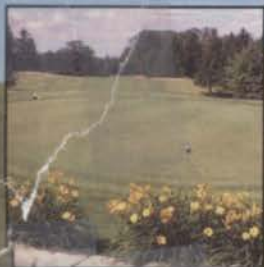
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USE READER SERVICE # 104

## issue #4:

## Labor, Immigration &amp; H-2B



Photo: Dreamstime.com

**WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW:**

Hiring immigrant workers with legal-looking documents and worrying every night if they are legit. Suffering through painful business raids. Dealing with government rules and regulations and their renowned slow pace. There is no question that finding people willing to work as laborers in the green industry is becoming more challenging every year, especially now that the most willing worker pool is being threatened.

With immigration at the top of many politicians' to-do lists, solutions seem too far off to rely on. Laws are becoming harder to follow and employers are being held more accountable than they've been in years.

H-2B has helped some landscape contractors through these tough times, bringing them supplemental labor. But not without having to put in a good fight first. On Sept. 29, hours before Congress was scheduled to adjourn for recess and one day before the Save Our Small and Seasonal Businesses Act was scheduled to expire, a one-year renewal of the bill was sent through. The bill, which was approved in the House and Senate by a voice vote, was the last measure approved before Congress adjourned for the pre-election recess.

The H-2B extension exempts returning workers from fiscal years 2004, 2005 and 2006 from being counted against the increasingly limiting cap. Originally, the extension was supposed to be for three years, but because House and Senate members refuse to move forward on solving H-2B's cap problems before coming to an agreement on comprehensive immigration reform, they would only approve a one-year extension. This means contractors who use the program will have to continue fighting in order to encourage lawmakers to pass another extension of this same bill next year to protect their 2008 workforces.

Since the H-2B program was enacted in 1990, it bore a cap of 66,000 workers. Employers question why the number has never been adjusted in more than 15 years to reflect current economic conditions or meet the needs of growing service industries.

The cap amount did not come into question until just before it was first hit in 2004. The limits and requirements of the H-2B program resulted in marginal visa usage – for example, in 1995, only 2,398 visas

were issued. But the program picked up popularity in the last five to seven years.

According to Chuck Twist, by clinging to the current cap the government admits the process is flawed.

"We have to prove to the Department of Labor that we can't get American workers through expensive advertisements, but then they only give us 66,000 workers," says the coowner, TNT Lawn & Landscaping and president H.O.L.A. Labor Consultants, Stillwater, Okla. "That's like saying, 'We agree you can't find American workers but we're going to put a cap on the program anyway.' If workers are not available and we can prove we need them, there shouldn't be a cap."

Bob Wingfield, owner, Amigos, Dallas, agrees. "I don't understand why the cap is there," he says, pointing to an example to show how small the H-2B program really is. "There are 19,431 cities in the United States. If you take 66,000 H-2B visas and divide that by the number of cities, that's only 3.4 workers per city. When you consider that there are 150 million people in the American workforce, and you take 66,000 divided by that you have to move four decimal points (.00044) before it has any affect on American workers."

Some lawmakers have discussed eliminating or raising the cap, points out Libby Whitley, president, MAS (Mid-Atlantic Solutions), Lovingson, Va. For instance, Congressman Henry Hyde (R-Ill.) sent a letter to House members discussing elimination of the cap, she says, but a dawdling government coupled with Hyde's imminent retirement meant the idea expired with him.

**WHAT YOU CAN DO:**

The landscape industry remains the largest user of the H-2B program. That means the industry supports local economies across the country. As a result, a politician might consider supporting an industry issue if he/she know businesses in his/her state will be greatly affected. Stay connected with local and national government officials and associations, voicing your concerns about labor challenges the green industry deals with on a daily basis. – **Nicole Wisniewski**

**ISSUE HOT ZONES:**

Labor is a nationwide issue, but states that use the H-2B program most include Massachusetts, Maryland, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Texas, Virginia and Colorado, according to the Professional Land-care Network. Many states wrestle with immigration issues, including those that border Mexico, as well as major metropolitan areas.

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# issue #5: rising equipment costs

## WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW:

New outdoor equipment prices rarely go down from year to year and 2007 will be no exception, but there's likely not going to be much sticker shock.

The most important material that makes up equipment such as mowers is steel, and luckily for contractors, steel prices are leveling off. The past two years, steel was on a wicked ride upward, increasing by more than 60 percent. This year, the increase has not been as severe.

"If everything holds true, price increases will be minimal," says Darwin Parcell, who sells equipment for Woods Equipment. "It's not going to be anything like a year ago." Steel of all types had been rising because demand by China left less steel on the market. When that happens, prices go up. But China's expansion, while still super-hot, has been cooling and that's left more steel in the mix.

Ben Overholser, president of Sisco, the Greenville, Ohio-based distributor of commercial equipment, says other material prices such as rubber and plastic tend to rise along with steel. But so far, the waters are calm. "We've haven't seen anything major," Overholser says.

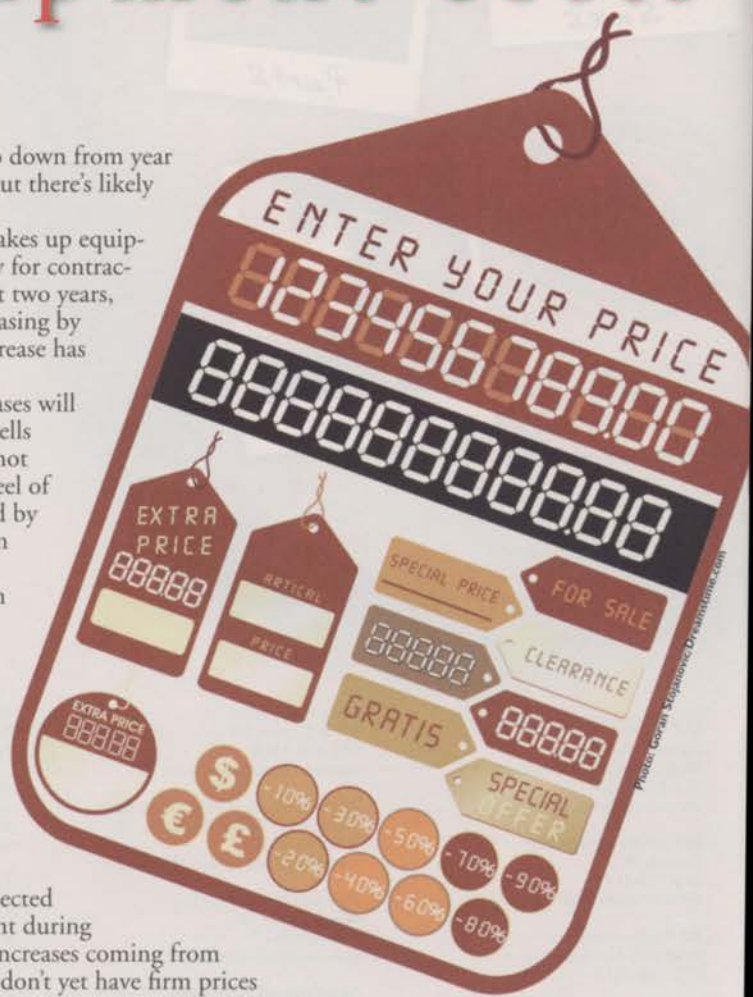
Overall, prices for equipment are expected to rise between 2 to 4 percent during 2007, with the bulk of the increases coming from material costs. Most dealers don't yet have firm prices for 2007. "Most of the buy-in programs begin in November, so there aren't hard numbers in the hands of dealers on what next year's equipment will cost," says Dave Kahler, president of the Ohio Michigan Equipment Dealers Association, based in Columbus, Ohio. Buy-in programs allow dealers to order inventory from the manufacturers for the following year.

## WHAT YOU CAN DO:

So, while 2 to 4 percent may not sound like much, contractors would be well served by carefully maintaining their machines to keep them in top running order. Many dealers have pre-season maintenance programs available to their commercial customers. These programs usually involve pickup and delivery of mowers, oil changes, deck cleanings and blade sharpening. Technicians also will check bearings and belts for wear. These checkups are typically done in the winter months when business is slower.

It's a very smart thing to do, Kahler says. "Many times a commercial mower that goes through this pre-season maintenance is going to start the season in very, very good shape," he says. "The contractor won't need to worry about downtime. That's something we would highly recommend."

"All of these mowers will vary by line, but they'll tell you how many hours you can run it before you need to change the oil and filters," Kahler says. "If I was a commercial contractor, I would follow the owner's manual to the hilt, because that's their bread and butter. They can't afford to have a breakdown in the middle of the summer." — **Mark Phillips**



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USE READER SERVICE # 35

## issue #6:

## professionalism &amp; perception

**WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW:**

Industry professionalism has increased significantly over the years, according to industry members and observers, who give today's industry a 7.4 rating on a scale of one to 10 – one being particularly unprofessional and 10 being extremely professional and highly skilled and respected. This is an increase from a 3.7 rating 25 years ago.

"Twenty-five years ago, 75 percent of other service industries were ahead of us," says Mike Rorie, president, Groundmasters, Loveland, Ohio. "Today, I'd say landscape companies would meet or exceed 75 percent of the other types of service businesses as far as the model we have to manage, which is more complex, more technical and more challenging than 75 percent of the other service businesses out there. We've come a long way in the last two-and-a-half decades."

The result of this boosted professionalism is enhanced validity in the marketplace.

"Society has created a legitimacy for certain businesses that wouldn't have existed 30 years ago," says Russell Frith, president and chief executive officer, Lawn Doctor, Holmdel, N.J. "I think this is because there is a much greater need for our business today because the demand for leisure time and available time has become incredibly stressed."

One of the factors that boosted the industry image is a recognition of the increasing costs and complexity necessary to get the work done, resulting in a need for landscape projects to be completed properly the first time around, Rorie says. "From a residential perspective, people used to do the work themselves," he explains. "Now, a large segment of the residential industry contracts that work to companies. Commercially, the work used to be done in-house. If you owned a factory 30 years ago, you bought a lawn mower and told one of the guys in the plant to cut the grass. Now, they outsource that work. As the professionalism in the industry has risen, the complexity to try to do it yourself became greater because of the equipment, the chemicals and the expertise necessary to get the job done. Our business has shifted from the humble beginnings of competency to people wanting someone else to do it because they know how much is involved if they want their landscapes to look great."



Photo: Serban Enache/Dreamstime.com

In addition to increased complexity, higher expectations from consumers has also driven the need for better residential and commercial landscapes installed and maintained by professionals. "Developers and home builders started to see the benefits of using high-quality landscapes as a way to set themselves apart," says Kurt Kluznik, president, Yardmaster, Painesville, Ohio. "Twenty-five years ago, the marketplace wasn't as sophisticated, so homes could go unlandscaped or minimally landscaped, and it was the same with commercial properties. But

now there are high standards and expectations. The world has become educated about the value and necessity of good landscaping."

However, despite the industry's feeling of heightened professional growth, some still doubt whether service businesses are given enough credit from the general public or their customers about how technical landscape work can be or how much horticultural knowledge is involved.

This could be attributed to the industry's relatively young age, Rorie points out. "I feel like our industry is really only 35 to 40 years old in its entirety," he says. "If you went back more than 40 years, it's almost rare to find landscape companies – our industry barely existed more than 40 years ago. The fact that it has become more professional and has been recognized by the consumer as well as the marketplace as a career is what has put us on the map. More than 25 to 30 years ago, if you told somebody you were a landscaper or gardener or that you worked outside, they felt sorry for you. People underestimate the industry's abilities. These companies can grow to become substantial businesses."

"We have a good ways to go to present a professional image to the consumer market," Frith adds. That's where organizations like Project EverGreen are helping boost the value and recognition of professional lawn and landscape services, says Terry Kurth, Weed Man USA, Middleton, Wis.

**WHAT YOU CAN DO:**

- Keep up with technology.
- Conduct regular training to advance your employees and continue to improve your public image and perception.
- Stay on top of business trends. Read business magazines and books regularly and commit to constant improvement.
- Become more involved in the industry – it will elevate the whole profession.
- Communicate the environmental importance of lawns and landscapes to your clients and in your communities.

– Nicole Wisniewski

**ISSUE  
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USE READER SERVICE # 36

# issue #7: branded vs. generic

## WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW:

A change is taking place in the pesticide supplier channel, as the 17-yearlong protection period lapses on as many as four-fifths of all active ingredients labeled for turf and ornamental use. When this occurs, the basic manufacturer (the company that discovered the active ingredient) no longer has the exclusive rights to manufacture and market the chemistry, and other manufacturers or formulators may purchase the rights to develop "generic" or post-patent pesticides.

What does this shift mean for lawn care operators? Post-patent manufacturers say competition is fundamentally good for the industry. In a capitalistic sense, it means prices will likely decrease as more formulators introduce products to compete with pesticides that were once proprietary. Also, as actives come off patent, the marketplace can expect more products that mix two post-patent actives to target multiple pests or species at different life stages.

Basic manufacturers argue that one implication will be less funding for new classes of chemistry to be developed. As generic products chip away at basic manufacturers' profits, these companies will devote fewer dollars to R&D, and as a result, fewer active ingredients will be brought to market in the future. Some researchers also say as more of the same active ingredients are used, pest resistance may become an issue.

Another possibility is product and technical support may take a hit. If pesticide manufacturers' revenues decrease, companies may be forced to reduce, eliminate or charge LCOs for support they receive. Manufacturers also may be pressured to limit industrywide education and stewardship.

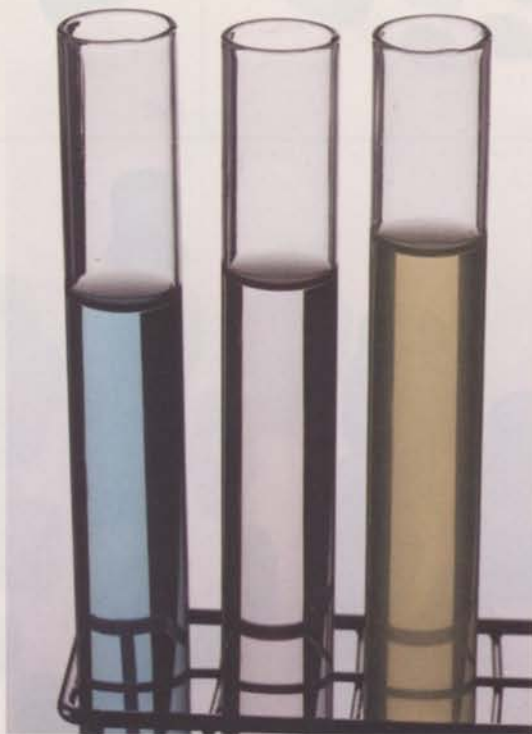


Photo: Leon Forado/Dreamstime.com

## ISSUE HOT ZONES:

Nationwide

## WHAT YOU CAN DO:

- **Know what you're getting.** For a true "apples-to-apples" comparison, don't assume two products with the same active ingredient will do the same thing. The active ingredient may not be of the same level of purity – the same active in two different products could come from the same U.S. manufacturer or an overseas company. Also the formulations (the active ingredient plus all other chemicals it's combined with) will not be the same. Formulations can affect the use rate, efficacy, odor and various other factors.
- **Make an educated purchase.** In line with knowing what's in the product you're purchasing, LCOs should consider who and what stands behind that product. Here are several questions to consider to make an informed pesticide purchase:

1. What customer service, regulatory and sales support and service does the manufacturer provide in the event of a problem?
2. If there's a problem, will the manufacturer help determine the cause and stand behind its product?
3. How long will it take to get a manufacturer representative on site to evaluate a problem?
4. Does the manufacturer have other trusted, proven brands in the marketplace?
5. From where is the active ingredient sourced – from the original patent holder or from overseas?
6. Does the manufacturer support the lawn care industry in the United States through associations and efforts to defend their right to do business? – **Marisa Palmieri**

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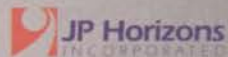
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# issue #8: pesticide regulations



Photo: Jay Critchfield/Dreamstime.com

## WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW:

Phosphorus and regulating its use in lawn care-related products has been a top-of-mind issue for lawn care operators.

Early in 2006, the ban on the use of lawn care products containing phosphorus remained intact in Wisconsin's Madison and Dane counties. The ban was initiated by activist organizations arguing that phosphorus has a detrimental effect on lakes and the environment and has been challenged by many in the green industry, including fertilizer retailers, lawn care companies and trade associations.

What makes the phosphorus issue most frustrating for lawn care operators is not only did the local governments decide they would regulate fertilizers, but they also plan to regulate pesticide-fertilizer combination products. The basis for this is their claim that they are only regulating the fertilizer portion of the product. However, federal

law states if combination products are registered as pesticides – which they are – then these products are considered pesticides.

Pressure to limit phosphorus use has also impacted suppliers. In September, fertilizer manufacturers Scotts Miracle-Gro and Lebanon Seaboard committed to reformulating their plant food to eliminate or cut in half the amount of phosphorus in their fertilizer products they sell for private use by 2009. The move was in response to a recent pledge by states around the Chesapeake Bay region to improve water quality and reduce instances of algae blooms that create aquatic dead zones. The companies also announced plans to reduce the amount of nitrogen, another nutrient, in their products in 2007.

Likewise, in 2006 some 300 state bills appeared to threaten the LCO's right to make informed pesticide and fertilizer choices to for care customers' turf and ornamentals, according to the green industry advocacy group, Responsible Industry for a Sound Environment (RISE). The local regulation issue is expected to continue into 2007.

On Capitol Hill, lawn care operators were keeping watch on "The Pest Management and Fire Suppression Flexibility Act," S. 1269 and H.R. 1749, which exempts federally regulated pesticides from the Clean Water Act and forces lawn care operators to get permits to apply a pesticide to or near water, regardless of EPA approval of the products and ignoring the fact that applicators are applying products according to label instructions.

Industry advocates argue the cost to obtain these permits and then conduct water monitoring is not only costly, but wasteful. In addition, the law renders lawn care operators vulnerable to nuisance litigation if an individual believes an LCO violated the Clean Water Act.

## WHAT YOU CAN DO:

- Support or become active with industry-advocacy groups such as Responsible Industry for a Sound Environment (RISE) and their efforts to protect lawn and landscape professionals' rights to apply pesticides and fertilizers.
- Educate yourself and become better informed on these issues at the national, state and local levels.
- Educate your clients to the facts about responsible pesticide and fertilizer use by trained and certified landscape professionals.
- Educate your local and state representatives on the facts about and science in responsible pesticide and fertilizer use, as well as the impact restrictive legislation will have on contractors and clients. – **Mike Zawacki**

## ISSUE HOT ZONES:

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USE READER SERVICE # 38

## issue #9:

## noise &amp; emissions



Photo: Echo

**WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW:**

Noise and emissions regulations, while they have their place, can also be like weeds – nipping one in the bud is much easier than dealing head-on with already-established laws.

Landscape contractors have the power to change and stop unnecessary legislation, but it takes a mix of education, patience and carefully constructed arguments based on facts – not emotions – in order for it to happen. The equipment that most often becomes a scapegoat in the battle over noise and emissions is the ubiquitous leaf blower.

The most notable emissions battle is going on right now in Palo Alto, Calif. There, landscapers made a deal with the city in 2000 to buy and use the quietest and most efficient leaf blowers possible. But recently, the city nixed the deal and banned the use of all gasoline-powered leaf blowers. Landscapers, to say the least, are stunned. The Outdoor Power Equipment Institute, based in Virginia, and the Bay Area Gardeners Association (BAGA), say the ban is illegal under the Federal Clean Air Act and contend the city broke its agreement with landscapers. OPEI threatened to sue the city and the battle continues.

A bill brought before the Arizona legislature in 2001 would have banned the use of all gasoline and diesel-powered leaf blowers in the central portion of the state. But that bill was quashed after contractors came together and successfully argued against it. The EPA also is investigating

the possibility of requiring catalytic converters on outdoor power equipment, saying that engines under 50 horsepower will account for 18 percent of smog-making emissions by 2020.

Many noise and emissions arguments tend to be based on politics, without regard to scientifically proven facts. For example, many new, efficient leaf blowers which Palo Alto landscapers bought emit noise in the mid- to low-60 decibel range. By comparison, the decibel level of a normal conversation between two people is between 60 to 70 decibels; a telephone dial tone is rated at about 80 decibels; and practicing the piano emits about 65 to 70 decibels.

**WHAT YOU CAN DO:**

The first thing landscape contractors can do to help themselves in the face of restrictive noise and emissions laws is to fight them.

Before a law is passed, a legislative body such as city council will hold public comment sessions. It's important to attend and participate in these, but to also do it smartly. Find articulate speakers who represent a broad cross section of the industry, including outdoor power equipment dealers, golf course managers and landscape contractors. It's better to use local experts, because they have a vested interest in the legislation. A city council in Wisconsin is less likely to listen to someone from California and vice versa.

Assign specific topics to the speakers in order to address the main points and to ensure topics don't overlap. Time is of the essence and arguments need to be made succinctly. While the topic is close to contractors' hearts, ensure speakers keep to the allotted time limit. Produce handouts that briefly explain the major points and use eye-catching graphics to illustrate the argument.

If legislation goes into effect, obey it, but keep fighting. Breaking the law won't endear landscape contractors to legislative officials and can cloud the issue when the argument is made against highly restrictive laws. Make sure all workers know and understand local and state laws and have read the equipment owner's manual to ensure proper operation.

It's important to keep equipment well-maintained, since poorly running machines are dirtier and make more noise. Contractors can also lower the throttle speed by a hair to stay a little quieter, while staying productive. And it's important to be as safe and courteous to others as possible. Complaints by even one disgruntled resident can lead to potential legislation. – **Mark Phillips**

**ISSUE  
HOT  
ZONES:**

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issue #10:  
**neighbor  
 notification  
 laws**

You  
 have been  
 notified

Photo: Daphne Hyatt/Dreamstime.com

#### WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW:

In 2000, New York state passed the "Neighbor Notification" bill, giving counties the go-ahead to adopt the bill as-is and force lawn care operators to notify all abutting properties in writing of an upcoming liquid pesticide application 48 hours in advance. The law, started by a state environmentalist, intends to prevent people from being unknowingly exposed to pesticides.

Since then, New York lawn and tree care applicators from the eight counties that have adopted the law have been dealing with an unfair burden – one that challenges their scheduling, professionalism and profits. The time involved is an additional 20 to 30 minutes per day in labor. Initial fines for a first-time offense are \$5,000.

When the issue first appeared on the scene, it was daily news. The past few years however, discussion of the topic has quieted. The other states considering something similar instead opted for a state registry of people who want prenotification. However, the issue is expected to intensify after last year when the Breast Cancer Coalition got involved in New York.

"When it's environmentalists talking, they stand out as extremists, so they can be easier to ignore," explains Bob Otlely, chief executive officer of One Step Tree & Lawn Care, North Chili, N.Y., and president of Growing Opportunities, a subfranchisor of Weed Man. "But when a coalition of normal, professional women from all walks of life who are politically connected start standing up for the cause and are emotional about it, it's hard for lawmakers to see our side."

This additional push escalated the issue in New York, and Otlely's county of Monroe adopted it in 2005. Now, Otlely expects the issue to intensify. "More counties will continue to adopt the law and then it will go back to the state and they will say it's no longer an option – it will become state law," he says. "Then the next step will be eliminating the aesthetic use of pesticides. Environmentalists don't quit. It's like fighting terrorists – we can pull out of Iraq today but they will still try to blow us up tomorrow. When an environmentalist loses a county one year, they just try again the next year. I have no doubt this issue will not go away."

#### WHAT YOU CAN DO:

- Some New York contractors switched to an all-granular program to avoid having to notify their customers' neighbors. This could be a proactive approach to steering clear of the controversy if it's feasible for your business.
- Some lawn care operators like Otlely are regularly communicating with their counties to find easier ways to notify neighbors in writing. The county approved the use of a once-a-year flag that can be put in people's yards and lists the dates their neighbors are receiving applications. Otlely says this is effective in reducing costs, but means he has to stick to his schedule religiously, which can be challenging based on weather fluctuations. Flags cost 5 or 6 cents each, according to Otlely, adding that he has 5,000 customers with homes abutting to 3 to 5 neighbor properties each, meaning his technicians deliver approximately 25,000 notification flags.
- To prevent this from happening in your state, keep in touch with your local elected officials and get involved. This can help ensure they will ask you questions when laws like this are proposed and, if a bill like this passes, means they might work with you to find an easier and less costly way to carry out the law. – **Nicole Wisniewski**

ISSUE  
 HOT  
 ZONES:

New York





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# issue #11: industry certification



## WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW:

Earning certification designations may be underappreciated, but they can provide landscape contractors with a great deal of personal and business advantages. However, as a concept, industry certification remains somewhat of an abstract notion that not all contractors are fully aware of in terms of its strengths and weaknesses.

While more contractors are taking the exams to become certified landscape professionals (CLP), certified landscape technicians (CLT) and even certified snow professional (CSP), many working in the industry remain uncertified. Within the industry, a strong push is being made to educate the public on the benefits of hiring a contractor with certifications in one or more areas of expertise.

So what are the advantages of earning a green industry certification designation?

Certification raises the standards of professionalism by reflecting the contractor's ability to provide a consistent level of customer service and by illustrating he or she is highly trained in the tasks they perform for clients. Professional certification conveys that the contractor has

the knowledge and a thorough understanding of green industry techniques, and maintaining the certification reflects the contractor's vigilance in keep up to date on cutting-edge industry practices.

It's important to leverage the certification's competitive and professional advantage in every aspect of marketing and sales. Contractors should bombard clients with certification information and certification logos should be placed on all letters, proposals, contracts and any marketing materials or print advertisements.

## WHAT YOU CAN DO:

Whether you're a business owner eager to earn credentials that solidify your business prowess, or a technician ready to prove yourself in areas of installation, maintenance or irrigation, there's a certification exam waiting for you. For more information, contact your state association.

- **Certified Landscape Technician (CLT)** – Ideal for an exterior technician who wants to establish credentials by meeting international standards for safe and effective operations of machinery and demonstrating a thorough

understanding of all facets of the position.

- **Certified Landscape Professional (CLP)** – Intended for company owners and managers who want to establish themselves and their companies as industry leaders.
- **Certified Turfgrass Professional (CTP)** – For those who wish to be well versed in lawn care best practices, including a mastery of weed, insect and disease identification/control, and the diagnosis of turfgrass problems.
- **Certified Ornamental Landscape Professional (COLP)** – A mastery of tree and shrub maintenance procedures, includes a concentration on landscape trees and ornamental woody plant physiology, health care management and establishment.
- **Certified Snow Professional (CSP)** – For contractors who manage snow and ice removal during the winter.
- **Certified Irrigation Contractor (CIC)** – For irrigation professionals whose principal business is the execution of contractors or subcontracts to install, repair and maintain irrigation systems.
- **Certified Irrigation Designer (CID)** – Evaluates site conditions and determines net irrigation requirements based on the needs of the project. The designer is then responsible for the selection of the most effective irrigation equipment and design methods.
- **Certified Golf Irrigation Auditor (CGIA)** – Involved in the analysis of turf irrigation water use tailored to the unique conditions found on golf courses.
- **Certified Landscape Irrigation Auditor (CLIA)** – Analysis of landscape irrigation water use. Auditors collect site data, make maintenance recommendations and perform water audits. Through their analytical work at the site, these irrigation professionals develop irrigation base schedules.
- **Certified Landscape Irrigation Manager (CLIM)** – Irrigation professional familiar with all areas of turf irrigation design and construction management.
- **Certified Arborist** – Arborists with three years experience in some aspect of tree care and have passed an exam developed by the ISA.
- **Certified Arborist/Utility Specialist** – Certified Arborists with experience in tree care around power lines.
- **Certified Arborist/Municipal Specialist** – Certified Arborists with experience in the specialty area of urban trees.
- **Certified Tree Worker/Climber Specialists** – Minimum of 18 months experience professionally climbing trees in a safe and efficient manner to perform tree care.
- **Certified Master Arborist** – Designed for arborists who have reached the pinnacle of their profession. – **Mike Zawacki**

ISSUE  
HOT  
ZONES:

Nationwide



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**Y**ou hear it every year: Landscape professionals love to network. Contractors enjoy talking to their peers about business projections, upselling opportunities, client referral programs, you name it. A conversation over the phone, in person or through an industry message board is a chance for landscape contractors to compare their businesses to others like them.

When it comes to financial statements, allocating costs and analyzing profitability, networking takes the form of benchmarking. Services offered as a percentage of your overall business, what you pay your employees, what kind of bonus structure do you have in place and so on. These are questions often pondered in the wee hours of the night.

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

At John Deere, this time of year also gives us a chance to introduce you to our full line of commercial equipment for the lawn and landscape professional that you've come to depend on over the years. Maybe you'll have the chance to benefit from some of our equipment offerings on these last few projects of the year; or, perhaps the products and plant materials available at your local John Deere Landscapes store will come in handy on late-season landscape installations. In either respect, all of our John Deere dealers and sales representatives are looking forward to working with you.

As a leading provider of commercial maintenance and installation equipment, irrigation products, landscape materials and other services, we at John Deere strive to be more than just a supplier for your business. We're eager to be your business partner, helping to meet your goals of improving everything from your business systems to your bottom line. This fall, we're sure you'll find the 2006 Benchmarking Your Business report to be a valuable tool in doing just that and we look forward to meeting you – perhaps in the spring, or even sooner – as you move into your next season of success.

Gilbert Pena  
Business-to-Business Strategic Manager  
John Deere



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

**- Gilbert Pena**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Gilbert Pena". The signature is fluid and cursive, written over a light-colored background.

Accounting for progress requires regular review of financials and understanding of industry benchmarks.

# How Are You doing?

**“How are you doing?”** is a casual question, a conversation starter that usually earns a thoughtless reply like “not bad” or “pretty good.” But when we ask our peers this same question during industry trade shows – when we reflect on the season and evaluate how we really are doing – the inquiry is more urgent.

Our radar is on, and our hope is for intuitive feedback. Numbers. Dollar signs. Reassurance that our year is on par with the competition – even better (truth be told).

“A business, by definition and by nature, has to be quantified,” says Jim Huston, president of J.R. Huston Enterprises, a management consulting company specializing in the green industry. Partnered with *Lawn & Landscape*, he headlines a series of Benchmarking Your Business seminars.

The message: Strong businesses measure up. In other words, by watching numbers and understanding key industry standards, landscape contractors can control their business rather than allowing market forces to control them.

“You want to have a lot of indicators to tell you where the money is going and what your costs are,” Huston says. “But the big thing is that you want to take all those costs and make sure your clients pay for them.”

In modest growth years, benchmarking helps landscape contractors stay on track.

“There are more landscape companies out there, and there is more competition today,” Huston notices.

But was this year on par for the green industry?

*Lawn & Landscape*'s 2006 Cost of Doing Business survey asked landscape contractors to tell us, in numbers, exactly how they are really doing. This 2006 Benchmarking Your Business report is the culmination of survey results, benchmarking standards and industry feedback. You'll find charts to



Photo: John Deere

help you compare your business to others and learn how peers use these numbers to gauge their performance.

Feedback from the field tells us that labor, fuel and housing starts are key concerns. "How landscape contractors perform is not so much dependent on the economy, but how prepared they are to do the work and execute," Huston says.

Successful landscape contractors who finished strong in 2006 understand that business is a game of checks and balances – and constant change. They stayed on top by measuring performance and reviewing financials regularly.

**A CHECK-UP.** Regardless of how you gauge your competition, your No. 1 contender is your own business. How did you perform last year, and what goals did you set for 2006? Most importantly, do you measure your progress?

"Our biggest competition is with ourselves," says Cindy Vance, vice president, Sunrise Lawn/Landscaping Services, Sterling, Va. "We compare how we do different jobs and ask ourselves, 'How can we do this more efficiently next time?' We really try to focus on

our own performance."

Basically, benchmarking is comparing your business with...your business. But it also includes measuring your performance compared to others in the market. Together, internal and external benchmarking can help a company increase profit and operate more efficiently. With benchmarking tools in place, employees are more accountable, managers are more knowledgeable, and owners can set and reach goals for growth.

Huston relates benchmarking to getting an annual physical. Your doctor tests cholesterol, blood pressure and your temperature, among other vital stats. He or she compares your results this year compared to last year, and considers where you stand in the big picture.

"Benchmarking dictates your business health," Huston says simply. "It gives you feedback on your health and also reassurance."

But just like in the doctor's office, where we may insist that our high blood pressure must be a false alarm, or that our diets are perfectly healthy – "High cholesterol, who me?" – we are also guilty of business habits that can sabotage our balance sheets.

Here are some common mistakes that Huston describes.

**More Iron Than Profit** – Is your fleet of equipment so large that machines sit idle, not “earning” their keep in your business? Equipment should be busy and billable 30 to 50 percent of the time.

**The Sugar Daddy High** – You landed the largest client in town, and you dedicate 80 percent of your time on this project. You know they’re good for the money – it’s the

these, 88.4 percent review them. Though half of companies do not receive statements, the industry is gradually tuning into benchmarking practices. In 2005, 34.2 percent of respondents reported receiving monthly financial statements. (See sidebar, “Who Reads Financial Statements?” on page J8.)

Until recently, benchmarks for critical line items like labor, materials and equipment were not available, Huston says. “I think we are making progress because the industry is starting to think about the process of benchmarking,” he says. “But usually, the people who need it most recognize it least.”

**THE RULES.** Many landscape contractors admit they didn’t enter the business to crunch numbers. A passion for the outdoors or a knack for

working with their hands drew them to the field. Now operating a business, numbers drag them back into the office.

“When I was a smaller company, I never really thought about this stuff that much,” admits Richard Bare, president, Arbor-Nomics, Norcross, Ga. “I was a one-truck start-up and I started hiring people. Then I noticed my net profit at the end of the year was decreasing something fierce. So I

“You want to have a lot of indicators to tell you where the money is going and what your costs are. But the big thing is that you want to take all those costs and make sure your clients pay for them.” – **Jim Huston**

top corporate account. Warning: A client should not exceed 15 to 20 percent of your business. “Don’t become a captive sub,” Huston says.

**Faster, Faster** – Jobs are rolling in faster than you can answer the phone, labor hours resemble a 24/7 superstore – you’re running ragged, so business must be good. Business must be great! Stop. If you feel out of control, you are, Huston says. Trust your gut, don’t crash and burn.

**Egomania** – You focus on being the largest game in town – in the country. Your motto: The only way to go is to grow. But wait just one minute. Many large green industry contractors who are masters at production, equipped with expert marketing teams and seemingly deep pockets leave good old-fashioned processes and measures out of their businesses. They make their mark, but they don’t benchmark. The

thing is, size does not matter. But control, quantitative and intuitive benchmarking do.

If these exaggerated profiles resemble any part of your business, a little quality time with your monthly financial statements is in order.

According to our 2006 survey results, 51.6 percent of respondents receive monthly financial statements, and of

#### INDUSTRY GROSS SALES REVENUE HIGHLIGHTS

How do you project your gross sales revenue to change from 2005 to 2006?			
Increase	Increase Change		
55%	Mean: 22.2%		
	Increase Change by Region		
	South/Southeast	Northeast/Midwest	West/Southwest
	17.2%	22.2%	29%
Decrease	Decrease Change		
15.6%	Mean: 12.7%		
	Decrease Change by Region		
	South/Southeast	Northeast/Midwest	West/Southwest
	12.6%	13.8%	10%
No Change			
29.4%			

started looking at costs – labor costs – and I realized that’s where it was going.”

Today, Bare reviews financials on a weekly basis and man-hours on jobs each day. But in the beginning, Bare was no different than the majority of new landscape contractors that struggle with job costing. He fell into one of the two major traps that Huston says can choke profit: not



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recovering overhead and not pricing properly.

"The big question is, are you taking all of your costs – labor, overhead, materials, equipment and so forth – and are you passing those costs on to your client in your bids?" Huston asks.

Bare checks his progress by reviewing weekly income. He knows his expenses are about \$52,000 per week, so he can gauge whether the company is on target to meet his growth goal. Even if sales are up \$30,000 one week, he's still cautious. "In December and January, we take losses," he notes.

Most owners don't review financial statements on a weekly basis; a monthly snapshot will highlight weak points and wins so you can plan for the following month, and the rest of the year, Huston says.

Focus on two keys. "Landscape contractors need to make sure they are monitoring the right data," he notes. "No. 1 is budget. Are you meeting your budget for the year? No. 2 is gross profit. Is it there? If it is, you are on track."

More specifically, you'll want to review expenses that can spin out of control if not carefully watched, mainly labor and materials. Benchmarks for these expenses will vary depending on whether a business focuses on maintenance, design/build or both, Huston explains. General industry standards are:

**Maintenance Company**

- Labor = 35 to 40 percent of sales
- Materials = 5 to 10 percent of sales

**Design/build Company**

- Labor = 20 percent of sales
- Materials = 30 percent of sales (or more, depending on the scope of the project)

Back to recovering costs through job costing, Huston reminds that sales should amount to roughly four times that of overhead costs. Twenty-five percent of every sales dollar should go toward general administration overhead (GnA). Half of this (about 12 percent) includes salaries for employees who do not produce billable hours – in other words, administrative assistants and the "bureaucrats" of the business, Huston says. That means the owner and anyone not working in the field.

"If your general administration overhead gets higher than 25 percent, you have to work on sales," Huston says. (See Industry Gross Sales Revenue Highlights on page J10.)

Also important to consider is equipment costs. Is your fleet working for you, or do trucks, mowers and other machines eat your profit? Could you

## Who Reads Financial Statements?

**Do you receive monthly financial income statements?**



**If yes, do you review them monthly?**



purchase better equipment to ease labor burdens, or do you have more machines than man-hours to keep them busy?

"Contractors often say, 'I have all this equipment. It's busy. I'm just not sure if it's paying for itself,'" Huston says. This question is best answered by determining equipment costs as a percentage of overall sales.

• Equipment (maintenance and design/build companies) = 8 to 12 percent of sales

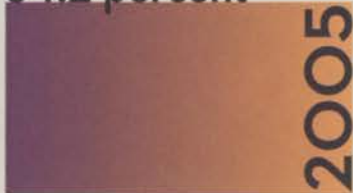
• Cost includes all maintenance and construction equipment, trucks, depreciation on equipment, fuel, repair, insurance and all other associated expenses

Applying this standard, a company with \$1 million in sales can spend \$120,000 on equipment. Most survey respondents projected that annual equipment purchases and leases increased from 2005 to 2006.

Understanding equipment costs helped Bare determine he could potentially purchase another company and operate it

More landscape contractors receive monthly financial income statements this year than in 2005.

34.2 percent



51.6 percent



more efficiently than the existing owner. The company has 1,200 accounts and earns \$500,000 in sales with six trucks.

"We were instantly able to see where we could fix the problem and run the company properly with two trucks because of our ability to benchmark," Bare says, noting the company's territory is tight.

**WORKING THE NUMBERS.** No matter the size of the company, all business owners face similar budget and benchmark challenges. Brent Kelly, operations manager of Allentuck Landscaping Co. in Clarksburg, Md., found reassurance in this fact and learned "you're not the only one out there," after attending on of Huston's benchmarking seminars.

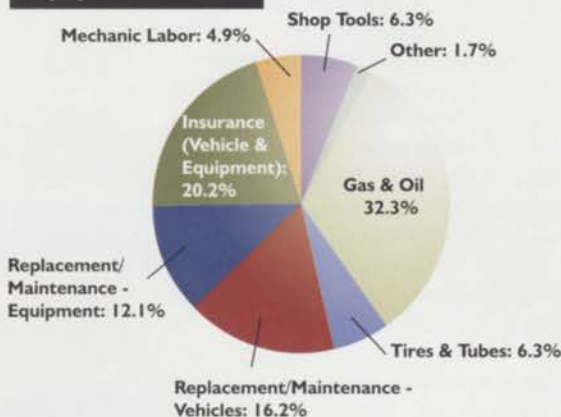
"Even the big companies have the same problems, just on a larger scale," Kelly relates. "The key is finding a system that works, and sticking to it."

For Vance, unconventional financial reports make numbers easier to read. "Traditional financial statements are prepared for tax purposes – for bankers and accountants," she points out. "That is not how we run our business on a daily basis."

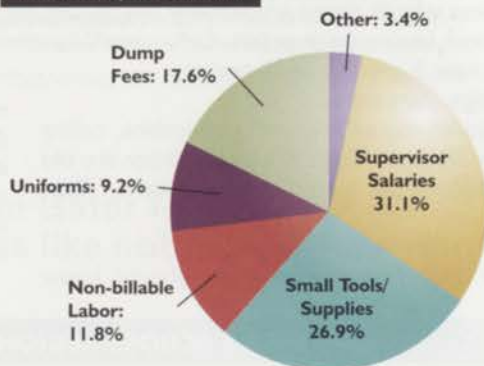
Vance linked up with a consultant/accountant who analyzes monthly financial reports and creates a customized statement for Sunrise. For example, the company separates its construction and maintenance

What are your company's projected costs in 2006 for each of the following expense areas?

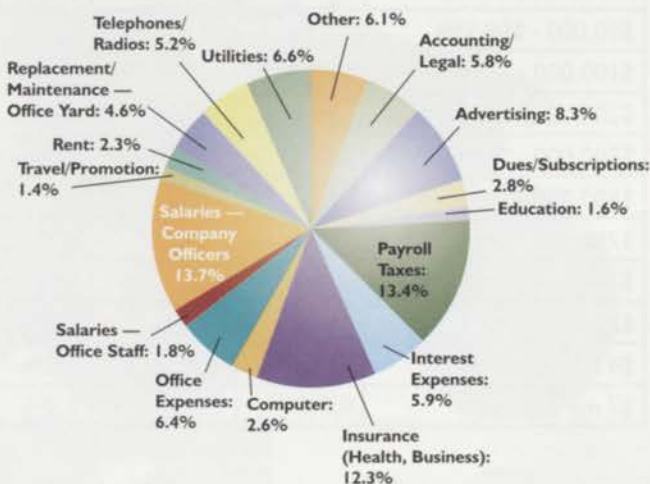
**Equipment Costs:**



**Indirect Job Costs:**



**Administrative Costs:**



## SERVICE MIX: PERCENTAGE OF ANNUAL SALES

divisions, figuring job costs based on different criteria because of the nature of the work.

"On the construction side, we do a lot of job costing, so I need to know in the middle of the job where we are (in terms of labor hours and materials costs) instead of waiting until the end of the project, hoping we made a profit," Vance says. "On the maintenance side, we focus more on budgeted vs. actual man-hours. For a year-long contract, we can key in on our monthly progress."

What does this type of benchmarking do for the bottom line?

If Vance notices that actual man-hours exceed her budget on a maintenance account, she knows she will eventually recoup for the excess hours during the slow season, when grass grows slower and crews can skip a cut or two. "So, it's tracking," she sums up.

Bare watches his bad debts, keeping them at less than 1 percent. While Huston recommends an asset-to-liability ratio of 1:1, Bare says it is difficult to maintain this ratio in a business where assets are nursery stock, trucks and landscape supplies. Still, bad debts that near 5 percent to 10 percent are a warning sign, Bare notes.

He also stays on top of accounts receivables, calling customers after 30 days. "Signs of a bad business are old accounts receivables and a high bad-debt ratio," Bare says.

Who should review monthly financials?

The owner and management team should know

34.3% Lawn mowing/maintenance

9.3% Lawn care

26.4% Construction/design-build

5.8% Irrigation

7.3% Tree & ornamental care

3.2% Snow & ice removal

12.4% Other

The South/Southeast region reported lawn mowing/maintenance as the boon of its annual sales at 55.2 percent. Irrigation services are strongest in the West/Southwest (6.7 percent of annual sales). The Northeast/Midwest led in construction/design-build as the greatest percent of annual sales, with 37.2 percent.

where the company stands, but who tracks performance depends on the size of the business, Huston says. Leaders of large companies might involve crew leaders to show them how labor hours add up. Managers in training can learn the back-end of a business by sitting in on monthly financial statement review meetings. His advice for all owners: Develop a managerial focus.

And most importantly, set goals.

"A goal well defined is a goal half achieved," Huston relates. "When you set goals, you can work backward and measure your progress as you achieve them."

So next time when someone asks, "How are you doing," you can answer, "Right on target."

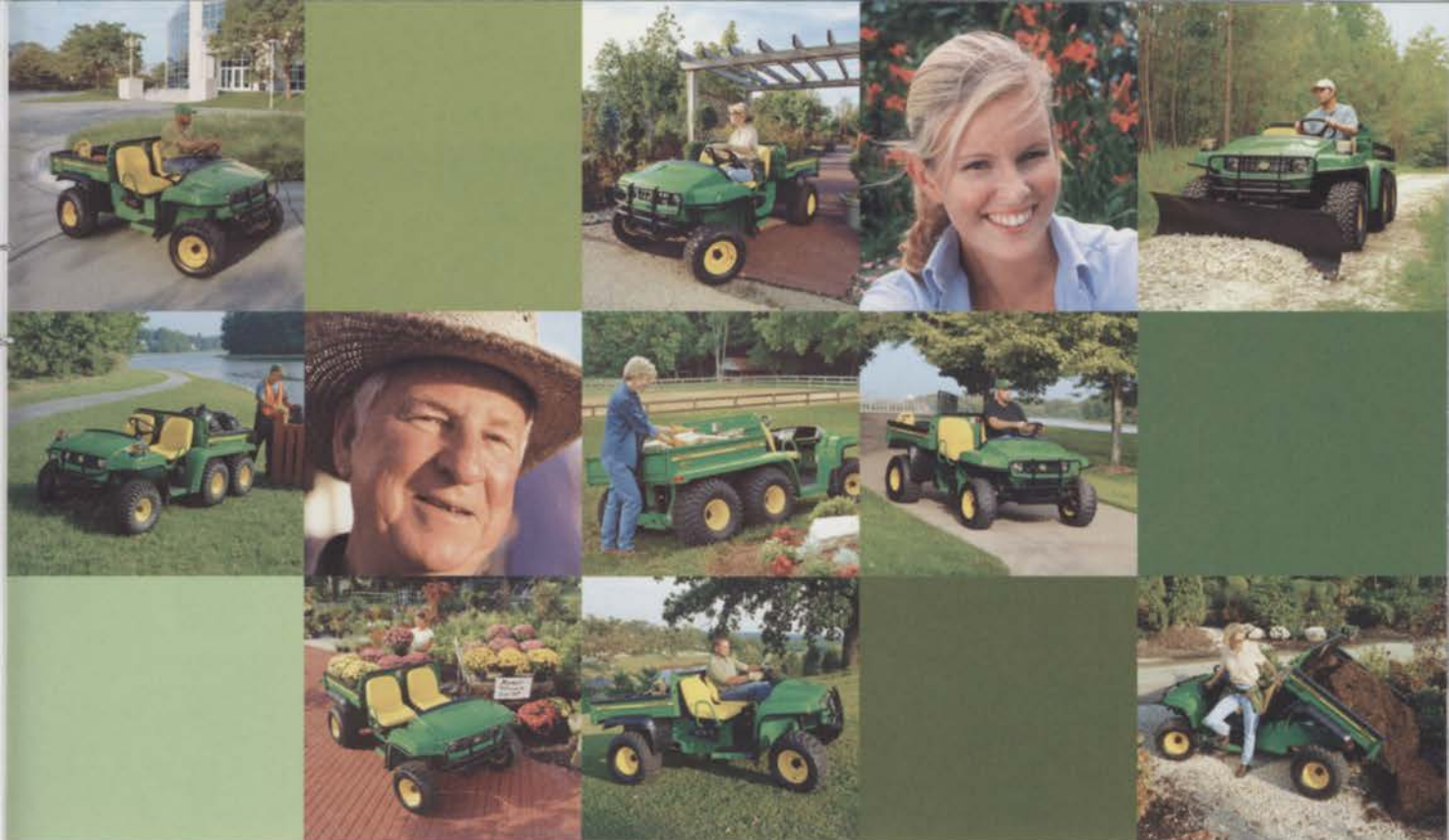
*Editor's Note:*

For more information about the *Benchmarking Your Business* seminars, go to [www.lawnbizseminars.com](http://www.lawnbizseminars.com).

## REVENUES ACROSS REGIONS

In what range do you predict your company's annual revenue to be in 2006?

Revenue	Total	S/SE	NE/MW	W/SW
Less than \$50,000	21.5%	24.3%	14%	32.4%
\$50,000 - \$99,999	22.4%	24.3%	28%	10.8%
\$100,000 - \$199,999	15.3%	13.2%	13.8%	19.9%
\$200,000 - \$299,999	15.1%	16.3%	17.3%	10%
\$300,000 - \$499,999	7.2%	7%	6.9%	8%
\$500,000 - \$749,999	6.5%	7%	6.3%	6.4%
\$750,000 - \$999,999	3.9%	1%	5.7%	3.2%
\$1 mil - \$1.9 mil	4.7%	0.9%	4.9%	7.7%
\$2 mil - \$3.9 mil	1.9%	3.5%	1.3%	1.5%
\$4 mil - \$6.9 mil	0.9%	0.9%	1.3%	0%
\$7 mil or more	0.6%	1.8%	0.4%	0%



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USE READER SERVICE # 43

2006 Cost of Doing Business survey results speak to the green industry's maturation and persistence in a tighter economy.

# ● A Steadfast Journey

## So how was this year compared to 2005?

Mild-mannered in their responses, landscape contractors told *Lawn & Landscape*, "not bad," and "actually, really well."

So 2005 wasn't a big boom, but it certainly wasn't a bust for most respondents, who expect to maintain at least the same revenue as last year or enjoy a modest increase. Drops of hope. Rather, this measured progress indicates a strong industry in demand, despite flat economies in many regions.

Call it the year of the turtle – slow, steady and predictable, but reliable. More than half of survey respondents (55 percent) projected an increase in total gross sales revenues in 2006 compared to 2005. Just 15 percent reported a decrease, and 29.4 percent said revenues stayed the same.

Those companies that experienced spikes in sales and revenues might attribute their accelerated growth to geography. Contractor Richard Bare remarks on how "Atlanta is really driving." Certainly, performance in 2005 – and every year, for that matter – depends entirely on the market, its housing trends and demographic makeup. (See Revenue Across Regions on page J10.)

**MARKET MATTERS.** Brent Kelly says homes that once sold in weeks sit on the market for six months in his Clarksburg, Md., service area. Headlines announce real-estate slowdowns in some markets – major drop-offs in other regions. Whether landscape contractors will feel a "bust" in sales depends, again, on activity in these micro-economies.

"The best thing for us to do is keep finding clients like the ones we have – customers who will still spend money for landscape services, even if there is a recession," says Kelly, operations manager for Allentuck Landscaping Co.

Cindy Vance also targets high-end homeowners' whose home values top \$1 million. A stubborn house market won't affect her business, she figures. "The industry slowed down a little this year, but there will always be a need for what we do in our area, and we are surrounded by high-end, professional clients who



Photo: John Deere

just need our services," says Vance, vice president of Sunrise Lawn/Landscaping in Sterling, Va. "They are so used to having them, they will find a way to pay for them."

Housing starts are not as strong as in prior years for markets like Phoenix, observes Jim Huston, president, J.R. Huston Enterprises, Englewood, Colo. But this doesn't mean the green industry can expect shortages in sales. "Some areas will see a wrinkle in housing starts, but I think other areas will remain strong," he says.

"Last night, I talked to a contractor in California who has \$2.5 million in business already sold for next year," Huston continues. "He's in the Silicon Valley area, and he said to me, 'We are just not part of the national economy.' There are about 16 major regions that are micro-economies, and you have to look at those individually."

**FUELING COSTS.** Arguably, prices at the pumps have garnered more press than they deserve, Huston

remarks. "But you can bet it will be a hot topic every year," he says.

Many landscape contractors anticipated rising costs and built the burden into pricing. Or, they looked for other ways to recover the expenditure. Rising fuel costs inspired Vance to negotiate with vendors to get the best prices on materials. Something has to give, she says, and customers cringe when prices creep. So she opted to tinker with her budget.

"I've been at this business for 10 years, and this is the first time we've had to pass on a portion of the fuel prices to customers," Vance says. Sunrise built a clause into maintenance contracts that if fuel prices exceeded \$3 per gallon, the company would institute a surcharge. Fuel prices were folded into construction contracts.

"We have longstanding relationships with our vendors, which allows us to have better buying power," Vance explains. "We were able to negotiate with our vendors and maintain competitive prices in our marketplace."

## IN A DAY'S WORK...

### How many paid days off does your company provide?

#### HOURLY/SEASONAL LABOR

- Paid vacation – 3 days
- Paid personal days – 1.3 days
- Paid sick days – 1.2 days
- Paid holidays off – 2.8 days

#### SALARIED LABOR

- Paid vacation – 5.7 days
- Paid personal days – 1.5 days
- Paid sick days – 2.8 days
- Paid holidays off – 3.5 days

#### EXECUTIVE MANAGEMENT TEAM

- Paid vacation – 6.7 days
- Paid personal days – 1.9 days
- Paid sick days – 2.3 days
- Paid holidays off – 3.9 days

The result was a year of modest 3 percent growth and \$3.1 million in revenue, which slightly exceeded Sunrise's \$3 million goal. "We continue to grow at this steady rate each year," she says, adding that the company's new facility promises growth. "We don't want the company to get crazy – we don't want to grow all at once."

Meanwhile, down in Atlanta, where Richard Bare runs Arbor-Nomics, higher fuel prices weren't a loss for the company at all. Bare anticipated the summer-long pressure at the pumps and, as he would do for the price of materials or labor, he figured the fuel increase into his cost of doing business and passed it on to the customer.

"The fuel prices were actually an opportunity to raise our prices and get away with it," Bare points out, adding that the stress of working in a service business is never fully compensated, but direct costs like fuel certainly should be. He noticed a 15 percent increase in fuel costs for his business during 2006.

Kelly says a tight service area prevented Allentuck Landscaping Co. from charging maintenance customers for fuel. "We did add fuel surcharges to landscape jobs, but we tend not to do that for maintenance," says Kelly, operations manager. "Our maintenance stops are routed so we aren't driving all over town."

**CONTROLLING LABOR.** Overtime costs will do a disappearing act on your profit dollars. But only 20.1 percent of respondents said that workers clock an average of 40 hours or less per week. Most reported

## HOW MUCH ON AVERAGE, DO YOUR COMPANY'S EMPLOYEES EARN IN EACH POSITION?

**ANNUAL SALARY** (Figures are projected, assuming full-time, year-round; president/CEO/owner figures are actual.)

		REGION				REVENUE			
		TOTAL RESPONDENTS	S/SE	NE/MW	W/SW	Less than \$100k	\$100-\$299k	\$300-\$999k	\$1 million+
Entry-level mower operator	Mean	\$16,988	\$16,424	\$17,765	\$15,679	\$17,618	\$16,784	\$16,965	\$16,656
Senior mower operator	Mean	\$21,657	\$20,220	\$22,905	\$20,359	\$19,851	\$22,503	\$21,809	\$21,963
Entry-level spray technician	Mean	\$17,232	\$15,682	\$16,888	\$21,461	\$ 6,538	\$17,087	\$20,682	\$18,742
Senior spray technician	Mean	\$24,555	\$21,204	\$28,932	\$22,140	\$24,000	\$27,581	\$23,887	\$21,777
Entry-level irrigation	Mean	\$16,979	\$14,398	\$16,008	\$21,417	\$13,333	\$12,648	\$19,380	\$19,188
Senior-level irrigation	Mean	\$23,290	\$15,606	\$30,155	\$27,328	\$26,007	\$10,961	\$26,438	\$23,322
Entry-level laborer	Mean	\$17,794	\$16,317	\$18,402	\$18,354	\$15,425	\$17,778	\$18,897	\$19,039
Senior laborer	Mean	\$25,013	\$20,050	\$25,759	\$28,560	\$23,789	\$25,032	\$25,172	\$26,016
Crew foreman/supervisor	Mean	\$31,662	\$26,869	\$32,487	\$40,441	\$27,429	\$32,892	\$30,979	\$32,385
Field supervisor/account	Mean	\$30,071	\$30,348	\$28,802	\$32,282	\$25,104	N/A	\$31,278	\$38,621
Equipment mechanic	Mean	\$32,488	\$28,710	\$29,322	\$46,619	\$29,000	\$22,000	\$43,773	\$30,656
Landscape	Mean	\$44,615	\$36,631	\$31,946	\$78,335	\$33,875	\$64,768	\$34,234	\$41,373
Salesperson	Mean	\$20,308	\$20,737	\$18,080	\$40,000	\$22,500	\$10,000	\$20,782	\$27,990
Operations manager/vp	Mean	\$38,611	\$28,500	\$32,397	N/A	N/A	N/A	\$46,884	\$44,500
President/CEO/owner*	Mean	\$70,240	\$74,960	\$63,134	\$79,271	\$75,000	\$53,977	\$71,792	\$97,444



**WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING BENEFITS DOES YOUR COMPANY PROVIDE TO EACH EMPLOYEE GROUP?**

	TOTAL	REGION			REVENUE			
	RESPONDENTS	S/SE	NE/MW	W/SW	Less than \$100k	\$100-\$299k	\$300-\$999k	\$1 million +
Paid vacation	28.5%	44.4%	26.8%	21.1%	2.5%	38.2%	41.8%	61.5%
Paid personal days	14.5%	26.5%	10.4%	13.4%	2.5%	30.2%	16.4%	11.5%
Paid sick days	16.8%	26.3%	13.6%	15.9%	0%	32.4%	20.2%	26.8%
Paid holidays off	27.6%	49.2%	26.6%	15.7%	2.5%	42.2%	30.5%	69.1%
Health insurance	22.7%	35.2%	24.2%	12.9%	2.5%	27.8%	26.9%	69.1%
Dental insurance	7.6%	2.1%	11.6%	5.1%	0%	12.0%	2.4%	34.6%
Vision insurance	6.8%	0%	10.7%	5.1%	0%	12.0%	2.4%	26.8%
Life insurance	5.0%	0%	5.1%	7.8%	0%	0%	8.2%	26.8%
Disability insurance	5.3%	2.4%	6.7%	5.1%	0%	8.0%	4.3%	19.0%
401(k) plan	10.5%	8.4%	16.5%	2.7%	0%	8.0%	13.0%	46.8%
Profit sharing	4.2%	0%	8.6%	0%	0%	4.0%	7.2%	11.8%
Company-supplied uniforms	29.9%	22.4%	33.2%	29.4%	0%	32.9%	60.1%	53.9%
Use of company car	10.8%	33.1%	7.0%	2.7%	0%	22.0%	15.7%	7.7%
Use of company cell phone	21.9%	20.3%	26.6%	15.9%	0%	26.5%	35.5%	54.0%
Raise/salary increase in 2005	34.9%	47.1%	39.0%	21.1%	2.5%	50.2%	57.6%	53.8%
Performance bonus	15.5%	32.9%	16.9%	2.5%	0%	26.0%	20.1%	30.9%
Year-end holiday bonus	31.5%	45.0%	38.3%	13.0%	2.5%	39.8%	59%	46.0%

a workweek of 40 to 44 hours (44.8 percent), and 17.6 percent said workers average 50 to 60 hours. (See "All in a Day's Work" on page J14).

Business owners control labor hours in a number of ways. Unlike manual labor, equipment always shows up to work on time, and workhorses like skid-steer loaders might reduce hours on a site or expand a company's service capabilities to include higher-margin projects. Also, hiring a mechanic ensures that down machines are up and running – and making money – as fast as possible, Vance says.

An in-house service technician also helps maintain equipment so the fleet lasts. Though just 4.5 percent of respondents employ a technician full-time, and 6.4 percent keep a mechanic on the roster on a part-time basis.

"Our crews want to beat their man-hours, too, and they have to have their equipment working perfectly to do their jobs," Vance says. "We do a lot of training with them to make sure they understand how to operate equipment properly."

**FOCUS ON THE FUTURE.** Internal factors dictate growth and success for a business more than what Huston labels as "macro" market indicators, such as geography or economy. "Just because your geographical or industry market is going through a recession does not mean that you have to participate in it," he reminds landscape contractors.

Bare takes this advice seriously.

"If you were to really listen to everything going on in the world, you could worry yourself into not expanding at all," he says. Health insurance, gas

prices, global unrest – you name it. "I could make a list of all the things the press has on the news every night," Bare adds.

Instead, Bare focuses on his business – and business is good. "I think 2007 in the Sun Belt, southeastern U.S. will be very strong," he says.

Huston says landscape contractors who started the 2006 season off shaky were more optimistic by the end of summer. "I hear that it's turned out to be a stronger year than anticipated," he reports.

As for 2007, "pipelines look good," Huston adds. Architects are busy, housing starts haven't halted, even if they are slower in some markets. The industry is steadfast, stronger even than last year. "We are doing a little better," Kelly says. "I'm not always sure what will come around the next year, but there are plenty of good jobs out there."

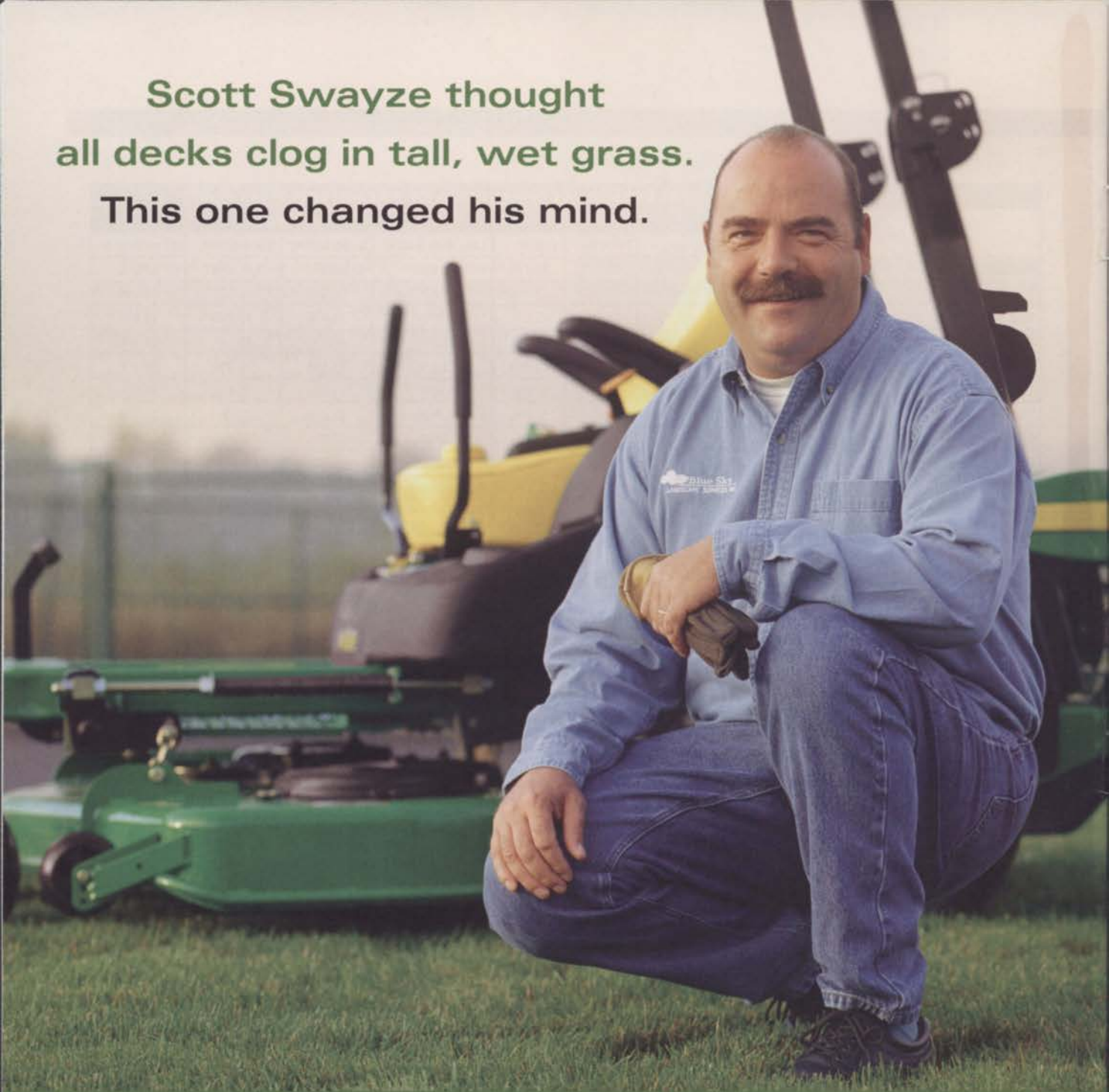
Voicing a careful confidence that he shares with industry peers, Kelly adds, "Either way, we'll get through it."

**How We Did It**

In September, 3,000 Lawn & Landscape readers received an invitation to take part in our annual Benchmarking Your Business survey, conducted by ABR Research, an independent firm.

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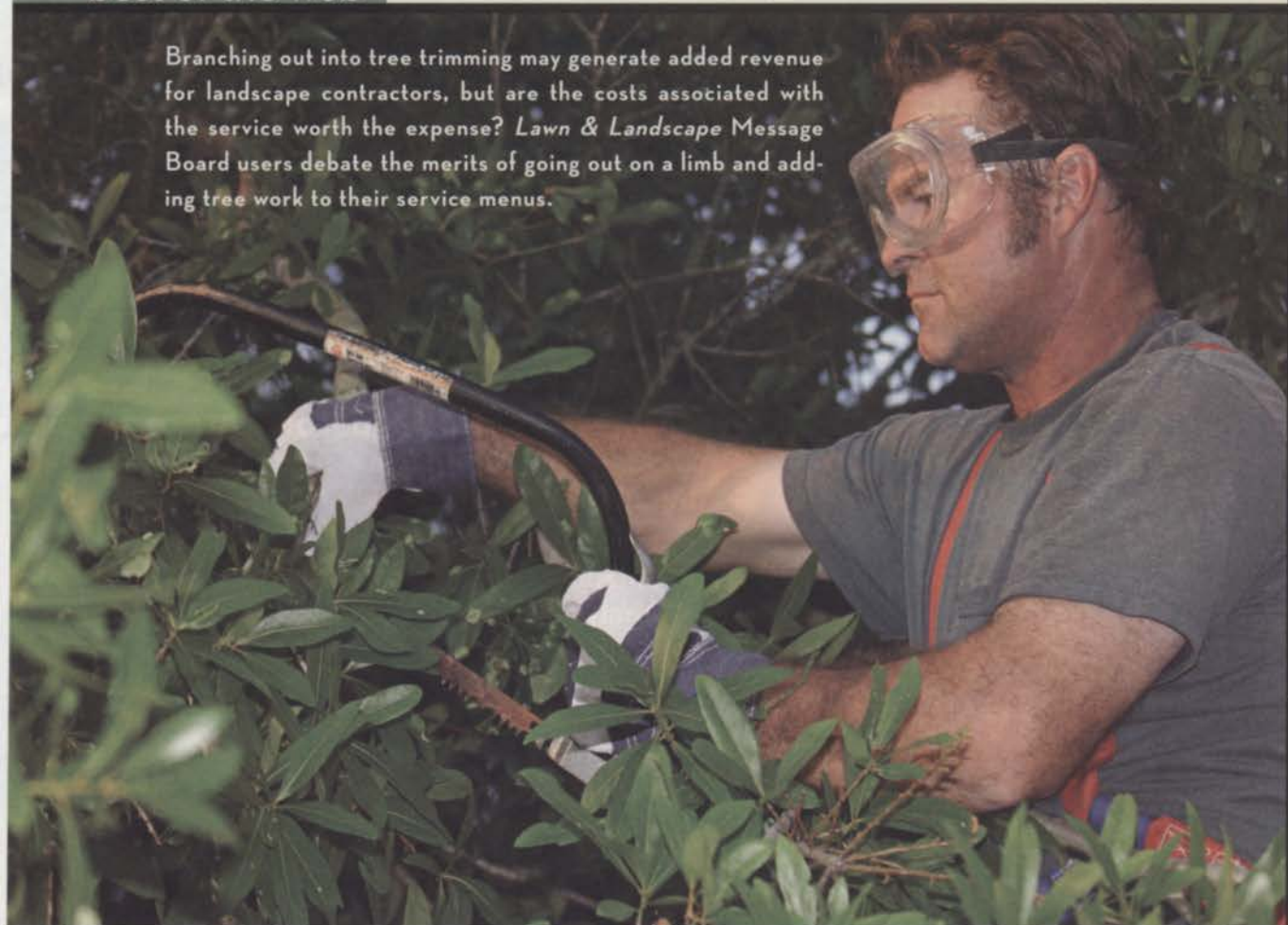
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Branching out into tree trimming may generate added revenue for landscape contractors, but are the costs associated with the service worth the expense? *Lawn & Landscape Message Board* users debate the merits of going out on a limb and adding tree work to their service menus.



Photos: Dreamstime.com

## Out On A Limb

**T**ree trimming is an attractive service addition for landscape contractors looking to expand their service menus and strengthen their bottom lines.

In fact, tree and ornamental care makes up about 5 percent of landscape contractor's annual sales, and 17 percent indicated the service's gross sales revenue grew from 2005 to 2006, according to recent *Lawn & Landscape* research. More than 54 percent of landscape contractors indicate they offer tree trimming and removal service and nearly 6 percent say they plan to begin offering the service in the coming year, according to the research.

So, do the rewards outweigh the risks? It's a question Chad Freed, owner of Philadelphia-based Sycamore Landscaping recently posed to fellow professionals for debate on the *Lawn & Landscape Message Board*.

"Around here all of the big companies have a tree service

division," Freed posts. "I subcontracted out some tree work a few weeks ago and three guys made \$2,200 in six hours. I was thinking of starting a tree division. Good idea or bad idea?"

**STEEP COSTS.** To do it right, a contractor will need to spend some money, says Todd Patton, president of Patton Property Maintenance in Heymarket, Va. Tree climbers, the guys getting into the trees to do the cutting, make very good money because the work is dangerous, Patton says. But a contractor needs to invest in the proper equipment in order to experience these benefits, posts George Iannaccone, director of operations at Innovative

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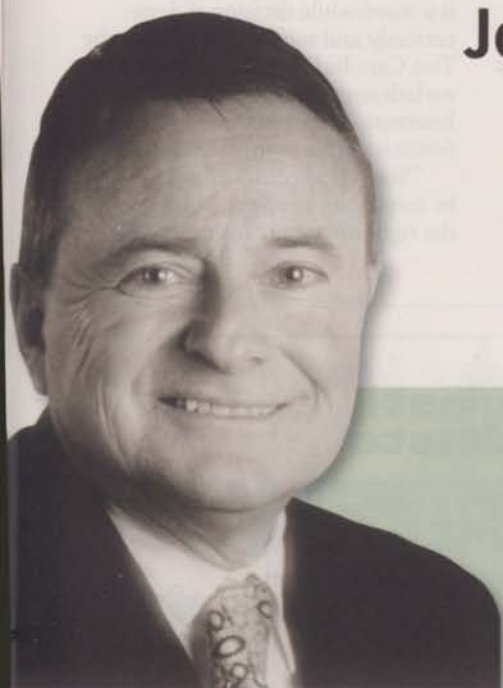


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**USE READER SERVICE # 45**

Designs & Maintenance, Syosset, N.Y. Landscape companies successful in tree trimming and removal need a decent chip truck, a basic chipper, something with which to haul wood such as a skid-steer loader, and a stump grinder, he posts. Altogether, Iannaccone says an interested contractor is looking at a \$100,000-plus investment without buying a single saw, which he will need in multiple sizes.

"All the things that make short work of tree removal," Iannaccone posts. "I know companies that show up to the job with over \$250,000 in equipment.

Likewise, that doesn't account for personnel costs, Iannaccone adds. "Just so you know, a good climber worth between \$25 and \$30 an hour will beat the crap out of a \$500 climbing saw in a season. And this doesn't include bars and chains."

If a contractor stays away from heavy tree work and concentrates on pruning services, Iannaccone suggests

a chipper and a dedicated chip truck will be a contractor's biggest expense.

"There's a lot of money to be made shaping pines, pruning fruit trees and especially formative pruning on young trees," Iannaccone posts. "These are areas often neglected by many landscape companies and not always cost effective for the tree men with the big machines. You can do a lot of this work in the winter and you can get by with a 6-inch chipper or none at all.

**INSURANCE IS VITAL.** Then there's the matter of costly insurance.

"Liability isn't so bad, but the workman's compensation sucks," Patton posts. "Worker's comp is a little more than 20 percent of payroll for us and some places are much worse."

Iannaccone agrees, adding New York worker's compensation on tree workers is in the neighborhood of 33 to 36 percent of payroll. Liability insurance, he adds, is still vital to a tree guy.

"If I hire you to prune my maple and two weeks or months later the thing splits in half and kills someone... hope you have a good lawyer and lots of insurance," he posts.

Despite the investment drawbacks, Patton posts tree work has been profitable for his firm and, although he's raised his prices, he continues to sell the service. "We make out a lot better on the tree work than mowing, but landscaping is right up there with it," he says. If you can sell the work for what it's worth and then keep a crew busy, you'll do well."

Iannaccone posts tree trimming is a worthwhile decision if done correctly and suggests contacting the Tree Care Industry Association ([www.natlarb.com](http://www.natlarb.com)) or a contractor's local International Society of Arboriculture ([www.isa-arbor.com](http://www.isa-arbor.com)) for assistance.

"You'll find plenty of people who'll be more than happy to point you in the right direction," he posts. **LL**

sidebar on page 88



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# timber!

Landscape contractors may not have tree pruning and removal divisions, but they do encounter sizeable fallen branches during their daily maintenance routines.

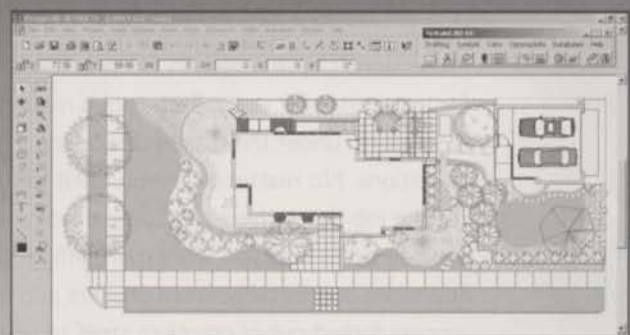
So how do landscape contractors handle fallen limbs, participants wondered recently on the *Lawn & Landscape* Message Board. Should limbs be loaded into the truck free of charge and hauled away or should it be charged to the client as an additional service?

Here's how some weighed in on this issue:

- Todd McCabe, president, McCabe Landscape Group, Wrightsville Beach, N.C.: "Generally, we will pick them up and haul them."
- Chad Stern, owner, Mowing & More, Chevy Chase, Md.: "Haul 'em and charge 'em."
- James Binns, president, Earthworks Landscape Gardening, Fayetteville, Ark.: "Either we take them at the time of mowing, or stockpile them in a corner of the property and take them away on a regular maintenance day."
- Kelly Tohill, owner, Tohill Landscape Management, Atlanta: "If it's big and I have to cut it up, I charge them. One buck a minute no less than \$10."
- Frank Connerney, president, Castle Lawn Care, Tampa, Fla.: "If it's just one limb we'll throw it in the back of the 1-ton dump free of charge. If it's more than one, or large enough that it has to be cut to be moved or fit into the dump body, we'll charge 'em."



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Photo: Kichler Lighting

## landscape lighting: it's all in the details

Shedding some light on the intricacies of this popular service offering.

Landscape contractors pride themselves on creating environments that enrich their clients' lives by allowing them to enjoy the outdoors and entertain friends and family.

Contractors have found that a natural solution to making the most of their customers' landscape investments is to extend the hours homeowners may enjoy their gardens, patios and pergolas by offering outdoor lighting.

"People are staying home and creating outdoor rooms," says Dave Hoffman, president of Grafton, Ohio-based Lifestyle Landscaping. "For most people, both man and wife are working all day and when they come home it's dark and they want to enjoy their yard at night, too."

The question today isn't "Do I add outdoor lighting?" Contractors acknowledge that landscape lighting can be highly profitable – more than one-third of design/build contractors provide this service, according to *Lawn & Landscape's*

2006 State of the Industry research. But many report they don't make the most of this side of their business. Some only market it to their current customers; others barely market it at all. Contractors say the service is highly competitive – with landscape companies, electricians and general contractors vying for business – but that the level of professionalism isn't up to par. Lighting manufacturers report that many companies install lighting but never offer follow-up services, which benefits no one – the customer sees only short-term satisfaction from their investment and the contractor misses out on a substantial revenue source.

The articles that follow address how to make the most of your outdoor lighting business – how you can best serve your customers by maintaining their systems, how you can position yourself as a lighting expert in your market and how you can greatly improve your portfolio with nighttime photography. ■

by marisa palmieri | associate editor

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Photos: Kichler Lighting

## Maintenance Matters

**A landscape lighting maintenance contract is a win-win for contractors and customers.**

Would you spend several thousand dollars on a refrigerator or dishwasher for your home without an extended service contract? Probably not. "Just like you have a service contract for your appliances in the home, it's important with lighting, too," says Eric Borden, vice president of product management and market research for Sea Gull Lighting, Riverside N.J.

It should be the same for landscape lighting, contractors and lighting manufacturers say, but not all contractors sell the add-on service to their customers as a standard practice.

"More contractors just put the lighting in and never go back," says Michael Southard, director of sales for Kichler Lighting, Cleveland. "Most homeowners don't maintain it, half the light bulbs go out and the fixtures are going every which way. It's important installers sell a maintenance agreement. I would definitely recommend it be incorporated one way or the other."

Because lighting is a service typically purchased by high-end residential customers, contractors note that extended maintenance should be an easy sell. "For the money that they're spending, it's pretty important to buy a maintenance

package," says Vince Del Vacchio, president of Del Vacchio Landscapes, Edgemont, Pa. "If you're going to spend thousands on lighting, then it makes sense to spend hundreds to keep it working."

Joe Lendo, president and owner of Elite Lawn Irrigation and Maintenance, Rochester Hills, Mich., agrees. "It's easy for a lighting system to go into disarray due to wear from soccer balls, pets — you name it," he says. "Fixtures get knocked over, bumped. If you're spending that kind of money it seems silly not to maintain it."

Lendo notes another important reason for contractors to sell maintenance. "That's where a fair amount of the money is, for one," he says, noting his company's annual maintenance package includes two visits, a system cleaning, fixture adjustment and bulb replacement. In addition to being a profit center in itself, annual or twice-yearly maintenance gives contractors the opportunity to up-sell their clients.

"It's a way to make money and be out there in front of the homeowner to say, 'Let do the backyard this year,'" Southard says. Even if the customer is not home to pitch ideas to, it's still an opportunity to drop off literature about

by marisa palmieri | associate editor



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any new product lines or special offers, contractors say.

Though the specifics of contractors' maintenance packages vary widely, a typical contract includes annual or biannual visits that cover lamp replacement, fixture cleaning and adjustment and transformer cleaning and inspection (see *Double Check* on page 96).

For cleaning, manufacturers recommend contractors clean internal components by using cans of compressed air to blow out bugs, dirt and debris and wipe down external components with a damp cloth and standard household cleaner. Another trick to preserving your customers' system is to apply a corrosion-preventive compound to sockets and electrical contacts and weather protectant to exposed metal components.

Many metal decorative fixtures are designed to patina naturally, but this weathered look can concern some customers, notes Fred Richards, general manager of Cleveland-based Hinkley Lighting's architectural division. "There's a lot of copper used in low-voltage landscape lighting," he says. "Some people like for it to be cleaned up, but it's really supposed to age nicely. So whether or not to clean it up is whatever the customer's preference is."

In terms of frequency, lighting contractors typically offer annual or twice-yearly service visits, and many begin the contract only after the product warranties are up or offer deals like "free service for one year."

"We include it for the first year with the installation, and then we go to them with a continued package after that," says Del Vacchio, noting that the package he offers is a twice-yearly one that includes cleaning, adjustment and replacement of any bulbs that are burned out.

Lendo's package is annual and he prefers to replace all lamps at once, rather than just the ones that are burned out. Elite charges customers a yearly discounted labor rate of \$20, waives the per-visit fee and charges customers for the materials. Although paying for all lamps at once can be a little pricey for customers that have extensive systems, most customers prefer this method. "It's pretty successful for us," he says. "It takes care of a lot of people from having to call

continued on page 98, sidebar on page 96



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## double check

Use this irrigation maintenance checklist, compiled from lighting manufacturers' tips, annually or semi-annually to inspect your clients' systems.

### Lamps

- ✓ Replace any lamps that are burned out or scheduled for replacement.

### Fixtures

- ✓ Remove lenses and clean out any dirt, bugs and debris from the socket. Canned compressed air is one way to do so.
- ✓ Apply a corrosion-preventative compound to all sockets and electrical contacts. Replace any sockets that show advanced corrosion.
- ✓ Apply weather protectant to exposed metal parts.
- ✓ Readjust fixtures as necessary, especially if plant material has grown. Pay special attention to mounts and fasteners for tree-mounted fixtures.
- ✓ Clean powder-coated fixtures with a spray cleaner and wipe off with a damp rag. Clean bird droppings off copper and brass fixtures, otherwise let them patina naturally.
- ✓ Repair or replace broken or damaged stakes or mounting elements.

### Transformers

- ✓ Clear debris out from transformer cabinet.
- ✓ Trip and reset all breakers.
- ✓ Check transformer wire connections for snug fit.
- ✓ Tighten common and voltage tap lug, as they can vibrate loose over time.
- ✓ Check amperage on each common lug (maximum amperage = 25 amps/per common).
- ✓ Check all switching devices and reset timers if necessary.

### Electrical components

- ✓ Test GFCI receptacles and cover plates.
- ✓ Check visible electrical connections, j-boxes, switches, etc.
- ✓ Inspect exposed wire/cable for nicks, wear or damage. Repair, replace or bury if necessary.
- ✓ Inspect cable and ties in trees for girdling.
- ✓ Ensure cable connections are waterproof to prevent moisture and corrosive build up within the cable.

### Miscellaneous

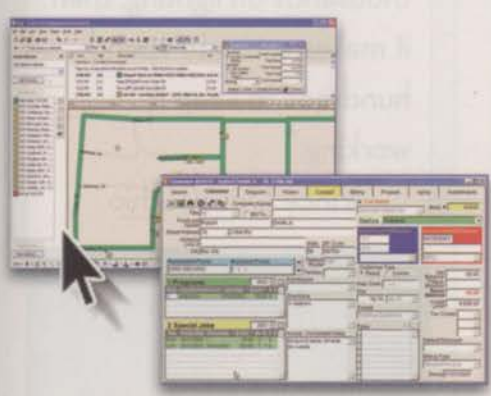
- ✓ Attach a sticker on the inside of the transformer with your company name, phone number, date of service and technician name.
- ✓ Use the maintenance visit as an opportunity to up-sell customers on additional fixtures – even if it's just to drop off literature.



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continued from page 94

for service five times a year. We just go out and take care of it at one time. They pay for the cost of the bulbs, but they don't get nicked-and-dimed on multiple service calls." He keeps his customers happy by knocking it all out at once, saving himself a few trips and making a profit on lamp mark-ups. "If we're making a good bulk

buy, we can get them a little cheaper," he notes. "And if they have 15 bulbs at nine bucks a piece, there's a little bit of money there."

Whereas Lendo chooses to profit from lamp mark-ups, others charge their typical labor fee plus the cost of materials.

At Lifestyle Landscapes, many

lighting customers are also lawn maintenance customers, so the company works the cost of lighting services into customers' annual landscape maintenance contracts.

Early spring is the most popular time of year for annual outdoor lighting checkups.

"A lot of times people are shoveling snow and fixtures get bumped around and snow has fallen on the fixtures. Even though it's melted off, dirt has accumulated," Lendo says,

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"For the money that they're spending, it's pretty important to buy a maintenance package. If you're going to spend thousands on lighting, then it makes sense to spend hundreds to keep it working."

- Vince Del Vacchio



explaining his rationale for favoring early-spring maintenance.

Also, Hoffman points out, "The April-May timeframe is good so we can change all of the bulbs so customers are not calling during the busy growing season."

For companies that offer biannual service, spring and fall are the natural times to do so, experts say. One reason is it's the time of year they're performing other pre- and post-winter preparation services. "In the irrigation business, this is when people do the start-ups and the shut-downs," Southard says. "That's a good time to do your lighting maintenance, too." LL

USE READER SERVICE # 58

# Maximizing Herbicide Effectiveness

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## Taking the guess work out of cost and labor-effective year-round weed control.

When it comes to providing year-round control of turf-attacking weeds and enhancing your reputation as a trusted turf care expert, you simply have to follow proven steps for success. These include identifying targeted weeds, checking the herbicide label, calibrating spreaders and sprayers, understanding water source pH, mixing products correctly and understanding safe product handling, application and disposal. Your effort prior to and after applying herbicides can save labor and product costs, while building a satisfied customer base.

### ■ Identify Your Targets

Correctly identifying the visible and anticipated broadleaf and grassy weeds in the treatment area is step one. Identifying broadleaf weeds during their

flowering stage is easy, but they're much harder to identify in early growth stages.

The type of herbicide needed depends on correct identification of broadleaf and grassy weeds. Phenoxy herbicides, for example, control broadleaf weeds but have little to no effect on grasses, while a preemergent herbicide, such as pendimethalin, can be used to control both grassy and many broadleaf weeds with one application.

First, correctly identify weeds. Second, understand each specific weed's lifecycle to determine which pre- or postemergent herbicides will provide the best control. In addition to the product label as your guide in determining which herbicides will work best to control your targeted weeds, other basic considerations include the following:

### ■ Preemergent control:

- Annual grasses and broadleaves are best controlled with preemergent herbicide applications in early spring prior to weed seed germination.
- When the turf is well established, a number of preemergent herbicides can be used to provide broad-spectrum seasonal weed control. This represents the most effective and least costly means of weed management.
- If the turfgrass is significantly thin or will require large areas of turfgrass replacement, choose herbicides labeled for use during or directly following seeding, sodding or sprigging.

### ■ Postemergent control:

- Generally speaking, this is more costly and more difficult than preemergent weed control programs.
- Many post-applied herbicides can only be used on specific cool- or warm-season grasses. Do not assume your turfgrass is safe until you check the label.
- Applications should be made when weeds are small. You can generally use a lower rate on newly germinated weeds.
- Lower use rates equate to greater turfgrass safety.
- Many post-applied herbicides can be used as spot-spray applications – an economical approach to treating growing weeds.
- Some tank-mix combinations can be used for broader spectrum weed control, but some mixes may cause an antagonistic effect or may cause injury to the turfgrass. Always consult the labels on each of the products being used prior to tank mixing.

### ■ Check the Label

Often overlooked by applicators, the herbicide label provides information to help achieve better weed control and avoid use on non-targeted plants. The following label information should always be reviewed prior to any application:

#### Precautionary Statements.

Safety should always be your top priority. Take the necessary time to ensure that proper safety and first aid equipment is available prior to use. This section also provides proper clean up, storage and disposal information.

**Uses.** In addition to where the herbicide can be used (residential and commercial vs. golf courses, sports fields or sod farms) specific use rates are stated by weed species and/or site and type of turfgrass (cool- or warm-season). The product maximum rate restrictions associated with the type of site and recommended reapplication intervals are listed for uses through the season.

Look for additional information that warns the applicator of turfgrass sensitivities as well and other restrictions that indicate trees, ornamental plants or home gardens that are part of the landscape that should be avoided during application because of potential plant injury.

**Weeds Controlled.** Simply stated, cross reference your list of targeted weeds against the broadleaf and grassy weeds listed on the label. Chances are if the weed isn't listed, the product will provide no control against it. For postemergent products, consult the label for the growth stage or weed height restriction at the

time of application.

#### Application Instructions.

This section is critical for maximizing the efficacy of the product. It also provides details on the best methods and application techniques, and will help you avoid mistakes such as damage to sensitive plants, drift and poor coverage.

Always use recommended nozzle types and gallonage for best performance of the product.

### ■ Calibrate Sprayers and Spreaders

Consistently ensuring your application equipment is in good working condition and properly calibrated is critical to product coverage, which prevents herbicide under- or over-application.

Properly functioning spray equipment must be able to maintain constant pressure and flow to allow the even chemical distribution at labeled rates throughout an entire application. Before conducting a calibration test, carefully check the spray tank and lines for leaks, the pressure regulator and flow meter for proper operation and spray tips for clogs or excessive wear. Worn spray tips will cause erratic coverage.

Handheld and backpack sprayers that do not function properly can typically be traced to corroded metal parts, clogged nozzles or damaged seals. This is usually caused by leaving chemical solutions in sprayers and can be easily prevented by cleaning after each use.

Whether mechanically driven or handheld, making sure your sprayer is triple rinsed following an application is the key to

# Mechanical Sprayer Calibration Tips:

preventing cross contamination between chemicals that can cause plant injury. Always store your spray equipment clean and, if possible, do not store unsprayed pesticide mixes overnight.

Walk-behind spreaders, while generally simple machines, can easily cause poor product application when not working correctly. Applicators should check to ensure that the hopper is opening and closing properly and that the product spreader is rotating freely. Additionally, a calibration test can ensure that the spreader settings match product application rates.

## ■ Knowing Your pH

Manufacturers of sprayable pesticide products recommend that the water used to make the spray solution should be in the pH range of 5.6 – 6.5. While this is generally the range of most city and well water, a water quality check is a good precaution in regions with highly acidic soils or if the source is reused or grey water. Simple water test kits are available through water conditioning retailers and municipal water treatment plants regularly test the water so they would also be able to provide pH measures.

When working with extreme spray solution pH environments (under pH 5 and over pH 8), applicators should consider adding a buffering agent to the spray solution to maintain product efficacy.

■ **Mix It Up – Correctly.** A common technique used to save application time is tank mixing products. This is generally a safe practice assuming the applicator

knows in advance that the products are compatible and can be mixed together without negating efficacy. Again, the product label is the best place to determine product compatibility and provides specifics on products that should and should not be mixed.

When it comes to tank mixing, the most common mistake is the order that applicators combine products in the tank. The quick reference below is a proven sequence that will ensure that you don't end up with a congealed mess in the bottom of your spray tank:

1. Fill tank 1/2 full of water; begin agitation.
2. Add soluble packet products
3. While agitating, add products in the following order:  
WP, DG, LF or DF formulations  
S or L formulations  
EC formulations  
NIS, COC or MSO  
Liquid fertilizers
4. Fill remainder with water.

A simple method to prove correct mixing order is to conduct what is known as the 'jar test'. Using an empty container, fill it with representative quantities of water and products that you intend to use in the mixing order stated above. After agitating the ingredients, check the consistency of the mix to verify that it is a sprayable solution.

## ■ Always Play It Safe

The health and safety of the applicator should always be a primary objective. Applicators should never cut corners when it comes to wearing protective equipment required on the herbicide label.

1. Record the type and capacity of the nozzles being used.
2. Select a speed and pressure setting.
3. Turn pump on.
4. Check for leaks in the system, including hoses, connections and nozzle assemblies.
5. With the sprayer parked in place, collect water from the nozzles for one minute in calibrated collection vessels. These are available from your fertilizer/pesticide dealer.
6. Record the amount of liquid collected from each nozzle. Calculate an average volume per nozzle (in gallons).
7. Repeat steps 4-5 until water has been collected from all nozzles.
8. Record the average output from all nozzles. If any nozzle varies more than 10% from the average, check the nozzle and/or strainer for wear or clogging. Replace the nozzle if necessary, and be sure to use the exact same type and size (rated output) of nozzle.
9. If output from all nozzles is acceptable, operate the sprayer for one minute while traveling at a designated speed. For lawn care operators using a hand gun connected to a vehicle-mounted sprayer, walk at a constant speed and measure your swath width as the 'throw' coming from the hand gun.
10. Measure the distance traveled.
11. Determine the area covered = boom width x distance traveled.
12. Determine the output rate using the formula: Rate = ([average volume per nozzle x number of nozzles] / test area) x unit area.

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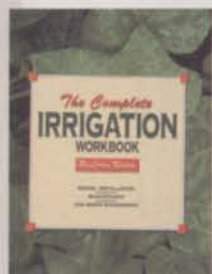
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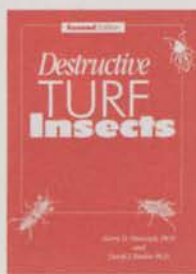
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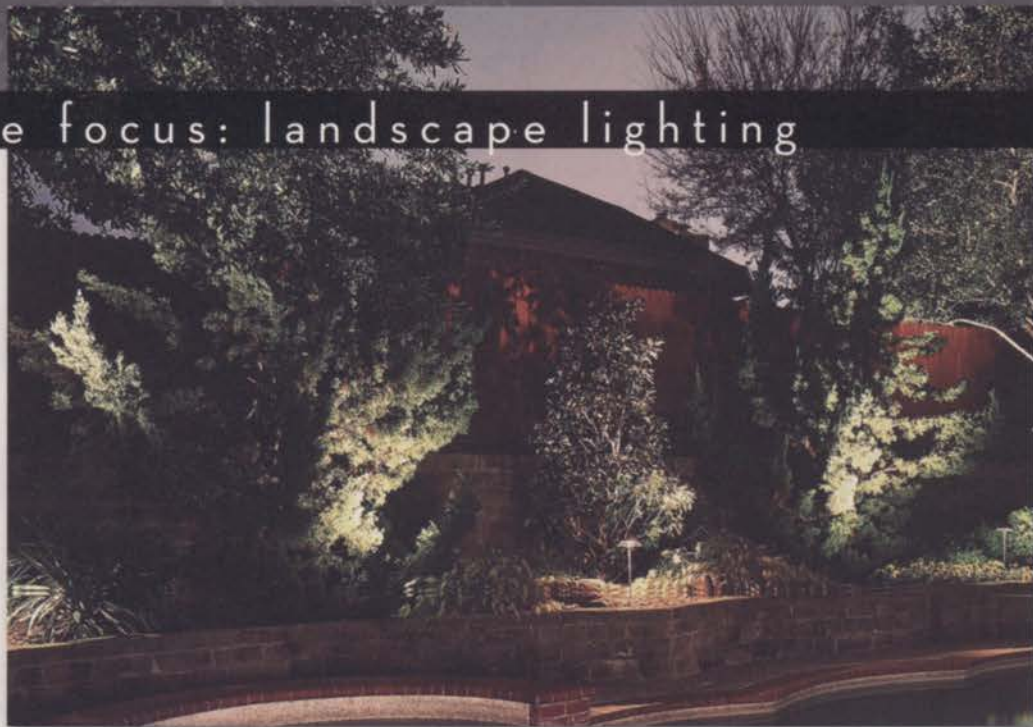
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Photos: Kichler Lighting (left); Sea Gull Lighting (page 105)

## Design Consultation: Fee or Free?

**One contractor details his system for collecting a landscape lighting design fee.**

Contractors often ask whether or not they should collect a fee for design consultation. I decided some years ago to implement a nominal hourly fee, which ranges between \$60 and \$150, determined by how far I must travel, for all new prospect design consultation meetings. Personally and professionally, it has had a huge positive impact on the growth of my business since then.

Before establishing my fee schedule, I would travel out to meet with what I thought were serious, qualified prospects to find they had no inclination to invest the kind of money it costs for one of my lighting systems. Some even had no intention of hiring me no matter what I did since they were do-it-yourselfers out for some free design and installation tips at my expense. I would return home feeling rejected and angry that I just wasted another three hours or so and burned \$10 to \$15 dollars of gasoline in the process. Being the single-person operation that I am, I realized I had to make a change in the way I conducted business. I could no longer spend unbillable time with prospects who might not buy from me. It just made sense to collect a fee at the end of our meeting and then credit it back to the client upon completion of their project.

Since collecting for design consultations, a mere 15 to

20 percent of the inquiries I get from prospects each year are unwilling to pay my fee. I have no way of knowing for sure how many of them would have bought from me, but I believe very few of them would have if they were unwilling to pay a nominal fee for consultation. Have I lost a few projects because of it? Maybe, but the financial and psychological costs to meet the numbers of those who wouldn't have bought from me far outweigh those that would.

If you think your market won't pay a consultation fee, first you must overcome your own preconceived beliefs and notions. They won't pay for free estimates but they will pay for a design consultation that has greater perceived and actual value. There is a big difference between the two. In my immediate service area of southern California there is intense competition from landscape contractors, electricians and other general service trades who offer one form of outdoor lighting or another. It took courage for me to implement a fee since prospects have got such freedom of choice. This is precisely the reason you should collect a fee. You should be doing things differently than your competitors.

Perception is reality. The perception is that you must be successful and busy if you can afford to risk losing some

by michael gambino

prospects by charging for your time. You are positioning yourself as an expert and valued advisor in the marketplace. If you are just starting out new in the business of outdoor lighting then in the beginning you may not be very busy. But when you are perceived as the expert in your area who is compensated for his time rather than someone who runs all over town chasing down every lead, the calls from qualified customers will start coming in.

If you have any doubts, implement the policy that says customers not satisfied with the consultation do not have to pay the fee. To date, I have not gotten every project that I've gone out on, but I've never been denied the consulting fee.

If you experience constant resistance to your fee then perhaps you are not presenting it at the right time or in the right manner. If you still experience resistance than maybe you are marketing to the wrong clients and should make changes that will bring you more qualified prospects. Your quality of work and service after the initial sale should solidify your position in the marketplace.

You should waive your fee for any client who has done business with you before. If you have treated them right, you should be positioned in the role of trusted advisor by now. It should be a matter of when you can do the additional work and not if. Competitors should not even be in the picture by then and a meeting should simply be a formality to discuss details and the cost of their planned project.

In the end, the decision is ultimately yours. If your outdoor lighting sales are lacking, this may be the kick you need to jump-start your business. Even if you are doing well, charging a fee for your time adds to your bottom line and will bring you more qualified prospects. It has for me. ☺

*The author is owner of Gambino Landscape Lighting, a Southern California-based outdoor lighting design/installation business. Reach him at [mike@gambinolighting.com](mailto:mike@gambinolighting.com).*



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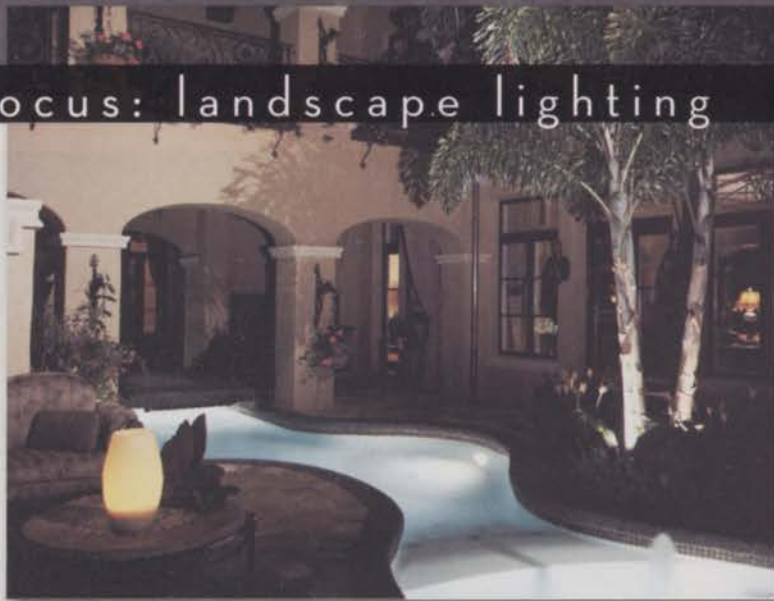


Photo: Sea Gull Lighting

## Perfecting Portfolio Photographs

Nighttime photography is tricky. Follow these tips to improve your portfolio.

Ideally, an outdoor lighting contractor would hire a professional photographer to take shots of his best work for his portfolio and promotional materials. However, a contractor just adding the service or one who only does it minimally might want to test the waters with his own digital photography before investing in a photo shoot that can cost several thousand dollars.

Amateur photographers beware – nighttime photography isn't as easy as point and click. Here are some simple tips from photo experts and CAST Lighting's Media and Marketing Director Steve Parrott.

**1. Camera selection.** An eight megapixel camera (the highest quality available for less than \$1,000) is ideal for an amateur nighttime photographer, Parrott says. When placed on its highest quality setting, this camera will allow contractors to shoot photos at 300 pixels per inch – the ideal resolution for high-quality 8½-by-11-inch prints. Remember, a camera's memory card may hold only a few images taken at this level; contractors should purchase the largest memory available or keep several cards on hand, Parrott adds.

**2. Set the stage.** Before dark, walk the property making sure no trash cans, toys, etc. are left out; don't shoot photos when cars are in the driveway. Also, request that the homeowner turn on the lights in the rooms that will be visible in the shot. "Lit windows give the house a warm and welcoming appearance," Parrott says. Dusk is the best time to take landscape lighting photos because the sky is dark, but some sunlight will still get through. Parrott says there's a 15- to 20-minute window where the light is just right. "This is the time to get the big picture shot that shows the entire house, surrounding property and a dark sky."

**3. Exposure issues.** The longer the shutter exposure, the longer the camera has to absorb the available light. A

daytime photo might require a camera shutter to remain open for 1/250<sup>th</sup> or 1/125<sup>th</sup> of a second, nighttime conditions may require decreased shutter speeds of 1/15<sup>th</sup> of a second or longer. With digital cameras, try using the camera's automatic nighttime setting. Based on how the image looks, Parrott says to add to the exposure using the camera's exposure adjustment system on the menu. "You'll need to read the manual carefully to be sure you can adjust the settings quickly in a dark situation," Parrott warns. "Don't forget to bring a flashlight."

**4. Avoid "camera shake."** Use a tripod. During nighttime photography, any shaking can result in blurred photos.

It's difficult to hold a camera steady for the exposure time length. Because even the smallest motion can cause a camera to shake, experts suggest using a tripod in addition to an external shutter release or the camera's self timer. The button release is when shake is likely to occur. Also, using optical zoom features can add to "camera-shake" conditions. Avoid using it if possible.

**5. Consider composition.** For the "big picture shot," which is best to take right at dusk, include the entire house, being careful not to cut off any of the roof. "You may need to stand across the street and deal with traffic," Parrott says, "but the shot is essential." As it gets darker, focus on the details.

For these shots, Parrott suggests contractors make sure they include an object in the foreground to give depth to the shot. "Likely foreground candidates include overhanging branches, bushes or gardens," he says. "Include just enough to be interesting, but not so much as to be distracting. The foreground image can be slightly out of focus, but it cannot be unrecognizable." Another tip from Parrott: "Avoid black holes. Good landscape lighting design will create a scene composed of focal points that naturally lead the eye from one place to another." ■

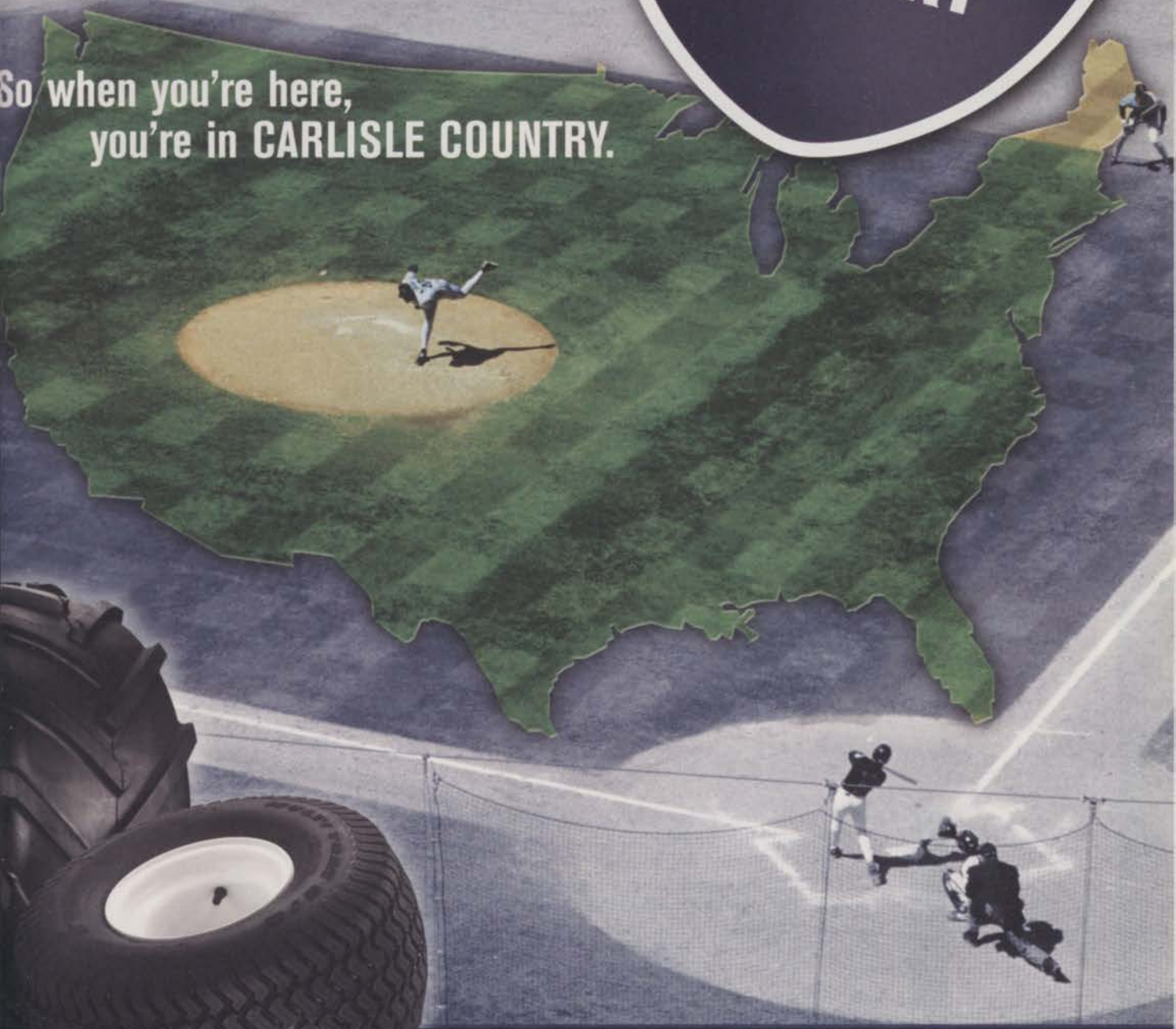
by marisa palmieri | associate editor

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Photos: Ditch Witch, Toro (page 118)

# BIG PRODUCTIVITY

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Don't let their size fool you - mini skid-steers can perform a range of duties with a dizzying array of attachments.

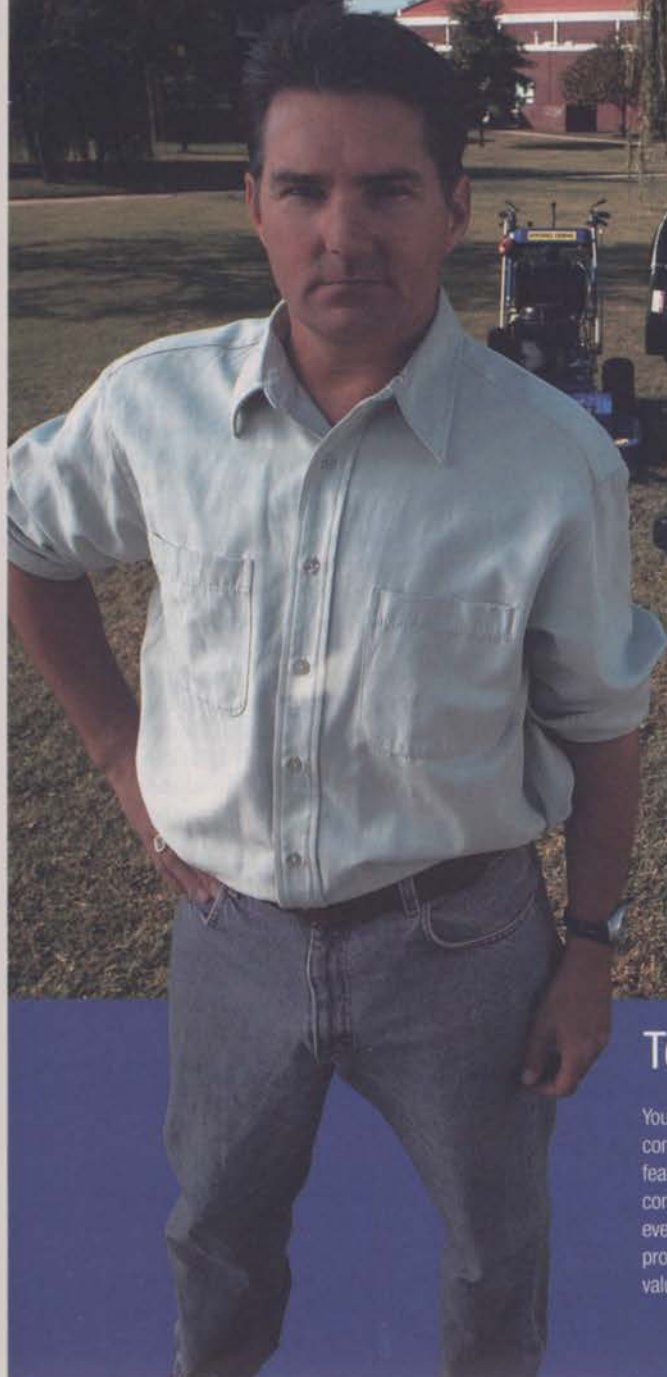
Imagine a skid-steer without the cabin, boasting 360-degree views, and a myriad of attachments that would make any contractor green with envy. You've just created a mini skid-steer, also known as a stand-on compact utility loader.

The landscape industry began buying up mini skid-steers and compact utility loaders in the mid-1990s, when contractors saw that they were useful for more than just material handling. Mini skid-steers were first used in countries like Australia and Canada, during the late 1960s and early 1970s, where they were used to move dirt and clean out barns, says Kevin Smith, product manager for compact utility for Ditch Witch, Perry, Okla. "They began to see the benefit and the versatility of multiple attachments, and multiple functions with a single unit," he says.

by mark phillips | associate editor

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## construction equipment

The use of mini skid-steers by landscape contractors gained prominence in the mid-1990s largely because the market began to focus on more than just upper-end clients. "They were looking for a machine that could help reduce their dependence on hand laborers and bulkier pieces of equipment that didn't perform well in many of their applications," says Greg Lawrence, marketing product manager at Toro, Bloomington, Minn. And landscape contractors were looking for ways to reduce their costs and increase their productivity.

"When they started looking around at the jobs and tasks at hand, they needed a productive, compact, versatile piece of equipment and mini skid-steers began to answer that," Smith says. "From that, manufacturers have continued to evolve those units to help contractors perform better on those jobs."

Since the machines are stand-on or walk-behind, the operator can see 360 degrees around the equipment while working. "The 360-degree visibility that you get when you're on these machines is something that we continue to hear contractors raving about," Lawrence points out. "If you're working in tight, confined areas, the ability to see all the way around you while you're working continues to be a positive on these machines."

Mini skid-steers allow contractors to work in even more confined and congested areas than larger, sit-down skid-steers. "Landscaping is not just happening in rural American anymore," Smith says. "It's in urban areas, downtowns, subdivisions that have 10 feet of room between the houses. You just don't have the room to put traditional, bigger equipment in there. That's part of why there's been a shift to these smaller machines."

Because mini skid-steers can access these areas, they allow landscape contractors to mechanize jobs that could only be done by hand before, completing jobs faster and with less manual labor, says Aaron Kleingartner, loader product specialist for Bobcat, West Fargo, N.D. "Instead of hiring two or three extra workers to dig holes for trees and shrubs, one operator can mechanize these tasks in half the time with an auger attachment on the mini track loader," Kleingartner says.



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The uses for mini skid-steers continue to grow as new attachments are designed. "Though mini track loaders don't have the lifting capacity of a full-size skid-steer loader or compact track loader, they are able to easily lift materials and perform smaller jobs," Kleingartner explains. A landscape contractor might use a mini skid-steer for grading in a constricted area, digging holes for trees or fence posts, installing irrigation, demolishing a concrete patio or steps, hauling sod or paving stones, or sweeping driveways and sidewalks.

One of the more unique duties Smith says mini skid-steers are being used to perform is in building trails. "We've had an opportunity to have them used in a fair amount of building recreational trails that people are used to seeing in parks," Smith says. "It's one of those applications that many contractors may not think about."

Also, space limitations continues to push the use of compact utility loaders. "Over the years, residential lot sizes have decreased - homebuilders are maximizing land by placing

larger homes on smaller lots and building homes closer together," Kleingartner points out. "Because of this, landscape contractors have less space to maneuver when completing tasks such as grading, sod and irrigation installation, and placing hardscape materials."

**EVOLUTION OF A MIGHTY MINI MACHINE.** While the basic design of the mini skid-steer or stand-on compact utility loader has remained the same over the years, manufacturers have introduced a wide variety of attachments that radically change the duties that can be performed. Mini skid-steers come in both wheeled and tracked varieties and offer a range of horsepower. "The evolution of the compact utility loader means more choices," Lawrence says. "Landscape contractors can select a model based on the type of fleet they currently have, ground/soil types, altitude and climate, and the attachments they will be operating."

The small size of mini skid-steers and low ground pressure means the

*continued on page 114*

## on the right track

**T**here are a number of daily and weekly maintenance tips that crews should be mindful of to ensure their equipment runs efficiently, and for as long as possible, says Greg Lawrence, marketing product manager at Toro, Bloomington, Minn.

On a daily basis, crews should walk around the machine and make sure all bolts appear tight; hoses aren't worn; and tires are properly inflated. If it's a track unit, make sure the track tension is good. Engine oil should be checked daily and all pivot points on the machine should be greased daily. Ensure that locking pins that hold an attachment onto the machine are in good repair and that the attachments have no hydraulic leaks. Also, make sure the teeth or tines on an attachment aren't worn or loose.

All filters should be inspected on a weekly basis. Other weekly maintenance items include: 1. Checking the hydraulic oil and filter; if hydraulic oil is a milky color, there is water in the hydro system and it should be drained. 2. Belts should be inspected and should be tight with a 1/4-inch deflection; belts showing wear should be replaced. 3. In the long-term, the hydraulic oil and filter should be changed every 400 hours, spark plugs should be checked every 100 hours and changed on a yearly basis and battery cable ends should be checked and cleaned regularly.



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Steve Miller, Owner (Standing); Freddie Diaz, Account Manager

continued from page 111

machine is very unlikely to break up concrete on a sidewalk or tear up grass or turf. "A lightweight, versatile machine has the ability to solve the needs of the job while minimizing turf damage," Lawrence says. "This gives the contractor the peace of mind knowing they will not have to go back and replace sod on a job." And the

machine's size makes it easy to load and unload on trailer and transport from the jobsite.

What started as a simple bucket machine that hauled dirt from one side of a jobsite to the other has grown into a true multi-function machine. It has hundreds if not thousands of duties it can perform while

on the job. Mini skid-steers can minimize contractor investment on the job, while increasing productivity. "It allows a contractor to take one unit to the jobsite one day and do all of the tasks that he needs in that day," Smith says. "If you take a crew of guys with shovels, and you give them a powered piece of equipment, their productivity will go up."

Many times, contractors buy mini skid-steers intending to reduce their labor force. But sometimes that's not the result. "So they actually end up expanding their businesses, taking on more work, while still being able to maintain their same labor force," Smith says. "These machines have evolved and can do anything from clearing the land prior to hardscaping,



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"Instead of hiring two or three extra workers to dig holes for trees and shrubs, one operator can mechanize these tasks in half the time with an auger attachment on the mini track loader."

- Aaron Kleingartner

all the way down to laying sod."

Compact utility loaders are ideal for landscaping, general construction or virtually any application where efficiency can be improved through the replacement of hand labor to bolster profits, Lawrence says. The most popular attachments are earth augers, trenchers, soil cultivators, underground boring units, tillers, vibratory plows and power rakes. "The breadth of attachments enables these compact units to perform big-machine applications like grading soil or carrying large rootball trees," Lawrence says.

The stand-on design of the mini

continued on page 118, sidebar on page 116

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## staying safe on the job

**W**hile they are small, the power of a mini skid-steer should not be underestimated. Working in confined areas presents a range of challenges not faced by operators in places like open fields.

"Understanding what's around you, where any hazards may exist, and understanding the terrain around you is important," says Kevin Smith, product manager for compact utility for Ditch Witch, Perry, Okla. An operator must understand or seek training for these units, since they'll likely be used in a host of working conditions. "A bucket is going to act differently than if you put a backhoe on the machine," Smith says. "Understanding how the attachment is going to affect the unit, and how that reacts on the terrain, will allow you to have safer operation throughout the day."

Aside from paying attention to the conditions around them, operators should acquaint themselves with the range of safety features available on most mini skid-steers. Mini skid-steers include a reverse-travel stop panel, which is located on the back of the machines, says Aaron Kleingartner, loader product specialist for Bobcat, West Fargo, N.D. When the panel is pushed in, it will return the drive control to neutral, stopping the machine and preventing it from moving backward.

A neutral start interlock will prohibit the engine from starting if either the drive/steering control, lift arm control or auxiliary hydraulic control lever is engaged. With the lift arm and tilt lockout system with manual bypass, if the lift arms are raised and the engine is off, the lift and tilt functions are locked. This prevents accidental movement of the lift arms or attachment, Kleingartner says. A parking brake also will keep the mini skid-steer from unintentionally moving.

Manufacturers strongly encourage operators to view safety videos associated with the mini skid-steer and to read the owner's manual before jumping in the driver's seat.

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continued from page 114

skid-steer gives the operator immediate access to the jobsite without having to exit the machine from a sitting position. The same applies to walk-behind versions. "Walk-behind machines deliver an added degree of comfort because the operator is not actually on the machine and does not need to 'hold-on' to secure themselves while operating the equipment," Lawrence says. "For some, it may be

operator needs to get a lot of traction on the ground. Turf-friendly track is smoother and is designed to be used on sidewalks and turf. With this type of track, less or no damage is done to the ground because the tracks don't grip as hard.

While mini skid-steers could be considered expensive, the benefits should be weighed before thinking the price is out of the ballpark. The

depend on the horsepower, size and attachments purchased.

Contractors should try to accurately match the machine to the job for which it's needed, Smith says. "A fencing contractor who's drilling post holes all day doesn't need the high horsepower performance that someone who is using a high-consumption attachment – like a tiller or a stump grinder – would use," he says.

If there's one drawback to using mini skid-steers, it's that some landscape contractors get too ambitious and try to use them for a larger job than intended, Smith says. "They are so productive that people try to do more with them than they should." ■

**"When they started looking around at the jobs and tasks at hand, they needed a productive, compact, versatile piece of equipment and the mini skid-steers began to answer that." – Greg Lawrence**

less intimidating to walk behind a machine than to ride on one."

**A MYRIAD OF USES.** Many landscape contractors look to mini skid-steers as an entryway into expanding the services they provide. "The range of attachments that contractors can purchase and rent makes the list of applications almost endless," Lawrence points out.

Lawrence has seen irrigation contractors using mini skid-steers with a variety of attachments, such as trencher attachments or vibratory plows to install pipe, trench fillers for covering an open trench, underground boring units for pulling pipe under driveways and sidewalks, augers for installing valve boxes and buckets for hauling materials. Still other contractors use attachments such as backhoes, pallet forks and buckets to build decorative ponds. Mini skid-steers equipped with hydraulic breakers can be used to take out walls on demolition jobs and then to clean up after the job is complete with a broom or bucket attachment, Lawrence says.

The terrain on which the mini skid-steer will be operated will determine the track. Aggressive track is used for hardscape work, such as digging out a pool, where the

typical unit with a bucket attachment can range in price from less than \$10,000 to more than \$20,000. Most machines landscape contractors use range in size from 1,000 pounds to 2,500 pounds. The final price will

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Visit the *Lawn & Landscape* Message Board to discuss your best practices for using mini skid-steers and compact utility loaders.



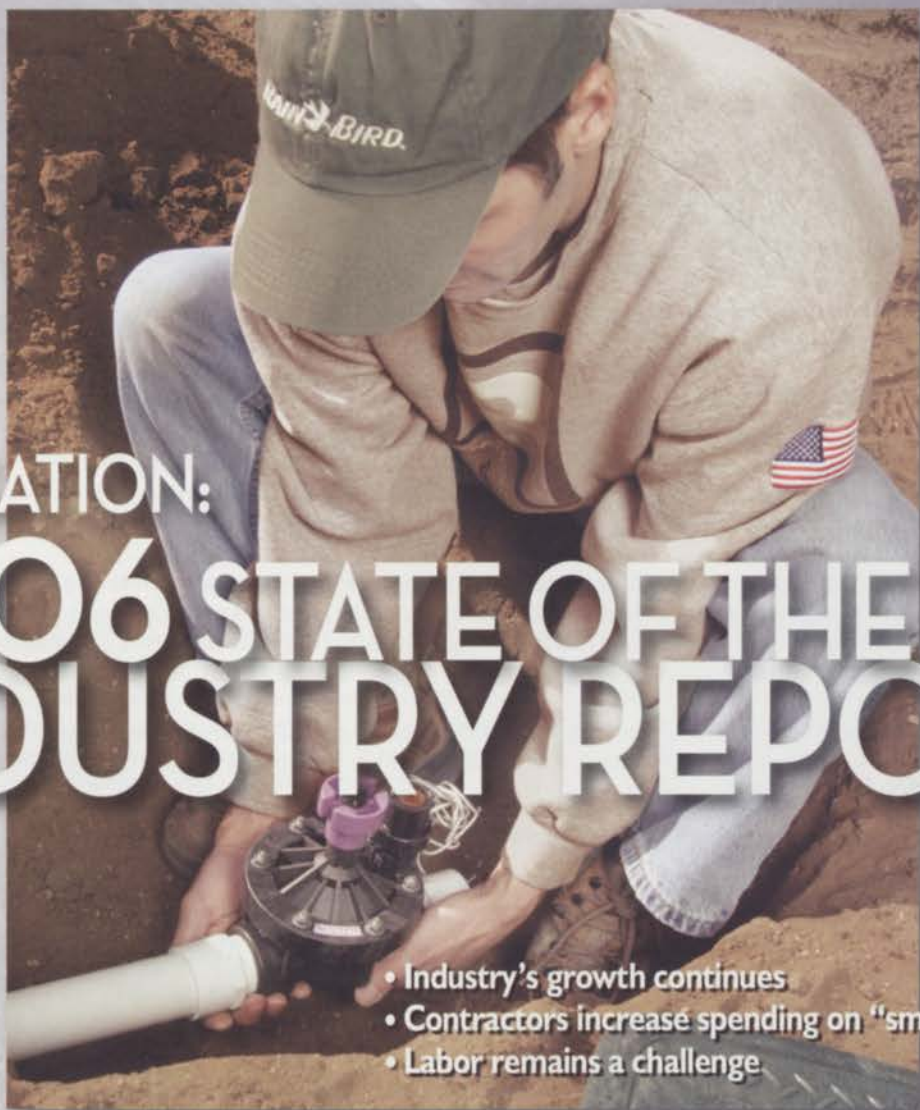


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## IRRIGATION: 2006 STATE OF THE INDUSTRY REPORT

- Industry's growth continues
- Contractors increase spending on "smart" products
- Labor remains a challenge

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**LEADERSHIP:** Rain Bird is taking a lead role in water conservation efforts. We have sponsored four international summits, bringing together some of the world's leading experts on water, irrigation and conservation to openly discuss and debate important issues. Additionally, our annual participation in the Tournament of Roses Parade provides a global forum, drawing attention to the importance of water to various animal species and natural habitats.

**EDUCATION:** Rain Bird is committed to teaching others about *The Intelligent Use of Water*. We have published two whitepapers, *Water for a Growing World* and *A Homeowner's Guide to Water-Efficient Landscapes* and developed water conservation curricula for teachers. And we continue to develop and sponsor educational Public Service Announcements that air all over the country.

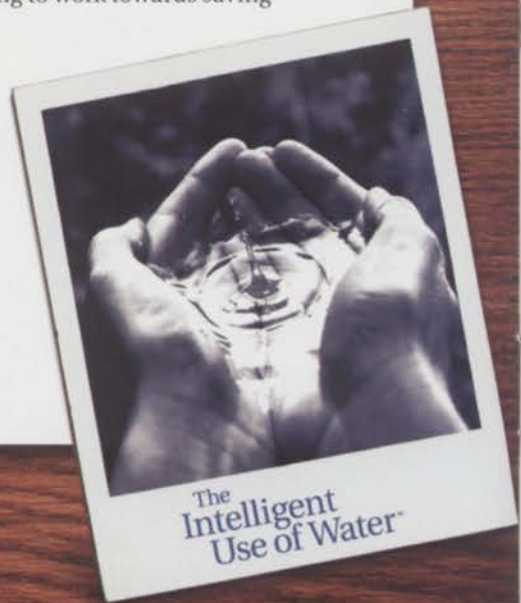
**PARTNERSHIPS:** Recognizing that there is power in numbers, Rain Bird partners with thought leaders, organizations and governmental agencies to achieve meaningful results. From industry-related activities with the Irrigation Association to our inclusion in the development of the Environmental Protection Agency's new labeling program, Rain Bird demonstrates that no one can do it alone.

**PRODUCTS:** Rain Bird's products exemplify the state-of-the-art in water conserving irrigation technology. From features like pressure regulating stems on spray heads and the industry's most efficient nozzles to cutting edge technology like our new ET Manager, Rain Bird's products will save water.

This past year as president of the Irrigation Association has been extremely rewarding. It has been an honor to serve this industry, and I look forward to continuing to work towards saving water for now and for the future.

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

Ken Mills  
Rain Bird Corporation  
General Manager for Landscape Irrigation Division  
Contractor SBU





Photos: Rain Bird

# BUSINESS as usual

The irrigation industry continues its growth despite water restrictions and some unpredictable economic conditions.

**T**he economy, weather and legislation – these are the three wobbly legs holding up the irrigation industry. And if one of those three legs of the tripod fails to support, business can collapse.

Contractors all over the United States are feeling pressure from all three areas. Some are struggling with less building going on in their regions, while other areas suffer droughts. Many are under water restrictions and regulations.

Yet the irrigation industry grows on.

An impressive 80.9 percent of contractors polled expect their company's gross sales to increase by an average of 15.52 percent in 2007. Only 1.3 percent of irrigation contractors expect their sales to decrease.

In Richmond, Calif., business is thriving, according to Jessie West, owner of Jessie West and Associates. "Business has gotten better – people are buying houses like crazy," she

says, noting that this factor has led her to increase her irrigation business. West's company provides irrigation design, installation and repair services for residential customers. About 75 percent of her business comes from irrigation design and installation, which she feels is more profitable.

Jeff Bowen, president of Stuart, Fla.-based Images of Green, also says that despite challenges the state of the irrigation industry is "strong and getting stronger." He attributes this growth to the amount of real estate development in his area. Bowen's irrigation division is about 80 percent irrigation maintenance and 20 percent irrigation installation, but like West, he says installation is his most profitable. "It's easier to sell," he says.

For areas where people aren't

building as many houses, it can be more difficult to stay busy. Sometimes, this is where another leg of the tripod kicks in. Droughts are a clever way for nature to remind customers to purchase irrigation systems.

"In central New York we had such a drought season last year that the cost of irrigation

## The Average Irrigation Company

Full-time employees	21.20
Part-time employees	5.96
Years in business	13.42
Years providing irrigation services	10.86
2005 gross revenue	\$692,601
2006 gross revenue	\$789,720
Increase expected in 2007	15.52%

# price check

If a contractor charges too much, he is cheating his customers, and probably won't get enough business. If he charges too little, he is cheating himself and his employees and will probably have too much business to handle properly. A balance must be struck to keep pricing fair for all parties involved.

As living expenses, labor costs and material costs increase, contractors should adjust their prices to reflect those changes. Fuel prices can affect contractors that must travel a lot for service calls, as well as the cost of petroleum products like plastic. Many contractors have found that the increase in fuel costs has forced them to up the bill for customers.

"We had to. The price of fuel went up. The price of materials went up. It was not a fun deal," says Michael Hornung, president, Valley Green Cos., Sartell, Minn. Hornung adds his prices increased about 7 to 10 percent over last year's.

Jeff Bowen, president of the Stuart, Fla.-based Images of Green, had to raise his irrigation prices by about 12 percent because material costs went up.

As prices continue to rise for contractors, it is likely they will rise for customers as well. To avoid upsetting clients, some contractors opt to enter into a contract with their customers that has a fixed price for a certain number of years.

"A lot of our contracts we do a one-year or two-year agreement and we sell the volume of time," Bowen says. "That gives you the opportunity to create a good relationship with the customer where they don't get surprised in the middle of the year by increases."

doesn't really seem to matter," says Aaron Smith, irrigation division manager, Lakeview Lawn and Landscape, Canandaigua, N.Y. "Last year's weather scared a lot of people so more people are considering irrigation who weren't before."

In these instances, Smith reports that irrigation maintenance services tend to drive up the revenue more so than irrigation design and installation.

"Our irrigation installation side of the business has been down 22 to 25 percent," says Michael Hornung, president, Valley Green Cos., Sartell, Minn. "I think a lot of that is attributed to not as much new construction as we've seen in the past because of the economy. We are now in a buyer's market."

Hornung says one of the biggest challenges to building his business in 2006 was the overbuilding of the area from a housing standpoint.

Smith claims there's a different reason behind his services being more profitable than the installation. "There are fewer unknowns. If somebody calls with a problem, you know what the problem is. Whereas with install, everything is underground and you don't know what you're going to run into," he says.

Overall, the irrigation industry is growing. Despite other factors, people are proving that there is still a demand for irrigation by continuously increasing the average company's revenue year after year.

## A LOOK AT PRICING

According to *Lawn & Landscape* irrigation research, the majority of contractors (77.1 percent) offer irrigation services to both residential and commercial customers. Only 12.5 percent offer services to just residential customers and only 10.3 percent of contractors offer services to just commercial customers.

While most contractors reported average residential property sizes of  $\frac{1}{4}$  to  $\frac{1}{2}$  acre, the average commercial property for both irrigation installation and maintenance services was between 5 and 6 acres, according to the research.

PRICING DETAILS	Residential Site (1/3 acre)	Commercial Site (1 acre)
Average price for complete design and installation of an irrigation system (including labor, materials and markup)	\$4,691	\$12,776
Average cost per hour for service calls or maintenance	\$52.66	\$55.71

# SPENDING SPIKES

Contractors are spending more each year on equipment and parts for irrigation systems.

To keep up with the growing irrigation industry's demands, contractors are buying more irrigation equipment and components every year. The purchases have led to a 23.6 percent increase of average annual expenditures for irrigation systems and components from 2005 to 2006 (from \$21,265 average annually to \$26,285, according to *Lawn & Landscape* irrigation research. And it may not be the end just yet – irrigation contractors predict at least another 9.3 percent increase for 2007 (from \$26,285 average spent annually to \$28,742).

Most contractors are putting their money into necessities like pipe, rotors, spray heads and valves. Everyday parts like these have allowed for 27.9 percent of contractors to admit to spending more than \$50,000 on irrigation systems and components this year and 32.3 percent planning to spend more than \$50,000 in 2007.

"I've spent more money on everything," says Jessie West, owner of the Richmond, Calif.-based Jessie West and Associates. "Pipes, controllers, electrical valves – there was more work, so I had to buy more stuff."

And many contractors don't feel too bad about increasing their expenditures because they feel the products are higher quality than they were years ago. "I think the products are much better," says Michael Hornung, president, Valley Green Cos., Sartell, Minn. "They're more in tune efficiency-wise, they last a lot longer, they're quieter and they don't require as much maintenance to keep them running. And because the parts are more efficient, there is less maintenance required, so the price of a sprinkler system 15 or 20 years ago isn't a lot more than it is now. This is also leading to more people hiring irrigation contractors to install systems in their yards. It's not just an option for wealthy people anymore."

The rise in water restrictions and regulation also has helped boost sales in irrigation equipment with some contractors now invest-

ing in more components like drip systems and smart controllers to conserve water.

## Where The Money Went

What percentage of your irrigation system and parts purchases in 2006 were for the following?

SYSTEM COMPONENT	% OF PURCHASES
Pipe	21.28
Rotors	17.52
Spray Heads	16.85
Controllers	13.9
Valves	11.70
Drip Systems/Components	8.39
Other	4.45
Rain Moisture Sensors	2.97
Pumps	2.95



## A DROP IN THE BUCKET

Think water restrictions were bad a year ago? Contractors say regulations are likely to increase in the coming years.

by heather de angelis | contributing editor

Water conservation has become increasingly significant in the past several years as legislation has been passed to restrict water usage. With drought-stricken areas thirsting for enough water to satisfy lawns and irresponsible watering increasing waste, irrigation contractors have been subjected to laws and regulations to keep from misusing water.

This year, 44.2 percent of contractors polled claim new water use restrictions and regulations have come into effect in their area, a 3.2 percent increase over 2005.

"The water situation in our area is not very good," says Brian Vinchesi, president of Teppdress, Mass.-based Irrigation Consulting. "We have at least eight cities that have banned automatic irrigation. We even have a state that is trying to eliminate outdoor water use."

While Massachusetts is on the more extreme side of regulation, other states are also feeling some effects. "A few years ago they actually went to an odd/even watering schedule in a lot of communities in our area where if a house number ends in an odd

number, they water on odd days, and even numbered homes are watered on even days," says Michael Hornung, president, Valley Green Cos., Sartell, Minn.

Increasing restrictions have even influenced some companies into changing their practices. Approximately 27.6 percent of contractors install more drip irrigation – a 3.8 percent increase over last year – and 23.2 percent install more automatic shut-off devices – a 4.3 percent increase over 2005. The biggest jump was in self-adjusting or "smart" irrigation

products, with 19.1 percent of contractors saying they are using more of them – a 5.4 percent increase over 2005.

Most predict water restrictions won't be going away any time soon, according to those interviewed. In fact, Smith believes there will be more water restrictions and more drip irrigation installations in the Northeast in the next 25 years. As such, irrigation contractors will have to adapt to meet the water conservation regulations in the coming years or risk business survival, Vinchesi says.



## Handling H2O

What impact have new water use restrictions had on your business in the past two years?

IMPACT	% OF CONTRACTORS
None – it did not change our business practices	48.9% (2.9% less than 2005)
We install more drip irrigation	27.6% (3.8% more than 2005)
We install more automatic shut-off devices	23.2% (4.3% more than 2005)
We began using more self-adjusting or "smart" products	19.1% (5.4% more than 2005)
Other	8.2%



# SMOOTH operators

Contractors need quality irrigation technicians for their businesses to be successful.

With the irrigation industry growing at an ever-increasing rate, knowledgeable and reliable technicians are becoming more important than ever. In order for a business to thrive, each employee must be able to perform the job quickly and thoroughly.

With 89 percent of the contractors polled claiming that they train by allowing technicians to learn from others on the job, the language barrier can be a speed-bump in efficient training.

In the future, "there will be even more people for whom English is a second language – specifically Spanish – coming into irrigation," says Jessie West, owner of Richmond, Calif.-based Jessie West and Associates. "As a result, more irrigation training needs to be offered in Spanish."

Jeff Bowen, president, Images of Green, Stuart, Fla., agrees. "Ten to 20 years from now, the percentage of irrigation company owners who are Hispanic will have increased dramatically. Currently, I don't have any irrigation technicians who are not Hispanic."

Because of this changing irrigation workforce, more contractors are learning Spanish to meet their employees half-way.

Despite the influx of Hispanic workers and their growing knowledge of irrigation tasks, some contractors still find it challenging to recruit and retain quality irrigation technicians. As a result, "we need to educate young people being brought up in high schools and grade schools, and let them know that irrigation is a good career area," Bowen says.

Michael Hornung, president, Valley Green Cos., Sartell, Minn., suggests other methods

## Teaching Techniques

How do you train your employees on irrigation maintenance and installation?

TRAINING METHOD	% OF CONTRACTORS
Learn on the job, observing others	89.3%
Professional training and/or certification classes	38.9%
Instruction manuals	34.5%
Online services	4.7%
Other	2.2%

of attracting capable technicians. "We need to provide better opportunity for year-round employment for them. There are some different things you can do – maybe you're doing snowplowing, maybe Christmas decorating, maybe you're doing some of these other things that allow you to keep your employees employed year-round."

Money is a powerful incentive to gain the edge over competing companies when it comes to attracting technicians as well. On average, contractors offer entry-level irrigation technicians with less than three years experience \$10.39 per hour, according to *Lawn & Landscape* irrigation research. If the technician has more than three years experience, the average jumps to \$14.69 per hour. The average irrigation foreman earns \$31,690 per year.

In Florida, Bowen ups the ante to keep employees attracted to his business. He pays new technicians about \$14 per hour. To make his deal a little sweeter, he makes sure the employees are well taught.

"We cross-train all of our technicians," he

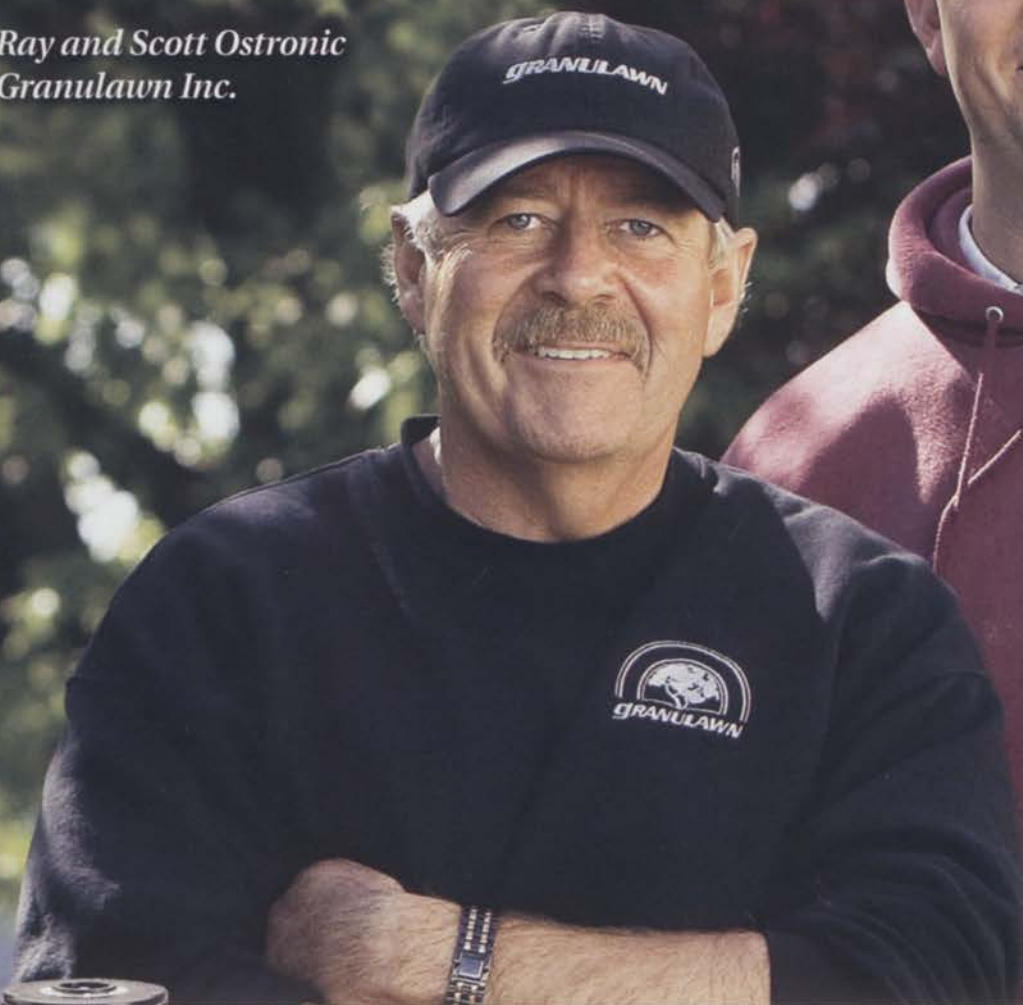
says, adding that he teaches them everything from how to run a clock to how to service various irrigation system components.

Many contractors hope that by providing competitive pay rates, superior training and good communication, quality irrigation employees should become easier to retain.

"Ten to 20 years from now, the percentage of irrigation company owners who are Hispanic will have increased dramatically. I don't have any irrigation technicians who are not Hispanic." – Jeff Bowen

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Photo: Hunter Industries



# Beat The Freeze

Preventing freeze in an irrigation system thwarts countless hours of frustration once spring returns.

**E**very year, contractors in colder climates must prepare for winter's wrath. For those who offer irrigation services, broken pipes and sprinkler heads are not an option – so they offer winterization services to their clients to prevent these occurrences. During this process, proper steps must be taken to ensure that water is sufficiently evacuated from systems to prevent freezing and cracking.

**FREEZE FRAME.** Winterizing an irrigation system is absolutely necessary in climates where the ground freezes because low temperatures cause the water in pipes to turn to ice and expand, causing cracks and ruptures in the equipment.

"If you don't winterize irrigation systems, you're going to end up with broken main lines, broken later-

als and broken sprinklers," says Don Cooper, corporate account manager, Weathermatic, Dallas. "Then all of those parts are going to have to be replaced or repaired the following year."

Knowing exactly how to perform this service is important so that no equipment is damaged in the process. "If irrigation systems don't get winterized properly, you can still leave pockets of water in them that can freeze and cause things to break," says Sam Moore, national Northwest field service manager, The Toro Co., Riverside, Calif. "Or you can damage the pipe by using too much air pressure or improper winterization

*continued on page 130*

by heather deangelis | contributing editor

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continued from page 127

techniques, and you won't know you were incorrect until the spring when things aren't working properly. You can also break things through surges."

Techniques also differ based on geography, Cooper says. "Say you're in northern Colorado and draw a line basically across the United States through Colorado. Most of the winterization techniques north of that line are called blowouts," he shares, explaining that in a blowout, compressed air is used to empty the system of water.

Southern states that experience light freezing generally practice a draining technique that uses automatic and/or manual drains in the system, Cooper adds. Typically, no winterization is required in the South.

The best time to perform irrigation winterization is dictated by location. In Northern states, winterization could begin as early as September. But in the South, contractors

## winterization dos and don'ts

Irrigation system manufacturers recommend the following tips for irrigation winterization services.

### Do

- Wear safety goggles.
- Use a commercial-grade compressor appropriate for the jobsite.
- Blow out the system a second time to rid the pipes of all water.
- Leave the controllers powered, but in the "off" position.
- Remove the back-up battery if you choose to power off completely.
- Start at the valve closest to the water source.

### Don't

- Use too much pressure.
- Stand over component parts while the system is pressurized with air.
- Leave the compressor unattended.
- Blow the system out through a backflow or pump.
- Leave the manual drain valves open after the blowout.
- Run air for more than 30 seconds after water has been removed.

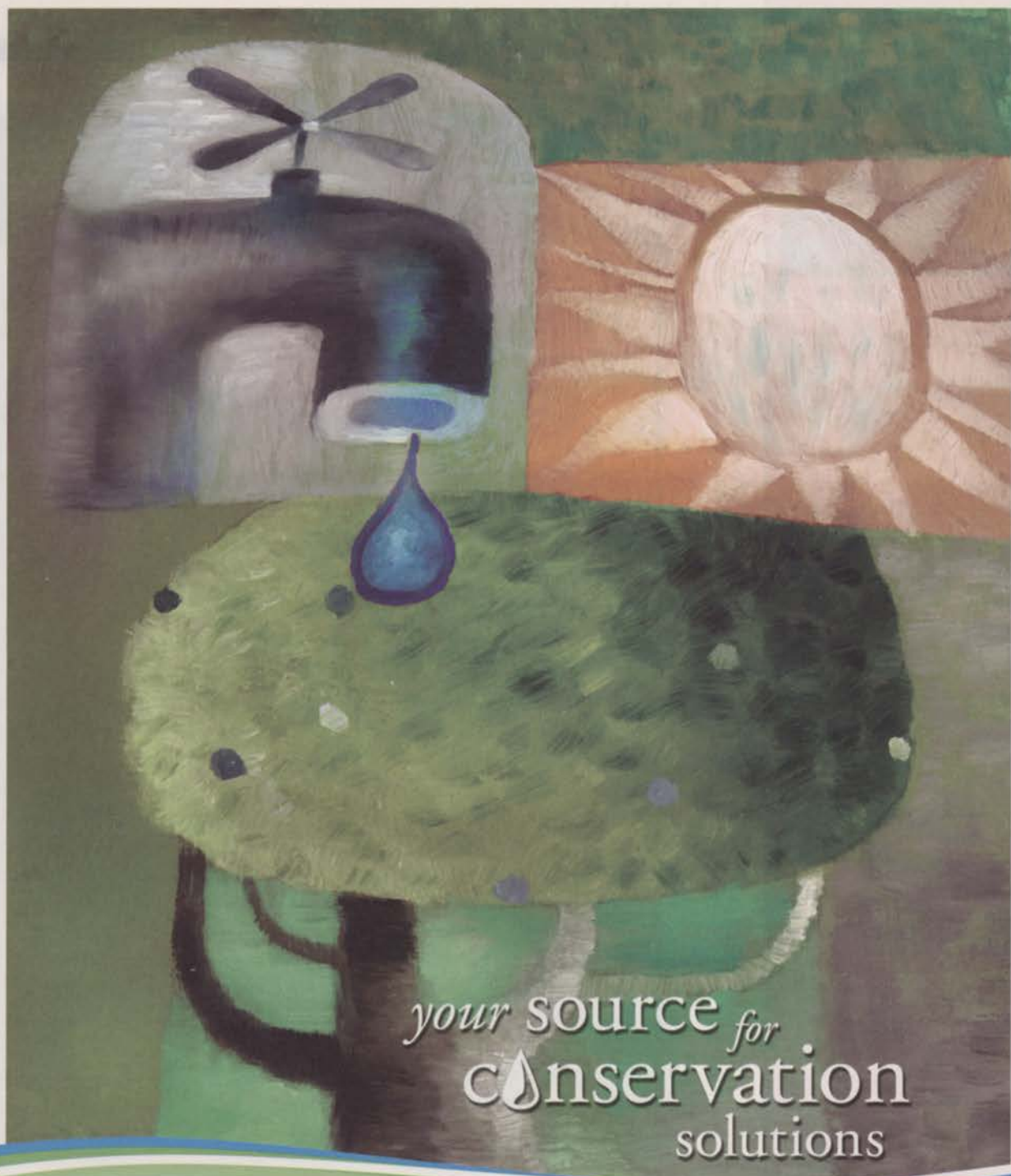
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winterization wonders

**H**enry DeBoer, owner, Epping Well & Pump, Epping, N.H., explains the ease of adding irrigation winterization services to a business.

**Q: Why should one add irrigation winterization?**

**A:** If you're not just a part-time irrigation contractor who does only six or seven irrigation installations a year on the side, then winterization is a necessary component of the complete package of installing irrigation systems in cold areas.

**Q: How do you operate the service?**

**A:** We have three dedicated crews for winterization. They perform irrigation services throughout the season, so these same crews are doing that once winterization has commenced.

**Q: What challenges should contractors adding the service expect?**

**A:** Apart from the initial cost factor of buying air compressors, winterization is probably one of the easier services we can provide because it doesn't require a tremendous amount of technical expertise. As for our crews, we have Nextel phones so that we have instant communication with all of our crews. We have GPS tracking in our vehicles so we know where they are at all times. So if we have one particular crew that has a problem we can send another to replace them.

**Q: How can a company perform this service efficiently?**

**A:** Sometimes the scheduling aspect of coordinating 10 people to be home at certain times can be difficult. So efficiency of scheduling is extremely important, especially in times when gas prices are as high as they are. And it just has to be an efficient scheduling process where you'd like to do 10 in a day if you could.

should begin anytime after the first freeze – before the ground surface freezes – because after that irrigation services are no longer needed.

“Generally, we start around September 15, and depending on the year and the weather, hopefully we're all done doing them before we get our first hard freeze in the ground,” says Henry DeBoer, owner, Epping Well & Pump, Epping, N.H. “It doesn't always work that way. It can be difficult when you do 1,300 jobs and you start on September 15 and you want to be done before November.”

**DOING IT RIGHT.** The blow out method is the most common for contractors in colder climates. Other options are available, however. The manual drain method involves one or more manual drains on the main line and several automatic drains on the lateral lines. According to Hunter Industries, this method should be used when manual valves are located at the end and low points of the irrigation piping.

Automatic drain methods are used when automatic drain valves are located at the end and low point

of the irrigation piping. These will automatically open and drain water if the pressure in the piping is less than 10 psi.

To drain these systems, contractors should:

- Shut off the water supply and open all the manual drain valves (automatic valves will open on their own).

- When the water has drained out of the mainline, the boiler drain valve or the drain cap on the stop and waste valve should be opened.

- Contractors should then drain all the remaining water that is between the shut-off valve and the backflow device.

- Open the test cocks on the backflow device, and then pull up on the sprinklers to allow the water to drain out the bottom of the sprinkler body.

- When all of the water has drained out, close all the manual drain valves (automatic valves will once again close on their own).

- Depending on the location of the drain valves, there could be some water left in the backflow, the piping and in the sprinklers.

For a more thorough water evacuation, experts suggest the blowout method. When done correctly, there should be no water left in the system to freeze. Cooper explains the step-by-step process needed to successfully blow out an irrigation system:

- Shut down the water source to the irrigation system.

- Plug the air compressor in; make sure the pressure is at a maximum of 50 to 75 psi. Use a high volume compressor, preferably a 100 cubic feet per minute (cfm) compressor or higher.

- Start at the valve closest to the water source. Evacuate that valve until the sprinklers start blowing air. If you're on a system using rotor gear drives, make sure the first gear drive that starts blowing water runs no longer than 30 seconds on air.

- Move to the next one and so on until the last one you do is the furthest from the water source.

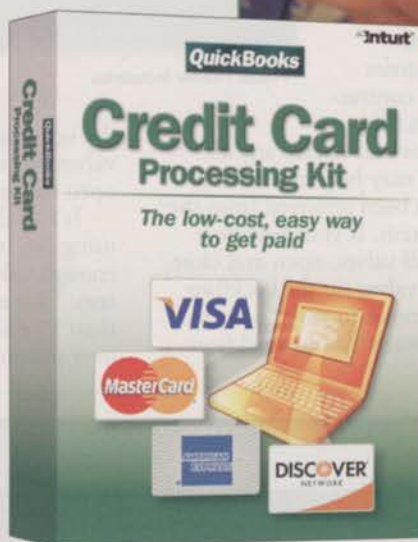
- Make a short run through the second time to pick up any water you missed previously.

- Shut down system entryways.

- On the middle belt where you use drains, make sure the drains are open and unblocked so that any water that penetrates back into the system from an outside source can drain during the winter. Close those drains during the

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spring start-up prior to reactivating the system.

- Turn the controller to the "off" position, or if you decide to completely shut down the controller make sure you remove the back-up battery on an electronic controller, rather than leaving the controllers powered year round.

In addition, Hunter Industries suggests that contractors disconnect the air compressor and release any air pressure that may be present once the water has been removed from the irrigation system. If your backflow device has ball valves, open and close the isolation valves on the backflow device a few times to make sure that any trapped water has escaped from



Photo: Hunter Industries

the upper areas. Leave the isolation valves open at a 45-degree angle and open the test cocks.

It's vital that contractors avoid using too much pressure and not enough volume to blow out the system. "We recommend using no more than 50 psi," Moore says. "If they over-pressurize, they can damage gear

drives by running them dry on air," he explains. "Gear drives are basically waterproof, and you can burn those out by just running them on air for an extended period of time. Once a system starts blowing air it needs to be turned off – maximum run time on air is probably about 30 seconds once a sprinkler starts

spewing air."

Volume usually should be at a minimum of 300 cfm for larger jobs, he explains, noting pipe size also plays a role.

But each job is be different. "Typically we'll use anywhere from 80 cfm all the way up to 160 cfm, depending

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on whether we're doing a small residential system or we're doing a golf course," DeBoer says.

"Not having the lines properly graded on auto-drains is another problem when you're not doing blowouts," Cooper adds. "But when you are doing blowouts in particular, the one thing that you need to do is start at the valve closest to the water source and work outward to the furthest valve from the water source. Never get the air in front of the water."

**SELLING THE SERVICE.** Selling winterization services is a good idea for any contractor who works in climates where the ground freezes; however the service does not grow on its own. It's an established service that grows proportionately with the rest of a contractor's irrigation business, irrigation service providers say.

Contractors should tell the client about winterization upfront in the design process, suggests Dan Rog-

ers, extension agricultural engineer at Kansas State University.

Moore believes contractors should sell the service when the system is installed by signing a client for a long-term contract including spring start-up. When everything checks out in the spring, sign them up for next year, Moore says.

"When we do a new installation we include the first year's winterization as part of the installation," DeBoer says. "After that, we offer service contracts that will start the system up, provide them with service throughout the summer and winterization as part of the contract." DeBoer sends out his service contracts in February and has approximately 1,300 customers that buy a \$250 contract at the beginning of the season. Epping Well & Pump charges \$100 to \$300 to winterize a system based on its size. Customers pay for the service in February, so it provides the company great cash flow when business is slow.

DeBoer's company averages \$150,000 per year with a 5 percent annual growth rate and a 65 percent gross profit margin for winterizing irrigation systems, which is a similar profit to its other services.

For contractors looking to offer winterization services, selling the idea to a customer is fairly easy, service providers say. "Simply explain the cost to them if they don't winterize," Cooper says.

Winterization has been a service landscaping and irrigation contractors have relied on for years. Today, they enjoy advancements in such areas as the quality of drains, higher volume compressors and more accurate pressure regulation valves.

"One of the advancements that has been made is a test water cycle called a manual test program," Cooper says. "Contractors can set those up so the system walks through it automatically. The newer controllers all have that feature built into them." **LL**

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USE READER SERVICE # 78



# A NEW DAY AT LESCO

Photo: LESCO

Together, both corporate and field personnel plan to return LESCO to its roots.

**W**ith 114 LESCO Stores-on-Wheels vehicles, more than 325 LESCO Service Center locations, a growing team of sales reps and a presence in 39 states, it's hard not to be familiar with the name LESCO. If you're in the lawn care, sports turf, golf course maintenance or snow removal business you've probably bought a product from LESCO, or certainly know someone who has. LESCO has headlined the news in the past year as it has worked to transition from its dual focus as both a distributor and manufacturer and struggled to maintain its stock price. Throw in some turmoil over a field sales strategy that resulted in the loss of more than 50 salespeople, and the news from LESCO hasn't been all that positive.

Over the past year, however, a new corporate attitude led by CEO Jeff Rutherford and his management team have initiated a turnaround that has people inside and outside of the

by cindy code | editorial director

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company taking notice.

Rutherford, 45, joined LESCO in 2002 as chief financial officer and he was named CEO in October 2005. Prior to joining LESCO, he spent four years with OfficeMax, a publicly held company, starting as the company's senior vice president and treasurer and advancing to senior vice president and CFO. Prior to joining OfficeMax, Rutherford spent 14 years with the accounting firm Andersen.

Rutherford recently sat down with *Lawn & Landscape* to discuss culture and other changes at LESCO that are repositioning the company for the long-term.

**L&L:** *LESCO has experienced quite a bit of transition in the last 18 months. In addition to the divestiture of your manufacturing business, key people in your management team and in the field have moved on. How do you explain the personnel shifts, particularly in the sales area?*

**JR:** As a company, we lost a bit of our customer focus for a while. Not in the field as much as in our corporate direction. So, if you went on our Web site today, you would see under culture it says "under construction" because we are really trying to change the culture back to what it was. Historically, our Service Centers and Stores-on-Wheels offered a high level of customer service. We (corporate) got away from that in the last five years, and now we are trying to get back to that level of customer service. So what we are going through is not about 'fixing' our field people, it is about the people who support them who lost their focus. As a result of our lost focus, we lost some good people both in the field and in the corporate office.

Last year, a decision was made to expand our Stores-on-Wheels from 73 to 111. We tried to take some outside sales people and put them into Stores-on-Wheels or regional management positions, and we lost more than 50

key salespeople as a result. We have said publicly to our shareholders that if we could turn back time we would have done things a lot differently than the way they were done. The people who made that decision and executed it are gone.

I can't stress enough that we haven't lost that commitment to customer service in the field. We lost it corporately, which made it difficult for our field personnel to service our customers the way our customers require and the way our salespeople want to service them. We kind of split the company culturally between those in the field who are focused on customers every day and those at corporate who were focused on other things.

**L&L:** *What business concerns caused the management team to shift focus, and how is the situation improving?*

**JR:** In the last five to 10 years, we have gone through a series of strategic moves. The company had historically

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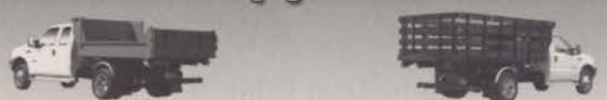
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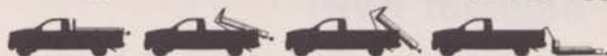


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been focused on Service Centers, Stores-on-Wheels, sales reps and serving customers. In a company with multiple business units, there is a tendency to put your capital into the unit that struggles. In the late 1990s, we decided to put our capital into manufacturing, pulling it out of the stores. One immediate result was that we stopped opening new Service Centers. That hurt our ability to grow sales, so the new management came in shortly thereafter.

Our first initiative was to strengthen the balance sheet and the capital structure side of business by partnering with GE Business Credit Services to offer our customers a stronger credit program. In that process and the subsequent process of finding a partner to purchase our manufacturing and distribution facilities, we focused totally internally and lost our focus on customers and helping our salespeople. As a corporate staff, we left our salespeople out on their own without the support they needed or deserved.

Quite literally, what happened was that the field was focused on the customer but the corporate focus was on the executives and CEO, and the decision making moved from field associates toward the CEO. As a result, there was a split in our culture along the field support functions, which left the field on their own.

Today, we are getting back to the customer focus. We have formed a culture committee, which I am involved in. And through a series of surveys and discussions with our people and our customers, we are getting back to being a company where everyone is focused on the customer.

**L&L:** Explain how your relationship with GE Business Credit Services works.

**JR:** Our partnership with GE is fairly simple and straightforward. GE provides us with money so that we can offer our customers various credit programs and delayed payment terms. When a customer makes a purchase at LESCO and pays for that purchase right away, then we collect that money. But when a customer elects to delay the payment for a certain period, say 90 days because of a promotion we're offering, then GE pays us for that purchase minus a financing fee. Then GE assumes the risk for collecting that receivable.

Before we partnered with them we were essentially operating a bank by funding our own credit program. But we are not a bank and are not capitalized properly to be a bank. Partnering with GE and gaining access to their capital allows us to offer more credit and delayed payment options to our customers while still being able to invest our capital in areas that will drive our growth, like new Service Centers.

**L&L:** What authority do LESCO's field sales personnel have?

**JR:** By moving decision-making

"I can't stress enough that we haven't lost that commitment to customer service in the field."  
- Jeff Rutherford

authority away from the customer toward the CEO, our salespeople lost not only the authority to make decisions but the confidence in their decisions. We have given them the authority to make decisions to serve the customer, but we are trying to rebuild their confidence in that decision making. Our salespeople know what they need to do - they just need to trust that they are allowed to do it.

For example, we had a customer come to us looking for some Bayleton fungicide, and the Service Center was out. Being out of the product is obviously a problem, but that's for a different day. The Service Center manager told the customer to go get the product from the competition since we didn't have any. When I heard this, I asked the manager why he didn't just go buy the product himself and then sell it to the customer to keep him from going to the competition. His answer was that he thought he would get fired for doing that.

He knew what the right thing to do was, but he didn't trust the company that we would support him for doing it. We need to fix that.

Our No. 1 value is customer focus.

That is not just for field associates but for everybody in the organization. We are getting back to being a place where people can make decisions. We are working to change the culture back to what it was. This is a company with a long history of customer service, but we lost our way for a little while.

**L&L:** Is there a time frame?

**JR:** It's both short- and long-term. The culture is going to take some time - time for people to trust that they can do the right thing to take care of the customer.

For the last few years, this was a command-and-control scenario where everyone was afraid to make decisions. That's not how good companies work. Historically, LESCO was a good place to work. We want to get back to that. We want to get back to a point where not only are we a good place to buy a product, but a good place for people to come and work.

**L&L:** What are your plans for Service Center growth?

**JR:** After opening 79 Service Centers the last three years, we will open about 40 more Service Centers this year. We continue to conduct studies relative to how many stores we can have and where they should be. Before we go into a market, we analyze the market based upon the number and location of golf courses, where the lawn and landscape customers are and where the competition is. We not only look at where our customers are but where their customers are not.

We have studied demographic information as well as customer coverage and determined we can open at least 250 more Service Centers. Our strategic plan calls for us to open 10 to 15 percent of our base every year, and we evaluate that plan annually.

The new Service Centers continue performing very well, and the biggest obstacle to opening more is a people issue more than a capital issue. Opening 40 new Service Centers this year means hiring 80 to 100 new people to work in them. We are at a point now that we are self-funded. The Service Centers we have opened the last few years generate sufficient cash flow to allow us to open as many stores as we want. The bigger issue is finding the right, solid people to put into the stores so we provide the level of ser-

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## conversation series

vice our customers expect when they walk into a LESCO Service Center.

**L&L:** *Because LESCO sells both branded and post-patent products, how does your sales force talk to and educate customers on product choice and availability?*

**JR:** I wouldn't say there is an overriding philosophy other than to make sure they understand all of the products we carry. On the post-patent products, we try our best to make sure we have comparable field tests so the chemistry side is balanced with the performance side. Then making the proper recommendation comes down to understanding the customer need – is the pest an annual recurring event or is it a one-time thing? There will be different answers to those questions.

Plus, the ability to partner with our vendors for technical training and product education is critical so we can make our customers comfortable with the products we offer. Our vendors do a great job supporting our business and our people. In fact, I think it is fair to say we have vendors on our Stores-on-Wheels or in our stores everyday.

**L&L:** *What is the relationship between LESCO and Turf Care Supply Corp. (your former manufacturing division)?*

**JR:** We are very happy with Turf Care Supply and its leadership. The CEO, Bill Milowitz, is as focused on customer service as anyone in our organization. He is changing the culture of our old supply chain. When we owned those manufacturing plants and distribution warehouses, the business was run as a cost center. Now it is a profit center, so customer service means a lot more to them.

We will still have service failures at times, and we apologize for those. We always try to make them right. But we are happy with the direction Turf Care is heading. Actually, it is humbling to say this, but they probably do a better job with customer service than when we owned them.

We have a long-term agreement with them, and there is no reason why we shouldn't be closer to them than when we owned the business. The reason is there is no longer a battle over capital. They have their own capitalization. They make their own capital decisions, and we have sufficient

capital for our business. But there used to be a struggle between the sales organization and manufacturing organization of who got the limited capital that was available to LESCO. In the late 1990s, manufacturing won the battle and we stopped opening stores. Sales suffered.

A few years ago we could see another battle was brewing, and we were not going to hurt sales again. So we sold the business to an organization with sufficient capital to make the necessary investments. Everybody wins, including our customers, who will continue getting the best possible products from LESCO as those plants are continually upgraded.

Now we are both profit-oriented and customer-oriented. We should be better aligned now than we ever have.

**L&L:** *With the sale of your manufacturing assets and the overhaul of your Stores-on-Wheels, has LESCO recovered from the financial applications of those moves?*

**JR:** Our stock trades around \$8 now. When the company was in its liquidity crisis in 2001 and 2002, it dropped to about \$6. Last year it got as high as \$17, which was based upon all of the changes we have made and where the company is heading. We do not have any liquidity issues, and we haven't for a number of years. Our balance sheet is very healthy. We just need to get the sales organization squared away and get back on the growth track we were on.

**L&L:** *The professional lawn and landscape market is competitive at many levels. What are you doing to separate yourself from the competition?*

**JR:** We differentiate LESCO in the market place through our Service Centers and the expertise and service provided by our personnel. Additionally, because of our size, we have the ability to bring to market LESCO-branded products to differentiate ourselves in the marketplace. These products include patented fertilizers with sulfur-coated urea, turf seed varieties that are exclusive to LESCO, our industry-leading spreaders and sprayers, and our full line of control products.

But, in the end, it really all comes down to the customer's relationship with our people in our Service Centers. It always comes down to people.



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**L&L:** Nearly every successful company attributes a big part of its success to its people. What is it about your people that distinguishes LESCO in the marketplace?

**JR:** It is not just the people – it's the right people. They have the knowledge, the incentive and they have the desire to help.

Our people are trusted by their customers. Our people know the region and they know the turf issues there, which enables them to help their customers. That's how they build relationships, and through relationships trust. Our customers know we are going to be here for them; we are not going anywhere. This is our business.

No one else can serve the customer with the convenience, quality and technical expertise we have.

**L&L:** What is LESCO doing on a national level to defend continued pesticide and fertilizer use?

**JR:** We recognize we haven't been a very good industry participant as a company. We relied on our sales associates to do it on their own at the local level. But we have made the decision to be a better industry partner. I'm committed to the industry for the long-term, and we will get involved. So we have created a position focused on industry affairs, and we are working to increase our support of groups like PLANET, RISE, STMA, NPMA, GCSAA, Project EverGreen and many state and local chapters across the country.

Everyone at LESCO is concerned about these issues, but our activity hasn't been very organized. We should be able to mobilize all of our people and our 150,000-plus customers on these issues. That's what leaders do.

**L&L:** What is your management style and how has it been good for LESCO?

**JR:** I don't know if I would say I have a particular management style so much as a management focus, although I believe leaders should serve an organization rather than control it. That's why my focus thus far largely has been on rebuilding our culture. Our corporate staff's focus had been directed internally away from our customers. I simply want us to be as customer-focused as possible. And we still have a way to go to get there.

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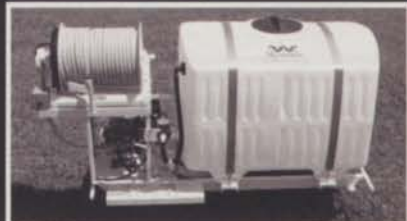
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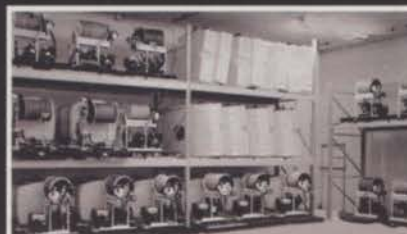


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let the problems at the corporate office distract them too much from serving our customers. And there were plenty of times when they could have. We really did make it much more difficult for them to sell and serve their customers.

Our customers come to us for solutions to their problems, and the people closest to the customer are better positioned to identify those solutions than people in a corporate office somewhere. That's why the salespeople need independence and a feeling of control so they can take initiative and even risk failure.

Our salespeople are creative, thoughtful and trustworthy. They are capable of making important decisions, and they expect to be held accountable for those decisions.

Empowering them to make decisions is how we best serve our customers, even though we know that people occasionally make the wrong decisions.

**L&L:** *Where do you see the lawn care industry in three to five years?*

**JR:** I don't think there are many opportunities for dramatic changes, but the one that stands out is what you referred to earlier – legislation.

The products our customers use – whether that means mowers, fertilizers, seed or control products – are good products. They can always be improved, but there probably isn't the tremendous room for improvement there everybody would like to see.

But there are clearly individuals and organizations that don't approve of many of our products, regardless of the science, research and governmental regulation that supports them. These people want to ban our products, plain and simple. All you have to do is look at what happened in Canada.

We need to do a better job of working together as an industry to promote the value of our services. We also need to do a better job defending


our interests. As an industry leader, LESCO needs to be more actively engaged in this work, as we discussed earlier.

**L&L:** *How will post-patent products change the way lawn care professionals purchase pesticides?*

**JR:** Post-patent products do two things for the market that ultimately benefit our customers.

First, they give the customer more options. Second, they create more competition among suppliers. The winners, as a result, are the product users.

Having said that, I don't think that the increasing number of post-patent products has had any significant change on customers' buying behavior other than allowing them to purchase the same chemistries at a better value.

The key for the suppliers is the same as with any product – you have to provide value to your customers. You can see this in our business. 



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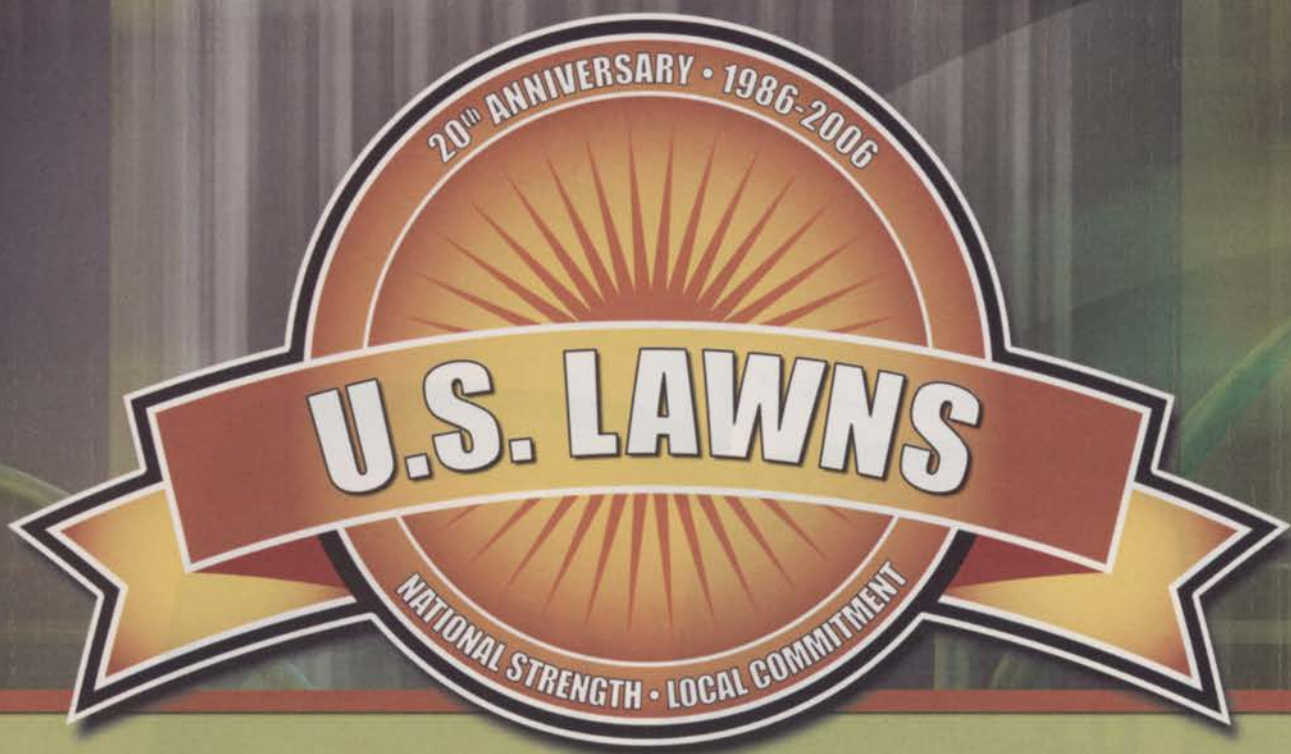
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*Here's to the next 20 years.*



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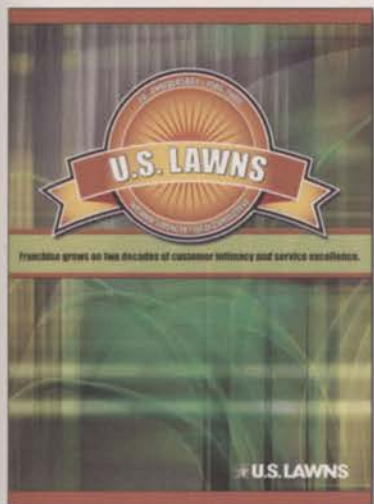
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# Time Passes, Passion Remains



■ Ken Hutcheson

**T**he celebration of U.S. Lawns' 20th anniversary represents a milestone for the company, as well as for me personally. It allows me an opportunity to reflect back on the challenges, the opportunities and the excitement of the past and to use this experience as we prepare for future opportunities as they arise.

In reflecting back to earlier years, I vividly recall the energy, the ideas, the dreams and the lofty goals shared by the U.S. Lawns team. While some of the names and faces may have changed over the years, the dreams, ideas and, most importantly, the energy, remain. Additionally, the newer members of the team, corporate support staff and franchisees alike, have a level of passion that is reflective of the early days. This passion, coupled with the strong foundation laid by the first generation of staff and owners, ensure future success for those involved with U.S. Lawns.

As part of the U.S. Lawns management team, and as its president, I am proud to have witnessed the exceptional growth of our dream and watched as the team delivered on its promise to all its stakeholders – the customers, employees, franchisees and to the company as a whole.

There have been many memorable moments during the last 20 years; some good, some not so good. Early growth was slow as the concept was tested and refined. Through 1995, a small group of franchisees along with a dedicated support staff pioneered many of the procedures and systems that make up the foundation of the company today. The good news was that



these founding franchises and staff were committed to the concept and to the industry, and they stuck with it.

Becoming a part of ValleyCrest Cos. in 1996 allowed us to drive the concept faster and more professionally. From 15 franchises in three states in 1996, to more than 100 in 24 states in 2003, we now stand at more than 170 U.S. Lawns franchises in 29 states. Most importantly, our franchisees and support staff remain as committed as ever to the concept, to the industry and to our mission: to serve each one of our customers with the highest level of trust, quality, value and service.

We may be more sophisticated today than when we started out. We may have more resources, more volume and more locations than we did in 1986, but our passion for the idea and the entrepreneurial energy and commitment that is our foundation have not only remained intact, but have grown even stronger.

Observing the individual growth of the U.S. Lawns team has been exciting as well. The quality of our facilitators, professional staff and customer support team is on a level with the best companies in the landscape and franchise industry.

As we continue to grow our organization, we will continue to focus on creating a culture that encourages their success. Staying ahead of the market is an obligation we have to the franchisees and to our landscape customer. Our goals remain lofty, but are achievable by combining national strength with local commitment. It's what we believed possible in 1986; it's possible today and it's possible tomorrow.

I am proud to be a part of U.S. Lawns. I look forward to watching it, and our great teams, continue to grow. Allow me to close with a sincere thank you to the team.

Ken Hutcheson  
President  
U.S. Lawns

**We may have more resources, more volume and more locations than we did in 1986, but our passion for the idea and the entrepreneurial energy and commitment that is our foundation have not only remained intact, but have grown even stronger.**

*Ken Hutcheson*



# U.S. Lawns Turns 20

**The industry's only commercial maintenance franchisor emerges from its teen years healthy, successful and primed for growth.**

**T**he daily challenges of any burgeoning business can bog down the owner. Start-up landscape contractors know this best. Sooner or later, the owner – who entered the green industry with the vibrancy and growth potential

of the very landscapes he maintains – gets tired. And it takes a toll on his personal life, his employees and on his client relationships.

In 1986, the Oyler Bros. Co., an Orlando, Fla.-based landscape company, identified a need in the commercial landscape market created when owners of landscape firms struggle to maintain client relationships as their organizations grow.

As the company grew during the late 1970s and early 1980s, management layers developed and the company's owners, cousins Tom and Ken Oyler, realized they were losing some of their older commercial accounts.

Although the quality of service may never have faltered, the customers disliked the fact that they no longer saw the owners regularly. This bothered the owners of Oyler Bros., which was founded in 1973 on the principle of customer intimacy.

This chain of events led to the founding of U.S. Lawns, the green industry's only franchise network dedicated specifically to commercial





landscape maintenance. The founders believed franchises could outperform big companies because the resources provided by the corporate support staff enables the branch owners to stay close to their customers and businesses.

"It was that need to get an owner involved again that spawned the concept," explains Ken Hutcheson, president of U.S. Lawns, who served as a franchise consultant to the company in 1986.

"U.S. Lawns was founded as a model for the franchisee to build a sustainable business – one that's large enough to endure the ups and downs created by employees, customers and distractions to owners – and most importantly to fill a need in the commercial landscape market that was clearly identified by the founders," Hutcheson says.

Two decades later, in terms of company principles, not much has changed. Sure, U.S. Lawns has grown leaps and bounds since then – from a handful of franchisees in the 1980s to more than 170 in 29 states today. But the values are the same as they always were. They highlight two components essential for customer satisfaction: service excellence and customer intimacy.

One important distinction that U.S. Lawns understood from the beginning is business owners enter the landscape maintenance marketplace from diverse career paths. Some are horticulture-loving green industry veterans with little business



management experience. Others are fleeing corporate America, looking to be their own bosses. Either way, the U.S. Lawns model allows them to preserve their entrepreneurial passion.

"One of the great features of this industry is the passion that so many lawn and landscape professionals have for the work they do," says Sidney Hinson, national accounts manager for Cleveland-based LESCO. As a vendor, Hinson has worked closely with U.S. Lawns support staff and franchisees for more than a decade. "Many of them find the business operations side much more challenging than caring for landscapes, so any organization that helps interested professionals increase their business management skills truly helps the entire industry grow."

Whether it's providing accounting skills or agronomic ones, U.S. Lawns' values have remained intact for more

**U.S. Lawns was founded as a model for the franchisee to build a sustainable business – one that's large enough to endure the ups and downs created by employees, customers and distractions to owners – and most importantly to fill a need in the commercial landscape market that was clearly identified by the founders.**

**– Ken Hutcheson, U.S. Lawns**



than two decades. "We've always had some strong core values," Hutcheson says. "You can do things the right way in business. You can treat employees right, treat customers right, treat the market right, treat your family right and win. Those things are not mutually exclusive."

Those ideals fall within an informal motto U.S. Lawns Vice President of Marketing Paul Wolbert promotes. "Remain close to the customer, close to the employees and go bowling on Friday night."

That last component is an important one, Wolbert says. "Having

a life is part of running a sustainable business."

Hutcheson explains, "That's the model, that's the culture, developed in 1986 and we're very proud of the fact that that model has not changed," he says. "It has evolved, but it has not changed."

## THE SYSTEM IS THE SECRET

"The system" is an answer most U.S. Lawns franchisees give when asked why their businesses prosper. What exactly are these systems they refer to? They're a variety of processes and resources designed to support an owner in building a sustainable business. "The best way to describe it is like a big tool box," says franchisee Bryant Jernigan who owns the Northwest Mississippi and Memphis, Tenn., territories. "There are things in there that you need at different stages and you have those available to you as you go through the phases of growth."

Plus, the system works for both franchisees with green industry experience and those without. Happy Lindeen, owner of U.S. Lawns of New Orleans and Baton Rouge is an example of that. "Without the systems I don't think I'd be as successful as I am today," says the former automotive technician of 25 years. "They managed to change me from a mechanic into a successful businessman."

Some components of "the system," as they've evolved over the years, include:

- Bidding and estimating formulas;
- P&L/balance sheet management;
- Agronomic and horticultural training;
- Sales training;
- Safety training;
- Access to in-the-field facilitators; and
- A Partner Program that offers purchasing power and training from select vendors.

## FRANCHISE EVOLVES.

In the early years, the U.S. Lawns concept was beta-tested and several branches were sold. But the growth really kicked into gear when ValleyCrest Cos. (then operating as Environmental Industries) of Calabasas, Calif., purchased the U.S. Lawns network in 1996.

At the time, U.S. Lawns had 16 franchisees who were scattered around the nation. This group of "first-generation" owners, who mostly came from the landscape maintenance industry, is credited with developing a sound business model on which the system could grow.

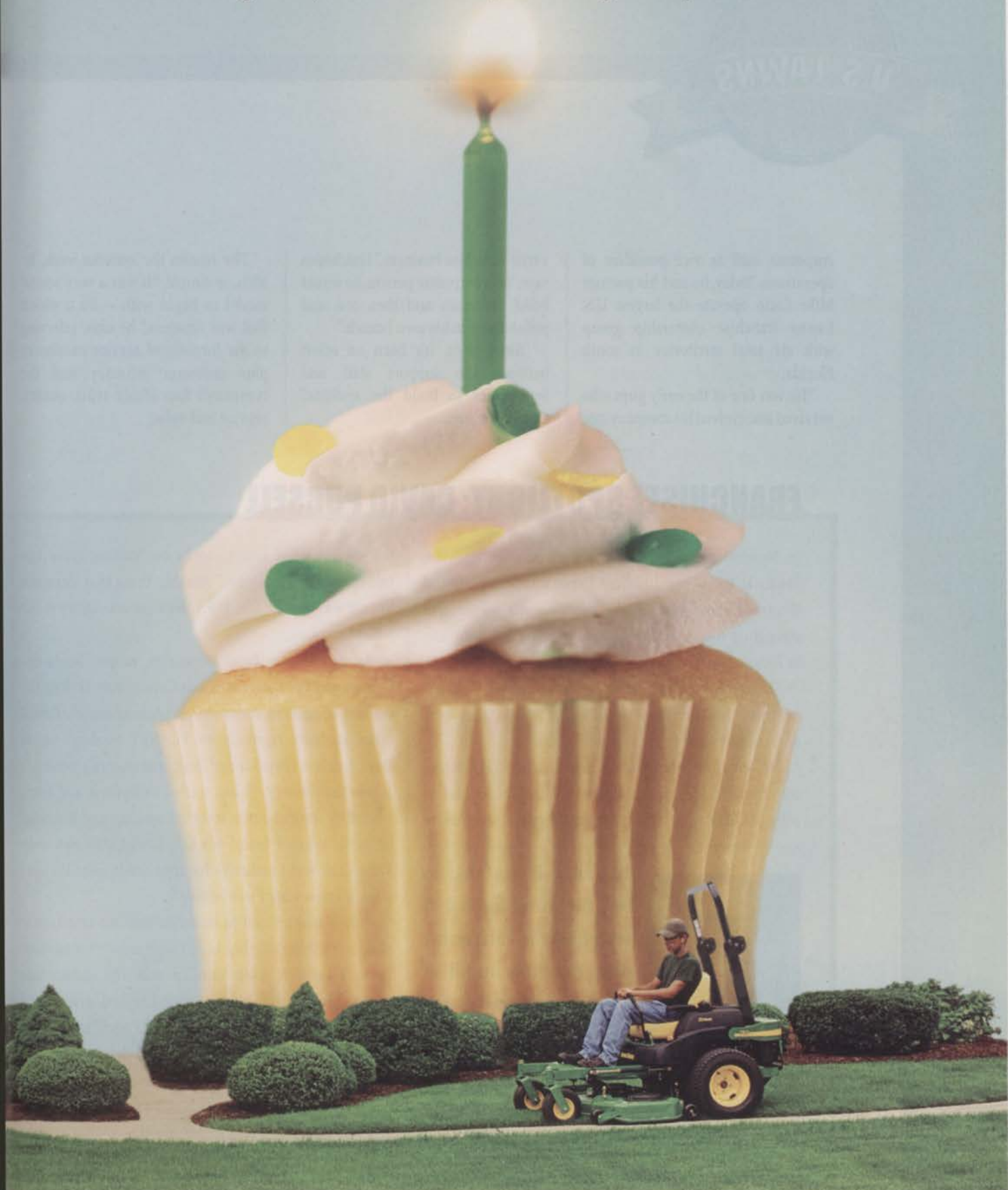
"They helped build U.S. Lawns," Hutcheson says. "They are passionate, totally entrepreneurial - very much industry-type people. They tested and built many of the processes we use today."

"It's been fun seeing the company grow," says Todd Moerchan, one of those early pioneers. "We've come a long way from our first conference in a 12-by-12 foot room with the ceiling tiles falling in," he jokes.

Over the years, Moerchan served as a facilitator in the field and on the



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JOHN DEERE

USE READER SERVICE # 89



corporate staff as vice president of operations. Today, he and his partner Mike Carlo operate the largest U.S. Lawns franchise ownership group with six total territories in south Florida.

"He was one of the early guys who survived and evolved his company into

a true franchise business," Hutcheson says. "As a corporate person, he would build processes and then test and polish them in his own branch."

"Since then, it's been an effort between the support staff and franchisees to build the systems," Hutcheson says.

The reason the systems work, he adds, is simple. "It was a very sound model to begin with – it's a vision that was timeless," he says, referring to the formula of service excellence plus customer intimacy and the company's four ideals: trust, quality, service and value.

## FRANCHISEE SPOTLIGHT: DAVID PURSELL

In November of 1998 David Pursell was in Nashville, Tenn., at the Green Industry Expo, wandering around the trade show floor. At the time, he was owner of a struggling 6-year-old landscape maintenance company in Ridgeland, Miss.

"I saw a U.S. Lawns booth and thought, 'What's this?'" he says. "I had no idea who they were or what they were and I wasn't seeking a franchise."

He inquired about what the Orlando, Fla.-based commercial landscape maintenance franchisor had to offer and liked what he heard about systems and resources



Basically, I was able to buy the wheel instead of trying to reinvent it on my own. They gave me all of the systems I needed and that I would have spent years developing, like an employee handbook and safety training.

– David Pursell

that would allow him to focus on "cutting grass and taking care of customers." Another thing that intrigued Pursell was the fact that U.S. Lawns is a subsidiary of the ValleyCrest Cos.

As an adjunct faculty member in the landscape management program at Hinds Community College (he teaches equipment operation and maintenance), Pursell takes students regularly to PLANET Student Career Days and has visited many large contractors' operations across the country. "I had toured ValleyCrest and knew what they were about in terms of systems and training," he says. "When I found out U.S. Lawns was owned by ValleyCrest and I realized what they had to offer, it's like I already knew what I was buying."

Pursell had arrived in Nashville with no intention to purchase a franchise, but he left with a different attitude. "I don't know if you're familiar with the success rate of small businesses, but last time I looked it was at 95 percent failure rate within five years," Pursell says. "I was in my sixth year and struggling and I didn't want to be one of those numbers."

"My wife and I came back home and thought about it and prayed about it and we felt like it was what we were



## GROWTH SPURT.

Polishing the processes and systems was U.S. Lawns' goal for two years after ValleyCrest purchased the system. The year 1998 marked the beginning of an era of growth. Before then, systemwide sales were less than

\$10 million. Today, systemwide sales top \$80 million.

In its 15th anniversary year – 2001 – the company achieved a notable milestone: 50 franchisees in 25 states. The next year, Hutcheson was promoted to president of the company. Growth ensued from there.

In 2003, the company hit the 100-franchisee mark. Two years later, U.S. Lawns broke 150 and currently the system is made up of more than 170 franchisees.

The strides U.S. Lawns has made in recent years has allowed it to expand its franchisee offerings. For example,

supposed to do," Pursell explains.

That was November 1998. His company became U.S. Lawns of Jackson, Miss., in early 1999.

Before converting to a U.S. Lawns franchise, Pursell's company grossed about \$250,000 annually. "I don't remember what the bottom line was because I'm not even sure I knew what the bottom line was then," he says. "I knew how to cut grass and the horticultural part of it and I had all the books and QuickBooks, but I just didn't know what I was looking at. I knew I was making money, but as far as saying we were making 10 percent net profit then – I just couldn't tell you that."

U.S. Lawns named Pursell the "rookie of the year" in 2000, franchisee of the year in 2001 and in 2002 Pursell won the Million Dollar Volume Ring Award – just three years into the system.

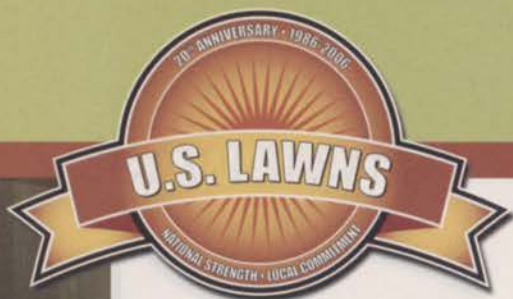
Pursell attributes a lot of his success to "the U.S. Lawns systems," like the bidding and estimating formulas and balance sheet management in addition to the in-the-field facilitator.

"Basically, I was able to buy the wheel instead of trying to reinvent it on my own," he says. "They gave me all of the systems I needed and that I would have spent

years developing, like an employee handbook and safety training. I could have bought stuff from PLANET or other places, but they just had the proven systems in place."

Being a franchisee also had allowed Pursell to step back a bit from his business. Before he joined U.S. Lawns, he made the mistake that a lot of small business owners make – he did everything himself. "Before, the company was a lot smaller," he says. "I was actually physically cutting grass during the day, bidding and talking to customers in the afternoon and working on financials at night. The hours were extreme."

Now, Pursell, who has 20 employees including 10 H-2B workers, knows how to delegate. "U.S. Lawns taught me not to do everything," he says. Although it's not beyond him to hop on a mower if need be, Pursell typically works from about 7 a.m. to 4 or 5 p.m., focusing on managerial duties. It's given the family man more time to be with his wife, Suan, and son, David Jr., and to engage in his community, as well. In addition to serving on the U.S. Lawns advisory board and teaming with his wife to lead their church's children's ministry, Pursell works year-round to prepare Hinds Community College students for the PLANET Student Career Days.



not more than five years ago, U.S. Lawns was spread relatively thin, with 150 branches in 25 states. Today, with 170-plus in 29 states, market density has improved, creating opportunities and efficiencies.

Bryant Jernigan, an ex-FedEx manager, is a member of what Hutcheson and Wolbert consider U.S. Lawns' "second generation." Generally, these owners joined during the last eight years and have roots outside the green industry. They're ex-corporate types seeking a second career, and U.S. Lawns has been their answer.

Jernigan, who owns territories in Northwest Mississippi and Memphis, Tenn., and is about to buy a third, says his business reaps the benefits of U.S. Lawns' excellent market density. "Property manager jobs change hands a lot," he says, explaining that U.S. Lawns' brand recognition helps in the

event that a new property manager comes to town.

"If they're from Nashville and the person gets transferred to Memphis, it's made a difference in us getting that work and continuing the relationship," he says. "The more trucks the better."

Brenda Gagas, co-owner of U.S. Lawns of Phoenix and a former aerospace industry executive, agrees. "When we bought this business, we had the only existing franchise in Arizona and we had maybe 25 accounts," she says. "Now there are four franchises in Arizona and I consider it very beneficial. Overall, the presence in Arizona has grown significantly and we alone have about 135 customers."

Thanks in part to their drastic increase in volume, Gagas and her partner Tami Swearingin are one franchise that will be inducted into

the U.S. Lawns Hall of Fame this year.

The density has allowed U.S. Lawns to extend the educational, marketing and sales opportunities available to franchisees by developing regional teams.

In 2003, U.S. Lawns refocused its marketing efforts and began national marketing on behalf of the franchisees. Part of that marketing includes a presence in national organizations like the Building Owners and Managers Association International (BOMA), the Community Associations Institute (CAI) and the International Council of Shopping Centers (ICSC).

In 2004, when U.S. Lawns developed a renewed focus on education, it became possible for seminars and training programs to take place regionally.

"We've always done training, but now we've really focused on education

1986	1996	2001	2002
U.S. Lawns founded in Orlando, Fla..	ValleyCrest Cos. acquires U.S. Lawns	The U.S. Lawns network surpasses the 50-franchisee mark	Ken Hutcheson becomes U.S. Lawns president
	U.S. Lawns signs first vendor partnership with LESCO		
	■ At right: Ken Hutcheson, LESCO's Sidney Hinson, Paul Wolbert and U.S. Lawns Baltimore Operation Manager Kevin Kraft shake on another vendor-partnership deal in 2002.		



While it's a national company, there's a very personal level to helping a contractor grow his business.

- Scott Cornwell, The Toro. Co.

and motivation," Wolbert says. "It goes back to market density. We're in a position to be effective regionally."

A renewed educational focus also allowed U.S. Lawns to add a full-time training director. Training programs include sessions on agronomics, equipment, management, sales and irrigation - all carried out regionally.

#### SUPPORT SYSTEM.

Much of U.S. Lawns' other training is done in conjunction with vendors in its Partner Program. "Today we have 15 partners that work with our franchisees on everything from equipment to labor to H2B and

business services," Hutcheson says, noting the company's first official vendor partner was LESCO. "In 1996, this partnership gave U.S. Lawns the resources to build out the model more effectively and completely."

Because some U.S. Lawns franchisees begin their businesses with little or no industry experience, its vendors take a proactive approach to training. "Because some of these people are new, we get engaged with safety training, making sure they keep operating costs low, showing them how to maintain the equipment and do it in a safe manner," says ExMark's Dan Dorn.

In addition, growth has allowed U.S. Lawns to hire more full-time

specialists. The support staff at the company's Orlando headquarters has grown from three full-timers in 1995 to more than 20 people today who are experts in a variety of fields beneficial to franchisees including accounting, sales, agronomy and training.

Gagas attributes individual franchisees' - and, in turn, the entire company's - success to the behind-the-scenes support.

"It's just the overall support structure in place that keeps the franchisees on their feet to keep running and growing," she says.

Hutcheson agrees. "This concept has grown around a passionate, committed group of franchisees and

### 2003

### 2004

### 2005

### 2006

The company breaks the 100-franchisee mark

U.S. Lawns operates in 25 states

National marketing presence creates partnerships with BOMA, CAI and ISCS

U.S. Lawns begins its educational and motivational mission, hiring a full-time training director and implementing regional training programs on agronomics, equipment, management, sales and irrigation

U.S. Lawns surpasses 150-franchisee mark

The company recognizes 12 franchisees with the U.S. Lawns Gold Ring award, which is given to members who reach \$750,000 in gross sales

More than 170 U.S. Lawns franchisees are in operation in 29 states

System wide sales top \$80 million





an equally passionate and committed group of U.S. Lawns support staff," he says. "It's great that we've hit this 20th year mark, this revenue and volume, but observing the individual growth of the team – franchisees, staff and facilitators – has been exciting. It's really cool to look at a franchisee and remember what they were like when

you had dinner with them before they became a franchisee. And to look at them today and see what they are now. It'll just knock your socks off."

Scott Cornwell, corporate accounts manager for The Toro Co., adds to that. "What intrigues me most about U.S. Lawns is their franchisees bring a passionate entrepreneurial spirit

to this industry," he says. "You think about a business that's just starting out and the owner has put everything on the line to make this work. While it's a national company, there's a very personal level to helping a contractor grow his business. That personal level is really the essence of the U.S. Lawns story." ■

## FRANCHISEE SPOTLIGHT: HAPPY LINDEEN

Last September, when Hurricane Katrina ravaged the Gulf Coast, taking homes and lives, it took many businesses, too. But it didn't take U.S. Lawns of New Orleans and Baton Rouge.

"It was pretty scary," says owner and operator Happy Lindeen. "We evacuated and took eight H-2B employees with us to Dallas. I wasn't real sure we would have a business when we returned."

Thanks to Lindeen's resilience and the assistance he received from U.S. Lawns franchisees and support staff nationwide, his business was back up and running about three weeks after the storm. "Everybody that's in the U.S. Lawns family did everything they could to help," Lindeen says.

U.S. Lawns headquarters set up a "help fund" that franchisees and support staff donated to, which allowed Lindeen to keep three key employees on the payroll during the several weeks of downtime.

"Other franchisees offered people, equipment and advice during a very stressful time," Lindeen says. Thankfully, his equipment was safe because he had

evacuated it before the storm. "But anybody who was within shouting distance offered equipment and a place for people to stay."

**"Other franchisees offered people, equipment and advice during a very stressful time." – Happy Lindeen**

Keeping H-2B employees on the payroll was a major concern of Lindeen's during this difficult time. "These guys would have had to go back to Mexico or else they'd be illegal if they weren't working," he says, noting his peers stepped in to help him. Franchisees in Indiana and Alabama took in eight of Lindeen's H-2B employees for three weeks. In addition to providing them with a steady paycheck, these franchisees provided them with a place to stay and took care of them. When Lindeen's business was back up and running, his H-2B employees returned to Louisiana. "It was nice to have these guys come back to work, otherwise we wouldn't have had anyone," Lindeen says.

Today, his greatest challenge is still finding qualified employees. He's up to 16 employees, but needs 22 to run at full capacity. But he's optimistic: He's on his way to purchasing a third U.S. Lawns territory.

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USE READER SERVICE # 91





# Mower Options

Check out the cutting machines these manufacturers are highlighting.

compiled by heather wood | web editor

## Bobcat Mower Attachment



- Recommended for rough-cut applications, including road ditch right-of-way, golf course roughs and large acreage mowing
- Eliminates driving over the grass before cutting
- Provides visibility to the work area
- Features three overlapping blades for clean cutting with no skips
- Adjustable cutting height ranges from 2 to 5½ inches in ½-inch increments
- Bobcat – 701/241-8700, [www.bobcat.com](http://www.bobcat.com)

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## Bush Hog Zero-Turn Mowers



- Include Bush Hog TOUGH features
- Frames are built of structural steel; decks are fabricated and reinforced for extra strength
- Powered by a 21- or 25-horsepower Kawasaki or a 23-horsepower Kohler command Pro engine
- Include three-year commercial use limited warranty
- Bush Hog – 334/874-2700, [www.bushhog.com](http://www.bushhog.com)

Circle 201 on reader service card



## Cub Cadet TANK Line with Diesel Options

- Includes two new models; one with a 60-inch deck and one with a 72-inch deck
- Powered by the 28.1-horsepower Caterpillar C1.1 diesel engine
- Mowers feature fully-welded steel frames and ladder-type construction
- Special dampeners facilitate zero-turn operation
- Mowers offer dual 7-gallon tanks
- Cub Cadet – 800/348-2424, [www.cubcadet.com](http://www.cubcadet.com)

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USE READER SERVICE # 93

## product spotlight



### Dixie Chopper LP 3000 Propane Mower

- Capable of 15 miles per hour ground speed
- Can mow 7½ acres per hour
- Includes a Generac Power Systems 992-cc liquid propane engine
- Fueled by two 40-pound metal cylinders that hold 7.9 gallons each
- The Gaseous Alternative Power can cut ozone-forming emissions by more than 50 percent when compared to conventional gasoline engines
- Dixie Chopper – 765/246-7737, [www.dixiechopper.com](http://www.dixiechopper.com)

Circle 203 on reader service card

### Encore X-treme

- Two additional deck sizes – 48- and 60-inch – recently introduced
- All versions designed for power and versatility
- Can mow up to 10 miles per hour
- Mowers feature bigger tires, a foot pedal lift and built-in comfort
- All mowers include the 10-year deck warranty and two-year parts and labor warranty
- Encore – 800/267-4255, [www.seriousred.com](http://www.seriousred.com)

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### EverRide Scorpion FX

- Fixed-deck, stand-on mower
- Quicker, lighter, smaller version of the Scorpion
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- Features faster trimming speeds and increased rider visibility
- EverRide – 402/274-8600, [www.everride.com](http://www.everride.com)

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### Exmark FrontRunner

- Equipped with a hydraulic push-button power deck lift and fold system
- Designed to cut grass in hard-to-reach places
- Powered by a 27-horsepower Kohler Command Twin engine or 25-horsepower diesel Kubota engine
- Available in either a 52- or 60-inch deck width
- Exmark – 402/223-6300, [www.exmark.com](http://www.exmark.com)

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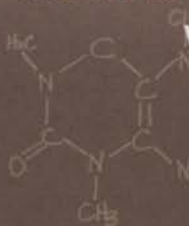
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USE READER SERVICE # 98

## product spotlight



### Ferris IS 2000 Z Mowers

- Two models were added to the lineup
- First new model features a 26-horsepower liquid-cooled Kawasaki engine
- The other new option features a Briggs & Stratton Vanguard Big Block engine
- Both models will be available with either a 52- or 61-inch deck
- The IS 2000Z series also features a 25-horsepower unit with a Kawasaki engine and a 27-horsepower unit with a Kohler engine and a 61-inch deck
- Mowers also feature four-wheel IS independent suspension
- Ferris Industries – 800/933-6175, [www.ferrisindustries.com](http://www.ferrisindustries.com)

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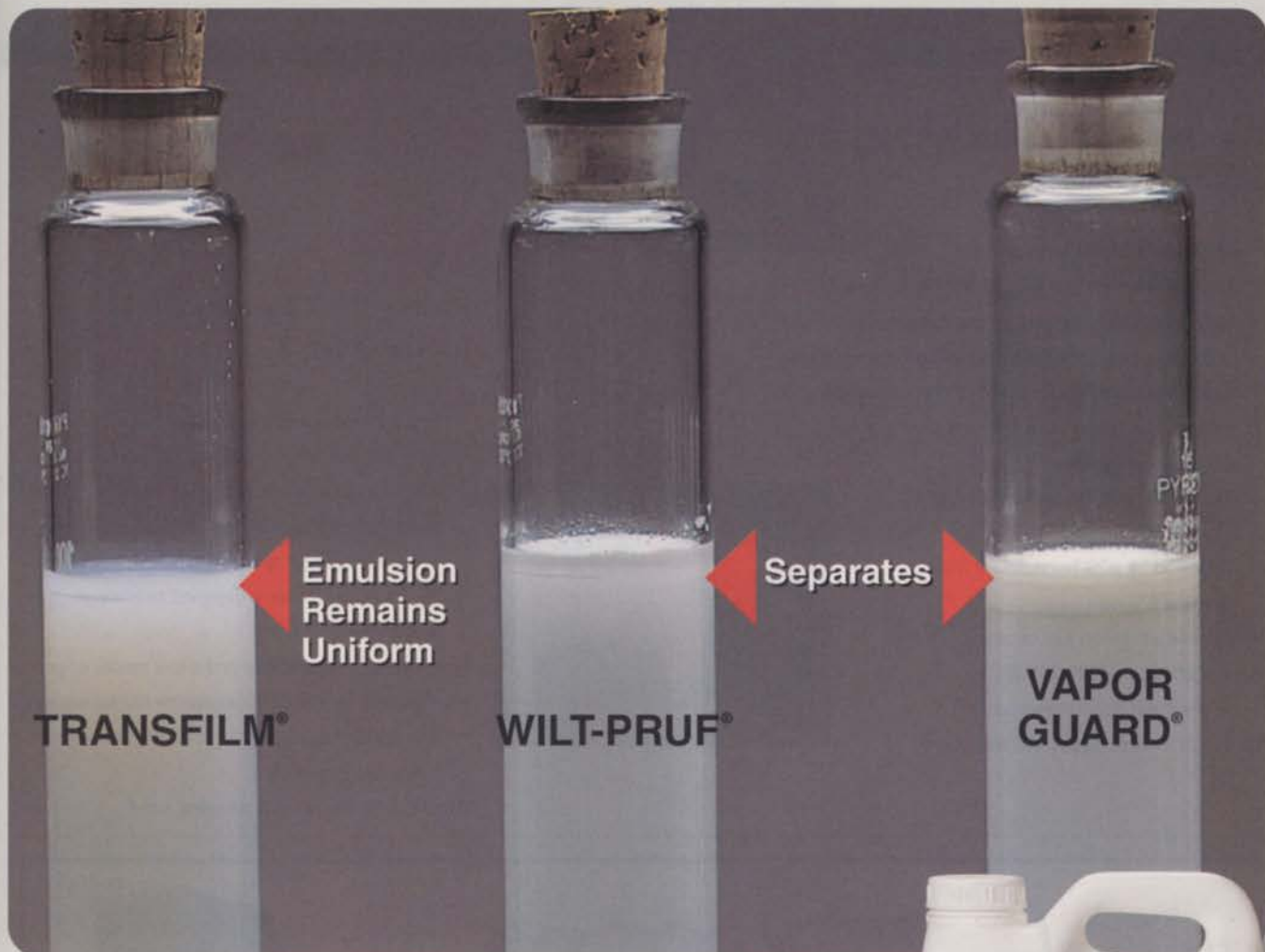
### Great Dane Brutus

- Available with a 25-horsepower Kawasaki engine or a 27-horsepower Kohler engine
- Includes a 52- or 61-inch deck
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- Great Dane – 402/274-8600, [www.greatdanemowers.com](http://www.greatdanemowers.com)

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## Grasshopper True ZeroTurn 100 Series Mowers



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- Cutting heights can be set between 1½ and 4½ inches
- Powered by a 20-horsepower V-twin gasoline engine
- Carries a 6-gallon fuel capacity
- Grasshopper – 620/345-8621, [www.grasshoppermower.com](http://www.grasshoppermower.com)

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## Hustler XR-7 Mowing Decks for the Super Z

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- Powered by Honda, Kawasaki or Kohler engines
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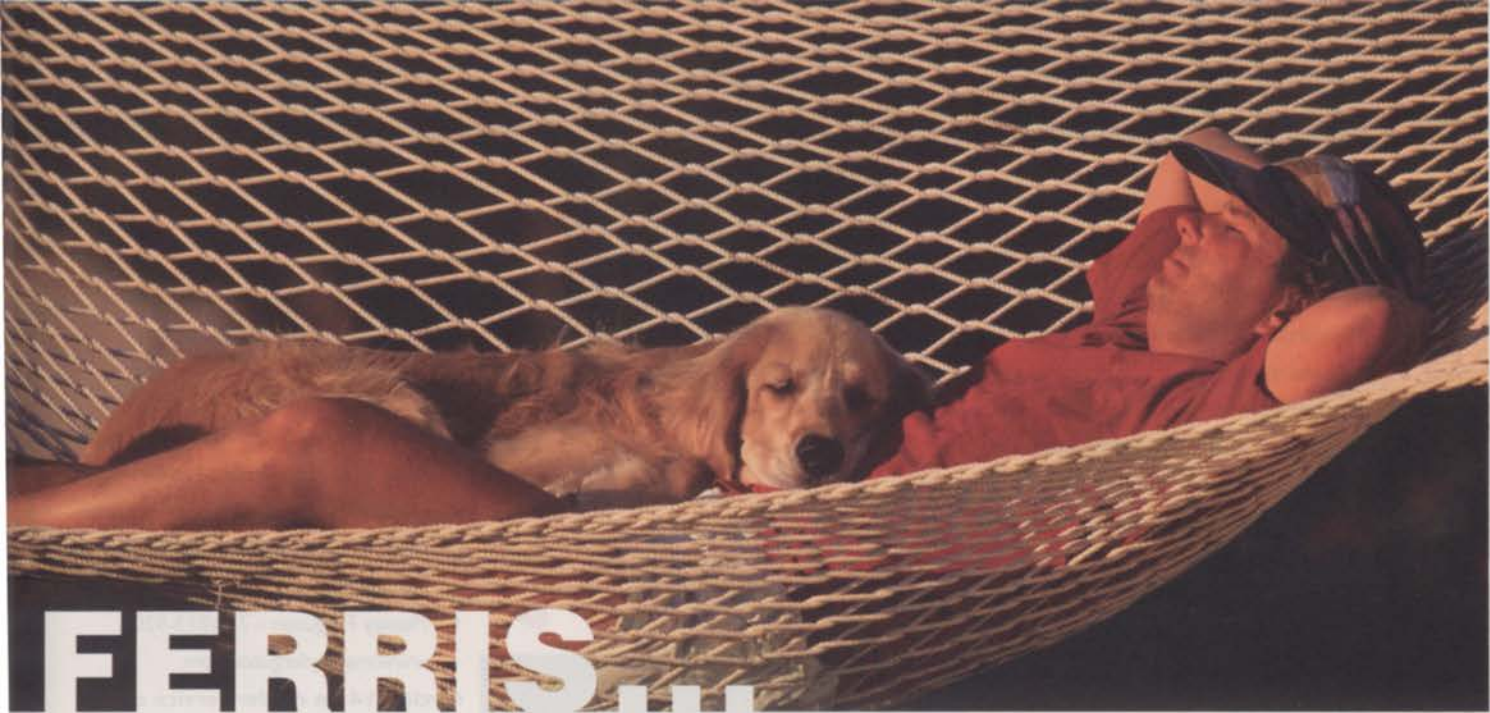
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USE READER SERVICE # 103



### Kubota F-Series Front-Mount Mowers

- Line includes three new mowers
- Powered by Kubota liquid-cooled diesel engines
- Two models are equipped with 28-horsepower engines while the other has a 36-horsepower engine
- Mower options include the Hi-PRO3 high-capacity 60- and 72-inch side discharge decks
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- Powered by either a 28-horsepower fuel-injected or carbureted Kohler engine
- Lastec – 317/892-4444, [www.lastec.com](http://www.lastec.com)

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### Massey Ferguson Zero-Turn Mowers

- Available in mid- and rear-mount models
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- Massey Ferguson – 770/813-9200, [www.masseyferguson.com](http://www.masseyferguson.com)

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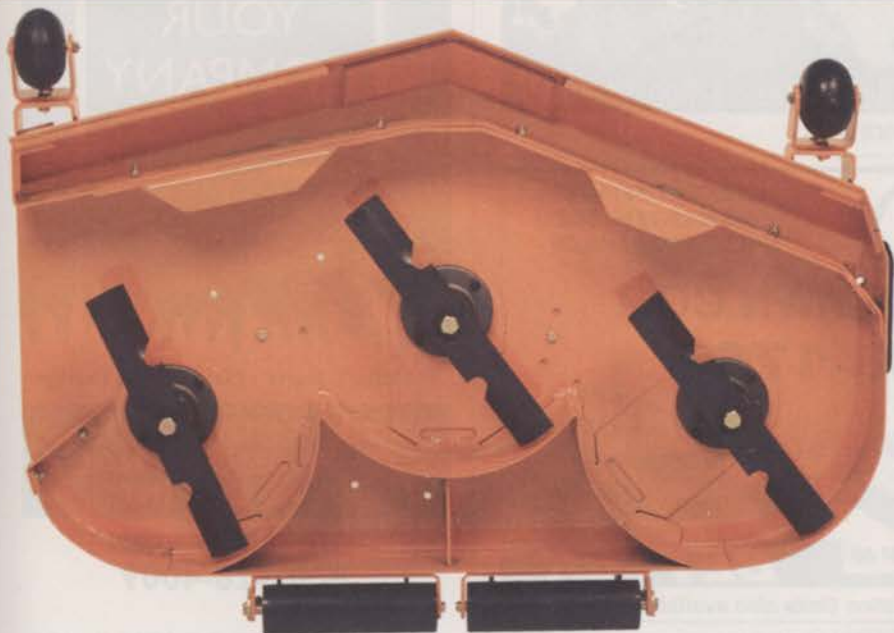
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- Includes 52- and 60-inch decks
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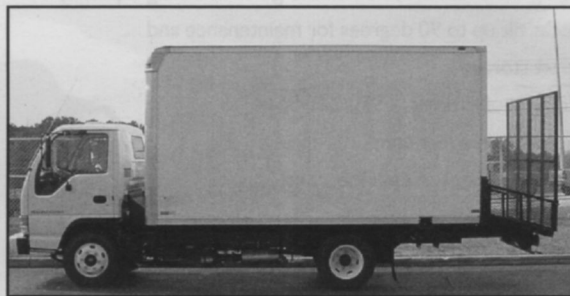


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- Equipped with a 61- or 72- inch commercial deck
- Powered by a 33-horsepower Generac industrial V-twin engine; speed reaches 12½ miles per hour
- Full-float deck features 7-gauge skirts
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- Cutting height is adjusted from the operator's seat
- Low center of gravity aids in greater stability
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## product spotlight

### Wright Sentar Standing/Sitting Zero-Turning-Radius Mower



- Features cutting widths up to 61 inches
- Padded seat with mono spring suspension folds out of the way
- Operator Balance Control lets the operator shift his/her weight as the terrain changes
- Includes a 2-cylinder, 19-plus-horsepower engine
- Carries a 10.7-gallon fuel tank capacity
- Speed reaches up to 11 miles per hour and 5 miles per hour in reverse
- Wright – 301/360-9810, [www.wrightmfg.com](http://www.wrightmfg.com)

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### Ventrac 4131

- Articulating and oscillating frame design gives the operator enhanced maneuverability and stability
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### Yazoo/Kees Mid-Max Mower



- Series has expanded to include the ZMKH61251
- Features an 11.2-gallon fuel capacity
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compiled by heather wood | web editor

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- Powered by an 86-horsepower Cat diesel engine
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- Bayer Environmental Science – 800/331-2867, [www.bayerprocentral.com](http://www.bayerprocentral.com)

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# Project EverGreen -2007 Report to Stakeholders

## Join Us in Telling Millions of Americans about the Benefits of Green Spaces



By Den Gardner

It's critical for our industry to educate Americans about the value of your company and the benefits you provide.

As the green industry equivalent of the "Got Milk?" campaign, Project EverGreen's very existence is based on a mission to raise awareness among consumers. The message is simple: the promotion of the environmental, economic and lifestyle benefits of green spaces.

Project EverGreen was founded two years ago by an alliance of large and small companies, associations, contractors and others who provide services and products for green spaces and the people who work in them. Our purpose is to promote the significance of those who preserve and enhance green spaces at home, work and



play and to bring an alternative voice from those criticizing these areas. By doing so, we support the thousands of American landscapers, lawn care operators, sod producers, arborists, nursery and greenhouse growers, golf course superintendents, sports turf managers, irrigation contractors, professional grounds managers and others.

But we don't lobby or represent any one segment or product category. Project EverGreen encompasses all the people, products and services used for green spaces and the benefits of maintaining them.

### Project EverGreen Tells the Green Industry Story

Midway through 2006, we had already touched more than 115 million Americans through exposure in the news media.

We have told your story in hundreds of newspapers and radio stations, from the weekly paper in the *Parkersville, W. Va. Sentinel* to *New York Newsday*. Here is a small sampling of the national media that have covered Project EverGreen nationwide:

- *New York Newsday*
- *The Tennessean*
- *The Cincinnati Enquirer*
- *The Daily Oklahoman*
- *The Denver Post*
- *The Minneapolis Star Tribune*
- *Detroit News*

### Partnering with Like-Minded People

We've created partnerships with organizations such as Habitat for Humanity and America in Bloom that give us a solid story to tell consumers, while simultaneously working directly with the public.



### ALL RIGHT AMERICA: Show Us Your Green Spaces

In 2006, Project EverGreen went in search of the best photos of well-maintained green spaces with a contest awarding publication in our *Because Green Matters* Calendar.

The photography contest was inspired by our *Because Green Matters* Award, which recognized the University of Akron (Ohio) and Southern Land Company (Tennessee) for their efforts to develop green spaces.

### Your Support is Crucial

As a non-profit organization, Project EverGreen relies on contributions to relay our message to consumers and your help is needed! Volunteer, contribute and get involved! Sign up online at [www.projectevergreen.com](http://www.projectevergreen.com). Or call toll-free at 1-877-758-4835.

*(Editor's Note: Den Gardner serves as executive director of Project EverGreen and helped found its current mission and strategies just two years ago.)*

### Do the Right Thing

Our highest profile campaign to date is GreenCare for Troops. This public service initiative provides free lawn care for families of armed forces personnel serving in the Middle East.

How does that help the green industry? GreenCare for Troops' slogan is "Serving You While You Serve Us." It puts a face on the green industry, and identifies us as people who care, by matching affected families with local lawn and landscape contractors who have volunteered their services. Are you a volunteer yet?



Project EverGreen enlisted former Marine Gunnery Sergeant, R. Lee "Gunny" Ermey, as its spokesperson. Well-known for his roles on screen and TV, Gunny supports the program because, "The lawn and landscape industry recognizes the financial and emotional sacrifices being made by our men and women serving overseas."

Word about GreenCare for Troops spread like wildfire through the international military community by our media relations. We give daily interviews about the program, and connect the media with local contractors and families for a truly personal perspective. A soldier in Iraq even asked that we send a Project EverGreen banner to him. It is now displayed in Saddam Hussein's former palace.



## Gehl 383Z Zero-Tail-Swing Excavator

- Model weighs 3 tons
- Zero-tail-swing maneuverability allows the machine's superstructure to rotate entirely within the tracks
- Can operate close to walls and obstructions without the risk of contact
- Includes a 29-horsepower Yanmar diesel engine on the side of the machine
- Hydraulic and fuel tanks sit on the rear of the machine to provide the operator with more legroom
- Controls and instruments are ergonomically located for easy use
- Gehl - 800/628-0491, [www.gehl.com](http://www.gehl.com)

Circle 236 on reader service card



## GoldenLook Vortex Flooring

- GL Epoxy Stone is installed over bare ground without concrete over wood decks and flooring
- Formulation uses a reinforced resin matrix designed to add strength
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## Hannay N700 Spring Rewind Hose Reel



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- Operates at pressures to 300 psi and handles temperatures from -20 to 225 degrees Fahrenheit
- Hannay Reels – 877/467-3357, [www.hannay.com](http://www.hannay.com)

Circle 238 on reader service card

## Havahart Liquid Critter Ridder



- Available in granular for perimeter protection or ready-to-use and concentrate formulas for multiple surface direct application
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- Active ingredients include oil of black pepper, piperine and capsaicin
- Repels by odor and taste
- One application lasts as many as 30 days
- Havahart – 800/800-1819, [www.havahart.com](http://www.havahart.com)

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## Hiniker Scoop Plow



- Conclave shape of the plow provides greater capacity, less spillage and faster, more efficient plowing
- Plow's 20-degree fixed-angle outer ends help the plow capture snow, making it ideal for clearing lots and parking areas
- Available in 8- and 9-foot lengths
- Features a high-impact polyethylene moldboard that creates a low-friction, corrosion-free surface
- Three-section trip-edge with a 9-inch high pivot point provides protection from high obstacles
- Hiniker – 507/625-5883, [www.hiniker.com](http://www.hiniker.com)

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## Howard Leight AirSoft Redesigned Earplugs

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- Features an internal air pocket design with noise-blocking fins
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- Includes a Kem Oil 250 chemical-resistant hose, poly pump and heavy-duty angled wand
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## Husqvarna HUV Utility Vehicles

- Ten HUVs available in three platforms: all wheel drive, two-wheel drive and compact
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- Minimizes contractor visits
- Irritrol – 800/883-1234, [www.irritrol.com/pcontrol](http://www.irritrol.com/pcontrol)

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### STATEMENT OF OWNERSHIP

The following is a statement required by the Act of October 1962, Section 4369, Title 39, United States Code, showing ownership of *Lawn & Landscape*, published monthly at 4012 Bridge Ave., Cleveland, Ohio 44113-3399 Cuyahoga County.

The Publisher of *Lawn & Landscape* is Ron Lowy, 4012 Bridge Ave., Cleveland Ohio 44113-3399.

The Editor is Cindy Code, 4012 Bridge Ave., Cleveland Ohio 44113-3399.

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

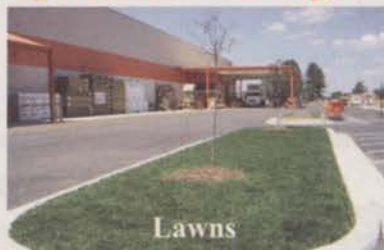
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Average number of copies each issue during proceeding 12 months, and of single issue nearest to filing date (September 2006), respectively, are as follows: Total number of copies printed (net press run) – 75,238 / 74,701; paid circulation sales through dealers and carriers, street vendors and counter sales – 0; paid and/or requested mail subscriptions – 72,892 / 71,777; free distribution by mail, carrier or other means (samples, complimentary or other free copies) – 1,621 / 1,673; Free distribution outside the mail – 725 / 1,251; total free distribution – 2,346 / 2,924; total – 75,238 / 74,701; copies not distributed (office use, leftover, unaccounted, spoiled) 0/0. Percentage of paid and/or requested circulation is 97% / 96%.

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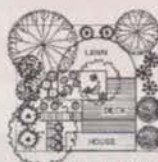
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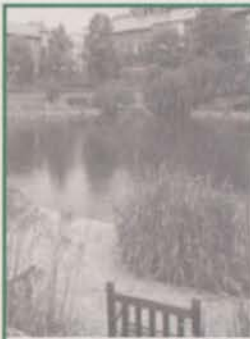
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The author is field safety and education manager for Wheeling, Ill.-based The Care of Trees. Reach him at jenberg@thecareoftrees.com.

## The Care of Trees Finds Leadership is Key to Safety

**T**ree care is a dangerous business and its workers have the highest accident rate of any job for a municipality, according to recent research conducted by the University of South Dakota. In fact, the most dangerous act you can do on the job is to remove a tree.

This sobering information is one reason The Care of Trees redoubled its emphasis on safety leadership. After years of focusing on our company's safety record, we had reached a consistent safety level, but we were not content. We wanted to get even better and become a zero-injury workplace.

"No one in our family gets hurt." This simple statement crystallizes our vision for our employee safety leadership program. We also borrowed H.O.P.E. (Hazards – things that can hurt us. Obstacles – things that we can hurt. Plan – isolate hazards, protect obstacles and get the job done. Equipment – right equipment for the job) from

ArborMaster Training as a simple way to remember the keys to our job briefings.

In March 2005, The Care of Trees commissioned Behavioral Science Technology (BST) in Ojai, Calif., to evaluate the company's safety leadership practices. The Care of Trees was the first tree care company to participate in the BST Strategic Safety Leadership program; some of the company's other clients have included DaimlerChrysler, Johnson & Johnson and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA).

The Care of Trees invests between 2 and 5 percent of its annual revenue into training programs, including those focused on safety leadership.

Focus groups, one-on-one interviews and in-depth surveys were conducted with hundreds of staff members – from ground crews to upper management. Approximately 700 hours during the company's standard work hours were needed to conduct the research and

### Three Key Factors to Safety Success

Among the major breakthroughs The Care of Trees had as they improved their safety leadership practices, three stand out as notable.

1. Whether your hourly workers believe you care about their safety is the most critical factor in success. They are on the front lines with customers every day, and their opinions of your company, whether positive or negative, affect the customers' experiences.
2. District managers play an important role in the hourly workers' experiences. District managers are the people within the company who usually have the most contact with hourly workers; they personify the company to employees. The workers' opinions of the entire company depend on their positive or negative perceptions of their district managers.
3. The effectiveness of leadership is a strong predictor of safety success. Working toward a zero-injury workplace begins with leadership throughout the entire company. By helping the management team strengthen their leadership skills, they become better performers not only in safety, but in all aspects of our business.



Photos: The Care of Trees

After years of focusing on its safety record, The Care of Trees reached a consistent safety level but still strived to become a zero-injury workplace.



implement the safety leadership program initiatives. Overall, the results were encouraging – The Care of Trees compared favorably to other companies in the areas of management credibility, the organization's value for safety, and employees' perception that the organization is concerned for their needs and interests.

The results also identified two key areas of improvement: employees' comfort levels in approaching others about safety, and the perceptions of workers regarding reporting injuries and incidents. These were major issues we needed to address aggressively.

We attacked these issues using different approaches. For example, we emphasized the importance of managers having risk conversations

with hourly workers on the job. At the jobsite, the manager or sales arborist asks the crew to identify the risks they will face and how they can eliminate or avoid them. While the manager may know many of the risks associated with a particular job, engaging in risk conversations demonstrates the manager wants to understand and address the risks the workers face.

When leaders consistently engage workers in risk conversations the workers are more likely to approach their coworkers on safety issues. Because the conversations reinforce a positive relationship with the district manager, they increase the likelihood the hourly workers will report injuries and incidents.

We believe leadership development is directly connected to a total safety

culture. Every manager participated in a confidential evaluation of their leadership skills. Once they received the results, each person met one-on-one with the BST consultant to interpret their results and learn ways to strengthen their skills.

After the regular meetings concluded, the managers received weekly e-mail reminders about their individual leadership goals.

BST advises that a significant reduction of injuries should not be expected until at least two years after the safety leadership program has been installed. The Care of Trees program has been in place for less than a year, but has already noted a lower frequency of injuries and significant reduction in the severity of injuries. – **Joe Engberg** <sup>LL</sup>

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# Lawn & Landscape

Leadership Awards:

## GIVING BACK

More business owners today are helping their local communities or volunteering their time for good causes to grow their businesses and better themselves as leaders.

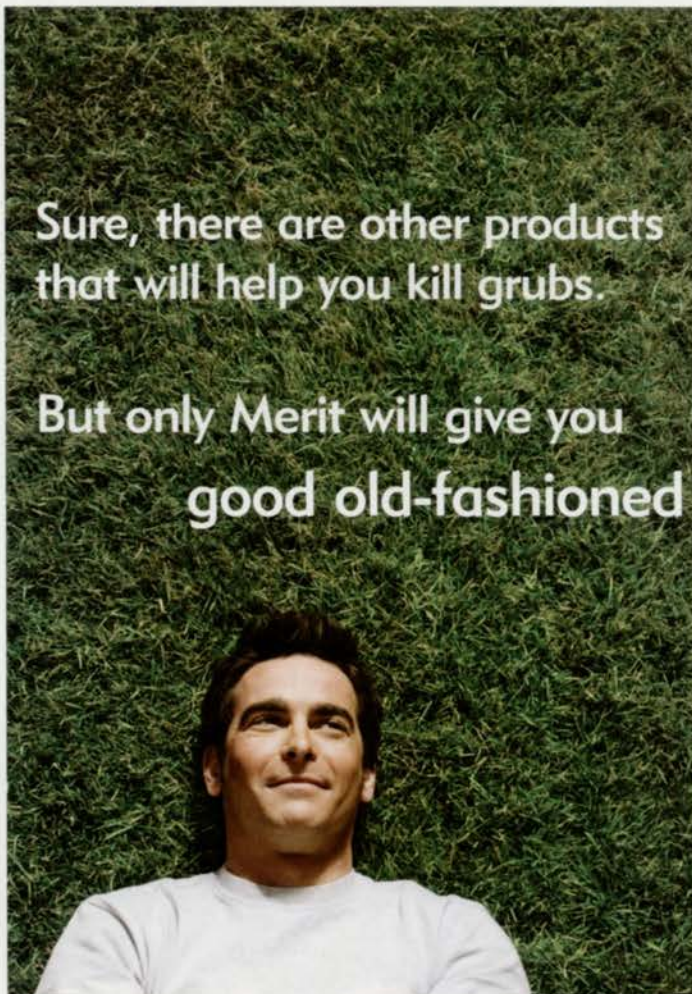
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**50 Frank Mariani**

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Gerry McCarthy's membership in more than 25 associations and clubs has made him a well-rounded business owner.

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Telling the pesticide user's side of the story is only part of Ed Walter's legacy.

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# giving back

In today's fast-paced business environment, entrepreneurs and amateurs alike struggle to balance their responsibilities in the workplace with those in their personal lives. Although this task is seemingly difficult for many, a leader can handle the task with relative ease.

An effective leader is an efficient one – one that manages his or her schedule wisely and allocates enough time to support the industry as well as other personal groups of interest. These individuals understand the importance of giving back.

There is a common misperception that giving back must involve a monetary gift to an individual or group that is less fortunate. Although this type of community service is extremely valuable, there are a variety of other ways to improve your professional and personal environment as well.



Neil Cleveland

At Bayer Environmental Science, we pride ourselves on the value-added services that we provide our industry. Some examples include:

- Our commitment to research and development, which allows us to bring new and improved solutions to the marketplace;
- Our continued effort to serve as an advocate for the green industry regarding all pending and potential legislation;
- Our support of local and national green industry organizations through board membership; and
- Our dedication to the industry's future that is manifested in our undergraduate scholarship programs.

We understand the challenges landscape and lawn care professionals encounter while trying to run a profitable, respected business. To prepare them for the issues they may face now or in the future, and to help them learn the best ways to run a more efficient business, Bayer Environmental Science created The Bayer Lawn Care Institute™.

Developed in connection with the Backed by Bayer™ product, training and service commitment, the focus of The Institute is to provide you with the resources and tools you need to develop a successful business. Initiatives such as the Bayer Lawn Care Institute™ and Backed by Bayer™ are a few of the most noteworthy ways in which we give a little something more to our customers. As a business owner, the opportunities are endless for you to give back to your community as well as to your employees. You'll find further information on the value-added services available through The Institute later in this issue.

The 2006 *Lawn & Landscape* Leadership Award winners highlighted in this publication have influenced other professionals in the industry not only due to their success as leaders in lawn care, but as valuable members of their own communities as well.

All of us at Bayer congratulate each of you on a job well done.

Best wishes for a successful year,

*Neil Cleveland,  
Director, U.S. Green Business  
Bayer Environmental Science*

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***"There is a common misperception that giving back must involve a monetary gift to an individual or group that is less fortunate. Although this type of community service is extremely valuable, there are a variety of other ways to improve your professional and personal environment as well."***

***— Neil Cleveland***

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# GIVING

# BACK





*More business owners today are helping their local communities or volunteering their time for good causes to grow their businesses and better themselves as leaders.*

Ninety-one percent of small-business owners contributed to their communities in the last year through volunteering, in-kind contributions and/or direct donations, according to a national small business poll by the National Federation of Independent Business Research Foundation.

While donations definitely help the organizations businesses support, many company owners find that volunteering their time proves to be a better experience. Volunteering can

good for you and your business – as long as it is the right fit.

**VOLUNTEERING TIPS.** Though giving back is a business practice many company owners choose to adopt, volunteers unfortunately sometimes wind up dreading the chore rather than finding it to be a rewarding and motivational experience. As such, if you want to volunteer, you need to do your homework to avoid disappointment. Here are some tips on



what you should look for before devoting your time and energy to a volunteer position.

**1. How will your time be spent?**

It's highly unlikely you would blindly accept a job without getting some facts. Find out all you can about the organization before you commit to volunteering for them. What are the organization's objectives? What goals have been reached? Who is the organization helping? Talk to the people who run the organization to find out what services they expect you to perform and how often. Are these services you want to perform? In addition, talk to other volunteers to find out if they actually enjoy volunteering for the organization.

**If you volunteer on a regular basis, you'll probably be put in charge of various projects. As you manage people other than your employees, you might gain a fresh perspective on your leadership role as a boss and business owner.**

**2. How does it benefit you?**

Be honest with yourself about your goals. If you are volunteering in part to gain exposure for your company, make sure that you do. If your motives are more personal, you should still ensure that you feel fulfilled in your service.

**3. Do what you love.**

Although you may be an excellent number cruncher, you may not want to spend your time volunteering as an unpaid accountant. As a volunteer, you may decide that human contact is more important than sitting behind a desk. The key is to volunteer doing something you love to do. It is not important that you use your skills from your business as a volunteer. Also, don't feel guilty if someone tries to peg-hole you into specific spots. A volunteer assignment is not a paying job, so remember to do what you love or have always had a desire to do.

**4. It's okay to say, 'No.'** Many times the staff at a nonprofit will see a good volunteer and ask for more service than the volunteer was originally willing to give. It is important to learn to say, "No, I can't do that." If you don't learn to say "No," more jobs will be piled upon you. Instead of volunteering five hours a week, you may suddenly find yourself at the nonprofit organization 12 hours a week. That extra time might considerably cut into time for yourself, your family or your business. In the end, you will wind up hating volunteering because it has become a weekly obligation that needs to be met rather than something you look forward to.

**5. Don't expect miracles.** In the nonprofit world, remember not to expect miracles. Progress may be very slow. If you had on your business hat, you know things would be different. Be patient. Remember to keep in mind that you are not the director of this organization and a little slow progress is better than none.

**BENEFITS OF VOLUNTEERING.**

Volunteering for seasonal events where you help serve food to the homeless on Thanksgiving Day or visit a children's hospital in December to help distribute toys are valuable experiences, but you'll get more out of volunteering if you make it a regular part of your life. From spending time with underprivileged youth to caring for animals in a shelter to delivering meals to the elderly, there are countless opportunities to make a difference in your community.

Not only will you benefit from the positive experience of helping others, but your business will, too. Consider the following ways that volunteering can give your business a boost.

- **Experience working with many different types of people.** When you volunteer, you will meet people from all walks of life and learn to work cooperatively with people holding views that can be quite different from your own. You'll also learn to relate to people in new ways, which can only help your managing skills and customer relations.

- **A network of contacts.** Through your volunteering work, you will meet other community leaders and business owners you might not have come into contact with otherwise.

- **Leadership skills.** If you volunteer on a regular basis, you'll probably be put in charge of various projects. As you manage people other than your employees, you might gain a fresh perspective on your leadership role as a boss and business owner.

- **Recognition and publicity.** Many people who volunteer receive awards for their work. Most often, they also receive free publicity because the award was presented at an event and covered by the local media. When they mention you, they'll mention your business, too.

- **New customers.** People like to support those who do good for others. Don't be surprised if you find your fellow volunteers – as well as their friends and families – frequenting your business. ♦

*This article was reprinted with the permission of the National Federation of Independent Business, a Washington, D.C.-based organization representing small and independent businesses across the United States. NFIB was recently ranked the most influential business organization and third overall in "Washington's Power 25" survey conducted by Fortune magazine. Check them out on the Internet at [www.nfib.com](http://www.nfib.com).*



## COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

**B**ecoming involved in community affairs and services makes good sense for businesses of all sizes. Involved companies become known as “neighbors and friends,” instead of just businesses out to make money.

During natural disasters and catastrophes, small companies reach out in many ways to help needy victims. These include finding or providing housing; supplying food, blankets or clothing; donating money; or enabling employees to take time off of work to volunteer to help without losing paychecks.

**Companies find that as community involvement increases (and employees intermingle more frequently with members of the community), employees begin treating customers with added respect, thoughtfulness and courtesy. This lays a foundation for excellence in customer service – perhaps the most important requirement for company growth.**

Small companies and independent businesses have opportunities every day to become involved in their communities. Proven avenues include:

- Donating items, money or employee time to community causes, such as charitable fund-raisers, walk-a-thons, biking events, substance-abuse programs, ongoing activities of non-profit organizations, etc.

- Providing schools and non-profit groups with furniture, supplies or employee involvement.
- Using and encouraging others to take advantage of energy reducing, environmentally friendly equipment and vehicles.
- Actively taking part in recycling programs and recycling whenever possible in day-to-day business operations.
- Committing a portion of profits to specific non-profit programs or organizations.
- Sponsoring employee and non-employee involvement in local charitable events.
- Contributing materials, funding and employee time to help build or refurbish buildings used by non-profit companies.

Small companies involved in community activities gain immeasurably. Community involvement gets the name of the company out to potential customers and enhances its reputation. Small companies that take part in community activities gradually become local “institutions” and are accepted by everyone as a vital, integral part of community life. Clearly, this is a tremendous way for businesses to be thought of by their customers.

Also, many companies find that as community involvement increases (and employees intermingle more frequently with members of the community), employees begin treating customers with added respect, thoughtfulness and courtesy. This lays a foundation for excellence in customer service – perhaps the most important requirement for company growth. – NFIB

# GIVING BACK: EXPERT ADVICE



**Brad Googins is executive director of the Center for Corporate Giving at Boston College ([www.bc.edu](http://www.bc.edu)). He talks about the unique position small business owners are in to reinvest in the communities that made them a success.**

**Q: What's the biggest challenge for small business owners in giving back?**

**Googins:** Everyone is knocking at a small business owner's door asking to donate to this or that cause. You can't possibly meet all the needs, so it's a matter of how to screen them without offending a neighborhood group. It puts small business owners in a heck of a bind.

**Q: What's a solution?**

**Googins:** To not think about only financial contributions because then you're one of a hundred or thousand companies giving a check. The involvement of your business in the community should go beyond giving a check. Ask yourself, "What can I do that's unique?" For instance, maybe it's a bakery giving free bread to a charity dinner.

**Q: How has corporate giving changed in the last few years?**

**Googins:** Today's company has to be much more strategic in its giving. Today's consumers make decisions not on traditional issues of quality, but on what kind of business you run. That's why it's important for a small business to focus on an issue, and get behind it in a way that makes a difference, rather than giving out \$25 gift certificates to every nonprofit in town.

**Q: How can giving help a small business's bottom line?**

**Googins:** Small business owners need to think of this as a competitive issue. If all of the stores on the street give a gift certificate to a cause, that doesn't give you any advantage. But if you can do something different, it can attract customers and the media. Be creative and look for a niche that isn't being filled.

**Q: How does a small business owner choose a cause to focus on?**

**Googins:** Ask yourself, "Is there an issue I get passionate about?" Don't let people knocking on your door determine where you give. The more you're giving is tied to your interests, the more you personally will prosper. — *NFIB*



## Bayer Lawn Care Institute™

RUNNING A LAWN CARE BUSINESS BRINGS A NEW SET OF CHALLENGES AND DECISIONS EVERY DAY. At Bayer Environmental Science, we know that selecting pesticides is only one of the many decisions you face. Whether it's growing your customer base, retaining good employees, or keeping overhead costs in check, the list can be long and daunting.

We want to help.

We're announcing a new initiative for the lawn care market called the Bayer Lawn Care Institute™. In addition to identifying current and future industry trends that will affect your business, the Institute will provide free resources to help you overcome challenges and make smart decisions.

Our hope is that the Bayer Lawn Care Institute™ will support your efforts to build a more successful, more profitable business.

### Don't Miss the 2007

#### Healthy Lawns, Healthy Business Summits

*Sponsored by the Bayer Lawn Care Institute™*

January 25	Gaylord Texan, Dallas, Texas
January 30	Sheraton Westport Plaza, St. Louis, Mo.
February 6	Hilton Garden Inn, Baltimore, Md.
February 8	Marriott Oakbrook, Chicago, Ill.
February 13	Renaissance Hotel, Orlando, Fl.
February 20	Ritz-Carlton, Cleveland, Ohio
February 22	Sandestin Hilton, Destin, Fl.
TBD	Providence, RI

For more information on the Bayer Lawn Care Institute™ and the Healthy Lawns, Healthy Business Summits, contact your Bayer field sales representative. If you're attending the Green Industry Conference, stop by our booth #2032 to learn more.

## HELP IN HELPING OTHERS

**H**ere are some resources for more ideas or assistance in setting up your own community service program:

- The Foundation Incubator, at [www.foundationincubator.org](http://www.foundationincubator.org), is a boot camp for philanthropic ventures, with support staff, office space and advice on everything from legal issues to giving strategies. Member foundations spend six months to three years in residence at the incubator in Palo Alto, Calif., to learn the essentials of effective philanthropy.
- Better Business Bureau Wise Giving Alliance – [www.give.org](http://www.give.org).
- Its Deductible is a software program that typically sells for \$29.95 and determines and tracks the proper fair market value of donations, while maximizing taxpayer savings. Most people have no idea what the fair market value of their gift is worth. For more information, call 800-976-5358, or go to [www.itsdeductible.com](http://www.itsdeductible.com).
- Business for Social Responsibility, online at [www.bsr.org](http://www.bsr.org), focuses on giving businesses hands-on guidance in setting up social programs.
- *Business Ethics* magazine offers articles on corporate social responsibility and a free e-newsletter. Go to [www.business-ethics.com](http://www.business-ethics.com).
- NewTithing Group offers a calculator at [www.newtithing.com](http://www.newtithing.com) that will calculate market conditions into your annual budget so you can determine your charitable comfort level.
- GiveForChange centralizes hundreds of nonprofits online, and lets you donate over the Internet, at [www.giveforchange.com](http://www.giveforchange.com).
- Volunteer For Change lists volunteer opportunities at more than 20,000 nonprofits and public sector organizations nationwide.
- GuideStar, at [www.guidestar.org](http://www.guidestar.org), lets you check out any organization and determine what percentage of your donations are actually going to the cause, as opposed to staff salaries and overhead.
- The American Institute of Philanthropy offers tips on giving, as well as a list of top-rated charities, on its Web site, [www.charitywatch.org](http://www.charitywatch.org). For a copy of its Charity Rating Guide and Watchdog Report, call 301-913-5200, or send \$3 to: AIP, 4905 Del Ray Ave., Suite 300, Bethesda, Md. 20814. – NFIB





Bayer  
Environmental Science

# Bayer Supports Arbor Industry as Tour de Trees Silver Leaf Sponsor

*Sponsorship supports Tree Research and Education Endowment Fund.*

This year, Bayer Environmental Science, Research Triangle Park, N.C., donated \$3,000 to sponsor the Tree Research and Education Endowment (TREE) Fund's Tour de Trees. An annual seven-day cycling event covering more than 500 miles, the Tour de Trees supports continued research for the advancement of tree care.

As a Silver Leaf Sponsor, Bayer also aided in the TREE Fund's promotion of the importance of urban and community forests. Cyclers made an immediate impact in communities in both the United States and Canada as they planted trees in select locations along the tour.

In its 15th year, the Tour de Trees has raised more than \$2 million for tree research and education. The Tour de Trees

event kicked off in Thunder Bay, Ontario, Canada, on July 23, and wrapped up in Minneapolis, Minn., on July 30. The conclusion of the tour coincided with the International Society for Arboriculture's Annual Conference and Summer Field Days, which took place in Minneapolis, Minn., July 29 through Aug. 2.

The International Society for Arboriculture (ISA) has served the tree care industry for more than 80 years as a scientific and educational organization. Today, there are more than 16,000 ISA members around the world. At this year's annual conference, Bayer was one of more than 100 exhibitors in attendance, showcasing the latest advancements in the tree care industry.

## Bayer Introduces New Formulation of Merit® Insecticide for the Tree Care Market

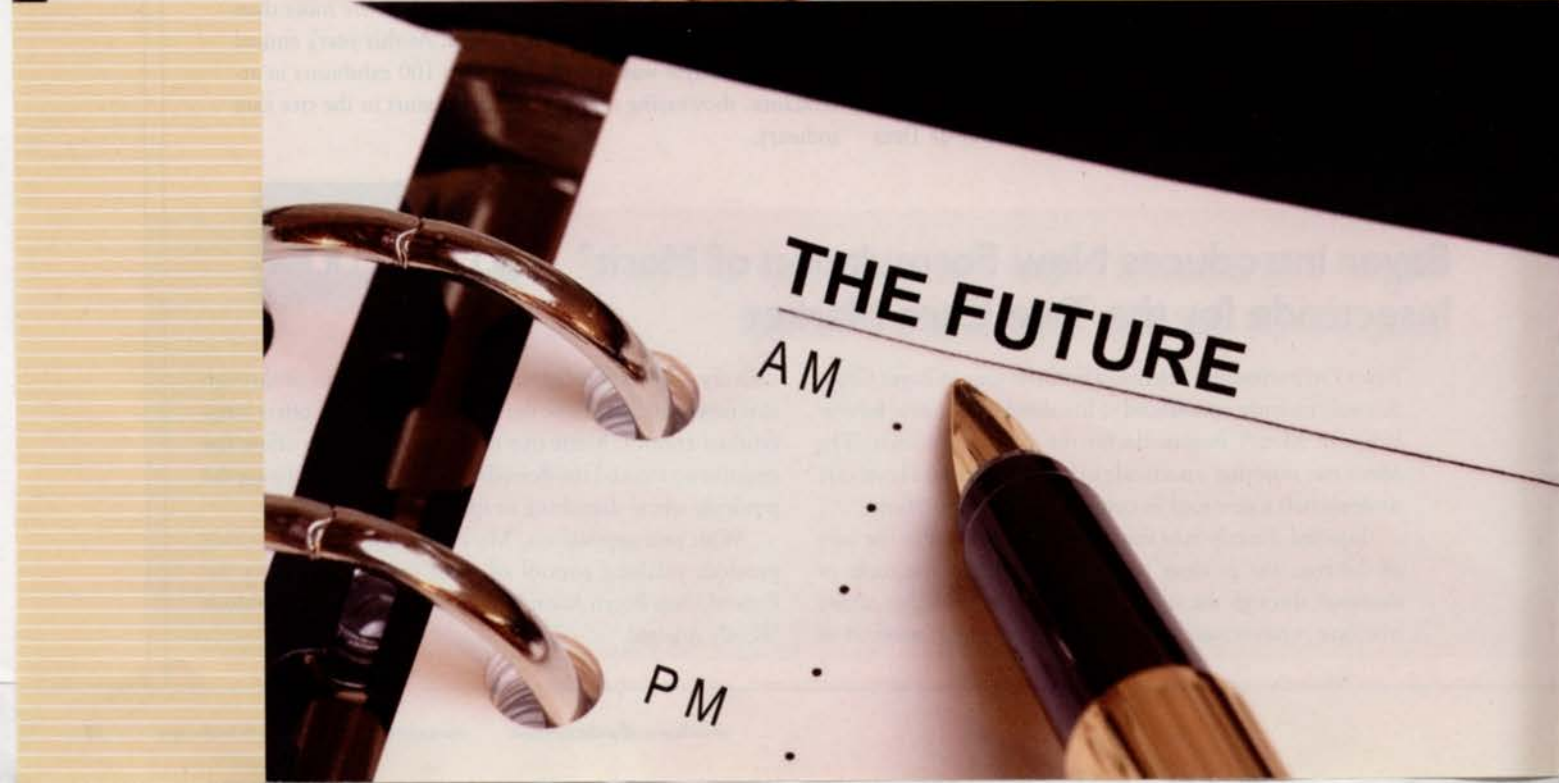
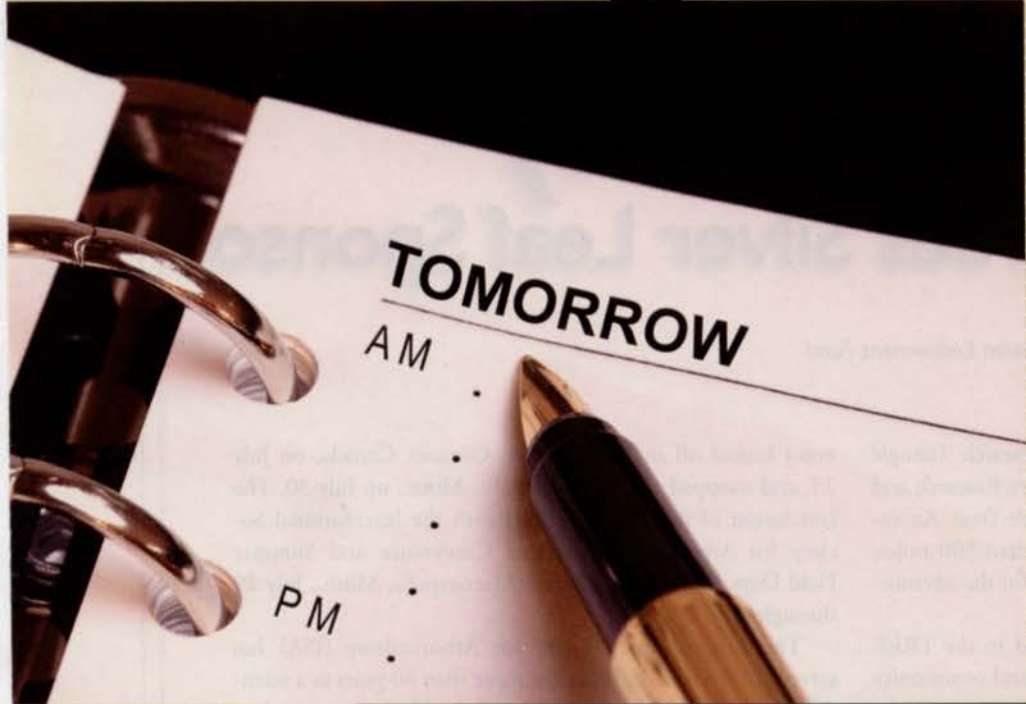
**MERIT®**

Bayer Environmental Science, a business unit of Bayer CropScience, recently announced it has developed a new formulation of Merit® insecticide for the tree care market. The Merit tree injection insecticide offers arborists and lawn care professionals a new tool in controlling pest infestations.

Injected directly into the tree or into the soil at the base of the tree, the product is taken up through the roots or absorbed through the foliage. This new formulation allows tree care professionals to choose their preferred method of

delivery – either through traditional application or through this new method. While the traditional method offers long-residual control, Merit tree injection insecticide offers fast curative action and the flexibility for professionals to use the pesticide where drenching or spraying is not feasible.

With one application, Merit tree injection insecticide provides yearlong control of most insects, including the Emerald Ash Borer, Asian Longhorned Beetle and Hemlock Woolly Adelgid.





# scheduling SMARTS

( By Keith Rosen )

*Sometimes making time for community service or volunteering as a business owner means better day-to-day scheduling — one popular concept is called time blocking.*

Time blocking is the art of allocating blocks of designated time for specific tasks throughout the day that are aligned with your goals and the realistic number of hours you have each day, while keeping your life in balance. If you haven't already, I suggest you make a list and prioritize the tasks to be included in your daily routine along with established time lines for each.

For example, if you have a nine-hour workday, you realistically have about eight hours (or less) to use to position various tasks within your schedule. I say only eight hours of actual task time because you should build in some buffer time throughout your day for those activities that either take longer than expected or would typically fly under your radar when planning (i.e. unscheduled meetings, traffic, emergencies, new projects, family/client demands, etc.)

You may also encounter certain sporadic, yet consistent activities that take up a portion of your day, such as personal errands, phone calls, e-mails, prospecting, administrative duties, managing employees, writing proposals, training, meetings or other work-related tasks.

Consider allocating blocks of time for each activity during certain intervals throughout your day to handle them rather than having these activities get in the way of the activities that would move you closer to achieving your goals, such as prospecting. For example, instead of being interrupted by incoming calls or e-mails throughout the day, try blocking out specific portions of your day to make and return calls or respond to e-mails.

Many people complain that their workflow is constantly being interrupted by phone calls or incoming e-mails. As such, they feel compelled to either take those calls or respond to an e-mail as soon as it hits their inbox, which distracts them from the initial activity they were involved in and disrupts their focus.

### ARE YOU INTERRUPT-DRIVEN?

Do you become easily distracted by situations, new tasks or people rather than maintaining focus on your goals? Consider for a moment that if your e-mail program is set to download e-mail every five minutes, in essence, you are scheduling an interruption or distraction for yourself every five minutes.

While many people feel the need to multi-task, there are many similarities between managing your mind-set and managing your schedule. Each activity or task that you engage in requires a change in your direction, both in action and in thought. As such, each task requires a shift in your mind-set and thought pro-

cess, focus, action and energy, skills and resources, and desired outcome.

If you spend time prospecting or cold calling, I would suggest separating new prospect calls with follow-up calls. When you shift the focus of your energy and thoughts, you are taking up time. Whether it's 10 seconds or 10 minutes, that time is compounded over days, months and years. For example, let's say for every five minutes you check your incoming e-mails, you are losing one minute. That's 12 minutes per hour. In an eight-hour workday, consider that you are losing at least one hour and 36 minutes every day.

If you are a creative person, there's a

different mind-set that's required when creating a marketing piece, writing an article or answering a phone call or an e-mail. Allowing certain interruptions can surely stall or block the flow of creativity, affecting your level of productivity.

Consider this solution: Change the time you have your e-mail program set to receive e-mails from every five or 10 minutes to every four or two hours.

To determine a realistic frequency when it comes to checking your e-mail, ask yourself these questions:

1. "Are the bulk of my e-mails time sensitive? Does my ability to quickly respond to an e-mail determine whether or not I will earn a new client's business?"

## TREAT EVERYTHING AS AN APPOINTMENT

**H**ard to complete your to-do list? Wondering why you just can't seem to get it all done? If you've ever wondered why you are unable to get through all of your tasks in a day even with your best intentions, consider that there are certain tasks that fly under your radar when scheduling your days.

To effectively manage your schedule and get everything done, try this approach. If it takes up time, consider it an appointment and schedule it into your routine.

For example, getting ready in the morning, having breakfast, dropping the kids off at school, your commute to work, drive time to appointments, managing your e-mails and phone calls, writing a proposal, even personal and leisure time are just some of the activities that need to be scheduled into your routine.

Assign designated blocks of time for each task or activity throughout your day. Most importantly, develop a healthier relationship with time by underpromising on personal and professional deadlines so that time becomes your ally instead of your adversary.

Treating every activity as an appointment will allow you to plan better. It will also keep you realistic about what you feel you can and cannot do throughout your day so that you can perform each task with a conscious intention without the stress normally associated with trying to Do it all. — *Keith Rosen*

11	12	07 <sup>00</sup>	
18	19	08 <sup>00</sup>	
25	26	09 <sup>00</sup>	
06		10 <sup>00</sup>	Meeting
5	5	11 <sup>00</sup>	
2	3	12 <sup>00</sup>	
9	10	13 <sup>00</sup>	
16	17		
23	24		
30	31		
6	7		



## PLAN FOR THE UNPLANNED

**T**here's essentially three reasons why we find it so challenging to adhere to our schedule and complete our to-do list:

1. Not being realistic with our time line and, as a result, having too many activities scheduled in a day.
2. Not engaging in activities that support our goals.
3. Not planning for the unplanned, also known as "externalities."

These externalities often go unnoticed and fly under our radar screen when attempting to map out our week. They have a tendency to eat up our days. These externalities can take on the form of errands or household chores, the kids' carpool, time on the phone, traffic, a doctor's appointment, a project or proposal that you're now responsible for that has a rapidly approaching deadline, a conversation with a co-worker, television, Web surfing, meetings, e-mails, etc.

Now, since we don't have a crystal ball to inform us about the imminent things that unknowingly consume part of our day, imagine if you were actually able to plan for these tasks.

Distractions are events that you are not planning for – so plan for them. Here's an example. One of my clients shared with me that once a new customer procures her services, the unplanned begins happening immediately.irate customers call in and they want things addressed and handled immediately.

This client happens to be in the emergency restoration business. So, the only time she does get a call is

when people have experienced a disaster in their building or home, such as a fire or a flood. As you can imagine, it's probably hard to plan exactly when she receives these calls.

When calls come in, you can also imagine how the customers might sound – harried, upset, fearful, angry or uncertain of what is happening. And every time my client received a call like this in the past, she would be surprised, as if it were the first time she'd dealt with it.

When I asked her how long this had been going on, she said for 15 years, ever since she started her business. This would be similar to a doctor who works in the ER and is continually shocked at the number and degree of emergencies that come through the door.

The solution for this client was apparent. Instead of resisting the truth she began to embrace the truth, and the truth was that she is in the business of providing not only solutions to her customer's restoration nightmares but providing support, guidance and reassurance that it will all work out OK.

Instead of being continually shocked at how her customers react when calling her, she embraced this as part of her business and accepted the truth. Then, she was able to more effectively plan for it. She began to make the shift from being highly reactive to responsive and service-oriented by anticipating these situations rather than being shocked when they occur.

If you feel that there's no predictability or consistency throughout your days, consider this paradox: The fact that your days are unpredictable actually creates a certain degree of predictability. – *Keith Rosen*

2. "Can I still provide the same level of service to my customers, and not compromise my ability to attract new customers or perform my job effectively, if I respond to e-mails only twice a day?"

If creating time blocks to respond to e-mails or phone calls would compromise your ability to do your job effectively, then this strategy may not work for you. But I encourage you to take the next week to determine if there's a specific time throughout your day when you receive the bulk of time-sensitive e-mails. There still may be an opportunity for you to block out designated times for responding to calls and e-mails at less fre-

quent intervals than you are doing now.

The fact is, even if you change the frequency of when you check your e-mail from every five minutes to every 10 minutes, you have just cut the time you can lose from this distracting tactic in half.

Remember, this same strategy can be used for telephone calls. Whether it's once, twice or three times a day, you can allocate a designated block of time to make or return calls.

Become someone who is driven by goals rather than driven by distractions. The more effective you are at time blocking, the greater the quality of your life will be. If you are responsible for attracting

and retaining your customers, your ability to manage their expectations is a direct reflection of your ability to not only manage your schedule but your mind-set as well.

Make time your ally. Eliminate at least two hours of your workload each day and do more of the things you want to do. ♦

*The author is president of Profit Builders, a business consulting firm. He is also the author of Time Management for Sales Professionals and The Complete Idiot's Guide to Cold Calling, the latter of which has made it to the Top 50 Best Seller List on www.amazon.com. Reach him at 888-262-2450 or info@profitbuilders.com.*

## IF IT'S NOT SCHEDULED, DON'T DO IT

**W**hen something new comes up, whether it's a request from someone or a new project or idea, before you say "Yes" to yourself or others, look at your schedule and ask yourself, "Can I take this on right now?"

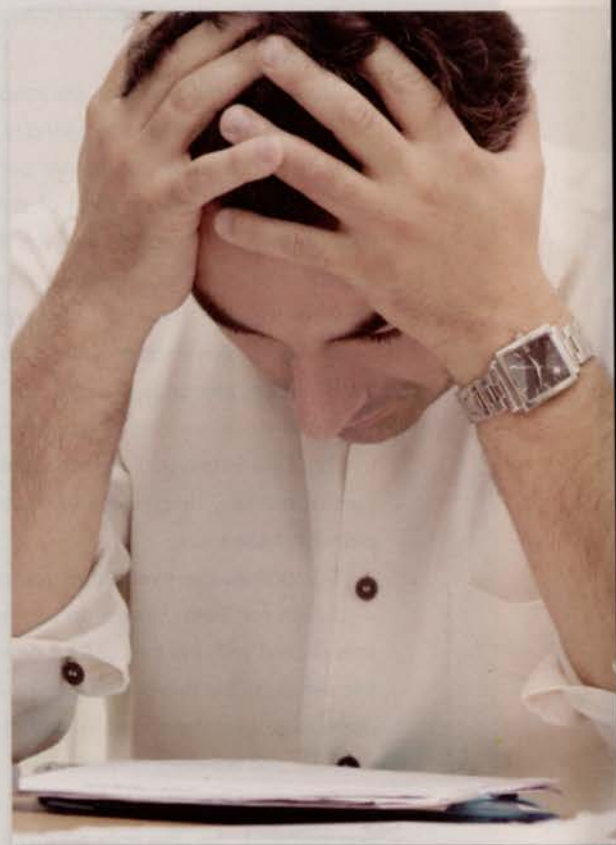
If it's not scheduled into your routine then chances are you don't have time for it. Instead, schedule that activity or task for a future time. Make an appointment for this task. Put it on your wish list. Otherwise, you'll find yourself doing everything except what you had originally intended.

This rule does have some flexibility, so use your best judgment. If the task that is pulling you away from your initial intention is considered a priority (a family situation, an emergency, a unique opportunity that supports your goals, an externality, a customer who is only able to meet with you at a certain time and not meeting with them can cost you their business, etc.), then clearly do it.

One of my clients recently had his second child – this is a life-changing event that clearly is highly important. If that's your priority, then own it, accept it and don't feel guilty for not honoring your routine. Something is going to have to give, even if that means taking time away from another scheduled activity.

Sometimes life has a tendency to get in the way of our plans. However, these sudden jolts to your routine are usually temporary. These occurrences are simply another opportunity to adjust your routine.

Exercise caution when choosing to engage in activities that will divert you from your planned activities. – Keith Rosen



## PRIORITIES VS. PERSONAL GOALS – WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

**B**y definition, priorities are things that are most important and meaningful in your life today (activities, values, beliefs, lifestyle, principles, standards, hobbies, etc.) that you are not willing to compromise in pursuit of something else (i.e. a goal). By definition, a goal is a future-based anticipated possibility or end result you are working toward creating or achieving that has not yet been realized.

Comparing the two, one is present-focused and one is future-focused – one is what is happening and what is what will or may be.

Here's an example: John had a goal of being a top producer in his company. So, he looked at the other top producers and the activities they engaged in. The top salespeople were working 12-hour days, sometimes seven days a week. Thinking, "It worked for them, so I guess I should do that too," he decided to give up a chunk of his family/personal time and other enjoyable activities/hobbies in his quest to become financially successful.

Although John's priority was spending time with his family, he didn't understand why he felt miserable and encountered resistance while attempting to achieve this goal. Once he created a personal strategy and a routine for achieving his own bigger goals that supported his lifestyle and priorities without having to sacrifice what matters most to him, he was able to reach his goals with less effort and enjoyed the process even more.

If you are encountering resistance while attempting to reach certain goals, chances are it's either something you really don't want to be doing, an old goal that may not serve you anymore (a should) or you are operating from someone else's agenda (also a should). The bottom line is, these

goals don't support your priorities and you'll continue to feel "off" throughout your pursuit of them.

Take the time to align your goals with your priorities. Otherwise, you'll feel confined or powerless to make changes, allowing situations or other people to influence or control you. Discover what you truly want in your life rather than just following the "shoulds."

In fact, "should-based goals" do not support your priorities. So, if you are unsure whether the goal classifies as a should, take a look at your lifestyle, values and priorities and see if they are all in alignment. If the goal doesn't support them, it's a "should."

At the end of the day, your goals need to be aligned with your priorities. Honor the priorities in your life by making them non-negotiable. Before you map out your goals, determine the priorities that you're not willing to sacrifice. This way, you can identify the activities you need to engage in and what you are willing to give up today (maybe

even a conscious, short-term sacrifice of certain priorities) in pursuit of a bigger dream tomorrow.

When your goals are aligned and balanced with your priorities, natural strengths and talents, you'll maintain your integrity, feel calmer and will experience greater peace of mind and fulfillment while traveling on your path to achieving bigger goals and meaningful, long lasting results.

Once you can orient your life around your priorities, you'll have fewer goals that you'll feel compelled to attain or be driven (consumed) by. If you design your life and career around what is most important to you on a daily basis, you'll avoid becoming hooked or attached to creating something 'better' at a future point in time, which can rob you of the quality of your life today. – *Keith Rosen*





# Power Over Fire Ants

*Three different site managers and the lawn care operators who maintain their properties share their stories about teaming up with Bayer Environmental Science to fight fire ants.*

Visiting the gravesite of a loved one is hard enough. Having to deal with fire ant mounds throughout the grounds makes it even harder. This is why Onslow Memorial Park, located in Jacksonville, N.C., will receive a donation of TopChoice™ fire ant control from Bayer Environmental Science and Freedom Lawns, a local lawn care company. TopChoice insecticide, a professionally applied product, eliminates fire ants for a full year with just one application.

"With so many visitors to our park each year, we can't take chances with fire ants. Our park environment should be one of peace and reflection, not annoyance and pain caused by fire ant stings," says Kerry Gibson, park director.

Built in 1952, this historical cemetery and park is currently in the process of renovations including a new mausoleum, expanded gardens and 33 new trees. Currently the cemetery holds more than 5,500 plots and sees about 180 burials per year.

"Fire ants are an issue in heavily-populated areas like Jacksonville and Wilmington, where families spend a lot of time outdoors," says Michael Owen, lawn and

landscape market specialist, Bayer Environmental Science. "To protect those spending a lot of time outside, grounds managers should consider a professionally-applied preventative insecticide like TopChoice."

Recent studies indicate that fire ants, which infest more than 325 million acres nationwide, sting more than 20 million adults and children each year. Studies also show that 10 to 15 percent of those stung by fire ants experience severe localized allergic reactions.

## **CLARENDON COUNTY, S.C. "TAKES A BITE OUT OF FIRE ANTS."**

Residents of Clarendon County, S.C. are also fed up with fire ants, and they're doing something about it. On Saturday, May 13, the county held its first "Take a Bite Out of Fire Ants" day where every resident was encouraged to protect their yards, pastures, parks and recreation areas and any other location that may be a host to fire ants.

"Fire ants are a serious issue in Clarendon County, and our goal is to greatly reduce the populations by treating 15 to 20 percent of land in the county and 40 to 50 percent of land in the urban areas," says Russell



*Andy Webber fills spreader with TopChoice™ insecticide for donation event at Camp Congaree (above). A South Carolina Sports Turf Managers Association technician applies TopChoice insecticide on the grounds of South Carolina girl scout camp (above left).*

Duncan, county extension agent, Clemson Extension Services. "We created some friendly competition by inviting every company who makes a fire ant product out to treat a designated area. This way we'll be able to follow-up down the road and see what product works the best."

The day began at 9 a.m. in Courthouse Square, where the Clarendon County Master Gardeners gave public demonstrations on different fire ant applications.

Information was distributed to discuss the health affects of fire ant bites. After lunch the focus was on professional applications and broadcast treatments. One such treatment was TopChoice fire ant control from Bayer Environmental Science. The product was applied to eight acres of the Clarendon County Recreation Complex, which includes baseball and soccer fields and a playground; all of which were infested with fire ants.

"TopChoice lasts a full year with just one professional application, so residents can be sure that fire ants will no longer be an

issue at the recreation complex," says Michael Owen, lawn and landscape market specialists, Bayer Environmental Science.

**FIGHTING FIRE ANTS AND BRINGING BACK OUT-DOOR FUN.** Last year the Girl Scouts attending Camp Congaree in Columbia, S.C. couldn't enjoy all of the outdoor activities during summer camp because there were too many fire ants. This summer was a different story, thanks to a 50-acre donation of TopChoice fire ant control from Bayer and the South Carolina Sports Turf Managers Association.

TopChoice insecticide is labeled for use on home lawns, commercial lawns, golf courses, sports fields, cemeteries, parks, school grounds and other recreational areas. It has been successfully used on tens of thousands of acres throughout the South including areas of Alabama, Arkansas, California, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, New Mexico, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee and Texas.

*There are many ways to give back during the holidays as a business owner – these top the list.*

# Share the SPIRIT

There are few, if any, better ways for a business to accomplish some genuine good and enhance its status as a corporate citizen of the community than by reaching out to those in need. Community outreach acknowledges a company's membership in the community, and during the holiday season – when needs are often more apparent and more pressing than at other times – you can find many opportunities to reach out and help.

An individual or company can, of course, always donate money to some worthy charity and turn away with the feeling of having done good. But true community outreach isn't always about money or the things it can buy; it's often about giving time and participation, about company employees at all levels becoming involved in the community. Woodrow Wilson once said, "Provision for others is a fundamental responsibility of human life." A company's community outreach fulfills that responsibility.

As the holiday season approaches, company representatives and employees acting alone or in groups can reach out in a number of ways and make a difference in the community. A few outreach opportunities follow.

In many towns, holiday dinners are provided at homeless shelters, missions and senior citizen activity centers. The sponsoring organizations that run these dinners always need donations for food or volunteers to help with preparation and serving. For example, in one community, a small team of middle managers regularly serves Thanksgiving dinner at a homeless shelter.

Almost every community has active channels for donating

food and usable clothing. You need not look beyond a few churches or a local community center to find a food pantry or clothing depot. These centers take donations from businesses as well as individuals, and a team of employees working to round up food and clothing could accomplish a great deal in short order. The employees of one inner-city health services organization adopted the practice of assembling Thanksgiving and Christmas food baskets for needy families in the community.

Some nationally known outreach programs welcome individual and corporate participation. Toys for Tots provides toys at Christmas to needy and underprivileged children. Sponsored by the U.S. Marine Corps, Toys for Tots has centers in most cities and has received and distributed toys since 1947. Another program providing gifts for children who might otherwise go without is the Salvation Army Angel Tree. Most churches in the community can provide information about this particular outreach, which primarily provides gifts for children of imprisoned parents.

Hospitals and nursing homes always need volunteers, and that need becomes more pressing during the holidays when the staff is slim. Most nursing homes always have a few elderly residents who have outlived friends and family and have no one to bring them small gifts or brighten up their days. Sometimes volunteering can consist of no more than visiting with or reading to someone who is alone and limited to a bed, chair or single room. Hospices can also use volunteers during the holiday season. Some of the smaller, independent hospices need supplies and equipment.





Most local chambers of commerce sponsor holiday activities and would welcome a company's volunteerism as well. In one community, a local business group sponsors a yearly "Train Ride with Santa Claus" using the facilities of an old, now largely inoperative regional railroad.

And, as elementary as this may sound, don't neglect the effects of holiday decorating or published greetings to the community. One manufacturing company gained a reputation for its 20-foot Christmas card, placed in front of its plant each year. Also, a number of companies regularly publish a yearly message of goodwill and best wishes in their local newspapers.

Some company management groups have paid little attention to involvement in their communities, preferring

to exist in a social and geographic vacuum. This posture, however, can lead to de facto isolation of a company at a time when it may need the support and good will of the community. But the company that reaches out – the true corporate citizen of the community – will rarely find itself isolated. ♦

*This article was reprinted with the permission of the National Federation of Independent Business, a Washington, D.C.-based organization representing small and independent businesses across the United States. NFIB was recently ranked the most influential business organization and third overall in "Washington's Power 25" survey conducted by Fortune magazine. Check them out on the Internet at [www.nfib.com](http://www.nfib.com).*

*When many charities and organizations ask a business owner for his money and time, it's inevitable that a full schedule book will prevent him from saying "yes" to every request.*

# YESAHOLICS

## Anonymous

( By Keith Rosen )

My wife and I are in the final stages of building our new home. We're in the ninth month of a four-month project, so I believe the job is almost done.

While my contractor does fabulous work, he didn't honor any of his time lines. At least he's the only one who accrues expenses for every additional day the job takes to complete, right? Not exactly.

In truth, this project was always a nine-month project, but he didn't want to tell me that. Instead, he wanted to keep me "happy." My contractor thought telling me what I wanted to hear would make me happy. Happy I had to extend my stay in temporary housing. Happy I'm billed every additional month for storage. Happy I'm paying my mortgage and utilities without living in my home. Happy my wife and I planned our lives (including school for three children) around a four-month time line. As you can imagine, I'm the farthest thing from being "happy."

You can make more money, have happier customers, generate more referrals and deal with fewer headaches if you could simply be more honest. I'm not suggesting that my contractor is lying by doing something illegal or immoral – the fact is I trust

him 100 percent. But if he was honest about what he knew to be true and shared this with his customers (even if they don't like what he's saying), they would have a better experience. The same goes for charitable contributions and volunteer efforts. If a business owner is more honest about his time, these organizations will appreciate him more.

For example, have you ever said "yes" when you're better off saying "no?" Have you made promises you can't keep or struggle to honor? Do you have a hard time telling the customer the truth about how long a project may actually take or cost? Do you withhold information from your customers that you know they want or need to hear in fear of a confrontation or losing a sale? Do you believe you need to please people for them to like you? Is your schedule frequently overbooked? If so, you may be a "Yesaholic."

When you instinctively say "yes" first without thinking whether you can realistically deliver on that time line or expectation, you always have the best intentions in mind. You believe you can "do it all." Yet, think about what happens when you promise to deliver on something and you're not able to? How does that make you and the other person feel?

Saying "no" is often perceived as a bad thing. After all, you don't want to say "no" and fear letting someone down, looking bad or losing a sale. The irony is if you inevitably say "yes" all of the time to keep everyone happy and don't follow through with your commitments, you wind up creating what you wanted to avoid from the start – letting others down and creating stressful situations that cost time, money and problems by continually overcommitting and not delivering.



Being honest and honoring your boundaries (saying “no”) is an attractive trait. People respect those who have strong boundaries.

The next time someone asks you to do something (including promises you make to yourself), give yourself the time to process their requests by saying, “Let me check my schedule and I will get back to you,” or “Thanks for the opportunity. I will consider it.” Then, ask yourself these five important questions before you respond. (How important are these questions? In terms of a measurable cost, these questions would have saved my contractor \$32,200).

1. “Is this something I really want to be doing?”
2. “Is this something I have to do?” (It supports my goals, responsibilities, lifestyle, priorities, etc.)
3. “Can I meet this person’s expectations?”

4. “Do I really have time for this?” (Are there other activities you have committed to that take priority?)

5. “What is a reasonable deadline/expectation I can commit to in the absolute worst case scenario?” (If you plan for the worst, you build buffers into your schedule that enable you to handle unforeseen problems while still honoring your commitments. The result? You look like a hero.)

After practicing this a few times, you’ll see the benefits since your life will become easier once you eliminate the problems that result from overcommitting. Remember, either you run your life or other people and circumstances do. ♦

*The author is president of Profit Builders, a business consulting firm, and the author of Time Management for Sales Professionals. Reach him at 888-262-2450 or [info@profitbuilders.com](mailto:info@profitbuilders.com).*

*Start the next year off right  
with some resolutions to better  
your personal and professional life.*

( By Keith Rosen )

# 10 LEADERSHIP RESOLUTIONS

The New Year brings the opportunity for change. For many of us, it's the time to think about resolutions. Often these resolutions are the same ones that we make every year or the ones we only stick to for a few weeks.

If you have ever struggled to keep your New Year's resolutions, consider that your goals and the strategies you have in place to achieve them may not be serving you best.

Resolution is defined as, "the process of reducing to simpler form," which brings us to the paradox of resolutions: Instead of simplifying our lives, we wind up dumping more tasks, goals or projects on our "to-do list," thinking that by achieving more, our lives will be more fulfilling and successful in the New Year.

To make and keep your resolutions with the least amount of effort, follow these 10 resolutions that will enable you to maximize your potential and manage your life.

**1. Quit Tolerating.** To attract new and better opportunities and results, first clear out what's clogging up your life to create the space for the better stuff to show up. List the things you're putting up with that limit productivity, cause stress and waste time and energy. Then determine what needs to happen to eliminate these tolerances. If you no longer accept being dragged down by unwanted events, problems or other people's behavior, you'll stop wasting time managing situations that shouldn't be there anyway.

**2. Play Your Game.** The best game to play is the one where you make up your own rules. If you're encountering resistance in reaching some goals, chances are it's something you

really don't want to be doing. Take the time to discover what you truly want by aligning your goals with your priorities.

**3. Create A Winning Routine.** Busy with tasks that consume you? Feel that you're fighting the clock? Design a weekly routine that complements your goals so you can focus on the activities that support your objectives and enhance your lifestyle. Develop a healthier relationship with time by underpromising on personal/professional deadlines so that time becomes your ally instead of your adversary. To develop a highly effective routine, get organized, eliminate distractions, reduce stress and manage your tasks in order to reach and exceed your goals.

**4. Have Fun.** Let's face it; this isn't our practice life. Are you doing the things that bring you the most joy? Find time every day that's yours. Shift your binoculars around to magnify your achievements rather than what you didn't do.

**5. Deepen Your Learning.** While we attract what we need to learn, we often resist the lessons. If similar problems keep reappearing, we missed the lesson. To accelerate success, learn from every experience and person in order to grow and move onto a new and better path.

**6. Expand Your Vision.** What does your ideal life look like? The fact is, we never grow past what we feel is possible. Let go of the current perceptions inhibiting your ability to explore greater possibilities and achieve more. Clarify what success looks like in every area of your life (career, relationships, health, environment, etc.). It's easier to create something great when you know exactly what you're looking for.



**7. Transcend Your Beliefs.** The Korean War Veterans Memorial says, "Freedom is not free." This holds true for our thoughts as well. Old limiting beliefs often keep us prisoner, preventing us from creating greater successes. Your outlook determines your outcome. So if you believe, "The past is responsible for the quality of my life today," "Success requires sacrifice," or "This is as good as it gets," consider challenging these assumptions and replacing them with healthier ones that would better serve you. Upgrade and direct your beliefs without letting them control you.

**8. Do Complete Work.** You don't have to achieve every resolution at once. Instead of stopping and starting something, pick one thing you want to change, create or finish, and commit to seeing it through to completion. Then move on to the next project. Otherwise, consider that you may be an adrenaline junkie and love the rush associated when working on overdrive. To prevent sporadic results and a pile of unfinished projects, get off the adrenaline train and start creating the momentum to produce consistent, long-lasting results.

**9. Focus On the Present.** Although planning for the New Year is productive, during our quest to achieve more we often lose sight of what is occurring today, preventing us from enjoying the hidden gifts or treasures that are already present in our lives. Keep focused on what is occurring now as opposed to what happened yesterday or what will be in the future. Live for today while planning for tomorrow.

**10. Fear Less.** Every year we want more but fear prevents us from taking risks, so we continually produce similar results. Since fear is the negative assumption of the outcome, shift your focus towards the positive outcome or what you do want to manifest, instead of what you are looking to avoid. ♦

*The author is president of Profit Builders, a business consulting firm. He is also the author of Time Management for Sales Professionals and The Complete Idiot's Guide to Cold Calling, the latter of which has made it to the Top 50 Best Seller List on [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com). Reach him at 888-262-2450 or [info@profitbuilders.com](mailto:info@profitbuilders.com).*



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## The Class of 1999

Fire ants a problem at your school?



Bayer  
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## Kick Fire Ants Out of School

Bayer Environmental Science offers schools special rate on TopChoice™ fire ant control.

Bayer Environmental Science once again held its Fire Ant Free Schools Program in 2006, which offered qualified public and private schools one free bag of TopChoice™, the company's revolutionary fire ant prevention technology, with every two bags purchased. The 2006 promotion was available to schools Apr. 1 through Oct. 31. TopChoice, a granular insecticide spread over turf like fertilizer, both controls and prevents fire ants for one year with a single, professional application.

"Bayer realizes that schools are zero-tolerance zones when it comes to fire ants. We believe that the best way to combat fire ant infestations is to prevent them in the first place," says Bryan Gooch, business manager, insecticides, Bayer Environmental Science.

Fire ants, which currently infest more than 325 million acres across the southern U.S., pose a serious and growing public health threat – injuring more than 20 million people each year with their stings. A full-blown colony of fire ants can number up to 500,000 members. When disturbed, hundreds, sometimes thousands of ants, will attack an intruder, inflicting painful stings that, in the most severe cases, can be life threatening. Studies show that 10 to 15 percent of those stung by fire ants experience severe localized allergic reactions.

Next year's program will kick off in spring 2007. For more information about TopChoice, visit [www.nofireants.com](http://www.nofireants.com), contact your local Bayer ES sales representative, or Bayer customer service at 1-800-331-2867.

## WANTED: 2006 Bayer Undergraduate Scholarship Applicants

Scholarships were awarded to 38 students in 2005.

For more than 20 years, students have been recognized for their pursuit of careers in various agricultural fields through the Bayer Environmental Science Turf Scholarship Program. Each year, the company awards scholarships to students that have demonstrated excellence in green industry majors at colleges throughout the country. The one-time scholarships range from \$500 to \$1,000 and are awarded based on academics, merit, and leadership ability.

In 2005, scholarships were awarded

to 38 notable students. The new year marks an opportunity for the next round of students to be distinguished. The Turf Scholarship Program allows students to interact with industry professionals. This experience inspires students to continue their education.

Applications for the Turf Scholarship Program are currently being accepted. Each Bayer sales representative will select students from their territory who are enrolled in agricultural courses at the university level. A college or university is

given a \$1,000 scholarship to award to one student, or two \$500 scholarships to award to two students. Recipients will be chosen throughout the course of the year.

For more information on the scholarship program or to request an application, you may contact Geneva Bowden at [geneva.bowden@bayercropscience.com](mailto:geneva.bowden@bayercropscience.com).





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**TOM HOFER**  
Spring-Green Lawn Care  
Plainfield, Ill.



**CHUCK MCINTIRE**  
Marietta, Ga.

# The Class of 2003



**SCOTT BRICKMAN**  
The Brickman Group  
Gaithersburg, Md.



**MARIA CANDLER**  
James River Grounds  
Management  
Glen Allen, Va.



**KIRK HURTO**  
TruGreen ChemLawn  
Delaware, Ohio



**LOU KOBUS**  
Fox Run Nurseries  
Mount Vernon, Va.

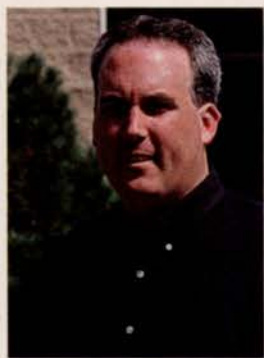


**JACK ROBERTSON**  
Jack Robertson  
Lawn Care  
Springfield, Ill.



**DAVID SNODGRASS**  
Dennis' Seven Dees  
Landscaping and Nurseries  
Portland, Ore.

# The Class of 2004



**DAN FOLEY**  
D. Foley Landscape  
Walpole, Mass.



**DAVID SHETLAR**  
The Ohio State  
University  
Columbus, Ohio



**JIM MCCUTCHEON**  
HighGrove Partners  
Austell, Ga.



**CONNIE HOM**  
Buckingham Greenery  
Buckingham, Va.



**BOB OTTLEY**  
One Step  
Tree & Lawn Care  
N. Chili, N.Y.



**HAROLD ENGER**  
Spring-Green  
Lawn Care  
Plainfield, Ill.

# The Class of 2005

# INTRODUCING...

*Lawn & Landscape* magazine and Bayer Environmental Science are proud to announce the winners of the eighth annual Leadership Awards. These individuals embody the essence of leadership, whether it's in their tireless industry involvement, pioneering spirit, dedication to education, commitment to personal improvement or environmental stewardship. We congratulate and thank them for their outstanding contributions to the lawn and landscape industry.



**BILL ARMAN**  
Landscape Development  
Valencia, Calif.



**ED WALTER**  
Washington Tree Service  
Shoreline, Wash.



**GERRY MCCARTHY**  
Mac's Landscaping  
Stoneham, Mass.



**ALAN WHITE**  
Turf Systems  
Burlington, Ontario  
Canada



**JOHN GIBSON**  
Swingle Lawn, Tree &  
Landscape Care  
Denver, Colo.



**FRANK MARIANI**  
Mariani Landscape  
Lake Bluff, Ill.

## The Class of 2006

# bill arman

With "Lead and they will follow" as his mantra,

Bill Arman inspires others to aspire.

**A**sk Bill Arman about leadership and he provides a patchwork of traits that comprise the ideal employee's DNA. This individual, according to Arman's definition, is a communicator, coordinator, collaborator and coach. He or she should be a good listener, but at the same time provide crystal-clear clarity of what is expected of the team and from each individual. A leader is achievement-oriented and has a can-do attitude. He or she is passionate, yet humble.

"A leader is one who inspires people to aspire," says Arman, the president of landscape maintenance for Valencia, Calif.-based Landscape Development. "They help people get excited about being something better than what they are."

Ask people to define Bill Arman and they repeat many of these same traits.

"Bill is a real people person and deals with people in a very positive way," says Bob Scofield, a mentor, confidant and friend. "More than anyone, Bill gets nearly 100 percent effort out of the people working for him, and that's because he's a good leader."

"He loves interacting," says Gary Horton, Landscape Development's CEO. "He loves motivating. He loves crafting business systems that empower employees to work together within a group and succeed. Bill is very goal-oriented and is gifted in simplifying complex business strategies into steps and goals that every employee understands and relates to."

"Bill has a very outgoing, positive personality and he's a very good cheerleader," says Bruce Wilson, former president of Environmental Care and former vice president of ValleyCrest Cos.

This regard is a testament to Arman's time in and impact on

**Name: BILL ARMAN**

**Company: Landscape Development**

**Location: Valencia, Calif.**

**Career Highlights:**

- Earned a bachelor of science degree in ornamental horticulture from California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, Calif.
- 1976 – Joined ValleyCrest Cos. as a horticulturist trainee and moving up the ranks of leadership as supervisor, business developer and branch manager.
- 1982 – named vice president
- 1992 – Became regional vice president of maintenance operations in Southern California
- 2002 – Joined Landscape Development as president of the maintenance segment where he is charged with growing the maintenance operations in the Southern California market
- Volunteers for several organizations including Samaritans Purse, Habitat for Humanity, Mission San Juan Capistrano, Saddleback Community Church, PLANET and CLCA
- Nationally recognized speaker, giving seminars, workshops and keynote addresses to members of CLCA, PLANET and other associations and organizations
- Has served as advisor and chairman of the Cal Poly San Luis Obispo Environmental Horticultural Science Department advisory board

By Mike Zawacki





Photo: Bruce Morr

**"I recognized that, if I did it well, I could have a positive affect on people, and what I did had a positive impact on the world around me." – Bill Arman**

the green industry. Arman has shown leadership as an employee, as an advocate for the client and as a manager of people. And he has shared his attributes in the green industry as a business coach, mentor, educator and overall cheerleader, as well as in his community endeavors through groups such as Habitat for Humanity and Second Harvest Food Bank.

**PASSION BLOOMS.** All of his life, Arman has always been an outdoors guy. So in 1966 he couldn't resist the opportunity to fill in for his friend, Johnny Cox, for two weeks on a mowing route. He became a member of a landscape crew that tended to 90 homes. For those two weeks, Arman mowed lawns, picked up trash, edged and pulled a ton of weeds. While many 13-year-olds cringe at these physical chores, Arman loved it and excelled.

"When my buddy came back, they hired me full-time and let him go," Arman says, adding he continued to do this work for nine summers in a row.

After high school graduation, Arman enrolled in Pasadena City College and eventually transferred to California Polytechnic State University in San Luis

Obispo to take part in the school's ornamental horticulture program. "I didn't know if I'd every make any money, but back then I was just running on pure passion," Arman says.

To this day, Arman still feels this passion for working in the green industry.

"I recognized that in whatever I did, if I did it well, I could have a positive affect on people and what I did had a positive impact on the world around me," Arman says. "If I took care of a park or a plant or a tree, I helped create an environment that people could relax in and enjoy."

**SAMURAI LANDSCAPER.** Following graduation from Cal Poly in 1976, Arman planned to work for a reputable landscape company, learn the ropes and then start his own firm. "I had my future all planned out," he says. "Little did I know..."

Bruce Wilson, who managed operations for Green Valley Landscape, a commercial landscape maintenance company serving the San Francisco Bay area, which was owned at the time by Environmental

Industries (now known as ValleyCrest Cos.), recruited Arman a few months before he graduated from Cal Poly.

"In those days, we were trying to recruit the top students out of Cal Poly and Bill was the top student in his class," Wilson says. "He was not only very competent as a horticulturist, but he was pretty aggressive business-wise as well."

Despite his experience and degree, Arman started out on the bottom rung with a San Mateo maintenance crew. "I started off with a blower and hand shears," he says. "We had to hand trim around everything back then. I didn't get to drive a truck or work one of the cool lawn mowers."

If a new worker, such as Arman, showed promise, confidence and competence, the company assigned him to South San Francisco's West Park Projects. There, they hoped to make or break Arman under the guidance of the notorious Tak Ishida, a 5-foot, 4-inch "samurai-type garden warrior" superintendent, who had a reputation for being hard on newbie maintenance guys. In particular, he ate hort-grads for breakfast.

"Tak was tough," Arman says. "You really had to earn your stripes from him. He wouldn't talk or relate to you until you'd worked your way through the menial labor. He was tough as nails, but boy did I love it."

Arman excelled and soon left Ishida's crew for a supervisory position in the East Bay office, primarily working for Wilson, then the branch manager, two days a week. The experience exposed Arman to another facet of the business – management, purchasing, estimating and sales.

"Bill learned quickly," Wilson says. "He was more aggressive than many of our other people in wanting to push the company forward. Bill was always thinking about the big picture.



## identifying leadership

Effective leaders possess certain hallmark qualities, says Bill Arman. Some of these include:

- Leaders are good communicators and team builders.
- They're able to manage themselves and their time well.
- Leaders are humble, hungry and smart.
- They possess people and relationship-building skills.
- They are achievement-oriented with a good sense of urgency.
- Leaders are quick learners.
- Finally, leaders exercise sound ethics and morals and demonstrate consistent success behaviors.

# bill arman on giving back. . .

For example, water has been an issue in California for years and Bill pushed us on our need to develop a water strategy.”

The experience allowed Arman to hone his leadership style, which he attributes to Wilson's influence. As an emerging leader, Wilson encouraged Arman to remain patient, listen carefully and exercise compassion toward others. Likewise, when managing people, Wilson taught Arman to learn all the facts before taking action, avoid overreacting to situations and, most importantly, stay calm when under fire.

In 1978, after 18 months in the East Bay office, Arman accepted a superintendent position at the Orange County office in Southern California.

Bob Scofield, the office manager at the time, was immediately impressed with Arman's enthusiasm and passion for the job, both rare qualities in up-and-coming personnel. In fact, Scofield had problems filling the position because many young employees at the time were less interested in a maintenance career and more focused on landscape construction.

“Bill's knowledge of horticulture and his deep interest in field work immediately impressed me,” Scofield says. “He'd also taken the time and effort to learn and become good at conversational Spanish. With Hispanic workers making up a large part of our workforce, this became a great asset. It allowed him to relate quickly and receive the respect of those workers.”

In 1982, during a growth push into Southern California, Environmental Industries promoted Arman to Orange County branch manager. Improving service consistency became his first order of business. “I launched a basic fundamental training program that took place every Saturday for two hours and lasted 52 Saturdays,” Arman says, adding that he also developed a quality assurance program that measured jobsite quality and gave each worker six fundamental questions:

1. What are key activities or actions I am supposed to be doing?
2. How well am I supposed to do them? How am I measured?
3. How well am I doing? I know what is being measured, but how do I stack up?
4. What do I need to learn/how do

**Q. What does the term “giving back” mean to you?**

**A.** “It is far greater to give than to receive. To give back from where you have received is of the highest importance. I have truly been most fortunate to have been raised within a positive family, received a great education, enjoying a prosperous career and am living a very comfortable life beyond my expectations. To give back so that others may enjoy some bit of comfort or become better is one of the greatest satisfactions in life I have found.”

**Q. Describe a situation where you feel you gave back to the industry or your community due to a cause or effort you believed in and how this impacted you in your career.**

**A.** “Within the industry, I participated in the PLANET Membership Adopt-a-Contractor where I adopted a local small landscaper and have served as coach and mentor for seven years. Whenever you help teach others you learn more than the student. And with Cal Poly San Luis Obispo, I've served as guest lecturer for 28 years, advisory board and chairman for six years, internship sponsor for 30 years and fundraiser for 20 years. God, it's great to go back to the school I love and help students select careers and develop success behaviors. It is truly gratifying to meet students who I may have had an impact on after they graduate. I've also participated as a PLANET Student Career Days volunteer, I've certified schools as part of PLANET's school certification, and given numerous presentations and workshops over the past 25 years for PLANET, CLCA and other organizations.

“The great lesson on giving back is you get to meet great people who usually become great friends and/or help you become better. The more you give the greater you receive. I have more fantastic things happen to me as a result of giving than anyone could imagine.”

**Q. Who is one person you admire most for giving back and why?**

**A.** “Rick Warren, the author of *Purposed Driven Life* and the creator of the PEACE world-wide program. Warren's attitude in life is, ‘It's not about you.’”

**Q. What is one thing you do to teach your employees the value of giving back?**

**A.** “It's ‘Lead by example. Lead and they will follow.’ You need to allow time and opportunity to give back. Our company did an Extreme Makeover and donates time and talent to community projects. You need to have this as part of your company's culture, doctrine and vision.”

**Q. What are the top three things a lawn care operator or landscape contractor can do to establish a trend of giving back and start experiencing the benefits?**

**A.** “Lead by example; allow time and opportunity to give back; and make giving back to your industry and/or community a part of your company's culture, doctrine and vision.”

I need to behave to be successful? What skills do I need to develop?

5. What should I expect if I do all of this? What is the payoff? Recognition? Money? Promotion?

6. Where do I go if I fail? Is there room for failure? How do I get it back together?

and executed it to the best of his ability, despite his views to the contrary. "This attitude helped Bill in his career because backing these decisions, whether he agreed with them or not, didn't bog him down or distract him," Scofield says. "It was more common with other managers to hear

another and must be balanced and work in unison to achieve success."

"Bill was always able to balance these three areas," Scofield says. "His choices were well grounded in his commitment to not only do the right thing, but to do the right thing for all people – the customer, the employee and the company. I never saw Bill sacrifice one of those ideals for his own personal improvement. Bill always was the one to say, 'Wait, let's look at all aspects of this situation.' That commitment is why you'd find it hard to find anyone who'd say anything negative about him."

Arman's forward thinking contributed to his success as a branch manager, Wilson says. "Bill was always looking ahead and managing for the future," he says. "He was willing to invest in people today so that when growth opportunities appeared he could take advantage of them."

By 1992, Arman had ascended to vice president overseeing all maintenance operations in Southern California – a nearly \$25 million portfolio. During the 10 years Arman managed the Orange County Branch, business grew from \$1.5 million to \$8 million.

In 2000, ValleyCrest asked Arman to serve as its vice president of human resources where he specialized in the area of organizational development and was the primary architect for training, recruiting and performance management systems for the now \$500 million, 6,500 employee operation.

He began heavily recruiting the best and the brightest minds from as many as 20 college horticulture programs.

At the same time, Arman established a performance management review system and at its core he had the six questions he believed everyone needed to know the answers to for success.

After 18 months, Arman left ValleyCrest to head Landscape Development's maintenance segment.

Horton says Landscape Development was in search of a creative, ethical and gifted manager who was particularly committed to the landscape maintenance

## family matters

In this industry, the plants don't stop growing at 5 p.m., and there have been many long days where these tasks have kept Bill Arman away from home. Arman credits the support of his wife, Carrie, and family as the foundation for his professional success.

"My wife, Carrie, has been very patient and supportive during my career," Arman says. "Carrie serves as my greatest support, my cheerleader, sounding board, advisor, confidant and trusted ally. She also loves to split a good cabernet as often as we can to celebrate another end to a beautiful day. My kids allow me to take them on tree tours and put up with my passion for landscaping."

The secret, says Arman, is to maintain a work-life balance, which ensures time is made to tend to the important things in life outside of work. Through good planning and establishing a competent team in the workplace, Arman says he has been fortunate to be able to attend most school and sporting events.

"I have truly learned the importance of being in balance in life," Arman says. "I try very hard to recognize there needs to be a balance as life does travel by very quickly."

How can I get help to be successful?

"Every person who works for you needs to know the answers to each of these questions," Arman says. "If they don't, then you're a bad leader. The objective is to eliminate any misunderstanding as to where you stand. One critical component of a leader is to make it crystal clear what the expectations are."

Scofield observed Arman's evolution at Environmental Industries, both in the company's hierarchy and as a manager and leader.

Arman brought a positive approach to the workplace. He always positioned himself in the middle of strategic discussions, offering his views on the situation at hand, Scofield says. When a decision was made, Arman backed it 100 percent

through the scuttlebutt that so-and-so was unhappy with this decision or with what was happening. You never heard that about Bill. The people who worked with him saw him in a positive way. They saw a person who was always positive and not filling their ears with disagreements over what the company was doing."

Arman believes to achieve success he has to protect the interest of his company, provide value to the client and ensure a positive workplace for his employees. All are vital and none are negotiable. "It all starts and ends with people," he says. "The relationship between the three needs to be at the core of everything you do. A happy team produces happy customers and contributes to an overall sense of gratification. All three feed off of one

## Go ahead, make mistakes.

From a business perspective, promoting failure sounds like bizarre advice. But for Bill Arman, it's the hallmark of a successful leader.

As a leader, Bill Arman prefers not to micromanage employees and would rather get out of their way to let them make their own decisions.

"I don't want people to stand around and have me tell them what to do," he says. "Go out and make a decision, even if it fails."

Not making a decision is the easy path, but not necessarily the best one. When people make decisions or take actions that lead to failure, Arman believes these represent the best opportunities for learning.

"When failure happens and nothing is learned, then that truly is failure," he says. "When a failure occurs and the organization recognizes that as an opportunity for learning or system adjustment, then true learning occurs. If the organization can be truly honest about the review of failure of the event without attacking the person then the organization truly is closer to becoming a learning organization."

Arman understands when to cut an employee a break and when to hold him strictly accountable, says Gary Horton, Landscape Development CEO.

"There is no fudge room on safety or quality," Horton points out. "However, the human side of Bill and Landscape Development allows us to be compassionate and helpful with our employees."

Organizations must provide their employees with a sense of ownership and encouragement, as well as a set of parameters for decision making, Arman says.

"As long as a decision is ethical, legal, moral, safe, fun and profitable, employees should be encouraged to pursue it," he says. "If it meets with all of these criteria, then go for it."

industry. Arman fit that bill perfectly, he says. "Prior to Bill's arrival, Landscape Development had achieved great success in construction, but we had yet to focus on, nor achieve desired results, in maintenance," Horton says. "In Bill, we saw the potential for a real 'dean' of the industry to craft our policies and procedures and to, quite literally, lead us into the 21st century of landscape maintenance."

The position offered a new challenge and an opportunity for Arman to call the shots in a larger roll, Horton says, and to make a very strong imprint where his influence would be the primary one.

"Bill wanted to build a maintenance company 'in his image' from the ground up and Landscape Development allowed him to do so," Horton says. "Bill has been able to refine his business strategy down to three or four main programs, and he uses creative repetition to get his point across and achieve buy in."

As an example, Horton points to Arman's Quality Counts system for gauging the appearance of landscape maintenance jobs. Arman devoted months to visiting every Landscape Development job in Southern California to get a first-hand grip on the company's level of expertise and quality. "It's an objective measuring tool that looks at 18 key areas," Horton says. "The scores are used to focus attention on quality improvements, training, ranking based salary reviews, bonuses, sales presentations and terminations."

As president of the maintenance division, Arman wants to grow the maintenance operations in the Southern California market from 10 percent of total sales to 25 percent. Much of this growth — as much as 80 percent — will be organic and internal, Arman predicts, coming from re-centering the group on customer service and reconnecting with the client base. Some of the programs Arman has instituted to achieve this include:

- Ag/Hort Program that calls out the type and timing of key chemical applications with preemergents and fertilizers.
- New Job Start-Up Program that gives a

standard protocol for getting outside jobs started up and turned over correctly and professionally.

- Headcount Report, a quick labor budget tool performed monthly or when there is an addition or deletion of sales.

- Mind The Gap, a four step process to minimize the costs of untimely turnovers.

Key acquisitions of small- to mid-sized companies will generate the rest of the growth, Arman says. "We don't want the client to view us as an institution," he explains. "We want them to look at us as a mid- to small-sized company with high-quality abilities."

**THE GREATEST MEASURE.** You can't keep Arman out of the field.

Although he splits his time between recruiting trips, quality control, mentoring tomorrow's leaders and customer relation issues, Arman still finds time to get out on a work site one day a week. "If it's a big job, especially a new one, I go out and foreman the crew," he says. "Mostly, though, when I get out I'm pruning trees, picking up trash or pulling weeds."

Arman's old superintendent, Tak Ishida, would be proud, although he might not say so. Throughout his tenure in the industry, Arman can count many accomplishments, yet he considers establishing industry relationships as his greatest. "Establishing and sustaining quality life-long relationships is truly the greatest measure of success," he says. "The greatest accomplishment is to have helped others to be more successful and maybe, just maybe, they recognize that you had played a role in their success. Having recruited, hired, trained and mentored more than 200 people to supervisor, sales and manager positions has been an accomplishment of which I am very proud."

Taking into account filling in for his buddy when he was 13 years old, Arman has been in the industry for the better part of 40 years. "God, I'm glad I picked a field for which I have such a passion," Arman says. "What a way to make a living — OK, a great living." ♦

# john gibson

*John Gibson of Swingle Lawn, Tree & Landscape Care is ready for any challenge – both in his outdoor hobbies and in the green industry.*

**T**he day John Gibson was offered a job at Swingle Lawn, Tree & Landscape Care, he told his employer he accepted, but he couldn't start right away. Gibson had a two-week hunting trip planned, and he wasn't about to miss it.

This was fine with his employer, Tom Tolkaacz, president of the Denver, Colo. company. Fifteen years later, Tolkaacz remains confident in his hiring decision. What's more, he's confident in Gibson because of the personality he derives from his love of the outdoors.

"John likes to excel in whatever he does and sets high goals for himself, be it at work or outdoors," Tolkaacz says. "He enjoys hiking, hunting and backpacking in the mountains. There's never a mountain he doesn't want to climb, and he demonstrates that in his personal and professional life."

Gibson's trek up the professional mountain started during his college years. Since then, he ascended at his company and in the entire landscape and lawn care industry when he was named president of the Professional Landcare Network (PLANET) this year. Not yet 40, Gibson is standing on a snow-capped peak, searching for a taller mountain to climb.

**Name: JOHN GIBSON**

**Company: Swingle Lawn,  
Tree & Landscape Care**

**Location: Denver, Colo.**

**Career Highlights:**

- Became the head of Swingle's tree care division
- Certifications: Certified Landscape Technician – irrigation and maintenance; Green Industries of Colorado (GreenCO) Best Management Practices
- Education: Bachelor's degree in business management from the University of Phoenix
- Holds a Colorado Dept. of Agriculture license as a qualified supervisor in turf, ornamental and right of way
- Volunteer positions: CLT irrigation test chair of the Associated Landscape Contractors of Colorado; director of GreenCO; chair of GreenCO's Water Efficient Leaders in Landscape; president of the Colorado Association of Lawn Care Professionals; president-elect of the Professional Lawn Care Association America; and currently president of PLANET
- Awards: ALCC's John Garvey Award; Rocky Mountain Regional Turfgrass Association's Distinguished Service Award; CALCP Golden Gun Award; GreenCO Person of the Year Award

By Heather Wood



Photo: Cara Eastwood

**"The glass is always  $\frac{3}{4}$ -full in my world. It's not half one way or the other; it's always positive." – John Gibson**



**THE ASCENT.** Gibson's first landscaping job came during the summer before his senior year of college. He was studying electrical engineering on a football scholarship. He took a job during the summer before his senior year doing mowing and maintenance work at Colorado Landscape Enterprises under Tom Garber, former president of the Associated Landscape Contractors of America. Because of his affinity for the outdoors, he deeply enjoyed the work. He never went back to college to finish his senior year – instead, he stayed with Colorado Landscape Enterprises for four years.

"Garber wasn't in support of me dropping out of school, but he said, 'If you want to make a career out of this, I'll show you how,'" Gibson recalls.

That career path led Gibson to Swingle, where he had essentially the same duties. After his first year there, the commercial maintenance division was closed and he was given the option to choose another division. He chose the lawn care side of the business.

Gibson rose to manage Swingle's

tree care division in the late '90s and the company has risen with him. "During the period of time that John has grown throughout his career, the company has doubled in size," Tolkacz says. "We grew in revenue and he grew in responsibility – those were parallel."

Gibson felt like he needed more tools to continue the ascent in his personal life. "I studied electrical engineering when I got into the field and got a lot of certification for my job, but I was missing the business background," he says. "So I went to school at night for a few years and finished my business management degree. My goal was to finish my degree before my two girls went to school and I just made it." Gibson received his degree just before his oldest daughter started kindergarten.

**REACHING THE TOP.** While Gibson has an unwavering interest in his career, he also wanted to give back to the industry for helping him to bring out his inner leader. He first became involved in the Certified Landscape Technician program with the Associated Landscape Contractors of Colorado as the irrigation test chair before he changed the focus of his volunteering time to lawn care matters.

Gibson was elected to lead the Professional Lawn Care Association of America when the organization was in talks with the ALCA about a merger, which became a reality and the two combined to become PLANET in 2005. He was then elected by his peers to become president of the combined organization.

"It all came full circle," Gibson says. "I started on the maintenance side, went over to the lawn care side and got a great opportunity to be president of what became one organization. If you would have told me that was going to happen, I would have laughed. You can't see that stuff coming."

Even though his term is nearly over, it still hasn't set in with Gibson that he is president of a national organization.

**BORN TO LEAD.** Tolkacz seems less surprised than Gibson at Gibson's position of leadership in the industry. He has



# john gibson on giving back. . .

watched Gibson interact with his peers during the last 15 years and all the telltale signs of a leader are there, he says.

"Other members of the company count on John as a person who will be there in a time of crisis because he's willing to take on any challenge," Tolkacz says. "He's someone who will challenge other people and organizations. He doesn't just rest on his laurels. There's definitely a desire to see things become new, or at least improved upon, in our work style. For some people that's great, but for others it's uncomfortable."

Gibson has the ability to be flexible and provide whatever demeanor the situation demands, Tolkacz adds. Gibson says he knows these skills are essential for great leaders and adds that it is up to the individual to become that way.

"You have to have some core abilities when you're born, but it's what you do with it that makes the difference," he says. "You can be a leader or you can be a great leader. It comes through practice, learning, adjusting expectations, never giving up and having a positive outlook."

Gibson applies these values to both his job and his volunteer work. Being the president of a national association is like running a business, from the staff and resources to expense decisions to strategic direction, he says. "The only difference is that you're representing an industry, not a business for profit," he explains.

Gibson applies lessons learned in organizations to his job, and vice-versa. He was able to apply experience with the PLCAA/ALCA merger to Swingle's recent acquisition of a Fort Collins, Colo. company, which he oversaw.

**GETTING IN GEAR.** Gibson tells aspiring leaders to have the courage to challenge themselves and try new things. Trust boosts courage, he says.

"When you tell your children to jump into the water, do they trust you enough to have the courage to do it?" he asks. "People who trust you are willing to try something outside of their comfort zone. I'm willing to acknowledge when I'm wrong. I'm willing to make tough decisions and stand behind them."

## **Q.** What does the term "giving back" mean to you?

**A.** "Ever since I took over as PLANET president, it's been truly humbling and an honor to be able to serve as president of a key industry association and give back everything that's been given to me. There's not a thing I'm involved with today that I didn't get into by being involved in the industry. I'm proud to be part of the green industry and represent the green industry.

I think giving back is something people do in different times in their careers that many expect to do later in their careers. People wait until they get to their 50s and 60s. I don't know if I'll die tomorrow, but I feel like giving all I can every day until then."

## **Q.** Describe a situation where you feel you gave back to the industry due to a cause or effort you believed in and how this impacted you in your career.

**A.** "Unifying PLCAA and ALCA with the people who helped with the merger was a rewarding experience. It is incredible to think of what the organization will be some day. When I tell people who all we represent, people say, 'Wow, that's a pretty impressive deal.'

It was really cool to see my name in *The Wall Street Journal* and to have my picture in magazines and stuff. I love the accolades and the euphoria of being recognized, but if you come to my office you won't see a plaque on my wall. They're all at home in a box."

## **Q.** Who is one person you admire most for giving back and why?

**A.** "I admire Theodore Roosevelt for his commitment to the outdoors. My business is dramatically involved with the environment. I appreciate what Roosevelt did with preserving open spaces in the U.S. that I now get to enjoy every day. When I'm 12,000 feet up in Aspen in the wilderness, I remember I get to do those things because he had a vision. I wish I could have a vision like that."

## **Q.** What is one thing you do to teach your employees the value of giving back?

**A.** "I encourage giving back and give the employees the opportunity if they really want it. I require it. It's a philosophy Tom has. Usually we have two people working full time in the industry. We have a spirit of giving and being involved. It's not what you get back; it's what you put in."

## **Q.** In your opinion, what are the top three things a lawn care operator or landscape contractor can do today to establish a trend of giving back and start experiencing the benefits?

**A.**

1. Budget for it – not just in dollars and cents. Budget in time, give people time to do it and time to prepare for the commitment.
2. Remember that the investment pays way more than it's worth.
3. It's easy to put in time and energy and to budget for giving back, but you have to enforce it and realize the commitment it takes to do it. I feel guilty about being away from the office when I volunteer, but it's worth it."

Gibson says he tries to see every failure as a positive learning experience and credits Tolkaacz for helping him to see things that way. "There are no negatives – the glass is always  $\frac{3}{4}$ -full in my world," Gibson shares. "It's not half one way or the other; it's always positive."

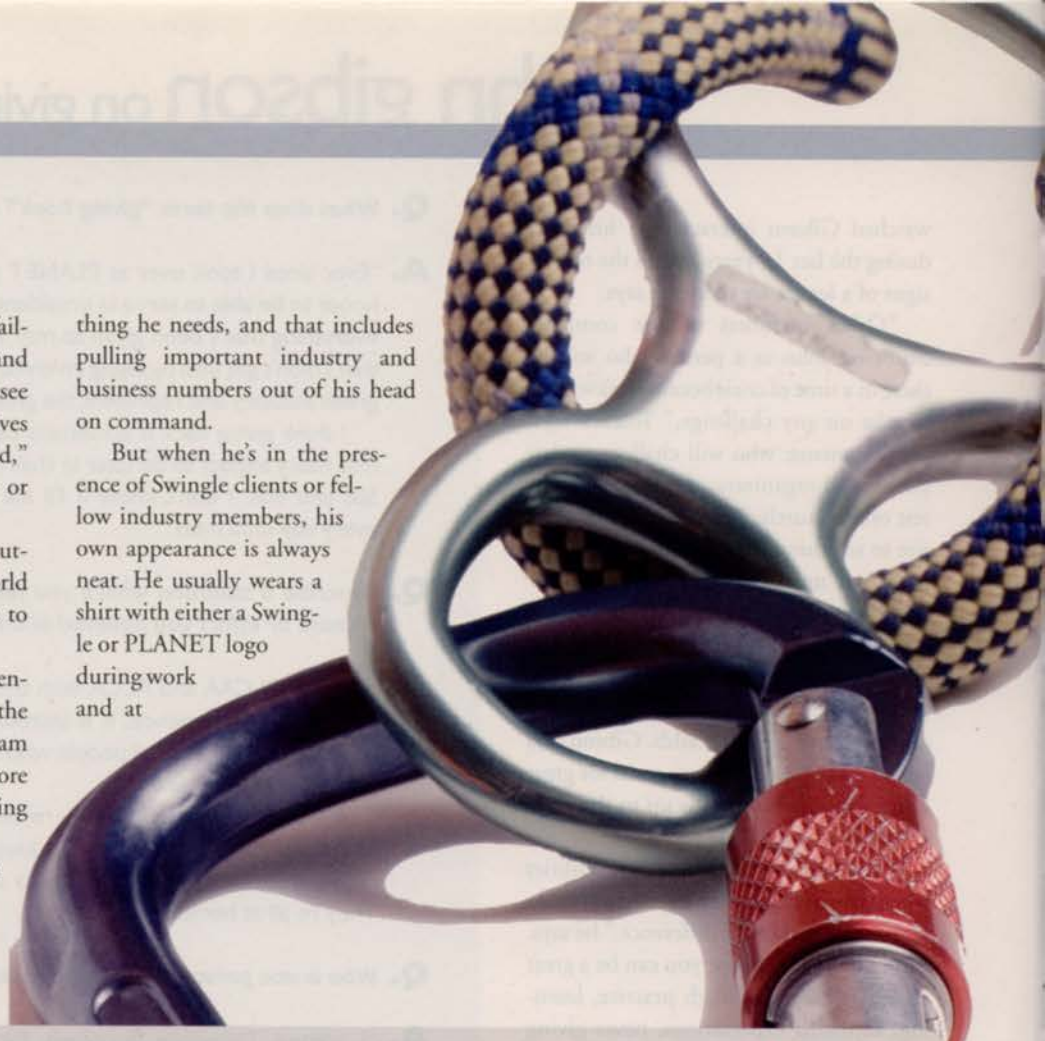
It's easy for Gibson to have a rosy outlook because the chaotic working world he experiences daily is how he prefers to work.

"I love to have a lot of things happening, and many things going on all at the same time," he says. "It's like ice cream to me. I always have an idea of the core things that are going on, but I love having interruptions."

Even though his desk usually isn't a model of tidiness, Gibson is organized enough to know where to find every-

thing he needs, and that includes pulling important industry and business numbers out of his head on command.

But when he's in the presence of Swingle clients or fellow industry members, his own appearance is always neat. He usually wears a shirt with either a Swingle or PLANET logo during work and at




## dealing with drought

John Gibson says he got a great taste of representing the industry during a major Southwest U.S. drought that lasted a few years. He was chairman of the Water Efficiency Leaders in Landscape program and led nine associations in the effort.

"I was the representative from the industry to all of the water providers and the Colorado Water Congress when we were trying to figure out how we were going to survive during the drought," Gibson says. "That's a lot of pressure, carrying that on your shoulders. Every group is trying to protect their livelihood and had their own desires. I had to keep the group together rather than letting them fend for themselves. It was great experience to learn all that."

Through that experience he learned to shed some of his idealistic views and to expect to deal with politics in associations. "I used to tell people I don't like politics, and then I realized that everything everywhere has politics," he says. "They're in every situation."

The region eventually came out of the severe drought and the association worked to educate the public on how to use water more efficiently during that time. Today, summertime water usage there is down 40 percent compared to pre-drought levels, Gibson points out, adding that he's proud to have had a part in educating the public. "It's a pretty powerful thing," he says.



industry functions. When he suits up for PLANET events, a white, button-up shirt with a PLANET logo is under his sport coat.

**THE NEXT ADVENTURE.** Right now Gibson is enjoying the last few months he has to suit up during his PLANET presidency. "I'm like a pregnant woman; I have a glow," he says. "How rare it is to be in the seat I'm in."

One thing he's missed during his term

"In the volunteer world, it will be interesting to see what John will do – from a green industry standpoint and in both his personal and professional endeavors," Tolkacz points out. "I'm sure he'll look for a little relief, but I'm sure it won't be long before he looks for another challenge."

He may not know what volunteer position he'll hold next year, but Gibson knows what he wishes for the industry in the next 25 years. He hopes lawn care operators can one day be recognized as

**"People who trust you are willing to try something outside of their comfort zone. I'm willing to acknowledge when I'm wrong. I'm willing to make tough decisions and stand behind them." – John Gibson**

is his characteristic mountain-man facial hair. He promised his wife, Kristin, he'd be clean-shaven during his term. But he's not complaining.

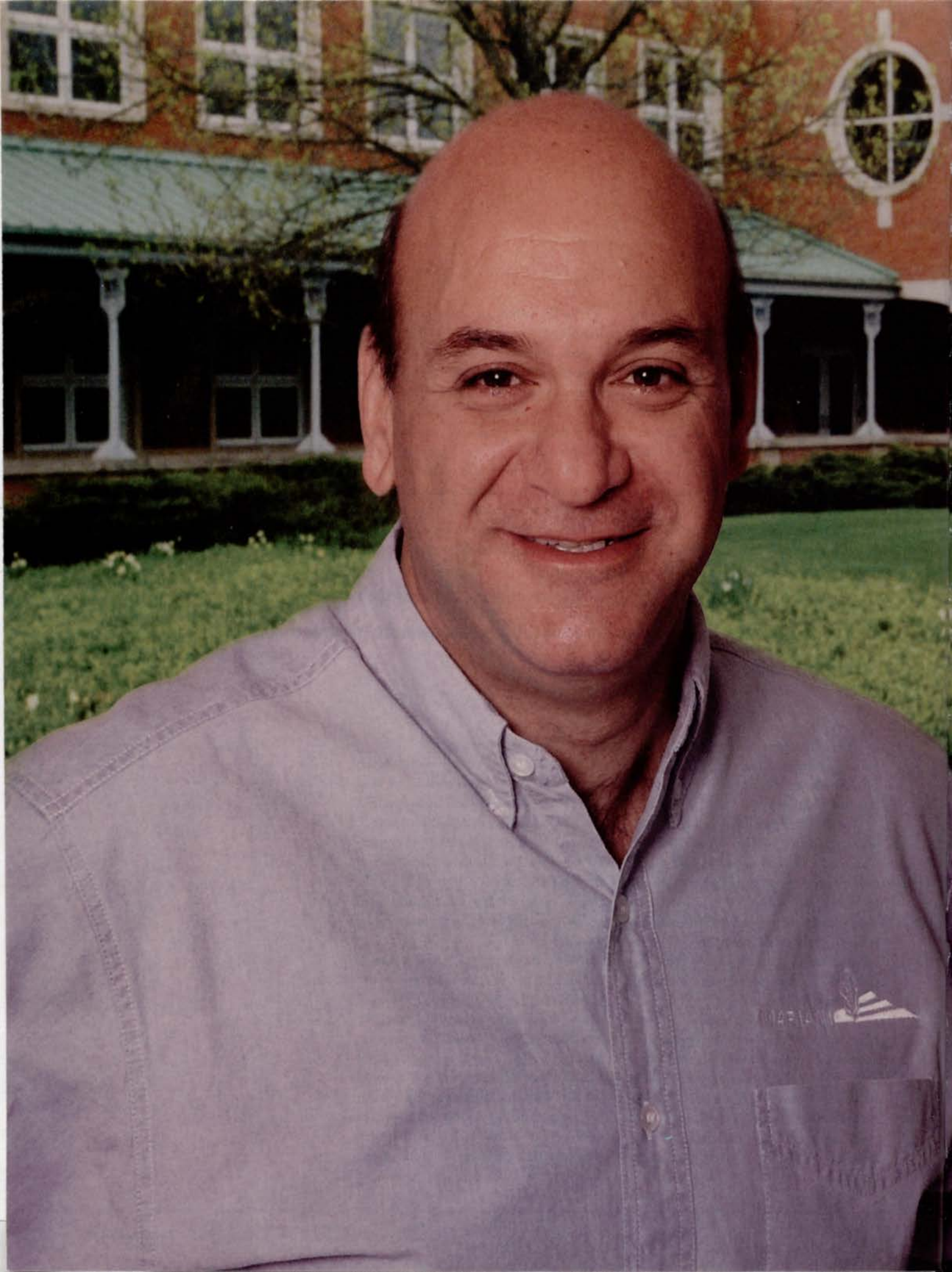
"My wife is awesome," he says. "She's very supportive of the 70- to 80-hour workweeks I've had to put in. She stayed home with the kids while I went to school and worked full time. She's supportive of my industry volunteering efforts and she realizes it makes me happy and proud to be involved. I don't think I could have done any of this without the support of my family."

Besides growing a goatee, Gibson plans to spend time with the people and activities he enjoys most after his term ends. This includes spending time with his girls – Taylor, 11, Marissa, 9, and his wife. In addition, he'd also like to spend more time hiking, backpacking and hunting. At 38, he's not ready to take a break.

the true professionals they are.

"Everyone says they can do landscape work and take care of lawns, but they don't realize the technical background it takes to be really good at these things," he says. "Industry people are the greatest resource. The challenge we'll find in the next 25 years is supplying the right people to do the job and helping them realize they can have a great career and a wonderful life."

While he aims high, Gibson doesn't feel like he has to scale every mountain. He's learned from more than 15 years of experience which professional feats are worth attempting. "I used to be more arrogant, but I'm wiser now," he says. "If I left tomorrow, I don't know if I would see that I made a difference. It's a humbling question. If I did my job right, I'm hoping that, at the very least, I helped someone else get more involved in the industry." ♦



# frank mariani

**Name: FRANK MARIANI**

**Company: Mariani Landscape**

**Location: Lake Bluff, Ill.**

**Career Highlights:**

- Became president of Mariani Landscape in 1973
- Became a partner in Hampshire Farms in 1998, and a majority owner in 2005
- Purchased property in Garden Prairie, Ill. in 2002 to establish a 120-acre container/propagation facility
- Established the Mariani Commercial Landscape Co. in 2002 to take on public projects, such as state government-funded work in the commercial arena
- Past president of the Illinois Landscape Contractors Association and the association's Man of the Year in 1994
- President and board member of the Mid-American Horticultural Trade Show for more than 10 years
- Member of the Chicago Chapter of Young Presidents Organization and is currently a member of the World Presidents Organization
- Mariani Landscape has been recognized by the Professional Landcare Network, the American Society of Landscape Architects and the Illinois Landscape Contractors Association with numerous awards for the design, installation and maintenance of their landscape projects
- Past president of the Children's Brittle Bone Foundation and current member of the Board of Directors

*From his own garden to his clients' estate landscapes, Frank Mariani has a fervor for outdoor spaces that cannot be ignored.*

**T**he perfect garden. To some it shouts with showy blooms and bellowing brights, while others prefer tiny whispers coming from blushing blossoms that twinkle and sway in the sun and wind. To some it means order – well-manicured rows that bring structure and cure chaos, while others stretch more comfortably amidst untamed tendrils. To some it's sensible, practical and productive, feeding needs. To others, one must not touch, clip or pick plants, only reserve seats to witness their colorful, changing cabaret.

So, which is right? All of them... and none of them, according to Frank Mariani, president, Mariani Landscape, Lake Bluff, Ill. The perfect garden, in his opinion, defies the seasons. It may lean one way or another but can never be defined by a single concept.

For instance, one client recently requested a white garden – simplistic, stylish, sedate. Something calm, something elegant – void of obnoxious carrot hues and cherry tints. White enough so as the sun sets on a summer evening and visual clarity fades, one would still be able to see masses of blooms as fluffy clouds or hills dusted with freshly fallen snow.

The idea was clear, and though Mariani appreciated the client's definitive vision, he needed to crystallize the concept. From a garden library in his office, Mariani pulled out a book highlighting Gertrude Jekyll's extensive designs. Jekyll is renowned for her more than 400 landscape creations in the United Kingdom, Europe and America. "I opened the book to a photo of Jekyll's famous white garden and the client said, 'Yeah, that's a spectacular white garden,'" Mariani says. "Then I closed the book and asked her, 'Did you notice all of the colors of the flowers?'"

In the picture, white shown dominant, but a closer look revealed sage, scarlet and sapphire. Strictly limiting the garden to flowers that

By Nicole Wisniewski

**"I think this is an industry where it's easy to get burned out, but I don't ride that horse. I am relentless in my belief of delivering unique landscapes and pushing the envelope every single day." – Frank Mariani**



bloom only white is too narrow a concept, but including other subdued hues like blush, robin's egg, muted melon or soft jade keeps a white garden from being monotonous and produces contrast, bringing the space to life. "If it's not purely white, you open up the palette you can use tenfold," Mariani says.

Pleasing the client isn't about being an order taker who proposes everything they ask for, Mariani insists. "The best designer or architect listens to the client's

needs," he says. "But as professionals who are touching, feeling and designing the landscape on a daily basis, shouldn't we also have ideas the client hasn't thought of? If we simply take down exactly what the client asks for, are we really doing our jobs? I don't think so. We need to listen and then challenge them with a multitude of ideas that meet the criteria, and exceed what they have planned."

Taking clients' ideas and showing them how they can translate in the garden

is one of Mariani's passions. A landscape company's worst nightmare is growing stale, using the same proven design concept time after time and never experimenting out of fear. Keeping it fresh is what keeps it challenging. And it's what's taken Mariani Landscape from a \$90,000, nine-employee, three-truck establishment in 1973 to the 380-employee, \$30-million company it is today. "Every landscape needs to be unique," Mariani says. "I think this is an industry where it's easy to get burned out, but I don't ride that horse. I am relentless in my belief of delivering unique landscapes and pushing the envelope every single day."

**PLANTING THE SEED.** Since he was in first grade, Mariani helped at his grandfather's nursery – John Fiore & Sons in Westlake Forest, Ill. "The school bus stopped at the garden center, so I would get off of the bus and work with my grandmother there."

The Fiore, Mariani's mother's family, have been in the nursery business since the late 1800s. Mariani's father, Vito Mariani Sr., worked there as well before spotting a niche in high-end residential landscape maintenance in 1958 and starting Mariani Landscape to care for homeowner properties and estates in the Lake Forest and Highland Park areas of Chicago. "The larger estates had full-time gardeners," Mariani says. "My dad saw an opportunity to care for properties where the clients didn't want to hire full-timers who lived and worked there everyday."

As a high schooler, Mariani enjoyed football, hunting and riding motorcycles. "I was a wild child in high school – very competitive," he says. He admits he knew how to work hard but wasn't thinking at

# frank mariani on giving back. . .

all about running a business at age 17. That was the year – 1973 – his father died from leukemia at the age of 45, leaving him to provide for his mother and younger siblings (five brothers and one sister). “I was the oldest son – it was a matter of survival,” he says. “We had to eat and live. I didn’t think about anything but making it work. I knew I had to do whatever it took. It was time to forget about high school and step up to the plate.

“Situations like this can really shape and form your life,” Mariani continues, sharing that his father spent his last year of life teaching him about the business. “We knew dad had the disease. It was pretty evident early that year that he wasn’t going to make it. In early spring, the doctors told him it was only going to be a matter of months, but he held on the entire year. He died two days after the company closed down for the year. A priest who was a friend of the family told me that he stuck around all summer to make sure I would be OK.”

Yet each winter during those first 10 years as the business shut down for the season, Mariani says he thought it would be his last. “I thought our customers would drop me over the winter and I’d be penniless,” he says. “That drove me like you can’t believe. I never got comfortable thinking I’d made it. I always thought the next winter would be my last and that I had to fight to make it. My wife, Sherri, tells me I still act that way today.”

Though Mariani is a big fan of formal education, in his own experience he had to “learn by the seat of my pants,” he says. “At the end of the day, you have to get up and go to work and have a can-do attitude – that’s the key to success. This business is not rocket science. It’s putting trees in straight, selecting the right plant material and proper pruning. You also have to be part psychiatrist to be able to manage your people and your clients.”

Family members – including grandparents, uncles and cousins who were also in the business – were supportive of Mariani’s venture to learn the business quickly. “They were the roots of the industry as I knew it,” he says. “They showed me that without a good work ethic, honesty and

commitment to doing my best, I was just spinning my wheels.”

After 10 years of focusing on maintenance, Mariani added design/build to the company. There were many models of success in the area, which was well-

populated with landscape firms. Mariani looked to them for guidance. “I didn’t want to reinvent the wheel – I looked at what they did well and emulated them,” he says. “I was amazed at these people I admired and how they would share ev-

**Q.** *What does the term “giving back” mean to you?*

**A.** “Giving back is part of our company’s mission statement. We have an extensive budget for giving back to charities and community events. There are a million ways to give back – sure, you can write a check, but I think it’s important to participate.”

**Q.** *Describe a situation where you feel you gave back to the industry or your community due to a cause or effort you believed in and how this impacted you in your career.*

**A.** “I am the past president of the Children’s Brittle Bone Foundation, a charity that over the past 12 years has raised more than \$10 million to fund extensive research with the goal of finding a cure for Osteogenesis Imperfecta. I started the foundation with a friend of mine, whose daughter had brittle bone disease. We’ve granted funds for research of the disease and identified the gene that causes the problem. We’ve made incredible progress.”

**Q.** *Who is one person you admire most for giving back and why?*

**A.** “I admire the team at Mariani Landscape. Our mission statement highlights community service as one key driver of our company. And it wasn’t written by me – it was written by our entire team. Our team decided they wanted giving back to the community to be part of our mission and I think that is a powerful thing.”

**Q.** *What is one thing you do to teach your employees the value of giving back?*

**A.** “I encourage them to participate and support them when they do. We share our stories of giving back with each other and that regular communication inspires others to get involved as well.”

**Q.** *In your opinion, what are the top three things a lawn care operator or landscape contractor can do today to establish a trend of giving back and experience the benefits?*

**A.** “1. Identify your passions and choose a cause you are passionate about.  
2. If your passion is landscaping, remember that there are organizations that need landscape work done or could use the money from a showcase of home gardens tour or something similar to help a good cause.  
3. Remember there is a limit to what you can do. If you feel a responsibility to one group or cause, follow that. For instance, I feel a responsibility to my clients – the people who are paying me – so I feel we should participate in their charities and causes. They pay me and give me profit so why shouldn’t I make a contribution to them and their interests?”

everything and anything with you. I got to hear their war stories. I benchmark our company against them all of the time."

Through his membership with the Associated Landscape Contractors of America – now the Professional Landcare Network – the American Society of Landscape Architects and the Illinois Landscape Contractors Association, Mariani gathered a wealth of knowledge from his peers. He's not only grateful for all of that wisdom, but insists on giving back so younger companies can benefit. For the past four years, Mariani has been a member of PLANET's Trailblazers, an in-depth, networking and mentoring program for both emerging and established companies to gain insight on how to develop and grow their businesses.

When it comes to landscape design, "we don't do design to feed our construction division – we do design because we want to do fabulous design," Mariani says, adding that a good design, in his opinion, blends in with the existing environment, is cohesive with the home architecture and lay of the land and meets the client's expectations – maybe even some expectations they didn't realize they had. "Every landscape needs to be unique. We really push to be cutting edge – not trendy but cutting edge. We have 14 landscape architects on staff and we work in teams to challenge each other.

"What makes good design is listening, keeping your eyes open and challenging every aspect of the project," he continues. "It's about being creative and not just settling for something easy. We'll go through a whole design process and scrap it and start over at the last minute even if our client is happy because we feel we can do something better."

When it comes to seeking out new jobs and growing his business, Mariani has been accused of wanting every job. To that, he replies, "Yeah, I do. But I would modify that and say I want every project where I know we could add value and that is challenging. I'm going to make sure we blow the socks off of people with the jobs

we pick. I can't tell you every project we do is something I want to show my peers. I think we'll be the best when I feel that way about every project. I don't think we're there yet, but I believe we can get there."

The competitors Mariani emulates are also the ones who help him strive for this goal because he believes they help elevate industry professionalism. His other drivers are his employees and his children, Frank V., 27, and Alexandra Lynn, 23, who also work in the business – Frank V. is a design/build project manager and Alexandra Lynn is in marketing and the first point of contact for clients. "As long as my children and my employees enjoy this business as much as I do, I feel I have a responsibility to help them grow," he says, pointing out that he has 380 employees, not including the nursery workers – all of whom he calls "associates." "I feel I have a responsibility to each and every one of them. It's humbling to know that I'm helping these people support their families – it's a huge responsibility that I don't take lightly. I depend on them so I want them to be able to depend on me."

As such, Mariani believes in being just like everybody else. This means he doesn't have a grand office with mahogany furniture and a rich view of a lake or park. He arrives at work at 7 a.m. most mornings to a 10-by-8, windowless workspace. "I lead by example and I assemble people around me who I feel are better than me," he says, pointing out that he spends a lot of his day communicating with and entertaining clients and visiting job sites. "I'm a regular guy trying to do a good job. I believe if you don't promote your people so they can do your job you're never going to make it and if you are afraid of talent because that means someone might be better than you, you have no chance."

Since the company focuses on maintaining outdoor spaces, Mariani makes it a point to keep his looking well. "If I pull into my facility and there's a Coke can or paper on the ground, I'm going to pick it up and throw it away – same if there's a weed in a bed, a cigarette butt



on the sidewalk or a leftover paper bag in the lunchroom," he says. "Our facility represents us and so it has to look great. If I want our group to keep it up, I can't be afraid to help as well."

Of the two key services Mariani Landscape provides – maintenance and design/build, Mariani doesn't have a favorite – he insists both are vital for each to thrive. "Maintenance has a rhythm, while design/build is a little more spontaneous – it's fun to do both," he says. "A good maintenance contractor can take a crummy design and installation and make it better. A poor designer or installer can gain a lot from understanding how a project matures over time. You need both and should be immersed in both to get the best benefits."

In addition to Mariani Landscape, Mariani runs three nurseries – Mariani Nursery, a 550-plus acre wholesale nursery on the Illinois-Wisconsin border; Hampshire Farms, a 50-acre perennial farm in Hampshire, Ill.; and a 120-acre container/propagation facility in Garden Prairie, Ill.

**SPROUTING SUCCESS.** When Mariani talks about designing and maintaining landscapes, tending vegetables in his garden or growing unique plants in his nurseries, his vigor is intoxicating. Immediately, the listener wants to run outside with a pruner and tend his shrubs, sit on





his patio and think up a new landscape bed or shop for a new plant color or texture to add to his palette.

As a child growing up in the Mariani household with mom, Joanna, and dad, Vito, Frank didn't have a choice – after church on Sunday, you worked in the garden before anything else, like it or not. "My parents grew vegetables and boxwoods and Texas yews on a  $\frac{3}{4}$ -acre lot," he says. "As kids, we thought we could make a baseball field out of it. My dad said, 'Sure, if you can find a way to eat it.' He tilled the entire thing – we didn't have a lot of lawn at all – just garden. We had to work on the landscape equipment and cultivate the garden and weed every Sunday – it was torture. Then we'd have a nice Italian meal and, finally, it was time to go out and play."

Mariani chuckles remembering this story: "Recently, we were out in the garden on Sunday and I started laughing to myself, and my wife asked me what was so funny. I said, 'If my dad could see that I was out here working in the garden on a Sunday and it was my decision to be out here, he'd turn over in his grave.'"

Today, Mariani and his wife, Sherri, own a 10-acre estate in Lake Forest, Ill., highlighted by a 1929 Tudor-style house surrounded by an ornamental kitchen garden, an English perennial border,

a prairie, an orchard, a woodland garden, an elegant allee of crabapples, and a unique collection of native and exotic trees (see photos, above and on page 52). Mariani's home gardens also serve as laboratories where Mariani Landscape staff can experiment with designs and learn proper maintenance techniques.

One of Mariani's favorite spots in the garden is the 30-by-80-foot potager, an elegant French style kitchen garden the combines herbs, flowers and vegetables. Some of the plants he has growing in this space are eggplant, Italian plum tomatoes, cucumbers and peppers, Mexican tomatoes, habanero and cerano peppers and tomatillos. Mariani, who not only loves to cook Italian meals, but Mexican, Chinese and Tai food as well, finds the task relaxing. "I get a lot of pleasure out of it," he says. "I think being around my family and the way they migrated around meals is why I love it so much. We always had a Sunday meal. I still try to do that today with my kids even though they are older. We share food and good discussion."

Though Mariani admits his dedication to reaching perfection at work may have taken him away from home more than he liked, his wife, Sherri, kept him grounded. "I am very fortunate – we had a pretty traditional family," he says. "Sherri supported me and made sure we took a

family vacation every year and that I didn't miss games or other school activities.

"I think for my own health and well being, I probably take my job and what we do a little bit too seriously," he admits, adding that he feels over the years he's grown to understand his shortcomings fairly well. "I expect perfection of myself, and if a client is unhappy it really knocks me down more so than is probably healthy."

Sensing the approach of burnout after more than 30 years of running the company, Mariani decided that he needed to hire a president five years ago – Fred Wacker, an old friend of Mariani's who is a Princeton graduate and ran a manufacturing business outside of the industry. The two were members of the Young Presidents Organization together. Wacker sold his business and shortly after Mariani asked him if he wanted to apply for the position. "The decision, though it was challenging to make, completely reinvigorated me," Mariani says. "As polished and educated as Fred is and as unpolished and uneducated I am, we make a hell of a team. I believe you need both book smarts and street smarts to be in this business."

Wacker calls Mariani an inspiration. "He lives the mission of the company and the mission of the green industry – to make the country a more beautiful place," Wacker says. "He cares about people – not things, dollars or tools. He cares about entry-level laborers and the young intern who's just starting out. He gives the same amount of attention to the client who doesn't have a lot to spend and the client who is spending \$1 million. He focuses on people and that's why he's successful."

Moving forward with the business and feeling less stressed now that he let go of some of his owner responsibilities, Mariani says he will never cease striving for absolute excellence. He walks outdoors for one hour each day to stay healthy, clear his head and reflect on what the company is doing right and what it can do better. "I really am in search of perfection," he says. "I understand I'll never reach it, but I'll never stop that pursuit – it's what drives me." ♦

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# *gerry mccarthy*

*Gerry McCarthy's membership in more than 25 associations and clubs has made him a well-rounded business owner.*

# G

erry McCarthy was sitting in front of the local bank president in the late 1970s. Only 23 at the time, McCarthy had worked and saved a down payment on a house and was now in need of a mortgage.

The bank president, neatly dressed and clad in a bow tie, stared at McCarthy after the young landscape contractor asked for a \$16,000 loan. The president would be hard to please. Never mind that McCarthy had \$40,000 in cash to put down, more than 71 percent of the home's cost.

"He says to me – with his bow tie – 'Mr. McCarthy, what do you do for a living?'" McCarthy recalls. "I told him I was a landscaper."

The questioning continued. "He asked what I did in the wintertime," McCarthy says. "I told him that I do snow plowing. He asked, 'What happens if it doesn't snow?'"

If it didn't snow, there's not much he could do about that, McCarthy told the bank president.

**Name: GERRY MCCARTHY**

**Company: Mac's Landscaping**

**Location: Stoneham, Mass.**

**Career Highlights:**

- Member of the PLANET board of directors
- Member of the GIE board of directors
- Member, Knights of Columbus, Stoneham Rotary Club
- Owner of Mac's Landscaping, a professional landscape business that serves the Greater Boston area

By Mark Phillips



Photos: Brian Smith

**"I'm the type of person who likes to talk to people. I love meeting people all of the time." – Gerry McCarthy**

"He asked, 'Well, how are you going to make your mortgage payments?' McCarthy's answer was simple: "Any way I can."

"It was obvious that he didn't have faith in me, and I had to prove to him I could do it," McCarthy recalls.

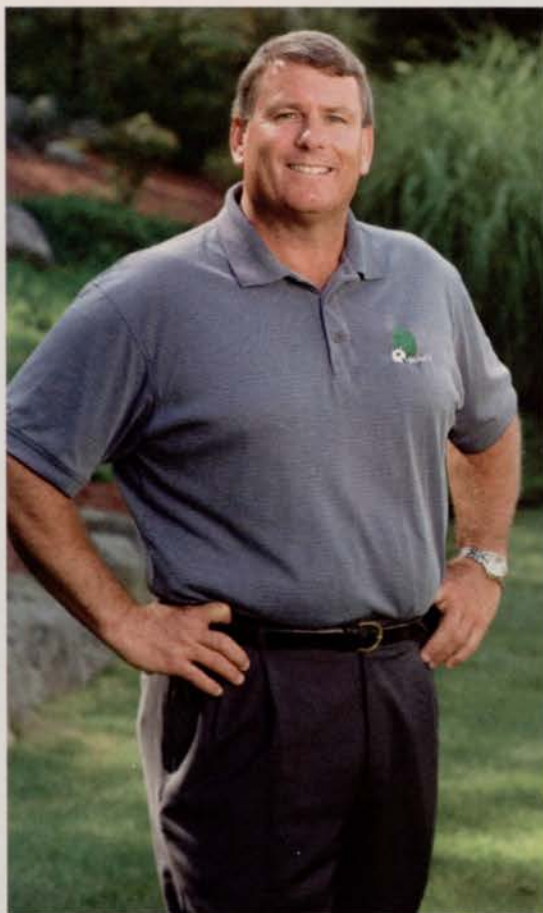
Gerry McCarthy loves green. Not money, mind you, but plants. Taking care of "anything green," as he puts it, propelled him into a career path that led to Mac's Landscaping in Stoneham, Mass., in 1975.

However, it all started with a mix of odd jobs, side businesses and listening to his mentors and the examples they set. It was bartending, painting houses on the weekends and making time for the craft he loves: keeping landscaping beautiful. This was the schooling that proved to be so valuable later in life.

McCarthy took an early stab at taking a leadership position when he sought the presidency of his local landscape association.

"But they thought I was too young," he remembers. "They just didn't think I was ready for it, which I really wasn't."

McCarthy, though, is no stranger to hard work. During his high school years he hauled hoses from heating oil trucks through snow-covered lawns during bitter-cold Boston winters. He remembers Cubby Oil owner Dom Uglietto – whom he describes as "tough" – encouraging him to work harder on one particular night. During one New Year's Eve, McCarthy told Uglietto that he wanted to go out to dinner that night. "He told me we'd get home early," McCarthy recalls. By 6:45 p.m., the snow continued to blow and the cold was biting his face. But still, Uglietto barked they needed to work even harder



Gerry McCarthy

to get the work finished.

"I remember he was just relentless," McCarthy says. "He told me, 'Come on, Mac. Let's keep going. Let's keep going.' He was always pushing and pushing. He's one of the hardest working guys I've ever met in my life. He never stops."

McCarthy was very active in his church, even when he was young. At 15, he jumped at the chance to work with the church's custodians on the grounds.

"I had a lot of pride in taking care of it," McCarthy recalls. "That was the biggest thing – getting on one of those big riding mowers, and I would ride the

mower to the top of the hill, and it just felt so good." He parlayed that into a small mowing service around his neighborhood.

Following high school, McCarthy attended Wentworth College and received a degree in civil engineering.

"I had no idea that I wanted to go into landscaping as a career," McCarthy says, "but I don't know what it is – I just like the outdoors."

For a while, he worked for Landscaping by Schumacher. McCarthy estimates the company was generating \$10 million in revenue at the time. He counts John Schumacher, the owner, as a mentor who taught him the value of hard work.

"One day, he told me, 'I'm sending you up to Quechee, Vt., to do a job. You'll be gone for a weekend,'" McCarthy says. That weekend turned into a summer. While being away from Christine, the woman who would eventually become his wife, was trying, he was resolute. "It was longer than I originally wanted to stay up there," he says, "but I wanted to learn about the trade."

Along with that hard work comes the preparation before you play the game, McCarthy says. "When I encountered difficulty over selling a piece of land I owned, I wanted to learn all I could about real estate," he explains. "So, I took real estate courses, studied, and passed the test to acquire my real estate license in 2000. Christine is also a realtor and processes the payroll for the landscaping business. I help my wife conduct open houses. She taught me the other benefit of acquiring a real estate license – the power of networking. It helps me in landscaping as well."

For McCarthy, working commercial jobs wasn't as enriching as talking to people and taking care of residential properties. He recalls one job where his crew planted 60 trees in one day.

"There was just no fun to it," he says. "Commercial to me is a lot different than residential. We are more of a design-build residential company and I've always liked

that. I'm the type of person who likes to talk to people. I love meeting people all of the time."

McCarthy's social nature explains his more than 25 association and club memberships and coaching positions over the years, including serving as past president of his local Rotary.

"We always ask how we are going to get the most qualified people," he says. "Rotary is about service above self. If you serve your community, you're going to get things ten-fold back. I try to encourage people to do that, so if they serve and do the best they can, somebody will notice it." His travels with the Ancient and Honorable Artillery Company of Massachusetts, the fraternal organization founded in 1638, afforded him the opportunity to travel to 20 countries during 16 trips. "I've traveled all over the world with them and I've learned an awful lot just by traveling and meeting people of different cultures," McCarthy says.

It was through the Ancient and Honorable Artillery Company that McCarthy had a life-changing experience – meeting Pope John Paul II. McCarthy recalls sitting with the pontiff during a private meeting in his library in Rome. "I was stunned; I was numb," McCarthy says. He recalls touching and kissing the ring on his hand. "I just felt very, very privileged. It sent chills down my spine. It was something that I'll remember for the rest of my life."

Traveling overseas has helped him in his business as well. "Education helps you to communicate with people," he says. "That's given me a lot of opportunities."

**EARLY RISER.** McCarthy's comptroller comes into the office one day a week. "She says, 'if your desk is messy, the work is coming,'" McCarthy says, laughing. "Everything on my desk is going to go to her desk eventually."

Work starts as he rises at 5:30 a.m. each morning. McCarthy likes to keep the attire casual. He favors Izod-type shirts, blue jeans and sometimes khakis and a nice pair of boots. In by 7 a.m., he makes himself available to managers and crewmembers.

**Q.** *What does the term "giving back" mean to you?*

**A.** "Remembering to give back to the community is something that I try to do daily."

**Q.** *Describe a situation where you feel you gave back to the industry or your community due to a cause or effort you believed in and how this impacted you in your career.*

**A.** "Throughout my more than 14 years of coaching youth sports teams, I have tried to instill hard work in young athletes. I always tell them, 'You don't always have to win. You just always have to play your heart out.'"

**Q.** *What memorable quotes on giving back can you share that influence you in your day-to-day life?*

**A.** "At my son's college graduation, a professor there said, 'You learn, you earn, and then you return.' I always remember that. We're always learning. You've got to earn – you have to make money to keep it going. But to return is to give back, and I never really understood the full meaning of that until the last 10 years or so. When you do something, you don't always have to look for a 'thank you.' Just do it for the cause, but don't say someone should have thanked you for it."

**Q.** *What is one thing you do to teach your employees the value of giving back?*

**A.** "Encourage them to join associations and be active in the industry."

**Q.** *In your opinion, what are the top three things a lawn care operator or landscape contractor can do today to get the most out of giving back when they join various organizations or causes.*

**A.** "I've always been a club-joiner, a person who gets involved. Once I get in there, I really do a lot of work. So, if you get involved, remember to do the work and then when you rise to leadership roles in those organizations, remember to give credit regularly to the people who are on your committee who are working their tails off to accomplish your goals."

"If they have any questions, I'm here in the office and they can come in here and talk to me," he says.

McCarthy then takes to his appointments, where he meets several prospective clients each day, often six days a week. Potential customers come in from referrals, phone books, signs on the company's trucks and the Web. Each referral to the company is carefully tracked. Eventually, the paperwork piles up on his desk.

"I have two secretaries who come in during the week and they try to keep it somewhat neat," McCarthy says. "I'm pretty clean – I'm not a total mess, but I know where everything is."

In between appointments with prospective clients, he visits jobsites. "I do an awful lot during the day – as a result, I sleep well at night," he says, laughing.

McCarthy likes to keep a visual record of the work the company performs



# leadership comes from within

**T**o Gerry McCarthy, honesty is the cornerstone of any good leader. "And you have to have a really positive attitude," he adds. "When something bad comes along, you have to deal with it and try to show good leadership."

Though he's been in the business for more than three decades, McCarthy knows he doesn't have all of the answers. It's necessary to let the good ideas rise to the top, he believes. "We try to implement some good systems and procedures for our people – things that actually work and make sense," he says. "A lot of times some people don't like the systems. I tell them if they don't like it and can create a better system, I'll be glad to listen to their idea and we'll make it work."

McCarthy believes a leader comes from within. "It comes with an attitude," he says. "People either have it or they don't have it. I think a leader is built on reputation. I think it has a lot to do with trust." McCarthy acknowledges his past shortcomings and seeks to improve upon them. One of those shortcomings was how he used to communicate at work. "When I was younger, I used to yell a lot. I would never do that again today," he says. "I take employees aside and I try to explain problems to them." A mix of patience, maturity, and a commitment to understanding the situation has helped.

He tries to remind his employees to remember to do the simple things first in order to make time for more important work. For instance, with several crews

out in the field on any given day, failure to keep up on paperwork can be frustrating. "This is something that's very simple," he says. "I have a lot of crews out there and I don't have a chance to check every single thing. It's a very simple system, but it's more complicated if they don't do it."

A subtle reminder in McCarthy's office lets employees know they can have everything he has. "It says, 'If you want what I have, do what I do,'" McCarthy says. "I have a nice car, a nice boat and a nice house, but I worked hard to get there. I don't think everybody sees that. And it took a long time for me to figure that out."

To McCarthy, leadership always means seeking realistic growth and keeping the business at a level that can be maintained. His sons often ask him why he's not going for \$10 million in revenue. "We're not a very big business – we do a little more than \$1.25 million," he says. "And I have a very good living and a very good life. I really do work hard, and then I take my vacations. I know some people would want more and more, but I'm happy at the level I'm at."

When finding future leaders within his company, he assesses their strengths and weaknesses early on. "You have to do a profile to see what they're good at," McCarthy says. "There's nothing worse than putting someone in a position where they don't like what they're doing. If you find someone who loves what they're doing, you've found a good match."

McCarthy's son, Shawn, says, "He's taught me that you have to work from the ground up and that there's a business side and a people side. And each of those complement each other."



through lots of before-and-after photos.

"I'm very proud of our work," he says. Son Keith, who graduated from Boston College with degrees in business administration and finance, works in the field for the company's masonry division. Shawn, who graduated from Bryant College with degrees in finance and marketing, works in the construction division. "One thing I can say about my own kids is that they work hard," McCarthy says. "You really have to put the time in to get the benefits out of it."

**LEARNING FROM MENTORS.** A good leader listens to their mentors and learns from mistakes, McCarthy believes. This was a difficult lesson to learn when he opened a garden center in 1984. One of his mentors, Paul Mahoney, who owns Mahoney's Garden Centers, a group of eight highly successful stores in Massachusetts, warned McCarthy against entering the market while being a landscaper. It would prove to be too much.

"I thought, if he can go into it, why can't I?" McCarthy recalls.

McCarthy let his pride get in the way,

center to be in the black four months out of the year. "The other months, we were always in the red. It was tough," he recalls. When it came time to sell the business, Mahoney operated the garden center until a buyer was found.

Mahoney's leadership and work ethic impresses McCarthy. "It just amazes me to see what he has done over the years," McCarthy says. "I'm amazed and I basically feel success is not always about money; it's about happiness, too."

McCarthy's son's college graduation also provided some unexpected wisdom. "A professor there said, 'You learn, you earn, and then you return.' I always remember that," he says. "We're always learning. You've got to earn – you have to make money to keep it going. But to return is to give back and I never really understood the full meaning of that until the last 10 years or so. When you do something, you don't always have to look for a 'thank you.' Just do it for the cause. But don't say someone should have thanked you for it."

His father's energy and excitement about the industry make his personality so

For the landscape industry to grow and prosper, young people must be shown how they can make a career out of it, McCarthy adds. "I've survived all of these years, but it's been tough in the winter time," he says. "And if you don't like to do snow plowing or something else, you have to make enough money in those eight months or so to last."

Success in the industry is deeply rooted in education, McCarthy points out.

"I don't have all the education that I wish I had," he says. "Try to get as much education as you can. It's so competitive these days. You have to work smarter rather than harder. I see a lot of guys coming in here – they have degrees and they're very versatile. But a degree carries employees only so far. They have to learn the practical stuff, too. You've got to get your hands dirty a little bit."

Anyone thinking about running their own landscaping business should take business management courses, McCarthy suggests. "The horticulture knowledge will always come," he says. "I didn't know the difference between an azalea and a petunia when I first started, but I learned."

New contractors should not assume the money will continue to roll in, McCarthy adds. "It's almost like that old story – they get a few dollars and they go out and buy a new truck," he says. "And then they think they're doing well, but they don't put any money away. Then a few bad years come along and they're not prepared." McCarthy has experienced several recessions, all of which reminded him of how hard things can be. "They've got to be very humble about it and basically go in there and try to understand that they have to work hard every day."

Government regulation will also continue to be an industry challenge, McCarthy says. "The focus of the future is that we're going to have a lot of different things thrown at us, such as government regulations that we're going to have to work with," he says. "They're always going to find problems with something, and we're going to have to deal with them." ♦

**"He's absolutely one of the most motivated people I've ever met.**

**People love him. He's so into the industry and he gets other people into it." – Shawn McCarthy**

and took Mahoney's warning as almost a challenge.

"It didn't work," he says. "I found out it wasn't my niche to try to run a garden center and be a landscaper. It was almost impossible to do both."

Nevertheless, McCarthy continued operating the garden center for nine years and struggled.

"I just couldn't succeed," he says. "I just found out that it's completely different and you need a lot of resources and a tremendous amount of money."

It wasn't uncommon for the garden

infectious, Shawn McCarthy says. "He's absolutely one of the most motivated people I've ever met," he shares. "People love him. He's so into the industry and he gets other people into it."

**FUTURE OF THE INDUSTRY.** An important challenge faced by the landscape industry is the increasing language divide, McCarthy says. "We have a lot of Hispanic people working in this industry and we have to better communicate with them and learn the language," he says. "I think we have to be bi-lingual."

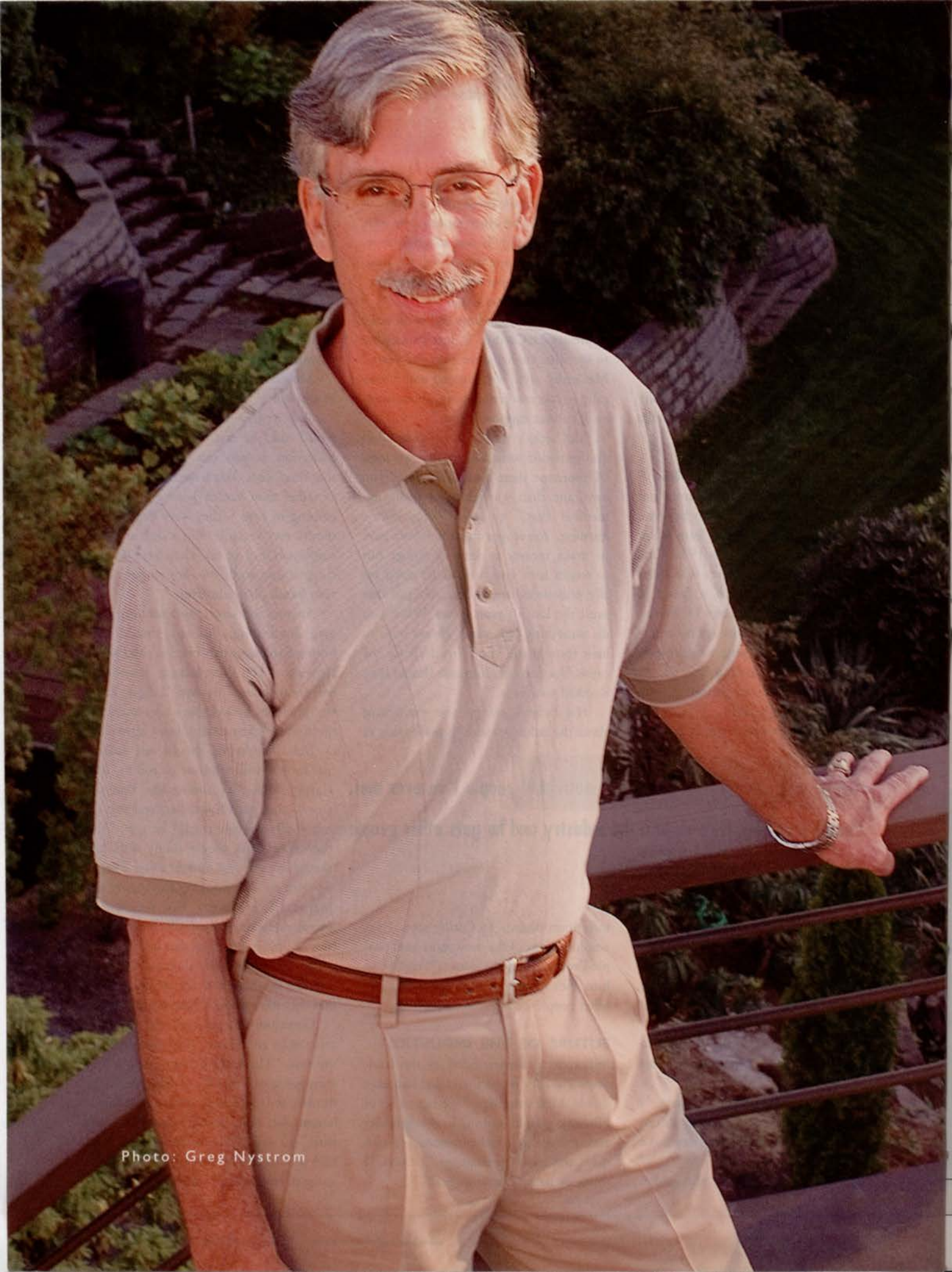


Photo: Greg Nystrom

# ed walter

*Telling the pesticide user's side of the story is only part of Ed Walter's legacy.*

**Name: ED WALTER**

**Company: Washington Tree Service**

**Location: Shoreline, Wash.**

**Career Highlights:**

- Bachelor's degree, business and marketing, Southern Illinois University
- 2nd Lieutenant in the U.S. Army, 1960s
- Joined Washington Tree Service, 1974
- Joined Interstate Pesticide Applicators Association, 1970s
- Founding member, Washington Friends of Farms & Forests, 1988
- Helped write sections on pesticide-sensitive registry and notification for the Washington Pesticide Applications Act, 1992
- Became president and CEO, Washington Tree Service, 1997
- Joined state department of agriculture's Pesticide Advisory Board, 2003

If members of the lawn care industry could dream up a spokesperson to represent them to legislators, activists and industry outsiders, who would it be?

He'd be a proactive, well-educated professional. He'd possess decades of experience and the respect of his peers and challengers, alike. He'd be assertive, passionate, yet level-headed. He'd be willing to devote time away from his business and family for the good of the cause and he'd have the ability to empower those around him.

He would be Ed Walter.

**ENTERING THE INDUSTRY.** In 1974, Washington Tree Service in Shoreline, Wash., had surpassed \$1.5 million, and was heading for \$2 million. The 26-year-old company was doing well, but co-founder Stan Raplee knew he needed a successor. He had his eye on the thirty-something husband of one of his relatives.

His prospective protégé was Ed Walter.

Aside from mowing his own yard, Walter had no green industry experience when Raplee approached him about joining the tree and lawn care business. Born in southern Illinois, the son of a small businessman, Walter had a management background with a bachelor's degree in business and marketing from Southern Illinois University.

Also, he possessed a can-do attitude and sense of discipline he'd picked up in the military. When Walter graduated college, Vietnam was afire, and he went from a draft-deferred position to the No. 1 draft spot in his county. Determined to be in control of his destiny, Walter enlisted in the Army, entered officer candidate school and came out as a second lieutenant in the transportation corps. Thankfully, he was never sent overseas.

With experience gained as an Army commissary officer, Walter landed a job as a food broker after he was discharged. He was recently

By Marisa Palmieri

married and several years into his career when Stan Raplee approached him with an opportunity to join Washington Tree Service in a middle management position.

"Stan wanted to step back from the business," Walter says. "We got along fine and I stepped into the company." This is the humble way Walter puts it, but you get the idea that it wasn't that simple. Lawn care experience or not, Walter was the man Raplee was looking for.

**EARNING RESPECT.** Since his days as a business student, it had been his goal "to climb the corporate ladder." And when Raplee presented his offer, Walter knew this was his chance. "It was an opportunity to try my hand at running a business and it was an opportunity to have ownership," Walter says. "It seemed like an opportunity to become president and CEO and fulfill my goal of getting involved in the corporate structure, large or small."

Walter has been dedicated to his career at Washington Tree Service – and to the tree and lawn care industry – ever since. But it wasn't always easy.

Washington Tree Service isn't the kind of place where people work for a few years and move on their way. Today, 30 percent of the workers have been employed there for more than 20 years; 10 percent have worked there for three decades or more.

Imagine a young, well-educated relative of the owner joining the ranks in a middle management position in 1974, working alongside other managers who likely worked their way up from entry-level spray technician jobs. Imagine him supervising employees with the field experience and technical know-how he did not yet have.

"I wouldn't have wanted to be in the position to be brought in like that and be expected to give these guys orders," says Randy Mock, the company's vice president who's worked with Walter for more than 30 years. "It was a difficult position for him to come in and not know anything about the spray business and take a lofty position. It turned some people off around here. I think he handled it as well as anyone could."

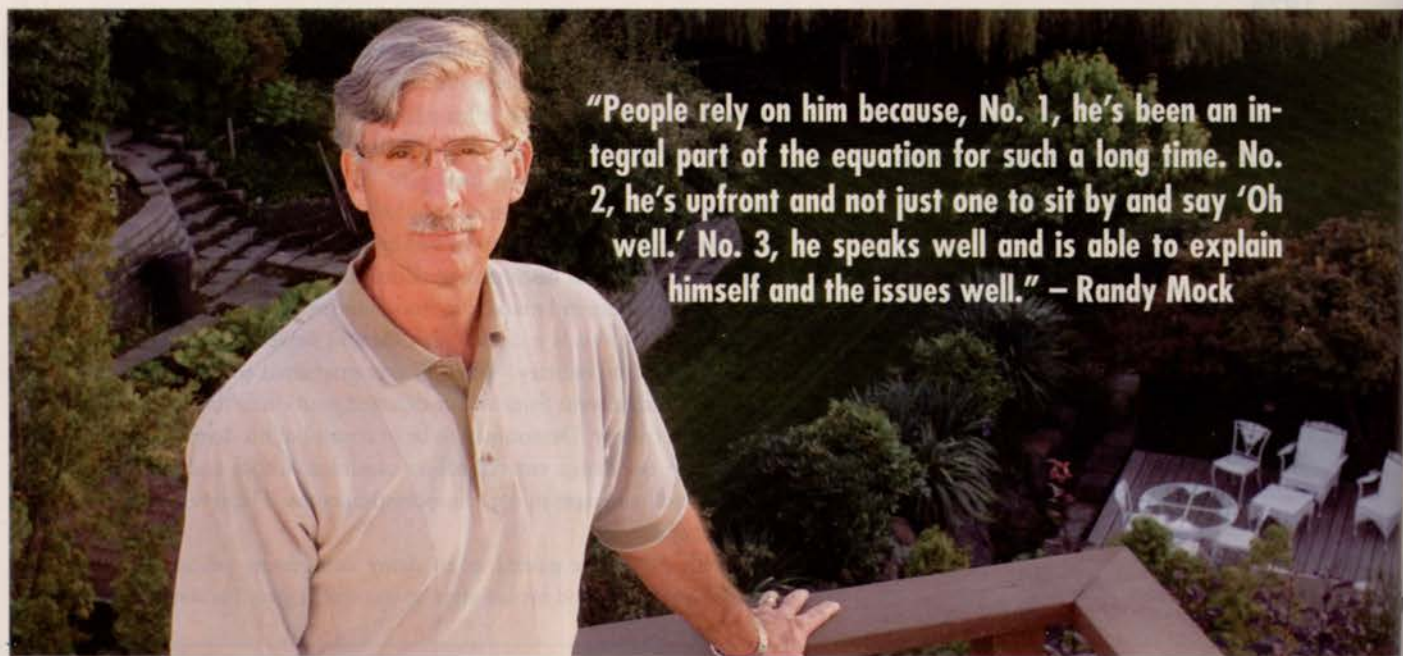
Walter eagerly learned the ins and

outs of the business, from sales to spraying to customer service. "I didn't have any industry experience – Stan's decision to hire me was based more on my business background," Walter notes. "So I started duplicating what he was doing – getting my feet wet in the field and learning the business side and the financials, which he wanted me to learn more than anything else." To master the required technical skills, Walter spent time out on jobs, took courses and studied to earn his applicator license.

"I was starting behind a lot of people in this area," Walter says. "I had to read more and study more and take different classes. I spent a lot of time early on reading professional magazines and technical bulletins to educate myself to catch up. I had to learn it while learning the business, too."

But his dedication didn't go unnoticed. "In time he gained the respect of everyone around here because of his work ethic," Mock adds. "He pretty much learned it all. He worked six days a week back in those days and put in a lot of hours."

In addition to gaining the respect of



**"People rely on him because, No. 1, he's been an integral part of the equation for such a long time. No. 2, he's upfront and not just one to sit by and say 'Oh well.' No. 3, he speaks well and is able to explain himself and the issues well." – Randy Mock**

his peers, Walter had to gain the respect of the man who hired him. Although Raplee brought him on to lead the company into the future, it took a while for Walter to win Raplee over entirely, although he had moved up to the ranks of vice president and general manager. "It was the mid-80s when for the first time I got the feeling that Stan was pleased and getting ready to leave me in charge," Walter says. A company in Tacoma approached Washington Tree Service, asking for a buyout. It was Washington Tree Service's first opportunity to open a branch location and Raplee turned to Walter to make the decision. "It was the first time I got the feeling that 'You're on your own and here you go,'" Walter says. "From that time on he just kept moving a little more out of the daily activity and into the background." The Tacoma location opened in 1984 and seven additional satellites have opened since.

Said to operate the company with a true top-down management style, Raplee did not relinquish his title as president and CEO until the late 1990s.

"I don't know if you've ever been around someone who's been the boss of a company for 40-some years," Mock says, speaking of Raplee. "Ed wasn't really allowed to completely run this place. He definitely put his time in here. He shows respect to everybody who's here. And he showed a lot of respect to Stan."

**STORY TELLING.** Washington Tree Service – and the industry in general – faced another challenge during the 1980s. At that time, activism surrounding pesticide issues was mounting. Walter's proactive, upfront approach to combating restrictions and communicating the industry's message is where his peers say he's made the biggest footprints.

The industry faced an onslaught of bad press and state and local regulation, including the loss of registered pesticides and buzz about notification requirements. Walter was already involved in the Interstate Pesticide Applicators Association, a group of professional pesticide users from Washington and Oregon. "One thing Stan encouraged me to do was get in-

involved in associations, work with government leaders, the department of agriculture and legislators – and I've done that for 30 years," Walter says. "By having a relationship with these people and an opportunity to talk with them, it's given us

an opportunity to present our opinion from a position of respect and authority."

Walter and others at the IPAA were instrumental in coordinating efforts to prevent state and local pesticide regulations, much like those that have infiltrated

**Q.** *What does the term "giving back" mean to you?*

**A.** "Giving back is the willingness to open up and share to others some of the things you've learned, the mistakes you've made and advising them on how not to make those mistakes. It's also about volunteering your time for different efforts and also sharing your good fortune. If you've been financially successful, share it."

**Q.** *Describe a situation where you feel you gave back to the industry or your community due to a cause or effort you believed in and how this impacted you in your career.*

**A.** "I can't think of any one specific cause, but being involved in the extra curricular activities like volunteering to sit in front of legislative committees, going to press conferences and volunteering throughout the state – that's giving back."

**Q.** *Who is one person you admire most for giving back and why?*

**A.** "There's one local individual that I admire greatly for doing what he does. A pitcher for the Seattle Mariners, Jamie Moyer – they just recently traded him to Philadelphia, but he has a foundation that helps families and children. He and his wife are intimately involved and they do excellent things for the community. That's a tremendous example of giving back to the community for your great fortune."

**Q.** *What is one thing you do to teach your employees the value of giving back?*

**A.** "I encourage and support the employees when they have outside-the-industry volunteer programs they're involved with – either with advertising or financially. I like to think I encourage them to be involved in these and I don't think I've ever not given my support."

**Q.** *In your opinion, what are the top three things a lawn care operator or landscape contractor can do today to establish a trend of giving back and start experiencing the benefits?*

**A.** "I admire companies that create a program or a project that encourages employees to get involved in giving back to the community in whatever they chose to do, and recognize or reward them for it. Leading by example is another good way to do it, but then sometimes that tends to focus on you rather than what the project is. Another way is encouraging involvement in associations."



## Keeping Options Open

Reorienting Washington Tree Service's structure to empower employees at all levels is one point of pride Ed Walter emphasizes in his 36-year career with the company.

Another one of his accomplishments – becoming a leader in natural lawn care – is a direct result of that effort.

"Over the last year and half we've introduced a natural program to mirror our traditional program in both lawn care and tree and shrub care," Walter says. "I believe we're one of the only companies who've done it.

"We had been hearing more and more from customers who wanted us to develop this program, and we also looked at some criticism that our industry receives for not offering it," he says, noting the issue is a prominent one in environmentally sensitive Washington state.

The company's newly reorganized management staff de-

signed and developed the natural program. "It's a result of empowering people to do things and creating the opportunity for them to do it," Walter says. The "Natural Choice" products meet the criteria established by the Washington State Department of Agriculture organic food program. Materials used in the natural applications include seaweed, fish fertilizer and sulfur. Management developed training and prepared employees with a list of responses for potential FAQ about the differences between the traditional and natural programs.

"I think it's just an excellent opportunity for us," he adds. "We're responding to the marketplace, but still offering the traditional program because not everything can be done with the natural program. It's also an excellent PR tool for our customers to deal with their neighbors."

Canada over the years. In the early 1980s, he helped organize busloads of people to go to the state capitol to speak with legislators and attend hearings. "Western Washington state is a hotbed of environmentalism and we had a very active anti-pesticide organization that did very well at getting the ear of legislators," says Chris Senske, president of Kennewick, Wash.-based Senske Lawn & Tree Care, a fellow IPAA member who's known Walter for close to 30 years. "It took a real yeoman's effort to get their ear or at least get the other side of the story told. And a lot of that was done with Ed's effort."

Telling the lawn and tree care industry's side of the story became a sort of second job for Walter over the years. In 1988 he helped found Washington Friends of Farms & Forests, an association of pesticide applicators from a variety of user communities. The organization's founding principle is to provide a balanced viewpoint for news stories about chemical use and provide oversight of statewide issues affecting pesticide use.

Though Walter no longer serves as a board member for "Friends," the organization's Executive Director Heather Hansen hears from him often. "He'll see an article in the newspaper and call me

up and say, 'What do you think about this? Should we write a letter to the editor?'" Hansen says, explaining that one of the greatest things about Walter is the fact that he's "a doer." "Other folks see an issue and say 'Somebody should do something about this.' He'll call and say 'I think we should do this.'"

Walter's spent many hours away from his family and business testifying before the state legislature on pesticide issues, as well as representing the industry at numerous local government meetings over the years. "Time and time again he's at meetings explaining, 'If you read the label and follow directions, it's safe,'" Hansen says. "It's important to have people in the industry to explain 'I wouldn't use anything on your lawn that I wouldn't use on my own.' You need people who are willing to take the time to educate the public and meet with editorial boards," she adds. "Ed is a great spokesperson for that."

The 1990s brought more activist challenges, but Walter's poise and foresight have helped to protect lawn care-friendly pesticide policies in the state of Washington for more than a decade. Once again, Walter helped assemble a statewide coalition of pesticide users and manufacturers to defeat oppressive laws that would

create burdensome regulation. Working closely with other IPAA members and then-State Senator Patty Murray, Walter in 1992 helped write new legislation on pesticide-sensitive registries. "He led the discussion to get everybody on the same page in terms of what we were willing to talk with legislators about and what we needed to do to defeat the other side," Senske says.

The result was sections 17.21.420 and 17.21.430 of the Washington Pesticide Applications Act.

"The part that made everybody nervous, but looking back was really the right thing to do, was not only the posting, but notification of those that were deemed sensitive," Walter says. "People thought we were really creating a hornet's nest, but it's now accepted as a very successful program."

More than 14 years later the legislation has not been altered whatsoever. "It's been a far-sighted and well-thought-out plan," Senske says. "The real result of his vision was that the rally cry of the anti-pesticide activists was silenced not just for a while but for more than a decade."

Walter's reputation as a voice for pesticide users and the mutual respect he's fostered with regulators landed him on

the Washington State Department of Agriculture's Pesticide Advisory Board as the urban landscape representative.

His long-time colleague Mock explains why Walter has emerged as a state-wide leader. "People rely on him because, No. 1, he's been an integral part of the equation for such a long time," he says. "No. 2, he's upfront and not just one to sit by and say, 'Oh well.' No. 3, he speaks well and is able to explain himself and the issues well."

**EMPOWERING OTHERS.** It's clear that Walter has given back on a large scale to the industry he was indoctrinated into more than 30 years ago. But his leadership skills have touched the lives of the people around him on a personal level.

"He is honorable in all aspects of his work and life, raising two successful children through college and caring for his wife of at least 30 years," Senske says.

Ed has been married to his wife, Patty, for 37 years, to be exact. It's been 30 years since life threw the couple a curveball – Patty was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis.

It's been challenging, Walter acknowledges, supporting his family's unique situation while remaining dedicated to the company and the industry. But with families, there's give and take. "For the first 25 years, I was working six and seven days here, and the family was extremely supportive of that," Walter says.

"He's a hell of a family man," Mock says. "He's gone through a lot of adversity, but he isn't a whiner."

The Walters have two grown children – a son and a daughter, who worked minimally in the business throughout the years. "My wife and I decided that we wanted somebody else to teach our kids how to work," he says. "We figured they would learn better if it wasn't mom and dad teaching them."

Walter, however, learned his work ethic from his father. If you ask him, he

says his leadership style was shaped primarily by his dad, who ran several small businesses and was well-respected for his community involvement and conduct. "My father influenced me on how to handle people, how to respect employees and customers, and that you have to devote a tremendous amount of time and effort and make some sacrifices to make a business successful," he says.

The way Stan Raplee ran Washington Tree Service indirectly affected the style Walter adopted when he took the helm, Walter says. As the founder of the company, Raplee operated as the "captain of the ship."

"As the founder of the company, his style was more autocratic," Walter says. "But only one person can do that – the founder. My style had to be more inclusive. I had to take advantage of the leadership team we'd assembled and rely more

countability and recognition they needed and deserved," Walter says.

He relates this experience to one of his favorite quotes about leadership from former president and Army General Dwight D. Eisenhower: "Leadership is getting others to do what you want them to do even if they don't want to do it."

He says the structural realignment was a major change for the employees, many of whom were content doing things the way they'd always done them. "It was a big change in everybody's comfort zones. It stirred the pot, but they've handled it very well," he says.

Walter's emphasis on empowering those around him translates to his association involvement, as well. He's always encouraged involvement in IPAA, Friends and other industry groups, as well as the opportunity for training and educational seminars. He says he fosters future leaders

**"You need people who are willing to take the time to educate the public and meet with editorial boards. Ed is a great spokesperson for that." – Heather Hansen**

on them to get them involved so they felt they had ownership in the business."

Lessons learned from both of these men add to Walter's reputation for being a well-informed, encouraging, even-keeled professional who leads by example.

"He's a good listener – he doesn't make snap decisions," Mock says. "He tends to research things very well."

One goal of the self-described "Polo-shirt-and-slacks guy" is to maintain a positive, level attitude. "I never want people to think 'What kind of mood is Ed in today?'" he says.

Transitioning the company from a top-down approach to a team-centric one is what Walter calls one of his greatest professional accomplishments. Four years ago, he re-oriented the company structure, positioning himself in a bottom-up, encouraging role. "We tried to empower the employee base to give them some ac-

by providing them with reading material and giving them "as much responsibility as they can handle." Walter also urges employees to get involved in the community with outside-the-industry volunteer programs.

"He's very much a team player," Hansen says. "In any group there are always folks who say 'I wish we could do this, but I don't know how.' Ed will just encourage people to do things and come up with a plan."

Mock attributes Walter's dedication and leadership in the company and the industry to being raised during a time when people were expected to be accountable for their actions. "Thirty years is a long time to be in one place – you don't see that much lately," he says. "Ed made a decision that this was going to be his career; he stuck to it and did what he had to do."

That, and a whole lot more. ♦

# alan white

*If a problem needs solving, all you have to do is tell Alan White that he can't fix it. Then, he'll prove you wrong.*

**W**hen Alan White was a young teenager working on a golf course near his rural home in Burlington, Ontario, it never crossed his mind that working in the green industry would one day become his career. He was just a kid doing a summer job that he loved. He enjoyed being able to work outdoors and learn about plants and trees – a far cry from sitting in a stuffy high school classroom.

As he grew into an adult, he attended school at Sheridan College to study marketing and advertising, much to the pleasure of his mother and father. He quickly discovered, however, that this was not the path he wanted to take.

**THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED.** White has a good sense of what he wants in life and tackles each obstacle that comes his way head-on. Even as a child, his principal at grade school met with his parents for a conference and told them, "Your son gets to the same endpoint as everyone else, but he takes his own path to reach it." Early on, his leadership qualities began to surface.

While working his first few jobs, he took mental notes on how to become a leader. "Whenever I worked, I looked at everybody else's job around me and tried to learn as much about those who were leading me as I could," he recalls.

**Name: ALAN WHITE**

**Company: Turf Systems**

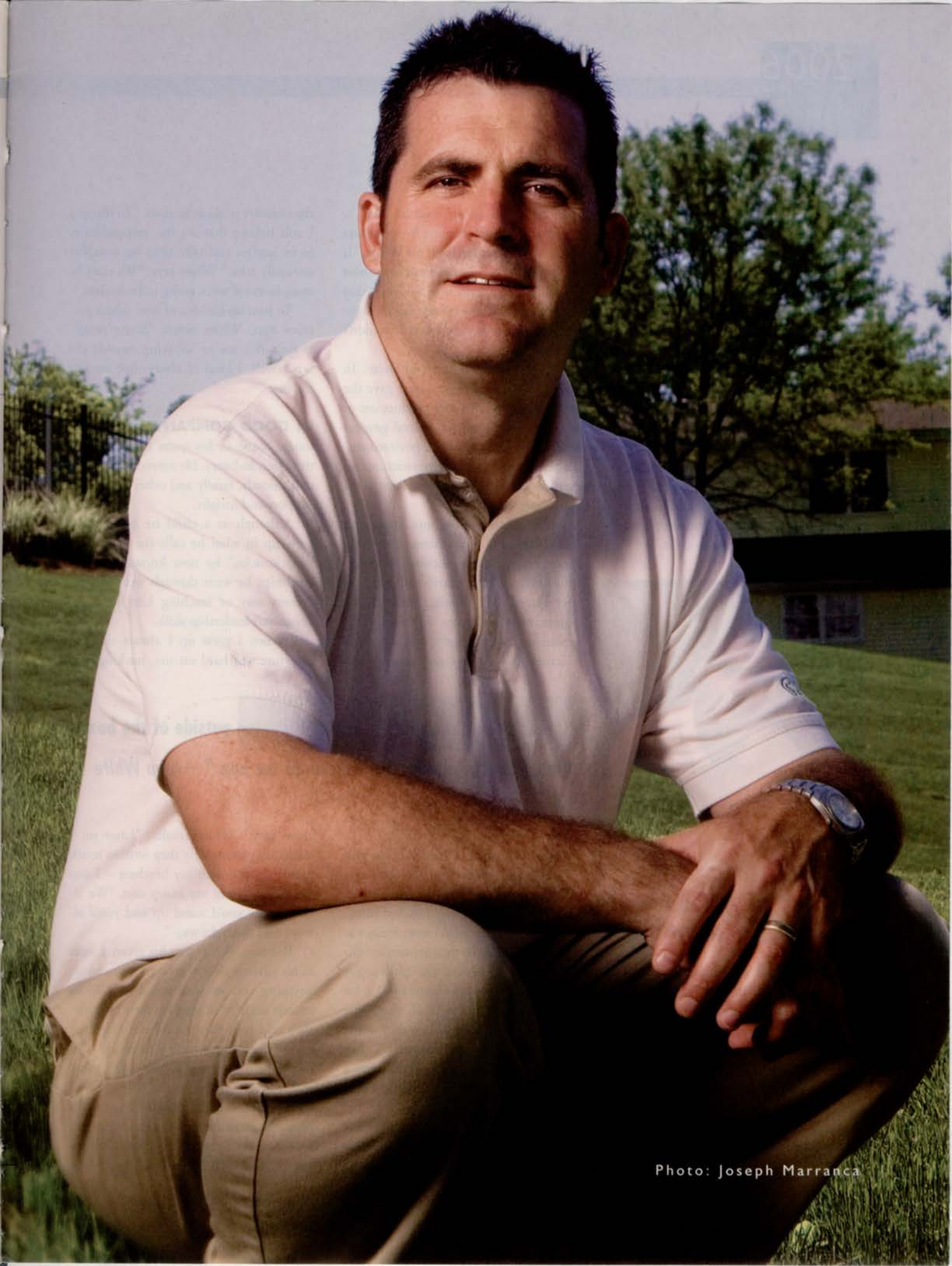
**Location: Burlington, Ontario, Canada**

**Career Highlights:**

- Founded Turf Systems in 1991
- Elected to lead the Lawn Care Commodity arm of Landscape Ontario in 2004
- On the IPM Council of Canada's Board of Directors
- Helped develop the IPM Accreditation Program
- Working with the U.S. Project EverGreen Board to bring the program to Canada

By Heather DeAngelis



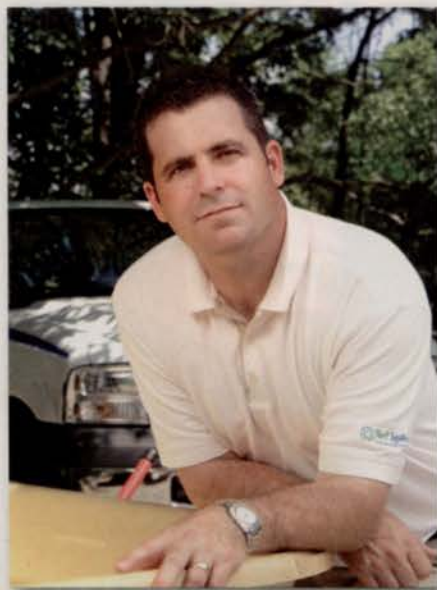


2005

Photo: Joseph Marranca

White worked at ChemLawn for a couple of years while he was at college. Mid-way through his higher education, he switched his academic focus to sciences and turfgrass at the University of Guelph. Through his schooling and job at ChemLawn, he began gaining insight into the business side of turf management.

But working for others soon became tiresome for White. He wanted to do something bigger – he wanted to start his own business. “I was frustrated with working for other people and not being in control of where I was going and not being able to try new things,” he says. “I wasn’t really paying much attention at the time as to why I did it, but once I was locked into it I was going to do it.”



White, armed with knowledge from his younger years in the golf industry, his short time at ChemLawn, his background at school and some serious ambition, started Turf Systems in 1991. At the time, Canada was in the midst of a recession and White found it difficult to gain encouragement for his endeavor. When you’re looking for support from other business people, White says, they keep telling you “it’s not easy; these are the

failure rates.” So, he did it on his own.

Getting through the first five years was an accomplishment in itself for White. “It was so entrenched in my head that most companies don’t make it to five years that that was kind of one of my career highlights, because everybody said I wouldn’t do it,” he says.

The challenges didn’t end there. In 2002, Canada’s Supreme Court gave the right to manage lawn care product use to the cities rather than the federal government. Cities began to heed environmental activists’ cries and place restrictions on pesticides and other products essential for proper lawn care.

Rather than falling into line with others or waiting for someone else to do something, White decided to better his situation. He started offering an Integrated Pest Management (IPM) program, which uses fertilizer as its main ingredient, but spot-sprays herbicides and insecticides as problems

the industry to do as he does. “To this day I still believe that it’s our responsibility to be leaders and take risks we wouldn’t normally take,” White says. “We can’t be complacent if we’re going to be leaders.”

To sum up his idea of how others perceive him, White notes: “Some people characterize me as ‘thinking outside the box.’ Well, I kind of always live outside the box.”

**IN GOOD COMPANY.** White is no longer alone in his quest for success in the green industry. He surrounds himself with friends, family and other leaders for support and insight.

Although as a child he believed he grew up in what he calls the “school of hard knocks,” he now knows that any hardships he went through were just his parents way of teaching him independence and leadership skills.

“When I grew up I always thought everyone was hard on me, nothing ever

**“Some people characterize me as ‘thinking outside of the box.’**

**Well, I kind of always live outside of the box.” – Alan White**

are found.

“I saw that things I learned in the golf industry also worked in the lawn care business, one of them being IPM. So that was the niche that I locked into,” White says. “My main career focus was to provide IPM to the mainstream client. When I presented the philosophy of IPM to mainstream lawn care, a lot of people said, ‘You can’t do that. The customer won’t buy into it – they won’t understand it; it’s too expensive.’” But White stuck to his guns and now owns a successful business with a 90 percent customer renewal rate.

Today, White is not only the president of a thriving company; he also spends most of his time encouraging others in

came easy,” White recalls. “Later on I asked my parents why they were so much harder on me than my brothers – I was the oldest – and my mom said, ‘We always knew you’d stand up and you’d always find the right way.’”

But now, White sees his greatest asset as his parents always saying, “You can do anything you set your mind to.” When he first decided to start his own business, they told him they would not help him financially to begin with – he would have to do it on his own. White didn’t think that was very nice.

“My parents said, ‘You might run into problems in the first two years, and you’ll need help then. So you figure out how to start it, and we’ll figure out how to help

# alan white on giving back. . .

you,” White explains. “I had this idea and I was looking for support – the bank wouldn’t help, my parents wouldn’t help – but it was because my parents knew that most businesses run into cash flow problems within two years. They were thinking ahead and I know inside they wanted to help but they knew they didn’t have that kind of luxury. They would be taking a risk, and they needed to know I was doing my homework first.”

Ultimately, White did not need his parents help at the two-year mark. But he did learn his problem solving skills and analytical approach to life – which combines the “can do anything you set your mind to” philosophy with “think twice, act once” – from his father, who is an engineer.

Along with his parents, White also has his wife by his side. They have been married for six years, but have been together for about 18 years. They have two young daughters.

Outside of the business, the Whites’ friends view them as an extremely hospitable family that is determined to make life better for everyone. “They always have people over, they’re always entertaining – they like people around,” says Dwayne Job, president, System Fencing Limited, Rockwood, Ontario. Job has been a friend of White’s since they were in public school together and has watched him build his family and business.

“If you drop by and it’s close to 5 p.m., you’re having dinner there – they just invite you into their home all the time,” Job says, adding that the White family also regularly helps people talk through their problems and find solutions. The outside observer can see they have a strong family connection and spend time together as often as possible, Job says.

Though he is an active family man, White spends a considerable amount of time building his business.

“Someone lied to me a long time ago when they said running a business allows you to do what you want and that you get Wednesdays off to go golfing or get to go to the cottage with the family on the weekend whenever you want because you’re your own boss – I work more hours

## **Q.** *What does the term “giving back” mean to you?*

**A.** “I think giving back leads to providing a return to the community and the industry, helping others advance and providing benefits to others. I think we help support society for the role we play in the green industry. And I think a way to profile what we do in the green industry is to always participate and showcase what we do as a means of bettering the community and teaching people what we do.”

## **Q.** *Describe a situation where you feel you gave back the industry or your community due to a cause or effort you believed in and how this impacted you in your career.*

**A.** “We try to give back everyday, not only on a national scale, but also in our local community. That was part of the reason why a mayor friend of mine originally approached me and got me involved – because I had a commitment and a passion to help our city with its green spaces when there was increasing pressure to do nothing with them and let them suffer. And that just bothered me that our children might not have somewhere green to play one day. There were people promoting that it was a bad thing to look after parks. So I became involved before it really became an issue.”

## **Q.** *Who is one person you admire most for giving back, and why?*

**A.** “I admire anybody who has the ability to give back – some people give monetarily, some people give time, some people give leadership and some give all of the above. Some people I admire most are the ones who give back and it doesn’t necessarily have to be self-serving. Even as recently as Bill Gates and Warren Buffett, who are great leaders who give back to causes like world hunger, education, disease research and things like that. Those are worthwhile causes that don’t directly benefit their businesses. And they could have chosen to do so many different things with that money.”

## **Q.** *What is one thing you do to teach your employees the value of giving back?*

**A.** “My staff asks me why I spend so much time participating in businesses and areas other than my own. They ask why am I involved in the U.S. market, why I belong to PLANET. I don’t do anything in the U.S. market but I think being involved will tremendously benefit our industry as a whole, whether it directly benefits me or not. If I have something I can share, I think it’s important to do it. I teach the same concept to my employees.”

## **Q.** *In your opinion, what are the top three things a lawn care operator or landscape contractor can do today to establish a trend of giving back and experience the benefits?*

**A.**

1. Participate in community groups to bring the importance of green spaces to the forefront.
2. Identify strong environmental initiatives that build strong community values.
3. Help our peers grow. Too often we see our competitors as competitors instead of part of a team. By building a stronger community together, we all benefit.”

than I ever worked," White laughs. "Not that it's bad – if it were bad I wouldn't be doing it. I love doing what I do."

"The fact that he can balance that personal, business and political kind of life where he's challenging people to think a different way – I think that's the most admirable thing about White," Job says.

**A SENSE OF STYLE.** Though a lifestyle like White's can be busy, he finds a way to balance it to preserve his sanity.

"I always try to leave enough room in the day so there's freedom to do whatever comes up," he says. "To free up time to make decisions, you have to make a portion of your environment predictable and calming. It can get deadline-driven and

stressful quickly and it's good to have things that aren't causing questions and concerns. It's good to know the staff is operating automatically and don't require you all of the time, and it's good to have things that calm you so your environment isn't stressful when situations outside become stressful."

This would explain why there's a large aquarium in White's office. He finds it calming amidst an office that his wife would call "organized chaos." White describes his office as a comfortable, large working space. The only TV in the office is used for weather and news reports, and there is nothing to distract him from a productive work day. The staff is friendly and professional.

"Image, marketing and direction has been a focus for our company from the day I started it," White says. "I show up every day in a uniform and my employees wear the same uniforms. I'm always dressed to meet a client or go to work."

White has all of his bases covered when it comes to running a company. "He's built a very nice business that is methodically thought out so right from the start, even though he's a small business, he acts like a large business," Job says.

**MAKING A DIFFERENCE.** As if these qualities alone don't make White a leader in his field, he goes above and beyond to stand out as an innovative lawn care specialist and what he considers to be a "true

## all fun and games

Alan White entered the landscape business because he enjoys the environment and wants to know more about it. At first, it was just a summer job that he thought was fun. When the business began to get too serious, it took a small child to get White back to the mentality that the difference between work and play can be slight.

"One day, a friend of mine who is a dentist came up to me, and his son, who is about 5 or 6, said something that stuck with me," White says. "In early grade school they were talking about what their dads and moms did for a living. He asked what I did, and his dad said, 'Well, he looks after gardens and plants and trees.' Then his son said, 'No, what does he do for a job?' because he thought, in his eyes, I was doing what his dad did every weekend."

White realized that he drove tractors and trucks and all the things the boy saw as fun, not as a job. "The child thought everybody else was working but me," White explains. "I get to have fun all day in his eyes."

There is a consumer appetite for the social and environmental benefits of gardening as a hobby, White adds, pointing out: "That's why we do it on the weekends... and that's why I do it as a job."



environmentalist." White is extremely active in his community and in the industry as a whole, spending countless hours examining problems and finding solutions, attending meetings and discussing the policies and regulations that have been forced on the Canadian lawn care business.

With Canada's increasing restrictions on pesticides, environmental issues have come to the forefront of people's minds. Lawn care operators must deal with customers alarmed by the perceived health concerns of pesticides.

In order to win this battle, consumers need to be aware of what lawn care operators are really doing and that some environmental activists don't give an accurate account of the risks involved with the products used, White insists. It is the responsibility of those in the lawn care industry to inform consumers of the truth, he says.

"We're all so busy running our businesses that somebody else is telling the story and then, ultimately when it comes down to it, nobody understands what we do," White notes. "We need to take that message to them. We need to tell them

that we care about the things they care about because, right now, most would perceive the opposite. Once we gain that trust back and consumers see us as the go-to people in the environment, then we can be better landscapers, lawn care

to helping an industry – it just became exponentially bigger," White says. "I try to help others understand the concept that it doesn't matter how big you are, it's the influence that you have on the environment that surrounds you. It just requires a

**"I try to help others understand the concept that it doesn't matter how big you are. Rather, it's the influence that you have on the environment that surrounds you. It just requires a passion and a dedication to meeting objectives and being a part of the solution." – Alan White**

companies, irrigation managers and green space managers."

White now heads the Lawn Care Commodity arm of Landscape Ontario and is a member of IPM Council of Canada's Board of Directors. Most recently, he has been working with the Project EverGreen Board in the United States to bring this important initiative to Canada. He has also developed the IPM Accreditation Program, which supports the idea of using Integrated Pest Management as a major solution to pesticide regulations.

"He's out there and in an association that's giving back to the community," Job says. "He's challenging the activists to get them to think in a new way. He gives back so much and he has a very defined vision of where he wants to see the industry go. And he's not afraid to take the steps to lead that vision and get it pushed through."

The fight has been challenging, but White is determined.

"He's got pressure from both sides to conduct business responsibly and grow his business, but at the same time not use the same products that everyone else is able to use throughout the rest of the world to fight lawn care problems," Job says.

"I think the biggest turn-around was when it went from running a business

passion and a dedication to meeting objectives and being a part of the solution."

Participation of landscape contractors in their communities and in the landscape and lawn care market is an absolute necessity to grow the industry as a whole, according to White. "My staff and I dedicate a considerable amount of time to not only servicing our clients, but considering new ways to help all of the clients and to help our peers grow," he explains. "It's either teach by example and help others or we all kind of falter and are grouped into the same class.

"We have to make some decisions in the next 10 years that will have long-reaching impacts on our industry and how legislators deal with things, and how consumers perceive what we do," White adds. "So it is critical that you're involved with your community, and that you're involved in government to promote the environmental and social benefits that we all believe in."

Being a leader just comes naturally to White. It has been a part of his personality from the start. "Originally you don't see it as leadership. You see it as 'the buck stops here, and I have to make that decision that nobody else wants to, so I'm going to do it,'" he says. "It's only later on that you start classifying that as leadership – initially, it's just survival." ♦



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