

Lawn & Landscape

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**Cover Story –
Put Growth In Gear**

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Whether you're pushing forward fast or taking a slower route to grow business, our exclusive State of the Industry Report uncovers key trends. Plus, *Lawn & Landscape* takes a look at a decade of industry research.

Cover illustration: Mark Harvey

10.06

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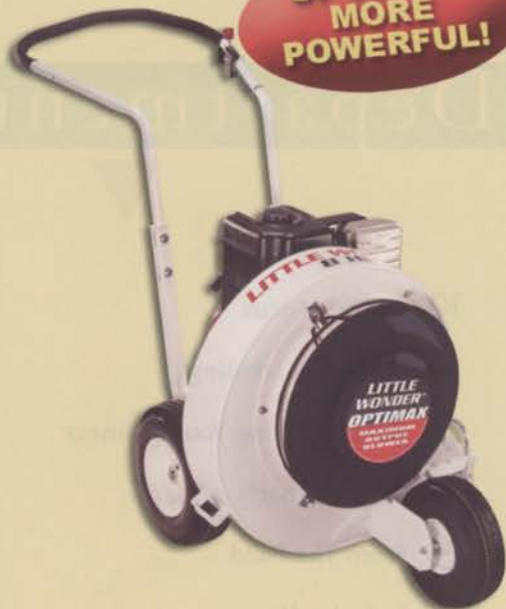
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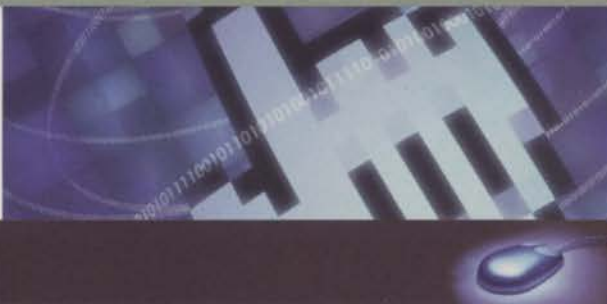
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uniform decision

As you grapple with the decision of whether or not to require employees to wear uniforms, read this month's Best of the Web story about this very subject on page 84.

There you can compare your company's uniform policy with those of members of our online community who have weighed in on the subject.

The contractors discuss charging employees for the uniforms, uniform policies and what the uniforms are meant to represent. Try on a few fresh ideas. Afterward, don't forget to give your two cents on the www.lawnandlandscape.com Message Board!

Labor & Litigation

As concerns mount over the shortage of skilled labor in the green industry, *Lawn & Landscape* is providing comprehensive coverage to keep readers on top of the latest developments. A special section on our homepage, Labor & Litigation, is your source for all H-2B and immigration news that affects the industry.

The stories in this section serve as a continuation of the

discussion that began in the special section in *Lawn & Landscape's* September issue and run through this month's issue. The topic isn't likely to fade any time soon. Visit www.lawnandlandscape.com and check out the section, just under Headline News, to stay updated on the various labor issues that impact our industry and the litigation issues that are sure to have an effect.



online poll



It's that time again. Contractors who offer a holiday lighting service are beginning to get organized for the season. *Lawn & Landscape* wants to find out how you do it and provide you with information from your peers.

When you log onto the Web site the week of Oct. 16, click on the red "Online Poll" button and answer the question, "If your company offers holiday lighting installations, how did you incorporate the service into your business?" See the latest results on the spot or check each Monday's e-newsletter for information on other hot topics in the industry!



Access SOI

As you'll see, the State of the Industry section supplementing this issue is packed with extensive, in-depth green industry analysis. All the valuable information has been made easily accessible at www.lawnandlandscape.com. Log on and browse it at any time. As always, you can also find the rest of the issue in our digital edition online.



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Resilience Personifies the Landscape Contractor

Without question, the professional lawn and landscape segment of the horticulture market is the largest, most diverse and fragmented portion of the marketplace.

With more than 90,000 industry service providers and sustained demand for new landscape installations and well-maintained properties, the professional segment of the landscape industry is well-poised for future prolonged growth.

Interestingly, attaining growth hasn't been an issue for those contractors who desired it. Rather, understanding the financial numbers behind the growth has been an uphill struggle for small companies who suddenly become mid-sized firms seemingly overnight.

However, our annual State of the Industry report illustrates that the contractor has become a better business person in today's day and age. Truth be told, this is a prerequisite for success given the varied factors that directly or indirectly impact the marketplace.

Perhaps most obvious is the ubiquitous housing bubble. The National Association of Realtors predicts a fragile housing market – weaker than originally thought – primarily because of a housing glut and the stubbornness of sellers who have grown accustomed to receiving top dollar for their homes.

Another challenge facing consumers (your customers) are escalating interest rates. At press time, mortgage rates are about one point higher than they were last year and are not expected to stop there.


Internally, contractors must face and balance continued challenges to profitability including escalating operations costs, flat wages, commodity pricing to name a few.

Ten years ago, *Lawn & Landscape* began publishing its annual State of the Industry report. It's become a much-anticipated report by contractors, suppliers, investors and others who have a stake in the landscape industry. Our 10th installment of this report appears in this issue.

The key message in this year's report is that business owners have become more fiscally savvy. Despite increased costs and challenges to incoming business revenue, net profit has remained strong.

Accompanying this year's report is a 10-year analysis of the marketplace. We measured key indicators such as overall revenues, years in business, number of employees, services offered among others. Those figures and key findings are intertwined throughout the report.

Industry statistics aside, the professional landscape market today requires a degree of skill and expertise which wasn't demanded from contractors in the past. The marketplace has grown from a business of laborers to business owners supported by technology not available 10 years ago.

The professional lawn and landscape industry is resilient and moving forward in sustained fashion. As your business management resource and partner, *Lawn & Landscape* is pleased to impart editorial that helps your firms not only grow, but at a more productive and profitable level. Enjoy the report. 

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 **NEW HOLLAND**



Building a Network

When we hear the word “network,” we often think first of that snarl of cables in our offices that connect all the computers to one another.

This month I want you to think about a very different network. This network comprises all of the people you know who could purchase your products and services or who know other people who could. This is the network every green industry sales professional needs to maximize to be successful.

How do you find people who want to buy your products and services? You go out and look for them, of course, and you become obsessed with the search. The following four tactics have worked well for me and may pay off for you.

Tactic No. 1. The CEO of the company that moved into the old manufacturing plant in town recently stated in the news he was committed to making a difference in the community. You drive by the site and notice the grounds need work – the lawn should be reseeded, trees should be replaced and the entrance could use some color. Clip the story from the paper and attach it to a handwritten note welcoming the CEO to town. Tell him you’re confident your company could help him make a difference by improving the look of his site. You might not receive a response, but you’ve established your presence and made an initial overture toward a professional friendship. It’s the first important step toward adding the CEO and his company to your network.

Tactic No. 2. Suppose you drive by a home under construction. You see the roof is going on and you know it’s a good four months before the owner takes residence in the home. Pull your marketing materials together, put them in one of your company’s large envelopes and print in big letters “FOR HOMEOWNER.”

Staple the packet to a wood stud in the garage so the homeowner sees it when he or she checks on the house’s progress. Again, you might not get a job out of this – though I bet you will – but you will certainly succeed in getting your name out and begin the process of adding this prospective customer to your network.

Tactic No. 3. Join the local chamber of commerce. Obvious? You bet. Underestimated? You bet, again. We join the chamber to get better health insurance and workers’ compensation rates, but you can use it to tap into the vast network of other business owners in the area. Likewise, you’ll be privy to news of all the new businesses coming to town. Likewise, think of the new market of landscape customers you could capture by getting to know local homebuilders – all of whom are likely chamber members. Go to the meetings a couple times a year. Play in the golf outing. Get involved.

Tactic No. 4. Show up at events your customers or potential customers are likely to attend. If you sell high-end landscaping, get involved in a local cultural institution by joining an event committee. Or help sponsor a charity event, like a fund-raiser for the local hospital or private school. Such gatherings are likely to attract a well-heeled crowd who have the income to spend on improving the appearance of their homes. Be sure to show up with business cards in hand, introduce yourself to as many people as you can, and collect as many cards in return as you can. When I attend these types of events, I am careful not to overstep my boundaries. Remember, you’re not there to sell a job but rather to lay the groundwork for accomplishing that at a later date.

These simple, but effective, tactics find people who can buy your products and services. Next month, I’ll share ideas for how to get these people to sell for you. ☞

marty grunder

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Backlog & Production

Last September I went on a fishing trip to Moosehead Lake, Maine, with two clients – Mark Pendergast and Dave Rykbost. Rykbost runs Dave's Landscape, a full-service maintenance company near Boston. Pendergast's firm, Salmon Falls Nursery (SFN), is a New England commercial and residential landscape construction company.

A few years ago, at \$3 million in sales, Pendergast had double-digit net profit before taxes. Rykbost, at about half the sales, saw his net profit hit the low 20-percent range. Both companies have grown significantly and both have seen their bottom lines erode substantially.

There are five stages or growth plateaus as sales increase from \$0 to \$5 million. A contractor has to reinvent himself five times in order to hit \$5 million, an extremely difficult process. Pendergast is struggling to reach the fifth level as he builds and trains his management team. Rykbost is struggling to get the pieces in place to transition into and through level four.

Pendergast has built an excellent management team and solid systems. Until last year, he didn't even have a desk. Focused on checking jobs and future work, he'd rather run things from his truck. Rykbost has a good team and systems in place, but some of his managers are weak.

At dinner one day, I had Pendergast explain how he ran his company and which benchmarks he monitored.

"Backlog," he blurted first. In other words, his crews have plenty of work and they are meeting budget for annual sales. "And production," he added. Production means the crews are performing at a high level and meeting or beating the hours in the bid. One focuses on effectiveness: Are we reaching the "big" picture – our annual sales goal? The other addresses efficiency: Are we being efficient as we execute the "little" picture – individual jobs?

Backlog is measured by means of a Bid Board, which puts the big picture into perspective. It displays, on an MS Excel worksheet, all jobs and their status. It also reflects where we are in relation to the annual sales budget. The little picture is measured by job costing individual jobs, which tells how each is progressing or regressing. Since field-labor hours bid-to-actual comprise about 90 percent of the total risk in a company, our primary focus for job costing is hours bid compared to hours it takes to perform the work.

Pendergast has built a high-performance office and field teams. The office team and managers focus on sales and meeting budget. The field team focuses on executing the work as bid.

In a February 2005 *Wall Street Journal* editorial, Rich Karlgaard quotes Management Consultant Peter Drucker describing a CEO's strategic focus. Drucker states: "Effective CEOs pick two tasks and devote their energies there. When those tasks are done, they don't go to No. 3. They make a new list, pick the top two and start over again."

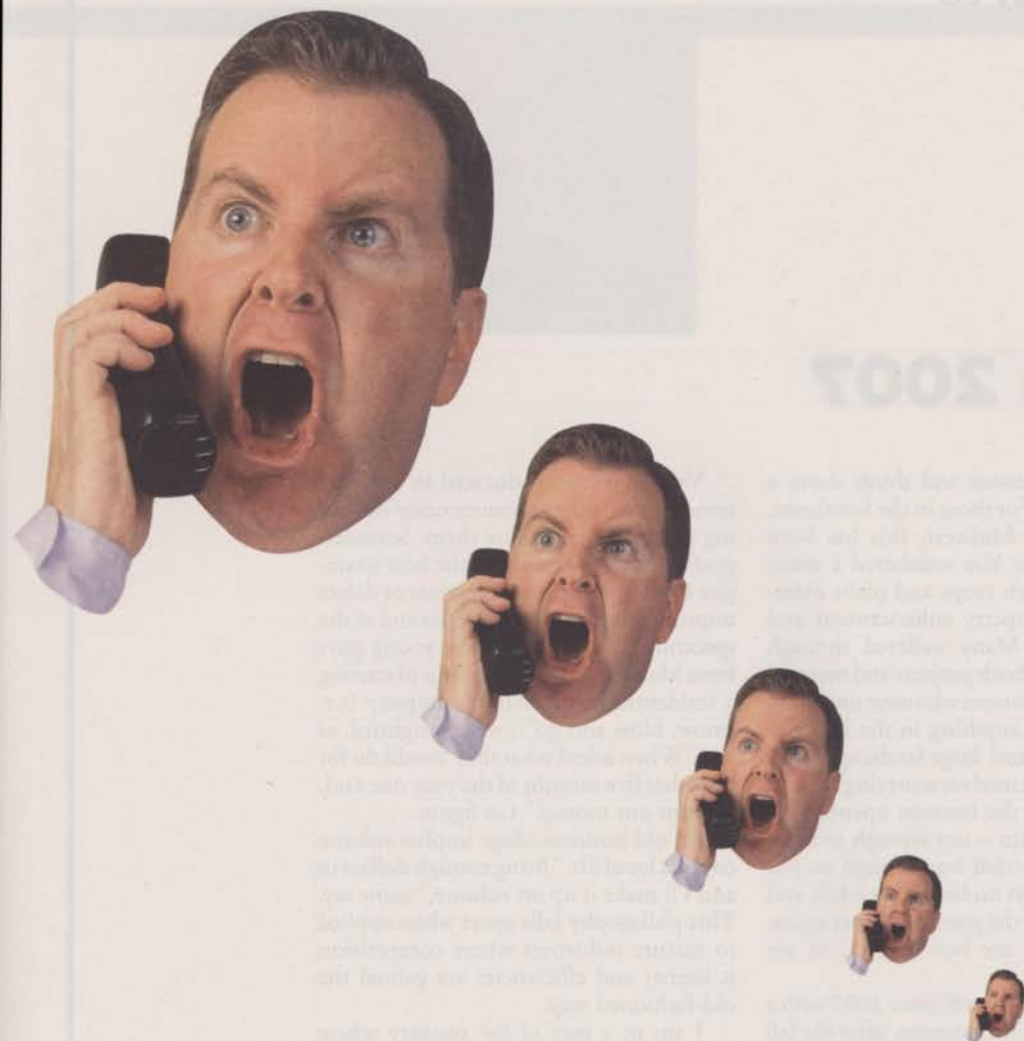
Most CEOs do not maintain this strategic focus. Instead, they become absorbed in the daily minutia and fail to develop a team to oversee those tasks. Effective CEOs and owners understand the power of strategic focus. Otherwise, they create paralysis from too much analysis.

Smart CEOs in the green industry establish internal company benchmarks (sales and production) and relentlessly pursue them as they build a team to take care of the details.

Pendergast has done a good job at this, but there have been adjustments as his team grows through the fifth stage. Our friend Rykbost is building a stronger team and trying to avoid getting wrapped up in things he should delegate. Both are making slow, but steady, progress. ■

jim huston

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Eyeballing 2007

Stop for a minute and think about a few things. For those in the Southeast, Southwest and Midwest, this has been a heck of a year. You weathered a water shortage for both crops and plant material used in property enhancement and beautification. Many suffered through cancellations of both projects and material orders from customers who were uncertain about planting anything in the hot, dry weather. Small and large landscape companies found themselves scurrying to hang on. Mercifully, the heavens opened and we got some rain – not enough to solve our annual shortfall but enough to put our drought fears on hold for a while and get a glimpse of the good old times again.

Happy days are here again... or are they?

It's a good bet we will enter 2007 with a rainfall deficit. Furthermore, after the fall elections we may have a new slate of House and Senate members in Washington whose priorities, at this point, are anybody's guess. If you listen to the Wall Street pundits, some predict an economic slowdown. The longer term landscape industry players with solid financial positions and well-defined game plans are focusing on improving their management practices.

Business owners were once faced with black-and-white decisions, but now they are many shades of gray. The days of the "seat-of-the-pants" owner are drawing to a close, and improved business management skills are needed now more than ever.

I recently attended a major nursery and landscape trade show. Along with the normal show venue, there was a major education and networking component that brought representatives from all size companies together to share ideas. It was apparent that the caliber of this year's discussions had taken a quantum leap forward.

Veteran owners, educated in industry trends, gave incisive commentary on facing the challenges before them. Seasoned professionals talked about the best strategies to add products and services or delete unprofitable ones. On the other end of the spectrum, comments by two young guys from Massachusetts on the verge of starting a residential maintenance company (i.e. "mow, blow and go"), were insightful, as well. When asked what they would do for the other five months of the year, one said, "Count our money." Go figure.

An old business adage implies volume covers a lot of ills. "Bring enough dollars in and I'll make it up on volume," some say. This philosophy falls apart when applied to mature industries where competition is keener and efficiencies are gained the old-fashioned way.

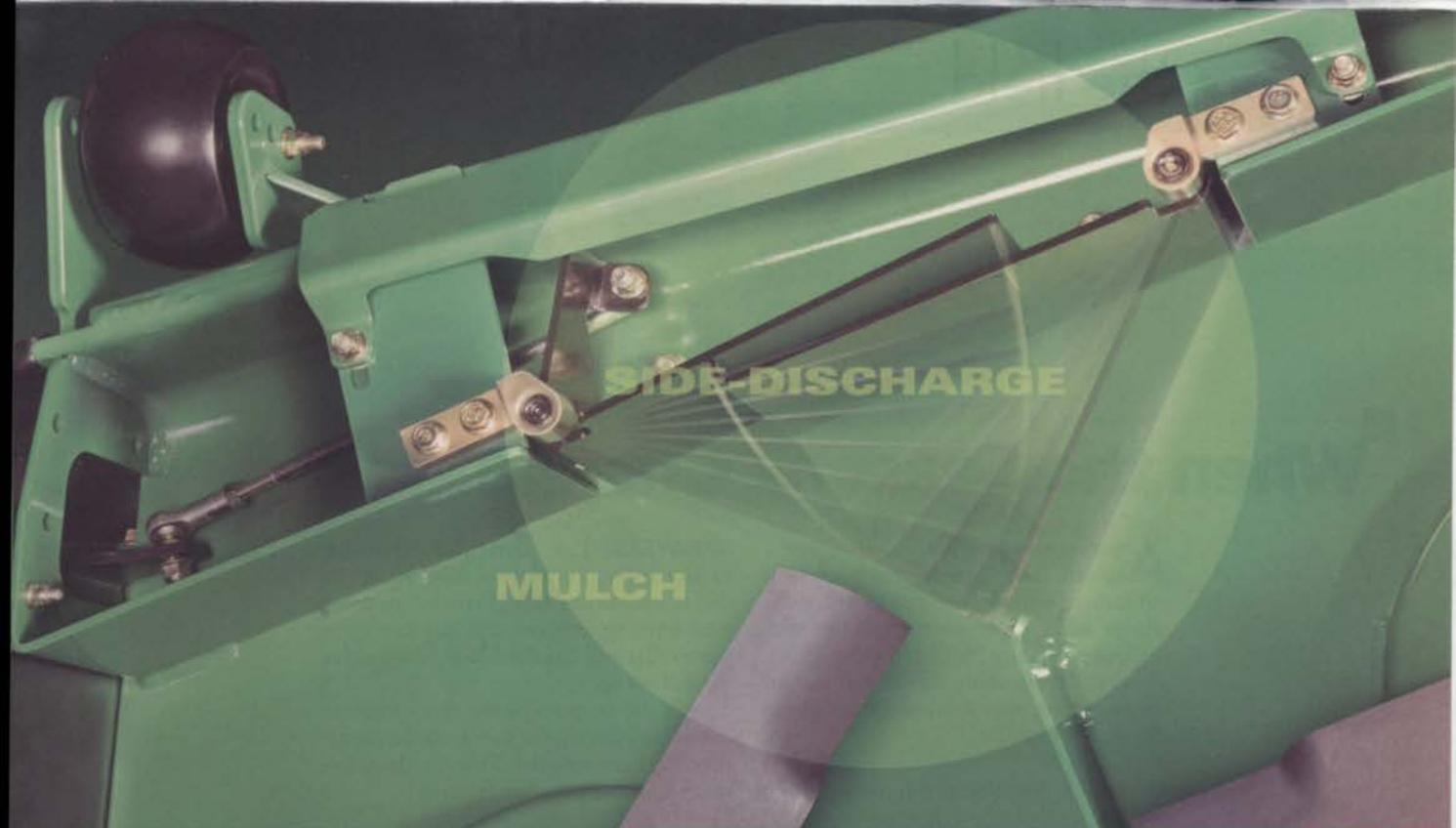
I am in a part of the country where people seem willing to spend a lot of money on landscape services and products. That's the good news. But good times don't last forever and, like it or not, some profound changes may overtake our industry. Working harder and trying to make it up on volume will not answer these new challenges. Instead, they will be dealt with through good management decisions requiring knowledge of markets, trends and what each of our companies is truly able to do well in terms of capitalizing on those opportunities. We have already had a glimpse of the impact that a natural phenomenon, such as a drought or last year's horrific hurricane season, can have on our businesses. For some this has been a wake-up call. For others, it will be business as usual.

The new year is closing fast. It should be a year in which we examine the ways we conduct business and make the needed improvements.

This is the year, right? **ll**

larry fish

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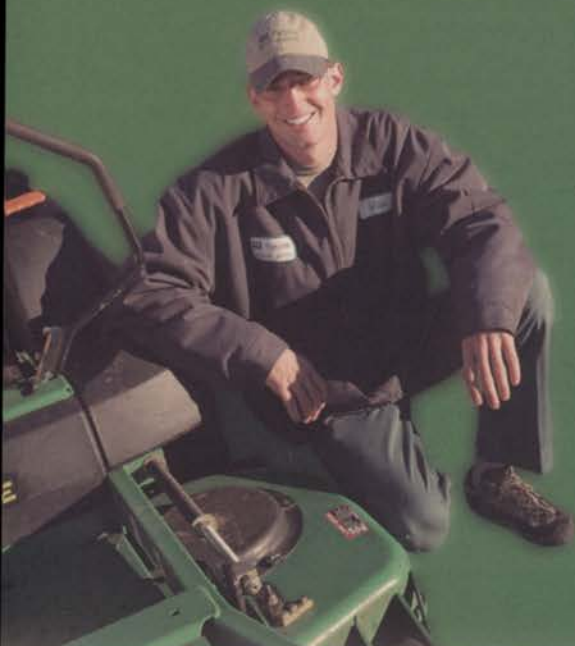


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See more of what Mike Dykstra has to say at www.mowpro.com

USE READER SERVICE # 18



When the Seasons Change

Another summer lies in the rearview mirror. That means much of your equipment will soon be put away for the winter while other pieces will be coming out for many Northern contractors. Here, then, are some tidbits and insight on protecting your machines throughout the winter months.

MOWERS. Shutting down mowers for a few months is not overly complicated, so follow these simple steps:

- Purge the fuel system by turning off the fuel and running the mower until the unit stalls out. This will purge any fuel you may have left in the fuel bowl. If you don't want to drain it, then fill up the tank(s) and add a fuel stabilizer. The stabilizer keeps out damaging moisture that may form in the tank and create water. If water forms in the gas tank, you will have a difficult time starting it in the spring.

- Remove the battery and periodically connect it to a trickle charger.

- There are two schools of thought as to "Do I change my oil before I store or do I wait until spring to drain it?" Well, if you don't want to waste time changing the oil now, then go ahead and wait until the spring – waiting will not damage the mower.

- To prevent the rings from sticking to the cylinder walls, remove the spark plugs and put a couple drops of oil into each cylinder.

- If storing equipment in an unheated building, spread kitty litter on the floor beneath the equipment, place plastic film over the litter and place the unit on the plastic. This keeps moisture from forming on the floor.

- Also, clean all grass from under the mower deck. This keeps moisture out of the mower deck and dissuades mice from nesting under the deck.

SPRAYERS. Pay particular attention to any spray pumps you may use while the temperatures falls. Freezing or even near-freezing temperatures can damage a pump that still has fluid in it, so consider the following:


- If the units still have spray mixture in the tank during the day, keep the pump running between jobs. This circulates the spray mix and prevents freezing.

- In the evenings, store the unit in a heated area or protect it by circulating a 50/50 mix of an RV antifreeze and water throughout the pump and the agitation nozzles in the tank.

SNOW THROWERS. As previously mentioned, some machines, such as snow throwers, are ready to come out of their summer-long hibernation. Here are some tips for snow throwers that don't perform as they should when you first fire them up.

- Check the belts for proper adjustment and signs of wear. Worn belts will lose traction on the pulleys. If they are not properly adjusted, they will slide over the pulleys instead of gripping and turning properly.

- If the unit is a single-stage snow thrower, check the auger blades for wear. They deteriorate through normal use and eventually need to be replaced.

- Likewise, check two-stage snow throwers for proper conditions. These units have a two-piece front auger with shear pins connecting the blades to the auger drive shaft. Shear pins are designed to break under harsh conditions (catching a rolled up newspaper, large stone, etc.) and prevent the gearbox from breaking. If the shear pins are broken, the auger will not turn. NOTE: Never use a different type of bolt in place of the shear pin. Using a non-shear type of bolt will break the gearbox and void your warranty. 

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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PLANET's Specialty Symposium

Lessons in Lean

Manufacturing is about optimization. It has been for decades. Through stringent quality assurance programs and audits, manufacturing plants strive to use the right amount of resources to deliver the right amount of product to the right location in the right time.

Over the last several decades, Toyota revolutionized the manufacturing landscape with the Toyota Production System (TPS), its version of lean manufacturing. TPS's goal is to eliminate waste by cutting out all non-value-adding steps in a process.

Some of these concepts have trickled down to the service sector over time, and service-related businesses are now more systemized and standardized than ever.

However, few have formally adopted the service sector's lean manufacturing counterpart, known as lean management.

Lean management was, however, the topic of a two-part session at the Professional Landcare Network's (PLANET) Specialty Symposium, held Aug. 4-6 in Milwaukee. The session, "Eliminating Waste In Your Organization," was part of the symposium's landscape management track. Panelists Brett Lemcke of R.M. Landscape, Hilton, N.Y.; Jeff Joutras of The Bruce Co, Middleton, Wis.; and Jim McCutcheon of HighGrove Partners, Austell, Ga., shared their firms' approaches to ridding waste.

Waste can be a problem in any organization, but especially one the size of HighGrove Partners. With locations in Charlotte, N.C., and Austell, Ga., the \$15-million company employs about 225 workers. Last September, after a visit to Ariens Co.'s Appleton, Wis., headquarters, McCutcheon introduced the lean concept to his company. "We wanted to



Jim McCutcheon

make sure that as we grew we didn't perpetuate any problems within our organization," McCutcheon explained, adding that lean management is appropriate for companies as small as two people and becomes more powerful the

larger the operation.

"I think 'lean' is actually a misnomer," McCutcheon continued, explaining that it gives the impression of cutting people and resources. Because of this common misconception – and knowing that employee buy-in is essential for success – McCutcheon guaranteed that no employee would lose his job during HighGrove's lean

continued on page 24

recommended reading on lean

- PLANET's 2006 Crystal Ball Report (PLANET expects to release the report this month). Members receive a complimentary copy; non-members can purchase the report at www.landcarenetwork.org.
- *Lean Thinking* by James P. Womack and Daniel T. Jones
- *The Kaizen Revolution* by Michael D. Regan
- *The Toyota Way* by Jeffrey Liker

KEI on Display

The PLANET Specialty Symposium also provided two busloads of attendees the opportunity see the new headquarters of Kujawa Enterprises, Inc. (KEI) in Oak Creek, Wis.

In addition to learning about the \$9-million company's new 42,700-square-foot facility, attendees heard about the firm's safety program and inquired about general operations.

KEI, which specializes in landscape design/build, maintenance, interior plant and seasonal decorating services, has 140 full-time employees, including six H-2B workers. The company services greater Milwaukee, including 25 miles north of the city, south to the Illinois border and west to Madison, Wis., with the help of two satellite locations.

Members of the Kujawa family and supporting staff led four tour groups around the building, which has a 32,000 square-foot footprint – 9,600 square feet each for the office area and service center; the warehouse, workshop and greenhouse areas encompass 12,800 square feet. Another 15,200 square feet on the mezzanine level brings the total usable floor space to nearly 50,000 square feet. The mezzanine currently serves as storage space, but KEI plans to turn the area into conference and training space that seats 200 people.

Behind the facility, dozens of KEI's signature orange trucks are lined up in the motor pool. Behind the lot, the material holding yard takes up another several acres. KEI uses 12 large storage containers to hold seed, salt, fertilizer and other materials.

The holiday decorating and greenhouse area, which stores hundreds of plants awaiting installation at interior accounts, takes up one corner of the building. The interior and holiday side accounts for 12 percent of KEI's business. About 40 percent is maintenance, 44 percent is design/build/installation and 4 percent is commercial equipment sales.

The service center, which takes up another fifth of the facility, is operated by a handful of mechanics and a fleet manager.

continued on page 26



At KEI, posters and T-shirts bear the Jesuit term "Magis" – a motto adopted by company Vice President Chris Kujawa's alma mater Marquette University and, in turn, KEI.



KEI keeps annuals on hand throughout the summer season in case damage requires flowers to be replaced. The company purchases about 15 semis a year of annuals.

Earl Wilson, PGMS Past President, Dies

E. Earl Wilson, past president of The Professional Grounds Management Society (PGMS) died on July 22.

Wilson was instrumental in forming an alliance between PGMS, the Professional Lawn Care Association of America and the Associated Landscape Contractors of America to host a joint trade show for the landscape industry now known as the Green Industry Exposition.

Wilson was also an important figure in promoting grounds management as a profession. "Earl was an extraordinary mentor for so many people in the industry," says past PGMS President Tom Smith of Cincinnati's Spring Grove Cemetery. "He was an unbelievable guy as far as leadership and moving our industry forward in getting people to realize professionalism."

At the age of 18, Wilson enlisted in the Marines, serving his country for four years. Upon his return, he entered The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio.

After graduation, Wilson joined with Bill Thorton to form the Thorton Wilson Co. Dealing with horticulture sales and distribution, his professional career was dedicated to his company as well as PGMS, industry members say.

To honor his contributions, PGMS established the E. Earl Wilson Award – its highest honor – in 2004.

Tom Shaner, PGMS executive director, says Wilson will be remembered in the industry: "We are hoping the implementation of this award as well as the continued progress of programs Earl established will honor his outstanding contributions to PGMS and the green industry."

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USE READER SERVICE # 19

continued from page 20

Lessons on Lean

transformation. "Lean is really about finding waste and looking at operations through the filter of what's important to the customer."

Kaizen is one tool companies use when going lean. Kaizen, a Japanese term that means "continuous improvement," is a weeklong period of observation and solution-finding. One area of business is scrutinized at a time. Personnel from inside and outside that

them to clients. HighGrove determined that most clients don't value this feature, and that it's not necessary to sell more jobs. Now, HighGrove will color render a design for a fee if the customer requests it. Otherwise, the designs go out colorless. Similar observations streamlined operations in maintenance and accounting—financial statements now go out on the sixth day of the month.

to come from me. Without a doubt, when you sign a team up for a kaizen some of them will grumble, but in the end they will sing your praises. I have never seen anyone say, "That was a waste of time."

McCutcheon answered many questions from contractors in the audience, mostly about how he is able to remove employees from their duties for a week to complete kaizen. One

"The biggest challenge of lean management is you have to become a culture of execution." – Jim McCutcheon

particular department analyze its activities from top to bottom to identify and augment wasteful activities – usually things people do "because that's the way they've always done them."

McCutcheon gives an example from his design/build division. Prior to implementing lean, HighGrove's landscape designers and architects used resources and devoted time to color rendering designs before submitting

"The biggest challenge of lean management is you have to become a culture of execution," McCutcheon said. "What we're doing is trying to get everybody in the company every day to find opportunities to eliminate waste.

"There's a saying in lean that I learned early on – 'In the beginning, lean has to be led,'" McCutcheon continued. "The message literally has

attendee insisted that his company "couldn't afford" to do that. To that, McCutcheon said: "I would contest that you can't afford not to." – **Marisa Palmieri**

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Check out www.lawnandlandscape.com for more coverage of PLANET's Specialty Symposium.

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continued from page 21

KEI on Display

In addition to repairing and maintaining KEI's vehicles and equipment, the service center staff generates work from the outside – as KEI is a dealer of Hustler parts and products.

Throughout the tour, it was evident that safety is front of mind at KEI. Employees wore safety glasses and a sign touting 395 days without a loss-time accident was displayed prominently outside the employee commons entrance.

A poor safety record in 2003 caused management to reevaluate safety procedures, Vice President Joe Kujawa explained. As a result, KEI implemented and enforced safety policies such as mandatory steel-toed boots, ear protection, safety glasses and a using a spotter when backing any vehicle.

Incentive programs like "Safety

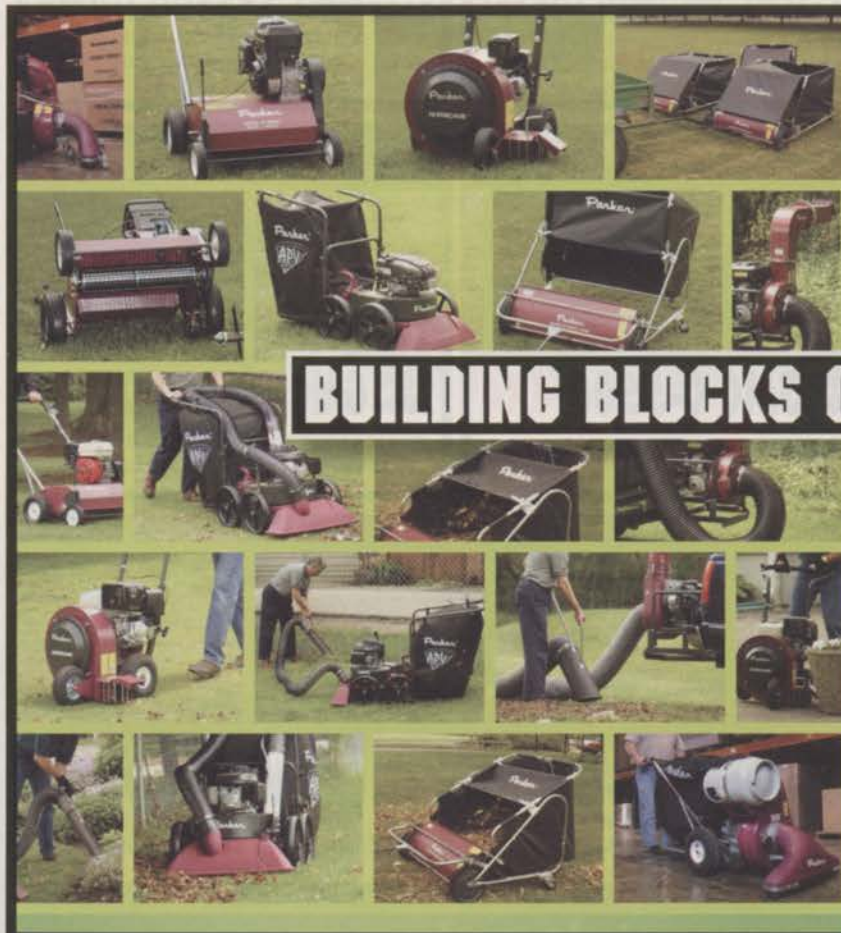
Bingo" have help to rejuvenate and sustain the safety program. At spring start-up, each employee is issued a bingo card. For every day that passes without an incident, a number is pulled. Employees that get "bingo" receive prizes (typically gift cards) valued at \$30. On days when minor incidents occur, no bingo number is pulled and an explanation of the incident is posted. Major accidents end the game. New cards are distributed and the game starts over.

KEI established another new safety-related solution in 2006. In an effort to start off the day with a safety focus, management instituted a stretching program. At 7 a.m., employees gather in the yard for three to five minutes of stretching, followed by an informational tailgate meeting or safety message. In addition

to the health benefits of stretching and making KEI's insurance provider happy, Joe Kujawa pointed out that the stretching program also has created a greater sense of camaraderie among employees who start the day doing an activity together. A focus on safety has resulted in a reduction of eye injuries from eight in 2003 to zero the following year and a reduction of overall safety incidents by 83 percent.

Throughout the facility, "Magis" is conspicuous on signage and employee apparel. "Magis" is a Jesuit term adopted by Vice President Chris Kujawa's alma matter, Marquette University and, in turn, by KEI. Employees explain that the word means to "exceed, excel, go above and beyond" in everything you do.

It looks like KEI is heading in the right direction. – *Marisa Palmieri*



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MERGERS & ACQUISITIONS



Bartlett Tree Experts Expands U.S. Business

STAMFORD, Conn. – As Bartlett Tree Experts nears its 100th anniversary, the company is also nearing another milestone – 100 office locations in the United States, Canada, Great Britain and Ireland. With the addition of an office in Accokeek, Md., Bartlett now has more than 90 locations and is continually looking for new growth opportunities.

The Accokeek office opened earlier this year as a result of the acquisition of Moran's Tree Service. Two other acquisitions in 2006, Shamrock Tree Service in Delaware and Northwood Tree Care in New York, also aided Bartlett's expansion in existing operating areas.

SUPPLIER STATS

LESCO Continues Growth

CLEVELAND – LESCO continues investing in its business by opening new Service Centers across the country. During the second quarter of 2006, the company reports 13 new Service Center locations.

These new locations are in Johnson City, N.Y.; Cheektowaga, N.Y.; Schenectady, N.Y.; Allentown, Pa.; Concord, N.C.; Summerville, S.C.; Cartersville, Ga.; Gainesville, Ga.; Kalamazoo, Mich.; New Albany, Ind.; Evansville, Ind.; Urbana, Ill.; and Norman, Okla.

These openings bring LESCO's 2006 new Service Center total to 19,

and its nationwide total to 319 Service Centers in 39 states as of June 30.



“Opening more Service Centers lets us better serve customers locally, which allows them to spend less time worrying about purchasing product and more time working and earning money,” notes Jeff Rutherford, LESCO's president and chief executive officer.

Since the beginning of 2003, LESCO has opened 98 new Service Centers across the country. The company ultimately plans to opening as many as 40 new locations in 2006.



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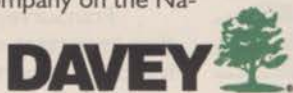
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Davey Makes List of Largest Employee-Owned Firms

KENT, Ohio – The National Center for Employee Ownership named The Davey Tree Expert Co. the 16th largest employee-owned U.S. company. With 6,000 employees, Davey is the only tree care company on the National Center list.

Davey Tree is also one of the oldest employee-owned companies in the nation, says John Logue, director of the Ohio Employee Ownership Center. "I think that's due to how Davey has tailored its forms of ownership to fit the needs of the business," he says. "Davey has a unique mix of employee ownership tools between regular stock offerings and purchase plans."

R. Douglas Cowan, Davey Tree chairman and CEO, says, "Davey employees have placed an enormous amount of trust in their company because they've seen the returns on their investments."



DIG Corp. Celebrates 25th Anniversary

VISTA, Calif. - Founded in 1981 in greater Los Angeles to provide the agriculture, commercial turf and retail marketplaces with a line of low-volume irrigation products, DIG Corp. has had a successful 25 years, the company says.

In 1991, DIG relocated its corporate headquarters from Sun Valley to San Marcos. In 2000, DIG relocated again to a 40,000-square-foot facility in Vista, Calif.

Over the years, the company has expanded to become a distributor of battery-operated irrigation controllers and valves, and also the manufacturer of a line of low-volume irrigation products, including drippers, micro sprinklers, sprayers, misting heads, drip hose, fittings and accessories.



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IN THE NEWS

U.S. Lawns Rated a 'World-Class Franchise'

ORLANDO, Fla. – For the second year in a row, independent franchise researcher FranSurvey rated U.S. Lawns a “World Class Franchise” and a “Franchisee Approved” company. U.S. Lawns earned the “World Class Franchise” rating because the company was endorsed by more than 70 percent of its franchisees.

FranSurvey’s methodology includes contacting every franchisee to elicit participation in the survey. The company requires a minimum of 70 percent participation for the survey to be valid. The process is completely transparent to U.S. Lawns management team; however, the identity of the respondents is not revealed.

Survey subjects include the quality of service, relationships with franchisors, effectiveness of training, marketing support and the helpfulness of field representatives. With



better than two-thirds of U.S. Lawns franchisees responding, the company scored across the board in the 80-percent range. Quality of service, franchisor relations and start-up support scored in the 90-percent range.

FranSurvey founder Jeff Johnson explained that important questions when investigating a franchise opportunity include: Is it something you really like and is your family behind you? Do you like the brand and business model? Do you believe in the ethics, integrity and character of the company? “If the answers to those questions are enthusiastic, you’ve got a winner,” he says.

Survey results placed U.S. Lawns in the top 7 to 8 percent of franchisors, earning it the “World Class” rating.

U.S. Lawns is a commercial landscape maintenance franchiser and is celebrating its 20th year in business with more than 160 franchisees throughout the United States.

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Inc. Recognizes Ruppert Nurseries for Rapid Growth

In 1998, Ruppert Nurseries, Laytonsville, Md., sold its landscape division and signed a five-year noncompete contract with the buyer.

The deal allowed the company to focus on its nursery business and, as a result, Ruppert Nurseries acquired additional planting land for its tree sales division.

When the noncompete restriction expired in 2003, Ruppert Nurseries reentered the commercial landscaping business, hiring back many former employees and experiencing rapid growth.

As a result, the \$31-million company sits among the primarily technology- and health care-focused firms that make up this year's *Inc.* 500 list.

Ruppert Nurseries appears at No. 172 with 659.9 percent growth over three years.

The *Inc.* 500 is the small business magazine's answer to the *Fortune* 500. In true entrepreneurial fashion, however, it doesn't honor companies with the highest revenue. Instead it highlights fast-growing, U.S.-based private companies.

The 2006 list measures companies' growth from 2002 through 2005. To be considered, a company must have had at least \$600,000 in revenue in the base year.

Ruppert Nurseries was founded in 1990 and employs 281 people.

In addition to being a member of the *Inc.* 500, Ruppert Nurseries appears at No. 27 on *Lawn & Landscape's* annual list of Top 100 Landscape Companies. (See page S22-S23 in the State of the Industry Report for this year's complete list of the industry's largest firms.)



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EQUIPMENT REPORT

Got GPS?

Nearly 12 percent of landscape and lawn care companies employ GPS technology in their operations, according to *Lawn & Landscape's* 2006 State of the Industry research. More than 13 percent of companies surveyed intended to purchase the asset-tracking gadgets in the next 12 months.

While complete GPS fleet management systems can cost contractors tens of thousands of dollars, those who aren't ready to make the investment and who are simply concerned with employee surveillance and routing (rather than the extensive speed, location and time-tracking reports other systems can provide) are enabling the GPS function on the cellular or push-to-talk phones they already use in their businesses. For a monthly fee that ranges from about \$10 to \$40 per month (on top of the devices' existing fees) cellular companies and their application

partners can provide real-time GPS tracking.

Contractor Daniel Hanson of SCLM Co., La Verne, Calif., has one GPS-enabled Nextel phone, which he uses to randomly check crews' driving habits and track those the company suspects may be doing side jobs during the workday. In fact, the unit allowed Hanson to catch and fire one employee who routinely went home to sleep while on the clock.

The device also allows Hanson to monitor the routes drivers take to job sites. "Often we find that they are not taking the most efficient route and we can direct them the way they want to go. This may seem like micromanaging, but when you have a truck with six people in it and they're wasting an extra 15 minutes driving to the job site every day, the cost can add up fast." — **Marisa Palmieri**

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 lawn care 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 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.

1. ENGLISH: Use the string trimmer.
SPANISH: Usa la cortadora de cuerda.
(Ooh-sah la core-tah-dore-ah day kwer-dah.)
2. ENGLISH: Trim along the fence.
SPANISH: Corto al lo largo de la reja alrededor.
(Core-toh ahl loh lar-goh day lah ray-hah ahl-reh-deh-dohr.)
3. ENGLISH: Follow the sidewalk/curb.
SPANISH: Sigue la acera. (C-gway lah ah-ceh-rah.)
4. ENGLISH: Finish this area by lunch.
SPANISH: Termina esta area al almuerzo.
(Tehr-me-nah s-tah ah-re-ah ahl ahl-mwer-soh.)
5. ENGLISH: Mow before trimming.
SPANISH: Corta el cesped antes de que cortes las bordes.
(Core-tah L cheh-sped ahn-tays day K core-tehs lahs bohr-dehs.)
6. ENGLISH: Use the blower to clean up.
SPANISH: Usa la sopladora para limpiar.
(Ooh-sah lah soh-plah-door-ah pah-rah leem-p-ahr.)

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Consumers Reveal Their Landscape Industry Perceptions

What's the value of green space to the American consumer? Results of Project EverGreen's consumer survey revealed conflicting attitudes and misconceptions about the value of green spaces and green industry products and services.

Overall, consumers have a positive attitude about maintaining their lawns and landscapes. Discrepancies between this belief and the actual services and products needed to maintain green spaces – private or public – were uncovered in the Project EverGreen survey, conducted in March by Gene Brown with Market Intellect.

"For example," explains Den Gardner, executive director of Project EverGreen, "Ninety percent of those surveyed agreed that landscaping is important in improving their home's value at sale time. However, only 50 percent agreed that landscaping was important in reducing energy costs. In the same way, there seems to be a lack of knowledge of the role green spaces can play in helping regulate air quality. Forty percent of survey respondents either disagreed or said they 'didn't know' that trees, shrubs and turfgrass remove pollutants from the air."

The survey, conducted nationwide, is part of Project EverGreen's ongoing work in assessing awareness of the benefits provided by well-maintained urban landscapes, both public and private. "It's not surprising that more education is needed to fully appreciate all dimensions of the value green spaces have for our society," Gardner said, "but there are signs of progress. For example, respondents indicated that if tax increases were necessary for the purpose of building public green spaces and parks, they'd vote 'yes' 55 to 45. That's encouraging."

The survey solicited consumer attitudes on the value of well-maintained green spaces (i.e. landscaping consisting of trees, shrubs, turf and other plantings). Here are some of the details of their responses in each area:



LIFESTYLE

Highest areas of agreement on issues of support for public green spaces

- Do you generally vote in favor of tax increases for the purpose of building public green spaces and parks? **55 percent yes, 45 percent no**
- You expect public areas that your children use for playing sports or other recreation to have well maintained turfgrass and landscapes. **100 percent agree**

Least agreement or knowledge in regards to attention to green space by government/developers

- Public officials give adequate attention to preserving green spaces. **50 percent agree; 50 percent disagree, don't know or have no opinion**
- Developers do a good job of including green spaces. **30 percent agree; 70 percent disagree, don't know or have no opinion**

Least agreement or knowledge concerning everyday benefits of green spaces

- Psychologists have found that access to plants and green spaces provides a sense of rest and allows workers to be more productive. **45 percent agree; 55 percent disagree, don't know or have no opinion**
- When landscaping is developed in a neighborhood there is a decrease in vandalism. **30 percent agree; 70 percent disagree, don't know or have no opinion**

ECONOMIC

Highest areas of agreement related to how green space adds value

- Landscaping improves home value. **90 percent agree**
- Green spaces and parks improve property values. **70 percent agree**
- Professionally maintained public parks and sports fields are good for the economy. **75 percent agree**

Least agreement or knowledge pertaining to how green spaces help conserve energy

- Trees shading homes can reduce attic temps as much as 40 degrees. **45 percent agree; 55 percent disagree, don't know or have no opinion**
- Improving landscaping can reduce energy costs. **30 percent agree; 70 percent disagree, don't know or have no opinion**

ENVIRONMENTAL

Highest areas of agreement in regards to how green space benefits the environment

- A well maintained landscape is essential to a clean environment. **95 percent agree**
- Proper landscaping reduces surface water runoff and soil erosion. **65 percent agree**
- Pesticides (herbicides, insecticides and fungicides) are a useful tool to fight weeds disease and insects. **65 percent agree**
- Green spaces create a better, safer environment. **60 percent agree, 35 percent disagree**
- Trees, shrubs and turfgrass remove smoke dust and other pollutants from the air. **60 percent agree**

Least agreement or knowledge pertaining to how green space helps air quality

- Green spaces within a city help regulate air quality. **55 percent agree; 45 percent disagree, don't know, or have no opinion**

ATTITUDES ABOUT LAWN CARE COMPANIES

- If states or local governments are going to limit or prohibit use of pesticides (herbicides, insecticides, fungicides) and fertilizers, it should eliminate their use by both professional licensed lawn care companies as well as do-it-yourself consumers. **90 percent agree; 10 percent disagree, don't know or have no opinion**
- Professional lawn care companies use products such as pesticides, herbicides, insecticides, fungicides and fertilizers in stronger concentrations than those available to consumers through retail chains. **70 percent agree; 30 percent disagree, don't know or have no opinion**

- I can trust my lawn care company to safely and responsibly take care of my lawn. **90 percent agree; 10 percent disagree, don't know or have no opinion**
- I can trust my lawn care company to take the necessary steps to protect my family when they treat my lawn. **90 percent agree; 10 percent disagree, don't know or have no opinion**
- There is more reliance on professional lawn and landscaping services. **50 percent agree; 50 percent disagree, don't know or have no opinion**

ATTITUDES ABOUT PESTICIDES & FERTILIZERS

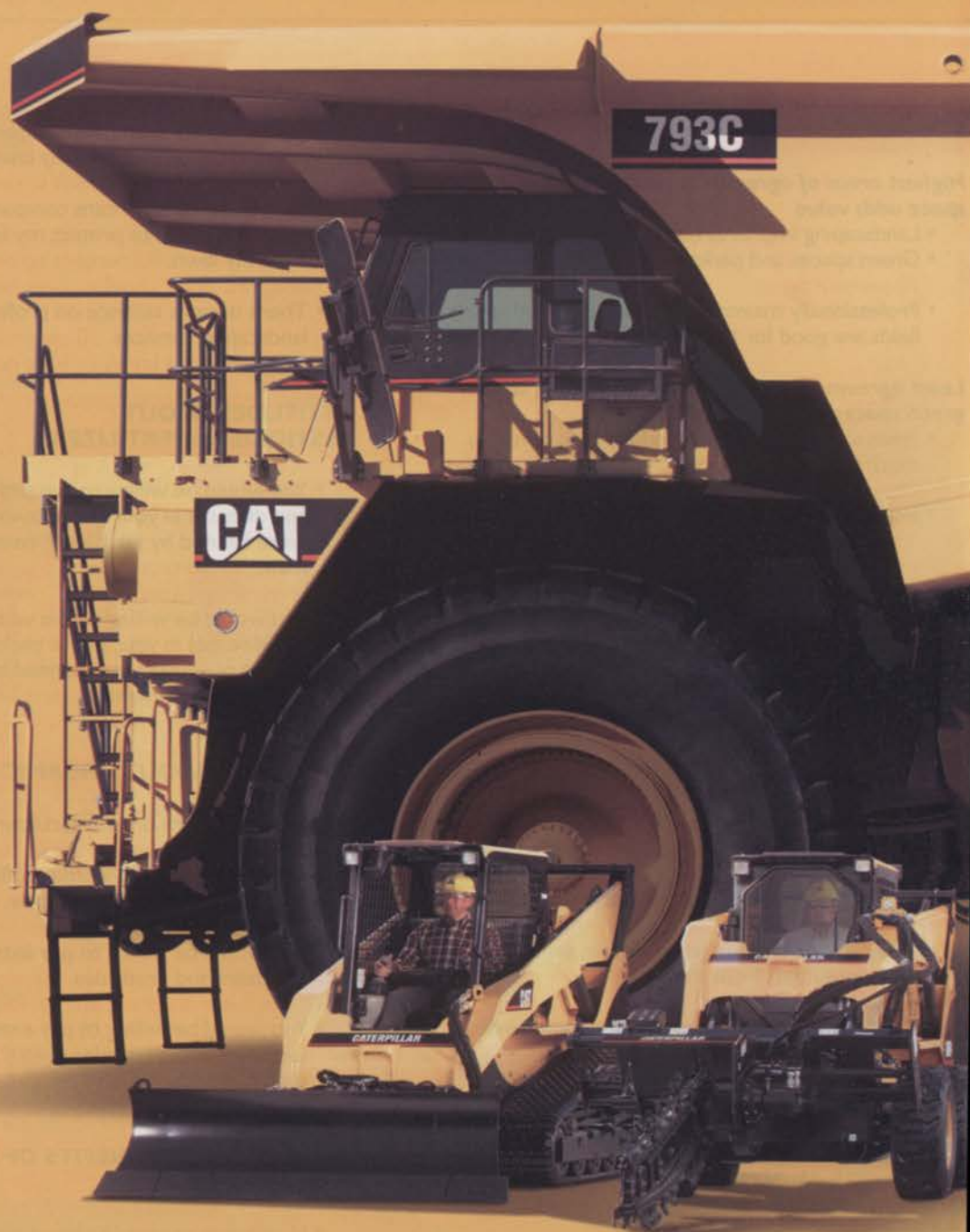
- You would be willing to live with lawn pests, weeds and diseases in your home lawn if certain products were banned by your local, county or state government. **25 percent agree; 75 percent disagree, don't know or have no opinion**
- You would be willing to live with lawn pests, weeds and diseases in your public parks and sports fields if certain products were banned by your local, county or state government. **25 percent agree; 75 percent disagree, don't know or have no opinion**

ATTITUDES ABOUT ORGANIC PRODUCTS

- We need more organic fertilizers. **60 percent agree; 40 percent disagree, don't know or have no opinion**
- Organic fertilizers should be offered by professional lawn and landscape companies. **60 percent agree; 40 percent disagree, don't know or have no opinion**
- You would be willing to pay extra for organic fertilizers and pesticides. **40 percent agree; 60 percent disagree, don't know or have no opinion**
- You would be willing to pay extra for organic fertilizers and pesticides even if it were less effective than current products. **25 percent agree; 75 percent disagree, don't know or have no opinion**

AWARENESS OF BENEFITS OF MAINTAINED GREEN SPACES

- Homeowners should place a higher priority on improving their lawns, trees and landscaping. **45 percent agree; 55 percent disagree, don't know or have no opinion**
- There is more awareness by consumers on both public and private green spaces of how landscape planning affects the environment. **65 percent agree; 35 percent disagree, don't know or have no opinion**
- Working to grow thick, healthy turfgrass is important in protecting groundwater. **80 percent agree; 20 percent disagree, don't know or have no opinion**
- Improving landscaping can reduce energy costs. **30 percent agree; 70 percent disagree, don't know or have no opinion**



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CALENDAR

Calendar Note

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OCT. 12 *Lawn & Landscape* Lawn Care Seminars, Washington, D.C. Contact: www.lawncareseminars.com, 800/456-0707

OCT. 19 *Lawn & Landscape* Lawn Care Seminars, Northern New Jersey. Contact: www.lawncareseminars.com, 800/456-0707

OCT. 22 – 26 Kentucky Turfgrass Council Conference & Trade Show, Bowling Green, Ky. Contact: www.uky.edu/Agriculture/ukturf/ktc.htm

OCT. 24 – 26 Alabama Turfgrass Association Annual Turfgrass Conference & Tradeshow, Auburn, Ala. Contact: www.alaturfgrass.org, 866/246-4203

NOV. 1 – 2 Green Industry Show & Conference (formerly Prairie West Horticultural Trade Show) Edmonton, Alberta. Contact: www.landscape-alberta.com, 800/378-3198





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NOV. 5 – 7 27th Annual International Irrigation Show, San Antonio.
Contact: www.irrigation.org or 703/536-7080

NOV. 7 – 8 Michigan Greenhouse Growers Expo, Lansing, Mich. Contact: 800/878-5131

NOV. 14 – 16 Empire State Green Industry Show, Rochester, N.Y. Contact: www.nysta.org, 800/873-8873

NOV. 14 Lawn & Landscape Benchmarking Your Business Seminars, Detroit.
Contact: www.lawnbizseminars.com, 800/456-0707

NOV. 15 Lawn & Landscape Benchmarking Your Business Seminars, Chicago.
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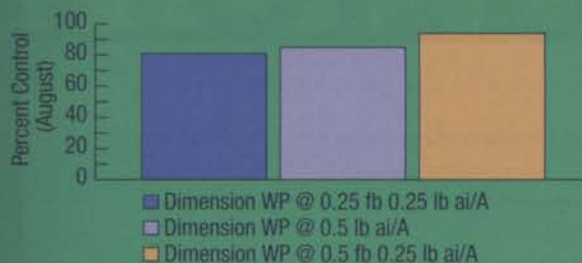
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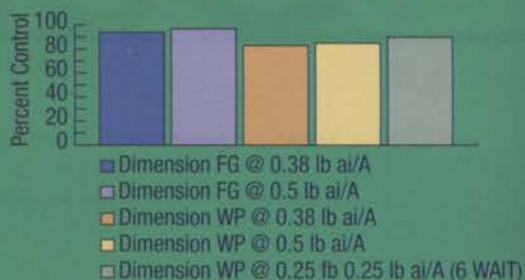
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The Sod Solution

When turf seed doesn't grow fast enough for demanding clients who are willing to spend a bit more, sod can provide an impressive finishing touch to the landscape.

In today's society, nearly everything is on-demand. Need a bite to eat? Dash to the drive-through. Dying to outfit the living room with the latest and greatest HDTV? Whip out the plastic. Unfortunately, this immediate gratification often leads to trouble – and the good-for-you instant options can be hard to pin down. But the landscaping industry is one of the few offering a “right now” choice that is often better than the wait-and-be-patient option. Namely, sod.

“Sod is quick and clean and completes the job,” says Tom Keevan, vice president and treasurer of Emerald View Turf Farms in Columbia, Ill. “That is why we sell sod – because it finishes the project and makes it look nice.”

And industry statistics confirm that the popularity of so-called “instant grass” is growing. According to the East Dundee, Ill.-based Turfgrass Producers International, nationwide production of sod has increased from 218,161 acres per year in 1992 to more than 386,000

by dawn weinberger | contributing editor



Photos: Patten Seed Co.

in 2002. And, as of 2002, the United States boasted more than 2,100 sod farms, up from just 1,614 for the 10 years prior. All-in-all, it is a \$147 billion-per-year industry, with 56 percent of contractors reporting that they offer sod installation as a service, making up 80 percent of all sod farm sales.

MAY BE SIMPLER THAN SEEDING.

But what about good old-fashioned seeding, or even hydroseeding? Sure,

some customers still ask for them (many even believe they ultimately produce better lawns). And seeded lawns can wind up lush and green, but getting it to that point takes special skills – skills the typical person doesn't possess.

Without this education, the results can be disastrous – from something as basic as a weed infestation to uneven seed distribution and erosion. Plus, many homeowners lack the time or patience to devote to fertilization,

mowing and weed control, so unless they hire a professional to tend to the lawn until it reaches maturity, they will likely be disappointed. And disappointed clients mean more complaints and callbacks to the contractor, something less likely to occur with sod.

"Properly installed sod combined with a customer who has been properly briefed in its care certainly should generate fewer callbacks than seeding," says Ben Copeland Sr., president of Patten Seed and Super-Sod in Lakeland, Ga.

Nonetheless, some potential clients shy away from sod because the initial financial investment seems too steep, as high as 50 cents per square foot for sod, compared to as low as 9 cents for seed. But that initial investment can be deceiving. Despite the up-front

"Properly installed sod combined with a customer who has been properly briefed in its care certainly should generate fewer callbacks than seeding." – Ben Copeland Sr.

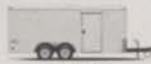
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THE RIGHT TRUCK FOR THE JOB

price, seed can cost as much as sod over time.

"If you are really honest with yourself, the cost of sodding and seeding are pretty much the same, if you look at the long-term cost of trying to grow in a seeded lawn," says Randy Tischer, who co-owns Green Velvet Sod Farms in Bellbrook, Ohio. In fact, many cus-

tomers end up investing in sod after being disappointed in their attempt to grow grass themselves, he adds.

QUALITY CLUES. Not all sod is created equal. While most growers strive to produce and sell high-quality sod, some do peddle substandard varieties. "When you are buying grass you

pay for quality," Keevan says. "And you get what you pay for."

But by learning to identify the good from the bad, contractors can ensure these "bad seeds" don't get passed along to customers. First and foremost, Copeland says make sure the root system and soil are attached to the grass.

"It should hold together and have good construction," he says. "And, it should all be mowed to the same height and be alive and well."

Other tips include looking at the product before agreeing to a purchase, checking the sod farm's references and inquiring about whether the grower stands behind the product with guarantees and offers support and service before and after the sale.

Choosing the right type of grass for the application is also a priority. For home lawns and commercial/business landscaping, Blue Fescue sod is common. Bermuda works well for athletic fields, and Zoysia is a popular choice for golf courses. Bluegrass, one of the most widely-used grass varieties, is also an excellent option for things like highway roadside landscaping as well as some home lawns.

Contractors can also increase the odds of customer satisfaction by making sure the soil is properly prepped before installation. Not doing so is one of the biggest mistakes contractors make when installing sod, Copeland says. Start by removing all rocks, debris and existing vegetation. Then, till the soil, create a soil root zone, and grade the ground for proper drainage.

"You don't want little bird baths in the lawn or the (sod) won't perform well," Keevan says.

And while it may seem obvious, some contractors forget to leave clients with basic operating instructions.

"Homeowners tend to over- or under-water because they have not been briefed on how to water," Copeland says, adding new sod should be kept constantly moist for two to three weeks, with no standing water, until roots are established. They should also hold-off on mowing during this time.

INDUSTRY INNOVATIONS.

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and more contractors to offer. The introduction of larger rolls, for example, is a major factor in this phenomenon. Instead of tiny squares delivered on a pallet and placed onto the soil by hand, these large rolls are put into place with a tractor.

The actual size of a large sod roll varies slightly by grower. Emerald

View, for example produces rolls ranging from 42 to 48 inches wide and 104 to 135 feet long. At Green Velvet, large rolls are 48 inches wide by 85 feet long. Regardless of the size, installation is speedy, as the tractor does most of the work. And while it used to take an entire day and a large crew to sod an average lawn, now two

or three people can do the job in a few hours, Tischer says.

In addition to more efficient installation techniques, the industry has morphed into a major player in residential landscaping.

In fact, some zoning agencies in the southeastern U.S. require it, Copeland says, as do regulations within individual subdivisions. And while these regulations do give the neighborhoods a neat-and-tidy look, they aren't about curb appeal.

"If the builder goes ahead and sods the yard, there is less likelihood that in a rainy time the soil will erode," Copeland says.

"Sod is the best erosion control blanket that there is," says Tischer, explaining that because sod has already had an opportunity to develop a mature root system, it comes with at least 1/4 layer of thatch. The thatch acts as a filter, which will in turn act as a sponge for rainwater and other runoff, pesticides and fertilizer. "Usually, sod is 18 months to 2 years old at harvest, and by that time it has a pretty good layer of roots," he adds.


THE PRICE IS RIGHT. All this knowledge, however, is futile unless landscape contractors are actually successful in convincing clients that sod is the way to go. The key, of course, is the right price, one that allows contractors to earn profits without causing sticker shock.

Contractor Russ Harris, owner of Harris Sod and Seeding in Van Dalia, Ohio, charges by the square foot, 26 cents on the low-end, 30 cents on the high end, which includes the sod itself, along with rock rousing and grading. And though 30 cents per square yard is usually his high-end, it only applies if the landscaper finds perfectly-prepped soil at the job site.

"If there is extra prep-work, we let them know it is going to cost extra," Harris says.

But even the most careful landscaper with the most precise bid can run into obstacles, such as a terrain that turns out to be more difficult than anticipated.

Harris, who meets regularly with his crew to ensure all jobs are going along as planned, says there is only one way to keep these issues from erupting into huge problems: good communication.

"That's the best strategy," he says. 



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By Nicole Wisniewski

Dissecting a Decade

Lawn & Landscape celebrates its 10-year anniversary of producing State of the Industry reports by examining each year's figures to expose key trends.

When you look at one specific business over the last 10 years, the ebbs and flows it experiences can seem severe.

Take Gardeners' Guild, for example. The San Rafael, Calif.-based business thrived through regional booms in the housing market coupled with the rise in technological advancements known as the dot-com bubble. But that rise fell hard in 2001 when the bubble burst, having a severe effect on the regional economy. Then 9/11 happened and a once great tourist destination – San Francisco's Bay Area – suffered because no one wanted to travel.

Despite these ups and downs, Gardeners' Guild President John Ossa says, "in general, we've really grown."

American Civil Constructors also experienced highs and lows, but in Colorado they came in the form of a severe drought coupled with an economic slowdown. During that time, "we didn't grow – we shrank," explains Todd Williams, the Littleton, Colo.-based company's vice president and regional director. "It was the first time in 20 years we had to take steps back because there was no work in the marketplace. But it forced us to take on new business strategies.

It's these strategies that continue to help us grow and prosper when times are good."

Most of the contractors interviewed for the *Lawn & Landscape* 2006 State of the Industry Report shared similar stories of pushing their businesses beyond hardships and coming out on top. It's this soaring optimism that many say have kept this industry growing for the past 10 years and should continue strengthening it for the next 10.

This year, *Lawn & Landscape*

celebrates its 10th year of providing readers with State of the Industry Reports, helping them to understand the current business climate and predict their plans to continue profitability into the coming year. To commemorate this achievement, we took each year's research figures and analyzed them to provide a 10-year picture of what the industry has experienced. The result is proof that the industry has improved professionally and strategically.

HOW WE DID IT

In August of this year, 12,510 *Lawn & Landscape* readers received an invitation to take part in our State of the Industry survey, conducted by ABR Research, an independent firm. We received 736 responses to the survey. The margin of error based on these 736 returned surveys is calculated to be no greater than +/- 3.6 percentage points at a confidence level of 95 percent.

The data was then analyzed, compared to the previous years of research and used throughout this report. Unless otherwise noted, the charts in this report were taken from this research.

The 10-year analysis was created by pouring over this year and the previous nine years of data and analyzing the responses to questions that were asked in a consistent manner across all 10 years.

Lawn & Landscape editors who contributed to this report include Heather DeAngelis, Mansa Palmieri, Nicole Wisniewski, Heather Wood and Mike Zawacki. ABR Research's Jeff Pogrob also contributed to this report.

UNSOPHISTICATED NO MORE.

The average landscape contractor today is considered a smarter businessman than he was a decade ago. One factor that has contributed to this is the growth in technology, smoothing service flow and enhancing efficiency.

"We are more mechanized today," says Sidney Showalter, president, Showalter Landscaping & Irrigation, Naples, Fla. "If we can find a way to operate faster, we do."

Establishing systems has also helped push contractors' growth. "We're also better at getting systems in place so if things go out of whack we can see what's going on," shares Joe Markell, president, Sunrise Lawn & Landscaping Services, Herndon, Va. "We're running like a business instead of just going with the flow."

Laurie Broccoli agrees. After 15 years of running Rochester, N.Y.-based Broccoli Tree & Lawn Care, she's able to look back and recognize "we hit some growing pains but now we're doing well again," she says, explaining some of the business-influencing factors that took place. "When 2001 hit, business went flat in 2002. Then we were doing well again and were flat again in 2004. It was about that time I realized I was a mid-sized company. I took myself out of the business for a year and looked hard at leadership and management. It's no longer a sort of mom-and-pop business – now it's truly a business to be admired in our market. Instead of being in the middle of every detail I've had to learn how to stand back and delegate."

Eric Storck, president, Blade Runners, Fairfax, Va., relates. "As you grow, you end up going into a growth cycle and you pick up a lot of work and then you have to realign your systems and management structure to accommodate that growth and make sure you're

continuing to do the same quality work that you've always been doing," he explains. "The industry has matured. There is much more support for the fledgling business today than there was 10 years ago – before we were largely figuring it out as we went along."

In fact, Roger Myers takes it a step further and says the complexity of the work done in the landscape industry has advanced along with business systems and technology. The owner of American Beauty Landscaping in Boardman, Ohio, points specifically to hardscape work. "The work today requires a degree of skill and expertise that wasn't demanded from workers in the past," he says.

This growth in industry business owners and advancing skill sets has also increased the level of competition in many markets, points out Tom Del Conte, president, Del Conte's Landscaping, Fremont, Calif. "Obtaining a leadership position within our marketplace is more difficult to sustain today because businesses are improving at a faster rate," he says. "The competition is becoming more sophisticated and good business models are becoming more prevalent within the industry."

With overall net profit averaging 16.6 percent over the past 10 years, according to *Lawn & Landscape* research, the alterations contractors have made to adapt to their changing markets have certainly paid off. By continuing this smarter approach to business, Craig Ruppert, chief executive officer, Ruppert Nurseries, Laytonsville, Md., believes there is only more positive to look forward to. "The customer is still looking for good value and the employee is still looking for a good place to work," he says. "So while things have changed, opportunity in the marketplace is still as good as it was 10 years ago." LL



A DECADE OF CHANGE

REVENUE – Over a 10-year span, average revenue appears to have taken quite a ride, going from an average of \$875,400 in 1997, down to \$600,000 in 2001 and resting in the middle this year at \$712,374.

NET PROFIT – Overall net profit has averaged 16.6 percent over the past 10 years.

EMPLOYEES – The decline in revenue seems to match the number of employees companies had, averaging a 14 percent decline in full-time staff over 10 years. On the other hand, part-time staff increased on average from 2.7 in 1997 to 6.7 in 2006, an increase of 148 percent.

EMPLOYEE PAY – Employee pay has increased over the past decade. Entry-level mower operators earn 14 percent more today compared to 10 years ago; entry-level spray technicians' pay has remained consistent and foreman's pay has increased 30 percent.

SERVICES – Throughout the past 10 years, lawn maintenance has always accounted for the largest slice of sales averaging 37 percent. Construction/design-build has traditionally come in second averaging 24 percent of sales over the past decade. Lawn care, irrigation and snow removal have all been pretty consistent throughout the years staying within the narrow ranges of 10 and 12 percent, 6 and 8 percent and 4 and 5 percent of sales, respectively.

CUSTOMER TYPE – Single-family residential properties account for the largest percent of a contractor's sales, averaging 60 percent over 10 years and increasing from 53 percent in 1997 to 66 percent in 2006. Commercial/industrial type properties make up the next biggest chunk of sales, however this work type did decrease over the past 10 years from 27 percent in 1997 to 23 percent this year. Government/institutional customers also declined from 10 percent of sales in 1997 to 3 percent in 2006.

* Look for more 10-year industry analysis in each section of the 2006 State of the Industry Report.

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- ✗ Heavy, wet grass.
- ✗ Long, wispy grass.
- ✗ Different grass varieties.
- ✗ Spring and fall leaves.



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Ready, Steady

Average double-digit increases hold steady as contractors prepare their businesses for more controlled growth.

By Nicole Wisniewski

Housing booms and impending busts. Rising interest rates. Skyrocketing fuel and health insurance costs. Price shoppers and the low-ball competitors that lure them away. Increasingly stressed out business owners.

Yes, these issues have been on landscape contractors' business plates for the past three years and, unfortunately, they aren't going away. But what has changed is contractors' reactions to these potentially business-limiting factors.

Among the more than 20 contractors across the United States interviewed, none said they were embracing the aggressive growth that was so prevalent in the late 1990s and into 2000. In fact, the word

"conservative" was used often, despite the fact that many contractors quoted 10 percent growth plans for 2006, which many business owners would consider quite impressive.

"We're conservative as we don't want to force ourselves into growing for growth's sake," says Bob Grover, owner, Pacific Landscape Management, Hillsboro, Ore., adding that his business is set to grow 15 percent his year bringing it to \$4 million.

Maurice Dowell, owner of Dowco Enterprises, Chesterfield, Mo., agrees. "We don't want to grow too fast because growth gobbles cash," he says, adding that his company is up 10 percent his year but originally planned for more, a move

INDUSTRY Overview

	% of the Industry	Sales From						Sales From
		Lawn mowing/maint.	Lawn care	Construction/design-build	Irrigation	Tree & ornamental care	Snow & ice removal	Single-family residential
Less than \$50,000	19.9%	61.1%	7.1%	10.6%	2.6%	5.6%	3.5%	76.9%
\$50,000 - \$99,999	17.6%	48.1%	9.0%	15.0%	4.6%	5.8%	4.8%	70.4%
\$100,000 - \$199,999	15.8%	44.9%	13.8%	15.2%	9.3%	4.7%	6.1%	69.1%
\$200,000 - \$499,999	20.8%	30.4%	13.2%	27.4%	9.1%	7.0%	4.8%	64.3%
\$500,000 - \$999,999	11.5%	22.8%	8.3%	35.9%	10.8%	1.5%	5.7%	64.3%
\$1 million or more	14.4%	23.7%	9.8%	35.6%	10.5%	3.9%	2.9%	49.8%
Overall Average		39%	10%	22%	7%	5%	5%	66%

dy, Grow

he calls unrealistic. "Sustained, controlled growth is what we're all about."

As Chris Davitt, president of Ruppert Nurseries, Laytonsville, Md., points out, growth doesn't seem to be the problem – "it's managing that growth." Ruppert Nurseries budgeted and plans to meet a 35-percent increase this year, which Davitt admits is far from conservative. "We're targeting 25 percent in 2007 so we can better keep up with our employee and equipment needs."

Many contractors feel the same. Though the "economy has been surprisingly resilient," as John Ossa, president of San Rafael, Calif.-based Gardeners' Guild points out, contractors are recognizing that operating

cost increases and a changing or shrinking customer base as a result of a housing slowdown could affect their future so they are planning accordingly.

BALANCING ACT. According to August 2006 *Lawn & Landscape* research, the average contractor's growth remained consistent, but the average contractor's revenue dropped from \$796,750 to \$712,374, which means growth came from more smaller companies this year. And a 2 percent rise in net operating costs from 14.4 percent in 2005 to 16.3 percent in 2006 didn't seem to affect net profit, which nudged upward slightly at 11.2 percent this year compared to 11 percent in 2005.

That doesn't mean operating cost increases haven't stung. "The biggest impact to our business is that our costs are rising more rapidly in recent years," Grover explains.

However, this year contractors seem to be responding better to these now-expected escalating expenses – for instance, by implementing fuel surcharges to counter surging gas prices. "Our growth came from raising prices due to fuel, packaging services so they are more economical for the customer and efficient for us and focusing on full-service vs. piecemeal servicing," points out Joe Markell, president, Sunrise Lawn & Landscaping Services, Herndon, Va., adding that his company is on track

	Region			Number of Employees							
	Multi-family structures	Commercial/ industrial	Government/ institutional	West/ Southwest	East/ Midwest	South/ Southeast	1 - 2	3 - 4	5 - 9	10 - 24	25 or more
	4.2%	16.1%	2.4%	20.9%	19.1%	20.9%	23.6%	6.1%	15.5%	5.4%	2.6%
	3.1%	20.5%	2.7%	14.1%	18.2%	20.9%	22.5%	9.8%	7.8%	3.6%	2.6%
	6.6%	20.5%	2.2%	14.1%	17.3%	14.5%	25.3%	17.1%	13.8%	1.8%	0.0%
	6.1%	23.9%	4.4%	23.2%	21.2%	16.3%	19.8%	46.3%	26.7%	8.9%	2.6%
	6.0%	25.0%	2.3%	9.0%	11.9%	12.8%	7.1%	14.6%	22.4%	23.2%	12.8%
	11.0%	30.2%	5.8%	18.6%	12.2%	14.5%	1.6%	6.1%	13.8%	57.1%	79.5%
	6.0%	23.0%	3.0%	25.9%	49.7%	24.5%	38.4%	16.7%	24.5%	11.8%	8.6%



THE AVERAGE 2006 LANDSCAPE COMPANY	
Revenue	\$712,374
Years in Business	13.5 years
Year-Round Employees	7.5
Seasonal Employees	6.7
Net Profit	11.2%
Net Operating Cost Change	16.3%
Revenue Per Employee	\$50,167* <small>* Considering 14.2 total employees</small>

TOP 7 COMPANY CONCERNS FOR 2007
1. Rising fuel prices
2. Inflation/rising interest rates & low-ball competitors
3. Worker's compensation costs & overworked/stressed
4. Health insurance costs
5. Weather problems & generating quality leads
6. Labor shortage
7. Drought/water restrictions

for 10 to 15 percent growth this year.

While some contractors were successful in passing a portion of these costs on to their customers, others say it only made low-ball competitors' prices look more attractive. "Not all prospects are willing to pay for the level of service we provide even though they are constantly underwhelmed by the service low-ballers give," Grover says. "The problem is compounded in the current climate of operating cost increases."

And "everything will get much more competitive than it is now with people vying for the same customers," agrees Mike Russo, president, Russo Lawn & Landscape, Windsor Locks, Conn., adding that his company has a 2006 revenue budget of \$3.1 million, a 10 to 15 percent increase over last year. "As a result, you have to be more competitive, creative and efficient."

KEEPING GROWTH IN GEAR. Once again, efficiency is the name of the growth game for many contractors looking to deal with rising costs while maintaining a profit.

However, while a majority of contractors maintained solid growth by improving systems, there were some who reported economic downturns despite their efforts to keep this from happening. Timothy Kilgallon, owner of CSI Landscaping in Scarsdale, N.Y., reports a 10 to 15 percent decrease this year from his original budgeted figure.

Roger Myers, owner of American Beauty Landscaping in Boardman, Ohio, also wasn't too positive about his business year, saying he leveled off after three years of consistent 15 percent growth. Myers is trying to run his

company fairly lean to make up for the lost growth and continue on track toward hitting \$2 million this year.

Mike Kowalski also had an interesting year. The owner of Ann Arbor, Mich.-based Great Outdoors, says in 2005 he was down 10 to 15 percent, but is making that up this year. "Things seem to be picking up and we're doing better this year than in years past, but you have to work a little bit harder for it," he says.

Whatever a contractor's growth plans are in 2006 and into 2007, "keeping perspective is important," stresses Laurie Broccoli, calling her Rochester, N.Y.-based Broccoli Tree & Lawn Care business flat this year at \$2.5 million in revenue. "This is really a phenomenal, viable industry that contributes to the economy in a big way," she says. "If we all keep raising the standards, it's good for all of us." **LL**

SERVICE REVENUE SPECIFICS	
Following are the net percent sales in each service sector	
SERVICE	% CHANGE
Construction	15.4%
Lawn Maintenance	14.9%
Chemical/Fertilizer Services	14.1%
Irrigation Services	13.8%
Arbor Services	9.4%
Nursery/Retail	2.3%
Snow/Ice Control	1.3%



AN EYE ON HOUSING

If the housing market is experiencing a so-called bubble burst, many contractors aren't feeling the effects. Yet.

"You probably heard that housing prices are softening around the country, but in our residential estate type market where homes are \$3 million and up, the market is hotter than ever," says John Ossa, president, Gardeners' Guild, San Rafael, Calif., adding "the case is the supply is not up to the demand," despite the fact that the high cost of living is a regional obstacle for the Bay Area because it limits the number of new people moving in.

Across the country in Windsor Locks, Conn., Mike Russo, president, Russo Lawn & Landscape, feels the same. "They're building new hotels on our road and there is still a bunch of over-55 condominiums being put up and they all need to be landscaped so it's still going pretty well," he says.

The reason it's going so well in many areas, according to Chris Davitt, president, Ruppert Nurseries, Laytonsville, Md., is because "being a landscaper we have the benefit of being at the tail end of real estate construction. When things start to slow down, we still have another year because we are the last trade in the process."

According to the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB), 2005 was an excellent year for residential construction, marking the fourth year of expansion following the 2001 recession. And economists say 2006 was comparable to 2005 on some fronts. "It was a cooling down of the housing market, not an out and out freeze," says David Seiders, NAHB's chief economist, explaining why some contractors may not be seeing any downturns in the housing market just yet. "With both prices and interest rates up, total housing starts are declining now and into 2007."

Though many contractors continue to report a positive housing situation, some markets have reported slight changes that many economists call the start of the bubble burst that could take a long time to actually reach its core phase. In fact, according to *Lawn & Landscape* research, though contractors interviewed seem fairly optimistic, those surveyed listed inflation/rising interest rates as their No. 2 business-influencing issue in 2007, tied with low-ball competitors and behind fuel in the No. 1 spot.

"There are a couple of storm clouds on the horizon that will impact the way we conduct business in the coming year - one is the housing market," explains Todd Williams, American Civil Constructors, Littleton, Colo. "If that happens, the landscape business in our area will definitely be impacted."

Joe Markell, president, Sunrise Lawn & Landscaping

Services, Herndon, Va., agrees. "I think things are going to start getting worse, especially when homeowners' adjustable rate mortgages are due - I expect the real estate industry to get turned upside down when that happens," he says. "We do work for a few custom home builders and they are already starting to back off. Normally they're building five to 10 homes a year, but they are building half that this year and they're cautious about buying and holding on to those lots."

The news of late from economists tends to paint the same worrisome picture for the road ahead into 2007 and 2008. As national residential construction continues to show evidence of cooling when looking at housing start figures, the outlook for different parts of the country varies. According to NAHB, the prospects for the South and West remain reasonably bright, while the Northeast and upper Midwest still struggle. "Formerly hot markets like Miami and San Diego, characterized by rapidly escalating prices, feverish building and speculation among home buyers, are

now showing evidence of excess supply," Seiders says. "The result is significantly reduced construction activity in 2006 and 2007 in our forecast."

But "for some Southern U.S. metropolitan areas, good employment prospects and population inflows translate into a

healthy residential construction forecast," Seiders continues. "In North Carolina, the Charlotte, Durham and Raleigh metropolitan areas are forecast to increase total housing starts in 2007. On the West Coast, Seattle housing construction is also forecast to rise due to expanding employment."

In addition to looming slowdowns in housing markets across the country, Mike Kowalski, owner, Great Outdoors, Ann Arbor, Mich., points to another trend contractors are noticing more this year - the growing popularity of adopting construction phases to spread out landscape costs. "Though I feel like people are spending more money on landscape projects and are staying in the house as opposed to going on vacation, I think they are spreading out these costs more," he says. "So, a few years ago, a customer may have done a three-year project that totaled \$20,000, but now they spend \$10,000 this year and \$10,000 next year, etc., spreading it out more but spending more."

Renovation is also popular for landscapes installed 15 to 30 years ago, points out Tom Del Conte, president, Del Conte's Landscaping, Fremont, Calif., saying, "on the older properties, there are a lot more face-lifts being performed."

HOUSING				
YEAR	TOTAL HOUSING STARTS*	NEW SINGLE FAMILY SALES*	EXISTING HOME SALES*	30 YEAR FIXED RATE
2004	1,950	1,201	5,192	5.8%
2005	2,073	1,280	6,170	5.9%
2006	1,878	1,123	5,792	6.6%

Source: National Association of Home Builders; * In millions



By Nicole Wisniewski

Equipment

Sixty percent

of contractors

boost spending

this year.

An overwhelming 60 percent of contractors increased their equipment/service budgets in 2006, with 17.2 percent of that group classifying this increase as "significant," according to *Lawn & Landscape* research. Many contractors interviewed say this increase in purchasing is the natural result of growth.

"We've doubled the amount of equipment we've purchased each year as we've doubled our revenue," explains Chris Davitt, president, Ruppert Nurseries, Laytonville, Md.

Eric Storck, president, Blade Runners, Fairfax, Va., agrees, stating that along with his 10 percent budgeted growth this year, he has spent approximately 15 percent more on equipment.

Only 16.2 percent of contrac-

tors said they decreased their spending in 2006, with 7.3 percent of them calling this decrease "significant." Approximately 24 percent of contractors maintained spending this year.

Despite whether they chose to spend more or less money on equipment, many contractors interviewed said they are improving their overall maintenance of equipment to extend its life and keep their companies in better cash flow positions. "We've invested in a great mechanic who is getting us seven years out of our vehicles now instead of only five years," shares Mike Kowalski, owner, Great Outdoors, Ann Arbor, Mich., calling his equipment purchasing "steady."

Tom Del Conte also uses the term "steady" to describe his

2006 SPENDING

How would you characterize your equipment/service budget in 2006?

Significant increase over 2005	17.2%
Increased	42.8%
Did not change	23.8%
Decreased	8.9%
Significant decrease from 2006	7.3%

equipment purchasing. "We can't afford to have machines down so it's important to keep our fleet as new as possible," says the president of Del Conte's Landscaping, Fremont, Calif., adding that he is focusing on maximizing his equipment investment. "Productivity is the name of the game. We are always looking at ways to shave off a few cents here and there."

10 YEARS OF SPENDING.

When looking at equipment buying over a 10-year time frame, walk-behind mower purchasing fell 5 percent as riding mower purchasing rose 4 percent.

A similar trend was seen between trucks and trailers with trucks declining 5 percent since 1997, but trailers experiencing

TRACKING THE DOLLARS

CATEGORY	AVERAGE EXPENDITURE
Equipment Trucks & Trailers	\$40,313
Trees/shrubs/plants/sod/turfseed	\$91,649
Irrigation systems and components	\$46,041
Chemical/fertilizer products for turf and trees	\$32,860
Construction hardscape materials	\$121,360
Snow & ice products	\$13,651
Technology (computers, business and design software, GPS systems/software, etc.)	\$8,063
Subcontracted services	\$50,778

Spending Rises

WHAT CONTRACTORS ARE BUYING

A majority of landscape contractors increased their spending this year, but what exactly are they buying? From a list of more than 50 common lawn and landscape tools and resources, respondents to a *Lawn & Landscape* survey indicated any and all products they purchased in the previous 12 months. The following list reveals the top 20 expenditures by the percentage of contractors who purchased them.

RANK	TOOL	% CONTRACTORS
------	------	---------------

1	Landscape tools	70.5%
2	Fertilizer	68.3%
3	Trees/shrubs/plants	67.3%
4	Safety equipment	64.3%
5	Equipment parts	64.1%
6	Turf seed	59.2%
7	Preemergent herbicides	53.1%
8	Postemergent herbicides	53.1%
9	Sod	52.5%
10	Backpack/handheld blowers	49.9%
11	Uniforms	49.3%
12	Trimmers/edgers	46.6%
13	Non-selective herbicides	46.5%
14	Subcontractors	44.9%
15	Bed edging	44.4%
16	Irrigation sprayheads/rotors	43.6%
17	Computers	42.8%
18	Business software	42.1%
19	Insecticides	41.2%
20	Trucks	39.2%

an 11-percent rise over the decade.

As irrigation service offerings increased, so did spending on irrigation sprayheads/rotors – 17 percent in 10 years. Hand-held equipment like blowers, trimmers and edgers also showed consistent growth throughout the past 10 years.

All of the three chemical lawn care products analyzed – fertilizers, insecticides and fungicides – held constant or declined slightly over the past decade. Sixty-eight percent of contractors purchased fertilizers in 1997, and the number was the same in 2006. Insecticide purchasing dropped 6 percent since 1997 and fungicide purchasing declined 3 percent.

SMARTER BUYING. Though spending is up, some contractors interviewed did say they were trying to be more conservative. "I'm no longer the kid in the candy shop when buying equipment," says Maurice Dowell, owner, Dowco Enterprises, Chesterfield, Mo., adding that the last three years he's evaluated his expenditures more closely. "We're redoing our existing vehicles. We're buying less and we're using what we have to the best of our advantage."

Some contractors have even gone to the extent of waiting an extra year or two to turn over equipment they would consider ready to exchange.

And "if you're not using it enough, don't buy it – rent it," advises Dowell, pointing out a lesson he learned concerning equipment spending.

Despite whether a contractor is spending a significant amount on equipment, maintaining his purchasing levels or renting more than buying, all in all, equipment spending still poses fewer concerns for contractors than employees, making it a hot commodity when workers are hard to come by. As Del Conte says, "Steel is cheaper than labor, so any time we can invest in a piece of equipment, we do." □



Attraction and retention,

immigration and

compensation are all

challenges of doing

business in the

landscape industry.

Labor

Landscape contractors continue to weigh labor issues and their impact on success.

Of the labor issues, the top concerns across the board were with ancillary labor issues, such as rising worker's compensation costs and the increasing financial burden of providing employees with adequate health insurance benefits, according to *Lawn & Landscape* research. Moderate concern was expressed with regards to the H-2B guest worker program and immigration issues, as well as attracting and acquiring qualified job candidates.

Examining workforce trends on a decade-long basis, the average contractor had a full-time staff of 8.7 employees in 1997 and 7.5 in 2006, a 14 percent decline, according to *Lawn & Landscape* research. Full-time staffing peaked in 1999 with 12.5 and was at its lowest just one year later with 5 full-time employees, according to the data.

In contrast, the data indicates part-time staff numbers increased from 2.7 in 1997 to 6.7 in 2006, an increase of 148 percent. During that decade-long time span, contractors saw their part-time staffs ranging from 5.2 in 1998 and 8.7 in

1999. The last four years have been fairly consistent with seasonal employees ranging between 6.5 and 7.6 people.

In terms of how landscape contractors have compensated their employees, average pay has increased slightly over the 10-year period, according to *Lawn & Landscape* research. Focusing on the three main job functions employed by a contractor (mower operators, spray technicians and foremen), the data reflects entry-level mower operators in 1999 were earning \$7.30 per hour and this past year they earned \$8.30, an increase of 14 percent. Pay for entry-level spray technicians hasn't shown much change, with an average pay of \$8.80 per hour in 1999 and the same rate of pay for 2005 and 2006. A foreman's rate of pay reflected the largest average increase, going from \$11.50 per hour in 1999 to \$14.90 per hour in 2006.

A LOOK AT BENEFITS. Providing adequate and attractive benefit packages to workers has been a pressing issue with most landscape contractors for the greater part of the last decade, and last year was no exception.

By Mike Zawacki

Relations

For example, Timothy Kilgallon of CSI Landscaping in Scarsdale, N.Y. says 10 years ago his employees paid about 15 percent of their health benefits. Today, however, they pay half, and the dollar amount they must contribute continues to increase.

Like Kilgallon, Maurice Dowell, president of Dowco Enterprises, Chesterfield, Mo., offsets his health care costs by having his employees cover half of the expense. Any less, Dowell says, is out of the question. "I have friends who provide full health care and they're getting slammed," he shares. "Anything you change is a decrease in pay. With the way the economy is, it scares me to go any deeper. We're jumping health care providers every two years."

Dowell adds that seeking better rates for health care coverage typically results in "paying more for less," however, he's made an effort to keep the out-of-pocket costs as low as possible for his employees.

This issue, however, extends beyond health care coverage and many contractors realize having a broad and attractive array of benefits is a key attraction and retention tool.

For instance, Mike Kowalski, owner of Great Outdoors in Ann Arbor, Mich., provides his laborers with paid vacations, dental and vision plans and a 401(k) plan. He also recognizes the need for a work-life balance. "We try not to overwork our guys," he says. "We work 45 hours a week and give them weekends off. That's part of what they like - they're not working 80 hours in the summer."

QUALIFIED WORKERS. An overall shortage in qualified and skilled labor remained near the forefront of contractors' minds this year, according to State of the Industry figures.

"Labor is and will continue to be a major obstacle, there's no two ways about it," says Roger Myers, president of American Beauty Landscaping in Boardman, Ohio. "We can generate sales, but we can't make a foreman. This is going to be a problem for us again next year and affect our progress more than anything else."

Outside of the 15 temporary workers he employs via the government's H-2B program, Joe Markell, president of Sunrise Lawn/Landscaping Services in Herndon, Va., says hiring quali-

WAGE WARS

Joe Markell is a wage war veteran. "It's a constant issue," says the president of Sunrise Lawn/Landscaping Services in Herndon, Va. "It's driven by what it costs to live here and employees have to make a certain amount to survive. We raise salaries and try to provide benefits so there is a reason for them to stay long-term."

Often the need for qualified laborers creates such demand in a region that landscape contractors find themselves duking it out with competitors over salaries and incentives in order to attract and keep quality workers on board. Some contractors say they're forced to "pay the price" to draw and retain the quality of laborer and management personnel who can facilitate growth.

However, other landscape contractors say they don't entertain this type of industry infighting.

"If we're going to battle over who pays who 50 cents more and that's what the employee is concerned about, then we're not on the same page," says Mike Russo, president of Russo Lawn & Landscape in Windsor Locks, Conn.

Chris Davitt, president of Ruppert Nurseries in Laytonsville, Md., says competition among landscape companies drives the market to some degree, but it's a fact of doing business that all contractors learn to manage.

"You have to be the most attractive offer to the employees as well as the customer," Davitt says. "It's an ongoing thing that you're always paying attention and adjusting to. It's a part of the business. It's always a tap dance that we need to pay attention to."



2006 PAY RATES				
POSITION	AVERAGE HOURLY WAGES & ANNUAL SALARIES			
	Overall Avg	West/Southwest	East/Midwest	South/Southeast
Mower Operator (entry level)	\$8.30/hr	\$8.20/hr	\$8.60/hr	\$7.70/hr
Mower Operator (experienced)	\$10.80/hr	\$10.40/hr	\$11.40/hr	\$10/hr
Spray Technician (entry level)	\$8.80/hr	\$8.60/hr	\$8.60/hr	\$8.90/hr
Construction (entry level)	\$8.90/hr	\$8.80/hr	\$9.30/hr	\$7.90/hr
Construction (experienced)	\$12.90/hr	\$12.60/hr	\$13.70/hr	\$11.10/hr
Foreman	\$31,077/yr	\$31,136/yr	\$31,634/yr	\$31,191/yr
Designer/Architect	\$44,671/yr	\$43,115/yr	\$45,629/yr	\$45,000/yr
Account Manager	\$36,657/yr	\$38,006/yr	\$38,055/yr	\$33,333/yr
Supervisor	\$38,182/yr	\$40,092/yr	\$37,573/yr	\$37,148/yr
Owner/President	\$57,089/yr	\$63,610/yr	\$54,764/yr	\$53,050/yr

fied and dependable employees has been a difficult task. "Especially finding someone who can drive and has any kind of experience," he says. "We will run ads and get no calls. Across the board, laborers can be found. It's really drivers and crew leaders that are the problem. It has even been difficult finding office personnel. There's a lot of competition for employees."

Finding skilled middle-management personnel as well as qualified entry-level employees also has been a difficult task this year, says John Ossa, president, Gardeners' Guild, San Rafael, Calif. "We pay well over \$10 an hour for an entry-level employee, and it's hard to get them to come through the door for that," he says. "That speaks to the national political issue around immigration and also to the cost of living. It's a very competitive market for an entry-level person."

Todd Williams, vice president and regional director at American Civil Constructors in Littleton, Colo., says while his firm has had little problems filling middle management positions, qualified irrigation and spray technicians are in short supply. Williams blames this on his region's low un-

employment rate. "For all intents and purposes the Denver economy is at full employment," he says. "The competition for irrigation technicians is fierce. Their pay has gone up proportionately more than any other group in our industry."

Landscape contractors working in and around major metropolitan areas say they must contend with high cost-of-living issues, which typically means higher employee salaries. Likewise, those employers operating in a region experiencing economic recovery and growth must deal with low unemployment rates and shrinking labor pools.

Other landscape contractors say they try to bridge the attraction and retention gap by investing in their employees, particularly through education, promotion and recognition.

"Training is a big part of it," says Craig Ruppert, CEO of Ruppert Nurseries in Laytonville, Md. "Our internal training is an ongoing, never ending effort. We try to keep as many employees involved with job costing and budgeting and financial management. We spend a lot of time and energy training in financial matters. The other key area to retention is appreciation and recog-

inition for work that's well done.

"This is really the business we're in," Ruppert adds. "We cut grass and grow trees along the way, but our business is growing people."

H-2B DEPENDENT? In regards to H-2B issues, many landscape contractors have come to depend on the temporary guest worker program because it's a viable source for reliable laborers. In fact, many cite that foreign workers – and not just those of Hispanic origins – are more dedicated than their domestic counterparts.

But landscape contractors fear they will not get the guest worker help they require to be successful in 2007 because of the political issues surrounding immigration and national security of late, says Maurice Dowell, owner of Dowco Enterprises in Chesterfield, Mo. "This is something that really impacts you when you go out bidding contracts," he says. "When I'm bidding a contract, I want to know I have the finances, assets and the personnel to make good on it and this has created quite a problem for us. We're not a viable business without the guest worker program." ■

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USE READER SERVICE # 110



By Marisa Palmieri

Who You Serve, What You Do and How Much You Charge

Finding the right mix of clients, services and price points is as much of a challenge as it's always been.

The typical demands landscape and lawn care businesses experience beg several questions for contractors: How do I remain competitive? What services do I offer? Should I go after a new market? And do I raise prices or hold steady for one more year?

In 2006, landscape contractors remained cautiously optimistic, despite these pressures. Most businesses carefully calculated costs – considering fuel, labor and insurance – and increased prices accordingly.

"Our prices increased by virtue of the fact that our costs increased," says Chris Davitt, president of Laytonsville, Md.-based Ruppert Nurseries. Pay

scale, plant material costs, fuel costs and rising health care premiums are all factors Ruppert, and other contractors nationwide, considered when bumping up prices this year.

On average, contractors increased prices for base services (residential and commercial mowing and chemical lawn care) 1 to 6.5 percent (see "Service Pricing" on page S17).

Although contractors raised prices, these increases reflect a decline in pricing growth, which had experienced several years of increases in the 10-percent range.

One reason pricing growth may have slowed in some regions is the perennial problem

of low-ball competitors.

"I'm seeing contractors bid down so low that I can't imagine anyone is making any money," says Todd Williams, vice president and regional director for American Civil Constructors, Littleton, Colo., explaining that a drought in 2002 caused Denver-area maintenance prices to plummet – and they haven't entirely recovered yet.

Broccoli Tree & Lawn Care, Rochester, N.Y., is another company that's been challenged by low-ball competitors on the maintenance side of the business. "We haven't increased prices in a few years and we're still not competitive," Company President Laurie Broccoli says. The company had moved to "full-service" provider status in years past, but plans to transition back to its lawn and tree care roots. This year, the company raised lawn care prices 8 percent and instituted an annual \$25 neighbor notification fee. As for next year? "We haven't decided yet," she says. "We'll probably have some nominal increases. It won't be just an across-the-board increase."

Nationwide, most markets have accepted conservative price increases. "In general, prices have been driven up from the costs of goods and salary pressure," says John Ossa,

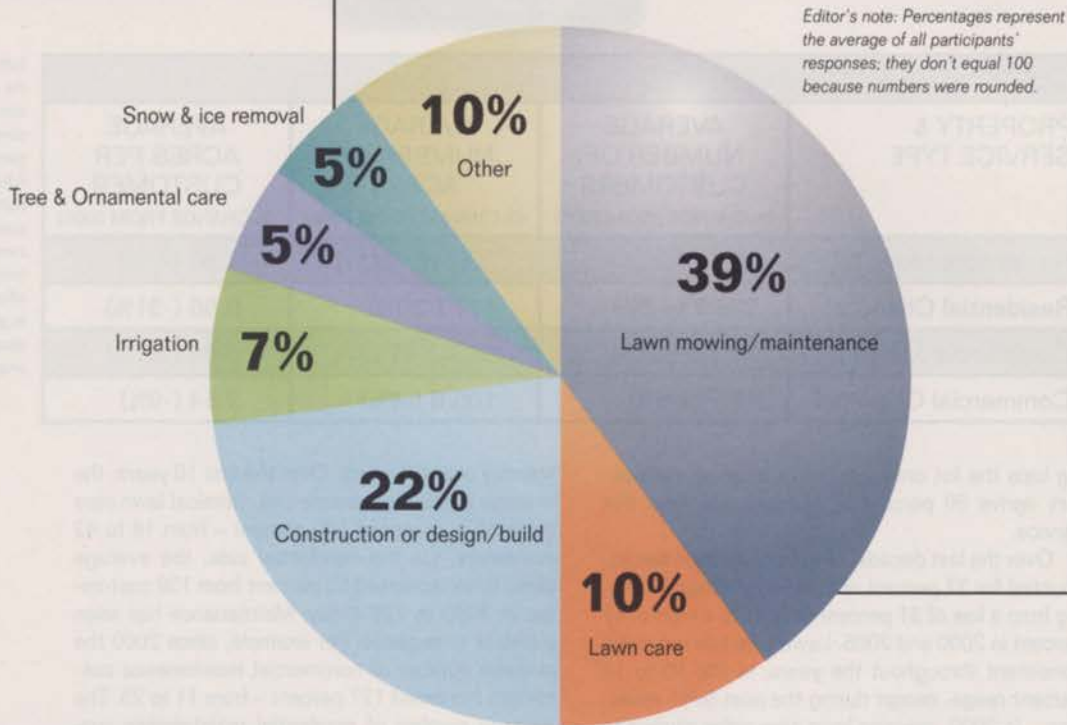
BIG GUYS SEE A BOOST IN DESIGN/BUILD SALES

One shift that occurred this year was the size of contractors who sold construction work. Construction sales at companies with revenue less than \$200,000 declined by 7 percent, down from 20 percent in 2005 to 13 percent this year. These smaller companies earned 52 percent of their sales from lawn mowing/maintenance, up from 41 percent last year. Larger companies' maintenance sales dropped from 43 percent to 26 percent, while their construction sales grew from 21 percent in 2005 to 32 percent this year.

These numbers reflect a trend of larger contractors going after the capital-equipment-heavy, high-skill-level work, while letting their smaller counterparts pick up maintenance business, which typically results in lower margins.

San Rafael, Calif.-based Gardeners' Guild, is one such "big guy." "We started as a maintenance company, but in recent years we're really focused on building the team, processes and equipment it takes to do construction," says John Ossa, president of the \$10-million operation. "Construction is the most profitable work, but also has the most risk, so it tends to be more volatile of a business. The highs are high and the lows are low."

ANNUAL SALES BY SERVICE TYPE



president of Gardeners' Guild, San Rafael, Calif. He and other contractors say that they favor case-by-case increases to across-the-board ones – careful not to give customers a reason to shop around.

Not surprisingly, the cost of fuel and its residual expenses – shipping prices, petroleum-based fertilizer, etc. – were the No. 1 reason businesses cited for increasing prices. "I'm trying to raise prices as minimally as possible, but with fuel we're going to have to raise again," says Joe Markell, Sunrise Lawn/Landscaping Services, Herndon, Va. His customers can expect a 3 to 5 percent fuel-related increase, he says.

"We raised some prices last fall for this year's contract season, but it was on a menu-item basis," says Maurice Dowell, owner of Chesterfield, Mo.-based Dowco Enterprises. "We haven't raised hourly rates in three years," he adds, noting that mowing has held steady at \$45 per hour, which is in line with this year's industry average.

AT YOUR SERVICE. In 2006, contractors generally generated revenue from the same slices of the pie as in years past (see "Annual Sales By Service Type" above). Maintenance/mow-

SERVICE PRICING			
SERVICE	2005	2006	% CHANGE
Residential Mowing (Hourly)	\$41.00	\$43.70	6.59%
Residential Chemical (Hourly)	\$47.10	\$49.90	5.94%
Commercial Lawn Care (per 1,000 square feet)	\$18.80	\$19.00	1.06%



CUSTOMERS & ACRES SERVICED

PROPERTY & SERVICE TYPE	AVERAGE NUMBER OF CUSTOMERS (% CHANGE FROM 2005)	AVERAGE NUMBER OF ACRES (% CHANGE FROM 2005)	AVERAGE ACRES PER CUSTOMER (% CHANGE FROM 2005)
Residential Mowing	52.7 (+2%)	100.3 (-6%)	1.90 (-8%)
Residential Chemical	226.2 (+2%)	127 (-30%)	0.56 (-31%)
Commercial Mowing	24.8 (+15%)	98.7 (-44%)	3.98 (-51%)
Commercial Chemical	41.7 (+6%)	105.8 (-4%)	2.54 (-9%)

Editor's note: Though the average property size is declining, contractors are gaining customers. Additionally, with labor shortages, contractors continue to report increased spending on more productive and efficient equipment to get work done despite shrinking property sizes.

ing tops the list once again. On average, contractors derive 39 percent of annual sales from this service.

Over the last decade, lawn maintenance has accounted for 37 percent of sales on average – ranging from a low of 31 percent in 2001 to a high of 42 percent in 2000 and 2005. Lawn care has remained consistent throughout the years, in the 10 to 12 percent range, except during the post-9/11 recession – in 2002, average lawn care sales slipped to a low of 6 percent.

Despite Mother's Nature's unpredictable influence over irrigation and snow removal success, the services have held steady since 1997, hovering at 6 to 8 percent and 4 to 5 percent, respectively. In 2002, irrigation peaked at 13 percent of sales and snow removal spiked at 11 percent of sales.

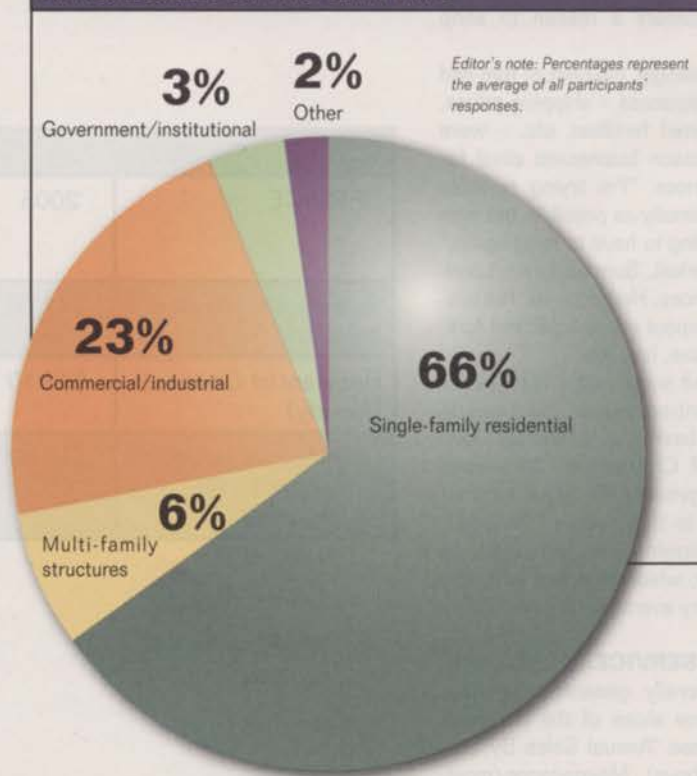
Holding steady in 2006 is the percentage of contractors' sales that come from residential vs. commercial accounts. (See "Annual Sales By Property Type" above.) Single-family residential properties generated the most sales in 2006 (66 percent). This year's numbers are consistent with the decade's figures, for which the average is 60 percent.

In 2006, contractors increased customer count in both maintenance and lawn care, however the average number of acres serviced decreased in all categories (see "Customers & Acres Serviced" above). As a result, the average acres per customer decreased across the board, reflecting that contractors are visiting more, smaller properties.

Contractors catering to more clients is another trend that's grown

steadily over the years. Over the last 10 years, the average number of commercial chemical lawn care customers increased 160 percent – from 16 to 42 customers. On the residential side, the average client base increased 63 percent from 139 customers in 2000 to 226 today. Maintenance has seen a similar emergence. For example, since 2000 the average number of commercial maintenance customers increased 127 percent – from 11 to 25. The average number of residential maintenance customers increased 35.8 percent (from 39 to 53).

ANNUAL SALES BY PROPERTY TYPE





By Marisa Palmieri

After last

year's erratic

fuel costs,

contractors

prepared

themselves for

higher prices.

Fuel Costs: No Surprises Here

There's one positive point about the high cost of fuel this year: In 2006, contractors weren't surprised.

In years past, drastic gasoline and diesel price increases caused by unexpected economic forces blindsided some business owners.

Consider Hurricane Katrina's impact in 2005. On Jan. 3, 2005, the average retail price of gasoline was \$1.78 per gallon, according to the Energy Information Administration (EIA). On Sept. 5 the national average was up 72 percent – to \$3.07 per gallon. Many contractors were caught off guard, facing a difficult decision – let fuel costs eat away at profits, or pass them along to customers?

State of the Industry research shows contractors cited fuel costs as the No. 1 factor they expect to affect business success in 2007.

"It is a concern, what we're paying now is just crazy – well over \$3 a gallon," says John Ossa, president of San Rafael, Calif.-based Gardeners' Guild. "We budget for increases, so it wasn't a big surprise that gas prices were going to take a jump."

For Dowco Enterprises, Chesterfield, Md., Owner Maurice Dowell estimates fuel has cost his company an additional \$8,000 this year.

The company has not raised prices as a result; instead, it's enlisting subcontractors to service farther away accounts. "We put maybe 6 miles on a truck a day," he says.

Better budgeting and streamlining operations this year took a former "crisis" down to the level of a "concern" for most contractors.

"Fuel absolutely is an issue," says Laurie Broccolo, president, Broccolo Tree & Lawn Care, Rochester, N.Y. But this year she, like many other contractors *Lawn & Landscape* interviewed, was prepared.

"Because we had some fuel crises in the past couple of years, we've been strategizing which vehicles get better gas mileage. We also use some biodiesel additives. We're very conscious of our routing right now," she says. "Fuel consumption, last time I looked, was only really 10 to 15 percent higher than last year, so we've done a good job controlling it – it's not a big concern."

Eric Storck, president, Blade Runners, Fairfax, Va., also downplays fuel costs as a significant problem – he has bigger fish to fry. "Obviously, it impacts our bottom line," he says. "The thing is, on your bottom line it's a 3 to 5 percent expense in your

business. To be all concerned about plus or minus 20 cents when you have much larger issues to think about – efficiency, how you run your business and how you manage your labor, how you produce your service – it's tiddleywinks."

This year, contractors agree that consumers are accepting fuel-related increases. "Everybody has to deal with the rising cost of fuel," says Joe Markell, president of Sunrise Lawn/Landscaping Services, Herndon, Va. "The customer is finally realizing how that trickles down and causes everything to go up, not just gas." His company builds a clause into its contracts, specifying that it will surcharge if gas prices surpass a certain amount. "Most customers are pretty understanding," he says. "They see the price at the pump, too."

SURCHARGE VS. PRICE HIKE. Now that most contractors are finally passing the fuel costs along to customers, their challenge is how exactly to do so.

Surcharging, or tacking on an additional monthly, per-visit or per-service charge, is the solution for some. Others are strongly opposed and prefer a general cost-of-doing-business increase.



American Civil Constructors, Littleton, Colo., took a hybrid approach to recouping fuel costs this year – it raised prices and created a surcharge plan, says Todd Williams, vice president and regional director. The company budgeted and priced work based on a \$3-per-gallon price and instituted a surcharge program if the cost rises above this level. "We do not anticipate any problems and did not get any negative feedback when we outlined the program at the beginning of the season," he says.

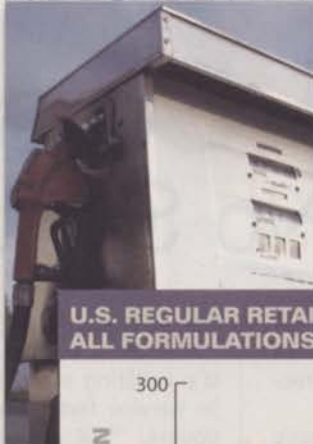
"We had a fuel spike a few years back and were quick to jump on the surcharge bandwagon," says Mike Russo, president of Russo Lawn & Landscape, Windsor Locks, Conn. Now, he reflects fuel cost increases in the direct price of a service. "Customers are surcharged to death," he explains. "If you're going to give someone a fuel surcharge, why not an insurance surcharge, and why not charge them for our uniforms? We're in business. You should know your costs."

Mike Kowalski, owner of Great Outdoors, Ann Arbor, Mich., hasn't yet hiked prices due to fuel, although the company anticipates a 2 to 3 percent increase for next year. Because he contracts with his customers, he prefers an overall price increase rather than a surcharge. "If we sign a contract with our customers, I like to be able to honor that price," he says.

That's the philosophy Ruppert Nurseries, Laytonsville, Md., follows. "We don't surcharge," says President Chris Davitt. "We contract with our customers and we live with the increases. To the extent that fuel goes up, our prices go up, but not inbetween projects."

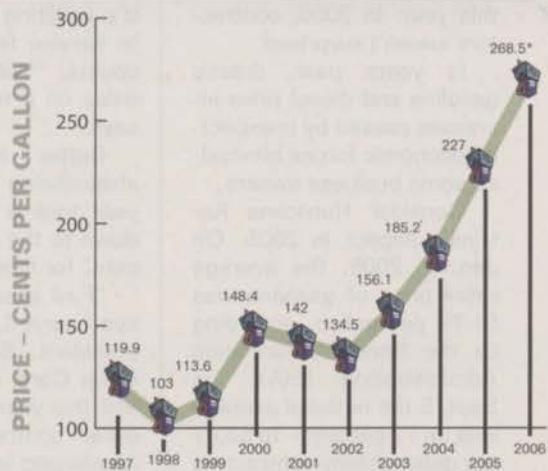
Price increases as a result of fuel costs is one thing contractors agree on. "What's our outlook in regard to fuel prices in 2007?" Williams asks. "We expect it to go up and we will price our services accordingly." LL

A DECADE AT THE PUMP



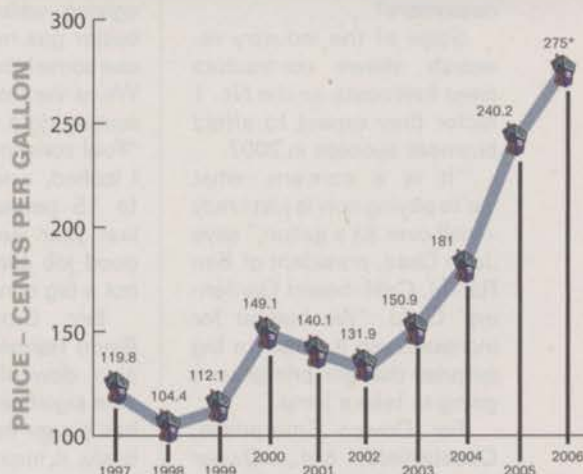
Contractors often talk about the days of double-digit gallons of gas. A look at U.S. average annual prices of retail gasoline and diesel shows it's been more than a decade since that was the norm.

U.S. REGULAR RETAIL GASOLINE PRICES – ALL FORMULATIONS



*Represents January through August average only
Source: Energy Information Administration

U.S. NO. 2 DIESEL RETAIL PRICES



*Represents January through August average only
Source: Energy Information Administration



By Mike Zawacki

The High-Tech Advantage

Landscape contractors continue to invest in and upgrade their technology.

Contractors continue to integrate technology into their operations and recognize the importance of upgrading high-tech equipment. But the industry does not rely on technology to generate sales and revenue.

In the last 12 months nearly 43 percent of contractors acquired new computers, *Lawn & Landscape* research shows. Nearly the same number (42.1 percent) invested in business software. And though some newer technological advancements are growing in acceptance by the industry, it's happening fairly slowly. For instance, this year contractors made only modest investments in GPS and fleet-tracking

technology, with 11.6 percent purchasing an average of \$1,938 worth of GPS equipment/software. In addition, only 1 percent of respondents use Internet referral services and 2 percent indicated they use their company Web sites and e-mail to bring in new clients. **LL**

TECH SPENDING

What technology items have you purchased in the last 12 months?

ITEMS	AVERAGE	LESS THAN \$200,000 REVENUE	MORE THAN \$200,000 REVENUE
Computers	42.8%	33.8%	52.6%
Business software	42.1%	36.7%	49.4%
Design software	17.8%	14.3%	21.8%
GPS	11.6%	5.4%	18.6%

CUSTOMERS & THE WEB

Compared to three years ago, what customer impact are you seeing from the Internet?

IMPACT	% RESPONDENTS
More comparison on services offered	48.2%
More comparison on service pricing	45.8%
More questions about landscape designs	41.8%
More questions about hardscape materials	32%
More questions or concerns about pesticides used	22.6%
More questions about company licensing	17.5%
Other	14.1%

By Marisa Palmieri

The Lawn & Landscape Top 100 List

The 99.9th percentile. That's where the companies that made this year's Top 100 List rank, in terms of revenue.

These companies – there's actually 102 on the list due to a three-way revenue tie at No. 100 – earned a total of \$6,054,894,514 and averaged 13 percent growth. They plan for an average of more than 12 percent next year.

As these firms grow, so does our list. The revenue threshold increased this year to \$12 million – up \$1 million from a year ago. Also, 14 firms that did not appear on the 2005 list made it this year. Some are newcomers, others have appeared on the list sporadically going back to its inception (as the Top 50) in 1997.

Starting in May, *Lawn & Landscape* used various methods including e-mail, fax and print promotion to solicit companies' 2005 revenue and other data. We calculate and omit any reported revenue sources that are not widely offered green industry services – like structural pest control, for example.

Our goal is to provide the industry with a comprehensive and accurate Top 100 List. We made every attempt to identify and contact companies eligible for the list; however, some companies choose not to disclose their revenue and therefore are not included. If you know of a company we missed, please let us know. Contact Associate Editor Marisa Palmieri at 800/456-0707 or mpalmieri@gie.net.

Check out the results on pages S22 and S23.



compiled by Marisa Palmieri

Lawn & Landscape

Our annual list of the landscape industry's top earners, ranked by revenue.

TOP 100 LIST

★ 2006 Rank	Last Year	Company	City	2005 Revenue	% Inc/Dec From 2004	Expected % Inc/Dec For 2006	Year-Round Employees	Seasonal/Part-Time Employees
1	1	The TruGreen Cos.	Memphis, Tenn.	\$1,477,963,000	4	2-3	n/r	n/r
2	2	ValleyCrest Cos.	Calabasas, Calif.	\$730,000,000	10.9	n/r	9,000	0
3	3	The Brickman Group	Gaithersburg, Md.	\$454,545,000	18.5	2.5	2,500	3,500
4	4	The Davey Tree Expert Co.	Kent, Ohio	\$431,000,000	8.3	8.9	5,500	600
5	6	Scotts LawnService	Marysville, Ohio	\$200,000,000	29	25	n/r	n/r
6	8	Gothic Landscape	Valencia, Calif.	\$151,000,000	43	15	1,600	n/r
7	7	Bartlett Tree Experts	Stamford, Conn.	\$122,000,000	7	9	1,250	200
8	9	Initial Tropical Plants	Riverwoods, Ill.	\$107,000,000	10	5	1,150	150
9	10	Weed Man	Mississauga, Ontario	*\$80,964,000	2	5	750	2,500
10	11	Lawn Doctor	Holmdel, N.J.	\$79,000,000	3	4	1,200	2,200
11	12	OneSource Landscape & Golf Services	Tampa, Fla.	\$78,000,000	0	n/r	1,200	200
12	13	U.S. Lawns	Orlando, Fla.	\$68,000,000	16	15	1,340	360
13	14	Vila & Son Landscaping Corp.	Miami, Fla.	\$55,492,000	9	10	650	0
14	5	American Civil Constructors	Littleton, Colo.	\$55,000,000	10	10	300	300
15	15	The Care of Trees	Wheeling, Ill.	\$48,929,211	6.02	3-4	500	50
16	17	Chapel Valley Landscape Co.	Woodbine, Md.	\$47,500,000	7	10	300	180
17	19	The Bruce Co. of Wisconsin	Middleton, Wis.	\$42,693,000	12	3	200	425
18	22	Acres Group	Wauconda, Ill.	\$40,408,000	16.3	5.2	106	605
19	19	Grounds Control Division of Sanitors	San Antonio	\$38,000,000	5	7	700	0
20		Landscape Concepts Construction	Richmond, Ill.	\$36,000,000	20	20	100	200
21(t)	21	Oak Leaf Landscape	Anaheim, Calif.	\$35,000,000	5	-3	370	n/r
21(t)	29	Marina Landscape	Anaheim, Calif.	\$35,000,000	17	10	310	n/r
21(t)	26	Toll Landscape	Lambertville, N.J.	\$35,000,000	n/r	n/r	n/r	n/r
24	24	Jensen Corp. Landscape Contractors	Cupertino, Calif.	\$33,405,000	6	8	275	0
25	27	Lipinski Landscape & Irrigation, Inc.	Marlton, N.J.	\$31,250,000	5	8	40	85
26	36	Autumn Landscaping	Englewood, Colo.	\$31,000,000	55	35	630	n/r
27		Ruppert Nurseries	Laytonsville, Md.	\$30,998,096	98	45	230	0
28	25	The Groundskeeper	Tucson, Ariz.	\$30,600,000	-2	8	650	n/r
29	29	Denison Landscaping	Ft. Washington, Md.	\$30,208,000	16	15	170	110
30	35	Dixie Landscape Co.	Miami, Fla.	\$30,000,832	25	16	299	0
31	29	Mariani Landscape	Lake Bluff, Ill.	\$30,000,000	15	5	90	300
32	34	Cagwin & Dorward	Novato, Calif.	\$29,558,859	18.88	10.9	406	1
33	28	Nanak's Landscaping	Longwood, Fla.	\$28,500,000	9	11	600	n/r
34	39	Teufel Nursery/Landscape	Portland, Ore.	\$28,380,000	21	20	289	125
35	37	AAA Landscape	Tucson, Ariz.	\$27,500,000	11	25	n/r	n/r
36(t)		Creative Environments Design & Landscape	Tempe, Ariz.	\$27,000,000	-23	60	550	n/r
36(t)	32	Choate Irrigation USA	Carrollton, Texas	\$27,000,000	25	15	300	n/r
38(t)	33	Chalet	Wilmette, Ill.	\$26,500,000	5	5	150	320
38(t)	40	Tropics North	Homestead, Fla.	\$26,500,000	30	25	400	50
40		Metroplex Garden Design Landscaping	Dallas, Texas	\$26,200,000	18	20	200	n/r
41	49	Clintar Groundskeeping Services	Markham, Ontario	*\$26,088,400	34	9	160	300

(t): tie n/r: not reported *Revenue reported in Canadian dollars and converted to USD based on an exchange rate of 0.8996 as of press time

★ 2006 Rank	Last Year	Company	City	2005 Revenue	% Inc/Dec From 2004	Expected % Inc/Dec For 2006	Year- Round Employees	Seasonal/ Part-Time Employees
42	45	CoCal Landscape	Denver, Colo.	\$26,037,000	18	-2	200	250
43	40	NaturaLawn of America	Frederick, Md.	\$25,600,000	12.8	13	350	50
44	40	Lucas Tree Expert Co.	Portland, Maine	\$25,000,000	10	10	400	n/r
45	46	Groundmasters	Cincinnati, Ohio	\$24,500,000	22	15	180	250
46(t)	37	Nissho of California	Vista, Calif.	\$24,000,000	0	25	380	3
46(t)	40	Scott Byron & Co.	Lake Bluff, Ill.	\$24,000,000	12	6	95	225
46(t)	40	Control Environmental	Edison, N.J.	\$24,000,000	5	5-10	80	300
49(t)	48	Spring-Green Lawn Care Corp.	Plainfield, Ill.	\$23,800,000	9.62	11	50	100
49(t)	51	Urban Farmer	Thornton, Colo.	\$23,800,000	21	n/r	180	370
51	47	The Greenery	Hilton Head, S.C.	\$23,684,100	8	12	380	25
52		Meadows Farms Landscape Division	Chantilly, Va.	\$23,500,000	10	15	200	400
53		The Collins Group	Pendleton, S.C.	\$23,000,000	20	20	24	n/r
54	56	Countryside Industries	Wauconda, Ill.	\$22,496,054	14.51	10	47	260
55	23	The Celtis Group	San Jose, Calif.	\$22,000,000	-17	-30	160	n/r
56	51	Odyssey Landscaping	Stockton, Calif.	\$21,900,000	18.5	10	225	75
57	62	David J. Frank Landscape Contracting	Germantown, Wis.	\$20,800,000	20	5	250	100
58(t)	61	Realty Landscape Corp.	Newtown, Pa.	\$20,000,000	22	15	70	200
58(t)	83	Mainscape	Fishers, Ind.	\$20,000,000	25	25	100	200
60(t)	57	R.H. Dupper Landscaping	Tempe, Ariz.	\$19,500,000	5	3	115	70
60(t)	87	LMI Landscapes	Carrollton, Texas	\$19,500,000	30	35	200	50
62	55	McFall & Berry Landscape Management	McLean, Va.	\$19,450,000	27	0	180	60
63	58	Benchmark Landscape	Poway, Calif.	\$19,150,000	6	7	300	0
64		Mission Landscape Services	Santa Ana, Calif.	\$19,000,000	12	15	650	n/r
65(t)	63	Maldonado Nursery & Landscaping	San Antonio, Texas	\$18,000,000	20	20	250	100
65(t)	66	Mariposa Horticultural Enterprises	Irwindale, Calif.	\$18,000,000	12	12	385	n/r
65(t)	72	McHale Landscape Design	Upper Marlboro, Md.	\$18,000,000	20	2	180	0
65(t)	73	Dennis' 7 Dees Landscaping	Portland, Ore.	\$18,000,000	23	22	275	25
69	59	Complete Landscaping Service	Bowie, Md.	\$17,743,000	18	12	125	430
70	65	The Highridge Corp.	Issaquah, Wash.	\$16,840,000	4	18	185	65
71		FAIRCO	Scottsdale, Ariz.	\$16,666,000	40	20	175	n/r
72	77	Sebert Landscaping Co.	Bartlett, Ill.	\$16,600,000	12	15	40-50	220-250
73	76	Girard Environmental Services	Sanford, Fla.	\$16,555,000	10.2	4.6	140	30
74(t)	84	Ecoscape Solutions Group	Huntersville, N.C.	\$16,500,000	22	42	265	0
74(t)	80	Pro-Grass	Wilsonville, Ore.	\$16,500,000	n/r	n/r	300	n/r
76	64	Clarence Davids & Co.	Matteson, Ill.	\$16,228,000	1	5	75	200
77	68	Northwestern Landscape Co.	Puyallup, Wash.	\$16,165,000	3	10	225	100
78	69	Western Dupage Landscaping	Naperville, Ill.	\$16,050,000	3	4	45	180
79	71	Landscape Specialists	Lake Forest, Calif.	\$16,000,000	4.62	20	400	100
80	73	DuBrow's Nurseries	Livingston, N.J.	\$15,900,000	6	10	75	150
81	70	Gachina Landscape Management	Menlo Park, Calif.	\$15,887,885	2.7	7	280	30
82	85	Outside Unlimited	Hampstead, Md.	\$15,500,000	20	20	70	90
83(t)	73	New Garden Landscaping & Nursery	Greensboro, N.C.	\$15,100,000	0	3	205	60
83(t)	79	HighGrove Partners	Austell, Ga.	\$15,100,000	-1.5	20	n/r	n/r
85(t)	81	Hermes Landscaping	Lenexa, Kan.	\$15,000,000	0	10	110	110
85(t)	90	Piedmont Landscape Contractors	Tucker, Ga.	\$15,000,000	15.4	50	200	50
85(t)		Florida Landscape Service	Orlando, Fla.	\$15,000,000	32	27	140	0
88		Heads Up Landscape Contractors	Albuquerque, N.M.	\$14,200,000	34	4	150	75
89		Visionscapes	Tucker, Ga.	\$14,010,000	15	5	125	25
90(t)	66	Dora Landscaping Co.	Apopka, Fla.	\$14,000,000	5	5 to 7	75	25
90(t)	94	Carson Landscape Industries	Sacramento, Calif.	\$14,000,000	14	5	200	0
90(t)		Gibbs Landscape Co.	Smyrna, Ga.	\$14,000,000	6	5	190	210
93	84	Swingle Lawn, Tree & Landscape Care	Denver, Colo.	\$13,739,600	5.6	25	170	40
94	99	Bozzuto Landscaping Co.	Laurel, Md.	\$13,000,000	18	0	125	150
95		Landscape Services	North Las Vegas, Nev.	\$12,600,000	6	19	187	0
96	96	Alpine Gardens	Greeley, Colo.	\$12,506,538	6.8	5	60	100
97	95	Ocean Woods Landscaping	Hilton Head, S.C.	\$12,400,000	15	5	185	30
98		BIO Landscape & Maintenance	Houston, Texas	\$12,104,055	39	13	150	170
99	79	Massey Services	Maitland, Fla.	\$12,098,884	11.8	15	667	n/r
100(t)	81	Stiles Landscape Co.	Fort Lauderdale, Fla.	\$12,000,000	1	1	200	30
100(t)	88	Lied's Nursery Co.	Sussex, Wis.	\$12,000,000	-6	2	167	33
100(t)	93	Parker Interior Plantscape	Scotch Plains, N.J.	\$12,000,000	0	0	180	20

1

2

3

AUGER 6 TREE HOLES
BRING 30" BIT



9

TAKE ... IN

REMOVE
CONCRETE PATIO
& HAMMER
& BUCKET



7

INSTALL
IRRIGATION
SYSTEM AT
JOHNSON HOME

18

ATTACHMENTS NEEDED:
* BACKHOE
* TRENCHER
* VIBRATORY PLOW

15



22

6 TON
RIVER
DELIVER

24

FORM UP PATIO
CEMENT BOWL
ALLSTAND



Less does more.

30

31

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For guest workers, the H-2B program provides more than an opportunity to make money.

second HOME

Feliciano Montes' son was up to no good. Working in Ijamsville, Md., as an H-2B landscape laborer for Outside Unlimited, Feliciano received word his teenage son, Jose, had mixed with the wrong crowd back in Mexico and was headed toward trouble.

Being hundreds of miles from home, Feliciano felt powerless. As a concerned father, he might as well have been a million miles from his son.

Desperate, Feliciano approached his boss, Michael Martin, Outside Unlimited's president, about his predicament.

"He told me he was worried and that his only goal for the last few years was to get his 18-year-old son up here to live with him," Martin says.

The next year, Martin was able to get Jose a work visa as part of the H-2B program that brings up nearly 100 Hispanics to work as laborers and foremen for his landscape company. It was the change of scenery Jose needed, Martin says. Under Feliciano's tutelage, Jose developed into a model employee at Outside Unlimited. "Up here Jose has been a great worker," Martin says. "He proved early on to be an excellent technical laborer and he's worked his way up to become an assistant foreman. In fact, after this year, we expect him to begin running his own crew."

That is, if the H-2B program still exists in its current form for Jose.

Jose's story, like many others, is the success overlooked during the H-2B discussion. As lawmakers lobby for the continuation of the H-2B program with the exemption of returning workers or a limited program that can reach its cap too quickly for the green industry to benefit, the human side of the equation is often overlooked.

The H-2B program annually grants 66,000 work visas for

by mike zawacki | managing editor



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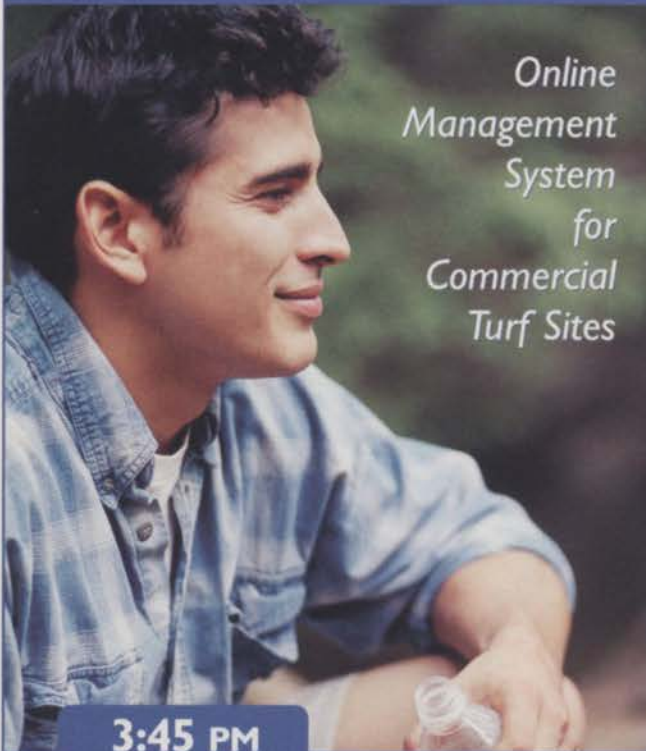
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labor & litigation

employers demonstrating a seasonal, intermittent, peak load or one-time need for foreign workers. The program has been under fire as of late due to anti-immigration and "restrictionist" conservatives in Congress, as well as a misinformed and erroneous perception that H-2B workers take jobs from Americans and deplete social services.

The fact is, in most cases, H-2B workers come to the United States and during their nine months toiling for landscape companies they become productive mem-

a long way from home

South Africa seems like a long way to come to work for a landscape contractor.

But for the past four years, Mike Martin, president of Outside Unlimited has counted on South African labor to serve as part of his overall H-2B pool of workers.

Unlike Hispanic workers who can take commercial buses to their U.S. destinations for less than \$100, the cost for a South African worker to reach the states can run up to \$1,200.

But it's a worthwhile investment. While in the United States under the H-2B program, these workers are assured full-time work at a competitive wage. In their nine months in this country they earn more than they can in years in their home country.

And while South African workers make up less than 10 percent of his overall H-2B workforce, Martin says he'd gladly take on more of these talented, reliable, hard-working individuals.

"Our South African workers bring with them unique skill sets," Martin says. "There is no language barrier because they typically can speak four languages. They're well educated. Nearly all have high school educations and some have some college. Many of them come with driver's licenses."

This educational component makes South African workers fast learners, Martin says. "They're able to catch on to new concepts and absorb information very quickly, more so than workers from other countries," he explains. "All of my irrigation foremen are South African because we do large irrigation systems and much of it is very technical work. They have to pull wire, glue pipe and bring the sprinkler heads to grade. It's all work they pick up very quickly."

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 **AN AMERICAN
REVOLUTION**

bers of their surrogate communities. During their stay here, many take advantage of the opportunities to better themselves, some for the first time in their lives.

Not only do they better themselves, but they return to their home countries with the ability to better the lives of their families.

A BETTER LIFE. Bruno Pillari remembers the disappointment on the faces of the men he turned away.

Pillari experienced firsthand the environment workers try to escape through the H-2B program. In the impoverished border town of Ciudad Juarez, just outside of El Paso, Texas, Pillari interviewed potential workers

for his Howell, N.J.-based landscape company, Pillari Brothers. Amid the shanty homes and street peddlers, Pillari screened dozens of candidates who believed working for his landscape company was the ticket to a better life.

"They were all dying to get in here because the opportunities are so bad where they are now," Pillari says. "Looking at their faces you can tell it's been a hard life and it hasn't been easy to make a living. They put a lot of stock and hope into getting picked up by this type of a program. When they don't make it, you see the looks in their eyes - now they've got to go back."

In many cases, the rejected were red-flagged because they had illegally crossed the border once before and were caught, Pillari says. Very little in the way of job opportunities or a livable wage remains for them in their rural Mexican farming towns.

"At a restaurant we bought a nice

"We encourage them to be independent, and in doing so they become less dependent on us."

- Manuel Castaneda

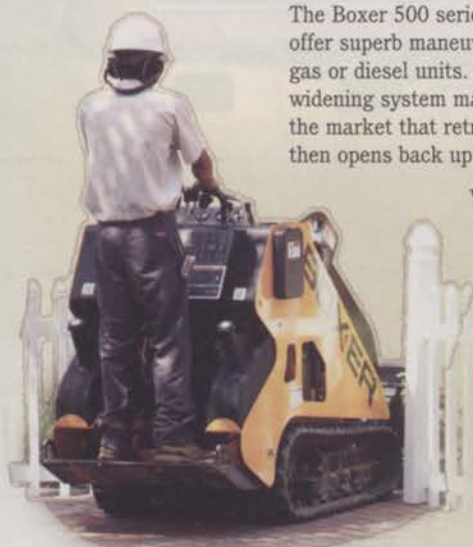
lunch for 24 guys and it only cost us \$90," Pillari says. "I left a \$10 tip and one of the guys said, 'Are you crazy? That waiter doesn't make \$10 all day.'"

Those fortunate enough to be granted a work visa are given a ticket to a better life.

In general, a new H-2B worker starts as a manual laborer digging trenches for drainage and irrigation systems, clearing out plants, shoveling gravel and making paths for walkways and patios. While they arrive uneducated, contractors say the workers are good with their hands and some have limited experience in trades such as concrete work and carpentry.

As they learn the ropes and better themselves through training and supplemental education, they have the opportunity to gain responsibility for

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more specialized work, says Manuel Castaneda, president of Pro Landscape in Hillsboro, Ore.

Castaneda's workers start at \$11.01 an hour which increases \$1 over a short period of time. Seasoned workers in their second or third year earn between \$12 and \$14 an hour, and Castaneda says he has a couple of veteran employees who make \$16 an hour. All workers are eligible for time-and-a-half overtime.

Martin's workers, the majority from Mexico, start out at about \$8 an hour, with experienced laborers earning \$15 an hour, not including overtime.

Likewise, Pillari says new workers earn about \$9 an hour and experienced foremen – with five to six years of experience – earn between \$16 and \$18 an hour.

Besides money, many contractors provide their H-2B workers with opportunities to better themselves. For many workers, it's their first exposure to a structured education.

"Most have practically no education, and if there is any, it's at a very elementary level," Pillari says. "You see this firsthand when they struggle to fill out paperwork. Some guys can't even write."

Castaneda provides his workers with educational opportunities at the local community college for English

classes and to become certified in welding, concrete work, stone carving and heavy equipment operation.

The investment, about \$10,000 annually, is worth it, he says. "They become much more productive when they understand why they're doing things a certain way," he explains. "When they understand why they become more interested in what they're doing and begin to build a passion for their work."

"The program allows guys to concentrate on the work at hand and not at looking over their shoulders because they're here working illegally," says Pellari, who subsidizes about 80 percent of supplement education costs for his H-2B workers. "They can also concentrate on taking classes to learn English and better themselves and not

worry that if they slip up they'll get arrested."

A worker who betters himself through education and added responsibility knows no limit, Martin says. On his crews, Martin has a number of Hispanic foremen who oversee \$100,000 jobs in high income residential communities.

SAFE PASSAGE. For many years Noe wanted to leave his home in Mexico to work in the United States but his parents refused to allow it.

They'd heard the stories. They worried Noe would find his way to the United States but then not find work and would be penniless. He could get arrested and incarcerated or

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a con artist offering safe passage to the U.S. may double cross their son. Or worse, their son could get lost in the desert and be condemned to die a horrible death from sun exposure and dehydration.

The H-2B program was the venue that provided Noe with safe and legal passage into the United States to work for nine to 10 months for Pro Landscape in Hillsboro, Ore., and earn a wage, benefits and lifestyle unattainable in his home country.

"This is a win-win situation," says Pro Landscape's Castaneda. "H-2B opens up an opportunity for them here. These people want to work and succeed. The people that are left out of the program are the people who want to blame others for not finding work."

Once here, very rarely are H-2B workers strangers in a strange land. Because the workers appreciate the H-2B program, it's common for them to lobby their employers to bring up relatives to work the following season. This builds community and support networks.

"Every year I get list of people — whole families — who want to

workers the opportunity to engage in normal lives. During their months working in the U.S., the workers become active members of their communities. They typically live with a relative or an acquaintance in an apartment while utilizing the H-2B program.

"We encourage them to be independent, and in doing so they become less dependent on us," Castaneda says. Likewise, H-2B workers are economic engines for their host communities. Besides renting apartments, during their stay they rent or buy cars, they spend money in their local grocery and retail stores and they invest their money at local banks.

"I had a local retailer tell me that when our guys are in town it's a whole different profit margin for their businesses," says Martin, whose company is about 40 miles outside of Baltimore. "Our guys are well-known at the local banks because they all have accounts, and they're well-known at the local stores because they spend money there."

"It's not as if they come here to work and they leave the United

"As landscapers, we'd be in trouble if the guys weren't available next year. For the workers, I imagine it'd be much worse."

— Bruno Pillari



States with all the money they made," Martin continues. "That's a silly misconception. The fact is they start to live lives as Americans and they're as much a part of the fabric of our community as anyone else."

Next to religious and church-related activities, soccer is the most popular past time among Hispanic workers. Castaneda sponsors a company team that often plays against teams from competing landscape contractors.

The H-2B program gives guest

"Soccer is one of the things all



of the Hispanic workers seem to have in common," he says. "From what I hear, our team is very good."

DEVASTATING CONSEQUENCES.

Landscape contractors readily admit the loss of the H-2B program, the lack of support for exemption of returning workers and an unaddressed and business limiting cap issue would have negative consequences on their businesses. Suddenly they could lose a proven workforce that many have cultivated and trained over the last decade.

Imagine the effects of losing a team of workers overnight and you get some idea of the impact on the industry. But imagine if the job you relied on to pay for your home, to support your family, to educate your children and improve your whole way of life suddenly disappeared. For the H-2B workers, continued limits on

strides they've made to become more self-sufficient, Castaneda says.

"I imagine their lifestyle has changed back home and they've become dependent on this kind of money to sustain that," Castaneda says. "Some have purchased land and built homes and that's the part we won't see here. If they can't work, they'll be in trouble."

If the system is dismantled, many landscape contractors expect workers will cross into this country illegally.

good to know that you have that security and that you're not going to have to walk three days through the desert for work or worry that someone may turn you in to the authorities," he adds.

Many H-2B workers don't understand what's on the line, while others expect, in the end, their bosses will find a solution and make everything right.

"When we talk to them about this issue they shake their heads that they

dire consequences

For the most part, contractors say their H-2B workers come to the United States to work and not to cause problems. They stay out of trouble during their off-hours by occupying themselves with community or church groups, sports or even second jobs.

In general, workers keep their noses clean because they are well aware of the consequences. Running into trouble with the law can nullify their participation in the program.

Manuel Castaneda, president of Pro Landscape in Hillsboro, Ore., had a similar situation when one of his workers was cited for driving under the influence last season.

"When he tried to come up for this season that DUI record came up and he wasn't allowed in," Castaneda says. "We used his misfortune as an example for the rest of the workers. This is what happens when you think you can go out and have a few on the weekend, jump into your car and believe everything will be okay."

Violating the terms of the program can cost a worker dearly; however, it also impacts the employer. "It costs us, too," Castaneda says. "With a new person we have to start all over with training, getting him a driver's license, etc."



the program could be devastating.

"As landscapers, we'd be in trouble if the guys weren't available next year," Pillari says. "For the workers, I imagine it'd be much worse."

"They've learned to trust the system," Castaneda says. "And these are a group of people who aren't really used to trusting anyone."

Not only have they bettered themselves here, but they've made life better for their families back in their home country. With the money they've earned, guest workers acquire better housing, send their children to college and even start second businesses. Losing the program jeopardizes the

"It is human nature to do what you need to do to survive," Martin says. "These jobs have given them a lifestyle that they're able to support and feel secure in because every year they know they'll have a job with us, they'll make money and they will be able to support their families."

"When you lay down at night, it's

understand but I really think that they don't," Castaneda says. "They take it for granted that their work visas will always be here for them. They don't worry because they figure we'll deal with it and figure it all out and that things won't change. They think we have more power to change things than we do." □

Employee uniforms do more than present a professional image, they brand your landscape company. *Lawn & Landscape Message Board* users share their views on the value of uniformed workers and cost-effective approaches to keeping employees looking good.

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Uniform Decision

Uniformed employees can be important to any landscape or lawn care business. In residential neighborhoods and in business parks and campuses, uniforms allow landscape companies to differentiate their personnel from their competitors, convey a solid business identity and image as well as promote company loyalty among workers. It's a trend seen across industries, according to the Uniform & Textile & Service Association. As many as 33 million people wear uniforms to work, according to UTSA research, and the number of uniform-wearing workers increases by about 1.2 million each year. The USTA estimates that the total potential market of uniform wearers is 84 to 88 million people, or three times the current number.

Lawn & Landscape Message Board participants recently debated the merits of uniforms and their impact on business,

as well as what was appropriate protocol in terms of uniform purchasing and maintenance.

BUY OR PROVIDE? One of the questions at the forefront of the uniform debate came from landscape contractors who were considering uniforms but were uncertain about whether to make employees pay for them.

Uniforms are an important business component, posts Bob Keating, president of Liberty Land Management in Palm Harbor, Fla. He supplies laborers with T-shirts and managers with dress shirts.

"Shirts are mandatory and everyone knows not to show up without them," Ke-

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ating says. "We do not charge for the first five shirts. After that it is \$5 per shirt. There's no charge for a shirt that goes through normal wear and tear.

"Managers get 10 dress shirts at no charge," Keating adds. "They pick the color and are responsible for dry cleaning bills."

"I buy them," posts Jamie Bush, president of Jamie's Lawn Service in Plano, Texas. "But if you can get them to spring for them, go for it."

"I buy them, too," adds Carrie Rasmussen, owner of Burien, Wash.-based Urban Landscapes Northwest. "But if they quit and do not return the uniforms it comes out of their last paycheck."

Andrew Aksar, president of Outdoor Finishes in Walkersville, Md., believes in the importance of uniformed employees. His workers are required to wear company T-shirts and he does not charge them. "To me, charging is not good," he posts. "It's my business. I decide I wanted them to wear uniforms. It's the cost of doing business. Therefore, the company pays for it. Landscape workers do not make glamorous wages. Providing uniforms and company shirts is part of their pay."

In order to save money, some contractors post suggestions to purchase

uniforms protect your company's name

Uniforms can play important marketing and public relations roles for your company. The International Facility Management Association, based in Houston, offers some key points as to the importance of uniformed workers.

- Uniformed workers support your business's desired image.
- An attired employee will not detract from a positive company brand.
- Uniforms reflect credibility. For example, consider the mustard-colored jackets worn by Century 21 Realtors, the black-and-white shirts of Foot Locker employees or even professional sports uniforms.
- Uniforms become intertwined with the company's brand and services.
- Uniforms assure clients that they will receive quality service.

has also found success employing a uniform service. "We use a uniform service that provides the uniforms and cleans them as well," says the president of McCabe Landscape Group, based in Wrightsville Beach, N.C. "We deduct about half of the cost of the service from each check. The employees seem to like this and we have never met any resistance from them."

cleaning agents. Now he provides laborers with T-shirts and gives hooded sweatshirts to his foremen.

MORE THAN BRANDING. Bill Smallwood, owner of W.J. Smallwood Landscaping in Salem N.H., disagrees with his Message Board colleagues and posts he doesn't see the need for uniforms or company T-shirts.

As many as 33 million people wear uniforms to work, and the number of uniform-wearing workers increases by about 1.2 million each year. The USTA estimates that the total potential market of uniform wearers is 84 to 88 million people, or three times the current number. - USTA



polo-style shirts in bulk from department stores when the apparel goes on sale, which can ensure color consistency and quality material. Company logos can be stitched on at a later date, and often for a small fee.

Other contractors posted they were in favor of defraying the cost of uniforms onto their workers.

Quit or fired, Todd McCabe says his employees must return their shirts or they are charged \$25 per shirt. He

Other contractors post that it is not unreasonable to either charge or deduct the cost of lost uniforms or clothing that has experienced "unreasonable" wear-and-tear.

Andy Novelli of Four Seasons Landscape in Washington, Pa., says his company tried a uniform service but the shirts were too hot and they gave his workers a rash, even though the provider had used anti-allergenic

He cited studies about why people chose their lawn service provider and uniformed employees garnered only about 3 percent of the responses. "Seems like a waste of money to me," he posts. "Make sure your employees are trained properly and thoroughly, are courteous to your clients and meet or exceed expectations. This will distance you from your competition, not what is on the T-shirt."


Ryan Holt, who provides employees with company shirts at his expense, counters that uniform benefits far outweigh the minimal financial cost to a landscape contractor.

"It's not necessarily for the customer," he posts. "It makes everyone feel like they are on the same team. And there is no argument as to what looks better: a crew dressed the same or a bunch of guys wearing all different shirts?"

"Think of it this way, you're playing softball and what team looks better, the team who is all wearing the same uniform or the team that is mixed and matched?" Holt continues. "Even though the team without uniforms might be better, just going on looks you would probably favor the team with uniforms."

IMPORTANT TOOLS. In some respects, uniforms can be just as important of a tool to a landscape firm as a zero-turning radius mower or a string trimmer.

In some previous posts, landscape contractors view uniforms as not only projecting a positive image, but also as an extension of both the owner and the company's professional principles and quality-oriented ideals.

"Uniforms give us a professional edge over the guys in holey shirts or no shirts, or even mismatched colors or clothing with possibly offensive writing," posts Melissa Brodsky, owner of Honeybee Landscaping in Grafton, W.Va. "It makes me very proud to see my company name on the guys. It's cheap advertising, too." 

who pays?

Where does the burden of purchasing uniforms lie – with the employer or employee? It really depends what state you're based in.

Some states, such as California, dictate that employers who require employees to wear uniforms on the job are responsible for providing and maintaining those uniforms, according to Nolo, a Berkley, Calif.-based provider of do-it-yourself legal solutions for consumer and small businesses.

However, this also means the uniforms are the property of the employer, who has the right to charge workers a reasonable deposit for the uniform, according to Nolo. Likewise, employers can legally keep or deduct the cost of a missing or destroyed uniform, according to the firm.

For the most accurate guidelines on whether your state requires you to pay for your employees' uniforms, contact your state's department of labor office.



About Teamwork

The pit crew swarms around the race car. Doing their darnedest – time after time – to get it back on the track, fast.

In the driver's seat, you and I tend to keep our eyes peeled on the competition...and on that checkered flag. Meanwhile, if trained properly, each member of our team is tightly focused on their own work— doing everything just right, not doing anything wrong. Tough job.

But when the race is won, folks rarely pour champagne all over the crew – who often make the difference between winning...or finishing out of the money.

Now and again, even frontrunners need to pay mind to how great their pit crew is doing – if they want to stay ahead of the pack.



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USE READER SERVICE #47



Photo: Bobcat

OPTIONS ABOUND

Whether it's buying, leasing or renting, contractors can acquire skid-steers and their attachments in myriad ways.

When Mike Haberl Jr. considers buying a new piece of equipment, he immediately does the math.

That's especially important when contemplating the purchase of big-ticket equipment, like skid-steer loaders, which can easily cost more than \$20,000. And Haberl's company, Prestige Landscape Construction, of Calgary, Alberta, owns nine skid-steers, so doing the math is important for him to make a smart purchase.

For Haberl, the owner and operator of Prestige, landscape projects drive the decision to buy. "It's not a matter of 'I think I need a skid-steer; let's go out and buy one,'" he says. "You want to resource each project to its capacity with the right piece of equipment. Does every single

project we do require a skid-steer? No, not every one does." Carefully reviewing his company's numbers and the project at hand can tell him whether he's going to take on a new skid-steer.

While it might sound easy, deciding on renting, leasing or buying comes down to a combination of running the numbers, assessing project needs and forecasting the ability to pay for the equipment in the future, especially during the lean months when cash-flow has slowed.

For contractors who want to do it all – from finish-grading with a skid-steer to lawn and nursery installation and maintenance – a wide assortment of skid-steer

by mark phillips | associate editor

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attachments would be required, says Gregg Zupancic, construction and forestry product marketing manager for John Deere, Moline, Ill. That array of equipment, including the skid-steer and attachments could cost as much as \$100,000. That's typical for many mid- to large-sized landscaping firms, Zupancic says. For that reason, as Haberl says, contractors need to do the math.

VERSATILE MACHINES. Sales of skid-steers have increased in the past few years due to new home sales that have fueled the demand for professional landscape services, says Dean Shaw, marketing manager for New Holland, Wheaton, Ill. "This increased demand has landscape companies looking to complete their work more efficiently, which in turn is driving skid-steer and specialty attachment sales."

Skid-steers are likely the most

to buy or not to buy?

Here are some tips to keep in mind when considering buying, leasing or renting skid-steers:

- Determine the applications and hours needed for a project to see if buying makes sense.
- Assess whether dealer or outside financing is more advantageous.
- Cash may be good for some contractors; however, financing can free up cash necessary for operations.
- Make sure the financing offers "skip payments" to use during slow parts of the season.
- Some programs allow renting with the option to buy.
- Leasing can offer the opportunity to trade in equipment at the end of the term, re-finance and continue to use the equipment or buy it outright.
- Renting should mainly be used to explore whether to add new services or for short-term projects.

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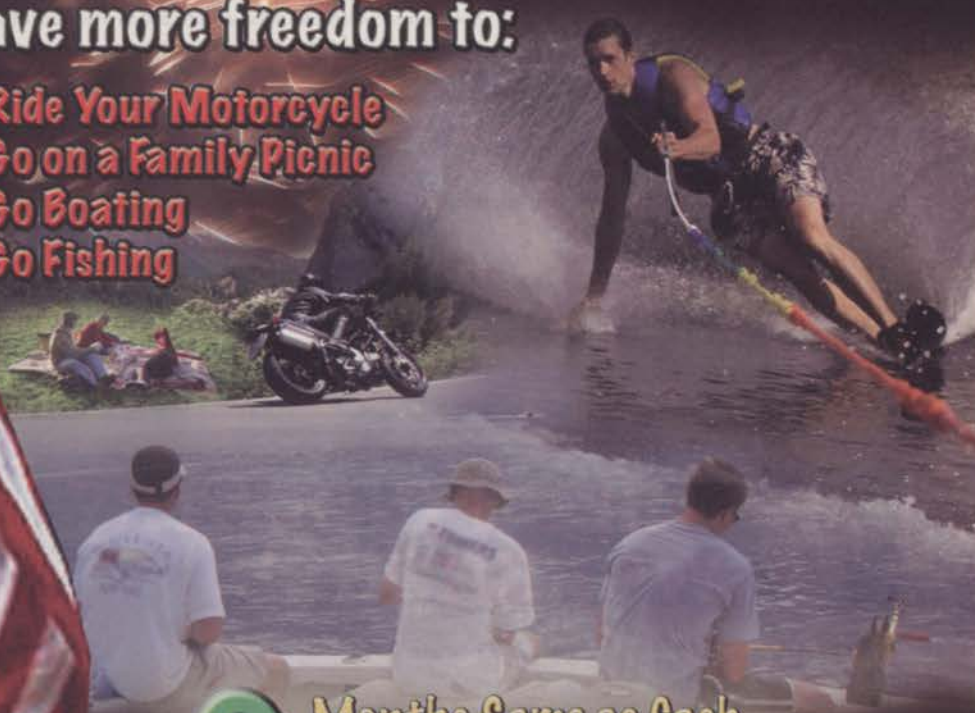
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versatile machines for green industry professionals, says Todd Lynnes, skid-steer loader/multi-terrain loader marketing supervisor for Caterpillar, Peoria, Ill. "The machines also help get the job done with fewer workers, which is a plus in an environment where contractors are really challenged to find and keep qualified people."

Skid-steers, whether in a wheel or rubber track form, are the perfect machines for these jobs because they're easy to transport, are incredibly agile in tight work areas and can drive over finished surfaces without inflicting damage, Zupancic says.

Skid-steers can be used for a host of tasks, including lifting and carrying materials, digging, grading and general ground preparation, Shaw says. Post-hole digging, planting trees and



Skid-steers, which cost between \$15,000 to more than \$45,000, can be used for a host of tasks, including lifting and carrying materials, digging, grading and general ground preparation. Photo: Caterpillar

trenching round out the typical duties. Skid-steer manufacturers say the machines cost between about \$15,000 to more than \$45,000, with attachments costing hundreds, and sometimes thousands, of dollars.

Because there are a host of jobs that can be accomplished, there are a number of attachments. Other than typical buckets and pallet forks, five

attachments stand out as the most-popular in the landscape industry: augers, trenchers, landscape rakes, sweeper buckets and soil conditioners, says Rob Otterson, market segmentation manager for Bobcat, West Fargo, N.D. "Manufacturers are constantly adding new models to fill customer requests," he explains, "many of which can be used on different types and brands of carriers, further increasing their utilization."

Stump grinders, rotary cutters, combination buckets, sod layers, snow removal attachments and many others can quickly increase a contractor's business. "The contractor who researches and is aware of these additions will be presented with more opportunities to grow his or her business," Otterson says.

In choosing attachments, contractors should keep flexibility in mind.



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"Contractors should look to purchase attachments that can be used to complete as many jobs as possible," Otterson says. Nearly every contractor can use a combination bucket and pallet fork on a landscape construction job, he says. A soil conditioner can be used to clear rocks, unwanted weeds, existing turf and create a final

grade in preparation for landscaping, planting seed or laying sod. "Trencher attachments are particularly useful for contractors installing irrigation lines and drain tile," Otterson adds.

Skid-steer loaders are typically purchased with between two and four tools, Lynnes says. "A landscape contractor would often purchase an auger

and trencher along with a bucket and fork because of the high frequency of their use on most landscape jobs," he explains.

In his estimation, Zupancic says the top five attachments are buckets and grapples, pallet forks, augers, brooms and landscape-type rakes. "These specific attachments give a contractor about 80 percent of the tools needed to finish and clean just about any job," he says.

The number of attachments purchased varies widely by customer depending on their business, says Brad Lemke, director of new product development at ASV, Grand Rapids, Minn. "Buckets, multi-purpose buckets, dozer blades, pallet forks and brush cutters are all very popular," he says. "With the cost of fuel going up sharply, being able to get more done



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"Failing to choose the proper machine or the options may result in a machine that may work fine today but will not meet the requirement for future jobs, forcing the contractor to rent a machine to get the job done."

- Todd Lynnes

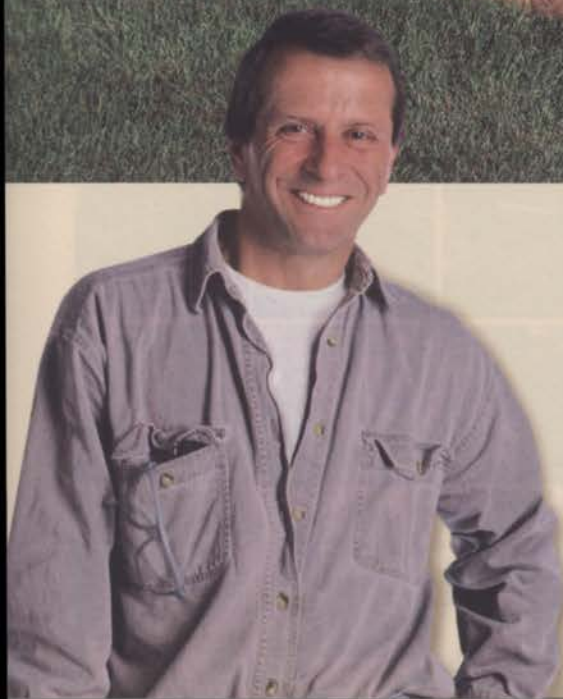
with your machine can help minimize the impact of those rising fuel costs."

"Just like a car or truck purchase, the cost of a skid-steer is going to depend on the size of the machine and the options chosen," Lynnes adds.

LEARNING FROM MISTAKES. Industry experts say contractors should do their homework before acquiring a skid-steer in order to avoid any potentially expensive mistakes. "The biggest mistake is generally involving buying the wrong machine for the job – a machine that is either too large or too small," Zupancic says.

"Do your homework," Shaw

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agrees. "Make sure to select the machine and attachments that will be needed to do the job. Plan ahead."

Higher-flow hydraulics may be needed for optimum performance for some attachments that may be purchased in the future, Shaw says. By adding this option or others at the time of the machine purchase, money will be saved over having the options installed later, he explains. Before settling on a machine, a contractor should see a demonstration unit in action and test attachments to see if they'll work for a particular project, manufacturers suggest.

Otterson says the types of attachments used will dictate the amount of auxiliary hydraulic flow needed from the skid-steer. Contractors who need enhanced performance with attachments like stump grinders, trenchers, chippers or snow blowers, may need high-flow machines, he adds.

"Failing to choose the proper machine or the options may result in

"Skid-steers help get the jobs done with fewer workers, which is a plus in an environment where contractors are really challenged to find and keep qualified people."

- Todd Lynnes

a machine that may work fine today but will not meet the requirement for future jobs, forcing the contractor to rent a machine to get the job done," Lynnes warns.

TAKING THE PLUNGE. When it comes to buying, Haberl grabs the

calculator. "I think contractors must look at their cost-recovery, first and foremost," he says. "You can finance a piece of equipment as long as you want. But the question is, at the end of the day, is it making money each and every day you use it? That's what I believe it has to come down to."

Haberl benefits from operating in a boom economy in Alberta. If he does take on new equipment, he can readily flip it, if need be. "Because we're very project-driven, we tend to flip units in and out," he says. "We have done that in the past, where the work was not conducive to the piece of equipment, so we flip it out - out-right sell it."

Regardless of whether contractors operate in booming areas or not, they need to think long-term and consider if they can keep up with the payments. "You might be able to make the payment the first 12 months, but what is the longevity of the corporation?" Haberl says. "What work are

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you trying to go after?"

Hartano Tanuwidjaja, merchandising consultant for Caterpillar Financial Services Corp., Nashville, Tenn., says contractors should consider three questions when thinking about buying.

1. Does the customer want to own the equipment?
2. What is the cash flow requirement for the customer?
3. What is the customer's tax situation?

As far as tax purposes, a contractor who wants to take tax advantage of the equipment depreciation would want immediate ownership, Tanuwidjaja says. "Other times, a customer wants to minimize their monthly payments, make a long-term rental commitment and have a pre-determined purchase option amount at the end of the contract," he explains, adding that in those instances, a lease might be the better alternative.

When buying, Mark Almeter, vice

"The contractor should understand all aspects of the purchase and their financing choice including monthly obligations, options during the term of the financing or lease and any end-of-term responsibilities."

- Mark Almeter

president and regional manager of CitiCapital, West Fargo, N.D., says it's important for the dealer to understand the contractor's need for the skid-steer, including the applications, hours and conditions under which the equipment will be used. "Based on this information, the dealer can tailor a lease or financing arrangement that provides the best solution for the customer," he shares. "The contractor should understand all aspects of the purchase and their financing choice including monthly obligations, options during the term of the financing or lease and any end-of-term responsibilities."

Customers generally fall into one of three categories when purchasing equipment - cash buyers, financing customers and leasing customers, Almeter says. While cash may be king, paying cash isn't for everyone. "A cash purchase is often viewed as the least expensive, which may or may not be true depending on the customer's

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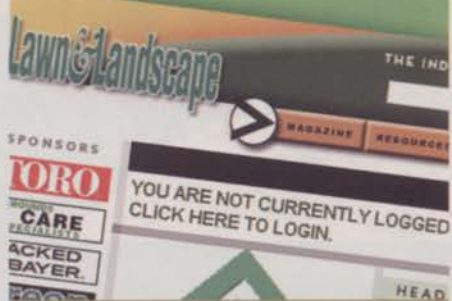
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financial situation," he explains. "Paying cash up-front can cause significant cash-flow challenges for the contractor. So, while it might feel good to pay something off all at once, depending on the contractor's situation, it may put a pinch on finances, at least in the short-term."

Contractors may find it better to finance, which can free up cash. "The contractor must be careful however, to match the financing terms to the expected usage requirements so they can avoid owing more than the equipment value at the end of the usage term," Almeter says. Zupancic adds that contractors who have seasonal businesses can choose financing that includes "skip payments." Flexible-term financing often benefits contractors working in northern climates, Almeter explains.

"Dealers are most likely to provide the fastest and smoothest financing options available," Almeter says, "but customers always have the option to pay for the equipment or secure outside financing through their own efforts." Most dealers are able to offer standard financing terms for the equipment purchase, he adds.

For Haberl, dealer financing is the way to go. "They can give you different options – they can give you skip programs," he says. "That, to me, means a lot in terms of cash flow. It's one more tie to the dealership in relationship building that you can utilize. It is certainly something for us."

"Often, a dealership or manufacturer will have many financing options or special financing programs available at the time of purchase, but a customer doesn't have to take advantage of them," Lynnes says, adding that a customer may choose to purchase with cash or open a line of credit instead. "Some contractors may even choose the manufacturer financing to conserve their operating line of credit with their lender."

Another financing tip: Since contractors put equipment through its paces due to constant usage, machines often have to be replaced in shorter intervals. Because of this, matching the financing terms to the expected use time is important so contractors can maximize revenue and cash flow, Almeter says. "Downtime means lost revenue, and financing over a longer term forces customers to use the equipment beyond its prime."

attachments come in all sizes, prices

Price ranges for landscape attachments vary depending on the manufacturer, but most attachments with a primary or single hydraulic function, such as an auger or box blade, can start at \$1,200, says Rob Otterson, market segmentation manager of West Fargo, N.D.-based Bobcat. Attachments with multiple hydraulic functions, such as soil conditioners or landscape rakes can start at \$4,000. Below are some general price ranges for various attachments:

KEY

\$ – up to \$2,000

\$\$ – \$2,000 and up

\$\$\$ – More than \$10,000

\$ Augers – for planting trees and installing fence posts

\$ Buckets

\$ Forks

\$ Pallet fork – carrying pallets of sod and supplies that typically weigh 2,000 pounds or more

\$\$ Backhoes – installing ponds, irrigation and drain tile

\$\$ Industrial grapple – area cleanup or placing boulders

\$\$ Landscape rakes – preparing soil for seed, sod or removing materials

\$\$ Snow blowers – good opportunity for off-season profits

\$\$ Soil conditioners – lot clearing, grading and soil prep for seed or sod

\$\$ Sweepers – cleaning streets/sidewalks near work areas

\$\$ Tiller – loosening soil for planting or removing weeds

\$\$ Trenchers – installing irrigation line

\$\$ Vibratory plow – installing drainage or irrigation lines

\$\$\$ Cold planers

LEASING AS AN OPTION. With interest rates on the rise, contractors are increasingly looking to leasing, Almeter says.

Leases are essentially long-term rental contracts, with the option to buy at the end of the term.

"Leasing is often more attractive with customers that choose to update their equipment at shorter intervals while maintaining lower payments," Almeter says.

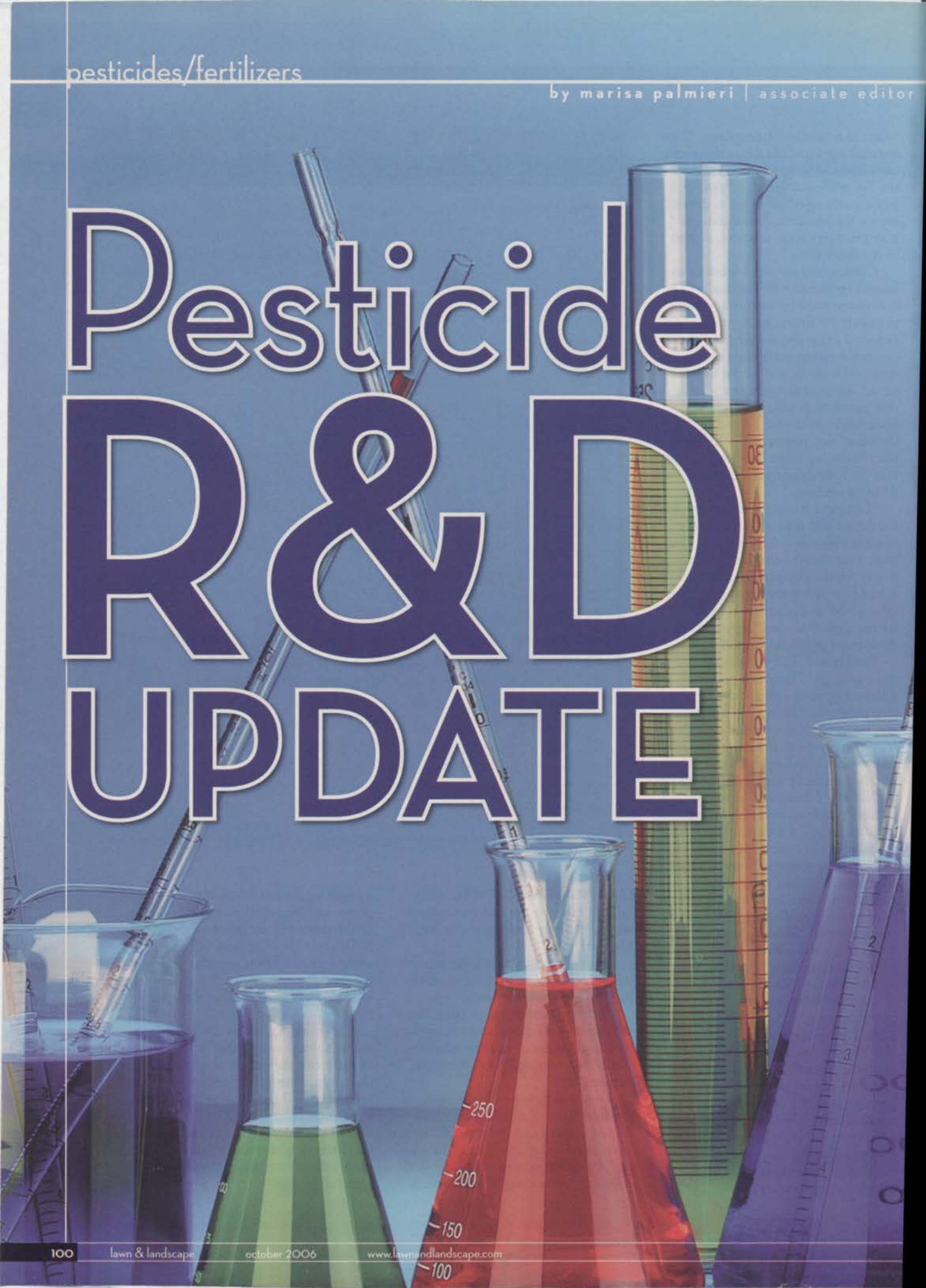
Due to differences in the accounting treatment of a lease, customers should understand their specific needs prior to entering into a lease, he adds.

"A popular way of acquiring skid-steer machines today is to rent with

a purchase option where up to 100 percent of the rental payments may be credited toward the purchase price," Shaw says. "Leasing does offer the advantage of a lower monthly payment and may come with the option to walk away at the end of the lease term."

Or leases may allow the contractor to buy the equipment at the end of the term; the option to trade in the equipment; or the option to re-finance and continue to lease the equipment, Shaw says.

Besides interest rate increases, fuel cost increases have also made leasing a more attractive option for contractors, Shaw adds. ■

A background image of various laboratory glassware including beakers, flasks, and graduated cylinders containing liquids of different colors (purple, green, red, yellow) against a blue gradient background.

Pesticide R&D UPDATE

Regulations

drive what

products

come

to market.

W

Within the walls of pesticide manufacturers' labs, armies of regulatory experts and chemists are at work researching new active ingredients and formulating pesticides. The success of their products – and whether or not you, the lawn care operator, will ever apply them – is determined by the thumbs up or thumbs down from an Environmental Protection Agency review.

"All companies, I think it can be said, are looking for those products that have profiles in toxicology, ecotoxicology, environmental dissipation and product efficacy that are positively received through an EPA review," says Kathie Kalmowitz, field development and technical specialty for BASF Professional Turf and Ornamentals, Raleigh, N.C.

Manufacturers estimate that it takes more than a decade of research and upward of \$150 million to bring a turf and ornamental active ingredient to market.

A product's ability to pass the EPA's stringent review is the single most important factor that determines how pesticides are formulated and which ones are brought to market today.

Re-registration is another concern for pesticide makers. In 2006, the EPA enacted its new registration review process, which replaces the pesticide re-registration and tolerance reassessment programs. The new registration review ensures that, as changes in science, public policy and the ability to assess risk evolve, all registered pesticides continue to meet the EPA standards of "no unreasonable adverse effects."





"In the regulatory area we continue to see products that have been usable or allowed in lawn and landscape to be looked at through the re-registration process – and there's a potential to lose products as we go forward," says Dave Ross, technical manager, Syngenta Lawn & Gar-

den, Greensboro, N.C. "On the other hand, it may allow registration for products that have been taken away to come back."

The EPA registration review and other regulatory processes instituted by federal or state agencies has sparked research and development, says Jamie Breuning, product

technology leader, U.S. Specialties Division, Dow AgroSciences, Indianapolis. For example, Dow voluntarily withdrew the label for the use of Confront, a herbicide containing the active ingredient clopyralid, which motivated researchers within the company to develop new use patterns for existing active ingredients such as fluroxypyr.

Add to EPA pressures a growing customer appeal for efficiency-creating products, and you get demand for pesticides that do more with less. That is: better efficacy, less potential for an environmental impact.

LOWER AND NARROW. Today's pesticides that meet EPA standards use a lower rate of active ingredient per acre than similar chemistry in the past and target a narrower pest spectrum than an older chemistry used for similar pest species, manufacturers say.

Due to scientific advancements in how new chemistries are discovered and synthesized to isolate their most active components, lower rates of active ingredients are necessary because of how biologically highly active a chemistry is on the target species.

"Sometimes you can deliver more efficiently with less active, which creates less exposure to the end user and environment," Kalmowitz says. "The end result of lower rate products is that less formulated product has to go into the environment. This used to be referred to as 'pounds on the ground,' but is now applied as 'ounces on the ground.'"

Another shift is toward narrower-spectrum products, notes Bill Brocker, vice president of marketing for PBI/Gordon, Kansas City, Mo. "Instead of the broad-based approach – a product trying to control everything – it'll be products tailored to cover a small range, a very hard-to-control insect or weed."

In addition to increasing efficacy, one factor contributing to a shift toward narrower-spectrum products is basic manufacturers' competition from the generic suppliers. See "A Shift Among Suppliers" on page 106). Narrow-spectrum products may be part of a basic manufacturer's patent-protection strategy, Kalmowitz says. "The tighter your product patent – active plus formulation – the better chance you have in defense with

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generic introduction many years down the road."

COOL COMBOS. One trend spurred by active ingredients coming off patent and manufacturers creating narrower spectrum products is the advent of combination products – those that include at least two modes of action on one or more pests or species at different life stages. These may include both above surface and below surface insecticides, preemergent and postemergent herbicides or a variety of fungicides.

As more active ingredients come off patent, more combination products will enter the market, pesticide suppliers predict.

"Combining post-patent products is something that a lot of basic companies are looking at," Breuninger says, noting the trend is more prevalent in Europe, but is gaining popularity in the United

"Combining post-patent products is something a lot of basic companies are looking at."

– Jamie Breuninger

States. "The first option is to look internally, and if you can't access it there, then you go externally. If both companies see value in the product, they'll work together."

One such partnership is the 2004 agreement between Bayer, Research Triangle Park, N.C., and Philadelphia-based FMC to bring a number of products to the turf and ornamental market. The alliance created the insecticide Allectus, which combines imidacloprid and bifenthrin and is aimed at controlling insects that thrive both

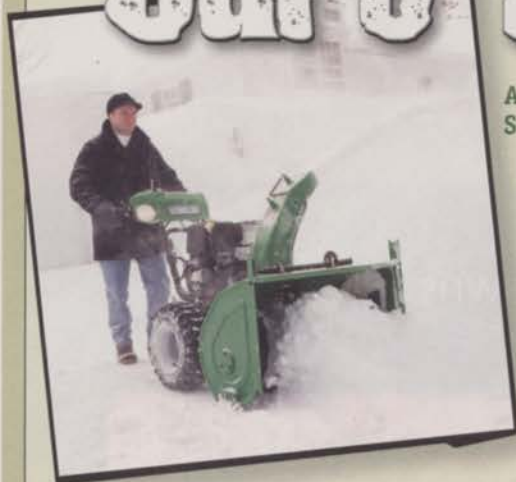
above and below the surface. Also, Bayer announced in June that it acquired rights to FMC's insecticide discovery pipeline, which enables Bayer the ability to discover and commercialize new insecticidal compounds. In return, FMC will receive royalty and milestone payments and access to certain Bayer CropScience products for premixes with FMC products.

Premixed formulations are advantageous because LCOs constantly search for labor savings. Various combinations pairing either fertilizers, insecticides, herbicides or fungicides are on the market. "Those will save the LCOs time and allow them to accomplish more in one trip," says Steve Stansell, lawn, landscape and aquatics market manager for Syngenta Lawn & Garden. "It's a broader spectrum that gives the LCO a unique tool to be more efficient and effective."

Combinations in the granular form are particularly becoming more prevalent. LCOs already have

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the ability to create their own liquid combinations by tank mixing products, but they don't have that luxury when using granulars. In addition to saving time by reducing the number of applications, granular combination products eliminate the risk of tank mix errors, compatibility issues and related chemical interaction risks.

Granular pesticides combined with fertilizers, which have been around for years, also remain popular because they save LCOs time.

"They're a really nice delivery system for fertilizing and putting down a controlling product at once," Breuninger says. In addition, some suppliers report research and development of combination products that combat up to three lawn problems – for example an insecticide-herbicide-fertilizer combination.

ODOR EATERS. Another pesticide research and development focus is an ever-increasing concentration on safety and factors that affect the perception of safety, like odor. "The more regulated the landscape continues to become, the more focus there is around the safety of the applicator and the people that are in contact with the pesticides," says Tim Stoehr, NuFarm's director of U.S. marketing and business development, Burr Ridge, Ill.

"People are looking for high-performance products, but they want products that have lower toxicity and less of an environmental footprint," says Mike McDermott, global business leader, DuPont Professional Products, Wilmington, Del.

A focus on safety and exposure has driven research toward creating low-odor formulations, which benefits the applicator as well as property owners and their neighbors. "Odor is becoming a bigger issue," Breuninger says.

"Lawn care services don't want extremely pungent odor lingering for days," Stoehr explains. As LCOs and their clients continue to request odorless pesticides, Breuninger says the decreasing use of solvents (fluids used to dissolve the active ingredient), will create a shift toward water-based formulations, especially in emulsifiable concentrates (ECs)

"Solvents in ECs may go away more as the demand for less odor continues," he says. "If you develop new liquids that don't have as much solvent, you get around the issue of phytotoxicity and odor."

a shift among suppliers

Like any invention, pesticide active ingredients are patented products that are granted a 17-year protection period for their creators to enjoy exclusive manufacturing and marketing rights.

About four out of every five active ingredients labeled for turf and ornamental use is or soon will be off patent, at which time other manufacturers or formulators may purchase the rights to create a generic, or post-patent, pesticide. The advent of post-patent products will certainly influence the future of pesticide formulations.

One implication is possible pest resistance.

"As the industry continues to rely on the same classes of chemistry, there is more pressure for pests to develop resistance," says Chuck Silcox, global product development, DuPont Professional Products, Wilmington, Del. "A novel mode of chemistry that targets pests in a new way helps address any resistance issues that may be occurring."

Another possibility is that fewer new active ingredients and novel classes of chemistry will be developed. "Many people don't realize, as the T&O industry goes generic, there will tend to be a lower return for the basic manufacturers to return to R&D," says Jamie Breuninger, product technology leader, U.S. Specialties Division, Dow AgroSciences, Indianapolis. "Generic use equals less return to manufacturers, which equals less money for R&D, fewer new products, more reliance on today's active ingredients and limited innovation for the future."

However, more competition may drive down product prices, points out Bill Brocker, PBI/Gordon's vice president of marketing, Kansas City, Mo. "With proprietary products coming off patent and being more available, LCOs are going to have an easier time finding economical product mixes to take care of their customers' needs," he says.

A new rule has come into play as the market requests low-odor products, Kalmowitz adds: "Most newer formulations developed for the landscape, ornamental and turf markets are generally not solvent-based."

FORMULATION FADS. Although preferences often vary from region to region and LCOs praise liquid products for being easy to measure on the fly, environmental sensitivity is driving a movement toward granular products, pesticide suppliers say.

"If you remember what the industry was like 20 years ago, it was mostly lawn care tanker trucks," Brocker

says. "That's not what it is today." He says cost and customer perceptions have contributed to the shift toward granular products.

Although granular products may be more costly to ship and use when applied on a 1,000-square-foot basis, the equipment needed for a granular application (a spreader) tends to be less expensive than tank trucks and backpack sprayers. Also, the public's perception plays a part. "Neighbors watching someone spread a granular product on the lawn doesn't create the same image a spray tank does," Brocker points out. "In some areas spreading is a more acceptable way of application."

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When LCOs do opt for liquids, suppliers say they increasingly prefer easy-to-mix concentrates over powders or water-dispersible granules. "Lawn and landscape professionals who prefer liquid formulations usually prefer water-based or improved dispersible granule formulations because they will carry less odor and tend to have less impact on the spray equipment," says Paul McDonough, channel vice president, lawn and landscape sales for LESCO, Cleveland. "These aqueous formulations create less clogging and settling and come out of the sprayers cleaner than the oil- or powder-based formulations generally do, so I think we'll see more of those products coming down the line."

Whether you're talking about formulation type or packaging, it's all about ease of use. "It seems that LCOs like to use containers that are graduated, offering pre-measured dosing for simple addition into a mix tank with only the requirement of slight agitation and then spray and go," says Nick Hamon, director of technical development for Bayer.


Water-soluble packs, though not brand new to the market, remain popular because they're easy to measure and limit applicator exposure, Breuninger says.

LOOKING AHEAD. Although fewer active ingredients are in the pipeline than once were, the marketplace remains a competitive one.

Back in the manufacturers' R&D labs, tight-lipped researchers test products LCOs dream of (see "Pesticide Wish List," at right) and some beyond their wildest imaginations.

Complex combinations, time-release technology, perfected packaging and biotechnology are under the microscope — both the manufacturers' and, someday soon, the EPA's.

"There will continue to be more regulatory pressure and more legislation related to pesticides, both at the federal as well as the state and local level," McDermott says. "And it's up to the manufacturers to come up with products that will meet regulatory mandates as well as their customers' demands."

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

pesticide wish list

Lawn & Landscape asked lawn care operators what "dream products" they'd like to see. Here's how they responded.

PARTICULAR PESTS. "A new pest to our area that's really hard to control is tulip tree scale," says Zach Smith of Landscape Management Services, Mountain View, Calif. "I would like a systemic that could be soil injected."

Scale also is a problem for Kevin Herrmann of Fairway Green, Raleigh, N.C. "Scale seems to be the toughest one to get a hold of. A product to get rid of scale at a curative level would be nice."

SIZE IT UP. "Pesticide manufacturers seem to be making products that have extremely low use rates," says Charlie King of King Green, Gainesville, Ga. "While I do not want to put huge amounts in a tank, a product that needs at least ½ ounce per gallon would be desirable."

Jerry Naiser of Austin-based Real Green Pest & Lawn Care agrees. "I hate it when manufacturers package concentrated products in packages that are way too small," he says, giving the example of a 5-ounce package that costs \$350 and is applied at the rate of 1 ounce per acre, or another one that's applied at a rate of 0.9 grams per 1,000 square feet. "Can you measure 0.09 or 0.18 of a gram?" Naiser asks, explaining that tough-to-measure products are a problem because incorrect measurements can damage turf or hinder efficacy.

PACKAGING POINTERS. "I would love to see dry fertilizer, fungicide, insecticide and preemergent herbicide all come in weatherproof, resealable containers," says Bob Fromme of Lawn Cure of Southern Indiana, Jeffersonville, Ind. "One freak thundershower and a few hundred dollars of product can be ruined."

Packaging is on the mind of Jeff Bowen, Images of Green, Stuart, Fla., as well. "The easier it is to mix the better," he says. "Any labeling in Spanish would also be a plus. For granular products, the bags need to be resealable."

DREAM AWAY. "In the Ohio Valley, the dream product would have to be a three-month, slow-release fungicide that could be put down at the onset of summer to control all the patch diseases," Fromme says.

Weeds and insects are Bowen's main concerns. "My dream product would be a quick 12-hour burn and kill for weed control that's cost effective and I would love a insecticide that would kill the Asian scale, also called tank scale, that is killing all of our sago palms in south Florida," Bowen says.

Weeds are also daunting for Herrmann. "Violet, ground ivy, chamber bitter, Virginia button weed and purple oxalis are the toughest weeds to control for our area," he says. "A product to control all these weeds with one application would be nice. This was a wish list, right?"

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For contractors who only perform aerating on some jobs, an aerating mower attachment could be more productive than a stand-alone aerator. Photo: Walker

Getting Attached

A mower attachment can be a contractor's best friend.

People end up with cavities in their teeth because sometimes too much of a good thing produces poor results. In the case of a dental exam, every sugary treat a child eats can come back to haunt him when he is sitting in the dentist's chair.

The same goes for a landscape contractor who starts off with one great piece of equipment and then can't help but purchase every trendy tool of the trade.

Once those large machines start taking up too much storage space, transportation time and money to maintain, they become a pain instead of the resourceful machines they were intended to be.

For contractors who have a variety of landscape jobs to perform and not enough manpower to do it all by hand, a single mower with multiple attachments could be the

perfect solution. Instead of spending a fortune for dedicated machines to do each job, contractors can attach anything to a mower – from an aerator to a snow blower – and get jobs done in a hurry.

Attachments such as dozer blades (also used as snow plows), dethatchers, rotary brooms, blowers, motor buckets, edgers, sprayers, chippers/shredders and grass collection systems are just a few of the tools that can make landscape work a bit easier.

ATTACHMENTS ABOUND. Mowing attachments are growing in demand as landscape companies begin to realize their advantages. Rather than walking

by heather deangelis | contributing editor



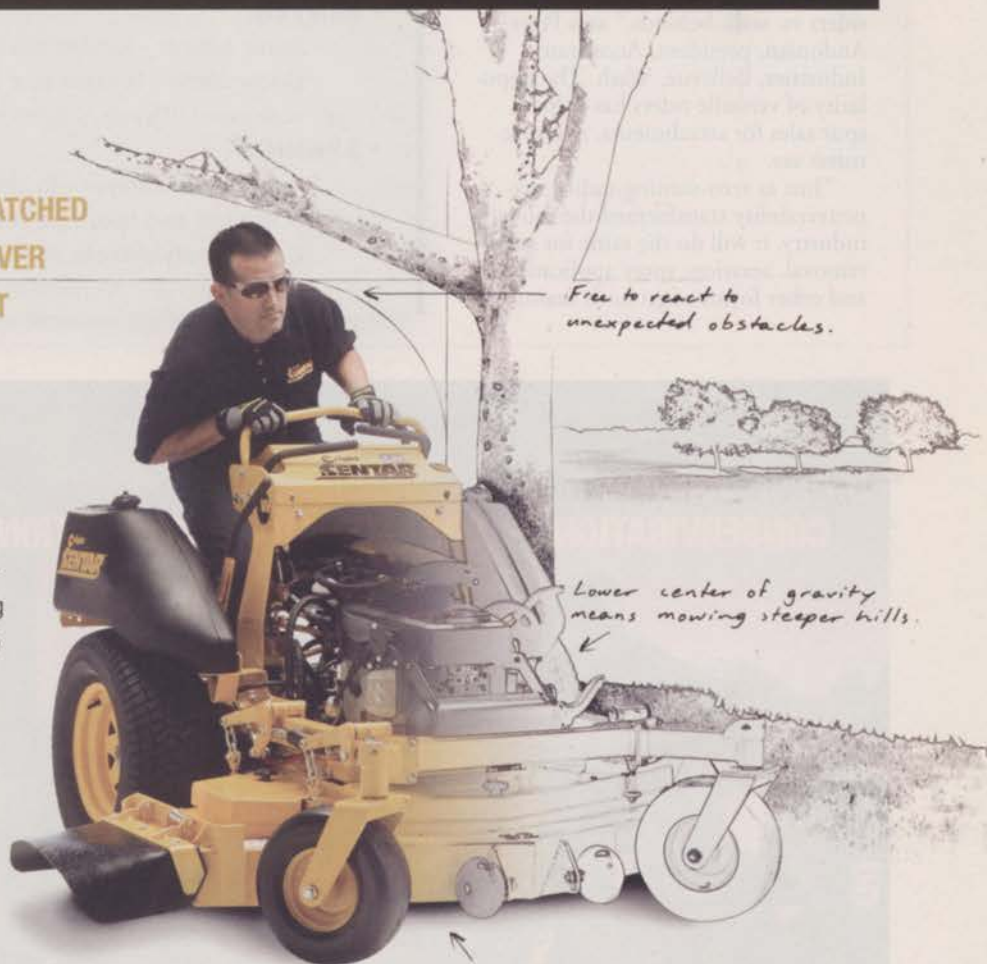
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behind separate machines, contractors are looking to ride-on tractor attachments to get the job done because zero-turning radius technology fine tunes the movements.

"Over the last five years, we've seen more contractors increasing their revenue stream by offering more services using implements," says Ruthanne Stuckey, marketing director, The Grasshopper Co., Moundridge, Kan. "We expect this moderate growth trend to continue."

Other manufacturers note similar trends. "There has been a move to riders vs. walk-behinds," says Peter Andonian, president, Accelerator Industries, Bellevue, Wash. The popularity of versatile riders has helped spur sales for attachments, manufacturers say.

"Just as zero-turning-radius maneuverability transformed the mowing industry, it will do the same for snow removal, aeration, spray applications and other forms of grounds maintenance."

an attachment for all seasons

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Blowers – to rid sidewalks of debris.

• **WINTER:**

Snow blower – for decreasing snow-removal time.
Dozer blade – For use as a snow plow to clean the streets, sidewalks and driveways in deeper snow.

• **SPRING:**

Aerator and sprayer – to limit switching time between machines and take care of multiple tasks on a job site.
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USE READER SERVICE # 70

nance," Stuckey says. Add-on tools like aerators, sulkies and dethatchers may improve the appearance of professionalism on a job and may take a mower to a whole new service area, manufacturers say, noting that collectors and vacuum systems are emerging as popular attachments. But aerators are climbing the charts as well, as are

blower systems, dethatchers, dozer blades, snow blowers, rotary brooms, sulkies and sprayers.

Another reason attachments have grown in popularity is they can boost productivity and limit cost. "The contractor should be thinking, 'How can I complete this job faster, with better quality, and utilize my mower

year-round instead of parking it in the garage or on the trailer?" Stuckey says.

"It's a return on investment issue," says Bob Walker president, Walker Manufacturing, Fort Collins, Colo. "If the mower is just going to be sitting there, waiting for the next mowing season, then why not put an attachment on and do something that needs to be done? You'd get better use out of your investment."

Most attachments are available for riding mowers, particularly front-mount machines, Walker says.

THINK ABOUT IT. "Usually the rule of thumb for attachments is if a person is using something for occasional use, an attachment is an excellent idea," Andonian says. "But, if a person is doing a high quantity of work, dedicated equipment is more appropriate."

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An aluminum grass catcher can be attached to a mower to collect clippings for clients who prefer a clean look after mowing is complete. Photo: Accelerator Industries

evaluate which mower attachment to incorporate into their business is to weigh how much work they complete by hand or by specialized equipment and then consider replacing both of those methods with implements that utilize the efficiency of zero-turning radius maneuverability, Stuckey suggests.

Walker also says contractors should consider using equipment that has been engineered for the machine and made by the same manufacturer as the mower. Because manufacturers vary their designs, it can be difficult for a universal attachment to have a really good fit, Walker says.

Whether or not equipment is easy to attach is also important to keep in

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mind. A quick change from one configuration to another could make a big difference in the amount of productivity in a day, Walker says. "It's important to be able to not spend a lot of time assembling – we're talking about a few minutes to change a machine from one to the other each time," he says, noting it's most important during the fall when you can be brooming one day and snow blowing the next."

Price is another issue. Usually, an attachment will be less expensive than a dedicated machine. For infrequent jobs, or if a contractor is just starting out in the business, attachments can save a considerable amount of money, Andonian says, adding that this is a good way for contractors to explore a new service and keep costs down.

Attachment prices vary considerably based on brand and complexity, but generally fall in the \$200 to \$5,000 range, with sulkies, dethatchers, collectors and dozer blades at the lower end and two-stage snow blowers and

chippers/shredders at the higher end, manufacturers say. Cost also can fluctuate in response to product quality.

Contractors can expect attachments to last from five to 10 years, depending on how much they use them. "A lot of attachments, because they're only used on a seasonal basis compared to mowing, might even last longer than the mower blades themselves just because they don't get the same utilization," Walker notes.

MAINTAIN YOUR MACHINE. Like any capital equipment, the increase in profit from the use of attachments offsets operating wear, Stuckey says. She insists that operators can receive years of service life from well-maintained, commercial-quality implements.

Catchers require very little maintenance – basically you just clean out the holes when necessary. Sulkies and moving transmission parts need greasing or lubrication and tools like aerators and edgers need to have tines

replaced as they wear down. Basically, Walker explains, it's the same kind of maintenance you would expect with a mower.

Keeping an eye on mower wear and tear when using attachments is also important. "To ensure an attachment is not stressing the mower, look for designs that place the attachment in a very close-coupled position to the power unit, in place of the mower deck," Stuckey suggests. If an attachment adds too much stress, the vibration can be too much for the mower.

Any ground-engaging device (one that's on the ground, subject to resistance) is subject to more of a workload. For example, a dethatcher's raking stresses the mower more than just someone pushing the mower.

Most manufacturers agree that contractors who decide to experiment with mower attachment use may notice a significant difference in the amount of productivity – and profit – they can produce. **LL**

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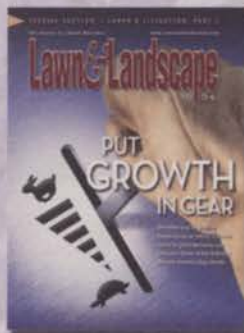
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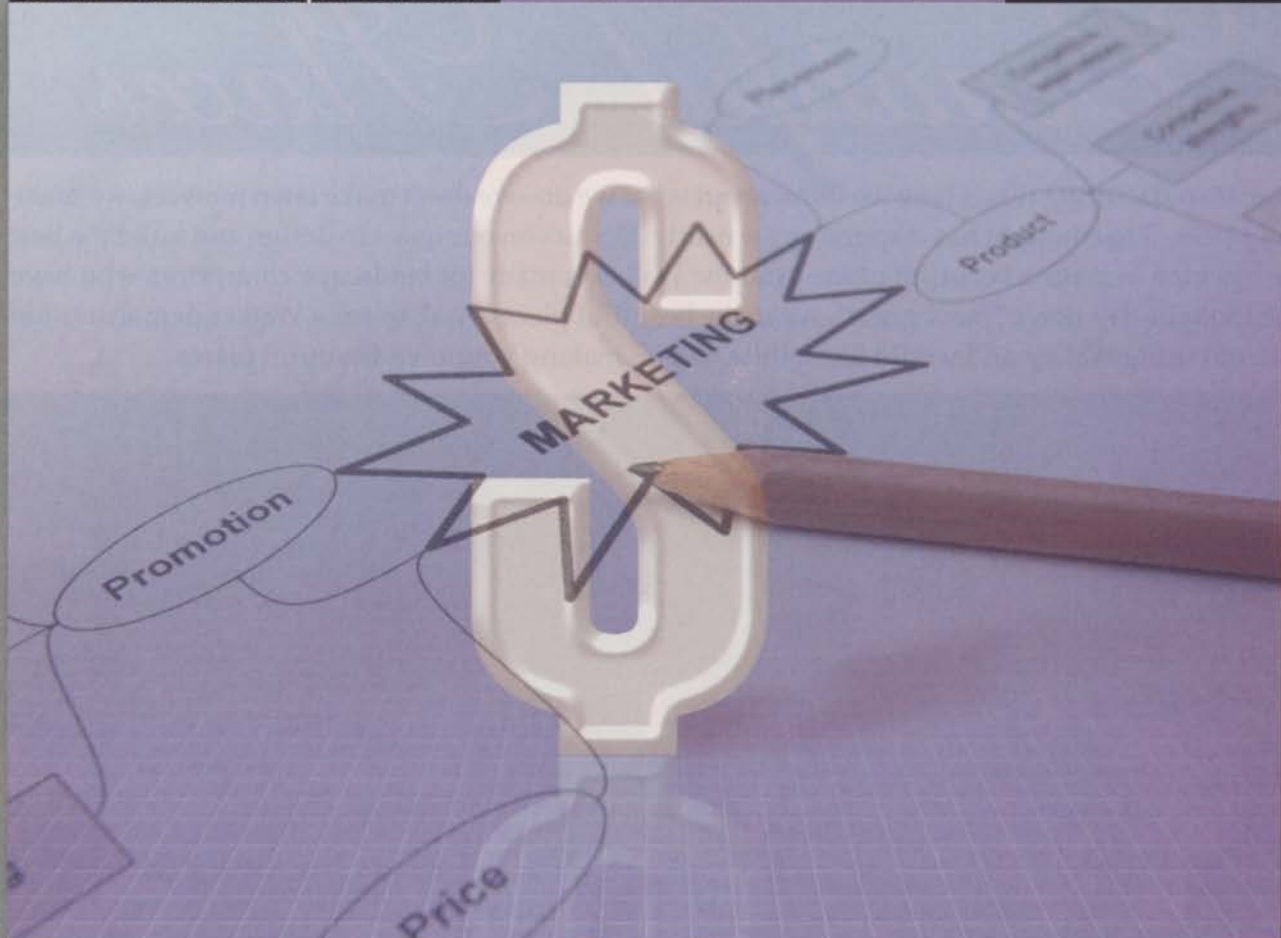


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Strategize for Success

Marketing is more than mailers and Web sites. Long-term planning is essential to a company's positioning and performance.

Safety training. Hiring new foremen. Re-working routes. Often the daily duties that bog down landscape business owners and managers cause them to focus on internal forces (employees and operations) rather than external ones – market conditions and, most importantly, the customer. In fact, most businesses spend 92 percent of their time on their intrinsic priorities, says Judy Guido, green industry consultant with Guido & Associates, Moorpark, Calif.

"Most of us aren't listening to customers' needs or to how the market has changed because we're so busy on the internal side of it," says Guido, who shared marketing insights with 13 landscape contractors at an industry roundtable sponsored by Bayer Environmental Science and *Lawn & Landscape* in June.

Neglecting customers and market conditions is like getting ready for a big party without making a guest list, Guido says, adding, "you may be preparing for a party that might never happen."

To companies that claim they don't need marketing or have all the business they need, Guido points out that marketing isn't only about advertising and acquiring new business. "You always need business and you better be marketing all year round," she says. "Does that mean you're advertising all year? Not necessarily, but you had best be keeping your name out there, asking your customers about needs, looking for partners

continued on page 122, sidebar on page 120

by marisa palmieri | associate editor

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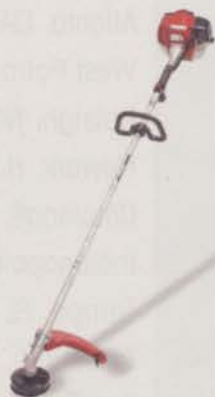
referrals, please

The marketing topic of formalized referrals got participants at the Bayer Environmental Science/Lawn & Landscape roundtable talking. Green industry consultant Judy Guido notes only 2 percent of green industry companies have a process in place for acquiring referrals. The No. 1 reason Guido says people don't ask for referrals? "It makes them uncomfortable." That's something contractors need to get over quickly, considering Guido's research shows only 17 percent of customers will offer unsolicited referrals.

Jeff Bowen, owner of Images of Green, Stuart, Fla., has grown his business 17 to 25 percent a year over the last 11 years on referrals. His process is simple: Account managers and supervisors are trained to ask for them. "It's no more than 'Mr. So and So, do you know anyone who can use our services?'" Bowen says. "It works in the maintenance end, in design/build and, amazingly, in irrigation."

Platinum Landscape & Design's post-installation referral system is so successful it's the only marketing program the Cedar Hills, Utah-based company has in place. "Once a job is secured, we review expectations with the client," says Owner Rick Meizner. "We tell them 'Our goal is to make you completely satisfied and if you are, will you refer us to someone you know who may be able to use our services?' If they're not satisfied, we ask what we could have done better."

Once a company implements and executes a referral process, it never hurts to offer a thank you, Guido points out. "Give them some kind of thank you, even if it's just those two words. Isn't it nice sometimes just to get recognized with a phone call?"



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continued from page 118

and performing competitive analyses.

"The heart of marketing is creating a strategic process of building your business," Guido adds. "How I position myself and brand myself are two of the most important questions in marketing." However, it's not something most contractors recognize. Only 6 percent of green industry companies have strategic

plans, according to Guido's research.

"You don't have to be a large company to have a strategic plan," she says. "In fact, the smaller you are, the more important it is to have a plan."

Companies who follow strategic plans tend to be No. 1 or No. 2 in their markets and average 47 percent higher profits, 92 percent higher customer

satisfaction and retention rates and 64 percent higher employee retention than those that do not, Guido says.

There's no "silver bullet" in marketing, Guido notes. "There's no one strategy, tactic, tool, message, medium or market that does it all," she says. "Your customers' needs, values and market forces dictate what you should be doing. Your strategy will drive what tactics you use."

One tip to creating a customer-driven strategy is to create a customer-advocacy board comprised of the company's most profitable clients. Ask these clients what you're doing right, what you're doing wrong and what they'd like to see you start doing. Also, ask them about the competition and why they choose to use your company. From these results, perform an honest analysis of your company and your competitors. Document strengths, weaknesses and where the competition stacks up.

Guido finds this honest analysis is one of the top reasons many contractors don't do strategic planning. "It can be painful," she says. "You may find some things out about your company that you really didn't want to know. But wouldn't you rather find the things out now than just keep going about your way thinking you're a great organization? It can and should be hard, but energizing."

"If you just ask the right questions, your customers will create your strategy for you," she adds.

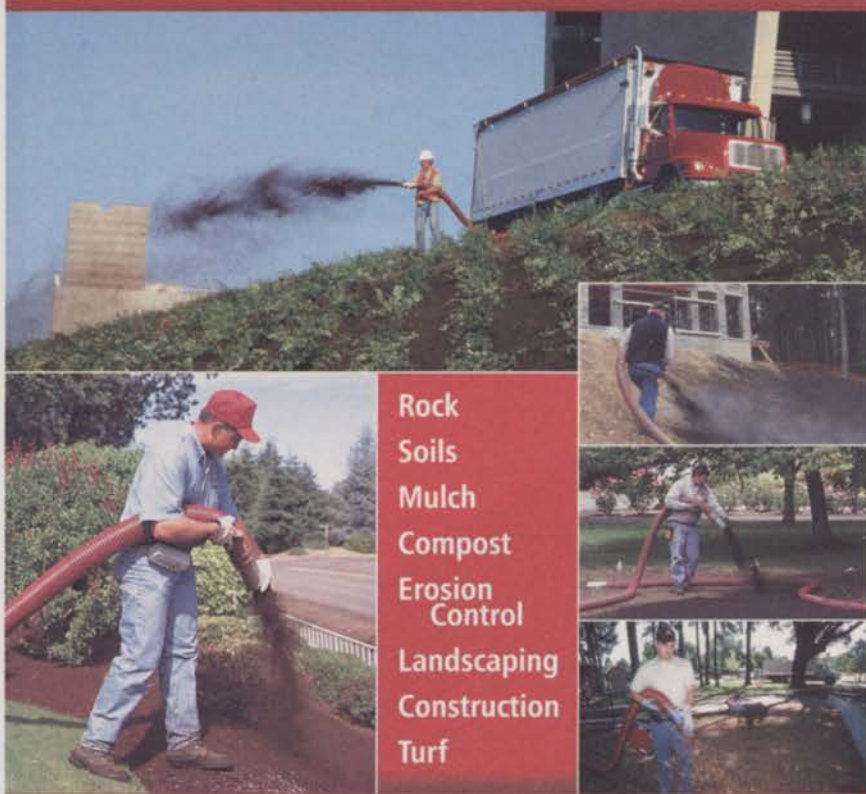
In addition, this process allows contractors to get a 360-degree view of their companies to create one of the most important strategic elements: an identifiable difference (ID) between your company and the competition.

An identifiable difference is key to a company's long-term marketing success and competitive advantage, Guido says, explaining that a company must actually make itself different – not just appear different. In addition, a company must communicate this ID accurately to the public. As Guido stresses: "Nothing costs more than a disconnect between marketing and sales promises and the reality of the customer experience." ^{LL}

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“**T**he holidays are like weddings,” says Chris Kaylor, owner of Kaylor Landscape, a landscape construction firm based in Porterville, Calif. “People are just nuts with what they’ll spend,” he says, explaining that both events evoke

tradition, family and joy. For some people, they’re priceless.

Kaylor Landscape added a holiday lighting franchise eight years ago. “When I first started they said the average sale was \$700 nationwide, and I thought, ‘We’re never going to sell that in Porterville,’” Kaylor says.

by marisa palmieri | associate editor





Boy, was he wrong. Since then he's sold holiday lighting projects priced at more than 10 times that amount at residences and businesses across California's San Joaquin Valley. Kaylor estimates the holiday business brings in 15 to 25 percent of his company's \$2 million revenue.

Other green industry companies tell similar success stories, whether they run holiday lighting franchises, are members of a supplier's organization or choose to go it alone.

Christmas Décor, an industry franchisor, estimates consumers spent \$200 million on holiday decorating services in 2005 – an 800 percent increase since the year 2000.

"It's become bigger and bigger," says Kevin Allen, general manager of Pro Care Landscape Management, Meridian, Idaho. "What's interesting is you don't get a significant drop-off rate and you have tons of new customers every year." Pro Care entered the holiday decorating business on its own about 20 years ago upon a landscape customer's request and has seen a spike in the service in recent years, thanks in part to a local population increase. "It definitely has grown every year; last year we probably had a 20 to 30-percent growth rate – it was more than we could handle," Allen says.

Part of the reason the holiday decorating industry is booming, decorators say, is upper- and middle-class consumers' willingness to pay a premium for specialized services that save them time and toil.

It's all about convenience. Consider Kaylor's point about weddings: It's common for a double-income couple to fork over thousands for a consultant to help plan for every last detail of their big day.

By the time the happy couple is settled into their new home and scrapping kids into car seats, it's likely they'll seek more services to shave seconds off time spent away from their family. Enter the landscaper, the cleaning lady, the pooper scooper service and – at the busiest time of year – the holiday decorator.

"I don't think you're able to find a whole lot of people who enjoy installing and taking down their own Christmas lights," says Brad Finkle, founder of Creative Decorating, an Omaha, Neb.-based holiday decorator and supplier of decorations and industry training materials.

While homeowners value the warm fuzzy feelings they get from having a bright home at the holidays, few of them like doing the grunt work – especially in regions where wintertime weather will leave them feeling less than warm and certainly not fuzzy. It's the same for businesses – especially retail outlets that know holiday decorations encourage traffic from shoppers, but don't want to risk putting their employees on rooftops and ladders during inclement weather.

"And it does come down to time," Finkle adds. "With two-income households and kids and activities, people just don't have the time to spend decorating their homes. It's one of those things like cutting the grass – people like it to look professional and have someone else take care of it for them."



Consumers spent \$200 million on holiday decorating services in 2005 – an 800 percent increase from 2000. Photos: Creative Decorating (above and page 125)

The professional look, decorators say, is as good of a selling point as the time-saving aspect. The bar is raised with every professionally installed display that goes up in a neighborhood. "It still comes down to keeping up with the Joneses," Finkle says. "All you need is that one person on the block to start and then another one will, and then you're adding more lights every year." After all, nobody wants their display to be the only amateur-looking one on the block.

SEASONAL BIZ. Manufacturers and franchisors estimate green industry companies account for 80 to 85 percent of all professional holiday lighting installers. Other seasonal businesses like pool/spa-care providers and pest control operators and a small percentage holiday-only companies

round out the rest of the industry.

Adding winter business alleviates an owner's anxiety about finding a way to keep dedicated employees on the payroll year-round.

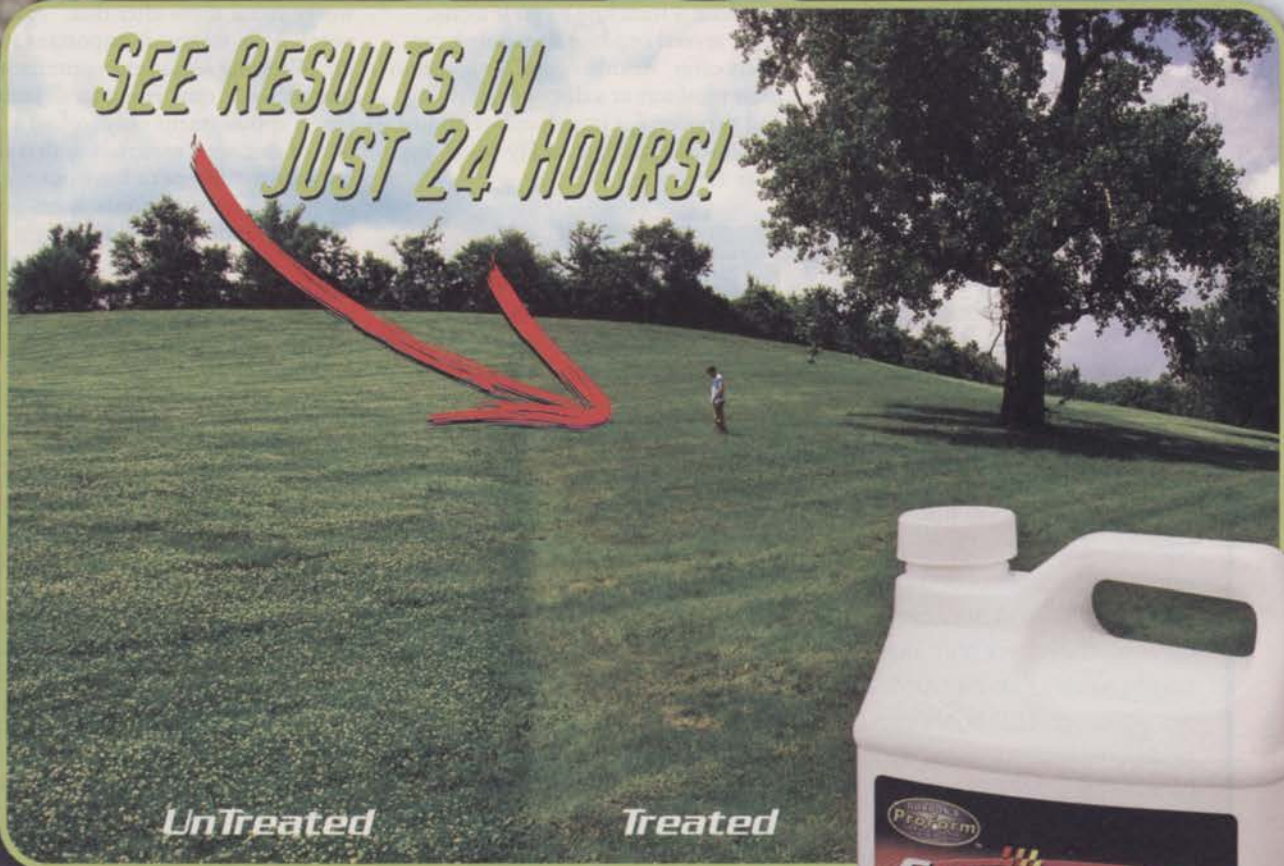
"One of the bigger benefits for us is that it keeps our guys working for that extra two months," says Mike Kaplan, operations manager for Giannini Landscaping, Lindenhurst, N.Y. As Giannini's maintenance and lawn care work slows down in October, 14 of the firm's employees transform into holiday lighting crewmembers. Crews begin installations around Halloween, often working 70- to 80-hour weeks during the height of the season (from Thanksgiving to mid-December), and stay busy taking down displays until about Feb. 1. "So our guys are really only off for a month before spring," Kaplan says.

Another attractive aspect of holiday lighting is its consistency. It's even been called weather- and recession-proof. While Mother Nature can certainly make an outdoor decorator's life difficult, profits don't depend on how much it snows. Christmas happens every Dec. 25; snow is not guaranteed, as many landscape contractors with snow-plowing divisions learned during the unseasonably warm winter of 2005-2006.

Decorators also say this "luxury" service is not hit hard by economic downturns, due to the deep pockets of the customers who purchase it and the sentimentality factor. "I don't want to sound hokey, but the holidays are a magical time," says Brandon Stephens, Christmas Décor's director of marketing. "People want to make their home as warm and comfortable

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as possible, and they're going to budget for it. It could have something to do with the higher-end clientele, but it's just one of those things that people don't want to let go."

Kaplan agrees. "Sept. 11 slowed down our landscape side of the business, but not our holiday side." It's part of a greater trend in the holiday industry as a whole – not just with outdoor lighting. According to a January 2006 report in the trade publication *Selling Christmas Decorations*, disasters and high gas and heating prices don't hurt the holiday industry as much as they do others. In fact,

these events can cause more people to spend Christmas at home, which may mean they'll put extra effort into decorating for the holidays.

OFFERINGS. When a contractor creates a holiday lighting division, he or she has a lot of options.

To start, there's the decision to purchase a franchise or go it alone. Also, several outdoor decorating suppliers offer "membership," or access to their products at a discount, training and support, for initial and/or annual fees. (See "Franchise or Fly Solo?" on page 130.)

design trends: LED lights

The hottest trend in holiday lighting is driven in part by the fact that it's not so hot – literally. Light Emitting Diodes, or LED lights, are becoming popular for the safety benefits of their cool-to-the-touch nature, energy efficiency and unique shimmer.

"The latest thing right now are the LED lights," says Brad Finkle, founder of Creative Decorating, an Omaha, Neb.-based holiday decorator and supplier of decorations and industry training materials. "They're a little bit brighter, they run cooler and they use less electricity. Also, they don't burn out as fast. A traditional light may run 3,000 hours; some LEDs can go 100,000 hours."

Although LED lights can cost as much as 10 times the amount of traditional incandescent lights, their initial investment can be offset by their lifespan and the fact that they use significantly less electricity. For example, the cost of lighting 600 LED bulbs five hours per day for 30 days is approximately 56 cents, according to the Long Island (N.Y.) Power Authority (LIPA). By comparison, the same number of incandescent bulbs over the same period of time would cost \$23. Government agencies are one customer set that's apt to commit to using LED lights for their energy efficiency, says Kevin Allen, general manager of Pro Care Landscape Management, Meridian, Idaho. Also, some energy providers offer rebates and incentives for customers who purchase LEDs, like LIPA did in 2005.

Homeowners not sold on the energy savings or safety aspects might appreciate the unique glow that LEDs give off. Also, LEDs come in a variety of styles, including ball-shaped, icicle-shaped and candle-shaped bulbs. Costs can vary substantially by color because color is produced by the chemical make-up of the bulb, rather than by painting it. Color-changing strings, rope lights and LED screw-ins for incandescent strings are also available. "People usually want to be a little bit different from their neighbors," Finkle notes. "One way is to get brighter."

Typically, when customers sign on with a holiday decorator, they receive design, installation, maintenance, removal and storage. Not all firms offer storage, but it's advantageous for several reasons, most importantly because it's part of selling convenience.

"If they've paid you to put them up, they pretty much don't want to worry about them after that," Allen notes. Also, storage is important so the following season the contractor doesn't waste time going to an installation appointment only to find a box of damaged materials or that the homeowner forgot to leave out the appropriate extension cords, notes Scott Hease, founder of Holiday Bright Lights, an Omaha, Neb.-based holiday lighting membership system that manufactures products and provides training and marketing materials to holiday decorators.

Storing your customers' decorations also can seal the deal for the next season. "Providing storage kind of ensures we get to reinstall the following year," Kaylor says. "They seem to feel more obligated and want to go with us again because we're taking care of it for them."

Another aspect of selling convenience is maintenance that's offered while the lights are up. "People need to be well-prepared to support their products," Allen says, noting that his company offers a full warranty on products for the first year. "You should ask yourself: If a light bulb burns out, are you going to rush right out and fix it or ignore it?"

How to price products and whether to sell or lease them is another consideration contractors should make.

When a contractor sells the products, customers are charged for the product during the first season and then for labor only in subsequent seasons. Typically, the commercial-grade lighting that professional decorators use lasts three to five years.

"For first-time buyers, we say, 'Spend what you're going to spend this year. If there's something else you want, add it next year,'" says Darryl Zellmer, president of Lawn Systems, West Bend, Wis. One benefit of selling the products is customers understand that their costs will go down considerably for the next few years.

Leasing products or providing a "service package," as the Christmas



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Décor franchise calls its format, is beneficial to customers who don't want to worry about purchasing new products when theirs age. Christmas Décor automatically replaces faulty or aging decorations. "It's similar to a lease, but it's not really a product-focused program," Stephens says.

Regarding pricing: "There's really no standard procedure," Hease says. "I see a lot of companies that operate in different manners. Some charge higher prices for product and lower prices for labor in the first year. Others almost give the product away and mark up their labor really high."

Profitability typically comes from

product mark ups, other decorators say. "Usually, products are marked up 100 percent," Finkle says. "Some items like wreaths and ornaments can be marked up more than that, up to three times the cost."

Contractors' pricing models vary: some price products by the foot, the strand or item, often adjusting price for installation difficulty. For example, a second-story strand of lights may cost more than a strand installed on the first story. Whether or not rappelling is required or equipment rental is needed also can add to cost. Individual product prices are then added to labor rates for the job's total price.

Real estate fluctuations from one market to the next greatly affect job prices, but the average residential sale for Holiday Bright Lights' national network of contractors is \$2,500, Hease says. Other contractors agree, sharing average new installations fees from \$1,000 to \$10,000.

SHORT AND SWEET. One of the greatest challenges a holiday lighting installation firm encounters is the short season. Contractors typically send out contracts for existing clients in September to secure existing business before signing on new customers. To maximize the selling season,

franchise or fly solo?

If you own a green industry business, chances are franchising has crossed your mind at some point. The pros and cons of purchasing a holiday lighting franchise are similar to those in other industries; however, there is a hybrid option in holiday décor: supplier's membership organizations.

Here's a look at some benefits and drawbacks to each holiday lighting option.

Franchising. The franchisees' ability to dive in with tried-and-true systems – including prospecting, sales, marketing and installation – is one benefit. In addition, an owner benefits from the collective knowledge of the group. "If there's been a problem, one of our franchisees has dealt with it," says Brandon Stephens, Christmas Décor's director of marketing, explaining that the company boasts 375 franchisees nationwide. Another perk is access to products. Because the holiday lighting season is so short, it pays off to have a reliable product supplier, which is also a franchisor's role.

In addition to a franchise's rigidity, which can stifle entrepreneurial creativity, another drawback to franchising is initial cost. For example, Christmas Décor franchises start at \$8,500, plus a "flexible territory" fee that depends on the number of crews a company will operate. Also, franchisees pay an annual royalty fee (5 percent of sales) and an advertising fee (1 percent of sales). Add any equipment expenditures like trucks and ladders, and the start-up costs can be in the tens of thousands.

Supplier memberships. Several manufacturers and distributors offer a middle ground through their "membership" organizations. They make available many of the pros of franchising like access to products, training and marketing materials for an annual or one-time fee without restricted territories.

The cost of these organizations range from about \$1,000 to \$5,000, and a variety of support levels are available. For a start-up holiday lighting professional, the training – on technical topics as well as sales and marketing methods – is a major benefit. Access to products at a discounted rate is another perk.

The downside, some contractors say, is the cost. Some programs are an upfront, one-time only fee; others require annual dues.

Flying Solo. The cost of going it alone depends on elements like a company's installation knowledge, equipment and the amount of personnel devoted to the service.

Benefits include the ability to test the waters without making an initial investment and the freedom to provide labor-only services like installing customers' decorations (ones they didn't purchase from you). The downside is that a product may not be readily available when you need it during crunch time and there's often a high learning curve (and a lot of headaches) when you're employing a trial-and-error training method.



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which typically starts in October but peaks in November, it's important for holiday lighting salespeople to qualify customers over the phone.

"You really only have 45 days to do installations, so you have to be organized and prepared," Hease says. "Make sure that customers are looking for the services you offer and the products you offer so you don't waste your time."

Kaylor knows his time is precious during holiday sales season. "An estimate takes at least an hour, and you only have so many hour slots in the short window of the holiday lighting season," he notes. One way to weed out customers who think it will cost about \$50 for a few hours of work is to implement a minimum charge.

"We screen on the phone, and that's really important," Pro Care's Allen says, adding his minimum charge is around \$300. "A lot of people want you to come out and they certainly want the service, but when they see what it costs they get sticker shock."

Zellmer agrees that a tactful but honest phone screening approach is necessary. "We explain that it's high-end, commercial-grade lighting," he says. "After we've asked the customer a few questions, we kindly point out that there's a \$1,000 minimum. Some of them might get sticker shock, but I just explain that half of the price covers the product, and that it's not worth my time to come out if I'm going to make less than \$500. It weeds out about half of the people that call in."

Once you have the "right customers," decorators say the sales process is short and sweet.

"If they're prepared to spend the money, it's probably already sold in their minds," Zellmer says.

Typically, a salesman visits a property armed with a portfolio, and talks with a client about what he hopes to achieve within his budget. One tactic Kaylor's salesmen have employed is proposing more decorations than a customer can afford, including specialty items like wreaths and lawn ornaments, for example.

"By over-proposing, we're able to let customers pick and choose what they want and come up with a program that maximizes their budget."

Because qualifying leads is essential, acquiring new business through traditional broad-based marketing methods probably isn't the best ap-

proach. "In years past we did some billboards, although I can't say that brought in a whole lot of business," Allen says. "We did some TV commercials, which gave us a good response, but until this year we hadn't done direct marketing, but I am going to send out a mailing this year to some targeted clients."

Other decorators also send out mailings to prospects in a specific income bracket or to their top-spending

out in Christmas-themed uniforms including red sweatshirts that say "Giannini's Elves." Also, the company asks customers if it can place a promotional sign in the front yard and it augments its trucks with magnets that tout holiday-decorating messages rather than landscaping ones. "We always hear, 'I've seen your trucks,'" Kaplan says.

Just as the selling season is short, installation times are, too, as most customers prefer their decorations be installed around Thanksgiving. It's not always possible, though, and many contractors begin installing lighting in mid-October.

Kaylor Landscape offers an incentive for early installation on new sales. It offers a 20-percent discount for those permitting installation during October and a 10-percent discount for those that permit installation from Nov. 1 until before Thanksgiving. Take-down time isn't as taxing. Firms usually begin removing lights on Jan. 1 and, depending on the weather, it takes about a month.



Vendors typically offer technical training and decorating tips. Photo: Holiday Bright Lights

maintenance, lawn care or design/build clients. Hease recommends that lawn care and landscape businesses do this as early as July by slipping a flyer into their late-summer invoices. Another effective method some contractors use is to identify high-income neighborhoods and canvass the area with door hangers or flyers.

Often, one installation will sell others, holiday lighting contractors say. The best advertising can be the house down the block – or the installation crews themselves.

Giannini Landscape stopped using traditional advertising for its holiday lighting services a few years ago. The company yields enough business from maintenance accounts, word-of-mouth referrals and pickups that come from installation crews decked

TRAINING & TIPS. As the installation period is squeezed into several booming weeks, it's important for crews to know how to hang lights efficiently and have a good base of electrical knowledge. For

contractors not lucky enough to have an electrical expert on staff, this type of training – along with light-hanging tricks of the trade – is available from a variety of sources, primarily franchisors and product suppliers. Usually these are national companies, but Zellmer's company received training and purchases products from a local supplier. "They conduct the training, and have a whole course on marketing and selling," Zellmer says, adding that it's extremely important for a contractor to get formal technical training.

"On the electrical side, there's a lot of fooling around when you're figuring out the amps and the draw, especially on an older house or one where there's been renovations," he says. "You can have a lot of headaches. But you live and learn." ■

More Software Tools Period

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CLIP Trak - Instantly know where your trucks are, then have this data automatically download into **CLIP** via GPS.



Erouter - go paperless and send your crews out with Palms that have the day's work on them.



Bill on website - your customers can view their bills on the web.

Bar Code Scanner - print bar coded sheets for the crews and scan as they get to each property.

Software Links:

Links with MapPoint - automatically route all your customers on the map.

Links with Microsoft Word and Excel - Make estimates and letters inside the customer's file.

Link with Scanner - Save the signed contract right inside the customer file.

Language Translation - Route Sheets notes print in Spanish and Portuguese.



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USE READER SERVICE # 84

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Twinkle Time

Add some sparkle at holiday time with these new seasonal lighting products.

compiled by heather wood | web editor

Creative Displays LED Mini Lights

- Features a full-wave reflector
- Includes a resistor
- Designed to bring a 50-percent increase in brightness
- Lights are waterproof and crush-resistant
- UL-approved in the U.S. and Canada and rated at 100,000 hours

• Creative Displays – 800/733-9617,

www.creativedisplays.com

Circle 200 on reader service card



Holiday Bright Lights 3D Starburst LightLinks

- Lightweight, 1/8-inch steel design ensures no sagging in the main support bar
- LightLinks patented locking gears are lower, improving the integrity of the main support and allowing for flexibility around corners
- Halved starbursts work with any type of eave or gable and collapse easily for efficient storage
- Use of commercial-grade materials allows for little maintenance
- Holiday Bright Lights – 866/932-9363, www.holidaybrightlights.com

Circle 201 on reader service card



Brite Ideas Lighting Product Lines

- LED/incandescent linkable lights are available in red, green, a combination or multi-colored
- LED-only starburst lights are available in red/green, red/white, gold/white, blue/white and green/white color combinations
- Starburst lights are available in 12- and 24-inch designs
- MPLEX lights are available in 50- or 100-foot-long cords with outlets every 10 or 20 feet, respectively
- Lights include a 15-amp timer
- Brite Ideas Decorating – 402/553-1178, www.briteidea.com

Circle 202 on reader service card





No matter how terrific the turf looks, your customers won't be happy if their shrub beds are filled with unsightly plants. Woodace fertilizers are specially formulated to improve color, health and vigor with exclusive technologies like Perk® slow release iron, MESA® slow release ammonium sulfate, Expo® slow release potassium sulfate, and IBDU® slow release nitrogen. So don't walk by an opportunity every time you knock on a customer's door. Use Woodace Preen Plus to control all your problem weeds. Combined with Woodace plant nutrition, Woodace Preen Plus will make your customer's shrub beds the envy of the neighborhood.

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landscape ornamentals
looking fed up, or well fed?*



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USE READER SERVICE # 85

The White Stuff

Snow and ice solutions come in several shapes and sizes, as these products demonstrate.

compiled by mike zawacki | managing editor

Air-Flo Quick Silver Snowplow

- Designed to fit ½-, ¾- and 1-ton trucks and available in 7 ½ foot, 8 foot and 8-½ foot lengths
- Available with a 304 stainless steel moldboard, an 11-gauge 304 stainless steel blade with seven laser cut ¼-inch stainless steel ribs and two stainless steel angle iron full-length braces
- Also available with an 11-gauge carbon steel moldboard with a silver powder coating to prevent against wear and dust
- The Quick-Flo hydraulic system comes standard
- Center mounted shock absorber lessens trip-back forces
- Optional Quick-Stick hand grip controller puts blade functions in the palm of driver's hand
- Air-Flo Manufacturing – 607/522-3574, www.air-flo.com



Circle 203 on reader service card

Agri-Fab Pro Push Broadcast Spreader

- 125-pound-capacity poly hopper with a vinyl cover provides 25,000 square feet of footage
- Includes an adjustable drop shield to allow spreading from a controlled 4-foot width up to a 12-foot pattern
- Features an easy-to-reach flow control lever with a solid control rod
- Outfitted with 14-by-4-inch pneumatic tires
- Agri-Fab – 217/728-8388, www.agri-fab.com

Circle 204 on reader service card



Avalanche Dump Box Salt/Sand Spreader

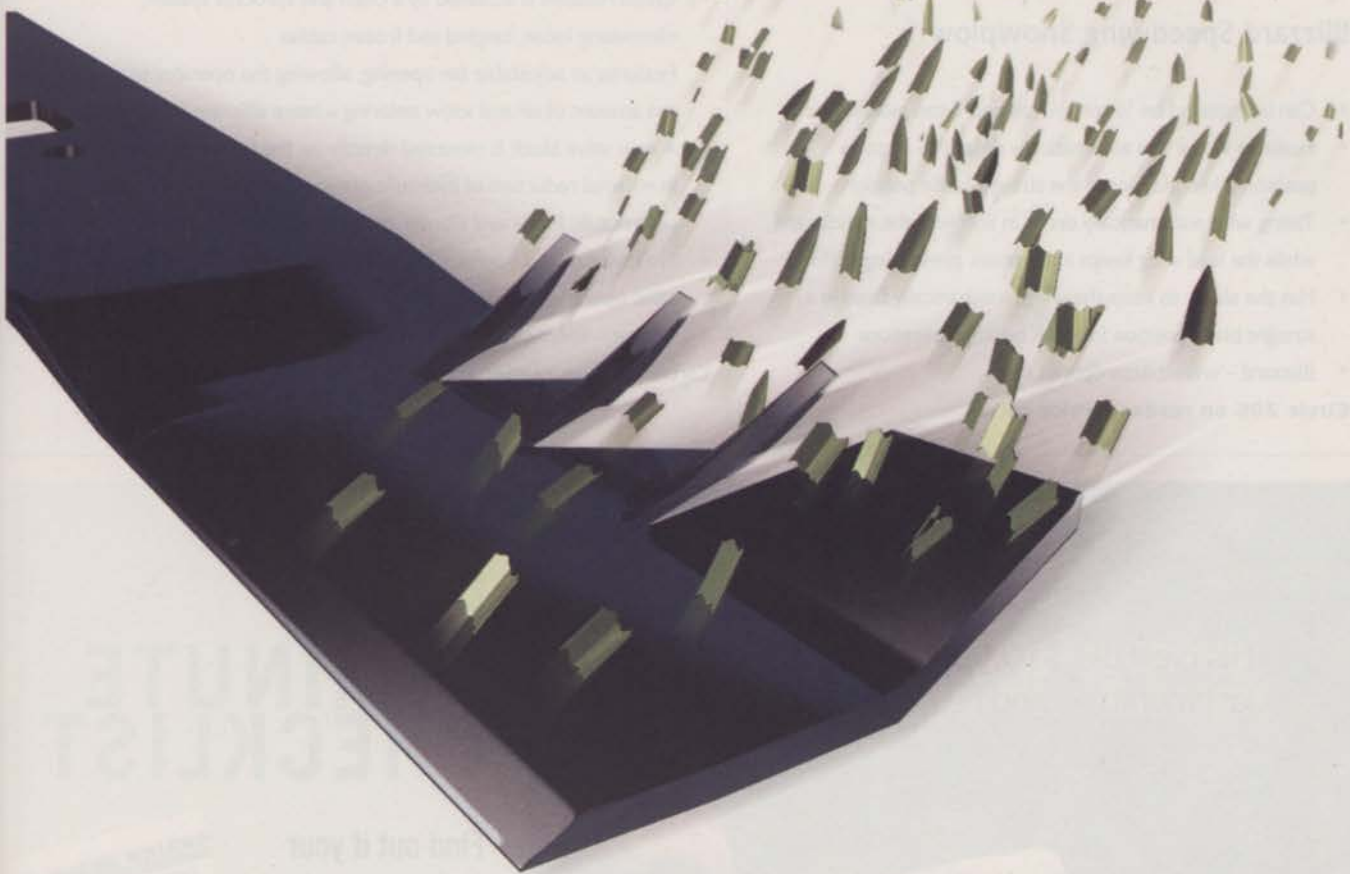
- Connects to dump body in less than 15 minutes
- Unit slides through an opening in a truck's tailgate and locks with a pin
- Carries a larger payload than a v-box
- Available in stainless or carbon steel models in various sizes
- Pre-lubricated bearings do not need greasing for the first season
- Components are made of stainless steel
- Service points are located within arm's reach at the rear of the unit
- Avalanche – 800/232-6950, www.avalanchespreaders.com

Circle 205 on reader service card



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Blizzard Speedwing Snowplow

- Can be installed on 1/2-ton, 3/4-ton and 1-ton pickup trucks
- Features wings that automatically default to a scoop position when plowing in the straight blade position
- Tailing wing automatically drops in line with the moldboard while the lead wing keeps its position, preventing spillover
- Has the ability to keep the wings mechanically fixed in a straight blade position for back blading operations
- Blizzard – www.blizzardplows.com

Circle 206 on reader service card

Bobcat Snowblower Attachment



- Attachment features a direct-drive hydraulic motor for the fan and auger; eliminating high-wear items such as gearboxes, chains, sprockets and shear pins
- Chute rotation is achieved by a chain and sprocket system, eliminating loose, tangled and frozen cables
- Features an adjustable fan opening, allowing the operator to control the amount of air and snow entering a more efficient 6-inch deep fan
- A new valve block is mounted directly on the fan motor and results in minimal reduction of hydraulic pressure and reduces the number of hydraulic hoses and elbows on the snowblower
- No hoses on the operator entry/exit side of the attachment ensure safer operation
- Bobcat – 866/823-7898, www.bobcat.com

Circle 207 on reader service card

His crew did \$10,000 in unbilled work last month — and he doesn't know it.

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USE READER SERVICE # 87

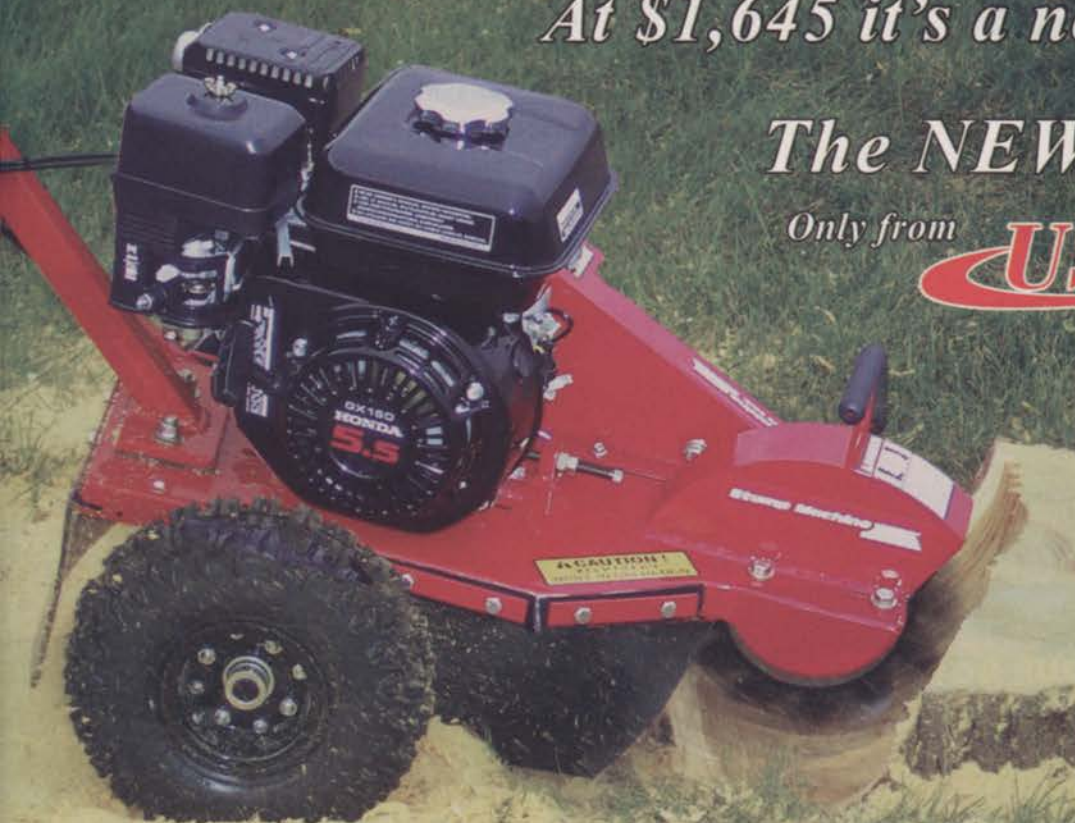
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USE READER SERVICE # 88



Boss Super-Duty XT

- Features a 1/2-inch by 8-inch High-Performance Cutting Edge
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- Snowplow Sight System available
- Includes SmartLight, SmartTouch and SmartShield features
- Features dual shock absorbers with four trip return springs
- Two-year factory-backed limited warranty available
- The Boss Snowplow – 800/286-4155, www.bossplow.com

Circle 208 on reader service card

Daniels Box Plow

- Steel trip edge cleans hard-packed snow and ice
- Cutting edges with 3/4-inch by 6-inch high carbon steel
- Box plow offers back dragging, adjustable spring tension, plus grading and year-round use
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- Available in 10 sizes from 8-feet to 32-feet widths
- Daniels Plows – 847/426-1150, www.danielsplows.com

Circle 209 on reader service card



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USE READER SERVICE # 80

Tired of losing money on every payroll?

EMPLOYEE TIMESHEET

NAME: Bill Kemp DATES: 9-13

DAY	START	LUNCH	END	JOB SITE	WORK DONE	HOURS
MON	7:00	1/2	3:30	Walby		8
TUE			3:30			8
WED			4:00			8 1/2
THU			4:00			8 1/2
FRI	▽	▽	4:00	▽		8 1/2

Employee Signature: Bill Kemp TOTAL HOURS: 41 1/2



Reality?

Employee Report

Bill Kemp

Jobsite Name: Walby Property Date Range: 10/9/2006 through 10/13/2006

Day	Start	End	Activity	Hours
Mon 10/9	7:08 AM	12:05 PM	Irrigation	4:57 hours
	12:41 PM	3:22 PM	Irrigation	2:41 hours 7:38 hours
Tue 10/10	7:12 AM	12:07 PM	Irrigation	4:55 hours
	12:43 PM	3:23 PM	Irrigation	2:40 hours 7:35 hours
Wed 10/11	7:12 AM	12:02 PM	Irrigation	4:50 hours
	12:46 PM	3:49 PM	Irrigation	3:03 hours 7:53 hours
Thu 10/12	7:17 AM	12:19 PM	Planting	5:02 hours
	12:50 PM	3:46 PM	Planting	2:56 hours 7:58 hours
Fri 10/13	7:13 AM	12:07 PM	Planting	4:54 hours
	12:44 PM	3:39 PM	Planting	2:55 hours 7:49 hours

Employee total **38:53 hours**

Signature: Bill Kemp Bill Kemp



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- Fisher Engineering – 207/702-4200, www.fisherplows.com



Circle 210 on reader service card

Henke Tube Table Snowplow

- Heavy-duty design and construction for high-country applications
- Features 5-inch by 5-inch by 3/8-inch tubular reverse table
- Equipped with six spring tripping mechanisms that allow the moldboard to pass over obstacles and automatically reset to the plowing position
- Shock-absorbing rubber blocks limit trip travel and provide greater safety
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USE READER SERVICE # 92

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- Provides snow-rolling performance similar to a highway plow
- Three-year warranty includes both parts and labor, as well as a 5-year structural steel warranty
- Meyer Products – 216/486-1313, www.meyerproducts.com

Circle 212 on reader service card



SnowEx Vee Pro 3000 Bulk Spreader

- Fits intermediate/import trucks and heavy-duty utility vehicles
- Inverted V-style hopper can carry a 1/2-cubic-yard capacity of salt or sand/salt mixture and is designed for efficient material movement
- Polyethylene construction prevents corrosion and constant maintenance, and, at 285 pounds, reduces the amount of weight added to the receiving pickup
- The spreader features SnowEx's Quick-Release pin, which allows for quick removal of the spinner assembly
- Features a separate spinner/auger controller powered by independent 12-volt DC motors
- Variable speed controller is mounted in the cab of the truck and the fully-adjustable spread pattern ranges from 5 to 40 feet
- TrynEx International – 800/725-8377, www.snowex.com

Circle 213 on reader service card



Hiniker DA-Series V-Plows

- Utilizes double-acting angling cylinders to provide full moldboard control in all positions
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- Mounts on full-size heavy-duty pick-up trucks
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- Utilizes the Hiniker Quick-Hitch
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Circle 214 on reader service card



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USE READER SERVICE # 94

Sno-Way 29TSKD Trip Edge Snowplows

- 29-inch tall plow is available in 7 1/2-, 8- and 9-foot sizes.
- Shares the same 10-inch-high trip edge and exclusive compression spring trip design as the truck-mounted models
- Equipped with a universal skid steer and tractor attachment plate with center A-frame float linkage, allowing the blade to travel along ground contours
- Includes angle cylinder crossover relief valves, which protect by diverting hydraulic fluid from an overloaded angle cylinder to the opposite angle cylinder.
- Available with interchangeable poly, steel and stainless steel blade skins.
- Sno-Way International – 262/673-7200, www.snoway.com

Circle 215 on reader service card



Western Tornado Spreader

- Equipped with 1 1/4 cubic yards of capacity
- Spreads sand, salt or a sand/salt mixture
- Belt conveyer, powered by a 1/2 horsepower electric motor, delivers a more even flow of material
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USE READER SERVICE # 95

Building Relationships, Growing Business

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Whenever working with suppliers, distributors, customers or employees, relationships are the key to successful, long-term business ventures.

"After 30 years in this industry I am convinced of one thing: everything we do is about relationships – professional, personal and spiritual," says Gary LaScalea, president/horticulturist of GroGreen lawn, tree and shrub care, Plano, Texas. "The rest of the business is just details."

For lawn care operators seasoned with 30 years of experience or beginners with 30 days on their route, building trusting relationships is critical. True success, which develops over time, comes from the number of positive business relationships you are able to nurture as you grow your business.

Whether you are an independent operator, a franchisee, a distributor or a manufacturer, your success

depends upon the relationships that you forge and how they promote integrity within the green industry.

LaScalea learned about lawn care the same way many independent lawn care contractors learned the business – coming up through the ranks. An important part of his success stems from his ability to understand how positive business relationships have helped grow his business over the past dozen years, making GroGreen what it is today – one of the leading landscape service providers in the North Dallas area.

"Customers don't buy from companies, they buy from people they trust," says LaScalea. "Doing business in an honest manner and keeping your commitments are fundamental to longevity in this industry."

■ **Satisfied Customers Do More than Prefer Your Service – They Refer Your Service**

The best source of new business is from existing customers. Keep them happy and they'll be more willing to accept service advice. Over time, satisfied customers with great looking yards and strong relationships with their technician will help market your service to prospective new customers through the most powerful marketing tool

money can't buy: word of mouth.

"I read once that there's not a lot of customer loyalty in the lawn care business," says LaScalea. "I just don't buy that."

GroGreen has high customer retention because it doesn't treat customers like numbers. If customers have second thoughts about its service, it'll do whatever it takes to maintain contacts.

In addition to building relationships with direct customers, LaScalea and GroGreen employees take the time to give back to the community by volunteering their services for charitable

landscape projects and faith-based benefit events.

Gro-

Green also hosts customer appreciation events where customers and employees can socialize and build a more personal relationship that will carry over to their business relationship.

■ **Customers Come First, After Employees**

Being on the front line, getting the job done while keeping the customer happy and managing their expectations is not easy work. By making sure that employees are well prepared to meet the day-in and day-out challenges, you are setting them and your business up for success.

Service industries have long advised that the customer comes first. While LaScalea understands that, he believes that customers can't feel like they come first if his employees aren't his top priority. He explains that long-term service relationships with the customer comes through his employees, so making sure that they are given the proper training, support and motivation are key.

Customer loyalty hinges on great customer service. Employee turnover can endanger those hard-earned relationships and could also lead to losing the account to a competitor. As a result, LaScalea puts a premium on attracting and retaining quality employees and is willing to pay them above average wages.

"Our payroll as a percent of sales is more than 30 percent,



which may be too high, but that's our foundation," says LaScalea.

GroGreen also promotes the concept of route ownership, in which a technician consistently services a specific area, leading to a more trusting relationship with regular customers. Technicians typically build trust by doing the little things, like announcing their presence on property, picking up the newspaper on the way to the front door and writing notes to customers that address their special interests.

Being able to genuinely congratulate a customer's son on his graduation or greet the family pet by name occur when a technician really owns his route. In turn, these relationships turn to sales. Customers who trust their lawn care provider refer him to neighbors and friends.

GroGreen provides employees with air-conditioned, extended cab trucks, quality equipment and the best professional products available to treat their customers' lawn and landscapes.

"These all come at a premium," says LaScalea. "But employees have to be equipped properly to be productive."

■ Evaluate Relationships with Distributor and Manufacturer Representatives

All lawn care operators depend upon distributors and manufacturers for products, but not all distributors and manufacturers provide the same level of service.

While any distributor can provide products, the distributor who is able to serve as a source

for technical information, product support and training offers lawn care operators a valuable business partnership. Distributors depend upon manufacturers for much of the product information, training and support they provide to their customers.

A strong relationship between a distributor and manufacturer sets up a winning relationship for the lawn care operator. The distributor serves as the central

– continue to enhance safety and minimize environmental impacts of the products and equipment they use to meet consumer demands to protect public health and property.

Actively being involved with industry issues before they become mandates benefits all lawn care operators. While the industry's ability to meet pest challenges has increased, so has local activism aimed at "re-regulating"

**"We depend on manufacturers to help build trust through marketing and education support, as well as commitments to industry trade associations."
– LaScalea**

meeting point for manufacturers to share their wealth of information on products and application techniques that will keep customers happy while helping reduce employee workload.

"We depend on manufacturers to help build trust through marketing and education support, as well as commitments to industry-serving associations," says LaScalea.

■ Every Lawn Care Operator Can Get Involved with Our Industry

Those involved in the lawn and landscape industry – from manufacturers to applicators

pesticides already approved by federal and state agencies as safe and effective. Commitment to the green industry means actively participating locally to inform consumers and elected officials about the science behind the industry's stewardship. Simply watching local legislation instead of participating in it can have dire consequences.

"Early in my career I was involved with proposed county legislation that would have mandated yard postings the size of real estate signs in treated yards as well as alerting neighbors," said LaScalea. "By getting involved in the issue, we were able to keep the situation manageable."

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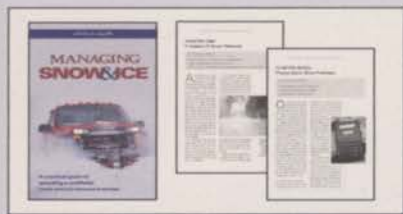
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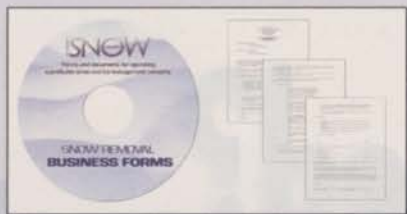
From Lawn & Landscape Media Group, Publishers of *GIE Media's SNOW Magazine*



Managing Snow & Ice

From highly respected and successful snow removal contractor John Allin comes a new, comprehensive guide to the business of snow and ice removal. From pricing to plowing, *Managing Snow & Ice* will educate readers on every aspect of owning and operating a snow and ice removal company. Novices will gain a solid understanding of all levels of the industry, while experienced pros will find insights to boost productivity and profitability.

- ❖ Published by Lawn & Landscape Media Group and *GIE Media's Snow Magazine*
- ❖ 224 pages in a durable softcover



Snow Removal Business Forms

A companion to *Managing Snow & Ice*, this CD-ROM contains all the forms and documents essential to snow removal. Taken directly from forms John Allin uses in his highly successful snow removal operation!

More than 25 forms including:

- ❖ Sample contracts
- ❖ Subcontractor agreements
- ❖ Financial statements
- ❖ Snow response plans
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- ❖ Time sheets
- ❖ Sales letter
- ❖ Job application
- ❖ Rate sheets
- ❖ And much more!



Snow Estimating Software

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

- ❖ Can be customized based on your company's production rates, snowfall, costs, equipment, etc.
- ❖ Includes default production rates based on rates used by Snow Management Group

Demo: <http://216.119.90.91/snow/>

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Snow Estimating Software - \$265.00 each		\$
Ohio Residents Add 8% Sales Tax		\$
MERCHANDISE TOTAL		\$
SHIPPING & HANDLING Inside The U.S. - First Item \$6.00; Additional Items \$2.00 Each International - First Item \$11.00; Additional Items \$4.00 Each		
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Stumped?

Figure out tree planting and removal with these tree tools.

compiled by heather wood | web editor

US Praxis Stump Machine

- Portable, 103-pound stump machine
- Powered by a 5.5-horsepower Honda GX160 engine
- Cuts from 10 inches above ground to 10 feet below
- Has a recommended maximum diameter cut of 24 inches
- Features the same replaceable, carbide-tipped "Quadblades" as the original Stump Machine
- Blade replacement takes less than 10 minutes
- US Praxis – 888/316-8200, www.stumpmachine.com

Circle 217 on reader service card



JP Carlton Line of Wood Chippers

- Includes 6-, 9-, 12- and 18-inch models
- Available for landscaping, tree maintenance and land clearing applications
- Heavy-duty construction includes a form-welded frame and Torflex axle strength
- Construction-grade tires included on all models
- Features high-speed dynamically balanced disk rounds for maximum chipping power
- Each chipper includes a hydraulic system with a single-integrated manifold for optimum control
- JP Carlton – 864/578-9335, www.stumpcutters.com

www.stumpcutters.com

Circle 218 on reader service card



Jonsered Pole Saw

- Powered by Jonsered's 24.5-cc, 1.2-horsepower high-torque engine
- Weighs 12.5 pounds
- Has a split shaft that can be decoupled without tools
- Features a slim-profile, lightweight cutting head
- Includes a narrow-kerf bar and chain and is geared for high chain speed
- Jonsered Importer Tilton Equipment – 877/693-7729, www.tiltonequipment.com

Circle 219 on reader service card



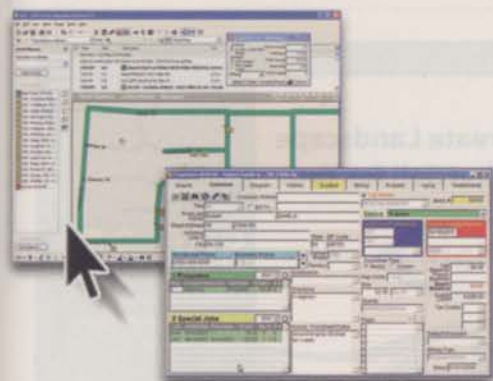
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- Slim profile enables it to get into tight spots
- High-grade steel blades capable of cutting limbs up to 1 1/4 inches in diameter
- Lightweight (1 pound, 7 ounces), but durable head
- Poles are made of hollow core fiberglass and available in 8-, 10-, 12- and 14-foot lengths
- Corona Clipper—800/847-7863, www.coronaclipper.com

Circle 220 on reader service card



Shindaiwa M-Series Attachments

- Two attachments available: AHS short shaft articulated hedge trimmer and PS short shaft pole pruner
- Designed to fit the Shindaiwa M2510, M231 and M230 multi-tool systems
- Features a positive coupler design for quick changing
- Ideal for applications where tight maneuvering is essential
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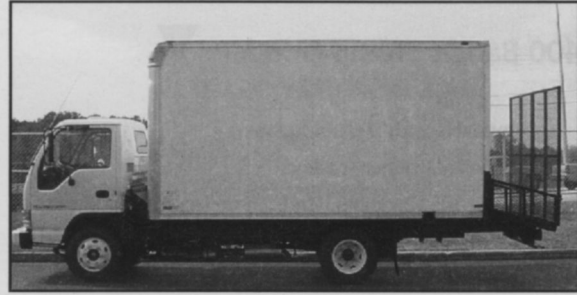
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- Powered by a 4.6-horsepower engine
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- Includes Husqvarna's LovVib anti-vibration system
- Air Injection system removes up to 97 percent of debris before it enters the air filter
- Husqvarna – 706/826-6900, www.husqvarna.com

Circle 224 on reader service card

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- Now available with 200 horsepower
- Self-propelled, rubber-tracked
- Features a 305 Cat rubber-tracked undercarriage
- Radio remote controls all functions and increases operator comfort
- Includes a cutter wheel drive with a hydraulic planetary motor built into the cutter wheel
- Bandit Industries – 800/952-0178, www.banditchippers.com

Circle 222 on reader service card

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- Features expanded range of speed and torque
- Comes with four-year warranty
- Fits a range of machines
- Premier – 866/458-0008, www.premierauger.com

Circle 223 on reader service card



Bobcat Tree Spade

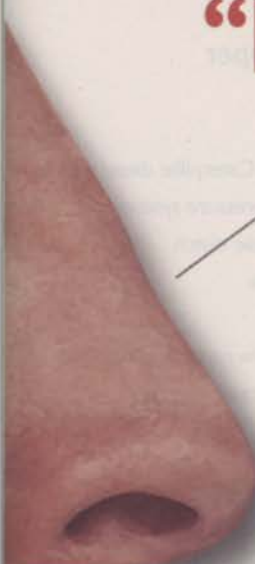
- Features all-electric control from the operator's seat
- Overlapping blades help to ensure a clean cut
- Includes a swing-open gate with open frame design for easy tree access
- Leveling light attached
- Adjustable slides grease- and rust-proof
- Legs are adjustable with four digging sizes
- Bobcat – 866/823-7898, www.bobcat.com

Circle 225 on reader service card



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No unpleasant odor

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The best thing about Triplet® Low Odor is its performance. This unique formulation of 2,4-D, Mecoprop-p and Dicamba delivers the proven triple-whammy you need to control dandelion, clover, henbit, plantains and other broadleaf invaders.

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- Compact Power/Boxer – 866/476-9673, www.cpiequipment.com

Circle 226 on reader service card



Rayco RC 12 Brush Chipper

- Drum-style chipper
- Powered by an 86-horsepower Caterpillar diesel engine
- Includes Rayco's PULSE down pressure system
- Features a self-adjusting hydraulic clutch
- Weighs more than 6,000 pounds
- Planetary feed wheel included
- Rayco Mfg – 800/392-2686, www.raycomfg.com

Circle 228 on reader service card



Vermeer BC1500 Brush Chipper

- Hydraulically-fed drum-style brush chipper
- Features a 15-inch diameter chipping capacity
- Powered by a 125-horsepower John Deere Tier-2 diesel engine
- Features 341 feet per pound of torque for high production chipping projects
- Equipped with a 45-gallon fuel tank for up to 17 hours of continuous operation
- Vermeer – 888/837-6337, www.vermeer.com

Circle 229 on reader service card



RedMax G3100 Chain Saw

- Weighs 7.8 pounds
- Powered by RedMax's 30.1-cc pure two-cycle engine
- Offered with a choice of a 12- or 14-inch bar
- RedMax – 800/291-8251, www.redmax.com

Circle 227 on reader service card



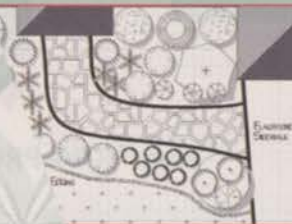
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- Nufarm – 630/455-2000, www.turf.us.nufarm.com



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- 9-foot, 9-inch arm and 28-inch triple semi-grouser shoes also available
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- New line of products including 31-3-8 fertilizer and four seed mixtures
- Seed blends include 3-way GLC Perennial Ryegrass Blend, Rye/Blue Mixture 80/20, Sun & Shade Mixture and Tall Fescue/Blue Mixture 90/10
- Fertilizer is a high-analysis, slow-release product
- Seed blends formulated to cover a range of applications
- Target Specialty Products – 800/352-3870, www.target-specialty.com

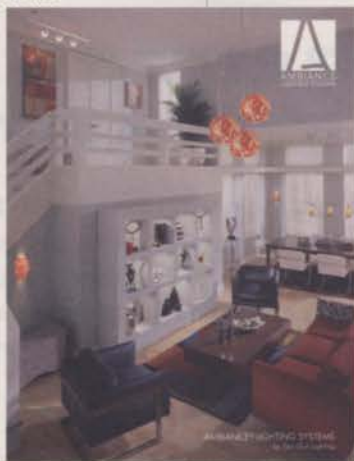


Circle 236 on reader service card

Ambiance Lighting Complete Line Catalog

- Incorporates a range of transitional lighting fixtures into its contemporary assortment
- Transitions line includes new glass fixture additions in feather blue and fireball
- Sconces included in the collection for the first time
- Line also includes pendant, rail, track and linear lighting systems
- Ambiance Lighting Systems – 800/347-5483, www.ambiancelightingsystems.com

Circle 237 on reader service card



Vandermolten Windmill 960BTx Blower

- Line of backpack blowers
- 60-cc model is fitted with a Kawasaki engine
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- Vandermolten – 973/992-8506, www.vandermolencorp.com

Circle 238 on reader service card



Willson A700 Series Safety Eyewear

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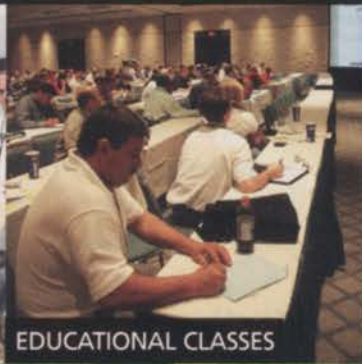
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- Part of Irrrometer's Smart Watering line of products
- Irrrometer – 951/689-1701,

www.irrometer.com

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- Performs the same functions as the SLW20
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- Includes soil moisture control options
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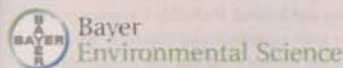
November 16, 2006
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A large, glowing lightbulb graphic is centered in the background of the advertisement. The lightbulb is dark with a bright, glowing filament inside, and it has a soft glow around it. The background of the entire advertisement is a dark, textured blue/purple color.

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- 5. Irrigation Contractor
- 6. Landscape Architect
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- 13. Extension Agent (Federal, State, County, City, Regulatory Agency)
- 14. School, College, University
- 15. Trade Association, Library
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2. What services does your business offer?

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- 2. Seeding or Sodding
- 3. Turf & Ornamental Installation
- 4. Bedding Plants & Color Installation
- 5. Irrigation Installation
- 6. Landscape Lighting
- 7. Hardscape Installation
- 8. Water Features

Landscape Maintenance

- 9. Landscape Renovation
- 10. Turf Fertilization
- 11. Turf Aeration
- 12. Tree & Ornamental Care
- 13. Tree & Stump Removal
- 14. Irrigation Maintenance
- 15. Erosion Control

Pesticide Application

- 16. Turf Disease Control
- 17. Turf Insect Control
- 18. Turf Weed Control
- 19. Tree & Ornamental Pesticide Application

Other

- 20. Mowing
- 21. Hydroseeding
- 22. Snow Removal
- 23. Interior Landscape Services
- 24. Structural Pest Control
- 25. Holiday Lighting
- 26. Other

3. What is the service mix %?

Mowing/Maint _____ Design/Build _____
 Chemical Application _____

4. How many full-time (year-round) employees do you employ?

5. Is Chemical Application work
 1. Outsourced 2. Done by own employees

6. What are your company's approximate annual gross revenues?

- ___ 1. Less than \$50,000
- ___ 2. \$50,000 to \$99,999
- ___ 3. \$100,000 to \$199,999
- ___ 4. \$200,000 to \$299,999
- ___ 5. \$300,000 to \$499,999
- ___ 6. \$500,000 to \$699,999
- ___ 7. \$700,000 to \$999,999
- ___ 8. \$1,000,000 to \$1,999,999
- ___ 9. \$2,000,000 to \$3,999,999
- ___ 10. \$4,000,000 to \$6,999,999
- ___ 11. \$7,000,000 or more

7. What percentage of growth do you anticipate? _____

8. What year was your business founded? _____

9. What is your business mix? (%)
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10. Is this a Headquarters or Branch location?
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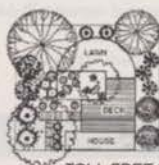
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The author is owner and president of J&K Landscapes in Columbia Station, Ohio, and can be reached at 440/236-3323.

Partnering on an Outdoor Display Area

Not having a physical display area at J&K Landscaping presented us with a couple of problems.

First, it was inconvenient to send prospective clients to a former customer's home to view our finished work. It was not only inconvenient for the homeowner, but also it presented scheduling problems with potential clients to go out and see the hardscapes and landscapes firsthand.

In addition, we were never certain how well a former client may have maintained the landscape after we were finished installing it. This set us up for potential embarrassment and a poor first impression.

I considered the need for an outside display area for nearly a year, but our business got busy and we always seemed to find one excuse or another not to follow through with the idea.

However, a speaker at the World of Concrete Show in Las Vegas in January talked about the importance of an outside display area. It brought my thought process back to the concept of teaming up with a local company whose mission

complimented our business.

One such potential business partner was Heat Exchange, a local company that sells grills, patio furniture and wood-burning stoves. As I left the World of Concrete symposium I made a mental note to pitch my idea to them when I returned to our Columbia Station, Ohio headquarters.

Surprisingly, Heat Exchange was 100 percent receptive to the idea of a partnership. In fact, they, too, had been looking for a company to pursue a similar concept, but, like us, had failed to follow through on the idea.

Together, we worked out a plan that had Heat Exchange paying for all of the hardscaping materials and we paid for all of the other costs, including labor. Total material and labor cost was \$10,000.

In exchange, we are allowed to use and maintain this space for five years. We have a key to the gate to send customers there or to hold meetings with customers and future clients. In addition, we completed all of our work the display area in the off season so it

5 Tips To A Successful And Beneficial Partnership

1. **Develop a solid concept and business proposal. Make sure the plan allows you to defray costs while providing you with your ultimate goal.**
2. **Present the plan to a business entity whose mission is complementary to your own.**
3. **Make sure it's a win-win situation for both parties. Not only should the partnership drive new clients to your business, but it should enhance your partner's business as well.**
4. **Don't forget about additional marketing opportunities. As part of the deal, gain the opportunity to display additional signs for your business and make sure you have brochures and business cards for them to hand out to interested parties.**
5. **Upkeep is essential. Don't forget about the display area and that it now represents the first impression that you'll leave with prospective clients.**



Photos: J&K Landscapes

J&K Landscapes partnered with a local company that sells grills and patio furniture to create a display area that mutually benefits both organizations.



did not impact our work load.

Inside our 3,500 square-foot-area we have unilock brussel pillars with limestone caps and black aluminum fencing. There is a water feature with two streams and a large sandstone bridge. There is nearly 600 square feet of stamped concrete, 250 square feet of pavers, a gas operated fire pit, a putting green, a sandstone water feature and plantings.

In addition to the outdoor space, we have multiple signs inside the garden area and inside the building we have a large sign on an easel as well as brochures and business cards.

Since its completion in mid-April, I've been sending people to Heat Exchange, which is only 10 minutes away from our headquarters, to view samples of our completed work prior to our first face-to-face appointment. This helps get the prospective client more excited about their project and gives them the creative inspiration to begin thinking about their own ideas.

Likewise, it provides us with a

huge advantage over most of our competitors. Since its completion, I've tracked \$115,000 in sales from the display. We consider it a huge weapon in our selling arsenal. While this project was involved, complex to execute and represented a significant investment in money, time, materials and labor, the rewards far outweigh the risks.

As for Heat Exchange, they gained a realistic display area for grills and patio furniture. Heat Exchange also claims to be the only store of its kind in Ohio with an outside display area. To date, they have used the area in various radio advertisements and they've partnered with local restaurants and beverage companies for food and wine tasting.

For a company like us – our pro-

jected gross for 2006 is \$750,000 – I would definitely recommend partnering with another company to develop this display area, especially if you do not have a nice shop or show room to take potential clients.

I believe a physical landscape you can see and touch sells your services better than one rendered only in pictures. – **Jay Schwartz** LL

We Want Your Feedback

Do you have a successful business system at your company that you would like to talk about in our How We Do It section? If you do and you're willing to share details about how and why you implemented this system, as well as the costs associated with it, contact *Lawn & Landscape's* Mike Zawacki at 800/456-0707 or mzawacki@gie.net.

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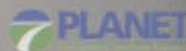
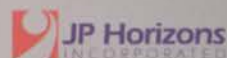
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