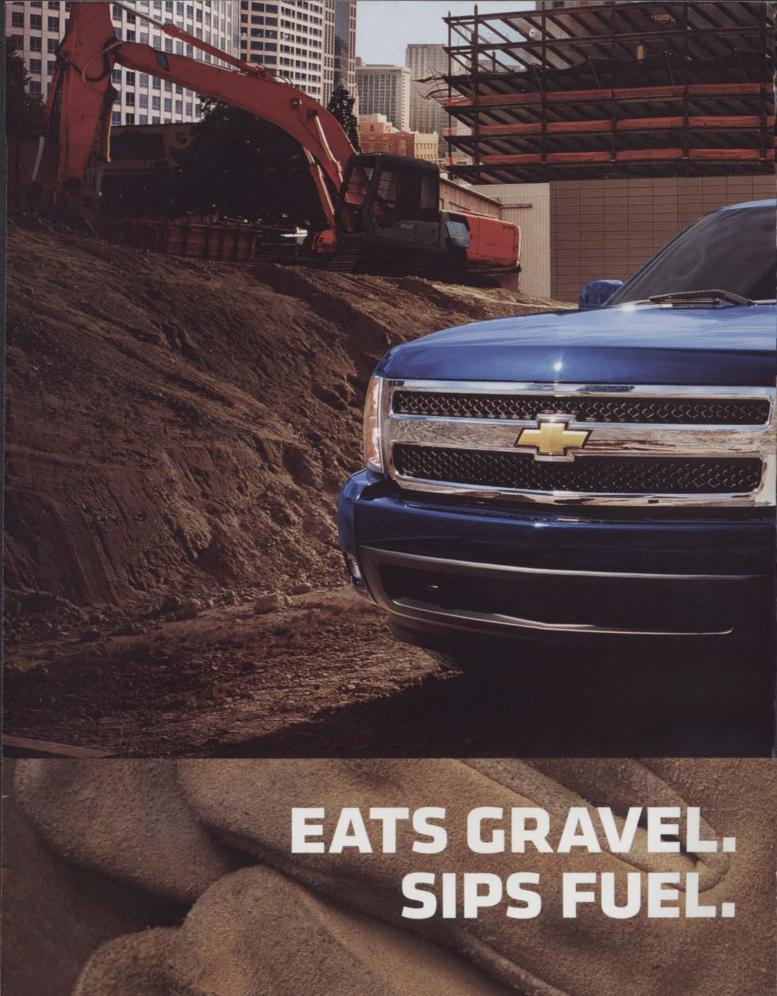
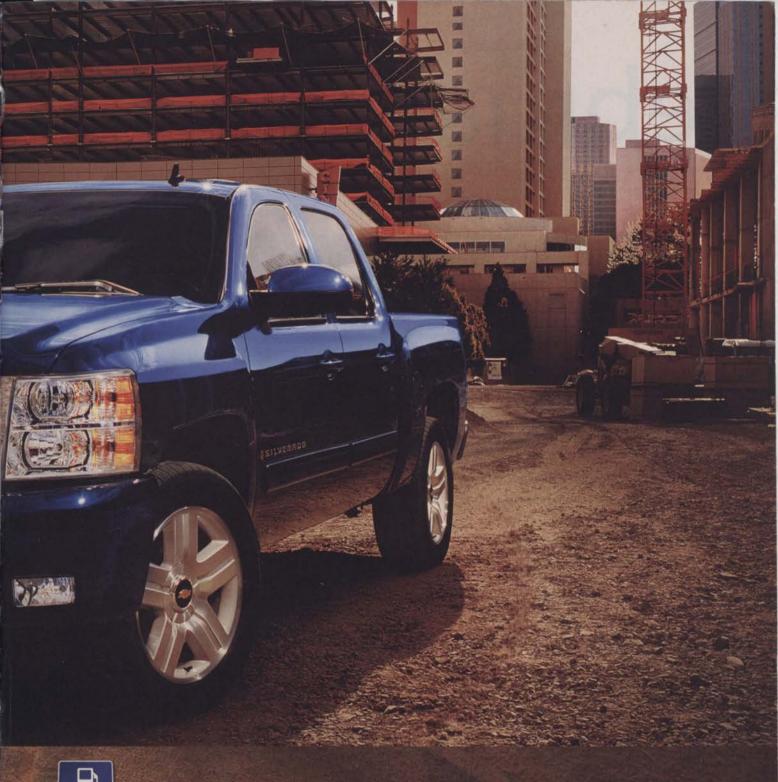
February 2008 www.lawnandlandscape.com Who Will Do The Work? The landscape industry addresses the labor crisis. -CNS INC IT SQUARE PA 19348-0501





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A GIE MEDIA PUBLICATION . VOLUME 29 NUMBER 2

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Cover illustration: Bill Graham

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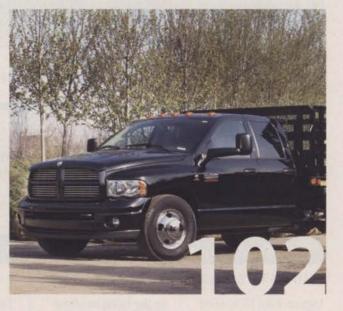
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February 2008

The Daily Resource for Landscape Contractors | lawnandlandscape.com



Lawn & Landscape's extensive coverage of the industry's labor situation, featured as this month's cover story, continues at lawnandlandscape.com. Look for the section title "Work Force Series" on the home page.

TOP FIVE WEB STORIES

1. Project EverGreen Offers Commercial Property Brochure

Titled, "How Green Can Save - And Make - You Money," the pamphlet is available for purchase by landscape and lawn care professionals to distribute to their customers.

2. Economists: Housing Market Decline is Not Over

Experts say the housing market will eventually hit bottom this summer before things start getting better.

3. Industry Buzz: Learning from San Diego

Lawn & Landscape spoke with Pat Seatter, ValleyCrest Landscape Management branch manager, San Diego, about what industry professionals can learn from the recent wildfires fires and aftermath.

4. Alternative Fuel Station Reaches Million-Gallon Mark

An E85 ethanol station in Oshkosh, Wis., reached a landmark with the help of flex-fuel vehicle owners.

5. Industry Buzz: Use Snow Throwers Properly

When operating snow removal equipment, make safety the top priority.



GREEN SIDE UP

Green industry consultant Ed Laflamme's guide to management, "Green Side Up," is available in the Lawn & Landscape book store.

Visit lawnandlandscape.com/store to order a copy.

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The Month Ahead | lawnandlandscape.com

INDUSTRY BUZZ

Log on Feb. 18 to read the latest Irrigation Association news in the online column that features a different industry expert each week.

ONLINE EXTRA

At the bottom of the home page, under "current issue," read "Questions and Answers" to help clients find their perfect water feature style.

E-NEWSLETTER

To receive the latest news and product information in your in box weekly, visit lawnandlandscape. com/newsletter and sign up.



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- Lastly we will explore the benefit and the skills needed to set and achieve goals: "You can't hit what you can't see."

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February 21 Baltimore, MD March 5 Chicago, IL

February 26 Columbus, OH March 11

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Additional information: 888-321-9333

Seminar details will be sent to attendees via e-mail.

editor's desk



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Who Will Do the Work?

Labor is the lifeblood of the lawn and landscape industry. With more than 70,000 business entities employing an average of 7.3 year-round workers is a lot of people to recruit, hire and train. Add an average of 7.1 seasonal employees and this workforce grows even larger.

While landscape companies project a 10 percent average growth rate this year, completing that work is dependent upon hiring workers. However, the government's refusal to extend the H-2B returning-worker exemption program places these goals in jeopardy. The impact of this decision - or lack of decision - will have far-reaching consequences for the landscape industry.

It's not simply a matter of will or won't workers under this program return, it extends beyond that question. For instance, if a crew can't be staffed with workers, there's no need to buy additional trucks. And, if trucks aren't purchased then trailers, mowers, compact utility equipment and hand-held products won't be needed.

The possible effects are wide-ranging. In a recent reader survey, landscape firms who don't receive workers through the H-2B program said they would cancel contracts and/or refuse business and some said they would hire workers with potentially fraudulent documents. In the end, the industry suffers.

The labor issue goes beyond H-2B. Without returning workers, survey respondents said they will raise wages, increase benefits and recruit from their competitors. Employee retention will become a No. 1 priority for landscape professionals this year.

The landscape industry has been challenged with finding and keeping workers for years. It's hard to attract labor to the landscape industry; seasonal workers in particular. And, it's difficult to convince workers that they can have a career in the landscape industry. If they only knew how rewarding this industry can be.

Lawn & Landcape addresses this crucial issue with a three-part series on labor. The first story - this month's cover feature - analyzes the H-2B and immigration crises and who will do the work. The next two features will go in-depth to address employee recruitment, hiring, training and retention. It's not enough to advertise for a specific job and expect to hire the best of the bunch. We're all familiar with this scenario: scheduling 30 interviews, half of them showing up, offering the job to the best and then never seeing the applicant again.

The key to attracting workers to the landscape industry is developing a career path for them based on a solid foundation in both the horticultural and business aspects of the industry. Our new monthly columnist, Bill Arman, a 32-year veteran of the landscape industry, will provide tips and strategies to first find and then hang onto your people.

Additionally, watch for special issues from Lawn & Landscape throughout 2008 that spotlight careers in the landscape industry as well as how to connect with potential employees before they even leave the classroom. Keep us posted on the labor situation in your area. Send feedback to ccode@gie.net. LL

Lawn & Landscape

4020 Kinross Lakes Parkway - Suite 201 Richfield, Ohio 44286 PHONE: 800/456-0707 EDIT FAX: 330/659-0824

Internet: www.lawnandlandscape.com Subscriptions & Classifieds: 800/456-0707

EDITORIAL

CINDY CODE Editorial Director ccode@gie.net

NICOLE WISNIEWSKI Deputy Editor nwisniewski@gie.net

MIKE ZAWACKI Managing Editor mzawacki@gle.net

MARISA PALMIERI Senior Editor mpalmieri@gie.net

MARK PHILLIPS Associate Editor

EMILY MULLINS Associate Editor emullins@gle.net

HEATHER WOOD Web Editor hwood@gie.net

CREATIVE MARK ROOK Creative Director mrook@gie.net

ANDREA VAGAS Managing Art Director avagas@gie.net

COLUMNISTS

BILL ARMAN The Harvest Group people@gie.net

MARTY GRUNDER

Grunder Landscaping Co. landscapesales@gie.net

JIM HUSTON

J.R. Huston Enterprises benchmarking@gie.net

EDITORIAL MISSION STATEMENT

Through its business management content, Lawn & Landscape provides its readers with pertinent, practical information on how to become more productive, efficient and profitable in your businesses.





The Right Way To Treat A Tree



letters to the editor

Readers can forward their letters via the Letters to the Editor button at www.lawnandlandscape.com or directly to Editor Cindy Code at ccode@gie.net.



Crack Down

In response to the article on www. lawnandlandscape.

com about the new Arizona law cracking down on illegal immigration, thank goodness it is finally happening.

3

I hope industry associations and publications track the effects so that we'll be prepared when legislation like this is enacted in our areas.

I expect the effect will be different in the companies that employed a lot of illegals vs. the ones that did not. I hope to see reporting on which companies shrink, go under, see wage or price increases and tap new applicant pools. I hope that the reporting will reflect the difference between companies that employed illegals and ones that did not and not blur the two.

Jim Hawkinson President TLC Total Lawn Care Jacksonville, Fla.

Get a Life

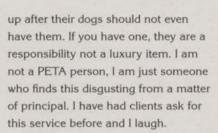
In your November issue, I read some great articles on employee theft, tax audits etc. However, I am appalled at those people who would strut their stuff



about picking up after people's dogs ["Scooping Up Business," November]. It's disgusting to know that this is being glamorized in our industry. I work in the richest of rich areas, and would not even think for a minute to do this for

my high-end clients.

People who don't have time to pick



I love the magazine and the Web site and will continue to read, but I want to tell these guys who wear their company shirts proudly displaying what they do, "Get a Life!"

We are landscape contractors, not the scum of the earth. And the prices they charge to do this, they should be embarrassed. No amount of money could ever get me to add this to my list of services.

Jim Webb Valley Landscape Services Jackson Hole, Wyo.

Head of the Class

I've worked as a newspaper journalist, banker, golf course employee and sales professional. Because of that breadth of experience, I've read dozens of trade magazines over the years. Almost all of them, sadly, were created to do nothing more than generate revenue for publishers who understood little about the industry they were covering. Your magazine is the exception to that rule.

Lawn & Landscape is the one publication I read cover to cover, every month, without fail. Hey, I even read the ads! Many thanks for helping me turn knowledge into profit. Keep up the great work.

Carl Hames Manager Lawn Butler Lewisville, Texas

Lawn&Landscape

4020 Kinross Lakes Parkway + Suite 201
Richfield, Ohio 44286
PHONE: 800/456-0707 SALES FAX: 330/659-0823
Internet: www.lawnandlandscape.com
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SALES

JOE DIFRANCO Group Publisher jdifranco@gie.net

DAVID BLASKO National Sales Manager dblasko@gie.net

DAVE ANDERSON Account Manager danderson@gie.net

DREW BREEDEN Account Manager dbreeden@gie.net

MIKE ZAVERL Account Manager mzaverl@gie.net

CHRISTINE ZERNICK Account Manager czernick@gie.net

AMEE ROBBINS Account Manager 616 Marine Ave., Manhattan Beach, Calif. 90266 PH: 310/465-6060 FX: 866/857-5442 arobbins@gie.net

TARYN O'FLAHERTY Account Manager 644 29th St., Manhattan Beach, Calif. 90266 PH: 310/545-1567 FX: 866/802-0549 toflaherty@gie.net

BONNIE VELIKONYA

Classified Advertising Sales bvelikonya@gie.net

JANET MARIONEAUX Marketing Coordinator Jmarioneaux@gie.net

PRODUCTION

HELEN DUERR Director, Production hduerr@gie.net

SAMANTHA GILBRIDE Advertising Production Coordinator sqilbride@gie.net

CHRISTINA HACKEL
Internet Production Coordinator
chackel@gie.net

CONFERENCES

MARIA MILLER Conference Manager mmiller@gie.net

CORPORATE

RICHARD J. W. FOSTER CEO

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inside the industry

INDUSTRY NEWS

MORE SNOW!

WHAT A DIFFERENCE A
YEAR MAKES. For many
areas throughout the
northern United States, this
winter's snowfall through
mid-January increased
significantly compared to the
same time period in winter
2006-2007 and even beats
some "normal" benchmarks,
according to the National



For example, snow fighters in some areas of New England have fought more than 60 inches of snow, compared to less than 10 inches the previous winter. Cleveland's snowfall total to date has doubled compared to the previous winter, and Madison, Wis., so far has seen more than 40 inches of snow, nearly 30 inches more than the previous winter and more than 15 inches above normal amounts, according to the data.

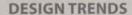
"This season has been fantastic," says Scott Carson, maintenance division general manager at Piscataqua Landscaping in Eliot, Maine. "We had well over 40 inches of snow in December, which was almost what we had total for all of the 2006-2007 snow season."

In anticipation of another weak winter, Carson says Piscataqua Landscaping booked plenty of work to get the company through December. Snow, though, has taken a priority. "I guess it doesn't matter how you get the work just as long as you get it," he says. "That's Mother Nature in

New England."

Other areas haven't been as fortunate. Brian Akehurst, president of Akehurst Landscape in Joppa, Md., reports his region has had only three workable snow events. However, Akehurst remains optimistic that winter 2007-2008 will end as a profitable snow season and an improvement over recent years. "I can't say





OUTDOOR GREAT ROOMS, SUSTAINABILITY IN VOQUE



For the last several years, outdoor kitchens

have topped the list of residential landscape trends. But in 2008, homeowners are taking outdoor living to a whole new level with outdoor great rooms, according to an informal poll of leading landscape architects conducted by the American Society of Landscape Architects.

Kitchens and fire pits continue to be popular, but more and more homeowners are requesting spaces that



WINTER 2007-2008 SNOW TOTALS

(amounts in inches through Jan. 15)

STATE	Winter '07-'08	Winter '06-'07	Normal Winter
Concord, NH	64	2.4	27.4
Bangor, Maine	61	10	25.5
Syracuse, NY	59.5	23.6	53.3
Burlington, VT	59.3	21.3	35.2
Deluth, MN	43.4	19.8	41.5
Madison, Wis.	40.4	12.8	24.2
Flint, Mich.	38.3	12.6	22
Green Bay	36.3	9.9	25.7
Milwaukee	33.3	15.8	23.3
Cleveland	23.9	12.3	26.4
Chicago	20	8	16.8
Indianapolis	13.1	.9	12.6
Pittsburgh	11.5	1.2	16.3
St. Louis	7.7	4.4	9.8
The state of the s	Villa Village II	Source: National Weather Service	

it has been a great year this far," he says. "At least we've had more snow than this time last year."

The consistent accumulation is a relief for many landscape contractors who stay busy pushing snow from mid-November through early April. In fact, research conducted by sister publication GIE Media's Snow

Magazine states nearly three quarters of snow contractors are landscape firms offering snow removal services.

The last couple of winters haven't been kind to U.S. snow fighters. In fact, mild/ inconsistent winters are the No. 1 business challenge contractors face, superseding the threat of low-ball competitors and escalating

fuel costs, according to Snow Magazine research.

So what does this mean for landscape contractors? The majority of snow removal contractors who engage in landscape work during the warm weather depend on snow revenue for an influx of cash necessary to jump start their spring operations, whether it's

purchasing materials, acquiring new equipment or even expanding their labor force.

December was the second snowiest for Milwaukee in more than 50 years, says Ken Wentland, operations manager at American Landscape/American Snow Professionals in Menomonee Falls, Wis. If winter maintains this momentum, it'll put the company in a great position for spring landscaping operations.

"A good snow season greatly helps our bottom line going into the green season and helps us purchase needed equipment and materials on a timely basis," Wentland says. "We also often find good new employees, people who start working for us in the winter many times continue into the green season."

- Mike Zawacki



incorporate living rooms, dining rooms and kitchens for outdoor entertaining. "It's no surprise that people want to take elements that work so well inside their home and recreate them outside," says ASLA President Perry Howard.

In light of increasing lawn maintenance costs - especially irrigation - landscape architects also anticipate a revival of the garden, incorporating more native and

drought-resistant plants, and a de-emphasis on the traditional lawn, ASLA says.

On the commercial side, landscape architects continue to see a demand for incorporating and quantifying sustainable design, Perry says, pointing to the increased popularity of green rating systems like LEED and the creation of the Sustainable Sites Initiative, which ASLA helped found. - Marisa Palmieri

LABOR

BRICKMAN FIGHTS H-2B RULING



THE BRICKMAN GROUP is fighting back after a federal judge ruled the company owes back pay to foreign seasonal workers. A recent ruling in U.S. District Court in Pennsylvania says the company must pay visa costs, labor broker fees and initial transportation costs for the workers who filed a case against the company. Although there is some dispute as to the precise number of plaintiffs named, the list totals around 100.

The law says certain expenses may not be deducted from an employee's paycheck if the deduction brings the paycheck below the minimum-wage rate. The employees allege they earned less than the minimum wage in their first paycheck after visa, broker fees and initial transportation expenses were paid by the workers and therefore deemed a deduction. Brickman argued in the case that it should only be responsible for expenses directly related to the job, but the judge ruled the visa, broker fees and initial transportation costs should be covered by the employer because the visa allows the worker to only work for a specified employer, making them separate from ordinary living expenses. But the worker can petition to transfer the visa to another employer, Brickman pointed out in the case. The judge did side with Brickman in ruling that passport and certain other costs must be borne by the worker.

Mark Hjelle, president of The Brickman Group, couldn't comment on the case because it is still actively in litigation, but he did say the company is planning to pursue an appeal.

– Heather Wood

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inside the industry

D-BASF

SUPPLIER UPDATE

BASE TO SUPPLY BAYER WITH FUNGICIDE

BASF will provide triticonazole fungicide to Bayer Environmental Science for use in the company's turf and landscape ornamental products.

The supply agreement between BASF and Bayer is for certain uses including professional sports turf, golf, landscaping and professional lawn care. BASF maintains all the rights to the active ingredient and to sell the compound in all the markets where it is registered.

Triticonazole is the active ingredient in Trinity fungicide; BASF will continue to support the launch of Trinity and will continue to develop additional differentiated triticonazole product offerings. Trinity is a key element of BASF's fungicide strategy, and BASF is investing in the continued growth and development of the molecule.

"There's an opportunity to get this out there and replace the old turf fungicides that are in use," says Tom Hill, BASF spokesman, adding it's a chance to increase sales of the product before it goes off-patent. "They will have a product that will have the same active ingredient as ours."

Triticonazole will become the active ingredient in Bayer's Chipco Triton.





Photos: (from left) Porcelain with fruit – Jil M. Swearingen, USDI National Park Service, Bugwood.org; Porcelain berry Infestation – Leslie J. Mehrhoff, University of Connecticut, Bugwood.org.

PESTS

GREEN INDUSTRY ASKED TO HALT INVASIVE PLANT

THE CONNECTICUT INVASIVE PLANTS

COUNCIL solicited public comments through the end of 2007 about whether to ban the porcelain berry (*Ampelopsis brevipedunculata*) outright or to seek some other method of stopping the plant. The council designated the plant species as "invasive" in mid-November.

Feedback almost conclusively called for efforts to ban or limit its use. Some council members, though, suggested a formal ban would not be necessary if local green industry professionals – nursery owners and landscape contractors – discontinued its sale and use in residential and commercial settings. At this time, Magnarelli says, a voluntary effort to stop using the plant is

the most prudent course of action.

"I think the voluntary stop sale of porcelain berry by the green industry is the best approach at this time," Magnarelli says. "This is not an economically important plant to the industry. Moreover, members of the green industry even recognize that this plant is a problem where it grows."

Originally from the Far East, porcelain berry is a deciduous perennial vine that thrives in open and wooded habitats. It spreads quickly – some accounts purport 15 feet per year – and chokes out native plant species in the process.

Porcelain berry is considered invasive in 12 states, primarily in New England.

- Mike Zawacki

PESTS

TINY MITE INVADES SOUTHERN FLORIDA

A STRAWBERRY RED MITE IS WREAKING HAVOC on palm trees in Southern Florida. The mite was first spotte

palm trees in Southern Florida. The mite was first spotted in the U.S. in November 2007. While the mites don't kill palms, they do suck the juices out of the tree and make the fronds yellow. Officials at the U.S. Department of Agriculture are worried the mites could spread to other southern states. Anyone who spots a red palm mite is asked to contact his or her state's department of agriculture.

Red palm mites primarily migrate through wind currents or through transporting plants, fruits or other greenery. Contractors have been using insecticidal soaps and horticultural oils to deal with the pests. – Mark A. Phillips

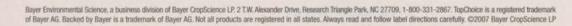


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HUMAN RESOURCES

HEALTH INSURANCE IS MOST IMPORTANT BENEFIT

AFTER PAY, HEALTH INSURANCE IS THE SINGLE-MOST IM-PORTANT INCENTIVE that small businesses use to recruit and keep workers, according to a recent study.

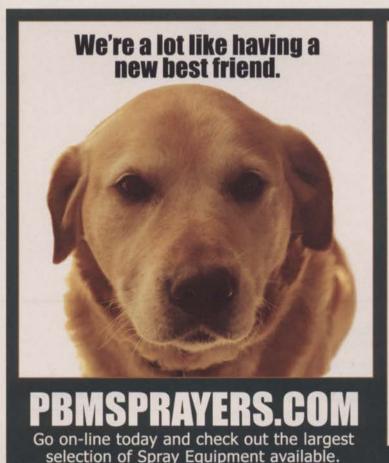
More than half of the 365 small businesses participating in the survey said their health care premiums rose as much as 10 percent this year, according to the study conducted by the National Association of Professional Employer Organizations (NAPEO). But a whopping 70 percent of business owners say they wouldn't raise employee contributions for health coverage in 2008. Five percent, however, said they are unsure if they will continue to offer health care coverage at all.

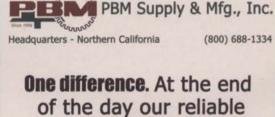
Nationally, beginning in 1996, more small businesses began offering health benefits to their workers, despite the rising

cost to do so. Today, nearly 60 percent offer employee health benefits. And 70 percent of respondents to NAPEO's recent survey said they will continue to insure their workers in the coming year – without raising the required dollar contribution by employees.

Increasingly, many larger companies are turning to employee health and wellness programs to manage rising health care costs, according to a recent survey by the Deloitte Center for Health Solutions and the ERISA Industry Committee (ERIC).

In fact, nearly two-thirds of leading companies said they have already implemented wellness programs to improve employee health, and the remaining third said they were considering it, – *Mike Zawacki*





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your bottom line instead of
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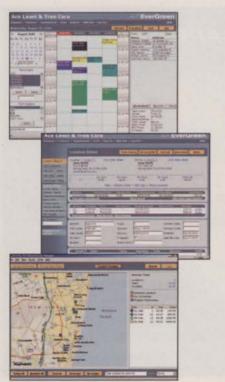


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inside the industry

EDUCATION

SESSIONS COVER ACCOUNT MANAGER STRATEGIES

PROPERTY OWNERS WANT LANDSCAPE CONTRAC-

TORS to be proactive in problem solving, attendees of the Wilson-Oyler Group Success Series seminar in Orlando, Fla., heard.

The Jan. 10 seminar reinforced that "property owners want you to be their experts on their properties regarding landscaping, irrigation and a host of other topics," says

Keith O'Neil, general manager for Vila & Sons Landscaping in Orlando. "You need to portray that to them and you need to be their expert."

Attendee Eddie DeLoach, co-owner of Tidewater Landscape management, Savannah, Ga., says he's looking at his sales methods in a new way.

"They showed us how to develop a pod of sales in a

particular area and how to develop it," he says. "It'll be a better way to attack sales rather than the shotgun approach we've been using.

"The idea is to let the account manager know this is their area, and this is an opportunity for them to develop a particular area and give him all the tools he needs to do that," he says.

The seminar series helps

firms develop top-of-class account managers.

Future seminars include Atlanta (Feb. 7), Baltimore (Feb. 21), Los Angeles (March 6), Denver (March 20), Chicago (April 3) and Columbus, Ohio (April 17).

The series is presented by Husqvarna; Lawn & Land-scape is the media sponsor. For a registration form, visit www.wilson-oyler.com.



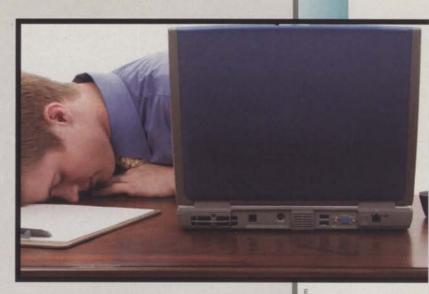
WAKE UP, YOU'RE SLEEPWORKING!

without a Doubt, small business owners are working longer hours than ever. And as many land-scape contractors can attest, it's difficult to leave the office issues, job site priorities and client dilemmas all behind at the end of the day. In fact, recent research shows that, for many business owners, work is carrying over into their sleep.

Fifty-one percent of small business owners say they dream about work, or sleepwork, and nearly 70 percent say they wake up and put their work dreams into action, according to the second annual Staples National Small Business Survey.

The study found some other interesting insight into how business owners work:

- · 72 percent make business calls while driving;
- · 38 percent can't recall their last vacation;
- 48 percent would work even more hours in 2008 if they could double their sales; and
- · 21 percent want more time off in 2008.



The survey also found that while three quarters of business owners considered themselves "organized," 70 percent of those surveyed admitted they do not have written business plan.

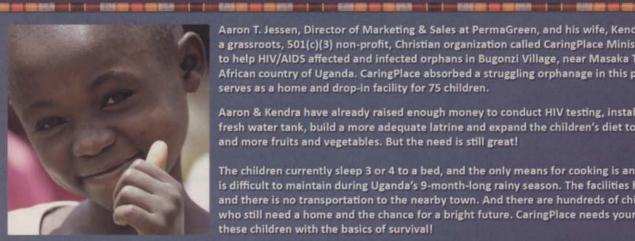
Maybe they just need to sleep on it.

- Mike Zawacki



permagreen Gives Back

We're raising \$150,000 to help orphans in a small East African village so they can have food, water, clothing, medicine and education. PermaGreen is pledging \$75,000, plus we will add 50¢ to every dollar you donate. Together, we can make a huge impact! Donate online at permagreen.com or CaringPlaceMinistries.org or by phone.



Aaron T. Jessen, Director of Marketing & Sales at PermaGreen, and his wife, Kendra, have founded a grassroots, 501(c)(3) non-profit, Christian organization called CaringPlace Ministries International to help HIV/AIDS affected and infected orphans in Bugonzi Village, near Masaka Town in the East African country of Uganda. CaringPlace absorbed a struggling orphanage in this poor village, which serves as a home and drop-in facility for 75 children.

Aaron & Kendra have already raised enough money to conduct HIV testing, install a 10,000-Liter fresh water tank, build a more adequate latrine and expand the children's diet to include meat and more fruits and vegetables. But the need is still great!

The children currently sleep 3 or 4 to a bed, and the only means for cooking is an open fire, which is difficult to maintain during Uganda's 9-month-long rainy season. The facilities have no electricity and there is no transportation to the nearby town. And there are hundreds of children in the area who still need a home and the chance for a bright future. CaringPlace needs your help to provide these children with the basics of survival!

Robert Luwalira, the native Ugandan that founded the orphanage, is the Director of Operations in Bugonzi. He provides proper management over the activities on the ground and ensures that every dollar is spent for the benefit of the children.

We need your donations to make this project a success!

\$50 provides a child with food, water, medicine, education and housing for a month \$100 can buy chickens or goats and pay for mattresses and mosquito nets \$500 can pay a teacher's salary for an entire year \$1,000 helps with operating costs for a month or can go toward building dormitories, buying a vehicle, building a kitchen, installing electricity or many other major improvements

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SAFETY

OSHA TO REQUIRE EMPLOYER-PAID SAFETY GEAR



THE OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH ADMINISTRA-

TION issued a new rule clarifying what personal protective equipment (PPE) must be paid for by the employer. The new requirement is expected to result in 21,000 fewer occupational injuries per year.

The new rule does not create new requirements regarding what PPE employers must provide, but it does reduce confusion about who pays for the safety gear. The rule:

- Does not require employers to pay for ordinary safetytoed footwear, prescription safety eye wear, logging boots, ordinary clothing and weather-related gear. The rule also does not require employers to pay for uniforms, items worn to keep clean or other items that are not PPE.
- Clarifies OSHA's intent regarding employee-owned and replacement PPE. It says if employees choose to use PPE they own, employers are not required to reimburse the employees for the PPE. The standard also makes clear that employers cannot require workers to provide their own PPE and the em-

ployee's use of PPE they already own must be completely voluntary. Even when an employee provides his or her own PPE, the employer must ensure that the equipment is adequate to protect the employee from hazards at the workplace.

 Requires the employer to pay for replacement PPE used to comply with OSHA standards. However, when an employee has lost or intentionally damaged PPE, the employer is not required to pay for its replacement.

OSHA will begin enforcing the new rule on May 15 – six months after it was issued – to allow businesses time to change their existing PPE payment policies. – *Marisa Palmieri*

For more information on outfitting your employees with personal protective equipment, see this issue's Tool Kit story, "Safety First," on page 138.

READY-MADE BROCHURES EDUCATE COMMERCIAL CLIENTS

PROJECT EVERGREEN recently made it even easier for professional lawn and landscape firms to educate commercial customers about the value of their services. Titled "How Green Can Save – And Make – You Money," the brochure is available for purchase by landscape and lawn care professionals to distribute to their commercial customers. The brochure goes beyond the environmental benefits of maintaining the green spaces surrounding a commercial property to explain how well managed and responsibly maintained green spaces actually contribute to the bottom line.

"It's a proven fact that well-managed landscaping and lawn care efforts not only make a business look more appealing, they actually result in lower operating costs and help drive an increase in property values each year," says Den Gardner, executive director of Project EverGreen.

The brochure makes a business case for landscaping with facts like:
• Landscaping can aid in reducing

air conditioning costs by up

to 50 percent; Planting just o

- Planting just one tree can remove 26 pounds of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere annually, equaling 11,000 miles of car emissions;
- Businesses are easier to locate when framed by trees and vegetation rather than concrete; and
- Office views of green spaces are proven to increase employee productivity and job satisfaction.

With more retail space being developed each year, it is vital to educate business owners about the importance of responsible green space maintenance. It's good business for the whole community, and the easiest way to do that is to show them how it relates to dollars and cents.

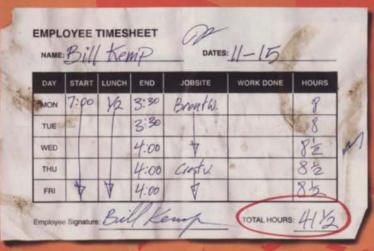
"Who wouldn't be interested in reducing their heating and cooling costs by up to 50 percent?"

For more information about purchasing these brochures, visit www.project evergreen.com/products.



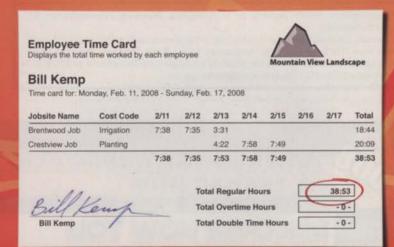
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inside the industry



ENGLISH TO SPANISH PHRASES

ENGLISH: Help me carry this.

SPANISH: Ayúdeme a cargar esto. (ah-YOU-deh-meh ah kahr-GAHR EHS-toh.)

ENGLISH: Let me help you with that.

SPANISH: Déjeme ayudarle con eso. (DEH-heh-meh ah-you-DAHR-leh kohn EH-soh.)

ENGLISH: We need to mark it with flags.

SPANISH: Debemos marcarlo con banderines. (deh-BEH-mohs mahr-CAR-loh kohn bahn-deh-REE-nehs.)

ENGLISH: We need to remove all rocks.

SPANISH: Debemos remover todas las rocas. (deh-BEH-mohs reh-moh-VEER TOH-dahs lahs RRROH-kahs.)

Considering that a growing number of landscape contractors employ 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 landscape and lawn care professionals, Lawn & Landscape is publishing a few phrases each month in English and Spanish, including a pronunciation guide, courtesy of the book "The Lingo Guide For Landscapers" by E.G. White. To inquire about ordering the book, which costs \$14.95, visit www.lawnandlandscape.com/store or contact the Lawn & Landscape Book Department at 800/456-0707. Got a phrase you need translating? E-mail it to Managing Editor Mike Zawacki at mzawacki@gie.net.



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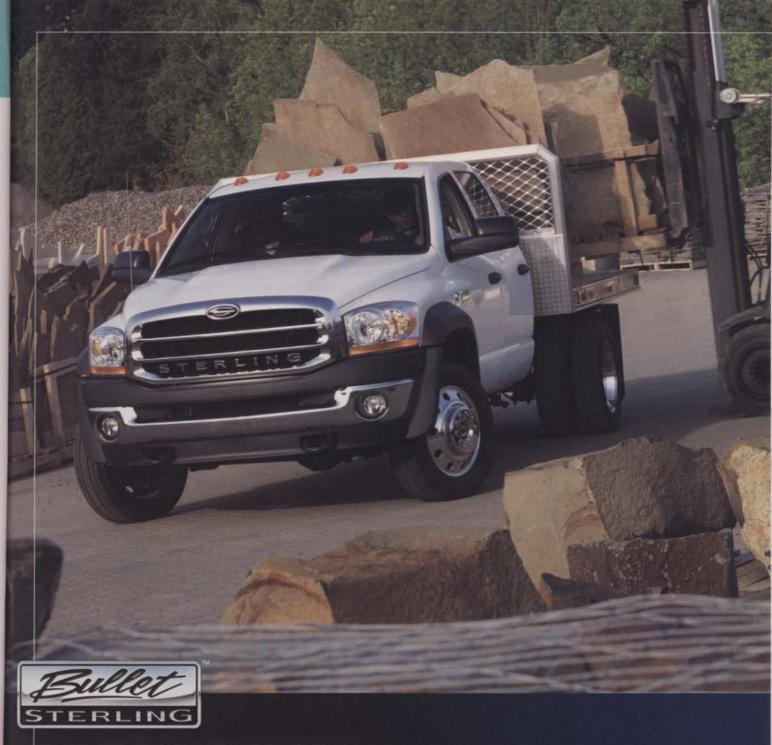
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Housing:

Putting The Brakes On Housing

Homebuilders put the brakes on new-home production in November, which should allow demand for new homes to catch up with supply. Nationwide housing starts declined 3.7 percent to a seasonally adjusted annual rate of 1.19 million units in November, according to the U.S. Department of Commerce. "Working down the inventory of unsold homes is key to returning the housing market to greater health and balance," says Brian Catalde, president of the National Association of Home Builders.

Source: Georgia Center for Urban Agriculture



QUOTABLE:

"This is a frontier that's going to open for the whole country, but especially for us in the Midwest and Northeast, where we need to grow our economy." - Mayor Douglas Palmer, Trenton, N.J.

Palmer was referring to an effort to place low-income and low-skilled workers into "green color" jobs in the \$341-billion-a-year green industry. The U.S. Conference of Mayors is seeking funding from the federal government that would boost green industry job-training.

Source: USA Today



\$33,000

The amount Dallas-based homebuilder Centex. is offering new homeowners per home in free patios, outdoor fireplaces and landscaping as an incentive to buy its homes.

Source: The Financial Times



36 percent

The percentage of recent homebuyers who made improvements to their landscaping shortly after moving in, according to the National Association of Realtors. Another 20 percent plan to upgrade their landscaping within two years of buying a home.

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That Unexpected Something









RICHARD HELLER'S clients want plants that are high impact, low maintenance and provide continuous color. From there, the president of Greener by Design in Pelham, N.Y., considers factors like the home's architecture, the client's vacation schedule and sunlight, soil and drainage conditions to choose the best plant material for each landscape.

Plants that make impacts in Heller's landscapes have interesting textures, unusual shapes and pleasant fragrances. But his most successful landscapes usually have a little extra, unexpected "something." "An interior designer once told me you have to throw in something that seems out of place to truly make a garden work," he says. "It might be an orange flower in a garden of pinks and purples, or a focal point that doesn't relate to the home's architecture – something that makes the viewer aware there is a relationship to everything else."

Above are four plants with colors, shapes, fragrances and sizes to liven up any landscape. **LL**

1. NORTHEAST

Name: 'Black Lace' elderberry Genus: Sambucus nigra USDA Zones: 4 to 7 Plant Type: shrub

- Grows 6 to 8 feet tall, spreads 4 to 5 feet wide
- · Requires sun to partial shade
- Has finely cut, dark purple foliage all season and pink blooms for three to four weeks
- Blooms emit a light lemon fragrance

2. NORTHWEST

Name: 'Summer Wine' ninebark Genus: Physocarpus opulifolius USDA Zones: 3 to 8 Plant Type: shrub

- Grows 5 to 6 feet tall, spreads 4 to 5 feet wide
- · Requires full sun
- Has pinkish-white blooms with dark purple foliage
- · Attracts songbirds

3. SOUTHEAST

Name: 'Pinky Winky' hydrangea Genus: Hydrangea paniculata USDA Zones: 4 to 9 Plant Type: shrub

- Grows 6 to 8 feet tall, spreads
 6 to 8 feet wide
- Requires full sun to partial shade
- Has 12- to 16-inch two-toned, white and pink flowers on red stems
- Blooms regardless of climate, soil, pH or pruning

4. SOUTHWEST

Name: 'Lavender Chiffon' hibiscus Genus: Hibiscus syriacus USDA Zones: 5 to 8

Plant Type: shrub

- Grows 8 to 12 feet tall, spreads 3 to 4 feet wide
- · Requires full sun
- Has large, single lavender-blue flowers and dark green foliage
- Adorned with a lacy center to create an anemone-like bloom

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One Tough Animal

ABOUT THE SERIES

Labor has always been a top challenge for landscape firms. This month, in the first of a threepart Work Force Series, Lawn & Landscape looks at the climate created as a result of an insufficient guest-worker program and a miscellany of new rules and state laws. In March, we take a look at strategies to recruit future leaders. And in April, we'll present a training and retention guide.

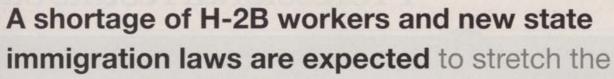
MORE ONLINE

Visit the Work Force www.lawnandlandscape.com for:

- · Seasonal Worker Recruitment Options
- · How to Perform an Internal I-9 Audit
- · Lawn & Landscape's labor
- immigration and all breaking

Illustration: Bill Graham







Over the last eight years, Leahy Landscaping has advertised for a total of 140 seasonal positions. Ten people have applied, all 10 were hired, but none of them showed up for work. "We spend in excess of \$10,000 a year advertising in newspapers and on Monster.com and we get little to no feedback," President Matt Leahy says. Despite his Lynn, Mass.-based company's \$12- to \$20-per-hour wages and excellent benefits package, unemployment rates are historically low and American workers don't want seasonal jobs, he says.

Local workers he does hire turn over quickly or find new jobs in the off season. He's not alone. Lawn $\mathcal E$ Landscape research shows that the average company's American seasonal-worker return rate is only 50 percent from one year to the next.

Faced with either no work force or an illegal one, Leahy Landscaping and thousands of other companies rely on the only legal option for hiring foreign workers – the federal H-2B visa program, which allows nonagricultural guest workers to come to the country for up to 10 months to take seasonal jobs employers prove they can't fill with local workers.

BY MARISA PALMIERI/SENIOR EDITOR

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What is H-2B?

The H-2B program is the only legal foreign worker visa program for nonagricultural employers. Any U.S. employer with a recurring seasonal or peak-load labor need may apply for the program. The government caps the H-2B program at 66,000 annual visas – 33,000 visas for each half of the federal fiscal year (October-March and April-September). In 2005 and 2006, Congress passed a temporary provision (known as the "returning-worker exemption") that allowed workers who participated in the program for any of the three previous years not to count against the cap. The exemption allowed the government to issue 69,320 returning-worker visas in addition to 60,277 new H-2B worker visas for fiscal 2007. Congress has not yet approved the exemption for this year. As a result, it's likely only 66,000 visas will be issued, eliminating an estimated 100,000-plus workers from the labor force.

This year, there's a pretty good chance Leahy won't be able to bring in the 26 workers he planned for. As of press time, Congress has failed to extend a provision that allows returning workers to be exempt from the H-2B program's annual 66,000 visa limit. Unless lawmakers pass the returningworker exemption before the start of the season, Leahy's firm will be a casualty of the cap. With a half-staffed seasonal workforce, Leahy expects his \$7.4-million company to take a several million dollar hit. What's more, Congress' failure to act on this measure threatens to slash the number of visas issued nationally by at least half, removing an estimated 100,000-plus legal workers from the labor pool.

But the H-2B program is just one part of the problem. At the same time, individual states and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) are taking immigration enforcement measures into their own hands, promising to crack down on business owners who hire illegal workers. If enforcement works and employers who previously hired illegal immigrants fire unverified employees, the already sparse legal labor pool – with national unemployment at 5 percent – will dry up.

Some people in the industry may say they're not affected because they don't use the H-2B program or don't hire illegal immigrants, but many people say these issues affect the entire industry.

David Lindoerfer, founder and senior consultant for Inside Out Services, Silver Spring, Md., has an all-legal, all-local workforce, but he still has concerns. "Every small- to medium-size company is scared to death of the Brickmans, ValleyCrests, Rupperts, TruGreens. If those giants can't get their labor supply, we fear they'll go into the smaller companies to find workers, and that will leave us in a hard position," he says.

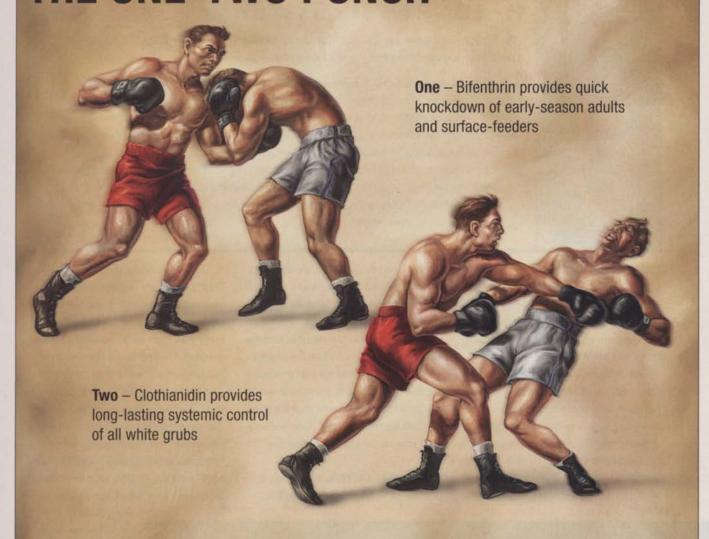
Lindoerfer is right to be uneasy recent Lawn & Landscape research indicates 50 percent of H-2B employers will recruit from their competitors if they aren't able to hire the guest workers they're counting on.

H-2B SHORTFALL. Since the government created the H-2B program in 1990, it's capped the number of visas each year to 66,000, but a provision allowing returning workers to be exempt from counting against the cap has expanded the program over the last few years. The government issued nearly 130,000 H-2B and returning-worker visas in fiscal year 2007, according to preliminary data from the U.S. Department of State.

The returning-worker exemption expired Sept. 30, the day before the start of the federal fiscal year, and Congress has since failed to pass an extension. The annual allotment of 66,000 visas was gobbled up by Jan. 2 – two months earlier than last year. Unless Congress passes the returning-worker exemption early this year, no more visas will be issued and more than half the number of visas issued last year will be eliminated from the labor pool.

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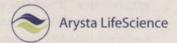


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Harmony In Growth





H-2B Repercussions

The results of a December Lawn & Landscape study show what actions H-2B users will take if they are unable to bring in the workers they planned for:

52% of companies will not purchase equipment/trucks they planned to buy in 2008

50% of companies will recruit employees from their competitors

43% of companies will cancel contracts, refuse business or otherwise stifle growth

36% of companies will raise wages/increase other benefits to better attract seasonal workers

29% of companies will hire workers with potentially fraudulent documents

29% of companies selected "other," which included "lay-off some permanent management level employees," "sell the company and try a different business," "I just don't know what I will do," "not sure yet," "recruit from other sources," "current staff will work longer hours to cover work"

Because even more returning workers would have been permitted in 2008 if Congress approved the returning-worker exemption, some H-2B supporters estimate the number of workers lost to be more than 100,000.

While there is still a chance
Congress could act, the window of opportunity narrows every day for something to happen in time for the start
of the landscape season. "It's unlikely
Congress will do anything substantive
until February, and then they have a
week off during February," says Libby

nesses need to make decisions about equipment and supply orders and bidding on contracts before their seasons begin in February or March. Those decisions depend on the number of field laborers they'll have. Plus, if Congress waits to act until late spring, processing delays at the U.S. consulate would create such a bottleneck that it's likely companies wouldn't get their workers until mid-season, labor agents say.

THE ILLEGAL FACTOR. It's no secret that illegal immigrants work in the

Jim Hawkinson, president of TLC Total Lawn Care in Jacksonville, Fla., estimates the rate of illegal workers in the industry to be much higher – maybe as high as 90 percent in some markets. He points out the common industry practice of hiring "properly documented illegals" – when businesses hire workers they know are illegal if the workers are able to furnish fake versions of the requisite documents. "It's the old 'wink, wink,' they're legal," says Hawkinson, who says he ensures he doesn't hire illegal immigrants by

using E-Verify (formerly known as Basic Pilot), the government's employment eligibility verification system, and relying on the H-2B program. He expects to bring in 30 guest workers this season.

Considering the public attention on

the immigration issue – Gallup polls say it's the fourth most important election issue after Iraq, the economy and health care – and the landscape industry's reputation as being part of the problem, H-2B supporters can't un-

"It's unlikely Congress will do anything substantive until February, and then they have a week off during February. If they wait until March or April, it's basically irrelevant for the landscape industry."

- Libby Whitley, Mid-Atlantic Solutions

Whitley, president of Mid-Atlantic Solutions, an H-2B labor consulting firm based in Lovingston, Va., during a January interview. "If they wait until March or April, it's basically irrelevant for the landscape industry." Landscape busi-

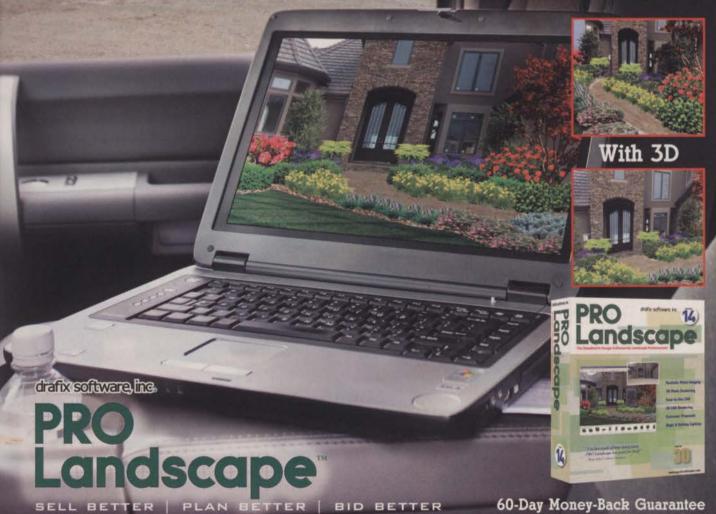
landscape industry. In fact, nearly a quarter of all companies in the industry say they have hired someone they knew or suspected to be an illegal alien, Lawn & Landscape research shows.

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derstand why the government wouldn't quickly extend an existing provision of a program that discourages employing illegal aliens and provides a means for employers to hire workers who are screened by the government, paid prevailing wages and required to return home each year.

But the reasons Congress hasn't passed the H-2B cap-relief fix, and why it's unlikely to pass in 2008, are largely political, H-2B supporters say.

Despite bipartisan, bicameral support for an H-2B returning-worker exemption (introduced in Congress as the Save Small Business Act), with 127 cosponsors in the House and 37 cosponsors in the Senate, the H-2B program's ties to the greater immi-

gration debate are holding the bill hostage, says Tom Delaney, director of government affairs for the Professional Landcare Network (PLANET).

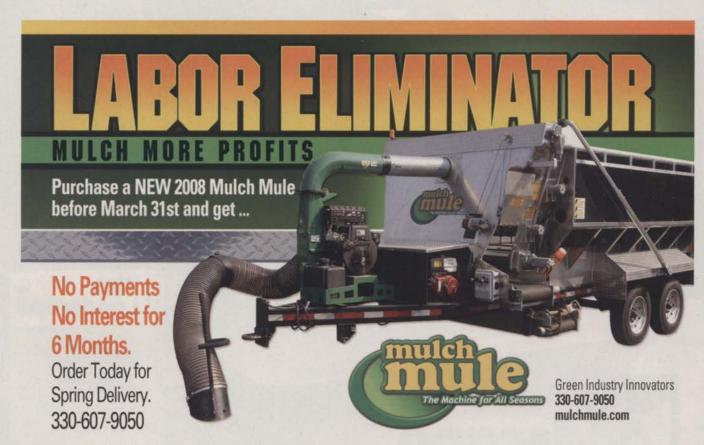
Late last year, Sen. Barbara Mikulski (D-Md.) attached an amendment for a one-year extension of the returning-worker exemption onto an appropriations bill that Congress later wrapped into a spending package and approved with \$7.5 billion in earmarks. But the H-2B fix was stripped out.

The H-2B amendment was blocked largely due to its perception in Washington as an immigration bill and the dissension in Congress after the collapse of a bipartisan comprehensive immigration reform bill last summer.

The Congressional Hispanic Cau-

cus, made up of 24 Democratic House members, has been a primary H-2B opponent, using its power to block an H-2B fix because it only wants to see visa issues taken care of as part of an immigration overhaul, not piece by piece. The caucus believes if business groups have their issues resolved individually, they'll withdraw their support of a comprehensive plan that includes a path toward citizenship for the estimated 12 million illegal immigrants already in the country.

Labor unions and anti-immigration groups also have taken a greater interest in opposing H-2B this year, Delaney says. Unions advocate wage and benefit increases among other changes. Anti-immigration groups



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generally oppose the expansion of all guest worker programs. They say most illegal aliens come to the country legally, but then overstay their visas.

While there is still a chance Congress could act on the returningworker exemption, nothing has changed in the political climate to suggest lawmakers will

be more willing to pass an H-2B fix in early 2008 than they were in late 2007. It's not likely that Congress will pass any major bills that an H-2B amendment could be attached to, and



Labor Woes: By the Numbers

129,547 The number of nonagricultural visas issued in 2007 (60,227 new H-2B visas and 69,320 returning-worker visas).

Source: U.S. Department of State

24 The percent of landscape companies that say they've hired an illegal immigrant.

Source: Lawn & Landscape research

1 The percent of companies nationwide using E-Verify prior to the Arizona law mandating employers use the database went into effect Jan. 1.

Source: Bloomberg

House and Senate leadership likely won't consider an H-2B bill on its own, Delaney says. "There's a good chance there will just be 66,000 [H-2B workers permitted] the next two years."

eyes on enforcement. The chances of a comprehensive immigration reform bill coming to the table aren't promising either, because of the donothing nature of the political system





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during an election cycle. But since
Congress failed to pass last summer's
Bush Administration-backed immigration bill, the Department of Homeland
Security and individual states have
stepped up enforcement of illegal immigration laws. These moves combined with Congressional inaction on
H-2B are expected to further stretch
the legal work force to the limit.

Right now, many eyes are on the states – there are at least 10 of them – that have issued their own, often contradictory, immigration laws. For example, the Arizona Fair and Legal censes of employers who "knowingly" hire illegal immigrants.

Immigration attorney Sean Lewis of Immigration & Naturalization Attorneys, Nashville, Tenn., calls the current patchwork of new laws and regulations "a mess" and warns contractors not to sit back and do things the way they've always done them. In addition to staying up on newly issued state and federal regulations, he encourages companies to perform immediate internal I-9 audits to verify the status of their entire workforce.

Enforcement is up, he says. "[Im-

in Nebraska and Texas.

In addition, DHS continues to pursue a new policy of using the Social Security Administration's nomatch letter program to crackdown on employers. The administration sends no-match letters to employers when the name and Social Security number an employee provided did not match the government's database.

Previously, the government didn't require employers to act upon receiving no-match letters, but DHS issued a rule in August that would require employers to resolve discrepancies

"A lot of companies are still completely complacent with the status quo and are still not worried. They don't believe raids are coming, they still have employees they know aren't verified – everybody's sitting back and waiting. If I had a landscape business, I'd be shaking in my boots."

- Sean Lewis, Immigration & Naturalization Attorneys

Employment Act that went into effect Jan. 1 requires employers to use E-Verify, the government's database for verifying employment eligibility. Conversely, an Illinois state law prohibits employers from using E-Verify.

It's too early to tell the results of the controversial Arizona law that has angered much of the business community and piqued the state chamber of commerce to hold weekly I-9-compliance webcasts.

"There's a lot going on here in Arizona, but not a lot," says Tami Swearingin, co-owner of U.S. Lawns Phoenix. "Everybody's still kind of waiting for things to unfold."

Beyond requiring employers to use E-Verify, the law is a two-strike policy that ultimately revokes the business limigration and Customs Enforcement] is going to hit every industry in every region of the country, and landscaping's up at the top with construction."

You don't have to tell that to Dean Hedges, the owner of a Louisville, Ky., landscape firm who awaits sentencing this month after pleading guilty in October to criminal charges of employing illegal immigrants. Hedges faced up to two years in prison, but after a plea bargain will pay about \$200,000 in fines to avoid jail time, his attorney told BusinessWeek.

ICE immigration-related arrests rose sharply in 2007 with a 21 percent increase in arrests leading to criminal charges and an 11 percent increase in administrative arrests. ICE also has made arrests at landscape companies

within 90 days, fire the employee or face charges.

A lawsuit from civil rights activists and trade groups, including the American Nursery & Landscape Association and the Essential Worker Immigration Coalition, of which PLANET is a member, has held up the rule so far. But DHS has vowed not to drop the issue, only to revise and reissue the rule in March after a small-business analysis.

"It's a new climate we're in," Lewis says. "A lot of companies are still completely complacent with the status quo and are still not worried. They don't believe raids are coming, they still have employees they know aren't verified – everybody's sitting back and waiting. If I had a landscape business, I'd be shaking in my boots." LL



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The Gab Factor

While Lawn & Landscape Message Board participants debate the best way to curb personal cell phone usage on the job, they agree there is such a thing as too much.

Where would we be without cell phones? Some green industry company owners say their businesses would be in a far more productive place without them.

As the portable devices become more ubiquitous, so do personal phone conversations during the work day. Participants on the Lawn & Landscape Message Board have been noticing the upward trend in inappropriate calls on the job. But what should be done about it? "It seems petty because it is one of those things that shouldn't happen, but that is one huge downside to cell phones these days," posts Ryan Holt, owner of Driftwood Lawn Care and Landscape in Rising Sun, Md.

Cellular phones and devices are prevalent tools out in the field. According to recent Lawn & Landscape research, nearly 68 percent of



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contractors say they provide their employees with cell phones or cellular devices. Additionally, the research indicates that 70 percent of contractors provided phones to foremen and supervisors, 56 percent gave them to top level managers and less than 15 percent equipped laborers with cellular devices.

There are no hard and fast rules for cell phone usage, as was evident as message board posters recently grappled with what action to take when employees overuse their phones. To some, it's pretty simple. "You're paying him to work for you, not talk on his phone," writes Daniel Hanson of SCLM Co. in Laverne, Calif.

POOR RECEPTION. One of the biggest problems participants have with cell phone use on the job is that someone could get hurt. Holt talks about it in a practical way. "Do you think you could be responsible for that workman's comp claim?" he posts.

An employee on the phone isn't giving his full attention to the job at hand, which can cause problems. Hanson learned this lesson a few years ago when he and an employee were planting trees on a tight schedule.

"It was this guy's job to be the spotter and make sure the holes were the correct depth and the trees were straight and placed correctly in the holes," he posts. "We had a 96-inch box tree all rigged and hanging in the air and all of a sudden he walks away to go answer the phone because his girlfriend was calling him." The employee was fired that night.

CLEAR SIGNAL. Some message board participants can't comprehend the behavior. "It's a shame they can't respect their employer's needs and therefore choose to disrespect the owner who writes their check," writes Matthew Schattner, owner of Matz Snow & Lawn in Kansasville, Wis.

It's possible the employees don't know what the policy is regarding cell phone use in the field. Whatever the rule is, make sure it's clearly stated.





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Keep the policy in writing in an employee manual, Schattner suggests. Then, if the policy is broken, taking action against the employee is warranted.

Present a letter explaining that cell phone usage is a privilege, says Andrew Garulay, owner of Yarmouthport Design Group in Yarmouthport, Mass. "Define that more than three or four minutes a day is considered abusing the privilege," he says.

Other posters suggest a policy that allows phone usage only during lunch or breaks. Another idea is to tell employees to leave their phones in their cars while they're on the clock. If an emergency arises, family members can call the company's office and the employee will be contacted.

calls ended. Some employers take an indirect route to eradicate the problem. Bill Atwood, owner of Bill's Complete Lawncare and Landscaping in Trumbull, Texas, recently noticed one of his best employees abusing the cell phone privilege. He told the employee he couldn't use his services for a while because work slowed down.

"He has called me every day this week wanting to know if I have something for him," Atwood posts. "I told him yes, but not if you bring your cell phone. He said he would leave his phone at home and would be here at 7:30 a.m."

Cutting the employee's pay is another option, but some say this could lead to more problems. "If you say you will cut pay, you are sort of giving him permission to use his phone and he will figure that if he is getting paid less he has a right to waste time talking on his phone," writes Chad Stern, owner of Mowing & More in Chevy Chase, Md.

Others don't tiptoe around the issue. "I'd can him," says Terry Duran, owner of Preferred Property Maintenance in Fremont, Calif., describing what he would do if one of his employees spent too much time on personal calls.

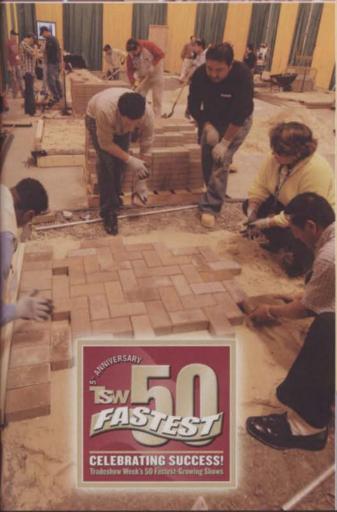
Garulay, though, would give employees another chance before sending them packing.

"Present him with a letter of warning," he says. "The second time, do a final warning letter. Can him the third time." **LL**











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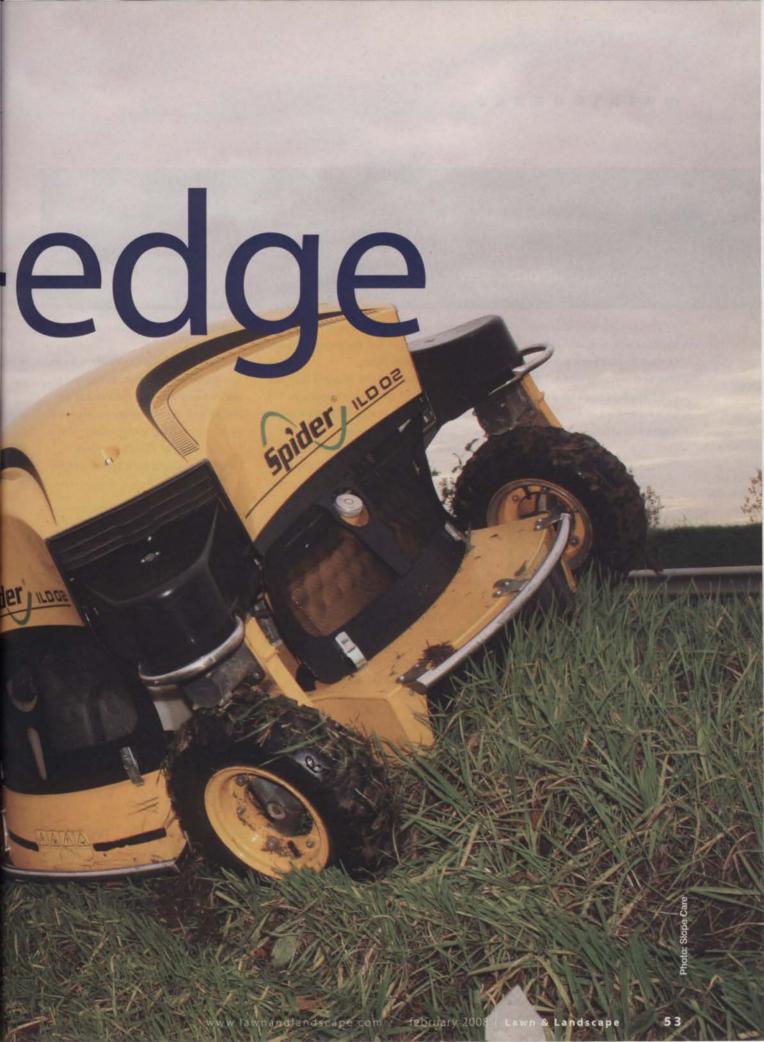
What's in the cards for mower technology? Both contractors and manufacturers have their sights on autonomous driving, GPS capabilities and alternative fuels.

BY MARISA PALMIERI/SENIOR EDITOR

Coming off trade show season, there's no doubt landscape company owners are thinking about the latest technology offered in the mowing world. The Lawn & Landscape staff was impressed by the offerings it saw last fall at the GIE+EXPO – one of the industry's largest trade shows. Afterward, we contacted mower makers around the country to see what secrets they would share about what the market can expect by 2020.

So, what's on the horizon? In addition to a heavy emphasis on alternative fuel sources, manufacturers suggest that remote-controlled, GPS-enabled and robotic mowers soon may be on their way.

OPERATOR REQUESTS. Features that maintain or improve the quality of cut while minimizing the labor associated with mower operation, transportation and maintenance top the list of many contractors' requests.



"I hope the drive systems will be programmable, by configuring the mower to the yard that needs to be mowed so the mower's robotics will mow the yard exactly to your configurations, saving money on labor." - Keith Wiggins, Wiggins Lawn Care

This trend focuses on the costs associated with a mower over its lifetime, not just its purchase price. "The total cost of ownership extends out to the costs involved in owning the contractor's entire fleet of equipment - do the mowers use the same parts or do they each require different components. how many mowers can fit in one

trailer, and so on," says Ross Hawley, marketing product manager for Toro, Bloomington, Minn.

Contractor Keith Wiggins likes the total cost of ownership approach. "I'd like to see more emphasis on a mower that can do it all and last," says the owner of Wiggins Lawn Care in Cedar Rapids, lowa. "The amount of maintenance required on mowers is time consuming."

Brian Elliot, owner of Elliot's Lawn Service in Warsaw, Ind., would like to see mowers' maintenance needs decrease and dependability increase all while maintaining a high-quality cut.

At the top of Elliot's "perfect mower" list would be a lighter weight



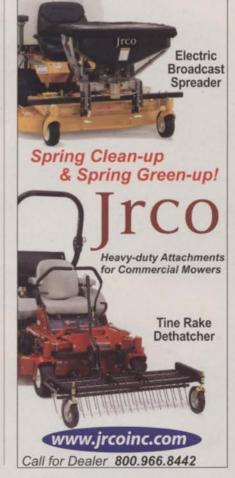
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maintenance

mower (half the current weight of a typical rider) with more evenly dispersed weight to prevent tire marks, a durable finish kit, excellent curb-climbing abilities and flat-proof tires that "don't weigh more than the mower."

PRODUCTIVITY. Maintenance firms' time-is-money mentality drives the advancements manufacturers are bringing to the market. For example, landscape business owners seek safety, ergonomic, comfort and fatigue-

reduction features to improve uptime.

Improved, unobtrusive roll-over protection systems are an advancement contractors can expect, says

Mark Pavcik, group product manager

– professional mowing at John Deere,
Cary, N.C.

Operator interfaces will be more easily accessible over the next decade, says Sean Dwyer, product manager at Coffeyville, Kan.-based Dixon. Zeroturn mowers will likely have handlemounted controls, he says.

In addition, contractors can expect electronic interfaces that deliver safety warnings and conduct diagnostic checks, says Mark Woodlief, product manager for Charlotte, N.C.-based Husqvarna Turf Care.

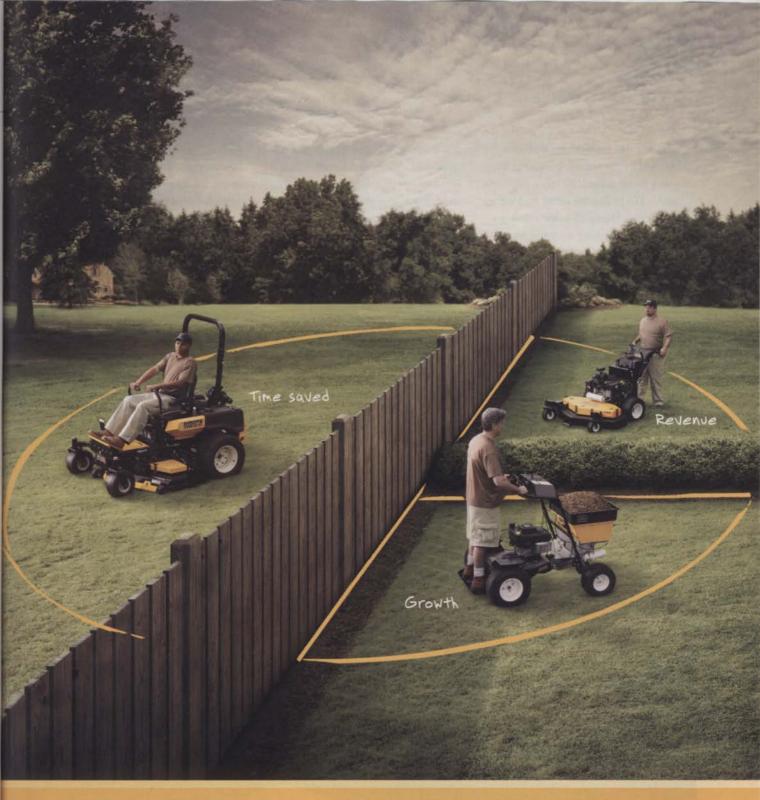
One productivity-related factor contractors and manufacturers alike focus on is speed. Many machines on the market already claim high ground speeds, Dwyer says, but such speeds can affect cut quality. He expects manufacturers to work on achieving faster cutting speeds with acceptable cut quality, but he doesn't see cutting speed exceeding around 12 miles per hour or transport speeds topping 20 miles per hour.

Speed likely will remain where it is today, says Dick Tegtmeier, CEO for Beatrice, Neb.-based Encore Power Equipment, adding speed depends on the tip speed of the blade, which is regulated by the government under the ANSI safety standards. Unless that changes, Tegtmeier doesn't see a great increase in cut speeds.

But speed isn't the only key to improving productivity, manufacturers point out. Jimmy Eavenson, chief engineer for Valley City, Ohio-based Cub Cadet Commercial, says mowers will include more non-grass-cutting attachments and application equipment, such as sprayers and spreaders.

Small businessmen like Wiggins,





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who has five employees, welcome this advancement. He's eager to see more mowers that "do more than one job" – like collecting grass and leaves, wet or dry. "More and more customers ask for bagging, so if the stand-on mowers can bag better, they will have a competitive edge," he says.

Elliot agrees, adding: "Disposal of clippings is one of the biggest pains we deal with. It would be nice to mulch all yards, but as long as people don't want their kids and dogs tracking clippings into their homes, we'll be bagging and dumping." In response, Elliot would like to see improved bagging systems that reduce clogging and allow for easy disposal.

Mowers that automatically ad-

just from side to rear discharge with improved mulching and collecting features are on the horizon, says Roy Dust, product specialist for Munnsville, N.Y.-based Ferris Industries. That's good news for Elliot, who would like to see a simple, operator-controlled discharge shoot with no handles or levers sticking out.

A focus on creating operator efficiencies is more likely than just increasing ground speed, says Ruthanne Stucky, marketing director for Moundridge, Kan.-based Grasshopper. She foresees GPS applications playing a role here, potentially in determining the most efficient mowing pattern to save time.

Husqvarna's Woodlief predicts

GPS systems may offer productivity tracking systems, allowing operators to more accurately quote jobs and optimize mowing, too.

Wiggins is hoping for such advanced technology by 2020. "I hope the drive systems will be programmable, by configuring the mower to the yard that needs to be mowed so the mower's robotics will mow the yard exactly to your configurations, saving money on labor."

Drive-by-wire technology, if it becomes affordable, is a possibility, too, says Jim Velke, product design engineer for Frederich, Md.-based Wright Manufacturing.

Autonomous driving, GPS navigation and self-adjusting decks are in

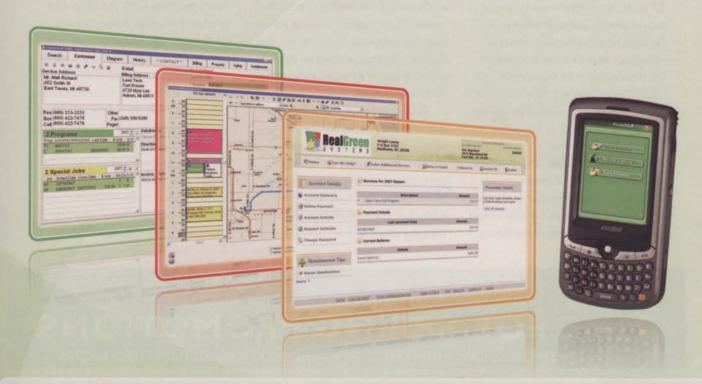


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the cards, says Daniel Bertou of Slope Care, which distributes a remote-controlled slope mower.

"While no one can honestly predict what will develop in the next 12 years, we envision a very similar mower design, but with some sort of George Jetson factor beginning to show up," says Eric Bernsee, public relations director for Coatesville, Ind-based Dixie Chopper. "But then again, weren't we all supposed to be driving flying cars by now?"

FUELING THE FUTURE. With propane and biodiesel-ready mowers already available, the greatest change industry members foresee is in the type of fuel that will power mowers in the future.

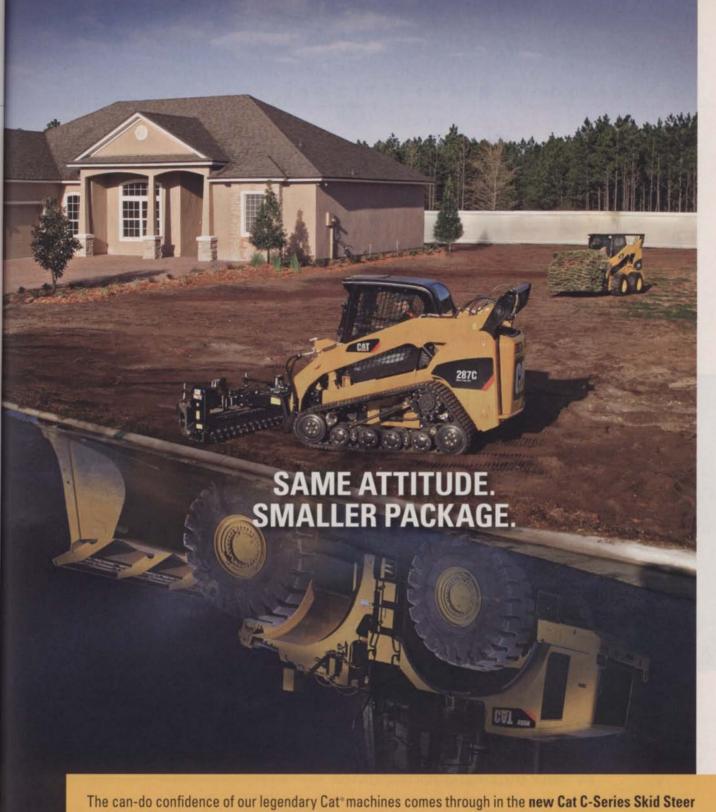
The financial reasons for moving away from gas-powered equipment is one incentive, but Adam Mullet, product manager for Hesston, Kan.-based Hustler Turf Equipment, sees emissions restrictions adding to advancements. "Gas-powered mowers will need to make many changes over the next decade," he says, adding he doesn't see propane or ethanol as viable long-term solutions.

Potential fuels are wide-ranging – propane, electric, biodiesel, ethanol. In fact, hydrogen fuel cell-powered mowers aren't out of the question, says Jeremy Hahne, vice president of marketing for Onyx Solutions in Cornelius, N.C., which manufacturers propane mowers.

One thing's certain, whatever fuel proliferates will depend on access. "Different fuel options will be available, but how far that goes will be somewhat limited by the supply of those fuel types," says Jeff Hebbard, vice president of value stream operations for Brillion, Wis.-based Gravely. "Until certain fuel types are readily accessible by the average consumer, the changes will not become mainstream. However, I think it's safe to say things will move pretty fast."

Elliot knows mowers will be running on a different fuel source in 12 years. "Pick your poison," he says, adding a wink and a nudge to manufacturers: "Wouldn't it be nice if we could use grass clippings?" **LL**





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TODAY'S WORK. TOMORROW'S WORLD."



Lawn care operators rely on springtime weed control programs to get clients' lawns in shape.

BY EMILY MULLINS/ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Weeds are a challenge for all LCOs, but every region has some that are more difficult to control than others. To get the most from their spring weed control program, LCOs need to know what they're dealing with and find the products that work best for them. According to Lawn & Landscape research, 60 percent of contractors offer weed control services, which comprise 11 percent of their annual sales. When done right, weed control can be a profitable service that leaves clients' lawns green and ready for spring.

THE TIME IS RIGHT. Weeds are a year-round battle for Blake Crawford, CEO of Crawford Landscaping in Naples, Fla. The Sunshine State's warm, humid weather provides excellent growing conditions for

continued on page 68, chart on pages 66, 67



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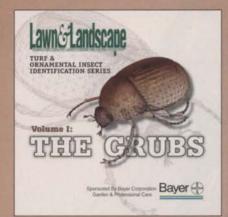
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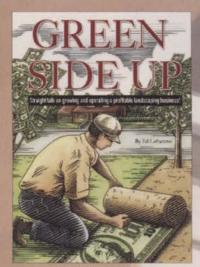


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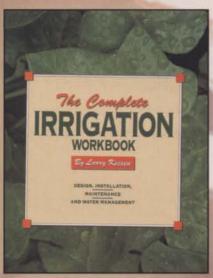
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pesticides & fertilizers

NAME	TYPE	DESCRIPTION	ACTIVITY
SPOTTED SPURGE	Annual broadleaf	Has leaves with a purplish spot, produces milky sap	Grows in summer
WHITE CLOVER	Perennial broadleaf	Spreads by creeping stems, forms patches, has white blooms	Flowers May through September
SPEEDWELL	Perennial broadleaf	Has creeping stems, opposite leaves and small blue or white flowers	Germinates in midfall
COMMON	Perennial broadleaf	Has blue or purple flowers and heart-shaped leaves	Flowers March to June
GOOSEGRASS	Annual grassy	Has a flat rosette of tough stems with a white center	Seeds in early spring/summer
CRABGRASS	Annual grassy	Is coarse-bladed and yellow-green in color	Thrives in hot, wet conditions
HENBIT	Annual broadleaf	Has square stems with light purple trumpet- shaped flowers	Grows in early spring
YELLOW FOXTAIL	Annual grassy	Resembles crabgrass, but is more upright and produces fuzzy seedheads	Thrives in new turf
YELLOW NUTGRASS/ NUTSEDGE	Perennial grassy	Is grass-like with shiny, stiff, upright, yellow- green leaves	Grows vigorously in summer
DANDELION	Biennial/perennial broadleaf	Bright yellow blossoms with fluffy seedheads	Thrives in thin lawns
DALLISGRASS	Perennial grassy	Coarse, yellow-green clump grasses	Grows in warm temperatures
COMMON	Annual broadleaf	Is mat-forming with tiny star-shaped white flowers	Thrives in spring and fall

1000	COMMON CONTROLS	PROMINENT AREA	IMAGE
	Dithiopyr, 2,4-D, MCPP, dicamba, glyphosate, prodiamine, pendimethalin, fluroxypyr	Eastern U.S. as well as California, Oregon and Washington	出海沙
	Glufosinate ammonium, dithiopyr, 2,4-D, MCPP, dicamba, glyphosate, fluroxypyr	Throughout the U.S.	
	Dithiopyr, 2,4-D, MCPP, dicamba, glyphosate, pendimethalin, fluroxypyr	Throughout the U.S.	
	Dithiopyr, 2,4-D, MCPP, dicamba, MCPA, triclopyr, glyphosate, 2,4-D free amine, fluroxypyr	Throughout the U.S., except for the Rocky Mountains	
	Fenoxaprop-ethyl, glufosinate ammonium, dithiopyr, glyphosate, prodiamine, pendimethalin	Southern U.S.	
	Fenoxaprop-ethyl, glufosinate ammonium, dithiopyr, glyphosate, prodiamine, pendimethalin, quinclorac	Throughout the U.S.	
	Dithiopyr, 2,4-D, MCPP, dicamba, MCPA, triclopyr, glyphosate, prodiamine, 2,4-D free amine, pendimethalin, fluroxypyr	Eastern U.S.	
	Fenoxaprop-ethyl, pendimethalin, glufosinate ammonium, dithiopyr, glyphosate, prodiamine	Throughout the U.S.	
	Fenoxaprop-ethyl, glufosinate ammonium, dithiopyr, glyphosate, halosulfuron- methyl, sulfentrazone	Throughout North America	
	2,4-D, MCPP, dicamba, MCPA, triclopyr, fluroxypyr, glyphosate	Throughout the U.S.	* * *
	Fenoxaprop-ethyl, glufosinate ammonium, dithiopyr, glyphosate, MSMA	Southern U.S.	
	Dithiopyr, 2,4-D, MCPP, dicamba, glyphosate, pendimethalin, fluroxypyr	Throughout North America except for the far west	

Photo: Spotted Surge - L. Sosnoskie. University of Georgia | Bugwood.org

Photo: White Clover - C. Evans, River to River CWMA | Bugwood.org

Photo: Speedwell - M.E. Harte I Bugwood.org

Photo: Common Violet - Mary Ellen (Mel) Harte I Bugwood.org

Photo: Goose Grass - R. Old, XID Services, Inc. I Bugwood.org

Photo: Crabgrass - L. Sosnoskie, University of Georgia i Bugwood.org

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Photo: Yellow Foxtail - L. Sosnoskie, University of Georgia | Bugwood.org

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Photo: Dandelion - M.E. Harte I Bugwood.org

Photo: Dallingrass - J.D. Syrd, Mississippi State University i Bugwood.org

Photo: Chickweed - J.D. Byrd, Mississippi State Universit I Bugwood.org

*Sources: University of Delaware College of Agriculture & Natural Resources, Virginia Tech

pesticides & fertilizers

continued from page 62

common weeds like pennywort, match weed, yellow and purple nutsedge, kyllinga and, perhaps the most difficult to control, crabgrass. "Up North, cold weather might knock out some weed populations each year, but down here they just continue to reproduce," he says. "We have to constantly be on our A-game to keep them under control."

Chris Paisley, turf manager and weed control specialist for Mariani Landscape, Lake Bluff, Ill., says crabgrass, common violet, henbit, chickweed, shepherds purse, dandelion and white clover cause the most problems in his neck of the woods. Unlike in the South, weeds are primarily a springtime problem in the Midwest.

In Rhode Island, chickweed,

knotweed, dandelions, violets and, occasionally, speedwell are problematic springtime weeds, says Mike Rovinski, lawn care operations manager at ProScape Landscape Management, East Greenwich. For Chris Peppers, maintenance manager for Frontier Landscaping, Vancouver, Wash., grassy weed problems include barnyard grass, Poa annua, Poa tribulus and goosegrass. Broadleaf weed problems include dandelion, spurge, oxalis, clover, buttercup and some chickweed that usually spreads from beds.

Crabgrass is arguably the most prevalent springtime weed regardless of region, says Kyle Miller, senior market development specialist, BASF Professional Turf and Ornamentals, Research Triangle Park, N.C. Prominent broadleaf weeds include chickweed in the South and South Central, clover in the North, South and West, henbit in the South and dandelion pretty much everywhere, he adds.

Generally Crawford's technicians spot-check client properties for broadleaf and grassy weed problems every eight weeks. When treating crabgrass, timing is an important factor because the most effective treatments take place prior to seed germination. The best application window in Naples is February for preemergent treatments and November for postemergent treatments, Crawford says.

Mariani Landscape's spring weed control program begins the first or

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second week of April, depending on winter's duration. The company's three-man crew begins spot treatments with preemergent and postemergent herbicides in mid to late spring. Fertilizer with preemergent herbicide is applied in early April to suppress crabgrass, and broadleaf weeds are selectively sprayed in late spring to control emerging annual and perennial weeds, Paisley says.

Proscape's technicians generally begin applying weed control in mid-May, but it's really weather specific. "If it warms up by early May and weeds pop up, we'll begin earlier," Rovinski says. Their weed control program is usually over by late November when weeds go dormant, but the weather can affect that date by a week or two.

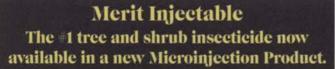
At Frontier Landscape, blanket preemergent applications take place in February and September to control grassy weeds. Broadleaf weeds are spot treated during regularly scheduled maintenance visits beginning in April and wrapping up in October. "Weather plays the biggest factor in our weed control program," Peppers says. "We get so much rain here – it affects everything from when we can treat to the products we use."

Timing is important for all LCOs and their weed control programs,
Miller says. "The best time to control broadleaf weeds is in the fall, but that's not when homeowners are most concerned with weeds," he says. "They

get concerned in the spring when everyone is wound up about their lawn."

Fall is also a popular time of year for reseeding and overseeding, processes that can be stifled by herbicide applications. This is why many contractors postpone postemergent applications until spring. "The turf has to be mature enough to tolerate herbicide applications," Miller says. "Once the weather warms up, lawn care operators should make one full application of a postemergent and then spot treat the weeds that escaped." LL

Log onto lawnandlandscape.com for more information on spring weed control programs.



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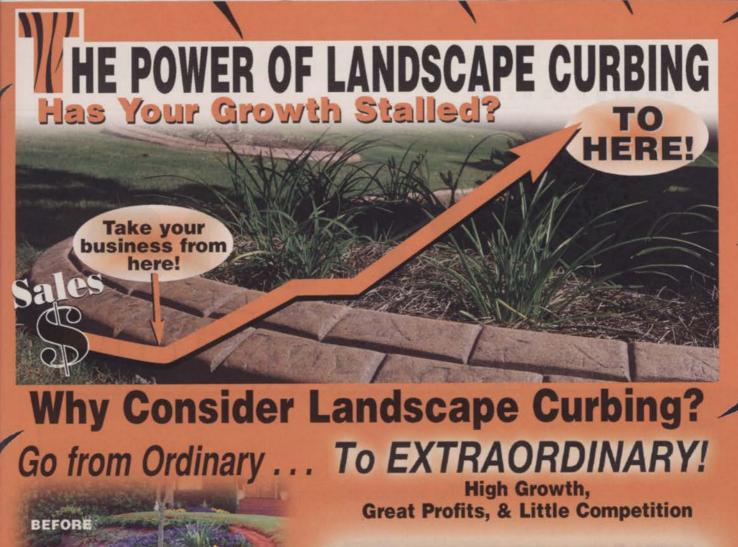
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A look at two white-board driven scheduling systems

that help contractors stay on track.

BY MARISA PALMIERI/SENIOR EDITOR

Whether it's Mother Nature's wrath or customers who add last-minute pergolas to their patios, unpredictable forces can wreak havoc on a landscape company's installation schedule.

When companies are small, it may not be too taxing to facilitate communications between owners, crews and clients. But as firms grow, these tasks get tougher.

Don't fret, seasoned contractors say. An organized, systemized scheduling process allows companies to minimize the internal battles that take place while meeting production requirements and – most importantly – customers' expectations. "You can design and install the most magnificent landscape, but if you didn't satisfy your customer's expectation of completion, you have not done your job properly," says Scott Parker, president of Parker Homescape, Fanwood, N.J. "Learn from your mistakes and make it a priority to meet your deadlines. It can mean the difference between being labeled an average company vs. a stellar company in the eyes of your customers."

Lawn & Landscape takes a look at two firms' systems for ensuring their work stays on track.

Eight-Week Scheduling Board WinnScapes, Gahanna, Ohio

At WinnScapes, a 15- by 5-foot dry erase board – known simply as "The Board" – is the company's installation-scheduling bible.

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design/build

"We've looked at some of the other scheduling programs to adapt into Outlook, but with our size and amount of work, we've deemed our dry erase board the most beneficial," says Clark Morris, president of the \$3-million, full-service company.

The board, which hangs on a wall in the company's conference room, covers an eight-week period. It lists crews vertically along the left-hand side and dates across the top. The job name and production hours (based on 10-hour days) are listed in each cell. Maintenance and lawn care jobs are listed on the board, too.

"The benefit of the board is it's so large scale-wise that if you have to make a move it's easy to see what the consequences are," says Dale Shuler, landscape design/sales representative.

The board was developed nearly a decade ago when WinnScapes transformed from a maintenance-only company to a full-service firm. "As we broke into design/build, we needed an intact system for scheduling," Morris says. The board started with just a month's worth of jobs listed, but as the business grew with the purchase of

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The staff at WinnScapes takes a photo of "The Board" before they erase and update it every six weeks. "It's just nice to refer back to if we need to," says Clark Morris, company president. Photo: WinnScapes

additional jobs on its "wait list" – a list on the side of the main board that details the backlog of each salesman's jobs. Every six weeks the production manager, who's the only person allowed to make schedule changes, does a "board move," and adds new jobs from the wait list.

Another feature: each job is color coded by salesman. Because each salesman is required to be on the production site when the crew arrives every day, this color coding system makes it easy to see where the sales staff is deployed every morning.

Change orders are the second biggest scheduling challenge after

externally, Shuler says.

An account adjustment form helps ensure good internal change-order communications. Even for minor changes, the salesman completes an account adjustment form, which he gets the client to sign before turning it over to the production manager. That evening, the production manager evaluates the schedule and makes any necessary adjustments.

In addition, the production manager is able to track and account for typical job delays because he visits every job site two times per day to stay in contact with crews.

The first thing in the morning, the

production manager updates the sales team on any changes to the schedule and the salesmen contact their clients if their project start dates have changed.

"Keeping our clients up to date on the schedule is a major

factor in keeping them happy," Morris says. "Communication between production and sales staff is the key component, followed up by communication with your clients."

"We've looked at some of the other scheduling programs to adapt into Outlook, but with our size and amount of work, we've deemed our dry erase board most beneficial." - Clark Morris, WinnScapes

design/build firm Schmidt Nursery in 1999, so did the need for an extended, eight-week scheduling system. More than two months is difficult to manage, Morris says, so the company logs weather, Morris and Shuler say, and they occur in about 50 percent of jobs and can affect all projects in line. The key to smooth changes is excellent communication, both internally and



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USE READER SERVICE # 65

design/build

Job-Stage Tracker Parker Homescape, Fanwood, N.J.

Parker Homescape also uses a whiteboard grid system to stay on track. The 3- by 4-foot board is prominently posted in the conference room so anyone in the office can see where every job stands.

Typically, eight jobs - one per design/build crew - are listed on the board, though this may vary if multiple crews are deployed to one large job.

The scheduling manager controls the board; she lists project names down the left side and tracks the projects with color-coded dots to show where they stand. Various stages in the process are listed across the top they include signed contract, deposit, "before" picture, start date, final payment, subcontractor paid, "after" picture and gift basket.

The system has helped the company become confident enough to put a start date and completion date on every contract, Parker says, noting the contract includes a clause protecting the company from hold-ups like weather, lack of site access or any

other circumstances out of its control. "We have never had a problem other than natural events occurring, which most customers understand aren't controllable," Parker says.

Because it's mandatory that residential clients be home on their start dates, it's especially important that salesmen keep customers in the loop. "We are conscientious of the fact that our customers take days off from work and are making a substantial investment in their properties," Parker says. "Our salesmen are constantly in contact with our customers."

Even so, change orders are a challenge, Parker adds. Even a minor addition to a project can push back other projects in the pipeline. Because of the company's focus on meeting the start date listed on a contract, it will usually only add to a current project if it doesn't inconvenience the customers in line who have already been given start dates. Parker says: "Most homeowners are very understanding when we nicely explain that we will be more than happy to add to their project after we complete the projects that already have a start date." LL



Color-coded dots on Parker Homescape's job-tracking board show progress, problems, change orders and completion. Photo: Parker Homescape



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One Florida irrigation contractor drives business by empowering customers and educating contractors.

BY MARISA PALMIERI/SENIOR EDITOR

With Florida and much of the Southeast in a drought,

unruly irrigation systems that spray down sidewalks are no longer acceptable. Water restrictions are a reality, and in many cases, landscapes are suffering as a result.

But they don't have to suffer, says Craig Borglum, owner of IrrigationRepair. com, an Orlando area irrigation installation and maintenance firm. Well-informed customers understand that efficient irrigation systems can get the job done within the constraints of many areas' water restrictions. And when well educated,



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well trained irrigation professionals deliver healthy plants with efficient irrigation systems, it's better for the entire green industry.

"If you're only allowed to water one day a week, you're going to need a more efficient system than if you could just blast water all over your yard anytime you wanted to," Borglum says. "[Water restrictions] are going to require contractors who are more educated to install better systems so that they use less water while still doing an adequate job of providing water to plants."

Borglum, a 30-year-veteran of the irrigation industry who holds Irrigation Association certifications in contracting, design and auditing, is dedicated to educating both contractors and homeowners though various mediums about how they can do their part.

INFORMING CLIENTS. Borglum is a fan of creating informed consumers. "I like to empower homeowners with information so they can do some things themselves," he says, referring to adjusting controllers and sprinkler heads and making minor repairs. "When you do that, and then they have a more difficult problem and need a repair technician, you'll be the person they go to."

Several years ago, Borglum produced a how-to irrigation repair DVD to foster homeowner education. But more recently, he realized there weren't enough easily accessible resources out there about irrigation repair for homeowners or green industry professionals, so he decided to provide more information on his Web site through a blog and expert articles.

This summer, after becoming a partner in the Environmental Protection Agency's WaterSense program, a consumer awareness initiative, he conducted a series of free local seminars to spread his water-saving message. "I think people need to be aware of just how critical the water resources are becoming," he says. "That's why the WaterSense program is a great idea, because irrigation is definitely moving toward, 'How do we do more with

DIY SEO

Though Craig Borglum claims he's not a "tech guy," he has to give himself some credit for his Web site's excellent search engine optimization (SEO) results. He optimized his irrigation maintenance firm's site, www.irrigationrepair. com, to show up on the first page of any Google search for



"irrigation repair" or "sprinkler repair" – even without any local terms included. Though he says SEO isn't easily explained and is "something you kind of get the hang of," he offers some tips for other companies looking to improve their search engine rankings.

- Understand keywords. Keyword search tools like www.wordtracker.com, a site that helps Web site owners identify keywords relevant to their business, are a good place to start.
- Use SEO software to your advantage. Borglum likes the program SEO Doc (www.instantposition.com/seodoc.htm). Though it won't skyrocket your site to the top of Google, it's a tool professionals can use to understand header tags, keyword saturation and other SEO components.
- Get links. "Google is set up as a Democratic Internet voting system," Borglum says. "The more fingers pointing to you, the more important you're deemed to be." He posts videos on YouTube and similar sites and is sure to include his URL in the videos. Search engines can read that text, which helps his rankings. The content on his blog boosts his site's results too. Social bookmarking also helps boost rankings. The site www.socialmarker.com can help your link get indexed by Google and get a lot of backlinks, Borglum says.



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irrigation

less?' We can't be watering sidewalks or spraying water all over the place any time we want anymore. Even if water was cheap, it's still going to go away."

Borglum posted videos of these

seminars on his company's Web site, as well. With the advent of broadband Internet, so many people are searching for videos, how-to information and answers online, he says, pointing to the overwhelming success of YouTube.

Though Borglum says it's difficult to quantify just how much, he knows all of his Web efforts - the blog, seminars and video - drive business. "It just makes you an authority on what you're speaking about and it makes people more comfortable about calling you up for repairs," he says. "They can check you out online before they pick up the phone. That's the greatest advantage to having a good online presence." About 50 percent of Borglum's customers have visited his Web site before hiring him, he says, crediting his strong search engine results (see "DIY SEO" on page 80).

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Craig Borglum, Irrigationrepair.
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gest education undertaking yet is a new Web site, www.irrigationTV.com - what he calls "the YouTube for irrigation." In addition to how-to videos for homeowners, the site has a portal for landscape and irrigation professionals. Some features are free; others are subscription-based. Daily, monthly and annual memberships are available.

The site may be of particular inter-

est to lawn maintenance professionals who are looking to add irrigation repair to their businesses, as the professional videos are aimed at both the technical side and the business side of irrigation repair.

"Everything these days is about accessing information instantaneously, and I'm trying to be on the front end of that for the irrigation industry," Borglum says. As such, he envisions irrigation professionals calling up the troubleshooting videos on their Internet-ready smartphones while they're on the job site.

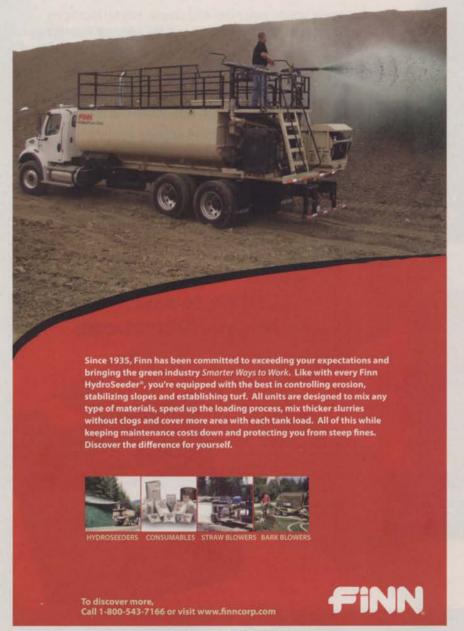
The site's business-related videos teach Borglum's pricing model, the gist of which is avoiding a simple "labor plus materials" price structure.

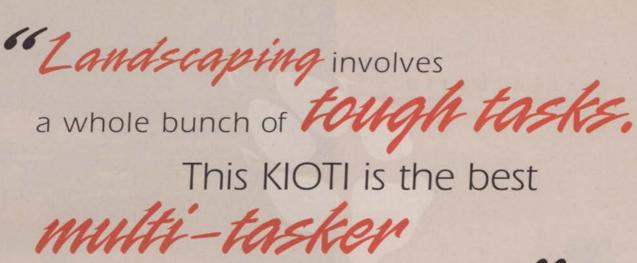
"Are you making \$100-plus per man hour?" a teaser on the site touts. "If you're not making this kind of cash, than you have come to the right place."

Irrigation maintenance profits lie in the labor charge, Borglum notes. Over the years, he's learned that charging flat-rate repair fees is more appealing to customers. "If you tell customers you're going to charge them \$70 an hour plus parts, they think that's a lot of money because they're not in business," he says. Instead, he advises contractors to charge flat rates for the repairs they need. "You just tell them flat out that to replace a rotor it's \$40, parts and labor included, to replace this pipe will cost \$50, parts and labor included. People seem to like that better than if you just tell them it's \$85 an hour plus parts."

Borglum came to his prices after a summer of conducting time trials. After defining production rates he was comfortable with and knowing he needs to make \$100 an hour to be profitable, he was able to determine a fixed price for each service. He added a buffer of about 10 percent and adjusts his prices as needed. **LL**

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ZHZE

Test the waters and learn your clients' likes and

dislikes before settling on a water feature design.

BY EMILY MULLINS/ASSOCIATE EDITOR

It might not seem as if a client's favorite hobby would have any correlation to a water feature's design. But it's a question Sherry Koontz asks during client consultations. Other probing questions include how much time clients spend outdoors and, simply, why they want a water feature. "We ask our clients about things that are important to them," says the president of Carolina Pondscapes in Thomasville, N.C. "They are the ones who are going to look at the feature everyday, so we want to create something they'll love."

According to 2007 Lawn & Landscape research, 36 percent of contractors

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offer water feature installation, and 13 percent plan to offer the service this year. While a contractor's artistic talents are an important part of a successful water feature design, knowing what a client really wants is essential before the first stone is set. Natural or formal, Japanese or English, fish or no fish - a water feature's options are endless and it's up to contractors to let their clients know what's available. "The key to making sure there are no problems with a design at the end is to understand what clients are looking for from the beginning," Koontz says. "Communication is so important."

SELECTING A STYLE. When it comes to water features, many clients figure

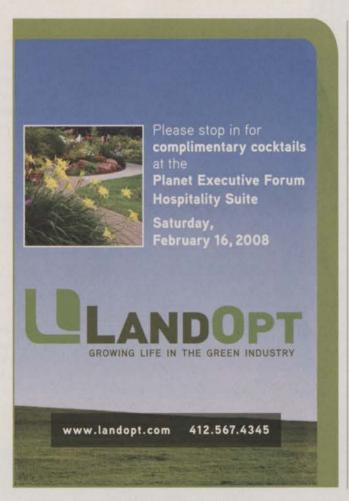
out what they want by first determining what they don't want, Koontz says. "Most clients have a general idea if they want their water feature to appear more formal or more natural, but most don't know specifics like sizes, and types of rock and plant material," she says. "They don't know what all is available to them."

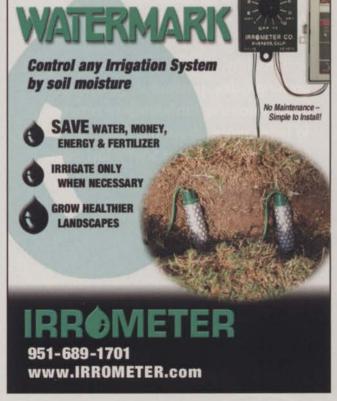
To get things rolling, Koontz sends a 14-question survey, or "inspiration sheet," to the home of potential clients interested in a water feature, which they complete at their leisure. The form asks basic questions, like what the client expects out of their feature and the type of feature they're interested in. It also discusses property logistics, like if electrical sources are

near the feature's chosen location and any potential drainage problems. And, of course, it has space for the client to discuss their budget.

By sending the form to a client's home, they have time to really
think about the answers and discuss
them with their spouse, Koontz says.
Depending on how quickly they want
an estimate, most clients take about a
week to fill out and return the form. In
the meantime, Koontz directs homeowners to the company's Web site to
get ideas from its online portfolio, and
also sends them to local water features
to see them firsthand.

Brad Augustian also sends his clients a "design goals" questionnaire prior to an on-site survey. This helps





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Water Waste

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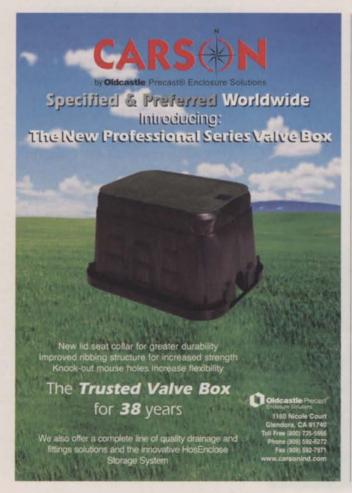
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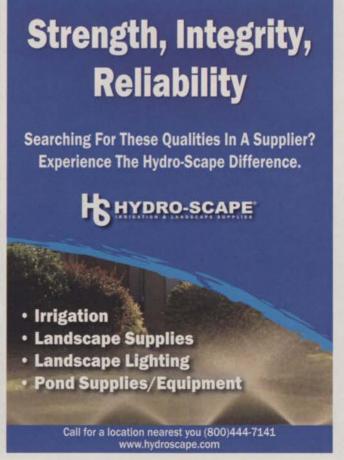
the president of Lizer Landscape & Nursery, Green Bay, Wis., his three landscape designers and its landscape architect determine how the client intends to use the pond. "Just as every pond is different, every customer has different expectations as to the ponds function," he says. "Some are interested in easy access to feeding their fish, while others focus on the sights and sounds of the falls and stream. The questionnaire helps keep the focus on the intended scope of the project."

Pictures are worth a thousand words when choosing a water feature design, says David Kelly, vice president of product management, Aquascape, Batavia, Ill. He suggests contractors create a portfolio of past projects to show clients what they're capable of doing. "Homeowners' biggest challenge is artistic vision – they often have a difficult time expressing what they want and understanding what the finished project will look like," Kelly says. "With visual examples clients can say 'I like the pond from this feature, the stones from this feature and the waterfall from this feature,' which contractors can refer to later."

Once Koontz receives the questionnaire, she schedules a face-to-face consultation at the client's home. This interaction helps her get to know the client on a more personal level and determine their future plans for the feature. How do they plan to use the feature – for entertainment, relaxation? How often do they plan to use it and when? "Talking to people makes a huge difference and really helps me get a good idea of their long-term plans," Koontz says.

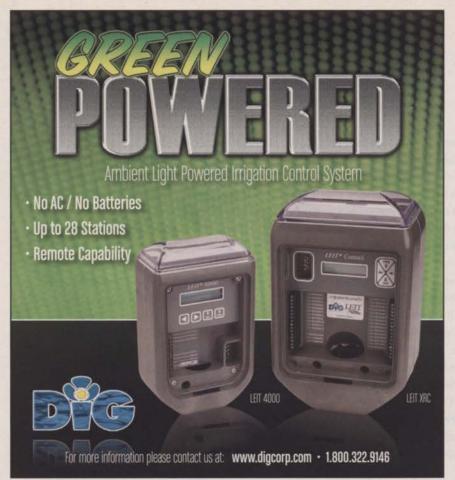
Face-to-face consultations also provide a chance to visualize the space for design purposes. For example, Koontz usually places the feature in an area that is visible from inside the home. "Many homeowners initially say they want the feature in their front yard, but because they spend most of their time in the back yard, I tell them they're essentially spending a lot of money on a water feature for the neighbors," Koontz says. "You want the feature to be where clients spend the most time so it gets the most use."



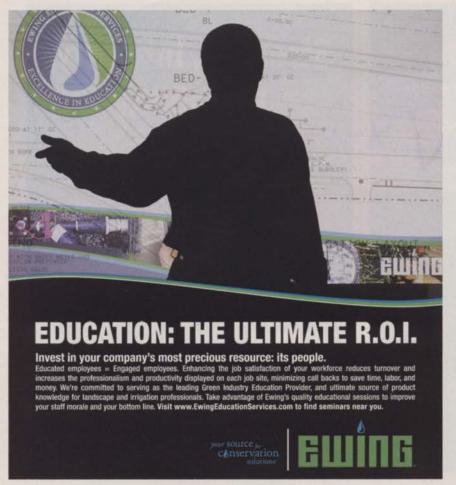


USE READER SERVICE #76

USE READER SERVICE #77



USE READER SERVICE #78



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design/build

Augustian's designers generally base the water feature's design on the styles of the home and surrounding landscape. This gives them the opportunity to suggest changes or alterations to the client's initial request if the designer thinks a different style would be a better fit. "We've had requests to install a formal water feature when the site's architecture clearly dictated another type of feature would be more fitting," he says. "The idea is to work with what nature started with and what the builder left behind using the client's allotted budget. Generally, the ideas for the conceptual plan come from the site survey, customer input and our experience with gardens we've installed in the past."

Koontz discusses the client's budget during the consultation because this greatly impacts what the company's designer, Sherry's husband Alan, is able to create. It's also a good time to determine if the client wants fish in their pond because that affects the types of filters and plants. At Carolina Pondscapes, a standard 11 foot by 16 foot water garden or a small Koi pond with a waterfall costs

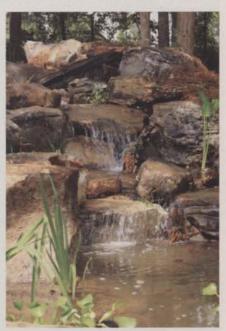


Photo: Carolina Pondscapes









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\$7,000 to \$10,000, while larger Koi ponds can cost \$15,000 or more. Pondless features usually cost \$3,000 to \$5,000 depending on how elaborate the design.

Adding fish not only increases the price, but also the maintenance requirements. Many clients choose pondless water features, a trend that has grown significantly in the past few years, Koontz says. These offer the calming sound effects – which she says is the No. 1 reason most homeowners invest in water features – without the maintenance hassles. "People love the sound of moving water," she says. "A lot of my clients drink their morning coffee by their feature and that's how they start their day."

TRACKING TRENDS. As home décor styles change it's important for contractors to remain current on the latest trends in water feature design. Every year, Koontz and her husband strive to attend pond building training seminars around the country about every three months to learn new styles and technology. "It can be hard to take the time away from your business, but we feel training is important all the way through."

They also spend time outdoors observing and even videotaping natural water features and water falls. This helps them create features that look as realistic as possible.

In terms of trends, many contractors predict pondless features will remain popular because of their affordable price. The lagging economy and increased competition in the water feature market have caused installation rates to fall from 30 to 35 ponds per year to around 20, Augustian says, adding pondless features are an affordable alternative to larger water gardens. In addition, Kelly adds contractors will continue to experiment with mixing and matching different types of stone to create more natural looking features.

Customer and client feedback plays a big part in determining future trends, and events like trade shows, home shows and seminars are great places for this interaction. Depending on the type of event, contractors and/or homeowners have the chance to see water features in different sizes, shapes and styles up and running, Kelly says. "When homeowners walk though a show and say they could picture a certain feature in their backyard, we know we're on to something good." LL



Log onto lawnandlandscape.com for sample questions from Carolina Pondscapes' inspiration sheet and for more information about pondless water features.

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making great mowers work even better. On weekends, he has his hands full working alongside his family in their mowing business. Yep, Steve is both an engineer and a landscape pro. When it comes to designing reliable mowers, you better believe this guy has an edge. He certainly understands mowing worst-case scenarios. Steve's dealt with everything from trying to beat the

setting sun,

himself in building the kinds of mowers he'd want to use. And that was before the family business. He wasn't just determined, he was a man on a clearly defined mission. The Lazer Z* HP proves it. While other manufacturers were going bigger, his team insisted on going smaller. And with good reason. Word in the field was that landscape pros wanted a smaller mower. Even back then Steve

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Terrific

A compact tractor can be beneficial to a

contractor's equipment arsenal.



Jeff Bowen breaks out the compact tractor for the big jobs - like when homeowners haven't touched a huge tangle of undergrowth on their property in six months. "You can take the tractor and mowing attachment and knock it right down to four or five inches," Bowen says. The tractor's ability to do the "rough" mowing that he doesn't want to touch with his zero-turns makes the tractor an invaluable part of his equipment arsenal.

But a compact tractor's usefulness doesn't end with mowing. Many of the same attachments used on equipment such as skid-steers can be utilized with tractors. "There are a multitude of tasks contractors can perform with a compact tractor," says Tom Patterson, vice president of marketing and sales for Springdale, Ark.-based Montana Tractors. "It's very versatile."

For landscape contractors, a compact tractor would likely supplement rather than replace existing equipment, Patterson says. "The advantages of compact tractors are they're lighter, a little more mobile and they won't tear existing grass up too much," Pat-

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terson says. "Whereas a skid-steer fits in better for rougher work, a compact tractor is better for finish work."

"If the company is fairly new without a lot of capital, they'll buy a tractor with a loader and a backhoe instead of buying a mini-excavator and a skidsteer," says Sean Sundberg, a product manager with Cary, N.C.-based John Deere. "That way, they're able to stretch their dollar a little farther."

Most landscape contractors perform multiple tasks on a job site. A compact tractor combined with a loader and a backhoe can prepare the ground for laying sod, or do backfilling, lay pipe, dig out stumps with a backhoe attachment, or use a harrower to prepare a seed bed for a lawn. The number of attachments available for compact tractors is growing and includes aerators, spreaders, tillers, mowing attachments, rotary brooms, snow blowers, backhoes, posthole diggers, front-end loaders,

example, a contractor performing only a few trenching jobs might rent a walk-behind trencher, thereby limiting his potential to take on larger jobs. "He's going to rent that for half a day and do 30 feet of trenching, lay some pipe and go on down the road," Patterson says. "But the guy who's going to lay a lot of irrigation pipe in a subdivision for irrigation of yards will mount a trencher attachment on the back of a tractor that can dig any depth he wants and at any speed he wants."

The notion that attachments make the machine is true for compact tractors. But it's the interchangeability of attachments between other machines such as skid-steers and compact tractors that make compact tractors an essential addition to a contractor's equipment lineup. "There are a lot of people out there who have skid-steers and most of them have two to three buckets, a post hole digger and pallet forks," Patterson says. "It may be a

"The advantages of compact tractors are they're lighter, a little more mobile and won't tear existing grass up too much. A compact tractor is better for finish work." - Tom Patterson, Montana Tractors

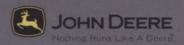
scrapers, pallet forks, rotary cutters, finish mowers, rear tillers, rear blades, yard rakes, box blades and augers.

"If you have several attachments, a compact tractor would be invaluable for landscape contractors," Bowen says. "For a company that does a lot of installation, it's fantastic. Anyone doing design/build will definitely have a tractor."

Contractors can increase their service offerings with compact tractors by increasing their ability to perform tasks quickly that might normally take longer with a smaller machine. For

situation where they can't get the skidsteer in for some reason, but they can get the tractor in. Instead of having to invest in another set of attachments, they can use ones they already own."

HOW TO CHOOSE. Before buying a compact tractor, contractors should consider the tasks they want to perform. For example, contractors facing a lot of trenching jobs will need a machine with a hydrostatic transmission, because trencher attachments will only work with hydrostats. A compact tractor with 23 horsepower



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costs around \$12,000, while a 49horsepower model with a loader and backhoe attachments could be in the \$25,000 range. It's important to try out a compact tractor before buying one. Through a demo, contractors will be able to decide if a machine features enough horsepower or if they're comfortable with the transmission type.

A compact tractor must be taken off the lot, experts say. In hilly areas,

Compact Comparisons

	PRICE	WEIGHT(lb.)	HYDRAULIC FLOW (gpm)	SPEED (top travel)
SKID-STEER	\$12,000 to \$30,000	2,000-8,000	6-25	12 mph
COMPACT TRACTOR	\$8,000 to \$25,000	1,100-4,500	6-35	9 mph

ATTACHMENTS

Landscape rake, rear blade, posthole digger, disk harrow, power rake, rotary tiller, soil pulverizer, rotary cutter, backhoe, loader, box blade, mid-mount mower, rear-mount mower, snow blower, tiller, scraper, pallet forks, finish mower, auger



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equipment

for example, it takes a lot of horsepower to traverse the terrain. "Anytime you can demo a piece of equipment, it certainly helps you," Bowen says. "If you're thinking of buying something, you should rent it first and try it out, especially if you're going to spend \$20,000 to \$50,000."

Testing a tractor on working conditions helps contractors get a feel for just how much horsepower they might need. "If you put it into a situation where it's going to perform the work it would do every day, it tells the operator a lot," Patterson says. "He may decide it's the wrong transmission for him or the tractor's not big enough."

A common buying mistake on the part of contractors is they acquire a

compact tractor that is undersized for the job. "Their biggest complaint typically becomes that the tractor won't perform like they want it to," Patterson says. "But it's because the machine is actually undersized."

Another buying consideration is the amount of auxiliary hydraulic flow needed for attachments. Hydraulic flow is measured in gallons per minute. Contractors using attachments such as a stump grinder or chipper would need a high-flow machine.

High-flow machines would fall into the 30-gallons-per-minute range. The measure of hydraulic flow is how quickly the machine can move an amount of liquid in a certain time period.

Compact tractors feature either hydrostatic or manual transmissions. though contractors increasingly look to hydrostatic models for their ease of use and smooth operation. "It just depends on what you're going to use the tractor for," Patterson says. "If you're going to do a lot of loading, a hydrostat is fantastic."

Manual transmissions require more steps to perform the same function. "In a gear transmission, you have to engage the clutch during loading," he says.

"With a hydrostatic, you just pull up the truck, offload and pull back. Both of them have the same function. but hydrostatics have much smoother operation and require no shifting." LL



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vatchers

BY EMILY MULLINS/ASSOCIATE EDITOR

When determining truck payload capacity,

BIGGER IS BETTER.

It's second nature for contractors to load equipment and materials in the back of their pickup trucks and haul it from job to job. But in reality it's just not that cut and dry. Contractors should first calculate the correct payload capacity to ensure the vehicle is being used to its intended abilities.

Determining the correct truck payload capacity is a somewhat confusing yet integral part of choosing the correct vehicle for a contractor's business needs. Too little payload capacity and a truck will burn out from excess wear and tear. Too much payload capacity and contractors will lose money on wasted fuel and operating costs.

To get it right, contractors need to determine their hauling needs before making any purchasing decisions. "Contractors should strive to find the right sized vehicle for their needs," says Bob Raybuck, technical services director for the National Truck Equipment Association, Farmington Hills, Mich. "A truck that's too small will wear out faster from overloading, but a truck that's too big will cost more to operate."

WHAT IS PAYLOAD CAPACITY? Payload capacity is a truck's gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR) - the maximum weight the truck is rated to carry - minus its curb weight - the weight of the truck unloaded plus a full tank of fuel. The resulting number is the available capacity for safely carrying passengers and cargo.



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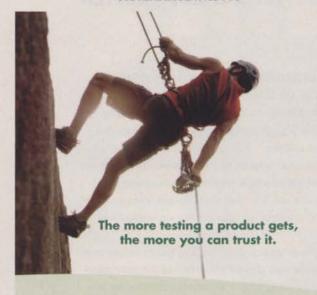
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trucks & trailers

Landscape contractors primarily purchase trucks from classes III, IV and V with GVWRs of 14,000 pounds, 16,000 pounds and 19,000 pounds, respectively. A truck's curb weight will vary significantly based on factors like brand, cab size and even engine type. But generally, class III trucks can carry roughly 6,600 payload pounds, class IV trucks can carry 8,600 payload pounds and class V trucks can carry about 11,400 payload pounds, says Brad Pugh, product planning manager for Ram Chassis Cab, part of Chrysler's Dodge Truck Division, Auburn Hills, Mich. "Different manufacturers have different curb weights of trucks in each class," he says. "The lighter a truck's curb weight, the higher its payload capacity will be."

There are, of course, price differences in trucks with different payload capacities. Stepping up from a class III to a comparably equipped class IV truck can cost contractors an extra \$6,000, while the cost difference between a class IV and a class V vehicle is about \$2,000, Pugh says. While many contractors start out with a class III, it's beneficial to the truck's performance to upgrade as necessary. "A truck is a big investment, so it's always a good idea to lean toward the conservative side

> "The most important thing for contractors to know is what they will need to haul during their everyday usage of the vehicle." — Bob Raybuck, NTEA

when choosing payload," he says. "Contractors might pay a premium to step up, but they're guaranteed to be protected if business grows in the future." According to 2007 Lawn & Landscape research, 41 percent of contractors invested in one or more trucks in 2007, spending an average of \$46,000, and 40 percent plan to invest in 2008.

Chad Stern, owner of Mowing & More, Chevy Chase, Md., agrees it's better to be safe than sorry when choosing a truck payload. For example, Stern opts for the bigger Ford F-350 rather than F-250 trucks to ensure his hauling needs are met. "I generally err on the side of caution and go with higher weight capacity in a given truck model," he says.

If costs of a larger vs. a smaller truck are a concern, Doug Austreim, owner of Austreim Landscaping, Brookings, S.D., suggests new or smaller landscape companies look into buying larger, used vehicles instead of smaller, new vehicles. "One-ton

trucks are the easiest to abuse," Austreim says, "Some guys just don't understand what it's built for and ration that if there's room, then it's OK to fill it to capacity. In the long run, it's wiser to buy a larger, used vehicle that can handle the load."

PICK AND CHOOSE. To choose the right payload for their business needs, contractors need to know what they will use the truck for and why. While this may seem like common sense, some homework is necessary to make sure no mower, tool box or crew member goes overlooked. "The most important thing for contractors to know is what they will need to haul during their everyday usage of the vehicle," Raybuck says. "From there, the next question is how many pounds of each item."

Payload experts suggest contractors list everything they plan to haul in their truck - including passengers, equipment, machinery and tool kits - and calculate the weight. Many truck manufacturer Web sites have online tools that can help make this process less daunting. "Calculation upfront is the most important part," Pugh says. "The fleet manager should do some homework before even arriving on the lot."



Austreim relies on help from his state's department of transportation to calculate the payloads of his 20-plus trucks ranging in size from standard pickups to tandem dumps. Using a DOT chart, he calculates the weight allowed per axle by considering

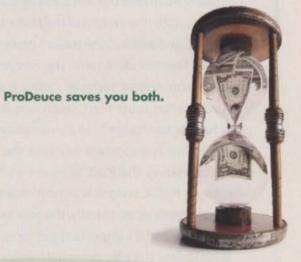
tire size, number of axles and distance between axles. He then calculates the weight of all the material he plans to haul. If an accurate measurement can't be conducted on site, he will take the equipment and materials to one of the many grain elevators found in the agricultural town of Brookings and weigh it there.

Because every state's requirements are different, Austreim says contractors should contact their DOT prior to making any payload decisions. If business requires out-of-state travel, it's important to know the laws of those states as well. "I wouldn't have a clue if my truckloads are legal in, for instance, New Jersey," he says. "Contractors should first get answers from their state and then know the variations of any state they work in."

SIZE 'EM UP. It's not beneficial for contractors to over- or underestimate payload capacity, but, when it comes down to it, underestimating is worse, Raybuck says. "If a contractor is



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looking to haul 5,000 pounds and his payload options are 3,000, 6,000 and 10,000 pounds, it would be best to go with the 6,000 pound option," Austreim explains. "The truck with the 3,000-pound payload wouldn't be enough, but the 10,000-pound option would be overkill."

Trucks consistently made to operate over the appropriate payload capacity will have more maintenance issues sooner caused by excess

wear on major parts like breaks, ball joints, suspension and spring systems, axle and transmission. It will also require more fuel to operate because the load will overwork its engine. Contractors who buy a truck with too much payload capacity for their needs will see increased operating costs, primarily in wasted fuel.

Overloading a truck is considered a traffic violation in many areas and can result in stiff fines or even vehicle impound. "This is just another reason contractors should take payload capacity seriously," Pugh says. "If something on the truck would break, it could damage the road or injure a lot of people."

An overloaded truck can create additional safety hazards because they are harder to stop once they get going, says Andrew Aksar, president of Outdoor Finishes, Walkersville, Md. Because of their low gears, trucks are capable of pulling heavy loads. But the heavier the load, the more brake time is required. "An overloaded truck can't brake as quickly as usual, which can result in traffic accidents and possible law suits," Aksar says.

RIGHT THE WRONG. If a contractor chooses the wrong payload, there are a few things he can do to lighten the load. Raybuck suggests contractors re-analyze their equipment load and decide what is truly necessary. Often times, using an attached trailer can help redistribute the load and meet payload requirements.

If contractors know they will be operating at the high end of their truck's payload, they can opt for features like additional front springs which help minimize the amount of jounce. "When you hit road bumps in an overloaded truck, you have less suspension capabilities," Pugh says. "Additional springs help absorb these bumps and help the truck's suspension system do its job."

Most vehicle warranties do not cover the repair of damage caused by overloading. "If a truck is capable of hauling 8,000 pounds and it was carrying 20,000 pounds when it broke down, that's blatant abuse of the vehicle," Pugh says. "If the manufacturer can detect that, the warranty won't cover the damage." LL

Hitchin' Up

A contractor's calculations don't end with truck payload capacity. It's just as important to determine if a truck can handle the extra load of a landscape trailer. To determine the maximum trailer weight (the most weight a given vehicle can safely haul) take the vehicle's payload capacity minus the tongue weight (the weight of the trailer tongue carried on the hitch ball) and add it to the trailer's gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR). This will determine the carrying capacity required and the appropriate series or strength of truck.

A contractor must then determine if the truck's rear axle can handle the trailer load by calculating its rear gross axle weight. This is important because the GVWR assumes the truck is sharing the load between its two axles, but when hauling a trailer, weight is almost never distributed equally between both axles. Usually, the rear axle takes the majority of the load, and it's important not to exceed its capabilities.

To calculate the rear gross axle weight, add the weight of half the passengers (the half being carried by the rear axle) with the cargo weight, the truck's rear curb weight (vehicle weight without passengers or cargo) and the tongue weight. Contractors must also add in the weight distribution factor, which accounts for the "teeter-totter" effect that occurs when a trailer is towed.

*Source: GM of Canada www.gmcanada.com



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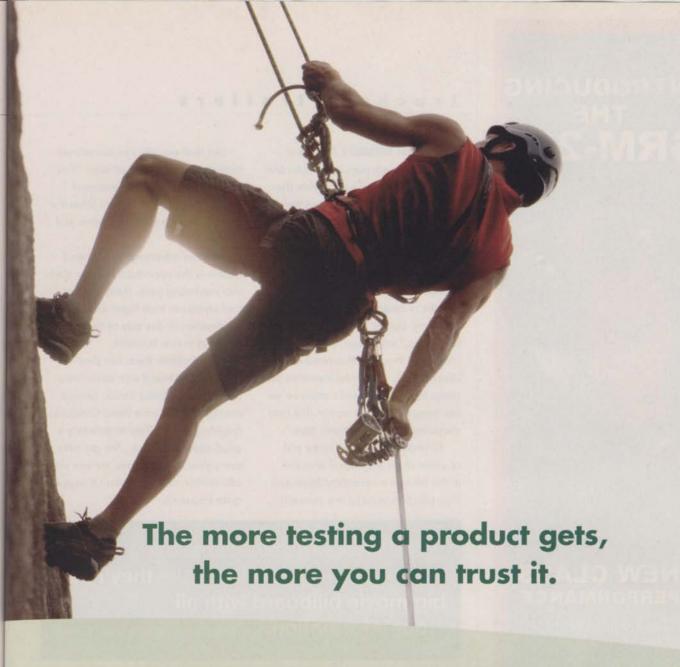
A good equipment trailer is a

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Many landscape contractors would argue that without their equipment trailers, they'd just be a guy with a pickup truck.

The right trailer enables contractors to transport the necessary tools and equipment to job sites - and they do so safely, while providing efficiency during a job. Contractors recognize the importance of trailers, and are willing to make the necessary investments. For example, recent Lawn & Landscape research has found that the average annual contractor spending on equipment trailers was nearly \$52,000 in 2007, nearly a 30 percent increase over the previous year.

But what type of trailer makes the most sense for your landscape operations? Enclosed cargo trailers and open utility trailers offer distinct advantages to different types of jobs and there are many factors to take into consideration. What matters more to you on a job: security or efficiency? Marketing opportunities or ease of access? These are the questions, along with many others, you should ask before making a purchase.



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LONG-TERM SECURITY. Enclosed cargo trailers are popular for jobs that last multiple days. They provide the security necessary for leaving the valuable tools and equipment they carry at sites overnight. The ability to lock up the trailers gives contractors peace of mind and protects them against potentially devastating losses.

"We're basically a maintenance company, but we do enhancements for big clients," says Russ Kimball, owner of Kimball Property Maintenance in Draper, Utah. "For enhancements we prefer to have enclosed trailers so we can keep equipment on site. We may stage there for two to three days."

Kimball performed a straw poll of some of his employees who are in the field on a consistent basis and they told him security is a concern.

But that security can sometimes slow down a job, Kimball says. "You still have to lock up the enclosed trailer. How efficient is that? What if a guy has to walk back to a truck and get fuel?"

Another advantage to enclosed trailers is the opportunity to turn them into marketing tools. Many contractors emblazon their logos and contact information on the side of their trailers, resulting in new business.

"We decorate them like they're a big movie billboard with all our information," says Doug Swink, general manager of Extreme Weed Control in Brighton, Colo. "They're definitely a good advertising tool... We get calls every year that say, 'Hey, we saw your information on your trailer.' It happens quite frequently."

"One advantage of the enclosed trailer is we decorate them like they're a big movie billboard with all our information." - Doug Swink, Extreme Weed Control

"The biggest thing nowadays is theft. We live in a world where people like to pick up that equipment and walk away," he says. "It's a real possibility."

Hand in hand with security goes protection from the elements. If contractors leave their trailers in the field during multiple-day jobs – for example, on an extensive design/build project – they'll want to prevent weatherization or equipment damage.

Enclosed trailers keep equipment "safe and clean," says Pete Ybarra, regional sales manager at trailer manufacturer Haulmark Industries in Bristol, Ind. "To [contractors], security equates to better-lasting equipment." SHORT-TERM EFFICIENCY. Open utility trailers are better suited for short-term landscape jobs that require quickness rather than days-long presence. "We use a lot of open trailers, and their key feature I like is ease of access," Swink says. "You don't have to walk through a door or up a ramp."

That ease of access can be valuable when a contractor needs to quickly survey what tools he has for a job. "You can reach over to get fuel cans and weed-eaters," says Frank Male, co-owner of Lawrence Landscape in Lawrence, Kan. "You can see what you've got – it's all handy."

Male also values the versatility an

open trailer provides. "The nice thing about an open trailer is you can load other equipment into it," he says. "We can use it for planting trees, so the versatility [is an advantage]."

But tools and equipment that are readily available for contractors are also available for thieves. If you're going to populate your fleet with open trailers, be prepared to invest time every day to secure your capital.

"When our trailers go out, all the equipment is chained down," says Nick DePasquale, California regional manager of Gothic Grounds Management Inc. "When we get back to the yard facility, we load everything into lock boxes. We don't leave anything out in the open."



Gothic's Los Angeles branch relies solely on open trailers. Southern California's mild climate doesn't present much of a weatherization hazard. but that's not the main reason for Gothic's preference: The company's

Open trailers offer landscape contractors a certain degree of versatility. Photo: Lawn & Landscape archive



111

employees log many hours on L.A.'s legendary freeway system, and the open trailers are easier to maneuver, DePasquale says. "There are lots of blind spots with an enclosed trailer."

SAFE PRACTICES. No matter what kind of trailer is in your fleet, your employees need to be cautious and vigilant operators. The potential for damage to job sites, other vehicles, your equipment, your employees or the trailers themselves is everywhere. Annual training, smart hiring and personnel decisions, and sound protocol make for a safe environment.

Training includes proper methods for backing up with and inspecting trailers before heading into the field, Swink says. Drivers need to be aware that they're hauling something that requires driving practices different from a regular car or truck. "A driver will cut a corner too short and blow out a tire," Swink says, adding, "Don't go through a dip in the road. Instead of taking that dip straight on, he maybe could take it at an angle" - since bottoming out is a potential hazard.

"Training is huge," Kimball says. "You train people to know how to lock it onto the hitch securely. When they leave the yard, more than one person checks the connection. [Trailers falling off] doesn't happen a lot, but it's happened. In 20 years of business, it's happened a couple of times."

DePasquale adds. "People say they can haul a trailer," he says. "Then we see them drive and it's a mess."

THE PERFECT TRAILER. Dealers can customize trailers with racks and

Tips From the Pros

Trailers are an integral part of a landscape contractor's business, so it's important to remember a few important tips when making a purchase:

Buy on quality, not price. Mark Boneck, division sales manager, Wells Cargo, Elkhart, Ind., has had a few customers who've bought cheap trailers, only to have them fall apart too soon. "They're buying trailers that aren't built for that application. They might buy something made for carrying a 400-pound go-kart."

Understand what you'll be using the trailer for. Contractors need to have a clear idea of what kind of tools and equipment they'll be hauling in the trailer, says Pete Ybarra, regional sales manager, Haulmark Industries, Bristol, Ind. Don't buy a trailer that's too small or light for your needs.

Order early, and order what you need. Planning and working with a supplier, rather than just buying any old 16-footer off the lot, will save you time. "Order to the exact specifications you need," says Frank Male, co-owner, Lawrence Landscape, Lawrence, Kan.

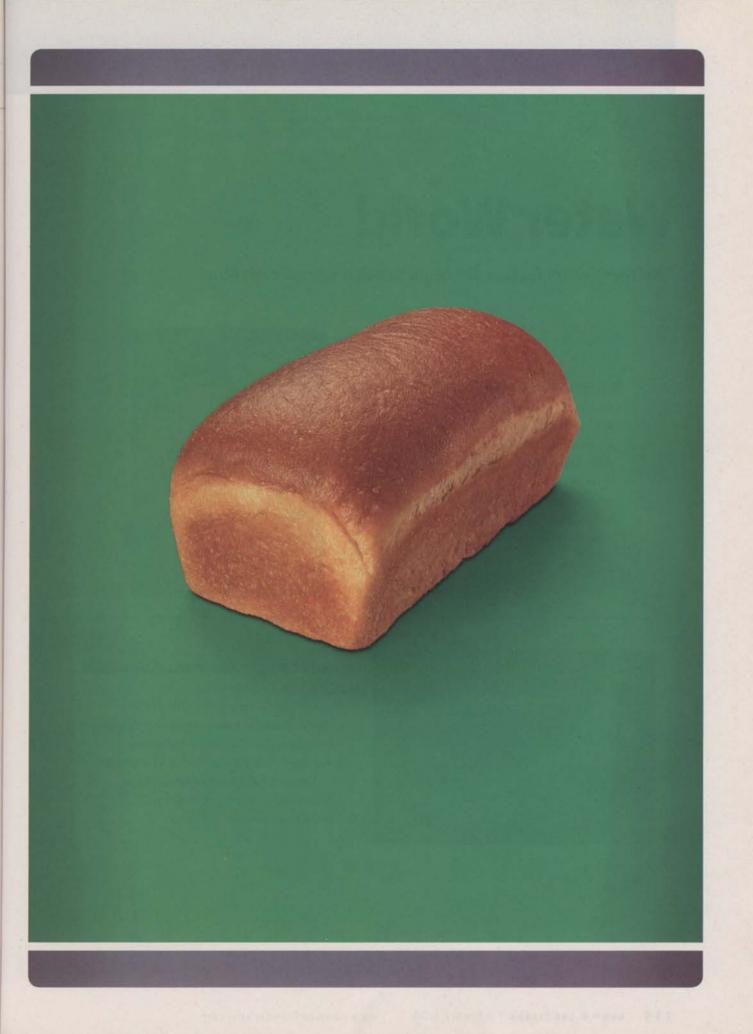
Ensure you'll have the income to cover the expense. "Debt kills," says Russ Kimball, owner, Kimball Property Maintenance, Draper, Utah. He recommends retiring equipment debt as quickly as possible. A common mistake is to finance an expense like a trailer for too long. "Otherwise, you're paying for it after it's worn out," he says.

shelves for various types of equipment. Water cooler installation is another popular aftermarket feature. "The [open] trailers we're using for our maintenance business are very customized," Kimball says. "We'll have them install blower holders, tree trimmer holders, a place for the gas tank, tie downs, larger dovetails for ease to get up into trailers.

But contractors often seem to have a do-it-yourself ethic when it comes to perfecting their trailers. Underwiring for brake lights seems to be a common problem. Most contractors just take those matters into their own hands. "When you order a trailer off

the racks, the wires are always light duty," DePasquale says. "We do a little to work to solidify the wiring. If the lights don't work, the trailer doesn't roll out. With heavy-duty casing, the wiring doesn't break as much."

DePasquale will have his trailer dealer replace light wire-mesh gates with a heavier material. He'll then apply grip tape on any portion of the trailer where employees may be standing to prevent falls. He has them painted about every two years. And the floors are durable enough that as long as you remove debris every night after a job, they should hold up for the lifetime of the trailers. LL



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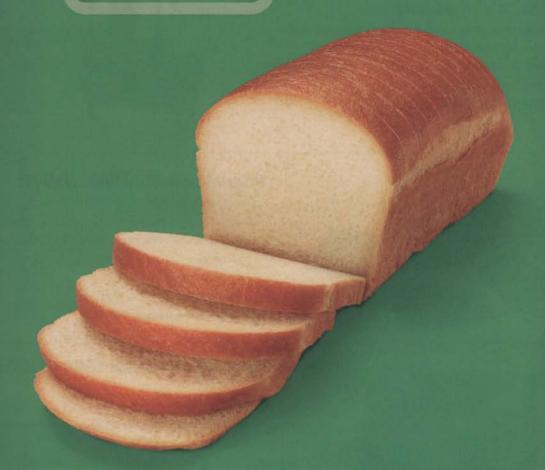












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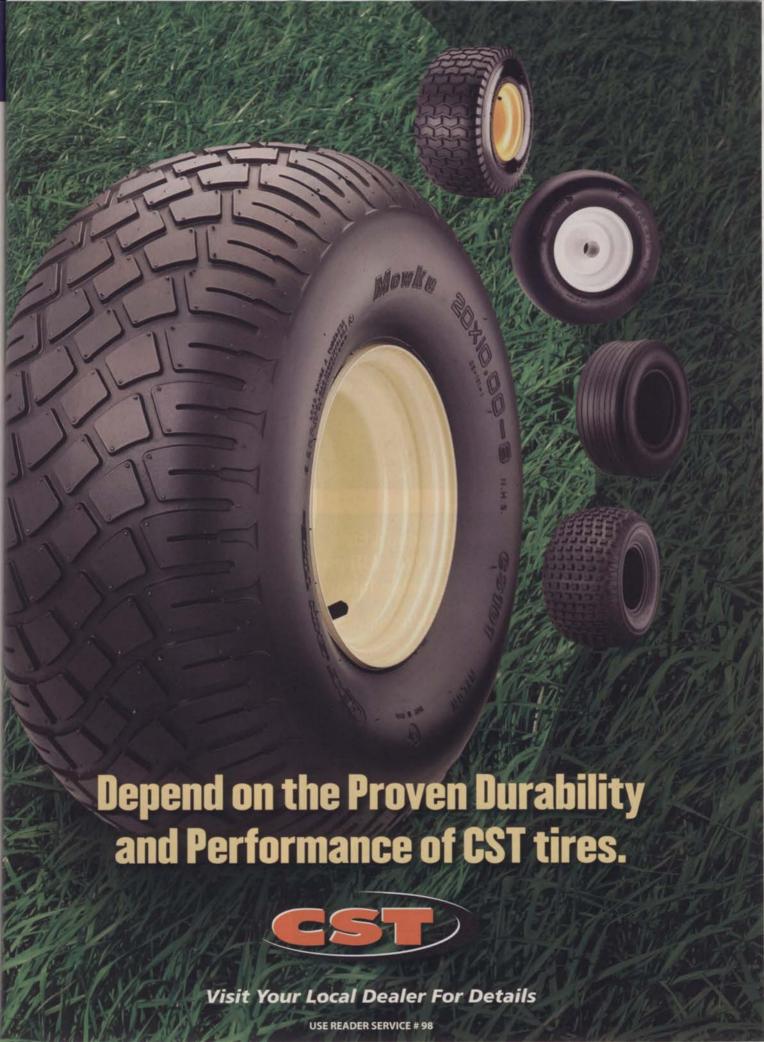
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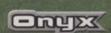
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bench marking

Jim Huston

is president of J.R. Huston Enterprises, a Denverbased green industry consulting firm. Reach him at 800/451-5588, benchmarking gele.net or www.irhuston.biz.



Less Oops in OPPH

he last of our estimating methods is the overhead and profit per hour (OPPH) method. While not goof-proof, the OPPH pricing method provides considerable advantages over the other five pricing systems we've benchmarked so far.

OPPH begins with an accurate identification of direct costs, such as materials, field labor, equipment and subcontractors. Then sales tax is added to materials and labor burden to field payroll. General and administrative (G&A) overhead is added next based on an overhead per hour (OPH) amount. Total estimated man-hours in the bid are multiplied by the OPH. The OPH is calculated by dividing the annual company G&A overhead by the projected number of billable field-labor hours in the company. In our scenario the OPH is \$10. Once we add the G&A overhead to a pricing scenario, we have calculated the break-even point (BEP).

Finally, net profit margin (NPM) is added to the BEP either as a margin percent or a dollar amount per labor hour. We'll use a 10 percent margin. Job A requires the entire field labor force for one month. Its price should include one month of G&A overhead cost or \$10,000. The 90 percent break-even point is easy to calculate as is the 17 percent gross profit margin (7 percent G&A overhead plus 10 percent NPM).

Job B requires the entire field labor force for four months. The G&A overhead costs should total \$40,000. Once again, the OPPH method accurately calculates and allocates the G&A overhead to the job. The 90 percent breakeven point is easy to identify and the gross profit margin is 32 percent.

ANALYSIS. You could argue Job A's GPM is low and I'd agree. A 17 percent GPM in a normal market is 5 to 11 percent too low for a commercial installation and 15 to 23 percent too low for residential installation. However, if you're in a soft economy or need work, it's important to know you could lower GPM to 17 percent and make a reasonable net profit. You could go even lower if you had to.

Job B's 32 percent GPM is 4 to 10

percent higher for a commercial installation and a bit low for a residential installation in a normal economy.

Basing our G&A overhead allocation to jobs on a time unit (man-hours), we are able to accurately calculate and apply these costs. Since 85 to 95 percent of all G&A overhead costs are incurred based on a time unit, they should be allocated to our work based on a time unit. Finally, material, equipment and subcontractor costs (I call these events) can vary dramatically from month to month and from job to job. Hitching G&A overhead costs to these direct costs, which vary dramatically, makes no sense. Tying G&A overhead costs to gross sales makes even less sense.

I challenge you to think through the various pricing methods we've covered. Calculate all of your costs, especially G&A overhead, using the OPPH method. You should then compare the price it calculates to ones found in your market. Add extra net profit if the OPPH price is too low. If it is high, you probably need to raise your prices. LL

Direct Costs	\$	%
Materials (w/tax)	100,000	69
Labor w/burden	13,000	9
Equip. w/rentals	7,000	5
Subcontractors	0	0
Total direct costs	120,000	83
Total direct costs	120,000	83
Total G&A overhead to recover on job (1,000 hours x \$10)	10,000	7
Break-even point (BEP)	130,000	90
Net profit margin (10%)	14,444	100
Price for job	144,444	100

Direct Costs	\$	%
Materials (w/tax)	40,000	23
Labor w/burden	52,000	29
Equip. w/rentals	28,000	16
Subcontractors	0	0
Total direct costs	120,000	68
Total direct costs	120,000	68
Total G&A overhead to recover on job (4,000 hours x \$10)	40,000	22
Break-even point (BEP)	160,000	90
Net profit margin (10%)	17,778	10
Price for job	177,778	100

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sales and marketing

Marty Grunder

is a speaker, consultant and author, as well as owner or Grunder Landscaping Co., Miamisburg, Ohio. Reach him at 866/478-6337, landscapesales@gie.net or via www.martyng.prieccom.



What Clients Won't Tell You, Part 1

want to address what clients don't want to hear from those of us selling lawn care, landscaping and other services. I hope you see some ways to improve your efforts in the process. OK salespeople, listen up because this is your customer speaking:

I WANT TO KNOW ABOUT YOU, NOT YOUR COMPETITION. Please don't talk about the competition. I don't care what you think about them. I called you to learn why I should work with you, not why I shouldn't work with your competition. I want to know what your company can do and why I should hire you. Show me proof you are who you say you are and give me a compelling reason to do business with you. Every time you slam the competition, it makes me wonder why you're so worried about them. If you must say something, then say you've never heard of them and move on.

I DON'T WANT TO KNOW ABOUT YOUR **EQUIPMENT, YOUR TRUCKS OR YOUR** FAMOUS CLIENTS. I want to know how you're going to help me and make my property look its best. Show me what's in it for me. Show me why my friends and neighbors will be jealous of my yard. Show me the value you're going to bring to the table. Sure, nice trucks are evidence you are who you say you are, but they aren't a reason to work with you. Instead, show me a photo of a house that could not be sold before you revamped the vard and a testimonial from a client whose home you helped sell by doing some custom landscaping.

I DON'T CARE ABOUT THE LATIN NAMES, THE CHEMICAL MAKEUP OF AN INSECTICIDE OR THE TECHNICAL REASON A PLANT DIED. You intimidate and confuse me when you talk about that stuff. If I want to know those things,

I'll ask you. I want to know the colors the plants bloom, how big they get, how fast they grow, why I would love them and so on. I want to know that your products are safe for my family and that they are legal and work. And while it might be cool to know why a tree died, I really just want a new tree. Let's face it, I'm busy and so are you.

SHOW ME YOU WANT MY BUSINESS.

Do something extra. Send me a card thanking me for my time. E-mail me some photos of some work you've done. Give me some room, but show you're interested in a professional way. And by all means, follow up and ask me for the business; just don't be a pain and make me wonder why you're so desperate to get my work.

Next month, more things clients won't tell you, but I will. **LL**





it's about people

Bill Arman

is a 32-year veteran of the landscape maintenance industry and is a founder of The Harvest Group, a national landscape business consultancy. He can be reached at 949/466-8837 or people@ie.net.



Recruiting Great People

he ability to attract, retain and grow great people is the difference between success and failure for an organization. Nothing is more important for an organization than to be very, very good at this. Previously, we've taken stock of your current employees and identified your people needs. Let's move on to identifying the target and gathering your tools.

IDENTIFY THE TARGET. When we "identify the target" we mean just that, we need a very clear picture of who they are and what background they have. Let's go over this in specific terms.

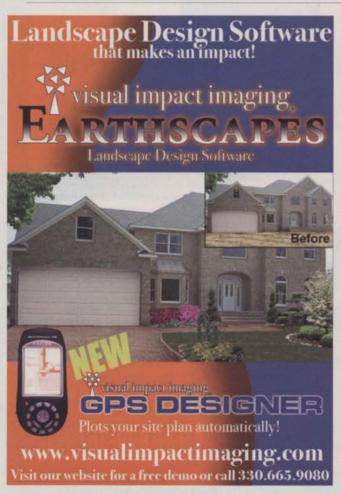
PROFILE. Profile your best employees. How did you find them or they you? What makes them your best? Attitude, hard-working, great behaviors, team-oriented, teaches others, volunteers for assignments, education, experience, results. OK, now you know what you are looking for.

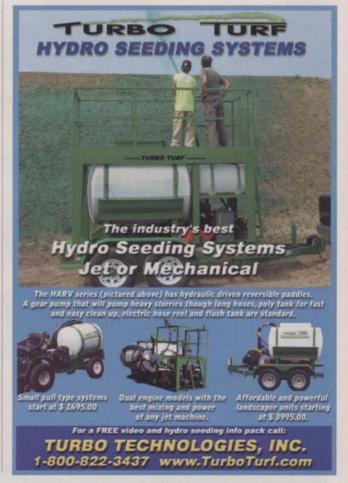
EXPERIENCE. Usually we look for the perfect person with all of the right experience and for a quick fix. I prefer to find humble, hungry and smart people who may not necessarily have the perfect experience. At least define the experience that would be nice to have.

SKILLS. Define the skills needed for the position. Remember, it is easier to teach technical skills than it is to teach soft skills like communication, playing nice with others and time management.

LICENSES AND CERTIFICATIONS. What licenses (such as a driver's license), and certifications would be nice? If they don't have any, can they get them?

EDUCATION. What types of degrees would be nice to have? Horticulture, landscape architecture, agriculture, etc. How important is education for this position? Note: A degree does not





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it's about people

necessarily make a candidate the right person, but it does indicate some focus and goal achievement.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS. What pay has the potential candidate been making? Watch out for people willing to take more than a 20 percent pay cut. Where does he live in relation to where he will be working? Be wary of huge commutes. Has he worked in good spots or not so good? The resume should show his footprints. Is his employment pattern full of short hops or long stints?

GATHER YOUR TOOLS. I am truly amazed at the companies that start recruiting without at least gathering the basic tools. At the very minimum, here are the tools needed before you try to attract people to your organization.

JOB DESCRIPTION OR JOB OUTLINE.

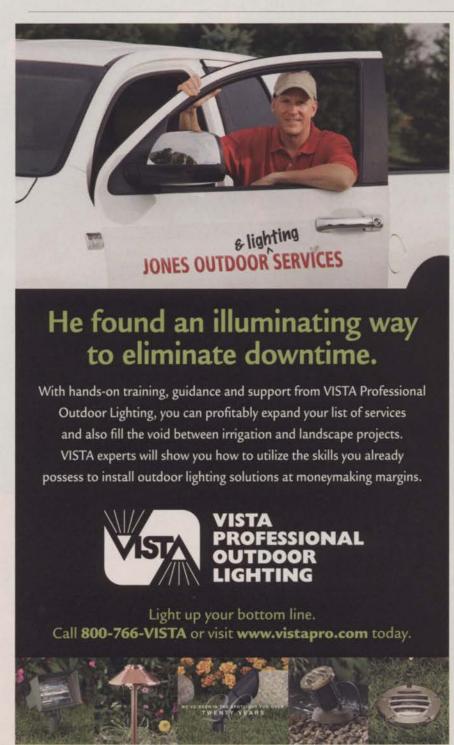
What are the job duties and responsibilities of this position? What results are expected? Skills needed/desired? Experience needed/desired?. Goals and expectations of the position? If you can't figure this out go to the "big boy's" Web site and see how he does it.

PAY RANGES AND BONUSES. What is the pay range for this position? Are you competitive? Are there bonus opportunities? Are both of these clearly spelled out in writing? If not, please do so to avoid miscommunication or worse, lose a viable candidate.

BENEFITS. Prepare a one-page summary sheet on vacation, holidays, health benefits, 401K (who is eligible and when) as well as training and certification programs, allowances for continued education, employee retreats, uniforms, gym memberships - whatever differentiates you from the competition.

EMPLOYMENT APPLICATION: Have all applicants fill them out. This tracks your applicants for EEOC requirements as well as serves as the first test on their ability to write and follow directions

SCREENING AND INTERVIEWING QUESTIONS. Develop a set of these for each position you are looking for and use them each time so you don't get off track and you will have a record of what was discussed. Make sure these are HRappropriate questions. LL



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Safety First

Safety equipment is an important investment

right from the start.

In the landscape industry.

safety is a must. The incentives for owners to keep their employees safe run the gamut, including more productive crews, lower insurance rates and an overall better reputation. Many contractors choose to stock their trucks and warehouses with the appropriate safety gear to keep operations running smoothly and safely.

"It is the responsibility of all employers to provide a safe working environment for all employees," says David Summe, director of sourcing, Cintas First Aid and Safety, Cincinnati. "Making sure people are equipped with the right safety equipment reduces injury and keeps people on the job to get work done."

OSHA requires the use of personal protective equipment, or PPE, "to reduce employee exposure to

not feasible or effective in reducing these exposures to acceptable levels." Employers are required to determine if PPE should be used to protect their workers, and if so, implement a program addressing the hazards present; the selection, maintenance and use of PPE; the training of employees; and monitoring of the program to ensure its ongoing effectiveness.

Although he began his company this past July, Everett Warren, owner of Green Man Enviroscaping, Lehighton, Pa., knew safety was important from the first day. His main priorities were to keep his insurance rates low and limit employee turnover by keeping his crews as safe and comfortable as possible.

Warren spends "as much money as needed" on his safety materials, but says he can fully equip his 4-man

crew for less than \$300

each, and spends about \$100 for additional or replacement items. Generally, goggles cost \$3 to \$6. and hardhats cost from \$10 to \$14. depending on the suspension in the helmet, Summe

says. Safety shoes and gloves have wider price ranges based on the features and benefits provided. Shoes can range from \$30 to more than \$100 per pair. Gloves can range from \$8 per dozen up to \$70 per dozen for higher-quality styles. According to Lawn & Landscape research, contractors spent \$904 on safety equipment in 2006.

By investing in safety equipment, contractors show their employees as well as their customers that they care about doing business in a responsible, professional way, Summe says.

"Providing PPE shows a company is professional and has a genuine interest in providing a safe work environment for its employees," he says. "Company owners who invest in safety often use the same thinking when providing service to their clients. In the end, the service provider, the employee and the client all benefit from a well-run company with safe working practices."

Warren agrees. "A reputation for accidents and injuries won't exactly make for good public relations," he says. "Safety is critical to keep employees alive and well. There's really no excuse to do business in an unsafe fashion." LL



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Question: "Is it advantageous for landscape contractors to trade up to new equipment on a regular basis?

THE DEALER:

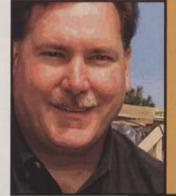
Scott Brady, owner Brady Outdoor Equipment, Elizabeth City, N.C.

"Sometimes contractors expect too much from a machine and run them down to zero, where they're having problems with it and they get upset about it. Some contractors tend to hold onto their equipment too long. Those contractors need to trade up a little sooner. I would say three years is the magic number. Some of the guys in my market are running their zero-

turns four or five years, to where they have big maintenance issues with them and that frustrates them.

The tendency to hang on to equipment longer than you should is kind of human nature. We're the same way with our delivery trucks. Sometimes we run them until they're pretty rough and we should probably buy something new, but we keep them patched up and keep them going. The failure and repair rate for machines past the age of three is double that of younger machines. A small contractor who keeps up with his own maintenance on a regular basis, those guys might be able to run them longer. But for some companies, the larger the crews, the owner is doing other tasks and the machines aren't being cared for as well. This year's been a little different because of the drought here and owners have been more reluctant to spend money on new equipment." LL





THE CONTRACTOR:

Roscoe Klausing, owner Klausing Group, Lexington, Ky.

"We actually turn everything in within two years to get about 40 to 45 percent return on the original purchase price. We've done it for at least seven years. There was a time when we didn't turn the machines in. Our company was a lot younger then and we didn't have the ability to do it. When we started doing it, it was simply an issue of how long the manufacturer's warranty existed and how much downtime on the equipment kills us. We felt the additional cost of always operating a new

> machine was worth it because of the benefit of not having to deal with as many repairs.



I can't say our ability to buy the new machines and turn in the old ones was based on revenue. It was that we built it into our business model. It's not really about how big you are if you figure out what the cost is going to be and how quickly you're going to have to depreciate the ma-

chines. There's essentially a Kelly Blue Book for used landscape equipment. At any time, our dealer has been able to tell us the suggested retail value of the unit. What we've found is that the more substantial the unit, the better it holds its value." LL





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Skeeter Busters

Installing mosquito misting systems can help landscape companies improve their customers' outdoor spaces.

About three years ago, John Parker's Houston-based landscape company, Summit Landscape Services, was looking for an opportunity that would allow it to maximize its strength in customer service and market to its existing customers.

In hot, humid Houston, mosquito control services are becoming a popular offering, Parker says. "Every year you hear more and more about the different diseases and problems with mosquitoes," Parker says. "It's becoming really big in the Houston market, along the coast in Texas and in Florida." Parker and his team decided this offering would be a good fit for their full-service company - it's another way they can help clients enjoy their outdoor spaces. They researched mosquito control services for a year and a half, considering everything from commercial fogging to consumer-grade systems available at Home Depot. They determined that mosquito misting systems - units installed on a property to spray insecticides through a network of nozzles - were the most effective and reliable.

After partnering with a manufacturer to become a dealer of its systems, Parker started a new company, It's Your Yard, to expand into the mosquito misting business.

So far, Parker is pleased with the business, which now includes a general manger, two two-man crews and an administrative assistant. He's hoping for a six-figure revenue this year and a return on investment by year four or five.

MARKET FOR MISTING.

The rise of outdoor living spaces and highprofile cases of the West Nile Virus have heightened consumer interest in mosquito misting systems.

Clients who purchase misting systems are typically well educated and living in homes worth \$250,000 and up, Parker says, adding "All of the clients use their outdoor spaces in one way or another." Misting system clients are typically well-established, having lived in their homes for eight years or more with income levels of at least 40 percent of their home values, General Manager John Cahill says.



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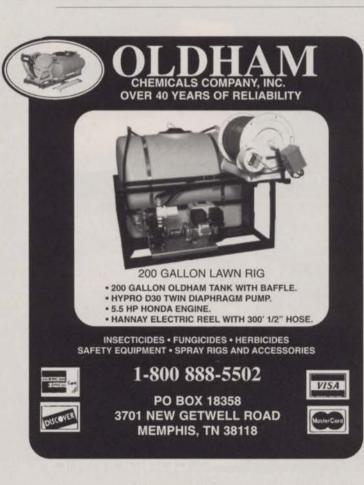
Knowing who the right client is drives It's Your Yard's sales and marketing efforts. About 25 percent of clients are referrals from its sister landscape company. The rest are the result of direct mail and door hangers targeting affluent clients who have already invested in their landscapes. Exhibiting at home shows also helps the company reach these clients.

The best time to sell misting systems is from February to September. Parker says, adding that interest often depends on the severity of the winter, how dry or rainy summer is and other environmental factors.

It's Your Yard operates with a nopressure sales approach, Parker says. The company provides clients with marketing materials and a DVD to

review on their own. "We believe the product, with some explanation and education, really sells itself," Parker says. If the client is interested, a sales representative schedules a meeting to measure and inspect the areas to be included in the proposal. Next, the sales representative uses a CAD program to design and print out a continued on page 148; sidebar on page 146

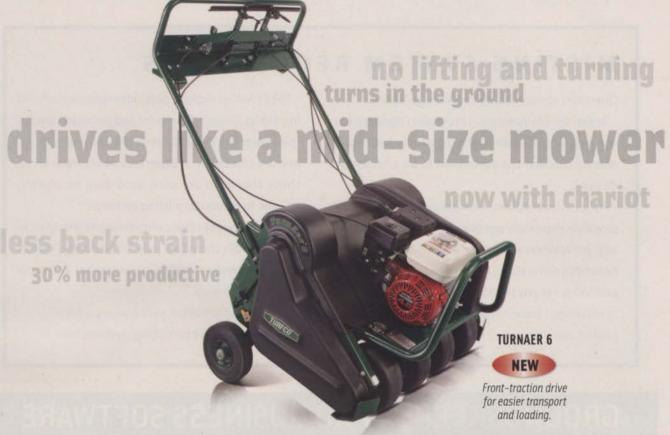
"Our goal is to build the company through customer loyalty and referrals and the best way to do that is to maintain client contact and service their systems for as long as they will have us." - John Parker, It's Your Yard





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MISTING SYSTEM REGULATIONS

Questions about misting system regulations?

So far, the Environmental Protection Agency does not regulate outdoor misting systems because it doesn't consider the equipment to be a "pesticide device."

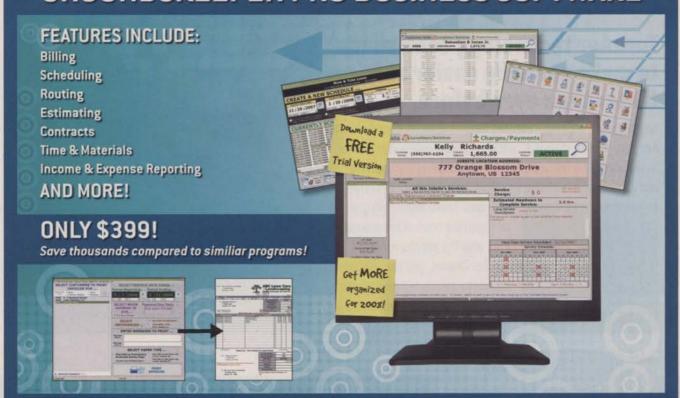
Prospective installers should check with their state pesticide regulatory agencies for details, but generally, no applicator licenses are required. The EPA notes that some states may forbid the use of certain pesticides - or any pesticides at all - in these systems in residential areas, others may require signs to be posted and others may not regulate their use.

The EPA does register pesticides that may be used in misting systems. Pyrethrins and permetrin are the most common insecticides used in misting systems, and the EPA does not expect risks to humans when these chemicals are used according to labeling specific to mosquito misting systems.

The EPA does say that permethrin is highly toxic to fish and both chemicals may kill beneficial insects such as honeybees, ladybugs, butterflies and other non-target species.

For more information, visit www.epa.gov/ pesticides/factsheets/misting_systems.htm.

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1. What is your primary business at this location? (choose only one) 1. CONTRACTOR or SERVICES 1. Landscape Contractor 2. Chemical Lawn Care Company (excluding mowing maintenance service) 3. Lawn Maintenance Contractor 4. Omamental Shrub & Tree Service 5. Irrigation Contractor 6. Landscape Architect 7. Other Contract Services (please describe) III. IN-HOUSE LAWN/CARE MAINTENANCE 8. In-House Maintenance including: Educational Facilities, Health Care Facilities, Government Grounds, Parks & Military Installations, Condominium Complexes, Housing Developments, Private Estates, Commercial & Industrial Parks III. DISTRIBUTOR/MANUFACTURER 9. Dealer 11. Formulator 10. Distributor 12. Manufacturer IV. OTHERS ALLIED TO THE FIELD: 13. Extension Agent (Federal, State, County, City, Regulatory Agency) 14. School, College, University 15. Track Association, Library Others (please describe) 2. What services does your business offer? 1. Landscape Design Landscape Installation 2. Seeding Plants & Color Installation 5. Irrigation Installation 6. Landscape Installation 9. Indicators of the Control of the Color Installation 1. Landscape Installation	S. Landscape Maintenance	7. What percentage of growth do you anticipate? 8. What year was your business founded? 9. What is your business mix? (%) Residential	13. Which of the following subjects would you be interested in learning more about? (CHECK ALL THAT APPLY) BUSINESS MANAGEMENT
8. Water Features	11. \$7,000,000 or more	19. Renovation Equipment (seeders, aerators, dethatchers, spreaders, hydroseeders)	OTHER 35. None of the above
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business opportunities

continued from page 144

custom drawing of the system. "Most companies still do the drawings by hand, but we feel the CAD option is more accurate, reliable and presents a better product to the client during the sales process," Parker says. The initial cost for the software was about \$500.

Next, the drawing is presented to the client along with maintenance proposals. It's Your Yard considers itself to be a service company first and foremost, so its goal is to secure the maintenance contract. "We really want the maintenance on the systems for many reasons: continued business, client referrals, the visibility of our trucks in the neighborhood, continuous cash flow billing throughout the year, etc.," Parker says.

PRICING & PROFIT. It Your Yard's installations prices typically range between \$2,000 and \$4,500 per job with profit margins between 25 and 35 percent. Prices are derived from base materials and a corresponding labor amount based on those materials. After those two things are accounted for, the sales representative has some flexibility in price based on how busy the company is, if it's a new or existing client and the chance of securing a maintenance contract. "Sometimes you have to take a little less profit on the install in order to get the maintenance," Parker says. "Our goal is to build the company through customer loyalty and referrals and the best way to do that in, our opinion, is

to maintain client contact and service their systems for as long as they will have us."

It's Your Yard offers two maintenance packages: basic and premium.
Basic includes a one-year manufacturer's warranty and pesticide refills,
which cost \$195 each and are necessary a few times a year depending on
the size of the system. This package
does not include regularly scheduled
service calls – it's up to the customer
to call the company to schedule a visit. A pesticide-refill visit also includes a
system inspection for clogged nozzles
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The premium package includes





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a lifetime transferable warranty plus monthly service calls and pesticide refills. "I compare it to the extended bumper-tobumper warranty offered in the car business," Cahill says. Prices are based on the estimated number of visits required. which is based on the nozzle count. A package for a home with 20-30 nozzles, requiring about four annual visits, costs \$780 a year; a large property with 45-plus nozzles would likely require eight annual visits. That's priced at \$1,560 per year.

OPERATIONS. Initially, It's Your Yard learned how to install the systems from the manufacturer training videos and support staff. It has refined its techniques over time by observing competitors' installations as it has picked up their former accounts. It's Your Yard learned it could outshine the competition by offering higher quality installations - for example never installing nozzles more than 10-feet apart and only using clamps and wood screws to install tubing vs. taking a shortcut with staples.

These accounts also have helped the company refine its maintenance practices. Competitors' former customers said their previous provider would allow their chemical to run out and nozzles to clog. It's Your Yard's premium maintenance package with monthly inspections prevents these faux pas.

It's Your Yard operates with two crews - one dedicated to maintenance and sales and the other to installations and major repairs.

Entering the business wasn't as cost prohibitive as other new services can be, Cahill says. Aside from two used vans, no major capital equipment purchases were necessary.

Costs to become an authorized misting system dealer vary by manufacturer. Typically, manufacturers require their installers to purchase a specific amount of merchandise to become a dealer. LL

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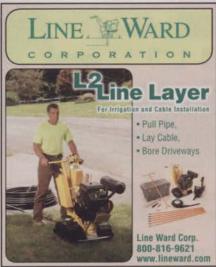
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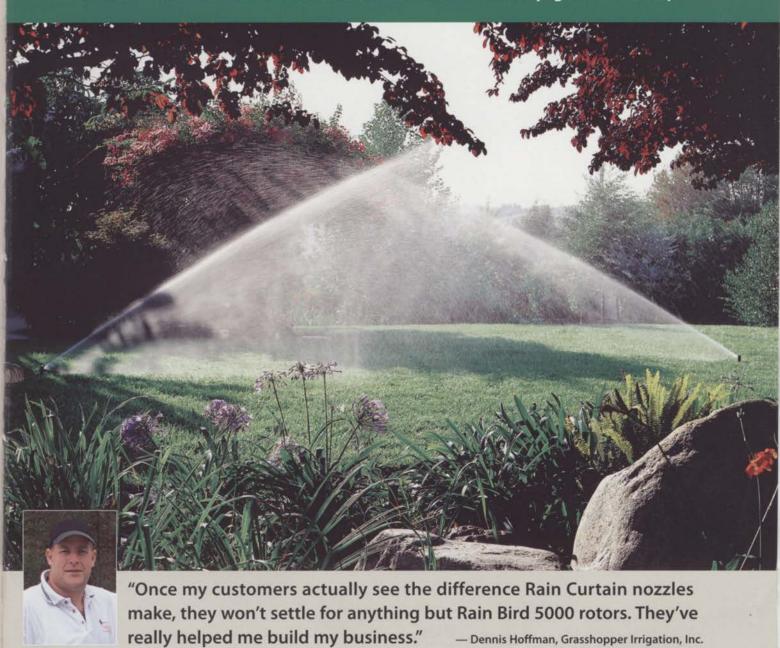
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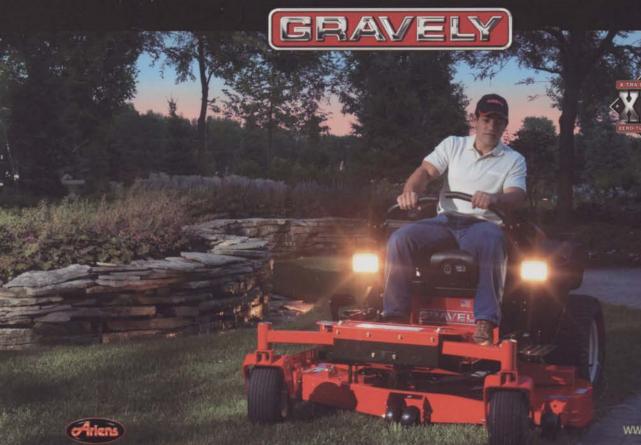
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