

PLUS: Zero-turn Tech // Hydroseeding // Tree Transplants

mya

FEBRUARY 2009
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Lawn & Landscape

Leading business magazine for landscape contractors

America's **LOVE** for Lawns

How you can profit from our nation's historic lawn care obsession.

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eXmark



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*"PRO Landscape paid
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Kostas Menegakis, Landscapes-R-Us

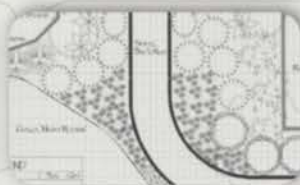
*"I sold two jobs the
first week I owned
the program."*

Dustin Leite, Maple Leaf Farms & Nursery

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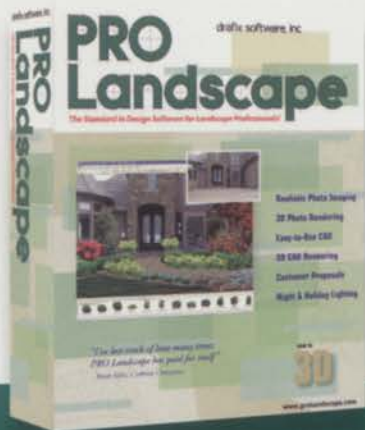
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- 16-0-5 50% LSN .13 Dimension

For more information on LSN and for your FREE Weed ID book, visit our website at LebanonTurf.com, click on promotions and enter coupon code LL9029.

LebanonTurf

Improving the Way Professionals Care for Turf

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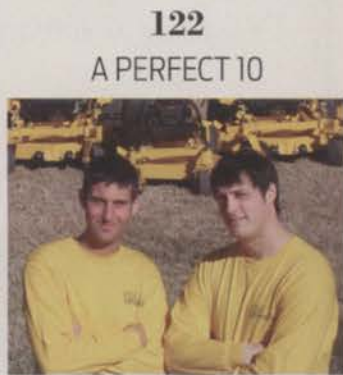
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120 IF YOU LOVE SOMETHING, LET IT GO



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The Contractor Closed this \$35,000 Job Thanks to John Deere Credit.

John Deere Credit can help you close more sales, too! Homeowners are accustomed to financing major purchases. Through John Deere Credit you can offer your customers simple finance plans such as low monthly payments or six months same as cash.

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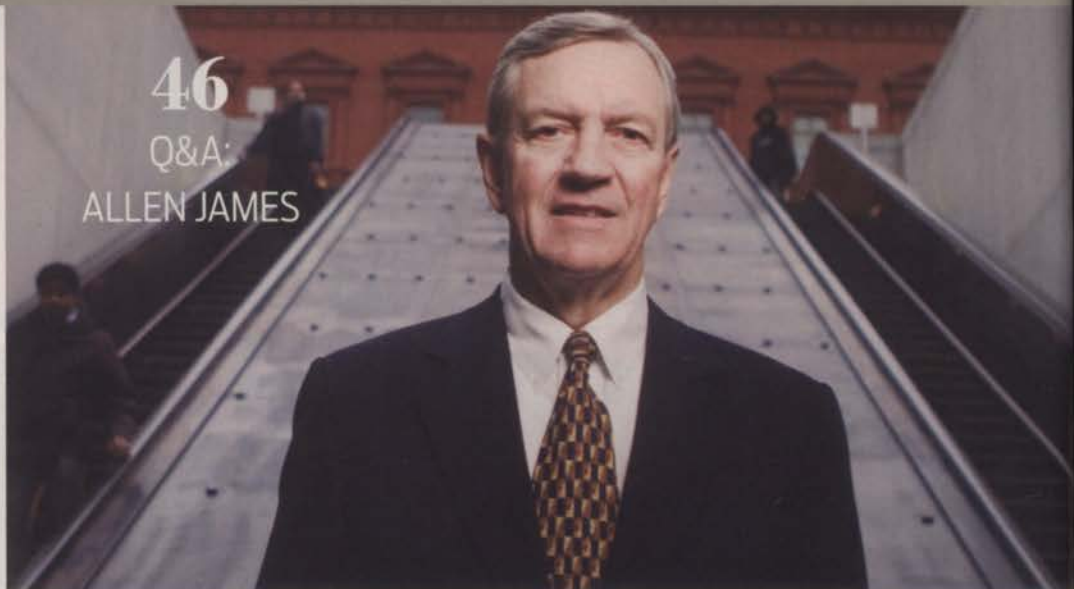
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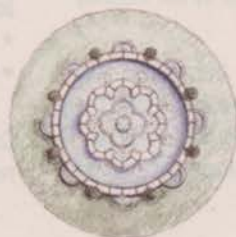


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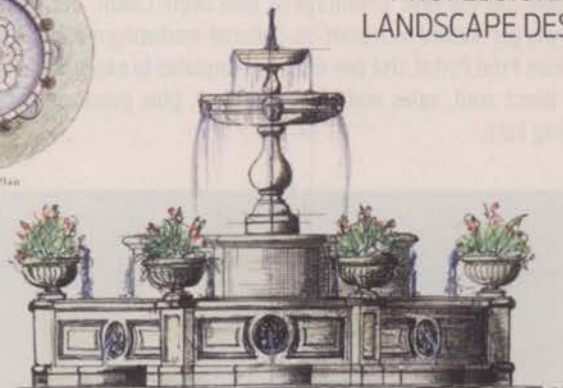


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July 2008, 2009



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USE READER SERVICE #14



KEVIN GILBRIDE
Publisher

Bucking the trend

As I talk with suppliers around our industry about the importance of staying top of mind with you – their customers – even when marketing dollars are harder to come by, it occurs to me that there are striking similarities between our sales efforts and yours.

Sure, it's different on the surface. At *Lawn & Landscape*, we're selling those manufacturers print and online advertising to help them reach out to you. On the other hand, you're reaching out to residential and commercial customers to sell them a variety of landscaping and lawn care services. It's a different type of sale and a different outcome, but our goal is largely the same: to create value that customers are willing to pay for.

How can you accomplish this goal during challenging economic times? You, like many businesspeople, are probably sitting in your office thinking, "How can I afford to spend money on marketing right now?" At the risk of sounding like someone who sells advertising for a living, my question back to you is, "How can you NOT afford to invest in marketing right now?"

If you knew that investing a little in marketing now could generate topline growth of nearly 300 percent as the market recovers, would you bite the bullet and do it?

Lots of companies have done it in the past and it's paid huge dividends for them. During the last significant downturn, Kraft salad dressings and Jif peanut butter both raised marketing budgets and increased sales by 70 percent and 57 percent, respectively. Pizza Hut grew sales by 61 percent and Taco Bell jumped 40 percent. And, those amazing market share gains didn't go away – the companies held them and continued to build incrementally on them for years afterward. But, most importantly, they recognized the truth of the old Chinese proverb that opportunity springs from a crisis.

You'll note from the relative "fatness" of this *Lawn & Landscape* issue that we've practiced what we've preached and marketed hard to make sure that we're still our advertisers' No. 1 choice in the industry. I think that's primarily due to the fact that we produce a quality product and we have great relationships within the industry. But, we also aggressively marketed our magazine and made sure that our customers – your suppliers – clearly understood that we are the best platform for them to get their message across to you even during tough times. The fact that you're reading this right now is further evidence of that.

I urge you to think about how you can do the same thing for your business. What's your unique selling proposition? What sets you apart from the crowd? What messages can you send to make sure that you retain and grow your business this year?

In that vein, our cover story this month is required reading – essentially Landscape Marketing 101 – for all of you who agree that there's never been a better time to be totally focused on growing your business. The story gives you the basic motivations and "hot buttons" that drive customers to hire professionals to manage their properties and, hopefully, shows you how you can incorporate those concepts into your sales efforts.

I know we're also bucking the trend by constantly investing in a better publication and better electronic media to serve your needs and the needs of our advertising partners. As management legend Stephen R. Covey once wrote: "If you're proactive, you don't have to wait for circumstances or other people to create perspective-expanding experiences. You can consciously create your own." I hope (once, of course, you finish reading the magazine cover-to-cover) you take that advice to heart and recommit yourself to expanding your perspectives and bucking the trend. **L**

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3. **How to Control Product Costs** - How to deliver products *accurately* and *effectively* using IPM techniques to reduce cost.
4. **How to Retain & Gain Customers** - Innovative ideas to reduce customer turnover and attract new customers, while reducing non-productive travel time.
5. **How to Control Overhead** - Choosing equipment and vehicles that produce higher profits...EVERY day.

With the right methods and equipment, your business can flourish. We want to be an integral part of that. We hope to hear from you soon!



CHANGING NAMES

What do you guys think of changing a business name? My current name is Driftwood Lawn Care & Landscaping. I don't really advertise for lawn care, and mow about 80 yards a week and am not looking to expand on that. I was thinking of keeping the word "Driftwood" and adding "Outdoor Living" to the name.

Ryan Holt

L&L Message Board

Sounds like a patio furniture store, especially "Driftwood." Are you sure you want to go there? Try something geographical or regional like West County Outdoor Services, Eastern Maryland Outdoor services, etc.

Terry Duran

L&L Message Board

There is nothing wrong with the name "Driftwood." Your name is what you make it. Some of the largest companies in the world have horrible names. The way you position and market your company is the important thing.

Kory Ballard

L&L Message Board

DOWN WITH THE DEVIL

I am an independent voter who has cast many votes for both republicans and democrats. Keeping that in mind, I would like to respond to Pat Jones' Devil's Advocate column in the December issue of *Lawn & Landscape*. But the article is so full of right-wing hysteria and factual errors that I'm not sure where to begin.

Mr. Jones starts his column with juvenile, inflammatory name calling (Pres-

ident-elect Barack "Vladimir Hussein Lenin"), thereby reducing any attempt at intelligent debate. It's no different than left-wing nuts labeling our current president "Hitler." While he may argue that this was done in jest, I counter that during this divisive time, name calling does nothing to reconcile our differences.

Mr. Jones goes on to say that Obama will "flush 232 years of successful free market capitalism down the crapper." I'm afraid he's in need of a history lesson. The United States has never had a free market. President Teddy Roosevelt smashed monopolies at the turn of the 20th Century. And now, after eight years of a republican administration, the government owns large shares of most of the big financial institutions in the country and is well on its way to owning the auto industry as well.

Moreover, Mr. Jones says "80 percent of our market generates less than a million dollars a year in revenue." If that's the case, almost none of these businesses will have their tax burdens increased. As put forth in the election, taxes would be increased on businesses that net \$250,000 or more, not gross. There are very few small businesses that net \$250,000.

Finally, Mr. Jones ends by taking a swipe at President Bill Clinton. Again, his history needs correction. Clinton did have a democratic congress for his first two years in office and America didn't come to an end. In fact, the country enjoyed unprecedented economic growth, budget surpluses and a reduction in the welfare rolls.

Name and location withheld by request.

- Ed.

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Leading business media for landscape contractors.

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NEWS FEBRUARY MIC CHECK

Lawn & Landscape debuts Market Insight Council

This month, *Lawn & Landscape* introduces its Market Insight Council, a panel of landscape and lawn care professionals who manage various sized businesses across the country, as well as representatives with various market knowledge from some key landscape associations. Check out our list of council members in the *Lawn & Landscape* masthead on page 8. *Lawn & Landscape* editors will be checking in with them regularly to gauge hot button issues and make sure the magazine is delivering on its promise to help readers better their businesses.

But just because we have this team in place doesn't mean we don't want to hear from you. If you ever want to comment on a story in the magazine, share an idea, talk about your business or critique the magazine in general, please feel free to contact us. Send input to Nicole Wisniewski at nwisniewski@gje.net or 330-523-5382.



“In 13 years, we’ve bought 122 Case skid steers. We always buy Case because we can rely on them to perform in all conditions and there’s never an issue with parts. Plus, we can depend on our Case dealer to be there for us whenever we need something.”

Kevin Stone, Landscape Concepts Management



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Cindy Code

Director, Interactive Content
Lawn & Landscape

FEBRUARY 2009

Director's Pick



Alas, the holidays are over. No more Macy's Thanksgiving Day parade or holiday bowl games. But don't let the winter doldrums set in. In case you missed it, be sure and check out the highlights of the Inauguration Day parade. The celebration was full of history, pomp and circumstance and various featured groups including cadets from the Virginia Military Institute, Chinese lion dancers and a model Mars rover.

However, the parade highlight had to be a group from President Obama's home state, the World Famous Lawn Rangers, known for their zany dances with lawnmowers and toilet plungers. Check out the video in the multimedia section of www.lawnandlandscape.com. For other Inauguration Parade facts, visit: <http://inaugural.senate.gov>.

Online Features

Gotta Love Those Bugs – Listen to our online-extra podcast, which relays industry innovations in insect control. (Say that five times fast!)

RFPs – We know how busy our readers are, so we scour the Internet and compile a list of "requests for proposal" to help keep you on top of potential bid opportunities. View the latest RFPs and be sure to click on each item's link to get the full synopsis. Come back frequently to see what has been added.

In the Know – Stay on top of lawn and landscape industry developments at the click of a button. Go to the top of www.lawnandlandscape.com, click on the orange RSS news feed symbol and receive the news in real-time.

MSDS – There's no place like www.lawnandlandscape.com to view a complete and up-to-date list of MSDS and product labels. Bookmark this page for easy reference.

E-newsletter Subscriptions

Lawn & Landscape has introduced six e-newsletters to its products roster. These targeted e-newsletters are sent out on a quarterly basis and are designed to help contractors cultivate profitable market niches.

E-newsletters include:

- Power Equipment Insider
- Irrigation Industry Insider
- Trucks & Trailers Insider
- Pesticides & Fertilizers Insider
- Nursery & Ornamentals Insider
- Design/Build Insider

There is no charge to receive any or all of the e-newsletters. Please e-mail Cindy Code at ccode@gie.net and indicate which e-newsletters you'd like to receive. Also, if you have news or information you'd like to submit for any of these e-newsletters, we'd love to hear your thoughts.

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Hoping to Turn Silver? Keep Changing.

This year marks Grunder Landscaping's 25th anniversary. Many things sure have changed since those first few days in business. However, that's a good thing. As the extraordinarily successful inventor Charles Kettering observed, "The world hates change, yet it is the only thing that has brought progress."

Hoping to inspire similar lawn care professionals who want to make progress of their own, I thought it would be beneficial to share a few short stories about the types of changes Grunder Landscaping has made during the past few decades.

Some changes were small. Others were big and expensive. But no matter the type of change, it was all beneficial.

QUALITY MARKETING

When I started my business in 1984, a friend drew up an advertising flyer and my brother and I went door-to-door handing out copies. We were pleasantly surprised to win three mowing jobs that way, and we charged our new customers \$25 each. Last November, we hung professionally designed advertisements on 146 doors in an exclusive neighborhood. The result? We were rewarded with two, \$10,000 maintenance contracts.

Though our marketing medium remained the same, we improved the quality of our printed pieces and targeted areas where we'd get the best return on investment. Change brought progress.

ATTRACTING ATTENTION

Also in 1984, I affixed a magnetic sign to an old Ford Ranger and then drove it all around town. That's how we grabbed the attention of a prominent local CEO.

(Little did he know that the truck he saw was actually my father's.) Today, we sell a lot of our work by utilizing the 30 or so trucks we have on the road. Our trucks are green, emblazoned with our professionally designed logo and washed frequently to keep our image sparkling. We do invest more into our equipment today, but we also get much more out of it.

ILLUSIONS OF GRANDEUR

In 1986, I purchased a quarter-page ad in the Yellow Pages for \$150 a month. I wondered then if it was worth it. Today, I know it's not and I no longer advertise that way. Instead, I focus on my company's Web site. The Internet has completely revolutionized the way the world does business. It enables companies to have a tremendous presence regardless of their size, and people often equate a company's size with its ability to do a job. So the bigger, the more sophisticated and professional you look, the better your chance is of winning a job – and the best part is that you can achieve this simply with a well-designed Web site.

FROM THE FUTURE WITH LOVE

It was 1986 and I bought my first car phone. I paid \$1,500 for that brick. It looked like a walkie-talkie from the TV show M*A*S*H. But the funny thing was, my clients were blown away when I'd call them from my truck to tell them I was running late for a meeting. One called me the James Bond of the landscaping industry! Today, I'm a fan of any new technology that enables me to communicate better with my clients and team. But the trick is to make the technology work for you, and for you not to work for the technology. For example, I rely on my Black-

Berry to help me run my business, but I dispense with it when I meet with clients. Nothing has and nothing ever will replace the value of face-to-face interaction.

SMILING HELPS

I needed a loan to grow my business in 1990. I was graduating from college and wanted to buy some more equipment, but few banks would talk to me. I didn't have a budget or a business plan, but I did have enthusiasm and showmanship. That got me the loan I needed. Today, I don't have any trouble securing loans, but the recent economic downturn has showed everybody how important a good working relationship with a bank is. I work with a small bank that caters to my concerns, and my banker sends me quite a few jobs and tips that help me grow.

BUYING PROGRESS

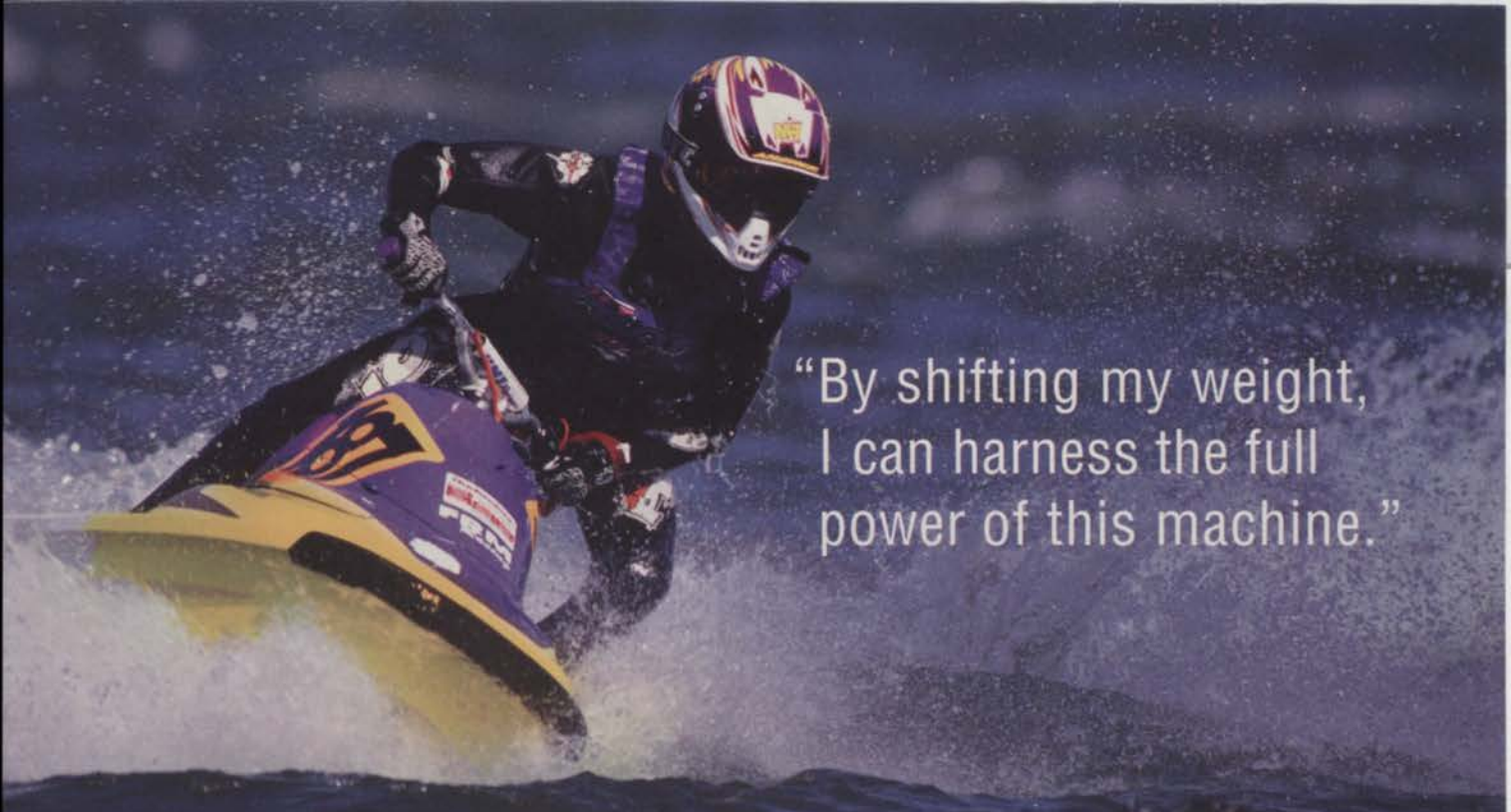
Twenty-five years ago, my company didn't install lighting, putting greens, water gardens or paver patios. Today, we do all this and more. We used to keep track of our records with pen and paper. Now, we'd be lost without our computers. Grunder Landscaping once was a company of one, which I piloted by the seat of my pants. Today, I oversee a team of 45 professionals and never undertake a project or enter a meeting without having done my research and planning.

Our world and our industry change every day. Sometimes it's hard to keep up with it all – it's far easier to cling to the old ways of doing business than to embrace new things. But if 25 years of running a landscaping company has taught me anything, it's that you can't grow if you don't change. 



MARTY GRUNDER

is a speaker, consultant and author, and also owner of Grunder Landscaping Co. in Miamisburg, Ohio. Reach him at landscapesales@gie.net or via www.martygrunder.com.



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America's Love for Lawns

How you can profit from our nation's historic lawn care obsession.

BY JOHN TORSIELLO

To say Americans have an unabashed love affair with their lawns would certainly not qualify as an understatement.

It's estimated that some 60 million Americans manicure their lawn to varying degrees, and around half of that number hire lawn care professionals to keep their grass, shrubs and trees healthy, green and tidy. Lawns in the U.S. are also said to cover an area about the size of New York State, and lawn care is estimated to be a \$59 billion annual industry.

However, the history of the well-maintained lawn is a relatively short one. The English, especially those owning large estates, are credited with imbedding the

image of a stately lawn into the psyche of the world. Some historians believe that desires for lawns originated in the 17th Century when royal families found them ideal for showcasing massive castles, manor homes and for flaunting wealth and importance. Soon, the land around a home became a status symbol rather than a place to plant gardens or trees.

As early as 1841, Andrew Jackson Downing published a landscape-garden book aimed at the American audience. The Newburgh, N.Y., nursery owner saw landscaping as uplifting to the human spirit, and labeled it a civilizing factor that a still rough and tumble American society craved.



PHOTO: JEFFREY M. HARRIS



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Soon after books and journals showed Americans what it was like to live in luxury, a lawn craze started sweeping the U.S. in the mid-1800s. Beautiful lawns were touted as essential for a person that wished to make style and wealth statements. And with the advent of the push mower around 1870, anyone who owned property could have a lawn.

At the turn of the 20th Century, various groups and organizations (most prominent among them being the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the U.S.

etched into the national consciousness. Further lawn support came from the first color telecasts of professional golf events, which spurred more fascination with large, manicured green spaces.

The advent of two-person working families and subsequent attempts to manage ever-expanding lawns and landscapes in the 1970s and 1980s led Americans to turn to lawn care professionals for the maintenance of their prized outdoor possessions. These individuals had the time, know-how and tools to properly maintain yards and landscape.

ing results in a whopping 100 to 200 percent recovery value per investment, topping such investments as kitchen and bathroom remodeling and the addition of a swimming pool to a property.

"Americans love their lawns," says Jim Fetter, Bayer Environmental Science sales manager. "Many people take pleasure working in the yard, while others simply enjoy the activities that can take place on the lawn."

In a recent Bayer Lawn Care Institute (LCI) study, 40 percent of those surveyed said they have far less time now than they



"Many people take pleasure working in the yard, while others simply enjoy the activities that can take place on the lawn."

— Jim Fetter, Bayer Environmental Science

Golf Association) conducted research to find an ideal grass seed with which the growing homeowner class could plant to help "green" America.

The USDA finally settled upon a mixture of seeds from around the world, including Bermudagrass from Africa, bluegrass from Europe and a mix of fescues and bentgrass that could withstand America's multiple climates.

Such inventions as the rotary mower, garden hose and sprinklers gave Americans more tools to establish and maintain lawns, and the desired home-centric, post-World War II lifestyles spurred lawns to even greater acceptance in American society. Homeowners in Levittown — the country's first planned communities that sprouted up in New York and Pennsylvania in the late 1940s and early 1950s — were shining examples of tasteful uniformity. Indeed, the owners of the communities agreed by pact to mow their lawns two times a week between the months of April and November.

The relative peace of President Dwight Eisenhower's administration in the 1950s further enhanced the image of lawns as part of the "American Dream." Pictures of dad mowing the lawn, mom weeding the flowerbed, kids romping about the yard and backyard barbecues were

But despite this positive, progressive history of lawns, there have been detractors to the lush emerald carpets that homeowners adore.

In his book "American Green," author Ted Steinberg virtually likens the desire for a perfect lawn to an obsessive-compulsive disorder — all while railing against the perfect lawns that are now commonplace.

Yet while attracting media attention, these books and studies seem to be merely interesting sidebars in the never-ending saga of lawns. A study by researchers at Ohio State University estimates that the space devoted to turfgrass in the U.S. is growing at a rate of almost 600 square miles a year. Other studies have shown that money spent on maintaining and enhancing a lawn is one of the best investments a homeowner can make.

"A properly cared for lawn and landscape helps build curb appeal," says David Klemm, president of Connecticut-based Klemm Real Estate. "Very often, the first impression a potential buyer has when approaching a house is lasting. A well-groomed lawn and landscape is a major selling point, and lawn care professionals and landscapers can help create that curb appeal that is so important to a home's overall value."

In a *Money* magazine report, landscap-

did five years ago. Another LCI study showed that a staggering 90 percent of homeowners prefer using experienced lawn care professionals for turf and landscape issues, pointing out the glaring fact that, while homeowners want beautiful lawns, maintaining them by themselves is becoming increasingly difficult.

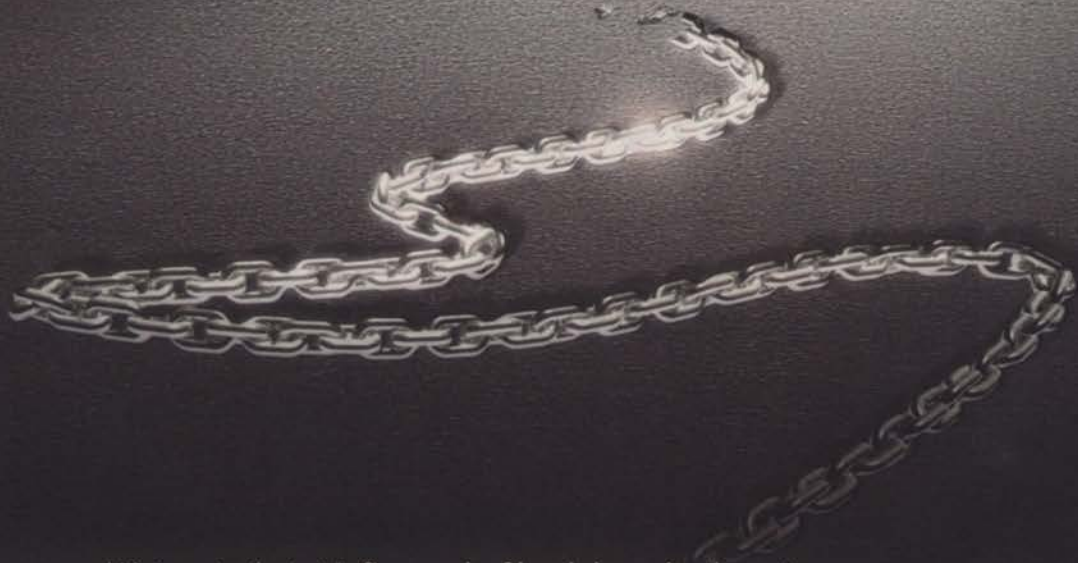
This is why lawn and landscape professionals need to understand how to properly utilize Americans' love affair with lawns.

"Two of the most compelling reasons that homeowners hire a professional lawn care provider are convenience and expertise," Fetter says. "When we saw the results of our surveys we encouraged lawn care operators to promote that the hiring of a professional will result in more free time and to communicate this statement through marketing materials, such as invoice stuffers, door hangers and newsletters, or simply mentioning it when talking to current or existing customers."

In a nod to current concerns over the use of chemicals, he added that LCOs should also promote their expertise in safely and effectively treating lawns.

Because many LCOs have college degrees in horticultural science or certifications related to lawn care, they also have the expertise and knowledge to protect

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homeowners from new invasive pests – such as the Emerald Ash Borer and Chilli Thrips – from attacking expensive and sometimes irreplaceable trees and ornamentals.

“Expert service providers are important to protect a homeowner’s landscape investment. Most homeowners lack the expertise to identify and address

are caring for is nice and thick, green and weed free and the lawn next door may have a lot of weeds and be off color. In the world of keeping up with the Joneses, it is a strong passive marketing tool.

“Another tool we use in marketing is telling potential customers not to take our word for it, but rather take a look at the five or six other homes that we care

well-maintained lawn can be a rather inexpensive pleasure.

“People will always have pride in where they live,” he explains. “The economy may be slipping, but keeping one’s home and yard looking nice is something people won’t give up. And people will likely be spending more time at home this year so they will want a nice looking yard, even

“If someone wants one dandelion pulled, then offer that level of service. You have to remember that these types of people are often your best customers and that they will talk to other homeowners.” – Dan Rothermel, Lawn Care Association of Pennsylvania

these challenging issues. LCOs should promote their credentials whenever possible.”

Dan Rothermel, vice president of the Lawn Care Association of Pennsylvania, strongly believes in what he calls an ideal “passive marketing tool” that can help lawn care professionals spread the gospel of the ideal lawn.

“One of the best marketing tools you have is the neighbor’s yard next to a home that you service. The lawn you

for in a neighborhood. It’s visual proof of what lawn care professionals can do to make a person’s lawn stand out.”

With a fledgling economy, many homeowners are tightening their budgets and putting off vacations or new car purchases. But one item Americans likely won’t scrimp on is their lawn and yard, says David Hofacre, president of the Ohio Lawn Care Association.

Hofacre says LCOs should take the opportunity to point out that having a

more than in the past.”

While homeowners may begin the year trying to do more of the yard work themselves, Hofacre says that will wear off.

“By the time summer rolls around and there are so many things taking up homeowners’ time, they need professional help.”

Lynn Luczkowski, owner of L2 Communications, says that a slow economy can provide opportunity for LCOs.

“Especially now, during economic

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uncertainty, lawn care professionals can market to customers the importance of preserving what matters most – a person's own home and yard. If someone is going to spend more time at home, they should make the most of what they have."

Luczkowski adds that LCOs can orchestrate contests, promotions and "make-overs much like the popular reality television shows." Moreover, they can take photos and personalize how they turned a "grubby looking yard into a paradise."

Jackie Beck, owner of Beck Communications in Old Saybrook, Conn., says lawn care professionals need to have a strong communication plan in place at all times in order to reach out and touch America's love affairs with their yards.

"Lawn care professionals should offer seasonal tips via their Web site, e-mail blasts or direct mailings, all while incorporating their products and services. This is a great way to keep in front of current and potential customers on an ongoing

basis. When it comes to needing services, your company will be on the top of the list for a quote."

But Rothermel says LCOs should be careful not to promise customers a lawn that is too perfect.

"The image some people have of their lawn looking like a golf course is not always realistic because the typical lawn is not maintained like a golf course," he says. "Explain what a customer's expectations should be and that a lawn is not something that you can carve out of granite. It's always changing and dependent on variables such as weather and use."

However, Rothermel says, be prepared to go the extra mile if a customer wants to seek perfection.


"Offer different levels of service. If someone wants one dandelion pulled, then offer that level of service. You have to remember that these types of people are often your best customers and that they will talk to other homeowners."

Fetter also advises lawn care professionals to not downplay the desire of many homeowners to be more environmentally sensitive.

"Show concern for what products are being used on their property. It's critical that LCOs take time to educate their customer on the safety of the products and how using them as-directed actually benefits the environment."

He adds that homeowners are becoming increasingly interested in improving the quality of their lawns and landscaping – not just from a cosmetic standpoint, but also in terms of their lawn's ability to resist stress and use less water.

"LCOs need to adapt to this new type of customer and ensure their service matches up to the demand."

Says Beck, "Make sure your marketing and advertising is truthful. Unsubstantiated claims can backfire on a business and customers will question the validity of your company." 

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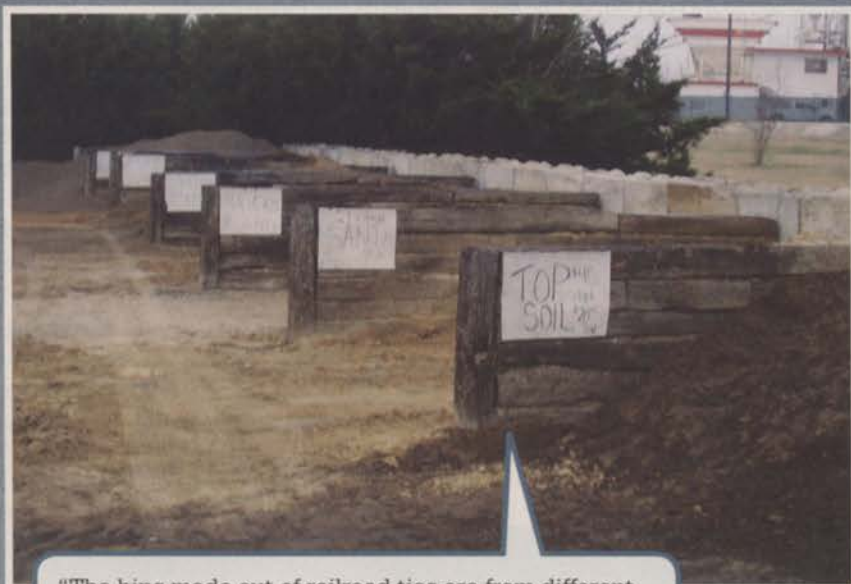
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Recycling for Profit

Ron Hall, Ron's Organics, Inc., Mesquite, Texas



"The bins made out of railroad ties are from different retaining walls that we would take down because clients wanted to go with the modern stone look. Very few of the ties were paid for. They were recycled. When we go to landscape jobs, we'll even harvest plants that we feel are going to be viable sometime down the road. We'll bring them back, repot them, hold them for a year to make sure they are healthy and – slowly but surely – we'll resell them."

"Rather than pay \$100 for each shelving unit, I went to an auction and got some from a Home Depot that closed. The shelves didn't need to be pretty, just functional. They go all the way to the ceiling so we can use as much space as we can."



"These are the bulk bins. Buying in bulk helps the profit margins and we don't have to drive around and pick stuff up. That was the reason we opened our garden center – just because we were doing such a large volume of landscaping. We could buy greater volume at a cheaper price."



"Twelve years ago, I was making money with synthetic fertilizer. But I started developing sensitivity to it. Every year when it was time to do grub control, I'd start getting headaches. So, long story short, I decided I was going to quit using chemicals and go all-organic. I came up with my own fertilizer blends and I make them in my shop using about 25 different ingredients."

Putting It All Together

Exmark upgrades its manufacturing process with the Next Lazer Z.

Forged from an unprecedented amount of end-user input and countless hours of engineering, Exmark's Next Lazer Z was poised to turn heads in the landscape industry. But to produce the industry's leading zero-turn mower, Exmark needed to raise the bar in how it manufactured the machine.

The improvements made to Exmark's manufacturing process for the Next Lazer Z allow the mower manufacturer to continue to work safely, to elevate quality expectations to new heights, to offer more flexibility from its manufacturing facility and to position Exmark so it can quickly adapt to new challenges, says Exmark Mechanical Engineer Mike Mayfield.

To achieve these goals, Exmark addressed four key areas.

Timing. Nearly 18 months in advance of Next Lazer production startup, Exmark began preparing its Beatrice, Neb., facility for this product family. One of the first actions was to standardize the assembly lines to offer more flexibility in managing the manufacturing process. It would be necessary to continue building all current models during the preparation for the Next Lazer product. So by standardizing the assembly areas, it became easier to move products around and make room for Next Lazer production.

Automation. Robotic welding cells were created to take advantage of the commonality designed into the Next Lazer product family. The weld cells are set up with tooling designed for quick change out and rapid reconfiguration to allow on-



Improvements made to the manufacturing process result in a superior, professional-grade product.

demand fabrication of any Next Lazer model. The robotic welders maintain Exmark's traditional emphasis on durable, high-quality products while expanding its capability to rapidly bring new model configurations to market.

"On the assembly line, computerized torque equipment was installed in some of the most critical areas to assist the assemblers in determining the proper torque requirement in situations where the requirement varies from one model to another," Mayfield says. "This helps Exmark insure that the proper torque is applied to each of the Next Lazer models, even with a mixed build sequence on the assembly line."

Standard Work. During the pre-production phase, Exmark developed work instructions for assembly based on the standardized assembly line concept. Using in-house talent, a new electronic system was developed to distribute and display these work instructions at each work station. Touch screen monitors provide up-to-date written instructions as well as photos or graphic sketches to assist operators with assembly work. As design changes occur in the future, the standard work can be quickly modified and transmitted to each work station to assure accurate implementation.

Material Handling. Exmark installed overhead hoists and manipulators covering most of the assembly areas to improve safety and provide ergonomic relief when components or subassemblies are too heavy or awkward to manipulate by hand. Special devices for grasping components have been designed where needed. The overhead cranes use common components wherever possible so workers can move assembly processes around and reconfigure the overhead hoists when necessary.

Together, these changes improve the flow of materials from receiving to assembly to shipping and have streamlined the production process to provide landscape contractors a next-generation zero turn with the best-quality cutting experience on the market.

>> This is the third of four advertorials focusing on Exmark's development of its Next Lazer Z from concept, to engineering and design, to production and concluding with the contractor.



Natural Innovation

New turf grass species are helping consumers save money and energy.

With the cost of fertilizers, pesticides and water on the rise, replacing existing stands of grass by overseeding, split seeding or entirely replanting with newer varieties is becoming a more attractive alternative, according to those in the grass-seed and grounds-maintenance businesses.

"Many of the newer grasses require fewer inputs, which makes them less costly to maintain,"



BY PETER BLAIS



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says Dr. Leah Brilman, director of research at Seed Research of Oregon (SRO).

For example, recently developed SRO bluegrasses requires less nitrogen than the older stands they generally replace. The same is true with the fescues. Some new ryegrasses show better gray leaf spot resistance. Shifting to one of the newer varieties of bluegrass, fescue or ryegrass can yield lawns that are a darker-green color, have a more dense growth pattern, require fewer nutrients and need less mowing.

Overseeding the newer varieties into the old can save money, Brilman says. But in the long run, completely removing the old turf and replacing it with one of the newer cultivars will save even more.

"You can get a significant maintenance-cost reduction by overseeding aggressively and changing the management program to meet the needs of the new material. But you won't get 100-percent catch on that

first overseed. It takes longer to replace the old turf that way (rather than entirely replanting). You may have to overseed several times."

Payback from introducing newer turf varieties may take a couple of years and will vary between locations, Brilman says. Each species and site is different. But the savings can be significant.

EXPERIMENTATION

Researchers involved in a recent Kansas State University trial on a new Kentucky bluegrass, for instance, watered the turf every time it reached 50-percent wilt. During the four-month trial, common bluegrasses planted nearby required 22 inches of water during that time period. The newer grasses, like SRO's Mid Atlantic and Compact America, needed just 8 inches.

"If you are paying for your water, that is a significant savings," Brilman says.

Most landscapers historically based their buying decisions on seed performances at the National Turfgrass Evaluation Program trials. Seed suppliers shaped

their breeding programs according to the landscapers' decisions. But in recent years, Scotts Turf-Seed has driven its breeding program toward finding varieties that can use less water, no phosphorus, less nitrogen and reductions in other inputs.

"We breed varieties for specific niches," says Wayne Horman, Scotts Turf-Seed account manager. "General managers of landscape companies in the Northeast, for instance, should be looking for Kentucky bluegrasses along roadways because that turf type is well adapted to the climate. But they should also be salt-tolerant because of the salt used to de-ice roads during the winter and shade-tolerant because of the number of trees.

"We also have a heat-tolerant bluegrass called Thermal Blue that can be used to replant a sports field in the middle of the summer. This is the only time of year that landscapers can replant a busy, southern playing surface because they are used heavily during fall, winter and spring."

Pennington Seed agronomist Russ Nicholson said his firm recently introduced a new product line called Smart Seed. Realizing water shortages will continue to be a major problem in the coming decades, the company has aggressively bred new turf varieties that conserve the precious liquid.

Dr. Leah Brilman says that overseeding newer varieties into old can reduce maintenance costs.





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Among them are Mallard and Blue Ridge Kentucky bluegrasses as well as Greystone and Justice tall fescues.

"We found varieties that will use as much as 30-percent less water," Nicholson said. "Many of the new cultivars also have better drought and disease tolerance."

With local governments and regulatory agencies encouraging and sometimes requiring lawn owners to use effluent – which usually contains higher sodium levels than potable water – Pennington has also worked to develop more salt-tolerant Bermuda grasses for use in transition zones and southern areas.

But there are upfront costs in taking out an existing stand of grass and replacing it with a newer one. It's the same with overseeding using newer varieties.

"Some older bluegrasses were cheaper to install originally than the newer ones," said JacklinGolf vice president Rick Elyea. "The newer varieties may cost a few more

cents per pound. But some of them can go without water for 10 to 14 days. Most older varieties can't do that."

JacklinGolf has several new varieties that can be overseeded or replanted, which saves significantly on inputs. Nu Destiny is a Kentucky bluegrass that grows in compact, dark-green stands and lengthens more slowly. Marco Polo is a drought- and heat-tolerant Kentucky bluegrass.

The choice whether to introduce any new variety – either by overseeding, split-seeding or tearing up the old turf and seeding in new – is ultimately up to the landowner's pocketbook and patience. If the landowner wants to establish the new cultivar as quickly as possible, then completely remove the old turf, plant the new and add soil amendments to improve the growing medium, Elyea advises.

"A one-time purchase of the newer varieties can save lawn owners 30 to 40 percent on water."

– Chris Edwards,
Robbins Landscaping

GROUNDS COMPANIES SEE CHANGES

"It would be great if, for instance, when landscapers needed to fix a shady spot they would use a shade-tolerant seed," Horman says. "But they do not always do that

because the price might be higher than something they already have on hand or they can find something else less expensive. This can be a shortsighted solution, especially considering the unprecedented increases in the cost of fertilizers and other inputs in the past year.

"Landscapers need to make good business decisions. If customers pay landscapers for turf-care programs designed to keep their lawns green, they don't care if the landscaper's fertilizer costs go up. They paid for the program and don't expect the landscaper to pass along those extra fertilizer costs. The best answer for

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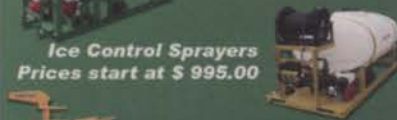


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the landscaper might be to find another seed that requires less fertilizer and start overseeding, split seeding or replacing customers' existing grass types with the newer ones that require less fertilizer."

John Stuhlsats is general manager of award-winning Tender Care Lawn and Landscape in Derby, Kan. Derby is located on the edge of transition zone. Most lawn owners in the area favor cool-season grasses, although some have installed warm-season varieties, primarily bermudagrass and some zoysiagrass.

"We generally recommend overseeding or replacing existing cool-season grasses with fescue," Stuhlsats says. "Replanting with a premium fescue blend with shade- and drought-resistant characteristics works well here."

Stuhlsats also notes it is roughly two- to three-times more expensive to sod than seed, which is a consideration for many customers deciding between those two alternatives.

Tom Gear is president and owner of T.R. Gear Landscaping. The Fairfield, Ohio, firm does most of its seeding around new or remodeled construction. Many of the areas near those projects were originally planted years ago with older strains of Kentucky bluegrass and have performed poorly in some of the drought conditions the Midwest has experienced in recent years.

"We have been replacing many of those lawns with new fescues that are more drought- and insect-resistant," he says. "They have older, inferior species."

Homeowners are also changing over old grasses for new, according to Chris Edwards, maintenance manager at Richmond, Va.,-based Robbins Landscaping.

"We are starting a marketing campaign to show that a one-time purchase of the newer varieties can save lawn owners 30 to 40 percent on water," he says. "Even if you use your own well and have plenty of water, you still use more electricity to

pump that extra water during droughts."

Edwards says during this past year his firm went largely with a blend of several fescues when overseeding or reseeding. And among Robbins Landscaping's 150 commercial clients, those who planted that particular mixture have been very happy with their choice.

THE BOTTOM LINE

New seed blends are more drought-tolerant, disease-tolerant and denser than the turf types they replace. Clippings can usually remain on the ground and disintegrate into the soil, meaning less need for fertilizers. Not to mention, denser growth patterns also result in fewer weeds, meaning fewer herbicides and less spraying time are needed.

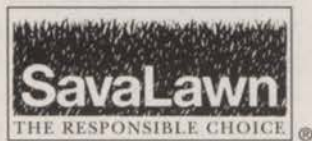
While overseeding or replacing existing grasses with new varieties may temporarily increase costs, many lawn owners can save money and have healthier turf by going with the newer seed varieties. **L**

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Finding the Pony

The New Year is just beginning to shape up and the uncertainty of a battered economy still prevails. However, it's not all doom and gloom around the country. Amongst the bad news are opportunities for sharp contractors.

In spite of the general downturn, many of my existing clients anticipate a "decent" 2009. But what surprises me is the number of new clients who have called looking for help to control the growth in their businesses. They are anticipating a rather "robust" year ahead and here's why:

JIM HUSTON

presides over J.R. Huston Consulting, a firm specializing in construction and services management in the green industry. For more information, e-mail benchmarking@jie.net or visit www.jrhuston.biz.

ACQUISITIONS

In the past three months, I have worked with no less than five clients who are in the process of acquiring other businesses. The companies being bought are service- or maintenance-based businesses. A number are irrigation service companies (not all of them small). Other targets include lawn maintenance, winter snow work, lawn care applications and some installation work.

The motivation for making these acquisitions is broad. However, most of my clients are attempting to either expand their current range of services or increase market share within their existing base of services. Sellers are getting out for a number of reasons. Some want to eliminate a section of their business that does not fit their company's direction. Others are either retiring or making a career change. And I've talked to individuals who are selling because they're tired of being entrepreneurs.

THE SECOND HOME MARKET

Another bright spot in the economy is the second-home market.

The late Sen. Barry Goldwater is said to have once asked a friend, "Do you know where the best place to hunt ducks is?" The friend replied, "No." Goldwater's response: "Where the ducks are!"

The best place to make money is "where the money is." And the money is in the second-home market. Places such as Jackson Hole, Wyo., Lake Tahoe, Calif., and Lake Winnepesaukee, N.H., have economies that are quite robust. While not totally immune from the ebb and flow of the market, they are less prone to its wild fluctuations

He wanted to see what had the greater influence – environment or heredity. He put one alone in a room filled with the latest toys. The other he put into a room full of horse manure. Two hours later, the boy with all the toys was crying and bored to death. The other boy had a shovel and was digging frantically. When queried as to what he was up to, the second boy replied, "There's got to be a pony in here somewhere."

How does this relate to lawn care?

A client of mine was recently

"There are opportunities in the current market, but only a fool would say it's easy to find them."

of late. My clients in these areas are doing rather well. If they're not, it is primarily due to self-inflicted wounds. Many of my clients that anticipate strong growth in 2009 hail from areas heavily influenced by second-home clientele.

GRASS ISN'T ALWAYS GREENER

Then there are the clients who have dug in their heels and are redoubling efforts in their current situation. They are reviewing everything, turning over one rock after another – nothing is sacred!

Some are implementing new software systems that make them more efficient and less overhead-intensive. Others have totally reinvented themselves from a marketing perspective or have simply put their head down and bulled ahead – in spite of market conditions.

To figure out how you should act in the market, remember the story of a psychologist who did an experiment with identical twin boys.

He had bad employees and no work. However, he had just landed a six-figure installation job. He found his "pony," but first he dug through the manure and fired bad employees. It wasn't easy, but he made his opportunity by persisting and believing in his work, his pricing and his future.

Another client just received the job of a lifetime (and it came from out of the blue). It's something that can accelerate the growth and reputation of his company by 10 years. How did he find this job? He didn't, it found him. And it found him because of his reputation for honesty and quality work.

Yes, there are opportunities in the current market, but only a fool would say it's easy to find them. You have to be creative and work hard. Some opportunities may drop from the sky. Others could be in your back yard. Either way, they are out there. It's up to you to have hope and find them. **L**

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PROVEN SOLUTIONS

An LCO controls Cub Cadet's zero-turn mower with the help of new "synchro-steer" technology, which replaced traditional lap bars.

The ABCs of ZTS

BY STEVE TRUSTY

Understanding new zero-turn technology can help increase profits.

If you're an LCO, you're always looking for ways to increase your bottom line. And the tighter the economy, the harder that is to do.

First, it's important to make sure that you have the right equipment for your business and that you get the best and longest use out of that equipment. You also must make sure that employees are being as effective as possible. So as markets and technologies change and evolve, it makes sense to obtain a wealth of information before taking a chance on ordering new zero-turn mowers.

ZERO-TURN BENEFITS AND FEATURES

In talking with manufacturers and operators, there seems to be universal consensus that zero-turn mowers are productive, efficient and maneuverable. They also can provide comfort and versatility, and improvements are constantly being made to increase the levels of each.

Currently, a combination of zero-turn features allows operators to reduce the amount of time spent on a jobsite.

High-capacity mower decks move across the ground faster (some at 10- to 12-miles per hour). Simplified controls, such as the ability to quickly change from mulch to side- or back-discharge, helps increase productivity. Some LCOs are catching grass, but mulching provides environmental benefits and you don't have to contend with the disposal of clippings. This increases productivity.

A few operators prefer rear discharge to side discharge, especially where auto or pedestrian traffic might be a factor. Also, with rear discharge, you can trim closely from either side of the mower and you don't have the extra width of the discharge chute to worry about.

If you haven't operated a zero-turn mower, it does take some training to gain the best effectiveness and maneuverability. The stick and pedal operation takes a bit of time to get used to. However, most LCOs report that once an operator is trained, efficiency increases from 50 to 250 percent when compared to walk-behind or traditional lawn tractors. Still, for 2009 there is an additional option to consider.

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To prevent workplace injury, almost every zero-turn mower manufactured today comes equipped with some type of rollover protection system.

Cub Cadet has introduced a new commercial zero-turn mower called the TANK S. It features "synchro-steer" technology that offers intuitive zero-turn control, replacing traditional lap bars with a steering wheel. Cub Cadet says that this improves comfort, safety and shortens training time for new operators.

Speaking of safety, most zero-turn mowers now come with rollover protection systems (ROPS) and seat belts. Some ROPS fold down for getting into areas with a low overhang. Center of gravity is something else to be aware of. The lower the center of gravity, the more stability an operator has. This can enhance traction and hillside maneuvering. But be sure to check with the manufacturer regarding hillside use. For instance, Ross Hawley, Toro marketing product manager for landscape contractor equipment, says his company does not recommend operating zero-turn mowers on slopes measuring more than 15 degrees.

MID-MOUNT VS. FRONT-MOUNT

Some companies make either mid-mount or front-mount zero-turn mowers. Others offer both. It is important to consider all potential uses for a machine to determine which is best for you. Benefits of mid-mount zero-turn mowers include: greater maneuverability, better visibility, lower center of gravity and the ability to trim closer from either side. Mike Christopher of Missouri-based Christopher's Lawn & Landscape says his company only uses mid-mount.

"We feel the grass lays down better and we can provide a better stripe," Christopher explains.

One of the biggest benefits of front-mount is the ability to utilize attachments. Both OEM and after-market manufacturers are developing more attachments to use with zero-turn mowers. LCOs have become inventive also.



Russ Kimball, president of Kimball Property Maintenance in Salt Lake City, has equipped 15 of his 20 Husqvarna zero-turn mowers with a snow blade.



"Our guys love the maneuverability and say it is as easy as cutting grass," Kimball says. "We don't have to buy four-wheelers anymore for snow removal."

Some operators report that they can mow and trim under trees better with the front-mount. Others say that the ride is a little smoother with front-mount zero-turn mowers. The easiest way to determine what works best for you is to try the different equipment on your job sites. You and your operators will quickly see what is most effective for your usual conditions.

CHANGES TO WATCH FOR

While productivity is important, it is not the only consideration.

"We are aware contractors are feeling pressure from property owners to reduce the size and speed of the mowing equipment

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Will battery technology make gas-powered zero-turns a thing of the past? Some manufacturers are betting on it.

being used on their properties," Hawley says. "This can necessitate the use of smaller machinery such as stand-on mowers."

To increase productivity, some manufacturers are increasing the speed, strength and stability of their smaller units. As LCOs recognize the new potential of zero-turn mowers, a bigger market for commercial grade 30- to 40-inch decks has evolved. But once again, the LCO must determine what works best for his clients.

FUEL OPTIONS

Manufacturers are constantly evaluating engines and fuel options. As some governments and institutions require liquid propane (LP) for bids, more zero-turn mowers will be produced with that option. Another fuel option is bio-diesel. But Hustler advertising manager Ken Raney says that within five years, almost all mowing will be done with electricity.

"Battery technology is the only hang-up right now, but it is coming along rapidly," Raney says. "We are seeing tests showing a four- to five-hour run time with only an hour-and-a-half charge time. This can work for commercial operators."

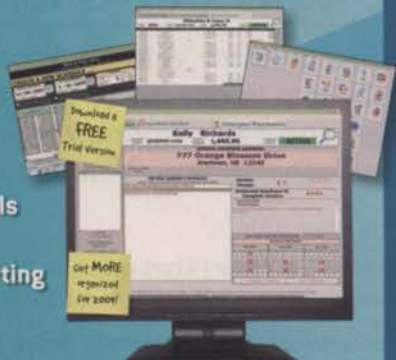
California regulations continue to be the most stringent, but the rest of the nation is not far behind. Because of this (and fluctuating energy prices), emissions and alternate fuels are going to continue to be areas that LCOs need to consider.

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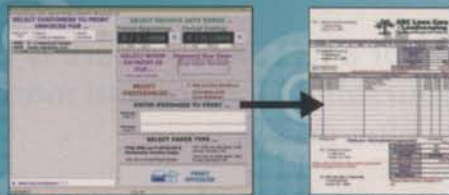
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MAKING THE RIGHT CHOICE

Whether you are replacing older models or making the switch to zero-turn mowers, it's important that you get the right machines for your operation.

John Marchionda, marketing director for Husqvarna professional products, says LCOs should pay particular attention to the cost/benefit ratio.

"Buy exactly what you need – not more or less," Marchionda suggests.

If you buy a lesser product, not only will you be spending more on parts and labor, but you'll also be disappointing customers when you can't get to them because a machine is down. Disgruntled customers are one of the last things an LCO needs in a down economy.

Yet even when you buy the right equipment, problems can happen. It's important to have service readily available from people who recognize the importance of getting your equipment back on the job. Do business with companies that you

can be assured are going to be around for the long haul. Getting a "bargain" from a company that soon goes out of business is not going to help your bottom line.

Additionally, consider standardizing your equipment as much as possible. This helps in a number of ways. Operators can work with any machine at the same level of competence. You can save money by buying replacement parts in quantity, and you can swing better deals with the seller if you are in the market for multiple units of the same model zero-turn mower.

Mark Pavcik, John Deere product manager, recommends that LCOs look for simple equipment design.

"The fewer moving parts, the less there is to maintain, wear out and potentially fail at the jobsite," he says.

The initial price you pay for equipment is not the total cost. In order to make the best buy, you have to consider your total costs over the life of the equipment. Serviceability is another key factor in choice.

Also, remember that you are buying more than a machine. You are buying into a company. Choose wisely.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Once you make a decision on what machines you are going to use, it's imperative to care for them properly. One way to do that is to perform regular maintenance, which is easiest when you choose more serviceable machines.

But what you use to mow a client's lawn is just one of the factors that affect your business' profitability. Coupling your zero-turn mower decisions and service with your overall business and marketing plan ultimately determines your success.

According to Jim Bednar, Cub Cadet marketing manager, LCOs must maximize the value out of every dollar that they spend. This means planning for less down time, minimizing time spent trimming and training employees to use equipment that can maximize productivity. **L**

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USE READER SERVICE #33

Not All Washed Up

BY MARK MIDDENDORF

Hydroseeding helps restore stream banks in Montgomery County, Md.

Most people are probably familiar with the tale of Nessie, the famous sea monster said to be lurking beneath the waters of Loch Ness for more than 70 years. But on the opposite side of the Atlantic, the Chesapeake Bay is home to its own legendary creature, Chessie. Rumored to inhabit the bay, the curiosity and excitement over a possible sighting of Chessie has added to the many reasons tourists visit the Chesapeake Bay every year.

Yet while the story of Chessie may be nothing more than a myth, there is something very real lurking beneath the bay's sparkling blue water. And, unfortunately, it is nothing anyone would want to see.

For more than 30 years, the bay has struggled to maintain its water quality and improve the natural habitat that is home to several types of plant and animal life. While many factors have contributed to the environmental deterioration of the bay, one of the largest problems has come from the heavily polluted water carried by the more than 150 rivers and streams that drain into the bay. Nutrients such as nitrogen and phosphorous, along with an abundance of total suspended solids (TSS) like clay and silt, have harmed plants and animals, and disrupted the biology of the aquatic system.

Two Anacostia River tributaries, Glenmont and Northwood, had been selected

by the local Montgomery County Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) for pilot revegetation projects following initial channel restoration work. The goals were to establish vegetation, and also to build the soil in order to stabilize the banks. This would reduce the amount of TSS washing into the water.

Montgomery County DEP began the process of exploring different approaches for a cost-effective, low impact method to build soils and establish native vegetation on eroding stream banks. In nearby Sunshine, Md., Kevin Richardson and Pogo Sherwood were hard at work conducting research that they hoped would help develop high-quality compost better than any current offering on the market. Richardson proposed his vegetation application idea – spraying an organic compost slurry mix with native seed onto the banks of the streams – to Montgomery County DEP, and it was accepted.

Needless to say, this turned into a great opportunity to apply his years of research and experimentation to the Anacostia tributaries' restoration projects.

"I knew their goal was to revegetate the soil," Richardson says. "But I also knew that it was about more than just spraying a typical seed and fertilizer mix to get the process going. First, the soil needed to be healthy."

Kevin Richardson's organic compost slurry mix penetrated directly into the soil, allowing for faster establishment of vegetation.



With a degree in Environmental Science, Richardson always knew how beneficial compost could be in creating healthy soil. But it wasn't until after college (and while working in Alaska) that he was introduced to the new concept of compost tea – compost that has been turned into a liquid solution so that it can

be sprayed.

"I knew that you don't need chemicals to achieve healthy environments," Richardson says. "I found out that it's the presence of beneficial microorganisms in the compost that really makes it tick."

Following his work in Alaska, Richardson created his own company, Local

"The hydraulically driven mechanical agitation system allows the hydroseeder to handle a wide variety of slurries. FINN invented the hydroseeder. So I felt confident the T-75 would work well for the guys."

-Ron Ciolfi, Wolbert & Master



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Solutions, which provides "green" practices such as ecological landscaping, restoration and sustainable energy systems. His favoring of biological answers over chemical answers caught the attention of Sherwood, who operated his own tree care company and was looking to expand the organic side of the business.

"I met Pogo (Sherwood) and he asked me to come work with him," Richardson says. "He wanted to get Pogo Organics going and our first mission was to develop a really efficient way to brew and store this compost tea."

The partnership became a success when the men found a way to make the tea into a fine powder, which extended its shelf life and made it easier to sell and ship. Richardson then began combining various organic materials such as wood mulch, oat flour and enzymatic digested fish (called fish hydrolysate) with the compost tea to create slurry mixes. The next step the men wanted to take was to experiment with hydroseeders and use the machines to apply these organic compost slurry mixes.

Richardson and Sherwood looked to Wolbert & Master, Inc., a local distributor, for help. Ron Ciolfi, a principle at Wolbert & Master, was eager to provide assistance in the form of a FINN T-75 hydroseeder.

"The hydraulically driven mechanical agitation system allows the hydroseeder to handle a wide variety of slurries," Ciolfi says. "FINN invented the hydroseeder. So I felt confident the T-75 would work well for the guys and their unique application."

The pair became familiar with the hydroseeder and how it worked, and experimented with spraying their organic compost slurry mixes.

"They were looking for a solution to a problem and I had it," Richardson says.

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"I know how important healthy soil is to establishing vegetation. And healthy soil comes from compost. I felt my organic compost slurry mix would be great for this job."

Montgomery County's stream restoration projects were an ideal proving ground for Richardson's innovative technique.

"I took the same hydroseeder that Ron (Ciolfi) had sold to Pogo and used it to apply the organic compost slurry mix to the stream banks," Richardson explains. "Within two weeks, we began seeing the establishment of vegetation. But more than that, I knew the process was making the soil healthy."

The process Richardson used was actually quite simple. He utilized the hydroseeder and applied the mix like any other hydroseeding application. The difference was, instead of using a typical seed and fertilizer mix, he used his organic compost slurry mix.

"I used a diagonal installation process.

In some places I'd spray a lighter mix, and in other places a heavier mix. But the mix was getting right into the ground, right into the soil."

Richardson said the hydroseeders achieved spraying distances of as much as 450 feet from the machine, which was important considering the banks were often located in the middle of thick forests.

"Because of the location of the project, we needed to be able to spray the mix from a distance," Richardson says. "The equipment worked great. I mean, I'm no hydroseeding expert, but that machine did exactly what I needed it to do."

Another factor that came into play with this project was the environmental sensitivity of the area. Because the material would be sprayed onto the banks, there was the chance that some could accidentally get into the water.

But Richardson's mix, consisting of all organic materials, posed little threat.


"That was the big thing, the water qual-

ity," Richardson explains. "But we didn't use any chemicals, so if some of the mix accidentally got into the water, the stream flow quickly diluted the mixture."

While the application did achieve the initial desired result, which was the establishment of vegetation, the process is still considered experimental.

"It's in a testing phase at this point," says Craig Carson of Montgomery County DEP. "We did achieve the immediate goal of establishing vegetation, and based on that, we are interested in using the application on future projects."

As for Richardson, his work with the county and Pogo Organics may be complete, but his mission is far from over. His goal is to raise awareness and show that something can be done to maintain and improve the environment.

"With the right equipment and products, we can create real solutions to environmental problems," Richardson says. "It can be done." 

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RISING TO THE OCCASION

A leader of the industry's most important lobbying group, Allen James talks about tough roads ahead and why contractors can make all the difference. BY PAT JONES

Allen James realizes that lawn care professionals don't wake up in the morning thinking about how they can help his organization succeed in keeping plant protection products on the market.

But he wishes they did.

For the past 18 years, James has led Responsible Industry for a Sound Environment (RISE), the trade association that represents the industry of specialty chemical manufacturers, formulators and distributors. The organization he helped launch in 1991 with \$40,000 in seed money has grown to spend more than \$2 million annually to protect the interests of makers and users of urban pesticides and fertilizers. Yet, it faces an uphill battle – particularly as a new admin-

istration and a not-so-friendly Congress has taken office and a handful of companies have been forced to withdraw from RISE due to the financial crisis.

For James and his small staff, the biggest challenge is educating regulators on the national, state and even local level about the health, social and economic benefits of pesticide use. RISE is sort of the poor city cousin of CropLife America, their "mothership" association that represents farm chemical interests. Yet, thanks to James' efforts and the work of myriad volunteers from around the industry, RISE has held its own over the years in preventing unreasonable laws regarding plant protection for non-crop uses.

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USE READER SERVICE #39

Beltway, one sentence out of James' mouth betrays his Southern roots. "I was a North Carolina tobacco farm kid," he draws. "And my first real job was as executive director of a USDA agricultural commodities office with an elected board of directors who were all farmers. Even though it was essentially a government

position, it taught me a lot about the non-profit business and dealing with volunteer leadership. I quickly learned that I had a natural calling for associations instead of farming."

From there, James went on to run a national fraternity and later to lead a Chicago-based association for the inter-

national sanitary supply industry (yes, the janitorial equipment business). But, he wanted to jump to an association central in Washington and he was recommended for the RISE job by Doug Fender, long-time executive director of Turf Producers International (the sod trade association). His Carolina connection helped during interviews, since several key figures on the search committee were fellow graduates of North Carolina State University. To this day, James – and the industry he serves – is lucky he didn't opt to become a Tarheel or Blue Devil instead.

Jay Vroom, his counterpart at CropLife America, sums it up: "It's definitely been a partnership since 1991. He's exceeded everyone's expectations even from day one. Bringing together the pieces of the specialty industry has been more than a daunting challenge and Allen has done a truly remarkable job."

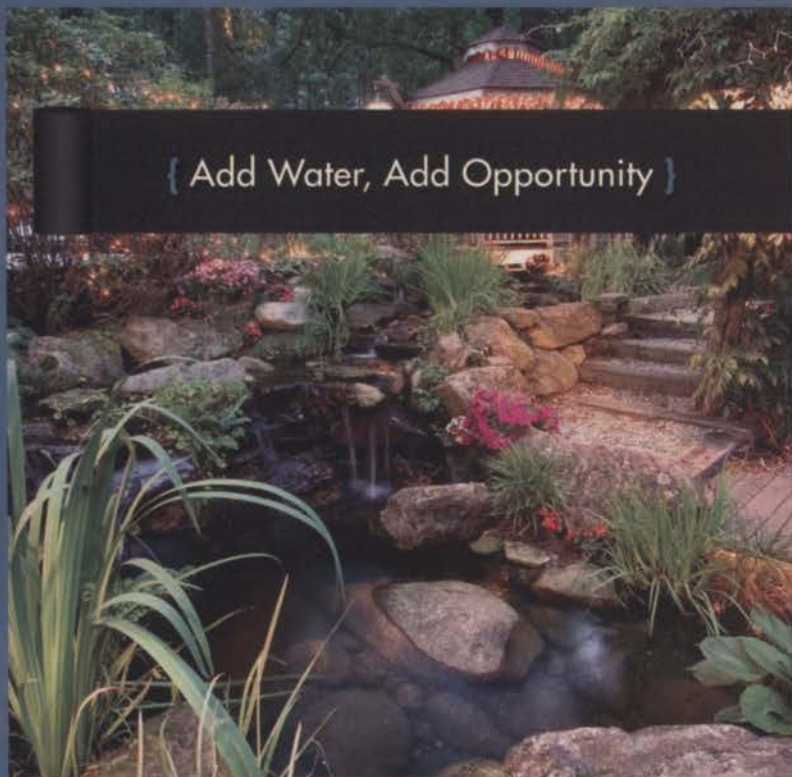
What were your expectations about RISE the day you signed on to lead the organization?

I'll confess – I'd come from a farm background in North Carolina and didn't know much about non-agricultural uses of pesticides. I understood EPA, product registrations, regulatory controls and such and I had a basic knowledge of working with the government. But I didn't know a thing about the green industry and I realized quickly how little voice we had.

All the previous lobbying had been done through smaller end-user organizations. The companies depended on their agricultural counterparts to represent them, and the weakness of that strategy became very apparent in the late '80s and early '90s when Congress decided it was fashionable to come after lawn care and golf. That was my first challenge. Within months, I was testifying before Congressional committees and trying to deal with serious challenges to our business.

How has reality differed from those expectations over the course of two decades?

It was quite different, no question about that. I suddenly realized I had an infant organization on my hands. I was nervous about the lack of operational money, and we were under threat from bans and other



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• UNCOMMON COMMITMENT

USE READER SERVICE #41

accusations that continue even today. We had to build up fast to get the resources to last over a long period of time. I wondered whether I had what it took and whether the industry would have what it takes. Later, we had our first annual meeting and the industry started to come together. Our dues structure was strong and we

grew rapidly. We had 12 members in the beginning of 1991, but more than 50 by the end of that year.

Describe the current situation facing the organization.

Our revenues are now greater than \$2 million annually and things continue to look

good. But, given the situation we face, we're trying to grow by another million. At the annual meeting this year the board proposed a fundraising campaign via the dues program to reaffirm and assure that pests are seen as a vital part of pest management. We call it the Big Audacious Goal. It's less about money than it is the fact that as the world becomes greener, our industry must be seen as a vital contributor to that. We're sometimes painted as just the opposite – harmful to the environment and even the sustainability of life on earth. Some in Congress have bought into that. We're determined to reaffirm to the American public that we're part of the backbone of the green movement.

We also are doing a major piece of public opinion research to get our messages right. People want to live in a safe environment. They depend on our products to keep their homes, schools and businesses safe and livable. We believe there are plenty of messages to communicate that, but we need good research to guide us in the right direction. That said, we're willing to live with what we find. We believe that we can turn the tide, but we need to know if it's possible to convince the American public that we're not the bad guys.

What doesn't the average LCO or end-user understand about the association?

It's a challenge for our suppliers to even reach LCOs and other ultimate customers with their sales or service messages, so we face an even bigger challenge because their attention is divided between so many ways. We have to work through allied and state user organizations, and there are natural forces in play – like internal politics and the occasional turf battle – that serve as roadblocks. We have to work through as many as three other parties and the message gets changed along the way sometimes. It's just the reality of how we're structured.

The applicator doesn't consider us to be a primary association or really their association at all. They're looking to their professional organizations first and foremost. We're always going to be an add-on source of support through those groups. A few years ago, we recognized that so many of our issues are at the local level, so we

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now work cooperatively with allies but also more directly through the national RISE grassroots campaign. We now have more than 1,000 applicators – end users like LCOs and superintendents – around the country who work with us on issues threatening their livelihoods. We work through local and national associations as much as possible, but we have to be there on the local level as well.

How do you do that?

Mainly, our role is to bring coalitions together. We're still just getting started, but a much larger percentage of end users and local groups now know that when they need help, they can turn to RISE. We were getting more calls from local associations, applicators and field sales reps who know us. Those field reps are critical, but their attention is so divided because they're stressed out trying to sell products. Also, GCSAA, PLANET and NPMA have embraced our grassroots approach and recognized that it wasn't a competition to decide who should try to solve which problems. Now, it's all about cooperation to build coalitions at the local level. They've been great partners.

How much will things change with the new administration and Congress?

Our board really had a lot of foresight in pushing for our grassroots program over the past few years. We're much more ready than we could have been – and bluntly, we needed to be.

Key (Congressional) committees are now controlled by individuals who have a track record of distrusting our industry. The financial crisis will take precedent initially, but Sens. Waxman, Boxer, Pelosi, Lieberman and Reid will eventually get around to us and it will be much more difficult than anything we've faced in decades. We think we'll see a new magnitude of attention because of the breadth of the Democratic control and the powerful people who just plain don't like us.

Fortunately, we're better equipped to deal with it than ever. But, on the other hand, the revenues in our industry (which drive RISE dues) are also under pressure. The marketplace has eroded dramatically. We welcome new competition (from new

off-patent companies), but it's clearly had an impact on industry finances and that puts pressure on us. We've lost three major members this year just because of financial pressures. Our dues aren't inexpensive and it's a big commitment for those companies, but we still have a strong core group of members.

What's your take on the new EPA administrator, Lisa Jackson?

We don't know her well, but she's out of the Carol Browner camp, so that tells you a lot. (Browner is the former EPA head under President Bill Clinton.) We're expecting her to be close to Sens. Waxman, Browner, Pelosi and others. The real unknown is

What accomplishment are you most proud of over your career in the industry?

It's a simple answer – I'm proud of RISE. We're the largest association in the world representing specialty pesticides. I'm also very proud of the way suppliers have supported us. There's only one year that we've gone backwards financially – this past year, unfortunately. We've become respected in Washington and among the allied associations. We have very effective relationships in states such as New York, which was unthinkable two decades ago. It's not that I take personal pride in what we've done, I'm just thrilled with what the organization itself has become.

“If customers have questions that go unanswered about the safety, value or need for pesticides, our industry is weakened.” – Allen James, RISE president

that Browner has been appointed to the “environmental czar” position – the new Office of Environmental Quality. We do not expect any support from them. That said, we will work with the new administration in the most constructive way possible. We have to work with them to make sure science is at the core of everything the agency does.

If you could wave your magic wand and have readers get motivated to go do something that would help RISE, what would it be?

Recommit at one level above whatever they're already doing. In other words, just give a little more of your time, attention and effort than you do now. Try to play a role, get engaged and make your voice heard above those who would put you out of business. That would be fantastic for us.

The activists have a strong voice and they have the “green movement” behind them. Our entire industry must understand their place in the environment and make their voice heard. Whether it's with RISE or with their associations, they just need to get engaged. They must step up as never before. We simply must stand together.

I'm told you're heading toward retirement. What happens next?

I will not be here at the end of 2010. My official retirement date is not certain, simply because of the challenges we face right now. We can't afford to make a transition at a crisis point, and this is a crisis. That said, we need to have the right person in place before the end of 2010 because I'm ready to move on. We have a six-month transition plan in place. The board will hire a new person and I'll go back down to North Carolina and live happily ever after.

Any final thoughts?

The users of our products are the greatest representatives of our industry. How they use our products and their professionalism in using them means everything. If customers have questions that go unanswered about the safety, value or the need for pesticides, our industry is weakened. This is a critical time – maybe the most critical we've ever faced – and the challenge is to be the most professional and most engaged they've ever been. If our users never recognized that, now is the time. **L**



Brian Allsopp has worked in the Bethel Park, Pa., area for 20 years.

Steely Resolve

BY DAVID YOCHUM

Southwest Pennsylvania seems isolated from America's recession. But that won't change Brian Allsopp's approach to business.

Last October, *TIME* magazine reported that the city of Pittsburgh was ideally positioned to withstand America's economic downturn.

This past month, *The New York Times* followed suit, confirming the former steel town (with a below-average 5.5 percent unemployment rate, rising home values and low foreclosure rate) indeed serves as a model of financial stability and revitalization.

"If people are looking for hope, it's here," urban studies expert Sabina Deitrick told the *Times*.

With so much optimism in southwest Pennsylvania's air, one might assume that local, advantageous LCOs have launched full-scale marketing assaults in hopes of landing new contracts.

But as Brian Allsopp would attest, that's not how growing companies operate near the 'Burgh – or at least not his.

"We don't really advertise," says Allsopp,

who owns Allsopp's Lawn Service in Pittsburgh's Bethel Park suburb. "We rely mostly on word-of-mouth and the name on our truck."

Since 1989, Allsopp has been building his small lawn business by using an equally small-town approach. He promotes his company by donating to sports and charity events. Occasionally, he'll purchase an ad in the community newspaper. And he always buys from the local hardware store.

"My theory is the small business next to me will support me," Allsopp reasons.

However, Allsopp has ambitions of making 2009 his best year on record, and the lifetime Bethel Park resident refuses to use gimmicks or ploys to reach that goal. Instead, Allsopp says he'll simply continue guiding his ship under the principles that he and his neighbors value most: hometown loyalty, absolute honesty and superior service.

PEOPLE FIRST

Customers can get lost trying to find Allsopp's Lawn Service headquarters. It's located near the end of a long, gray road, and there are no Allsopp's signs on the building's exterior. In fact, Allsopp doesn't even work inside the building – he runs his company from its windowless, lower-level garage.

How can this be the image of a business making upwards of \$300,000 annual revenue?

"We're a pretty well-known community name," Allsopp says. "And we're in an industrial park where businesses are located, so we have a lot of contractors around who will come to us and say, 'Hey, I have this job for you or I know a plumber who needs a ditch.'"

There are other reasons Bethel Park business owners and residents call Allsopp with lawn care, hardscape and snow-removal requests. This part-time volun-

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teer firefighter has been servicing the same area since high school, and employs three experienced workers – all of which enjoy 100-percent paid health insurance and benefits for themselves and their families.

But above everything else, Allsopp says customer service is what makes his business truly unique.

"I'm there for you," he explains. "If customers ever have a problem, they can call me on my cell phone. I'll answer 24/7."

Furthermore, Allsopp maintains his integrity, letting clients know the exact costs and problems associated with each of his company's projects.

"(Contractors) should stick to their bid prices the best they can so they don't deprive people," he advises. "Just be honest with people. If you're doing a job and you run into a boulder that you have to remove with specialized equipment, go up and tell them. But first make sure you have an alternative to offer them in

case they don't want to do that."

Allsopp had a golden opportunity to practice what he preaches this past fall.

Because salt prices in Pennsylvania jumped by 100 percent, he was forced to raise his service prices accordingly. Yet before doing so, Allsopp showed each customer his company's exact salt costs and sent them letters of explanation. That way, clients were aware he wasn't trying to boost his margins.

"I think that helped them understand," Allsopp says. "We only lost one customer because of the price increase."

Still, Allsopp's openness, honesty and generosity haven't always worked in his favor. During his first few years in business, Allsopp says he went through roughly 40 employees – many of which were friends



Allsopp gives Lawn & Landscape a tour of his shop.

that were looking for seasonal work.

"I always give everybody a shot to come work for me," he explains. "Whether it works out or not, I can't really say. At that time though, everybody was doing different things in college and we were maintaining 200 properties a week."

He's also learned that once he finds an employee that he likes (and one that likes working for his company), Allsopp will reward that employee so that they can



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PROFITS LATER

As the owner of a relatively modest business, Allsopp is able to afford first-rate talent because of a historic commitment to fiscal responsibility.

When he opened the doors to Allsopp's Lawn Service 20 years ago, he did so with a motley fleet of one "junkie" truck (that he spent a year piecing together), one "circus" truck (appropriately named because each body panel was a different color) and a dump truck that his parents helped him purchase.

"Starting out working with my own money and not taking a line of credit was probably a mistake," Allsopp laughs. "(Credit) would have let me have a bit more of a life those first five years. But

that's probably one of the biggest reasons I was really involved with the fire department, because I didn't have any money. It worked out though."

Knowing what it takes to plow through tough financial times certainly helped Allsopp this past year. While national publications may portray Pittsburgh as a city in fantastic economic shape, that doesn't mean Allsopp isn't encountering challenges.


"Money is always an issue," he says. "Sometimes it's tough to get the commercial money in after the 60-day period. We've been stuck a couple of times, but most often we work it out. I think we only had one business go under on us, and we've only lost a handful of customers."

To ensure his business continues to get paid, Allsopp says he is trying to "bill as he goes," and with some maintenance contracts, he has now begun billing weekly instead of monthly. As for his

company's future work, fuel prices and unpredictable weather have made it difficult to accurately predict where revenue will come from.

"About two years ago, it was very slow from October to December," Allsopp explains. "We had no snow and no work lined up. It's tough to go through a few periods of that, but as soon as we get worried, we'll start getting calls."

Allsopp says he already has hardscape jobs scheduled for this spring (including a few that were postponed due to the economy). Yet for the rest of 2009, he has good reason for wanting to focus on clients with necessary maintenance work.

"The Pittsburgh area hasn't really felt the full effect of the economic downturn yet, but I think it's coming," Allsopp warns. "We're usually about two years behind everybody else, and they're still laying people off at the bigger companies and stuff like that. You just never know." 

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— Jan Miller, YourHomeAddition.com

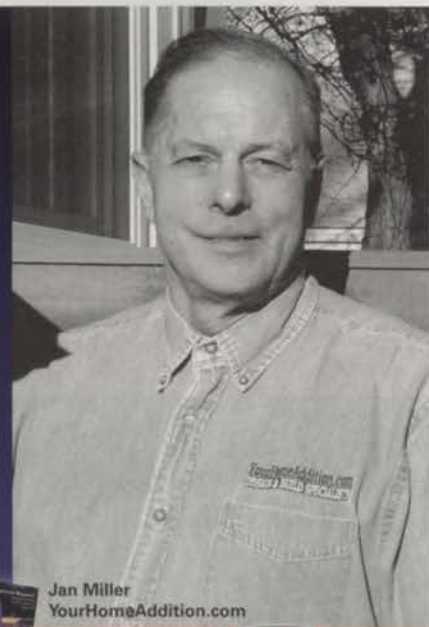
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USE READER SERVICE #58

Kicking a Messy Habit

The simplest ideas can sometimes have a big impact on operations. BY LAWN & LANDSCAPE STAFF

It seems too simple, yet contractors are embracing it as something new, different and useful. What is this innovation?

It's a box.

What exactly can a box do for your operation?

Ask yourself a few questions:

How valuable is it to keep materials like mulch, gravel and earth contained and ready to use on the job site?

What is it worth to keep those materials hidden from whiny neighbors and other potential customers?

And wouldn't life be better if you could keep those materials uncontaminated and clean for use?

Contractors around the country face a dilemma: how can they stockpile materials during a project but avoid the usual hassles of storage? The answer is KicBox, a relatively new product developed by Mike Hughes, a Denver-based industry veteran. He's just getting started, but the concept is catching on.

As Hughes puts it, KicBox is "really, really simple." It's a four-sided steel creation that holds and hides your materials or equipment onsite. One short side of the rectangular design folds down for access by crew members, a Bobcat or other means.

The product is designed to alleviate complaints from neighbors about piles of landscaping material crowding the street near the job. It also helps to reduce worries about materials running off into creeks or fresh water sources. Finally, it segregates one pile of stuff from another, preventing cross-contamination of the various materials you bring to a site. Thus the name KicBox – which is short for Keep It Clean.

"I met Mike Hughes three or four years ago," recalls Scott Haugland of medium-sized J&S Landscape in Longmont, Colo. "He asked me if I'd be interested in something that would keep my product clean and not make a big mess. I said, 'Heck yes.'"

According to Haugland, a lot of developments and homeowners associations use codes or covenants to prevent contractors from leaving materials on the road because of traffic and stormwater runoff concerns. "We took a lot of flak from people for making messes around Boulder. There was a huge need to be able to leave the materials on the site and keep them neat and tidy.

KicBox is helping contractors store materials in an organized, accessible fashion.



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"So, we use KicBox to store materials off the street and keep material clean and the area tidier. It fills a huge void and makes our life easier. It was a no-brainer."

Each KicBox stores up to 20 yards of product – and when two or three units are put together, there's room for materials and equipment on the site.

"It takes about a half an hour to mobi-

lize from job to job," says Haugland. "We transport it on the back of dump truck or a trailer. We primarily use it for stone and bark mulch, and may use it for sand."

He also notes that it's handy for storing small equipment overnight.


"We'll put our stuff in there and it really cleans up a site. We'll just park a Bobcat in front to 'lock' it up."

KicBox offers both lease and purchase options, but Haugland bought a built-to-spec model outright for around \$5,000.

Another Colorado contractor, Jamie McCawley of TurfMasters, echoes Hoagland's comments about KicBox.

"It's all about prudence," says McCawley. "It solves problems in terms of site safety, site security and environmental compliance."

McCawley took the extra step of having a spray-in bedliner – similar to those used in pickup trucks – installed to prevent corrosion and extend the life of his 16-cubic-yard KicBox.

"We use it for mulch and equipment that we leave on site like heavier Rototillers. It's good for security and maintains topsoil consistency, but we really like it because it helps our environmental image. There's no runoff or movement and it obviously prevents leaching. It's been a great addition for us." 

Quick Facts: KicBox

- When disassembled, the sections are designed to "nest" into each other for easier transport.
- Sections move into place using a provided handling arm. Two cotter pins and two horseshoe-shaped steel sleeves lock each section in place.
- Can be driven into by delivery trucks.
- Largest model (three sections) can handle as much as 20 tons of rock material.
- Available in sizes from 10-foot (single axle dump loads), 15-foot (for tandem axle) up to 30-foot.
- Sectional design allows it to be customized for special needs.
- Accessories include fold-down front gate and a locking feature to prevent access and theft.

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Keeping track of real-time driving conditions helps Valley Landscaping maintain its edge.

BY TOM HOGGARTY

Lodi, Calif.-based Valley Landscaping is a jumbo-sized landscape contractor in California's central valley with annual revenue of about \$8 million. And with 50 trucks in the field every day, Valley Landscaping Controller Lorne Truscott says, "Keeping track of them is a challenge."

So after spending several months evaluating its options, the 35-year-old company decided to install a FleetBoss Global Positioning Satellite (GPS) system on its trucks about two years ago.

"One of the reasons we chose the FleetBoss system was that it gives us 'real time' capability," Truscott says. "We



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looked at other systems that cost less, but they required downloading the data at night. All our trucks would go out in the morning, come back to the yard in the evening and then download the information

to our computer. Then someone had to run the individual reports the next day.

"We decided that wasn't good enough for us. It was like reading yesterday's newspaper. We needed to know what was

going on right now. We made a conscious decision between the available systems that real time was the way to go."

REAL-TIME BENEFITS

Truscott says that the real-time GPS system is "kind of like looking over the driver's shoulder."

"If they are going over 70 miles an hour, for example, we get an alarm. So we can call them and tell them to slow down. You can get a 42-page document the next day that tells you that at 10 a.m. the previous morning, one of your drivers was doing 78 miles per hour for a period of time."

Truscott compares this solution to ineffective dog training – you have to rub their nose in the smelly stuff while it's happening.

"In this case, telling the driver about your concern in the 'here and now' is much better than telling him a day later. And possibly, he may have a legitimate reason for speeding up in a specific situ-



Money man Lorne Truscott (right) and Valley Landscaping founder Don Oliver decided the real-time tracking investment was worth it.

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ation – such as trying to elude an erratic driver – that he'll be able to tell you about if you talk to him within an hour or two. By tomorrow, he may not remember why he exceeded the speed limit.

"The bottom line is we care about our drivers. Many of them have been with us a long time and we want them to know if there is a problem, so we can work together on a solution."

Truscott says keeping an eye on excessive speed improves safety and helps keep insurance costs down through a safe driver program.

"The way we look at it, if you are going over 70 miles an hour, you are just looking for an accident," Truscott says. "In addition, traffic fines are expensive, and you're bound to be using more gas. It's well known that the faster you go, the more fuel you burn."

REDUCED IDLE TIME

While Valley Landscaping never made an

actual "before and after" comparison of vehicle idle time, the company now uses the real time GPS system to find when a truck engine in the 50-vehicle fleet is idling for more than five minutes.

"We can call the offending idler and tell him to shut off the engine," Truscott says. "We never did quantify the numbers, but we knew there would be savings just from that alone. Put it this way: we are still saving many gallons of gasoline, which is a cost we can control, whatever the price of gas is. Cutting idle time also cuts down on vehicle wear and tear."

WHERE AM I?

Having a GPS system brought an unexpected added feature. Truscott reports that the FleetBoss system has, on several occasions, found one of its trucks that was stuck somewhere in remote locations.

"We don't exactly have remote locations that we service, but sometimes to get to our regular customers our drivers find it necessary to take county roads or alternate routes," Truscott reports. "If a truck should break down – and it seems to be that this calamity usually occurs on a Friday afternoon when everybody is out

About the Fleetboss System

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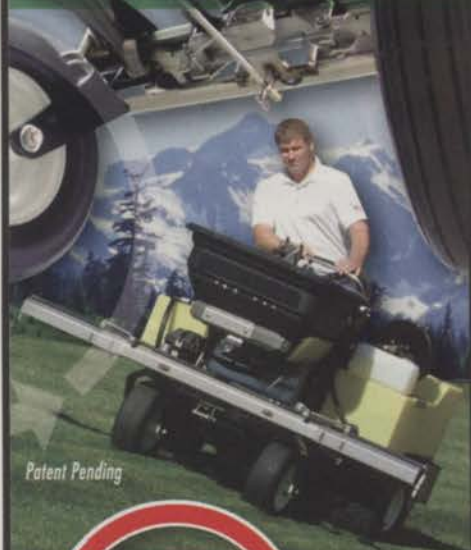
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of town for a holiday weekend – it is often difficult to find their precise location. Even though the streets around here are well identified and the roads are good, it's difficult to locate a truck stuck on a county road where there are no street signs."

Truscott says the GPS system eliminates the hide-and-seek aspect, saving both overtime and money in locating the disabled truck.

DRIVER PROTECTION

Truscott adds that the FleetBoss GPS system also protects its drivers from false accusations. "We know where our trucks are at any given time," Truscott says. "So, as was the case recently when an irate lady called in to complain that one of our trucks had just tried to run her off the road, we were able to prove (using the GPS tracking system) that we had no trucks in her area at the time the alleged incident occurred.

"Plus, she says the truck that did the damage was red. Ours are white, with our name in green and yellow."

Since Don Oliver founded the company in 1975, Valley Landscaping has strived to build a reputation for honesty and


integrity. This effort has allowed Valley to expand into related businesses, adding a wholesale nursery, a green waste recycling company, and synthetic turf installation – all divisions that need to know where their vehicles are.

STILL LEARNING

Truscott reports that even though the FleetBoss GPS system has been in place in Valley Landscaping's fleet for two years, he's still exploring all the reports and options.

"We started out only installing units on our maintenance trucks, but the results were so good, we added them to our entire fleet. We are now looking into the possibility of using the system to achieve the most efficient routing of our maintenance crews."

Still, Truscott says there's been a learning curve with the system.

"We've had to replace some old units and had a few technical questions since installing the system. But FleetBoss installer Al Trevisan of Escondido, Calif.-based A&D Technology has been more than willing to answer questions and do whatever necessary to keep us moving quickly and efficiently." 

The actual GPS unit is small, simple and durable, according to Truscott.

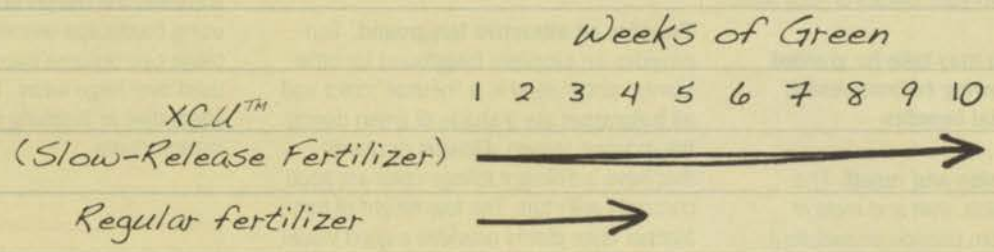


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The Miracle Beneath Your Feet

Don't take the benefits of turf for granted.

Even those of us in the industry sometimes forget what a miracle a simple blade of grass is. And, too often, consumers or even employees aren't well-informed about the benefits that a well-maintained stand of turf like a lawn provides. Here's a reminder that you can share with your clients or your staff.

The turfgrass you may take for granted provides the following environmental, physical and social benefits:

Reduces soil erosion and runoff. The dense leaves, thatch, mat and roots of the turfgrass system provide an excellent groundcover that significantly reduces soil erosion and water runoff when compared to other landscape plants or bare soil. The turfgrass system can efficiently reduce groundwater and surface water contamination from fertilizers and pesticides applied by capturing, retaining and using them.

Provides a cooling effect and reduces glare. Patios, concrete walks and other nonliving landscape materials used as walking surfaces reflect significantly more light than turf. This reflection can cause glare and on sunny days can be visually uncomfortable. Turf provides a cool, nonglare surface that is pleasant to walk on, sit on and look at. On a hot summer day, lawns will be 30 degrees cooler than asphalt and 14 degrees cooler than bare soil.

Reduces noise. Using turf instead of concrete on road embankments can reduce traffic noise by nearly 200 percent. Turf also increases water infiltration on slopes which minimizes water run-off, soil erosion and potential environmental contamination.

Provides an attractive foreground. Turf provides an excellent foreground for other plants, since green is a "neutral" color and all turfgrasses are a shade of green during the growing season. Flowers or plants that have a different foliage color are good contrasts with turf. The low height of turf against taller plants provides a good visual contrast and also gives a sense of depth to the landscape. In addition, the fine texture of turf creates interesting contrasts when viewed adjacent to plants with large leaves or rough bark.

Adds spaciousness to an area. Maintained turf is usually mowed at heights no greater than 3 1/2 inches. This creates an open area that makes the space appear larger than if the vertical plane was broken up with plantings of trees, shrubs and flowers.

Defines Landscape Space. Well-designed turf areas contrast with adjacent plant heights, textures and colors that can define "rooms" in the landscape. Landscape rooms with turf "floors" can vary in size and relative scale, but in all cases the turf should have simple straight or curved edges and be of sufficient size to simplify maintenance,

allow equipment access, and use standard irrigation components.

Softens hardscape surfaces. Including decks, patios, benches, pavers and other hardscape elements is important to complete the design of a landscape. But, using hardscape elements on the ground plane can become overwhelming when used over large areas. Turf provides one alternative in breaking up and softening the ground plane.

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- Grass clippings contain, on average, 4 percent nitrogen, 2 percent potassium and 0.5 percent phosphorus
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A single grass plant can have 387 miles of root

- There are 329,000 miles of root per square foot or about 3 billion miles of roots in a 10,000-square foot lawn.

(Adapted from information provided by the University of Nebraska Extension Service and Turfgrass Producers International.)

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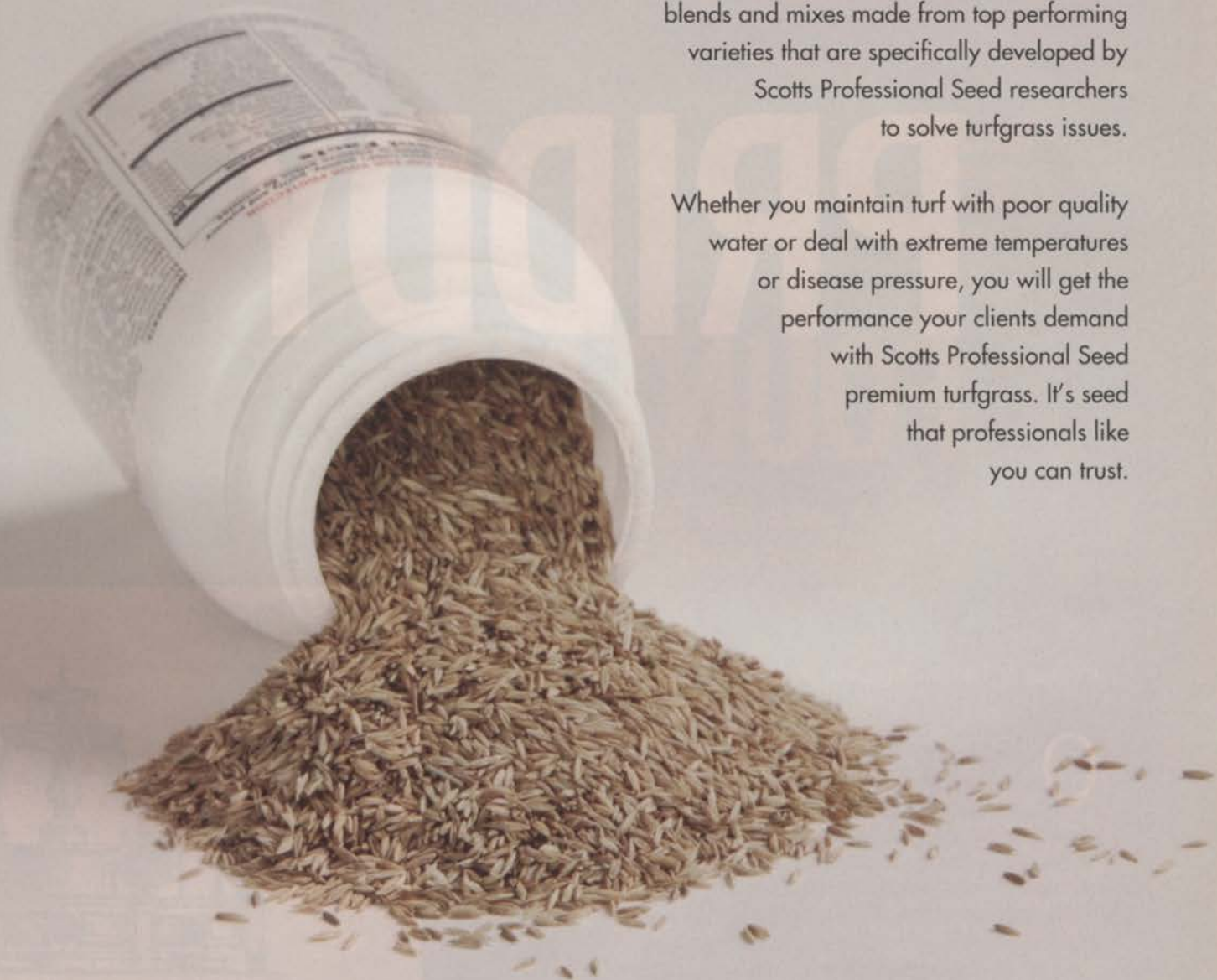
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USE READER SERVICE #62

THE PRIDDY FOUNTAIN

Lambert Landscape Company brings
a little piece of Italy to Texas.

BY PAUL N. FIELDS AND LARA MOFFAT

Our company was approached by several major donors to accept the challenge of redesigning, installing and constructing this memorial fountain plaza in the heart of Dallas. Viewed by the civic council and local residents as the major portal to Highland Park, the original fountain had become inefficient due in part to its inferior, porous-stone construction. Since it was completed in 1987, the fountain suffered severe freeze/thaw damage, which caused this prominent feature to need constant repair. So, after a short design and planning period, our firm was given four months to remake the fountain before the plaza's Easter rededication.



Ashley H. Priddy Memorial Fountain

A sketch of the redesigned Priddy Fountain, located in suburban Dallas' affluent Highland Park community.



The Priddy fountain was hand carved in Italy, shipped to the United States, constructed and then rededicated. Lambert Landscape Company says diligent planning and exceptional management were keys to the project's success.



Time was not on our side. To complete the project on schedule, we (along with a team of subcontractors) had to work five days per week regardless of weather. In order to accomplish this, we coordinated with the city and developed a suitable plan for staging and construction during the four-month span, which included rerouting traffic on one side of the triangle, where the fountain plaza sits. Furthermore, this plan included erecting a tent which allowed work in all weather, screened the unsightly construction site from residents and kept the fountain under wraps until the rededication.

Since this was a privately-funded project built in a very public location, there were many opinions expressed

Italian Renaissance period. The fountain is mostly constructed of Istrian stone, with subtle detailing of glass tile in the same color hue. This gives it a simple, elegant and cohesive appearance. But the stone was selected for its endurance, not its color and ability to hold detail when carved.

Istrian stone (or Pietra d'Istria) was discovered by the Venetians in the 13th century and has been widely used ever since – particularly in the Gothic period. The majority of structures in the lagoon region of Venice, such as bridges, churches and more than 80 percent of the Palazzo Ducale, are made of and decorated with Istrian stone. What makes this stone so ideal is its high-compressive

In order to give the 40- x 18-foot structure the appropriate scale, classical urns were used to broaden the base, thereby offsetting the height of the central fountain. These urns (perched on plinths and filled with seasonal flowers) encompass the mid level and provide a nice interplay between architecture, plants and water. The lower basin, with its neoclassical panels, spills water into the lunette-shaped vessels.

Due to the location of the fountain, all equipment is housed in an underground room below the intersection. The plumbing system was broken down into three sections, which allows for pumping flexibility and enables each tier to be individually controlled. To limit corrosive and harmful chemical usage, the water is cleansed through a biological filtration system to eliminate the use of chlorine. (Over time, chlorine degrades the stone and clouds the glass tile.)

Illumination, another concern of the fountain's redesign, was addressed by incorporating integral lighting into the basin. When lit, the water feature proudly beckons to residents of the town and inhabitants of the city, all while remaining architecturally appropriate and respectful of its namesake.

The juxtaposition of the classical piece in an urban setting certainly brings context to this median plaza. An Italian visitor summed up all our feelings when he drove by, leaned out of his car window and proudly exclaimed to our project manager, "*Bellissima!*" **PLD**

QUICK FACTS: HIGHLAND PARK, TEXAS

A town within a city, Highland Park was established in the late 1800s, but saw its rise in the early 20th century. Designed as a residential refuge to blossoming Dallas, 20 percent of its original land was strategically set aside for parks. Today, Highland Park maintains the respite of elegant residences and tree-lined boulevards through strict zoning and detailed building codes.

According to the U.S. Census, Highland Park is ranked as one of the wealthiest cities in the United States (in areas with a population of 1,000 or more). It has a median income of \$375,000 and the average home price is \$1.1 million.

during the design and build process. One major area of concern was the budget. By reusing sections of the original foundation, redirected funds could be used for high-quality stone and tile. The other major concern was time, which we were able to overcome by having good relationships with artisans and subcontractors. One example; the Italian carvers that we commissioned did not take their extended Christmas break in order to meet our deadline.

Acting as a gateway to Highland Park, the fountain contextually unites urban and residential communities, and the design reflects surrounding Italian and Romanesque architecture. Consequently, the redesign of the Priddy fountain was based on classical design elements, details, scales and proportions of fountains from the late

strength, which permits minimal water absorption. Technically a limestone, its chemical makeup more closely resembles marble. And though it may be difficult to carve, once sculpted, the stone resists weathering and is ideal in wet locations.

Like many Italian water features, this memorial takes advantage of the site's promontory location. Center stage is a quatrefoil-shaped, tiered-stone fountain with lion's head spouts. A single jet crowns the upper section. The lion's mask, which has been used since pagan times, re-emerged in Roman architecture as a symbol of stateliness and power. Here, it is an understated reference to this influential area. The scalloped, mid-tier basin (with water jets) surrounds the simple, glass-tiled upper basin. Venetian-influenced glass tiles were chosen as a background to the fountain jets.



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USE READER SERVICE #410

The Bare Necessities

A Maple tree is lifted from its original location before being placed on a truck. Note the root breadth and density.

A different approach to transplanting specimen trees.

BY DEBORAH HOWE

“Set it down!”

Seeing his crew give a thumb's up, the Bobcat operator lowers his machine's fork to the ground. He throws it into reverse gear, and the forklift slides out from under the nine-inch caliper Eastern Red Cedar balanced on it, leaving the upright tree and its enormous bare-root mass resting in a shallow crater about 18 feet in diameter. Another worker steps into the crater and moves a few of the cedar's roots so that they splay in an even radial pattern around the tree's upright trunk.

In front of an audience of about 50 landscape professionals, workers shovel a backfill of native soil mixed with hydrogel and a small amount of root fertilizer over the tree's roots, building a low dam around the

planting area before flooding it with water. An hour later, the tree stands alone, untied and unstaked – yet stable – in its new home.

This cedar tree transplanting was part of a special Massachusetts Arborists Association workshop held last August in Westford, Mass. About 100 arborists, landscape architects, landscape contractors and designers gathered at Nonset Farm, the tree nursery owned by certified arborist Matt Foti, to see demonstrations of bare-root transplanting.

Mike Furgal, another Massachusetts-certified arborist, was the event's featured speaker. In the last several years, Furgal, a sole practitioner, has developed a method of moving specimen ornamental trees bare-root by using an air spade. At the workshop he gave a slide presentation to illustrate

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his technique. Later, he and a crew demonstrated it by moving several trees in Foti's nursery.

NEW USES FOR EXISTING TECHNOLOGY

Air spade technology was introduced to the tree industry in the late 1990s, mainly for the purposes of diagnosing and treating tree root problems. With an air spade – a nozzled, compressed-air hose – an arborist can locate the original trunk flare of a tree, reduce compaction in a tree's root zone or reveal girdling roots that may threaten a tree's health.

Furgal believes that he is the first arborist to move trees with an air spade. When faced several years ago with having to move a Japanese Maple from a very tight spot, he realized that he could use his air spade not just to investigate sub-grade rooting conditions, but to unearth the tree's entire root mass. With no soil weighing down the root mass, he figured it would be fairly lightweight and far less likely to experience internal root-shear and breakage from being moved.

Working on that assumption, he then blew soil out of the tree pit, picked up the unweighted tree with his compact

utility loader and moved it to a new location on the property. After that success, Furgal decided to develop his method and now uses the air-spade for transplants whenever possible.

TREE TRIALS

Furgal and Foti had chosen several trees to move for their August workshop – each selected to illustrate a particular lesson. The seed-grown Red Cedar was first, to show how a non-cultivated tree's roots grow and to test how well it might withstand the stress of air spade transplantation. After the cedar, the arborists spaded and moved matching twin European Cutleaf Birch trees – which are known for being a fall digging hazard.

The trees, as is typical practice, had been hydrated a few days earlier to prepare them for transplantation. Before the workshop began in the morning, Foti's crew dug the first birch with a 40-inch tree spade. By the time they had finished their work two hours later, the tree's leaves had completely wilted and the tree was in serious decline. By day's end its leaves were withering. The arborists determined that it would not survive the operation and sent it to the chipper.

In contrast, the second birch was air spaded in the heat of midday during the workshop. A Bobcat lifted it (with its eight-foot diameter root plate) and carried it to a new location where it was replanted in a wide, shallow crater, then backfilled and watered in without any wilting evident. As of late fall, it remained settled in its new location without any sign of stress.

The highlight of the workshop was the relocation of an 18-foot Bloodgood Japanese Maple from a site up the road to a location in Foti's nursery.

Again, the tree had been hydrated prior to its excavation and move. The afternoon before the workshop, Furgal's and Foti's crews had air-spaded the tree's roots, sprayed them down with water and covered them with wet burlap. On the day of the workshop,

Furgal says to properly bare-root a tree, arborists must have patience and take care with each step. For success in transplanting trees with an air spade:

Hydrate the tree's roots thoroughly before excavating it.

Foti and Furgal advocate watering the tree deeply 72 hours prior to its scheduled move. Soil type will affect the timing of watering; clay soil blows out best when it is damp; sandy soil blows out best when it has drained a bit.

Look closely at site conditions.

Assess the tree's below-grade structure thoroughly before determining where to put the trench that will mark the limit of the excavation. Go as far out from the trunk as possible to dig your trench. Furgal starts his trench at the dripline; if he doesn't find roots there, he moves inward toward the tree until he does find roots and then he scribes his trench line. Foti doubles the standard root ball diameter and checks the root system by hand digging to see if he needs to dig his trench further out or further in.

Dig a perimeter trench.

The trench should be four- or five-feet wide and two- to three-feet deep. You will be blowing soil toward and into the trench, working from the trench inward toward the trunk as the roots are revealed. You will then have to dig the blown soil out of the trench and stockpile it to fill the hole once the tree is out of the ground.

Keep the roots as moist as possible.

During digging and moving, the air spade

may cause some root drying. Hydration before the spading process lessens stress.

Plant the tree at the same grade it was at in its original location.

You will likely find that the new planting hole will not have to be very deep. Don't dig it any deeper than necessary. The tree will show you its requirements.

Backfill with the soil you have excavated from the new planting hole.

Some soil amendment may be fine, though Furgal prefers not to amend backfill much. Foti adds a hydrogel to the backfill to maintain moisture levels during re-establishment. He also advocates a light application of high-phosphorus root enhancing fertilizer to promote root growth.

Immediately after backfilling, flood the welled planting with water to eliminate air pockets.

Continue to irrigate the tree through the growing season to insure its establishment. If you use drip irrigation, be sure to place the lines out around the drip line of the tree, rather than at its trunk. The roots will search outward for water and help anchor the tree.

Assess the conditions and stake the tree at your discretion.

Furgal does not advocate staking, though it may be useful if you've placed the tree in an especially windy or exposed location.



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USE READER SERVICE #420

a truck carried the maple down the road to Nonset Farm and placed it in its new home shortly after noon. The crew backfilled and welled the planting, then flooded it.

Despite the hot sunny weather and exposed location, the leaves appeared utterly unstressed – they remained fully turgid and color stayed good – and the tree settled easily into its new home. To date, it too has shown no sign of dieback.

AIR SPADE ADVANTAGES

When moving a tree with a tree spade or using the traditional balled and burlapped (B&B) method, arborists use a standard formula for determining root ball minimum size. The formula calls for at least 10 inches of root mass diameter

for every inch of trunk caliper (diameter at breast height, or DBH). This ratio is considered the accepted minimum standard for a tree to be able to re-establish in its new location.

Preserving the greatest number of roots within the accepted standard has been the arborists' customary ideal. The more roots that can be saved, the shorter the time it takes for a transplanted tree to adjust to its new site and begin to show visible, new growth.

The air spade process (when used correctly) makes the standard tree transplanting formula look downright stingy, as almost all of the root mass can survive the excavation and move. Furgal estimates that a bare-root specimen may retain 80 to 95 percent of its root mass,

(Right) The Maple is placed on a truck bed. Its trunk is supported with hay bales; wet burlap will cover its roots and a tarp will be tied over its crown. (Below) A Bloodgood Japanese Maple during air spade excavation from its original site.



as opposed to 30 percent for one dug by hand or with a mechanical tree spade. Minimizing harm to the root mass also minimizes transplant shock, and as a result, the air-spaded tree needs a shorter establishment phase when the tree is planted in its new location.

COMPARATIVE COSTS

Hand-digging to get a B&B tree usually requires a backhoe, a fork and a crew of two or three to dig, burlap, tie and move each tree. With the care and machinery needed to transplant this way, hand-digging tends to be the slowest and most expensive method of transplanting a specimen ornamental tree.

A tree spade takes less time than either hand digging or air spade bare-rooting, but it does require a tree spade, which is an expensive piece of equipment. Air spade transplanting takes longer than tree spading, but equipment costs for a compressor and an air spade tend to be much lower.

Furgal, who has done most of his transplanting from one location on a site to another, believes that an on-site bare-root move might cost half as much as a move using a tree spade, because more heavy equipment is needed with the tree spade. However, the need to move a tree from one job site to another may change the equation somewhat.

GROWTH OPPORTUNITY

To date, Furgal has moved mainly ornamental specimens: Japanese Maples, Eastern Red Cedars, Chamaecyparis, Stewartia, Betula, Cherry, Morus and Pinus trees. Foti has moved several of these species, as well as a mature Hydrangea paniculata 'Grandiflora' (PeeGee Hydrangea) and a Syringa reticulata (Japanese Maple), with good success so far.

Neither arborist has moved any deep-rooted oaks or beech trees, but they hope to do so in the future. Both will be looking to see how other species react to being moved in this way. Early indications from the work that Furgal has done and that was highlighted at the

workshop show the potential for success in moving heretofore "tricky" trees using an air spade, without the mortality that comes from hand digging or tree spade transplantation.

Foti, describing some trees he has transplanted since the workshop, says that every tree he has bare-rooted – even in full leaf – has shown absolutely no sign of transplant shock, even in late summer-early autumn weather. He anticipates using the method in situations where a tree spade might place the root system at too much risk, where access with any machinery is too difficult or where the largest root mass possible is required.

Furgal points out that while not every tree is a candidate for bare-rooting with an air spade, the technique can, in certain circumstances, create the option to move a plant that might otherwise have been inaccessible or unmovable with other equipment.

He also says it's important to deal with the soil issues each tree encounters (bare-rooting lets you introduce the tree immediately to the site soils of its new location). When planting B&B, you may be dealing with one soil type in the root ball and one in the planting location. Roots don't like to move from one type of soil to another, and that can hamper root growth. With bare-root transplants, Furgal says that's not an issue.

For those trees that can be moved bare-root, the simplicity of the process, the preservation of so much root mass and the resulting cost savings make a compelling argument for doing so.

At one time, a tree in a tight spot might have been impossible to move safely and with a reasonable assurance of survival. However, the possibility of moving that tree and allowing it to thrive in a new location finally exists. The air spade may just herald a revolution in specimen tree transplantation. **PLD**

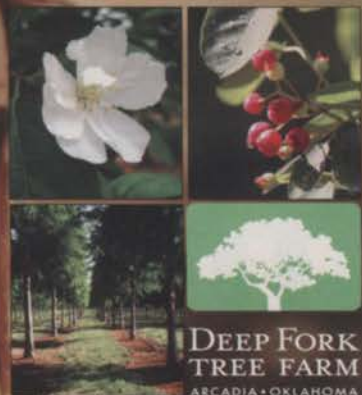
Deborah Howe is a registered landscape architect with a particular interest in woody plants. A sole practitioner, she has 20 years of professional experience. She co-writes a blog on landscape architectural practice and design issues, found at www.takingplace.net.

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USE READER SERVICE #413



Naperville, Ill.-based Knoll Landscaping has found that most big landscaping installations now include hardscape components.

HARD DEMAND

Patio and walkway construction helps landscapers increase their bottom line.

BY DAN RAFTER

CARL THOMAS, BLUE RIDGE LANDSCAPE

Chicago knows pizza. It loves it, too. Walk through most Chicago neighborhoods and you'll eventually stumble on a restaurant serving thick and thin slices to hungry residents.

This leads to a challenge: How can a business owner set his pizza place apart from all the competitors?

At Pompei, a trendy pizza restaurant on Chicago's North Side, the owners settled on an expansion plan: They envisioned a new outdoor eating area, complete with beer garden.

But what the owners of Pompei didn't want was to simply throw some chairs and tables onto a plain, concrete patio. They were concerned about aesthetics, and wanted something that was as attractive as it was functional. They also wanted something that their customers would come back to.

Ray Knoll, owner of Knoll Landscape Services in Naperville, Ill., helped Pompei's owners meet their goals. For three weeks in 2008, Knoll and his crew worked long days installing Rivenstone pavers from Unilock. The Rivenstone looks like flagstone, and added a more elegant feel to the restaurant's new outdoor area.

For Knoll, the job was fairly typical. The hardscaping portion of his business – the patios, walkways, walls and fountains that a growing number of his customers seek – now ranks as the biggest and most lucrative part of Knoll Landscape Services.

"Any big landscape installation now has some hardscape component to it," Knoll says. "It's a very important part of our business. People are looking for something that is going to enhance their property. Walkways are often the first impression people get of a home or building, so our customers are paying more and more attention to them." Knoll is far from alone. Landscapers today are frequently tackling hardscape elements as they work with commercial and residential customers.

Moreover, property owners are

demanding aesthetically pleasing walkways and patios that feature flagstone, fountains, curving walls and other amenities. Simple concrete walkways and patios have largely fallen out of favor. This provides a growing opportunity for landscapers across the country.

But while this portion of the landscaping business can be a profitable one, landscapers must work just as hard to acquire clients interested in stone walls or fountains as they do to nab more traditional landscaping business. Earning a reputation for providing quality hardscapes doesn't just happen. It requires that landscapers communicate closely with their clients to make sure everyone knows exactly what a finished product will look like. It also means working closely with suppliers, shopping for the best prices on materials and being able to determine what designs will work in a given space.

Yet while developing a thriving hardscaping business may take work, the payoff can be tremendous.

THE POPULARITY OF OUTDOOR LIVING

Angela Cramer, who along with her husband owns Cutting Edge Lawn Services in Virginia Beach, Va., says that patios and walkways currently make up about 30 percent of her company's business. And, she says, that number may rise. Or maybe not.

"It's hard to say if this will be a growing market due to the recession," Cramer explains. "With families staying home more, it's such a nice addition for outdoor living and expanding your entertaining space. Fire pits are big in the southeast. Toasting marshmallows with your children on a Friday night is a huge hit."

Carl Thomas, president of Blue Ridge Landscape & Design in Winchester, Va., says that patio and walkway installation accounts for about 20 percent of his company's annual revenue – a figure that he expects to continue rising.

"These days, people are staying in the houses they own," Thomas says. "They're not selling them right now, so they are choosing instead to enhance their current outdoor spaces. The outdoor environment seems to be more important to people now than it ever has been."

To succeed in this facet of the business, though, landscaping companies must devote the proper amount of resources to it. To Thomas, that means having enough staffers so that clients meet with the same person at the start of the job all the way through to its completion. It also means paying staffers charged with finding and landing new jobs on a salary, not commission basis.

"Clients don't react well to high-pressure sales tactics," Thomas says. "And employees paid on salary are less likely to resort to these tactics."

Thomas also adds that, when customers deal with one person, there is less room for miscommunication.

"You don't end up with the customer saying that they thought they were getting something else," Thomas says. "For the customer, it's nice not to be handed off to someone else right after the sale. They deal with the same person from start to finish. That person designs what they are looking for, oversees the installation and handles the collection and billing for the job."

As it is when working on any landscaping project, this kind of communication is key to creating happy customers. And happy customers can generate positive word-of-mouth advertising for a landscaping company.

For Thomas, the emphasis on communication starts during the earliest phases of a project. Representatives from Blue Ridge shape a rough hardscaping design with their clients, then take this conceptual design and create a more detailed plan that the clients approve. That plan becomes the drawing that Blue Ridge uses to create an outdoor patio, courtyard or walkway.

Once construction begins, a project can last from one day to six months depending on its complexity and size.

Blue Ridge relied on this method when creating an outdoor living area for a residential client in Winchester. The homeowners wanted an area where they could entertain during two or three seasons of the year.

The finished job, which began with initial meetings in April and wrapped up in December, included walls on which visitors could sit, a fireplace, accent lighting, a fountain and (of course) plenty of patio and walkway space. To make the

Thomas also recommends that during the initial planning phase, landscapers make sure to explain to their clients that some walkway and patio designs take longer to install than others. This is important information because some patterns, for example, may cost more than others simply because of the amount of installation labor involved.

"A herringbone pattern takes twice the amount of time because of all the cuts along the edges," Thomas says. "When you're setting budgets and making plans, you need to go over that with clients. You don't want to surprise them down later."

and worked out a cost-effective solution. Knoll also recommends that landscapers building their hardscaping business make sure to hire professionals who already come with experience in installing patios and walkways.

"Always make sure you're dealing with experience," Knoll says. "It is certainly not something that people can just pick up. You need people with experience involved in this end of your business."

Landscapers need to do their homework to make sure that projects end up turning a profit. One way they can do this, Cramer says, is by always measuring



job truly appealing, though, Blue Ridge installed Pennsylvania Bluestone and brick that matched the house.

Thomas says the owners loved the completed job – something he credits to those initial meetings when the first sketches were created.

"The conceptual drawings are really important," he says. "Nothing is worse than working on a project and discovering that what you're building is either too large or too small. That kind of miscommunication doesn't help either party."

On the Winchester project, Thomas' clients first ripped pages out of various home magazines. They felt it was the best way they could show him exactly what feel and atmosphere they were hoping he could create. Using these photos, Thomas eventually drafted the conceptual drawings that his clients approved. This was just the beginning of Thomas' pre-installation work, though. He also traveled twice to Pennsylvania to study stone types before settling on the right variety for the project.

Cramer also emphasizes the importance of communication in making sure that a job goes smoothly.

"I have phone numbers, e-mails and everything," she says. "We can never communicate enough. We constantly call with questions and we focus on the families. It's easy if you listen and watch their daily routines."

For example, Cramer says a family's young son may like to ride his skateboard through a specific area of the backyard. If that's the case, it probably doesn't make sense to install an expensive piece of hardscaping in that area if the son is going to use it as a skateboard ramp.

USE YOUR RESOURCES

Another key to succeeding with patio and walkway installation can be the suppliers.

Whenever Knoll faces a challenging project, he calls his supplier for advice.

While working on the outdoor areas of the pizza restaurant in Chicago, for example, Knoll was faced with some daunting drainage problems. He then contacted his representative with Unilock

a project's specifications more than once.

"If you don't measure accordingly and you end up over-digging, you will need more gravel," she explains. "Then you lose out on your profit margin."

As a final piece of advice, Thomas reminds landscapers that just because they've finished installing their hardscapes, that doesn't mean the job is done. Finishing touches are important, too. This includes repairing any lawn that they dug up during the project and cleaning their own messes.

By completing these tasks after having already done a good installation, Thomas says landscapers can help guarantee that their clients spread good words about their work to friends, family members and co-workers.

And when clients start showing off photos of their new outdoor areas, that becomes the best advertising any landscaper could hope for.

"We try to make the patio or walkway look like it's been there forever," Thomas said. "The last touches are what set us apart." **PLD**



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USE READER SERVICE #315



Big Features, Small Space

Maryland-based **Botanical Decorators**
builds a detailed Virginia estate



When Botanical Decorators arrived at this Virginia site, there was no driveway. Nothing had been developed around the home, so landscape designers essentially were working with a blank slate.

Yet the client – a single, mortgage company owner – did have a few requests.

First, he wanted an outdoor dining area and a place where he could “throw up a tent and entertain hundreds of people.” He also wanted large water features, parking for four cars, a grilling station, an outdoor fireplace and an arbor.

BY DAVID YOCHUM

The detailed exterior of this Virginia home matches its extravagant interior.

But not just any arbor – the client wanted his to resemble something he'd seen in a Miami hotel.

"He actually flew our president down to the hotel on a private jet to take a look at what he wanted to model it after," says Botanical Decorators designer Brian Hahn.

Taking those requests into consideration, Hahn and his colleagues began designing a three-quarter acre property that could both feel larger and more isolated than it actually was. The client wanted his contemporary, Asian-inspired grounds to appear expansive, but he also wanted heavy screening from a nearby neighbor and main road.

"So we put a European-style parking court in the front and we decided to divide the property into three different areas to make it feel like an estate," Hahn explains.

Botanical Decorators used different paving patterns to give each area its own flavor, and unique



(Above) The raw home construction site before Botanicals Decorators imported gravel and soil. (Right) The newly finished, European-style parking lot and sub-terranean water fountain.



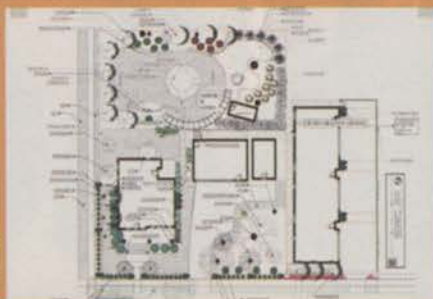
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materials helped make everything stand out.

"We matched stone walls to the house, used custom railings and helped him design all the iron work. We used all granite cobblestone, all smooth flagstone and the pergola is actually made of Brazilian walnut. Another thing is all the light fixtures on the house and everything we built into the landscape and parking court are all lit by natural gas. Everything is truly detailed – we left nothing to chance – and the client let us make a lot of the design decisions."

One decision that wasn't made by Botanical Decorators was the request to protect and save six historic trees throughout the property. But out of the six trees, only a single large cypress was in good health. The rest eventually needed to be removed.

Other problems with the project included working around the property's poorly drained west side and engineering the outdoor entertainment systems and sub-terrain water feature.

"There was only a certain location we could put all the mechanicals for the front fountain. There is a huge 10-foot by 12-foot vault buried that holds

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Total labor hours: 1,800

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Initial project estimate: \$600,000

Key materials: Vaulted fountain, quarry stone walls/fireplace, stucco walls, granite cobblestone, thermal Pennsylvania flagstone w/bull nose caps and step treads, custom powder coated railings and gates, Lynx grills/appliances, Ipe Pergola, exposed aggregated parking court and gas lanterns.

Equipment: New Holland rubber track skid steer with backhoe Rockhound attachments



BEFORE



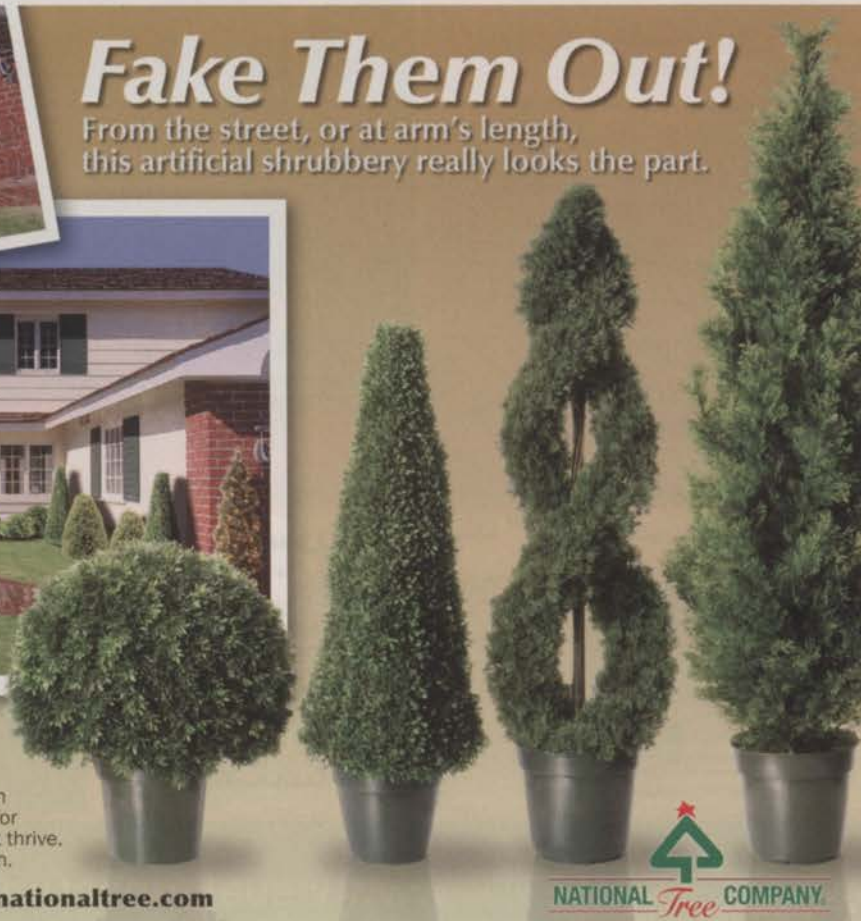
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everything. Another element that was very difficult was that all the lighting, the fountain and the outdoor audio system is programmed into a wall-mount computer inside the house. And because of limited space, all that wiring and stuff that was buried under ground was very difficult to work with."

Still, it only took Botanical Decorators six months to design and build the entire property, thanks to more than 50 workers and subcontractors. And Botanical Decorators landscape says the final result is quite elegant.

"It shows how even the most unusual spots on the property were utilized to bring a true estate feel," explains landscape architect Stephen Wlodarczyk. "Plantings are simple and traditional, and the use of old-world materials in a clean design is what made this project work." **PLD**



The dining patio and grilling station are grand in scale. Plantings were kept simple and clean.

PHOTO: BOTANICAL DECORATORS

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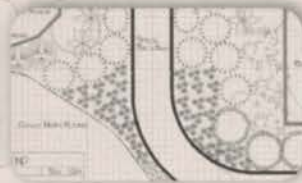
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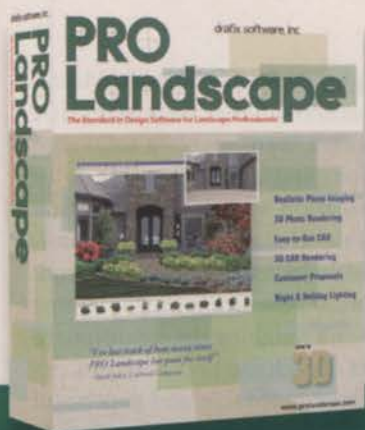
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USE READER SERVICE #418

Macro

or Micro?

What to consider before offering injection services.

From Dutch elm disease to the emerald ash borer, tree care professionals seek treatments for a variety of formidable ailments. But battling diseases and pests forces arborists and landscapers to juggle the pros and cons of adding on macro- and micro-injection services. Many believe injection systems can be an effective and potentially profitable service for landscape businesses to offer clients. On the other hand, these treatment technologies also necessitate an invasive process, such as drilling into

the perimeter of tree trunks or root flare, which can permanently damage tree tissue.

When evaluating whether to add injection systems to your tool chest, experts say it's critical to take the big picture into consideration. Deciding which treatment systems to offer involves broader business decisions such as charting how to increase returns on investments and providing customers with the best method for given conditions.

Joel Spies of St. Louis Park, Minn.-based Rainbow Treecare's scientific advancement team makes a solid case for not jumping into either macro- or micro-injection services without first assessing the availability of a distributor, confirming which technology and products are most effective for regional tree ailments and weighing the environmental impact of each method. Practitioners will be most profitable and successful in offering injection services if they thoroughly do their homework.

BY CHRISTINA BECK



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USE READER SERVICE #64

TRUNK Treatment

CONSIDER ALL METHODS

There are multiple types of therapeutic interventions possible for controlling diseases and pests. Macro- and micro-injection are becoming increasingly popular because they offer reduced drift and require a smaller amount of active ingredient than traditional methods such as spraying. However, researchers and industry representatives alike emphasize that while injection technologies are advancing, they should not be used as a first line of defense. Bal Rao, manager of research and technical services for the Davey Tree Company, says that there is “the good, the bad and the ugly” of injection if it is not performed properly. Drilling can impact the cambial zone of a tree so that it can not effectively transport chemicals to the xylem. Without proper investigation of a tree’s symptoms, appropriate use of chemicals, and correct injection methods, there can be hazardous, costly consequences such as environmental contamination and loss of trees.

Considering such environmental and safety factors, Rao ranked four preferable treatment methods. Recognizing that there are variable levels of effectiveness per given ailment and tree, his first recommended route is using soil application, which is simpler and safer than spraying. Rao says his second preferred method is applying a bark penetrate which requires no wounding. Third, Rao recommends



performing conventional spraying even though it may have non-target drift. And finally, Rao says he would use injection as a last choice because of the physical damage caused to a tree.

Practitioners need to consider the frequency of injections that are required for effective control and should also compare how many growing seasons potential treatments will last. The frequency of invasive treatments stresses tree systems and multiplies client costs. To help reduce these issues, applied research on injection technologies is currently underway at the Davey Institute for both in-house purposes and for primary injection producers such as DuPont. Ultimately, making injection technologies that are as effective, economical, user-friendly and as non-damaging as possible makes the best business sense.

“All types of tree injection involve wounding the tree, and this is a primary drawback of the technique,” Spies says. “A lot of problems can be managed with soil treatments. The real difference between

Properly investigate all tree symptoms before deciding to treat issues with chemicals and injections.



macro and micro is the amount of active ingredient and water needed to meet the treatment requirements.”

UNDERSTAND THE TECHNOLOGIES

Micro-injection systems were originally designed by Mauget, and the company remains an innovator in the field. Mauget representative Marianne Waindle says micro-injection uses a small volume of solvent to inject the active ingredient, typically just one to seven milliliters per injection site. The equipment required for providing micro-injection services is typically a drill, injection gun and other small devices. Waindle says startup costs are a few hundred dollars, which many businesses can recoup within days. She also adds that injection is “where the future of tree-treatment is going” because it has less drift than traditional methods, is efficient and uses a smaller amount of chemical.

There are two different methods of micro-injection systems – low-pressure and high-pressure. The passive low-pressure system is the industry’s earliest injection technology, which requires drilling into the tree trunk. Then, a product is inserted from a capsule into the tree at the sap stream rate. The downside of this passive process is that the injection can take up to several hours and practitioners are required to stay on site throughout this time, thereby adding labor costs. Once the process is completed, the capsule must be removed and disposed. The drilling

Common Ailments and Injection Treatments

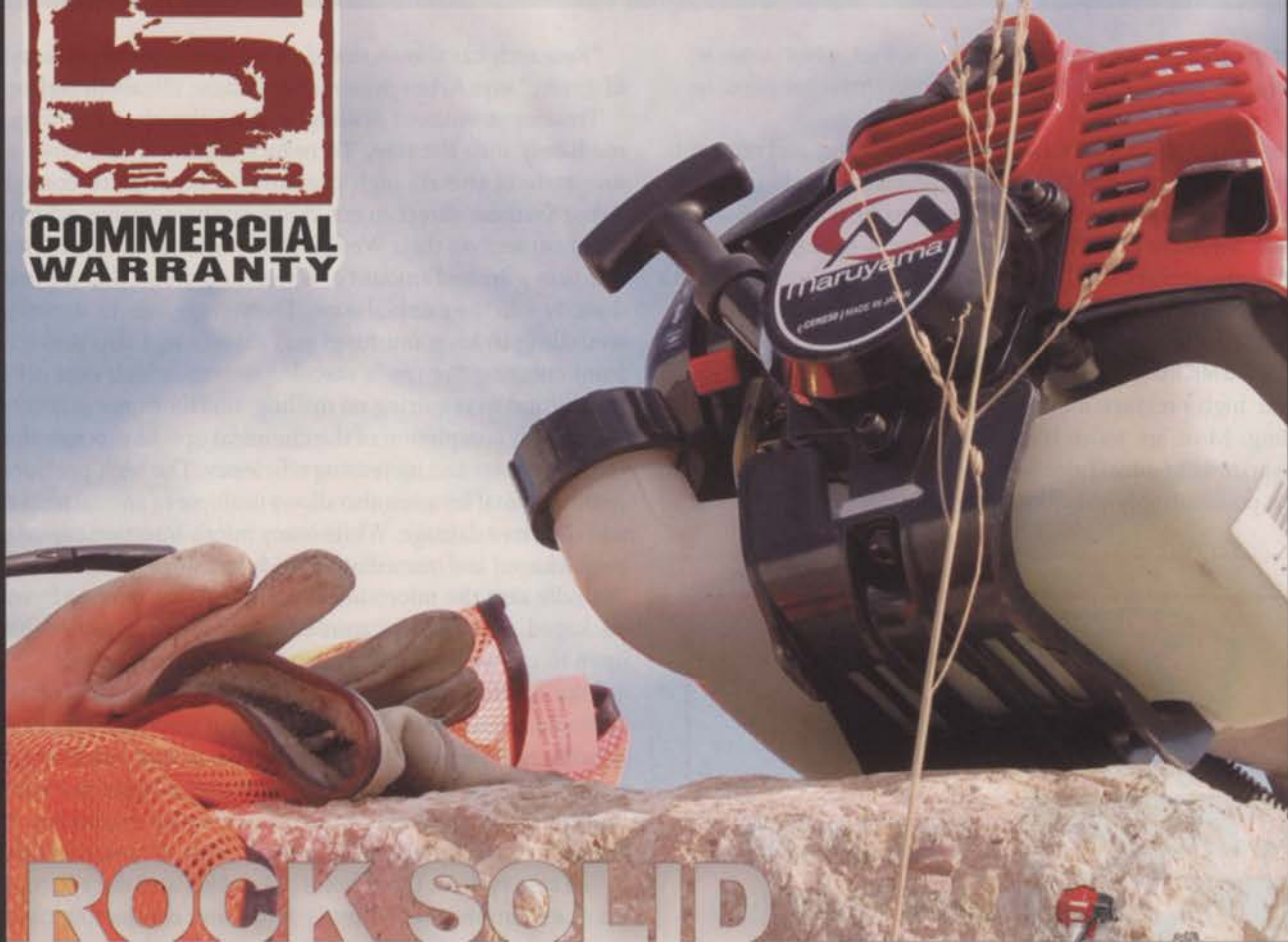
Disease/Pest	Region	Potential Treatments
Dutch Elm Disease	Eastern and Central states including Texas, Florida and Saskatchewan, Canada	Arbortect’s macro-injection and Mauget’s micro-injection Tebuject
Sycamore Anthracnose	Eastern half of the U.S.	Arbortect’s macro-injection and the TreeTech micro-injection
Oak Wilt	Appalachian, Central states and Texas	Alamo macro-injection and Mauget’s Tebuject
Pine Wilt Nematode	Midwestern states from Colorado to Pennsylvania	Arbor Systems’ Greyhound and the Pinetect Infuser
Emerald Ash Borer	Midwestern states and spreading to Eastern and Central states	Arbor Systems’ Pointer direct-inject and Mauget’s Imicide
Bacterial Leaf Scorch	Eastern, Southeastern and Midwestern states	Rainbow Treecare’s Bacastat micro-injection

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TRUNK Treatment



Most micro-injection methods are like a shot, which uses a syringe for pressurized chemical injection from the capsule.

process does affect a tree's ability to move water and nutrients. Damage can be caused by the solvents, which may include alcohol. Moreover, trunk wounds are difficult to heal and can attract disease. Since the active ingredients in micro-injection are inherently more concentrated than macro-injection, this may cause a greater potential for danger if there is breakage.

APPLYING MICRO-INJECTION TREATMENT

Newer high-pressure micro-injection methods do not involve drilling. Most are more like a shot, which uses a syringe for pressurized chemical injection from the capsule. It requires no drills, power supply or bulky equipment.

"Research has shown that drilling upsets the vascular system of a tree," says Arbor Systems consultant Elizabeth Nelson.

Treatment without drilling enables the chemical to go immediately into the tree. To reduce chemical and labor costs, one state-of-the-art high-pressure technology to consider is Arbor Systems' direct-inject, quick-connect system, which is an advancement on their Wedge direct-injection device. This system uses a limited amount of active ingredients that are injected directly into the cambial zone. The syringe injection minimizes wounding to keep out fungi and insects and also prevents air from entering the tree's vascular system, which cuts off flow. In addition to requiring no drilling, no labor time is devoted to waiting for completion of the chemical uptake process, thereby reducing costs and increasing efficiency. The high-pressure system's minimal invasion also allows multiple or annual treatments with less tree damage. While many micro-injection capsules are prepackaged and immediately ready to use for on-site efficiency, Waindle says the micro-injection industry is moving from prepackaged, proprietary capsules to reloadable capsules that are open to use with products from multiple companies.

Like micro-injection, macro-injection methods offer less drift and require less chemical use than traditional treatments. A primary difference between the two is that macro-injection requires a large volume of water and uses a larger pressure system for quick injection of the diluted active ingredient. Since the active ingredient is less concentrated, it causes less danger to the tree system. Once holes are drilled and the system is set up, the solution is sent directly into water conducting tissues of the root flares for faster uptake and even distribution throughout the canopy.

Macro-injection is a bit more costly start-up service, ranging from \$600 to \$1000. Yet this investment is less expensive than adding-on many other landscaping services. It may also be considered more cumbersome because of its equipment, which includes a pump, tubing, reservoir tank, drill and infusion tees. However, macro-injection equipment is reusable. It does not require collecting used product syringes or capsules for disposal. Environmentally-conscious solutions are increasingly important to many clients, and Spies says macro-injection systems may be viewed as even more environmentally-friendly than micro-injection's reloadable technologies.

Currently, Rainbow Treecare is the only distributor of macro-injection equipment. Rainbow's system is designed to accommodate both their proprietary formulas and those of other suppliers.

While the best treatment method for each ailment and tree should be evaluated, both micro- and macro-injection systems



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Injection Training and Safety First

Before providing injection services, practitioners should become familiar with regulations specifically addressing injection technologies and chemicals. Both the EPA and state agencies have environmental, health and safety guidelines governing macro- and micro-injection, such as staying on site during chemical uptake. It is important to caution that a pesticide used for foliar or soil application may not be suitable for injection. According to EPA regulations, only products specifically labeled for macro- or micro-injection methods may be used for their respective purposes.

In addition to regulations on the distribution, labeling and usage of macro- and micro-injection products, practitioners are required to have appropriate training. Training on safety regulations and application techniques is provided by many suppliers and professional associations. A variety of educational materials are also available online.

Government guidelines recommend wearing safety goggles, protective clothing and chemical-resistant gloves during application. These items (along with injection training) should be calculated into the operational expenses associated with providing injection services.

offer practitioners and clients positive factors. In an open letter to tree care professionals, Arbor Systems president Chip Doolittle referenced the medical doctors' oath to "First, do no harm." This guiding mantra is leading the research and development of all new tree injection technologies.

BUILD PROFIT

Two key components affecting a practitioner's injection service profits are how many chemicals are needed for an effective application and how much time is required per injection, says Arbor Systems consultant Elizabeth Nelson. These factors are important when establishing pricing and projecting work. Micro-injection processes (both low- and high-pressure) and macro-injection processes have labor requirements that can vary from minutes to hours per tree. Furthermore, the amount of chemical used and cost of the product varies greatly by ailment, active ingredient and type of injection. There are general rules of thumb for how closely injections should be placed and measuring tree perimeters to assess the potential number of injections can help in forecasting project costs. Thus, practitioners can develop a general calculation for estimating fees on injection services, yet this will evolve with experience using the systems and

understanding the variables. Growing expertise in applying injections will increase practitioner efficiency and profits.

Overhead costs and market conditions will also impact the profitability of including macro- or micro-injection on your business' menu of services. Overhead includes training, equipment maintenance and marketing. The marketing of injection services can take different routes from word-of-mouth to glossy informational brochures. Some clients prefer to have a single contractor on site providing landscaping services (being a one-stop shop for everything from mowing to tree healthcare can be quite a selling point). Alternatively, when a practitioner is on client property or making a bid, presenting injection services can be done in conjunction with offering warranties on plants.

Arborists and landscaping professionals can start on their road toward a profitable business in macro- or micro-injection by researching which technologies and products are most effective for the common diseases and pests found in their region. Investing in training and equipment are the limited startup costs for adding on such services. In the long run, a practitioner's in-depth knowledge of regional tree ailments and professional experience applying injection treatments will support labor efficiency, accurate fees and customer satisfaction. **L**

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Watering lawns longer and less frequently encourages root health.

REJUVINATING THE SOIL AND CULTURAL PRACTICES

An organic approach to lawn care that works in concert with nature's own system of checks and balances is the best way to help build a healthy, sustainable lawn. Always use the proper seed blend and vary the plantings in any landscape; biodiversity is one of Mother Nature's clever tricks for achieving balance. Sharpen mower blades every day and recycle grass clippings to improve organic matter and provide another natural source of nitrogen. Cut at near three inches to shade the soil and discourage weed growth. It also helps to keep the soil cooler through the summer months.

Some lawn care professionals recommend not watering more than three days a week. Watering longer and less frequently allows the water to penetrate further into the soil profile, encouraging root growth and health. A good overseeding plan in the fall will be the most effective and friendly weed killer next spring.

The additives mixed in base solutions also provide a variety of nutrients for soil. Bio-stimulants and micronutrients improve soil structure and aid in superior uptake of NPK and minor elements. To enhance natural aeration of the soil, use a soil penetrant that breaks water tension and aids in moving water more evenly through the soil profile. Humic and fulvic acids enhance nutrient availability. L-amino acid substrates and plant metabolites promote superior root mass and make nutrients in the soil more readily available to plants. As fungi and bacteria colonize the root zone, they form a symbiotic relationship with the roots. They provide nutrients to the roots and, in return, get carbon in the form of sugars.

Many lawn programs overuse nitrogen to enhance lawn color and vigor, resulting in a tremendous spurt of top growth while stressing the grass and doing nothing to promote root growth and health. Chelated iron added to the treatment mix produces

Treating Turf with a Modified Organics Program

A realistic approach to environmentally-friendly lawn care.

BY MICHAEL CIOFFI

Organic" is an increasingly popular word in the landscape industry, as more and more clients ask for environmentally-friendly lawn, tree and shrub care choices. At the same time, some misconceptions exist with regard to what constitutes organic care.

Organics are like holistic medicine for the lawn. But even holistic medicine must sometimes be supplemented with traditional care because occasionally, diseases or infestations do require sterner measures. It's how one handles these situations that determines the level of environmental responsibility.

Using a "modified organics program" that is as environmentally-friendly as pos-

sible is often the most effective approach to providing the best care. For example, building good soil is the foundation of successful gardens, lawns and landscapes. Nitrogen sources used from feathermeal, bone meal, blood meal and kelp help by increasing the organic content of soils, which keeps lawns healthy.

Sensible lawn care can be achieved by avoiding chemical treatments where possible, choosing the chemicals that are used very carefully and taking the time to find the least toxic solution to problems. Consistently providing good integrated pest management practices goes a long way toward significantly reduced pesticide usage.

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Trunk injection is a system that should leave no residue behind.

a deep green color without promoting excessive top growth. Iron allows a very conservative 3 pounds of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet per year.

In colder weather, calcium nitrate addition is useful. The calcium helps build thicker, stronger cell walls in the leaf, while the nitrate promotes nutrient response at lower soil temperatures and reduces the sodium levels in the soil. Adding a potassium-based fertilizer and compost tea to the mix prior to stressful periods improves the turf's resistance to disease, thus reducing the need to use fungicides.


WHATEVER IS PRUDENT AND NECESSARY

Over time, application methods and rates have changed to reflect technological and product advancements. Many ask, "What exactly do you apply and when?" The best answer is: "Whatever is prudent and necessary."

Companies could have a five-application organics plan, but the final formulation for any given application round is based on weather, rainfall, and changing seasonal pressures from temperature, pests and pathogens. One significant change for some businesses was the integration of tree trunk injections. This is a very effective way to solve problems and the closed system leaves no chemical residue behind. One set of injections can last up to two years.

Pesticides are still needed for certain situations, but many problems can be remedied using a holistic Integrated Pest Management (IPM) approach. Contractors have been known to spray garlic oil with good success for flea, tick and mosquito applications. Horticultural oil applications also produce good results. In treating crabgrass, for example, a pre-emergent called prodiamine is effective, precise and water-insoluble, so it does not enter the surface water or ground water. Corn gluten can be used as an organic alternative, but it requires 20 pounds per 1,000 square feet, is very expensive and, on first application, only about 60-percent effective. Because corn gluten is 10-percent nitrogen, that means applying 2 pounds of nitrogen at one time and would result in an increase in fungus problems, particularly in the summer when those pressures are highest.



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P R O V E N S O L U T I O N S

Recently, DuPont launched a new insecticide called Acelepryn, which works at extremely low doses, and has an excellent toxicological and environmental profile. It has been classified as a reduced-risk insecticide by the EPA and is labeled for surface feeding and subsurface feeding pests (grubs).

An organic alternative to killing weeds can be grass seed. If grass is kept thick and healthy, weeds have no chance to emerge. In many cases, if weeds are controlled, they can be treated and removed individually as they are few and far between.

THE ARTIFICIAL TURF OPTION

As a component of bio-friendly lawns, artificial turf can also be a great option, especially for backyard recreational areas.

Some new products on the market

now outperform previous materials and retain the look of freshly mowed grass. One product for children's play areas, for example, has a top layer of artificial turf made from a blend of polyethylene and

As a component of bio-friendly lawns, artificial turf can also be a great option, especially for backyard recreation areas.

nylon thatch fibers that simulate a fine blade fescue or blue grass. A sand infill holds the green fibers in place, and the turf rests on top of a cushioning layer made from 90-percent recycled foam rubber to absorb impact. This pad also allows for fast drainage, so children aren't bouncing in mud, and is also non-toxic and non-flammable. Both the pad and turf are anti-microbial and 100-percent recyclable.

The advantages of such a product are many. It provides a true cushioning for falls, discourages insects, eliminates

the need to mow and trim, it stays clean and dry and still looks like a green lawn. Similar products are available for maintenance-free backyard golf greens, as well as tennis and basketball courts.

BACK TO BASICS

In a world of instant gratification, the time it takes to achieve optimal results with organic treatments may seem lengthy, with results taking up to one year to manifest themselves. But clients soon learn that, for the sake of a healthy lawn and a healthy environment, it can be well worth the wait. (L)

Michael Cioffi heads the Lawn Maintenance and Organics divisions of Borst Landscape & Design, an award-winning firm located in Allendale, N.J. He has been involved in the landscaping industry for more than 30 years and is a member of several professional landscaping organizations including PLANET, SIMA and NJLCA.

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Create a Culture of Efficiency

If you've been in this industry long enough, you have seen tough times both nationally and locally. If you haven't, this turn of events can be a little confusing.

It seems that the rules of the game have changed dramatically from just a year ago. Yet I would submit to you that the rules have not changed at all. The rules on which we need to focus to be successful have. Let me explain.

During the boom times, the dynamics of business are such that a company is focusing on margins – gross margins of their accounts and net margins of their business. This is because there is a reliable quantity of work available. And while there is a segment of the market where price pressures are strong, there is such a disproportionately large amount of opportunity that it allows a company the luxury of choosing which jobs they want to bid and at what margins to earn.

Then pop! The bubble bursts and the economy shifts.

Now a company has to focus

on cash flow. And the thoughts turn to cost cutting. Without a doubt, all non-essential costs need to be eliminated, but that should be done regardless of economics. When the economy slows and gross margins are no longer there to offset the waste, this becomes vital.

The question is, which costs can be reduced or eliminated without hurting the business?

Certainly you do not want to negatively affect margins, efficiencies or relationships with key suppliers, customers or employees. Simply put, it is the right decision if a cost reduction improves cash flow or reduces accounts receivable (AR) without hurting those three.

Besides cutting cost to boost cash flow, a company can improve efficiencies. And I'm talking about more than completing a job in fewer man hours than you bid. This is about focusing on business efficiencies as much as production efficiencies.

- Negotiate deeper discounts from suppliers for early or prompt payments.

- Seek to change payment terms to suppliers from 30 days to 60 days.

- Have the customer pay your supplier directly for bulk materials.

- Motivate customers to pay you upon completion (before you leave the job) instead of billing them.

- Leverage manufacturer reward programs.

- Reduce financing rates for both short- and long-term debt.

But do not overlook production efficiencies, which I define as the percentage of total payroll hours that are billed. Clearly, not every man-hour can directly or immediately generate revenue. But I'm

sure you can create a culture within your company where employees ask themselves, "Does this task ultimately result in making money for the company today?"

If it does not, the employee should intuitively know to fix it or ask a supervisor to help him change it. This is the starting point for improving production efficiencies. When your lead employees embrace that type of culture, then all workers will. And your lead employees take their lead from you!

Start by challenging lead people with tasks that directly make money for the company. Have them group the tasks into two separate types: "job-specific tasks" and "general company tasks." Some examples of job-specific tasks could be: trenching, fitting pipe, backfilling trenches, installing sprinklers, billing customers or site clean-up. General company tasks might include: maintaining equipment, stocking materials for the yard/warehouse, conducting employee reviews, sales calls and association meetings.

When this exercise is completed, get together as a group to review. If you are the only leader, you will need to enlist the help of colleagues or fellow business leaders to conduct the review.

The review consists of hard-line questioning of each task, determining its relevance to generating revenue in the short run versus long term. From this, open discussion and interaction between the management, leaders and employees becomes as important as the findings.


Now, the transformation has begun. You and your leadership just need to keep it up until it becomes habit. Those habits will then be your new company culture of efficiencies. **L**



KURT THOMPSON

is a 28-year veteran of the irrigation and landscaping industries. His North Carolina-based consulting firm, K. Thompson and Associates, Inc., specializes in water use and training. He can be reached at kurt@kthompsonassociates.com.





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INNOVATIONS IN Turf Insect Pest Management

Combination products hold promise.

BY L. DOUGLAS HOUSEWORTH, PH.D.

In the '70s and '80s, turf managers had a number of products that essentially made turf insect control a non-issue. These products were based on organophosphates and chlorinated hydrocarbons, and active ingredients such as chlordane, diazinon and isazophos provided excellent long lasting residual control of turf insect pests. The problem, however, was that these products had a lot of environmental baggage and eventually were removed from the market due to pressure from the EPA.

Targeted pest control can be effective, but turf managers often need to use several different applications.

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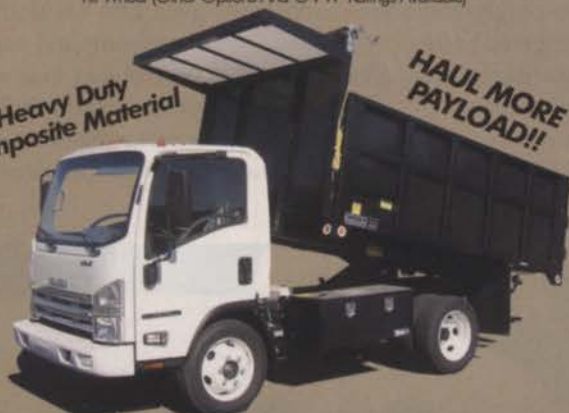
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This left a serious void that was partially filled in the '90s with the active ingredients imidacloprid and halofenozide. The application timing of these products was (and is) critical to their success. The timing requires turf managers to make multiple applications and pay particular attention to recommended timing, based on the behavior and life cycle of the insect pests when they are most susceptible to the insecticides. Modern day IPM is based on identification of the turf insect pest, monitoring pest population threshold levels and targeting an insecticide application specifically to that target pest. Targeted applications are effective; however, they are often inefficient and/or result in several pesticide applications being used throughout the growing season to control multiple targeted pests.

But a new possibility for effective insect control does exist.

Drs. Harry Niemczyk and David Shetlar discussed the concept of multiple turf

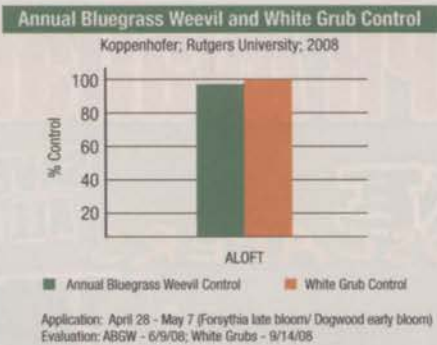


Figure 1: Example of multiple pest control with one early preventive application.

insect pest control in their book, "Destructive Turf Insects." Up until now, the problem with this concept has been the availability of products that meet stringent EPA requirements for human and environmental safety, broad-spectrum control and long residual activity. New products recently introduced into the turf insect control market have the potential to fulfill the concepts of Niemczyk and

Shetlar and provide turf managers with a tool to obtain multiple turf insect control and potential full-season control with one well-timed application.

NEW TECHNOLOGY BRINGS NEW OPTIONS

Newer turf insect pest management tools allow turf insect pest managers to rethink their way of controlling turf insects. In 2005, clothianidin was introduced into the marketplace. This neonicotinoid compound is very active against a wide range of insects and provides long-term control of several major insect pests. Its weakness is sporadic control and slow action. In 2008, a new premix product was introduced to the marketplace that contains clothianidin and bifenthrin with the intent that it would provide very broad-spectrum, consistent control of most (if not all) major turf insect pests, very quick knockdown and long residual control. The product, Aloft Insecticide, has been extensively researched by many

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Turf managers are being forced to rethink the way they control insects.

turf entomologists over the last two years. In 2008 another product that contains chlorantraniliprole, Acelepryn, was introduced by DuPont. It also may have potential for control of multiple pests with one application.

THE CASE FOR A NEW PARADIGM

If the assumption is that one product can be applied for early-season insects and provide full-season control of all major turf insect pests, what's the problem? Several philosophical concerns have been raised regarding this concept:

USING TWO ACTIVES WHEN ONE WILL DO THE JOB

This concern is rooted in the IPM concept that only one active ingredient should

be used to control a current insect problem. This concern assumes that the second active contributes nothing to the target insect pest control and just adds expense and additional insecticide load to the environment. This concept also discounts the fact that two products allow flexibility in timing for quick control of existing insects and season-long residual control of target insect pests that might escape the initial knockdown toxicity. Also not considered is the potential synergy in using two actives against the target pest to obtain better control than when one is used alone.

APPLYING INSECTICIDE WHEN NONE MAY BE NEEDED

Responsible turf managers will not apply an insecticide before they have reasonable assurance that they will have an insect

problem. Historically, the same insect pest problems occur every year and corrective measures must be implemented every year. If a turf manager monitors for the first insect pest that normally needs corrective action, then it makes sense economically and environmentally to apply a product that provides long-term control of that and multiple other insect pests. If monitoring is conducted and the first application is made when the first insect pest needs attention, insecticide is not wasted.

DIMINISHING THE IMPORTANCE OF IPM

On the contrary, the success of product mixtures with multiple modes of action depends on monitoring pest populations, accurately timing the application to the appearance of the first early season pest and then monitoring the turf for hot spots that may occur for various reasons throughout the season. Environmentally and economically, this method makes



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much more sense than making an application every time a different insect shows up.

INCREASING POTENTIAL RESISTANCE TO TWO ACTIVES

Research and historical use of single pesticides in multiple applications targeted toward at-risk insects has clearly demonstrated that the fastest route to resistance is the use of a single product. Typical examples are the bifenthrin resistance issues in Annual Bluegrass weevil in New England and the chinch bug resistance issues in Florida. Other disciplines, including weed control and disease control, have relied heavily on the use of mixtures to minimize the development of resistance. The Insecticide Resistance Action Committee (IRAC), an organization composed of experts in the pesticide industry, acknowledge that the use of mixtures is a valid resistance management strategy.

OVEREMPHASIZING CHEMICAL TREATMENTS

In most cases, a well-timed application of a combination product will be all that is needed for full-season turf insect pest control. Even if there are isolated hot spots, they can be cleaned up with a targeted spot treatment to the affected areas. Research and commercial use has shown that 0.375 pounds of the active ingredient in Aloft will provide control of early season insects and full season control of white grubs. Using conventional control practices, one to three applications of an insecticide for early-season insects followed by applications targeted toward white grubs is the norm. This results in a higher economical and environmental impact than a single, low-rate application early in the season.

WIPING OUT BENEFICIAL INSECTS

First, it is acknowledged that bifenthrin will depress populations of beneficial insects that come in contact with it. Clothianidin is relatively benign with respect to beneficial insects. Assuming those beneficial insects are important to turf insect pest control, then the question is, "Are beneficial insects present in April and early May when early season applica-

tions are made? If so, does the bifenthrin component stay around long enough to affect beneficial insect populations later in the season?" Since bifenthrin is a contact toxicant and relatively short lived, it's assumed that it would have minimal impact on beneficial populations. The early season application of bifenthrin/clothianidin certainly will have less impact than conventional practices.

With products like these, turf managers can potentially make one application per season and obtain full-season control of grubs and other insects. The bifenthrin component of Aloft is synthetic pyrethroid chemistry that is extremely active on a number of insects and provides very quick knockdown of insects that come in contact with it. The clothianidin component of the products is a new chemical of neonicotinoid chemistry that is much more active on insect pests than other neonicotinoid-based products on the market and is also much more persistent than other chemicals. What this combination brings to the table is the ability to apply the insecticide early in the growing season for insect pests and to get full season control of all white grubs without having to apply a product again when adult beetles lay eggs later in the season. In effect, it allows turf managers to obtain multiple insect control with one application based on their schedule, not the life cycle of the insect. A good example of this is control

Turf managers can potentially make one application and obtain full season insect and grub control.

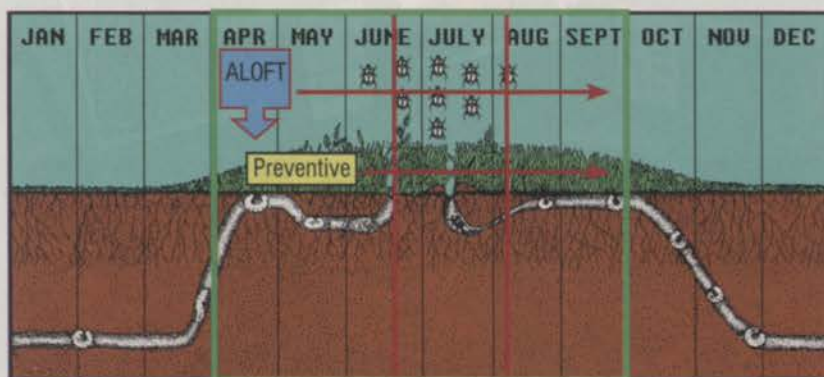


of Annual Bluegrass Weevil and White Grubs. The product can be applied once early in the season when the Annual Bluegrass Weevil adults are active (April or May) and that application can also control White Grubs that appear much later.

SUMMARY

Interestingly, back in the early '90s, there was outcry from the turf entomological community that IPM was dead. The organophosphate or chlorinated hydrocarbon chemicals were being eliminated. Bayer's imidacloprid (Merit) was perceived as the antithesis of IPM because it had to be applied before insects reached levels to damage turf, and now imidacloprid is considered a component of IPM programs. To deviate from that paradigm with a new way of managing turf insects is considered by many a violation of IPM concepts. The future for turf managers is very bright, new products have come to market in the last few years and more will follow. This will give turf managers more flexibility and will allow them to select the turf insect management strategy that best fits their particular situation. ①

EARLY IS BETTER



- Annual Bluegrass Weevils
- Ants
- Billbugs
- Cutworms
- White Grubs
- Cinch Bugs
- Sod Webworms

Figure 2: Early preventive application timing of ALOFT to control early-season adults, surface feeders and white grubs.

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USE READER SERVICE #80

'Good' Marketing

Community volunteer work rewards landscaping businesses.

BY DAN RAFTER

Whenever Heather Denchfield drives past Walt Whitman Senior High School in Bethesda, Md., she makes sure to sneak a peek at the entrance to the school's football stadium.


The stone walkway (formed in the shape of a large blue "W") reminds her of Denchfield Landscaping's volunteer work, which helped create the walkway in the fall of 2007. And it's just one of the many local charitable projects that can be credited to Denchfield Landscaping.

Denchfield, human resource manager of the landscaping business and owner of the company's nursery division, hopes that others also remember her company's volunteer work when they see the blue "W". Only she hopes that they then think of Denchfield Landscaping when it's time

to put new bushes, perennials and walkways in front of their own homes.

"Doing charitable work definitely does pay off for the business," Denchfield says. "We do a lot of charitable work in the area in which we have our client base. Our clients really appreciate the fact that you aren't always working with only profit in mind. They appreciate that you're willing to give back to improve the community, and they remember when they're looking for their own landscaping work. It's a win-win situation."

Denchfield is far from the only landscaping professional to realize this. But the company takes on several charity projects throughout the year, doing everything from installing flower beds on elementary school grounds to regularly shoring up the



Denchfield Landscaping created this stone walkway (free of charge) at Walt Whitman Senior High School in Bethesda, Md.

landscaping in front of the local Easter Seals building.

The firm does all this for the good of the community, but Denchfield also takes on volunteer work because it helps boost the company's local name recognition and, as a result of the positive word-of-mouth advertising, its revenues for the year.

"We do a lot of work for the local schools," she says. "A lot of our customer base comes from these schools. They greatly appreciate the work we do beautifying these locations. They then feel better about having us do their landscaping work. They know that we care, and they feel better about hiring us."

THE BIG EVENT

Charitable work comes in many forms. Some companies, such as Denchfield, concentrate on installing community gardens at schools, government buildings or in local parks.

Others, such as Exterior Image, a landscaping company in Lothian, Md., take a different approach.

In late October, Exterior Image hosted "Rockin' for a Reason" – a festival that benefited a local charity working with at-risk youths and substance abuse treatment. The event featured bands, food and an auction, which were all designed to raise funds for the charity.

"It's always a good time to do something like this," says Exterior Image owner Mark Childs. "But now, it's really important. The economy is struggling and these charities need all the help they can get. The need is much greater than it has been. During these times, it's imperative to help people who need it."

Childs says the main reason for the event is obvious: He wanted to give back to the community that has supported his nursery and landscaping business. Holding the event and donating the funds it generates was the right thing to do, he says.

But there was another benefit, too. Because the event was held at Trent Hill Farm & Nursery (Exterior Image's nursery division), it allowed Childs and his staff to show off their business. Extensive gardens dot the nursery grounds. These gardens, with their perennials, annuals, shrubs and flowering trees, can't help but remind event attendees of the other good work that Childs and his landscapers do.

And when it's time for festival attendees to hire a landscaper for their own homes and businesses, the odds are good that they'll at least consider Exterior Image.

"It's always a good time to do something like this. But now, it's really important. The economy is struggling and these charities need all the help they can get."

– Mark Childs, Exterior Image owner

"By bringing people to our facility, where we are having the event, that is helpful," Childs says. "People are reminded that the place up on the hill is not a house, but is actually a beautiful nursery. But that's not the guiding force here. The guiding force is to help others. When you help others, help naturally comes back to you."

PICKING YOUR PROJECTS

Both Denchfield and Childs agree that the biggest challenge in performing volunteer work is deciding which projects to take on.

There are several factors to consider: The visibility of a location and the landscaping that is eventually installed; the need of the organization or individual to be helped; and the ease of maintaining the project once it's completed.

This last point is critical for Denchfield, who points to the fact that the "W" project at Walt Whitman High School does not include any flower beds or other live plantings in addition to the stonework. This is important be-

cause both the landscaping company and the school wanted the project to be simple to care for. A flower bed, for instance, isn't really a gift if it requires its new owners to spend precious hours weeding every week.

"Whatever we do, we don't want to create more work for the community," Denchfield says. "We look carefully at our projects to make sure that it will be easy for the community to maintain it. Still, we do go back and maintain our community projects. We'll go back and weed the flower beds we install and add fresh mulch, but we don't want anything we do to be too

labor-intensive."

Scott Aanenson, landscape designer at Sioux Falls, S.D.-based Landscape Garden Center, says his firm makes regular donations to the area's major hospitals and the local Good Samaritan Center, largely because those entities often have the largest needs.

The company also considered the question of need before embarking on one of its most ambitious volunteer projects – providing free landscaping for a Sioux Falls luxury charity home. Once completed, the home's builder will offer tours of the luxury home for five weekends, donating all the money from the tickets purchased to a local children's home.

Landscape Garden Center donated all the landscaping work for the show-home, planting several flowering plants and evergreen bushes along the home's lawn, and choosing boxwood plants and knockout roses to match the home's Mediterranean look. The landscaper also chose trees that are very narrow and tall so that the luxury house would not look overly large.

Scott

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USE READER SERVICE #65

PROFITABLE Practices

"These projects do benefit us as a business," Aanenson says. "It promotes our company while we give back to the community. That in itself benefits us tremendously as far as future jobs go. You'd be surprised at how much good word-of-mouth advertising spreads when you're acting as a positive part of the community."

Even the firm's low-profile projects – such as making financial donations every year to the area's hospitals – have resulted in new business, Aanenson says.

"You go to the charity events of the organizations that you donate to and you meet more and more people," he says. "Jobs spin off of that. It all works out pretty well."

Denchfield says that before taking on a volunteer project, her firm also considers the likelihood of the project getting done if Denchfield doesn't do the work for free. At Walt Whitman Senior High School, for instance, there was no guarantee that the entrance area to the football field would ever look like anything more than a neglected, weed-choked flower bed if Denchfield landscapers didn't plan for the walkway.

"When you do a project for a school, it frees up the school's budget to spend on academics," Denchfield says. "We realize that school budgets are tight. We'd rather they'd be able to spend their dollars on the academic part. We like giving something that allows a school to free up its money to be applied in different areas."

Denchfield, and other landscapers who routinely perform charity work, say scheduling volunteer jobs doesn't have to be a hassle. Many landscapers do the work during slower times of the year. Others simply slot it into their workers' schedules as if it were any other type of job.

But even if fitting the volunteer jobs into a busy schedule was a challenge, the work would be worth it for landscaping firms. Three years ago, Denchfield Landscaping installed several trees outside a local middle school. Denchfield says people still tell her how much they appreciate those trees.

"It's honestly one of the best ways to let your clients know that you care," she says. **L**

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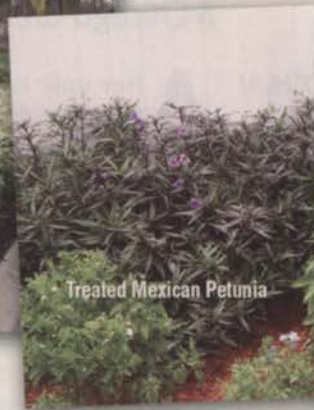
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USE READER SERVICE #77

If You Love Something, Let It Go

A Chicago-area fleet manager gives up a good thing.

BY DAVID YOCHUM

After only two months of being together, Mark Teegan and his lawn care crews reluctantly parted ways with Toro's new Grandstand mowers last fall.

It was a planned divorce – Acres Group employees were only to demo Toro's entry into the stand-on mower segment – but that didn't necessarily make the man-machine breakups any easier.

"My guys were happy to use the Grandstands," Teegan admits. "I didn't really get any complaints – they never needed repairs."

If anything, such a positive experience may have left the Chicago-area workers with a permanent, sour taste for old stand-on technology.

So perhaps that's why, as soon as the 2009 snow season ends, Teegan plans to reignite the Acres-Toro relationship. Only

this time, the Acres Group fleet manager is committing to Toro for the long haul.

"We need to outfit 13 additional crews, so we're looking at ordering probably 20 or 30 units," Teegan explains, "Because this is the first year that Toro has made stand-ons, we already have a bunch of other models. But we're going with Toro because of the good service, parts support and training. We do a lot with that company – they even contacted us for input when they were designing the Grandstand."

Because Teegan has been working with Toro since the Grandstand's inception, he is uniquely able to describe how one of the industry's newest mowers could be valuable for similar large businesses. The Acres Group generates upwards of \$37 million in annual revenue, and the Toro mowers already helped some of its 600 employees



tackle the company's "bread and butter" townhome properties.

"When they were in tight spots, workers could slow the mower down and still keep the deck running full bore," says Teega, highlighting the Grandstand's signature speed control feature. "It made the machine much more controllable. On other mowers, the only way you could slow them is to throttle down, but then you lose deck speed."

Teega adds that the speed control feature even makes it easier to train new employees.

"It's tough for some guys when they are first learning to use stand-ons," he explains. "The equipment is really responsive. If someone isn't familiar with them, stand-ons can be jerky and hard to maneuver."

Grandstand mowers also helped Teega's crews with a more safety-oriented control dilemma. Because the Acres Group frequently asks employees to trim close to water, the company has had issues with machines sliding down slopes and into retention ponds. In those instances, Teega says the ability to flip up the Grandstand's platform and transform it into a walk-behind mower was "huge."

"Obviously, by folding the platform you can put more in a trailer, too," Teega says. "But our trailers are set up for riders, so size wasn't really much of an issue. We had room for them."

Additionally, Acres Group employees gave the Grandstand's padded platform high marks for its "cushy," shock-absorbing suspension, and Teega praised the mower for its quiet demeanor.

"It didn't seem like the deck had any whine (sound)," Teega says. "That tells me that maybe there is little more flow."

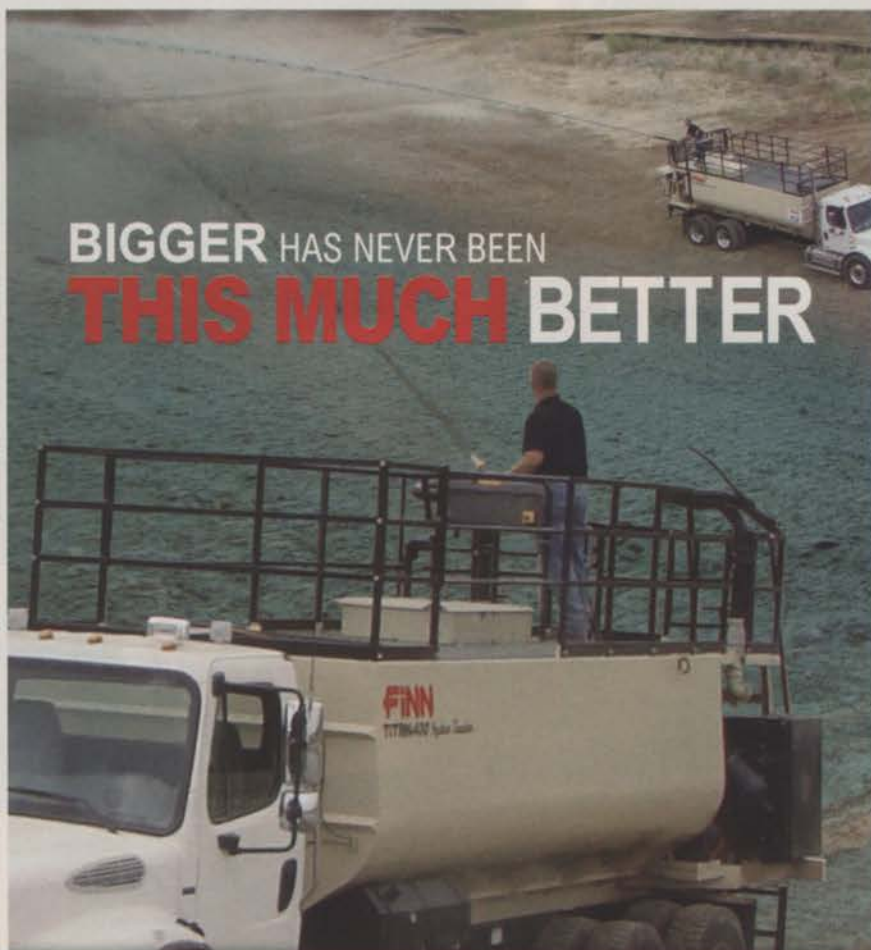
Still, Teega points out there is still room to improve the mower. He says Toro's Grandstand doesn't seem more fuel efficient than any other stand-on in the market, and his company will likely only be purchasing models with a 52-inch deck.

"The Grandstand with a 48-inch deck was a little too small for us," Teega says. "It would be great for a residential guy going into backyards, but we do all commercial maintenance." **L**

Mark Teega and Acres Group employees enjoyed their two Grandstand demos.



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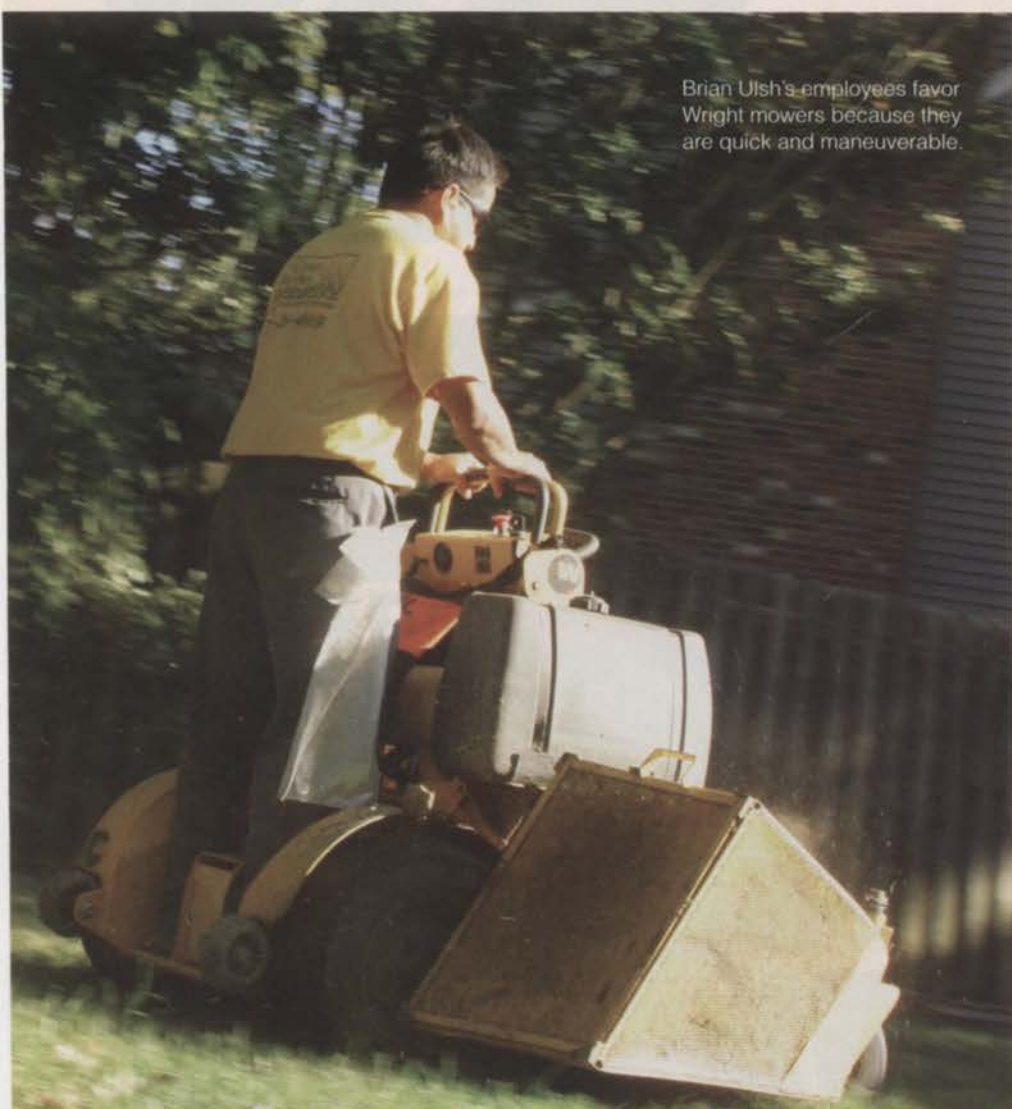
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USE READER SERVICE #83



Brian Ulsh's employees favor Wright mowers because they are quick and maneuverable.

Most LCOs can't remember each piece of equipment in their lawn care inventory. Even fewer can reveal the exact names or specifications of that equipment on-the-spot.

But Lawn Barber CEO Brian Ulsh isn't the typical lawn professional.

In fact, he could be considered *the* Wright Manufacturing enthusiast.

"Since I started using Wright stand-ons, we have phased out every other brand in our fleet," Ulsh says. "We now have a total of three 36-inch Stander, four 36-inch Rapid Height Stander, three 52-inch Sentar, one 52-inch Sentar Sport and two Stander ZKs."

Ulsh, who owns and operates a full-service maintenance company in Hampton, Va., is committed to Wright stand-ons for a number of reasons. He has ambitious plans to double Lawn Barber's 2007 revenue (\$300,000) by 2010, and found Wright to be a manufacturer that can help him reach that goal.

But of course, simple economics doesn't make a contractor fall head-over-heels for a brand of mowers. While Ulsh was searching for stand-ons, he discovered Wright's offerings were quick, economical, easy to maneuver and durable.

And most important – they fit in his trucks.

"One of the biggest assets of Wright mowers is that they are so compact," explains Ulsh, a 15-year maintenance

A Perfect

Lawn Barber's Brian Ulsh is captivated by one stand-on manufacturer.

BY DAVID
YOCHUM

veteran. "We can fit a 36-inch and 52-inch stand-on side-by-side in our regular pickup trucks with modified beds. If we need to, we can even get a 36-inch and two 52-inch mowers on the back of a truck. That's a big deal."

Ulsh says he tried hauling similar stand-ons from six other companies. However, they were all too big.

"Size was a huge selling point for us in the beginning, but that isn't necessarily the most important thing," Ulsh adds. "If the mower doesn't have a quality cut, then it really doesn't do you any good. Wright stand-ons leave a nice stripe, and even though most mowers can turn on a dime, I really like these because you're essentially standing on the center of gravity. When you turn, you aren't thrown off balance."

Particularly impressed with Wright's Sentar model, Ulsh noticed balance isn't even a problem when cutting on hills.

"You don't have to slow down much.



You displace your weight by leaning into the hill and then you gain more traction on the side."

Engineering also played a role in Ulsh's decision to use Wright stand-ons. He says that because the company's lineup is built with few moving parts, he experiences little down time. Yet when a mower component does break, Wright immediately helps address the problem via phone.

"There was a specific instance where one of the mowers was down and I couldn't get the part, so I called Wright at 3 o'clock in the afternoon," Ulsh explains. "They shipped the part to me by Fed Ex and by 10 o'clock the next morning they were walking me through how to put it on."


Overall, Ulsh says most troubles with

Lawn Barber workers use five different models of Wright stand-on mowers.

Wright's products are related to operator error, such as broken blades or spindles.

"Outside of that, I'd say there haven't been very many issues with them. One of our mowers had a few things wrong with the engine, but that's the engine - not the mower itself. We still use a stander that I've had for six years because it runs strong. Typically, we'd phase out our mowers in four or five years. These are holding on."

But with a wealth of new mower technology on the market, would even a Wright enthusiast be comfortable operating one of the company's vintage stand-ons?

"The original Stander is pretty good," Ulsh admits. "If I had to rate it on a scale from one to 10, I'd give it a seven. But they've made huge improvements from the original Stander to the (Stander) ZK. Now, with the way they have the suspension set on a spring-loaded system, I'd give it a 10." 

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A Stand-up Guy

Mike Halloran sells stand-on mowers to himself...and he's a happy customer.

Mike Halloran is 100-percent Chicago. He was born there, he lives there, he cuts grass there and he even sells equipment there.

Halloran, whose voice sounds uncannily like actor George Wendt doing his famed "Da Bears" skit on "Saturday Night Live," is owner of Aesthetic Landscape, a highly successful firm that primarily serves apartment complexes and bigger commercial sites around the Windy City and its suburbs.

And, by the way, he also operates a dealership that sells the Ariens line of equipment and other stuff for his fellow contractors. During the past 12 years, he's built his distribution business to incorporate two – soon to be three – locations.

So, when you're both a customer and a dealer and you can sell to yourself, what

do you buy and why?

His answer is simple: "Da Stand-On because of Da Profitability."

Well, that's not *exactly* what he said, but here's his story.

More than a decade ago, Halloran already had 15 years in the business as a contractor. He'd been operating primarily with riding decks and really hadn't thought a lot about alternatives. Then, at a trade event, he was introduced to the Surfer – one of Great Dane's earliest stand-on units.

"It took me about two minutes to decide that this was the way my business needed to go," he recalls. "I immediately realized the implications for my operation and decided on the spot to sell my six zero-turns and replace them with stand-ons."

The nature of Halloran's client base –

apartment clusters with mixed areas of open turf and lots of edges, corners and other obstacles, convinced him it was a perfect fit.

"I looked at those machines and compared them to what I was running and I knew I could put more of them on a trailer, get them into tighter and more confined sites and not have to switch between the big and small units I was using then. We haven't looked back since."

The original Surfer also was kinder to operators on hills and slopes. "It was

a smaller footprint and we didn't have nearly as many problems with scalping. The hilltops looked much better and we had fewer complaints."

Aside from the versatility he found with the Great Dane models, the number-one benefit was simplicity. "The original Surfer and the newer models have very few moving parts. Just look at a parts diagram and compare it to any riding unit. It couldn't have half as many parts. Fewer moving parts means fewer problems in my book."

Another advantage was limited blade changes. Given his location in the northern part of the Midwest, turf is nearly always mowed at 3 inches. He didn't need a unit where constant cutting height changes were easy. In short, why bother with a feature you're not going to use all the time?

The switchover wasn't perfect at the time. Major problems included re-educating a few of his operators and changing the mentality of his customers. "Initially, there were two issues. The first was retraining older guys who'd been on sit-downs for 20 years. We had to change their mindsets and get them used to covering an entire space instead of just the big areas."

"The second challenge was that, on some residential work, we couldn't go at full speed. Quite frankly, going that fast intimidated a few customers. The units went so fast that it scared the bejeebers out of Mrs. Smith and I'd get calls. That was a problem, but a good problem to have in the long run. Fast is good in this business."

The other challenge was changing the mindset of team leaders who were used to ride-mowing large areas and then finding something to do while the crew finished the smaller spaces and trim mowing.


"Back then, the leader would run the big 60-inch rider. Once he was done, he'd turn into a taxi driver by the end of the day. He'd be running errands for the crew and getting lunch. With the stand-ons, they're more productive."

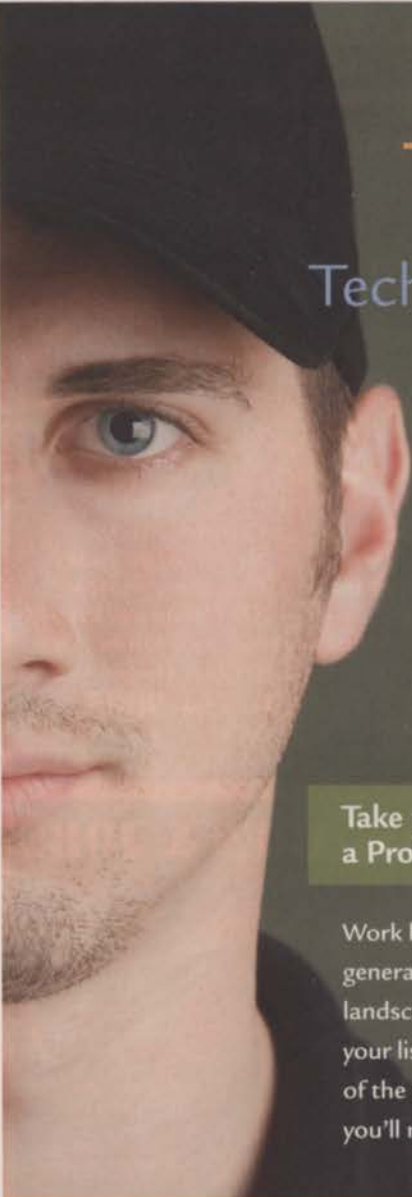
Ultimately, it comes down to finding the right fit for the business, in Halloran's mind. "Why have a machine on the trailer that won't work on every job? It's wasted space, wasted fuel and wasted mainte-

nance. I can't overemphasize the labor savings we've realized."

Looking back over the years, what was the biggest benefit from the change? "The biggest thing is that we're logging 1,100 hours per year on the stand-on versus an average for the sit downs of 400 or 450 hours per year. Plus, they can go every-

where. We fire 'em up in the morning and they go all day."

Aesthetic has relied on its fleet of Super Surfers for years now, but Halloran does plan to make a change soon. "I'm going with the new version of the fixed-deck model. It's old school, baby. The simpler, the better." 



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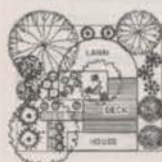


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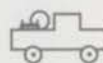
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Industry journalist Pat Jones presents both sides from his sometimes twisted point of view.

The Winner's Edge

Regular readers of this curious back-page of *Lawn & Landscape* know that the usual premise of my column is to explore both sides of an issue and argue each vigorously. Response to this idea has been strong – people are either strongly amused and supportive or strongly irritated and opposed. Hey, that's the nature of the beast.

But, every once in a while an idea comes along where there's no dispute. This is one of those occasions.

So, for the time being, the Devil takes a holiday while we focus on one company owner that's doing things undisputedly well.

I've known Wayne Winner for the better part of 15 years. We both served as volunteer leaders for RISE – the chemical industry trade association – and attended endless meetings and conferences together. Wayne always impressed me because he was a busy honcho with Valent Professional Products, yet he was always willing to invest extra time he didn't have into the organization because he believed strongly in our industry.

I knew Wayne worked out of Dallas (despite Valent being headquartered in California), but I never knew *why* until recently. It turns out that in addition to managing sales for a chemical company, he also owned a good-sized landscape contracting firm called Techscapes, which serves mostly commercial clients in the Dallas-Fort Worth area.

Today, several years after leaving Valent to devote himself full time

to his company, Wayne and his son Kevin are proving that Winners never quit – even when times get tough economically. Here are a few useful LCO suggestions I took away from a conversation I had with them a couple of weeks ago:

- **Focus on relationships, not just revenues.** “The approach we've applied to all of our clients is that we're there to be a business partner. What's the priority for them? Would they sacrifice a few leaf pick-ups for better plant beds? Are liability issues more important than looks? We'll work directly with them to create and justify their budgets. Then, we'll focus our program on their needs and customize our services to fit.”

- **Avoid cost cutting and discounting.** “Reduction in cost has to be associated with reduction in services. We simply don't understand some of the pricing that the other guys are using. We'd rather find services the client doesn't value as much, dial those back and still give them quality.”

- **Think ahead instead of reacting.** “We saw problems coming last year and started proactively talking with customers about how they should adjust. We even went back to a few twice and readjusted before they even asked us to. You have to put yourself in their place and think like them.”

- **The culture of the company sets you apart.** “We constantly talk to employees about continuing to build the industry in a positive way. We're a professional services company, so we should be professional in all aspects of what we

do. That raises the perception of what you do. Our golden rule is to do what you say you're going to do. The contractor industry as a whole just has a horrible reputation because of failing to do that. That's the number one complaint. Just do what you say you're going to do and the vast majority of customers will be happy.”

- **Practice survival skills in tough times.** “First and foremost, we're educating and meeting face-to-face with existing clients. We keep those relationships perfect because we always seem to expand from within that core group. Almost all of our new clients are recommendations.”

- **Don't be afraid to risk a little to save a lot.** “A lot of our contacts had been re-signed for 2009 in October. When the economy tanked in November and December, we renegotiated. It didn't matter if we already had a signed contract for an increase, because we know our clients well enough to understand what the hardships were going to be for them. We gave up a little to keep the vast majority of the business.”

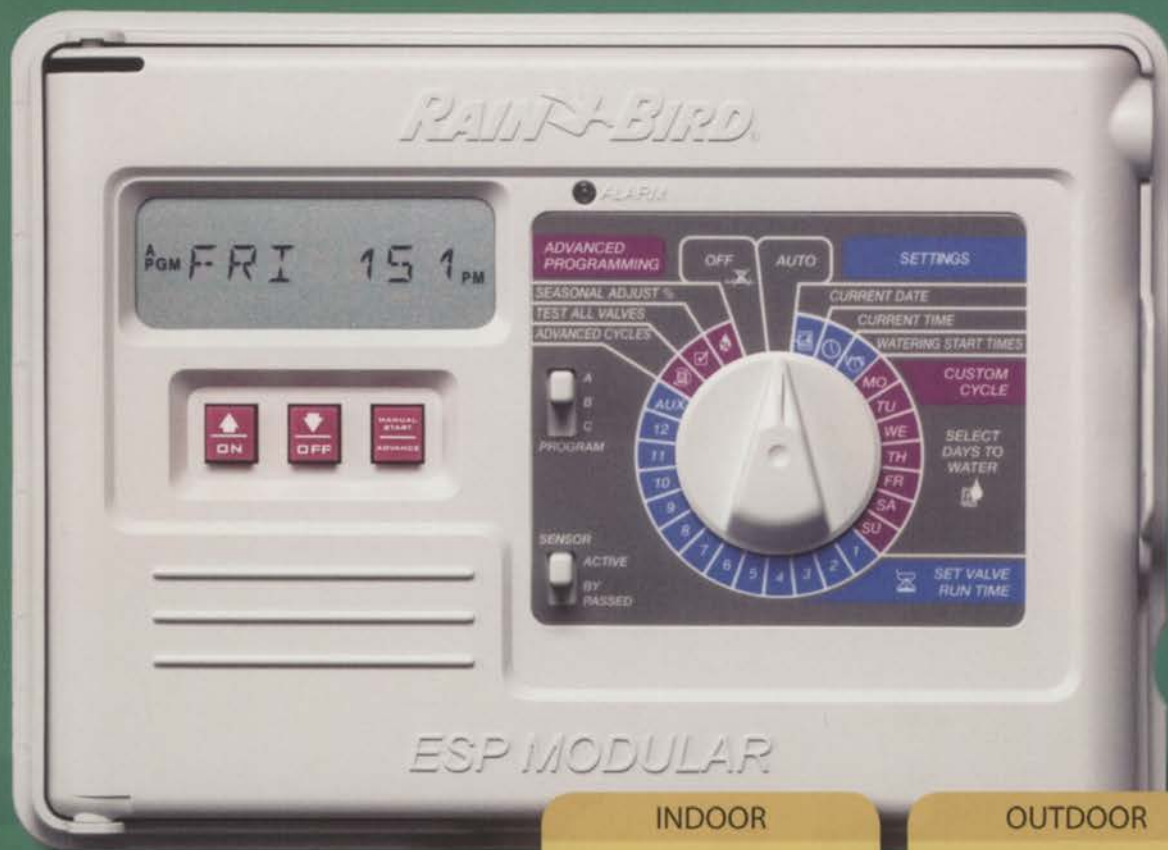
So, the lesson here is that a thoughtful approach – one without panic or radical change – can be very effective for companies such as Techscapes that have a long-term vision.

As always, the Devil in me wants to be a little cynical, but Wayne and Kevin just aren't the kind of guys I'd mistrust. Basically, they play by the rules, don't take shortcuts and never forget they're part of a team. Winners are like that. **L**



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