"Growing people," a commitment to quality and delivering what the client wants are specialties of the Brickman group -- one of the largest design/build, maintenance companies in the nation.

by Maureen Hrehocik, managing editor

Dick Brickman makes success seem so easy.

Like an athlete in training, his companies, Brickman Industries and the Theodore Brickman Co., continually reach for the best -- in recruiting, training, management and motivation of their people and excellence in all phases of their work.

"Some teams play offense, some defense. We do both," says Brickman, 52, president and chief executive officer of the Brickman group.

Simply, Brickman's statement sums up the corporate philosophy of one of the major success stories in the design/build, maintenance business. Brickman Industries, the maintenance portion of the business, and the Theodore Brickman Co., the design/build portion, forming the Brickman group, is the largest company of its kind in the country.

Dollar volume for 1983 is expected to be around $14 million. Next year, the company hopes to do $16 million. Brickman also owns the 40-acre Maple Leaf Nursery in Long Grove, IL. It supplies to Brickman jobs only. The Brickman corporate client list includes AT&T, Allied Corporation, Arco Chemicals, Bell Labs, Exxon, McDonalds Corp. and Rustoleum. Condominium and apartment projects, shopping centers, banks, insurance companies, industrial parks, universities, recreation centers, office buildings, private businesses and residences have all been a part of the company's extensive job list.

Brickman does no advertising. Its finished projects are its greatest public relations tool.

And while Dick Brickman is proud of the projects his company has worked on, it is in the company's people where the greatest investment has been made.

"We can only grow as quickly as we can grow people," says Brickman, sitting in his newest branch office in Langhorne, PA, right outside of Philadelphia.

"We look to long-term tenure of our employees and because of this we have very low turnover. We want to grow for financial reasons,
A condominium development in Lancaster, PA, before and after the Brickman group designed and executed the landscaping.

but equally important to us is growing to satisfy the creative needs of our employees.”

**Teamwork**

Intensive training programs, continuing education on the enrichment and graduate levels, and regular discussion sessions with employees and supervisors are some of Brickman’s ways of investing in his people.

“As chief executive officer, it’s my job to be the main company cheerleader and set the motivational tone. Everyone has his own style. I’m not a speech-giver. I believe in more personal contact. I have a dedicated, sincere interest in our people.”

The corporate structure of the company is streamline. Dick Brickman, as president, oversees the entire company and is responsible for planning, major clients and policy-making. His brother, Bob, in Long Grove, is executive vice president. Don Synnestvedt, in Langhorne, is operations manager of Brickman Industries and oversees all four of the company’s maintenance divisions. Bruce Hunt in Illinois is operations manager of design/build with a Langhorne and Long Grove division employing 20 landscape architects. On the same level is a finance head and marketing sales manager, each with an east and west division. Depending on the season, Brickman employs between 200 and 500 people. Each Brickman office, in Long Grove, Langhorne, Morristown, NJ and Laurel, MD, has developed its own, specific training program.

In the maintenance division, employees are given a 28-component test, ranging from job planning to employee relations representing 400 hours of training. The division also has a 40-hour winter program.

Behavioral analysis tests are given before promotions and everyone is evaluated semi-annually.
"While there is no pass/fail, this type of test gives phenomenal insight into a person," explained Brickman. "Sometimes we've seen the results years later.

For the most part, the company has formulated its own training programs, but has also adapted from corporate training programs such as Perron-Ambrose and Kraft.

Everything from MBA degrees to personal enrichment courses are encouraged -- and financed -- by Brickman after an employee has been with the company a year. "We've never declined a request from an employee for any kind of course," said Brickman.

When hiring, the Brickman group is looking more and more toward trained managers, people from graduate and specialty schools and strong on the business side.

"Traditionally, the type of person attracted to this field are those who like to make things look healthy and who are more 'artsy.' There aren't too many with a business background."

Brickman said 80 percent of the company's recruiting is done through schools.

The company also plans to formally start "quality circle" groups. In these sessions a trained leader or superintendent meets with employees once a week to hash out company issues as they apply to customers.

"This really gives us a chance to get our field people involved in the decision-making process," explained Brickman.

At a more basic level, Brickman believes in cross-training his employees to provide the type of service clients need. The designers are taught what goes into maintaining a project and the maintenance group is taught to understand the intent of the design.

**Back door**

"Our designers are in the field," he says. "In the client's mind we provide a total service, that's why we cross train."

Brickman said design/build used to be considered unprofessional. Now, it is the fastest grow-
ing segment of the industry. Profit in this area is no longer a dirty word.

"With many firms today, design/build is looked upon as a fad," said Brickman. "Some contractors have looked to it to avoid the bidding process." At Brickman, design/build is hardly a fad.

"We look on design/build as a sculpturing process," said Brickman. "The execution is as much a design project as it is at the conceptual stage. We want to control the bidding process." At Brickman keeps in mind the costs and attention to aggressively pursue just maintenance contracts. Maintenance, now the foundation of the company's revenues, accounts for 60 percent of business (around $6 or $9 million) and Brickman would like to see it become 2/3 of the company's business in the future.

Don Synnestvedt, maintenance operations manager, oversees all four of the company's maintenance operations. Synnestvedt's background has been in the landscaping and nursery business, working with his uncle, Ralph, at Synnestvedt Nurseries in the Chicago area. He has been with Brickman 13 years and is now based in Langhorne, where, with his other duties, is temporarily in charge of the maintenance division there.

Besides the obvious financial benefits of the division, Brickman says one of the most important things about maintenance is it serves as the "security blanket" for the company's design/build division.

"Because we maintain a project, we can preserve the design integrity our architects have built into each site.

"Our getting into maintenance was a stroke of genius," Brickman continued, "because it provides us with an insurance for a project. If properly designed and maintained, a project can be an asset that really grows."

Because of the quality of its work, the company has won many awards, and, according to Brickman, these are the company's best calling cards.

"The area we've really been deficient in is marketing and strategic planning," Brickman said in the Chicago area especially, there are a number of firms copying their work - and cutting prices to do it.

"We've been a little too complacent (in the marketing area)," he said.

That lack of strategic planning, though, hasn't seemed to hobble the company's growth.

In the beginning

Theodore W. Brickman, Dick's father, is the founder of the Brickman group. At 77, he is chairman of the board and still keeps abreast of the company's business. It is Dick, though, who runs the day-to-day affairs. Brickman Sr. was drawn into the horticultural business in Texas. Later he was in charge of the gardens at the Century of Progress International Exposition in Chicago in the 30s.

In 1939, after working with the Chicago Park System as a horticulturist, he started his own landscape business in Glenview, IL. His business was interrupted in 1941 with the start of World War II and gas rationing. In 1945, Brickman reopened his business. It wasn't until 1957 that Dick Brickman, after getting his degree in landscape architecture from the University of Illinois, joined his father. In 1959, Theodore Brickman Co. was incorporated and moved to Long Grove. Bob Brickman became active in the firm in 1961. With Dick's arrival and that of Bruce Hunt in 1961 (Hunt is currently operations manager of design/build), the company started to evolve away from its "grass cutting" image and into landscaping. "When we first started out in the business, we were mainly in residential," recalls Brickman. "I got sick of dealing with housewives. We went through a transitional period where we didn't do any residential work."

A project for Standard Oil was their first major design/build job.

"We got the contract for landscaping all the Oasis gas stops along the Illinois Toll Road," recalled Brickman. "That one job was worth more than we made all year. It scared the hell out of Dad. As it turned out, we did the project, but on a smaller scale."

Now, most of the company's contracts are in the commercial and institutional areas, although if a major client needs something residential done, Brickman will usually do it.

"We've had some very successful residential projects," he said.

With the company's continued growth, branch offices continue to be a necessity; operations in Langhorne were set up in 1977, in the Washington area in 1980.

"We create branches where it's necessary within the limits of our resources - mainly people resources," said Brickman.

Brickman says he has no plans

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of expanding farther west than Chicago, but the Florida market is a ripe area. His nursery may also be another area of expansion in the future.

"We don't actively seek branches, but if we see good growth potential, we'll look into it."

Brickman feels competition is healthy and has no concerns about his company ever replacing the smaller landscape businessman.

"There's plenty of room for both," he says. "Just by the nature of how our companies do business, we define our market. Even our equipment is specialized for the type of business we do."

Brickman, a Howard-Price dealer, is proud of the 104-inch bat-wing rotary mower Howard developed and Brickman tested. It will be marketed this spring.

"This machine was created out of a need for this size mower in this market," Brickman said. "We see ourselves getting more and more involved in the development and dealership of equipment in the future."

Brickman's operation in Long Grove is unionized. He says it presents no problem.

"Where we run into a union situation we work with it and deal with the issues up front."

A legacy

Brickman was raised in Chicago. He and his wife, Sally, recently moved to Bryn Allyn, a northeast Philadelphia suburb, to be close to the Langhorne office. Two of Brickman's sons are following in their dad's and grandfather's footsteps. Steve is a salesman in maintenance operations for the company and Scott is a junior in landscape architecture at Penn State. A daughter, Sue, attends Sweet Briar College and another daughter, Julie, is a high school freshman.

Brickman is a licensed pilot who used to fly the company plane. With business responsibilities, his flying time was cut to a minimum. He still finds time to golf and play tennis. He is on the board of directors and is very active in The New Church, based in Bryn Allyn. He chairs the Associated Landscape Contractors of America's curriculum committee and is a past national president. He serves as treasurer of the Landscape Architecture Foundation.

Much of Dick Brickman's success has to lie with his ability to deal with people, especially his clients.

Not even being referred to as a "landscaper" by a client (which does happen occasionally), can dull his sensitivity to their needs.

"This is a people development business we're in," he said. "It is successful only to the degree it is committed to excellence. We constantly strive to meet the needs of the client. We can't force our ideas on them. The client is spending money to achieve a goal. The process is not important. The end result is.
"We come out of college with over-inflated ideas of who we are," Brickman continued. "We become so impressed with our own credentials. We must keep in mind the client and his wishes. As I get older, I see more of what the client's view of us is."

Brickman sees a need for more professionalism in the industry, especially in the maintenance area.

"What's happening now is we're seeing outside service companies coming in. In the next ten years, we'll see organizations coming in and contracting national sites with major real estate companies. It's already happening in the janitorial services. Not many landscape firms are up to that type of challenge at present. Within the next 10 years, I see a much greater influence on marketing in landscape architecture. I'm excited about the future. Awareness of us by the public is real. It's up to us (the industry) to decide whether we'll be a leader or a team player."

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