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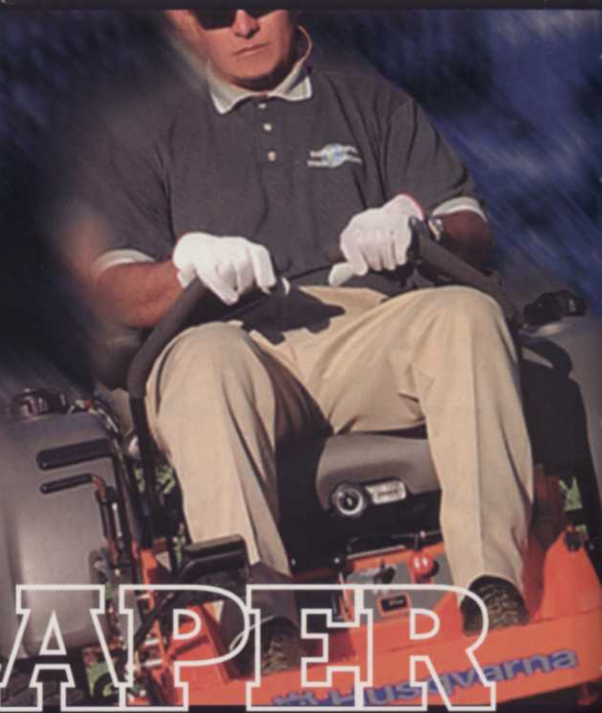
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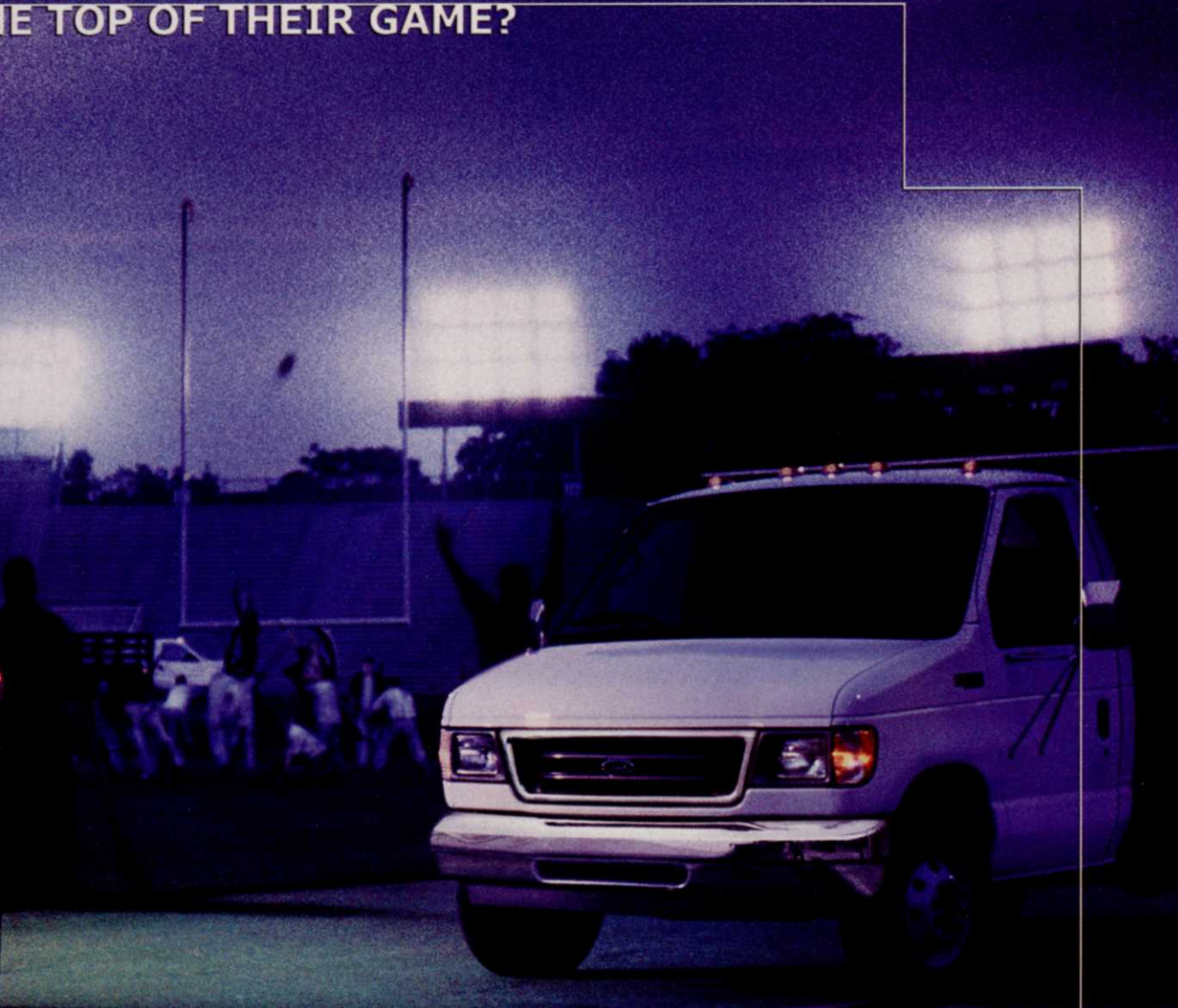
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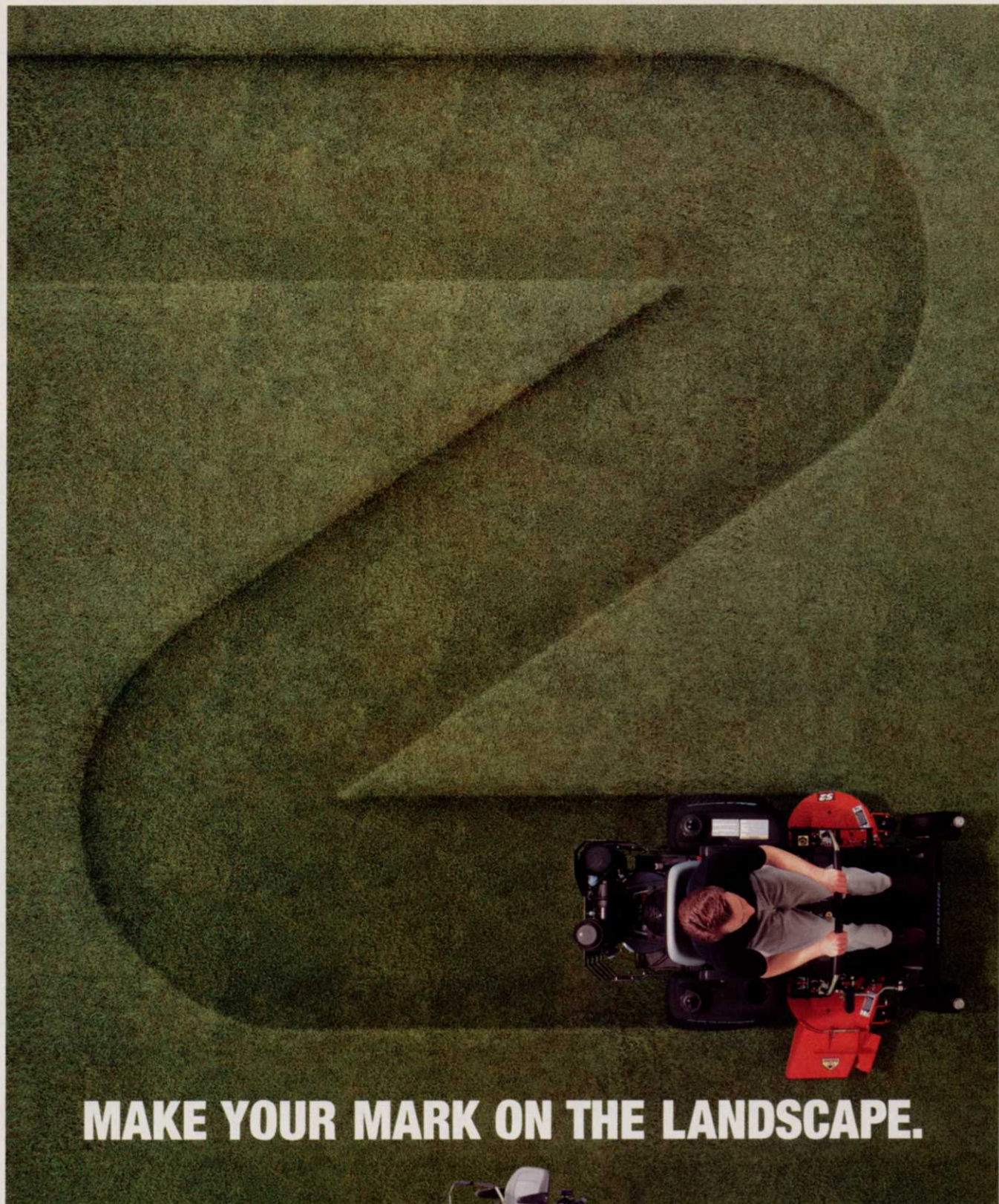
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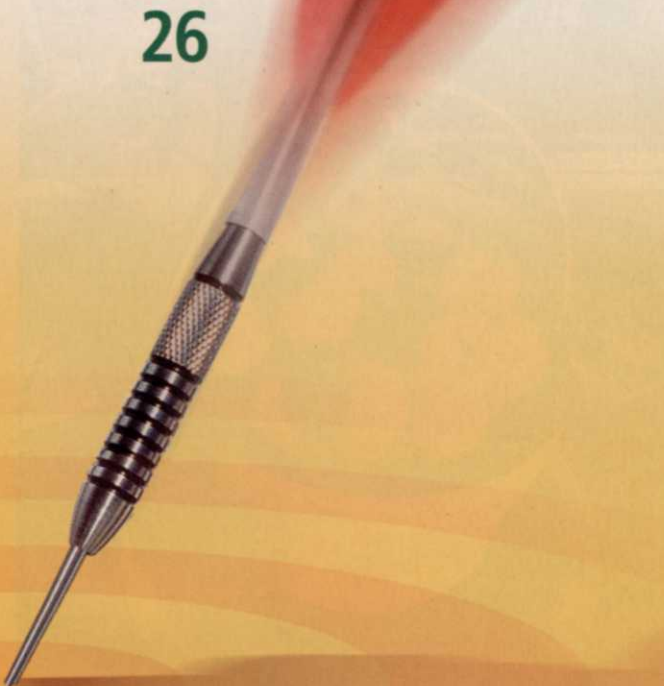
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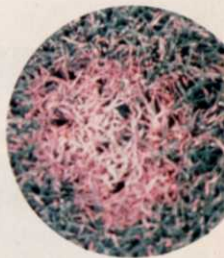
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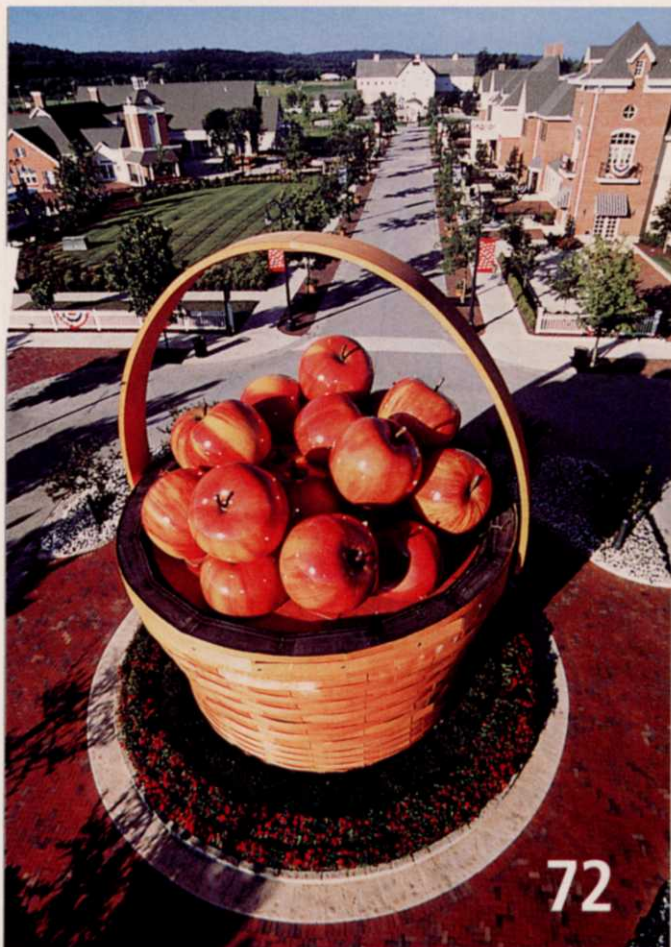
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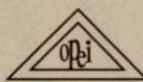
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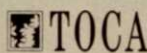
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These guys aren't so dumb

BY JASON STAHL / Managing Editor

I achieved a couple of firsts recently: I made my first visit to Oregon and now know the proper pronunciation of Willamette Valley (Will-AM-ette, not Willam-ETTE), Oregon (Ore-GIN, not Ore-GON), and Tualatin (Tu-A-latin, not Tua-LA-tin).

While in Oregon, specifically at the recent Engine & Equipment Training Council (EETC) conference in Lake Oswego, I came to a realization: I'm dumb when it comes to matters mechanical.

As I sat with the four-stroke committee going over the EETC's technician certification exam, I realized that I know as much about engines as I do crochet.

Pop quiz: Maximum valve overlap occurs a) at top dead center, exhaust stroke, b) before top dead center, c) after top dead center, intake stroke, d) before bottom dead center.

Uh, um, gee, uh...duh.

Or how about this one: Piston rings control oil consumption best when a) they always remain flat against the cylinder wall, b) they flex slightly to use the edge of the piston ring, c) the ring end gaps are below .001", d) the oil ring has become as wide as possible.

What is intelligence?

This is complicated stuff. Hey, I used to think the shop class kids were the dumb ones, but I've changed my mind there. What is intelligence, anyway? Is it being able to build a rocket? Or is it knowing how to make quiche? It's probably best described as a person's capacity to learn.

Regardless, the stigma of mechanics being lugheads might be one of the reasons there's a critical shortage of service technicians for outdoor power equipment. It seems everyone wants to be a doctor or lawyer — or

venture capitalist. Could you see a parent pushing their child to become a lawn mower mechanic?

One attendee said that's what everyone wants to be — that, or a golf equipment mechanic. But being a small engine technician is simply not viewed as a viable career.

The EETC is doing what it can to show people that it is a viable and professional career. Take one look at the 140-question certification exam and you'll know this job is no joke. The pay isn't bad, and hey, there are plenty of positions available.

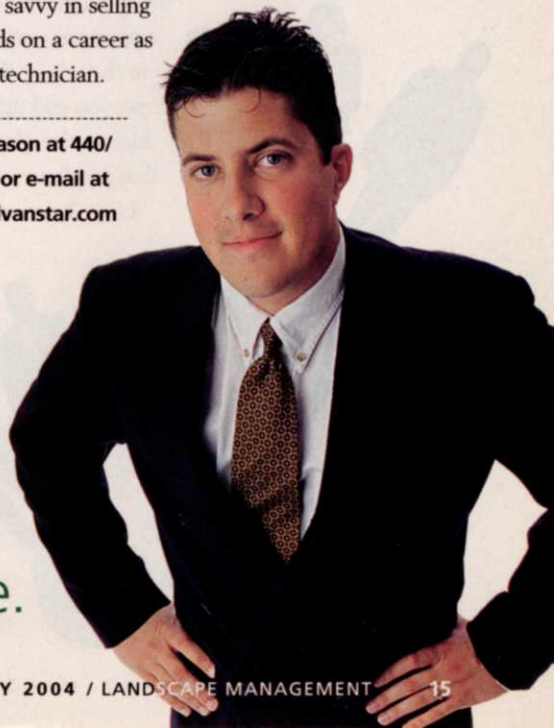
Just like Uncle Sam

That's what I don't understand — we're mired in a rotten job market, yet here is an industry that's begging for qualified techs and hardly anyone's listening.

A national advertising campaign would help change people's view of a career as an outdoor power equipment technician, but that would be costly.

A better idea is to blanket high school career days like the armed forces do. Whether it's the Army, Navy, Air Force or Marines, those guys are aggressive recruiters. In my high school days, I remember speed-walking by their booth and hiding my face behind my bookbag. The EETC could use aggressive individuals to be just as savvy in selling young kids on a career as a service technician.

Contact Jason at 440/
891-2623 or e-mail at
jstahl@advanstar.com



The stigma of mechanics being lugheads is one reason for the service tech shortage.

If you're always thinking about building your company around the best people, you'll attract better people over time.



Build with a talent mindset

BY BRUCE WILSON

Companies that are growing face two challenges: cash flow or capital acquisition and people. While both can become limitations to growth, they can be and are overcome by many companies. When you talk to contractors, most say that finding good people is their most difficult challenge. To grow, I believe a company must develop what I call a "talent mindset."

Got talent?

To me, a talent mindset is the philosophy of always looking to upgrade the talent in your company. You must "build your bench" so that when a growth opportunity arises, you have the talent waiting in the wings. If you don't have talent ready to go, you end up "settling" when you have to hire on the spot. The outcome over time is that you have a team of mediocre people.

How do you successfully build a bench without hurting profits while you're trying to grow? This is the challenging part for everyone. I believe one of the answers is to always be on the lookout for good people and, when one comes along, to find a way to work them into your organization. Take every opportunity to

build better talent. Upgrade every position whenever you have a chance.

The weakest link

One way is to replace weak links, and we all have them. Sometimes contractors hesitate to hire because they can't afford to take on a \$50,000 salary. When you look at it that way, many of us would hesitate. Another way to look at it is to put them to work in another position. Even if that position is only worth \$35,000, it's covering \$35,000 out of the \$50,000, so your incremental cost for the bench strength is only \$15,000. If you look at it that way, it works.

Where do you find people? Networking is the best method. Let people in your company know that you're always looking and have them put the word out in their circles. Many have friends in the industry. The best part is that they'll probably only bring in good people because they have to work with them.

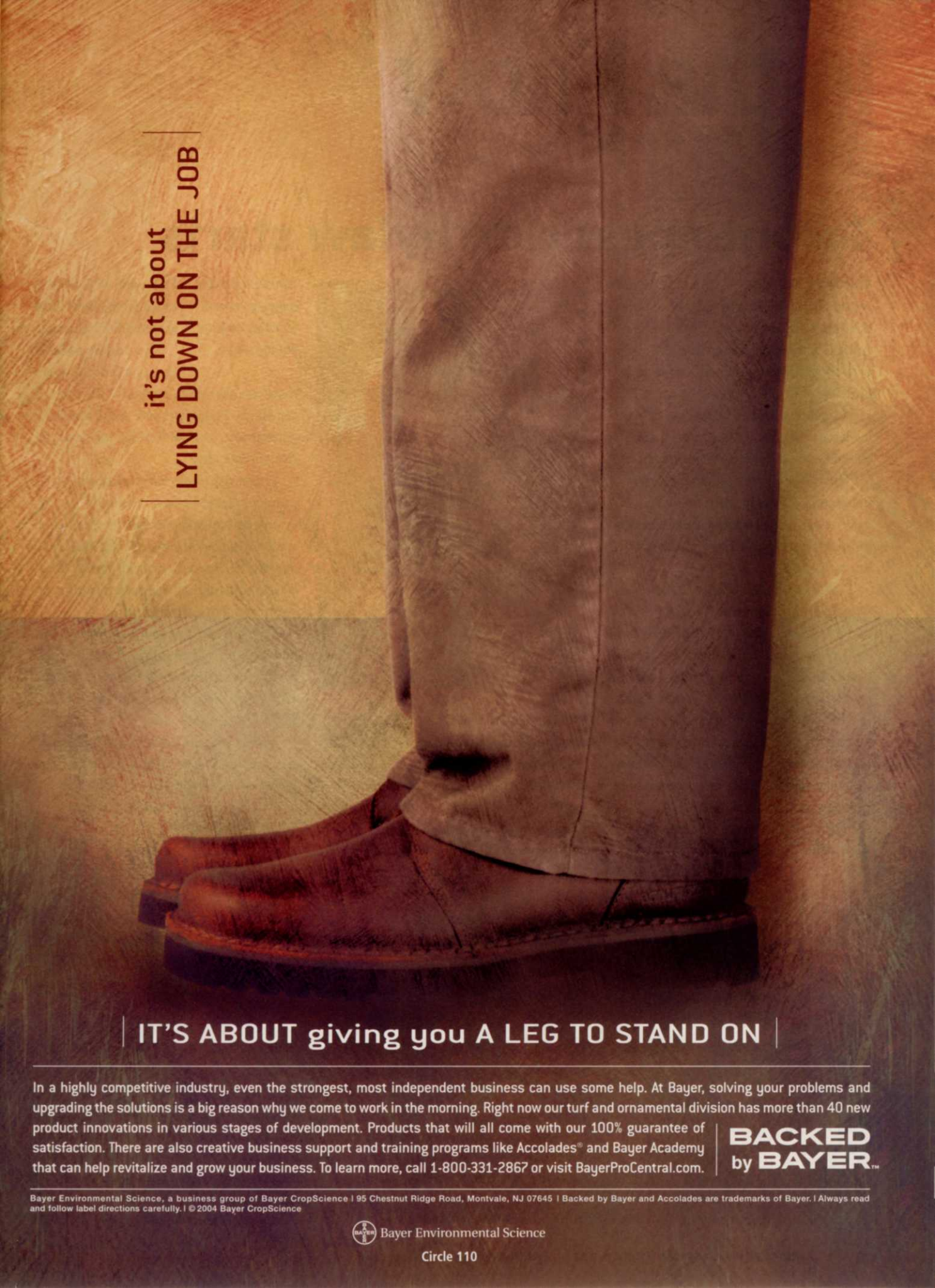
Getting an article written about your company in industry trade magazines is also a big boost to getting your company known and respected. This kind of thing gets the phone to ring. Attending industry events like the ALCA Student Career Days is another great way to get your name out among people entering the industry.

If you're always thinking about building your organization around the best possible people, you'll attract better people over time. Talented people like the challenge of working with other talented people.

— The author spent 30 years with Environmental Care, Inc. before partnering with Green Industry entrepreneur Tom Oyler to form the Wilson-Oyler Group, which offers consulting services. Visit www.wilson-oyler.com.



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Bayer Environmental Science

Circle 110

In the Know

BUSINESS NEWS YOU CAN USE

Toronto pesticide bylaw starts

TORONTO, ONTARIO — This city's bylaw restricting the "non-essential use" of outdoor pesticides went into effect this past April 1. The bylaw, passed in 2003, starts with an ambitious public education and outreach effort. Next spring Board of Health employees will begin issuing "warning letters" to anyone found in violation, and in Sept. 2005 begin issuing fines.

The bylaw allows the use of conventional pesticides only when there is a health issue or a pest infestation causing an immediate or potential risk of substantial loss or damage.

Debra Conlon, Executive Director, Urban Pest Management Council (UPMC) said the bylaw represents bad science and bad public policy. She pointed out that all pesticides are thoroughly tested by federal authorities before they can be sold. "This, and the City's expenditures relating to pesticide police is a waste of taxpayers dollars and unnecessary duplication," said Conlon.

Owners of lawn service companies objected as well, and contended that it is "unnecessary, expensive and unenforceable." Even so, initial indications are that most



will continue to serve this market, the largest in Canada with approximately 2.5 million people. They, along with grounds managers, have already begun altering their programs, seeking accreditation as Plant Health Care (PHC) and Integrated Pest Management (IPM) practitioners. The

Toronto education campaign aimed at homeowners is not too subtle. University of Guelph manages the PHC/IPM accreditation program. In a curious twist of law, pesticides — even those not allowed to be used in Toronto — can still be bought because the provincial government, and not the city, regulates the sale of pesticides.

Lower risk pest control products permitted under the bylaw include:

Insecticidal soap, dormant or horticultural oil, biological controls such as Bt and nematodes, Borax/boric acid, Ferric phosphate, horticultural vinegar, pyrethrum or pyrethrins, fatty acid and sulfur.

"We hope that people will buy into this and hope it's a good thing," Alan DeSousa, on the city's executive committee, told the CBC. "We don't want to come with a heavy-handed approach."

People who use pesticides illegally could face fines starting at \$100, but DeSousa said he hopes people will comply voluntarily.

To learn more about the Toronto bylaw visit the Web site www.toronto.ca/pesticides.

Debate flares again

TORONTO — The debate over the alleged link between pesticide exposure and human illness flared again here April 23 on the release of a review by the Ontario College of Family Physicians. The review received a flurry of media attention.

The authors of the review recommended prevention and reducing exposure "whenever and wherever possible."

"Overall with respect to cancer this review provides compelling evidence of

a link between cancer and pesticide use both occupationally and with home use," Dr. Cathy Vakil of Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario, was quoted by the Canadian Press.

The report urged Canadians to use alternative methods of lawn and garden care, and supported municipal bans on the use of pesticides for cosmetic purposes.

Industry was quick to respond. Lorne Hepworth, President of CropLife Canada, disagreed with the report and said that pesticides are highly regulated

and must go through exhaustive testing before they're approved for sale.

"Pesticides used properly constitute no unacceptable risk to people's health or to the environment," he said.

Specifically in regards to the common weed control product 2,4-D, one of the most extensively studied compounds ever, Donald Page, Executive Director of the Task Force on 2,4-D said the review "completely ignores the decisions of authorities like the World Health Organization and recent studies by the U.S. National Cancer Institute."

EETC, Shindaiwa focus of conference

BY JASON STAHL / Managing Editor

LAKE OSWEGO, OR — The Equipment & Engine Training Council (EETC) expects certified technicians to be on the cutting edge of technology. At its 8th annual conference recently, the EETC announced that it, too, is getting technical with a new on-line version of its certification exam.

"It's out there in some test markets right now to work out some bugs in the database system, but it should be released in 90 days or so," says Jim Roche, Executive Director of the EETC. "That way it will hit the fall test season."

Roche also announced to the 85 attendees that the number of schools with ac-

creditation programs jumped from 56 to 66 this year. Also, that more emphasis was going to be placed on electrical and component parts knowledge in the exams given technicians' weakness in those two areas.

One other notable happening was the passing of the gavel from outgoing EETC president Peter Fernald, Technical Services & Training Manager of Shindaiwa, to Dann Roark, Director of Technical Education for Briggs & Stratton.

Shindaiwa in spotlight

As the host of the conference, Shindaiwa offered a tour of its manufacturing plant in Tualatin and CEO Tom Bunch offered comments on the company's standing in his



EETC prepares its certification exam for new online version.

keynote address.

One observation he made was that more than 100 cities now have noise regula-

tions, and that emissions regulations were having a "major disruptive impact" on the industry.

"There's more coming, and there will be some winners and some losers," Bunch said.

In addition to making his company's products more emission compliant, Bunch listed other new features of Shindaiwa products:

- ▶ programmable ignition
- ▶ new fuels & oils
- ▶ new composite materials
- ▶ soft start recoils

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Circle 112

Keep your butt out of the mulch



WOOSTER, OH — Your workers have just applied mulch in the beds surrounding a commercial or industrial building. Some of this mulch is near a “smoking zone” outside the building. A smoker chucks a smoldering butt into the mulch. It catches on fire. Far fetched? Not really.

Larry Steward, assistant professor of horticulture at The Ohio State University Agricultural Technical Institute (Ohio State ATI) enlisted the aid of some colleagues and put 13 organic mulches to ignition tests. They tested the mulches under natural field conditions for their ease of ignition from cigarettes, matches and a propane torch. The tested mulch was 2 to 4 in. deep, which eliminated the chance of spontaneous combustion.

Some of the mulches, like cocoa hulls, never ignited under any of the circumstances, while others, like ground rubber, had flames within a minute and

Larry Steward, left, tested mulches for their ability to ignite and found that some catch fire easily, below. were a struggle to extinguish. “It’s rare that you would have a fire in mulch that is immediate,”

Steward said. “Most creep along under the mulch and then ignite, with rubber as an exception. It spreads fast and can’t be contained. What’s scary is that rubber’s commonly used in playgrounds.”

Overall, mulches high in oils, such as pinebark and shredded cypress bark, were easiest to ignite, Steward said. Fresh wood mulches like the currently popular recycled pallets, also were easily ignited, and shredded materials tended to go up in flames more quickly than cubed.

“Overall, cocoa shells, the medium pine bark nuggets and hardwood bark are the three organic mulches that I would recommend for most locations, especially where there is a real chance of someone flicking a cigarette.

For more details about mulch ignition and the specific mulches tested by Steward, call 330/263-3780 or email ctoardc@osu.edu and ask for a copy of “Is Your Landscape Going up in Smoke?”



Gardeners' Guild, Inc. honored

SAN RAFAEL, CA — Gardeners' Guild, Inc. has been selected as one the “50 Best Places to Work in the Greater Bay Area” by the San Francisco and Silicon Valley Business Times. Gardeners' Guild is a 100% employee owned landscape contracting company, serving the Greater San Francisco Bay Area.

Ewing opens Florida location

FT. WALTON BEACH, FL — Ewing Irrigation, Golf & Industrial expanded into the Florida market. “Our recent merger with Irrigation Solutions in Ft. Walton Beach is an exciting time for Ewing,” stated Douglas York, President. Ewing will retain John Royals as manager of Ewing's Ft. Walton Beach operations.

Brickman builds Ohio presence

COLUMBUS, OH — The Brickman Group, Ltd. acquired Columbus based Urban Environments, Inc. (UEI), headquartered here. UEI President, Joel Korte, will remain with the company, as regional manager of Brickman's Columbus Region, as will his management team. UEI locations in East and West Columbus will join Brickman's existing Columbus operations, located south of town.

Ruppert returns to Atlanta

SUGAR HILL, GA — Ruppert re-entered the Atlanta market by opening a landscape installation branch here this year. Ruppert served the Atlanta area from 1992 until its sale in 1998. Patrick Luzier, who was Ruppert's branch manager from 1995 to 1998 returns to lead the new branch. Mike Ward and Stacy Smith will work with him.

[CLIPPINGS]

PHOTOS COURTESY: KEN CHAMBERLAIN (TOP); LARRY STEWARD (LEFT)

WLCA-MM members opposed a phosphorus ban their community, earned a compromise.



Chalk up a win for these owners

BY LYNNE BRAKEMAN / Web Editor

PEWAUKEE, WI — When the Village of Pewaukee, WI, recently announced it was considering joining the City of Pewaukee in banning phosphorus in lawn fertilizer, six members of the Wisconsin Landscape Contractors Association of Metro-Milwaukee (WLCA-MM) (www.wlca-mm.org) organized to oppose the ban.

"It was beautiful," says Heather Schuster, owner of Terra Firma Landscape Inc. in Muskego, WI. Schuster is also president of the Milwaukee Metro Chapter of WLCA-MM. "Gary Oberfoell from Lake-Country Lawn Care made all the phone calls and coordinated everybody. We gave each person a single snippet of our entire argument. Everybody had a different point and it worked out." After their testimony, the village council voted to table the ban.

Oberfoell says that in the summer of 2003, the same issue was being considered by the City of Pewaukee city council (the City of Pewaukee is adjacent to the Village of Pewaukee). Oberfoell says the group testified several times and, last summer, the city council voted 5 to 1 against a ban on phosphorus fertilizers.

After that initial success, the group was blind-sided when, without warning, the issue was considered again in December 2003 and the council reversed its previous decision.

"So after that, we created a hot line," says Oberfoell. "When an issue like phosphorus comes up in one locality, we now have a list of people who want to know about that issue and they all get emails."

This past March the Village of Pewaukee council tabled its proposed phosphorus ban ordinance after Schuster, Oberfoell and other WLCA-MM members spoke out against it.

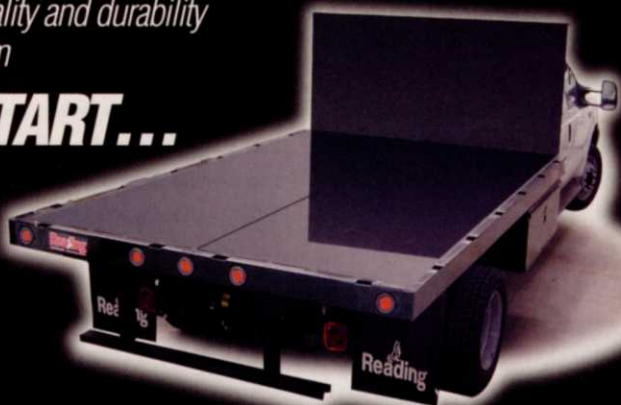
In April, the Town of Delafield and the Village of Pewaukee both agreed to a com-

promise of 3% phosphorus in lawn fertilizer. Schuster is hopeful that the City of Pewaukee will consider negotiating a reversal of their 0% ordinance in response

to the decision of its neighboring communities. The group is lobbying two other towns that border another lake, also.

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Bobcat dealers say 'yes' to KaBOOM!

WEST FARGO, ND — Bobcat Company is donating use of equipment to KaBOOM!, a non-profit organization that helps build playgrounds throughout the United States.

"Our mission is simple: to create healthy play opportunities for young people," said Jennie Connor, KaBOOM! project manager. "The Washington, D.C.-based KaBOOM! (www.kaboom.org) also has offices in Chicago, Atlanta and Redwood City, CA. KaBOOM! has built more than 600 community playgrounds and raised over \$20 million since its start in 1995.

The playgrounds vary in cost from \$30,000 to more than \$100,000. The bud-



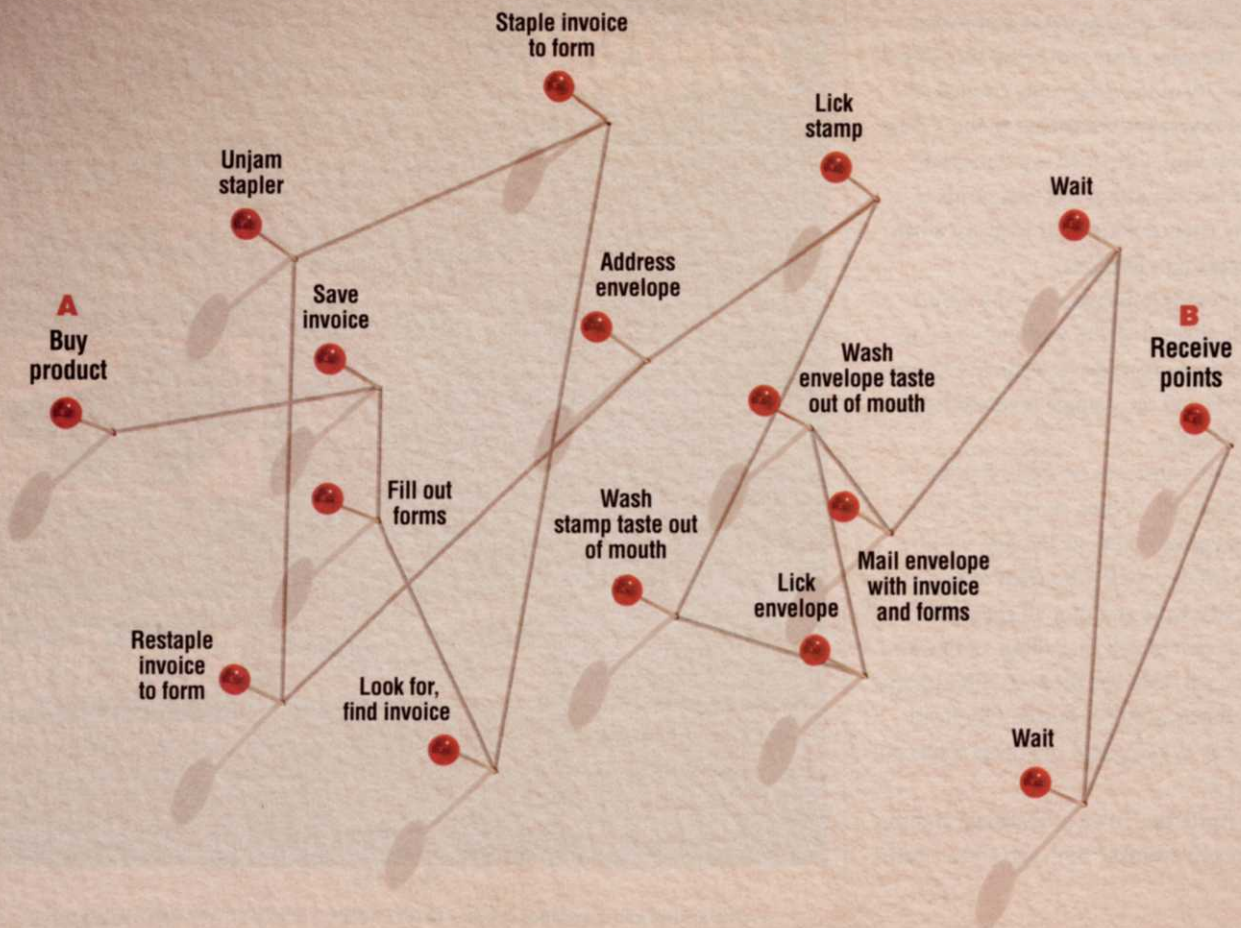
Bobcat dealers donated equipment to help 13 cities build parks through KaBOOM! program.

get is impacted by factors including the land's size, site-preparation needs, the complexity of play equipment, and the safety surfacing selected. Connor said Bobcat Company donations save the organization between \$350 and \$500 daily. "Local

Bobcat dealers were able to help us in 13 cities last year," Connor said.

"We saw this as an incredible opportunity to get involved, on a local level, with a worthwhile cause," said Gary Hornbacher, North American marketing manager for Bobcat Company. "In the end, we rely on our dealer network to donate and deliver the equipment, and we couldn't be more proud of our dealers for being so enthusiastic and generous with their time and resources."

Participating Bobcat dealers typically donate a new skid-steer loader, an auger attachment with two bits, and a bucket for drilling holes for two days during site-preparation work. Then, when the playground equipment is installed, the dealer sometimes delivers a Toolcat 5600 utility work machine to the build site for the day.



People & companies



Skinner Nurseries hired **Sterling Dees** as the new branch manager for their Houston distribution center.

John Deere Landscapes, San Diego County, appointed **Daniel Jazdzewski** accounts manager.

Symbiot Business Group hired **Bruce Wilson** as Director for the Symbiot Landscape Network.

Exmark recognized three of its leading distributors for

completing 20 years of service: Lawn Equipment Parts Company (LEPCO), Landisville, PA, **Jeff Clark**, president; Outdoor Equipment Distributors, Inc. (OED), Raleigh, NC, **Rob Zucker**, president; Blalock Machinery & Equipment Company, College Park, GA, **Bill Blalock**, president.

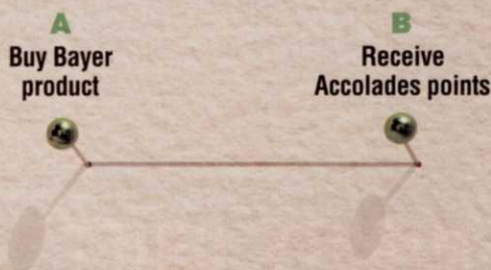
Zaretsky and Associates, Inc. won the top honor at the Rochester Flower & Garden Show: Best of Show. Their display also won the

Gold Award for Best Use of Lighting, and the Silver Award for Most Creative Use of Water, Best Single Garden Structure, and Best Overall Use of Structures and Accessories.

Profile Products LLC named **Marc S. Theisen** Director of Business Development.

Bayer Environmental Science's four new sales representatives for the newly formed Lawn and Landscape Region are (l. to r.): **Joseph**

Robert (Robby) Clemenzi II for south Georgia, Coastal South Carolina, Alabama, Mississippi and North Florida; **Michael M. Owen** for north Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina and Tennessee; **Foster McWhorter** in Texas and **David Crank** (not pictured) for New Jersey, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Virginia, Maryland, Delaware and Washington, D.C. **Mike Daly** is the new Regional Sales Manager for the Lawn and Landscape Region.



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Ready, aim...

Fred Schillinger, Turf Doctor in Mt. Vernon, OH, counts on customer referrals to help his company attract new clients and achieve business suc-

cess. If customers are pleased with the services Turf Doctor provides, Schillinger expects them to spread the word to neighbors and friends.

But Schillinger knows he can't rest on his laurels because of a job well done. He understands the need to sell his business and his services in order to attract a steady stream of customers.

"You've got to penetrate the market by doing some sort of marketing. It's all about name recognition," he says.

Awareness is important, but how you're perceived in the marketplace is equally crucial. Consider:

- ▶ what your company stands for,
- ▶ what people think about you,
- ▶ the associations customers and potential customers make



Fred Schillinger and his team realize they need more than word-of-mouth to grow.

with your company.

These factors comprise, in essence, your brand. Your job in marketing and promoting your company is to develop this distinguishing brand, an identity that separates you in a positive and exciting way from your competitors.

Develop a marketing plan

So how do you effectively deliver your message and establish your unique brand in an environment swarming with competitors? You do it by creating and implementing a marketing plan that identifies and reinforces your unique abilities and services and then com-

municates them in a positive way to your target audience. And it does this over and over again in a variety of ways.

As the accompanying chart illustrates, a marketing plan should be a logical extension of your business plan. OK, maybe this chart is a bit much for your

operation. People whose job it is to market developed it, after all. But you get the idea. You need a plan, and you have to devote some of your financial resources, some of your time and, depending upon your style, your imagination, too.

Before devising your plan, you need to know:

- ▶ what you want to do with your business,
- ▶ what your sales objectives need to be in order to survive and thrive,
- ▶ what your capabilities are,
- ▶ who your most likely and best customers are and
- ▶ your budget

A good example is the marketing communications plan used by DeSantis Landscapes Inc. in Salem, OR, a

Strategies for delivering
your message and
making it stand out

BY NATHAN ODGAARD



market!



Dean DeSantis, above, says you must define your niche. Kevin Herrmann, below, promotes branding.

plan that flows directly from the company's business objectives. Until a few years ago, the company infrequently pursued marketing opportunities without a clear objective in mind.

"We're now more focused on what we want," said Dean DeSantis, general manager. "We realized we needed to sit down and decide what our niche is, how we're going to reach it and what we're going to budget to get there. Once we decided what we were going to do for the entire year, the decisions became a lot easier and made more sense." Last year, DeSantis saw an 18% growth in business.

Numerous marketing tactics exist that can help you penetrate the market with your branding messaging. It's up to you and your company to determine which tactics make the most sense and will be most ef-

fective, taking into account factors such as costs and demands upon your time.

Marketing components

Advertising is often used interchangeably with marketing, but it is just one component of marketing. Other components, or tactics, include public relations (such as press releases, articles, lawn and garden shows, and newsletters), direct mail, flyers, Web sites, listings in Yellow Pages, and logos on the side of your company's vehicles. The more of these tactics you can incorporate in your plan, the stronger you can build your brand.



Fairway Green, Raleigh, NC, takes a comprehensive approach. "You really have to do a mixed bag of marketing in this type of business and reach as many homeowners as

you can in your target market," said Kevin Herrmann, general manager of the lawn care company. "You've got to get your name in front of them in any way that you can."

In addition to relying on referrals and placing door hangers throughout residential neighborhoods, Fairway Green's marketing campaign consists of radio advertisements, news releases, direct mail, and flyers. It has stepped up its advertising and direct mail efforts this year. In the past the company relied

continued on page 30

10 quick Marketing tips

Marty Grunder is a master marketer, both for his Miami-based, OH-based landscape company and on his own behalf as a speaker and consultant. If you've been to one of his presentations you know what we mean. If you haven't, you need only know that he signs his name with an exclamation mark (Marty Grunder!), and if you want to learn more about him visit his Web site www.martygrunder.com.

This past year Marty has been giving an excellent presentation entitled "57 Fun, Cheap & Different Ways to Market Your Company to New Heights." Suggestion number 49 is "do more than you said you would." Marty practices what he preaches because if you get an opportunity to hear his talk, you'll actually get 64 suggestions.

Here are 10 quick Marty tips. If you want more, let us know and we'll oblige. Meanwhile, check out Marty's Web site to find out when you can hear him next.

- 1 Newsletters, two-sided, front-and-back, stuff them in envelopes along with a special offer. Do it at least four times a year.
- 2 Get a box truck with your logo on it; park and drive it everywhere. It's a one-time expense that keeps working.
- 3 Wear a logo on your jacket. Your shirts. Your hats.
- 4 Testimonials. Actively seek testimonials from customers. You can never get enough. Use them in your marketing materials. Powerful.
- 5 Instead of sending Xmas cards (everybody does), why not send Thanksgiving cards, indicating your thanks and appreciation? It's different and memorable.
- 6 Sign your name with an exclamation point just like Marty! Why not set yourself apart?
- 7 Hand out seed packets with your company information rather than business cards. The packets cost about a nickel each.
- 8 Job site signs reinforce your company's presence. Cost? They cost about \$45 each.
- 9 Send thank you letters even if you don't get the job. You're backing out with class. It won't be forgotten.
- 10 How about vanity license plates for your vehicle? You're proud of what you do, right?

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continued from page 28

on phone solicitation for 80% of its business, but was forced to change strategies once the new National Do Not Call Registry allowed potential customers to block his calls.

But Fairway Green, which also has an office in Charlotte, N.C., has hardly suffered a setback in sales. "Sales have been astronomical due to marketing," said Herrmann. Fairway Green is spending in excess of \$200,000 on marketing this year.

Timing is everything

When you implement these marketing tactics it is equally as important as to which tactics you choose. The most logical period in the landscaping industry comes in the winter and early spring months when customers are gearing up for the spring season.

Each year, Fairway Green launches an aggressive marketing campaign that runs from January through May, promoting the comprehensive list of services that the company offers. "I cut back a little bit in the summer because it's hard to add new customers that time of year," he said.

Herrmann switches gears in June, when his marketing efforts focus on disease control. The late summer and early fall season is the ideal time to promote his seeding services, he said.

Consistency is also crucial. Maintaining a consistent presence on the radio, in the newspaper and through direct mail,

or whatever medium is most appropriate for you, will help keep you on top of customers' minds. Remember — repetition, repetition, repetition.

One of DeSantis Landscapes' goals, for example, is to receive press coverage at least once every quarter, on top of implementing other tactics. He has developed a strong bond with a reporter at a Salem daily newspaper. DeSantis frequently suggests story ideas and offers to write articles, while the reporter calls DeSantis at least once a month for comments and insight for a story or to simply discuss industry news.

"It's been a great relationship," he said. "By serving as a key source for the newspaper, we've had the opportunity to position ourselves in the market as the experts."

In addition to seeking regular publicity, DeSantis Landscapes produces a quarterly newsletter and distributes it to all existing clients and potential customers. The newsletter contains company information and services, features on company personnel, and how-to articles.

Gauging success

To gauge the success of your marketing plan, it's important to track business that results from your marketing efforts. A simple method is to ask customers how they heard about you.

"I track every new customer who comes through the door and ask how he or she hears about us so I know where the money is best spent," Herrmann



Branding
— 5 easy pieces

- 1** Recognize who you are and what you can do in the marketplace.
- 2** Determine how you want to be perceived by customers and potential customers.
- 3** Identify your target audience — those people you most want to see as your customers.
- 4** Develop your message and make it a part of your company.
- 5** Budget for your message, stick to it and continuously reinforce it in the marketplace.

said. Doing so can help you determine whether you are investing in the right marketing strategies and in the right manner, and can paint a clear picture of your return on investment.

But don't get discouraged if you don't see immediate results once you've launched a marketing campaign. Successful branding and marketing campaigns take time.

Sometimes the best public relations is the impression you leave with a customer, the work that you do and the recognition you receive for it.

"We're in the image business, so we feel we need to project that same professional quality image that we're trying to sell to our clients," DeSantis said. "Part of that is attractive logos, clean trucks and trailers, and attractively dressed employees."

Of course, job performance is key as well. You can saturate the market with all of the advertising, public relations efforts and flyers that you want, but if you're not satisfying your customers, then marketing won't help much.

DeSantis said his company has earned a strong reputation for designing and maintaining high quality craftsman landscapes. As a result, they've landed some big jobs, such as helping design the Oregon Garden and maintaining the Target distribution center in Salem.

In addition, DeSantis Landscapes has won several awards in recent years. They promote this recognition — to position the company as a leader and expert in the industry, and to generate publicity — by writing news releases, sending them to the press and posting them on its Web site.

Marketing communications is a vital component to your business plan that helps enhance the public's perception of your company and drive sales. Just as your customers depend on you as experts in landscape design and maintenance, you may want to consider going to experts in the marketing communications field for advice and guidance. **LM**

— Nathan Odgaard is a public relations associate for Swanson Russell Associates in Lincoln, NB, that specializes in the green industry. Contact him at 402/437-6411 or nathano@sramarketing.com.



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Ryan and Colin Taheny, Co-owners, Ryco Landscaping, Lake in the Hills, IL

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INSIDE

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12 Keep equipment
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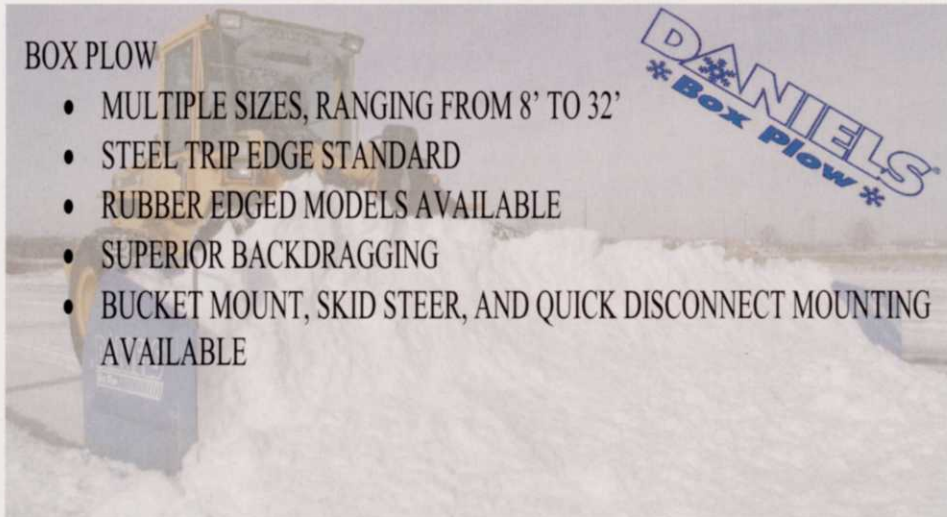


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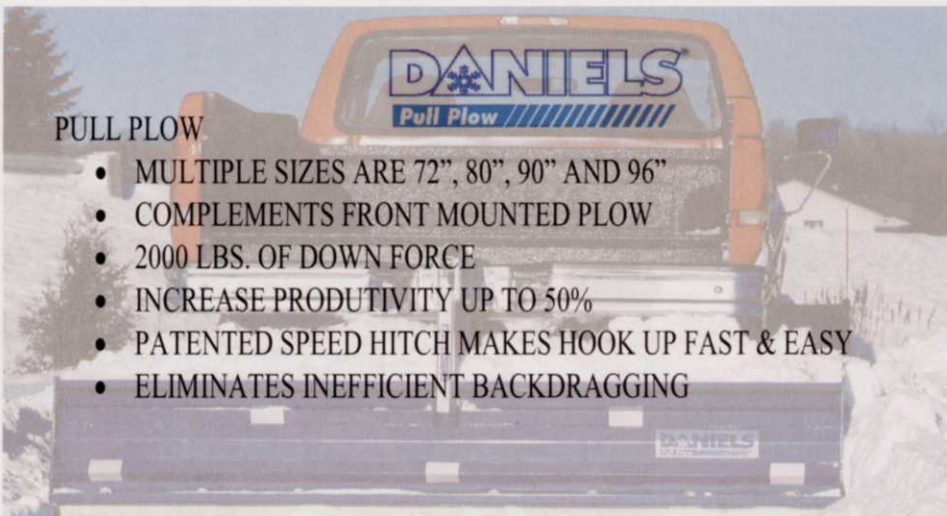
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Costs going up, up, up

BY RON HALL / Editor-in-Chief

Why are you offering snow and ice management services? Stop. Ask yourself that question. Think it through. If I asked you this question today, would you tell me:

- ▶ We do it because we want to keep our landscape customers and we don't want other contractors on their properties.
- ▶ Some of our accounts expect us to take care of their properties year-round and some demand it.
- ▶ What else can we do with our trucks and loaders when the weather gets nasty?
- ▶ We've got good employees, and plowing snow allows us to keep them on the payroll during the winter.
- ▶ Hey, a guy's gotta do what a guy's gotta do.

There seem to be a lot of reasons why contractors like yourselves get into the snow business. If you really think about it, though, there's only one reason to stay in it — to earn a fair financial return for your efforts. What's fair? You have to figure that out based upon your own unique situation. Before you do, though, consider what it's going to cost you. Do this prior to signing up a new client or renewing contracts, especially borderline ones.

The price of just about everything associated with plowing snow keeps going up, up, up. Gasoline. Trucks. Insurance. Labor. How likely is it that any of these costs will be less in the coming months? Fat chance, right?

Stop and calculate the time it takes you to prepare for your snow services. Preparing your equipment before the first event? Training the team? Selling the services?

How about the time, say in March or April, that it takes you to switch your personnel and equipment back and forth between spring production and snow removal when those early spring storms hit?

And yourself? What about some off-season down time? What about the week you'd like to spend with your family at Disney World? Or the cruise you promised your mate?

Figure out how much it really costs you in money, time and personal sacrifice to be in the snow business so that you don't shortchange yourself. Snow work is hard work. **LM**

Fight snow like a pro

10 steps for a solid winter defense program

BY VICKY POULSEN

When a big winter storm hits, it's time to bring in the specialists — the mighty operators in snow and ice removal otherwise known as...the snowfighters.

Like firefighters, Rick Winnestaffer, CSP, CEO of WinnScapes, Inc., Gahanna, OH, says snowfighters are on 24-hour alert status during the winter months.



Rick Winnestaffer

"It's our job to serve our clients and protect people from weather-related accidents," says Winnestaffer. "We like the snow because it gives us a chance to use our expertise, and we feel like we're helping someone."

The snowfighting business can be a lucrative market if snow and ice professionals have a tried and true plan. Although there are regional variations among snow and ice contractors, the following steps from Winnestaffer for designing a winter defense program can benefit everyone in the business:

1 Meet with your client. The purpose of the meeting will be to ascertain what the client expects and/or requires from you. If you don't meet expectations, you'll fail, and if your expectations are too high, you'll overprice the project. All

Mechanization has made snow removal more efficient, but contractors must still match their capabilities with a clients' expectations.



expectations need to be clearly defined and understood by both parties. Paraphrase your communication back to the client so everyone involved has the same meaning of what's to be done.

2 Determine zero-tolerance. Do your customers have a zero-tolerance policy when it comes to snow and ice? For example, zero tolerance may mean that there will be absolutely no snow allowed on the pavement, parking lots will need to be pre-treated and plows will be kept going until the job is completed. In other words, they may want a wet parking lot with no snow accumulation.

3 Familiarize yourself with the job site. Walk the property with the property manager or contact person. Once you have the job, make your employees and workers walk the property as well. It's important to establish a good rapport between your personnel and the client so that the lines of communication can remain open.

4 Begin to formulate a plan. Provide the client with a list of options as to how the job can be done. Clients may not be accustomed to different plowing methods, so explain the type of equipment you have as well as the type of equipment the industry has to offer. Discuss the cost of operations for each piece of equipment and the advantages of one piece of equipment over another. Clients should be advised that certain methods may be costly up front but will save them more money in the end. For example, it may cost \$75 an hour to run a truck and \$150 an hour for a 14-ft. containment plow, but the plow can do the job in four hours compared to 10 hours with the truck.

5 Decide on sidewalks. If sidewalks are to be cleared, decide which type of equipment will be most cost effective.

6 Check storage. See if they have on-site storage for equipment and/or ice removal products.

Determine the revenue for each piece of equipment per hour. Your profit will be based on how well you estimate the time.

7 Determine what your paperwork flow will involve. What weather system will you be using to track the storm? What is your call-in procedure? Every storm is different and can change in minutes with little or no notice, so make sure you have a good backup plan to handle emergency situations.

8 Make sure everyone is on the same dial. Communication is pivotal in guaranteeing a successful snow and ice removal season. Everyone must have some way of communicating with one another — whether it's a cell phone, Nextel two-way radio or CB radio.

9 Assemble your support staff. Office support staff are imperative in keeping the flow of communications going. Winnestaffer allocates one support per-



son for every 20 pieces of equipment. There needs to be an ample amount of people to answer and screen phone calls to personnel in the field, collect route sheets, track the weather and address communication issues with customers as they call in to get updates on when and how the job is getting done.

10 Assess the job after the storm. All employee and equipment information needs to be collected, audited for accuracy and entered into a database that can be accessed at any time. From that database, a contractor can determine the revenue for each piece of

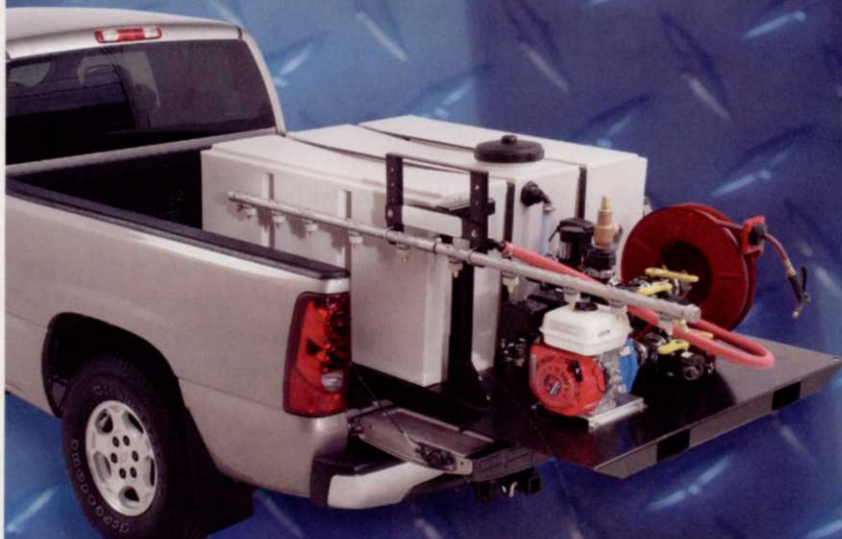
equipment per hour, per minute; the accuracy of price estimation per job; the effectiveness of the crews (who needs training and who doesn't); which equipment works well and which equipment needs to be updated; and which subcontractors will be invited back and which will be taken off the will-call list. And invoices need to be sent out right away so customer concerns are addressed and settled quickly.

"Your success in this business begins with an organization structure and how well versed you are in the snow removal business," says Winnestaffer. **LMI**

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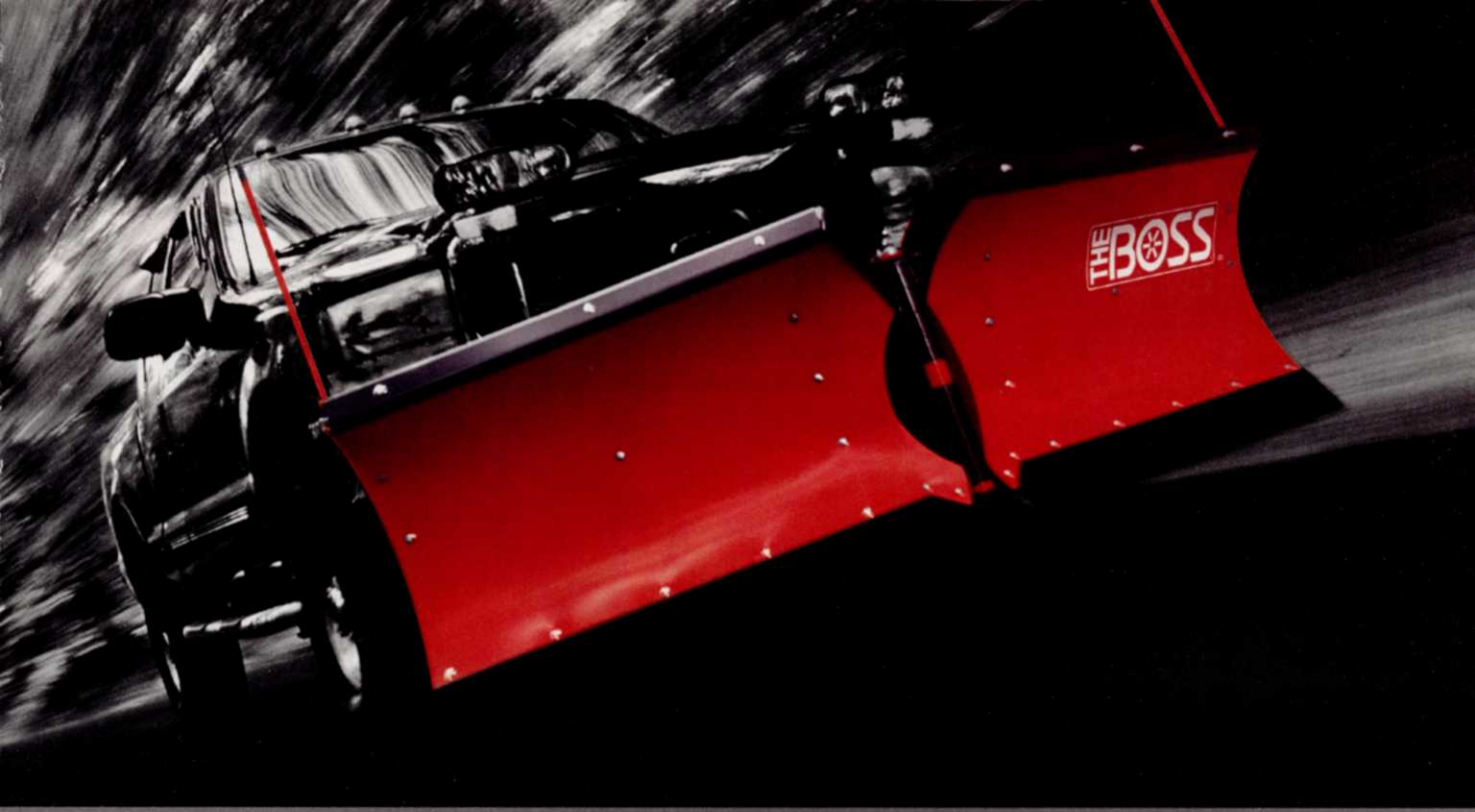
**New Call Center gives
Snow Management Group
foundation to keep growing**

BY RON HALL / Editor-in-Chief

Mission control for the U.S. snow plowing business is tucked along the southeast shore of Lake Erie. Since the weather in Erie, PA, generally arrives from the northwest (and travels the length of the Lake, picking up moisture along the way), the region averages more than 100 inches of snow each season.

This city of 105,000 is also the location of the headquarters of the privately owned Snow Management Group (SMG). Landscape Company owner/entrepreneur John Allin started SMG just four years ago

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and already it provides snow and ice management services in 32 states.

The heart of SMG

OK, admittedly the one-year-old SMG Call Center is not Houston's Mission Control. But, when the snow starts flying it becomes the heart of SMG with 30 employees (during the winter's bitterest months), most of them fielding calls from customers and tracking snowplow crews in communities across the United States. The operators rely upon 6 television sets, each tuned to The Weather Channel, to connect them to the outside world. They rely upon 65 telephone lines to keep them connected to their customers and also to the company employees and subcontractors who service these customers.

The Call Center represents a big step in securing Allin's SMG as the dominant for-hire snow removal force in the United States. And, with some unexpected bumps its first season, the center accomplished just that, says Allin. SMG is poised and can now assimilate at least another 50% growth this coming season, he says with calm confidence.

"Of course we have to become more



Lisa Edwards, Vice President of SMG Operations, helped the company settle into its new Erie, PA, headquarters.

business savvy," Allin continues. "We strive to be the leaders in the industry, but that means we're always forging new ground, too. We don't have any place we can go to ask, 'Hey, how are you people doing this?' or 'What problems have you experienced?' What we're doing is new to this industry."

The Call Center, which occupies 3,000 sq. ft. of a 6,000 sq. ft. building, became a necessity, admits Allin. In prior winter seasons, he and practically his entire landscape company operated SMG from his landscape company offices.

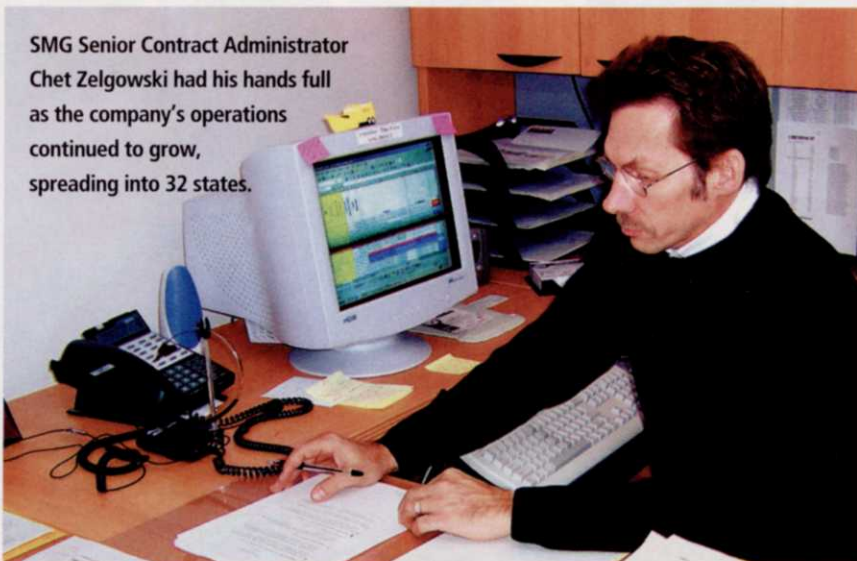
SMG grew too big for that to continue. So he had the Call Center built in 2003 across the street from his landscape company headquarters.

Open for business

The center opened this past November with a small crew that grew as the season progressed. The phones were manned 24/7, but the busiest times, as expected, were in the pre-dawn hours of any major storm. Generally, that's when snow removal and sidewalk crews call in to report what they've done. Every person working for SMG must report to the Center, and the information is promptly recorded in the company's proprietary software. SMG phone lines, of course, are always open to customers, no matter what part of the country they're calling from. Those calls, when they do come, generally start about 7 a.m. to 8 a.m., when customers start arriving at their businesses.

While Allin says the first year of the Call Center was successful, it was far from easy, at least initially.

"We stumbled a bit in the beginning," Allin admits. "We had to develop a training program for the Call Center people. Many of them weren't snow savvy. We had to teach them the terminology. Like



SMG Senior Contract Administrator Chet Zelgowski had his hands full as the company's operations continued to grow, spreading into 32 states.

any industry, there is a language that you have to learn. You try to anticipate what's going to happen but there are no other snow plowing concerns in the United States quite like this one. We kind of had to make our training program up as we went along."

Also, it soon became evident that SMG would have to beef up its internal accounting system to manage the tremendous amount of paperwork it was generating. Once the snow season began, the company revved into high gear. To meet the demand, it added a team of accounting professionals to its staff.

"That was a huge learning experience this year," says Allin. "Moving snow, easy. Getting customers, easy. But having busi-

We had to develop a training program for the Call Center people. Many of them were not snow savvy and we had to teach them about the terminology.

ness processing systems in place, that has been the biggest challenge."

Heading toward the 2004-2005 snow season, Allin says one of the biggest hur-

dles SMG faces (now that most of the kinks in the Call Center have been worked out) is continuing education.

"The education process continues to be extreme," he explains. "The industry is becoming more knowledgeable and sophisticated, and by that I mean the people who are purchasing our services. They're no longer looking for the one-truck operator to just push the snow off to the side. They're looking for somebody to assume the risk that comes from doing such work.

"We're having to educate a large percentage of the people working for us that they must have the proper insurance, and they must do the proper paperwork because customers are demanding it." **LM**

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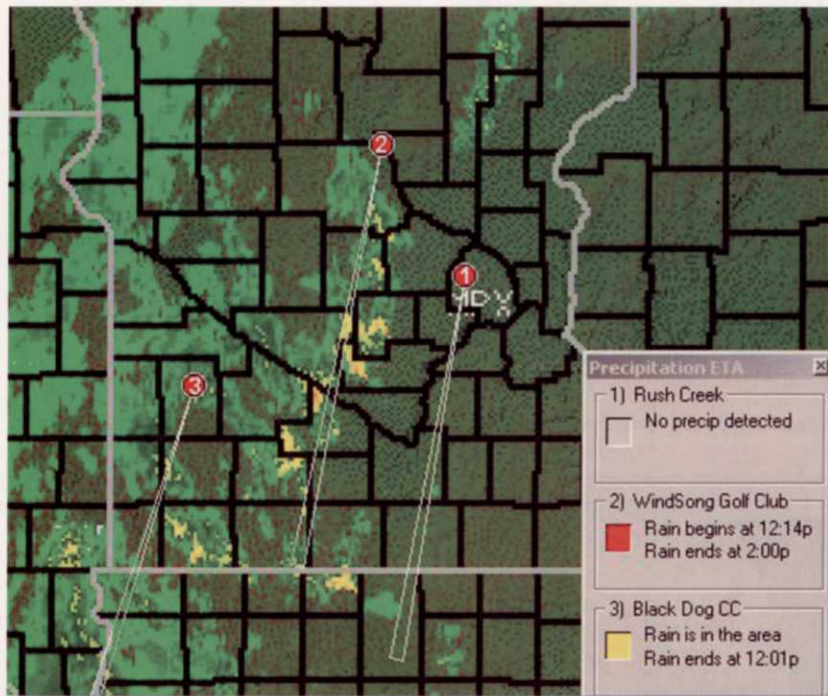
Today's weather forecasting systems give you the profit edge in snow and ice management

BY TODD MEYER

Snowstorms, ice build-up and freezing rain can severely affect the landscaping industry. Many landscape company owners, however, do not look at these conditions as profit breakers but as profit makers. They offer a variety of snow and ice removal services at a time of the year when cash is traditionally tough to come by.

Smart contractors boost efficiency and reduce expenses — equipment maintenance, wages, insurance, fuel and supplies, to name a few — by working with the weather and not against it. They rely upon accurate weather information to send out crews and how much ice-fighting material to use. These are the type of efficiencies that give them a competitive edge and allow them build in more margin for their efforts.

Why is weather information critical? Because no two winter storms are alike. They all come sweeping in with lots of variables in ice, wind and water content of snow. This makes planning difficult at best. But with up-to-minute weather information, contractors can prepare a strategic response— to schedule drivers, start the snow removal process and de-



Advanced weather systems provide graphical representations of temperature and ice forecasts and up-to-the-minute weather radar images that can pinpoint your clients' neighborhoods.

cide how much salt to put on the trucks.

Here are some examples of how detailed knowledge of current and future weather conditions can help you make smart decisions and help your company save time and money.

► **Knowing who to call** — If you know that snow is coming and when it's coming, you can alert your drivers. But if you know your clients are only going to get a dusting and that the storm will be followed by sunny skies, you can make the informed decision not to call in all of your drivers and only send out salt crews to handle key building and parking lot entrances.

► **Advanced watch** — Look for signs that indicate the wind will increase. If you're sending out crews at midnight,

and you know the wind is going to kick up at 3 a.m., you may want to defer your crews a few hours so that they don't have to go over the work they've already completed due to drifting.

► **Wind speed** — Pay attention to the direction of the wind speed, and direct your drivers appropriately. If the wind is from the northwest, you might consider piling the snow at the southeast side of your client's parking lot so that any blow-off goes away from the lot, saving time, effort, manpower and fuel.

► **Temperature trends** — If you know that majority of the day will be at or above 20 F, then salt will be a very efficient tool to control ice throughout your clients' parking lots and walkways. However, as

temperatures approach 0° F (and you're aware that it will drop) you know that an alternate deicer might be the right call.

► **Cloud cover** — The asphalt surface temperatures on a cloudy day can be 10° to 20° F cooler than on a sunny day, adding to your equation about whether or not salt will be effective. The combination of air temperature and cloud cover monitoring and forecasts can help you make an informed decision about when and what type of product to use.

► **Water ratio** — Pay attention to water content and the ratio between snow and water. The average ratio is 10 inches of snow to 1 inch of water. But fine, fluffy snow can have a ratio in the neighborhood of 30 inches of snow to 1 inch of water and heavy, sticky snow can be as low as 5 inches of snow to 1 inch of water. These ratios are temperature dependent. Watching temperature and understanding what type of snow to expect will help you plan for how much time it will take your drivers to cleanly plow your clients' properties, as light, fluffy snow will lead to more passes, especially if there is a good amount of wind.

Watch weather radar for snow bands. We've all been tricked into thinking that because the sun is peeking through the clouds the storm is over. You may have even sent out crews, thinking that there would be no more precipitation and your clients' properties could be cleared quickly and easily. But then within an hour it clouds up again and snows once more. These costly errors in judgment can be avoided by monitoring the movement of snow on weather radar. With access to timely weather radar information, you can monitor start and stop times of incoming snow bands or squalls.

Many of the nation's landscapers manage their businesses using advanced technological weather systems. Meteorology, the world's largest commercial weather

services provider, gives landscapers access to up-to-the-minute weather information, including the ability to accurately gauge rainfall, check wind speed and heat indexes, and receive highly localized fore-

casts. For example, when a landscape manager spots a snowstorm on the horizon, they are better prepared to reschedule crews to better plan snow and ice removal

continued on page s10



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SNOW & ICE GUIDE

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schedules, saving both time and money.

Knowing when to call crews in, when to send crews home and when the chance for potential emergencies is greatest makes any landscape manager's job easier. Local forecasts provide accurate outlooks at hourly intervals for three days, helping to determine when temperatures are expected to drop, making work conditions too dangerous for crews, or when the conditions are ideal for managing ice and snow.

Weather tools

As you've read through the above tips, you may have wondered how you could possibly pay attention to information like ratios of snow to water or radar screens

for snow bands. The challenge is especially vexing if you rely solely on your local weather forecast for information.

Snow removal contractors who are serious about monitoring costs and being as efficient as possible should consider the use of a satellite-based weather system service, which can provide customized weather information right to their PC. The most advanced services offer highly accurate proprietary weather forecasts, long-term forecasts for the benefit of scheduling, atmospheric temperatures to gauge how much water content will be in the snow, among other features.

Additionally, advanced weather systems provide graphical representations of temperature and ice forecasts so that the

most effective use of salt can be determined, up-to-the-minute weather radar images that can pinpoint client neighborhoods to determine weather conditions at the site and enhanced weather radar to include depiction of areas of snow/mix/rain.

Weather conditions affect the day-to-day operations and employees of a snow removal and landscape management business. An accurate, reliable weather monitoring system can help snow removal pros effectively run their business and protect their fellow employees, while saving costs and increasing productivity. **LM**

— The author is with Meteorlogix, which can be found on the Web at www.meteorlogix.com.

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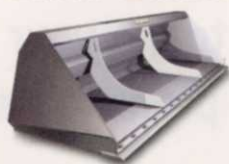
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Extra-large side plates let you move more snow, faster. Reinforced with a unique cone gusset, these side plates are designed to endure the wear and tear of snow removal.



The cone shape also provides a self-cleaning surface to prevent snow and ice from accumulating.

Double Skin Construction



To ensure the ultimate in durability, Degelman has integrated its proven double skin dozer blade structure into each Strongbox™. With extra blade depth and internal reinforcement, the Strongbox™ provides added structural support where you need it.

Rubber Cutting Edge

The Degelman Strongbox™ features a durable high density rubber cutting edge, which gives it the flexibility to



clear snow, slush and water without damaging pavement or road obstacles.

Skid Shoes

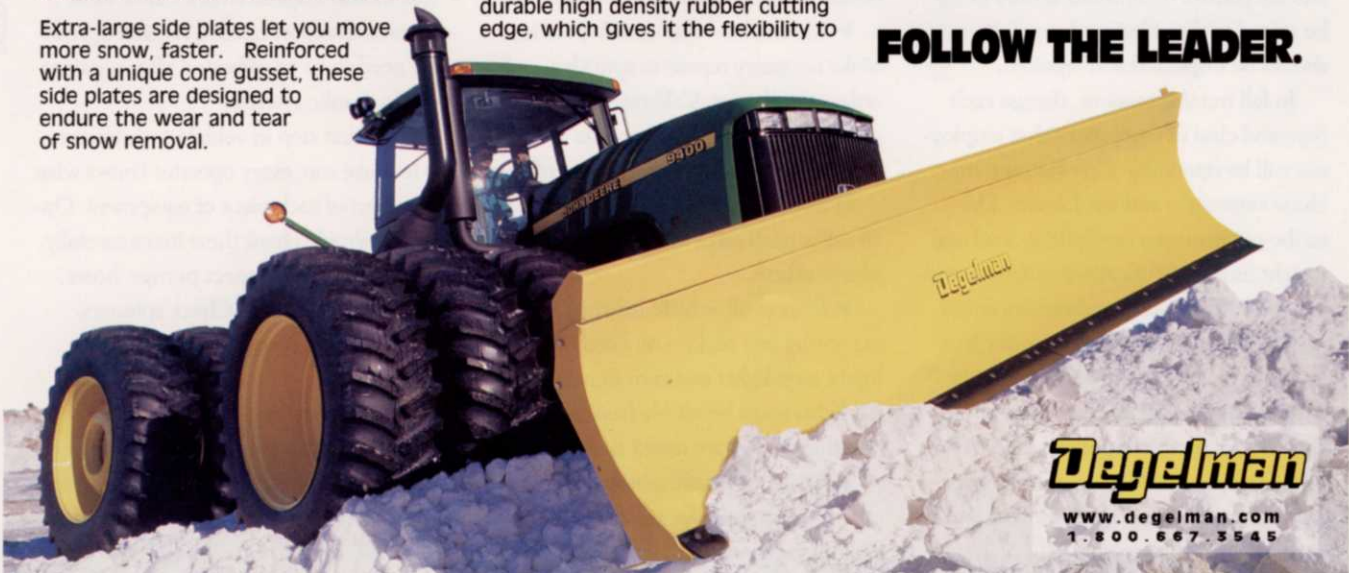
The Strongbox™ is equipped with skid shoes that ensure it rides level and allows the rubber edge to clean the full width of the blade with no trail off to slow you down. Flush mount skid shoes let you clean closer than ever to walls and curbs and abrasion resistant steel provides extended wear and no maintenance.

Universal Mounting

The Strongbox™ is quickly and easily adaptable to all payloaders, backhoes, skid loaders and most Ag tractors. No matter what you use to push snow, we guarantee a quality, secure fit-up.

Hundreds of fit-ups, dozens of options and thousands of loyal customers later, Degelman is recognized as a market leader. Call Degelman for further details.

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Keep equipment ready to go

Follow this handy checklist to get your snow removal fleet off to a profitable start

Equipment can make or break a maintenance organization. It must be suited to the job. Winter operations require the highest level of equipment maintenance. It's a good idea to review equipment needs after each winter season when they're fresh in your mind. If new equipment is required, it can be ordered with good assurance of delivery prior to the next winter season.

The secret to successful winter maintenance is the ability to fight storms with equipment already on hand. The key is proper equipment maintenance. Snow and ice control equipment should never be stored without being cleaned. It should be inspected and repaired.

In fall training sessions, discuss each type and class of equipment that employees will be operating. Go over each machine's strengths and weaknesses. Describe performance capabilities, load and weight limits, specifications, safety considerations, attachments and modifications.

If possible, assign each operator to a specific spreader, plow or loader. Man and machine make a better team when they work together regularly. The feeling that a vehicle "belongs" to an employee also will make an operator show more responsibility for its upkeep.

In some organizations, it may be necessary to switch operators from one piece of equipment to another. Then, management must depend on a system of checks to ensure that equipment is properly operated and maintained.

Thoroughly inspect all equipment during late summer or early fall. Make all repairs and order stocks of parts not locally available. Pay particular attention to these components:

- ▶ Inspect condition of moldboard and cutting edge of all snowplows.

- ▶ Inspect snowplow hoists and underbody blades. Check air and hydraulic hoses and other critical parts of power units and obtain adequate replacement stocks.

- ▶ Mount, load and test all spreaders. Make necessary repairs to spreaders and order critical parts. Calibrate all spreaders and place the calibration card on or over the visor or in glove compartment of truck.

- ▶ Supervisors should have copies of all calibration cards on file in the administrative offices.

- ▶ Inspect all vehicle lighting, including wiring and sockets on headlights, tail lights, stop lights and turn signals. (Warning lights must be visible from all sides, whether bodies are raised or lowered.)

- ▶ Make sure sufficient stock of tire chains, tires, spreader repair parts and other miscellaneous supplies are on hand.



Late summer or early fall is the time to make sure your equipment is primed for another season of pushing snow.

- ▶ Make sure all operators are familiar with spreader controls, whether manual or automatic.

To keep equipment in top condition, establish a regular maintenance routine to be followed all winter. Equipment operators should inspect vehicles after each storm and report needed repairs. Spreaders need to be recalibrated after repair to the hydraulic system.

The first step in vehicle maintenance is to make sure every operator knows what to expect of each piece of equipment. Operators should check these items carefully:

Spreaders — Inspect pumps, hoses, controls and fittings. Check spinners, augers and auxiliary engines.

Controls — The two major components of any hydraulic system are the pump and the controls. All operators should become familiar with spreader controls. They should also realize that no two hydraulic systems are exactly alike.

Plows — Inspect blades after each use. If blade wear begins eating into the moldboard, it will be very costly to replace. Plow blades don't wear evenly. Replace blades when they're badly worn at any point. (Right-hand plows wear most rapidly on the left side, while the opposite is true for left-hand plows.)

All electrical equipment — Inspect and service all lighting and electrical equipment regularly, including wiring and sockets. Carry ample stocks of parts for rotating flasher units, including lenses and lamps. Faulty wiring and failure of alternators, generators or batteries cause the most downtime in winter maintenance vehicles. Nothing is more terrifying and dangerous than a stalled

and darkened vehicle that's stranded in a winter storm.

Communication equipment — Test all radios and phones in the field to make sure they're charged and operational.

Safety equipment — Are flashlights, flares, flags and safety vests in truck cabs?

Despite careful planning, equipment on hand may be inadequate in certain situations. Don't be caught short. Compile a list of all rental equipment available from contractors or haulers during snow emergencies. List specifications, rental rates and the names, addresses and telephone numbers of owners. Establish ground rules for contracting for this equipment.

Warning! Before permitting rented or loaned equipment to operate, make sure

your organization is protected from liability for property damage or injuries resulting from accidents, and that insurance coverage is adequate and complies with all state and local laws or ordinances.

Preventive maintenance is crucial. After each storm, all equipment must be cleaned, washed and allowed to dry. When dry, components such as chains, sprockets, hinges, spinners and other moving parts should be coated with used motor oil, diesel fuel or kerosene. Grease all bearings. Check hydraulics and quick disconnects for leakage. **LMI**

— By the Salt Institute, Alexandria, VA.

For more information, call 703/549-4648 or visit the Web site www.saltinstitute.org.

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JOHN DEERE

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Clint Meyer
Northwood Turf & Power, Baxter, MN

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New products

Spray away

Turbo Technologies unveiled its new line of Ice Control Sprayers for both residential and commercial applications using the Turbo Turf Hydro Seeding Conversion Kits. Systems are available with a capacity from 30 gal. to 1,600 gal. and can be equipped with controllers to automatically adjust the spray. The Lot anti-icing/de-icing sprayers are designed for low speed applications and include a 30-gal. unit for attachment to a pickup truck or gator-type vehicle.

For more information contact Turbo Technologies at 800/822-3437 or visit www.icecontrolsprayers.com

Snowblowers to fit any job ▶

From Honda, snowblowers for residential and commercial applications are found in a product line consisting of 10 models in four separate series ranging from 5 hp to 11 hp and capable of clearing from 46 tons to more than 70 tons of snow per hour. All of the models except the lightweight HS 520 series are available with high-traction dual-track drive.

For more information contact Honda at 770/497-6400 or www.hondapowerequipment.com



Mini spreader tackles big jobs ▼

The BOSS Snowplow offers a mini tailgate spreader that requires little to no physical effort to attach or detach – whether the spreader is full or empty, reports the company. The BOSS Snowplow



SmartHitch 1100 is designed to spread dry, free-flowing materials such as salt and other de-icers effortlessly on driveways, parking lots and roads.

For more information contact The Boss at 800/286-4155 or www.bosspow.com

Plow up a storm ▼

Designed for higher stacking capabilities with full use of the blade for faster snow removal and placement, the 29 series of plows from Sno-Way measure 29 in. high and in widths of 7 1/2 ft. and 8 ft. The company recommends that the 29 series be put on trucks that are HD 1/2 ton to 1 ton.

For more information contact Sno-Way International at 800/662-1453 or www.snoway.com



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Hard-packed or wet snow is no match for Loftness Attachments, which has two new 2-in., 200 hp Prairie Gearbox models with 8-ft. and 9-ft. double augers. Features include heavier 5/16-in. end plates with gussets and braces, and a unibody design for added strength, reports the company. Industrial Models I Series and the 9-ft. 1000 rpm model are available.



For more information contact Loftness/US at 800/828-7624 or www.loftness.com

A triple-threat to snow jobs

Henderson Manufacturing added three models to its series of Snow-foe plows. The Leveling Wing provides seven heavy-duty flame cut ribs, fingertip hydraulic operation, and a variety of front and rear posts, with up to 86 inches of leveling capabilities. The Full Trip Reversible One-way Plow has two optional adjustable compression springs with five position settings for variable control of the trip force. And the Reversible Plow has an adjustable cutting edge or full moldboard, plus flame cut ribs and an optional integral shield.

For more information contact Henderson 800/359-4970 or www.henderson-mfg.com

In control of snow removal ►

The TJ Series of Tethered Joystick Control is an ergonomic handheld control for light- and medium-duty snow removal equipment from Force America. The system is designed to run the plow, hoist, and clutch pump from a single handheld joystick. The controller outputs are compatible with most electric valves and components in a central hydraulic system.

For more information contact ForceAmerica at 888/99FORCE or www.forceamerica.com



Take a gander at hopper spreader line

Western's line of v-box spreaders are designed for ice control on driveways, roads, and parking lots. They mount easily on pick-up and dump or platform trucks and are available in 7-ft., 8-ft., and 10-ft. body lengths in powder coated steel or stainless steel. Choose

from 10 hp V/C Tecumseh, 11 hp V/C Honda, or hydraulic motors.

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Products continue on page s16



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SNOW & ICE GUIDE



Snowplow for pros ▲

Among the snowplow lines from Little Falls Machine is the SSTR with a 31-in. mold-board height, made of 10-gauge grade 50 steel. It is available in 8-ft. and 9-ft. models (750-lb. and 800-lb. respectively). The industrial-style, single-acting reversing cylinders have a full 30-degree angle left and right with an adjustable safety trip cutting edge.

Options include wear shoes, high-vis blade guide-ons, and rubber snow deflectors.

For more information contact Little Falls at 800/772-7569 or www.fallsplovs.com

Attach, remove plow in a jiffy

Getting your truck plow-ready is made easier with the new Minute Mount 2 from Fisher Engineering. The mount has a built-in handle that disengages both connecting pins simultaneously when removing the plow and the lower gear is flared twice as wide for easier drive-in alignment, reports the company. The spring-loaded lift chain automatically retracts the lift arm.

For more information, contact Fisher at 207/594-4446 or www.fisherplovs.com



Speedy spreader attachment ▲

SnowEx, a product division of TrynEx International, has a new Express Mount Kit specifically designed for its SnowEx Vee Pro bulk spreader models. The kit includes a heavy duty steel subframe for mounting directly to the truck bed base. The frame surrounding the spreader slides into the subframe and locks into place. For removal, two people activate two quick-release levers and slide the spreader out of the truck bed in less than a minute, reports the company.

For more information contact TrynEx at 800/725-8377 or www.unitedtruckbody.com/trynex.htm

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'04 seed supplies remain tight

Many of you are discovering that there isn't enough seed of many of the elite cultivars this year and you've been hard-pressed to get what you want. This problem will increase until the 2004 crop harvest as more cultivars sell out.

Last year's market correction was drastic because seed field plow-outs were coupled with a drought situation in most production areas and yields were off by an average of 5% to 25%, depending on species. By early summer this year, most species no longer had carryover from past years, which had kept prices down. With the seed shortage, prices of most species increased but aren't even close to historic highs.

Fall plantings

Compared to last year, this summer's production is forecast to be higher, but not as high as many predict. Most seed companies were able to place their desired acres with farmers. There's a lot of competition from crops like wheat and corn in placing acreage with farmers. Estimates are that grass seed acreage increased 10-20% over 2002-2003 levels, thus more acres will be available for 2004 harvest.

Acreage for most species is still lower



Growers battle weeds in their fields, such as this Canada bluegrass.

than it was several years ago. Yields this summer are expected to be "average" and possibly down 10% to 20%, especially on fields that didn't do well this past winter. Coupled with no carryover of last year's crop, seed buyers can look to a season of strengthening markets and stable prices.

Seed suppliers keep a close watch on their inventories. The chart on page 34 lists cultivars that are currently sold out or in limited supply until the new crop is cleaned. Lots of suppliers have the same problem.

Production costs increase

The increasing price for Kentucky bluegrass is due to the increased cost of production. Kentucky bluegrass fields have historically been burned after harvest to promote seed head initiation of the next year's crop in addition to ridding the field of insects,

Higher prices are likely until the harvest of the 2004 crop as more cultivars become sold out

BY SUSAN H. SAMUDIO, M.S.C.

disease and rodents. This process of burning has been curtailed by state laws and will soon be eliminated. Thus, production is moved to other fields with shorter life spans and increased use of farm chemicals and machinery.

"My biggest concern entering into the spring of 2004 is the increased cost of production," says Dave Johnson, Simplot Grower Representative in the Columbia Basin of Washington. "The rising cost of fuel, water and fertilizer/chemical is likely to make growers cut costs and corners that will effect the final seed yields."

Since 2002, Kentucky bluegrass has seen major plow-outs as these production changes take place. Prices escalated by \$0.25 per pound, still only about half the price that was paid from 1986 to 1988. Proprietary Kentucky bluegrass prices are expected to increase another 5% to 15% before harvest because less seed is available. After harvest, the Kentucky bluegrass market is expected to remain strong, with higher than normal pricing.

After years of oversupply, the 2002-2003 perennial ryegrass acreage had one of the largest reductions of any of the grasses.

Blends, mixes affected too

Most cultivars aren't sold as straights but as part of a mixture or blend. A tight market affects you because, as cultivars are depleted, it becomes harder to fill the best-selling blends and mixtures. As the more popular cultivars are sold out, remaining seedlots will have weeds and off-quality issues. Some of the weeds that are more prevalent in production areas include Canada bluegrass, downy brome, red top, alkaligrass, bulbous bluegrass, windgrass, rattail fescue and soft-bearded oatgrass. Even with some of these weeds in your seedlot, they can still make certified or sod quality, so check the analysis. If you're considering purchasing seedlots with any of these weed seeds, ask yourself the following:

- ▶ What type of turf use do I plan?
- ▶ What is the weed count per lb.? Is it already native to my soil?
- ▶ Will the weed persist or fry out during the summer or with mowing?
- ▶ Is the weed a perennial or annual weed?
- ▶ What grass species is it mixed in, and will I be able to remove it chemically or with repetitive cycles of mowing?
- ▶ Carefully critique the seed test to insure that it will meet your needs.

— SS

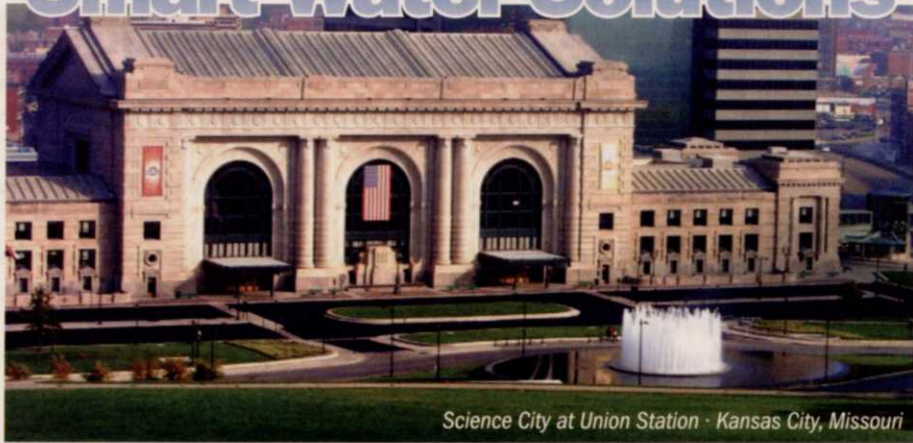
All carryover is long gone, and last summer's harvest will be gone by harvest. Perennial ryegrass prices may go 10% to 20% higher through the summer.

Over 10,000 additional acres were planted last fall, so supply shouldn't be as tight. The perennial ryegrass market isn't expected to dramatically soften after harvest. Over half of the production is used quickly by the southern overseeding market to maintain green cover through the winter on dormant bermudagrass. There will be a rush to clean the seed for the overseeding market, and suppliers will potentially have to pay extra to get specific seed lots prioritized during cleaning.

Tall fescue booms

The tall fescue market is expected to

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strengthen as supplies begin to run down before harvest. This crop is more in sync with supply and demand than bluegrass or ryegrass. If the industry has a wet spring, there will still be some carryover of the tall fescue crop at harvest. Tall fescue prices are also expected to increase 10% to 20% through the summer.

"How much tall fescue is available will depend upon how quickly and what kind of spring the East gets," says David Nelson, Executive Director of both the Oregon Tall and Fine Fescue Commissions, headquartered in Salem, OR. "If we get a good spring, it will work down the tall fescue carryover significantly. We can use up a lot of tall fescue seed pretty quickly if we have a good, long spring."

Both the fine fescue and bentgrass markets are much smaller in size and remain stable. Through the summer, they're also expected to strengthen.

Nelson explains the price of fine fescue seed is influenced by seed produced in Canada. He says the rising price of wheat has caused many growers there to shift out of fine fescue production. "By the end of this year we will see fairly tight supplies of fine fescue," he predicts.

Waiting could be costly

Russ Nicholson at Pennington Seed, whose Seeds West Division is a major supplier of seeded bermudagrass, says the 2003 crop of common bermudagrass did not meet expectations because strong hay prices competed for production. Proprietary varieties of bermudagrass "should be adequate for 2004," he adds.

"If you hold off seed purchases waiting for a better price, you may miss out," warns Chris Claypool, Vice President of Jacklin Seed. "Expect more than the usual frenzy after harvest as the cleaning plants jockey to get their perennial seedlots cleaned." Claypool also notes, "Other than

ryegrass, there is no reason to expect grass prices to decline after harvest unless delays due to weather this spring in the Northeast significantly impact demand and therefore seed carries into the fall." **LM**

— The author works for J.R. Simplot/Jacklin Seed. She can be reached at 208/777-6152 or ssamudio@simplot.com.

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The bad news and the reason why your advertising doesn't work is simple — your ads stink.



Build a compelling message

BY TOM ARCORIA

I'm going crazy and my mind is about to explode! What am I talking about? I'm talking about you contractors telling me that advertising doesn't work for the landscape business.

You tell me, "I spend \$5,000 and I get \$1,000 in return, or I spend two days at a trade show and I get one sale out of it."

Well, I have some good news and some bad news for you. The good news is (and I know when I say it, many of you will think I'm an idiot) the Yellow Pages, magazines, newspapers, postcards and trade shows work. The bad news and the reason why your advertising doesn't work is simple — your ads and often your messages stink. They're all pretty much alike.

Look for yourself. Open the Yellow Pages to the "Landscape" section. Wow, look at this! Almost all of the advertisers give free estimates and are "complete" landscape design and maintenance companies. For the most part, the ads make the same promises. Why would a customer call one company over another?

Here are some suggestions to set yourself apart:

► **Determine what makes your company unique.** Can you explain that in a sentence? There's nothing unique about the statement, "a complete landscape design firm." Everybody's claiming that territory.

► **Use headlines in your advertising.** In a recent direct mail campaign for my consulting company, I used a headline that was big, bold and covered about 20% of the advertisement. Be creative. For example, "Does your Landscaping Stink?" or "Local Couple Finds Paradise in Their Own Backyard!"

► **Identify your target audience.** Who is your customer? Identify and target a specific geographic area. Be specific and focus on particular neighborhoods, income levels, occupations and younger or older families, to name just a few. Check out www.infousa.com, an outstanding Web site to find prospects.

► **Budget for marketing.** Most landscape and lawn service companies set aside no budget for marketing. They rely on word-of-mouth advertising. That's great, but in today's marketplace you'll probably need more.

► **Direct mail is still relatively effective and cost efficient.** Start with your customers and tell them about all of the services your company offers. Follow up quickly. Market hard; market fast. Send three pieces about two weeks apart, then follow up quarterly at least.

► **Always ask customers for referrals.** Many will help you if you write the letter for them. Your clients' friends and family are excellent prospects.

► **Seek marketing alliances with other service providers.** These can be carpet cleaners, pool maintainers, etc. They're serving many of the same people that could use your services. How about sharing customer lists? Combining marketing messages?

Be creative, no matter what type of advertising you use.

A couple of weeks ago I received a shoe in the mail. The card attached said, "I just wanted to get a foot in the door!" I loved the idea. But there was no followup and somebody lost a great opportunity to get a foot in my door.

— *The author is Immediate Past President of the Ohio Landscapers Association and owner of Sagamore Soils and BET Trucking in Sagamore, OH. He can be reached at 330/656-5720.*

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Inside the Owner's Head

BUSINESS

PERSONALITY PROFILE

Don Hartwell

► Spruce Lane Farm, Inc.

BY JASON STAHL / Managing Editor

Don Hartwell owns Spruce Lane Farm, Inc., a \$6 million big tree nursery, retail store and landscape business located in Calgary, Alberta, Canada. The company's landscape division, which is 100% design/build, accounts for \$4.5 million of the company's revenue. The 53-year-old Hartwell is a member of the Associated Landscape Contractors of America and JP Horizons' Owners' Network.

You were in show business for awhile, right?

Well, sort of. I rented motor homes to movie production companies when they came to Canada in the 1970s. I met celebrities like Gene Wilder and Richard Pryor (in the movie *Silver Streak*) and Lee Marvin.

What was Gene Wilder like?

He was a lot different than when you see him on screen. I expected him to be a lot more boisterous. Most of the actors I met were more subdued in person than on screen.

You're a part owner of a golf instructional school, too, right?

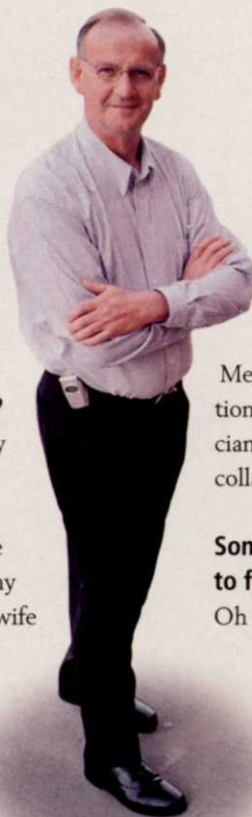
I'm an investor in a golf school in Phoenix, Arizona, the Kent Chase School of Golf. I used to be a serious golfer, but I've had four back surgeries in the last 10 years, so the fact that I'm still walking and talking is a big feat.

How did you get started in the landscape/nursery business?

I grew up in the industry because my dad had a garden center and landscape business, so by the time I decided to start my own it was old hat. My wife has a degree in horticulture and was a journeyman landscaper for awhile. We started a nursery in Idaho back when the Canadian dollar was a lot stronger, and we shipped a lot of trees from the United States to Canada. But when the dollar went down, the business wasn't viable anymore, so now we ship trees from Canada to the U.S. — Alaska, Chicago, Denver, anywhere.

Has the outbreak of various tree diseases affected you at all?

A lot of product that comes from seedling stock for growers in Canada comes out of California, and now there's a total ban on shipping out of California, so that's definitely going to affect us down the road. And there are some definite international problems arising. Since 911 happened, security has been beefed up and the rules have changed. It's harder to do international business without spending a lot of money to set it up. Canada and the U.S. is such an integral market that I think, in our industry, our



ag departments have to work a lot closer. We need to have a North American market as opposed to a U.S. market, a Canada market and Mexico market. There's so much protectionism on all sides that I think the politicians are missing the boat as far as the collaboration of their resources.

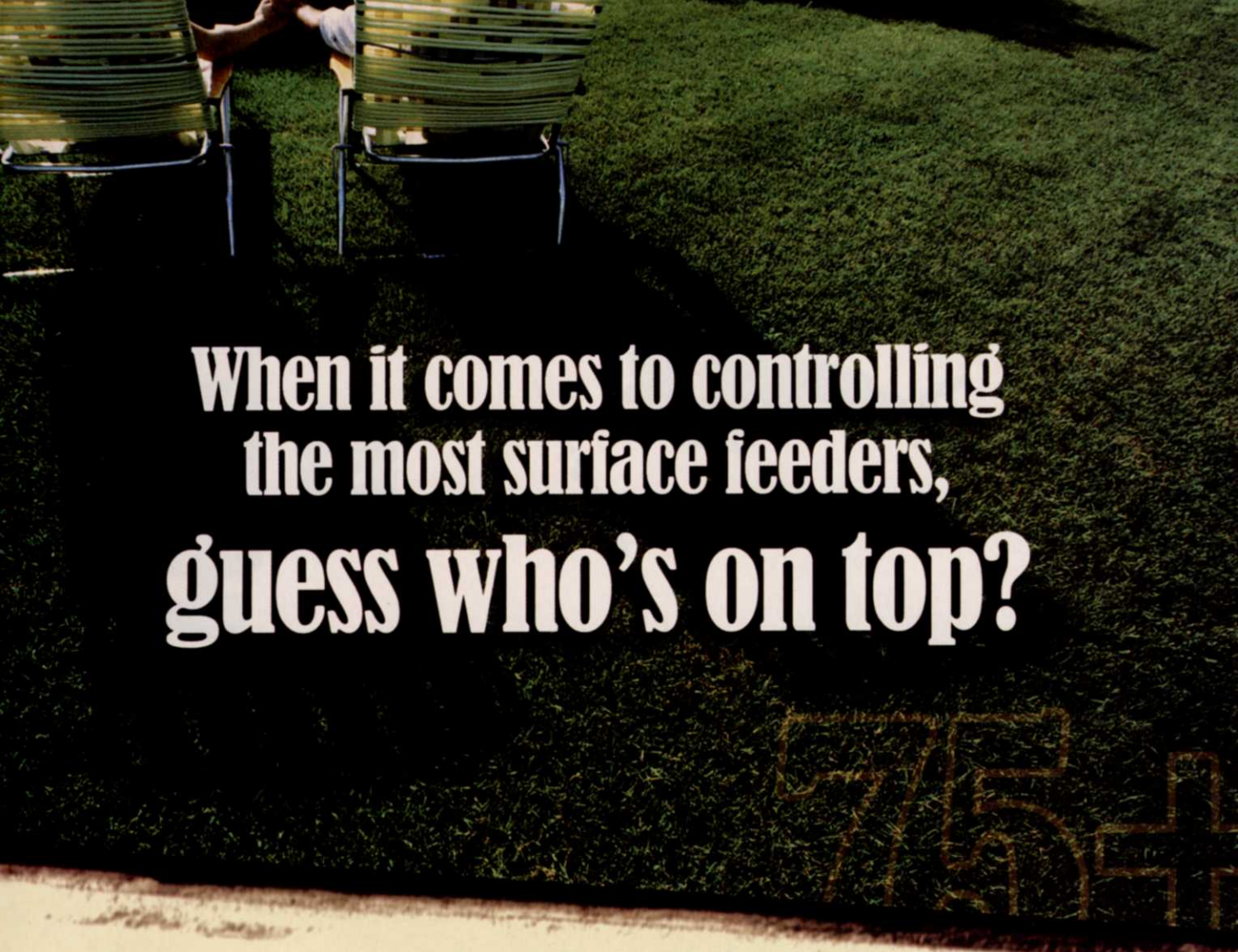
Someone has to get up pretty early to fool you, don't they?

Oh yes. My wife and I live on the nursery. During the summer, I usually get up by 4 or 5 in the morning and work til 6 or 9, seven days a week. My social life then is nonexistent. Even when we're on vacation, we get up that early.

So are you going to hand off the business to your two sons some day?

I think that's the dream of every business owner, but it seems the younger generation doesn't want to work seven days a week. They want their evenings and weekends free. Our oldest son just got his MBA from the University of Sydney in Australia and is set to go into banking. He worked with us a few years and decided it was more work than he wanted to do. I see a trend in our industry of family-owned nurseries having an increasingly hard time trying to get their kids involved in the business. So where do we go for the future? If they don't want to put in the hours, how is that going to affect the cost of our services?

— *Spruce Lane Farm, Inc. participates in JP Horizons' People Solutions programs. To learn more visit www.jphorizons.com or call 877/574-5267.*



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* Trials conducted by Dr. Steve Alm, University of Rhode Island, 2001; by Dr. Dave Shetlar, Ohio State University, 1999; and by Dr. Dave Shetlar and Dr. Harry Niemczyk, Ohio State University, 1997.

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For more information contact RedMax at 800/291-8251 or www.redmax.com / circle no. 284

2 Extended help

Stihl's extended length hedge trimmers are now powered by the emissions compliant and longer running STIHL 4-MIX engine. The Stihl HL 100 series with STIHL 4-MIX technology provides faster acceleration, more power, more torque and increased fuel efficiency. Each model offers a varying combination of either an adjustable or fixed-angle cutting head and either a 42- or 59-in. shaft length. Other features include a double-sided reciprocating 24-in. blade with integrated cutter guard, Easystart system and anti-vibration system. The HL 100K and HL 100 also feature a loop handle with barrier bar for multi-position cutting.

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Gardena introduces the Lawn Sprinkler System, a convenient underground watering system for residential and commercial applications with watering areas up to two acres. It's unique from other systems in that it doesn't require wiring or special tools for installation and is winter-proof. The gear-drive pop-up sprinklers come in three different sizes, cover up to 4,000 sq. ft. and have adjustable ranges from six to 38 ft. A handheld programming unit eliminates the need for a wall-mounted control panel or timer. An electronic rain sensor has a built-in photo eye that monitors water accumulation and interrupts or suppresses the watering cycle.

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How do you get your equipment to the site and back? Can you have both security and accessibility?



Use your head when you haul

BY HARRY SMITH

How do you get your equipment to the site and back? Can you have both security and accessibility? In the past, equipment security and transport options were limited. Most operations used an open trailer and a pickup truck. Larger operators had a 1- or 2-ton truck with an open “beaver-tail” body. It was difficult to secure equipment left on the truck at the job site. Blowers, trimmers, saws and hand tools frequently walked away. If a shower popped up, the equipment got wet. Parking with a trailer in suburban neighborhoods was a challenge.

A few companies tried enclosed trucks or trailers. In some areas this is still the common choice despite head bumping and tangled equipment. And trailers still encounter parking hassles, and truck ramps have to be devised to load and unload your larger equipment. Is there a better way? Two truck body manufacturers think so.

An interesting twist

Supreme Corporation of Goshen, IN (www.supremeind.com) built an enclosed body up to 22 ft. long on an Isuzu chassis and added an interesting twist: the back of the truck body is ramped downward like a beavertail body. A vertically split folding ramp is attached to the end of the bed. Now you have a secure, weather-resistant storage area and the convenience of a beavertail body.

Super Lawn Trucks (www.superlawntruck.com) uses a different approach by employing an articulated, hydraulically activated loading ramp. This ramp can

also be used as a work platform for pruning or as a workbench. The company also offers a complete interior rack system for trimmers, backpack blowers and hand tools. Super Lawn Trucks can equip the truck with an external fueling system for both pre-mix and straight gasoline, enabling you to carry a week’s supply of fuel and doing your fueling from outside the truck.

Other pluses to both of these truck systems are huge billboard areas to advertise your business onsite and as you move from job to job. And, with all of your unused equipment securely out of sight.

Solution on the side

Several other manufacturers (Mobile Structures Incorporated at www.mobilestructures.com and Load-Trail at www.loadtrail.com to name just two) have come up with a simple solution to a chronic problem.

You get your trailer parked at the curb. Your zero mower is loaded last, then your push blower and right at the front is your walk mower. What do you need for this job? You need your walk mower, of course.

So what do you do? Unload everything off the trailer and park it where? Or unload and reload the trailer and when you get done you have the old re-assemble-in-reverse-order routine.

This isn’t necessary with these companies’ side gate trailers. Flip the curbside gate down, roll out your walk mower and go to work. When you’re done, back it goes and your unneeded equipment at the back of the trailer never has to move. I give this idea my “Why Didn’t I Think of That” award.

— The author is the turf equipment professor at Lake City Community College, Lake City, FL. He can be reached at Smithh@lakecitycc.edu.

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Seize the disease

Unlock the mystery to common turfgrass diseases by knowing the telltale signs and treatment options

BY BAL RAO, PH.D.

This article will help you understand some of the common cool- and warm-season turfgrass diseases, their identification and management options. A more complete discussion of turfgrass diseases can be found on the Web site www.landscapemanagement.net.

ANTHRACNOSE

Pathogen name: *Colletotrichum graminicola*

Host: Kentucky bluegrass, bentgrass, fine fescue

Activity: July-August

Symptoms: Yellowing of leaf blades with a black crown rot. As the disease progresses, it produces fruiting bodies with small, spiny setae.

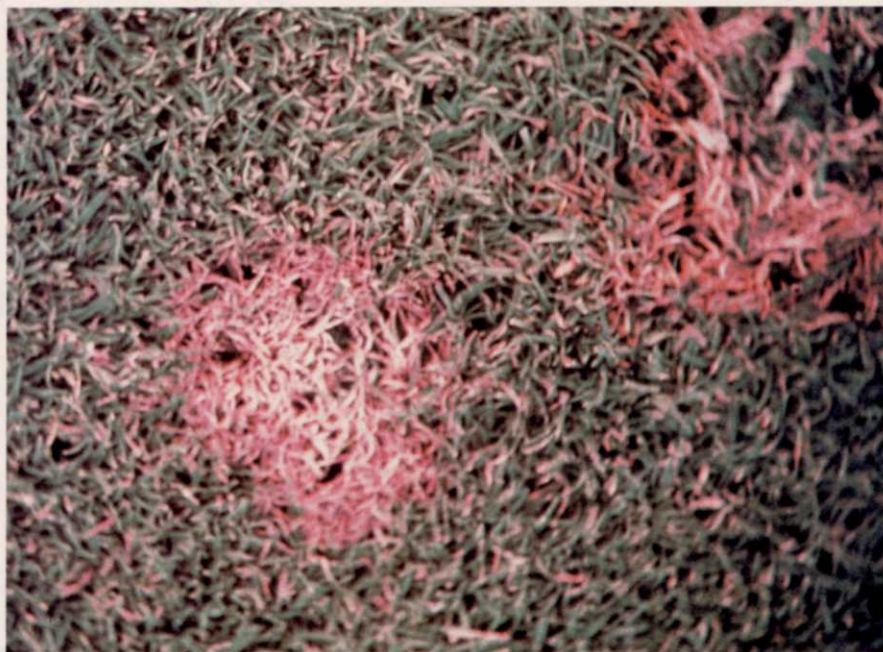
Management: Avoid nitrogen deficiency. Fertilize and water as needed to maintain vitality. If the disease is severe, use recommended fungicides.

BROWN PATCH (*Rhizoctonia* blight)

Pathogen name: *Rhizoctonia solani*

Hosts: Ryegrass, tall fescue and bentgrass

Active: June-September



Symptoms: Occurs during the warm temperatures of summer. Irregular, circular, sunken pockets in areas of dead, brown grass (a few inches to several feet), surrounded by a narrow, darker ring called a "smoke ring," the result of sudden wilting and most conspicuous in the morning. Cottony mycelium may be present in the morning. Infected turfgrass is at first a dark purplish green fading to brown as the plants dry out.

Favorable conditions: Warm, humid conditions (80° to 85°F) and high night temperatures.

Management: Maintain good cultural practices. Since the pathogen spreads through water, try different methods of removing water from the leaf surface, or improve conditions for fast drying. If the disease is severe, use a fungicide. Avoid heavy fertilization and too much watering, maintain

▲ Fusarium patch

good nitrogen and potassium levels, and improve air circulation.

DOLLAR SPOT

Pathogen name: *Lanzia* spp. and *Moellerodiscus* spp (Old name— *Sclerotinia homeocarpa*)

Host: All turfgrasses

Active: April-October

Symptoms: Normally the disease occurs in spring and fall, but it can be active during the summer. The affected areas in a home lawn may range from 2 to 6 in. in diameter. Infected turfgrass shows hourglass-shaped straw-colored lesions, with or without reddish borders, across the leaf blade. Affected turfgrass blades show extensive dieback, and these dead tissues can be colonized by secondary saprophytic fungi. At

Fairy ring ▶



this stage, diagnosis would be very difficult. Therefore, examine the border of affected areas for possible disease activity. The lesions are initially yellowish green but turn a light tan. White, cobweb-like mycelium of the fungus may be noticeable in the infected area in the morning while dew is present. As the disease progresses, the straw-colored dead grass produces depressions in the turf.

Favorable conditions: Most damaging in areas where turf suffers from inadequate moisture and excessive thatch. Prolonged dry periods (65° to 85°F) can lead to severe outbreaks. The disease appears to follow the mowing pattern, particularly when clippings are left behind.

Management: Water properly and manage excessive thatch. Use fungicides if the disease is severe, but avoid controls showing resistance. Disperse dew by dragging a hose or pole, or by mowing. Dollar spot activity also can be minimized by the application of 1/2-lb. of nitrogen in conjunction with improving cultural practices. Consider overseeding with resistant cultivars.

FAIRY RING

Pathogen name: Various basidiomycetes:

Agaricus, Amanita, Boletus, Calvatia, Cantharellus, Collybia, Lepiota, Hydrellum, Lactarius, Lycoperdon, Hydnum, Marasmius, Sclerotinia, Clitocybe

Host: All turfgrass

Active: All year

Symptoms: Fairy ring is caused by several species of basidiomycetes, which produce mushroom-like fruiting bodies. Usually more noticeable as mushrooms growing in turf areas during warm (85° to 90°F), wet weather. Symptoms vary from one simple ring to a stimulated ring with mushrooms or two stimulated rings with a middle dead zone and mushrooms developing from the outer rings. Circles may range from a couple of feet to 50 ft. in diameter. The fairy ring gets progressively larger each year.

Favorable conditions: Excessive thatch, buried organic matter and excessive moisture.

Management: Mow and get rid of the mushrooms. Aerate and improve water penetration, provide balanced fertilization. Water heavily to a depth of 10 to 24 in. to disperse the nutrients generating from buried organic matter. Where feasible remove buried organic matter, reseed or sod as needed. Although expensive and time-consuming, fumigating or replacing the soil can help manage this disease.

FUSARIUM BLIGHT SYNDROME

(patch disease syndrome)

Pathogen name: *Fusarium spp.* (also called fusarium crown and root rot); fusarium

blight is most severe during hot, dry weather in late spring through early fall.

Symptoms: Characteristic symptom is a circular, 6- to 15-in. doughnut-shaped area of reddish-brown or reddish-tan grass with green grass in the center (frog-eye symptoms). However, recent studies indicate that the frog-eye symptoms of *Fusarium* blight syndrome need not be caused by *Fusarium spp.* alone. The following other disease agents also can develop similar circular patches — necrotic ring spot, summer patch and take all patch.

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NECROTIC RING SPOT

Pathogen name: *Ophiosphaerella korrae*, (Old name — *Leptosphaeria korrae*)
Host: Kentucky bluegrass, red fescue
Active: March-June and September-October

SUMMER PATCH

Pathogen name: *Magnaporthe poae* (*Phialophora graminicola*)
Host: Kentucky bluegrass, *poa annua*, fine fescue
Active: July- September

GRAY LEAF SPOT

Pathogen name: *Magnaporthe oryzae* (= *Pyricularia oryzae*), *P. grisea*
Host: Perennial ryegrass
Active: July-September
Symptoms: Affected turfgrass blades show water soaked spots; later, leaves become gray colored with twisted tips and appear drought stressed. Spots may coalesce and result in blights and killing crown. Leaf spots may resemble spots caused by *Bipolaris sp.*
Favorable conditions: Warm, humid conditions (80° to 85°F) and high night temperatures.
Management: Maintain good cultural practices. If the disease is severe, use a fungicide. The disease may have drought stressed appearance. However, if watered, disease may increase.

MELTING OUT

Pathogen name: *Drechslera poa* (Old name — *Helminthosporium vagans*)
Host: All turfgrasses
Active: April-October

LEAF SPOT

Pathogen name: *Bipolaris sorokiniana* (Old name — *Helminthosporium sorokiniana*)
Host: All turfgrasses
Active: April-October. Melting out and leaf spot are different diseases caused by two different pathogens. Both diseases produce leaf spot symptoms. However, under favorable conditions, only the melting-out disease fungi develop melting-out symptoms.
Symptoms: Both diseases are most destructive during cool, moist weather of spring and fall, but they can develop throughout the summer. The first visible symptom is the appearance of brown or tan spots on leaves and stems. These spots, seldom larger than 1/8 in., commonly have a purple border. In the case of melting-out disease, the fungus moves down into the crown, and the grass appears to "melt out" (fade) in scattered, irregular patches. Dead, brown patches may be several feet in diameter and are difficult to control at this stage. Quite often the disease activity can kill the blade, tillers and even crown and

may require overseeding affected areas.
Favorable conditions: Accumulation of grass clippings or thatch, heavy rain and cloudy weather, early evening water-

ing, rapid succulent growth, temperature between 55° and 80°F, and prolonged cool and wet periods.
Management: Proper mowing height, fertilization and watering in the morning as needed and, if the disease is severe, use a recommended fungicide. If reseeding, use resistant cultivars. Quite often, melting out disease can kill the crown of the turfgrass plant and requires overseeding. Avoid light frequent watering. Maintain adequate nitrogen and potassium levels.

POWDERY MILDEW

Pathogen name: *Blumeria graminis* (Old name — *Erysiphe graminis*)
Host: Kentucky bluegrass
Active: April-November
Symptoms: Occurs during cool temperatures of spring and fall, usually in shade with high humidity. Symptoms: powdery, grayish-white fungal spores and fluffy white mycelium (signs) in patches on the upper surface of leaves.
Favorable conditions: Shade, poor air circulation, high humidity, cloudy weather,



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temperature around 65°F, high soil moisture and low light intensity.

Management: Improve air circulation, reduce shade and reseed with shade-tolerant cultivars. If the disease is severe, use fungicides and plant disease-resistant cultivars.

PYTHIUM BLIGHT

Pathogen name: *Pythium ultimum*, *P. graminicola* and *P. aphanidermatum*

Host: Perennial ryegrass, creeping bentgrass, *poa annua*

Active: June-September

Symptoms: Occurs during warm, wet weather in summer. More common on golf courses because of their cultural practices.

The disease produces greasy or slimy water-soaked spots in the turf, 1 to 4 in. in diameter, eventually turning light brown as they become dry. They produce serpentine-shaped spots and spread by drainage water. In early morning, fluffy white mycelium may be evident.

Favorable conditions: Disease occurs at high temperatures (85° to 95°F), accompanied by high humidity, wet conditions and poorly drained clay soils. The disease is common in newly seeded lawns, causing

▲ Pythium blight

“damping-off” of grass plants at soil level.

Management: Maintain good cultural practices and use Pythium-specific fungicides if the disease is severe. Avoid excessive watering, fertilizing and mowing when wet. Improve drainage and air circulation

RED THREAD

Pathogen name: Red thread, *Laetisaria fuciformis*; Pink patch, *Limonomyces roseipellis* (Old name — red thread and pink patch — *Corticium fuciforme*)

Hosts: Perennial ryegrass, fine fescue, tall fescue, Kentucky bluegrass

Active: February-November

Symptoms: Occurs in the early spring and late fall. Characterized by the red and coral pink, thread-like structures of the fungus, which protrude from the tip of the grass leaves (at right angles). Usually, the affected areas produce 4- to 5-in. diameter spots arranged around the circumference of a 2- to 3-ft. diameter circle. Disease is severe on fine fescue. Pink patch produces small red to pink patches of blighted turf with long, slender threads of fluffy pink



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Circle 126

Rust ▶



mycelium growing out of foliage.

Favorable conditions: Low fertility, temperatures 65° to 75°F, moist condition, excessive thatch and nutrient deficiency.

Management: Apply fungicides if the disease is severe. Application of 1/2 lb. of nitrogen can help mask the symptoms and boost turfgrass recovery. Avoid nitrogen, potassium and calcium deficiency and reseed, as needed using resistant cultivars.

RUST

Pathogen name: *Puccinia graminis*

Host: Bluegrass, perennial ryegrass, zoysiagrass

Active: August-November

Symptoms: Yellowing of leaves, with

brown pustules on leaves and stems.

Favorable conditions: Warm and humid (80° to 85°F) and high night temperatures in late summer.

Management: If the disease is severe, use a fungicide. Avoid nitrogen deficiency. Use rust disease-resistant varieties of turfgrass.

SNOW MOLDS

Pink snow mold or microdochium patch

Pathogen name: *Microdochium nivale* (Old name — *Fusarium nivale*, Fusarium Patch, also called Gerlachia Patch)

Host: Creeping bentgrass, perennial ryegrass

Active: November-May

Gray snow mold

Pathogen name: *Typhula incarnata*, *T. ishikariensis*

Host: Creeping bentgrass, perennial ryegrass

Active: November- May. These low-temperature diseases occur during the cool, wet weather of late fall through winter and early spring, with or without snow cover.

Affected areas range from a couple of inches to 2 ft. in diameter.

Symptoms: Pink snow mold is characterized by reddish-brown spots, while gray snow mold has gray-to-black mycelium around the border of the spots. The latter fungus also produces yellow-brown fungal bodies (sclerotia) embedded in infected plants' leaves and crowns. Both diseases produce matting of turfgrass leaves and prevent new growth.

Favorable conditions: Temperature 32° to 45°F, snow, excessive thatch, turfgrass too long, lush growth in late fall and high humidity.

Management: Avoid heavy fall fertilizing which will promote lush growth. In the

spring, rake infected and matted leaves to promote new growth. If the disease is severe, use a fungicide. On lawns with a history of snow mold problems, use fungicides once before the first snow accumulation, a second time in midwinter and the final application after the spring thaw.

STRIPE SMUT

Pathogen name: *Ustilago striiformis*

Host: Kentucky bluegrass

Active: April-November

Symptoms: More noticeable during the cool periods of spring and fall, particularly in 3- and 4-year-old lawns. Symptoms include yellowish streaks on the leaf blades, which later turn gray to black in color. Eventually, the epidermis ruptures, exposing a long streak of black, sooty spores. Diseased plants may occur in small patches only 1 or 2 in. diameter and occasionally more than a foot in diameter. New growth if any will be dwarfed, yellow and stunted or dead.

Favorable conditions: Heavy thatch, cool temperature (50° to 60°F) and heavy watering.

Management: Remove thatch, water properly and, if the disease is severe, use a systemic fungicide. Apply water after treatment application to help move the fungicides to root systems and improve efficacy. Reseed the affected area with disease-resistant cultivars. **LM**

— The author is Manager of Research and Technical Development for the Davey Tree Expert Co., Kent, OH. He can be reached at brao@davey.com.

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Circle 127

Leadership insights

GROWING GREEN INDUSTRY LEADERS

SUPPLEMENT TO LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT

Surprise!

Watch your business bloom as you delight your clients with the unexpected

BY CHERYL HIGLEY

1 A picture is worth 1,000 words. Whenever possible, Hemlocks Landscaping in Jasper, GA, sends clients an 8x10 aerial photograph of the completed project. "This has proven to be a huge surprise to many of our clients and really helps with word-of-mouth referrals," explains Ross Fletcher, CLP. Keith Baughman, landscape architect for Lawn Pride, Inc., in Indianapolis creates before-and-after postcards for his clients. "It is a simple and inexpensive way to reach our clients," Baughman says.

2 Support your clients' causes. Salmon Falls Landscaping of Berwick, ME, thanks any developer, builder, architect, etc., that recommends the company by donating 2% of the completed job's cost to a favorite charity of the person who offered the recommendation. "I'm proud that our company reaches outside the business deal and gives



something back to the community," says Joan Lofgren.

3 Spring a surprise. Golden Gate Landscape Management in Santa Rose, CA, surprised several clients by planting narcissus bulbs in select locations during the slow winter season. Clients didn't know about the planting until spring, when the flowers bloomed. *(Photo above)*

4 Reward customer loyalty. Eisler Landscapes in Prospect, PA, is working with a family who has been a customer for many years. Two of the family members are building new homes, and to reward

Continued on page 55

From the front lines

Knowing your clients makes surprises easy

Take the time to learn about your customers, and you can make a lasting impression. Marianne Mumford of Landscape Images Ltd. in New Orleans consulted with a client that loved cats. When the proposal was delivered, the client was surprised to find a bag of goodies and toys for the cats as well. By tuning into the client's love for the cats, the company landed a \$100,000 job.

Mike Shannon, vice president of maintenance operations for Hillenmeyer Landscape Services in Lexington, KY, agrees that extra effort pays off – which is why a customer service representative makes a personal visit (with fresh cookies or something special that appeals to the client) the day after a proposal is delivered.

Taking the business relationship to a more personal level is an important aspect of the business for Kaulbars Lawns in Bonita Springs, FL. Cards are sent for birthdays, illnesses and new babies, and gift baskets or flowers are sent to thank customers for referrals.

"One of our customers was diagnosed with larynx cancer and our foreman did a great job of finding out when he would be back from the hospital after each of his surgeries. We had a plant sent to his house the day he returned," explains Kiryn Pasricha, office manager. "Whether it's a card or a planter, they are little gestures that our customers will remember."

"It takes months to find a customer ... seconds to lose one."

– Anonymous

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BY JIM PALUCH / PRESIDENT JP HORIZONS

Nurture the art of SURPRISE

Here's an idea a little different from what you might expect. Let me give you a couple of statements that will confuse, frustrate and create little or no positive outcome when approaching your team with them.

The first statement: "We've gotta improve customer service." The second: "We've gotta quit getting so many complaints." Next: "We've gotta quit losing good customers." And finally: "We've gotta improve our quality." I could go on with many more "gottas," but I think you understand the direction. Generally, these statements are made by companies that are troubled, desperate for business, desperate to quit losing business or just desperate overall. Desperate companies generally make "gotta" statements. This next statement may land close to home with company leaders reading this article. I cringe when I hear this statement because I know it is not a call to action but is more a call to becoming defensive: "We've gotta exceed customer expectations."

Why do desperation statements fail to produce positive results? Because they fail to get the individual that we are making them to engaged in the problem or situation. As soon as an employee can be placed in a position to engage in solutions to a problem, then the energy and enthusiasm to solve that problem becomes greater. If you want to create and keep great customers, involve everyone in the process and figure out how you want to start surprising your clients.

Involvement works the same for our customers as well. The instant our clients feel engaged in the design process, installation process or follow-

GET EXCITED ABOUT THE THREE "R'S"

A significant correlation to a customer-oriented organization can be seen in the referrals, repeat business and renewals. Often, these three areas are taken for granted but should be a gauge indicating how well we are servicing customers.

How many people in your organization know what percentage of business you renewed this year compared with last year and the year before? Is it improving, and what can you do to keep it headed in that direction?

How many people know the percentage of your sales that is repeat business because the customer has enjoyed doing work with you or because of satisfaction with the final product that you delivered? Asking questions like, "What can we do to make customers want to spend money with us again?" engages the employees' thinking, and referrals become the ultimate compliment to our service.

Referrals are present clients proving they trust us enough to tell a friend or associate about the experience they had, and evidence of their belief that someone else will have the same experience. Ring a bell, send off fireworks, stand on your head or do something that draws attention to referrals, and remember repeat business and renewals help reinforce the culture of service throughout your team.

up process of a landscape project, they will feel more enthusiastic about that project. As enthusiasm increases, the possibility for surprise is increased. With all of this being the case, the critical step to surprising our clients is to ask better questions and make better statements that engage both the employee and the customer.

The following ideas, exercises and approaches will help create a culture that focuses on surprising the customer. Creating a culture where the customer enjoys working and spending money with us is essential to separating ourselves from the competition. The basic elements of a customer-focused culture are creative thinking, risk taking, developing a servant's attitude and understanding the far-reaching impact of the actions we take today.

A bold move

Sometimes creativity takes bold moves brought about by the owner or

leaders of an organization. Try this bold move. Give each of your management team a gift certificate for two to a variety of the nicer restaurants in your city. Tell them to take their spouse or friend out to dinner on you, and the only catch is that they must come back to the next management team meeting and present a report on what makes this a great restaurant and how the concepts learned can be applied to your service. Challenge them to interview the restaurant manager and the waitresses; ask to go into the kitchen, and to take pictures of things they saw that surprised them or made their evening special. Set a deadline of two weeks after the gift certificates are awarded. Set aside the time for the entire management team to discuss the concepts learned and begin to put together game plans on how these concepts can be introduced in your organization.

Focused attention

Put a big piece of paper up on the wall. Not just a regular piece, because if we are going to get great big results, we want a great big piece of paper, one that covers a whole wall. Challenge your employees to fill the wall with brief descriptions of surprising-the-customer ideas. Every week, pull the new ideas off the list, send them out to the team and vote on the best idea that you can use to surprise your customers. Reward the winners and watch what happens as the idea is put into a game plan and implemented.

This idea never fails

The time-tested customer forum is a process that brings the employees and customers together in a face-to-face event that acts as a quality survey, customer service seminar, and marketing event. Imagine sitting five of your best customers down in front of your entire company, whether it's at a restaurant or in the cleaned-up maintenance bay of the company. Have the customers sit at a head table and have your employees ask a list of questions that will allow your team to understand what the customers' expectations are and what others are doing to win and keep their business. Sample questions might be "What do you like least and best about our service?" or "What are other vendors doing that we should consider in order to serve you better?" If you really want to surprise your customers, think about picking them up in a stretch limousine and bringing them to your company for this client forum. It can be a sit-down, catered meal or simply hors d'oeuvres to enjoy as they tour your facility. In the forum setting, they will be greeted by an enthusiastic company wanting to know their ideas and sent home with a plaque showing your appreciation for their participation in this spe-

cial event. A follow-up thank you letter signed by everyone in the company sent the next day will be the finishing touch to your ultimate surprising-the-customer event. The information gained and the confidence your team experiences in pulling it all off will be invaluable as well as an event that your clients never forget. I've helped many companies do client forums, and the lasting effects have proved to be incredible.

Focus on the positives

Several years ago, ND Landscaping in Georgetown, MA, held a contest that looked for 100 customer compliments before Thanksgiving. Every time an unsolicited compliment came in, the compliment was written on a chart, identifying the crew or individual that received the compliment and the customer that gave it. When 100 compliments were received, everyone who received a compliment received a company jacket and other prizes. Measuring the positives creates a focus on what you want to have happen.

The above exercises are simple, yet put you in the position to try a new approach. Creating new ideas and new paths to go down will create an energy that keeps everyone awake and focused on servicing the customer.

In today's market, where change is happening so fast, there is no room in a successful organization for the word "gotta." Gotta is simply a form of procrastination and a passive approach to service. Get creative and SURPRISE your clients today! ■

Jim Paluch is president of JP Horizons, Inc., in Cleveland, OH, and offers People Solutions that Drive Business Performance. The JP Horizons team has been helping companies reap the rewards of positive change for more than 15 years. Visit www.jp horizons.com for more information.

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BOOKSHELF

"Re-imagine!" by Tom Peters

More than just a how-to book for the 21st century, "Re-imagine!" is a call to arms — a passionate wake-up call for the business world, educators, and society as a whole. Focusing on how the business climate has changed, this inspirational book outlines how the new world of business works, explores radical ways of overcoming outdated, traditional company values, and embraces an aggressive strategy that empowers talent and brand-driven organizations where everyone has a voice.



— from Amazon.com

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This time it's personal

Give some of your time and a little extra effort and you will transform a simple business transaction into a long-term committed relationship

BY CHERYL HIGLEY

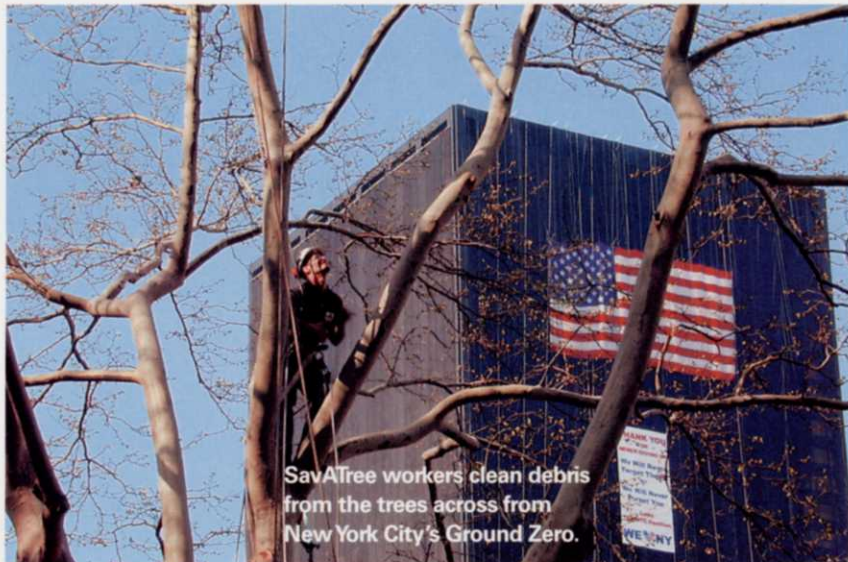
In business, the bottom line is a tangible measure of success; but for many leaders, going the extra mile to elevate a business relationship to a more personal level is equally as important for the company's long-term survival. Whether it's making life a little easier for your customers, giving back to the community or helping with a special surprise, chances are your efforts won't go unrecognized.

Making a pit stop

After hearing their customers' drivers complain about having to clean their trucks every Friday, the staff of Skinner Nurseries in Jacksonville, FL, surprised them with a NASCAR-themed pit stop. After their orders had been loaded on the truck, the drivers went into the office to receive their invoice. While they were completing the paperwork, the Skinner pit crew went to work, cleaning windshields, the interior and tires, removing trash, vacuum-



Children get a chance to climb trees with the help of SavATree arborists.



SavATree workers clean debris from the trees across from New York City's Ground Zero.

ing and hanging air fresheners.

"The owners of these companies were impressed with what we had done," says Kathryn MacKenzie, who works in inside sales and helped coordinate the project.

William Ten Eyck, regional manager, said the project achieved its goal: "We wanted to bring about a lasting impression on our customers by doing something unique that they would talk about to others."

A hare-raising experience

John Chiarella, owner of Ultimate Services Lawn Care in Wolcott, CT, is accustomed to granting every wish for his high-end customers.

A customer's children wanted to give their mother two "Peter Cottontails" for her birthday, which was in two days. What sounded like a simple rabbit hunt was anything but easy. Turns out Peter Cottontail is a hare, which isn't nearly as easy to find. The staff spent Tuesday and Wednesday searching and finally located a farm that raised hares. Chiarella went to the farm and waited until 11 p.m. for the owner to return. By midnight, Chiarella had the hares, and they arrived at their new

home just in time for the children to surprise their mother.

"We service our clients, period. There is nothing we won't do – whatever keeps them happy – because in the end it's all worth it," Chiarella says.

Making a connection

According to Luann O'Brien, vice president of marketing and sales development at SavATree in Bedford Hills, NY, anyone can make money, but people make a difference. Look beyond the landscape, says O'Brien, and that is where you'll find some of SavATree's best work.

For example, while looking for a way to honor a 15-year employee, a manager found a letter from a customer commending the worker for a job well done. The customer had died five years earlier, and the employee took it upon himself to care for his cemetery plot, even picking the widow up from the train station and traveling with her to the cemetery.

"You can't resist going the extra mile when you care about the customer," O'Brien says.

Many of SavATree's clients are active in their communities, and SavATree



Skinner Nurseries in Jacksonville, FL, surprised its customers with a NASCAR-themed pit stop. While the drivers completed paperwork, Skinner employees cleaned their trucks.

works with them to support those causes. It extends SavATree's relationships with their clients but also allows them to be good citizens as well.

SavATree enthusiastically supports Arbor Day and Earth Day activities and sponsors popular Kids Tree Climbing events in clients' communities. But perhaps no community project was more important than when SavATree volunteers journeyed to St. Paul's Chapel, across from Ground Zero in New York City, in April 2002.

Workers climbed into the trees, removing imbedded glass, draperies, clothing and other debris that were caught in the limbs. Everything they removed was given to the FBI as part of the investigation.

"Our mission was to restore the trees on this site, which was the spiritual and community center of the Ground Zero reclamation efforts following the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks," O'Brien explains. "I saw arborists gingerly repositioning little American flags and children's artwork at the base of the fence that was the focal point of our country's mourning. It was an unbelievable experience and became a defining chapter in our company's history."

The power that comes from forging that personal relationship cannot be underestimated.

"We don't see our customers as revenue sources. We see them as human beings. By donating our talents, spirit and enthusiasm, we have developed meaningful, multifaceted customer relationships that are woven seamlessly in the fabric of our organization," O'Brien says.

Look beyond the green

Owners gather inspiration from other industries

BY CHERYL HIGLEY

Moving outside of your comfort zone can bring unexpected surprises. Turning the tables on a group of owners who strive every day to deliver outstanding customer service, we asked them how they've been surprised as a customer:

Going HOG wild

For Bill Gerhardt, owner of GreenScapes Landscape Architects & Contractors in Columbus, OH, Harley-Davidson epitomizes success by selling an experience, not just a product.

"When you buy a Harley you are buying a 'Rebel Experience.' You get to be James Dean every time you ride," Gerhardt explains. "In addition, you are given a free one-year membership in the Harley Owners Group. This is not something I would have joined, but it was a surprise. They have rallies, special deals and notices of what is going on so you can hang out with your fellow HOG members."

Comforts of home

Kris Kaylor of Kaylor Landscape, Porterville, CA, went on a 600-mile, four-day dirt bike trip in Baja, Mexico, where he experienced great customer service.

"The company that we rode with made sure that our every need was met, and mostly without asking. They kept our bikes serviced, offered plenty of food and water on the trail, delivered and loaded our bags at every room and took us on special unmarked trails. If all service-oriented businesses would deliver a little bit more than what the customer is expecting, it would make for more repeat business, word of mouth and happy customers."

Make them saw 'WOW!'

Johnette Taylor, owner of Roundtree Landscaping in Dallas, says she learned some tips to "wow" her customers



For GreenScapes' Bill Gerhardt, Harley-Davidson delivers the ultimate customer experience.

from her local car dealership. When she takes her car in for service, she is greeted by name and offered a seat and snacks in a comfortable lounge. If she is in a hurry, they offer to take her to work. Once the car has been repaired, it is returned – washed and vacuumed. Inside is a gift from the dealer and a local department store.

"That is wow service," Taylor says. "It doesn't need to be elaborate, but it goes above and beyond their expectations."

Attention to detail

David W. Rooney, owner of Rooney Landscape, Rolling Meadows, IL, was impressed by the owner of a bistro during a night out with his wife and another couple.

"We hadn't been to this restaurant in over two years, but the owner greeted me by name," Rooney says.

After he introduced himself to Rooney's companions, the owner made recommendations and took the groups' coats and stored them in his office.

"Moments after my group got up to leave, the owner appeared with coats in hand and thanked us for coming," Rooney says. "What impressed me the most is that he has trained his people to do their jobs, which allows him to be the ambassador of his business. That is the one job you cannot train anyone for but yourself."



By the numbers

BY DAVID ZERFOSS / PRESIDENT HUSQVARNA

To succeed, exceed expectations

You're probably familiar with the old saying, "Build a better mousetrap and the world will beat a path to your door." In today's business environment, anyone who follows that advice exclusively will find himself pretty lonely!

That's because it's no longer enough simply to have a good product. Your customers expect – and deserve – excellent service as well.

At no other time in history have consumers had more options. Go to any supermarket and you will see evidence of that. Count how many kinds of toothpaste are available, or how many varieties of ketchup.

Your customers have choices, too. But you have an advantage over supermarket products: you can interact with your customers. And the way that you and your employees interact with customers will be critical to determining the success of your business.

To succeed – to stand out from your competitors – you need to provide outstanding service that exceeds customer expectations. By fulfilling your customers' needs and surpassing those expectations, you will retain and grow their patronage.

Naturally, each customer will have specific needs. But here are four tips for getting you started on the road to outstanding customer service:

1. Ask – and listen. Find out what your customers want by asking key questions about how you can help solve their problems. A brief written survey can be a starting point, perhaps included with your next invoice mailing. If you have a few large customers, a series of personal meetings may be appropriate. The important part is to engage your customers in a dialogue and to make sure



Enthusiastic employees can deliver outstanding service, which helps to foster customer loyalty.

they understand that their input is very valuable to you. It demonstrates a commitment on your part to maintaining and improving the relationship.

The second component is to "listen" – that is, to really hear what your customers are telling you, either explicitly or between the lines. It might be something you don't want to hear. However, this process will identify issues to help your business grow – by allowing you to see the relationship from the customer's perspective. Then you can take appropriate action steps in response.

2. Small investments add up to big results. You want to keep your customers for the "long haul" because long-term relationships are usually the most profitable. Statistics indicate that it costs twice as much to gain a new customer as it does to keep a current one.

Therefore, be willing to provide the little things that keep customers happy, above and beyond your typical service. Some hotels deliver a complimentary newspaper to their guests. An auto re-

pair shop washes customers' cars when service is completed. What small "extra" service could add up to customer loyalty for you?

3. Create employee support and enthusiasm for your brand. To your customers, your employees are your company. They are a key touch point for your brand, and by hiring them you've placed your brand in your employees' hands. Do your employees understand the impact that they can have on your business – your brand? Training and education of your employees and empowering them to deliver excellent customer service is key to developing and maintaining brand value.

4. Develop programs that reward excellent service – and excellent results. Rewarding excellent customer service is always less costly than the alternative loss of customer loyalty.

At Husqvarna, our approach is the "Total Source Solution." Our family of products is designed to meet all outdoor power equipment needs. That also extends to customer-service practices.

We work hand-in-hand with thousands of retailers and end users every year to provide training and support. We maintain retailer and consumer web sites with the latest product information. Our toll-free customer service line fields product questions and requests. These examples of our "Total Source" service contribute to our goal of providing every customer with a great experience.

We know that technology will continue to advance, and like the old saying, new "mousetraps" will be introduced. However, if you provide outstanding service that exceeds expectations, your customers will continue to beat a path to your door. ■

Association Spotlight

FOCUS: PROFESSIONAL LAWN CARE ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA

The Professional Lawn Care Association of America is the premier global trade association for residential and commercial lawn care professionals. Its goal is to develop leaders and to help their businesses succeed by developing education programs, defining industry standards and serving as the voice of the lawn care industry through its legislative activism.

"We have so many good people delivering quality results and customer service but their businesses fail because they're not good business man-



Jim Campanella

Gary Clayton

agers," explains PLCAA President Jim Campanella. "Our members are excellent at diagnosing turf and pest problems, but we offer them technical and business management resources to help them succeed."

PLCAA is extremely involved in government affairs, and Executive Vice President Gary Clayton says the association's involvement is essential, not only for its members but also for the industry as a whole.

"Our leadership role is to lead and inform at every level. Not only do we represent our members on Capitol Hill, but we also can help them tackle local and state issues that arise as well," Clayton says.

Educational opportunities offered by PLCAA include workshops, training and resource materials, an annual management conference and the annual Green Industry Conference at GIE.

PLCAA's Certified Turfgrass Professional and Certified Ornamental Landscape Professional certification programs also help organizations build leaders while adding another level of professionalism to the company and the industry that it represents.

"By taking the time to become certified, it shows that you are qualified and professional – that is important from a marketing and consumer perspective. Everyone should make the effort to become certified. It makes your organization look good and it shows your pride for the industry," Campanella says.

Continued from page 49

their loyalty, Eisler is designing their landscapes for free. "Each of these projects will be well into the six figures, and the design is our gift to them for being such great clients," explains President Eric French.

5 Do your job. ND Landscaping, in Georgetown, MA, earned a new client just by doing its job. While cutting a customer's lawn in the rain, a neighbor came by and mentioned that he saw the technicians come at the same time and day each week, rain or shine. That neighbor is now a client of ND Landscaping. "Even without trying to surprise people, we sometimes do by showing up when we're scheduled and doing excellent work," says Rich Clough.

6 Inform your customers. K&D Lawn Care Service in Norfolk, VA, sends out a monthly newsletter with news and articles from each department. "I have had several calls about its success," says President Ed Romm. "This is something we talked about for two years. Had I known its success, I would have done it sooner."

7 Be a good neighbor. Marianne Mumford of Landscape Images Ltd. in New Orleans says many customers become nervous about how their neighbors might react during the construction phase. To ease those concerns, Landscape Images delivers annuals to the neighbors with an introduction about what will be happening. "We assure them that we will be there to make sure all goes smoothly and that if they have questions they can call us," Mumford says.

8 Helping a friend in need. Shear Scapes in Woodbridge, VA, is extending a helping hand (and green thumb) to a client who has cancer. "Because of the illness, money is very tight for them right now, so we will provide spring cleanup and summer flowers for free," explains owner Nancy Marouf.

JUST THE FACTS



PLCAA

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Soil sensors make sense

Soil moisture monitoring takes the guesswork out of irrigating landscapes with different water needs

BY MIKE MILLER



Advancements in sensor design will reduce the need for digging and trenching.

Sensors are nothing more than technological devices that monitor a variety of external factors. They surround us in our everyday life. So when it comes to watering our landscapes,

why don't we have sensors that can do the job for us?

Many attempts have been made at sensor-based watering. The present ET (evapotranspiration) controllers are sensor based. Weather station sensors measure external factors such as sunlight, wind and tempera-

ture to estimate water loss in the soil. Sensors are also connected directly to controllers to measure temperature or humidity or sunlight. Water schedules are changed based on weather conditions. This seems simple but because of the complexity of commercial landscapes this method has only had limited success.

This begs the question, "Why not measure the moisture in the soil directly and let the sensor control the watering directly?"

A long history

Soil moisture sensors have been used in agriculture for years. There are many different types of soil sensors ranging in price from \$20 to \$10,000. There are also different ways to measure moisture in the soil. The most common method (without getting into the expensive nuclear probes) has been to pass electricity through two electrodes and measure the resistance. In the past there have been numerous problems with these kinds of sensors.

In order to control watering, a soil sensor must be easy to install, durable, provide consistent readings and be affordable. Until recently such a sensor wasn't available.

By modifying some old technology used during World War II, a new breed of sensor is emerging. These sensors measure the speed of light (or an electronic wave) that is passed through the soil to determine the moisture content. (Light travels slower in water than in air.) And with the cost effective power of the microchip these sensors are affordable.

But a sensor alone won't do the job. The sensor has to be attached to an irrigation controller. There are two ways the sensor can be used by the controller, either as an "interrupter" that shuts water off when it gets too wet or as an integrated sensor that actually controls the watering. Rain Bird and WaterWatcher sell the interrupter sensors. These sensors interrupt the ground wire connection on an already existing controller.

Baseline, Acclima and Irrrometer sell the totally integrated controllers.

Small but mighty

When sensors are installed the landscape is divided into microclimates (zones that have similar watering profiles). A sensor is placed in each microclimate.

Soil moisture sensors work similarly to the thermostat in your house, which measures the temperature in a single room and controls the heat output. If there are adjustments by room, then dampers are opened and closed. A soil sensor operates in basically the same way. One sensor can control many zones. If a zone is drier than the master zone, then the dry zone is watered more.

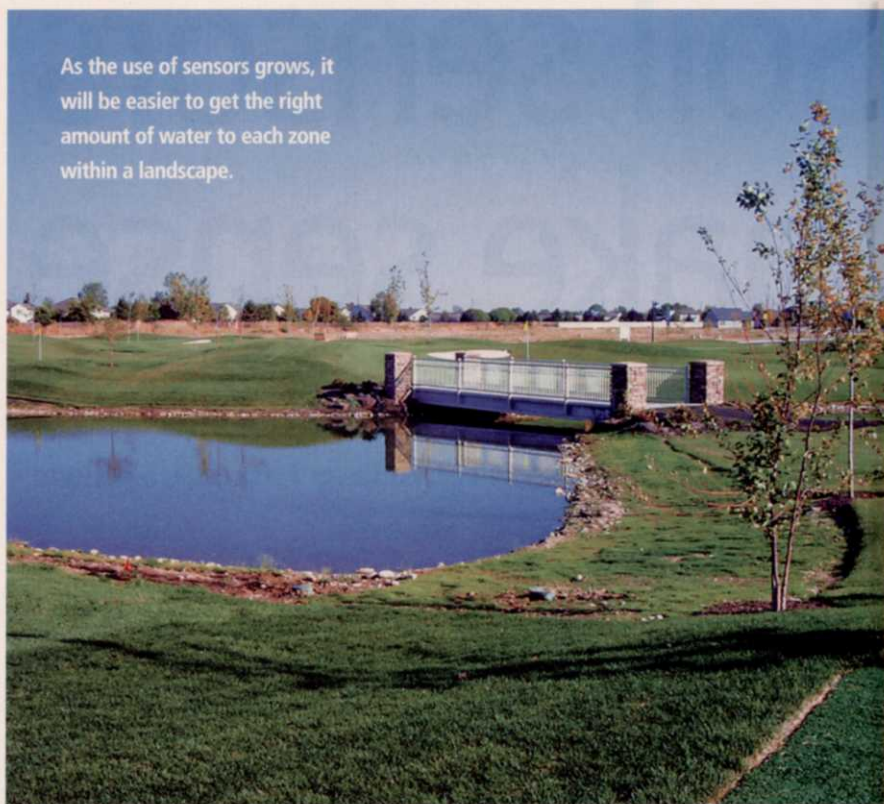
One of the past problems with soil sensors had to do with wiring the sensor to the controller. This often meant lots of digging and trenching. New advancements in communications, however, allow sensors to be attached directly to the existing valve wires so there is minimal trenching.

Soil moisture sensors work similarly to the thermostat in your house.

Another issue with sensors is where to place them. Again, modern technology has come to the rescue. Place the sensor in a place that gets average watering. But if it is placed in a wet or dry spot, adjustments can be made at the controller.

Can do's and can't do's

With a sensor controlling watering, the landscape will always get the right amount of water, eliminating over- and under-watering. There will be no sched-



As the use of sensors grows, it will be easier to get the right amount of water to each zone within a landscape.

ules to input (except watering restriction times), and the controller will adjust watering for all changes in weather and in seasons.

But don't think that sensors will solve all your watering problems. Most problems with landscapes have nothing to do with the watering schedules. Controllers cannot correct poor landscape planning or bad distribution uniformity. And sensors cannot correct a customer's overwhelming desire to make a wetland out of his landscape.

Also be aware that, as with all irrigation controllers, sensor-based controllers should not be set and forgotten. While soil-sensor-based systems are much easier to adjust, no landscape should go unmonitored. No matter what controller is used, there's nothing like a good walkaround once a week to look for broken heads and valves and to keep landscapes and watering in balance.

We're surrounded by sensors in practically every part of our lives, from toasters to airplanes. So why don't we have sensors that will water our lawns? Actually, ET-based sensor control of watering has been around a long time. But ET sensors were always monitoring external factors. Now, with modern technology and the advancement of the microchip we have reliable and inexpensive soil moisture sensors integrated into soil-moisture-based controllers that control watering based on actual moisture in the soil.

These controllers are just starting to appear in the market. As more models are introduced and prices drop, soil-moisture-based watering will become the preferred method for watering landscapes. **LM**

— The author is manager of Baseline Systems, L.C. He can be reached at mike@baselinesystems.com. For more information on Baseline, visit www.baselinesystems.com.

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season-long grub control.**

 Dow AgroSciences

MACH 2*
Specialty Insecticide



Profit from prevention

Many property owners are embracing the idea of season-long fire ant control

BY RON HALL / Editor-in-Chief

There are an estimated 150 fire ant control products in the marketplace. They offer varying degrees of control, most of them effectively killing foraging ants and/or destroying their mounds. But these fixes have been (to this point, anyway) short term with a new batch of ants moving onto a property within weeks, building unsightly mounds and threatening, with painful bites, anybody or anything that disturbs them.

Problem: Callbacks, complaints

The problem for lawn care professionals, apart from customer complaints, has been costly callbacks to retreat for re-infestations. But that's changing.

Lawn service professionals in the South have a new profit

opportunity — preventative fire ant control. Along with that, some are providing customers with guarantees that their properties will be "fire ant free" for an entire season.

It's an idea that many lawn care customers find hard to understand but once they do they find it equally hard to resist, says Judi Pittman, owner of Nitro Green Lawn Care, Madison, AL. Who does she target with this message? People who maintain active lifestyles on their properties, customers with children and/or pets or those that get joy out of gardening, for example.

Pittman admits she was hesitant to promise clients season-long "fire ant free" properties, but after two years of exceptional results, she knows that she can do it and many of her clients want it.

"This year, in addition to marketing to our current customers each time we have a contact with them, we're also marketing this service to our new customers and about 20 percent of them have signed up for our fire ant program," says Pittman.

Solution: They stay away or die

The reason for her confidence is the new TopChoice granular fire ant insecticide from Bayer Environmental Science (Bayer ES). Originally adopted by turf managers for its ability to slay pest mole crickets, it was later found to be both curative and preventative for fire ants, as well. Bayer ES claims that it gives at least 95% fire ant control for up to a year with a single application.

The reason for this lies, in large part, with the product's active ingredient, fipronil. Foraging ants contact the granules containing fipronil and return to their mounds where they (and the product) come in contact with other ants. Eventually the insecticide reaches the queen

and once she's gone and the workers are dying, the colony collapses. The product, because it acts relatively slowly, spreads throughout the colony without the ants being aware of it. The product takes several to six weeks to destroy a colony, depending upon conditions.

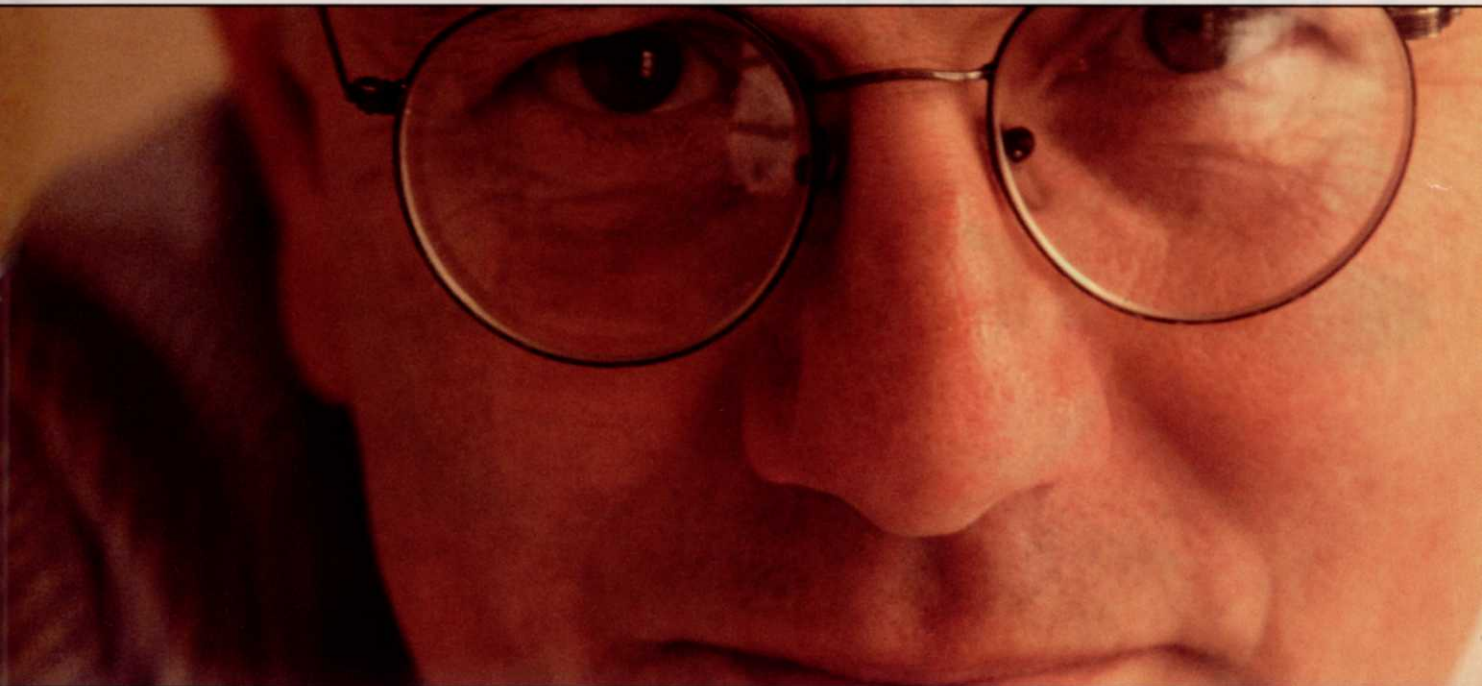
Unlike other fire ant controls, the product provides a lengthy residual effect and creates, in effect, an exclusion zone. If and when new ants appear on treated property they die.

While the product can be put down any time of the year and still retain its long-term effectiveness, says Bayer ES, Pittman's techs apply it in spring for two reasons:

- ▶ that's when mounds appear and people start calling.
- ▶ often lawns are too soggy for her techs to use their ride-on Perma Green spreaders for fertilizer applications, so they apply TopChoice with walk-behind broadcast units. For flowerbeds, they apply it with hand spreaders.

The product's label restricts its use within 15 ft. of fresh water or 60 ft. of salt water or an estuary. Bayer recommends using Maxforce Fire Ant bait near water as well as near hard-scapes, such as curbs, pavers and sidewalks. **LMI**

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Isn't it time you got to know ProSource One?



Circle 129



Trimmers & edgers

BY CURT HARLER

Buying tips

- ▶ Confused about handle style? Bicycle handles are for heavy brush; loop handles are for trimming grass...never brush
- ▶ Some units allow operation from either side...great for southpaws
- ▶ Check ease of starting. Now, check again
- ▶ Try on the harness. Does it cut the shoulder?
- ▶ Look for cushioned handholds, straps, anti-vibration technology
- ▶ Proportions and weight distribution differ among models
- ▶ Be sure units meet 2005 emissions standards, CARB requirements
- ▶ How easy is it to clean filters?
- ▶ How long does it take to change blades or strings?
- ▶ How many feet of line does the string trimmer's head hold?
- ▶ Be sure to get fuel capacity to sustain the task at hand, but still keep the unit lightweight
- ▶ Compare warranties



Shindaiwa ▲

T272X Blade Capable Trimmer is powered by a 27.2cc, 1.5-hp engine based on the legendary T27/T270. Two-ring piston, chrome-plated cylinder and heavy-duty air filter for exceptional durability and engine life. Since better blades mean sharper edges on landscapes, Shindaiwa's commercial hand-held lawn edger blades give a sharp, beveled edge for easier cutting and less resistance.

For more information contact Shindaiwa at 800/521-7733 or www.shindaiwa.com / circle no. 262

Little Wonder

Model 6232 ProEdger is powered by a 4-hp Honda engine. OHV steel sleeving, extended engine life, 30% better fuel economy and low-oil alert make for economical operation. Like others units in the series, it has fingertip controls and large 3-qt. gas tank.

For more information contact Little Wonder at 877/596-6337 or www.littlewonder.com / circle no. 263

EFCO

Powerful E8753BAV is a 52.5-hp straight shaft trimmer with bike-style handle. One of several units available, it comes standard with three cutting attachments: line trimmer head, 3-tooth grass/weed blade and 80-tooth brush blade. Anti-vibration design, ability to carry or wear the unit and adjustable handles make it ergonomic.

For more information contact EFCO at 800/447-1152 or www.tiltonequipment.com / circle no. 264

Greenline

Attachments, replacement parts, blades and consumables for popular edgers and trimmers like RedMax, Little Wonder, Maruyama and Shindaiwa are available through the Greenline catalog or online. Free freight on most orders over \$300.

For more information contact Greenline at 800/356-0171 or www.greenlinedist.com / circle no. 265

Echo

Echo has a full line of string trimmers, including the 30.5cc U-Handle model. Like other trimmers in the line, it includes electronic ignition, all-position diaphragm carb with purge pump, vibration-reduction system and semi-automatic, dual tine head with 0.095 nylon line that cuts a 17-in. swath.

For more information contact Echo at 800/432-3246 or www.echo-usa.com / circle no. 266



Husqvarna ▶

Husqvarna's 326Lx trimmer's lighter weight combined with a high-torque engine assures high production with less fatigue. The specially designed loop handle and compact engine make it easy to turn and use at varying angles. It features Husqvarna's E-TECH II engine, a new technology that meets more demanding environmental requirements.

For more information contact Husqvarna at 800/487-5962 or www.usa.husqvarna.com / circle no. 267

Vandermolen

L4320K trimmer cuts a 22-in. swath. Throttle lock, deadman engager, finger trigger throttle, on/off slide switch all are on shaft handle. Unit weighs 15.5 lbs. without cutting head. Powered by 43.2cc Kawasaki engine that's CARB- and EPA-compliant. Full cross-back safety harness with side pad and one-pull release. Has 1-liter fuel tank.

For more information contact Vandermolen at 973/992-8506 or vancorp@superlink.net / circle no. 268



Deere

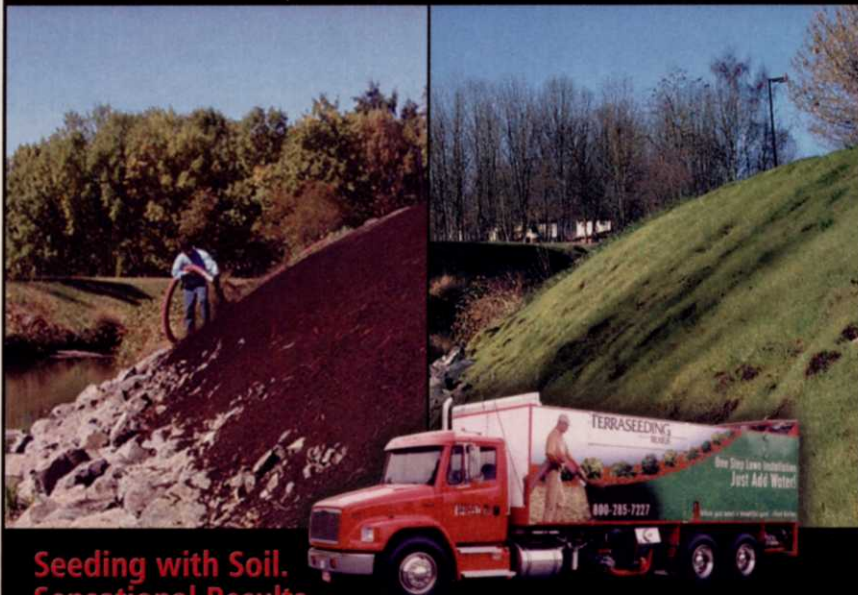
The professional grade XT140SELE Stick Edger has an efficient 1.6-hp, low-emission M-Series engine, quieted by low-tone, glass-

wool-lined aluminum mufflers. Weighs 13 lbs., including a fuel capacity of 20 fl. oz. Smooth, anti-vibration clutch housing. Unit includes angled 59-in. shaft, a large guide wheel, an 8-in. blade for tough turf, ad-

justable depth control up to 2.25 in. and cast-aluminum edger blade housing.

For more information contact Deere at 800/503-3373 or www.johndeere.com / circle no. 269

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LM Reports



Kawasaki ▲

The high-power KTR27A string trimmer has a 26.3cc engine, but the key benefit is its ease of starting. Just a half-pull starts the engine. Reduced recoil pulling force, fully covered carb, one-piece fan housing, easy to service air cleaner element and muffler screen.

For more information contact Kawasaki at 877/529-7697 or www.kawpowr.com / circle no. 270

Stihl

The MM-55 Yard Boss is perfect for light landscaping duties. This multi-task tool converts from an edger to aerator, dethatcher or paddle sweeper. Front and rear carry handles, integrated throttle control with on/off switch, protected control panels. The MM-55 has a 27.2cc 1.07-hp motor. It weighs 20.7 lbs. without attachments.

For more information contact Stihl at 800/467-8445 or www.stihlusa.com / circle no. 271

Robin

Robin's new BEH2500 features the Robin 24.5cc 4-stroke engine and provides performance and easy serviceability. Its 4-stroke engine cuts down on noise and pollution, while giving ample edging power. With a 16.9-oz.

fuel tank and a light 12.6-lb. weight, the BEH2500 is made for every landscaping job.

For more information contact Robin at 800/929-1948 or robinoutdoorpower.com / circle no. 272



Bear Cat

Constructed with solid steel frame, EZ TrimMowers are tough, yet light enough for one person to unload. Family of trimmer mowers offers engines from 5.5- to 6.5-hp, manual or electric-start, push or self-propelled drive and tilt and trim. All EZ TrimMowers have a cutting width of 24 in. and offer cutting heights of 1-7/8 in. and 2-3/4 in. Heavy-duty .155-mil string is standard, .130 mil is optional.

For more information contact Bear Cat at 800/247-7335 or www.bearcatproducts.com / circle no. 273

RedMax ▼

Powerful new string trimmer, the RedMax BCZ3000S meets CARB and EPA 2005 standards without a catalytic converter. The 29.4cc, 1.4-hp Strato-Charged engine has a heavy-duty commercial air cleaner and the Free Flow system, which reduces clogging of air intake and assures that leaves and debris won't overheat the incoming air. 2.5-in.

clutch in a metal housing reduces breakage and slippage.

For more information contact RedMax at 800/291-8251 or www.redmax.com / circle no. 274

Sarlo

Weedboss hand-held trimmers feature B&S Fource 4-cycle engine that delivers more power, durability and easy starting. Extra power means trimmers can cut through thick wet grass without bogging down. No need to mix gas and oil. Engines exceed 2005 EPA emissions standards, meet all CARB standards. Visit their new Web site.

For more information contact Sarlo at 800/749-5296 or www.weedboss.com / circle no. 275

Makita ►

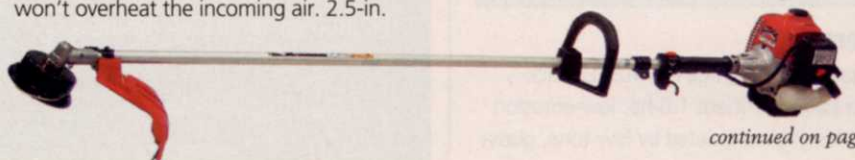
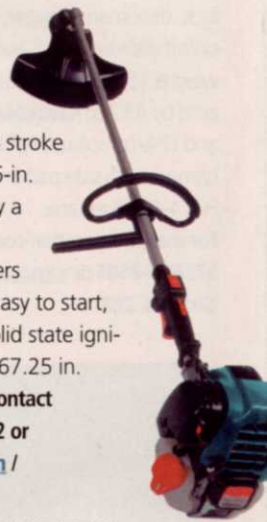
At 11.8 lbs., the EM4251 claims to be the world's lightest commercial mini-4 stroke string trimmer. Has 16-in. cut width. Powered by a 24.5cc engine, its 16.9-oz. fuel tank offers great fuel efficiency. Easy to start, quiet running, with solid state ignition. Overall length is 67.25 in.

For more information contact Makita at 800/462-5482 or www.makitausa.com / circle no. 276

Sierra Prime Line

Replacement trimmer parts and accessories, including nylon blades, line and filters, are available for quick shipment from Sierra. Order line by the 3-lb. or 5-lb. spool. Find everything from gas caps to edger blades to fuel line assemblies in the catalog or on-line.

For more information contact Sierra at 217/324-9400 or www.primelinepe.com / circle no. 277



continued on page 68

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Always read and follow label directions.



LM Reports

continued from page 66

Maruyama ▶

Maruyama's BST23 trimmer features a light, compact design. This 9.8-lb., 22.5cc machine has commercial features like a die-cast aluminum clutch housing, high and low frequency anti-vibration mounts, structural aluminum outer tube and a threaded drive-shaft mount. Recoil Assist Starter System requires 30% less effort to get running than a traditional starter system.

For more information contact Maruyama at 253/735-7368 or www.maruyama-us.com / circle no. 278



Tanaka ▶

The TCB-230 trimmer/brush cutter is powered by a 21cc, 1.1-hp low emission 2-stroke engine. Bearing supported, solid steel drive shaft provides smooth and efficient power transfer from the engine to the cutting head. Semi-automatic cutting head holds 25 ft. of .095 nylon line. Meets CARB and EPA standards with up to 70% reduced emissions.

For more information contact Tanaka at 888/482-6252 or www.tanaka-powerequipment.com / circle no. 279



Tru-Cut

The TC380B, TC280H and TC480H Commercial Pro edgers all trim with a 10-in. steel blade. Tricycle-style front tire makes maneuvering easy. The 380B has a 3.5-hp B&S, the 280H has a 2.5-hp Honda GX and the 480H a 4-hp Honda GX engine. All feature heavy-gauge tubular steel handle, comfort hand grips with throttle and clutch depth controls at top of handle.

For more information contact Tru-Cut at 323/258-4135 or www.trucutmowers.com / circle no. 280

continued on page 70

X-Ceptional Grooming with Beacon's New X-Drag

Beacon's sturdy new X-drag is ideal for a variety of infield grooming tasks including scarifying baselines, cutouts and home plate areas as well as nail dragging of infield skin topdressing. The versatile 3' x 2' X-drag can be pulled from either side so it fits easily between the three-foot line and foul line.

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Circle 132

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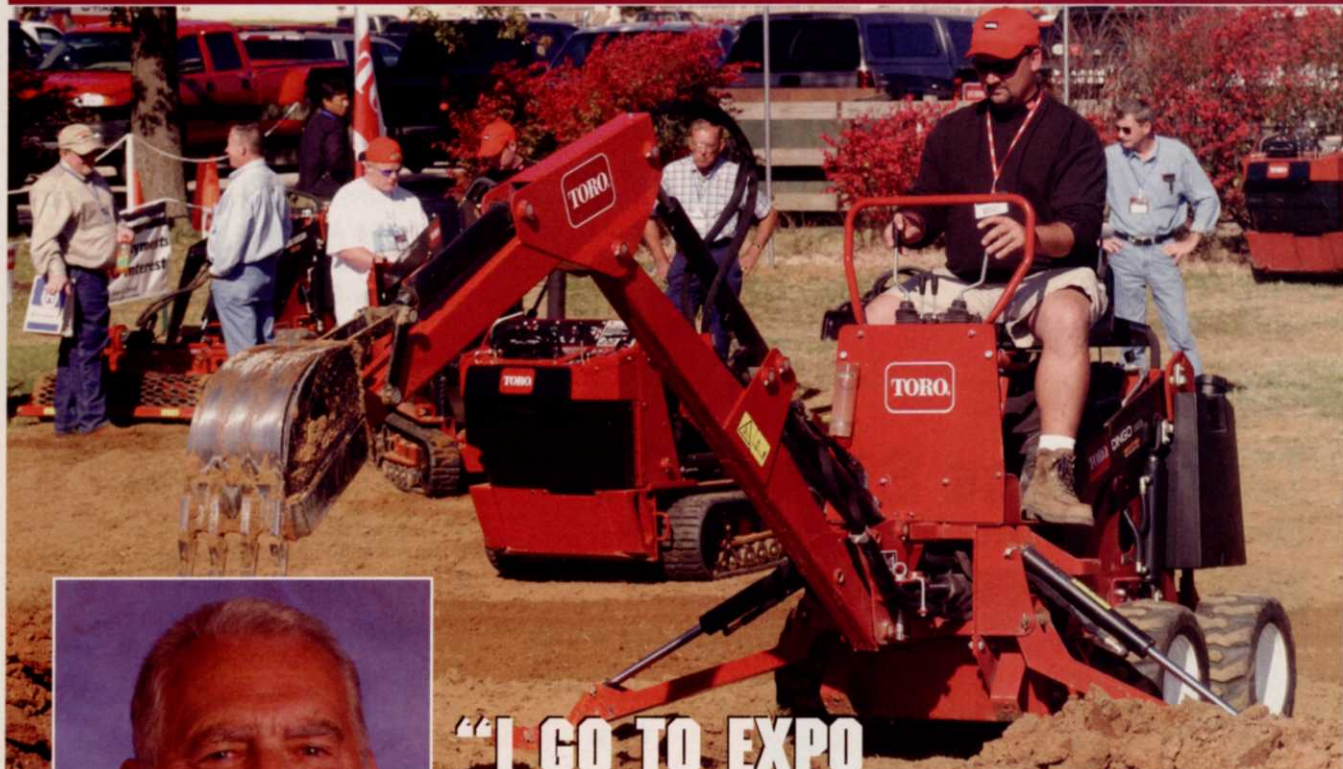
Jeff Bradshaw, Owner
Bradshaw Landscape Maintenance



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Circle 133

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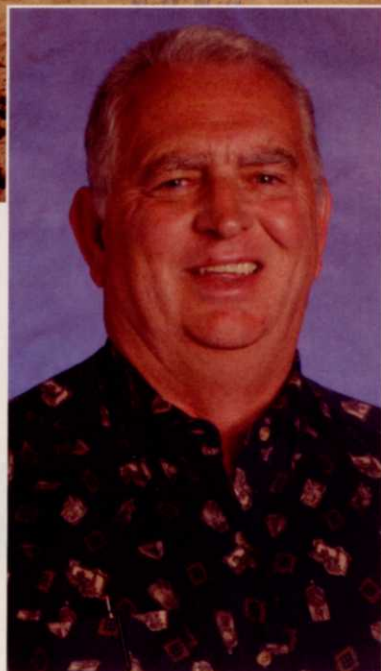
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Richmond Meadows
MRM Outdoor Designs, landscape design, installation & maintenance
Fletcher, NC



LM Reports

continued from page 68

Honda ▶

Honda Power Equipment's all-new HHT255 LTA 4-stroke trimmer promises to be the lightest and quietest of its kind with a



weight reduction of 2.58 lbs. and a noise reduction of 2.1 decibels.

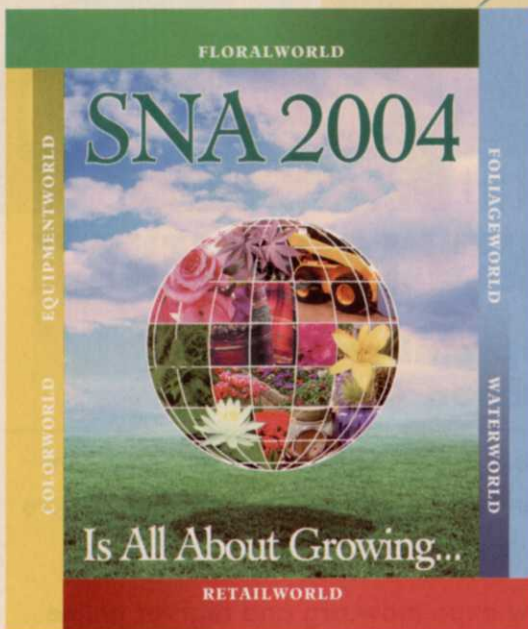
The 360-degree reclinable trimmer's use of mechanical decompression results

in a 40% reduction in the effort required for starting. A lightened flywheel works with a new accelerator pump-equipped carburetor to achieve rapid acceleration on par with that of a 2-stroke trimmer.

For more information contact Honda at 678/339-2600 or www.honda.com / circle no. 281

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Circle 131

Cub Cadet Commercial

Engineered specifically for commercial landscapers, the Cub Cadet Commercial line of hedge clippers includes the 24HC with 24-in. double-sided blade; 40HC (shown) with 40-in. single-sided blade; and 19EHC with 19-in. double-sided articulated blade and extended shaft. All have 25.6cc 2-cycle en-



gines, diaphragm with purge pump carburetor, dual piston rings and flywheel magneto starting system.

For more information contact your Cub Cadet Commercial dealer or visit www.cub-commercial.com / circle no. 282

Solo

Solo's straight shaft trimmers can be equipped with nylon string heads or steel blades for cutting grass or light brush. The 1.5-hp Model 129B is powered by a 29cc 2-cycle engine and features electronic ignition and bicycle handles. The 152 has a 52cc engine and 2.8 hp.

For more information contact Solo at 757/245-4228 or www.solousa.com / circle no. 283



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Maybe we should print our patent number for our competitors to see. Naaah. That would be rubbing it in.

Shindaiwa T2500 with C4 Technology[®]

High-visibility debris shield with line cutter

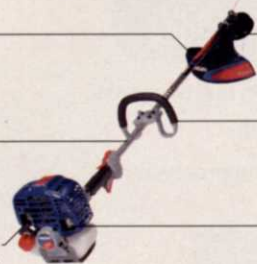
Heavy-duty, 4-bearing gearcase with helical gears

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Walbro WYL carburetor for all-position operation

Chrome-plated cylinder with 2-ring piston



Longaberger Homestead

2003 PGMS Grand Award Winner for Shopping Area

Property at a glance

Location: Newark, OH
Grounds Supervisor: Chad Dickson
Category: Shopping Area
Total budget: \$182,570
Year site built: 1998
Acres of turf: 14.87
Acres of woody ornamentals: 4.29
Acres of display beds: .19
Total paved area: 7.09 acres
Total man-hours/week: 243

Maintenance challenges

- ▶ Snow removal from decorative pavements
- ▶ Efficiently watering a large number of containers
- ▶ Compacted soils and drainage

Project checklist

- Completed in last two years:
- ▶ Turf borders
 - ▶ Drainage improvements

On the job

- ▶ 11 full-time staff, 5 seasonal employees, 2 licensed pesticide applicators

Chad Dickson would probably agree that he's a perfectionist. As he likes to put it, "The biggest thrill for me now is to take a site and put the Longaberger emblem on it."

Dickson has been with the company famous for its handcrafted baskets since high school, when he found that he liked the job so much he started looking at it as more of a career than summer employment. By hard work and attention to detail, he worked his way up to management. He says he's been fortunate to be able to experience many different management styles, which has helped him be a leader today.

"I try to include my key people in the decisions I make," Dickson says. "I lay out the day's or week's work and let them make the call on how they do it. The people who do the work often have the best ideas."

Longaberger Homestead, a 30-acre shopping and entertainment complex made to look like a turn-of-the-century mid-American small town, draws countless visitors every year. "I want them to think



Chad Dickson's goal is to keep Longaberger green and clean.



this is the cleanest place they've ever seen," says Dickson. All mowing and trimming in the

guest areas is completed prior to opening time. Walk-behind mowers are used inside the facility, and riders around the perimeter. The 648,000 sq. ft. of Kentucky bluegrass turf gets 40 to 45 cuts per year. More than 187,000 sq. ft. of plant beds keep the grounds crew busy, too, as does hardscape maintenance of 142,000 sq. ft. of custom designed pavements and 167,000 sq. ft. of parking lots.

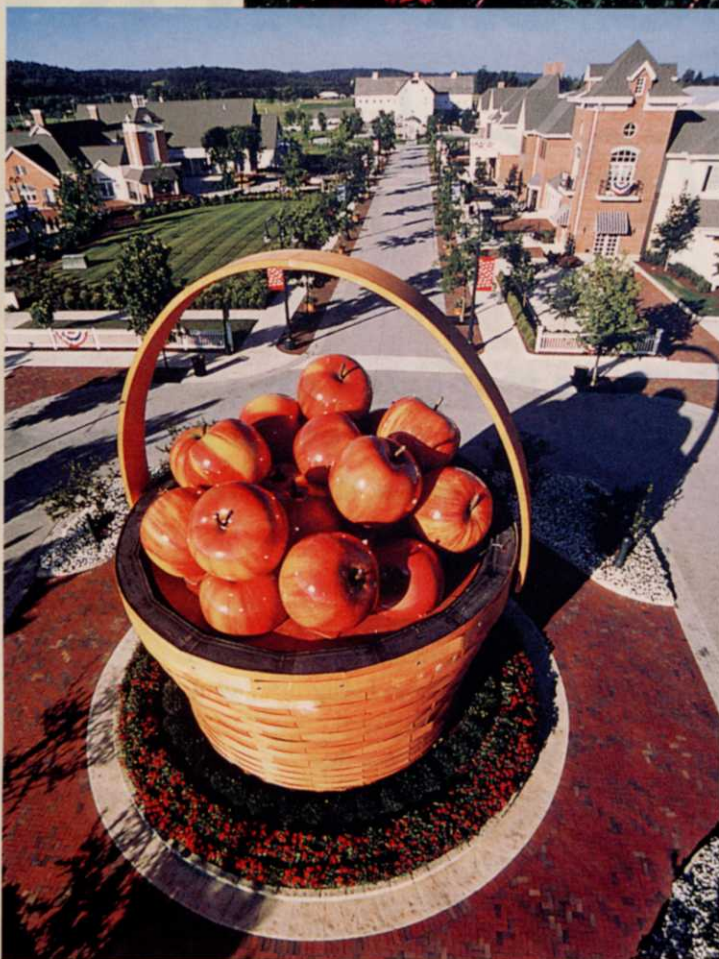
Editors' note: *Landscape Management* is the exclusive sponsor of the Green Star Professional Grounds Management Awards for outstanding management of residential, commercial and institutional landscapes. The 2004 winners will be named at the annual meeting of the Professional Grounds Management Society in November. For more information on the 2003 awards, contact PGMS at: 720 Light St. • Baltimore, MD 21230

• Phone: 410/223-2861. Web site:

www.pgms.org

PGMS Landscape
MANAGEMENT

Longaberger Homestead, located in central Ohio, beckons destination shoppers with its old-fashioned Midwest charm. Once there, they're treated to well-tended displays of seasonal color.



Longaberger is known worldwide for its baskets and also for the great care it takes with its showcase grounds.



Outsourcing — *here's how*

“**O**utsourcing” means: 1.) You hire someone outside your organization to do x, y and z for you, and then 2.) You sit back, relax and forget all about x, y and z...right? Wrong!

Not surprisingly, you get out what you put in with outsourcing. We spoke with three respected grounds professionals who agreed to share their experiences with you.

Start at the beginning

LM asked Mark Feist how he goes about outsourcing at American University in Washington D.C., where he is Assistant Director of Physical Plant. Feist has 85 acres and 20 in-house employees under his responsibility. Here are the steps he follows to get started deciding what and whether to outsource:

“There are four major reasons why we outsource,” he reports:

1. Cost. Somebody else makes more economic sense.

2. A need for quality or a technical specialty. “An example is our large tree

Three respected grounds pros share their secrets to hiring outside contractors to do those special jobs

BY GEORGE WITTERSCHEIN



Mark Feist

pruning, where there are specialty issues including training and liability. By ‘large,’ I mean a tree that requires climbing,” he says.

3. Liability and licensing.

Not only in the tree area but, for instance, with interior and outside pest control. Licensing enters into this picture also. “A contractor normally has all the licenses

necessary to perform his specialty; we may or may not have those in-house,” says Feist.

4. Seasonal resource allocation. “Landscaping work has its peaks and valleys, and at the peak times we may need supplemental labor. We find we need additional manpower resources in the spring when we’re planting our annuals, so we outsource for it.”

With those four yardsticks in hand, Feist says, “First we identify the need, using the four elements I mentioned above. We try

to plan ahead, and, on a yearly cycle, identify the need for the year in those areas.

“We then create a scope of work for that particular area, for example a tree contract. Then we prepare a request for proposal (RFP). This is made available to interested and qualified contractors,” says Feist.

“Past experience of course plays a big role here, both in helping us forecast our outsourcing needs and in selecting who we go to for those needs,” he concludes.

Nick Caggiano, Superintendent of Parks for the city of Nashua, NH, says that his outsourcing ranges from tree work to swimming pool maintenance. (See sidebar, “Contractor opportunities”).

Michael Loftus, Mid-Atlantic Regional Director of the Professional Grounds Management Society (PGMS), is Assistant Director of Facilities for the University of Delaware at its Newark campus. His outsourced activities list is similar to Caggiano’s, as is Mark Feist’s.

continued on page 76

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continued from page 74

Follow a process

Once you know what you intend to outsource, the next question is how. For your benefit, here is a summary of our three sources' observations:

► **Anticipate your outsourcing needs.**

This one isn't always difficult, because so many outsourced functions (mowing, tree work, planting, setting up for graduations and public events) are repetitive year after year. The biggest advantage of using last year as a guide for this year or next is that it helps you to budget for your outsourcing needs.

"We pretty much know what we're going to need," says Caggiano. "I can predict and budget how many big trees we will need to take down and so on, although unforeseeable weather events like the high winds we had last autumn can upset the apple cart sometimes."



Nick Caggiano

► **Keep your paperwork in order.**

This includes RFPs, bid processes and purchasing regulations. Exactly what your outsourced contractors do for you, and how well they do it, depends to a great extent on how you went about hiring them. Make sure your contracts are clear and comprehensive about what it is you expect the contractor to do for you.

Virtually all government entities and many corporations have regulations in place that governs purchasing. "Our purchasing department is helpful with a terrific system that gets the bid out in many channels, including the Internet, so that the same contractors don't necessarily get the job year in and year out," Nashua's

Caggiano reports.

To simplify his bidding workload, Delaware's Loftus uses term contracts (sometimes called "open purchase orders") with the term contractors working

Don't keep blindly reusing old contracts from year to year. Conditions change.

on a T&M basis. (See sidebar, "Contractor opportunities").

After you've hired an external resource to work for you, your relations with the outsourced firm will be governed by the contract you signed with them. You can hold an outsourced company to "The Language You Wrote into the Contract," but not to "The Language You Should Have Written into the Contract, But Didn't."

Another pointer: Don't keep blindly reusing old contracts from year to year. Conditions change.

"We re-examine our contracts before we rebid them if they are pre-existing," says Mike Loftus. "We don't just cut and paste from an old contract. For example,

continued on page 78

Contractor opportunities

Here's a list of the functions our three sources typically outsource. This list provided by Nick Caggiano from Nashua, NH, Mark Feist of American University, Washington D.C. and Mike Loftus of the University of Delaware is comprehensive.

Pesticide applications. "Most of these we outsource to large national companies. They're more efficient at it and they have all the right equipment, safety materials and so on."

Large tree removal. "For very large trees, it makes more sense economically and from a safety standpoint to sub that out to a tree company that has a crane and experienced climbers."

Brick work. Nashua's Main Street and a number of the side streets have brick sidewalks in constant need of repair. "Rather than dedicate two employees to that, I found it easier to just bid that out and let a local mason do it."

Nursery. "In years past, Nashua had a greenhouse and we raised our own flowers, but that wasn't very cost-effective. Now we buy them from nurseries."

Pressure washing of two sports stadiums. (Including one that is the home field of the professional Nashua Pride baseball team). "A company that does this full-time just comes in, performs the work smoothly, and it's done."

Large sod installation. "This is something we perform on a shared basis with a contractor. I'll let the contractor roll it out and install it, while I supply him with some of the laborers. They're more efficient, and they have the right equipment."

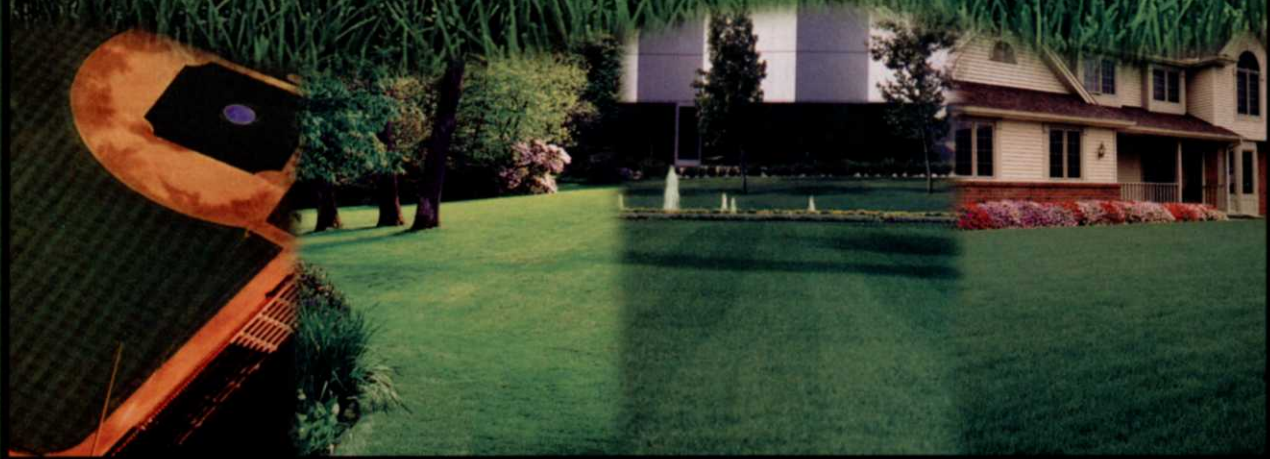
Swimming pools, a management nightmare. "And it's a priority to keep them going through the summer. We really don't want a pool down because it's only open for 10 weeks a year in our short New England summer. So we rely on experts."

Snow removal. "We just don't have a fleet of vehicles and equipment sufficient to handle all situations and all storms."

Irrigation. Installation and repair and seasonal maintenance are outsourced.

continued on page 78

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continued from page 76

on a snow removal contract, any additions to the campus acreage could change the scope of work."

► **Stay flexible.** The fact that grounds outsourcing needs tend to repeat year after year doesn't mean that what you did last year is written in stone. Things change; new needs arise and so do new opportunities, such as saving budget dollars or providing better service.

The City of Nashua used to grow its own flowers. "For our beautification program, where we place flowers throughout the city, we once had a greenhouse and raised our own flowers," says Caggiano. "But that wasn't very cost-effective. Now we buy them from nurseries and keep them in a hothouse until we're ready to use them. It just makes economic sense."

► **Remember your staff.** Don't overlook or neglect the feelings of your in-house staff about your outsourcing. In an era when everyone seems to know somebody who's lost their job to an outsource, your employees will be watching every contract

you put out for bid. They'll be fretting, "Is this the one that takes my job?"

"You have to make sure everybody is busy," says Caggiano, whose Nashua, NH, work force consists of unionized municipal employees. "You can't justify outsourcing if you have people who aren't busy. And they have to be busy doing not just anything, but working within their job descriptions. I have a good relationship with the union workers, and as long as everyone is busy working within their classification, things tend to work out.

And since Nashua is a fairly sizable city of 90,000, our work force always has plenty to do."

Communicating never hurts, either. "Since outsourcing often brings with it unfounded worries in the minds of staff, we try to communicate about outsourcing issues with staff in a timely manner," adds Delaware's Loftus. "So you could say that



Mike Loftus

we use outsourcing not to replace but to enhance our in-house resources."

► **Monitor the outsourced work performance.** Of course, outsourcing won't succeed if contractors do not give you what

you need from them, and in a timely fashion. You'll have to make sure they do.

"I or one of my managers will go out in the field and actually do hands-on monitoring of contractors in the process of performing work for us," says Loftus. "You have to inspect all the way through a job and not just before and after."

Adds Caggiano, "You need to have somebody in your office who monitors the subs on both quality and quantity of work. I have an assistant superintendent, John Barry, who handles that. He's developed expertise in the area of monitoring contractors." **LM**

— *The author is a freelance writer who lives in New Jersey. He can be reached at grbwitt@aol.com.*

continued from page 76

"We experienced an increase in irrigation on campus without additional staff to support the operation," says Caggiano.

Excavation work, depending on the availability of the excavation section of his Grounds Department.

Fence installation and repair. "We also use term contractors. They work on a T&M basis to supplement staff at a guaranteed rate," adds Caggiano. "If we have a project, we call them to come in quickly and we supply some labor and some materials. To make sure they don't overrun our capacity to pay them, we work closely with them to complete emergencies and planned work. In the case of scheduled work, we'll secure an estimate to ensure that the job begins with a clear under-

standing of the scope of work. When you need someone quickly, it avoids a lot of competitive bids."

"We also outsource big **concrete work, sports lighting** (we don't want to be climbing lighting poles) and **granite work** for curbs and monuments," Caggiano concludes.

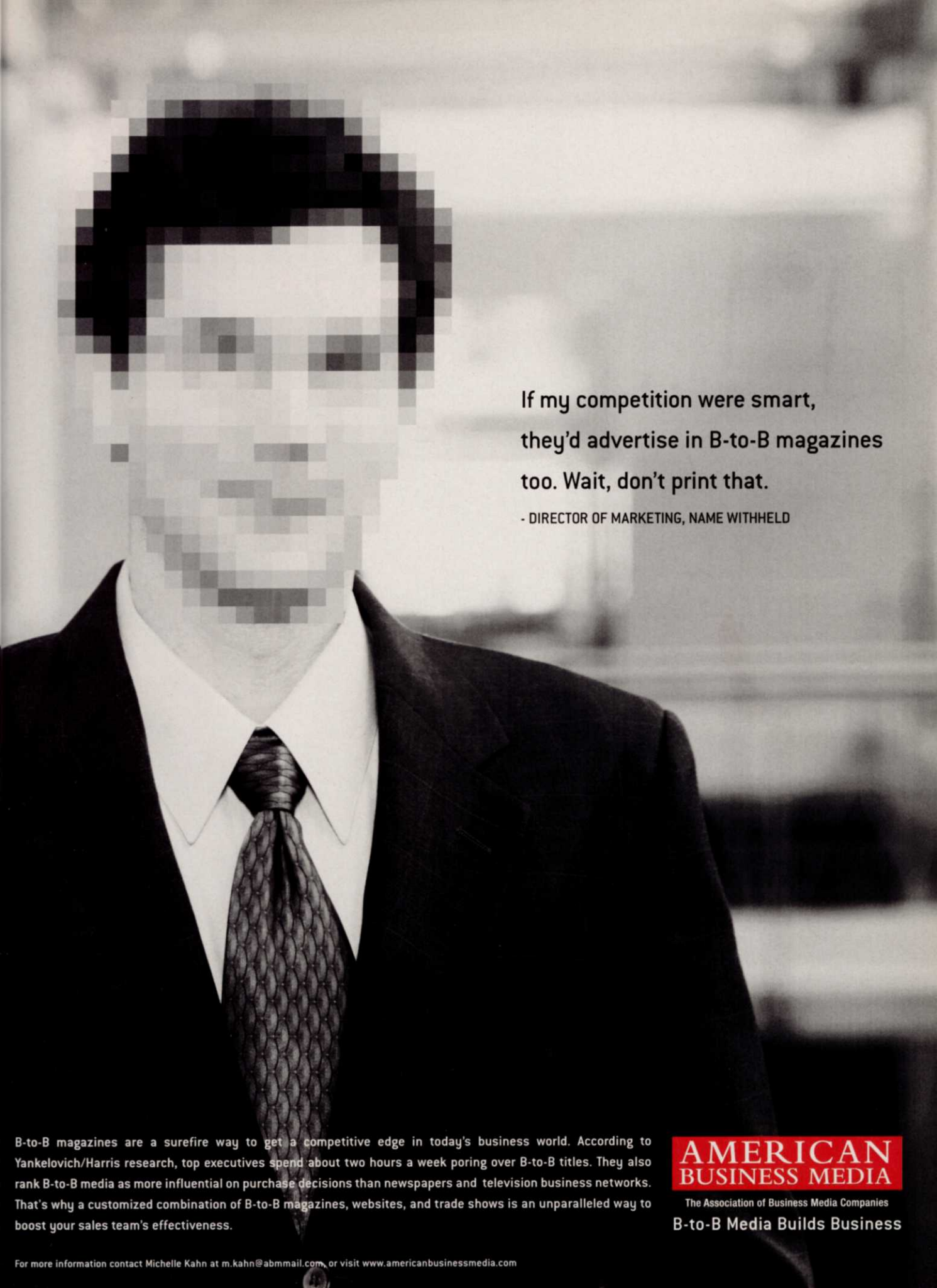
Mark Feist's list at American University is similar but he adds **mowing**. "We have planted almost 500,000 square feet of perennial beds. In order to accommodate that additional landscape maintenance workload without adding to the burden on the existing grounds staff, we decided to outsource mowing," he reports.

In Delaware, Mike Loftus also outsources **mulching**. "We've hired someone

to blow mulch onto landscape beds and parking islands. Since we have a very narrow window (between spring planting and June graduation) within which to complete most of the mulching on campus, we needed to find an efficient method of spreading a lot of mulch in a short period of time. Utilizing this service allowed us to accomplish in several days what has taken weeks in the past at a time when we can't spare the labor."

"We also outsource **sweeping of parking lots and roads** due to the specialized equipment required. We re-evaluate this decision periodically as our site changes and new equipment comes into the market.

— GW

A black and white photograph of a man in a dark suit, white shirt, and patterned tie. His face is obscured by a heavy pixelation effect, making it unrecognizable. The background is a blurred office setting.

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Howard Price Turf Equipment introduces an 80-in. cut, zero-turn mower with an articulating deck. A wing floats 20 degrees up and 12 degrees down for a manicured cut over knolls and undulations. The deck hydraulically folds and lifts for transport. The large cutting capacity allows operators to cut 6.5 acres per hour. The new "Z" may be ordered with a 29-hp direct fuel injected, water-cooled Kawasaki gas engine or a 36-hp Yanmar diesel engine.

For more information contact Howard Price at 636/532-7000 or www.howardprice-turf.com / circle no. 250

Use your head

Shindaiwa announces the availability of a new heavy-duty fixed-line trimmer head. The trimmer head will accommodate all line diameter sizes up to 0.155 in. and can be loaded in either a 2-line or 4-line configuration.

Also, it's made of super lightweight high-tech alloy which, according to the company, makes it nearly indestructible.

The head will fit all Shindaiwa straight shaft trimmers, brushcutters and the multi-tool system.

For more information contact Shindaiwa at 800/467-8445 or www.shindaiwa.com / circle no. 251



Track equipment maintenance

Link It Software Corporation offers a Web-enabled version of its EZ Maintenance software. This will allow companies to access the same maintenance management software program at all localities via the Internet. Each location can independently schedule and track the maintenance for which they're responsible. Maintenance managers will be able to monitor the maintenance records of any vehicle or piece of equipment located anywhere at any time. The web version, like the standard ver-



Spread the word

Pequea Machine's GT-100 top-dresser is loaded with features for fast, accurate and efficient application. The fully adjustable gate, 20-in. wide conveyor and spindlers work together to create a precise spread depth and pattern from a 23-cu.-ft. capacity hopper. The optional TURFtronic vehicle

mount control system allows the operator to make adjustments to the spread pattern without stopping the machine or getting off the vehicle. The dual spindlers spread the pattern from 15 ft. to 30 ft. and tilts 15 degrees up or down while the metering gate manually adjusts from 0 to 7 in.

For more information contact Pequea Turf at 717/354-4343 or www.pequeamachine.com / circle no. 252

sion of EZ Maintenance, will schedule and track maintenance, create work orders and track fuel costs. It has a complete parts inventory section, and will handle an unlimited number of both vehicles and equipment.

For more information contact Link It at 904/287-8085 or www.ez-maintenance.com / circle no. 253

All in the grass

A quick-attach, 12-bushel grass catcher that allows installation or removal in 90 seconds or less is available for the EverRide Warrior zero-turn mower. Its cable control engagement is easily accessible to the operator, and its hook mount boot allows for quick installation and removal. The mower, which

features a 25-hp Kawasaki engine, 54- and 60-in. decks and hydrostatic drive, was designed to accept a grass catcher, unlike other mowers where grass catchers were designed, EverRide contends, as an afterthought.

For more information contact EverRide at www.everride.com / circle no. 254

Hunter's new mid-range rotor

Hunter Industries has released the PGJ, a new mid-range rotor for use on all 15- to 30-ft.

sites. The PGJ is available as a shrub head, 4-, 6- and 12-in. pop-ups, and can be used as an alternative to spray heads on small turf or landscaped areas. Two rows of PGJs will irrigate the same area as three rows of spray heads. Also, the PGJ can be installed on the same zone as larger Hunter rotors. With a gallon-per-minute rate of .64 to 5.3, the PGJ is also recommended for

use on low pressure/low flow irrigation systems. Installer-friendly features such as arc settings can be





adjusted with either a screwdriver or Hunter wrench. A "captive" radius adjustment screw has also been built into the PGJ.

For more information contact Hunter at 800/733-2823 or

www.hunterindustries.com / circle no. 255



An easy fit

Rain Bird's Landscape Drip Division has introduced a new Easy Fit Compression System that helps simplify and expedite installation of landscape drip systems. The system is comprised of three fittings, five adapters and a flush cap. The three fittings (elbow, coupling and tee) feature Rain Bird's Easy Fit design that accepts multiple sizes of tubing, from .63 in. to .71 in. O.D. A connection is easy to make each time, as the amount of force required to insert tubing is reduced by almost 50%. In addition, the system now includes five male- and female-threaded adapters that are attached to the ends of the compression fittings for increased flexibility and installation ease.

For more information contact Rain Bird at 800/724-6247 or www.rainbird.com / circle no. 256

Twin engines ▲

According to Dixie Chopper, its new S'Burb'N Turb'N riding mower is the only production twin engine mower in the world. It offers the power of a diesel engine with the cost effectiveness of an air-cooled unit. The "twin" model XXW4600-72 was developed to meet the demand for a mower that could cut a 72-in. wide path at 13 mph. It has two 23-hp Kohler Command engines that work in unison or independently and are synchronized by using manifold pressure. It comes with a quad-loop hydraulic system, 14-gal. fuel ca

capacity, six-rail frame, velvet touch control system and one-micron engine oil bypass filtration system.

For more information contact Dixie Chopper at 765/246-7737 or www.dixiechopper.com / circle no. 257

Spray it

Otterbine Barebo introduces its newest pattern, the Genesis, to its aerating fountain line. The Genesis' fountain-like two tiers and 16 silhouetted streams resemble an architectural fountain. The 5-hp's tallest tier can reach spray heights of 18 ft. and widths of 62 ft. Minimum operating depth of less than 30 ft., and

1- to 5-hp models available in single and three phase.

For more information contact Otterbine Barebo at 610/965-6990 or www.otterbine.com / circle no. 258

Stay sharp

Rapco's carbide chain is ideal for landscape and arborist professionals challenged with difficult cutting applications. Engineered specifically for adverse conditions, Rapco's chain is designed to stay sharp — up to 25 times longer than standard chain. Manufactured in nearly all pitches and gauges to fit most chain saws, the chain is available with three cutter styles and two types of carbide.

For more information contact Rapco at 800/959-6130 or www.rapcoindustries.com / circle no. 259

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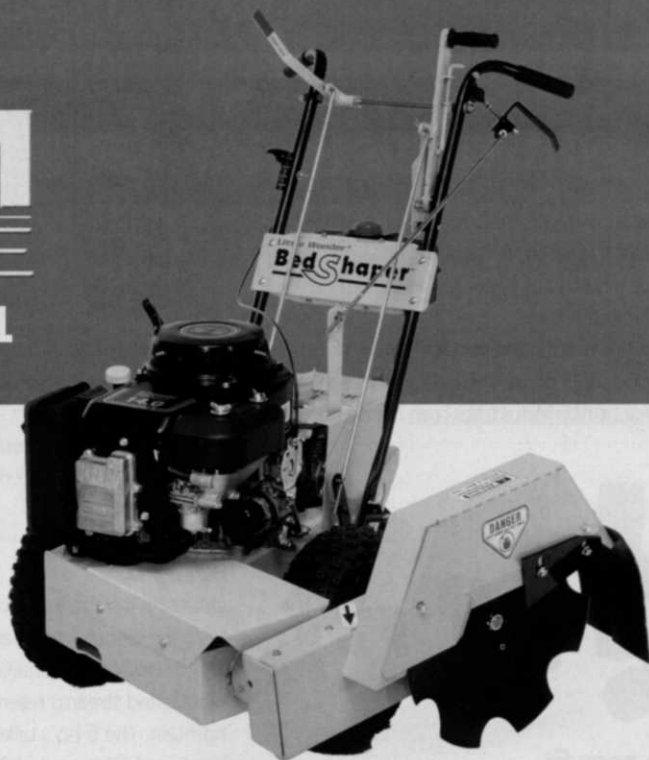
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 365 Dealers, Distributors, Formulators & Brokers 370 Manufacturers
 850 Other (please specify) _____

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 20 **Manager/Superintendent** - Arborist, Architect, Landscape/Grounds Manager, Superintendent, Foreman, Supervisor
 30 **Government Official** - Government Commissioner, Agent, Other Government Official
 40 **Specialist** - Forester, Consultant, Agronomist, Pilot, Instructor, Researcher, Horticulturist, Certified Specialist
 50 **Other Titled and Non-Titled Personnel** (please specify) _____

3. Which of the following services does your company provide? (Fill in ALL that apply)
Maintenance/Services
 A Mowing F Turf Fertilization C Tree Care
 B Turf Insect Control D Turf Aeration L Pond/Lake Care
 J Turf Weed Control E Irrigation Services N Snow Removal
 G Turf Disease Control H Ornamental Care O Other (please specify) _____

Design/Build
 I Landscape Design M Landscape Installation P Irrigation Installation
 K Paving/Deck/Patio Installation Q Other (please specify) _____

4. Type of customer served? (Fill in ONE ONLY)
 A Commercial B Residential C Both

5. Which of the following landscape products do you purchase or specify? (Fill in ALL that apply)
 B Blowers H Herbicides Y Ornamental/Nursery Products P Tractors
 C Chain Saws I Insecticides Z Pavers/Masonry/Bricks/Rocks Q Truck Trailers/Attachments
 U Engines W Irrigation Systems (Hardscape Materials) R Trucks
 V Erosion Control X Landscape Lighting 3 Seed/Sod S Turfseed
 F Fertilizers J Line Trimmers 1 Skid Steers T Utility Vehicles
 G Fungicides K Mowers N Spreaders 2 Water Features

6. My firm's annual revenue is: (Fill in ONE only)
 F More than \$4,000,000 B \$1,500,000 - \$1,999,999 D \$500,000 - \$999,999
 G \$2,000,000 - \$4,000,000 C \$1,000,000 - \$1,499,999 E Less than \$500,000

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104	116	128	140	152	164	176	188	200	212	224	236	248	260	272	284	296	308
105	117	129	141	153	165	177	189	201	213	225	237	249	261	273	285	297	309
106	118	130	142	154	166	178	190	202	214	226	238	250	262	274	286	298	310
107	119	131	143	155	167	179	191	203	215	227	239	251	263	275	287	299	311
108	120	132	144	156	168	180	192	204	216	228	240	252	264	276	288	300	312
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- F Turf Fertilization
- D Turf Aeration
- E Irrigation Services
- H Ornamental Care
- C Tree Care
- L Pond/Lake Care
- N Snow Removal
- O Other (please specify) _____

Design/Build

- I Landscape Design
- K Paving/Deck/Patio Installation
- M Landscape Installation
- Q Other (please specify) _____
- P Irrigation Installation

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- C Both

5. Which of the following landscape products do you purchase or specify? (Fill in ALL that apply)

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- C Chain Saws
- U Engines
- V Erosion Control
- F Fertilizers
- G Fungicides
- H Herbicides
- I Insecticides
- W Irrigation Systems
- X Landscape Lighting
- J Line Trimmers
- K Mowers
- Y Ornamental/Nursery Products
- Z Pavers/Masonry/Bricks/Rocks (Landscape Materials)
- 3 Seed/Sod
- 1 Skid Steers
- N Spreaders
- P Tractors
- Q Truck Trailers/Attachments
- R Trucks
- S Turfseed
- T Utility Vehicles
- 2 Water Features

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108	120	132	144	156	168	180	192	204	216	228	240	252	264	276	288	300	312
109	121	133	145	157	169	181	193	205	217	229	241	253	265	277	289	301	313
110	122	134	146	158	170	182	194	206	218	230	242	254	266	278	290	302	314
111	123	135	147	159	171	183	195	207	219	231	243	255	267	279	291	303	315
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21 University of Arizona Desert Horticulture Conference /
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7-9 International Symposium on Snow Removal and Ice Control Technology / Spokane, WA; Sponsored by the Transportation Research Board; 202/334-2934

9-11 Eastern Snow Conference / Portland, ME; www.easternsnow.org

10-12 Snow & Ice Management Symposium / Minneapolis, MN; 814/835-3577; www.sima.org

17 Northeast Ohio Lawn Care Seminar / Wooster, OH; 800/510-5296; www.ohiolawn.care.org

17-19 Super Floral Show / Charlotte, NC; 617/728-0300; www.superfloralshow.com

22-23 Virginia Turfgrass Council Demo Days / Virginia Beach, VA; 540/942-8873

27-30 Garden Centers of America Specialty Tour / Williamsburg/Tidewater, VA; 888/648-6463; info@garden-centersofamerica.org

July

6-8 Perennial Plant Symposium & Trade Show / New York, NY; 614/771-8431; www.perennialplant.org

13-18 ANLA Convention & Executive Learning Retreat / Maui, HI; 202/789-2900; www.anla.org

19-20 PLCAA Legislative Day on the Hill / Washington, DC; 800/458-3466

24-28 Soil and Water Conservation Society / St. Paul, MN; 515/289-2331; www.swcs.org

27-29 Penn Allied Nursery Trade Show (PANTS) / Fort Washington, PA; 717/238-1673; www.plna.com

27-30 Turfgrass Producers International Summer Convention & Field Days / Manheim, PA; 800/705-9898; www.turfgrasssod.org

August

5-7 American Conifer Society Meeting / Newark, OH; 410/721-6611; www.conifersociety.org

7-11 International Society of Arboriculture Annual Conference & Trade Show / Pittsburgh, PA; 217/355-9411; www.isa-arbor.com

12-14 SNA 2004 World Showcase of Horticulture / Atlanta, GA; 770/953-3311; www.sna.org

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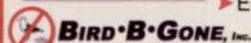
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Category	2002 Actual	2003 Forecast	2004 Forecast	2005 Forecast
Hand-held blowers	1,800,500	2,017,621	2,076,061	2,015,935
% change	5.5%	12.1%	2.9%	-2.9%
Backpack blowers	393,104	466,365	448,269	432,256
% change	10.5%	18.6%	-3.9%	-3.6%
Trimmers	5,499,580	6,437,771	6,828,439	6,682,894
% change	13.2%	17.1%	6.1%	-2.2%
Chain saws	2,600,075	2,666,379	2,779,554	2,687,289
% change	15.4%	2.6%	4.2%	-3.3%





* Unit shipments on calendar year basis



SOURCE: OPEI

Survey says...

Q The U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services agency announced it won't accept any more H-2B applications for 2004 since it has already reached a congressionally mandated cap of 66,000. Is the H-2B cap a problem for your business?

- 44%  I've got all my labor needs lined up already
- 26%  This is going to hurt us a lot!
- 19%  I'm not sure what H-2B is
- 10%  This might be a problem, not sure

Percentages based on 149 responses

Log onto www.landscapemanagement.net and answer our online survey. We publish the results here monthly.



RETURN ON ASSETS IS REAL TEST OF HEALTH

smaller business, 25% return on assets is the minimum you should expect from your business investment. You of course want a higher percentage than this, and some companies in the industry, in fact, achieve as high as a 50% return on assets.

To calculate return on assets, divide your net profits

before taxes (this is the number from the bottom line on your income statement) by the total average assets invested in your company. This number comes from your balance sheet. It's the dollar value total of your cash, accounts receivable, inventory and equipment (net depreciation). Here's a sample calculation:

1. Take annual net profit: \$100,000
2. Then add your Jan. 1 beginning assets: \$375,000
3. And Dec. 31 year-end assets: \$425,000
4. This is your average assets (\$375,000 + \$425,000)/2: \$400,000
5. Then calculate return on assets: \$100,000/\$400,000 = 25%

SOURCE: KEHOEGUIDO



How healthy is your business from a financial point of view? The financial ratio "return on assets" is the real test of health, not net profits. Based on the financial risk associated with investing capital in and owning a seasonal

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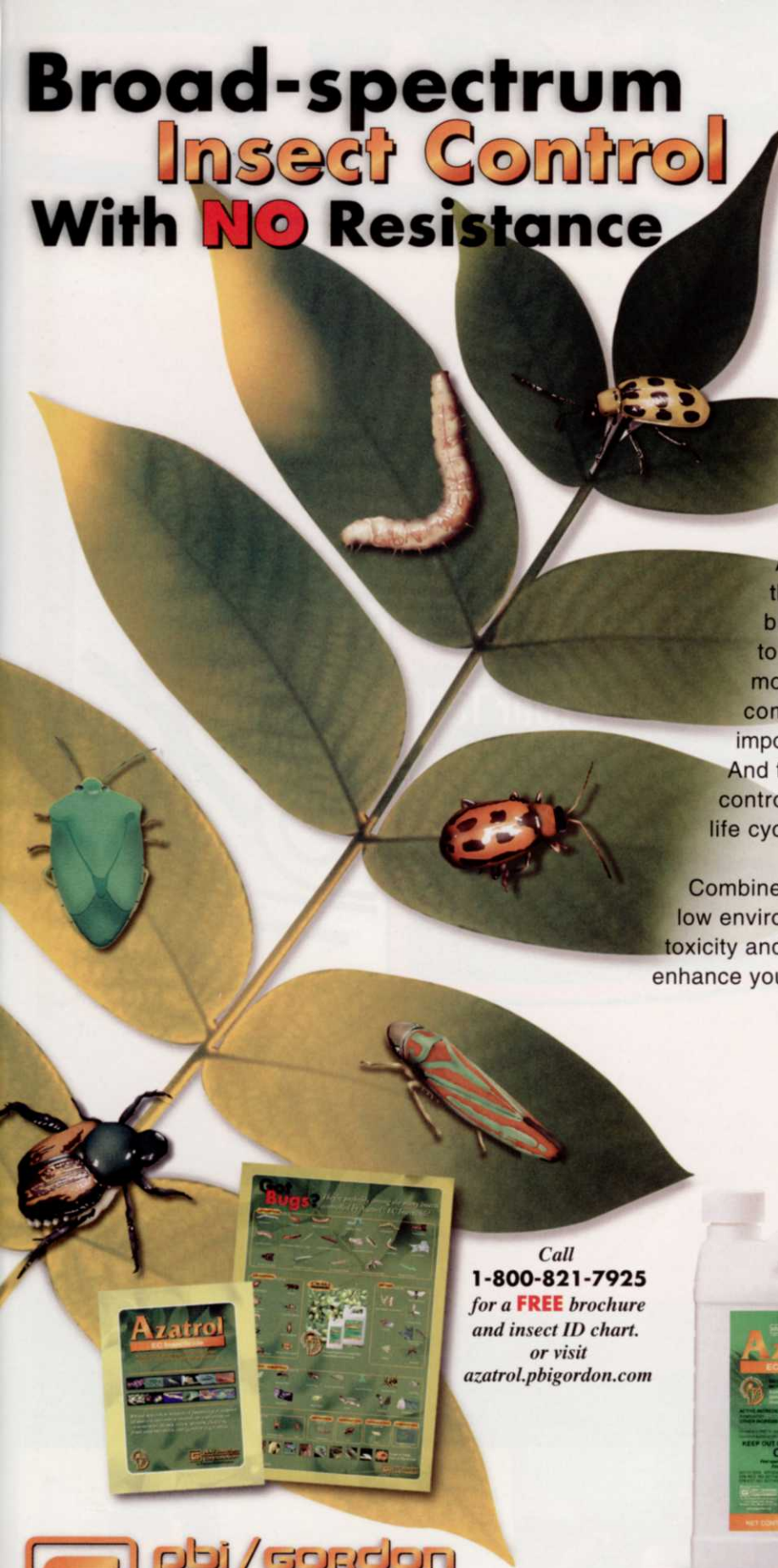
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