



AT A GLANCE

COMPANY: Weed Man, Springfield, MA

FOUNDED: 2001

TITLE: President/Owner

NUMBER OF LOCATIONS: two franchise locations

EMPLOYEES: 15

INDUSTRY INVOLVEMENT: Started in landscape and lawn care business in 1977, former member of PLCAA, current chairman of the PLANET Lawn Care Specialty Group, board member and immediate past president of Massachusetts Association of Lawn Care Professionals.

PERSONAL HIGHLIGHTS & HOBBIES: "I love to be outdoors and to spend time with my family camping, hiking, biking and kayaking."

FAMILY: Wife, Joy, and two daughters: One in college and the other getting ready to go to college next fall.

Things are looking up in the weed business. **Tom Mauer**, president and owner of two Springfield, MA-based Weed Man franchises is expecting a year of growth. "Our payments are ahead of last year, and it appears customers are making the commitment to get caught up on some of the services they might have skipped last year." Mauer discusses changes in the industry and how he deals with a fluctuating economy.

Tom Mauer, tell us when, how and why you got involved with the lawn care industry.

"I fell in love with the Green Industry when I was a little kid following my grandfather around in his gardens and greenhouse. I grew up working in the soil, and when it came time to make a decision about college, it seemed a natural fit for me to start off in the direction of landscaping and lawns."

New England is one of the most ecologically conscious regions of the country. How does your company meet the environmental expectations of your clients? "It comes down to communication of what we're doing on the lawn and to the recommendations we make for each customer. We try to let the customer know there is no standard fit that works on every lawn. Our goal is to work with the customer with a 'big-picture' approach that will include nutrients, control applications, cultural practices and improvements like core aeration that help to improve

the lawn and soil ecology. And educating the customer on issues like water needs and promoting best practices validates our commitment to protecting our green spaces."

How to you respond to customers who ask for organic or natural lawn care? "We'll ask them 'What is it exactly that you're looking for? Do you mean organic fertilizer? Or do you mean you don't want pesticides?' And oftentimes, they will respond, 'Yes, I don't want pesticides.' Or they will say, 'Give me a program without pesticides unless I want you to spray the weeds, then I'll let you know.' We can work with that."

How would you describe selling to and serving today's customers versus customers of 10 years ago? "Tactically, the selling process has changed because of the do-not-call legislation. But

selling to the customer is really still the same. For the most part, they want a 'green, weed-free lawn.' Making a sale means educating the customer about the value of their lawn or green space, and helping them to understand there is no way to guarantee a totally 'weed-free lawn,' but we will work with them to improve their lawn and soil's health. And when there are problems, we're the professionals who will be there to take care of it."

What do you feel it's going to take for the lawn care industry to see the kind of growth it experienced in the years prior to this recent recession?

"We need to educate consumers on the value of lawns and landscapes to the environment. Customers buy lawn care because they want their lawns to look nice, and possibly because it's an expectation a lawn should look nice

to add value to a property. We tend not to focus on the real value of what a lawn does as a 'green space.' It's time for us to move beyond pure aesthetics to creating interest, value and demand based on our contribution to 'green.'"

OUR GOAL IS TO WORK WITH A 'BIG PICTURE' APPROACH THAT HELPS TO IMPROVE THE LAWN AND SOIL."