

"PennLinks is Paradise at the End of 'Hell's Half Acre' "



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"The reward for powerful strokes and crafty strategy is the PennLinks green that finishes the hole.

"Members welcome the predictability and consistency of this and the other greens on our course.

"All 18 greens were redone in the fall of 1991, and were in play the following spring. We gassed the existing grasses before renovating and reseeding our soil greens. Based on my prior success with PennLinks creeping bentgrass, I felt secure in

specifying PennLinks. Even with our heat and humid conditions, it survives and thrives in Baltimore.

"Once our members reach the paradise at the end of 'Hell's Half Acre', they never look back.

"But they sure do talk about it".

Douglas W. Petersan, Supt.
Baltimore Country Club
Timonium, Maryland

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International Society of Arboriculture, P.O. Box 908, Urbana, IL 61801; (217) 328-2032.

International Turfgrass Society, Crop & Soil Environmental Sciences, VPI-SU, Blacksburg, VA 24061-0403; (703) 231-9796.



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AS WE SEE IT

JERRY ROCHE, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF



Growing not always easy in this economic climate

Et tu! To grow or not to grow—that is the question. Whether 'tis nobler to be static, or to suffer the slings and arrows of expansion.

Okay, so I'm no Willie Shakespeare.

But in that first paragraph, you can read what happens when someone tries to be something he's not...it just doesn't work.

Growing (the subject of our cover story this month) is not easy, ever—much less in the current economic climate.

One of the great quotes I wrote down while researching the cover story is this: **"You cannot push growth; you have to release it."**

Another: **"The act of growing implies, at the least, paying attention to the world around you; learning from others; and changing yourself."**

In this context, paying attention to the world around you means knowing the market, knowing the general economic climate, and predicting what future services might be in demand.

Learning from others means getting critical feedback from customers. It's not enough—any more—to be content with a batch of kind comments. **You have to really work to pry information from your customers.** The information can then be used to improve your business and your standing with your customers. Mostly, though, it's information that you can learn from.

Learning from others also might mean getting critical feedback from your employees. **You cannot plot out a growth curve that might exceed the growth curve of your employees. They have to grow with the company.**

One of the reference books I read suggests this:

"Sit down with employees and explain how you think the business is going to grow in the next year, and how you believe this will affect the different jobs or departments. Then find out what each employee thinks of the scenario...and whether they

will be with you or against you."

Sound advice.

Once you've determined how you're going to improve and grow, sometimes the hardest part of the entire process is changing your business to accommodate the anticipated growth.

If you're lucky, you'll be able to grow without having to sink a lot of money into materials and equipment, at least initially. (If a branch office is necessary, you could be facing additional start-up costs approaching as much as \$500,000, according to one landscaper we talked to.)

Finally, after all the growth mechanisms are in place, you wake up every morning to the sound of chirping bluebirds. The phone is ringing off the hook. The sun is highlighted against a cloudless azure sky.

...But wait just a minute. All might not really be right with the world.

One expert says that **the most perilous time is when a company starts to succeed wildly, enjoys high earnings and shows rapid sales growth.** Those symptoms can breed mistakes that are masked by the company's outward prosperity.

When you're hustling to please all your customers and working long hours to keep pace with all the new sales, small things can start falling through the cracks. And then the pendulum begins to swing the other way. Maybe you hear more complaints; maybe you start losing employees; maybe your pre-tax profits plummet.

No, growing in this economic climate is not easy.

But it's possible—likely, even—if you follow some of the suggestions in our cover story.

LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT

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6 Growth strategies

A business is never stagnant. According to a recent publication, it's either growing or dying. Here are some tips on avoiding the latter.

Jerry Roche

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Bob Coleman

43 GCSAA looks for CEO

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Jerry Roche

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Margins just so-so? Exceeding customer expectations will help strengthen them—perhaps to as high as eight percent profit—this landscaper says.

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Richard B. Huff allegedly tried to build a lawn care company the wrong way—with dirty tricks, insurance fraud, arson and, finally, murder. That's why he may spend the rest of his life in prison, if a West Virginia grand jury has its way.

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J. Walter Wolfner, Jr. is experimenting with bentgrass in mid-summer because he has no choice. The Meramec River destroyed two of his courses.

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ASK THE EXPERT

DR. BALAKRISHNA RAO

Poisoning ivy plants

Problem: We find poison ivy plants growing beneath and climbing on trees in our clients' properties. Would you please suggest some methods to get rid of them? (Indiana)

Solution: Assuming that you have properly identified the plants as poison ivy (*Rhus radicans* is referred to as *Rhus toxicodendron* or *Toxicodendron radicans*, which are older names), it can be controlled either by mechanical means, such as digging and mowing, or by applying herbicides.

Although difficult, digging and removing all plant roots in long pieces can provide effective control. Cut the poison ivy vines at the base of the tree and pull out as much of the plant as possible. However, if a small piece is left behind, it can sprout again.

Remember that poison ivy's skin irritant is found in all parts of the plant, including the roots and fruit, but especially in the sap. Therefore, protect your skin as much as possible. Contaminated clothes, gloves, etc. should be washed thoroughly or burned (if you can afford it) after use.

Roots and stems that are removed should also be destroyed because even the dry plant parts are poisonous. If the plant parts are burned, keep away from the fumes, as they are potentially very dangerous.

Another method of control is to mow or prune young stems until the plants are killed. The objective here is to deplete the nutrient supply of the plant.

Herbicides sprayed on foliage will kill the leaves and may kill roots. Amitrole (trade names Amizole, Amino Triazole, Weedazol) is very effective, especially in the late spring or early summer. Apply this material when the leaves are fully expanded. If necessary, re-treat when new growth occurs. This is a systemic material which translocates inside the plant; therefore, permanent control can be expected with two to three applications.

Glyphosate (Roundup) can also be used. Although slower-acting, it is preferred in some situations because it has a shorter soil residual than amitrole. Here again, if regrowth occurs, re-treat as needed.

Read the labels and follow the directions for safety and better management results.

Wasps cause galls

Problem: One of our clients' shingle oak trees has a large number of galls on the twigs. They are very hard. We see quite a bit of dieback in the crown. What causes this? Would this spread to other oaks (not shingle oaks) nearby? Is there anything we can do to manage this? (Missouri)

Solution: The galls you are referring to are most likely caused by a tiny wasp. These are commonly called gouty oak galls. They can be very destructive, and their management is very difficult.

Reports indicate an increase of galls last year, because of the mild winter. Some of the galls may not have become evident until this year's growing season because of their complex lifecycle.

The adult wasps consist of only females, which emerge from twig galls during leaf expansion in spring. They lay eggs along the

veins and midribs of the new leaves. The eggs hatch into tiny larvae, and their feeding swells the tissues underneath the leaves. They generally pupate in late June to early July. The new generation, unlike the previous, will have both males and females which mate and lay eggs on oak twigs. These eggs hatch and produce galls on twigs, which take two to three years to mature into a hard woody structure.

In the case of gouty oak galls, there are no protruding structures called "horns." A similar gall called horned oak gall will have protruding horns. These galls can cause extensive dieback and may lead to the tree dying.

Management is very difficult because of the complex and overlapping lifecycles, and because the larvae are protected inside the gall tissues. Applying insecticides to manage these wasps after the gall formation doesn't help. Where feasible, consider selective pruning and destroying the affected plant parts to help minimize the problem.

Reports suggest that applying horticultural oil combined with a labeled insecticide (contact your local extension office) can help manage the hatching larvae. This should be done before the larvae enter the host tissue. Even with this approach, managing this problem is very time-consuming, difficult and may not be practical.

For fruit in sweetgum, sycamore

Problem: Is there a chemical we can use to get rid of unwanted fruits from sweetgum and sycamore trees? (Michigan)

Solution: I am not aware of any products labeled specifically for this problem. However, the Florel brand plant growth regulator from Rhone-Poulenc Ag Company is showing promising results in our research trials.

Both sycamore and sweetgum have objectionable fruits and present a serious problem on lawns and sidewalks. Florel should take care of these "messy" problems.

A Rhone-Poulenc representative indicates that Florel has been submitted for label expansion. Registration is expected by early 1994. The expanded label will have both sweetgum and sycamore listed.

Dr. Balakrishna Rao is Manager of Research and Technical Development for the Davey Tree Co., Kent, Ohio.

Mail questions to "Ask the Expert," LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT, 7500 Old Oak Blvd., Cleveland, OH 44130. Please allow two to three months for an answer to appear in the magazine.



Snow Mold

Stop Snow mold cold all winter long. Go with Daconil 2787® this fall.

To stop Snow mold cold and help ensure green and healthy turf come spring, go with the fungicides you trust all summer long: Daconil 2787® Flowable Fungicide and Daconil 2787 WDG Fungicide from ISK Biotech Corporation. And, to be sure you control both Pink and Gray snow mold, mix with Chipco† 26019 at recommended rates for the last two applications right before the snow flies.

Otherwise, all through the winter, whenever moisture and temperature conditions are right, Snow mold spores can germinate, creating infection.

Fifteen years of independent research confirm there is no better Snow mold control. And remember, there's never been a documented case of disease resistance to Daconil 2787.

Daconil 2787 and Chipco 26019. The proven way to stop Snow mold cold this fall and ensure healthy turf next spring. And that's one more reason to stick with Daconil 2787 all season long.

**ISK Biotech Corporation,
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5966 Heisley Road, P.O. Box 8000,
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Stop Snow Mold Cold. Daconil 2787.

GROWTH



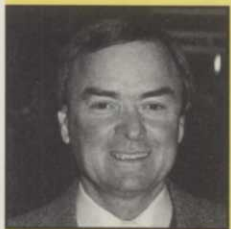
Turnbull

"I'm involved in everything now, and have a better handle on what's going on. I'm accepting my level of income, trying to work smarter and maintain my net."



Schlossberg

"The industry's days of large growth are over—but I don't see it going down the tubes. The need is there, and customers appreciate our services."



Carpenter

"It might be glamorous to do big volumes of work, but when you grow, you expand the overhead."

A business is never stagnant, it's either growing or dying. Here are some tips to keep yours healthy.

■ Because of the economy, many lawn care and landscape companies are now in a minimum growth mode. Some aren't growing at all. So they're being forced to look at the different ways they can grow their businesses.

In the lawn and landscape industry, the three directions in which to expand are:

1) customer base: selling existing services to a higher percentage of potential customers within your territory;

2) territory: expanding the geographical area in which you do business; and

3) services: offering new services to your existing customer base.

Because of the low interest rates now available from savings and loans, this could be the perfect time to expand. You may be considering re-financing your loans anyway, so why not borrow more money for expansion at the same time?

"You get to a point where you're going to bust through and hire people and buy equipment, or you stay where you're at," notes Jay Turnbull of Turnbull Landscaping in Nashville, Tenn. "I'm always evaluating, trying to decide which way to go."

Here are some thoughts that may help your decision-making:

● The main problem is lack of imagination, not capital, says Paul Hawken in his book "Growing a Business" (Simon &

FOR 90 Expanding y

by Jerry Coldiron, Boone Link

■ If you've been given charge of a new golf course, or an expansion project—as I was—remember this:

At 6 a.m. on opening day, no one will be able to feel the excitement and pleasure as much as you.

I would like to share some pleasures and pitfalls, as well as tips, I experienced during construction, though each construction or renovation project will doubtless vary.

1) Develop a realistic set of goals and budget (based on solid research), and be sure you understand exactly what the owner expects. Decide on the project's expense, type and style.

Carefully interview and select prospective architects and contractors. Field trips (we made six) are invaluable. Talk with owners, pros, superintendents—and even players.

2) Develop a "team approach," and make sure everyone has a clear understanding of

STRATEGIES

the ways our course?

and Lassing Pointe Golf Courses

duties and responsibilities. Our team: golf professional, golf architect, engineer, building architect, and myself (project manager). Schedule mandatory meetings. Communicate and document daily. Keep a solid filing system, log all calls, and maybe hire a secretary.

3) Develop a solid set of specifications and construction drawings. Study, review and tailor these specifications to your project. *Do not accept generic specifications.* Demand and fight for the little details. Keep everything in writing.

Be sure all parties understand the change order process. Develop a project timetable. Update and revise the timetable at your weekly meetings. Schedule for weather delays.

4) Determine your irrigation source pump locations and start the ball rolling early on getting electrical power.

My biggest headache was coordinating all

continued on page 8

Schuster, 1987). "Meaningful change almost always comes from the edge, the margins," Hawken writes. "Good ideas often do not look very good at first or second glance, but don't worry if it sounds weird, crazy or obscure. It may defy common sense or logic in the market as it now exists, but it may also be breaking new ground."

● The six keys to growth, according to Stephen Jenks, writing in *Home Office Computing* magazine, are: (1) energy, motivation and resilience; (2) innovative marketing; (3) market knowledge; (4) solid financial planning; (5) staying close to customers; and (6) using new technology.

● *Home Office Computing* offers these ideas for growth:

- *plow profits back into the business;
- *hire employees who can, by their presence and imagination, help spark growth;
- *develop a new niche or target empty niches;
- *focus energy on developing and improving services; and
- *be fast and flexible.

● Do your homework, writes Fred Klein in "Handbook on Building a Profitable Business" (Entrepreneurial Workshops Publications, 1990). Research the market. "When you get customized requests from customers, ask yourself if there is a market to the entire customer base."

● "You want to take a look at where this industry's heading," says Mark Schlossberg of Pro-Lawn Plus, Baltimore, Md. "The industry's days of large growth are over—but I don't see it going down the tubes. The need is there, and the customers appreciate our services."

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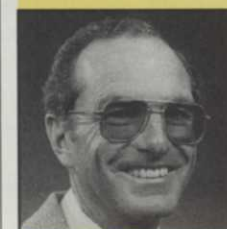
Doesburg

"We do more promotion-type marketing to keep our name in front of the public. We also work very closely with organizations like the home builders."



Berghuis

"Don't grow too fast...and never, ever kid yourself about what kind of financial shape you are really in."



Gerlack

"We're trying to offer more services. We've been looking at composting, but regulations make it difficult to get into."

The first decision—Initially, you might be happy with minimum growth.

"After seven years of growth, I plateaued in 1987," Turnbull says. "Then when building and everything slowed down in 1988 and 1989, I slid back and pretty much found my level. I've had no numerical growth in four years. But I've found a comfortable level that works best for me."

Likewise, Landmasters in Gastonia, N.C., has also slowed—but by design.

"We got into the trap of growing sort of 'free-fall' in the mid-'80s," observes Joe Carpenter. "Since 1986, I've restricted growth and put much more of a managed control on it. It might be glamorous to do big volumes of work, but when you grow, you expand the overhead."

Expanding customer base—If you choose to add more customers, you're going to have to intensify your marketing (including telemarketing) tactics.

"Twenty years ago when our name wasn't as well known, we tended to do more media marketing," says Rick Doesburg of Thornton Landscaping, Maineville, Ohio. "Now, we do more promotion-type marketing to keep our name in front of the public. We also work very closely with organizations like the home builders."

Klein, in his handbook, suggests Yellow Pages ads, direct mail, newspapers, radio and shoppers for service business advertising. Billboards, magazines and television are an advertising no-no, he says.

Expanding territory—"I could expand our territory, but I don't just want to grow for growth's sake," says Carpenter.

Expanding territory means hiring more help, buying more equipment, and possibly opening branch or satellite offices—all comparatively expensive procedures.

"My advice is to see if you can do it with the people, equipment and supervision you have in place," Carpenter observes. "If not, count the added costs to see if there is actually some profit in expanding."

(For more information on deciding whether to open branch or satellite offices, see Ed Wandtke's articles in the November and December, 1992 issues of LM.)

Adding services—The lawn and land-

scape market is becoming more full-service-oriented. "You have to make sure you're doing the job for the client or someone will come in the back door," says Doesburg. "We've even gotten into things like Christmas decorating and gutter cleaning."

According to *U.S. News & World Report*, large companies that sell multiple services are streamlining. This gives the smaller company the chance to expand into areas that the large companies are abandoning.

"We've done a lot of customer surveys," says Bob Ottley of One-Step Lawn Care, Rochester, N.Y. "A few years ago, we weren't doing everything the customer wanted.

"Now, we're pretty much customer-driven. We've also come up with ideas of what the customer might like—we're dabbling in mulching and planting flower beds now."

Adds Ken Gerlack of Contra Costa Landscaping, Martinez, Calif.:

"We're trying to offer more services. We've now got an eight-foot harvester and we're licensed for lake management. We've been looking at composting for the last three years, but regulations make it difficult."

(See list to the left for some add-on services we've come up with.)

A note—Peter Berghuis, president of the California Landscape Contractors Association, offers these final words of caution:

"Don't grow too fast—20 percent of something smaller is better than 0 percent of something larger. Have a plan for downsizing as well as upsizing. And never, ever kid yourself about what kind of financial shape you are really in."

—Jerry Roche

Add-on services:

- ☐ aeration
- ☐ brick paving
- ☐ Christmas decorations
- ☐ composting
- ☐ edging
- ☐ fence and retaining wall construction
- ☐ gutter cleaning
- ☐ hauling
- ☐ irrigation maintenance
- ☐ lake management
- ☐ lighting installation and maintenance
- ☐ lime applications
- ☐ mulching
- ☐ patios and brick paving
- ☐ planting and maintaining flower beds
- ☐ seeding
- ☐ selling or recycling chips
- ☐ snow removal
- ☐ stump removal

continued from page 7

the infrastructure (utilities, roads, buildings). If you are willing to accept responsibility, you might save enough to pay for your new turf building. Also, you end up being totally involved anyway, so you may as well capitalize on the situation.

5) If your project is a new course, consider building your turf care facility early. This will be the hub of the entire project. Fight for early funding and a state-of-the-art facility. If you cannot work it out, be sure to plan for temporary offices and/or buildings and trailers.

6) Be certain to obtain, in writing, all necessary documents and permits.

7) Use an experienced irrigation consultant/designer, if feasible. Be sure to explore the new variable drive pump stations and radio-controlled head technology—they are a must.

8) Determine green and tee construction methods, grass varieties—early. Research, compare prices; complete all necessary soil testing. Develop a fertility program to meet your needs. (Words of caution: an ample "grow-in" or "maturation maintenance" budget is a must. Prepare your owner for this cost: if it's done properly, it's not cheap and is often overlooked.)

9) Work closely with your building architect on the turf care clubhouse, restrooms, shelters, pumphouse, and chemical storage build-

ings. New ideas and technology are being developed daily. These considerations will affect the total project, especially cost.

10) Get solidly involved in: *sand, seed varieties and mixes (be sure your grassing contractor understands calibration); *working out grassing lines with the architect (we used color-coordinated survey flags); *field layout irrigation (it always changes from the paper design); and *play "construction golf" (hit a ton of golf balls).

Check distances and tee and approach angles as soon as the rough shaping takes place. Get everyone involved.

11) Allow time to hire and develop a strong staff. An assistant mechanic, irrigation technician and chemical technician are the first hires. Justify their presence by getting them involved.

12) Consider using a local nurseryman to document and help integrate native plants and trees. Stake, rope and clearly define all "natural" and "native" areas as well as specimen plants (a yellow ribbon or painted "x" will *not* suffice).

Finally—on a very serious note: allow times away from the project for yourself and your family. It can be an all-encompassing job, and this industry can quickly destroy a family. Also, be sure to surround yourself with quality people, machines, budgets and a solid plan. This type of project can be an exciting and fulfilling opportunity that only a few superintendents get a chance at. Good luck!