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Mechanic likes these grinders

■ To the editor:

I read your article on grinding and sharpening blades in the August issue and have a few comments to make.

I used to backlap after grinding at some of the courses I worked at. Now, I don't

backlap any more because of the Express Dual Spin Grinder and the Anglemaster Bedknife Grinding System.

This system eliminates the need for backlapping because the Anglemaster trues the bedknife to the reel. The spin

INJECTION from page 40
sprayer tank.

The new system is designed to continually mix correct amounts, and to electronically adjust application rates regardless of vehicle speed or terrain.

With Injector Pro, users can decide, in the field, to use a one- or two-chemical delivery system with water and chemical held in separate containers. This eliminates rinsate disposal and incompatibility problems since the materials have contact briefly before going out sprayer booms.

More news—Other companies are making it easier to apply turf chemicals for faster results with slow-draining greens. Aquatrols, a leading water management and wetting agent supplier, recently introduced Dose-It, a portable, water-driven in-line injector designed to

complement the HydroJect 3000.

Aquatrols adapted the Dosatron pump for faster, more effective turf application of AquaGro-L, its turf wetting agent, through a HydroJect. Dose-It is easily mounted to a hand truck or utility vehicle, and can be quickly hose-connected for accurate proportions: one part AquaGro into 500 parts water. The solution does not require watering in, say Aquatrols specialists.

Depending on the HydroJect's speed setting, they add, and whether the roller washers are on, the operator can inject as much as 9 oz. of AquaGro-L per 1000 sq.ft. Before the Dose-It, AquaGro had to be mixed as a solution in a spray tank, then connected to the HydroJect.

—Author Robert G. Coleman is a freelance writer specializing in landscape articles. He is based in Longwood, Fla.

grinder grinds the reel with a relief already in the reel. This eliminates the process of relief grinding that would be done on other types of reel grinding machines.

With this system, we can go 6 to 10 weeks between grindings, and the life of the bedknives is almost doubled. We save a few thousand dollars every year in labor, lapping compound, reel bearings and other related repairs.

All of our greens and tee mowers' bedknife angles are ground at 7 degrees; fairway angles are ground at 9 degrees; roughs angles at 11 degrees. All bedknife face angles are ground at 95 degrees.

While Tim Moraghan made good points, this is another system that works very well and that superintendents and their mechanics might consider.

Paul Fox
Boca Woods C.C.
Boca Raton, Fla.

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GCSAA looks for new CEO

■ The Golf Course Superintendents Association of America (GCSAA) is looking for a new chief executive officer following the resignation of John Schilling to open his own business.

GCSAA president Randy Nichols wrote this in a letter to members:

"The Board of Directors is extremely disappointed with (Schilling's) decision to resign. However, we do respect his desires to begin his own business where his ability and skills will again be demonstrated."

Robert Ochs and Diana Green also resigned to become part of Schilling's new venture, St. Andrews Corp., based in Lawrence, Kans. It will offer various services—event management, import/export consultation, risk management and insurance services—to golf and other industries. Ochs had been senior director of communications and general counsel; Green was senior director of operations.

Schilling's resignation is effective Jan. 1, 1994, but he will stay through January to affect a smooth transition in leadership. He will also be available to help manage the

1994 Conference & Show in Dallas.

"I have thoroughly enjoyed the last 15 years at GCSAA, serving the membership and the golf course management industry," Schilling told LM. "The association has made tremendous progress during the last few years, and I've been very pleased to be a small part of that. I believe the association has a bright future, and look forward to continuing to assist the golf industry."

Schilling took over as executive director on Sept. 1, 1983, when his controversial predecessor, Jim Loughlin, resigned. During Schilling's tenure, the GCSAA has increased its membership, grown its annual Conference & Show, and expanded its boundaries internationally.

The GCSAA Board of Directors is conducting a nationwide search for a new CEO amidst an organization-wide realignment. Arthur Andersen & Co., one of the world's leading consulting firms, following

a lengthy study, had recommended:

1) Eliminating the senior director management level.

2) Creating an Accounting and Finance Department headed by a chief financial officer.

3) Creating the position of deputy chief executive officer.

4) Consolidating the Communications and Publications Departments, separate from the Development Department.

5) Creating a Conference & Show Department.

6) Adding a human resources manager.

The Board approved Andersen & Co.'s recommendations 8-1. The dissenting vote was cast by immediate past president Bill Roberts of Lochmoor Club in Grosse Point Woods, Mich., who resigned.

In his letter of resignation, Roberts objected to the study and the need for the recommended changes. "This process could...subject the association and certain individuals to needless litigation," he wrote. "To implement the study places the chief executive officer in a mere figure-head position."

—Jerry Roche

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LAWN CARE INDUSTRY

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Margins just so-so? Exceeding customer expectations will help strengthen them, this landscaper says.

■ Statistics by the Associated Landscape Contractors of America claim the average landscape management firm is operating with a 2 to 3 percent profit margin. Clean Cut of Austin, Texas, quadruples that every year, by design.

"Too many times, the sales force for landscape firms becomes a price taker instead of a price maker," says Dennis Dautel, who combined with Rex Gore to launch Clean Cut in 1984. "Profit is not our only goal, but we like to operate at a margin of 8 percent or better."

How have they done it?

"Top people, the best available equipment, and work that exceeds the customer's expectations," Dautel says. "Theoretically, landscape maintenance is a no-profit business. It's easy to get into, and just as easy to get out of. So you're always competing with the low-price operation, many of which get into the business for a year or two and then disappear."

Clean Cut has a unique management system.

"We have to differentiate our service from others to sell at a profitable level,"

says Dautel. "It takes an intense effort to teach our people how to do that. But after eight years, we think we have the techniques pretty well determined."

The keys—Here are the keys:

- A new facility will include a training center for marketing as well as operational functions. New people will be taught how to set bid specifications and how to work with customers.

- Employees are involved in decision-making. Small groups meet frequently to discuss jobs and projects under way, as well as things that can improve the product.

- A new management operations program allows the "team leaders/partners" of the operating teams to build their own equity in the business by managing people and equipment efficiently.

- Special computer software ("SuperScope") developed by Dautel and Gore has been so successful that they're selling it to other landscapers.

- A profit-sharing plan, based on both long- and short-term margins, is determined from end-of-month and end-of-

High-profile complexes like The Park at Wells Branch provide Clean Cut the opportunity to provide 'work that exceeds the customer's expectations.'

year figures.

- People—both employees and customers—are a prime consideration. "Building value-centered relationships with customers makes for long-term contracts," Dautel notes, "and building good attitudes and relationships with team members makes for smoother, more efficient work results."

- The equipment fleet has been refined over the past two years. For instance, Clean Cut has used mid-sized riding mowers for the past three years, even on complex landscaped areas.

- Minimize equipment downtime by having a maintenance shop and doing most of their own maintenance.

Equipment plus people—"We used mid-sized walk-behind mowers to start with," Dautel observes. "Then, we tried one of the zero-turn-radius riding mowers on the market. Finally, we wound up using Walker mowers. Now, each landscape maintenance team has at least one Walker and some have two.

"Initially, going to riding mowers drastically improved our mowing time efficiency, but we weren't getting the quality we needed to leave a manicured look on customers' lawns. Now, though, we can get that quality look with the same amount of mowing time."

Another key is in the maintenance shop. "Our Walker mowers are probably in use a higher percentage of time than any other piece of equipment," Dautel states. "They just don't sit idle much of the time, and that's one of the keys to keeping equipment operations efficient."

In the last three years, Clean Cut has won nine Texas landscaping awards, five ALCA awards and two from the Professional Grounds Management Society. This year, it was named to *Inc.*

magazine's list of the 500 fastest-growing privately-held companies in the U.S.

From a first-year sales volume of \$167,000, Clean Cut now projects 1993 gross sales of more than \$5 million.

"You have to have the best machinery, then train your

people to get the most out of it, to do the type of precision work we like to see," Dautel says. "It all goes into the objective of giving the customers more than they expect. That's why we've been able to maintain our growth curve for more than eight years."

W. Va. grand jury charges LCO with arranging murder

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.

Huff, 32, former manager of Custom Lawn Care of West Virginia Inc., has been charged with arranging the May 21, 1993, murder of a former co-worker, Jerry Powell, 28.

U.S. Attorney William A. Kolibash of Wheeling, W. Va., says Huff plotted Powell's murder. He did it to keep Powell from testifying about how Huff had sabotaged competitors' businesses over a period of several years, Kolibash says. Powell had briefly worked with Huff but, apparently, had nothing to do with the dirty tricks himself.

Powell was shot-gunned to death about 4:30 a.m. May 21 on an empty road north of Weirton, W. Va., while he was driving his van to work at the Ross Park Mall.

The federal grand jury that met to consider the killing returned a 20-count indictment also claiming that Huff:

- ordered "grass killer" sprayed on the greens of Pleasant Valley Country Club, Weirton, and the Woodlawn Golf Course, New Cumberland. Both were customers of another lawn care company.

- had two of his employ-

ees pour grass killer into the spray tanks of competitors' trucks.

- ordered employees to throw bombs at the home, business and equipment trailer of a competing lawn service.

- slashed tires and scratched the paint of competitors' trucks.

- obtained more than \$40,000 in settlements from fraudulent insurance claims.

Kolibash calls the case "one of the most bizarre and unusual cases I've ever seen in 20 years in this office."

Indicted along with Huff, were Daniel J. Wentz, 20, and William D. Bish, 24.

The indictment alleges that Wentz actually pulled the trigger of the 20-gauge shotgun (two blasts), but that Huff had sought the killing, and had written the check for the ammunition the day before the murder. Bish, the indictment says, accepted a check of \$1,500 from Huff as an advance payment for the killing of Powell. It was Bish who enlisted Wentz to kill Powell, the indictment alleges.

"It's like something out of a grade B movie," says veteran reporter Lawrence Walsh, who is covering the case for the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*.

Jury selection for the trials of Huff and Wentz is set for Nov. 8.

—Ron Hall

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Busy Bill Clutter pleased with growth in both OLCA, TurfGard

Successful OLCA swap meet is combined with tour of Scotts facilities.

■ "Some of us sold a lot. Some of us didn't sell much. It just depends on what you're selling," says Bill Clutter, TurfGard Company, Dayton, Ohio.

Clutter, president of the Ohio Lawn Care Association, sold five used, walk-behind spreaders, three coils of used and new hose, and bartered an aerator for a small trailerload of granular fertilizer at OLCA's first-ever summer swap this past August.

In all, 15 lawn/landscape companies brought surplus tools and equipment to The Scotts Company picnic grounds in

Marysville, Ohio. Clutter says between 85-100 lawn and landscape pros attended the swap meet. About 50 lawn pros toured the Scotts' compost and fertilizer manufacturing facilities earlier that day. (Lunch was on Scotts too.)

"For a first-time affair, I'm very pleased with the turnout," says Clutter, president of TurfGard, Dayton, Ohio.

Clutter, a powerfully built, methodical man with a ready grin, has reason to be pleased. The OLCA has grown to more than 350 members in just three years.

Clutter says many factors contribute to OLCA's popularity but three stand out:

- Volunteers like past president Phil Forgarty and other committee members. "I certainly can't take credit for what so many have contributed to," he says.



TurfGard's Bill Clutter credits OLCA growth to strong committees, valuable member services, affordable dues.

- Affordable dues. "Thanks to some of the industry suppliers, we've put together a welcome packet whose value exceeds the cost of membership," Clutter points out.

- Responding to what members want. "A lot of our members have cross-over businesses. One of our goals is to offer services to our members that sometimes extend beyond basic lawn care," he explains.

Clutter credits TurfGard employees,



Some tools require a lot of time and manpower . . .



Left to right: Troy Boucher, Scott Hurler, Steve Bailey and Jay D'Amico give this Ryan overseeder a thorough workout.

headed by operations manager Mike Young, for allowing him time to be OLCA's leader.

It's a busy company, and it's having a "good year," says Clutter. This past season TurfGard began offering tree & shrub service. He says next spring it will open a "mechanical services" division offering aerations, seeding, and commercial mowing.

TurfGard, Dayton, Ohio, is a consolidation of five companies, the company Clutter started in the mid 1970s and four other smaller companies he's purchased and incorporated since.

Dayton, (pop. 190,000) in southwest Ohio, is an intense lawn care market. Clutter says he can name a dozen major competitors. "There are so many small competitors and their names change so often I just can't keep up," he says. It was this intense competition from cost-cutting competitors that prompted Clutter to start his own separate low-cost lawn care company several years ago, an operation separate from his "high-end" TurfGard.



Les Richendollar, left, and Troy Thomas of Plantscape, Urbana, Ohio dicker with Tom Burton, right, Burton's Landscape, Troy, over this used spray rig.

He's been backing away from that move though. He discovered that even though some customers will only pay minimum prices for lawn care, they still expect maximum service. "It's just not the way to go," says Clutter.

Clutter feels TurfGard "is probably exactly where it should be." By next spring, with the startup of the mechanical services division, he expects to employ about 25.

—Ron Hall

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HOT TOPICS

Flood causes 'worst year,' but Missourian still smiling

Russell Schmidt says customers are anxious to restore lawns/landscapes following this year's historic Mississippi River deluge.

FESTUS, Mo.— His smoky blue eyes narrow into slits as he surveys the Mississippi River. It's not where it's supposed be. It's at his feet where a football field used to be. It should be out beyond the tree line at least a half mile away.

Russell Schmidt, who started Schmidt Landscape, Jefferson County, Mo., 7 years ago, says "it's been our worst year yet."

But he's still smiling.

He's confident his 12-person company will survive the flood that caused so much destruction in the small river communities just south of St. Louis, his market area. (Schmidt's offices and home are in neighboring but higher Hillsboro.)

Compared to many others, he says he has little to complain about.

"I came down here two weeks ago and saw a couple pull up a nice stringer of catfish, right up from the stands. Caught 'em on the football field," he grins.

Schmidt, 28, stands over the sullen river that looks more like a slowly flowing lake. Humidity seeps from its coffee-colored surface and coaxes sparkles of perspiration from his forearms and forehead.

Hatless in the noonday sun, he relates how he and his Hillsboro High School mates battled the Crystal City Hornets on this very football field just 11 years ago.

Slow retreat—Now, in mid-August 1993, the muddy water still laps up to the third row of concrete steps at the stadium.

It's been an unforgettable year in more ways than one, says Schmidt.

Spring rains which seemingly never



Landscaper Russ Schmidt shows what turfgrass surrounding a bank looks like after the Mississippi River flood.

ended crippled maintenance schedules almost from season's start.

"We were contracted to mow properties four times a month, but we could only cut some of them once or twice. That's revenue we can never get back," he says.

Then, in July, the floods came.

The Mississippi, day by day, crept up to—and, in many cases, over—homes and businesses. River dwellers had more to worry about than lawns and landscapes, like saving the pews at the First Baptist Church. They put them on styrofoam blocks, hoping they would float. They did.

Indeed, when President Bill Clinton and Vice President Al Gore arrived in July and reporters from around the world jostled for high ground for their mobile broadcast units, townsfolk piled sandbags shoulder high to keep the river out of downtown businesses.

Road work—No wonder that instead of installing or repairing irrigation systems this past July—jobs normally scheduled when summer drought turns lawns brown—Schmidt's crew, using the two company loaders, built an emergency road for homeowners cut off by high water.

"Everybody was involved in this flood. A lot of people shut down their businesses to help. Sometimes when they were sandbagging the water was coming in faster

Lessons learned from The Flood

1) Build a history of dependable, reliable service. When disaster strikes, clients will know you're trying. "I had guys sitting in trucks beside properties waiting for the rain to stop to get on properties," says Schmidt.

2) Develop a loyal, well-trained staff. As flooding worsened, Schmidt says his employees often relied upon their own initiative to solve problems. "We have meetings every Monday at 6:45 a.m., but my guys know what to do on their own."

3) Communicate with clients. His company left "obnoxious-looking" red door hangers ("That way I know they'll look at them") on every property.

Schmidt spent extra time in the office so he could personally answer clients' calls.

4) Two-way radios pay for themselves over and over again, particularly in an emergency.

5) Don't gamble with low bids. If anything unusual happens, you're working for nothing—or losing money. Schmidt says he now adds a little extra for labor on bids.

6) Keep smiling. "You wouldn't believe how many of my customers tell me how much they appreciate my men's cheerfulness even though there's not too much to smile about," says Schmidt.

—R.H.



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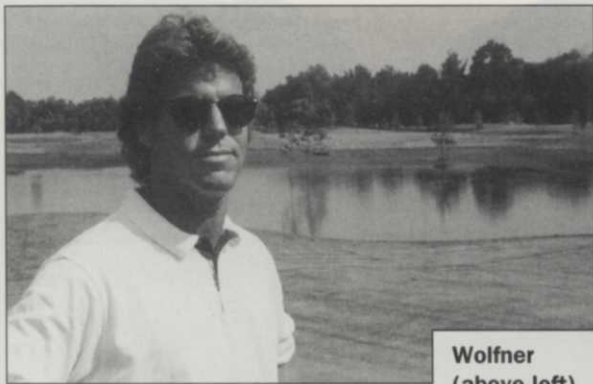
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than they could work," says Schmidt.

Schmidt says recovery is under way. The number of calls from homeowners wanting flood-damaged lawns and landscapes repaired and renovated surprises even him. The commercial properties—well, that he kind of expected.

"We're going to take our chances and start replacing plant material. If we lose some of it, we lose it," says Schmidt. "We can't afford to wait. Not this year."

—Ron Hall



Wolfner (above left) is taking the opportunity to upgrade the irrigation system at Riverside Golf Course.



The Meramec created a moonscape at Fenton City Park.

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Course being rebuilt on faith

FENTON, Mo.— It's August 17, and behind the desk of J. Walter Wolfner Jr., sits a single Petri dish containing a pinch of turfgrass seed. Planted two days ago, the tiny crop of bentgrass is little more than a hint of green.

This is faith.

"My supplier tells me it germinates in two days and I might be able to have a putting surface in 30 days," says Wolfner. "But I know it's going to be tough growing bentgrass here in August."

Wolfner, 39, is owner/operator of Riverside Golf Course here. The Meramec River, usually little more than a creek in mid-summer, destroyed his 18-hole course and his increasingly popular par-3 course.

Of his 120 acres, only the clubhouse escaped damage.

"The course was just beautiful this season, too," says Wolfner. "We were so happy with it. And we just had to sit and watch the water come up, slow, real slow. It just kept coming."

Wolfner is using a low-interest Small Business Administration (SBA) loan to rebuild and improve Riverside.

"We're putting in automatic irrigation, installing zoysiagrass aprons around all the greens, reseeding all the greens with bentgrass, and sodding all the tees with bermudagrass," he says. The greens take the most work. "First we have to hose all the scum off, then aerify them in a couple of different directions, and then overseed."

Wolfner hopes to re-open Riverside this fall, but the flood's legacy will be apparent for years to come.