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BOBCAT BOOT CAMP

Sloshing around in a mud pit was never so much fun.

BY DAN JACOBS EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

What is it about mud puddles that attract kids like Karaoke Night draws Journey front man Steve Perry wannabes?

Whatever it is, climbing into a Bobcat loader, skid steer or excavator after a heavy downpour is something of heaven for those kids who never grew up completely. That's just what happened at the Bobcat boot camp earlier this summer. An overnight deluge left the fairgrounds, where Bobcat was providing education and training to members of the company's dealer network, a massive mud pit. Think Woodstock without the music and mind-altering substances.

Bobcat, which has manufactured more than 750,000 skid steers and loaders since the late 1950s, today offers about 20 different models in the skid steer and compact track loader lines. And a few editors were invited to test the latest models.

The company's latest editions — the M-series — were introduced starting in 2008, and offer a variety of improvements over the previous models, including better fuel capacity, better traction and increased lift.

PHOTOS BY DAN JACOBS



(From top left) Tires not neatly, but stably stacked. A brief rain storm delayed, but could not stop the fun. A view of the playground.

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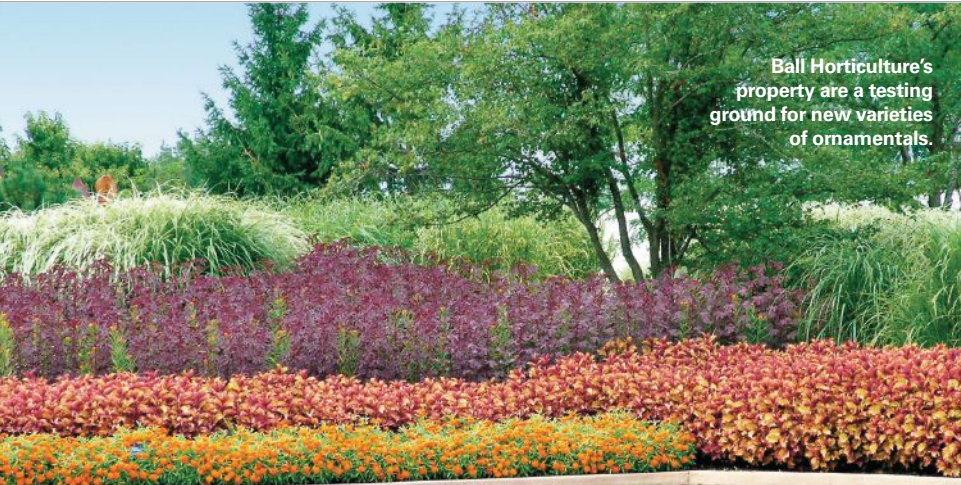
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Ball Horticulture's property are a testing ground for new varieties of ornamentals.

Having a Ball

The flower company explores the latest trends in ornamentals and the industry.

BY DAN JACOBS EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Ball Horticulture clearly recognizes that landscape contractors are key components of the ornamental supply chain.

"You are the bellwethers of things to come," says Jeff Gibson, landscape business manager for the Chicago-based company. "It's terribly important for you, the contractors, to work one-on-one with our growers."

In August, Ball hosted several contractors and growers as part of its annual Landscape Day. The event included a tour of the company's nearly 9-acre property and new research facility, as well as a panel discussion looking into the latest trends and issues facing growers and contractors.

Economic concerns

To say market conditions are volatile might be an understatement. At press time, the stock market was in the midst of



400-point swings and there is little clarity about where we're headed. The phrase "double-dip recession" crossed the lips of a few commentators at the event.

"The economy was better — at least it was two weeks ago," quips Terry Carter, Designs by Sundown, Englewood, CO.

That said, homeowners associations, homeowners and commercial property owners seem to be a little more willing to spend money than they have been, says Carly Rizer, enhancements manager for Christy Webber Landscape in Chicago.

While customers might be willing to shake off the cobwebs and wipe the dust

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from their pocketbooks, few, if any, are expecting the economy to return to full bloom anytime soon.

Visitors admire Ball's latest offerings.

"I think our industry is moving in the right direction," says James Russell, Armstrong Growers, San Juan Capistrano, CA. "We're forgetting what it was like and learning what it will be like."

One thing that hasn't changed is the growers' desire to know what they'll need to grow for clients as soon as possible.

"Eighty percent of what we do is pre-booked," Russell says. "We need to get the clients to understand the timeline."

In other words, contractors who work with their customers and know what they'll need for the year are more likely to get what they want when they want it. Nurseries can't afford to grow products no one will buy.

"Nobody likes to have their neck on the chopping block all the way," says Jim Clesen, Ron Clesen Ornamental Plants, Maple Park, IL.

Christy Webber tries to pre-book as much of its business as possible, but customers can be a bit of a gamble, Rizor says. Customers don't always know what they want, or if a customer gets laid off from his or her job or a business goes under, homeowners or property managers might not have the money they were expecting.

Of course, the economy can only be blamed for part of the problem.

"Budgets are still cut," Russell says, "but there are still customers out there to find." **LM**

What's hot at the HOTHOUSE

Three trends gathered from the Ball Landscape Day event:

1. Color is still king.
2. Sustainability is moving up the royal ranks.
3. Textures are increasing in customer importance, as are native plants.

Some customers have rushed into sustainability with such fervor that they've raced past reasonable. Armstrong Growers' James Russell cites one California resort as an example that went past that point and ended up with a sterile-looking environment.

"There's a balance," he says. "When the color goes away, the comment cards start coming in — and the customers start going to other hotels."

PHOTO BY: DAN JACOBS

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Rows of headstones remind visitors of the ultimate sacrifice.



Remembering the fallen

Perhaps it was the row upon row of white gravestones, situated in symmetrical straight lines. Or the striking contrast of green and white everywhere you looked.

For whatever reasons, even as nearly 400 landscapers and their families (including 58 children) from around the country descended upon Arlington National Cemetery on July 25, the place seemed quiet and still, resounding with an uncanny, peaceful hush that implied the cemetery itself is as resilient as those it holds once were.

The landscape professionals from 101 companies nationwide had gathered for the Professional Landcare Network's (PLANET's) 15th annual Day of Renewal & Remembrance. The day of volunteerism is the industry's way of honoring

More than 400 Green Industry representatives beautify Arlington National Cemetery at PLANET event. BY BETH GERACI SENIOR EDITOR

military men and women of past and present, and thanking them for their service through donating expertise and equipment.

"Our work here is a small token compared to their great sacrifices," said PLANET President Jerry Grossi in his opening address.

And that sentiment seemed to be the consensus of the day.

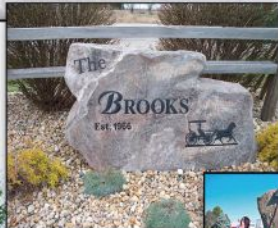
"We're here to donate our time and services to all the thousands of people that've died for our country," said Todd Tarring, 41, president of Chantilly, VA-based Pleasant Valley Landscapes, who was volunteering with his family. "We feel it's a small sacrifice, a token of appreciation, and it was something we needed to do."

The event was especially moving for veterans like Tim Price, an Iraq veteran and territory manager for Herbi-Systems, Memphis, TN.

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PHOTO BY: BETH GERACI

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Getting their voices heard



BY BETH GERACI SENIOR EDITOR

Ohio Landscape Association Executive Director Sandy Munley, Professional Landcare Network (PLANET) Government Affairs Chairman Paul McDonough, and other PLANET members representing Ohio walked the halls of Congress.

They were there on July 26 as part of Legislative Day on the Hill, PLANET's annual event where reps from around the country share their views with their congressional leaders on landscaping-related legislation before Congress.

Meeting with spokespeople for Ohio Senator Rob Portman, Speaker of the House John Boehner and Ohio Rep. Sherrod Brown, these PLANET members spoke out about two key issues that would greatly impact the landscape industry: the WaterSense bill (H.R. 1967) and the federal regulation on H-2B visas.

The WaterSense bill would limit to 40% the amount of turf that homeowners are allowed on their properties, as a means to conserve water.

Problem is, "most turf is not irrigated," McDonough told Speaker Boehner's liaison. "To tell homeowners, 'You can't have more than 40% of your

landscape as turf' is absolutely absurd. "If you don't have turf, you have more sediment runoff. It's counterintuitive."

Potential changes to the federal regulation on H-2B visas would make it more expensive for landscape businesses to hire temporary workers from outside the country, requiring employers to pay them about \$3 more per hour. Without action the new regulation goes into effect September 30.

PLANET reps asserted the change would hurt small businesses financially, causing many to forego hiring immigrant employees, who often constitute the core of their workforce.

Whether lawmakers were swayed remains to be seen. But McDonough was pleased with their efforts.

"One of the most encouraging things is the turnout that we had," he said, explaining that 80 more PLANET members participated this year. "It's certainly encouraging that people are willing to be more involved. It's crucial!"



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REMEMBERING *continued from page 17*

Tears welled in his eyes as he spoke. "It was kind of a different world, I guess you could say," he said, describing his experience in Iraq. "... It's an honor and a privilege to come do it. Just spend a few days here, visit the cemetery, just pay my respects."

According to PLANET statistics, landscapers at this year's event applied 120 tons of lime to 271 acres; aerated 30 acres of turf; installed 24 yards of soil; planted 1,381 perennials; updated two irrigation systems; and installed lightning protection on seven trees. And that's just the start.

Landscape companies donated \$200,000 in staff, time and equipment. To date, PLANET has contributed more than \$2 million to the care of the historic landmark.

Few tears were shed at this year's event. There was no laughter, either. Just reverence. For the 15th year, landscapers paid their respects in the best way they know how: through their work. **LM**



A volunteer installs cables to help protect trees from lightning strikes.

PHOTOS BY: BETH GERACI

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PROGRESS

Turf takes a stand



Advances in breeding, equipment and pesticides get the credit for today's better turf.

Turfgrass technology has progressed dramatically over the years, say turfgrass scientists from around the

country, and the result is stronger grass that is denser, more uniform, more colorful and more attractive. And that's just the beginning.

In the 1960s, Kentucky bluegrass and fine fescues were the only turfgrass games in town, says Peter Landschoot, Ph.D., professor of turfgrass science at Penn State University.

Back then, Kentucky bluegrass was prone to leaf spot and was not very resistant to disease. Today, bluegrass is drastically more disease resistant.

Advances in turfgrass breeding happened largely due to the efforts of retired Rutgers University turfgrass professor and breeder Reed Funk, Ph.D., say Landschoot and Funk's Rutgers colleague William Meyer, Ph.D.

"I really think that the most important thing discovered was the work that Funk started here in 1960, where he proved you could go through cycles of improvement on cool season grasses and make an improvement in them every year," says Meyer, professor of Plant Biology and Pathology and director of turfgrass breeding at Rutgers.

When Funk and his students discovered in the 1970s that flowers of all Kentucky bluegrass open after midnight, a new era dawned on turfgrass breeding.

"Dr. Funk and his students found out if they sprinkled pollen from one bluegrass onto another they could make hybrids," Meyer says. "That was a phenomenal discovery. And today all the new varieties that are performing

well evolved from making hybrids in that greenhouse."

Major strides also have been made in ryegrass and tall fescue. "The first improved perennial ryegrasses were Manhattan and Pennfine perennial ryegrasses, and now we have over two hundred perennial ryegrasses," Landschoot marvels.

Ryegrass is a prime example of higher turf quality today, in disease resistance, uniformity, color, mowing quality, texture, density and brightness, says Meyer.

When Meyer started at Rutgers, he recalls, bluegrass constituted two-thirds of the turfgrass market. Then ryegrass came along in the early 1970s and trumped Kentucky bluegrass's popularity, thanks to its quick establishment and wear tolerance.

Even with ryegrass's popularity, in many areas today tall fescue reigns, especially in the South. The first improved tall fescue emerged in 1980, Meyer says. It was called Rebel.

"Before that," he says, "there were a couple hundred million pounds of Kentucky 31 in the 1940s, a forage type grass that has one redeeming quality: It's cheap."

Tall fescue is popular, Meyer says, because "it comes up fast. It has a rooting system that's three to four feet deep, so it uses more of the water resources in the ground."

Whereas tall fescue traditionally was a coarse yellow pasture grass used for ground cover along highways, once

it was accepted for use on lawns and sports fields, Landschoot says, breeders began to seek ways to produce finer textured tall fescue that were darker green and appealed to homeowners.

In the past, says turf expert Clark Throssell, Ph.D., there was an emphasis on turf aesthetics. Now that they've been mastered, the challenge is to make turf even more drought tolerant and disease resistant, he says.

Giant leaps also have been made in pesticide formulation, experts say. "The pesticides we use are much safer than the ones of 30 or 50 years ago and are applied at much lower rates," says Karl Danneberger, Ph.D., professor of horticulture and crop science at The Ohio State University.

In the '50s and '60s, chlordane was used, and it contained arsenic, he says. "There've been huge improvements since the days of mercuries and arsenics, which were used until the '70s. Now we have much cleaner products and much lower rates."

Just as advances in breeding and pesticides have shaped today's turfgrass formulation, so has technology such as aerators, seeders and mowers.

Together with improved breeding science, better equipment engineering accounts for about 50 percent of the advances made, says Landschoot.

"It's impossible to transport yourself back to those early days," Landschoot says. "Once in a while I think, 'Oh my God, that's what we had to deal with back then.'"